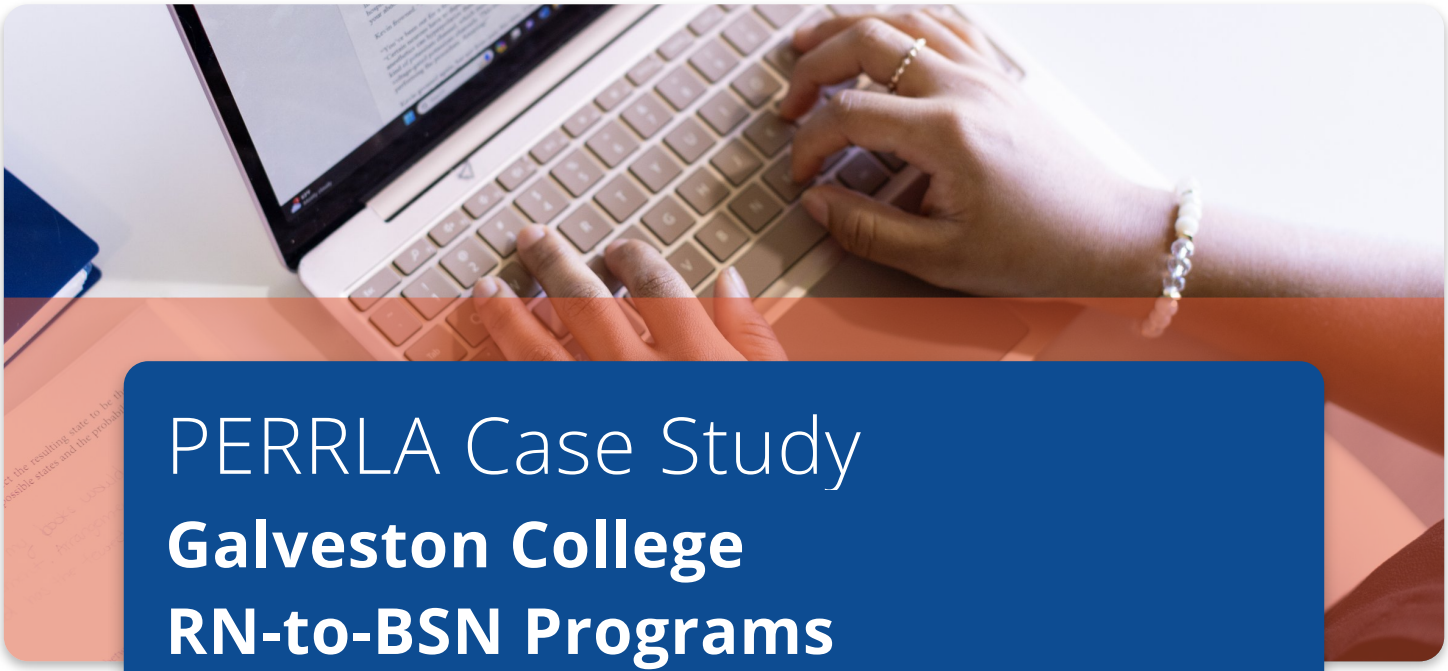


PERRLA Case Study

Galveston College RN-to-BSN Programs

Executive Summary

Karen Bell knew PERRLA before she ever brought it to Galveston College. She had used it herself as a graduate student and never forgot how much easier it made her academic writing. When she became Program Director of Galveston College's RN-to-BSN program – a writing-intensive program serving working nurses returning for their bachelor's degree – she already knew she wanted her students to benefit from PERRLA as well.

Galveston introduced PERRLA partway through the fall semester as part of a case study. Even with a mid-semester start and limited onboarding, the students who picked it up used it steadily, and Karen could see the difference in their papers. The experience also surfaced a clear lesson: giving students access to a tool is only the first step. The real work is helping them use it well.

The Challenge

Galveston College's RN-to-BSN students arrive as working nurses, most coming from associate degree programs where formal writing was rare. The bachelor's program asks much more: papers nearly every week, APA formatting throughout, and citation conventions that take time to learn for anyone who has not cited sources in a while.

For a small faculty team, that adds up. Time that could go toward helping students develop strong, evidence-based writing instead goes toward correcting formatting and answering the same questions about when and how often to cite. Karen wanted her students spending their energy on the thinking, not the mechanics.

About the Program

Galveston College's RN-to-BSN program serves licensed nurses completing their bachelor's degree. Coursework is almost entirely online and writing-intensive, with papers due nearly every week.

→ Students entering with little formal-writing experience

→ Small faculty stretched across a writing-intensive program

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Getting Started

Karen's belief in PERRLA came from experience, but rolling it out to a full cohort was a different task. Galveston introduced PERRLA in November, partway through the fall semester, which meant students met the tool in the middle of their coursework rather than at orientation. Some had already purchased individual subscriptions on Karen's recommendation before the institutional case study was in place – a sign of how strongly she vouched for it.

From Students

"I have recommended PERRLA to future students and friends as one of the best resources for writing papers and assisting with APA formatting."

"I enjoy the create-a-class feature so that any paper I write for that class already has the information for the cover page. Overall, it's a great tool, and I enjoy using it."

Access Isn't the Same as Fluency

The gap showed up when Karen sat down with a few students who were frustrated that Word kept changing their paragraph formatting. As she talked with them, she realized the issue wasn't PERRLA – it was that they didn't know PERRLA could handle the formatting for them. One student, asked how he had been managing his headings, said simply: "I just type."

That moment crystallized the gap. Students had the tool, but no one had shown them what it could do. It wasn't a shortcoming of the software or the students – it was a missing step in onboarding. The fix wasn't more technology. It was a short, structured introduction showing students the features they didn't know were there.

Early Signs

Even with a partial rollout, the students who adopted PERRLA used it consistently. In a single 30-day spring window they created 77 papers, 122 references, and 177 citations, and the pattern held through the summer: 87 papers, 150 references, and roughly 230 citations from June through July – steady output, months after a mid-semester introduction.

Karen saw it in the work, too. Though she wasn't teaching the courses herself that term, she could tell which students were using PERRLA by the quality of their formatting alone.

And when students did lose points on papers, it was rarely for formatting. It was on judgment calls – when to cite, how often, how to weave sources into an argument – exactly the skills faculty want their time free to teach. The early results pointed in a consistent direction: the students who used PERRLA benefited, and the priority going forward was helping more of them start well.

Lessons & Recommendations for Others

Introduce PERRLA at the start, not mid-stream – students adopt the tool most readily when they meet it at orientation, before the pressure of coursework builds. A mid-semester introduction works, but it asks more of students who are already busy.

Show students what the tool can do – access isn't the same as fluency. A short walkthrough of core features like headings and references keeps students from doing by hand what PERRLA can handle for them.

Pair it with an early, low-stakes assignment – a small required task early in the term gets students into their accounts and through first use, which pays off across every paper that follows.

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