Looking to grow, a community college expands its online learning program

Eastern Gateway Community College
The Challenge

In 2014, Eastern Gateway Community College (EGCC) in Steubenville, Ohio, was looking for a way to increase its enrollment and meet the needs of adult learners. To accomplish these goals, EGCC decided to expand its online learning program. The college already offered some online courses, but it lacked the internal capacity to grow the program. Kenneth Knox, interim vice-president, Academic Affairs, explained, “If you are offering a typical online course and you do your own thing, how do you replicate it if your growth dictates multiple sections? It’s hard for community colleges to adopt an online program and take it to scale without uniformity, consistency, and presentation.” So EGCC began researching vendors who could help it grow its online learning program and maintain the college’s high standards.

An Online Learning Solution

EGCC chose Pearson as its online learning partner. Working together, they developed three programs using Pearson’s Propero® courses. “The first is a business management degree, the second is a criminal justice degree, and the third option that we offer students is the associate of arts transfer degree,” Knox noted. “We’ve gotten the most interest in the business management and criminal justice programs.”

To get faculty members’ buy-in, EGCC enlisted their support upfront. “We had the good sense to start with the faculty,” Knox explained. “We had our full-time faculty look at and approve the content, course objectives, and learning outcomes so that it became an easy sell.”

Since 75 to 80 percent of EGCC’s online courses are taught by adjunct faculty, EGCC and Pearson designed an orientation program to familiarize first-time users with the course platform and content. “We make it clear to the adjuncts that the content is here,” Knox noted. “We’re not hiring them to design a course; we’re hiring them to facilitate a course.”

“Propero is a way to take your online programs to scale and reach a larger audience.”

—Kenneth Knox, Interim Vice-President, Academic Affairs
James Gibbs, an adjunct professor for the Principles of Management course, noted that before Propero, he created online courses that included a lot of documents, PowerPoints, and assignments, which could sometimes be overwhelming for students. But with Propero, “the transition is really smooth,” he noted. “I like the application and the website, especially when dealing with the course material. It is easier to get to the books, the supplements, and the course questions and quizzes. And the students enjoy it because the quizzes set them up to prepare for the tests.”

Peggy Pyle, an adjunct professor for the American History course, agreed that the practice quizzes are beneficial for students. “I like the fact that the program allows them to retake the practice quizzes before they take the actual test that counts for a grade. I think that it gives them a little more confidence because they have already gone through and achieved a certain percentage on the quiz.”

For the online learning courses, the role of EGCC faculty is to advise and coach students through regular and meaningful interaction. Gibbs does this through weekly emails, checking in with students to ensure that they are completing their assignments and that their questions are answered. Propero’s analytics show him which students are falling behind in their work or struggling with the material.

Pyle supplements the material from Propero with short writing assignments. “I pick out something from each of the lessons that is a little more topical or maybe has something more to do with the students,” she explained. “For example, during a lesson on the Progressive era, I had them write about two current societal issues and the crusaders who are leading the fight to fix the problems.” Pyle noted that in her class, supplemental assignments count for approximately one-third of a student’s grade.

The Results

Since the partnership launched, the number of distinct Propero courses has grown from eight to twenty while enrollment in the online learning courses has increased from 232 to 1,300 students. EGCC has promoted the program to labor unions throughout Ohio and plans to expand its promotional efforts to labor unions throughout the country later this year, which could result in an increase in enrollment totaling 5,000 to 10,000 students.
“What has really contributed to the growth in enrollment in our programs is the consistency that we can offer across multiple sections,” Knox explained. “The courses all look the same because we use Propero content. Students like that, the faculty likes that, and, more importantly, it allows us to take the content to scale.”

Faculty members appreciate Propero’s high-quality content and automatic scoring of assignments and assessments, which frees up their time so they can concentrate on teaching. “We can be more focused on the material and actually helping the students compared to lecturing,” Gibbs commented. “It’s a great instrument to have to help you stay on track and teach the material. I enjoy it.”

Feedback from students has also been positive. “They like the consistency of the offering, the content, the interactive presentations, the availability of the audio to-go and the videos, as well as the pace charts, and they like that they can work ahead,” Knox commented. “Students love it.”

To learn more about how online learning programs can help your students, visit propero.com