Case Study Texas Tech University

CHANGING THE GAME WITH CUSTOM COURSE CONTENT

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TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

Textbooks can't be printed fast enough to keep pace with certain dynamic topics. Just ask Dr. Amber McCord, an assistant professor who teaches an introductory course on the impacts of social media at Texas Tech University.

When she started teaching the undergraduate course four years ago, Dr. McCord couldn't find a textbook that adequately covered the fast-evolving subject of social media. So she decided to create her own.

It wasn't easy at first; when she tried to amalgamate course material using open educational resource (OER) materials, because the quality of the content was hit or miss. "I didn't have my students read a lot because I simply couldn't find the right content," she said. Fast forward to May 2018, Dr. McCord began working with McGraw-Hill to create a customized digital course that would enable her to personalize the learning experience. Using McGraw-Hill's Open Learning Solutions (OLS) platform, she layered a rich set of digital content and assessment tools on top of the highly configurable digital learning ecosystem.

"One single textbook couldn't cover the content I wanted to cover," she said. "So I selected news articles, videos, and interactive content. I chose different chapters from different textbooks, and I used six different texts for my course."

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When creating her course, Dr. McCord had the tools of McGraw Hill's Open Learning Solutions (OLS) at her fingertips, which is easily configured and uses standards-based technology. She was not only able to build a curriculum by aggregating media and high-touch content from digital textbooks, personally authored material, OER, YouTube videos, hyperlinked articles, and interactive simulations but she could also have the custom course material backed by the learning science technology found within the OLS platform.

The OLS platform enables instructors to easily publish and share content with students where they live: on their smartphones. "I knew what content I wanted to use for teaching, but I didn't have access to the learning technology and digital delivery capabilities that McGraw-Hill brings to the table. Something as simple as enabling my students to do their homework on their phones was impossible on my own," Dr. McCord said.

"The combination of my own course content with the McGraw-Hill content allows me to deliver a world-class learning solution to my students."

It has also helped reduce the costs of textbooks for Dr. McCord's students. The average undergraduate student at a four-year institution spends $1,240 in books and supplies per year, a sum that has almost doubled over the last decade, according to the College Board. Digital textbooks, on the other hand, typically cost less than $100 per course.

"Students and their parents are increasingly concerned about the costs of textbooks, and digital content enables us to reduce costs for students," said Todd Chambers, associate professor and associate dean for undergraduate affairs at Texas Tech. "The McGraw-Hill solution allows us to help students realize learning improvements by offering cutting-edge information at a reduced cost."

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Media & Communication wasn't the first Texas Tech college to embrace digital learning platforms. In 2014, the College of Arts and Sciences launched custom digital content for a popular political science course. Dr. McCord saw how the political science course content was structured and was intrigued.

Dr. McCord and McGraw-Hill held initial meetings in May 2018, and by the next month they had started writing and aggregating materials. Course content was authored, packaged, and published in four months, just in time for the fall semester.

According to Dr. McCord, the McGraw-Hill staff was indispensable in helping develop, design, and display the reading materials, videos, quizzes, assessments, and graphics. "The team at McGraw-Hill was super supportive and responded quickly. I had a lot of questions and they were always there to help," she said.

One of the first steps for Dr. McCord and the team was designing the underlying structure of content: Compound Learning Objects, or CLOs. These pedagogically linked groups of digital content define the learning objectives that each individual piece of content will teach. Dr. McCord worked with a dedicated McGraw-Hill solutions architect to define and weave CLOs into the fabric of the social media curriculum. From there, she drafted an outline, authored content, customized assessment tools, and added external assets like videos and hyperlinked articles. Once satisfied with the materials, Dr. McCord submitted her coursework to the McGraw-Hill team to assemble, design, and publish the content.

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As with any new academic initiative, there's a learning curve associated with implementing a digital learning platform. McGraw-Hill streamlines the process by providing a dedicated team for advice and guidance, from conception to post-go-live.

"We want it to work well from the beginning, so we provide faculty with a single person to work with," said Brian Coovert, McGraw-Hill Solutions Architect. "For us, what's most important is that faculty are happy with the service and that students get the best learning experience."

Open Learning Solutions
A one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work for everyone. McGraw-Hill offers a consultative approach to successfully identifying, creating, and implementing a tailor-made courseware solution that's right for you.

DECIDE A PLAN

We take the time to help you identify your goals, challenges, stakeholders, and timelines.

PICK THE CONTENT

Choose locally authored content, OER, or from a deep library of McGraw-Hill content.

PUT IT TOGETHER

OLS architects help you select the content and technology choices that best meet your goals.

ENSURE SUCCESS

We'll work with you every step of the way to ensure your faculty is trained and resourced.

OPEN LEARNING SOLUTIONS

IT TAKES A TEAM



Implementing an Open Learning Solution harnesses a McGraw-Hill team of behind-the-scenes professionals to orchestrate the design, create the content, align the pedagogical assessments, and deploy. Key roles include:

Learning scientists: Help ensure that the pedagogy of the course design is sound, and evaluate the metadata tags in the educator's course content.

Solutions architects: Configure the core technology platform, and help educators build competencies in using the tools and assembling personalized materials. Solutions architects are the point of contact throughout the project deployment and maintenance processes.

Curriculum services: Helps create a framework using learning objectives and probes, works with course creators to mine existing MHE content to scale course development, and guides new content creation through MHE authoring toolsets.

Production: Ushers new and existing content through permissions, accessibility, and production (compositor, QA, etc.) processes to help ensure compliant, professional-quality outcomes.

Graphic designers: Help faculty create templates and custom graphics to present course content in an attractive, functional format.

TURNING INSIGHTS INTO OUTCOMES

During the first semester of use, the unified learning tool helped produce notable improvements in student outcomes.

Using Connect Smartbook technology, Dr. McCord monitored the progress of 340 students on day-to-day coursework, reading assignments, quizzes, and in-class interactive learning. The assessment tool quizzed learners to determine if they were reading—and comprehending—class materials.

"If a student does poorly on an exam, I can see if they have been reading the material," said Dr. McCord. "It's a great tool for problem-solving and feedback. I can look at the average time each student spent on reading, and if they are not doing well, I can tell them they need to do more reading in order to better prepare for quizzes."

Reading assessments can also help learners improve their grades. "Students who are not doing well on assessments come to me and ask, 'What can I do to improve my grades?'" Dr. McCord said. "These students are coming to me earlier than they have in the past. In previous years, they might become concerned after bombing a midterm exam; now they are talking to me sooner rather than later."

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BREAKING DOWN THE BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

"DIGITAL ENABLES THE INSTRUCTOR TO OFFER COURSE CONTENT THAT IS ON THE CUTTING EDGE OF CURRENT EVENTS."

A DIY approach to creating custom course materials is not without its challenges.

The biggest concern, Dr. McCord said, is the time and effort required to identify, write, and aggregate custom coursework. Each instance of an Open Learning Solution has unique variables that may require more time to design and implement. Dr. McCord completed writing and aggregating her course materials within two months, a comparatively fast turnaround.

And then there's digital maturity. For some instructors, new technologies can be intimidating. Even though content-authoring and course-management tools are designed for ease of use, seasoned faculty may worry that they lack technical aptitude.

The barriers to digital adoption are tumbling down, however,as technology becomes more capable, less costly, and faculty grow more comfortable with online systems. By this fall, five Texas Tech communications courses will be using the McGraw-Hill Open Learning Solutions platform.

"For both instructors and students, it's so important to have the adaptability and flexibility to customize content in a way that reflects what is going on in today's world," said Chambers. "Digital enables the instructor to offer course content that is on the cutting edge of current events."

LET'S BUILD SOMETHING GREAT TOGETHER

Contact us today and we'll help you decide if tailor-made McGraw-Hill Open Learning Solutions are right for you.

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