



**ACHIEVING THE DREAM'S
INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY FRAMEWORK
AND ASSESSMENT TOOL**



Achieving the Dream™

Community Colleges Count

Most efforts to improve community college student outcomes involve relatively small innovations or changes at the margins. After more than a decade of experience, Achieving the Dream (ATD) has learned that improving student success on a substantial scale requires colleges to engage in bold, holistic, sustainable institutional change. ATD's Institutional Capacity Framework takes a comprehensive approach to directly addressing the emerging needs of the field to improve success for all students and to position colleges to undertake large-scale reforms such as pathways and successfully prepare for accreditation.

From the beginning, our focus was designed to help colleges build capacity around five principles required for organizational change: (1) committed leadership; (2) a culture of evidence; (3) broad engagement; (4) systemic institutional improvement; and (5) equity.

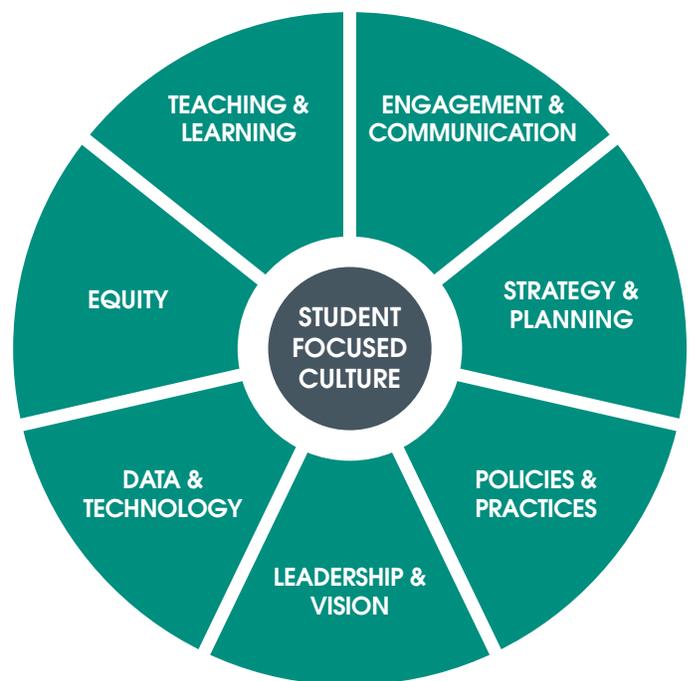
What we learned from that approach, the latest applied research, and the progress of more than 200 colleges in our national reform Network is enabling us to pave the way for the next generation of reform. Among the changes, the framework is designed for scale and pays more attention to teaching and learning and non-academic supports while keeping equity at the heart of the action. By identifying specific capacities, ATD is presenting a clear vision of what is required to create a student-centered institution.

ATD'S INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY FRAMEWORK

These understandings inform the next generation of work at ATD and our approach to organizational change. The framework has at its core seven essential capacities that must be in place for colleges to create the student-focused culture that promotes student success. With the capacity framework as a guide, our approach integrates and aligns existing college success efforts such as redesigning developmental education, engaging faculty in student success, putting data and information in the hands of faculty and advisors, implementing pathways, preparing for accreditation, integrating planning and advising systems, and going the extra mile to address students' financial challenges to help them continue their studies.

The seven capacity areas are:

- 1. Leadership & Vision** — The commitment and collaboration of the institution's leadership with respect to student success and the clarity of the vision for desired change.
- 2. Data & Technology** — The institution's capacity to collect, access, analyze and use data to inform decisions, and to use powerful technology to support student success.
- 3. Equity** — The commitment, capabilities, and experiences of an institution to equitably serve low income students, students of color and other at-risk student populations with respect to access, success, and campus climate.
- 4. Teaching & Learning** — The commitment to engaging full-time and adjunct faculty in examinations of pedagogy, meaningful professional development, and a central role for them as change agents within the institution. Also, the college's commitment to advising, tutoring, and out-of-classroom supports as well as restructuring developmental education to facilitate student learning and success.



- 5. Engagement & Communication** — The creation of strategic partnerships with key external stakeholders, such as K-12, universities, employers and community-based organizations, and internal stakeholders across the institution to participate in the student success agenda and improvement of student outcomes.
- 6. Strategy & Planning** — The alignment of the institution with the umbrella goal of student success and the institution's process for translating the desired future into defined goals and objectives and executing the actions to achieve them.
- 7. Policies & Practices** — The institutional policies and practices that impact student success and the processes for examining and aligning policies and practices to remove barriers and foster student completion.

The capacities reflect a heightened focus on what happens in the classroom and the academic and non-academic supports that are essential to student success. A culture of evidence is also embedded into all seven capacities, reflecting the need for colleges to incorporate data-informed decision making across their value systems. Data and technology have more prominent placement, as we have learned more about the power of technology to support students in moving into and through college. Finally, the principle of “systemic improvement” is divided into strategy and planning and policies and practices, giving deeper attention to the roles of these capacities in guiding and sustaining holistic change.

The framework brings improvement efforts under one cohesive umbrella. It weaves in Network colleges’

experiences and the best thinking from the student success movement with the successful strategies already underway on campus. ATD learning events, such as DREAM and the annual Data & Analytics Summit, and ATD initiatives continue to deepen our understanding of the capacities.

Each college undertakes the work differently, but the Institutional Capacity Framework and other ATD support services provide a practical approach to creating an institution that systemically supports the success of all students. We work closely with the college’s leadership, faculty, and staff to strengthen their ability to adopt high impact policies and practices that redesign the way students experience college both inside and outside the classroom.

THE INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY ASSESSMENT TOOL: A DIAGNOSTIC FOR ASSESSING STRENGTHS AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

To complement the framework, we worked with our Network colleges to develop a diagnostic tool. Launched in fall 2016, the Institutional Capacity Assessment Tool (ICAT) is a self-assessment that helps colleges identify strengths and areas for improvement in each capacity area. The assessment asks a broad range of college stakeholders to assess their institution’s capacity using four levels from minimal to exemplary. Colleges have reported that engaging a cross-section of representatives from the board of trustees, president’s cabinet, administrators, full-time and adjunct faculty, staff and student success teams results in rich conversations that surface critical issues. We recommend that the college collaborate with ATD Leadership and Data Coaches to review the results to identify strengths, discuss areas in need of bolstering and to generate actionable ideas for advancement. The ICAT also can be taken regularly to measure progress.

Colleges preparing for accreditation find the ICAT can be an important tool. Some accrediting agencies want colleges to use more than one form of assessment and to use qualitative and quantitative measures in the initial accreditation of reaffirmation. Although the ICAT was not intended to be a psychometric tool, it produces a numeric result with qualitative feedback from faculty and staff who participate in accreditation processes.

ATD’s Leadership and Data Coaching services are being integrated to create customized support rather than a “one-size-fits all” approach. Expanded professional development connected to the capacity areas will deepen the expertise coaches bring to their colleges. Consistent consultation of ICAT results, bolstered by targeted coaching, helps institutions better understand and prioritize their capacity building needs and take action toward desired improvements.

INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY ASSESSMENT TOOL IN ACTION

Changing campus culture and improving student outcomes is a challenging task that requires self-reflection, critical thinking and feedback, and coordinated action across the institution. The ICAT is a tool that can get this work done. Colleges that completed the ICAT are leveraging the results to guide strategic planning, prepare for accreditation,

launch pathways, implement high impact practices, facilitate discussions across the college and drive action. The ICAT is helping colleges examine the critical elements necessary to support student success and build capacity to transform culture and student outcomes.



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FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ACHIEVING THE DREAM:

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