

Texas A&M University-Commerce (A&M-Commerce) is the largest university east of Dallas, Texas. The university offers more than 100 major areas of study at the undergraduate, master's and doctoral levels and serves students representing 50 states and 55 countries. Approximately 60% of the student population is undergraduate and 40% are graduate. A&M-Commerce is designated as a military-friendly institution and enrolls approximately 500 active military and veterans each semester. In addition, 93% of A&M-Commerce's first-time, full-time students receive some form of aid with 49% of undergraduates receiving Pell grants and 60% receiving federal student loans.

According to the Texas State Data Center, the Dallas Fort Worth region Hispanic population is expected to grow to 9.6 million by the year 2040 representing a 21.7% increase since 2005. A&M-Commerce aspires to become a Hispanic-serving/minority serving institution which has resulted in increased efforts at the highest university administrative levels to further expand and serve this population of students. These efforts have resulted in A&M-Commerce's earning distinction as an Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI), with the expectation to move to the enrollment threshold of 25% within the near future.

We have a unique opportunity to make a significant impact on the education of students in the region and beyond so that they are exceptionally prepared to become the next generation of scientists and leaders. The primary service area of the university is extremely diverse with 13 rural counties to the east of the sprawling urban and suburban Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex. This region is made up of a large percentage of economically disadvantaged communities and diverse demographics.

The ongoing mission of A&M-Commerce since 1889 has been to nurture and educate our students for success and provide academic, research, and service programs of the highest quality. Recently, the Chronicle of Higher Education ranked A&M-Commerce as the 17<sup>th</sup> fastest growing college. The present enrollment is in excess of 12,000 students, which is the highest in the university's history. A&M-Commerce has a 125-year legacy of serving the students of northeast Texas, the state of Texas, the nation and the world. The university is engaged in a multi-year effort to strengthen the quality of research and teaching. A new 110,000 square foot \$28 million science building was constructed recently; this building houses the Chemistry, Biological & Environmental Sciences, and Physics departments, as well as a planetarium.

To better serve the science, technology engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines, the College of Science, Engineering & Agriculture recently divided into the College of Science & Engineering, and a separate School of Agricultural Sciences. This new structure allows our college to better concentrate on STEM disciplines and to provide additional and needed support for undergraduate research within each of the STEM departments, including Chemistry. At A&M-Commerce, greater than a third of our undergraduate students are classified as low-income and first-generation and the minority enrollment is 36%, with a Hispanic enrollment of

13%. With a rapidly growing Hispanic population in the region and the State, increasing the Hispanic enrollment at the university is a top priority, and one of the goals of the university is to become a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) within the next few years. This is an ambitious goal, but one that the university is committed to achieving owing to the importance of recruiting and graduating a broader cross-section of students that reflects the population that we serve. Owing to the large number of community colleges that we serve, approximately 75% of students at A&M-Commerce are transfer students from regional community colleges. As a result, we have an excellent opportunity to make a significant impact on these students. With the rapid increase in our enrollment, especially minority students, we are poised to educate a large number of diverse students in STEM disciplines, especially chemistry.

**Record of commitment to educating undergraduates.** Within the past few years, our university has aggressively sought and received funding for several research programs to involve undergraduates in research and help them persist in the educational pipeline to graduation. For several years, A&M-Commerce has implemented a successful *Research Experiences for Undergraduates* (REU) program in the chemistry department, which continues to receive funding from NSF. Our REU program capitalizes on the well-established partnerships with approximately 18 community colleges that are in close proximity to the university. The Physics department also has a very successful REU program, funded from the NSF, and attracts students from across the nation.

Another of our very successful programs is the Ronald E. McNair program, which provides an avenue for economically disadvantaged students to become involved in research as they pursue advanced degrees. Through our various mentoring programs, our undergraduates are better prepared to pursue and be successful at doctoral programs.