

Late Nite Labs Case Study



"They loved it. We used it again the next semester because students were saying they thought it was a powerful tool"

Challenge

- ▲ Students coming to lab unprepared
- ▲ No understanding of safety issues
- ▲ Undue burden on TAs and wasted lab time

Solution

- ▲ Web-based chemistry pre-lab implementation
- ▲ Test period for 70 students, grew to over 2,000 first-year students
- ▲ Pre-lab assignment used as lab entrance ticket

Results

- ▲ Students better prepared, safer in the lab
- ▲ TA time and resources freed up
- ▲ Plans to replace some wet labs for no-majors course

2,000 students use Late Nite Labs at The University of Mississippi; come to lab better prepared

BACKGROUND

Before discovering Late Nite Labs, John Wiginton, Lab Manager at The University of Mississippi, used to watch his chemistry students come to class unprepared, wasting precious lab time. The standard procedure at the beginning of class was to give students a quiz and a pre-lab lecture and then put them to work, but, John says, it caused him great concern.

"There was a safety problem," he says. "Students didn't know the procedures or the chemicals they were working with. They didn't know if a reaction, say with nitric acid, was going to bubble and boil over and explode."

SOLUTION

John was trying to think of a way to make pre-lab preparation more meaningful when he came across an advertisement for Late Nite Labs, the online resource for chemistry lab tools. John placed the first call to Late Nite Labs at the start of the fall semester in 2005. He was skeptical at first, he says, about a company he was unfamiliar with, and wanted to be sure Late Nite Labs would meet his expectations.

"I wanted the highest degree of realism that I could get, and the highest degree of accessibility," he says. "I didn't care about the platform, but I wanted to be sure students could get into the system anytime and when they did, would find it a useful tool."

John compared Late Nite Labs to other online chemistry tools but found them cumbersome. "I felt they were pretty tedious," he says. "They weren't intuitive to me and I didn't have time to read the books."

Late Nite Labs, on the other hand, proved to be a straight-forward option that looked attractive, based on John's goal of better preparing students for chemistry wet labs. Late Nite Labs not only provides 24-hour access for students via the web, the company's team worked with John to roll out a test.

"I wanted to poll the students and see what they thought first," he said. "I wanted to see what Late Nite Labs had going on. I liked that they let me get into it slowly and test it out."

RESULTS

Seventy students signed up for the initial roll-out, encouraged by extra credit points given for trying out the new service. The goal, John explains, was to see if Late Nite Labs could be a good pre-lab tool, if it was instructive, if it was fun. The response, he says, was phenomenal.

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About Late Nite Labs

Late Nite Labs develops innovative applications of simulation technologies for education and training. It's all about using technology to gain an edge in science education. Visit us at www.latenitelabs.com



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“They loved it,” he says. “We used it again the next semester because students were saying they thought it was a powerful learning tool.”

One of the advantages of Late Nite Labs is the ability to customize labs to meet the specific needs of the class, teacher and school. For John, this was a major advantage because he writes his own lab manual. The Late Nite Labs team, he says, helped him move those labs to the web, where students could do the pre-lab work.

“This is a huge asset to me,” John says. “Students can do the actual lab online and can be exposed to safety, technique and MSDA information before the lab. And Late Nite Labs put all my labs on the site for me.”

John also liked that he could keep students accountable for doing the pre-lab work, due to his ability to see how students logged on and conducted the lab. “On my end, I require the lab report as an entrance ticket,” he says. “I don’t grade it, but I check that they went through the procedures.”

The knowledge and peace of mind that students have a prior understanding of the lab before coming to class is also beneficial to fellow students, John says. “When you know people are in the lab with you and are clueless about safety, it makes everyone a little nervous,” he explains. “Now everyone in the lab knows everyone went through the same thing and they can feel safer.”

Better prepared students creates a time saving advantage for teaching assistants, who typically bear the burden of preparing students for labs. John explains that Late Nite Labs is a popular solution with TAs who now have more time to focus on their own classes and research. “In addition,” he says, “Late Nite Labs facilitates discussion in the lab. Students come with questions and want clarification of events. That didn’t necessarily happen before.”

Today, up to 2,000 chemistry students use Late Nite Labs at The University of Mississippi. John continues to be impressed by the level of preparation demonstrated by students, the ease of use and customization, and above all, customer service. “I like the support we get,” he says. “Late Nite Labs bent over backwards to do anything we ask them, and they help us make sure that everything goes smoothly. It’s just bar none as far as I’m concerned.”

John does not plan to replace the wet lab experience for science majors, but says there is a chance that for non-science majors Late Nite Labs could be expanded to serve as the primary lab experience in some cases. “It would save a huge amount of overhead for us,” he says. “English and history majors don’t necessarily need the hands-on experience each time.”

John considers himself a Late Nite Labs convert. “To me, Late Nite Labs is a great brag tool with the faculty,” he says. “It was been very well received.”