

Presence on Purpose:

How the First in the World Project Enhanced Engagement and Improved Outcomes for Online Students of Color

Wake Technical Community College

INTRODUCTION

- Wake Tech's First in the World grant, Project COMPASS, was designed to improve retention and success rates of students of color in online courses.
- COMPASS, Wake Tech's first randomized controlled trial, is an acronym for "Constructing an Online Model to Promote At-Risk Student Success"
- Project COMPASS treatment instructors have employed "high-tech" tools and "high-touch" course redesign strategies that enhance the student experience
- Teaching strategies and tools were developed based on the Community of Inquiry Model, which focused on social, teaching and cognitive presence to enhance the learning experience



[Image credit: <https://coi.athabasca.ca/coi-model/>]

PROBLEM

- Online education is growing rapidly, but online students do not perform as well as traditional students (Allen & Seaman, 2015).
- For non-Asian students of color, the disparity is even greater than for their Asian and White counterparts (Jaggars & Xu, 2016; Xu & Jaggars, 2013, 2014)
- Qualities which help create a learning community do not occur naturally in the online classroom and must be intentionally created (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000).
- Matthews (2010) found that students of color often feel isolated in college classes, impeding retention, persistence, and completion of students of color.

METHODS

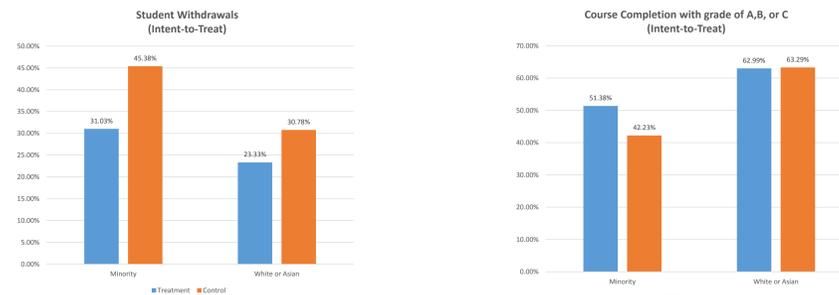
- Students randomly assigned to treatment and control online sections of three high-enrollment, low-success gateway courses (PSY 150, BUS 110, CIS 110)
- Treatment faculty received training and guidebook/checklist (see image at right)
- Teaching interventions include:
 - Intentionally inclusive online course design: Inclusive image representation, examples featuring people of color, multicultural component in assignment, host/promote speaker
 - Intentional proactive communication: Weekly announcements with expectations and tips, include affirmational messages, provide due date reminders, respond to emails and texts promptly
 - Intentional re-engagement strategies: Email, text, or call students who miss an assignment during the previous week, contact students who do not login to Blackboard for seven days

Semester Checklist At-a-Glance

PRE-SEMESTER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confirm ADA accessibility for all course materials. Incorporate minority figures and field leaders in images, topics and examples of course content. Include at least one major assignment with a multicultural component.
WEEK ONE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilize web conferencing to provide a one-time synchronous orientation. Create and upload a custom welcome/getting started video in the course introduction materials. Identify and contact potentially at-risk students enrolled in the course.
WEEK 2 THROUGH End OF SEMESTER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold 3 hours of synchronous events, such as webinars or virtual office hours. Aim for a weekly personalized video (minimum of 8 during the semester). Utilize weekly discussion board forums to support student collaboration, inquiry and problem-solving. Respond to student contacts within 6 hours on active days. Send weekly announcements with affirmation messages Send reminders to students of upcoming due dates. Contact (email/text/phone) students who missed weekly assignments or have not logged into Blackboard for 7 days.
ONE TIME EVENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Host and/or promote at least one online event with a minority speaker from Campus during the semester. Support high participation in the COI survey (mid-semester). Finalize your data collection at the end of the semester.

Treatment faculty checklist

RESULTS (Intent-to-Treat Data, PSY 150 & BUS 110)

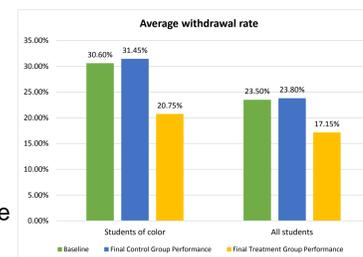


- Withdrawal rates improved for both minority students and White or Asian students exposed to the treatment
- For students of color, the difference in withdrawal rate between treatment and control groups was nearly double that of White or Asian students
- Students of color exposed to the treatment performed almost 10 points better than students of color in the control group
- White and Asian students academic performance was virtually unaffected (not statistically significant)

RESULTS (Descriptive Data, PSY 150 & BUS 110)

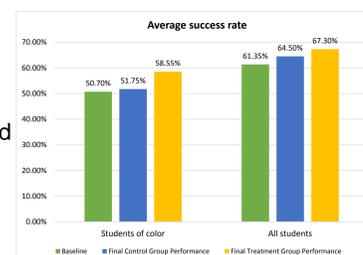
Improved Success and Retention for Students of Color

Withdrawal rate for treatment sections improved by 9.85 percentage points
Success rate improved by 7.85 percentage points



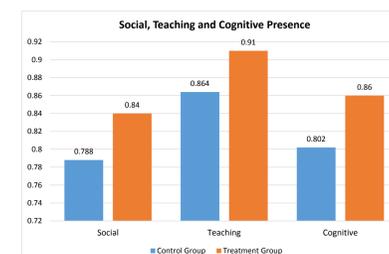
Improved Success Rate Overall

Average withdrawal rate for all students improved 6.35 percentage points
Success rate for all students has increased by 5.95 percentage points



Increased social, teaching, and cognitive presence

Community of Inquiry (CoI) survey results showed treatment courses scored higher than control courses



DISCUSSION

- Average withdrawal rates improved for treatment students overall
- Improvements in success rate for treatment students overall
- More pronounced improvements in withdrawal rate and success rate for students of color
- White and Asian students' academic performance was virtually unaffected (not statistically significant)
- Results support current literature that states higher student engagement leads to higher student outcomes (Shelton, Hung, & Lowenthal, 2017; Wendy, 2018) and that students of color benefit academically from positive social interaction with faculty (Wood & Ireland, 2014; Wood, 2012; Zell, 2010; Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, & Cantwell, 2011).
- Plans to scale-up the model throughout the college
- Professional development training modules are being created to support plans to scale-up

LIMITATIONS/FUTURE RESEARCH

- Data collection for the third course in the study (CIS 110) is currently underway
- Generalizability may be limited due to including only two course disciplines and limited time (two semesters)
- Limitations to research may have been present due to difficulties training instructors to deploy the model and coordination with administrative units to conduct randomized control trial
- Other limitations to scalability include resistance to change and identifying an affordable web conferencing software
- Future research may address how to accommodate for students with different communication preferences such as frequency of contact

CONCLUSION

- The model used for this study has increased student success and should be shared throughout the college.
- With the proper supports and teaching strategies in place to enhance engagement, students of color can be more successful in online courses.

REFERENCES

Please refer to handout for list of references.

Acknowledgements:

This material is based upon work supported by the U.S. Department of Education grant no. P116F150082.
Project Team Members: Bryan Ryan (PI), Carlos McCormick, Chris Roddenberry, Kai Wang, Pooneh Lari, Belinda Profitko, Cynthia Bowers, Laila Shahid-EI, Sarah Rothman, Shelley Evans, Matthew Henry, Thomas Rankin