

School Name Southeast Community College, Lincoln, NE  
Course Name Quick Start  
Course Format Lab

**Key Results** Fifty-two percent of students who completed the Quick Start course with MyFoundationsLab earned college credit versus 32 percent of students in a control group without it. Ninety-one percent of all Quick Start students who retested on the COMPASS test improved their placement scores, testing out of an average 1.8 classes each and saving more than \$136,881 in tuition from May 2012 through June 2014.

#### Program director

Phip Ross, PhD, English Instructor

#### Course materials

MyFoundationsLab

#### Background

Southeast Community College enrolls nearly 11,000 students annually and offers more than 50 programs of study, including 12 programs entirely online. With a commitment both to help students achieve their individual potential and to increase students' employability, the college transfers or places into occupations more than 90 percent of its graduates each year yet offers the most affordable tuition and fees of all Nebraska colleges.

#### Challenges and goals

Observing that many students who scored poorly on the COMPASS placement exam would simply walk away from campus and not return, Phip Ross and his Transitions Lab staff determined to create an intervention to help students put their academic and career goals back on track. With funding from a Department of Labor grant, Ross launched the Quick Start program in 2012. Quick Start combines personalized skills remediation in MyFoundationsLab with advising, tutoring, and advocacy from Transitions Lab staff.

*“Quick Start with MyFoundationsLab aims to strengthen students’ basic skills while reinforcing the academic and social behaviors that constitute college readiness.”*

—Phip Ross, Program Director

Ross' goals for the Quick Start intervention included:

- Remediate students' academic and noncognitive readiness skills gaps to enable students to enroll at Southeast Community College.
- Accelerate students' progress into the credit-bearing courses that would help them achieve their ultimate career goals.
- Link adult education with developmental studies.

Ross states, “Students know that higher education can help them realize their career and life goals, but a low placement score often demoralizes them. Many students struggle to visualize a path beyond that obstacle. We try to counsel all students with low placement scores and build relationships with each one. Quick Start aims to strengthen students' basic skills while reinforcing the academic and social behaviors that constitute college readiness.”

*“We suspected that some of the lowest-scoring students were, in fact, fully capable of doing college-level work. The Quick Start program proves that, with modest remediation and advising, these students can outperform peers who initially scored higher on the placement exam.”*

*—Phip Ross, Program Director*

### Implementation

Students whose COMPASS scores place them in Pre-Foundations (less than sixth grade) or Foundations (developmental) levels of math, reading, or writing are encouraged to enroll in Quick Start. Quick Start is a noncredit continuing education course but students who enroll must register at Southeast Community College, obtaining access privileges to the Lab and the valued credential of a student ID. Students pay a fee of \$20 to commit to the Quick Start program; the fee offsets the cost of the software license.

Once enrolled, students take the MyFoundationsLab pre-diagnostic and then work independently on the modules in their personalized Learning Path. Students must complete 10 or more hours of work in MyFoundationsLab to earn a passing grade in the Quick Start course. That passing grade entitles students to retake the COMPASS exam with the \$15 fee waived.

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### Results and data

#### Comparison of learner outcomes with Quick Start intervention and without Quick Start

Transitions Lab staff randomly selected two groups of students from among those who completed a Southeast Community College COMPASS test in spring, summer, or fall 2012. Students’ test scores qualified them as either Pre-Foundations (less than sixth grade) or Foundations level (developmental). The Group A Treatment cohort included 176 Quick Start students; the Group B Control cohort included 176 non-Quick Start students. Both cohorts were controlled to include 65 students with Pre-Foundations scores.

Quick Start students outperformed the control group by a significant margin, with 52 percent of Quick Start students earning credit versus 32 percent of the control group. Among the Pre-Foundations cohorts, 37 percent of Quick Start students earned credit while only 17 percent of the control group did so (Figure 1). Overall, Quick Start students earned nearly twice as many credits as the control group: among the Pre-Foundations

Cohorts (n = 176 each)	# of Students Earning Credit	Percent Earning Credit	Total Credits Attained	Tuition @ \$56.75
A: QuickStart	91/176	52%	2,004.5	\$113,755.38
B: Control	56/176	32%	1,161.0	\$65,886.75
Difference	35	20%	843.5	\$47,868.63

Table 1. Comparison of Credits Earned by Quickstart Cohort Versus Control Cohort, Fall, Winter, and Spring 2012

Cohorts (n = 65 each)	# of Students Earning Credit	Percent Earning Credit	Total Credits Attained	Tuition @ \$56.75
A: QuickStart	24/65	37%	417	\$23,664.75
B: Control	11/65	17%	203.5	\$11,548.63
Difference	13	20%	213.5	\$12,116.12

Table 2. Comparison of Outcomes per Subgroup of Pre-Foundations Students

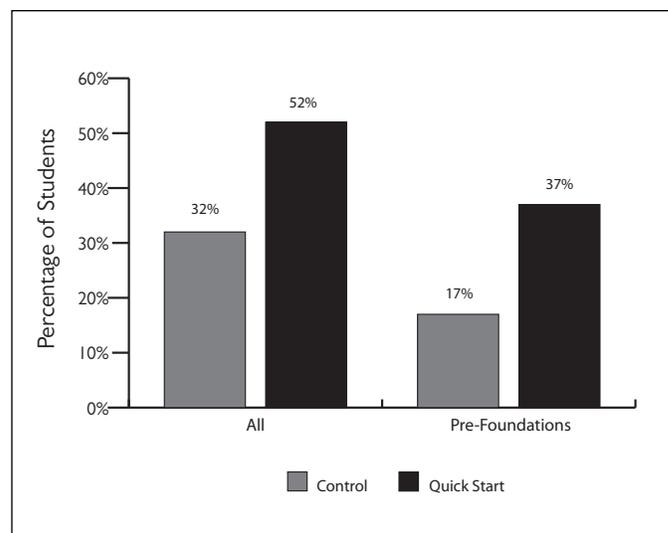


Figure 1. Percentage of All and Pre-Foundations Quick Start and Control Students Earning Credit, Fall, Winter, and Spring Quarters 2012 (All Control, n = 176; All Quick Start, n = 176; Pre-Foundations Control, n = 65; Pre-Foundations Quick Start, n = 65)

*“Quick Start absolutely prepared me for college coursework. Without the Transitions Lab, I would have shied away from college and gone back to construction. Earning a place on the Dean’s List made me more determined than ever to achieve my goals.”*

—Student

cohorts, students who completed Quick Start earned 417 credits while the control group earned only 203.5. Results from this initial study demonstrate that even the lowest-scoring students are capable of college success if afforded a modest intervention that addresses gaps in readiness.

#### Cumulative results of Quick Start with MyFoundationsLab, May 2012–June 2014

- A full 406 students completed Quick Start and retested on the COMPASS.
- Ninety-one percent (369 of 406 students) improved their COMPASS scores.
- Two hundred ninety-seven students tested out of 536 classes, an average of 1.81 classes per student; total tuition saved equals \$136,881 (536 classes = 2412 credit hours x \$56.75\* per credit hour) or an average of \$460.88 tuition saved per student.
- Forty-eight Quick Start students earned spots on the 2013 fall quarter Dean’s List.
- Quick Start students have earned a total of 11,254.5 credits through June 2014; at \$56.75\*/credit, these credits equal \$638,692.87 in tuition fees that may not have been realized without the Quick Start intervention.
- Forty-three Quick Start students to date have completed certificates, diplomas, or degrees.
- Quick Start students are outperforming students with similar placement scores by completing and passing courses at a rate of almost 2 to 1.

*“Quick Start students are outperforming students with similar placement scores by completing and passing courses at a rate of almost 2 to 1.”*

—Phip Ross, Program Director

#### The student experience

##### Snapshots of two Quick Start students

J. came to Southeast Community College seeking a career change after years in the military and construction. With Quick Start, J. improved his COMPASS writing score from a 4 to a 78 (a score of 16 or higher is needed for credit courses at Southeast Community College) and his math score from a 17 to a 37. He earned a grade of A+ in Composition I and a place on the Dean’s List.

*“I was shaky and nervous on my first day in the Transitions Lab, but the Quick Start program restored my confidence. Quick Start absolutely prepared me for college coursework. Without the Transitions Lab, I would have shied away from college and gone back to construction. Earning a place on the Dean’s List made me more determined than ever to achieve my goals.”*

K. completed the Quick Start program, raising his math score from a 23 to a 36 and his reading score from a 73 to an 82 in less than two weeks.

*“I made some mistakes—I was a felon. But I have four kids, and I need to show them something. Quick Start helped me refresh my skills, and I am now registered for college. My goals are to become an entrepreneur, open my own business, and mentor troubled youth. Thanks to the Transitions Lab, I’m ready to go. My advice to fellow students is: put in the effort, put in the hours, and you can meet your goals.”*

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\*2012 tuition cost per credit hour; rate increased to \$59.75/credit hour in 2014.

*“Quick Start is a great investment for the students and for the college.”*

*—Phip Ross, Program Director*

### Best practices

Ross notes, “MyFoundationsLab is really solid. The program is easy to navigate and very well designed. Even students who arrive without any prior technology experience are able to get started easily and to work independently. If students commit to working in MyFoundationsLab, they do well.”

He continues, “The human connection is vital. The Transitions Lab is a safe zone where students can address their insecurities without fear of being exposed. Every student has an advocate, or several, who know that student’s name. That advocacy bolsters students’ confidence to take risks, and each challenge met serves to increase students’ confidence. The Transitions Lab advisors and tutors know the people and processes at Southeast Community College really well. Transitions Lab staff help students navigate the campus and make connections. Advisors don’t hesitate to pick up the phone or even to walk a student to the registrar or the financial aid office. That personal investment helps students gain their bearings in the campus environment; students quickly become able to self-advocate.”

### Conclusion

The Transitions Lab at Southeast Community College was recently named a winner of the National Council of Instructional Administrators Exemplary Initiatives competition in the Curricular Program Innovation category.

Ross summarizes, “We’re taking a close look at improving student services across the college. Students need both learning technology and human resources. With Quick Start, we’re combining skilled advising and academic tutoring with personalized, just-in-time skills remediation through MyFoundationsLab. Results indicate that this model is an effective intervention to retain Foundations and Pre-Foundations students—and the cost of the program is relatively insignificant compared to the increased tuition revenues from students who matriculate and take more and more credit-bearing courses. Quick Start is a great investment for the students and for the college.”

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This user-report case study documents implementation practices and evaluates possible relationships between program implementation and student performance. These findings are not meant to imply causality or generalizability beyond this specific instance. Rather, findings from this study demonstrate associations that are potentially useful for further theory testing in future experimental studies. For this case study, a mixed-methods design was applied, and the data collected included qualitative data from interviews, quantitative program usage analytics, and student performance data. An open-ended interview protocol was used to guide data collection.