

MyLab Business Communications educator study examines use of Dynamic Study Modules at Elgin Community College

<p>School name Elgin Community College, Elgin, IL</p> <p>Course name Business Communications</p> <p>Course format Flipped and face to face</p> <p>Course materials MyLab Business Communications with <i>Business Communications Essentials</i> by Bovee and Thill</p>	<p>Timeframe Spring 2017</p> <p>Submitted by Susan Timm, Professor</p> <p>Results reported by Candace Cooney, Customer Outcomes Analytics Manager</p>
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Key Findings

- Data indicate a very strong correlation between MyLab assignments and average quiz scores and a strong correlation between Dynamic Study Modules and average quiz scores.
- Students completing all MyLab assignments earned significantly higher average quiz and final course grades than students who skipped at least one assignment.
- 92 percent of students agreed that the Dynamic Study Modules pattern of test-learn-retest helped them retain information about important chapter topics.

Setting

- Locale: large, urban, two-year public community college located in northeastern Illinois, approximately one hour from Chicago
- Enrollment: more than 16,000 students

- Full-time students: 22 percent
- First-time, full-time students: 36 percent
- Full-time retention rate: 77 percent
- Three-year graduation rate: 30 percent completed degree or certificate
- Student-faculty ratio: 20:1
- Age 23 and under: 53 percent
- Gender: 54 percent female
- Minority: 40 percent Hispanic, 56 percent total minority

About the Course

Susan Timm has been teaching at Elgin Community College since 2003, after previously teaching at a local university for 15 years. She teaches a variety of business courses in the Office Administration Technology program, including Business Communications, which has an annual enrollment of approximately 400 students. This one-semester, three-credit course is open to all students. There are no prerequisites, so students from many programs and majors take the course. The course generally is non-transferrable, so most students take the course as an elective, looking to improve their business writing skills.

Business Communications introduces correct structure and writing technique for a variety of business documents, including electronic and oral communication in today's business world. It is a study of workplace communications including techniques in listening, speaking, writing, critical thinking, working in teams, understanding multicultural communication, and applying the job search process.

As participants in this course, students have the opportunity to gain:

- An awareness of the complexities of the communication process and various aspects of business communications;
- Skills in listening and multicultural communication;
- Experience with the writing process while creating effective business letters and memorandums;
- Insights into the job-search process and the role of technology in business communications; and
- Knowledge and practice in research.

Challenges and Goals

Several years ago, Timm and her colleagues were using a different textbook that did not provide much digital support for students. When reviewing books and online technology products, she was encouraged by the many options for homework assignments and quizzing in MyLab™ Business Communications. The course is taught by multiple instructors, including many adjuncts, so being able to offer students a consistent experience across sections was important. Additionally, she hoped that pre-class homework assigned in MyLab would compel students to read the textbook and understand the basics so she could focus on more challenging content in lecture. Believing that today's students are proficient at using digital content, she hoped to offer students learning in all course formats a wide-ranging, all-encompassing course experience, and she adopted MyLab in 2015 along with her colleagues.

Additionally, Pearson worked with the department and the Elgin bookstore to create a Digital Direct Access (DDA) program that would digitally deliver the required MyLab program and eText to all students on the first day of class, immediately ensuring 100 percent student compliance, as well as offering student cost savings.

Implementation

First Day Access and Experience

Digital Direct Access

Many educators agree that students who do not have access to required course materials on the first day of class may be at a disadvantage, which may have serious consequences for students' academic performance. Nationally, innovative institutions are transitioning to digital delivery of course materials to ensure every student has access to essential course materials from the first day of class at an affordable price. Through careful planning, implementation, and ongoing refinement of their strategies, schools are growing their campus' digital footprint, reducing textbook costs, improving student access to course materials, and gaining deeper insights into student performance and needs for early intervention through data analysis. The Elgin bookstore partnered with faculty to create a [digital direct access](#) program that includes eText and MyLab costs in the course fee, ensuring that all students have immediate access to necessary course materials.

Single Sign On

[Pearson's Learning Management System \(LMS\) integration service](#) gives students and instructors easy access to MyLab from their existing school LMS. Timm chose to integrate her MyLab course with DesireToLearn (D2L) for the following reasons:

- **Single sign-in process:** students are ready to work in MyLab on the first day of class;

- **Grade transfer:** grades are easily transferable from MyLab to D2L and there is one single gradebook for the course; and
- **Content linking:** ability to link to MyLab directly from D2L.

Timm's students have just one access code and a single sign-on process without the need to log in to D2L and additionally sign in to MyLab. This results in a simple way for students to start their MyLab assignments, ensuring that they are ready to work from the first day of class. On an end-of-semester survey that Timm used as an extra credit, in-class assignment (98 percent response rate), students indicated the following:

- 97 percent of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they were able to access MyLab through D2L and appreciated not having a second, separate login for MyLab.

Most students are familiar with MyLab from other courses but for those who are not, Timm invites a Pearson representative to her first class to help students learn to navigate the homework assignments and use the eText, videos, and other resources. She posts start-up documents in D2L and requires that students take a short syllabus quiz the first week of school. Providing students with [First Day of Class resources](#) is a Pearson MyLab best practice that gives students a positive start to their digital homework experience and may lead to fewer questions and confusion during the critical start-up period.

MyLab Business Communication

MyLab is required; the program is used by students working at home on a personal computer as well as in class. Students use MyLab for understanding content, homework assignments, additional practice, and assessments. Timm's goals for assigning work in MyLab are to ensure that students are reading the textbook, introduce new concepts, provide homework and practice opportunities, and help students assess their own understanding of the course material. Timm anticipates that students will spend at least four hours per week working in MyLab, which could include reading the eText and completing assignments and simulations. Based on results of the end-of-semester survey, 41 percent of students said they spent 3–5 hours using MyLab, and an additional 10 percent of students indicated they spent more than five hours per week working in the program.

Before completing any work in MyLab, students take a grammar proficiency pre-test to identify their current skill level. Students who score below 70 percent are required to visit the tutoring center at Elgin for remediation. All students complete nine MyLab homework assignments and quizzes. Homework is created using a variety of exercises to foster learning outside the classroom. Bi-weekly MyLab assignments consist of:

Chapter Warm-ups: Completed before lecture, these quizzes allow Timm to see if students are reading the material in the textbook and understanding the concepts. As a result, students come to class familiar with basic content, allowing her to focus on more challenging topics.

Dynamic Study Modules: These questions continuously assess student performance and activity, using data and analytics to provide personalized feedback in real-time to reinforce chapter concepts. The Dynamic Study Modules give Timm's students additional practice in the content areas where they struggle the most. As a student stated on the end-of-semester survey, "*The DSM helped a lot to understand the chapters.*" The DSM are mastery based and required, so students generally complete them all. For additional information on how to assign Dynamic Study Modules and use the reporting feature, see Module 7 of the [MyLab Implementation Guide](#).

Decision-making Mini Sims: Mini-simulations put Timm's students in the role of manager as they make a series of decisions based on a realistic business challenge. The simulations change and branch based on their decisions, creating various scenario paths and strengthening critical thinking skills. The simulations can be time consuming, each taking a minimum of 20 minutes to complete, and students may complete the simulation as many times as they like to earn a higher score. Timm also uses the simulations as group work in lecture, with students agreeing on which decision option to choose. This creates discussion and a terrific learning experience regarding the impact of different decisions on business outcomes.

Video assignments: 'Watch It' and 'Think Like a Manager' videos explore a variety of business topics related to the theories students are learning and assess students' comprehension of the concepts covered in each video. Videos are less than ten minutes in length, and students have unlimited attempts at completing the five-question, multiple-choice quizzes that follow.

Document makeovers: Timm gives her students the opportunity to understand the why and how of polished communication in these exercises. Students review a sample document, analyze and revise an interactive document, receive feedback, and finally prove their comprehension on a brief document makeover quiz.

Grammar improvement exercises: These practice exercises provide a grammar refresher, assessing student understanding of basic grammar concepts, and include short media lessons followed by practice QuickChecks and objective-based homework questions. Students have unlimited attempts at completion.

Chapter quizzes: Students complete a 25-question, multiple-choice quiz in MyLab for each chapter. Quizzes are open-book, are not timed, and students have two attempts at completion. Timm's goal is to get students reading the textbook.

On the end-of-semester survey, students reported the following about MyLab assignments:

- 93 percent of respondents agreed that the Dynamic Study Modules pattern of test-learn-retest helped them retain information about important chapter topics.

- 80 percent of respondents agreed that the use of confidence levels ('I am sure,' 'I am partially sure,' 'I don't know yet') helped them identify chapter content they needed to work on.
- 85 percent of respondents agreed that the simulations in MyLab helped them practice decision making and apply the chapter content to a real-world business challenge.
- 82 percent of respondents agreed that the detailed report of their choices at the end of the simulation exercises allowed them to see the consequences of the business decisions they made.
- 90 percent of respondents agreed that the video exercises in MyLab helped them visualize the chapter contents in action.
- 92 percent of respondents agreed that the grammar improvement exercises helped them identify and focus on mistakes they were making to improve their writing.
- 90 percent of respondents agreed that document makeover exercises helped them learn how to communicate in a professional setting and refine their business writing skills.

Additional course assessments include a variety of in-class activities including Writing Space assignments from MyLab, a country snapshot project that introduces students to the business characteristics of a self-chosen country, and a job search assignment where students create a resume and cover letter, and review help wanted ads and job applications. Five case studies are completed as an individual assignment outside of class with a specific rubric and instructions. Points earned per case study increase as the semester goes on, as students become more familiar with the process and expectations.

Assessments

- 23% MyLab homework assignments (Chapter Warm-ups, DSM, simulations, video exercises)
- 16% MyLab grammar improvement exercises
- 14% MyLab quizzes
- 14% Country snapshot project
- 13% Job search project
- 8% Case studies
- 6% Grammar tutoring
- 6% In-class activities

Results and Data

Figures 1 and 2 are correlation graphs; correlations do not imply causation but instead measure the strength of a relationship between two variables, where r is the correlation coefficient. The closer the positive r value is to 1.0, the stronger the correlation. The corresponding p -value measures the statistical significance/strength of this evidence (the correlation), where a p -value $<.05$ shows the existence of a positive correlation between these two variables.

- A very strong positive correlation exists between average MyLab homework scores and average MyLab quiz scores where $r=.87$ and $p<.05$.
- A strong positive correlation exists between average Dynamic Study Module scores and average MyLab quiz scores where $r=.70$ and $p<.05$.

For students, the formative MyLab homework is intended to help them identify where they are in terms of successfully completing the summative assessments; it appears that performance on these assignments could be a leading indicator of course success (additional research is needed to develop and test this concept further). Empirically, Timm indicates that the MyLab assignments provide the practice that is necessary to be successful in her course.

Correlation between MyLab homework score and MyLab quiz score

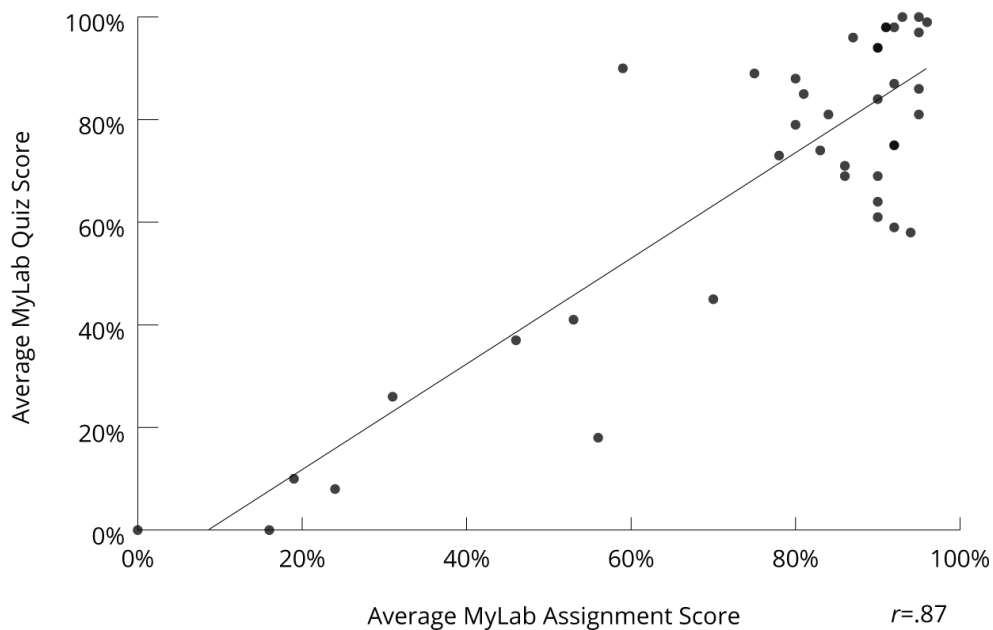


Figure 1. Correlation between Average MyLab Homework Assignment Score and Average MyLab Quiz Score, Spring 2017 ($n=40$)

Correlation between Dynamic Study Module score and quiz score

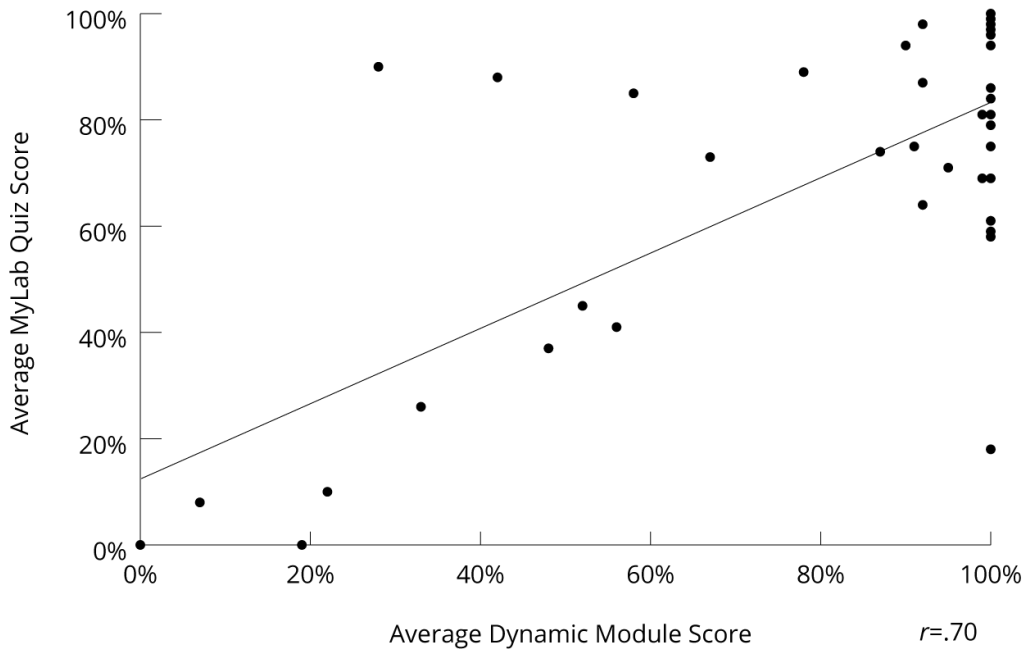


Figure 2. Correlation between Average Dynamic Study Module Score and Average MyLab Quiz Score, Spring 2017 ($n=40$)

Students were divided into two groups based on completion of the Dynamic Study Modules. Students who completed all DSM assignments earned higher average quiz and final course grades than students who skipped at least one DSM assignment (figure 3), and the difference is statistically significant.

- Students who completed all DSM assignments earned average quiz scores 24 percentage points higher than students who skipped at least one DSM.
- Students who completed all DSM assignments earned average final course scores 19 percentage points higher than students who skipped at least one DSM.
- Results of a t -Test show statistical significance for the difference in average quiz scores where $t(11)=2.73$ and $p<.05$ and the difference in final course scores where $t(11)=3.83$ and $p<.05$.

Dynamic Study Module completion

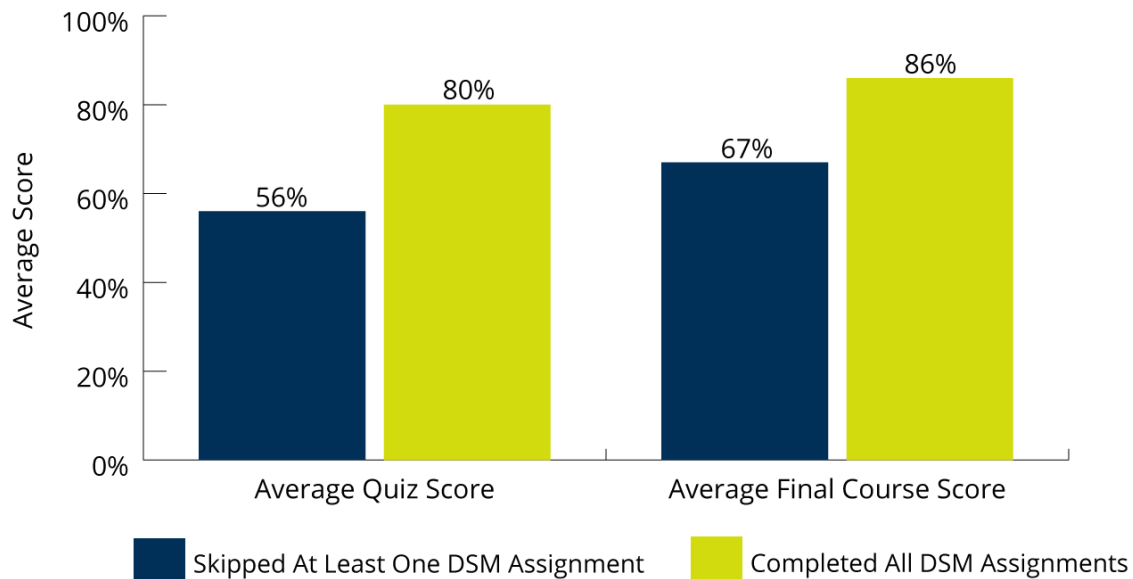


Figure 3. Impact of Dynamic Study Module Completion on Average Quiz and Final Course Scores, Spring 2017 (n=40)

The Student Experience

Responses from the Spring 2017 end-of-semester survey of Timm's students indicate that the majority of responding students recognize the value of MyLab Business Communication.

- 98 percent of students strongly agree or agree that their understanding of the course material increased as a result of using MyLab.
- 97 percent of students strongly agree or agree that they would recommend MyLab to another student.

Student survey responses to the question, "What are the benefits of MyLab for you as a student?" include:

- *"It is an innovative platform for teaching which gives you many tools to learn in various ways. I like how organized it is."*
- *"MyLab offered a variety of content in different mediums to appeal to students of all learning styles."*
- *"[MyLab] has step-by-step assignments that are easy for students to follow and know what they have accomplished, or what they still need to work on."*
- *"The benefits are that it is easy to use, organized, easy to access, and it provides good feedback."*

Conclusion

As Timm sought to offer her students a more digitally-enriched course, she identified the variety of MyLab assignments as a way to offer students many options for practice, and digital direct access as a way to deliver the course that would ensure 100 percent compliance and access to all students on the first day of class. Timm's students appreciated the variety of MyLab assignments and the many options for self-study. One student echoed the comments of many on the survey, saying, *"A benefit to MyLab is that you can work on your own time and you have everything available."*

Timm encourages new users to recognize that there will be a learning curve, as there is with any new technology. Putting thought into assignments up front will minimize problems as the semester goes on. She also suggests using a coordinator course so that everyone is using the same assignments, particularly adjuncts who may not have used the program before. Timm states that training adjunct faculty on MyLab implementation is very important for them to feel confident and successful in the classroom.