

Providing Bridges from 2YC to 4YC in the El Paso Region

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For the past ~3 years the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) has been working with El Paso Community College (EPCC) to help ease the transition of geoscience and environmental science students between our institutions. We have initiated a number of activities to accomplish this including: articulation of degree programs, review of introductory course content, cross-institution research projects with EPCC students and co-sponsored student research symposiums. One of the most successful activities has been our cross-institutional research projects that involve either individual students working with a UTEP undergraduate/UTEP faculty member team or EPCC classes that join UTEP classes for some aspect of field work or project. The EPCC students gain confidence in their ability to succeed by working with UTEP students and finding out that they are as capable of engaging in and completing research as their 4YC peers. They also have an opportunity to first meet UTEP professors as mentors and professional colleagues rather than in a classroom setting. The research symposium serves as an excellent venue for showcasing their research to the EPCC and UTEP community, as well as interacting with local and out of town professionals who serve as judges for the research presentation. Feedback provided by the judges assists students in refining their presentations for out of town meetings such as a regional GSA or SACNAS conference.

The first students participating in the research program will be graduating from UTEP within the next year. Many involved in the research activities have obtained summer internships in industry or at other academic institutions, some even prior to attending UTEP. Several have received competitive scholarships. The greatest challenges to the research program include finding UTEP faculty who are willing to work with EPCC students and the means to help support the students during their research activities.