THE LEADERSHIP LADDER PROGRAM

"Committed to Student Success"

A. Brief Description of the Institution

A part of the Texas A&M University System, Texas A&I University is a four year public institution located in Kingsville, Texas. The university offers a wide variety of academic programs at the baccalaureate, masters, and doctoral levels. The university's programs in engineering, agriculture, home economics, and adult education are unique to South Texas.

With a student enrollment of nearly 6000, Texas A&I University is one of seven senior institutions on the mainland U.S. with a Hispanic student population of 50% or more. Texas A&I University is committed to being the premier institution in meeting the educational needs of South Texas.

B. Description of the Retention Program

In January 1991, Texas A&I University initiated a new, exciting, and innovative program involving successful role-model students and every new freshman student. The program, named the Leadership Ladder Program (LLP), provides new freshman students with peer guidance and "cross-generational" support by students who have successfully completed different levels of college work.

The thrust of the LLP is two-fold. The first is to provide peer and academic support through LLP counseling with new freshman students. The second is to recognize successful role-model students and encourage them to graduate.

How does the LLP work? From a technical perspective, LLP students participate in applied leadership experiences (i.e. work) on an assigned situation for 12 to 19 hours per week depending on

their classification. LLP students receive stipends from $400 to $1500 in increasing amounts according to their classification and responsibilities. Biweekly meetings are held with the LLP coordinator for leadership development activities, planning, and coordination of assignments.

The LLP is either responsible for or plays a major role in several program activities:

Program Activity 1: "Hoggie Days" Orientation and Pre-Registration Program

For the first time in 1991, newly admitted freshman students were required to attend one of the special two-day orientation and pre-registration programs called "Hoggie Days". In stark contrast to the old orientation program, "Hoggie Days" is an exciting, well attended feature event for freshman students. The Leadership Ladder Program was a major factor in totally revamping the freshman orientation program.

During the entertaining and informative two-day program, LLP students are totally responsible for the featured "Hoggie Show". The "Hoggie Show" is a spoof of Johnny Carson's Tonight Show featuring an LLP host who interviews guests (administrators, civic leaders, students, and faculty) in a entertaining and off-beat manner.

During "Hoggie Days", LLP students also provide peer academic advising to students who are undecided about their major field of study. LLP students are treated as professional staff and provide quality advising to new students.

The conference was so successful that school districts immediately began calling to schedule the next conference. As a result of its success, a second South Texas Leadership Conference has been scheduled.

Program Activity 4: College I Newsletter

One of the goals of the new Dean of College I was to improve communication with university faculty, school administrators, teachers, and counselors. The Leadership Ladder Program was asked to assume the major task of publishing a newsletter that would keep people informed of College I events. The LLP organized and published two newsletters in the 1991 Fall semester and one in the 1992 Spring semester. This project represented another "first" to be implemented by the LLP and resulted in enhanced communication as well as a more positive image for College I.

Future Directions: An Expanded Leadership Development Role

When creativity is combined with hard work, good things seem to happen. The Leadership Ladder Program will not only continue the programs already established, but will also be a major player in developing an expanded leadership development effort on the campus of Texas A&I University and in South Texas high schools. Plans are under way to begin a South Texas Association of Young Student Leaders for high school students and a College I Council for freshman students at Texas A&I.

C. Development of the Program

In 1989, Texas A&I University took a bold step to improve

student achievement, success, and retention by creating its highly innovative College I program. College I, organized as the university's seventh academic college, is the academic home base for all freshman students. As a result of College I, freshman students receive more personal attention and guidance throughout their first year of enrollment.

College I staff members, however, felt an essential ingredient was missing... a student-to-student development process. To fill this void, the university developed and presented a proposal to establish the Leadership Ladder Program as a part of College I. A private foundation reviewed the proposal and provided funds to develop the Leadership Ladder Program.

There were two primary problems encountered in developing the Leadership Ladder Program. The first was money, which was overcome with the vision and assistance of a private foundation. The second was deciding how the LLP could be integrated into other program elements of College I. This was resolved by having two College I professional staff members work directly with the LLP, one of whom serves as LLP coordinator.

D. Specific Goals and Objectives of the Retention Program

The LLP is designed to enhance student success and improve student retention. Accordingly, the LLP targets two very specific groups of students. The first target group includes all new freshman students. The primary goal of the LLP and College I is to improve the retention rate of full-time freshman students.

The second target group includes currently successful students

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who are selected to participate in the LLP. Leadership stipends and applied leadership development activities are provided to encourage these role-model students to complete their degree at Texas A&I University.

As a direct result of its initial successes, the goals of the LLP are now broader but very precise. All of the goals reflect the on-going efforts of the LLP. Current goals include:

Goal 1: Working with new freshmen students as peer mentors and counselors.

LLP students have doubled (a 100% increase) the amount of personal attention given to new freshmen students. Over 1,000 new freshmen students participated in individual advisement conferences. The LLP was the major factor in adding peer advising for new students.

Goal 2: Retain LLP students through graduation.

To date, all LLP students have been successfully retained. Of the 9 current LLP students, all are currently enrolled and three are scheduled to graduate in May 1992. To date, there is a 100% success rate.

Goal 3: Present the "Hoggie Days" program.

The LLP is primarily responsible for the entertaining, informative, and highly successful "Hoggie Days" program for new freshman students and parents. In 1991, over 800 students and 400 parents attended one of the four "Hoggie Days" programs.

Goal 4: Direct the Academic Rescue Program.

LLP students are totally responsible for the Academic Rescue Program (ARP). In 1991 over 750 students received the benefits of the Academic Rescue Program. Over 70% of the students referred resulted in successful outcomes (grade improvement, tutoring received, course dropped without failing).

Goal 5: Publish the College I Newsletter.

Working directly with the Dean of College I, LLP students will organize, format, and publish the College I Newsletter to keep the university community informed as to College I events.

Goal 6: Continue the South Texas Leadership Conference.

The LLP planned, organized, and convened the very first South Texas Leadership Conference in 1991 which attracted 200 student leaders from twenty-eight school districts throughout South Texas. A second South Texas Leadership Conference has been scheduled for 1992.

Goal 7: Establish the South Texas Association of Young Student Leaders.

Plans are on schedule to initiate this new association in November, 1992. Indications are that the Association will have an initial membersnip of 200. The goal of this association is to give the youth of South Texas a stronger, more unified voice.

E. Results and Outcomes For Students and/or the Institution

The Leadership Ladder Program is a remarkable success story. After just one full year, the LLP is recognized as a model program within the university and throughout secondary schools in South Texas. Beginning with an idea and a modest grant, the LLP has developed into a major element within the College I program. Due to its success, the future of the LLP is assured. The university plans to extend the LLP over the next few years with scholarship funds to be used as leadership stipends. The LLP anticipates growth to 24 students and eventually to 50 students.

In evaluating the results and outcomes of the LLP, it is necessary to look at both qualitative and quantitative measures. The overall goal of the LLP is to improve the retention rate of freshman students. While it is still early, it appears that the retention rate of full-time freshmen students has improved about 4% comparing the fall to fall enrollment of College I students (all full-time freshmen students). The retention rate has increased from 50.1% in the benchmark 1989-90 fall semester to 54% for the 1991-92 fall semester. These figures are dependent on a College I cohort group entering in each fall semester. Previously, data were maintained on all freshman students (every student under 30 semester hours) and the fall to fall retention generally ranged up to 52% with an average of approximately 50%. The benchmark 50.1% includes all freshman students (full-time and part-time), while the College I cohort group consisted only of full-time freshman students. The 54% retention rate compares favorably to the 50.1%

benchmark. Continual evaluations will confirm the stability of this projection, but the early data appear positive.

F. Use of Resources

The Leadership Ladder Program is one of the most productive and cost effective programs ever created at Texas A&I University. The LLP was initiated and continues to operate on a three year $30,000 grant ($10,000 a year), all of which is used for leadership stipends. As a program within College I, the LLP has access to offices, telephones, computers, and supplies. Program activities like "Hoggie Days" and the South Texas Leadership Conference generate their own revenues.

G. Potential for Adaption

The concept of the Leadership Ladder Program could easily be duplicated by other institutions. Every institution offers scholarships, has talented students, and provides student development programs. The LLP concept is unique because of the College I program at Texas A&I University. Very few universities have a program committed to freshman students that is structured as an academic college. The stable and creative environment provided by College I enables the LLP to flourish. On-going efforts are difficult to sustain without this type of environment and stability and without a willingness to trust the creativity, energies, and talents of student leaders. Leadership Ladder Program students are given every opportunity to succeed, but they are also given the opportunity to fail.