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Northwestern Oklahoma State School of Nursing

Key Findings

NWOSU needed exam security and to improve NCLEX pass rates

ExamSoft provided an intuitive tool for easy adoption, support and implementation

The school improved licensure exam pass rates from 72 to 92 percent of students passing

Northwestern Oklahoma State School of Nursing adopted ExamSoft in a particularly challenging time. The school's licensure exam passing rates were at an all-time low, with an accreditation visit looming. Faculty got up-to-speed on ExamSoft over a summer break and dramatically improved licensure exam pass rates in just one year, going from 72 to 92 percent of students passing.

"We continuously stress the importance of fiscal responsibility to our students. It's equally important to lead by example in our decision making. ExamSoft worked within the budget we had earmarked for a better, more secure test-taking solution."

Northwestern Oklahoma State (Northwestern) is a small, regional, public university. Northwestern is proud to provide a high-quality academic experience in an

accessible way, from both a cost and geographic perspective. The university has four program delivery sites, with the main campus located in Alva, Oklahoma, a rural community bordering Kansas, and additional campuses in Enid, Woodward and a fourth delivery site in Ponca City. The university offers 40 bachelor's degrees and three master's programs. Its single doctoral program is in nursing.

The Northwestern nursing program started almost 40 years ago. It maintains a small student-to-faculty ratio (on average 1:5). This affords faculty an opportunity to forge close connections with their students…a high priority for the school.

What led Northwestern Oklahoma State School of Nursing to ExamSoft?

The need for improved exam security.

The need to improve NCLEX pass rates.

The Problem

There were two primary drivers that led Northwestern Oklahoma State's School of Nursing to ExamSoft. The first was exam security. The second was the need to improve the school's National Council Licensure Exam (NCLEX®) pass rates.

Northwestern has a learning management system (LMS) in place, which the Division of Nursing used but ultimately found it to be frought with shortcomings related to exam security. Despite having all of the security features activated, students still found ways to copy questions or exams, violating academic integrity policies. During this time, and for several years prior, the school's NCLEX passing rates hovered in the low 70s.

These issues prompted the search for solutions to increase exam security and strengthen the program and student experience.

While security and data goals drove the search, Northwestern had financial limitations to consider. With a small staff that wears multiple hats, Northwestern didn't have the luxury of a dedicated team to lead and support the implementation and use of a new tool. It needed an intuitive tool that would be easy for faculty to adopt across its four different, rural locations. The university also needed a partner that would be engaged throughout the transition from paper to computer-based testing and available to provide support. ExamSoft fit the bill.

The Solution

Throughout the process of evaluating various solutions, it became clear that only ExamSoft could meet the school's top requirements – improving exam security and identifying gaps in students' learning to enable remediation and, ultimately, improve licensure exam pass rates.

Northwestern evaluated four other online test taking products, starting with those built in to its LMS. Many came with an additional fee attached to the secure testing feature. Not only were these fees onerous, but the solutions' data and analytics fell short of what Northwestern required. The products that could provide meaningful data without layering on a fee per test didn't have the security features Northwestern was seeking.

> **With an accreditation visit scheduled for early 2019, Northwestern moved quickly to rollout ExamSoft in the summer of 2018. Leadership saw tremendous value in the tool's ability to:**
>
> - Help students become better prepared for licensure
> - Identify shortcomings of test questions
> - Enhance security
> - Yield rich data for accreditors

Their enthusiasm was instrumental in getting faculty on board and expediting the rollout. Northwestern designated two faculty members to lead the ExamSoft rollout. Between in-person trainings and the extensive library of resources available to ExamSoft users, the two-person team quickly got up-to-speed. They were able to conduct a short, three-week, introductory pilot course with junior students. With only a small number of students, this class presented the best opportunity to administer a mock exam. The mock exam not only helped the two faculty leads, it also proved to be instrumental to have a group of students with some experience using the software who could serve as champions for the broader rollout.

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To prepare the rest of the faculty, with the administration's backing, the school was able to provide supplemental compensation for faculty members to complete training over the summer break. The administration's enthusiasm created a sense of importance and helped pave the way for faculty buy in. The full faculty participated in online trainings and reviewed materials over summer so that they were well-prepared for the in-person training sessions preceding the fall rollout.

For Northwestern's ExamSoft launch in the fall of 2018, exam questions were "tagged" to, or assigned, End of Program Student Learning Outcomes. This tagging made it possible for Northwestern faculty to run reports and know how their students were performing in critical curricular outcomes. Even though the software can be used to "tag" questions with any attribute (like accreditation outcomes, licensing exam topics, program outcomes, etc.), by focusing only on End of Program Student Learning outcomes, the faculty could ease into the new technology while creating robust data in support of their upcoming accreditation visit.

What has impressed Northwestern Oklahoma State School of Nursing the most about their ExamSoft implementation?

"An unexpected but wonderful addition was the ExamSoft support. They helped us get started and then, when we were on our own, they remained accessible and continued to check in, invite us to conferences, and provide continuing education. I've been amazed by how quickly we can access support when we need it."

The Process

1 Exam questions were "tagged" to End of Program Student Learning Outcomes

2 Reports were run to know how the students were performing

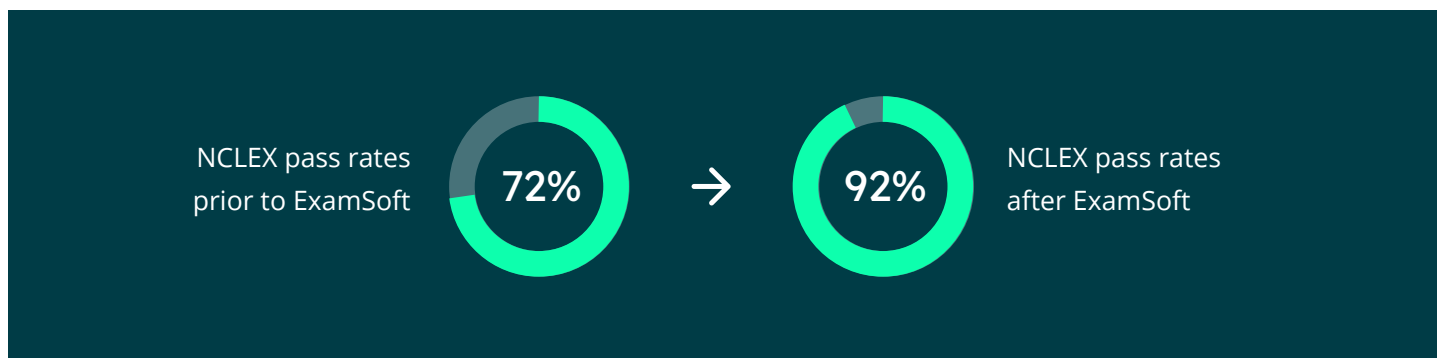**3** Robust data was captured in support of their upcoming accreditation visit

Challenges

Somewhat set in their ways, upperclassmen were less-than-eager to transition to a new, online test-taking platform. Having a small group of peers with baseline familiarity, gained during the summer session, helped bring the the hesitant group of upperclassman along.

The other challenge Northwestern faced was helping all the students get their personal devices prepared for ExamSoft usage. Many students hadn't kept their device's operating system up to date and weren't sure how to get them up to speed. Beyond this, test-takers needed to learn the settings that would make ExamSoft compatible with their devices like turning off antivirus tools before downloading and taking a test. Not everyone knew how to do that, but with ExamSoft's help, the university quickly documented and shared system requirements, best practices for computer settings, and was able to get everyone up and running.

Results

Less than one year after adopting ExamSoft, exam security concerns were alleviated, NCLEX pass rates improved from 72 to 92 percent and the school passed accreditation.

NCLEX pass rates prior to ExamSoft — **72%** → **92%** — NCLEX pass rates after ExamSoft

Immediately following implementation, the faculty was able to create reports to help all students with remediation. Remediating with students was nothing new for Northwestern faculty but the quality and depth of those sessions, and the time spent in preparation, improved drastically...as did student outcomes.

Continuous Growth

✓ Creating additional categories for tagging questions to course and curricular outcomes.

✓ Exploring options for integrating ExamSoft with other online programs.

✓ Developing an ExamSoft orientation for new faculty members.

✓ Working with ExamSoft discover new ways to use assessment data.

Data that once took hours to pull from disparate sources and on a per-student basis was automatically generated and easily accessible. Student remediation sessions became infinitely more effective with stronger focus and the ability to go deep on the types and categories of questions that were creating challenges. Northwestern faculty was able to identify specific thought processes and responses that needed addressing.

Using ExamSoft, Northwestern had extremely rich performance data to share during its February 2019 accreditation visit. It demonstrated specific changes made to strengthen the quality of testing and the overall program rigor. Faculty could clearly chart performance on key metrics, demonstrating improvements in student learning and end-of-program outcomes to accreditors.

> "With a few clicks, we were able to show accreditors very clearly that we were instructing students in a very strategic way and meeting the essentials for their nursing education."

Northwestern received its accreditation. The NCLEX passing rate is the highest it's been in years. Faculty credit this squarely to higher-quality test questions and effective remediation. Having scored impressive quick wins within the first year of implementation, the faculty at Northwestern is now growing its use of ExamSoft and constantly finding new ways to use ExamSoft.

Northwestern Oklahoma State School of Nursing Best Practices

Get leadership backing, have a change champion.

Document and share system best practices early on.

Conduct a pilot, and implement what was learned in the roll out.

ExamSoft by Turnitin

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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