Kurzweil Educational Systems

Customer Profile

Mary Hinson
Using Kurzweil 3000 for her Students to
Transition into College or the Workplace

Turning a Dream into a Reality

Mary Hinson is a Job Developer, Instructor, and Transition Specialist at Catalina
Magnet School in Tucson, Arizona — an inner-city school with approximately 1,500
students from 48 countries, speaking 43 languages. Catalina has one of the highest,
most diverse populations of students in the state with nearly 300 students identified
as Special Needs, and an additional 300 English Language Learners. Mary's focus is
helping high school juniors and seniors with special needs successfully transition
from secondary school to college or the workplace. As part of her job, she regularly
visits local colleges and companies to see how she can best prepare her students to
succeed in their new environments.

Mary observed that while there were a number of excellent resources for graduating
students, including Pima Community College and the University of Arizona's SALT
Center (Strategic Alternative Learning Techniques Center), students were often not
sufficiently motivated or lacked the time to take advantage of those resources. Both
institutions were actively promoting the use of Kurzweil 3000, a versatile reading and
writing software program. As Mary learned more about the program, she became
convinced that introducing Kurzweil 3000 to her high school students would ease
their transition to college or the workplace.

A Woman with a Mission

Mary was determined to find a way to provide her special education students with the
same technology they would encounter after graduation. As a first step, she
established a collaborative relationship with Pima Community College and the SALT
Center to promote the use of programs like Kurzweil 3000 to students and teachers at
Catalina. Mary describes herself as a "go-getter." "Once I make up my mind to do
something, I don't stop until I achieve it." Her philosophy — "No never means no" —
has paid off. "I keep knocking on doors," Mary explains, "until I find the right resource."
By sheer perseverance she's been able to raise over $1.5 million in funding for her
various initiatives.

2005 Kurzweil Teaching Excellence Software Award Winner

To further her mission of getting Kurzweil 3000 technology into her school, Mary
applied for and won a Kurzweil Teaching Excellence Software Award given to K-12
teachers committed to integrating technology into their curriculum to help students
with learning disabilities reach their potential. As an award winner, she received two
copies of Kurzweil 3000, a scanner, and a full day of training. Mary also took her
principal to Pima College to see Kurzweil 300 being used. She had little difficulty in
convincing Catalina's principal to purchase additional Kurzweil 3000 licenses so that
more students could use the software. She then persuaded the head of Information
Technology for Tucson Unified School District to supply the additional computers.
Once the technology was in place, Mary was able to secure funds from the district to
train a handful of special education teachers as well as Catalina's Technology Specialist
on the use of Kurzweil 3000.

A Dream Realized

By February 2006, Kurzweil 3000 was up and running on 20 computers housed in the
computer lab and available to students at all times. Mary made the judicious decision

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Mary Hinson, Teacher,
Catalina Magnet School

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from a Cummings, Director of Assistive
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Arizona Department of Education

of using the lab to teach her daily English classes so her students could learn to use Kurzweil 3000 as they worked on their assignments. In addition to helping struggling readers, Mary found the program's study skills toolbar to be particularly helpful in teaching students to track different types of text, organize their ideas, and turn highlighted text into working outlines.

Soon after Kurzweil 3000 was installed, Mary got permission for students who had Kurzweil written into their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) to use the software to take their AIMS (Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards) test. Simply by using Kurzweil 3000, several students made impressive gains in their scores. One student was able to raise her reading scores from "falls far below" to "meets the standards" — a gain of 300 points. As news of this initial success spread, more and more of Mary's students started to use Kurzweil 3000 for all of their subjects. It was not unusual, Mary recalls, to be stopped by a colleague who wanted her to know that students who were getting low Cs were now getting Bs on papers and quizzes. Even more important than grades, from Mary's perspective, was the fact that her students were functioning more independently and were more self-assured and at ease. "I can't emphasize the importance of this," Mary remarked, "because so many students with special needs are constantly anxious that they won't be able to perform. Kurzweil 3000 has given them the confidence they need."

"It brings tears to my eyes," Mary reflects, "whenever I think about the way Kurzweil 3000 has transformed the lives of my students." Most students, Mary recounts, are hard workers, but because of their learning challenges, their grades often don't reflect their effort or their knowledge. Kurzweil 3000 opened a door to a whole new level of understanding and competency. As one student wistfully remarked, "If I had Kurzweil 3000 all during high school, I could have learned so much more."

Getting the Word Out

Mary already has plans for the fall. In addition to the 20 computers in the lab, she's identified science, social studies, math, foreign language, English, and ELL classrooms to place two or more computers with Kurzweil 3000. While initially focusing on students with special needs, she now wants to give any student who needs it immediate access to the curriculum. Naturally, Mary was eager to share her students' successes with her principal, district superintendent, SALT and Pima partners, as well as with froma Cummings at the Arizona Department of Education. froma Cummings, recently promoted to Director of Assistive Technology and Textbook Accessibility for the state of Arizona, recalls being overcome with emotion when she met with some of Mary's students. "My main concern is making technology available to students who need it," froma remarked, "and so I was delighted with the progress Mary's students had made. My real satisfaction, however, was in seeing how technology had changed the way these students felt about themselves." She was touched by the way Mary's students supported each other and in hearing them say things like, "I used to think I was dumb, but now I know I'm really smart," or "I never picked up a book unless I had to, but now I love to read."

froma encouraged Mary to share her success with the broader community by presenting at regional and national conferences. She believes that successes like Mary's can help teachers see how the right tools can dramatically improve students' grades and their belief in themselves as learners and hopes that other Arizona schools will be inspired to participate in the new Tech for Learning trainings offered by the Arizona Department of Education. Schools interested in integrating Assistive Technology, Universal Design for Learning, and Educational Technology into their curriculum can become Tech for Learning Communities and receive special training and ongoing coaching. This pilot program is designed to increase the number of "technologically savvy" professionals who in turn can assist and recruit others. "We're all about capacity building," says froma, "and teachers like Mary Hinson are our best examples of what we hope to attain statewide."

Katie Enright of Catalina Magnet School Class of 2006, shares her experience

My learning disability is dyslexia, and I have struggled with reading for as long as I can remember. When I read, words and letters tumble up and down and cause me to see things in odd ways. Here's an example. "You see things oen whay bt a person wht disleckca lke me sees them anther whay."

I also know that people with dyslexia can be very smart. I was in National Honor Society and have so many Honor Roll awards that I use them as wallpaper.

Despite my good grades (and I had to work hard for them), I've always done poorly on standardized tests, and I knew this could affect my chances of getting into college. Fortunately, in my senior year my school got Kurzweil 3000: a computer program that you can scan your texts into and it reads it to you in any voice and at any speed you want. I was just learning the program when I was permitted to use it to take the AIMS test — the standardized test we use in Arizona. My AIMS score increased over 400 points and I passed with flying colors!

Kurzweil 3000 has helped me in other subjects as well, especially government, where I had trouble understanding what I was reading and had to guess a lot by matching words in the text to words in the question. I've already arranged through Voc-Rehab to have my own copy of Kurzweil 3000 when I start college in the fall.

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