In 1988, the Firestone Trust Fund awarded The University of Akron a $3 million gift from which an endowment was established to create The Firestone Fellows Strive Toward Excellence Program, otherwise known as STEP. The Strive Toward Excellence Program is a unique pre-college preparatory program designed to assist middle school students who aspire to attend college.

Students are inducted into STEP while they are enrolled in the sixth grade, where they remain until entering high school, and are designated as "Firestone Fellows." At this level, students progress into either The University of Akron’s Upward Bound or Upward Bound Math Science Program.

STEP graduates who attend The University of Akron are awarded Firestone Fellows scholarships in varying award amounts, based upon either high school or undergraduate grade point averages. These scholarships are renewable yearly based upon progress toward degree completion and program compliance.

The Strive Toward Excellence Program is designed to provide students with the attitude, skills, support, and financial assistance to pursue and successfully attain a college degree by:

- assisting students approaching adolescence in developing the positive self-identity necessary to resist peer pressure that devalues academic excellence.
- assisting students to develop measureable skills in writing, mathematics, and analytical thinking, which will enable them to enroll in the appropriate college-prep courses.
- assisting parents with information and resources that provide support to their children in preparation for a college education.
- assisting students in financing their college education through the awarding of supplemental academic scholarships.

During the six-week summer program, students will attend a rigorous academic program at The University of Akron. They will receive daily instruction in English and Math, which includes multiple hands-on learning experiences. Students will also participate in elective classes such as speech, karate, dance, and swimming. In addition, students will enjoy educational field trips, unique tours and career presentations with our benefactor, Bridgestone/Firestone.

The summer program culminates in an educational trip to one of the major cities in the United States or Canada. Some of the previous trip destinations outside of Ohio have been: Washington D.C., Florida, Massachusetts, Texas, Tennessee, and Toronto. Students discover various cultural, social, and historical lessons on these excursions. All classes, field trips, and activities throughout the summer are designed to prepare students for the upcoming school year and reinforce the importance and accessibility of a college education.

The University of Akron  *  Firestone Fellows
Strive Toward Excellence Program
55 Buckingham Center  *  Akron, OH 44325-7910  *  330.972.6819

**Background**

**Program Objectives**

**Program Requirements**

Twenty students are selected each year from various Akron area schools to be inducted into STEP. They must meet the following criteria to gain consideration to become a Firestone Fellow:

- enrolled in the sixth grade (seventh grade considered if opening is available)
- interest/desire to obtain a college education
- demonstrate successful academic abilities
- completion of student and parent/guardian application
- obtain favorable recommendations from designated school personnel and individuals of their choice
- completion of a student and parent/guardian face to face interview
- meet federal income and/or are "first generation" college students (neither parent has earned a Bachelor degree).

**Summer Component**

**Academic Component**

During the academic year, students return to their regular schools and extensive follow-up is provided. School visitations are made each grading period by the Program Coordinator and Academic Advisor to review students’ academic and social progress. Tutorial and enrichment opportunities are provided to further enhance academic progress and success.

In addition, a series of mandatory workshops during the year are provided for the “Firestone Fellows” and their parents. The workshop topics are: Study Skills, Effects of Peer Pressure, Media Influences, Internet Safety, Self-Development, Communication, and Career Awareness.

Academic year activities include field trips, cultural excursions, recreational and volunteer activities. These activities are provided to the students and, where applicable, to their parent, as well. There is no financial cost for program participants.

**Staff**

Deborah Stone, Coordinator
Candice Glenn, Academic Advisor
Shannon Skelton, Data Base Specialist
Coleen Daniels Curry, Director of Academic Achievement Programs
**Mission Statement**

Academic Achievement Programs is dedicated to the mission of preparing students for success in higher education. It provides academic, social and cultural experiences for students from grades 6 through 12. Through five distinct programs it expands and enhances the academic instruction, and adds value to the development of students through an intensive summer component and full academic year activities. These experiences are intended to empower students to make good decisions at home, in school and personal relationships, which will improve their high school graduation rates and facilitate their successful admission to and graduation from post secondary educational institutions.

**Vision**

**V:** View each participant as capable of achieving a college degree with appropriate guidance.

**I:** Involve each participant in academic experiences which improve skill levels.

**S:** Support the personal growth and development of each participant.

**I:** Intellectually stimulating challenges.

**O:** Opportunities for leadership and encourage personal and group integrity.

**N:** Never negotiate when it comes to honesty and respect of self and others.

**Funding Sources**

- Firestone Trust Fund
- The University of Akron
- The Department of Agriculture