

Paradigm's Benchmark Series Excel Course Spurs Students' Success at Bob Jones University

Paradigm is one of the country's leading providers of post-secondary educational solutions, designed to teach students the software and technology skills they'll need in today's global, connected workplace. From traditional textbooks to engaging digital teaching tools, Paradigm is focused on empowering students with business computing expertise straight from some of the world's best educators.

We believe that students learn best from doing, and our coursework creates a hands-on, collaborative learning environment where students and teachers work to solve problems and explore the technology together. Our approach to teaching has been developed by real instructors based on their real classroom experience – and we deliver real results for students. We know it works because we've seen it; just ask Alan Carper, who teaches Business Spreadsheet Analysis at Bob Jones University.

Benchmark Series Excel Courseware Makes a Difference in the Classroom

Although it's now one of his passions as an educator, Alan Carper never intended to teach Microsoft® Excel. With a degree in management and an MBA from Queens University of Charlotte, Carper has taught courses in finance and banking at Bob Jones since 1983. However, in 2012, when a colleague who taught the school's Business Spreadsheet Analysis course left, he was asked to teach the course – and challenged to learn some new skills.

Carper (who rated himself as “about a four out of ten” in terms of his Microsoft Excel skills prior to teaching the class), was asked by the school administration to take on teaching the Excel training course due to his experience in using spreadsheets in his finance classes. He accepted and quickly began digging into Paradigm's Benchmark Series Microsoft Excel 2010 Levels 1 and 2 courseware, which had been recommended by the outgoing colleague. He was impressed with the text's organized and practical approach to teaching the application. “They were using the Benchmark Series Excel 2010 books,” Carper recalls. “So I said, ‘Well let me take a look.’ I really liked the teaching methods and the fact that the course [focuses] on the students themselves doing most of the work. It's not like when I'm teaching corporate finance or economics, where I stand up and lecture and take questions.” When Microsoft released its next version of Excel, it was an easy choice for Carper to transition to Paradigm's Excel 2013 Levels 1 & 2 and, he said, in a few months he is looking forward to adopting Paradigm's Excel 2016 Levels 1 & 2.

The project-driven approach used in the Benchmark Excel course revolves around a methodical layering of skills. Along with the detailed chapter



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project instructions and illustrations, there are “visual benchmarks” (illustrations of what the completed spreadsheet should look like) and hands-on case studies, which build on the skills and techniques learned in the chapter, emulating the types of spreadsheet tasks that might be required of the student in the workplace.

Through this logical progression, students move from basic Excel commands and shortcuts to advanced formulas and spreadsheet analysis techniques. It’s an approach that Carper’s students find both effective and enjoyable.

Carper says, “The projects that they complete step the students through – ‘point here, click here.’ By the time they get to the case studies, they know how to do it so well. I tell the students that my goal is that, when they finally take the exam, they will be bored because it’s so easy for them. That’s because the text is so good at presenting the material. I’ve learned a lot from it myself.”

A Proven Approach

Paradigm’s textbooks and course materials work in the classroom because they are rooted in the classroom. These are books written by teachers for teachers. Nita Rutkosky, who has authored many Benchmark Series books over the years, first started teaching business technology at Pierce College in 1978. She can still remember the first time that she taught a school administrator how to print a document from an early personal computer. Seeing the excitement that someone feels when they master a new technology is still what drives her work with Paradigm. Over the years, she’s learned a lot about what works in designing a course.

“We focus on student success,” says Rutkosky. “That’s something we take very seriously. We understand how people learn and how to make information understandable to students, helping them to successfully accomplish a task and build on that success by adding additional information.”

In Paradigm’s courseware, students learn by doing, gradually moving from simple to complex concepts and then applying that learning to hands-on exercises like the provided worksheets and case studies. Throughout, the authors use clear, concise instructions that are easy to understand and contain clearly defined steps to complete the task.

“If students aren’t successful, it’s not their fault; it’s the fault of the textbook,” says Rutkosky. “We take that very seriously. It’s our job to make sure they understand the material. We’ve been doing it for years and I think we’re very good at it. [We’ve developed] a consistent, thoughtful presentation that really makes it an easy experience for the student.”



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While Nita Rutkosky no longer teaches, three of her co-authors (Ian Rutkosky, Audrey Roggenkamp, and Jan Davidson) are still classroom instructors, which allows them to constantly test their coursework to make sure it provides the maximum benefit for students. Observing the courseware being used by real students has proved to be an invaluable resource for the team as they plan revisions and improvements.

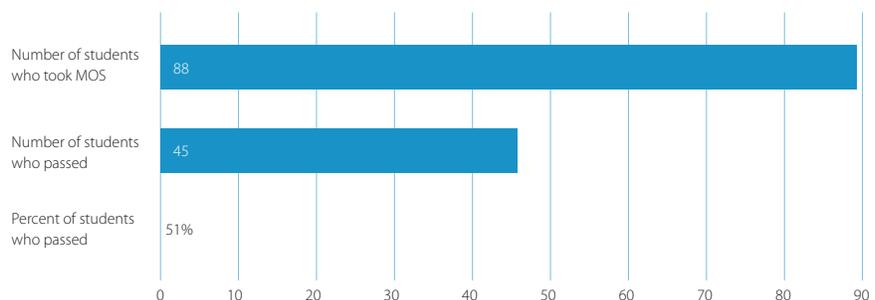
Ian Rutkosky says, “While I’m teaching, I see where students are struggling and use that when we’re writing the next edition. I remember that I need to change a certain section because students were struggling with it. It’s not about taking it out because it’s too hard, it’s ‘How can I rewrite this or present it in a different way that’s more understandable?’”

The team also communicates with Procert Labs to guarantee that the courseware and other training products map to the industry-standard Certiport Microsoft Office Specialist test for Excel. This ensures that Paradigm’s course materials are up to date, giving students the best chance to earn an Excel certification.

Real Students, Real Results

Alan Carper can attest to how effective Paradigm’s course materials are in preparing students to earn their Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) certification in Excel. Inspired by a colleague, he recently changed his grading practices, allowing students who take and pass the Microsoft Office Specialist certification exam in Excel to earn a perfect mark for their course final exam.

Carper says, “I tell my students, ‘If Certiport says that you know Excel to the point where you can be certified – who am I to say that you don’t?’ It was a little incentive. My wildest expectation was that maybe 10% of the class would do it.”



To make it convenient for students who lacked transportation to take the MOS certification exam, he worked with the testing center at Bob Jones University to make it a Certiport-authorized testing center. The results were impressive, with over half of the class’s 88 students passing on their first try. Of the remaining students, all but a handful passed on their second try.



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"I was flabbergasted," remarks Carper, who attributes this remarkable success rate to the quality of Paradigm's Benchmark Series Excel 2013 textbooks and course materials. "I don't teach; I see myself as a facilitator. This course is about learning by doing, and the Paradigm Benchmark Series Excel books are perfectly suited to that approach. It's not about me standing up there and going through the process; they go through it themselves. It's like the saying goes, 'Give a man a fish, he'll eat for a day. Teach a man to fish, he'll eat for a lifetime.'"

Carper's student-directed approach in the classroom is made possible by Paradigm's expertly designed curriculum presented in the Benchmark Excel courseware. The results he's seen with his students is impressive. After starting the semester as novices, Carper's students were able to not only pass his class, but actually achieve certification as Microsoft Office Specialists by an independent testing organization. Even more importantly, Carper's students are coming away with something far more valuable than any certification or test grade. Through the Benchmark Excel, they learn the real-world skills that make them a more competitive job candidate – and help them succeed in the workplace.

At Paradigm, we understand that empowering students to be successful is our ultimate goal. Our courseware is outcome-driven, hands-on instruction that delivers results for students and teachers. It works for Alan Carper and his students at Bob Jones University, and it can work for you. Please contact us at 800-535-6865 or visit ParadigmCollege.com if you'd like to learn more about how our educational solutions can prepare your students for success in the classroom and on the job.

