CHALLENGES

- Bringing language courses online for the first time can be a daunting prospect for instructors, professionally and technically.

- An online delivery model can present significant learning obstacles in a conversation-heavy language course where face-to-face discussion is typically the norm.

- Traditional textbooks are often limited in their ability to engage students and encourage the speaking and interaction that is vital to developing communication competence.

SOLUTIONS

- iLrn™ for Spanish

- Hershberger, Robert and Susan Navey-Davis and Guiomar A. Borrás, *Viajes: Introducción al español*

RESULTS

- iLrn, an all-in-one course management system for language learning and teaching, eased the burden of transitioning to an online format. Implementation was much easier than expected, and iLrn allows instructors and students to connect and communicate in multiple ways, creating the feel of a traditional face-to-face classroom.

- By allowing students to talk to each other and to instructors, iLrn makes it possible for online courses to have the advantage of conversation-focused learning. Voice-enabled activities allow students to record and hear their own speech, and instructors and students can talk with one another.

- iLrn engages students and brings the textbook to life with interactive lessons, tutoring, and videos as well as by providing the ability to record, critique, and edit conversations. Students get practice in reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Debora Rager, MATL

Assistant Professor of Spanish, Department of Communication — Simpson University, Redding, California

iLrn™ Is Key to Communication Competence in Online Intro and Advanced Spanish Courses

Debora Rager is the full-time instructor of Spanish at Simpson University in Redding, California, and has more than 25 years of experience teaching Spanish and French. The university recently implemented a rule specifying that any course with more than one session must include at least one online session. Consequently, Debora now teaches both an online and a traditional session for both her Spanish I and Spanish II courses.

When she realized that she would be taking some of her classes online, Debora started looking at the available options, including iLrn™, an all-in-one course management system featuring communication tools that encourage students to use language outside of the classroom. She attended an iLrn presentation as well as one from another publisher. "Hands down, iLrn was so much better that it really wasn't even a choice. It was the obvious choice," she says.

EFFECTIVE SPEAKING PRACTICE — EVEN ONLINE

Communicative competence is key to the language-learning experience, and Debora particularly stresses conversation in her traditional classes. She gives students a topic, and then has them work together to participate in a very basic conversation about that topic. iLrn allowed her to create an effective language-learning experience online. "I switched textbooks because of iLrn. I wanted my students' online experience to be as close to a traditional classroom experience as I could make it."

With iLrn, students can access their textbook online as well as other resources that guide them to success in the course. Voice-enabled activities allow students to record and hear their own speech, building their confidence and skills. They can hear pronunciations by simply clicking on terms in the iLrn ebook. *Share It!* — a class collaboration tool — engages students in communicating in Spanish. They get practice in speaking as well as with listening, reading, and writing.

"iLrn was the only program that allowed the students to talk to each other within the program, and to complete those conversations with other students in big groups or small groups, and with the teachers," says Debora. "I can talk to and with students, and I really like that component."

One of Debora's favorite elements of iLrn is the ease with which her students can find a partner. "They click on a button when they're going to do one of the activities from the textbook that requires them to talk to someone. They click on a button, find a partner, and they can both record." She also gives her students specific questions that they can discuss; they can also record and share the discussion.

IMMEDIATE FEEDBACK, STUDENT-INSTRUCTOR INTERACTION, AND MORE

Debora and her students appreciate the immediate feedback that iLrn provides. When they complete an iLrn activity, they can submit their answers and immediately see their score as well as their correct and incorrect responses.

Debora says that her students also like the ability to talk to each other and connect with her when they need to. "It helps keep the course more realistic, because it is supposed to be a conversation-based course. If you're doing something like Rosetta Stone or those other types of online courses, you're not really talking to anyone. You're just parroting back. iLrn allows you to talk to someone else."

When it came time to implement iLrn after Debora had selected it for her online class, she was a little worried about the time it would take to get rolling. "It was going to be a complete transition from my normal, traditional experience as the teacher, and I thought it was going to be a lot more difficult than it has been. I think most of the students would also say it was easier than they thought it was going to be." Switching back and forth from a traditional classroom to an online class has also been much easier with iLrn.

Finding iLrn, which simplified the process of transitioning to an online format — and allows her students to get a similar experience to the traditional delivery method — has made all the difference to Debora. "Knowing that there are resources like iLrn out there that you can set up and use is a load off my shoulders. It works so well and it's been so easy!"

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