Athens Technical College’s core team of people who are working on the Achieving the Dream initiative met Wednesday, March 21, 2012 with Achieving the Dream coaches Rhonda Glover and David Hartleb to discuss formulating priority goals to be included in a comprehensive plan to improve the retention and performance of students at the college.

Attending the meeting were Dr. Flora Tydings, Dr. Joyce Sansing, Dr. Dan Smith, Yancey Gulley, Dr. Alysen Heil, Vidya Nahar, Becky Farrow, Stephanie Benson, Andrea Daniel, Dr. Carol Myers, Liz Dalton, Howard Sokol, Dennis Ashworth, Mary Clare DiGiacomo Jennifer Benson, Chenghong Shen, Vidya Nahar, Caroline Angelo, Margaret Morgan, Carol Stanley, Virginia Bramblett, Howard Sokol, Wanda Hicks, Dr. Scott Martin,

At the beginning of the meeting, Stephanie Benson, director of research and assessment at the college, gave a presentation on what data has determined are five major areas of concern for the college’s students.

Those five components were:

- The largest group of students referred to English, Math and Reading are the <=19 year olds
- Students are more successful if they complete their learning support and gatekeeper classes in the first year.
- We have many students who are transferring to other colleges.
- Results show low percentages of credit completion by black students
- Math students who exempt the placement test are not successful in gatekeeper courses.

Dr. Sansing explained that the group needed to formulate a plan based on the findings and would have to find consensus on those plans. ATD coordination Coach David Hartleb told the group that he and data coach Rhonda Glover would offer guidelines for the proposal for which a draft is due April 16. The final proposal is due May 15 or 16. He told the group that fashioning the initiatives was a chance to do something special and that the core members needed to think broadly about the priorities rather than focusing on the details first.

Rhonda Glover pointed out that there were two key components to designing a quality plan. One is integration of instruction and academics – they must be systemic across the board. Two is making sure all participants contribute to the writing of the plan. The plan should encompass two to four priority areas that focus on improvement and two to three interventions (action plans) for each priority. Those interventions should be phased in with the bulk of the work coming at the end of year two. The group also will need to determine how to measure progress.

Dr. Sansing noted that ATD offers a chance to capitalize on the Complete College Georgia initiative and the group must make sure the efforts are in sync. She recommended coming up with three broad priorities based on the date findings presented by Stephanie Benson. Director of Student Affairs Yancey
Gulley suggested that the Quality Enhancement Plan the college is currently working on has seven areas of concern that could serve as a guideline for the three priorities.

In the discussion, several ideas were discussed. Carol Stanley suggested focusing on the first-year experience including orientation, advising and learning support. Dr. Carol Myers, Dean of General Education, said the second-year experience and pathways to success were key. Dr. Smith mentioned support services and the classroom experience. Dr. Sansing presented three priorities: reducing the number of students requiring learning support; transforming remediation, modularizing courses and diagnostics; and designing a support system and evaluating policies to help more students.

The group recommended combining Dr. Sansing’s first and second priorities. One suggestion was to name the overall theme “Creating a Culture of Success” with two priorities -- Creating a Culture of Success for Students and Creating a Culture of Success for the College’s faculty and staff. The group will continue discussing and honing ideas for the plan and will be asking the college’s students, faculty and staff for theme ideas in the coming months.