

SIX EXEMPLARY PROGRAMS WIN HIGHER EDUCATION STAR AWARDS

AUSTIN, October 11, 2005 – Six exemplary higher education programs received the Texas Higher Education Star Award from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board at an award ceremony last night.

“The winners represent the state’s most effective efforts for closing the education gaps that challenge our state,” said Commissioner of Higher Education Raymund A. Paredes. “The Coordinating Board is proud to recognize the people and the institutions that develop and implement these programs, as well as the organizations and others who support them.”

The awards ceremony was part of the Coordinating Board’s 2005 Governing Boards Conference for higher education regents and trustees, who oversee universities and colleges. This year, the conference focused on improving excellence in higher education – one of the four goals of the state’s *Closing the Gaps by 2015* higher education plan.*

The 2005 Star Award winners include:

Houston Community College System – *Graduates and Completers Project*. Through six strategies, the Houston Community College System increased its number of graduates and other completers from 2,025 in 2000-01 to 6,144 in 2003-04. The strategies include degree audits and related assistance to help students take the courses needed for graduation; degree completion fairs; a twice-a-year Student Success Week focusing on advising, transcript evaluation, and graduation applications; identifying and advising students who have completed core courses; a process allowing students to transfer back equivalent courses taken within three years of enrollment in the system; and a focus on resolving individual students’ graduation problems.

Contact: Charles Cook, Vice Chancellor, Educational Development; (713) 718-5042

North Harris Montgomery Community College District-North Harris College – *Summer Bridge Program*. North Harris College’s Summer Bridge Program provides an intensive three weeks of developmental education to graduating high school seniors who need improved reading, writing, and math skills, allowing those students to make a smoother transition from high school into college. The program also links students to faculty or staff mentors, offers grants to pay for textbooks, and offers \$100 scholarships to students who successfully complete it. Summer Bridge success rates are much higher than for traditional 16-week courses -- 84.4 percent compared to 44.3 percent in a math course and 98.8 percent compared to 62.3 percent in an English course, for example.

Contact: Linda Luehrs Wolfe, Associate Vice Chancellor, Curriculum and Instruction; (832) 813-6504

Texas A&M University-Commerce – *Navarro College Partnership*. Through this partnership, Texas A&M University-Commerce offers on the Navarro College campus upper-division courses leading to teacher certification, providing a full-time director and advisors, faculty who teach on-site, and student support services. Prior to the partnership, Navarro students had to drive one to two hours to reach a campus offering upper-division courses. Enrollment has increased from

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* See the plan at www.thecb.state.tx.us/ClosingtheGaps/.

63 students in fall 1999 to 510 students in spring 2005, and the partnership has produced 312 certified teachers who are employed in the surrounding five-county service area.

Contact: Mary Hendrix, Associate Vice-President for Academic and Student Affairs; (903) 886-5021

University of Houston – *Center for Mexican American Studies*. A diverse spectrum of programs offered by the University of Houston Center for Mexican American Studies is supporting the needs of a diverse urban Hispanic student population. Efforts are focused on promoting preparation for college, student recruitment, smoothing students' transition from high school to college, financial and academic support for undergraduate students, and career counseling. Approximately 86 percent of participating high school students enroll in higher education, and are much more successful in college than non-participants. For example, the college graduation rate for participating students is 76 percent, compared to 39 percent for all other Hispanic students at the institution.

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The University of Texas at El Paso – *UTEP Model Institutions for Excellence Initiative*. The University of Texas at El Paso's Model Institutions for Excellence Initiative supports science, technology, engineering, and math undergraduates by improving their first-year experiences, improving curricula, and providing enrichment activities. As a result of its efforts, persistence rates for first-year students has increased from 57 percent to nearly 70 percent, the average first-semester grade point average has increased from 2.06 to 2.88, and the average time to graduation has decreased from 6.6 years to 5.1 years for those students.

Contact: Benjamin C. Flores; (915) 747-6961

The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston – *Gulf Coast Consortia/Keck Center*. The Gulf Coast Consortia, one of the largest inter-institutional cooperatives in the world, brings together the strengths of Houston/Galveston-area academic medical research institutions and universities to build interdisciplinary collaborative research teams and training programs at the frontiers of biomedical sciences. The W. M. Keck Center for Interdisciplinary Bioscience Training – the training arm of the consortia – supports more than 60 trainees and has more than 200 affiliated training faculty with five joint training programs. This collaborative effort also allows consortia members to more successfully obtain federal science and engineering research funding. Members include The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, The University of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center, The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston, Baylor College of Medicine, Rice University, and the University of Houston.

Contact: David Gorenstein, Associate Dean for Research; (409) 747-6801.

The Texas Higher Education Star Award was established by the Coordinating Board to recognize exemplary contributions toward goals of the state's *Closing the Gaps* plan.

For this year's competition, the Board received 58 applications, from which 10 finalists were chosen. Selection of the six Star Award recipients was based on the recommendations of a nine-member panel made up of three Coordinating Board members; three Texas business, education, and community leaders; and three out-of-state educational experts.

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