

ACHIEVING THE DREAM
A National Community College Initiative to Improve Student Performance

Background

While the UHCC has had success in increasing the number of Hawaiian students who enroll in a degree program at one of our colleges, we have been less successful in having those students either continue their enrollment at the college, or successfully complete their chosen programs with a degree or certificate. This grant application is intended to address the low success rate of Native Hawaiian students pursuing higher education degrees by providing a portion of the resources necessary to allow the UHCC system to participate in the Achieving the Dream project sponsored by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and the Lumina Foundation.

Achieving the Dream is a multiyear national initiative to help more community college students succeed. The initiative is particularly concerned about student groups that have traditionally faced the most significant barriers to success, including low-income students and students of color. Achieving the Dream emphasizes the use of data to drive change, and is especially interested in closing achievement gaps. As a national multiyear effort involving some of the best community colleges across the country, the initiative focuses attention and resources directly on those practices that will both enable the UHCC to meet its stated goal of student success, and more Hawaiian students to complete degrees, by developing institutional practices that enhance students' success.

Data compiled by the Institutional Research Office of the University of Hawai`i, documents the rate of success of students in the University of Hawai`i Community College system.

Table 1: 2003-04 Success Rates

UHCC System Campus	Peer Success		Success Rate		Grad Rate		Cont. Rate		%NH of Pop
	Rank	Aver	Total	NH	Total	NH	Total	NH	
Kaua`i CC	12/16	46%	36%	32%	31%	28%	5%	5%	17.7%
Leeward CC	15/18	44%	38%	29%	12%	13%	26%	16%	16.0%
Windward CC	12/16	42%	28%	30%	9%	7%	19%	23%	30.4%
Kapi`olani CC	17/20	48%	40%	30%	10%	8%	30%	22%	10.2%
Honolulu CC	14/16	50%	37%	34%	15%	15%	22%	19%	16.0%
Maui CC	14/20	42%	36%	30%	18%	14%	18%	16%	22.6%
Hawai`i CC	7/16	50%	34%	30%	20%	18%	14%	12%	30.5%

The overall Success Rate is a combination of the Continuation Rate and the Graduation Rate. The Continuation Rate equals the percentage of first-time freshmen in a given fall semester who returned to the campus in a subsequent fall semester. The graduation rate is the cumulative percentage of first-time freshmen in a given fall semester who graduated within a designated period of time, measured as of the summer term. The designated period of time is 150% of the normal time for completion. For example, students in a 2-year program would graduate within 150% time if they graduate within 3 years. The success rate is the percentage of first-time freshmen in a given fall semester who have either graduated or are still enrolled. Retention, Graduation, & Success data are based on first time, full time, degree seeking freshmen at each respective institution.

Each campus was also compared against peer institutions based on their enrollments, degree offerings, and faculty ratio.

Key Partnerships for Success

This project is a major multiyear statewide effort that will require financial and moral support from a number of sources to be successful. In addition to this request, we are also seeking support for this initiative from the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA). Preliminary discussions indicated that they support the initiative and will likely be a financial partner. We are also exploring developing partnerships with the Campbell Estate and the Castle Foundation.

The Achieving the Dream is a national initiative in its third year of operation. Participation in the initiative requires a commitment to a five year structured process under the guidance of the Achieving the Dream national staff as well as technical experts participating in the initiative. The following section is from the prospectus (Attached) soliciting participation in the fourth and final cycle of the initiative. It describes the various activities that would take place if UHCC was selected as a participant.

Co-designed by Lumina Foundation and eight national partner organizations, Achieving the Dream works on multiple fronts, including broad-based change at participating colleges; research into effective practices at community colleges; public policy at the state and national level; and outreach to communities, businesses, and the public. Improving student outcomes, particularly for students of color and low-income students, is at the core of this multilayered initiative.

In addition to the funders, the national partners and consultants to Achieving the Dream are: American Association for Community Colleges; Community College Leadership Program, University of Texas Austin; Community College Research Center, Teachers College Columbia University; Institute of Higher Education, University of Florida; Jobs for the Future; MDC, Inc.; MDRC; Public Agenda; JBL Associates, and KSA-Plus Communications.

The Design

A. Institutional Change

Each college starts by forming two or more teams to carry out the work of the initiative. A **core team** designs, oversees, and integrates the work. The core team develops and manages a process for institution-wide dialog about Achieving the Dream data findings, goals, and strategies. The team works with and through the institution councils, departments, and divisions to adopt priorities for improving student success, particularly for underserved populations.

A **data team** conducts in-depth examinations of data on student outcomes, disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender and other characteristics to diagnose institutional strengths and weaknesses in student attainment and achievement. The data team develops simple graphic presentations to share with the core team, faculty, key academic and student support staff, administration, students, and the broader community. In addition, this team works with the core team to recommend institutional priorities for strategy development.

Achieving the Dream provides a coach – typically a recently retired community college president or other highly experienced administrator – who meets with the president and the core team quarterly. A data facilitator – typically an institutional researcher from another community college, meets quarterly with the data team to help them know what questions to ask, what data to collect, how to analyze and interpret the data, and how to present the data to decision-makers at the college. The core team participates in a national **Kickoff Institute** that grounds the team in the values, goals, and expectations of the initiative.

During the first year, the teams engage students, faculty, and the community in data analysis and conversations that lead to the development of a four-year implementation plan. The plan includes up to five priority areas for improving student success. Institutions will adapt strategies from other institutions or design new approaches to address their priority areas. They set measurable goals and integrate the Achieving the Dream plans and priorities into their strategic and annual planning, as well as budgeting and resource allocation processes.

Each winter, the colleges send representatives to an annual **Strategy Institute** where national resource persons and Achieving the Dream colleges share information about problem-solving and strategies that have proven effective in increasing student success.

B. Influencing Public Policy

In each Achieving the Dream state, the initiative supports the work of a **lead organization** to promote policy innovations that help community colleges improve student success. The lead organization may be the state community college system office, the state community college association, or another group that provides leadership on community college issues. The lead organization is selected by the national Achieving the Dream partner organizations, based on the organization's interest; commitment to building a leadership team; and ability to effectively identify, develop, and execute strategic policy reform opportunities in the state.

Staff and other members of the state leadership team participate in semi-annual meetings of all Achieving the Dream policy teams. They share strategic and operational work plans and report on annual progress and lessons learned. They also collaborate on issues that are common across state lines, such as development of student data systems.

Expected Outcomes

At its core the initiative seeks to help more students reach their individual goals which may include obtaining a better job, earning a community college certificate or degree, or attaining a bachelor's degree. Each college participating in Achieving the Dream identifies student populations that currently experience low rates of success, develops interventions to improve student outcomes, and measures changes in student success. To gauge the effect of the initiative as a whole, all colleges document over time the percentage of low-income students and students of color who accomplish the following:

- 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;
- reenroll from one semester to the next; and
- earn certificates and/or degrees.

After four years of implementation, we expect the demonstration colleges to show measurable improvement in success rates among the studied groups, with no reduction in enrollment for these populations.

After eight years, Achieving the Dream colleges will have achieved the long-term targets for student success set in Year One, and they will be poised to sustain or further improve success rates.

After twelve years, the initiative will influence other community colleges nationally, as evidenced by increased success rates at colleges that did not participate in Achieving the Dream.

Benefits of Participating in Achieving the Dream

A. Colleges

Colleges that participate in Achieving the Dream receive assistance in building a culture of inquiry and evidence, that is, in using data to identify problems, set priorities, and measure progress toward success. Achieving the Dream colleges make lasting changes in policies, programs, structures, and services that work in an integrated fashion to support success for all students. Additionally, Achieving the Dream institutions gain expertise in improving success among diverse student populations.

Colleges receive planning and implementation grants to help seed reforms. They have access to, training in, and use of a national database that includes student cohort data for all participating Achieving the Dream institutions. Their state policy teams work with them to share information and action strategies to influence public policy. Achieving the Dream colleges participate regularly in special institutes to work with national experts and share best practices. Perhaps most importantly, they participate in a national community of learners – like-minded leaders who are deeply committed to improving student success.

B. States

States that participate in Achieving the Dream receive technical assistance and grants to support activities resulting in policy development and reform. A lead state agency – often the state higher education governing agency – receives an annual grant for five years to cover some portion of the costs associated with research, data systems development, convening of the colleges, and other strategies leading to policy development. Technical assistance and support are provided by representatives of the national partnership.

State policy teams share information on campus issues, strategies and best practices. Issue briefs and special meetings help teams stay abreast of current policy news and ideas.

C. Funders

Funders that participate in Achieving the Dream realize significant leveraging of resources while accessing a “turn-key” comprehensive national initiative. Lumina’s investment in eight national partner organizations has created a rich infrastructure to support the efforts of colleges and states and a working alliance that has become a national voice and platform for reform. There are many different ways in which funders can add and gain value through an Achieving the Dream partnership.

Funders may tailor the college selection process and, if desired, underwrite enhancements that advance the funder’s priorities. For example, one Round Two funder supported an external evaluation of its colleges’ progress in the initiative that proved extremely valuable not only to the colleges but to the initiative as a whole. A Round Three funder is supporting training for trustees as part of its Achieving the Dream work. Funding partners also become integral to our community of learners, lending leadership and expertise by participating, if they wish, in one of four working groups that guide the continuing development of the initiative.