

Enriching Our Youth

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**AGRICULTURE
& LIFE SCIENCES**
TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY



Subcommittee Report on Grand Challenge: Enriching our Youth

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Background Information

Providing the supports, opportunities, programs and services to assist Texas youth to grow to be fully productive citizens presents significant challenges to families, our education system (from pre-school to higher education), youth serving organization and a variety of government organizations at every level. Besides the normal tasks of growing up, youth face an increasingly complex world. To aid in a critical discussion around solutions, the committee has provided the context of changing culture, demographic diversity, and a clarification of the term “youth.” A further reflection of rapid changes in technology; increasingly diverse demographics and culture; expanded, yet not always fully accessible, educational opportunities; a growing obesity rate, and challenging economic issues will be addressed as focus areas.


The Changing Culture and Diversity of Texas

The demographics and cultural diversity of Texas is changing rapidly. As of 2010, Texas had the second largest population in the United States, exceeding 25 million people, with 28% of the population less than 18 years of age. As the population continues to grow, so does the cultural, racial and ethnic diversity of the state. Approximately nine million (38%) Texans are of Hispanic descent, 2.8 million (12%) are African Americans, and 1 million (4%) are other non-Anglo, mainly of Asian descent. By the 2020, it is expected that Texas will have more persons of Hispanic descent than any other racial or ethnic group.

In addition, Texas continues to be one of the desired places in the United States to live and work. Net immigration to Texas accounts for almost half of the population growth in recent years. More than 171,900 college graduates moved to Texas each year between 2006 and 2008, a record exceed by only one other state. Texas is the second largest in the country in terms of square miles (268,601), with 83% of the population living in urban area, three of the top ten largest cities in the Nation, and many cities being among the most rapidly growing in the country.

Texas continues to be a family oriented, working state. With one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country and an expanding economy, people see Texas as a great place to reside. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Texas gained more population than any other state in the last ten years by adding 4.2 million people.

Changing Educational Opportunities



With an increased population in Texas there is increased demand on all levels of the education system. From expectations of standardized testing in secondary schools, to the maintaining an affordable cost and reasonable access for higher education institutions, educational providers and government agencies are challenged to provide the economic support, reasonable access, and appropriate content to prepare students for the workforce and their roles as educated citizens.

The cost of higher education has been steadily increasing. Between 2000–01 and 2010–11, prices for undergraduate tuition, room, and board at public institutions rose 42 percent, and prices at private not-for-profit institutions rose 31 percent, after adjustment for inflation. The inflation-adjusted price for undergraduate tuition, room, and board at private for-profit institutions was 5 percent higher in 2010–11 than in 2000–01. For the 2010–11 academic year, the US Department of Education National Center for Education Statics reported that in annual current dollar prices tuition, room, and board for undergraduate education were estimated to be \$13,600 at public institutions, \$36,300 at private not-for-profit institutions, and \$23,500 at private for-profit institutions.


In addition to the rising cost of education across the United States and Texas, many more students are entering higher education institutions with college credits completed in order to minimize college costs and to position themselves for better acceptance into a particular college/university. Research indicates that students participating in credit-based transition programs have a higher completion rate of a college degree, especially for those in underserved areas (Struhl & Vargas, 2012). According to Struhl and Vargas, in 2010 more than 90,364 high school students in Texas were enrolled in dual credit courses. With this increased number of youth entering college with advanced hours, teaching styles may need to be adjusted. Due to age and/or maturity level of student and their previous exposure to formal higher education classroom settings, it will be necessary to look at how these individuals are taught in the future.

The Changing of Youth – understanding who we work with

The United Nations define “youth” as any person between the ages of 15 to 24 years. Individuals under the age of thirteen are defined as “children.” To appropriately address the needs of youth in Texas, we augment this definition of youth to include those age 13 to 24 years old. Regardless of the terminology and the age distinctions used to define youth, enabling young people to successfully transition to adulthood is the priority. Communities across the United States and Texas are searching for the best ways to facilitate positive pathways for youth to follow on their journey to adulthood. Agencies and organizations working with youth have created services and programs to decrease negative behaviors such as drug use, engagement of unprotected or early sexual activity, involvement in in gangs, and low school performance or dropping out of school. At the same time, agencies and organizations have sought to help youth develop the positive attitudes, skills, and behaviors that will enable them to successfully transition to adulthood.

Recent research shows that American youth have made tremendous progress in overcoming some of the behaviors that decrease life chances. For example, there has been a decrease in rates of teen births following a period of increases; decreases in the number of youth who are heavy drinkers or smokers; and increases in the number of students completing high school. However, data also indicates that there has been a steady increase since 1998 in the number of youth living in poverty; an increase in children and youth experiencing food insecurity; and the number of parents that have employment security is at its lowest rate since 1996.

Research also shows that American youth spend 42% of their time in leisure related activities. These activities include activities such as playing sports, attending church, being involved in hobbies,




watching television, as well as the use of social media. Constructive use of out-of-school time has been shown to increase positive social behaviors, prevent risk behaviors and provide settings for social support from peers, parents and other caring adults. In addition, quality out-of-school time activities enable youth to achieve higher academic levels, demonstrate greater optimism about their future and become active productive citizens. Organizations that provide positive activities through intentional activities continue to need support in program design, program management, fundraising strategies, staff training, and program evaluation. Facilitating organizational capacity for quality youth development opportunities that will increase the probability that youth will make a successful transition to adulthood (i.e. being economically self-sufficient, form meaningful relationships with others, and being good citizens). Despite changing demographics, many youth of color have been underserved or inappropriately served by both government funded social service systems and private and non-profit sector organizations. Additionally, providers of youth programs and services too often have inadequately addressed culturally-based perceptions and behaviors, such as value orientation, ethnic identity, social capital supports (e.g., caring adult role models), language and acculturation, religious beliefs and practices, and family structure. Therefore, it is important to understand cultural context, the recruitment and retention of youth in select programs and services, and how it influences the overall development of youth as they transition to adulthood.

Focus Areas

The Engaging Youth subcommittee identified four priority areas regarding youth in Texas. The areas were decided upon based on current and future issues affecting youth and their transition to becoming productive adult community members. Those identified areas include:

1. *Promote Health and Wellness of Youth.* The health and wellness of our youth is a serious issue for our state, country, and world. Our youth are growing up with challenges not faced by previous generations. During this time period youth establish patterns of behavior and make lifestyle choices that affect their current and future health status and general well-being. With significant increases in obesity, diabetes, violence, growing dependence on technology, and other juvenile health issues, a focus on health and wellness is a priority. In addition, many youth continue to struggle with adopting positive behaviors that could decrease health risks, including healthy eating habits, engaging in adequate levels of physical activity, and avoiding drug, tobacco and alcohol use. Furthermore, research has found environmental factors such as family, peer group membership, and school and community characteristics may also contribute to overall youth health and risk behaviors. A focused community approach is needed to emphasize the engagement and partnering of multiple sectors needed to improve overall well-being. These health issues must be addressed aggressively with youth and their families through the combination of education and youth programs utilizing best practices. Finally, the college alongside the AgriLife agencies needs to provide information that will help guide the discussion at the local, state and national levels to improve community, state and national efforts for monitoring and decision-making about these issues.
2. *Facilitate Academic Achievement, College Readiness and Career Development.* Preparing youth for the college experience is beginning at a younger age. As a result, the stress of academic achievement presents challenges for many young people. Many young people need help to create aspirations to attend college earlier in their school careers, elevate their expectations and dreams. Helping young people develop an



educational plan is necessary in order to enhance the thought processes about the value and need for higher education. Additionally, the academic culture in higher education needs to enhance the advising and guidance processes as youth they enter college, including assistance with career exploration to aligning classes to support career goals. Students, whether they are college bound or not, also need to be prepared for a job market that is increasingly specific in the skills required to be successful. Youth can become overwhelmed without the skills necessary to navigate the sea of information about jobs and needed skills. Some universities and colleges have moved away from allowing entering students to be undecided with regard to their major, but at the same time forcing them to choose a major with limited information. School districts are not providing sufficient focus on career guidance to enable students to make informed choices about their future, whether to pursue college or industry related positions. Career guidance needs to be enhanced to enable students to make more informed educational decisions. This process includes the promotion of positive attitudes, skills, and behaviors around occupational and career choices and decisions. Thus, their need to be enhanced processes to promote work-readiness skills, career interest assessments, increased leadership opportunities, connection to communities through service, civic engagement, and involvement in work that provides advancement, satisfaction and self-sufficiency.

3. *Build and Sustain Collaborative Partnerships among Governmental, Educational and Non-Profit Agencies to Support Youth Development.* As a land-grant university, the mission of Texas A&M is to disseminate education to the citizens of Texas. This practice includes engaging faculty members in the community through the translation of research into practice through the utilization of all areas of the AgriLife program, including the college and the agencies. Collaboration with government, industry, foundations, and other funding sources for research and outreach involving youth and youth issues is also vital. In order to the success of youth in identifying pathways to adulthood, government agencies, community organizations, schools, and community members need to work together in a more comprehensive approach. As such, joint efforts can help promote a more comprehensive approach that views each youth from a holistic perspective, recognizing the unique role that each sector play in ensuring the development of youth into healthy productive members of society.
4. *Training for Staff.* In today's higher education setting, it is imperative that faculty and staff are offered adequate training opportunity to be cutting edge faculty members. Training is critical in five areas: technology, risk management, exposure to issue affecting youth, mentoring, and professionalism. It is imperative that the latest technology is used to deliver educational materials to our students, including understanding new technology, having access to it, and creating expectations to use it. Risk management is becoming a larger issue for all who work with youth – from how to work with them, properly involving them in programs, and the impact of risk management factors on quality programs. Knowledge of youth issues is also critical. To be an effective educator, one needs to be knowledgeable of youth issues such as violence, bullying, obesity, sexuality, and how youth learn and are engaged in the learning process. In addition, training faculty and staff to be positive adult mentors is becoming more and more important for working and engaging youth. As more young people have less positive influences in their daily lives, adults have the obligation to serve as mentors for young people in order to prepare them for their education and/or career experiences.

Capacity Building

The subcommittee examined multiple areas within the college to identify programmatic strengths. It is believed these areas would be places to build capacity to make significant contributions regarding the priority areas. Examples of research, programs or events have been provided to illustrate efforts in this area. While not an exhaustive list, these efforts demonstrate leadership that can be maximized.

1. *Health and Wellness of Youth (i.e.: childhood obesity, identity issues, etc.)*

- Research throughout the college:
 - Research briefs through Sequor Youth Development Initiative (YDI) including emerging topics and literature reviews
 - Texas Grow Eat Go program evaluating the impact of intervention programs to improve physical activity and eating behaviors of children at selected elementary schools
 - Institute for Obesity Research and Program evaluation has worked with the Texas Department of State Health Services to assess the WIC program new food packages and evaluate the impact of two national policy implementations in Texas
 - Role of Social Sciences in feeding the world in Agricultural, Leadership, Education & Communications with teachers in high schools
- Research & extension programs across the state
 - Hippotherapy certification program with Extension provides theory and practice for individuals working in equine assisted therapies
 - Junior Master Gardner
- Engagement of youth:
 - 4-H MASH camp
 - District 4-H Leadership Labs
 - Texas 4-H Conference Center leadership camps
 - Junior Master Gardner workshops

2. *Academic Achievement and College Readiness*

- Research throughout the college
 - Toyota grant with Agricultural Leadership, Education, & Communication
 - CYFAR Life Skills program
 - Success characteristics of targeted student populations in Science, Technology, Engineering, & Mathematics (STEM) disciplines
 - Use of experiential learning in agricultural education classrooms
 - Mentoring models with underrepresented youth
 - Recruitment and retention of underrepresented youth in agriculture and life sciences

- Training & trainers on variety of topics:
 - High Impact Program funded advisors to experience programs in departments in order to stimulate student interest
 - Webinars on critical issues in advising students (i.e.: counseling undecided students, understanding returning veteran issues, etc.) for academic advisors
 - University Advising Council (UAC) provides professional development for campus based academic advisors
 - Agricultural Science Teacher certification program grooms potential teachers
 - Sequor YDI annual conference
- Promotion of higher education:
 - Outreach programming & AVID presentations with schools
 - College recruiters
 - Articulation agreements with community colleges,
 - Rural Talent Search
 - Greater Texas Foundation through Texas A&M to reach target populations in Texas
- Engagement of youth:
 - Initiatives in multiple departments (including Biochemistry, Entomology and Animal Science) in the college allow undergraduates to engage in the funded scholarly research alongside faculty mentors
 - Myriad of contests and clinics to develop skills in animal science, horticulture, public speaking, robotics, and food safety
 - ExxonMobile Bernard Harris Zombie camp exposes middle school students to STEM disciplines in order to stimulate their interests
 - Learning communities (L3C & CLUES) to build support systems for undergraduate scholars

3. *Career Development*

- Research throughout the college
 - Student interest in agriculture & life science in Agricultural Leadership, Education, & Communication
 - Leadership development in volunteer groups (4-H, FFA, MANRRS, etc.)
 - Career awareness of students enrolled in agricultural and/or life science programs at colleges and universities
 - Success characteristics of targeted student populations in Science, Technology, Engineering, & Mathematics (STEM) disciplines
 - Effective instructional methods with agricultural teachers
 - Coping and support services for youth in out-of-school programs
 - Cultural competency and youth development
- Extension personnel across the state provide workshops to students and the community at large about a variety of subjects related to agriculture and life sciences. Internships for both high school and college age students are provided at some Extension Centers.

- Promotion of higher education:
 - Ag in the City affords the San Antonio community an opportunity to experience agriculture
 - Agriculture & Life Science College recruiters provide workshops on affording higher education and ways to attain college degrees to communities around Texas
 - Partnerships with community colleges to matriculate students into degree programs within the college at Texas A&M
 - Ag Day @ Blinn and Lonestar community colleges provides exposure to opportunities within agriculture and life sciences at Texas A&M to community college students and counselors
 - Partnership with the College of Veterinary Medicine to support youth camps encouraging youth to select veterinary medicine as a career
- Engagement of youth:
 - Summer Training in Agriculture and Related Sciences (STARS) gives students a glimpse of opportunities available to them in agriculture and life sciences
 - Kids2College affords middle school students an opportunity to see the benefits of a college education
 - World Food Prize Youth Institute exposes students to interdisciplinary solutions needed globally to resolve issues of food insecurity, poverty and hunger
 - AG4U at HLSR provides participating Houston area schools an opportunity to gain better understand about the intersection of agriculture and living in an urban environment

4. Collaborations and Partnerships

- Build capacity of youth service providers through technical support
- Provide training & facilitators on variety of topics
 - Sequor YDI partners with local youth agencies to provide various training on emergent youth development issues
 - Academic departments within the college provide professionals in residence to industry representatives
- Formal agreements:
 - Prairie View A&M University partnership with Agricultural Leadership, Education, & Communication to teach multiple courses
 - System Admission Agreements through Admissions assists the college and the university in providing college admission opportunities to youth in Texas
 - Hispanic Leadership in Agriculture and the Environment is a partnership with the college, USDA, and the US Forest Service focused on developing leaders researching issues in agriculture or the environment that affect Hispanic communities
 - Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo(HLSR) and San Antonio Livestock Exposition (SALE) – providing internships, scholarships, and agriculturally based programming to youth

- Engagement of youth:
 - Agriculture and Natural Resource Policy Internship provides internship experience for those students interested in public policy
 - Study Abroad programs are housed in several academic departments for undergraduates and graduate students to participate in.

5. *Training for Staff*

- Research throughout the college:
 - Sequor YDI briefs and parent information sheets
 - Sequor YDI Evaluations: Camp Counselor study for ACA, CYFAR 4-H program, UPBEAT Final Reports and Toolkits
 - Extension Volunteer trainings: JMG & 4-H
- Training & trainers on variety of topics
 - Trainers available through affiliated list of faculty in Sequor YDI
 - Fostering collaborations & partnership development
- Research & extension centers across the state:
 - Lab safety training
 - Volunteer Training through 4-H
- Promotion of higher education:
 - Cross Training for college recruiters jointly facilitated with Admissions and Financial Aid to discuss updates in policies and programs affecting incoming students
 - Undergraduate emphasis area and certificate in Youth Development in Recreation, Parks and Tourism Sciences
 - Graduate degrees in Youth Development in Recreation, Parks and Tourism Sciences
 - Joint Doc@Distance program with Texas Tech University for students in Agricultural Leadership

Goals, Needs, Outcomes and Strategies

Promote Health and Wellness of Youth

- Goal: improving quality of life & health for youth in Texas by addressing state priority issues:
 - Childhood Obesity,
 - Bullying and Violence,
 - Healthy Identity Development, and
 - Develop habits of health-promoting behaviors (e.g. exercise, conflict resolution, stress management, & coping skills)
- Needs:
 - Coordinated interdisciplinary research teams to discover and disseminate knowledge regarding programmatic innovations addressing priority issues for youth

- Increase available supply of translational research regarding youth for practitioners
- Promote positive interpersonal/social development of youth through research, education and outreach
- Strategies:
 - Organize and distribute collaborative interdisciplinary research and demonstration programs to service providers in high-need areas
 - Collaborate with community partners to implement demonstration programs on priority areas
 - Create direct service demonstration programs (after school, camps, playground programs) intentionally addressing priority issues

Facilitate Academic Achievement, College Readiness and Career Development

- Goal: preparing youth for successful living and meeting tomorrow's challenges
- Needs:
 - Directed support strategies for students not attending college
 - Intentional efforts toward developing needed skills in youth:
 - Daily living skills
 - Job skills (including customer service/guest experience)
 - Perspective taking skills
 - Strong understanding of self
- Strategies:
 - Create a Career Development Center providing resources/materials to aid youth practitioners, counselors, and teachers in guiding youth (middle and high school level) in connecting their talent/academic potential with market offerings
 - Combine and redefine "success" metrics across units to increase collaboration and reduce silos
 - Create and maintain a central web database of trainers and topics related to academic preparation of youth for college
 - Sponsor camps and enrichment programs facilitating awareness and importance of higher education (associates, bachelors, and graduate degrees) as well as agriculture and life science disciplines
 - Facilitate better linkages with community colleges, teachers, educational service centers, and school districts as partners for high need areas (eg: STEM)

Build and Sustain Collaborative Partnerships among Governmental, Educational and Non-Profit Agencies to Support Youth Development

- Goal: optimize the efficacy of organizations in the Texas youth-serving industry

- Needs:
 - Formalized unified partnership(s) between the college, Sequor YDI and AgriLife agencies to support youth initiatives
 - University level support and buy-in with Youth Development Initiative to guide risk management protocols addressing youth on campus
- Strategies:
 - Establish connections with foundations and community groups to sustain an urban focus within Texas
 - Create greater flexibility in shared infrastructure (i.e.: accounting, communication, marketing, web support, etc.)
 - Identify and overcome impediments to increase collaboration between units across the college and affiliated agencies
 - Increase capacity of Sequor YDI to facilitate centralized and online training programs for youth practitioners

Training for Staff

- Goal: improve delivery of quality programming, research,
- Needs:
 - Strengthen web presence at the college level to warehouse: central databases of trainers/topics, camps and/or enrichment programs
 - Training facility to host staff trainings for college, agencies as well as youth state youth practitioners
 - Increase the visibility and function of Youth Development Initiative to facilitate centralized & mobile training for youth practitioners
- Strategies:
 - Design mobilized trainings offered to staff (agency and college) on youth issues, technology, and professionalism
 - Develop trainings to address linkages with community colleges, teachers, and counselors working with youth
 - Provide better recognition or credit in the promotion tenure process for participating faculty
 - Create volunteer training to address former students and retired professionals as resources for mentoring and advocates for youth

External Supports and Resources

- Foundations and out-of-school time program providers
- Workforce Development funders
- Endowed funds and increased fundraising from the AGLS Development Office
- Department of Education grant funds