MINDEDGE LEARNING

A System for Success: Professional and Continuing Education

at University of Vermont

Continuing Education Case Study

Dedicated to Lifelong Learning

In the Department of Professional and Continuing Education (PACE) at the University of Vermont, providing flexible, relevant educational options for people at all stages of their lives is how UVM captivates lifelong learners.

"We believe that the opportunity to learn should never stop," Greg Dunkling, Senior Program Director of PACE, said. ***"Our vision is to create connections through our interactions. And we do that with individuals, with organizations, [and] with businesses across the state of Vermont."***

The department serves a variety of individuals coming from a wide variety of educational backgrounds: from pre-college audiences and career changers, to non-credit professional audiences and senior learners.

Building Quality Instruction

How does the department keep growing and building quality programs? They find quality instructors and subject matter experts and focus on continuous improvement: an essential practice to keep leaders and instructors coming back.

In the case of the digital marketing program, Dunkling formed a partnership with the Philadelphia Interactive Marketing Association (PhIMA) to develop the program. The department then worked with PhIMA to find and retain talented instructors from across the greater Philadelphia area.

"Digital marketing obviously is a very fluid area – it's changing frequently," Dunkling said. ***"We did not have expertise within the university to lift the non-credit program. So I had to go find the talent."***

To maintain a loop of continuous feedback and improvement, the department debriefs with instructor leadership and collects detailed course evaluations from learners.



Student-Focused Learning Options

The department's offerings tend to be instructor-facilitated, sometimes asynchronous. But as the demand grew for more subjects, the department was limited by time and resources.

"What we didn't have a lot of were asynchronous, on-your-own-time, self-paced programs, and those can be very expensive to develop," Dunkling said. ***"Once you develop them often, depending on the content, you have to keep them current."***

During the search for online learning partners, Dunkling thought MindEdge's high-quality, self-paced programming, plus support from people who are aligned with the university, could be an asset to learners of all learning styles.



Student Success Supports

For the digital marketing program developed with MindEdge courseware, the department brought in Knowledge Navigators—consultants with significant knowledge of digital marketing, that could offer support and answer questions for learners as they completed their capstone projects. The Knowledge Navigators serve as mentors to students, as a way to bring a community element to the online program.

In addition to the program is the option to meet with a career coach to help guide each learner through the process of trying to obtain their dream job. The career coach helps those looking for career opportunities position themselves as quality applicants on paper, and in person.

"[Learners] have the option as a value-add to the program, and many of them take the opportunity to enroll in it," Nichole Hathaway, Program Planner & Outreach Professional of PACE, said.

The career coach takes learners through this process of identifying the jobs that they may have an interest in, looks at the job descriptions, and helps the learners interpret their backgrounds and include them on resumes and applications.

Fostering alumni relationships and sharing alumni experiences with social media is another value-added support.

"We started a Facebook page for our alumni, and we reach out to them," Hathaway said. ***"We have short courses that we offer for them."***

"The very best recruiter is a happy alum," Dunkling said. ***"That's the very best, most authentic kind of referral or recommendation that you're going to get."***

The Facebook page also enables alumni to communicate with each other about their experiences and share job opportunities within the network.



MindEdge and UVM Partnership

UVM goes through a rigorous process to identify partners that will meet program needs, as well as audience needs. PACE serves nearly 600,000 learners in Vermont and beyond.

"For us to be successful, we need to reach a much broader audience than just in Vermont," Dunkling said. ***"So in my process of looking at the various educational partners out there, actual partners had to reach a threshold of quality."***

Dunkling, Hathaway, and the rest of the department took a lot of time looking at MindEdge's offerings to make sure it had the quality they were looking for.

"We've been very satisfied and that was essential to build out this other component of having Knowledge Navigators, simulations, and capstone projects," Dunkling said.