



Mentor Case Study: San Jacinto College

Houston, Texas

Overview of San Jacinto College

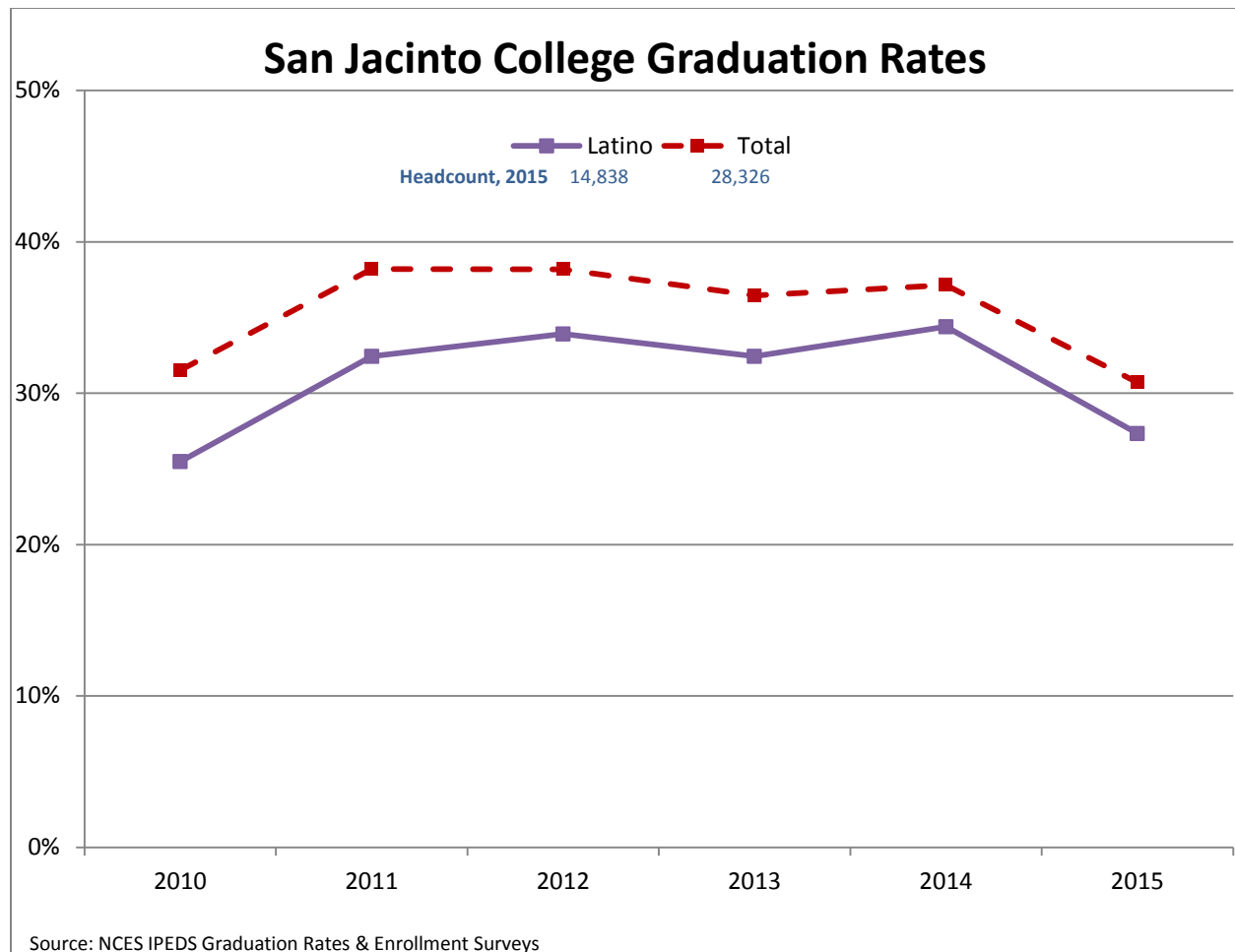
Surrounded by monuments of history, industries and maritime enterprises of today, and the space age of tomorrow, San Jacinto College has been serving the citizens of East Harris County, Texas, since 1961. San Jacinto College is a 2017 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence Rising Star Award recipient and an Achieving the Dream Leader College. Approximately 45,000 credit and non-credit students each semester benefit from a support system that map out a pathway for success. The College offers eight areas of study that prepare a diverse body of students to transfer to four-year colleges or universities or enter the workforce with the skills needed to support the growing industries along the Texas Gulf Coast. San Jacinto College graduates contribute nearly \$690 million each year to the Texas workforce.

Our mission is to ensure student success, create seamless transitions, and enrich the quality of life in the communities we serve. San Jacinto College is a leader in educational excellence and in the achievement of equality among diverse populations. We strive to empower students to achieve their goals, redefine their expectations and encourage their exploration of new opportunities. Our passions are people, learning, innovation, and continuous improvement.

The College is active in workforce and economic development partnerships across the region. Industry partners serve on advisory committees for all technical programs and work in mutually supportive ways to train incumbent and future workers. Program development is keyed to job availability and market demand. The Chancellor served as chair of the Economic Alliance Houston Port Region (2012-13), chair for Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership (2014-15), and on the Board of Greater Houston Partnership. San Jacinto College personnel serve on both the Steering Committee, Construction Sector, and Petrochemical Sector committees for Greater Houston Partnership, and Upskill Houston Initiative.

Data Trend Chart

The chart below represents San Jacinto College graduation trends for Latino students (purple line), and for all students (red) over five years.



How did San Jacinto College get started on the “student success” path?

Since joining Achieving the Dream in 2006, San Jacinto College shifted its institutional focus from enrollment to a commitment to student success and completion that involves every employee. What drives the institution is not individual pursuits, but a collaborative emphasis on ensuring success for all students who enter the College, no matter the pathway they use or the level of skills with which they arrive. We have engaged in re-designing the institution: admissions, test preparation, entry testing, advising, differential placement, developmental education, entry college-level courses, mathematics and English, student success courses with faculty advisors, tutoring services, technical programs, part-time faculty development, intense and intentional communication plans, and commencement. All aspects of the College are building around the student’s San Jacinto Journey from front door to completion. This has resulted in a 140% increase in certificate and degree completers from 2007 to 2015, with 6,441 degrees awarded in 2014-15, making San Jacinto the 17th highest degree-granting community college in the nation and 19th highest for degrees to minorities.

Student Success Goals are stated in the San Jacinto College mission statement: seamless transitions from the front door to completion, equity among diverse populations, student

achievement of goals, redefining of student expectations, and encouragement of student exploration of new opportunities. Student Success is one of the five college strategic goals: Student Success, Workforce and Economic Development, P-16 Pipeline, Our People, and Continuous Improvement. From the strategic goals, annual priorities are developed. For Student Success, these include positioning for the future, front door to completion, anticipation of and response to workforce needs, talent and organizational development, and fiscal accountability and responsibility.

At San Jacinto College, we hold ourselves accountable for the performance of our students, and every day faculty, staff, and administration work to help students achieve their goals.

How does San Jacinto College sustain the student success movement?

Our Board of Trustees has led the way in developing an external and internal strategic vision that maintains a focus on student success. Our Chancellor stimulates creativity, fosters opportunities for success and communicates the shared vision of our Board of Trustees. Together they provide the bold leadership that keeps the college striving to be better.

San Jacinto College's executive leadership test the robustness of assumptions and logic while exhibiting a college-wide perspective and understanding of issues, processes, policies, practices, and resources. When working with their direct reports, executive leaders direct and guide an understanding of this unified perspective. Each leader facilitates communication with peers, constituencies, and the College community. The College's values guide the organization's culture and character. Each leader fosters a climate that is consistent with these core values.

The focus of the campus leaders is to foster teaching, learning and student success. The campus leaders endeavor to identify new ways and programs to serve the community and to promote creative methods to engage faculty and staff. The campus leaders challenge the status quo, promote academic excellence, and ensure consistent quality and service levels among campus operations.

Student Success is a priority for faculty, staff and leadership at San Jacinto College. All members of the College community are responsible for student success. Those in the classroom facilitate learning, while maintaining the highest standards of quality. We all share the responsibility to provide students with the best environment and support available so that students can concentrate on learning. We are charged with ensuring excellence in everything that we do and addressing challenges directly.

What is the role of culture change?

The gains we have achieved since 2007 would not have been possible without a change in culture. San Jacinto College District operates as one college with multiple campuses, centers, programs, and services. Common policies and procedures and consistent business practices guide the organization. The synergy is apparent. Concern is for the whole. Competition between the individual units, departments, or functions is not part of our values. Decisions and actions are data informed answering the ultimate question,

“How does this improve student success?” We celebrate our accomplishments and successes together.

As an institution we place our students first. We evaluate practices and procedures with the goal of removing barriers for our students. We use data to help us identify ways that we can improve and it is this culture of constant improvement that allows us to better serve our students and our community.

What institutional data is used to drive efforts?

San Jacinto College embraces a proactive approach in collecting and analyzing completion data in an effort to highlight successful practices that promote course, certificate, and degree completion. We use completion data to identify areas of low completion in order to initiate instructional and support services redesigns that will improve completion. The collected data build from the course level and include successful completion of student learning outcomes and course success rates. For example, faculty include the review of student success data as an integral component of their individual self-assessment and the overall assessment of certificate and degree programs.

The college’s institutional research office produces detailed program review reports for every program at the College on a four-year cycle and oversees a college dashboard on the website, an aspect of which is reviewed at every Board of Trustees meeting. The reports provide data on student course success, credential attainment, average time to award, enrollment, success by instructional modality, and students’ GPAs, among others. These data are used by every program, department chair, dean, and provost to provide in-depth analyses of student outcomes. As program data are thoroughly reviewed, continuous improvement occurs in each program. For example, analysis showed the lowest completion in mathematics, Composition I and II, and lab sciences; faculty and leaders in those programs began fundamental changes to instruction and student support in those courses, resulting in an increase in student success in individual courses and, ultimately, degrees. The improvements based on student outcome data ultimately affect all 28,000+ students at the College.

[San Jacinto College Dashboard](#)

How were challenges overcome?

A challenge that all institutions face is identifying those initiatives that are the most effective as well as those initiatives that may have limited impact or initiatives that are challenging to expand. Over the years we have piloted a number of student success initiatives. These initiatives have various levels of success and the challenge is how to determine the true impact on our students.

We have empowered our Institutional Research & Effectiveness Office (aSPIRE) to provide the necessary support. The aSPIRE Team provides innovative and creative research and data analyses for the San Jacinto College community to inform decisions that result in a positive, measurable effect on student success.

We recently held a joint meeting of the aSPIRE team and the instructional deans to examine our student success metrics and identify those initiatives that provided the greatest impact as well as factors that limited impact on student success. These findings were presented to our Board of Trustees at our monthly Board Meeting. The ability to review initiatives and explore what works in an open and transparent manner has been a significant change in culture for San Jacinto College and has allowed us as an institution to ask the hard questions.

The San Jacinto College vision is that a student should never fail because of a barrier we overlooked or created. Our faculty and staff are working together, examining processes and procedures, and determining if they present unintended barriers to student success and completion. With the help of faculty, we are getting student input on what barriers they encounter along their educational pathway. As a result, a group of leaders in student support services, faculty, financial aid and administration has begun the job of examining and redesigning the student experience from enrollment through the last semester. The intended result is for students to complete their certificate or degree in a timely manner to transfer to a four-year university as a junior or move into a career in their chosen field.

Knowing what you know now, what would San Jacinto College do differently?

The journey over the last ten years has been challenging, but the challenges allowed us to grow as an institution. There is no perfect path, but it is essential that an institution embraces a culture of change and self-improvement that emphasizes student success. Obviously, there are individual initiatives that in hindsight we might reconsider. However, growth occurs through the process of trial and error.

Advice for those just starting the student success journey?

Keep your focus on your students and their success. Do not be afraid to try new things. One of the mindsets we had to break was the “we have always done it that way” philosophy. Breaking away from “tradition” allowed us to take positive steps to eliminate barriers that we created as an institution. Our gains in completion rates and our achievements in equity validate our break from past practices.

Take great pride in your mission of helping students achieve their dreams. Graduation is obviously one of our favorite days of the year. It is gratifying as students walk across the stage and accept their degrees or certificates and heartwarming to hear their families cheer them on. At that moment you realize that all that we do is changing the lives of our students, their families, and our communities.