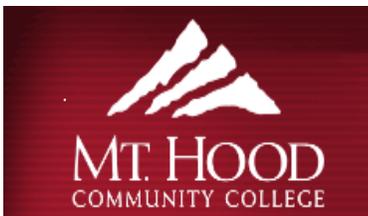




2014 AHE COMPENDIUM

Fall 2014

Mt. Hood Community College



The story of **Mt. Hood Community College** is part of a compendium that contains case studies of six colleges and universities from across the United States that implemented AVID for Higher Education (AHE). Whether implemented as a First-Year Seminar course or as part of an existing tutoring or mentoring program, AHE is making a positive difference in student learning. ***Read more . . .***

MT. HOOD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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CAMPUS PROFILE & INFORMATION

Type of Institution: Public, 2-year, comprehensive community college

Total Enrollment: 9,393 students

Student Population:

- Undergraduates, age 24 or below: 52%
- Underrepresented minority: 27%
- Federal aid recipients: 46%
- Pell-eligible first-time students: 70%

AHE System: Student Success Initiative (SSI)

AHE Campus Timeline: 3rd year (started in 2011)

Source of Funding: Institutional

Professional Development—Administrators, Faculty, Staff, Tutors: 501

Summer Institute Attendance: 3 years

'MOVING MOUNTAINS, TRANSFORMING LIVES, & BUILDING COMMUNITIES'

In 2011, AVID for Higher Education (AHE) was implemented at Mt. Hood Community College's (MHCC) campus in Gresham, Oregon. Initial funding was provided by the Innovation Fund Request which was a collaboration between AVID Planning Team members and the MHCC Vice President of Instruction and Student Development. All saw the need for a comprehensive and holistic program that provided student support through learning communities and faculty professional development in high engagement teaching strategies.

Like many institutes for higher education, MHCC faced low persistence, retention, and completion rates, especially among students who placed into developmental education coursework (courses below the 100 level). In addition, there was a need for innovative and effective ways to encourage and support recent GED (General Educational Development) graduates and adult basic skill (i.e., ESL/ENL) students with their transition into general education coursework. These needs prompted MHCC's involvement with the AHE program, which began with just one group of students taking reading and writing courses together, and which has expanded to include several AVID Learning Community offerings per term, an AVID Center staffed by learning specialists, and a designated AVID coordinator.

After four years, AVID strategies are having an impact on instructional practices throughout campus. At MHCC, AHE has truly meant transformative pedagogy and student support. AVID Coordinator Lauren Smith adds,

"The challenges to implementing AHE at Mt. Hood were largely caused by funding and hesitation on the part of faculty and staff. Trends in higher education tend to be fast-moving and ever-changing and instructors were wary of the next 'shiny new object' or trend that they would need to adopt, and that cost the college money in an already stretched economy. These challenges were largely overcome by the outcomes of the AHE program and its impact on student persistence.

“While most developmental education courses see dismal persistence rates, AVID Learning Community students persisted at nearly 85% during the first full year of implementation in Fall 2012. In addition, the AVID Center served hundreds of students, supporting them in their academics, future course and career options, and providing much needed mentorship and coaching when life barriers got in the way of college success. Through small- and large-scale professional development sessions, AHE at MHCC was able to show that AVID is not a passing fad, but rather, a collection of best practices encouraged by any campus looking to provide greater support to their underrepresented and underserved student populations, as well as providing quality professional development opportunities to their faculty.”

COLLABORATING ACROSS CAMPUS

As AHE begins its fourth year of implementation on this campus, many opportunities have presented themselves along the way, largely because of the commitment to the five AHE Essentials and the understanding that the Essentials, data, and student needs guide the work on the campus. What began as the mission of ten AVID Planning Team members has now become the work of leaders and stakeholders from departments across campus that have experienced the value of AVID. Professional development has taken place within the advising department, the diversity resource center on campus, and the learning commons, including MHCC's main campus tutoring center, the Learning Success Center. The college has consistently involved campus staff and faculty in the AVID Summer Institute and on-campus professional development. By identifying individual champions of the program, MHCC makes the success of AVID a collaborative effort, rather than an isolated event. Consequently, AVID has played a part on several campus committees and councils dedicated to implementing best practices and creating a student success plan that serves all students in an equitable and student-centered way. This involvement has allowed the AHE program to shine and encouraged those who may have been initially skeptical of the program to take a closer look.

Another major opportunity that the AHE program created was the implementation of Learning Communities and a first-year seminar or experience for incoming students. Using AVID strategies, in conjunction with Skip Downing's¹ *On Course* curriculum, allowed MHCC faculty to create a well-rounded and successful 12-credit package of classes that not only teaches students the reading and writing skills that they need for success, but also the student and “life” skills that aren't always explicitly taught or that some educators may assume students already possess. This Learning Community model and college success class has proven so successful that it will be used to create a campus-wide, first-year experience for students at MHCC and should have a positive effect on student persistence and completion.

Furthermore, the AVID Center expanded during Spring 2014, allowing AVID learning specialists to reach more students in a larger and more learning-conducive space. For many students, the AVID Center has become a home on campus where they can build relationships with peers and AVID instructors. In addition, AVID staff assists in retaining students and developing their intrinsic motivation to reach the goals they have set.

REACHING OUT TO AREA SCHOOL DISTRICTS

While the goal of the AVID program at MHCC continues to be transformative pedagogy and student support, the program has also grown in outreach to AVID schools in local primary school districts, partnerships with universities to provide tutorial training to new AVID tutors, and grant opportunities to expand services and the work that has been done. As the college changes under new leadership, the influence of the economy, and the continued demographic shifts within the community, there is a clear role for AHE to play and the future looks positive.

FOCUSING ON A UNIQUE STUDENT POPULATION

In community colleges across the country, students are enrolling to find a pathway to gainful employment. At MHCC, where the average student age is 31, this is also true. For many students, the community college is one of few accessible and affordable avenues toward a career. To meet this need, the college has invested in the creation of new and affordable career pathways.

Although these programs are steadily gaining in popularity, many potential students are arriving on campus without the academic background needed to be successful in college. AHE at MHCC supports the school's mission by focusing its attention on this unique student population. These developmental education students not only need academic skills, they often need non-academic support and guidance. The AVID Learning Community cohort class model was created to help bridge this gap.

In an AVID Learning Community at MHCC, the keystone class is an AVID Seminar. These classes are critical to student success because they enable students to build the institutional knowledge needed to succeed in higher education. Additionally, these classes focus on topics that will serve students in both immediate and future job markets and include topics such as professionalism, organization, communication skills, and time management. Although the primary focus of the AVID program at MHCC involves helping students transition into certificate and degree programs, a great deal of energy is put into giving students tools that will help them be successful in life.

In addition to the AVID Seminar classes, students also receive a great deal of support and guidance from the AVID Center at MHCC. Learning specialists at the AVID Center are more than academic tutors; they provide holistic support to the college's students, helping with scholarship applications, employment applications, resumes, letters of recommendation, financial aid, community support resources, and registration. Additionally, they work with students to develop more effective time-management and organizational strategies, which reinforce the broader concepts that students learn in AVID Seminar classes. AVID Learning Specialist Beth Keegan comments,

“The AVID program at MHCC empowers students to take control of their education. By focusing on both academic skills and work/life skills, AHE is preparing students for success. The global economy is dynamic and students need as much support as they can get. Along with the academic credential, students who understand the additional professional skills—often unwritten—will have a better chance in the labor market.”

CREATING LEARNING COMMUNITIES

College can be overwhelming, even for the most prepared student. For students who come to community college with educational gaps and past negative experiences in formal education, it is a stressful and often confusing uphill battle to success. At MHCC, AHE supports less-prepared students through two avenues: the AVID Learning Communities, which are pre-college learning cohorts carried over from one term to the next; and the AVID Center, an inviting study space where all students have unlimited access to the center's computers, free printing, and most importantly, tutoring and support from six upbeat, experienced AVID learning specialists (most with a master's degree in education or related content areas).

Student Wendell T. is one recent AVID success story at MHCC. Wendell, a returning African American student, has successfully passed both AVID Learning Communities and is now in his second term at college level:

“It was scary at first coming back to school [after a 10-year break]. I knew college was going to be different from high school. I knew the work was going to be harder. The learning communities made it less scary.”

The AVID Learning Communities at MHCC bring together cohorts of pre-college students to take three linked courses: reading, writing, and college success. The courses are scheduled back-to-back so that students with family and work commitments can make the most of their time on campus. The reading and writing classes are centered on a theme, such as music, and are taught by instructors who use high-engagement instructional strategies. The college success courses introduce students to college culture and expectations and also present essential life skills that will lead to student success beyond college. Wendell T. arrived at the college with a solid foundation:

“Reading and writing were easy for me so [pre-college writing] was a brush-up, but I also got help with taking notes, organizing my work, and, especially, math.” The learning communities are composed of approximately one-half traditional-aged college students and one-half

returning students, who range in age from their mid-20s to age 50 and beyond. Many are first-generation college students whose families originated in Central America, Southeast Asia, Russia, or Northern Africa. With such age and ethnic diversity, it's easy for students to find other students "like me," while also gaining experience relating to people of other ages and cultures. In this way, each student truly becomes part of the MHCC community, rather than another anonymous face on campus.

HELPING STUDENTS THROUGH THE AVID CENTER

From the student perspective, the stress of choosing a reasonable schedule is eliminated by just registering for a learning community! Because taking multiple classes on different parts of the campus can be daunting for less-prepared students, all of the courses in each AVID Learning Community take place in classrooms located in one colorfully decorated hall, with the newly expanded AVID Center housed in the same hall. This arrangement creates a school-within-a-school—a safe and friendly community where students, teachers, and AVID Center staff greet each other on a first-name basis. At chairs and tables in the extra-wide hall, students check their phones and socialize, waiting for classes to begin. Before and after classes, students flock to the AVID Center for help with assignments, understanding instructions, navigating the class website or portal area, and figuring out financial aid. Many students study for 2–4 hours at a time in the AVID Center on a daily basis and take advantage of free coffee, a microwave, and no rules against eating, all of which makes long study sessions in the center easier.

When students enter the AVID Center, they not only find learning specialists knowledgeable in reading, writing, math, science, and overcoming administrative hurdles, they find caring professionals focused on building relationships with each student. AVID staff are willing to go the extra mile for students in almost any area of life that might affect their education. In one instance, a student was jailed for a week for a probation violation. The student's relative phoned the AVID Center (the only campus number the student had ever written down in his notebook) and asked AVID staff to let the student's teachers know that he would be back in class as soon as possible. Of course, AVID

staff relayed the message to the student's teachers, and the student later resumed class.

For many of the college's students, their experience at the AVID Center may be the first time in their lives that they have access to help from teachers and other educators in a low-stress, casual, and supportive environment outside of the classroom. When students observe mutual respect, even playfulness and humor, between AVID staff and teachers, students begin to see teachers and educators as people they can actually learn from, rather than intimidating authority figures. Celebrations of successes small and large are also significant elements of AHE's value. Students appreciate that MHCC holds regular recognition events and distribute certificates of completion or awards of "dedication to learning." They are excited to participate in our finals week study parties and our end of the year success receptions.

When Wendell T. transitioned into college-level courses in Spring 2014, he was a bit nervous:

"I thought I might be on my own, but I got continued help in the AVID Center, especially with biology."

In Summer 2014, Wendell visited the AVID Center for help working through multi-step, multi-source writing assignments for his college-level business courses:

"If I ask for help from someone else, I might feel dumb, but I always felt comfortable coming here for help if I got stuck, because I already know you guys. I even got help when I was having some personal problems. You guys do a little extra, probably beyond what you have to do."

Wendell's feelings are echoed in students' comments on anonymous end-of-term surveys. One student wrote,

"I feel they want to see me succeed. I never leave feeling like a failure. On my bad days there is still staff to encourage me."

Another student shared,

"AVID has kept me on my feet and has readied me for college success."

Yet another student said,

“The AVID Center is the best help you can get on campus. And I would recommend all students to go there.”

Students who responded to the anonymous surveys also gave positive comments about the AVID Learning Communities. One student wrote,

“The AVID community provides me with everything I need. I do recommend AVID for students who are just starting out in college.”

Many others agreed, with one student adding,

“I like this because it’s small and I know the people that run it.”

As Wendell T. said in Summer 2014,

“I definitely wouldn’t have made it this far without you guys!”

BUILDING BONDS BETWEEN FACULTY & STUDENTS

At MHCC, the primary mission of AHE is supporting developmental education students—students who require remediation in reading, writing, or math before entering general education coursework. These students often have a long road ahead of them and innovative and engaging learning strategies are critical to their success. The students within the developmental education program at Mt. Hood Community College are diverse. This diversity stretches across age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and academic experience. Subsequently, as a teacher, it can be challenging to reach every student with every lesson.

With AHE, high engagement is the name of the game. This is essential in learning environments such as developmental education, in which every student needs to feel connected to the learning in order to succeed. For many developmental education students, previous academic experiences have been negative. AHE’s focus on high engagement strategies in the classroom enables these students to gain confidence and control over their learning, often for the first time in their lives.

At MHCC, AVID students are primarily organized into AVID Learning Communities. An AVID Learning Community is a cohort of students taking the same classes together. Most AVID Learning Communities consist of three classes: Reading (RD090/115/117), Writing (WR090/115/121), and College Success or Academic Success Strategies (HD100C/EL115C). In an AVID Learning Community, instructors collaborate with one another to develop concepts and themes that stretch across all three classes. AVID Learning Communities tend to be very dynamic, and bonds between students and faculty develop quickly. As AVID Writing Instructor Michelle Hampton observes,

“The students who do very well in AVID are the ones who like to interact with each other, do not want to be lectured to nonstop, and who are comfortable getting feedback from peers. They enjoy making relationships with people who will last from one quarter to the next. Students who haven’t been in a classroom in a while want to come back and see what college is like. So this is a good way to get easily accessible support and also be in a class where students have a voice immediately.”

BOLSTERING ADJUNCT FACULTY

In an AVID Learning Community, both students and instructors receive a great deal of support from learning specialists in the AVID Center. Instructors collaborate with them to ensure that all students are receiving effective academic support outside of the classroom. At MHCC, where more than 75% of faculty members are part-time, it can be difficult for many adjuncts to feel connected. One of the most effective aspects of the AVID program is its ability to bridge that gap for adjunct instructors. The vast majority of AVID classes are taught by part-time instructors who often receive support and curriculum ideas from the AVID Center staff. Just as AVID instructors collaborate with each other to plan and develop themes for an AVID Learning Community, instructors and learning specialists also work together to meet the needs of students. Additionally, much of the scheduling, substitute support, and student conduct issues are handled by AVID Center staff.

While the AHE system is coordinated through the AVID Center, the AVID Center itself is open to all MHCC students. Any student can use one of the computers, study tables, white boards, or the lending library during open hours. The AVID Center's physical design fosters collaboration among students and offers a welcoming environment for students to get assistance from learning specialists on a drop-in basis. Additionally, part-time instructors are often found using the space to meet with students or prepare for classes.

Finally, AHE provides many avenues for professional development such as the AVID Summer Institute, which a number of instructors attend each year to learn new strategies and perspectives. On campus, AHE promotes seminars and other learning opportunities through which instructors can learn and collaborate with their peers, says MHCC's GED Instructor Scott Plinski,

"Instructors all want help because teaching can be so individual it's like we're each stuck in a cocoon. The professional development is great because we get to talk to instructors who are going through the same things as us."

FOOTNOTES

¹ Skip Downing is an international consultant in the field of faculty development and student success strategies.