

## Case Study: Florida A&M University

### Richard A. Ford Jr., Laboratory Coordinator and Professor of Chemistry

Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU) was founded in 1887 with 15 students and 2 instructors. Today, as one of the nine institutions that compose Florida's State University System, FAMU serves the citizens of the state of Florida and the United States through preeminent educational programs, academic excellence, and a commitment to meet the challenges and needs of future generations. And it shows: an October 2007 study sponsored by the National Science Foundation and featured in *Business Week* magazine named FAMU as one of the country's Most Innovative Colleges and Universities.

Richard Ford, lab coordinator and chemistry professor, embodies the kind of innovative thinking and student-first mentality that are the hallmarks of FAMU. As early as 1998, he knew that the key to a more productive lab session—and thereby to more learning—was a thorough, easy-to-follow, and clearly written lab manual. So he wrote his own. And sought a publisher. "I was using another company," says Ford, "but about a week later, met with a representative from Pearson. They were simply more professional. The quality of the products seemed higher, they offered more options, and the end cost to the student was lower. I switched to Pearson."

*There's a big difference between what I used to do in class and what I do now. The video has lightened my load. I can now do a three-hour lab in one and a half to two hours.*

Ford has dealt primarily with the same Pearson custom editor since then—and has nothing but praise for her and his professional experience with her. "She's the highest-quality person I've ever worked with in the chemistry materials and textbook fields," he says. "Whatever she says comes to pass—no question. And it's been that way since Day One. She makes all the arrangements and ensures that all the deadlines are met. Everything is clear. Nothing is left hanging."

Ford's latest project bundles a lab manual and a DVD. The new product benefits students and faculty in a variety of ways. "The most obvious benefit is that the lab is now in sync with the book," says Ford. "Most lab manuals aren't in order; they don't correlate chronologically with what is being taught in the classroom. Creating a class-specific lab manual reduces confusion for students and enables them to do timely

applications that support classroom theory. Learning is contextual and, therefore, easier."

Prior to each lab session, Ford's students are required to preview the upcoming assignment on the DVD. They see how to set up, and they learn exactly what techniques will be used. "The DVD clarifies the assignment for the students," says Ford. "Knowing what to expect reduces the pressure on them. They arrive more relaxed and receptive to the learning experience. It also reduces the number of questions they ask, and that means more time for hands-on learning and being there for them in a productive way."

Instructors appreciate also the customized lab manual from an assessment standpoint. "Before working with Pearson, we were using modules," Ford says. "Students tore out and completed modules that were never changed. When we taught those modules the next semester, the answers could be passed on. Customization enables us to change the questions to more accurately track and evaluate student learning."

The most surprising benefit was cost. "Even with all the benefits and with its being packaged together, it costs less now," he says. "And that works for everyone."

"We're on our fourth edition and couldn't be more pleased," says Ford. "Everything Pearson did was done well—from production to deadlines, to details like sending extra copies to certain instructors. It's all been so great that it inspired our biology department to start its own custom publishing. I've personally promoted it so much that I'm thinking of asking Pearson to hire me when I retire from teaching! Selling their product is that easy."