

Start Guide for Online Learning: First term results

PCC Distance Education

The Distance Education department is committed to improving student success and retention through building student support resources and quality online courses. As a Prepare phase effort for online students, the department has been working on a major redesign of an orientation and self-assessment since 2012, which is now mandatory for first-time online students at PCC.

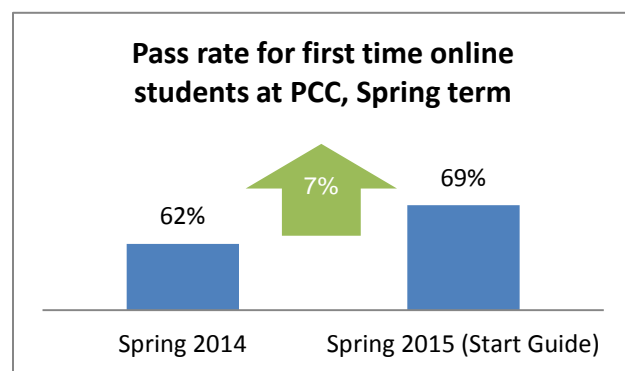
The orientation, known as the *Virtual Backpack: The Start Guide for Online Learning*, must be completed before students can register for their first online class at PCC. The Start Guide contains information about online learning, college services, technology requirements, academic integrity and, most importantly, a student readiness assessment. The readiness assessment covers topics like technology competency, learning styles, and how life factors and individual attributes may affect student success in online classes. This self-assessment helps students decide if online learning is right for them before they register and provides a customized report for each student based on the assessment results.



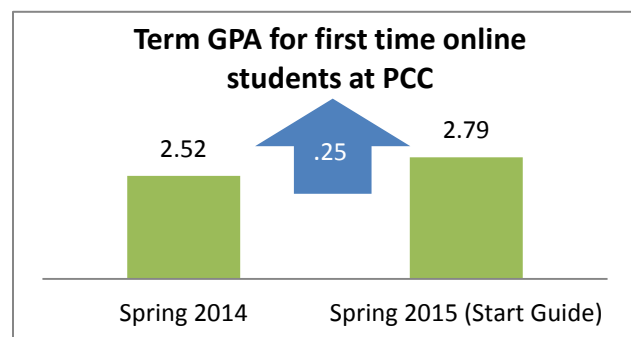
**Virtual Backpack:
The Start Guide for
Online Learning**

After piloting the content for two terms in 2012-13, Distance Education staff incorporated feedback from students, faculty and PCC staff before launching the Start Guide in January 2015 for students planning to take online classes that spring term. After spring term ended, Distance Education worked with Institutional Effectiveness to evaluate the results. Institutional Effectiveness compared first-time online students from 2014 who had not completed the Start Guide to first-time online students from 2015 who had. The results of the study are positive.

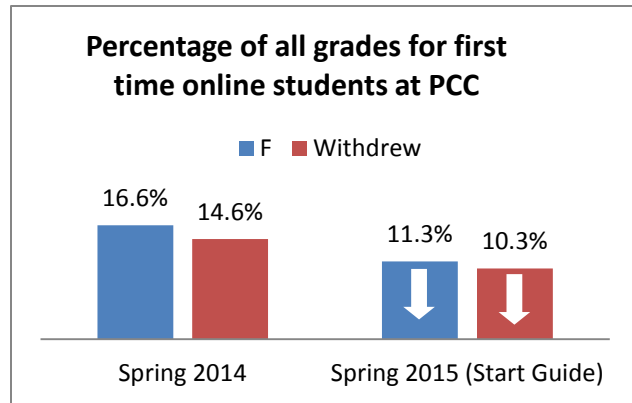
- When comparing students who completed the Start Guide to first-time online students from spring 2014, the Start Guide completers had a higher pass rate: 69% vs 62%.



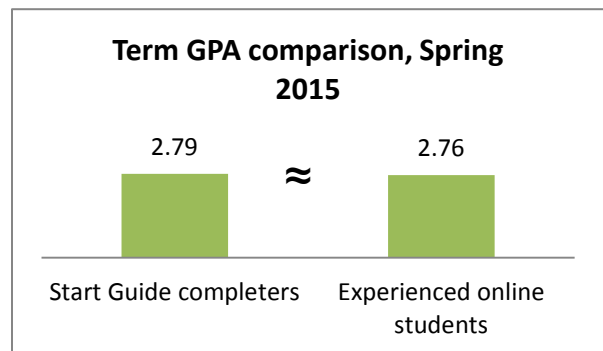
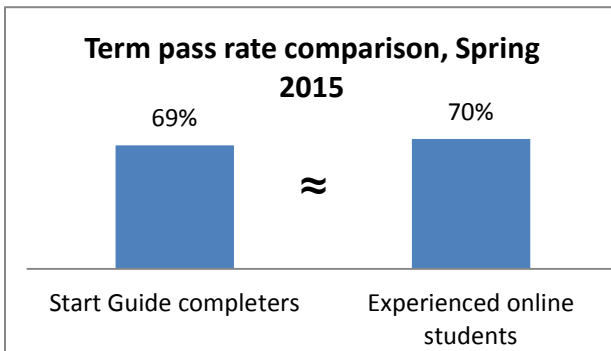
- Students who completed the Start Guide also completed the term with a higher GPA than first-time students from 2014: 2.79 vs 2.52.



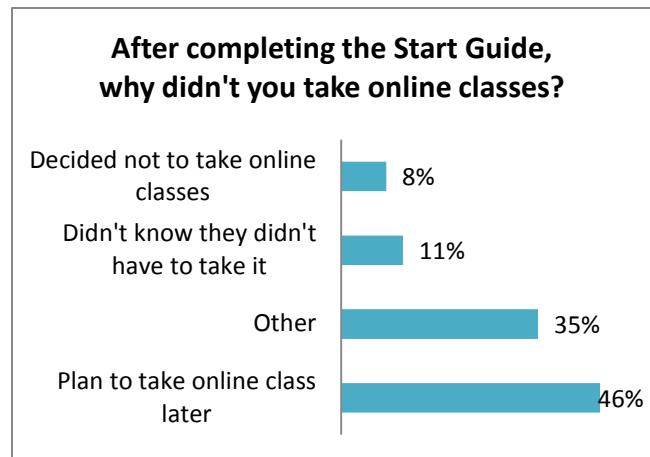
- Students who completed the Start Guide withdrew from classes and received an F grade at a lower rate than first-time online students from spring 2014 as well. (F: 11.3% vs 16.6%, Withdraw: 10.3% vs. 14.6%)



- Students who completed the Start Guide in spring 2015 performed similarly to experienced online students from spring term 2015, with similar pass rates (69% vs 70%) and similar GPAs (2.79 vs 2.76).



Distance Education also surveyed students independently about their experience completing the Start Guide and has received overwhelmingly positive feedback. It has also surveyed students who completed the Start Guide for fall 2015 but did not register for an online class. The majority (46%) indicated that they plan to take online classes later, while only 8% indicated they decided not to take online classes after completing the Start Guide.



Distance Education will continue improving the content of the Start Guide based on feedback from students and faculty, and hope to use results from the readiness assessment to identify next steps for how to further improve success and retention in online classes at PCC.