

Breaking Down Barriers for Students with Quality Courses

Introduction

With online courses growing to become a larger percentage of offerings at colleges across the nation, student retention rates in these courses becomes a growing concern, especially when surveys report online students are less engaged than students involved in blended instruction (Fisher, 2010). Research demonstrates that the design of the online course may be a factor in motivating students to complete a course (Pittenger and Doering 2010). The following study, of completion rates for one science lab course by an instructor, will show an increase in student completion rates following a Quality Matters (QM) course review.



Central Lakes College student working in lab

Learning Objectives

1. Identify common barriers to student success in an online course
2. Identify ways Quality Matters (QM) certification can improve a course to increase retention rates.
3. Advocate for particular course improvement strategies using the knowledge and skills gained in this presentation.

Methods

- Student completion* rates were calculated for two semesters prior to QM review, as well as three semesters following the review.

*Completion is percentage of students who registered for the course relative to the number that completed successfully with a grade of D or higher.

Results



1. Student concerns seemed to decrease
2. Grading is more efficient
3. The course fills quickly
4. Student completion rates improved (figure 1)



Comparison of Student Completion Rates before and After QM Review

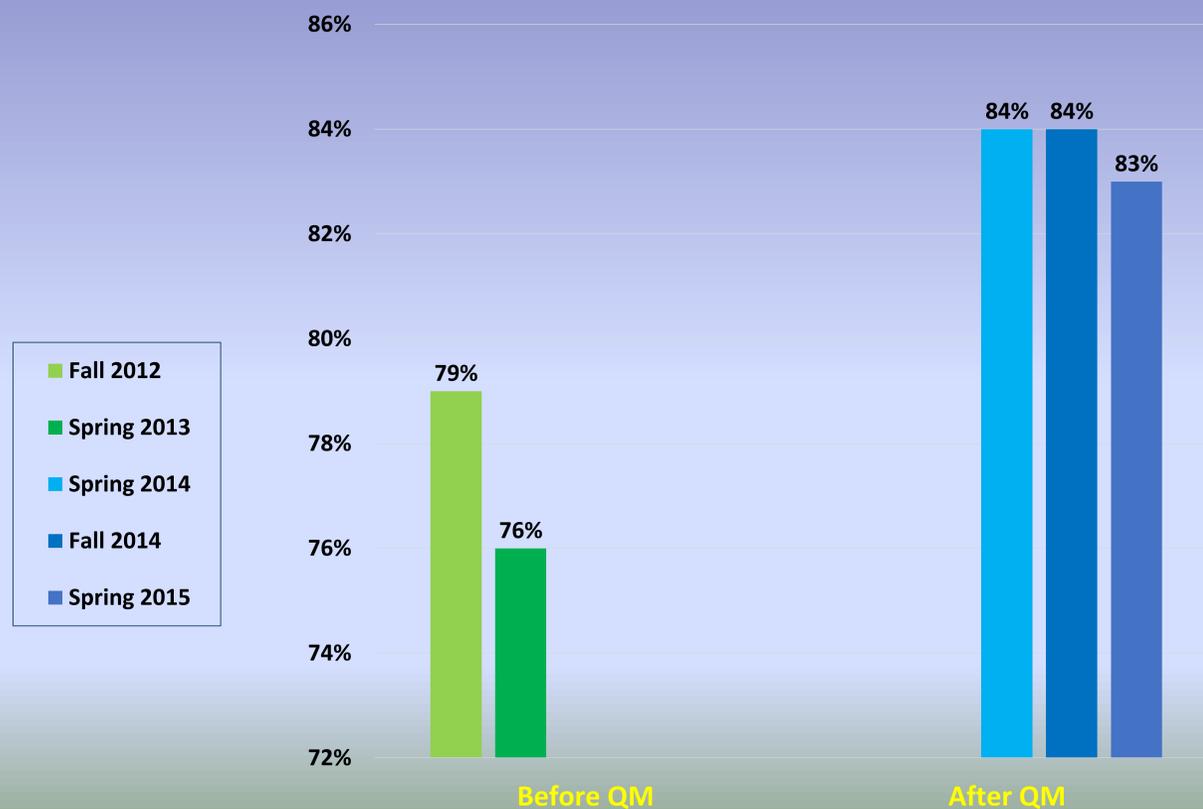
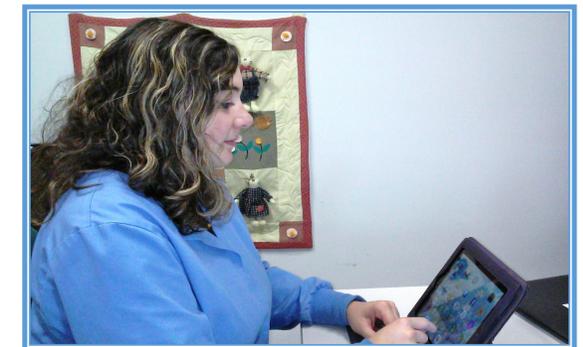


Figure 1. Rates of completion are compared before QM (average of 77.5%), to a completion rate after the QM process averaging 83.6%. This data shows an increase in student retention and completion for this course over three years.

Conclusions

The results from this single online course over a period of 5 semesters demonstrate improved retention at a specific point in time, which coincides with the timing of a Quality Matters (QM) certification for this course. As the instructor, text, lab manual and assignments for the course did not change drastically over time this demonstrates that QM certification may be beneficial in retaining students in online courses.



Central Lakes College student working online.

References

1. Fisher, K. (2010). Online student engagement: CCSSE finds enrollment status and online experience are key. *Community College Week*, May 17, 2010, pp7-9. Retrieved from www.ccweek.com
2. Pittenger, A., Doering, A. (2010). Influence of motivational design on completion rates in online self-study pharmacy-content courses. *Distance Education*, Vol. 31, No. 3, 275 - 293.

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