ACC broadens direction, teams with RRHEC

By Veronica Obregon
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Austin Community College is proud to announce several developments since this time last year.

In July of 2004, Dr. Robert Aguero joined ACC as the new president. Dr. Aguero was the former Vice Chancellor of Educational Affairs for the Dallas County Community College District and brings more than 20 years experience in teaching and senior level leadership to the college.

Changes will soon take place at ACC's Cypress Creek Campus. Preliminary plans have been drawn to build a 68,000 gross square foot facility that will provide ample room for increased enrollment at the campus. In addition to the new construction, the existing facility at Cypress Creek will also see some improvements.

The enlarged campus will house more classrooms that are larger in size, four new science labs, a multipurpose room for lectures, and new faculty, staff and administrative offices. The expansion will also result in larger computer labs, larger nursing and testing labs, a more spacious library and Media Center, as well as a larger space for Student Services. The campus parking lot will even be expanded to a total of 785 spaces.

Construction of the new portion of the campus is expected to start by the end of the year and open for classes in spring of 2007. Remodeling of the current building will occur during the spring 2007 semester. Cypress Creek Campus will remain open throughout the construction and renovation process.

Construction has also begun at the site of the new Round Rock Higher Education Center (RRHEC). This collaboration between Texas State University and Austin Community College will bring the Williamson County area coursework leading to 23 associate degrees, 7 bachelor's degrees and 15 master's degrees. The RRHEC is funded by Texas State and is scheduled to open for classes in fall of 2005.

ACC recently partnered with the Leander Independent School District to implement a program called College Connection. The program - created to remove the mysteries of how college works and to encourage high school seniors to enroll in higher education -will result in every participating senior in LISD receiving a letter of acceptance to ACC, along with their diplomas on graduation day.
ACC Executive Vice President Stephen Kinslow was instrumental in the creation of College Connection and recently answered some questions regarding the new program and the RRHEC.

**Q: Through the Leander ISD/ACC College Connection every participating senior will be accepted to ACC. How will this be accomplished?**

Kinslow: Part of the College Connection mission is to remove the barriers that often keep high school graduates from pursuing higher education. To accomplish this, ACC delivers higher education services to high school seniors, so that they may become familiar with how college works in the comfort of their own classrooms. The services we will betaking to the high schools are those dealing with admissions, financial aid, advising, etc.

ACC staff has already begun visiting seniors in the Leander ISD, and throughout the semester each senior will be individually assisted with applying to the college. Seniors will be helped with filling out ACC's online application and with applying for financial aid. Seniors will also be exposed to more college-like experiences through events like "ACC Tour Day" and "College Day" in which various ACC departments set up booths in the high school to inform seniors about the different areas of study available to them.

ACC's College Connection program is unlike any other college preparatory program in that this program sticks with seniors throughout the entire admissions process, until each and every student has completed the necessary forms for college entry and has received a letter of acceptance to ACC. I am very proud to say that ACC staff is fully committed to this program.

**Q: Why did ACC develop a program such as College Connection?**

Kinslow: When the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board created the "Closing the Gaps" initiative, it was up to community colleges and four-year institutions to take the lead and develop their own strategies for recruiting more students. College Connection is just one program ACC has created and implemented to increase the number of Texas high school graduates who enroll in higher education.

So far the program works. In San Marcos, for instance, where ACC's College Connection program was first piloted in 2004, the San Marcos Consolidated Independent School District experienced a significant increase in student's who pursued college after graduation.

College Connection is also a very effective way to encourage first generation college students to pursue higher education. By walking students through what some consider to be the most intimidating part of going to college - the admissions process we can prove to students that higher education is more attainable than they ever thought.
Q: How does the (RRHEC) fit into ACC's role for educating the region.

Kinslow: Although funding for the RRHEC is coming from Texas State University in San Marcos, ACC is honored to be an academic partner in this endeavor. Together Texas State and ACC will offer Williamson County residents a chance to continue their education by providing them with numerous course options from a variety of disciplines.

ACC has always been committed to offering the community access to higher education.

The RRHEC is just another point of entry for local residents to educate themselves. And we all know an educated society it better for the local economy and better for Texas.

Q: Will there be different courses offered at RRHEC than at Cypress Creek Campus?

Kinslow: ACC offers an array of general education classes at all of our campuses and centers.

While most workforce programs are typically not offered in out-of-district areas because of the lack of tax revenue to fund expensive equipment and special faculties, the RRHEC will be different. The new center will provide a variety of courses including classes in Computer Science and Computer Technology.

ACC is honored to be a part of the new RRHEC and to provide Williamson County residents the access to higher education they deserve.

The Avery Building, now under construction, is the first permanent building on the campus of the Round Rock Higher Education Center It is scheduled to open for the fall semester, 2005.

* Hill Country News Photo Courtesy of Texas State University