Mindjet

Success Story

University Instructor Uses Catalyst to Empower Student Success

Institution
Ryerson University

Industry
Education

Location
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Product
Mindjet Catalyst

Challenge

- Help students make sense of complex material
- Explain important relationships and concepts to students
- Empower students with the knowledge that they are studying the correct lessons
- Give students effective tools for remembering information

Solution

- Placed the course materials online for easy access
- Created an online workspace where students could collaborate with each other
- Implemented a new learning system through visual information mapping

Results

- Instructor can easily track the material and make changes to the curriculum
- Students are more successful understanding complex ideas
- Students use information maps for effective studying methods
- Students are enthusiastic about information mapping and are mapping more than required
- Students can extend their use of information maps to other classes

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–Bob Grisdale, Instructor of Physiology and Anatomy, School of Nutrition, Ryerson University

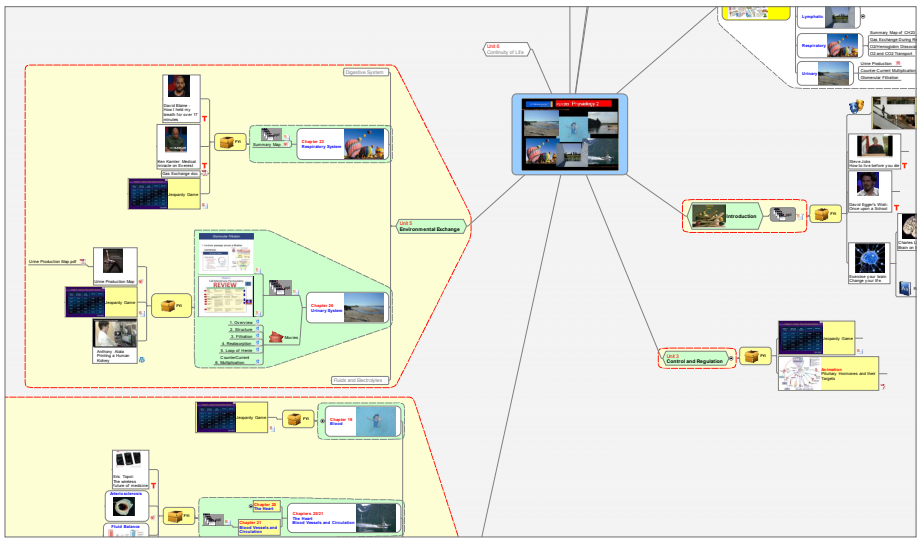
Background

Bob Grisdale, Instructor of Physiology and Anatomy in the School of Nutrition at Ryerson University, teaches courses packed with intricate concepts. He is always interested in finding ways to make it easier for his students to understand and retain important ideas taught in class. Grisdale was already familiar with Mindjet® MindManager,® having used the program to improve his own contextual memory. For this reason, he incorporated Mindjet Catalyst® in his courses as an organizational and collaboration tool to facilitate student learning.

Challenge

Grisdale wanted to help his students make sense of the extensive and complex material in his physiology and anatomy courses. "The challenge was to help them find ways to organize the material," says Grisdale. The students were required to grasp concepts contextually; and through short answer exam questions, they were asked to show their understanding of concepts and how these concepts interrelate. This ability was key to Grisdale's students' success and comprehension of physiology and anatomy. In addition, Grisdale wanted to empower his students with an ongoing method to remember what they had learned.

Once Grisdale had introduced information mapping in his classroom, he began using MindManager and Catalyst as an educational vehicle in his classes. Using information maps—a visual representation of ideas and information—Grisdale's students could further demonstrate their knowledge of the coursework by identifying (*continued on next page*)



A physiology course map Grisdale created at Ryerson University

the main topic, subtopics, and connecting ideas between various subjects. Combined with Catalyst, a virtual collaboration solution and workspace, the students could then easily create their maps online, share their ideas, and work together with their professor and their peers.

Solution

Initially introduced as a method of enhancing the university's standard online document management system, Grisdale used Catalyst just for his class lectures via its web-based mapping capabilities. After he put his courses online by storing lecture notes, homework assignments, and study aids in Catalyst, his students were able to easily access the material using the same "Course Map" interface that he used in lectures. The students could go to their online course management system, click "Course Map," and go directly to Catalyst. Grisdale says, "The entire course is there in one large map that includes all the textbook chapters, lecture outlines, Microsoft® PowerPoint® presentations, links to videos, everything; this map builds throughout the year."

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In addition, Grisdale created a workspace on Catalyst and conducted weekly tutorials, working with his students to help them build their maps. He taught them special information mapping techniques as well. "I showed students how they can establish relationships, cut and paste directly from the textbook, etc.," he says. "When they start seeing how to use it, then you really start getting some traction."

Grisdale continued to encourage his students to embrace this new way of learning. The quality of a student's map became part of Grisdale's criteria to determine a student's semester grade. He graded his students on their ability to show connections, relationships, and links. "Fifteen percent of the students' grade is based on these maps," reports Grisdale, "and it makes learning complex material fun again."

Results

Using one large information map, that includes the entire course and everything associated with the curriculum, has facilitated Grisdale's course presentations. "It's easier for me to keep track of what I'm teaching and to make changes." However, that is not what Grisdale was most pleased about.

"The biggest change is in my students' ability to answer those short answer questions," he reports. "It's helped them know what to study, giving them the confidence of knowing that they're studying the right material and in the right context." Grisdale was not concerned with map style, but, rather, whether those maps demonstrated that his students saw relationships and used those relationships to see how connections repeat themselves in various topics. "Those are pretty sophisticated concepts they've understood," says Grisdale. "Some of those maps were amazing."

Mapping has also reduced students' anxiety related to not knowing how much and what level of textbook detail was sufficient to study and answer short answer exam questions. The layers and levels allowed by topics, subtopics, and relationships enabled students to answer a high level concept question within the ten minutes allowed during an examination. Grisdale encouraged his students to use maps for studying. He hoped information mapping would actually replace the need to take pages of linear notes, and from what he has observed, students are starting to do just that. "From the anecdotal evidence I'm getting, it seems they're starting to use it for creating notes," he says, "so rather than 50 pages or so of handwritten notes, they've got these maps as a studying tool."

As a result, the students are enthusiastic about information mapping. Many of them are now creating maps to organize their other university courses. Many have already asked Grisdale if they can use maps in their course work the following year. "MindManager and Catalyst allow my students and I to put a context thread to a sea of seemingly unrelated content," says Grisdale. "My goal is for my students to identify and understand concepts by weaving a thread between content details. The context thread makes a concept, and mapping has helped me do that."