Online Education White Paper

QEP Selection Committee

October 21, 2015

Online Education White Paper

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.

	College-Wide Enrollment by Modality: Fall-to-Fall Comparisons		
Academic Term	Online	Blended	Face-to-Face
Fall term, 2011-2012 (445)	35,057	8,177	57,435
Fall Term 2012-2013 (460)	34,695	7,147	53,548
Fall Term 2013-2014 (0475)	34,107	6,810	52,105
Fall Term 2014-2015 (0490)	35,914	6,404	52,260

Source: Pulse BI; Dashboard: Academic Program Viability Report; Report: Performance; accessed 9/28/2015

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:

	College-Wide Success Rates by Modality: Fall-to-Fall Comparisons		
Academic Term	Online	Blended	Face-to-Face
Fall term, 2011-2012 (445)	73.6%	73.6%	74.8%
Fall Term 2012-2013 (460)	73.4%	73.9%	75.7%
Fall Term 2013-2014 (0475)	74.9%	78.8%	77.8%
Fall term 2014-2015 (0490)	74.0%	78.2%	77.7%

Source: Pulse BI; Dashboard: Academic Program Viability Report; Report: Performance; accessed 9/28/2015

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

College Board. (2015). *2014 College Board program results: Florida 2014 Results*. Retrieved
    October 15, 2015 from https://www.collegeboard.org/program-results/2014/florida

Fike, D. S., & Fike, R. (2008). Predictors of first-year student retention in the community
    college. *Community College Review, 36*(2), 68-88. doi:10.1177/0091552108320222

Harrell, I. L., & Bower, B. L. (2011). Student characteristics that predict persistence in
    community college online courses. *American Journal of Distance Education, 25*(3),
    178-191. doi: 10.1080/08923647.2011.590107

Liu, S. Y., Gomez, J., & Yen, C-J. (2009). Community college online course retention and final
    grade: Predictability of social presence. *Journal of Interactive Online Learning, 8*(2),
    1541-4914.

Puzziferro, M., & Kaye, S. (2009). Challenging our assumptions about online learning: A
    vision for the next generation. *Distance Learning, 6*(4), 9-20.

Wolff, B. G., Wood-Kustanowitz, A. M., & Ashkenazi, J. M. (2014). Student performance at a
    community college: Mode of delivery, employment, and academic skills as predictors of
    success. *MERLOT Journal of Online Learning and Teaching, 10*(2), 166-178.

Woosley, S., & Miller, A. (2009). Integration and Institutional Commitment as predictors   of
    College Student Transition: Are Third Week Indicators Significant? *College Student
    Journal,* 43(4), 1260-1271.