



## UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS HOSTS PROJECT GRAD SUMMER

BY UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS  
*Online Article*



The University of St. Thomas served as a spring board into college for 74 high school students in the Project GRAD/UST College Institute.

The students from John H. Reagan and Jefferson Davis Senior High Schools came to the UST campus to prepare for college life, and to qualify for a \$4,000 scholarship to the college of their choice. The summer institute was a three-week program held from July 6 – 24.

High school students from Davis, Reagan, Sam Houston, Wheatley and Yates High Schools were able to register on March 1 for their choice of summer institute. The students chose from institutes at Rice University, University of Houston – Downtown, University of St. Thomas, University of Texas Health Science and

Texas Southern University.

Project GRAD, which stands for Graduation Really Achieves Dreams, is a nonprofit organization that seeks to increase high school graduation and college attendance rates by addressing issues that can hinder the achievement of economically disadvantaged and minority students.

“A study of the first eight classes of Project GRAD scholars shows a 52 percent college completion rate,” said Melissa Martinez, Project GRAD college institute coordinator. “This compares to the 27 percent national college completion rate for low income students who enter a two- or



four-year college or university.”

Brisa Ponce, an incoming junior at Reagan, was one of the 74 students who registered for the UST institute. Ponce heard about Project GRAD from her older sister, who also participated in the program. “One of my influences is my big sister,” Ponce said. “I see that she has to struggle with studying, but she doesn’t quit. My sister demonstrates that Hispanics can make it and succeed.” Growing up with parents from Mexico, Ponce and her sister are determined to be the first generation to graduate from high school and college.

At the Project GRAD/UST College Institute, students attended classes in multicultural literature, Web site design and communications/ debate. Out of the 74 students at the UST campus, 96 percent of



DENNIS HERCULES and  
BRISA PONCE

the students were Hispanic, and 4 percent were African American.

With Dennis Hercules’ senior year approaching at Reagan, his college advisor suggested he attend Project GRAD. Hercules also heard about the program through his friends, who had already signed up or already participated.

“I’m doing something productive with my time off,” Hercules said. “I thought, ‘You have nothing to lose and a lot to gain.’ If I was at home, I would be bored watching TV, but here, I’m hanging out with my friends and having fun and learning a lot.”