



University of Maryland University College

HIGHER ED SOLUTIONS

“Custom publishing meant I could focus the curriculum and instruction for a large department that has a high number of adjunct faculty. I knew the content was well designed. This gave me more time to focus on the professional development of my faculty.”

—John Beyers, Ph.D.
Professor and Director
of Mathematics and Statistics

Founded in 1947, University of Maryland University College (UMUC) is an accredited institution focusing on the educational and professional development needs of returning students. From locations in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area, Europe, and Asia, UMUC offers a broad range of award-winning classes. UMUC’s innovative options—online instruction, accelerated academic programs, and on-site courses taught during the day, in the evening, and on weekends—offer convenience to working adults, military personnel, and others who balance jobs, family, and community.

John Beyers, Ph.D., professor and director of mathematics and statistics at UMUC, first met with a Pearson Learning Solutions representative in 2004. Responsible for approximately 2,000 students at the time, Beyers envisioned growing UMUC’s mathematics program further via fully customized online courses comprising custom textbooks, solutions manuals, a distance-tutoring program, MathXL, additional Web-based content, and a Web portal. “Several publishers wooed me, but the Pearson rep sold me,” says Beyers. “She was phenomenal. She immediately amassed a team of key people—anyone and everyone we might need, including consultants, managers, and vice presidents from a variety of departments. She allowed me to dictate the goals of the project. And then she devised the most timely and customer-focused way to achieve them. She made me feel confident in Pearson’s ability to match all of my department’s customization needs, and it panned out: we put together a tremendous course.”

Beyers was particularly impressed with the customer service he received. “From our very first meeting, communication was consistent, clear, and ongoing—on all levels, from the staff to the president of the company,” he says. “I felt as if I had the entire company working toward making my product the best it could be.”

As the size of Beyers’s mathematics department grew both in the United States and abroad to over 18,000 students annually, so did his reliance on more than 250 adjuncts. “Customization helped me focus the content and clarify UMUC’s Beginning-Intermediate-College Algebra sequence,” he says. “We can’t monitor every section all the time to ensure that every adjunct is teaching to the course objectives. We can offer guid-

ance in the form of custom products by focusing the content of existing texts and providing a clear vision for our faculty. Adjuncts can now cover exactly what’s in the book—nothing more, nothing less—since we’ve customized the text to meet the needs of our students and the program. It’s a form of quality assurance.”

Retention data for Introductory and Intermediate Algebra indicate that the benefits of customization extend to student performance. Drop/fail/withdrawal rates for Introductory and Intermediate Algebra courses had traditionally averaged about 35 percent. Within a year of switching to the customized format, the attrition rate dropped to 22 percent. “I believe custom products played a role in improving student retention,” says Beyers. “Pearson Learning Solutions helped us standardize the curriculum scope and sequence. By reducing the variability of course content, particularly in the large sections, students were consistently better prepared.

“A lot of colleges project an image of academic rigor,” says Beyers. “We embody it. I think in part that it’s due to the clarity of content and assessment efforts. Students and faculty know exactly what is expected of them, and those expectations speak directly to the assessment tool of the final exam. Customization is like a tailor-made suit, except it doesn’t only fit better; it costs less, too.”

Under Beyers’s direction, UMUC’s mathematics department is in the process of rolling out a global custom adoption in its U.S., European, and Asian divisions. “I feel as though Pearson really understands the needs of our department and our university,” says Beyers. “We have a great synergy.”