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## An Essay on an A&M-Texarkana Successful Baccalaureate Degree Distance Education Program

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Responding to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Boards' goal for greater access to higher education as well as the chronic problem of teacher shortages in Texas, Dr. Gene Mueller, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and Education at Texas A&M University-Texarkana, proposed offering two four year degree programs on the campus of Northeast Texas Community College (NTCC), a seventy to ninety minute drive west of Texarkana. The school districts in the counties served by NTCC (Camp, Titus, and Morris Counties) have difficulties retaining teachers, and were hoping that residents in Northeast Texas who are "place bound" would take advantage of a four degree program on the campus of NTCC.

Intending to enlist the broadest possible support for the Baccalaureate Degree programs to be offered, initial meetings were held with representatives from the faculties of both institutions (NTCC and A&M-Texarkana) and from four school districts (Mt. Pleasant, Daingerfield, Chapel Hill, and Pittsburgh). NTCC students were surveyed, and there was considerable interest in the Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies program that includes EC-4 teacher certification. At the same time, the school districts were especially interested in mathematics, due to a shortage of certified mathematics teachers. Consequently, it was agreed to pursue the possibility of offering both degree programs: BSIS: EC-4 and Mathematics (for teacher certification in grades 4-8 and 8-12).

The meetings extended over a period of six months, involving faculty representatives from NTCC and A&M-Texarkana. Faculty from Education, English, mathematics, and special education attended the meetings, as well as counselors from NTCC. Early on it was determined that a baccalaureate degree could be offered on the NTCC campus by utilizing face-to-face instruction and instruction utilizing the Trans-Texas Video Network. There was also discussion of some courses becoming, in time, web-based.

Once the faculty determined that a degree was logistically feasible, they came to an agreement on four year degree plans for the BSIS, Mathematics 4-8 and Mathematics 8-12 programs. There were some changes made; for example, ED 311 Human Growth and Development, was replaced with Psychology 2308 Child and Adolescent Development. The final degree plans were then taken to the A&M-Texarkana faculty for approval. The A&M-Texarkana approved the degree plans to be offered at NTCC and then the two institutions entered into a formal agreement September 1, 2001. The two institutions agreed that the administrative oversight for the program would "be provided by the Vice President for Academic Affairs at A&M-Texarkana with input from the Vice President for Instruction and Student Development at NTCC."

The formal signing of the agreement took place on the campus of NTCC on a beautiful day in September and over one-hundred interested students attended, as well as community leaders from the Mt. Pleasant area.

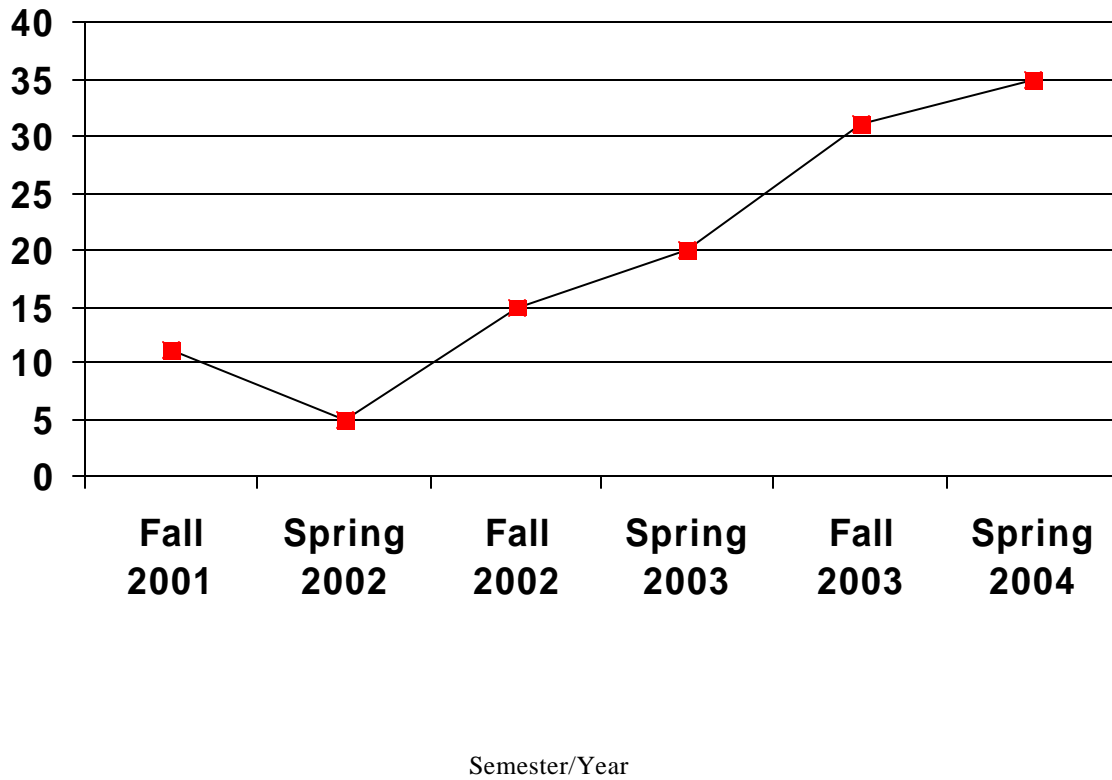
The initial success of the program, with well over one-hundred student inquiries, led A&M-Texarkana and NTCC to agree to a memorandum the following summer, wherein the two institutions would fund a Program Director on the NTCC campus. The Program Director would “be responsible for increasing the number of students entering A&M-Texarkana’s teacher preparation program and advising them concerning degree requirements.” Besides funding the position, the two institutions also agreed to provide \$7,000 annually for scholarships. This was a considerable boost to the program for it now had a full-time director to whom students could visit regarding the unique program on the NTCC campus.

Besides the obvious agreements and decisions regarding the curriculum, the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and Education also made certain that resources utilized on the main campus in Texarkana in the instructional program would also be made available at the NTCC site. Consequently, for example, videos, software, and graphic calculators were provided for instructional use at NTCC. In addition, the librarian at NTCC agreed to order several key education journals that were deemed necessary. Both libraries (NTCC and A&M-Texarkana) work together, providing students with adequate library resources, including journal articles.

An additional partner was added in 2001-2002, when the Mount Pleasant Independent School District allowed students in the program to observe in its Child Development Center. The Mt. Pleasant ISD Child Development Center is an excellent facility that works with three to five year olds, offering students enrolled in the BSIS EC-4 program at NTCC an opportunity to observe and work with the children in a school atmosphere. More partners were added in 21003-2004 when Chapel Hill ISD and Harts Bluff ISD signed contracts with A&M-Texarkana to be resident teacher sites. These Additional ISD partners were necessary because of the increased enrollment in the degree programs offered on the campus of NTCC.

The following graph illustrates enrollment growth in the BSIS EC-4 program:

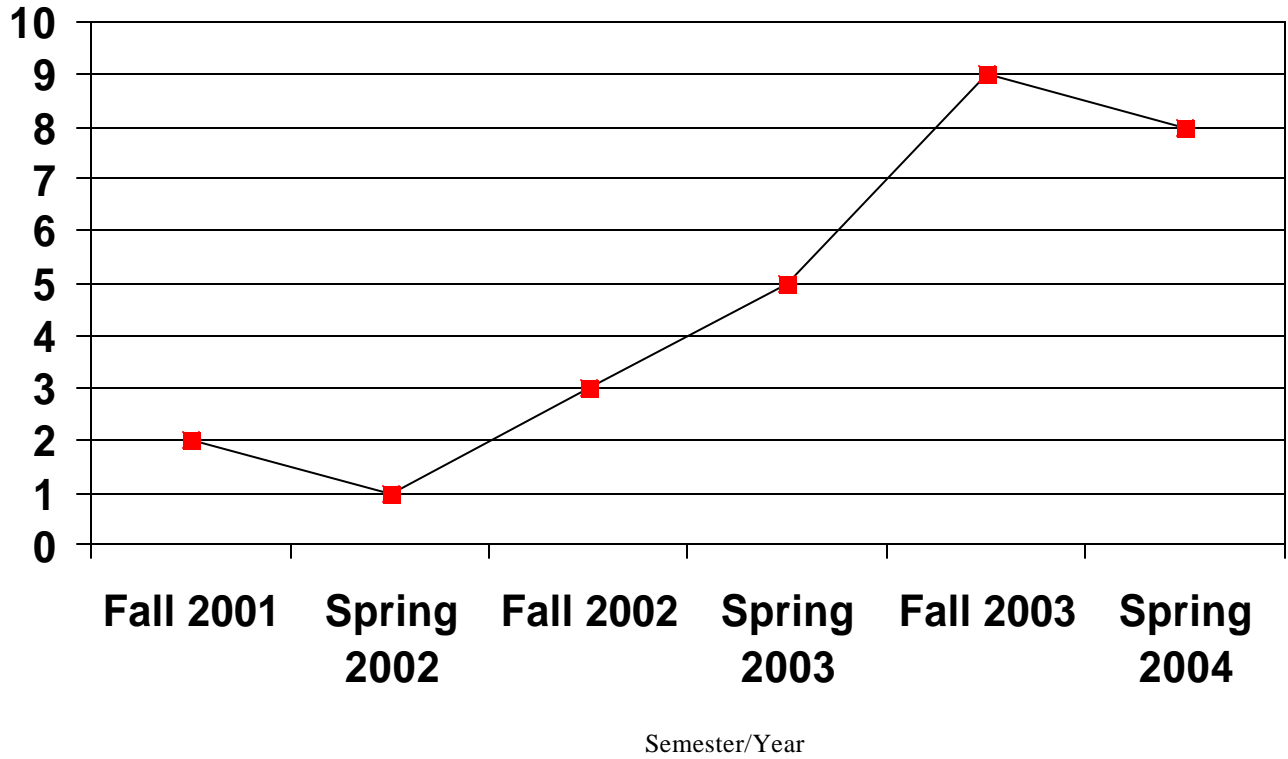
**Number of Students Enrolled in BSIS EC-4  
Taking 9 sch or More at NTCC Site**



As one can see, there has been a dramatic growth since the spring of 2002, with some 35 students enrolled in nine or more hours. This is a significant growth, given the rural nature of east Texas.

Enrollment growth in the Math degrees was similar, as shown by the following graph:

**Students Majoring in Math  
Taking 9 sch or More at NTCC Site**



While there was a drop of one from fall 2003 to spring 2004, enrollment in fall 2004 has increased to twelve! Thus, the program is successfully meeting the demands of the teacher shortage and at the same time offering an opportunity for place bound students in east Texas to pursue a college education.

The total number of students enrolled in A&M -Texarkana programs are given in the following chart:

Number of Students Enrolled in TAMU-T  
BSIS EC-4 or Math BS Degree Programs at NTCC

Program	Year	Head Count
BSIS EC-4 and ECSE*	2001-2002	87 <sup>†</sup>
BSIS EC-4	2002-2003	62
BSIS ECSE	2002-2003	23
BS in MATH 4-8	2002-2003	28
BS in MATH 8-12	2002-2003	10
BSIS EC-4	2003-2004	77
BSIS ECSE	2003-2004	64
BS in MATH 4-8	2003-2004	36
BS in MATH 8-12	2003-2004	9

\* EC is Early Childhood Education and ECSE is Early Childhood Special Education.

<sup>†</sup> Some of these students were already enrolled in the TAMU-T program prior to the agreement with NTCC.

We have enjoyed a remarkable success with the distance education degree programs at NTCC. The reasons for the success is careful planning, faculty endorsement and approval of the curriculum, strong community support, the use of distance education technology, and a significant student demand for the programs. NTCC proudly presents the partnership on their website at: <http://www.ntcc.edu/4year/TeacherPrep/index.htm>. The title of website is “Teacher Preparation Program NTCC \* TAMU-T”. It explains the seamless transition from completing the core requirements at NTCC and then the opportunity for students to enroll in upper-level courses taught on the NTCC campus by NTCC or A&M-Texarkana faculty or “via distance education.” It is a testament to the success of the program. This A&M-Texarkana-NTCC partnership clearly demonstrates that a University can collaborate with a community college to offer meaningful degree programs to consumers in rural areas.