



# ALEKS® Case Study

Skagit Valley College | Mt Vernon, WA

## Students Score Above National Average on ACS with ALEKS



Professor Tony St John was drawn to ALEKS because it is a mastery-based system and is adaptive to each student. He had used one-size-fits-all systems in the past and had been unsatisfied with the results.

When St John started teaching at Skagit Valley College, he took the opportunity to start fresh and try a new learning system. “My students at Skagit Valley College score well above the national average on the American Chemical Society (ACS) final exam in Chemistry 163,” says St John. He believes using ALEKS is a big part of his students’ success.

## ALEKS Implementation

Skagit Valley College is an open-access institution, although students must have satisfied the prerequisite of Precalculus I to enroll in Chemistry I. Objectives are due once a week on Sunday night. Students get points for each objective and for their total pie, adding up to 100 points (50 and 50) total. ALEKS accounts for 15% of a student’s total grade, which is equivalent to one exam.

For Chemistry I and II, students take a paper/pencil final. For Chemistry III, students take the ACS General Chemistry exam.

**ALEKS Course:** General Chemistry I, II, and III

**Course Type:** Blended/Hybrid and Lecture-Based

**Textbook:** Chemistry by Julia Burdge

**Instructor:** Tony St John

**Enrollment:** 70 students per section; 210 annual

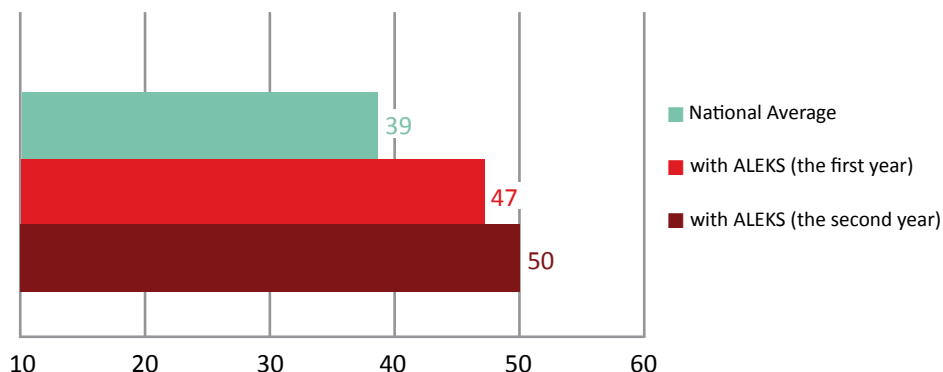
**“I have loved using ALEKS. It is an excellent system; and, once it’s set up, it’s very easy to use. I can identify struggling students from week one and work on targeting them for one-on-one help. I would never go back to a different system.”**

—Tony St John

## Results Achieved

St John believes ALEKS contributes to his students' success (Figure 1). He shares, "The national average on the ACS exam is 39 out of 70. My students' average the first year I used ALEKS was 47 out of 70; last year, the students' average was 50 out of 70."

Figure 1: ACS Average Exam Scores



St John believes ALEKS helps with the idea of mastery. He says students are often frustrated at first with the idea of having to "re-do" a topic because they "already did that." However, St John encourages students to strive for a higher level of thinking and problem-solving instead of the simple memorization/regurgitation approach to learning.

## Student Reactions

Professor St John says, "Students eventually realize the utility of ALEKS. Last year, about 15%-20% of my class requested additional knowledge checks so they could make sure they had mastered the material. Students recognize the value ALEKS provides, even if they resent having to put in the work at times!"



**Tony St John** earned his BA in Chemistry from Whitman College in Walla Walla, WA. It was during his time at Whitman that Tony really discovered his passion for teaching thanks to another amazing professor, Allison Calhoun. From there, Tony went straight into graduate school at the University of Washington where he studied hydrogen storage and worked towards developing anti-Markovnikov hydroamination reactions. After graduate school Tony went to work as an adjunct professor at Western Washington University where he worked for three years prior to moving to Skagit Valley College.

## Institution Profile:

Skagit Valley College is a two-year community college serving Skagit, Island, and San Juan counties in northwest Washington state. Established in 1926, Skagit Valley College grants academic transfer degrees, professional/technical degrees, and certificates.