Achieving the Dream College Implementation Strategy Overview

Developmental Education

Data analysis by Achieving the Dream colleges has revealed large numbers of entering students who require developmental education, and low completion rates in developmental courses. As a result, most Achieving the Dream colleges are making changes in developmental education to improve student outcomes. Strategies include the following:

1. Course placement

- Refine testing, placement, and administrative procedures to ensure that students enroll in the developmental courses they need.
- Consider discontinuing "D" as a passing grade in developmental classes.

2. Curriculum and pedagogy -- general

- Revamp the developmental education curriculum to incorporate study skills and motivation
- Better align the curriculum with placement tests
- Compress the developmental sequence from four courses to three.
- Offer supplemental instruction, tutoring or study groups.
- Create a centralized developmental education unit.
- Increase the use of active learning strategies.
- Establish learning competencies.

3. Curriculum and pedagogy – developmental math

- Research and utilize new technologies for teaching developmental math.
- Offer alternative instructional formats in developmental math (traditional and individualized), and place students in the appropriate class based on a learning styles test.
- Offer a short, intensive review/refresher course ("Math Jam") to help students with low test scores to enter the developmental sequence at a higher level.
- Reduce class size in developmental math.
- Offer an "extended quarter" math option, which stretches two developmental math courses over three quarters.

4. Student engagement

- Establish learning communities for developmental courses.
- Make Individual Education Plans more descriptive and prescriptive for students.
- Convene broad-based forums to study ways to increase student-faculty interaction.
- Assess student attitudes toward math.

5. Faculty development

- Offer professional development for faculty who teach under-prepared students.
- Increase faculty knowledge of best practices in developmental education through participation in national organizations and conferences.
- Teach faculty to understand and address diverse learning styles.

Gatekeeper Courses

Like developmental courses, gatekeeper courses can be hurdles that slow or halt a student's progress toward a degree. Data at some colleges showed low pass rates or large achievement gaps in these courses. Colleges are using the following strategies to improve retention and success in gatekeeper courses:

1. Support activities

- Offer supplemental instruction, success workshops, tutoring, and study groups.
- Create learning communities.
- Implement an Early Alert System to ensure that struggling students get help.

2. Curriculum and pedagogy

- Improve instruction in gatekeeper courses.
- Use techniques such as active/collaborative learning, paired classes, and computer-assisted labs.
- Establish learning competencies.
- Institute "class conferencing" in English Composition classes – instructors meet with students individually on a regular basis.

3. Faculty development

- Offer professional development for faculty who teach gatekeeper courses.

First Year Experience

To improve retention, some colleges are implementing clusters of strategies intended to make the first year in college more engaging and successful. First Year Experience strategies at Achieving the Dream colleges include the following:

1. Student orientation

- Make orientation mandatory.
- Offer special orientation programs for subgroups of students.
- Include advising and registration in the orientation process.
- Create a college transition program targeting students who have delayed entry to college from high school by at least one year.

2. Advising

- Create an early alert system for students experiencing difficulty.
- Overhaul and evaluate computer-based career planning tools.
- Establish an information center.

3. Student Success Courses

- Create a student success course or improve an existing course.
- Make a success course mandatory for first year students and/or developmental education students.

4. Teaching and learning

- Establishing learning communities.
- Develop Individual Learning Plans for first-time in college students.
- Incorporate learning-centered methodologies in the classroom, especially in first-year courses.
- Employ multiple methodologies for student engagement in ESL classes.

5. Faculty and staff development

- Provide professional development focusing on needs of first-year students.
- Train faculty and staff in strategies that have proven effective in promoting student success.

Learning Communities

Learning communities are a strategy to engage students more fully in their education while providing strong academic and social support. Students enrolled in a learning community take a cluster of courses together as a group, promoting peer support and closer relationships with faculty. Several Achieving the Dream colleges are piloting or expanding learning communities, using the following approaches:

1. Targeted students

- Most learning communities target at-risk groups, such as entering students who need two or more developmental courses.

2. Targeted courses

- Most learning communities include developmental or gatekeeper courses. Some include student success courses.

3. Learning community enhancements

- Some learning communities include enhancements such as: an orientation course; career assessment; academic and support services such as tutoring, advising, or mentoring; and social engagement activities.
- Most colleges are providing training for faculty who teach learning community courses.
- Some colleges are deliberately incorporating active learning strategies in these courses.

Advising

Several Achieving the Dream colleges are striving to provide meaningful advising to more students, to help them chart a course through college and to intervene when they run into trouble. Strategies include the following:

1. The advising process

- Develop a case-management system of advising for the highest risk students. Some colleges are assigning Success Coaches to at-risk students.
- Enhance advising through use of a "road map" – a structure of guided sequential steps.
- Establish a "one-stop learning center" for advising, counseling, & tutoring.
- Create a position to coordinate advisement.
    - Revise registration policies and procedures to include advising.
    - Ensure that all First-Time-In-College students are advised.
    - Require advising for all developmental students until they have attained 30 credits.

2. Professional development

- Train division and faculty advisors to use a more holistic approach in advising students.
- Provide professional development that addresses diversity issues, especially the advisement of students of color, low-income students, and first generation students.

3. Early alert system

- Create an early warning system for students at high risk of failure.
- Institute weekly academic progress reports in selected courses, accompanied by frequent check-ins between at-risk students and their teacher or counselor.

4. Use of technology

- Create an advising database to track students who seek and receive advising.
- Use web-based Individualized Learning Plans.
- Review and improve policies regarding online advisement.

5. Other

- Follow up with students who drop out of developmental or gatekeeper courses.

Student Support Services

At some Achieving the Dream colleges, student surveys and focus groups identified gaps in the institution's support for students. Strategies to improve student support include the following:

- Assess and align academic and student support programs.
- Improve admissions, registration, financial aid, and other student services.
- Redefine and expand the role of counselors.
- Expand and improve an existing mentoring program. Train mentors and pay them a stipend.
- Develop mentoring and support programs targeted at specific populations: men of color; Hispanic students.
- Develop list of all available services, and operate an information center with trained staff and extended hours.
- Provide a variety of services to help ABE and ESL students make the transition to credit courses, including financial aid workshops, peer mentoring, and bridge classes.

Tutoring and Supplemental Instruction

Many Achieving the Dream colleges are using tutoring and/or supplemental instruction, including the following approaches:

- Create a walk-in math lab; establish a writing lab.
- Offer free tutoring services, including tutoring by students and staff. Train peer tutors.
- Hire and train supplemental instruction leaders to assist with reading and math.
- Research supplemental instruction models for developmental education, including diagnostic software. Create supplemental modules to complement courses.
- Establish and staff a testing center, and offer workshops in test taking.
- Improve communication about the availability of the learning assistance and testing center.

K-14 Strategies

Data at some Achieving the Dream colleges revealed large numbers of recent high school graduates who enter college unprepared for college-level work. In response, colleges have planned collaborative efforts with local high schools to improve students' readiness for postsecondary education. Strategies include the following:

1. Work with local school districts

- Increase engagement with local school districts.
- Work to align high school curriculum across all the local K-12 school districts.
- Create or expand dual enrollment programs.
- Offer a College Success class for high school seniors.

2. Summer bridge programs

- Implement a summer college prep course for high school students.
- Develop a bridge program for low-income students.

3. College placement tests

- Improve communication with high schools students about testing requirements.
- Work with school districts to administer the college placement test in high schools.

Community Engagement

Community engagement strategies at Round One and Two colleges include the following:

1. Community Outreach

- Develop ongoing communication with the community.
- Use community ambassadors to do outreach to increase utilization of financial aid.
- Create a community advisory board.

2. Engaging Diverse Populations

- Seek input from people of color in the wider community.
- Host on-campus diversity events and a bilingual telephone hotline.
- Offer a cultural speaker series to the college and larger community.
- Develop a service learning program.

Improved Use of Data

Building a "culture of evidence" is central to Achieving the Dream. Many colleges are striving to use data more effectively to guide institutional decision-making. Approaches include the following:

- Develop a knowledge management system to monitor student progress and share data.
- Build statistical models to measure the impact of the college's major interventions.
- Evaluate the college's current practices that target student success, and use data on program effectiveness in making budget decisions.
- Conduct focus groups with students, faculty and community members to get input on the college's policies and practices.
- Train faculty in data analysis and assessment skills.
- Incorporate quantitative and qualitative data findings into professional development sessions.
- Hire and/or train institutional research staff.
- Establish an Office of Institutional Effectiveness to enhance IR capacity and promote the use of data.