



U.S. Department of Education

Sample Projects Evaluated by PEER

Preparing Next Generation Special Education Teacher/Scholars: Focus on Equity Mindset, High-Quality Instruction, and Student-Centered Approaches that Achieve Equitable Outcomes for all Learners at a Hispanic Serving Institution (Project Next Gen SET) (2023–2028)

This U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services funded project focuses on preparing scholars, including those from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds, to serve children, including infants, toddlers, and youth, with disabilities. The project aims to recruit 40 graduate-level scholars pursuing their master's in Exceptional Student Education and train them to become high-quality, fully credentialed special education teachers. Moreover, course curriculum is being enhanced to provide scholars with advanced skills and knowledge to improve their teaching practices. The project will also create a Virtual SET Professional Network (VSPN) of advising and peer support to facilitate induction into the field.

- Principal Investigator: Dr. Elizabeth A. Dooley, Ed.D., UCF College of Community Innovation and Education

Project ELEVATE (Elevate Learning by Empowering and Valuing Advancement of Teacher and other Educators) (2023–2026)

Project ELEVATE is a project sponsored project awarded through the U.S. Department of Education Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program. It serves a network of eight schools in the UCP Charter Schools network of public charter schools in Central Florida. UCP Charter Schools, a Charter LEA, serves approximately 2,100 students from 18 months through 12th grade with a disproportionate number of students with disabilities (including students with significant disabilities) educated together with their peers. The project addresses the challenges associated with recruitment and retention of effective teachers and leaders in high need schools and build capacity in teacher leadership through development and implementation of a customized targeted and job embedded professional learning program, teacher mentor/coaching, master teachers and model classroom, development and implementation of a gamification incentive program, a Principal Academy and Principal Resident program, and building Instructional Leadership Teams (ILT).

- Principal Investigator: Dr. Ilene Wilkins, President/CEO of UCP of Central Florida

Systemic School Treatment and Response Project (Project STAR) (2023–2027)

The goal of this U.S. Department of Education Office of Elementary and Secondary Education sponsored project is to increase the number of qualified school-based mental health service professionals, specifically school counselors and school psychologists. To accomplish this, the program will train graduate students from UCF by placing them into school-based practicum and internship settings each year. Following completion, Project STAR student interns are required to maintain eligible employment as a school-based mental health services provider for one year. Project STAR supports four high-need Local Education Agencies (LEAs), including Orange County Public Schools, Seminole County Public Schools, School District of Osceola County, and Volusia County Schools.

- Principal Investigator: Dr. Melissa Zeligman, Ph.D., LPC, NCC, UCF College of Community Innovation and Education



ENFERMERIA: Educating Nurses for Engagement, Research, Mentoring Excellence and Reinforcing Interpretation Access (2022–2027)

This U.S. Department of Education PPOHA (Title V Part B) sponsored project is aimed at increasing Hispanic/Latino/a/x representation in nursing graduate programs at UCF. The project allows UCF to expand efforts that support Hispanic/Latino/a/x student success and strategically address the critical nursing shortage of Florida and the nation. Goals for the project include increasing the number of Hispanic postbaccalaureate students served by UCF; attending to Hispanic postbaccalaureate students social, emotional, and academic needs; and increasing Hispanic postbaccalaureate education access, affordability, completion, and career success. These are being accomplished through activities such as enrollment, faculty recruitment, curriculum expansion, and holistic support.

- Principal Investigator: Dr. Andrea Guzman, Ed.D., Office of the VP Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

English-Learner Infused Training and Experience (ELITE) Program for Early and Primary Learning Educators (\$2,603,976, 2022–2027)

Project ELITE is a U.S. Department of Education Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA), National Professional Development Program (NPD) funded project at UCF that supports English Learners (EL) instruction and school/community engagement by emphasizing academic content literacy in voluntary pre-kindergarten (VPK) through Grade 3 and strategies to increase and strengthen parent, family, and community engagement within schools and across the community. This aim is being achieved through ELITE's structure of layers of interconnected EL supports which include (a) job-embedded EL professional learning for teachers, paraprofessionals, and educational leaders, focusing on literacy and EL evidence-based key instructional strategies, and EL parent, family and community engagement strategies; (b) EL parent, family, and community engagement activities, emphasizing culturally responsive and linguistically responsive practices; and (c) advancing EL parent agency.

- Principal Investigator: Dr. Marjorie Ceballos, E.D., UCF College of Community Innovation and Education

Project RAISE: Robots and Artificial Intelligence to Improve Social Skills for Elementary Students (\$2,500,000, 2021–2025)

Project RAISE is a collaborative project between UCP of Central Florida and the University of Central Florida that aims to improve the social skills of students with disabilities by creating a teaching toolkit featuring the Dash™ robot and an AI-driven socially assistive robot, ZB. Through the experience students will have opportunities to learn basic coding while also practicing real-world skills like problem solving, collaboration, cooperation, and strategic thinking in a safe, distraction-free environment.

- Principal Investigator: Dr. Ilene Wilkins, President/CEO of UCP of Central Florida

Dual Language Support through Technology Enhanced Programs and Strategies (Dual Language STEPS) (\$2,691,313, 2017–2023)

Dual Language STEPS was designed to improve English learners' (ELs) academic achievement by fostering dual language programs across the Greater Orlando and Tampa Bay areas. The U.S. Department of Education awarded over \$2.6 million in funding through its Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) to the UCF College of Community Innovation and Education in collaboration with the UCF College of Arts and Humanities to prepare 100 highly qualified dual language K–12 teachers through a technology enhanced dual language education graduate certificate. In addition to developing a certificate program in



Dual Language, the project also had a community component focusing on improving parental, family, and community engagement in dual language.

- Principal Investigator: Dr. Joyce Nutta, UCF College of Community Innovation and Education

Micro-credentialing of English Learners Teaching Skills (MELTS) (\$2,441,766, 2016–2022)

The MELTS project was a U.S. Department of Education Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA), National Professional Development Program (NPD) funded project at UCF. UCF partnered with Pinellas County Schools (PCS) in Florida to meet OELA's priorities for the NPD grant using the TESOL WIDA Proficiency Standards and prior data collected on UCF preservice teachers (PSTs), the MELTS project team developed ten key instructional micro skill performance tasks for three different English Learner (EL) proficiency levels to be demonstrated by PCS in-service teachers, videotaped, and modeled with UCF preservice teachers through their courses of study. PSTs then practiced and demonstrated these skills either through (a) peer micro-teaching or in the (b) TeachLivE elementary classroom simulator at UCF for evaluation by trained observers. PSTs who demonstrated attainment of these skills were to receive micro credentialing Digital Badges to validate their expertise. Micro-credentialing activities developed by MELTS met the criteria for strong and moderate evidence of effectiveness based on the What Works Clearinghouse evidentiary reports.

- Principal Investigator: Dr. Joyce Nutta, UCF College of Community Innovation and Education

Project ASD: Special Educator Preparation in Autism Spectrum Disorders (\$1,200,000, 2011–2015)

The goals of this U.S. Department of Education (ED) Professional Development Program funded grant were to (a) increase the number of certified special education teachers highly qualified to implement evidence based practices for comprehensive programming for students with ASD; (b) enhance the University of Central Florida's (UCF) current teacher preparation programming in ASD to include transition planning and interdisciplinary teaming to support increased inclusion of individuals with ASD in school and community settings; and (c) expand UCF's current mentorship/demonstration site program to include opportunities for high quality practicum experiences in a variety of settings with increased emphasis on high poverty schools and exemplary transition programs.

- Principal Investigator: Dr. Wilfred Wienke, UCF College of Community Innovation and Education

College Bound Project (\$748,284, 2010–2013):

Trident Technical College (TTC), in Charleston, South Carolina, received funding through the U.S. Department of Education's (ED) Fund for Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) program. The primary objective of the College Bound project was to increase the effectiveness of teachers, thereby increasing the number of students attending TTC; decreasing the percentage of students requiring developmental reading; and increasing the persistence, completion, and four-year college transfer rates of the cohort. It was intended that the College Bound proactive approach would be replicable in community colleges nationwide.

- Project Director: Randy Howell, Trident Technical College, Charleston, SC

MILMI - International Masters in Laser Materials and Interactions or Trans-Atlantic Graduate School in Laser Materials and Interactions (2009–2012)

MILMI was sponsored by the European Union—United States Atlantis Program, which was jointly administered and funded by the U.S. Department of Education's CED Fund for the Improvement of



Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) and the European Commission's Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG EAC). It involved students from four partnering institutions including University of Central Florida, Clemson University, University of Bordeaux in France, and Friedrich Schiller University of Jena in Germany. Students involved in this program, if successful, obtained two graduate degrees, one from their home institution and one from another overseas. This process takes about two years, where they study for one year at their home institution and one year abroad.

- Principal Investigator: Dr. Martin Richardson, Professor, UCF College of Optics and Photonics

Improving the Use of Postsecondary Data (\$89,000, 2010–2011)

The purpose of this investigation was to provide evaluation services to help Osceola Public Schools meet their ED Sponsored Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) Grant objectives for improving the use of postsecondary data. The Smaller Learning Communities program awards discretionary grants to local educational agencies (LEA) to support the implementation of SLC and activities to improve student academic achievement in large public high schools with enrollments of 1,000 or more students. SLC include structures such as freshman academies, multi-grade academies organized around career interests or other themes, "houses" in which small groups of students remain together throughout high school, and autonomous schools within a school, as well as personalization strategies, such as student advisories, family advocate systems, and mentoring programs. This formative evaluation report focused on survey results from senior exit exams administered at one of the two Osceola high schools, Poinciana High School. PEER assisted with survey development and analyzed data from senior exit surveys.

- Lead Institution: School District of Osceola County