

# Course Design

## EDUCATOR TESTIMONIAL GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY PARALEGAL DEPARTMENT

**COURSE:** Natural Science undergraduate course: Paralegal graduates. The goal at George Washington (GW) is to prepare graduates to lead the paralegal profession, which means their curriculum is rigorous and scholarly.

**SUMMARY:** There were two distinct issues the university wanted to solve: to understand and improve the drop out rate on one of their foundational prerequisite courses, and to help students and lecturers better engage with each other.

### What challenge or problem did you want Pearson's course design services to solve?

**Challenge 1:** Students were reporting frustration with the lack of interaction with their professors. The professors were highly engaged, but they worked in the background— designing and reviewing rubrics and curriculum, assessing student learning and adjusting courses based on those assessments, updating topical material, managing facilitators, and responding to escalated inquiries. The students didn't see that engagement because the results came to the students invisibly or filtered through their facilitators.

**Challenge 2:** The university was concerned with the drop-out rate in its foundational prerequisite course, Legal Research and Writing. The course contained a lot of material to master in a short period of time, and the class was only seven weeks long. In addition, another seven-week course immediately preceded it in the semester. Students didn't have enough time to digest the information, practice it, perfect it, try it again, and move on to the next task while successfully making progress through each course level.

### How did you work with Pearson to develop your course?

**Challenge 1:** To ensure that the students' perception of faculty engagement concurred with the reality of it, GW and Pearson instituted a policy regarding faculty practices, the centerpiece of which was posting weekly videos. The instructional designer

created a widget on the course home page called "The Professor's Office" and linked it seamlessly to an online video sharing site. Professors are now required to record a three to five-minute video every week and post it in the Professor's Office. The videos are casual, conversational, and short. To further ensure that students realize the professors are closely monitoring the course, they contain specific references to the week's work (e.g., comments on the discussion board, quizzes, or assignments).

**Challenge 2:** GW and Pearson identified and quantified a high drop-out rate associated with the Legal Research and Writing course. Pearson suggested reworking the schedule to allow more time for students to acquire the specialized knowledge in the course properly. The professors and instructional designers converted the two consecutive seven-week courses into two concurrent 14-week courses. The task required them to



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reconcile the two course schedules, so that the work would be evenly distributed.

### What benefits have you seen from using Pearson's course design services?

- On the Legal Research and Writing course the new schedule that the Pearson team recommended resulted in increased retention rates. Drop-out rates dropped from 15 percent in the seven-week course to less than 6 percent in the 14- week course.
- GW worked with Pearson's instructional designers to develop multimedia components, which included weekly videos and podcasts featuring lead instructors offering insightful commentary on relevant course and program content, lectures, and assignments.
- Pearson's instructional designers made it possible for lead instructors to record weekly videos, which helped to personalize the students' experiences and made the students feel more connected (as if they were actually with the instructor on campus).

As a result of these improvements, student course evaluation survey scores increased significantly.

