

Richard Hart
Phone: 919-968-4531, x344
E-mail: rhart@mdcinc.org

News Release

Achieving the Dream Honors Guilford Technical Community College

*GTCC recognized nationally for innovative first-year programs resulting in increased persistence;
Receives \$25,000 award to go toward student success initiatives*

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. (February 2, 2010) – Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count, a national initiative to help more community college students succeed, and Lumina Foundation for Education today announced that Guilford Technical Community College (GTCC) has been honored with the second annual Leah Meyer Austin Institutional Student Success Leadership Award. GTCC received the award during the opening of the annual Achieving the Dream Strategy Institute in Charlotte, NC.

Guilford Tech, the fourth-largest community college in North Carolina with nearly 14,000 students on four campuses, is being recognized for its unique and effective “front door experience,” which combines intensive first-year student support services with a major physical and functional restructuring of the school’s student services facilities. The changes to the school’s advisement and student orientation model, along with the student services facilities themselves, were informed by student and faculty input and data gathered and analyzed as part of its work with Achieving the Dream.

Conceived in 2004, Achieving the Dream has expanded to more than 100 institutions in 22 states, reaching nearly one million students. ATD is focused on creating a “culture of evidence” on community college campuses in which data collection and analysis drive efforts to identify problems that prevent students from succeeding—particularly low-income students and students of color—and develop programs to help them stay in school and receive a certificate or diploma.

“The Guilford Technical Community College leadership, faculty, staff and students have revolutionized the culture at the school,” said Dr. William Trueheart, CEO of Achieving the Dream. “This is truly a lesson in the power of high-level commitment and well-focused, evidence-based decision making.”

“Participating in Achieving the Dream helped us make tremendous changes in the culture of our college,” said GTCC President Donald W. Cameron. “The data and feedback that we now collect and analyze has helped identify some major pedagogical and structural inefficiencies in our processes. In our 50-year history, there has never been an initiative that has produced more meaningful involvement of the total college community and yielded such beneficial results.”

Involved with ATD since 2004, GTCC’s early conversations and data analysis elevated the need to make dramatic changes in the maze of departments and procedures students had to navigate when they enrolled. As a result, the college committed more than \$300,000 in capital funds to renovate facilities and relocated admissions, testing, financial aid, counseling, and advising services into a central location.

Focus on Student Success

By seeking student and faculty input, collecting data and following evidence rather than well-intentioned intuition, GTCC has reshaped its institutional culture and put its focus squarely on identifying effective programs and processes that will lead directly to student success, particularly among higher-risk, developmental education students.

The college piloted 15 total projects, 11 of which continue today. One of the most productive programs has been GTCC's reorganized orientation process. The new Student Orientation Advisement and Registration (SOAR) initiative has enhanced the process by changing the original one-hour orientation seminar to a more comprehensive three-hour orientation that now includes the addition of advising and registration support. GTCC is also scaling up pre-placement refresher courses, intensive advisement of entering developmental education students, and case management services for higher-risk developmental education students.

Efforts are Paying Off

Findings from its evaluations of the SOAR program showed that new students who participated in the first SOAR pilot persisted into spring 2006 at a rate of 79% compared to 64% for new students who did not. Longitudinal data indicates students who go through SOAR persist at a higher rate in subsequent semesters than those who do not go through the voluntary program. More than 12,000 students have now gone through SOAR, which GTCC continues to revise based on student feedback, observational data, and technological advances.

“What we’ve come to understand is that one size does not fit all,” said President Cameron. “We are now committed to an ongoing, constantly evolving process that thrives on a continuous flow of student and faculty input, quantitative analysis, and other key success indicators.”

About the Award

The Leah Meyer Austin Award, sponsored by Lumina and administered by the American Association of Community Colleges, recognizes outstanding institutional achievement in creating excellence and equity through: 1) committed leadership; 2) use of evidence to improve policies, programs, and services; 3) broad engagement; and 4) systemic institutional improvement.

“Lumina Foundation is thrilled to sponsor this award and recognize the tremendous progress made by Guilford Technical Community College while simultaneously honoring the vision of Leah Meyer Austin, our former colleague,” said Lumina President and CEO Jamie P. Merisotis. “Leah’s commitment to student success at all levels is very much in line with Guilford Tech’s efforts.” Meyer Austin is a former Senior Vice President at Lumina Foundation for Education and shaped the development of Achieving the Dream.

Guilford Tech may use the \$25,000 cash award for any student success purpose it deems appropriate. Achieving the Dream also gave Special Recognition to South Texas College (McAllen, TX) for its work in developing a college-going climate in poor, Hispanic communities along the U.S.-Mexican border, and Zane State College (Zanesville, OH) which serves low-income residents of rural Appalachia. These colleges each received \$5,000 to use toward student success programs and initiatives.

[About Achieving the Dream:](#) Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count helps more community college students succeed, particularly students of color and low-income students. The initiative works on multiple fronts — including efforts on campuses and in research, public engagement and public policy — and emphasizes the use of data to drive change. Achieving the Dream was launched in 2004, with funding provided by Lumina Foundation for

Education. Other organizations providing technical and other support to the colleges and states include: the American Association of Community Colleges; the Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas-Austin; the Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University; Jobs for the Future; MDC; MDRC; and Public Agenda. MDC is the initiative's managing partner.