

## **University of Houston**

### **HB 1172 Timely Graduation Report**

According to HB 1172, the president of the University of Houston shall provide to the Board of Regents a report regarding the institution's efforts in encouraging timely graduation of its undergraduate students. Below, each of the five areas of interest to the state has been addressed.

#### ***Ensure that undergraduate students graduate in a timely manner***

In FY 2004, the University of Houston convened, for the first time, the Enrollment Management Task Force (EMTF) to address such issues as student admissions, retention and graduation rates. During the first year, the EMTF worked with the UH Undergraduate Council and Faculty Senate to develop new freshman admissions criteria, which were implemented for the first time in Fall 2006. In FY 2006, the EMTF finalized an on-time graduation agreement with undergraduates, proposed a stricter course drop policy to the Undergraduate Council, and developed the JUMP program, through which FTIC freshmen receive a head-start on their college education by completing six credit hours in the preceding summer (142 students participated for the first time in summer 2006.) All of these initiatives were implemented in FY07 in addition to the opening of a new Welcome Center which gives students easy access to the registrar, the admissions office, financial aid, financial services and academic advising.

During FY 2008, the University of Houston addressed student retention and graduation through the reorganization of freshman orientation, the merging of the University Studies Division (USD) and Scholars' Community to become Undergraduate Scholars, the creation of standard 9-hour course blocks that are required of Undergraduate Scholars during their first semester, the hiring of additional advisors, and the continuation of the exploration and development of additional incentives for timely graduation. These efforts complement the university's existing academic and retention programs that promote timely graduation, including national honor societies, study abroad opportunities, and distance education offerings. The university also has an extensive Writing Center and a Center of Academic Support and Assessment, which provides small group and individual tutoring services. Additional tutoring and mentoring are also provided to Undergraduate Scholars who participate in the College Success Program, the first year experience program of the University. To assist the undeclared students in choosing a major, Undergraduate Scholars also organizes the "Major Selection Fair" each fall semester where all colleges will be at one place to discuss with students the various options for a major. These programs complement the many programs also offered by the colleges to retain and graduate their students.

Finally, the University of Houston enrolls a significant number of transfer students from community colleges each year. To pave the way for their transition, UH has implemented joint admissions agreements with each of the member institutions of the Gulf Coast Community College Consortium, which includes all of the community colleges in the Houston metropolitan area. Special scholarships are also awarded to transfer students to provide additional financial assistance so students may not need to work as much and can concentrate more on their studies to ensure timely graduation. In FY 2008, UH also embarked on a four year grant with the Achieving the Dream organization to work on "Transfer Student Success" which creates opportunities of pre-advising on-site at the community colleges for potential transfer students, more timely and transparent transfer credit evaluation system, and a transfer student orientation

program. New retention programs for transfer students will also be explored in 2008-2009 and will begin implementation in 2009-2010.

***Ensure that undergraduate students do not attempt an excessive number of semester credit hours beyond the minimum number required to complete the students' degree programs***

Information on degree requirements can be found in the university's online catalog. Information on the SCH cap has been communicated to faculty, staff, and students through informational meetings and through print and website postings. Notices are generated electronically to the students who are over the cap, will go over the cap in the subsequent semester, or are within 30 hours of the cap, in order to continuously advise the students of their status. In addition, the university has implemented a stricter drop policy that establishes a limit of six course drops per student for their entire academic career. From monthly meetings with all lead advisors of the colleges, bi-monthly meetings with all academic advisors, listserv messages for all advisors, and daily communications to advisors on enrollment issues, the University continues to communicate to advisors to work with students on proper course selection, remind students of all pertinent policies regarding the enrollment cap, and inform students of new policies from the university and state levels regarding their academic career.

***Provide academic counseling concerning timely graduation***

Academic counseling is one of the cornerstones of timely graduation. Recognizing this, the University of Houston established the Advising Coordinators Team (ACT) in FY 2005 to make policy recommendations that enhance the quality of advising on campus. In addition, Undergraduate Scholars established an Academic Advising Certification Program, which all academic advisors must complete. This is the first program of its kind in Texas and has garnered support from many colleges. In addition, this program was an award recipient in 2005 from the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA). In FY 2008 the University hired additional advisors as part of the plan to improve student retention and graduation. Advisors will be trained to work with students about timely graduation and course selection, and to emphasize the financial incentives for students for timely graduation including the graduation pledge, scholarship programs and tuition rebates. As part of the Achieving the Dream grant, a pilot project of 6 academic advisors were hired in fall 2008 to be trained and deployed to selected community colleges beginning late fall. These advisors will work in tandem with the community college counselors to ensure community college transfer students will be selecting the proper courses for future transfer, thereby ensuring timely graduation.

***Develop an online student degree progress report which compares the courses taken and credit received by a student to the courses completed and needed for degree and graduation requirements for each academic term***

In spring 2007 the student services component of the PeopleSoft management information system was brought on-line. Within this component, a degree audit program and advising program will be available for all students so that they can check their progress online for their graduation plan. Fourteen of the University's more than 100 majors went-live on December 7, 2007 as a test of the system. All majors went live by Fall of 2008. Currently, academic advisors are using the system to work with students on their course selection and graduation progress discussion. The system should be available for student access by Fall 2009.

***Implement tuition policies that encourage timely graduation***

The University of Houston participates in the state's \$1,000 tuition rebate program and the B-on-Time Loan Program. We have also developed our own "contract with students" program for FTIC freshmen. Like the two state programs, this one provides students with financial incentives to graduate in a timely manner. Students who sign the contract and complete 30 hours after the first year, 60 hours after the second year, and 90 hours after the third year toward their declared major will receive scholarships during the following years of \$500, \$1,000 and \$1,500 respectively. The JUMP program for FTIC's, offering a two-for-one tuition structure, also assists students with tuition while providing them with a jump-start. In 2008, the regents adopted a new tuition and fee policy for incoming in-state freshmen at UH from families with an annual income of \$30,000 or less. Called the "Cougar Promise," the program calls for UH to cover all tuition costs beyond what the student receives in financial aid, provided the student is eligible to receive federal financial aid. Information on these programs is mailed to all freshmen upon their acceptance into the University. These programs are also stressed during all freshman orientation sessions. In addition, colleges work with students and conduct workshops at the college or department levels to encourage students to take advantage of all these incentives.

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***Ensure that undergraduate students graduate in a timely manner***

In FY 2004, the University of Houston convened, for the first time, the Enrollment Management Task Force (EMTF) to address such issues as student admissions, retention and graduation rates. During the first year, the EMTF worked with the UH Undergraduate Council and Faculty Senate to develop new freshman admissions criteria, which were implemented for the first time in Fall 2006. In FY 2006, the EMTF finalized an on-time graduation agreement with undergraduates, proposed a stricter course drop policy to the Undergraduate Council, and developed the JUMP program, through which FTIC freshmen receive a head-start on their college education by completing six credit hours in the preceding summer (142 students participated for the first time in summer 2006.) All of these initiatives were implemented in FY07 in addition to the opening of a new Welcome Center, which gives students easy access to the registrar, the admissions office, financial aid, financial services and academic advising.

During FY 2008, the University of Houston will address student retention and graduation through the reorganization of freshman orientation to require all students to participate, the merging of the University Studies Division (USD) and Scholars' Community to become Undergraduate Scholars, the creation of standard 9-hour course blocks that will be required of Undergraduate Scholars during their first semester, the hiring of additional advisors, and the continued exploration and development of additional incentives for timely graduation. These efforts will complement the university's existing academic and retention programs that promote timely graduation, including national honor societies, study abroad opportunities, and distance education offerings. The university also has an extensive Writing Center and a Center of Academic Support and Assessment, which provides small group and individual tutoring services. Additional tutoring and mentoring are also provided to Undergraduate Scholars who participate in the College Success Program, the first year experience program of the University.

At the college level, many programs are in place to assist students in their transition from high school to college and become successful college graduates. The Academic Achievers Program, part of the Center of Mexican American Studies, is one of the 2005 Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's Star Award recipients. The Cullen College of Engineering provides academic and financial support to increase opportunities for students with diverse backgrounds through PROMES (Program for Mastery in Engineering Studies). The College of Natural Science and Mathematics has the Scholars Enrichment Program, which, in partnership with the Houston Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation, promotes academic enhancement and retention of undergraduate students through a series of coordinated recitation workshops. The Bauer College of Business also has the Bauer Experience, which helps to prepare students for the real world of business. The Experience combines online work, traditional classes, workshops and leadership activities to instill business ethics in students, help them develop communication skills and inform their decisions about career paths. As part of the Experience, students are assessed for BBA Basics and the Bauer Code of Ethics and must sign up for a Business Writing Evaluation

before filing a degree plan. The Bauer Experience was recognized as one of the twelve finalists of the 2007 Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's Star Award.

Finally, the University of Houston enrolls a significant number of transfer students from community colleges each year. To pave the way for their transition, UH has implemented joint admissions agreements with each of the member institutions of the Gulf Coast Community College Consortium, which includes all of the community colleges in the Houston metropolitan area. Special scholarships are also awarded to transfer students to provide additional financial assistance so students may not need to work as much and can concentrate more on their studies to ensure timely graduation.

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***Provide academic counseling concerning timely graduation***

Academic counseling is one of the cornerstones of timely graduation. Recognizing this, the University of Houston established the Advising Coordinators Team (ACT) in FY 2005 to make policy recommendations that enhance the quality of advising on campus. In addition, the Office of Undergraduate Academic Development and Retention established an Academic Advising Certification Program, which all student advisors must complete. This is the first program of its kind in Texas and has garnered support from many colleges. In addition, this program is an award recipient in the 2005 National Academic Advising Association (NACADA). In FY 2008 the University will hire additional advisors as part of the plan to improve student retention and graduation. Advisors will be trained to work with students about timely graduation and course selection, and to emphasize the financial incentives for students for timely graduation including the graduation pledge, scholarship programs and tuition rebates.

***Develop an online student degree progress report which compares the courses taken and credit received by a student to the courses completed and needed for degree and graduation requirements for each academic term***

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***Implement tuition policies that encourage timely graduation***

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During FY 2007, the University of Houston will continue to address student retention and graduation. Areas to be explored include flat-rate tuition, a math placement test for all incoming freshmen, a new first year experience program, and changing the course schedule so that it better serves the needs of non-traditional students. These efforts will complement the university's existing academic and retention programs that promote timely graduation, including national honor societies, study abroad opportunities, distance education offerings, and the UH Scholars' Community, which provides three distinct programs for retention and graduation. The university also has an extensive Writing Center and a Center of Academic Support and Assessment, which provides small group and individual tutoring services.

At the college level, many programs are in place to assist students in their transition from high school to college and become successful college graduates. The Academic Achievers Program, part of the Center of Mexican American Studies, is one of the 2005 Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's Star Award recipients. The Cullen College of Engineering provides academic and financial support to increase opportunities for students with diverse backgrounds through PROMES (Program for Mastery in Engineering Studies). The College of Natural Science and Mathematics has the Scholars Enrichment Program, which, in partnership with the Houston Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation, promotes academic enhancement and retention of undergraduate students through a series of coordinated recitation workshops.

Finally, the University of Houston enrolls a significant number of transfer students from community colleges each year. To pave the way for their transition, UH has implemented joint admissions agreements with each of the member institutions of the Gulf Coast Community College Consortium, which includes all of the community colleges in the Houston metropolitan area.

***Ensure that undergraduate students do not attempt an excessive number of semester credit hours beyond the minimum number required to complete the students' degree programs***

Information on degree requirements can be found in the university's catalog, both in print and online. Information on the SCH cap has been communicated to faculty, staff, and students through informational meetings and through print and website postings. In spring 2006, a written reminder of the policy was sent to all faculty, staff, and students. Notices are also generated electronically to the students who are over the cap, will go over the cap in the subsequent semester, or are within 30 hours of the cap, in order to continuously advise the students of their status. In addition, the university is implementing a stricter drop policy that establishes a limit of six course drops per student for their entire academic career.

***Provide academic counseling concerning timely graduation***

Academic counseling is one of the cornerstones of timely graduation. Recognizing this, the University of Houston established the Advising Coordinators Team (ACT) in FY 2005 to make policy recommendations that enhance the quality of advising on campus. In addition, the Office of Undergraduate Academic Development and Retention established an Academic Advising Certification Program, which all student advisors must complete. This is the first program of its kind in Texas and has garnered support from many colleges. In addition, this program is an award recipient in the 2005 National Academic Advising Association (NACADA). In FY 2007 the University will hire additional advisors as part of the plan to improve student retention and graduation. Advisors will be trained to speak to students about timely graduation and to emphasize the contract with students and scholarship program.

***Develop an online student degree progress report which compares the courses taken and credit received by a student to the courses completed and needed for degree and graduation requirements for each academic term***

Currently, the University of Houston does not have an online student degree progress report program. However, we have been working over the past several years to implement the PeopleSoft management information system. The student services component of the system is scheduled to be completed by spring 2007. Within this component, a degree audit program and advising program will be available for all students so that they can check their progress online for their graduation plan.

***Implement tuition policies that encourage timely graduation***

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***Ensure that undergraduate students graduate in a timely manner***

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In the spring of 2006, the EMTF will concentrate on developing a comprehensive retention program for the university. Areas that will be discussed include: mentoring, advising, course linking, study skills, freshmen 101 programs, freshmen orientation, transfer student orientation, core completion incentives, incentives for retention, a summer college program, course scheduling, and cohort programs. The efforts of the EMTF complement the university's existing academic and retention programs that promote timely graduation. These include national honor societies, study abroad opportunities, distance education offerings, and the Scholars' Community, which provides three distinct programs for retention and graduation purposes: the Scholars' Prep class (for freshmen), Scholars Plus (for sophomores), and Upper Division Scholars (for juniors and seniors). The university also has an extensive Writing Center and Center of Academic Support and Assessment, which provides small group and individual tutoring services.

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written reminder of the policy will be sent to all faculty, staff, and students. In addition, the Enrollment Management Task Force has been working with various policy-making bodies to recommend a stricter drop policy and to create guidelines for advising students in their choice of programs and courses.

***Provide academic counseling concerning timely graduation***

Academic counseling is one of the cornerstones of timely graduation. Recognizing this, the University of Houston conducted a study on the current status of advising in summer 2005, which led to the establishment of the Advising Coordinators Team (ACT). The ACT consists of all chief academic advising officers of undergraduate programs and other key advising officials. The mission of this team is to make policy recommendations that enhance the quality of advising on campus. In addition, the Office of Undergraduate Academic Development and Retention has established an Academic Advising Certification Program, which all student advisors must complete. This is the first program of its kind in Texas and has garnered support from many colleges. Central to the work of both the ACT and the Office of Undergraduate Academic Development and Retention is providing students with the advising and other support they need to complete their degrees in a timely manner with a minimum of excess courses.

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