Academum

Catawba Congeniality

Strengthening the Relational Core of a Liberal Arts College

CATAWBA COLLEGE

Catawba College is a member of the
CIC Online Course Sharing Consortium

Table of Contents

Page	Chapter
1	Introduction: Catawba Congeniality
1	Challenge: Small College, Big Problem
2	Solution: Expanding Course Options
3	Results
4	Conclusion

Copyright © 2020 Acadeum. All rights reserved.

Introduction: Catawba Congeniality

Catawba College has long adapted with the times. During the Civil War, it temporarily became an academy. In the late 1800s, it became coeducational. Facing financial hardship in the early 20th century, Catawba closed and moved its campus 50 miles east to Salisbury, North Carolina, where it was able to re-find its footing and flourish. Since then, the college has grown to offer over 70 fields of study and serve 1,300 students each year.

Through it all, Catawba College has remained committed to providing a welcoming and congenial learning atmosphere to all students in search of truth and knowledge. Now, it is once again undergoing a transformation.

Like many institutions, Catawba has seen changes in the number and types of students it serves in recent years. Sixty percent of its students participate in inter-collegiate athletics. The college is serving more and more nontraditional students, and about 90 percent of its students are Pell-eligible. This has created unique challenges, as administrators and faculty work to meet the demands of these students. Catawba has started offering online degrees for the first time, while working to attract new kinds of students at a time of shrinking enrollment.

To maintain the atmosphere of congeniality of which it is so proud, the institution knew it must find a way to better serve all its students. In doing so, it enhanced its intimate, relation-based educational foundation – and provided an instructive example for other small liberal arts colleges navigating the complex challenges facing higher education today.

Catawba Student Profile

- 60% Student Athletes
- 18% Non-Traditional
- 90% Pell-eligible

Challenge: Small College, Big Problem

As Catawba grew and changed, it became increasingly difficult for the college to offer the full range of courses its students wanted and needed. In particular, Catawba struggled to create courses for its growing number of adult and non-traditional students, who required evening or online offerings.

And like most small institutions, it faced the semester-to-semester challenge of delivering 70-plus major programs efficiently to all of its students. Inevitably, students faced issues around course availability. If a class fills up, there may not be a faculty member available to teach a separate section for those that still need the course that semester. If a section only has two or three students signed up, offering that course is not financially viable for the institution. These issues pose massive challenges for students, who must wait until the desired course becomes available, which in turn may delay their graduation and potentially fuel frustration with the college.

Moved by a growing awareness of Catawba's course availability challenges, Provost Connie Lowery and Dean of Distance and Online Learning Jeff Bowe began to look deeper into cases where students struggled to get the courses they needed. They discovered an opportunity to enhance student progress by improving access to prerequisite courses, as well as replacement courses to help students regain good academic standing.

The latter opportunity involved solving a particular challenge: if students had earned poor grades, they had to retake the course on campus to change their grade. The negative impact of a single poor grade on a student's GPA cannot be overstated. It takes three good grades to offset one poor grade, and students with poor grades tend to cycle on and off probation. Something had to change.

Copyright © 2020 Acadeum. All rights reserved.

Solution: Unlocking Course Options

To provide more course options for its students, Catawba turned to the CIC Online Course Sharing Consortium supported by Academeum. The consortium provides the college with thousands of online course options from aligned and peer institutions, from which its faculty can carefully vet and select additional courses that meet the college's high standards and specifications.

"With the consortial model, we are able to give our students many more options to replace poor grades and maintain the original path to graduation." — Connie Lowery, Provost

Initially, Catawba focused on providing additional options to online and evening students, selecting 30 highly in-demand courses to supplement its offerings. Within a few months, however, Catawba expanded its approach and started to provide options to its traditional students to alleviate curricular bottlenecks, help students make up for lost credit hours or regain good academic standing, and help student-athletes maintain athletic eligibility.

In addition, Catawba started to offer its own online courses to other institutions through the Academeum platform, finding a particular niche with its compact 4-week Winter Term.

2019-2020 Catawaba Enrollment Mix

Top courses Catawba offered from other institutions as a home institution.

Course Category	Enrollments
Health Science	7
Biology	3
English	3
Psychology	2
Finance	2
Education	2
Marketing	1

Top courses taught through Catawba as a teaching institution.

Course Category	Enrollments
Spanish, Foreign Language	15
Economics	14
Music	11
Philosophy, Ethics	6
Management, Leadership	5
Psychology	4
Communication	4

Copyright © 2020 Academeum. All rights reserved.

Results & Financial Benefit

In just 6 months —beginning with the Summer 2019 semester — Catawba distinguished itself as an adept user of the Academum platform, employing the consortium to save four students from poor academic standing, teach 96 students from other institutions, and admit 32 nursing and education students who would not have otherwise come to Catawba. The latter group chose to come to Catawba because they were able to find the necessary prerequisite courses through Academum and maintain progress towards their degree.

All told, within 6 months Catawba generated $450,000 of additional revenue for the 2019-2020 operating budget through its use of the Academum platform. "The financial bump is not just the one semester in front of you but the entire number of semesters until that student graduates," Bowe said. Accordingly, the returning and new students could add another $360,000 in tuition to Catawba's bottom line next year as well.

But the experiment's true success can be found in the stories of the college's students.

Four students in poor academic standing may have dropped out had they been unable to make up important courses through Academum. One student missed a registration date for the courses he needed to remain eligible for his financial aid, but he was able to use consortium courses to remain enrolled. Two former student-athletes have returned to the college — having previously left early to pursue careers in baseball — and are using the consortium courses to complete their Catawba degrees while traveling and competing with their teams. One rising senior simply could not afford to return to campus and had to take a full-time job 125 miles away to support his family, but is using consortium classes to graduate on time. A working mom has returned to complete her degree, and the consortium courses help her fit school into an already busy life.

When a student lost his mother to cancer last year, his grades understandably suffered, putting his academic standing and athletic eligibility in peril. He was able to take consortium courses to make up for that lost time and get back on track.

"We have found that the consortium courses complement our offerings and give us flexibility to answer unexpected challenges that students face," Lowery said. *"But this is not just about ensuring students remain at our institution. It's about providing them with the ability to stay on path to their intended major. It's about giving students more opportunities to follow through on their educational dreams, no matter what life might send their way."*

Catawba also has several 2+2 programs, in which students complete their first two years of coursework at a community college, transferring in a maximum of 64 credit hours to Catawba. However, students were arriving with the maximum transferable credit hours but without required, pre-requisite courses. Instead of turning those students away, Catawba found consortial courses as replacements, allowing those students to immediately enroll and begin their bachelor's degree, saving the student time and earning the college incremental revenue.

Value added to Catawba 2019-2020 operating budget

96	**Students**	Taught from other institutions
32	**Nursing & Education Students**	Admitted into Catawba
4	**Students**	Regained good academic standing through grade replacement

Copyright © 2020 Academum. All rights reserved.

Conclusion: Strengthening the Relational Core

With Academum's help, Catawba is finding new and thoughtful ways to help its students succeed. It has grown its online and evening programs through the network of consortium courses, expanding its offerings in ways it never could have previously.

The arrangement allows the traditional liberal arts institution to scaffold up its online presence, helping more students stay on track, graduate on time, and pursue the degree they want at an institution they love. And, importantly, it allows Catawba to provide a welcoming and accommodating learning environment to more kinds of students than ever before.

Catawba's use of online courses to give students more options is a surprising example of untapped potential in online learning. While many may see online learning as a poor substitute for the intimate experience of a small liberal arts college, Catawba College demonstrates how online options can enhance the relational core of that college model. "It's not about short-term revenue," Bowe said. "It's about serving the students to fulfill our mission."

With the additional options, Catawba is able to cater its education to the individual circumstances of a variety of differently situated students. In this way, Catawba College embodies its true ideals as described by famed theologian John Henry Newman: it knows its students one by one, and is not a foundry, a mint, or a treadmill.

Copyright © 2020 Academum
All rights reserved