

Spring 2024 Opening Day – President Ralston’s Remarks & Presentation Slides

Welcome to Spring Semester, 2024. I’m Pamela Ralston, and I am honored to serve as President of this outstanding college. To those of you who are joining us for your first Opening Day, we’re thrilled to have you here. Later in the program, we will be introducing new permanent classified professionals, faculty, and managers who have joined the college since August.

I hope your winter recess was restful, calm, fun and not too wintery, unless you love a good chill. Folks have been back to work all month making the college ready for students and helping students prepare for their best semester yet. We’ve been working to enroll, re-enroll, and guide students into courses. Over this past week, we’ve been involved in professional development to help us become better in the classroom, in the services we provide, and in offering the best educational environment for all students.

I hope you were able to spend time reconnecting with colleagues and enjoying the breakfast refreshments. Let’s thank the folks who have made today’s meeting possible—Jennifer Adams, Facilities folks, and the IT team. Let’s also thank the people who will be here after we break for the rest of our workday. Custodial, Facilities and Grounds staff play integral roles in helping us serve students and our community. And, it’s such a treat to have our breakfast prepared in house. Here’s to having a cafeteria on campus again!

During our All-College Meeting, we will reflect on successes of the past year, and we will honor people who stepped into new roles and those who join us for the first time. We will also highlight important areas where we will focus our efforts. To help us provide context for those, we will be hearing from some of our exceptional students.

Post-pandemic, we find ourselves in a high-pitch moment of change – continuing the largest experiment in the history of higher education. There were moments throughout the pandemic when it was not clear that higher education would recover nationally. In the past four years, enrollment declines forced some institutions to shutter their doors. Here at LMC, we survived. We have returned classes and services to our campuses, and we are poised to go beyond surviving to thriving.

The communities we serve are in a state of marked, rapid change. Some industries that brought people to our region are facing transformation or impending obsolescence. Our communities need this college now. Los Medanos has been recognized by the Aspen Institute five consecutive times for excellence, innovation, and service to students. It is that energy we will bring to bear as we move further from the pandemic and position ourselves as the best educational opportunity at every level we offer.

Over the course of this year, we are focused on addressing two key areas of our Educational Master Plan and our Student Equity and Achievement Plan:

- Equitable, proactive enrollment, and
- Inclusive academic achievement.

And there are three ways we can drive toward those goals:

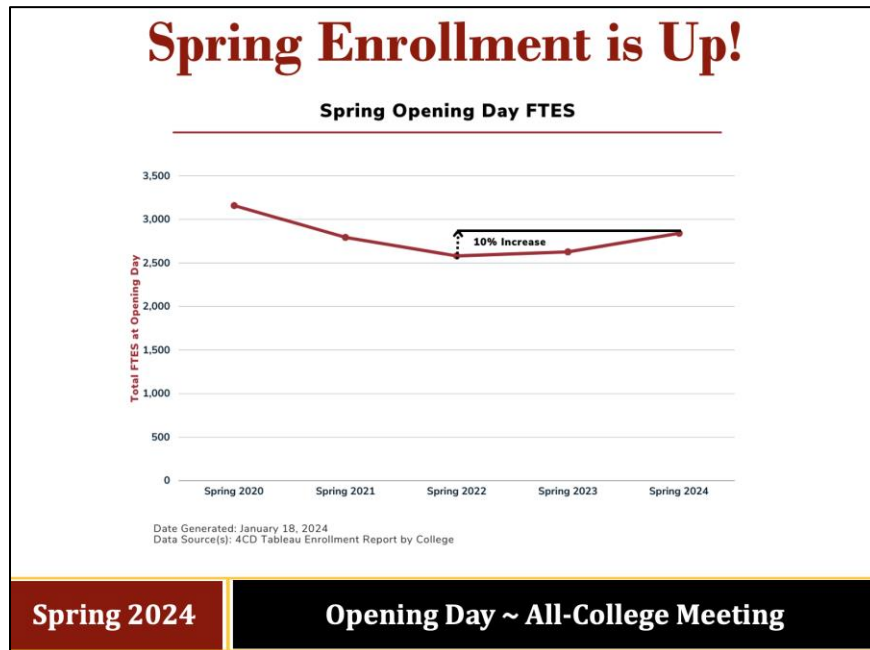
- Fostering Engagement;
- Creating Belonging; and
- Inspiring Joy.

At the end of last spring, our Shared Governance Council adopted a proposal focused on college engagement in participatory governance. During fall semester, a cross-constituent task group began evaluating how our committees work. YOU WILL be asked to weigh in and shape our structure and processes for engagement and input in our shared decision-making processes. This group is helping committees re-evaluate their purpose and intended outcomes in relation to our equity goals, possibly lessening the number of committees and therefore meetings, and increasing participation of classified professionals and faculty across the college. This effort will create more opportunities for people of color and others who have been under-represented in critical discussions across the governance structure.

We know from research about student development that a sense of belonging leads to increased student success. That's true for those who work at colleges, too. Our sense of belonging has been disrupted, probably for more reasons than I am aware of, but I'm pretty certain that working remotely hasn't increased our sense of belonging and wellbeing. This year, we will work to be intentional about remote work in relation to student success. For example, the District is developing a telecommuting policy that balances remote and in-person collaborative work in support of student success.

We'll need everything we've got in terms of engagement and belonging as we address increasing equitable, proactive enrollment and student achievement.

Our enrollment stabilized last year. I have some great news to share about the fruits of really great outreach, recruitment, and retention. I am happy to tell you that we've enrolled more students who are taking more classes this spring than we saw last year. Enrollment is Up! After experiencing post-pandemic declines in FTES from Spring 2020 – Spring 2022, we have seen increases in the last 2 spring terms resulting in a 10% increasing in FTES in comparison to this same point in the enrollment cycle in Spring 2022.



Engagement, Belonging, and Joy

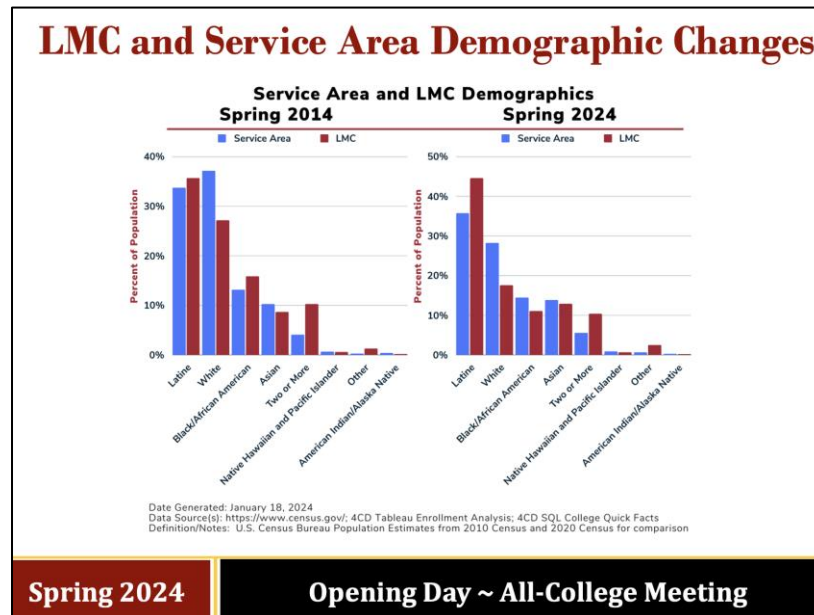
Let's recognize the folks who played a role in helping increase this enrollment.

- Welcome Center, please stand up. And stay standing.
- If you worked on a calling campaign, please stand up.
- If you work in marketing and helped produce amazing commercials and recruitment materials, please stand up.
- If you represented LMC in our community, please stand up.
- If you helped a student enroll at the college, please stand up.
- If you helped students manage their financial resources to enroll, please stand up.
- If you helped a student develop an educational plan, please stand up.
- If you keep our buildings and grounds looking fabulous, please stand up.
- If you help students navigate technology, check out library and research materials, sell textbooks and supplies, please stand up.
- If you help with the business operations that make the college operational for students, please stand up.
- If you support the faculty and staff who work directly with students, please stand up.
- If you taught students in the fall and encouraged them to keep on going this spring, please stand up.

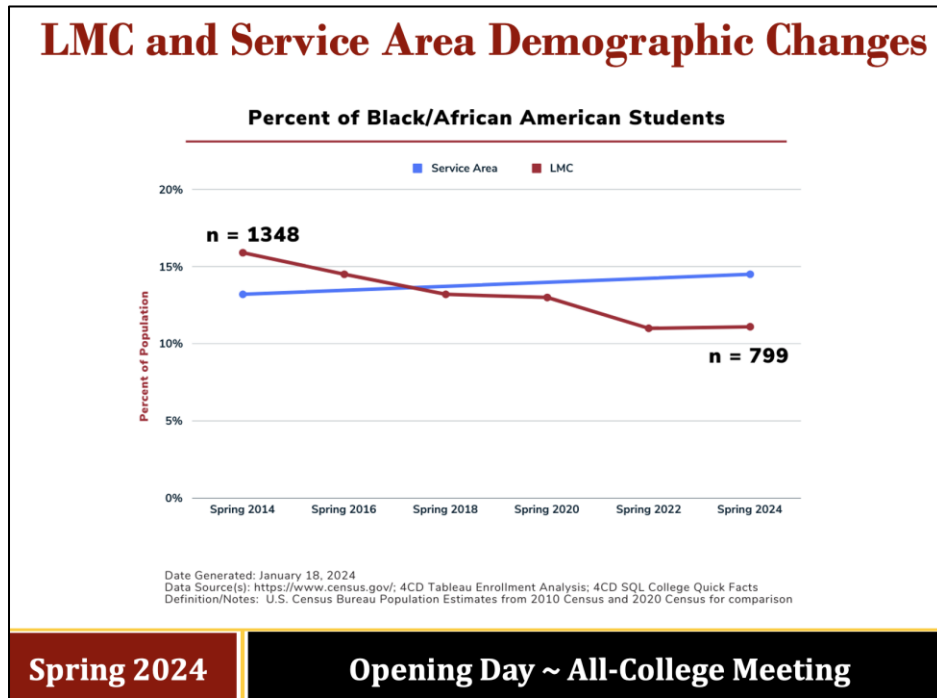
Thank you. You all are nothing short of amazing.

We done a great turn around, and we have some more to do. Our enrollment increase is across the board, but when we drill down, we can see some enrollment losses that are significant.

We have, however, experienced an enrollment loss of Black students of all ages, and a loss of students over the age of 24. We are dedicated to changing those numbers. Over the past 10 years, the ethnic and racial composition of our student body has changed in similar ways to the overall population changes in our service area with 2 significant exceptions. First, while there has been a significant increase in the percentage of Latine people in our service area, our college has seen an even greater percentage increase to our Latine student population. Even as our enrollment overall has declined in the past 10 years, the number of Latine students we serve has increased.

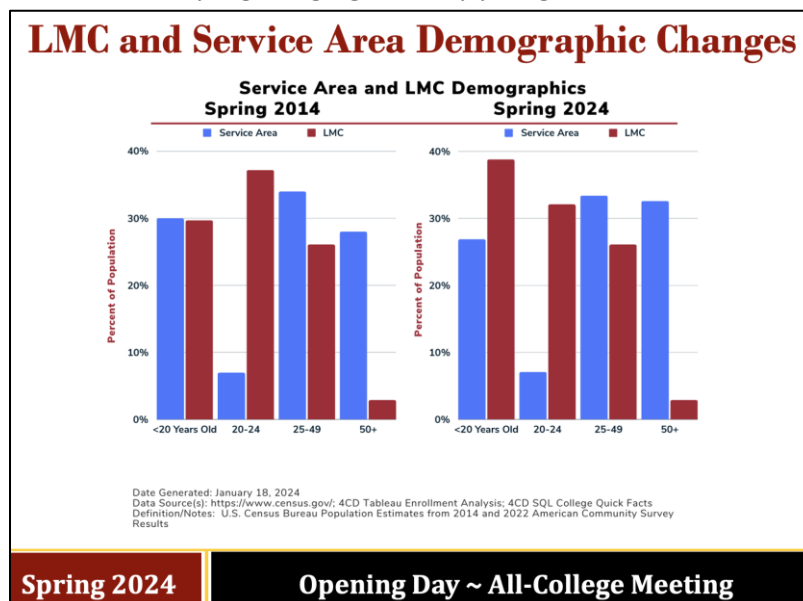


Second, in contrast to this, while the number and percentage of Black/African American people living in our service area has increased over the last decade, we are serving both a lower number and overall percentage of Black/African American students at the college. In particular, in Spring 2014, 15.9% of our student population was Black/African American compared to 11.1% this Spring 2024 semester. This accompanies a drop in 349 unique Black/African American students.

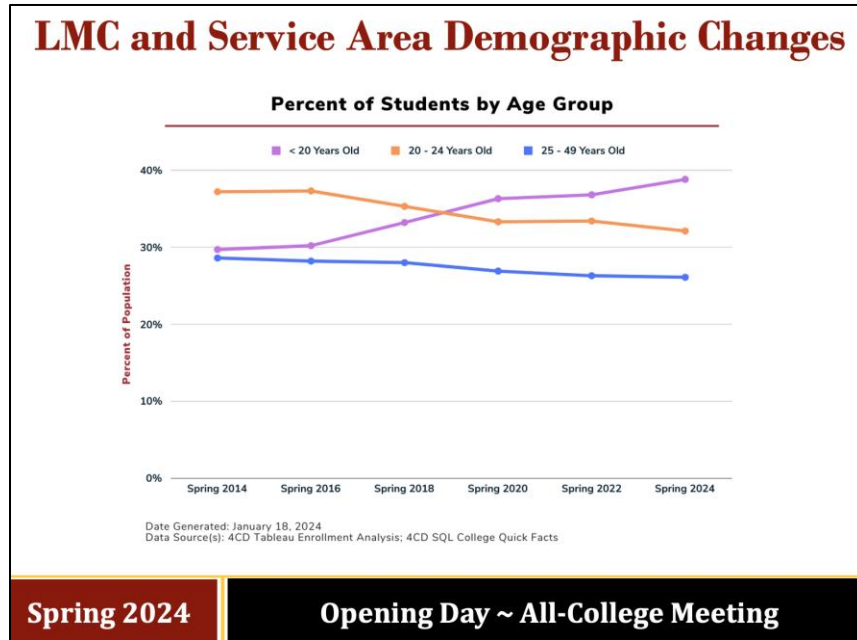


Age Demographics

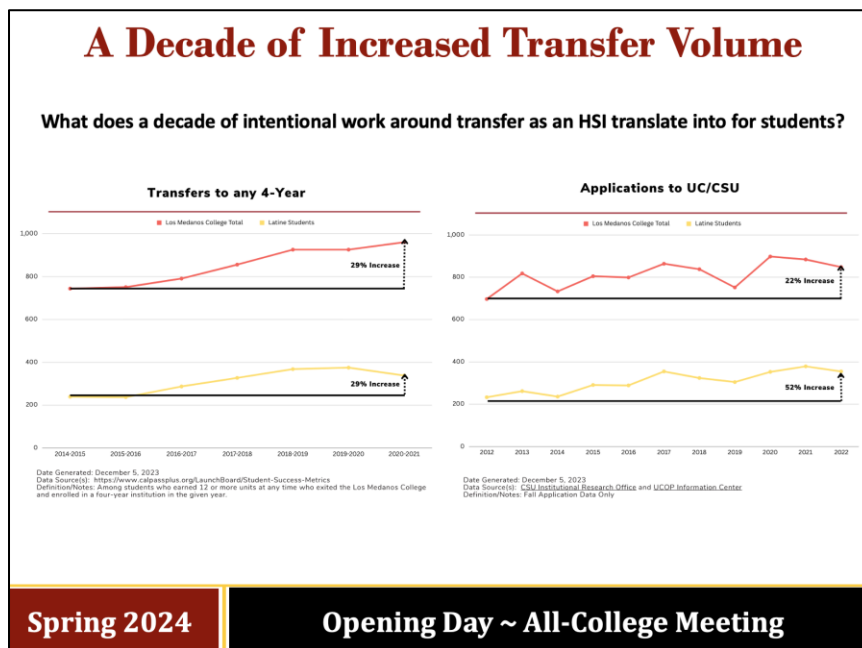
In terms of age demographics at the college, while our service demographics have been shifting to an older population, our student body is getting significantly younger.



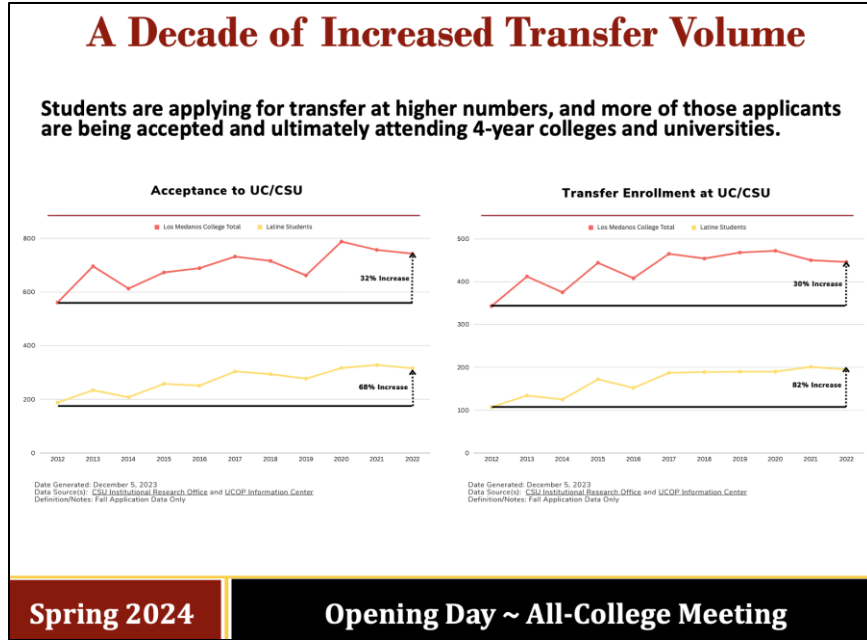
In particular, the percentage of our student body that is under 20 years old has increased from 29.7% in Spring 2014 to 39.8% this Spring 2024 with corresponding declines in the percentages of students 20 – 24 years old and 25 – 49 years old.



Ten years ago, LMC received grant funding to strengthen the college as a Hispanic Serving Institution, This created focused, intentional efforts that not only helped Latine students but the improved outcomes for the student body as a whole.

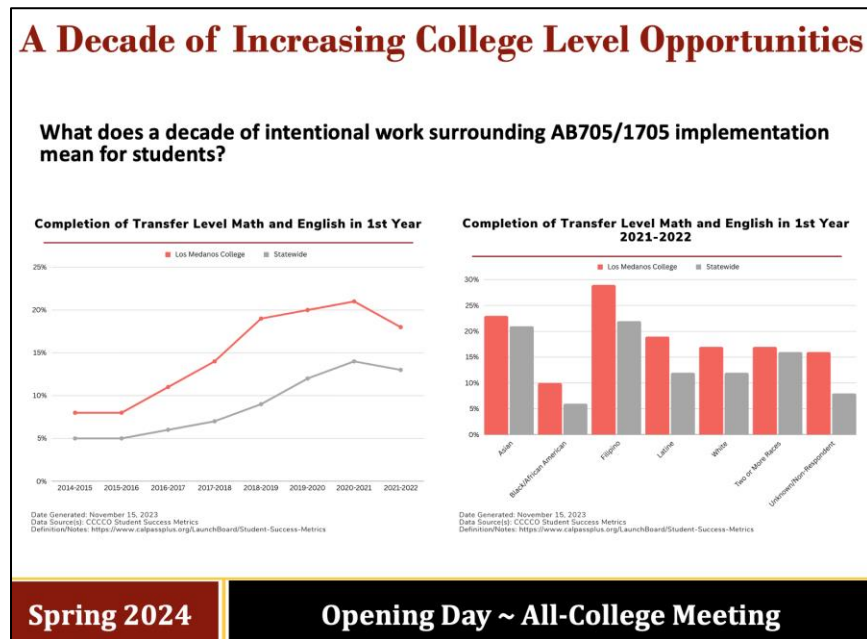


Take a look at what intentional work as an HSI around transfer has done to our transfer volume over the past decade. It has resulted in more transfer applications, and a higher percentage of those applications result in acceptance and enrollment at 4-year colleges and universities.



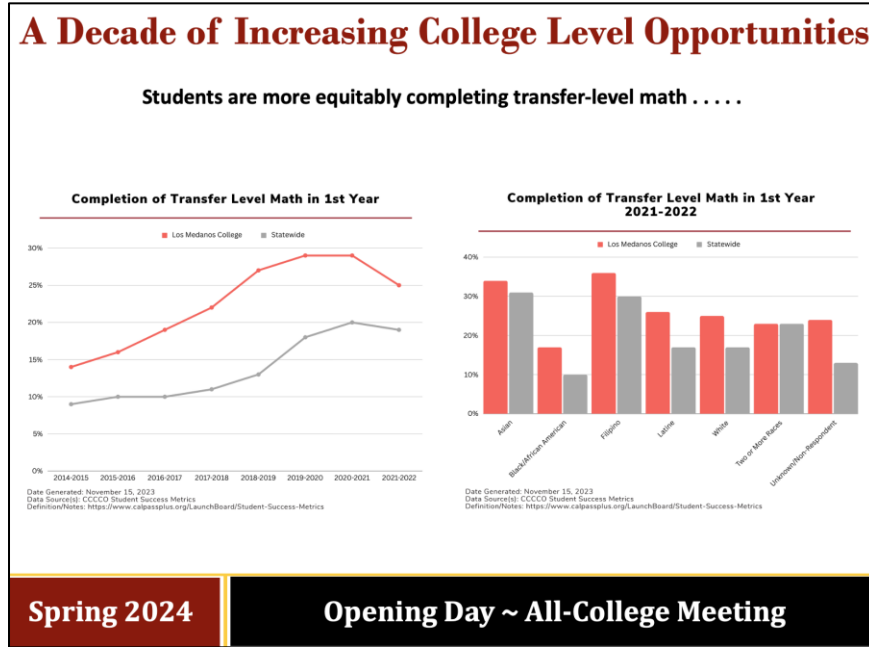
English and Math Completion

As a result of important acceleration work by English and Mathematics faculty that predated AB 705 and 1705, as well as their efforts since the passage of that legislation, our transfer outcomes have improved.

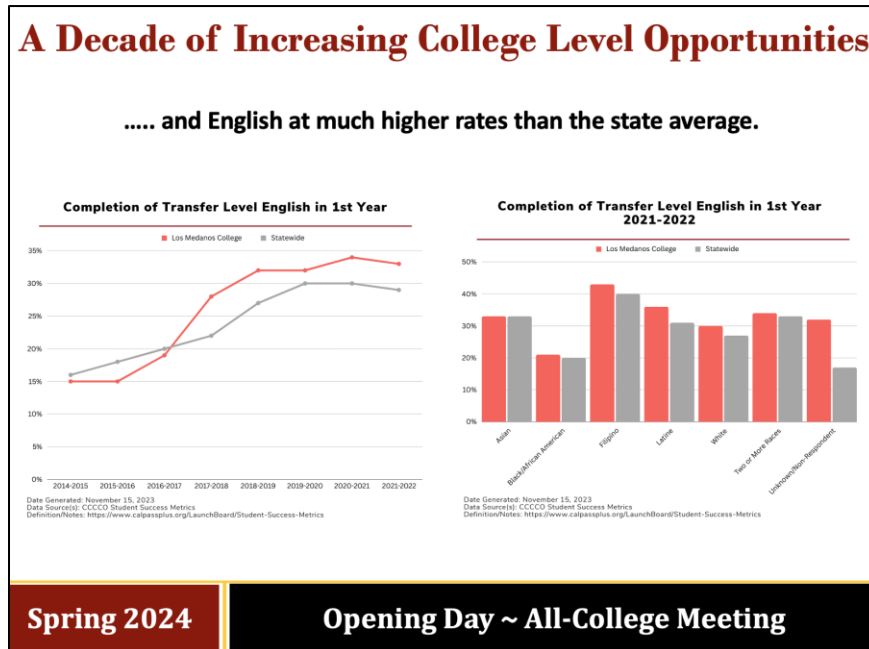


Take a look at what the work we have done around AB705/1705 implementation has done for our 1st year transfer-level math and English completion rates. Students are successfully completing transfer-level math and English at much higher and more equitable rates. These increases have been even higher at LMC than the increases seen on average throughout the state.

Math



English

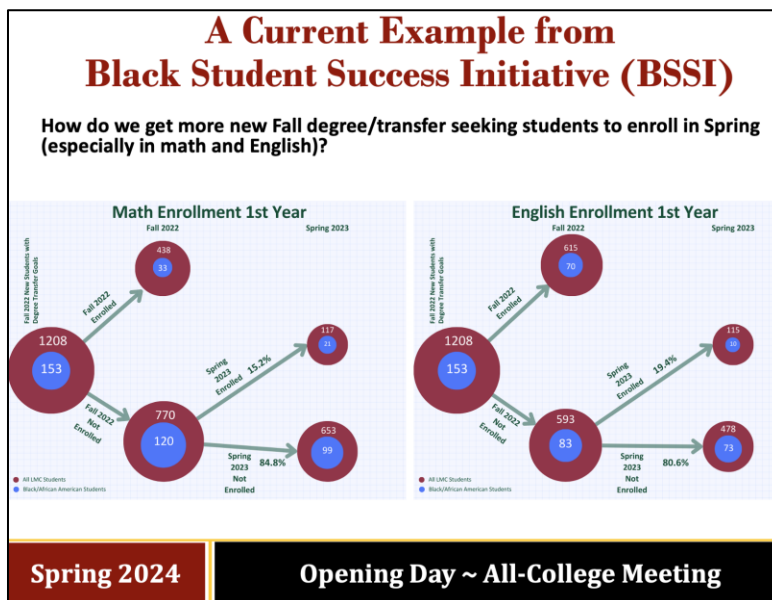


Persistence—Our Next Focus

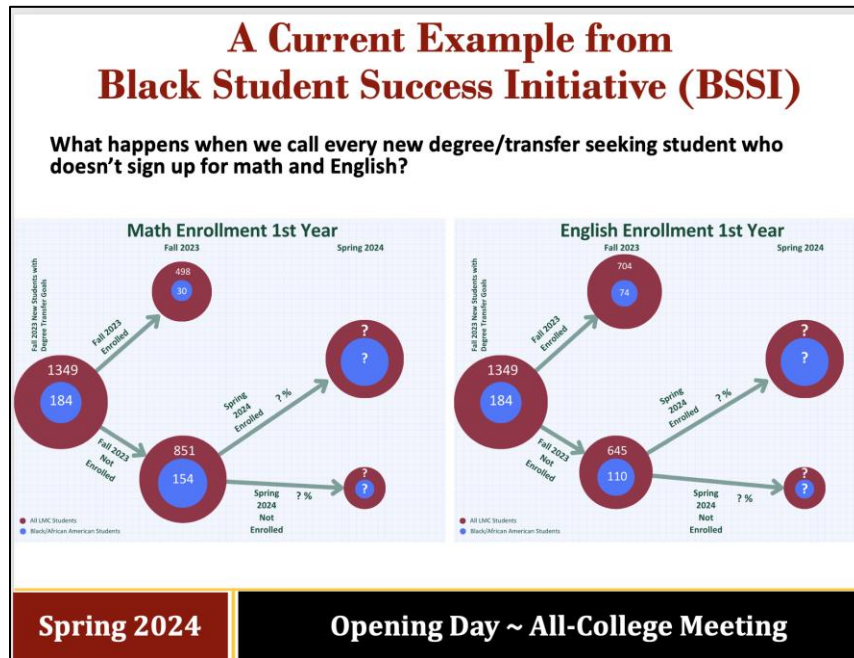
Let’s celebrate these successes while continuing to apply our energy to areas where we have consistently underperformed in comparison to our sister colleges in the State. For example, our 1st to 2nd term persistence rate has consistently lagged behind the state average.



What would it take to increase this percentage from 67% to 70%? One example of current activity intentionally addressing this is some of the work of the Black Student Success Initiative. This group looked deeply into the math and English course taking patterns for our new degree/transfer seeking students in the Fall. They found that not only did the vast majority of students not sign up for math and/or English in their first fall semester, but these students predominantly did not sign up in the subsequent spring semester as well. For Fall 2022 – Spring 2023, these rates were only 15.2% of the students for math and 19.4% of the students for English.



This Fall 2023, our college took the initiative to call every new degree/transfer seeking student who did not sign up for math and/or English and talk to them about their plans for Spring 2024. Will this result in 25% or more of these students enrolling this semester? I can't wait to tell you where we end up!



As we continue our LMC Pathways implementation, we will hold up EOPS, Honors, Umoja, Puente, MESA/STEM, Athletics, and the Transfer Academy as models for belonging, where students are engaged in communities that overtly value their identities. The magic that these programs provide can be shared with more students. Using the high contact approach of our learning communities models, the new success coaching team will be developing support strategies for students in our LMC Pathways. Together, these programs provide a model for how we work with all students across learning communities for successful outcomes.

Last fall, our focused flex session was premised on the idea that James Baldwin encapsulated when he declared: “Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

Much of what we will face in order to change, in the sense of James Baldwin’s call to action, can be seen in the stories our data tells. We are awaiting the results from USC’s Race and Equity Center for the National Assessment of Collegiate Campus Climates (NACCC) Employee Survey from spring. NACCC is an assessment of campus racial climates. We offered the student survey in fall 2021 and will conduct the faculty survey this spring. Data from the student and employee surveys can help to guide our work in creating a deeper sense of belonging for all at LMC.

We also will be working with data from three important student surveys: CCSSE AND SENSE, HOPE. The first two examine student engagement and opportunities for us to improve the student experience, and the third, the HOPE survey, will help us know more about the living situations and challenges our students experience as they pursue higher education.

Knowing more about our students helps us in striving to meet our mission. Our mission is to provide equitable access to educational opportunities and support services that empower students to achieve their academic and career goals in a diverse and inclusive learning environment.

When we struggle with enrollment and retention, we struggle with fulfilling that mission. Our commitment to our community is a promise, and when we lose students, when they enroll at the college but don't register for classes, when they drop before completing courses, when they don't persist from one semester to the next, or from one year to the next, we struggle to fulfill that promise.

We made headway in closing many critical equity gaps over the course of the last two equity plans. Our Student Equity Plan data makes it clear, however, that we have underserved our Black students. We need to disrupt what we're doing to achieve different outcomes. We must face the impact that our policies, practices, and campus culture have on reinforcing patterns of inequity. And we need to make changes.

Over the course of the next two years, we will engage the larger community to increase dual enrollment by 30% and enrollment of students over 24 by at least 10%. We will increase Black student enrollment by 8% as we committed in the Equity Plan. And we will increase completion, degrees and certificates, by 4%. We will all need to engage in this work—it takes all of us to make LMC effective and meaningful for students.

To do that, we need to meet students where they are—literally. This year, we will reach out to people and organizations across our service area to learn what has limited our enrollment, what opportunities exist that we can amplify, and we will carry the stories of our students' success across the region. We will listen to students -- who are the experts of their own lives. And we will make changes based on what we learn.

As a starting point, we will spend the remainder of our morning together with a panel of students. Today, we will be conducting part 3 of a 4-part series designed to lift student voices regarding their academic journey at LMC in their own words. This series is based on the Loss/Momentum Framework. The Framework analyzes the student journey across 4 phases of the student academic experience: Connection, Entry, Progress, and Completion. During College Opening Day and College Assembly this fall, we started with the Connection and Entry phases. Today, we will be discussing the student experience during the PROGRESS phase (essentially the student's experience in college during their second year). Our students will be speaking about their involvement, engagement, retention and success both in and out of the classroom at LMC throughout the second year (30-50 units) of their academic journey at LMC. They will be sharing their personal experiences and providing their feedback and perspectives on how we can continue to make LMC a premiere institution for learning, growth, transformational development and a sense of belonging and inclusive community.

STUDENT PANEL

