



Academic Success for Sophia Students

2024





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We know students need flexibility. Life gets challenging, scheduling conflicts arise and the stresses of structured college experiences compound. Sophia’s goal is to offer students an alternative way to learn. Now more than ever, students need learning options that meet them where they are so they can continue to pursue their academic goals. Although there has been an upward change in national enrollment trends in the fall of 2023 with 1.2% growth, this is the first increase since 2019.¹

Sophia serves tens of thousands of students every month. The reasons to choose us keep on growing. According to a 2022 survey of actively subscribed Sophia learners, a university’s ability to accept Sophia courses influenced over 63% of Sophia learners to enroll in their current or future university.

¹ National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. “Current Term Enrollment Estimates.” <https://nscresearchcenter.org/current-term-enrollment-estimates/>

Sophia allows every student the chance to learn on their terms, take college-level courses online, make progress toward higher education goals and build skills to further their careers.

We provide a suite of self-paced, online general education courses inspired by our partners and users. We deliver courses on a custom learning platform that we designed to live outside of your school’s tech stack. There’s no implementation or operational friction. Every course Sophia publishes is reviewed by the American Council on Education and is recommended for college credit.



Who uses Sophia?



Our students fall into one of three groups based on their paths to higher education. We have students who sign up for Sophia *before* enrolling in a university (partner nonaffiliated), students who are *already* enrolled in a university that isn’t partnered with Sophia (affiliated), and students who are enrolled at a Sophia partner university (partner affiliated).

Among the tens of thousands of monthly Sophia users are thousands of unaffiliated learners across the country. In increasing instances, unaffiliated Sophia students often start courses with us and then choose to enroll in one of our partner schools’ programs.

Some adult students view Sophia as an opportunity to change their lives.

Sophia offers opportunities to students who may not have thought college

graduation and real-world skill attainment were an option for them. Our students want to pursue a degree while overcoming barriers to their education, like family obligations, financial struggles or other roadblocks.

Many of our students are already enrolled in a degree program and use Sophia as a career amplifier and skill builder. Whether enrolled at a partner school or not, these students are looking for a flexible way to complete their coursework and fast-track their graduation.

Some learners choose Sophia because the self-paced courses help them address challenges with difficult topics or complete core courses on their off time, during the summer session or while balancing other obligations to work or family. No matter how our learners find us, we’re proud to serve individuals from a broad range of backgrounds and experiences.

Measuring Success: Our Approach with Partner Institutions

Since 2020, Sophia has worked closely with select partner institutions across the country to understand how alternative learning options help impact enrollment continuation at a student’s home institution. We have found that students who complete Sophia courses tend to have the drive to persist through graduation. An example from one of our partner schools: University of Maryland Global Campus students who successfully completed Sophia courses continued to their fourth term at an 86% higher rate (Figure 1).

All institutions’ datasets and systems vary. We took a comparative approach that builds a framework for an initial assessment of term-over-term persistence. Sophia’s 60+ partner institutions range

from traditional brick-and-mortar to regional residential institutions to some of the largest online universities in the country. First-year student attrition is a challenge for many universities.

Sophia aims to bridge the gap and help students stay motivated to stay enrolled and eventually graduate. Only 11% of adult students received credit through Prior Learning Assessment/Credit for Prior Learning (PLA/CPL) methods. Black students, those from lower-income households, and community college students had notably lower PLA/CPL credit receipt rates compared to other demographic groups.²

² Rebecca Klein-Collins, Peace Bransberger, and Patrick Lane. “Equity Paradoxes in The PLA Boost.” CAEL-WICHE, October 2021, p. 5. Available at www.cael.org

Figure 1 | Term-to-Term Continuation Improvement for Sophia Users

	More likely to complete first term	More likely to enroll in second term	More likely to enroll in fourth term
Partner University A	22%	47%	86%
Partner University B	18%	21%	57%
Partner University C	26%	23%	72%
Partner University D	21%	25%	55%

Our Methodology

Our approach was simple. In partnership with select Sophia university partners, we compared the term-over-term enrollment of sampled populations against their non-Sophia-using peers. This comparison provides us with a simple way to evaluate whether Sophia users tend to enroll at higher rates than their peers on their path to graduation.

Step One: Sample Selection

In partnership with our selected institutions, we started by identifying student samples based on undergraduate students (pursuing an associate or bachelor’s degree) in their first term at the institution. We used a unique identifier to create cohort groups so we could track the same students in each subsequent academic term.

Within those cohort groups, we identified students who completed one or more Sophia courses *before* the end of their first term. We included students who have taken Sophia courses before enrolling, as well as students who have *concurrently* taken Sophia courses in their first term at the home institution.

Step Two: Outcomes Measurement

After selecting students in their first term with undergraduate status, we compared the performance of each group on the following outcome measures:

- Determined whether each student in the sample population passed one or more home institution courses at the end of the first term.
- Calculated the rate of first-term course success for each student.
- Reported the first-term course success rates for the two groups: students who took Sophia courses before/during their first term at the institution vs. students who did not take Sophia courses before/during their first term at the institution.

We repeated this study for second- and fourth-term students to find additional success in Sophia student re-enrollment at their home institution. Additionally, Sophia explored academic success within another sample population of undergraduate Sophia users from one partner institution. Using propensity score matching, we concluded that Sophia students demonstrated **academic success** beyond their students who did not use Sophia.

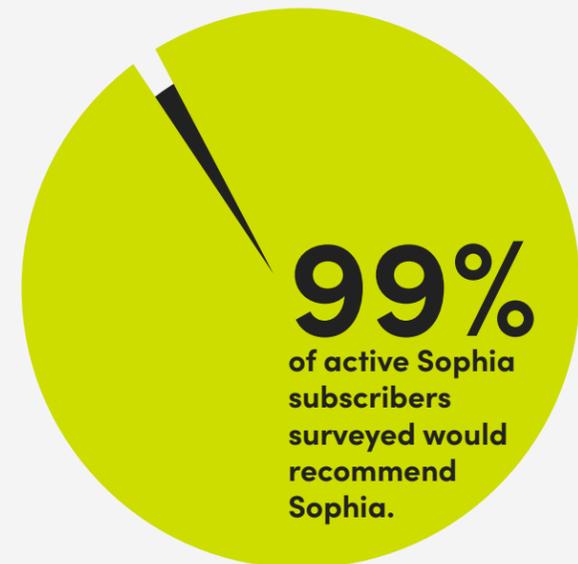
Propensity Scoring:

Sophia and non-Sophia students were matched primarily on application data from our partner institution. This includes demographics, prior education, employment, total transfer credit, on-ramp data and social vulnerability index. **Not only do Sophia users tend to re-enroll at higher rates than their peers, but they also tend to perform better academically.**



Students Choose Sophia Time and Time Again

Our rapid growth is due to word of mouth from our students. We've designed a platform and an alternative learning experience that helps learners in need keep pushing forward, no matter the challenges life throws their way.



“Sophia has made my academic learning career so much easier than I anticipated. Thanks to Sophia, I can complete courses at my own pace and time, allowing me to focus on my main courses. I love the feedback I receive at the end of courses that require written papers. It is very important to me to be able to understand what I did right or wrong and to know what I can improve on.”

- LaCoya C., Sophia Learner

“Sophia has made my back-to-school journey easier, getting me several steps closer to earning my degree. Adding another program outside of being a single mother, full-time student, and employee sounds stressful and makes completing a degree seem impossible, but Sophia has done the opposite. Because of Sophia, I will have completed all my elective courses at an affordable price and graduated a year early.”

- Nicolette H., Sophia Learner

I believe that Sophia Learning is so important to someone who works best in an environment on their own because it is self-pace and you can review material at any time. Being a first generation graduate for my family has been stressful, but at the same time such a rewarding factor. Sophia assisted navigating the worries of classes I didn't think I would do well in to turning around to be classes I really enjoyed.

- Krystal B., Sophia Learner



“As a mom, full-time employee and student, Sophia has given me the foundation to be successful in a classroom setting. I am forever thankful for this program and its benefits!”

- Eliana G., Sophia Learner

Benefits for Institutions and Students Alike



For your school

- Showcase your institution to tens of thousands of new and returning Sophia students every month.
- Attract nontraditional/unaffiliated students by boosting your transfer-friendly status.
- Accept ACE (American Council on Education) and DEAC (Distance Education Accrediting Commission) reviewed courses.
- Validate learning that happens outside the classroom.



For your students

- Adult students thrive in a flexible learning environment.
- Reduces stress around returning to school or taking especially challenging general education courses.
- Help students graduate fast and find an affordable alternative.
- Provide student-athletes with a pathway to success during busy seasons.
- Give students more options during winter and summer breaks.



Sophia ADA Compliance

ADA Compliance Statement:

Sophia is committed to providing reasonable accommodations and services to qualified students with disabilities. Sophia recognizes and fulfills its obligations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and similar state laws.

Policy:

Sophia's policy is to meet Level AA of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2 standard.

Reasonable Accommodations:

Students who require additional support, such as extended time on tests, must provide copies of their approved accommodations from their college/university to Sr. Director of Sophia Operations, Rachel Feld (rachel.feld@sophia.org).

Standards Compliance

As part of our commitment to ensure access for people with disabilities, we use the following guidelines:

- All pages are screen-reader accessible.
- Alt text and transcripts are provided for audio and video.
- Links include descriptive text.
- Text resizes well without loss of functionality.
- Contrast and color support visually impaired students.

Additional time for tests and quizzes is provided for qualified students upon request.

Disclaimer:

Despite our best efforts to ensure accessibility, some content may not yet have been fully adapted to the strictest accessibility standards.

Please contact us if you observe any issues. We are continually striving to improve the experience for all of our students.



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