Establishing a Health Professions Pathway Program to Recruit Underrepresented Minority Pharmacy Students

Minority Health Research and Education Grant Program

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Introduction

The national trend of a decreased amount of African Americans and Hispanics in health professions has been reflected in the Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD), Respiratory Therapy (RT), and Dietsetics (DT) programs at Texas Southern University (TSU). This is evident in the College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences (COPHS) by the amount of students in these populations admitted to the professional phases (i.e., after completing two years of prerequisites) of the PharmD and RT programs. Although, graduation rates for the professional PharmD and RT programs are 85% or greater, retention data for the pre-professional phases of these programs reveals that typically these students are unprepared upon entering the University. Therefore, they experience academic difficulty in their prerequisite courses, making them less competitive when applying to the professional programs. Additionally, the DT program in the College of Liberal Arts and Behavioral Sciences (COLABS) has seen a decline in the number of minority students enrolling in the program and being competitive in the profession upon graduation.

The TSU-College of Pharmacy & Health Sciences (COPHS) Health Professions Pathway Program (HPPP) has been established to increase the likelihood of underrepresented minorities being accepted into the PharmD and RT professional programs and a retention program be established to support students in the PharmD, RT, and DT programs.

The College anticipates the program will enhance recruitment and retention by establishing partnerships with high profession feeder schools, mathematics and science faculty (with whom our PharmD, RT, and DT students receive critical prerequisite education), and the TSU Honors College where our highest academic performers tend to be classified. The program also seek to increase marketing efforts through the use of technology, and improving academic advising and tutoring/entrance exam preparation of pre-professional students.

Objective

To recruit high-performing African American and Hispanic high school seniors, TSU freshman, and community college graduates into a newly established contingency-to-admit program (HPPP program) which guarantees admissions into the professional phase of the preferred program based on specific criteria. Additionally, develop and enhance retention programs to increase the likelihood of TSU native African American and Hispanic students being admitted into the professional phase of the students’ program of choice.

Ongoing Program Metrics:

- Number of underrepresented minorities recruited through targeted activities.
- Qualitative and quantitative assessments [HPPP students- formative/summative i.e. performance, socialization] throughout matriculation.
- Number of transfer students accepted to program from targeted community college. Establish performance indicators of HPPP students post admissions.
- Partnerships established with high schools and community college programs
- Number of underrepresented minorities recruited through target recruitment activities
- Articulation agreements established through coordinated efforts with the TSU Health Professions Pathway Career Center

Discussion

Given TSU’s status as the only Historically Black College/University (HBCU) in Texas to offer undergraduate and professional degrees in multiple health profession areas (i.e., clinical laboratory science, dietetics, environmental health, health administration, health information management, respiratory therapy, and pharmacy), TSU is poised to be an attractive higher education institution for minorities seeking degrees in healthcare. The uniqueness of this setting inherently produces a support system for these students, while facilitating the interprofessional interactions amongst fellow healthcare practitioners necessary for the evolving healthcare environment. As such, this program allows for the expansion of qualified underrepresented minority candidates into these medical professions and enable continued success into the future.

Methods

Students accepted into HPPP must maintain specific criteria to maintain satisfactory status in the HPPP. Upon application to the professional phase of the desired program (typically after two years of prerequisites), students will be granted automatic admissions into their program of choice if all HPPP criteria and program specific criteria are met:

To maintain satisfactory status in HPPP, the student is required to:

a. Maintain criteria of the retention policy during matriculation
b. Participate in all required retention programming offered and/or promoted by the College.
c. Become a member of and participate in the Pre Health Professions Club

to be granted automatic admissions to the Pharmacy program the student must:

- Have a 3.25 minimum overall gpa
- Have a 3.0 minimum science and math gpa
- Score a minimum composite score of 50% on the PCAT
d. Participate in the interview process
e. Good academic and judicial standing in the College and University

To be granted automatic admissions to the professional phase of the Clinical Laboratory Science and Respiratory Therapy programs, the student must:

- Have a 3.0 minimum overall gpa
- Have a 2.75 minimum science and math gpa
- Take the HOBET exam
d. Participate in the interview process
e. Good academic and judicial standing in the College and University

To be granted automatic admissions to the professional phase of the Environmental Health, Health Administration, and Health Information Management programs, the student must:

- Have a 3.0 minimum overall gpa
- Have a 2.75 minimum science and math gpa
- Has good judicial standing in the College and University

Conclusion

Preliminary data revealed that undergraduate students are generally underprepared upon entering the university, putting them at a disadvantage academically, thus making them less competitive. Moreover, the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) progression guidelines led to an increase in admissions standards for the College, making it more difficult for some students to be admitted.

Programmatic criteria and student outcomes are being evaluated according to the following baseline indicators: pre-admissions grade point average, entrance examination scores, class rank, interview scores and essays. All student cohorts are coded for formative/summative analyses. Benchmarks are defined based on these data. Intervention methodologies (i.e. tutoring, academic counseling, progression reports, etc.) are established resultant of these measures and collected for continual analysis. Recruitment and retention initiatives of HPPP students will be evaluated via qualitative and quantitative measures. Recruitment strategies will be evaluated based on each program’s yield. Promotional material will be distributed during targeted recruitment events and tracked by “student type” for efficacy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal and Performance Measures</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>YR 1 Outcomes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of HPPP applications</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>35:13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total number of students selected to the HPPP</td>
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<td>15:12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of students transferring into the targeted degree programs from community colleges</td>
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<td>10:6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of students recruited to HPPP through Honors College</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of high school partnerships</td>
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<td>Number of community college partnerships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of articulation agreements with community colleges for health profession programs</td>
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<td>2:1</td>
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</tbody>
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Acknowledgements

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