



Achieving the Dream™

Community Colleges Count

August 22, 2012

Stephen Schoonmaker, President
College of the Ouachitas
One College Circle
Malvern, AR 72104

Dear President Schoonmaker,

Thank you for your Achieving the Dream efforts this year and for submitting your annual report. We reviewed your annual report and consulted with your Leadership Coach and Data Coach. We offer our observations regarding the college's progress to date.

We are enthusiastic about your achievements. It is admirable that at College of the Ouachitas, everyone takes on multiple roles that are all aimed at improving students' success. The college integrated its Achieving the Dream work with its reaccreditation efforts, leveraging the results. Additionally, as a new president it is apparent you have stepped right into the role of helping the college continue to make student success a priority. The college's specific efforts to improve success rates for African American students are showing strong results in closing the retention gaps. This is admirable work in line with Achieving the Dream's principle of equity. We applaud your intervention in Intermediate Algebra involving different delivery methods and curriculum mapping, revisions combining Basic Writing and Basic Composition courses, and First Year Experience interventions involving New Student Orientation, the Student Opportunities Seminar, and Men on a Mission.

We are encouraged by your progress in implementing the Achieving the Dream model in the following ways:

Committed Leadership: As the student success leadership and data torches are passed to new leaders at College of the Ouachitas, it is encouraging to see continued support for improving student success rates. The inclusion of information on the progress in ATD and forthcoming plans for the year in the president's annual State of the College address has proven useful. While each president chooses his or her own methods of informing the college's faculty and staff of status, this annual update seems to have been of great benefit and showcases your commitment to this work.

Use of Evidence to Improve Policies, Programs, and Services: It is very good that "Show me the data" continue to be the watchwords at College of the Ouachitas and the beginning of conversations involving student success. College of the Ouachitas's Strategic Plan and Annual Plans involving course and program reviews, along with its Institutional Effectiveness Progress/Report Card are complementary to the student success agenda at the college. Mandatory orientation and the required Student Opportunities Seminar course are improved continuously through student surveys and focus groups have made a difference in student

success rates. The continued use of evidence and leveraging this evidence for accreditation and other purposes is important for improving student success and other aspects of institutional performance. We note the college has adopted a scorecard approach to sharing these data widely.

Broad Engagement: We applaud the broad engagement of relevant stakeholders. A few of the methods include: 1) presentation of information and data at on-campus, community, state-wide, and national venues; 2) dissemination of information and data on College of the Ouachitas's website, Intranet, newsletter, e-mail, boards reports, and strategic plan; 3) publication of articles and ads in newspapers and 4) administration of surveys and periodic focus groups. The efforts to communicate regularly and comprehensively to the internal and external stakeholders are well organized. Moreover, involvement of adjunct faculty in designing and implementing the interventions is an important way to gain their talents and commitment.

Systemic Institutional Improvement: We commend the weaving of the Achieving the Dream Core and Data teams, interventions, and measures into the fabric of College of the Ouachitas accreditation efforts and Key Performance Indicators. The IPEDS data that shows an increase in College of the Ouachitas graduation and transfer rate from 21 % to 47 % is impressive especially when the latest rate of 47 % is compared to a 41 % rate for peer institutions involved in the National Community College Benchmarking Project and the 43% reported by IPEDS peers. Just as impressive is the tremendous increase in the number of awards conferred that began with 120 in 2002 and ended with 659 in 2010. The latter number greatly exceeded the projected 365 awards.

We recognize that improving student outcomes can be both rewarding and challenging. As you plan for the coming year, we encourage you to take a closer look at the following:

Committed Leadership: As leaders assume their positions at the college and as the planning year plus four years of implementation are ending it would be the perfect time for the college to consider involving a new cohort of faculty and staff in the student success agenda.

Use of Evidence to Improve Policies, Programs, and Services: For the same reasons, we also urge the college to update disaggregated cohort studies involving the five primary student success measures identified by Achieving the Dream.

Broad Engagement: Engaging a new cohort of faculty and staff in the student success agenda and updating studies of the five primary student success measures can be demanding. During such periods of activity, many colleges have found that new efforts of broad engagement throughout the college and the community were necessary.

Systemic Institutional Improvement: Using a curriculum mapping approach to redesign the math course sequence was a worthwhile effort. We are impressed that the faculty used the evidence so successfully and thoroughly and resulted in a clearer pathway for students to follow. New eyes may see new possibilities for systemic institutional improvement. One such opportunity could involve looking at success data as it relates to the new CAAP program.

It is impressive that all of the interventions have been brought to scale. We understand that while they are scaled, there is always improvement in the process, and potentially expansion to

other subgroups that will continue to "move the needle" on student success. We urge the college to examine which other subgroups would benefit from one or more of the interventions but that may not have been fully touched by the interventions.

As you know, the past year has been an important and critical time for community colleges. There is much that is expected of us and much that we need to accomplish if we are to create clear and meaningful pathways for our students as they strive toward success. It is our belief that working together, as a community of learners, practitioners and citizens, we can set high standards and accomplish these goals.

We appreciate the time, resources and hard work that you and your faculty and staff have devoted to your Achieving the Dream efforts. We look forward to working with you in the coming year and seeing you at DREAM 2013.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rachel Singer', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rachel Singer
Vice President for Community College Relations and Applied Research
Achieving the Dream

cc: John Brockman, Leadership Coach
Mike Flores, Data Coach
Terri Colananni, Instructor, Mathematics
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