

CASE STUDY

MIAMI DADE COLLEGE

Digital Course Solution Improves Student Success and Increases Retention

Professor Villar-Smith sought an engaging way to teach the grammar component outside of class so that she would have more time in class to focus on the writing process. In Summer 2009, she selected two six-week classes to test the effectiveness of *Connect Writing*, using it for online grammar drill and practice in one class and teaching the grammar component traditionally in the other class. The results were remarkable: final passing scores were 20% higher in the class that used *Connect Writing*. This class also had a 100% student retention rate.

Institution Profile

With more than 170,000 students, Miami Dade College is the largest institution of higher education in the United States. Its eight campuses and many outreach centers provide more than 150 academic programs leading to associate degrees, bachelor's degrees, and numerous certificates.

Implementation

Course Description:

College Prep Writing III is the final level of a developmental writing sequence at MDC. Success in the course is measured by a departmental writing assignment and a state-mandated grammar exam. The classes involved in this study were accelerated (6-week) versions of a traditional 16-week course. Course size was small with fewer than 30 students.

Course Grade:

Students can receive either an S (satisfactory and can move on to college-level work), P (progress required and must repeat the course), or U (unsatisfactory and must repeat the course).

Students must pass the written final exam with a combined score of at least 6 out of 12. Students must also pass a state-wide grammar exam with a score of 60% or higher.

Digital Product in Use:

Connect® Writing

Course Name:

College Prep Writing III

Course Type:

Hybrid (3 hours lecture, 1 hour in-class lab, and on-line/week)

Credit Hours:

Four

Textbook in Use:

College Writing Skills with Readings by Langan, 7e

Instructor Name:

Maria C. Villar-Smith

Enrollment:

300/year

Case Study Term:

Summer 2009

“Connect Writing makes the teaching of the process of writing less stressful. It has opened up more free time for me to dedicate to student writing.”

“I have been instructed to maintain detailed assessments and retention rates, and Connect Writing helps with that. It has [also] aided in my ability to pinpoint which areas the groups and individual students struggle with.”

- Professor Maria Villar-Smith

Implementation of McGraw-Hill *Connect*

In this capstone developmental writing course, students must demonstrate proficiency in writing and grammar application in two high-stakes exams—one departmental and one state-mandated—in order to move on to the next level of required English courses. For some students, this is no easy task, especially considering that 96% of them speak a language other than English at home.

Based upon its ease of use, administrative abilities, the interactivity and pertinence to student goals, and the customizability to the course goals, Professor Villar-Smith decided to incorporate *Connect Writing* in one of her two summer College Prep Writing III course sections in order to:

1) evaluate its impact on student comprehension/application of grammar rules and conventions

2) use the recovered in-class time to focus on student writing

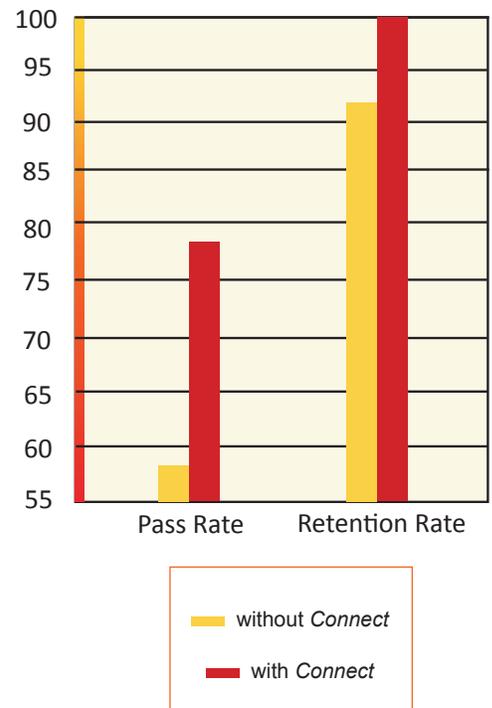
The other College Prep Writing III course section was taught traditionally. Professor Villar-Smith devoted one face-to-face lecture to each element of grammar as an introduction in both sections. In the *Connect Writing* section, the online learning took over the repetitive nature of the grammar drills in “an interactive manner that pleased the students and is in line with student learning patterns of the 21st century.” In the traditional class she conducted in-class drill and practice in a second lecture.

By also having access to individualized diagnostic scores, Professor Villar-Smith had the ability to see where each of her students were struggling in the course in order to provide assignment material specific to their needs without the rest of the class having to follow suit, making sure that each student spent time learning the material they needed most. “With *Connect Writing*, I can keep a more statistically valid evaluation of the students’ progress.”

Results Achieved

Connect Writing has allowed Professor Villar-Smith to spend more class time remediating the writing process and less time going over grammar exercises. Consequently, she found that the course section using *Connect Writing* experienced a 20% higher pass rate than the other class (see Figure 1). The student retention rate for this class was also 8% higher! “Students who use *Connect Writing* are more apt to do the grammar work and are more engaged when grammar discussions are covered in class,” she says. “*Connect Writing* presents a real-world perception of grammar and its usefulness. This, I believe, is due to the scenarios that mimic real-life professional environments in a multicultural and generalizable format.”

Figure 1 - Summer 2009 Course Scores



Conclusion

By incorporating *Connect Writing* in her College Prep Writing III course, Professor Villar-Smith was able to free up valuable class time to focus on the writing process. This led to increased student academic success and increased retention rates. “I expected higher passing rates on both the state exam and the departmental writing exam, and this is exactly what has occurred,” she says. In addition, Villar-Smith was able to better organize and maintain student records. She recommends *Connect Writing* to other faculty as well. “I have spoken with our new chairperson about the usefulness of *Connect Writing*. I constantly rave about its practicality and administrative value.”