



GREATER TEXAS FOUNDATION

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SUMMARY OF BEST PRACTICES IDENTIFIED BY GTF SCHOLAR PROGRAM INSTITUTIONS

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OVERVIEW

As part of the GTF Scholars Program evaluation, GTF Scholar Program 1.0 and 2.0 institutions were asked to identify best practices that they have developed pertaining to recruitment and other program components. The richness of the responses we received reflects the level of knowledge and thoughtfulness of the Principal Investigators and

Coordinators and their commitment to their students' success and the programs' quality.

Institutions' responses are summarized below according to these categories:

- Recruitment, Outreach and Marketing
- Program Materials
- Academic Advising and Support

- Financial Aid
- Mentor Programs
- Creating a Learning Community/Dedicated Space
- Parent Involvement
- Program Management and Data Collection

Please note that responses are presented exactly as they were received from the institutions and may not necessarily reflect Foundation policies.



Recruitment, Outreach and Marketing

- “Outreach – Develop a good outreach and communications plan with your local or targeted Early College High Schools. It is important that high school counseling staff know about the GTF program and what opportunities there are for students at your school. Stress the financial benefits of being in the program and the support structures that are in place to ensure student success.” (TAMU)
- “Recruitment: Contacting Principals of ECHS after students initially apply and are accepted at UHD. Probably one of the most effective recruitment strategies employed was contacting ECHS principals, providing them with a list of students from their campuses who had applied to UHD and fit the intended applicant profile, and soliciting their assistance to encourage these potential applicants to consider availing themselves of the opportunity to participate in the GTF Program. There was an immediate increase in the number of applications submitted. Merely contacting ECHS college access coordinators and informing them about the program was less than effective and time-consuming ... including principals in the loop made the difference. Additionally, contacting ECHS graduates who were scheduled for orientation at UHD directly by phone to promote the program also impacted the applicant pool considerably. Their commitment to the institution had, at that point, been determined and proved an effective means of securing a significant number of the final 40 students on the 2018 roster.” (UHD)
- “To better inform our decisions regarding marketing, recruitment and program structure, and to anticipate and address concerns that ECHS students in years prior to the inception of the program faced as they matriculated to the university, we held focus groups with the assistance of campus research and data analysts.” (UHD)
- “Design a marketing plan complemented with high-quality materials that can be used frequently to inform critical stakeholders about the scholarship program. Our tri-fold brochure is attractive and prominently features ECHS students on the cover. The content informs students, parents, and ECHS personnel about the benefits of the program, such as, dedicated advising, support to minimize student debt and enhanced opportunities to actively engage in high-impact practices. Marketing materials are distributed at schools, and at gatherings such as, the ECHS Leadership Council meeting hosted by El Paso Community College (EPCC) and at the ECHS Counselors’ and Administrators’ Academy hosted by the University of Texas at El Paso.” (UTEP)

- “Part of the marketing strategy includes having a panel of GTF 2.0 scholars talk to the counselors and administrators about their experience in the program and about their experience at UTEP. Students often discuss the preparation they received from the ECHS and they discuss their current progress at UTEP, including the ways in which the scholarship program is providing support. This strategy keeps the GTF 2.0 scholarship program front of mind and motivates ECHSs to promote the scholarship program with their students.” (UTEP)
- “Rely on early recruitment to garner excitement and to build sense of belonging. The GTF 2.0 program at UTEP was designed to provide an effective transition from ECHS to UTEP. To that end, we recruit students beginning junior year and once selected, we forge a strong bond with students during senior year, before they enter UTEP. This strategy allows us to foster excitement about the program in the ECHSs and reinforces UTEP’s presence. During senior year, we are able to provide targeted support to students and begin to form and solidify sense of belonging to UTEP and to the scholarship program.” (UTEP)
- “Building Relationships. Building strong professional relationships with high school counselors at ECHS campuses throughout the region has proven to be the number one, most effective method for recruiting students to the GTF Scholars Program at UTRGV. High school counselors can be the greatest program advocates, encouraging their students



to apply for scholarships when the students themselves are lackadaisical. Further, counselors are often the “gatekeepers” at high school campuses, meaning they can create opportunities for program staff to interact with and recruit students to the program. Cultivating these relationships throughout the year leading up the application period is crucial.” (UTRGV)

- “Student Testimonials. An often untapped asset in terms of a recruitment strategy is the network of current and former Scholars who travel with program staff to their respective ECHS campuses to share their post-secondary stories. When available, students will visit campuses to participate in classroom presentations, small-group chats, or large-scale presentations on the benefits of joining the program. Hearing these stories from someone who, quite literally, sat in their seat not long ago has shown to be an effective way of encouraging high school seniors to apply for the program. This also provides Scholars

with an opportunity to develop their leadership and presentation skills while also giving back to the community that supported them throughout their journey to college.” (UTRGV)

- “UTPB Scholars Program Coordinator and the PI visit Midland College, Odessa College, and Early College High Schools to garner student and school district interest.” (UTPB)
- “Email flyers and send postcards via snail mail to parents and students.” (UTPB)
- “Host partnered Early College High School districts in our campus and do activities with them so they learn about the UT Scholar Program.” (UTPB)
- “Consistency and transparency in recruitment. This means we are being very clear on what the GTF Scholars grant covers. We are striving for complete transparency with the amount of the grant, the expectations throughout each year, and how the renewal process works.” (UTT)

Program Materials

- “Materials – Create materials (flyers, postcards, brochures, etc.) that clearly explain the program and benefits. Student need to be sent targeted materials selling programs and services, especially the low-cost education a student may receive. Showcasing existing students or

recent graduates who are (were) GTF scholars is helpful in selling the program. They are the best advocates of the program.” (TAMU)

- “Marketing Materials and Website. Providing counselors and students with easy-to-read materials that explain program eligibility, the application process, and deadlines has shown to help recruitment efforts. Most counselors will post information on their college/career readiness rooms so students are constantly seeing the information as they venture in and out. Additionally, having an updated, easy to find website is key. Many inquiries we receive from outside the region are a result of the information counselors find online. Transparency with the process and information is always appreciated, and providing easy access allows institutions to capture stakeholders through various means.” (UTRGV)

Academic Advising and Support

- “Advising and Mentors – GTF scholars need special attention when it comes to academic advising, especially if they are bringing in a significant number of college credits. ECHS students can often end up in upper-level coursework very quickly, and it is important they are properly placed in classes that fit with their degree program.” (TAMU)
- “Support and Success – learning communities and support structures are the hallmark of a successful GTF scholars program. Students who have the necessary support and team of

staff ready to help them navigate the college experience are the most likely to succeed. This is especially critical in the first year experience, so emphasis should be placed on tracking and following up with students regularly to make sure they are successful. Typically students require less support as they move through their academic program.” (TAMU)

- “Dedicated Academic Coach and Advisor: Academic Coach’s guide transitioning into our university, steps for registration, and make recommendations to appropriate campus resources. Academic advisors assist with guiding students through their three-year plan, degree and graduation requirements and developing academic and career goals.” (TAMU-SA)
- “Be as thorough as you can in academic audit prior to students’ first semester as it can help minimize unnecessary excess credit.” (UH)
- “Provide academic and social support but not at the expense of overwhelming students with program requirements which can easily overburden your already stressed overachievers. GTF scholars are on the fast track and struggle to juggle extremely heavy course loads of upper level classes, many while working part time and still contributing to the shared responsibilities of being a family member, or caregiver. In addition to GTF, many UHD students were eligible and invited to participate in other scholarly initiatives

(Distinguished / Merit Scholars, Honors Program, Scholars Academy, etc.) each with their own agendas and requirements, most offering a financial incentive. In the spirit of collaboration, we encouraged GTF scholars to avail themselves of opportunities presented, particularly those that would ease their financial burden. The expectations for each individual program often, unfortunately, compete with others in terms of time required and effort expended. Students involved in multiple initiatives found themselves overwhelmed trying to meet the demands (community service, study hall hours, routine program meetings etc.) of each. Conversations early in the application process cautioning scholars to make judicious decisions related to the intricacies of layering commitments to several programs concurrently would be in order.” (UHD)

- “Get to know your scholars. Telephone interviews / Personal written statements on application essays / Face-to-face Mid-Term Check-Ins. Telephone conversations as a requirement of the application process proved beneficial in the selection process, as well as a mandatory written personal response to a choice of essay prompts, was quite revealing in identifying potential candidates for inclusion in the cohort. The Mid-Term Check In was perhaps the most informative. A Doodle link was provided with 70 available time slots over 10 days to select a time to schedule an appointment for a REQUIRED GTF SCHOLARS MID-TERM CHECK-IN which consisted of a 20-minute conversation to discuss

each scholar's current status in their academic courses and any opportunities they have taken to connect with the university community on a social level through organizations, events, or networking. Students were asked to print a copy of their Fall 2018 class schedule and bring it with them to the Check-In session to begin the conversation." (UHD)

- "Weekly Meetings in First Semester: All first-year GTF Scholars are required to participate in a weekly seminar-type meeting. This provides us with an opportunity to help ensure a smooth transition for the students to UNT and provide them with relevant information they need to be thinking about. Some topics include money management, preparing for graduate school, getting involved, recognizing their strengths, and career exploration." (UNT)
- "Pre-Orientation Meeting: All new ECHS graduates are required to go through a freshman orientation program (despite credits) so they have more opportunities to interact with their peers and learn about opportunities at UNT. Prior to this orientation, we invite all ECHS graduates to a meeting to better prepare them for orientation, particularly their advising session. GTF Scholars are required to attend this so we can better explain the scholarship at the conclusion of the general presentation with all ECHS graduates. This also provides us an opportunity to get them to sign their

consent forms prior to the semester beginning." (UNT)

- "Students meet with their professors and departments such as financial aid, advising, and the career center." (UTPB)
- "Supports provided to students. As we share with ECHS students, parents, and school officials, we are not only talking about the grant but the unique supports that UT Tyler offers to students and how we provide an environment of care and support that makes us stand apart from other institutions. These include not just the supports provided to GTF Scholars but also ones that our entire undergraduate student population is offered. Our students' success is truly our passion at UT Tyler. Examples of supports include: tutoring, supplemental instruction, appointments with student money manager, student life and leadership support." (UTT)
- "High Touch Connection. The grant PI and the program coordinator work with the parents and students so they feel connected and have a consistent point of contact with the university." (UTT)

Financial Aid

- "Be as thorough as you can in the financial aid audit annually. A strong relationship or having a dedicated/assigned financial aid advisor for the GTF cohort helps." (UH)

- “Requesting Loan Process: We seek to apply work study to every GTF Scholars financial aid package because we know the benefits to working on-campus (time management, learning about resources on campus, having a supervisor you can seek advice from, etc.). Occasionally, our students don’t want to work or their EFC is higher than their family can actually contribute and they want to take out a loan. If their EFC is 0, or low, they likely have to reduce their work study to do this. Regardless of the circumstance, GTF Scholars have to apply for a loan through the GTF Scholars program. Before our designated Financial Aid representation (another best practice) will talk to them about a loan, they must first complete our application and meet with us. This allows us to talk to the student about what they really need and a repayment plan.” (UNT)

Mentor Programs

- “Also, having mentors that can help GTF scholars along the way is crucial for them to feel connected and supported. Often, they need access to someone who can be their cheerleader.” (TAMU)
- Peer Mentor Program: Early college high schools students are interacting with the Greater Texas Foundation cohort through the peer mentor program. Each scholar is paired with a current ECHS student, and they provide additional support and guidance. The partnering high school has used this program to report continued social and emotional

support to the Texas Education Agency as part of their ECHS blueprint.” (TAMU-SA)

Creating a Learning Community/Dedicated Space

- “Learning Community: Scholars are enrolled in a learning community that will allow them to learn beside other members of cohort 1 through their Jaguar Tracks course. These classes are designed to promote student success, encourage campus involvement, and foster continuous learning beyond graduation.” (TAMU-SA)
- “Having a designated GTF study space / computer lab / lounge seems one of the most utilized and appreciated perks of belonging to the GTF cohort. Though space is at a premium at most campuses, having a home base ...regardless of the size of the available real estate ...helped to build community among the GTF scholars who embrace the perceived prestige associated with this incentive.” (UHD)



Parent Involvement

- “Incorporate parent presentations as much as possible. In the recruitment phase, we schedule presentations at the ECHSs to discuss the GTF 2.0 scholarship program with students and parents and explain the scholarship program and its benefits in English and Spanish. Once students are selected, we host a reception to honor students and their parents. At this event, we reinforce the goals of the scholarship program and obtain necessary signatures on documents such as, consent forms, media release forms, and others. Parents are invited to join the UTEP Parent Association and representatives from the UTEP Alumni Association are always invited to provide this information.” (UTEP)

Program Management and Data Collection

- “Be both consistent and flexible. For both student success outcomes reporting comparison from year to year as well as overall student success you want to exercise both consistency and flexibility. Make sure you have a copy of all the official agreements, documents and reports in case there are organizational or leadership changes along the way.” (UH)
- “Plan for attrition ... even before your program begins. Once a student accepts an offer to be a part of the GTF cohort, communicate regularly prior to the start of the semester and update your roster routinely. Keeping

a current Wait List beyond the 40 approved applicants is critical to ensuring a solid enrollment goal. Though the required number of eligible student applicants had been achieved well before the start of the Fall semester, the roster remained fluid and a wait list proved worthwhile. Adjustments to the roster were still being made less than a week prior to the start of the semester.” (UHD)

- “Budget realistically. Program effectiveness is connected to budget and that budget must include projections for not only front loading events relative to activities and events that assist in helping transitioning students during their first two semesters, but include plans for those same students in years 2 and 3 of the program. Events that build community and promote student engagement ... if they are of any substance and quality ... cost money, the amount of which is greatest particularly in years when there will be a projected 120 scholars on campus at one time.” (UHD)

One last thought:

“Enjoy the students and learn from their stories & experience. They are here for such a short time. During that time expect that, just like with any student, their path will change direction more than once and that they will need more time for academic and professional preparation.” (UH)