Mark Hopper:
MORE EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE PROFESSING

"We're asked to do more with less, like most colleges these days," remarks Mark Hopper, Associate Professor of Psychology at Loras College in Iowa. That's a common refrain, but Hopper decided to rise to the challenge by finding an efficient way to give students in his writing-intensive courses the feedback they needed without compromising the quality of his commentary.

"My colleagues were giving students less feedback because Loras has moved away from multiple choice tests and toward more writing," Hopper explains. "I didn't like that. I wanted to give them more feedback."

And that's when he brought in a dragon – Dragon NaturallySpeaking, that is – to slay his problem. After a quick training session, Hopper soon put Dragon to work: using the review function in Microsoft Word to insert comments in students' papers; composing and responding to emails; inserting feedback in essays written by students in the college's online course management system; jotting lecture notes before class; and writing department announcements and memos.

"At a minimum," he says, "I can double what I used to do in the same amount of time. For example, my students' case study papers average 8-10 pages in length, and each student writes four of those per semester. It used to take me an hour to read one and produce feedback. Now I can do four to five per hour, and I can give more feedback than before. And where I used to get those papers back in three to four weeks, now it's 7-10 days."

Hopper continues: "All of a sudden, students were getting much more feedback than they had expected in the past. And my colleagues have asked me, 'How do you get all this work done?' I've told them about Dragon, and they're suitably impressed."

He adds: "Loras is a laptop campus, which means all incoming students need to have a laptop when they start school. We're tech savvy here, so why not use Dragon to meet our workload demands?"

Expanding the Scope
Hopper has also found other ways to use Dragon, such as in a class that produces practice counseling videos. He watches a video and when he finds a spot where he wants to give feedback, he pauses it and dictates what the student said, complete with a time stamp, into a Word document. Then he adds his comments, so the student can see exactly where in the video they made the statement and understand the context of Hopper's feedback.

He has only just begun to get started with Dragon, too. In the future, he plans to use the speech recognition software to take notes as he reads research sources for his writing; he plans his first submission in 2012. He also wants to employ Dragon's speech-to-text capability to capture his lectures, which he describes as narratives, and post them online for his students.

In addition, he has his sights set on writing a blog for his Positive Psychology class – tentatively titled "Hopper is Gettin' Happy" – that will provide adjunct reading material. "I couldn't even think about doing that if I had to type every entry," Hopper notes.

Reflecting on the positive impact Dragon has made on his teaching and the ways it can help him further in the future, Hopper remarks: "Dragon NaturallySpeaking has allowed me to become a more efficient and effective professor."