

Online tutoring service helps nontraditional students and student-athletes succeed

West Texas A&M University



Overview

West Texas A&M University (WTAMU), a student-centered learning community, is committed to preparing its graduates to succeed in a dynamic global environment. Offering fifty-eight undergraduate programs, thirty-nine master's degree programs, and one doctoral program, the university provides its diverse student body with an engaging, technology-rich educational experience. To help each student meet his or her goals, the university offers a comprehensive suite of student success services, including a Tutor Assistance Program (TAP). In 2007, WTAMU added an online tutoring service to TAP, which students have valued for its convenience and flexibility.

Challenge

In 2007, one of WTAMU’s vice presidents approached Michelle Blake, assistant director, Office of Educational Services, about a concern regarding TAP’s accessibility. Although many students were benefiting from the face-to-face tutoring service, there were subgroups of students who were unable to take advantage of the program due to scheduling and logistical conflicts.

Nontraditional students, many who held jobs or had families, had difficulty finding the time to come to campus for tutoring assistance. Student-athletes in this competitive Division II school also had difficulty accessing the service due to heavy practice and game schedules. In addition, student interest in online classes was growing, so the time seemed right for WTAMU to look for an online tutoring solution.

Solution

WTAMU chose Pearson’s Smarthinking as its online tutoring service because it is available 24/7, gives students the option to work with a tutor immediately or to schedule a session at a future time, and provides tutoring in critical subjects like math and science. In addition, WTAMU was interested in Smarthinking’s writing review services. Students can submit a draft of an essay for any course and receive a detailed critique within 24 hours.

When the university launched Smarthinking at the beginning of the 2007–2008 academic year, Blake conducted a series of presentations around campus to raise awareness of and demonstrate the online tutoring service. She also posted video tutorials on the university’s website.

The technical implementation of the service went smoothly, and the university has encountered no challenges since then. “From what I’ve heard and from what I’ve seen when I experimented with it, Smarthinking is so user friendly that there haven’t been any issues at all,” noted Blake.

PROFILE

City/State

Canyon, Texas

Institution Type

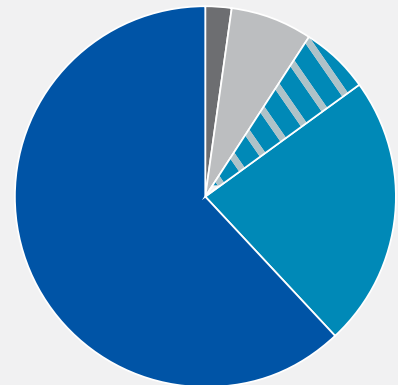
Public 4-year college

Enrollment

8,981 students

Ethnicity

- 62% Caucasian
- 23% Hispanic
- 6% African American
- 2% Asian
- 7% Other



Results

The number of students using Smarthinking has varied since the service was first introduced, ranging from 479 to 713 students per year. Usage is heaviest between 8:00 and 10:00 p.m. and on Mondays and Wednesdays.

Students appreciate the online tutoring service. “The convenience and flexibility of just being able to get online and ask a question about a math problem prior to an exam or to be able to submit a paper and get a response within 24 hours is amazing,” said Blake. “We get nothing but positive feedback.”

Student-athletes have been particularly enthusiastic about the program. “When they’re on the road, they’re able to get the help that they need,” explained Blake. Audrey Meador, instructor of mathematics, agreed. “I have had some students comment that they can use Smarthinking from their mobile phones, and one student told me he used it in the airport.”

“Smarthinking is very convenient, helpful, and beneficial to our students.”

—Michelle Blake,
Assistant Director, Office
of Educational Services



Results *continued*

Meador, who teaches math courses ranging from developmental math to calculus, encourages her students to take advantage of either the face-to-face or online tutoring services. She finds, though, that students in her more advanced classes are more likely to use the online tutoring service because they are embarrassed to be seen asking for assistance.

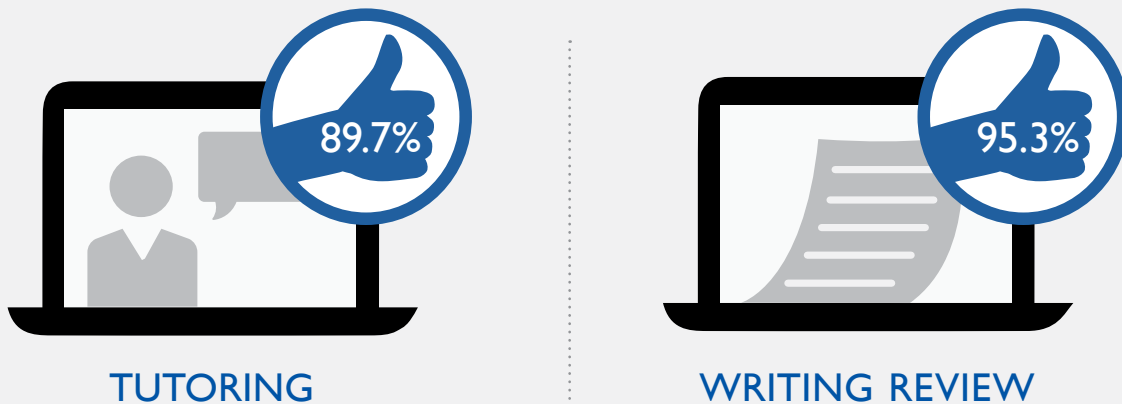
Exit survey results confirm student satisfaction with Smarthinking. When asked if they would recommend the tutoring service to a friend, 89.7 percent of students said yes, and 95.3 percent would recommend the writing review services to a friend (see Figure 1). Blake summarized the survey results in this way: “Smarthinking is meeting all our students’ needs, and they are very happy with the service.”

“If students need help with a problem, they can go to Smarthinking and get immediate assistance.”

—Audrey Meador,
Instructor of Mathematics

FIGURE 1

Percentage of Students Who Would Recommend Smarthinking to a Friend



Exit Survey Results, August 15, 2014–May 14, 2015

To learn more about how Smarthinking can help your students succeed, visit smarthinking.com/solutions/higher-education