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UTPA receives \$3.1 million grant to support women in STEM academic careers

Friday, September 14th, 2012

Texas Border Business ---

Edinburg --- The University of Texas-Pan American has received a \$3.1 million award from the National Science Foundation's ADVANCE Program that will support its development as an exemplary Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) in attracting and nurturing women, especially Hispanic women, in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) fields and careers.

The NSF ADVANCE Program's Institutional Transformation award supports comprehensive programs to transform institutions of higher education in ways that will increase the participation and advancement of women in STEM academic careers, thereby contributing to the development of a more diverse science and engineering workforce.

UTPA's five-year ADVANCE project, which will start Oct. 1, aims to increase the representation and advancement of women in the STEM fields across all faculty and leadership ranks at the University said University administrators at a press conference held Sept. 11 to announce the receipt of the grant.

"This project will address faculty recruitment and advancement, policy and climate, education and empowerment and social science research that is intended to broaden and deepen the knowledge base related to issues that hinder the success of women, particularly Latinas in the STEM fields," said Dr. Havidán Rodríguez, provost and vice president for Academic Affairs, who will lead the project as its principal investigator. "We appreciate that the National Science Foundation recognized our critical leadership in educating Hispanics generally and Latinas specifically in STEM fields throughout the country and decided to make a significant investment in The University of Texas-Pan American."

Co-principal investigator and project director of UTPA's ADVANCE project, titled "Attracting and Nurturing Women Faculty at a Hispanic Serving Institution," is Dr. Ala Qubbaj, vice provost for Faculty Affairs. He said members of the Faculty Senate, the STEM deans and faculty members from STEM and across all colleges will be actively involved in the project.

"We want this project to yield best practices that can be readily exported to other HSIs across the nation," Qubbaj said.

Currently, women represent only 18 percent of all faculty in STEM fields at UTPA compared to a national average of 28 percent. Their representation in UTPA's tenured and tenure-track positions is even lower at 14 percent. At senior faculty ranks, only two of 33 full professors in STEM are women and there are no females in chair, associate dean or dean positions in the STEM fields.

Dr. Maria Cristina Villalobos, associate professor of mathematics, director of UTPA's Center for Excellence in STEM and a co-principal investigator of the ADVANCE grant, said she exemplifies the STEM faculty who will benefit the project.

"I am one of five females in the math department, which has 35 faculty members, and one of only two Latinas in that department. I am also a wife and mother of two elementary school-aged children and have a husband who is an educator. I very much understand the issues women face," she said.

One of the project's goals will be to double the current number of STEM women faculty. To that end, the University will seek to increase the number of assistant professors by 50 percent, double the number of female associate professors, and triple the number of female full professors. Another goal is to double the number of Hispanic STEM faculty and place female faculty members in leadership positions like department chair or associate dean.

The University will also promote a positive workplace/climate along with policies and practices that support female scholars, including a more family-friendly workplace, improved department and campus environments for workforce diversity and enhanced campus awareness and education on gender and worklife issues.

The program's many initiatives will include enhanced recruitment efforts for improved diversity in candidate pools and the creation of an Institute for Faculty Development and Leadership that will offer additional development opportunities, including a Leadership Fellows program. The University will, for the first time, institutionalize the spousal/partner hiring guidelines and assistance and also intends to revise and revamp its maternity/paternity leave, sick leave, tenure and workload policies.

To promote campus awareness and empower faculty and administrators to address gender and work-life issues, an ADVANCE Distinguished Speaker Series will be instituted and



The University of Texas-Pan American received a \$3.1 million grant from the National Science Foundation's ADVANCE Program to recruit and retain female Hispanic faculty members in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) fields. UTPA Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Dr. Havidán Rodríguez, pictured far right, is the grant's principal investigator. Dr. Ala Qubbaj, vice provost for Faculty Affairs, pictured left, and Dr. Maria Cristina Villalobos, associate professor of mathematics, are co-principal investigators of the grant.

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trainings for faculty and administrators on these issues will be held. A qualitative study to investigate the impact and effectiveness of the project's initiatives will also be conducted.

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"The project will lead to systematic, long lasting and sustainable institutional change and will have measureable impacts on the entire UT Pan American community. We want to send a strong, clear and unequivocal message that gender diversity matters at UT Pan American," Rodriguez said.

UTPA President Robert S. Nelsen will chair an External Advisory committee that will include national experts to provide feedback and direction on the implementation and progress of the five-year project. The implementation team will also be advised by an Internal Advisory Committee comprising STEM deans, department chairs, faculty representatives, the Faculty Senate chair and UTPA's information operations officer, affirmative action officer and human resources director.

"Increasing the number of Hispanic women who will serve as role models for our students is critical for the nation's future. I am incredibly proud of the team at Pan Am that is turning this necessity into a reality," said Nelsen. "Pan Am is doing the right thing."

For more information on the NSF ADVANCE program, go to its website www.nsf.gov/advance.

For more information on the UTPA ADVANCE project, contact Dr. Ala Qubbaj at atqubbaj@utpa.edu. **TBB**

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