



Profiles in Success: Miami-Dade County School District



Miami, FL—“I use the Internet for everything, so I knew how important it was to have a website. We are extremely pleased with the way our website turned out, and working with the students was delightful. They did their research about the agency before I met with them, so they were prepared and very professional. The mission of our agency is to improve the lives of children, but in this project, Foster Care Review was the receiver.”

—Ana Maria Pozo, Executive Director of Foster Care Review, Inc.

Miami, FL—Hundreds of students in Florida’s Miami-Dade County Schools are developing skills in project management, collaboration, and communication while gaining professional-quality expertise and certification in web design. It’s all part of the Apple Digital Campus Curriculum in Web Communication and Design. In the fall of 2001, 12 schools agreed to serve as pilot sites called “Apple Web Design Academies”—and are now providing high school students with the skills and knowledge base they need for the real world.

Based on San Francisco State University’s highly successful Web Design Intensive course, Apple’s Web Communication and Design curriculum employs a project-based approach. Students first learn all the components necessary to create a website: competitive analysis, workflow, budgeting, timelines, client reviews, content creation, and how to use all the necessary software applications. After honing these skills, student teams create websites for nonprofit agencies. Following their intensive coursework, students can take the certification examination in web design from the World Organization of Webmasters (WOW).

“We wanted every student to work in each of the ‘real’ roles, whether that was getting client buy-in up front, or doing postproduction testing at the back end,” says Rick Reece, instructional technology education specialist for Miami-Dade County Schools. “Now the students don’t just graduate with a diploma. They walk out with tons of experience working with clients, managing projects, and balancing workloads.”

Campus Commitment

Each of the 12 initial Apple Web Design Academies had to commit at least one teacher for two class periods and promise their school’s participation in the program for two full academic years. Teachers were also required to attend a two-week, in-depth summer training session.

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“Twelve schools signed up from all over the district, which gave us a wonderful cross-section of student ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds,” says Reece. “We also ended up with a great mix of teachers. We have instructors who teach social studies, history, English, PE, print shop, and everything in between.”

Technology Tools Enhance Program

Once the teachers and program participants were identified, each academy installed a lab of 22 Power Mac G4 computers, a Power Mac G4 teacher station, a Power Mac G4 server, and an assortment of scanners, printers, and digital cameras, as well as an LCD projector. The district also opted to provide an iBook laptop to each Web Communication and Design instructor to extend learning to his or her home, and to give instructors a more portable means of transporting digital content.

“One of the biggest surprises of the program was the amount and quality of the core and supplemental materials provided to the instructors,” says Deb Singer, Web Communication and Design instructor for Miami’s Design and Architecture Senior High. “This made instructor learning and lesson preparation quick and easy.”

Connecting with the Community

When the academies officially opened for the Fall 2001 term, each school hosted two classes with an average of 25 students per class. Students were then divided into project teams, and each team selected a nonprofit organization for which they would create a website.

“During the customer interviews and client presentations, the students learned much more than just the variables needed for successful website development,” says Reece. “They acquired invaluable communications and teamwork skills as well as knowledge about their own greater community. We hope that with this information, students will want to continue giving back to the community as they get older.”

The Word’s Out

Requests from other community groups are now pouring in and the academies are considering an expansion of the service to small-business owners in Miami’s most economically depressed areas.

“We’ll approach new clients in the South Florida area soon,” says Reece. “In fact, the teachers’ union in another county has already contacted us and requested that one of our schools develop a website for them. That boggles my mind! It’s incredibly exciting to see what the kids are producing, and the caliber of their work.”

“I use the Internet for everything, so I knew how important it was to have a website,” says Ana Maria Pozo, executive director of Foster Care Review, Inc., one of the Miami-area agencies that benefited from the students’ creativity. “We are extremely pleased with the way our website turned out (visit <http://www.fostercarereview.org/>), and working with the students was delightful. They did their research about the agency before I met with them, so they were prepared and very professional. The mission of our agency is to improve the lives of children, but in this project, Foster Care Review was the receiver.”

Challenges

- Equip students with project management skills
- Teach professional web design in high schools
- Install cost-effective computer hardware and software

Solution

- Apple Digital Campus Curriculum in Web Communication and Design
- Lab of Power Mac G4 computers, Power Mac G4 teacher station, Power Mac G4 server, iBook for each teacher; an assortment of scanners, printers, digital cameras, and LCD projectors

Benefits

- Students learn real-world, collaborative skills
- Students and faculty are excited, engaged by learning multimedia skills
- Academies make invaluable contributions to the greater community

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Looking Forward

Several of the schools have modified the curriculum to better accommodate students' progress. "The students have taken an active lead in the research and development of special project requirements outside the core curriculum," says Singer. "For example, one of our clients, the Historical Museum of Southern Florida, requested a children's game website (visit http://www.historical-museum.org/educate/kids_pages/kidspage.html). The student team independently learned and applied advanced Macromedia Flash Actionscript programming to create interactive games and activities."

It's clear that Miami-Dade students see the value of their digital curriculum. "When I first joined South Dade High School's Apple Web Design Academy, I thought of it as just another way to complete my computer requirement for graduation," says senior Amanda Fraga. "Now, as I return for my second year, I look forward to learning more about web designing. I see the information I gather in this course as valuable knowledge that will give me a competitive edge as I enter the workforce."

Miami Norland senior Nativia Bell adds, "This program is very good in teaching teamwork and leadership skills. It also gives you a feeling of accomplishment. I have been thinking about a career in web design; this class is helping me to prepare."

Exploring New Possibilities

In some cases, students eager to embrace the digital domain volunteered their services for too many agencies, only to be overwhelmed by an avalanche of production work later on. And a few of the site designs were simply too advanced, with the webmasters envisioning sophisticated sequences that proved too time-consuming and difficult to realistically produce. But these were minor speed bumps in comparison to the program's overall success.

"We're really looking at the involvement of the kids, and the products they produce, as opposed to developing specific success metrics right now," Reece reveals. "We feel that there's so much for both the community and the kids to gain. They're learning important skills that will help them no matter what career they choose. To watch these kids in action is just amazing."

Miami Norland junior Peta-Gaye Simpson sums up the feelings of her fellow academy members about the value of their training, saying, "The Apple Academy has done so much for me over the past three months. It has taken me places I never thought I would go, and lets me do things I never imagined doing. I wish to pursue this as a career in the future."



Advice to Other Districts

- Allow sufficient time to enlist teacher, student participation
- Adjust pacing of course to students' capabilities
- Make sure teachers are comfortable with course materials, knowledge base
- Limit number of websites that students will create each term
- Be realistic about level of expertise, length of time required to fulfill site design specs

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