

Students

**Students aren't  
just data points,  
but numbers do count**

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Writing: Christopher Connell Editing: David S. Powell

Editorial assistance: Gloria Ackerson and Dianna Boyce

Photography: Shawn Spence Photography

Design: Huffine Design Production assistance: Freedonia Studios Printing: Mossberg & Company, Inc.

**On the cover:** Indonesia-born Kristi Dewanti attends Tallahassee Community College, where a concerted emphasis on outcomes data is boosting student success.

*Lumina Foundation Lessons* is an occasional publication in which we share the results of our grantees' work. By thoughtfully evaluating the programs we fund and then sharing what we learn, we hope to broaden the impact of our grant making, while also boosting the effectiveness of the organizations and individuals who do the vital work of increasing students' access to and success in college.

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

## Our grantees wield 'a powerful tool:' data

Having spent most of the last two decades as a higher education researcher and analyst, I've developed some appreciation for the importance and value of student-outcomes data for colleges and universities.

Such information is used for a variety of purposes, from informing collaborative action planning on campus, to the actual implementation of those plans, to the assessment or benchmarking of results based on the work undertaken. Robust, reliable data are vital for institutional decision making and accountability. Compelling data can be the driving force in fostering a "culture of evidence," leading to measurable impacts on students and lasting campus change.

Too often, casual observers might think that a data-driven institution is one that focuses mainly on the processes of collection and analysis. But at Lumina Foundation for Education, we have always considered data a powerful tool to better meet students' needs.

From the Achieving the Dream initiative – which has done groundbreaking work to support data-driven decision making at community colleges – to the important results that have been attained at minority-serving institutions under the Building Engagement and Attainment for Minority Students (BEAMS) project, Lumina's investments in data-driven campus change have been gratifying.

In this issue of *Lumina Foundation Lessons*, we highlight the work of grantees at three distinct postsecondary institutions: Tallahassee Community College in Florida, Harry S Truman College in Chicago and the University of Southern California. In unique and impressive ways, leaders from these institutions are demonstrating that data can be the difference between a good and a great institution – between moderately successful students and those with the potential to be transformative leaders in their communities.

As the new president and CEO of Lumina Foundation for Education, I celebrate these successes in our ongoing work to support data-driven decision making on campuses. I believe that data can be even more useful, however, when seen as a critical tool that helps to inform people who make decisions that can have a broad impact – including state and federal policymakers, influential experts in the field and many others.

As we embark on the next phase of Lumina's work to expand access and success beyond high school, we will be looking at new and better ways that data can be used. Our goal is to foster innovation and support scalable change, building on the exciting successes of the grantees highlighted in this publication.



Jamie P. Merisotis  
President and CEO  
Lumina Foundation for Education



## *'Equity for All' at USC*

# Going under the microscope to create macro-level change

**E**stela Mara Bensimon considers her work a return to her roots as a community organizer working on behalf of Puerto Rican youth in New Jersey's poorest cities in the early 1970s. These days, Bensimon isn't a street-level activist, she's a researcher – the founding director of the Center for Urban Education (CUE) within the University of Southern California's Rossier School of Education. Still, CUE specializes in what Bensimon calls "action research" and reflects the professor's determination "not to write anymore only for people like myself. I wanted to do something that brings about change."

From offices high above USC's campus, Bensimon and her team are working to help colleges and universities come to grips with their shortcomings, especially in achieving equity for underserved minority students – not just equity in admissions or in theory, but "equality as a fact and equality as a result," as President Lyndon B. Johnson put it in a famed 1965 commencement address at Howard University.

Bensimon's path-finding work – first on her Diversity Scorecard project and now on an effort called Equity for All – has drawn national attention and the support of Lumina and other major foundations, including the James Irvine Foundation, the Ford Foundation and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. It involves working closely with faculty, counselors, deans and researchers to mine their own institutional data about how many students move up the academic ladder, and to break down the data by race, ethnicity and gender.

Bensimon is less concerned about the large, four-year institutions and more worried about what happens at the urban community colleges and comprehensive universities that enroll minority students in the largest numbers. "These institutions were already diverse; they didn't have a problem with access. The problem was with success – and no one was really looking at that," says Bensimon, a native of Argentina whose family moved to New Jersey when she was 12. Now, thanks to CUE, more institutions are putting their data under the microscope. More often than not, they are surprised by what they find – and motivated to do something about it.

"Researchers aren't supposed to have an agenda, but we *do* have an agenda," says Bensimon. "Our agenda is to bring to light that there are inequalities and (to show) that something can be done about them." Equity for All is not merely a search for data. Indeed, it is based on the idea that the most important thing is for a team of faculty, staff and administrators to engage in the process of inquiry, jointly deciding what to look for and, ultimately, what to do about what they find.

In Bensimon's view, colleges "are drowning in data" but clueless about

what to do with all of the information. While enrollment and graduation data usually are available by race and ethnicity, seldom do institutions look closely enough to identify which students disappear into the lowest level of developmental courses and never come out. As Marshall "Mark" Drummond, chancellor of the Los Angeles City Colleges and former chancellor of the California Community Colleges system, puts it: "Our 'back door' (is) much less diverse and equitable than our 'front door.'"

The Equity for All project took Bensimon and her researchers out to a dozen community colleges in and around Los

**"These institutions were already diverse; they didn't have a problem with access. The problem was with success – and no one was really looking at that."**

*Estela Mara Bensimon,  
Center for Urban Education,  
University of Southern California*

Angeles. They trained "evidence teams" of faculty and administrators on how to sift through existing data and raise new questions. Invariably, there were big surprises.

Bensimon herself attended monthly team meetings at Long Beach City College (LBCC), 25 miles down the freeway from Los Angeles. Almost two-thirds of Long Beach's 27,000 students are minorities; one in three is Latino. Long Beach had tried to produce a student equity plan in 2002, but faculty members were skeptical about the data the college produced. "Equity for All gave us the opportunity to come at it fresh rather than revisit the heartaches of the earlier, failed attempt," says Linda Umbdenstock, administrative dean for planning.

The eight-member Long Beach evidence team examined the records on all 43,547 first-time college students enrolled between 1999 and 2005. Hannah Alford, the college's research analyst, ran the numbers and produced PowerPoint slides with the raw data. The team sat around a table, and "questions begat more questions," says Fred Trapp, administrative dean for Institutional Research and Academic Services.

The biggest surprise was how many students dropped off the radar screen just one or two courses shy of being ready to transfer to a four-year college. Many were stymied not by math, but by requirements for courses on critical thinking and speech communication. The pass rate in Beginning Algebra, the lowest-level remedial course, was 35 percent. A third of those 43,547 entering students had indicated their goal was to transfer to a four-year institution and earn a bachelor's degree. But only 659 – 1.5 percent – made it in the six years that the LBCC team reviewed. One finding was particularly startling. There were 87 students who completed transfer requirements in three years – practically warp speed at LBCC – but who never transferred. They were dubbed "the missing 87."

"Equity for All gave us the validity and credibility to move forward with this agenda," says Leticia Suarez, dean for Learning Resources, Teaching and Technologies. "Nobody could question this data. It was solid. And at the same time, it was borne out by what the faculty and students themselves were experiencing. We all knew this was happening, but now we know why."

The numbers harvested for Equity for All sent shock waves through the institution. The evidence team made presentations to different academic departments and returned with requests for more data. They published three newsletters explaining their findings. Shauna Hagemann, counselor for Disabled Students Programs and Services, says, "We went through all of the different phases: disbelief, shock, anger. I found myself saying, 'This can't be true. These numbers cannot be true.' Every time we saw a (new) slide from Hannah, it was a shock."



Estela Mara Bensimon, founding director of the Center for Urban Education (CUE) at the University of Southern California, is committed to the use of data to increase student success.



**English instructor Jordan Fabish leads a reading-development class at Long Beach City College, whose faculty members are embracing the Equity for All project.**

Lee Douglas, head of the Center for Learning Assistance Services, says: “We were finding out this information ourselves. We as a campus had ownership of it. It wasn’t some outside group coming in and telling us what we should do.” Suddenly, instead of waging a defensive fight against the numbers, faculty members were eager to learn more. Long Beach Vice President Don Berz says: “It’s courageous for a college to be willing to engage in this introspection and self-reflection.” LBCC even invited leaders of other community colleges to share what they were learning.

Long Beach staff members secured a grant from the Hewlett Foundation to take a closer look at “the missing 87.” They interviewed dozens of current or former students, as well as faculty and counselors. They were able to track down only one of the “missing 87,” despite offering \$30 and eventually \$50 gift cards as an inducement to participate. Many could not be found; home addresses had changed. Some did not want to talk about their Long Beach experience. But other students mentioned that the transfer center was hard to find. “Most of the teachers, let alone

the students, didn’t know where it was,” says English instructor Jordan Fabish. For students who did find their way to the center, there were limits on how many pages they could print out from college Web sites, and the office space was shared with another program.

Students had to make appointments a week or two in advance for a 15- or 30-minute appointment with a counselor. At university fairs, they could walk up to the California State University representatives, but they had to arrange in advance to talk with admissions officers from UCLA, Berkeley or other UC campuses. For Bensimon, the data revealed not only a transfer gap but what she calls a “choice gap.” Almost 200 of these 520 fast-track Long Beach students had grades that qualified them for the more selective University of California system, but only 40 actually enrolled at Berkeley, UCLA, Irvine, Santa Barbara or the rest. Long Beach’s best students usually enrolled at a Cal State institution.

A Filipino honors student who attended Long Beach on scholarship from the Rotary Club and Bank of America explained why he decided to

transfer to Cal State-Long Beach instead of UCLA. Juan Ruiz – a pseudonym used by Bensimon – told the interviewers that he felt overwhelmed by the grandeur of Royce Hall and other buildings on the UCLA campus, while Cal State-Long Beach “felt like a second home.” Ruiz said, “I thought I was going to collapse on the UCLA pavement... It was just bad vibes.”

Another honors student, Marisol Carrion (also a pseudonym), transferred to Cal State-Fullerton, but quit after one semester and returned to LBCC to take child-development courses so she would qualify for a job as a teacher’s aide. Fullerton didn’t “feel right,” she said. “They didn’t make it feel as homey as here. I just felt like it wasn’t where I was supposed to be.”

The one member of the “missing 87” who consented to being interviewed was Raquel Roque (not her real name), who graduated in 2004 with an associate’s degree in nursing and opted for a hospital job. Roque was saving to return to college and was determined not to take out student loans. (After the interview, she was admitted to Cal State-Long Beach, with her hospital

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## *Buildings just one sign of LA Southwest's rebirth*

Two years after the 1965 Watts riots, Los Angeles Southwest College opened its doors to serve many of the city's poorest neighborhoods. It's still serving them, with a student population of 6,000 that is 75 percent African-American and 19 percent Latino. The college, which sits on a 69-acre campus east of Los Angeles International Airport, today is undergoing a \$65 million rebirth, with cement being poured and new academic buildings rising at a furious pace. Gone are the last World War II-era military bungalows.

The physical plant isn't the only thing that needed work at LA Southwest. With five of six entering students placed in developmental English and math, the college long has struggled with low student persistence and success rates. But an accreditation team that visited in March 2006 commended LA Southwest "for moving toward a culture of evidence that is being fostered by the increase in available quantitative data." Some of that data came from its participation in the Equity for All project – and it informed a reorganization of staff.

Developmental communications instructors who had been in the English department now are part of a new Learning Assistance Department. The handful of tenured English faculty still will be teaching some courses that start two steps below college-level English. But students with the greatest deficits – including some who read at third- and fourth-grade levels – will be placed in classes taught by developmental reading specialists. Interim President Jack E. Daniels III says: "We struggle with these titles just like the students. Sometimes they get smacked with that (basic skills) title, and they don't want to move on."

The college's Equity for All team tracked 747 students who signed up for developmental math and 1,169 in developmental English or English as a Second Language (ESL) in Fall 2002. Of the 655 African-American students who started in basic-skills math, 36 (5.5 percent) passed college-level math

within five semesters. Eight of 91 Latino students (8.8 percent) made the grade. Only 41 of the original 1,169 developmental English students (3.5 percent) passed college English. The team further found that, though 44 percent of Spanish-speaking Latino students from basic-skills math class persisted through five semesters, African-American and English-speaking Latinos persisted at only half that rate.

Dean of Academic Affairs Dan Walden, the team leader, says it was "big news" to discover that only 7 percent of all students placed in developmental classes ever got to college-level math or English. "This started opening a lot of eyes," says Walden. "It wasn't just something we sort of knew anecdotally; we actually had data on the page in front of us."

It typically takes 7.6 years for a student to earn an associate's degree at LA Southwest. "The majority of our students are part-time. They take a course, two courses, then they stop out. They face all kinds of issues (including) children, child care, transportation and basic subsistence," says Daniels.

Math Professor Ed Hector entered with the first class in 1967 and graduated two years later. "I didn't even take algebra in high school," says Hector. But after Hector got a B in college algebra, the instructor convinced him he could become a math major instead of a gym teacher. "I believed him," says Hector. "Two and a half years later, I'm taking differential equations and integral calculus" at UCLA. Hector worked for the Jet Propulsion Laboratory and IBM before joining the LA Southwest faculty in 1995. He now has a doctorate in education.

His classes fill up fast. "I'm a strong believer in using multimedia and group collaborative learning," Hector says. "I try to implement a whole gamut of things to create a learning environment. It's a nontraditional learning environment." And he never forgets the impact that a few words from his math professor had on him four decades ago. "A good instructor will affect students in ways he doesn't even realize," says Hector.



**Dan Walden (center), dean of academic affairs at Los Angeles Southwest College, says the data produced by CUE experts such as Alicia Dowd (next to Walden) are "opening a lot of eyes" on his campus.**



**Long Beach City College philosophy instructor Matt Lawrence (left), here with student Oscar Campos, says efforts to focus on outcomes data have helped create “more of a transfer culture” at the two-year college.**

paying part of her tuition.) Roque spoke highly of the job that the professors in her honors classes and the Long Beach counselors did in encouraging students to transfer. But she added, “I guess it would help to nag a little more so students can’t miss it.”

Matt Lawrence, an LBCC philosophy instructor, has moved beyond nagging. He got counselor Ruben Page to put all of the university transfer fliers into a PowerPoint show that he projected at the start of classes this fall. “The Missing 87 project has helped us develop a bit more of a transfer culture and think critically about what we as individual faculty or administrators can do to make a difference,” says Lawrence. This fall he asked students to sign a contract promising to come see him if they failed the first exam or if they were considering dropping the class.

## *At Rio Hondo, empty parking lots spell trouble*

Traffic is a nightmare at Rio Hondo College outside Los Angeles during the first week of fall classes. Cars snake up and down the hillside drive, newly hired security guards in neon vests wave STOP signs, and anxious drivers nose down the parking lot aisles, looking for a vacant spot.

But fast-forward a couple of months, and the parking problems are gone long before the semester is over. Rio Hondo, a largely Latino community college, is an Equity for All campus whose faculty and administrators share a passion for using data to improve opportunities and outcomes for students. But no statistics are necessary to understand one important fact about Rio Hondo. Says Antonio Flores, dean of Counseling, Outreach and Matriculation: “When you have a full parking lot four weeks into the semester, and it’s half empty by the tenth, eleventh, twelfth week, something is not right.”

Rio Hondo served a mostly Anglo population when the Whittier, Calif., campus opened in 1961, but today the area is 70 percent Latino. Most Rio Hondo students place into basic-skills math classes – the lowest level. Still, 718 of the 20,000 students completed an associate’s degree in 2005-2006, and hundreds more earned certificates in vocational programs from automotive technology to drafting to welding.

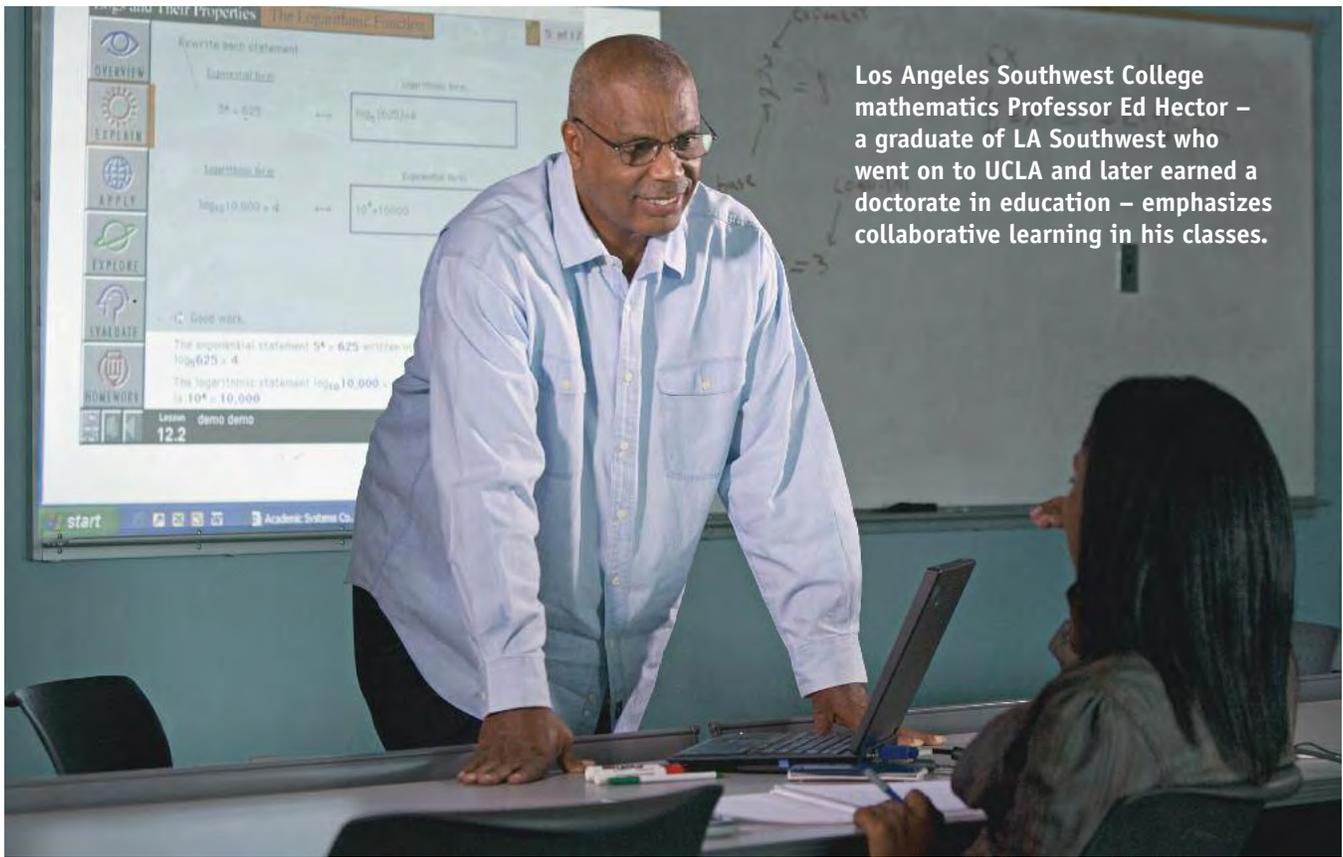
Rio Hondo persevered through Equity for All even though it had no bona fide institutional researcher during most of the work. The Rio Hondo team, led by Henry Gee, vice president for Student and Community Services, found that the college’s one-year persistence rate ranged from 21 percent to 36 percent,

with African-American students the lowest, and Mexican-American students rating the highest. The team looked at what happened to the 9,545 first-time students ages 18 to 25 who entered the college in Fall 1998-2001. Half of the Mexican-American students but only about 1 in 10 black students completed English 101 and Math 100, the courses required to transfer. Ultimately, 527 students who entered in Fall 1998-2001 earned associate’s degrees, including 52 who started in basic-skills math.

Robert Holcomb, an associate professor of English as a second language, says, “That jumped out at us: The lower that students place in the basic-skills sequence, the longer it takes and the less likely they are to go into freshman English transfer-level courses. It’s kind of the law of diminishing returns,” says Gail Chabrán, dean of communications and languages. “None of these things was shocking to us, but we’re constantly looking for ways to eradicate some of the weaknesses.”

Katie O’Brien, faculty counselor for Extended Opportunity Programs and Services, says: “So many of our conversations led to more questions, really good questions. We wanted to delve into the data more.” Now, as a test site for the California Benchmarking Project, they will have that opportunity.

“We have the data that show the baseline . . . , so now where do we want to go every year – and how do we get there?” asks Flores, the dean of counseling. “Nobody’s thinking we’re going to do something magical, but making small steps and getting some small victories is important to get more people on board.”



Los Angeles Southwest College mathematics Professor Ed Hector – a graduate of LA Southwest who went on to UCLA and later earned a doctorate in education – emphasizes collaborative learning in his classes.

Math instructor Kristin Hartford says the project has “changed my functioning every day. It reminded me of all these little things I knew were important to students, but I lost focus of” – including such details as the clarity of a teacher’s handwriting on the board.

Equity for All isn’t taking place in a policy vacuum. Colleges in California and across the country are feeling the heat from accreditors and regulators, who are demanding that institutions be more forthcoming about student performance. Community colleges in California are required to prepare equity plans, and, in 2004, the state legislature created a performance-measurement system for the California Community Colleges (CCC). Last March CCC released the first results in a 767-page report that includes six pages of data and comparisons on the state’s 109 two-year public colleges.

As state chancellor, Drummond put up \$300,000 in matching funds to help launch Equity for All in 2004. He also helped convince California voters to approve \$2.1 billion in construction bonds for community colleges, many

of which now are undergoing badly needed face-lifts. Drummond left Sacramento in July to resume running the 180,000-student Los Angeles Community College District, the nation’s largest. Drummond, a former business professor and an ex-president of Eastern Washington University, has an MBA as well as a Ph.D. “I like to know what’s going on,” he says. “I welcome audits. If something’s wrong, I’d rather know about it (so I) ... can get to the bottom of it and make things better.”

“We should all be disaggregating and finding out exactly what’s happening to these different groups of students,” he adds. In Los Angeles, “80 percent of our students are either Hispanic or African-American. If you’re dealing with a population of that magnitude and it’s not succeeding, it seems like there’s a social responsibility to find out what’s going on and why and fix it,” he says.

For her part, Bensimon already has embarked on the next stage of her efforts to help colleges achieve what LBJ called “equality as a fact and equality as a result.” Long Beach City Col-

lege and two other Equity for All campuses, Los Angeles Southwest College and Rio Hondo College (see accompanying stories), are piloting the California Benchmarking Project, in which evidence teams will set goals for improving the pass rates of basic-skills students in “gatekeeper courses,” introductory courses – often in math or English – characterized by high enrollment and high failure rates. The Hewlett and Ford foundations are underwriting the work, which is being led by Bensimon’s colleague, Alicia C. Dowd, an assistant professor at the Rossier School.

Bensimon says her projects help faculty “to become anthropologists, in a way, of their own institutions” and to look at institutional practices with new eyes. “It’s normal to want to teach to the students who are the smartest and are getting it, and to ignore the ones who seem to be falling behind,” adds the community organizer-turned-academic. “The problems we are dealing with can only be resolved in the classroom because that’s where a big part of the inequities are being created.”



## *Chicago's Harry S Truman College*

# Giving students a safe start inside a bilingual bubble

**O**n a late August morning, in a gritty urban landscape two stops north of Wrigley Field on the Chicago Transit Authority's elevated Red Line, two dozen would-be college students gather in an oasis of opportunity. At first glance, they seem unlikely scholars – 18- and 19-year-olds, most of them immigrants from Mexico and Latin America. Many are recent graduates from Chicago public high schools; others were plucked from GED classes taught in Spanish. They have limited English and even more limited means.

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Yet these students are bright, and they are eager for the academic journey that will take many of them beyond these streets, where condos and Starbucks outlets flank seedy hotels and check-cashing parlors beneath the clattering “el” trains. The first stop on that journey – their oasis today and perhaps for two years or even longer – is Harry S Truman College, a community college with deep roots in this Uptown neighborhood. These two dozen students have been recruited to form the newest Transitional Bilingual Learning Community (TBLC) at Truman.

The TBLC program, launched in 2002, groups promising Latino students into cohorts that take four credit-bearing courses linked by a unifying theme. Most TBLC members also receive Harold Washington Scholarships, a City Colleges of Chicago award of full tuition for students who maintain a 3.0 GPA and meet other high academic standards. Texts are in English, but classes are initially taught in Spanish, with the bilingual instructors gradually switching to English by year’s end.

The idea is to create a safe and supportive early environment for these at-risk students, to give them a head start in at least two ways: First, because they attend all classes with the same peers, the students form bonds of mutual support and assistance. Second, because of its bilingual nature, the program allows students to earn college credits *while* they build their English-language skills – not *after* those skills have been built in non-credit, developmental courses. At the end of their first two semesters at Truman, TBLC students should have 24 to 30 credits in math, technology and social science and also be ready to succeed in all-English courses.

So far, according to a Lumina Foundation-funded evaluation of the program, TBLC has shown promising results. Evaluators from the University of Illinois recently reported that among the first 124 students, 87 percent finished the one-year program and stayed at Truman. As of Spring 2007, 17 from the first three TBLC classes had completed associate’s degrees, and seven had transferred to four-year institutions in the Chicago area. Seven graduated

from Truman with high honors. By Spring 2009, the evaluators projected, almost a third of the original class (nine of the first 28 students) and more than half of the second (14 of 24) will have earned a two-year degree and/or transferred to a four-year college or university.

“Students’ lives have been positively influenced by teachers who take time to get to know them, challenge them with new ideas and concepts, have an understanding of their life circumstances, demonstrate respect and dedication, and have an appreciation for their cultural heritage,” wrote evaluators Lizanne DeStefano and Trinidad Molina Villegas.

On this August morning, the newest group of TBLC recruits can already feel that positive influence. Classes are still a week away, but the students are spending all morning in the fourth of six orientation sessions here at Truman College. Two women sit with their teenage daughters at tables arranged in a horseshoe facing a half-dozen professors and program leaders. A week earlier, at the first orientation, 10 proud parents accompanied their children, listening attentively as the professors and TBLC coordinator Carlos Martin spoke in Spanish and English about the program – and about their own educational journeys.

“How come some people manage *con muchas cosas en contra*” (against many obstacles) while others slack off even if their parents are paying for college? instructor Elizabeth lehl asks the class. “You have to be motivated,” says lehl, a computer instructor and director of the Computerized Tutoring Center. “We will offer you a nice environment to study, but it is up to you....Concentrate on the goal. Be on time. Get the work done.”

Truman provides more than scholarships to help these students succeed. Martin, a Spaniard who first came to Truman as a fellow with the Kellogg Foundation’s ENgaging LATino Communities through Education (ENLACE) initiative, now holds a permanent position in Truman’s Student Success and Leadership Institute. Martin regularly scouts for talent in Chicago high schools and spots promising students in Truman’s GED classes. He personally serves as the TBLC students’ chief adviser, ombudsman, advocate and mentor.



Juan Martinez (left), a native of Coacalco, Mexico, talks with Carlos Martin, coordinator of the Transitional Bilingual Learning Community (TBLC) at Truman College. Martinez, who completed the TBLC program in 2005, was later elected student body president at the Chicago college.



**Helen Valdez (right), chair of the math department at Truman College, encourages TBLC students to “take as much math as possible.” At least one of her charges, Miriam Heligio, is certainly following that advice. She wants to be a math teacher.**

It is no coincidence that a TBLC alumnus, Juan F. Martinez, 27, from Coacalco, Mexico, was elected president of the Truman student government this year. Nor is it coincidental that Martinez and other TBLC students have founded a service organization called Latinos United for Education (LIFE), which sponsors cultural events, films and workshops.

English teacher Kimberly Steffen tells the group that she will be teaching them in one of Truman’s “Studio Classrooms,” which make heavy use of laptop computers, small-group instruction and tutors. “This is a great program. If you take advantage of it, you can really do well. It’s hard to go to school, to work, to have a family – I don’t know all your situations – but we offer the

support that a majority of our students don’t get,” says Steffen.

Helen Valdez, chair of the math department at Truman and TBLC program director, urges students to follow in her footsteps. “A lot of opportunities are available for those who will not let math hold them back,” she tells the audience. “You really should take as much math as possible – and science, if you’re

inclined. There are great opportunities for scholarships and internships." Part of their education will also be exploring the National Museum of Mexican Art (formerly the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum) that Valdez helped found in the early 1980s with fellow teachers from Bowen High School.

Elena Berezaluce Mulcahy, a retired Truman administrator and former head of bilingual education for Chicago's public schools, tells the young people that where she grew up, "going to work was a chore. Everybody dreaded Monday mornings. What you have an opportunity to do is to select something to do in life so that Monday mornings are not horrible for you. You can get yourselves into positions that you will love and that will make you feel fulfilled."

The students listen raptly. No one seems to notice when the orientation runs 30 minutes beyond its allotted two hours. Toward the end, the students – Gabriela, Silvia, Marisol, Airon, Nathali, Franco, Lucia, Yuliana, Miriam and others from across Mexico, Guatemala and elsewhere in Latin America – speak of their aspirations. A young woman wants to be an elementary school teacher. Another, to Valdez' delight, is determined to teach math. A young man from Uruguay aspires to transfer

**"What you have an opportunity to do is to select something to do in life so that Monday mornings are not horrible for you. You can get yourselves into positions that you will love and that will make you feel fulfilled."**

*Elena Berezaluce Mulcahy  
Retired Truman College administrator*

to Northwestern University and become a dentist. Others have nursing careers in their sights; one wants to become a pharmacist, and another is interested in computer science.

The students have lofty goals, yet they face long odds.

In this, TBLC's sixth year, Martin concedes the program has not yet produced a four-year college graduate, though Truman officials expect that to happen this winter. "The transition is taking longer than we thought, but the pipeline definitely has been strengthened," Valdez says later.

Even with classes clustered in the morning so afternoons are free for study and part-time work, it will take these students years to amass enough credits to transfer to a four-year institution. "Life gets in the way of their ambitions," says Mulcahy. If they do as most of the 124 students in the five previous TBLC classes did, most will revert to part-time status after the first year. Their grades – usually 3.0 or better in the first semester – will slip, which means they stand to lose the Harold Washington Scholarship. Pregnancies, too, keep some from earning a degree. Eleven percent of the female students in past TBLC groups became pregnant sometime after their first year.

The name of Harry Truman is hallowed in community college circles. President Truman commissioned a higher education panel in 1947 that first gave currency to the term "community college," and Truman helped lay the groundwork for the postwar growth of these institutions.



Truman College Interim President Lynn Walker praises the bilingual learning community program as "a grassroots effort that combines our faculty, our community and our students."

Today they enroll almost half of all U.S. undergraduates. Fittingly, busts and drawings of Harry Truman occupy places of honor in the Truman College lobby, and the college has a personal connection with the 33<sup>rd</sup> president as well: Grandson Clifton Truman Daniel is director of public relations at Truman, one of seven colleges in the City Colleges of Chicago system.

Last fall, 4,700 of Truman's 12,700 students were degree-seeking students. Four out of five attend part time, and almost half are Latino. Students typically are in their late 20s. The graduation rate for the first-time freshmen who enrolled full-time in 2003 was 15 percent; for all students, it was 5 percent. The graduation rate was 9 percent for white, non-Latino students, 5 percent each for Latino and Asian students, and 3 percent for African-American students. The college's retention rate was 44 percent for full-time students and 30 percent for part-time students. Like many community colleges, which typically serve students who face significant barriers to success, Truman wants to improve those statistics – and the TBLC program is a step toward that goal.

"There's no other program like TBLC in the City Colleges," says Lynn Walker, Truman's interim president. "We're really proud of its accomplishments. It's a grassroots effort that combines our faculty, our community and our students. Truman's always been an innovator in terms of the creativity of our faculty, technology and pedagogy."

Sharon Todd, the institution's director of grants, calls it being "Trumanized." This openness to new ideas is seen in the quick launch of the TBLC program in 2002. "We got the idea in May 2002 and had the program going full-tilt that fall," recalls Mulcahy. The college's penchant for innovation is also evident in the rapid expansion of the Studio Classroom approach – with heavy use of laptops and tutors available within larger classes to work individually with students. "We just jumped up and did it," says Todd, a Truman alumna whose heritage is part Native American. Truman once had a special program serving Native students whose families had moved to this section of Chicago in the 1950s and 1960s.

*Continued on Page 20*

# Data Quality Campaign

## *Among education reformers, the impopular weather: Everybody talks about it, but*

That is, until the Data Quality Campaign (DQC) came along.

For the past two years, this small but potent initiative has mounted a savvy crusade to unite the major players in the education world – governors, state education officers, higher education chancellors and more – in a single-minded effort to allow state information networks and systems to talk to each other.

The organizer for this campaign is Aimee R. Guidera, who says: "We are data-rich but information-poor in this country." It is a battlefield conversion of sorts for this veteran policy wonk, who confesses: "I was always one of those people writing in my reports that 'data matter' and 'you can't change what you can't measure,' but never giving it more than a paragraph."

The National Center for Educational Accountability (NCEA), a think tank based in Austin, Texas, helped launch the campaign in 2005 with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. "My organization (NCEA) was really frustrated with the quality of data coming out of states, and we found that a lot of other policy organizations felt the same way," says Guidera.

Soon 14 managing partners (see accompanying list) were gathered under the DQC's big tent and putting their stamp on a 10-point campaign to improve the production and sharing of vital information about students and the schools and colleges they attend. "It's an amazing partnership," says Guidera. "Absolutely nothing goes out with the DQC logo on it unless every single organization has signed off, shaped it and made it their own."

The DQC is pushing states to have longitudinal data systems in place by 2009 to track the performance of individual students all along the education pipeline. It has laid down what it calls the 10 essential elements of such systems:

**The federal No Child Left Behind law has made school officials hungry for better data, but "in higher education, we do not have that corresponding sense of urgency. We need it."**

*Michael Sessa,  
Postsecondary Electronics  
Standards Council*

# wages war on information poverty

*tance of gathering good data recalls Mark Twain's quip about the nobody does anything about it.*

1. A unique statewide student identifier from pre-K through Grade 12.
2. Student-level enrollment, demographic and program-participation information.
3. Ability to match students' test records from year to year to measure academic growth.
4. Information on untested students.
5. A teacher identifier system with the ability to match teachers to students by classroom and subject.
6. Transcript information, including courses completed and grades earned.
7. Student scores on college-readiness tests (SAT, ACT, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate and others).
8. Complete graduation and dropout rates.
9. Ability to match students' records from pre-K to K-12 to postsecondary systems.
10. State audit systems to verify data accuracy and quality.

This summer, the Institute of Education Sciences within the U.S. Department of Education awarded \$62 million in grants to 13 state education departments to help them build longitudinal data systems. If states want answers to questions such as: "Which schools and classrooms produce the greatest academic growth for students? What teacher-training programs have the greatest impact on student achievement or what percentage of high school graduates take remedial classes in college?" they need much better information systems than those that now exist in most states, Guidera says.

The DQC director, who cut her teeth on education policy work with the National Governors Association, sees big challenges ahead. Perhaps the biggest hurdle to be cleared is to allay fears about privacy while modifying the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) so it doesn't impede school-improvement efforts. "We need to respect basic privacy tenets, but at the same time, we need to update that law," says Guidera.

Recently, with support from Lumina Foundation and the Gates Foundation, the DQC has initiated talks among education policymakers and funding organizations about the need to align the largely separate data systems for pre-K-to-12 and higher education. At a June 2007 DQC conference held at the U.S. Department of Education, Michael Sessa, executive director of the Postsecondary Electronics Standards Council, said that the federal No Child Left Behind law has made school officials hungry for better data, but "in higher education, we do not have that corresponding sense of urgency. We need it."

Larry Fruth, a former science teacher and Ohio education official who heads the Schools Interoperability Framework Association, likens the current difficulties of incompatible data systems to the situation in which 19<sup>th</sup> century railroads ran on different-width tracks before the British gauge of 4 feet 8½ inches was adopted as the standard.

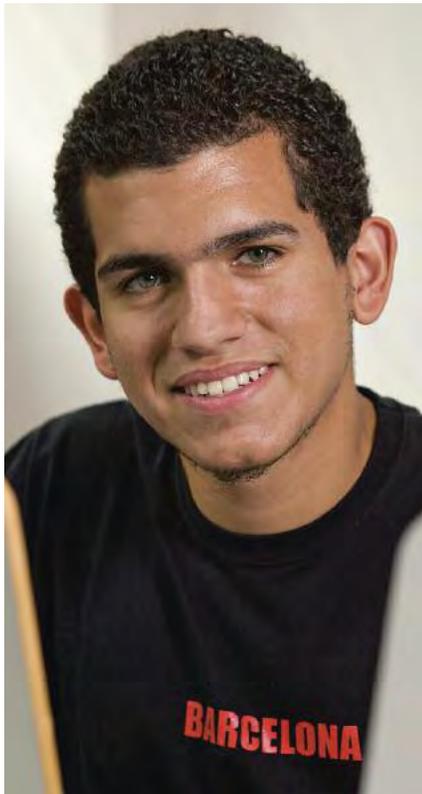
"All the tracks should be the same width," Fruth told the DQC conference. "Of all the visions of grandeur you hear in education for e-learning (and) autonomous learning," interoperability is the key, Fruth says. It's "not sexy," but without it "you can't put those other pieces into play."

## Data-driven partners

The 14 organizations that constitute the managing partnership of the Data Quality Campaign are: Achieve Inc., the Alliance for Excellent Education, the Council of Chief State School Officers, the Education Commission of the States, The Education Trust, the National Association of State Boards of Education, the National Association of System Heads, the National Center for Educational Accountability, the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, the NGA Center for Best Practices, the Schools Interoperability Framework Association, Standard & Poor's School Evaluation Services, the State Educational Technology Directors Association, and the State Higher Education Executive Officers.

At Truman, and at many community colleges, the non-credit and credit tracks are different worlds, and Latinos are overrepresented in the adult education, General Educational Development (GED) and English as a Second Language (ESL) courses. That is why TBLC, with just 25 students a year, has been watched so closely and engendered such support at Truman.

Some of the biggest boosters are the students from the first TBLC classes, dozens of whom are still working on their associate's degrees. Several spoke on a panel to the new TBLC students on the first day of orientation, returning a week later to speak with a visitor about what the program has meant in their lives. Among them were Luz Solis from the 2004-05 group, a Mexico City native who does kitchen work at Comiskey Park in the summer; Christian Sanchez (2005-06) of Guayaquil, Ecuador, who wants to become an electrical engineer; Juan F. Martinez (2004-05), the student body president who came from Mexico



**With help from the bilingual program, Uruguay native Franco Fernandez hopes to transfer to Northwestern University and study dentistry.**

four years ago; and sisters Johana and Jazmin Medrano, also from Mexico.

Sanchez, who came to Chicago two years ago at age 17, learned about TBLC when Carlos Martin spoke in his ESL class. "After he was done, I asked for information, and he told me I could get a scholarship with my GED score," says Sanchez, who fixes computers on the side. "For me, the best part of TBLC is the scholarship. Otherwise I wouldn't be able to study."

Luz Solis chimes in: "The scholarship was important, but the other thing for me was that the program was in Spanish and English, with a lot of support. That was really good for me. At that time I thought I could not do it in English only."

Martinez, 27, also learned about the opportunity while taking ESL and GED classes in Spanish at Truman. Martinez had taken some psychology classes at a university in Mexico and scored high enough on the GED that Martin offered him a scholarship. "This is my last semester here," says Martinez, who wants to become a clinical psychologist.

Johana, 22, the younger of the Medrano sisters, went through the program in 2003-04, two years before her older sister. Martin recruited Johana when she made the National Honor Society during her first and only year in Chicago's Roberto Clemente High School. An engaging young woman, she works as a bank teller and has used the French she learned at Truman to help customers who speak that language.

"I really liked (TBLC) and I learned a lot of things. I'm still here at Truman because I haven't been full time all those semesters," says Johana. "When I started at TBLC, the sociology and math classes were in Spanish. I didn't even notice when they changed to just English. It was very helpful." She hopes to transfer next year to nearby Kendall College to earn a degree in culinary arts.

Jazmin Medrano, 26, expects to earn an associate's degree next May and aims to transfer to the University of Illinois-Chicago, to the UI campus in Urbana-Champaign or to Northwestern University to become a Spanish teacher. Jazmin, now president of the student organization LUFÉ, says that she had no thoughts of going to college



when she first arrived in Chicago at 19 with little knowledge of English. "I thought I was just going to take ESL classes and work," she says. TBLC "helped me to think more in the future. With the TBLC, I learned that there are more opportunities, even though English is not your first language."

The students spoke highly of how TBLC taught them to work as a group. Their core classes, including sociology, are organized around a central theme such as *Uptown: Immigration and Neighborhood Change and Chicago, Latinos and its Neighborhoods*, and students go out in groups to explore the surrounding neighborhoods. "I really like to work with a team, not individually. It's one of the things TBLC teaches," says Johana Medrano. "You're not the only one who can come up with ideas. We can learn from each other."



**Jazmin Medrano (in blue shirt), president of Latinos United for Education (LUFE), leads a meeting of the group as they plan campus activities for Hispanic Heritage Month. Medrano, 26, plans to earn a four-year degree and become a Spanish teacher.**

TBLC alumni echo Johana's positive views on peer learning – and at least one graduate of the program takes it even a step further as he offers encouragement to those following in his footsteps. "We feel like a family. We are like a family," says Luz Solis. "We feel like we are models for them. It's another good thing about TBLC. It is a good bridge for people who want to start a college education."

These self-confident students are learning leadership skills as well as academics at Truman. When asked how the TBLC program might be improved, the students answered with one voice: more scholarships. "A lot of students work more than they study," explains

Johana. "It's very hard to study and work at the same time."

Another area for improvement – one that TBLC students mentioned again and again in response to survey questions posed by University of Illinois evaluators – concerns the next step along the academic road: transfer to a four-year institution. "(I need) more information about how to transfer to the university," read a typical response. "At this point, I do not know how or what I need in order to do so." Another student urged: "Definitely (give me) more information about how I can transfer to a university."

Clearly, these students are striving as

well as thriving; they want to retain their heritage, but they're also looking ahead – to places far beyond the reach of the Red Line trains.

"I would like to mention something," says Jazmin Medrano. "I believe TBLC teaches students how to adjust to the culture. It teaches you that it's OK to study and use your language, but at the same time it teaches that you have to learn English; you have to understand the American society in order to become a successful person. It's wonderful to speak your language and be proud of the country you are from," she says. "But also it's part of your responsibility as an immigrant to adjust to the culture."



## *Tallahassee Community College*

# Keeping students' eyes on the prize – through every lens possible

**B**y almost any measure, Tallahassee Community College (TCC) is not your typical community college. The 258-acre campus is a showcase in Florida's capital, with architecture and facilities that many four-year institutions would envy. Half of its 14,000 students attend full time. They come from across the state, many straight from high school with hopes that TCC will be their steppingstone to nearby Florida State University. The FSU student newspaper is distributed in boxes on the TCC campus. The 2,016 associate's degrees that TCC awarded in 2005-06 placed it in the top 20 of the nation's 1,200 community colleges. Almost 500 of those degrees went to African-American students; only 10 community colleges awarded more.

But what has really enhanced Tallahassee Community College's reputation lately is the very public way it has owned up to shortcomings and mounted efforts to improve student success rates. Spurred by President William D. Law Jr., TCC has overhauled its orientation and advising to help keep more students on track and has installed early-warning signals that alert professors and counselors at the first signs of trouble. TCC requires students who place into two remedial courses to take a College Success class. More than 2,800 students were enrolled in 103 sections of that course last year.

Law, a New Yorker who earned his doctorate at Florida State and worked on higher education governance for the Florida legislature and the state's board of regents, returned to Tallahassee in 2002 after leading community colleges in Illinois and Texas. This was no turnaround assignment; TCC was flourishing. But Law also sensed that "we were not very introspective. We were good because we *knew* we were good."

TCC knew surprisingly little about the students who didn't make it through to transfer to Florida State, Florida A&M and other four-year universities. "We weren't capturing any information to advise our decision making," Law recalls. "We did not know what paths students were taking, and where the choke points were. We had no data on students. Our systems essentially fed state reports. There's a big difference between state reports and management data on which you're going to organize and assess programs."

To begin the shift toward a more strategic use of data, Law brought in Kay McClenney, director of the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) at the University of Texas at Austin. She spoke with the faculty about the growing movement for accountability in higher education and told them how the best institutions were gleaned information from assessments to improve teaching and learning. A few faculty members may have wondered what all the fuss was about, but most bought into Law's vision for making a good college even better.

This new direction gained further traction in 2004, when TCC was

selected in the first round of colleges to participate in Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count – a national initiative aimed at improving success rates of community college students, particularly students of color, first-generation students and low-income students. A central tenet of the initiative is that it seeks to build a "culture of evidence" within community colleges. Achieving the Dream – launched with Lumina Foundation funding on 27 community college campuses in five states – has since grown to include more than 80 colleges in 15 states. Conceived and implemented by a partnership that



**Sheri Rowland, director of the Student Success Center at Tallahassee Community College, focuses intently on students who are in danger of being "left behind."**

includes eight nonprofit organizations, Achieving the Dream is now supported by 19 funding organizations whose combined support for the initiative totals nearly \$100 million. (See Pages 26 and 27 for more details.)

Looking back on TCC's entry into the initiative, Law says: "It could not have come at a better time for us." In 2004, Law had already set TCC's sights on enrolling more students from rural, neighboring Gadsden County, the poorest county in Florida. TCC's enrollment is 57 percent white, 32 percent African-American and 6 percent

Latino. Sharon Jefferson, vice president for student affairs, says a team of TCC faculty and administrators returned to campus fired up from the first national Achieving the Dream conference and decided to learn everything they could about the class that entered in 2003.

"We pulled together deans, directors, registrars, everybody who had something to do with these numbers and asked: 'What are they telling us? How many of these students were college-ready?'" she recalls.

Law preached the gospel that student success was everybody's responsibility and suggested that the best measure of success was how many students finished the courses they started. "Every intervention we had was predicated on low GPAs. Wrong indicator. The interventions should be on successful completion of courses," says Law. In a report immediately shared with its board of trustees, TCC found that 80 percent of students who dropped no more than one course in their first semester returned for a second semester. But those who dropped two or more had an 80 percent likelihood of not returning. TCC quickly moved to make tutors and extra labs available in the classes where most students were stumbling; they also harnessed technology to provide early warnings for faculty and counselors.

"The challenge for all of us at TCC is not to settle for just the one who gets through to graduation, but to ask: 'What about the five, the 10, the 15 left behind?'" says Sheri L. Rowland, director of the Student Success Center.

"When you have a staff of 12 or 14 counselors and 14,000 students, you don't have to be a mathematician to figure out that there aren't enough hours in a year's time for us to serve that many students one on one." Rowland adds: "We have wonderful, committed counselors who really believe in student service. The difficulty has been in moving them out of the old way of doing things, into using technology... (and) moving from individual, face-to-face counseling sessions into group advising."

Here, as elsewhere, the demands of college often come as a shock to first-year students who did well in high

Tallahassee Community College  
President William D. Law Jr. says  
the data-driven nature of the Achieving  
the Dream initiative "could not have  
come at a better time for us."



school. After earning good grades in Plantation, Fla., James Emerson, 20, was surprised to land in developmental reading and math at TCC. Fortunately for him, Emerson was randomly selected to be in the cohort of 216 "Dream Big: Achieving the Dream" students who received extra counseling and help. "At first I thought it was a bad thing: 'What did I do?'" Emerson relates. But he soon felt otherwise.

His group received what Sharon Jefferson calls "intrusive advisement," including tips on time management and test-taking skills, as well as regular encouragement to get involved in student activities and invitations to events on campus.

"The program keeps your morale up," Emerson says. "I met periodically with my guidance counselor. We would go over things and fill out the success checklist. It kept me focused." Emerson's first-semester grades (a 3.7 GPA) were his best since elementary school. A close friend didn't fare nearly so well. "My roommate didn't really have anyone to go over stuff with him. He registered for classes, his guidance counselor told him what was needed, but that was basically it," says Emerson. The roommate

*Continued on Page 28*



**Kristi Dewanti, a native of Indonesia, praises TCC's College Success course as "really helpful" in easing her transition to a new academic setting.**

## *Achieving the Dream seeks*

*The 27 original community colleges in their five-year journeys to help more certificates. The effort has expanded digging deeply into data to figure out*

A fourth round of colleges was added in April, along with a dozen new funders. With Lumina Foundation's recent \$18 million pledge to extend its involvement in Achieving the Dream through 2012, Lumina and its partners now have committed upwards of \$100 million to this effort to improve student success by helping two-year institutions embrace "the culture of evidence." Now organizers and funders are starting to talk about the next phase: a

national expansion that would allow all 1,200 U.S. community colleges to benefit from the Achieving the Dream model, which uses data to develop strategies for improved rates of student success.

"A committee of the national partner organizations is working on figuring out what the next iteration might be," says Carol Lincoln of MDC Inc., a North Carolina-based nonprofit that serves as the initiative's managing partner. When Achieving the Dream does ramp up, it probably will rely less on foundation grants and more on the colleges and states themselves paying for the work. That work includes bringing in data "coaches" to advise an institution's president, faculty and staff on how to disaggregate data and communicate what they learn to wider audiences.

And what about the pioneers of this approach?

MDRC and the Community College Research Center at Columbia University's Teachers College last spring published a 157-page evaluative report of the early results being shown by the initiative's 27 original Achieving the Dream campuses.

**"The theory behind Achieving the Dream is that careful analysis of hard data will lead college administrators, faculty and staff to accept some responsibility and ask what they themselves might do differently to lead to better outcomes."**

*Tom Brock, MDRC*

## *to stem traffic out colleges' side doors*

*the Achieving the Dream initiative are past the midpoint of low-income and minority students stay in college and earn degrees and to 83 campuses in 15 states where faculty and administrators are why so many students exit college too soon.*

The report, *Building a Culture of Evidence for Community College Student Success: Early Progress in the Achieving the Dream Initiative*, documents baseline student performance and early developments in the first two years of a five-year commitment. One of its findings is that students on these campuses "are struggling academically." Only one in nine who started in 2002 earned a diploma or credential within three years, and one in five of those referred to developmental math and one in three referred to developmental English passed those courses in that time frame. Seventy percent of students who began in 2002 returned for the second semester, but fewer than 25 percent were still around two years later. The colleges found gaps in achievement by racial and ethnic groups, with some gaps running counter to what was expected. Latino students persisted at higher rates than white and African-American students, but that persistence did not translate into degree completion.

Tom Brock of MDRC, the lead evaluator, says faculty members and administrators at these institutions often were surprised by how many students were failing or giving up. The theory behind Achieving the Dream is that careful analysis of hard data will lead college administrators, faculty and staff to accept some responsibility and ask what they themselves might do differently to lead to better outcomes, Brock says. He applauds these colleges for being willing to break down their data by race, ethnicity, gender, income and other factors and go public with the results. "These colleges are trend-setters," says Brock.

The courage of these institutions is reinforced by George Kuh, chancellor's professor of higher education at Indiana University and director of IU's Center for Postsecondary Research and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Kuh says increased accountability "is the way of the world," but adds: "Higher education has been one of the last adopters of this mantra." More than 600 colleges and universities take part in NSSE, which surveys freshmen and seniors to gauge what they gain from attending college. NSSE, first piloted in 1999, seeks to give institutions information they can use to improve the undergraduate experience.

Two-year colleges, which enroll 6.5 million students, are learning much about themselves from a companion effort, the

Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), a project of the Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas at Austin. CCSSE surveyed students from more than 500 community colleges last spring. The survey's primary aim is to provide institutions with information to bolster student learning and retention.

When CCSSE was launched in 2001 with support from Lumina and other foundations, community college presidents insisted on making all of the data public. Kay McClenney, director of CCSSE, says their reasoning was that community colleges "are overwhelmingly public institutions. They are going to be held accountable, but they should be held accountable for the right stuff... (namely) the quality of the education experience that students encounter when they show up on the campus." Both CCSSE and Achieving the Dream strive to deliver better data to college administrators and faculty, who can use that information to develop an institution's strategies for improved student performance.

"Somehow, we've managed to get by for a long time without seriously looking at the truth of what happens to students" at community colleges, says McClenney, who is a coach for several Achieving the Dream colleges. "Typically, community college people are there because they want students to have better chances in life." Data that raises questions about their own performance "may cause them a little angst," McClenney admits. "But pretty quickly, they are going to roll up their sleeves and say: 'OK, now what can we do about this?'"



**Tom Brock of MDRC, who is leading the evaluation of the Achieving the Dream initiative, praises the participating colleges, calling them "trend-setters."**

wound up dropping a couple of classes and wasting Florida prepaid-tuition funds on which his family had counted.

"College can get rough sometimes," says Emerson, who plans to become a marriage counselor. "It's good to have somebody there to let you know, 'OK, you might be slipping now, but you can still go and achieve what you need to get better grades.'"

Kristi Dewanti, 25, from Jakarta, Indonesia, was also in an Achieving the Dream cohort, although she hardly seems to need an extra push. Back home in Indonesia she worked as a secretary for the manager of a U.S. Agency for International Development project, and the manager sponsored her to study in the United States.

Dewanti, who has a 3.6 GPA and works for the international student affairs office, took both ESL and a remedial English course, as well as the College Success course. "It was really helpful," says Dewanti, who plans to return to Indonesia after earning a bachelor's

degree in computer studies. She doesn't have a car, but she's never failed to catch the bus in time to reach the all-commuter campus. "I never miss my classes. I just think if I miss a class, it's going to make me miserable. This is not my first language," she says with determination.

Tallahassee is still tracking the performance of its Achieving the Dream students in comparison with a control group that received no extra services. Since students customarily take several years to complete an associate's degree or transfer to a four-year institution, it is unclear how much difference the extra counseling and services have made.

But as of September 2007, here is where things stand for the 1,712 students who enrolled as first-time, full-time freshmen in Fall 2003:

- 374 or 21.8 percent already graduated.
- 185 (10.8 percent) still enrolled.
- 254 (14.8 percent) not enrolled for the current semester.
- 899 (52.5 percent) dropped out, including 334 after the first semester.

TCC is moving on other fronts to bolster retention and success rates. Starting in Fall 2006, it required 8,000 students – two out of three – to complete individual learning plans. The plans were mandatory for all first-time students, as well as for those in honors or developmental courses, those in the Achieving the Dream cohorts, international students, disabled students, those who had dropped 25 percent of the courses they had attempted, and anyone with a GPA below 2.0 after 46 credit hours.

This summer TCC extended orientation from a half day to a full day, scheduling scores of sessions from late May through August. It also overhauled its computer systems and Web portals. At Tallahassee, the students not only have TCC e-mail addresses, but also – through a program called TCC Passport – they can personalize their own Web pages, complete with blogs and pictures, much like Facebook.

TCC Passport has a more serious purpose, too. As William Campman, vice president for information technology, explains, the new system allows the college to track student use of online resources, including online tutoring and learning centers. Students and counselors have access to the student's full academic record, and an electronic "dashboard" prominently features green, yellow and red traffic lights to let students know where they stand on registration, paying for classes and meeting degree requirements.

Says Law: "We know a lot about our students that we didn't used to tell them. Now everything we know about a student shows up in that student's portal. The student has access to his or her whole record. When the faculty member sits down with a student, the record is fully available to both parties."

Chemistry professor and science department Chair Carol Zimmerman, who helped pilot the system last year, found that the technology helped her stay in closer contact with her advisees. Before classes start, faculty members get e-mails from the counseling center listing the names of students who require extra attention. "The memo will say: 'These are your first-time-in-college



**William Campman (left), vice president for information technology, worked to create TCC Passport – a Web portal that gives President Law and other TCC staff a full picture of each student's academic progress.**



**Carol Zimmerman (center), chemistry professor and science department chair at TCC, helps students Shieta McKenzie (left) and Danielle Koehler prepare for an upcoming test. Zimmerman says the TCC Passport portal's early-warning system helps her do a better job with her advisees.**

students, and these are the ones to worry about.' Because, if they can get a couple of semesters under their belt, they are more likely to stay in and graduate," says Zimmerman. A few weeks into the semester, instructors add comments to TCC Passport that explain how these students are doing in their classes. Both the student and the counseling staff see the feedback.

Zimmerman liked the approach so much that she helped her other advisees draw up individual learning plans. "You could see this moving into the whole advising system," she says. "We can check to see if they have any warnings. If we see a bad grade, we can ask them:

'Can you go in and see that teacher? Is there anything you can do to pull that up?'"

Janita Patrick, TCC's Achieving the Dream director, says, "We're now putting all these components and things we've learned together into a package, so from application to graduation there are steps and signposts and milestones for the students. The dashboard (on the student Web pages) lets them know all the things they have to do. Just because you're green now, two months from now you could be in the yellow. There are always more greens, yellows and reds they have to go through. We're measuring along the way."

Law has convinced faculty and staff of the power of data to improve outcomes. "We are no longer afraid of numbers," insists TCC's president. "We understand that is actually how you make progress. In fact, it's the only way professionals are going to change their opinion, when credible information challenges what they believe.

"Community colleges have lived on access," Law adds. "We pride ourselves on giving people a second and third chance. We're proud that the poorest kids can get here. *We ought* to be proud of that. But it's not enough. If it was ever enough, it's not enough today."

*By Davis Jenkins*

*Senior Research Associate, Community College Research Center*

In the past, the focus of research by most public colleges and universities has been on providing “snapshots” of how many students are coming through the door and how many are graduating. This attention to enrollments and degrees awarded is not surprising. Enrollments are a key basis by which higher education funding is determined in most states. In addition, colleges understandably want to celebrate their successes. As a result, public institutions of higher education have traditionally collected data for two primary purposes: first, to comply with government reporting requirements, and second, to promote themselves through public relations and fundraising.

The projects profiled in this publication reflect a trend whereby public colleges and universities are increasingly using data and research for another purpose: to improve student success and institutional performance. They are part of a larger movement to focus on student outcomes, not just enrollments. With this new emphasis on outcomes, colleges and state higher education agencies are now examining what happens to *all* of their students, not just those who succeed. They are tracking the progression of entering students to locate “leakage points” where students tend to struggle; they also are identifying gaps in achievement among different student groups, such as students of color or older, “nontraditional” students.

Longitudinal cohort analysis of this sort helps move discussions of student success beyond anecdotes. It dispels the myths that abound on campuses about why many students falter, and it focuses attention on what the institution can do to help them succeed. The involvement of a growing number of community colleges in these efforts is especially significant because these institutions play an important role in providing “open door” access to large

numbers of students who might not otherwise pursue higher education. The increased attention that many community colleges are now paying to student progression is great news. It offers promise that postsecondary success rates among traditionally underserved students might increase.

Several forces underlie this trend. First of all, families have a greater stake in college completion than ever before – both because of rising college costs and the increasing economic benefits that a college degree affords. Policymakers, too, want assurances that the investment of public funds is paying off in terms of increased numbers of qualified graduates. Also, accreditation agencies, spurred by policymakers and the public, are putting much more pressure on institutions to provide evidence of learning by *all* students, particularly by those who face barriers to success. As postsecondary education becomes increasingly essential for our individual and collective prosperity, public colleges and universities are recognizing that they cannot fulfill their mission if large numbers of students fail to complete a program of study.

That’s why colleges that are serious about achieving substantial improvements in student outcomes are focusing squarely on student-outcomes data. They’re making this information the basis for academic program review, strategic planning and, ultimately, budgeting, so that resources are directed to programs and practices shown to enhance student success. They are also creating data “portals” that allow students to monitor their progress and take greater responsibility for their own learning.

This trend toward examining progression and outcomes for students generally discourages the all-too-common tendency for colleges to implement “boutique” programs that serve

# good news for students

relatively few students. Instead it encourages them to consider *systemic* changes in practice, such as rethinking orientation and advising processes, aligning remedial and college-level curricula, and setting clear learning outcomes for courses – changes that have potential to benefit students on a large scale.

These developments have put pressure on higher education institutions to strengthen their information systems and research capacity. They are also making “institutional research,” traditionally an administrative function, more central to the management of the institution. Increasingly, colleges and universities are elevating institutional research directors to cabinet-level positions with authority over institutional planning and effectiveness as well as traditional research. This can create resource challenges, particularly for community colleges. Community colleges receive proportionally less funding than four-year institutions, even though community college students are in general less well prepared and therefore more challenging (and expensive) to serve.

Increasing investments in institutional research staff and more user-friendly information systems to make data on student outcomes broadly available to faculty, staff and students offers the potential to enhance decisions about the design, delivery and management of programs and services. However, improving information systems and research will not by itself lead to improved student outcomes. Before information can be useful, the potential users need to ask the right questions. For real change to occur, faculty and student services staff in particular must be centrally involved in the process of asking and answering tough questions about what happens to their students. They then need to work together

within and across departments – faculty collaborating with counselors and remedial faculty working with faculty in college-level programs – to figure out why some students are not succeeding and to identify ways to help students overcome barriers to success. The Transitional Bilingual Learning Community at Harry S Truman College (see Page 12) is an example of a product of this sort of collaboration – in this case focused on helping students with language barriers make the transition to college.

The pioneering work of Estela Mara Bensimon of the University of Southern California (see Page 4) provides a method by which colleges can build “evidence teams” to address other barriers – particularly those that hamper underserved students. A similar approach is being taken by Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count, an initiative that works with community colleges across the country to improve outcomes for underserved students by building a “culture of evidence and inquiry” focused on student success.

Changing the culture of an institution requires strong leadership. Strong leadership can move institutions traditionally preoccupied with access to adopt a new emphasis on access *and* success. Leadership is critical to creating a climate on campus where faculty and staff feel sufficiently secure to have “courageous conversations” that allow them to question their ingrained practices and experiment with new approaches. This is the sort of leadership exemplified by Tallahassee Community College President William Law (see Page 22). Under Law’s leadership, an institution that was already doing well by many students is using its data to uncover ways to do better by all of its students.

The next frontier in this work involves analyzing the flow of students

not only within institutions, but across educational systems. Some states are already taking steps in this direction, but for these efforts to have a broad impact, leadership is needed at multiple levels: superintendents and school boards, college leaders and boards, and state agency officials, legislators and governors.

The Data Quality Campaign (see Page 18) is seeking to build support among policymakers for tracking students across the educational continuum from preschool through college. Increasing alignment among state education data systems will facilitate such alignment at the local level. This in turn has the potential to produce a powerful base of information that stakeholders – including educators, employers and labor and community groups – can use to create clearer and straighter pathways to college degrees and careers.

Institutions that use student-outcomes data in this way – to the ultimate benefit of the students they serve – will be those that most fully realize the mission of public education.

*Davis Jenkins is a senior researcher with the Community College Research Center at Teachers College, Columbia University. He works with colleges and state education, workforce and economic-development agencies to analyze patterns of student progression and use this information to identify ways to improve education and labor market outcomes for students,*

*particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Jenkins also serves as a data consultant (or “facilitator”) at three Achieving the Dream institutions, including Tallahassee Community College.*



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