# Case Study: *How Surgent CPA Review Helped Duquesne University Improve CPA Exam Pass Rates*

**Summary:** After incorporating Surgent CPA Review content and technology into its Auditing Course, Duquesne University saw a 44% improvement in its student pass rates on the Auditing and Attestation (AUD) section of the CPA Exam, as well as a 22% increase in the percentage of students interested in taking the exam[A].

## Key Results:

- Duquesne student pass rates on AUD rose from 54.6% in 2015 to 79% in 2018 (a 44% improvement)
- Duquesne students sitting for AUD over the same period increased from 50% to 61% (a 22% improvement)

**Challenge:** In 2015, faculty and administrators at Duquesne University recognized that students taking their Auditing Course were not passing the AUD section of the CPA Exam as often as they felt was possible. Not only were not as many of their students sitting for the exam as they would like, but the pass rate of those who did sit was 54.6%, only slightly above the national average (which was 47% for AUD in 2015). Believing that there was room for improvement, the team looked for a way to boost pass rates among its students.

**Steps Taken:** To improve these mediocre pass rates, as well as increase the university's visibility and creditably, Duquesne began looking for better content and new ways to teach the content more effectively. After consulting with Surgent Executive VP Liz Kolar, Duquesne became interested in exploring Surgent's adaptive learning platform and decided to embark on a pilot program to test its effectiveness within the Auditing Course.

Working closely with Duquesne educators to ensure alignment with existing course syllabi, Surgent CPA Exam experts, including fellow educator Liz Kolar, incorporated actual CPA Exam content, questions, and guided study into classroom study plans. Students had the opportunity to work with multiple-choice questions and simulations taken directly from the Surgent course, which gave them a far more realistic approximation of the real CPA Exam experience.

Surgent's course features an adaptive learning platform called A.S.A.P. Technology™, which helped Duquesne students identify their unique strengths and weaknesses within the AUD content. This helped them focus more time on the material they needed to study, as well as more accurately track how much of the content they had already mastered.

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**Success:** Results of the pilot program were successful at Duquesne University. Since the program's launch, Duquesne has seen a large increase in the number of their accounting students choosing to sit for the CPA Exam. Prior to the pilot program launch, only about 50% of graduating seniors polled planned to sit for the CPA Exam. That number jumped to 61% after Duquesne incorporated Surgent's adaptive technology and real exam content. Better preparing the students encouraged a larger proportion of them to take the exam.

In the first testing window following the pilot program in 2016, pass rates on AUD for Duquesne students jumped from 54.6% to 80%. Based on this success, the university has continued using Surgent CPA Review's A.S.A.P. Technology and bank of CPA Exam questions within its Auditing Course and student pass rates have stayed at the much-higher level (in 2018 the Duquesne pass rate on AUD was 79%).

[A]Kollar, Robert J., Williams, Valerie Trott (April 25, 2017). "Strategies for Passing the CPA Exam and Filling the Pipeline" *PICPA.org*. Retrieved December 7, 2018.