

# PREP SUPPORT COMMITTEE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:  
WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 17, 2003

CONTACT: Joleen García  
210/ 715-0519

## CONCERNED COMMUNITY MEMBERS LAUNCH PETITION DRIVE TO SAVE NATIONALLY ACCLAIMED PREP PROGRAM

**San Antonio**—Community members alarmed by what is happening to the award-winning Pre-Freshman Engineering Program (PREP) and its celebrated founder, Manuel P. Berriozábal, Ph.D., held a public rally this afternoon at the downtown campus of the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) to launch a petition drive to “*Save PREP and Bring Back Dr. Berriozábal.*”

The petition (attached) calls on UTSA President Ricardo Romo, Ph.D. to save PREP by restoring Dr. Berriozábal to his full leadership responsibilities for PREP and its statewide and nationwide offshoots, Tex-PREP and Proyecto Access.

The petition drive – organized by the PREP Support Committee, an ad hoc group of past PREP participants, parents and family of PREP participants, students, community activists, educators, business people, healthcare practitioners, artists, lawyers, religious, engineers, administrators, and other concerned individuals – is also being conducted online at <[www.saveprep.org](http://www.saveprep.org)>.

According to the PREP Support Committee, in June 2003 – at the start of the 25<sup>th</sup> annual summer PREP program – a UTSA administrator notified Dr. Berriozábal, 72, that he was being removed from his position as overall director of PREP. Dr. Berriozábal, or “Dr. B,” as he is affectionately known by thousands of past PREP participants and their families, was instead being assigned to the position of “PREP Development Director” – with no responsibility for the intellectual and academic leadership of PREP, and with no staff.

This “arbitrary and capricious” decision, according to the PREP Support Committee, came on the heels of an eight-month-long forced leave of absence initiated by UTSA when Dr. Berriozábal became part of an investigation last fall by the District Attorney’s office in connection with his role as a volunteer treasurer for the San Antonio Area Foundation, which is part of the Alamo Community College District (ACCD).

(more)

## Community Launches Petition Drive To Save PREP /p. 2

In June 2003, the District Attorney's office made clear that Dr. Berriozábal was not a subject of the investigation but a *witness*. Instead of being fully reinstated to his position as overseer of all PREP programs, however, Dr. Berriozábal was inexplicably ousted from PREP's helm by Jude Valdez, Ph.D., a UTSA vice president, according to the PREP Support Committee.

Characterizing the UTSA administrator's action as "shameful," Joleen García, a PREP graduate and spokeswoman for the PREP Support Committee, said, "Is this any way to treat a community hero – a man who against all odds and with extraordinary dedication founded and for 25 years has directed a program that has benefited 10,000 children, mostly children of color, in San Antonio alone?" She went on to note that the UTSA administrator's action "is also dangerous, putting PREP needlessly at risk." García noted that during the founder's banishment from PREP and while UTSA Vice President Valdez has been directly responsible for the program, three of 14 Tex-PREP sites have shut down.

According to the PREP Support Committee, UTSA has recently placed ads in the San Antonio Express-News announcing its search for a "PREP Director" and a "Proyecto Access Director." In both cases, UTSA is seeking to replace Dr. Berriozábal, who possesses a doctorate in mathematics and has researched and published on issues related to minorities and mathematics education, as well as provided expert testimony on these matters before the U.S. Congress and the Texas State Legislature, with candidates possessing less rigorous intellectual and academic qualifications.

The PREP Support Committee has repeatedly sought and obtained no response from UTSA as to why one of its administrators has put PREP at risk by dismissing Dr. Berriozábal from its helm. The petition notes that this action "already has weakened the PREP program, excluding many young people from participating, and will further injure the PREP program and the opportunities for young people in San Antonio, Texas, and the nation, if corrective action is not taken."

The petition asks UTSA President Romo to intervene and take "corrective action," bringing Dr. Berriozabal back to the helm of the award-winning<sup>1</sup> programs he founded and has so ably run.

# # #

---

<sup>1</sup> In 1997, San Antonio PREP received the nation's highest recognition when Dr. B accepted, on its behalf, the *Presidential Award for Excellence in Science, Mathematics, and Engineering Mentoring* at a White House ceremony. Over the years, Dr. B and PREP have received other numerous awards, honors, and commendations. Among the more recent: In 2000, Dr. B was inducted as a *Charter Member of the Texas Hall of Fame for Science, Mathematics and Technology*, along with Dr. Michael DeBakey, Dr. Denton Cooley, four astronauts, and four Nobel Laureates. In 2001, Dr. B received the most prestigious award given annually by the Mathematical Association of America to one of its 24,000 members for distinguished service. Hispanic Business Magazine in 2001 named him one of "100 Most Influential Hispanics." In 2002 TexPREP, the state network of PREP programs received the *Texas Higher Education Star Award*, and in 2003, while banished from PREP, UTSA bestowed on him the *President's Distinguished Achievement Award for Excellence in University Service*.