

LEAH MEYER AUSTIN AWARD 2014

DREAM



ACHIEVING THE DREAM HONORS Bunker Hill Community College

This year, Achieving the Dream recognizes two first-place winners of the Leah Meyer Austin award, Bunker Hill Community College and Montgomery County Community College, for building whole-college solutions to improve student success and equity, adapted to meet the specific needs of their student body, that have resulted in noteworthy increases in student success.

The Leah Meyer Austin Award was established in 2008 to recognize outstanding achievement in supporting and promoting student success through the creation of a culture of evidence, continuous

improvement, systemic institutional change, broad engagement of stakeholders, and equity, with particular attention to low-income students and students of color. Each winning Achieving the Dream institution is awarded a \$25,000 prize in support of their student success efforts. The 2014 Leah Meyer Austin Award is made possible by the generous support of The Leona M. & Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust and is given in honor of Leah Meyer Austin, former Senior Vice President for Program Development and Organizational Learning at the Lumina Foundation, whose visionary leadership shaped the development of Achieving the Dream.

Bunker Hill Community College

Boston, Massachusetts • Pam Y. Eddinger, President
www.bhcc.mass.edu

Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC) receives the 2014 Leah Meyer Austin Award for building whole-college solutions to increase student success and achieve equity outcomes. The commitment of faculty, staff, administrators, and trustees to Achieving the Dream's Student-Centered Model of Institutional Improvement made it possible for BHCC to sustain momentum on ambitious student success goals even as its enrollment grew from 8,000 to 14,000 students and the college transitioned to a new president.

BHCC achieved Leader College status within the Achieving the Dream Network in 2011 for its effectiveness in moving the needle on student success through its Learning Community Program, which integrates academic affairs and student support services. The college has since scaled the program to reach more students, piloted new reforms, and strengthened its focus on equity outcomes.

Since becoming part of Achieving the Dream in 2007 to fall 2012, BHCC has:

- Increased fall-to-fall persistence from 41 percent to 51 percent
- Improved black students' course completion rates from 68 percent to 72 percent
- Increased Latino students' course completion rates from 68 percent to 74 percent
- Improved white students' course completion rates from 74 percent to 79 percent
- Raised completion rates in gateway English from 67 percent to 74 percent
- Improved completion rates in developmental English courses (reading and writing) from 72 percent to 78 percent
- Increased credits earned after two years by 7 credits for students enrolled in both Learning Community Clusters and Seminars compared to the comparison group

Most noteworthy among BHCC's many promising trends are the higher retention rates of students of color and Pell grant recipients compared to the retention rates of the overall student population. BHCC, located in urban Boston, is the largest community college in Massachusetts and one of the most diverse public higher education institutions in New England, with their student body being 20 percent Latino, 23 percent black, and 29 percent white. The college is a federally designated Asian American, Native American, and Pacific Islander-serving institution.

From fall 2011 to fall 2012, the college saw a retention rate of 54 percent for students of color compared to 51 percent of the overall student population. The college's Pell grant recipients (62 percent of the student body) did even better, with a retention rate of 58 percent.

Learning Communities Catalyze Change

BHCC's faculty-driven learning communities serve as the primary catalysts for the broad and deep transformations the college is striving to make. Faculty chose learning communities as the cornerstone for BHCC's Achieving the Dream initiative for two reasons:

- (1) Learning communities had been successful on a small scale for the college's English-language learner population since 1973, when the college opened.
- (2) National data confirmed that learning communities are a high impact practice.

As the college expanded its use of learning communities, the initiative became the vehicle for intense faculty engagement in the college's student success movement. Faculty use learning communities across disciplines and for all levels of instruction, from developmental to capstone courses. Learning community pedagogy emphasizes culturally-relevant content, active learning, and integrated support services, including peer mentors and success coach advisors. The high level of personal and professional investment in the strategy is evident by the fact that a majority of the full-time faculty have participated in this initiative, with 136 faculty members—70 full-time and 66 part-time—involved in the design and implementation of learning communities in 2012-2013.

BHCC Scales Two Types of Learning Communities

In 2012, BHCC was one of four Achieving the Dream colleges selected through a competitive process for the Catalyst Fund, which expands proven interventions to reach significantly large populations with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. In addition to funding, BHCC receives technical assistance from Achieving the Dream to ensure scaling success and to capture lessons that will inform scaling at other community colleges. The college is scaling the program to reach more part-time students by requiring learning communities for new degree-seeking students enrolled in 9 or more credits. With Catalyst Fund support, the college plans to increase enrollment from 4,000 students served in 2012-2013 to 6,500 students by 2016.

BHCC developed two types of learning communities to meet the needs of its diverse student population: the Learning Community Seminar for First-Year Students and the Learning Community Cluster. Learning Community Seminars are thematic, three-credit, college level courses that are designed to help students make a successful transition to college. Seminars are designed around academic themes meant to engage students' career interests, academic goals, or personal experiences. Each section has a student peer mentor who is present during each class session, and provides peer support to students outside of class. A student service staff member or "success coach advisor" is also assigned to each section to facilitate the integration of student development outcomes, like educational planning.

Learning Community Clusters link two or more courses around a common academic topic. For instance, Rites, Rituals and Reasons combines English and psychology courses under the theme of African American Literature to help students develop their writing in a learning environment that values intercultural competence. Meanwhile the course, Dig Where You Stand compresses developmental and college-level English instruction into one semester and uses urban community histories to engage students' interest in writing. Both clusters and seminars incorporate a common set of student learning outcomes in critical thinking, integrated communication, intercultural knowledge and competence, reflection and self-assessment, and teamwork.

This team approach begins when students attend Start Smart Orientation where advisors, success coaches, and peer mentors welcome students and help them register for classes. They also guide students' selection of learning communities, which range from career-oriented options to courses that delve into science, art, politics, and family life.

BHCC is dedicated to ensuring that learning communities also focus on culturally responsive, place-based curricula. The learning community seminar Freedom Rising, developed in partnership with the Museum of African American History, is an example of these curricula. BHCC co-sponsored a summer institute for faculty in July 2013, which led to further integration of place-based curricula

in several BHCC courses. Other learning communities incorporate museum exhibits and resources and visits to the Black Heritage Trail to help students understand the history of Boston's vibrant African American community and the struggle to fully realize equality.

BHCC Builds a Culture of Student Success through Faculty & Staff Professional Development

Dynamic professional development has been crucial to sustaining BHCC's student success initiatives. The college's Innovative Teaching and Learning Series is the primary mechanism to recruit, train, and retain learning community faculty. According to Liya Escalera, director of learning communities, the series has knit Achieving the Dream principles into the college's teaching and learning environment.

"What makes our professional development unique is that it is inquiry-based and driven by faculty and staff. So it's not something done to or for our faculty and staff. It is something we engage in together," Escalera said. "It's not a matter of faculty buy-in; it's a matter of faculty ownership. Because they own it, there's no need to buy in."

In 2012-2013, 197 faculty and staff participated in Innovative Teaching and Learning Series programs. Participants included 83 full-time faculty (58 percent of BHCC's full-time faculty), 85 adjunct faculty (16 percent of all adjunct faculty), 11 professional staff members, and 18 administrators. Sessions were offered at various times to encourage participation by adjunct faculty, who are also involved in the planning and facilitation of these sessions.

"All along the way faculty and staff have not only engaged in rich conversations about student learning and success, but have exercised real decision-making power over the Achieving the Dream initiative," Lori Catalozzi, dean of humanities and learning communities, said. "As faculty and staff coalesced around the student success agenda, collaborative leadership and dynamic partnerships emerged at all levels of the institution. This collaborative approach and focus on a whole college solution enabled the work to continue seamlessly during the change in the college's leadership."

Study Finds Statistically Significant Student Impacts

The interactive and relevant educational experiences available through learning communities are yielding positive student outcomes at BHCC, according to a 2013 case study by consulting firms DVP Praxis, Ltd. and OMG Center for Collaborative Learning. Based on data from student cohorts over four academic years (2008 through 2012), the researchers found statistically significant impacts on several success indicators for students who took either type of Learning Community course.

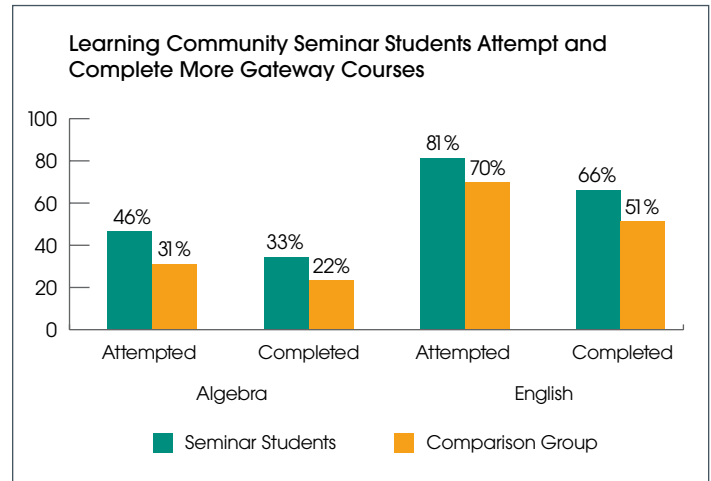
The study used a rigorous analysis process to assess the progress of students in Learning Community Clusters and Seminars relative to propensity-matched comparison groups.¹ Findings showed improvements in key student success milestones including developmental math completions, gateway course attempts and completions, and credits earned.

Developmental Math Completions

Both Learning Community Seminar and Learning Community Cluster students were more likely to complete one or two levels of developmental math within two years. The best performance was by Learning Community Cluster students in classes one level

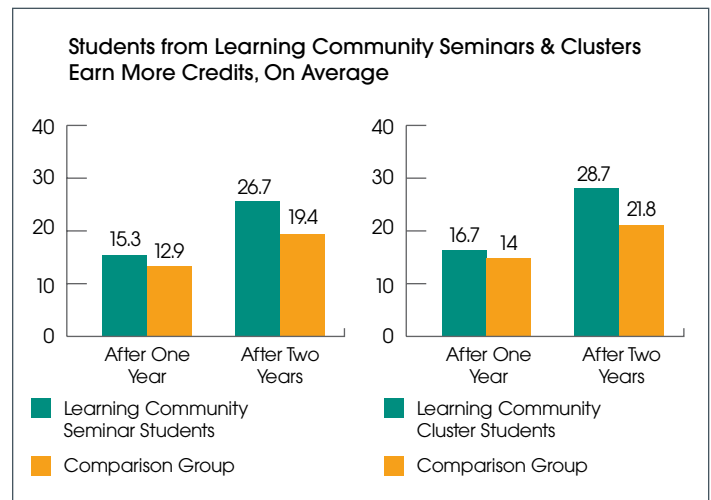
below college math. These students dramatically out-performed the comparison group: 71 percent of Learning Community Cluster students completed the developmental math sequence in two years compared to 56 percent of the comparison group.

Gateway Course Attempts and Completions



Learning Community Seminar students attempted and successfully completed algebra and college-level English at higher rates than students in comparison groups. Most notable is that 66 percent of seminar students completed the gateway English course within two years of enrollment at BHCC, compared to 51 percent of the comparison group. Thirty-three percent of seminar students completed algebra within two years compared to 22 percent of the comparison group.

Credits Earned



Learning Communities are also leading to greater credit attainment.

After two years of enrollment, cluster students had earned an average of 28.7 credits, an important marker of momentum toward degree completion. After two years, the comparison group had earned an average of 21.8 points. Seminar students also out-performed the comparison group, earning an average of 26.7 credits versus 19.4 credits by the comparison group.

¹Seminar N = 3,549. 2,652 received the treatment and 887 were in the comparison group. Cluster N = 2,069. 1,407 received the treatment and 662 were in the comparison group. The analysis was weighted "to equalize" the comparison groups.

Smooth Leadership Transition

Pam Y. Eddinger, who became BHCC's president in July 2013, said the leadership of her predecessor Mary L. Fifield and the dedicated team leaders she selected have anchored the student success work. She noted that learning communities and other success strategies continued, and in some instances expanded, during the college's year-long presidential search. Dr. Fifield served as president of BHCC for 16 years and is now an Achieving the Dream Leadership Coach.

"My role coming in really is not so much to do transformational change ... It's really stability and continuity in higher education leadership that fosters good work. And I think that's the case here," Dr. Eddinger said, adding that her student success goals align with those the trustees have set with Achieving the Dream. As one of 11 community college presidents who participated in the recent White House Summit on College Access, Dr. Eddinger said BHCC would expand its public school collaborations and its Summer Bridge Program.

Jan Bonanno, associate vice president and dean of students, notes that Dr. Fifield, Dr. Eddinger, and the trustees have consistently invested operational funds to scale successful strategies that were initiated with external resources such as Federal Title III grants, foundation support, and state allocations.

These strategies include the Summer Bridge Program, which offers free developmental English and math boot camps and courses to increase college readiness for incoming high school graduates; LifeMap, which integrates student development outcomes across the curriculum; Singlestop, which provides free, comprehensive social and financial services; and The Mary L. Fifield Endowed Student Emergency Assistance Fund, which provides emergency financial support and increases access to resources for students in need.

BHCC's comprehensive Achieving the Dream efforts are equipping more students with the skills and support they need to achieve their educational goals in a shorter time period.

Montgomery County Community College

Blue Bell, Pennsylvania • Karen A. Stout, President
www.mc3.edu

Montgomery County Community College (MCCC) also receives the 2014 Leah Meyer Austin Award for working effectively to help every student achieve his or her education goals. The president, trustees, staff, and faculty—both part-time and full-time—act with the understanding that individuals' success in higher education has the potential for positive, multi-generational effects on families and communities.



The Helmsley Charitable Trust

The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust aspires to improve lives by supporting effective nonprofits in health, place-based initiatives, and education and human services. Since 2008, when the Trust began its active grantmaking, it has committed more than \$1 billion to a wide range of charitable organizations. Through its National Education Program, the Trust views education as a lever to advance both American economic competitiveness and individual social mobility. In K-12, the Trust focuses on ensuring all students graduate high school prepared for college or careers by supporting teacher effectiveness and the adoption and implementation of high academic standards. In postsecondary education, the Trust is primarily interested in increasing the number of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) graduates who can participate in high growth sectors of the economy. The Trust also focuses on policy levers that improve postsecondary completion, particularly for underrepresented populations. For more information, please visit www.helmsleytrust.org.



Achieving the Dream, Inc.

Achieving the Dream, Inc. is a national nonprofit dedicated to helping more community college students, particularly low-income students and students of color, stay in school and earn a college certificate or degree. Evidence-based, student-centered, and built on the values of equity and excellence, Achieving the Dream is closing achievement gaps and accelerating student success nationwide by 1) guiding evidence-based institutional improvement, 2) leading policy change, 3) generating knowledge, and 4) engaging the public. Conceived as an initiative in 2004 by Lumina Foundation and seven founding partner organizations, today Achieving the Dream is leading the most comprehensive non-governmental reform network for student success in higher education history. With over 200 colleges, more than 100 coaches and advisors, and 15 state policy teams—working throughout 34 states and the District of Columbia—the Achieving the Dream National Reform Network helps 3.8 million community college students have a better chance of realizing greater economic opportunity and achieving their dreams.

Applications for the 2014 Leah Meyer Austin Award were reviewed by a selection committee representing Achieving the Dream Founding Partners. The winning college had to present strong quantitative data and outcomes across all five Achieving the Dream outcome indicators. In addition, the college had to show evidence of closing achievement gaps, as well as a compelling qualitative story of culture change using Achieving the Dream's Student-Centered Model for Institutional Improvement. The selection committee was supported by the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT).