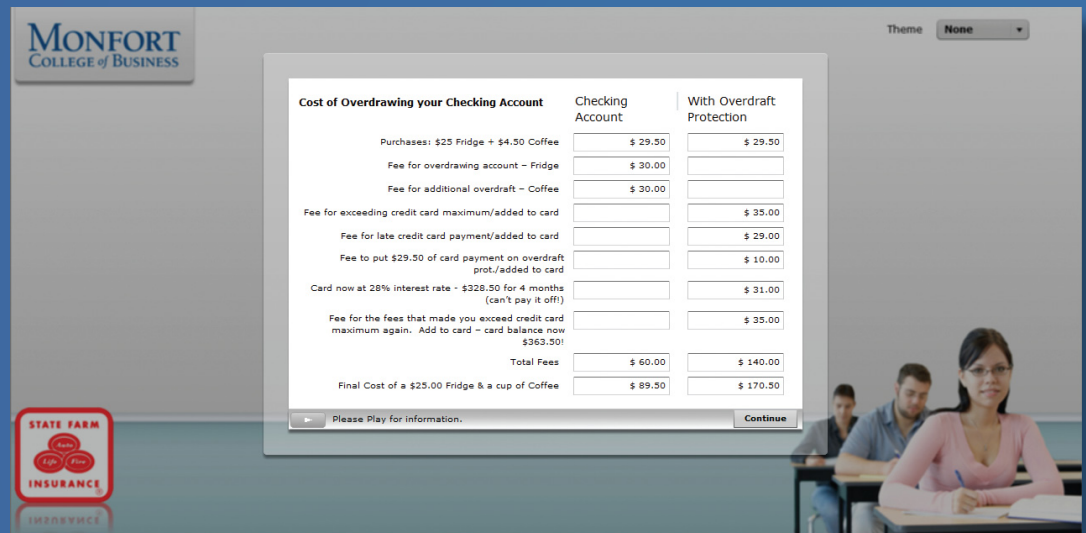


Making money work

Freshman students engage with online curriculum to improve college and personal finance skills

With its rich 118-year history, dedicated faculty, active students, and noted athletic teams, the University of Northern Colorado (UNC) is large enough to provide students with a broad university opportunity, yet small enough to treat each student as an individual. At UNC, students in more than 200 graduate and undergraduate programs are encouraged to stand out, not just fit in.

With only two weeks of lead time, The Monfort College of Business at UNC chose a full set of Adobe tools including Adobe Creative Suite 3 Web Standard, Adobe Flex, and Adobe ColdFusion, to rapidly build and deploy the university's first online Personal Finance course. Adobe ColdFusion serves as the underlying application server technology, while Adobe Flash CS3 Professional and Adobe Flex Builder software were used to create the course application.



“The only way we could complete this instructional development project on time was by using integrated Adobe technologies.”

Justin Imhoff, web designer, Monfort College of Business, University of Northern Colorado

The Monfort College of Business at UNC focuses exclusively on excellence in undergraduate business education. The first and only business program to receive the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award from the Office of the President of the United States, and the only undergraduate-only program worldwide to be accredited by the nation's leading agency in both business and accounting, Monfort offers degrees in business administration with emphases in accounting, computer information systems, finance, general business, management, and marketing.

Through a study of its freshman class attrition rate, staff at the Monfort College of Business discovered that half the UNC students who left school after their first semester stated financial issues as their reason for leaving. Commonly, first year college students need to acquire new skills to stay solvent while faced with independent living challenges and managing the cost of a college education. With support from the private financial sector, UNC set out to improve the freshman attrition rate by starting a new online course to teach students how to manage their finances.

According to web designer Justin Imhoff, the team had only two weeks to build the course from scratch. The goal was to serve 1,200 students and keep them engaged with content for nearly two hours. The course also had to include reporting and testing capabilities and provide users with the ability to save data for future reference. “The only way we could complete this instructional development project on time was by using integrated Adobe® technologies,” says Imhoff. The team turned to Adobe Flash® CS3 Professional and Adobe Flex™ Builder™ 2 software to create the application, with Adobe ColdFusion® MX 7 as the underlying application server technology.

"The students love that they can alter the color schemes and move things around on the fly."

*Justin Imhoff, web designer, Monfort College of Business,
University of Northern Colorado*

Intro to fiscal responsibility

More than 1,600 freshmen enrolled in the new, for-credit course titled Student Personal Finance the first semester it was offered. "The online class is like an electronic textbook," says Imhoff. "It has everything a student needs to successfully complete the class, including savable worksheets and assessment tools." An on-campus version of the class complements the eLearning experience, but the eventual possibility is to offer the class online only.

The course consists of four eLearning modules that include interactive content, quizzing, and animation. Approximately three quarters of the introductory module is video snippets of lectures, highlighted by an animated diagram of how different parts of the brain control decision-making. "It was really easy to animate the brain graphic using Flash CS3 Professional and then tie it into the Flex framework," says Imhoff, who explains that when a user clicks on the brain inside the Flex interface, the action registers to the SWF content created in Flash.

The other three modules address more complex topics including income and expense basics, monthly and annual budgeting practices, and how to effectively navigate the world of credit. "The students love that they can alter the color schemes and move things around on the fly," says Imhoff. With the application deployed using Adobe Flash Media Server, there are no page refreshes for data, visual, or content revisions. Many of the fields are also automatically populated with current information including tuition expenses and student loan information, as the application ties to various back-end databases and web services.

Maximizing resources

The online offering helps students work more efficiently by referring to course content on the web at their convenience. As web developers, the team relies heavily on student survey information to keep courses standardized, relevant, and engaging.

From a development standpoint, Imhoff explains that he opted to use Adobe Flex Builder 2 for its ease of use in building interactive components, its rapid production capabilities, and for the ability to integrate Flex components seamlessly

Company

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Challenge

- Rapidly develop online course from scratch
- Integrate engaging elements for successful completion of online courses
- Deploy new course inside existing IT infrastructure

Solution

UNC's small web team employed a full complement of Adobe tools—Adobe Creative Suite 3 Web Standard, Adobe Flex 2, and Adobe ColdFusion 7—to rapidly build and deploy a web-based finance course in just two weeks.

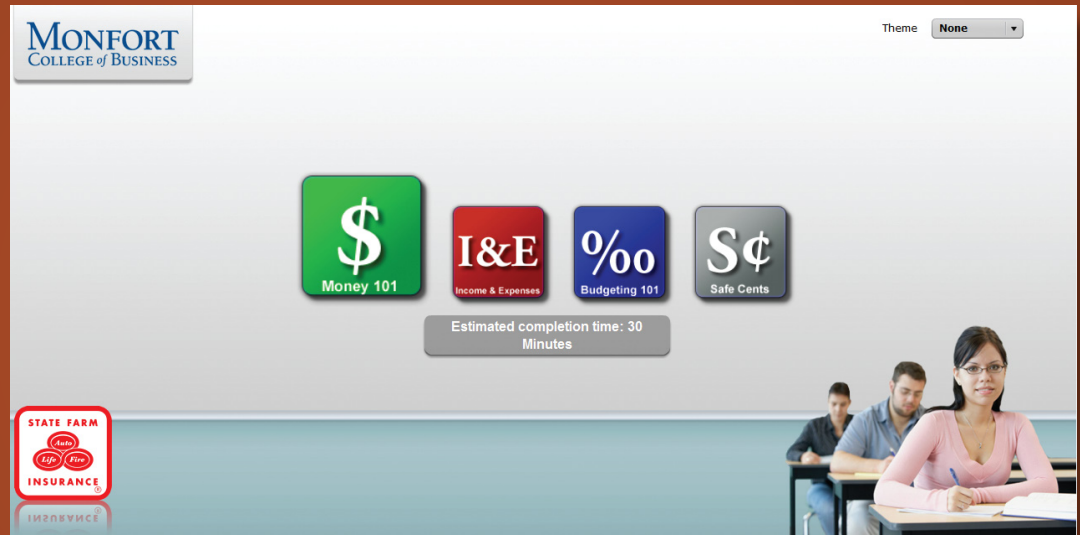
Benefits

- Provided first-year students with convenient eLearning option
- Saved administrative and physical costs of running large-scale bricks and mortar class
- Enabled students to gain greater understanding of personal financial management
- Cost effectively established an eLearning program designed to help decrease freshman attrition rate
- Deployed project rapidly within existing IT framework

Toolkit

- Adobe Creative Suite 3 Web Standard. Components used include:
 - Adobe Dreamweaver CS3
 - Adobe Fireworks CS3
 - Adobe Flash CS3 Professional
 - Adobe Flex
 - Adobe ColdFusion
- Platform: Dell Optiplex PCs running Microsoft® Windows Vista™ OS

The Monfort College of Business at UNC's new web-based finance course consists of four eLearning modules that include interactive content, quizzing, and animation. Developers chose Adobe Flash CS3 Professional to animate graphics that were then tied to the Adobe Flex framework. Course modules cover complex topics including income and expense basics, monthly and annual budgeting practices, and how to effectively navigate the world of credit.



“For developers like me with a limited design background, working in Adobe Flex, Flash, and ColdFusion, empowers me to produce sophisticated web applications and keep them easily updated to meet the constantly changing needs of the university.”

Justin Imhoff, web designer, Monfort College of Business, University of Northern Colorado

into a ColdFusion framework. According to Imhoff, The Monfort College of Business website runs on ColdFusion application server software, so the new course was extremely easy to deploy within the existing IT infrastructure.

Imhoff uses a variety of Adobe Creative Suite® 3 Web Standard components for his projects including Adobe Dreamweaver® CS3 software for web development, as he believes “there is no better standard,” and he opts to launch

Adobe Fireworks® CS3 software regularly to optimize images for the web. On the freshman finance course project, he used the slices feature in Fireworks to ensure items would fluidly resize when running inside Adobe Flash Player. He also imported Flex skins directly into Fireworks for editing.

Along with the rest of the IT professionals at the Monfort College of Business, Imhoff believes that the advantages of working with Adobe tools result in rapid development cycles, seamless workflows, and headache-free application deployment. “For developers like me with a limited design background, working in Adobe Flex, Flash, and ColdFusion, empowers me to produce sophisticated web applications and keep them easily updated to meet the constantly changing needs of the university,” he says.



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