SHOP TALK # 46:
INTENSIVE COLLEGE READINESS INITIATIVES CONTINUE

For the second year, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) has funded its Intensive College Readiness Programs for Adult Education Students (IP-AES). The programs are designed for the GED graduate who wants to attend college. According to Tamara Clunis at the THECB, of the 74% of GED graduates who annually declare an interest in college, only 27% of those who enroll complete a semester, and only 4% obtain a degree. The IP-AES affords adult learners an exciting opportunity in a supportive environment. Recipients of the 2010 IP-AES grants include the following:

- Austin Community College
- Kilgore College
- Lone Star College
- Midland College
- Richland College
- South Texas College
- Education Service Center Region 20
- Education Service Center Region 6
- Literacy Council of Tyler
- San Antonio Northside ISD
- San Angelo College
- Texarkana College

This SHOP TALK features Northside ISD’s IP initiative. The PACE program (Preparing Adults for College Excellence), in partnership with Northwest Vista College in San Antonio, promotes long-term college success for transitioning adults. Like many IP-AES initiatives, the program is designed to decrease the likelihood of educational “fatigue” and financial drain. PACE offers intensive instruction in math, English/ESOL/language arts, computer literacy, and college readiness. College readiness modules include study skills, tutoring, note taking, time management, and stress reduction.

In July, an information open house was held at the Northside Learning Center. Surveys and interviews were used to recruit highly motivated candidates inclined to complete the program. Student candidates include college/developmental course dropouts, GED students, and adults 20 years and older. Also included are individuals who are non-native speakers of English. A separate ESL cohort will allow teachers and students to focus on two types of learning tasks – one in acquiring language skills for academic settings, and the other in gaining content mastery, since ESL students have both cognitive and linguistic demands. The intense, day only, ten week model includes four features found in successful college preparatory initiatives:

1. directed instruction to address gaps between knowledge and skills required to complete the GED and those needed to succeed in college;
2. a learning environment that teaches college success skills by simulating a college environment in terms of class format, expectations, and scheduling;
3. a comprehensive “case management” counseling component; and
4. student cohorts or learning communities.
A dedicated PACE counselor/advisor is available each day to help address student needs and concerns. Weekly meetings with the counselor assist students in determining their goals, perceived barriers, and academic preparedness. The counselor/student relationship continues through the learner’s first year of college.

Learning communities and student cohorts are essential components to learners’ success. Learning together provides the social glue needed to encourage and motivate students. To encourage teamwork and participation, PACE students have the opportunity to create a website and/or form a social networking site to assist each other throughout the program.

To retain students, a tuition scholarship program for those who complete the program is being provided. Onsite childcare and transportation costs are also covered. The PACE counselor/advisor will maintain contact with program participants through August 2011, hosting webinars and assisting students with enrollment. Students who complete the intensive ten-week course will receive up to $500 in tuition towards the Spring 2011 semester. Those who complete the spring semester and enroll for a subsequent semester in credit-bearing classes will receive an additional $500 to be used toward tuition and other costs.

Another important feature of Northside’s PACE program is its commitment to professional development for its instructional and counseling staff. Staff development will help team members further their knowledge about postsecondary academic rigor and relevant college readiness standards. Staff will familiarize themselves with assessment instruments used to gauge academic progress as well as changes in attitudes that impact student success prior to, during, and post project.

Enrollees are scheduled to take the THEA as a pre-test and post-test at Northwest Vista College. Nancy Bentley Dunlap, the adult education coordinator and PACE director, reports that a cohort of students began the intensive 120 hour program on September 7th, with classes scheduled to continue through November 20th. Four instructors, two interns, and one dedicated advisor ensure that students stay on track and succeed. A tracking system will be created to track students throughout their college experience to allow for data-driven decision making. This will be a first for both the adult education program and its partner college, with innovative features that can hopefully be replicated.

Northside Adult Education and Northwest Vista College recognize the fact that many students entering college are unprepared both technologically and in course content. Most adult secondary programs do not prepare students to conduct research and write a term paper, or to use the computer for these activities. Adults who enter college without these skills are at the highest risk for dropping out their first year. In addition, the math curriculum covers material from the college’s developmental math courses to include algebra, geometry, and appropriate use of technology.

For more information about the PACE initiative, contact Nancy Bentley Dunlap at nancy_dunlap@nisd.net.