

**REPORT ON THE FRESHMAN  
SUCCESS PILOT PROGRAM**

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board  
Division of Participation and Success  
October 2004

## The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

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### Mission of the Coordinating Board

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's mission is to work with the Legislature, Governor, governing boards, higher education institutions and other entities to provide the people of Texas the widest access to higher education of the highest quality in the most efficient manner.

### Philosophy of the Coordinating Board

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board will promote access to quality higher education across the state with the conviction that access without quality is mediocrity and that quality without access is unacceptable. The Board will be open, ethical, responsive, and committed to public service. The Board will approach its work with a sense of purpose and responsibility to the people of Texas and is committed to the best use of public monies. The Coordinating Board will engage in actions that add value to Texas and to higher education; the agency will avoid efforts that do not add value or that are duplicated by other entities.

## INTRODUCTION

Section 5, Senate Bill 4, of the 78th Texas Legislature requires the Coordinating Board to develop a pilot program that will focus on the retention of high-risk students who are first-generation in college, low-income, and/or educationally underprepared. The program will address the academic, emotional, behavioral and financial needs of students, as well as any cultural barriers that may affect success in college. The legislation further requires the Board to complete a pilot program study to evaluate its potential impact upon the state's *Closing the Gaps by 2015* plan.

At its October 2003 meeting, the Coordinating Board adopted a process for selecting institutions to participate in the pilot program. Staff nominated institutions of higher education that have previously demonstrated interest and effectiveness in freshman retention programs for special populations, as indicated by their work with College Enrollment Workshops, their Uniform Recruitment and Retention Reports, and/or their existing, exemplary freshman retention programs for first-generation students. Institutions of higher education also self-nominated for selection, based upon their existing, exemplary freshman retention programs for first-generation students.

Selection criteria for determining which institutions were invited to participate in the pilot include the following: significant percentage of first-generation students enrolled in the freshman class, existing student services and programs to support persistence of first-generation students, and commitment to increasing their institution's freshman-to-sophomore persistence rate for all students (in general) and first-generation students (in particular).

The Commissioner considered the nominations and selected the following institutions to participate in the pilot study:

### The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP): Entering Student Program

The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) is an "access-driven" university whose faculty and staff have been continually challenged to encompass quality higher education, research, and scholarly production in an environment that promotes the success of all its entering students. Focused on UTEP's high-risk, first-generation students, UTEP created the Entering Student Program (ESP) to support these highly vulnerable students and affect their academic, social, and personal success.

The first-year Seminar (UNIV 1301: "Seminar in Critical Inquiry") is the academic anchor of the Entering Student Program. The Entering Student Program focuses on excellence as it addresses the socio-academic needs of students through the first-year Seminar, helps students find their niche through participation in learning communities, assists them in making informed decisions regarding majors through developmental academic advising, strengthens their academic foundation through developmental education, and develops leadership skills through the Student Leadership Institute. The Entering Student Program has allowed UTEP to provide services that were not previously available and to tie together recruitment, admissions, testing, orientation, academic advising, University Studies, and Tutoring and Learning Center activities.

In addition, SmartSTART is a summer bridge program to help high-risk students transition from high school to UTEP. Participating students complete two required courses, including the Seminar, designed to strengthen academic performance and familiarize them with the university environment. Students are involved in learning communities, which help enhance

their essential academic skills, increase interaction with faculty and fellow students, and increases their involvement with UTEP activities and resources.

#### Prairie View A&M: Academy for Collegiate Excellence and Student Success (ACCESS)

ACCESS is a “Bridge to College” program designed to improve students’ academic performance and assist in their smooth transition from high school to college. The program consists of a seven-week summer residential, academic component and a freshman year component that provides continued academic enhancement and a wide variety of support services. University College (UC) is the physical embodiment of Prairie View A&M University’s commitment to its freshmen. University College’s mission is to provide freshmen with effective advisement, intense academic enhancement, accessible, centralized support services and a structured, academically focused residential learning community. Freshmen are assigned to a University College Academic Team (UCAT) that is housed in a specific residence hall. The UCAT includes the 102 live-in residents (and a small number of commuter students), a professional advisor, live-in residential staff, and a Faculty Fellow. The professional staff and faculty assigned to a residential hall work together to provide a supportive, academically focused environment for the students.

#### Lamar University: Freshman SUCCESS Center

The Freshman SUCCESS Center at Lamar University is a joint program between the divisions of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs. The program was established to increase the academic success of high-risk students by reducing the effects of barriers to academic achievement, academic persistence, and graduation from the university. First-generation, low-income, or educationally underprepared freshmen are targeted as possible program participants. The program provides intensive orientation, academic advising, personal counseling, study skills development, as well as a number of other services.

#### Houston Community College District: Student Success Centers

Each major campus of the Houston Community College System has a Student Success Center that serves as the entry point for new students. Each center will provide information for new and prospective students; coordinate advisement activities; provide referrals to social service partners, childcare, legal assistance and transportation; provide career counseling/job placement; help remove barriers for students in the admissions/registration/financial aid process; and provide an “early warning system” for at-risk students. The Centers are cooperative ventures between Instructional and Student Services staff.

### **FINDINGS**

The pilot study began in the spring semester 2004 and will continue through the fall semester 2004, so the data reported is preliminary. The following text and tables are excerpted from the reports submitted to the Coordinating Board by each institution. Coordinating Board staff will provide the Legislature with final results as they are submitted them.

#### **University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP): Entering Student Program**

The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) is a Hispanic-majority (71percent), research-intensive, four-year public institution located on the U.S.-Mexico border. UTEP’s total fall 2003 enrollment was 18,542 students; over 2,300 of them were first-time first-year students. The

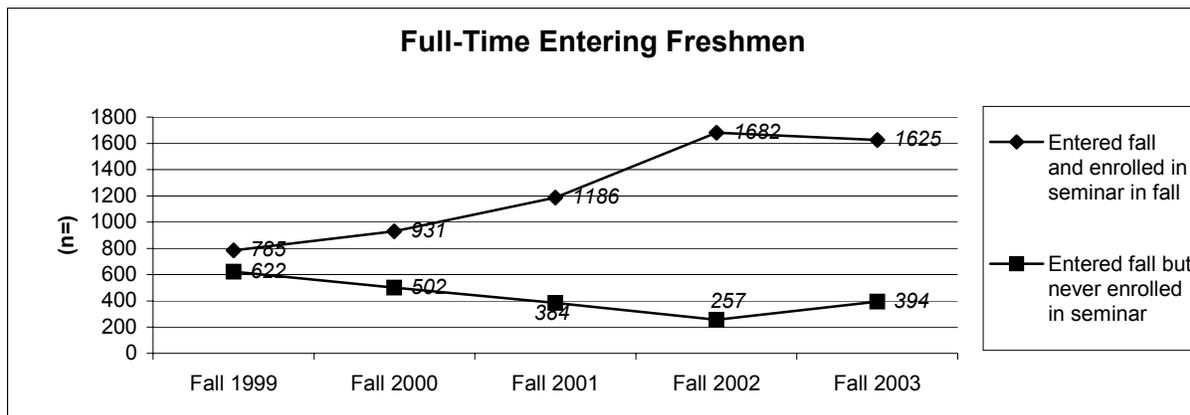
great majority of UTEP's bi-national student population is non-traditional: 98 percent commute and more than 80 percent work; the average undergraduate age is 24. Many have family support responsibilities and are the first in their families to attend college (54 percent). Student demographic data, institutional mission, and concern for improving first-year students' experiences, retention and success drove the development and design of UTEP's first-year seminar.

Each seminar is taught by an instructional team consisting of an instructor, librarian, and peer (upper-division student) leader. Instructors may be full-time faculty or staff, with a master's or terminal degree. Though the theme for each section varies, all must address the same five goals: (1) strengthen students' academic performance and facilitate their transition to college; (2) enhance students' essential academic skills; (3) increase student-student and student-faculty interaction both in and outside of the classroom; (4) encourage students' self-assessment and goal clarification; and (5) increase students' involvement with The University of Texas at El Paso activities and resources.

To teach the seminar, instructors must submit a proposal identifying the theme and describing how the section will address course goals. Proposals are accepted based on academic merit.

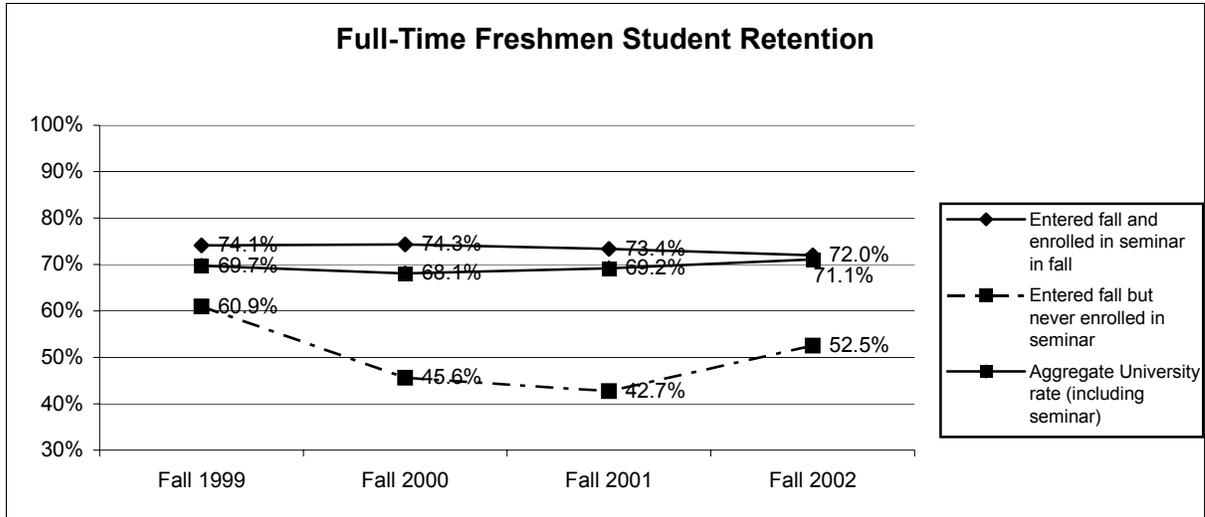
The strategy is based on the success and collaboration of the evaluation efforts of the National Science Foundation-supported Model Institutions for Excellence grant, the CircLES program, and the University College.

**Table 1. The University of Texas at El Paso's Student Seminar Enrollment (Fall 1999-2003)**



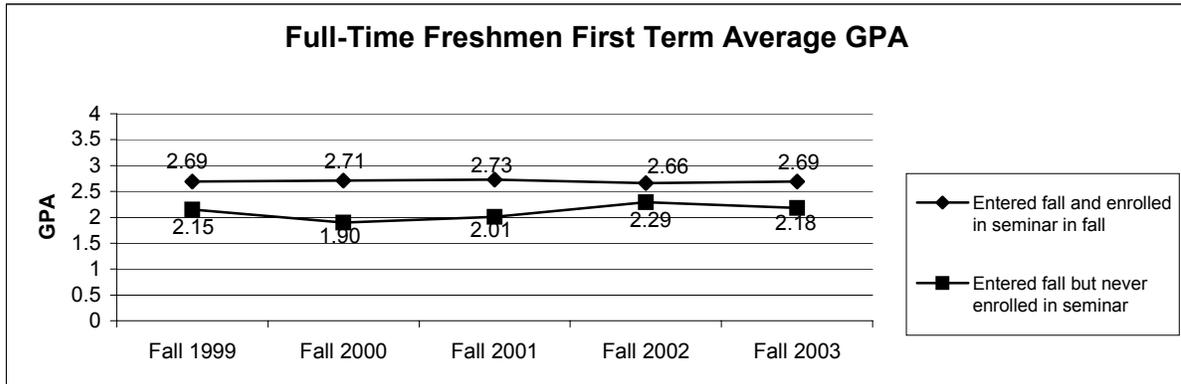
Note: Numbers depicted in this table only reflect first-attempt seminar enrollment for entering students. These numbers form the cohorts in Tables 2 and 3 below.

**Table 2. The University of Texas at El Paso's One-Year Student Retention by Cohort (Fall 1999-2002).**



Note: Students who enrolled in the fall seminar (diamond symbols) were retained at a significantly higher rate than students who never enrolled in the seminar (square symbols).

**Table 3. The University of Texas at El Paso's First Term Average GPA (Fall 1999-2003).**



Note: Students who entered UTEP and enrolled in the seminar in the fall (diamond symbol) had a significantly higher GPA than students who never enrolled in the seminar (square symbol) in each of the five years.

**Table 4. The University of Texas at El Paso's Instructor- and Peer Leader-Reported Seminar Outcomes (2000-2002)**

<b>Seminar Instructor Respondents<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>
	n = 27	n = 30	n = 31
% of seminar instructors reporting using one or more targeted instructional innovations (e.g., cooperative learning, electronic technology)	100%	100%	100%
% of seminar instructors reporting using one or more student development strategies (e.g., career exploration, learning style sessions)	100%	95.7%	97.7%
% of seminar instructors reporting using one or more cultural awareness strategies	88%	63%	79.1%
<b>Peer Leader Respondents<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>
	n = 21	n = 20	n = 48
% of new peer leader reporting increased knowledge about teaching	100%	100%	94.9%
% of new peer leaders reporting increased competence in seminar responsibilities	100%	96.8%	100%
% of new peer leaders reporting increased knowledge about leadership	94.4%	100%	100%
% of new peer leaders reporting increased confidence about assuming a leadership role	88.9%	96.8%	97.4%

<sup>1</sup>Instructors and peer leaders are encouraged but not required to complete the survey, so the number of respondents does not represent 100 percent of either group.

**SmartSTART** (This summer bridge program helps high-risk students transition from high school to The University of Texas at El Paso. Participating students complete two required courses, including the Seminar, designed to strengthen academic performance and familiarize them with the university environment. Students are involved in learning communities, which help enhance their essential academic skills, increase interaction with faculty and fellow students, and increases their involvement with UTEP activities and resources.)

2002 Cohort = 78 students (62 START, 16 non-START)

Gender = 38 Male (28 START, 10 non-START); 40 Female (34 START, 6 non-START)

Ethnicity = 68Hispanic (63 START, 15 non-START), 6 White (5 START, 1 non-START), 4 Black (4 START, 0 non-START)

Persistence to 2003 = 23 Male, 22 Female; 39 Hispanic, 3 White, 3 Black

SmartSTART received its initial funding through a multi-year grant from the Atlantic Philanthropies Foundation. That grant allowed the purchase of laptops (~\$160,000), paid for on-campus housing for this first cohort while they were enrolled in SmartSTART (~\$60,000), paid peer leader and resident advisor salaries (~\$5,000), and paid the salaries of the instructors (~\$10,000).

The second cohort used the laptops, but the majority did not live in on-campus housing. The grant paid peer leader salaries (~\$2,500), and paid the salaries of the instructors (~\$10,000).

The third cohort had the use of the laptops, but the majority did not live in on-campus housing. The university paid peer leader salaries (~\$2,500) and paid the salaries of the instructors (~\$10,000).

### **Prairie View A & M University (PVAMU): Academy for Collegiate Excellence and Student Success (ACCESS)**

The ACCESS program is open to any recent high school graduate or GED recipient. Although it is located at PVAMU, it is not restricted to students admitted to PVAMU.

ACCESS has three key strategies: intensive academic enhancement, effective advisement coupled with centralized support services and a structured, academically-focused residential environment. ACCESS was designed with two primary components: a residential summer, pre-college academic “bootcamp” and a holistic, centralized student support services component during the freshman year for those students entering PVAMU. The curriculum for the seven week “academic bootcamp” was developed around a constructivistic model emphasizing the content areas of math, reading and composition while concentrating on learning strategies which address the demonstrated weak skill areas in problem solving and critical thinking. ACCESS participants spend over 200 hours in academic enhancement classes. They attend daily classes in Math, Composition, Reading Comprehension, Critical Thinking and Problem Solving and study halls nightly, which include tutoring and workshops in the areas of study skills, articulation and math enhancement.

ACCESS students participate in leadership training, social/personal development activities and cultural enrichment experiences. These activities broaden students’ horizons and require them to utilize the critical thinking and problem solving skills they are developing in the classroom. Each ACCESS session closes with a trip to Austin that includes a special visit and briefing at the state capitol. This year the ACCESS students participated in a multi-day final field experience to visit several famous civil rights museums and historical sites related to the *Brown at 50* anniversary. The curriculum of several classes enhanced the student’s preparation for this unique experience. ACCESS is highly structured. Students arise at 6 a.m. and lights are out at 11p.m. Cell phones, TVs and video games aren’t allowed. There is an enforced behavior and dress code and violators are sent home. Students are taught that academic success requires personal discipline.

The freshman component of the ACCESS program proved to be a critical factor for student success for those ACCESS students who matriculated at PVAMU. This component became the pilot program known as the **Panther Living and Academic Community Experience (the PLACE)** that formed the cornerstone for the current University College program.

The ACCESS program entered its ninth year in 2004. Through summer 2003 756 students completed the program and another 140 were selected for summer 2004 participation. The ACCESS students who matriculated at PVAMU between 1996 and 2001 had an average retention rate of 79.2 percent. This is over 11 percent higher than the university’s average for the same year groups. The ACCESS classes have exceeded the university’s first time, full-time overall freshman first semester GPA seven out of eight years. The first two ACCESS classes to reach the six-year graduation point had an average graduation rate of 40.6 percent, over 5

percent above the university's average for those two-year groups. ACCESS students have gone on to be student body president, Ms. Prairie View, the president of the Marching Storm Band, scholar athletes and leaders in all areas of campus life. In the last year, the ACCESS program won a Texas Higher Education Star Award. This award was established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to recognize higher education institutions, organizations, groups and individuals for their exceptional contributions toward one or more of the goals of "Closing the Gaps 2015," the Texas higher education plan. In 2004, ACCESS expanded its marketing to include the "Home School" constituency, advertising in home school publications and participating in a "Home School" College Day. In June ACCESS welcomed 140 participants, an increase of 40 percent over the previous year. ACCESS has added a study skills component to the Critical Thinking Class and reconfigured evening study hall to be a more structured learning experience emphasizing math, reading and composition.

The ACCESS Program was presented as a concurrent session at the THECB Access and Equity Conference. In 2005 PVAMU will celebrate the 10th year of the program and anticipate that the 1,000th ACCESS student will graduate from the program in summer 2005.

	Year										
	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998	1997	1996	SUM	Percent
<b>Total Accepted</b>		<b>103</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>784</b>	
Males		48	39	54	50	46	55	39	34	<b>365</b>	47%
Females		55	54	45	51	57	65	51	41	<b>419</b>	53%
African-American		74	69	79	99	97	113	84	69	<b>684</b>	87%
Caucasian		2	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	<b>5</b>	1%
Hispanic		26	23	17	2	6	2	4	6	<b>86</b>	11%
Other		1	1	2	0	0	4	1	0	<b>9</b>	1%
First Generation		62	56	63	63	53	89	51	34	<b>471</b>	60%
2nd or more Generation		41	37	36	38	50	31	39	41	<b>313</b>	40%
Average SAT Score		778	763	780	783	790	810	783	820	<b>788</b>	
Average ACT Score		16	16	16	16	16	17	16	16	<b>16</b>	
<b>Accepted into the ACCESS Summer Component</b>	103	93	99	101	103	120	90	75		<b>784</b>	
<b>Completed ACCESS Summer Components</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>69</b>		<b>756</b>	96.4%

## **Lamar University: Freshman SUCCESS Initiative**

The Freshmen SUCCESS Initiative presented here is based on the premise that increasing student involvement with the university and providing student academic supports (intense academic advisement, tutoring, study skills classes, workshops, etc.) will increase retention. This premise also acknowledges that successfully improving retention demands a university-wide commitment and proactive intervention from not one but several core departments and/or units within the university.

The Freshman SUCCESS Initiative is a multi-component retention program at Lamar University. The Initiative continues to reach for Lamar's current retention objectives and is open to all freshmen but targets high-risk college freshmen who are first-generation in college, low-income, and/or educationally underprepared. Intensive proactive intervention modules address the academic, social, emotional, behavioral, and financial needs of the participants, as well as cultural barriers thereby impacting their academic achievement, academic persistence, and, ultimately, graduation from the university.

The Freshman Success Initiative is a strong multi-component retention program involving three core units: Foundations of Excellence in the First Year, Student Affairs, and the Center for General Studies. Each of these units houses several retention programs. The three units work together to coordinate and promote services in addition to providing support to each other in the development, enhancement, and implementation of all retention efforts.

### **I. Office of Student Affairs - New Student Programs**

The Office of Student Affairs/New Student Programs, under the Division of Student Affairs, has developed five retention programs targeted specifically for freshmen: New Student Orientation, Cardinal Week of Welcome, Freshman Year Experience, Lamar Leadership Conference, and the Peer Advisor Program. These five programs incorporate a variety of student activities, mentoring, and advising to address academic, emotional, behavioral, and financial needs of the participants, as well as cultural barriers.

#### **New Student Orientation**

*(Needs addressed: social, emotional, behavioral, financial, and cultural)*

##### Description:

New Student Orientation is designed to assist students in making a positive adjustment to the college environment and to university life. Orientation provides new students with a head start on a successful collegiate career at Lamar University. Research suggests that attending an orientation program will increase a student's graduation success and positively affect the university retention rate. With this knowledge, Lamar University provides a successful and beneficial orientation program to all new students.

The goals of LU New Student Orientation center on reducing the likelihood of attrition and increasing retention through facilitating a smooth transition from high school or work environment to university life; enhancing the new student's potential for growth and development in the classroom; involving university administration, faculty, staff, and current LU student leaders at all levels of involvement including planning, leadership, and implementation of the program; promoting the orientation program so that the Lamar University community, prospective students, and their families acknowledge the advantages and goals of attending

orientation; providing professional academic advisement and assistance for all new students; advising all incoming students of the policies, procedures, regulations, rights, and responsibilities governing Lamar University; ensuring that each new student attending New Student Orientation leaves with a schedule of classes and fee statement in hand; familiarizing new students with the registration processes available on the Internet and telephone; creating a positive attitude about Lamar University; and introducing new students to other incoming freshmen and Lamar University organizations.

Statistics: 1500 students and 800 parents served

Budget: \$150,000

### **Cardinal Week of Welcome**

*(Needs addressed: social, emotional, behavioral, and cultural)*

#### Description:

Cardinal Week of Welcome (W.O.W.) was introduced in summer 2003 as an expansion of the orientation process to assist students in quickly acclimating to the university. Participation in W.O.W. is designed to impact retention and satisfaction with the university community by involving new students in university traditions and its culture prior to their first semester of college. The goals of Cardinal W.O.W. include: increasing student and faculty/staff contact and interaction; providing new students an advanced, in-depth look into LU policies and procedures; providing scheduled time for new students to reunite with summer peer advisors and other new students they met during New Student Orientation; introducing new students to various departments and/or university organizations; providing a forum to answer questions and/or concerns held by new students prior to the first class day; and providing a fun, interactive environment for new students and their families as they are welcomed to the LU community.

Statistics: 500+ new students served (2003 inaugural year);  
600 new students served (2004 inaugural year)

Budget: \$24,200

### **Freshman Year Experience**

*(Needs addressed: social, emotional, behavioral, and cultural)*

#### Description:

Freshman Year Experience (FYE) is an emerging leaders program designed for students who exhibited high school leadership, as well as students who have not yet discovered their leadership potential. The goals of FYE include: building a cohesive group, consisting of diverse qualified students who work as an effective and spirited team; increasing knowledge about, awareness of, and pride in Lamar University, and to developing a sense of commitment to furthering that knowledge, awareness, and pride within the university; assisting students in becoming aware of their preferred leadership style and how to work with others more effectively; challenging students to reflect upon their standards of conduct and how they make decisions; providing a forum to hear emerging leaders' ideas and concerns about the university; providing instruction on how to manage a group of peers in a meeting, and how to plan programs effectively and creatively; and educating new students about the appropriate university protocol

that should be used when conducting business with members of the faculty, staff, and administration.

Statistics: 50 students annually

Budget: \$8,745

### **Leadership Lamar Conference**

*(Needs addressed: social, emotional, behavioral, and cultural)*

#### Description:

After students have completed the Freshman Year Experience program, they are in a strong position to evolve as top student leaders at LU. A Leadership Lamar Conference (LLC) is held each January the first weekend after the spring semester begins, for 50 of the strongest student leaders and/or most promising emerging leaders at LU. Goals of LLC include: providing a one-weekend leadership training retreat; providing students with opportunities to develop a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities as leaders at LU; encouraging students to appreciate diversity among the students in their organizations and on campus; advocating the exchange of ideas among student leaders; and providing an environment conducive to exchange of ideas while building trusting relationships within peer groups.

Statistics: 50 students annually

Budget: \$7,500

### **Peer Advisor Program**

*(Needs addressed: social, emotional, behavioral, and cultural)*

#### Description:

The Peer Advisor Program is possibly the most critical component of the New Student Orientation program. The program provides mentors in the form of peer advisors to new students throughout the orientation process. Peer Advisors assist new students with becoming acquainted with LU. The program serves as an excellent retention tool for both Peer Advisors and new students in the program.

To qualify as Peer Advisors, students must be full-time students with a minimum 2.5 GPA, and be in good standing with the university.

Budget: Each staff member receives a \$500 stipend and \$500 in additional university incentives.

## **II. Foundations of Excellence in the First Year of College**

Foundations of Excellence in the First Year, developed in 2003 and housed in the Division of Academic Affairs, has developed five freshman retention programs: Big Red Resources, First Generation Initiative, Learning Communities, the Freshmen Mentoring Program, and the G-Force Organization. These five retention programs provide variety of

student informational services, instructional support, activities, mentoring, and advising to address academic, emotional, behavioral, and financial needs of the participants, as well as cultural barriers.

## **Big Red Resources**

*(Needs addressed: academic, social, emotional, behavioral, financial and cultural)*

### Description:

The Big Red Resources is a centralized information center that is a key component in the integration of freshmen and other first-year students in the LU population. First-generation college students are one of the primary student populations for which the Big Red Resources is needed. First-generation college students are vulnerable to college attrition for many reasons. One of the primary reasons is family resources which lack the college experience and therefore are unable to guide students through the system or help them understand procedures and opportunities available to them. Other students who also benefit from a centralized information center (Big Red Resources) include all incoming students with a lack of familiarity with LU campus, transfer students, and international students. Materials and information from over 30 departments are provided for dissemination. Incoming students learn about the facility during New Student Orientation campus tours and Week of Welcome. Services focus on facilitating students' participation in both academic and extracurricular opportunities on and off campus. The information center is a vital resource for integrating students into the LU campus and informing them of deadlines or important events with which new students will be unfamiliar.

Statistics: 920 students served (since beginning of August 2004)

Budget: \$6,575

## **First-Generation Initiative**

*(Needs addressed: financial)*

### Description:

Both nationally and within our Lamar University community, financial barriers are often reported by first-generation students as a primary factor in inhibiting college progression. The First Generation Initiative program provides grants of \$500 per semester to 60 first-generation college students to offset the expenses of pursuing their education. The students use the money to ease their financial burden as they see fit, whether that is in paying for books, child care or transportation expenses. Students from high schools with low college-going rates are specifically targeted within this program. A committee composed of representatives from Foundations of Excellence, Student Affairs, and the Center for General Studies reviews applications and selects students for funding based on need. Freshmen are given preference. Continuation of funding from semester to semester is provided when possible to encourage retention.

Statistics: 60 (100 percent) first-generation students in fall 2004

**Budget:** \$47,000 (Funded through the THECB First-Generation College Student Program Grant)

### **Learning Communities**

*(Needs addressed: academic, social, emotional, behavioral, and cultural)*

#### Description:

Learning Community programs allow students to begin their university experience with small cohort of students who share most of the same classes. The communities range in size from eight to 21 students. The advisors develop the schedules for the spring and fall semesters for their students. In many cases, instructors are hand-selected for participation in the program. The small group interaction of the Learning Community facilitate integration into the university environment. The Learning Community program offers a nice balance of small group participation to facilitate feelings of connection and belonging within the university with the greater university experience. Team-building events are held at the beginning of the fall and spring semesters. Learning Community students are monitored to ensure success and to implement early intervention if difficulties arise.

#### Statistics:

▪ Number of students served	63 (fall 2004)	
▪ Gender:	Female	41 (65%)
	Male	22 (35%)
▪ Ethnicity:	Caucasian	34 (54%)
	African American	21 (33%)
	Hispanics	7 (11%)
	Asian American	1 (2%)

**Budget:** \$1,350

### **Freshman Mentoring Program**

*(Needs addressed: social, emotional, behavioral, and cultural)*

#### Description:

The freshman mentoring program is part of a comprehensive plan to enhance the first-year experience of the diverse population of the LU first-year student population. Mentoring is a highly effective system for integrating students within the university setting. Many first-year students feel like outsiders within the university setting. Without a feeling of connection to the university, they are vulnerable to dropping out of school. Participating in a mentoring relationship is a wonderful means of making immediate connections within the university. Other benefits of mentoring relationships include increased performance, increased academic persistence, and increased satisfaction/connectiveness with university settings. Two mentor training sessions are held and mentors are provided Mentor Handbooks. Three events are held

to increase connection between mentors and students. These include a welcoming reception at the beginning of the fall and spring semesters and a mid-semester Trivia Competition in the fall.

Statistics: 88 students served  
First-generation status: 63 percent (Of the 76 enrolled students for whom this information is available, 48 are first generation.)

Budget: \$3,025

### **G-Force Organization**

*(Needs addressed: Academic, financial, and cultural)*

#### Description:

G-Force is a collegiate student organization for first-generation college students. A component of the THECB *College for Texans* Campaign, the purpose of G-Force is to raise awareness among students and their families about the benefits of higher education and how to prepare for it academically and financially, and to motivate students to successfully pursue higher education.

G-Force participation offers a forum to express matters of interest to first-generation college students and to act as a voice for those students. Members have the opportunity to encourage, support, and prepare each other for college; form study networks; make stronger connections with Lamar University; lobby for services for first-generation college students; and get information about career and further higher education opportunities. Additionally, G-Force members have the opportunity to participate in a number of rewarding activities to support and promote higher education. Members can get involved by serving as mentors in local high schools, participating in various outreach activities to promote higher education to students and community members where Go Centers are located, assisting high school G-Force chapters, and assisting various Go Center satellites. Five G-Force members were selected to receive leadership training provided by the *College for Texans* campaign. Those five students act as mentors to high school students at Lamar University's partner public school, Central High School in Beaumont.

G-Force activities can help disseminate information to first-generation students, assist in new students' transition into college, and retain students. As a student organization, G-Force provides a network for students and involvement in campus activities.

Statistics: 32 LU students have joined G-Force  
First-Generation Status: 100 percent (all 32 are first-generation college students)

Budget: Funds provided through the THECB GO Center Grant

### III. The Center for General Studies

The Center for General Studies (CGS), housed in the Division for Academic Affairs, is a multi-service advising unit established in 1997. The Center's mission is to provide the highest quality academic advising, instructional support, and services for three types of students: (1) those who are undecided as to their major, (2) those who are experiencing academic problems, and (3) those who desire a Bachelor of General Studies (BGS) degree.

The mission of the Center is to effectively guide students along their educational and career paths by providing them with a dynamic and student-centered environment that facilitates academic and career exploration, enhances the learning process, modifies barriers to student success, encourages self-reliance, and fosters a sense of belonging to the university community.

The CGS has developed six retention programs to enhance the student's university experience and academic success: the Freshman STEPS (Start Thinking Early to Plan for Success)Program, Early Alert, the Monitored Probation Early Intervention Program, McNair Scholars Program, Supplemental Instruction, and the Academic Enhancement Workshop Series. These programs provide proactive intensive advising services to address the academic, emotional, behavioral, and financial needs of the participants, as well as cultural barriers.

**The retention rate at Lamar University has improved since the development of the Center for General Studies in 1997: the retention rate was 63.90 percent for AY 1997-1998, and 68.79 percent for AY 2002-2003.**

#### General Studies Population Description

Statistics: 1800 students served  
First Generation Status: 63 percent

The following information was obtained from Lamar University Institutional Research to describe the population of General Studies for the fall 2003 semester.

▪ Gender	Male	42.40%	
	Female	57.60%	
▪ Ethnicity	White	73.28%	
	Black	18.64%	
	Hispanic	4.69%	
	Asian	2.69%	
	American Indian	0.54%	
	International	0.16%	I

Budget: \$244, 912 (fall 2003; includes all CGS staff and programs).

## **Freshman STEPS Program (Start Thinking Early to Plan for Success)**

*(Needs addressed: academic, social, emotional, behavioral, financial and cultural)*

### Description:

The Freshman STEPS (Start Thinking Early to Plan for Success) Program began in spring 2004 and is a proactive retention program designed to address the academic, emotional, financial, social, and career needs of students, as well as any cultural barriers that may affect success in college through early attention to students' strengths and areas of need. This program supports the mission of the university and that of General Studies in increasing the freshman-to-sophomore persistence rate for all students and, in particular, first-generation, low-income, and/or educationally under-prepared students.

The Freshman STEPS Program identifies students' academic and career needs; assesses their academic strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles; assesses their career interests, values, and skills before their first class day; facilitates the development of effective study skills; teaches freshman responsibilities; provides personalized academic advisement; and offers opportunities for students to obtain out-of-class assistance through workshops, tutoring, mentoring, or placement in Supplemental Instruction courses. The goal of the Freshman STEPS Program is to help these students persist to sophomore standing, maintain good academic standing, and choose a major by 45 semester hours.

### Statistics:

#### Spring 2004

- Number of students served: 375 freshmen
  
- Gender
  - Males 47%
  - Females 53%
  
- Ethnicity:
  - White 77%
  - Black 15%
  - Other 4%
  - Hispanic 3%
  - Indian 1%
  
- First-Generation Status 65 percent (fall 2003)
  
- Persistence Rate (Spring 2004 to Fall 2004):
  - General Studies – 67 percent
  - Lamar University – 66 percent

**Note:** General Studies' freshman retention rate has exceeded the university's retention rate since the first semester inception of the Freshman STEPS Program.

Budget: \$30, 247

## Early Alert Program

(Needs addressed: academic)

### Description

The Early Alert Program identifies students whose GPAs fall between 2.00-2.25 and then provides services to assist these students in maintaining good academic standing.

### Statistics:

#### Fall 2003

- Number of students served: 131
  
- First-Generation Status: 12.2%
- Gender: Male 63.3%  
Female 36.7%
  
- Ethnicity: White 67.8%  
Black 22.2%  
Hispanic 6.7%  
Asian 3.3%
  
- Persistence Spring 2004 88.9 percent

#### Other:

- 2.3 percent of Early Alert students were previously on Monitored Probation
- 6.1 percent of Early Alert students graduated with Bachelor of General Studies degree

#### Spring 2004

- Number of students served: 119
  
- First- Generation Status 11.3%
  
- Gender: Female 58.1%  
Male 41.9%
  
- Ethnicity: White 67.7%  
Black 27.4%  
Hispanic 3.2%  
Asian 1.6%  
Mexican-American 1.6%
  
- Persistence to Fall 2004: 75.8 percent

- Other:
- 18.5 percent of Early Alert students were previously on Monitored Probation
  - 5.9 percent of Early Alert students graduated with Bachelor of General Studies degree

Budget: \$25,458

## Monitored Probation Early Intervention Program

(Needs addressed: academic, social, emotional, financial, behavioral, and cultural)

### Description

The Center for General Studies at Lamar University instituted the Monitored Probation (MP) program, a comprehensive academic retention program, as an early intervention approach to facilitate academic recovery for students who have been placed on academic probation or suspension. This MP program is a multifaceted program with three intervention levels. General Studies' students with GPAs less than 2.0 are required to participate as a condition of continued enrollment. Participation includes utilization of the support services provided, such as academic counseling, tutoring, study skills courses, workshops, and supplemental instruction. Needed services are obtained through a referral and follow-up process. Student academic progress is monitored, evaluated, and tracked through personal contact and documentation of student academic performance each semester.

### Statistics:

#### Academic Year 2003-2004

- Number of students served: 385 students (253 - Fall 2003, 232 - Spring 2004)
- Gender:

Male	49.40%
Female	50.60%
- Ethnicity:

White	62.30%
Black	27.50%
Hispanic	6.20%
Asian	2.60%
Other	0.30%
- First-Generation Status: 58.3 percent
- Persistence (Fall 2003 to Spring 2004) 72.5 percent

#### Other:

- 104 students (27 percent) achieved good academic standing (earned cumulative GPA 2.00 or higher during Fall 2003-Spring 2004)
- 5 MP students achieved good academic standing and graduated with BGS
- Term GPAs: 56 percent earned 2.000 or higher in Fall 2003  
54 percent earned 2.000 or higher in Spring 2004
- Expanded outreach efforts for MP students (100%) MP Freshman contacted by phone in Fall 2003 and Spring 2004.

Budget: \$35,500

## McNair Scholars Program

*(Needs addressed: academic, social, emotional, behavioral, financial and cultural)*

### Description:

The Lamar University Ronald E. McNair Post Baccalaureate Achievement Program, popularly called the McNair Scholars Program, is one of eight federal TRIO programs administered by the U. S. Department of Education. The mission of McNair is to prepare students for doctoral studies through involvement in research, educational workshops, and other scholarly activities. Most McNair participants are from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and are among the first-generation of their families to attend college. Participants may also be members of ethnic or racial groups that have been historically underrepresented on university faculties. To be selected as McNair Scholars, students must demonstrate strong academic potential, as well as the desire and perseverance to attain a doctoral degree. The goal of the program is to encourage students to pursue graduate studies by providing opportunities to define goals, to engage in research, and to develop the skills and student/faculty mentor relationships critical to success at the graduate level.

The program offers participants a variety of services, including workshops on study skills, technology skills, personal learning styles, GRE preparation, resume and personal statement writing, research preparation, conference experience, as well as a paid summer research internship. During the McNair Summer Research internship, scholars are paired with a faculty mentor with similar research interests, and under the direction of these mentors, students participate in a research project.

The McNair Scholars Program is funded through a \$220,000 grant per year from the U.S. Department of Education.

### Statistics:

▪ Number of students served	83	
▪ First-Generation Status	86%	
▪ Gender	Female	63%
	Male	36%
▪ Ethnicity:	Caucasian	49%
	African American	29%
	Hispanic	16%
	American Indian	2%
	Asian	4%

Budget: \$220,000 (Funded through a Department of Education TRIO Grant)

## **Supplemental Instruction**

*(Needs addressed: academic, emotional, and behavioral)*

### Description:

Supplemental Instruction is a pre-emptive academic intervention program for students enrolled in difficult courses with histories of poor student performances. A trained Supplemental Instruction student, who has strong academic experiences in the course, acts as a leader in weekly review sessions from the beginning of each semester. At these review sessions, students are able to compare notes, discuss confusing information, and test their knowledge base. Participation in Supplemental Instruction can allow freshmen to develop a firm foundation in difficult courses and develop effective note taking/study skills to facilitate integration in the academic environment.

Budget: \$32,680 annually (varies according to the number of SI leaders)

## **Academic Enhancement Workshop Series**

*(Needs addressed: academic, behavioral, and cultural)*

### Description:

The Academic Enhancement Workshop series consist of hour-long study skills seminars presented by Lamar University faculty and staff. Sixteen topics are presented during the fall and spring semester. The workshop series is available to any Lamar student interested in participating. These workshops may provide freshmen with enhanced study skills to ease their transition into the strenuous academic requirements of the university setting.

Statistics: Number of students served: 711 students (Fall 2003 – Spring 2004)

Budget: \$2,200 annually (Each presenter receives \$50 per workshop; 44 workshops)

The average retention rate of freshmen served by special persistence programs at Lamar University is over 76%. (Statewide retention rate of students from freshman-to-sophomore year was 53% for Community and Technical Colleges and 73% for Universities. [Data from the CB FY 03 Statistical Report])

## **Houston Community College District: Student Success Centers**

[Data not yet received.]

## **Summary**

Based upon preliminary data from the institutions, this pilot program demonstrates that significant success in freshman persistence is achievable, particularly for underrepresented students. All programs could possibly expand if additional funds are appropriated by the Legislature and applied specifically to freshman-to-sophomore persistence programs.

Related reports and data available from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's  
Division of Participation and Success:

*Report on Retention of First-time, Full-time Freshmen by Gender, Ethnicity; Annual Statistical  
Report, 2003*

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This document is available on the  
Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board  
World Wide Web Site  
**<http://www.thecb.state.tx.us>**

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