Doña Ana Community College Assessment Committee Newsletter

Our objective is to support and showcase effective and meaningful academic and institutional assessment.

DACC Data Update: Student Success Plan Shows Strong First-Year Results at DACC

Dr. Kouame, AVPIA

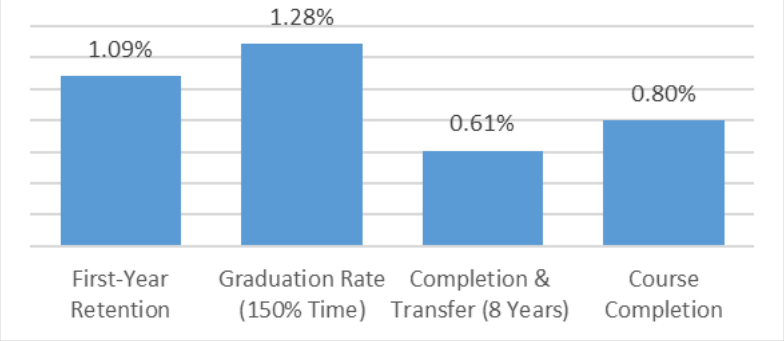
Doña Ana Community College (DACC) is off to a promising start in its Student Success Improvement Plan (SSIP), exceeding all key performance targets in its first year of implementation. Early results highlight steady progress across measures that reflect student retention, completion, and academic success **(Table 1)**. The first-year retention rate for first-time students reached 59.35%, surpassing the target of 58.26%. Graduation rates within 150% of normal time also exceeded expectations, coming in at 17.10% compared to the 15.82% goal. Long-term outcomes remain positive, with the completion and transfer rate eight years after entry at 45.27%, slightly above the 44.66% target. Additionally, course completion rates rose to 70.00%, exceeding the benchmark of 69.20%. While these gains are modest **(Figure 1)**, the consistency across all measures signals that DACC's student success strategies are beginning to take effect and provide a strong foundation for continued progress.

These early achievements reflect the college's comprehensive approach, including enhanced advising, expanded digital learning support, coordinated assessment practices, and increased faculty and staff development. The integration of wrap-around student services has also contributed to improved student outcomes. Looking ahead, DACC remains committed to building on this momentum. With the upcoming Strategic Plan 2030 and continued collaboration among faculty, staff, students, and community partners, the college is well positioned to further strengthen student success and ensure all learners have the support needed to reach their academic and career goals.

Table 1. Report on Student Success Measures

Measures	Target	Reported First Year Rate
First-Year Retention Rate (First-Time Cohort)	58.26%	59.35%
Graduation Rate Within 150% of Normal Time	15.82%	17.10%
Completion & Transfer Rate at 8 Years After Entry Completion Rate	44.66%	45.27%
Course Completion Rates	69.20%	70.00%

Figure 1. Percentage Point Gains Above Student Success Improvement Plan Targets for Key Outcome Measures During the First Year of Implementation



Faculty Focus

Empowering Students Through Innovative Teaching

Deborah Parks, Early Childhood Faculty

Meet Dr. Marnie Rocha, this year's recipient of the prestigious Donald C. Roush Award for Teaching Excellence. Since joining DACC in 2023, Dr. Rocha has been an exceptional addition to the Education Department and a source of inspiration to the AHSS Division, bringing a wealth of experience and expertise that greatly strengthened our education program. Dr. Rocha's genuine passion for teaching motivates students not only to learn but also to value education. Initially relying on standard quizzes, midterms, and finals, she shifted her mindset significantly following ESCALA training, a program focused on improving teaching practices in Hispanic-serving institutions.

She found that high-context activities were more effective for assessing student learning, particularly for Latinx students. Recognizing some students' apprehension about writing, she introduced the "Book, Head, Heart" framework (2017) by Beers and Probst, a technique that encourages students to reflect on the material, challenge their critical thinking, and deepen their emotional understanding as they develop into thoughtful, compassionate individuals. Recognizing collaboration with colleagues as an essential practice for preservice teachers, she incorporates case-study discussions to foster awareness of real-world teaching situations. Dr. Rocha relies on low-stakes writing assignments as formative assessments, using the results to guide course structure and improve instruction each semester, thereby maximizing student success. "Another influence on how I use assessment is from my work on the Academic Assessment Committee. When I build assessments, I ask myself, "How does this assessment support my department's program learning outcomes?" Dr. Rocha embodies DACC's commitment to excellence, demonstrating exceptional leadership in teaching and faculty service committee responsibilities.

General Education Assessment at DACC

Rethinking Assessment in the Age of AI

Dr. Andrea Severson Lopez, Humanities & Social Science Faculty

As we adjust to a world where Artificial Intelligence (AI) exists and complicates assessment, the only practical step is to redesign our assignments with AI in mind. Central to this process is the concept of backward design, which means that educators must begin by identifying what they truly want students to learn. AI-integrated assignments mean students might generate an initial draft with AI and then critique, revise, and expand upon it, demonstrating their ability to think critically about the content.

Alternatively, AI-resistant assignments focus on tasks that are difficult for AI to replicate, such as in-class writing, oral presentations, or projects requiring multiple drafts and personal reflection. In addition, well-designed rubrics allow educators to assess specific skills and processes rather than simply evaluating final products. By focusing on how students think, revise, and apply knowledge, instructors can better distinguish between superficial completion and genuine understanding.

General Assessment at DACC

Qualitative Research in the Age of AI: The Reverse Research Paper

Dr. Erik Braeden Lewis, Humanities Faculty

In an era of pervasive use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), we must rethink how we approach assessment. Since students use AI regardless, developing an ethical approach to its use is essential. Therefore, I created the *Reverse Research Paper* for my in-person history class. This approach integrates AI with traditional, scaffolded research strategies. The project culminates in a student-written, five-page research paper. To reach this goal, students first select a topic and use AI to generate a rough draft. Next, they conduct research using peer-reviewed sources to create an annotated bibliography and a list of facts, then check the AI rough draft against their findings. Afterward, students create an outline and write their own papers.

The final step is a written reflection on the ethics and legitimacy of using AI for research. Early data collection shows students initially push back against using AI for a research paper. Learners who have completed the technique report mixed results about the legitimacy of claims made in AI rough drafts. They find that basic knowledge, such as dates and names, is generally accurate, whereas higher-level critical thinking remains problematic for AI. Despite these mixed results, students are engaging with technology and research in ways that reveal possible gaps in AI's knowledge. This underscores the need for individual agency in the research process at the collegiate level.

Teaching Perspectives

Informal & Incidental Learning to Benefit Structured Learning

Dr. Sean Kardar, Science Faculty

Learning occurs well beyond the classroom; it's an everyday process of acquiring knowledge through life experiences, driven by informal and incidental learning. That's correct, aside from structured classroom instruction that mirrors the collegiate professor's expertise, most learning occurs informally and incidentally. This reality presents a powerful pedagogical opportunity to enhance comprehension by intentionally connecting unstructured life learning to academic learning. Students possess rich lived experiences that no textbook can replicate. These experiences stem from diverse backgrounds that shape their perspectives, character, and ways of thinking. Educators can leverage this diversity by bridging informal and incidental learning with structured instruction. By helping students connect familiar, everyday knowledge to academic concepts, meaningful learning pathways are created, and scaffolds deeper understanding.

Ask how and where learners can relate ideas to their lives and further develop the meaning of learner-shared examples, both academically and contextually, to strengthen comprehension. Create unstructured, spontaneous learning moments to further exploration by using your expert conceptual and practical knowledge to develop applied learning, on demand, via search engines and social media. Leverage your storytelling and that of learners to seamlessly integrate unstructured lived-experience learning to draw student interest and prompt questions that drive learning. Because unstructured learning through media such as news, radio, and film intersects with academic topics, integrating these real-world touchpoints helps students recognize the dynamics and value of learning interconnectedness to advance social mobility. When instructors integrate informal/incidental learning with structured classroom learning, they create richer, more engaging channels that support comprehension, relevance, and lifelong learning.

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DACC Unit Focus

Biomedical Electronics: Bridging Technology and Healthcare

Tonya Sanchez-Shepan, Sonography Faculty
& Bonnie Rinkels, Dental Hygiene Faculty

DACC student performing a lab experiment in ELT-135 Electronics II

Biomedical electronics combines electrical engineering with biology and medicine to develop technologies that improve and save lives. Professionals in this field design, maintain, and troubleshoot devices used to diagnose, monitor, and treat medical conditions. From imaging systems like MRI and CT scanners to pacemakers and patient monitoring systems, these technologies rely on precision, accuracy, and reliability. Doña Ana Community College's Biomedical Electronics program, housed in the Commercial Technologies Department prepares students for high-demand careers in southern New Mexico's growing electronics and healthcare sectors. The program integrates foundational theory with extensive hands-on laboratory experience using industry-standard equipment such as oscilloscopes and spectrum analyzers.

A defining feature of the program is its strong emphasis on performance-based assessment. Students are evaluated not only through quizzes and exams, but through practical lab exercises that require them to demonstrate real-world competencies, including diagnosing circuit faults, interpreting measurement data, and safely operating electronic test equipment. This approach is reinforced through industry engagement, including insights from professionals such as Professor Cliff Baxter, whose expertise helps ensure that students meet current workforce expectations. To further support skill development, students may earn the IPC (Institute of Printed Circuits) Hand Soldering certification, a nationally recognized credential. This training ensures precision in assembling and repairing electronic components used in medical devices, where accuracy directly impacts safety and performance. Through applied assessment and industry-informed training, DACC's Biomedical Electronics program prepares graduates to succeed in today's healthcare technology workforce.

Assessment is today's means of modifying tomorrow's instruction

Carol Ann Tomlinson