



Case Study: North Iowa Area Community College

Jeff Platt, Psychology Instructor

North Iowa Area Community College (NIACC) is a progressive, comprehensive learning institution founded in 1918 as the first public two-year college in Iowa. It serves more than 3,000 degree students annually under a mission to enhance the quality of life for the people of north Iowa via comprehensive educational opportunities, progressive partnerships, exemplary service, and responsive leadership. The college offers nearly 40 one- and two-year career programs, the first two years toward a bachelor's degree in most fields, and an array of continuing education opportunities for professional and personal growth.

NIACC students represent a wide range of life and learning experiences. "Many of our students are not prepared for college," says Jeff Platt, psychology instructor. "MPL [MyPsychLab] offers them the opportunity to learn how to better learn and better manage their time. They are shown exactly what needs to be done in order to achieve a good grade."

Students noticed that when they didn't use MPL, they weren't as prepared for the test.

MPL is poised to particularly help those students who would benefit from one-on-one tutoring but because of shame don't get that help. They can anonymously work at their own pace, explore additional learning resources, and receive immediate feedback. "The scramble-the-night-before paradigm is no longer an issue," says Platt. "With MPL, students are guided step by step through the material throughout the semester.

"Most of my students appreciate the extra resource to help them prepare for tests," says Platt. "And they're grateful for the second chance to take quizzes. I, too, appreciate that. It reinforces the fact that learning is about content mastery and not solely about grades. As a result, students become more involved with the textbook and in the course."

A side result of all the testing is that students receive feedback on their reading skills. They acquire better comprehension skills and become better consumers of information.

Seventy-seven percent of NIACC students are employed in addition to attending college. MPL's Web-based format enables those students to do schoolwork whenever it suits their schedule—and they do. E-mail records indicate that most of Platt's students do their homework between midnight and one a.m. But the technological aspect of MPL is more than just a convenience. For those students with neither extensive computer experience nor the money to purchase a computer, MPL is a key to a new skill set and a brighter economic future.

Platt also recognizes how well MPL works for instructors. "One of the main reasons I adopted MPL was that its learning objectives are tagged to those dictated by the American Psychological Association," he says. "That's a huge help, come assessment time, for both me and the college."

Of the students who dropped or failed my class, most were students who didn't use MPL.

Nobody likes administrative details. Platt is no exception. "MPL made it easy for me to download grades and keep them organized," he says. "When I'm relieved of the book-work aspect of teaching, I can focus more on the content of the class and on ensuring that my students get the practice they need in order to succeed. That benefits both me and my students."