Online Education White Paper

QEP Selection Committee

October 21, 2015
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St. Petersburg College currently has a number of initiatives designed to facilitate student success, including the College Experience, Smart Start, and Finish Strong, with multiple efforts and resources focused on student retention, persistence and helping students to finish what they started. Although these initiatives are applied to the college as a whole, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to equally target all student populations or modalities. This paper will focus on one specific modality, online education.

SPC has long recognized the importance and viability of online education. Online courses make up a large percentage of SPC course offerings. Between Fall 2011-12 and Fall 2014-15, Business Intelligence data shows that students who took at least one online course accounted for approximately 34-38% of enrollment. Online course offerings continue to grow at SPC, and made up almost 21% of all courses offered for the Fall 2014-15 term.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Term</th>
<th>Online</th>
<th>Blended</th>
<th>Face-to-Face</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall term, 2011-2012 (445)</td>
<td>35,057</td>
<td>8,177</td>
<td>57,435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall Term 2012-2013 (460)</td>
<td>34,695</td>
<td>7,147</td>
<td>53,548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall Term 2013-2014 (0475)</td>
<td>34,107</td>
<td>6,810</td>
<td>52,105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall Term 2014-2015 (0490)</td>
<td>35,914</td>
<td>6,404</td>
<td>52,260</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The college has a strong commitment to quality online education as demonstrated through the Online Revitalization initiatives and the adoption of the Quality Matters models for quality online education. However, the fact remains that online success rates have consistently been lower than Face-to-Face and Blended Learning at SPC, as shown below in data from Business Intelligence:

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Online</th>
<th>Blended</th>
<th>Face-to-Face</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall term, 2011-2012 (445)</td>
<td>73.6%</td>
<td>73.6%</td>
<td>74.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall Term 2012-2013 (460)</td>
<td>73.4%</td>
<td>73.9%</td>
<td>75.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall Term 2013-2014 (0475)</td>
<td>74.9%</td>
<td>78.8%</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall term 2014-2015 (0490)</td>
<td>74.0%</td>
<td>78.2%</td>
<td>77.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What drives student success in online learning? It seems logical to start with ensuring that students are *college ready*, particularly *academically ready* as they begin (Wolff, Wood-Kustanowitz, & Ashkenazi, 2014), a step that may be skipped in Florida given the 2014 legislative move (SB1720) making placement testing prior to college enrollment optional. Of further concern, 2014 Florida SAT data indicated that only 36.8% of SAT takers met the SAT College and Career Readiness Benchmark (College Board, 2015).

It is commonly accepted that student success in online education requires different skills than might be required for traditional classroom courses. In addition, a number of general assumptions may work to set students up for unsatisfactory online experiences, including:

a. Students have basic computer skills (Harrell & Bower, 2011)
b. Students have *consistent* access to computer technology
c. Students have proficient reading and writing skills (Fike & Fike, 2008)
d. Students are able to articulate thoughts, ideas and insights in writing
e. Students have effective time management skills
f. Students have the skills and aptitude to successfully complete online courses (Liu, Gomez, Yeu, 2009)
g. One size (instruction) fits all – homogenous student demographic (Puzziferro & Kaye, 2009)
h. Students *prefer* less interaction with instructors and peers (Woosley & Miller, 2009)
i. Students choosing online courses are motivated, independent learners
j. Students understand academic honesty principles and how to avoid plagiarism
k. Students have made a personal skill assessment of their ability to be successful in online courses

Failing to account for these assumptions or have plans in place to provide adequate support for students who do not match them, ultimately may set students up for failure in the online environment. Students need appropriate tools, strategies and support if they are expected to engage, persist, and be successful.
References


