

CASE STUDY: MELISSA SPROCK

GPA Climbs at Indiana Wesleyan's 'The Den' Learning Center

Underprepared students struggle with college-level academics

When Melissa Sprock was hired as Director of Learning at Indiana Wesleyan University six years ago, she faced three challenges. She wanted to help underprepared students boost their grades. She needed to train the new group of peer tutors to help the hundreds of students requesting services. And she had to start the new campus Learning Center.

Her students came from a variety of backgrounds. They started with GPAs or SAT scores below what was usual for Indiana Wesleyan. Many were missing key college skills. For example, some had never written a research paper. Others didn't know how to space out studying to prepare for tests.

"A lot of students coming into the Learning Center would tell me 'I don't know how to study,' and so our first goal is to give them a very practical way to learn the material, so they can succeed in any class," Melissa said.

Without help, many of these students would join the more than 370,000 of their peers who drop out of college every year across the U.S.

Indiana Wesleyan needed to build a Learning Center from the ground up

Melissa knew that in order for students to thrive in college, they needed skills—but she didn't know how to teach them. "I was from Residence Life so I didn't have a background in education," explained Melissa. "I understood that our students needed to learn study skills. But I didn't know how to take all the complex information about how people learn and teach students in a practical way."

Melissa also needed to train peer tutors, so they could coach students effectively. "My struggle as a new learning center professional was that I could talk to students all about the brain, but really what they needed was how to put that information to use. We needed practical tools to give students.



EDUCATOR

- Melissa Sprock, Director of Learning
- 6 years in current role
- Indiana Wesleyan University, Marion, Indiana



STUDENTS

- 64% graduation rate
- 27% first-generation college
- 13,000 students
- 79% receiving need-based aid



CHALLENGE

- Students with low GPA, SATs not prepared for college-level academics
- New Director tasked with starting a Learning Center
- Effective training program needed for peer tutors



SOLUTION

- *Anti-Boring Approach* brings brain-science-based learning to Indiana Wesleyan



RESULTS

- "Foundations" class grades improved by 45%
- Learning Center a model for other universities
- Peer tutors become 'educational allies'

New center based on the science of learning

Melissa learned about Gretchen Wegner's *Anti-Boring Approach for Powerful Studying* through a colleague. It turned out to be exactly what she was looking for.

Melissa explained, "There are so many theories and so many practical tips out there, and Gretchen takes them all and puts them into a tangible, practical, how-to model. Her training was exactly what we needed."

She used professional development funds to train her entire staff. "We did Gretchen's class as an office," Melissa said. "It was kind of like a conference for us."

By the end of that class, coaches and tutors not only understand the science of learning but also how to teach specific skills that students can use immediately for their college coursework.

Effective tutoring strategies lead to better grades

The Learning Center now serves hundreds of students every semester and houses the university's peer tutoring program. In addition, professional staff offer academic coaching and a "Foundations" class to help underprepared students.

And it's working. Recently, ninety-three percent of students in the Foundations class finished their semester in good standing. Students on probation (GPA of less than 2.0) increased their GPA by an average of 0.9—that's almost an entire letter grade in every class.

The Learning Center's reputation is growing. Students know it as "The Den," and enjoy its relaxed, welcoming atmosphere. Even tutors have seen their grades increase.

"I remember a young woman in the nursing program who wanted to tutor for us," Melissa said. "Her grades were passing, but some of them weren't high enough to meet the Learning Center's tutor requirements. But when she went through the Anti-Boring training, her grades improved." Now she shares her knowledge and enthusiasm by tutoring other nursing students.

Tutors become 'educational allies'

The Anti-Boring mini-lecture format made it perfect for training incoming tutors. "We could hand them a set of best practices," Melissa said. And once trained, the staff and tutors had a common language they could use to talk about learning and study skills. That made it easier to help students and share strategies with each other.

"I didn't have to create a curriculum out of nothing," Melissa said. "Gretchen has done such a stellar job with the *Anti-Boring Approach* that I feel really confident using it to train my tutors. We've made it our own and embedded it in everything we do."

Every year, students report that their tutors were a significant part of their academic journey. "It's not just about the content," Melissa said. "It's also about the skills you need to acquire that content. We equip our tutors to become educational allies."

"In the past, tutors spent too much time re-teaching class material," Melissa said. "But, if you're talking more than a certain percentage of the time, then you're the one that's learning and not the student. We were able to reverse that."

Promising resources for universities

Melissa believes other university coaching and tutoring programs would benefit from the Anti-Boring Approach. "It's clear, and it's focused," she said. "For someone to have done the research, developed strategies, and put it together for an academic coach or an instructor—it's a gift."

The Learning Center has changed how Indiana Wesleyan students approach their coursework, and how they view learning. Now students who start college with low GPAs and SAT scores have a roadmap for academic success.

"If we as an institution believe that we can serve students that come in underprepared in any way, we need to work *with* them," Melissa said. "We need to offer services and strategies that will exponentially help them. And here at Indiana Wesleyan, the Learning Center is a place for those students, a place where we fill the gap."

Gretchen Wegner is the industry expert in what every student needs to know about how to study, and what every parent and educator needs to know about how to inspire students to study. Find out more about her anti-boring coaching, courses and community at gretchenwegner.com.