Palo Alto College's Quality Enhancement Plan:
Embedded Tutoring in High-Challenge Courses

Executive Summary

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Palo Alto College is a federally designated Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) of approximately 11,000 students located on the southside of San Antonio, an area historically underserved by the K-12 public school system. The student population of this urban community college is 77% Hispanic, 62% female, and overwhelmingly part-time (87%).

Starting in August 2019, a series of college-wide presentations created the backdrop for the selection of a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) topic grounded in the College's quest for continuous improvement. Presentation topics included the 2019-2024 Strategic Plan, the College's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and current institutional and student data. Concurrent with the campus-wide data review, an employee survey was launched to identify possible QEP topics.

In January 2020, a student survey was conducted to identify students' perceptions of the challenges that impeded their success as learners. Four key themes emerged in both the employee survey and the student survey: a need for 1) more opportunities for active learning, 2) more supportive faculty-student connections, 3) more tutoring resources, and 4) more focus on boosting students' self-confidence. Each theme suggested numerous strategies that could serve as a QEP focus. In June 2020, a diverse cross-college group reviewed the top six most compelling strategies in a research-based forum and selected **Embedded Tutoring in High-Challenge Courses** as the College's QEP.

The topic resonated with the College's long-standing commitment to maximize academic support for students enrolled in high-challenge courses, which are defined as courses with enrollment over 100 and a Productive Grade Rate (PGR) below 70%. PGR is measured as the percent of students who complete a course with a final grade of A, B, or C. Three persistent high-challenge courses were targeted for embedded tutoring intervention: BIOL 2401Anatomy & Physiology I, and corequisite sections of both College Algebra (MATH 1314+) and Composition I (ENGL 1301+). Co-requisites allow students, who are not yet college-ready, to take credit-bearing courses while also taking developmental education courses to improve their skills.

During the three-year QEP project, embedded tutoring will be implemented in 16 sections each semester (8 sections of MATH 1314+, 4 sections of ENGL 1301+, and 4 sections of BIOL 2401). Each summer, embedded tutoring faculty and tutors will prepare for the next academic year by attending a 2-day workshop focusing on best practices in embedded tutoring.

Four student learning outcomes were identified for the QEP: 1) demonstrated understanding of course content, 2) increased self-confidence, 3) increased sense of classroom belonging, and 4) positive perceptions of tutoring. These outcomes will be assessed quantitatively through course performance metrics and qualitatively through student survey and focus group data. Faculty and tutors will be surveyed at the end of each term to identify successes and areas for improvement.

Two Co-Directors will facilitate day-to-day implementation assisted by the QEP Advisory Committee. Ongoing overall evaluation of the QEP will be the responsibility of the QEP Oversight Committee. The College is fully prepared to allocate the necessary staffing and financial resources to ensure the success of its QEP.

Ultimately, the goal of the QEP is to implement embedded tutoring in all high-challenge courses at Palo Alto College. The 3-year QEP will provide an opportunity for rigorous, systematic evaluation of embedded tutoring pedagogy in three disciplines and create a cadre of faculty and tutor mentors to assist in expanding embedded tutoring to all high-challenge courses.