CRITERIA RESPONSES

What has the CEO initiated or helped develop in the area of innovative programs used in two-year post-secondary education?

Dr. William Serrata currently is the President of El Paso Community College (EPCC) where he has served since 2012. He holds a Bachelor’s Degree from Texas A&M, a Master’s Degree from the University of Texas at Brownsville and a Doctorate of Philosophy in Educational Human Resource Development from Texas A&M. Prior to working at EPCC, Dr. Serrata worked at South Texas College leading all areas with the Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management where he served in multiple roles, including being the Vice President for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management where his leadership increased enrollment growth, retention and graduation rates with an emphasis on first-generation and Hispanic populations. His academic background combined with the results achieved throughout his career shaped him to be a leader at EPCC who has fostered innovation with proven results.

Under the leadership of Dr. Serrata, EPCC has become nationally recognized for student success and academic achievement. He has taken EPCC to the next level by developing and initiating innovative programs. As a result, the data shows that EPCC has made a measureable impact in many areas including increased completion of degrees and certificates, greater transfer rates, improved student engagement and retention, enhanced college readiness, creating a college going culture as well as numerous other student success measures. EPCC is an Achieving the Dream Leader College, was competitively chosen as one of only 30 colleges selected for the AACC initial Pathways Project and is nationally known for creating best practices in community colleges. In 2015, EPCC was named one of the nation’s Top Ten Community Colleges by the Aspen Institute.

The college is repeatedly ranked in Community College Week and Hispanic Outlook Magazine as 1st amongst nearly 1,200 community colleges in awarding associate degrees to Hispanic students; EPCC has also been awarded the Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) award from INSIGHT Into Diversity magazine; EPCC was also named multiple times to the coveted Military Friendly Schools® list which names the top 20 of the colleges, universities and trade schools in the country that are doing the most to embrace America’s military service members, veterans, and spouses as students and ensure their success on campus. The college was awarded the Leah Meyer Austin Institutional Student Success Leadership Award for outstanding institutional achievement in equity and excellence in 2011; and was recognized by Excelencia in Education with the “Samples of Excellence” award for the Early College High School program. In 2016, EPCC was recognized with AACC’s prestigious Student Success Award.

Dr. Serrata has a bold vision for change to ensure that the educational attainment in our region equals or exceeds national averages. One of many dynamic initiatives Dr. Serrata has brought to EPCC is creating a college-going and college-completing culture for the greater El Paso region. In El Paso, 80% population is Hispanic and nearly 25% families live below the poverty level so there is a great need to increase regional educational attainment. Dr. Serrata understands that education is the greatest disruptor to poverty and not only is he a strong advocate to make education more accessible but is also working to develop initiatives to ensure more students start and finish college. Research shows that parents have the greatest impact on a student’s decision to enroll in postsecondary education. Therefore, from creating and expanding EPCC’s Adopt an Elementary School Program to developing a parental component of New Student Orientation, Dr. Serrata is initiating efforts to create programs that are developing a college-going culture among children, students and parents.

The Adopt an Elementary program works by building strong elementary school and college connections through campus tours, workshops, presentations, outreach programs and parental involvement so it is his goal that EPCC builds a college going culture where college begins in kindergarten. EPCC has expanded the school adoption program to multiple campuses at all major ISDs in the area. “A student is never too young to learn the importance of going to college,” said Dr. Serrata. “Reaching out to elementary school students and their parents allows them to learn that higher education is within their reach and we build a college-going culture.”

The addition of a parental component to New Student Orientation helps parents encourage their children to attend college, but also educates them about the demands and importance of education so that students have the support they need to persist and complete. In addition, Dr. Serrata has fostered partnerships with the Greater El Paso Chamber of Commerce, the University of Texas at El Paso to expand the number of students completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and has also increased the number of College Transition Coordinators to follow-up with students. Dr. Serrata also has significantly grown and strengthened K-16 partnerships across the region to expand dual credit and early college high school opportunities. Results are showing that these efforts are increasing the numbers of students who pursue postsecondary education and creating the mindset the college is necessary and accessible to all citizens.

Under his leadership, EPCC has embarked on a visionary district-wide master planning process which will lead the institution in serving the higher education needs of the region through 2025. He has lead the effort to ensure that EPCC has a master plan for the Board of
Dr. Serrata’s commitment to equity was recognized when EPCC was named ACCT’s Western Regional Equity Award winner in 2016. As a leader he champions diversity. He supports and advocates for equity minded programs as well as development for faculty and staff that improve diversity awareness and inclusion. In order to ensure that student success initiatives are facilitating success and inclusive of all students, he has also made sure that decision making utilizes data that is disaggregated based on gender, race and ethnicity as well as age, social economic status and other demographics. By setting the example, Dr. Serrata is an exemplary leader who is committed to closing achievement gaps in our region, state and nation. This has resulted in increased degree attainment for Latino students, including Latino males. “President Serrata is a dynamic higher education leader, and he has been a consistent source of support for our growing research to practice efforts on behalf of Latino males in Texas higher education,” Victor Saenz, UT Austin Educational Administration Department Chair, said.

Dr. Serrata’s comprehensive leadership approach has had other measurable results. For example, even with a 25% enrollment growth over the past decade, graduation rates have outpaced that enrollment growth and have increased 211%. To increase college-readiness, Dr. Serrata has been a collaborative voice in the community helping to form multiple partnerships. For example, the El Paso Area Collaborative for College Readiness Consortium works to increase student participation in higher education, members include EPCC, area school districts, Region 19, the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) and ADP. EPCC also has extensive partnerships with K-12 school districts as evidenced by Early College High Schools, a growing Dual Credit program and the previously mentioned Elementary School Adoption Program. This success is evidenced by the increase in ECHS from one to 12 campuses that have graduated more than 2,200 students, nearly one-third being first generation college graduates. The Dual Credit Program has increased enrollment more than 3,500% since its inception in 2006 with an 87% success rate and more than half the students enroll at EPCC after high school and are college-ready. Qualitative evidence shows that College Begins in Kindergarten is successful in promoting a college-going culture. Additionally, student transfer trends have also improved. For example, students transferring to the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) have nearly doubled since these strategies have been implemented and more than 73% of all UTEP graduates have transfer credits from EPCC.

How has the CEO served on technical or special committees serving two-year postsecondary education, and what impact did this effort have on the community, state or nation? How has the CEO been active in developing, organizing or supporting state and/or national two-year postsecondary education associations?

Dr. Serrata is actively engaged in both service, committee and leadership roles for multiple organizations. All of these activities have a collective impact on postsecondary education at the community, state and national level. His involvement has helped promote progressive higher education practices, provided recommendations for legislative advisory committees and helped the overall progress of community colleges. He is regularly invited to participate in a variety of K-16 initiatives and programs. For example, in the fall of 2016 he was part of an exclusive delegation invited of 37 education, business and philanthropic leaders to travel to Singapore to take a look at the policies, best practices that have made that country an "educational powerhouse" and find way to replicate them in the U.S. Some of the committees and associations he has been a part of during the past five years include:

- Chair-Elect, American Association of Community Colleges (AACC)
- Texas Association of Community Colleges (TACC), Executive Board of Directors
- Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas—El Paso Board of Directors
- Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD)
- American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admission Officers (AACRAO)
- American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education (AAHHE)
- American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) Board of Directors
- Aspen Institute Ascend Fellow
- Catch the Next/Puente, Board of Directors
- Community & Technical Colleges Committee, Texas Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officer, Chair
- House Bill 5 Workgroup Committee Co-chair
- El Paso Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Board Member
- Excelencia in Education, Board Member
- Higher Education Research & Development Institute (HERDI) Advisory Board
- Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU)
- National Student Clearinghouse Advisory Committee

ACCT—Chief Executive Officer Nomination—Dr. William Serrata, EPCC
Dr. Serrata is known for having a caring and compassionate attitude and has a steadfast commitment to ensuring student success. He truly believes in the mission of community colleges to assist first-generation, economically disadvantaged and minority students. He acts with great passion to facilitate the success of these students by continuing to raise expectations and rigor while providing the support they need to succeed. Because of his sincerity, genuine goals and hard work, he is widely admired within and outside of EPCC.

Dr. Serrata has a strong working relationship with the Board of Trustees that is positive and productive. They frequently comment on his collaborative working style, effective ability to communicate along with his commitment to implement the student success goals that the Trustees have set forth. “Driven by data, devoted to innovative ways to build a stronger educated workforce, and dedicated to student completion, Dr. Serrata embodies the mission of a community college,” Selena Solis, EPCC Board Trustee said.

His administrative cabinet echo the same sentiments about his interactions with them as well as others. “Dr. Serrata is a visionary leader who is purposeful about creating an environment that fosters cooperation and cohesiveness among EPCC's senior leadership. He encourages cross-departmental thinking with all constituents participating fully,” Steve Smith, EPCC Vice President of Instruction and Workforce Education said. “His leadership has transformed the way EPCC administration operates and this transformation has positively affected the entire institution.”

His caring attitude and passion are contagious. Dr. Serrata has been well received by faculty, staff and administration. He seeks to keep his college team informed and effectively solicits their involvement when possible. He does an annual State of the College presentation as well as visits all campuses frequently for town hall meetings or interactive ‘Sodas with Serrata’ or coffee with the President. He is highly respected by college constituency groups such as the Student Government Association, Faculty Senate, Classified Staff Association and the Professional Staff Association who he regularly meets with.

Above all, Dr. Serrata is genuine and sincere. He never fails to acknowledge the work of others, including staff and even past presidents and also frequently credits his role models and mentors. Even when achievements are a result of his own efforts, he is extraordinarily humble and puts the limelight on those around him instead of himself. He does this important work not for accolades or recognition, but with students in mind. When things are going well or exceed expectations he says the credit lies with faculty and staff, but if anything falls below expectations, he is the first to take responsibility. For Dr. Serrata, it all begins and ends with student success.

Serrata’s leadership style and caring attitude is highly influenced by his own personal struggles as an undergraduate. “I am a first-generation Latino college student and also the oldest of four siblings. My parents did not have an opportunity to attend college, but insisted that each of their children did. It was my responsibility to be the first in our family to graduate from college and thus set the example and expectation that each of my younger siblings follow suit, which they have. As a result, my family is the perfect example of the power of higher education,” Serrata said. “Given my personal background and how it parallels the vast majority of the students we are privileged to serve at El Paso Community College coupled with the synergy of community leaders in El Paso, I believe that we are ready to meet the college-going and college-completing challenge.”
Not only is this positive attitude seen by the college team, he is also recognized as a caring, dynamic leader community wide. He acknowledges that as President of EPCC that it is his responsibility to also serve the local committee which has embraced him and his family. This is exemplified by the strong partnerships he has created with K-16, business and industry and non-profits and his community volunteerism. He is regularly asked to speak at community events and to serve on various boards and committees. An example of the boards he serves on includes United Way of El Paso County, Sierra Providence East Hospital, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Executive Committee, Workforce Solutions Rio Grande and many others. He has been awarded as a McDonald's Hispanos Triunfador and given the Workforce Solutions Borderplex Chairman’s Award in recognition of his collaborations, service and attitude of caring.

What has the CEO published in the area of two-year postsecondary educational concepts?


In addition to publications, Dr. Serrata frequently is invited to present about post-secondary education locally, regionally and at the national level where he has delivered more than 100 presentations. He is also sought out as an educational expert by the media and has been quoted by Community College Daily, Inside Higher Ed, the New York Times and profiled on National Public Radio as well as other leading news outlets. He has been featured on the cover of the Community College Journal and profiled in other publications.

What awards or honors has this CEO received in recognition of leadership in the college, community or nation?

- 2017 Recognized and profiled as an Hispanic Leader in Education by Diversity in Education Magazine
- 2016 Recipient—Workforce Solutions Borderplex Chairman’s Award
- 2016 Recipient—McDonald’s Hispano Triunfadores for Education
- 2015 Aspen Ascend Fellow
- 2012 Recipient – National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) Excellence Award
- 2006 Recipient – Presidential Jaguar Excellence Award, Office of the President, South Texas College.
- 2005 Recipient - Employee of the Year – Pecan Campus, South Texas College.
- 2005 Inducted – Honorary Member of Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, South Texas College Beta Mu Chapter.
- 2002 Recipient - Jaguar Excellence Award, Division of Student Services & Development, South Texas Community College.
- 1996 Recipient – Exceptional Merit, Division of Student Affairs, The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College.

What outstanding characteristics of this CEO motivated you to nominate him?
Dr. Serrata’s overall ability, leadership and passion for post-secondary education in unmatched. The Board of Trustees believes that his vast knowledge, extraordinary commitment and demonstrated results at EPCC, throughout the state and nation make him deserving and qualified for this award. “EPCC and the El Paso community as a whole could not have chosen a better leader than Dr. Serrata to advance student success,” Board Trustee Selena Solis said. "His passion for ensuring that every child not only has access to higher education, but also the support to be successful has been tantamount to the national and regional recognition and trust Dr. Serrata has garnered from all sectors of the community in such a short time.”