PennState World Campus

CHAIKEN CENTER FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

Online Learning Readiness Survey

World Campus Undergraduate Students

2025

Executive Summary

The Assessment

The SmarterMeasure Learning Readiness Indicator (SmarterMeasure) is a web-based assessment designed to measure a learner's readiness for success in an online and/or technology-rich learning environment through the evaluation of non-cognitive indicators associated with academic success.

The primary goal of administering the SmarterMeasure assessment to new World Campus students is to help learners identify their strengths as online students while increasing awareness of academic skill areas where additional support and resources may be beneficial. A secondary goal is to assist students in developing a plan to strengthen target areas identified in their assessment results and to familiarize them with the resources available to support their academic success at World Campus.

The assessment measures seven key areas related to online learning readiness:

- **Individual Attributes** – motivation, procrastination, willingness to seek help, and related behaviors
- **Life Factors** – availability of time, family and employer support, finances, and other external influences
- **Learning Styles** – preferences based on the multiple intelligences model
- **Technical Competency** – proficiency in using technology
- **Technical Knowledge** – understanding of technology-related terminology
- **On-Screen Reading Rate and Recall**
- **Typing Speed and Accuracy**

Discussion

Results from the SmarterMeasure assessment, combined with prior academic performance and student background factors, can help identify learners who may benefit from additional academic support and resources. Data suggests that reading and typing skills, along with non-cognitive factors such as students' perceptions of their academic abilities, are important areas to address in order to increase the likelihood of student retention and academic success.

Reading and typing skills can significantly influence the amount of time students spend engaging with course content and completing assignments. Students who are unfamiliar with college-level reading may experience difficulty understanding course materials, which can result in longer periods of time needed to achieve content mastery and progress through coursework. Similarly, below-benchmark keyboarding skills may negatively affect productivity, time management, study efficiency, and class participation.

Research further supports the relationship between keyboarding proficiency and academic success. A 2006 study by Lubbe, Monteith, and Mentz (p. 290) found that self-regulated learners demonstrated stronger keyboarding skills than less self-regulated learners. Additionally, studies by

Snyder et al. (2014) and Weerdenburg et al. (2018) found that students with limited keyboarding proficiency place greater demands on working memory as they search for keys while typing. These studies concluded that keyboarding skills play an important role in reducing cognitive load and supporting effective learning.

Application of Assessment Results

World Campus Chaiken Center for Student Success utilizes a comprehensive approach to help students apply insights from the SmarterMeasure assessment as they prepare for online learning at World Campus. This approach is designed to strengthen student readiness, increase engagement with support resources, and promote academic success and persistence.

Key components of the plan include:

1. **Increasing utilization of the SmarterMeasure assessment** by integrating the assessment into the World Campus New Student Orientation process.
2. **Expanding student support services** through one-on-one coaching, group webinars, asynchronous learning resources, and enhanced communication and outreach through Starfish.
3. **Providing targeted resources and skill-building opportunities** designed to strengthen students' knowledge, skills, and abilities in order to support academic success and continued enrollment at World Campus.

Data Collection

Penn State World Campus began offering the SmarterMeasure assessment to incoming undergraduate students during the 2010–2011 academic year. Initially, the assessment was included as part of a series of pre-enrollment tasks that students were encouraged to complete before beginning classes. However, completion rates during this period were relatively low. To improve participation, the assessment was later incorporated into the asynchronous New Student Orientation (NSO) course delivered through Canvas. Although completion of the SmarterMeasure assessment remained optional, embedding it within NSO resulted in a significant increase in participation rates.

In 2018, Penn State World Campus made NSO mandatory for all undergraduate students. SmarterMeasure continued to be integrated into the orientation experience, contributing to additional increases in completion rates. Since that time, completion rates for the SmarterMeasure assessment have consistently exceeded 70% (OAR-12084, 2019).

Upon completion of the assessment, students immediately receive a detailed report summarizing their results. The report provides information on each scale and sub-scale measured within the assessment, offers positive reinforcement related to students' strengths, and includes recommended resources designed to strengthen online learning skills. The appendix of the report also highlights support services and tools available to students at World Campus.

Each week, Academic Development Services receives a report identifying students who completed the SmarterMeasure assessment. Assessments are flagged based on the number of scales and sub-scales that fall below established threshold levels. These thresholds are determined through ongoing analysis conducted by the World Campus analytics team, which periodically reviews assessment data and adjusts benchmark scores to align with indicators of academic success and student persistence.

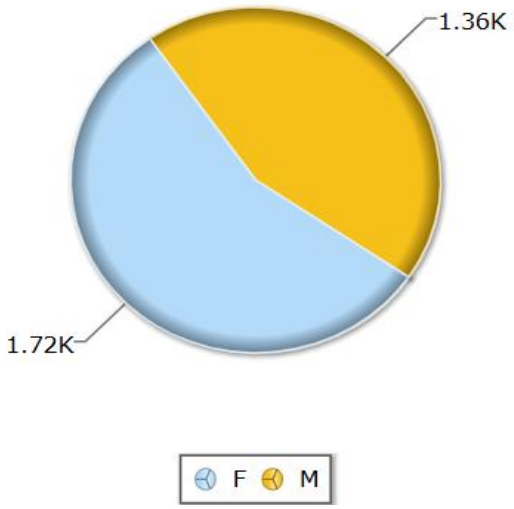
Academic advisers within the Chaiken Center for Student Success receive summary reports for students who complete the assessment. These reports identify areas where student scores fall below threshold levels and support informed conversations regarding academic readiness and student support needs. Advisers may recommend asynchronous resources, such as ASK modules, or refer students to additional support services including academic coaching, financial aid, career services, student disability services, student affairs, and Care and Concern resources.

The results presented below summarize the demographics of all SmarterMeasure assessments completed between September 1, 2024, and August 31, 2025. During this period, 3,129 assessments were initiated and 2,849 were completed, resulting in an overall completion rate of 91%. This completion rate remains consistent with the previous two academic years. Because students have the option to skip or opt out of individual questions within the assessment, response totals may vary across demographic categories and assessment scales.

Demographics

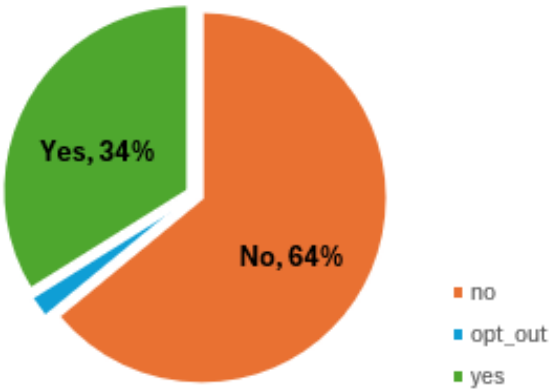
Gender Distribution (n=3080)

The gender distribution of students completing the SmarterMeasure assessment has remained consistent over time. During the current reporting period, females represented 56% of students completing the assessment, while males represented 44%. These findings reflect no significant change compared to 2024 data.



First-Generation Learners

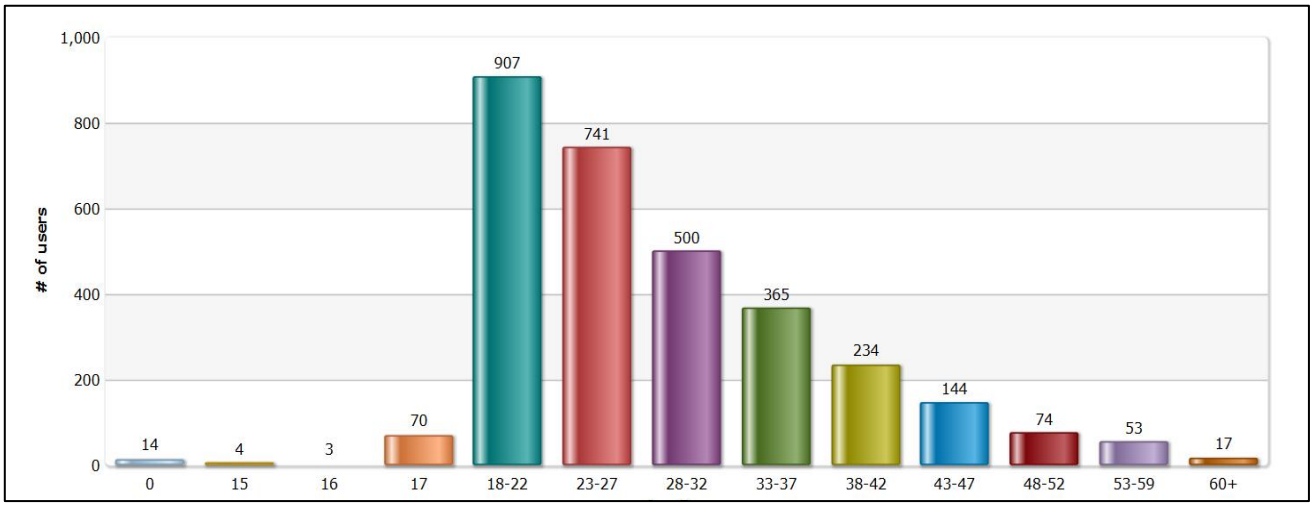
The proportion of students identifying as first-generation learners within the SmarterMeasure assessment population has remained consistent in recent years. During the current reporting period, 34% of students identified as first-generation learners, reflecting no change from the previous year.



Age Distribution (n=3126)

The age distribution of students participating in the SmarterMeasure assessment showed slight shifts during the current reporting period. Students between the ages of 18 and 32 represented 68.7% of respondents, compared to 70.1% in the previous reporting year.

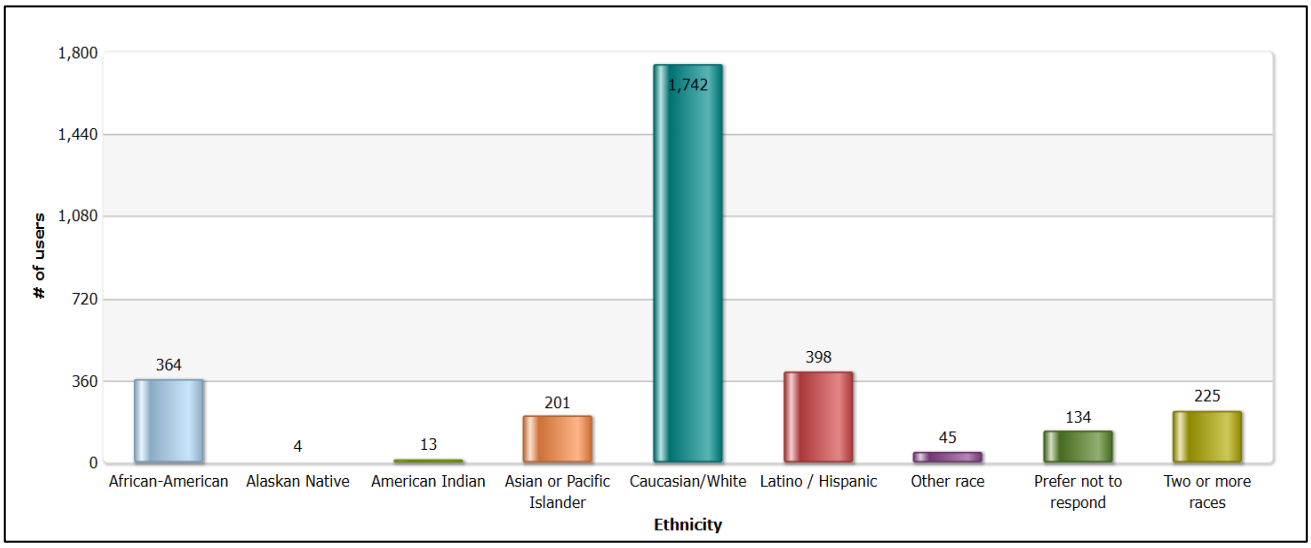
The proportion of students in the 18–22 age range decreased to 29%, compared to 31.7% in 2023–2024, and more closely aligns with the 2022–2023 reporting period (29.1%). In contrast, the percentage of students in the 23–27 and 33–37 age groups increased by 1.4% and 1.2%, respectively.



Ethnicity Distribution (n=3129)

The ethnic distribution of students participating in the SmarterMeasure assessment reflects several continuing demographic trends. The percentage of Caucasian/White students has declined for the fourth consecutive year, representing an overall decrease of 8.4% since 2021.

In contrast, participation among African American and Hispanic or Latino students increased by 4.8% and 3%, respectively, since 2021. The percentage of Asian or Pacific Islander students participating in the assessment decreased by 0.9% overall since 2021; however, this group experienced a 0.5% increase during the current reporting period.



	Caucasian/White	African American	Hispanic or Latino	Asian or Pacific Islander
2024-25	55.7%	11.6%	12.7%	6.4%
2023-24	59.5%	11.0%	12.3%	5.9%
2022-23	61.8%	10.2%	10.8%	5.6%
2021-22	63.4%	8.8%	10.1%	9.6%
2019-21	64.1%	6.8%	9.7%	7.5%

Conclusion

The SmarterMeasure assessment continues to provide valuable insight into the readiness and support needs of students enrolled at Penn State World Campus. Assessment data highlights the importance of both academic skill development and non-cognitive factors in supporting student success within the online learning environment.

Findings from the current reporting period demonstrate continued strong participation in the assessment process, with completion rates remaining stable and above institutional benchmarks. Demographic trends also reflect the evolving diversity of the World Campus student population,

including continued representation of first-generation learners and increases in participation among historically underrepresented student groups.

The data further reinforces the importance of targeted interventions and support services, particularly in areas such as academic skills, time management, reading proficiency, keyboarding skills, and student self-perception of academic readiness. Through collaboration among Academic Development Services, academic advisers, and student support units, SmarterMeasure results continue to inform proactive outreach, individualized support strategies, and referrals to appropriate resources.

Moving forward, Penn State World Campus will continue leveraging SmarterMeasure data to strengthen student readiness initiatives, enhance support services, and promote student persistence and academic success in the online learning environment.

References

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