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National education leaders recognize top programs at increasing degree completion among Latinos

WASHINGTON – U.S. Under Secretary of Education Martha J. Kanter and Jon Whitmore, CEO of ACT, joined *Excelencia* in Education at the U.S. Capitol here today to announce the 2011 Examples of *Excelencia*, top programs that increase degree completion among Latinos at the associate, bachelor, and graduate level.

Top honors went to programs run by El Paso Community College, Texas Tech University, and Carlos Albizu University, San Juan Campus, marking the first program from Puerto Rico to be recognized since Examples of *Excelencia* launched in 2005. Sixteen other programs were honored as national finalists. All of the programs recognized during the *Celebración de Excelencia* 2011 event are listed in the latest edition of "What Works for Latino Students in Higher Education," which *Excelencia* in Education released today and is available for download at www.EdExcelencia.org.

"For America to achieve President Obama's goal of becoming the world leader in college degrees by 2020, it is vital that we increase degree completion among Latinos," said Kanter. "The successful and innovative programs recognized today are examples of institutions working to do their part, and I commend *Excelencia* in Education for helping institutional leaders, educators, and policy makers to understand these best practices."

For the 2011 Examples of *Excelencia* competition, 195 programs were nominated at three academic levels: associate, baccalaureate, and graduate. These programs demonstrate broad geographical representation in the effort to contribute to Latino student success and represent 22 states plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

At the associate level, **El Paso Community College's Early College High School Initiative** is a partnership between the community college and five school districts that gives students the opportunity to complete an associate degree while attending high school. Since its launch in 2006, the program has served 1,522 students, 80 percent of whom are Latino. The program maintains academic rigor and creates a college environment by focusing on "college first" and "high school" second.

"For the most part, these students are the first member of their family to ever set foot on a college campus, and their families, in most cases, face significant economic challenges," said Dr. Ernst E. Roberts, interim president of El Paso Community College. "These students and their families are rising to the challenge of the Early College High School Initiative, receiving associate degrees a full year prior to receiving their high school diplomas."

At the bachelor level, **Texas Tech's Successful Transition to Educator Preparation, or STEP 2**, program provides a variety of support services to help students with associate degrees in teaching transfer to Texas Tech's College of Education and complete both their bachelor's degree and their certification to teach. The program boasts 100 percent retention of transfer students and a 100 percent graduation rate of among participants.

"With up to 40 percent of Latino participation in the STEP 2 program, the College of Education at Texas Tech is helping to meet the high demand of classroom teachers specializing in bilingual education, English as a second language, math and science, as well as special education," said Janie Landin Ramirez, outreach programs administrator at the Texas Tech College of Education. "Formerly, with their associate degrees, these students could only serve as teaching assistants in the classroom. Now, they are the teachers."

At the graduate level, the **Ph.D. Clinical Psychology Program at the Carlos Albizu University, San Juan Campus** is the only doctorate program in Puerto Rico accredited by the American Psychological Association. The program's unique mission is to train culturally sensitive psychologists in a Hispanic/Latino cultural context, increasing the number of Latinos trained with the clinical and research skills to investigate mental health issues, particularly those associated with disadvantaged populations.

"Our strengths include a strong curriculum that emphasizes diversity and a sensitive and student oriented faculty," said Dr. Aida L. Jimenez, director of the program. "We have included students in decision making and have supported the creation of different student committees to encourage the sense of belonging and adherence to the program. As a result, we have an 80 percent retention rate, and ninety four percent of our graduates are licensed in clinical psychology."

"Congratulations to all of the institutions and programs recognized for their demonstrated success with Latino students," said Sarita Brown, president of Excelencia in Education. "Nationally, Latinos will have to almost triple the number of degrees earned currently for America to reach that 2020 goal, which makes programs like these so important to our future."

"The educational achievements of Hispanic students are critical to our nation's future," said Whitmore. "Historical and socioeconomic issues should not be a barrier that keeps these students from achieving their full educational and career aspirations."

Examples of *Excelencia* is a national initiative to systematically identify and honor institution-based programs and departments that demonstrate with evidence that they effectively boost Latino enrollment, performance and graduation. It is supported by USA Funds, ACT, Diverse Issues in Higher Education, EduK, Univision Communications, Educational Testing Service, College Board, and the California State University System.

To download "What Works for Latino Students in Higher Education," which includes detailed information about all of the programs recognized today, visit www.EdExcelencia.org.

Excelencia in Education is a Washington, D.C.-based non-profit organization whose mission is to accelerate Latino student success in higher education.

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2011 Examples of Excelencia

Associate Level: **Early College High School Initiative**, El Paso Community College, Texas

Baccalaureate Level: **STEP 2 (Successful Transition to Educator Preparation)**, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas

Graduate Level: **Ph.D. Clinical Psychology Program**, Carlos Albizu University, San Juan Campus, Puerto Rico

2011 Examples of Excelencia National Finalists

Associate Level

- **Academy for College Excellence**, Cabrillo College, Aptos, California
- **BUSCA (Bilingual Undergraduate Studies for Collegiate Advancement)**, La Salle University, Philadelphia
- **College Readiness Initiative**, El Paso Community College, El Paso, Texas
- **Learning Frameworks**, Brazosport College, Lake Jackson, Texas
- **Transfer Alliance Project (TAP)**, University of California, Berkeley

Bachelor Level

- **Center for Chicano-Boricua Studies**, Wayne State University, Detroit
- **Community Scholars Program**, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.
- **Grow Your Own Teachers**, Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago
- **Latino Student Services and Outreach (LASSO)**, Georgia State University, Atlanta
- **Medical Spanish for Heritage Learners**, University of Texas Pan American, Edinburg, Texas
- **The Scholar's Academy**, University of Houston-Downtown
- **Transfer Articulation Bridge (TAB) Program**, San Francisco State University and City College of San Francisco
- **UNIV 1301 – Learning Framework**, University of Texas Pan American, Edinburg, Texas

Graduate Level

- **Ph.D. in English**, University of Texas at San Antonio
- **Department of Chemistry**, University of Buffalo, The State University of New York
- **Master of Business Administration Program**, The University of Texas at El Paso

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