

TTU PEGASUS Program

Recruitment and Retention of Ethnic Minorities

Groups benefiting from PEGASUS

PEGASUS helps the FGC students by easing the transition to college, providing an academic home, and demystifying the college experience. Many FGC students come from low income backgrounds and are often from populations traditionally under-represented in higher education. Statistically, in 2005-2006, 57% of the PEGASUS Scholars were Ethnic Minorities, 45% of our PEGASUS Mentors and 48% of our Non-Scholar Members; to give a combined total of Ethnic Minorities participating in our program of 50%.

Furthermore, research shows that FGC students are less prepared academically, less comfortable culturally, less persistent in applying to and attending four-year research institutions, and less likely to be retained and graduated (Thayer, 2000; Choy, 2001). Statistics show that FGC students are twice as likely to leave before their second year compared to students whose parents had a bachelor's degree (Choy, 2001). Through the developmental and comprehensive efforts of the program, PEGASUS participants are being retained at a higher rate than the University average: for the 2005-2006 academic year, PEGASUS had a 100% retention rate for participating freshmen FGC Scholars for first-to-second year at TTU. Mentors and PEGASUS members were retained at 90% compared to 83.9% for the FGC population as a whole and the university population at large. Over 25% of each TTU entering class self-identify as First Generation College (FGC) students. PEGASUS phone campaigns in the fall take the count to closer to 1/3 of each entering class.

PEGASUS also helps the families of FGC students bridge the gaps created by changing expectations, financial pressures, and the student's transition from dependence to interdependence. Effective programs affirm and help students understand that academic success is not attained through individual achievement alone, but through an axis of support (Gullant and Jan, 2003).

PEGASUS helps the University by making an impact on the diversity of the student body, retention, and graduation rates of traditionally underrepresented populations. FGC minority students in one study expressed a need "to find places to study, meet friends, or seek support.....spaces that provided some measure of "comfortability" on campus (Hsiao, 1992).

The greatest gains in retention rates result from focusing not only on the selection process, but also the student environment and interaction after college entry. Some institutions adopt retention strategies because FGC and low-income students may be among those at highest risk of dropping out, and it helps the institution show their commitment to racial and cultural diversity (Thayer, 2000).

The domino effect can be seen in the work by PEGASUS. For example, because of efforts by PEGASUS staff members, University offices such as Academic Operations and Services, Financial Aid, and Institutional Research are coordinating efforts to better identify and report on FGC student populations. This, in turn, will impact the University's ability to accurately report its diversity. FGC status and diversity in Texas are directly linked, and this will change the University's ability to be selected for grant funding.

PEGASUS helps the community by nurturing the goal of a college education in the minds of elementary and secondary school students. For example, PEGASUS Staff and FGC Scholars, Mentors, and Members work with public school children through the area Boys and Girls Clubs, Upward Bound, and Buckner Children's Home (PAL Program for Foster Care Youth), and area high school FGC clubs to 'plant the seed' of a college education in the minds of the participants.

National Information

PEGASUS has become a national leader in FGC programs and services. For example, beginning in 2002 PEGASUS took a leading role in the services for FGC student populations through NACADA, the international academic advising association. At the last National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) Region VII conference, PEGASUS was the only FGC-specific presentation on the schedule, and PEGASUS has been invited to present at each of the international NACADA National Conferences.

The University Advising Center and the PEGASUS websites are setting the stage for website development, producing cutting edge resources for TTU students. Components available include two-year plans for all colleges on campus, College is for Everyone (speaks to all students who believe that they could never be successful in college because of their differences), blogs, internet based FGC workshops and mentor training modules, and (the first University to have a) FGC Literature Review.

PEGASUS is also setting the pace for FGC student support programs in the Big XII. Several Big XII campuses have federally-funded TRiO programs like Upward Bound, Talent Search, the McNair Scholars Program, Student Support Services (SSS), etc. Furthermore, many Big XII schools address FGC students in their strategic plans. However, Texas Tech University is the only Big XII institution to fund a structured university-supported, FGC-specific, first year program.

Works Consulted

Choy, Susan P. 2001. *Students Whose Parents Did Not Go To College: Postsecondary Access, Persistence and Attainment* (NCES 2001-126). Washington, DC:U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2001/2001126pdf>.

Gullatt, Yvette, and Wendy Jan 2003. *How Do Pre-Collegiate Academic Outreach Programs Impact College-Going among Underrepresented Students?* Washington, DC: Pathways to College Network Clearinghouse.

Hsiao, Karin Peterson. Nov. 1992. *First- Generation College Students* (ERIC ED351079) ERIC Digest, November. Office of Educational Research and Improvement. Los Angeles, CA: ERIC Clearinghouse Products (0-71). www.eric.ed.gov

Thayer, Paul B. 2000. *Retention of Students from First Generation and Low Income Backgrounds* (ERIC ED446633). Opportunity Outlook (May), 2-8.