



Digital Course Solution Helps Teach Students of All Skill Levels

Students in Professor Marcy Courier's Introduction to Computers course come from a variety of backgrounds. Some students have used Microsoft Office applications their whole lives, while others have very little experience using computers. One reason Professor Courier uses the SimNet learning platform is because it offers the flexibility to let students work at their own pace. The results are very positive: 89% of her students feel that their skills are "Good" or "Excellent" after taking the course.

Institutional Profile

The University of Tampa has an annual enrollment of approximately 7,000 students. The university offers 150 programs of study, with 11 master's programs and nine concentrations.

Implementation

Course Description:

Introduction to Computers provides students with a foundational knowledge of Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, and Excel computer applications. No computer experience is required to take the course, but the goal is for all students to exit the course with an intermediate skill level using the applications. The course is required of all incoming undergraduate students so that they're able to use the Office applications in other classes without the instructors needing to provide further instruction.

Digital Product in Use: SimNet
Course Name: Introduction to Computers
Course Type: Traditional
Credit Hours: 1
Textbook in Use: None
Instructor Name: Marcy Courier
Enrollment/year: 1,800

Course Grade:

- 33% of the grade is based on the Word exam
- 33% of the final grade is based on the Excel exam
- 33% of the final grade is based on the PowerPoint exam

Challenges for the Course:

With any course, instructors must teach students with varying amounts of knowledge of the subject matter. But with computer fundamentals in particular, students come to the university with vastly different skill sets. Some students have worked extensively with the Microsoft Office applications, while others have never used a computer before. Because students come to the class with such different knowledge bases, bringing every student up to the same level of skill is a major challenge for instructors.

Implementation of SimNet:

After introducing students to the SimNet software, Professor Courier has them meet once a week in a computer lab to complete online tutorials for Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, and Excel. Because SimNet is available on every computer on campus, as well as on students' PCs, students can continue learning outside of class.

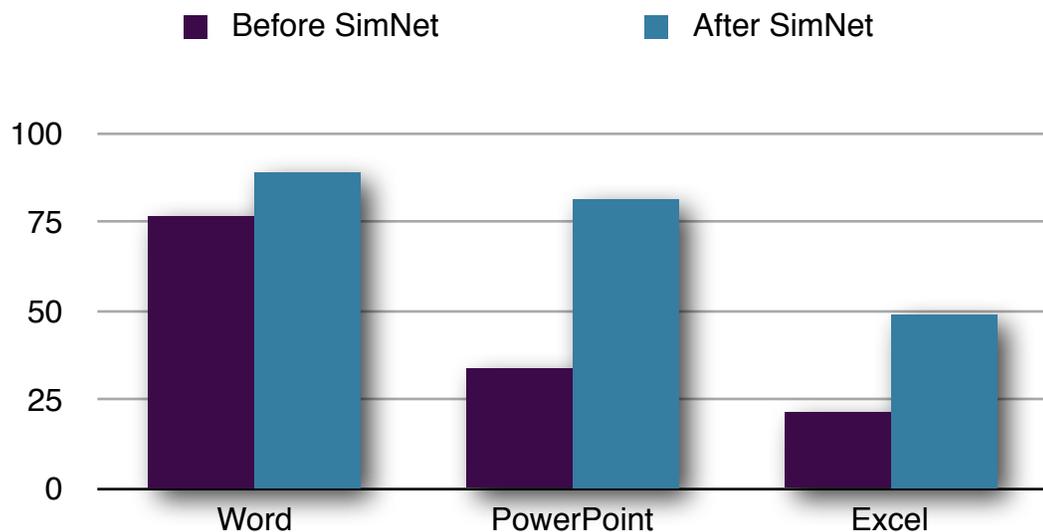
Students are free to work at their own pace, but they must take the final exam for each Office application by an assigned date. Students may take the exams early, but each exam can only be taken once. If a student elects to take an exam early, he or she is not required to attend class until the next application is covered. Students with lots of experience using Word, for instance, might take the exam the second week the class covers the program, while other students might attend each lab session and take the exam on the due date. Optional practice exams are available over SimNet for students who would like extra practice either in or out of class.

Results Achieved

Professor Courier found that SimNet is an effective learning tool for students regardless of their familiarity with computers prior to taking the class. SimNet's flexibility means that students can use the program

according to their individual needs, both inside and outside of the classroom. Professor Courier says, "It enables them to work on their skills from any place at any time. It is designed to meet anyone's needs, regardless of the student's skill level."

Using SimNet is paying off. In a paper by Courier and her colleague Raymond Papp, the instructors detail the effectiveness of the Introduction to Computers course. Courier and Papp gave 712 undergraduate students a questionnaire asking them how proficient they felt in using Word, PowerPoint, and Excel before and after taking the course. They found that only 44.1% of the students felt that their skills were either "Good" or "Excellent" prior to taking the course. After taking the course, 73.3% of the students considered their skills "Good" or "Excellent." That's almost at 30% difference.



Conclusion

Professor Courier is pleased with the results she gets using SimNet, and would "absolutely" recommend SimNet to other instructors. "If the student wants to get an A," she says, "he is able to."