Customer Spotlight Q&A:
Northeastern Illinois Public Safety Training Academy (NIPSTA)

Ken Koerber, Fire & Technical Rescue Program Director

Overview

Located in the Chicago metropolitan area, the Northeastern Illinois Public Safety Training Academy (NIPSTA) is an intergovernmental agency comprised of municipalities, fire protection districts, and other organizations that have combined to create a regional, state-of-the-art safety training facility. NIPSTA is designed to meet the needs of its members by providing ongoing training of fire, police, public works, and other public safety personnel. As of 2019, NIPSTA trains around 8,800 students across all disciplines. They have almost 100 part-time fire service instructors, most of whom are full-time fire fighters.

As the Fire & Technical Rescue Program Director at NIPSTA, Ken Koerber provides oversight for NIPSTA's Fire, Fire Officer, Tech Rescue, and HazMat Training programs as assigned and in accordance with all prescribed guidelines, protocols, and objectives from the NIPSTA administration, Illinois State Fire Marshal, and any other agencies providing curriculum guidance or oversight. Mr. Koerber conducted this Q&A to share his experiences with Navigate, an online learning platform from the Jones & Bartlett Learning Public Safety Group.

Key Outcomes

- Helped fill Phase I 40-hour classroom/online learning requirement in accordance with the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules (JCAR).

- Achieved a 100% pass rate on Navigate final exams.

- Reduced the burdens of managing a paper test program through Navigate quizzes and gradebook.

- Improved student experience with eBook, audiobook, and other easy-to-access study materials.

- Freed up classroom time to focus on hands-on skills with self-study assessments ("flipping the classroom").

- Eased the transition to remote learning during COVID-19 pandemic with Interactive Lectures.

What led you to consider Navigate for your organization?

We have been using the Advantage Access Package for *Fundamentals of Fire Fighter Skills and Hazardous Materials Response, Fourth Edition* for about three years now in our Basic Operations Firefighter Academy. We've also used PSG textbooks in our advanced and fire officer programs. NIPSTA recognized that we are serving a new generation of learners. For example, many students prefer reading eBooks over having to lug a heavy textbook around with them. They are becoming more "tech savvy" and like having their learning resources easy to access on their electronic devices. As a result, we feel the need to continually adapt to remain relevant and meet the needs of our "new learners." At the same time, there are still quite a bit of "old school learners" who rely on physical textbooks and traditional study techniques. Therefore, we chose Navigate because we felt it gives NIPSTA the ability to best serve both types of learners and maintain a positive learning environment for all.

What are some of the Navigate tools that your students and instructors have found to be the most useful?

More and more of our students seem to prefer reading the material via the eBook, which contains links, audio features, and end-of-chapter quizzes. We've also found that a growing number of students, many of whom have busy personal and professional lives, like the audio book feature so they can listen to a reading of the book "on the go."

Personally, I think one of the most important factors an instructor needs to understand is that all students tend to learn differently. Having the ability to deliver more than one method of instruction for the NFPA requisite knowledge and skills via Study Center flashcards and video is another important tool for student success.

Additionally, on a periodic basis, we learn of students in our programs who have documented or undocumented learning disabilities. When students notify staff of documented learning disabilities, we can "prescribe" additional exercises via Navigate learning tools. In cases where we see students struggling academically, we can intervene quickly and use Navigate learning tools to improve knowledge retention and academic performance.

How has Navigate helped with your program's testing capabilities?

For training facilities with limited resources, management and security of testing can be overwhelming at times. Having the ability to administer quizzes, mid-terms, and final exams electronically —while maintaining security and accountability — is very important to us.

From the students' perspective, we are finding that many students not only read content via smartphones and tablets, but also feel comfortable taking quizzes and exams on these devices as well. We, as well as our students, also like that test results are returned immediately with remediation on where to find the correct answers within the chapters and objectives.

Specific to our region, the Illinois Office of The State Fire Marshal ("OSFM") requires "end-of-course exams" to be administered at the end of all state-certified classes. Not having to manage a variety of paper tests not only saves time, but also ensures "study guides" are not created and shared. The Illinois OSFM accepts Navigate exams in lieu of creating and submitting "end-of-course exams" for course approval.

Additionally, the Illinois OSFM is in the process of transitioning to electronic testing. We have found that using Navigate for testing helps prep students for electronic OSFM exams. Students also have the benefit of taking more practice tests via Navigate. We think this is particularly helpful for "old school pen and paper" learners in becoming more comfortable for OSFM and other challenging electronic tests.

"We have found that using Navigate for testing helps prep students for electronic OSFM exams. Students also have the benefit of taking more practice tests via Navigate. We think this is particularly helpful for "old school pen and paper" learners in becoming more comfortable for OSFM and other challenging electronic tests."

Has your organization customized its Navigate courses at all? If yes, can you provide some examples?

Yes. We've added some customized course blocks which, combined with all the other features I've mentioned so far, creates a powerful learning tool. The following is a brief example of some customizations we've added with the course blocks tool:

- ✅ Student rosters and company assignments
- ✅ Student reports and research assignments
- ✅ Student policy manuals, guidelines, syllabi, and schedules
- ✅ Student pre-assignments, including important COVID-19 information and videos
- ✅ Video scenarios with written "How Would You Handle?" Q&A assignments
- ✅ Custom videos specific to local course skills that students can watch prior to campus hands-on demonstrations as well as after
- ✅ Attendance tool for Interactive Lectures

You mentioned Interactive Lectures. How have they benefited your programs?

NIPSTA began using Navigate Interactive Lectures in the Spring of 2020 as part of our distance learning efforts during the current COVID-19 health crisis. We quickly discovered three key advantages.

The first advantage is consistency in delivery of learning materials. We feel that classroom lectures are only as good as the instructors presenting the materials. Large training facilities tend to have large instructor cadres with varied availability and skill sets, which can sometimes lead to inconsistency in how information is presented. We've found that the use of Interactive Lectures better ensures that NFPA requisite knowledge and skills are delivered as they are intended — consistently, with repetition and knowledge checks to ensure student compression.

> **"We've found that the use of Interactive Lectures better ensures that NFPA requisite knowledge and skills are delivered as they are intended – consistently, with repetition and knowledge checks to ensure student compression."**

The second advantage revolves around management and automation. Using the example of our Basic Operations Firefighter program and the need to safely address classroom lectures during the current health crisis, the Interactive Lectures for "Essentials" was our best option. We had a few options available to us (Zoom, Adobe Classroom, etc.), but since we were already using and familiar with Public Safety Group resources, the Interactive Lectures made sense. With minimal preparation, we were able to convert our normal classroom schedules to Public Safety Group Interactive Lectures. This option not only saved time and money, but also provided a safer learning environment for students, while protecting campus staff during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lastly, there has been a lot of talk about flipping the classroom, and it's been said that, "Your brain can only take what your butt can take." We were seeing comments in our end-of-course student critiques like, "Less death by PowerPoint," or "We can read slides on our own." As a result, we are constantly looking for ways to provide a better, more engaging learning environment for our students.

With Interactive Lectures and other Public Safety Group tools, more students are reporting that they like the convenience of being able to engage with this material in a more comfortable (and safe) setting and at their own learning pace. In terms of learning during the current health crisis, we are also finding that students may be less comfortable and more distracted in a classroom where distancing and face coverings are required. Interactive Lectures help overcome this problem by truly empowering remote learning.

> "With Interactive Lectures and other Public Safety Group tools, more students are reporting that they like the convenience of being able to engage with this material in a more comfortable (and safe) setting and at their own learning pace."

Are there any closing words you'd like to share for the Jones & Bartlett Learning Public Safety Group team?

We encourage the Jones and Bartlett Learning Public Safety Group to continue to develop additional Interactive Lectures for their line of fire, fire officer, and special operations textbooks. We've had great experiences with your products, and we look forward to seeing what you produce in the future.

JONES & BARTLETT LEARNING
An Ascend Learning Company

PUBLIC SAFETY GROUP
A DIVISION OF JONES & BARTLETT LEARNING

JONES & BARTLETT LEARNING
NAVIGATE