

Midland College's Success Keeps Growing with PLATO® Instructional and Assessment Solutions



Overview – Midland College, Midland, Texas

- In six years, Midland College has expanded from two PLATO® basic skills sections to over 50.
- Over 1,400 students per year use PLATO Learning Solutions at four campuses.
- The college has integrated PLATO® Instructional and Assessment Solutions to serve the needs of its diverse student population across multiple courses, including developmental reading and writing, ESL, GED, and math and language arts for students seeking occupational and technical degrees and certifications.

Basic Skills

When a comprehensive institutional analysis indicated that a significant number of students enrolling in their occupational/technical certificate programs were beginning their college career severely deficient of basic skills, Midland College responded by developing a comprehensive basic skills program utilizing PLATO® courseware.

Under the direction of Michael Makowsky, coordinator of the basic skills program, the College developed custom built PLATO® assessments and alignments for two business studies courses: business math and business English. The benefits of PLATO basic skills remediation became quickly evident, as students enrolled in the sections using PLATO scored an average 10 percent higher on program post tests than students in sections not using PLATO.

Customization Pays Off

Encouraged by these results, Midland College took this model and applied it to several other courses and programs, including developmental reading and writing, ESL, GED, nursing, and technical studies, as well as additional business studies courses. According to Makowsky, central to the success of PLATO remediation is the flexibility afforded by being able to customize learning paths and assessments to precisely address the learning needs of students in each program.

INSTITUTION:

With an enrollment of over 6,000 students, Midland College offers two- and four- year degrees with over 100 programs of study.

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MIDLAND COLLEGE
FACULTY MEMBER



“Prior to bringing a new course or program, I will sit down with faculty and find out what skills their students need help with. Together, we’ll look at what PLATO Learning has to offer and come up with a plan for a learning path that will best meet those needs,” Makowsky said. “Customization is a large part of what makes PLATO Learning so successful here. Both faculty and students have embraced the program because they know that assignments have been specifically designed with their individual needs in mind.”

An example of Midland’s customization can be seen in its use of PLATO® Vocabulary Builder. The college created three 500-word assignments for college-level ESL and developmental reading students. PLATO Vocabulary Builder has the capability to include audio in the form of sample context sentences read aloud. So, in order to provide this audio component (especially helpful for ESL students), over 30 faculty members volunteered to serve as voice talent to read for that customization. “Once faculty realized its potential, they were more than happy to contribute in any way they could,” said Makowsky.

Student and Faculty Support

Both students and faculty agree on what they like most about PLATO® courseware, including the ease-of-use and availability, the range of subject material, the ability to customize assessments and learning paths, the array of reporting options, and the self-paced learning. Using surveys, passing rates, and exam scores, Midland College has determined that PLATO Learning has had an educationally meaningful impact on the performance of its students.

According to one faculty member, “PLATO Learning helps all students learn regardless of the subject matter or learning objective. Students who work on PLATO courseware typically score higher on entrance exams, tests, and get better grades than students who do not.”

PLATO Learning’s impact has also been expressed by the growth in numbers of students who now use it for basic skills remediation. Since 2000, the number of students using PLATO courseware at Midland College has grown from less than 100 to over 1,400 each year. The number of courses and programs using PLATO® Instructional Solutions has also increased from the original two, to over 50, housed in over a dozen labs, spread across four campuses.

“We realized that to get PLATO Learning accepted on the scale we wanted, we’d have to make it easy for faculty. It’d have to be effective, and students would have to react to it in a positive way. We looked at how faculty wanted to approach teaching with a lab and worked with them and lab managers to ensure that incorporating PLATO into their curriculums went as smoothly as possible. We designed the learning paths to be user-friendly for students and made sure there was always a lab seat available. The level of cooperation and coordination between faculty, lab staff, and my department has been tremendous. I believe this is a testament to PLATO Learning’s impact on our students,” said Makowsky.

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