

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/241724570>

Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) in a Community College Setting: A Case Study

Article in *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* · October 2012

DOI: 10.1080/10668920903182583

CITATIONS

5

READS

271

3 authors, including:



[Karen M. Watt](#)

University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

23 PUBLICATIONS 381 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)



[Jeffery Huerta](#)

University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

15 PUBLICATIONS 261 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)

Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) in a Community College Setting: A Case Study

Karen M. Watt, Jeffery Huerta, and Ersan Alkan

*Department of Educational Leadership, The University of Texas Pan American,
Edinburg, Texas, USA*

This study examined the initial implementation process of Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) in a northern California community college. Focus groups of students, faculty, and administrators were conducted in the spring of 2008, as well as observations of several planning meetings in the spring and summer of 2008. The community college students enrolled in the AVID class reported that the support they received through AVID has helped them focus, become more organized, and become more motivated to continue their studies. This was so even though not all of AVID's 11 essentials were implemented on campus. In addition, challenges such as faculty buy-in and resistance to changing institutionalized practices were encountered by staff members responsible for implementing AVID. In this initial implementation, faculty and administration sought to change the culture of the college to better serve the underrepresented students in their quest to transfer to four-year institutions. This study provides a framework for other community colleges and higher education institutions to leverage the academic potential of underprepared and historically underrepresented students.

Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) is a secondary school college preparatory program that includes an academic and social support elective class, enrollment of students in rigorous curriculum, professional development for a school's site team, and the use of writing, inquiry, collaboration and reading strategies. Prior to this study, AVID had yet to be implemented and studied in a postsecondary institution; therefore, this study aims at providing descriptive and explanatory data that reveal purposes, challenges, and successes of AVID implementation at West Coast Community College (WCCC)¹. Because only half of all community college students in the United States complete a certificate or degree within eight years of enrolling in college (Bailey & Morest, 2006), a support mechanism like AVID may help serve students who are academically challenged in higher education. The results of this study may assist other postsecondary institutions in implementing AVID with their incoming students, particularly those who are underachieving and underrepresented in higher education. As a result of AVID implementation, this study also seeks to explain what changes, if any, in school culture are observed.

American community colleges have become the largest sector of higher education, enrolling 6.5 million students each year for credit-bearing courses and about 5 million for noncredit-

¹This is a pseudonym.

Address correspondence to Karen M. Watt, The University of Texas Pan American, 1201 West University Drive, EDCC 2.504, Edinburg, TX 78539. E-mail: watt@utpa.edu

bearing courses. These institutions enroll 46% of all U.S. undergraduates including 47% percent of undergraduates who are African American and 55% who are Hispanic. Nationally, half of all four-year college graduates have attended community colleges prior to earning their degrees (The College Board, 2008).

A significant challenge facing community colleges is the ability to shift the historical focus on student access to one of student success. When examining community college success in terms of student outcomes, there are extremely positive findings in some areas as well as troubling data in others. For example, only 29% of community college students who attempt a developmental math course and 37% who attempt a developmental English course complete them within three years (Brock et al., 2007). Yet, on a positive note, community colleges are the higher education institution of choice for many students who are members of groups that have been historically underrepresented in higher education (The College Board, 2008).

COMMUNITY COLLEGE CULTURE

The cultural beliefs of a community college often resemble a hybrid of those found in secondary schools and of those found in four-year postsecondary institutions. On one hand, community colleges are an extension of high school, a stepping-stone to a four-year institution; yet, most often without the close faculty-student engagement found in high schools. On the other hand, community college expectations are similar to those found in four-year colleges; students are there to learn and can opt out if they choose to do so.

Community college culture is made up of assumptions about students held by those in the educational community. Claxton (2007) examined the need for stakeholders to change their assumptions in order for the community college culture to change. Professional development is one way to assist faculty, staff, and administrators to bring their assumptions to the surface and share these assumptions with one another, with the ultimate goal of bringing about changes in community college culture (Claxton, 2007).

Chang (2005) emphasizes faculty-student interaction as a means to further involve and develop the interests of community college students, particularly students of color. Though community college students generally show low levels of engagement with faculty, Chang reaffirmed the need for college faculty to be culturally sensitive when dealing with students. Faculty must make the effort to interact with students because taking the initiative to engage with faculty is difficult for many students and often culturally foreign.

AVID

Advancement Via Individual Determination has been a proven model for college preparation in over 3,500 middle schools and high schools across the country and in 15 foreign countries (<http://www.avidonline.org/info/?&ID=604&tabID=1>). Extensive research is available on AVID from the past two decades including AVID's effect on middle school student performance (Guthrie & Guthrie, 2000, 2002); AVID as a reform model (Watt, Powell, & Mendiola, 2004; Watt, Powell, Mendiola, & Cossio, 2006); AVID's ability to "level the playing field" (Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, & Lintz, 1996); and, AVID's effect on students' college aspirations (Watt, Huerta, & Lozano, 2007).

The success of this program is due, in part, to its comprehensive implementation parameters. AVID schools must implement 11 essentials in order to be certified as an AVID site. These essentials include: (a) student recruitment and selection requirements; (b) voluntary participation agreements from students, staff, and parents; (c) integration of the AVID elective class within the regular school day; (d) enrollment in rigorous curriculum that satisfies college requirements; (e) introduction of a strong writing and reading curriculum; (f) introduction of inquiry for critical thinking skills; (g) emphasis on collaborative instruction; (h) academic assistance through tutoring with trained college tutors; (i) evaluation of program implementation through data collection and analysis; (j) district/school commitment to AVID funding appropriations and compliance; and (k) interdisciplinary site team collaboration (Swanson, 2000, as cited by Watt, Mills, & Huerta, 2010).

West Coast Community College (WCCC), the case studied, enrolls adult students mostly from portions of the surrounding northern California county. In fall 2006, student enrollment was 8,453 (43% male, 57% female), with an average age of 31 years. Thirty-nine percent of WCCC students are Caucasian, 24% are Latino, 15% are African-American, and 11% are Asian. Course success has remained relatively constant at 68% for the last six years, but it has only been above the state average for two of those years. The number of associate degrees awarded has fluctuated for the last five years. Even though there has been a steady increase of WCCC students transferring to the California State University and University of California systems in the last five years, the transfer rate still remains among the lowest in the state (The Office of Institutional Research, 2008).

In the spring of 2008, WCCC, with the assistance of key AVID personnel, began implementing AVID (an AVID elective class) to see if AVID-like successes could be achieved within a community college setting. Because AVID has almost exclusively served secondary school students, its ability to meet the needs of college students in their pursuit of an advanced degree is unknown. The 11 AVID essentials, for example, may or may not need to be modified in order for them to be implemented effectively in a community college setting. During the semester, plans were also being made to expand AVID to include more sections and students and to train more professionals on campus (to expand the culture of AVID). This study, however, only includes an analysis of the implementation activities occurring during the spring of 2008.

METHOD

This was a case study (Yin, 2003; Stake, 1995) of West Coast Community College's efforts to implement AVID wherein a cohort of 22 college students were enrolled in an AVID elective class. Several modes of inquiry were used: in particular, focus group discussions and observations of meetings. Document review was also used when examining meeting notes and site team plans.

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. How has one semester of AVID implementation at West Coast Community College prepared selected students for transfer to a four-year institution?
2. How were AVID's 11 essentials implemented at West Coast Community College?
3. What do students and instructors report to be the challenges and successes of AVID implementation at WCCC?
4. What changes, if any, in school culture have occurred at WCCC as a result of AVID implementation?

Data Sources and Evidence

Focus group interviews and observations of meetings were employed to gather data for this study. Early in the spring 2008 semester, a faculty/staff focus group was conducted with six participants (FFG1), and a student focus group was conducted with seven participants (SFG1). Later in the semester, a second focus group was conducted with nine students (SFG2) who did not participate in the first focus group.

In addition to conducting focus groups, the researchers observed three meetings at WCCC. The first was a faculty meeting (FM1) held in the early spring. The second and third meetings were administrative meetings (AM1 & AM2) held in early spring and late spring. Finally, the researchers also observed a week-long site-team planning session (STM1) in the summer of 2008 at the AVID Summer Institute.

To strengthen the trustworthiness of this study, draft case member-checking was employed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By submitting the draft manuscript to WCCC's president and constituents, the researchers were able to test for factual and interpretive accuracy, as well as to provide evidence of credibility. In addition, pseudonyms have been used throughout the manuscript to ensure confidentiality and maintain anonymity of the participants and the participating site (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Creswell, 2007).

FINDINGS

Findings of this study are organized by addressing each research question. Highlights from each area of inquiry are also included here.

Preparation for Transfer

Twenty-two students began the 2008 spring semester enrolled in the AVID elective at WCCC. At the end of the semester, only 16 of those students were still enrolled at WCCC and in AVID. Despite the attrition, the 16 remaining students completed AVID and indicated that their intent was to transfer to a four-year institution in the fall of 2008 or to continue at WCCC and remain enrolled in AVID.

In a focus group of WCCC faculty and staff, conducted early in the spring of 2008, the need for AVID at WCCC was explained:

When I first came to [West Coast Community College], I transitioned from the K-12 system . . . I looked around, literally on my first term I said, "This college needs AVID. They need AVID. They need support, they (students) have to have help to learn to navigate the system." And so I kind of got it rolling from there. . . . the intent and the purpose were to, across the whole college, increase, in significant amounts, the whole transfer rate for these students. (Cynthia, WCCC English Teacher, FFG1)

In addition, the college president stated his motivation for supporting AVID implementation: "We want an overall movement to bring about changes for overall success." (AM2).

It was apparent from the focus group discussions that preparing students for transfer to a four-year institution was the main goal of faculty and students at WCCC. How did AVID

implementation address the need to improve transfer rates? This is how one of the AVID English teachers explained it:

When I found out that only 6% of students from [local high school] get their A-Gs [college prep requirements], it's like all the alarms are going off to say, "they have to have some form of assistance to help them get to 4 year college because it doesn't exist in K-12!" (Cynthia, FFG1)

One student stressed the importance of peer support in her goal to transfer:

Since we are all in AVID we should take the general education together . . . we are all trying to work toward transferring . . . if two of us have the same major or whatever is the requirement, English, math, bio, then we should plan on taking those classes together so that we are in it together. And if I miss a day, I could call what's her name and be like "what's going on in class?" . . . we're kind of like family and working to transfer. (Sonya, SFG2)

The AVID students articulated that they were focused on their goal of transferring to a four-year institution, and that the AVID teacher was helping to facilitate the preparation for transfer. A first-year WCCC AVID student, Shawndra, described college AVID:

College is like all on your own . . . No one's pushing you, but like AVID, it's kinda . . . it's not like high school but you know there's some professors that . . . they sit down and listen. . . . in AVID it's kinda like, "we're gonna be here for you, help you with everything if you have trouble." They just don't leave you on your own. (SFG1)

Another student, Jose, agreed:

First semester I didn't have AVID so I'd just wake up, come by myself . . . if I didn't want to come to class I didn't have to . . . When I got into AVID if you don't come to class you get a phone call, text message, maybe even an airplane with a sign on it. (SFG1)

Another AVID student also explained his goals:

To transfer to a four year college basically is what I want to do. I want to help with what is going on in my community . . . to give back to the community . . . thinking back from past experiences . . . I just want to stop some of the stuff that is going on right now . . . (Antwon, SFG2)

AVID's Essentials

AVID's accountability system and certification process involves the implementation of 11 essentials. These essentials are present in all 3,500 certified AVID middle and high schools in the nation. In a postsecondary setting, however, these essentials are anticipated to take on a different look as they were mentioned in the focus group discussions and as observed in team meetings. One student explained the strategies (Essentials 5, 6, and 7) taught in the AVID class:

He's (AVID teacher) teaching us study habits and while we're in class, we're taking Cornell notes of course and . . . how to listen . . . sitting in the front row. Little things that can really help out . . . if we have any questions or anything I mean he's [AVID teacher] just a phone call away. (Jeffery, SFG1)

The AVID site team (Essential 11) typically consists of an AVID elective teacher, a teacher from core content areas, a counselor, and an administrator. In the case of WCCC, the site team that attended the AVID summer institute included the college's president; three other administrators—including the director of Equal Opportunity Program and Services; the AVID elective teacher; a counselor; two English instructors; a math instructor; another instructor; a high school counselor; and the tutor coordinator.

Early in the semester, there were concerns about support for the program; however, it was apparent that the president's team had buy-in and was willing to provide resources to assist with implementation. Mr. X. (AVID elective teacher) explained as follows:

You have to have good people, I mean that's really important. Everybody has a very similar vision of how they want to transform the school, and we got a lot of smart people willing to put their energy into it. Having an administrator that knows the lay of the land and how to negotiate the tricky parts of it is a huge, huge advantage. (FFG1)

During the first semester of implementation, several essentials were observed and discussed in the focus groups. For example, Essentials 5, 6, and 7 focus on writing, inquiry, collaboration, and reading. These strategies were explained by students as being used in the AVID classroom and in their English and math classrooms as well. Essential 10, which requires that schools have the financial resources and administrative support for their AVID program, was highly visible in the meeting observations and in the faculty focus group discussions. As the WCCC vice president stated, funding is "the least of my worries." Getting broad faculty support was the focus of many discussions as AVID was being introduced at WCCC.

Challenges and Successes

Successes, though often difficult for faculty members to identify so early in the implementation process, were explained by administrators.

I would say that the fact that the president, vice president and the dean of instruction who were in it since the very beginning, are key, because had they not been, I would not have been able to make the strides that I have been able to make for doors to open. (Wendy, FFG1)

We have built a huge community of students who trust us and believe in us, and we believe in them . . . I think they are sold that we are going to get them into a 4-year college, and to me that is very exciting. (Cindy, FFG1)

Some challenges included the recruitment and scheduling of WCCC faculty, who were described to be somewhat resistant to the new initiative. In addition, the need for rigor (Essential 4) was discussed as a challenge because math prerequisites acted as gatekeepers, and there was a need to by-pass these prerequisites in order to meet Essential 4.

One of the biggest challenges for all stakeholders at WCCC was explained by a staff member:

The community is not a college going culture . . . I think that is one of the things they [students] come in with—not having that as part of their culture . . . there's this fear . . . and their families don't know how to assist them and be their advocate. (AVID Administrator, FFG1)

There was excitement around AVID within the small group of instructors and administrators who were charged with implementing the program. However, instructors and administrators recognized that changes would not happen overnight and that AVID implementation initially may be seen as a competition to other established programs in the college.

Changes to School Culture

In the initial meeting with WCCC administrators (AM1), one administrator stated that she wanted to “avidize” the school culture by implementing and coordinating program efforts such as Learning Communities and First Year Experience. However, the general consensus among the administrators was that “we need to get others on board.”

Anticipated cultural changes, as explained during the Summer Institute site team meetings, included the following:

The students will become empowered by having a good experience at the institution and will start to see [WCCC] as their ally instead of an obstacle. I think the self-advocacy component will reveal itself analogously to what happens when students associate individual counselors and teachers as their allies at the institution. (Arlene, English Instructor, STM1)

Another English instructor (STM1) explained that positive cultural changes could occur at WCCC as a result of AVID implementation but with certain conditions:

AVID would have to be part of every instructor’s curriculum. The institution would have to change one of its goals to align with the AVID principles.

Math instructor, Tom, added this: “The next biggest goal will be to institutionalize AVID instead of running it as a separate silo.” (STM1).

DISCUSSION

Reflecting upon the four research questions posed in this study, the researchers can conclude that one semester of AVID implementation at the community college level cannot necessarily prepare students for transfer to a four-year institution. However, WCCC students reported that the support they received through the AVID class at WCCC has helped them focus, become more organized, and become more motivated to continue their studies. This is in part due to the close interaction between the students and the AVID faculty at WCCC (Chang, 2005). In addition, as evidenced by the large group of WCCC faculty, staff, and administrators attending the AVID Summer Institute, collaboration toward common goals, such as student transfer, were in progress.

The second research question addresses the implementation of the 11 AVID essentials. The essentials that were observed to be in place at WCCC, and similar to those found in secondary schools across the nation, were essentials 2 (voluntary participation), 3 (students scheduled in the AVID elective during the school day), 5–7 (curriculum focused on writing, inquiry, collaboration, and reading within the AVID elective and in other core classes), 10 (financial resources and administrative support for AVID), and 11 (interdisciplinary site team). Essentials that were

observed yet looked somewhat different from those implemented in secondary schools included essential 1 (student selection) and 8 (trained tutors). Not observed were essentials 4 (rigor) and 9 (data collection). There were several discussions around rigor such as the need to bypass established prerequisites for students entering credit-bearing core courses. The rationale behind this action was explained by the AVID teacher who suggested that AVID students were receiving support in the AVID elective; therefore, they were capable of succeeding in more rigorous coursework.

The third research question addressed the challenges and successes of AVID implementation at WCCC. This is how Mr. X explained them:

In terms of . . . looking at this from a high school perspective . . . high school is, whether or not you are learning anything . . ., you are there with your friends. Then they [students] come here and the system is less user-friendly. . . . how do you engage students? They are coming here and they don't know what to expect, it's an entirely new situation. (FFG1)

Getting buy-in from other faculty members, reexamining the goals of the community college, and trying to change the culture of the community college were the biggest challenges mentioned by the faculty focus group participants. AVID professional development activities that were suggested included training the WCCC faculty members in an attempt to change the “assumptions” they had about community college students (Claxton, 2007). WCCC sent a team of faculty members and administrators to the AVID Summer Institute to begin this process of cultural change. Here is how the WCCC vice-president addressed cultural change:

AVID is part of our systemic change to address the underserving of our population. The [WCCC] approach has been a “be all” to everyone, but we've spread ourselves too thin. The AVID approach creates a core of practices, instructional services, and teaching strategies that goes broader than just the elective class. (AM1)

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

This study provides a framework for institutions similar to West Coast Community College to leverage the academic potential of underprepared and historically underrepresented students. AVID is well-documented in previous studies on secondary schools. Several findings of this post-secondary study were parallel to findings from other AVID studies of middle and high schools. Administrative support (Guthrie & Guthrie, 2002; Watt, Huerta, & Cossio, 2004); advocacy of the AVID teacher (Watt, Johnston, Huerta, Mendiola, & Alkan, 2008); focus on preparation for four-year college (Martinez & Kloppott, 2005; Mehan et al., 1996); and building self-confidence in students (Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2002) are a few examples. Further examination of AVID implementation at WCCC is needed to better answer the research questions posed in this study, in particular, the question addressing community college culture change.

The historical trend in most community colleges has been to passively accept students in the first year and to weather the attrition without much reflection or intervention. AVID is a more structured and guided approach to the first year experience for community college students. (WCCC President, STM1)

REFERENCES

- Bailey, T., & Morest, V. S. (2006). *Defending the community college equity agenda*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Brock, T., Jenkins, D., Ellwein, T., Miller, J., Gooden, S., Martin, K., . . . Pih, M. (2007). *Building a culture of evidence for community college student success: Early progress in the achieving the dream initiative*. New York, NY: MDRC and the Community College Research Center.
- Claxton, C. (2007). Placing our assumptions at risk: Pathway to changing the culture of the community college. *Community College Journal of research and Practice*, 31, 217–229.
- Chang, J. C. (2005). Faculty-student interaction at the community college: A focus on students of color. *Research in Higher Education*, 46(7), 769–802.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Denzin, A., Hubbard, L., & Mehan, H. (2002). *Extending educational reform: From one school to many*. New York, NY: Routledge Falmer.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. (2005). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Guthrie, L. F., & Guthrie, G. P. (2000). *Longitudinal research on AVID: 1999–2000* [Final report: Executive summary]. Burlingame, CA: Center for Research, Evaluation and Training in Education.
- Guthrie, L., & Guthrie, G. (2002). *The magnificent eight: AVID best practices study*. Burlingame, CA: Center for Research, Evaluation, and Training in Education.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Martinez, M., & Klopott, S. (2005). *The link between high school reform and college access and success for low-income and minority youth*. Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum and Pathways to College Network.
- Mehan, H., Villanueva, I., Hubbard, L., & Lintz, A. (1996). *Constructing school success: The consequences of untracking low-achieving students*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- The College Board. (2008, January). *Winning the skills race and strengthening America's middle class: An action agenda for community colleges* [Report of the National Commission on Community Colleges]. Retrieved from <http://www.collegeboard.com/communitycolleges>
- The Office of Institutional Research. (2008). Institutional effectiveness. West Coast, CA: West Coast Community College.
- Watt, K. M., Huerta, J., & Cossio, G. (2004). Leadership and AVID implementation levels in four south Texas border schools. *Catalyst for Change*, 33(2), 10–14.
- Watt, K. M., Johnston, D., Huerta, J., Mendiola, I. D., & Alkan, E. (2008). Retention of first-generation college-going seniors in the college preparatory program AVID. *American Secondary Education*, 37(1), 17–40.
- Watt, K. M., Huerta, J., & Lozano, A., (2007). A comparison study of AVID and GEAR UP 10th grade students in two high schools in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas. *Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk*, 12(2), 185–212.
- Watt, K. M., Mills, S. J., & Huerta, J. (2010). Identifying attributes of teacher leaders within the AVID program: A survey of school principals. *Journal of School Leadership*, 20(3), 352–368.
- Watt, K. M., Powell, C. A., & Mendiola, I. D. (2004). Implications of one comprehensive school reform model for secondary school students underrepresented in higher education. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 9(3), 241–259.
- Watt, K. M., Powell, C. A., Mendiola, I. D., & Cossio, G. (2006). School-wide impact and AVID: How have selected Texas high schools addressed the new accountability measures? *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 11(1), 57–73.
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.