

June 18, 2004

To: Bruce Leslie

From: Charles Cook

Re: Report on Achieving the Dream Seminar

Xc: Sue Cox, Fena Garza, Linda Gibbs, Tim Sever

The Seminar in Austin for the *Achieving the Dream (ATD)* participant colleges was an intense but informative and enjoyable session. Here is a recap of our activities and plans for follow-up.

Sunday, June 13 – the Seminar began with a welcome reception and buffet dinner. Dr. Sheldon Ekland-Olson, Provost of the University of Texas-Austin delivered the official welcome and Leah Austin, Senior Vice President for Programs and Research of the Lumina Foundation for Education, gave us the background on how and why Lumina has chosen to devote several million dollars to this project.

As you know, *Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count* will be a national project whereby selected community colleges will spend a year in collecting and analyzing data regarding access, persistence, and achievement of students of color and students of low income. Also in our first year, we will spend time studying best practices and planning for specific strategies to improve our performance in each of the categories listed above. The subsequent years (two through four) will be spent in activities we design, implement, and evaluate.

We were also introduced to representatives of our partner organizations – AACC, Jobs for the Future, Public Agenda, MDC, University of Texas-Austin Community College Leadership Program, Columbia University, and Brown University. We were also assigned our “coach” for the project – Byron McClenney, former President at San Antonio, Denver, and Kingsborough Community Colleges and currently a staff member with the UT Community College Leadership Program.

Monday, June 14 – Byron McClenney provided us an overview of seminar activities. George Boggs, President and CEO of the American Association of Community Colleges, emphasized AACC support for the project and Lynn Barnett of the AACC staff introduced the college teams. David Dodson, President of MDC, discussed the “values” for ATD:

1. Promoting Student Success
 - a. Student-centered vision. Helping all students achieve their educational and career goals is the “north star” that should guide institutional decisions.
 - b. Culture of evidence and accountability – College should make decisions and allocate resources based on evidence of what is working and what is not.

- c. Equity and excellence – more students succeed when colleges demonstrate commitment to excellent education for all.
2. Promoting Institutional Change
- a. Long-term impact requires change in systems, not just “add-on” programs or services.
 - b. Strategies must be appropriate to their locale.
 - c. Broad-based participation is essential, including student involvement.
 - d. Inside and outside voices must be heard.
 - e. Institutional change is both technical (applying known strategies to routine problems) and adaptive (shifting institutional priorities, culture, or values to ensure closer alignment of policies and practices with ATD goals).

Kay McClenney, UT Community College Leadership Program, and Tom Bailey, Columbia University, discussed the importance of building a “culture of evidence.” We completed a survey of “best practices” in terms of how well we perceived HCC to be doing the things necessary to produce and utilize data in decision-making in terms of strategic priorities, resource allocation, faculty and staff development, and improvement of programs and services. We agreed that in most cases, we had “begun” the building of a culture of evidence, but that we had much further work to accomplish. JBL Associates produced a statistical profile of each participating college showing us how we compared to the “group average” in terms of

- Graduation rates by race/ethnicity (we’re on target)
- Percentage of first-time, full-time students receiving Pell Grants (we’re behind)
- In-district tuition (our rates are lower)
- FTE enrollment (we’re bigger)
- Percentage of students that are full-time (our rates are lower)
- Percentage of students over 24 years old (we’re much older)
- Ratio of FTE to full-time faculty (we have more full-time faculty per FTE)

We will create a “data team” at HCC to help create and monitor specific data measures, notably the percentage of our students who

- Successfully complete developmental courses and progress to credit-bearing courses
- Enroll in and successfully complete gatekeeper courses
- Complete the courses they take, with a grade of C or higher
- Re-enroll from one semester to the next
- Earn certificates and degrees.

Marilyn Rundell from Scholarship American distributed a brochure by which HCCS may apply for additional “emergency” scholarship funds for students. The amount requested must be matched by the institution. More information on this program is available on their web site at www.scholarshipamerica.org.

Bryon McClenney then discussed with us *A Community College Inventory* of best practices regarding *Student Persistence, Learning, and Attainment*. The inventory contained these parts:

- Vision, Values, and Culture
- Data collection, analysis, and use
- Strategic Focus, Planning and Resource Allocation
- Learning Outcomes

- Learning Assessment
- Learning Process
- Student and Academic Support Services
- The People of the College
- Leadership for Learning
- Institutional Policy
- Institutional Assessment

Each of these parts had identifying characteristics and practices that will be reproduced and shared with all core team members for further discussion of how we implement them at HCCS.

Derek Price, Consultant to MDC, supplied each college with a CD pre-loaded with statistical information on all community colleges that allows us to compare our performances with those of others. We spent the remainder of the day discussing questions as “Where are we?” and “Where do we want to be?” regarding the various educational goals of the project.

Tuesday, June 15 – This day’s sessions opened with presentations by Richard Kazts, Senior Vice President of Jobs for the Future, on public policy at state and national levels. Frank Renz, Executive Director of the New Mexico Association of Community Colleges, and Pat Windham of the Florida Department of Education briefed us on the current status of policy development in those states. The identification of need for policy changes at both state and national levels became the focus of a following discussion.

For Texas, we identified the following suggestions:

- Need for state mandated annexation of all ISDs to a community college district.
- Elimination or modification of rider 62 disallowing funding of courses for students who repeat courses more than twice.
- Allow community colleges to set differential tuition rates and lab fees by program areas.
- Elimination of unnecessary restrictions on colleges in provision of child care.
- Alignment of all policies promoting dual credit courses by the TEA and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.
- Adoption of state policy promoting community colleges as the preferred sources of workforce training for state agencies, including location of TWC workforce centers at all community colleges.

College teams were allowed time to work in their groups and with their coaches on “alignment” of vision and practices. Our Coach emphasized the need to choose no more than five priorities on which to concentrate our resources and efforts to ensure adequate progress.

The HCCS team continued to hone the ideas originally presented in our application. In terms of five strategic areas of vision, we began to talk about practices and where we might have our greatest needs.

1. Vision: Students will gain unproblematic access to HCCS. Practice – we suggested that financial aid might be a practice whereby we seek improvement in terms of numbers of awards, dollar amounts of awards, and percentages of qualified students applying for and receiving Pell Grants. Specifically, we talked

- about the need for the automatic “packaging” of financial aid by PeopleSoft, the filling of vacant financial aid positions, increased marketing and outreach efforts in terms of financial aid, and bringing in high school students during their senior year for financial aid applications and counseling.
2. Vision: Students will have a first semester and first year experiences that will provide necessary basic skills and successful orientation to HCCS services, culture, and support systems. Practice – we discussed the need to improve our orientation/student success courses, GUST 0303 and 0101. Fena noted that San Antonio requires orientation for all students and charges them for it, but offers the course during the summer for free for any new students as an enticement to get them in early for advising and registration. Sue said we need to keep an open mind and consider many suggestions and options for improvement before we decide on required orientation for all. We all agreed, however, that any required orientation would only be for new students, those with less than 12 semester credit hours completed successfully, and those on academic suspension or probation.
 3. Vision: Students will receive effective academic advising and counseling. Practice – we need to integrate an effective definition and description of academic advising into our Faculty Workload Guidelines and Faculty Evaluation System to ensure its adoption and use. We all agreed that “academic advising” includes not only advising within particular programs or “majors,” but also a willingness to work in some capacity as “mentors” for the large numbers of our students who are uncommitted or unclear of their educational and career goals.
 4. Vision: Students will receive the benefit of a comprehensive Student Progress Audit that will provide both an early warning system and a tracking element to help them persist. Practice – much like financial aid above, this must become a priority for our PeopleSoft programming and services. Distance Education and Student Services are both working on various on-line means of tracking and advising students and may provide guidance on how we can move forward to provide both students and faculty a way of tracking student progress toward goal completion.
 5. Vision: Students will be fully engaged with their own learning, with each other, with faculty, and with the community. Practice – we have many examples of student engagement currently underway, including service learning, the Common Book, Global Certificate, and the Mexican-American/Latino Studies Programs. However, we need to continue to emphasize the expansion of such opportunities and the benefits they provide. Mr. Austin has suggested the creation of an “Eagles Fellow” program for student leaders. At the conference, we attended a break-out session from Seattle Community College on the innovative Learning Communities they have established. Impressively, the course retention rate for students in their Learning Communities averaged 95 percent, compared to a 78 percent rate for students in their regular courses.

All of the above needs further discussion with an expanded Core Team back at HCCS.

Other break-out sessions attended by team members on Tuesday afternoon included Best Practices in Developmental Education, Student Services to Promote Student Attainment, and a Work Session for Institutional Researchers.

The day ended with a presentation by Kay McClenney on the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), a survey in which HCCS has now participated for three years.

Wednesday, June 16 – Dr. Leslie joined us for a full day of activities. The morning consisted of further explanations on budget and work plan requirements for all colleges participating in the grant. Our next reporting date is July 15, 2004.

We worked within our group to complete an inventory on HCCS Institutional Plans, Priorities, and Outcomes. We completed the inventory as individuals and then compared and discussed results with one another. Again, we agreed, that we have definitely begun most of the needed activities, but that we need to continue to focus and link our planning efforts together so that everyone feels they have a voice, that we measure results, and most importantly, use results and data in setting priorities, allocating resources, and making other critical decisions.

During the afternoon, we worked within our group on the following tasks:

- Membership – who else must be involved internally?
- Relationships – who should we partner with externally?
- Knowledge – what data do we already have? What more do we need to gather?
- Analysis – how do we need to analyze the data and for what purposes?
- Politics – what are the local political issues and forces that might impede progress on our goals?

We prepared a “group report” on the tasks above and then listed the “top ten” things we need to accomplish during the first three months of the grant.

We then sent “visiting ambassadors” to other college groups to see what they were reporting and what new we might learn as one of our group remained behind to report to visitors to HCCS.

Our group report contained the following:

- Membership – We must expand our core team to include additional representatives from the affected functional areas of the college (especially students, developmental education, student services, and instruction generally) and also ensure broad coverage from administrative and staff areas. We will create our data team with Linda leading that group.
- Relationships – We will create an Advisory Committee that includes a Board member(s), school district representatives (including potential areas under consideration for annexation), university representatives, community representatives, and representatives from business/industry.
- Knowledge – We will work with IT to create a “knowledge management” portal. We will also work with the core and data teams to plan a series of student focus groups and a “college tour” to hold forums to gather information and discuss ideas.
- Analysis – We will examine data that we have and identify the “holes.” We will work with IR and IT as necessary to design new data reports.

- Politics – We recognized the many issues that result in a multi-college, multicultural institution and decided that open communications and outreach are our best solutions in terms of ensuring that everyone is able to access information and provide input.

Our “top ten” activities for the first three months will consist of the following specific efforts:

1. Expansion of the Core Team.
2. Creation of the Data Team and begin collection and analysis of existing data.
3. Holding a Retreat for a combined meeting of the Core and Data Teams.
4. Creation of an Advisory Committee of Community Leaders.
5. Conduct of internal information-gathering sessions among students, faculty, and staff.
6. Hold a Community Summit in partnership with the Greater Houston Partnership in September.
7. Plan the All-College Conference of October 1 with Achieving the Dream as the theme.
8. Meet with state agency officials to cooperate on data collection needs.
9. Solidify college values with all constituencies.
10. Update and emphasize all partnership agreements with ISDs and universities.

When we visited other colleges, we learned they were:

- Using professional groups to assist in collection of student data.
- Seeking ways to leverage funds with institutional and state funds.
- Developing “courage to act upon results of the data.”

The day ended with a reception, dinner, and final presentation by Irving McPhail, Chancellor of the Community College of Baltimore County.

Thursday, June 17 – This morning was devoted to wrap-up activities and discussion of communication strategies. Communications Consultants described the psychology of framing proper messages in helping convey grant objectives and goals. The power-point presentation as well as “template” messages and ads will be made available for all of the colleges soon on the AACC Web site.