Pearson

MyLab Business Communications educator study analyzes homework, quiz, and writing assignment scores at Mesa Community College

School Name Mesa Community College, Mesa, AZ	**Timeframe** Spring 2016
Course name Business Communications	**Submitted by** Lo-An Tabar-Gaul, Professor
Course format Online	**Results reported by** Candace Cooney, Customer Outcomes Analytics Manager
Course materials MyLab Business Communications for *Excellence in Business Communication* by Thill and Bovee	

Key Findings

- Data for this course show a very strong positive correlation between average MyLab assignment grades and average MyLab Writing Space assignment grades.
- Data indicate that students who earned higher average quiz scores, showing mastery of course material by earning an A,B, or C average, had average MyLab scores 13 percentage points higher than students who earned a D or F as an average quiz grade.
- The use of computer-assisted grading for the Writing Space written assignments in MyLab allowed for a fair and reasonable grading structure for students and freed up the instructor's time for other course preparations.

Setting

Mesa Community College (MCC) is a two-year, urban, public institution located outside of Phoenix. It is the largest of the ten community colleges in the Maricopa County Community College District, which is the largest community college district in the United States in terms of enrollment. In fall 2015, MCC enrolled more than 21,000 students, 31 percent of whom were full-time. Forty-two percent of MCC's students plan to transfer to a 4-year college or university with a degree or certificate from MCC, and 23 percent plan to enter or advance in the job market with an MCC degree or certificate. Fifty-seven percent of students primarily attend classes during the day while another 23 percent attend in a non-traditional manner such as online or a mix of day and night classes. Among entering students, 34 percent are first-time, full-time undergraduates; the average student age is 25, and 48 percent of students identify as minorities.

About the Course

Professor Lo-An Tabar-Gaul has been teaching full-time for 28 years at MCC where she has been teaching the Business Communications course for three years (www.linkedin.com/in/tabargaul). She has been involved in Quality Matters (QM), a non-profit organization that certifies online and blended courses for colleges internationally (https://www.qualitymatters.org/) where she has been serving as a Certified Master Reviewer for the past several years.

Business Communication is a one-semester, three-credit course enrolling approximately 100 students each semester, both online and face-to-face. It is required for an associate degree in business or management and is also an elective for other majors. The course is intended to enhance students' ability to write and communicate electronically and verbally in a professional environment; it does not teach methods of common English writing as it assumes students are already familiar with report and letter writing for formal English communications. Course competencies include:

- Identifying general characteristics of language and meaning;
- Identifying ways of producing messages and evaluating their success;
- Writing coherent sentences and paragraphs, using fundamental writing techniques for electronic mail, business letters and business memos; and
- Composing reports and preparing visual aids for business situations, including oral reporting.

Challenges and Goals

In 2013, Tabar-Gaul was tasked with building an online course for the Business Communication course around the core course competencies. She hoped to find an existing program with interactive activities that would match their educational goals, where the material would be presented in a variety of ways to accommodate the different learning styles of online learners. She reviewed MyLab and noted immediately that while it was rich with interactive activities, it was also user-friendly enough for her to learn on her own and also had the backing of advanced technical

support with Pearson. An additional advantage was the ability for other instructors to copy and modify a course that she created; Tabar-Gaul adopted MyLab for her Fall 2013 classes.

Implementation

MyLab is required; the program is used by students at home on a personal computer. Students use MyLab for learning new concepts, homework assignments, quizzes, and writing assignments. Tabar-Gaul's goals for assigning work in MyLab are to get students to read the textbook and use the various multimedia assets available to them, practice key concepts, as well as to help students assess their own understanding of the course material and track their progress. As the course instructor, Tabar-Gaul's role is to assign content, homework, and assessments in MyLab, offer remote monitoring and support, and provide additional grading of writing assignments.

Student activity in Tabar-Gaul's online course follows a structured weekly format, covering one to two chapters per week. Active learning activities assigned include:

- Reading the appropriate textbook chapters and viewing the PowerPoint notes in Canvas
- Completing a discussion board post related to the chapter content in Canvas
- Logging into MyLab for completion of several homework assignments
- Taking the MyLab chapter review quiz

Tabar-Gaul expects her students will spend at least 1.5–2 hours per week working in MyLab, and another 30 minutes working through course content and discussion assignments in Canvas. Her students confirmed this on a Fall 2015 voluntary, end-of-semester survey (100 percent response rate)—28 percent of students spent one to two hours per week working in MyLab, 39 percent of students spent two to three hours per week working in MyLab and 33 percent of students spent more than three hours per week working in MyLab.

After completing the chapter reading assignment and discussion board posting, students begin their MyLab assignments:

- Decision-making simulation exercises put students in the role of manager as they make a series of decisions based on a realistic business challenge; the 5-question simulations change and branch based on the students' decisions, creating various scenario paths. Students have eight simulation assignments worth 5–10 points each.
- Video exercises explore a variety of business topics related to the theory students are learning; a 5-question quiz requiring critical thinking and decision-making follows the video. Students have 10 Video Exercises worth five points each.
- The chapter review quiz is a 15-question, multiple choice/true-false quiz that Tabar-Gaul creates using the Pearson test bank. The quiz is timed to 60 minutes and students have three attempts at completion. Approximately 100 questions per chapter are pooled and randomized, creating a challenging assessment; however, multiple attempts allow for success, which is Tabar-Gaul's intention. Students complete 16-chapter review quizzes worth 15 points each. Additionally, Tabar-Gaul chooses questions that meet AACSB standards and tie back to her course competency goals and learning objectives.

Writing Space
Midway through the course, Tabar-Gaul incorporates Writing Space assignments for chapters 8–10 of MyLab to provide her students with an opportunity for professional communication. These written assignments help her assess concept mastery and critical thinking with the benefit of less time spent hand-grading. Tabar-Gaul uses the automatic-grading option where MyLab auto-grades the initial student submission based on a five-point rubric. The rubric gives students a structure around which to create their writing assignments and helps keep them focused on creating a properly organized and professional communication. Additionally, the integration with Turnitin® allows Writing Space to check students' work for improper citation or plagiarism.

Students scoring less than 80 percent on the initial computer-graded submission must complete revisions based on the computer feedback and resubmit for scoring. Students scoring over 80 percent have their grade recorded as the final written assignment score in the gradebook. Tabar-Gaul does, however, review each submission and can insert comments on her students' writing in MyLab; at that point, she may adjust the grade, if necessary. Because the computer does not grade for content, Tabar-Gaul uses this opportunity to provide appropriate personal feedback.

Initially, students were understandably concerned about the concept of computer grading for their written assignments, and often shared their anxiety on the discussion boards. However, Tabar-Gaul now explains the grading process and her involvement, and also shares examples of acceptable writing so there is less apprehension about the grading policy. Students on the end-of-semester survey were asked about the auto-graded assignments:

- 56 percent of students agreed or strongly agreed that they were initially uncomfortable with the idea of having a computer grade their writing assignments.
- 100 percent of students agreed or strongly agreed that they followed the MyLab 5-point rubric (Development of Ideas, Organization, Convention, Voice, and Coherence) when writing the first draft of their assignments.
- 83 percent of students agreed or strongly agreed that the Writing Space assignments provided them with an opportunity to improve their writing skills.
- 100 percent of students agreed or strongly agreed that looking back on the computer grading of their writing assignments, they believe it was fair and reasonable.

For more information on how to use automatic-grading for written assignments, see Writing Space for MyLab.

Tabar-Gaul creates her course to meet the standards of Quality Matters, a peer-review process that is designed to certify the quality of online courses. While she has not submitted her course for review, she follows their Quality Matters Higher Education rubric, a set of eight general standards and 43 specific review standards used for course evaluation.

Employability/21st Century Skills
Tabar-Gaul's use of simulation and video learning in MyLab is helping to arm her students with 21st century employability skills. There is a growing body of knowledge about what soft skills are needed to open up work opportunities for college graduates today, but these skills themselves can be a challenge for students to develop. The majority of hiring managers place the greatest value on proficiency in these soft skills, however, less than 38 percent of employers say college graduates are

prepared in these skill areas/learning outcomes. The MyLab framework, which includes simulation, video decision making, and written communication, moves away from memorization and content definition and is instead organized to help learners understand, identify, and develop these core soft skills:

- Communication
- Decision-making
- Problem-solving and analytical skills
- Knowledge application

Learning Management System (LMS) Integration
Tabar-Gaul was intrigued by the ability to integrate MyLab with Canvas, the LMS system used at MCC, especially the seamless integration of the gradebooks. Ultimately, she opted to integrate her course for the following reasons:

- Grade transfer–grades are easily transferable from MyLab to Canvas and there is one single gradebook for the course
- Single sign-on–students are ready to work in MyLab on the first day of class
- Content linking–ability to link to MyLab directly from Canvas

The availability of grade syncing made the decision to integrate MyLab and Canvas quite simple. Additionally, students now have just one access code and a single sign-in process instead of the need to log in to Canvas, followed by a separate log in to MyLab. Easy access to MyLab is important, particularly for remote online students; anything that minimizes potential start-up issues early in the semester is appreciated. As one student on the end-of-semester survey said, "I liked that it was easy to get to my assignments." The single sign-in has resulted in a simple way for students to begin their work in MyLab:

- 89 percent of students agreed or strongly agreed that they were able to access MyLab through Canvas and appreciated not needing a second, separate login for MyLab.
- 78 percent of students agreed or strongly agreed that the sign in and registration process for MyLab was simple and fast through Canvas.

Assessments

- 33% MyBCommLab writing assignments
- 30% Discussion Board assignments
- 26% MyBCommLab quizzes
- 11% MyBCommLab assignments – simulation and video exercises

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 *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 <.01 shows the existence of a positive correlation between these two variables. The simulation and video exercises comprise the MyLab assignment score:

- A very strong positive correlation exists between average MyLab assignment grades and the average quiz grade, where *r*=.77 and *p*<.01.
- A strong positive correlation exists between average MyLab assignment grades and the final course grade, where *r*=.56 and *p*<.01. It should be noted that the MyLab scores are 11 percent of the final course grade, influencing this relationship.

For students, the formative MyLab assignment grades are intended to help them identify where they are in terms of successfully completing the more summative writing assignments; 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). As a best practice, MyLab assignment grades are intended to help Tabar-Gaul identify students early on who are struggling and might be at risk of poor overall course performance.

Correlation between MyLab assignment grade and quiz grade

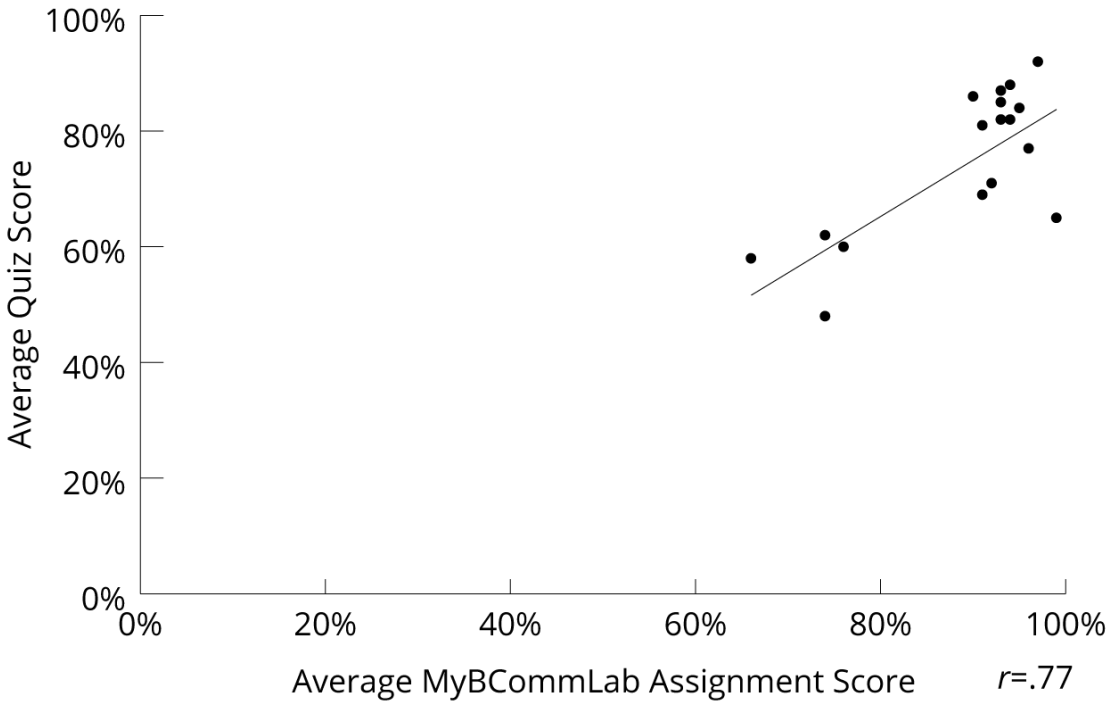

Figure 1. Correlation Between Average MyLab Assignment Grade and Average Quiz Grade, Fall 2015 (*n*=18)

Correlation between MyLab assignment grad and final course grade

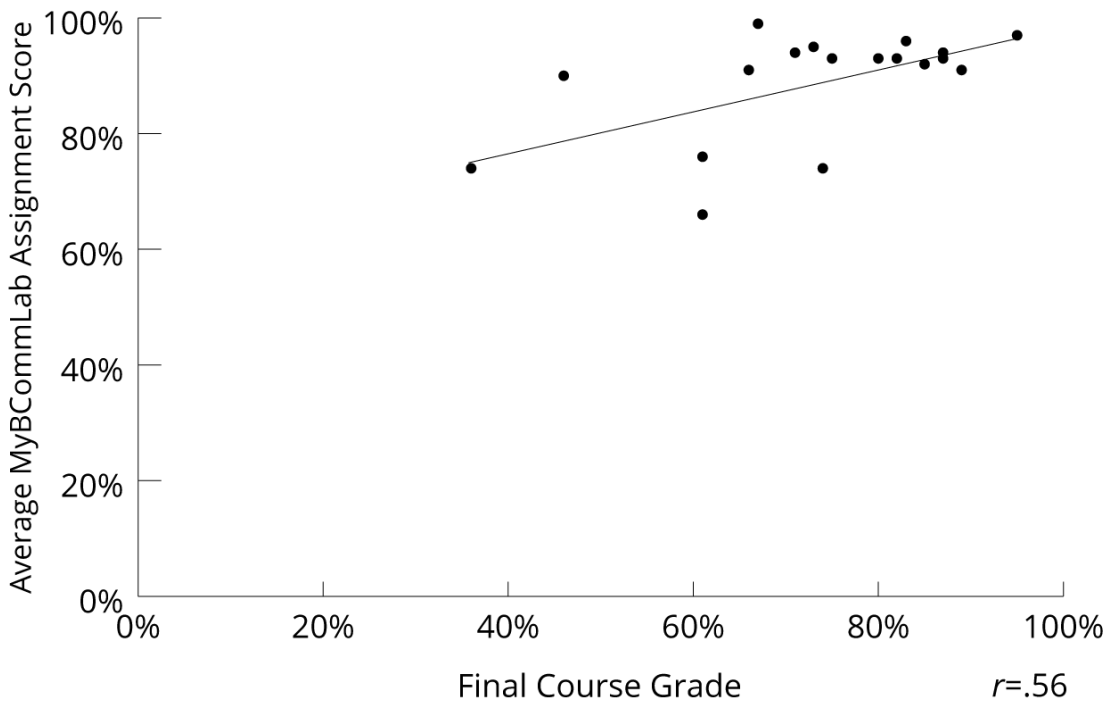

Figure 2. Correlation Between Average MyLab Assignment Grade and Final Course Grade, Fall 2015 (*n*=18)

Figure 3 looks at MyLab completion rates which were analyzed to determine if a relationship exists between assignment completion and both average quiz grades and final course grades. Students were placed into two groups based on the average number of MyLab assignments they completed; students who completed all MyLab assignments earned higher average quiz and final course grades than students who skipped at least one assignment:

- Average number of assignments skipped: one
- Students who completed all MyLab assignments had an average quiz grade 24 percentage points higher than students who skipped at least one assignment.
- Students who completed all MyLab assignments had a final course grade 20 percentage points higher than students who skipped at least one assignment.
- 77 percent of students completed all MyLab assignments.

Relationship between MyLab assignment completion and quiz and final course grades

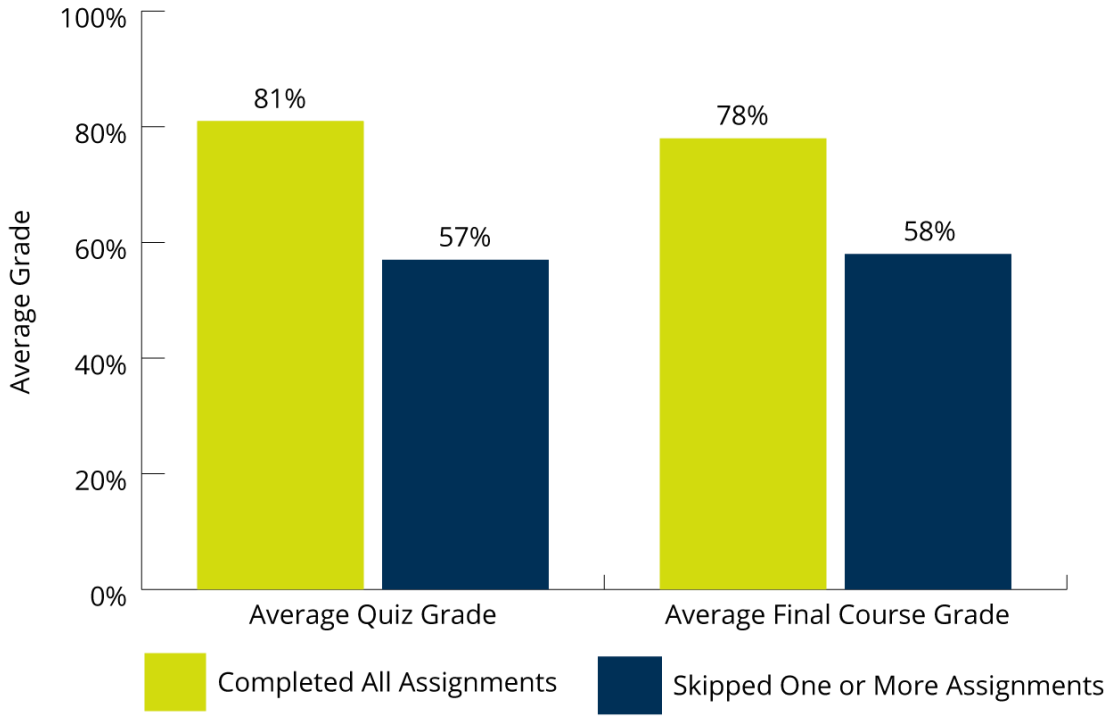

Figure 3. Relationship between MyLab Assignment Completion and Average Quiz Grades and Final Course Grades, Fall 2015 (*n*=18)

Figure 4 presents the relationship between the average quiz letter grade distribution per average MyLab assignment score. Students showing mastery of course content by earning an A, B, or C for their average quiz grade had average MyLab assignments scores 13 percentage points higher than students who scored a D/F quiz average:

- Students earning an average quiz grade of A scored an average of 97 percent on the MyLab assignments.
- Students scoring an average quiz grade of F scored an average of 70 percent on the MyLab assignments.

MyLab assignment score and quiz grades

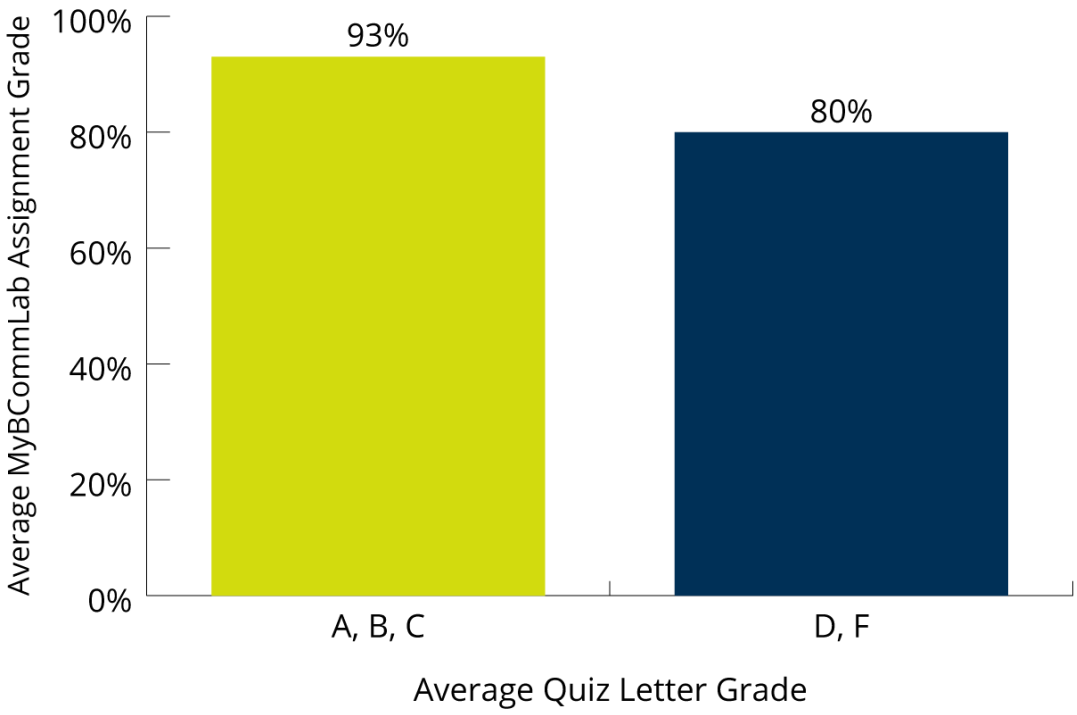

Figure 4. Relationship between Average MyLab Assignment Score and Average Quiz Letter Grades, Fall 2015 (*n*=18)

The Student Experience

Responses from a Fall 2015 end-of-semester, voluntary survey of Tabar-Gaul's students (100 percent response rate) indicate that the majority of responding students recognize the value of MyLab:

- 94 percent of students agree or strongly agree that the use of MyLab positively impacted their quiz scores.
- 89 percent of students agree or strongly agree that MyLab provided additional resources that helped them learn more than they would have from more traditional pencil and paper homework.
- 89 percent of students agree or strongly agree that their understanding of the course material increased as a result of using MyLab.
- 100 percent of students agree or strongly agree that they would recommend MyLab to another student taking this course.

Student survey responses to the statement, "Explain how you felt about the computer-graded Writing Space assignments in MyLab" include:

- *"I was skeptical at first but after the first one realized it was a good program."*
- *"The computerized system did a good job and I was impressed by it to see that the scores were decent."*
- *"I found the computerized grading to be quite fair and mostly on par with the following grade given by the instructor."*
- *"I enjoyed them. A lot of sites similar to MyLab have assignments that are graded immediately by a computer, however it was great to see how accurately the computer on MyLab graded my written assignments."*
- *"I liked that there was more than one type of homework assignment, so I could practice in different ways."*
- *"All the information is located in a centralized place. It allows me to see the scores I have earned on each assignment in real time and it provides multiple activities per chapter to reinforce the material."*

Conclusion

In Tabar-Gaul's active learning environment, her students engage in activities like reading, writing, discussion, and problem solving to promote analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of class content. Successful creation of this environment in an online course, however, takes time to integrate well. Following a Pearson best practice, she cautions those planning to offer an online course with an interactive digital program to help their students get an exceptional start to the semester. She removes much of the initial confusion by creating a tutorial video-orientation to Canvas and MyLab that is a basic 'how-to' guide for registration and start-up for these main course tools. In fact, the students' first post on the discussion board is a reflection on their MyLab sign in experience and first week of class; she listens to their responses and makes adjustments for the following semester accordingly. Once students get comfortable with the course structure, they can fully engage themselves in the active learning environment she creates and move closer toward the ultimate goal of being able to create professional communication for 21st century employment.