Success Story

Portland State University



Challenge

Dr. Stanton Heister's educational challenges included the need for a digital platform that allows for customizable content tailored to specific learning outcomes, offers diverse assignment types to support varied learning interventions, reduces reliance on teaching assistants, and seamlessly integrates with the Canvas Learning Management System (LMS).

Solution

Connect Master: *Introduction to Business* by McGraw Hill and Tim Broxholm

Result

Connect helped Dr. Heister overcome his challenges by offering diverse, engaging content, providing adaptive learning that customizes to student needs, and simplifying grading through digital assignments with immediate feedback, thereby reducing reliance on teaching assistants.

> **With Connect, students can engage with content in various ways, which is important for a younger, emerging generation of students."**
>
> – Stanton Heister



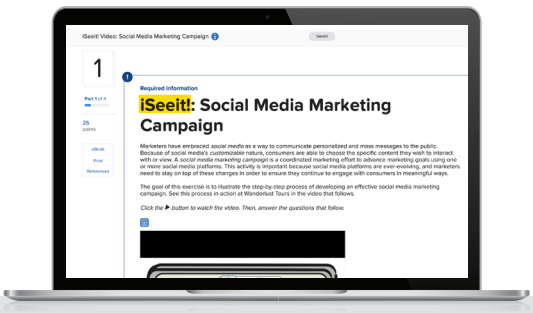
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The Challenge

Finding a Flexible, Cost-Effective Solution for Diverse Learners

Dr. Heister faced several educational challenges that prompted him to seek a digital course solution. He needed a platform that allowed for seamless integration with the Canvas gradebook, reducing administrative overhead and simplifying the grading process. “I wanted digital options for assignments where grades were able to flow directly from the publisher tool to our Canvas gradebook,” he explains. Additionally, Dr. Heister sought a variety of assignment types to engage students with varied learning experiences. “Our students are less traditional and often less affluent, so I needed a cost-effective product that could still generate creativity and curiosity,” he notes, emphasizing the importance of balancing affordability with robust, customizable content to meet his specific learning outcomes.





Course grade is determined by the following:

- Connect Adaptive Learning Assignments 30%
- Connect i SeeIt! Quizzes 10%
- Connect Cases/NewsFlashes 10%
- Connect Administered Exams 10%
- Team Projects/Attendance Pop Quizzes 40%

The Solution

Connect Master

Dr. Heister implemented Connect Master to create a dynamic and interactive learning environment, leveraging a variety of digital assignments and assessments to enhance student engagement and retention. His strategy begins by requiring students to complete chapter readings and Adaptive Learning Assignments before class. **"I always have the students complete the chapter readings and Adaptive Learning Assignments before the day that we cover that topic in class,"** he explains, ensuring that students arrive prepared for more in-depth discussions.

Dr. Heister leverages the **flexibility of the Adaptive Learning Assignments** by setting anticipated completion times to help monitor the time expectations placed on students. "I find student performance reports helpful if a student challenges what is reported in the gradebook—and statistics are helpful to understand if something is working, not working, was too hard, etc.," he says. This data allows him to adapt assignments and individual questions to better meet student needs and learning goals.

To further reinforce learning, Dr. Heister uses a range of digital resources, including iSeeIt! Videos, video case studies, and Manager's Hot Seat videos. He frequently incorporates videos or news segments into class sessions, followed by group activities. "I will play a video or a news segment for the students and then give them time in class to work in small groups to complete this work," he notes. This method promotes teamwork and communication skills while helping first-year and newer students form early friendships, which improves persistence.

Additionally, Dr. Heister utilizes Connect Master for remote, open-book exams, designed to balance rigor with a low-stress environment.
"I time them at 60 minutes so students must be prepared to answer most questions without the need to research the book," he says, while still allowing some time for review. This approach supports learning by encouraging preparation while permitting occasional reference to course materials.

Each week, Dr. Heister assigns 3-5 assignments, including team projects that span multiple chapters and align with specific learning objectives. "Each team is assigned a company—like Team Amazon or Team Apple—to research throughout the term, applying concepts from marketing, finance, and accounting," he explains. These projects cover 2-3 chapters per assignment and increase in difficulty, challenging students to progressively build their skills.

Dr. Heister has also begun using NewsFlash assignments to connect classroom learning with real-world events. **"We use the NewsFlash assignments as in-class assignments where we either play the associated audio clip of the article or have the students read the article and then complete the quiz with a small group of students,"** he explains. Following the quiz, students discuss the news, the chapter topic, and their perspectives on the issues, which strengthens critical thinking and application of course concepts.

This approach has significantly impacted his students. "Having students read or listen to news related to business opens their minds to what else they can learn from staying up to date with current events that affect business," he says. "I also ask them to think about how this issue has affected other industries or parts of business to help them 'connect the dots,' so to speak. If we can get our students thinking about news in this way, we can help them evaluate and solve problems based upon the content they are learning in all their business classes." By encouraging this level of critical engagement, Dr. Heister helps students develop a deeper understanding of how their coursework applies to real-world business challenges.

The Result

Positive Outcomes in Retention, Inclusivity, and Course Delivery

Using Connect Master has significantly transformed Dr. Heister's approach to lecture preparation and class engagement. By assigning Adaptive Learning assignments before class, he finds that "students are to some degree familiar or have even mastered some subject matter," which allows them to participate more actively in class discussions. This preparation leads to more meaningful questions from students and enables Dr. Heister to "condense the overall lecture time per chapter," freeing up more time for in-class activities. **"With reduced lecture time, I can do more in-class activities,"** he says, which has resulted in fewer missed assignments and increased student participation.

Connect Master has also reduced the time required for grading, benefiting both Dr. Heister and his teaching assistants. **"Using Connect Master digital assets has reduced, significantly, grading time for me and my TA,"** he explains, allowing them to focus more on evaluating high-impact, subjective assignments like team projects. Furthermore, the varied assignment types in Connect Master have enhanced student engagement. **"Students are more prepared to ask and answer questions during lectures,"** he notes, and small team collaborations have improved the overall collegiality and dialogue among students, fostering lasting friendships and increasing retention rates, particularly in introductory courses like Introduction to Business.

Dr. Heister has observed improvements in quiz and exam performance as well. "Options like offering multiple attempts, allowing extra time, and using large test banks with scrambled questions help reduce cheating and improve scores," he says. Additionally, he notes a positive impact on class passing rates, especially among BIPOC students. **"The variety of assignments and options, such as extra time and attempts, help students who might otherwise struggle with standardized tests succeed,"** he states. Implementing Connect Master across multiple course delivery modalities has also enabled the university to streamline scheduling and maintain consistent learning outcomes, which is vital for accreditation purposes. "Getting new adjuncts up to speed is much less challenging because of the intuitive interface and McGraw Hill support services," Dr. Heister adds, highlighting the broader institutional benefits of using Connect Master.

Ensuring Student Success: The Limitations of OER for Intro to Business

While Dr. Heister has experience using Open Educational Resources (OER) for advanced technology courses where no current course materials are available, he does not recommend them for introductory courses like BA 101. "The supporting material, publisher support, and other tools make it much more attractive and provide better student success," he explains. He often reviews courses that incoming transfer students propose as replacements for BA 101, and when OER is listed on the syllabi, he finds it challenging to make a one-to-one comparison with the content covered in his course. As a result, he is often compelled to reject the transfer and require students to take his version of Intro to Business to ensure they meet the necessary learning objectives.



From Theory to Practice: Students Value Interactive Video Cases and Decision-Making Exercises

Interactive tools like Application-Based Activities (ABAs) allow students to step into different roles, sharpening their critical thinking skills by tackling real-world scenarios.

"I find that putting myself in a theoretical position is engaging. I also enjoy the practice as a pretend manager, business owner, etc.; I believe it forces me to think more critically about what a problem is, or a question being asked."
–Student at Portland State University

Real-time decision-making exercises challenge students to think on their feet, interpret data, and make informed choices, reflecting the complexities of real-world business situations.

"I like how the Manager's Hot Seat scenarios give you the sense of real-time decision-making. I also like how sometimes the wrong answers seem like the correct decision to make. You have to gather data to make an informed decision based on a dynamic business scenario."
–Student at Portland State University

With concise, impactful videos, students gain valuable insights and apply their learning directly to major assignments, enhancing their understanding and performance.

"The Connect iSeeIt! Video Cases are my favorite aspect of the class because they are fairly short video assignments, but within the video, you learn a lot that you get to apply to bigger assignments."
–Student at Portland State University

