

Ready, Set, Succeed: Strengthening College Readiness for Long-Term Success

I. Initial Goals & Intended Outcomes of the Quality Enhancement Plan

St. Petersburg College’s (SPC) Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), “Ready, Set, Succeed!” (RSS!) was designed to promote college readiness with a special emphasis on the first-year experience, which would ultimately produce long-term success. With a focus on academic preparation at the outset of a student’s academic career, the QEP strived to produce college-ready students who experienced success in gateway courses such as English and Math and, thus, would be more likely to complete their degree program.



Initial Goals, Strategies, and Desired Student Learning Outcomes

Starting in 2015, a QEP topic selection committee began examining existing SPC initiatives, analyzing student success as well as persistence, retention, and completion data, and surveying faculty and staff with the goal of choosing a topic that would align with existing SPC initiatives and would be the most beneficial to our students. SPC decided that due to the steady decline in both success and completion rates of our flexible opt-out students (students who were no longer required to take developmental Math and English courses) that “College Readiness for Long-Term Success” (RSS!) would be an ideal QEP topic. The theme “Ready, Set, Succeed!” embodied the goal of the program.

The intended RSS! program outcomes were aligned with persistence, retention, and completion goals.

- Program Outcome 1: The percentage of participating flexible opt-out students to continue enrollment (fall to spring) will exceed that of non-participating flexible opt-out students, year to year (**Persistence**).
- Program Outcome 2: The percentage of participating flexible opt-out students to continue enrollment (fall to fall) will exceed that of non-participating flexible opt-out students, year to year (**Retention**).
- Program Outcome 3: The percentage of participating flexible opt-out students to complete a degree or certificate will exceed that of non-participating flexible opt-out students, by the end of year 4 (**Completion**).

To achieve these outcomes, SPC implemented the following strategy: offer a free, non-credit, full-year first-year seminar to *all* incoming first time in college (FTIC) flexible-opt out students called Neighborhoods for Success (NFS 1000). NFS 1000 would emphasize metacognition, time management, study and note-taking skills, learner mindset and grit, goal setting, etc. NFS 1000 would meet weekly, be led by a faculty mentor and success coach (academic tutor), and have a peer mentor embedded in the course. Because students would be together for an entire academic year in a supportive and integrated environment, the seminar was intended to parallel a traditional learning community. Thus, the learning objectives of NFS 1000 were:

- Students will identify their learner mindset, including their motivation, and take ownership of their academic goals (**Ready**).
- Students will learn strategies such as time management, knowledge monitoring, and comprehension to help them along their academic path (**Set**).


- Students will show how their learner mindset and learning strategies have helped them in persistence, retention, and completion (**Succeed**).

Learning in the seminar would be assessed by multiple modalities using the learning outcomes below.

- Student Learning Outcome 1: NFS 1000 students will identify why they came to college, what their motivations are for pursuing a degree or certificate, and how they can apply their behaviors to take ownership of their academic goals (**Metacognition/Mindset & Motivation**).
- Student Learning Outcome 2: NFS 1000 students will identify barriers to efficient time management and apply the planning tools to increase productivity (**Time Management**).
- Student Learning Outcome 3: NFS 1000 students will identify their knowledge gaps (**Knowledge Monitoring**).
- Student Learning Outcome 4: Students will effectively apply thinking strategies to comprehend course material (**Comprehension**).

Remember that **SMART** Goals should be:

Specific
Measurable
Achievable
Results - Focused
Time - Bound



Bad Example	Better Example	Reason
I want to make an A in all my classes!	I will do better in my writing course.	Too broad and may not be achievable. Consider each class separately. Not all classes have the same amount of work. Some classes are introducing you to topics while others require more advanced knowledge. The better example is specific to a class and exam. Remember that your SMART goals should be small. They are then combined to not have to give up.
I will do better in my writing course.	I will visit the writing center this week to get feedback on my first essay for ENG1101.	The bad example is not specific and hard to measure. The better example provides an actionable, result-focused alternative.
I am going to study more.	I am going to schedule 3 hours each day to study for my courses.	The bad example is hard to measure and may have issues with timing. The better example includes specifics and a timeframe for the action.

Implementation of the QEP

Implementation of the RSS! program was piloted through the NFS 1000 seminar at two campus sites: St. Pete/Gibbs (south county) and Clearwater (north county) with the intent of expansion to other campuses. The seminar followed the model of a traditional learning community; 25 students were enrolled in each of the 2 sections of NFS 1000, which met weekly in the fall and spring. These initial sections were marketed and offered to flexible opt-out placement students, but any student recommended by an advisor or faculty member was allowed to enroll. At the beginning of the initial term, students enrolled in NFS 1000 were required to take a four-week Smart Start orientation, which was already offered by the College. During the pilot year, the RSS! Leadership committee provided continuous assessment of best practices for the seminar in order to refine the seminar for Years 1-4. Additionally, the committee worked to develop training materials for faculty and staff, create online resources for faculty and staff, and prepare advisors for expanding the program.

During Years 1-4, the RSS! program and NFS 1000 seminar were expanded. First, the seminar gradually expanded to all five major campus sites and one online section. In Year 1, the RSS! goal was to offer 3 sections with 25 students each. In Years 2-4, the RSS! goal was to offer 6 sections with 25-30 students each in an attempt to reach approximately 180 flexible opt-out students per year. Though flexible opt-out students remained the targeted student population of the RSS! program, any student recommended by an advisor or faculty member were still allowed to register. The seminar met weekly during the fall semester and biweekly during the spring semester. Peer mentoring was also added to each NFS 1000 seminar in Year 2 to provide an extra level of support. Additionally, all students enrolled in NFS 1000 were required to attend a mandatory welcome event—Off on the Right Foot—where they would meet NFS 1000 program staff, interact with faculty from across the College, and forge relationships with fellow QEP participants. They were also required to attend specialized RSS! programming in the fall

semesters and attend at least two on-campus events in the spring semesters for successful completion of the NFS 1000 seminar. The RSS! Leadership committee met monthly throughout Years 1-4 to reflect on the success of the program, analyze assessment data, and refine and make adjustments as needed.

II. Changes Made to the Quality Enhancement Plan

During the Pilot year (2017-2018), the RSS! program and NFS 1000 seminar were implemented as written. After evaluation of the pilot year, the RSS! program was expanded to other campuses and modalities as intended, but it underwent several changes in the years that followed. During Year 1 (2018-2019), Smart Start Orientation was eliminated as it replicated Off on the Right Foot. NFS 1000 scheduling also shifted from weekly meetings for a full academic year to weekly meetings in the fall and bi-weekly meetings in the spring after the RSS! committee evaluated feedback from students who participated in the pilot year. A virtual option was added for one of the mandatory seminar events—Keep it Going!—to better accommodate students having difficulty attending on-campus events.



RSS! students meet faculty at Off on the Right Foot event

In Year 2, 2019-2020, RSS! experienced significant change. During this academic year, students were provided not only with a laptop but also school supplies at the Off on the Right Foot event to ensure students had the tools they needed for success. The active participation policy for the spring semester was also altered to include the option of attending six on-campus events as an alternative to attending the bi-weekly seminar. Other changes to RSS! during Year 2 included altering the Final Reflection Rubric and the Final Reflection assignment to provide more comprehensive direction for students. Finally, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in the spring of 2020, all courses were moved to an online and Live Online modality (using Zoom). This was a substantial change for our face-to-face students who relied on meeting with their Faculty Mentor, Success Coach, and Peer Mentor.



RSS! students moved to online events and coursework

As the pandemic continued throughout Year 3 (2020-2021), RSS! struggled with enrollment and retention since the program was forced to move completely online. All six sections of NFS 1000 moved to a Live Online format, which impacted the sense of belonging that was created through the weekly and bi-weekly face-to-face meetings with Faculty Mentors, Success Coaches, and Peer Mentors. Many students struggled with the technology, although students were still provided a free computer with webcam. All events such as the Welcome Event, Off on the Right Foot, and Keep it Going were also moved to a webinar format via Zoom, which also impacted student

engagement. Year 3 also saw new QEP leadership. After analyzing persistence and retention data from the pilot and Years 1-2 as well as enrollment data and student feedback, the new QEP faculty lead

proposed curriculum and duration changes to the RSS! committee. As a result, a working group was formed to evaluate and reassess the NFS 1000 curriculum content. A pilot 12-week Express session version of NFS 1000 was also proposed, approved, and initiated during the Spring 2021 semester.

As the working group assessed the curriculum in the NFS 1000 seminar, they proposed to the RSS! Leadership Committee that each module reflection be removed from the course and the final reflection be revised to include questions posed in the module reflection. Additionally, some of the smaller assignments that were easy to complete as a class in a face-to-face setting were removed, simplified, or adjusted to apply to coursework that students were completing in their for-credit classes. The working group also proposed to shorten the seminar from a full-year commitment to a one-semester commitment so that the enrolled students could complete the NFS 1000 seminar in one semester. These changes were approved by the RSS! Leadership Committee and SPC’s Vice President of Academic Affairs.

As a result of these recommendations, the RSS! Committee continued to reshape the framework of RSS! and the NFS 1000 seminar in Year 4 (2021-2022). While some of these changes were necessary to accommodate the realities of the pandemic, others were necessary to better serve the College’s student population and align with the original intent of the RSS! program: college readiness for long-term success. Six semester-long sections of NFS 1000 were offered in Fall 2021 and six sections were offered in Spring 2022. During Year 4, three sections returned face-to-face, two remained in the Live Online format, and one was fully online with an optional Zoom component. The seminar met weekly throughout each term.

III. Impact on the Environment & Student Learning

Initially anticipating 690 students over a five-year period, *Ready, Set, Succeed!* enrolled 408 students in 32 Neighborhoods for Success (NFS) 1000 seminar sections from 2017-2022 (Table 1), with 239 students completing the program. Of those participants who completed, 141 were included in the “Eligible” category. Evidence of RSS! impact on student learning was collected throughout the seminar period using multiple modalities and both qualitative and quantitative assessment formats. Results were reviewed by the QEP committee to track students’ progress and identify areas for concern or necessary program change. These results were disaggregated by “eligible” QEP participants (those fitting the original target population definition of FTIC and flexible opt-out) and “all QEP participants.” Where appropriate, data was also compared to matching data from cohorts of eligible non-participants—those students who qualified for the QEP program but chose not to participate—to demonstrate evidence of program efficacy.

Table 1: Ready, Set, Succeed! Enrollment 2017-2022

Cohort	Enrolled	Completed	Eligible Enrolled	Eligible Completed
2017-2018 Pilot	37	34	29	28
2018-2019	72	49	46	35
2019-2020	93	44	68	34
2020-2021	53	20	36	14
Spring 2021 Express	22	11	8	6
2021-2022 (Fall and Spring cohorts)	131	83	38	26
Total	408	239	225	141

Impact on Student Learning and Course Success

Ready and Set: Assessment of Student Learning during the NFS Seminar

The primary assessment used to assess impact on learning throughout all NFS cohorts was the Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI), an evidence-based pre- and post-test instrument that uses 64 Likert-scale questions to assess change over time in students’ learning attitudes and practices. Questions are grouped in nine sub-categories, including Selecting Main Ideas, Information Processing, Anxiety, Test Strategies, and Using Academic Resources. For the QEP, these sub-categories were then-aligned to the four NFS Student Learning Outcomes: Time Management, Comprehension, Knowledge Monitoring, and Motivation. Students completed the assessment during class in the first week and last week of the course.

Results for all aggregated cohorts are provided in Table 2. For reporting purposes, comparison means were only calculated for those students who completed both the pre- and post-LASSI assessments (N=123). Eligible participants’ data was further disaggregated (N=77). Mean scores are based on a 5-point Likert scale. Percent differences between pre- and post-assessments are indicated, as are standard deviations and significance values (assuming $p \leq 0.05$). As Table 2 demonstrates, on average participants demonstrated the most learning in *Comprehension* skills and attitudes (+0.54), followed closely by *Knowledge Monitoring* (+0.31). Participants’ responses, particularly eligible participants, indicated more confidence in asking for help from instructors and other academic resources, greater understanding in how to adapt studying styles to the material, and greater reliance on skills such as creating study questions to self-test for an exam. Eligible participants saw the greatest gains in these areas.

Table 2: Pre and Post LASSI (5 pt scale)

LASSI Category (SLO)	All Participants			Eligible Participants		
	Pre LASSI Mean (N=123)	Post LASSI Mean (N=123)	Diff.	Pre LASSI Mean (N=77)	Post LASSI Mean (N=77)	Diff.
<i>Motivation & Ownership (SLO1)</i>	3.70	3.77	0.07	3.35	3.82	0.47
<i>Time Management (SLO2)</i>	3.10	3.21	0.11	2.88	3.57	0.69
<i>Knowledge Monitoring (SLO3)</i>	3.26	3.57	0.31	2.88	3.47	0.59
<i>Comprehension (SLO4)</i>	3.48	4.02	0.54	3.21	3.83	0.62

From pre- to post-assessment, participants showed greater learning in areas such as motivating themselves to complete coursework, setting goals for grades and course performance, and desiring to complete a certificate or degree. Significance testing on these metrics showed findings were statistically meaningful between pre- and post-assessment, further supporting evidence of learning gains from NFS participants who completed the program.

In addition to the LASSI, the Knowledge Monitoring Assessment (KMA) was a pre-and post-test used as a diagnostic tool to demonstrate how accurately participants could gauge what they knew when learning how to determine what areas to study and where knowledge gaps were. In later course surveys, participants identified the KMA as a useful tool in increasing their understanding of their own knowledge gaps.

Reflection assignments assessed students’ understanding and growth within the four learning outcomes: *Motivation and Ownership*, *Time Management*, *Knowledge Monitoring*, and *Comprehension*. Students submitted a Module Reflection after each of the four modules ended, as well as a comprehensive Final Reflection at the end of their NFS term, which detailed how they utilized the skills learned within each learning outcome. Reflections were scored by a team NFS committee members and standardized to a scoring rubric. Mean scores are based on a 3-point Likert scale. Of the four Cohort Module Reflections aggregated across all program years, *Time Management* held the highest average of 2.51, whereas *Comprehension* had the lowest average with 2.06. Module reflections were discontinued in 2021-2022 with the move to the semester-based NFS term. Of the four Final Reflections sections, *Motivation* had the highest average at 2.25, and *Knowledge Monitoring* had the lowest at 2.05. Participants demonstrated clear overall gains in learning in each of the four modules as means scored above a halfway-mark of 1.5. However, results from both Module and Final Reflections were limited as only a portion of participants completed the assignments.

In addition to these assessments, RSS! students were surveyed anonymously at the end of each semester to gather their impressions of the program, their own sense of learning and growth, and recommendations for improvement. Table 3 shows a sample of questions with mean scores on a Likert scale of 5, from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*. The majority of students agreed or strongly agreed on multiple metrics that showed evidence of their growth as students and the impact of learning from the NFS course.

Table 3: Course Survey Responses		
<i>Survey Question</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>
<i>Participation in NFS1000 has helped me be successful in other courses</i>	94	4.40
<i>I now know behaviors to help me achieve my goals</i>	96	4.51
<i>I now know how to identify what I do and don't know about my learning</i>	96	4.48
<i>This course helped me identify why I'm pursuing a degree</i>	96	4.12
<i>This course taught me strategies to help me fill my knowledge gaps</i>	97	4.44

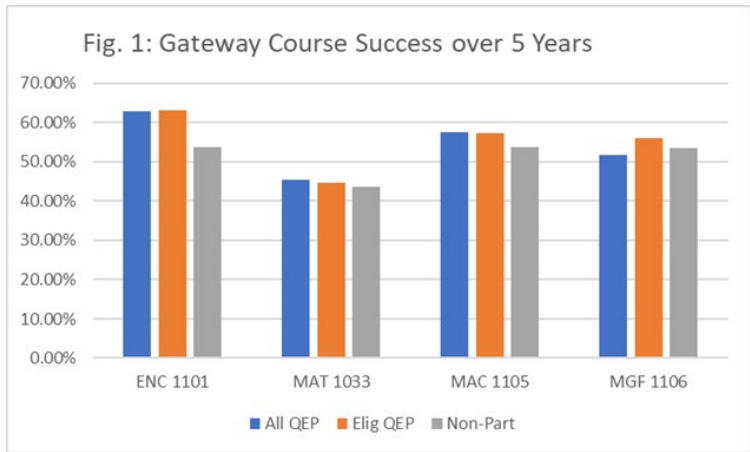
Additionally, qualitative responses gathered from open-ended questions provided more insight into what impacts students felt from the program. Comments included:

- *“This was my first semester of doing online college, so I felt I needed all the help I could get. I’m glad I joined NFS.”*
- *“The activities helped me think through how to apply the skills not just in the course but in everyday life and school.”*
- *“I made new friends, staff connections, and created new learning strategies for myself.”*
- *“I approach life with another mindset, and study more effectively.”*

Sentiment analysis of narrative responses showed thematic patterns. A *sense of connection with program faculty and staff*, *support from instructors*, and *belonging with peers* were viewed as key benefits of program participation, which all contribute to higher course success and program completion rates.

Succeed!: Student Outcomes and Course Success as a Result of NFS Participation

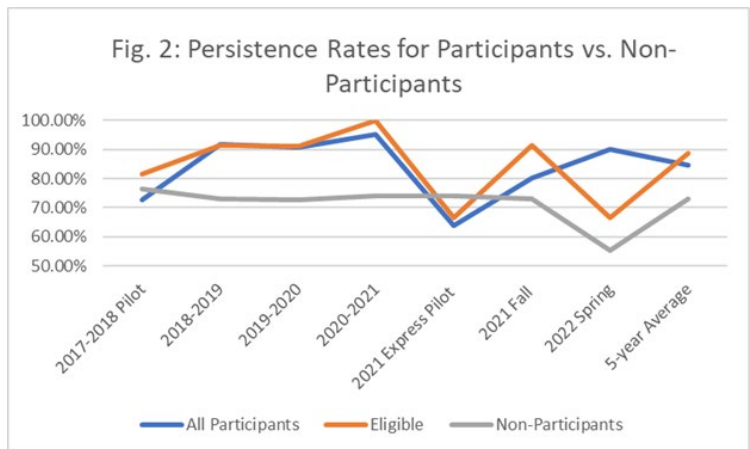
The modules and supports offered during the NFS 1000 seminar and Ready, Set, Succeed! program were designed to give participants the skills necessary to be more successful in their courses, defined as earning a passing grade of A, B, or C. While not a formal program outcome for the QEP, improved course success outcomes, particularly in “gateway” courses, are a necessary stepping stone to improved persistence, retention, and completion. Course success was tracked for participants using performance in four Composition and Mathematics gateway courses taken either during or after participation in the NFS 1000 seminar. Differences in course modality (i.e. online vs. in-person) and course length (i.e. 12 weeks vs. 16 weeks) were not tracked due to high variability between students and academic programs.



As demonstrated in Figure 1, success outcomes for QEP participants exceeded those for non-participants in nearly every case. Particularly of interest were outcomes in ENC 1101, the standard Composition course required for all students. All QEP participants averaged a success rate of 62.9%, and eligible participants a rate of 63.2%. This far exceeds the Non-participant rate of 53.7%, further supporting the efficacy of the NFS 1000 seminar in improving student success. While the margin of success for other gateway courses such as mathematics (MAT 1033) and statistics (MAC 1105) was narrower, there is still a clear trend of QEP participants being more successful than their non-participant counterparts.

Impact on Persistence, Retention, and Completion

The overall program outcomes for *Ready, Set, Succeed!* were 1) higher persistence rates for participants vs. eligible non-participants; 2) higher retention rates for participants vs. eligible non-participants; and 3) higher certificate or degree completion rates for participants vs. eligible non-participants. For the purposes of the QEP, persistence is defined as enrollment in the subsequent full term (Fall to Spring or Spring to Fall for Spring enrollees). Retention is defined as enrollment in the same term one year later (Fall to Fall or Spring to Spring), minus those participants who graduated during that time. Completion is defined as participants earning a certificate or degree. Participants are defined as students who completed the NFS program. Metrics were tracked for all QEP participants, eligible QEP participants, and eligible non-participant cohorts.

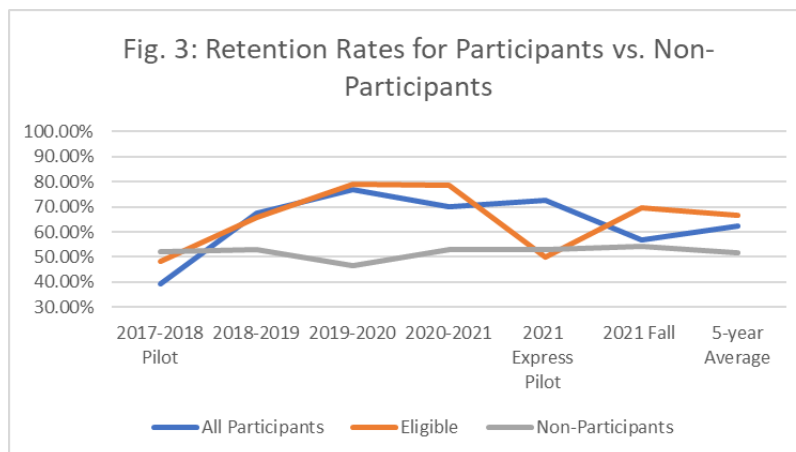


Program Outcome 1: Increased Persistence

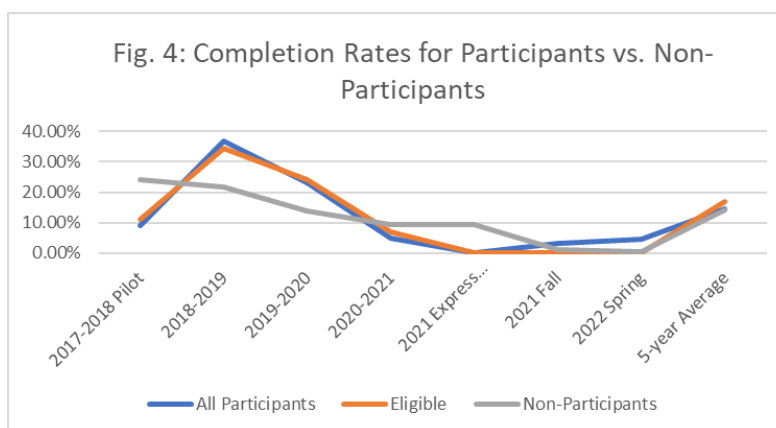
was achieved for the QEP program. As shown in Figure 2, the overall average persistence rate for all QEP participants

(84.3%) exceeded that of eligible non-participants (72.9%) by more than 11% during the two cohorts' 5-year span. The average eligible participant persistence rate was even higher, at 88.7%. Both of these margins were deemed significant through standard T-tests ($p \leq 0.041$ and 0.046 , respectively), although limitations on pool size for QEP eligible participants should be noted. Program completion was also significant for persistence when comparing NFS completers versus those who dropped the program before completing. Of those who dropped NFS, only 43.7% overall and 58.5% of eligible participants remained enrolled in any courses the following term. Spring 2021 Express Pilot figures represented a small subset of the total QEP population; based on the persistence rate and other data, it was determined that the Express format was not as beneficial to students' outcomes and the Express model was reworked.

Program Outcome 2: Increased Retention was also realized. The overall average retention rate for all QEP participants (64.0%) exceeded that of eligible non-participants (51.1%) by more than 11% during the cohorts' 5-year span (Figure 3). Retention for eligible participants (66.7%) also exceeded non-participants by more than 15%. Significance testing did not yield statistically significant results; however, limitations on pool size were likely a factor.



Finally, **Program Outcome 3: Completion** was also met during the 5-year QEP period. Of the 239 participants who completed RSS!, 18.4% went on to earn a certificate or degree by the end of the QEP period as compared to 16.6% in the non-eligible cohort. More significantly, 21.99% of eligible participants earned a certificate or degree during this time (Figure 4). While completion numbers were still relatively low overall, this trend follows typical patterns of completion for community college students, as average time to completion is three years or more.¹ When looking at the 2018-2019 cohort and completion within three years at the end of the program, there is a marked difference between RSS! participants and non-participants. Approximately 36.73% of all participants and 34.29% of eligible participants in this cohort earned a certificate or degree, exceeding non-participants' completion rate of 21.71% by nearly 15%. Higher persistence and retention



¹ Juszkievicz, J. (2020, July). Trends in Community College Enrollment and Completion Data, Issue 6. Washington, DC: American Association of Community Colleges

rates for program completers in later cohorts also offer encouragement toward the likelihood of additional participants earning a certificate or degree after the QEP term has ended.

As evidenced by the persistence, retention, and completion data, *Ready, Set, Succeed!* had a measurable impact on its participants in both their preparation for college courses and success in working toward a degree.

Impact on Learning Environment

Ready, Set, Succeed! was successful in meeting its program goals. The program not only impacted its participants and their academic preparation and success, but it also had resounding effects on the faculty and staff involved in the program as well as the College at large. When asked to identify areas of learning that could be used beyond NFS, faculty mentors, success coaches, and peer mentors shared the following:

- *“This program probably did more for me than it did the students. As I worked with these FTIC (First Time in College) students and really listened to them, I was able to pick up tips that I was able to pass on to FTIC students who were not in the program.”*
- *“Connecting with the students outside of my subject area helped in understanding the challenges students face. This in turn enabled me to review my curriculum to incorporate more study skills resources as well as a reflection piece to show the students how learning economics helps them in their daily lives.”*
- *“One of the biggest things I have gained from serving as an NFS peer mentor is more confidence in social situations and social skills...it pushed me to communicate better.”*



RSS! helped faculty connect with students and better understand challenges

As noted in these comments, the lessons learned from the NFS classroom helped to revamp instruction and faculty/student interactions in courses beyond NFS. Materials developed during NFS, such as the Study Strategies Toolkit and Time Management Toolkit, were shared College-wide and incorporated into the Smart Start Orientation curriculum made available to all SPC students.

Lessons learned from the QEP program have also helped to shape future programming at SPC. NFS students responded most positively to the connections they were able to form with faculty and staff, and to the events that were available

throughout the year. Student surveys and persistence data

within the seminar showed committing to a year-long, non-credit program proved difficult for many of the students the College serves. Thus, plans for future support services, such as an upcoming First Year Experience program, will focus more on shorter-term curriculum and emphasize connection events to garner increased participation by students.

IV. Reflection on the QEP

The RSS! QEP program demonstrated to St. Petersburg College that the goal inherent in the topic—**college readiness for long-term success**—highlighted a need to not only better prepare flexible opt-out students for academic success, but also a need to provide these skills to all incoming FTIC students. Because NFS 1000 so heavily focused on academic preparation skills, provided individualized support, and fostered a sense of belonging through working with a faculty mentor, a success coach, and peer mentor as well as participating as a student cohort, students who completed the seminar largely felt that it was beneficial to their success in college. However, the realities of the College’s student demographic often prevented them from finishing the NFS 1000 seminar or participating at all since it was not-for-credit.



RSS! had a positive impact on student completion

Upon further reflection, the College saw that the goals, program outcomes, and content of NFS 1000 were a good fit for students, but that what we really needed was a mandatory First-Year Experience (FYE) program to transition *all* new students into college. As a result, SPC has taken what it has learned from RSS! and is beginning to develop a First-Year Experience program. During the 2022-2023 school year, funding was provided for a First-Year Academic Experience that utilizes the content from RSS! through a series of academic success skills workshops for all first-time SPC students, beginning with an academic orientation that takes place before the semester begins. Events such as Off on the Right Foot and Keep it Going have transitioned into this new program, called First-Time Titans, and workshops focusing on time management, goal setting, study skills, etc., are currently in development. Peer mentoring will also continue through this program, although it will take the form of one-on-one mentoring.

Finally, the QEP gave the college the opportunity to better understand our student population and their needs as well as the needs of faculty and staff. These needs were further emphasized as the program was implemented through the pandemic. As the program faced enrollment declines each year, the College saw an increasing need for flexibility and simplicity in order to meet the RSS! program outcomes. This allowed the RSS! committee to translate its original content from high-level best practices to student-friendly content that students could apply in real-time to the courses in which they were currently enrolled. The College also learned that the cohort-based year-long learning community model in which

the RSS! program was founded was difficult to implement due to both challenges with student schedules and institutional concerns. The results of these reflections have allowed us to better design our FYE so that branding is easy to understand, content is simple, flexible, and provided during blocks of time when both students and faculty are already on campus, thus ensuring more successful outcomes in the future.

