

Case Study: Creating a Nationally Recognized 'Culture of Engagement' that Prepares Students for Future Success

Like most institutions, the University of Texas El Paso (UTEP) had its own unique set of challenges and opportunities. As one of the largest bi-national campuses in the world, UTEP was quickly becoming the first national research university in the U.S. with Hispanic students in the majority. Yet, given the large number of first-generation students and inherent language barriers, administrators were struggling with how to increase involvement outside the classroom.

“Student life has a very different meaning” at UTEP, noted Catie McCorry-Andalis, Associate Vice President and Dean of Students. “We had been toying for a long time with how we demonstrate engagement and, more importantly, how to get students engaged.” Administrators realized that creating pathways for student success and involvement was critical for their student body—which is why they chose Campus Labs CollegiateLink, a leading web-based solution for promoting student involvement.

The results were impressive, and were noticed far beyond campus. Thanks in part to CollegiateLink, UTEP was recognized by The Carnegie Foundation as one of the most engaged campuses in the United States—an exceptional achievement considering that only a few hundred students actually live on campus.

“We were not going to take a cookie-cutter program and make it work here,” said McCorry-Andalis. The CollegiateLink tools were flexible enough to meet the institution’s needs, and they were backed by a team that could help UTEP optimize CollegiateLink for the campus. Administrators at UTEP also appreciated the fact that CollegiateLink was intuitive for users—a necessity given that the campus did not have a full-time staff member in charge of the program.

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With CollegiateLink, UTEP received a solid platform for an effective co-curriculum, and the ability to adjust everything from the name of the program (CollegiateLink is branded as “Mine Tracker” on campus) to the depth and breadth of the involvement pathways. “Our students need to see a road map,” noted McCorry-Andalis, who used CollegiateLink to establish four distinct learning dimensions for students, and link them to institutional learning outcomes. Within each learning dimension—Civic Engagement, Global Perspective, Personal Enrichment and Career Development—UTEP then created separate levels of engagement. “We had to help students understand that before they become club president, they should probably be a member of a club,” said McCorry-Andalis. Today, students begin at the “entering student” stage of each learning dimension, then progress to the “engagement stage” and, ultimately, the “leadership stage.”

Because all the data in CollegiateLink is connected and housed in one central location, student involvement has become a campus-wide initiative, with student affairs and academic partners equally invested in its success. As a result, the impact of CollegiateLink on students has been “incredible,” with McCorry-Andalis citing a “tremendous increase” in the number of students who are involved on campus, and nearly 200 student organizations using the web-based tools. CollegiateLink also helps free up valuable campus resources by automatically tracking student progress, and by granting credit for the things students do outside of the classroom every day.

One factor behind the successful partnership with UTEP is the fact that the Campus Labs team “understands higher education—and our language,” noted McCorry-Andalis. As she said, “I don’t have to explain things.” The group also has a well-earned reputation for superior service and support. “I’ve been in this field for 25 years,” said McCorry-Andalis, “and the part that has been most impressive is how easy it is,” to work with them.

Following the success of CollegiateLink, UTEP recently added Campus Labs Baseline, an assessment solution that works seamlessly with CollegiateLink, allowing UTEP to learn more about the effectiveness of campus events and further enhance student outcomes. UTEP is also considering using CollegiateLink with their community college partner, capturing and validating engagement in a way that “I don’t think has ever been done,” according to McCorry-Andalis.

Today, CollegiateLink continues to help thousands of UTEP students become more involved and more marketable by encouraging a “culture of engagement,” instilling pride, and helping students gain the life skills they need in order to fulfill their potential. As McCorry-Andalis said, thanks to the CollegiateLink tools and Campus Labs solutions, students at UTEP are “not just engaged, but more intently engaged—and more prepared for the world of work.”

For more information on CollegiateLink or any other Campus Labs product, contact:

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