



# Lessons Learned from Achieving the Dream



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# Presenters

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# Achieving the Dream Overview

- Launched by the Lumina Foundation for Education in 2003; first round of colleges in 2004.
- Focuses on helping more students succeed, especially low-income students and students of color.
- Began with 27 community colleges in five states; now 82 institutions in 15 states.
- Lumina has invested more than \$74 million with more coming from others.

# Achieving the Dream Goal

**Improve performance and reduce achievement gaps among subgroups on five indicators**

- Advancement from remedial to credit courses
- Enrollment in & successful completion of gatekeeper courses
- Successful course completion (earning credits)
- Re-enrollment from term to term and year to year
- Attainment of credentials (degrees and/or certificates)

# Three Step Process

- **Diagnosis and Planning**
  - Collect and analyze baseline data
  - Identify achievement gaps
  - Examine existing practices
  - Develop improvement plan with success strategies
- **Implementation and Evaluation**
  - Strengthen programs and services
  - Remove barriers to success, including policies/processes
  - Evaluate effectiveness of strategies, policy changes
- **Institutionalization**
  - Bring effective strategies to scale with continuous improvement
  - Allocate resources based on evidence of what works
  - Align strategic planning, institutional effectiveness and accreditation with AtD

# Support to Participating Colleges

- Four rounds of colleges received a planning grant and a four-year implementation grant (a few self-funded)
- A data facilitator to assist in
  - Conducting longitudinal & subgroup analyses
  - Compiling student, faculty, and staff perspectives
  - Interpreting and presenting data
  - Evaluating the effectiveness of programs and services
- A coach [a former community college president] to
  - Assist the leadership teams draw lessons from data analyses
  - Help communicate results, especially when unflattering
  - Develop and implement plans for improving student performance

# Organizational Structure at Participating Institutions

- **Data Team:** Gathers & interprets data on outcomes.
  - Institutional research director
  - Faculty representatives
  - Student services and administrative staff
- **Core Team:** Guides institutional change work.
  - President/ Chancellor
  - Chief academic & student services officers
  - Institutional research director
  - Faculty representatives
  - Community representatives

# Students at Achieving the Dream Colleges Struggle

- About 33% attempting the highest developmental course in math, English, or reading completed it within three years.
- About 20% of students referred to a gatekeeper math course were successful within a three-year period;
- For gatekeeper English, 30% of students were successful.
- 70% of students enrolling fall 2002 returned for a second semester, but the enrollment fell to 23% by the third year.
- About 11% percent of students starting in 2002 earned a credential or diploma within three years.

# Gaps in achievement by subgroups...

...but not on all measures & sometimes contrary to expectations

- Persistence among African-American and non-Hispanic white students are roughly the same.
- Hispanic students show significantly *higher* persistence rates on some measures.
- Completion rate of an associate degree was significantly *lower* for African-American, Hispanic, and Native American students than for non-Hispanic white students.
- Students receiving Pell Grants (i.e., low-income) generally had better outcomes than others.

# Selected findings for Round 1 Colleges [ from evaluation by MDRC]

**The colleges embraced the goal of building a culture of evidence.**

- About half the colleges used data analyses to identify issues problems to address.
- Colleges were not always sure about how to respond to what they had learned from the data.
- Some colleges struggled because their research offices were understaffed or their computer systems were weak.

# Selected findings for Round 1 Colleges Continued

**The “culture of evidence” concept resonated strongly with the colleges.**

- Less reliance on personal beliefs or anecdotes.
- Faculty and staff felt motivated to address problems when confronted with data on poor student performance.
- Relatively few faculty and staff on the data teams, few examples where most faculty within academic departments (such as English and math) had begun looking at data.

# Selected findings for Round 1 Colleges Continued

## Using data to identify and address issues.

- About half the colleges reported using longitudinal data as well as focus groups and student surveys to identify problems.
- There was disagreement about the usefulness of the data AtD required colleges to compile [perceived as burdensome or redundant].
- However, even these critics agreed that longitudinal tracking was a powerful method for identifying gaps in student achievement.

# Selected findings for Round 1 Colleges Continued

## Using data analysis to identify strategies.

- About 37% of the colleges had a direct link between the analyses performed and the strategies chosen.
- Remainder used existing literature, ideas from AtD conferences, or ideas considered before becoming involved in the initiative.
- Six colleges showed signs of institutionalizing a culture of evidence after only one year. Most others showed signs of progress.

# Selected findings for Round 1 Colleges Continued

## Evaluating strategies

- 25% of the colleges had plans for evaluating the effectiveness of the strategies to improve student performance.
- Most colleges had not yet thought about how to evaluate their program strategies.
- Evaluation plans from those who had them suffered from weak designs, usually because of the absence of a valid comparison group.

# Obstacles to a Culture of Evidence

- Difficulty retrieving and analyzing data.
- Limited institutional research capacity.
- Unfamiliarity with using data to improve student success.
- Concern that data would be used against faculty & staff.
- Skeptical that increased use of data and research would lead to improved student outcomes.
- Identified outcomes unsuitable to assess really important elements such as actual student learning.

# Obstacles to a Culture of Evidence

- View that students should be held accountable for their performance, not the institutions.
- Concerns that efforts to increase graduation rates would lower academic standards.
- Emphasis on students of color and of low-income students amounted to favoritism or unequal treatment.
- Changes in leadership.
- Beyond members of the core teams, relatively few were knowledgeable about AtD at their colleges.

# Principle Strategies at AtD Colleges

- Strengthening academic advisement
- Creating or revamping new student orientation
- Creating or revamping “college success”
- Supplemental instruction and tutoring
- Learning communities
- Professional development, including training in cultural competence and racial dynamics for faculty and staff.

# Implementing & Institutionalizing Strategies

- Most colleges had fully implemented at least one of the selected strategies
- Another five colleges were taking preliminary steps in this direction. The other 16 colleges while making some progress — often had difficulty meeting the initiative's research demands.
- Nearly all the colleges had begun to implement program strategies to improve student success.
- The number of students affected by the strategies was generally small.

# Implementing & Institutionalizing strategies (continued)

- Only a minority of strategies targeted all students.
- Six colleges showed strong indications of broad engagement in using data for program review, strategic planning, and budgeting.
- Five colleges had adopted, or were in the process of adopting, evidence-based strategic planning procedures.
- Accreditation processes & state policy initiatives reinforce the goals of AtD at most colleges.
- In Texas, two colleges mentioned the synergy between AtD and the “Closing the Gaps” initiative.

# Online Support for ATD Institutions

- National Database: Benchmarking with IPEDS cohorts – enrollment, graduation, revenue sources, and financial aid
- E-stats data cubes-members only access to longitudinal data for your college
- First time degree or certificate-seeking students
  - Math, English, reading, gatekeeper courses, and retention/completion
  - Can manipulate data views by various student groups
  - Graphic representations (bar, line, & pie charts)

# Online Support for AtD Institutions (continued)

## AtD Dashboard – Dials with aggregate data

- Developmental Math
- Retention (Fall to Fall)
- Gatekeeper Completion
- Credit Completion Rate
- Disaggregated graphics available for each measure



Completed all Dev  
Math in 2 years  
(2002 cohort)

# Online Support for AtD Institutions

## (continued)

- Strategy Collection Tool: To record & update strategies.
  - Helps maintain cycle of evaluation and accountability
  - Requires colleges to provide evidence of progress
- *Data Notes* newsletter
  - Provides model ideas for studies & data presentation
- Strategy Institute – annual AtD conference
  - Presentations/handouts posted for reference
  - Keynote speaker addresses posted

# Online Support for ATD Institutions (continued)

- Research Publications – ATD topics and policy issues
  - *Institutional Research and the Culture of Evidence at Community Colleges*
  - *Six States Pilot Better Ways to Measure and Compare Community College Performance*
  - *It's Not About the Cut Score: Redesigning Placement Assessment Policy to Improve Student Success*

# Achieving the Dream Leader Colleges

- Once AtD colleges complete their initial plan, they may apply to become “Leader Colleges” and continue their membership in AtD.
- Applying colleges report evidence of improvement in four areas:
  - Committed leadership.
  - Use of evidence to improve programs and services
  - Broad engagement
  - Systemic institutional improvement.
- Advantages of being a “Leader College.”

# Preparation for AtD Participation

- Begin now to produce or develop the capacity to conduct longitudinal cohort data analyses
- IR & IT capacity need to exceed compliance reporting
- IR & IT need to function as partners not adversaries
- Ensure student services & academic departments engage with each other routinely about operational plans and policies
- Apply to join AtD as an affiliate college in 2010