SUMMER SCHOOL AND WORKING STUDENTS

HOW ALAMO COLLEGES DISTRICT SUPPORTS WORKING STUDENTS IN COMPRESSED SUMMER COURSES

Twenty years ago, the summer months on college campuses were a bit sleepy. But with the rise of online learning, summer term has become a peak time for delivering online courses.

Alamo Colleges District in San Antonio is a prime example. It offers more than 1,300 online courses during the summer, each of which is condensed into eight, five, or three-week periods. Because the timeline is compressed, students must dedicate significant time to courses each week. This is challenging because a large percentage of the district's students are "non-traditional."

"We're a group of community colleges, so our students have a lot going on in life," said Kenneth Rogers, one of the District's Enterprise Instructional Technology Specialists. "They're often older, with full time jobs and families, and they need to balance coursework with other priorities and obligations."

Nearly a decade ago, Alamo's colleges began using LockDown Browser, which is a custom browser that deters cheating during online exams. This worked well for proctored environments, such as classrooms and testing centers, but it wasn't sufficient for exams taken in their fast-growing online program.

"Having students come to campus for examinations wasn't a solution," explained Kenneth, particularly in condensed summer courses where an exam might be required every few days. Third-party testing centers were costly and inconvenient. Even live proctoring services that work over the internet were too expensive (often costing about $25 per exam).

Alamo Colleges District is always on the lookout for ways to save students time and money — and online testing seemed like an ideal opportunity. In 2016, the District implemented Respondus Monitor, an automated proctoring solution that records students with a webcam during online exams. It then flags suspicious behaviors during exam sessions and provides those to instructors. Respondus Monitor runs atop LockDown Browser, a combination that "gives instructors confidence that students won't try to cheat," says Kenneth.

"It provides our students the flexibility they need," he continues. "Students can take online exams from home, which is a much better fit for work and family schedules."

Kenneth Rogers
Enterprise Instructional
Technology Specialist

Alamo Colleges District picks up the fee for Respondus Monitor, rather than passing it along to students. There are no per-exam fees, which means instructors don't have to worry about how often they use it.

"Some instructors use Respondus Monitor with more than 10 exams in a course," says Kenneth, "although our average is about 4.7 exams per course." Last summer alone, students across the District used Respondus Monitor with over 6,000 exam sessions.

For all of this to work, the technology must be simple and hassle-free. "LockDown Browser and Respondus Monitor are easy for students to install and use, even those who aren't as technically inclined," says Kenneth. "And that makes summer terms just a little less stressful for everyone."

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