

### What Is a Cohort?

A *cohort* is a group of people studied over time. The individuals in the group have at least one statistical factor — such as when they started college — in common.

The Achieving the Dream 2002 student cohort is the group of credential-seeking students that attended Achieving the Dream institutions for the first time in fall 2002. This cohort will be tracked until 2008.

Tracking a cohort over time makes it possible to compare the progress and outcomes of different groups of students (e.g., groups defined by race, age or other demographic characteristics) and to determine if there are gaps in achievement among groups of interest.

### Developmental Education

The overarching goal of Achieving the Dream is to increase student success, particularly for low-income students and students of color. One of the initiative's pathways to this goal is to increase student success in developmental coursework.

According to the 2005 Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), about half of first-time community college students are underprepared for college. Most of these students are referred to developmental education courses during their first term. Indeed, 53 percent of CCSSE respondents had taken, or were planning to take, at least one developmental education class. Many underprepared students do not finish their first semester at college, let alone return for a second. In addition, the more developmental courses or subjects a student is referred to, the more likely he or she is to drop out. Furthermore, close to half of the students referred to developmental education classes do not even attempt them.<sup>1</sup>

*“Pass rates in college-level math and English courses for students completing developmental classes are as high, or higher, than those for students who were not referred to developmental classes.”*

Failure to complete developmental education classes is related to poor persistence. Students who don't successfully complete developmental classes are unlikely to stay in college and earn a degree or certificate. On the flip side, student success in developmental education has a positive correlation with future success in credential-bearing coursework. Pass rates in college-level math and English courses for students completing developmental classes are as high, or higher, than those for students who were not referred to developmental classes. Further, students who

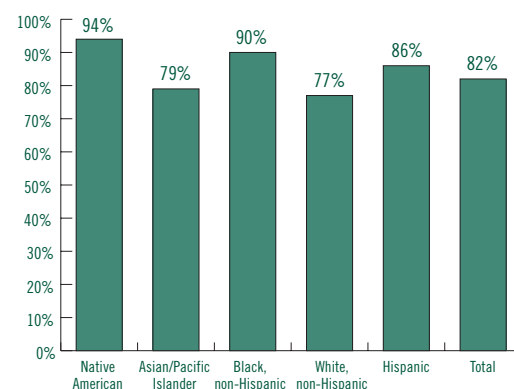
successfully complete their first developmental education course with a grade of C or better are more likely to fulfill their developmental education requirements within one year.<sup>2</sup>

Thirty-five of the 58 Achieving the Dream institutions have participated in the initiative long enough to provide cohort data. Initiative-wide data indicate that Achieving the Dream students follow the same trends found in the research. The following analysis examines the percentage of Achieving the Dream students requiring developmental education, their enrollment patterns and successes in developmental coursework during their first term, and second-term persistence.

### The Scope of Developmental Needs

Figure 1 displays the percentage of students in the 2002 Achieving the Dream cohort who were referred to developmental education by race/ethnicity.<sup>3</sup> Eighty-two percent of students in the cohort were referred to developmental education. Students may have been referred

**Figure 1.** Percentage of the 2002 Achieving the Dream cohort referred to developmental education by race/ethnicity\*



\*These data reflect 77 percent of the 2002 Achieving the Dream cohort of students; colleges could not provide developmental education data for the remaining 23 percent.

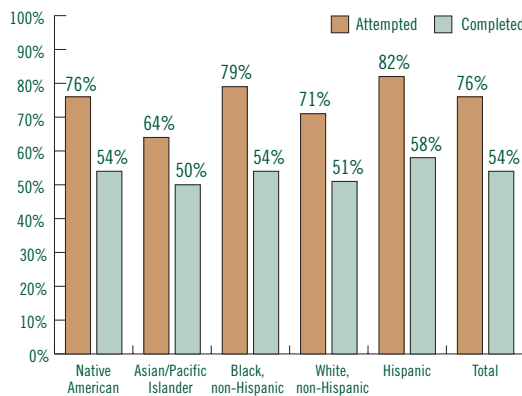
(continued on next page)

<sup>1</sup>Community College Leadership Program. *Engaging Students, Challenging the Odds*. Community College Survey of Student Engagement: The University of Texas at Austin, 2005. Available: [http://www.ccsse.org/publications/CCSSE\\_reportfinal2005.pdf](http://www.ccsse.org/publications/CCSSE_reportfinal2005.pdf).

<sup>2</sup>Boylan, H.R. and Saxon, D.P. *Outcomes of Remediation*. Prepared for the League for Innovation in the Community College. Available: [http://www.ncde.appstate.edu/reserve\\_reading/Outcomes\\_of\\_Remediation.htm](http://www.ncde.appstate.edu/reserve_reading/Outcomes_of_Remediation.htm).

<sup>3</sup>These data reflect 77 percent of the 2002 Achieving the Dream cohort of students; colleges could not provide developmental education data for the remaining 23 percent.

**Figure 2.** Percentage of the 2002 Achieving the Dream cohort referred to developmental education that attempted and completed at least one developmental course during their first term, by race/ethnicity



to as many as three subjects of developmental education at three or more levels of coursework. With a 94 percent referral rate, Native American students were most likely to be referred to developmental education. Ninety percent of black students were referred, followed by 86 percent of Hispanic students and 77 percent of white students.

## Developmental Education Attempts and Completions

Of students who were referred, approximately three-quarters (76 percent) attempted some type of developmental education during their first term of enrollment (Figure 2). Consequently,

about one-quarter of the students needing developmental coursework did not attempt such coursework during their first term. The percentage of students attempting developmental classes varied by race/ethnicity. Eighty-two percent of Hispanic students and 79 percent of black students attempted developmental education during their first term, both above the average. About three-quarters (76 percent) of Native American students attempted, the same as the average. Less than three-quarters (71 percent) of white students attempted developmental classes, which was below the average.

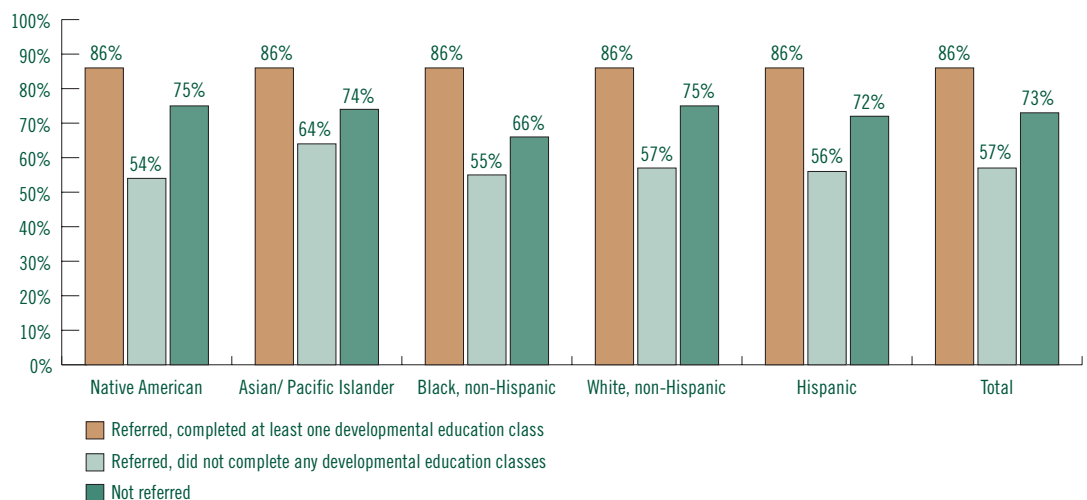
Of referred students, 54 percent successfully completed developmental education classes (with at least a 2.0, or a Pass) during their first term of enrollment. Completions also varied by race/ethnicity: 58 percent of Hispanic students referred to developmental education completed at least one developmental education class during their first term, which was more than the average. Fifty-four percent of both black and Native American students completed at least one developmental education class during their first term, the same percentage as the average. The percentage of white students completing at least one class was lower than the average, 51 percent.

## Second-Term Persistence

Second-term persistence varied widely by whether students were referred to developmental education and completed developmental classes during their first term, were referred and did not complete, or were not referred. Students who were

*(continued on next page)*

**Figure 3.** Percentage of the 2002 Achieving the Dream cohort persisting to the second term by developmental education referral and completion and race/ethnicity



*This figure reports the percentage of students in each group that persisted. Using all students (Total) as an example, 86 percent of all students who were referred to and completed at least one developmental education class persisted, while 14 percent did not persist. Fifty-seven percent of all students who were referred to developmental education and did not complete any developmental education classes persisted, while 43 percent did not persist.*

referred to and completed developmental classes attained the highest persistence rates, and there was no difference by race/ethnicity — 86 percent of these students persisted to the second term (Figure 3). Further, students who were referred but did not complete developmental classes had the lowest second-term persistence rate — 57 percent. Of those students not referred, 73 percent persisted to the second term.

## What Does This Mean?

More than 80 percent of students in institutions participating in the Achieving the Dream initiative were referred to some type of developmental education.<sup>4</sup> Of those referred, three-quarters attempted developmental education during their first term, and approximately half successfully completed some type of developmental education. The percentage of white students attempting and completing developmental education during the first term was lower than that of black, Hispanic or Native American students. More research needs to be conducted to help explain this finding as there could be relevant academic, financial or demographic issues related to the developmental education coursework of white students.

“Among students who were referred to and completed developmental education, persistence to the second term was the same for all students regardless of race/ethnicity.”

Students referred to developmental education who completed at least one developmental class during their first term were more likely to return the next term than those who did not complete any developmental education classes. Indeed, nearly 30 percent more students completing

developmental education classes returned for the following term than students who did not complete any developmental education classes.

Among students who were referred to and completed developmental education, persistence to the second term was the same for all students *regardless of race/ethnicity*. This could be because successful completion of developmental education coursework levels the playing field. Even though students come to college with different levels of academic preparation and varying personal challenges, developmental education helps underprepared students catch up, so outcome measures can begin to converge.

“These findings reinforce the importance of students’ completing developmental education classes.”

These findings reinforce the importance of students’ completing developmental education classes. Colleges should examine their own data to identify groups of students that would benefit from early intervention to increase completion rates of developmental education classes during the first year of attendance. Strategies initiated by Achieving the Dream colleges to facilitate student success in developmental education coursework, especially early in students’ academic careers, are likely to increase the chances of future academic success.

## Achieving the Dream’s Database

Achieving the Dream colleges can use the database created by JBL Associates to replicate the analysis presented here for their own institutions. This analysis might help colleges identify areas of their curricula or groups of students needing special attention. ■

*Data Notes* is a monthly publication that examines data to illuminate the challenges facing Achieving the Dream colleges and to chart their progress over time.

Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count is a national initiative to help more community college students, particularly students of color and low-income learners, succeed. The initiative works on multiple fronts — including efforts at community colleges and in research, public engagement and public policy — and emphasizes the use of data to drive change. For more information, visit [www.achievingthedream.org](http://www.achievingthedream.org).

*Data Notes* is written by Sue Clery, senior research associate at JBL Associates, Inc., and designed by KSA-Plus Communications, Inc.

If you have questions regarding this issue, or if there is a topic you would like to see addressed in *Data Notes*, please contact Sue Clery at [sclery@jblassoc.com](mailto:sclery@jblassoc.com).

This report uses the May 30, 2006, version of the Achieving the Dream database.

<sup>4</sup>These data reflect 77 percent of the 2002 Achieving the Dream cohort of students; colleges could not provide developmental education data for the remaining 23 percent.