



Smarthinking online tutoring educator study

A look at the impact on student success and persistence at Valencia College

Key findings:

- Students who used both face-to-face and online tutoring had the highest success rates.
- Students who used tutoring of any type appeared more likely to be retained while students who used both types of tutoring appeared to have the highest rates of retention term-to-term and year-to-year.
- Students identified the prompting of an instructor as the most influential factor in their seeking tutoring assistance.

Setting

Serving 68,000 students on seven campuses in Orange and Osceola counties, Valencia College is a public state college nationally recognized for its excellent degree completion, transfer-to-university, and placement rates. Review more facts about Valencia College [here](#).

Valencia College offers face-to-face tutoring at each campus. Online tutoring is available to all Valencia students through the college's student portal.



School name: Valencia College, Orlando, FL



Course name: All courses



Course format: Face to face, online, hybrid



Course materials: Smarthinking online tutoring



Timeframe: 2014–2017



Educator: Karen Reilly, Campus Dean of Learning Support; Laura Blasi, Director of Institutional Assessment; Donna Kosloski, Institutional Research Analyst



Results reported by: Lauren Gill, Sr. Results Manager, Readiness, Progression, & Employability

Challenges and Goals

Annually, Valencia College conducts an Academic Initiative Review, a thorough evaluation of one area of the college. For 2017, Valencia's Learning Leadership Council elected to focus on all aspects of tutoring, including face-to-face tutoring, campus writing centers and math labs, and Smarthinking™ online tutoring. The AIR explored the impact of tutoring services across the college in areas of course success, retention, tutoring modalities, and frequency of tutoring by examining both quantitative and qualitative data. As part of a commitment to continuous improvement, the AIR aimed to answer questions like:

- Are tutoring services linked to course success?
- Does student learning occur as a result of tutoring?
- Are tutoring services meeting the needs of special populations of students?
- How can tutoring services be improved?

Campus Dean of Learning Support Karen Reilly states, "We had discussed a study of Smarthinking's impact for some time, as a means to generate evidence of what is working, for whom, and under what conditions. The Academic Initiative Review provided a perfect opportunity for a thorough evaluation of all of our tutoring modes, including Smarthinking. We could then use that evidence to more effectively communicate the benefits of student-tutor engagement to our faculty and student communities."

Implementation

Smarthinking online tutoring services are available to all Valencia students through LMS single sign-on and the student portal; face-to-face tutoring is offered at every campus in the form of drop-in tutoring centers, math labs, and campus writing centers.

Karen Reilly notes,

"We value Smarthinking as an important online component of our overall tutoring and academic

support strategies for our students. We did not institute any special or additional marketing of Smarthinking prior to this evaluation of impact. The Academic Initiative Review gave us the opportunity to understand the level of awareness of tutoring among students and faculty, the level of engagement, and the impact of tutoring services. Going forward the evidence will help us to better deploy tutoring services for maximum impact on student success."

Results and Data

Data analysis was commissioned by Valencia's Institutional Research team and independently verified by Kyra Garofolo, Program Development Manager, Pearson Smarthinking Services.

"The results of our analysis show that Smarthinking is an important component in our overall academic support program; it is essential that students have access to tutoring assistance after hours and on weekends--whenever a learning moment is happening."

— Karen Reilly, Campus Dean of Learning Support

Karen Reilly explains, "Unsurprisingly, evidence shows that students who engage with tutoring services of any type achieved higher rates of success and persistence. The data also shows that a significant percentage of students do not avail themselves of tutoring assistance." Consequently, the investigation further looked at:

- What do students believe about the value of tutoring?
- How are students influenced to access tutoring services?

The Student Experience

Karen Reilly states, “Responses from the most frequent users of tutoring services reveal that instructors are far and away the most influential in terms of prompting students to access tutoring services.”

She continues, “Focus group data revealed to us that faculty are often unaware of the variety, hours, and/or protocols of tutoring services. A clear takeaway from this analysis is that we have an opportunity to improve student outcomes by promoting tutoring services to our faculty as a means to extend productive instructional engagement.”

Conclusion

“The Academic Initiative Review, and the complementary Pearson review of Smarthinking’s impact, met our goals to quantify the value of our tutoring services,” notes Karen Reilly, “and to identify meaningful actions we can take to maximize the benefits for particular groups of students and expand the pool of students experiencing improved outcomes. Consistent with our commitment to continuous improvement, we intend to address the AIR’s findings by creating more training for our faculty, new marketing campaigns that utilize the evidence we gathered, and a review of our budgets to ensure that we are resourcing the efforts most clearly linked to student success.”