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TIAA Institute



PARTICIPANT PERSPECTIVES

Southwest Tennessee Community College

THE SOUTHWEST WAY: THE BIG, AUDACIOUS GOAL TO REDESIGN, REINVENT, AND RESET THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

A persistent challenge in higher education today is eliminating the achievement disparity between White students and students of color. It is a social issue with economic implications.

At Southwest Tennessee Community College, we are working to close the achievement gaps in our student population by dismantling institutional barriers and creating necessary wrap-around support services to increase student completion rates.

The Setting: Memphis, TN (Shelby County)

- Southwest's student body is 62 percent African-American and a majority of that population qualifies for Pell Grants, meaning their income (or that of their parents') is below the local, regional and national average, with many living at or below the poverty line.
- Southwest is a primary source of education for residents of the Mid-South and a supplier of trained workers to regional industries. (Southwest EMSI Report, June 2018).
- The economic viability of the region and the State depends on increases in the number of Tennesseans with a college degree or certificate by 2025. (driveto55.org)

The Challenge:

- Caucasian students at Southwest Tennessee Community College are graduating at more than double the rate of African-American students. (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2018)

Our Approach:

- Southwest redesigned student services processes, procedures, and programs through our Achieving the Dream work. Through the use of business process mapping, we identified institutional barriers that have historically prevented students from achieving success. In addition, we adopted a "whole student approach" by providing the social, emotional, professional/ personal development support needed to increase success.

The Benefits:

- Southwest will serve as a national model for closing the achievement gap, decreasing economic disparities and creating a culture of equity and inclusion inside and outside the classroom.
- Southwest will assist the state of Tennessee in meeting its Drive to 55 goal.
- Southwest's students will receive a stream of higher future earnings that will continue to grow through their working lives.