

Arkansas Early Childhood Education Cohort

Cengage Learning partners with Community Colleges across Arkansas to facilitate the goals of the cohort to develop a series of nine standard core courses with unified course solutions.

Prepared by Cengage Learning Custom Solutions

THE SITUATION

Leadership within Early Childhood Education programs at fourteen Community Colleges across Arkansas was primarily motivated to band together by an act passed by the state legislature to create a birth to pre-K teaching credential. Another motivating factor was the requirement set forth by the Office of Head Start, requiring 50% of their staff to have a bachelor's degree by 2013. Due to the increased demand for the development of highly qualified caregivers from birth through prekindergarten, the need for a seamless transition from two-year to four-year programs has increased. Directly related was the need to increase the number of two-year programs within the state that have NAEYC accreditation, since this is a requirement of universities who are NCATE accredited. Along with this desire for increased accreditation was a feeling that students should take pride in their studies and view their degree preparation in early childhood education as preparation for a profession.

With these goals in mind a dedicated group of educators from fourteen community colleges, two state universities and the Head Start Coalition office began meeting on a monthly basis to attack the problems. Their first order of business was to develop a set of common courses that would be offered at their respective community colleges. The next step in the process was to develop the list of core competencies that needed to be included for the AAS degree. Later these competencies fell into nine agreed upon core courses with common names, course descriptions and measurable outcomes. These nine core courses are now part of the AAS degree in Early Childhood which is offered at each of the Cohort-member community college campuses.

Needs of the Arkansas Early Childhood Cohort

- defined competencies for each course aligned with NAEYC standards
- consistent course description amongst nine core courses
- one location for students to access their course materials
- a method to communicate the common curriculum and to help inform current and future students about the Early Childhood Education Cohort

The Solution: Partnership with Cengage Learning

As a result of the strength of the content within the Cengage Learning education list, the Arkansas Cohort turned to us for help in matching content to their specific learning outcomes. In some cases an off-the-shelf title succinctly matched up with their course objectives. In other instances there was a need to combine content from multiple textbooks to achieve the best solution.

Trude Puckett, faculty member at Pulaski Technical College and one of the chief founders of the Cohort, shared this observation, *"The Cohort instructors are excited about teaching from the same textbooks for the core courses. We are seeing a high level of sharing of ideas and a level of cohesiveness across the state that we had never thought possible. There is a feeling across the state that the schools are working toward a common goal"*

One of the desired stated outcomes for the Cohort was to help students view the degree that they are pursuing as a critical step in their journey to becoming a professional as an early childhood educator, not just a series of courses and assessments that they need to pass. As a profession, the materials that they acquire and the projects that they complete throughout their coursework are valuable resources that they will need, not only if they pursue a higher degree but materials that they can leverage in the work place. The Custom course materials from Cengage Learning are delivered in a personalized course binder that has additional space where students can organize their course materials throughout the semester. Having the materials organized in this manner facilitates the development of a portfolio which is a requirement within the capstone course of the program.

"The first semester that the students received the custom book, many of them didn't understand what to do with it. It really kind of freaked them out. Once they have used it they really love the idea of having everything that they need for that course all in one place. They put their projects in the binder and this gets them in the habit of reflecting upon their current work, thinking about what they have to learn, where they are, and where they want to go. This really instills into the students the idea of being a lifelong learner and the custom text helps them so much with their study skills" stated Trude Puckett.

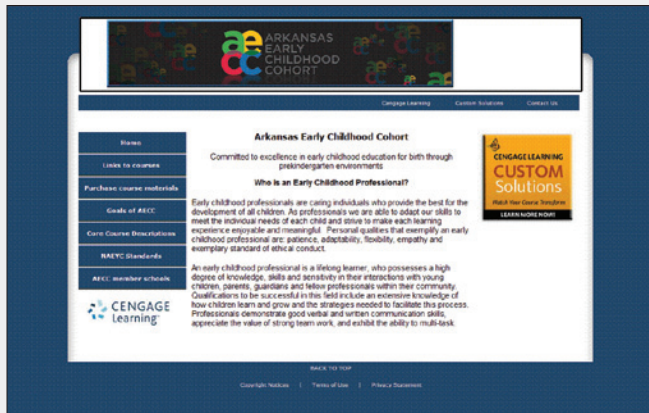
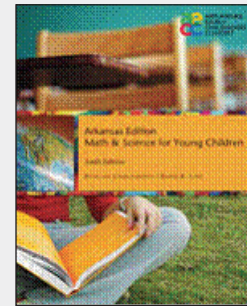
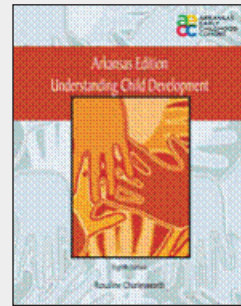
Another feature of the partnership is a website that is used to deliver multimedia content from our video library. *"The videos have been so valuable. Last semester one homework assignment was to read the chapter on Piaget's theory of childhood development and watch an associated video on the site. The students came to class excited about how much clearer the material was to them after watching the video"* stated Puckett.

Puckett went on to say, *"The real benefit of having all of these resources on the custom website was that it kept the students focused on the course between classes, and really helped them gain more value from the lecture. This was true with both the on campus students and the distance learning students."*

The approach that Cengage Learning Custom Solutions takes with digital content development is simply stated: Pick your content and pick your delivery method. Since the Cohort did not want to use a Learning Management System to deliver the media assets to their students, it was determined that a custom-designed website would best fit their unique program needs. Students learn one procedure that works for all courses and which helps them build their skills in the use of technology.

Components of the Cengage Learning Custom Course Solution Custom Portal Page: Cengage Learning created a custom portal page, branded for the Arkansas Early Childhood Cohort that serves as a one-stop shop for current students within the Cohort to purchase and access their online course materials. It also helps to communicate to others the valuable work that the Cohort has undertaken and promotes early childhood education to potential students.

Custom Print Solutions: Cengage Learning Custom Solutions created tailor-fit custom print solutions for each of the nine courses with content mapped to the Cohort's learning objectives delivered in a flexible format that best met the student's course needs.



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