Achieving the Dream

WHAT IS ACHIEVING THE DREAM?

- Achieving the Dream (AtD) is a bold national effort to help more community college students succeed, with a special focus on students of color and low-income students.
- AtD is especially interested in low-income and students of color because research shows that they are the most at risk of not achieving success.
- AtD began in 2004 with 27 community colleges in five states. As of 2011, the initiative will have grown to over 150+ institutions enrolling more than one million students in 24 states and the District of Columbia.
- Colleges participating in AtD agree to engage faculty, staff and administrators in a process of using data to identify gaps in student achievement and to implement and improve strategies for closing the gap.
- The goals of the initiative are to improve student progression through milestone points including:
  - Successfully completing basic skills instruction and moving into college-level coursework
  - Enrolling in and successfully completing college-level English and math
  - Completing all courses with a grade of “C” or better
  - Persisting from one term to the next
  - Earning a certificate or associates degree

WHAT IS THE BENEFIT TO COLLEGES IF THEY JOIN THE INITIATIVE?

- Colleges receive assistance from other AtD member schools that have successfully tackled the achievement gaps that we are seeing in the LACCD. These gaps include:
  - The gap between math, ESL, and English success rates in terms of progression from basic skills to college-level coursework (see attachment)
  - The gap between underprepared and college ready students in terms of graduation and retention rates
  - The gap between racial/ethnic groups in their completion of basic skills coursework and degree completion or transfer
- Each college receives a coach (usually a former community college president) and a data facilitator to help colleges create comprehensive, evidence-based improvement and evaluations plans.
- Improved student success because a substantially higher percentage of students will complete certificates, degrees or transfer to four-year colleges. Colleges that have made substantial gains in closing the same achievement gaps are called “lead colleges” and share their strategies with other colleges in the initiative.

WHY THE ACHIEVING THE DREAM MODEL?

- AtD has documented evidence that success rates have risen for colleges that have joined the initiative.
- AtD focuses colleges on understanding and making better use of data to improve student outcomes.
- The AtD student success agenda is well integrated with ACCJC accreditation standards in the area of student achievement outcomes that require us to show evidence of completion rates.
COLLEGE PROPOSAL FORM: NARRATIVE

College: West Los Angeles College

Proposal Submission Deadline for LA District Colleges: February 1, 2011.

To be completed by each college in the system wanting to join Achieving the Dream and submitted to info@achievingthedream.org with the subject line “[College Name] ATD Proposal.” Provide all the information requested on this College Proposal Form. Narrative text should be single-spaced in 12-point font with one-inch margins and should not exceed eight pages.

1. Committed leadership. Please answer each question.
   - What is the college’s vision for student success?
   - What is the college’s vision for equity?
   - How is the President mobilizing support for this vision in the college and community?
   - How is the vision reflected in the college’s strategic plan (or equivalent document)?
   - How does the college’s planning process currently use data in planning and decision making?

The Vision of West Los Angeles College, as developed through a collegial process and adopted through the shared governance process by the whole college is: “A gateway to success for every student.” The Mission of the College is to provide a transformative educational experience. West fosters a diverse learning community dedicated to student success. Through quality instruction and supportive services, the College develops leaders who encourage excellence in others. A West education enriches student with the knowledge and skills needed to earn certificates and degrees, to transfer, to build careers, and to pursue life-long learning.

The College vision for equity was developed after intensive review and analysis of student data related to access, retention, basic skills completion, ESL completion, degree and certificate completion and transfer. As the Equity Plan states, “WLAC views student equity as an on-going program that will be the basis for additional research, reviewing programs and services, integrating student equity goals and objectives into the college overall planning process and providing a high level of service on an equal basis to all who can benefit by attending West Los Angeles College.

The College Values offer further expression for the vision of student success: Excellence – West envisions each student and employee striving for excellence in and out of classes, laboratories, libraries, studios, playing fields and offices. Ethics – We hold ourselves and others to the highest standards in personal as well as intellectual responsibilities. This informs relationships among students, staff, faculty and administration. Empowerment – At West, everyone—students, staff, faculty, administration—is empowered by high

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expectations, respect and acknowledgement in all pursuits, from single lessons to completed degrees, from daily encounters to formal policy deliberations. Engagement – To be fully engaged-academically, locally and globally – is to embrace learning with passion, commitment and energy.

The President mobilizes support for the college vision by careful attention to and management of the college’s resources, including the building program; by respecting, abiding by and using the college’s collegial governance process, including its committees, effectively; by providing educational leadership by articulating a clear vision to the entire college of the college’s mission.

All of the strategic goals of the college support this vision of student success: Access, Student Learning, Transfer, Career Technical Education, Foundation Skills Program, Diversified Modes of Instructional Delivery, and Campus Infrastructure.

Analysis of and reflection on data and information is core to the development, refinement and updating of all college plans. Data of a range of types is used: detailed student demographic and outcomes data; qualitative data derived from program review assessments and survey data; dashboard measures tailored to the LACCD Strategic Plan which permit comparison with other colleges in the LACCD. Progress in reaching the goals of the Educational Master Plan is assessed using student outcomes data as well as an implementation matrix which permits intensive review of progress and stimulates discussion by affected groups of people. A further example of the importance of data and information in decision-making and in planning is in the area of enrollment management. The Enrollment Management Committee uses data and information from a wide variety of sources in steering a course that balances curricular needs with fiscal and funding limitations. Class schedule planning is intensively guided by reports tailored to answer specific questions related to curricular needs.

2. Use of evidence to improve programs and services. Please answer each question.
   • How is the college currently using student unit data and program and policy evaluations to improve programs, services and create systemic institutional improvement?

West uses a detailed program review process to provide an opportunity for reflection by the faculty, staff and administrators involved in each department, program and service on campus. Student unit data, both demographic and achievement outcomes, is provided for each department and program. The student unit data is summarized at the discipline, department, and college-wide levels. The departments then reflect on the data to determine what implications may exist for the program. When problems or opportunities are identified, the department can then develop an action plan to address the issue. Additional data is also used in the program review process, including labor market information, evaluation of previous action plans, survey data.

   • What obstacles is the college experiencing in using evidence to improve programs, services and create systemic institutional improvement (if any)? How
would involvement in Achieving the Dream help the college overcome these obstacles?

We need to find ways to involve more people in discussion about how to effect change, how to move forward with what we need to be doing. It has been challenging to convince people to be open to actually doing something, to be open and involved with change. Related to this is the issue that the same people are looking at and analyzing the data, without engaging new people.

An issue that sometimes arises is a distrust of statistics that can be presented in so many different ways. Often data and statistics are used against us rather than in supportive ways.

Another obstacle to the effective use of evidence is the overwhelming amount of data and information we receive. Often there is so much information about issues that are so complex that we do not know what to do with it, or how to prioritize options.

We hope that participating in Achieving the Dream will assist us with the fresh perspective provided by the coach and data facilitator. These experienced people may help us engage with sensitive issues such as prioritizing efforts to improve student success and equity.

3. Broad engagement. Please answer each question.
   • How is the college currently engaging stakeholders in problem solving and/or leadership activities?

West has a vigorous shared governance process that engages a large number of the campus community. The College Council is the lead group that provides recommendations directly to the college president. Within the College Council are the Budget Committee, the Planning Committee, and the Program Review Committee, which also serve in information-sharing and advisory roles. The Academic Senate, which includes the Student Success Committee and the Curriculum Committee, among others, also shares in leadership and decision-making.

Two examples of the commitment of the college to engaging stakeholders in problem solving and leadership are the Foundation Skills Think Tank and the Enrollment Management Committee. The Foundation Skills Think Tank was organized to bring renewed focus, thought and energy to improving the learning outcomes of students whose language and mathematics skills are not yet at college level. A representative group of people, including significant student involvement, drafted a Foundation Skills Plan as well as a proposal to continue and institutional the work of the ‘Think Tank.’ The result, after consultation through the shared governance process, was the establishment of a Student Success Committee.
The Enrollment Management Committee takes a broad-based and inclusive approach to
issues of enrollment management. Again, discussion and decision-making are grounded
in detailed review and discussion of data.

- What obstacles to engaging stakeholders is the college currently experiencing (if
  any)? How would participating in Achieving the Dream help the college
  overcome these obstacles?

It is noted and commented upon that the same group of people is involved in much of the
committee work of the college. The college feels the need to broaden the base of support
and involvement in college-wide planning and student success activities, and especially
to invite the participation of the newer faculty and staff. Participation in Achieving the
Dream will provide an occasion to stimulate renewed enthusiasm and focus on issues of
student success and equity.

4. Systemic institutional improvement. Please answer each question.
   - How has the college improved student success within the last seven years?
     What changes in programs, services, policies, or practices produced the
     improved success rate?

West uses three major metrics for assessing improvement: ARCC data, District/College
Effectiveness Report, and Core Indicators of LACCD Institutional Effectiveness. West
continues to face the challenge of improving student learning and student achievement
outcomes. A number of changes have been tried. Several cohort programs were
established: Umoja, FACE and Puente. Tutoring has been expanded. High school
outreach was enhanced, and then reduced due to budget constraints.

West has refocused its attention on student success through the use of technology. The
curriculum has significantly expanded in the area of distance education, accompanied by
substantial student services support, including online counseling and an automated online
degree audit system for student use. West has a thriving ‘Tech Fair’ program that
provides training in the use of technology so that faculty and staff will be able to fully
utilize the available technology.

West has committed substantial resources to improving the foundation skills program of
the college and to addressing issues of equity. The FACE (Freshman Academic &
Community Experience) cohort program provides a structured 1st year university transfer
and Associate Degree program designed for recent high school graduates that includes
pre-selected courses, academic counseling, and rapid progress towards transfer. The
Umoja cohort program is a community of instructors, counselors, students and support
services staff who are committed to the academic and personal and professional growth
and self-actualization of African American students and others. Program includes special
courses and access to scholarships, financial aid, career counseling, mentoring and more.
The Puente cohort program includes special courses and access to scholarships, financial
aid, career counseling, mentoring and more, with an emphasis on the success of Latinos
and others. The ACT (Accelerated College Transfer) cohort program was designed with

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mature working students in mind. The Trio program is a federally funded program located in the Institute of Student Excellence focused on increasing student retention, graduation, and transfer rates.

West has developed the use of ‘program maps’ which articulate the course sequence students should follow to complete a degree or certificate. The initial program maps were so effective, that they were expanded to more programs. From this point, the use of program maps was leveraged college-wide through inter-divisional meetings where class scheduling was refined to coordinate the offerings of multiple, inter-related divisions. The result of this effort was the ability of students to take larger unit loads since time conflicts were reduced, and thus to reach their goals more quickly.

The Mathematics Division initiated an effort to rent textbooks to students, in response to the rising cost of books. The initiative was so successful that it was been leveraged via a $1 million grant to create a college-wide book rental program.

• How were these changes evaluated?

The program review process and data were used to evaluate some of the efforts. A Foundation Skills ‘Think Tank’ worked over one summer to assess progress in basic skills, and to design a basic skills plan.

• How has the college scaled-up or improved upon these programs, services, policies or practices?

The college has formed a new Student Success Committee, which will carry on the work of the Foundation Skills Think Tank, to monitor the implementation of the Foundation Skills Plan. Based on the work of this new committee, West hopes to build upon and expand programs that have worked.

• Did the changes reinforce and leverage each other to bring about systemic institutional improvement or were they largely independent of each other?

Most efforts to improve student success are largely independent of each other.

• What obstacles, if any, are hindering full implementation of proven programs and services? How would participating in Achieving the Dream help the college overcome these obstacles?

A more systematic approach to evaluation of the pilot programs is needed to improve the programs. In addition, more systematic evaluation could help engage the college more broadly in support of the programs, and generate more resources. Currently most of the programs have no dedicated staff.

A concern that is often perceived as an obstacle is the question: Where will the resources come from? In an era of still increasingly reduced financial circumstances, the funding
resources for current activities are not sufficient, much less funding for new activities. We think that if we rethink and restructure to achieve greater efficiency, we may be able to do more with less. If we can be creative and re-engineer our processes we may be able to improve student learning without greatly increased expenditures. We plan to use the benchmark data of the Achieving the Dream effort to streamline operations wherever possible. We must use AtD data and information to assist with prioritizing educational efforts, and thus to increase student learning and student success despite the budgetary challenges of the current environment.

An obstacle related to this concern is the difficulty in discussing change. Diplomacy is needed in presenting ideas for change so that people can listen and be open. We hope that the AtD coach and data facilitator will be able to help frame discussions such as these.

A severe obstacle to leveraging programs that West has started is the State cuts to Categorical programs, such as EOPS, DSP&S, and CalWORKS, that serve low income, first generation and disabled students. A large proportion of West’s students come from these disadvantaged groups, and so feel the impact of the State cuts especially hard.

NOTE: Colleges will be expected to use student outcome data to drive decision-making about interventions that may need to be abandoned and others that hold promise for greater success. Colleges are cautioned against jumping to selection of intervention strategies prior to conducting a thorough analysis of ongoing activities and challenges during the planning period.

5. What relationships does the college have with potential funding sources that could support ATD beyond the three years of the grant period? What is your plan for securing or reprioritizing funding to scale and sustain successful innovations that resulted from participating in ATD?

West has an active and successful grants development office. West qualifies as an Hispanic Serving Institution (HIS) and as a Predominately Black Institution (PBI), and has received Title III and Title V grants based on these qualifications. West has both individual and collaborative grants, and has experience both as the lead institution and as the partner institution when collaborating with other colleges. In addition to federal funds, West pursues grants and partnerships with private organizations to support the work of the college. The grants that West has been awarded have resulted in the use of enhanced instructional methodologies college-wide and have enhanced the college’s outreach to high schools. The plans that are developed from Achieving the Dream will be integrated into the college’s grant planning and proposal development.

In addition, there is strong District-level support for West’s participation in Achieving the Dream. The Chancellor and Vice Chancellor will work with the Foundation to secure funding. Further, the District Budget Committee has allocated substantial funding to support the initiative.

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6. Data Analysis Capacity. Please answer each question.
   - Describe the college’s current or planned institutional research capacity to
     facilitate the mission of ATD to create a culture of evidence to inform decision-
     making. How will this capacity be sustained beyond grant funding for ATD?

   West has one staff person who is responsible for institutional research. This capacity is
   leveraged by shared utilization of research support provided through the LACCD
   Research Office. It is further leveraged through the skills of other staff people who can
   prepare specialized reports. The college also makes SurveyMonkey, and online survey
   tool, available for all faculty to use.

   The college has already developed a ‘culture of evidence’ and expects to engage in ‘data-
   informed decision making.’ However, the college feels a need to expand and deepen its
   use and understanding of data, and of the factors affecting student success. For example,
   one of the urgent needs is to understand the pathways followed by basic skills students, to
   develop a more detailed understanding of the factors which impede the progress of basic
   skills students, so that these factors can be more effectively addressed.

   The college is interested in expanding its capacity to make research data and information
   readily available to the campus community. The goal is for people to more quickly
   identify with the data and make it personally meaningful. On-line dashboard techniques
   have long been a goal, but difficult to achieve. The college anticipates the
   implementation of a new student information system, along with expanded data
   warehousing capability, in the next few years. This new capacity would enable us to
   further the work begun with Achieving the Dream.

   - What types of data analyses are routinely produced for use by faculty, staff, or
     administrators?

   A number of focused reports are routinely produced in connection with specific campus
   processes. As previously mentioned, enrollment management reports are used to guide
   the creation of the class schedule, as well as to monitor day-to-day enrollment changes, in
   addition to student outcomes. Student achievement data is routinely compiled, analyzed
   and discussed at a variety of campus forums.

   - How does the college incorporate these data into decision-making processes (if
     at all)?
     What difficulties do you anticipate (if any) in meeting Achieving the Dream’s
     expectations of colleges regarding the submission of annual student cohort data,
     the evaluation of student success interventions, and the collection, analysis, and
     presentation of student outcome data?

   Research capacity exists both at West and at the LACCD Research Office to prepare and
   submit annual student cohort data. West already collects, analyzes and presents student
outcome data. It is our hope that we can build on this capacity, and expand the level of analysis. Specifically, we need to expand the assessment of student learning outcomes.

We agree to abide by the commitments described in this proposal.

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