Alumnus Works on Behalf of Thousands of Students at Texas Tech
by Kristin Kemp

Texas Tech University in Lubbock has roughly 36,000 students, and nearly 30,000 are undergraduate students. As TTU’s associate vice provost for undergraduate education, Dr. Patrick Hughes (PhD ’01, communication studies) is focused on ensuring TTU students have a rewarding and meaningful college experience.

Hughes has been a highly productive scholar in the communication studies department at TTU ever since he began teaching there in 2000; he has secured $1.3 million in funded research during his tenure. In 2011 he accepted a campus-wide administrative role to focus on TTU’s undergraduate students.

His latest co-edited book, Perspectives in Interdisciplinary and Integrative Studies, is a compilation of essays about higher education best practices. The book is a resource for college administrators across the country who are responsible for academic assessment, degree program development and the promotion of an integrative campus culture. In fact, administrators at DU have read his book.

“Sixteen years ago Patrick was a promising doctoral student at DU. Now he’s a national leader in higher education,” said Dr. Danny McIntosh, dean of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences at DU. “His counsel is invaluable to us in AHSS, especially as we strive to enhance experiential, interdisciplinary opportunities for our students.”

Multidisciplinary approaches have been present on college campuses for a long time, including at DU. But they haven’t always been the focus nor have they been broadly adopted yet.

“Though I wouldn’t say a shift from discipline-focused approaches to interdisciplinary and integrative approaches is occurring widely across higher education, it does seem to me that colleges and universities are interested in learning more about how interdisciplinary and integrative pedagogies can be used to teach students to think critically about important, complex problems and synthesize knowledge,” said Hughes. His latest book is a reflection of some shifting trends in higher education.

Hughes’ affinity for research and teaching began during his bachelor’s and master’s studies, which both required an original thesis project as a partial fulfillment of graduating.

“I [have] always enjoyed designing research projects, collecting and analyzing data and thinking through the implications. Or as they say, answering the ‘so what?’
questions,“ said Hughes. As a master’s graduate student, he realized he still wasn’t ready to be done with school. He began considering a number of communication doctoral programs, and ultimately selected DU.

“DU’s Ph.D. in human communication was a great fit. The faculty were actively researching and publishing. I was encouraged to freely explore a wide range of theoretical and methodological perspectives, and I was given opportunities to build experiences teaching and collaborating on research,” said Hughes, who then landed a tenure-track position at TTU, which had both high research and teaching expectations.

“Good research and good teaching are not mutually exclusive. I believe my research experiences have made my teaching more effective in the classroom,” said Hughes. “Pursuing research funding is an excellent way to build collaborative relationships with one’s colleagues across a university. Many research grants are written in collaboration with scholars from a variety of fields.”

He has continued to publish new works as associate vice provost, with his latest book about academia best practices in integrative studies perhaps demonstrating a reflection of his experiences as a collaborative researcher as well as his administrative role to serve TTU’s undergraduate students.

“As associate vice provost, I am fortunate to have the opportunity to work with campus leadership on a number of student-centered initiatives,” said Hughes. “For example, our collective efforts at TTU to improve student success and retention are resulting in positive outcomes such as increases in one-year and two-year retention rates.”

“One of the best things about being a professor is seeing students succeed academically and then apply their expertise to the betterment of their careers and communities,” he added.