



### Highlights from Achieving the Dream's Annual Conference

Ascendium staff were delighted to see so many partners and practitioners at Achieving the Dream's 15th annual DREAM convening in February. The event was packed with inspiring programming including surprise plenary speaker Dr. Jill Biden, who shared stories about forging more personal connections with her students at Northern Virginia Community College.

On Day Two of the conference, Ascendium hosted a session that featured representatives from three Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) we've been working with as part of a larger effort to build a learning community among 35 TCUs. Leaders from the Institute of American Indian Arts, Leech Lake Tribal College and Nueta Hidatsa Sahnish College discussed how they are leveraging institutional change and community connections to expand student resources while they work to overcome challenges that small, rural institutions face. Achieving the Dream coach Eleanor Brown moderated the discussion, which was well attended by practitioners from rural colleges across the country.



Frederica Lefthand from Little Big Horn College and Ascendium's own Maryann Rainey

### New Report Offers a Snapshot of Tribal College Life

One of our partners working to grow the TCU learning community is the Center for Community College Student Engagement. The Center used the DREAM 2019 conference as an opportunity to release **Preserving Culture and Planning for the Future: An Exploration of Student Experiences at Tribal Colleges**, a report that explores student life at TCUs. The report is based on data and stories collected through surveys and other research sponsored by Ascendium.

Over 1,000 students across 25 TCUs responded to the Center's 2017 Survey of Entering Student Engagement, and over 2,400 students across 22 TCUs responded to the 2018 Community College Survey of Student Engagement. With input from TCU practitioners, the Center customized the surveys with questions that reflect Native American culture and values.

We're hopeful that these surveys, along with other ongoing efforts, provide new opportunities to boost student success at TCUs.



### Degrees When Due Initiative Helps Adults with Some College but No Degree Claim Credentials

Last fall, we made an \$840,000 grant to support the research component of **Degrees When Due (DWD)**, an initiative the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) launched in 2018 with funding from Lumina Foundation and The Kresge Foundation. DWD is working with colleges across the country to implement degree reclamation strategies that help adults with some college but no degree get credentials they have earned or are close to completing.

With coaching from DWD, colleges are reaching out to students who are a few credits away from completion to encourage them to finish their studies. They are also identifying transfer students who have already earned enough credits for a credential and retroactively awarding them degrees, a process known as reverse transfer. Project researchers are analyzing education and labor market outcomes for students who received an associate degree as a result of degree reclamation, disaggregating results for historically underrepresented populations.

Early findings published in the Winter 2019 issue of *The Review of Higher Education* suggest that reverse transfer works. In the article, "Modeling the Effect of the Reverse Credit Transfer Associate's Degree: Evidence from Two States," researchers Jason L. Taylor and Matt Giani reported high persistence and completion rates among students who retroactively received degrees in Hawaii and Minnesota—states that already have strong transfer systems in place. The article is available to subscribers **online**; there are also single article purchase options.

This project complements a **National Student Clearinghouse project we funded** to streamline reverse transfer and aligns with our strategy to validate promising interventions. **Read more.**



### Reminder: Live Webcast to Focus on Better Serving Students who are Unsuccessful in Developmental Math

In last month's newsletter, you read about our new project aimed at better understanding which students are not being well-served by recent developmental math reforms, and learning more about the barriers they face. To explore this issue, we made a \$350,000 grant to the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) to help the field shape a research agenda. NAS has assembled a committee of experts who will share their insights at a two-day workshop, **Understanding Success and Failure of Students in Developmental Mathematics**, taking place in Washington, DC on March 18 and 19. We invite you to tune in to the **live webcast of the workshop**.