



LANGUAGE LEARNING

Profiles

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HOW HOFSTRA UNIVERSITY IS TEARING DOWN THE WALLS OF ITS LANGUAGE LEARNING CLASSES – VIRTUALLY SPEAKING.



This profile was based on an interview with Mustapha Masrour, Ph.D, Teaching Administrator and Director of both the Language Learning Center and Foreign Language Education at Hofstra University.



HOFSTRA
UNIVERSITY

Hofstra University is the largest private college on Long Island, New York, with schools in the Liberal Arts and Sciences, Business, Law, Communication, New College, University Studies, and Continuing Education.

Hofstra University's primary mission is to provide a quality education to its students in an environment that encourages, nurtures, and supports learning through the free and open exchange of ideas, for the betterment of humankind. Hofstra University is fully committed to academic freedom and to the transmission, advancement, and preservation of knowledge for its own academic community and for the community at large. Hofstra University offers undergraduate and graduate programs taught by a research-active and professionally engaged faculty. Academic excellence guides everything the University undertakes.

Foreign language students at Hofstra University work on their language skills anytime, anywhere. But rather than literally tearing down the walls, Hofstra accomplished this virtually with the SANSSpace™ Virtual Language Learning Environment, a web-based software from SANS Inc. that links course management and content delivery for the school's instructors and language learners.

Simply explained, SANSSpace is a software program that securely manages and gives instructors and students permission-based access to course content. This platform allows for 24/7 learning online, on campus, or a blend of both. Instructors post and organize lesson content in dedicated SANSSpace folders that can be easily used by their students. Granular tracking of activity and reports in SANSSpace provides a snapshot of how students are progressing. Through SANSSpace, teachers and students can communicate with other users in real time or asynchronously. But what makes SANSSpace particularly beneficial to language instructors and students is the built-in digital language recorder, allowing them to work with audio and video content, record a dialogue, save, compare, and assess.

"SANSSpace is a way of delivering data to students and other users both on and off campus. It enables a flexible way of working, allowing you to select and gather only the content you need to get started," said Mustapha Masrour, Ph.D, Teaching Administrator and Director of both the Language Learning Center and Foreign Language Education at Hofstra. As a seasoned professor who supports the integration of technology in education, Dr. Masrour was highly influential in adopting SANSSpace for Hofstra's language program, citing advantages for the faculty and the students, as well as for the administrators.

Teaching by modeling versus teaching by theory.

SANSSpace helps teachers monitor and track students' progress. When an instructor logs-on to SANSSpace, whether at home or on campus, he or she can see which students are actively working and tap into a particular student to see how they are doing. "If I notice that a student is listening to the same item several times, then it's telling me that I ought to address this. If I see it as a common occurrence among many of the students, it's telling me I should address the whole class," said Dr. Masrour. "The beauty of the technology is that it helps me help the learner," he added.

By monitoring students' progress on SANSSpace, instructors can address any issue a student is having and respond either by texting or conversing online or by addressing it in person in the classroom. "SANSSpace doesn't just mean I am meeting with my classes virtually; it affects how I deliver information, gather notes, and what I present in the classroom. It is a new way of teaching and learning based on the work completed rather than a required number of hours, so that students can learn at their own pace," said Dr. Masrour. "It allows me to teach by modeling instead of being just theory based," he added.

Dr. Masrour also likes the virtual office hours made possible by SANSSpace. Whether they are in Hempstead or Hong Kong, instructors can be available when students need them most. "Based on my teaching experience, learning is an ongoing process, and a student needs office hours on a regular basis, not just during finals or mid-terms," said Dr. Masrour. "With SANSSpace, my office hours are as flexible as they need to be."

Students work at their own pace, space, and place.

To maintain confidentiality, Hofstra faculty and students access the SANSSpace software through a dedicated portal. Through a simple log-on at www.myhofstra.edu, students can access SANSSpace from anywhere and complete their language assignments. With its user-friendly interface and easy navigation, SANSSpace has an easy learning curve for tech-savvy students, but the lab staff also provides assistance and tutorials to help them use the software most effectively. "Students love the idea of working from home," said Dr. Masrour. "When students go online, they can see which classmates are also online, and if they happen to be working on the same lesson, they can collaborate through chatting or texting. It's a way of being able to study together from two different locations," he added.

From a practical standpoint, anytime, anywhere learning is ideal for commuter students, who can complete language learning courses "without having to sacrifice either their education or their profession," as Masrour put it. "Technology helps students when it does not bind them to be physically connected somewhere," explained Masrour.

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VIRTUAL

"When students aren't locked into a particular time or place, they experience less tension and anxiety and can learn better. And with the online digital recorder, students have more time to speak, listen, and self-evaluate than in a traditional classroom," he added.

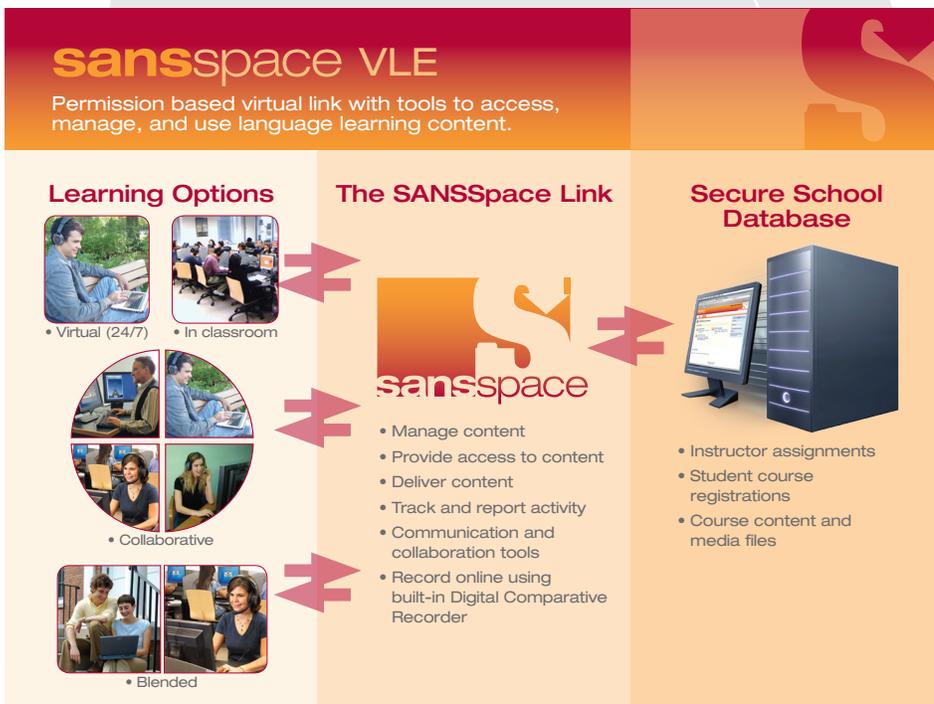
Qualitative learning with quantitative results.

With about 900 students studying foreign languages ranging from Arabic to Swahili, Hofstra's drop-in language lab can be quite hectic. To meet this level of student demand, Hofstra has several hundred annual SANSSpace licenses, which allow for a good number of simultaneous users. "The nice thing about SANSSpace is that you can get any number of annual licenses and increase as needed," said Dr. Masrour. During a recent spring session alone, the SANSSpace log reported 11,000 usage sessions of SANSSpace, both on and off campus.

The tracking and reporting tools are also helpful for administrators at Hofstra. Dr. Masrour sends monthly reports to the Dean and the IT Department, who use these stats and metrics to determine return on investment (ROI) and track usage.

Dr. Masrour also applies SANSSpace in unique ways. University faculty and employees can access language courses to expand their skills, and former students of Dr. Masrour, who have since become language teachers, are invited to post their lessons. Students also use the technology to create portfolios to show their language skills when applying to advanced programs of study and/or to future employers.

By embracing technology in general and SANSSpace software in particular, Hofstra University and Dr. Masrour have built an open learning environment — without walls, borders, or boundaries – virtually speaking. And that leaves the door to future possibilities wide open.



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