

Connect More than Doubles Pass Rate of Students and Brings Class Retention Rates to Nearly 100 Percent

Professor Evans has been requiring *Connect* for the past four years in her developmental writing course. Traditionally the retention rate of students in this class was low. Students had limited understanding of grammar, mechanics and the writing process which needed to be improved to continue on to the next course, Composition 1. With *Connect*, the retention rate and pass rates are higher, students' grades are up, and Evans is spending less time in class explaining concepts they've learned with *Connect*.

Implementation of McGraw-Hill *Connect*

Course grade is determined by the following:

- 20% - *Connect* Assignments
- 40% - Exams administered within *Connect*
- 20% - Final Exam administered within *Connect*
- 20% - Class participation

Before *Connect* was implemented, Evans offered a traditional lecture format class. Students used a university selected text which consisted of a compilation of essays and readings. The class used a pocket handbook for grammar and mechanics as well as the writing process.

Another instructor at the University of Arkansas selected *Connect* for a summer class, after which Evans began piloting *Connect*. "I was familiar with other digital products and was given the task of continuing a pilot with *Connect*."

The developmental course she teaches is required for students scoring 18 and below on the English part of the ACT, with the majority of those students scoring 15 and below. Because the retention rate of these students was very low, Evans was looking for a way to raise retention and elevate these students' grammar, mechanics and the writing process skills to a higher level, so that they could move on to Composition I. "The *Connect* program was a good mix of review and adaptation for students and instructors," she says.

Digital Product in Use:

Connect™ Integrated Reading & Writing

Course Name:

Fundamentals of English

Course Type:

Blended lecture and online

Credit Hours:

Three

Instructor Name:

Betty A. Evans

Enrollment:

3 sections; 20 students/section, 500 students/year (university total)

Case Study Term:

Fall 2014; Spring 2015

"Connect has been an integral part of my classroom experience and has shown me that students who have a sense of success, continue to do well in their other classes.

Connect gives them that success through its immediate feedback and adaptive programs."

– Betty A. Evans



Students first take the pre-test provided in the *Connect* assignments. Evans then analyzes the pre-test scores to adjust her course schedule in *Connect*. Following a mini lecture, Evans generally assigns a *Connect LearnSmart Achieve* (an adaptive student experience designed to boost student success by providing individualized learning resources) topic/module in grammar and mechanics during the early part of the semester. The topics she assigns relate to the lecture time in class. As a result of the content adapting to each student's progress through the material, some students may spend more time on this assignment than others.

As students progress in grammar and mechanics, she begins making *Power of Process* assignments on particular readings from the *Connect Integrated Reading and Writing* thematic eReader (readings available online). She makes up to four *Power of Process* assignments on the same reading selection covering vocabulary, annotating and the reading and writing processes. The *Power of Process* guides students through performance-based assessment activities that require them to apply active reading and writing strategies while demonstrating critical thinking and analysis of a reading selection with their own writing.

Evans adds the reading and writing processes later in the semester after students have a good handle on writing complete sentences and setting up a paragraph. "With the addition of *Power of Process*, I added assignments based on particular readings to take students through the reading process and then into the writing process," she says. By making multiple *Power of Process* assignments from one reading, she gives students the opportunity to learn how to read critically and then write about what they read.

She learned, as she proceeded, just how to use *Connect* most efficiently. "I have discovered that multiple assignments, especially in *Power of Process*, on one reading slows the student down, enabling them to really see what they are reading and to get more out of it. She uses *Power of Process* for vocabulary, critical thinking, annotating and setting up a thesis statement for an essay. She adds that *Power of Process* provides a level of understanding for students that might not be possible in a traditionally taught class. "This leads to better class participation and discussion."

Since using *Connect*, Evans can cover much more material. This is especially important for the lowest level students who often must be taken back to the basics of grammar and mechanics. With *Connect*, she says, she can give them more in-depth assignments to bring them up to speed more quickly, "so I am not lecturing over their heads all the time." The quizzes in *Connect* are automatically graded, saving Evans more time to work with students rather than grading papers.

The most useful *Connect* reports have been the *Connect Insight* dashboard, Assignment Results, Student Performance and the At-risk Report. The *Insight* dashboard shows Evans the data visually. The visualized data is ready, no gathering or organizing required, for Evans to interpret and act on. The greatest value from the *LearnSmart Achieve* performance reports, she says, comes from Progress Overview, Student Details, Practice Quiz and Metacognitive Skills. "They tell me what my students are doing and how I am doing."

Results Achieved

Those students scoring 18 or less on the ACT, or 69-84 on the COMPASS, must take the developmental course and pass an end of course exam to be able to go on to Composition I. Some of these students don't know the difference between a noun and a verb, and they have trouble writing a complete sentence. The *Connect* program has enabled these students to achieve success and has given

Course Description:

The Basic English course is designed to make students proficient in reading and writing skills in preparation for Composition 1. Students must develop reading, vocabulary and study skills, become familiar with the writing process and understand sentence structure, paragraph development and short essay composition. Students also develop skills in determining audience and purpose in writing expressive essays.

Institution Profile:

University of Arkansas at Monticello is a four year liberal arts college that is part of the University of Arkansas System. The UAM was established in 1909 as an agricultural and mechanical college. Today, the school offers Master's degrees, Bachelor's degrees and Associates degrees. UAM is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

them the idea that college might work for them after all. “I’ve had students tell me that they didn’t know they could read so well until they did the *Power of Process* assignments,” says Evans.

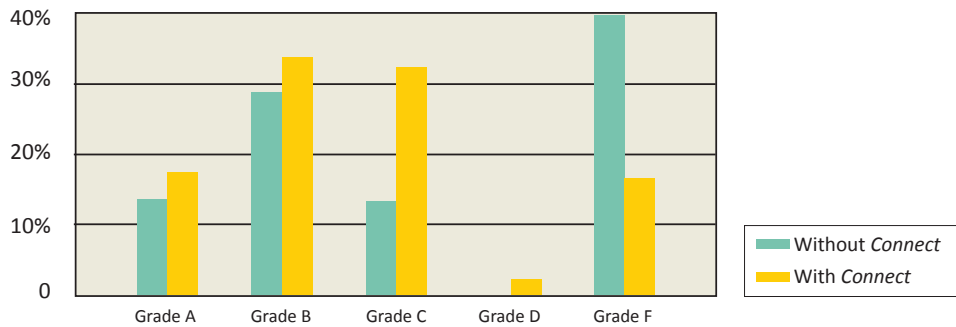
Combining lecture and *Connect*, students begin to see how thoughts and conversation are connected to writing, and that reading is not the ordeal they had imagined. “I have had students coming into my classes with an ACT score as low as nine. While they might not have placed a 19 on the end of course exam, (with *Connect*) they scored in the 14-16 range which is a tremendous improvement,” she says. They come back the next semester ready to move on to Composition I.

Evans says she was taken by surprise with the increased student participation in class discussions. “I credit much of that to *Power of Process*. Students slow down and begin to think critically about what they are reading.” She adds that the thematic eReader readings are timely and relevant to the students and as a result they become engaged and ready to discuss the material.

The students are enjoying the annotating and highlighting feature in *Power of Process*, Evans reports, and use that feature to discuss in class what they are reading. Evans can give them immediate feedback and that prompts better discussions in class. “They begin to think about what they are reading and discover it is fun to talk about what they have read.” At times Evans will review students’ *Power of Process* assignments and use their comments for class discussion. “They love this exercise and I’m never at a loss for volunteers.”

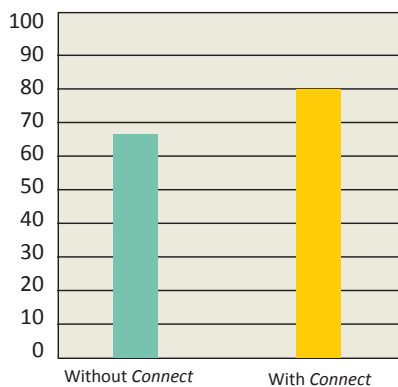
When it comes to grades, Evans is seeing more students in the Bs and Cs range and fewer with Fs (Figure 1). “My grade distribution has been impacted positively with the introduction of *Connect*, especially with the new *LearnSmart Achieve* and *Power of Process* assignment types.”

Figure 1 - Grade Distribution



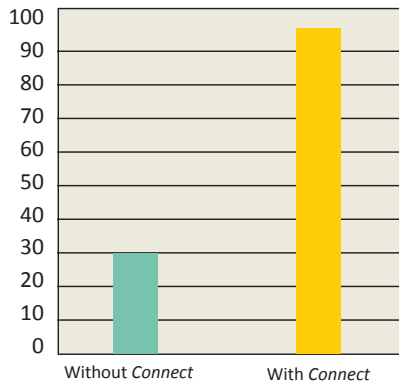
Evans says she has seen more students pass the course and move into Composition 1 with *Connect* in comparison to classes without it (Figure 2). “The *LearnSmart Achieve* and *Power of Process* assignments have really been significant in showing students how to read with comprehension and how to respond to what they are reading.”

Figure 2 – Student Pass Rates



Retention rates more than tripled with the use of Connect (Figure 3).

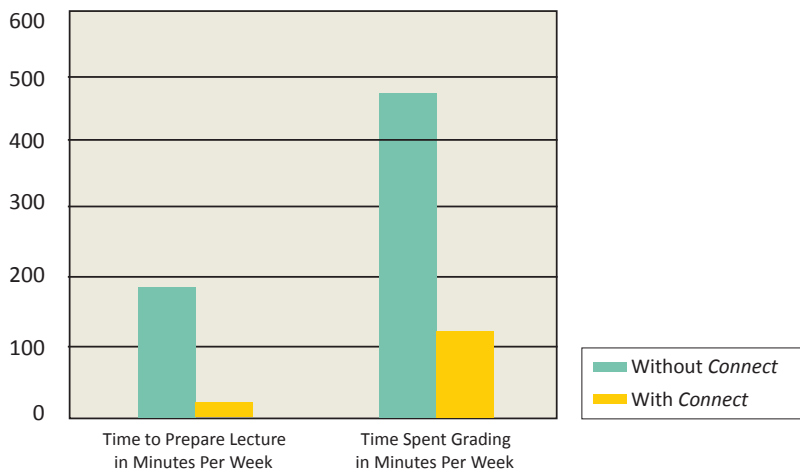
Figure 3 – Student Retention Rates



The time preparing for lectures has been significantly reduced with *Connect* as well, she reports. What took three hours each week in preparation without *Connect* is now only 30 minutes per week (Figure 4). “I make my assignments on *Connect* and base my lecture around those assignments,” she explains. “I am able to have a semester long lesson plan completed before the semester begins based on the master course I have created,” While she may then make some changes during the semester based on the results of the students’ pre-tests, she says “I know what I need to cover and when, and can tell immediately how my students are progressing and if I need to do any re-teaching.”

Grading time is also reduced to a quarter of what it was (Figure 4). “Grading time with *Connect* has given me more time with my students and with helping those that need a little extra one-on-one time,” she says.

Figure 4 - Time Required for Lecture Prep and Grading



“Connect enabled many of my students to pass the course, go on to Composition I and do well in their other courses.”

Conclusion

This fall Evans will shift from a 16-week semester to an 8-week session, with classes meeting 5 days a week. *Connect* will enable her to give students what they need in grammar and mechanics instruction during that time. *Connect* has shown Evans that students who experience success continue to do well in their other classes.

To any peer instructor or administrator, Evans would say ‘Let me show you this great program! *Connect* is something that I believe in and have seen great things happen with students who were not given a snowball’s chance of succeeding.’ Many of her first students who used *Connect* have now graduated. *Connect* is not a cookie cutter program, but is adaptive for students’ learning styles and can be adapted by instructors for their teaching styles, she says, and adds, “The *Connect* team is always there to help and I have never felt alone.”