



Mentor Case Study: Los Medanos College Pittsburg, California

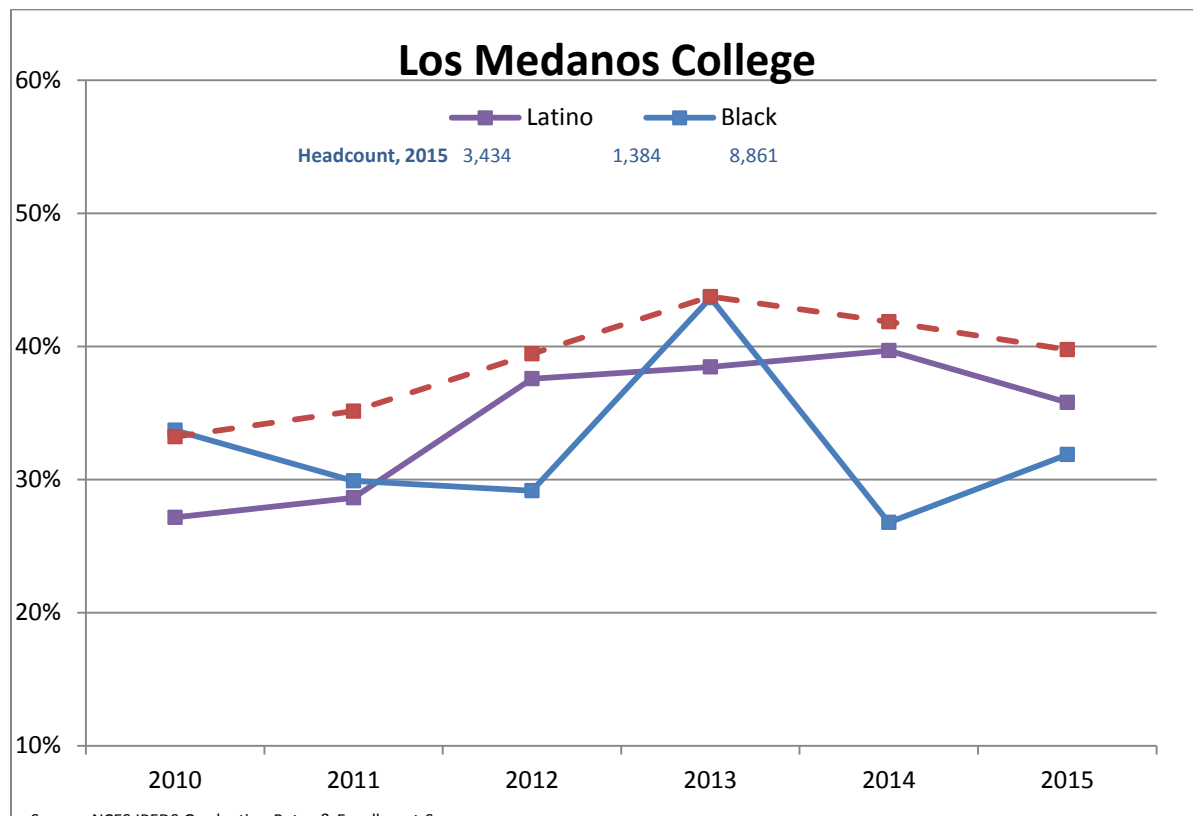
Overview of Los Medanos College

Los Medanos College is the newest campus of the three colleges in the Contra Costa Community College District. The college, which opened in 1974, prepares students to excel and succeed economically, socially, and intellectually in the innovative, engaging and rapidly-growing and changing East County, while enhancing the quality of life of the diverse communities it serves. Los Medanos College is known for its transferable general education program and career technical programs strongly connected with local business and industry.

Los Medanos College (LMC) serves over 12,000 students. The largest three racial/ethnic groups are Latino (41%), White (26%) and African American (15%) and 69% of the student population is under the age of 25. The majority of students attend part-time with only 34% of students taking 12 or more units.

Data Trend Chart

The chart below represents Los Medanos College's graduation trends for Black students (blue line), Latino students (purple line), and for all students (red) over five years.



How did Los Medanos College get started on the “student success” path?

The road to success is seldom smooth and straight and that has been true for LMC. The story of LMC’s institutional change focused on equitable student success can be broken down into four overlapping areas.

The Early Days: Between 2005 and 2008 foundational ground work began to support Latino and African American students. In 2005 with a rapid increase in Latino student population, and newly acquired Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) status, LMC received its first federal Title V HSI grant. The grant primarily focused on access for Latino students based on data which showed that Latino students represented 40% of local middle and high school students. A series of middle school and high school workshops were planned and hosted to help increase the enrollments of Latino students attending LMC. The grant also focused on developing the college’s ESL program. In 2006 LMC partnered with California Tomorrow’s “Campus Change Network” which helped support community college leaders in strengthening, expanding and institutionalizing change efforts around issues of diversity, access and equity. For two years the Campus Change Network convened and engaged teams of community college faculty, administrators, staff and student leaders to discuss, share and learn from practices and models that have created fundamental campus reforms around access and equity. Following the conclusion of the partnership with California Tomorrow, the LMC Black Scholars Task Force was formed to look at the success and retention data for African American students. From this work, a learning community called the Umoja Scholars Program was formed. The program was designed to increase the success rates for African American students in college level English and math.

Formalizing the Work: Exciting work took place in 2009 as LMC began to formalize the equity work taking place. Out of the partnership with the Campus Change Network the Institutional Development for Equity and Access (IDEA) committee was formed. IDEA became a formal sub-committee of the Shared Governance Council, setting itself in position to be a vital part of the institution. The IDEA Committee analyzes college data and seeks out areas in need of critical attention. Initially the committee focused on: conditions of academic success amongst African American and Chicano/Latino students; student leadership and engagement; and the development of a shared language amongst LMC professional community on issues of diversity, equity and inclusion. At approximately the same time, IDEA partnered with Center for Urban Education (CUE) at University of Southern California’s School of Education. This partnership centered on training 17 faculty and staff to engage in action research by analyzing data that would eventually lead to recommendations and beginning steps towards identifying equity gaps and creating an action plan to address them. Also in 2009, LMC received approval for a Mathematics Engineering Science Achievement (MESA) program which is designed to serve educationally underrepresented students in Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields.

Growing and Expanding: From 2010 to 2013 equity work continued to grow and expand in many areas of the college. In 2010, the math and English departments began to look at how accelerated pathways through basic skills courses may increase success for African American and Latino students. That same year LMC received its second Title V HSI grant. Based on data showing that

transfer rates among Latino and low-income students could be improved significantly by making academic, programmatic and systematic changes within the institution, the grant focused on increasing transfer services and transfer rates at LMC by creating a clear pipeline to transfer and improving student and family outreach services and the welcoming of Latino and low-income students to LMC. Another learning community, the Transfer Academy, was formed out of this grant as well. Additionally, in 2011, the college chose to focus on African American student success in its interim Strategic Plan. One of four strategic initiatives in the Interim Strategic Plan was: “Improve the Academic Success of our African American students”. LMC was also granted a Title III NSF HSI STEM grant and began another round of equity-focused action research with CUE in 2011. The “growing and expanding” era ended with a focused look on using data to evaluate programs and receiving the first NSF S-STEM grant which allows LMC to put money in the hands of educationally underrepresented students to pursue their education in STEM.

State Mandated Change: Beginning in 2014 the California Community College Chancellor’s Office began issuing state mandates to improve the success of underserved students. Each California Community College was directed to develop a Student Equity Plan. Based on disaggregated data provided by the state and research gathered by the District research office, LMC went through a process of creating student equity goals and activities and a way to distribute the state-allocated funds. Equity professional development was funded and began to focus on training our faculty and staff to enhance their understanding and use of cultural competence and cultural humility with regard to practice and pedagogy. After a few years of exploring acceleration in basic skills in math and English, a fully developed acceleration model for English and math was implemented. In addition, a significant amount of work was put into Multiple Measures Placement which when combined with accelerated support course curriculum, now has the majority of LMC students placing at college level as compared to 80% placing at the basic skills level prior to these efforts.

In 2017 the Office of Equity and Inclusion was formed and a successful hiring search was conducted for a Dean of Equity and Inclusion. This leadership position is now a member of the President’s Cabinet ensuring equity continues to be a college priority and considered in all high-level decision making. Furthermore, the state continues to develop initiatives to ensure community colleges continue their equity work. Two large initiatives include the use of Starfish technology (for early alert retention efforts) and Guided Pathways. To support Guided Pathways implementation, the state Chancellor’s Office has allocated \$150 million system-wide to support colleges in designing academic roadmaps and transfer pathways that explicitly detail the courses a student must take to complete a certificate or degree on time.

Yet despite these successes, LMC has not arrived. The college is still on the path to fully realizing equitable student success. This path continues to be pathed with changing goals and directions. Over time, the road has become more strategic and intentional and as a result more meaningful and impactful. The work continues to move forward.

How does Los Medanos College sustain the student success movement?

Leadership plays an important role in sustaining the equity-focused student success movement. In a community college shared governance environment, it takes the support of administrative

leadership, faculty leadership, classified professional leadership and student leadership for this to happen. LMC's approach was to find advocates of equity work in all of these areas and engage them in the conversations early on. It was also important to engage those who were opposed to some of the work, to understand their views and engage in dialog when appropriate. LMC has been fortunate to have a strong leadership team that understands the importance of serving all students equitably. Even at times when they could not be directly engaged in the work, having their support was critical.

The ability to sustain the work of institutional culture change requires an intentionality to infuse equity into major and minor aspects of the college. Ad-hoc work is sometimes the best approach to getting started in equity work, but in order for it to be sustained long enough and deep enough to make a real impact on the lives of students, it has to be infused into the fabric of the institution: the mission and vision, strategic plan, college policies and other major initiatives (such as the LMC Student Equity Plan, Equal Employment Opportunity plan, etc.).

What institutional data is used to drive efforts?

LMC uses a variety of data and sources to measure impact on achieving equitable student success. According to the IPEDS data for 2015-16, although African American students are underserved in the area of certificate completion at 9.8%, they are close to equitable representation with AA degree completion at 13.8% and a graduation rate of 17%. Latino students are slightly underrepresented with a graduation rate of 31% but very close to equitable representation of certificate completion (36%) and AA degree completion (38%). Transfer velocity data shows some increases for both Black and Latino students in recent years. When tracking a 6 year transfer period, the transfer rate for the 2008-09 African American student cohort increased from 26.3% to 46.2% in 2010-11. The transfer rate for the 2008-09 Latino cohort increased from 28.5% to 32% in 2010-11.

Furthermore, while not disaggregated, the significant increase in overall transfer success for the college is telling. Over a fifteen-year period UC transfers increased from 15 to 102, CSU transfers increased from 155 to 412, and Out of State transfers increased from 39 to 127. While enrollment has remained relatively steady during this period, the college has more than doubled its annual transfer rate.

The MESA and Umoja Scholars Program learning communities have also shown positive outcomes. According to data from 2016-17, MESA serves approximately 240 students per year. The MESA program achieves an average retention rate of 92% for African American students and 94% for Latino students. Furthermore, the success rate for African American students in MESA is 89% and is 87% for Latino students. The Umoja Scholars Program serves approximately 140 students annually and has an average completion rate of 79%.

In attempting to achieve institutional culture change, it is also important to pay attention to qualitative and anecdotal data. The increased engagement of African American and Latino students on campus is an important accomplishment. This can be attributed to a number of factors including the promotion/support of learning communities and an engaged student government and Student Life Office that teaches advocacy and leadership skills.

How were challenges overcome?

When attempting to create change, there will always be challenges. Los Medanos College is no exception to this. One major challenge, common to many, is limited resources. Although there has been recent funding provided by the state to help support, the resources have not always been available and there is no guarantee that they will continue. In addition, the resources are limited and are allocated with numerous specific restrictions. For example, using equity funding for necessary positions allows the work to be imbedded in the college, but also takes up a large percentage of the funds. In addition, it is a challenge to balance the expectations for immediate results that often come with this funding with work that makes sense, is meaningful to the college, and addresses long-term barriers for students.

Another challenge also common to many institutional change efforts is the ability to make systematic meaningful shifts while navigating many uncontrollable external factors. The changing demographic of LMC over the past decade has led to the challenge of serving an increasingly diverse population. This demographic shift has come with lower socio-economic status, social oppression, an increase in first generation college students, etc..., all of which impact student success. With these challenges comes the opportunity to rise to the occasion to meet the needs of our changing and growing student population. Not everyone at the institution fully understands this opportunity and our responsibility to meet students where they are in order to help them reach the outcomes they desire. Many are unaware of their ability to have an impact on students to realize an improved socio-economic status and the possibility to overcome social oppression. This leads to an additional challenge of building an increased commitment for more people to engage in equity-focused work and who are willing to be more intentional with regard to the process of making equity-focused institutional change. It becomes a challenge when the same handful of people are carrying on what should be the work of the entire institution to create an environment where all students can achieve equitable outcomes and be successful.

Knowing what you know now, what would Los Medanos College do differently?

LMC's equity efforts have led to rich learning experiences and more importantly growing experiences, so there are no regrets. However, knowing what we know now, one area of focus that should have been tackled earlier and with more intention is related to hiring. There has been a significant decrease in African American and Latino faculty and staff employed at the college in recent years. While there has been a huge focus on student success, transfer, and completion, there has not been a good enough look into what we were exemplifying as an institution with regard to "who" is serving our students. For example, according to our 2014 employee data, Latinos are significantly under-represented in all employee groups (classified, faculty, management), yet LMC is an HSI with more than 40% of the student population identifying as Latino. The Equal Employment Opportunity committee has done some work towards this and continues to try and make change, but an initial sense of urgency and attention given towards this issue was not as strong as it could have been in the beginning.

Advice for those just starting the student success journey?

Words of advice Los Medanos College would like to share with others engaging in this work are:

1. Be strategic and intentional. Whether equity work at an institution begins as a grassroots effort or as organized institutional action, it is important to be strategic and intentional about this work. It is ok to make mistakes along the way that you will learn and grow from, but what you cannot afford to do is to make decisions that are not thought through. However, don't get stuck in thinking and lose a sense of urgency - there is no time to waste when each day is an opportunity to change students' lives.
2. Use the data but do not get lost in it. It is important to use data to inform decision making and to measure your results, but it is just as important to not spend so much time in the weeds of the data that you never move towards action.
3. Carefully decide which battles you will fight and who you need on your team to carry out the work. Every angle is not worth taking and every battle is not worth fighting. It is important to decide which are worth it. Sometimes this may happen in the middle of the battle which is ok. What is important is that the team understands this work takes time and must be approached from different angles. If one angle is not working, it may be necessary to try a different approach.
4. Institutionalize the work by embedding it into the "fabric" of the college. Whatever the equity effort may be, it is important that one end result of that work is that it becomes a part of the institution rather than a separate isolated effort that is reliant on a particular person or champion to keep it moving forward. This keeps the work "alive" and not faced with the possibility of fizzing away because champions leave or get tired.
5. Celebrate. This is hard work. In many cases, only a small group is deeply "called" to do this work. People get tired, but what gives them renewed energy to continue is to celebrate the accomplishments along the way, both big and small.