

TSU Back to Basics Summer Intensive Institute – July 9-13, 2018

Texas Southern University (TSU) is committed to building partnerships with Houston metropolitan area schools. To that end, in 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013, Dr. Elizabeth Brown-Guillory served as Director of the Back to Basics Summer Institute, which was funded by a grant from Chevron. With remaining funds from the Chevron grant, Dr. Brown-Guillory proposes to host a Back to Basics Summer Intensive Institute from July 9-13, 2018.

While other summer institutes nation-wide either invite teachers or students to campus, the Back to Basics Summer Intensive Institute is unique in that it brings together both teachers and students in an institute featuring a series of seminars focusing on SAT/ACT preparation and multi-ethnic dramatic literature. The institute will target rising sophomores, juniors, and seniors with the aim of helping them prepare for standardized tests and mentoring them to attend TSU upon completion of high school.

In previous summers, Houston area teachers participated in literary studies during the morning sessions and taught what they learned to their students in the afternoon sessions. During the morning sessions, TSU graduate students taught test-taking skills to the high school students and engaged them in drill and practice for the ACT/SAT. During the lunch hour, distinguished guest speakers, including TSU faculty, local artists, and business and community leaders, enriched the group with intellectually stimulating presentations and/or performances.

One of the main objectives of the program is to enhance college readiness through college admissions practice tests and preparation. In recent Back to Basic Summer Institutes, the students were given sample ACT and SAT tests in addition to learning techniques and successful test-taking strategies.

In a comparison of the ACT test scores, on average, students achieved an accuracy score of 51% on the English portion of the pre-test (test administered prior to the ACT workshop) and 81% on the post-test (test administered at the end of the ACT workshop). Similarly, the pre-test results for the Math section were 38% correct while those for the post-test were 85% correct.

Prior to the SAT workshop, students were administered a pre-test of the SAT and the scores were as follows: 64% correct on the Verbal section, 89% correct on the Math section and 63% correct on the Reading section. Upon completion of the SAT workshop, students were administered a post-test, and the results were as follows: 81% correct on the Verbal section, 93% correct on the Math section and 89% correct on the Reading section.

As demonstrated by the above figures, the students showed a significant improvement in reading and verbal skills. This further proved that the acquired skill set can help students score higher on standardized tests such as the SAT and the ACT.

A second main objective of the program is to immerse teachers and their students in multi-ethnic dramatic literature, including African American, American Indian, Asian American, European American, and Mexican American authors. As a result, students will gain invaluable reading comprehension and critical thinking skills, while teachers will study authors who may be added to the curriculum when they return to their classrooms.

The culminating activity of the institute during one recent summer included a showcasing of student talent, namely students demonstrated to an audience of their peers, teachers, parents, TSU faculty, and community and business leaders their ability to successfully link technology to literary studies. During the closing program, we surveyed students, faculty, and parents. The following are brief excerpts from parents:

“My daughter is intelligent, well-spoken, and has a wonderful personality. Yet, she kept all of her treasure in a small box. She is generally quiet, soft-spoken, and likes to stay at home. We really pushed her into the program. She enjoyed the program so much that she didn’t want it to end. She was a moderator during the closing day program and she has really blossomed in just 2 weeks! She is more excited about her life...outside of the house!”

“This institute was awesome. I am an educator in HISD and learned some new and innovative ways to push our students to greater levels.”

Finally, the Institute represents a viable TSU/School partnership, from which bridges may be built to prepare students for college and to help retool teachers pedagogically. Back to Basics has the potential to transform the lives of the teachers and students, particularly because this unique pairing has embedded in it a mentoring program that extends beyond the institute and tracks students over a two-year period to monitor their progress and to encourage them to attend TSU.

