

COVID -19 Relief: Bring Bobcats Back
Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund
Reskilling Grants 2 & 3
Texas State University

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by

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Abstract

The Bring Bobcats Back program was established at Texas State University in 2018 for students who had “stopped out” to return and finish their degrees. Bring Bobcats Back has expanded thanks to federal and state grant funding born out of the pandemic. Through the U.S. Department of Education's Stabilization Fund Program via the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund, Grant/Contract Number: 2020-GE-84425C, Texas State received \$3 million in reskilling grant funds to help former students who have been affected by COVID-19 return to school and complete their degrees. Students who meet the eligibility requirement are eligible for up to \$2,500 per semester. The Reskilling grants funded 1,432 student awards (\$2,751,072) from 150 different programs/majors, 832 students received more than one award, and 175 graduated. The average award, see Table 1, for Tuition/Fees (M=\$1,790, SD=\$878), Cost of Attendance (M=\$131, SD=\$216), and Total Support (M=\$1,921, SD=\$720). The number of credit hours completed ranged from 1 hour to 24 hours with the mode of 12 credit hours. Texas State partnered with ReUp in 2020. Since then, 589 students have enrolled, 3,353 students are in the pipeline, 175 students have graduated, and 4.4 million dollars has been recovered in tuition.

Bring Bobcats Back / Reskilling Grants

The Bring Bobcats Back program was established at Texas State University in 2018 for students who had “stopped out” to return and finish their degrees. Bring Bobcats Back has expanded thanks to federal and state grant funding born out of the pandemic.

Through the U.S. Department of Education's Stabilization Fund Program via the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund, Texas State received \$3 million in reskilling grant funds to help former students who have been affected by COVID-19 return to school and complete their degrees. Students who meet the eligibility requirement are eligible for up to \$2,500 per semester.

“We want to help them to get back on track, so our commitment is to reduce any barriers that prevent future success. That's the driving force behind Bring Bobcats Back — it is recognizing that there are 2.5 million students in Texas (3.9 million in the U.S.) who have started some kind of degree and haven't finished,” says Gary Ray, associate vice president, enrollment management and marketing. “We were working at that time to find funding because we recognize that the students are trying to come back and face barriers — such as finances and flexibility.”

Ray cites the No. 1 goal of the state's 60X30TX project – that by the year 2030 at least 60% of Texans ages 25 to 34 will have a certificate or degree. This goal was recently revised by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to have a Texas workforce made up of 25- to 64-year-olds with degrees or certifications. THECB estimates that each year, more than 48,000 students stopout at Texas colleges and universities have completed 75% of the credits needed for a degree. A student needs 120 hours to complete a bachelor's degree, and 60 hours for an associate degree.

“Many students express an interest in returning but affordability was a major concern, so we began to look at new possibilities,” Ray says. Students who want to change majors — to reskill — are urged to meet with an advisor. It may mean more credits and/or time.

Finding students who fit the criteria for re-admittance can be challenging. When the reskilling grants were first offered the parameters set by the state were deemed very restrictive. Students who apply do not have to be former Bobcats. Anyone looking to complete a bachelor's degree may apply.

To search for qualified students, Texas State partnered in 2020 with ReUp, a tech-enabled service whose motto is, “We help stopout students connect to complete.” Ray says the university learned about ReUp after applying for a grant through the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

The focus was to contact students who were out for three consecutive long semesters (spring and fall). “ We didn't always know why students left, and so they were going to provide us some of that feedback so that we can be proactive in addressing some of those issues on the front end. We discovered ReUp's success at other partner colleges were having graduation rates

going up by 4%," Ray says. ReUp's target was to reenroll 350 former Texas State students in the first year. The final number enrolled was 589.

ReUp's success coaches work with students "all through their journey to complete college," says Mira Fontana, director, partner success for ReUp. She says they use multichannel communication channels to reach former students. Success coaches with ReUp provide "individualized support to every student through personal communication."

Texas State has a two-year contract with ReUp with an option for a third year. Since the partnership began, ReUp has reached almost 10,000 Bobcats and engaged with more than 3,353 who are considering a return to college or are in the process of applying.

Born out of pandemic

The federal and state funding was born out of the pandemic to aid in the continuation of education of students impacted by COVID-19. In 2020, a record 1,773 students withdrew from Texas State. That was 13% higher than the 2019 figures.

"It's about college access. It's about increasing enrollment and the awarding of meaningful credentials," says Dr. Gene Bourgeois, provost and vice president of Academic Affairs. "The whole notion was to use this funding to upskill and reskill those persons, including an attainment of a college credential – like a degree to make them more workforce ready and competitive for jobs." Bourgeois says that Texas State is among the top five universities and community colleges competing for state funds.

Dr. Todd Sherron, assistant professor of practice, from the Department of Organization, Workforce, and Leadership Studies (OWLS), College of Applied Arts, was responsible for obtaining and overseeing the first \$1.5 million reskilling grant from the THECB. OWLS primarily serves working adults, student veterans, and service members and is designed to accelerate degree completion by credentialing work-life learning and training into college credit and offering eight-week online courses. Sherron says many of the students finish their degree in two to three semesters.

Dr. Christopher Murr, assistant vice president, Financial Aid & Scholarships, garnered the second \$1.5 million reskilling grant, which provided Texas State with a total of \$3 million. "As a result, we are reaching out to students through social media, community newspapers, radio, and other types of media services to let folks know we can help them come back, reengage and complete their degree with Texas state," Murr explains.

Completion grants help

In addition to these reskilling grants, Financial Aid & Scholarships applied for and received from the state funding for a completion grant that provides eligible students up to \$1,000 each to pay off outstanding charges with the university. "Such debt is often another barrier that we can now better help students overcome and return to school, Murr says, and adds that returning students are also eligible for scholarship consideration.

Texas community colleges saw enrollment drop by 86,000 since 2019. “That’s another thing that we saw — low-income students were most impacted by the pandemic and most likely to drop out. This program helps to get them back on track because it provides funding,” Ray says.

The university was able to apply for GEER funding and received the maximum amount which was targeted to help 1,000 students. “We are now spending \$1.5 million on scholarships for those students that are re-enrolling or continuing, and then also a certain portion of each of those grants can be used to market it to reach those displaced workers or our students out there,” Ray says. “We can also take students who stopped out from other schools with the expansion of the grant or displaced workers. It really is a three-dimensional approach now that's been scaled because of the funding that we got from the state.” The response from students and their families to the stopout recruitment and ReUp’s success coaches has been very positive.

TXST Reskilling Grants Summary Results

The Reskilling grants funded 1,432 student awards (\$2,751,072) from 150 different programs/majors, 832 students received more than one award, and 175 graduated. The average award, see Table 1, for Tuition/Fees (M=\$1,790, SD=\$878), Cost of Attendance (M=\$131, SD=\$216), and Total Support (M=\$1,921, SD=\$720).

Table 1 Average awards

	Mean	Std Dev
Amount for Tuition/Fees	\$1,790	\$878
Amount for Cost of Attendance	\$131	\$216
Total Support	\$1,921	\$720

The number of credit hours completed ranged from 1 hour to 24 hours with the mode of 12 credit hours, see Table 2.

Table 2 Semester Credit Hours

Total Semester Credit Hours Completed	N	% of Total
1	1	0.07%
3	65	4.54%
4	11	0.77%
5	3	0.21%
6	185	12.92%
7	41	2.86%
8	22	1.54%
9	148	10.34%
10	49	3.42%
11	16	1.12%
12	411	28.70%
13	156	10.89%
14	88	6.15%
15	141	9.85%
16	52	3.63%
17	20	1.40%
18	20	1.40%
19	1	0.07%
22	1	0.07%
24	1	0.07%

Students from across the university were eligible to participate in the Reskilling grants if they met the grant requirements.

- Texas residents eligible for in-state tuition as determined by the institution;
- Have filed a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA);
- Are eligible for federal Title IV aid. Students who are enrolled in short-term ineligible Title IV workforce credential programs but who are otherwise Title IV eligible may be included;
- Have affirmed they were affected by COVID-19. Institutions may establish their processes for determining COVID-19 impact;
- Be enrolled in an eligible academic degree program or short-term workforce credential program as described in this RFA on either a full-time or part-time basis.

See Table 3, students from 150 different programs and departments across Texas State participated in the Reskilling grant programs. The top three departments in which students

enrolled were from Psychology, Applied Arts & Sciences/OWLS/BAAS, and Computer Science.

Table 3. Program /Department (N =1,432)

Program/Department	N	% of Total
Psychology, BA	104	7.26%
Applied Arts & Sciences/OWLS/BAAS	74	5.17%
Computer Science, BS	62	4.33%
Exploratory Professional	58	4.05%
Exercise & Sports Science (Pre-Rehabilitation Sciences), BESS	55	3.84%
Health Sciences, BS	52	3.63%
Criminal Justice, BSCJ	44	3.07%
Education (TCert Elem Core ESL), BS	37	2.58%
General Studies, BGS	37	2.58%
Management, BBA	29	2.03%
Marketing, BBA	28	1.96%
Accounting, BBA	26	1.82%
Biology, BS	25	1.75%
Finance, BBA	24	1.68%
English, BA	22	1.54%
Political Science, BA	22	1.54%
Anthropology, BA	20	1.40%
Theatre (Performance & Production), BFA	20	1.40%
Biology (Pre-Medical), BS	17	1.19%
Health & Fitness Management, BESS	17	1.19%
Human Dev & Family Sciences, BSFCS	17	1.19%
History, BA	16	1.12%
Social Work, BSW	16	1.12%
Wildlife Biology, BS	16	1.12%
Education (TCert All-Level Special Ed), BS	14	0.98%
Electronic Media, BS	14	0.98%
Advertising, BS	13	0.91%
Interior Design, BSFCS	13	0.91%
Animal Science (Pre-Veterinary), BSAG	12	0.84%
Construction Sci & Mgt, UPRE	12	0.84%
Manufacturing Engineering, BS	12	0.84%
Electrical Engineering (Computer Engineering), BS	11	0.77%
Geog Resource & Enviro Studies, BS	11	0.77%
Healthcare Administration, UPRE	11	0.77%
History (TCert 7-12 History UG), BA	11	0.77%
Public Relations, BS	11	0.77%

Program/Department	N	% of Total
Respiratory Care, UPRE	11	0.77%
Agriculture (Horticulture), BSAG	10	0.70%
Agriculture, BSAG	10	0.70%
Computer Science (Computer Engineering), BS	10	0.70%
Geography, BS	10	0.70%
International Relations, BAIS	10	0.70%
Music Studies (Instrumental), BM	10	0.70%
Communication Design, BFA	9	0.63%
Communication Design, UPRE	9	0.63%
Digital Media Innovation, BS	9	0.63%
Economics, BA	9	0.63%
Exercise & Sports Science (Clinical Exercise Science), BESS	9	0.63%
Psychology, BS	9	0.63%
Anthropology, BS	8	0.56%
Computer Information Systems, BBA	8	0.56%
Public Health, BS	8	0.56%
Theatre (Film Production), UPRE	8	0.56%
Animal Science, BSAG	7	0.49%
Art, BA	7	0.49%
Electrical Engineering (Micro & Nano Device Systems), BS	7	0.49%
Studio Art (Painting), BFA	7	0.49%
English (TCert 7-12 English Lng Arts UG), BA	6	0.42%
Exercise & Sports Science (TCert All-Level Physical Ed), BESS	6	0.42%
Nutrition & Foods, BSFCS	6	0.42%
Radiation Therapy, UPRE	6	0.42%
Spanish, BA	6	0.42%
Ag Business & Management, BSAG	5	0.35%
Applied Sociology, BS	5	0.35%
Engineering Technology (Mechanical Engr Technology), BST	5	0.35%
Exploratory, 000000	5	0.35%
Health Information Management, UPRE	5	0.35%
Healthcare Administration, BHA	5	0.35%
Mass Communication, BA	5	0.35%
Nursing, BSN	5	0.35%
Photography, BFA	5	0.35%
Public Administration, BPA	5	0.35%
Sociology, BA	5	0.35%
Advertising, UPRE	4	0.28%
Applied Mathematics, BS	4	0.28%
Biology (Pre-Dental), BS	4	0.28%

Program/Department	N	% of Total
Communication Disorders, CDIS	4	0.28%
Computer Science, BA	4	0.28%
Electronic Media, UPRE	4	0.28%
Health Information Management, BSHIM	4	0.28%
Health Sciences (Health Sci Pre-Nursing), BS	4	0.28%
Management (Entrepreneurial Studies), BBA	4	0.28%
Management (Human Resource Management), BBA	4	0.28%
Mass Communication, UPRE	4	0.28%
Nutrition & Foods (Dietetics), BSFCS	4	0.28%
Philosophy, BA	4	0.28%
Religious Studies, BA	4	0.28%
Respiratory Care, BSRC	4	0.28%
Theatre (Acting), BFA	4	0.28%
Theatre (TCert All-Level Theatre), BFA	4	0.28%
Theatre (Technical Production), BFA	4	0.28%
Biochemistry (Pre-Medical), BS	3	0.21%
Biochemistry, BS	3	0.21%
Computer Information Systems (Business Analytics), BBA	3	0.21%
Dance (TCert 8-12 Dance), BFA	3	0.21%
Fashion Merchandising, BSFCS	3	0.21%
Geog Water Resources, BS	3	0.21%
Geography, GEO	3	0.21%
Industrial Engineering, BS	3	0.21%
International Studies (Latin American Studies), BAIS	3	0.21%
Manufacturing Engineering (Mechanical Systems), BS	3	0.21%
Mathematics, BS	3	0.21%
Spanish (TCert All-Level Spanish), BA	3	0.21%
Studio Art (Expanded Media), BFA	3	0.21%
Studio Art (Jewelry & Metals), BFA	3	0.21%
Studio Art (TCert All-Level Art), BFA	3	0.21%
Aquatic Biology, BS	2	0.14%
Art History, BA	2	0.14%
Biology (Pre-Physician Assistant), BS	2	0.14%
Civil Engineering, BS	2	0.14%
Communication Studies, BA	2	0.14%
Construction Management, CSM	2	0.14%
Consumer Affairs, BSFCS	2	0.14%
Criminal Justice, CJG	2	0.14%
Digital Media Innovation (Multimedia Production), BS	2	0.14%
Digital Media Innovation, UPRE	2	0.14%

Program/Department	N	% of Total
Electrical Engineering, BS	2	0.14%
English (Film), BA	2	0.14%
Geog Urban & Regional Plan, BS	2	0.14%
Microbiology (Pre-Physical Assistant), BS	2	0.14%
Music, UPRE	2	0.14%
Professional Counseling (Marriage & Family Counseling), PCOU-MFCN	2	0.14%
Public Relations, UPRE	2	0.14%
Secondary Education, SCED	2	0.14%
Advanced Practice Leadership (On-line Regular), SAPL-OREG	1	0.07%
Agriculture (TCert 6-12 Ag Food & Nat Res), BSAG	1	0.07%
Biochemistry (Biochemistry ACS), BS	1	0.07%
Biology (TCert Secondary Level Life Sci), BS	1	0.07%
Education (TCert Mid Math), BS	1	0.07%
Education, UPRE	1	0.07%
Electrical Engineering (Computer Engineering), UPRE	1	0.07%
Electrical Engineering, UPRE	1	0.07%
Electronic Media (Multimedia Production), BS	1	0.07%
Engineering Technology (Civil Engineering Technology), BST	1	0.07%
Engineering Technology, BST	1	0.07%
English (Creative Writing), BA	1	0.07%
Exercise & Sports Science (Health & Well Promo Clin Pop), BESS	1	0.07%
French, BA	1	0.07%
International Studies (International Business), BAIS	1	0.07%
Mechanical Engineering, BS	1	0.07%
Microbiology, BS	1	0.07%
Physical Geography, BS	1	0.07%
Psychology (Pre-Medical), BS	1	0.07%
Psychology, UPRE	1	0.07%
Public Administration, PA	1	0.07%
Recreation Administration (Therapeutic Recreation), BS	1	0.07%
Spanish (Hisp Lit & Culture), BA	1	0.07%
Special Education (TCert All-Level Special Ed), SPED	1	0.07%
Studio Art (Ceramics), BFA	1	0.07%
Theatre, UPRE	1	0.07%

The Reskilling grants allowed marketing expenditures. As a result, \$150,000 (10%) from each of the two reskilling grants (total of \$300,000) were used to market Texas State. The University Marketing team developed a campaign that ran from January 2022 to August 2022 and used multiple vehicles to advertise the reskilling program, see Table 4 and Figure 1 for Community Impact ad.

Table 4. Reskilling Marketing Campaign

Community Impact Print (1/2 page 4/color)

Central Texas (9 markets including Austin, San Marcos, Buda, Kyle, etc.)

San Antonio (2 regions)

Digital Audio (:30 ads) in Austin, San Marcos, San Antonio

Pandora/Soundcloud (A21-44 with some college) \$15.40 CPM

Podcasts (A21-44, non-music sports, kids, family, education, business) \$21 CPM

Digital Advertising (Austin, San Marcus, San Antonio, South Texas)

Paid Search (Google Ads)

Programmatic Display Ads (contextual, behavioral, retargeting)

Facebook/Instagram sponsored Ads (\$35 per day)

Twitch :30 video ads

Public Radio (:15 sponsorships)

KUT: Austin (approx. 10 spots/week)

The image shows a community impact advertisement. On the right is a photograph of a smiling man wearing a light-colored button-down shirt and a brown flat cap. On the left is a dark brown vertical banner with white and yellow text. At the top of the banner, the words 'TXST NEXT' are repeated in a stylized font. The main headline reads 'RETURN TO COLLEGE & FINISH YOUR DEGREE!'. Below this, it says 'The NEXT step in your journey starts at TXST.' and 'Learn more: go.txstate.edu/finishyourdegree'. The Texas State University logo is centered below that. At the bottom of the banner, there is a QR code and a small disclaimer: 'Texas State University is an Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer, committed to inclusive thought and action in support of our diverse community. Individuals from historically underrepresented groups and all those who share our commitment to inclusivity and passion for the strength of our diversity are strongly encouraged to apply.'

Figure 1. Community Impact ad

Enrollment Management / ReUp

Texas State partnered with ReUp in 2020. Since then, 589 students have enrolled, 3,353 students are in the pipeline, 175 students have graduated, and 4.4 million dollars has been recovered in tuition.

Table 5. Top ReUp programs for Fall 2022

Programs	N
Applied Arts & Sciences /OWLS/BAAS	34
Psychology	28
Education	15
General Studies	14
Computer Science	12
Social Work	11
Exploratory Professional	10

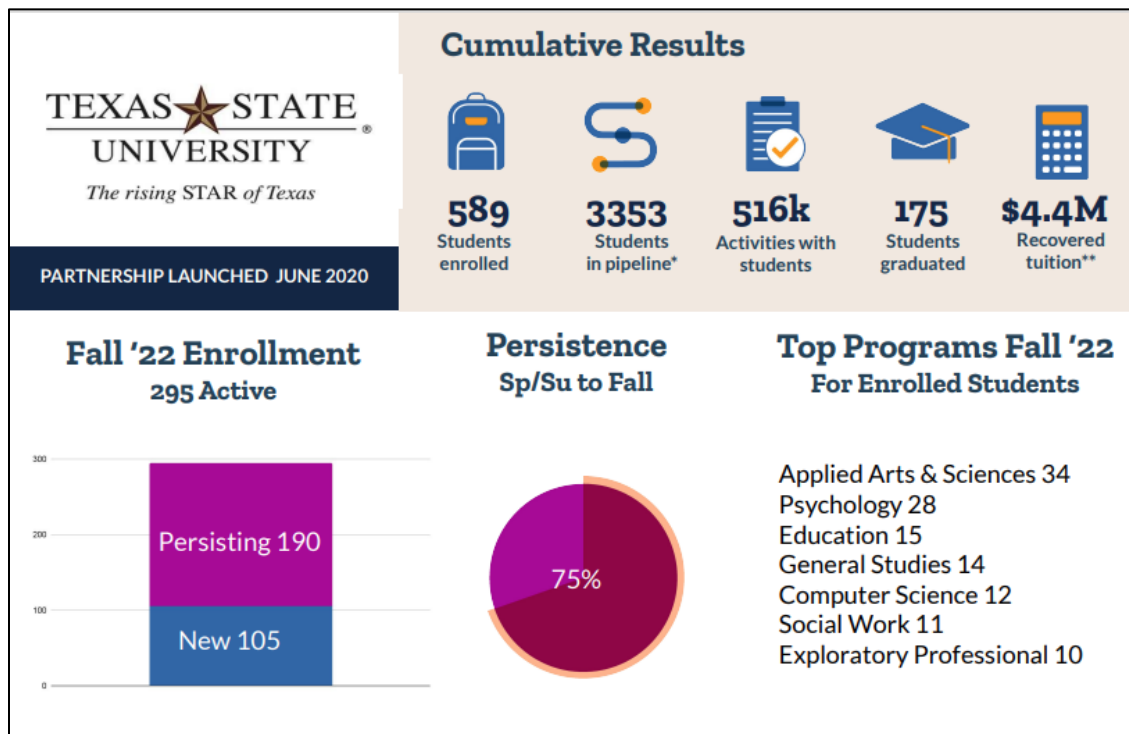


Figure 2. ReUP Cumulative Results

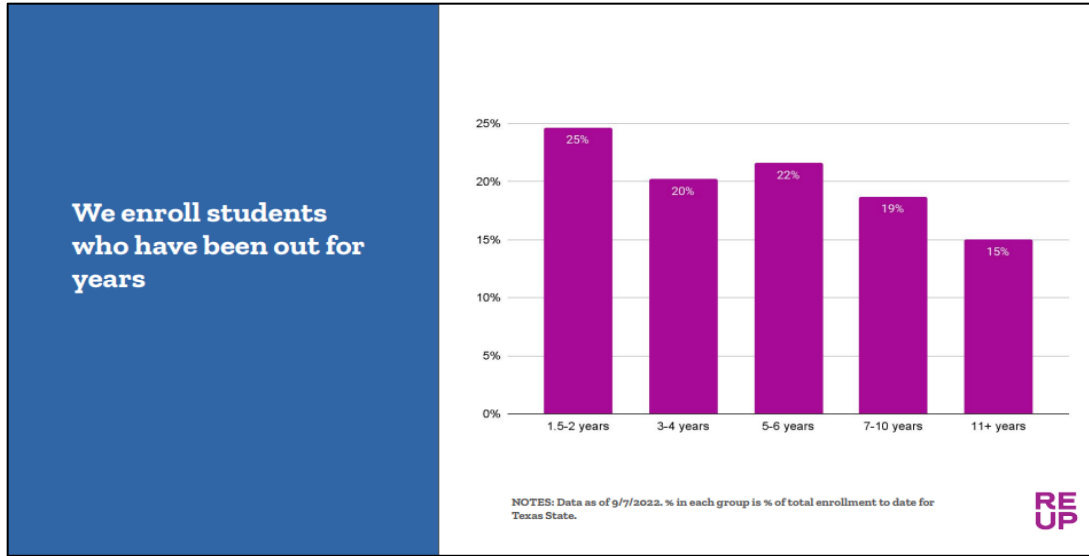


Figure 3. Stopout Years

Table 6. Top Reasons Why TXST student leave

Drop Reason	Drop Reason - subcategory	# Students
Finances	Financial hardship - needs to work	436
Finances	Student choosing not to pay - too expensive	394
Academics	Unknown	191
Health	Mental health - personal	185
Finances	Financial hardship - loss of financial aid	169
Life Balance	Juggling responsibilities	163
Professional Commitments	Work commitments	144
Professional Commitments	New job	109
Life Balance	Birth of child / adoption	104
Life Balance	Relocation / move	101
Health	Physical health - personal	98
Academics	Other	94
Motivation	Low motivation	87
Life Balance	Other	79
Motivation	Take time to figure out goals	59
Life Balance	Death in the family	57
Health	Family health	55
Motivation	No clear path to career	52
Finances	Other	50

Addressing these barriers will result in more returning students.

- Financial and Cost
- Need for online and flexible courses
- Uncertainty about the value of a degree

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