

Research In Brief

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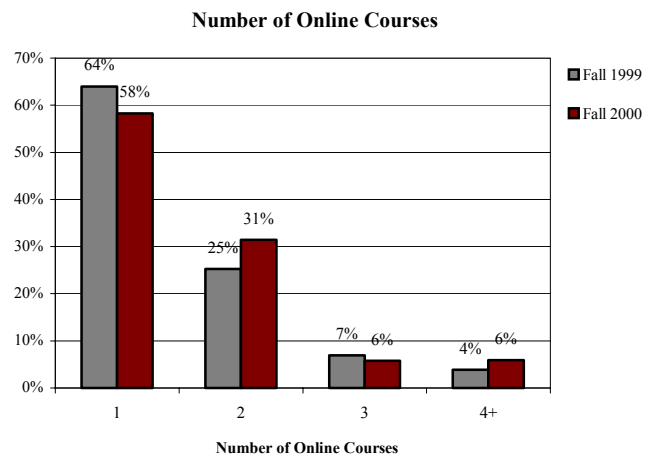
Evaluation of Online Courses at Palomar College, July 2001

Introduction: Many community colleges are now offering courses via the Internet. Palomar College has offered online courses since Fall 1999. A rise in online enrollment and number of online sections offered indicates that Palomar College is attempting to meet the needs of its students by offering a new type of learning environment via the Internet. This method of instruction is relatively new and there is little knowledge of the demographic makeup and success rates of Palomar's online students. Therefore, the Coordinator of Academic Technology Resources has requested that the Office of Institutional Research and Planning (IR&P) complete an evaluation of the online courses offered at Palomar College.

Methodology: To complete this study, we used historical data to compare students enrolling in online courses with students enrolling in on-campus, corresponding or peer courses. The study was completed in three phases. In Phase 1, we looked at enrollments. In Phase 2, we created and compared demographic profiles of online students and peer course students. We included the following demographic variables: gender, ethnicity, and age. In Phase 3, we compared the academic performance of online students and students enrolled in peer courses.

Results: Phase I: Enrollments

- The majority of online students enroll in only one online course. These findings are presented in the chart above:

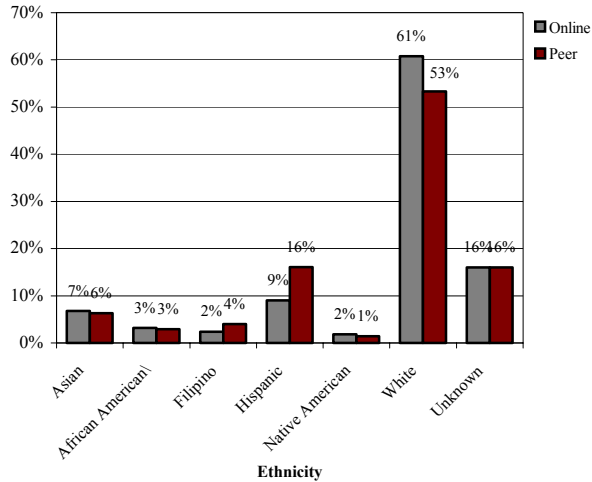


- Most students enrolling in online courses also enroll in on-campus courses. In Fall 1999, only 20.8% of the online students enrolled in online courses only. For Fall 2000, the percent of students enrolling in online courses increased to 30.9%.

Phase II: Demographic Profile

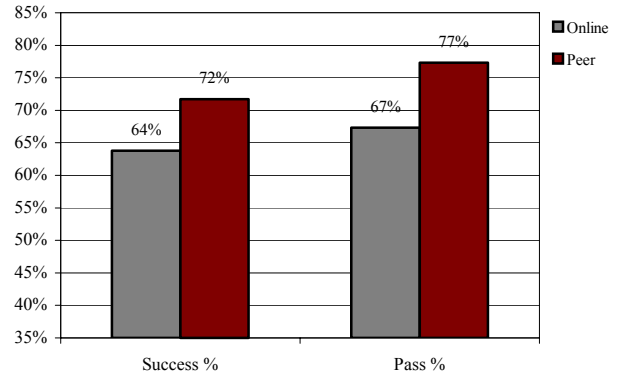
- Online students are older than their peer course counterparts. The median age of our online students is 27. The median age of our peer course students is 20.
- The distribution at first census of online students by ethnicity is different than it is of peer course students. A higher percent White and lower percent Hispanic enroll in online course. These results are depicted in the chart below:

Ethnicity at First Census



- The percent of women enrolling in online courses is slightly higher than the percent of women enrolling in peer courses. 52.6% of students enrolling in online courses are women. 51.2% of students enrolling in peer courses are women.

Percent Success and Pass Rates for Online and Peer Courses



- While overall course success is higher for peer courses, the cumulative GPA of online students is higher. In Fall 1999, the cumulative GPA for online students was 2.62; for peer course students it was 2.43. In Fall 2000, the cumulative GPA for online students was 2.64; for peer course students it was 2.45.

Phase III: Academic Performance

- Course retention (% of students remaining at the end of the course) is slightly higher for peer courses than for online courses. The mean retention rate for peer courses is 94.8%. The mean retention rate for online courses is 91.6%.
- Course success rates (% of grades “C” and above) and Course pass rates (% of grades “D” and above) are slightly higher for peer courses than for online courses. The chart above show these results:

Summary and Conclusions: The results of this study provided a lot of information. For example, it appears some students are enrolling in online courses only. Further, the demographic makeup of students taking online courses is slightly different than those taking corresponding on-campus courses.

Finally, it is interesting that while students in online courses have higher cumulative GPAs, students in the peer courses perform better in the courses we compared. Note, there are exceptions to this generalization, please refer to the results section of the report. Additional research such as a survey of online students may provide some additional information that will help the college serve its online students.

More information? Please contact the Office of Institutional Research and Planning if you have any questions about this or other research and planning issues (Ext. 2360)