

CREATING A CULTURE OF CARING, LEARNING AND INNOVATION



How love, data, and the will to help students overcome life barriers transformed a college.



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CHAPTER 1

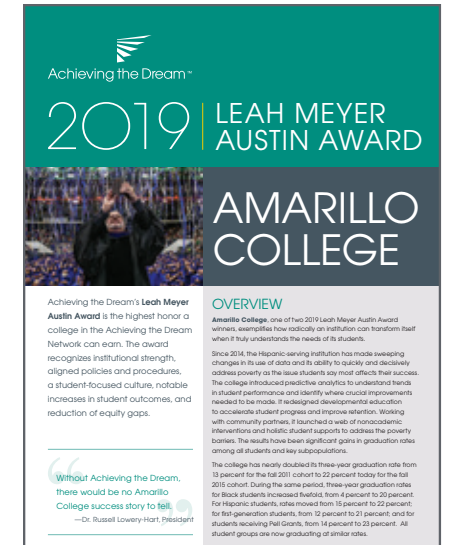
The Journey Towards Student Success



Just a few short years ago, Amarillo College concluded that the singular focus we have on helping students connect to college, overcome barriers to success, and stay on the path to completion gets blurred when viewed through an archaic higher education model. The old ways of doing things no longer work.

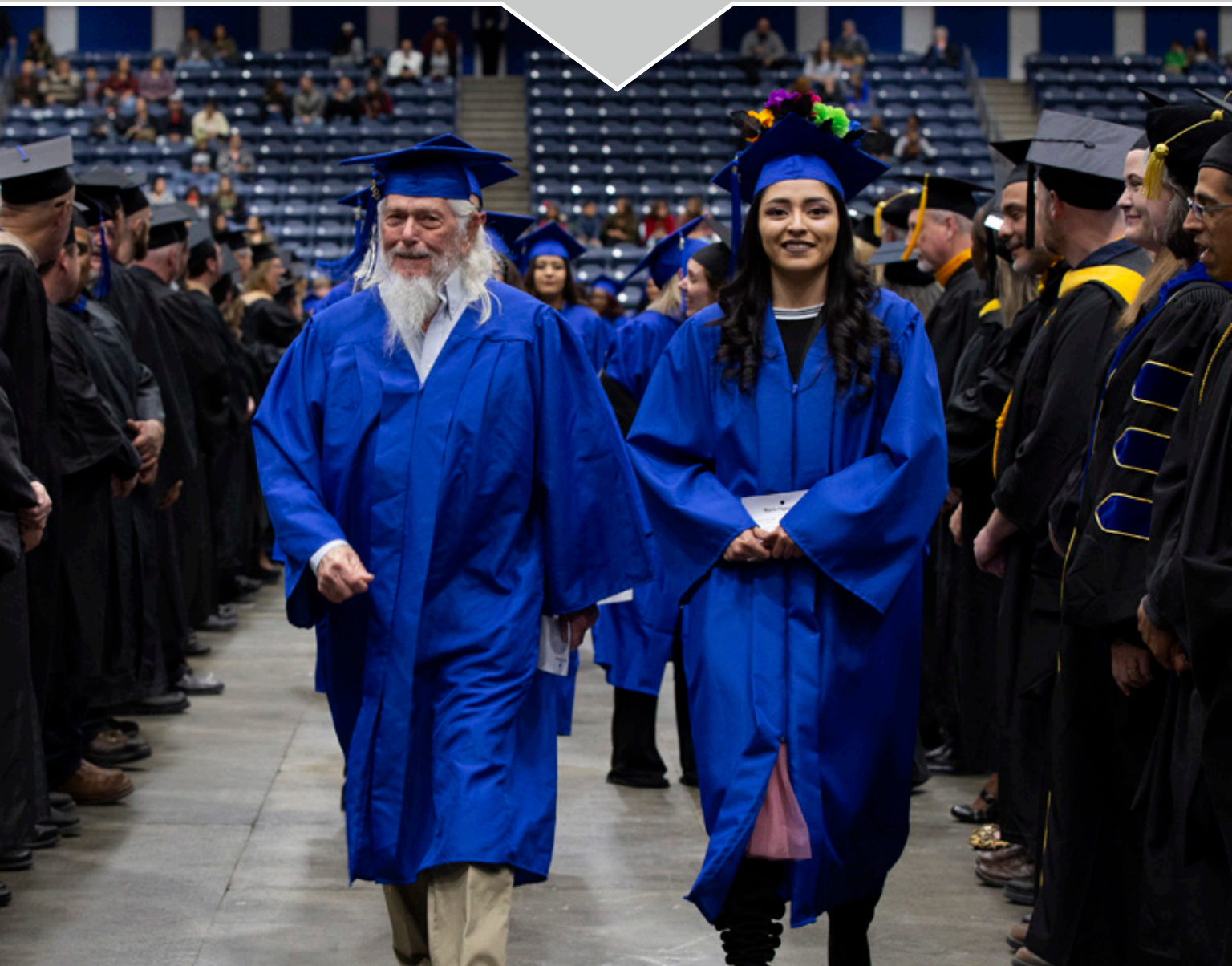
Over the past 6 years we developed and implemented innovative strategies to successfully move our collective needles of student success.

Along the journey through which we learned so much, AC attracted an accolade like Achieving the Dream's Leah Meyer Austin Award, while also being honored by inclusion among the Top 10 colleges vying for the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence.



INTRODUCTION

Over the past 6 years Amarillo College has carefully crafted a ***Culture of Caring, Learning and Innovation*** by truly listening to our students, learning about their lives and empathizing with their dreams. We strove to prioritize student success and remove barriers that threatened their dreams of higher education.



Our Theory of Change drives everything at Amarillo College (AC):

1. Removing a life barrier +
2. In an accelerated learning environment +
3. Through a deep culture of caring = COMPLETION.

As we listened to our students, we realized our college was designed for a student that no longer existed. To rebuild AC for our students, we had to know who they are and what they need. Institutional Research created a data composite of the typical student at AC. At an all-college general assembly and data-summit, we introduced “Maria” to all employees. She is smart and ambitious – and she needs us differently than previous students. She is a first-generation (70%), Latina (46%) female (66%) with significant financial need (60%) who works two part-time jobs and raises a child. She is the hope of our community; yet, we weren’t designed for her. To love Maria to success, we had to know and listen to her.

As a college, we committed to ensure no barrier would impede Maria’s graduation. We adopted a *No Excuses* philosophy. We took responsibility for failure and responded to it by rethinking policy, process, procedures, and personnel issues.

We learned from our students through secret shoppers, focus groups, and surveys. Students described what they need to be successful. The student voice, supporting data, and predictive analytics defined our theory of change, and thus, our interventions, budgets, learning structures, and personnel—at scale.

TYPICAL AC STUDENT

70% First Generation

54% Part-time

57% Minority

66% Female

60% Financial Aid

52% Transfer Focus

25 Average Age



Strategic Plan Tactics

With the *No Excuses 2020 Culture of Caring* strategic plan, we nearly doubled our graduation and transfer rates between the 2012 and 2016 cohorts by:

1. Removing a life barrier: The top seven issues our students identified as keeping them from success inside the classroom had nothing to do with the classroom – transportation, childcare, healthcare, food and housing insecurity, utility payments, and legal services.

Working with our community, hiring social workers, and leveraging our AC Foundation, we built a robust social services system. All faculty and staff received training in understanding the types of poverty and their influence on students' worldviews. Early alert systems included social services. We placed the Advocacy and Resource Center (ARC) in the heart of the main campus with satellites throughout other campuses. Emergency aid removes barriers within 24 hours and without bureaucracy. Our Social Services Department responds to over 5,000 student visits annually.

2. Accelerated learning: The longer it takes students to complete degrees, the more costly it becomes and the less likely they are to graduate.

Seeing the finish line for each class and degree gives students hope. Our accelerated structures to improve time-to-degree mandated: 8-week classes, integrated and required tutoring, scaled co-requisite developmental education, course redesign, master scheduling, career-focus communities, and intentional faculty and advisor development. We scaled accelerated learning college-wide. Our students' learning increased and success rates improved.

3. Culture of caring: Initially when students needed help, they faced a college culture that privileged self over help.

We asked our students to redesign the institution and write the college values. Students were clear – the perfect college for them is full of people who care for them. We placed these values in every job description, evaluation, and hiring process. Every employee knows these values — Wow, Innovation, Fun, Family, and Yes — and what they mean to our students. We reinforce these values through monthly *Badger Buzz* newsletters, general assemblies, data summits, and Super Hero annual awards. With *Camp Wow*, AC Greeters, team values innovation challenges, and monthly *No Excuses* spotlights, we empower employees to remove barriers and solve problems. We became a college committed to loving our students to success.



Seeing the finish line for each class and degree gives students hope.

The values derived from our strategic plan are central to our entire college and every employee knows who Maria is and what she needs from us. We close our campus offices twice a year for an all-college general assembly and data summit where we listen to our students, review our institutional report card, analyze our goals, and share ideas for how to be more responsive to student needs. We place signs on every door on campus: “Closed to study student success.”

We have an innovation team challenge that is focused on our values. Every employee is on a team, recommending solutions to institutional challenges. Winning plans have addressed issues such as transportation, simplifying procedures, and improving financial effectiveness.

We are continually reflecting on our institutional goals of completion, learning, labor-market alignment, equity, and financial effectiveness. When embracing a culture of caring, intentional communication and team building across the college are critical. And because of our theory of change, we closed our equity gaps and dramatically increased our completion rates.

"I KNOW IN MY HEART THAT AC IS POISED TO PLAY A GREATER ROLE IN FUELING ECONOMIC PROSPERITY THAN EVER BEFORE."
 —Dr. Russell Lowery-Hart



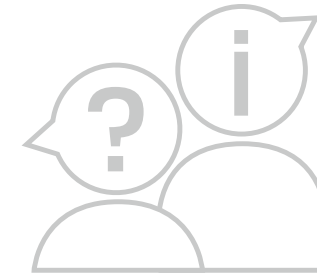
COMPLETION OUTCOMES

Since launching a **Culture of Caring, Learning and Innovation**, Amarillo College's gains have outpaced those being recorded nationally in A-to-C pass rates and fall-to-fall retention, three-year graduation and transfer rates, percentage of students who attend full time, and more.

We prioritized accelerated learning, predictive analytics and wraparound social services. We redesigned developmental education and incorporated the courses into credit-earning pathways, while reconfiguring most courses from 16 to 8 weeks in a successful effort to achieve essential learning outcomes.



The Power of Advising



Goals of Amarillo College Advisors

- Identify career interests;
- Formulate success plans;
- Explore career and transfer institutions;
- Connect to resources to overcome academic barriers; and,
- Link to social services offered at the ARC, which addresses life barriers hindering student success.

Advising and Academic Alignment

In 2015, AC established nine academic communities (pathways) to align our programs of study and allow students to explore a variety of careers within any given community. AC has restructured programs to include stackable certificates leading to an associate's degree. Assigned to one of the nine different communities, advisors connect students to programs within the communities; assist students with creating academic success plans; and, provide transfer and employment resources.

AC considers academic advising essential to college success. The Advising Department operates under a holistic, student-centered and culture of caring model. Advisors are intentionally trained to understand and respect students' needs.

Advisor Enrichment

In 2018, advisors completed the National Career Development Association training for facilitating career development. By evolving the necessary skills needed to assist students in discovering their career goals, advisors are connecting students to the right community and the right career. Per the 2019 CCSSE report, 45.8% of AC students stated they discussed their career plans with an instructor or advisor, 11-percentage points higher than the 2019 cohort.

Career Counseling

Undecided students take the MyPlan Career Assessment to identify career interests and explore labor market opportunities. Advisors evaluate students' career assessments from both AC and the high schools and work with students to determine the career community and pathway that fits their career and/or transfer goals.

Harnessing High School Recruitment

Advising works to reach high school students before graduation. Advisors collaborate with all 34 high school counselors to provide accurate advising and financial aid information and resources. We are committed to ensuring a seamless road from high school to college. Entering freshman from Amarillo ISD — the largest feeder district for the college — meet with AC program advisors on their respective campuses prior to high school graduation. We introduce and enroll students before they graduate from high school. During these one-on-one engagements, Advising and our newest recruits work together to learn about educational and financial aid options available.



*By changing our perspectives of higher education, AC has seen a **60%** growth rate increase in our student attainment/transfer rates between 2012 and 2016 cohorts (**30%-48%**). We have seen a **75%** growth rate in first-generation students graduating with a degree/certificate (**21%** growth rate in transfer).*



Financial Aid

The Financial Aid Office holds hands-on FAFSA workshops at all 34 high schools in our service area. Our staff work directly with incoming students and their families to complete the FAFSA form before the student's high school graduation, review scholarship processes, and financial forecasting.

New Student Orientation

Incoming students are enrolled into New Student Orientation (NSO) sessions. These interactive and engaging sessions help students continue to explore AC communities and programs. Students also are taught how to use AC's student software systems including Blackboard (Ellucian's Student Self-Service program) and Student Planning. NSO is a campus-wide collaboration between Student Affairs, Enrollment Management, and Academic Affairs.

Transfer Partnerships and Advising Pathways

AC has a number of partnerships and pathways that can help students transition to a university. Students work closely with AC advisors from initial meeting to identify a university pathway. Transfer advisors from West Texas A&M University (WTAMU) and Texas Tech University (TTU), our students' top two choices, are embedded within in the AC Advising Department. Students have the opportunity to meet directly with the transfer advisors and discuss career programs, admissions requirements, and financial assistance from the beginning of the first semester at AC.

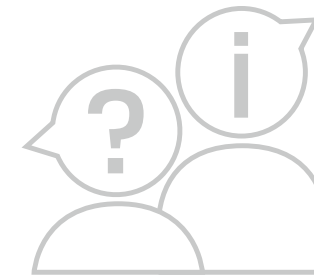
Advising works with WTAMU to bridge our joint student management systems to align transfer pathways clearly and seamlessly. Advising's goal is for students to see their entire pathway from certificate to the bachelor's degree via Ellucian's Student Planning module. Our students need to see a pathway to completion, course by course. They need to see each milestone as they chart their attainment and realize their educational hopes. Per a Fall 2019 CCSSE report, 70.1% of AC students had reviewed their progress towards degree/certificate completion versus 56.8% of students attending other large colleges.

The recent modifications in Advising to improve processes in student success are significant and are proving effective. Advising leverages technology to help students maintain successful academic progress and stay on track toward completion. Advisors create a comprehensive success plan with students to encompass a full academic year or to completion of certificates/degrees in accelerated timeframes.

In Fall 2020, AC student plans will be deepened to specific course sections. This allows intuitive course planning, simplifies the registration process, and allows students to visually chart their paths toward completion. This also allows advising to work closely with faculty to identify course offering needs and improve the master schedule for AC's 8-week model. Students are required to meet with their academic advisors before changing programs/communities. Advising uses Student Planning to demonstrate to students the benefits or disadvantages of changing majors.

AC's *No Excuses* philosophy guides advisors and led the college to add a social work component to our process. Each student completes a needs assessment during initial registration. Advisors review the assessment and work with the student to remove academic and life barriers by connecting students to academic resources. Advisors communicate with the ARC through a referral system for a student's non-academic needs. AC's ARC staff — three full-time Master's level social workers — connect our students to campus and community social service resources. With departments working together, AC is removing life barriers that will hinder a student's academic success.

AC's culture of caring exemplifies our theory of change: When we address a student's poverty barriers in an accelerated learning environment through a loving culture, our students will graduate/transfer. By changing our perspectives of higher education, AC has seen a 60% growth rate increase in our student attainment/transfer rates between 2012 and 2016 cohorts (30% to 48%). We have seen a 75% growth rate in first-generation students graduating with a degree/certificate (21% growth rate in transfer). We also have seen a 64% growth rate in graduation and 29% growth rate in transfer for Pell students.



Per the 2019 CCSSE report, 50.6% of AC students stated we help them "cope with their non-academic responsibilities." This is nearly 20-percentage points higher than the ATD or 2019 cohorts. AC's culture of caring shows our students our commitment to their success.



Completion rate interventions and innovations

Over the past six years, AC opened a counseling center, a legal aid clinic, a career and employment center, and a childcare center. We also launched an Advocacy and Resource Center, which houses a food pantry and connects students with social services provided by more than 60 local nonprofits.

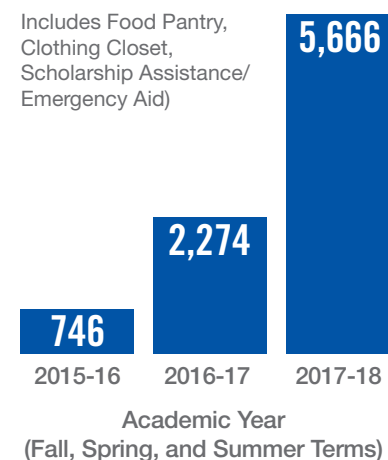


Poverty is the single greatest threat to higher education today. To counter the devastating effects of poverty on our community, AC implemented our culture of caring techniques. While we never expected to become advocates for removing poverty barriers, we know our culture of caring approaches are positively impacting the success of all our students. Our systems have changed the lives of our students and our students are impacting entire neighborhoods in our community.

“Students attending Amarillo College, and community colleges across the country, define the future of our country, and its capacity for economic growth and prosperity in a global society.” Dr. Russell Lowery-Hart, US Senate HELP Committee Testimony, Jan. 2018.

AC’s culture of caring centers on humanity for all – students, faculty, and staff. We have restructured our entire college around our students’ needs and removing the barriers to their success. *No Excuses 2020* reflects our resolve to being a higher education institution focused on meeting students’ needs; student success and completion; and creating a data ecosystem to drive change.

Advocacy and Resource Center Total Student Visits



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–Dr. Russell Lowery-Hart,
US Senate HELP Committee Testimony, Jan. 2018.

Data makes a difference

AC employs data analytics to create systems to eradicate student poverty barriers while reducing time-to-degree using scaled accelerated learning systems. They include redesigned 8-week courses, embedded tutoring, scaled co-requisite developmental education, and career-focused advising pathways.

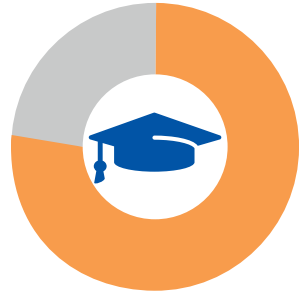
By building a social services system, we are significantly closing equity gaps by course, program, and degree. Socioeconomic status should never hinder a student’s educational dreams. In 2012, AC began creating a cohesive system designed to address the top 10 barriers to success identified by our students. With the creation of the ARC, AC began utilizing our community nonprofits and their resources for our students. AC works with over 60 local nonprofits, who have federal/state/private funds, to help students meet basic needs that could potentially stop them from reaching their educational goals. In AY 18-19, AC social workers assisted 2,468 students (32% of our total enrollment) in over 5,300 visits.

In spring 2016, AC determined 77% of all students take 26 specific courses each semester. To date, 95% of these courses have been redesigned to an 8-week format. By transitioning courses to a shorter time frame with the same amount of contact hours, students are able to register for two 8-week courses in term I and two 8-week classes in term II (fall, spring and summer semesters). This approach allows students to enroll full-time. In fall 2019, 45% of AC students were full-time versus 30% in fall 2015.

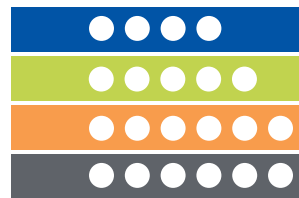
By moving students from part-time to full-time, we ease financial burdens because students have access to more financial aid and scholarships. Our data indicates students who complete 24 hours in the first year are substantially more likely to reach their educational dreams. Additionally, required embedded tutoring in the 26 courses ensures a shorter time-to-degree. We aren’t just accelerating learning, we are deepening it as well. By redesigning our academic systems and courses to reduce time-to-degree, our students are completing more credit hours each academic year and graduating/transferring in less time.



The difference made by the 8-week format



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Paving the Way with Pathways

Amarillo College has aligned its programs of study with Career Communities that not only correspond with career endorsements supported by Texas High Schools, but also ideally serve returning and transfer students.



Our approach to guided pathways is through our nine communities: Liberal Arts, STEM, Creative Arts, Education, Business, CIS, Health Sciences, Public Service, and Industry. More than merely supplying an organizational framework for our programs of study, our communities are designed to increase current and future student engagement with faculty, staff, industry, and transfer partners around community specific activities. Students start with a clear plan to completion and transfer. Communities build relationships between the students' course work, transfer institution, and career options.



Each community hosts events—including career fairs, clubs and organizations, meet and greets, student publications, panel discussions, and other types of event—to cultivate a sense of family for (and opportunities for interaction among) students.

At Amarillo College, our approach to guided pathways is through community.

WE HAVE NINE COMMUNITIES:

BUSINESS

CIS

CREATIVE ARTS

EDUCATION

HEALTH SERVICES

INDUSTRY

LIBERAL ARTS

PUBLIC SERVICE

STEM

Our communities are aligned with high school endorsement areas in Texas. Therefore, future students can understand how our programs of study build upon their existing knowledge of transfer education and workforce. Each community participates in Success 360: Discover Your Community at AC events designed as a recruitment tool and as a way to connect them with faculty and staff, making the college experience seem achievable.

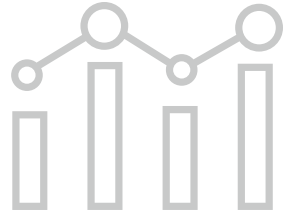
Our programs of study — the pathways within the communities — have clear course sequences developed by faculty that advisors use in planning a student path from program beginning to the end. Our Student Planning feature enables students to see the sequencing of the courses and track progress. As the college has moved to a 100% co-requisite model for developmental education, all students start their pathway earlier, avoiding the trap of a linear developmental education sequence.



Data, daring and the will to help

Our data-centric culture focuses on transparently using data to improve, not penalize. We believe all employees, regardless of classification, should understand who our students are and what they need.

AC's culture of caring approaches support early interventions to address a student's academic and non-academic needs before a student loses hope and drops out of school.



Data-driven Philosophy

We believe data should be reviewed consistently so all employees have an accurate picture of how our institution is performing and fulfilling its mission. The Office of Decision Analytics and IR (DAIR) created college-wide accessible data dashboards that display success data-filtering to micro-levels, including individual faculty and student support statistics.

Big Data on Campus

The DAIR dashboard is used every semester by faculty, department chairs, deans, and vice president of academic affairs council to review student course success disaggregated by a standard set of demographics. The data guides course redesign schedules, faculty development programs, and identification of equity gaps within individual communities, departments, and courses. Annually, the program review dashboard assist academic leadership with determining how students progress through programs of study, transfer, and align with projected local labor market demand.

Student Affairs Data

The student affairs dashboard provides retention (fall/spring and fall/fall), graduation, and transfer statistics for each area of Student Affairs: Career & Employment Services, Disability Services, Student Life, and Advising. The advising dashboard filters data to the micro-level and provides leadership with statistics related to each individual advisor and their student caseload. Individual data guides advisor effectiveness discussions and professional development; direction on student intervention needs; and support for student re-enrollment activities.

Leveraging Withdrawals

In fall 2015, AC revised its withdrawal policy to require signed faculty approval. Since its implementation, student withdrawal rates have continued to decrease while course success rates have increased. Fall 2014 baseline rates: 11.14% withdrawal, 72.84% course success versus fall 2018: 6.5% withdrawal, 80.8% course success.

In Summary

AC's culture of caring approaches support early interventions to address a student's academic and non-academic needs before a student loses hope and drops out of school.



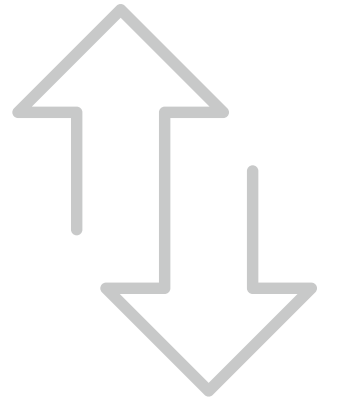
TRANSFER OUTCOMES

AC is laser-focused on creating a seamless and navigable system of transfer and advising so students can optimally proceed to four-year universities without loss of credits or valuable time.



Strategies for Success

Despite significant progress, transfer issues will demand our greatest attention moving forward. Students work closely with AC and university transfer advisors from the beginning. Transfer advisors from West Texas A&M University (WTAMU) and Texas Tech University (TTU) — our students' top two choices — are embedded within advising. Students meet directly with these advisors and discuss career programs, admissions requirements, and financial assistance from their very start at AC.



Student Planning Tools

Advising works with WTAMU to bridge technology and align the transfer pathways clearly. The goal is for students to see their entire pathway from the certificate to the bachelor's degree via AC and WTAMU's self-service Student Planning tool. The embedded WTAMU transfer advisor also has access to AC's student database to help streamline the conversation about credit hours earned and transferability. AC students are able to participate in all WTAMU events and student organizations.

Destination WT

Through our *Destination WT* agreement, students declaring an Associate of Art or Science at AC are co-admitted to WTAMU. The advantage of this agreement is that students who maintain academic satisfactory status and earn their associate's degree are guaranteed admissions and scholarship opportunities to WTAMU.



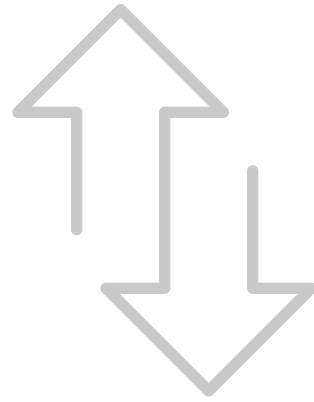
Transfer Strategies and Their Effectiveness

AC supports and facilitates student transfer by asking students to identify prospective destinations at the point of application. We host partner university recruiters, coordinate transfer fairs, deliver transfer workshops, and physically connect students with our two most prominent partners through campus visits, participation in university events and student organizations.

Our primary transfer partner, WTAMU, has a permanent office and fulltime advisor housed within AC. This space has been thoughtfully branded with WTAMU colors and symbols. The office is strategically located in our high-traffic student-advising center.

Through ID scanning software, AC tracks students at various success points throughout the college. DAIR tracks student engagement to determine project and program effectiveness. To evaluate transfer effectiveness, AC tracks students who sign in to see visiting university recruiters and participate at college-hosted transfer fairs. In addition, AC surveys students who participate in transfer-related programming. DAIR compiles this information into the Student Affairs dashboard.

AC matches student records against Student Clearinghouse data on a scheduled basis to determine primary transfer destinations for our students and to calculate transfer percentages – a key success measure of the college’s three-year, first-time-in-college (FTIC) completion rate.



We host partner university recruiters, coordinate transfer fairs, deliver transfer workshops, and physically connect students with our two most prominent partners through campus visits, participation in university events and student organizations.

Transfer Partners, Potential and Programming

WTAMU recently proclaimed AC transfers as its highest priority. Because WTAMU is the transfer destination for approximately 75% of AC students who transfer, our partnership is strong and growing stronger through plans developed this past year. AC efforts to improve transfer rates are uniquely tied to our relationship with WTAMU.

With a 2018 *Destination WT* program agreement, AC student pathways start with the WTAMU degree plan from the very beginning. AC and WTAMU have entered in to a FERPA-compliant shared advising agreement by which AC has designated WTAMU as an “AC official” for the purposes of advising, with WTAMU advisors permanently placed within the AC advising center and sharing training and resources.

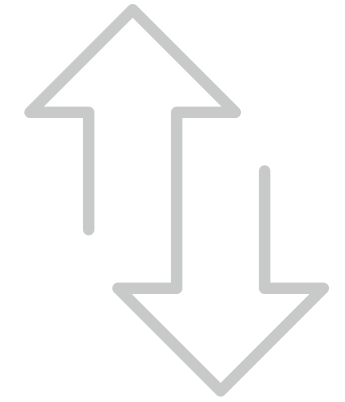
The design of the *Destination WT* program is straightforward. At the beginning of every semester, AC students enrolled in AA and AS programs are advised of their right to opt out of the *Destination WT* program. The academic records of students who do not opt out are electronically delivered to WTAMU at the end of every semester to facilitate the advising relationship described above. We then work with WTAMU to build relationships between the students and their faculty, advisors, and engagement organizations.

WTAMU populates its student system with the records of prospective AC transfer students. Soon, AC students who participate in *Destination WT* will be able to access a special WTAMU portal designed to display how their AC courses fulfill requirements for WTAMU programs—including the ability to complete what-if scenarios.

AC students who transfer with a GPA of 3.5 and higher receive an automatic \$4,000 per year scholarship and reduced housing fee through the *Destination WT* program.

It is too early to see measurable results for this partnership. However, we are confident in its design and are fully committed to its success.

*Because WTAMU is the transfer destination for approximately **75%** of AC students who transfer, our partnership is strong and growing stronger through plans developed this past year.*



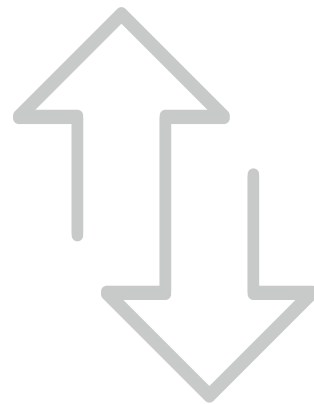
Transfer partners, potential and programming

Advisors start with a detailed analysis, each semester, of all students on a transfer pathway. Then, DAIR obtains transfer data through the National Student Clearinghouse each semester. All faculty and program managers receive and review the data in an outward-facing data dashboard for program review. Faculty and program managers review their programs every other year, analyzing trends and developing action plans to increase transfer rates.

Additionally, academic leadership and faculty within each career community systemically receive and review transfer data. In Fall 2019, for example, the college hosted a data summit focused on transfer rates using the dashboard (Fall 2012 transfer rate 23% vs. 27% for Fall 2016). Each community analyzed its transfer rate and discussed ways to improve the rate through curricular action, advising, partnerships with transfer institutions, and student engagement. The academic deans of these communities continued the conversation throughout the semester in separate community-based meetings with the faculty and leadership therein and made recommendations for new and streamlined efforts to President's Cabinet in October 2019.

Finally, DAIR provided deans with a list of 221 students from the 2017 FTIC cohort who, as of fall 2019, had not graduated or transferred but were still enrolled in courses. The deans, along with their faculty, developed action plans to contact these students, over the course of the 2019-2020 academic year, and present transfer opportunities based on where the students are in their programs. Much of this outreach relies on faculty engagement and connecting the students, based on the transfer conversations, with four-year transfer partners.

Our primary partner, WTAMU, leverages the data-sharing agreement between us to coordinate communication, outreach, advising, campus visits, and engagement activities to be more intentional with the relational hand-off of students between our institutions.



Closing gaps and impacting outcomes



The use of predictive analytics holds substantial promise for improving student success by revealing at-risk circumstances and empowering timely interventions.

In support of bolstering transfer initiatives, predictive modeling led AC to create an at-risk profile for all incoming FTIC students in fall 2017. Through data analysis, DAIR determined we lost a significant number of FTIC students between fall-to-spring and fall-to-fall (3-year average: 25% attrition and 40% attrition respectively). In particular, part-time students and developmental education students were at higher risk for dropping out than other students. With this knowledge, the VPAA office and DAIR created an FTIC at-risk intervention led by faculty.

In the fall 2017 pilot and fall 2018 scaled intervention, faculty coached FTIC students most at risk toward systems designed to remove poverty barriers; increase student learning and completion; and, provide more robust non-academic student support. Students in the pilot and scaled interventions had an increased retention rate by 5 percentage points over the three-year average (fall 2017 – 78% and fall 2018 – 79%).

Transfer students in the FTIC at-risk intervention represented 52% and 56% of the total students. While neither cohort is at the three-year transfer rate metric as determined by Texas, the transfer rate for the fall 2017 FTIC at-risk cohort is 13% in comparison to 24% for the FTIC cohort not at-risk.

In fall 2019, the AC FTIC at-risk profile continues to be refined and used to support intervention activities from Academic and Student Affairs. The AC Coaches and Champions mentoring program has taken at-risk students (risk level 3-5) and assigned them to coaches. Staff volunteered to support intervention activities led by Student Affairs for FTIC students, levels 1 and 2. Outcome data is pending.

Although AC has seen gains in three-year transfer rates, we know our new strategic plan, *No Excuses 2025*, will need to strengthen transfer pathways and systems with the same reformation that our previous plan strengthened academic success.

Part-time students and developmental education students were at higher risk for dropping out than other students. With this knowledge, the VPAA office and DAIR created an FTIC at-risk intervention led by faculty.



LABOR MARKET OUTCOMES

AC adds **\$640M** in income to our regional economy yearly.



Our region's labor market



The labor market not only guides our conversations; To align degrees and certificates with labor market demand is one of the five stated goals in our Strategic Plan.

Per Emsi's 2019 *The Economic Value of Amarillo College*, AC adds **\$640M in income** to our regional economy yearly. AC students support one out of every 22 jobs in our region. The manufacturing sector is the largest employer, supporting 10.7% of total employment. Next are retail, healthcare, finance, and hotel and food services. These sectors account for 60% of total employment. All programs and curriculum require labor market reviews annually.

Our salary data affirms AC cannot just align with our labor market – we must diversify and improve it.

Our salary data affirms AC cannot just align with our labor market – we must diversify and improve it. Students who earn an associate's degree from AC make wages of \$38,700 per year. AC students see an average rate of return of 24.6% for their investment of time and money. In return for their investment, students will receive \$421.5M in increased earnings over their working lives. This translates to a return of \$4.50 in higher future earnings for every dollar students invest in their education. While this is encouraging, our regional salaries require drastic economic development to defeat regional poverty and underemployment. If we solely align to our labor market, it will be to our peril. AC must build new industries to change our economic viability.



Employment and employer relationships

We're integrating work-based learning, applied learning, into all of our technical programs and even integrating some of that into some of our transfer programs.



Removing life barriers that interfere with program completion began in earnest in 2015. Advising recently started building upon culture-of-caring approaches through a new, aggressive social work advising process. Learners meet at least every semester with their community-specific advisor, who guides the conversation via a social work-driven protocol. Advisors will not separate the learners' basic needs from their academic planning needs. It is through this caring relationship that a path around the roadblocks starts.



Beginning in 2018, Academic advisors started using the National Career Development Association's Facilitating Career Development model. The training equips the advisor with relevant skills and knowledge to assist our learners in planning careers and navigating around life barriers to obtain meaningful work.

AC's General Education Competencies build our students' professional skills within the context of each class they take. Interview skill building is delivered through one-on-one guidance, classroom presentations, employer-delivered mock interviews, and online self-help modules. These experiences are scaled in our technical programs with expansion across all communities ongoing.

In 2019, our CIS program launched a Coding Academy. Local businesses identify and submit projects, and learners develop solutions for real-world challenges using cutting edge programming languages such as Apple Swift. Technology skills and degrees are central to our plans to diversify our regional economy.

Through a community partnership, AC, WTAMU, and TTU share a 20,485 sq-ft SimCentral lab where high-fidelity human patient simulators provide multi-disciplinary training opportunities to nursing, allied health, and medical school students.

Job placement is intricately woven into each program through our Career and Employment Services. All programs have active advisory boards to provide guidance and connections for employer recruitment and job placements. CES provides a web-based job search platform and offers resume and cover letter development assistance; interview coaching; and, help with job search strategies.



Industry partners and employer relationships



We work diligently and intently to align our programs and certifications to labor market demand. Our curriculum and program reviews are specifically tied to labor market connections and projections. AC works in various ways with employers who hire students with certificates and/or AAS degrees.

Advisory boards, internships, apprenticeships, and clinical experiences allow for continual input and relationship building within our business community. Career and technical education programs hold advisory board meetings to get employer input on curriculum and current and future industry trends. These meetings review student work, curriculum, equipment, and future skill needs.

Our healthcare programs provide students hospital and clinical experiences while earning college credit for practicum/clinical courses. MOUs are established with medical providers to ensure students are given ample learning opportunities in their settings. Other programs—such as business, mass media and graphic design—partner with local employers to provide students opportunities for job shadowing and internships. Our technical programs are building apprenticeship opportunities into their programs with the projection that in 2022 all students will have an apprenticeship opportunity before graduation.

AC has work-based learning partnerships with several local companies including the City of Amarillo, Bruckner's Truck Sales, Toot'n Totum, McDonalds, Happy State Bank, Sandia Labs, Pantex, and Bell Helicopter to ensure a workforce they require.

The *Texas Consumer Resource for Education and Workforce Statistics* highlights that AC's implementation of our theory of change is resulting in learners graduating more quickly, and fewer are unemployed.

Our employers help with equipment, facilities and tuition. Yellowhouse Machinery extended our diesel program by providing a hydraulics training lab with real-world application. AC has work-based learning partnerships with several local companies including the City of Amarillo, Bruckner's Truck Sales, Toot'n Totum, McDonalds, Happy State Bank, Sandia Labs, Pantex, and Bell Helicopter to ensure a workforce they require.

Yet, our real work is just beginning. Our service- and agriculture-based economy is in peril, and we cannot just align to it. AC must lead the way in diversifying and changing it through new programs.



Economic development and the importance of a skilled workforce



Economic development requires a skilled workforce, and AC's region relies on the college to help reduce poverty by increasing educational attainment. Like many colleges, we review labor market data. We are directly and specifically aligned with the workforce needs of our area. Yet, this has created a frightening concern for us.

Aligning to our local labor market will put our students and community in peril. We are working to "future-proof" our most important existing industries in manufacturing, transportation, agriculture, and service-oriented work. We certainly work to provide a trained workforce for existing partners. But we understand as a rural-serving institution that we will be foundational to changing the economic landscape of our community by helping existing partners adapt and helping create new industries based in technology, medicine, and veterinarian services.

We added future-proofing to our faculty and staff development. We work with futurists to identify leading trends in our current labor market while simultaneously working with regional leaders to create and attract new industries.

Program review is the epicenter of our labor market alignment and expansion. DAIR data can be disaggregated by indicators such as race/ethnicity, Pell, age, gender, first generation, enrollment status, and instructional method. Furthermore, cohorts can be filtered by persistence, graduation, transfer, job placement, and labor market. All programs, certificates and associate's degrees offered by AC are included within the labor market part of our dashboards.

Annually, DAIR compares our top 20 AAS programs, based on enrollment, to Emsi Labor Market three-year projections. DAIR presents this analysis to board of regents, president's cabinet, VPAA leadership, and faculty. AC's marketing department uses this data to highlight programs with enrollment capacity and job growth. For those programs with limited enrollment capacity, academic leadership works with faculty and advisors to find alternatives for prospective students.





Amarillo's population is increasingly poorer and decreasingly educated. Our fastest growing demographic is children born into poverty. Over 71% of secondary students qualify for free and reduced lunch; and, 60% of AC students require financial aid. The U.S. Census shows less than 23% of our citizens have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 31% Texas or 32% U.S. Until we address poverty, our economy will be dependent upon low-skill, manual labor jobs.

If a technical program has employment equity gaps, faculty target specific courses for redesign and request development opportunities. Then, specific student demographics are targets for additional supports like coaching, paid internships, career mentors, and enhanced tutoring.



Through the implementation of communities, AC designed programs of study that include stackable certificates (Level I and II) leading to an associate's degree. For example, we transitioned our two leading continuing education workforce programs — Truck Driving and Certified Nursing Assistant — to Level I certificates on a pathway to degrees leading to higher paid and more stable jobs. By creating a pipeline from these certificates to corresponding associate's degrees, we are ensuring our students are graduating with degrees that lead to a living wage. Furthermore, students enrolled in these programs are eligible for scholarships and financial aid, including Pell.

DAIR created dashboards for student-success and program-review data. They guide AC employees through reviews of individual course and program completion and employment data disaggregated by indicators such as race/ethnicity, Pell, age, gender, first generation, enrollment status, and instructional method. Within Program Review, cohorts are filtered by persistence, graduation, transfer, job placement, and labor market.

Annually, we partner with Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) for a Gainful Employment Placement Rate, to assist AC faculty and academic leadership with program alignment to labor market and workforce demands.

60% of AC students require financial aid.



STUDENT LEARNING

From developing strategies to increase student engagement to prioritizing accelerated learning and professional development, AC faculty has challenged the old way of doing things and prioritized removing barriers to student success.



Defining excellence in teaching and learning



Student learning drives everything at AC. We define excellence in teaching and learning in our *No Excuses* 2020 Strategic Plan under the institutional goal of learning. The classroom experience is key to a student's performance. So, teaching excellence in the classroom emerges from learner-centered and active-learning pedagogies that improve student mastery of and engagement with course content.

Alongside our commitment to removing life barriers, accelerating learning systems, and creating and sustaining a culture of caring, we know student success is guided by dedicated faculty who are committed to dynamic, engaging, and culturally responsive pedagogical practices. Faculty participate at a high level in Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) professional development focused on teaching and learning through modular and cohort-based programs. Because development is data-driven and critically important, we compensate faculty for engaging with it.

The impact, as well as its implementation in the classroom, is primarily measured by course success. DAIR dashboard provides faculty and academic leaders with access to course success data across several demographic and other categories appropriate to the college's mission, student body, and community. These dashboards drive faculty performance review, course redesign, course sequencing, advising, and the development of the master schedule.





Through the program review data dashboard, department chairs and coordinators are able to explore relevant data on learning outcomes, including course success across key categories such as Pell status, race/ethnicity, and modality. These academic leaders are able to drill down into each course to assess student performance at various stages of the program where content knowledge, as indicated on curriculum maps, is introduced, developed, and mastered according to specific program goals.

This analysis leads to action plans for improvement that may involve implementing new pedagogical approaches around student engagement (e.g., high-impact practices), teaching strategies (e.g., use of Transparency in Learning and Teaching design), implementation of course-based supports, rubric alignment, course redesign, critical reading strategies, and adaptive learning.

As an example of this, the Criminal Justice faculty teach courses that are part of AC's core curriculum. In 2017, Criminal Justice assessed the empirical and quantitative skills of the students in the Introduction to Criminal Justice course. The average results of the students reflected that 60% of the students were successful as defined by a rating of exemplary (score of 4) or proficient (score of 3) in their ability to apply their empirical skills to a particular problem.

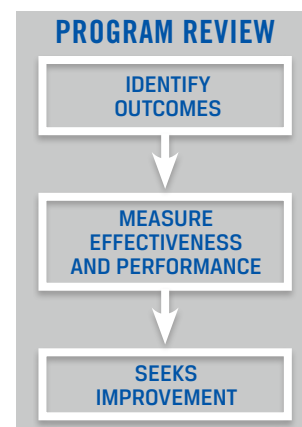
In 2018, the faculty implemented the Transparency in Learning and Teaching design (TILT) as an improvement strategy. The students' empirical skills were measured again in 2019 and the data show 70% of the students are in the top two ratings after the implementation of the student engagement technique (TILT). This is an increase of 10% in the student's ability to apply empirical skills to solve a problem.

Through the program review process, leadership is able to determine where students struggle the most and make appropriate changes. For example, when leadership over the Biology department determined through the program review process that a significant percentage of students struggle in online A&P I, the online sections were removed from the course offerings to go through course redesign. For online sections in Spring 2017, 74% of 162 students were unsuccessful. The overall course success for all A&P I sections that spring was 49%. In Spring 2018, the overall course success increased to 60%, and the total enrollment was comparable at 497 in 2017 and 486 in 2018 (with no online sections).

Wants, needs and assessments

AC privileges the student voice. Data from SENSE and CCSSE provide college-wide frameworks for understanding how students engage and learn with us. With the larger context of that experience, our most significant needs for improvement in learning outcomes emerge through a robust program review process that is bolstered by frequent assessment of general education and program-level learning outcomes.

Program review is a process through which each program identifies its outcomes, measures its effectiveness and performance across several metrics, and seeks improvement based on the results. A biennial report measures program outcomes over a three-year trend line. Program review enables each department to review their program/student performance outcome data in alignment with the strategic plan institutional goals, including learning.



The most significant needs for improvement are identified at the course/program levels; however, the Director of Institutional Effectiveness (in conjunction with CTL, academic deans, associate VPs, and VPAA) is able to discover trends across the college requiring attention. For example, a number of program reviews recently revealed that the online modality for numerous courses has success rates that are far lower (because of a lack of engagement) or much higher (because of issues with rigor) than traditional and hybrid modes of delivery. This revelation resulted in focused faculty professional development, discussed in 5.3.



One of the more notable successes we have had is with the creation of cohort-based professional development for faculty, after identifying a need for pedagogy more suitable for the students we have, rather than the students we used to have. This effort speaks directly to the third part of our theory of change to create a culture of caring where our students feel seen, heard, and loved.



Working closely with Dr. Paul Hernandez, author of *The Pedagogy of Real Talk*, we created a Real Talk Faculty Institute model that takes a cohort of 15-20 faculty, from within the same academic community, to develop pedagogical strategies for engaging at-risk students. Facilitated by instructional designers from CTL, as well as Dr. Hernandez, the institute is a multiyear collaborative workshop that begins with an annual summer immersion week, followed by bi-monthly meetings, during which faculty work closely together to produce “real talks” and “alternative lessons.”

A real talk is a scripted personal story, from the instructor’s experiences, that focuses on a universal theme around overcoming adversity. The goal of a real talk is to authentically relate to the student, build a relationship, and create a safe space for the student to interact with the instructor inside and outside of the class. The “real talk” is an expression of the culture of caring in the classroom that humanizes the instructor for students who may have negative misperceptions of the college experience.



Alternative lessons, on the other hand, provide contextualized activities that locate course content within real-world (or topical) scenarios. These lessons represent the student engagement piece in the classroom. Together, these techniques more closely connect the students to the instructor and the content to improve their classroom experience and learning. Currently, DAIR is analyzing course statistics for cohort members of the Real Talk Faculty Institute to determine its impact on student success and learning.



One promising early result, for one of our faculty, suggests that real talks and alternative lessons positively affect student performance by 10 percentage points on exams for which the concepts were presented using both techniques. At least 25% of our faculty have experienced this real talk cohort model and ALL faculty have received *Pedagogy of Real Talk* training and development.

The alignment of curriculum and learning outcomes to workforce requirements is established through the use of the mandatory state guidelines, as well as functional advisory boards that inform programs about industry trends, local employer needs, and the performance of AC graduates in the workforce.





Wants, needs and assessments

The most important strategy for strengthening teaching and improving student learning outcomes is through faculty professional development (FPD). Our CTL is the primary means professional development around teaching and learning is developed for faculty. FPD is tied to the institutional goal of learning in the strategic plan, which emphasizes learner-centered and active-learning pedagogies related to technology utilization, adult learning theory, instructional design principles, and teaching strategies within an accelerated learning environment.

FPD is delivered to adjunct and full-time faculty through modular programs that are topical (e.g., the “flipped classroom” or critical reading strategies) or through cohort-based environments (CBE). New adjunct and full-time faculty are required to go through New Faculty Academy, which provides onboarding, FPD, and instruction in the college’s culture of caring and the various resources associated with that culture. New full-time faculty receive additional support through a Teaching for Transformation workshop that focuses on pedagogical innovation.

CBE is especially unique to the college as it is an FPD model that takes a small cohort of faculty (5-20), from within a department or career community, and places them in a collaborative workshop setting over the course of one or two years. Facilitated by CTL, this cohort model thrives on regular meetings, immersive week-long workshops, and content oriented toward improving the classroom experience through student engagement. Deliverables include redesigning entire courses, creating master courses, or developing contextualized assignments and classroom strategies.

167 out of 197 full-time faculty have participated in some type of FPD, and over \$90K in FPD stipends has been distributed to faculty.

With modular and cohort FPD, faculty are expected, as part of their job duties, to take advantage of these opportunities. AC tracks each faculty member’s participation in FPD over the course of the year and pays a stipend commensurate with the amount of FPD taken. 167 out of 197 full-time faculty have participated in some type of FPD, and over \$90K in FPD stipends has been distributed to faculty. The goal is to create a culture of learning, teaching and innovation.

All adjunct and full-time faculty are evaluated annually using assessment instruments that rely on analyzing course success and attrition, student feedback and, in the case of adjuncts, an evaluation of classroom instruction. These evaluations are used to determine continued employment at the college and create action plans for pursuing applicable FPD. Full-time faculty must address innovation in the classroom and FPD in their annual faculty performance review.

Finally, there are numerous examples of course- and program-level innovation in pedagogy. The CIS program launched a Coding Academy where learners take on projects submitted by local business stakeholders to develop solutions for real-world challenges using cutting edge programming languages such as Apple Swift. In 2018, AC opened a state-of-the-art greenhouse where our STEM majors participate in cutting-edge, hands-on research in hydroponics, aquaponics, and aeroponics, which greatly enhances their classroom experiences. AC partners with TTU and WTAMU to share a 20,485-square-foot SimCentral lab where high-fidelity human patient simulators provide multi-disciplinary training opportunities to nursing and allied health students. All Health Sciences programs use clinical experiences within local/regional medical facilities and classroom labs for applied learning.



Learning gaps and how to close them



DAIR created the student success dashboard displaying course success data disaggregated by a standard set of demographics such as gender, race/ethnicity, age, first-generation, Pell college readiness. This data exposes any equity gaps in overall student course success outcomes at the community, department, and course levels. The AC service region has a high poverty rate, and our students reflect that with over 50% qualifying for Pell grants this fall.



We have data analyses that show students who are full-time in their first academic year are much more likely to succeed, and one of the barriers for our low-income students is their inability to enroll full-time. This was one of the main reasons for implementing an 8-week course model and intentional social service support. We increased course success in most areas (for example, college algebra went from a 67% success rate to a 72% success rate from fall 2015 to 2018. Our main goal was to increase full-time enrollment, which is now sitting at 7% above the five-year average.

Based on data analyses of FTIC and Developmental Education students and their completion, we are embarking on a new no-Dev Ed strategy to help our underprepared students achieve their goals (discussed at length in 5.5). This scaled strategy initial results are overwhelming. Previously, 33% of developmental education students earned credit within their first year.

One of the barriers for our low-income students is their inability to enroll full-time.

After the first 8-weeks with co-requisite model, developmental education students were incredibly successful. In college algebra, over 69% of developmental education students earned credit; 66% of STEM college algebra students; 81% of contemporary math students; and, 69% of English students earned credit. In just the first 8-weeks of co-requisite education, over 70% of developmental education students earned at least three credits, when only 33% of similar students earned credit in the previous year with the tiered developmental education approach.





No Excuses and adapting to students' reality



Time to completion is critical for all students, especially the 60% facing life and college-readiness barriers. Our *No Excuses* approach demanded we adapt to our students' strengths and needs through approaches: accelerated learning through 8-week courses, required and embedded tutoring, and scaled co-requisite developmental education.

Our students are commuters with family and work obligations that prevent them from enrolling full-time. In the spring of 2016, AC piloted 8-week courses with the goal of converting more part-time students to full-time status and accelerating time to completion, even for students requiring developmental education.

In an 8-week model, a student is able to take two courses in a first or second 8-week term, thereby reaching 12 hours or more within a semester, 24 hours after two semesters, and 30 hours through continuous enrollment in the summer. Currently, 77% of the total enrollment is located within 26 general education courses. 95% of those students are enrolled in 8-week sections of those courses. Course success is higher in 8-week courses.

In spite of significant increases in developmental education course success after the shift to 8-weeks, DAIR determined that these students who were getting through the developmental education sequence more quickly were still not completing a certificate or degree. As a result, AC removed all stand-alone developmental education courses in favor of a 100% co-requisite model for math and English only. Students who are not college ready in reading, writing, and/or math — no matter what their score is on the TSI placement exams — are enrolled in the appropriate co-requisite.



The co-requisite model for math and English provides an integrated learning experience, within one 8-week term, for the transfer and support sides of the co-requisite. A student enrolled in a co-requisite takes the transfer course first, four days a week, followed immediately by the support course. The support faculty is embedded in the transfer course to monitor student comprehension and stay connected to the transfer-level content. And, a tutor is embedded in the support course to assist the support faculty in meeting the individual learning needs of the students. The transfer and support faculty collaborate with each other at least once a week to assess student performance, develop appropriate interventions and study reviews, and identify strategies for improving student learning.



The math co-requisite has four pathways (business, contemporary, algebra for STEM, and algebra for non-STEM) that are aligned to the program of study and transfer pathway. Students who are successful in the co-requisite earn college credit and are already on their guided pathway, without having to move through a prolonged linear developmental education sequence. The effectiveness of the co-requisite model is measured through course success data provided by the DAIR data dashboard, as well as student surveys.

Alongside the shift to a 100% co-requisite model, developmental education prerequisites were removed from all general education courses. To support these students, a tutoring for success policy was adopted for the college as a whole that requires departments to identify specific tutoring interventions for each of their courses.



EQUITY

All students deserve an equal chance at earning a certificate or degree, transferring to a university, or learning the skills they seek to launch the careers of their dreams.



Equity Goals, Values, and Strategies



Reflecting our commitment to closing equity gaps, Goal 4 of our *No Excuses* 2020 Strategic Plan concentrates on increasing equity degree and certificate attainment by building systems supporting increased minority enrollment and completion. We aspire to treat each student as an individual.

First-generation students have access to strong community support, yet they are puzzled about how to receive that support. Students often struggle with academic achievement and lower degree attainment because WE are not ready for THEM. We moved from a deficit model (students have a problem) to an opportunity model (institutions are the problem) created by Dr. Donna Beegle. This model focuses on building authentic relationships and deep customer service.

Our students wrote our college values focused on what they said they needed from us — a culture of caring and service. These values are written into every employee job description and merit pay evaluation. The first week of classes, we put these values on significant display by placing employees all over our campuses – from parking lots to classrooms – to ensure students have someone to walk them to classes, take them to the bookstore, guide them through advising, and serve them as if our community’s future depends on it.

Demographic shifts make poverty central to our mission. In order to educate our students, meet workforce demands, and serve our community, we must address poverty barriers in a loving and supportive culture. And, it works.

AC has seen a 75% growth rate in first-generation students graduating with a degree/certificate (21% growth rate in transfer); and, a 64% growth rate in Pell students graduating (29% growth rate in transfer). AC course success rates (A-C pass rates) have increased 110% for Hispanic students, 112% for African-American students, and 108% all students. Data represents Fall 2012 to Fall 2016 FTIC cohorts.

Between 2014 – 2019, AC has seen a **75%** growth rate in first-generation students graduating with a degree/certificate.



Equity Goals Values and Strategies



Our understanding of equitable access has been profoundly influenced by a 2007 report from a collective impact organization, Panhandle 20/Twenty. *The Panhandle Imperative* report resulted from a yearlong study of the economic implications of low educational attainment rates in Amarillo and the Texas Panhandle. As a college, we were actively involved in the study, along with hundreds of other individuals representing several local institutions and organizations.



At the time of its publication, *The Panhandle Imperative* described that educational attainment rates in Amarillo and the Texas Panhandle lagged behind the state of Texas, which at that time, was positioned just ahead of Mississippi as having the lowest education attainment rate in the nation. The most important takeaway for AC was the report's emphasis on the fact that the future viability of our regional economy depended on our ability to significantly increase the college-going rate of Hispanic students.

Since 2007, the college has worked to ensure equitable access by implementing multiple initiatives designed to improve attainment rates. Three examples include: founding of Community Link, an award-winning, neighborhood-based, enrollment center that serves predominantly Hispanic and refugee populations; establishing AskAC, an inbound call center designed to deliver anywhere/anytime enrollment services; and by providing very focused enrollment supports for a local "promise" scholarship program, THRIVE, which was specifically designed to improve college-going rates for African-American and Hispanic students.

AC's ethnic demographic enrollment now very closely mirrors the demographics of the community we serve. Equity gaps are closing or have closed through our theory of change.

The overall college-going rate for our community is increasing at a modest pace. However, we are encouraged by the results of our efforts to increase the enrollment of Hispanic students. Between 2007 and 2018, Hispanic student enrollment at AC increased by 56%. Additionally, AC's ethnic demographic enrollment now very closely mirrors the demographics of the community we serve. Equity gaps are closing or have closed through our theory of change.





Equity Challenges



We are committed to building systems for equity gains. In 2012, AC students identified their top 10 barriers to academic success. Life barriers – food/housing insecurity, transportation, legal issues, mental health, childcare — stood in the way of completion. The initial 2012 survey was reaffirmed by follow-up data collection via CCSSEE, SENSE, Trellis Financial Well-being, and Hope Center surveys.

With the ARC as the hub of our equity plan, 32% of all students received intervention support. Since 2012, the AC Foundation has provided over \$400,000 in emergency aid funding to help students.

Top Barriers to Academic Success

2012 AC STUDENT SURVEY

FOOD INSECURITY

TRANSPORTATION

MENTAL HEALTH

HOUSING INSECURITY

LEGAL ISSUES

CHILDCARE

With over 70% of students first-generation and 57% minority, our theory of change is closing equity gaps. Yet, we have challenges that demand our attention and investment:

1. While we are systemically addressing equity by leveraging social service resources in the college and community, we still have barriers that impede student success. Childcare remains a community-wide barrier. Although we built a new childcare center in partnership with the medical community, childcare remains a daunting challenge to solve.
2. As we build a culturally responsive culture, we still have serious challenges in equitable hiring. Certainly, we have integrated equity and cultural understanding training throughout the college. Still, our employees – especially faculty – do not reflect our community. However, new HR recruiting measures and “growing our own” strategies are starting to have impact.
3. We closed socioeconomic attainment gaps for first-generation and Pell students. Hispanic students are graduating at similar rates to white students (21% vs 23%). Even though our black citizens are only 4% of the community and college population, we still must laser-focus on ensuring African-American men continue to close those gaps (15% vs 23%). Improving transfer rates for minority and low-income students will be a focus of our *No Excuses 2025* Strategic Plan.



Equity strategies to advance diversity and inclusion

All students deserve an equal chance at earning a certificate or degree, transferring to a university, or learning the skills they seek to launch the careers of their dreams.



Equity, one of our five AC *No Excuses* 2020 goals, has guided our intentional plan focused on redesigning and rethinking training, policy and procedures, recruiting and hiring, and student engagement in order to close equity gaps.

Because of the political realities of our community, we attacked equity through a poverty lens first. All employees completed a robust certification of understanding poverty. Additionally, 13% of our employees completed Dr. Donna Beegle's Community Impact Poverty Coach Accreditation. This created a unified language and understanding of our community – of which, AC is a complete demographic reflection. We learned about different kinds of poverty. Generational poverty teaches our students they have little control over the outcome of their lives. Those living in generational poverty have watched their families work extremely hard, long hours without ever seeing hard work pay off.

We had to learn that our stereotypes of poverty had been written into our payment plan policies, our financial aid practices, our recruiting efforts, and our instruction. Poverty is not about laziness. In our community, those living in the warzone of poverty are working two and three part-time jobs. Dr. Beegle's training allowed us to see our students (and ourselves) in a completely different, less judgmental and more loving light. Our poverty work gave us a shared language and understanding on which to build a culture of caring that loves the students we have, rather than the ones we used to have or wish we had.

Poverty-informed practices were integrated into hiring, student and employee orientations, and faculty and leadership development. AC's structure and guiding policies and procedures were modernized to act on poverty and subsequent equity training. We changed our recruiting and hiring practices. We intentionally recruited candidates of color within our faculty and staff ranks by proactively seeking partners throughout the community – churches, businesses, nonprofits, and support groups for different ethnicities — to connect us to individuals who normally would not apply for our jobs. It's working. Staff and faculty diversity has improved by 24% over three years.

While our initial equity focus was on poverty, our diversity committee held events highlighting the various cultures represented within AC, giving direct voice to the lived experiences of our students and employees of color. Faculty and advisors received training for gender and sexually inclusive classrooms, and AC employees signed on as allies.

In 2018, the President's Leadership Institute (PLI) spent an entire year studying, listening, and evaluating equity within the college and community. They made recommendations to college leadership and regents on services, interventions, and needed resources. PLI identified new technologies to help bridge language barriers for the large refugee population within our community and college. Currently, AC students speak over 40 different languages. They extended trainings to the entire college and facilitated panels with community leaders.

Our new strategic planning process will focus on how to improve success and completion rates for black male students.



Success and student groups



Tracking student participation in these success intervention activities helps us predict when and where students will need us and build systems to those points – such as online tutoring, emergency aid, and coaches.

TUTORING
SOCIAL SERVICES
STUDENT LIFE

ADVISING
TRANSPORTATION
COUNSELING

CAREER AND
EMPLOYMENT
SERVICES

Our robust data-centric culture leverages information and insights to improve, not penalize. We built our own dashboards and use data analytics to predict where and when students need support. Our data defined our theory of change and subsequent interventions.



Data is reviewed and discussed consistently by all employees via our dashboards. These dashboards provide faculty/staff with current and historical data for course success/program completion; retention/persistence rates; workforce demand; and, three-year graduation/transfer rates. Dashboards can be disaggregated based on demographic indicators.

Via an ID scanning system, AC tracks student participation in ALL success intervention activities, including tutoring, social services, student life, advising, transportation, counseling, and career and employment services. We then predict when and where students will need us and build systems to those points – such as online tutoring, emergency aid, and coaches, for example.

Data analytics and predictive modeling drive AC initiatives, such as our at-risk profile for all incoming first-time-in-college students. The at-risk profile project increased FTIC fall-to-spring retention by nearly 10%. Faculty intentionally connected students most at risk (level 3 and higher) to institutional systems designed to eradicate poverty barriers; increase student learning and completion; and, provide non-academic student support.



INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES AND CULTURE

Institutional capacities and human capital



Our success in executing our theory of change is dependent on not only a powerful overarching vision, but also on the daily, intentional actions by the individuals who work for AC. To ensure we select the right culture fit, each job description and posting explicitly describes the expectation of living the culture of caring values in every encounter with every student, colleague and guest. We are committed, at every level of the institution, to love our students to success. We build systems to intentionally care for students from recruitment to graduation.

Employee performance is measured against not only technical skills but also the culture of caring, with a faculty-designed merit pay system, which is reflective of our culture of caring expectation. The college immerses new employees and faculty in the culture of caring, through our Camp WOW, which engages employees to understand our Maria by listening to her and reviewing data about her. New employees learn that every person, no matter the job title, is responsible for Maria's success.



Resource allocation and leadership

Goal five of *No Excuses 2020* builds systems for financial effectiveness by creating innovative, simplification, and financial responsibility. Through zero-based budgets and our retention calculator, departmental funding requests address pillars within the theory of change. Initial funding for our culture of caring initiatives began with federal, state, and local grants. However, all program costs are now institutionalized. As student success improved, Texas Success Point funding increased. Budget growth reflects tuition and fees from improved student retention; transition of students from part- to full-time; and, a budgetary philosophy focused on simplifying and streamlining processes, personnel, procedures and policies.

AC carefully follows a shared governance model. We recognize faculty, administrators and the board of regents each have a role in strategic planning and decision-making, with respect for the differences in these roles. Faculty has the opportunity and responsibility to inform administrators of the best practices for identifying student success barriers and information about excellence in education.



Governance, guidance and decision-making



AC's nine-member elected board of regents sets the policy for the institution, approves its strategic plan, oversees institutional budgets, and holds the president accountable for implementation of the plan and adherence to the budget. Regents begin every meeting reviewing student success data from the AC report card.

Faculty leadership is an eighteen-person faculty senate, which meets regularly to consider matters such as curriculum and pedagogy. Questions, decisions and observations from this group are presented regularly to the cabinet and the college.

AC's institutional leadership is the nine-person president's cabinet composed of the leaders for every area of the institution. Cabinet meets weekly with a prepared agenda to consider all matters of the institution and review data on a variety of subjects concerning student success. The minutes of these meetings are posted on AC's public website for review.

The cabinet identifies key problems and trends about enrollment, retention, persistence, equity, and completion. Data, proposed solutions, and new initiatives are presented at each regent's meeting to describe all aspects of student success. Key issues are put through a "scrum" list with a cross-college team and a short timeline to tackle and implement solutions. For example, our scrum team for the retention plan had 12 people from marketing, IT, academic and student affairs, and enrollment management. They first designed a comprehensive communication map and then implemented the technology and personnel to execute the plan.

The regents and president formed a leadership team that brought students to the table for meaningful dialogue and input. We listened to student focus groups and utilized students as secret shoppers to assess our processes aimed at eliminating barriers to success. AC has almost 100 Poverty Coaches, certified through Dr. Donna Beegle's institute. We host poverty awareness trainings for new employees quarterly. The president invited employees to join him for a poverty simulation by living as homeless to understand our students' challenges.

AC conducts data summits where employees review demographic and success data. Our students' experience helped us understand the need for a new communication process. We contracted with SWIM Digital to turn our secret shopper insights into a comprehensive enrollment to retention to completion plan. Every sector of the college provided insights and expertise in responding to the student experience.



CHAPTER 2

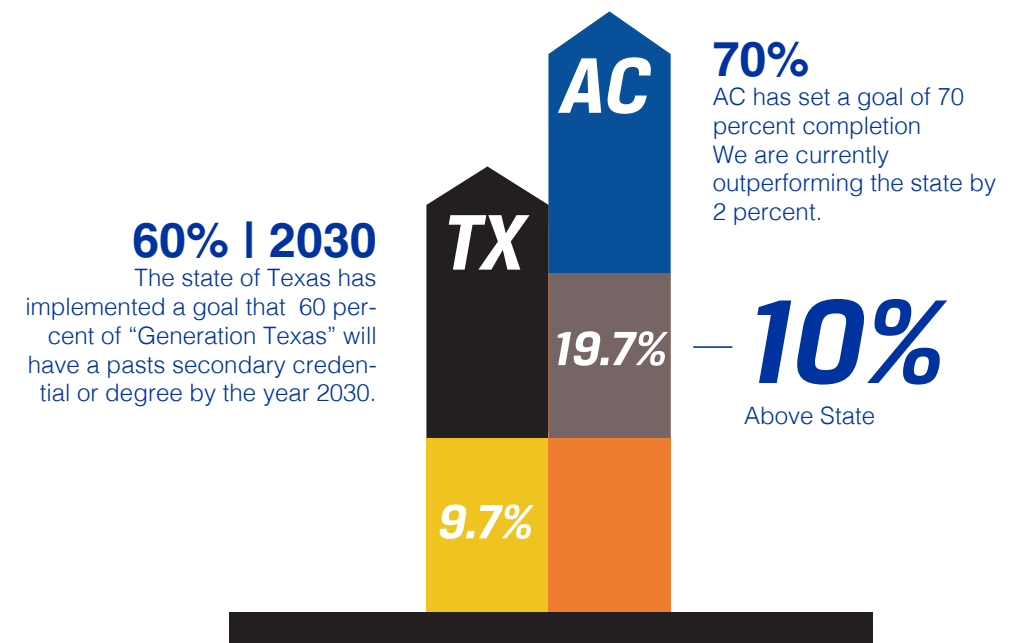
Report Card



Over the past six years Amarillo College has sought to become a data-driven institution—focusing on measurable results that manifest the outcomes of the strategies and policies the college adopts. Part of this initiative is creating a yearly report card that communicates these metrics to both internal and external stakeholders—providing an atmosphere of transparency and accountability at all levels.

Of particular importance for community colleges is the metric of completion. AC has spent considerable effort leveraging its resources to ensure that students have the tools necessary to pursue their dreams of higher education. AC is pursuing an ambitious completion rate of 70%.

Growth In Associate Degree Awards | 2015-2017



STATE OF THE COLLEGE REPORT



STRIVE
for **70**

SUCCESS IS THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

Amarillo College is focused on completion, labor market demands, learning, equity, and financial effectiveness.

In our pursuit of 70% completion, AC has undergone a comprehensive system redesign—from students walking in the front door to students walking across the graduation stage.

Data Sources: AC Office of Institutional Research, THECB, TWC

COMPLETION

10 YEARS HAS BROUGHT DRAMATIC PROGRESS

3-YEAR
COMPLETION RATE
2006-2009



25.11%

3-YEAR
COMPLETION RATE
2016-2019



51.53%

INCREASES IN CERTIFICATES AND DEGREES

139%
ALL STUDENTS

179%
HISPANIC STUDENTS

208%
AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS

LABOR MARKET DEMANDS | 2020-2025

TOP AREAS OF OCCUPATIONAL GROWTH IN THE REGION

TOP PROGRAMS ALIGNED WITH LABOR MARKET DEMANDS

Utilities	115%	Industrial Technology and Renewable Energy
Educational Services	112%	Education
Health Care and Social Assistance	107%	Nursing and Emergency Medical Services
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	106%	Business Management and Computer Information Systems
Transportation and Warehousing	106%	Automotive and Diesel Mechanics Technologies and Truck Driving

STUDENT SUCCESS NON-THRIVE AND THRIVE STUDENTS

70%

54%

57%

66%

60%

52%

25



Fall 2019

TYPICAL AC STUDENT

First Generation

Part Time

Minority

Female

Financial Aid

Transfer Focus

Average Age



Fall 2019

THRIVE STUDENT

69%

17%

69%

58%

73%

67%

18

AC ECONOMIC IMPACT FY 2017-2018

AMARILLO
COLLEGE
ADDED

\$639.4
MILLION

TO THE
AC SERVICE
AREA

FOR EVERY \$1 INVESTED IN
AC, SOCIETY RECEIVES

\$9.50

IN ADDED INCOME AND SOCIAL SAVINGS

THE ACTIVITIES OF AC AND
ITS STUDENTS SUPPORTS

1 OUT OF **22**

JOBS IN THE AC SERVICE REGION

FOR EVERY \$1 INVESTED IN
AC, STUDENTS WILL GAIN

\$4.50

IN LIFETIME EARNINGS



CHAPTER 3

Data-Driven Tools and Strategies



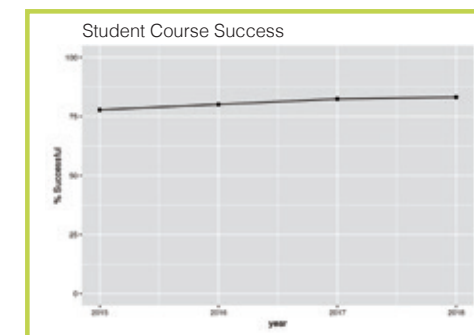
As Amarillo College sought to re-orient itself around data the need for nimble and accessible tools became apparent. The Office of Decision Analytics and Institutional Research created a series of data dashboards available to all Amarillo College faculty and staff. With these valuable metrics in hand individuals at all levels are empowered to examine their activities and ensure they are maximizing resources in effective ways.

AC understands the process of breaking down higher education silos to create a cohesive, integrated system. We must be willing to reimagine programs with only one driving question in mind: How does this program love and support our students and lead to their educational success? As an institution data-driven through a lens of caring, AC ensures our decisions supporting student success and improving student outcomes focus on restructuring the college to systemically and intentionally love our students to success.

OFFICE OF DECISION ANALYTICS AND INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH DASHBOARDS

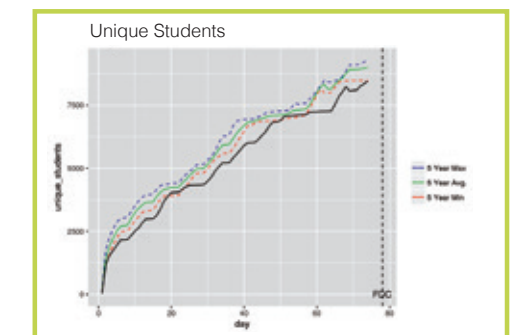
Academic Affairs

This dashboard tracks course success through time based on an aggregate view or disaggregated by a predefined set of demographics.



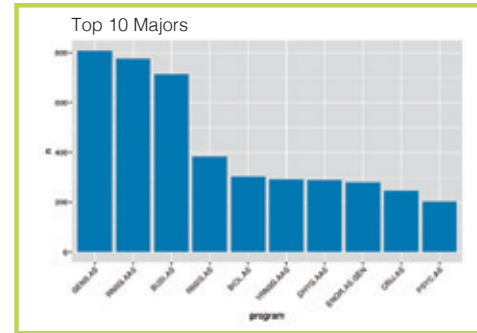
Enrollment

AC tracks daily enrollment throughout a semester and see how it compares to the five semester enrollment average, enrollment maximum, and enrollment minimum.



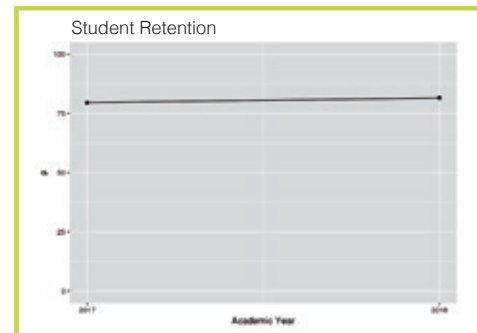
Program Review

AC assesses program health through time based on measures such as number of majors, course success, graduation, and labor market alignment.



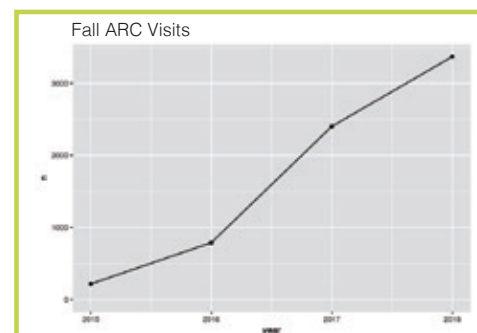
Student Affairs

This dashboard tracks student affairs departments over time based on retention, graduation, and transfer rates of students that have visited each department.



Advocacy and Resource Center

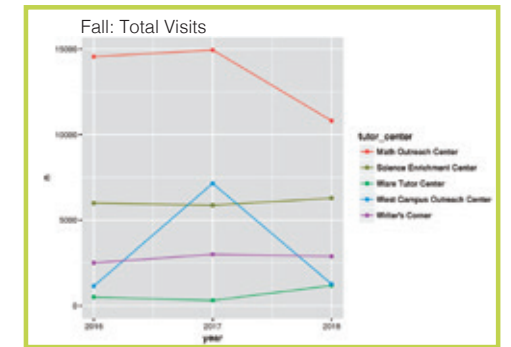
AC monitors the number of visits made to the center, the services requested, and academic measures such as retention, graduation, and transfers.



Flexibility is a core tenet of our culture of caring. We recognize that we must be willing to adapt to the changing needs of our students. And to adapt to the changing needs of our students, we must know our students. By creating college-accessible dashboards, faculty and staff are invested in breaking down the barriers to student success. They have readily accessible data allowing them to constantly rethink and reimagine our procedures, policies, and programs. DAIR created data dashboards to display student and success data disaggregated by a standard set of demographics for both academic courses/programs and non-academic interventions.

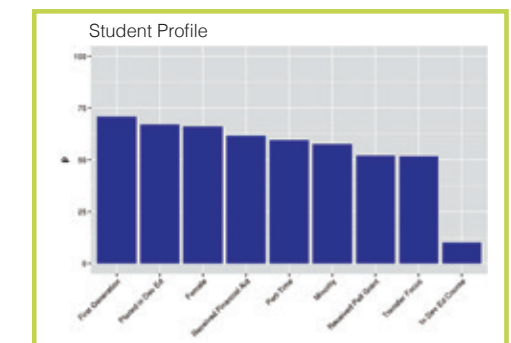
Tutor Center

AC tracks the number of visits made to each tutoring center, the average number of hours per visit, and other center measures, as well as course success related to tutoring.



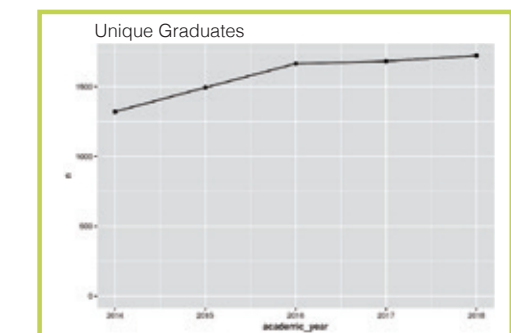
Student Profile

Dashboard users can see the college's undergraduate non-dual credit student profile for a selected fall semester.



Completion

AC monitors unique graduates, program graduates, and transfers during the past five academic years based on an overall view or disaggregated by a predefined set of demographics.



DAIR participates in No Excuses communication meetings, which are open to all college employees. These meetings are designed to discuss the status of our No Excuses 2020 strategic plan and its key data performance indicators, retention interventions, and upcoming student success initiatives.

During the September 2019 data summit, dashboards were created for each of the nine communities and non-academic areas to engage faculty and staff in student success data discussions supporting our No Excuses 2025 strategic planning. Faculty and staff provided feedback to DAIR and leadership. Based on feedback, the spring 2020 general assembly will engage faculty and staff in ongoing student success data discussions and workforce engagement.

CHAPTER 4
Teaching for Transformation
Magazine



In the spring of 2019 Amarillo College sought to recognize the excellence of its faculty and the quality of their teaching in a comprehensive and profound way. Our inaugural issue of *Teaching for Transformation* celebrates their academic accolades and credentials as well as their integral role in creating a culture of caring on our campus.

Access the *Teaching for Transformation* magazine:



info.actx.edu/TFT



The magazine featured the amazing work of more than 20 different faculty and staff members.

Articles highlighted classroom techniques, amazing programs, and a variety of things.



CHAPTER 5

Chronicle of Higher Education Feature



A Culture of Caring

Amarillo College's 'No Excuses' program for low-income students has made it a national model



In the spring of 2019 Amarillo College was featured in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. The results that came from our transformation as a culture of caring were garnering national attention and as a result *Chronicle* reporters came calling.

Access the story online here:



info.actx.edu/Chronicle



"Poverty is not about laziness or lack of work ethic or the need for a handout," Lowery-Hart told educators at a recent meeting of *Achieving the Dream*.

Amarillo College has developed a national reputation for tending to the basic needs of students at risk of dropping out. Colleges across the country are facing demands for similar programs, but providing food, shelter, and emergency assistance for needy students can be expensive and time-consuming.



CHAPTER 6

Speaking to the United States Senate



In the spring of 2018 Russel Lowery-Hart testified before the United States Senate. In his testimony he spoke to the challenges facing higher education and the students they serve. Augmenting these challenge is his own Amarillo College's location in the Panhandle of Texas. He spoke about poverty, resilience, our region and the power of education to serve as a game changer for not only it's students but the region as well.

Access the United States Senate testimony here:



info.actx.edu/Testimony



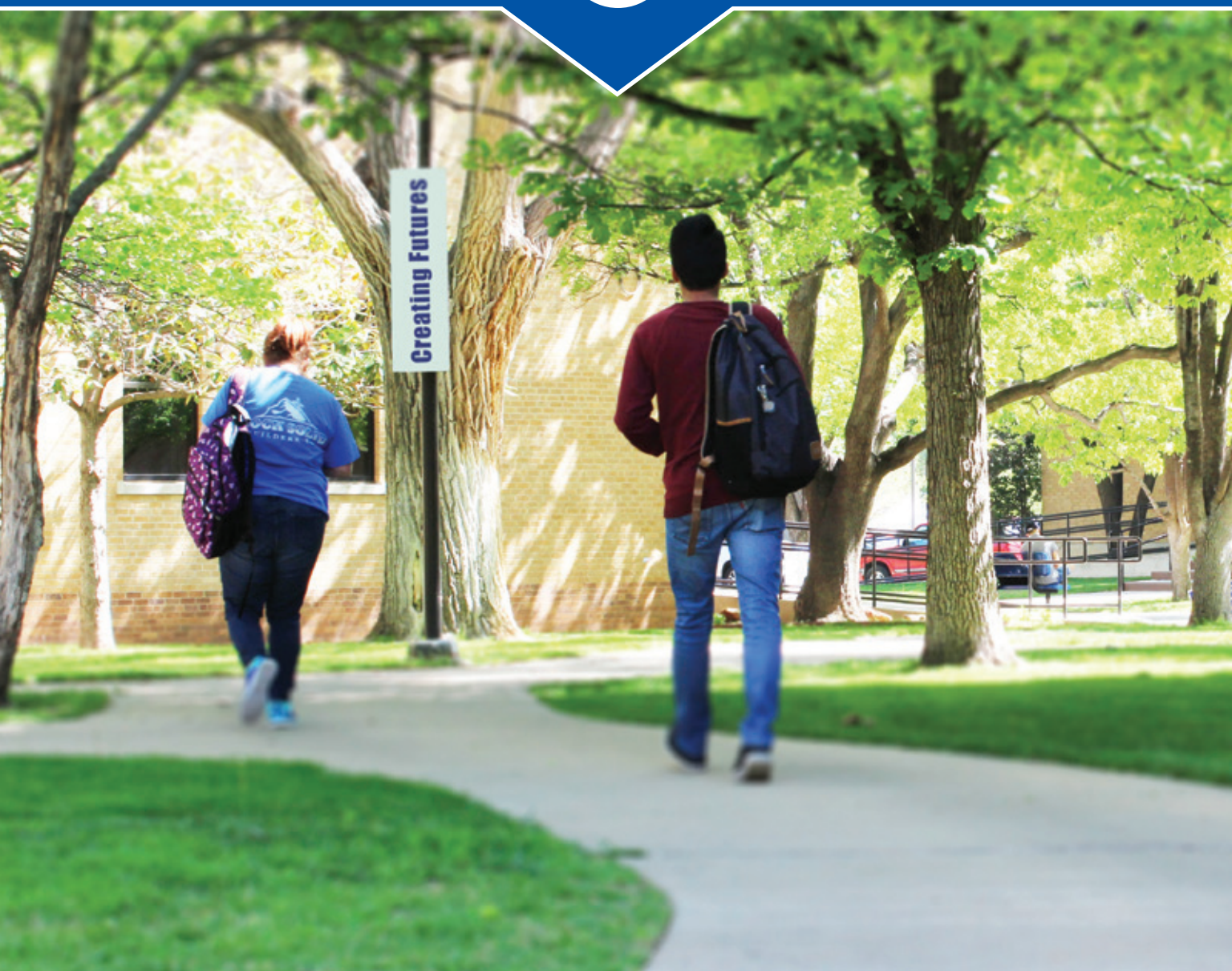
"We have students that don't apply for financial aid, one, because they don't think they're eligible when they are, and, two, because the process is so complicated that they don't think that they can complete it, or that they don't think they're smart enough to complete it,"

—Dr. Russell Lowery-Hart



CHAPTER 7

Aspiring in The Atlantic



What separates Amarillo College from most of its peers is not any particular program, but how much it focuses on addressing the effects of poverty. The Atlantic's article, *Schools are no match for American poverty* explores the barrier that students face as they aspire towards better lives. Amarillo College and Russell Lowery-Hart are being watched by college leaders all over the country, because finding realistic solutions for student poverty could be transformative for the U.S. higher-education system.

"Quit wishing for a different kind of student. We want to be the right college for the students we have."

—Dr. Russell Lowery-Hart

Access the
online story here:



info.actx.edu/Atlantic



EPILOGUE

COVID 19 AND TECH-SUPPORTED LEARNING



Even a pandemic, with which the spring of 2020 will forever be associated, proved incapable of derailing the Culture of Caring that has become the bedrock of Amarillo College, which swiftly made a seamless transition to a remote learning environment.

"The worst thing you can do in a crisis is cower. When we were faced with an unimaginable pandemic, we made our Culture of Caring the foundation of every decision we made moving forward and, in hindsight, I would not change that now even if I could."

—Dr. Russell Lowery-Hart, Amarillo College President





At semester's end, Amarillo College celebrated the successful completion of a record number of almost 1,200 graduates in a virtual commencement ceremony, which AC President Russell Lowery-Hart termed 'celebratory, personal, fun and meaningful.'

It was the 100th commencement in the College's storied history.

