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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

EIU INITIATES PROGRAM TO INCREASE MINORITY TEACHERS

CHARLESTON -- Eastern Illinois University has teamed up with Rend Lake and Danville Area Community colleges to encourage minority students to become teachers.

"By working cooperatively with these two community colleges and their feeder schools, we hope to identify potential teachers among minority students. Although the long-range goal is to recruit teachers, the more immediate goal is to help students develop a positive attitude about their futures," said project director Freddie Banks, assistant professor of educational administration at Eastern.

Banks said the "Minority Teacher Identification and Enrichment Program," funded by a \$150,000 Illinois Board of Higher Education "Higher Education Cooperation Act" (HECA) grant, will help address a nationwide shortage of minority teachers.

In Illinois, Banks noted that the 5-plus-5 early retirement program has created a shortage of teachers. There is an even greater demand for minority teachers, particularly in urban areas, he said.

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The initial phase of the program will be the creation of Minority Teacher Education Association (MTEA) chapters at the participating schools.

Minority students from all educational levels are introduced to teaching through participation in their school's MTEA. Faculty sponsors mentor the students, sharing their knowledge of the teaching profession and its requirements and opportunities at regularly scheduled MTEA meetings. They also provide tutorial assistance and inform students about financial aid and other topics of interest to the pre-teacher.

"Our goal is to create a cohesive group of students who share the common goal of going on to college to become teachers. Through MTEA, we can attempt to break down the stereotypes of teaching and communicate to students that teaching is a worthwhile vocation that is very challenging," said Judith Lyles, assistant project director and an associate professor in Eastern's educational psychology and guidance department.

"Each MTEA chapter consists of a local coalition of students, educators and community members and functions as an educational and support group, with members at the cooperating schools working to improve the basic skills of minority students, to encourage them to live up to their potential and to help identify the future teachers among them," Banks said.

The MTEAs at the participating schools are modeled after Eastern's association, which already has been proven successful. Banks founded the association in

1992 to provide students enrolled in a teacher education program with a successful undergraduate education experience. MTEA members also receive hands-on teaching practice by observing teachers in the public schools and tutoring children or serving as teacher's aides in a classroom.

Banks said all association members who have graduated from Eastern have obtained teaching positions through their MTEA contacts.

To further encourage minority students to choose teaching careers, the Minority Teacher Identification and Enrichment Program includes a two-week summer session on the EIU campus.

About 30-50 junior high, high school and community college MTEA members complete courses which emphasize reading, writing, computing, mathematical skills, music and art. The courses are taught by faculty members from Eastern and from the cooperating institutions. Study skills workshops, science field trips and social activities also are planned.

"For some high school seniors and second-year community college students, the program will act as a bridge familiarizing them with life at and the expectations of a four-year institution. For all participants, the summer component will sharpen basic tutoring and mentoring skills as it enriches their understanding of and interest in the teaching profession," Banks said.

Through these activities, the Minority Teacher Identification and Enrichment Program is conservatively estimated to serve 200 minority students, primary and secondary teachers, community college and university faculty and staff, and community leaders, Banks said.

For more information about the program, call Banks at (217) 581-7055.