

The Innovative Web-based Application, academic.com, Has Given Cañada College a Leading Edge in Meeting the Needs of its Underrepresented Student Population



Overview—Cañada College, Redwood City, California

- Features interactive, targeted tutorials that cover almost 1,700 concepts
- A perfect supplement to instruction
- Addresses the needs of adult learners
- Available 24 hours a day, seven days a week
- Can be used by students, faculty, and the community

Located in California's Silicon Valley, Cañada College attracts an average of 6,000 students a year, 40 percent of whom are Latino. To better serve its traditionally underrepresented student population, Cañada offers a large ESL program and a wide range of developmental and entry-level college introductory courses.

In 2001, Cañada decided to offer students another way to reach academic success—through self-paced, online learning libraries on academic.com. The Learning Center at Cañada ran a pilot test of academic.com, a fully interactive library of online supplemental course material that supports instruction and offers review in mathematics, writing, science, business and economics, and study skills. It was an instant success. “When we first started using academic.com, we really thought that we were going to spend an entire semester just planning on how to use it. But we jumped right in and started getting students and faculty involved from day one,” said Rita Sabbadini, program supervisor at the Learning Center, “and it's been building ever since.”

Multiple Uses

Since this Web-based application was launched, academic.com has been used by a growing number of faculty in a variety of ways. Learning Center Director Jeanne Gross encourages faculty to come in for a demonstration of the program so that they can see how well the teaching points are presented. “They are very short, very manageable units that offer multiple ways of explaining the material. This is especially helpful in developmental courses because it addresses students' different learning styles.”

While faculty members are not required to use academic.com, those who do use it find creative ways to supplement their instruction. Some instructors will link the modules from the program's libraries directly into their course Web site. Other faculty will use it to introduce a topic in class, to supplement their entire classroom curriculum, or as an additional aid if students need

INSTITUTION: A member of the 108-school California Community College system, Cañada College serves the local and international community at three Silicon Valley campuses: the main campus in Redwood City, the Menlo Park Center, and the Education and Technology Downtown Center in Redwood City. The small size and friendly atmosphere of Cañada College enable the faculty to provide more individualized attention to the diverse student population.

SIZE: Approximately 6,000 students enroll in academic, transfer, and workforce development courses at Cañada College.

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“Once faculty members spend a few minutes looking at academic.com, they're hooked.”

RITA SABBADINI,
LEARNING CENTER PROGRAM
SUPERVISOR

help understanding concepts or want more examples. And since it features an integrated management system, faculty can also keep records on student progress, use it while grading papers, and print reports on what students have achieved in class.

A Growing Trend

When Cañada first started using academic.com, it attracted mostly English and social science teachers who emphasized writing in their curriculum. As the staff at the Learning Center spent more time with the program, they started targeting other departments like mathematics, business, economics, and early childhood education. Today, the program is used in the Learning Center computer labs, in the library, in ESL classrooms, and by tutors, counselors, and faculty from many different departments. “I haven’t had one faculty member not like it,” said Sabbadini. “Once they sit down and look at it, they love it.”

According to Gross, the program works well for students who love independent learning and working with computers. “We find that it’s really good for students because they can work on modules at their own pace, they can redo them if they want, or they can skip to the next unit if they want to get ahead.” Sabbadini adds that the program addresses the needs of adult learners in ways they can

understand. “academic.com is very sophisticated in its approach because it addresses college students at their own level, unlike other programs that target the middle or high school level. The information is also presented exceptionally well so the student can listen to the material as well as see it. And it’s done in small chunks so the students don’t feel overwhelmed,” she said.

Students Give High Marks

While academic.com is not for every student, those who enjoy the alternative method of learning love it. According to a questionnaire filled out by 65 history and English students who used academic.com in the spring of 2002, 85 percent of students preferred using a computer as a tutorial resource, and 60 percent said they would use academic.com the following semester, even if an instructor did not assign it to them. “Overall, students who use academic.com find it very helpful and beneficial in class,” said Gross.

“Student evaluations have been very positive—between 85 and 100 percent find it very helpful.”

JEANNE GROSS,
LEARNING CENTER DIRECTOR