Leah Meyer Austin

Institutional Student Success Leadership

Award

Achieving the Dream Honors

Guilford Technical Community College

GTCC Receives $25,000 Award for 2010

Lumina Foundation for Education created this award for institutional transformation in 2008 in honor of Leah Meyer Austin, its former Senior Vice President for Program Development and Organizational Learning. Her visionary leadership shaped the development of the national Achieving the Dream initiative to improve student success at the nation's community colleges, particularly for students of color and low-income students. This award is open solely to institutions actively affiliated with Achieving the Dream.

Aligning with the goals and values of the Achieving the Dream, this leadership award recognizes outstanding institutional achievement in creating excellence and equity through policies, practices, and an institutional culture and climate that support and increase student success, with particular attention to low-income students and students of color.

The winning college may use the $25,000 cash award for any student success purpose it deems appropriate.

Guilford Technical Community College

Jamestown, North Carolina / President: Donald W. Cameron / www.gtcc.edu

Leadership Influences Change

Guilford Technical Community College was selected as the 2010 winner of the Leah Meyer Austin Institutional Student Success Leadership Award for its outstanding achievements in changing its institutional culture.

"Participating in Achieving the Dream helped us make tremendous changes in the culture of our college," President Donald W. Cameron said. In their award application GTCC leaders summarized the impact this way: "In the 50-year history of the college, there has never been an initiative that has produced more meaningful involvement of the total college community."

Outside evaluators agree that GTCC has institutionalized its student success agenda and systematized data use across the college. "Most of its numerous strategic interventions—ranging from a supplemental instruction program for developmental education students to a revamped orientation and streamlined intake process for [developmental education] first-year students—have each been implemented and evaluated over time. Furthermore, several strategies have been scaled up based on promising student outcomes to reach increasing numbers of students," MDRC evaluators reported in 2009.

How GTCC, which earned Achieving the Dream Leader College status in 2009, built a culture of evidence to achieve equity and excellence is a lesson in the power of high-level commitment and well-focused grassroots action.

The active participation of President Cameron and two trustees—Shirley Frye and David Miller—on the ATD Core Team was a significant first step in changing the college's culture. "Their presence let people know that Achieving the Dream was important to the leadership of the college," said Kathryn Baker Smith. Now retired, she led Achieving the Dream for five years as vice president of educational support services. The trustees' request that Smith report to them quarterly on the progress of Achieving the Dream strategies had the effect of making the entire board of trustees a secondary core team. Now student success issues, not just decisions about bricks and mortar, are regular agenda items for GTCC trustees.

GTCC's improved "front-door experience" offers orientation, advisement, registration, and other services in a renovated, central location.

Other changes in GTCC's culture can also be traced to college leaders' purposeful integration of Achieving the Dream into the inner workings of the college. They did this by

- Encouraging administrators, faculty, staff, and trustees to embrace the freedom to experiment that Achieving the Dream offered. The college piloted 15 projects during the initiative and continues to run 11. It is also scaling up pre-placement refresher courses, intensive advisement of entering developmental education students, and case management services for higher-risk developmental education students as part of its Developmental Education Initiative (DEI) grant from MDC, Inc. DEI is supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Lumina Foundation for Education.
- Following evidence, rather than well-intentioned intuition.
- Seeking input from a broad range of stakeholders, including students.
- Hiring a new institutional research director—Karen Ritter—who created an on-campus data warehouse, used specific methodologies for following the progress of every student in each pilot project, and analyzed a plethora of other data.
- Executing basic changes in processes that can be sustained even if there are budget cutbacks. For example, more meaningful information is collected from students at registration and during other routine interactions.
- Folding Achieving the Dream's goals into the college's existing structures. The Planning Council, in particular, incorporated student success into strategic

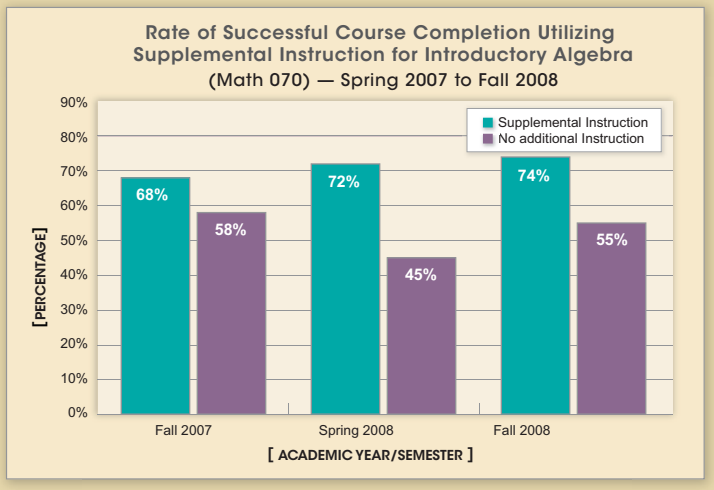
goals that influence budget decisions. Faculty terms on the Planning Council rotate; many faculty members helped formulate ATD's implementation and carry it out in their departments. Faculty also select some of the success indicators that are tracked on the college's dashboard.

- Listening to faculty while developing the success factors and implementing new programs. Smith characterized the conversations during focus groups, formal gatherings, and private chats as "really good discussions," generally practical and rarely acrimonious. Skepticism was overcome when it became clear that improving the collection and use of data would lead to knowledge, not blame. Investigations of disputed numbers helped build grassroots support. One follow-up found that program completion numbers were askew because students were not filing program changes.
- Investing significant ATD resources in professional development to increase the capacity of faculty and staff to develop and execute their ideas for improvements, and to sustain the most promising projects.
- Expanding the academic success course (ACA 118) to a three credit hour version that qualifies for full funding from the state.
- Using Achieving the Dream as the catalyst for "courageous conversations" about structural inequity.

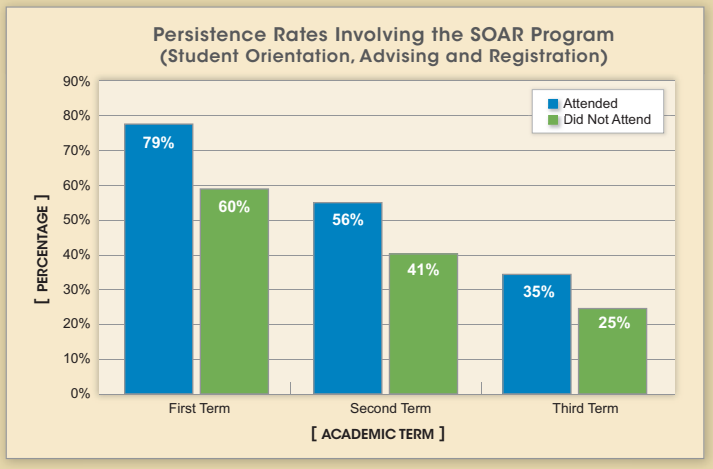
A discussion at an all-personnel meeting in 2003 about the fact that many of the 10 highest enrollment courses were also among the 10 most difficult courses was the first of many courageous conversations about graduation and retention rates. Faculty members responded by creating a study skills course: a one-hour introduction to gateway business courses. Its success led to development of a three-hour study skills course linked to multiple courses and learning communities.

In their courageous conversations the trustees considered data on the large number of developmental education students, and problems with course completion and term-to-term persistence, particularly among African-American males. "The board was absolutely courageously involved," President Cameron said. One of the board's discussions led to Dean of High Point Campus Janette McNeil's idea for a transitions program that provides free literacy training for the lowest performing math students. This training enables some to bypass developmental education classes and preserve financial aid eligibility.

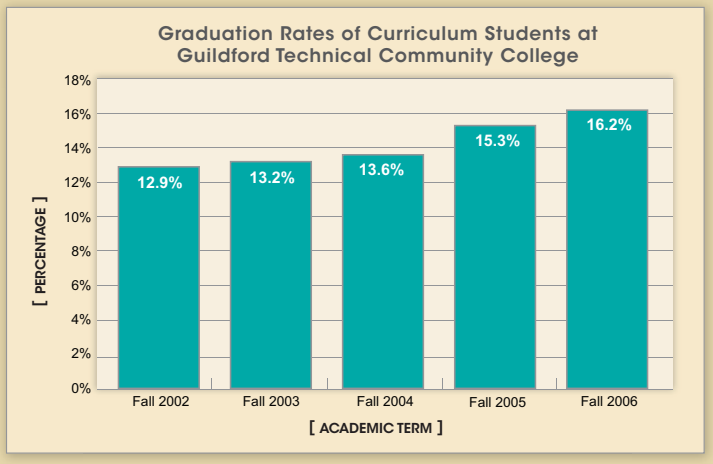
Overall, GTCC's courageous conversations heightened interest among trustees, faculty, and staff to work harder with local school systems to improve entering students' skills.



Supplemental instruction consistently helps more students complete introductory algebra with a final grade of "C" or better. The extraordinary cost of peer-led supplemental instruction has so far prevented GTCC from scaling it up and expanding it to English courses. (This figure also appears on page 35 of MDRC Report, "Building Student Success From the Ground Up.")



Students who enter GTCC through the SOAR process have higher rates of persistence than students who did not participate in the voluntary orientation and advisement program. Based on this evidence, college leaders are currently considering requiring students to participate in SOAR.



At the same time that it has been experiencing double-digit enrollment growth, GTCC's graduation rate has steadily increased. Graduation rates of curriculum students—those enrolled in credit programs that lead to certificates or degrees—have grown every year for 10 years. Because graduation rates are calculated from three years after students enter, this is the most current data available.

Source: *Guilford Technical Community College Institutional Research Department*

★ SPECIAL RECOGNITION ★
For College Readiness

South Texas College

McAllen, Texas
President: Shirley A. Reed
www.southtexascollege.edu

South Texas College (STC) receives special recognition for increasing college readiness. The college has worked creatively and energetically to develop a college-going climate in the poor, Hispanic communities along the U.S.-Mexican border. The proportion of students in the region enrolling in college directly after high school graduation has increased from 48% in 2004 to 60% in 2008. College Readiness Summits that STC began during Achieving the Dream laid the groundwork for powerful collaborations. At the now-annual forums several hundred educators, government officials, and community organizers share college readiness data and strategies. From these meetings, STC has become the link between workforce development resources and underserved populations, the higher education partner for five early college high schools and three STEM dual enrollment academies, and the developer of a College, Career & Technology Academy that enables students to earn a diploma and college credits simultaneously during a fifth year of high school. STC continues to convene community conversations similar to ones it piloted with Public Agenda and MDC. In response to Hispanic parents' comments, the college created videos on how to enroll and succeed in college. It also expanded orientation to include the parents and other relatives of incoming students, and added presentations in Spanish. STC is using a Developmental Education Initiative (DEI) grant from MDC to revise its developmental education curricula. DEI is supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Lumina Foundation for Education. South Texas College earned Achieving the Dream Leader College designation in 2009.

★ SPECIAL RECOGNITION ★
For Institutional Transformation

Zane State College

Zanesville, Ohio
President: Paul D. Brown
http://www.zanestate.edu

Zane State College receives special recognition for institutional transformation. This small college, which serves low-income residents of rural Appalachia, built a culture of evidence from scratch during Achieving the Dream. Its new institutional research capacity advances student success initiatives as it establishes data-informed decision-making processes throughout the college. Zane State's Math Advising and College Student Inventory interventions increased the number of students completing at least one developmental math course within the first year of college, and increased year-to-year retention rates among target populations. These results led the college to expand intensive advising procedures and early-alert systems to all developmental education students, who are approximately 70% of all first-year students. Zane State received a grant from MDC, Inc. to participate in the Developmental Education Initiative (DEI). These resources will be used for the intensive advising expansion and a new, fast-track developmental education program intended to reduce the time and money students spend completing remedial courses. DEI is supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Lumina Foundation for Education. Zane State continues to expand its outreach to underserved groups through new projects such as early admission testing of high school juniors; the Seniors to Sophomores dual enrollment program; and the addition of inquiry-based learning at a vocational center. Zane State earned Achieving the Dream Leader College designation in 2009.

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Applications for the 2011 Leah Meyer Austin Institutional Student Success Leadership Award will be available in late spring 2010.
Open solely to colleges actively affiliated with Achieving the Dream
For additional information, please contact Lynn Barnett at atd@aacc.nche.edu.

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