

Identifying Students with “Yet-To-Be Realized Potential”

SAT/ACT scores and GPAs are not all that matter for admission to Northeastern University’s Torch Scholarship Program. To maintain a diverse student body and maintain its legacy of offering opportunities to first generation college students, Northeastern designed and instituted a scholarship program to identify motivated students who overcame personal challenges. The Torch Scholars program began in 2006 with support from alumni who themselves were the first in their families to attend college. The program recruits students who do not have the traditional college acceptance credentials and offers an opportunity for them to demonstrate college-readiness in a more personal manner.

According to founder and Senior Vice President of Enrollment Management and Student Affairs, Philomena V. Mantella, “We are staying true to our roots. In the end, we will have built a national model for other schools to emulate.” The admissions process involves 10-steps to delve into these students in unique ways using assessments like personality tests and extensive interviews to identify a student’s initiative, leadership skills, and ability to work in groups, all essential skills to be successful in the university and indicate their worthiness for a full scholarship. The first 11 scholarship winners completed their freshman year with more than half earning at least a B average.

While the Torch Scholars program is university based, it is similar to the outreach activities of the Posse Foundation, a non-profit organization based in New York City. It has identified, recruited, and trained student leaders from public high schools for the last 18 years. Student teams (posses) work for eight-months in an intensive Pre-Collegiate Training Program to prepare for enrollment in top-tier universities. The Posse Foundation reports placing 1,850 students into colleges and universities. Students have won over \$175 million in scholarships and are persisting and graduating at 90 percent – a rate higher than national averages. Deborah Bial, founder and president of the Posse Foundation was announced as a MacArthur ‘Genius’ award winner in September 2007.

Counselors can use this information to steer students towards these two programs and by asking universities in their area to think about adopting similar programs for your students. The process is labor-intensive and requires support and nurturing to students when they arrive on campus. Yet, it allows colleges to recruit first generation students who otherwise would be missed. Equally important, such programs allow an institution to increase the diversity of its student body.

To find out more about the Torch Scholars Program visit <http://www.torch.neu.edu/> and <http://www.possefoundation.org/> to learn more about the Posse Foundation.

Northeastern University created Torch Scholarships to recruit first generation college students who may not have traditional admission credentials.

Candidates are evaluated through an extensive 10-step process examining each student individually.

The students are successful, with SAT scores nearly 300 points below their peers, more than half of the first cohort completed freshman year with at least a B average.