Washington, D.C.—The nation’s community colleges are making great strides to increase completion rates. Six community colleges were honored for their work toward the student success agenda on April 7 at the American Association of Community Colleges’ (AACC) Awards of Excellence Gala, part of AACC’s 94th Annual Convention in Washington, D.C.

This is the second year AACC has presented the Awards of Excellence.

In the category of Emerging Leadership, Howard Community College (Maryland), led by Kathleen Hetherington, was named the winner. This category recognizes AACC member CEOs who have created a campus culture that supports employee leadership advancement at all levels. Hetherington makes available several in-house professional development opportunities for faculty and staff. She also developed and grew the college’s nationally-recognized coaching program, Step Up, which connects students with faculty or staff coaches.

Midlands Technical College (South Carolina) won in the College/Corporate Partnership category. Midlands partnered with Michelin North America, Inc. to develop a pipeline of technical talent to help fill critical shortages at the company. Working with a local school district, they created the Michelin Technical Scholars Program, which identifies promising high school students and introduces them to industrial opportunities, while changing their perceptions of manufacturing jobs. The students are offered full scholarships to Midlands along with paid, part-time positions at Michelin. After earning their degree, scholars are positioned for growth in full-time positions with competitive salaries.

The Advancing Diversity category recognizes colleges that are dedicated to increasing diversity and advocating for social equity on their campuses and in the community. Highline Community College, one of the most racially/ethnically diverse higher education institutions in Washington, won in this category. The college developed a cultural diversity policy to affirm its commitment to providing a safe learning environment and to the elimination of discrimination and updated its mission statement to reflect its commitment to diversity and globalism.

Florida’s Miami Dade College (MDC), winner in the Student Success category, is employing bold strategic plans, innovative programs and evaluation of data to advance student success on its campuses. Led by Eduardo Padrón, MDC has a success rate of greater than 86 percent and leads the nation in graduating students with associate degrees and in degrees awarded to minorities. MDC restructured its developmental education curriculum and has enhanced its student supports to help students both inside and outside the classroom. The Student Achievement Initiatives brings together all of the interventions, processes, and policies that help its students succeed.
AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE—2

In the Exemplary Board/CEO category, Sinclair Community College (Ohio) was named the winner. The successful relationship between President Steven Johnson and the board of trustees at Sinclair revolves around a strategic focus to improve teaching and learning, accessibility, institutional sustainability, and community alignment.

John Squires, an associate math professor and head of the math department at Chattanooga State Community College in Tennessee, won in the new Faculty Innovation category. In the course of three years, Squires assisted with the redesign of 12 math courses at the college. Squires worked with faculty to produce quality resources for each course, including videos and PowerPoints. Because of his efforts, developmental math student success rates at the college have increased from 48 percent to 65 percent and college math success rates improving from 66 percent to 73 percent.

Winners were selected by a committee of the AACC Board of Directors. Eighteen finalist colleges also were recognized at the Awards of Excellence Gala.

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As the voice of the nation’s community colleges, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), delivers educational and economic opportunity for 13 million diverse students in search of the American Dream. Uniquely dedicated to access and success for all students, AACC’s nearly 1,200 member colleges provide an on-ramp to degree attainment, skilled careers and family-supporting wages. Located in Washington, D.C., AACC advocates for these not-for-profit, public-serving institutions to ensure they have the resources and support they need to deliver on the mission of increasing economic mobility for all.