Virginia Tech supplements curricula, promotes professional growth with online training

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Located in the town of Blacksburg on a 2,600-acre campus, Virginia Tech has eight colleges and a graduate school that serve 31,000 full-time students. Founded in 1872, the university offers 65 bachelor's and 150 master's and doctoral degree programs. Virginia Tech has nearly 1,400 full-time faculty and 5,000 staff members.

Challenge: offer video training campus-wide

For several years, a smattering of Virginia Tech academic and administrative departments used online training from a handful of companies, including lynda.com. This piecemeal approach served certain programs well, but administrators ultimately sought a higher-quality experience, convinced video instruction could successfully scale to a broad user base. They wanted access for all students, faculty, and staff.

Goals of the expansion included supplementing curricula, streamlining help desk and faculty development programs, and providing a high-quality "virtual help desk" available anytime, said John Moore, managing director in the Learning Technologies department. "Services we buy need to be multipliers. They need to magnify what we can do physically."

Solution: lynda.com video training

In 2012, Virginia Tech decided to exclusively purchase lyndaCampus, which provides full, organization-wide access to lynda.com. It allows users to create personal profiles and access the entire lynda.com library.

Students, faculty, and staff embraced the service—and created thousands of user profiles in a few weeks. To further encourage adoption, Virginia Tech dropped student-designed promotional postcards in dorm rooms, placed them in dining halls, and distributed them at events. The school also emailed faculty, posted an announcement on its learning management system, and shared videos about the ability to use lynda.com from smartphones and tablets.

In addition, administrators displayed digital signage promoting lynda.com in a prominent front window of the campus emerging technologies and new media lab, an innovative space open to students, faculty, campus staff, and the local public. The busy lab provides assistance through free and open access

to software, hardware, and a specially trained crew. Every day, thousands of passersby see the digital ads.

"lynda.com provides us with a very scalable solution," Moore said, adding that the range of topics and depth of lynda.com teaching exceeds other offerings. "And it's very high quality. Our lyndaCampus reporting indicates that some users access the service for short periods to find answers when they need them, which is great. Others log dozens of hours, as though they are walking through a library and reading every book they go by."

Result: support for the emerging technologies and new media lab

Before lynda.com was available campus-wide, the 28-workstation emerging technologies and new media lab had a half-dozen licenses for its staff. Boosting lynda.com access allowed the lab to expand its slate of student development workshops covering a range of software applications.

In addition, "there are times when the lab is full, particularly around midterms and finals," said Jennifer Sparrow, director of emerging technologies and new ventures. "lynda.com has allowed us to provide on-demand, just-in-time training for students, faculty, and staff, even when the lab is busy or closed."

"lynda.com gives the staff more time to focus on higher-level issues," Moore added.

lynda.com helps administrators manage the lab's 500-piece inventory of hardware and equipment, which includes expensive DSLR cameras and audio recorders that are loaned out on a regular basis. In lieu of an in-person class, lab visitors can take a lynda.com course on how to use a camera, for example, satisfying a requirement that they receive instruction before checking one out.

Result: lynda.com in the classroom

Faculty are encouraged to use lynda.com to supplement curricula. A growing number have adopted a flipped classroom model, in which homework can consist of online video content while class time is reserved for concept mastery and one-to-one assistance.

"Students might be doing a project with InDesign, for example. If they need more knowledge about it, their professor can send them to lynda.com for more in-depth instruction," Sparrow said. "Instead of spending an hour of class time teaching Photoshop, faculty can send students to the lynda.com Photoshop essentials courses. Then when students bring their photos to class, we can spend time more efficiently—collaboratively editing, or critiquing each other's work."

Students are receptive to online training, Sparrow said. "I had one come to me and say, 'Thank you so much. I've been paying for it myself every month.'"

Teachers are equally enthusiastic about lyndaCampus. "Right at the beginning, we had a report from a faculty member who had required students to buy

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lynda.com access for the semester," she said. "He was ecstatic they no longer had to spend that money."

Moreover, "We can tell faculty, 'You don't have to be a technology expert in order to do X, Y, and Z in your class,'" Sparrow said, noting lynda.com was particularly effective in an Introduction to Sociology class. In lieu of a final paper, the professor assigned a video project, breaking the class into groups of five. "He can't spend three class periods teaching iMovie or Windows Moviemaker. He's not a filmmaking expert. So he said, 'Here's lynda.com.' We enabled 500 people to get more creative on an assignment than ever before."

lynda.com fosters an educational shift, Moore said: "This product enables an unlocking, if you will, that can change the teaching-learning paradigm for the better."

Result: professional growth

Inside the classroom, Virginia Tech faculty can use lynda.com to support instruction, and to leverage class time for hands-on projects and collaborative learning. Outside of the classroom, they can use lynda.com 24/7 to keep their technology skills current.

"lynda.com makes skills-based professional development more convenient," Moore said. "It's no longer a scheduling problem. Faculty and staff can access the material they need when they want. It adds efficiency and effectiveness."

In addition, he said Virginia Tech administrative staff members regularly use lynda.com to stay up to speed on a wide range of software, creative, and business skills relevant to their specific roles.

Looking ahead

As graduates move on and new students arrive, efforts to promote lynda.com at Virginia Tech will be ongoing. Looking ahead, administrators are excited to add promotion to new-student orientations, Sparrow said.

Administrators also expect to more proactively target incoming students for specific trainings, she said. "We'll be reaching out to the students in the courses that we know assign software that have corresponding lynda.com tutorials. This targeted marketing can be the introduction to what we hope students will see as an ongoing additional resource provided by the university."

Another key goal is to continue measuring success. Using detailed lyndaCampus reporting, Sparrow and Moore said Virginia Tech will continue to develop new metrics that not only track adoption but demonstrate the effectiveness of the service.