Introduction:

With campuses across Indiana and a reputation that extends worldwide, Purdue University is recognized for being a launching pad for some of the brightest new talent in the fields of science, technology, engineering, math, and beyond. The university’s Computer Graphics Technology program combines advanced technologies with top-notch instruction to provide students with the best possible learning experience. The program prepares students for careers creating and managing the production of computer graphics within a wide range of industries. Since 2005, ASCENT has been working with Purdue to provide students with a variety of courseware for both CATIA and Pro/ENGINEER classes.

The Challenge:

“Students in our programs benefit from our state of the art labs. Unfortunately the software they work with evolves very quickly and physical textbooks have a hard time keeping up,” explains Nathan Hartman, Assistant Department Head and Associate Professor of the Computer Graphics Technology program.

Traditionally, students purchase multiple textbooks in order to learn key concepts and detailed software features and functionality for graphics production. Not only are physical books cumbersome, they also provide a finite amount of information in a static format. “It’s kind of ironic really, that we were training people to work in the digital world using textbooks,” said Hartman. Books also pose challenges for bookstore staff who need to forecast enrollments, stock the necessary titles, and manage the buy-back of used texts and return of new textbooks if they overshot their forecasts.

Hartman began exploring the possibility of moving his courses to a new online system to provide a richer learning experience for students. With content online, he could eliminate the uncomfortably heavy load of textbooks students had to carry to class, and provide them with 24/7 access to an up-to-date, interactive learning environment that could evolve as quickly as the topics he was teaching.

Since he had been using ASCENT training guides for years, Hartman was familiar with the high quality of their learning materials and the team’s dedication to customer satisfaction. “As an instructor, I continuously work to improve learning opportunities for my students. Today this means meeting the expectations of our young digital natives. I know that working with ASCENT I could achieve this while reducing their financial burden as well, so much the better.”

He posed the challenge of moving his courseware to an online system that would seamlessly integrate with back-end processes. “I knew ASCENT was always there to support me, so I was extremely comfortable moving forward.”
The Solution:

ASCENT recommended transitioning students to its online ProductivityNOW portal. ProductivityNOW SOLO (Searchable Online Learning Objects) is a user-friendly, self-serve learning portal providing students with access to ASCENT’s courseware content. Upon making the decision to switch to ProductivityNOW, the account took just 48 hours to set-up and ASCENT launched Purdue’s first online course content solution for Hartman’s class of 90 students, using a custom ProductivityNOW portal that was created to meet the university’s specifications. The self-serve, online resource allowed students to search for answers to questions quickly and efficiently. ProductivityNOW guides students through demonstrations and hands-on exercises to help them master software features and functions at their own pace whenever they want. Using a simple web-browser, students can obtain and contribute tips and techniques, view video demonstrations, practice their skills through hands-on exercises, and review frequently asked questions that are answered by ASCENT’s technical support experts.

ASCENT also produced simple ordering instructions that Purdue’s students received when registering for classes. “Working with the ASCENT team made this a seamless transition and their ability to respond to the challenge was remarkable,” remarked Hartman.

The Results:

Today, several of Purdue University’s Computer Graphics Technology CAD-focused courses benefit from ASCENT’s ProductivityNOW eLearning solutions.

Accelerated Learning

Students now have easy access to course materials within ProductivityNOW and also use the tools independent of scheduled class time. Hartman has noticed a significant increase in how quickly his students reached a comfort level with the online tools, allowing him to teach at a more advanced level. “We are now able to spend classroom demonstrations doing things that are a couple of notches beyond the ‘picks and clicks’ with the assumption that students have used outside time to understand the software at a fundamental level,” said Hartman. “Offering a better learning experience at a reduced cost is a perfect solution.”

Hartman also noticed that students are now using the CAD software in unrelated classes. “The accessibility to these course materials provides students with a higher degree of confidence to be able to engage with the tools and learn at their own pace,” added Hartman.

Success for Teachers, Students, & Administrators

ASCENT’s online portal allows teachers to delve deeper into the software with their students, and provides students with increased access to information for a richer learning experience. Additionally, the system ultimately saves the students money.

“ASCENT is progressive in the educational space in not only online delivery, but also in taking advantage of the digital forefront by building reinforcing elements into curriculum materials that you don’t often find in other similar offerings” added Hartman. “The ASCENT team is flexible and supportive, always striving to resolve any issues immediately. Their dedication to fulfilling our requests has had a positive benefit on our students and their ability to learn.”

The ProductivityNOW portal provides the university with an economical, long-term solution that can easily be expanded and changed to meet different course demands. “I’m recommending that my colleagues working inside the PLM space in an academic environment speak with ASCENT as this solution helps everyone involved — professors, students and the university bookstore staff — the perfect combination for any educator.”