

University of Houston-Downtown
HB 1172 Timely Graduation Report

According to HB 1172, the president of the University of Houston-Downtown 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 have been addressed.

Ensure that undergraduate students graduate in a timely manner

It is not always clear or predictable as to why students leave college prior to completion of degree. While there is a tendency to equate early departure with "flunking-out" the majority of students who leave are in good standing. At the University of Houston-Downtown, over eighty percent of the first-time-in-college (FTIC) students are not represented in a graduating class within six years. Approximately half of these students are identified by the Coordinating Board as enrolled or graduated at another institution. Similarly, over sixty percent of all new entering UHD undergraduates are transferring from other institutions. With that in mind, the following are new efforts designed to help improve the retention rates and timely graduation of UHD students.

1. The freshman admissions application deadline has been moved from August 1st to July 1st. This will allow students and UHD staff more time to register for classes, address financial aid matters, purchase books, and make necessary arrangements prior to the first day of classes. Many students encounter problems as a result of applying late and missing the financial aid and class registration priority deadlines.
2. Recruitment efforts are focusing on encouraging students to apply for admissions and student financial aid earlier. The campus will use for the first time the Texas Common Admission Application this coming fall semester and plans to take use the new electronic transcript system being developed statewide to help admit students earlier.
3. A coordinated study between Enrollment Management staff and faculty teaching English courses 1300, 1301, and 1302 is being conducted beginning this fall semester which is designed to determine when and why students are dropping out or performing poorly in those classes. The survey will help determine causes cited by students that are non-academic, those resulting from the quality of instruction, or problems due to the lack of academic preparation of students. The results will be used to implement appropriate corrective actions.
4. While UHD remains committed to its "Open Admission" policy, plans are to increase emphasis on informing high school students of the importance taking pre-college preparation courses. New publications will encourage students to take

- recommended core courses and will inform them of the level of preparation needed to succeed at UHD.
5. UHD provides matching grant awarded to Project Grad students and will use the funds as an incentive for encouraging greater college preparation and timely applications. High school juniors and seniors participating in the Project Grad programs who wish to be considered for UHD matching grants will sign contracts agreeing to meet the new expectations.
 6. This coming year the campus plans to offer a three day summer orientation programs to assist entering freshmen with weak academic records. The students will be invited to participate in a comprehensive orientation summer session where they will receive one-on-one academic counseling, basic study and learning skills, information regarding the availability of tutorial and academic support services, meetings with faculty and administrative staff, and will receive assistance in resolving problems that would hinder their successful introduction to college.
 7. In an effort to increase the number of students who graduate within six years, academic advisors will meet with students who have completed over 100 units to encourage and help expedite their graduation date.
 8. Students who do not return after the first year will be identified and efforts will be made to contact them to determine the reasons for not returning and where possible help will be offered to facilitate their return to UHD. Students enrolled at community colleges will be encouraged to return to UHD to complete their bachelor degrees. Plans are to seek funds for scholarships and access to desired majors will also be used to encourage their interest in returning to UHD.
 9. Financial difficulties are the major reasons given by college students for not returning to complete their degree. A major review of all financial aid policies and practices, information system, and processing of awards is being conducted to help streamline and improve the financial support provided to students. We have initiated changes in the PowerFAIDS system which will expedite fund distribution, and have expended the communication capabilities. We are implementing an earlier financial aid packaging and award schedule and will review the packing practices to see if we can spread the grant funds among more students. Students will be encouraged to use the new E-Z financial aid form which will help facilitate the process.

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

A new section to the 2005-2006 UHD Catalog headed Tuition for Excessive Undergraduate Hours warns undergraduate students that they “may be charged a tuition rate not to exceed that charged nonresidents, if they are a resident of Texas and the number of hours required for

completion of their undergraduate degree is in excess by at least 45 hours. Details on this law are available from the Registrar's Office.”

In addition, an informational page has been created that explains the various regulations that impact students’ tuition. That page is found in the UHD Registration Bulletin, available both online and in print, and as a web link located on high traffic pages on the UHD website, including the Admissions page, Registration page and the Campus Information Board, an electronic bulletin board for students. A flier with this same information is being made available to students at Admissions, Financial Aid and various advising offices.

Provide academic counseling concerning timely graduation

The university’s academic deans have held extended discussions about the timely graduation requirements set forth in H.B. 1172 and how information about these requirements can best be incorporated into the advising process. An effort has been made to make all faculty members aware of these new requirements. UHD academic advisors have been briefed on these changes so that they will be able to provide accurate information to students.

The UHD Advising Center has begun to inform students about “excessive undergrad hours” in these ways:

- To notify undeclared students who seek advising at the Academic Advising Center about the 30 and the 45 hour rule.
- To post flyers in Information Center, Office of Admissions, Office of Records, and on the closed circuit TV “Campus Information Board.”
- To email every registered student with 60 hours at the beginning of each semester.
- To notify all newly declared students at their [degree granting] College Orientation.

The university’s academic administrators and advisors will continue to explore ways of helping students to complete the coursework needed for graduation in a timely manner. One current policy that will be reviewed is the university’s repeat rule policy that permits students to repeat courses they have already passed and replace the grade originally earned with the one earned when they retook the course.

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

UHD is in the final stages of implementing a degree audit/progress tracking system called Curriculum and Program Planning (CAPP). A module of Banner, UHD’s student information system, CAPP will allow students and their advisors to track progress toward the students’ educational goals. In addition to seeing how the courses completed by students meet their degree criteria, CAPP will indicate which courses are not used by the degree program and display total hours attempted and earned both at home and in transfer.

UHD’s implementation of CAPP will include a program for allowing freshmen and sophomores to track their progress through the general education core, a stumbling block for many students who have not yet declared their majors.

The CAPP implementation, an 18-month project, is currently being tested live with students still taking their general education core and is due to be released in early 2006 to the campus at large.

Implement tuition policies that encourage timely graduation

As an incentive for timely graduation, the University of Houston-Downtown participates in the state's \$1,000 tuition rebate program and the B-on-Time Loan Program. As a disincentive for taking excessive hours, the university charges premium tuition for students who exceed the cap on developmental education courses, who take the same course more than two times and those who exceed the 45 hour cap.