

MySpanishLab educator study

A look at online course success at St.
Catharine College

Key findings:

- Active students* achieved an average score of 93 percent on their MySpanishLab homework.
- There was a strong positive correlation between MySpanishLab homework scores and the final exam score, suggesting that students who score higher on MySpanishLab homework also perform better on the final exam.
- The success rate of this online course was 83 percent, a commendable rate for a first-time online language course. This online course is a work-in-progress, and each semester, I will evaluate and make changes accordingly to increase student success.

Setting

St. Catharine College is a private, four-year, liberal arts, Catholic institution. In Fall 2014, the undergraduate population comprised approximately 600 students, 83 percent hailing from the state of Kentucky and 92 percent enrolling full-time.**



School name: St. Catharine College, St. Catharine, KY



Course name: Elementary Spanish



Course format: Online



Course materials:

MySpanishLab; *Unidos* by Guzmán, Lapuerta, and Liskin-Gasparro



Timeframe: Fall 2015



Submitted by: Victoria Walker

Challenges and Goals

The Fall 2015 semester marked the first time in many years that a Spanish language course has been offered at St. Catharine. A primary goal in teaching this new course was to report back to the college the success of the class using hard data. Secondly, I wanted to ensure the online course would encourage active learning and allow students to engage with one another in a fun, interactive environment. Finally, I wanted to accurately grade all student assignments in a timely manner. MySpanishLab provided a solution to all of these needs.

By using various components of MySpanishLab, I was able to ensure the course design supported four measurable learning outcomes:

- Learners will apply and display knowledge and mastery of targeted grammatical structures and vocabulary as they learn to combine, identify, apply, and express proper Spanish.
- Learners will be able to effectively understand spoken Spanish and speak about who they are, what they study, what they do in their free time, foods they eat, and what their family is like.
- Learners will be able to read and comprehend passages in Spanish, centered around identities, studies, hobbies, foods, and family as well as learn to write about these topics.
- Learners will indicate and articulate a heightened cultural awareness of Spanish-speaking countries by comparing and contrasting their culture with the Hispanic culture through discussion boards and audiovisual clips.

Two online sections of Elementary Spanish ran in Fall 2015 with a total enrollment of 29 students.

Implementation

I assign the Readiness Check at the beginning of each chapter which tests students on their knowledge of English grammar terminology and concepts. It determines which grammar skills students need to strengthen before they engage in learning Spanish grammar. Quick, audiovisual tutorials explain grammar in English, and students can take a post-test to make sure they are ready to learn. I also assign the Practice Test with Study Plan for each chapter. After reading a chapter, students take a pre-test.

Based on their performance, MySpanishLab creates an individualized study plan with personalized auto-graded activities, vocabulary and grammar tutorials, and links to areas in the eText where more study is needed, all based on students' correct and incorrect answers in the pre-test. After reviewing suggested topics, students take a practice post-test to re-test their knowledge. At this point, post-test scores hopefully indicate improvement.

In regards to the four key learning outcomes:

- To help students with grammar and vocabulary, I assign vocabulary flashcards, vocabulary and grammar tutorials, and Amplifier Dynamic Study Modules, designed to improve long-term learning and help students master and retain vocabulary and grammatical concepts.
- To help students understand spoken Spanish, I assign auto-graded Apply audio comprehension assignments, pronunciation practice assignments, and four instructor-graded *Práctica Oral*/voice recording assignments in MySpanishLab.
- To help students improve their reading and writing Spanish, I assign instructor-graded writing assignments and auto-graded reading comprehension activities in MySpanishLab.

- Finally, to help students with cultural engagement, I assign *Club Cultura* videos and activities as well as auto-graded Apply activities related to culture in MySpanishLab.

For each chapter, I assign about 16 machine-graded Apply assignments, two *Club Cultura* Apply assignments (on which students have three attempts), four or five *Comprendes* (grammar) activities, two activities from the Pronunciation folder, two *Cineastas en accion* video activities, and a few cultural-based activities.

Students have three attempts on computer-graded homework. The highest score filters into the gradebook, and the correct answer is given after the third attempt. All grades are located in MySpanishLab except for discussion boards which are in the school's Learning Management System.

The gradebook allows me to see how much time students are spending on their homework assignments. I use the built-in notifications and alerts in "Today's View" in MySpanishLab to track student activity and to contact students who are struggling or falling behind. I believe this technique increases retention in my classes because I am able to intervene with these students before it is too late. I also analyze high stakes activities in the gradebook to see what questions students are missing the most. By addressing these questions in class, I can help increase students' comprehension and understanding.

Looking ahead, I am most excited about the new instant temporary access for students to MyLanguageLabs!*** I cannot begin to articulate how important this will be for student retention—it will allow students to get up and running right away, no matter what financial or technological stumbling blocks they may be facing.



Assessments

- 50% MySpanishLab homework (Ch. *Preliminar*, 1, 2, 3, 4)
- 8% MySpanishLab culture homework
- 8% Instructor-graded cultural discussion board posts (4) and peer responses (8)
- 8% Chapter exams (Ch. P, 1, 2, 3)
- 5% Comprehensive final exam
- 5% Oral interview (submitted via voice recording)
- 5% Written autobiography
- 5% Summative cultural awareness assey
- 2% Self-assessed progression of cultural awareness (survey)
- 2% Blackboard Collaborate activity
- 2% Introductory forum post

Results and Data

Out of 29 original students, one student received an incomplete due to extenuating circumstances. Four students neglected to keep up in the course and subsequently failed. All 24 remaining "active" students completed the course and passed with a final letter grade of A, B, or C—a success rate of 83 percent.

Active students ($n=24$) had an average score of 93 percent on their MySpanishLab homework. There was a positive correlation between MySpanishLab homework scores and the final exam score, $r=.45$, $p<.05$.

The data suggest that students who score higher on MySpanishLab homework also perform better on the final exam. Please note: three students who did not have a final exam score were removed from this calculation.

The Student Experience

An online survey was sent to students at the end of the semester. Of 24 active students, 23 students took the survey, a 96 percent response rate. 83 percent of the students reported they had exposure to Spanish language learning in high school, and 13 percent had no previous language experience.

Students were asked to self-report and rate themselves on areas such as engagement in speaking Spanish and awareness of Hispanic culture before and after the course.

Students also answered open-ended questions about the challenges and benefits to taking an online Spanish course. The following quotes reflect a selection of student responses:

What were the challenges of taking an online language class?

“Staying focused and remembering you have work to do.”

“It’s not the same as being in a classroom having someone work with you one on one if you are struggling to understand. It is also a lot harder to ask questions and get feedback through an online course.”

“Sometimes it felt too fast-paced.”

“Good internet and due dates.”

What were some of the benefits of taking an online Spanish course?

“Being able to work at the pace that I needed...”

“It made learning Spanish more convenient for my busy schedule.”

When asked, “What did you like most about MySpanishLab?” many students called out review and practice opportunities the program provided:

“I liked that the assignments gave you three chances to get the right answers, and if you did get a question wrong, it gave you a hint so you could get it right the next time.”

“The repetitive use of the language really helped me and made me understand the language in a better way.”

“I liked the end of chapter reviews. They helped me to prepare for the exams.”

“Flashcards were very helpful in learning individual words. They are all right there and you can go back as many times as you need until you are comfortable with a word. All of the vocabulary tutorials were nice to have as well.”

“I liked having all of the extra activities to do and look at for extra help. The more work to do seems stressful, but in the end it’s better to have more in this case, because you can learn better and have a higher chance of getting a good grade overall.”

“The audio test parts that got you speaking in Spanish. It made sure that you practice speaking some to feel better acclimated with the language.”

Other students commented on the user-experience and design aspects of the program:

“I like the interface of the whole program, it was easy to use and easy to see what had to be accomplished.”

“How user friendly it was—I was easily able to find what work was due that day on the calendar.”

Finally, a few students commented how much they enjoyed learning about culture. I believe MySpanishLab shows students the importance of the Spanish language and cultures by including videos and presentations to increase cultural awareness and appreciation of the Hispanic world. It really hits home for students and inspires them to be more passionate about learning Spanish.

Conclusion

Since this was the first time that a Spanish course was offered at the college in quite some time, to encourage interest and enrollment, I wanted to make the class stress-free and enjoyable for students. That being said, looking back at the final course grades, the high weighting of homework did lead to some grade inflation. I will be making changes for the Spring 2016 semester, including increasing the weight of chapter exams and the final exam from 13 to 20 percent, and decreasing the weight of MySpanishLab homework from 58 to 40 percent (not including voice recordings).

I am still a proponent of giving homework a fairly high weight, because students spend most of their time here, and this is where most assessed learning takes place. Also, based on student survey results and requests for more speaking practice, I will be increasing the weight of Voice Recordings and Oral

Practice. I will also be implementing MediaShare assignments to build community and as a tool for video uploads of students speaking Spanish.

This online course is a work-in-progress, and each semester, I will evaluate and make changes accordingly to increase student success. I am eager to improve the course at every turn!

**In this course, four students stopped working in the course and subsequently failed. Because they received zeros due to inactivity, and not due to poor performance, we are referring to them as “inactive” and the 24 remaining students as “active.” One student received an incomplete and is not included in the course results.*

**<http://www.sccky.edu/aboutus/collegefacts.php>

*** 14-day Temporary Access codes are now available for all Beginning Level MyLanguageLabs Courses (except Hoy dia) and all Intermediate Spanish and French courses (except Gente intermedio).

N=Number of Learners

Read Victoria Walker’s blog post, [Teaching language and culture in the same breath](#), published October 2016 on Pearson’s [Teaching & Learning Blog](#).

Learn more about MySpanishLab

Learn more about how MySpanishLab could benefit your course by visiting:

<https://www.pearsonhighered.com/timetotalk/myspanishlab/index.html>