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Students Improve Their Mindset and Grades with MindTap®

Carey Roberts has nearly 20 years of experience as a college instructor, 13 of them at Arkansas Tech University in Russellville, Arkansas, which offers programs at the baccalaureate and graduate levels. As Coordinator of University Assessment, Carey also has frontline knowledge of typical student performance and of improvements associated with new learning resources and techniques. He has used MindTap® — which replaces a traditional textbook and offers a personalized online learning experience — for a year in his online U.S. history course, and sees a significant improvement in grades and learning. “Almost across the board, students using MindTap improved on the main learning objectives of the class,” says Carey. “As the university assessment director, I do this sort of evaluation all the time. I’ve never seen any results like this.”

COURSES AND PARTICIPANTS

The two-semester online history course satisfies a general education requirement. About 40% of Carey’s students are first-generation freshmen and sophomores — the first in their families to attend college. The vast majority — about 80% — works at least 20 hours per week, and some students work full time. Their average ACT college readiness score is 22.

Carey was initially attracted to the MindTap interface. “I like to describe MindTap as a Google® for an LMS (learning management system). The interface is so streamlined and intuitive,” he says. “Now I see all sorts of benefits with MindTap, but the ease of use appealed to me right off the bat. The ability for me to insert information within the interactive MindTap Reader was especially appealing.” Through a built-in MindTap app, Carey uses Kaltura, an open-source online video platform, to embed podcasts and screencasts of his lectures and other multimedia directly into appropriate places in the MindTap Reader.

THE CHALLENGES

Because so many of Carey’s students work, a key challenge for them is managing their time to allow for studying and homework. “Unfortunately, I’ve found that students measure the worth of their courses by the amount of time and effort that they expend, and not by what they learn — having to invest time in a course is a negative for them. They don’t see the link between effort and learning.”

That mindset makes one of Carey’s goals — encouraging students to put more effort into the course — particularly problematic. He chose MindTap in part because he perceived that it would motivate students to engage with the subject matter.

CHALLENGES

- **Better performance and improved outcomes** are ongoing objectives.
- **Some U.S. History students lack motivation** to put forth the effort necessary to learn course material.
- **Poor study skills** hinder some students from learning as effectively as they would otherwise.

SOLUTIONS

- MindTap for *A People and a Nation: A History of the United States, Brief Edition* by Norton, Mary Beth, Carol Sheriff, David W. Blight, Howard P. Chudacoff, Fredrik Logevall, & Beth Bailey

RESULTS

- **Students improved their grades (by a full letter)** as well as their performance on course learning objectives.
- **MindTap engages students in active learning** by combining readings, multimedia, activities, assessments, web apps, and social media tools — with all resources instantly accessible. **ReadSpeaker text-to-speech app** allows students to listen to reading assignments on desktops, laptops, iPads (2 and above), and netbooks. Instructors can personalize the MindTap Reader by embedding notes, videos, and other multimedia resources to further promote student effort and engagement.
- **MindTap encourages efficient study and review** with a note-taking feature that allows students to summarize key concepts, and color-coded highlighting tools that help them organize topics. Flashcards make it easy to study key terms.

“Students’ learning improved dramatically, and their grades improved by a full letter — from a C- average to a B- average. I’ve never seen anything like this.”

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THE RESULTS

More than an eBook, MindTap guides students through their course by combining readings, multimedia, activities, and assessments in a singular LearningPath — with all resources instantly accessible at any time. It also offers web apps and social media tools that accommodate the preferences of today’s students.

“Students are immediately comfortable with the interface,” says Carey. “The layout is like a self-contained app, and students relate to that. We use a browser to access MindTap, but other than that, students don’t surf the web with a browser the way they did ten years ago, and neither do I. We use apps. Everything is laid out sequentially with the Learning Paths, and all the resources they need are accessible from within the MindTap Reader. I think that is revolutionary.”

The MindTap ReadSpeaker text-to-speech app allows students to listen to their reading assignments on desktops, laptops, the iPad® (version 2 and above), and netbooks. “They absolutely love the ReadSpeaker app. They also love the note taking capabilities and the flashcards,” says Carey. Carey created a screencast to show students how to use the note taking and highlighting apps to color code different topics and study more efficiently. He also taught them how to compare their quiz question answers with their notes on the topics covered. “They appreciate being taught how to take good notes, and they see the connection between good notes and good grades.”

Carey is impressed with the results that he has seen in his MindTap class. “Students’ learning improved dramatically, and their grades improved by a full letter — from a C- average to a B- average. I’ve never seen anything like this,” he says.

According to Carey, students were very pleased with MindTap overall. “For the first time in my career students came into my office and thanked me for choosing a product. They were far more engaged with the text and the course material.”

Fifty percent of Carey’s students said they were likely to take another class just because it used MindTap. As for Carey, he will soon use MindTap for his one-semester online American History survey. “MindTap is the first digital product that seems to be making a real difference in student learning.”

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