Digital Success with SIMnet for Business

Mc Graw Hill

Instructor:
Liz McLean

Liz McLean is a Full Time Instructor at St. Lawrence College Cornwall Campus. She has taught at St. Lawrence College for the past 11 years in the following programs: Business and Arts & Science. She is a passionate and effective instructor, facilitator, and trainer. Liz McLean is a graduate of the MBA program at Dalhousie University and the Bachelor of Computer Science Degree at the University of New Brunswick.

Institution:
St. Lawrence College

For nearly 50 years, St. Lawrence College has been a vital part of the communities in Eastern Ontario with campuses in Brockville, Cornwall, and Kingston. St. Lawrence College provides a variety of post-secondary programs and services to support the success of students while contributing to local and international economies. It serves a diverse population of 6,700 full-time students from across Canada, representing over 40 countries worldwide, and offers over 85 full-time academic programs to meet the needs of contemporary learners and has over 20,000 continuing education students and 1000 staff.

Resource in Use:

SIMnet 2013 Code - no hardcopy text

SIMnet®

Course:
Intro Computer Applications

Course Type:
Lab, In-class

Course Enrollment:
400

Experience Before Using SIMnet

Describe the points of frustration you faced before selecting SIMnet.

Prior to adopting SIMnet a few years ago, we were receiving several complaints from students about the method of delivery used with our computer courses. At that time, students would purchase a textbook and the instructor would basically take them through the book, page by page, at a relatively slow pace due to of the diverse level of capabilities in the classroom. On occasion we do have mature students that need more time and attention in the introductory level class, but the vast majority come in with a certain level of computer skills. Students were not able to work ahead and were becoming increasingly frustrated with having to follow along at a pace that was far below the average grades.

What were the main reasons you selected SIMnet?

SIMnet was chosen for many reasons, the key one being that it allows students to work at their own pace so that they stay engaged and challenged. It also provides students who do need more time to review the lessons and the practice questions as often as needed, until they feel comfortable with the material, and the code doesn't expire.

Compared to other technologies you've used, what do you like most about SIMnet? Please explain why.

SIMnet is the first specialized software I have used to facilitate the teaching of a computer course. Compared to our prior approach to teaching, what I like most about SIMnet is the fact that the number of assignments during the semester has increased dramatically due to the instant grading capability of the software that I like most about SIMnet is the fact that the number of assignments during the semester has increased dramatically due to the instant grading capability of the software. In the 45 hour (15 week) course I am currently teaching, students will complete approximately 20 assignments.

Experience Using SIMnet

What McGraw Hill digital product are you using in your course? How long have you used it?

I have been using SIMnet to teach my course since the Fall of 2011.

Describe how you are currently using SIMnet in your course, and what percentage of your course grades do you assign to SIMnet?

I am using SIMnet to teach every aspect of my course. SIMnet has been used to implement a "flip the classroom" format. Lessons are assigned as homework and are completed outside of class. We use most of the 3 hour class time to work on projects, as well as to deliver the occasional brief lecture on topics in the lessons that were more difficult. The exams are also written using SIMnet and 100% of the course grade comes from SIMnet.

Experience Using SIMnet

What benefits have you seen from requiring SIMnet rather than making it recommended or optional?

There are many benefits to using SIMnet. It is a required component of my course meaning that students could not complete the course without the SIMnet code.

How easy or hard was it to implement SIMnet in your course? Please describe what process you took to get started, including leveraging McGraw Hill support.

SIMnet is a very user friendly product. There is some initial work up front to set up the lessons using the content that you would like to include, but the user interface makes everything very intuitive. Our part-time faculty have no problem getting up and running quickly with the software. One of the main reasons implementation has been so smooth is due to the exceptional support received from McGraw Hill. At any point we had a question or difficulty, timely help was always there. I have never seen such a remarkable level of support provided by any other vendor during my teaching career.

How is Connect with SmartBook different than other learning technology that you've used?

The other technology I tried was several years ago and related to a different type of course. I remember at the time having a lot of trouble learning the system, as well as having significant technical difficulties, which is certainly not the case with this technology.

Outcomes/Results

What changes are you seeing in student outcomes as a result of requiring the SIMnet in your course?

Student comments about SIMnet are very positive; they appreciate the flexibility they have to determine how slowly or quickly they master the material, and they enjoy working on projects during class time as opposed to listening to a lecture. With the immediate feedback they receive on their projects when they are submitted for grading, they are very interested in seeing where they went wrong, correcting their errors and resubmitting to improve their grade. In the past, they often waited two weeks or more to see a grade on an assignment and by then there was no interest at all in seeing where they went wrong. Because of this change in the feedback timeline and additional attempts, average grades have been increasing.

How has using SIMnet changed the way you teach your course?

As described above, SIMnet has changed everything about the way we teach our computer courses. We would never go back.

What data have you tracked or collected to show your how effectively SIMnet has been working for you?

We have not formally tracked data quantitatively; however, informally I do see an increase in grades since moving to SIMnet. Also, we do know that student complaints have virtually disappeared, our attendance has increased significantly and students are engaged at a level that we have not been able to achieve with our prior delivery approach. The Dean at our campus is constantly boasting to others about how much we have improved the student experience with SIMnet.

What are your students telling you about SIMnet?

Students love SIMnet! They enjoy learning on their own outside of class and then being able to apply it in the lab. With the lessons having both an audio and hands on component, they have indicated to me that they actually enjoy sitting down to complete them. Their favourite part of SIMnet, by far, is having the immediate feedback on their projects.

Best Practices and Tips

What advice would you suggest to your colleagues or instructors who are incorporating SIMnet in their courses for the first time?

My advice to anyone who is incorporating SIMnet into their courses for the first time would be to allow yourself enough time for setup and to feel comfortable with the software. Also, be sure to take advantage of the resources offered by McGraw Hill, including any opportunity to speak with current users of the technology.

What is the single biggest reason you would recommend SIMnet?

The single biggest reason why I would recommend SIMnet is that it can take you into a new 21st century delivery model allowing you to better engage students and successfully meet learning objectives.

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