Online Assessments for Western Governors University

Key Highlights

155,000+
Registered users

1 Million+
Tests delivered annually

6,000+
High Stakes exams delivered weekly

12,000+
Pre-Assessments delivered weekly

The Client

Western Governors University (WGU) is an online university serving more than 81,000 students across USA. WGU delivers online competency based degree programs to help students succeed at workplace by bridging their skill gap and making them future-ready.

Business Needs

WGU was looking for a robust, secure and reliable assessment solution which would support both low as well as high stake exams. At the same time WGU wanted to enhance the current test management process to meet their futuristic assessment needs.

For instance, item authors were not satisfied with the existing authoring system which had a confusing navigation and a not too great user experience. The authored items had to be field tested and tagged to a competency level before they could be published. Test authors would then use these published items to create tests to assess student competencies and skills for certification.

The constructed tests were desired to be delivered to students in a secure environment through a user friendly and accessibility complaint Interface. Additionally, WGU administrators wanted to track and manage student test sessions with ease. All of this was not present in the solution being used all the university.

Also With different applications present in the WGU eco-system, a seamless access for end users was required without disturbing the current processes and ensuring smooth transition.

Solution

Excelsoft's team worked closely with WGU stakeholders to design and implement an assessment solution to meet the challenges. The proposed solution was based on the SARAS eAssessment platform which is Excelsoft's flagship product. The platform provided a secure environment for delivering High Stakes and Pre-Assessments tests in a reliable and consistent manner while providing a great user experience. Excelsoft's consultative approach coupled with their proven execution methodology led to on time delivery of value-added features.The below touches upon some of these features.

Item Authoring and Banking

SARAS item authoring interface helped authors to create and modify items efficiently. Backed by a robust content management system, media assets could be stored in a repository and used to author simple and complex item types supported in SARAS. The platform made it easier for even novice users to review an item and provide feedback. The authored items could be field tested to validate their difficulty level and tag them to competencies and grades. The items were stored in structured repository and could be used to create tests to assess course competencies.

Test Authoring and Management

SARAS comprehensive set of test authoring features allowed authors to create and configure tests as per their needs. Test authors could create test templates based on a defined logic to select preferred items and use these templates to construct tests. Similarly authors could define random item selection logic for High Stakes tests, to expose different items to students during each attempt. The platform facilitated test administrators to search a test and review and edit it, before publishing on SARAS. Test administrators could choose from a wide-set of configurable test setting options to create and deliver Readiness Tests, Pre-Assessments and High Stakes assessments to students.

With SARAS proven capabilities, robustness, reliability and strong security features, WGU is progressively increasing its usage. As on date, close to a million tests are delivered through SARAS.

Test Player with Intuitive Design

Students took their tests through SARAS test player. The player received much appreciation from students for its user experience and ease of navigation. The test player was enhanced with new feature sets to elevate students' testing experience. A question review pane was added to allowed students to quickly review and navigate to unattempted or bookmarked items during the test session, rather than navigating item-by-item thus saving time. Student also had a custom 'Take-A-Break' feature to take break(s) in between the test sessions.

However during the break, a background test timer would restrict extension of time. To prevent cheating, the students'

won't be allowed to retake previously attempted or viewed items once they resumed test after break. A font magnifier was added to help visually impaired students during test session as they would enlarge text font to view questions. Also, various exam aids such as calculator and notes were enabled for ease.

Exam Monitoring Interface

SARAS exam monitoring interface allowed proctors to monitor students' activities and check for any signs attempts of malpractice/cheating during High stake tests online. Proctors could manage multiple test sessions simultaneously, pause, resume or suspend a session as per their discretion.

Figure 1 SARAS Test Player Screen

The interface kept track of idle users, in-progress students during the test session and also kept a check on the number of breaks student took during test.

In order to facilitate online proctoring for High stake tests, SARAS was also integrated with a 3rd party proctoring tool being used by WGU.

Dashboard to Manage Exam Schedules

Administrators could access a "Student Live dashboard" to get a bird's eye-view of tests schedules and related data to manage and monitor test schedules effortlessly. Also the interface provided granular level data including information around tests conducted, attendee details and student level test schedule data. These schedules were accessible to the administrators to search, identify and force close / re-open test sessions for students who had already submitted the test. A reporting interface would allow administrator to view test responses and student status for live tests being conducted across WGU.

The system was configured to send out periodic mails to administrators on weekly exam count, idle test users and items skipped by test takers and keep administrators updated with relevant information.
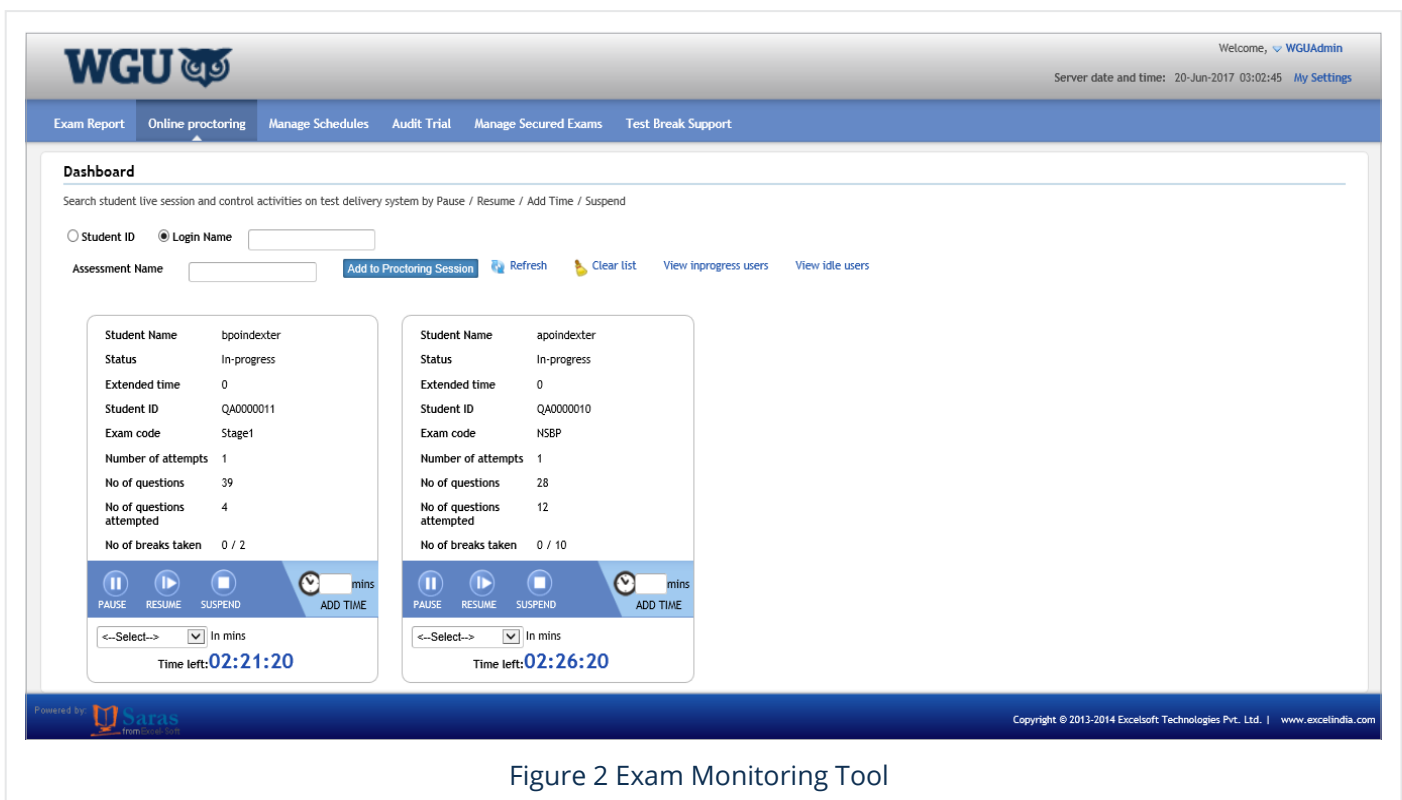

Figure 2 Exam Monitoring Tool

Seamless Access and Other Features

Single Sign On between WGU System and SARAS allowed student to access to their portal using a single username/password and access course related Pre-assessments and High stake tests. Once students took the test, the test data captured by

SARAS was shared with existing WGU reporting system. This test data would be analyzed by student's mentors to create student coaching reports. The reports highlighted the areas of improvement and helped students to prepare for High-stake tests.

Excelsoft's prompt support and timely delivery of custom features was appreciated by WGU team and this contributed to renewal of contract and a long term partnership with WGU.

" The SARAS application has met the main needs of Western Governors University in delivering High Stake exams along with pre-assessments with efficiency. The Excelsoft team has constantly and consistently adhered to the set criteria as well as made the necessary re-configurations and adjustments when necessary. The fast response that I receive when there is an urgent matter is always appreciated."

Lanni VO
Assessment Solutions, WGU

About Excelsoft

Excelsoft provides innovative technology based solutions catering to the needs of educational publishers, universities, schools, government and corporates. With in-depth eLearning domain experience and a strong focus on pedagogy and learning design, our goal is to create compelling learning experiences. We've managed to make a positive impact to the lives of over 25 million users worldwide through our innovative products and solutions.

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