As Chancellor of the Alamo Colleges, I read with great interest the recent and timely Express-News article by Melissa Ludwig (“Tracking” revived at community colleges. 1.21.11). Ms. Ludwig captured the spirit of the issue at-hand: how do community colleges continue to serve the thousands of underprepared students entering our doors every semester, while faced with millions of dollars in decreased state funding?

Although pleased with the article, I am troubled by and the Express-News should reject the use of the word “tracking” in the headline, which suggests that underprepared students at the Alamo Colleges and other community colleges are to be steered toward a predetermined path. This has historically had negative gender and racial implications. In reality, students are guided to determine a goal and provided the support to achieve the goal. What we are implementing is a national best practice known as “Career Pathways” that effectively and efficiently guides students toward a program that best meets their educational preparation and needs. This ensures certification at various stages in their educational journey so they will be successful in achieving their goals and be more marketable for employment.

At the Alamo Colleges (Northeast Lakeview College, Northwest Vista College, San Antonio College, Palo Alto College, and St. Philip’s College) and at other community colleges throughout the country, the challenge lies with the range of students’ readiness to be successful in college-level work and their lack of awareness of the range of paths available—from one-year programs leading to productive jobs to obtaining the first two years of the requirements of a 4-year bachelor’s degree. As described by Ludwig, programs such as Preparing Adults for College Excellence (PACE) at Northwest Vista College assists students in determining a program option that fits their interests and preparation for college-readiness at the level required for success. By expanding awareness of the features of these programs, students can more effectively and quickly move through developmental education into college level studies. Ultimately, students are more successful when they have a deliberate strategy in place.

Dr. Raymund Paredes, Texas Commissioner of Higher Education summed it up in his comment quoted by Ludwig that students who fall below the threshold of college readiness will not be abandoned, but “dumping them into (remedial) education is not the solution.” As Dr. Fabianke stated in Ludwig’s article, “half of all students at the Alamo Colleges who need remedial math test into the lowest levels and of those, only 12-15% makes it to college-level algebra.” We cannot justify or afford to continue an approach where only 12%-15% of our students are successful.

There are viable options that a student may or may not be aware of and we work to provide the information needed to make the best decision possible about his or her future. Our partners in the K-12 sector and community initiatives such as Project Quest and Cafécollege help immensely in this effort.

Student success is at the core of what we do. We are challenged with seeking to balance the needs of our students with our shrinking budget. We are examining our programs and services, and are implementing many strategies to operate more efficiently and, at the same time, continually increase our effectiveness.
Our faculty and staff have streamlined and reduced in most every possible fashion, and yet we know we must dig deeper. Regardless of the cost-saving strategies we must implement, our commitment to students will not diminish. We are here for the 66,000+ students who have entrusted us with their academic needs and never has the Alamo Colleges been more steadfast about achieving its mission of *Empowering our diverse communities for success.*

******************************************************************************

Bruce H. Leslie
Chancellor
Alamo Colleges
201 W. Sheridan, Bldg. B
San Antonio, TX 78204-1429
(210) 485-0020 (Phone)
(210) 485-0024 (Fax)
bleslie@alamo.edu