CITY COLLEGES OF CHICAGO USES NEW TECHNIQUE TO TEACH LANGUAGE

Transitional Bilingual Learning Community Program – Successful Integration of ESL Classes with Degree-Related Coursework

Chicago, IL -- Twenty-seven-year-old Jazmin Medrano spoke no English when she arrived in Chicago with her family in 2000. She was already a high school graduate, wanting to move on with her education, but the language barrier forced her to put her education goals on hold until she took some English as a Second Language [ESL] classes first. “I did learn the basics in the ESL classes,” says Medrano, “Which was a good start, but I wanted so much more.”

Through family connections, Medrano then discovered a different kind of English learning program at Harry S Truman College, 1145 W. Wilson Ave., one of the City Colleges of Chicago. It’s called the Transitional Bilingual Learning Community Program [TBLC Program], a one-year (two-semester) program in which new students don’t just learn English; they combine their English instruction with classes in their chosen fields of study.

For example, Medrano, who wants to be a teacher, took Urban Sociology 202 – in which the reading and writing assignments were linked with her ESL 100 course. All subjects offered through the program (humanities, mathematics, etc.) run the same way – integrating the content of the particular subject with the skills taught in the English course, thus enabling students to accomplish two things at once: mastery of the subject material and advancement of the English language.

For Medrano, it was a perfect fit: “This program was essential to me,” she says. “The faculty was hugely helpful; the way they taught their classes enabled me to master the English language – I was writing papers in English by the second semester-- but they also taught me about American culture and American society. The program allowed me to take responsibility for myself as an immigrant, and successfully reach for my goals.”

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City Colleges of Chicago Uses New Technique to Teach Language
Page 2

Medrano is now studying at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She plans on completing her degree in 2011, then continue on with a master’s degree. Her goal is to teach Hispanic Linguistics at an American college.

“Medrano’s success in Truman’s TBLC Program is by no means unusual,” says Lynn Walker, president of Truman College. “The average grade point average of students enrolled in the program after the first semester is 3.07 out of 4.00, and the retention rate after the program is around 90 percent. So far, around 60 students who have completed the TBLC Program have earned their associate degree -- and most of the students have gone onto pursue bachelor’s degrees. Three program graduates are currently pursuing master’s degrees.”

The high rate of success is also due to the strong academic and social support the program gives its students. “We have found that friendship and support equals better academics,” says TBLC Program coordinator Carlos Martin. “In time, these TBLC students form attachments to one another, understand each other, help each other; they participate in the Latino club and other activities together. Many of our students don’t have a strong support system outside the classroom, so their classmates fill a critical gap.”

TBLC Program services include:

- 2-wk Orientation to college (prior to first semester)
- Tutoring
- Interdisciplinary teaching model
- Academic advisement
- Career planning and development
- Transfer information and assistance
- Financial aid advisement
- Club activities
- Service Learning
- Parents’ seminars
- University and museum field trips
- TBLC Student Scholarship Fund (raised over $5,000 last year)
- Other scholarship opportunities

Students with a high school diploma (from the United States or another country) or a GED are eligible for the program, and most students enrolling qualify for a two-semester scholarship that covers many of the tuition costs.

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For more information about the Transitional Bilingual Learning Community Program, contact Carlos Martin Llamazares, Truman College at (773) 907-4780, or visit http://www.trumancollege.edu/tblc/

The City Colleges of Chicago [CCC], Community College District 508, is a system of seven colleges accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. CCC provides four essential services. They are: Liberal Arts Education (associates degrees and certificates); Occupational Education (workforce training); Adult Education (General Education Development, English as a Second Language, Adult Basic Education); and Continuing Education (programs that add value to the quality of life).

City Colleges of Chicago, District 508, includes Richard J. Daley College, Kennedy-King College, Malcolm X College, Olive-Harvey College, Harry S. Truman College, Harold Washington College, and Wilbur Wright College. WYCC-TV Channel 20, a public broadcast station, is also part of the City Colleges system. For more information about the City Colleges of Chicago, call (773) COLLEGE or visit www.ccc.edu

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