



Case Study: Oklahoma City University

Mel Preisz, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology

Oklahoma City University (OCU) is a small, private university affiliated with the Methodist Church. It has more than 3,500 students and offers a wide variety of degrees in the liberal arts and sciences disciplines. But don't be fooled by its diminutive size. OCU is the only Oklahoma institution listed in the top tier of the regional Master's Universities category in *U.S. News & World Report* magazine's America's Best Colleges 2007 issue.

I'm not tempted to look at other brands. I found a good one and I'll stick with it.

Prentice Hall's superior-quality textbooks and hands-on representatives convinced Mel Preisz, psychology professor at OCU and newbie to online courseware, that MyPsychLab (MPL) would be an easy-to-use and effective classroom tool. "The textbook reps came to our department and showed us how to get online. That visit was very useful," he says. "Others in the department had reservations, but not any longer. Our students definitely benefited from MPL, and the program records show it. Even the less capable students benefited. MPL allowed them to go through the material at their own pace, with no pressure or intimidation.

"MPL is a useful supplement to any serious professor's effort to be more effective," says Preisz. "Any vehicle that engages students outside the classroom is going to be consistent with course goals and, ultimately, benefit the students. In our case, students achieved more objectives in less time and retained that material for a longer period of time. I saw an improvement in course learning from the previous semester by one-half to one full letter grade."

MPL not only works for Preisz's students; they like it. "I don't remember one case in which a student was negative about it," he says. "Students like that the tests cover smaller sections instead of larger chapters. They make good progress in small steps and are less likely to fall behind. They appreciate the check marks that indicate they've passed. It reinforces the idea that they're making progress—learning

something. They also like that they can spend more time on task. They read extra and learn more—and are more comfortable throughout the process."

Preisz is an ardent fan of both MPL and the learning pedagogy behind it. "MPL gives students a user-friendly way to become better learners," he says. "Each student's approach to learning is different. And MPL caters to each one by shepherding students beyond reading to becoming engaged in the material, reinforcing how to study, checking up on how they're doing, and providing immediate reinforcement via feedback."

MPL helps Preisz cover more instructional material—and more effectively. "I particularly like the summary printouts of the students' records," he says. "I like to see the class as a whole because it gives me a lot of information on how to best target my assignments and ensure that not even one student falls behind."

Last semester Preisz used MPL as a required homework module equivalent to one classroom test. He took the total percent of each student's score; in this case, all were very high—in the 80s in one class and the 90s in another—and factored that percent into the total. "I can say anecdotally that MPL was more effective than the past semester, when I suggested it but didn't require it," he says. "When it was required as part of the class grade, I had only one failure—and that student wasn't using the program. And I definitely had more As and Bs than last semester.

"Students soon discover that learning with MPL is a lot easier and more efficient than learning on their own," Preisz says. "From organizing their time to managing their studying, MPL makes the process of learning easier. And for students, easier is always better."

Preisz is looking forward to using MPL in his fall classes. "What a tremendous relief for those of us who don't have teaching assistants or a lot of office hours," he says. "I'm convinced that if professors just give it a try, they'll find that their students are grateful. It reduces the number of questions students have and puts the responsibility for learning back in their hands—and most rise to the occasion."