Achieving the Dream™

2022 | LEAH MEYER AUSTIN AWARD

TALLAHASSEE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Achieving the Dream's **Leah Meyer Austin Award** is the highest honor awarded to colleges in the Achieving the Dream (ATD) Network. The award recognizes institutional strength, aligned policies and procedures, a student-focused culture, notable increases in student outcomes, and reduction of equity gaps.

OVERVIEW

Tallahassee Community College, winner of ATD's 2022 Leah Meyer Austin Award, points to its name as a sign of its commitment to the region it serves. As one of only two Florida two-year colleges that has kept the word "community" in its name, TCC has focused on redesigning the student experience around drivers of student success and working closely with its academic and workforce partners.

"We think of ourselves as a college of choice in three very specific ways," says President Dr. Jim Murdaugh. "We wish to be considered the college of choice for the students who come here, we wish to be the employer of choice for faculty and staff, and we wish to be recognized as the partner of choice in our community."

These efforts have coalesced around the concept of C.A.R.E. (Connections, Academics, Resources, Engagement), an integrated series of advising, academic and non-academic supports, and resources intended to ensure students are supported from applying to TCC through graduating—at which point virtually all (98 percent) of the college's graduates find employment or continue their education in the same year.

The comprehensive redesign has seen success rates rise and equity gaps narrow, as equity efforts have focused on ensuring that every member of the TCC staff has a role to play. "It's not just on paper and it's not just a slogan," says Dr. Angela Long, TCC's chief engagement officer. "It is literally the culture and the heart of the campus."

SNAPSHOT

In Fall 2020, according to the U.S. Department of Education Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), **TCC's total enrollment was 11,245 students**, of whom 51 percent were full-time and 49 percent were part-time.

The average age of TCC students is 21, younger than the national community college average of 28. The college is **45 percent white, 31 percent Black, 17 percent Hispanic**, and **3 percent multiracial**, according to IPEDS data.

According to TCC, close to half (45 percent) of first-time college students received Pell Grants, and **more than half of all students (53 percent) are first-generation college students.**

CHALLENGES

For TCC, serving the community involves addressing the needs of a student body that closely mirrors that of the Tallahassee region, college officials say. The college's ZIP Code is the state's poorest—and home to nearly half of its students (43 percent). Sixty percent of students self-identify as minorities, and the numbers continue to grow. Fall 2021 saw Hispanic student enrollment increase by 37 percent.

An Achieving the Dream Network College since 2004 and an ATD Leader College since 2009, TCC has long leveraged the Network's resources for continuous improvement. It developed a teaching and learning framework with the help of ATD professional learning communities and coaching and created guided pathways. To continue addressing student needs, college leaders disaggregated student data in the months before the pandemic and identified three ongoing equity challenges:

- Gaps in completion rates
- Low college enrollment
- High failure rates of students from the nearest majority-minority high school.

SOLUTIONS

To address these needs, TCC brought together nearly 170 faculty and staff to rethink the student experience. Over two days, the group determined that the college should ensure that students have a sense of belonging and begin their studies on a pathway in which they would receive ongoing support. Doing so would require a coordinated and comprehensive approach.

"If we implemented wraparound student support in multiple areas, then someone would have their hand on the pulse of the student and be able to help them navigate, get on the right path, and remain enrolled," says Dr. Sheri Rowland, vice president for student affairs.

The C.A.R.E. framework was the result of these discussions, which reallocated resources and added new positions to

support students from onboarding and advising to holistic student supports:

Connections. Along with increased outreach to racially minoritized student populations in middle and high school, newly hired admissions navigators reach out to prospective students and help them complete the application process.

Academics. After enrolling, students are assigned a personal advisor to help them select a pathway based on their interests and strengths using an assessment developed in partnership with the Myers-Briggs Company. Advisors also help ensure students don't postpone critical gateway courses and avoid taking excess credit hours.

Resources. Academic success coaches support first-year students, using an early alert system to communicate with students as needed. "A lot of students would text back and go, 'wait a minute, this is a robot' and the coaches would say 'no, I'm a real human being and I'm here and I care,'" Dr. Long says. "I believe that was integral."

Collaboration across academic, student affairs, and administrative services provide non-academic supports, including emergency assistance and mental health resources. The college's Institute for Nonprofit Innovation and Excellence serves as a hub to connect students with community resources. "We're doing a lot of connecting the dots—not only creating opportunities, but also making

sure they get access in a seamless way," says Kimberly Moore, vice president for workforce innovation.

Engagement. Efforts are focused on increasing engagement in and out of the classroom, through clubs, organizations, workplace and community learning and volunteer opportunities, backed in part by a faculty commitment to 60 hours of out-of-classroom student engagement.

"Students need to be known by name, not just a number on the roster, but that you know about me and care about me," Dr. Long says.

Addressing Equity Gaps

C.A.R.E. has provided TCC with ongoing opportunities to evaluate which students are faring well during their full lifecycle as students. The college has dramatically narrowed gaps among Hispanic students, in part through programs such as the Hispanic Alliance for Talented Students (HATS), a cohort-based system to foster a sense of belonging which also led to the creation of a for-credit Latin culture course based on student requests.

Ongoing data analysis identified continuing equity gaps among Black students, which have become an area of specific focus in the college's strategic plan. Along with working with ATD, TCC created opportunities for faculty to receive credentials and collaborate on equity-minded syllabi, language, and faculty-developed retention plans. The college also created an academic boot camp to prepare incoming students for gateway courses. About 700 students attend at the beginning of each semester, helping narrow gaps. A Commission on Race and Equity and an equity summit also resulted in 17 equity action steps, carried out by cross-functional units.

"Everybody at this campus understands how important it is—they get it," Dr. Murdaugh says. "But sometimes people ask what can I do, as an individual advisor or faculty member. What we did was move that conversation down to a process level… to help people understand that there are things that every single person at this college can do to make a difference when we break it down."

Community Partnerships

As part of its identity as the "college of choice," TCC sees its two key goals as transfer and workforce development. The college has engaged in deep partnerships in both areas. TCC sees itself as part of an "education ecosystem" with the region's two major colleges, Florida State University and Florida A&M University, an HBCU. It has developed enhanced transfer partnerships with both institutions, known as TCC2FSU and TCC2FAMU.

"The presidents of those two institutions have publicly said many times that the reason they are so highly ranked is because they accept so many of our students who come to them as juniors that add to their success metrics," Dr. Murdaugh says.

On the workforce front, "we are the convener of a lot of conversations with industry," says Moore. Partnerships with the Chamber of Commerce and economic development organizations have helped TCC develop just-in-time programs to meet workforce needs. For example, the college helped meet an acute regional shortage of entry-level healthcare workers by partnering with the Chamber to survey employers and developed a 90-day program for medical assistants—one of more than 70 short-term programs that lead to industry-recognized credentials connected to immediate employment opportunities and high-wage careers. Workforce development extends to certificate programs in five correctional institutions, with plans to expand to two more.

TCC was also one of three colleges to participate in an ATD professional learning community focused on developing career pathways focused on a high-poverty high school in its service area.

Across teaching and learning, workforce, and student services, ATD coaching, resources, and site visits helped the institution realize its strategic needs. ATD coaches "who come in with fresh sets of eyes and ask questions without flinching are one of the things that ATD brings to bear which is so valuable to me as a president," Dr. Murdaugh says.
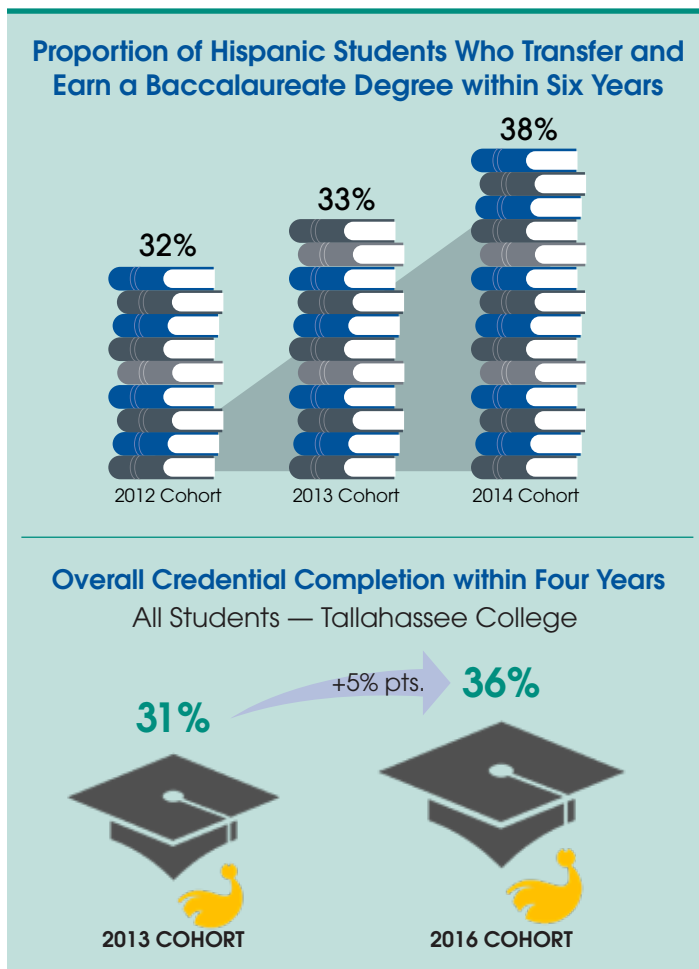
RESULTS

Recognizing that research still shows that bachelor's degree attainment results in increased social and economic mobility for students, TCC has focused on closing equity gaps around transfer and four-year degree attainment. For example, the proportion of Hispanic students who transferred and earned a four-year degree within six years increased 6 percentage points from 32 percent (2012 cohort) to 38 percent (2014 cohort).

TCC has seen other dramatic results:

- Fall-to-fall persistence increased from 56 percent for the fall 2016 cohort to 58 percent for the fall 2019 cohort. While equity gaps exist, Black, white and Hispanic students increased fall-to-fall persistence, and persistence is above 50 percent for each group. The retention gaps between Pell and non–Pell Grant students and first- and non–first generation students also narrowed.

- The four-year completion rate increased from 31 to 36 percent from the fall 2013 cohort to fall 2016 cohort.

- Equity gaps are narrowing, with Hispanic student four-year completion rates increasing 15 percentage points and now equal to white students at 47 percent for the fall 2016 cohort.

- Gateway math and English completion increased from 31 percent for the fall 2017 cohort to 33 percent for the fall 2020 cohort, an increase of 3 percentage points. The college also narrowed equity gaps between women by 4 percentage points on completion of gateway English and math within one year. Pell students also saw gateway math completion increase from 25 to 34 percent.

- 98 percent of TCC graduates find employment or continue education the year they graduate.

Proportion of Hispanic Students Who Transfer and Earn a Baccalaureate Degree within Six Years

32% — 2012 Cohort
33% — 2013 Cohort
38% — 2014 Cohort

Overall Credential Completion within Four Years
All Students — Tallahassee College

31% — 2013 COHORT
+5% pts.
36% — 2016 COHORT

NEXT STEPS

C.A.R.E. was implemented before the pandemic, but the shift to online learning provided an opportunity to embed supports directly within online classes, including adding librarians, math support groups, and additional online resources, including Study Edge, into gateway courses like English Comp and Algebra. "We embraced the option that students don't do optional, and dealing with the pandemic, we used that to our advantage," Dr. Murdaugh says.

Success rates in college algebra doubled to 80 percent during the pandemic, creating a new model for support that has continued even as in-person courses have resumed. TCC was also the first college in the state to roll out a community reemployment plan during the pandemic and worked to help community organizations pivot through its Performance Innovation Institute.

"The results we saw during the pandemic are encouraging us never to go back to the way we did it before," Dr. Murdaugh says.