



Achieving the Dream: the Challenge of Attaining a College Education

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“We know that our success as an Achieving the Dream Institution is measured through the success of each person who calls Lake Michigan College their college.”

*-Dr. Robert Harrison,
President, Lake Michigan College
2011*

Overview

The Lumina Foundation for Education along with its seven partners launched the *Achieve the Dream (AtD)* community college grant initiative in 2004. This effort is designed to close achievement gaps and accelerate student success nationwide by:

- 1) Guiding evidence-based institutional change
- 2) Influencing policy
- 3) Generating knowledge about student success
- 4) Engaging the community as part of the solution

The Challenge

Research cited by the *AtD* partners states that:

- *For the first-time in U. S. history, the current generation of college-age Americans will be less educated than their parents’ generation, yet our workplaces require higher-level skills than ever before*
- *Most students who enter community college never finish with a certificate or degree*
- *It is much harder for low-income students and students of color to graduate*

Achieve the Dream Colleges

AtD believes that having someone attain a college degree not only fulfills the hopes and dreams of countless families, but that earning a college degree impacts our welfare as a nation. Community colleges are a vital link to employment, career training and our collective success as a nation. To achieve this, *AtD* institutions: 1) model a deep commitment to student success, 2) utilize data to identify problems, set goals, and measure progress, and 3) make lasting changes in policy and structure to improve student success.

About LMC

Lake Michigan College (LMC) is located across 4 campuses in southwest Michigan (Napier Avenue, Bertrand Crossing, South Haven, and M-TEC). Over 7,000 students annually enroll in both credit and non-credit courses. Its student population is 68% white, 18% African American, and 4% Hispanic. About 40% of all students receive some financial aid. Partnerships with *Sienna Heights University* and *Western Michigan University* allow students to pursue bachelors and graduate level degrees at the Napier campus.

LMC AtD Grant

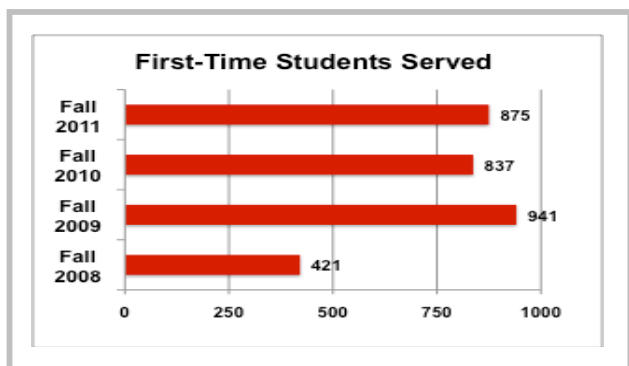
In 2004, Lake Michigan College (LMC) was one of 84 community colleges nationwide to receive a \$400,000 implementation grant from the Kellogg Foundation and the national *AtD* initiative to improve student retention and success. In its grant proposal, LMC selected to increase the number of first-time students who: 1) complete 24 or more credit hours within two year, and 2) return to the college from the fall semester to the winter semester of their first year. *AtD* provides coaching in the areas of leadership and data usage to guide these efforts.

To accomplish these goals, LMC has created an environment of committed leadership, faculty use of data to improve student success, and broad engagement across the four college campuses. A *Student Success Steering Council* was also formed to coordinate the efforts of LMC staff in planning and implementing the various intervention strategies necessary for systemic improvement and to assess the documentation and evidence related to the *AtD* goals and planned interventions.

AtD Intervention Strategies

The following is a list of documented *Achieve the Dream* grant intervention strategies that Lake Michigan College has been implementing in 2008 – 2012, years 1 -4 of the grant:

Intervention #1 – *Advising Transformation: provide first-time students with an academic plan to increase student engagement leading to higher rates of persistence and retention*



⇒ Increase the % of students with at least 1 advising contact

- Fully scaled (100%) with 3,074 students benefiting to date
- 85.0% of the 2010 cohort participated
- 2011 participation rate increased to 88.5%
- 2012 goal is 100% student participation

⇒ Increase % of students with academic plans (SEP)

- 2010 cohort rate was 77.5%
- 2011 cohort rate increased to 80.2%
- 2012 goal is 100% student participation

⇒ Increase % of new students with 3 or more advising contacts

- 2009 cohort rate was 48.6%
- the 2010 cohort rate increased to 57.8%
- 2012 cohort goal is 75%

⇒ Increase term-to-term persistence of students

- 2009 cohort rate was 44.6%
- 2010 cohort rate increased to 74.6%, a one-year gain of 30%
- 2011 cohort rate decreased to 71.9%, but still exceeded the goal of 70% persistence
- 2012 revised cohort goal is a term-to-term persistence rate of 75% up from 70%

⇒ Increase year-to-year retention

- 2009 cohort rate was 44.6%
- 2010 cohort rate increased to 45.6%
- 2012 cohort goal is 51%

Intervention #2 – *Developmental English Revision 095: first-time students that pass at least one developmental course persist at greater rates than those who do not pass or attempt developmental courses*

⇒ Increase the % of new students passing revised developmental English course in Fall semester

- Fully scaled (100%) with an estimated 928 total students benefiting to date
- 2009 cohort achieved 50%
- 2010 cohort dropped to 43.6%
- 2011 cohort decreased to 40.8%
- 2012 cohort revised goal is 75% up from 70%

⇒ Increase term-to-term persistence of new students needing developmental courses

- 2008 baseline was 74.4%
- 2009 cohort was 73%
- 2010 cohort was 74.6%
- 2011 cohort decreased to 67.9%
- 2012 cohort revised goal is 75% up from 70%

Intervention #3 – *Developmental Math Revision 095/095 Lac Classes: first-time students that pass at least one developmental course persist at greater rates than those who do not pass or attempt developmental courses*

⇒ Increase the % of new students passing revised developmental math courses in first semester

- 80% scaled with an estimated 788 total students benefiting to date
- MATH 090 baseline was 48% in 2009
- 2010 cohort increased to 51.8%
- 2011 cohort decreased to 42.1%
- 2012 cohort goal is set at 60%
- MATH 095 baseline was 38% in 2009
- 2010 cohort increased to 64.2%
- 2011 cohort maintained at 63.8%
- 2012 cohort goal is 70%

Intervention #4 – *CLS 100 revisions: increase enrollment by offering mores sections to part-time students; increase instructor preparedness through coordination and content*

⇒ Increase the % of new student cohort who enroll in CLS 100

- 70% scaled with an estimated 936 total students benefiting to date
- 2008 baseline was 20.4%
- 2009 cohort increased to 24.2%
- 2010 cohort increased to 25.5%
- 2011 cohort decreased to 23.4%
- 2012 cohort goal is 33%

Intervention #5 – *BIO 101 Supplemental Learning Activities: part of an overall science redesign of this important gateway course increasing out of class activities and technology usage*

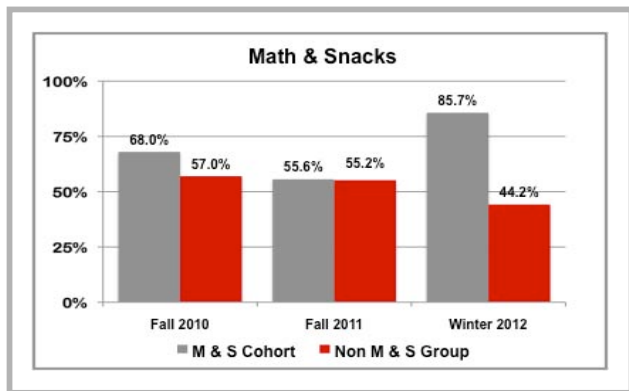
⇒ Increase new student pass rate of C or better

- Fully scaled (100%) with an estimated 184 total students benefiting to date
- 2009 pilot/baseline was 67%

- 2010 cohort maintained at 67%
 - 2011 cohort increased to 74.1%
- ⇒ Increase % of new students earning 24 or more credits in their first two years
- 2008 baseline was 33%
 - 2009 cohort increased to 47.4% exceeding the cohort goal
 - 2012 cohort goal remains at 38%

Intervention #6 – *Math & Snacks: mixed group instructor-led review in an informal atmosphere offered on 2 campuses (Napier & South Haven)*

⇒ *M & S students will pass at higher rates than non*



M & S students

- 70% scaled with an estimated 47 total students benefiting to date
- Fall 2010 M & S cohort exceeded non M & S group 68% to 57%, a total of 9% points
- Fall 2011 M & S cohort exceeded non M & S group 55.6% to 52.2%, a total of 3.4% points
- Winter 2012 M & S cohort exceeded non M & S group 85.7% to 44.2%, a total of 41.5%

Intervention #7 – *Orientation Pilot: research suggests that first-time students who enter with more “college knowledge” will persist at higher rates*

⇒ *Increase number of students who participate in orientation*

- 1% scaled with an estimated 10 total students benefiting to date
- 2010 cohort was 1% participating
- This intervention was revised in 2011 and will again resume in 2012
- 2012 goal is 10% student participation

Formative Findings

Formative evidence from the first four years of the grant confirms that the *Lake Michigan College Achieve the Dream (AtD)* program grant has made a measureable positive impact upon first-time students. The following claim statements summarize the aforementioned data for the seven AtD intervention strategies:

1) Advising

LMC continues to serve an ever-increasing number of first-time students through their transformation of academic advising. The 2011 participation rate of 88.5% is laudable, and it appears that the infrastructure is in place to reach full capacity along with their stated goal of 100% in 2012.

2) Developmental English

Student achievement in the developmental English courses has been mixed, but the curricular revisions and instructor training are in place to ensure continued growth in this area of focus.

3) Developmental Math

Student improvement in MATH 095 is notable, though mixed results occurred in the corollary developmental course, MATH 090. The current curricular revisions and staff training have proven to be successful in helping first-time students achieve higher passing rates in mathematics courses.

4) CLS 100

The changes to this entry-level course have resulted in some growth of passing rates for first-time students. Additional staff training and/or curricular revision may be warranted to achieve the 2012 cohort passing rate goal of 33%.

5) BIO 101

The additional out-of-class strategies have proved successful for students in this all important gateway course. Longitudinal data also supports that this course has positively impacted the % of first-time students earning 24 or more credits in their first two years of enrolment.

6) Math & Snacks

Though this intervention is fairly recent, data supports that student participating in the Math & Snacks program outperform similar students who do not take advantage of this strategy. Scaling up this strategy to impact more first-time students is necessary to gauge the full impact of the program.

7) Orientation

Much work is needed in scaling up this intervention from the current level of 1% of students served. There is not enough data at this time to gauge the merit and worth of this intervention strategy.

In summary, 4 of the 7, or 57% of the chosen intervention strategies (i.e. *Advising*; *Developmental Math*; *BIO 101*; and, *Math & Snacks*) have a documented positive impact upon first-time students. Continued implementation and scaling up of these AtD strategies is posited to influence the term-to-term persistence rates of first-time students at LMC, along with their retention rate from Fall to Spring semester of their first academic year.

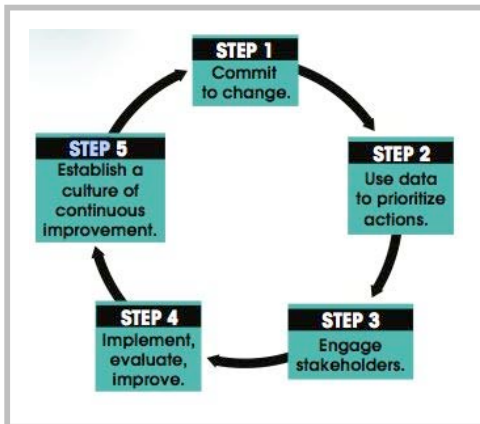
The remaining 3 of 7, or 43% of the strategies (i.e. *Developmental English*; *CLA 100*; and, *Orientation*) have yet to show a sustained positive impact on the growth and/or success of first-time students. For these strategies additional attention is warranted in revised program planning and implementation to ensure that these interventions support the stated goals of the *LMC Achieve the Dream* initiative.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are provided by the independent external evaluator for consideration by the leaders and staff of the *Lake Michigan College Achieve the Dream* program grant:

1) *Use of Data for Continuous Improvement*

In year 5 of the grant, a concerted effort is needed in having faculty and staff utilize available and existing data to make informed decisions about the *AtD* grant interventions to improve student performance. One way to do this is to continue to utilize and implement a systemic planning model, such as the one offered by *AtD* below for curricular and instructional revisions.



2) *Tracking of AtD Student Data*

Continued efforts are needed to collect data that identifies term-to-term persistence and retention data to assess the impact of the *AtD* interventions on student performance in developmental and gateway courses as well as college-wide. Continued allocation of human, time and financial resources must be coordinated at the administrative, college and departmental levels to support *AtD* goal attainment and student achievement targets.

3) *Administrative Leadership*

Continued exemplary leadership, ownership and involvement by the administration is necessary to achieve and sustain the level of success set forth in the *AtD* program goals and to further enhance student performance. The *Student Success Steering Council* is noted as one avenue that can be utilized that is impactful in fostering a culture of continuous improvement within the college community.

References

Intro to Achieving the Dream (2011). Retrieved September 21, 2012, from <http://www.achievingthedream.org/about>

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