



## Case Study: Patrick Henry Community College

### JoAnne Armstrong, Associate Professor of Psychology

**P**atrick Henry Community College (PHCC) is a fully accredited two-year public college serving about 3,000 students each semester from Martinsville, Henry County, Patrick County, and the southern portion of Franklin County, Virginia. Over its 40-year history, the college has served more than 30,000 residents in their quest to improve skills, increase knowledge, and become productive members of the community.

The college offers a wide range of academic, vocational, technical, and workforce development courses in more than 60 fields of study. It's also one of the most wired schools of its size in the U.S., and as such offers a variety of distance-learning courses.

***At least once a semester, I receive a call from Prentice Hall asking if I have questions or concerns about the product. They care.***

Jo Ann Armstrong, associate professor of psychology at PHCC, sought a product for both her in-class and distance-learning courses that would integrate with Blackboard. She found MyPsychLab (MPL) in 2006. "I liked MPL initially for two reasons: because I knew it was compatible with Blackboard and because I saw that it engages students in the learning process and provides them with immediate individual feedback," says Armstrong. "MPL offers ready-made diagnostic and exit quizzes as well as simulations and study features that I, as an instructor, can select or modify to promote the learning needs of a particular class."

Once Armstrong had used MPL, her reasons for staying with it multiplied. "A big draw for me is the focus on what to learn and how to learn. Both the textbook and MPL use the American Psychological Association goals to identify what to learn. Bloom's taxonomy for cognitive learning is used for showing how to learn. This is the first program to successfully do both," she says. "I also appreciate the strong emphasis on assessment. MPL questions are incorporated into the test bank and assess students' use of the Web site and the textbook. This reinforces students for using the study

materials and taking exit tests. And the Gradebook feature enables defensible grading, which is so important. When students can see the result of their efforts—and they know I can, too—it makes them more accountable and motivated."

But most important, Armstrong's students like and use MPL. "They like the simulations and especially the flashcards," she says. "Students respond to the gamelike aspect of it all—the immediate feedback and the sense of winning. It's very motivating for them to have a constant measure of where they stand, what they've mastered, and what they need to do to succeed."

"MPL gives students something concrete to do," says Armstrong. "Students won't just read a textbook. They need a variety of sensory stimulation techniques and a variety of teaching styles to meet their varied learning styles. It's one of the reasons I'm committed to using online resources. I see that it makes a difference—more than CD-ROM utilities do and definitely more than a straight lecture format does."

Armstrong also finds the MPL site better prepares students for class. Online students practice in group meeting places such as the discussion board on Blackboard. Class time can then transcend lecture on basic concepts and be used for collaborative activities in which concepts are applied and analyzed. In this manner, MPL advances learning beyond typical knowledge and understanding levels.

Although unrelated to the teaching and learning psychology itself, instructors also respond to the ancillary benefit of MPL as a vehicle for technical learning. "I enjoy watching my students learn about both psychology and technology," says Armstrong. "The positive technological experience that MPL provides makes a tremendous contribution to the rest of their academic and future occupational careers. The more students use the computer, access the Internet, and navigate the Web, the more familiar—and comfortable—they'll be with technology in general. For much of the community college population, MPL may be the only time they apply technology before they face it in the workplace. I believe MPL helps students beyond the classroom. I absolutely recommend it."