

INTERWRITE Lessons

UMass Uses InterWrite PRS for Interactive Classes

Professor Richard Rogers, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA

All educators are challenged with keeping students interested in the materials being presented. In addition, many higher education professors who teach introductory courses, are faced with an even greater challenge: Getting students to show up for class. With class sizes that can reach 300 students, many of them find it difficult to connect with the professor and/or the lecture itself.

Reconnecting Students

Due to the disconnection of his students and the lecture, Professor Richard Rogers of the University of Massachusetts (UMass), has experienced first hand low or passive attendance. In fact, 20 percent of his students had failed his introductory statistics course. Rogers reasons, "Students find it difficult to answer questions in a large class, especially shy students. [And] even if I ask them to raise their hands, there would be too many to count."

Simply put, Rogers wanted, "To teach 200 students like [he] teaches 20."

Six years ago, while attending a demonstration given by the UMass Physics department, Rogers was introduced to InterWrite PRS. InterWrite PRS is an interactive assessment tool that gives each student a chance to participate during class using a wireless transmitter. The Physics department had been using a more expensive system that was susceptible to technical problems, such as broken wires. InterWrite PRS provided a cost effective solution and directly addressed the gap between Rogers and his students.

PRS in the Lecture Hall

Using wireless technology, students use remote control-like transmitters to answer questions projected in front of the room. When teaching probability, Prof. Rogers has students perform an experiment with coin tosses. Students enter the number of "heads" produced in four tosses. The PRS software graphs the responses and allows him to compare the relative frequencies to the theoretical probabilities. The quick PRS results give immediate feedback to students and the professor, indicating whether a review of the lesson is needed.

Typically, Rogers asks up to eight questions per class period and sees a direct correlation between the PRS results and the distribution of exam scores. Rogers' course evaluations suggest that 90% of his students believe InterWrite PRS is a successful addition to their learning.

PRS & UMass

A grant from the Davis Educational Foundation provided UMass' Provost Office with the freedom to redesign many of the university's large lecture rooms with InterWrite PRS. As word of InterWrite PRS' effectiveness spread, so did the number of curricula that incorporated it into their courses. So in addition to the Physics department and Prof. Rogers' classes, the astronomy, art history, biology, chemistry, finance, nursing, political science and psychology departments all use InterWrite PRS to interact with and assess their students. Approximately, 8,500 students and 40 faculty members are currently using InterWrite PRS at UMass.



Photo from another school



InterWrite PRS
Transmitters & Receiver

GTCO CalComp
PERIPHERALS