



# Achieving the Dream

Community Colleges Count

## **Readiness Assessment Due May 17, 2011**

Achieving the Dream has found that entering institutions are better equipped to build broad support and design successful interventions if they form a collaborative group to reflect on the institution's student achievement and equity work to date prior to the Kickoff Institute. Institutions completing this self-reflection are better prepared for the first year of Achieving the Dream work because the self-reflection process:

- Helps individuals on these teams build relationships and refine the vision for Achieving the Dream
- Aids in preparation for the Kickoff Institute, where institutions will be required to think critically about existing practices and policies
- Provides coaches with information about each institution so they can offer effective consultation at the Kickoff Institute

This readiness assessment facilitates appropriate self-reflection as it focuses on the four principles of Achieving the Dream's model for effective institutions. A five-point scale is provided to enable institutions to indicate the extent to which they have implemented various practices.

Institutions are not expected to have implemented the practices listed under the principles. In fact, the Achieving the Dream improvement process is designed to help institutions adopt practices like those enumerated here.

To complete the assessment, each institution should form a team of senior administrators and faculty and staff leaders. The team should meet and discuss the assessment. It is important that institutional leaders discuss whether existing institution policies and practices support student success, and what can be done to improve student outcomes. This is more important than determining a precise rating for each item.

Space is provided for the team to summarize strengths and weaknesses under each principle and, at the end, indicate what the team sees as the main opportunities and challenges to pursuing a student success agenda. Though institutions are responsible for developing their own plans, this information will be useful for Achieving the Dream coaches as they provide critical feedback on plans for strengthening evidence-based student success efforts.

Please submit a completed readiness assessment to MDC at [info@achievingthedream.org](mailto:info@achievingthedream.org) by May 17<sup>th</sup> in a single Word or PDF document with the file name "Institution's Name\_Readiness Assessment\_5.11" MDC will share submissions with assigned coaches.



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## Tips on Launching Achieving the Dream on Your Campus

A successful launch sets a tone and rhythm that either supports or detracts from efforts to build a culture of evidence for student success. The experience of Achieving the Dream institutions suggests that taking the following steps early in the process will enhance the chances for long-term success.

### **Broadly involve key internal stakeholders in the initial discussions about participation in Achieving the Dream.**

It is less likely that Achieving the Dream will be embraced as an institutional priority if it is thrust upon the organization from above, without broad consultation and support during the decision stages. The same degree of transparency and collaboration that the institution wishes to model in moving the initiative forward should be exhibited in making the decision to participate.

### **Make key leaders and constituents aware of Achieving the Dream.**

Institutions can engage key stakeholders in Achieving the Dream through presentations at meetings that bring together faculty members, student services staff, administrators, and community members. This can also be accomplished by hosting a “big” meeting to which all institution personnel are invited. In communicating about Achieving the Dream, it is important to help stakeholders recognize that the initiative is a journey more than a destination. Institutions must understand that the process for continuous progress involves constant evaluation, interventions, improvements, and sharing.

### **Select the core team and the data team.**

The persons appointed to the core and data teams should be well respected by the institution community. Selection of the core team leader is especially important. This person should be placed high enough within the organization — vice presidents of academic or student affairs often play this role — to signal that the initiative is an institution priority and ensure broad-based buy-in and support for the initiative. Many institutions also appoint a coordinator to assist the core team leader in managing the day-to-day activities.

### **Determine baseline performance.**

There will be many opportunities throughout an institution’s participation in Achieving the Dream to examine data, but to engage stakeholders, each institution should collect and analyze data on the five Achieving the Dream performance measures for the period leading up to the point of joining Achieving the Dream.

### **Examine promising practices developed by Achieving the Dream institutions.**

For example, research conducted by Achieving the Dream has shown that basic skill students who are co-enrolled in a student success class can substantially improve their chances of success. Further, students who complete at least 12 uninterrupted credit hours also have significantly higher success rates. While these strategies do not guarantee greater success for your students, the research suggests that institutions can use these approaches to improve student outcomes.



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## Readiness Assessment 2011

Institution's Name: Skagit Valley College

Date: 17 May 2011

Team Members Who Completed this Assessment: Tollefson, Gary; Paul, David; Pettitt, Maureen; Moore, Linda; Stady, Jeff; Bruce, Gail; Donahue, Mick

### Instructions

The Achieving the Dream process for improving student outcomes is designed to help institutions adopt and strengthen practices based on the Achieving the Dream model for institutional effectiveness. Institutions joining Achieving the Dream are not expected to have implemented all of the practices listed under the principles. Use the scale provided to indicate the extent to which each practice has been implemented to create a baseline against which to measure future progress

### Principle 1. Committed Leadership

		Extent of implementation				
		Little or None 1	2	Increasing 3	4	A Lot 5
1.1a	CEO and leadership team actively support efforts to improve student learning and completion.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X <input type="checkbox"/>
1.1b	CEO and other senior leaders have made an explicit policy commitment to achieve equity in student outcomes across racial/ethnic and income groups and communicated the policy to faculty, staff, students, and the community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.1c	Institution communications emphasize a student success agenda, including news releases, the institution website, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	X <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



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1.2a	The board expects, and the CEO provides, regular reports on student outcomes and the impact of efforts to improve success rates.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X <input type="checkbox"/>
1.2b	Senior leaders demonstrate willingness to support changes in policy, procedures, and resource allocation to improve student success.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X <input type="checkbox"/>
1.2c	Faculty leaders actively support a broad-based student success agenda.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Summarize your institution's strengths and weaknesses in COMMITTED LEADERSHIP:

The leadership is verbally and philosophically committed; however, action is sporadic. We lack sustained focus; we need to communicate our focus and develop action plans with specific targets and measurable indicators keep us heading in the right direction. We believe our participation in ATD will help us immensely with these efforts.

There is a broad commitment at the leadership level to helping students succeed, but it is not clear that all stakeholders have a consensus regarding what "student success" means. A shared vision of student success would be ideal—one that emphasized student achievement and performance—allowing all stakeholders to better refine their efforts toward achieving that goal.

Lastly, the college is sometimes challenged by the collective ambition of faculty, administrators and staff to undertake new and innovative projects to meet the needs of its varied communities and enhance the achievement and performance of its students. One of our core objectives is to concentrate on connecting different efforts so that we have "curricula and support services that are aligned to produce maximum institutional coherence."

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## Principle 2. Use of Evidence to Improve Policies, Programs, and Services

Extent of implementation

	Extent of implementation				
	Little or None 1	2	Increasing 3	4	A Lot 5
2.1a IT capacity is adequate to meet the demand for data and institutional research.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.1b Policies and procedures are in place to ensure integrity of data collected.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.1c IR staff capacity is adequate to meet demand for data and research.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.1d IR staff effectively educates and assists college personnel in the use of data and research to improve programs and services.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.2a Institution routinely collects, analyzes, and reports longitudinal data on cohorts of students to chart student progression and outcomes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.2b Institution routinely disaggregates student cohort data by age, race, gender, income, and other factors to identify gaps in achievement among student groups.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.2c Institution regularly conducts surveys and focus groups with students, faculty, and staff to identify weaknesses in programs and services and opportunities for improvement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.3a Institution routinely engages personnel from across the campus community to review data on student achievement and to help develop and refine strategies for addressing priority problems.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.3b Institution routinely evaluates the effectiveness of efforts to improve student success and uses the results to improve policy and practice.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



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Summarize your institution's strengths and weaknesses in USE OF DATA FOR IMPROVEMENT:

Our strengths are 1) our focus on student achievement/performance 2) the general acceptance of innovation as part of how we do business, 3) our many initiatives (maybe too many), and 4) the significant engagement of faculty and staff with regard to our learning structures and pedagogy.

However, need to be more consistent at being goal-focused and using data to measure our progress. In general, the use of data driven by administration rather than faculty/staff; however, there are pockets of very data savvy faculty and staff who use data for a variety of initiatives and projects.

Most faculty see student success as what is happening in their class rather than as a larger, institutional issue of students' achievement, retention and completion.

Few personnel understand how other schools have improved retention and completion. We could use a better sense of what data other school are collecting—and how they are using these data—to improve retention and completion.



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## Principle 3. Broad Engagement

Extent of implementation

	Little or None 1	2	Increasing 3	4	A Lot 5
3.1a Faculty meets regularly to examine course and program outcomes and develop strategies for addressing achievement gaps and improving student success.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.1b Faculty routinely assesses academic programs and teaching strategies from the perspective of current research on effective practice.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.1c Part-time or adjunct faculty is actively engaged in institutional efforts to improve student success.	<input type="checkbox"/>	X <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.1d Student services staff routinely assesses student success strategies from the perspective of current research on effective practice.	<input type="checkbox"/>	X <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.1e There is alignment and extensive collaboration on efforts to improve student success between academic/instructional affairs and student services.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.2a Institution secures active student participation in efforts to improve student outcomes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	X <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.2b Institution secures input from external stakeholders to identify causes of achievement gaps and inform the development of strategies for improving student success.	<input type="checkbox"/>	X <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Summarize your institution's strengths and weaknesses in BROAD ENGAGEMENT:

We have over the past several years used our “all-hands” in-service activities to focus on the data related to student retention, engagement and completions.

Faculty involvement in student success initiatives described in detail on Page 12. They also meet regularly as departments to work on curriculum, learning outcomes assessment plans, scheduling, etc.

The college is highly involved with K-12 districts with our AVID activities, curriculum development related to our Skills Centers, and Math curriculum.

The college has active and engaged Advisory Committees for all workforce programs. The President is highly active with the NW Higher Ed Consortium.

The college needs to do a better job providing focus by communicating that shared vision and connecting different efforts not only with the college community but with our community partners.

The Dean of Students and the ATD team will need to help connect different efforts and provide better vision. Part of that means providing improved, easier means for part-time faculty, full-time faculty, and staff to connect students who may be struggling with resources that can help them.

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## Principle 4. Systemic Institutional Improvement

Extent of implementation

	Little or None 1	2	Increasing 3	4	A Lot 5
4.1a Institution has established a strategic planning process that relies on data to set goals for student success and to measure goal attainment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X <input type="checkbox"/>
4.1b Plans for a given year are driven by a limited set of strategic priorities that have a focus on student success.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.1c Institution regularly evaluates its academic programs and student services to determine how well they promote student success and how they can be improved.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.1d Decisions about budget allocations are based on evidence of program effectiveness and linked to plans to increase rates of student success.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.1e Institution uses external grant funds strategically to support systemic efforts to improve outcomes for students broadly, not just for isolated projects that benefit small numbers of students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.1f Institution actively works to scale up and sustain pilot programs or practices that prove effective.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.1g The student success agenda is integrated with ongoing accreditation activity.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.2a The institution has a standing committee or committees responsible for guiding and monitoring efforts to improve student outcomes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.2b Major meetings, organizational units, and work groups regularly focus on student success.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.3a The institution offers to faculty and staff professional development that reinforces efforts to improve student success and to close achievement gaps.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.3b Induction and orientation activities for new faculty and staff foster a commitment to student success.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.3c Institution provides training to faculty and staff on using data and research to improve programs and services.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



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Summarize your institution's strengths and weaknesses in SYSTEMIC INSTITUTIONAL IMPROVEMENT:

Processes for institutional planning and evaluation at Skagit have been continually revised over the past decade based on internal process reviews and the changing expectations of the College's stakeholders. The processes for planning, budgeting, and assessment have become more integrated, transparent, inclusive, and collaborative. This cycle could be strengthened, but overall has provided impetus for institutional improvement.

The President interviews all candidates for exempt, administrative and faculty positions at the college to ensure that new employees know the college ethos regarding student engagement, achievement and support. At the beginning of each academic year, the President hosts a new employee breakfast where he again orients new employees to the college culture with regard to student success.

Program review has been conducted since 1999 at the college; however, there is minimal focus on student performance—other than the student Learning Outcomes Assessment Plans—but the process would benefit from additional measures related to student engagement and achievement. The college should also provide better assessment and accountability for programs (not just academic programs).

As mentioned earlier, the institution lacks a cohesive and aligned plan to improve student achievement and completions. We will also need to pay more attention to our newly-implemented core themes and how they can guide us in this work.

One of the notions that came from our discussions about this question, was the idea that in our committee and meeting work, it is worth closing with the following question: "how does what decided on or did today help improve student success?"



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How does Achieving the Dream fit with your institution's goals and priorities?

The college recently developed three core themes as part of the new accreditation standards and process. They are described below. We believe these are closely aligned with ATD .

## **Core Theme I: Fostering Quality Learning Opportunities and Outcomes**

*What it would look like: Institutional structure, programs, and services focused on creating access and quality educational programs and services that result in identifiable learning for students and employees.*

### *Core Theme Objectives*

1. Educational access for a diverse community
2. Quality, equitable student learning outcomes at both the general education and program level
3. Learning opportunities for faculty, staff and administrators

## **Core Theme II: Building and Supporting Healthy Communities**

*What it would look like: Institutional structure, programs, and services that create, communicate, and support a sense of community internally and externally, and contribute to the economic, environmental, and social vitality of the college's communities and partners.*

### *Core Theme Objectives*

1. Relationships and connections that create engagement and success in our learning environments
2. Partnerships with the community that contribute to cultural and economic development
3. Facilities, systems, and programs that are regenerative and sustainable

## **Core Theme III: Creating and Supporting Educational Alignment, Achievement and Transitions**

*What it would look like: Institutional structure, programs, and services that are aligned, understandable, consistent, and adaptable in ways that foster successful transitions across levels of educational attainment, and into the workforce.*

### *Core Theme Objectives*

1. Curricula and support services that are aligned to produce maximum institutional coherence
  2. Student progression and completions
  3. Student success in transitioning to four-year programs/institutions and/or to the workforce
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What other student success initiatives are in place at your institution? How will Achieving the Dream build on or work with these other efforts?

As noted previously, the college is sometimes challenged by the collective ambition of faculty, administrators and staff to undertake new and innovative projects to meet the needs of its varied communities. As examples, the following are recent initiatives at the college:

*Counseling-Enhanced Developmental Learning Communities:* The improved retention of students enrolled in the counseling-enhanced developmental learning communities during the first two years of this initiative led the college to require that all developmental learning communities have a counseling component. (The college continues to receive recognition for this work through the Dept. of Education grant and presentations at conferences, including the national Association for Institutional Research Annual Forum in May 2010).

*AVID:* Skagit is one of a few selected colleges in the country participating in the AVID (Advancement via Individualized Determination) post-secondary pilot project, which will assess the efficacy of specific student success strategies at the post-secondary level. Strategies being implemented include *Cornell Notes*, where students use a two-column note-taking model and generate relevant questions, and *Socratic Circle*, which moves students beyond simple "yes" and "no" answers into the realm of critical analysis and key observations of a given text.

*College Success Skills Courses:* Enrollments in college success skills courses continues to increase. A new CSS 104 (College Success Skills for Online Learning) was developed this year to help students learn how to take an online class successfully. In addition, the number of CSS 100 sections for fall 2010 was increased—all CSS 100 courses will be linked with classes that have a traditionally high enrollment of new students and lower than average success rates.

*Teaching for Understanding Project:* Faculty and administrators participated in a Washington Spark funded project to integrate college-readiness knowledge and skills into pre-college courses. The TfU framework will be used to develop integrated assignments for the CSS 100 federated courses being piloted starting fall 2010.

*Pre-college Information Literacy Research:* The libraries received three mini-grants for creating integrated assignments in collaboration with ESL/ABE/GED instructors. Three librarians and three basic skills instructors across the district received stipends for their work. Both the Dean for Library & Basic Skills and the Director of Institutional Research have been highly involved in the project.

*TRIO:* Skagit's TRIO program served 310 students although contracted to only serve 230. Thirty-six percent (36%) of the students served in 2008-09 were students of color and 16% were Hispanic. In 2009-10 the percentages were 43% and 36%--a 19% and 31% increase respectively.

One of our biggest challenges will be to connect and align our many student success initiatives so that our "curricula and support services that are aligned to produce maximum institutional coherence."



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What challenges will the institution face as it seeks to build a culture of evidence to support increased student success?

Budget issues over the past three years have consumed an inordinate amount of leadership time and energy.

Our focus will be integration and alignment; this will require a significant amount of collaboration within the college community and with our community partners. We have a strong interest in better communication and teamwork with Latino community.

We also want to develop dash boards or similar tools for each focus area; we currently lack a good system for developing this, but hope to within the year.

Our student-entry systems need to be evaluated, particularly orientation, advising, placement, and college success courses. Our CCSSE/SENSE and internal survey data indicate that about one-third of our students do not use advising services, but use friends and family to get information. Clearly, we need to address this.