

2016 Leah Meyer Austin Award



ACHIEVING THE DREAM HONORS

William Rainey Harper College

Achieving the Dream is pleased to present the 2016 Leah Meyer Austin Award to William Rainey Harper College in Palatine, Illinois. The award recognizes Harper College's outstanding achievement in developing an organizational culture designed and dedicated to increasing student success. The award further recognizes the impact of dynamic leadership committed to empowering all stakeholders at the college to innovate for their students and institutionalizing the efforts that prove successful.

Achieving the Dream's Leah Meyer Austin Award annually recognizes an Achieving the Dream institution that has demonstrated outstanding progress in implementing a cohesive strategy of organizational and cultural change in pursuit of a vision for student success. The winning institution receives an award of \$25,000 and the opportunity to share its story with over 200 of its peer colleges.

Reviewers of this year's applications included representatives from Achieving the Dream, American Association of Colleges and Universities, American Association of Community Colleges, Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program, and MDC.

Harper College's Story: Moving from Stand-Alone Excellence to Integrated Excellence

One common agenda

In 2009, when Kenneth Ender became president of William Rainey Harper College, a comprehensive two-year college in Palatine, Illinois that serves more than 40,000 students, he discovered faculty and staff who were ready for a college-wide strategy that emphasized student success. Harper's students were not completing enough of the credentials they had come to college to earn, and Harper's faculty and staff wanted that to change.

Dr. Ender saw in that desire a unique opportunity to unify the college under one common agenda. With the support of the board of trustees, Harper College joined the Achieving the Dream (ATD) National Reform Network in 2009 and began applying the ATD Institutional Improvement Model and organizing to launch a student success agenda grounded in the principle of building community.

The overall impact has been transformational. Dr. Sheila Quirk-Bailey, Chief of Staff and Vice President of Planning & Institutional Effectiveness, notes that since joining ATD Harper College's culture has evolved from one characterized as "stand-alone excellence" to a community dedicated to "integrated excellence." Leaders from all areas of the college are now empowered to improve the student experience. The collective efforts of the college community have contributed to an impressive ten percentage points increase in their graduation rate (see Chart 1).

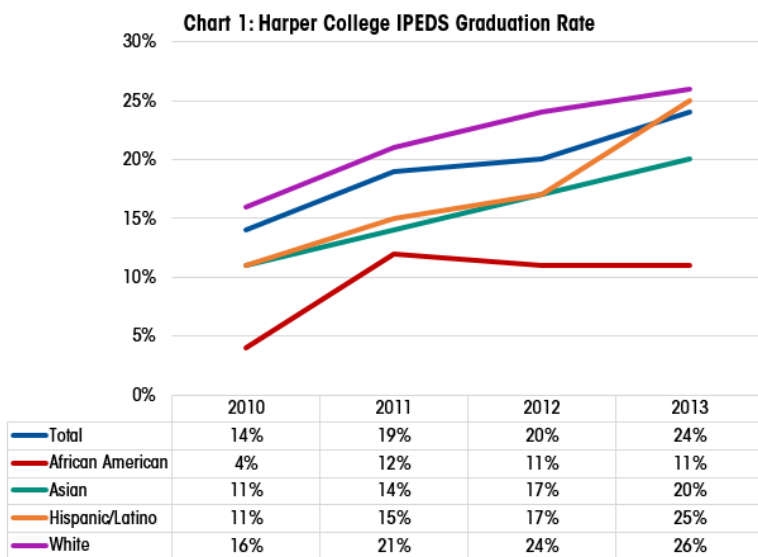


Chart 1: Percent of full-time, first-time, degree/certificate-seeking students who completed a degree or certificate within three years of initial enrollment.

Culture of collaboration

To build a community committed to student success, Dr. Ender, faculty, and staff worked intentionally to develop an institutional culture defined by collaboration, a unified vision, trust, and transparency. Those ideals aligned with those of the college's namesake, William Rainey Harper, a pioneer in the community college movement and the first president of the University of Chicago, who said when that university was founded, "The question before us is how to become one in spirit, not necessarily in opinion."

The commitment to create a culture of collaboration and transparency dovetailed with decisions to change the college's operations, resource allocation, and related policies. It also led to a community-based strategic planning process. In contrast to previous strategic plans, the 2010–2015 strategic plan was developed collaboratively by college faculty, staff, and administrators with input from the local community, workforce partners, K-12 superintendents, university representatives and national thought leaders. Together, the community developed four key strategic directions used to define nine strategic goals.

Harper College Strategic Plan 2010–2015 Strategic Directions

Inspiration	Develop programs with educational partners that inspire postsecondary education and career readiness as a life goal
Partnership	Engage in partnerships to develop programs in existing and emerging career areas that enable students to succeed in a global economy
Accountable	Create a culture of innovation, accountability, and transparency
Completion	Increase completion and achievement of all students with a focus on underperforming student groups

As implementation began in 2010, the college's trustees approved the reallocation of \$3.28 million of operating budget to support innovation and scaling of student success efforts. Excitement about the new culture and strategic plan quickly began to build. In total, 170 faculty and staff volunteered to join one of the nine Goal Teams to help implement the strategic plan. Responsibility for allocating the budget and implementing the strategic plan was given to a Champion Team composed of six faculty and six administrators.

Faculty and staff who wanted to test innovative ideas within one of the strategic plan's nine goals could develop a plan, receive funding and pilot the innovation. Each piloted intervention followed the college's four-stage Institution Innovation Model, which includes evaluation and scaling from the beginning. Once data demonstrated the success of an initiative, a Goal Team would submit a proposal to bring the project to scale which, if approved by the Champion Team, would imbed the initiative into the standard operations of the college. This process helped ensure that effective practices were institutionalized into the college's standard operations.

As implementation of the strategic plan progressed, President Ender and colleagues continued to engage community members through periodic updates and requests for feedback. To this day, interested parties can track the college's progress through a dashboard on their website.

Collaborating to improve student completion

The foundation of Harper College's approach to increasing student success is focused heavily on creating strong, active partnerships with local workforce, education, and community organizations. Those partnerships are critical to helping students meet their educational, financial, and career goals.

The college developed one of its strongest partnerships from a deep understanding that college readiness of high school students was a concern that could not be addressed in isolation. Together, President Ender and the three regional superintendents formed the Northwest Educational Council for Student Success (NECSS), a jointly governed organization focused on college readiness, curriculum alignment, ensuring all high school students earn college credits prior to graduation, and common success metrics. Through the NECSS organizing structure joint programs of study were developed and curriculum alignment in math and English were accomplished which dramatically increased college readiness of high school graduates.

Through the guidance of a goal team, in partnership with NECSS and high school teachers, 34 aligned career paths were created to inform students on what they need to achieve before reaching college. These paths aligned with stackable credentials offered at the college, and included labor market data for each level of certification as well as transfer options. All of this is supported by an integrated electronic system that is available to students, parents and high school/college faculty and staff.

To complement this powerful resource, the college scaled the "completion concierge" position (a goal team initiative) whose entire function is to proactively reach out to students to let them know if they were within three courses of completing a degree or certificate. In the first year of the career paths and completion concierge implementation, certificate completion rose by one third.

Engaging in new conversations to address achievement gaps

One of the college's nine strategic goals was to reduce achievement gaps identified through its work with Achieving the Dream. With support from its Achieving the Dream coaches, the college began analyzing the causes of achievement gaps to identify ways to better support underrepresented and underserved students. As a testament to the growing culture of trust at the college, college leadership noticed that over time such discussions became more candid, while still remaining collaborative and constructive. For example, faculty members came to be able to openly discuss the impact of their relative privilege on their view of what less privileged students need to succeed.

This environment of trust empowered faculty to develop four student success interventions designed to support the college's low-income students and students of color by providing more tailored supports. For example, R.E.A.C.H. is a two-week summer bridge program targeted at first-time in college, degree-seeking students of color transitioning from high school to college with two or more developmental placements. R.E.A.C.H. provides a structured support system that increases persistence by assisting students with academic success and in navigating the sometimes complex college system.

These targeted efforts, combined with the student success efforts scaled to all students, have helped to:

- Close the persistence gap between African American students and all students from 9 percentage points in 2010 to 1 percentage point in 2014.
- Increase college readiness in math for Hispanic students from 36% in 2010 to 62% in 2014 and for African American students from 16% to 58% over the same time period.
- Increase successful completion of developmental math sequence for all students from 68% to 71% between 2010 and 2014 and for African American students from 41% to 61%.
- Increase successful completion of developmental writing sequence for all students from 66% to 76% between 2010 and 2014 and for African American students from 41% to 70%.

While initial evidence suggests the college's equity-focused efforts are indeed helping to improve student outcomes, the college has struggled to scale these resource-intensive efforts. Still, that has not deterred the college from pursuing its goals. Work continues to develop an evidence-informed plan to take these efforts to scale as one of the college's strategic directions.

Sustaining the college's commitment to building community

Harper College's dedication to building community and increasing student success continues to this day. In March 2015, the college convened a conference for the community designed to help define the college's strategic direction and identify focus areas for the coming four years. Providing ample opportunities for discussion, the conference exposed attendees to the challenges of increasing global competition, the latest research in student success, and best practices shared by other ATD colleges. Together, the community assessed the college's successes from the past five years and identified three specific focus areas for moving forward:

- **Inclusion.** Foster an environment that values and respects each member of Harper's diverse community and actively encourages cross-cultural engagement.
- **Engagement.** Foster and support a culture of engagement throughout the college.
- **Achievement.** Enhance and support the academic environment in ways that lead to increased student achievement and facilitate greater equity of student success across demographic groups.

These areas direct the college's student success efforts towards strategies that build on previous successes, such as enhancing the college's efforts to provide all students with "equitable and responsive support, both in and out of the classroom." However, they are also pushing the community to address new areas of student success, such as innovating how faculty teach and designing more tailored supports for adult learners.

Looking forward, President Ender defines the college's focus as "helping students connect with the college, understanding why they are here and creating and monitoring a plan to ensure they complete." The college's role, he adds, "is to help students find their passions and then provide them with the instructional opportunities and supports to help them achieve their goals." The next phase of Harper College's work is designed to do just that.

ABOUT THE WINNER

Harper College was established by referendum in 1965 and opened September 1967. It is named for Dr. William Rainey Harper, a pioneer in the junior college movement in the United States and the first president of the University of Chicago.

Harper College is now one of the nation's premier community colleges and one of the largest, serving more than 40,000 students annually in Chicago's northwest suburbs. The College's academic programs prepare students for rewarding careers and for transfer to four-year universities. Harper offers associate degree and certification programs, advanced career programs, workforce training, professional development, continuing education classes, accelerated degree options for adults and developmental education programs.

Key Facts (Source: Harper College)	2014
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Total Enrollment	14,957
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Asian	11.1%
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Black/African-American	4.6%
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Hispanic/Latino	21.8%
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White	56.0%
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Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1.5%
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Part-Time	64.0%
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Developmental Education	13.7%
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First Generation*	40.8%
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Pell Recipients	23.0%
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* estimated

ABOUT US

Achieving the Dream, Inc. is a national nonprofit dedicated to helping more community college students, particularly low-income students and students of color, persist in their studies and earn a college credential. Together with our Network of over 200 institutions of higher education, 100 coaches and advisors, 15 state policy teams, and numerous investors and partners working throughout 35 states and the District of Columbia we are helping more than 4 million community college students have a better chance of realizing greater economic opportunity and achieving their dreams.



Achieving the Dream™

Community Colleges Count