

**Final Project Report  
CELT Judge Julian Beck Instructional Improvement Grant  
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## **Teaching CSUN's Most "At-Risk" Students: The Paradigm Shift in EOP's Bridge Program**

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Bridge Teaching Demonstration Website  
<http://www.csun.edu/eop/bridgedemo/>

With the Beck instructional grant I received from CELT, I created a "Bridge Teaching Demonstration Website" to share important advances made by faculty in the Bridge Residential Program who teach CSUN's most "at-risk" students — "special-admit" freshmen. These are students who based on test scores for English and math placement tests are required to complete in their first year at CSUN a developmental reading class, a developmental writing class, and developmental math classes. The website highlights instructional strategies developed by Bridge faculty during the 2002-2003 academic year, which are part of an overall paradigm shift launched by Bridge administrators during the past six years. For the Bridge student cohort of 2002, this paradigm shift enabled 90% to successfully complete their critical first year of college. This freshmen success rate is significant, especially at a time when CSUN and the CSU system as a whole are grappling with the challenges of increasing student retention and graduation rates and responding to the needs of entering freshmen. Thus, the Bridge paradigm shift can serve as a valuable resource for all programs working with freshmen. The Bridge Teaching Demonstration Website presents insights from the academic side of the paradigm shift, especially faculty teaching strategies involving developmental

approaches to learning, faculty experiences with long-term learning communities, faculty efforts to integrate and link subject matter from different classes, and faculty attempts to infuse mentoring into all interactions with students inside and outside the classroom.

The Bridge Residential Program consists of 105-115 underprepared freshmen admitted to the University through EOP. Most of these students are the first generation in their families to attend college. Entering CSUN as “special admits,” these students are required to complete the six-week residential summer program in order to enroll in the fall. In the summer, students receive not only academic instruction (i.e., two classes — Developmental Reading and University 100) but also academic advisement, tutoring, and life management advisement. The program’s academic component is designed to assist underprepared freshmen gain basic developmental skills in reading, writing, and study techniques as well as an increased appreciation of both their ethnic identity and that of their fellow students. The five faculty for Bridge are selected by EOP from the University’s three Ethnic Studies departments: Asian American Studies, Chicano Studies, and Pan African Studies.

Two years ago, EOP Director José Luis Vargas and Bridge Coordinator Shiva Parsa implemented a new academic approach by creating and maintaining student cohorts over three semesters, keeping student learning communities formed during the summer together with their same professors for one class each in the fall and spring semesters, providing integrated curriculum and “linked classes” during the summer program, and reorganizing academic instruction and student support services (e.g., peer tutoring and counseling) around the concept of mentoring. These enhancements in Bridge are part of a series of changes introduced since 1996, which, taken together, constitute an important

paradigm shift in EOP's work with freshmen at CSUN. These changes have increased student academic performance, raising first-year retention rates of CSUN's most "at-risk" freshmen from 70% several years ago to 90% this past academic year.

I received a Beck grant of \$1,600 for a demonstration project to enable faculty from the residential Bridge program to share lessons from the Bridge paradigm shift with other CSUN faculty, especially relating to teaching strategies for underprepared freshmen. My demonstration project focused on one academic year — from Summer 2002 through Fall Semester 2002 and Spring Semester 2003. The Bridge 2002 student cohort represented only the second student cohort participating in the new "three-semester model."

Three of the five faculty members working with the students were new to the Bridge paradigm shift, specifically the approach of teaching two integrated and linked summer courses and then continuing to work with student learning communities for one class each in the fall and spring semesters. Thus, for faculty, working with the Bridge "three-semester model" was a new pedagogical experience. Aside from myself, the four other Bridge faculty members were Professor Bernardean Broadous of Pan African Studies, Professor King Carter of Pan African Studies, Carlos Guerrero of Chicano Studies, and Professor Juana Mora of Chicano Studies. For the past three years, I've also served as the EOP Bridge academic liaison, working with fellow Bridge faculty, developing academic resources, and helping faculty understand the new Bridge paradigm.

For this demonstration project, I focused only on the paradigm shift for the "academic side" of the Bridge Residential Program — i.e., instructional strategies of faculty in the classroom. However, as noted above, these academic advances are part of a

larger transformation that includes reorganization of the EOP admissions process to emphasize group and individual interviews with all applicants, reorganization of training for staff and peer advisors and tutors around the central concept of mentoring, and the creation of close working relationships between faculty and EOP support staff in Bridge. These “non-academic” elements of the paradigm shift are also valuable for other units at CSUN, and EOP hopes to share them with the University community in the near future.

I used funds from my Beck grant for two project areas: 1) purchase of copies of four books to help Bridge faculty grapple with the challenges of linking and integrating two different courses during the summer, creating a developmental approach in classes over one summer and two semesters to build the academic skills of underprepared freshmen, and appreciating the power of long-term learning communities; and 2) the hiring of webmaster Mesan Richardson to create the “Bridge Teaching Demonstration Website.”

### **Resource Books**

With my Beck grant, I purchased copies of the following four books for Bridge faculty to help develop teaching strategies for our students. I provide a brief explanation of the application of each book to Bridge’s paradigm shift.

Sonia Nieto, *The Light in Their Eyes: Creating Multicultural Learning Communities* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999). In her critique of educational inequality, Nieto emphasizes the creation of multicultural learning communities as a transformative strategy for teachers and students. She discusses multicultural education from the social context of learning, educational equity, and critical pedagogy.

Mina P. Shaughnessy, *Errors & Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977). Shaughnessy's book is valuable for teachers of classes of developmental reading and writing. She helps teachers understand the writing strategies of developmental writers and suggests ways that teachers can work with these students to improve writing skills and grammar.

David A. Sousa, *How the Brain Learns: A Classroom Teacher's Guide*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2001). Most educators are unaware of recent research relating to the brain and the applications of this research to teaching in the classroom. Sousa presents information in an easy-to-understand format and provides extensive suggestions for lesson plans and teaching strategies.

Vincent Tinto, *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). By analyzing why students leave college, Tinto provides a valuable framework for effective retention programs. At the heart of Tinto's recommendations is an emphasis on the social context of learning, especially the importance of faculty-student and student-student interactions and the power of mentoring.

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With my Beck grant, I also hired webmaster Mesan Richardson to create the "Bridge Teaching Demonstration Website." Mr. Richardson previously created websites for EOP and also was instrumental in establishing an admissions and student tracking database that has served as a critical element in the Bridge paradigm shift.

The “Bridge Teaching Demonstration Website” contains the following webpages: an introduction to the project, background information on the Bridge paradigm shift and its importance for increasing academic success for freshmen, and links to other EOP-related resources. The bulk of the website contains instructional strategies for teaching freshmen, including syllabi, sample assignments, and samples of student work. Overall, the website shows how Bridge faculty have created a developmental approach to teaching “at-risk” freshmen by integrating and linking classes, emphasizing the importance of long-term learning communities, and infusing the concept of mentoring into all interactions with students, both inside and outside the classroom.

### **Project Budget**

I received a \$1,600 Beck instructional improvement grant from CELT; I spent \$600 for copies of four resource books for the five Bridge Residential Program faculty, and I spent \$1,000 for the hiring of webmaster Mesan Richardson for creation of the “Bridge Teaching Demonstration Website.” Funds were administered by the University Corporation. I thank also EOP Financial Officer Lizbeth Dela Cruz for her help in facilitating transfer of funds from the University Corporation for project use. Finally, EOP provided valuable resources and support for completion of this project.