July 20, 2009

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am writing this letter in support of the Tutors with Vision (TV) program established by Ms. Sharon Duncan and Mr. Abel Villarreal. Throughout the last two years, I have personally witnessed the invaluable impact TV has had in fostering the skills prospective educators will need in order to effectively address the needs of students from diverse populations. The personal mentoring Mr. Villarreal has provided to our students coupled with his data driven and humanistic approach to education has left an indelible impact on many of our Austin Community College students pursuing the Associate of Arts in Teaching degree.

In response to the pervasive teacher shortage, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board in 2005, enacted the Associate of Arts in Teaching (AAT) degree. The primary purposes of the AAT degree are to retain and attract culturally diverse students to the teaching profession. Presently, there are 884 students enrolled in the program. EDUC 2301 Introduction to Special Populations is one of the pre-service courses offered by the Education Instruction Department. EDUC 2301 provides prospective educators an overview of schooling and classrooms from the perspectives of language, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnic, and academic diversity with an emphasis on factors that facilitate learning. A vital component of the course is the 16 hours service learning experience.

With TV’s original focus on math and science achievement, it was assumed that the students, who were not as comfortable in the areas, would select a different program. However, I noticed a great number of AAT students choosing to participate in TV. Mr. Villarreal’s approach eased their personal “intimidation” of math and science and bolstered their ability to teach it to the middle and high school students. As our AAT students gained more confidence with the TV approach, they have continued to respond very positively to the program. Subsequently, the decision was made to expand the TV program options to the surrounding public schools in the South Austin area. The positive relationships AAT students were able to foster with the public school students and educators, resulted in some of our AAT students deciding to continue with the program beyond the semester in which they were enrolled in the course.

Last spring, the Education Instruction Department was awarded the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) in Action grant. The purpose of the grant was to attract AAT students into the STEM areas. Four STEM scholars were assigned to work with Mr. Villarreal at Crockett High School. Despite having completed their service learning requirement of 40 hours, the STEM scholars continued to assist the high school students during the week and on the weekends. I was impressed with the insights the students provided about the experience. The TV experience reinvigorated their desires to teaching in the STEM areas and solidified their commitment to bridging the educational gaps.

I have great admiration for Mr. Villarreal’s dedication to the teaching profession and his unrelenting persistence to produce work of the highest quality. Mr. Villarreal’s personal...
commitment to teaching, learning, and students makes TV a valuable asset to the efforts to bridge the public school and Austin Community College relationship. TV is having an impact on teacher preparation and could be an integral part of the conversation for the next generation of educators.

If you have any questions or need further assistance regarding this matter, please feel free to contact me at 512.223.9204 or via email at gphan@austincc.edu.

Sincerely,

Giao Phan, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Department Chair Education Instruction