

CUTTING EDGE SERIES

ENGAGING ADJUNCT AND FULL-TIME FACULTY IN STUDENT SUCCESS INNOVATION

No. 1



Achieving the Dream™

Community Colleges Count

 PUBLIC AGENDA

Dear Colleagues:

In recent years, student success and completion has skyrocketed to the top of the national education agenda, and for good reason. There is growing recognition that increasing the number of college certificate and degree-holders is critical to America's economic health. Community colleges are playing a vital role in addressing this national imperative, and institutions participating in Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count (ATD) are demonstrating how it can be done.

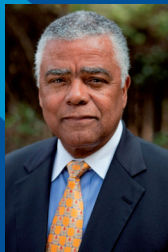
Over the last seven years, ATD institutions have fundamentally changed the way they operate. They have implemented the innovative ATD Student-Centered Model of Institutional Improvement and created a culture of evidence in which data and inquiry drive efforts to close achievement gaps and improve student outcomes overall.

While we are encouraged by this progress, and very proud of the rich national learning community that has been established, there is more to be done. Ultimately, increasing and accelerating student success and completion is what drives our work. It matters to the nation, and most importantly, it matters to every student in pursuit of a market-valued credential and a better quality of life.

A recent interim report by MDRC and the Community College Research Center allowed ATD the opportunity to reflect on aspects of our work that need deeper thinking and greater focus. The report, called "Turning the Tide: Five Years of Achieving the Dream in Community Colleges," identified some vexing challenges in community college reform. The report concluded with recommendations for next steps: do more to involve adjunct and full-time faculty; devote more attention to improving teaching and learning inside the classroom (especially developmental education classrooms); pay more attention to scaling up promising initiatives to reach more students; and consider more proactive ways of supporting colleges that enter with very weak data capacity.

ATD welcomes these important recommendations, and this publication is the first in a series of practical guides to address the challenges and ensure that every ATD institution has the tools necessary to move the needle on student success and completion. This ATD series is produced in partnership with Public Agenda, one of seven ATD Founding Partners. This first publication, called "Engaging Adjunct and Full-Time Faculty in Student Success Innovation" provides the framework, principles, and practices that will help colleges sharpen faculty engagement. We hope this guide and the subsequent guides will prove timely and helpful.

Sincerely,



William E. Trueheart
President & CEO
Achieving the Dream

Engaging Adjunct and Full-Time Faculty in Student Success Innovation

How to Use This Guide

This publication is intended to be used as a tool that helps colleges design and implement effective faculty engagement strategies on behalf of institutional change for student success.

Working within the ATD 5-Step Process for Increasing Student Success through Institutional Change, this report attaches a set of core principles for effective adjunct and full-time faculty engagement to each stage in the process. These principles are then considered more closely, and a set of concrete recommendations and practices is offered for implementing each principle.

Section 1, comprised of the framework, principles and practices, is designed to help college leadership make strategic decisions about when and how to most constructively engage faculty as partners in the difficult work of institutional change. It is intended as a strategic resource that can help colleges plan or rethink their efforts to engage adjunct and full-time faculty in their student success work. This section (pages 7 to 12) can be used as a freestanding deliberation guide for college leadership.

Because real stories and concrete examples are always helpful for colleges as they plan or refine their own faculty engagement efforts, Section 2 of this report (beginning on page 13) offers a number of mini-cases of faculty engagement in action at colleges participating in ATD.

For those who are interested in delving deeper into particular aspects of the faculty engagement issue, the Appendix (pages 19 to 21) provides a list of resources. This list includes scholarly research, conference presentations and additional case studies that colleges can use to learn more about the challenges and opportunities relating to faculty engagement in the work of institutional change for student success.

Finally, background information on the Faculty Engagement Workgroup and other sources of expert input into this tool may be found on page 22.

Introduction

This guide is based on findings from Public Agenda's research into the most promising practices for engaging full-time and adjunct faculty in institutional change efforts toward increasing student success at community colleges.

This current study was prompted by an interim report by MDRC and the Community College Research Center (CCRC) titled "Turning the Tide: An Examination of Round 1 Achieving the Dream Colleges' Progress After Five Years in the Initiative."¹ As part of its comprehensive analysis of the early experience of the first 26 community colleges that have participated in Achieving the Dream since 2004 as Round 1 colleges, the report concludes that the efforts of colleges that succeeded in establishing a strong culture of evidence shared several key features. One of the most important commonalities across these colleges has been the deep engagement and participation of full-time and adjunct faculty in the institution's reform agenda. This finding served as the primary impetus for Public Agenda's latest investigation into how to effectively engage faculty.

Over the past several years, Public Agenda – a Founding Partner to Achieving the Dream – has cultivated a strong knowledge and experience base in stakeholder engagement in higher education reform, and faculty engagement in particular. In 2010, Public Agenda published a report for Lumina Foundation for Education on promising strategies to effectively engage faculty and institutional leaders at two- and four-year institutions in conversations about the difficult work of higher education productivity. Drawing on insights from focus groups and interviews with a range of personnel, this work offered approaches for framing the productivity conversation, strategies for constructive dialogue and avenues for fostering co-ownership of institutional productivity initiatives with faculty.² From 2007 to 2008, Public Agenda worked with four ATD colleges to develop a refined method of conducting faculty-student dialogues to share in the development of solutions that address the obstacles to student success.³

In 2009, Public Agenda developed a short guide of principles and promising practices for community colleges to apply when engaging faculty in Achieving the Dream.⁴ The current report builds and expands most directly upon the earlier publication and is informed by several layers of research and deliberation. This current work used a multi-methods approach to glean the best thinking about and strategies for engaging faculty in community college success initiatives, beginning with a survey of extant literature on the subject. Combined with existing expertise, this review helped to develop discussion materials for online and in-person deliberations.

In cooperation with ATD and MDC, Public Agenda recruited a group of twelve diverse experts in faculty engagement and community college change initiatives to provide input on faculty engagement based on their experience and research. The work group participated in a week-long moderated online forum, responding to the discussion materials and comments from their colleagues. This online deliberation served as a launching point for the in-person convening, during which the work group participated in facilitated large and small group discussions to think critically about the most promising faculty engagement practices. The online and in-person deliberations were summarized in a draft report, which was submitted to the work group for review.

¹ Zachary Rutschow, E. et al. (2010). "Turning the Tide: Five Years of Achieving the Dream in Community Colleges." New York: MDRC. Available at: <http://www.mdrc.org/publications/578/overview.html>.

² Public Agenda (2010). "Changing the Conversation About Productivity: Strategies for Engaging Faculty and Institutional Leaders." Available at: <http://www.publicagenda.org/files/pdf/changing-conversation-college-productivity.pdf>

³ Public Agenda. "Planning Guide: Faculty-Student Dialogues for Student Success." Available at: <http://www.publicagenda.org/files/pdf/ATD-faculty-student-dialogue-workbook.pdf>

⁴ Birnback, L. and Friedman, W. (2009). "Engaging Faculty in the Achieving the Dream Initiative: Principles and Practices of Student Success." Report by Public Agenda to the Lumina Foundation for Education

To ensure that a diversity of voices was represented in this work, Public Agenda conducted a series of interviews with ATD coaches, full-time faculty and adjunct faculty at four community colleges. The insights from these interviews were integrated with those from the work group and helped to inform many of the recommendations that address adjunct faculty engagement in particular. By integrating an array of perspectives, the report that follows offers strong hypotheses that can inform how colleges engage full-time and adjunct faculty in institutional change efforts. Further, the utility of this report can extend beyond the ATD circle to the host of community colleges across the country that are working hard in their efforts to improve outcomes for their students.

Consistent with Public Agenda's previous work with Lumina Foundation for Education, MDC, and ATD, this report provides additional support for the well-established conclusion that faculty engagement is critical to the success of community college institutional change initiatives.⁵ In particular, faculty engagement can help such efforts by:

- Shedding light on critical obstacles to student success
- Generating creative and practical solutions to close achievement gaps
- Leveraging faculty expertise in "what works" to inform, drive and sustain change
- Fostering a sense of shared ownership and responsibility for change efforts
- Minimizing faculty resistance to, and improving implementation of, new practices
- Insulating new practices from common derailers

Keeping Adjuncts at the Center

Despite the linguistic clumsiness of the repeated use of the phrase "full-time and adjunct faculty,"⁶ we have made the conscious decision to explicitly and continuously include adjunct faculty when referring to faculty throughout the report. We use this phrase as a consciousness-raising exercise aimed at helping the reader remember to consider those individuals who teach the majority of students at community colleges and yet have been comparatively neglected in conversations about institutional change. By avoiding the temptation to take the standard approach and bracket out adjuncts in a separate section as a problem to manage, a temptation that indicates the longstanding challenge of integrating adjunct faculty into the life of the college and the core of reform efforts, our approach here has allowed us to sharpen our own thinking about faculty engagement and highlight issues and opportunities that may be unique to the circumstances of adjuncts. We believe the self-conscious and rigorous inclusion of adjunct faculty, even at the expense of elegant prose, is a useful exercise and one that can help colleges think more clearly about the critical work of engaging all faculty in institutional change.

⁵ Kennedy 1995, Roueche 1995, McClenney 1996, Zemsky 1997, Gonzalez 1999, Public Agenda 2005, 2010.

⁶ Throughout this report we use the terms "full-time and adjunct faculty," realizing that some adjuncts teach full-time and that there are other terms, such as "contingent faculty" that might be used to describe non-full-time faculty. For our purposes, adjunct faculty are those individuals who are not employed as full-time faculty and who typically do not have non-teaching responsibilities outside the classroom. "Full-time" faculty refers to those individuals who do have non-teaching responsibilities outside the classroom and who have been hired as full-time members of departments.

Common Obstacles to Engagement

Faculty Challenges

- Heavy workloads: Administrative duties demand a large share of faculty time (especially among full-time faculty), and the requirements of new promising practices are often labor-intensive. Busy faculty might tend to think of new initiatives as “add-ons” to those duties, and as unwanted distractions, instead of as opportunities to improve practices. Heavy workloads also make it more difficult to solicit faculty participation in professional development activities.
- Initiative overload undermines engagement: Adjunct and full-time faculty are more likely to engage with reform that they think is operationally feasible and that has long-term commitment from leadership. Because the presentation of new “best practices” is so common an experience, faculty may hesitate to invest their time in an initiative that feels like a “flavor of the month.”
- Lack of intellectual connection and “goal congruence”: Adjunct and full-time faculty may not readily see the connection between a new initiative and their personal/professional goals and commitments. Researchers observe that many of the best-engaged faculty have highly personal motivations for engagement, while many successful engagement efforts have found ways to help faculty relate new practices to their own values and beliefs.
- Resistance to mandates from above: Adjunct and full-time faculty often mistrust initiatives that they see as completely “top-down” efforts; this gives an impression that central leadership is insensitive or indifferent to the opinions of faculty and/or the needs of the school at “ground level.” Top-down efforts are also especially vulnerable to being viewed as faddish or fleeting, and therefore unworthy of support.
- External, rather than internal focus: Adjunct and full-time faculty are often, and increasingly, overwhelmed by a high volume of underprepared students or students who face a multitude of pressures, and therefore tend to naturally look to the failings of the K-12 system or other external challenges as the source of the problems and solutions. Refocusing faculty on institutional change can be a challenge.
- Lack of adjunct faculty integration: Many colleges have yet to develop effective infrastructure and practices for communicating with adjunct faculty and integrating them into important institutional efforts.

Institutional Challenges

- Compensation, tenure and promotion policies encourage old values over new ones among both adjunct and full-time faculty: In some cases, adoption of new practices is hindered by existing institutional reward structures. These are especially discouraging to those faculty who are less established and more sensitive to concerns about professional status.
- An intervention’s “deliverables” may not be the kind in which adjunct and full-time faculty are most interested: For example, the student data collected and produced through ATD might not include all of the students they teach or might not directly address the leading concerns of faculty (for example, student opinions of their past courses, instead of just student performance).
- Faculty autonomy and governance cuts two ways: A strongly autonomous faculty (or faculty with great influence in school governance) might be able to minimize “structural” constraints on faculty engagement, such as unfavorable hiring and promotion practices. However, a faculty culture that encourages autonomy might also insulate teachers from pressures—whether from administrators, students or peers—to adopt new practices or take on new responsibilities.
- Leadership turnover/instability: Frequent turnover in leadership threatens the stability of any initiative or practice that is not fully institutionalized. Turnover also creates uncertainty about the stability and level of support that an initiative will receive.
- Silos undermine engagement: Aside from impeding communication and collaboration among faculty in general, the presence of silos between departments, between types of faculty and between staff and faculty undermines efforts to engage faculty as reliable partners in institutional change efforts.

SECTION 1:

Engagement Throughout the Process of Institutional Change

For colleges doing the hard work of transforming themselves to become more focused on and accountable for student success, it is helpful to think about faculty engagement in the broader context of the change process and to consider how specific engagement practices might be employed at each point in that process. To encourage this kind of systematic thinking, we apply the suggested principles and practices to the ATD framework for increasing student success – a five-step process to guide institutional improvement. As articulated in the ATD Field Guide for Improving Student Success,⁷ the five steps are as follows:

- Step 1. Commit.
- Step 2. Use data to prioritize actions.
- Step 3. Engage stakeholders.
- Step 4. Implement, evaluate, improve.
- Step 5. Establish a culture of continuous improvement.

To emphasize the importance of engaging faculty throughout the process of institutional change, in the sections that follow we have maintained the five-step structure, but have modified the language used by ATD to label the steps. By thinking about how to engage full-time and adjunct faculty early and often in developing student success initiatives, colleges will be in a better position to sustain and bring to scale the most successful of them.⁸ One of the advantages of examining faculty engagement through the “process of change” lens is that it becomes easier to consider how to deploy strategies that are appropriate to the goals of the change effort, and that are appreciative of the obstacles and opportunities that exist at various steps along the way. Of course, change is never as simple and linear in reality as it is on paper, but this straightforward framework can help colleges make decisions about when and where to invest energy and resources in engaging full-time and adjunct faculty in ways that will maximize the power of student success initiatives.

⁷ Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count. (2009). *Achieving the Dream Field Guide for Improving Student Success*. MDC Inc. and Lipman Hearne. Available at: <http://www.achievingthedream.org/CAMPUSSTRATEGIES/RESOURCESFORCOLLEGES/default.tp#fieldguide>.

⁸ Effectively scaling up successful interventions requires thinking from the outset about how to build and deepen the commitment required to move an effort from pilot phase to standard practice. This is an area where the challenges of faculty engagement and scaling up intersect in important ways. Insights on scaling up successful interventions will comprise the next installment in this Cutting Edge Series.

Five-Step Process for Increasing Student Success through Institutional Improvement⁹

- I. Commit to institutional change and improvement.
- II. Use data to identify achievement gaps, assets and obstacles relevant to student success and to prioritize actions.
- III. Design practices/policies.
- IV. Implement, evaluate and improve practices/policies.
- V. Sustain, continually improve and validate practices/policies.

A Framework of Faculty Engagement Across the Five-Step Process

- I. When making the commitment to institutional change and improvement, it is important to **exercise leadership that inspires** a willingness among adjunct and full-time faculty to become active partners in the difficult and often uncomfortable work of change.
- II. When using data to assess achievement gaps and decide on specific interventions, invest in institutional research capacity to **create both a culture of evidence and a culture of engagement**, one that treats full-time and adjunct faculty as valuable partners in making sense of data.
- III. When designing strategies, **provide the resources, incentives and recognition** for full-time and adjunct faculty to engage intensively as tactical partners on the front line of institutional change.
- IV. When implementing, evaluating, and improving strategies, **institutionalize expectations and opportunities for continuous engagement** in order to deepen full-time and adjunct faculty commitment to change efforts.
- V. When creating the conditions for sustainability and continuous improvement, work to **span silos and nurture a college culture that is inquiry-based, collaborative and transparent**.

⁹ We have modified the language of ATD's Five-Step Process in order to demonstrate opportunities for faculty engagement throughout the change process

Principles & Practices of Constructive Faculty Engagement

In the following section, we take a closer look at each of the principles of engagement that were mapped onto specific steps of the change process above. By unfastening these principles from the five-step process, we hope to show that these are flexible concepts that may operate in many, if not all, of the steps depending on the specific context and goals pursued by the college. We also aim to add some texture and depth by offering specific examples and recommendations gleaned from both the literature and our many conversations with practitioners at community colleges.

1. Exercise leadership qualities that inspire constructive faculty engagement

College leaders who are particularly effective at engaging full-time and adjunct faculty tend to embody certain attitudes and exercise certain practices. They tend to:

- ▶ Consistently articulate the broad vision for change and diligently connect the dots between various initiatives and the central vision in order to combat a sense of initiative overload or mission creep among faculty.
- ▶ Establish an atmosphere of collaboration and co-ownership by coming to full-time and adjunct faculty with questions, not answers, and by viewing faculty as expert resources for deepening the college community's understanding of challenges, assets and opportunities.
- ▶ Respect the knowledge, expertise and commitment of full-time and adjunct faculty with respect to their subjects and students, valuing what they already contribute to the college and bring to the classroom.

- ▶ Recognize full-time and adjunct faculty accomplishments in public venues such as campus gatherings or college publications.
- ▶ Catalyze the energies of college administrators, staff and faculty by cultivating those who are willing to be early adopters and champions of institutional change.
- ▶ Appreciate that adjunct faculty teach for a variety of reasons and find opportunities to partner with those faculty that demonstrate a particular commitment to the institution and the success of its students.
- ▶ Make themselves accessible to adjunct faculty to give the institution a face and build investment among adjunct faculty in the college community as a whole.

2. Develop institutional research (IR) capacity to cultivate not only a culture of evidence but a culture of engagement as well

In data-informed initiatives like ATD, finding ways to engage faculty in data collection, interpretation and use is critical for success, yet creating data systems that are both accessible to and informed by faculty has proven quite difficult. A number of strong themes emerged in our conversations about the role of institutional research practices in relation to faculty engagement.

- ▶ Engage faculty leaders in helping you create data presentations that are relevant and meaningful to faculty overall, and that pique their curiosity and inspire their involvement in your student success work.

Principles & Practices of Constructive Faculty Engagement

- ▶ Establish routine systems for information exchange at the departmental level in order to effectively engage faculty in institutional research activity. For instance, IR personnel or college administrators may attend department meetings to offer opportunities for faculty to interpret, elucidate or inquire into data.
- ▶ When possible, hire IR staff who have not only technical but also social competence, and who are able to serve as data translators (not only number crunchers).
- ▶ Increase capacity of presidents and other college leaders to act as communicators and translators of data to the broader college community. When the leaders demonstrate command of the data, faculty will feel more confident that improvement decisions are well-informed.
- ▶ Take the time to show full-time and adjunct faculty how data are collected and analyzed; investing this time from the beginning can help to build transparency and trust in the data. Further, involve full-time and adjunct faculty in data collection and analysis activities by drawing on their skills and experience.
- ▶ Provide professional development opportunities such as workshops for full-time and adjunct faculty to learn how to use or apply institutional data.
- ▶ Establish channels of communication so that faculty can regularly advise IR personnel and college leaders on performance measurement indicators based on their first-hand interactions with and knowledge of their students.

- ▶ Develop vehicles for IR and faculty to collaborate on research that aligns with institutional change efforts. For instance, create opportunities for IR to support and facilitate faculty-initiated pedagogical research.

3. Provide the resources, incentives and recognition to inspire and sustain engagement

One of the most important keys to engaging faculty is providing the right kinds of incentives to inspire their intensive participation as tactical partners on the front lines of institutional change efforts. There are a number of ways to provide incentives and inspire faculty engagement:

- ▶ Give release time and stipends during those phases when engagement requires extensive time and involvement of full-time and adjunct faculty.
- ▶ Provide pedagogical resources to more deeply engage full-time and adjunct faculty who are subject matter experts, but perhaps not pedagogy experts in issues of student success.
- ▶ Offer high-caliber professional development opportunities that empower full-time and adjunct faculty to participate in the culture of inquiry and evidence at the college (build their data collection/analysis capacities).
- ▶ Reward full-time and adjunct faculty through formal recognition of faculty achievements, and acknowledge existing efforts made by faculty to boost student success.
- ▶ Extend departmental resources such as space, professional development opportunities, and classroom research awards to adjunct faculty who may not be as closely connected to the

Principles & Practices of Constructive Faculty Engagement

institution as their full-time counterparts, and make special efforts to recognize adjunct faculty achievements.

4. Institutionalize expectations and opportunities for continuous engagement

Regardless of their stage in the change process, colleges should look for ways to institutionalize expectations and opportunities for continuous engagement of full-time and adjunct faculty. By embedding engagement in institutional practices, it will be easier to build the trust and infrastructure necessary for a culture of collaborative problem solving. In our conversations about this, a few pieces of advice for leaders and institutional reformers emerged repeatedly:

- ▶ Make use of regular events, like convocations and orientations, to engage full-time and adjunct faculty, but infuse an element of interactivity into these existing channels. For example, a convocation might be used as an opportunity to engage full-time and adjunct faculty in dialogue in small breakout groups.
- ▶ Make use of existing channels of communication to engage full-time and adjunct faculty in new ways, and create structures that bring adjunct and full-time faculty into more creative and collaborative contact. For example, establish a process by which adjunct and full-time faculty are paired as instructional collaborators.
- ▶ Increase utilization of technology, multimedia and the Internet to connect and communicate with adjunct faculty on college initiatives, news, data and opportunities to engage.

- ▶ Establish the expectation for faculty involvement in student success initiatives at the hiring stage for both full-time and adjunct faculty, while reinforcing an expectation of engagement through faculty performance reviews.
- ▶ With faculty collaboration, create a student centered college mission, and ensure that change initiatives are linked to that mission for consistency and clarity of purpose. Keeping the focus of change efforts on student success will help to gain the confidence and participation of faculty.
- ▶ Capitalize on adjuncts' industry experience and connections when conducting curriculum and degree design (e.g., invite their participation on committees).
- ▶ Develop and disseminate standard operating procedures for full-time and adjunct faculty to utilize college resources that enhance student success, for example, research grants or event space.

5. Work to span silos and nurture a college culture that is inquiry-based, collaborative and transparent

There are a host of “us/them” pitfalls that can obstruct or stymie institutional change efforts. The most common divisions exist between developmental and general education, between faculty and staff, between faculty and administration, between academic affairs and student services, between faculty and students, and between full-time and adjunct faculty. Below are a number of engagement tactics and tools that can help span various silos, create transparency and foster collaborative problem solving in which faculty are centrally involved.

Principles & Practices of Constructive Faculty Engagement

- ▶ *Faculty Work Groups and FIGs:* There are a number of tactics fitting the acronym FIG that can be of particular value at various points in the change process. Faculty Inquiry Groups, Faculty Interest Groups and Faculty Innovation Grants are three FIGs that are employed by colleges intent on gaining strong participation by faculty in institutional change. FIGs often work best when they are designed to help engage full-time and adjunct faculty across silos—such as those that often exist between developmental education and general education programs, departments and types of faculty.
- ▶ *Adjunct/Full-time Faculty Dialogues:* The colleges that have an easier time engaging adjunct faculty are those that think strategically about creating connections between adjuncts and full-time faculty by fostering collaborative dialogue on issues of student success and workforce development. In addition to respecting all faculty as experts in their subjects and as deeply knowledgeable about student success, such dialogues honor adjunct faculty as having unique insights by virtue of their more direct connection to the workforce. Since many adjunct faculty work in the industries they teach about, tapping their knowledge about the “real world” application of classroom learning may be a valuable strategy at various points in the change process that can deepen adjunct engagement while also strengthening student success efforts.
- ▶ *Campus Conversations and Faculty-Student Dialogues:* Apart from engagement efforts focused on helping faculty communicate more effectively with each other, change efforts require silo-spanning efforts that extend beyond faculty themselves and help link faculty to staff, administration, student services, student voices and the broader community served by the college. Campus Conversations and Faculty-Student Dialogues are two approaches that have been used with great success by many colleges. Detailed manuals developed to help colleges deploy these tactics for engaging faculty are available to all ATD colleges in the resource section of the Achieving the Dream website.
- ▶ *Data Summits:* A large group gathering focused specifically on the meaning of new student achievement data to advance the college’s student success effort is a promising strategy for bringing together full-time and adjunct faculty. Data summits may be used as vehicles for bringing student services staff, administrators and faculty together in collaborative inquiry. It is important that these are designed carefully to create an atmosphere of collaboration instead of one of blame and defensiveness. Discussions about data can also be integrated into the context of some form of FIG, as discussed above.

SECTION 2:

Engagement in Action: Examples of Successful Faculty Engagement Efforts at ATD Colleges

We offer examples from several Achieving the Dream colleges that have developed innovative ways to engage faculty more broadly in efforts to improve student success. These colleges have overcome many of the challenges highlighted in the previous section. Further, their stories illustrate how the principles and promising practices we have presented may be operationalized by ATD colleges and beyond

Engaging Faculty in Data Collection and Analysis and in Redesigning Courses at Sinclair Community College

Even before joining Achieving the Dream, Sinclair Community College had an active institutional research (IR) department. However, faculty rarely saw the data that the IR office collected and even more rarely discussed or thought about how to use the information. One of the first things the college did after joining the initiative was to bring faculty and staff together at a “data retreat” to examine and discuss student success data.

Participants in the retreat found that their most at-risk students were struggling with math and English especially and decided to involve faculty from developmental studies, along with the math and English departments, in a problem-solving group to address the challenge.

Ultimately, they merged the work of faculty in these priority areas into two Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) projects the college developed for reaccreditation: math and writing success. The work teams for these two AQIP projects were led by faculty and were composed of faculty and staff from across the college.

While most of the attention at the initial data retreat and other planning meetings was on quantitative data, it became clear that there was also a need to collect qualitative data from students to understand why students were experiencing difficulty and to help design appropriate strategies. Sinclair’s ATD Project Director asked permission to interview students in ten developmental math and English classes to find out about their experiences in these courses.

The faculty were assured that all information collected would remain confidential. Students were asked about various aspects of their experience in the given class, such as where their needs were being met, where they were struggling, and how the course could be improved. After the notes were compiled, the ATD Project Director met individually with each faculty member to discuss what had been heard, and finally the entire group met to look for patterns in the data and discuss possible solutions to the problems identified.

The developmental course faculty who had been involved in these interviews greatly valued hearing what students were saying about their classes, and for their part, students appreciated the opportunity to talk about their experiences. Despite some early fears that students would focus on personal problems and gripes, responses focused on practical ways in which students thought things could be improved, such as the suggestion that students be allowed to work in the computer lab and that faculty post notes and worksheets online.

The faculty concluded that these class interviews should be held during the middle of the term, so

Examples of Successful Faculty Engagement Efforts at ATD Colleges

that instructors would still have time to make changes before the end of the course. They also believed that other faculty members would enjoy learning about their students' experiences. They became the first faculty to become interview facilitators and note-takers for Sinclair's mid-quarter student interviews, a process that had a faculty grassroots beginning. Each quarter, all full- and part-time faculty are invited to participate in a mid-quarter class interview. The interviews are facilitated by two faculty volunteers who ask the class ten questions and share the responses with the faculty member.

At the request of the writing success AQIP team, faculty interviewed the students in all sections of developmental English as well as those enrolled in the first credit-bearing English course—more than thirty classes in all. The English and developmental writing faculty created a “best practices” website where they could share what they had learned with the larger college teaching community. In addition, they worked together to write a successful “learning challenge grant” that enabled them to hire an outside expert on the teaching of grammar for professional development sessions.

Next, the ATD Project Director suggested to the math AQIP team that it use mid-quarter interviews to gather student information to guide a revision of “MAT 101—Introduction to College Algebra,” a course with a high failure rate. A team of four math faculty developed a questionnaire to ask students about computer-based instruction. Faculty also visited twenty-five sections of MAT 101 to interview students and to complete the questionnaire.

The ATD project director met with four math faculty to review the raw data, ensuring that there would be no misinterpretation and empowering the faculty to perform the analysis themselves. Based on the data, the course was substantially reworked, and faculty designed a pilot course to improve student success by using computer software, class tutors, lab time and other student engagement activities. Ultimately, as a result of the math AQIP work, the curriculum was revised into a new, slower-paced three-course series — MAT 191, 192 and 193 — which produced a measurable, if modest, increase in student success. Following the pilot year, full-time math faculty members, along with the math and English departments, collaborated in a problem solving group to address the challenge.

Sinclair reports that the process of working together on student success has been valuable for the math faculty who have been involved to date, improving working relationships and collegiality within the department and producing concrete results for students. The next step is for the college to find ways to engage faculty through its new Center for Teaching and Learning, which will provide support for faculty to learn more about effective teaching methods.

Using Large-Format Meetings to Strategically Engage Faculty in Achieving the Dream

Houston Community College (HCC)

At the beginning of the college's first implementation year, the Houston Community College system focused its annual all-college meeting on Achieving the Dream. Attendees included everyone from the Chancellor to the maintenance service staff, and the meeting

Examples of Successful Faculty Engagement Efforts at ATD Colleges

provided an opportunity to build on growing interest in ATD among the faculty and staff. The college's ATD coach was invited as the keynote speaker and was able to let the entire college community (numbering in the thousands) know more about the initiative's overall goals and processes, as well as to begin a discussion of the college's specific ATD implementation strategies while sharing some preliminary data. The meeting also included smaller breakout sessions where attendees could discuss each strategy with a facilitator and their colleagues.

HCC also partnered with the faculty senate for its annual conference, attended by roughly 60–70 percent of the faculty. Capitalizing on good relationships with the city and the Chamber of Commerce, the college secured the free use of the local convention center and invited the surrounding Gulf Coast colleges that were also ATD participants to attend the meeting, share successful strategies and compare notes on their ATD work. Speakers were invited from other, non-ATD colleges and universities to share their knowledge with the group in plenary session; for example, a representative from Kingsborough Community College spoke about his institution's success with learning communities. HCC was awarded an additional grant from the Houston Endowments to support this meeting.

Valencia Community College's "Big Meeting"

Valencia Community College in Orlando, Florida, offers an additional example of how a college can strategically use a large meeting format to effectively engage college stakeholders in decision making and data analysis. At the end of the college's Achieving the Dream planning year, Valencia held what they called a "Big

Meeting," inviting faculty, staff, students and stakeholders from across the college (including a few community members) to present and discuss the strategies the college was considering for its Achieving the Dream implementation phase and for input into the strategic plan.

The daylong meeting was comprised of several plenary sessions, each setting the stage for small group table discussions with a facilitator and someone taking notes on a flip chart. Participants were asked to help narrow down roughly 100 possible strategies into a final three based on the following criteria: Were the strategies ripe, scalable and effective? The core team presented work it had done ahead of time to narrow the strategies and cluster them into three categories (supplemental learning, learning communities and student success initiatives), but participants were still free to discuss any of the other options.

In the end, the notes from the small group discussions were collected and the data from the meeting were a part of the final decision making by the core team and college leadership. Valencia's Achieving the Dream Director, who attended the meeting in her capacity at that time as professor of mathematics, reported that because of the meeting's structure, people felt that their opinions were actually heard and their input would have an effect on the process.

Faculty-Led Task Forces and Engagement in Student Advising at South Texas College

South Texas College (STC) has worked hard to involve a diverse group of faculty in its Achieving the Dream work. Much of the college's success can be traced to the attitudes of college leaders, who told faculty early on, "We are going

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to transform this institution and we want you to play a big role in that.” Faculty were actively involved in the initial data collection work that was part of the early ATD planning process, and most attended a college-wide professional development day that focused on conducting a SWOT analysis of the college.

Faculty were engaged in planning for institutional change from the beginning of the college’s ATD work in a variety of ways. For instance, faculty leadership positions were established on the college’s Planning and Development Council (STC’s equivalent of a data team). Further, leaders from the faculty senate, the Council of [Department] Chairs and others were included on the Academic Council (which includes the Vice President for Academic Affairs, academic deans and other key academic leaders). Key faculty leaders were asked to serve as co-chairs of the original ATD task forces (comprehensive advising and student accountability) and the subcommittees that were formed as part of those task forces.

At STC, faculty members have led task forces in topics such as advising, assessment, placement and matriculation, and student accountability. The college has developed a very structured approach to task force creation and function that involves five key steps: (1) identify the issue; (2) conduct a literature review to find out what the experts say; (3) identify promising practices at other colleges, sometimes directly contacting other institutions to find out what they are doing that is working; (4) examine the relevant data on student success and review current STC practices; and (5) make a series of formal recommendations to college leadership and other faculty on how to make progress on the issue at hand.

Rather than signaling the end of faculty engagement in the process, such task force recommendations mark the beginning of a new and broader round as task force co-chairs work with the Vice President of Information Services and Planning to take the recommendations to all five campuses. There they hold dialogue sessions on the recommendations with a much larger group of faculty and staff, and explain the process by which the recommendations were developed. This serves at least two purposes. First, it informs a much wider swath of the college community about the issue and what is being done to address it, building awareness and, hopefully, a degree of consensus at the same time. Second, during the dialogue sessions, the task force gains ideas from a broader group of colleagues about how to effectively implement their recommendations.

After this broader process of engagement and problem solving, the task force presented its findings and recommendations to the ATD core team, along with an implementation and assessment plan. In almost every case, the college has implemented the recommendations of these committees, validating the effort that faculty and others have devoted to the process, and cementing their commitment to the ATD student success agenda.

STC has also used the power of faculty engagement through its work on faculty advising. One of the recommendations of the Comprehensive Student Advising task-force, co-chaired by the Dean of Student Support Services and the Chair of the Faculty Senate, was that the college should develop a faculty advising training program. Acting on this recommendation, the college instituted a new

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program to train faculty in advising, which also allows faculty to fulfill the service requirement in their contracts. Since 2006, more than 400 faculty have completed “level-one” advising training. Faculty members suggested putting a “level-two” program in place for those who wanted more advanced professional development on the topic. The faculty involved in the advising program meet with an assigned number of students at least three times throughout the term to make sure they are progressing and to offer support and assistance with problems.

The faculty advising training was the first large-scale collaborative strategy between academic affairs and student affairs. Aside from the semester-long training program, faculty also worked alongside the advisors in the advising center. The faculty advising training was also used to train all student affairs staff that holds a baccalaureate degree, so that they could serve as Beacon Mentors (staff assigned to gatekeeper courses for a semester). The Beacon Mentors must work closely with faculty, as they are required to meet with students in the class a minimum of four times per semester. During this time, student affairs also modified the job description for the counselors to include teaching one College Success course per semester as part of their 40-hour week. STC believes that this effort has accelerated the breaking down of silos between academic and student affairs, resulting in greater collaboration in addressing issues and producing new strategies to support students both in and outside of the classroom.

Faculty-Student Dialogues and Campus Conversations at Coastal Bend (TX), Capital (CT), Cuyahoga (OH) and Bunker Hill (MA)

Achieving the Dream has recently developed a set of tools for structured “faculty-student dialogues” and “campus conversations” to help engage faculty and other stakeholders in problem solving to help more students succeed. These tools and processes were piloted at four diverse ATD colleges: Coastal Bend (TX), Capital (CT), Cuyahoga (OH) and Bunker Hill (MA). The faculty-student dialogues are designed as a series of three separate two-hour sessions, each with a facilitator/recorder team and comprised of some combination of faculty, staff and students. In these groups, participants work through discussions about obstacles to student success, select student achievement data and brainstorm various solutions that might improve student outcomes. The campus conversations involve a larger number of participants from the entire campus community, with a combination of large group plenary sessions and smaller moderated discussion groups. The results are then reported to the ATD core and data teams and incorporated into strategic planning.

In some instances, colleges reported that the data they received from the dialogue groups helped to confirm and/or legitimize the strategies they were already planning to pursue as part of their ATD implementation efforts, giving them greater confidence to proceed. In other cases, administrators were made aware of new areas where they could address issues or problems relatively quickly, without a big infusion of resources. For example, students at one college complained that they had no place

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to store their lunches if they were going to be on campus for the greater part of the day, meaning that they either had to spend money to buy food or go without. Immediately the college bought a refrigerator that would be available for students, saving them both time and money. By addressing such “low-hanging fruit” issues promptly, the college leadership was able to provide concrete assistance to address students’ concerns and signal its seriousness about helping students succeed and establishing a culture of continuous improvement.

Many of the colleges that participated in the pilot described seeing meaningful attitude changes in how faculty related to students. In one case, a full-time professor who had participated in a series of faculty-student dialogue groups told an evaluator, “I used to be able to use my office hours as quiet time to get my work done. Since being in the dialogue group, the word has spread that I’m actually a pretty OK guy, and can help. Now I’ve got students coming to my office to talk to me who aren’t even in my classes!” Finally, the faculty-student dialogue and campus conversation processes can contribute to building a culture of evidence at the college.

For example, at Coastal Bend College, the college’s institutional research department completed a full content analysis of the qualitative data revealed in the dialogues and campus conversations they held on each of four campuses. The IR staff created a detailed presentation for the President, the core and data teams, and the Board of Trustees. The data are being used to inform the college’s new strategic plan. At Cuyahoga, the ATD core team is using the data from its dialogues and conversations in deliberations as the college ends the

“demonstration” phase of ATD and moves toward policy decisions that will facilitate more widespread implementation of student success strategies. The core team created a final report based on the engagement experiences that were shared with the strategic planning team, which is using the results to create action plans for the FY09–14 strategic plan.

Overall, the dialogues and conversations were a positive way to promote understanding and build relationships between students and faculty. Participants in the conversations were excited to be involved in a respectful dialogue in which their concerns, suggestions and strategies for action were taken seriously. Faculty and students both expressed great appreciation for the opportunity to interact with each other outside the classroom environment and said they would like more opportunities for this kind of relationship building.

APPENDIX

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