



Western Oklahoma State College Embraces Learning “Beyond the Lecture” with Academic Systems® Algebra

INSTITUTION: Western Oklahoma State College in Altus, Oklahoma, was established in 1926 as Altus Junior College. With 1,500 undergraduates pursuing A.A., A.S., and A.A.S. degrees in more than 35 areas of emphasis, Western Oklahoma State College is committed to providing exemplary educational opportunities to meet the needs of individuals and communities in Southwestern Oklahoma and the surrounding area.

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A Variety of Learners; A Wealth of Possibilities

Like many two-year institutions, Western Oklahoma State College in Altus, Oklahoma, long struggled with student retention, particularly in the first year of instruction. In his developmental mathematics classes, instructor Larry Huntzinger saw disinterested students on a daily basis, and it was no surprise when those students dropped out of class and, eventually, out of school. “We needed to find an alternative method for students who weren’t successful in our lecture classes,” said Huntzinger. “We wanted an electronic solution, so students could easily catch up if they were behind—something other than worksheets and busy work.”

In response, Huntzinger and other math department faculty launched a comprehensive electronic learning curriculum at Western Oklahoma State College. Almost immediately, students began taking advantage of the flexible, yet rigorous curriculum to recover credits and improve skills. After several successful years using PLATO® Interactive Mathematics, the college adopted the new Academic Systems Algebra solution and realized the full potential of having a robust, customizable electronic learning system at its command. Now, Western Oklahoma State College uses Academic Systems Algebra for basic and intermediate math instruction with on-campus students, distance learners, and adults looking to make career changes.

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learners—from our youngest to our oldest students,” said Huntzinger. “This program truly helps all types of learners succeed.”

Aggressive Learning, Unique Features

Academic Systems Algebra gives Huntzinger and his colleagues a powerful and efficient teaching tool, and provides students with multiple opportunities for success.

Western Oklahoma State College students use Academic Systems Algebra in three distinct implementation models. Some students enroll in a traditional time on-campus course, which incorporates computer-based activities and quizzes. Others enroll in blended-instruction classes that use Academic Systems Algebra in a lab setting with instructor guidance and limited lecture throughout the entire term. Finally, remaining students participate in a completely

self-directed, Internet-based class, engaging an instructor only as needed. This distance-learning option is the most popular with busy commuter students. Student athletes, as well as other students who spend large amounts of time representing the college, take advantage of the courses delivered in an electronic format, as it offers the more flexibility in completing their work from home on evenings or weekends.

“The best part about our Academic Systems implementation is that I get to spend more one-on-one time with students,” said Huntzinger. “They can dig deeper into the material and work at their own pace, but if they miss a day of class or are having difficulty with a particular concept, it’s easy for me to sit down with them and say ‘where are you having trouble’ and address student needs directly, in real time.”

According to Huntzinger, another advantage of Academic Systems Algebra is the software’s excellent organizational model. Where other software solutions require students to “jump around” to different areas of the instruction—skipping key sequences needed for subject mastery—instructors using Academic Systems Algebra can assign sequential courseware in “blocks” that augment students’ ongoing successes. “Unlike our old system, I don’t have trouble keeping track of who was doing what coursework,” said Huntzinger. “Now I know students are getting better instruction while keeping better track of their progress. They can’t get lost moving back and forth between lessons.”

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Benefits to Learners and Instructors

With Web-based instruction and distance learning becoming popular options at Western Oklahoma, Academic Systems Algebra is extremely useful as an instructional tool. The college has hundreds of distance learning students, many of whom are serving in the armed forces, as well as many adult learners who are changing careers. “Many companies are now using computer-aided learning to train new employees,” said Huntzinger. “Academic Systems Algebra helps teach students of any age how to teach themselves using computerized instruction. I tell my students that they have to be in charge of their own learning, and it’s very empowering for them to realize their goals using the software.”

Academic Systems Algebra also helps free up classroom space and facilitates better scheduling within the mathematics department. “The new software gives us the ability to ‘stack’ classes—or conduct two classes at the same time—so we can better serve the students and make the schedule more flexible,” said Huntzinger. As a result, Academic Systems Algebra helps instructors and administrators prioritize their limited resources more effectively.

Also, faculty can create customized content documents based on lecture material, and integrate them into the Academic Systems Algebra curriculum sequence to further illustrate difficult concepts. “For instance, a few of my students were having trouble with working volume and area problems, so I created a slide presentation and dropped it into the Academic Systems lesson that dealt with the geometry formulas they were having trouble with,” said Huntzinger. “We often use this feature of the software to create individual scenarios that illustrate real-world mathematical concepts. It’s one of the most unique things about this program.”



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