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ELEVATE Dual Enrollment Scholarship
3 full time employees; 1 part time employee
School district: 10,001 - 25,000
Special Communication Projects/Campaigns
*Please consider this entry for a Golden Achievement Award
SYNOPSIS

The Tuscaloosa City Schools (TCS) serves more than 11,000 students across three high school feeder zones. A key focus of the school system is to close the achievement gap between students of differing ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. The reality is for many TCS students, like students in other locales, college is out of reach due to the rising costs of pursuing post secondary education. CNBC analyzed the data in 2019 and found that college costs have increased by 25 percent in the last decade.

The school system’s approach has been to remove barriers for students as part of its nearly $170 million strategic plan focused on teaching and learning, human resources and capital improvements. As this five-year strategic plan draws to a close, TCS’ efforts received a public endorsement from Tuscaloosa’s mayor in 2019 by way of public investments to be made through his signature initiative, ELEVATE Tuscaloosa. According to the website developed by the city on this plan, costing nearly $250 million over the next 10 years: “Elevate Tuscaloosa is a community-driven process for strategically investing in education, cultural arts, tourism, parks, recreation, and connectivity.”

Education is always mentioned first in every instance. The mayor’s plan calls for an additional $14-plus million to be directed to the school system to support Pre-K, Summer Learning, and Dual Enrollment. For him, Dual Enrollment is the cornerstone of the education initiatives. Based on the plan, an eligible TCS student can take up to six hours of college credit (free of charge) at any of three institutions of higher learning in this community: no tuition, no fees, no book charges.

This concept is further supported by the research which shows that “some college-level coursework models have been shown to have a positive effect on student outcomes like attendance, high school graduation, college enrollment, and college completion,” according to the a 2015 U.S. Department of Education study.

This submission details how the Tuscaloosa City Schools worked to ensure students and their families were made aware of the opportunity and took advantage of it in its inaugural year as part of a large-scale rollout as part of a branded integrated communication plan.
In early 2019, Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox unveiled his signature plan, **ELEVATE** Tuscaloosa, designed to provide a lift for educational experiences in the economy (below). The mayor’s plan called for $25 million in educational investments over the next decade in three areas: Pre-K, Summer Learning, and Dual Enrollment college scholarships. The central component of this aspect of the plan was funding $7.8 million worth of Dual Enrollment college scholarships in the next 10 years. The proposal (right) was amended in the final budget. (TCS primary research showed that less than 15 percent of TCS 10th - 12th grade students are taking dual enrollment/dual credit courses during the 2019-2020 school year.)

The terms of the **ELEVATE** Dual Enrollment Scholarships required that students:

- Attend a TCS high school at least one year prior to taking courses as part of the **ELEVATE** Dual Enrollment Scholarship program;
- Live in the Tuscaloosa City Schools’ residential attendance zones; and
- Meet institutions’ minimum grade point average requirements.

Eligible students would take the courses during the senior year, with the Class of 2021 being the inaugural cohort to receive the scholarship opportunity. Because of the magnitude of the investment, the superintendent charged the public relations team to “over communicate” the opportunity.

Drawing from the research of psychologist Robert B. Cialdini in his book Influence: Science and Practice (5th ed.), the public relations team used six of the seven principles of influence cited by Cialdini to incorporate into its work. Those principles, briefly described, include: commitment and consistency where once one makes a choice, they will “behave consistently to that commitment” or face personal and interpersonal pressure; social proof—people look to others to “find out what other people think is correct”; liking, where one is more likely to “comply” with the request of those they like; authority, which suggests that “obedience to authority is mostly rewarding, and scarcity where if an “item is rare or becoming rare, it is more valuable.” These principles would guide the rationale for decision-making in this communication campaign.

The need to communicate this well aligned with research conducted by Project Tomorrow: more than half wanted to increase parental knowledge about school and district policies and programs. The annual national Speak Up Survey is considered “the research tool districts use to learn what students, educators, parents and the community have to say about education issues.” Coming in at 54 percent, made this a top 10 priority for parents. Further, the same study conducted in 2019 showed that parents wanted information to be pushed to them rather than having to pull it from a website or other materials themselves. The research also highlighted that 83 percent of parents “agree the most effective tool for teacher communications about individual student performance, behavior or progress is a personalized message.”

Understanding this information allowed the TCS public relations team to develop a strong integrated strategic communication plan to meet the request of the superintendent to “over communicate.”
PLANNING

While it was important to unveil the plan for the city as part of a January 2020 press conference, the goal for TCS was simple: to make sure all eligible students and their families knew about this unique opportunity. Due to the program's requirements and that the scholarships were intended to be used during one's senior year, the target audience was defined as 11th grade TCS students and their families.

A three-member TCS PR department determined the following strategies would be used to communicate this opportunity: branding, media relations, social media, digital communication, direct mail and experiential communication (press conference).

Again, the charge, or goal, by the superintendent was to “over communicate” the opportunity.

Research from the Speak Up survey suggested that providing parents with direct information specific to their child would be effective. The plan called for identification of which members of the junior class met the scholarship’s requirements. In the Class of 2021, there are 488 eligible students. Prior to ELEVATE Dual Enrollment Scholarships, TCS students were limited by two factors in taking college coursework while in high school: the family’s ability to pay or attendance at a high school with grant opportunities to offer free coursework. Accordingly, many students were not able to take advantage of college classes while in high school.

The TCS public relations department, in consultation with school counselors, established the following objective: To register at least 30 percent of eligible students prior to March 13, 2020, which coincided with the start of spring break.

The TCS public relations department assisted the mayor’s office with the kickoff press conference on January 13, 2020. However, the work to communicate about the ELEVATE Dual Enrollment scholarships belonged to TCS.

Besides parent information meetings, TCS created branded social media content to generate buzz with the wider community, but created custom branded print and email communication in addition to automated messaging for families specific to their children. To serve as the backbone for the communication, a special website was created, detailing the program particulars with a set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ).

For this work, a budget of $500 was set, excluding the in-kind services of photography, videography, and graphic design as the school system already employed people with those particular skill sets. The office includes a coordinator, whose function was to provide copywriting and editing, identification of which specific students and their families to contact and dissemination of electronic communication to this very specific audience; a video media specialist whose role was to develop concepts for promotional videos and to film and edit them and a digital communication website specialist whose background in graphic design proved helpful to support the development of collateral for print, video, and social media. This work supplemented the plans of the counseling department to host parent information meetings, conduct one-on-one meetings with students, and communicate by daily announcements.
In December 2019, parent information meetings were held to preview the formal announcement of the ELEVATE Dual Enrollment Scholarships. Following the January press conference, the Tuscaloosa City Schools began implementing a social media campaign about the ELEVATE Dual Enrollment Scholarships. The branded materials featured figureheads from three local institutions of higher learning participating in the program, along with the mayor and the superintendent. This unified message was important to communicate to stakeholders to underscore the strength of the program.

A series of social media posts went out over the course of the following two days to coincide with the press coverage garnered. The plan called for custom postcards to be sent to the families of eligible students highlighting the opportunity. Although the registration window was set for February 24 - May 1, 2020, TCS created an early registration period (prior to spring break) to capitalize on the excitement generated by ELEVATE Tuscaloosa. For the purposes of this campaign, the time period was February 14 - March 13, 2020.

Cialdini’s research on scarcity demonstrated that people are more inclined to act if they believe there is limited access to the item. People are motivated by the scarcity principle through either limited supply or time constraints. In this case, time was the constraint: prior to the start of spring break.

Meanwhile, at the three local high schools, meetings were called by counselors to in February reiterate the opportunity to eligible students. During the registration window, eligible students would be scheduled to meet with either their advisory or counselor to determine which of the three paths of learning would be most advantageous to their future: the four-year public university, a two-year community college or the four-year private HBCU (Historically Black College or University).

The registration process was designed to elicit an answer from each eligible student through the return of paperwork which required a parent’s signature. To motivate students to return the paperwork, the automated messaging system was used to remind parents that their eligible student had not returned the paperwork yet, an example of Cialdini’s commitment and consistency.

Additionally, the City of Tuscaloosa supported these efforts by generating its own social media content from both the city and the mayor’s accounts. These posts amplified the messaging by the school system. In fact, the system and the city coordinated on key messaging to highlight the significance of the ELEVATE educational opportunities: by living inside the city limits and attending a TCS school, a family could expect to save more than $11,000 during the course of a child’s Pre-K-12 career in TCS (above).
EVALUATION

At the end of the early registration period, March 13, 2020 (which coincided with the start of spring break and the effective state-mandated closure due to the novel coronavirus), 222 of 488 eligible students or 45.4 percent registered to claim their ELEVATE Dual Enrollment Scholarship. By the central objective of this campaign, this effort is considered successful, exceeded projections and came in under budget.

Other metrics of success included the number of postcards distributed, the number of calls made, social media posts and their associated analytics, video production elements among others. Additionally, members of the mayor’s staff conducted community meetings during this time period and reported that education was a big topic of discussion among participants where the conversation centered around the ELEVATE Dual Enrollment Scholarship and the feedback was deemed “all positive.”

While the original plan called for students to register by May 1, 2020, the state-mandated closure due to the novel coronavirus may hamper higher yields.
KEY POINTS

GOAL
To raise awareness about the ELEVATE Dual Enrollment opportunity within the Tuscaloosa community.

OBJECTIVE
To raise ensure 30 percent of eligible students register for ELEVATE Dual Enrollment Scholarships prior to the end of day March 13, 2020.

AUDIENCE
- Eligible 11th grade TCS students who meet the requirements of the ELEVATE Dual Enrollment Scholarship
- Parents of the eligible 11th grade TCS students

BUDGET: $500

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Printing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Postage</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
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TIMELINE

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 20, 2019</td>
<td>Press conference scheduled</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 2019</td>
<td>Parent informational meetings scheduled and held</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 13, 2020</td>
<td>Press conference</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 13 - March 13, 2020</td>
<td>Schools connect with students about the opportunity</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 24, 2020</td>
<td>Postcards distributed</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 24, 2020</td>
<td>Early registration window opens</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 13, 2020</td>
<td>Campaign ends</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 1, 2020</td>
<td>Last day students can register for ELEVATE Dual Enrollment Scholarships</td>
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EXPERIENTIAL COMMUNICATION

The mayor’s office kicked off all projects funded through the ELEVATE initiative with a press conference designed to elicit maximum press coverage. This event, known as experiential communication, was no different. Figureheads from the key players in this initiative participated in the press conference on January 13, 2020. Featured left to right: Dr. Bill Ashley, Shelton State Community College president, Dr. Kevin Whitaker, University of Alabama, Walt Maddox, Tuscaloosa mayor, Dr. Cynthia Warrick, Stillman College president and Dr. Mike Daria, Tuscaloosa City Schools superintendent.

This press conference is an example of Cialdini’s authority principle.

"THIS INITIATIVE IS BRINGING ABOUT AN UNPRECEDENTED PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN STILLMAN, THE UNIVERSITY AND SHELTON STATE. THIS IS A WIN FOR EVERYONE. THIS IS A WIN FOR OUR STUDENTS. THIS IS A WIN FOR THE COMMUNITY."
January 13, 2020

Mayor Announces ELEVATE Dual Enrollment Scholarship Program

Tuscaloosa City Schools’ high school students will soon benefit from a major educational initiative to make college more affordable as part of ELEVATE Tuscaloosa, the city’s signature plan to elevate education, experience and the economy. Mayor Walt Maddox announced the launch of Elevate Dual Enrollment college scholarships on Monday, noting that the scholarships will become available starting with the Class of 2021.

“I want every child in the City of Tuscaloosa to have an opportunity, if they so desire, for a college education,” said Maddox. “We couldn’t do this without our higher education community.”

The mayor and TCS superintendent Dr. Mike Daria were joined by Dr. Kevin Whitaker, University of Alabama Executive Vice President and Provost, Dr. Bill Ashley, Shelton State Community College President, and Dr. Cynthia Warrick, Stillman College President, for the announcement.

During their senior year, TCS students may take up to six fully-funded hours of college credit at either The University of Alabama, Shelton State Community College or Stillman College.

To qualify, students must:

- Attend a TCS high school at least one year prior to taking courses as part of the ELEVATE Dual Enrollment Scholarship program;
- Live in the Tuscaloosa City Schools’ residential attendance zones;
- Be classified as a senior; and
- Meet institutions’ minimum grade point average requirements.

TCS administrators have worked with all three institutions of higher learning to identify core courses that will apply to any major. These courses will be fully funded--to include books and fees--as part of the ELEVATE Dual Enrollment Scholarship program.

For some families, the rising costs of higher education may mean college is out of reach. Thanks to ELEVATE, taking courses will become a reality for students starting this summer.

Daria said that the scholarships underscore the work being done as part of the system’s strategic plan to provide access and equity for students.

“This support from the City is a shining example of removing access barriers,” said Daria. “This allows us to do work that we were only able to do in pieces before, but now will be open to all students. This initiative is bringing about an unprecedented partnership between Stillman, the University and Shelton State.

This is a win for everyone. This is a win for our students. This is a win for the community, and we cannot thank everyone enough.”

Nearly 500 TCS high school juniors are projected to be eligible for the program and will begin signing up in the coming weeks at school during the annual course registration process. Funding has been allocated for all students who qualify and choose to enter the ELEVATE Dual Enrollment Scholarship program. Students will begin taking the Dual Enrollment courses later this year.

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ELEVATE Tuscaloosa is a community-driven process for strategically investing in education, cultural arts, tourism, parks and recreation and connectivity. The ELEVATE plan commits $500 million worth of investments to Tuscaloosa’s future over 30 years. To learn more and become involved in the process visit [www.elevatetuscaloosa.com](http://www.elevatetuscaloosa.com)

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You are receiving this email because of your relationship with Tuscaloosa City School District. If you wish to stop receiving email updates sent through the Blackboard service, please [unsubscribe](mailto:unsubscribe).
Parents of students who had not submitted their intent to accept an ELEVATE Dual Enrollment Scholarship were contacted via automated messaging system at the halfway point of the campaign to remind them to claim their scholarship.
TCS CONTROLLED MEDIA: NEWSLETTERS

For Your Information
An update for TCS Employees

Game Changer
This week, Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox unveiled the new ELEVATE Dual Enrollment Scholarship Program, benefiting Tuscaloosa City Schools' students! Under the guidelines of the program, eligible students can earn up to six hours of college credit through either Shelton State Community College, Stillman College or The University of Alabama.

This Week in TCS
January 15 Core Notes

A Game Changer:
This week, Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox unveiled the new ELEVATE Dual Enrollment Scholarship Program, benefiting Tuscaloosa City Schools' students! Under the guidelines of the program, eligible students can earn up to six hours of college credit through either Shelton State Community College, Stillman College or The University of Alabama.
Following the press conference, parents of eligible students were sent the postcards featured at right. The postcards detailed the requirements for participation and the process for registration. The system’s growing Latinx community provides the TCS the opportunity to communicate with families in Spanish.
TCS CONTROLLED MEDIA: WEBSITE

Streaming video was featured on the homepage of the TCS website (above).

A special webpage was dedicated to ELEVATE Dual Enrollment Scholarships to explain the purpose and the requirements of the program. The webpage included a FAQ and can be found at: www.tuscaloosacityschools.com/Page/2328
The Case for Dual Enrollment YouTube Playlist

Videos and all included graphic elements were designed to be integrated across all platforms for the ELEVATE Dual Enrollment campaign. The above showcased image depicts students from each of the system's three high schools. This decision was intentional to illustrate to students that their friends were taking advantage of the opportunity (Cialdini’s liking and social proof).
Facebook is the most prominent social media platform to reach TCS parents. Many of the efforts were focused on this channel of communication. This is borne out in the engagement in both analytics and a sample of the online feedback.
College just became more affordable for TCS students! In an unprecedented partnership between The City of Tuscaloosa – Government, Tuscaloosa City Schools, Shelton State Community College, Stillman College and The University of Alabama, students will have the opportunity to take up to six hours of college credit as part of the ELEVATE Dual Enrollment Scholarship Program.

Eligibility starts with the class of 2021. Learn more: http://bit.ly/36SjWDw
Collateral was generated for Instagram to capture the attention of high school students and parents who may be on this social media platform.
TCS Board of Ed @TCSBoardofEd · Jan 13
Do you have or know a current TCS junior? Then you need to know about the brand new ELEVATE Dual Enrollment Scholarship Program! Eligible students can earn up to 6 hours of college credit thanks to the @tuscaloosacity!

Elevate Dual Enrollment Scholarship Program
Elevate Tuscaloosa will provide up to two college courses for eligible TCS seniors. http://bit.ly/365IWDw & youtube.com

TCS Board of Ed @TCSBoardofEd · Jan 13
In an unprecedented partnership between @tuscaloosacity, TCS, @sheltonstate, @StillmanCollege and @UofAlabama, students will have the opportunity to take up to 6 hours of college credit as part of the ELEVATE Dual Enrollment Scholarship Program. bit.ly/365IWDw

Walt Maddox and Mike Daria
Video was also prominently featured as part of the TCS campaign. By featuring a student, the campaign demonstrated Cialdini’s principle of both liking and social proofing by showcasing students from all three TCS high schools.
**NEWS COVERAGE**

**LOCAL & REGION**

**Tim McGraw plans Amp show**

Country singer Tim McGraw will play the Tuscaloosa Amphitheater on May 27, according to the Tuscaloosa Amphitheater. McGraw is best known for his hit songs such as "I Need You Now," "Let It Be Christmas," and "Over Me."

**Tax proceeds to benefit dual enrollment**

*Published January 15, 2020*

Tuscaloosa, Ala., passed away January 12, 2020. Services will be 2 p.m. Tuscaloosa and attending the Hill Gardens with Bro. Bradley Boothe, Dillon Hunter Hughes, Lee Collet, and Alton Turner (Terri). Pallbearers will be Jerry Cohen, Nick Fowler and Darryl Thrasher (Ken). Survivors include his wife, Mary Marie Carter, daughter, Samantha, and his children, Alexis Cocker, Alton Turner, and Mark Turner. Memorial donations may be made to Buhl Health Care Station One.

**Ivey silent on refugee settlements**

Alabama Governor Robert Bentley is not saying what he will do in the event of refugees settlement within the state. There have been recent reports indicating that the governor has discussed the possibility of accepting refugees, but he has not made any official statements on the matter.

**DUAL**

Pallbearers will be Jerry Cohen, Nick Fowler and Darryl Thrasher (Ken). Survivors include his wife, Mary Marie Carter, daughter, Samantha, and his children, Alexis Cocker, Alton Turner, and Mark Turner. Memorial donations may be made to Buhl Health Care Station One.

**Memories of Tuscaloosa**

In honor of Tuscaloosa's centennial, a special event was held featuring a variety of artists and performers. The event included a performance by Tim McGraw, who has a home in Tuscaloosa. The celebration also featured exhibits and memorabilia from the city's history.

**DUAL Enrollment Classes Allow Tuscaloosa City School Students to Earn College Credit (1/15/20)**

This coverage was featured in the local newspaper the day following the press conference. Other media coverage is as follows:

- **New Scholarship Program Allows High School Students A Chance to Gain College Credit (1/13/20)**
- **Tax Proceeds to Benefit Dual Enrollment (1/13/20)**
- **Tax Proceeds to Benefit Dual Enrollment (1/14/20)**

This coverage was featured in the local newspaper the day following the press conference. Other media coverage is as follows:

- **New Scholarship Program Allows High School Students A Chance to Gain College Credit (1/13/20)**
- **Tax Proceeds to Benefit Dual Enrollment (1/13/20)**
- **Tax Proceeds to Benefit Dual Enrollment (1/14/20)**

Dual Enrollment Classes Allow Tuscaloosa City School Students to Earn College Credit (1/15/20)