Mc Graw Hill connect®

Success Story

Northeast Wisconsin Technical College



Challenge

Increasing student preparedness before lecture.

Solution

Using Connect's SmartBook® to drive accountability and insight.

Result

Higher engagement, better grads, and stronger passing rates.

> **Before SmartBook, about half of the students would come in unprepared and struggle through the material. I also found it difficult to figure out what they were struggling with, as I would usually hear crickets when I asked."**
>
> – Dr. Angelo Kolokithas



Dr. Angelo Kolokithas

Professor of Biology and Program Director at Northeast Wisconsin Technical College

The Challenge

When Dr. Angelo Kolokithas began teaching General Microbiology at Northeast Wisconsin Technical College, one of his biggest challenges was getting students to read the material before coming to class. With 224 students annually, nearly half were showing up unprepared, which made lectures less effective and often led to silent classrooms.

Dr. Kolokithas needed a solution that would:

- Ensure students engaged with the material before class.
- Provide real-time insights into where students struggled.
- Allow him to tailor lectures to focus on the most challenging topics.

The Solution

Dr. Kolokithas implemented McGraw Hill's Connect with SmartBook assignments as a key part of his course design. By assigning points to SmartBook homework, he motivated students to complete readings before class while gaining access to powerful analytics about their comprehension.

"I have enjoyed a 90% completion rate for SmartBook assignments since making them worth 10% of the overall grade," he explains. "Assignments are due the night before lecture, which gives me time to review the reports and adjust my teaching based on where students are struggling." One of the reports he relies on most is the Challenging Concepts report, which shows how many students are struggling with specific topics and allows him to focus lecture time on those areas.

In his General Microbiology course, Dr. Kolokithas assigns 2–3 SmartBook activities per week, each tied to the corresponding textbook chapters from Cowan's *Microbiology Fundamentals*. Using SmartBook's Assignment Scope slider, he highlights the most important concepts and sets an average 30-minute study time, with 30–50 questions per assignment.

The integration of Connect with Canvas has also streamlined his workflow, making it easier to track completion and performance.

> **"Knowing where students are struggling before lecture allows me to customize my lectures and make data-informed decisions on focus points."**



The Results

Since implementing Connect and SmartBook, Dr. Kolokithas has seen **significant improvements in both student engagement and performance.** Students come to class better prepared, ask deeper questions, and focus more on big-picture concepts rather than basic definitions.

> **"Student engagement has increased, and their questions are much more about the big picture rather than struggling with simple concepts."**

Interestingly, some students initially resisted the assignments, viewing them as too time-consuming. But once they saw the positive effect on their first exam, attitudes shifted. Many students now use SmartBook's Recharge feature and performance reports to track their own progress and take ownership of their learning.

> **"At first, students complained about having homework due before lecture. But after the first exam, they realized how helpful it was and started appreciating the value of SmartBook."**

Key Outcomes Include

Improved Exam Scores
After switching in 2016 to having SmartBook assignments **due before lectures**, grades began to rise steadily.

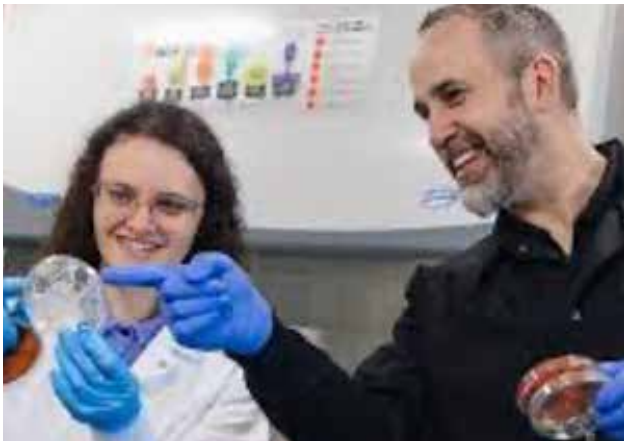
Better Grade Distribution
Before Connect's SmartBook, his course grades followed a traditional bell curve. Now, the breakdown is:
15% A | 60% B | 20% C | 5% D/F

Increased Passing Rates
In his blended microbiology sections (online lectures + in-person labs), pass rates jumped from **below 50%** to **nearly 75%** after introducing SmartBook.

Conclusion

By leveraging McGraw Hill Connect's **SmartBook adaptive learning solution**, Dr. Kolokithas has successfully transformed his microbiology course into an **engaging, data-driven learning experience**. Students now arrive prepared, interact more meaningfully during lectures, and demonstrate stronger performance on exams and overall grades.

Dr. Kolokithas's experience highlights how SmartBook can enhance student success while making instruction more efficient, impactful, and personalized.



About Northeast Wisconsin Technical College

Northeast Wisconsin Technical College (NWTC) is a leading institution focused on hands-on learning and workforce development, serving students across Wisconsin and beyond. With a commitment to innovation and student success, NWTC prepares learners for high-demand careers through dynamic teaching, cutting-edge technology, and personalized academic support.

Instructor Bio

Dr. Angelo Kolokithas is a Professor of Biology and the Program Director at Northeast Wisconsin Technical College (NWTC), where he has taught since 2011. He has designed and taught courses including General Biology, Cell and Molecular Biology, and Experimental Design, while also leading curriculum redesigns for Microbiology and other laboratory science programs. An active researcher and mentor, he advises students pursuing careers in science, works closely with adjunct faculty and lab technicians, and has collaborated with universities, national labs, and international partners.