QEP Executive Summary
Online Orientation: Preparing Students to Succeed in Online Courses

Mission
The mission of Alvin Community College is to improve lives by providing affordable, accessible and innovative educational opportunities to those it serves.

QEP Justification
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% 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 17percent 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 Alvin Community College Quality Enhancement Plan goal is to increase the student success level in online classes by reducing the failure and withdrawal percentage levels in these classes.

QEP Solution
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.