ALVIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Online Orientation:

Preparing Students to Succeed in Online Courses

Alvin Community College

On-site review: September 26, 27, and 28, 2011

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ALVIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE QEP EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Alvin Community College strives to support its mission statement and provide forward-thinking post-secondary education to the spectrum of learners in its service area. As a member of Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) regional accrediting agency, Alvin Community College participates in a SACS mandated ten-year review and reaffirmation process. A portion of the review includes improving student learning through the development of a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). While complying with this scheduled review and maintaining the college's ongoing goal to improve student learning, Alvin Community College has identified an area of student learning where significant improvement can be made in the context of an existing, and growing, pedagogical apparatus. Specifically, Alvin Community College has designed a Quality Enhancement Plan for an online course management system, currently Blackboard, that addresses the introductory technological and process challenges that confront students taking online classes.

Research and statistical analyses performed at Alvin Community College show that students taking online classes fail at a rate 11 percent higher or withdraw at a rate 16 percent higher than students taking the same course in a traditional face-to-face format. These conclusions resemble recent research findings of colleges and universities across the nation. Approximately 86 percent of courses at Alvin Community College use MyBlackboard online course management interface in one of three capacities: an enhancement to a traditional face-to-face class, a hybrid course (one half online, one half traditional face-to-face), or a 100 percent distance education online course. National data support this trend. According to Sloan Consortium surveys, "over 4.6 million students were taking at least one online course during the fall 2008 term; a 17 percent increase over the number reported the previous year" (Allen and Seaman 1). The 17 percent enrollment increase exceeds the 1.5 percent overall growth for higher

education in the same period (Allen and Seaman 5). Furthermore, the study concludes that “more than one in four higher education students now take at least one course online” (Allen and Seaman 1). The goal of the Alvin Community College Quality Enhancement Plan is to increase the student success level in online classes by reducing the failure and withdrawal percentage levels in these classes

To address this problem, Alvin Community College has developed a solution that will produce measurable results and benefit all students taking online courses. Students enter ACC possessing varying levels of computer literacy. Inexperience with the online course delivery system and/or low computer literacy is a non-course related, non-educational barrier to success for the student. Alvin Community College’s Quality Enhancement Plan will require students to complete an online orientation that will break down the barriers to accessing course material and will enhance their ability to fulfill the requirements of the course. After completing the online orientation, students will have the necessary baseline technical skills to fully engage the course. Alvin Community College believes that the implementation of this Quality Enhancement Plan will result in greater success for students taking web-enhanced courses, hybrid courses, and online courses. ACC’s distance education professionals and QEP Team expect that over a five-year period, withdrawal and failure rates will be reduced by 5 percent for students taking online classes.

From concept to construction to future implementation, Alvin Community College has practiced diligence in identifying student learning needs, in using talent and resources both internal and external, and in crafting an effective and practical solution to the identified challenges of technological preparedness in online courses.

HISTORY OF THE COLLEGE

The Alvin Community College District, a two-year public community college, was approved by the qualified voters of the Alvin Independent School District on November 2, 1948. From its inception until 1971, the college was administered by officials of the Alvin Independent School District. The 1971-72 academic year marked the beginning of a new era in the history of Alvin Community College. A separate administration, tax district, and college board were established to assume the management, control, and operation of a newly created Alvin Junior College District.

Initially, when the college and public schools were in the same system, the college was part of Alvin High School. The first classes began on September 12, 1949, in facilities which grouped grades 11 through 14 in one building and which placed Alvin under a system known as the 6-4-4 plan.

One of the more important changes at Alvin Community College was the building of a separate facility for academic work at the college level and dropping of the 6-4-4 plan in favor of a 6-3-3-2 arrangement. The college program was strengthened by additional facilities, by an enlarged faculty, and by successfully meeting the standards of the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools (SACS, 1959). Alvin Community College moved to its present campus in the summer of 1963.

By a vote of both the original district and voters of adjoining territories, the college district was enlarged to nearly twice its geographical size in 1974. Then in the spring of 1975, an $8 million bond issue was approved, providing funds for the facilities necessary to meet an expanding enrollment. Several new buildings were added to the growing campus.

In 1998 the College expanded into its service area with the establishment of the Pearland College Center in Pearland, Texas.

The enrollment of Alvin Community College has grown from 134 students in 1949 to over 4,000 students today. Click on the following link for additional information about the history of ACC: http://www.alvincollege.edu/about/historical_statement.htm

PHILOSOPHY

We believe in the dignity and worth of all individuals. Learning is a lifelong process, and all individuals should have opportunities for lifelong education. Education should help people develop technical excellence, occupational proficiency, and academic ability to their maximum capacity. Education should also provide for personal enrichment. To prosper in a complex and changing society, each individual must learn to think independently, value logical and tested conclusions, develop problem-solving abilities, and function effectively with other people. Competent performance contributes significantly to individual health and happiness and benefits the organizations and communities in which individuals work and live. Alvin Community College is an integral part of the community it serves, and it must respond to identified needs and interests. In delivering educational services, we believe that there is no substitute for the pursuit of excellence.

MISSION STATEMENT

Alvin Community College is a public, two-year, comprehensive community college with a strong educational heritage and a continuing emphasis on providing quality educational experiences for all of its students.

The College seeks to implement its philosophy by providing quality post-secondary educational services (including occupational/technical, college transfer, and adult programs) for all those who can benefit from them, as well as quality occupational/technical program opportunities for area secondary students. The College

also seeks to provide accessible educational services, through varied formats and schedules and full- and part-time programs, which address a wide spectrum of individual needs and abilities, along with educational programming related to the economic and employment realities of the area served, and to offer expanded career options through cooperation with industry, business, professions, government, and other educational institutions.

In addition, the College seeks to offer comprehensive programs which integrate communications, math, science, humanities, interpersonal skills, and reasoning. Further, the College seeks to provide students the opportunity to develop skills needed to enter and succeed in College programs through continuing opportunities to extend and upgrade skills, knowledge, and interests; through testing, evaluation, and counseling to allow students to make informed decisions regarding their abilities, achievements, and behavior; and through experiences to develop personal, social, and cultural dimensions. The College is accountable for its mission within the limitations of its physical and financial resources.

HISTORY OF DISTANCE EDUCATION AT ALVIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Alvin Community College has been offering opportunities for students to take classes at a distance since the late 1980's. As part of the college's Strategic Enrollment Management Plan, the Distance Education (DE) program has been able to reach more segments of the student population without expanding the physical infrastructure of the campus. When the Distance Education department was established in 1997, it offered students four primary options for taking distance education courses: self-study, video cassette, televised courses, and Internet courses. After the Spring 2007 semester, cassette courses were no longer offered due to lack of interest and low enrollment

numbers, and most self-study courses were being replaced with newer options offered via the Internet.

ACC first offered Internet courses in 1999. By the Fall 2005 semester, 676 students were enrolled. Enrollment continued to increase; and by Fall 2010, 1,121 students were enrolled—a 66% increase over five years.

On the ACC campus, all Internet courses are delivered through ACC's online course management system (CMS) MyBlackboard Learning Management System. This software allows instructors to post syllabi, readings, assignments, and assessments, as well as interact with their students via e-mail, virtual chats, and discussion boards to enhance teaching and learning efforts. Initially this software was purchased to support Internet classes only. However, use of the system has expanded to include many hybrid and web-enhanced classes, and demand for using the system continues to rise rapidly. In the Fall 2007 semester, approximately 250 discrete sections were provided in the CMS. By the Spring 2011 semester, over 850 individual courses were using the CMS to help instructors and students meet learning objectives.

Definitions of Online Course Categories at Alvin Community College

Internet	**Internet classes are conducted almost entirely online through MyBlackboard. Some instructors may require that students come to campus for orientations, field trips, or to take tests.***
Hybrid	**Hybrid courses combine online learning and face-to-face instruction at regularly scheduled times, thus reducing the number of face-to-face classroom meetings.***
Web-enhanced	**Web-enhanced courses are face-to-face courses in which instructors utilize various applications of MyBlackboard to supplement the course, such as posting student grades, semester calendar, and course syllabus.***

***As of the writing of this document, Alvin Community College uses MyBlackboard as its current Course Management System.**

During the summer of 2012, ACC will upgrade the CMS to Blackboard Release 9.1. This upgrade will accommodate expanding technologies and the demand for mobile

options for course delivery. Instructors and students will be able to interact with their courses from their mobile devices as they create and upload content to and from their courses from virtually any location. This upgrade includes significant changes in the way that students and instructors will interact with course materials. A well-developed, thorough online orientation for the CMS will be beneficial for all students to enable success in online and hybrid courses.

PRE-QEP COMMITTEE HISTORY

In preparation for the Alvin Community College (ACC) 2011 reaffirmation of accreditation process as promulgated by the Commission on Colleges, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, John Bethscheider, Provost and Dean of Instruction and Technical Programs, and Drew Nelson, Dean of Academic Programs, selected Karen Downey, Instructor of Court Reporting, to establish and serve as chair of the committee responsible for developing a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) for ACC. In May 2008, Downey recommended Christopher Chance, Department Chair of Geography, History, and Philosophy, to represent the academic side of the college and to serve as a co-chair of the QEP Team. During the summer of 2008, Downey and Chance began reading background material published by SACS concerning QEP strategies, development, and formatting.

On September 13, 2008, Hurricane Ike struck the Gulf Coast, forcing the closure of ACC for four weeks because the college sustained millions of dollars' worth of structural and property damage. Considering the challenges facing the institution, SACS granted ACC another year to complete its study, and ACC became a member of the 2012 class.

Although committee work was postponed, college representatives continued background research, including attending the December 2008 SACS Annual Meeting

and the January 2010 QEP Seminar. This early work established a base of knowledge about the QEP process and potential topics, while providing a resource network of institutions engaged in the reaffirmation process.

Beginning in January 2010, Downey and Chance met on a weekly basis to discuss pertinent literature and potential QEP topics and to select committee members. In addition to weekly meetings, Downey and Chance visited Bruce Glover (QEP Chair at College of the Mainland, Texas City, Texas), who discussed the challenges that were faced by his college in selecting their topic for the QEP. In addition to sharing College of the Mainland's QEP timeline, process, and procedures, Glover made recommendations concerning committee construction, task assignments, and project software.

After selecting members from a range of disciplines and inviting them to serve on the QEP Team, Karen Downey and Chris Chance called the first QEP meeting, February 22, 2010. See Appendix I for a list of QEP Team members.

OVERVIEW OF TOPIC SELECTION

To begin the QEP topic selection phase, ACC's QEP Team reviewed data compiled during a faculty workshop in 2007 on the national initiative, Achieving the Dream (ATD). During the workshop in a brainstorming session, the faculty was charged with identifying areas it felt were barriers to student success. The overwhelming area of concern was students' study skills, which ACC began to address by initiating and enhancing developmental and gatekeeper courses.

The results of the ATD initiative were a significant influence in the QEP Team's decision in the preliminary stages of choosing a QEP topic. However, determined not to duplicate the ATD efforts, the QEP Team analyzed the remainder of the ATD data for additional areas that the faculty deemed a hindrance to student success. In addition, the Team informally gathered comments and suggestions from administration, staff, and

students about other areas of concern. Some of these included reading comprehension and content retention, tutoring/mentoring, higher-order thinking, and consistent standards among faculty.

Faculty Survey

The 2007 ATD data suggested potential areas for improvement. In February 2010, the QEP Team decided to involve faculty through a survey in which it asked faculty to propose ideas for potential QEP topics. However, because the QEP needs to be focused and measurable, the Team decided instead of soliciting undirected suggestions from the faculty that it would "frame the argument" by proposing specific potential QEP topics based on the ATD data. After some discussion, the Team narrowed the survey to three proposals—Academic Honesty, Reading, and a Mentors Program—employing the following decision process:

Academic Honesty was considered as a possibility because ACC does not have a uniform plan to address this issue, which poses a significant legal weakness. A QEP that focused on this issue could include behavior changes which would lead to improving learning/academics, as well as focusing on student values. This topic would affect most areas of the college.

Reading was considered because college-level reading skills are essential for student success and the faculty would agree that substandard reading skills are a serious and widespread problem, as was indicated in the ATD workshop. Clearly, this topic would need to be refined, focused, and specific.

A Mentors Program was considered because ATD has used this program successfully at other colleges and has seen substantial improvements in retention rates of participating students. The Team thought that if both faculty and staff were included

as mentors, the QEP would have an impact on university parallel programs and the technical programs of the college.

Technology as a possible fourth QEP topic was added to the faculty survey after a focus-group meeting with students. The meeting and topic addition are discussed in the following section.

The faculty survey was made available (between the March and April 2010 meetings) on the SurveyMonkey website and through a link on the ACC Homepage. The survey directed the faculty to rate the importance of the four topics the Team posed: Academic Honesty, Reading, a Mentors Program, and Technology. In addition, the faculty were encouraged to write in other topics that were worthy of consideration. Institutional Effectiveness and Research (IER) compiled the faculty survey results.

Of the 203 respondents to the survey, Reading (83.3 percent) was rated as the most important of the four topics, followed by Academic Honesty (73.4 percent) and Technology (58.6 percent), respectively. See Appendix II for Faculty Survey Results.

The QEP Team created a rubric to evaluate the written comments, then compiled the written comments and suggestions on the Faculty Survey. In this section of the survey, Reading (18.5 percent) was the topic most often cited as necessary to college success, followed by Writing (11.2 percent), Study Skills (11.1 percent), Technology (10.3 percent), and Critical Thinking (9.5 percent). See Appendix V for Tally of Comments from Faculty & Student Surveys.

Student Input

The QEP Team used two methods to solicit student input on prospective QEP topics: a focus group composed of Student Ambassadors and a campus-wide student survey.

***Student Ambassadors*.** In March 2010, a Team member met with ACC's Student Ambassadors, a group composed of dedicated students with diverse backgrounds, degree plans, and interests, who serve as liaisons between ACC and the community. Of the three suggested topics—Reading, Academic Honesty, and Mentors—the group rated Mentors as the most worthwhile topic and Reading as the least worthwhile. When the student group was asked to suggest other potential QEP topics, the following topic was proposed: increased use of the Course Management System (CMS) in all classes. Discussion ensued regarding a lack of conformity among classes, primarily relating to teacher-student communication. Several students said that if all instructors used the CMS for e-mailing and posting of major activities on the calendar, grades, and syllabi, that this would greatly ease transition from one class to another. As a result of this meeting, a fourth general topic was added to the survey: Technology.

Student Survey. In April 2010, students completed a two-page survey listing the four potential QEP topics as part of the regularly scheduled Spring Semester Student Evaluation of Instructors. The survey defined the acronym "QEP" and explained the survey's purpose and the reason students were being asked for their input. The students were asked to use a Scantron form to rate the importance of each of the four topics that the college was considering. The second portion of the survey provided students an opportunity to write in skills that they felt were necessary to their success and that should be considered as potential QEP topics.

ACC's Department of Institutional Effectiveness and Research (IER) reported receiving approximately 6,000 responses from students. Although students were directed to fill out only one survey, a small proportion of students completed this survey in more than one class. IER analyzed the Scantron data and reported the following cumulative results: Students rated Academic Honesty and Integrity (61.80) as the most important of the four suggested topics, followed by Reading (57.32) and Technology

(57.16). Note that these numbers are not percentages. Respondents could rate more than one topic as important. See Appendix III for Student Survey 2010 – Final Results.

The QEP Team then compiled the written comments and suggestions on the Student Survey. In this section of the survey, of the students who submitted comments, Technology (16.4 percent) was the topic most often cited as necessary to college success, followed by Study Skills (16.3 percent) and Reading (15 percent). See Appendix V for Tally of Comments from Faculty & Student Surveys.

Community Survey

The purpose for surveying the community was to solicit opinions about the skill sets and knowledge areas that members of the community believe to be critical to student success. The community survey was distributed to a random sample of addresses from seven (7) ZIP code mail routes within the Alvin Community College district. The QEP Team worked with the ACC Marketing Department to develop a simple and attractive postcard to be mailed to the community by June 10, 2010. In order to increase the community response rate, ACC offered participants a chance to win a laptop computer. The deadline for returning the survey was June 20, 2010.

As an additional segment of the community survey, a list of ACC Technical Programs Advisory Board members was compiled, and these individuals were e-mailed and requested to participate in the ACC QEP survey as described below. A list of the Technical Programs Advisory Board members may be found at the following link: http://www.alvincollege.edu/about/qep/technical_advisory.html

The postcard to the random sampling of the community and the e-mail to the Advisory Board members directed participants to access the ACC QEP survey on the SurveyMonkey website, where they were given a brief introduction to the QEP and the objective of the survey. The survey included five questions. The first four questions

asked participants to rate the four potential QEP topics: Reading, Academic Honesty, a Mentors Program, and Technology. A brief description of each topic was given and the respondent was asked to rate the topics as very important, moderately important, important, little importance, and unimportant. The final question asked participants to list two skill sets or knowledge areas that they believed were critical to student success. In addition, participants were encouraged to include specific suggestions or outlines for possible QEP topics.

From the 9,995 postcards mailed and the 126 e-mails sent, 173 individuals responded to the survey—a response rate of 1.7 percent. The community rated Reading the most important topic (68.2 percent), followed by Academic Honesty (66.5 percent, Technology (64.7 percent), and the Mentors Program (38 percent). Note that these numbers are not percentages. Respondents could rate more than one topic as important. See Appendix IV for Community Survey Results.

Decision to Focus on Technology

In the June 2010 meeting, the QEP Team unanimously decided to focus the QEP on Technology although a focused QEP was not definitively selected at this point. Throughout May and June, the Team informally discussed the highest ranking topics in the faculty, student, and community surveys. Reading ranked highest for all the groups. However, no specific plans or approaches were suggested by any of the individuals completing the surveys. Certainly, most respondents felt that reading was an essential skill; however, there were few written comments about this topic and no specific actions proposed. Given the tremendous efforts of Achieving the Dream (ATD) regarding ACC's developmental reading program, the Team decided to focus on the next highly rated possibilities: Technology and Study Skills. The ACC Advising Center forwarded the Team information that would ultimately affect the potential of study skills as a QEP topic.

Due to ACC's work on ATD, the College is offering more than 24 discrete study skills workshops each semester to both day and night students. In addition, the ACC Writing Center has merged with the Learning Lab, and tutoring hours have been expanded for all subject areas, particularly English, science, and math. After lengthy discussions the Team decided that the goal of improving study skills has already been addressed by the College.

Technology is a broad issue that needed attention and had rated among the top three topics in the faculty, student, and community surveys. Those who responded to these surveys added written suggestions and proposals detailing specific areas in technology that needed work. Also, during the meeting with the Student Ambassadors, the students emphasized the need for improvement in technology and the CMS. Due to the expressed interest of these groups, the Team discussed many possibilities for a QEP focused on technology, including online grading, increased use of e-books, hybrid courses, increased use of e-mail communication, posting syllabi and calendars, increased training for faculty, and implementation of training for students to better use the CMS and their own computer systems. Obviously, all of these areas could not be addressed by the QEP. Advice from ACC Administration helped the Team make its selection when it was suggested that many of these areas were already being addressed and others could be implemented through administrative policy rather than an entire QEP. For example, the State of Texas had mandated that course syllabi and calendars would be posted online beginning the fall semester of 2010. Increased use of e-mail and online grading could be encouraged or mandated by departments and divisions. The bookstore was already offering e-books and had plans to make e-books a suggested alternative for most classes. Training was the area that seemed the most promising as a QEP topic.

The Distance Education (DE) department reminded the Team that the new CMS, Blackboard Release 9.1, would be implemented within the next two years. Significant training would be necessary for all faculty and staff who are teaching online since the platform is significantly different from the version now being used at the college. In addition, Administration had recently required that all faculty teaching Internet classes take a new online certification course administered by the DE department. Finally, DE and Information Technology (IT) offer discrete technology and Blackboard training sessions each week (fall and spring semesters) specifically for faculty. Although not all faculty take advantage of this training, the Team thought that the training was adequate to meet the college's needs. Administrative policy could easily address how many training sessions faculty were required to take each year.

Since faculty training was being addressed in so many areas, the Team then turned to student training and student technical skills.

Discussions were held throughout June and July among Team members, DE, Institutional Effectiveness and Research (IER), and Dean Nelson. Dean Nelson reminded the QEP Team that "computer literacy" was a specific learner outcome and was a viable QEP topic. In addition, the DE department was concerned that the new Blackboard release would be difficult for students to learn and navigate. They felt that a student orientation would be not only beneficial to successful student learning outcomes but essential.

At the July meeting, the Team decided upon a tentative mission statement: "All students will be required to complete a Course Management System orientation course."

The QEP Team felt that the proposed topic needed additional research and discussion. During July, August, and September of 2010, the Team thoroughly reviewed existing literature on the topic of online courses, CMS issues, and student learning outcomes in online courses. As a result, the Team decided that more input was needed

from faculty and students. In the August 2010 meeting, the QEP Team decided to host a faculty focus group to hear their concerns about the CMS, the new release, and student issues with the CMS; a student focus group would be offered in several online classes in the fall semester.

The QEP Team reviewed other colleges' online orientations and received input from DE regarding which orientations were most likely to fit the needs of the ACC student population. Also, the QEP Team spoke with the Enrollment Services Center and the Registrar about the viability of an online student orientation, the ability to track students who completed the orientation, and the technological requirements in producing a student CMS orientation.

By late summer the QEP Team felt that a student CMS orientation was both viable and necessary. However, the Team was reluctant to disregard the other issues that had been so thoroughly discussed. The QEP Team decided to draw up an additional report to distribute to Administration and relevant areas of the college regarding its findings of the last eight months. Several areas which need improvement were included in the report: (1) The faculty needs to promote the college's study skills training to the students; (2) the administration needs to encourage the faculty to take IT training; and (3) a committee needs to revamp and implement the academic honesty policy.

In November the Team selected six online instructors to conduct an online student focus group, and Chris Chance, QEP Co-chair, conducted a faculty focus group. (See next sections for detailed information regarding these focus groups.)

Given the summer and fall discussions and the additional comments from the student and faculty focus groups, the QEP topic was chosen: "All students will complete an online CMS orientation."

Student Focus Groups Data

During the Fall 2010 semester, ACC's QEP Team selected four instructors to mediate asynchronous online student focus groups. These focus groups targeted both fully online classes and web-enhanced classes which had significant online testing and communication components. These focus groups gave students an opportunity to discuss issues that they were having in the online environment in general and with the CMS in particular. The following questions were posted to the focus group forums:

1. In your experience with Blackboard, what problems have you encountered with the Blackboard program?
2. In your experience with online and/or web-enhanced courses, what technical issues have you encountered?
3. What other challenges have you encountered in taking online and/or web-enhanced classes?

The online focus groups were left open for one week. The gathered information was used to provide the QEP Team with baseline information to empower topic selection. In addition, once the topic was definitively selected as an online student orientation, this information was shared with the Distance Education department regarding areas that should be addressed in our orientation.

A total of 138 students responded to the survey. As expected, students in the web-enhanced classes encountered fewer problems with the CMS than the fully online classes. Students in web-enhanced classes can ask the instructor questions face-to-face and receive in-class counseling, in addition to having fewer required interactions on the CMS than students in fully online classes.

Forty-one percent of the responders reported "no or very few problems" with the CMS. Percentages can be misleading, however. Many of these students discussed

problems they had encountered in one or more areas even after saying that in general they had not had issues.

Fifteen percent of students reported having issues with logging on. However, the college changed log-on procedures for the fall 2010 semester, so this high percentage will likely be reduced as students become familiar with their new log-on ID's. Future surveys and focus groups will help the Team determine whether this continues to be a significant issue.

Seven percent of responders reported having problems with opening documents, finding course materials, and attaching files. This has also been identified as a significant student weakness by faculty in the faculty surveys and focus groups. Settings such as Java, Cookies and Pop-Ups did not rate highly as sources of frustration, with students reporting only 2 percent, 0 percent, and 3 percent problems, respectively. Three percent of students reported having problems with their personal computers.

The survey also addressed student behavior and attitudinal issues. Nine percent felt that they had problems with time management and failing to take personal responsibility, 4 percent reported a lack of communication with faculty and/or peers; 3 percent reported difficulty taking online timed exams due to feelings of pressure and stress.

Other issues that the students noted included problems navigating the course in general (7 percent), the CMS timing out (17 percent), and the CMS freezing up (8 percent). Although these problems may initially be seen as problems with the course design or with the CMS, they may also be problems created by lack of user knowledge. For example, faculty often receive the complaint from students that the CMS times out and that students lose information. The 17 percent of students who reported the CMS time-out complaint find this frustrating. However, when students realize that they should complete assignments in a word processing program and/or save their work before

submitting it and if they also are taught that they have 15 “inactive” minutes before being timed out, this problem should be resolved. Some of the “freezing” problems will also be resolved when students understand how to find the proper Java settings, clear their files and caches, and check their browser settings. Anecdotal complaints from both students and faculty show that many complaints about the CMS will be solved with increased knowledge of the system settings and format.

Finally, students discussed some problems with the CMS that cannot be resolved by a tutorial, but they will be passed along to DE and IT departments, as well as faculty. These include the CMS being down (9 percent), Chat feature not working (1 percent), and classes not appearing (less than 1 percent). Once again, however, the 9 percent of students who often found the CMS “down” may be experiencing personal computer setting errors as faculty and DE rarely report the CMS being unavailable.

In summary, 118 comments were made regarding problems with the CMS, and 30 more comments were submitted regarding behavioral or attitudinal issues.

Faculty Focus Group Data - Fall, 2010

In addition to student data, the QEP Team solicited focus group input from select ACC faculty as well. Eight faculty members, representing a range of technical and academic disciplines, met in seminar format to discuss issues associated with teaching online courses. The QEP Team formulated a series of questions for the participants to discuss as a starting point. Members then shared their experiences teaching *web only*, *web-enhanced*, and *hybrid* courses, as well as citing student and faculty difficulties in dealing with the course management system.

After broadly examining the topic of online teaching, the focus group considered how to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and ultimate success of the online CMS through an online orientation.

The QEP Team presented the following discussion topics to the eight faculty members:

1. What do you most like about teaching online at ACC?
2. What are the pedagogical benefits of online instruction?
3. What are the greatest challenges to you as an instructor in teaching online at ACC?
4. Concerning students, what do you believe are the greatest benefits of online learning?
5. Concerning students, what do you believe are the greatest difficulties associated with online learning?
6. What sort of technical problems have you and/or your students experienced?
7. Addressing the challenges above (Questions 3, 5, and 6), how can we create an online orientation for the course management system to enhance the students' ability to be successful?
8. What specific areas should be addressed?
9. Of these areas, where should we concentrate our effort?
10. What medium or media should be used to accomplish these goals?
11. Who, and at what level, should be required to pass the orientation?

The comments from the faculty focus group members, regardless of discipline or delivery method (web only, web-enhanced, hybrid) were fairly consistent. Members argued that online teaching is convenient and flexible and that once a student understands the software and requirements of the course, online teaching is also effective. Several faculty members lauded the course management system's ability to link students seamlessly with large amounts of course content while enabling them to discuss issues and material with classmates in a nonthreatening venue.

The faculty also cited a number of challenges for students taking online classes, including difficulty logging on and navigating the site, problems downloading content and/or submitting documents, and problems manipulating assignments and taking assessments. In addition to course-specific problems, faculty noted that students face challenges with Internet access, including lack of broadband availability, periods of Internet outage, and software compatibility issues.

Next, the focus group looked at an online orientation as a means to remove these basic barriers to students' success in their online classes. Group members suggested that the college should build an objective, process-driven orientation that requires student mastery of basic tasks in the CMS, including logging on, sending and responding to e-mail, downloading and submitting documents in multiple formats, taking assessments and examinations, submitting assignments, understanding time limits and date limits, participating in discussions, accessing external links, and understanding how to access grades. The group went on to recommend that the orientation be presented not only online but also in alternative venues, such as live classes in college computer labs.

Finally, group members argued that a successful orientation needed to be comprehensive but not too long. Several faculty cited face-to-face experience with students who have short attention spans and proposed that the online orientation focus not only on content but also efficiency. One group member suggested live video-clip instruction in each module; others suggested the use of software such as *Camtasia* that enables a step-by-step, process-oriented walk-through of each module.

Ultimately, faculty focus group members see a bright future for online courses at ACC. As a group they agree that a comprehensive online orientation addressing identified difficulties in delivery, computer literacy, and specific course awareness will

enhance student success. A copy of the QEP Team meeting minutes may be found at the following link: http://www.alvincollege.edu/about/qep/minutes.html

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since 1995, a combination of institutional and student demand for online courses has caused a dramatic increase in the number of these courses offered by community colleges. In 1999, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that 58 percent of public two-year institutions offered distance education classes in 1995; by 1998, that number had increased to 72 percent (United States). According to a survey of two- and four-year institutions conducted by the EDUCAUSE Center for Applied Research (ECAR), by the 2001-02 academic year, "more than 95 percent of associate institutions" were offering online courses (Arabasz and Baker 2). While the number of institutions offering online courses increased from 58 percent to 95 percent between 1995 and 2002, the number of distance learning courses offered by these same institutions "represented only 5 percent of all courses" and 11 percent of all courses were hybrid courses (Arabasz and Baker 3).

More recent data shows that this increase in online courses continues at a rapid pace. A survey conducted by the Instructional Technology Council (ITC) in the 2007-08 academic year had 226 responding community colleges (1). The survey reported “a 22 percent increase for distance education enrollments” (2), up 11 percent from the previous year (13). Another study of 2500 U.S. colleges and universities reported a 21 percent increase in online course enrollment from fall 2008 to fall 2009 (Allen and Seaman 5). The growth rate of online enrollment is more than 10 times the growth rate of enrollment in traditional classes (Allen and Seaman 1). What, then, accounts for this demand for online course offerings?

Reasons for increased number of online courses

Student Perspective. As cited above, students are enrolling in online courses in post-secondary institutions in increasing numbers. Students opt for online courses primarily for flexibility and convenience and secondarily because they perceive online courses to be easier than traditional seated courses. In the article “How Students Develop Online Learning Skills,” Alan R. Roper stated that adult learners are in need of courses and programs that match their "busy lifestyles.” Many of today's college students who want to obtain a degree or skill are older than 18 and have the responsibilities of a full- or part-time job, are married with children, or are single parents with children. A profile of a typical online learner emerged in a 2002 study by Alana Halsne and Louis Gatta that compared learning styles of community college students enrolled in a distance-learning course to those of students who were taking the same course in a seated class. The following table has been created as a visual summary of the results of Halsne and Gatta's study:

Characteristics	Online Learners	Traditional Learners
Age	Over 25	Under 25
Gender	Women	Men
Employment status	Full-time professional, Educator, or "Other" occupational category	Part-time student worker, Service worker, or Sales rep
Marital status	Married or Divorced	Single
Dependent children	Yes	No
Family income	Over $40,000	Under $40,000
Race	White/Caucasian (not Spanish/Hispanic origin)	White/Caucasian More likely to be Hispanic/Any Race than online learners
Education level	More educated than traditional learners	High school graduate
Student status	Part-time	Full-time

Data source: Halsne and Gatta

Halsne and Gatta report that many students who opt for online courses have financial responsibilities and cannot give up their jobs to attend seated classes. In addition, they are challenged by conflicts between work schedules and set course meeting times, as well as a "geographic remoteness" (Halsne and Gatta). The fact that working adults seek online classes rather than classroom courses is reinforced by Paul Stevens, who wrote, "Working professionals want to act in self-reliant ways to optimize their own available time, learning and resources" (qtd. in Ali 43). Many of these online learners are married or single parents with dependent children, adding an additional dimension of time/responsibility constraints (Baab 3). Distance education offers a growing population of students a flexible, convenient learning alternative to a rigid seated course (Halsne and Gatta, Roper).

However, many surveyed online students have responded that they chose an online course because they believed it would be easier than the same face-to-face course and require less work. Instructors of online courses have confirmed this expectation because students have said they were "surprised by the time commitment required for an online course" and thought, prior to taking the course, that logging in once a week would be all that was required (Bozarth, Chapman & LaMonica 91).

College Perspective. Increasing student demand for online courses poses a unique growth opportunity for institutions of higher learning (Willis). Advancements in technology and increased use of computers at home and in the workplace have enabled colleges to provide educational opportunities to a previously untapped wealth of students: those students who were not able to attend seated classes due to time or geographic constraints. Online instruction is predominantly delivered asynchronously, overcoming time constraints posed by the set class times of seated courses. With the use of technology, the instructor and the classroom materials are brought to the student's computer, overcoming geographic constraints previously experienced by many

students (Willis; Arabasz and Baker 2). Reaching this new population of students has increased enrollment, thus increasing revenues for colleges (Arabasz and Baker 2).

Higher education recognizes the need to keep pace with the technological demands made by students. No college or educator can dispute the presence of technology in our students' lives. In 2006, EDUCAUSE's then Vice-President Diana Oblinger cited some interesting facts about the ubiquitous presence of technology:

- The number-one way to find a job is through online job searches.
- The number of online searches in Google in March 2005 was 3.5 billion.

  …
- Over 75,000 new blogs are created each day.
- The stickiest Web site is PokerStars.com, with 600,000 users—typically sixteen to twenty-five years old—spending at least eight hours per week on the site.
- 50 percent of Americans play videogames…. (80)

Today's younger students are instant messaging, Facebooking, and texting from their "Smart" phones. The millennial generation (born 1982 to 2000) is the first generation to grow up with a personal computer in the home. The *ITC 2009 Distance Education Survey Results* states that "online classes will increasingly attract millennial students due to their technology base" (14).

Colleges have embraced technology and recognized the need to engage students with technology. The response by colleges to this new technology has taken many forms, from employing courseware such as Blackboard to enable students to access the course syllabus, e-mail, grades, and calendar to using specialized state-of-the-art software and virtual world programs. The embrace of technology by colleges and the offering of online courses will ensure continued enrollment growth and increased

revenue while providing an educational opportunity to those who might otherwise have to forego attending classes.

Failure and Withdrawal Rates in Online Classes

Over the last 20 years, the majority of distance learning literature has emphasized the high withdrawal and failure rates that accompany online learning compared to face-to-face learning. This is particularly true of older studies. George Siemans in an online article titled "Preparing Students for Elearning" reported that “elearning struggles with high dropout rates. The concept of anytime/anywhere learning often becomes never/nowhere. As many corporations and schools have discovered, the online medium, while still dealing with issues similar to classrooms, faces unacceptable rates of drop outs [sic] and failures.” Robert Nash, Supervisor of Instructional Design at Coastline Community College, Fountain Valley, California, stated that colleges and faculty across-the-board see better success rates for on-campus students in comparison to online learners. David Diaz found in his dissertation research that online students had almost double the withdrawal rate of campus-based students. Diaz concluded that “online course enrollment represented a real risk for students who were not adequately prepared or whose profile did not match that of the successful online student” (5).

The studies reviewed by Alvin Community College are consistent in their statistical and anecdotal findings. The wealth of data from the 1990's and 2000's cannot be ignored, given its uniform outcomes and analysis. Although data from more recent surveys show lower dropout rates, the success gap between online learning and traditional, campus-based learning has not been closed.

Statistical findings from college records and surveys concur. Using surveys and data from 2000 and earlier, Stacey Ludwig-Hardman and Joanna Dunlap found that “drop out [sic] rates associated with distance learning typically range from 20 to 50%”

(1). Other studies report that "student dropout rates were as high as 35% to 50%, compared to 14% for traditional classes" (Lynch). However, withdrawal and failure rates do not reveal the entire scope of the problem. Hyllegard and Burke found that "online students had a significantly greater incidence of course attrition, more than double that of students in enhanced courses (26% versus 12%)." They also found that "online students tended to receive a disproportionate number of incomplete grades (12% versus 3%)."

Recent studies are more encouraging since they show an improving picture of online education in the United States. The *ITC Annual Survey March 2010* showed a significant increase in online student success rates:

> Since the inception of online instruction, administrators have dealt with the issue of lower student retention or completion rates than traditional face-to-face instruction. During the early years, retention/completion could easily fall below 50 percent. However, colleges have progressed in addressing this challenge—in 2009 administrators reported that the average retention or completion rate for online classes was 72 percent, compared to 76 percent for traditional face-to-face courses. Based on six years of data, the trend in online retention has continued to improve. (12)

The above analysis may need to be qualified, however. Out of the 400 community colleges surveyed, the response rate was 17 percent. Surveys were typically mailed to and completed by directors of distance education departments. With over 80 percent of community colleges not responding, it is difficult to be decisive about this improvement, but the numbers suggest that at least some of the problems identified in early distance education programs are beginning to be addressed in a positive way.

In a report published in 2011 by Xu and Jaggars, two researchers who have published multiple studies on online courses for Community College Research Center

(CCRC), the results showed that “overall all across studies, students who took a given course online had estimated withdrawal rates that were 10 to 15 percentage points higher than students who took the course face-to-face” (1).

Failure and withdrawal rates are a good starting point in assessing strengths and weaknesses of online programs. However, many studies elaborate on the complexities facing students in these courses. Hyllegard and Burke included an important caveat, which is the fact that online courses show “a disproportionate number of students earning high grades. These course outcomes suggest that some students flourish in the online environment, while others flounder."

Specifically, in assessing two groups—students in online courses and those in web-enhanced courses—Hyllegard and Burke found that “grades in the online courses approximate a bimodal distribution, with a large percentage of A’s [47.1%], very few C’s [9.1%], and a substantial share of failing grades [21.1%].” The type of student studied is also clearly important. Diaz's dissertation showed that online students were just as likely to be successful as traditional students, and sometimes more so, when the considered factors were “exam scores, obtaining a grade of ‘C’ or better, and by student satisfaction. However, online students dropped out of online classes nearly twice as often as equivalent on-campus students...” (5).

In assessing Hyllegard and Burke’s “flourish/flounder” concept, it should be emphasized that online students are more likely to be satisfied with their learning experiences than traditional students are. In “Online Drop Rates Revisited” published in 2002, Diaz looked at the withdrawal rates of online students and found that these students were more likely to drop courses (13.5 percent drop rate versus 7.2 percent drop rate); however, they were more likely to “outperform traditional students.” In attempting to improve the quality of online courses and the success of online students, ACC feels the profile of the online student must be kept in mind. The literature review of

Nash's study reflected a consensus that online learners are “typically older, attend school part-time, and often juggle a full-time job along with family responsibilities.” Online students have self-selected to take online classes and are more likely to be self-starters and self-motivated (Nash). Miller and Lu’s study “Barriers and Challenges to Serving Non-Traditional Students in E-Learning Environments” showed that nontraditional students “are increasingly the population of e-learners, and are the most likely to find challenges in grappling with the technology and expectations of a non-traditional classroom environment” (5). As online learning becomes the norm for many colleges, the profile of a typical online learner will become more similar to that of a traditional campus learner, which will cause different challenges in the future. At this time, however, the nontraditional student is still an appropriate focus of distance education.

Another factor to be considered is the low retention rate in online classes. In 2010 Jaggars and Xu reported that ”students who took remedial courses online were less likely to advance to subsequent gatekeeper courses; students who took online coursework in early semesters were slightly less likely to return to school in subsequent semesters; and ever-online students who took a higher proportion of their coursework online were slightly less likely than other ever-online students to eventually earn an educational award or transfer to a four-year school” (24).

Nash reported that other studies found “deeper” reasons for the problem of retention rates, such as poor direction and feedback on assignments, problems with time management, and students trying to accomplish too much. These are factors that colleges can hope to address with a reasonable expectation of success.

Another segment of retention research focuses on the environment of the rural community college, such as ACC. In a study by Katsinas and Moecek, Miller and Lu found a reason for concern about the preparation of these students to use technology:

> While many students arrive on campus well prepared for using technology, there is a large segment of the college student population, namely the non-traditional college student (represented by . . . those from lower-economic strata and first-generation college students) that is not entirely comfortable with technology. The use and integration of technology ... does not become an enabling variable in the collegiate experience, but conversely becomes a detriment to persistence (qtd. in Miller and Lu 6).

In other words, "the medium of distributed learning has progressed, while the abilities to use the tool have not progressed at the same rate" (Miller and Lu 12). A significant barrier to successful online learning is the student's lack of experience with the technology itself (Miller and Lu 1).

In Miller and Lu's research, faculty members were asked to respond to the question: "What do you believe is the most substantial barrier to nontraditional student learning success in online environments?" (9). The faculty's responses seem to represent the circumstances found among the online students at ACC. Miller and Lu recorded the responses in "no particular order":

1. no history working with technology
2. have not worked with on-line courses in the past, therefore creating a barrier

   …
5. access to on-line support

   …
8. digital divide
9. expectations of technology use by the non-traditional learner

   …

12. non-traditional students don't have the money to buy state-of-the-art technology to keep up on-line learning demands

…

14. non-traditional students don't have the time to 'play-around' with technology and with the subtext of on-line classes…. (9-10) (qtd. list from original)

Although this research is eight years old, the barriers faced by nontraditional students have remained largely the same and will continue to be relevant for many years to come. In addition, unlike many studies that focus on four-year universities, this study was concerned with nontraditional students attending community colleges (minorities, first in a family to attend college, lower socioeconomic status, parents, etc.) and addressed the "digital divide" often found in more rural communities.

Another study addressed additional roadblocks to student success. Phipps and Merisotis discussed the "possible disparity" between the technology that a college expects students to use and be familiar with versus the technology that many students actually have at home:

> Although institutions may have enhanced, or are enhancing, their capability with high speed networks with additional bandwidth, and improved video quality, course development must take into consideration the technology that the students possess. Many students have older personal computers, equipped with slow modems, insufficient memory, and small hard drives. (15)

Internal faculty surveys at ACC show that this is a common and persistent problem for our campus and students.

In "17 Elements of Good Online Courses," Doug Madden discusses the necessity of training students to use technology. His experience has been that students often wait

until it is too late to get technological help and make mistaken assumptions about their own knowledge base, as well as false assumptions about their personal computers and Internet access.

Technology as a barrier is likely to remain a significant problem to college students in the future. As online courses increase and become more "the norm" for colleges, traditional students will gravitate toward these classes just as the nontraditional learners have in the past. The traditional students are not likely to be the familiar self-starters that online educators have encountered in the past. These new online students will likely be better versed in technology, but that has as yet to be proven. While younger and traditional students may be immersed in technology from the viewpoint of texting, surfing the web, and social networking, they are not necessarily more computer savvy in areas that are essential to success in an online class. Therefore, past studies which target problem areas are still relevant.

Technology is certainly not the only barrier, and ACC intends to address other problematic areas in an orientation. As Laurie Hillstock makes clear in her presentation at the Association of Small Computer Users in Education Conference in 2005, students expect the online "class will be easier, because they can work at their own pace" (141). However, the reality is that "it takes much more discipline on the part of the student to be successful in a distance education course and the work load is usually heavier than in a traditional classroom" (141). Table 1 in Nash's study (below) showed that 23 percent of online students who failed (withdrew or received a failing grade) felt that online courses would be easier. This is in comparison to only 5.7 percent of successful students feeling that the classes would be easier.

TABLE 1

1. During 1999, why did you choose distance-learning courses at Coastline rather than traditional classroom courses? (Please check all that apply.)

Response Categories	Success	Not Success	Drop	Unknown	Total Responses	% of Total Responses
Because of time or physical constraints, I can't take traditional classes	225 (45.8%)	25 (36.8%)	25 (41.7%)	38 (43.7%)	313	44.3
I like learning on my own, at my own pace	157 (32.0%)	22 (32.4%)	19 (31.7%)	27 (31.0%)	225	31.9
I thought the course work would be easier	28 (5.7%)	9 (13.2%)	6 (10.0%)	6 (6.9%)	49	6.9
Distance learning is fun and interesting	25 (5.1%)	4 (5.9%)	1 (1.7%)	7 (8.0%)	37	5.2
Other (write in): DL classes are more convenient/flexible for my schedule and family					34	4.8
Traditional class versions of course(s) I wanted were closed/cancelled	13 (2.6%)	4 (5.9%)	3 (5.0%)	4 (4.6%)	24	3.4
Other (write in): Miscellaneous					24	3.4
Totals	491	68	60	87	706	100

Data Source: Nash

Behavioral Barriers to Online Learning

Nontechnological barriers that explain student attrition are numerous and will be discussed as the college creates the online orientation. These factors run the gamut from lack of college preparation and low computer literacy to reading ability and time management skills (Nash). The QEP will also be researching what Noriko Hara calls the "distress" factor present in online learning. Hara reports that "frustration, anxiety and confusion seemed pervasive" among surveyed online students and "the level of student distress we found….significantly exceeded our expectations" (68). Other research verifies these findings while emphasizing that anxiety is often a normal part of online learning. This "apprehension associated with change (from traditional to online) can be a serious setback in moving toward effective online learning…" (Ali 43).

In “Online Drop Rates Revisited,” Diaz’s study of earlier research gives the QEP several factors to investigate while crafting an online orientation. Diaz concludes his study by quoting C. C. Gibson, who found three categories of barriers to student success in online learning:

- Student factors: educational preparation, motivational and persistence attributes, student academic self-concept;
- Situational factors: family and employer support, changes in life circumstances; and
- Educational system factors: quality and difficulty of instructional materials, provision of tutorial support. (qtd. in Diaz)

While new data is encouraging regarding student success in online environments, it is clear that there is much work to be done. ACC’s QEP will look carefully at ways to assist student success as it creates an online orientation that will serve as a critical bridge from the traditional classroom course to an online course. Since many community college students come with weak computer skills, “we must commit time and energy to preparing them for a successful online learning experience” by including exercises and tasks designed to give them the practical computer skills they will need in the course (Baab). An online orientation taken by students prior to starting an online course will also reduce student anxiety and frustration, provide a solid learning environment, and highlight the necessary technical knowledge and skills required to take an online course. Noriko Hara learned that students cited frustration, anxiety, and confusion as being major problems in taking online courses (68). Ahmed Ali’s study showed that anxiety and apprehension regarding technology and online courses in general can be a block to effective learning (43). Requiring students to complete an online orientation prepares them mentally and technically.

Students perceive themselves as having good computer skills because they access and search the Internet easily. However, the University of Central Florida faculty reported that they were devoting a portion of the early weeks of a class “dealing with technical issues rather than course content” (Truman-Davis et al. 50). In addition, some of these issues were as basic as “accessing the Internet” and adding an attachment to an e-mail (50). A study that included graduate-level students in an online course revealed that the students identified their lack of navigational skills as a challenge in the course “with each student mentioning either the need for additional orientation activities and time or that the existing orientation session, which was conducted ‘live’ was important” (Brescia et al.). One student related his frustration, saying, "There were times on Blackboard where I was lost completely" (Brescia et. al.). One of the specific recommendations of Abuloum and Khasawneh’s article was that "for a successful use of Blackboard, an extensive orientation on the various features of this e-learning tool has to be given to students prior to their actual use of it."

Students should have a suitable online environment (including access to a computer, an Internet connection, and the learning software) and technical skills (including knowledge of the learning system or CMS) in order to be successful in an online course (Siemans). Courseware, such as Blackboard, requires specific operating systems, downloads, and plug-ins —for instance, Java and FlashPlayer—in order to function properly. Frequently, students do not know how to download these systems or troubleshoot them when technical problems arise. As a result, students log on to the CMS but are not able to access all of the features because of a lack of these specific downloads or plug-ins (Truman-Davis et al. 50). Colleges can prepare students to succeed in their online courses by providing this technical knowledge and skill in an online orientation.

Benefits to the Online Faculty and the Institution

An online orientation will allow faculty to spend more time on course material and less time fielding CMS and technical questions. A common complaint among faculty teaching online classes is the amount of time needed in the first few weeks of class preparing students to use the courseware and find materials on the course site (Truman-Davis et al. 50). Ali's study found that "in online forums, it is not uncommon to see at least half of discussions are about the technology issues, instead of content" (44). An online orientation that prepares students to learn online would allow instructors to shift their focus away from troubleshooting technology and toward imparting knowledge and skills.

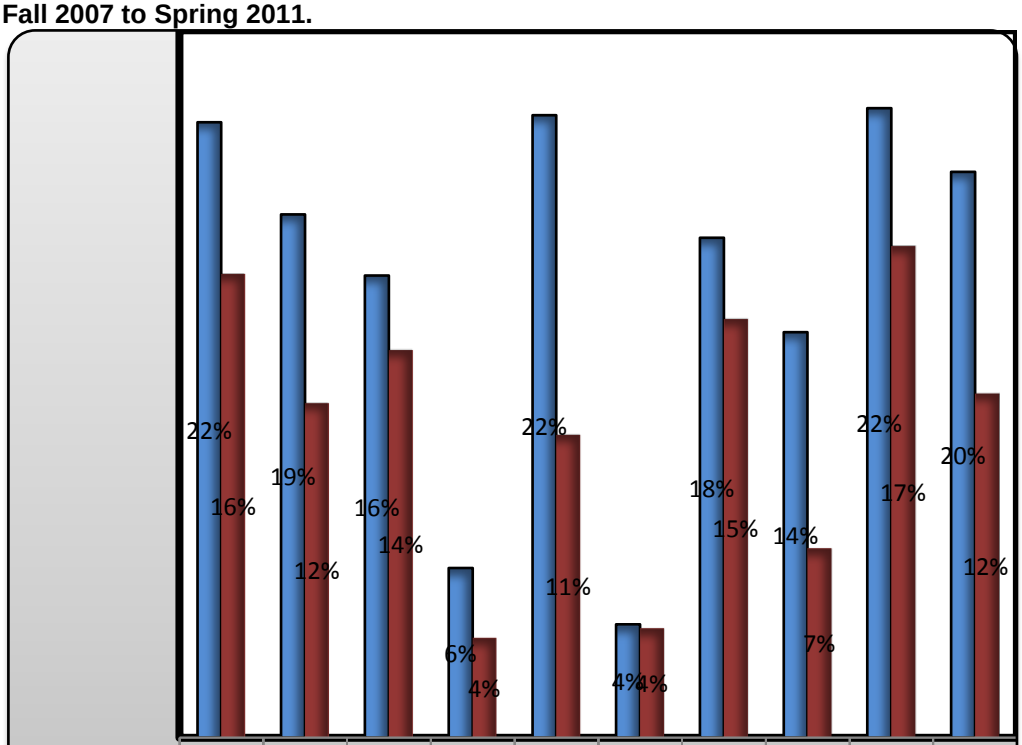
Another important benefit is that administering an online orientation helps retain students. In "Rethinking Access, Success and Student Retention to Open and Distance Learning," author Anne Gaskell states that an orientation course and early support measures result in improved student retention. Indeed, providing students with an online learning environment that is as comfortable as they experience in a face-to-face classroom is the institution's responsibility (Brescia). An online orientation course will have an important role in reducing the barriers to student success in online classes.

Application of the Literature Review

Alvin Community College's statistics regarding failure and withdrawal rates are consistent with statistics found in the literature. Students enrolled in online courses at ACC consistently earned more failing grades and withdrew more frequently than students enrolled on non-online courses (Figure 1). Overall, from Fall 2007 to Spring 2011, an average of 20 percent of students enrolled in online courses earned failing grades with an additional 13 percent withdrawing. During the same period, 18 percent of students enrolled in non-online courses earned failing grades and

8 percent withdrew. Failure rates in online courses ranged from 14 percent in Fall 2010 to 27 percent in Summer II 2008. Failure rates in non-online courses ranged from 13 percent in Fall 2010 to 18 percent in the Fall semesters in 2008 and 2010. Withdrawal rates for online courses ranged from 0 percent in Summer II 2008 to 24 percent in Fall 2007. Withdrawal rates for non-online courses ranged from 3 percent in the Summer I semesters of 2009 and 2010 to 14 percent in Fall 2007.

Figure 1: Average percentages of students at Alvin Community College that earned a failing grade (F) or withdrew (W) from online and non-online courses per semester from Fall 2007 to Spring 2011.



	F	W	F	W	F	W	F	W	F	W
	Spring		Summer I		Summer II		Summer 11-wk		Fall	
Online	22%	19%	16%	6%	22%	4%	18%	14%	22%	20%
Non-online	16%	12%	14%	4%	11%	4%	15%	7%	17%	12%

Table 2: Percentages of students at Alvin Community College that earned a failing grade (F) or withdrew (W) from online and non-online courses from Fall 2007 to Spring 2011

Online courses

	Spring		Summer I		Summer II		Summer 11-wk		Fall	
	F	W	F	W	F	W	F	W	F	W
2007									23	24
2008	22	22	20	5	27	0	20	15	22	21
2009	23	19	15	4	24	8	17	14	22	19
2010	20	18	14	9	15	4	16	14	22	16
2011	22	15								

Non-online courses

	F	W	F	W	F	W	F	W	F	W
2007									16	14
2008	15	14	14	4	11	4	14	7	18	11
2009	17	11	14	3	10	4	16	8	17	12
2010	17	10	13	3	11	5	15	5	18	12
2011	17	12								

While new data cited in the literature is encouraging regarding student success in online environments, it is clear that there is much work to be done. ACC's QEP will look carefully at the barriers to student success as it creates an online orientation.

QEP GOAL AND OBJECTIVE

Alvin Community College's QEP goal is to improve student success by teaching them to use ACC's online Course Management System (CMS). In the QEP surveys, ACC's faculty and students and the greater community of Alvin, Texas, identified one barrier to students' online learning as being a lack of computer and technical skills and the inability to use the Internet. The literature review highlights the importance of providing preparatory training for students in online courses to improve learning in those courses. Eighty-six percent (86 percent) of the courses offered at ACC require the use of the Internet through the CMS.

The goal of Alvin Community College's QEP is *to facilitate student learning by providing a comprehensive online orientation since the courses classified as web-enhanced, hybrid, or Internet require significant computer support.*

To achieve this goal, one main objective has been identified: *Ninety percent* (*90 percent) of students in online courses will demonstrate the ability to use and navigate through the specific tools used in the online CMS*. To accomplish this objective, all online students will complete an online orientation to the CMS. After successfully completing the orientation, the students will be able to (1) navigate through course materials, (2) participate in discussion groups, (3) create and respond to e-mail, (4) submit assignments and access grades, and (5) take course assessments.

STRATEGY: REQUIRE STUDENTS TO COMPLETE AN ONLINE ORIENTATION

Implementation of the online orientation will begin in the Spring 2013 semester. The online orientation will teach students ways to navigate and manage their online course(s). Alvin Community College will purchase access to online orientation software through Blackboard, our current online CMS.

Instructional design team. A team of online instructors, led by the director of DE, will review and customize the CMS orientation package modules during the fall semester of 2011 and the spring semester of 2012. The design team will complete the following tasks:

1. Develop instructions for completing the orientation
2. Determine learning objectives for each of the five modules
3. Customize the Flash tutorials
4. Develop the assessment for each module
5. Develop the final assessment for the orientation

6. Test the orientation
7. Redesign the orientation, if necessary.

Beta test team. During the summer and fall semesters of 2012, preproduction versions of the orientation modules will be beta tested. Focus groups of volunteers consisting of students and faculty will provide feedback to improve the orientation modules prior to launching the online orientation. The following faculty members have volunteered to serve on the faculty beta test team:

Rhonda Boone	Department Chair	Pharmacy Technician Program
Georgette Goodwill	Program Director	Polysomnography
David Griffith	Band Director/ Instructor	Music
Bonny Johnson	Department Chair	Sports and Human Performance Fitness Center Director
Cathy LaBouef	Instructor	Computer Science
Nancey Lobb	Division Chair Instructor	Social Sciences/ Psychology
Tom Magliolo	Department Chair	Computer Science
Sara Mangat	Instructor	Speech
Saul Olivares	Instructor	Spanish
Jim Preston	Instructor	Court Reporting
Crystal Price	Professor	Office Administration
Tim Reynolds	Instructor	Economics/Government
Ashley Salter	Instructor	English

The faculty on the beta test team will evaluate the online orientation by responding to the following statements:

1. The Blackboard orientation is easy to navigate.
2. The information contained in this orientation meets my expectations.

3. This orientation will help prepare my students for success in an online course.
4. The orientation is visually appealing.
5. The instructions for completing the orientation are clear.
6. As a result of this orientation, please rate your ability to do the following tasks:
    a. Configure your home computer so it is compatible with MyBlackboard
    b. Log into MyBlackboard
    c. Access, read, and reply to discussion board posts
    d. Create an e-mail
    e. Locate the grades
    f. Submit an assignment
    g. Take a test in MyBlackboard

See Appendix VI for the Beta Test Online Orientation Survey.

DE will review the faculty comments submitted after the beta testing and modify the modules and/or delivery of the online orientation, if necessary.

Next, a group of students selected by the online faculty and approved by DE and the QEP Team, as well as a new group of online faculty, will test the new version of the orientation. The students and faculty will use the same comments outline to submit comments and suggestions to DE. Then DE will incorporate additional modifications and finalize the orientation.

In the spring semester of 2013, the online orientation will be launched, and all students will complete the online orientation.

Roles and Responsibilities for Implementation of the Online Student Orientation

The Distance Education Department is responsible for producing and distributing information about the online student orientation to all faculty and staff. Since a successful orientation requires that all participants understand their roles and

responsibilities for supporting this project, the orientation will be introduced in a presentation to the faculty and staff at the Fall Workshop in August 2012 and updated at the Spring Workshop in January 2013.

The materials distributed by DE during the workshops will include information about the orientation, such as the purpose and content of the orientation, which students are required to take it, how the students will be notified that they need to take it, where to refer students who have questions about it, and how the DE department will track who has taken it. This information will be distributed in several formats: an introductory video, a flyer, a pamphlet, and a mass e-mail to all faculty and staff.

"The QEP Procedures for Online Faculty," a more specific document, will be sent only to online course instructors. This document will contain all of the above information, as well as two additional requirements for all online instructors: (1) online instructors will include a paragraph about the orientation in all online syllabi and (2) online instructors will use the Course Management Systems (CMS) Student Questions Checklist to track any student questions addressed to them about the orientation. See Appendix VII for CMS (Blackboard) Student Questions Checklist.

The CMS Student Questions Checklist is a convenient record-keeping document that the instructor will use to record the number of students who asked the instructor questions about the online CMS and record how the instructor answered the question. The DE will distribute the checklist to all online instructors at the beginning of each semester and collect the data at the end of each semester using an online survey tool distributed through campus e-mail.

The admission and advising counselors play a critical role in informing students about the orientation. They will receive the same information about the orientation as the faculty. The director of DE will meet with all the counselors during the fall semester of 2012 to address their questions and concerns about the process of delivering the

online orientation that the counselors may have before their providing information directly to students enrolling in online classes.

Orientation Modules

The orientation will be divided into five (5) major components. The modules will be named (1) finding your way, (2) getting organized, (3) communicating, (4) assignments and grades, and (5) taking tests.

- *Finding Your Way* will focus on ensuring that students are able to navigate through the CMS.
- *Getting Organized* will show students how to maintain and organize files within the CMS.
- *Communicating* will teach students methods of communication with instructors and with other students in their online courses within the CMS interface.
- *Assignments and Grades* will focus on enabling students to complete and submit assignments and to obtain and view grades posted in the CMS interface.
- *Taking Tests* will instruct students on taking tests in the CMS interface.

In addition to these five topics, two more will be addressed: (1) personal computer-to-CMS interface and (2) troubleshooting interface problems.

QEP ASSESSMENTS

Assessment 1: Online orientation assessment taken by online students.

Beginning in the Spring 2013 semester, students who are enrolled in online classes will be required to take the online orientation assessment after completing the online orientation. All other students will be encouraged (but not required) to take the online

orientation due to the college's conversion to Blackboard Release 9 in the Fall 2012 semester.

Assessment 2: Biennial comparison of the cumulative pass/fail rates in online classes.

Prior to Alvin Community College's interim report to SACS-COC in 2017, the QEP Team will compare the two sets of pass/fail rates: the five-year pre-online orientation set and the five-year post-online orientation set.

Assessment 3: Biennial comparison of the cumulative withdrawal rates in online classes.

Prior to ACC's interim report to SACS-COC, the QEP Team will compare the two sets of withdrawal rates: the five-year pre-online orientation set and the five-year post-online orientation set.

Data will be collected by the Institutional Effectiveness and Research (IER) department during the fall and spring semesters beginning five years prior to the implementation of the online orientation assessment—that is, beginning the Fall 2007 semester through the Fall 2012 semester. Beginning with the Spring 2013 semester, which is the first semester the online orientation is implemented, IER will collect cumulative pass/fail and withdrawal rates each fall and spring semester. During the summers of 2015 and 2017, the QEP Team will compare each semester's rates with the pre-online orientation statistics to determine if there is a significant difference in the pre- and post-online orientation statistics.

Assessment 4: Student survey of the efficacy of the online orientation assessment.

At the end of the online orientation, students will be directed to a survey page that requests feedback regarding their ability to understand the instructions and the ease of

navigation of the online orientation. Students will be asked such questions as the following: Do you feel the orientation helped to prepare you to take an online course? What aspect(s) of the CMS (Blackboard) were not covered by the online orientation that you feel should be covered? What sections of the CMS were covered but additional instruction would have been beneficial?

Assessment 5: Student end-of-course evaluation.

Upon the completion of a student's first online course beginning in the Spring 2013 semester, a survey designed by the DE department and administered by the IER department will ask the student to respond to questions addressing whether or not the online orientation assessment helped them succeed in the course. If the student answers “yes,” the survey will direct the student to identify which part, if any, of the orientation benefited him or her in succeeding in the course(s) and what part of the assessment was not beneficial. The student will also be asked to identify which aspects of the computer/online course delivery program are not addressed by the orientation but would be helpful to have known prior to taking the online course.

This survey will be part of the online student evaluation survey that all students taking online courses will complete during the fall and spring semester classes.

Once the IER department has compiled the data from the student surveys, the QEP Team on a semester basis to review the data from the surveys. At that time the team may adjust the online orientation assessment, if needed, to facilitate the students' ability to navigate the assessment.

Assessment 6: Student focus groups to discuss the online orientation.

The QEP Team, with the assistance of the DE department, will conduct yearly informal focus groups composed of students who are taking online courses. Student input regarding the ease of taking the online orientation, which modules were beneficial to his

or her succeeding in the course and which ones could be improved will assist the Team in its evaluation of its QEP goal.

Assessment 7: Faculty focus groups to discuss student performance in online classes

The QEP Team will meet yearly with a select group of faculty teaching online classes to determine faculty perception of the effectiveness of the online CMS on student performance. The Team will ask these individuals to compare the approximate number of questions from students regarding the online CMS prior to the implementation of the orientation with the number of questions after its implementation. The Team will also solicit information regarding the type of questions faculty are receiving, if any.

QEP EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The QEP Team expects to achieve three outcomes from the QEP.

OUTCOME 1: Ninety percent (90%) of ACC's online students will have a 100% mastery of the Course Management System (CMS)

The online orientation will be composed of modules—each module educating the student on a particular component of computer compatibility with the CMS or on a particular feature of the CMS itself. At the end of each module, the student must pass the knowledge- and performance-based quiz with a grade of 100%. If this is not accomplished, the student must repeat the module and quiz until the required pass rate is achieved. The online orientation will not permit a student to proceed to the next module until success in the current module is achieved. Therefore, at the end of the orientation, the student will have demonstrated mastery of all the selected features of the CMS at 100%.

The QEP Team believes at least 90% of students enrolled in online courses will take and pass the online orientation with a 100% pass rate. The Team also believes that up to 10% of students enrolled in online courses may withdraw from the courses prior to taking the online orientation.

OUTCOME 2: At least a 5% decrease in the failure rates across all online courses after the fifth year of the implementation of the orientation.

OUTCOME 3: At least a 5% decrease in the attrition rates across all online courses after the fifth year of the implementation of the orientation.

The QEP Team will compare the pre-orientation data to post-orientation data pertaining to pass/fail and withdrawal rates in online courses. The IER and the DE departments have collected data pertaining to pass/fail and withdrawal rates in online courses since the Fall 2007 semester. This data collection will continue through the Fall 2012 semester and will comprise the "pre-orientation statistics." Beginning with the Spring 2013 semester, when the online orientation is initiated, and continuing through the Spring 2017 semester, a separate set of data will be collected pertaining to pass/fail and withdrawal statistics. This data set will comprise the "post-orientation statistics." The QEP Team will compare the two sets of data biennially (2014 and 2016). The QEP Team expects that the failure and withdrawal rates in online courses will decrease by at least 5% post-orientation. See Appendix VIII for QEP Timeline.

QEP MARKETING PLAN

The Marketing/Communications Department (MC) and the QEP Team have taken a forward-looking, technology-based approach to publicizing the QEP. Since the QEP is centered on technology and students will be required to take an orientation

online, marketing will focus on reaching the ACC campus, new students, and the community through social media and numerous online avenues.

Spring 2012 and Summer 2012 will be the planning and initial implementation stages. The first meeting between MC department and the QEP Team will be held January 2012, with a follow-up meeting in March 2012. An important component of the planning stage will be the development of a brand for the QEP orientation which will be used in social media, advertising, and other outreach programs for students. Included in the brand will be a QEP-specific icon that will become familiar to students, staff, and faculty. In addition, the MC department will develop a "Smart" phone application to partner with the orientation.

Roll-out for the QEP marketing plan will be Fall 2012. The target date is October 25, 2012, when the Spring 2013 schedule becomes available to students online.

Information about the QEP will be placed in the online and printed Spring 2013 schedules and for every subsequent semester through 2016. Information will also be posted in WebACCess so students will see the QEP requirements both as they plan for classes and as they register for them.

As the budget shows, the main semesters for the Marketing budget will be focused on Fall 2012, Spring 2013, and Fall 2013. One full year after the publication of the orientation has been implemented (three full semesters), the campus, students, and community will be familiar with the process. Subsequent marketing will target new students with basic information and the campus in general with updates and changes.

A variety of forms of media will be used to market the QEP in all semesters, 2012 through 2016: the ACC BlueTube communication system, Facebook, Twitter, ACC website links, color flyers, color posters, outdoor marquees, and other signage.

A raffle will also be held each semester. All students completing the online CMS orientation will be entered in the raffle. The main prizes in the spring 2013 and fall 2013

semesters will be an MP3 player or an IPod. Subsequent semesters will have smaller prizes; however, all of the prizes will focus on technology, such as gift cards for wireless cafes, software packages, and "Smart" phone covers. There will be no fewer than ten raffle winners each semester.

A QEP marketing committee will be formed in Fall 2012 to work with the ACC Foundation and MC department to solicit gift donations for each raffle.

The ACC Communications, Radio and TV Broadcasting Department (CRTVB) will develop media segments primarily for use in 2012 and 2013. An explanatory video segment introducing the QEP will highlight specific student and faculty interviews and testimonials. This video segment will first be shown in the fall 2012 workshop to staff and faculty. It will be revised and updated and shown in the fall 2013 workshop as well. In addition, it will be accessible through the ACC website.

A 30-second television spot for the ACC cable station (KACC-TV) and a 30-second radio spot for the ACC radio station (KACC) will be produced and will run for two weeks, eight times per day for each of the following semesters: Fall 2012, during spring registration; Spring 2013, during the first two weeks of class; and Fall 2013 during spring registration. The spots will be analyzed by MC, CRTVB, and the QEP Team and will be revised and updated for the Fall 2013 semester. The Team and CRTVB will evaluate this marketing tool at the end of the Fall 2013 semester. At that time, a decision will be made whether continued cable and radio exposure is needed.

The QEP Team and the MC department are aware of the importance of the adjunct faculty being an active part of the QEP process and implementation since many adjunct faculty members teach online, and many more participate in web-enhanced classes. If the adjunct faculty is not acquainted with the QEP, its components, and its significance, successful student learning outcomes will be affected. Therefore, the MC department and the QEP Team will work with the Human Resources Department to host

an Adjunct Faculty Lunch Workshop in the fall semesters of 2012 and 2013. A special focus will be on the significance of adjunct participation and CMS training. The extended video segment will be shown, the QEP will be discussed in detail, and a Q&A session will be hosted.

Costs for all marketing expenses are reflected in the ACC QEP budget.

QEP BUDGET

The majority of the costs for implementing and assessing the QEP will be based on existing personnel and departments. To calculate personnel costs for institutional support, percentage estimates have been made for the workloads expected to fall on the departments of Distance Education (DE), Institutional Effectiveness and Research (IER), and Information Technology (IT). The corresponding percentages calculated in the budget are preliminary estimates based on meetings and correspondence with the directors from each area.

The QEP Team anticipates that as much as 30% of the normal work schedule in DE will be focused on the following responsibilities:

- customizing Blackboard's online orientation modules to suit ACC's needs
- designing and implementing a beta testing program for select online faculty from the academic and technical sides to test the orientation pre-launch to students
- training online faculty and counselors in their roles per the QEP post-launch of the orientation
- tracking online students taking the orientation
- preparing and submitting a report reflecting numbers and types of assistance to students each semester to the QEP Coordinator each semester

- preparing for online faculty/student orientation success rate reports and tracking student problems and issues with the CMS pre- and post-orientation.

The College is providing funding for a student worker, who will assist with data input and other tasks as deemed appropriate by the Director of DE.

The College is allocating approximately 10% of the normal work schedule in both IT and IER. IER will be charged with preparing and administering a QEP survey each semester to all students and reporting its results. In addition, IER will compile pre- and post-orientation data regarding student success rates in online classes.

The college is allocating a budget for marketing and supplies in order to inform both college personnel and students of the QEP scope and timelines. While the need to inform students is obvious, it is also important that faculty members who participate in online teaching are made aware of the significant change that the students will encounter once the QEP is implemented. Because change is usually met with anxiety, a marketing plan is being developed to help reduce that anxiety.

Professional Development and Travel is a significant portion of the new college expenditures dedicated to QEP. These funds will be used primarily to train key faculty members in the use of the Course Management System. In the current system, all training and assistance is handled completely by DE. Providing high quality, publisher-based training to select faculty members will ease the workload on the DE department and enhance the response time for those faculty members who need assistance with the online instruction system.

The College is allocating $15,000 per year for five years for a QEP Coordinator. This individual will be a faculty or staff member of the college, selected by the QEP Team, who will be charged with the following responsibilities:

- assuring that the QEP proposed timeline is followed
- communicating each semester with DE, IER, and Counseling regarding issues each of those departments may encounter
- gathering numerical data and written comments from QEP surveys and faculty and student focus groups each semester
- preparing and submitting a written report to the QEP Team each semester
- meeting each semester with the QEP Team to discuss reports, surveys and data.
- preparing the interim and final QEP reports for presentation to SACS-COC

Increases in institutional support listed in the budget reflect anticipated inflationary growth in salary and increased personnel benefit expenditures. See Appendix IX for QEP Budget.

APPENDIX I QEP Team Membership

Original Leadership Committee

Downey, Karen
QEP Co-Chair
Instructor, Court Reporting

Chance, Chris
QEP Co-Chair
Instructor/Department Chair, History

Hume, Johanna
QEP Secretary
Instructor, History and Geography

Imthurn, Manuela
Instructor, ADN

Lewis, Bill
Instructor/Division Chair, Communications, Radio & TV Broadcasting

Rhodes, Dwight
Instructor/Division Chair, Math & Sciences

Additional Leadership Committee Members

Butcher, Jerrod
Instructor, Biology

Faust, Dena
Director, Distance Education/Instructional Design

Matteson, Linda
QEP Document Writer
Instructor, English

Boone, Rhonda
Department Chair, Pharmacy Technology

Theato, Julia
Student, Student Worker, Student Ambassador
(Member during topic selection phase)

Resource Team Members

Buso, Sandra
Research Assistant, Institutional Effectiveness and Research

Butler, Susan
Administrative Assistant III, CTRP / DMSO / EMMT / COMM

Fleming, Charzetta
Web Administrator, Marketing/Communications

Goswick, Lynn
Director, Marketing/Communications

Resource Team Members (cont)

Guggisberg, Cammy
Marketing Specialist, Marketing/Communications

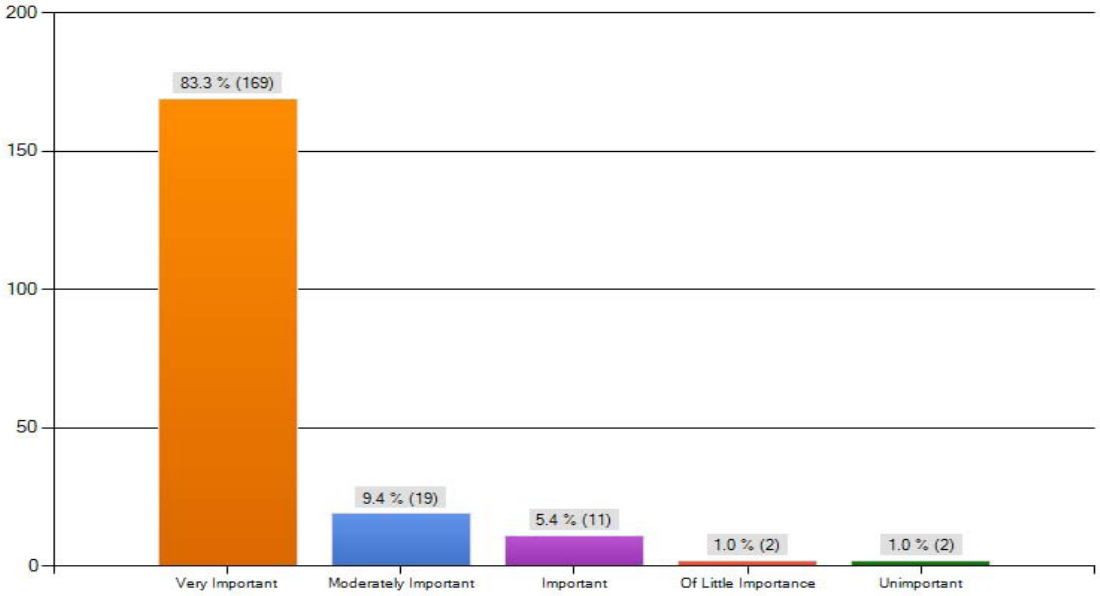
Nelson, Drew
Dean, Academic Programs

Sanger, Patrick
Director, Institutional Effectiveness and Research

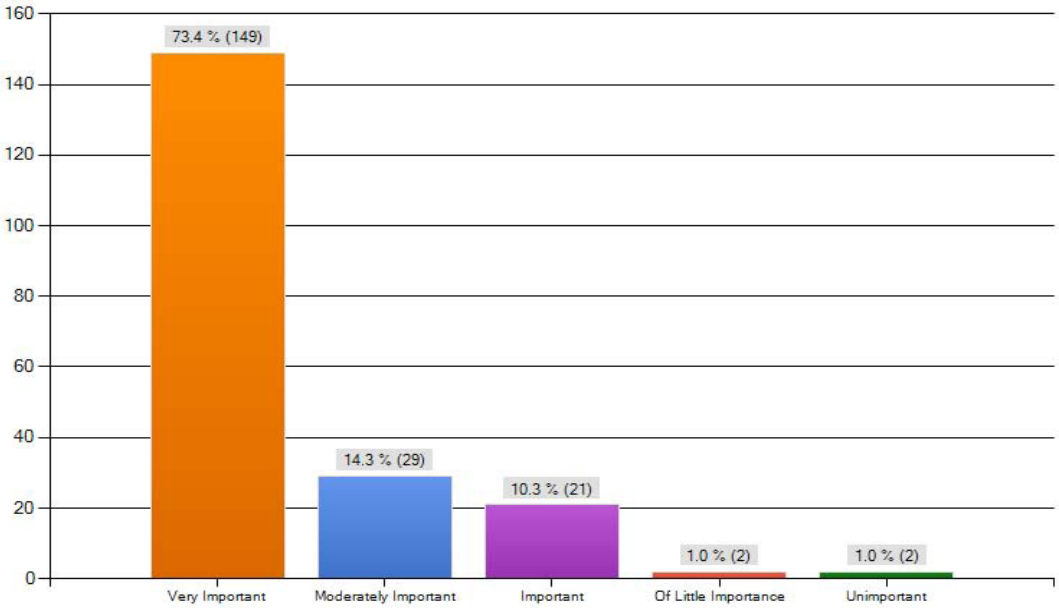
Thompson, Nikki
Research Associate, Institutional Effectiveness and Research

APPENDIX II Faculty Survey Results

READING Strong reading skills and habits are vital to academic success and enrich students' lives. The goal of this QEP is reading across the curriculum, and primary objectives would include ensuring and facilitating academic and workplace success, increasing students' vocabulary, and development of reading enrichment opportunities. Please rate how important you think Reading is as a choice for the QEP.

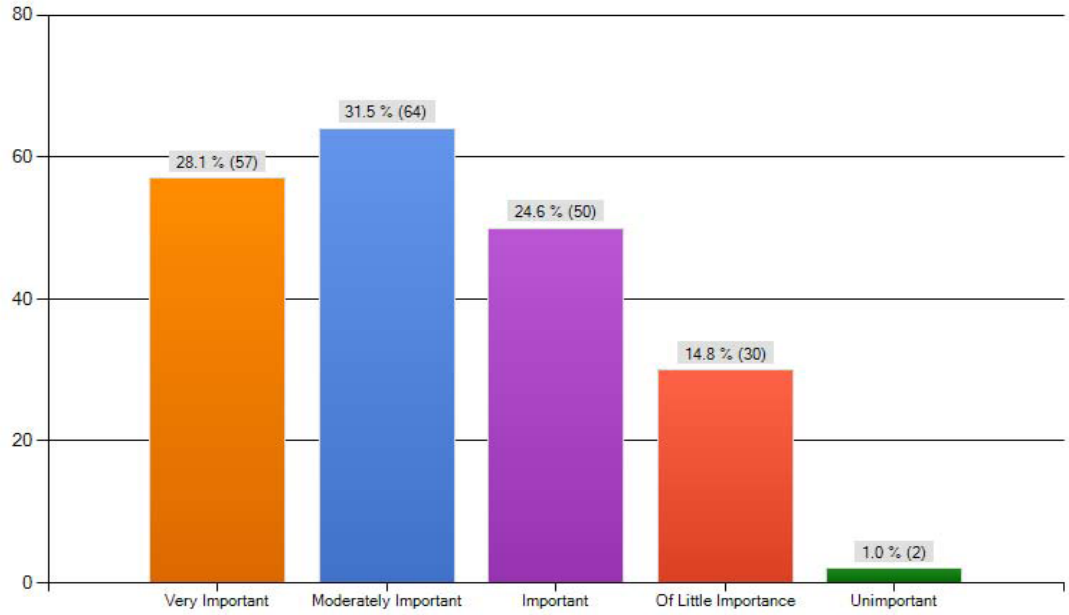


ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND HONESTY Academic integrity and honesty go to the core of academic and personal development and ethics. The goal of this QEP is to reaffirm and strengthen the degrees that ACC confers through academic integrity training and policies for faculty, staff and students. Please rate how important you think Academic Integrity and Honesty is as a choice for the QEP.

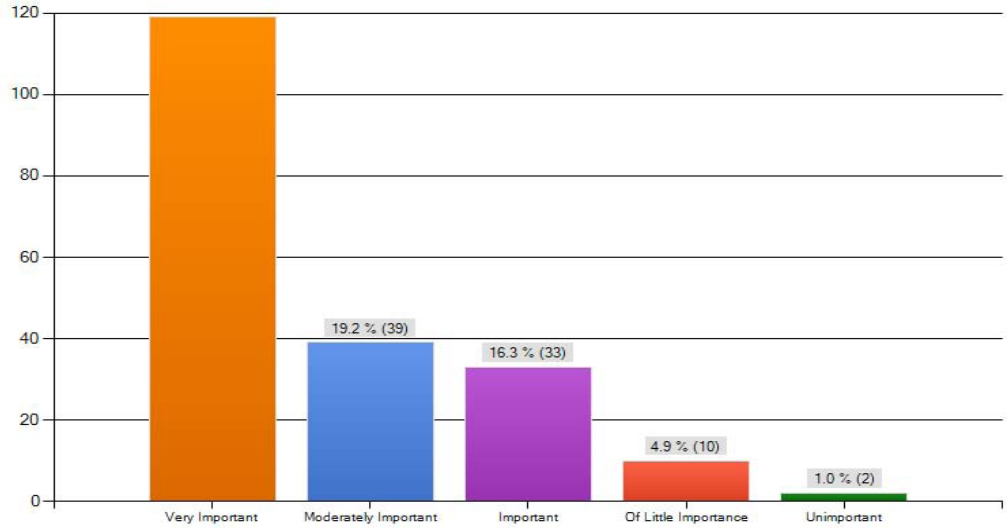


APPENDIX II Faculty Survey Results (cont.)

CAMPUS MENTORSIntegration into the campus environment is a critical component to student success. The goal of this QEP is to create a mentoring program in order to increase student achievement and retention. Implementation will focus on a program of campus mentors who will communicate with students on a regular basis in order to track their needs and progress. Please rate how important you think Campus Mentors is as a choice for the QEP.



TECHNOLOGYA high level of computer literacy and technology skills, for both faculty and students, are essential in the modern learning environment. The goal of this QEP is to increase skills throughout the campus in order to increase students' academic engagement. Implementation will include increased use of Blackboard and online grade books, as well as online peer groups.Please rate how important you think Technology is as a choice for the QEP.

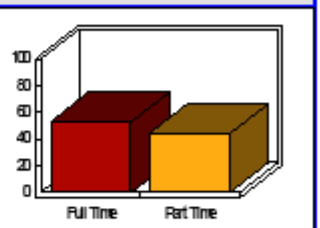


APPENDIX III Student Survey 2010 - Final Results

SP10 QEP Student Survey-Final Results Report

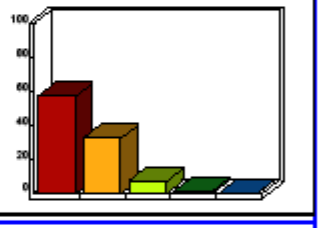
FULL/PART — Mean: 1.46

Response	Value	Freq.	Percent	Cum. Percent	Valid Percent	Cum. Val. Percent	Graph
Full Time	1.00	3535	52.97	52.97	54.46	54.46	
Part Time	2.00	2956	44.30	97.27	45.54	100.00	
Total Valid		6491	97.27		100.00		
Missing		182	2.73				
Total		6673	100.00				



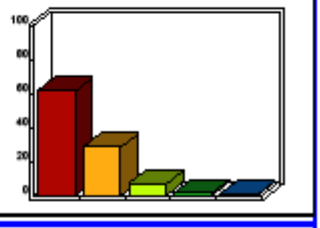
READING — Mean: 4.46

Response	Value	Freq.	Percent	Cum. Percent	Valid Percent	Cum. Val. Percent	Graph
Very Important	5.00	3825	57.32	57.32	57.85	57.85	
Important	4.00	2183	32.71	90.03	33.02	90.87	
Moderately Important	3.00	484	7.25	97.29	7.32	98.19	
Of Little Importance	2.00	91	1.36	98.65	1.38	99.56	
Unimportant	1.00	29	0.43	99.09	0.44	100.00	
Total Valid		6612	99.09		100.00		
Missing		61	0.91				
Total		6673	100.00				



ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND HONESTY — Mean: 4.51

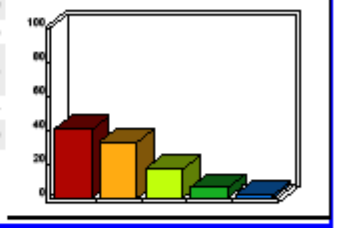
Response	Value	Freq.	Percent	Cum. Percent	Valid Percent	Cum. Val. Percent	Graph
Very Important	5.00	4124	61.80	61.80	62.36	62.36	
Important	4.00	1905	28.55	90.35	28.81	91.17	
Moderately Important	3.00	461	6.91	97.26	6.97	98.14	
Of Little Importance	2.00	96	1.44	98.70	1.45	99.59	
Unimportant	1.00	27	0.40	99.10	0.41	100.00	
Total Valid		6613	99.10		100.00		
Missing		60	0.90				
Total		6673	100.00				



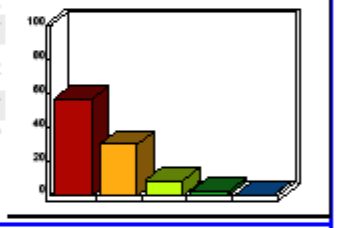
APPENDIX III Student Survey 2010 - Final Results (cont.)

SP10 QEP Student Survey-Final Results Report

CAMPUS MENTORS — Mean: 4.06

Response	Value	Freq.	Percent	Cum. Percent	Valid Percent	Cum. Val. Percent	Graph
Very Important	5.00	2695	40.39	40.39	41.09	41.09	
Important	4.00	2208	33.09	73.48	33.66	74.75	
Moderately Important	3.00	1133	16.98	90.45	17.27	92.03	
Of Little Importance	2.00	401	6.01	96.46	6.11	98.14	
Unimportant	1.00	122	1.83	98.29	1.86	100.00	
Total Valid		6559	98.29		100.00		
Missing		114	1.71				
Total		6673	100.00				

TECHNOLOGY — Mean: 4.43

Response	Value	Freq.	Percent	Cum. Percent	Valid Percent	Cum. Val. Percent	Graph
Very Important	5.00	3814	57.16	57.16	57.73	57.73	
Important	4.00	2018	30.24	87.40	30.54	88.27	
Moderately Important	3.00	591	8.86	96.25	8.95	97.22	
Of Little Importance	2.00	149	2.23	98.49	2.26	99.47	
Unimportant	1.00	35	0.52	99.01	0.53	100.00	
Total Valid		6607	99.01		100.00		
Missing		66	0.99				
Total		6673	100.00				

APPENDIX IV Community Survey Results

QEP Community Survey Spring 2010

1. READING Strong reading skills and habits are vital to academic success and enrich students' lives. The goal of this QEP is reading across the curriculum, and primary objectives would include ensuring and facilitating academic and workplace success, increasing students' vocabulary, and development of reading enrichment opportunities. Please rate how important you think Reading is as a choice for the QEP.

	Response Percent	Response Count
Very Important	68.2%	118
Moderately Important	13.9%	24
Important	15.0%	26
Of Little Importance	2.9%	5
Unimportant	0.0%	0
answered question		173
skipped question		0

2. ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND HONESTY Academic integrity and honesty go to the core of academic and personal development and ethics. The goal of this QEP is to reaffirm and strengthen the degrees that ACC confers through academic integrity training and policies for faculty, staff and students. Please rate how important you think Academic Integrity and Honesty is as a choice for the QEP.

	Response Percent	Response Count
Very Important	66.5%	115
Moderately Important	18.5%	32
Important	14.5%	25
Of Little Importance	0.6%	1
Unimportant	0.0%	0
answered question		173
skipped question		0

APPENDIX IV Community Survey Results (Cont.)

3. CAMPUS MENTORS Integration into the campus environment is a critical component to student success. The goal of this QEP is to create a mentoring program in order to increase student achievement and retention. Implementation will focus on a program of campus mentors who will communicate with students on a regular basis in order to track their needs and progress. Please rate how important you think Campus Mentors is as a choice for the QEP.

	Response Percent	Response Count
Very Important	38.2%	66
Moderately Important	29.5%	51
Important	23.7%	41
Of Little Importance	7.5%	13
Unimportant	1.2%	2
answered question		173
skipped question		0

4. TECHNOLOGY A high level of computer literacy and technology skills, for both faculty and students, are essential in the modern learning environment. The goal of this QEP is to increase skills throughout the campus in order to increase students' academic engagement. Implementation will include increased use of Blackboard and online grade books, as well as online peer groups.Please rate how important you think Technology is as a choice for the QEP.

	Response Percent	Response Count
Very Important	64.7%	112
Moderately Important	23.1%	40
Important	9.8%	17
Of Little Importance	1.2%	2
Unimportant	1.2%	2
answered question		173
skipped question		0

APPENDIX IV Community Survey Results (Cont.)

5. Please list two skill sets/knowledge areas that you see as critical to student success. You are encouraged to include specific suggestions/outlines for possible QEP topics.

	Response Percent	Response Count
1.	100.0%	146
2.	93.8%	137
answered question		146
skipped question		27

APPENDIX V Tally of Comments from Faculty & Student Surveys

Topics noted in write-in comments	Student Totals	Faculty Totals	Percentage of Totals for Top Four Choices	
			Students	Faculty
Reading	292	45	15.0	18.5
Academic Integrity	75	2		
Mentoring	49	3		
Technology	318	25	16.4	10.3
Writing	86	32		11.2
Study Skills/study groups/study areas	316	27	16.3	11.1
Critical Thinking/Problem solving	67	23		
Communication	37	19		
Math	167	16	8.6	
Time Management	91	18		
Personal Responsibility	90	11		
Professionalism	9			
Tutoring/Learning Lab	88	4		
Interpersonal Skills	36	4		
Public Speaking	35	3		
Teamwork	4	3		
Organizational skills	32			
Library-resources/update/classes/skills	15			
English-grammar vocabulary	24			
Science	16			
Teacher support/communication/availability	66			
Counseling/Career course	25	4		
PE/Fitness	11			
Athletics	7			
Creative Thinking	5	3		
Weekend/night college access	8			
Hands-on projects	9			
Professional development for teachers	1			
Fine Arts	6			
Comprehension of material	7			
Listening skills	3			
Campus life enhancement	5			
Totals	**1935**	**242**		

Grayed cells represent the top four topics noted by faculty and students in the write-in comments.
Blued cells represent the topics with the highest percentages of write-in comments for faculty and students.

APPENDIX VI Beta Test Online Orientation Survey

1. The Blackboard Orientation was easy to navigate.

5- Strongly agree
4- Agree
3-Neutral
2-Disagree
1-Strongly Agree

2. The information and knowledge contained in this orientation meets my expectations.

5- Strongly agree
4- Agree
3-Neutral
2-Disagree
1-Strongly Agree

3. This orientation will help prepare me for success in an online course.

5- Strongly agree
4- Agree
3-Neutral
2-Disagree
1-Strongly Agree

4. The orientation was visually appealing.

5- Strongly agree
4- Agree
3-Neutral
2-Disagree
1-Strongly Agree

5. The instructions for how to complete the orientation were clear.

5- Strongly agree
4- Agree
3-Neutral
2-Disagree
1-Strongly Agree

6. As a result of this orientation please rate your ability to do the following tasks:

	Very confident	**Somewhat confident**	**Not confident at all**
Log into MyBlackboard			
Access, read, and reply to discussion board posts			

	Very confident	Somewhat confident	Not confident at all
Create an e-mail			
Configure your home computer			
Locate your grades			
Submit an assignment			
Take a test in MyBlackboard			

7. Are there any additional items that you believe should be included in this orientation?

8. Please add any additional comments about how we can improve this orientation

APPENDIX VII CMS (Blackboard) Student Questions Checklist

Blackboard - Question Checklist

One of the expected outcomes for the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) for ACC is that students will pose fewer questions about the online interface (Blackboard) to faculty and support staff personnel. In order to do this, we are asking each online instructor to keep a simple checklist to record the number of questions posted directly to them. Please keep track of this simple form for each semester. The Distance Education department will collect and record these results for the QEP at the end of the semester.

Blackboard-Question Checklist		
Instructor's name -*<Enter Name Here>* **Semester** -*<Enter Semester Here>*		
Problem Category	**Number of requests for help (Place one hash mark for each question addressed)**	**Total**
Logging in		
Course Navigation (Where to locate course links, how to access features)		
Communicating (Sending receiving e-mail, posting or responding to discussions, blogs, or chats)		
Assignments and Grades (Opening, submitting, or attaching files for assignments, locating grades)		
Taking Tests (Submitting tests, locating test grades)		
Computer Configuration (Browser issues, Java problems, home computer issues)		

APPENDIX VIII QEP Timeline

Preceding 2008

Late 1980's – Distance education first offered at Alvin Community College

Fall 1997 – Distance Education Department established at ACC

Fall 1999 – First Internet classes offered at ACC

Fall 2007 – ACC began a four-year Achieving the Dream Initiative; faculty workshop designed to identify areas of institutional and student learning improvement

2008

May 2008 – Karen Downey selected to form and chair the ACC QEP Team; Christopher Chance selected to co-chair

June 2008 – QEP Team Chairs began research into literature and possible topics

September 13, 2008 – Hurricane Ike struck ACC, forcing a four-week college closure and moving ACC into the 2012 SACS reaffirmation class

December 2008 – QEP Co-chair Chris Chance attended SACS Annual Meeting, San Antonio, TX

2009

January through December 2009 – QEP Team Chairs met regularly and continued research

2010

January 2010 – QEP Team Co-chair Karen Downey attended SACS Annual Meeting, Atlanta, Georgia

January 2010 – QEP Team Co-Chairs selected and solicited committee members from academic and technical faculty, staff, and student body

February 2010 – QEP Team Co-Chairs met with College of the Mainland QEP Chair, Bruce Glover

APPENDIX VIII QEP Timeline (cont.)

February 2010 – First QEP Team meeting convened; faculty, student, alumni, and community QEP topic surveys proposed

March 2010 – Faculty, student, alumni, and community QEP topic survey administered and reviewed

May 2010 – QEP online site (using Blackboard course delivery system) established as a way for QEP Team members to communicate and store documents and pertinent literature

June 2010 – QEP Editor selected to write the QEP document; QEP Team voted unanimously in favor of "technology" as a QEP topic

July 2010 – QEP Team narrowed its focus to online education and technology; student learning outcomes defined

August 2010 – QEP Team began literature search concerning technology and online classes; discussion of scholarly literature

September 2010 – QEP Team determined the final QEP Topic: students will take an online tutorial designed to enhance student learning in online classes; QEP Team began the search for an evaluator for on-site review; QEP Team developed a survey to assess student learning outcomes; a timeline for implementation of the QEP Topic established; QEP Team discussed the need for identifying resources and delegated responsibilities; preliminary QEP Budget discussed

October 2010 – QEP Team members began to write sections of the QEP document

November 2010 – Student and Faculty focus groups convened to consider the QEP Topic, Blackboard online orientation/tutorial; QEP Budget assessment and discussion

APPENDIX VIII QEP Timeline (cont.)

2011

January 2011 – QEP Draft completed; QEP Budget proposed

February 2011 – QEP Workshop with Dr. Rudolph Jackson; QEP Team determined the level and extent of longitudinal tracking and the type of orientation to be used

March 2011 – QEP Team continued to write, edit, and rewrite the QEP Document

April 2011– QEP Team began to focus closer on the details concerning the structure of the document (appendices, charts, and graphs)

May 2011 – QEP Team continued to edit the document; new appendices proposed and added

June 2011 – Lead Evaluator J. Patrick Whitaker nominated to review QEP Document

September 2011 – SACS on-site visit

October 2011 – Begin job-search for QEP personnel

December 2011 – Allocate office space and purchase office equipment for QEP personnel

Fall 2011 – QEP Instructional Design Team will review and customize CMS Orientation Package

2012

Spring 2012 – QEP Instructional Design Team will review and customize CMS Orientation Package

January 2012 – Hire personnel to support QEP

Summer 2012 – Preproduction versions of orientation modules will be beta-tested

August 2012 – Blackboard Release 9

August 2012 – Distance Education Department will distribute Blackboard Orientation information to faculty and staff at Fall Workshop

APPENDIX VIII QEP Timeline (cont.)

2013

January 2013 – Distance Education Department will distribute Blackboard Orientation information to faculty and staff at Spring Workshop

January 2013 – QEP online orientation assessment launched

May 2013 – Student end-of-course evaluation; student focus group; faculty focus group

May 2013 – Collection of cumulative pass/fail and withdrawal rates

December 2013 – Collection of cumulative pass/fail and withdrawal rates

2014

May 2014 – Student end-of-course evaluation; student focus group; faculty focus group

May 2014 – Collection of cumulative pass/fail and withdrawal rates

December 2014 – Collection of cumulative pass/fail and withdrawal rates

2015

May 2015 – Student end-of-course evaluation; student focus group; faculty focus group

May 2015 – Collection of cumulative pass/fail and withdrawal rates

June 2015 – QEP Committee pre-post online orientation comparative analysis

December 2015 – Collection of cumulative pass/fail and withdrawal rates

2016

May 2016 – Student end-of-course evaluation; student focus group; faculty focus group

May 2016 – Collection of cumulative pass/fail and withdrawal rates

December 2016 – Collection of cumulative pass/fail and withdrawal rates

2017

May 2017 – Student end-of-course evaluation; student focus group; faculty focus group

May 2017 – Collection of cumulative pass/fail and withdrawal rates

June 2017 – QEP Committee pre-post online orientation comparative analysis

December 2017 – Collection of cumulative pass/fail and withdrawal rates

APPENDIX VIII QEP Timeline (cont.)

December 2017 – Comparison pass/fail and withdrawal rates of pre-five year online orientation data set to five-year post online orientation data set

APPENDIX IX QEP Budget

Alvin Community College Quality Enhancement Plan Budget Fiscal Years 2011-2016						
Expense Categories	**FY 2011-12**	**FY 2012-13**	**FY 2013-14**	**FY 2014-15**	**FY 2015-16**	**Five-Year Totals**
Institutional Support						
Institutional Effectiveness	$ 40,000.00	$ 40,000.00	$ 40,804.00	$ 41,412.00	$ 41,716.00	$ 203,932.00
Distance Education	$ 38,000.00	$ 38,000.00	$ 38,764.00	$ 39,152.00	$ 39,452.00	$ 193,368.00
Software Purchase		$ 14,000.00	$ 14,000.00			$ 28,000.00
Marketing						
Support Services						
Blue Tube	$ 200.00	$ 200.00	$ 200.00	$ 200.00	$ 200.00	$ 1,000.00
Social Media	$ 350.00	$ 350.00	$ 350.00	$ 350.00	$ 350.00	$ 1,750.00
Website Links	$ 400.00	$ 150.00	$ 150.00	$ 150.00	$ 150.00	$ 1,000.00
Marquees	$ 400.00	$ 400.00	$ 400.00	$ 400.00	$ 400.00	$ 2,000.00
TV Spots	$ -	$ 5,600.00	$ 2,800.00	$ -	$ -	$ 8,400.00
Radio Spots	$ -	$ 7,840.00	$ 3,920.00	$ -	$ -	$ 11,760.00
Signage	$ 100.00	$ 300.00	$ 200.00			$ 600.00
Adjunct Workshop	$ -	$ 500.00	$ 500.00	$ -	$ -	$ 1,000.00
Raffle Prizes	$ -	$ 1,000.00	$ 800.00	$ 500.00	$ 500.00	$ 2,800.00
Video Production	$ -	$ 5,000.00	$ 2,000.00	$ -	$ -	$ 7,000.00
Cable Production	$ -	$ 500.00	$ 200.00	$ -	$ -	$ 700.00
Radio Production	$ -	$ 300.00	$ 300.00	$ -	$ -	$ 600.00
Brand/Icon	$ -	$ 1,000.00	$ 200.00	$ -	$ -	$ 1,200.00
PR for Phone App	$ -	$ 300.00	$ 300.00	$ 100.00	$ 100.00	$ 800.00
Flyers for ESC	$ -	$ 500.00	$ 100.00	$ 100.00	$ 100.00	$ 800.00
Office Supplies	$ 500.00	$ 500.00	$ 500.00	$ 500.00	$ 500.00	$ 2,500.00
Professional Development and Travel	$ 6,000.00	$ 6,000.00	$ 6,000.00	$ 6,000.00	$ 6,000.00	$ 30,000.00
Student Worker	$ 7,000.00	$ 7,000.00	$ 7,000.00	$ 7,000.00	$ 7,000.00	$ 35,000.00
QEP Director	$ 15,000.00	$ 15,000.00	$ 15,000.00	$ 15,000.00	$ 15,000.00	$ 75,000.00
Total Estimated Budget	**$ 92,950.00**	**$144,440.00**	**$134,488.00**	**$110,864.00**	**$ 111,468.00**	**$ 609,210.00**

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APPENDIX XI Acronyms and Other Terminology

ACC – Alvin Community College

ASCUE – Association of Small Computer Users in Education

ATD – Achieving the Dream initiative

CMS – Course Management System

COC – Commission on Colleges

CRTVB – Communications, Radio and TV Broadcasting

DE – Distance Education

ECAR – EDUCAUSE Center for Applied Research

EDUCAUSE – a nonprofit association whose mission is to advance higher education by promoting the intelligent use of information technology

Hybrid Courses – Hybrid courses combine online learning and face-to-face instruction at regularly scheduled times, thus reducing the number of face-to-face classroom meetings.*

Internet courses – Internet classes are conducted almost entirely online through MyBlackboard. Some instructors may require that students come to campus for orientations, field trips, or to take tests.*

IT – Information Technology

ITC – Instructional Technology Council

IER – Institutional Effectiveness and Research

MC – Marketing/Communications

MLMS – MyBlackboard Learning Management System

NCES – National Center for Education Statistics

QEP – Quality Enhancement Plan

SACS – Southern Association of Colleges and Schools

SACS-COC – Southern Association of Colleges and Schools-Commission on Colleges

APPENDIX XI Acronyms and Other Terminology (cont.)

Web-enhanced Courses – Web-enhanced courses are face-to-face courses in which instructors utilize various applications of MyBlackboard to supplement the course, such as posting student grades, semester calendar, and course syllabus.*

*As of the writing of this document, Alvin Community College utilizes MyBlackboard as its current Course Management System.