



The Need: Formal Technology Education to Fill the Gaps in Knowledge

Schoolcraft College in Livonia, Michigan—a suburb of Detroit—is an open door, community-based school that welcomes students of many ages and backgrounds. In recent years, especially with a struggling Michigan economy, Schoolcraft has more and more adult students who never thought they'd be back in college, but who need a new skill set to move their career forward. William Schlick, professor in Schoolcraft's Computer Information Systems (CIS) program, said, "In CIS, we have many students who are out of a job and mad at the world. We turn that around and help them find new skills." Some of Schoolcraft's CIS students return to college having already worked in computer-related jobs but having no formal training in their field. "They don't have the piece of paper, the documentation, to back up their knowledge. They learned what they needed to do a job, but they have large gaps in their knowledge," Schlick said.

Schoolcraft's technology courses are offered both traditionally—in a physical computer classroom with an instructor present—and in the Open Entry/Open Exit (OEOE) program—the college's flexible distance course alternative for highly-motivated students. "OEOE allows more people to attend college," said Schlick, "and the number keeps growing." With a 15-week semester, OEOE students can register all the way up until the ninth week—a good option for students who don't want to wait until the next semester to begin their education.

While Schlick feels the traditional route is best for the majority of students, he works with both groups and makes it his priority to give each student a quality technology education. "This is serious to me," he said. "I want all my students to feel like there's only one student and only one professor." To accomplish this, Schlick wanted to find and develop solutions for implementing greater interaction and hands-on learning in his technology courses. "Hands-on is the only way to learn technology," Schlick said.

The Solution: LabSim Offers Interactive, Hands-on Learning Around the Clock

Schlick discovered TestOut's LabSim informally more than seven years ago when he was given a part of a LabSim course but not the whole product. At first he was a little confused by the incompleteness of it, but after finally being exposed to the full LabSim course, Schlick realized he'd found a solution for his CIS students. The hands-on learning available in LabSim would work well for both his traditional classrooms and his OEOE students, and he began utilizing the LabSim A+ and Network+ courses in his classes and is now offering LabSim CCNA to several independent study students.

Schlick said that the "beauty of LabSim" is that it lends itself in many different ways to meet students' needs because not everyone learns the same way. Some of his students struggle learning from written materials but spend hours with the videos, so he suggests they use LabSim's written lessons as checklists. "I tell them, use the written lessons in conjunction with the videos. Or if you're in a lab and get snagged, use the written explanation to get through it." Schlick advises his students that if they start working on a lab or a video and realize they already understand it, they can move on. "But they love that the videos are always available to review," said Schlick.

In the past, Schlick used standard textbooks to supplement LabSim training in his classes. “I found the books completely unnecessary,” he said, “because LabSim is totally self supporting.” Schlick also creates his own PowerPoint presentations to incorporate his personality into the course and connect more personally with his students.

“I believe learning doesn’t just happen from 10 to 11 AM while students are in the classroom,” said Schlick. “LabSim helps learning continue when students are home. Sometimes a student will ask me, ‘Can I do this at home?’ ‘Of course!’ And since LabSim is now online instead of only on CD, it’s a huge help to students. They can learn any time they want.”

The Results: Uniform Improvement in Student Learning

While some students start out in the CIS courses not caring about what is covered in class, Schlick said that with LabSim, “They learn anyway, and they learn they have skill sets they never realized. LabSim supports me in helping them discover their strengths. Using LabSim, I see a uniform improvement across the board.”

Like many college courses, the CIS courses at Schoolcraft are required to have final exams, and Schlick has implemented the LabSim exam questions into the finals he administers. He explained that his students may view the LabSim videos, do the labs, and retake the practice exams as many times as they need in order to prepare for the final, and they may retake the final as many times as they need to get the grade they want. “Before using LabSim, students would take my final over and over again and not get better,” said Schlick. “With LabSim, they get the material. LabSim has made me the Maytag man—students don’t need me as much! It’s a great thing because it means they’re learning.”

Overall, Schlick said that the simulated labs are what differentiate LabSim from all the other possible tools for interactive teaching in his CIS classes. “LabSim gives my students hands-on experience and practical know-how,” said Schlick. “It’s a true teaching tool. If it sounds like I’m happy, it’s because I am.”