
\$6.2 million awarded to aid college access programs

Bobby Longoria

Daily Texan Staff

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The Texas Guaranteed Student Loan Corporation awarded \$6.2 million in grants to 55 institutions and non-profit organizations across the state last week.

Kristina Tirloni, spokeswoman for the corporation, said the grants are intended to help underrepresented students gain access to college and ensure their success.

“[The grants] help target students that maybe need additional help or additional access to get into a higher education institution,” Tirloni said. “It doesn’t matter if it’s in Austin or Houston or Oklahoma or Washington, D.C. It’s to help kids across the board find access and success in a post-secondary education.”

Eight Austin-area institutions and organizations received more than \$966,000, including a UT project titled “Con Mi Madre” which received more than \$76,000.

The program director, Sonia Castellanos, said the program helps Hispanic teenage females and their mothers understand what is required to be successful in their academic and personal lives.

“The majority of our students will be first-generation college students,” Castellanos said. “What we do is not only work with the students, but work with their moms. That’s one difference between our program and other college access programs.”

The program concentrates on the girls' academic and personal lives, which can become stressful and affect their overall success. The executive director of the program, Sandy Alcalá, said the program plans to use the grant money to fund salaries, the cost of workshops and individual counseling.

"Counseling is a big thing. The ethnic group that has the highest risk of depression is the Latina," Alcalá said. "We understand she has to be mentally safe, she has to be emotionally strong in order to excel in the classroom. She needs to go to school and feel motivated and build up her self esteem."

Interns from the UT School of Social Work conduct workshops as well as individual counseling with students. Nancy Varick interned with the program for two semesters and witnessed the improvement it made for many young women.

"It helps to talk to people — someone who can talk to you one-on-one," Varick said. "It's confidential, it's helpful for [students] to meet with someone objective and talk about their goals."

The Texas Guaranteed Student Loan Corporation board of directors awarded the grants on a competitive basis and chose each program to receive funding.

Other Austin-area programs that received funding included GeoFORCE Texas, run by the Jackson School of Geosciences, and the Free Minds Project, which is run by UT's Humanities Institute.

GeoFORCE Texas program coordinator Danielle Horton said the program received \$100,000. The program provides students interested in geosciences the opportunity to learn geology from professionals.

"It's a summer outreach program for underrepresented students interested in the sciences — specifically geoscience," Horton said. "We take them on trips across the United States for projects of geoscience interest that range from two to seven days."

Tirloni said the benefits derived from the programs will stay noticeable throughout the students' college career and beyond.

"[The corporation] is working with businesses, individuals, institutions and organizations to help ensure that students have access to college education because the value of that can be

seen over a lifetime.” Tirloni said. “Once they are in college, they can successfully fulfill that education and reap the benefits of having it.”




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