

## Executive Summary

# AVID College Completion Project Final Comprehensive Evaluation Report

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Submitted to:

AVID Center

and the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation

May 2019

**GIBSON**

AN EDUCATION CONSULTING & RESEARCH GROUP

# AVID College Completion Project

*Final Comprehensive Evaluation Report*

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## Executive Summary

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### Background

In fall 2013, AVID Center received a grant from the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation (MSDF) to implement the AVID *for* Higher Education (AHE) program at a diverse group of nine colleges and universities across the country. The following colleges and universities participated in the MSDF-funded AVID College Completion Project: Atlanta Technical College, Butler Community College, California State University – San Marcos, Fort Valley State University, Saddleback College, Texas Wesleyan University, Tougaloo College, University of North Carolina – Asheville, and Washington State University, Tri-Cities. Six 4-year institutions and three 2-year colleges, located in seven different states, participated in the program.

The primary goal of the AHE program is to improve student persistence and graduation outcomes for students enrolled at participating institutions. The program relies on a series of institution-wide processes (e.g., creation of a site team to facilitate cross departmental discussions about student success, AVID-related professional development for faculty and staff, establishment of peer tutoring programs using Socratic questioning approaches, and the infusion of student-centered instructional practices and skill-based content into first year experience (FYE) and other targeted freshman courses to accomplish its goals. Staff and faculty at participating institutions of higher education (IHEs) participated in professional development (PD) related to the implementation and administration of the AHE program. They also participated in PD related to inquiry-based, high engagement strategies (i.e., the use of active and collaborative learning), effective reading strategies, time management, test-taking strategies, and other topics. In addition, most of the participating institutions sent their peer tutors to training on how to use Socratic tutoring approaches in their work with students at the campus tutoring and student success centers.

Gibson Consulting Group was hired to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the AHE program. A variety of data sources were used in the evaluation, including:

- Annual site visits to participating institutions (which involved group interviews with college leaders, faculty members, and peer tutors, and observations of freshman course sections taught by AVID-trained faculty and nonparticipating instructors);
- Annual PD participant surveys (e.g., administrators, instructors, and tutors);
- Annual student surveys (AVID and non-AVID course sections);
- Program implementation scores provided by AVID Center; and
- Student-level data files collected from participating institutions related to student demographics and prior academic achievement (e.g., SAT/ACT, high school GPA), college enrollment, course enrollment and grades, and degree attainment.

This report explores program implementation, instructional practices, and related student outcomes for nine participating colleges and universities, and three cohorts of students (i.e., those participating in the AHE program and matched nonparticipating students) who began college in fall 2014 (Cohort 1), 2015 (Cohort 2), and 2016 (Cohort 3). This evaluation utilizes a variety of statistical models to explore the near-

term and long-term effects of AHE participation on student persistence and course passing rates. Outcomes for each of the three student cohorts are followed through fall 2018.<sup>1</sup>

## Key Findings

### AHE Program Implementation

***Based on multiple data sources, it is evident that colleges and universities participating in the MSDF-funded grant program made concerted efforts to have college administrators, faculty, and tutors participate in AVID-based PD with the goal of improving instructional practices and student engagement in freshman courses. PD participants were in agreement that the PD they attended was impactful.***

- Over the course of this project, the AHE program had an extensive reach – directly impacting over 1,150 faculty members and college leaders through professional learning and nearly 12,000 students enrolled in targeted courses taught by AVID-trained faculty.<sup>2</sup>
- The vast majority of college administrators indicated that the PD they received onsite and at AVID Summer Institutes were helpful in helping them implement AHE at their institutions. Further, college leaders shared that AHE provided a pivotal role in improving communications related to improving success between academic affairs, student services, tutoring, and other departments.
- College instructors and peer tutors who participated in AVID PD felt that the training provided onsite and at AVID national events was relevant, impactful, and contributed to their continued and expanded use of active and collaborative learning strategies in their classes and work with students.

***Strong evidence exists that targeted freshman courses, typically FYE courses, were successfully redesigned to provide for skill-based content and instructional practices geared toward active student participation, which effectively connects students to peers and their instructor.***

- The majority of students enrolled in AVID-infused freshman course sections shared that skill-based content (e.g., structured note-taking, test taking approaches, time management skills, and critical thinking and inquiry) were emphasized, and active and collaborative learning strategies were utilized by their instructors (e.g., small group and hands-on activities).
- High-engagement strategies most commonly observed in AVID course section include quick writes, think-pair-share, jigsaw, gallery walks, and critical reading strategies (e.g., marking the text and rereading).

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<sup>1</sup> Propensity matched, regression-adjusted models are used to control for demographic and academic differences between students participating in the AHE program and matched nonparticipating students.

<sup>2</sup> This does not include the many students who were enrolled in courses taught by faculty teaching courses outside of the targeted FYE or freshman courses, and does not include students who may have benefitted from tutoring services received by AVID-trained peer tutors.

- After attending AVID PD, roughly two-thirds of respondents indicated that they increased the use of AVID-based strategies during the 2014-15, 2015-16, and 2016-17 academic years.
- In the majority of course sections taught by AVID-trained faculty, small group activities (79%) and reflective writing exercises (69%) were noted by Gibson researchers during classroom observations.

***Not all participating institutions were able to implement the AHE model with equally high levels of fidelity, but more positive persistence results were observed at those which did.***

- Substantive differences in AHE CSS implementation scores were observed across the nine participating colleges and universities, with six of the nine participating institutions at or approaching routine use of AHE.
- Colleges and universities with generally higher implementation scores (e.g., Texas Wesleyan University, UNC Asheville, Saddleback College, and Butler Community College) tended to post the largest effects of AHE program participation on student college persistence results.<sup>3</sup>

### **Differences in Instructional Practices between AVID-Trained and Nonparticipating Faculty**

***Higher levels of student engagement and collaboration in AVID freshman course sections were evident through student surveys and classroom observations.***

- Students reported more frequent usage of active and collaborative learning strategies (e.g., small group and hands-on activities) and skill-based content, such as note-taking approaches, effective time management practices, test taking strategies designed to lower anxiety, and critical thinking exercises, in targeted freshman courses. This was particularly evident for the first (starting college in fall 2014) and third (starting college in fall 2016) cohorts of students.
- Based on direct observation by Gibson evaluators, course sections taught by AVID-trained faculty exhibited higher degrees of student engagement in the lesson and more student collaboration than sections taught by nonparticipating faculty members.

***Differences in instructional practices and the content of FYE courses were evident with instructors in AVID sections using more active and collaborative learning strategies and providing more skill-based content than instructors who did not participate in AVID training.***

- Students reported that courses taught by AVID-trained faculty more commonly involved active and collaborative learning strategies (e.g., small group work, hands on-activities) and content designed to improve their academic and nonacademic skills (e.g., structured note-taking, time

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<sup>3</sup> Some institutions with high AHE implementation marks (e.g., Washington State University, Tri-Cities) could not be included in student outcomes analyses due to the lack of a viable comparison group.

management, test taking strategies, critical thinking) than comparable course sections taught by nonparticipating instructors.<sup>4</sup>

- A substantially larger proportion of AVID students in Cohort 1 (68% vs. 45%), Cohort 2 (70% vs. 52%), and Cohort 3 (73% vs. 43%) indicated they were familiar with high-engagement instructional strategies (e.g., Think-pair-share, Gallery walks, Socratic seminars) than students in course sections not taught by AVID-trained faculty.
- For each of the three student cohorts, a larger proportion of students enrolled in AVID course sections consistently reported that: small group activities were conducted on a weekly basis (Cohort 1: 84% vs. 68%; Cohort 2: 82% vs. 77%; and Cohort 3: 83% vs. 65%); critical thinking and inquiry was emphasized (Cohort 1: 90% vs. 83%; Cohort 2: 91% vs. 88%; and Cohort 3: 92% vs. 85%); and structured note-taking strategies were emphasized (Cohort 1: 74% vs. 56%; Cohort 2: 76% vs. 61%; and Cohort 3: 79% vs. 53%).
- AVID classrooms scored higher than sections taught by nonparticipating faculty for each of the four observation metrics: 1) student engagement; 2) student collaboration; 3) classroom energy exhibited by student; and 4) classroom energy exhibited by the instructor.
- The use of writing activities was far more commonly observed in AVID-based freshman course sections (69.1%) than non-AVID course sections (32.9%) over the 2014-2016 period. These activities most commonly involved short quick writes on a particular topic or reflective journal entries made by students.
- Small group activities were also observed more frequently in freshman AVID course sections (79.4%) than non-AVID course sections (48.3%) over the 2014-2016 period.

### Ways in Which Instructional Approaches and Skill-Based Content Matter to Students

*Student exposure to highly-engaging instruction is associated with students feeling that the course has improved critical skills and confidence levels. In addition, this exposure is also correlated with students being more willing to access college resources (e.g., tutoring, faculty office hours), participate in campus events, and connect with peers through study groups.*

After controlling for differences in student characteristics:

- Students in freshmen course sections who reported higher degrees of student-centered instruction and skill-building activities/content were significantly more likely to feel that the course improved their skills and their confidence that they will be successful in college.

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<sup>4</sup> This may be the result of the AVID-based PD, or it could be the result of instructors who were already using more active and collaborative learning approaches volunteering to attend or being selected to attend AVID training, or some combination of these and other reasons.

- Students in freshmen course sections who reported higher degrees of student-centered instruction and skill-building activities/content were also significantly more likely to be willing to access university resources through faculty office hours and tutoring center attendance, participate in campus events, and organizing or participate in peer study groups.
- A positive and statistically significant relationship was found between students' perceptions of how the targeted freshman course may have impacted their skills and confidence to be successful in college and connection to university resources and peers (i.e., their willingness to access university resources, participate in campus events, and engage with other students in peer study groups).

### **Relationship between AHE Participation and Student Persistence in College (and Degree Attainment)**

*The results from statistical models, conducted at the institution level, suggest that there is a positive statistical relationship between AHE participation and student persistence in college. However, program effects vary substantially by institutions and appear to be related to program implementation fidelity.*

After controlling for differences in student characteristics and high school academic performance between AVID and non-AVID students, AVID students persisted in college at higher rates than their non-AVID counterparts:

- For 71% of student cohorts across nine institutions, AVID students posted higher freshman fall-to-spring persistence rates than their non-AVID peers – in 33% of the cohort analyses, persistence rates for AVID students were 5 percentage points or more, and 24% of the differences were positive and statistically significant.
- For 76% of student cohorts across nine institutions, AVID students posted higher year 1-to-year 2 persistence rates than their non-AVID peers – in 52% of the cohort analyses, persistence rates for AVID students were 5 percentage points or more, and 29% of the differences were positive and statistically significant.
- For 77% of student cohorts across nine institutions, AVID students posted higher year 1-to-year 3 persistence rates than their non-AVID peers – in 39% of the cohort analyses, persistence rates for AVID students were 5 percentage points or more, and 15% of the differences were positive and statistically significant.
- The random effects meta-analysis, which calculates AHE program effects on persistence across participating institutions rates at 4-year institutions, yielded modest and consistently positive (but not statistically significant) AHE program effects on persistence when examining both near-term (+0.68 to +1.29 percentage points) and longer-term (+1.92 to +2.43 percentage points) persistence. These results reflect the variation in implementation fidelity across institutions and the results are differentially influenced by larger institutions in the program which did not yield the strongest student persistence results.

- Based on the random effects meta-analysis conducted for 2-year institutions, substantive and statistically significant AHE program effects on persistence at 2-year colleges and universities were observed when examining both freshman fall-to-spring (+6.29 percentage points) and year 1-to-year 2 (+8.22 percentage points) persistence. While not statistically significant, AVID student cohorts obtained associate's degrees within three years at higher rates (+2.08 percentage points) than their non-AVID peers.

***Four of the nine participating colleges and universities, which implemented the program at a higher level by getting faculty and staff involved in AVID PD to increase student engagement and focus on enhancing student study skills, posted consistently positive college persistence effects for AVID students.***

- Student persistence results were most positive at four institutions which exhibited higher degrees of AHE implementation fidelity: Texas Wesleyan University, UNC Asheville, Butler Community College, and Saddleback College.
- While no significant differences in bachelor's degree attainment rates within four years of starting college were observed, a substantive difference in degree attainment was observed between AVID (31.5%) and non-AVID (19.6%) students at Texas Wesleyan College.
- Cohort 1 AVID students, who started at Saddleback College in fall 2014, were also more likely than their non-AVID counterparts to receive an associate's degree or program certificate (+9.4 percentage points).

### **Relationship between AHE Participation and Course Passing Rates**

***While the relationship between AHE participation and course passing rates was relatively weak across participating institutions, positive effects were more likely to be observed during the first year of college when the outcome of freshman year passing rates was more proximal to the AHE intervention.***

After controlling for differences in student characteristics and high school academic performance between AVID and non-AVID students:

- 62% of the AVID student cohorts across nine participating institutions passed a higher proportion of freshman courses (71.4% of 21 student cohorts). However, the program effect sizes were small with only 14% of the AVID student cohorts posting course passing rates five percentage points higher than their non-AVID peers.
- The relationship between AHE participation and course passing rates became even weaker the further removed students were from the freshman AHE intervention. None of the AVID student cohorts posted year 2, year 3, or year 4 course passing rates of five percentage points higher than their non-AVID peers, and none of the differences were positive and statistically significant.

***The relationship between AHE participation and course passing rates was certainly weaker for institutions across the board; however, one institution (Texas Wesleyan University) which posted the promising program effects on persistence, also demonstrated the most consistently positive program effects on course passing rates.***

- For Cohort 1 students at Texas Wesleyan University, 2014-15 freshman course passing rates were 9.1 percentage points higher than non-AVID students. For Cohort 2 students, their 2015-16 freshman course passing rates were 8.1 percentage points higher than their non-AVID counterparts.<sup>5</sup>
- Sophomore year course passing rates for AVID students at Texas Wesleyan University were also consistently higher for AVID students than non-AVID (+1.2 percentage points for Cohort 1, +3.1 percentage points for Cohort 2, and +0.01 percentage points for Cohort 3).<sup>6</sup> Junior and senior year course passing rate differences were more mixed as students moved further away from the freshman year AHE intervention.

### **Relationship between AVID Participation in High School and College-level Student Outcomes**

***Students who took AVID in high school tended to be at higher risk of academic failure than students who did not enroll in an AVID elective course in high school, and these students were more likely to be enrolled in AHE during their freshman year in college.***

- A higher proportion of students who took an AVID elective course in high school were first generation college students (55% vs. 33%), were more often economically disadvantaged and recipients of a federal Pell grant (47% vs. 28%), had lower high school GPA (3.30 vs. 3.43) and lower SAT reading and math composite scores (936 vs. 1048), and worked during the fall semester of their freshman year of college (50% vs. 40%) than students who did not participate in AVID during high school. These findings are expected because the high school AVID elective targets these students, as they are more academically at risk.
- Students who took AVID in high school were more likely to be enrolled in an AVID-infused freshman college course than the students who did not take AVID in high school (65% vs. 49%).

***There is some descriptive evidence to suggest that students who took AVID in high school had higher college freshman course passing rates and freshman fall-to-spring persistence than their non-AVID counterparts, but little evidence from this exploratory analysis to suggest that taking AVID in high school may be related to longer-term freshman-to-sophomore persistence.***<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Both of these differences are significantly different at the .05 level.

<sup>6</sup> None of these differences reached statistical significance.

<sup>7</sup> Previous studies using National Student Clearinghouse data showed more promising college persistence results for students who were enrolled in AVID during high school (see Adams, 2014).

- Little differences in freshman fall-to-spring and freshman-to-sophomore year persistence rates were observed between students who took AVID in high school and those who didn't; however high school AVID students passed a higher percentage of their freshman courses than non-AVID students.
- After controlling for differences in student characteristics, only one significant finding emerged – students who took AVID in high school persisted from fall-to-spring of their freshman year in college at higher rates than students who did not have AVID in high school.

## Summary

This comprehensive evaluation of the AHE program reveals a number of important findings related to:

- The implementation of AHE across a diverse group of colleges and universities;
- The perceived impact of AVID PD;
- Instructional practices of instructors who have participated in AVID PD;
- The perceived impact of freshman student exposure to student-centered instruction and skill-based content;
- How student participation in AHE may be related to persistence in college and college course passing rates; and
- The relationship between students' participation in AVID in high school, participation in AHE and student outcomes.

Results presented in this report show that, while each participating institution sent administrators, faculty members, and peer tutors to AVID PD offerings, AHE program implementation fidelity varied substantially across the nine participating IHEs. As a byproduct of AHE program implementation, college leaders shared that participating in the program helped to improve student success-related communications between academic affairs, student services, tutoring, and other departments.

PD participants shared that the AVID training they attended was of high quality, relevant to their work as college administrators, instructors, and tutors, and helped to improve the quality of their instructional practices. The research team at Gibson found that faculty who participated in AVID-related PD were more likely to implement active and collaborative learning approaches (e.g., small group, hands on, and reflective writing activities) and skill-based content (e.g., note-taking, time management, test taking, reading, critical thinking strategies) aimed at improving academic and non-academic skills in their courses.

When these instructional practices and course contents were used more commonly in targeted freshman courses, typically FYE courses, students were significantly more inclined to feel that the course had improved their skills and their confidence that they will be successful in college. In addition, students who were exposed to higher degrees of collaborative and active learning instruction and skill-based content in a targeted freshman course were also more likely to express willingness to connect

with university resources through attending faculty office hours and campus tutoring centers, participate in campus events, and organize or participate in peer study groups.

After controlling for differences in student demographic and characteristics and prior academic achievement, students who were enrolled in targeted freshman courses taught by AVID-trained instructors persisted in college at consistently higher rates than their non-AVID peers. While college persistence results varied substantially across participating institutions, colleges and universities which implemented AHE with higher degrees of fidelity (e.g., UNC Asheville, Texas Wesleyan University, Saddleback College, and Butler Community College) posted more positive AHE program effects on persistence. The relationship between AHE participation and college course passing rates was weak and inconsistent across participating institutions. Only one IHE, Texas Wesleyan University, posted significantly higher freshman year course passing rates.

Students who took AVID in high school tended to be at higher risk of academic failure than students who did not enroll in an AVID elective course in high school, and these students were more likely to be enrolled in AHE during their freshman year in college. There is some descriptive evidence to suggest that students who took AVID in high school had higher college freshman course passing rates and freshman fall-to-spring persistence than their non-AVID counterparts, but little evidence to suggest that taking AVID in high school may be related to longer-term freshman-to-sophomore persistence.

In summary, this study of the AHE program reveals promising results and suggests that additional program supports from the AVID Center and IHE administration may be required to improve implementation fidelity to a level necessary to achieve positive student outcomes.