

# ALEKS PPL Significantly Improves Students' Placement and Performance in College-Level Math Courses

## **Institution Profile**

William Rainey Harper College provides a community college education to more than 26,000 students annually in Chicago's northwest suburbs. Harper College offers associate degrees, certification programs, workforce training, and continuing education classes.

## **A Study to Evaluate Math Placement**

Harper College used ACT's Compass math placement exam for over 20 years. To improve their course placement and success rates for students in college-level math courses, Harper College, in partnership with researchers from Vanderbilt University, conducted a controlled pilot of more than 1,000 students during the summer of 2014 and subsequently monitored student performance in math classes during the fall of 2014.

The pilot design and analysis were done by researchers at Vanderbilt University to allow for an independent, unbiased and data-driven assessment of ALEKS PPL relative to the student body. The ALEKS PPL product was used by students in the experimental study group and compared against a control group of students who utilized the ACT Compass assessment.

## **Implementation**

Harper College requires degree-seeking students who do not have an ACT math score of 22 or higher from within the past five years to demonstrate their mathematical abilities by taking a math placement exam. The placement exam serves to place students from developmental math through Calculus I. The first assessment students take is proctored, and additional assessments are not.

Harper College requires that students use the ALEKS PPL Prep and Learning Module prior to reassessing. Students must spend three hours in the Prep and Learning Module in order to take the second assessment, and an additional three hours is required for a third attempt. A fourth attempt is available for students who spend an additional five hours in the Prep and Learning Module and, finally, eight additional hours are required for a fifth and final attempt.

## **Results**

Students who used ALEKS PPL were 7–9% more likely to place in a college-level math course compared to the control group who used Compass. Additionally, students who used ALEKS PPL were 19% more likely to receive a “C” or better in their college-level course. Those students were also 22.5% more likely to stay enrolled at Harper College

