



Blinn College

HIGHER ED SOLUTIONS

“By partnering with Pearson Learning Solutions, we’re able to offer our students the best possible learning products at the best possible cost.”

—Ron Hammond
Chair, Mathematics Division

Blinn College, located in Brenham, Texas, serves a 13-county area, with campuses in Bryan, Schulenburg, and Sealy. Initially founded in 1883 for the purpose of training young men for the ministry, Blinn evolved to meet the demands of the public, and academic courses were added. In 1937 Blinn became the first county-owned junior college district in Texas and today is one of the largest of the state’s 50 public junior/community college districts. Blinn’s Bryan campus contains state-of-the-art learning facilities, is fully wireless, and enrolls approximately 12,000 students.

In 2006, Ron Hammond, chair of Blinn’s mathematics division, was part of a team responsible for the college’s quality enhancement plan, a plan designed to identify those college-credit courses in the top 25 of enrollment with a passing rate of less than 70 percent. Two of the courses identified by the plan were finite math and macroeconomics. No newcomer to the benefits of online learning, Hammond took the opportunity to explore best practices in mathematics teaching and learning. His goal: establish how today’s innovative technology can increase the efficacy of the academic support already in place for those courses.

Hammond’s research identified two major components of proven student success: (1) the increased time on task and immediate feedback provided by online homework programs and (2) multimedia resources and tutorial support that both enabled in-context problem solving and catered to a range of student learning styles. Pearson’s MathXL was selected for departmentwide implementation. “I didn’t dictate which program or programs were to be used—only that one be selected and that its use be mandatory,” says Hammond. “Faculty tried several and unanimously decided that Pearson offered the best products on the market, not least because its programs automatically capture and track student data. After implementation, we were able to immediately see—and report with statistical support—a 5 to 10 percent increase in pass rates across courses.”

But Hammond didn’t stop at new software. To further enhance the student experience, Pearson Learning Solutions helped Hammond develop a custom Web

portal through which all mathematics courses are routed and which today serves approximately 6,000 students per semester. In addition to online homework, the portal houses Flash-enabled eBooks, video tutorials for every course, and links to teaching and learning resources.

It was a daunting challenge: coordinate development of the portal and course materials for 16 courses, align more than 500 course codes, and collaborate with bookstore personnel. Pearson Learning Solutions worked hand-in-hand with all parties across the semester to ensure a smooth transition. In spring 2007, facing an enrollment increase of up to 1,200 students per semester, the portal was successfully launched.

Hammond’s custom Web portal provides Blinn College students with an academic boost—and a financial one because Pearson’s customized eBooks offer textbook savings of up to \$200 per course. Students may choose a new or used hard-copy book or a less expensive, Flash-enabled eBook—and via the one-stop portal, purchase everything they need. “The customized Web portal enables us to offer our students as many options as possible,” says Hammond. “Students appreciate the choices and took to it like ducks to a pond. It’s a medium they are comfortable with.”

Students can access the Web portal either at home, at Blinn’s library, or at either of the college’s two dedicated learning labs. “Data coming in indicates the system works,” says Hammond. “Homework grades are now consistently well above 90 percent. In finite math alone, the percentage of As earned doubled from

5 percent to 10 percent, and the number of withdrawals decreased by half from 20 percent to 10 percent.”

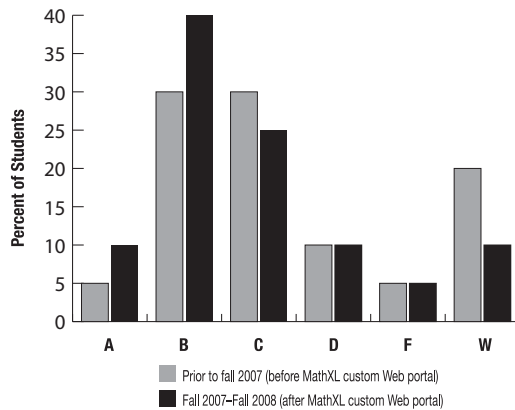


Figure 1. Comparison of Finite Math Final Course Grades before and after MathXL Custom Web Portal Implementation

Hammond attributes these successes to the added support: more homework, the immediate feedback, and the multimedia options. “Students work on problems until they get them right,” he says. “They get more practice and are more likely to master a concept before moving on to the next. That translates into better grades, but more important, it teaches students more-effective study habits that help them throughout their academic careers.”

The portal also works for faculty. “Although most had reservations at the onset, they all embrace it now,”

says Hammond. “One by one, faculty have evolved from using the software just for homework to adding online quizzes; and some now use it for tests as well. Their comfort levels have increased over time, plus they’ve had the opportunity to experience the pedagogical benefits of the online-program-plus-portal combination, including increased time for hands-on teaching, reduced worry about cheating, and increased quality control over class content and objectives.”

As department chair, Hammond appreciates how Blinn’s customized technology solution enables the college to maintain academic integrity across 52 instructors and 200 course sections each fall and spring semester. “I’m confident that every course section covers the same content and that every instructor is teaching to the same objectives,” he says. “By the same token, every one of our students receives the kind of high-quality education that facilitates completion of studies at a faster rate—either toward graduation or toward transfer, whereby they become equipped to succeed right alongside students at respected four-year institutions like Texas A&M.”

Hammond is very satisfied with the ongoing relationship between Blinn College and Pearson Learning Solutions. “Our Pearson team manages the portal and all of the technical issues involved in it,” says Hammond. “They work hard to ensure we’re up and running at all times. It’s a partnership that works well; it means we can offer our students the best possible learning products at the best possible cost.”