



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## A TEACHER TRAINING ACADEMY

As one of seven campuses in the Dallas County Community College District, Mountain View College opened its doors in the fall of 1970, and since then has met the needs of the community while adjusting to changing demographic trends. Many of its students are first-generation college attendees who need extra attention, support, and encouragement during their college careers, but particularly during the first-impresion, first-enrollment stages.

In 1997, the relatively new college president was visiting with business and community leaders about ways the college could serve the community better. When she called on one of the local principals, he discussed his desire to increase the numbers of students attending college. He also complained to the president about his need for more teachers. The president asked the principal what she could do to help, assuring him that she wanted his students to come to her college. The principal responded by saying, "We send them to you, but then what happens? Where do they go? They just seem to fall through the cracks and disappear." From that conversation came the harsh awareness that retention was an issue that had to be addressed "head on." Thus, the idea of creating a central location where students could access, in one place, many critical student services related to advising, enrollment, and the like (at Mountain View, as well as at any of the other colleges in the district), was born, and soon after, the Academy, as it came to be known at the college, became a reality. The "Academy" was conceived as a way to retain students and track their migration. Training teachers seemed a logical place to implement this new strategy for student retention.

In 1998, the Teacher Training Academy was developed for students who wanted to become K-12 teachers. Every August, headlines in the local metropolitan newspaper drew our attention to stories about teacher shortages. The shortage was critical across the nation, but nowhere more critical than in the Southwest, where the need for bilingual, special education, and math and science teachers was acute. In an effort to meet the

needs of the community, Mountain View College entered a partnership with the Dallas Independent School District (DISD) and area universities to train teachers, with the goal of reducing the critical shortage of teaching professionals.

Not only did our public schools need more teachers; they also desperately needed teachers who understood the needs of minority students in urban areas and who wanted to teach in those environments and neighborhoods. "Most of the kids who live here won't be going away to college, but with the right encouragement, they might come to you," said a DISD area superintendent. "We have the people we need right here. These kids love this neighborhood. They want to be near their families. We just have to get them interested in teaching and get them started in the right direction."

That superintendent recognized that his classrooms were full of *potential* teachers who had been reared in the community, who planned to remain in the community, who were not afraid to work in urban schools, and who already possessed the cultural sensitivity and many of the skills needed for working with diverse school populations. Many were already bilingual speakers. What these students needed was the desire to teach, a vision of their own potential for success, some assistance in navigating their way through higher education, financial assistance, and the encouragement to complete their academic programs.

The Teacher Training Academy was to be a center at the community college for students who wanted to go into teaching and a partnership between the urban public school district, the local community college, and two area universities. Initially, leaders from the three educational levels met to develop a plan. Students would be recruited from the high schools, enroll in academic work to develop their basic skills and then in general education courses at the community college, make seamless transfers to the universities to take their upper-level classes, and return to their neighborhoods for their student teaching. Then, upon receiving their baccalaureate degrees and teaching certifications, these students would be hired by the area superintendent. To date, 36 former Teacher Training Academy students



have been certified as Texas teachers. Many of them attribute their career success to the nurturing and personal attention they received at Mountain View and, particularly, in the Academy.

After experiencing such success with the Teacher Training Academy, the college elected to implement a similar model for recruiting and retaining students who plan to major in the fields of science and mathematics, engineering, and law enforcement. Named the FIRST (Futures in Research, Science, and Technology) Academy, CSEMS (Computer Science, Engineering, and Math), and Tomorrow's Cops Program, recruitment activities are underway, and students are being identified within the general population. High school faculty are sending their students to these new academies as readily as they did to the Teacher Training Academy. Just as the Teacher Training Academy can provide internships with America Reads, the newer programs can offer similar career-related work opportunities for their students. Academy staff members team up with recruiting representatives from the college's admissions office to attend local college fairs and community events. Academy staff are well trained and knowledgeable about the college's general offerings and often recruit on behalf of the entire college. However, students who demonstrate an interest in any of the academies are given the special information that their particular programs require.

Additionally, the academies work with various clubs and in extracurricular activities at local elementary, middle, and high schools, attending group meetings and special events with students. Several times a year, students (and their parents) who are members of the "Future Teachers of America," or "Police Explorers," or "Science Club" visit Mountain View College's campus and enjoy various opportunities to interact with college students and staff.

Each academy maintains its own office and staff. Databases of student involvement in the various programs help staff keep track of student enrollments, transfer information, and job placements. Staff are selected based on their teaching abilities and their commitment to students, the principles of inclusion, and the profession the academy represents. In each academy office, the staff are committed to the goal of creating a friendly environment where students are welcome and want to visit—whether they come on official business to receive services or just to say "hi."

Upon their decision to enroll in an academy, students can receive personalized academic advising, register for classes, complete financial aid applications, learn about scholarship opportunities, and apply for college work-study or part-time jobs related to their chosen field—all

services housed in the academy's general offices. Some of the academies have received special grant funding for program enhancements—e.g., a textbook stipend for qualifying students. Each academy meets monthly with its students (as a group) and provides programs featuring guest speakers sharing information on various topics. Academy students give high ratings to the services they receive and their academy experiences overall.

The academy model includes many critical student services—e.g., tutoring, advising, financial aid assistance, and work opportunities—that, while available to all students at the college for some time, are consolidated into a one-stop shop in each academy. And, as important as offering this special location is to student success, everyone agrees that at least three other factors weigh heavy on the success side of the academy model—specifically, identifying and hiring staff committed to students and to their career choices, creating support networks and an academic track which can be navigated easily, and helping establish relationships with individuals who can help these students before they enter college, throughout college, and when they graduate.

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