



## IMPROVING RETENTION AND SAVING MONEY AT TALLAHASSEE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

### CHALLENGE

Tallahassee Community College (TCC) was chosen as one of 30 schools to receive a prestigious grant from the Pew Grant Program on Course Redesign. The purpose of the Pew grant program is to encourage colleges and universities to use technology to redesign high-enrollment courses to reduce cost and enhance quality.

TCC chose to redesign College Composition, a required course for all degree-seeking students. The course serves approximately 3,000 students annually in sections of 30 students in a traditional format that combines lecture, discussion and writing activities.

College Composition posed some specific challenges. The course's traditional format made it difficult to address individual needs. Considerable class time was given to reviewing and re-teaching basic skills, thus reducing the amount of in-class time devoted to actual writing. Additionally, success rates were poor (less than 60% annually), and many students repeated the course. Finally, as is the case with many community colleges, there is a heavy dependence on adjunct instructors, leading to problems with instructional consistency.

### SOLUTION

TCC contracted with SMARTHINKING to help improve success rates and decrease the workload for faculty who teach the required College Composition course. Students submit mid-stage drafts to SMARTHINKING's online tutors where they receive expert feedback on written assignments. This reduces the burden on the TCC Writing Center and the amounts of time faculty spend grading papers. By shifting many basic individual instructional activities to the online environment, students and faculty can use classroom time to focus on the writing process and enhance the learning experience.

"Both the teachers and the students are pleased with the high quality of the responses from the SMARTHINKING writing tutors," said Dr. Patrick McMahon, TCC English Faculty and Project Director. "They provide exactly the type of responses the faculty would on mid-stage drafts, freeing up the faculty and the on-campus writing center to work on higher order writing concerns."

When proposed, TCC estimated that SMARTHINKING's tutorial support would reduce course costs by minimizing the amount of time and resources required of faculty and TCC's Writing Center staff. SMARTHINKING contributes to a 43% reduction in the cost per student from \$252 to \$145. Most importantly, in a survey conducted in December 2002, the faculty members said that they feel that the quality of the responses by the SMARTHINKING tutors led to improved rates of success in the course.