

SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



Farewell to Russ Hodges: Retiring After 42 Years

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Russ Hodges, EdD, an associate professor in the Graduate Program in Postsecondary Student Success in Learning, Literacy, and Mathematics within the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Texas State University (TXST) in San Marcos, Texas, recently retired in August of 2025. He will step down as co-editor of *Journal of College Academic Support Programs (J-CASP)* with the release of this issue. Russ taught both graduate and undergraduate courses and retired after a 42-year career, which he began as an academic counselor and lecturer at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette (ULL, 1983–1986), and continued at TXST (1986–2025). He is a distinguished Council of Learning Assistance and Developmental Education Associations (CLADEA) Fellow, former CLADEA chair, and former president of both the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA) and the Texas Chapter of CRLA.

Russ is the recipient of numerous accolades throughout his career for his teaching, scholarship, and service, including two Lifetime Achievement Awards (College Academic Support Programs [CASP] Conference and the Association for the Coaching and Tutoring Profession), the Gladys R. Shaw Outstanding Service to Developmental Education Students Award (National Organization for Student Success), the Karen G. Smith Special Recognition Award for Outstanding Service (CRLA), the Distinguished Teaching Award (CRLA), the Excellence in Diversity and Inclusion Faculty Award (TXST), and the Alumni Teaching Award of Honor (TXST). He was also named “Advisor of the Year” (Student Government Association at the ULL).

Russ’s many scholarly, practical, and service-related contributions to the field of developmental education and postsecondary student success include 19 book/chapter publications, which include three editions of his international best-selling student success textbook titled *Academic Transformation: The Road to College Success* (Sellers et al., 2005, 2011, 2015). He also co-edited CRLA’s highly popular *Handbook for Training Peer Mentors and Tutors* (Agee & Hodges, 2012) and co-edited *Teaching Study Strategies in*

Developmental Education: Readings on Theory, Research, and Best Practices (Hodges et al., 2012). His latest co-edited book, *The Handbook of Peer Tutoring* (Sanford et al., in press), will be released this October. Additionally, Russ has published 19 juried journal articles, conducted 20 keynote addresses, conducted 55 juried and invited conference institutes, presented 94 juried conference sessions, and delivered 85 invited talks, workshops, and/or guest lectures. Finally, Russ helped to secure and was a co-principal investigator on nearly \$1.5 million in external grants and contracts during his time at TXST.

Beyond scholarship, Russ also made significant strides for the field through his impact on policy changes at university and state levels by providing professional development for programs and practitioners across the country and through mentoring countless professionals and graduate students, who are now leaders in their own right. When Russ was hired, the university environment was ripe with opportunity for young professionals interested in working with developmental students and expanding the field. The learning assistance center was well-established, and its staff members were actively engaged in state and national organizations, including the CRLA, the Texas CASP conference, and the NOSS.

Almost four decades ago, an ambitious young Russ Hodges stopped by the learning assistance center at Southwest Texas State University (now TXST) to inquire about future job possibilities. As chance would have it, the center staff, who also coordinated the applied learning strategies course, *Effective Learning*, was looking to hire a new instructor. Little did anyone know that during his 38-year career at TXST, this eager young man from Louisiana would become one of the most nationally influential people in the field of developmental education and postsecondary student success.

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Having previously taught academic skills courses at the ULL, Russ was hired in 1986 to teach *Effective Learning* and coordinate outreach presentations for the Student Learning Assistance Center (SLAC). His reputation as an outgoing, caring, and fun instructor and colleague grew quickly, and the following year, he was invited to teach the new *University Seminar* course for freshmen and transfer students, which was offered through the College of General Studies. Russ continued teaching this additional course, often to students conditionally admitted to the university, for 23 years, serving as a faculty mentor and group leader for 6 of those years.

A major focus of Russ's research and practice has been on learning frameworks courses, such as the *Effective Learning* course he inherited from his mentor, Dr. De Sellers. At the time that Russ was an assistant professor, there were only a handful of learning frameworks courses in Texas offered for credit at the university level. In 1999, armed with research results of the positive effects of his learning frameworks course on college student success outcomes, Russ helped lead a collaboration between Texas State University and the University of Texas, which also had findings about the positive effects of their learning frameworks course developed by Dr. Claire Ellen Weinstein, one of Russ's dear friends and colleagues. Russ's testimony to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board was influential in the authorization of formula funding for learning frameworks courses. In turn, Russ's contribution to the authorization likely influenced his subsequent promotion to a tenured associate professor.

As Russ recounts, he was asked by his vice president to attend the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board meeting in Austin. Much to his relief, he was told he would not have to speak at all during the meeting. Much to his dismay, that quickly proved to be false. When board members began to ask questions about the research supporting the effectiveness of the course on student outcomes, his vice president simply exclaimed, "Oh yes, here is Dr. Russ Hodges to tell you all about that."

The petition was a success that led to the authorization of formula funding for the course and a subsequent surge in learning frameworks course offerings across Texas 2-year and 4-year colleges and universities. Russ has been and continues to be a major force in shaping learning frameworks courses in Texas and beyond through his research, policy, professional development, and practice. In addition to helping transform undergraduate education in Texas through his work on learning frameworks courses, Russ also helped establish the first-ever PhD program in Developmental Education in the United States and, quite possibly, in the world.

To address the growing need for postsecondary researchers and educational professionals with advanced degrees in developmental education and

postsecondary student success, Russ co-created the Graduate Program in Developmental Education (later titled the Graduate Program in Postsecondary Student Success in Learning, Literacy, and Mathematics). Approved in 2011, this innovative multidisciplinary program offers PhD, EdD, and MA degrees in Postsecondary Student Success with concentrations in learning support, literacy, and developmental mathematics. Russ has left an enduring legacy of excellence and compassion in his graduate program, where he loyally served as faculty, instructor, student advocate, mentor, and dissertation advisor to many students over the years. As faculty, Russ has chaired five dissertations, served 12 times as a dissertation committee member, and participated three times as a master's committee member. Two of these students won nationally recognized awards for their dissertation research.

Whether Russ was planning for a conference, writing for a textbook, or having an outing with colleagues, his graduate students were always close behind. Even the most apprehensive of his mentees was thrust into the limelight at conference luncheons, vendor dinners, pre-conference workshops, and the occasional ski lift. His end goal was always to encourage graduate students to attend conferences, especially if they could meet with their scholarly heroes. One of his most classic moves was to simply call juggernauts of the field on the phone while in Zoom meetings with students and say, "Oh, by the way, my graduate students are here, and I would like for them to introduce themselves." He has created countless connections between emerging scholars with a simple press of the speaker phone button.

A true extrovert with a passion for service throughout his career, Russ found his niche in the rapidly expanding and evolving landscape of developmental education conferences, institutes, workshops, and symposia. He thrived on planning CASP conferences and assisting with Texas State's Technology Institute for Developmental Educators (TIDE), creatively searching for just the right themes, logos, hotels, entertainment, menus, and off-site excursions before overseeing the conferences and institutes as site chair in addition to presenting papers and workshops. Russ rarely missed an opportunity to dance with conference attendees at opening night festivities, visit for hours making new friends, lead the off-site adventures, or co-host hospitality suites (often with his loving husband Santi at his side). He is especially known for his conference pranks. Just ask Dr. Karen Agee about the snowball incident or Dr. Deb Daiek about her CLADEA Fellow induction. Working directly with Russ to plan and host Austin-area conferences, as well as traveling to conferences, always resulted in fun-filled, memorable experiences exploring new cities, restaurants, museums, and natural surroundings.

Volunteering at the local level eventually led to opportunities for national service, and for Russ, CASP and TX-CRLA (president-elect, president, past president 1995–1998; treasurer 1993–1995) opened those doors. Not only did Russ continue the duties of planning, overseeing, presenting, and hosting at national conferences, but he also accepted offers to provide keynote addresses and work as a consultant, sharing his expertise on a variety of topics to colleges and universities across the country. While much of his professional involvement was with CRLA (president-elect, president, past president 2003–2006; treasurer 1999–2002), Russ maintained close ties with other organizations, including NOSS, the International College Learning Center Association (ICLCA), and the Association for the Coaching and Tutoring Profession (ACTP). Russ's collaborative nature led to his lengthy tenure as the chair/past chair of CLADEA (2007–2014). Through a grant that he wrote with Dr. Emily Miller Payne, he co-established the *J-CASP* in 2018 before taking over as co-editor with Dr. Denise Guckert (his former doctoral student) in fall 2020. He also credits his former doctoral student, Dr. Michael McConnell, with helping to co-establish the *J-CASP* by serving as its first editor.

As Russ concludes his illustrious career as a staunch advocate for supporting postsecondary students at all levels of their educational endeavors, he will be most remembered for his collaborations and professional development that he conducted for so many faculty members, student success practitioners, administrators, policymakers, and leaders within our field. He has developed an engaging and ever-emerging repertoire of insightful workshop materials and activities that could entertain exhausted, overworked audiences of educational practitioners for weeks on end. His *Academic Transformation* textbook co-authors, De Sellers and Carol Dochen, especially commend his creativity and insight on everything from their textbooks' cover designs to selecting and sequencing material in chapters, designing activities and questions for reflection, and obtaining feedback from current students as invaluable in producing the textbook they envisioned. Russ's outgoing personality and contacts across the country were a perfect fit for marketing the textbook at conferences and coordinating faculty development workshops at a variety of colleges and universities. The textbook continues to sell well, and as a direct result of Russ's perseverance, the *Effective Learning* course at Texas State University is now officially approved as a Social and Behavioral Sciences core curriculum option starting in fall 2025. He will certainly be missed at TXST and as a co-editor of *J-CASP*. Congratulations and happy retirement to Russ!

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

About the Authors

Carol Dochen, PhD, retired as director of the Student Learning Assistance Center (SLAC) at Texas State University (TXST). She also served as the Law School Admission Council (LSAC) coordinating prelaw advisor for TXST and taught University Seminar 1100 from 1994 to 2020. She was awarded the Mariel M. Muir Excellence in Mentoring Award in 2019, the Texas State University System Regent's Staff Excellence Award in 2020, and the First-Year Student Advocate Award from the National Resource Center at the First Year Experience (FYE) Conference in 2020.

De Sellers, PhD, created one of the earliest learning framework courses for American college students that was based in cognitive theory while working at Texas State University (then known as Southwest Texas State University). While serving as dean of General Studies and the Director of the Learning Assistance Center—among other administrative duties—she taught the course for 25 years. Since retiring from academia, she is the president of Cerridwen, Inc., an educational consulting and counseling firm. She is a licensed professional counselor with a special focus in pastoral counseling.

Taylor W. Acee, PhD, is a professor in and a prior program coordinator of the Graduate Program in Postsecondary Student Success in Learning, Literacy, and Mathematics at Texas State University. His research is focused on college student learning, motivation, and self-regulation, as well as assessments and interventions related to these areas.

Jonathan Vontsteen, PhD, is the student development specialist II for the IDEA Center—an undergraduate research center—at Texas State University. He earned his doctorate in Developmental Education at Texas State University. Jonathan is an autistic scholar who studies professional development for postsecondary students, faculty, and staff. His research primarily centers on metacognitive, motivation, and self-theory-based practices to support postsecondary students in both traditional college and prison settings.

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