



Case Study: Mercyhurst College

Gerard Barron, Psy.D., Assistant Professor of Psychology

Mercyhurst College, a Catholic institution in the liberal arts tradition, founded in 1926, comprises a community of roughly 3,000 students.

Mercyhurst's mission promotes a dedication to the lifelong development of the individual. In keeping with that mission, Mercyhurst students are challenged to think critically, to comprehend the richness of the global community, and to work for positive change.

I'm interested in anything that assists student learning and improves course outcomes.

MPL does both.

Mercyhurst operates on a 10-week-term system rather than the traditional 14- or 15-week model. For those who teach introductory courses, it means that a large number of learning objectives need to be covered in a fairly short period of time—the perfect environment for online course supplementation like MyPsychLab (MPL).

Gerard Barron, assistant professor of psychology, has used other courseware in the past but chooses MPL for its ability to drive just-in-time teaching (JiTT). “I’m interested in JiTT pedagogy, in which Web-based assignments completed prior to class are used to engage students and inform lectures,” says Barron. “But it involves a lot of work and, most prohibitive, a lot of time. With MPL, much of that work is already done. Pretests and posttests are preexisting for each major section within each chapter. All I need to do is select which questions I want to make available.” In this way, MPL enables Barron to both accentuate areas students have trouble in and move past areas they already understand, thereby saving both him and his students precious time.

Barron didn't require the use of MPL this past semester, but he offered extra points to those who did use it. “Once my students started using MPL, it was self-perpetuating. I didn't have to require it,” he says. “My students really enjoyed the ability to self-assess, that each chapter was divided into sections, and that both the textbook and the online material were so clearly written and well organized.”

MPL's impact was felt beyond student enjoyment.

“Quantifiably speaking, my course grades were significantly better,” says Barron. “The class average was 83 percent with the use of MPL versus 76 percent without it. I also had fewer students fail.” Barron attributes the difference to the testing effect: taking frequent quizzes increases recall of overall material. An end-of-course survey indicated that 97 percent of Barron's students used the system at least occasionally, and 79 percent used the quizzes and tests at least once per chapter. Anecdotally, Barron observed that the students' ability to work with the material as frequently as they did—both online and with the text—resulted in more-lively class discussion.

MPL helps Barron teach the way he likes to teach. “Far from hindering my teaching style, the flexibility and modification options in MPL enable me to mold the program to my liking and make it an extension of my teaching style. I really appreciate that.”

When technical issues arose, Barron's experience couldn't have been better. “Even at peak usage times, technical support was very helpful,” he said. “They got back to me when they said they would. It's a novelty to have tech support be so timely!” Barron's students had equally positive experiences: “I felt confident giving the MPL support number to my students. Tech support was willing to work with the students and resolved their issues.”

MPL helps students avoid failure. That helps them save money and eliminates the experience of self-doubt that failure brings.

MPL is a natural way to incorporate the teachings of psychology into the teaching of the course,” says Barron. “We can just talk about the testing effect, for example, or we can provide students with an opportunity to experience it. MPL piques their interest, so they use it more often. The results are improved study skills and a better foundation for learning that will last their entire college career. Yes, I'll be using MPL again next semester. I might even require it.”