

## CASE STUDY

Transforming Student Support in First Year Math Courses at Western Governors University with InScribe



### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Western Governors University (WGU) offers online, competency-based education tailored to the needs of non-traditional students nationwide. WGU's flexible approach allows learners to manage multiple responsibilities while starting courses and completing their degrees at their own pace. While this flexibility is key for many students, it can also mean they find themselves learning and working through difficult concepts on their own. This was particularly true in WGU's Bachelor of Science in Computer Science program, where students struggled to get through the complicated topics in first-year calculus and discrete math courses. Dr. Mike Peterson, Associate Dean and Program Director of Computer Science, recognized this challenge and sought a solution that could improve the support experience for these students, while also accommodating a large student body who are at different stages in the curriculum and require support at all times of the day.

The solution emerged through the integration of InScribe's digital community platform into WGU's course curriculum. The addition of InScribe created a virtual space where students could go any time of day to ask questions, find answers, and seek advice. Now students could continue to learn at their own pace, but when they faced difficult moments in their coursework, they had a dynamic, engaged community they could reach out to for help. Immediately, Dr. Peterson noticed a boost in student engagement and as the course progressed, he saw that more students were mastering the course competencies at a faster pace. Notably, students who actively participated in the community were nearly twice as likely to stay enrolled compared to students who hadn't joined the community.

The integration of InScribe's digital communities into WGU's educational model is more than just a technological enhancement; it's for non-traditional students navigating the complexities of higher education on their unique timelines. By providing real-time, relevant support exactly when and where students need it most, this innovative solution is bridging the knowledge gap in challenging courses like Calculus and Discrete Math. A direct result has been increased student engagement, a richer collaborative learning environment, and higher persistence rates. The initiative reinforces WGU's unwavering commitment to adapting and innovating to meet the diverse needs of its student population, while setting a new standard for what online, competency-based education can achieve.

"InScribe is more than just EdTech; it's a lifeline for our diverse student body. Its seamless integration into our tech stack means that help is just a click away, right when students need it the most."



**Dr. Mike Peterson**  
Associate Dean and  
Program Director of  
Computer Science

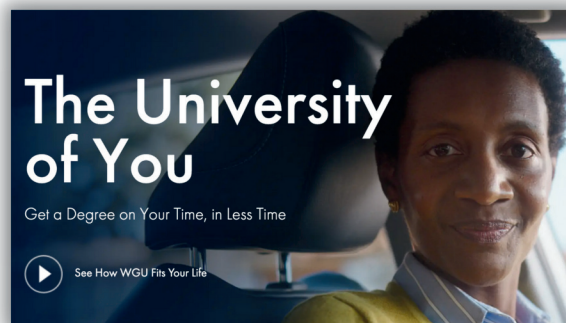


**PARTICIPANTS WERE  
TWICE AS LIKELY  
TO STAY ENROLLED**



## ABOUT WESTERN GOVERNORS UNIVERSITY

Founded in 1997 by the Western Governors' Association, WGU is a fully online, non-profit higher education institution offering sixty post-secondary degrees to more than 150,000 students each year. Since its inception, WGU has been a pioneer of career-relevant, competency-based education. Its flexible, student-centric model allows working adults to earn a degree on their own terms and in less time than most traditional degree paths.



## THE CHALLENGE

One of the fastest-growing schools within WGU is the School of Information Technology which offers a variety of degrees across Cybersecurity, Data Analytics, Cloud Computing, and Network Engineering. One popular degree, the Bachelor of Science in Computer Science, consistently sees concurrent enrollments of over 5,000 learners. Within this program, a series of foundational courses including Calculus and Discrete Math are challenging for many learners. Struggling in these early courses can slow degree progress, and can often trigger larger feelings of anxiety and self-doubt, particularly among students who have been out of touch with math for an extended period of time.

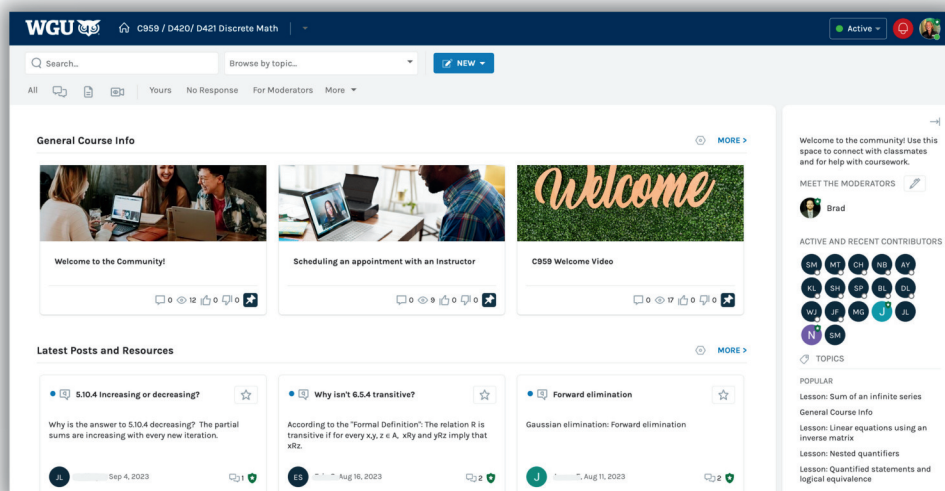
Dr. Peterson recognized this recurring hurdle among his students. WGU's competency-based model allows students to progress at their own pace, therefore studying at all times of the day and evening, resulting in support needs that span well outside of regular working hours. Dr. Peterson needed a solution that could increase his students' access to support while remaining flexible, scalable, and personalized.

## INTEGRATING DIGITAL COMMUNITIES IN COURSE CURRICULUM

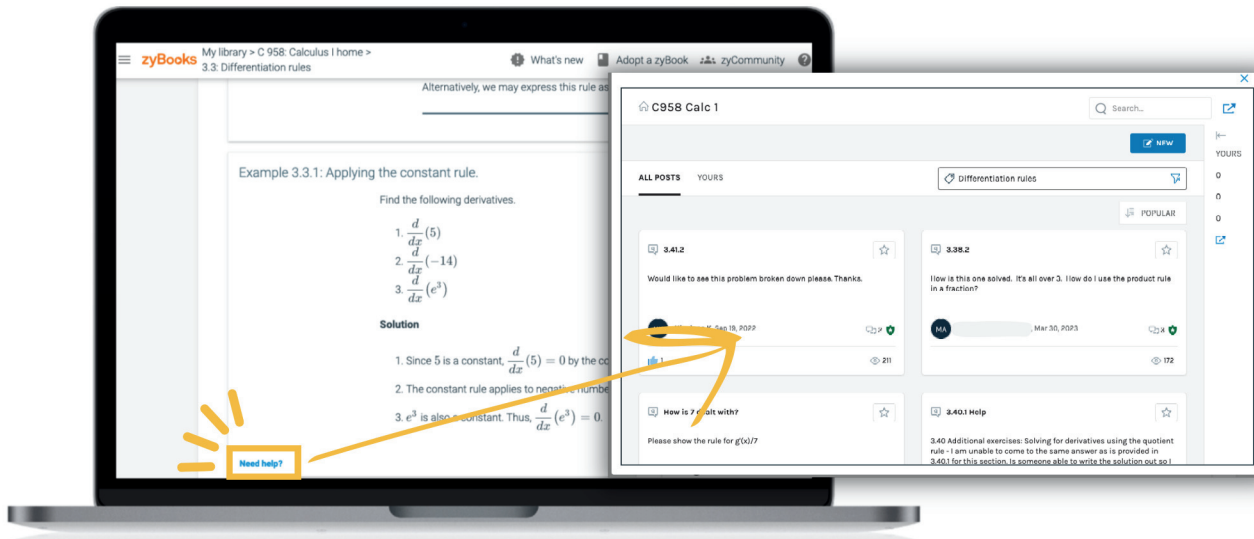
Dr. Peterson found his solution with InScribe's digital community platform. InScribe offered virtual spaces for his students to connect when they had questions and needed help with their course materials. Answers provided to one student were shared with the entire class, so students with similar challenges could benefit from earlier conversations. InScribe not only connected students with faculty but also with each other, facilitating a new model of peer-to-peer support that was previously missing from his courses. WGU's competency-based approach further enhanced the peer support model, allowing students who were further along in the course materials to help those who were just beginning.

**“One of the most significant challenges in a competency-based model is offering real-time support to students who are all at different points in the curriculum. InScribe addresses this issue head-on, allowing for immediate, interactive support irrespective of where a student is in their academic journey,”**

**Dr. Peterson said.**



One novelty of these community spaces were how students accessed them. Dr. Peterson knew it was important to offer support at the exact moment a student was struggling. To accomplish this, the community was integrated directly into the LMS and into WGU's digital courseware product, zyBooks. These integrations ensured that students had fast and easy one-click access to their InScribe community right where they were learning and practicing new skills.



As Dr. Peterson notes, "Students struggling with specific topics can click a 'Need Help' link to access a wealth of information, creating an ecosystem of collaborative problem-solving."

## RESULTS

The integration of InScribe into WGU's courses had a transformative impact on multiple fronts, from enhancing student engagement and academic performance to optimizing the instructor experience. The outcomes of this integration validate the community's capability to address the specialized learning requirements of WGU's diverse, non-traditional student community.

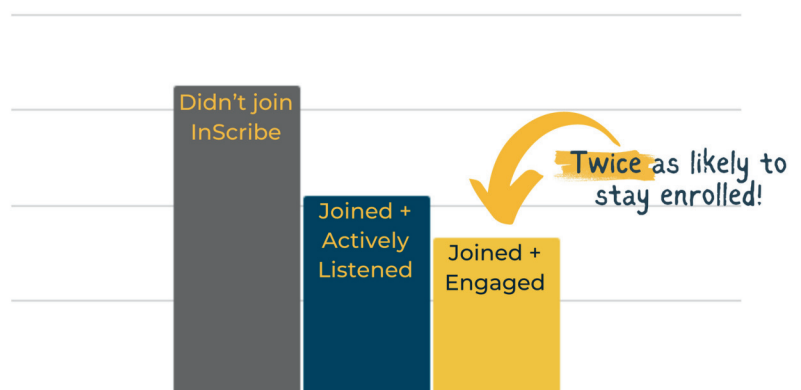
### Student Engagement

The platform has seen a consistent uptick in student use, a trend that has been positively correlated with improved class attendance and lower drop-out rates. Dr. Peterson notes, "Students struggling with the course material are going to InScribe; it serves as one of the initial touchpoints they seek for help." Students who actively engaged in the community were nearly twice as likely to stay enrolled compared to students who hadn't joined the community. The platform's interface is relatable to students, bearing similarity to other social platforms in terms of user engagement. This familiarity has facilitated a kind of academic crowdsourcing, where students not only find answers, but also actively build a sense of belonging by posting questions, responding to peers, and revisiting common topics. The level of ongoing engagement—measured by return visits, posts, and responses—serves as a strong indicator of its effectiveness.

### Academic Performance

"We've observed a substantial difference in the academic performance between students who use InScribe and those who

### Student Drop Rates





don't," says Peterson. The platform has become an essential academic lifeline for students, especially those facing challenges in understanding course material. The addition of peer-based support helps combat the feelings of "imposter syndrome" and lack of confidence that many students previously faced. By connecting students with classmates who share similar challenges, worries, and aspirations, InScribe helps foster an inclusive, supportive environment that contributes to overall student success.

## Instructor Experience

InScribe has revolutionized the way instructors interact with students. What was once a time-consuming process of handling repetitive one-to-one queries has now been transformed into an efficient and scalable one-to-many support system. Instructors can leverage the space as a central repository for questions and resources, allowing them to manage their time better and ensuring all students have access to the same answers and information.

At the heart of this initiative is a commitment to meet non-traditional students where they are—providing support that is both flexible and immediately accessible. This approach to on-demand, online education is paying dividends for the institution through higher student persistence rates. The integration of InScribe into WGU's curriculum supports the institution's ongoing mission to offer practical, scalable solutions that genuinely meet the diverse educational needs of its student body.

---

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Following the successful pilot, the InScribe platform was expanded to courses across the Computer Science and Engineering program, amplifying its reach and impact. Beyond the specialized courses, InScribe has also been rolled out within WGU's general education classes, extending its benefits to an additional 20,000 students across various disciplines. These expansions demonstrate the platform's adaptability and effectiveness across a broad academic spectrum.

The integration of InScribe into WGU's first-year math courses has proven to be revolutionary, particularly for non-traditional students who require more flexible, on-demand support. Spearheaded by Dr. Peterson, this initiative has not only improved the learning experience but also increased student engagement and academic performance. Moreover, it has streamlined the instructor experience, optimizing their time, impact, and reach. By addressing the unique challenges posed by a competency-based educational model, InScribe has filled a critical gap, offering real-time, interactive support regardless of where a student may be in their academic journey.

The pilot's success, evidenced by enhanced engagement metrics and higher persistence rates, has paved the way for the platform's expansion into additional courses and disciplines. It reinforces WGU's commitment to continual innovation, setting new benchmarks for what online, competency-based education can and should be. As we look to the future, the potential of InScribe to further scale its positive impact across the broader educational landscape remains promising, accentuating its role as a vital lifeline in the complex world of higher education.



### Ready to increase persistence rates?

Get started today! Your community can be set up in as little as 10 business days. Plus, your dedicated customer success team will ensure a successful launch and assist with the long-term health of your community.

**Request a proposal at [hello@inscribeapp.com](mailto:hello@inscribeapp.com).**