Microsoft® Office Specialist

Herbert W. Armstrong College Helps Freshman Build Useful Technology Skills with Microsoft Office Specialist Certification

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HERBERT W. ARMSTRONG COLLEGE

Location:
Edmond, Oklahoma

Program enrollment:
20 students per year

Success Metrics:
- Workforce training
- Strengthen college-level work habits
- Teach useful life skills

SMALL PRIVATE INSTITUTION FOCUSES ON TEACHING SKILLS, CONCEPTS AND VALUES THAT LEAD TO SUCCESS IN LIFE, NOT JUST THE WORKPLACE

CHALLENGE

Herbert W. Armstrong College (AC) is a private liberal arts college established in August 2001 in Edmond, Oklahoma. AC focuses on teaching skills, concepts and values that lead to success in life, not just the workplace. Its curriculum includes theology, history, classical literature, language, social sciences, natural sciences, mathematics, music and physical education. AC offers two- and four- year scholastic curriculums, and does not offer accredited associates and bachelors degrees.

AC founder and chancellor Gerald Flurry's vision to help students achieve their goals during college and beyond led the school to start a Business Applications class in 2006. The course has since become a requirement for all freshmen during their first year at AC.

"One reason we made the Business Applications course a requirement was to provide students with the tools necessary to thrive in completing their course work for the remainder of their time in college," explains Jason Hensley, Registrar at AC.

Hensley and AC administrators also hoped the course would equip students with knowledge they could apply immediately in their on-campus jobs. All AC students participate in a work-study program, but some were unable to perform typical office tasks such as creating a spreadsheet or documents in Microsoft Word.

"At the inception of the Business Applications course, we realized that if we were going to teach students useful technology skills to prepare them for further study and employment, we should take it one step further and provide them with an industry-recognized certification that would highlight their skills as they entered the workforce after graduation," said Hensley.

Hensley and the administration at AC set out to find a certification program that would accomplish their goals in the classroom while providing students with tangible validation of their relevant job skills.

SOLUTION

AC courses required students to complete assignments in Microsoft Office programs, and Hensley discovered the Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) exams as he researched a certification solution to add to the Business Applications curriculum. He discussed the MOS exams with other faculty members and administrators, and ultimately the certification was approved for use on the AC campus in 2006. They decided to offer Microsoft Word and Excel exams as a capstone to the Business Applications course, since those programs were the most heavily used among AC students.

AC developed the Business Applications curriculum not only to prepare students for the MOS exams, but to teach them why these skills are useful in the real world. "Throughout the course, emphasis is placed on seeing the importance of applying the understanding beyond

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certification," said Hensley.

In Janurary 2006, AC began using Certiport's Certiprep practice exams to help students master the Word and Excel applications and prepare for the certification exams. Over the years, they perfected the curriculum and used Certiprep more in class rather than just as homework so instructors could provide assistance during the sample tests.

Former AC student Luke Cuenco said the Certiport study materials were helpful, and he prepared for certification by studying for approximately 30 minutes each night during the course.

"I was adept at technology and had experience with Microsoft products before I took Business Applications, but I did not know nearly as much about Word and Excel as I learned in the class," said Cuenco. "Studying and earning Microsoft certification really boosted my knowledge of these applications."

An average of 20 freshmen take the Business Applications course each year, and all of them take the Microsoft Word and Excel Specialist exams as a capstone to the course.

RESULTS

Approximately 203 students have passed an MOS exam at AC. In 2011, the college saw its highest pass rate in history, when 100 percent of test takers passed the Microsoft Word exam, and 96 percent passed the Microsoft Excel exam. Hensley credits the improved pass rate with perfecting the course curriculum and heavily using the Certiprep materials.

In addition to improving their pass rates, AC has also accomplished their original goals for the Business Applications course as a result of implementing the MOS certification program.

"Without a doubt our students are better equipped, and in many cases more motivated, to marshal the full and diverse forces of Microsoft Word in the production of their history papers," said Brad Macdonald, instructor of Western Civilization at AC. "Thanks to this course, the 'packaging' and layout of student papers has been sharper and a whole lot more professional."

Another goal of the Business Applications course was to get more value out of students in the AC work-study program. The Chief Financial Officer at AC, Andrew Locher, recently took on a new student assistant. "I have stopped having to do all of my own documents and presentations," said Locher. "My assistant does the work and makes it look nice. I believe this is a result of the Business Applications course and the MOS certification."

Cuenco completed his studies at AC in 2010, and soon after won a job as a Web designer with Microsoft Word and Excel certification on his resume.

"I use both Word and Excel every day on the job, so certification was extremely beneficial," said Cuenco. "The learning curve at my current job would have been a lot harder without certification."

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