

# The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley™



## KAREN WATT, PHD

Karen M. Watt Endowed Scholarship in Support of the College of Education and P-16 Integration

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# DR. KAREN WATT

## A Life-Long Educator, Championing Innovative Teaching Methods



Over the past 21 years, Dr. Karen Watt has had a remarkable impact on the College of Education at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) and its legacy institution The University of Texas-Pan American (UTPA). She established resources and innovative teaching spaces to develop well-rounded students prepared to excel in the fields of teaching and education. Her steadfast leadership and advocacy for student achievement have strengthened the college in a perceivable way.

Dr. Watt joined UTPA in 1999 and since that time has seen the college grow to serve the needs of students and the region as well. "My entire higher education career has been here," she says. "I see

how hard the teachers work, I see how hard the instructors work, and I see how driven the students are - for a better life, to improve the economy of this whole region. There is a passion here for preparing students for a better life."

Dr. Watt received a Bachelor of Science in physical education from St. Joseph's College in Rensselaer, Indiana followed by a Master of Education in physical education from UTPA. Dr. Watt also received a doctoral degree in educational leadership from The University of Texas at Austin. She holds a Texas teacher certificate, mid-management certification, and superintendent certification, the last two of which were earned at UTPA. Dr. Watt truly built her career upon the education she received at UTRGV's legacy institution.

Before establishing her career at UTPA, Dr. Watt was a high school biology teacher and coach at several school districts in the Rio Grande Valley. She was the Principal at St. Joseph Catholic School in Edinburg, TX as well as the Assistant Principal for Edinburg High Schools. As she pursued her doctorate, Dr. Watt made the transition to higher education. She accepted a one-year appointment upon completion of her degree, and the next year accepted a tenure track position at UTPA.

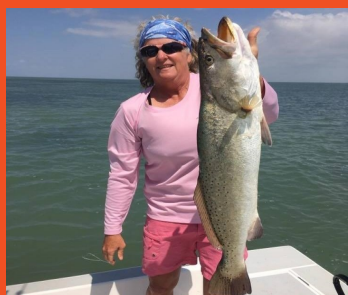
"I am so glad that I got that first position at UTPA," says Dr. Watt. "Higher education has been a really great experience for me. There is more academic freedom, it is great working with students. I like researching, and I love teaching. So, it worked out very well. Sometimes all the stars are aligned."

Dr. Watt has been directly involved with the implementation of the AVID program in the South Texas region, including the program at UTRGV. AVID, which stands for Advancement Via Individual Determination, is a program that prepares underachieving students for a four-year college education. Developed in California in the 1980s, a time in which teachers had low expectations of students from disadvantaged areas, AVID is now a nonprofit education system that impacts more than 2 million students in the US and Department of Defense education programs across the world. The program trains educators to facilitate student-centric classrooms with the purpose of closing the opportunity gap.

Dr. Watt has held a variety of roles with the AVID program in the Rio Grande Valley, a program that has positively influenced countless students in the region. She provided technical support for the Edinburg school system, held the positions of state office director and national research center director, and was the liaison for AVID for Higher Education Teacher Preparation at UTRGV. Dr. Watt was instrumental in securing over \$1.65 million in grant funding for the program at UTRGV during her time as director of the national research center. She also helped the UTeach program, which prepares STEM majors to become teachers, incorporate AVID into their curriculum and instruction.

Dr. Watt emphasizes, "Quality math and science teachers are needed in local middle and high schools. UTeach graduates are almost always placed in teaching positions immediately upon graduation, and they are especially sought after by principals of AVID schools."

## Training the Body and Mind



Dr. Watt's calm, direct demeanor translates well to her coaching endeavors. "My hobbies have always been fitness-related," states Dr. Watt. As a high school and collegiate athlete, she chose to major in physical education with a minor in biology, degrees which she puts to use as a certified USA Triathlon coach, certified U.S. Masters swimming coach, and as a certified USA Triathlon race director. Upon retirement from UTRGV, she will pursue her triathlon coaching business called PowerWatt Coaching, LLC.

"There are many similarities between triathlon training and earning a doctoral degree - everybody can do it, but you have to put your mind to it and actually want it," she asserts. "If you don't want it, and you don't put it as a priority, it is not going to happen."

In addition to coaching, Dr. Watt is also an astute angler, spending much of her free time fishing in the Laguna Madre. She supports many local charities by fishing in tournaments whose proceeds directly benefit the causes they promote.

# An Invaluable Resource for the College of Education

Dr. Watt is a beloved educator, scholar, and champion of education. She brought innovative teaching methods and programs to UTRGV and has served on countless committees and task forces. Her guidance to the College of Education and the University is invaluable. She continues to be a steadfast advocate for the AVID program and for all students. As she prepares for retirement, her impact on students will continue in perpetuity through the Karen M. Watt Endowed Scholarship in Support of the College of Education and P-16 Integration.



"We are fortunate to have faculty members like Dr. Watt in our college who are generously supporting our students, who are committed to our institution, and who give back" said Dr. Alma Rodriguez, Dean of the UTRGV College of Education and P-16 Integration. "Endowed scholarships are of great benefit to our students, their families and our community by helping our students achieve their goal of obtaining a higher education degree."



Ever the advocate for students, Dr. Watt concludes, "I gave my whole life to educating students, and I would like to continue to help them through their education with this scholarship. I also encourage others to give back and leave a legacy for future students to benefit from."