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UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

Birmingham, Alabama

Case Study

Departmental Retention Rate of Students who Enrolled in Second Semester Spanish Increased from 23% to 53% after Implementing *Connect*® Spanish

The retention rate for students who took Spanish 101 and went on to take Spanish 102 was 23%. Dr. Krista Chambless wanted to increase that retention rate and produce more proficient speakers of Spanish.

After implementing *Connect*, student retention increased to 53%, and all students achieved Intermediate Low proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing on the STAMP 4S after completing the three-course sequence.

Digital Product in Use: *Connect*® Spanish

LMS Integration: Canvas

Course Name: Spanish 101

Course Type: Face to Face

Credit Hours: Three credit-hour course with one credit-hour online required lab

Program in Use: Goodall, G. & Lear, D. (2017) *Conéctate*, 2 ed. New York, New York: McGraw-Hill Education, including the online workbook/lab manual with *Connect*® and *LearnSmart*®.

Instructor: Krista Chambless, PhD

Enrollment: 25 students per section; 16 sections; 450 students per year (university total)

Chambless says, “One of the main goals of switching our program was to improve retention rates from SPA 101 to 102. Our rate was a dismal 23% before switching. After the first semester with *Connect*, our retention rate was 53%.”

Not only has the retention rate improved, but Chambless can devote more time to classroom activities instead of grading. “Grades are automatically transferred from *Connect* to Canvas. Students love *Connect* because they log in to Canvas, and all their assignments are in one place. They do not have to remember logins to a separate platform.”

Although it is hard work to change programs, Chambless says it was worth it. “*Connect* is much easier to use than other platforms I have seen. I am grateful for the guidance, support, and expertise provided by McGraw Hill’s Digital Faculty Consultant (DFC). Our DFC helped customize the *Connect* course content and led a training workshop for our instructors.”

Implementation

The following determines the course grade:

- Integrated Performance Assessment 1 20% (from *Connect*)
- Integrated Performance Assessment 2 20% (from *Connect*)
- 22 Países project 10%
- Cultural event attendance 5%
- Class Participation 5%
- Quizzes 15% (from *Connect*)
- *Connect* / *LearnSmart* assignments 25% (from *Connect*)

Chambless says she always starts with backward design: “What do you want your students to be able to do at the end of the course?” Then she works backwards, planning activities that help students achieve that goal. She says, “Be very organized and structure your assignments logically. Be sure to focus on what students can do with the language.”

“

The most important change after implementing the Connect program was a tremendous increase in our departmental retention rate. With the previous program, the retention rate from first to second semester Spanish was approximately 23%. Retention increased to 53% after implementing the Connect program.”

Students complete four chapters in Spanish 101, using the first week to discuss language proficiency, learning strategies, and course navigation. Students spend the next three weeks per chapter with one week for a midterm Integrated Performance Assessment and one week for a final Integrated Performance Assessment.

Students answer 8-11 questions in each assignment, and there is one assignment per week. Additionally, students have *LearnSmart* assignments every week. Chambless says she does not review homework in class unless a student asks a specific question. "Students are given feedback in *Connect*, so I don't worry about it. I spend my class time focusing on communication rather than grammar drills by giving more detailed feedback on writing and speaking activities."

Week 1 introduces vocabulary. Week 2 is spent on grammar. Week 3 is spent on grammar and the *Conéctate* section at the end of the chapter. Chambless says, "One of the aspects I love about the *Conéctate* text is the integration of culture throughout the book. Students are using the language (and the vocabulary/ structures) to learn about the variety of Hispanic cultures. I do not have to worry about whether or not I am 'covering' enough culture. It is already included."

Chambless uses *Connect* reports "Student Performance" and "Item Analysis," and *LearnSmart* reports "Student Details," "Missed Questions," and "Item Analysis" to help check in with students' progress and performance.

"I like to look at individual student performance, especially if a student is struggling. It shows me what they are having trouble with. I also like the Item Analysis, so I can see if there is something I need to reteach in the classroom because the whole class missed the question."

She uses the reports in *LearnSmart* because she believes "students should be aware of and take responsibility for their learning."

Although the various textbook options help students save money, Chambless believes students appreciate the learning tools available in *Connect* and *LearnSmart* because the focus is on improving proficiency in speaking and writing skills, and that has increased the students' confidence in the classroom.

She says, "The end of each chapter has 'Can-Do' statements so that the students can evaluate their progress. We now focus on what students can do with the language rather than on what they can't."

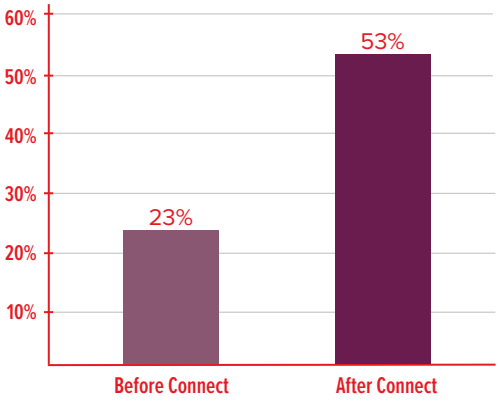




Results Achieved

Chambless believes *Connect*, as well as other curricular changes such as Integrated Performance Assessments, are responsible for their department's increased retention rate. Before using *Connect*, only 23% of students in Spanish 101 took Spanish 102. Now 53% of students continue learning Spanish (Figure 1).

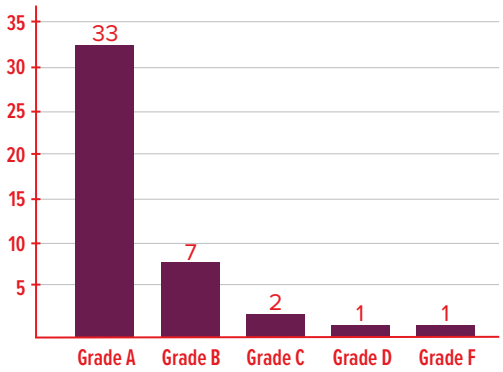
Figure 1:
Department Retention Rate



Student grades have improved. Chambless says, "Some faculty expressed concern about grade inflation because so many students got As. I look at that as very positive. If we are teaching correctly, most of our students should be successful."

To address grade inflation concerns, students are now limited to three attempts to complete the homework instead of allowing an unlimited number of attempts. Chambless says, "For my specific courses, I had 33 As, 7 Bs, 2 Cs, 1 D, and 1 F" (Figure 2).

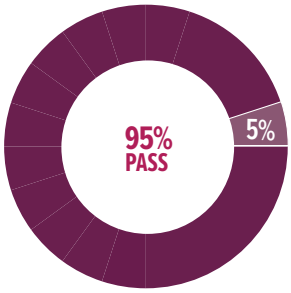
Figure 2:
Students Grades After Implementing Connect



Chambless does not have comparative data for quizzes and exam scores before *Connect* because of the course redesign. However, she says that students do seem to do well on quizzes and Integrated Performance Assessments: "Student proficiency in speaking has improved greatly. All four skill areas were assessed with a third-party unbiased assessment: the STAMP 4S. All students who took the assessment reached the goal of Intermediate Low proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing."

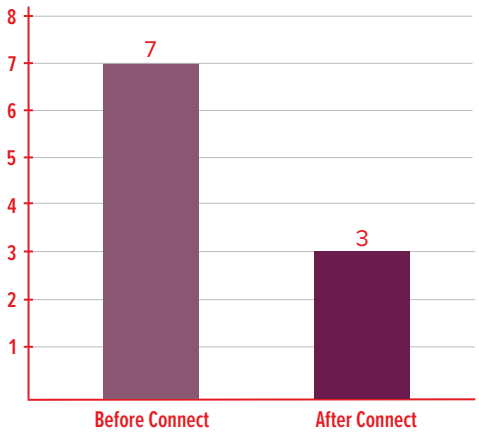
Chambless had a 95% pass rate in her specific courses and believes all students can succeed with *Connect* if they are willing to complete the work (Figure 3). She says, "The students who failed did so because they did not complete any work or stopped coming to class. If students followed the program, they passed."

Figure 3:
Student Pass Rate



Connect and *LearnSmart* have also decreased the number of hours Chambless has to spend grading. Before *Connect*, she spent 5 to 7 hours grading. After *Connect*, Chambless spends 2 to 3 hours grading (Figure 4). "I can now devote my time to giving more detailed feedback on writing and speaking activities because I don't have to grade all of the *Connect* assignments."

Figure 4:
Maximum Hours Spent Grading



Conclusion

Chambless is pleased with the switch to *Connect*. The retention rate for the department increased by 30%, and students are more engaged in classroom learning and feel more confident in participating. Reduced grading time means Chambless can focus on more interactive lessons for the classroom and spend more time providing detailed feedback on speaking and writing skills in the classroom. At the same time, tedious topics, such as grammar, can be reinforced via *Connect* and *LearnSmart*. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the transition to an entirely online delivery method was seamless.

"We are now offering our three-course introductory sequence online. Connect has made it easy to transform the face-to-face class into an online environment. I can make sure students are getting a very similar SPA 101 experience, no matter the course delivery method."

– Krista Chamberless, PhD, University of Alabama at Birmingham

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Instructor Biography:

Krista Chambless earned her PhD in foreign language education from the University of Alabama and has worked and developed foreign language programs as a graduate teaching assistant, pre-school teacher, elementary school teacher, high school teacher, and college professor teaching both French and Spanish language courses and has taught foreign language methodologies to pre-service teachers. She travels extensively and believes: foreign language learning is for everyone, students should be the focus of the classroom, classroom communication should be meaningful and purpose-driven, and culture is the heart of foreign language learning.

Instructor's Implementation Goals:

- Improve student retention in the department
- Improve students' confidence in speaking and writing Spanish
- Devote more time to providing detailed feedback on writing and speaking activities in the classroom
- Reduce grading time so more time can be spent planning classroom activities

Issues for Instructor Before Using *Connect*:

- Students didn't continue taking Spanish courses
- Students needed a proficiency-based learning tool
- Class time was less interactive
- Grading was tedious

Benefits to Instructor After Using *Connect*:

- Student retention rate improved by 30%
- Students are more proficient and confident in speaking and writing in class
- More time is devoted to class discussion and detailed feedback
- Grading time is reduced
- Course transferred easily to an entirely online delivery method during the COVID-19 pandemic

SPOTLIGHT

Institution Profile:

The University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) is a public research university that offers 140 programs of study to approximately 22,000 students from more than 110 countries. The UAB Health System, affiliated with UAB, is one of the largest academic medical centers in the United States and provides opportunities for residency programs in internal medicine, neurology, physical medicine and rehabilitation, surgery, radiology, and anesthesiology.

Course Description:

Introductory Spanish 101 is the first course of a three-course sequence (101, 102 & 201). The first four chapters of *Conéctate* will be completed in this course. The primary goal of this course is to aid students in achieving proficiency in the Spanish language. According to the ACTFL, proficiency guidelines, students at the intermediate-low proficiency level can participate in conversations on a variety of concrete topics using complete sentences. Students can handle social interaction in everyday situations as well as ask and answer simple questions. All the research shows that an interactive, Spanish-speaking learning environment is optimal for acquisition of the language. Thus, Spanish will be used 90% of the course time.