

## Wanted: Band Students

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Since students have a lot on their plates, sometimes recruiting them for marching band can be a challenge. Even big-name bands work hard for a large freshman class, so recruiting for a smaller high school or college ensemble can be a daunting task. But it's far from impossible when directors and current members get involved.

By Elizabeth Geli

How far would you go to recruit students for your band? Last year, Texas College (TC) Director of Bands Jeffery C. Herbert embarked on a 17-day tour of the southern United States and drove more than 3,000 miles visiting various high schools.

With the strain of academics and other extracurricular activities on today's students, sometimes it's hard to convince people there's still time for marching band. Every band should plan and implement a recruitment strategy to draw in new members to keep the band alive and growing, especially in the case of small or developing bands.

### Road Trip

Texas College, a historically black college established in 1894 in Tyler, Texas, had always had a band, but it never had more than 30 members. Herbert, a high school band director and former assistant director and alum of the Southern University band, was hired in 2006. He worked with a 17-member band in his first year.

TC had hired Herbert because the school wanted a band with more than 100, so Herbert had some drastic recruiting to do before school started in the fall. Herbert borrowed a TC van and visited 59 high schools in the southern states, recruiting students for the band and at the same time, for Texas College. In the fall, 102 students showed up to try out.

"I needed to go out and recruit some talented, gifted kids for this program," Herbert says. "I didn't have much to offer, but I spread what my vision was for the Texas College band."

This year, Herbert took a slightly different approach. A New Orleans native, Herbert is well versed in the festivities that take place in the area during Mardi Gras. With help from TC students that went home to New Orleans for the weekend, he visited more than 20 different parades, each with 15 to 20 bands from all over the country. They talked to bands and collected reply cards as the students got off the buses before their performances.

Mardi Gras 2008 was a significant event for New Orleans because most of the parades used their normal routes for the first time since Hurricane Katrina hit Louisiana in 2005. Also, more revelers crowded the city for Mardi Gras than they had since the disaster, creating an ultra-enthused atmosphere for Herbert to give his recruitment pitch.

In some cases, Herbert needs to convince the students to simply attend college before even thinking about the band.

"Sometimes kids change their mind, and they don't want to go to college, and they settle for fast food or construction jobs," Herbert says. "They're not looking at the long haul. I have to give them hope that their work will all come back in 100-fold. I'm a band director, but, at the same time, I'm like a parent and a counselor."

Herbert has supported and counseled students who previously didn't believe they could attend college and some who have overcome considerable hardships. "I have to sit down and talk to these kids because they have issues, especially the ones from New Orleans," Herbert says. "They lost everything in Katrina, and they are here, and being here on this campus is the only thing that seems sane to them. When they go back to New Orleans, they are still living in trailers on the front lawn of their former houses."

One student had to evacuate quickly and left his trombone in his house. "He thought he was going to only be gone for a day, but he lost everything," Herbert says. "He said it was like his baby that he had for 10 years was washed away."

TC has an unusual open-door policy for admitting students. If students don't reach TC's standard on the ACT or SAT, they can still attend the school but must take a placement test once there. If their score is below average, the school recommends that the students take remedial classes. Herbert has the same policy for the marching band.

"If you do not have experience with marching band, I would have a beginner stage in which to work with you," Herbert says. "The band room door is like the college door—open-door policy."

TC also offers scholarships to the band members. After students apply for federal grants, and all other scholarships come in, the remaining tuition balance can be supplemented with band scholarships of different levels based on need and seniority.

"It's really nice going into college cause it's like having your own personal adviser, someone who's been there and done that and can help you," Peoples says. "We really are our own community, so people find people they can study with, find their best friends. It's like an immediate support group."

Herbert feels the same way about TC. "That's what we have to offer, not just with the college itself, but when they get in this band, it's one band, one sound," he says. "Each student is a part of this big happy family. Everyone knows each other by name, and that's the closeness that we have to offer here."



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