

*Leah Meyer Austin*  
*Institutional Student Success Leadership Award*  
**—2012—**



**Achieving the Dream Honors**  
**Zane State College**

Earns National Recognition and Prize Money for  
Closing Achievement Gaps and Increasing Student Retention

The Lumina Foundation created the “Leah Award” for institutional transformation in 2008 in honor of Leah Meyer Austin, its former Senior Vice President for Program Development and Organizational Learning. Her visionary leadership shaped the development of the national Achieving the Dream initiative to improve student success at the nation’s community colleges, particularly for students of color and low-income students. Applications for the award are accepted solely from institutions actively affiliated with Achieving the Dream.

Designed to reinforce the goals and values of Achieving the Dream, this college leadership award recognizes outstanding achievement in creating equity and excellence through policies, practices, and an institutional culture and climate that support and increase student success. The winning college may use the \$25,000 cash award as it deems appropriate for furthering student success.

# Zane State College

Zanesville, Ohio ■ Paul R. Brown, President ■ [www.zanestate.edu](http://www.zanestate.edu)

Zane State College receives the 2012 Leah Meyer Austin Institutional Student Success Award for closing the gap between developmental education students and college-ready students, and improving the retention of drop-out prone students. Zane State College's Achieving the Dream strategies have changed the college's culture and raised the prospects of residents of Zanesville and the other low-income, rural Appalachian Ohio communities served by the college. In Fall 2011, 87% of the college's 2,900 students received financial aid; 76% needed developmental courses.

The Austin Award recognizes the superb management of the college's leadership team, as well as the college's closing of gaps between underprepared and college-ready students, and its steady graduation rate amid exponential enrollment growth of high-need students.

## Developmental Education Completion Improves As Enrollments Grow

Despite steep challenges, the average success rate across all developmental courses at Zane State College (ZSC) is 78%. The college has recorded double digit increases in the rate of students completing all their developmental requirements during their first year. Most strikingly, developmental education students are closing the gap with college-ready students in gatekeeper courses. Since 2009, three out of four students are succeeding in college-level gatekeeper courses irrespective of their initial placement status. And lately, students who began in developmental education have outnumbered college-ready students on the honor roll.

The college's advances on various student success measures have occurred during a period of unprecedented enrollment growth, with disproportionately high numbers of students who need developmental education. The college serves three Appalachian Ohio counties where high unemployment

and poverty pervade residents' lives. By Fall 2010, the 2,100 students enrolled in Zane State College's developmental education courses exceeded by 500 students the college's total enrollment in Fall 2005, when it joined Achieving the Dream as a Round Two college.

Remarkably, Zane State College's improved retention rates far surpass those of other Round Two colleges. The college has sustained a 23% three-year graduation rate, according to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. In addition to the 23% of the 2007 cohort who graduated within three years, 38% persisted at Zane State College or another institution, raising the overall success rate to 60%. When developmental education students are included in the college's on-time graduation calculation, the graduation rate increases by 10 percentage points.

## Exemplary Leadership

Zane State College has "moved the needle" on student success with a persistent, consistent leadership team and the systematic use of data to inform and engage faculty and staff in integrated student success strategies. While nearly half of the college's employees have been employed at the college for five or fewer years due to retirements and the college's growth, Zane State College's Achieving the Dream effort has been led by Paul R. Brown, president; Chad Brown, vice president for Academic Services and Workforce Development; Rebecca Ament, associate dean for Developmental Education; and Stacie Mahaffey, director of the Student Success Center.

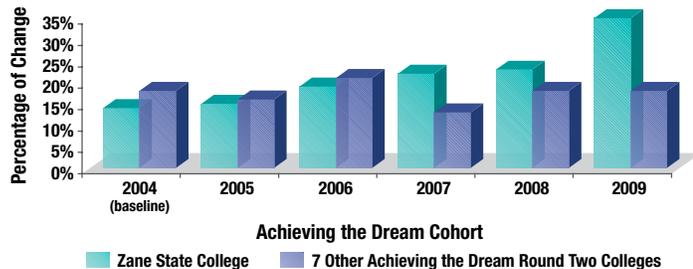
After examining the academic and non-academic risk factors faced by its racially homogeneous (93% Caucasian) student population, college leaders chose to focus efforts on strengthening advising services for first-year students who place in developmental math, implementing a case-management approach for drop-out prone students, and developing a comprehensive first-year experience.

From the outset, the team wove student success work into its strategic plan and continuous improvement framework. Data-informed decision-making is at the center of the college's operations and the conceptual model devised and revised to shape its project management and communications processes. The model reinforces the holistic approach to all improvement initiatives.

Significant, ongoing investments in professional development facilitated broader understanding among college employees about the college's "personal touch" philosophy, its access mission, and the realities of growing up in generational poverty that shape so many of its students' attitudes, behaviors, and expectations. The college's monthly town-hall style employee meetings provide updates on student success initiatives.

"Our issues are poverty related," explains President Brown. "As we began the Achieving the Dream journey we realized the importance of understanding the culture of poverty in Appalachia and the importance

**Percentage of Developmental Math Students Completing All Developmental Math in Their 1<sup>st</sup> Year of Enrollment**



By 2009, more than one-third of ZSC students who needed developmental math completed this requirement during their first year of enrollment. ZSC's one-year developmental course completion rate in math lagged behind its Round Two Achieving the Dream counterparts in 2004, but has surpassed them by an increasingly wide margin since 2007. In 2009, 65% of developmental English students and 59% of developmental reading students at ZSC completed these requirements in their first year of enrollment.

of strategies that work within that culture to advance students' success."

Respect, responsiveness, and responsibility serve as core values to the college's personal touch philosophy. The expectation that employees "model and teach these three Rs to influence student development of behaviors that will lead to academic, professional, and personal success" is written into every job description and included in each employee's annual evaluation.

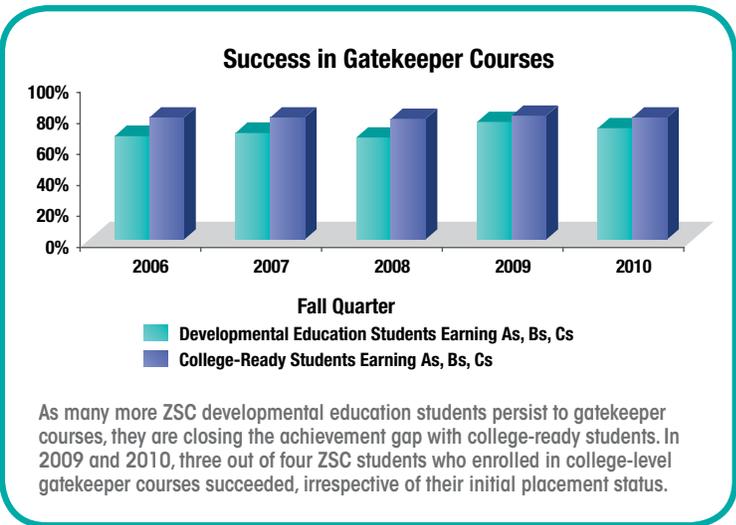
### Retention's Return on Investment

Early in its Achieving the Dream journey the college redefined access to include retention. Elevating the student services dean's position to the vice presidential level and making developmental education an academic department are examples of the organizational steps the administrative leadership team and trustees took to emphasize their commitment to this goal. "Access is getting more people in, but it's also retaining those students that you have," President Brown said, adding, "Our work has shown that these up-front investments to retain new students pay for themselves over time."

The college obtained grants to start innovative programs like QuickStart to College, which it developed in partnership with the Ohio Learning Network, Owens Community College, Rhodes State College, and the Lumina Foundation for Education. This free, eight-week program is for students who are unsure about their ability to enter college successfully and those who try to register late without completing a FAFSA. Tuition from QuickStart students who went on to enroll at the college has sustained the program. The college leveraged the QuickStart results for Title III, Developmental Education Initiative (DEI), and TRIO grant opportunities that it has used to expand multilevel developmental education opportunities. These include conditional admission, MathStart, learning communities, and pre-enrollment computer training.

### Math Advising Initiative's Strong Outcomes

The Math Advising Initiative exemplifies a new service that leads to positive student outcomes. After identifying developmental math as a significant hurdle, the college held focus groups to learn why its first-generation college students were not completing developmental

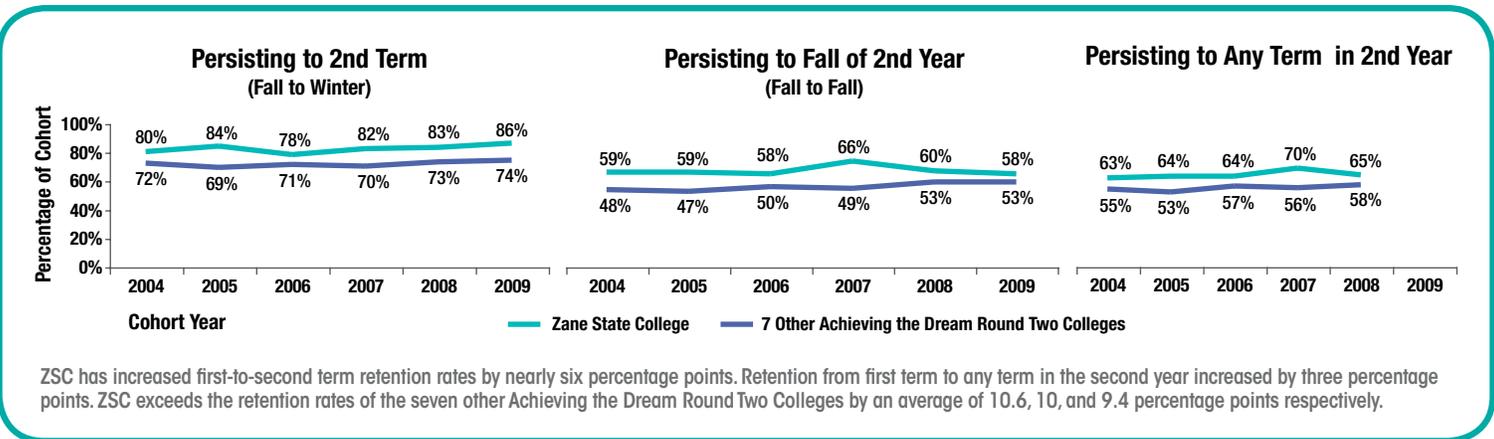


math. The Math Advising Initiative was then designed to get students to take math during their first quarters and to help them persist with an early alert system. This system has a dedicated math advisor interact with students who exhibit risky academic behaviors by phone, email, and face-to-face appointments to ensure that they receive appropriate interventions.

Math Advising was so successful that Zane State College expanded its attentive advising services to all developmental students as part of DEI. As a result, the percentage of students completing developmental education coursework in their first year of enrollment increased significantly between 2004 and 2009. First year completion of developmental English requirements increased by 24 percentage points; first-year completion of developmental reading increased by 13 percentage points; and first-year completion of developmental math increased by 21 percentage points.

The creation of linked developmental and prerequisite courses has helped developmental education students gain momentum and improve the rate of those earning As, Bs, or Cs in gatekeeper courses. The linked courses have improved interactions between developmental education faculty and other faculty who previously did not routinely work together.

Zane State College became an Achieving Dream Leader College in 2009.



## For Culture Change

# Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas

Helena, Arkansas ■ Steven F. Murray, Chancellor ■ [www.pccua.edu](http://www.pccua.edu)

Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas (Phillips) receives special recognition for using Achieving the Dream to reinvent itself and to transform how it serves students. As Chancellor Steven F. Murray says, the college's commitment to student success "has become a part of the cultural air we breathe and has changed the way we see ourselves and define our work."

Phillips has changed from an institution focused on enrollment and teaching to a college focused on students and their success through learning. Its strategies include redesigning its entire developmental education curricula; implementing Supplemental Learning Labs; adding 30 contact hours in each developmental education course; creating an additional developmental reading level; and providing professional development to engage faculty more substantially in improving student learning outcomes.

The college also added intrusive advising through its Early Alert Program and expanded other student support services to meet the needs of the approximately 90% of incoming students who are placed into at least one developmental education course.

The college has seen positive results since it changed both the content and delivery of developmental reading, writing, and math in Fall 2007:

- 66% of students have successfully completed developmental education courses compared to 55% in the 2004-2006 cohorts.
- 74% of students have persisted term-to-term compared to 67% in the 2004-2006 cohorts.
- 42% of students have persisted fall-to-fall compared to 33% in the 2004-2006 cohorts.

Phillips' commitment to evidence-informed decision-making processes is evident in its new Minority Male Initiative. It began when college personnel determined that African American males' retention and completion rates in Basic Writing I and II and Freshman English were improving, but not at the same pace as other populations.

During its first year in Achieving the Dream, Phillips provided every employee with a copy of the book *Bridges Out of Poverty*. The college then held many large and small group meetings about the cultural disconnections between students who have lived in generational

poverty and faculty and staff members' middle-class values. (According to the 2010 census, three of the five counties Phillips serves are among the 100 poorest in the nation.) As a result of these discussions, employees came to see that many of the problems they regarded as student issues were influenced by organizational structures that could be changed.

The college continues to use common readers to explore the challenges of poverty and racism in the non-threatening environment it strives to provide on its three campuses. Local young people's reference to Helena, the largest city in Phillips' service area, as "Hell Town" hints at the racial strife and civic dysfunction that accompany the region's poverty. The college has found that using novels, such as *Them* and *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, makes it easier for people to talk about difficult topics.

As a way of continuing the conversations, a group of Phillips faculty and staff, working with students from the Clinton School for Public Service, developed a curriculum for a series of small group, dialogue-to-action conversations around the issue of race. Piloted in 2011, the curriculum is being delivered to faculty, staff, and students this year and will be expanded to include the external community next year.

Recognition that students succeed within the context of family and community led Phillips to establish a Center for Working Families where success coaches teach financial literacy, wealth-building, and employability skills. The college's foundation created the Great River Promise to provide gap scholarship funding to cover tuition and mandatory fees at Phillips for all students who graduate from high school in Phillips and Arkansas counties.

Leadership by Chancellor Murray and other Achieving the Dream presidents and chancellors led to the development of a statewide student success initiative, funded with a \$14 million Department of Labor grant. The success measures for the state's new performance-based funding requirements grew out of the experiences of Phillips and the other Arkansas Achieving the Dream colleges, transforming Arkansas' entire two-year college system. Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas became an Achieving the Dream Leader College in 2011.



The Leah Meyer Austin Institutional Student Success Leadership Award is sponsored by the Lumina Foundation and administered by the American Association of Community Colleges.

#### Achieving the Dream Founding Partners:

American Association of Community Colleges ■ Community College Leadership Program, University of Texas-Austin ■ Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University ■ Jobs for the Future ■ MDC ■ MDRC ■ Public Agenda