

Assessment Solution



SOUTHWEST TEXAS JUNIOR COLLEGE (SWTJC) IS A COMPREHENSIVE, PUBLIC, TWO-YEAR COMMUNITY COLLEGE. IT SERVES MORE THAN 6,000 STUDENTS AND 11 COUNTIES OF SOUTHWEST TEXAS, FROM FOUR MAIN CAMPUSES. TO ACHIEVE ITS GOAL OF EXPANDING ASSESSMENT CAPABILITIES ACROSS THE COLLEGE'S CURRICULUM, THEN CENTRALIZING COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA IN A COST-EFFECTIVE AND TIMELY MANNER, SWTJC'S ADMINISTRATION SELECTED THE PROSPER[®] ASSESSMENT SYSTEM FROM SCANTRON.

Challenge

- *Routing numerous paper forms to a central location was burdensome*
- *Completed test forms were often unaccounted for*
- *Handwritten subjective responses were needed along with the objective response test forms*

To ensure the quality of student learning, Southwest Texas Junior College embarked on a major initiative to expand assessment across many areas of the college's curriculum. This was accomplished through pre- and post-testing, combined with common final exams. Initially, the college used paper and pencil testing, but as the extent of testing increased, SWTJC sought a more effective alternative.

"Two challenges became apparent as we expanded assessment," said Dick Whipple, director of curriculum and instruction. "First, the burden of routing so much paper to a central location became a significant problem. Second, faculty wanted subjective responses in addition to the objective responses."

Scantron paper-based assessments were being used in as many as 25 different class locations. In addition to being scanned at each class site, completed assessments were sent to SWTJC's central campus for scanning a second time. College and commercial couriers, as well as the U. S. Postal Service, were used. It often took weeks to collect all of the assessments and, at times, as many as 10 percent of the distributed test forms went unaccounted for.

In addition, faculty, especially those in the English and Social Studies departments, wanted to collect open-ended subjective responses. This requirement was becoming especially critical as common final exams were introduced in more advanced courses, such as sophomore English literature.

"The only way to collect additional handwritten papers along with the Scantron paper assessment forms was to try to keep them together as they made their way back to the central campus," said Whipple. "In the end, the assessment office was being overwhelmed with the burden of keeping up with all of that paper!"

Solution

- *Assessments are scanned at multiple locations and data is sent to the centrally located server*
- *Handwritten answers are collected through image capture*
- *Results are immediately available to the assessment office*

Scantron's Prosper assessment system supported Southwest Texas Junior College in achieving its goal of centralized collection and analyses of assessment data—and did so efficiently and cost-effectively. With installation on SWTJC's area-wide network, it enabled all of its campuses to use a shared solution for creating, administering and reporting assessments.

As a first step, common pre- and post-tests were designed and implemented for developmental math courses using the Prosper system. Following this, common final exams were developed and implemented for two freshmen gateway courses, as well as all sophomore literature courses.

Using Prosper to create course mastery assessments, the initial tests and exams included embedded questions linked to course outcomes. A variety of Prosper reports provide analyses of course outcome mastery, which in turn supplies assessment information needed for departmental planning and improvement.

In addition, Mr. Whipple noted, “Answer keys are centrally loaded on the Prosper system and no longer have to be widely distributed to end users—a practice that often compromised the integrity of tests and final exams.”

Along with implementing Prosper, SWTJC also installed two Scantron *i*NSIGHT™ 4 scanners, with image capture capability, at each of its campus locations. This allowed each campus to scan its assessments, including all subjective responses, into a centralized database where the assessment office could immediately access the data and analyze the results. In addition, SWTJC worked with Scantron to create a custom test form to work with the Prosper software. It captures both subjective and objective responses in a single pass through the scanner.

Many of SWTJC’s courses are delivered remotely, using interactive audio/video. The instructor delivers the class from an originating site to students in three to six remote sites. Formerly, answer forms from the remote sites first had to go to the instructor’s originating site for grading and then to SWTJC’s main campus, to be scanned again by the assessment staff for its reports. This approach was cumbersome and problematic, often resulting in lost answer forms. With Scantron’s Prosper/*i*NSIGHT 4 solution, answer forms are scanned at the site where testing is done, with the results available to the instructor and assessment office via the central server.

“The advantages for the college’s distance education program already appear to be enormous,” said Dick Whipple. “Such a quick turnaround would have been impossible using the previous paper-based, labor-intensive method of collecting and capturing assessment data.”

Results

The Prosper assessment system, combined with the *i*NSIGHT 4 scanners and custom forms, is meeting the needs of Southwest Texas Junior College. This community college is better able to serve its many students—and better support its staff—through the timely insights it gains through centralized data collection and analyses.

“The quick turnaround of assessment information means that faculty and administration can obtain immediate feedback for planning and improvement purposes,” said Whipple, “Not to mention eliminating boxes upon boxes of paper!”

Tests and final exams can be scanned at any of the four college locations, with the Prosper-generated reports immediately available to instructors for grading purposes, and to the assessment office for departmental assessment and planning. Previously, six to eight weeks might have elapsed before all answer forms arrived in the assessment office and assessment reports were subsequently provided to department chairs.

“Besides providing quicker information turn-around, eliminating the need to scan answer forms a second time saved, on average, 15 staff-hours per week,” added Whipple,

Also, pre-slugged Prosper answer forms, which are delivered in advance, have virtually eliminated test and student identification errors. Prior to using Prosper, the assessment office devoted an average of 10 staff-hours per week to identify and correct these issues.

By providing image capture of the answer sheet, the combined solution of Prosper and the *i*NSIGHT 4 scanners brings uniformity and expediency to testing in English courses where written answers are required. As an example, all SWTJC English literature students took common finals during the last week of the fall term. These tests included both multiple choice questions and an essay question. Before being scanned, faculty scored each essay by bubbling in a credit value on the test form. The answer forms were then scanned. The Prosper reports were available immediately for determining final grades, which were due by noon on Friday at the close of term. On the following Monday morning, the English department’s assessment team met, and images of randomly selected essays from the final exam were analyzed using the college’s standard writing rubric. At the beginning of the spring term, assessment findings were presented to department faculty by the college’s assessment office.

“USING PROSPER, A TASK THAT WOULD HAVE FORMERLY TAKEN SIX TO EIGHT WEEKS WAS ACCOMPLISHED IN LESS THAN A WEEK.”

DICK WHIPPLE, *DIRECTOR OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION*
SOUTHWEST TEXAS JUNIOR COLLEGE

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