

THE 2021 ASPEN PRIZE

FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE EXCELLENCE

COLLEGE
EXCELLENCE
PROGRAM
 aspen institute



The Aspen Institute College Excellence Program aims to advance higher education practices and leadership that significantly improve student learning, completion, and employment after college—especially for the growing population of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds on American campuses.

The \$1 million Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, awarded every two years, is the nation's signature recognition for America's community colleges—as President Obama called it, “basically the Oscars for great community colleges.” The Aspen Prize honors institutions with outstanding achievement in six areas: teaching and learning, certificate and degree completion, transfer and bachelor's attainment, workforce success, equitable outcomes for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds, and leadership and culture. By focusing on student success and lifting up models that work, the Aspen Prize aims to celebrate excellence, advance a focus on equitable student success, and stimulate replication of effective culture and practice.

Authors Ben Barrett and Rebecca Lavinson

**THE ASPEN INSTITUTE
CONGRATULATES THE FINALISTS FOR
THE 2021 ASPEN PRIZE FOR
COMMUNITY COLLEGE EXCELLENCE**

WINNER:

San Antonio College, Alamo Colleges District (Texas)

FINALISTS WITH DISTINCTION:

Broward College (Florida)

San Jacinto College (Texas)

West Kentucky Community and Technical College (Kentucky)

RISING STAR:

Amarillo College (Texas)

FINALISTS:


Borough of Manhattan Community College (New York)

Odessa College (Texas)

Pasadena City College (California)

Pierce College (Washington)

Tallahassee Community College (Florida)

 To learn more about the Aspen Prize selection process, past winners, and more, visit:
highered.aspeninstitute.org/aspen-prize

Well-Equipped When Crisis Hits

Over the past year, a global pandemic forced many of us to live, work, and learn differently. Millions of Americans have gotten sick while hundreds of thousands have died from COVID-19. Wealth gaps were made painfully apparent, as many lost their jobs or had their wages reduced. The killing of Black Americans by police forced the country to reckon more directly with its long history of racial injustice.

For the 8 million U.S. undergraduates enrolled in community college, the stressors of the past year were particularly significant. As life shifted online, kitchen tables became offices and shared classrooms for the whole family. For many students, it was overwhelming to juggle work, child care, and learning during a time of social isolation and societal upheaval.

Throughout, excellent community colleges demonstrated the best of what our country has to offer. They were tested in many ways, with ill and fearful community members, logistical challenges, enrollment declines, and a previously unthinkable large-scale transition to online learning. Yet they educated many of the health care workers who cared for those sick with COVID-19. They kept on propelling countless low-income families into the middle class and retraining displaced workers for new, in-demand careers. They continued to instill in their graduates the skills and ethos to be more active citizens in our democracy.

The best community colleges—including those being honored as finalists for the 2021 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence—were especially well-equipped to surmount challenges, because of the student-centered work they'd been diligently doing for years.

Aspen Prize finalist colleges have demonstrated a commitment to a vision bigger than just enrolling and graduating students. They are focused on advancing racial equity and social mobility and making sure that students are well prepared to take the next step after graduation, either at a transfer institution or in the workforce. They think strategically and generously about how they can make their communities better. They engage in concrete practices that prioritize student belonging and strong outcomes, and they are always working to improve.

In a crisis, these colleges don't just survive but thrive, because of a deeply entrenched commitment to the students and communities they serve.

Clear value proposition

At a time of great economic uncertainty, students at Aspen Prize finalist colleges know exactly how their institution will lead them to a great career. Finalist colleges focus on offering programs that lead to in-demand, well-paying careers, either immediately upon graduation or after transfer and a bachelor's degree. **Borough of Manhattan Community College**, in New York, is one of the top community colleges in the nation for catalyzing economic mobility for its students; in partnership with K-12 institutions, universities, and employers, it has committed to preparing students primarily for jobs in pandemic-resistant fields, such as information technology and health care, that pay at least \$55,000 annually.

The best colleges aren't just responsive to employers; they're forward-thinking and instrumental in helping build a local economy that provides living-wage jobs for graduates. Because **San Jacinto College**, in Texas, works with regional employers to foster economic development, graduates in several programs are likely to find success in the industries that dominate Houston's economy, such as aerospace, maritime transportation, and petrochemical technology. Students making decisions in the uncertain context of the pandemic know they can rely on San Jac to connect them with good jobs that already exist and to continue to create new opportunities on their behalf.

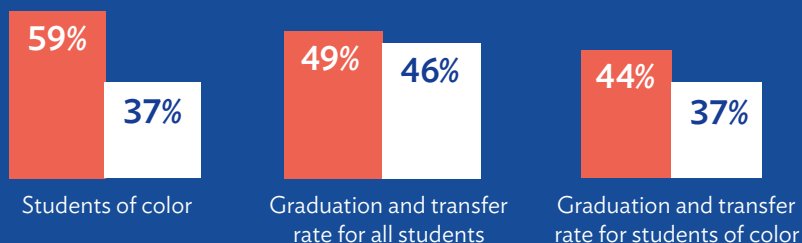
Student-centered culture

Aspen Prize finalists' success begins with a student-centered culture shared by all faculty and staff and backed by concrete expectations. At excellent colleges, everyone knows it's their job to ensure that students are academically supported and that their life challenges are addressed. What's more, college leaders do not rely on individual goodwill or leave faculty and staff guessing how they should support students.

Success in Numbers

2018

Aspen Prize finalists
National average



A note on data: Except where indicated, references to the "graduation rate" refer to the percentage of students who earned a credential within three years of enrolling. References to the "graduation and transfer rate" refer to the percentage of students who graduate or transfer to another college within three years of enrolling.

Excellent colleges work to understand what students of different backgrounds need to be successful.

For example, as the COVID-19 pandemic hit, several finalist colleges created systems to contact every student individually to understand their needs—something they could get everyone on board to do because of a culture that had developed intentionally over many years.

At **Amarillo College**, in Texas, leadership, faculty, and staff “love students to success,” as they put it, and are dedicated to actively removing barriers that stand in students’ way. When the pandemic shifted all coursework online, every staff member at Amarillo College—from board members to custodians—was assigned a group of students to call weekly, a script to follow, and a template to report back on students’ needs. Students felt comfortable opening up about their challenges, and the college could connect them with supports, because they had built that expectation and relationship over several years.

Similarly, **Odessa College**, also in Texas, has long held faculty and staff accountable for what the institution refers to as an “all-in” approach to student engagement. Faculty are expected to adhere to four commitments: that they learn every student’s name in the first week of class; meet individually with every student; closely monitor them and intervene early if they struggle; and simultaneously set clear, high expectations while being flexible when life prevents them from completing coursework on time or at a high quality. The effort to connect with every student during the pandemic was a natural extension of these commitments—and, in the spring of 2020, it paid off with a remarkably low 2 percent course drop rate.

Excellent colleges have been able to deliver high-quality online instruction because of thoughtful approaches to professional development already in place. Over the past few years, **Tallahassee Community College**, in Florida, has devoted significant resources to training faculty members in active-learning pedagogy, redesigning classrooms, and providing technology to foster student engagement. Effective online course delivery—with library services and tutoring embedded in virtual classes—was a natural step in the deep work already underway to make instruction a top priority.

Commitment to racial equity

Excellent colleges strive to serve as engines of opportunity for all student populations, and they go to great lengths to understand what students of different backgrounds need to be successful. Through inclusive and culturally competent instruction, data analysis, and close partnerships in their communities, these colleges are on the front lines of closing racial outcomes and income gaps, at a time when structural racism in American institutions is getting long-overdue attention.

Over the last few years, **West Kentucky Community and Technical College**, in Kentucky, has deepened its relationships with local

community organizations like the NAACP and churches, as well as K-12 systems, to build trust in the college and to recruit more Black and Hispanic students. The college serves as a model of inclusion in its community, and because of this groundwork it will play an important role in building a stronger future for those hit hardest by the pandemic.

For over a decade, **Pasadena City College**, in California, has made equity a top priority, and the college has concrete goals for closing gaps among student groups. Faculty are highly engaged in a culture of continuous improvement in teaching; they regularly study data to see how students of different backgrounds are doing in their classes and engage in thoughtful professional development to improve their teaching, with a focus on inclusion and cultural competence.

Pierce College, in Washington, which also has long prioritized equity-mindedness and cultural competency—in hiring, professional development, and pedagogy—has recently taken its efforts a step further. The college has adopted a sharp focus on antiracism, hunting for and eliminating practices and policies that stand in the way of success for students of color.

Strategic resource allocation

Aspen Prize colleges have clearly established, evidence-based, and student-centered systems to make difficult financial choices. They spend money where it matters most: on student success.

For instance, **Broward College**, in Florida, revamped its budget system so that all requests must be supported by evidence on how they'll contribute to improved student success outcomes. Savings from discontinued programs are going to the supports students need, like advising and tutoring—and the campus community is now accustomed to the kind of tough decisions that a pandemic and economic crisis occasion.

San Antonio College, in Texas—the winner of the 2021 Aspen Prize—aligns all its spending with its strategic, student-centered priorities: advising, academic supports, and nonacademic supports. Every vacancy is filled only if it will advance these priorities; all work-study students have jobs either as peer advisors or tutors; and when the college eliminated part-time positions, it transferred employees to student success-focused jobs where possible.

Each of the 10 finalists for the 2021 Aspen Prize has demonstrated an impressive commitment to students, across a variety of contexts but all backed by strong outcomes. In a time of great uncertainty, these exceptional community colleges provide some confidence that the path forward will be brighter, because of the hard work they began many years ago. ■

WINNER



San Antonio College

Alamo Colleges District

San Antonio, Texas

Student population
34,787

Pell Grant recipients
29%

Students of color
67%

Candace Hooper-Ellison, 31, had been a stay-at-home mom without college ambitions when her husband lost his job. As Candace began looking for work to help support her family, she realized she would need a college degree to land a job. So, 10 years after graduating from high school, Candace enrolled in San Antonio College to study American Sign Language, and became the first in her family to go to college.

Candace was filled with doubts. She was worried about the cost of attending SAC and whether she was smart enough to succeed. However, during her first semester, Candace was placed in a required student success class, where her instructor called her “the most underachieving overachiever”: She finished all her work early and had good grades, but aimed only to get an associate degree. Her instructor helped build up her confidence and devise a plan not just to acquire her associate degree, but to reach higher.

San Antonio College, one of five colleges in the Alamo Colleges District, is full of students like Candace: older or first-generation college students who are supported from start to finish to accomplish what they came to do—and then some. SAC actively recruits specifically within its immediate environs, an area that is predominantly low-income and Hispanic, with low rates of educational attainment and high rates of unemployment. Four-fifths of students attend part time.

Other colleges might see these student characteristics as hindrances to strong completion outcomes, but in 2018, 48 percent of students who started at SAC graduated or transferred within three years, compared to the national average of 46 percent. The rate for students of color was nearly as strong, at 45 percent, compared to a national average of 37 percent.

A culture of care and attention

At SAC, there is a feeling of family, a tangible sense and concrete expectation that everyone in the community is responsible for students' well-being, inside and outside the classroom.

“It’s been a village,” said Gregory Torres, 31, who went back to school to move beyond a low-wage position as a certified nursing assistant. After his first year at SAC, Gregory found himself on academic probation and lost his financial aid, but the college provided him with emergency funds that enabled him to pay tuition and stay enrolled. “Every time life told me to give up, SAC provided me with an opportunity to keep going,” he said. Motivated to not let down the people who had helped him, Gregory passed all his classes that semester and was never on academic probation again. He graduated this spring. “They believed in me and took a chance on me, so I believed in myself.”

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— GREGORY TORRES,
graduate, nursing

SAC faculty get to know each and every student—not just their names but their interests, circumstances, and challenges. After Candace’s student success instructor motivated her to aim for a bachelor’s rather than an associate degree, she worked with her advisor to choose a major (criminology and criminal justice) and a transfer destination (Texas A&M) so that she can eventually become a court-certified sign language interpreter working in legal settings—a high-demand job with good pay.

The advising function, built on the systemwide AlamoADVISE model, is a highly structured process that pays off. SAC students are assigned to a professional advisor embedded within their academic program, and starting from orientation they are encouraged to select a program of study, each accompanied by a crystal-clear map of courses that will move them efficiently to a degree. Advisors stay with the relatively low 380 students in their caseload throughout their journey, meeting with them at mandatory checkpoints to update their degree plan, select a transfer destination, and provide other guidance according to a specific set of learning outcomes for advising.

Students also benefit from extremely specific transfer advising guides, which tell them every course they must take to transfer with junior standing in their major at one of 13 colleges and universities. Students

who follow these guides will lose at most 3 of their 60 credit hours, or one course, at transfer. (Nationally, students lose 13 credits, on average, when they transfer.)

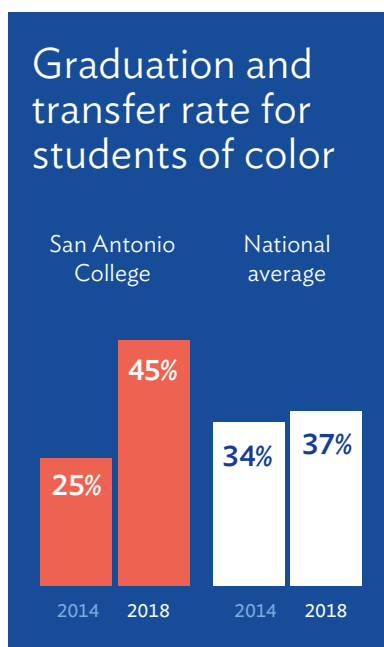
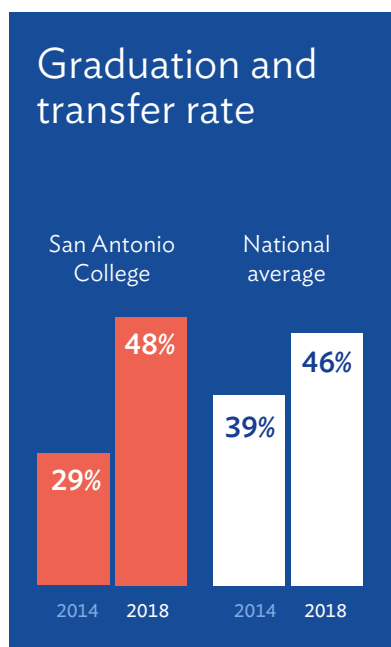
When Gregory started at SAC, he knew what degree he needed to progress in the medical field but didn't know the steps to get there. His advisor helped him outline his academic plan, including which classes to take and when, helping him space out the most challenging courses so he wouldn't get stuck taking them all in the same semester. "I came in with an idea and I left with a plan," Gregory said. "The advisors empower you."

Like all SAC students, Gregory and Candace meet with their advisor every semester to not just review their course selection, but also to make sure they are on track to complete their degree plan.

Inquiry, action, and improvement

A culture of caring has become a hallmark of excellent community colleges. What distinguishes SAC are the ways the caring culture is undergirded by an unusually robust culture of inquiry and action—a remarkable balance of head and heart. Faculty and staff are equipped to effectively educate and guide their students, with clear expectations, strong analytical systems, and a commitment to ongoing improvement.

Throughout the college, leaders, faculty, and staff constantly analyze whether students are getting what they need—whether it's math knowledge, child care, or useful information about their transfer destination—and adapt programs to meet the needs of their diverse student body. This commitment to continuous improvement yields results: In just five years, SAC's graduation and transfer rate increased by almost 20 percentage points.



The advisors who work with students like Candace and Gregory receive rigorous training that prepares them to understand the needs of diverse students, get students the information they need, and help them navigate systems. Gregory's advisor is knowledgeable about the requirements to become a registered nurse and help him transfer to the University of Texas Health San Antonio; Candace's has deep knowledge of the ASL department and transfer pathways. The advisors regularly

receive data to pinpoint students who may be struggling and prioritize outreach to the students who need it the most. What's more, advisors and department leads use a scorecard to monitor whether their advising is effective, and quick assessments measure whether students are learning what they need to from advisors.

SAC's data-based culture of improvement also extends to the classroom. Each semester, all faculty, including adjunct professors, review student success data from their own and their colleagues' course sections, broken down by student characteristics such as race and ethnicity. Teams revisit instructional strategies when students struggle in key courses. Faculty with relatively low course success rates develop action plans for improvement, and may be mentored by a faculty member with a high success rate or moved to a course that's a better fit. While the improvement measures are not punitive, faculty are held accountable for the success of their students.

This approach to collecting actionable data, analyzing it meticulously, and following that with action—all while understanding that each data point represents a human being struggling to improve their circumstances—exemplifies the culture and expectation at SAC that all individuals should take responsibility for the success of all students.

The “power of one”

That investment has a ripple effect. Since enrolling at SAC, Candace has convinced her husband to enroll, and they both will graduate this spring. Her mother, who hasn't completed high school, is considering enrolling in SAC's GED-Thru-College, a free program to not just get students their diploma but move them into college coursework, while Candace's two teenagers want to attend SAC through dual enrollment at their high school. It's a natural choice for her family, who have all spent a lot of time with Candace on the SAC campus. “It's a place with a family feeling,” says Candace.

That kind of aspiration and success is infectious by design, according to Robert Vela, president of San Antonio College since 2014. “Our thought is that if you begin to experience excellence,” he said, “you begin to see it in instruction, you begin to see it in student services... you begin to want more. You begin to want it for yourself. You begin to demand it for your family.”

President Vela calls this the “power of one”: the idea that changing one person's aspirations can change a whole family's, which eventually pays dividends for a whole community. “That's the power of one student making it, and understanding why it's so important that they make it and graduate.” The individual and magnified impact that comes from attending SAC is why SAC ensures student success is not left to chance. ■

FINALIST WITH
DISTINCTION



Broward College

**Fort Lauderdale,
Florida**

**Student population
62,013**

**Pell Grant recipients
49%**

**Students of color
68%**

Many colleges have adopted guided pathways reforms—that is, reorganizing the student experience so that everyone has a clear destination, an organized path to get there, and effective support along the way. Broward College adopted guided pathways early and remains a national exemplar. Every major comes with a program map that lays out each course to take, not just to graduate but, for transfer students, to attain a bachelor's degree efficiently. Milestones define what advisors should help students do and know at specific points along their progression. Technological tools help ensure that students are taking the right courses and meeting those milestones and, when they do fall off track, help advisors be proactive about providing support.

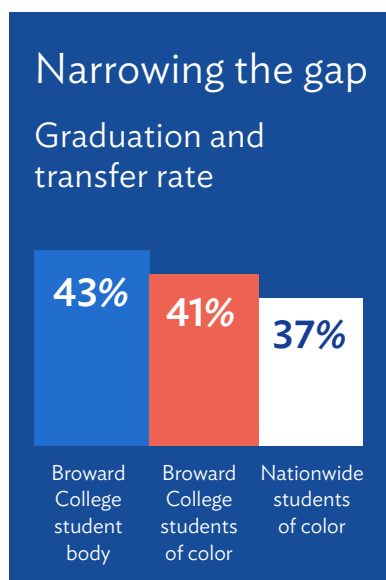
For all colleges—and especially one with more than 60,000 students—sustaining such efforts requires making difficult choices about resource allocation. Broward College recently implemented a process through which the college evaluates the costs and benefits of hundreds of programs in order to shift resources to those with the greatest impact on equitable student success.

This has involved some difficult decisions. For example, an analysis of the athletics program showed that the college was spending \$11,000 per student on an athletics program that only served 147 students. After making the hard choice to eliminate athletics, the college is rerouting



those funds to halve the student-to-advisor ratio from 700-to-1 to 350-to-1, embed tutors in hundreds of courses with the highest failure rates, and establish food pantries on each campus.

Another key investment in student success is training new faculty in an evidence-based model of effective online pedagogy, provided by the Association of College and University Educators (ACUE). An independent study found that the outcomes gap between Black and white students was halved for those in courses taught by ACUE-certified instructors, while the gap for students from low-income backgrounds was eliminated. These results are especially important at an institution where 68 percent of students are students of color (compared to 27 percent of community college students nationally) and 49 percent come from low-income backgrounds (compared to 36 percent nationally). The training proved timely amid the COVID pandemic, said Kalena Armstrong-Henry, an accounting professor. “It’s very appropriate for what’s going on now—remote teaching—and learning how to engage students and help them persist online.”



The intentionality with which Broward College’s leaders allocate resources to equitable student success is also reflected in a significant new initiative, Broward UP. Through partnerships with local government and nonprofit organizations, Broward UP provides free workforce training, career advising, and other student supports in communities with high unemployment, high rates of poverty, and low educational attainment. The short-term credentials lead to in-demand jobs, offering a viable path out of poverty for thousands of individuals.

“It is incumbent upon us at the only public institution of higher education based in Broward County to ensure that we are reaching every corner, every crevice of this community,” said Gregory Haile, the college’s president since 2018. “If we are going to truly optimize our mission, we have to say and live the ideal of serving those who need us most.” ■

**FINALIST WITH
DISTINCTION**



San Jacinto College

Pasadena, Texas

Student population
42,202

Pell Grant recipients
25%

Students of color
63%

Over the last decade, many community colleges have made strides in committing to student success through graduation. At San Jacinto College, in the Houston metropolitan area, that commitment doesn't end with a diploma. Rather, San Jac takes responsibility for how students fare even after leaving the college, both in the workforce and at transfer destinations.

San Jac's partnerships with industry and transfer institutions are defined by mutual trust, respect, and two-way accountability. The strength of these relationships enables San Jac to receive honest feedback on how students are doing and take actionable steps to improve programs and practices that prepare students for life after San Jac.

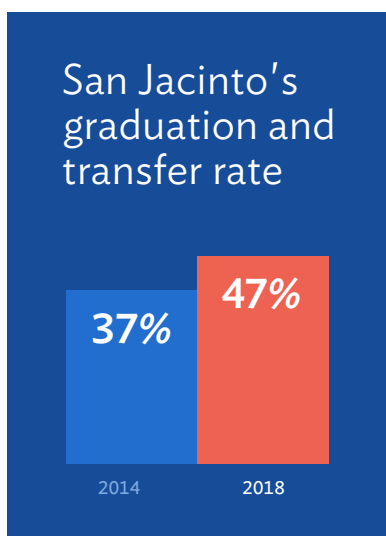
San Jac stays responsive to local workforce needs by partnering with key industries in the region, developing state-of-the-art training centers in collaboration with local employers, and establishing degrees in high-demand fields. While this kind of collaboration is common among excellent community colleges, San Jac plays an unusually strong role in strategic conversations that drive progress in the region. Brenda Hellyer, chancellor since 2009, regularly convenes industry CEOs and other regional workforce leaders in a think-tank style setting to discuss high-level goals. "San Jacinto is proactive," said Steve Altemus, president and CEO of Intuitive Machines, an

San Jac made changes requested by employers and secured a commitment they would hire qualified graduates of the college.



engineering company that designs equipment for NASA. “The college is there, engaged with the community, engaged with the city, engaged with the industry trying to solve the problem.”

After hearing from petrochemical employers that curriculum and equipment was outdated, over the course of a year, San Jac added more hands-on instruction, improved the facilities, and hired instructors familiar with the latest technology. The cooperation goes both ways: The college secured a commitment that employers would hire qualified San Jac graduates after implementing these changes. San Jac’s strategic relationships with employers and responsiveness to workforce needs yields strong results for students: San Jac graduates with an associate of applied science degree, intended to prepare students to immediately enter the workforce, earned nearly \$15,000 more than the average new hire in the county.



Long an exemplar in workforce programming, San Jac has focused in recent years on excellence in transfer as well. The college’s leaders have taken a leading role in a regional initiative designed to create seamless pathways between two-year and four-year institutions. And San Jac faculty, department chairs, and deans regularly meet with their counterparts at neighboring four-year institutions to ensure alignment of courses and degree pathways. In areas where students struggle after transfer, they make the necessary changes. For instance, when it was clear that several math and science courses were misaligned with expectations at four-year institutions, San Jac faculty changed course syllabi, assignments, exams, and textbooks.

This reflects the college’s ambitious approach to addressing challenges: When data show a need for improvement, San Jac quickly finds strategies that work and scales them up to serve all students. As a result, virtually all its student outcomes metrics have been moving upward for several years, with more progress likely ahead. ■



West Kentucky Community and Technical College

Paducah, Kentucky

Student population
8,238

Pell Grant recipients
36%

Students of color
10%

In and around Paducah, Kentucky, there's been a change in what it takes to support a family. Many low-skill jobs in dominant industries like agriculture and mining have gradually disappeared, and some fields, like marine technology, have begun to require more education to progress. Amid this transition, West Kentucky Community and Technical College has been remarkably proactive in working with partners to prepare students for higher-paying, more sustainable opportunities and clear a wide path toward social mobility for a broader swath of Kentuckians.

The efforts are bearing fruit: Students receiving federal Pell Grants because of financial need graduate at a far higher rate than the national average, and the college's efforts to align programs with employers' needs has resulted in graduates earning, on average, \$10,000 above the median income for all workers in the area within five years of graduating.

The college has put in a lot of effort in recent years to advance opportunities for the region's most marginalized high school students and workers. Partnering with civic leaders like the NAACP, churches, and industry leaders, the college has set out to immediately enroll more Black and Hispanic students, while also addressing the longer-term challenge of building a college-going culture in the region. In a community where fewer than one-third of adults have any college

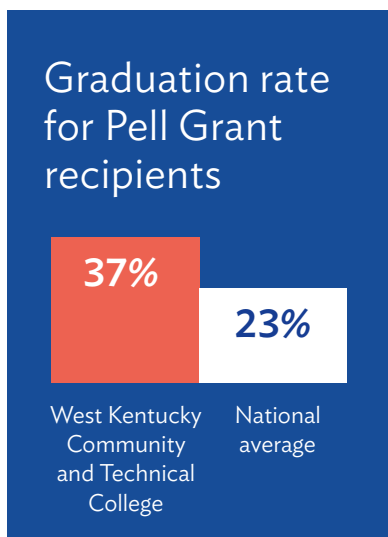


credential, WKCTC has expanded dual enrollment programs in high schools serving predominantly students of color and helped partners gather the resources necessary to create new career training centers for the region’s K-12 systems.

Just as the college does not passively wait for students to arrive at its doors, it does not sit by and wait for the economy to change. Instead, it focuses on reengaging those who have fallen behind in changing industries. For instance, an innovative pipeline advances deckhands working on river barges into better-paying jobs. Partnering with local employers, the college has created new courses in diesel technology that lead to applied associate degrees in marine technology and engineering, which then lead to bachelor’s degrees like those at the University of Kentucky’s College of Engineering, which has a branch on the WKCTC campus.

Matt Vishino, a 31-year-old father of a toddler, has been working full-time on the river for the past 12 years, mostly as a deckhand but recently as a harbor operations manager. In 2019, his company’s leaders encouraged him to enroll at WKCTC, at their expense. They explained that as he progressed in college he could rise through the ranks.

“The river industry has never been a college-degree industry, but times are changing,” Vishino said. After graduating with his associate degree in marine logistics, he anticipates a promotion and eventually a bachelor’s degree in project management. With a long family history working on the river, Vishino has no plans to leave his line of work or the area. “I’ll always be on the water,” he said. “But I want my kid to see his dad do something.” ■





Amarillo College

Amarillo, Texas

Student population
13,023

Pell Grant recipients
39%

Students of color
45%

In 2014, leaders at Amarillo College recognized that students were dropping out not because they struggled academically. Rather, they were struggling to survive—to afford housing and food and transportation, find care for their children, and get the health care and legal help they needed.

So Amarillo College reshaped itself around a core conviction: You can't move students to a degree and a career if you don't remove the barriers that poverty creates. In just a few years, the college has become nationally known for its robust social services division, which every year receives more than 5,000 visits—equivalent to half the student body. AC employs three full-time social workers, offers 10 free sessions of mental health counseling, and provides emergency aid that can be accessed within 24 hours, as well as a daycare center that costs only a few dollars per week.

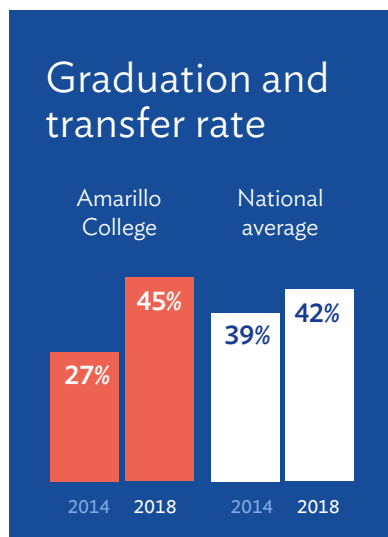
There are other colleges that offer a range of supports like these. What sets AC apart is that every employee knows it's their job to connect students to whatever they need. Instructors mention all the resources available to students multiple times a week; email reminders and posters around the college make it impossible to not know the many ways the college stands ready to help. When they enroll, students are asked about their needs; this, plus a predictive model assessing risk



factors, yields a list of 1,000 students believed to be facing the greatest challenges. Social workers contact them at least six times each semester to ensure they are on track.

All of these efforts—coupled with an ambitious approach to rapidly scaling academic reforms—have paid off: Amarillo College’s graduation and transfer rate increased a remarkable 18 percentage points over five years.

Patty Melton, 56, is one of the many students for whom this approach has made a world of difference. She recently went back to school for the first time in nearly 40 years, after losing her job during the COVID pandemic. Just after enrolling, she found herself having a difficult time not only with algebra, but also with her rent and bills. “I really needed some money,” she said, “a week ago and not a week from now.”



Instead of spinning her wheels in remedial classes, Melton, like all AC students with developmental needs, was put in a credit-bearing math class that benefited from an additional instructor who kept assuring her she could succeed. Meanwhile, her advisor got her connected to an advance on her financial aid, which meant the difference between staying enrolled and stopping out.

After one semester in business management, Melton had a 4.0 GPA. She credits her success to the warm AC culture and array of resources. “This college is nothing like I ever would have thought college would have been like,” she said. “Every time I’ve had an issue or get stumped, there is a resource or someone available to help me.” ■

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