

School Name	Mesa Community College, Phoenix, AZ
Course Name	U. S. History to 1865
Format	Online

Key Results CourseConnect delivers a consistent learning experience for all online students. Student engagement, concept mastery, critical thinking, and persuasive communications—measured by the quality of students’ discussion posts—increased with CourseConnect.

Submitted by

Steven Lurenz, Associate Professor

Course materials

CourseConnect American History I

We have a diverse student population at Mesa: 18 year-old high school graduates, single parents returning to finish their degrees, full-time workers preparing for career changes. Online education enables us to meet the needs of all of these learners. The flexibility of online learning allows students to fit classes into their busy schedules—to simultaneously work, raise their families, and meet their educational goals and aspirations.

“CourseConnect supports diverse learning styles—the Study Guide deserves a special mention for its ease of use and effectiveness.”

The history department at Mesa Community College adopted CourseConnect to bring consistency and quality to our online course offerings. With CourseConnect delivering a uniform curriculum and award-winning learning experience to all online students, individual instructors are free to customize their courses according to their preferences and areas of specialization. Beginning in fall 2013, we are taking our CourseConnect integration to the next level with the offering of 100-percent-online degrees.

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Implementation

CourseConnect supports diverse learning styles. Its lesson presentations are vivid and dynamic, drawing students in immediately and keeping them engaged. The extensive and authoritative media assets make it easy for students to pursue the required research. CourseConnect’s Study Guide deserves a special mention for its ease of use and effectiveness. The Study Guide assesses students’ understanding of a given chapter and then offers a personalized, color-coded study plan; students don’t waste time reviewing concepts they’ve already mastered.

In addition, the discussion posts and other written assignments give students opportunities to wrestle with the historical evidence and demonstrate critical thinking in persuasive essays. Submitting all written work through CourseConnect makes it simple for students and easy for me, too.

“The competencies demonstrated in the following two discussion post excerpts are more reflective of success in my course than an A on an exam. These students grappled with historical evidence and thought deeply about what the evidence shows. They are personally experiencing what it means to ‘do history.’”

Results and data

In an online class, I strive to foster a learning community. The CourseConnect discussion forum is where we come together with a common goal and sense of belonging; we're there to learn together. Students are required to perform research and to demonstrate critical thinking in weekly discussion posts. With CourseConnect, I see my students diving into the research, pushing to embrace complex ideas, and stretching to persuasively express new thoughts. The competencies demonstrated in the following two discussion post excerpts are more reflective of success in my course than an A on an exam. These students grappled with historical evidence and thought deeply about what the evidence shows. They are personally experiencing what it means to “do history.”

Student discussion post excerpts on the topic “Causes of the U.S. Civil War”:

Student 1 discussion post:

Beginning in the early 1850s the animosity concerning slavery increased substantially. The country was expanding; we had acquired land by means of the Louisiana Purchase and with the determination of Manifest Destiny were preparing to settle the land from coast to coast. Conflicts over whether to allow slavery into the new territories were growing. The Compromise of 1850 and the subsequent Fugitive Slave Act intensified the hostility between the north and south. By not allowing slavery into the newly established states, the south feared a partisan majority in Congress would emerge and representatives from the Free states along with abolitionists in the north would vote to abolish slavery altogether. The election of slavery foe Abraham Lincoln and the knowledge that he would not work to protect slavery and the southern way was the final act; the south could no longer stand by and allow their states' rights, standard of living, and economic future to erode.

Student 2 discussion post:

There may have been a double reason for the abolition movement in the north; I don't doubt that it was in part for humanitarian reasons, but racial equality was not a factor. The north had to know the crippling effect the removal of slaves would have on the southern economy. I think that since so few in the south owned slaves, the issue of states' rights was a very strong factor. Again, the south didn't want politicians in the north telling them what they could or couldn't do. Expansion in the country only served to heighten these

fears. The country was changing, and the south was working hard to hold on to their genteel southern ways. Abolition was tricky; it was a very violent movement and didn't have full support of everyone in the north. As Prof. Lurenz points out, there was no plan for what would become of all the freed slaves. The north viewed them with the same emotions as it did the Native Americans: not equal and not welcome. The north was then showing discrimination against the Catholic Irish immigrants and would probably not have embraced an influx of freed slaves into their cities and towns. I wonder if, given a chance, Lincoln would have been able to reach a compromise with the south. He was not a supporter of slavery, but he also didn't feel Congress had the power to override the issue. If new states had been allowed to make decisions on whether or not to allow slavery, a balance may have occurred. But the south was not willing to take this chance; they had more confidence in maintaining their way of life by secession than in following the new President-elect Lincoln.

The student experience

Student responses to end-of-semester survey questions:

100% Yes “Would you take another CourseConnect course?”

100% Yes “Would you recommend CourseConnect to a fellow student?”

Conclusion

I define student success as the ability to examine historical evidence critically and to then evaluate a specific period of history. With Course Connect, I see students developing strong critical thinking skills in our group discussion and coming to understand why events happened rather than just recalling a textbook definition of what that specific event was.

As an instructor, I measure the quality of online learning when I see my students successfully come together as a learning community and experience thinking like a historian. CourseConnect provides a rich, personalized, and connected learning experience. Even though we don't see each other face-to-face, we have a single shared purpose: to understand the events and flow of history.