

ABC-CLIO's Online Databases Fulfill a New Role as Core Content Resources for Social Studies Courses

CHALLENGE

Empire High School opened in 2005 with a unique vision:

"It is the mission of Empire High School for students to become self-directed learners through positive relationships. Empire is ... Culture-rich, Innovative, Challenging."

To accomplish their mission, the high school is one of the first to be planned, designed, built, and opened with all-wireless technology, laptops for students, and rich, digital curriculum resources.

SOLUTION

At Empire High School, all social studies classes use ABC-CLIO's online databases as their frontline content resource. As part of the school's founding vision, the social studies department elected to eliminate traditional textbooks in favor of the more dynamic, authentic core history reference resource collection from ABC-CLIO.

Notes Jeremy Gypton, Instructional Team Leader for social studies at Empire, "In more traditional settings, the textbook was the driver of

curriculum. However, we found that textbooks simply did not align appropriately with our state standards. The big difference, in using ABC-CLIO's online databases as our core content resource, is in teacher planning. We plan directly from our state social studies standards. The databases are easily aligned with what we need to do...in sequence and in depth."

Gypton noted that he rarely distributes "hard copies" of materials to his students. Students work on assignments and projects in class, around the campus, and at home, using their laptops. Gypton stated, "There are several ways for students to locate appropriate resources, including the **Eras** section in the history databases. This organizes history entries chronologically, giving students a familiar starting point for their research."

Gypton has structured his American History classes into four themes. Depending on the lesson or time period, he uses the **Eras** section to meet his lesson goals. He also gives students problems to

solve, issues to wrestle with, and activities that build their ability to conduct increasingly sophisticated searches to find materials. He structures students' use of the databases according to what kinds of student work will be required to meet Arizona standards.

Gypton reflected, saying "Some days, the database is just that...a source for reference information. Another day, we may use ABC-CLIO's online databases as the launching pad for a problem or inquiry-based lesson where students are searching for information to support an argument. It's a strategic instructional approach because students are building strong research skills by using technology to find the most relevant information within the databases and at the same time, they're immersed in very high quality history content. I appreciate the flexibility of ABC-CLIO's online databases. Because of the organization and the content, they offer far more than a traditional, more static set of textbook resources."

EVALUATING SUCCESS

According to Gypton, his American Government students use online discussion boards to discuss current news stories that connect to the week's class discussions, often based on the current events information and historical background connections found within ABC-CLIO's online databases. The department's American History students respond to discussion questions online and comment on peers' answers. These responses are part of the courses' formative assessments.

Strategic Teaching and Learning in History

Gypton pointed out that the use of primary source documents figures prominently in his teaching methods, saying "I've always liked to use primary source documents because students have to dig deep into the antiquated language and think their way through it... synthesizing meaning. But finding those unique documents can be a problem. With the ABC-CLIO databases, I can find the primary resources more efficiently, including photos, political cartoons, video, and audio."

When asked about the impact that the ABC-CLIO databases have had on his department's teaching and student achievement, Gypton offered these observations:

- Anecdotal evidence from teacher observations and evaluations points out that educators at Empire are delivering richer, more challenging, more varied lessons in terms of instructional approach and expectations. Gypton notes that teachers have more enthusiasm right along with their students.
- Teachers have also noted that seniors demonstrate greater capability in accessing prior knowledge and applying it to higher level projects and assignments.
- Teachers have also noted that students' research skills have improved as they learn to conduct more targeted research that goes beyond generalized Internet searches.

Gypton notes that the databases have supported his department's goals of teaching students rhetoric, core content, critical thinking and analysis skills, along with strategies for supporting an argument or thesis and deconstructing arguments. He summed it all up by saying,

"I couldn't do all of this three or four years ago. Then, I spent a lot more time trying to put together materials relevant to my lessons. I'm convinced that I teach better using ABC-CLIO's online databases. My lessons

QUICK FACTS

Empire High School Vail School District Tucson, Arizona

- High School, grades 9-12
- 1,042 students
- High school students have a three-year social studies requirement:
 - World History (freshman requirement)
 - American History (junior requirement)
 - Government (senior requirement)
- ABC-CLIO's Online Databases Used:
 - American History
 - American Government
 - Issues: Understanding Controversy and Society
 - United States at War: Understanding Conflict and Society
 - World History: Ancient and Medieval Eras
 - World History: The Modern Era

are richer and more challenging and that's entirely because I have a resource that is genuinely comprehensive and easy to use."



Jeremy Gypton
Instructional
Team Leader for
Social Studies

Note: Jeremy Gypton, Empire High School, is an ABC-CLIO History Fellow. He has been interviewed by National Public Radio, CBS This Morning, ABC, and the Associated Press about his innovative use of digital resources in his history classroom.