

**Testimony of Dr. Stephen B. Kinslow,
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to the

**U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Education and Labor
Subcommittee on Higher Education, Lifelong Learning, and Competitiveness**

**Higher Education Act: Support for Colleges and Universities under Title III and V
June 4, 2007**

Opening remarks

Chairman Hinojosa and distinguished members of the Subcommittee:

Good morning.

As president of the Austin Community College District, or ACC, it is my pleasure to speak with you today regarding the critical role community colleges play in educating the nation's traditionally underserved populations, especially minority, low income, and first generation college students.

ACC is on the verge of becoming eligible for Hispanic-Service Institution status and as you will see, the funding provided under Title V is desperately needed.

ACC has been serving Central Texas since 1973. Since then a lot has changed. Community colleges are now the primary gateway to higher education and training for more than 50 percent of all who enter college, whether they are recent high school graduates or adults. Community colleges are also the primary provider of transfer students to four-year colleges and universities.

As the members of this committee are keenly aware the United States is competing in a global market, demand for highly skilled workers is on the rise, and our nation's future economic development is more dependent than ever on community colleges.

While community colleges meet the same accreditation standards as four-year colleges and universities, they are different. There is an "open door" policy. Rather than turn away people who may not have the prerequisites for college level work, the community college offers avenues for students to obtain the necessary skill levels. Community colleges are challenged by a broad mission, different funding mechanisms, and by the enormous diversity of students the "open door" welcomes.

At ACC, our students range in age from 17 to 70, they have a huge variety of academic goals, are at different levels of college readiness, and increasing come from traditionally underserved populations. It is our mission, as a community college, to meet the needs of the diverse and rapidly changing demographics of our society through:

- General education or core curriculum for transfer-bound students
- Workforce training in high-demand careers, such as nursing
- "Access" or "developmental" programs to assist those who are not yet "college-ready."

- Adult Basic Education for adults who need help with writing, reading or math, GED preparation and English-as-a-Second Language.
- Extensive community outreach programs that create a college going culture

According to the U.S. Census, Texas is a majority-minority state, with Hispanics representing the fastest growing segment of the population. From 1990 to 2005, the Hispanic population almost doubled in size, reaching 7.9 million. In Central Texas, the numbers are just as telling, with Hispanics making up nearly 60 percent of the local school district.

While we are fortunate to have a diverse population, we also are keenly aware that the fastest growing demographic groups are also those with lower high school graduation rates and lower participation rates in higher education. Just as the need for an educated workforce is increasing, the number of students enrolling in higher education is falling.

If we don't "close the gap," simply put, we are headed for a crisis.

Texas risks not having enough educated, highly-skilled workers to meet demand, creating a disincentive for existing businesses to expand, pushing new industries away, and leaving residents with fewer dollars in their pocket. The economy will be hit hard.

- The state will lose jobs
- Citizens will earn & spend less money
- There will be fewer contributors to the local tax base
- And, social services costs will continue to increase.

In contrast, by providing access to affordable higher education, community colleges are able to help students find better jobs, earn higher wages, spend more, and contribute more equitably to the local tax base. Increasing the number of college graduates and trained workers helps reduce pressure on social services.

Providing access to affordable higher education is a MUST!

The State of Texas is addressing these challenges through its *Closing the Gaps* initiative to enroll an additional 630,000 students into higher education by 2015. For the ACC District this means increasing enrollment from 33,000 to nearly 40,000 by 2015.

And, we are pleased to report that the ACC District is successfully meeting these goals, but we also need the help of good government policy to continue to reach more traditionally underserved populations.

- From fall 2001 to fall 2006, ACC's overall enrollment increased 14% with
- A 31% increase in Hispanic students
- From fall 2000 to fall 2006, the number of Hispanic graduates increased 60%
- The ACC District is less than 1% point away from being designated a Hispanic Serving Institution

The increase in enrollment is partly due to an innovative, proactive program called *College Connection*. Implemented in 2004, the ACC District program delivered college assessment, admissions, and financial aid services to area high schools, giving seniors

individual assistance for transitioning to college. One year after it began, ACC experienced a 37% increase in college attendance among high school graduates, particularly those from traditionally underserved communities. The success of *College Connection* has garnered national media attention. ACC received the Star Award from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and a national Bellwether Award.

College Connection is now offered in 22 school districts within the ACC District Service Area. Considered a statewide model by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board for establishing a college-going culture among Hispanics and other ethnic minorities, more than a dozen community colleges have implemented similar programs across the state and the nation. Maine and Florida have adopted statewide initiatives modeled after ACC *College Connection*.

Engaging high school students early is also crucial to successfully increasing enrollment among Hispanics. The ACC District's Early College Start program gives high school juniors and seniors the opportunity to earn up to a year's worth of college credit - at little to no cost – before they graduate! For the college's tax paying residents, Early College Start is free; for those outside of the district, the dual credit classes are only \$40 each. And it's working! Nearly half (46%) of Early College Start students enroll at ACC within two years after high school graduation.

The college's outreach extends well beyond high school and into the elementary and middle school years. ACC's Summer Youth Programs provide fun, educational opportunities for children of all ages to improve their math and science skills, explore careers, and see first-hand what a college campus is like.

Noelle Hernandez, a current ACC student, is living proof that early engagement is the key to closing the gap between Hispanics and higher education. She enrolled in ACC's Summer Youth Program in 5th grade and returned several years later as a camp volunteer. Noelle has stated often that had it not been for this opportunity, she might not have ever considered college an option. She is now well on her way to receiving an associate degree in Commercial Music Management and plans to transfer to the University of Texas.

In line with the unique mission of community colleges, the ACC District also provides programs for adults that help them overcome barriers to higher education. Through our Adult Basic Education program, English-as-a-Second Language and GED classes are provided free of cost. These programs are increasingly bridging the gap to higher education for Hispanics. In fall 2006, more than 50% of ACC's GED graduates returned to the college to pursue college credit courses as the result of our Adult Education College Connection Program.

One of our GED students is here with us today. Irma Apolinar was born in Mexico City, one of 11 children who grew up in a hard working family where higher education was not an option. The family moved to the U.S., at the age of 15, Irma got married, had a child, and dropped out of school to help make ends meet. Her baby is now 16, she is a U.S. citizen, and just recently returned to school. Irma came to ACC to get her GED. She graduated, was awarded a Texas Association of Chicanos in Higher Education scholarship and a work-study job in our Student Success Office. I am happy to report that Irma is well on her way to an associate degree in Business Management and hopes one day to earn a four-year degree. She's already talking about getting her children

enrolled in Early College Start and her sister is now attending ACC, working on an associate degree in Accounting.

We now have more than 8,000 Hispanic students and growing. Irma is one of many first generation college success stories at ACC.

But Irma tells us, and this is true of many of our students, her future success depends on the availability of financial aid. If the money is there, she WILL continue her education, and she will better be able to help her children attend college. Title V is vital to keeping these students in school and creating a college going culture one family at a time.

We are fortunate to have quality faculty and staff who make all of these student outreach and recruitment programs successful. And just as fortunate to have community partnerships that help the ACC District exceed our *Closing the Gaps* goals.

One such partnership is Capital IDEA, lifting working families out of poverty by sponsoring educational case management services that lead to lifelong financial independence. Capital IDEA funds qualified students' tuition, books, childcare, and works with them to secure employment with good salaries, benefits, and opportunity for career growth.

Just as crucial as minority recruitment is, however, so is retention. With an increase in Hispanics and "first generation" college students there exists a need for resources to keep students engaged. ACC's El Centro, or the Latino/Latin American Studies Center, offers Hispanic students mentoring and an opportunity to become involved in the local Latino community.

Similarly, ACC's Center for Public Policy and Political Studies was established to enable and empower ACC students to gain knowledge and experience of, and to actively participate in varied political and policy processes that govern our state and nation. The first of its kind at a community college, the Center is committed to education, civic engagement, informed decision-making, critical analysis, and understanding cultures.

As ACC meets the benchmark enrollment criteria for HSI, we work to expand existing programs and implement new initiatives under Title V. In our quest to increase enrollment among traditionally underserved students, the ACC District faces many challenges:

- Expanding college access
- Keeping college affordable
- Providing additional financial aid (scholarships, grants, work-study)
- Expanding outreach programs such as ACC's *College Connection*, Early College Start, and Summer Youth Program to prepare secondary students for higher education
- Expanding Student Support & Success services to assist students in reaching their goals
- Increasing opportunities for lifelong learning and workforce training
- Offering additional "access" programs to get students "college-ready" such as an intensive remediation course to improve student performance on the required assessments

- Developing a new University Transfer Center that offers counseling, workshops, tours, and establishes alliances with faculty members at receiving four-year institutions by discipline, to strengthen continued student success
- Strengthening institutional capacity to further enhance libraries to include expanded cultural studies sections
- Expanding faculty development programs that focus on teaching diverse communities and diverse learners

All of the college's seven campuses are near capacity, and ACC is expected to enroll an additional 20,000 students by 2025, where will we put them?

The ACC District Facilities Master Plan calls for the expansion and renovation of several existing facilities and the construction of new campuses in areas where the demographics suggest an expansion of higher education services are needed. But expansions such as these take millions of dollars.

Unlike four-year institutions, community colleges do not have their facilities paid for by state government. Although we do receive an ever declining proportion of state appropriations, most of our revenue comes from local tax dollars and student tuition. Although the college continues to pursue annexation of areas to increase its taxing district, the burden on students needs to remain low for us to meet our *Closing the Gaps* goals.

Another challenge involves funding the employment of additional faculty and staff. Quality faculty from diverse backgrounds are needed for the success of Hispanic and other first generation college students. Skilled staff is also crucial to support recruitment efforts such as *College Connection*

We are grateful to you for implementing Title V funding for Hispanic Serving Institutions. Higher education depends on this funding and frankly cannot achieve the goals expected of us without assistance from Congress.

Community colleges are the primary provider of transfer students to four-year colleges and universities, we are the primary trainer of those seeking high-demand careers, and we are primary source of "access" programs, lending a helping hand to students who are not yet college ready. Community colleges are the engines that drive economic development.

If we are to meet our objectives we must work together. What's at stake if we don't?

- America's reputation for educational excellence
- Quality of life
- Competitive strength in the economy
- Our nation's ability to confront the challenges of the future

We encourage you to place a priority on Title V funding as our demographics here in Texas and across the nation continue to change. Never have Hispanic Serving Institutions been so important to America's economic well-being than they are today. While most Hispanic Serving Institutions are succeeding in the recruitment, retention and graduation of Hispanics, we must do more to break down the barriers to higher education. Time is running out.

We have a goal – to reverse a potentially devastating trend by increasing college attendance and graduation among Hispanics.

Please help us achieve this goal - everyone's future depends on it!