Success Story

University of Delaware



Challenge

Scaling Assessment and Instruction in a Large Nutrition Course

Solution

McGraw Hill Connect®, SmartBook®, and NutritionCalc Plus with *Wardlaw's Perspectives in Nutrition* by Carol Byrd-Bredbenner, Jacqueline Berning, Danita Kelley, and Jaclyn Abbott, along with Affordable Access and the Evergreen™ delivery model

Result

Improved Efficiency, Strong Engagement, and Consistent Student Performance

> **Standardizing assessment while managing the logistics of a large class was my biggest challenge.**



Melanie Rojas, MS, RDN
College of Health Sciences Demonstration Kitchen Manager/ Instructional Coordinator and Adjunct Instructor

The Challenge

Teaching a foundational nutrition course to approximately 100 students per term presents distinct instructional and logistical challenges. Instructor Melanie Rojas sought to standardize concept assessment across a mixed-major student population while significantly reducing grading time in order to devote more energy to teaching, student interaction, and classroom management.

"In a large, face-to-face course, the logistics can easily overshadow instruction," Rojas explained. "My primary challenges were standardizing concept testing, managing grading efficiently, and preserving time for meaningful teaching."

While this course has consistently been taught using Connect, Instructor Rojas notes that in other courses where Connect is not available, maintaining consistency across assessments and delivering timely, meaningful feedback requires significantly more manual effort. As those courses also emphasize applied concepts, data interpretation, and real-world relevance, the absence of scalable, integrated tools makes it more challenging to manage assessment logistics, particularly in classrooms with diverse levels of student preparedness and academic background.

The Solution

Instructor Rojas adopted McGraw Hill Connect with *Wardlaw's Perspectives in Nutrition* to address these challenges through a cohesive, technology-supported instructional model. Her implementation integrates SmartBook, NutritionCalc Plus, and Assess My Diet, supported by evergreen content updates and Affordable Access.

"I made the overview Connect assignments mandatory early in the term so students could become familiar with the platform right away," said Rojas. "Attaching points ensured engagement and minimized confusion later on."

SmartBook plays a central role in the course design. Rojas assigns SmartBook readings and practice questions before lecture, using its adaptive, confidence-based learning approach to assess student understanding. Rather than passive reading, students actively engage with the material as questions adjust to individual responses and provide immediate feedback. This adaptive experience helps identify knowledge gaps, reinforce challenging concepts, and promote deeper comprehension.

Students also value that SmartBook assignments are graded. Assigning points motivates them to complete readings on time and stay on track with course pacing. While some students, particularly first-year students, need a brief adjustment period to learn Connect and Canvas, most report feeling comfortable navigating both platforms by the second week of the term.

Applied learning is reinforced through NutritionCalc Plus and Assess My Diet, which guides students through personal dietary analysis and interpretation of macronutrients, micronutrients, and Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs).

"The Assess My Diet project is particularly effective," Rojas noted. "It helps students connect abstract nutritional concepts to their own intake in a meaningful, data-driven way."

All quizzes, exams, and the comprehensive final exam are built using Connect's test banks and integrated seamlessly into Canvas via QTI files. Rojas uses Connect in conjunction with Canvas throughout the course, noting that the two platforms work exceptionally well together.

"McGraw Hill's customer service support for both instructors and students has been outstanding," she added. "The support team is very well versed in Canvas functionality, which makes the integration between Canvas and Connect seamless and effortless."

> **Connect allows me to combine conceptual understanding with real-world application—at scale.**

> **Using Connect shifts my time from grading mechanics to meaningful student engagement.**

The Results

Instructor Outcomes

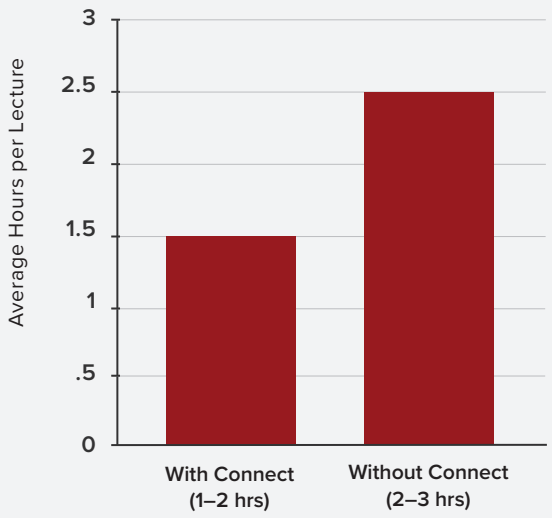
Using Connect has streamlined lecture preparation and dramatically reduced grading time. Instructor resources, including regularly updated slide decks aligned with Evergreen releases, allow Instructor Rojas to prepare lectures efficiently and adapt content as needed.

"Lecture preparation with Connect typically takes one to two hours per session, and that time continues to decrease as I become more familiar with the tools," she said. "In courses where Connect is not available, preparation can take two to three hours per lecture. The reduction in grading time compared to courses without Connect is substantial."

Freed from routine grading, Rojas now incorporates more in-class polling, interactive activities, and manually graded extra-credit opportunities that promote deeper engagement. The reliability of Connect and responsive technical support also minimizes instructional disruptions when students encounter technical issues.

"When students do run into problems, contacting Connect support has consistently resolved issues quickly and efficiently," she noted.

Average Lecture Preparation Time: Connect vs. Non-Connect Courses



Student Outcomes

Student engagement and preparedness have increased measurably. SmartBook's adaptive learning ensures students interact actively with course material before class, allowing lecture time to focus on higher-level application and discussion.

"Students who consistently complete SmartBook readings come to class better prepared and perform better across quizzes and exams," Rojas observed. "They ask stronger questions and engage more fully in class activities."

Assessment data indicate steady mastery of key concepts, with 65–69% of students earning an A- or higher, and typically only 1–3 withdrawals per semester. Immediate feedback through Connect reinforces learning, supports retention, and builds student confidence.

Consistent Student Performance

- **65–69%** earn A- or higher
- Only **1–3 withdrawals** per term
- **~100 students** per term

> **Students arrive prepared, engaged, and ready to tackle more complex nutrition concepts.**

Conclusion

Reflecting on her experience, Instructor Rojas emphasizes thoughtful course design, early platform orientation, and intentional use of analytics as keys to success.

"For instructors new to Connect, I strongly recommend exploring the instructor resources, viewing assignments in student mode, and assigning points to SmartBook so engagement is built in," she advised. **"Connect's reports are invaluable for guiding instruction, and McGraw Hill's support team has been exceptional."**

She also recommends creating a Connect course shell aligned with syllabus language and dedicating time in week one to platform navigation. "The more comfortable students become early on, the more effectively they can focus on learning rather than logistics."

> **Connect has been an extremely positive teaching experience. I wish I had similar tools in every course I teach.**

About Instructor Melanie Rojas

Instructor Melanie Rojas serves as the Demonstration Kitchen Manager and Instructional Coordinator within the College of Health Sciences at the University of Delaware, where she also teaches as an Adjunct Instructor. Her teaching focuses on applied nutrition education, experiential learning, and scalable instructional design to support student success in large, face-to-face courses. She also teaches one-credit elective cooking classes, Health and Nutrition Assessment (including the use of Connect simulation labs), Introduction to Public Health, and Community Nutrition.

About the University of Delaware

The University of Delaware (UD) is a nationally recognized research institution committed to academic excellence, experiential learning, and innovation in teaching. Located in Newark, Delaware, UD offers a wide range of undergraduate and graduate programs and emphasizes evidence-based instruction that prepares students for professional success and leadership in their communities and industries.

