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Title III Grant Helping MSCC, ASU, UCA Students Start Careers

A \$2.5 million Department of Education Title III Strengthening Institutions grant to Mid-South Community College, Arkansas State University, and the University of Central Arkansas in 2007 is paying major dividends for the region.



The five-year award has helped numerous students in the area complete bachelor's degrees and land jobs in their chosen professions. In addition, the success of the collaborative program has generated sufficient enrollment in the bachelor's degree programs to sustain the offerings on the MSCC campus even when federal dollars cease to flow.

"Growing and Keeping Our Own in the Arkansas Delta: A Transfer Initiative" has focused on teacher education and addiction studies. MSCC tailored its Associate of Arts in Teaching degree with an Early Childhood Education emphasis (P-4) to articulate directly with ASU's baccalaureate program. Although ASU had provided P-4 courses in the past, it had not offered the entire degree program on the MSCC campus before the grant.

MSCC also added courses to its Associate of Arts curriculum that support seamless transfer to UCA's baccalaureate in Addiction Studies, a program which is the only one in the state that prepares individuals to work in substance abuse prevention and treatment facilities.

ASU and UCA have both dedicated full-time faculty members to the MSCC site to support local access to academic advising and support.

“ASU’s P-4 Education and UCA’s Addiction Studies programs anticipate continued enrollment that will allow them to be self-sufficient on our campus, and that was the goal when we started this initiative,” said Veronica Davis, MSCC Title III Project Director. “Each program has a sufficient number of students in their fall entering cohorts to remain viable, so MSCC will continue to host the upper division courses.”

“Over the course of the past five years, we have seen growth in both programs and anticipate this trend will continue for years to come. We look forward to a long-lasting relationship with ASU and UCA that will continue to enhance our college and community.”

Retention, completion, and employment have been major objectives of the collaborative effort, and numbers indicate that the goals are being accomplished.

The P-4 Education program has been particularly effective as nearly 50 students are either pursuing or completing degrees or are already working as teachers. All of the students in the first graduating class (2009-2010) landed teaching jobs after completing the program.

Graduates of ASU’s teaching program have been employed at Bragg Elementary, Richland Elementary, Marion Elementary, Hughes Elementary, Blytheville Middle, and the McCrory, Memphis, Searcy, Wilson, Forrest City, Brinkley, and Southaven, Miss., school districts.

“Over the course of this grant, 47 students have passed the Praxis exam which is a prerequisite to enrolling in the ASU program, so that basically means we have that many teachers at some point,” said Dr. Topeka Williams, MSCC Director of Institutional Effectiveness.

“By giving our students the opportunity to complete their degrees in West Memphis, we increase the likelihood that more of them will stay in the region to work in our schools. That’s extremely important to the future of Eastern Arkansas.”

Fifteen students in the MSCC/ASU partnership received degrees at the Mid-South Commencement in May.

UCA recognized its first four bachelor’s degree recipients last month, and more students are expected to complete their requirements in December. Program graduates are

expected to have no trouble finding work as educated/trained counselors are often the exception rather than rule in many communities.

MSCC, ASU, and UCA have been working together to deliver a diversified learning network that offers place- and time-bound students enhanced access to educational programming. The learning network has included a combination of face-to-face, online, hybrid, and compressed interactive classes.

Each institution provides online services to implement and supplement the curriculum effectively, improving access to both two-year and four-year degree programs as well as improving students' persistence and success. The partnership has allowed the grant participants to share resources, reduce costs, and serve more students.

Before applying for and receiving the grant, MSCC, ASU, and UCA actively sought information from other institutions, particularly those that had engaged in cooperative projects to maximize resources and improve academic success and transfer rates.

Title III programs are designed to help colleges and universities expand their capacity to serve financially-disadvantaged students. Federal funds may be used for planning, faculty development, endowment funds, administrative management, and the development and improvement of academic programs. Other eligible projects include joint use of instructional facilities, construction and maintenance, and student services.

For information about two- and four-year degree opportunities at MSCC, visit the campus at 2000 West Broadway in West Memphis, call (870) 733-6728, email admissions@midsouthcc.edu, or access the college's website at www.midsouthcc.edu.

Mid-South's fall semester is scheduled to begin on Aug. 20, and registration will be held on Monday, Aug. 6, 9 a.m.-12:30 p.m., and Tuesday, Aug. 7, 5 p.m.-6:30 p.m.