INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY FRAMEWORK AND ASSESSMENT TOOL

Achieving the Dream™

Most efforts to improve community college student outcomes involve relatively small innovations or changes at the margins. After more than a decade of experience, Achieving the Dream (ATD) has learned that improving student success on a substantial scale requires colleges to engage in bold, holistic, sustainable institutional change. ATD's Institutional Capacity Framework provides a comprehensive framework to identify strengths and capacities institutions will need to plan, design, and implement this change successfully.

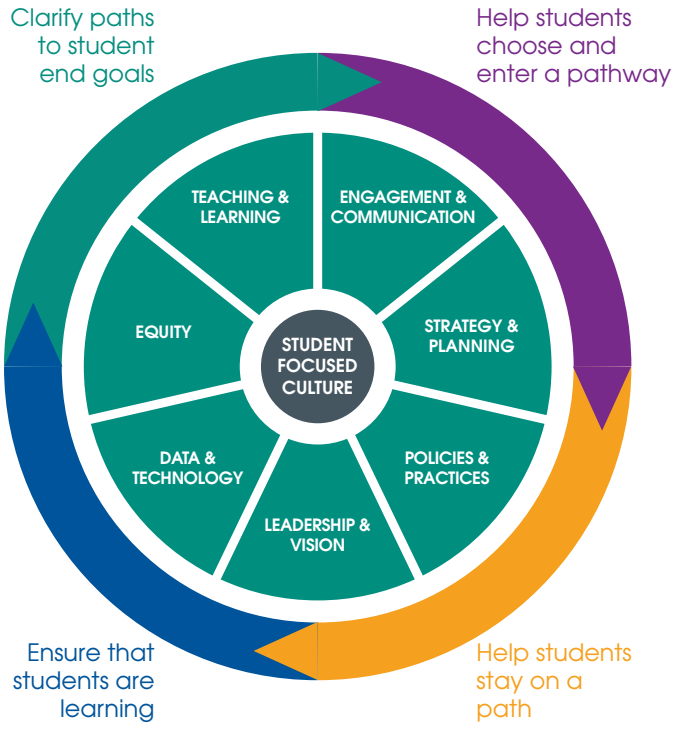
The framework is based on the latest applied research and the progress of more than 220 colleges in our National Reform Network. It facilitates reflections about an institution's trajectory, provides a common language to discuss institutional issues and shared concerns, identifies strengths and helps the college develop priority actions for improvement. Colleges have leveraged their ICAT results to inform their strategic planning process, support accreditation efforts, and to assess their readiness to undertake large scale reform work such as guided pathways.

"The ICAT provides a structure for stakeholders from all areas of the college to collectively examine critical elements necessary to support student success and determine how we are doing in relation to these elements. With a broad focus that extends beyond individual initiatives, we were able to use the tool to identify college strengths within capacity areas and develop a foundation on which to build future efforts."

– Margaret Annuziata, Vice President, Academic Programs and Services, Davidson County Community College (NC).

ATD'S INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY FRAMEWORK

The framework has seven essential capacities that must be in place for colleges to create the student-focused culture that promotes student success. Our approach integrates and aligns existing college success efforts such as redesigning gateway education, engaging faculty and staff in student success, putting data and information in the hands of faculty and advisors, implementing pathways, preparing for accreditation, integrating planning and advising systems, and going the extra mile to address students' financial challenges to help them continue their studies.



The seven capacity areas are:

1. Leadership & Vision — The commitment and collaboration of the institution's leadership with respect to student success and the clarity of the vision for desired change.

2. Data & Technology — The institution's capacity to collect, access, analyze and use data to inform decisions, and to use powerful technology to support student success.

3. Equity — The commitment, capabilities, and experiences of an institution to equitably serve low income students, students of color and other at-risk student populations with respect to access, success, and campus climate.

4. Teaching & Learning — The commitment to engaging full-time and adjunct faculty in examinations of pedagogy, meaningful professional development, and a central role for them as change agents within the institution. Also, the college's commitment to advising, tutoring, and out-of-classroom supports as well as restructuring developmental education to facilitate student learning and success.

5. Engagement & Communication — The creation of strategic partnerships with key external stakeholders, such as K-12, universities, employers and community-based organizations, and internal stakeholders across the institution to participate in the student success agenda and improvement of student outcomes.

6. Strategy & Planning — The alignment of the institution with the umbrella goal of student success and the institution's process for translating the desired future into defined goals and objectives and executing the actions to achieve them.

7. Policies & Practices — The institutional policies and practices that impact student success and the processes for examining and aligning policies and practices to remove barriers and foster student completion.

"Achieving the Dream's ICAT helps provide an opportunity to look at seven very specific elements of how an institution functions and because of that framework, it allows you to look at how much capacity do we have in each of those? And then prompts you to be able to respond to the areas where you don't have as much capacity to build it."

– Matthew Campbell, VP of Learning and Student Success, Pierce College (WA).

The capacities reflect a heightened focus on what happens in the classroom and the academic and non-academic supports that are essential to student success. A culture of evidence and ongoing improvement is also embedded into all seven capacities, reflecting the need for colleges to incorporate data-informed decision making across their systems. Finally, the principle of "systemic improvement" is embedded throughout these capacities, reinforcing an institution's long-term commitment to a process that builds and sustains holistic change.

The framework aligns improvement efforts under one cohesive umbrella. It allows in Network colleges to interweave the best thinking from the student success movement with successful strategies underway on campus. ATD learning events, such as DREAM and the annual Data & Analytics Summit, and other initiatives also provide Network colleges opportunities to learn more about field progress, and new tools and resources.

Each college undertakes the work differently, but the Institutional Capacity Framework and other ATD support services provide a practical approach to creating an institution that systemically supports the success of all students. ATD works closely with college leadership, faculty, and staff to strengthen their ability to adopt high impact policies and practices to redesign the way students experience college, both inside and outside the classroom.

"I think the ICAT will continue to help us to make changes in terms of making sure that we're looking at everything from a broader scale. Is everything that we're doing at the classroom level, and the department level, and the division level, is that rolling up to the institutional level? I think that is the greatest impact that the iCAT will have."

– Erin Latoya, Arts and Humanities Coordinator, Pierce College (WA).

THE INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY ASSESSMENT TOOL:

A DIAGNOSTIC FOR ASSESSING STRENGTHS AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

ATD also developed a diagnostic tool to complement the Institutional Capacity Framework. The Institutional Capacity Assessment Tool (ICAT) is a self-assessment that helps colleges identify strengths and areas for improvement in each capacity area. The assessment asks a broad range of college stakeholders to assess their institution's capacity using a scale from minimal to exemplary. Colleges report that engaging a cross-section of representatives from the board of trustees, president's cabinet, administrators, full- time and adjunct faculty, staff, and student success teams results in rich conversations that surface critical issues.

We recommend that colleges collaborate with their ATD Leadership and Data Coaches to review the results, identify strengths, discuss areas in need of bolstering and generate actionable ideas for advancement that align with the overall student success agenda and goals. ATD's Leadership and Data Coaching services have been enhanced to create customized support to colleges based on their current capacity levels, strategic goals, and constraints.

ICAT findings also help colleges prioritize their Action Plans, identifying areas where resources can be reallocated and/or leveraged to achieve improved outcomes. It also can be taken regularly to measure progress. Colleges preparing for accreditation find the ICAT can be an important tool. Some accrediting agencies want colleges to use more than one form of assessment and to use qualitative and quantitative measures in the initial accreditation of reaffirmation. Although the ICAT was not intended to be a psychometric tool, it produces a numeric result with qualitative feedback from faculty and staff who participate in accreditation processes.

INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY ASSESSMENT TOOL IN ACTION

Changing campus culture and improving student outcomes is a challenging task that requires self-reflection, critical thinking and feedback, and coordinated action across the institution. ICAT is a tool that supports this work. Colleges that completed the ICAT are leveraging the results to guide strategic planning, prepare for accreditation, launch pathways, implement high impact practices, facilitate discussions across the college and drive action. The ICAT is helping colleges examine the critical elements necessary to support student success and build capacity to transform culture and student outcomes.

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