

Achieving the Dream

Henry Ford Community College was chosen as one of only six Michigan community colleges to be part of the national Achieving the Dream (AtD) Initiative to help students succeed through broad institutional changes based on achievement data. As part of a national consortium of eighty-three colleges and universities, HFCC has dedicated itself to develop and implement strategies to improve student success and build a culture of evidence to justify the new institutional changes. During the 2007 planning year, HFCC gathered institutional data through an internal scan to see the number of students who completed developmental courses, completed gatekeeper courses, earned a “C” or better in courses enrolled, re-enrolled the following semester, and earned certificates or degrees. As part of the five-year initiative, this year focuses on developing our three initiatives that will improve students’ success rates. The \$450,000.00 grant, sponsored by the Kresge Foundation, provides the College with an opportunity to do this in-depth investigation and improvement of its policies using a broad spectrum of faculty and staff.

HFCC was able to generate support for the AtD Initiative by aligning it with the recently created three-year strategic plan. Also, the President held strategic conversations to get across-campus involvement with the Initiative. In addition, key college leaders were involved in choosing a steering committee to participate in designing the College’s initiatives. Based on many months of gathering data and deriving a solid understanding of the data, these key stakeholders provided the necessary support for the AtD Initiative to build best practices that would allow our students to succeed.

HFCC’s is truly a diverse institution with approximately a quarter of its student population being African-American, another quarter being Arab-American, and a continuing growth in its Hispanic population. This diverse population made HFCC an excellent example of AtD’s desire to show where equity and excellence promotes student success and those assumptions about who can succeed should not be hindered by demographic disparities.

Thus, HFCC developed three initiatives based in a culture of evidence that provides support for all students to succeed and to make lasting, institutional changes to help obtain this success. Based on its year-long internal scan, HFCC came up with these three initiatives: Increase success in developmental math, Increase persistence and retention through an effective transition-to-college plan, and Increase the preparedness of entering students through an effective orientation. For the 2008-2009 academic year, these three initiatives are moving forward through pilots, data gathering, and further research into best practices.

Developmental Math Initiative:

Over 90 per cent of HFCC students enter the College under-prepared in mathematics at either one or two levels below college-level. Of this group, only 40 per cent of these students successfully complete their developmental mathematics courses with a “C” or better. After reviewing the data, the Mathematics faculty have begun two courses of action. The first is to review placement into math courses to ensure that students are being placed properly. The second is to develop appropriate intervention strategies based upon best practices. At this point they have conducted focus group research, gathered data sets for Math 080 and 110 students, and sent their course masters to ACT for placement validation.

Transition-to-College Initiative:

In FA '07, 93 per cent of HFCC students entering college directly from high school required at least one developmental course and nearly half of all new students required three areas of remediation. It was recognized that a collaborative effort with high schools to identify weaknesses and implement intervention strategies would enhance student preparation and increase their success rates. Fordson High School was chosen as the pilot program partner because it is one of the largest feeder schools and has a large portion of its students entering HFCC requiring developmental courses. Presently, the initial data analysis is being completed of Fordson students attending HFCC during FA '07 and WI '08. In addition, the AtD subcommittee is contacting and reviewing other AtD schools with similar intervention strategies.

Orientation Initiative:

Approximately 25 per cent of new students do not persist after their first semester at HFCC, and another 25 per cent fail to return after their second semester. These numbers indicate the difficulty many entering students have making a successful transition into the college environment. Presently, less than 10 per cent of new students attend an orientation program. Research into Best Practices has shown that students who attend a well constructed orientation improve their chances of success, persistence, and retention. After an internal scan of our enrollment and orientation process and research of best practices, HFCC created a pilot orientation for the FA '08 semester. Students who attended these pilot orientation were registered for classes during their sessions, and these cohorts will be tracked for 3 semesters. They will be compared with non-participants in persistence rates, developmental and gatekeeper course completion, and academic performance.