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Case Study

Situation: Capstone Institute’s new study group project needed to increase collaboration among freshman students, as well as student-student and student-faculty interactions.

Challenge: Today’s social networking environment made reaching students difficult.

Solution: Capstone Institute implemented ConnectYard. ConnectYard leverages social networking tools to increase connections between students and the university community.

Results: ConnectYard improved program communication and positively impacted measures of student engagement and performance.



508 Hamburg Tpke
Wayne, NJ 07470
973.494.8041
www.connectyard.com

For the past decade, Howard University’s Capstone Institute has been at the vanguard of institutions providing evidence-based methods for improving teaching and learning in urban school districts. The Capstone Institute recently turned its focus to the college environment and needed a tool that complemented its comprehensive strategy to teaching and learning. That is when Capstone found ConnectYard.

SITUATION

To address the challenge of retaining STEM students at Howard University, an historically Black institution, the Capstone Institute initiated the Calculus, Physics, Chemistry Program (CP)2. The (CP)2 program involves creating structured study groups to support the targeted courses. The study groups incorporate classroom-based peer learning techniques that increase student connection to the learning material and involve students of different years and standing.

To ensure the success of the project, however, communication and engagement outside of the classroom sessions are essential.

CHALLENGE

Today’s students are extremely busy. They are connected to their social networks 24/7 through popular sites like Facebook and Twitter, and from their networked devices like cell phones. It can be difficult for University messages to penetrate into this environment and catch students’ attention. In addition, social networking and texting has displaced email as a common form of communication among students. However, despite its popularity among students it is difficult to facilitate dialogue between students and faculty on Facebook, for example.

SOLUTION

The Capstone Institute implemented Con-

nectYard to support their (CP)2 project. Capstone Institute was impressed with ConnectYard’s social learning tools. ConnectYard supports strong messaging features that ensure students receive relevant messages by mechanisms they frequently use. Capstone appreciated ConnectYard’s ability to interface with Facebook and Twitter, which allows messages from ConnectYard to be posted to a student’s preferred social network, with no “friending” or “following” involved.

“We chose ConnectYard to support our study projects because it effectively increases student-student and student-faculty communication,” said Dr. Wade Boykin, Director of the Capstone Institute. “Its ability to make students aware of important information via Facebook and text messaging was also extremely important.”

RESULTS

ConnectYard effectively increased student-student and student-faculty interactions. Messages sent out via ConnectYard’s platform reached students on their communications channels of choice and allowed them to respond from those channels as well. This facility afforded the creation of an active learning community and extended discussions outside of the classroom. Questions and answers were actively posted and the available tutoring resources were amplified, as a result.

Quantitative evaluations of the (CP)2 targeted courses indicated that :

82% of participants received a B or better;
77% reported a high level of engagement;
81% reported highest level of self-efficacy.

ConnectYard continues to be a critical component of Capstone’s strategy for teaching and learning.