

# Recruiting & Preparing Diverse Urban Teachers

## One Urban-Focused Teacher Education Program Breaks New Ground

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### Introduction and Purpose

Within the last two decades, many researchers, educators, agencies, and even policymakers have expressed grave concern over the significant disparity between the increasing population of students of color and the teaching force in U.S. schools (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Duncan, 2009; Gay, 2010; Irvine, 2003; National Collaborative on Diversity in the Teaching Force, 2004; Villegas & Davis, 2007).

Across the nation, although numerous forums and conferences and even special journal theme issues (see *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 2007) have been organized to address the teacher-student demographic gap (National Collaborative on Diversity in the Teaching Force, 2004; National Summit on Diversity in the Teaching Force, 2002), the problem persists. Recently, the National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME) (2012) hosted a summer institute on the theme, "Addressing the demographic imperative: Recruiting and preparing a diverse and highly effective teaching force." The institute provided opportunities for presentations showcasing an array of exemplary programs on teacher recruitment and preparation for diversity.

Researchers argue that the demographic disparity between K-12 students and the teaching force not only violates our standards of equity, but that it also exerts some deleterious effects on students' achievement, particularly students of color (Villegas & Davis, 2007). The growing concern about the demographic gap has led to calls for action and, in particular, challenges to schools and colleges of education to find new and creative ways to recruit

and prepare new teachers from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds.

Schools and colleges of education at some universities, especially in urban communities, are taking bold steps to respond. These programs have varied in size and type, yet share the common goal of promoting teacher diversification. Some programs, including one on our campus, have achieved documented success.

In this article we examine our university's Urban Teacher Education Program (UTEP) and its success not only in recruiting, preparing, retaining, and graduating its students, but also in leading to employment and retention as teachers in urban schools. We focus on critical aspects of the program including:

1. The recruitment of diverse candidates, specifically for urban schools;
2. Collaborative partnerships;
3. Student support and mentorship;
4. Curriculum conceptualized for social justice and multicultural education;
5. Extended field experiences in urban schools and communities; and
6. Induction for program graduates.

Following a review of relevant literature, we describe the context of the program and its basic features, including the recruitment process and programmatic innovations. Then, we provide an analysis of our assessment of the program's impact and sustainability.

### A Demographic Gap

Much has been written about the demographic gap between the growing racially-diverse student population and the teaching force in U.S. schools (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Gay, 2010; Irvine, 2003; National Summit on Diversity in the Teaching Force, 2002). According to the National Center for Education Information (NCEI) (2011), about 84% of

the teaching force is European-American (White), while students of color constitute about 46% of the K-12 student population. It is projected that by 2050, students of color will comprise the majority of the student population (NCES, 2012). About 40% of U.S. public schools have no teachers of color and in urban schools, where teachers of color are primarily employed, European-American teachers (White) still dominate (Center for American Progress, 2011; National Collaborative on Diversity in the Teaching Force, 2004).

Data show that almost every state reflects this large diversity gap between students and teachers (Boser, 2011). Multicultural scholars contend that this demographic gap creates a teaching-learning disconnect that contributes to the too often dismal academic performance, high dropout rates, and low graduation rates of diverse urban students (Gay, 2010; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2009). It is also argued that the lack of diversity in the teaching force is a contributing factor to the over-representation of students of color and those from low-income backgrounds in special education programs (Haycock, 2001; Sleeter & Thao, 2007).

Although some argue that race does not determine teacher quality, and that teachers of color also struggle in teaching students of color (Sleeter & Thao, 2007, p. 4), many agree that there are significant benefits to diversifying the teaching force. Among these are:

1. It facilitates productive student-teacher relationships. (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Irvine 2003)
2. Diverse teachers bring diverse life experiences and perspectives that benefit all students, including dominant culture students, and thus improves the quality of education for all. (Gay, 2010; Nieto, 2000)
3. It provides students of color role models. (Gordon, 2000)
4. It is a matter of equity and social justice

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that schools should reflect the racial and ethnic makeup of the larger society. (Villegas & Davis, 2007)

More importantly, advocates contend that it improves the achievement rates of students of color (Ehrenberg & Brewer, 1995). In launching the national initiative, "Teach.gov to recruit the 'next generation' of teachers," U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan stated:

I'm very concerned that increasingly, our teachers don't reflect the great diversity of our nation's young people, and so making sure we have more teachers of color and particularly more men, more Black and Latino men, coming into education is going to be a significant part of this Teach Campaign. (Chait & Birede, 2011, p.1)

Over the years, some schools and colleges of education and other entities have explored and experimented with different approaches. Some college-based programs that have been recognized for their successes include the Santa Clara University post-baccalaureate cohort-based program, the Teachers for Rural Alaska program, the University of Texas-Pan American bilingual/bicultural teacher education program, the University of Wisconsin Teach for Diversity (TFD) graduate-based program, the Teachers for Chicago (TFC) graduate-based program, and the Armstrong Atlantic State University program.

Other innovative programs are "Project 29" at the University of Illinois at Chicago, the Neag School of Education at the University of Connecticut, and the University of California Los Angeles Center X. It is important to point out that most, if not all, of these programs are at the graduate level. In contrast, our UTEP program serves the undergraduate level.

### A One-of-a-Kind Program

UTEP is a four-year undergraduate program that is one of a kind in the United States. It is situated in a School of Education (SOE) within a comprehensive public research university located in a large urban community in the Midwest U.S. region. UTEP's institution collaborates with a large urban school district and other urban school districts in the area.

The program emerged as a result of the university's campus-wide initiative to create "an interdisciplinary campus institute" with the intention of supporting the urban community, especially the city schools (UTEP proposal, 2004, n. p.). It was also in response to national and local calls for reform in teacher preparation.

The mission of UTEP is to prepare exemplary teachers for urban schools through curricular innovation, collaborative partnerships, and rigorous clinical experiences in urban schools and communities. UTEP defines exemplary teachers as change agents who demonstrate a commitment to student academic achievement, cultural competence, and critical socio-cultural consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2001).

UTEP was conceptualized as a collaborative initiative to engage the university's Chancellor and Provost, academic units such as the SOE, College of Arts and Sciences (A&S), and the School of Business, as well as community leaders including the mayor and the African-American and Latino-American communities.

Although UTEP's university is located within a large urban community, the university historically did not have a positive relationship with that community. In fact, the community criticized the university for its lack of responsiveness to the community's needs, especially its schools. The city's large school district is populated by a disproportionate number of students of color—African Americans, Latino Americans, and immigrants with limited English proficiency—and a high percentage of low-income students.

The school district had a reputation for dismal student academic achievement, high dropout and low graduation rates, and high teacher and administrator attrition rates. In 1999, UTEP's university re-evaluated and reversed its attitude toward the community. With the leadership of the Interim Chancellor, Provost, and SOE Dean, an "Urban Mission Task Force" was established with several committees that included the "Community Education" committee that conceptualized UTEP as an interdisciplinary, collaborative, partnership-based program.

In 2002, the SOE Dean issued a powerful statement:

... the School of Education will work together with the urban community to eliminate the achievement gap between Black and White, poor and affluent, urban and suburban.

In keeping with this statement, we believe that the recruitment, preparation, and retention of diverse and highly competent teachers is the most formidable weapon for eliminating the impoverished academic achievement realities of diverse urban students.

### Documenting Our Story

Given the goal of this article—to ex-

amine and assess our institution's urban-focused teacher education program relative to recruitment, preparation, and retention of diverse teacher candidates—our evaluation has employed a qualitative research methodology that is descriptive, historical, and reflective.

First, we are teacher educators who have been intimately and actively involved in the conception, design, and implementation of UTEP for the past nine years. We have drawn on our historical memory, archival documents, student reflections, and researchers' field notes and reflections. In what follows we provide a description of the various facets of the program and our assessment of the impact.

### Cohort Model

UTEP is a cohort-based program aimed at fostering a professional learning community that recruits mostly teacher candidates of color and those with urban life experiences (Haberman, 2005b). It enrolled its first cohort in 2005 and, to date, has graduated four cohorts of teachers. UTEP candidates are full-time students supported by financial assistance, including tuition, housing, and the cost of books.

During their first year in the program, students take the same classes and thus develop professional relationships with and among the group. Cohort students are provided support and given opportunities to create a social network (Bennett, 2002; Carter, 2006; Izizarry, 2007; Nicpon et al., 2006; Shom, 2006; Villegas & Davis, 2007) through such activities as bowling nights, celebrations, and study groups. These relationships have proven to be sustainable even after program completion.

### Recruitment and Admission

UTEP's primary goal is to recruit, retain, and prepare highly competent diverse individuals, especially those of color, to serve as teachers in the community's urban schools. Our university is a predominantly White institution (PWI); students of color do not typically self-select PWIs, even more so when those institutions have a reputation of being unwelcoming to students of color, as was the case with our campus (Harper, 2006).

Therefore, we knew we needed to be focused and strategic in our recruitment efforts and our admissions process (Eubanks & Weaver, 1999; Irizarry, 2007; Landis, Ferguson, Carballal, Kuhlman, & Squires, 2007; Villegas & Davis, 2007).

**Recruitment.** Over the past eight

recruitment cycles, we have targeted candidates of color, first-generation college students, candidates with urban school experiences, candidates with a professed desire to teach in urban communities, candidates living in urban communities, and those with experiences working with diverse populations of children (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007; Haberman, 2005a, 2005b; Ryan & Alcock, 2002; Tredway, 1999; Weiner, 2000).

To this end, we have employed deliberate recruitment strategies that include building close and trusting collaboration with local school districts and community agencies and utilizing future teacher clubs, faith-based organizations, community agencies, college and career counselors, teachers, and cadet teaching programs. In addition, we are diligent in keeping current with recruitment materials that showcase the achievements of our candidates of color, the strengths of the program, and anecdotes provided by program completers.

Once identified, potential applicants are contacted on numerous occasions and assistance is offered to applicants and their families when completing the application for admission to the university, financial aid forms, and during all other phases of the application process (Clark et al., 2006).

**Admission Process.** UTEP utilizes multiple ways of candidate selection and a non-traditional admissions process that ensures student persistence and success once in college (Shom, 2006). The admission process is rigorous, multi-faceted, and considers not just the candidate's academic potential, but also the social and cultural capital they bring and their disposition toward diversity and teaching in urban schools.

The admission process includes:

1. An application to UTEP including written responses to a number of questions regarding the applicant's interest in teaching in urban schools.
2. An academic index composed of test scores, a transcript review, and class rank.
3. A writing sample that is evaluated for both content and proficiency.
4. Letters of recommendation from individuals who can speak to the applicant's potential for teaching in urban schools.
5. A video response to the prompts, "Why do you want to be a teacher?" "Why do you want to be a teacher in an urban school?" and "What do you think makes a good teacher?"
6. A two-phase interview process that includes the Haberman Star Teacher Selection Interview (Haberman Founda-

tion, 1994). The Star Teacher Selection Interview was designed to predict Star (successful) teachers for urban schools through screening for seven beliefs or characteristics held by successful urban teachers (Haberman, 2005b).

Admissions decisions are determined collectively by UTEP faculty. Each application is reviewed individually and decisions are informed by the six components listed above with extra consideration given to candidates who are students of color, first-generation college students, male, and/or graduates of urban school districts. UTEP admits 12-18 students per year; currently there are 60 students in UTEP, 22% of these students are males and 17% are males of color; 62 % of all current students are students of color.

### **Creative Partnerships and Collaboration**

**Partnership with A&S.** Given UTEP's collaborative premise and the SOE Dean's leadership, we forged a collaborative relationship with our colleagues in A&S. Recognizing the critical role the College plays in the development of teachers, A&S faculty in content areas of mathematics, English, communications, history, and the sciences were involved in the original curriculum design of UTEP.

This partnership fostered a strong content component as well as broadening the conversation about urban education and teacher preparation. Colleagues in A&S are beginning to view themselves as "teacher educators" and have taken ownership of creating experiences that promote our ideals and goals. In many cases, UTEP students are enrolled in special sections of A&S courses which explore content through the lens of urban issues and/or teaching.

For example in one English composition course in which the students learn freshman English skills, they do so by reading and researching historical aspects of the racialization and segregation within our city. A second example is an integrated history and English course, demonstrating the value of curriculum integration and thematic teaching.

Additionally, many content courses are taken in alignment with teaching methods courses, allowing the students to see the immediate K-8 classroom application of content. Content and pedagogical courses of UTEP have been designed in alignment with national and state mathematics, science, and literacy standards for elementary and middle school teachers. This alignment removes many elective choices

for our secondary students, yet ensures that all students graduate with a standard of content knowledge and a familiarity with the state expectations for the grade levels they will teach.

Not only are our colleagues in A&S involved in the planning and implementation of curriculum, but they are also involved in programmatic aspects of UTEP. A&S faculty participate in the admissions process and interviews, are involved in student orientations, work with SOE in collaborative course scheduling to avoid scheduling conflicts between education courses and A&S courses, and attend community meetings and events in support of UTEP. The commitment of A&S faculty has been one of UTEP's enduring strengths.

**Partnership with Community.** UTEP was developed in consultation with the community, including civic and business leaders, political figures, school district partners, and university personnel. We have remained committed to partnerships with these key stakeholders and have established and maintained several working committees to assist us in achieving program goals. These formal partnerships include the Chancellor's National Advisory Board, the Partnership Consortium, and the Community Immersion Experience Planning Group.

The Advisory Board began as a group of 25 to 30 community stakeholders who helped envision and advocate for UTEP. Members included local school district officials, city and state level political leaders, business leaders, and leaders from community agencies such as the local chapter of NAACP and Urban League. After UTEP completed its first year, the community advisory board transitioned to a smaller board comprised of civic leaders and national scholars on urban education. The local membership meets bi-monthly and the national membership meets annually. The board serves primarily as an advocacy group on behalf of UTEP.

The Partnership Consortium is a working committee comprised of representatives from each of our three partner school districts (appointed by the respective Superintendents) and representatives from various campus offices including the SOE, A&S, Admissions, Public Relations, Financial Aid, and the Chancellor's Office. The Partnership Consortium meets approximately three times a year and serves as a space for communication and collaborative decision-making between all partners. Areas of focus for the Partnership Consortium include recruitment and ad-

missions, marketing, student support and mentorship, and graduate job placement.

The Community Immersion Experience Planning Group was born out of UTEP's commitment to develop community-minded and culturally relevant teachers. The Group was convened specifically to help design a unique community immersion experience for all UTEP students. Several members of the Group continue to be an integral part of the implementation and evaluation of the Summer Community Immersion Experience.

#### **Retention:**

##### **Student Support and Mentorship**

Students of color at PWIs often experience alienation and isolation, classroom challenges including stereotyping from peers and faculty, low persistence rates, racism, and low involvement in campus activities and organizations (Davis et al., 2004; Foster, 2003; Harper, 2006). Therefore, we have worked diligently in establishing environments conducive to learning for all students (Carter, 2006; Castillo et al., 2006; Harper, 2006; Shom 2006; Sleeter & Thao, 2007).

To assist students in making a smooth transition from high school to college, achieve academic success, and understand code switching that occurs when transitioning from urban student to education professional, UTEP offers multiple layers of support. Support structures that have proven most successful for our students include utilizing a cohort model, maintaining high expectations, and creating close interaction with faculty (Waddell, in press).

**High Expectations.** UTEP is a rigorous program with high standards and equally high expectations for student performance. UTEP students must maintain a cumulative grade-point average of 3.0 and adhere to professional dispositions as outlined in the UTEP Fitness to Teach policy (Desjean-Perrotta, 2006).

At the start of every semester, students participate in orientations that socialize them to the expectations of the program and explain the program's philosophical underpinnings. Multiple approaches are used to ensure student academic and personal success. For instance, faculty regularly facilitate group and individual advising sessions and conduct midterm conferences. Our academic and professional expectations are regularly communicated to students, instructors, and school district partners.

Students, instructors, and mentor teachers all work together to help guide

students and monitor their success. If necessary, students are placed on contracts to help them monitor their own progress toward the standards of the program. One student's comment illuminates the impact of these high expectations:

I like the high expectations because it has helped me organize my time, my job and school activities and it has also made me become more professional and understand the importance of being professional inside our classes and outside. My personal experience has been excellent. It has been a challenge for me, and I believe that I have been successfully completing this challenge. My GPA has increased dramatically and I know it's because of this program. (Waddell, in-press)

**Close Interaction with Faculty.** As an extension of the cohort model students experience close interactions with faculty throughout the four-year program. Just as we are committed to preparing exemplary teachers for our urban schools, we are committed to modeling the importance of relationships and close support. Providing close interaction with faculty is possible do to such factors as the intentional program design, the careful selection of faculty, and the faculty's commitment to urban education (Waddell, in-press; Wood & Lewis, 2010).

All faculty members within UTEP have recent or current experience teaching and working in urban schools and have chosen to work with a program dedicated to social justice and educational equity. Many UTEP faculty members are faculty of color. It is not uncommon for faculty and students to develop professional bonds based on their own life experiences and a shared commitment to social justice.

Members of our first cohort, who are now fourth-year teachers, maintain regular contact with faculty through ongoing mentorship and collaboration. As one program graduate reflected on her UTEP experience, "the consistency and support from professors [was most beneficial], they were our mentors; we really came to trust the experience of our professors." UTEP support strategies and program structures are affirmed by Tinto's work (2000, 2005), demonstrating that maintaining high expectations, providing faculty support, and offering productive learning communities can increase the likelihood of college retention and success for all students.

##### **Curriculum**

Given UTEP's mission, we seek to prepare exemplary teachers who will be

effective agents of change in urban schools. To be effective in urban schools,

... teachers need to know the meaning of culture, the impact of culture on learning and schooling...the nature of ethnic, racial, and urban cultures different from their own, and the role of culture in patterns of socialization, interaction, and communication. (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p. 28)

Therefore, the UTEP curriculum is conceptualized upon the principles and practices of social justice and multicultural pedagogy. The program is guided by a socio-constructivist framework with a focus on knowledge as a social construction (Dewey, 1938; Vygotsky, 1978). This sociocultural and political epistemology unfolds as teacher candidates come to understand the cultural and sociopolitical context of urban schooling (Gay, 2000, 2010; Nieto, 1999).

Employing a social justice stance, students are exposed to the realities of urban schools and society and are encouraged to question their own reality as they adapt their understandings through their program experiences (Noddings, 1990; von Glasersfeld, 1990). The curriculum is connected through curricular themes and program innovations, offering consistency and reinforcement of program goals throughout the four years. Curricular themes and program innovations include partnership with A&S, an emphasis on diversity and social justice, multicultural education, an Urban Education Seminar, and a community immersion experience.

**Diversity and Social Justice.** Because we recognize that teacher education needs to focus on the preparation of socially conscious educators as well as "provide opportunities for preservice teachers to engage in in-depth exploration of issues and practices of equity/inequity, responsive and equitable curricular and pedagogical practice, helping preservice teachers develop habits of critical reflection and questioning about access, equity, and social justice" (Ukpokodu, 2007, p. 12), diversity and social justice are at the forefront of UTEP's program.

Through seminar and pedagogical courses, students explore the political and social context of teaching. Curricular themes and program innovations allow multiple and coherent opportunities for UTEP students to develop as socially conscious and action-oriented educators. One student, upon graduation, stated, "UTEP has helped me develop into a more critically thinking person who is never afraid to fight for what is best for my students." In addition to a theme of social

justice, UTEP curriculum also focuses on the enactment of multicultural and culturally relevant teaching.

**Multicultural Education.** Throughout the program candidates are provided opportunities to explore their own culture, urban communities, and the cultures of their students, thus making exposure and understanding diversity central to the curriculum. The curriculum combines aspects of cultural awareness, exploring cultural identities, and culturally relevant teaching practices.

Through courses taught in urban school classrooms, students are able to see the immediate application of culturally relevant and responsive teaching and learn how to make pedagogical modifications that address the cultures present in the classroom in order to make content meaningful to students. Program courses are carefully sequenced to build upon prior learning and experiences that focus on teaching in diverse settings.

In addition to the multicultural perspectives infused in all methods courses, specific required courses include Introduction to Urban Education, Seminar in Social Justice, Cultural Diversity and American Education, Introduction to Urban Teaching, Understanding School Communities, Summer Community Immersion Experience, Working with Families and Communities, and Culturally Responsive Strategies for Teaching Diverse Learners.

UTEP graduates appreciate the curricular experiences they have had that allow them to look at education, curriculum, and teaching through a culturally responsive and social justice lens. Specifically, they have appreciated UTEP's emphasis on understanding students, communities, and families. Consider these comments:

I have grown as a preservice teacher and as a person. Having courses that focus on social justice and multicultural education has really impacted my thinking and approach to teaching.

I understand the importance of building relationships with students and families and understanding different cultures, languages and diversity. I also know the importance of not having a Euro-centric view of teaching.

We really learned about understanding the background of students. Learning about students and families prepared me for the reality of teaching in urban schools. Now [as a teacher], I get offended when [fellow] teachers don't view parents and their students as having value.

**Urban Education Seminar.** Aligned with field experiences is a seminar course which allows students to work closely with faculty exploring the political and social context of teaching. The Urban Education Seminar meets bi-weekly for two hours and serves as a tool for learning and offers an opportunity for engagement in authentic dialogue. The seminar also complements the curriculum in challenging candidates to critically reflect about themselves, about issues of diversity and social justice, and about teaching in urban schools. Over the course of the eight semesters of seminars, seminar topics include issues of power and privilege, racial identity, educational equity, social justice, diversity, and culturally responsive pedagogy.

A second component of the Urban Education Seminar involves providing a space for students to receive support and guidance in understanding professional dispositions and the social norms associated with teaching. This is intended as a safe environment for students to share their questions, concerns, and challenges they face in transitioning first from a high school student to a college student and then from a college student to a professional educator.

The Urban Education Seminar is a critical component of the curriculum and the UTEP support system. One student commented,

Our [bi-weekly] mentorship meetings have been really helpful, allowing us time to vent about our classes and receive advice and counseling for the future semester. It shows us that someone cares if we succeed or not.

Other comments from students highlight the content of a seminar and the impact of the seminar topics and structure:

I really enjoyed the way [this seminar] was run; it created a safe and responsible environment. I am not a person who openly talks about race with anyone, but this course opened my eyes and has got me thinking about why I don't feel comfortable and has helped me with that aspect of my identity.

I learned from my group members because we were given opportunity to voice opinions. I learned that I need to continually self-assess. This course made me grow as a person and as an educator.

**Community Immersion.** An innovative aspect of the UTEP curriculum is the community immersion experience. Because we believe that teachers should "see self [themselves] as part of the community"

(Ladson-Billings (2009), we designed a unique community experience with that goal in mind. Developed in partnership with community stakeholders, the summer community immersion experience is an eight-week summer intensive course in which UTEP students are immersed in the urban community.

The majority of the class experiences occur out in the community. Students spend three or four days per week immersed in experiential learning and reflection on the complexity of the urban community. Within the course, students gain experience interacting with other cultures and are provided access to community resources not typically available to teachers and families. The goals of the summer experience are three-fold:

1. To deepen the candidate's understanding of self;
2. To expand the candidate's understanding of others, including the experiences of the families and students they will teach; and
3. To gain a broader understanding of the community's influence and resources for children and families. (Waddell, 2011)

Within the eight-week immersion, candidates are involved in four types of experiences: course activities, community excursions, service learning, and facilitated reflection and dialogue. During a typical week course activities might include watching documentaries and discussing assigned readings on community issues such as urban living, hegemony, the school to prison pipeline (NAACP, 2005), and community support systems.

Community excursions include field trips to community agencies, neighborhood walks, and simulations within the urban context. Each candidate is also involved in a service learning opportunity in which they spend five-to-10 hours per week working in and learning about a community agency. Finally, experiences are debriefed through careful reflection and knowledge is constructed through discussions facilitated by course instructors (Waddell, 2011).

The community immersion experience is one example of our focus on carefully designed field experiences and the critical alignment of clinical experiences and course work.

#### **Extended Field Experiences**

Gay (2004) states that "field experiences should be based on an immersion mode of learning that should start from the time students first declare an interest in

teacher education and extend throughout the duration of the preparation programs” (p. 87). UTEP students begin working in urban schools during the first semester of their freshman year and are involved with field experiences each semester of the program.

These experiences are coupled with coursework that allows the teacher candidate to “move abstract learning into practical experiences” (Gay, 2004, p. 85). Through the first three years of the program students experience an increased immersion in urban schools and urban communities. During the final year of the program, all students participate in a carefully designed year-long internship.

**Urban School Immersion.** Beginning with the first semester in the program our students are involved in field experiences within our urban partner schools. During the freshman year the students spend three-to-five hours per week in the schools. During the sophomore year the field work increases to one full day a week, allowing students to experience all of the intricacies of a full school day. During the junior year teaching methods courses are delivered in urban schools following Hollins’ (2011) practice-based model of learning to teach.

In this model students participate in focused inquiry about teaching, a directed observation in which they observe particular aspects of teaching, and a guided practice in which they enact practice under supervision of faculty and/or master teachers. During the junior year the candidates are also involved in a full-day internship each week. The final year of the program provides an opportunity for candidates to experience a full-year internship.

**Year-long Internship.** The internship assures that candidates experience a full year of working with the same school community, the same cooperating teacher, and the same students. This allows the candidates to enact and apply their knowledge of social justice and culturally relevant teaching in a “real world” setting. During the internship the candidates follow the same calendar as the contracted teachers. They begin the day that teachers return from summer break, they return from winter break when contracted teachers are expected to return, and they work until the close of the semester. Candidates are assessed throughout the year on the impact they have on student growth and development. This assessment includes student achievement, student attitudes,

and family involvement, as well as the candidate’s development as a teacher.

The internship year is designed to provide candidates with an experience that is as similar as possible to that of a first-year teacher. This experience serves as an important backdrop, since we then continue working with our candidates after they graduate and on throughout their induction years as teachers.

### **Induction Program**

Significant learning about the profession happens in the first few years of teaching. Therefore, we work in collaboration with school districts in providing a structured induction program for our graduates. UTEP’s New Teacher Assistance Program (NTAP) was originally designed to offer mentoring and professional development support to our graduates during their first two years of teaching. The induction program was funded through a local foundation and provided experienced mentors to work with each new teacher two-to-three hours a week. The mentors provide support in instruction, relationship building, classroom management, and the transition to the “real world” of district mandates, school culture, and urban school bureaucracy.

During our first cohort’s second year of teaching we added a monthly meeting component to the weekly mentoring support structure. These meetings served as an opportunity for graduates to revisit our mission and philosophy, share ideas for effective teaching, and reconnect with their cohort and fellow UTEP alumni. What we quickly discovered was how the meetings became a professional learning community involving perspective-sharing and emotional support for the teachers as they learned how to navigate challenging school cultures and mandated curricula.

During a session, one graduate wrote,

This week has been very rough at work. I almost did not come tonight. However, I am very happy that I chose to attend. Talking to other UTEP teachers, helps remind me why I teach.

Currently we have four cohorts of UTEP graduates working in our partner schools. The NTAP, originally intended as new teacher support during the first two years of teaching, has become a staple for many of our graduates beyond their second year of teaching. Some of our most loyal participants are our fourth-year teachers who regard the meetings as their monthly reminder of what it means to be a teacher

for social justice. In comments from the monthly meetings, graduates report on the ways in which NTAP has impacted their teaching and resiliency:

[Tonight’s meeting] helped me reflect on who I have become as a teacher... I just hope that these meetings continue. I really enjoy them and they keep me motivated! I like being able to talk to my peers and get new ideas. I think that is the best and most meaningful time. I also appreciate the encouraging words I receive. It helps me remember why I became a teacher.

### **Assessing Impact What We Have Learned**

The vision and mission of UTEP is to recruit, prepare, and retain diverse individuals for urban school settings. More importantly it aims to prepare exemplary educators who are agents of social change. The program partners with the urban community to prepare outstanding teachers for its schools—teachers who have a positive inclination and disposition toward teaching in urban schools.

In addition to these aims UTEP was conceived as a response to the call to be responsive to the urban community in which UTEP’s institution is situated. Specifically, UTEP was designed to help meet the needs of urban schools. As we reflect on the past nine years of UTEP’s existence, what have we learned? More importantly, to what extent have we realized our mission goals?

We answer these questions by identifying four broad areas of success: the increased diversity of program candidates and graduates, the success of our graduates, the expanded collaboration with school districts and A&S, and our journey to becoming a successful national model for urban teacher education.

### **Increased Diversity of Program Candidates**

We have been deliberate and intentional in our recruitment efforts that target candidates of color, first-generation college students, candidates with urban school experiences, candidates with a professed desire to teach in urban communities, candidates living in urban communities, and those with experiences working with diverse populations of children. We have also been deliberate in retaining our students and supporting graduates.

Of UTEP’s current students, 62% are students of color, including 22% males and 17% males of color. Of UTEP graduates, 49% are teachers of color with 12% of graduates being males. Our students

and graduates represent a diverse pool of teachers and teacher candidates—current students and graduates include Black, White, Latino, and Asian individuals

### Indicators of Graduate Success

Since commencing in 2005, four UTEP cohorts with a total of 51 students have successfully graduated. Given the fact that cohort candidates receive financial support during their program and the need to ensure program quality, yearly admissions are restricted and range between 12 and 18. Of our graduates, 94% in the first three cohorts obtained teaching positions, while 88% have remained teaching in urban schools. Of the 2012 graduates, 83% have already been offered positions in urban partner school districts.

Using Haberman's Teacher Selection Interview, we have seen a score increase of 12.6 points on a 45-point scale when comparing entrance and exit scores. Throughout this article we have shared students' comments that attest to UTEP's quality program. In addition, this comment is worth highlighting:

The support—college or teaching can be a challenging thing but when it comes to UTEP that is never something you go through alone. I completely believe it would be impossible to find this support anywhere else. I have seen UTEP stick with people time and time again simply because they believe that they were born "to teach." UTEP is my family and always will be; how many collegiate programs can you say that about?

In 2011, one UTEP graduate was named a school's "teacher of the year" and was eligible to compete for the district's teacher of the year.

### Successful Collaboration with Partner School Districts

In 2005 when UTEP began, three partner urban school districts were engaged. Today our SOE has forged partnerships exclusively with nine urban school districts and UTEP has added metropolitan area charter schools to our partnership. All of these districts compete for UTEP's graduates and most, if not all, are hired by them.

These districts also provide opportunities for field experiences for UTEP's teacher candidates. We continue to work with the schools and teachers within these districts so that they embrace and are committed to UTEP's conceptual framework and its focus on culturally responsive and social justice pedagogy.

### Successful Collaboration with A&S Faculty

The collaboration with A&S has contributed tremendously to the strength and sustainability of UTEP. Given their active involvement in UTEP, A&S faculty have become more aware of the need for high quality teaching for education students.

Many of the A&S faculty have commented that they now consider themselves teacher educators and that UTEP has provided them an opportunity to enhance their courses and programs. We are certain that UTEP students are receiving high quality liberal education that fosters their pedagogical knowledge base.

### National Model

In 2004 when UTEP was first being conceptualized the vision was that it would eventually be nationally recognized for recruiting and preparing exemplary educators for urban schools. Today UTEP has gained such national recognition and stature.

First, it has become the leverage for acquiring SOE's Teacher Quality Partnership Grant from the U.S. Department of Education. This grant has provided opportunities for program innovation that has impacted the quality of all programs in SOE and facilitated the establishment of Professional Development Schools with urban school districts. Second, UTEP has become a national model that attracts visitors interested in learning about the program.

### Conclusion

Researchers contend that the cultural and demographic gap between teachers and students in U.S. schools is a serious problem demanding concerted and collective action if we are to improve the academic achievement of diverse urban students. At this time the continued dismal academic achievement of students of color and low income students remains disturbing and morally unacceptable in a nation that is premised on ideals of democracy, diversity, and social justice.

The call to diversify the teaching force to more appropriately reflect these changing demographics (Duncan, 2009; National Collaborative Taskforce on Diversity, 2004; Villegas & Davis, 2007) demands a bold and urgent response. In this article we have described and evaluated one institution's innovative effort to not only recruit, prepare, and retain diverse teacher candidates but also to ensure their success, competence, and retention as teachers in urban schools.

Today's educational realities demand that institutional approaches to the education of an increasingly diverse urban student populations must be innovative, strategic, and collaborative. Universities and colleges that prepare teachers and leaders can no longer afford to do business as usual—can no longer function in isolation and remain unresponsive to the needs of their communities.

UTEP's institution's unequivocal commitment to serve the urban community and its success in recruiting, preparing, and retaining diverse teacher candidates is ground breaking and a national model worth disseminating. The institution's commitment to create an "interdisciplinary campus institute" and the collective, collaborative, partnership-based model that it utilizes transcends traditional approaches to teacher education.

UTEP's 88% retention rate of graduates teaching in urban school communities provides hope and reassurance that urban students will have dedicated and highly competent teachers in their classrooms and that UTEP will be able to continue to supply these urban-prepared teachers for the community's school districts.

UTEP's institutional commitment to respond boldly and innovatively to the educational needs of its community, and its success in doing so, provides a narrative worth sharing as part of the growing discourse on addressing the demographic gap in the teacher workforce.

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