



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

Published by the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) • College of Education • The University of Texas at Austin

## BECOMING A FULL PARTNER IN TEACHER EDUCATION

### Our Purpose

The El Centro College Urban Education Program has been designed for students who want to make significant community contributions by becoming teachers who are role models and advocates for children. This program was initiated during the 1997-1998 academic year to fill a conspicuous void for community college students seeking pathways to education careers. Like many community colleges, El Centro had a "club" for future teachers, but no specific program or degree plan for them to follow. Our intent was to design a program/degree plan that would prepare students for transfer to universities with teacher certification programs. We wanted to offer "declared" teaching majors the opportunity to take education courses during their first two years of college, without the fear of losing any credit hours when moving on to university programs. Any student wanting to tentatively explore the world of teaching can also take an Urban Education class. We wanted an academic degree program that valued and honored the teaching profession and allowed aspiring teachers to congregate and share ideas.

### In the Beginning

To get started, we negotiated an agreement with Richland College for El Centro College to offer a full repertoire of Educational Personnel courses that could be applied to the Richland Educational Assistant Certificate Program and would also serve as the curriculum to be aligned with EXCET competencies and standards relevant to university course content. Subsequently, El Centro proposed a new and unconventional Associate in Arts degree in Urban Education that included the traditional DCCCD core curriculum plus a required transferable block of Educational Personnel courses, derived from the Richland AAS/Certificate program. The Urban Education degree limits some of the typical A.A. options and requires at least two

semesters of Spanish. (We believe that potential urban educators should experience what it is like to learn a second language.) We also determined that the required education courses should have field components and be based on the principles of multicultural education. In addition, each education course includes specific reading, writing, and speaking requirements to reinforce the idea that teachers *must* excel in these basic skills. The courses selected for our curriculum include: Principles and Practices of Multicultural Education, Reading and Language Skills for Educators, Bilingual Education, Educational Practices and Processes, and Teaching the Exceptional Child.

### Articulation Projects

Several exceptionally student-centered professors and others at the University of Texas at Arlington worked diligently with us to negotiate an official articulation agreement with the UTA Early Childhood/Bilingual Education (pre K-6 elementary certification) program. Urban Education courses were accepted as options in the Delivery System list of required courses, so our students were able to receive full credit for their work at El Centro and take advantage of a transfer agreement previously negotiated by Richland College with Texas Women's University, as well.

### Our Faculty

The Urban Education Program has attracted and retained a nucleus of adjunct faculty who are dedicated public school teachers and administrators. Our students are exposed to the most current pedagogy and have the opportunity to observe best practices in real-work settings. Our faculty are selected from a common belief that "we teach who we are." Our program focuses on cultivating self-awareness, empathy, passion, justice and spirit to augment the usual skills and competencies required of teachers. Students are introduced to the teacher formation principles espoused by Parker Palmer in *The Courage to Teach*. Our faculty are expected to model these principles and offer students special support and inspiration in their quest for teaching



excellence. We want our students to experience the exhilaration of working with faculty and students who personify the dedication and courage needed to make a difference in the lives of young people. By the time they finish this program, our Urban Education students will know whether they really want to *be* teachers and whether they have what it takes to be *great* teachers.

### Our Students and Their Stories

Urban Education students come to El Centro from every corner of Dallas County. Some are recent high school graduates; some are returning adult students; others are continuing students who only recently have begun to consider teaching as a career choice. They represent all age ranges, diverse ethnic groups, and a variety of work and life experiences.

For example, Tina Phillips, who works for Dallas Public Schools as a bus driver, has maintained a 3.4 grade point average while taking 9 to 12 credit hours per week each semester. Tina began her coursework in spring 1998, and has completed the entire Developmental Math sequence and College Algebra. She is more than halfway through the Urban Education degree program. Brenda Cardoso, Ernestine Nava, and Coretta Broadnax are completing their associate degrees in Urban Education this semester, and all are transferring to UT-Arlington to complete their studies and attain state certification. Sheila Walker has completed 19 credit hours while continuing her job as a teaching assistant at a Dallas Public Schools Montessori school. Carolyn Guerrero is nearing completion of her Urban Education degree while serving as supervisor of tutors in the El Centro Gear-up Program. She is working toward teacher certification as a third career, having worked previously as an airline attendant and as a translator.

Claudia Castro personifies the successful Urban Education graduate. She was a member of the very first Urban Education class in fall 1997. She was a straight-A student who attended Texas Women's University on a scholarship, majoring in Bilingual Education. Claudia will graduate from TWU, in May 2001, and has been hired to return to her roots as a teacher in the Dallas Public School System.

### Indicators of Program Success

Students have continued to enroll in the El Centro Urban Education Program at a pace far exceeding projections. This spring, as we concluded the program's third year, 80 new students joined the 140 students from previous semesters who have enrolled in at least one Urban Education course. Many have completed the education block and are working on their core curricu-

lum courses, while others are taking one education course per semester. Some students have stopped out for various personal reasons but are now resuming their studies—the new Associate of Arts in Urban Education degree appears to be a draw for students interested in pursuing teaching careers. They like the opportunity to qualify automatically for the Educational Assistant Certificate along the way. Students report being very satisfied with our transfer agreements and the helpful assistance they get from the receiving institutions. At the end of the 2001-2002 academic year, we will be able to report on the actual number of students who are moving into the teaching profession from their start in the Urban Education Program.

In addition to student satisfaction and increased enrollment, another indicator of success may be that the other six DCCCD colleges are planning to offer the Urban Education degree to their students, beginning fall 2001 semester.

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September 28, 2001, Vol. XXIII, No. 20

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*Innovation Abstracts* (ISSN 0199-106X) is published weekly following the fall and spring terms of the academic calendar, except Thanksgiving week, by the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD), Department of Educational Administration, College of Education, SZB 348, Austin, Texas 78712-1293, (512) 471-7545. Periodicals Postage Paid at Austin, Texas. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Innovation Abstracts*, The University of Texas at Austin, SZB 348, Austin, TX 78712-1293. Email: sroueche@mail.utexas.edu