

SmarterMeasure™

Learning readiness indicator



Case Study of Ashford University and SmarterMeasure

SmarterServices™

Helping you make smarter decisions

Our mission is to organize and analyze data that empowers people to make smarter decisions. We help you obtain data about your students, faculty, teachers, employees, and courses. Data-driven decisions create strong strategic plans, maximize efficiency, and foster an environment of learning - learning from our mistakes, learning about best practices, and learning how to do things better.

SmarterServices™ provides the following four products:

- (1) **SmarterMeasure™** - learning readiness indicator,
- (2) **SmarterSurveys™** - automated data collection survey system,
- (3) **SmarterFaculty™** - searchable database of thousands of faculty who want to teach online,
- (4) **SmarterProctors™** - searchable database of neutral proctors to administer high stakes exams.



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Ashford University

Ashford University was founded in 1918 as Mount St. Clare College in Clinton, Iowa. In 2005, Bridgepoint Education acquired the institution, at that time called The Franciscan University, and renamed it as Ashford University. Ashford University is defining the modern college experience by combining the heritage of a traditional campus with the flexibility and effectiveness of online learning. The University provides a vibrant learning community where high-quality programs and leading-edge technology create a dynamic, immersive, and stimulating learning experience. Ashford University is accredited by The Higher Learning Commission and a member of the North Central Association (www.ncahlc.org). The University offers practical and progressive associate's, bachelor's and master's degree programs online, as well as bachelor's degree programs at its Clinton, Iowa, campus.



The Challenge—Plan of Action

Ashford University has implemented a variety of initiatives to support student success and provide students an opportunity to experience the online learning environment prior to provisional admission:

1. Ashford expanded its Student Success Orientation (SSO). The orientation is designed to provide students with a complete overview of the Ashford University experience, prepare them for success in their courses, and help them to self-evaluate their readiness to succeed in an online classroom setting. Students are instructed on Ashford University policies and the learner resources that are available to them through interactive videos and assessments.
2. Ashford also implemented the Ashford Promise, which provides degree-seeking online students with a no-cost, risk-free opportunity to explore the online learning environment for the first three weeks of their first course.

Beginning in Fall 2011, Ashford began using the SmarterMeasure Learning Readiness Indicator as one component of the Student Success Orientation. As the primary assessment and reflection tool, SmarterMeasure provides the students with personalized feedback about their strengths and weaknesses. The tool measures student readiness in six areas including Life Factors (external to the learner; time, place, resources), Individual Attributes (motivation, procrastination, etc), Learning Styles, Technical Skills & Competency, On-Screen Reading Rate & Recall, and Typing Speed & Accuracy. In addition to feedback provided by SmarterMeasure, a faculty-led discussion on the results occurs in a discussion board and provides students an opportunity to reflect on their results with the instructor and fellow classmates.

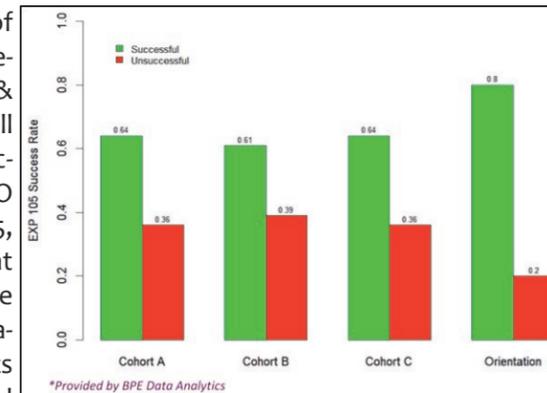


Additional discussions in the course are meant to build community and make students aware of academic resources such as the Ashford Library and Ashford Writing Center. A reflective assignment is the final activity in the course, and asks students to reflect on what they have learned and identify areas for improvement to help ensure academic success.

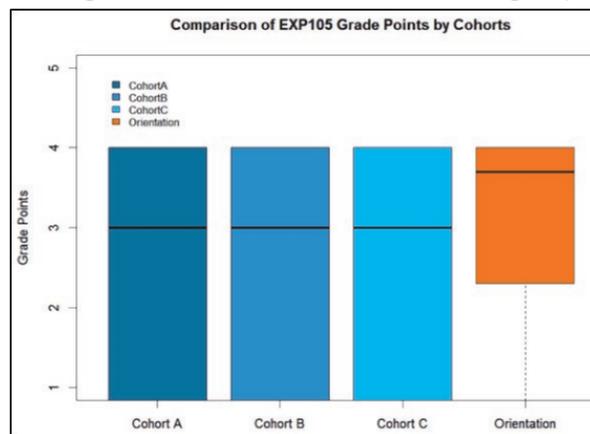
The Results—Notable Impact

The question remains, is there a strong relationship between having a mandatory Student Success Orientation course and the persistence of online students? According to the results of Ashford's study, the clear answer is yes. Dr. Jeff Hall, lead faculty, along with Morgan Johnson, Director of Instructional Services, who conducted the study, stated, "Creating an orientation was an excellent step in improving student retention. We were very interested in studying the future academic success of students who had successfully completed the Orientation course while developing a profile of students who struggled and did not complete Orientation." The first finding showed students who did not complete the SSO scored lower in Individual Attributes and Life Factors. Individual Attributes measures factors that are internal to the learner like procrastination, time management, and willingness to ask for help. Life Factors measures factors that are external to the learner including time and place to study, work/family responsibilities, and motivation to obtain college credit. These two sections were most indicative of a student's ability to progress through and complete the orientation course.

Following the SSO, students enroll in their first credit bearing course: EXP105. The SmarterMeasure scores were compared to EXP105 student success rates and engagement analytics. Based on the results, Life Factors and Individual Attributes were indicative of EXP105 engagement. Further analysis revealed that Technical Competency & Knowledge and On-Screen Reading & Recall were predictors of a student's overall success. To determine the impact the SSO course had on student success in EXP105, Ashford compared three cohort groups that did not participate in the Orientation course versus one group that did take the Orientation course (see chart A). The results showed that the students who participated in the Orientation course improved their success rate (earning a C- or better) in EXP105 by an average of 17%.



In addition, the study showed students who completed the SSO had higher grade point averages in EXP105 than the three cohort groups who did not complete the orientation (see chart B).



Another factor that made the SSO a success was a network of dedicated faculty and support staff including Instructional specialists who support faculty, monitor performance, and facilitate academic issues.

When asked about future plans for the Student Success Orientation, Ashford's Dr. Jeff Hall, professor and lead faculty, stated "Our orientation is continually under evaluation and we work hard to

continue to improve the content and increase student engagement."

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