



the Research & Planning Group
for California Community Colleges

Online Education Initiative: Evaluation of Quest for Online Success

Summary Report

Fall 2015

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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
What Is Quest for Online Success?	3
Pilot Colleges.....	3
In This Report.....	4
Evaluating Quest for Online Success	5
Initial Survey Responses from Pathway 1 Students.....	6
Overall Satisfaction with QOS among Pathway 1 Students.....	6
Useful Strategies and Tools in Pathway 1.....	7
Initial Survey Responses from Students in Pathway 2.....	8
Overall Helpfulness of Pathway 2.....	8
Students’ Intentions after Viewing Each Module	9
Most and Least Valuable Aspects of Each Module	10
End-of-Term Survey Responses	11
Why Students Chose Not to Participate in QOS	11
How Students Learned about QOS	12
Key Comments about the QOS Experience	13
End-of-Term Reflections on Most and Least Useful Aspects of QOS	13
End-of-Term Suggestions for Improving QOS.....	14
Faculty Survey Responses.....	14
Faculty View of QOS’s Impact on Students	14
Faculty Assessment of QOS Content	15
Comparison of Spring and Fall 2015 End-of-Term Survey Results.....	16
Use of Quest for Online Success.....	16
Students Who Did Not Return to QOS.....	16
Conclusions and Recommendations	17
Initial Survey	17
End-of-Term Survey	17
Faculty Survey	18
Comparison of Spring 2015 and Fall 2015 Results	18
Recommendations	19

Introduction

What Is Quest for Online Success?

The Quest for Online Success (QOS) program, a key component of the Online Education Initiative (OEI), is designed to improve students' retention and success rates when learning in the online environment. Students are provided a diagnostic assessment of skills needed for success in online courses. Based on their assessment results, students work through skill-building interactive modules to remediate their weaknesses.

Quest for Online Success, consisting of a set short modules delivered online, was undertaken by students either before or concurrent with online coursework. QOS began with five modules; however, based on student feedback in spring 2015 about these modules being more appropriate for students new to the online environment, four of these original modules were placed in a pathway for students new to online coursework, and a pathway with the Becoming an Effective Online Learner Module (module 4) and five new modules was created for students with more online course experience. The new modules in the experienced online student pathway focus less on the online learning environment and more on aspects of learning that occur outside the classroom such as career, education, and financial planning. These two pathways and the relevant modules are outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1. QOS Pathways and Modules

Pathway 1: New Online Students	Pathway 2: Experienced Online Students
Module 1. SmarterMeasure <i>An assessment test that quantifies a student's readiness to take an online or technology-rich course</i>	Module 4. Becoming an Effective Online Learner
Module 2. Introduction to Online Learning	Module 5. Career Exploration
Module 3. Getting Tech Ready	Module 6. Education Planning
Module 4. Becoming an Effective Online Learner	Module 7. Instructional Support
	Module 8. Personal Support
	Module 9. Financial Planning

Pilot Colleges

In spring 2015, eight colleges were engaged in a pilot implementation of Quest for Online Success. In fall 2015, the pilot implementation of QOS expanded to include the 24 colleges listed in Table 2 on the following page.

Table 2. Fall 2015 QOS Pilot Colleges

1. Antelope Valley College	13. Los Angeles Pierce College
2. Barstow College	14. MiraCosta College
3. Butte College	15. Monterey Peninsula College
4. Cabrillo College	16. Mount San Antonio College
5. Coastline Community College	17. Mount San Jacinto College
6. College of the Canyons	18. Ohlone College
7. Columbia College	19. Rio Hondo College
8. Foothill College	20. Saddleback College
9. Fresno City College	21. Shasta College
10. Hartnell College	22. Ventura College
11. Imperial Valley College	23. Victor Valley College
12. Lake Tahoe Community College	24. West Los Angeles College

In This Report

This report presents a highlight of the findings from the fall 2015 surveys, providing an overview of both student and faculty feedback. First, it offers an overview of survey responses from Pathway 1 students provided immediately after taking each QOS module, and then the responses from Pathway 2 students are reviewed. Next, the report discusses results from the end-of-term surveys, followed by faculty feedback. Finally, results from fall 2015 are compared to those from spring 2015, identifying differences in end-of-term survey responses and faculty comments. The report concludes with a summary of key findings in each of these areas.

Evaluating Quest for Online Success

To assess the impact of QOS, the Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges (RP Group), as part of its role as external evaluator of the Online Education Initiative, worked with the QOS coordinators to develop and administer surveys designed to learn about students' and faculty's experiences.

Students were given links to the appropriate survey at the conclusion of each module. These surveys were created by the evaluation team in SurveyMonkey, and only the evaluators had access to the raw survey data. The survey data were kept completely confidential, but respondents were asked to provide their student IDs in order to be able to match their survey responses to outcomes data, such as final grade in the course. In fall 2015, the evaluation team and QOS coordinators developed an end-of-term survey that was designed to be sent to students approximately two weeks before the end of their course. This survey was also developed in SurveyMonkey and only the evaluators had access to the survey and its data.

To learn about faculty experiences with QOS, online surveys were developed and administered at the end of the semester. The survey was intended to learn more about how QOS was implemented in each course, whether the instructor observed an impact on student learning, and to measure faculty's satisfaction with the content of the program.

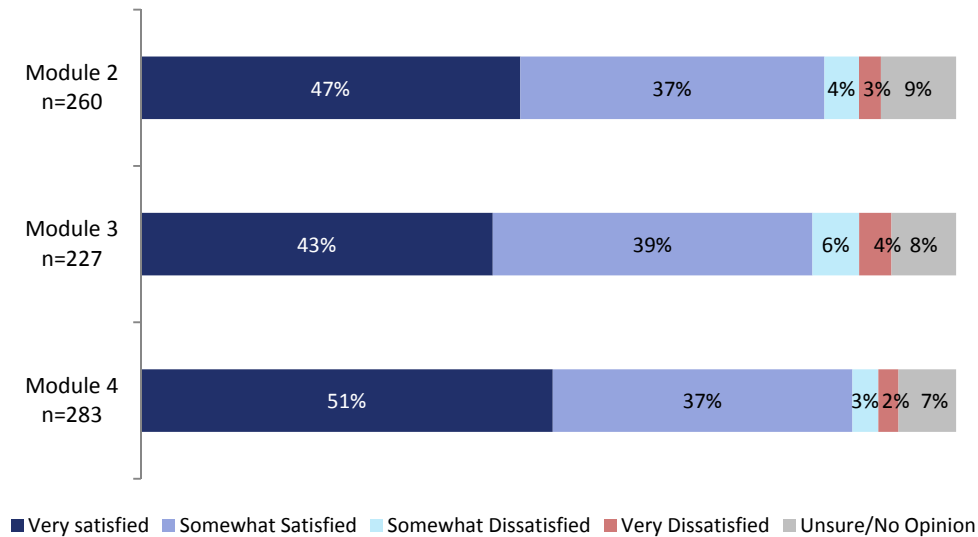
From August 6, 2015 to January 7, 2016, between 70 and 296 students completed the nine initial surveys for Smarter Measure and the eight learning modules. Between September 16 and December 23, 2015, 385 students completed the end-of-term survey, of which 196 indicated that they had participated in a QOS module. Between September 24 and December 22, 2015, 12 instructors completed the faculty survey.

Initial Survey Responses from Pathway 1 Students

Overall Satisfaction with QOS among Pathway 1 Students

Students were most satisfied overall with modules 2 (Introduction to Online Learning) and 4 (Becoming an Effective Online Learner). Combining responses of “very satisfied” and “somewhat satisfied,” a total of 84% reported satisfaction with module 2 and 88% indicated the same for module 4. Please note that the survey did not ask about students’ satisfaction with module 1 (SmarterMeasure) since it is an assessment, whereas the other modules are tutorials.

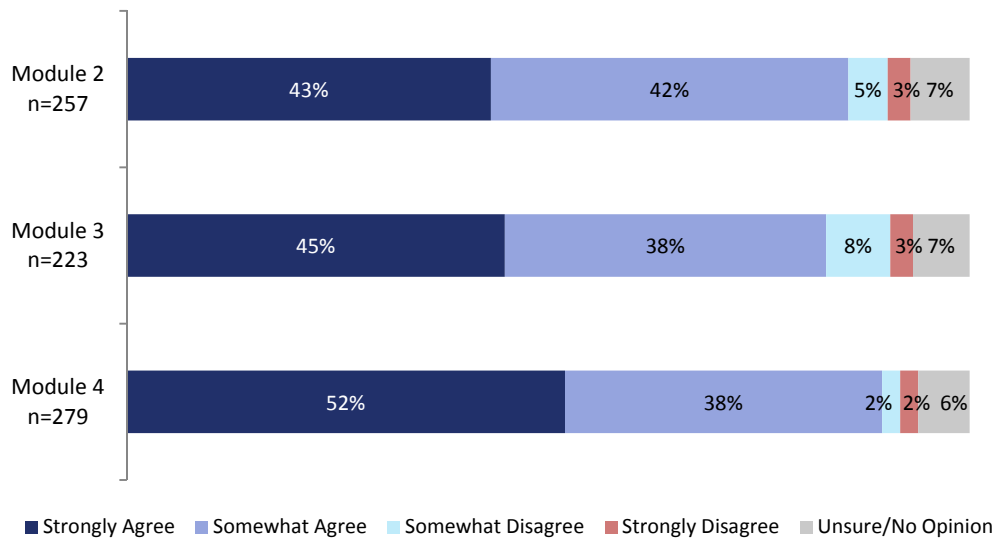
Figure 1. Overall satisfaction by learning module



Useful Strategies and Tools in Pathway 1

While a majority of respondents strongly or somewhat agreed that the learning modules provided them with useful strategies and tools to help them succeed in their online classes, module 4 (Becoming an Effective Online Learner) garnered the most positive responses, with 90% agreement (see Figure 2). This finding is particularly interesting given the fact that 21% of respondents indicated having taken four or more online courses previously, yet despite their experience, module 4 was still useful to them. **This finding suggests that launching pathway 2 with module 4 may in fact be the most effective approach even for experienced online students.**

Figure 2. Students' belief that each module has provided them with useful strategies and tools that will help them succeed in their online class

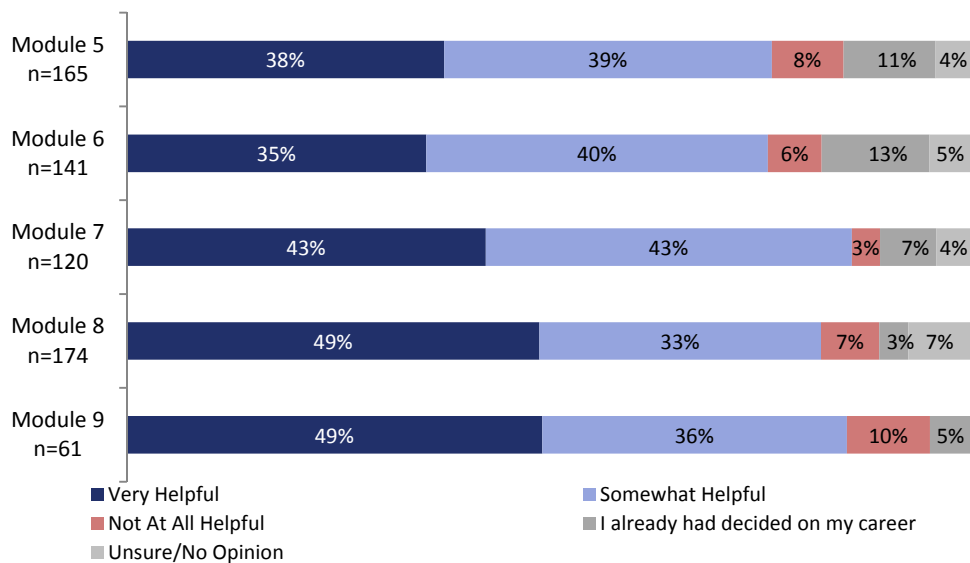


Initial Survey Responses from Students in Pathway 2

Overall Helpfulness of Pathway 2

When combining the respondents who indicated that the learning modules were very or somewhat helpful, students felt that modules 7 (Instructional Support), 8 (Personal Support), and 9 (Financial Planning) were most helpful, with 86%, 82%, and 85%, respectively (see Figure 3). While modules 5 and 6 received lower ratings than the others, the majority of students still agreed that these modules were helpful (77% and 75%, respectively).

Figure 3. Overall helpfulness by learning module



Students' Intentions after Viewing Each Module

The following questions are specific to the focus of modules five through nine, asking students about their intentions after having viewed each one.

Career Planning (Module 5)

When asked what they plan to do next regarding their career plans, more than half (51%) of respondents said they already have a career plan, and 31% indicated that they will make an appointment to see a counselor at their college. Only 14% indicated that they will go to the career center at their college.

Education Planning (Module 6)

When asked what they plan to do next regarding their educational plans, two-thirds of respondents said that they plan to see a counselor to confirm or update their education plan (42%) or develop an initial (15%) or a comprehensive (10%) education plan.

Instructional Support (Module 7)

After being asked what they plan to do this semester to help ensure success in their classes, 56% of respondents said they plan to develop and follow a regular study schedule, 50% indicated they would develop a plan to help avoid procrastinating and stay motivated, and 42% said they would use the online tutoring available for their online class.

Personal Support (Module 8)

When asked about the likelihood of their going to see a counselor, a majority of respondents indicated that they are much more likely (36%) or somewhat more likely (39%) to see a counselor at their college if they begin to experience any of the 10 challenges presented in the module.

Financial Planning (Module 9)

When asked what they will do next regarding their financial plans, 40% of respondents said that they plan to go to the "I Can Afford College" website and 33% indicated that they already have financial aid. Only 6% said that they do not need financial aid, and 9% said they do not need any additional information about financial planning.

Most and Least Valuable Aspects of Each Module

When asked to identify what they found most valuable about each module within Quest for Online Success, the components that garnered the most agreement were module 5's (Career Exploration) provision of information on how to choose and plan for a career (42%) and module 9's (Financial Planning) identification of resources and websites (48%). The most common responses by each module are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. What Students Found Most Valuable about Each Module

Module	MOST Valuable Aspect	Percent Response
1. Smarter Measure	Identifying their strengths and weaknesses from the Smarter Measure assessment	38%
2. Introduction to Online Learning	Learning about the myths of online classes	42%
3. Getting Tech Ready	Trouble-shooting and tech support information	35%
4. Becoming an Effective Online Learner	Organization and time management skills	26%
5. Career Exploration	Information on how to choose and plan for a career	42%
6. Education Planning	• Information about education plans	13%
	• The importance of having an education plan	12%
	• The STEP process	12%
7. Instructional Support	How to improve study habits	27%
8. Personal Support	• The 10 challenges students may face	15%
	• Resources and information to get help	14%
9. Financial Planning	The resources and websites provided	48%

When asked to identify what they found least valuable about each module within Quest for Online Success, there was no overwhelming consensus among the students. The module components garnering the most frequent responses were the myths section of module 2 (Introduction to Online Learning) and the online reading strategies in module 4 (Becoming an Effective Online Learner). The most common responses by module are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4. What Students Found Least Valuable about Each Module

Module	LEAST Valuable Aspect	Percent Response
1. Smarter Measure	Technical knowledge section	10%
2. Introduction to Online Learning	The myths section	16%
3. Getting Tech Ready	Creating an email account	14%
4. Becoming an Effective Online Learner	Online reading strategies	12%
5. Career Exploration	There is no section for those who already have a career plan	6%
6. Education Planning	The students' stories	5%
7. Instructional Support	The introduction; how to define success	6%
8. Personal Support	The introduction was too long	4%
9. Financial Planning	Not detailed enough; not tailored to each school	7%

End-of-Term Survey Responses

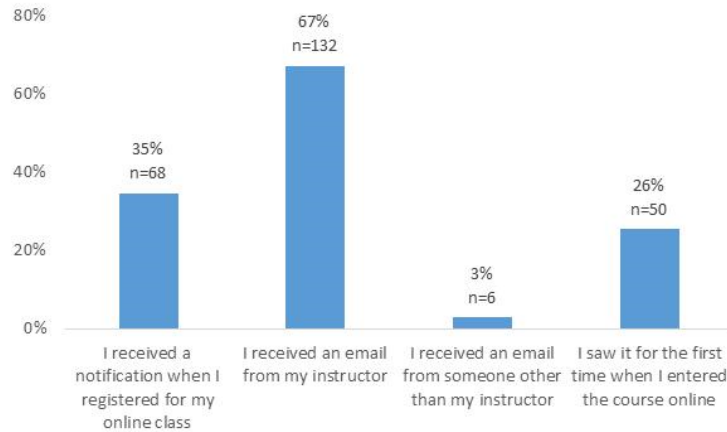
Why Students Chose Not to Participate in QOS

Of the 241 students who indicated they had not participated in QOS, 94 students shared their reasons as to why they had not participated. The most common response was that they did not know what QOS was (35%), followed by not knowing QOS was available (32%), and not feeling that they needed the help (21%).

How Students Learned about QOS

When asked how they learned about the program, 67% of respondents indicated that they received an email from their instructor, 35% received a notification when they registered for their online class, and 26% saw it for the first time when they entered their course online (see Figure 4). Please note this question employed a “check all that apply” format, hence the total number of responses is greater than the 196 total surveys received.

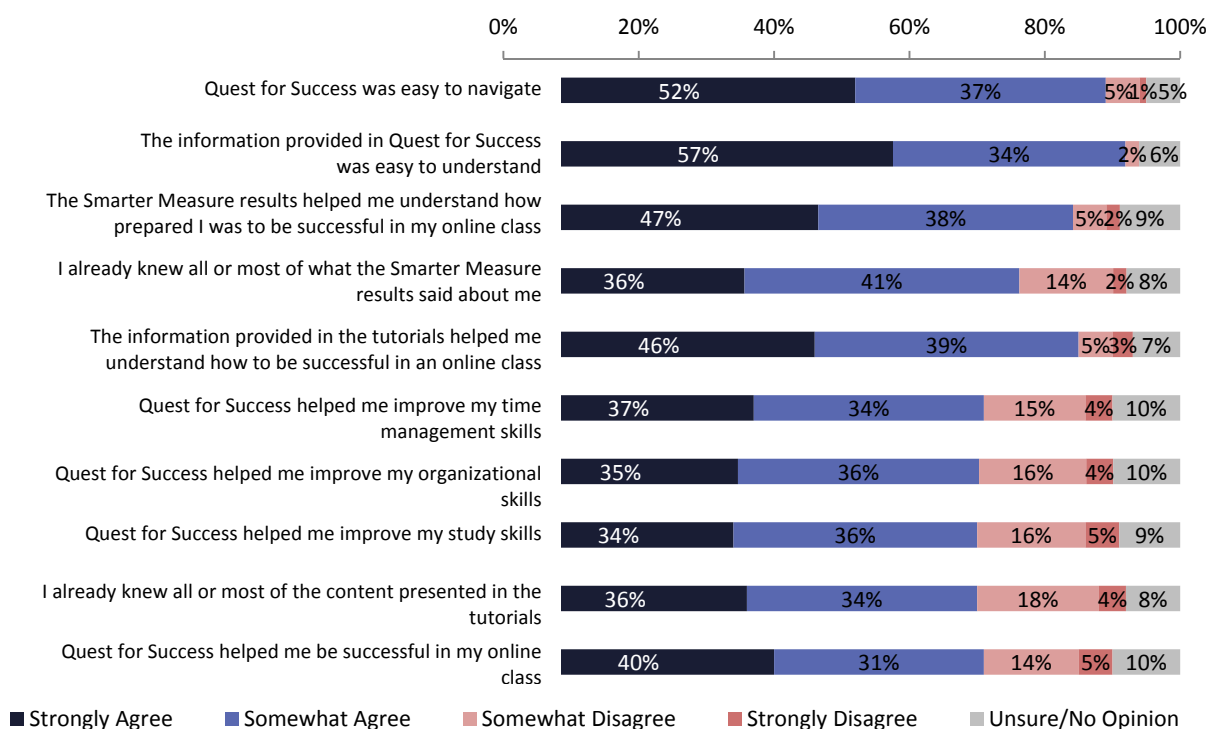
Figure 4. How students learned about the Quest for Online Success



Key Comments about the QOS Experience

Students were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements related to their QOS experience. The highest levels of agreement were seen with the statements about QOS' ease of use. Ninety-one percent of respondents agreed somewhat or strongly that the information provided in QOS was easy to understand, and 89% said that QOS was easy to navigate (see Figure 5). In addition, 85% agreed strongly or somewhat that the information provided in the tutorials helped them understand how to be successful in an online class and that the SmarterMeasure results helped them understand how prepared they were to effectively complete their online class.

Figure 5. Students' agreement with statements about Quest for Online Success



End-of-Term Reflections on Most and Least Useful Aspects of QOS

When asked what they liked the most or found the most useful about QOS, 136 students provided a response. The most common responses were that QOS was easy to access and use, and that it provided helpful information. Respondents also appreciated the helpful tips and information regarding time management, as well as the information on what to expect and how to be successful in an online class.

When asked what they liked the least or found the least useful about Quest for Success, 128 students responded. The most common response was that nothing was least valuable, or that

everything was valuable. However, some respondents felt that it was too time consuming, and several said that they did not need it because they already knew most of the information.

End-of-Term Suggestions for Improving QOS

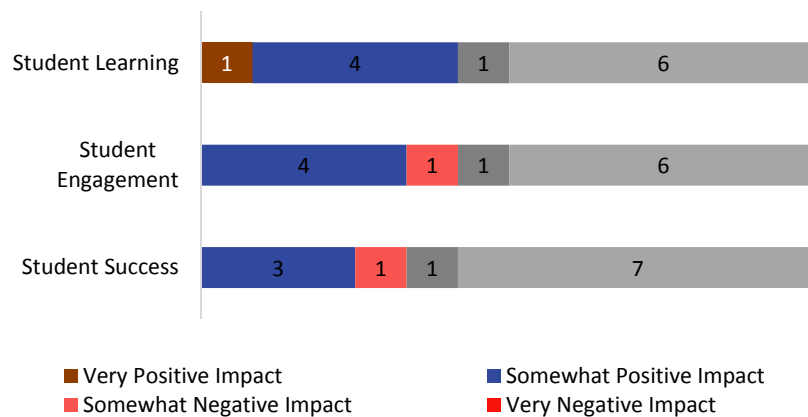
When asked what suggestions they have for improving QOS, 105 students responded. Most respondents said that it is good as-is. Among those who did offer suggestions, the most common responses were to make QOS shorter and more easily accessible, and to incorporate some content regarding papers, group assignments, and discussion board posts.

Faculty Survey Responses

Faculty View of QOS's Impact on Students

Five of the 12 faculty respondents indicated that QOS had a positive impact on student learning, while four respondents noted that QOS had a positive impact on student engagement. Only three said QOS had a positive impact on student success (see Figure 6). A significant number of faculty indicated they were unsure of QOS' impact.

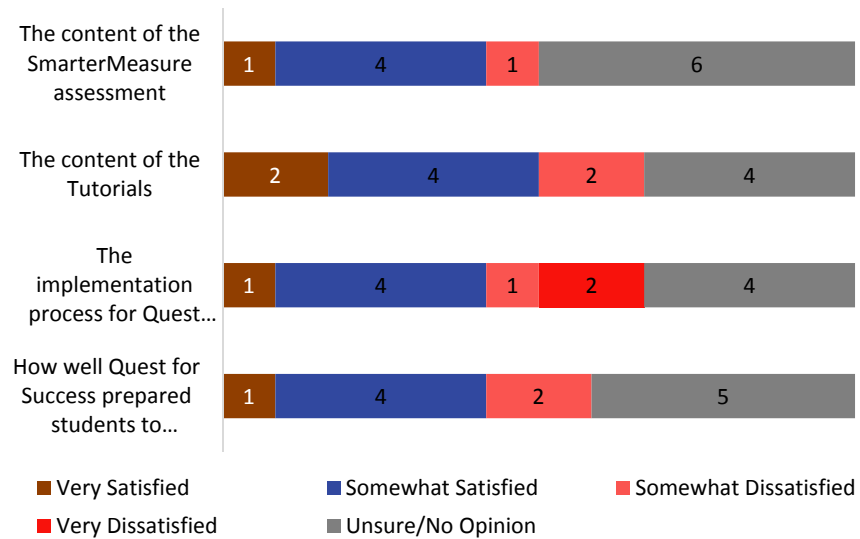
Figure 6. Faculty Evaluation of Quest for Online Success' Impact on Students



Faculty Assessment of QOS Content

Five of the 12 respondents were satisfied with the content of the SmarterMeasure assessment, while six were satisfied with the content of the tutorials. Five respondents were satisfied with the implementation process for QOS and with how well QOS prepared students to succeed in online classes (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Faculty Evaluation of Quest for Online Success' Content, Implementation, and Preparation of Students

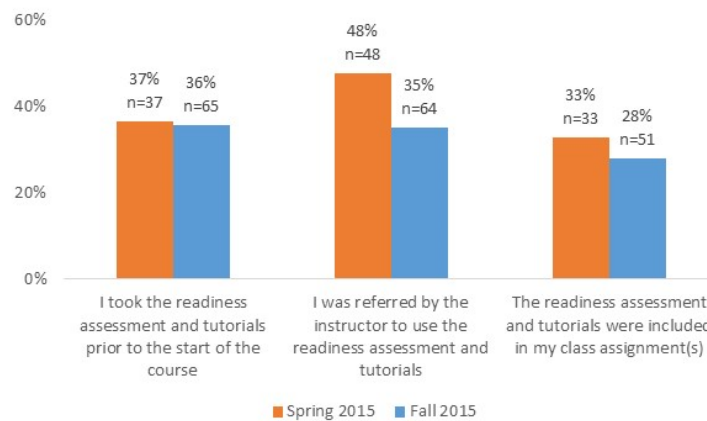


Comparison of Spring and Fall 2015 End-of-Term Survey Results

Use of Quest for Online Success

More than one-third (36% in fall 2015 and 37% in spring 2015) of the respondents indicated that they took the readiness assessment and tutorials prior to the start of their course. However, while nearly half (48%) of the respondents in spring 2015 were referred by their instructor to use the readiness assessment and tutorials, this percentage dropped to 35% in fall 2015 (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. How and when students used QOS—Spring 2015 vs. Fall 2015



Students Who Did Not Return to QOS

Of the 72 respondents in spring 2015 who did not return to QOS on their own, 28 provided explanations as to why not. Of the 119 respondents in fall 2015 who did not return to QOS on their own, 63 provided explanations as to why not.

The most common reasons students chose not to return to QOS included they did not need the help (43 responses), they forgot about it (13 responses), and they were focused on their class (13 responses). Some students also noted that they did not have time (six responses) and that they did not find QOS very helpful (four responses).

Conclusions and Recommendations

In general, students liked QOS and felt that it provided valuable information to help them succeed in their online courses. Many students felt that they did not need QOS, due to their prior experience in online classes, while others thought that QOS could be streamlined—shorter modules that retained the most useful information. Faculty in spring 2015 were more positive about QOS than faculty in fall 2015. Below are summaries of key findings from each of the different surveys, followed by a set of recommendations for how the program can improve based on these findings.

Initial Survey

A majority of respondents indicated that completing the SmarterMeasure diagnostic assessment would greatly improve their chances of being successful in their online course. Overall, respondents in Pathway 1 were most satisfied with module 4 (Becoming an Effective Online Learner), and they agreed that module 4 provided them with useful strategies and tools to help them succeed in their online classes. Additionally, most respondents indicated that they felt more confident about successfully completing their online class than they did before learning about the seven myths of online classes.

Students in Pathway 2 felt that modules 7 (Instructional Support), 8 (Personal Support), and 9 (Financial Planning) were most helpful. Module 7 assisted students in improving their study habits, and module 8 (Personal Support) influenced most respondents to see a counselor at their college if they begin to experience any of the 10 challenges described in QOS. Regarding financial planning (module 9), a majority of respondents indicated that they plan to go to the “I Can Afford College” website or that they already have financial aid.

When asked what they found most valuable about QOS, students’ responses focused on the information they received about how to be successful in their online classes and the resources available to support them. Students’ comments regarding the least valuable elements of QOS focused on information they already knew or information they thought was missing, such as the myths section in module 2 (Introduction to Online Learning) and the online reading strategies in module 4 (Becoming an Effective Online Learner). Finally, students suggested improving QOS by making it shorter and more interactive, as well as including an indicator to track which modules students had completed.

End-of-Term Survey

The most common reasons as to why students had chosen not to participate in QOS were that they did not know what QOS was (35%) or that it was available (32%). A majority of respondents learned about QOS by receiving an email from their instructor. Almost half of the respondents accessed QOS from within their online class, while one-third were sent a link that took them to an external Quest course site. Regarding how and when QOS was used, one-third of respondents were referred by their instructor to use the tutorials, while another one-third took the readiness assessment and tutorials prior to the start of their course, and the remaining students had the tutorials included in their class assignments.

One-third of respondents indicated that they chose to return to QOS on their own, while more than one-third indicated that they were required to complete QOS before gaining access to the remainder of the course. Still others were encouraged by their instructor to complete QOS as soon as it became available or were awarded extra credit for completing it. A majority of respondents said that they would recommend QOS to other students, particularly those who are new to college, new to taking online courses, and/or less technologically savvy.

A majority of respondents indicated that the most valuable thing about QOS was that it is easy to access and use, and that it provided helpful information. Most of the respondents said that everything was valuable, but some indicated that it is too time consuming. Suggestions for improvement include to make it shorter and more easily accessible.

Faculty Survey

Half of the faculty respondents indicated that they encouraged all students to access QOS throughout the term. However, fewer than half indicated that QOS had a positive impact on student learning, student engagement, or student success. Five of the 12 faculty respondents were satisfied with the content of the SmarterMeasure assessment, the implementation process for QOS, and how well QOS prepared students to succeed in online classes, while six were satisfied with the content of the tutorials. Five of the 12 faculty respondents said that they would recommend QOS for other online courses. It is important to note that of the 63 instructors who participated in the fall 2015 pilot of QOS, only 12 responded to the survey, representing a 19% response rate, which means that these responses may not be a representative sample of faculty experiences with QOS.

Comparison of Spring 2015 and Fall 2015 Results

Student Surveys

A majority of respondents in both spring and fall learned about QOS by receiving an email from their instructor. Forty-four percent of respondents in spring 2015 and 50% of respondents in fall 2015 received access to QOS prior to the start of class, while most of the remaining students in both terms received access on the first day of class. Fifty-eight percent of spring 2015 respondents accessed QOS within their online class, compared to 42% of fall 2015 respondents. Forty-eight percent of spring 2015 respondents were referred by their instructor to use the readiness assessment and tutorials, compared to 35% of fall 2015 respondents.

Five to six percent more of respondents in spring 2015, as compared to fall 2015, agreed that the information provided in the tutorials helped them understand how to be successful in an online class, that QOS actually helped them to be successful in their online class, and that QOS helped them improve their time management, organizational, and study skills. Five percent fewer respondents in fall 2015 as compared to spring 2015 indicated that their instructor awarded extra credit for completing QOS. Seventy-five percent of spring 2015 respondents said that they would recommend QOS for other online students, compared to 63% of fall 2015 respondents, a significant decrease from one semester to the next.

Faculty Surveys

Spring 2015 faculty were more likely to feel that QOS had a much more positive impact on student learning, student engagement, and student success than fall 2015 faculty. Spring 2015 faculty were also more satisfied with the content and implementation of QOS, as well as how well QOS prepared students to succeed in an online class. Faculty in spring 2015 were more likely to recommend QOS for other online courses than faculty in fall 2015.

Recommendations

Based on survey results, the RP Group makes the following recommendations to improve the implementation and effectiveness of Quest for Online Success:

1. **Consider using student's suggestions for improvement.** Students suggested improving QOS by making it shorter and more easily accessible as well as incorporating some content regarding papers, group assignments, and discussion board posts. Students also felt that including an indicator to track which modules students had completed would be very useful.
2. **Better inform students about QOS and how it can help them.** As noted earlier, the most common reasons as to why students had chosen not to participate in QOS were that they did not know what QOS was or did not know that it was available. As such, more effort is needed to ensure that students are aware of this resource, what it is, why they should use it, and how it will benefit them.
3. **Share QOS's impact on students with faculty.** As described earlier, a significant number of faculty indicated they were unsure of QOS' impact on students. While we are unable at this time to provide information linking students' participation in QOS to their grades, we are able to share these survey results with faculty. These results can show faculty the overwhelmingly positive feedback from students, a large portion of whom did feel that QOS assisted them in succeeding in their online courses.
4. **Increase faculty participation in the evaluation.** As noted earlier, there was only a 19% response rate to the faculty survey in fall 2015. It is important to improve this response rate in order to know that the opinions being expressed are representative of most faculty. Faculty need to understand the importance of providing their feedback and the role it plays in continuously improving QOS.