<u>Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarships: Student Support Systems Analysis and Recommendations</u>

A report presented to the Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities Association

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this project is to provide more insight into the Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship (TELS) program by examining its impact on Tennessee's independent colleges and universities. TELS retention is an important issue on the state and institutional level and this project attempts to identify the programs and activities associated with retaining the award. The Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities Association with the cooperation of its members has been collecting data on each lottery scholarship participant since the program's inception in 2004.

Institutional retention practices were examined through responses to two surveys designed to identify specific TELS academic support and overall academic support for first-year students respectively. Ten campuses were selected for follow-up interviews based on quantitative results, survey responses and geographical region. A list of potential best practices and recommendations was developed for TICUA institutions aimed at helping improve TELS retention rates.

Project Findings:

This project has several key findings. Institutions typically do not offer special academic support initiatives designed to increase scholarship retention among TELS recipients. Academic support initiatives tend to be offered to all students on an optional basis. The exception is academic advising which tends to be mandatory across TICUA institutions.

Although scholarship retention is not the same as student retention, the project team used literature to identify institutional retention practices. In order to improve retention rates institutions should consider implementing the following best practices in academic support:

- Implement an early warning system.
- Make TELS orientation workshops or sessions mandatory.
- Provide a variety of academic support services to students.
- Focus on getting first-year students off to a good start through orientation programs, having an on-campus residency requirement, counseling and first-year experience courses.
- Consider implementing a mentoring program, block scheduling or living-learning centers.
- Start support initiatives that have the opportunity to "spread" across the institution.

To be effective, no matter what practices are implemented or adopted, institutions should strive to find ways to increase the amount of "touches" each student receives from the institution. Accomplishing this may help each student feel special and important to the institution and is critical for scholarship retention.

Another finding from interviews was that administrators responsible for the TELS program tend to incur a burden due to the disparity between what is required to qualify for a TELS award and what is required to retain the award at the first and second checkpoints.

A final finding was that a "one size fits all" approach to the TELS program and award retention is not possible or practical for each institution. Each institution must decide how it should support its students based on their own particular characteristics, constraints and resources. Based on the findings, the project team makes the following recommendations.

- TICUA member institutions need to ensure that all TELS award recipients are aware of eligibility and renewal requirements of TELS.
- Institutions should better utilize existing support systems and collaborations between departments, faculty, and administration to monitor and provide academic support for TELS recipients. Using multiple retention and academic support initiatives will help reduce the possibility that students will "fall through the cracks" before receiving the help they need.
- Find ways to maintain regular, ongoing contact and enhance the social integration of recipients on campus.
- Treat all TELS recipients as "at-risk" and be proactive versus reactive in supporting those students.
- Simplify requirements and reduce the administrative burden of the TELS program.

Introduction

Four years into the Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship (TELS) program there are TELS recipients populating college and university campuses across the State. Yet, there is minimal data from which to draw conclusions about its impact on retention at Tennessee's colleges and universities. The program has stirred differing opinions on how best to administer the program so that it is most beneficial to students. The Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities Association (TICUA) is interested and active in encouraging lawmakers to consider alterations to the TELS program.

Therefore, in an effort to support its member institutions and acting in the best interest of Tennessee students, TICUA is interested in learning more about the effects of the TELS program on those same students and their individual institutions. They hope to find evidence of the TELS program positively affecting the lives of private college students and to identify areas where the program might be improved. To this end, TICUA engaged a project team from Vanderbilt University's Peabody College to examine this program and its participants. The project team consisted of doctoral candidates Tyrone P. Miller, Martin H.

Sabo, and William D. Preble. The team possesses a significant amount of experience as college student faculty, student life administrators, and enrollment officers.

Institutional Retention Practices

The study team addressed a guiding question: what institutional retention practices are associated with higher TELS retention rates? The study team first administered the *TELS Academic Support Programs Survey*. The team then used responses from this first survey to construct *The First-Year Student Academic Support Survey.* Finally, the team conducted interviews of campus officials.

TELS Academic Support Programs Survey

Thirty-one institutions received the *TELS Academic Support Programs Survey* (Appendix A). Fourteen institutions responded for a response rate of 45%. According to respondents, the number of support hours dedicated to TELS recipients each week ranged from zero to three hundred hours per week. All respondents reported offering tutoring, academic advising, and financial counseling to TELS recipients on an optional or mandatory basis. With the exception of academic advising, support services were often optional for TELS recipients.

An interesting survey finding was the fact that 79% of respondents do not offer an orientation session specifically for TELS recipients. Considering the implications of failing to meet the GPA requirements required to keep the TELS, the study team expected TELS recipient specific orientations to be a standard practice at the college level. Survey findings indicate this is not the case and the institutions share the TELS eligibility and retention information with students via the university website, recruiting visits, or through high school guidance counselors. The study team encourages institutions to consider reinforcing students' understanding of the TELS requirements and the support resources available them.

Respondents were asked whether an early warning system was used to identify students who were struggling academically. Most of the respondents (64.3%) indicated that an early warning intervention system was in place for students at their respective institutions. However, in most cases (if not all) the early warning system was not used specifically for TELS recipients. This finding was consistent with the overall results of the survey that showed no special programs or initiatives were specifically targeted to TELS recipients. Institutions indicated that support services were offered or designed to serve all students not just TELS recipients.

Respondents were also asked to identify the types of support services offered to TELS recipients. Table 1 shows the response breakdown for each category.

TABLE 1: TELS Academic Support Services Summary				
Support Services	Offered-Optional	Offered-Mandatory	Not Offered	TOTAL Responses
Tutoring	14	0	0	14
Academic Advising	9	5	0	14
Counseling	13	0	1	14
Financial Counseling	13	1	0	14
Academic Skills Workshops	11	0	3	14
Personal Skills Development Workshops	8	0	5	14
TELS Orientation Session	2	0	11	14
Mentoring	9	0	5	14

Results from the *TELS Academic Support Survey* showed that institutions focus on offering academic support to all students and do not necessarily target lottery scholarship recipients. Considering the limited financial and human resources available to most universities and the fact that students receiving the lottery scholarship tend to be very good students, this represents a prudent and pragmatic approach since, even if students lose the scholarship, most tend to remain in school. *Scholarship retention* does not seem to be an important issue apart from *student retention*.

Key Findings from the TELS Academic Support Programs Survey:
- Academic support services are offered to all students—not just TELS recipients
- TELS specific orientation sessions are generally not offered by institutions
- Early warning intervention systems are used by some institutions to track TELS recipients and to advise struggling students to seek help
- One institution held a recognition dinner for TELS recipients with the college president

First-Year Student Academic Support Survey
Since student retention seems to be a more salient issue for TICUA member institutions and indirectly influences scholarship retention, the study team developed a second survey to assess the types of academic support available to first-time freshmen at member institutions. The team sent the *First-Year Student Academic Support Survey* (Appendix B) to the same 31 recipient institutions as the first survey. The second survey sought to identify local examples

of national "best practices" in student retention. The list below presents the national "best practice" activities reflected in the development of the *First-Year Academic Support Survey*:

- *Early warning intervention systems, academic advising, academic skills workshops, counseling (personal and financial) and tutoring:* Research has shown that academic advising can play a role in student persistence and is often one of the most universal features of colleges and universities' academic support systems. Peer tutoring can have a positive impact on knowledge retention according to Astin (1993). Tutoring and peer learning were often standard practices among schools involved with Project DEEP (Documenting Effective Educational Practice) (Kuh, Kinzie, et al. 2005). Project DEEP schools used different versions of early warning systems to identify and support students struggling academically. The inclusion of academic skills workshops, academic advising and tutoring as academic support strategies is also intuitive and has face validity (Pascarella and Terenzini 2005).

- *First-year seminar programs, orientations, freshmen live on-campus requirements, living-learning centers, mentoring and block scheduling:* These practices have been used to increase communal potential, academic performance, and retention. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found that first-year seminar programs had a positive effect on persistence and academic performance. Braxton, et al (2004) suggested that developing learning communities through the use of block scheduling may enhance the communal potential of campuses and may have particular usefulness at institutions with large numbers of commuter students. Orientation programs, freshmen on-campus living requirements, and living-learning centers are also believed to have a positive impact on persistence and facilitate students' social involvement. (Braxton, Hirschy, et al. 2004; Kuh, Kinzie, et al. 2005; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005)

Twenty-two institutions responded with a completed survey - a response rate of 71%. The majority of responding TICUA institutions made the following services available to first-year students:

- Orientation – 100%
- Academic advising – 100%
- Tutoring – 95%
- Counseling – 95%
- First year experience course (one or two semester) – 86%
- Financial counseling – 77%
- Personal skills development workshops – 77%
- Academic skills workshops – 73%

Support services less commonly used for first-year students by TICUA member institutions that responded to the survey were:

- Mentoring – 41%
- Living learning centers – 18%
- Block scheduling – 4.5%

Table 2 summarizes the responses to the types of academic support services offered at TICUA member institutions.

TABLE 2: First Year Student Support Services Summary				
Support Services	**Offered-Optional**	**Offered-Mandatory**	**Not Offered**	**Response TOTAL**
Tutoring	20	1	1	22
Academic Advising	4	18	0	22
Counseling	19	2	1	22
Financial Counseling	14	3	5	22
Academic Skills Workshops	14	2	6	22
Personal Skills Development Workshops	15	2	5	22
Orientation Program	6	16	0	22
Mentoring	6	3	13	22
First-Year Experience (1st Semester only)	5	11	6	22
First-Year Experience (1st & 2nd Semester)	1	2	19	22
Block Scheduling for First Year Students	0	1	21	22
Living-Learning Centers	4	0	18	22

Just more than half of the respondents required first-year students to live on campus. Student retention rates at commuter institutions tend to be lower than those of residential colleges and universities. Although requiring all freshmen to reside on campus is not always an indication of whether a campus is commuter, it is interesting to note that freshmen were not required to live on-campus at the five institutions with the lowest retention rates.

Nineteen out of the 22 respondents (86.4%) required first-year students to meet with a counselor more than once during the semester. Of the 22 respondents, 17 (77.3%) indicated that the institution used an early warning/alert system for first-year students in order to identify students struggling with their coursework during the semester. A small number (18.2%) indicated that they did not use an early warning system and one respondent did not know.

Nine of the 17 respondents (52.9%) required faculty to participate in the early warning/alert system while the remaining respondents indicated either that faculty participation was not required or that respondent was not sure about the requirement. Just over half of the respondents required struggling students to meet with a counselor or advisor. At one institution, the respondent stated, *"We require that early warning students meet with an advisor, but they don't always respond. We do try to track them though."*

Another institution responded that the alert system was done on *"an informal basis but, not as a part of a structured program."* They continued by saying that *"students who are skipping class or having other difficulties are referred to the director of retention and/or their freshmen advisor."*

In addition to the standard survey response options, an open-ended question allowed respondents to provide other examples of retention programs used by their campus. Their responses are listed below:

- *"Writing center/Math Support Center Early Intervention Program (e-progress reports are used and students with deficiencies are contacted at midterm."*
- *"Students admitted on probation have a full-year course with mentors. This is a requirement for that [student] population. All freshmen have a peer leader in their freshmen seminar course.*
- *"We also have an 'at-risk' committee that meets four times per semester to discuss and plot strategies for helping students succeed that are having academic difficulties."*
- *"Mandatory peer counseling program for the first half of the semester."*
- *"Time management and study skills offered on an individual basis."*

First-Year Student Academic Support Survey Key Findings:

- Orientations, academic advising, tutoring, counseling, financial aid counseling, academic skills workshops, personal development workshops, and first-year experience courses seem to be standard features of most institutions' retention efforts. This is consistent with research that finds institutions tend to "inhabit common organizational fields and tend (isomorphically) to grow increasingly similar over time, with shared cultural elements."(Braxton 2000; Laden, Milem, et al. 2000)
- Practices such as mentoring, block scheduling, and living-learning centers were used with much less frequency by institutions. This could be due to the need for increased coordination and resources for implementation.
- Other retention efforts such as a peer leaders, peer counseling programs, individualized time management and study skills sessions, early warning e-progress reports and a special committees to monitor at-risk students can be effective and meet the needs of a particular institution.
- Early warning systems are common, but vary in implementation across institutions.

Campus Officials Interviews

Based on the survey findings, the study team conducted on-site interviews of key campus influencers at ten campuses indentified based feedback learned through survey responses. In order to ensure a strong geographic and demographic sample, the team selected institutions from each of the three regions in the state. Interview questions explored efforts by these ten institutions to retain TELS recipients. Appendix C provides the interview protocol. The chief academic officer and the chief enrollment officer were the first contacts. Often, these individuals delegated or identified additional or more appropriate personnel to assist in investigative and probing efforts. Titles of other officials interviewed included president, vice president of academic affairs, associate provost, director of financial aid, dean of admission, vice president of enrollment, academic advisor, and director of student success.

This qualitative strategy identified some activities worthy of review. Further, a common set of concerns among TICUA member institutions about the TELS program was identified. While some institutions revealed innovative and proactive practices that benefited the institution and its Tennessee students, most institutions shared some common elements, sentiments, and philosophies regarding the TELS program, its recipients, and the importance of retention. In each of the interviews, the project team attempted to learn about the institutional specific practices. The following section further outlines the themes that emerged from the interviews.

> The project team suggests that the findings share three main underlying concepts:
>
> 1. Institutional monitoring responsibilities are an administrative burden.
> 2. There is too much disparity between the requirements to obtain and to retain the TELS award.
> 3. There is very little interest on the part of institutions in TELS specific retention apart from retention of all students.

INTERVIEW RESULTS

Theme 1: *Institutional monitoring responsibilities are an administrative burden.*

Regardless of size, all institutions must fulfill the State's expectations on TELS tracking and reporting. Many consider these expectations burdensome. Small and often overburdened staffs at many schools face the burden of effort to track individual recipients. This responsibility often falls to staff in the financial aid office.

Most of the institutions interviewed commented on the time-consuming nature of identifying and confirming status of TELS recipients. Several officials stated that because of the time

spent on the administrative requirements for the program, they do not find time to think of efficient ways to track students or methods to improve retention. Thus, in some cases, the program seems to be defeating itself.

Several institutions' administrators did not hesitate to share the fact that TELS has had little or no effect on their institution's philosophies, policies, and practices. These institutions tended to have little dependence on tuition revenue and have an institutional mission to increase the number of out-of-state students. Desiring a national presence, especially within certain hallmark programs, these institutions felt that the TELS dollars were not meaningful enough to garner much attention. Yet, they were quick to support the concerns of officials at other institutions that are more dependent on the TELS for providing access.

One institution, which currently enrolls 30% of its students from Tennessee, does not use TELS for recruiting. Since the program requires considerable administrative time, the institution has been unwilling to devote special staff time to separate tracking of TELS beyond State reporting requirements. There are no separate retention efforts, nor any single responsible party for retention. Similarly, another institution communicated information about the program in their materials and admission and financial aid conversations, but only from an informational perspective, unlike some other institutions that utilize it as a recruitment advantage over out-of-state schools. Such institutions might find benefit in borrowing or utilizing strategies attempted by other schools that do focus on TELS students to improve retention rates.

The majority of officials interviewed shared the feeling that while the State and the media have done a reasonable job of promoting the program, the burden of actually explaining the qualifications of the program, and its effects when lost, has fallen directly on the institutions themselves.

In order to promote the program, two institutions routinely monitor their in- and out-of-state student enrollments. One of these institutions has been relatively unaffected by the introduction of the TELS program, while the other has seen an increase in Tennessee students. Annually, about 75% of the former institution's students come from Tennessee. Officials at this institution again noted that students were very informed about the TELS program eligibility, but were less aware of what it takes to keep the award. Therefore, campus officials believed it was their obligation to the students to publicize the program in at high school visitations and participation in financial aid nights.

Admissions personnel often offer explanations about the TELS program during standard campus visit programs. Several admissions departments make a point to include references and information about the TELS program in their brochures. While one might expect State

officials and high school personnel to promote the program through the media and other outlets, campus officials found it necessary to shoulder most of the burden.

One challenge for the State and individual institutions to overcome is the promotion of eligibility standards and renewal requirements. One institution participated in and hosted financial aid nights for prospective families in the surrounding communities as a service for college-bound students. These meetings took place on-campus or at a local high school. College representatives helped parents with the FAFSA forms and informed them about TELS and other aid programs. The Tennessee Student Assist Commission (TSAC) outreach specialist for the region assisted with this outreach by presenting the TELS portion of the program. Additionally, admission counselors included language about the program in their recruitment conversations and tele-counselors, who also called potential recipients for reminders.

When a group perceives a program to be an administrative burden, it often falls idle due to lackluster energy and support. This appears to be the case for TELS. Some institutional officers have little interest in fulfilling the necessary reporting requirements and promoting the program to achieve the greatest success possible for both the institution and its students. Individual institutions, THEC, and the State Legislature often have differing goals regarding TELS recipients. Thus, these groups may not share information adequately. This was a major source of frustration for some administrators, who have tired of the "red tape" and want to move forward with what actually works for Tennessee students.

What is the burden to which these administrators refer? Part of the burden rests on determining what type and how much financial aid should replace a student's lost TELS money. Monitoring progress and informing students when they are in jeopardy of losing the scholarship constitutes an additional portion of this burden. Manual tracking of a TELS-specific grade point average is another piece of the administrative burden. Many officials pointed out that calculating and tracking two grade point averages manually (one for the school and a second for the award) as one of the most ludicrous requirements of the scholarship program. Promotion of the program itself also adds to the work of campus officials.

Campus officials felt that the State neglected their expertise. The lottery legislation is popular with the public, but lawmakers refused to acknowledge campus experts who suggested it would not accomplish its goals. One institution's officials in particular were very vocally frustrated with what they perceived to be program's greatest shortcoming--the criteria to retain the TELS award are too tough for students with high secondary school GPAs, but low ACT scores, who are then required to maintain at least a 2.75 college GPA.

One institution demonstrated the most awareness and interest in monitoring the number of prospective incoming freshman. Willing to take on the additional responsibilities associated with TELS, and equipped with the personnel and desire to make the program successful, this institution committed a significant amount of time and resources to administering and supporting all aspects of the program. The enrollment areas of admission and financial aid were prepared to call an emergency meeting of key administrators--including the president, if the projected enrollment numbers fell below certain predetermined levels of in- and out-of-state balance. They were also quick to utilize the information about a student's likelihood to be eligible for the TELS award as a recruitment tool against other out-of-state competitors.

This same recruiting strategy was also used by another institution. In addition to aggressively and creatively promoting, identifying, tracking, and celebrating the TELS program, this institution used the TELS award to "win" recruitment battles against its out-of-state competitors. By committing tremendous energy, time, and personnel to support the program, this institution saw the program as impacting access, brain drain, and economic gain.

This institution proved to be the most innovative of all schools and one from which we might learn the most about how proactive activities by school administrators can impact TELS or other retention efforts. For example, while a tremendous burden on the school, the registrar flags TELS recipients. If the student considers dropping out, dropping a class, or transferring, they must clear/check with financial aid and/or the dean or assistant dean. The registrar also informs advisors of the activity of their advisees, who are lottery scholarship recipients, providing another campus official who can intervene. Finally, TELS students sign a contract with the institution stating their understanding of the requirements and the importance of the program and confirming their commitment to complete their education. University officials at the institution agreed that while the lengths that they go through to serve this population are great, it is a necessary responsibility they must accept due to the lack of support from the state. They, along with several other institutions, all shared their frustrations with the short term interest of the legislature.

This university also provides financial aid counseling to their TELS students. An additional activity sponsored by this institution, encourages TELS recipients to attend a luncheon in their honor with the president each semester. The luncheon includes speakers and reminders about TELS retention requirements. The luncheon is a celebration of student accomplishments and a "feel good" moment to convey how happy the university is to have these students. Financial aid sends a midterm letter to TELS recipients with their status report of GPA. Seventeen percent of this institution's students are TELS recipients, of which only three students were lost during last fall semester at the first checkpoint.

Although the TELS program has not changed the proportions of in- and out-of-state students so far, the goal of this institution is to increase the number of Tennessee students in order to take advantage of the funding from the TELS and Tennessee. Several administrators worked to accommodate this change in recruiting goals. Annually, about 47% of their students are from Tennessee. Since this institution felt that geographic balance was important, they chose a very deliberate path, which included monitoring withdraws so that the proportions of students could be maintained.

Overwhelmingly, there is a great desire by the administrators interviewed, for improving the benefits for students. Their number one interest is the success of students. Second, however, is the feeling of frustration and fatigue with the TELS program. Collectively, administrators commented on the administrative burden the program has placed on the institutions, especially financial aid offices. This was especially true of financial aid offices with few staff members. The resources required to track and calculate a second GPA, certify eligibility, report to the state student progress, and other duties, has made it impossible for some to even consider retention strategies. Administrators saw this as counterproductive and outside the goals of the TELS program.

Lastly, the project team believes that the sharing among TICUA members of activities and/or programs may lead to better institutional retention success. No matter how seemingly insignificant, these ideas will likely benefit some of the smaller schools that either do not have the personnel to study and design programs, or do not possess time to develop processes that will better aid themselves and their institutions. The team can assure TICUA and others that the burden these schools and their officials feel are real, even if unrecognized by the State of Tennessee. Daily, the campus officers must make important decisions about the future implications of the program in areas such as access, brain drain, promotion, academic achievement, and others.

Theme 2: *There is too much disparity between the requirements to obtain and to retain the TELS award.*
Probably the most insightful information and most vigilant voices surrounding the second theme come from a single university. Students at this institution typically go nearly unaffected by the difference in eligibility and retention requirements. However, administrators believe that although TELS has had a positive impact, adjustments to the eligibility or retention requirements would benefit students. *"TELS awards are too easily obtained, but too difficult to retain"*, commented one administrator. This school's administrators also referenced discussions during the development of the TELS program in which they perceived a lack of awareness by the lawmakers of the lack of educational quality of the State's high schools. Perception was that the interest of those developing the program

for the state of Tennessee was more on the "look" of the legislation rather than on what would truly work and benefit Tennessee students. One administrator remarked:

> *"We believe the answer to this problem is on the front end. Change the requirements to allow less dissidence between what qualifies a student and what that student must do to retain the award rather than concentrating on programs/policies that are aimed at retaining them. Why? Because all students should be retained and singling this groups out for special retention efforts runs counter to the educational philosophy of many."*

Only those who self-identify as TELS recipients are known to faculty and staff at most institutions. This particular institution chose to replace 50% of lost TELS aid for students they considered "good risks." Typically, they chose low-income students with a high grade point average for this institutional help. The financial aid office sends to low-income students a special mailing that highlights the school's desire to support them. Losing the $4,000 TELS award can make it tough for high-financial need students to remain in school.

According to administrators at two other institutions, poor preparation for the academic rigor of college challenges some minority students from inner-city schools, who were often near the top of their high school class. It can be difficult for these students to obtain the benchmarks required to retain the lottery scholarship. Many of these students need the funds in order to remain in college. If a student loses the scholarship, the institution faces the dilemma of either replacing the money so that the student can remain in school or not replacing the money and letting the student drop out.

Campus officials offered the suggestion to lower the retention requirements of the award. One official compared the program to the Byrd (National) Scholarship, which has higher thresholds to obtain the money, but lower retention expectations. Such an adjustment to the retention criteria seems to help the state more easily accomplish its goals. Interviewees expressed concerns over whether this was a budgetary consideration (i.e. Did Tennessee plan for the 50% loss of TELS money due to the need to balance the budget?)

At one institution, 80% of recipients were from public schools and yet, half did not retain the award at semesters end. Most students lost their award during the first year. Under the current state of affairs, students majoring in the hard sciences and other majors perceived to be more difficult appear to suffer the most.

Another observation concerned the placement of thresholds for the first and second benchmarks. One interviewee recommended moving the 24-credit hour benchmark to completion of 48-credit hours, thus allowing the student a longer college adjustment period. Administrators suggest that students have the most trouble at the first benchmark when they

must achieve a 2.75 GPA. Then the second benchmark requirement of a 3.0 GPA eludes many of those who survived the first benchmark. Many institutional officials were frustrated with this aspect of the program.

At one institution, administrators told us that most students lost their TELS awards due to academic rigor and performance issues. In some cases, TELS recipients leave the institution due to unmet financial needs and lost lottery awards that go un-replaced.

One institution's administrators agreed that the fundamental flaw in the program is that it is easy to obtain, yet hard to retain. This was the repeated motto with administrators, especially financial aid personnel. This sentiment is punctuated and supported, they believe, by the nearly 50% loss record of TELS awards statewide over the past four years.

Nearly every administrator is a proponent of lessening the gap between the requirements to obtain and those to retain the award. Whatever the answer, and whatever the unique spin each institution placed on this issue of dissidence, it was evident that everyone believed that the state should reconsider its thresholds of what is acceptable for attaining and retaining TELS awards. Schools face the unnecessary burden of the decision of whether to replace lost aid. The State fails to provide sustainable access to a significant number of its students.

Theme 3: *There is very little interest in TELS specific retention apart from retention for all students.*
Institutions visited overwhelmingly felt that "retention is retention." Thus, academic support was the area where activity appeared most prevalent. In the Georgia HOPE program, the perceived difficulty of courses and majors appears to influence a student's academic choices. This does not appear to be a concern of officials at Tennessee schools. Several officials believe there is a high level of academic and social capital to be gained for students. Nearly every school offered forms of tutoring & orientation (e.g. writing lab) for all students. At some schools, these types of assistance were encouraged for all students identified as "at-risk" (i.e. not just at risk for losing the lottery scholarship).

One university did offer a few retention specific programs including orientation. Classes are offered for 100 students per session. These classes aided preparation for social, health, academic, and other facets of college life. The institution offers an early warning system, where faculty refer names of students with excessive absences to the orientation leader. Freshman students are required to visit in July before classes begin and are given information about the TELS program and its requirements. They have seen a strong awareness of the program with incoming freshman, but a lack of understanding of retention requirements. Therefore, they believe it is imperative that their campus convey the importance of TELS retention through its publications and presentations.

At this particular institution, students identified through the early warning system, are required to meet with the academic dean to analysis the situation and select the best course of action. Another institution's small size allows officials to meet with each student and suggest, or even require, that "at-risk" students meet with tutors and utilize writing labs. The team also spoke with a student worker in the academic resource center who commented on the positive impact she believed the center has had on students.

With very few exceptions, the sentiment was that there is no need to track students separately because retention was important for all students, not just TELS recipients. Administrators at several universities were adamant that while all TELS recipients were encouraged to participate in the institution's retention programs, advising, and other support services, there was no need for TELS specific services. Outreach to TELS recipients mainly took place in the form of recognition or academic advising. However, as mentioned earlier, the TELS program influenced recruitment so much at one institution, that the office's culture was changed to emphasize the importance of TELS students. This caused the monitoring of in- and out-of-state balances for prospective students. Without question, the only offices that worked with these students as a unique group were the financial aid offices.

More education and outreach is necessary for minority populations not only to learn about the TELS program but also to help complete the necessary financial aid forms (e.g. FAFSA). Many prospective students and their families desperately need help, but are skeptical, do not trust the government, and will not disclose the information necessary for completion of the financial aid application forms.

Another institution offers eight-week classes that connect freshman with upper class students for mentoring. This institution also offered all students math and writing centers and tutors. It also has honor societies and strong student-faculty relationships that they believe are conducive to strong retention for all students. Other than those specific strategies, this institution, too, offers little for TELS specific students, and really does nothing beyond the financial aid process to track or identify these students separately.

Additional Findings
Beyond the three main themes discovered through the interviews, the project team found additional areas of importance.

Another suggestion from several campus officials was for the state to consider opening the program up to bordering states like Arkansas and Mississippi where large portions of the workforce live, or Georgia where some of the Chattanooga population lives.

Realizing the necessity of financial aid for their students, many of the financial aid administrators admit that the TELS dollars are critical to their ability to enroll students. Financial aid officers also agreed that these scholarships were necessary not only for issues of access, but also for retention. Several institutions pointed to the retention burden that they felt when they are forced to make critical decisions concerning students who are in jeopardy of losing the TELS money. Schools under financial strains are often unable to replace lost scholarship money in spite of an institutional willingness to make such a commitment. Yet, without the aid, such students may not persist to graduation. The project team found that those schools that are most dependent on the students and the related TELS money are more likely to replace some or all of the lost revenue. Yet, at some schools, financial constraints prevent them from being able to replace lost TELS aid because they simply cannot afford to do so.

An administrator made the seemingly simple suggestion that the money should be referred to as a grant, rather than a scholarship to better and more accurately describe the program. This psychological difference could help shape expectations and understandings, thus improving retention. And, after all, it is the team's opinion that the single most commonly shared desire is better understanding of the program, its goals, and its expectations - specifically, a narrower gap between eligibility and retention requirements. Perhaps this suggestion may add clarity to this arguably misunderstood program.

Lastly, it was suggested by administrator at one school, that the professional literature is highly skewed toward big state schools. The small liberal arts type institutions that are typically private and tuition driven versus those that are not provide less variance or a narrower student profile. The same administrator also believed that family expectations are different for first generation students. Thus, most officials believe that Tennessee's TELS program must be amended and that it needs to do a better job of establishing and meeting goals for the betterment of its students. All commented that anything short of inclusiveness was not in the best interest of students.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Tennessee's independent colleges and universities play an important role in higher education in the State. Each institution's mission and student population together create a unique and rich culture. Although relatively new, the Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship Program has had a profound impact on student enrollment patterns across the state. One of the main purposes of the program is to increase access to higher education for students. In order to ensure that the program is a success, institutions need to devise and implement retention strategies that will aid in achieving this goal.

Institutions should consider campus-specific research to evaluate and recommend retention programs and strategies. One school has already done this in an effort to attract and retain TELS specific dollars.

Increasing access is not simply enrolling more students into the institution. Increasing access involves ensuring that every student enrolled has the opportunities, resources, and services needed to thrive and succeed through graduation. Institutional retention practices are generally not limited to TELS specific activities within individual institutions. However, some general retention activities identified through the project interviews might be beneficial to increasing TELS retention. Therefore, we share the following activities and ideas so institutional officials can consider the appropriateness to their particular institution and students:

1. Implementing an early warning system
2. Mandating TELS workshops on eligibility and renewal requirements
3. Orientating and encouraging awareness and usage of academic support services
4. Developing a decision-tree for counseling and advising TELS recipients
5. Developing a "covert" tracking system and identification to key players
6. Treating all students as "at risk" during the first semester
7. Creating a mechanism for TICUA institutions to share institutional activity and/or programming "best practices"
8. Developing mentorship programs with faculty and previous TELS recipients

Specifically, the project team also advances the following recommendations for TICUA institution officials to consider. The team believes that with the implementation of these, the TELS students may be better supported.

Recommendations
1. *Examine institutional mission and commitment to serving students*. Be honest and forthright in dealings with students.
2. *Offer workshops for coping with stress of the first year of college* (Braxton 2004). Since the first year of college is often stressful, institutions need to ensure that students have the skills needed to cope effectively with the transition while maintaining academic performance.
3. *Make first-year orientation mandatory for all students*. It is important for each student to be socialized proactively into the culture of the institution. Braxton(2004) refers to this as "anticipatory socialization" which is the process of preparing one's self for college and using stress coping behaviors in a positive way. Institutions should also consider making TELS-specific orientation sessions mandatory. These sessions will connect

award recipients with each other while and provide valuable information about the eligibility and retention requirements.

4. *Treat all students as "at-risk."* This is particularly important during the first year of college. The first year of college is usually a major adjustment period in the life of students and not all students go through the process smoothly. This period of adjustment can impact a student's academic performance in a negative way. The first checkpoint for the TELS program requires that the student earn at least a 2.75 GPA. At the second checkpoint, all students are required to maintain at least a 3.00 GPA. It is difficult to increase one's GPA significantly as one earns more credit hours. Performing well early provides a more solid foundation for maintaining eligibility as the student progresses.

5. *Enhance the communal potential for students on campus* through programs or events that maintain regular, ongoing contact between and among students, faculty and staff. Students that are more socially integrated on campus tend to persist more than students who are not. Consider retention strategies such as block scheduling, peer counseling or mentoring, and establishing living-learning communities in order to create and build relationships among students, and between student and faculty and staff.

6. *Be proactive rather than passive in implementing retention strategies.* One institution implemented such a strategy by promoting institutional affiliation, identifying at-risk students, and connecting students with available student resources (Braxton, Hirschy et al. 2004) The key to the success of the program was that the dean reached out and built relationships with students proactively. Passive strategies allow students to "slip through the cracks." Institutions should make the process of leaving an institution as "noisy" as possible and created an environment of "enforced success."(Hermanowicz 2003)

7. *Develop learning communities for first-year and commuter students.* This will help to enhance academic integration and enhance student retention.

8. *Find ways to recognize and remain in contact with TELS recipients.* Periodically hold focus groups and meetings with TELS students to understand the challenges and issues they are facing as a TELS recipient. Sometimes, in addition to reducing financial burdens, scholarships improve the motivation and self-efficacy of students. Loss of the award may negatively affect the student's emotional well-being. Keeping in contact with students will help to develop the relationships necessary to communicate the availability of support services students may need with they need help.

9. *Implement an early warning system.*

10. *Demonstrate that the institution cares about student welfare.* As was mentioned earlier, TELS recipients tend to be above-average students and this could lead them to the institution overlooking these students when considering retention. Seeking these students out and ensuring that they have the resources needed to successfully

maintain their scholarship eligibility is one way to communicate concern for student welfare.

11. *Better utilize existing support systems and collaborations* between departments, faculty and administration to monitor and provide academic support for TELS recipients. Start support initiatives that have the opportunity to "spread" across the institution. Use of multiple retention and academic support initiatives will help reduce the possibility that students will "fall through the cracks" before receiving the help they need.

Finally, Tennessee's TELS program is certainly a good start to help support and fund higher education opportunities for its students. But, there is clearly work to be done if the state is to further its outreach to a citizenry that ranks seven percent below the national average for college participation, with only 47% of Tennessee adults having some college experience (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2005). "Tennessee also trails national averages with respect to educational attainment levels for adults aged 25 and older, as the state average of 21.5% is a full five percent below the national average." (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2005).