**Connect** More than Doubles Pass Rate of Students and Brings Class Retention Rates to Nearly 100 Percent

Professor Evans has been requiring **Connect** for the past four years in her developmental writing course. Traditionally the retention rate of students in this class was low. Students had limited understanding of grammar, mechanics and the writing process which needed to be improved to continue on to the next course, Composition 1. With **Connect**, the retention rate and pass rates are higher, students’ grades are up, and Evans is spending less time in class explaining concepts they’ve learned with **Connect**.

**Implementation of McGraw-Hill Connect**

Course grade is determined by the following:
- 20% - **Connect** Assignments
- 40% - Exams administered within **Connect**
- 20% - Final Exam administered within **Connect**
- 20% - Class participation

Before **Connect** was implemented, Evans offered a traditional lecture format class. Students used a university selected text which consisted of a compilation of essays and readings. The class used a pocket handbook for grammar and mechanics as well as the writing process.

Another instructor at the University of Arkansas selected **Connect** for a summer class, after which Evans began piloting **Connect**. “I was familiar with other digital products and was given the task of continuing a pilot with **Connect.**”

The developmental course she teaches is required for students scoring 18 and below on the English part of the ACT, with the majority of those students scoring 15 and below. Because the retention rate of these students was very low, Evans was looking for a way to raise retention and elevate these students’ grammar, mechanics and the writing process skills to a higher level, so that they could move on to Composition I. “The **Connect** program was a good mix of review and adaptation for students and instructors,” she says.

“**Connect** has been an integral part of my classroom experience and has shown me that students who have a sense of success, continue to do well in their other classes. **Connect** gives them that success through its immediate feedback and adaptive programs.”

— Betty A. Evans

CASE STUDY

University of Arkansas at Monticello

www.mcgrawhillconnect.com
Students first take the pre-test provided in the Connect assignments. Evans then analyzes the pre-test scores to adjust her course schedule in Connect. Following a mini lecture, Evans generally assigns a Connect LearnSmart Achieve (an adaptive student experience designed to boost student success by providing individualized learning resources) topic/module in grammar and mechanics during the early part of the semester. The topics she assigns relate to the lecture time in class. As a result of the content adapting to each student’s progress through the material, some students may spend more time on this assignment than others.

As students progress in grammar and mechanics, she begins making Power of Process assignments on particular readings from the Connect Integrated Reading and Writing thematic eReader (readings available online). She makes up to four Power of Process assignments on the same reading selection covering vocabulary, annotating and the reading and writing processes. The Power of Process guides students through performance-based assessment activities that require them to apply active reading and writing strategies while demonstrating critical thinking and analysis of a reading selection with their own writing.

Evans adds the reading and writing processes later in the semester after students have a good handle on writing complete sentences and setting up a paragraph. “With the addition of Power of Process, I added assignments based on particular readings to take students through the reading process and then into the writing process,” she says. By making multiple Power of Process assignments from one reading, she gives students the opportunity to learn how to read critically and then write about what they read.

She learned, as she proceeded, just how to use Connect most efficiently. “I have discovered that multiple assignments, especially in Power of Process, on one reading slows the student down, enabling them to really see what they are reading and to get more out of it. She uses Power of Process for vocabulary, critical thinking, annotating and setting up a thesis statement for an essay. She adds that Power of Process provides a level of understanding for students that might not be possible in a traditionally taught class. “This leads to better class participation and discussion.”

Since using Connect, Evans can cover much more material. This is especially important for the lowest level students who often must be taken back to the basics of grammar and mechanics. With Connect, she says, she can give them more in-depth assignments to bring them up to speed more quickly. “so I am not lecturing over their heads all the time.” The quizzes in Connect are automatically graded, saving Evans more time to work with students rather than grading papers.

The most useful Connect reports have been the Connect Insight dashboard, Assignment Results, Student Performance and the At-risk Report. The Insight dashboard shows Evans the data visually. The visualized data is ready, no gathering or organizing required, for Evans to interpret and act on. The greatest value from the LearnSmart Achieve performance reports, she says, comes from Progress Overview, Student Details, Practice Quiz and Metacognitive Skills. “They tell me what my students are doing and how I am doing.”

Results Achieved
Those students scoring 18 or less on the ACT, or 69-84 on the COMPASS, must take the developmental course and pass an end of course exam to be able to go on to Composition I. Some of these students don’t know the difference between a noun and a verb, and they have trouble writing a complete sentence. The Connect program has enabled these students to achieve success and has given
them the idea that college might work for them after all. “I’ve had students tell me that they didn’t know they could read so well until they did the Power of Process assignments,” says Evans.

Combining lecture and Connect, students begin to see how thoughts and conversation are connected to writing, and that reading is not the ordeal they had imagined. “I have had students coming into my classes with an ACT score as low as nine. While they might not have placed a 19 on the end of course exam, (with Connect) they scored in the 14-16 range which is a tremendous improvement,” she says. They come back the next semester ready to move on to Composition I.

Evans says she was taken by surprise with the increased student participation in class discussions. “I credit much of that to Power of Process. Students slow down and begin to think critically about what they are reading.” She adds that the thematic eReader readings are timely and relevant to the students and as a result they become engaged and ready to discuss the material.

The students are enjoying the annotating and highlighting feature in Power of Process, Evans reports, and use that feature to discuss in class what they are reading. Evans can give them immediate feedback and that prompts better discussions in class. “They begin to think about what they are reading and discover it is fun to talk about what they have read.” At times Evans will review students’ Power of Process assignments and use their comments for class discussion. “They love this exercise and I’m never at a loss for volunteers.”

When it comes to grades, Evans is seeing more students in the Bs and Cs range and fewer with Fs (Figure 1). “My grade distribution has been impacted positively with the introduction of Connect, especially with the new LearnSmart Achieve and Power of Process assignment types.”

Evans says she has seen more students pass the course and move into Composition 1 with Connect in comparison to classes without it (Figure 2). “The LearnSmart Achieve and Power of Process assignments have really been significant in showing students how to read with comprehension and how to respond to what they are reading.”
Retention rates more than tripled with the use of Connect (Figure 3).

![Figure 3 – Student Retention Rates](image)

The time preparing for lectures has been significantly reduced with Connect as well, she reports. What took three hours each week in preparation without Connect is now only 30 minutes per week (Figure 4). “I make my assignments on Connect and base my lecture around those assignments,” she explains. “I am able to have a semester long lesson plan completed before the semester begins based on the master course I have created.” While she may then make some changes during the semester based on the results of the students’ pre-tests, she says “I know what I need to cover and when, and can tell immediately how my students are progressing and if I need to do any re-teaching.”

Grading time is also reduced to a quarter of what it was (Figure 4). “Grading time with Connect has given me more time with my students and with helping those that need a little extra one-on-one time,” she says.

![Figure 4 - Time Required for Lecture Prep and Grading](image)
Conclusion

This fall Evans will shift from a 16-week semester to an 8-week session, with classes meeting 5 days a week. Connect will enable her to give students what they need in grammar and mechanics instruction during that time. Connect has shown Evans that students who experience success continue to do well in their other classes.

To any peer instructor or administrator, Evans would say ‘Let me show you this great program! Connect is something that I believe in and have seen great things happen with students who were not given a snowball’s chance of succeeding.’ Many of her first students who used Connect have now graduated. Connect is not a cookie cutter program, but is adaptive for students’ learning styles and can be adapted by instructors for their teaching styles, she says, and adds, “The Connect team is always there to help and I have never felt alone.”