

JCCC launches Achieving the Dream



Drs. James Tschechtelin and Ted Wright, JCCC's coaches for Achieving the Dream, brainstorm with Jeff Frost, JCCC dean, mathematics, during an Achieving the Dream session of Fall 2009 Professional Development Days.

Johnson County Community College is the first and only school in Kansas to join Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count, a national initiative to help more community college students succeed, particularly low-income students and students of color.

JCCC is one of 102 institutions – 98 colleges and four universities – in 22 states to participate in Achieving the Dream, which helps participating colleges implement strategies designed to help more students earn degrees, complete certificates or transfer to other institutions to continue their studies. The initiative emphasizes building a culture of evidence, in which colleges use data to identify effective practices, improve student success rates and close achievement gaps.

The Lumina Foundation for Education, which funds Achieving the Dream, has a goal to raise the proportion of the U.S. adult population who earn high-quality college degrees to 60 percent by the year 2025, an increase of 23 million graduates above current rates, according to Dr. Marilyn Rhinehart, executive vice president, Instruction, JCCC. Currently, approximately 39 percent of American adults complete a two- or four-year degree. Each college makes a two-year commitment to focus its efforts on closing performance gaps among students in targeted populations.

“The analogy I like to give comes from my high school band teacher, who said the band is only as good as its fourth-chair clarinet player,” said Jeff Frost, dean, mathematics, and

Achieving the Dream core team leader. “If you can make the fourth-chair clarinet better, the whole band sounds better. This program is not for the first-chair trumpet player. This program is for the fourth-chair clarinet players.”

Core team members are Rhinehart; Frost; Rick Moehring, dean, Learner Engagement; Dr. Ralph Juhnke, director, Institutional Research; Paul Kyle, dean, Student Services; Pam Vassar, assistant dean, Student Life and Leadership Development; and Wendy Farwell, counselor. JCCC has been assigned two team coaches – one to assist with data and a former community college president to assist with implementing a plan.

JCCC's first step is to gather data to determine which student groups are less successful than others and which high-enrollment courses have the lowest success rates.

“Achieving the Dream really requires us to use data to focus on measurable outcomes and be open and forthright about current performance,” Juhnke said.

While Achieving the Dream is about data, Rhinehart says that every number represents a person.

“Every piece of data has a story that can help us understand how we can make the greatest difference to a student. We need to learn how we can take down barriers to student success and give students the courage and confidence to succeed,” Rhinehart said. 