

# STRAYER STUDIOS

Increased Student Engagement and Success through Captivating Content







**THE STRAYER STUDIOS CREW  
ON LOCATION WITH RON  
FINLEY, THE GANGSTA  
GARDENER, IN LOS ANGELES.**



# AS THE WORLD BECOMES MORE DIGITAL, ONLINE EDUCATION WILL CONTINUE TO EVOLVE AS A FLEXIBLE, IN-DEMAND LEARNING OPTION,

especially for students whose needs do not align with traditional education models. However, with the rapid growth of online learning, a new challenge arises: how to guide student success from a distance.

Recognizing that student engagement with course material leads to stronger student success, Strayer University launched Strayer Studios, an in-house film production unit that blends documentary films with course curriculum to bring lessons to life.

## RESULTS

When students experience Strayer Studios content in their online classes, they are more engaged, more satisfied, and more successful:



### INCREASED ENGAGEMENT

**6.3%** increase in engagement through submitted coursework



### IMPROVED RETENTION

Student persistence to the next quarter increased **5.5%**



### STUDENT SATISFACTION

**88%** or higher rating on overall effectiveness



### CONSISTENCY IN STUDENT ATTENDANCE

**10%** fewer students dropped courses

Learn more about the Strayer University innovation that uses story-telling and compelling video content to improve student success. ►



**PREPARING TO INTERVIEW  
DEREK HAMILTON, CRIMINAL  
JUSTICE REFORM ADVOCATE,  
FOR ENG 115 ENGLISH  
COMPOSITION**

## SITUATION

Despite the rapid shift from in-person to online education, curricula and learning models have not adapted to the online space, leading to poor academic performance and lower course completion rates for online learners. In fact, the GPAs of students taking online courses lag behind those of their in-class-only peers by nearly 11 percent, according to an analysis from *Inside Higher Ed*.<sup>1</sup>

Yet online education remains a vitally important manner in which to serve non-traditional students, who face a myriad of obstacles toward academic achievement. Through in-depth analysis, Strayer University measured how students and faculty interacted with online content and what series of interactions resulted in students' success. From this testing, **Strayer learned that one essential variable affects academic performance: student engagement with course content.**

The need for online courses that feature interesting, interactive content is, thus, a critical concern for educators seeking to improve student performance. Unfortunately, many online courses are not engaging—students often find the courses to be boring because they are nothing more than lecture videos.

**11%**

**GPAs OF ONLINE  
STUDENTS** lag by  
11% compared to  
in-class-only peers.



“The challenge was, how do we grab a student’s attention? We thought a lot about binge-viewing and not being able to wait for the next episode of a show. Why can’t we do that with academic content?”

— **BRIAN JONES,**  
President, Strayer  
University

<sup>1</sup> Roll, Nick. “Is Online Ed Missing the Mark?” *Inside Higher Ed*, June 12, 2017, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/06/12/study-questions-effectiveness-online-education-risk-students>. Accessed October 16, 2017.

## SOLUTION: STRAYER STUDIOS

Without an approach that improves engagement, online learners will continue to fall short of their current potential.

Seeing the engagement exhibited by those who binge-watch their favorite television show or online series, Strayer University leaders wondered whether cinematic, academic content could achieve a similar increase in engagement with course material.

Strayer recruited Emmy Award-winning filmmakers, producers, editors and cinematographers and paired them with a team of learning designers, technologists and faculty to launch **Strayer Studios, a new multi-platform production team that puts story-telling and compelling video content at the heart of course material.**

The central challenge Strayer Studios set out to solve was to make online education as engaging as an in-person classroom experience—or as engaging as a student’s favorite show. By drawing students into a course with content that is relatable and visually engaging, Strayer Studios helps introduce difficult course material and **demonstrates how in-class learning can be applied to real-world scenarios.**

Never before has this type of content been available through online education platforms at this scale and in this format.

**The Strayer Studios platform, launched in 2015, includes several key features:**

### BINGE-WORTHY VIDEOS



The human brain is hard-wired to learn through story. So, the Strayer

Studios team set out to find stories that would resonate with students. For example, to augment traditional readings about sociology, the Studios team partnered with Ron Finley, a community activist known as the “Gangsta Gardener.” Together, they created documentary-style episodes to demonstrate how one community used urban gardening and increased access to fresh produce as catalysts to address inequality.

### DIRECT APPLICATION TO LEARNING GOALS

After students watch the documentary films in each course, additional videos are provided to make the connection between the film and the curriculum. These videos reinforce specific facts and lessons to help students connect the stories with the academic content.



### REIMAGINED USER EXPERIENCE

The online learning platform for Studios courses was also redesigned to complement the films and keep students engaged. Strayer reshaped and customized off-the-shelf learning platforms to offer an online environment that incorporates data-driven best practices in user-experience, graphic and web design.



# INITIAL RESULTS

By examining online education through this new lens, Strayer faculty found that quality content drove important markers of student success, including class attendance, completion of assignments and participation in class discussion.

With a total of 30 courses restructured to the Studios style, the concept is still relatively new to Strayer University. Student feedback, however, is promising and marked by stronger persistence (advancing to the next course) and improved enthusiasm for course activity.

“I absolutely loved the Strayer Stories videos. I was intrigued by real live people telling their success stories. This makes you very motivated and determined. I love having that visual aspect of learning.”

— ELENA ROQUE RODRIGUEZ

## Initial findings include:

### INCREASED STUDENT ENGAGEMENT



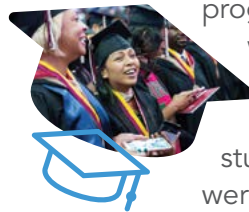
Typically, viewership of online educational videos starts out high, then declines. However, in Studios courses, approximately 85 percent of students watch videos from beginning to end, for the duration of the course. Strayer also saw a 6.3 percent increase in submitted coursework in Studios courses.

### CONSISTENCY IN STUDENT ATTENDANCE

On average, 10 percent fewer students dropped courses when they included Strayer Studios content—a critical data point given drop rates are higher among the non-traditional student population.



### IMPROVED LONG-TERM RETENTION RATES



In every pilot Studios course, more students progressed towards degree attainment compared to students who were engaged in traditional course work. In fact, in those pilots, student persistence to the next quarter increased 5.5 percent when students were served Strayer Studios video content.

### STUDENT SATISFACTION

On average, students gave Studios courses an 88 percent or higher rating on whether the courses provided effective real world examples, were intellectually challenging or were effective overall.







THE STUDIOS  
TEAM SHOWS  
RON FINLEY HOW  
HIS STORY IS  
BEING FEATURED  
IN SOC 100 INTRO  
TO SOCIOLOGY

## OPPORTUNITY FOR CONTINUED ANALYSIS

As Strayer students continue to engage with the Studios platform, Strayer will obtain additional opportunities to trace overall retention and degree attainment rates. The University estimates that 52,000 classes will have been delivered in the Studios format by the end of 2017 — a number that Strayer expects to double by the spring of 2018.

As more Studios courses are developed and serve more students, **Strayer will continue to test and respond to feedback** with the continued goal of improving student engagement and, ultimately, student success.



### Using Real-Time Feedback to Improve Content

In most traditional classrooms and online courses, instructors rely on end-of-course surveys to obtain student feedback. However, that is often too late for the faculty member to implement the feedback by the start of the next term.

Because the Strayer Studios platform provides real-time data about each student interaction with the course material, Strayer can incorporate feedback and adapt course material much faster, often immediately.

This agile response to student feedback ensures course content is meeting the learning needs of the students currently enrolled in the course in addition to future students.

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### **About Strayer University**

Founded in 1892, Strayer University is an institution of higher learning for working adult students. It offers undergraduate and graduate degree programs in business administration, accounting, information technology, education, health services administration, nursing, public administration, and criminal justice.

Strayer University is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104 (267-284-5000, [www.msche.org](http://www.msche.org)). The Commission is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. For more information, visit [www.strayer.edu](http://www.strayer.edu).

