



Best Practices in Immigrant Education

Name of Community College: Miami Dade College

Title of Program: Adult Education / EL Civics Program

Type of Program: ESOL program, which includes Citizenship classes and Family Literacy activities

Primary Division(s) or Department(s) involved: School of Continuing Education and Professional Development

1. Need for Program

The communities served by this project are all characterized by high levels of unemployment and underemployment and are home to the poorest immigrant populations in Miami-Dade County. Participants live and work in Opa Locka, Little Havana, Little Haiti, Homestead, North Miami and other areas of Miami Dade County with an average income-level below the poverty line. The majority of these immigrants are not American citizens and many do not possess a high school diploma. The ability to access information related to job training, post-secondary-education, high wage jobs, better housing, and healthcare is severely limited by their lack of English fluency and awareness of their rights and responsibilities as community members.

The program, currently funded through a combination of College budgets and Florida Department of Education Adult Education and Family Literacy and EL Civics grants, has been in place since 2001. Initially the program provided ESOL classes and Family Literacy services to approximately four hundred on-campus students and one hundred participants at two elementary schools and one community-based organization within a five-mile radius of North Campus. Through expansion of partnerships, the program now serves over eight hundred on-campus students and six hundred additional participants and their families at fifteen locations throughout Miami-Dade County.

2. Brief Description of Program

The Adult Education and EL Civics programs combine academics (ESOL, Citizenship, and GED Preparation classes) with Student Services (Financial Literacy, Health Literacy, children's tutoring, and family-oriented cultural activities). The purpose is to provide English language acquisition and educational and support services leading to immigrant integration documented by passing the Citizenship exam, obtaining employment, and enrolling in post-secondary training leading to economic self-sufficiency.

3. Specific Population Served

The population includes Hispanic, Haitian, and European (mainly Russian) immigrants and their families. The majority of the students at North Campus are Haitian and Hispanic.



4. Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: Increase English-language literacy.

Major Objective 1: Provide ESOL instruction at the College and at community-based centers to maximize participation by immigrant students. Community locations include churches, elementary schools, libraries, and senior community centers. Instruction is focused on the real life language skills immigrants need to gain employment, continue their education and fully participate in civic life in this country.

Goal 2: Increase participation in the Naturalization process.

Major Objective 1: Integrate Civics instruction into ESL classes.

Major Objective 2: Offer Citizenship classes to prepare participants for the Citizenship exam and create awareness of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship through in class and out of class activities.

Major Objective 2: Through community partnerships, offer workshops related to Financial Literacy, Health Literacy, Goal-Setting and Post-Secondary Training, and Understanding the U.S. Educational School System. Workshops provide immigrants with information and tools to assist them in their efforts to integrate into the mainstream of U.S. life.

Goal 3: Increase participation in volunteer activities.

Major Objective 1: Incorporate Service Learning as a component of ESOL and Citizenship instruction. Service Learning integrates volunteerism into instruction by giving academic credit for volunteer hours. Workshops provide immigrants with information and tools to assist them in their efforts to integrate into the mainstream of U.S. life.

Goal 4: Increase parent's involvement in children's education.

Major Objective 1: Incorporate Family Literacy activities for parents of school-age children by partnering with elementary schools, offering tutoring for children during parents' class time, and incorporating family-based cultural activities in which parents and children together practice their emerging English-language skills. Teach parents how to become advocates for their children in the school system and support their child's success in school by providing literacy and enrichment activities at home.

Goal 5: Increase employment and placement in post-secondary training.

Major Objective 1: Assist upper-level ESOL students in the Financial Aid application process by holding weekly advising sessions.



Major Objective 2: Sponsor workshops on post-secondary training opportunities and assist ESOL completers with transition to post-secondary programs. Major Objective 3: Assist ESOL completers needing a high school diploma to enroll in free GED Preparation classes offered at North Campus.

5. Outcomes

The EL Civics program serves as an enhancement program for ESOL students at Miami Dade College. In the 2011-12 year, the college reported more than 5000 total enrollments in ESOL classes. The EL Civics program is based at one of the campuses with services also provided at outreach centers in the county. Retention is 85% as measured by instructor records. The average pass rates on the CASAS at the campus with an additional civics component indicate a standardized, measurable increase in English language fluency of approximately 80%. This campus also serves approximately 500 students at countywide outreach centers. Last year, over 50 participants moved into post-secondary or GED Preparation programs.

A recent addition to the program has been the hiring of full-time career readiness advisors to help ESOL students identify career goals and academic and training opportunities needed to meet career goals. As a result students have more access to career planning opportunities and support when obstacles arise.

6. Collaboration

Partners include Catholic Charities, Branches Outreach Ministry, Little Havana Nutrition Centers, Miami Lakes Public Library, Savvy Parents, and Amigos Together for Kids. Partners provide locations for classes within immigrant communities that remove transportation and childcare obstacles and maximize community participation.

7. Success Factors

Quality and dedication of instructors and staff have been most critical to program success along with the willingness of community partners to work with the program through active support (rent-free space, recruitment, immigrant counseling, etc.). The participation of other agencies involved in the naturalization process, fiscal literacy, cultural education, medical resources, and employment have brought a wealth of information and support to the program participants. Grant funding has allowed the program to increase both its reach and the range of opportunities participants enjoy on their path to full integration into US life.

8. Challenges Faced and Overcome

The major environmental challenges for students were access to transportation and childcare. The program overcame these challenges by partnering with community organizations that agreed to provide space for on-site classes for adults and to assist with childcare and/or provision of tutoring for children while parents studied. Environmental challenges for outreach locations were limited access to traditional classroom space and technology. The program has worked to overcome these challenges by purchasing laptop computers for all outreach centers. The program has also created partnerships with community organizations and non-profits to remove barriers to attending English classes. Students have access to healthcare at one site, referrals to employment opportunities at all sites, and access to



free cell phones and legal services through these partnerships. The program is able to refer students for help with processing documents to obtain citizenship.

Another challenge has been the addition of a mandated course fee. Enrollment decreased when the fee was introduced. Since the fee for students who were not state residents was three times the fee for residents and unaffordable for many, the program saw a drop in enrollment. The numbers are gradually rising again as students adjust to the existence of a monetary cost associated with the ESOL program.

9. Funding and Sustainability

The program is funded through a combination of State grants (EL Civics) and institutional funds. Partners provide support through a variety of activities such as providing rent-free space, assistance with recruitment, free immigration counseling, workshops designed to aid in the acculturation process, childcare, and tutoring support for children of adults enrolled in the program. The program will be sustained through expansion of partnership involvement, future grant submissions and the continued commitment of the campus and the College to serving immigrant populations.

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