

E-Focused! Enhancing Student Learning in Online Courses by Improving Institutional Readiness

The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) of Southern University at New Orleans (SUNO) is designed to enhance online learning for freshman students, entering and transfer, who have completed less than 30 credit hours. The hard lessons learned from the Katrina and Rita hurricane disasters of fall 2005, when many displaced SUNO students were calling to express a strong desire to continue with their studies at the institution, greatly influenced the choice of the QEP topic. E-Focused specifically promises a well-planned preparedness for any such future calamities and addresses measurable activities and assessments for increasing student learning, performance and success in online courses.

The Goal addresses student readiness for online learning by focusing on their technical competence in introductory Biology and English courses. Three (3) objectives are supported by nine (9) Student Learning Outcomes (SLO). Objective 1: To formally assess freshman students' technical readiness for online learning. The SmarterMeasure assessment will be applied as a pre- and post-test tool. Students who perform well will be allowed to enroll in the online sections of Biology 105 and English 111 for SLO 1.1. Students who do not meet the pre-test readiness benchmark will be directed to SmarterMeasure's remedial-type resource links or be required to enroll in the JRDV III-H College Survival Skills course and be assisted formally by a class Instructor. Objective 2: To promote student effectiveness in the use of technology to improve their performance in online learning (technical skills). Seven (7) SLOS (SLO 2.1 to 2.7) for this objective will enable the assessment of student basic technological skills, discussion forum participation, assignment submission, participation in chat rooms and live discussions, test taking and submission, help page usage, and communication with faculty and fellow students, e. g. through e-mail or Blackboard Messaging. Objective 3: To improve student performance in online course content (content area competency). SLO 3.1 supports this objective, and it requires students to demonstrate mastery of the course content for the Biology 105 and English 111 online courses.

The assessment plan consists of three components: 1. Formative assessments of each phase of QEP implementation; 2. Summative assessments of each SLO; 3. Overall assessment of the QEP impact on students, faculty and the institution. Data will be reported annually and used for continuous improvement of online education and related institutional processes.

INTRODUCTION

Southern University at New Orleans (the University) is pleased to present its Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) Impact Report to SACSCOC for review. *E-Focused! Enhancing Student Learning in Online Courses by Improving Institutional Readiness* was the University's five-year QEP initiative designed to enhance online readiness for freshmen students. The focus of the plan was to help students improve both their knowledge, technical skills, and dispositions to effectively prepare them to succeed in online courses, which is currently the trend in higher education. An institution-wide committee of faculty, staff, administrators, alumni, and students selected the theme after a campus-wide survey helped to identify areas of concern within the teaching and learning environment. *E-Focused* was chosen as a tool to help engage students in the learning process, as well as, to equip them with the requisite competencies and skills to be successful in college and beyond.

E-Focused is directly linked to the University's mission and vision of empowering and promoting "the upward mobility of diverse populations of traditional and non-traditional students through quality academic programs and service to achieve excellence in higher education." It is also aligned with the University's strategic plan goal of improving opportunities for student access to and success in higher education by diversifying course delivery through online teaching and learning. With a large population of non-traditional and low-income student body with full-time jobs, the University believes that *E-Focused* will be a platform to encourage students' persistence in learning and enhance degree completion in a timelier manner.

Section 1: A succinct list of the initial goals and intended outcomes of the QEP

University's QEP is focused on one (1) Goal: To Enhance freshman year students' readiness for online learning by focusing on their technical competence in Introductory Biology and English courses.

Three objectives, addressing a total of nine (9) student learning outcomes (SLO), were identified to support this goal as follows:

Objective 1- To formally assess freshmen student readiness for online learning. (Technical Readiness)

SLO 1.1 - Students will demonstrate readiness for online learning in the areas of technical competency (computer and Internet) and technical knowledge.

Objective 2- To promote student effectiveness in the use of technology to improve performance in online learning. (Technical Readiness)

SLO 2.1 - Students will demonstrate the ability to log in, and access the syllabus and course calendar within the first week of class.

SLO 2.2 - Students will demonstrate the ability to participate in discussion forums, including discussion boards, blogs, and wikis.

SLO 2.3 - Students will demonstrate the ability to submit assignments via the assignment link, including the downloading and uploading of data files.

SLO 2.4 - Students will demonstrate the ability to access chat rooms and participate in live discussions.

SLO 2.5 - Students will demonstrate the ability to access and submit tests.

SLO 2.6 - Students will demonstrate the ability to use the help page, access the online tutorials, and check grades.

SLO 2.7 - Students will demonstrate the ability to communicate with other students and professors via a course messaging mechanism, e.g., email or Blackboard messaging.

Objective 3-To improve student performance in online course content. (Content Area Competency)

SLO 3.1 - Students will demonstrate mastery of the course content for the BIOL 105 and ENGL 111 online courses.

Section 2:

A discussion of the changes made to the QEP and the reasons why

The original QEP initiatives were deemed too broad and showed limited supporting assessments aligned to student outcomes. Consequently, the goals were reduced to reflect the institution's mission and efforts were refocused to enhance and improve institutional readiness for online teaching and learning. More importantly, the following changes were made:

1) Reduction in the number of Student Learning Outcomes:

At the initial stage of implementation, it became apparent that the skills that SLO 2.1 (Basic Skills) and SLO 2.2 (Discussion Forums) were designed to impart to students, were already covered in SLO 1.1, especially through the course content of JRDV 111-H. Consequently, SLOs 2.1 and 2.2 were eliminated. Similarly, faculty teaching the pilot courses, BIOL 105 and ENGL 111, reported that the skills that SLO 2.4 (Live Chat/Discussions) and SLO 2.7 (Interaction) were intended to impart were not particularly needed in accomplishing the course objectives. Consequently, the original nine (9) SLOs were reduced to five (5) as follows:

SLO 1.1 - Students will demonstrate readiness for online learning in the areas of technical competency (computer and Internet) and technical knowledge.

SLO 2.1 (original 2.3) - Students will demonstrate the ability to submit assignments via the assignment link, including the downloading and uploading of data files.

SLO 2.2 (original 2.5) - Students will demonstrate the ability to access and submit tests

SLO 2.3 (original 2.6) - Students will demonstrate the ability to use the help page, access the online tutorials, and check grades.

SLO 3.1 - Students will demonstrate mastery of the course content for the BIOL 105 and ENGL 111 online courses.

2) Changes in Directorship of the QEP:

The Directorship of the QEP changed three times as follows:

1st Appointee (Oct 2012-Feb. 2013) -resigned from the University to accept another position elsewhere.

2nd Appointee (June 2013-Jan. 2014) - appointed to a higher position (Director of Institutional Research, Effectiveness and Strategic Planning).

3rd Appointee (Sept. 2014-July 2015) - resigned from the University to accept another position elsewhere.

4th Appointee (Oct. 2015 to date) - appointed as Interim Director

In spite of the frequent changes, the Offices of Academic Affairs and Institutional Effectiveness ensured that the QEP implementation plans were not stalled.

3) QEP Timeline revisions:

The QEP Timeline was revised as follows:

FALL 2013

- Hired a new QEP Director (Dr. Lott)
- Analyzed data from Fall 2011-Spring 2013
- Re-established the QEP Advisory Council
- Wrote the Annual QEP Report for Years 1 and 2

SPRING 2014

- Developed and improved the process for capturing the Freshmen QEP Cohort
- Re-established the QEP Town Hall Meetings
- Conducted monthly QEP Meetings with Advisory Council and Committee
- Continued Quality Matters Training for Faculty (Saturday, February 8, 2014)

FALL 2014

- Hired a new QEP Director to replace Dr. Lott (Dr. Nichols)
- Compiled, tracked, charted, and analyzed assessment data for QEP online courses for Year 3
- Held one (1) QEP Town Hall Meeting (College of Business)
- Interviewed QEP Instructors on Direct and Indirect Assessments
- Created and conducted Internal Surveys for QEP Faculty and Students via online using Survey Monkey.
- Conducted monthly QEP and Advisory Council Meetings

SPRING 2015

- Planned two (2) QEP Town Hall Meetings (Library and School of Social Work)
- Compiled, tracked, charted, and analyzed assessment data for QEP online courses for Year 4
- Continued Quality Matters Training for faculty (Saturday, February 21, 2015)

FALL 2015

- Appointed Interim Director of QEP (Mr. A. Benjamin)
- Continued monitoring and assessing QEP Cohort and finalized data collection and analysis
- Wrote Annual QEP Report for Year 4 and continued the preparation of data reporting for Year 5

SPRING 2016 Completed QEP Impact Report and Uploaded QEP Impact Report to LiveText

Section 3:

The QEP Impact on Student Learning

OBJECTIVE 1: To formally assess freshmen student readiness for online learning.

All students matriculating at Southern University at New Orleans as first-time freshman are required to take and pass the *JRDV 111 College Survival Skills* course. The *JRDV 111-H* course was designed specifically to assist students who failed the SmarterMeasure assessment with remediation of technical skills in order to prepare them for online learning. The *JRDV 111-H* course covers the same course content as the other sections with the exception that students are exposed to mobile technology, and are required to take the SmarterMeasure online assessment set up by the E-Learning Unit of the University.

SmarterMeasure is a learning readiness indicator used to assess learner's possibility for success in an online environment. SmarterMeasure includes seven major assessment components: 1) Individual Attributes (motivation, procrastination, willingness to ask for help, etc.); 2) Life Factors; 3) Learning Styles; 4) Technical Competency; 5) Technical Knowledge; 6) On-screen Reading Rate and Recall; and 7) Typing Speed and Accuracy. The University's Quality Enhancement Plan developed its learning outcomes around just the technical competency and technological knowledge components of the SmarterMeasure assessment tool as research showed that the major cause of failure in online classes was associated with incompetence in technological skills required to navigate online classes.

Any Freshman who indicates a desire to take an online course takes the SmarterMeasure Assessment before the Fall classes begin. Students who pass the SmarterMeasure are encouraged to enroll in *BIOL 105* and *ENGL 111* and other online courses of their choice as they matriculate through the University. The expectation is that such students would be capable of navigating online classes smoothly and pass the courses. Students who do not receive a passing score must follow the remedial links provided in their assessment report and/or complete supplemental work provided by the Instructor. Students also participate in a workshop with the E-Learning Department on how to navigate *Blackboard*, the University's online learning management system. Freshmen students are guided to the E-Learning webpage in order to access the SmarterMeasure assessment to test their computer skills. At the conclusion of the course, students take a final exam that incorporates the technical components of the computer system and the SmarterMeasure assessment post-test as proof of their readiness.

From Fall 2012 through Fall 2015, a total of 238 students took the SmarterMeasure assessment. Eighty-five (85) were non-Freshmen and were eliminated from the QEP implementation plan. Of the 153 Freshmen who took the SmarterMeasure assessment, 81 (53%) passed. Chart 1(a) provides a narrative of assessments and results for SLO 1.1. Figure 1 breaks down the passage rate by each of the Fall semesters 2012-2015.

Chart 1(a): Alignment of SLO 1.1 Assessments and Results

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)	Methods of Assessment	Results/Outcomes and How Used
SLO 1.1 (Technical Readiness): Students will demonstrate readiness for online learning in the areas of technical competency (computer and internet) and technical knowledge.	<i>SmarterMeasure</i> pre-test assessment, remedial link intervention, and post-test assessment. http://suno.smartermeasure.com	Figure 1 summarizes the <i>SmarterMeasure</i> passage rates of 58% (N=26) in Fall 2012; 61% (N=28) in Fall 2013; 29% (N=10) in *Fall 2014; and 63% (N=17) in Fall 2015. Except for the lowest passage rate in Fall 2014, the passage rates in the 1 st , 2 nd , and 4 th semesters were satisfactory and surpassed the projected annual 5% increase for the SLO. *See explanation at the bottom of Chart 1(a) on page 6

Figure 1: SmarterMeasure passage rate in each of the Fall Semesters

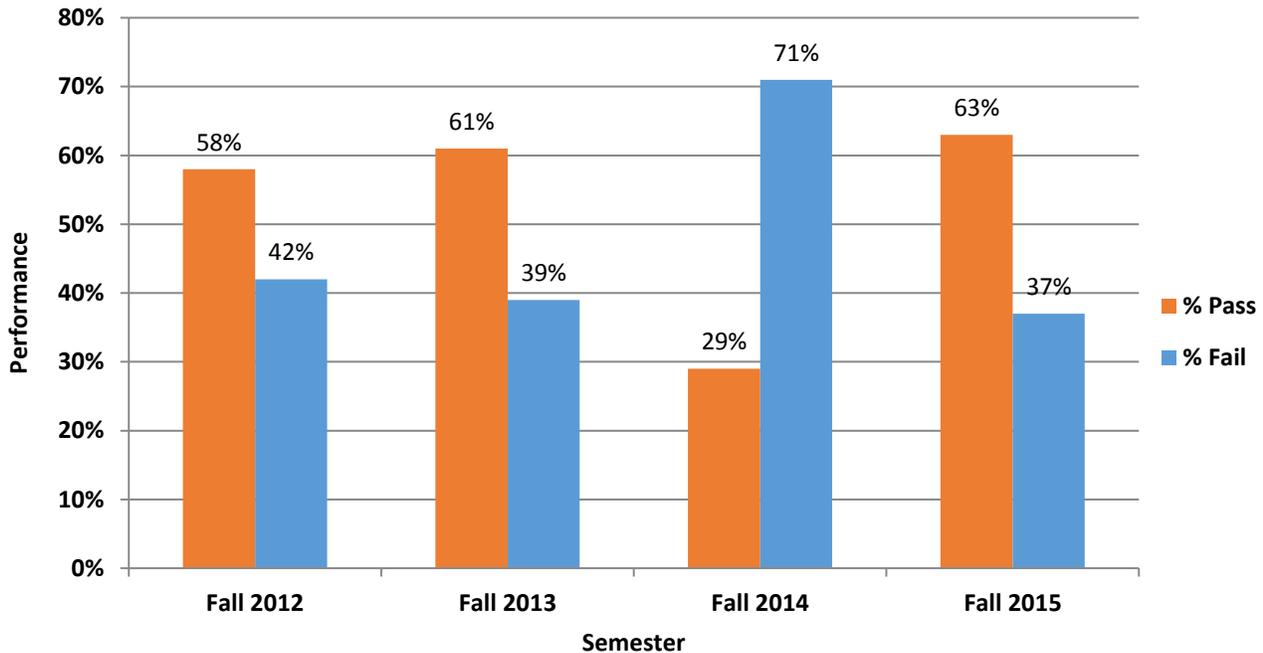


Chart 1(a), cont.: Alignment of SLO 1.1 Assessments and Results

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)	Methods of Assessment	Results/Outcomes and How Used
SLO 1.1, cont. Of those students who do not pass <i>SmarterMeasure</i> and are enrolled in JRDV 111-H in Fall 2012, 50% will meet the technical readiness competencies required to enroll in the two designated online courses (BIOL 105 & ENGL	Students enrolled in JRDV 111H will demonstrate: -Mastery of technical equipment use (i.e., how to activate computer, monitor & printer; start programs or switch between programs to complete tasks; mouse usage to activate commands, menus, move & drag screen elements; use mouse to open, close or resize computer screen	Of the 72 Freshmen who failed the <i>SmarterMeasure</i> assessment, fifteen (15) enrolled, as instructed, in the JRDV 111-H class; thirteen in Fall 2012, 2 in Fall 2013, and none (0) in Fall 2014 and Fall 2015. The academic records of the 15 students were tracked up to Fall 2015 enrollment. It was very disappointing that none proceeded to enroll in <i>BIOL 105</i> online or the <i>ENGL 111</i> online classes after completing the <i>JRDV</i> -

<p>111). This number is expected to increase by 5% the consecutive years of the plan unless other circumstances beyond the technical skills come into being.</p>	<p>windows; keyboarding, entering, erasing & deleting text; using flash drives; shutting down & restarting appropriately computers correctly).</p> <p>-Mastery of the select educational software use (i.e., how to use MS Word, Excel, PowerPoint).</p> <p>-Mastery of Blackboard (BB) access and use (i.e., how to access and download course syllabi and calendar, use the BB assignment link to upload completed assignments, and construct, send, and retrieve emails.)</p>	<p><i>111H</i> course although the students were aware of the expectation to do so. The remaining 57 Freshmen either enrolled in land-based classes or withdrew from the university.</p> <p>The latter group of students were not tracked any further as they did not fit into the QEP implementation protocol. It was unexpected that some Freshmen would have opted to enroll in land-based classes rather than make effort to pass SmarterMeasure via the remediation plan of the QEP. It was not mandated by the University for Freshmen to enroll in the <i>JRDV 111-H</i> course, and there were always several sections of <i>JRDV 111</i> for such students to meet the requirement of the 1-credit College Survival course.</p> <p>The University learned some useful lesson through the data. Specifically, it is now obvious that while some students love online classes, some actually prefer land-based classes and would not make any sacrifice to adapt to online classes. This is a very useful outcome of the QEP to the University as a whole.</p>
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*There is no clear explanation for low performances in Fall 2014; however, the Louisiana Board of Regents raised admission Standards to higher than the Fall 2012, 2013 and 2015 semesters. It is possible that students admitted in Fall 2014 were already technology savvy and did not see the need to take SmarterMeasure in order to perform well in subsequent online classes.

OBJECTIVE 2: To promote student effectiveness in the use of technology to improve performance in online learning.

As reported under SLO 1.1, of the 153 students who took the SmarterMeasure assessment test between Fall 2012 to Fall 2015, 81 passed. Forty-four (44) of the 81 students enrolled in BIOL 105 and ENGL 111. Thirty-seven (37) of 81 students failed to follow the QEP protocol and opted to proceed with their program of study, enrolling in land-based classes even though they met the SmarterMeasure requirements for enrolling in online classes, or withdrew from the University. The 37 students were not tracked further. Table 1 and Chart 1(b) summarize the students' performance and their competence with regards to SLO 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3. Overall, **89%** (N=39) were able to successfully submit assignments; **91%** (N=40) were able to take and pass course tests successfully; and **86%** (N=38) demonstrated competence in utilizing the self-service component of Blackboard.

Table 1: Summary of Results by Semester for BIOL 105 and ENGL 111 Combined

Semester	Number of Freshman Who Met Standards	SLO 2.1 (Submit Assignment)	SLO 2.2 (Take Test)	SLO 2.3 Self-Service	SLO 3.1 Course Content Proficiency
Fall 2012	5	1 (20%)	2 (40%)	1 (20%)	1 (20%)
Fall 2013	22	16 (73%)	17 (77%)	16 (73%)	12 (55%)
Fall 2014	7	5 (71%)	5 (71%)	5 (71%)	4 (57%)
Fall 2015	15	14 (93%)	14 (93%)	14 (93%)	13 (87%)

Chart 1(b): Alignment of SLOs 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3 Assessments and Results

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)	Methods of Assessment	Results/Outcomes and How Used
<p>SLO 2.1 (Assignment Submission): Students will demonstrate the ability to submit assignments via the assignment link, including the downloading and uploading of data files.</p> <p>By the end of Fall 2012, 75% of all students enrolled in the designated online courses will demonstrate the ability to submit assignments via the assignment link, including the downloading and uploading of data files; the percentages will increase 5% annually throughout the QEP implementation years.</p>	<p>Instructors of the QEP Biology 105 and English 111 used <i>Blackboard</i> Course Reports to track students to determine if they have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Successfully submitted assignments via the <i>Blackboard</i> Assignments Link, and Successfully downloaded and uploaded data files as assigned 	<p>Table 1 indicates an increase in passage rates for submission of assignments in Biology 105 and English 111 combined. Of the 5 students enrolled, data suggests a slow start of 20% (N=1) in Fall 2012, and notable increases in subsequent semesters of 73% (N=16) in Fall 2013; 71% (N=5) in Fall 2014; and 93% (N=14) in Fall 2015.</p> <p>SLO 2.1 met and exceeded the projected 75% passage rate as well as the 5% annual increase in passage rates.</p>
<p>SLO 2.2 (Test Taking): Students will demonstrate the ability to access and submit tests.</p> <p>By the end of Fall 2012, 75% of all students enrolled in the designated online courses will demonstrate the ability to access and submit tests. This percentage will increase by 5% annually throughout the QEP implementation years.</p>	<p>Instructors of the QEP Biology 105 and English 111 used <i>Blackboard</i> Course Reports to track students to determine if they have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Successfully accessed and submitted tests via <i>Blackboard</i>. 	<p>Table 1 shows a slow start with 40% (N= 2) of students demonstrating proficiency in test taking in Fall 2012, however, the levels of proficiency increased to 77% (N= 17) in Fall 2013; 71% (N= 5) in Fall 2014; and 93% (N= 14) in Fall 2015, meeting and exceeding the projected benchmark for SLO 2.2.</p>

<p>SLO 2.3 (Self-Service): Students will demonstrate the ability to use the help page, access the online tutorials, and check grades.</p> <p>By the end of Fall 2012, 75% of all students enrolled in the designated online courses will demonstrate the ability to use the help page, access the online tutorials, and check grades. This percentage will increase by 5% annually throughout the QEP implementation years.</p>	<p>Students have the ability to seek help 24/7 through <i>Blackboard</i> Student Services. This information is provided on the eLearning page and also through a link within each course of the Learning Management System (<i>Blackboard</i>) entitled Technical Help. The data received from students and faculty is retrieved from <i>Blackboard</i> Student Services by the eLearning director. The <i>Smarthinking</i> online 24/7 tutorial services information is gathered through an administrative portal by the eLearning director who then forwards all of the data to the Institutional Effectiveness Office for analysis QEP reporting purposes.</p>	<p>Table 1 also shows that in Fall 2012, 20% (N=1) of students demonstrated the ability to use the Technical Help Page and access online tutorials and research URLs. This rate increased to 73% (N=16) in Fall 2013; dropped a little to 71% (N=5) in Fall 2014; and increased to 93% (N=14) in Fall 2015, suggesting a slow start but notable increase in student use of the BlackBoard Self-Service links for SLO 2.3.</p>
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OBJECTIVE 3: To improve student performance in online course content.

As shown in Table 1 above, 30 (68%) of the 44 students who enrolled in *BIOL 105* and *ENGL 111* online classes after passing SmarterMeasure were able to demonstrate a mastery of the course content. It should be noted that, students’ failure to submit assignments (11%), take test (9%) and demonstrate a mastery of the course content (32%) was not necessarily caused by lack of knowledge in technical skills and competency. Rather, the students did not make attempts to log in and complete the necessary requirements for the courses. Chart 1(c) below provides a summary of the students’ performance pertaining to SLO 3.1.

Chart 1(c): Alignment of SLO 3.1 Assessments and Results		
Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)	Methods of Assessment	Results/Outcomes and How Used
<p>SLO 3.1 (Course Competency): Students will demonstrate mastery of the course content for the <i>BIOL 105</i> and <i>ENGL 111</i> online courses.</p>	<p>Instructor for the QEP Biology 105 course utilized the Biology 105 Pre - and Post-test assessments and analysis of data to demonstrate whether the student has mastered the course content.</p> <p>Instructor for the QEP English 111 utilized a diagnostic essay and combined reading quizzes, grammar exercises, formal essay assignments, as well as the English 111 Exit Examination to assess students’ mastery of the course content.</p>	<p>As with SLOs 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3 above, students’ course content proficiency started out at a low 20% (N=1) in Fall 2012, but increased more than 5% to 55% (N=12) in Fall 2013, 57% (N=4) in Fall 2014, and 87% (N=13) in Fall 2015. [Table 1]</p>

QEP Follow-up Student Survey

At the end of the Spring 2015 semester, a follow-up survey of Freshmen who were included in the QEP project was conducted to ascertain their perceptions of the QEP experience. The students were to indicate the extent to which; 1) they were provided ample assistance to successfully access and use electronic data (e.g., Blackboard and SmarterMeasure), 2) the extent to which technical assistance was readily available, and 3) the extent to which the instructors provided clear and adequate

information about course requirements. Sixty (60) or 85.7% out of the 70 students surveyed in the QEP courses felt that they were provided clear and adequate information from the instructor about the course. Sixty-Two (62) or 88.6% of the seventy students surveyed agreed that they were able to obtain assistance to help them access electronic data and sixty-one (61) or 87.1% agreed that they received technical assistance throughout the duration of the course via online support resources made available by the E-Learning Unit. The ability to keep up with the rigors of online coursework becomes very important when the tools for success, including technical assistance, are readily available and when course information is conveyed clearly and adequately to ensure student success. The survey results from students' perspectives are encouraging since institutional support and readiness is a main focus of the QEP. Priority has been given to assessing and strengthening the University's online presence, recognizing that *E-Focused* has laid the foundation on which further online support can then be enhanced.

Section 4 Conclusion

The direct and indirect assessments of technical competency, knowledge and skills, and the perceptions of students' engagement with technology (dispositions) proved to be beneficial in the University's focus on enhancing online learning. QEP instructors have stated that students' participation and engagement in online classes is continuously improving, and successful completion of online courses has increased since implementation of *E-Focused!* By incorporating the goals, objectives, and student learning outcomes, the University promoted course and teaching modifications that have prepared it to sustain and continue to improve online teaching and learning. The University has also established a sound foundation for continuing student learning and success should a natural disaster, like Hurricane Katrina, hit in the future.

Freshmen student performance in online classes with regards to passing or failing was tracked for 22 students who passed SmarterMeasure and continued to enroll in various upper level online classes after successfully completing *BIOL 105* and *ENGL 111* online classes. The data is presented on Table 2 below.

Table 2: The Performance of 22 Freshmen who passed SmarterMeasure (SM) standards prior to enrolling in other online courses.

Performance in Online Courses						
Semester SM Standards Met	# Meeting Standards	Total # of online courses enrolled in	Passed (A,B,C or D)	Failed (F)	Excessive Absence (FX)	Withdrawals
Fall 2012	3	5	2 (40%)	1 (20%)	2 (40%)	0 (0%)
Fall 2013	12	55	26 (47%)	7 (13%)	20 (36%)	2 (4%)
Fall 2014	7	11	8 (73%)	1 (9%)	1 (9%)	1 (9%)
Total	22	71	36 (51%)	9 (13%)	23 (32%)	3 (4)

The passage rate in online classes increased progressively during the three semesters, while failure rate and the rate of excessive absenteeism (negative traits) decreased progressively. Although the number of Freshmen available for tracking was low (22), the University is pleased with the pattern

that emerged. We believe that the SmarterMeasure assessment tool that assists students to improve the basic technological skills has contributed to a better student understanding and performance in online classes. Furthermore, we have noted that disputes related to unsuccessful assignment submission, poor test taking skills, lack of understanding of the available help seeking processes, etc., have diminished, confirming the improved student satisfaction noted above with the QEP Student Survey. Thus, overall, the QEP project has created positive impact on student performance in online classes, which, in the long run is expected to translate to improved student retention at the University.

Section 5

Reflections of Lessons Learned

With the successful implementation of *E-Focused*, Southern University at New Orleans has seen the lasting impact on student learning outcomes and the learning environment for students at the University. Our understanding of the challenges in developing, implementing, monitoring, and sustaining a QEP has deepened. *E-Focused* was a bold move by the University to foster a change across traditional boundaries of teaching. There is a new appreciation of the benefits of long-term goal setting in order to foster change and growth. We were forced to take a critical look at our initial QEP in order to cut away the complexities and multilayers that made it quite ambitious. We reframed our goals, streamlined our thinking, created a new timeline and challenged ourselves to embrace, and in the future, institutionalize the QEP process as a collaborative effort.

In the beginning phase of the implementation process, we discovered that in asking the Southern community to change its way of thinking about student learning and distance education, we were making a commitment to “think outside the box” and look beyond campus to virtual boundaries. This shift in thinking has helped us to look more critically at the entire undergraduate curricula with regards to online teaching and learning and to make informed academic decisions and changes to help push the University further into the global, technological realm of the future. With the institutionalization of the SmarterMeasure assessment tool for Freshmen, students who realized they were not technologically knowledgeable and competent to successfully navigate the online learning environment and were unwilling to go through the remediation processes provided honorably decided to enroll in traditional on-campus classes. The decision was good for the students and the University. Students who would potentially drop out of online classes and complicate the University’s retention efforts stayed out of online classes. It looks now that students who venture into online classes are those who are technologically competent. Notwithstanding, 21% of those who failed the SmarterMeasure went into the *JRDV 111-H* to be formally assisted by a class instructor to prepare themselves in case they had to enroll in an online course in the future. We will ensure that this path to assist technologically weaker students remain.

The QEP steering committee has already begun discussions as to the next phase of our QEP, and how to maintain the momentum and consistency that this first phase has offered to the University. We have learned that relevant and ongoing assessment is important to this process, and will work diligently to improve our professional practices with regards to assessment and accountability, not only for SACSCOC endeavor, but for the sustainability of the University’s commitment to student access and success. We have also learned the benefits of broad-based involvement of all stakeholders in the QEP process, especially its focus on student learning.