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Academy for Collegiate Excellence and Student Success (ACCESS)

George C. Wright

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BRIEF ACCESS OVERVIEW

The Academy for Collegiate Excellence and Student Success (ACCESS) is a residential “bridge to college” program at Prairie View A&M University that provides intensive academic enhancement and facilitates the transition for students entering college. (ACCESS) is seven-weeks long and is open to any Texas resident who has recently graduated from high school, not just to students who have expressed interest in attending PVAMU. ACCESS will operate its 13th program in the summer of 2008. The program’s initial class was 75 participants. Over the years, the number has been as high as 137 but has averaged approximately 100 students per session.

The curriculum for the seven week program was developed around a model that stresses math, reading, writing and emphasizes the cognitive skill areas of problem solving and critical thinking. Outside the classroom, ACCESS students participate in leadership training, social/personal development activities, service learning/civic engagement opportunities 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.

In 2008 ACCESS is combining service learning/civic engagement with studying the lives and Presidencies of Lyndon Johnson, George H. W. Bush, and Bill Clinton. The students will visit each of their Presidential Libraries. The students will then engage in a Presidential Debate on current issues but they must do so from the perspective of these Presidents.

Successes: over 1200 students have participated. ~~ACCESS has its first-graduate in medical school.~~ Former ACCESS students are graduate students in multiple areas from Bio-Chemistry to Business, *and in Medical & Law Schools.* These students have produced retention and graduation rates that are above their peers; added a diversity to the university; and proven that college success can be a reality for a broader base of our community.

A word about the funding of ACCESS: When it started in 1995, it received special item funding (E&G funds), ~~sponsored by Texas House Representatives Steve Ogden, and Garnett Coleman in the amount of \$900K per biennium.~~ In the following years, ACCESS has been funded by Academic Enhancement dollars and Texas Commitment appropriated to PVAMU. It is currently funded through a combination of Academic Development Initiative dollars (E&G) 64%; designated tuition 31%; and participant fees, 5%. Individuals are asked to pay \$300 to participate in the program, and we feel it is necessary because it allows the student to have a stake in the program. ~~Occasionally schools or other groups will pay a participant's fee.~~ If a student has a severe need, we will reduce or waive this fee. This total funding is \$547,000.

FINAL POINT: With increased funding we could ① increase the size of the cohort by 25 to 50 or run 2 parallel but separate cohort programs.

The ACCESS program becomes a natural lead to the University college environment, which is unique, for PVAMU freshmen. This is funded with Title III funds.