



Digital Course Solution Improves Student Success and Increases Instructor Efficiency

Prior to 2010, the University of Louisiana at Lafayette offered over 20 computer literacy courses, spread across various departments and using a number of different teaching tools. Exit exams showed that even after taking the classes, many students were still struggling with computer fundamentals.

In 2010 the university created a single general education course called Information Literacy that all students were required to take. They chose to teach the course using the SimNet learning system. SimNet made it easy to teach the material to hundreds of students, and exit exams showed that students were finally learning the material.

Institution Profile

The University of Louisiana at Lafayette is a nationally recognized public university that's home to over 16,000 students, including 1,500 graduate students and an Honors Program of nearly 1,000 students. The university offers over 100 academic majors, options, and concentrations.

Implementation

Course Description:

The Information Literacy course provides an introduction to word processing, spreadsheet, database, and presentation software. The

Digital Product in Use: SimNet
Course Name: Information Literacy
Course Type: Traditional
Credit Hours: Two
Textbook in Use: None
Instructor Name: Marilyn Gastineau
Enrollment: 3,000/year
Case Study Term: Fall 2012

course is also designed to help students learn about the ethics and societal impact of information technology.

Course Grade:

- 60% of the final grade is based on five exams
- 30% of the final grade is based on 14 projects
- 5% of the final grade is based on daily lessons
- 5% of the final grade is based on class participation

Challenges for the Course:

Originally, many departments at the university were offering courses that covered computer literacy. Even after taking these courses, however, exit exams showed that students continued to struggle with the material. The Information Literacy course was designed as a general education requirement to introduce students to computer fundamentals in a more effective way.

Implementation of SimNet:

Professor Marilyn Gastineau teaches Information Literacy to about 240 students each semester. The course meets for 50 minutes once a week. The majority of the students' work is completed using SimNet outside of the classroom. Each week's homework assignments must be completed prior to the next class meeting. The students' answers are transmitted to the instructor over SimNet and graded automatically by the program.

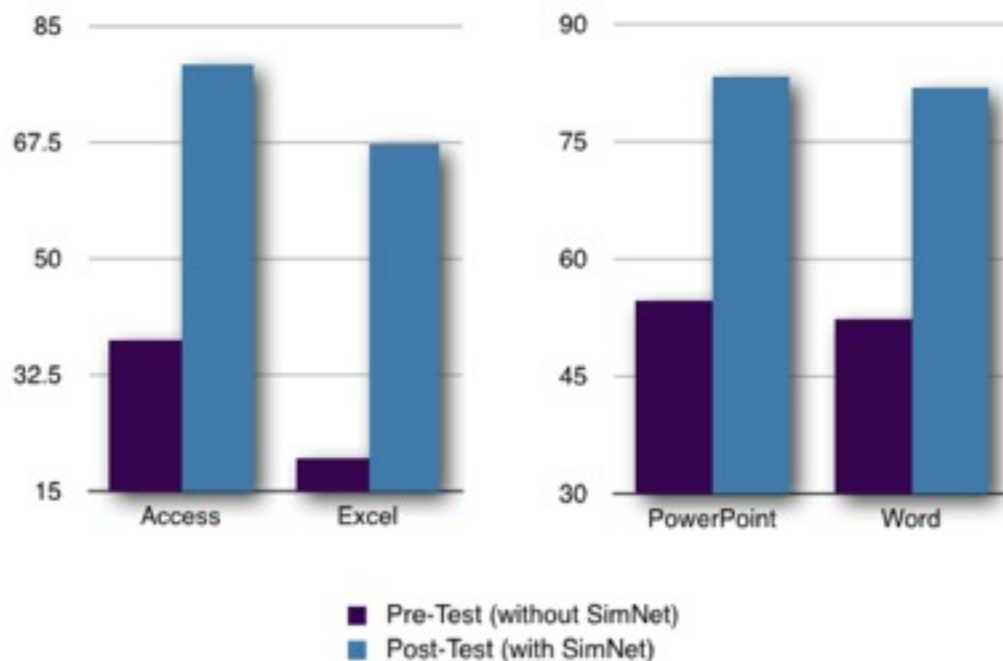
Throughout the semester, five unit exams are administered during class via SimNet. Each Microsoft Office program is the subject of an exam, including Word, Excel, Access, and PowerPoint. Another exam covers computer concepts, Internet usage, and e-mail.

SimNet is the sole teaching tool used in the class. No textbooks or other programs are required for students to purchase.

Results Achieved

Using SimNet, Professor Gastineau and the other Information Literacy instructors are able to teach over 450 computer skills to thousands of students each year. The homework assignments allow students to work at their own pace, so students with more advanced knowledge of computer fundamentals can finish the assignments quickly after class, while those requiring more help can take their time throughout the week. SimNet provides a flexible platform for instruction.

In addition, SimNet gives instructors flexibility in what they teach and when. “Since we customized our course to the skills we wanted students to learn in the order we wanted them presented, SimNet has worked very well for our program,” Gastineau says. “We now have a system that almost runs itself.”



Using SimNet has paid off. Before the Fall 2012 semester, Professor Gastineau had about 800 students take a pre-test to assess their knowledge of computer fundamentals. The pre-test covered many of the skills they would learn with SimNet in the class. The average score for the pre-test was 41.22 out of 100. After Gastineau taught the course using SimNet, she gave the students a post-test that covered the same material. The average post-test score was 77.9--a 53% increase.

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Conclusion

Gastineau is happy with SimNet and will continue to use and recommend it to other instructors. She says, "We cover 491 skills in Information Literacy. The only way we could do that reasonably is to have the self-grading that SimNet provides." SimNet is a flexible educational platform that helps instructors teach a wide variety of computer skills to students of all levels of knowledge. For Professor Gastineau and other instructors at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, SimNet has been a powerful tool for designing a course of study, teaching a large number of students, and increasing student success.