Action Plan for Student Readiness for Online Learning

Step 1: Problem/Issue
Students who have not taken an online course through Blackboard begin their first online course with learning required for both subject content and course format literacy. This creates a barrier to success that is evidenced by (1) student withdrawal rates, (2) a disparity in performance gaps between online and face-to-face course modalities of 5% or higher, and (3) increased faculty attention devoted to student readiness gaps.

Step 2: Proposed Solution
Our recommendation is to build a Blackboard-based Orientation to Online Learning with content addressing (1) online academic integrity, (2) netiquette/online communication, (3) supporting resources, and (4) the Smarter Measure student readiness for online learning assessment. This content will engage students who have not yet successfully completed an online course at Valencia with Blackboard LMS features such as attaching an assignment and posting to a discussion. The Orientation will be graded to mastery with unlimited attempts and facilitated by academic advisors designed to help students arrive at appropriate course modality choices for their skill sets. Banner attributes will be created to indicate student's orientation completion and advisors will track resulting modality advice provided. This Orientation will be available as an optional intervention during the student enrollment process, enabling students to clear the Banner registration hold for subsequent online course registration. For students who did not choose to complete the Orientation during enrollment, it becomes required at the point of registration for the first online course at Valencia. Periodic monitoring will be used to assess the longitudinal success of students.

Step 3: Hypothesis/Working Theory
We believe that students do not have the information to adequately assess their preparedness for online learning nor the pre-course familiarization with the learning environment necessary for them to "start right" on the first day of an online course focused on the course subject matter. Action in this area relates to student success through Building Pathways and Learning Assured.

Step 4: Evidence
Data provided by Valencia's Institutional Research department showing success gaps; Faculty feedback regarding lack of online student preparedness; Online and Hybrid Course Prioritization Guide (Education Advisory Board 2014); Distance Learning Current State Assessment and Recommendations for Valencia College (DM&A 2013); Smarter Measure; The READI Assessment as a Possible Predictor of Student Success in Online Communication Courses (Fair, Brandy and Wichersham 2013); Student Preparation for Distance Education (Mark Taormino 2010); Design-based Research Principles for Student Orientation to Online Study (Wozniak, Pizzica and Mahony 2013); and benchmarking from numerous institutions (please see attached). Much of the evidence we looked at suggests that engaging students within the LMS prior to the beginning of a course sets expectations and scaffolds learning, and that helping students understand their skills related to online learning aids in course modality decision making.

Step 5: Goals/Expected Outcomes
The goal of this Orientation is to increase student success and learning in online courses.
Students who complete the Orientation will:
1. master the technical issues they will need to be successful in an online learning environment.
2. identify the skills they need to acquire for this learning environment including study skills, academic integrity, and communication skills.
3. make an informed decision about course modality enrollment choices.
4. afford their faculty members the ability to focus on content knowledge acquisition as opposed to lack of student readiness for online learning.

Step 6: Test and Metric
To verify that we will:
1. Design Orientation to be graded to mastery.
2. Design Orientation content to include Smarter Measure constructs, study skills, academic integrity, and communication skills in an online environment. Completed through analysis of student grades and withdrawal rates between the courses included in the pilot and courses not included in the pilots to determine if there is a difference between the students who did/did not complete the Orientation. Student grade outcomes and withdrawal rates for students who did and did not complete the orientation will be examined.
3. Collect data to determine if students followed prescribed advice on modality enrollment choice and their subsequent progress at Valencia.
4. Survey faculty who are teaching the courses in the pilot to determine if there is reduced time spent on technical and preparedness issues with the students.

Step 7: Resources
For implementation in Summer 2016:
- Instructional Designer services in Summer 2015 and Fall 2015 to design the Orientation (could be the QEP Instructional Designer if that position is funded at full time level in 2015-16 budget).
- Purchase Smarter Measure assessment tool: ~$3.60 (per individual assessment) x 1,000 (projected number of students) = $3,600
- 2 Part-time academic advisors: 25 hours/week (per advisor) x $17.77/hour x 48 weeks (Jan – Dec, 2016) = $21, 424 x 2 advisors = $42,848 total
- Total estimate for 2015- December 2016 = $46,448