



GREATER TEXAS FOUNDATION

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SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES: THE COLLECTIVE WISDOM OF GTF SCHOLARS PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS

PREPARED BY BARBARA GOLDBERG AND KIM STEZALA
GTF SCHOLARS PROGRAM EVALUATION TEAM

OVERVIEW

This first year of GTF Scholars 2.0 included a process designed to strengthen the learning community among the participating universities - to find ways to identify and share successful strategies related to several aspects of GTF Scholar programming including:

- 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.

The process designed to gather this information was multi-faceted. It included:

- Site visits to the four new 2.0 institutions. Site visits were conducted by the evaluation team in June and August 2018 at TAMU-San Antonio, UH-Downtown, UT Tyler, UTEP, and UT-Permian Basin.

- Information about best practices collected from individual institutions in fall 2018.
- Successful strategies identified by participating institutions during a webinar conducted in November.

This document synthesizes these materials. Key strategies and lessons learned are summarized below.

Please note that responses reflect the perspectives of program administrators and may not necessarily reflect Foundation policies.

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Texas A&M University	Lynn Barnes Marcus Cooper Bonnie Davila
Texas A&M University-San Antonio	Dr. Michael Brien Briana Hagelgans
University of Houston	Dr. Heidi Kennedy
University of Houston-Downtown	Dr. Scott Marzilli Branden Kuzmick
University of North Texas	Dr. Melissa McGuire Jacob Biedebach
The University of Texas at El Paso	Dr. Ivette Savina Juan Bolanos Corina Hernandez
The University of Texas of the Permian Basin	Dr. Lillian Porter
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley	Jhabryll Fernandez Michael Aldape Rose Pulido
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Recruitment, Outreach and Marketing

- Develop a deep understanding of the pipeline of ECHS students and, more specifically, the number of ECHS graduates available in order to implement a robust GTF Scholars 2.0 Program with a full cohort.
- With the assistance of campus research and data analysts, hold focus groups with ECHS students to gain a better understanding of their experiences, strengths and challenges.
- Develop a good outreach and communications plan with your local or targeted Early College High Schools. Stress the financial benefits of being in the program and the support structures that are in place to ensure student success.
- Design a marketing plan complemented with high-quality materials that can be used to inform crucial stakeholders about the scholarship program. 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.
- Build strong professional relationships with high school counselors at ECHS campuses throughout the region. Cultivating these relationships throughout the year leading up to the application period is essential.
- Contact ECHS principals after students apply and are accepted at the university and provide them with a list of students from their school who meet the GTF Scholarship selection criteria. Solicit their assistance to encourage these potential GTF Scholars to apply for the scholarship.
- Call ECHS graduates who are scheduled for orientation to promote the program.
- Host a panel of GTF 2.0 Scholars to talk to ECHS counselors and administrators about

“An often untapped asset in terms of recruitment strategy is the network of current and former Scholars who travel with the program staff to their respective ECHS campuses to share their post-secondary stories...This also provides Scholars with an opportunity to develop their leadership and presentation skills while giving back to their community that supported them throughout their journey to college.”

their experiences in the program and at the university. Students can discuss their current progress, including the ways in which the scholarship program is providing support.

- Recruit cohorts during their junior year of high school to reinforce advising about credit to degree issues, provide programming and establish a sense of belonging in their cohort, in the program and in the university.
- Recruit with consistency and transparency. Provide clarity in what the GTF Scholars grant covers, the amount of the grant, the expectations throughout each year, and how the renewal process works.
- Ensure that GTF Scholars serve as ambassadors to their ECHSs and serve as mentors to students there.
- Establish a written protocol for recruitment.

Application and Selection Criteria

- Establish an online application that is clear and concise, requiring just the right amount of information.
- Build the application and selection process to meet the needs of the community and institution, adjusting and making changes based on the number of qualified applicants you have received to fill your cohort.
- Keep a current waiting list. Plan for attrition before the 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 target goal of approved applicants is critical to ensuring a full cohort.

Academic Advising and Support

- Get to know scholars through a variety of avenues, such as telephone interviews, personal written statements on application essays and face-to-face mid-term check-ins.
- Be as thorough as you can in academic audits prior to students' first semester in order to minimize unnecessary excess credits.
- Provide learning communities and support structures, a hallmark of a successful GTF Scholars Program, so students have the necessary support and team of staff ready to

help them navigate the college experience. This is especially true in the first-year experience, so emphasis should be placed on tracking and following up with students regularly to make sure they are successful.

- Offer Early College Credit Degree maps of the top 10 majors/programs in which ECHS students enroll.
- Provide an academic coach who can guide the transition into the university, outline the steps for registration and make referrals to appropriate campus resources. Academic advisors can assist with guiding students through their three-year plans, degree and graduation requirements and in developing academic and career goals.
- Require new ECHS graduates to go through a freshman orientation program (despite credits) so that they have more opportunities to interact with their peers and learn about opportunities at the institution.
- Provide academic and social support but not at the expense of overwhelming students with program requirements which can easily overburden already stressed overachievers. Encourage GTF scholars to avail themselves of opportunities presented, particularly those that would ease their financial burden.
- Require weekly meetings during the first semester to help ensure a smooth transition for the students and provide them with relevant information they need to consider. Some possible topics include money management, preparing for graduate school, getting involved, recognizing their strengths and career exploration.
- Offer a central touchpoint where students can turn to identify barriers to graduation and overcome them in an expeditious manner.
- Provide students with opportunities to meet with their professors and departments such as financial aid, advising and the career center.
- Incorporate the institution's online degree programs and courses as part of the program model.

“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.”

Financial Aid

- Be as thorough as you can in the annual financial aid audit.
- Consider work study for GTF Scholar's financial aid package in light of the benefits to working on-campus (time management, learning about resources on campus, having a supervisor you can seek advice from, etc.)

Mentor Programs

- Have mentors that can help GTF Scholars along the way for them to feel connected and supported. They need someone who can be their “cheerleader.”
- Offer members of previous cohorts the opportunity to serve as peer mentors to new GTF Scholars.
- Establish a written protocol for the peer mentoring program.
- Pair GTF Scholars with current ECHS students to provide additional support and guidance.
- Train faculty about how to teach younger students and about the psychological, social and emotional needs of this population.
- Link each student to a faculty member to strengthen ties to the campus community.
- Offer participation in the National Society of Leadership and Success as a component of the GTF Scholarship. The National Society seeks to build “leaders who make a better world” and offers several pre-induction and post-induction benefits (e.g., chapter success coaches, engagement events, résumé enhancement, leadership opportunities, nationwide network).

Creating a Learning Community/Dedicated Space

- Create a GTF Scholars Learning Community that will allow students to learn beside other members of their cohort, promote student success, encourage campus involvement and foster continuous learning beyond graduation.
- Offer a designated GTF study space/computer lab/lounge. Having a home base helps build community among the GTF Scholars.
- Develop a “caring unit” around each student, for their success.

Parent Involvement

- Ensure that the grant PI and the program coordinator work with parents and students so they feel connected and have a consistent point of contact with the university.
- Incorporate parent presentations as much as possible. 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, host a reception to honor students and their parents.
- Invite parents to join a Parent Association to provide them with added information and insights about career paths post-graduation.

Program Management and Data Collection

- Be *consistent* in data reporting on student success outcomes and comparisons from year to year. Be *flexible* in programming to meet the needs of each cohort. Retain copies of all official agreements, documents and reports in case there are organizational or leadership changes. Reference the evaluation framework document.
- Budget realistically. Program effectiveness is connected to budget and that budget must include projections for both front-loading events related to activities and events that assist students during their first two semesters, but also include plans for the same students in years two and three of the program.
- Strengthen the capacity for data collection and analysis that can inform the program, the university and its partner institutions.
- Incorporate broad and deep inter-departmental collaboration as an underpinning of everything that takes place. Include project-based collaboration as a management model for institutional effectiveness.
- Utilize the GTF Scholars 2.0 Program as an opportunity to strengthen relationships with ECHSs. This also will leverage data analysis related to recruitment, possible comparison studies and the matriculation patterns of the institution’s ECHS population.

“Enjoy the students and learn from their stories and 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.”

