

Ferris State University College of Pharmacy Gains Insight to Improve Instruction

Key Findings



FSU used ExamSoft to help satisfy increasingly stringent accreditation requirements



Hurdles included faculty adoption and administering large-scale OSCEs



ExamSoft's solution provided: robust data for accreditation, insights for improved instruction, and time savings

Ferris State University adopted ExamSoft to satisfy accreditation requirements. In addition to sailing through accreditation with robust data from ExamSoft, Ferris faculty gained invaluable insights to improve instruction and benefit from tremendous time savings.

Founded in 1894, the Ferris State University College of Pharmacy is a Michigan institution. Today, with more than 500 students enrolled, the school awards about 125 Doctors of Pharmacy degrees annually. Ferris State University's College of Pharmacy is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE).

“With increased scrutiny and expectations from accreditors, it was clear that we would benefit from ExamSoft. It meets our needs for large-scale testing and performance-based assessments, generating data that wholly satisfies accreditors.”

Motivation

Motivation to Adopt: FSU's College of Pharmacy pursued ExamSoft primarily in response to increasingly stringent accreditation requirements. The ACPE requires schools to demonstrate that the program is achieving goals across the program and within specific courses, reporting effectiveness both in aggregate and at the individual student level. More stringent accreditation requirements came as a result of pressure from the Department of Education to ensure that healthcare educational institutions in the U.S. were held to the highest degree of accountability for achieving program outcomes.

Before adopting ExamSoft, Ferris had a host of tools in place, most of which focused on the course level outcomes. The school's learning management system (LMS) offered only course-centric data, lacking the cross-curriculum, program-wide view.

Before ExamSoft,
student performance
was measured
through:



Scantron-
based tests,



Paper-based
rubrics
assessments



Performance-
based assessments
through an LMS

FSU's College of Pharmacy didn't evaluate multiple platforms when considering a computer-based testing solution. All signs pointed to ExamSoft. It provides a single platform for both formative and practical evaluations, as well as robust data management and analysis.

The Problem

- 1** Needed proof that the program is achieving accreditation goals
- 2** The need for both formative and practical evaluations
- 3** The need for robust data management and analysis

Implementation & Learning

Ferris rolled out ExamSoft one class at a time, starting with first-year students. Now, five years later, ExamSoft is being used throughout the program.

While ExamSoft was well-received by Ferris College of Pharmacy students, there was some hesitation among the 45-person faculty. The first hurdle to overcome in the ExamSoft implementation was the transition from paper-based rubrics -- which had been in place for 10 years or more—for objective structured clinical exams (OSCEs) to a digital platform.

With ample documentation, training, and trained faculty available to help, the transition was easy. After the first OSCE in ExamSoft, nearly all faculty were won over and welcoming the change. They realized it was simple and intuitive to use. They were thrilled when it became clear how much time they'd save in grading and pulling course data using ExamSoft.

Faculty champions made a big impact in the transition. Ferris had a team of early- and eager-adopters who took the initiative to develop expertise on multiple aspects of the software and its implementation. This group not only helped bring the broader 45-person faculty along, but they were able to lead the charge in specific areas like: category tagging, designing rubrics, grading open-ended questions in ExamSoft, and more. They were able to demonstrate the value of ExamSoft to their peers, both in terms of time saved and data to help improve instruction.

With an average of 16 faculty graders participating in a single clinical assessment, Ferris ran into a second hurdle...logistical challenges in administering large-scale OSCE assessments with multiple and variable graders. With the standard setup, if one grader was out unexpectedly, another couldn't fill in for them as long as all the faculty graders were each assigned unique personal log in credentials. This was resolved by creating generic faculty grader accounts that allowed any faculty grader to quickly and easily sign in and begin assessing students.



“We had some strong faculty champions who ran with it, becoming experts and champions for the tool. They helped onboard the rest of the team. Today, five years in, all of Ferris College of Pharmacy faculty is very hands-on with ExamSoft.”

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What has been an unexpected outcome of the ExamSoft implementation?

“An unanticipated but incredibly valuable outcome of the ExamSoft implementation, for me, was how it illuminated gaps in my instruction. As every educator knows, the first and best way to improve student performance is to improve the quality of instruction. Before ExamSoft, I considered the exam itself to be the unit of analysis. If the average class grade was a 79, I thought ‘OK, that’s pretty good.’ A more valuable way to view the effectiveness of instruction is question analysis. The first time I used ExamSoft, I wrote the exam and then looked at the blueprint tied to course and programmatic outcomes and quickly realized how imbalanced that exam was. ExamSoft helps me write a better test and improve my effectiveness as an instructor. Now when I look the overall student performance on an exam, I can see if there is a question category that is falling flat for the majority and I know that I have some work to do on the instruction side. Seeing specific highs and lows by question category has been tremendously helpful.”

Professor of Pharmacology at Ferris State University

How was the accreditation process transformed after implementing ExamSoft?



Successfully demonstrated student performance



Able to communicate course corrections, and evolving instruction

Results

Accreditation Goals Met and Instruction Enriched

Being ExamSoft users transformed the accreditation process. Data that once took days to pull and write explanations and context around, was prepared in a matter of hours. The data and outcomes were clear, concise and compelling. FSU’s College of Pharmacy sailed through its first, post-ExamSoft accreditation visit. In addition to demonstrating student performance they could clearly communicate course corrections, how they were evolving instruction to better meet student needs, and prove the impact of those changes.

Enriched Instruction

One of the most helpful outcomes for Ferris has been category reports on cumulative assessments to identify areas where students are deficient. Ferris places an emphasis on ability-based outcomes in question tagging, but also looks at a variety of question categories including course outcomes, professional activities, interprofessional education, patient care process and more.

With respect to performance-based assessments, using ExamSoft made it easy to identify what lines on the rubric larger percentages of students consistently struggle with. No longer are faculty relegated to making assumptions about if and why students are struggling; now they can pinpoint issues in specific categories and for specific students. The path to improvement is made clear by ExamSoft data. Feedback is specific, focused.

The insights ExamSoft is giving Ferris State University College of Pharmacy are making it possible for faculty to proactively identify subjects that students are struggling with, allowing time to make adjustments mid-course to ensure comprehension.

On an individual level, faculty can see a student's performance over time and across courses which creates more targeted remediation sessions, where faculty provide students guidance on how to better prepare, approach a problem, or study.

Time & Resource Savings

The time saved in grading exams and compiling student data has been a huge benefit. Ferris faculty have processes in place for grading essay-style questions, performance-based evaluations and, of course, multiple choice exams. Grading takes about a quarter of the time it previously required, which leaves more time for enhancing instruction and meeting with students. There is also a lot of time and resources saved on the administration side. A paper-based exam on multiple pages for 100+ students means using a lot of paper, and a lot of time scanning, printing and

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collating. Then, oftentimes, there would be scanning and saving electronic copies of the completed exam on the back end. Eliminating this administrative hassle and cost (time and money) was an unintended but positive upside in the shift to ExamSoft.

Looking Ahead

Pharmacy schools will soon be required to demonstrate students' preparedness to enter Advanced Pharmacy Practice Experience (APPE), essentially a clinical rotation. While specific metrics for measuring readiness have yet to be issued, Ferris faculty are able to look at the data within ExamSoft to determine, objectively and with a very high degree of confidence, each students' competency to move into a practical setting based on:

- 1. Knowledge** – Based on test performance, with questions tagged to specific categories, faculty can see if there are any knowledge gaps to be addressed.
- 2. Skills** – Having standardized rubrics throughout the curriculum, using four consistent categories (proficient, competent, novice and unacceptable), faculty have a clear picture of each student's level of competency on all performance-based measures.

ExamSoft has transformed how Ferris State University College of Pharmacy looks at student performance, which has had a significant impact on instruction. Today, Ferris faculty use data to drive course and program improvements. Faculty have gained confidence in knowing instruction aligns with desired outcomes. Even five years in, the team at Ferris feels confidence there is more to learn and is continually improving the quality of the learning experience for its students.

Ferris State University College of Pharmacy Best Practices



A phased approach helps with faculty and student buy in



Have faculty champions expert in specific areas



A hands-on faculty means using ExamSoft smarter



ExamSoft is the digital assessment platform that helps institutions achieve higher levels of course, program, and student success. With an intuitive testing application, ExamSoft makes it simple to create, administer, and grade exams, and generate detailed performance reports from the results — all to provide educators with a complete and accurate view of student learning.

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