

# CHEC Out the View

*Collin Higher Education Center offers a world of opportunities close to home*

by Kirk DICKEY



Throughout the day, groups of students gather in the lobby, enjoying the light and the plush furniture to talk between the classes that will help them earn a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree. That's where you could find Arwa Muhammad most days when the Allen special education resident teacher was between classes at the center. Muhammad said the students in her early childhood education classes always seemed to gather in small groups in the comfy seats around the building to go over assignments, work on lessons or prepare notes during seminars.

Muhammad is working on her bachelor of interdisciplinary studies degree from Texas A&M University-Commerce and attends the Collin Higher Education Center, which is located in McKinney at the corner of U.S. Highway 75 and the Sam Rayburn Tollway. Her degree requires that she also attend special education teaching seminars in Commerce about once a month, but Muhammad said that the option to take most of her classes at CHEC was a big help.

According to Dr. Bob Collins, who chairs the Collin College Board of Trustees, "There was a time when a student with a full-time job could commute to a university after work for night classes. Today, that's nearly impossible because of gridlock on the highways. We created CHEC so



our students could complete associate degrees at Collin College and then earn university degrees without leaving Collin County. Clearly, it's working."

For Muhammad who enjoys living in Allen, taking all the classes she could at CHEC made sense. That wasn't the only reason she liked taking classes in McKinney, though.

"The professors there were amazing, so once I started there, I continued," she said. "It was closer. I didn't have to move, and I wasn't losing the standard of education by staying at CHEC."

That standard of education is maintained because of the partnerships between Collin College and the universities that share space in CHEC, including Texas A&M University-Commerce, Texas Tech University, Texas Woman's University, The University of Texas at Dallas and the University of North Texas.

"The Collin Higher Education Center is a perfect extension of higher education, connecting our associate degree graduates with these university programs," Collin College Executive Vice President Dr. Brenda Kihl said. "We believe collaborating with exceptional universities is one way to provide much-needed services to our students seeking higher degrees."

As part of that service, each of the partner universities maintains an office at CHEC, where university staff members meet with students to offer guidance on admissions, registration, financial aid and university policies as well as help with any other needs the students might have in pursuing their degree. Although Collin College owns the facility, the students who come through the center are enrolled with the partner universities.

Likewise, each university employs its own professors to teach classes at the center. By employing their own professors, the universities can be assured that the students are exposed to the same academic rigor that they could expect from attending their home campuses.

The partner universities offer dozens of degree plans ranging from a bachelor's degree in accounting to a master's of business administration or a Ph.D. in counseling, all from Collin County's first and only university center.

Texas Woman's University is taking advantage of the center's teleconferencing rooms to offer a master's of healthcare administration that has only been available in Houston prior to this year. The professors

teaching the class will split time between the CHEC building and the Houston TWU campus, with students at both locations getting some in-person instruction and some teleconferenced instruction.

Bringing new opportunities to the residents of Collin County was one reason the university center was built five years ago. Since that time, enrollment at the center has tripled.

That may be in part because Collin College students are seeing the benefits

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of continuing their educations through one of the CHEC partnerships. If a student takes the required courses at one of Collin College's other campuses before transferring to one of the CHEC

partner universities, the cost savings can be substantial.

"For students, the bottom line is cost savings," said Collin College District President Dr. Neil Matkin.

"Collin College has the lowest tuition in the state, and we are committed to a model that doesn't leave students paying on loan debt for the rest of their lives."

By coming to the CHEC rather than commuting or uprooting their life to attend a university on its home campus, students like Muhammad also save money on gas, rent and other expenses.

"It's easy to save money here," Dr. Kihl said. "There are smaller class sizes. You don't pay for parking. You can still work. You can still live at home."

For students attending classes at the university center, the most important benefits are the degrees they will receive.

However, the four-story building also has an inspirational view. Whenever a student is stressed out by a test or a hard assignment, all he has to do to remember why he is working so hard is to look up.

Learn more about the Collin Higher Education Center and see all of the degree plans offered there at [www.collin.edu/chec](http://www.collin.edu/chec). ❖

*Kirk Dickey is a public relations writer for Collin College.*

*Photos: Nick Young, Collin College.*