SoftChalk™
Create. Connect. Inspire!

Century College

Faculty add WOW Factor to Online Courses with SoftChalk

Century College is the largest community college in Minnesota, serving over 15,000 students in more than 40 career programs. It is also the state's largest provider of technical training, serving another 10,000 students. Located north of the twin cities in White Bear Lake, about 13% of Century's courses are offered fully online or in a blended online and classroom learning format.

When the college first offered online courses nearly a decade ago, lessons were primarily text based. Faculty loaded Microsoft Word and PDF documents into Desire-2Learn, the Learning Management System used by Century. Like many early e-learning initiatives, the system proved less than engaging to students.

SoftChalk Introduces Rich Interactive Experience

The college took a big step forward in 2009 when faculty in the Reading program wrote a grant that enabled them to purchase six licenses from SoftChalk, the maker of content authoring software. Licenses were used in the Reading Lab and by Reading faculty.

The difference was remarkable. With SoftChalk, faculty found they could easily create multimedia courses with features they never dreamed of. In minutes they could mash up their own materials with rich media (video, audio, images), and create interactive exercises, quizzes and text. It was easy to add supplemental material and drag and resize images—and SoftChalk ensured that lessons met accessibility standards.

Faculty from the Reading program presented SoftChalk to other programs on campus. By 2011 faculty members in more than a dozen programs and departments across campus, from nursing and dental hygiene to biology, chemistry and interior design, were using SoftChalk.

Authored by Alexandra Crittenden of Century College

"Faculty see it as a canvas to create the lesson they want, and its ease of use has made it popular not just with younger faculty, but also with older faculty who may not be as technologically savvy," says instructional designer Stephen Kelly. "Rather than text-based lessons, they could easily add multimedia, color, links and make their courses truly interactive. Interactivity is what gave it the wow factor with students, who found the interface intuitive."

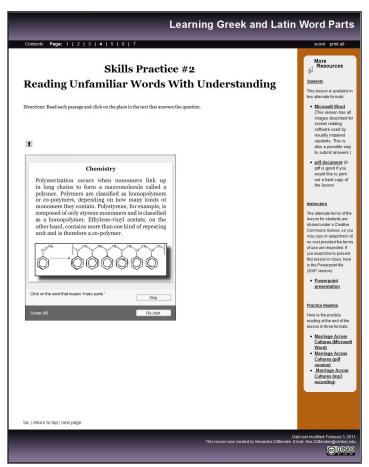## Maximizing LMS Value and Improving Learning Outcomes

Student focus groups revealed that students overwhelmingly liked the SoftChalk interface, content presentation, ease of use and interactivity. While a formal study has not been done, Kelly says there is already anecdotal evidence that SoftChalk improves student outcomes.

"Any time you can give a user something to click on and manipulate, you're going beyond passive learning and winning the attention battle online," he says. "Exploration allows for a 'choose your own adventure' experience; too many learning modules out there don't provide avenues for exploration. A student that can pursue their interests on impulse will ultimately discover valuable content on their own."

Kelly also notes that SoftChalk-created lessons provide a quality of content that is not available in learning management systems, adding value to its Desire2Learn LMS.

In February 2012, Century rolled out a campus-wide SoftChalk implementation and established SoftChalk training sessions. "We expect the number of users to grow quickly now that we have made it accessible across campus," Kelly says.

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Stephen Kelly
Instructional Designer

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