

## ACHIEVING THE DREAM HONORS

# South Texas College



Data. Reform. Equity.  
Achievement. Movement.

## LEAH MEYER AUSTIN AWARD 2013

Formerly known as the Leah Meyer Austin Institutional Student Success Leadership Award, the Leah Meyer Austin Award was established in October 2008 by the Lumina Foundation. This award recognizes outstanding institutional achievement in creating excellence and equity through policies, practices, and institutional culture to support and increase student success, with particular attention to low-income students and students of color. The winning college may use the

\$25,000 cash award as it deems appropriate for furthering student success. The 2013 Leah Meyer Austin Award is made possible by the generous support of The Kresge Foundation and given in honor of Leah Meyer Austin, former Senior Vice President for Program Development and Organizational Learning at the Lumina Foundation and current Achieving the Dream board member. Austin's visionary leadership shaped the development of Achieving the Dream.

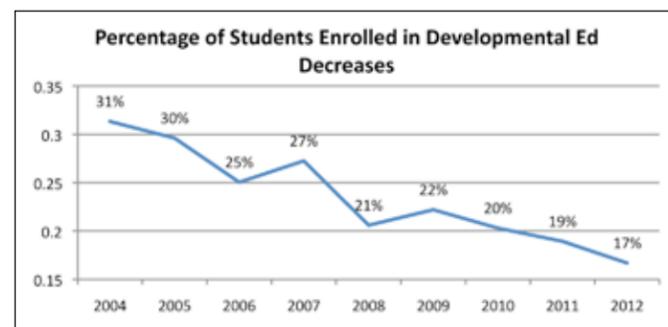
# South Texas College

McAllen, Texas • Shirley A. Reed, President  
www.southtexascollege.edu

**South Texas College (STC)** receives the 2013 Leah Meyer Austin Award for demonstrating systemic institutional changes that have resulted in noteworthy increases in student success. Through the implementation of Achieving the Dream's Student-Centered Model of Institutional Improvement, STC has:

- Created a college-going culture in its community
- Raised its three-year graduation rate
- Expanded its dual enrollment program
- Improved college-readiness of incoming students
- Increased completion rates in developmental and gateway courses

STC made these achievements during a time of increased enrollment and economic challenges. The comprehensive nature of the college's student success work and collaborative efforts within the community it serves is evident by this significant data point: the proportion of incoming students and the actual number of students who place in developmental education courses decreased at the same time that STC's enrollment increased.



Enrollment in developmental coursework decreased steadily as overall enrollment at STC increased by 75%.

## STC Serves A Hispanic Community in Deep South Texas

STC serves two counties along the U.S.-Mexico border in a region recognized as one of the fastest-growing in the country. More than 90% of STC's approximately 30,000 students are Hispanic. Most of STC's students are low income, with 74% receiving financial aid. Nearly 40% of the region's residents over age 25 have neither completed high school nor attained a GED.

Achieving the Dream's evidence-based, student-centered approach has acted as the catalyst for STC's work to increase graduation rates, high school-to-college matriculation, and college success among STC students who are among the first generation in their families to attend college.

STC has increased its three-year graduation rate by seven percentage points since 2007, according to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. Community College Week ranks STC fourth in the nation in awarding associate degrees in all disciplines to Hispanics and ninth in awarding associate degrees to all minorities. Excelencia in Education ranks STC first in awarding Latinos associate degrees in the biological/biomedical sciences and first in engineering.

The number of recent high school graduates in the region who immediately enroll in college increased 7.7% since 2004. This trend illustrates the tremendous growth in STC's dual enrollment program—the biggest dual enrollment program in Texas. More than 11,000 high school students enroll annually in one of five college credit options that STC offers. The academic rigor of STC's dual enrollment program and the college's community outreach activities are encouraging students to pursue their college options during their secondary school careers. The high school students in STC's dual enrollment program now account for about one-third of the college's entire enrollment.

## Achieving the Dream Shifts Paradigm

Founded in 1993, STC was still a relatively young institution when it expanded its emphasis from access to embrace access and success. Since joining Achieving the Dream in 2004, data-informed decision-making, broad engagement, and systemic improvement have become components of the college's identity.

Working in partnership with faculty and staff, the college's leaders set the creation of a college-going culture as a community goal. The college's process of developing comprehensive strategies to address the complex needs of the region identified by its analysis of quantitative and qualitative data is a model for other colleges.

The committed leadership of Dr. Shirley Reed, STC's founding and current president, has provided far-reaching vision and aggressive leadership for STC, the state of Texas, and the national community college network. This is evidenced by President Reed's appointment to the Board of Directors of the American Association of Community Colleges. The college's trustees are equally exceptional with Gary Gurwitz, a founding member of STC's board, receiving the 2012 National Community College Trustee Leadership Award for dedication to student success.

Through the implementation of Achieving the Dream's Student-Centered Model of Institutional Improvement, STC:

- Established an Office of Student Learning and Achievement
- Formed an administrative level research, reporting, assessment, and planning team
- Restructured the Office of Institutional Research (IR) and Effectiveness to allow more efficient use of data throughout the college
- Invested heavily in its faculty professional development program and eliminated operational silos through better communication and collaborative practices
- Ensured academic, financial, and operational decisions throughout the college are based on evidence

## Data Sharing Leads to Broad Participation, Comprehensive Strategies

Through Achieving the Dream, data has become the centerpiece of STC's decision-making processes and the catalyst for broad engagement.

This is evidenced by the way student data drove the formation of STC's Case Management Advising Program. In 2005, student survey data identified the lack of information about classes and services as a top issue and prompted President Reed to create the Comprehensive

Advising Taskforce. The taskforce included faculty, staff, and administrators from both the Academic and Student Affairs divisions. The taskforce developed the Case Management Advising Program and piloted it along with mandatory orientation in Fall 2005.

"It has always been my philosophy to encourage input from faculty and staff in the decision-making process, especially when it comes to facilitating student success. I want broad-based participation because I find it leads to better decision-making and greater acceptance of institutional decisions," President Reed explained.

The dedication of the STC community to student success is best illustrated by the efforts to scale the Case Management Advising Program. Through a data-informed cost analysis, STC identified a number of daunting logistic and financial challenges to scaling the program due to the comprehensive nature of this effective program. When faculty were told it was simply too expensive to hire enough advisors for the thousands of students who begin their postsecondary education at STC, many faculty volunteered to serve as advisors. More than 450 faculty members have since completed a professional development program based on National Academic Advising Association principles; they provide academic guidance to students on a voluntary basis without additional compensation. The college also refined its information technology systems to complement the advising by providing students with personalized information about their progress toward degree completion.

More recently, faculty, staff, and administrative groups used data to plan the contextualization of developmental reading and writing curricula. The developmental education faculty and faculty from the sociology and history departments have worked collaboratively to scale the contextualized developmental education curricula.

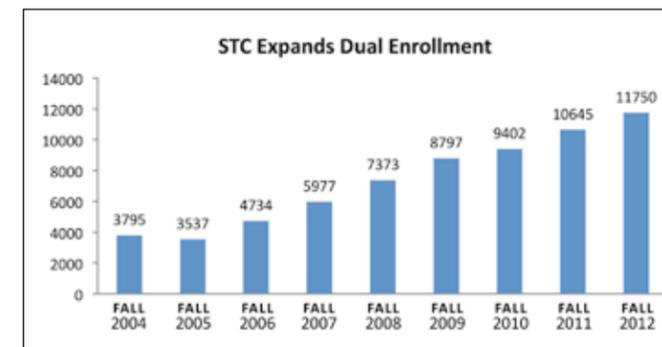
President Reed and the executive cabinet continue to share student success data systematically with faculty and staff during bi-monthly meetings of the Planning and Development Council, the President's Administrative Staff, at divisional meetings, during semi-annual College-Wide Professional Development Days, and with adjunct faculty and dual enrollment instructors. In these various settings President Reed frequently asks: How can the college improve its performance? How will a proposed change benefit students? What do the data tell us? Stakeholders' responses to these questions and their analysis of the data are an integral part of the college's effective and efficient decision making process.

## Dual Enrollment Raises Expectations and Improves Outcomes

STC's dual enrollment program exemplifies the college's effort to raise educational expectations. Regional data indicate that successful participation in STC's dual enrollment program increases the likelihood of future college success and completion.

STC offers multiple ways for high school students to earn college credit. High school students may take advantage of dual credit opportunities at one of STC's six campuses; at their high schools during the regular school day from STC-credentialed instructors; at one of four academies (engineering, medical science, computer science, and criminal justice) with competitive admissions; in the Ninth Grade

Initiative for at-risk students; or at one of 15 Early College High Schools. STC singularly supports more Early College High Schools than any other college in the nation.



A 2012 University of Texas-Pan American study found that its entering freshmen who had prior college hours were 2.7 times more likely to persist after their first year. The majority of students in this study acquired college credits in STC's dual enrollment program. These students were also 8.3 times more likely to graduate with a bachelor's degree within four years. Additionally, entering freshmen with prior college hours earned significantly higher GPAs than their peers who did not have previous college credits: 2.8, 2.71, and 2.74, respectively, for the Fall 2008, Fall 2009, and Fall 2010 semesters as compared to 2.09, 1.98, and 1.99.

## STC singularly supports more Early College High Schools than any other college in the nation.

Efforts launched with Achieving the Dream and the attitude changes that have accompanied them continue to ripple through the region.

STC's collaboration with 21 school districts has mobilized college readiness efforts at 68 high schools where students receive direct preparation for dual credit opportunities. Thousands of high school students take STC's placement test in advance of their senior year, and are motivated to do well on the test with additional support services as needed. Texas requires that dual enrollment students take college courses for credit and demonstrate proficiency in the disciplines in which they want to take courses. Students, parents, and school officials, therefore, know of academic weaknesses earlier in students' high school careers and are taking steps to address them. These collective efforts have contributed to decreases in the proportion and actual number of students who require developmental education courses upon enrollment at STC after high school graduation.

In addition to encouraging dual enrollment for high school students, STC's outreach programs bring K-12 students to STC campuses and also encourage parents to complete their academic credentials.

"We believe that positive momentum is built and maintained when students embark on a college pathway early," said Kristina Wilson, the Achieving the Dream Core Team leader at STC. "We have created on-ramps to higher education that are suitable for anyone who wishes to pursue a certificate or degree."

The Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) receives special recognition for its programs that accelerate students through developmental courses, and into and through gateway courses.

Since joining Achieving the Dream in 2009, the college has scaled the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP), which allows students who place into upper level developmental writing courses to enroll concurrently in English 101, a gateway credit course. ALP's success led to the creation of the Accelerated Math Program (AMP), which combines lower level developmental math and blends upper level intermediate algebra with college algebra.

The college piloted ALP in 2007 to eliminate leakage points from its developmental education program. Through the implementation of Achieving the Dream's Student-Centered Model of Institutional Improvement, the majority of new students who place into developmental writing now take the ALP paired courses. CCBC offered 130 sections of ALP to serve more than 1,000 students in Fall 2012. A similar number of students enrolled in ALP for Spring 2013. By limiting ALP developmental writing sections to 10 students, instructors are able to address the academic and non-cognitive needs of students.

Studies by the Community College Research Center of Columbia University in 2010 and 2012 found "promising evidence of the model's effectiveness." The researchers reported that ALP students consistently perform better in the developmental writing course; are more likely to complete English 101, the gateway course, and English 102, the subsequent course; and persist to the next year. African American students who take ALP also dramatically outperform their peers in traditional developmental writing and gateway English courses.

"We were naive when we started," Donna McKusick, Dean of Developmental Education and Special Academic Programs, said of the college's pre-Achieving the Dream plan to double ALP sections each semester. "We didn't understand how an initiative like this had to grow roots."

Achieving the Dream helped CCBC personnel understand the value of professional development to nurture the "roots" necessary to sustain student success work. CCBC used data to engage faculty and inform its creation of a 25-hour professional development program for both full-time and part-time faculty to improve implementation of ALP. ALP has now been adopted by almost 100 colleges across the country, and implemented statewide in several places.

"The importance of faculty training was a big thing that we didn't understand. Achieving the Dream helped us better grasp how important it is to educate faculty on how to teach developmental students within the accelerated framework. It helped us stick with it, and continue to examine the data every single semester," McKusick explained.

After the success of ALP, CCBC investigated other areas to improve student success, again using the key principles of Achieving the Dream's Student-Centered Model of Institutional Improvement to guide effective, lasting change for students.

"Achieving the Dream helped us fit the pieces of other strategies together with the accelerated program to improve the success of all students," McKusick said.

CCBC engaged more effectively with internal and external stakeholders to close achievement gaps between African American and Caucasian students and to eliminate obstacles to credential completion. By synthesizing several existing initiatives the college:

- Scaled the college's student success course by making it mandatory for all new CCBC students. In addition, the college added contextualized information for course sections designed to address the needs of African American men, honors students, as well as students planning to enter STEM careers and healthcare fields.
- Developed financial literacy toolkits that infuse financial literacy lessons throughout the student success course and all developmental education courses. The toolkits provide context and opportunities to practice life skills such as computing the interest rate on loans, recognizing financial predators, and developing savings plans. The college's Silver Savings Program distributes small piggy banks to students in the college's student success course and encourages them to deposit the coins they save in the piggy banks in bank savings accounts.
- Reconfigured and expanded its faculty training program, Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), to include workshops on social capital, stereotype threat, and models of intelligence. The college now uses CRT to cross-train developmental education instructors and the instructors who teach the student success course to approximately 6,000 students each year.

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Applications for the 2013 Leah Meyer Austin Award were reviewed by a selection committee representing Achieving the Dream Founding Partners. The winning college had to present strong quantitative data and outcomes across all five Achieving the Dream outcome indicators. In addition, the college had to show evidence of closing achievement gaps, as well as a compelling qualitative story of culture change using Achieving the Dream's Student-Centered Model for Institutional Improvement. The selection committee was supported by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACCC).