



# The University of Texas at Austin | Positioning the University as an Innovative Thought Leader

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## **CHALLENGE**

While the landscape of higher education is everchanging, The University of Texas at Austin's longstanding commitment to fueling upward mobility in the state of Texas and beyond is unwavering. To help close the rampant opportunity gap in schools across the state, the first step is identifying prominent common barriers inhibiting success. Whereas financial barriers are often the first to come to mind (and one that the University recently met head-on with the introduction of free tuition to low-income students), additional barriers including lack of resources and support, as well as a misalignment in expectations are frequently to blame for students not attending or having difficulty completing two or four-year colleges. To address these issues, The University of Texas at Austin's Office of Strategy & Policy developed two innovative initiatives transforming both student's and educators' lives across the state - Texas OnCourse and the UT OnRamps. Texas OnCourse is a free, state-funded initiative providing training and resources for school counselors and college and career advisers who serve more than 95 percent of the middle and high school students statewide, while UT OnRamps provides high schoolers an opportunity to experience authentic college-level courses in a low-risk, high school setting.

## **OBJECTIVE**

After accomplishing the difficult task of orchestrating the successful launch of Texas OnCourse and UT OnRamps across the state, the University looked to Pierpont to increase local, regional and national awareness of the initiatives. Through well-rounded, focused media campaigns rooted in existing research, programming, and expertise, Pierpont developed a media relations plan focused on positioning the University as a transformative thought leader in the education space to local and national media as well as education trades. Tactics included the coordination of media briefings for University leadership and prominent national education reporters, leveraging existing events and milestone moments to generate media coverage, the development of bylined articles, and proactive insertion of University leadership into an existing national dialogue about education.

## **APPROACH**

Kicking off the engagement with an intensive messaging and plan development process, Pierpont launched a proactive media relations campaign. Recognizing the need for Texas eighth-graders to select their high school endorsement track, Pierpont positioned Texas OnCourse as a vital resource for parents, students, and educators resulting in lengthy feature stories on Austin's ABC affiliate (KVUE) and Spectrum News.

## **RESULTS**

On the national media front, Pierpont leveraged the University's participation in SXSW Edu 2019 and an event for policymakers in Washington D.C. to coordinate media briefings with education beat reporters at the Wall Street Journal and the Washington Post as well as The Chronicle of Higher Education and Inside Higher Ed. Additionally, to further emphasize the University's role as a thought leader in the education space, Pierpont worked alongside the Texas OnCourse team to develop and place a bylined article in The Hechinger Report and secured a top-tier education reporter for The Chronicle of Higher Education to serve as moderator for an upcoming SXSW Edu 2020 session hosted by The University.