

Student Success at Oakton Adapting Achieving the Dream Indicators

Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count is a multiyear national initiative to foster success among community college students, especially students of color and low-income students. The initiative began in 2004 with 26 colleges in five states. Supported by funding from a number of foundations, most prominently the Lumina Foundation for Education, and managed cooperatively by eight national partnership organizations, Achieving the Dream (AtD) now includes more than 100 colleges in 21 states.

The specific goals of Achieving the Dream are simple: to increase the number of students who

- successfully complete the courses they take;
- enroll in and successfully complete gateway courses;
- earn degrees and/or certificates.
- advance from developmental to credit-bearing courses;
- enroll from one semester to the next;

One of the key components of Achieving the Dream is building a culture of evidence at participating colleges. Institutions collect, analyze and use data to develop, implement and evaluate strategies to improve student success. The fundamental building block for Achieving the Dream data is the student cohort. An AtD cohort is a group of students who enter the college in the same fall semester. These students are tracked over time to determine the percent who meet the AtD goals identified above. A second key concept is the gateway course, a course that is prerequisite for other courses and has high enrollments. The first college-level courses in composition and math are included among gateway courses.

In 2008, Oakton Office of Research staff compiled data on Oakton cohorts who shared similar, though not identical, characteristics as the Achieving the Dream cohorts. The Oakton cohort project was not designed as a means to compare the achievement of Oakton students with that of students in Achieving the Dream colleges. However, if we look at Oakton data in isolation, it is difficult even to begin understanding how the success of Oakton students fits into the national landscape of community college student success. Consequently, *where they are available*, we provide Achieving the Dream data to help depict the national context of community college student success.

In this *In the Abstract* we look at the success of Oakton students from initial mathematics and composition placement through completion of the first college-level course in the discipline. Table 1 depicts the number and percent of students who were in Fall 2002 -2004 cohorts who placed into developmental composition or math courses and their enrollment and success in college-level courses. We tracked students for three years (nine terms, including summers). Data show that slightly more than one-third of students placed into developmental composition whereas 67 percent placed into developmental math (MAT 052 or below). Another 19 percent place into MAT 120: Intermediate Algebra, which does not satisfy general education requirements in transfer curricula. One-third of students who placed into developmental composition enrolled in and successfully completed the first college-level composition course within three years, while 10 percent of students who placed into developmental math enrolled in and successfully completed a college-level math course within three years.

Table 1: Placement, Advancement and Success in English Composition and Mathematics
Oakton Students Beginning in Fall 2002, Fall 2003, Fall 2004

Discipline	Total Cohort with Placements	Place into Developmental		Advance to College-level Course – of those with Dev. Placements		Enroll and Successfully Complete Gateway Course (EGL 101 and MAT 125 or higher) – of those with Dev. Placements		Enroll and Successfully Complete Gateway Course (EGL 101 and MAT 125 or higher) – of All Students in Cohort with Placements at Any Level	
		Number	Pct. of cohort	Number	Pct. of dev	Number	Pct. of dev	Number	Pct. of total
English	6,132	2,114	36%	890	42%	720	34%	2,851	46%
Math	4,841	3,222	67%	430	13%	335	10%	1,103	23%

Achieving the Dream data are available for the Fall 2002 cohort from 35 colleges. They show that 34 percent of cohort students successfully completed a college-level English course in three years regardless of initial course placement; Oakton data show that 46 percent of students in Cohorts 2002-2004 successfully completed English 101, the College’s gateway English course. AtD data for the same Fall 2002 cohort also show that of students placed into developmental math, 8 percent completed college-level math in three years; 10 percent of Oakton students who placed into developmental math completed college-level math in three years. Of all students in the AtD 2002 cohort, 18 percent successfully completed a college-level math course in three years; 23 percent of Oakton’s Cohorts 2002-2004 did so.¹ Thus the success of Oakton students in English and math, while not at rates that may be desired, is also not dissimilar from success rates in other community colleges.

As Achieving the Dream colleges have found, there are no easy answers, simple solutions, or quick fixes. Improving student academic performance requires institutions, including Oakton, to re-examine policies and procedures, pedagogy and course content, academic and student support services, and the configuration and scheduling of remedial and gateway courses.

¹ JBL Associates, Inc. *Data Notes*. Gatekeeper Achievement. Vol. 1 No 3, April 2006, and JBL Associates, Inc. *Data Notes*. Remedial Math Students and College-Level Coursework. Vol. 1 No 8, November/December 2006.