

# Doctoral Programs in Developmental Education: Interview with Three Leaders

By Marla Kincaid

---

*[Working professionals] have the added advantage to immediately practice what they are learning in the program.*

---

Marla Kincaid  
Adjunct Instructor, Austin Community College  
M.A., Developmental Education  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
Texas State University-San Marcos  
601 University Drive  
San Marcos, TX 78666-4684  
marla.kincaid@austin.rr.com



*Dr. Olatunde Ogunyemi is Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership at Grambling State University in Grambling, Louisiana. He also serves as the Director of the Educational Resource Center and Assistant to the Dean in the College*

*of Education at Grambling State. Prior to this he served as Assistant Professor at Wayne State University in Detroit Michigan.*



*Dr. D. Patrick Saxon is Associate Professor and Director of the Doctoral Program in Developmental Education Administration at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas. For more than 20 years he managed the*

*research activities and finances of the National Center for Developmental Education and continues to serve as the editor of Research in Developmental Education. He currently serves as Treasurer for the National Association for Developmental Education.*



*Dr. Eric J. Paulson is Professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction and coordinator of the Doctoral Program in Developmental Education at Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas. He is the current*

*Editor of the Journal of College Reading and Learning. Prior to this he served as both the Director of Graduate Studies for the School of Education and the Coordinator for the Graduate Certificate in Post Secondary Literacy Instruction at the University of Cincinnati.*

## Grambling State University

### Dr. Olatunde Ogunyemi

Grambling State University, in Grambling, Louisiana, offers a 66-hour Ed.D. program in Developmental Education in the Educational Leadership Department. Areas of concentration include Curriculum and Instructional Design, Higher Education Administration and Management, and Student Development and Personnel Services. Dr. Ogunyemi is head of the Ed.D. program in Developmental Education at Grambling State University.

**Marla Kincaid (M.K.):** The Louisiana Board of Regents approved the nation's first Ed.D. program in Developmental Education (DE) in 1986 at Grambling State University. Can you share some of the history of your program?

**Olatunde Ogunyemi (O.O.):** In 1982, the College of Education at Grambling State University (GSU) began to recognize the need to have professionals with specialized credentials to work with the large population of students underprepared to enter the nation's postsecondary institutions.

As a result, a needs assessment was conducted, consultants in the field were contacted, and a proposal was sent to the Board of Regents for the State of Louisiana requesting approval to offer the Master's Degree in DE with four options: Reading, English, Mathematics, and Guidance and Counseling. By 1983, the Master of Science Degree in DE was implemented; by 1984, the Specialist Degree was offered; and, by 1986, the Doctor of Education Degree (Ed.D.) began.

**M.K.:** Please describe the unique aspects of your program.

**O.O.:** The program prepares researchers, practitioners, and leaders for postsecondary education, business, industry, government, and human service agencies. Developmental educators work both in the traditional classroom and in the workplace, using a variety of skills, including counseling, administration, management, and instructional design and training to help the nontraditional learner. We offer a graduate degree program to meet the needs of students taking advantage of

full-time study as well as practicing professionals needing more flexible part-time enrollment.

**M.K.:** Does your program offer courses through distance education?

**O.O.:** Yes, we offer several courses online and have been approved by our Board of Regents to deliver the entire program completely online. We recognize that many students—especially those professionals currently working in the field—are not able to enroll in graduate programs in the traditional face-to-face and full-time formats; therefore, we are redesigning the program to meet their needs. We do so without disrupting their work, and they have the added advantage to immediately practice what they are learning in the program.

**M.K.:** Please describe the type of students your program is seeking.

**O.O.:** We seek community college faculty, university faculty, learning center administrators, and other professionals dedicated to the success of students enrolled in developmental courses and programs. We also seek individuals who are interested in assisting the underprepared students to successfully complete their higher education experiences.

**M.K.:** What are some of the distinctive qualifications of your program's faculty members?

**O.O.:** We have highly trained faculty members with years of experience in curriculum and instructional design, instructional technology, learning center administration, higher education administration, and counseling and student affairs. Additionally they publish extensively in professional refereed journals, and some also serve as editors or as editorial board members. Our faculty members also engage in competitive grantsmanship, and many have held leadership positions in national and state professional organizations.

**M.K.:** Two urgent needs for our nation include (a) a critical need for more citizens with graduate degrees to meet the changing workforce requirements (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010) and (b) ways to support an ever increasing number of high school graduates underprepared for higher education (ACT, 2012; College Board, 2012). How do you see your institution's doctoral degree specifically addressing each of these issues?

**O.O.:** We recognize the need to produce more graduates to meet the needs of the changing workforce requirements; therefore, we endeavor to train faculty members and administrators to assist developmental and nontraditional students

to stay in school until graduation. This increases the pool of graduates needed for the workforce.

Research has shown that even students with high ACT or SAT scores may have developmental needs. As such, we are producing highly qualified developmental educators to work both at the community college and university levels to help meet the needs of developmental learners and nontraditional students. The effort is to assist the students to persist through the first-year experience. Research has shown that persisting through first-year experience tends to increase graduation rates.

We offer courses that prepare developmental educators to develop effective programs to not only promote successfully completing the first year but also persisting to graduation.

**M.K.:** The U.S. population, estimated in the 2010 Census at 309 million, is becoming bigger, older, and more diverse (Congressional Research Service, 2011). How does your doctoral programs best pre-

---

### *A doctorate in the discipline of developmental education is unique.*

---

pare future educators to address the needs of the dynamic and diverse group of learners in college?

**O.O.:** One of the areas that the GSU program focuses on is the issue of nontraditional students. We realize that the traditional model of bricks and mortar does not specifically address the needs of this group of students. Hence we teach our students several methods of adequately serving the nontraditional students.

We also recognize that a majority of our students are professionals in the field of developmental education who work full time and mostly 12 months. Hence, they are unable to participate in regular classroom instruction. And, we endeavor to present the entire program online.

#### **Sam Houston State University Dr. D. Patrick Saxon**

Sam Houston State University (SHSU) in Huntsville, Texas, offers an Ed.D. in Developmental Education Administration. The program is in the Department of Educational Leadership and Counseling. This is a 60-hour program offered in an online format. Dr. Saxon is director of the Ed.D. program in Developmental Education at SHSU.

**Marla Kincaid (M.K.):** In summer of 2011, The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

(THECB) approved Sam Houston State University's application for a new doctoral program (Ed.D.) in developmental education administration. Can you share some history on the process it took to create the new doctoral program?

**Patrick Saxon (P.S.):** I was hired to direct the program after it was established and shortly after the first cohort was accepted, so I do not have firsthand experience on the process of its creation. I do know that the State of Texas has a long history of innovation in and support for developmental education. I consulted with my colleague, Dr. Sheila Joyner, who provided more detail on the process.

Dr. Joyner suggested that interest in developing our doctoral program originated with the THECB and the Texas State University System (TSUS) administration. SHSU was considered a natural fit for the program because of the strong reputation of its college of education. SHSU's Educational Leadership and Counseling (ELC) department already had in place a successful Ed.D. program in Educational Leadership. The TSUS administration approached the SHSU administration about developing a proposal for a new developmental education doctoral program. At that point the administration and faculty leaders in the ELC department went to work on the proposal.

Consultation began with national leaders in the field of developmental education and instructional technology specialists. A review of the literature for information about the field was conducted and existing doctoral programs in the discipline were studied as well. By the time these were completed, the proposal committee was convinced of the merit of such a program.

The approval process was protracted since it required two separate bodies to examine the proposal. Proposed program components such as curriculum, admissions, and recruitment processes required a typical graduate degree program approval. The proposed distance education delivery method required an additional approval from the THECB Distance Education Advisory Committee. Along the way, a nationally recognized consulting team offered advice for any changes needed prior to final program approval. Upon approval, the administration and faculty of SHSU's ELC department along with the Office of Graduate Studies set out to staff and market the program. Staffing is still a work in progress; we have hired another graduate faculty member with developmental education expertise effective by the summer of 2013.

**M.K.:** Please describe the unique aspects of your program.

**P.S.:** First and foremost, a doctorate in the discipline of developmental education is unique. There are only three of these programs in the nation and

two of them (including ours) were established in recent history.

A particular unique aspect of the SHSU program is that it is fully administered online. From application to graduation, everything involved in the program can be completed remotely, using technology. It enables access to this graduate degree opportunity from nearly anywhere in the world.

The nature of this online model lends itself to attracting a unique group of students. The fact that there is no physical residency requirement allows students who are simultaneously working, or for whatever reason cannot relocate to Texas, to engage in graduate study. Given that there are so few graduate programs in the discipline of developmental education, remote access expands the market and educational options for working professionals in the field of developmental education.

There are also other benefits of this distance education model that engages working professionals as its primary student candidates. A diverse group of students, many with a wealth of practical knowledge about developmental education, have already entered the program. They are familiar with current trends in the field, and they interact with the curriculum and content in an experiential fashion. This makes for dynamic learning situations with many opportunities to apply scholarship to practice in real-world situations.

**M.K.:** Why was it decided to offer your entire program through distance education?

**P.S.:** It is apparent that policy makers in Texas and administrators at SHSU wanted to support and expand innovation in graduate instruction through technology. But again, although I was not involved in the conceptual phases of the program, I suspect that somewhere along the way it was acknowledged that there is a need in this field to expand the graduate education market and enable working professionals to advance their careers through graduate education.

The State of Texas has contributed in many ways to the professionalization of the field of developmental education. With so few programs in the discipline, distance learning opportunities are a natural fit for expanding graduate education opportunities for the tens of thousands of professionals working in this field.

Generally, we are also seeing growth in confidence about online education. A recent survey conducted at Northeastern University found that about 7 of 10 respondents believe that an online degree will be as accepted as traditional degrees by employers in the near future (*InsideHigherEd*, 2012). As two of the three programs in our discipline are primarily online, that is good news and

important to those who are considering a commitment to distance education.

**M.K.:** Please describe the type of students your program is seeking.

**P.S.:** We are looking for students who have a commitment to working in leadership positions in post-secondary developmental education. However with its leadership focus, this degree would facilitate the advancement of a career in many areas of higher education. Still, when we interview applicants, we indeed want to see a dedicated interest in serving underprepared and disadvantaged college students.

Students also need an understanding about the demands of participating in an online distance-learning program. Even though the technology needed to participate in the program is rather common, occasionally there will be technical challenges that must be overcome.

---

### *The field has a deep-seated history of serving diverse student populations.*

---

Although in many cases students will work independently, they need to possess the drive to engage with instructors and classmates to build working relationships. These relationships are developed over time among the cohort and with faculty advisors. Students should not assume that because the program is fully online that it is managed as an independent study.

**M.K.:** What are some of the distinctive qualifications of your program's faculty members?

**P.S.:** We have nationally recognized scholars in the areas of developmental education, higher education leadership, statistics, and research methods. As mentioned, there are plans to add to the ranks of our developmental education graduate faculty in the near future as well.

The leadership here in the SHSU ELC department seems to have struck an optimal balance of focus on teaching and research. It is apparent to me that the faculty shares a strong commitment to working with students. Perhaps an easily assumed criticism of online programs is that they may lack a strong element of student-faculty interaction. I can assure you that our faculty are mindful of the attention and guidance that students need to become scholars and colleagues in this discipline. And they work diligently with students to ensure that those needs are addressed.

**M.K.:** Two urgent needs for our nation include (a) a critical need for more citizens with graduate degrees to meet the changing workforce requirements (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010) and (b) ways to support an ever increasing number of high school graduates underprepared for higher education (ACT, 2012; College Board, 2012). How do you see your institution's doctoral degree specifically addressing each of these issues?

**P.S.:** We indeed directly address the first noted need as our program will produce graduates with a terminal degree prepared for leadership positions in higher education. Graduates of our program will be among the most knowledgeable in the field with regard to research, program models, and best practices in serving underprepared students. They will know how to develop and lead comprehensive, effective programs that assist students in reaching and succeeding at college-level studies.

All too often in this field we have well-meaning state, college, and other institutional leaders making decisions about developmental education without an adequate level of experience or knowledge base about effective practice in working with underprepared college students. Unfortunately that sometimes leads to broad sweeping, one-size-fits-all policy approaches pitched as solutions. The professionals who are now committing to graduate education in the discipline of developmental education will know better. They will emerge as scholars and opinion leaders who will make a difference in the way we go about preparing students to succeed in college.

**M.K.:** The U.S. population, estimated in the 2010 Census at 309 million, is becoming bigger, older and more diverse (Congressional Research Service, 2011). How will your doctoral program best prepare future educators to address the needs of the dynamic and diverse group of learners in college?

**P.S.:** The dynamic characteristics of the student population in developmental education are well documented. The field has a deep-seated history of serving diverse student populations. In our graduate program, students will be working with leading scholars in the field. They will be informed by the research literature and study best practices for working with developmental students. They will prepare themselves as the nation's intellectuals by researching, studying, teaching, and thinking about how best to serve our dynamic and diverse student population. Over time, as they rise to the ranks of leadership in their respective professions, they will become the advocates and architects of quality instruction and programs needed to develop the talents of the most disadvantaged students.

# Graduate Program in Developmental Education

## **Ph.D. in Developmental Education**

### **Ed.D. in Developmental Education**

Applications for Fall 2014 due February 15

## **M.A. in Developmental Education**

Applications are reviewed each semester

## **Certificate in Developmental Education**

Applications are reviewed each semester

*With degree concentrations in Learning Support, Developmental Mathematics, and Developmental Literacy*

### **Graduate Program in Developmental Education Faculty include:**

Taylor Acee, Ph.D.

Steven Aragon, Ph.D.

David C. Caverly, Ph.D.

Russ Hodges, Ed.D.

Jodi Patrick Holschuh, Ph.D.

Rebecca Jackson, Ph.D.

Selina Vasquez Mireles, Ph.D.

Eric J. Paulson, Ph.D.

Emily Miller Payne, Ed.D.

Emily J. Summers, Ph.D.

Visit our website at <http://www.education.txstate.edu/ci/dev-ed/> to learn more about our programs.

Follow us on Twitter: @DevEdTxSt (or visit <http://www.twitter.com/DevEdTxSt>)

Or search for us on Facebook: Texas State University Graduate Program in Developmental Education

Call for more information: 512.245.6839



Texas State University-San Marcos is an equal educational institution. Texas State is a tobacco-free campus. Member The Texas State University System™

## Reference

Inside Higher Ed. (2012, November 28). *Americans support higher ed and online degrees, poll finds*. Retrieved from <http://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2012/11/28/americans-support-higher-ed-and-online-degrees-poll-finds>

### Texas State University-San Marcos Dr. Eric Paulson

Texas State University-San Marcos, under the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, offers two Doctoral degrees in Developmental Education: a Ph.D. and an Ed.D. The program includes specialization in Developmental Mathematics, Developmental Literacy, and Learning Support. Dr. Paulson is director of the Doctoral Program in Developmental Education at Texas State.

**Marla Kincaid (M.K.):** In summer of 2011, The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) approved Texas State University's application for two new doctoral degree's in developmental education (Ph.D. and Ed.D.). Can you share some history on the process it took to create these two new programs?

**Eric Paulson (E.P.):** Everything starts with the faculty, and my colleagues at Texas State

University—well-known experts in multiple areas within developmental education—saw the need for doctoral degrees in the field and worked toward that end for several years before the formal process even began. The approval process itself is a lengthy one and involves review and approval at departmental, college, and university levels before going up for review at the state level. We had two sets of external evaluators make site visits to evaluate the proposal, and both of those groups were enormously useful in helping us examine the direction of the proposal. Before any of that, however, faculty at Texas State realized the need for a doctoral degree in this area and conceptualized the degree in broad terms before crafting the proposal itself. It's fair to say that faculty had their sites set on this program for a decade before it was eventually approved: a long process, but one that allowed for critical examination of the need for, and direction of, doctoral work in this area.

**M.K.:** Please describe the unique aspects of your program.

**E.P.:** The perspective we hold on preparation of doctoral students is one of apprenticeship, and our approach is aligned with the recommendations of the National Council of Graduate Schools.

Students have a variety of mentor relationships as they progress through the program—including those with their advisor, dissertation chair, and research mentor—and they begin engaging in research activities in their first semester through shadowing an experienced faculty researcher. We build in the coauthoring of presentation proposals and journal articles with faculty and other students as part of the program's out-of-class experiences and include students in our scholarly and professional activities.

We also offer both an Ed.D. and a Ph.D., since we recognize that there are a number of ways that Texas State's doctoral program can move the field forward. One is in the need for the highest-level preparation for practitioners and leaders in community college departments that offer developmental education courses and initiatives. Likewise, those who are interested in impacting policy and administration of developmental education programs also benefit from this high level of preparation. These groups of students are most likely interested in our Ed.D., which focuses on issues germane to those career goals. The Ph.D. is geared toward those whose career focus includes theory generation and conducting basic and applied research in the field and who seek to become faculty in graduate schools, where they

will educate the next generation of developmental education masters and doctoral students. Both of these degrees share the same rigor, robustness, and faculty instruction.

**M.K.:** Does your program offer courses through distance education?

**E.P.:** In general we are proponents of distance education; in fact, our online Certificate in Developmental Education is approved and up and running. In our doctoral program, we will have some elective courses online, but we have deliberately chosen to work toward creating a vibrant community of doctoral student scholars in a face-to-face model of apprenticeship. This has a lot to do with our view that coursework is only one part of a doctoral experience, and the hallway conversations, group synergy, and potential for working with faculty and classmates on multiple projects is best realized if students are on campus. Likewise, the nature of doctoral education as one that carries with it a strong collaborative aspect with the student's advisor and other members of the scholarly community at Texas State also led us to adopt the face-to-face model for our doctoral program.

**M.K.:** Please describe the type of students your program is seeking.

**E.P.:** There is certainly no "prototypical" student that we have in mind. But we expect that those with experience in, and knowledge of, aspects of developmental education and who have burning questions about the field that they want to explore would find our doctoral program a good fit. Completing a doctoral program is no small undertaking, and students who are ready for doctoral work can usually see themselves as progressing toward what the Carnegie Foundation terms *stewardship of the discipline*: scholars who generate new knowledge, conserve that knowledge which is useful, and transform the field through their work.

**M.K.:** What are some of the distinctive qualifications of your program's faculty members?

**E.P.:** I think it is fair to say that our program faculty include some of the most active scholars in the developmental education field today. We have experts in developmental literacy (including developmental reading and basic writing), developmental mathematics, and learning support. Drs. Taylor Acee, Steven Aragon, Dave Caverly, Russ Hodges, Jodi Holschuh, Rebecca Jackson, Selina Vasquez-Mireles, Eric Paulson, and Emily Miller Payne are core faculty in the program who publish research in high-level journals and play key roles in most developmental education-related

organizations. Importantly, all of us are committed to the importance of doctoral education in the field and excited about working with our emerging researchers.

**M.K.:** Two urgent needs for our nation include (a) a critical need for more citizens with graduate degrees to meet the changing workforce requirements (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010) and (b) ways to support an ever increasing number of high school graduates underprepared for higher education (ACT, 2012; College Board, 2012). How do you see your institution's doctoral degree specifically addressing each of these issues?

**E.P.:** As you note, graduate study is important in general for a variety of reasons, and perhaps even specifically in developmental education. Although there continues to be a healthy amount of good research focused on developmental education, what has been missing is the tradition of research born

---

### *What has been missing [from the field] is the tradition of research born of graduate study.*

---

of graduate study. Consider just about any field—literacy, physics, psychology—there are numerous graduate programs that produce research through theses and dissertations on a regular basis, with faculty in those programs basing their research around those same disciplinary foci. That graduate study pipeline is not as prevalent in dev. ed. Because there historically have been few graduate degrees focused on dev ed as a field, there has not been a tradition of graduate student research in this area. One of the ways we hope to make an impact on the field is to foster this kind of research tradition.

This actually also has a lot to do with the second part of your question, about understanding students' needs in postsecondary educational contexts. There is an awareness among developmental educators that the reasons for student struggles in the postsecondary context are much more sophisticated than a cognitive deficit model would indicate. Instead, explanatory power lies in examination of differences and mismatches, including differences in discourse, language, expectations, goals, perspectives, identity, ways of being and doing, and more among and between students and academic institutions. Progress on student success is more than new classroom strategies, and the complexity of the issues demand the kind of research focus that is found in graduate programs.

**M.K.:** The U.S. population, estimated in the 2010 Census at 309 million, is becoming bigger, older and more diverse (Congressional Research Service, 2011). How will your doctoral programs best prepare future educators to address the needs of the dynamic and diverse group of learners in college?

**E.P.:** Texas State University was recently designated a Hispanic Serving Institution, and this designation serves as a good representation of the awareness of issues of diversity that our program holds. We view diversity as more than ethnicity, of course, since students placed into developmental education contexts have rich diversity of language, background, experiences, strengths, expectations, goals, and so on. Our program is focused on producing researchers that understand the complex diversity of students in colleges. Just understanding is not enough, though, which is why we also focus on preparing our students to work toward seeking pedagogical, policy, and higher education cultural change that supports such a diverse group.

Where we have work to do is in fulfilling the potential of developmental education to positively impact students' lives. This includes the efficacy of coursework and out-of-course support structures, certainly. But dev. ed. should be more than a set of courses or tutoring sessions: It should be a framework within which students are apprenticed into the discourse of the academy, are able to navigate its approach to learning, and can master its learning outcomes. Dev. ed. deals with the cognitive and the affective, but also the social and the cultural aspects of postsecondary educational contexts. So there is work to do, but it is good work.

### References

- American College Testing. (2012). *The condition of college & career readiness 2012*. Retrieved from [http://www.act.org/research-policy/college-career-readiness-report-2012/#.UHQ21Y7\\_Tao](http://www.act.org/research-policy/college-career-readiness-report-2012/#.UHQ21Y7_Tao)
- College Board. (2012). *The SAT report on college and career readiness 2012*. Retrieved from <http://media.collegeboard.com/homeOrg/content/pdf/sat-report-college-career-readiness-2012.pdf>
- Congressional Research Service. (2011). *The changing demographics profile of the United States*. (CRS Report RL 32701). Washington, DC: Author.
- U.S. Department of Labor. (2010). *Bureau of Labor Statistics. Occupational employment, job openings, and worker characteristics*. Retrieved from [http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep\\_table\\_107.htm](http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_table_107.htm)

