Effective Strategies for Engaging Faculty and Staff

During a three year initiative, 15 Achieving the Dream Leader Colleges embarked on an ambitious strategy to broaden faculty and staff engagement through the Walmart PRESS (Persistence, Retention, and Student Success) for Completion Grant. This document presents a summary of lessons the colleges learned through the faculty and staff engagement work.

- **Clarify expectations and project design up front.** Any campus discussions about beginning a new project or initiative should include faculty in its development or planning. This can be accomplished by developing a road map that outlines objectives and how they will be accomplished, and should include pertinent items such as stakeholders, team members, design principles, expected outcomes, and timeline. It is easy to lose sight of the vision when multiple voices are present in the work, so this plan should be shared, modified, and referenced regularly to remind faculty of the desired goal.

- **Make the work meaningful for faculty.** Faculty and staff want to know that what you are asking them to do will actually make a difference and, if so, for who and in what way. They are busy people, but if the work is something meaningful to them, they will be more likely to participate. Particularly for faculty, it is important to connect the work at the most important level—in the classroom. Focusing on teaching and learning is an excellent way to build – and sustain – interest from full- and part-time faculty.

- **Identify champions and get buy-in.** Start by identifying faculty members who are early adopters—those who are already invested in the work to be done and can champion the work. Support these faculty members in developing and publicizing the work to encourage more faculty members to get involved. Engaging only with faculty that are motivated to lead change does not provide the depth of reform that you have when the "fence sitters" also embrace the project. Provide resources and create opportunities for widespread engagement that let faculty and staff share issues, isolate concerns, research solutions, and develop implementation plans.

- **Ensure there is two-way communication.** Effective communication from the very onset of the project will make it easier for faculty and staff to support the initiative. Ensure that their voices are heard as equals among peers. Collaboration is holistic and does not occur when stakeholders in the population meet separately (e.g., faculty and staff, full-time and part-time). Meetings must be inclusive of all groups and allow each participant to have an equal voice.

- **Use and share data.** Data can be a powerful tool in telling the institution's story and documenting need for improvement. Invest in institutional research capacity to not only collect data, but also to train faculty and staff to make meaning from the data. Building this culture of evidence and treating faculty and staff as valuable partners in the solution can go a long way in ensuring the initiative's success.

- **Be conscious of workloads and scheduling.** When seeking widespread participation, give faculty and staff options and degrees to which they can be involved. If they see that there are different levels of commitment and the work is meaningful, they more likely to participate. Also ensure that faculty and staff members have opportunities to participate that fit within their work schedules, and allow them the flexibility to attend.

- **Offer incentives.** When possible, provide participating faculty and staff with something of value for engagement and participation. Incentives like stipends, travel funds, or release time can go a long way in building support and fostering participation. Offering professional development opportunities on teaching strategies will go a long way in getting faculty support. Celebrate and honor the work that they do.