



Alvin Community College: Not Just Open Door. Open Arms.

At Alvin Community College (ACC), decisions stem from one clear principle: connect person to person with every student, as often as possible.

“Coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is evident that we are dealing with a different generational experience,” says President Robert Exley. “There is social isolation and a lack of human connectedness. So we work to connect with students in every setting. We’re an open-admissions institution. And not just open doors, but open arms.”

“Many of our students are first generation, so it’s really brave of them to even get up to the front door,” adds John Matula, vice president of student services. “So when they do come in, it’s very important to let them know that they belong here, and that there’s a place for them here. Then it’s critical to get them into a program of study and on a pathway that will lead to a livable wage.”

Faculty and Staff Team Up for Advising

In recent years, ACC has introduced corequisite support and eight-week classes. These changes have been accompanied by improved advising by both staff and faculty.

“When I was an advisor, I worked with a lot of nursing students,” recalls Jessica Ranero-Ramirez, dean for college access and partnerships. “I built partnerships with the faculty in both the biology and nursing departments so I was better be able to support students as they pursued their degrees.”

Ranero-Ramirez also sat in on a few anatomy and physiology classes, and faculty from these departments joined her in advising sessions so they could hear the questions students asked. Many faculty members also invite advisors and coaches into the classroom so students can hear from them during regular class time.



“We make sure that the students are aware that we’re here for them,” Matula says. “We are their people.”

Shorter Time to Degree and Wraparound Support Services

Before Texas Pathways, students who earned associate degrees were graduating with close to 100 credit hours. As the college introduced pathways, excess credits and time to degree began to decrease.

ACC also trained admissions counselors and advisors on prior learning, assessment, and articulation agreements. Now staff discuss whether incoming students have industry-based credentials, military experience, or workforce experience that can apply to credits at ACC.

“We identify areas where students can receive credit here at Alvin for their earlier work,” says Cindi Robinson, coordinator of pathways and articulation and the college’s pathways lead.

“We also talk about their options when they leave — where they will have guaranteed admission and where their credits will transfer if they follow particular pathways,” she adds. “Students are hearing about their options from the beginning and learning the language related to transfer so they can apply that knowledge as they go throughout their program.”

ACC also makes sure that students are supported so they can focus on their coursework. “We let students know from the very beginning that we have all kinds of supports,” Robinson says. “They know that we offer counseling services and career services, we have food boxes if they’re in need of food, and we have academic advisors and tutoring services.”

Allocating Funds to Meet Student Needs

ACC regularly reallocates funds to better support students. For example, if the college has an open position, it might decide to staff differently to meet student needs. This openness to targeted restructuring has enabled the college to have dual enrollment coaches for every high school in its service area — and to provide nearly 100 percent of the instruction for dual enrollment classes offered in the high schools.

“It’s a major commitment to ensure that we get the highest quality of instruction possible,” Exley says.



ACC consistently looks for student needs and finds ways to meet them. In fact, the college is in the process of hiring a licensed social worker to serve students on campus and connect them to community resources.

“The real reward for us is the profound impact we can have on students, and that comes through in so many different ways,” Exley adds. “But it always goes back to faculty and staff caring about students.”

TSC and Teamwork

ACC’s efforts are paying off. From 2015 to 2022, the college tracked these gains:

- Students earning 6+ credits in the first term increased from 56 percent to 66 percent.
- Students earning 15+ credits in the first term increased from 37 percent to 47 percent.
- Students completing math in the first year increased from 20 percent to 43 percent.
- Students completing writing in the first year increased from 29 percent to 54 percent.

In addition, the college has introduced new opportunities for students. For example, three ACC culinary arts students are traveling to Augusta, GA, for a food services internship at the Masters Tournament. Another is doing an internship at the Disney Culinary Institute. Both of these opportunities grew out of networking by a culinary arts faculty member.

The college celebrates these successes together, and the pathways team is grateful to the Texas Success Center (TSC) for the support it provides.

“The TSC not only gives us great tools, but it also sustains us emotionally. And that is why we do this work,” Exley says.

He adds, “The Texas Pathways effort also gave us tremendous momentum to fundamentally improve the state’s financial support for our colleges. It took two years to move the legislation [HB 8], which got 100 percent support in the House and all but two voted for it in the Senate. To get 50 community college presidents to agree and stay on track for two years on an agreement is remarkable. It tells you the power of the pathways work through the TSC.”

The Texas Pathways Institutes provide a chance for colleges to review student outcome data and think deeply about strategy. “The TSC provides key performance indicator (KPI) data so we can track our progress and compare our performance with our peers,” Matula



says. “It gives us time to look at and think about a particular process or work flow or problem.”

Ranero-Ramirez describes the Institutes as a chance to become a mini think tank. “It allows us to step away from the everyday hustle-bustle,” she says. “We leave energized and feeling like we’ve identified a manageable solution that we can take back to our campus.”

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