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## Minority-serving institutions depend on special funding

By Matthew Dembicki, *Published June 21, 2007*

Presidents from two community colleges where most of the students are minorities detailed to a House panel this month why federal funding set aside for such colleges is important.

Stephen Kinslow, president of Austin Community College (ACC) in Texas, told members of the House subcommittee on higher education, lifelong learning and competitiveness that his college is on the verge of becoming a federally recognized Hispanic-serving institution, which means it would be eligible for Title V funding for such institutions.

The funds will be critical to help ACC serve a growing number of traditional college-age and older Hispanic students in the area attain the education and skills required for local jobs, Kinslow said.

“While we are fortunate to have a diverse population, we also are keenly aware that the fastest-growing demographics groups are also those with lower high school graduation rates and lower participation rates in higher education,” he told the panel.

Meanwhile, Olivia Vanegas-Funcheon, president of Tohono Oodham Community College (TOCC) in Arizona, has helped the fledgling college serve a population of Native Americans who are facing drastically high unemployment rates by focusing on math and science



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programs.

Kinslow noted that if the educational needs of the growing Hispanic population in Austin and other areas are not met, economies will suffer and it will have a trickle-down effect. States will lose jobs, residents will earn and spend less, there will be fewer contributors to the local tax base and social services costs will continue to increase, he said.

ACC has had success getting more Hispanic students to enroll, Kinslow said. From 2001 to 2006, the college saw a 31 percent increase in number of enrolled Hispanic students and a 60 percent increase in the graduation rates among those students, he said.

Kinslow partially credited a program called College Connection, a district initiative that provides assessment, admission and financial aid services to area high schools, helping students transition to college. Within a year of initiating the program, college attendance among high school graduates—particularly students from traditionally underserved communities—increased by 30 percent, he said.

ACC and other community colleges in the district are reaching out to younger high school students and even elementary and middle school students to help them understand they can attain a higher education.

Kinslow provided the example of Noelle Hernandez, a current ACC student who has been involved with the college since the fifth grade, when she began enrolling in ACC's summer youth program. Hernandez is now on her way to earning an associate degree in commercial music management and plans to transfer to the University of Texas.

Title V funding also helps colleges like ACC educate older students who want to attain their GED or learn English, which again is critical to an educated, skilled workforce.

Meanwhile, TOCC, one of the newer tribally controlled colleges and universities in the U.S, is trying to cut high unemployment rates among its residents. The college has used its Title III grant in part to provide a science laboratory for research, hire math, science and GED instructors and establish a study center for tutoring and mentoring.

The grant has also helped to leverage additional resources, Vanegas-Funcheon said. TOCC received a U.S. Department of Defense grant



to buy remote sensing and global tracking equipment to help local farming and ranching efforts, she said.

A new General Accountability Office (GAO) study of several minority-serving institutions that received Title III and Title IV funds show the colleges use the money for a wide range of improvement activities, from academic quality to in-stitutional management.

For example, Sinte Gleska, a tribal college in South Dakota, used part of its Title III grant to fund its distance learning department and to provide students with academic and research resources otherwise not available to students at its rural locale.

But such colleges face some unique challenges, such as staffing the program, which can delay implementing projects, GAO said.

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