

The Gateway Program: Fostering Academic Success at The University of Texas at Arlington

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Court cases often affect the programs at public, urban universities. In the case of *Hopwood v. State of Texas* (1996), the court found that The University of Texas Law School had separate admissions criteria for minorities and non-minorities, and that this was a discriminatory policy. As a result of this ruling, public institutions must no longer use ethnicity in admissions decision-making. Furthermore, in response to the Hopwood decision, the Texas Legislature passed House Bill 588, which requires public universities in Texas to accept automatically any applicant from the top 10% of any public or private high school class in the state of Texas, regardless of academic preparation. Therefore, students from a less rigorous high school can gain admission to any state institution even though they might not otherwise be qualified. The University of Texas at Arlington (UTA) assessed its current provisional admission program and created “The Gateway Program,” a new intervention designed to assist those students who did not meet regular admission requirements but who were automatically accepted under Bill 588.

UTA’s former provisional admission program required students to take nine hours from the liberal arts core curriculum and a one-hour college adjustment course taught by trained student paraprofessionals during two summer sessions. The courses were taught in two parts over two five-week summer sessions. Underprepared students were routinely taking six to seven hours during each five-week term. Thus, at-risk students were taking a course load equivalent to 18 to 21 hours in a regular term. The first change implemented by the creators of the Gateway Program was to limit the number of hours in which a provisional student could enroll.

Over the full two-session summer semester, Gateway students were required to take English, mathematics, and a newly created three-hour college adjustment course entitled “University Success.” Placement in English and math courses was based on UTA placement test scores and results from the mandatory Texas Academic Skills Preparation (TASP) exam. Team-taught by faculty and staff, University Success incorporates knowledge of campus resources with a writing component to assist students who are underprepared for college writing. In addition, courses were blocked so students are in class from 9 a.m. until 1 p.m. on Mondays and Wednesdays and 9 a.m. until 11 a.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays. There were no Friday classes.

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TABLE 1

Gateway Program Results

Summer, 1998

Admitted	Enrolled	Passed	Failed	Withdrawn	Did not Enroll
290	73	50 = 68%	18 = 25%	5 = 7%	8*

*Students listed as “did not enroll” attended orientation and registered for classes, but dropped before the census date. Two students were allowed to enroll in classes and continue on probation for one additional semester even though they did not pass all parts of the Gateway Program. They are counted in the “failed” group. Only one student out of the 50 who passed Gateway did not enroll in fall 1998 classes.

A large number of students were admitted into Gateway but decided not to enroll in the university. A major reason for this was that some students chose not to attend because they were required to attend summer school. Nonetheless, results after the first summer indicate initial success and point to promising additional successes of the program.

At the end of the fall semester, 30 of the 49 (60%) who enrolled earned a grade point average of 2.00 or better. Fourteen (28%) earned a grade point average between 1.50 and 1.99. Forty-two (86%) of these students enrolled in spring 1999 classes. These results, however, are most notable when compared with the results from the previous provisional admission program.

TABLE 2

Former Provisional Program Results

Fall, 1995 - Spring, 1998

Term	Enrolled	Passed	Failed	Withdrawn
Fall, 1995	26	8 = 31%	17 = 65%	1 = 4%
Spring, 1996	38	6 = 16%	30 = 79%	2 = 5%
Summer, 1996	25	15 = 60%	10 = 40%	0 = 0%
Spring, 1997	55	21 = 38%	34 = 62%	0 = 0%
Summer, 1997	49	23 = 47%	21 = 43%	5 = 10%
Spring, 1998	56	20 = 36%	32 = 57%	4 = 7%

Requirements of the Gateway Program

To participate in the Gateway Program, students must agree to maintain a 2.0 GPA in the first term and pass all classes with a grade of “D” or better. Students who

successfully complete Gateway are admitted without provisions, but they are required to remain undeclared majors until they reach sophomore classification.

Limitations

As with most new programs, the evaluations indicated that there were concerns. For example, because some students were required to remediate in both math and English and those courses were graded “pass / fail,” their grade point averages were determined by only one grade. In addition, that one grade, which was from the University Success course, did not count toward students’ degrees.

Furthermore, students in the Gateway Program disliked the notion that they had to remain “undeclared” even though they might wish to declare a major.

Unexpected Findings from the Gateway Program

The Gateway Program assessment revealed that these students were more apt to seek help from campus resources. This may have been, in part, because of the unanticipated close bond reported by University Success instructors.

The assessment revealed that students in this program who held work-study jobs on campus had a much greater chance of success. Working students indicated that they felt the “barriers” between student and staff were eased through the experience of working on campus.

In addition, some of the Gateway students who did not pass have expressed an interest in returning to UTA, possibly suggesting that their initial university experience had a positive impact. Some of the former Gateway students are attending local community colleges and plan to enroll at a later date.

Future Plans for Gateway

Based on the information obtained from the assessment, the Gateway Program is scheduled to be offered only during the fall and spring semesters, beginning with spring 2000. Some students who needed to be in the program had not been admitted by June 1, the onset of the Gateway Program, and, therefore, were not able to participate in the summer program. In addition, the change will alleviate the problems associated with the creation of special Gateway math and English sections that were offered during the summer.

References

Hopwood v. State of Texas, 78F.3d 932 (5th Cir. 1996)