Inclusive Access and Connect® Reduce Financial Burden for Students while Improving Course Grades

Introduction

To address low passing rates, Dr. John Starnes and his colleagues wanted to improve access to the textbook and course materials on the first day of class. Many of his students would not buy a textbook or would experience financial aid delays. “Because of Inclusive Access, all students have access to the course materials they need to be successful much earlier in the course,” said Starnes.

Earlier access to course materials has improved pass rates and grades. Since implementing Connect and Inclusive Access in the online BIO 212 course, students who earned passing grades (A, B, C) climbed from 51% without Connect to 70% with Connect, to 74% with Connect and Inclusive Access. Consequently retention rates jumped by 20%.

“With Connect, I can make sure students get access to the content and can assign targeted, supplemental work for those who are struggling," said Starnes. Students also have a better grasp of what concepts they don’t understand or need help with. . . Instead of saying, ‘I don’t understand anything’.

---

**Case Study**

Somerset Community College

**Inclusive Access and Connect® Reduce Financial Burden for Students while Improving Course Grades**

**Course Name:** Introduction to Biology (BIO 212)

**Course Setup:** Connect® with Johnson
*The Living World, 9e*

**Implementation:** Online

**LMS Integration:** Blackboard

**Case Study Enrollment:** 1 section of 30-60 students (university total = 450 annual)

**Case Study Term:** 2011-2012 (without Connect), 2015-2016 (with Connect)

Learn More: mheducation.com/highered
Implementation

Upon course enrollment, students are immediately enrolled in Inclusive Access and don’t have to opt-in. The Inclusive Access fee is included in their tuition.

The course grade is determined by:

- 40% Exams administered within Connect
- 30% Connect + SmartBook
- 20% Quizzes administered in class and within Connect
- 10% Research paper

Students have five SmartBook assignments per week and are expected to work through them and the assigned readings prior to class. Because of this, students are able to focus more on content in class and have deeper discussions on real-world applications.

“*In class, we focus on the areas students have the most difficulty with and other areas of interest,* said Starnes. “*For example, some days we dissect a biology finding that impacts their daily lives, once they understand the related basic concepts.*”

After class, students complete Connect assignments to reinforce the material. Starnes assigns online discussion board topics to help students learn the topic through communication with other students. There is also a midterm and a final to assess how well students retain the material.

Starnes uses Connect with Blackboard so students can use a program they are comfortable with to be able to jump right into the Connect assignments that are laid out in the proper order. Grades are kept in one place so students can access them quickly if necessary.

Using the Student Performance, Item Analysis, and Category Analysis reports in Connect, Starnes can see which students may need extra help, which topics students may be struggling most with, and which learning outcomes they may need to review in class.

“*I spend more time covering content in my course using Connect because I don’t have to give quizzes as much during class,*” said Starnes. “*I can assess how well students understand the material by reviewing the reports in Connect.*”

In SmartBook, Starnes analyzes the Student Details report to see how much time a student is spending on an assignment, the Missed Questions report as a jumping off point for a content-related discussion in class, and the Most Challenging Learning Objectives report to develop content and provide additional assignments for the class.

Instructor’s Implementation Goals

- Provide students with affordable access to course content immediately
- Improve students' pass rates
- Spend more time working with students on core course content
- Help students engage with the course content in an interactive way
- Reduce time spent grading assignments
- Make students' grades and feedback on coursework available immediately
“This report allows me to target heavily on what the students need to understand. Sometimes I send students a short video or an extra assignment to help them grasp a concept that continues to be missed,” said Starnes. Students are also learning to use the reports to help themselves. Starnes acknowledged he was surprised to see that, after discussing the Missed Questions report in class, students started to use the review topics next to the questions in SmartBook themselves for their own review.

Results Achieved

The opportunity to access course materials immediately, to review topics prior to class, and to dive deeper into content has led to higher grades for more students. "Since using Connect," said Starnes, "I have seen an increase in the number of students earning an A, B, or C. Prior to Connect, the average percentage of students earning passing grades (A, B, or C) was 51%. After implementing Connect, the average jumped to 71%. Once Inclusive Access was added, the average rose again to 75%." (See Figure 1)

Pass rates have also improved with the implementation of Connect and Inclusive Access to the course. Pass rates without either was 79%. With Connect and Inclusive Access, pass rates increased by 4% to 83%. (See Figure 2)
Retention rates climbed 20% after switching from a traditional textbook to Connect + SmartBook. The key to student success is the opportunity for all students to have access to course content early in the semester. Since implementing Inclusive Access, 94% of students now have access to course materials on or before day one of the course.

Starnes believes that, “With Inclusive Access, students are able to jump right into the content. Before, students would wait to purchase their book or to log in and complete work. Now, even before class starts, I can have material up and ready for students to begin working on. Many students take advantage of this head start.”

Starnes is also able to spend much less time prepping for lecture, allowing his classroom to be more engaging. He uses the SmartBook assignment results to help him plan mini-lectures that address questions students missed. "I can be more targeted in the content I develop for class activities by focusing on topics that are confusing to the students." (See Figure 3)

He also spends less time grading (See Figure 3). In fact, the ease of grading has allowed his department to switch to larger sections in an online environment. They have also begun adding hybrid courses so that students can do most of the coursework online, but can still meet in a classroom where they have access to an instructor and peers. This gives them an opportunity to participate in more hands-on exercises.

Conclusion
Implementing Connect with Inclusive Access has improved students’ grades, pass rates, and retention rates. Inclusive Access offers students instructional materials on the first day of class. By utilizing the reports available in Connect and SmartBook, lecture prep time has reduced for instructors and students’ class time is focused more on content and having deeper discussions on real-world applications of the materials they have learned.

Somerset Community College is a two-year college in the Kentucky Community and Technical College System. It offers associate degrees, diplomas, and certificates in over 60 different areas of study, including nursing, criminal justice, business administration, early childhood education, computer and information technologies, and aviation technology.

Dr. John Starnes is an Associate Professor of Biology at Somerset Community College where he has worked for the last seven years. He earned his Bachelor’s degree in Agriculture Biotechnology and Ph.D. in Plant Pathology from the University of Kentucky. He also has a M.Sc. degree in Biology from Western Kentucky University.