

GET YOUR VOICE HEARD! HELP DESIGN THE NEW TALENT SEARCH

By this time, most members of the TRIO Community are aware that the Higher Education Opportunity Act seems to envision a “new” Talent Search. This is because for the first time in its 43 year history Talent Search programs are going to be held accountable for the “extent to which [they assist students in completing] a rigorous secondary school program of study that will make students eligible for programs such as the Academic Competitiveness Grants Program”

What This Doesn't Mean

It is important to understand that if TRIO staff utilize their status as an organized community, it can help prevent two possible, yet harmful interpretations of this requirement: (1) that all students served by Talent Search will be expected to complete a rigorous curricula and (2) that Talent Search will be expected to provide the more intensive and regularized services necessary to support students in their efforts to complete rigorous curricula at the same cost per student at which it is currently operating.

What Are the Steps in the Process?

It is anticipated that major decisions about the “new Talent Search” will not be made until the next Administration “settles in.” That is, probably not until at least late spring or summer. At that point the Administration will launch what is known as “negotiated rule-making” where representatives of the Department of Education and representatives of various higher education organizations sit around a table and try to collectively draft changes in the regulations governing the Higher Education Act – that everybody can agree upon. Exactly what order will be followed in re-writing regulations remains unclear.

What is COE Doing to Prepare for this Process?

The most important task before us is to get your input on several questions that will assist the COE Board in formulating a position for negotiated rule-making. These questions include:

- What are the obstacles that currently prevent low-income, first-generation students from successfully completing a rigorous curricula?
- What types of support (for example, tutoring, more regularized counseling and academic advising) would make it more realistic for a portion of Talent Search students to aim at completing rigorous curricula?
- What would the cost of providing those services be per student?
- Assuming that your project is starting with its rising ninth grade class, what is a realistic percentage of students that could, with adequate support, complete a rigorous curriculum?

Why This New Standard at This Point in Time?

In crafting the new Talent Search prior experience criteria, Members of Congress responded directly to a frightening downward trend in which the United States continues to slip behind other industrialized nations in terms of academic and economic competitiveness. To halt this decline and help boost American educational achievement, Congress explicitly listed eligibility for the Academic Competitiveness Grant Program among the goals for Talent Search. The Academic Competitiveness Grants (ACG) Program is a need-based grant that awards \$750 and \$1,300, respectively, to first- and second-year undergraduates who completed academically rigorous programs of study in high school.

While the potential impact of this program for TRIO students is great, we have not yet begun to truly access this vast source of funding. In FY 2008, the Department of Education had to return \$525 million in unused ACG and National SMART Grant funds to the U.S. Treasury. (The National SMART Grant is the companion program to ACG and provides up to \$4,000 to third- and fourth-year undergraduates majoring in physical, life, or computer sciences, mathematics, technology, or engineering or in a foreign language determined critical to national security. Students must be Pell grant recipients to be eligible for the National SMART Grant.) This is but one example of the opportunities that await Talent Search students under the new language in HEOA.

COE's Public Policy Team is working with your state and regional associations – as well as developing a web-based system to provide input and scheduling conference calls – to get your input on these important questions. We need to hear your voice to make sure we accurately reflect your views, develop a workable plan, and position Talent Search to be a major part of the next Administration's education agenda. Once the process with Talent Search is underway, COE will begin looking at Upward Bound.