

Houston Community College is committed to
Achieving the Dream

Houston Community College is one of only 27 colleges selected nationally to participate in *Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count*, a multi-year initiative funded by the Lumina Foundation for Education to increase the success of underserved students at community colleges.

Several prestigious national partners have joined the selected colleges to study data and assist them devise and implement strategies to help students of color and students of low income achieve greater academic success in community colleges. The national partners include the American Association of Community Colleges, the Community College Leadership Program of the University of Texas, the Community College Research Center at Teachers College of Columbia University, the Futures Project of Brown University, Jobs for the Future, MDRC, and Public Agenda.

We are all familiar with the issues. Education and economic opportunity are inseparable in today's society – over 80 percent of current jobs require some level of post-secondary education or training. For ever-increasing numbers of low income and first generation college attendees, the community college represents the door to upward mobility. While Texas and other states are having some success in “closing the gaps” in terms of access, success rates overall are low and vary widely by race and ethnicity.

The goals of Achieving the Dream are easy to understand but difficult to obtain. We must increase the percentage of low income students and students of color who successfully complete developmental courses, go on to complete “gatekeeper” or difficult college-level courses with a grade of C or better, re-enroll from one semester to the next, and earn certificates and degrees.

More than 70 percent of community college students have *at least* one of the following characteristics identified by the literature as impeding success: delayed enrollment after high school, lack of a high school diploma, part-time enrollment, working at least 30 hours a week, financial independence from parents, dependents other than a spouse, and single parenthood. To help students succeed, community colleges must create experiences and environments that help students overcome these obstacles.

Houston Community College is dedicated to five broad strategies designed for student success. These include provision of easier, smoother access to college, a first semester/first year experience to help students achieve basic skills and successful orientation to college, effective academic advising and counseling, effective monitoring and support mechanisms, and learning engagement activities that allow students to interact in meaningful ways with each other, the faculty, and with the community.

Nationally, the grant project hopes that college efforts will not only result in improved student outcomes and institutional changes, but also in positive public attitudes, supportive state and national policies, and enhanced capacity of national organizations to provide leadership and guidance. For more information, please visit our website at http://www.hccs.edu/system/Instructional_Services/dream.html or contact me at charles.cook@hccs.edu.