

Drexel University – College of Nursing

Flexible and Secure Distance Learning & Testing

Drexel University has a long history of innovation in education which dates back to its founding as the Drexel Institute of Art, Science and Industry in 1891. A pioneer in co-operative education, where students alternate periods of study with periods of full-time professional employment related to their academic and career interests.



As Philadelphia's technology university, Drexel has also led the way in integrating the latest technological advances into the learning process. In 1983, it became the first university to require all entering students to have microcomputers, and the school began offering distance learning programs in 1996. Today, its distance learning programs are ranked among the best in business, education, engineering, and library science by U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT. One reason for that ranking is that Drexel online programs follow the same policies and rigorous academic standards as those taught on campus at Drexel University. Not surprisingly, Drexel is the recipient of the United States Distance Learning Association's 21st Century Best Practice Award. As one of the nation's 10 largest online graduate nursing programs, Drexel University's College of Nursing and Health Professions serves more than 1,000 students pursuing online nursing degrees and certificates at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

THE SEARCH FOR A SECURE SOLUTION FOR REMOTE TESTING

About four years ago, Cheryl Portwood, a Clinical Assistant Professor at Drexel University's College of Nursing and Health Professions, was handed a new assignment by Mary Ellen Smith Glasgow, the University's Associate Dean for Nursing and Undergraduate Health Professions. Dean Glasgow asked Professor Portwood to take on the added role of Coordinator of Quality for Distance Programs in Nursing. One of her first responsibilities in that role was to find a way to ensure the security of online examinations, particularly for the Nurse Practitioner program, a popular fully-online degree program that attracts students from up and down the East Coast.

As part of an ongoing program of continuous improvement, Dean Glasgow was adamant that secure testing was necessary to produce the best possible graduates. Having heard about a beta test of Software Secure's Secureexam Remote Proctor at Troy University, Dean Glasgow asked Professor Portwood to look into it.

Professor Portwood began her due diligence efforts, looking at Secureexam Remote Proctor, as well as two other solutions. One was a keystroke dynamics-based system that authenticates users by the manner and rhythm by which they type on a keyboard. The other was based on the user's ability to answer challenge questions.

“At the time, Drexel was using Blackboard for its online exams and taking advantage of the constraints allowed by the Blackboard environment. But there was no way of confirming that the students taking the exam were who they said they were – or what materials they were using during the exam.

Cheryl Portwood
Clinical Assistant Professor
Coordinator of Quality,
Distance Programs in Nursing
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A COMPLETE SOLUTION AND A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

With Securexam Remote Proctor, each student installs patented Securexam software on the PC before testing and connects the Securexam Remote Proctor device to the PC via a USB port. At testing time, the USB device authenticates the test taker's identity and captures each student's testing experience through both audio and video recording. Meanwhile, Securexam Browser locks down the testing tools within the institution's Learning Management System (e.g., Blackboard, Angel, Moodle, WebCT). Securexam Student locks down a standalone word processor and spreadsheet test engine.

As a result, students can take tests wherever it is convenient for them without having to arrange for a live proctor, or go to a testing center and institutions can confirm that the right people are taking the tests and doing so fairly. Test videos for all exams are reviewed to look for any suspicious behavior or violations of testing protocol.

In evaluating the three proposed solutions, Professor Portwood identified four key criteria. The ideal solution had to: positively identify the test taker; effectively scan the testing environment; lock down each PC's browser; and be supported with a full range of services.

"Of the three products, Software Secure's Remote Proctor was the only one that did everything," said Professor Portwood. The decision was made. After testing the product, Drexel began requiring the use of Securexam Remote Proctor for all online courses in the Nurse Practitioner program in the fall of 2007.

EASY IMPLEMENTATION AND USER ADOPTION

The initial deployment and use of Securexam Remote Proctor went smoothly for the most part, according to Professor Portwood. The Software Secure team handled technical support for faculty and students with Professor Portwood, the program director for the Nurse Practitioner program, an administrative coordinator managing the program administration. Later, an in-house tech support consultant joined the team.

"Student acceptance has been fine," said Professor Portwood.

"We had to find work-arounds for a couple of students, but nearly all of them perform the installation easily," said Professor Portwood.

Most students in the program are practicing nurses who hold jobs and work on a variety of schedules. Using Remote Proctor gives them the welcome flexibility at exam time. Course instructors have also embraced the system because they have confidence in the validity of their testing outcomes. Issues related to live proctoring variables have been eliminated. Today, Securexam Remote Proctor is used for all exams in the Nurse Practitioner program.

After several years using Securexam Remote Proctor, Professor Portwood remains a staunch advocate of the system and equally satisfied with Software Secure as a partner. "The company has never been anything than the most professional," she said.

"People go out of their way to be user-friendly and support our programmatic needs. They're a great company to work with."

"I am absolutely committed to secure testing," she said. "I see it as the key underpinning for online education. Securexam Remote Proctor has been a good solution for us, doing what we needed it to do."

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Ultimately, for Professor Portwood, the choice of using Remote Proctor comes down to quality and Drexel's appreciation for the real-world ramifications of graduating nursing students who fully understand the course material and are prepared to take a certification exam.

"It's the nature of our work," she said. "It's a high-stakes exam and we have a responsibility to turn out quality. Remote Proctor is a great partner in ensuring the quality of our product – advanced practice nurses who will be diagnosing and treating patients."

ABOUT SOFTWARE SECURE

Software Secure is a pioneer and market leader in secure, computer-based testing solutions. With an unrivaled commitment to supporting its customers, Software Secure provides proven, patented solutions for traditional and distance learning environments, as well as professional certification organizations. Academic institutions, as well as organizations overseeing mid and high-stakes testing environments, rely on Software Secure's expertise for testing solutions that exceed regional and national accreditation standards as well as federal regulation requirements, and facilitate the responsible use of technology in education.



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