

ABSTRACT
**CAMINOS: Increasing Access to Education and Opportunity
in the Upper Rio Grande Region**

As Title V Cooperative Project partners, Adams State University (ASU) and University of New Mexico-Taos (UNM-Taos) have combined resources and expertise to set forth new educational pathways that will particularly benefit the Hispanic and low-income populations in their rural region. Overcoming the immense barriers of poverty, vast terrain, and the demands of working and/or family life poses great challenges for many potential students in northern New Mexico and south-central Colorado. The region's population is 51% Hispanic and 5% Native American. Fewer than 21% of adults age 25 and older hold a bachelor's degree. 42% of students at UNM-Taos and 18% of ASU's students are age 25+. A quarter of the region's families live in poverty.

The central goal of the *Caminos* project is: to increase access and academic opportunity for Hispanic and low-income students to support postsecondary degree completion in the Upper Rio Grande Region. Through collaborative planning and research, ASU (4-year HSI) and UNM-Taos (2-year HSI) have identified *distance education* as an effective path to bridging geographical and other barriers that prevent many residents from attaining a degree.

Title V funding, collaboration, and resource sharing will build the capacity each institution needs to increase enrollment, persistence, and graduation rates of Hispanic and other high-need students (*Absolute Priority*). Together, ASU and UNM-Taos will take a bold step forward in implementing improvements through distance technology innovations. Successful distance education encompasses online, hybrid, and web-enhanced applications in instructional delivery and incorporates interactive tools such as video, threaded discussions, etc. that offer new approaches for effective and rewarding learning. Drawing on each institution's deep experience serving diverse students, the project partners will improve persistence and degree completion through three synchronized efforts:

- 1) *Online Undergraduate Program Development*: Train faculty in online/hybrid instructional techniques and recognized standards that inspire world-class, high-quality distance courses; offer affordable degrees that prepare students for regional career opportunities;
- 2) *Online Delivery of Academic Support Services*: Create evidence-based academic support services tailored to online student needs, including student orientations, college success courses, tutoring, mentoring, and academic advising to improve retention;
- 3) *Infrastructure and Capacity Building*: Improve distance technology infrastructure and capacity; expand digital resources; build access/outreach in remote, rural communities.

Expected project outcomes include:

- 5% annual increase in online student enrollment in Yrs. 1-5; 10% annual increase in number of transfers from associate's to bachelor's programs in Yrs. 3-5;
- More than double the number of distance degrees awarded at UNM-Taos/ASU by Yr. 5;
- 5% annual increase in persistence rates through innovative distance academic supports;
- Increased capacity and institutional stability/sustainability through growth of distance education: institutionalization of 10+ positions, incl. academic support services for distance students.

The project partners seek \$3,178,389 to support this 5-year collaborative effort. The project meets both Competitive Preference Priorities.

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