Course Redesign Initiative with *Portales* Continues to Pay Dividends, Even Amidst a Pandemic

In 2015, St. Petersburg College made the commitment to overcome an issue faced by many colleges—high attrition and low success rates in its online Spanish courses. New leadership at the college outlined a plan for revitalizing its offerings, tasking faculty with selecting, designing and implementing new courses with the goal of improving outcomes.

For fall 2015, Professor Roxana Levin chose to pilot *Portales*—Vista Higher Learning's groundbreaking introductory Spanish program—with impressive results.

After adopting *Portales*, student success rates (defined as final grade of C or above) increased by up to 30%, while withdrawal and failure rates fell by as much as 50%, indicating a much higher level of engagement and participation than was previously possible.

Ongoing success thanks to *Portales*
When *Portales* was rolled out to more classes and modalities, St. Petersburg faculty saw improved class interactions due to its highly effective features, including:

- Intuitive learning progression with opportunities for student-directed practice
- Presentational and interpersonal skill-building using Virtual and Partner Chats
- Real-time feedback and personalized remediation via self-check diagnostic tools
- Flexibility to customize assignments
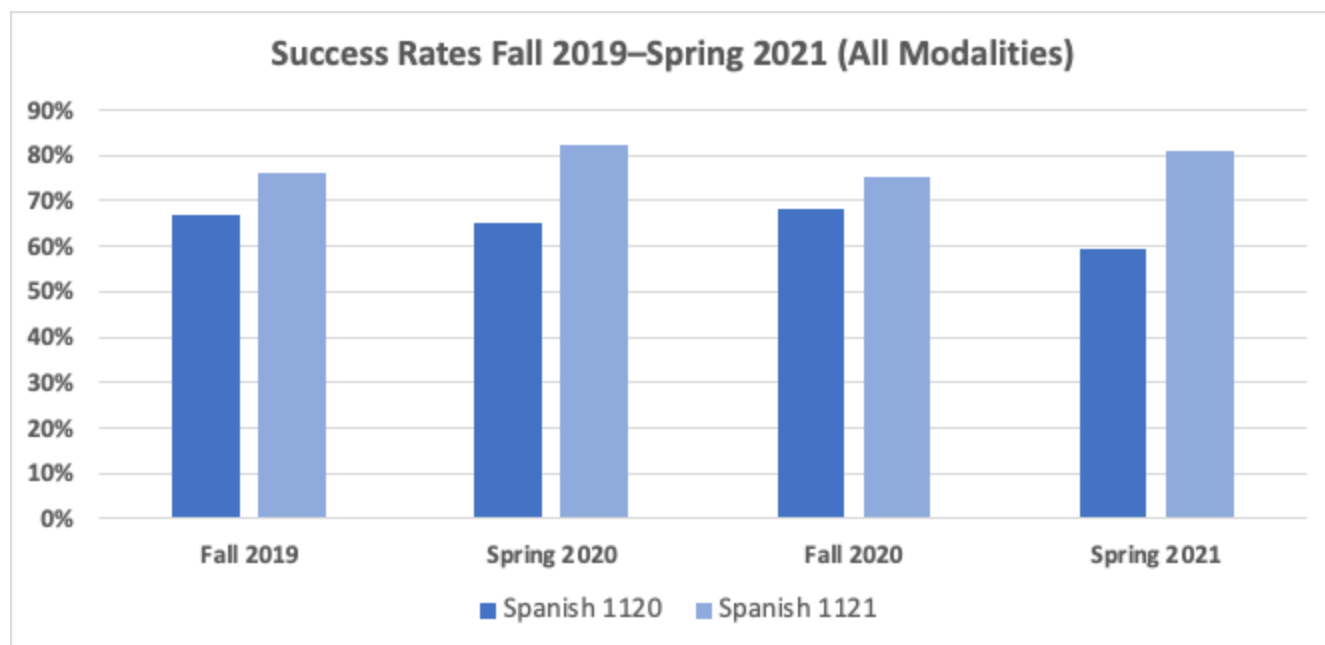- Easy course setup using Learning Tracks

The Results

By fall 2019, success rates had increased to nearly 70% for Spanish I and 80% for Spanish II. Then the pandemic hit.

While many colleges experienced significant downticks in class enrollment, completion and success rates, St. Petersburg faculty and students were better prepared as a result of implementing *Portales*. They were already comfortable with online learning, as well as using the robust complement of online tutorials, interactive exercises and activities.

Says Professor Levin, "It's not easy to take a skills-based course online. The *Portales* platform helps students still feel that sense of community because there are so many opportunities for interaction. And because the activities cover all four skills – writing, reading, listening and speaking — they're a big factor in increasing student success rates."

Professor Levin, who was instrumental in creating the "course of record" for St. Petersburg's Spanish online courses, says that Portales played a big role in the standardization of all Spanish online and live-online courses.

"The revitalization of Spanish online courses at St. Petersburg College was aimed at creating high standard courses and ensuring quality control. As course creator and course coordinator, I had to undergo a rigorous Quality Matter certification and I am expected to revise the courses periodically," according to Levin. "Starting in the spring 2022, with the implementation of the new Enterprise administrative tool in Portales, we will also be able to standardize the Portales content by managing and distributing content to all Spanish online faculty at the college."

Success Rates Fall 2019–Spring 2021 (All Modalities)

Legend: ■ Spanish 1120 ■ Spanish 1121

Additional Benefits

In addition to increased student success and retention, students using *Portales* were able to transfer more successfully from a face-to-face course to an online course, which proved invaluable once classes shifted to 100% online.

Since the 2015 pilot, the Spanish department has also leveraged *Portales*'s cultural and technological strengths to increase students' cultural competency, while incorporating more pair and group activities to ensure that students are properly contextualizing the course material.

Portales by the Numbers

- **400,000+** students at 400+ schools have used Portales 1 to learn Spanish in the past 5 years.
- **2,962,159** # of activities assigned
- **6,920** Average activities assigned by institution
- **8,518** Number of sections with assigned activities

With *Portales* 2.0, the innovative learning experience has been thoughtfully revised and expanded by our specialized language learning team. This update brings new activity types and online group work—among many other updates—so that students build their proficiency through practice and collaboration with their peers. Learn more at learn.vistahigherlearning.com/portales

About Vista Higher Learning

Vista Higher Learning was founded in 2000 with one mission: to raise the teaching and learning of world languages to a higher level. Because we are specialized, we dedicate 100 percent of our resources to this goal and base every decision on how well it supports language learning. Our programs make language learning exciting and relevant, and drive positive outcomes for both educators and students.