

University of Texas at Arlington
Timely Graduation Report
November 26, 2008

1. To ensure that undergraduate students graduate in a timely manner:
 - All colleges and schools were asked to reduce, where possible, their undergraduate degree plans to 120 hours. Those colleges or schools with undergraduate degrees exceeding 120 hours had to submit justification to the provost for approval.
 - Graduation in 4 years is stressed at orientation; UT Arlington has a special website devoted to this issue (<http://www.uta.edu/uac/graduation4/on-time-graduation-guide>).
2. To 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:
 - Students are sent a variety of warnings as they approach the 45/30 hour limit (and the 99 hour limit at the PhD level).
 - A UT Arlington policy states that the institution can charge out-of-state tuition once the limit is surpassed.
 - UT Arlington has implemented the 6 W limit rule and the impact of this rule should be apparent this year.
3. To provide academic counseling concerning timely graduation:
 - Counseling and academic advising encourage timely graduation.
 - A new emphasis has been placed on professional advising; colleges and schools are replacing faculty advisors for freshman and sophomores with full time advisors.
4. To 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:
 - This reporting module is currently in place. UT Arlington is also investigating a system to allow students to use their existing credits to predict time to degree in other majors. Presently, students who change majors frequently experience an increase in their time to degree because they did not understand how their completed courses would be counted in their new degree program.
5. To implement tuition policies that encourage timely graduation:
 - UT Arlington offers flat-rate tuition that is capped at 12 hours. Thus, students who take for example, 15 hours pay the same tuition as 12 hours of coursework. This encourages full-time enrollment and motivates students toward a timely graduation.
 - In addition to the tuition rebate program specified in Texas Education Code 54.0065, an expanded tuition rebate program is available to UT Arlington students. This plan provides a \$2000 tuition rebate for progress toward timely graduation. The plan details are:

If all the requirements listed below are met, a \$500 per year (\$2,000 maximum) On-Time Graduation Tuition Reduction will be provided. The reduction will be credited to a students' account at the beginning of the following fall term with any remaining credit mailed after the term begins: (1) enroll in an undergraduate program; (2) complete at least 14 units in fall and spring regular session, for a combined 28 units during the regular sessions; (3) maintain a 2.5 GPA.



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To: Janet Beinke
Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

From: Ronald Elsenbaumer *Ronald L. Elsenbaumer*
Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Subject: Timely Graduation Report for UT Arlington

Date: November 1, 2007

The University of Texas at Arlington provides the following report addressing critical steps being taken to ensure timely graduation for our students.

1. To ensure that undergraduate students graduate in a timely manner.

Multiple policies, procedures and practices have been implemented to assist the diverse student population at UT Arlington to graduate in a timely manner. In particular, we have:

- restructured tuition pricing such that it encourages students to take and complete a maximum number of required credit hours per semester;
- implemented a new enhanced student information system;
- instituted more aggressive course drop policies (per SB 1231);
- taken a more proactive approach to advising; and
- implemented mechanisms to identify and assist students at risk.

Recognizing that UT Arlington's student body is composed of both traditional students as well as a significant number of part-time students and students who are employed for more than 20 hours per week, our practices are designed to encourage timely graduation for all students, regardless of their circumstances. How each of these initiatives is structured to assist UT Arlington students to graduate in a timely manner is outlined below.

2. To 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.

UT Arlington, like all state institutions, has fully implemented state requirements designed to ensure that students do not enroll in excessive hours. For example, we have implemented the state requirement limiting the number of dropped courses, the number of hours a student may take beyond the degree requirements without paying non-resident tuition, and the number of times a student may repeat a course. We have also implemented local policies that encourage shorter time-to-graduation by reducing many degree plans to the minimum 120 hours, where possible. We also provide a tuition rebate for students who enroll in consecutive semesters at full-time status and make good academic progress toward their degree.

Be A Maverick.™

3. To provide academic counseling concerning timely graduation.

The most effective tool for ensuring timely graduation from UT Arlington is academic advising that is proactive, supportive, and accurate. From the moment students arrive for freshman orientation until the time they graduate, students are advised of the importance of taking a full course load, of remaining in classes and not dropping them (seeking tutoring or other student support as appropriate), and of staying on track to graduate in four years. During the University's required orientation, the students are advised of the commitment that the University makes to them to graduate in four years. We also have the students sign a banner noting that they are part of the class to graduate four years hence (e.g., those entering this fall will identify as members of "Class of 2011"). We believe that such an act – though symbolic – is a powerful reminder of a fundamental expectation shared by University, the students, and their families: that we expect them to graduate in four years.

We also make a wide variety of advising materials available to reinforce our "Graduation in 4" initiative. For example, this year we have provided all students and advisors with a manual that stresses the importance of graduating in four years (available online at <http://www.uta.edu/uac/graduation4/on-time-graduation-guide>). Moreover, we have a website listing policies dedicated to assisting students to graduate in four years: <http://www.uta.edu/uac/graduation4/graduation-policies-and-procedures>.

To enhance continuity between the spring and fall semesters, we have moved the annual pre-registration for the fall semester from June to early April. Doing so will provide students an additional six-week window during which they can receive academic advising in the previous spring semester, prior to leaving campus for the summer.

To help students assess their academic progress, we recently implemented mid-semester progress reports. These reports provide freshman, undeclared students, and those defined as "at-risk" with a mid-semester grade so they can gauge their performance and so that advisors can intervene in situations where the students are under-performing.

One additional effort implemented last year is known as the PASS program (<http://www.uta.edu/uac/uac/?c=Potential-for-Academic-Success-PASS>). This is a required program for freshman who performed poorly during their first semester. These students are required to take a course which teaches study skills, time management skills, and skills critical to college success.

4. To 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.

UT Arlington is making significant use of technology to provide students with greater access to information about their progress toward earning their degree. We have recently completed the implementation of a new student information system which provides students with on-demand access to degree plans called UMAPs. The UMAPs show the courses completed as well as the courses remaining to be completed. All academic advisors currently have access to UMAPs and can review them with students

during advising sessions. By the beginning of the Spring semester 2008, students will have direct access to their UMAP 24-7.


We have also automated the process of applying for graduation. Students are encouraged to apply earlier, thereby providing an early opportunity to review their degree-seeking status to determine if necessary courses remain to be completed. Early review provides advisors with an opportunity to correct student course schedules prior to the start of their final semester.

5. To implement tuition policies that encourage timely graduation.

The flexibility permitted by deregulated tuition enabled us to continue our policy implemented the previous year, which structured our tuition rates so that we offer a more attractive tuition cost for students enrolled full-time. Under this plan, the tuition rate per credit hour is graduated, with students who take more hours paying a lower rate per SCH. Hours in excess of 14 are at no additional charge. In addition to tuition discounting beyond 14 hours, we also continue to provide a tuition credit toward the next academic year for students who are enrolled full-time for two consecutive long semesters. Together, these programs are intended to encourage students who were previously part-time students to carry a full load of courses and, thereby, graduate more quickly. The plan has realized a modest shift in undergraduate students taking more than 12 credit hours. Future tuition will be structured in a manner that provides students with more incentives to attend full-time and to link consecutive semesters of full-time enrollment.

MEMORANDUM

TO: Janet Beinke
Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

FROM: Dana Dunn 
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

SUBJECT: **Timely Graduation Report**

DATE: November 22, 2006

The University of Texas at Arlington has taken the following steps to ensure timely graduation for students.

- (1) Using tuition to enhance graduation. The flexibility permitted by deregulated tuition enabled us to structure our tuition rates so that we offer a more attractive tuition price for students enrolled full-time. The tuition rate per credit hour is graduated, with students who take more hours paying a lower rate. Hours in excess of 14 are at no additional charge. The intent here is to encourage students who were previously part-time students to carry a full load of courses and, thereby, graduate more quickly. We also offer a tuition credit toward the next academic year for students who are full-time enrolled for two consecutive long semesters.
- (2) Using technology to enhance graduation. For years, UT Arlington's student information system inhibited our ability to effectively communicate with students and to provide them with timely information. Over the past 18 months we have completed the implementation of a new student information system (MyMav) that permits us to provide students with more timely information and to more intentionally provide them with notices and information. For example, the new system provides a feature called UMAP that allows a student, at a moment's notice, to determine the status of their degree plan, to view the hours earned, and the hours remaining. Students also have the ability to select other majors to determine the consequences of switching from one field of study to another. Finally, this system allows us to push advising-related reminders and notices to students via their student portal.

- (3) Using policies to enhance graduation. During the past year, UT Arlington amended its policy related to dropping classes. Students entering Fall 2006 are limited to 15 hours of dropped courses over the course of their academic career. The policy requires that before dropping a class, a student is required to meet with an academic advisor to learn about the consequences of dropping such as the impact of progress toward the degree, financial aid, and the ability to enter subsequent courses which use the dropped course as a prerequisite. An additional policy implemented this fall requires full-time freshmen who earn below a 2.0 g.p.a. to take an academic skills course during the subsequent semester as a condition of remaining enrolled at the university.

- (4) Proactive advising focused on timely graduation. Our advisors are trained to focus their time with students on promoting the benefits of timely graduation.

In addition to the efforts described above, we continue with a wide range of efforts that have proven successful in the past. Students who have not entered a major by their sophomore year are sent specific communications related to the need to select a field of study. Additionally, students who are entering their senior year are reminded of the university's excessive hours policy. Finally, we continue to enhance and support a wide range of academic support services.

DD/cf

xc: James D. Spaniolo, President

**The University of Texas at Arlington
Graduation Rates Task Force Final Report
June 1, 2005**

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Introduction

As educational policy-makers begin to address issues of student persistence, success and national graduation rates, The University of Texas at Arlington elected to increase attention to its retention practices, success initiatives, low graduation rates, and length of time-to-degree imperatives by convening a Graduation Rates Task Force (GRTF) in September 2004. There are numerous external explanations for students not attaining a degree including economic circumstances, family obligations, and quality of college preparation prior to entrance, to name a few. However, institutional factors along with state and federal policy decisions also influence student success and timely degree completion. The Task Force primarily directed its energy on examining those institutional factors that could potentially impact graduation rates. Specifically, the charge to the GRTF was to consider and focus on ways the institution could decrease the time-to-degree for our undergraduates and to understand methods and practices that promote and increase graduation rate outcome. As such, this report synthesizes the objectives, findings, considerations and recommendations of the GRTF.

It is implicit but useful to clearly state that recommendations for future actions to improve retention and graduation rates are consistent with the values of the University on academic achievement and intellectual development. Improvement in academic standards and graduation rates are mutually reinforcing.

Framework:

National, State and Local Issues Related to Graduation Rates

Nationally, there has been a steady increase in college enrollment over the past 10 years. However, national graduation rates have failed to keep pace. Nearly a third of first-year college students do not return for a second year. The national four-year graduation rate is 37 percent, the five year graduation rate approximately 52 percent, and the six year rate is 63 percent. The median institutional graduation rate is 32 percent (Carey, 2004). In "One Step from the Finish Line," Carey, Senior Policy Analyst for the Education Trust, (2005a) states

Every year, more than one million first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students begin their undergraduate careers at four-year colleges and universities with every hope and expectation of earning a bachelor's degree. Of those students, fewer than four in 10 will actually meet that goal within four years; barely six in 10 (57 percent) will make it out in six years.(p.1)

Furthermore, the African American and Latino student graduation rate is below 50 percent.

In an attempt to provide higher education institutions and the public with a measure for comparison among institutions, The Education Trust created a web-based data tool called College Results Online (www.CollegeResults.org, 2005). It permits a comparison of graduation rates for any four-year college or university with similar institutions, based on 11 factors that are statistically related to graduation rates. College Results Online shows that very similar institutions often have very different graduation rates.

In "Measuring Up 2004," the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education State Report Card on Higher Education showed that 74 percent of freshmen at four-year colleges and universities in Texas return for their sophomore year. The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education awarded Texas a grade of "C" for the completion measure of the report card, noting that there has been substantial improvement in the proportion of students earning a certificate or degree in a timely manner over the past decade. First-time, full-time students completing a bachelor's degree within 6 years of college entrance is up from 44 percent a decade ago to 49 percent in 2004, but Texas still ranks below the national rate.

According to Carey (2004), the U.S. has made no progress over the past 10 years in college attainment rates compared with other developed countries. This clearly has consequences for the American economic outlook. Likewise, the state of Texas has outlined the economic fallout of fewer degreed workers and through

its “Closing the Gaps” initiative is attempting to mitigate the impact (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2000).

The implications of low graduation rates for individual students is significant in that those with bachelor’s degrees will earn almost twice as much per year as those with only a high school diploma. People with a four-year degree or higher now earn much more relative to high school graduates than they did 30 years ago, and the gap increases with the level of the degree (Carey, 2004). For higher education institutions, the implications are also significant as legislators begin challenging them to demonstrate their efficiency in educating students, by way of performance and accountability measures. Universities that fail to demonstrate progress could receive less funding.

In the state of Texas, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) included time-to-degree considerations and suggests “incentives to encourage institutions to structure offerings in ways that students can take the classes they need” (Texas Guaranteed Student Loan, 2004, p.2) thereby encouraging students to complete their degrees more quickly.

The Education Trust, College Results Online data for 2003 shows UT Arlington enrollment at 15,281 undergraduates, with 27.1 percent of students classified as Underrepresented Minority, a median SAT of 1070, and 23.3 percent of students receiving Pell grants. THECB data (University of Texas System Board of Regents, 2004) shows Full-time, First-time Degree Seeking Freshmen Graduation Rates for 4 years at 14.5 percent (1999 cohort) and for 5 years at 29.5 percent (1998 cohort). THECB data also shows that the 6 year graduation rate has increased 6.25 percent from 30.6 percent (1995 cohort) to 36.8 percent (1997 cohort). Nevertheless, the Education Trust College Results Online information shows that in comparing UT Arlington’s graduation results with 15 similar institutions, UTA lands in the bottom quartile; ranked 13th.

Proactively Addressing These Issues: **UTA's Graduation Rates Task Force**

Clearly, the impact of low graduation rates raises serious questions for policymakers, university administrators, faculty, staff, and ultimately is of concern to the students who attend UTA. Problems emerging from low graduation rates and length of time-to-degree include failure to meet the needs of our students, loss of public support, accountability and funding issues, financial and physical resource inadequacy, and compound the inability of our state and nation to keep pace with the global economy. Despite this knowledge, ACT (2005) reports that the results of a survey of officials at more than 1,000 two-year and four-year colleges and universities reveal a lack of plans or goals to improve retention and degree completion rates.

Within the culture of evidence that promotes continuous improvement, UTA embarked on a mission to increase graduation rates, pay more attention to the policies which ensure student success, and develop methods for supporting student achievement. The Graduation Rates Task Force was convened in September 2004, and met through May 2005 to review relevant issues and concerns. Careful consideration was given to the composition of the Task Force to reflect the diversity of stakeholders. Representation from faculty, students, and professional staff provided a multidisciplinary approach and enhanced expertise to bring to bear upon the challenge. Materials investigated by the GRTF included research reports, data, books and articles, interviews, surveys, and previous studies.

Five lines of inquiry developed as broad categories influencing graduation rates:

1. **Research on Student Graduation Success Factors and Identification of Best Practices;**
 - a. *Objective:* to investigate what is known about student persistence and retention, and research best practices that ultimately lead to higher numbers of students graduating and doing so in a timely manner.
2. **Identification and Evaluation of Current Resources;**
 - a. *Objective:* to research what resources/services UTA departments and academic units provide that support graduation in 5 years or less, and discover the resources/services that UTA students find helpful to them in their path toward graduation.
3. **Identification of Department and Faculty Practices;**
 - a. *Objective:* to research and identify departmental and faculty practices that affect student success, retention, graduation and time-to-degree issues.

4. **Identification and Evaluation of Administrative/Process Barriers;**
 - a. *Objective:* to identify administrative and institutional process barriers that have potential impact on student persistence, retention and graduation rates.
5. **Data Analysis;**
 - a. *Objective:* to collect and review data pertinent to retention and graduation and consider additional data that might be useful to collect and analyze.

The Task Force was divided into five sub-committees whose members were asked to gather information and evidence in each of these inquiry areas, as well as provide discussion points, communicate their findings, and prepare a sub-committee report for inclusion in a preliminary report to the Provost in January 2005. The 'consideration' sections in the subcommittee reports contained both long-term and short-term strategies for effecting change in the desired graduation rate and time-to-degree outcomes. Elaboration and refinement of initial findings and considerations, along with the addition/development of some other strategies continued throughout spring 2005, and are the foundation of this report.

Available Data

While UTA has never before delved into graduation-specific data to the extent this Task Force has, there were several high-impact data sets that informed the work of this committee:

A. National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)

UTA students reported significantly less interaction with faculty members outside of class, and lower rates of participating in enriching experiences than students in nationwide comparison groups.

Results from the 2004 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) Benchmark report indicates that UTA lags behind the national norms in categories of “Active and Collaborative Learning” and “Student-Faculty Interaction” (see Table 1).

Table 1: Summary of 2004 NSSE Data for UTA*

	First-Year Students	Score Difference	Senior Students	Score Difference
Active and Collaborative Learning				
UT-Arlington	36.9	-5.4	46.5	-4.9
National	42.3		51.4	
Student-Faculty Interaction				
UT-Arlington	27.9	-5.4	34.3	-9.6
National	33.3		44.0	

* Values in this table represent a benchmark score based on weighed means and rescaled from 0-100.

Seniors gave significantly lower ratings than comparison seniors regarding the contribution of their college experience to their knowledge, skills and personal development (writing, speaking, critical and analytical thinking).

B. Student Experience Survey (1998)

Characteristics of students who do not persist indicate that the majority of students leave within two years of their original enrollment; they have earned fewer than 18 SCH's; and 45 percent leave with GPA's of 2.49 or lower (Note: A survey of students who do not persist was last conducted in 1998, and programs have changed significantly in the last 7 years)

C. College as Seen from the Rear-View Mirror of Non-returning Students

Dave Norton, an assistant for Marketing's Mark Peterson, (personal communication, May 28, 2005) called all 141 phone numbers from the 1998 study of non-returning students and actually talked to some of these non-returning students. While the results need more analysis, a quick review suggests that few eventually earned bachelor's degrees anywhere. Some of the respondents' answers suggested a nomadic approach to higher education ("I thought I would try things over at UNT" or "I went over to TCC to get some hours"). This issue seems to be a cultural one, in that these students 7 years ago tended to view UTA as mainly the "low-cost provider of higher education." Without UTA having other meaningful distinctions for these students at that time, the attachments between these students and UTA were relatively weak.

The results of survival analysis from the 141 non-returning students suggests a small, but noticeable effect for a positive relationship between credit hours earned and early resumption of studies at UTA. This implies that UTA would receive a small lift in enrollment by speeding the accumulation of hours for students, as some of the "drop-outs" with more hours would more likely convert themselves to "stop-outs", and return more quickly to UTA

D. Graduation Initiative Survey

The Graduation Initiative Survey was developed by the Best Practices and Department and Faculty Practices subcommittees of the GRTF, and distributed to Associate Deans and relevant departmental directors. Departmental and faculty practices that affect student success, retention, graduation and time-to-degree issues were also targeted for identification.

Analysis of the Graduation Initiative Survey produced several emergent themes thought to be significant in that both departments and academic units identified them as practices contributing to persistence and graduation.

1. Academic Support: diverse central academic support programs, departmental support programs heavily weighted in the advising arena
2. Publications: numerous types and avenues of publications
3. Programs: department-specific orientations, support of related programs such a leadership development and student associations related to academic interests

E. Other UTA data sources

1. **Employment Status of Full Time Undergraduates Responding to the Spring 2004 Student Affairs Survey**

Forty-two percent (42%) of full-time undergraduates surveyed reported working more than 20 hours per week.

2. Expected Graduation Rate Calculation

In their 2005 monograph, Astin and Oseguera published formulas for institutions to use in calculating expected 4-year and 6-year graduation rates based on characteristics of their incoming freshmen such as high school grade point average, total SAT score, gender and race/ethnicity. The formulas were developed by performing multiple regression analyses on data from almost 57,000 students at 262 institutions across the nation. Astin and Oseguera also investigated the predictive power of variables gathered using the CIRP freshman survey, e.g., parental income and education level, student intent to work off campus, etc. They encouraged institutions to compare the expected and actual graduation rates as an indicator of the extent to which an institution is successful in maximizing the potential of its students.

UTA does not administer the CIRP freshman survey, so the expected graduation rates were calculated using the basic set of variables. SAT score, gender and race/ethnicity were available from the university data base. We determined that high school GPA could be obtained by examining high school transcripts. It was not feasible to manually extract GPAs from the transcripts of all 1500 freshmen in the Fall 2000 cohort, so a sampling strategy was employed. Using the rule of thumb that 25 subjects per variable is desirable for a multiple regression study, we decided on a sample size of 250 because there were 10 variables in the formula (race/ethnicity was coded as a series of seven dummy variables representing various ethnic categories). A larger sample was drawn to allow cases with missing data, high school attendance outside the United States, or previous attendance at another institution of higher education to be dropped. ACT test scores were converted to SAT equivalents using a conversion chart provided by Astin and Oseguera (2005).

The values for each of the 10 variables were averaged across the 250 subjects and the results were multiplied the appropriate weights as specified by Astin and Oseguera (2005). The resulting numbers were summed with the appropriate constant to derive expected values for 4-year and 6-year graduation rates and a 6-year persistence rate (which also includes the percentage of students still enrolled after 6 years). The expected rates and the actual rates are shown in Table 1. It should be noted that Astin and Oseguera found that one of the variables in the additional set, intent to work while in school, impacted probability of graduating in four or six years negatively. The fact that the expected graduation rates we calculated did not take work behavior into account

coupled with the fact that a large proportion of UTA students work off campus, may provide a partial explanation for why the actual graduation rates are so much lower than the rates predicted in this study.

Table 1: Comparison of Expected and Actual Graduation and Persistence Rates

	Expected UTA Rates ¹	Actual UTA Rates ²	Actual National Rates
4 Year Graduation	37.7% (Based on 2000 cohort)	15.8% (Based on 2000 cohort)	36.3%
6 Year Graduation	58.9% (Based on 2000 cohort)	37.5% (Based on 1998 cohort)	57.6%
6 Year Persistence ³	62.3% (Based on 2000 cohort)	46.3% (Based on 1997 cohort)	60.6%

Notes:

- Percentage of UTA entering freshmen in Fall 1997 that graduated from ANY Texas public institution within 6 years is 43.3%
- Percentage of UTA entering freshmen in Fall 1997 that are still enrolled in ANY Texas public institution after 6 years is approximately 18.7%

Note: Since the Graduation Rates Task Force was commissioned, a graduate research assistant was hired to assist IR&P in data collection and analysis for this project.

3. Graduation Rates Student Focus Groups

In an effort to understand the student perspective on barriers to graduating in a timely manner, a series of student focus groups were conducted by members of the GRTF. One qualification for this data should be highlighted; based on difficulties attracting mainstream volunteers, the majority of the focus group sample included students who would be considered highly engaged on campus, such as members of the Student Alumni Association and Student Congress, though the themes throughout all the interviews remained consistent. Many of their comments were exemplified with anecdotal instances, both positive and negative in nature, but overall, the themes consistent.

The majority of the students sampled emphasized the importance of good academic advising in making progress toward graduation. Mainly, students expressed wanting more aid in the **long-term planning** of their time at UTA. For instance, students reported that they struggled with the

¹ Expected graduation rates for UTA were calculated using the HERI formula (revised edition – 2005; authors Astin and Oseguera).

² Source: UTA Fact Book

³ Persistence rates include students who graduated or are still enrolled after six years.

development of a personalized educational “roadmap” of their time at UTA due to difficulties in determining course loads (e.g. what courses to take/not to take together), proper course sequencing (i.e., prerequisite considerations and when courses may be offered), and courses that meets graduation requirements. Students advocated requiring landmark progress checks toward graduation. At minimum, they requested a means of completing on-line electronic degree plan audits for easy access and subsequent follow-up with advisors as necessary. They also advocated for advisor training that included information about departmental courses, frequency of course offerings, prerequisites, and teaching styles of faculty.

Another prominent theme raised by the students was access to information about graduation policies and procedures. Most students reported acquiring information about graduation from a friend rather than staff/faculty of the University. Information received by the University was reported as being acquired too late to correct and allow for the planned graduation. Students advocated more **electronic communication** about graduation policies and procedures, such as 1) targeted emails to students with deadlines and information impacting graduation, 2) on-line tools such as centralized graduation website and personal degree audit capabilities, 3) a more “user-friendly” on-line undergraduate catalog, and 4) electronic access to advisors for basic questions such as a call-in center and on-line chats.

Other interesting streams of conversation developed from financial incentives and course offerings. While students are interested in initiatives that would save them money, many students do not have much information on programs that UTA currently employs or completely understand how some initiatives would impact them (e.g., flat rate tuition, rebates/discounts in light of a desire for freedom to drop classes). In regards to classes, students advocated for a.) diverse offering of times, b.) faculty teaching of important, major-based courses, and c.) computer proficiency be built into each ‘major’ course requirement.

While a case can be made that students may not always be taking responsibility for their own educational process, it is important to consider means to help change the culture of “irresponsibility” and provide easily accessible tools to aid students in their own personal and academic planning.

Recommendations

The recommendations of the Graduation Rates Task Force can be disaggregated into short-range (with focus on doing more with what we have; more assessment, more review, more robust delivery; more full utilization of programs); mid-range (technological and infrastructure improvements that will be available with MyMav and e-culture initiatives); and long-range (culture-shifting transactions).

A. Short Range

- 1. Recommendation: Review early intervention programs for improvement and use multiple approaches to addressing student needs. Construct these programs with a clear understanding of the populations served.**

Rationale: Some early intervention processes and programs are not fully delivered, or at minimum delivered in an efficacious manner. Make specific use of programs developed to meet the specific needs of the diverse populations. It is known that student subgroups have different characteristics and needs, therefore will benefit from different programs and interventions.

Actions:

- Mid-term progress reports could also be evaluated for impact.
- Require more University-wide participation in the College Learning Team database and report*.
- Provide financial support for the continued development of the data collection program of the College Learning Team to further study the patterns of student success.

* The College Learning Team annual report for 2003-2004 (Remmers & Cardell, 2004) provides program description, details on student use, information on general effectiveness, budget details, including cost effectiveness, for many of the major support programs on campus. The programs have been organized under the general headings of Learning Assistance Programs, Developmental Education Programs, Advising and Mentoring Programs, and Admissions and Transition Programs. The College Learning Team annual report does not attempt to identify and describe every retention effort as many UTA colleges have set up additional programs that have a positive impact on student retention in their respective areas.

- 2. Recommendation: Review readmission processes for dismissed students.**

Rationale: Students who leave UTA in good standing but simply do not attend for two long semesters must go through the same application process as all other students.

- First dismissal students with 1-24 grade point deficiencies are automatically readmitted without appeal requirement or other accountability measure.
- Early readmission opportunities for departments lack consistency and accountability.

Action/Status: ➤ In progress; Shannon Williams

3. Recommendation: Consider course scheduling to allow graduation in 4 years

Rationale: Difficult academic scheduling issues, such as non-standard meeting patterns and 'primetime' subsets of the scheduling week may be identified as an obstacle to graduating in a timely manner. Based on student survey showing the number of hours students work, it is likely that the need to work for many of our students conflicts with course availability. Providing a schedule that reflects student demands will improve attendance and faster progress towards graduation.

Action:

- Continuous review of enrollment patterns for schedule preferences.
- Ensure that prerequisites are offered in the appropriate sequence and often enough for students to complete the degree requirements within 4 years
- Convey course scheduling information to advising community through the on-going advisor training program (refer to Long Range: Recommendation 8) for more efficacious advising.

B. Mid Range

1. Recommendation: Support Campus-wide Technological Improvements

Rationale: There are overriding campus technology issues such as multiple information systems that do not provide a holistic view of each student's information. The lack of use of course delivery management systems does not permit for optimum enrollment management at the department level.

Actions:

- Improve technology across the campus, such as computer labs, robust e-mail, course management systems, university classroom support function

- Investigate institutional and/or departmental monitoring and notification of student progress toward graduation (e.g. University of Florida computer tracking system).

2. **Recommendation: Departmental Program Evaluation (Including Prerequisite Checking and Course Sequence Review)**

Rationale: Prerequisite checking and completion is not systematically handled. Departments vary greatly in procedures related to all aspects. Prerequisite checking is deliverable with PeopleSoft and will serve, when activated, as a reinforcing tool for advisors. For the longer term, this may be a first step toward greater use of a technology to better manage enrollment at the departmental level, allowing registration only to those students meeting course or major requirements.

- Actions:
- Rollout and education are currently being planned collaboratively by MyMav SR Module leadership. Status: Departments are currently performing program reviews and in-depth consideration of prerequisite requirements
 - Determine if all academic units provide 4 and 5 year degree plan guidelines
 - Publish 4- and 5-year degree plans. Status: Departments are currently performing program reviews and in-depth consideration of prerequisite requirements and offerings to insure smooth progression, as part of cultural shift to PeopleSoft environment.

3. **Recommendation: Utilize the Advising Degree Audit Functionality of PeopleSoft**

Rationale: An advising degree audit is deliverable with PeopleSoft, and gives UTA the opportunity to actuate this functionality as an advising tool, where the legacy version was limited to degree check-out. In student focus groups, students were requesting this functionality for self-service progress checks.

- Actions:
- Convey degree audit functionality to advising community through the on-going advisor training program (refer to Long Range: Recommendation 8) for more efficacious advising. Status: Rollout and education is currently being planned collaboratively by MyMav leadership, UAC, Office of Records, and Academic Affairs

- Vet communication and training plan through related oversight bodies (UAAC, UTAAA, Associate Deans Council, Graduation Rates Task Force if still commissioned) for fullest impact and participation.

4. Recommendation: Support E-culture Intentional Messaging

Rationale: An intentional communication plan emphasizing messaging through right-on-time delivery to students will emphasize institutional expectations.

Action: ➤ Move to e-culture as quickly as possible. Status: Steering Committee in place with planning documents and business plans for e-culture initiatives developed.

5. Recommendation: Improve On-line Communication for Graduation Information

Rationale: Promotes student self-service and responsibility. Also, in student focus groups, students report the desire for a centralized location for information on graduation policies and procedures and “user-friendly” on-line undergraduate catalog.

Action: ➤ With student input, develop a website for centralized information on how to progress to degree and graduation policies and procedures.

C. Long Range

1. Recommendation: Encourage Institutional Alignment in Student Success Programming and Organization Policies and Procedures

Rationale: Research into what is known about student persistence and retention, and best practices that ultimately lead to higher numbers of students graduating and doing so in a timely manner, resulted in the mention of several programs. Best practices that have proven results on other campuses include orientation programs, freshman seminars for at-risk groups, freshman interest groups (FIG) and learning communities. However, Tinto (2003) cautions against simply adopting “best practices” to patch a problem.

One of the critical pieces to consider from a programmatic perspective is integration of programs across the campus. Attention must be given to institution-wide alignment with regard to effectiveness. Programs and participants must share the same perspective regarding purpose and

student outcomes. Shared purpose, collaboration, depth of pervasiveness and sustainability are among the characteristics of institutional commitment that speak to a culture of accountability. Assessment of student outcomes is a necessary component of program and institutional effectiveness. According to Carey (2005b) institutions that monitor student progress and analyze patterns of student success develop appropriate policies and procedures that encourage graduation. While many UTA first year and student success programs meet the challenge by continued full participation in this regard, not all programs and contributing departments evidence the same level of comfort with this task. The intention of more fully assessing efforts is a key mechanism for strategic improvements and alignment/integration of the first-year focus.

Actions: ➤ Request organizational entities (e.g. Academic Standards Committee) to consider and analyze the potential impact on graduation rates when introducing or changing governing policies.

2. Recommendation: Increase Faculty Engagement with Students

Rationale: Refer to “Available Data: NSEE data” for Student-Faculty engagement data.

Current initiatives on campus that promote active and collaborative learning, such as the Mav Scholars Learning Communities program and the promotion of service learning in courses and leadership programs, struggle to gain faculty support and participation. The Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education Focuses National Learning Communities Institute touts learning communities as “...one of the leading education reform strategies in the United States for improving student retention and academic achievement.” Tinto makes the case that “some researchers have found a link between student participation in learning communities and their likelihood of persisting in higher education” (Carey, 2005b, p. 11).

At UT Arlington, the recent development of learning communities espouses the goal of improving student success. Freshman Interest Groups (FIGS) embedded within the learning communities—Maverick Scholars—which organizes cohorts of students in a set of course they take together and which encourages group study and socialization, boasts a one year retention rate of 75 percent.

Oates and Leavitt (2003) point out that the three components of learning communities: providing an active learning environment, building community; both academic and social, and connecting classroom theory and study to applications in the broader community outside the classroom

provides opportunities to integrate service-learning into the curriculum. Studies show that faculty-student interactions both inside and outside the classroom result in a rich educational experience for students and contribute to improved graduation rates.

- Actions:
- Promote efforts to enhance student involvement in learning and hence student success by rewarding faculty who demonstrate effective instructional improvement strategies.
 - .50 FTE selected to serve on LC advisory board to further faculty development and involvement in program
 - Support and implement Recommendation for the Development of a Center for Teaching Excellence (see Long Range: Recommendation 3) to provide a developmental mechanism.

3. Recommendation: Development of a Center for Teaching Excellence

Rationale: In an effort to improve student learning and enhance the interactions between students and faculty, the Graduation Rates Task Force advocates for the investigation of developing a center for teaching excellence to reinforce engaging pedagogy and student involvement and the use of state-of-the-art instructional technology.

Chickering and Gamson (1991) propose that there are seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. Good practice includes:

1. encouraging student-faculty contact
2. encouraging cooperation among students
3. encouraging active learning
4. giving prompt feedback
5. emphasizing time on task
6. communicating high expectations
7. respecting diverse talents and ways of learning.

A teaching center for excellence will reinforce these principles and help to support faculty in the development of skills and knowledge that would help support these basic practices and will help faculty develop new pedagogical techniques that can support constructivism, collaborative learning, and communities of practice.

Case studies at other colleges and universities also provide significant support for the need to develop new pedagogical techniques and attitudes to improve undergraduate learning (Carey, 2005b). (St. Mary's University in San Antonio, The University of Notre Dame)

At the University of Texas, Uri Treisman has shown how institutions can improve student success rates in gatekeeper courses like calculus by restructuring the course to promote more intensive and collaborative learning among students. These case studies serve to provide evidence that student success can be enhanced with new, innovative pedagogical practices in the classrooms. Faculty development and rewards for innovative pedagogy through a center for teaching excellence can support the engaged learning imperative for student success (Carey, 2005b).

A center for teaching excellence would also serve to support the Mission of the University of Texas at Arlington (2004).

The University prepares students for full, productive lives and informed and active citizenship. To that end, we have developed undergraduate and graduate curricula and classroom practices that engage students actively in the learning process.

In addition, a case can be made that a center for teaching excellence could lend support for a number of Strategic Goals of the University, such as:

- Strategy 1: Closing the Gap in Participation: A. Recruitment and Retention – Faculty Involvement and Student Retention
- Strategy 2: Closing the Gap in Success: A. Integration of Technology into Instruction – Faculty Use of Technology; B. Student-centered Academic Community – Customer Service
- Strategy 3: Closing the Gap in Excellence: A. Excellence of Academic Programs; B. Distinguished Faculty – Faculty recognition and Rewards, Faculty Mentoring, and On-Campus Workshops; C. Community Outreach and Service – Faculty/Staff Community Participation.

Actions:

- Convene an investigating body for a Center for Teaching Excellence.
- In an effort to provide the investigating body a roadmap on where to start their study, the Task Force recommends that they review materials on the Center for Teaching and Learning at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill (2005) provided at <http://ctl.unc.edu>. In particular, under the link “About the Center” there is significant information provided regarding their mission (which is conducive for the culture change suggested by this Task Force) and history providing rich detail on how their center developed and the impact on campus.

4. Recommendation: Mandatory Freshman Seminar

Rationale: College graduates are having a harder time making their way in the world, often leaving college with little sense of what kind of career might interest them. Stressing the importance of career exploration throughout college not just in the senior year is a good strategy for focusing students on a major, and possibly reducing the number of times a student changes majors, enhancing progression to degree (Gore, 2005).

Action:

- Implement a Freshman Seminar with career exploration as part of the curriculum. Include all students classified as Freshmen less than 30 semester credit hours.
- Recruit faculty to lead the freshman. Recruit from the Academy of Distinguished Teachers and other award-winning teaching entities.
- Support and implement Recommendation for the Development of a Center for Teaching Excellence (see Long Range: Recommendation 3) to provide a developmental mechanism.

5. Recommendation: Provide and Communicate Tuition Incentives for Completers

Rationale: Modify behaviors that prolong time to degree. Decrease financial consequences for students.

Actions:

- Offer incentives, rather than nominal rewards for on-time completion, such as instituting a full time tuition cap (at 12 hours), and locking in tuition rates for students maintaining full-time status.
- Develop short-term high impact tuition and graduation incentives, to include 4-year graduation “contracts” (symbolic rather than binding) and other substantial methods that concurrently communicate institutional expectations
- Status: Marketing to bring greater visibility to existing rebate programs per info information below.

- 4.95% tuition increase for students taking 15 SCH reduced to only 1.18% increase for those earning an On-Time Graduate Tuition Reduction
- 8.91% tuition increase for students taking 12 SCH
- 5.00% tuition increase for students taking 9 SCH

- 5.01% tuition increase for students taking 6 SCH
- 5.00% tuition increase for students taking less than 6 SCH

Students who complete at least 15 semester credit hours each Fall and Spring semester while maintaining at least a 2.25 GPA are eligible for an On-Time Graduate Tuition reduction of \$200 per year (\$800 maximum).

6. Recommendation: Change Advising Model to Professional Staff Advisors and Salary Structure to Support

Rationale: High quality professional advising high and high advisor to student ratio are also cited as best practices. Research from ACT (2004) on college retention and graduation suggests that the primary factor directly impacting whether or not a student stays in college and graduates is the quality of the interaction he or she has with a concerned person in the campus community.

Research indicates that student ready access to high quality advising prior to registering and throughout their academic careers is, perhaps, the single most effective strategy in improving academic performance and consequently persistence and graduation rates. Such a robust advising system as we imagine would intersect with and support numerous other initiatives to improve student academic outcomes including, but not limited to: student recruiting and orientation, career planning and placement, interdisciplinary experiences and community building.

There are numerous extant advising models at other institutions that bear further study to identify best practices that may be appropriate to a UTA system. Nevertheless, irrespective of whatever structure or system we would construct, we envision a significant change in institutional culture which would more highly value advising as a primary point of academic contact with students, integrate advisor expertise as part of the essential intellectual resources of the institution and elevate advising from a support service to that of a symbiotic function with that of classroom teaching. “Academic advising is a multidimensional and intentional process, grounded in teaching and learning, with its own purposes, content, and specified outcomes.” (National Academic Advising Association, 2004)

In brief, academic advising is now of such both a cost benefit and a risk to the University that it is critical to invest in development of an integrative vision for advising which is aligned with the University’s planning priorities.

Actions: ➤ Move to a professional staff model of advising in all departments, with faculty serving collaboratively in mentoring

roles. To enable this model to be successful, several key factors must be realized:

- Advising salaries must be adequate to realistically retain professional advisors a minimum of 4-5 years (duration of a college student's tenure at the undergraduate level) and must be more consistent across the platform.
- Expectations of professional advisors must be clearly articulated and assessed.
- Advisor-to-student ratios must be evaluated for consistency and appropriateness
- Assess core competencies at various developmental points
- Link learning outcomes to advising assessment
- Embrace advising as teaching model (Campbell, 2005)

7. Recommendation: Expand and Formalize a Campus-wide Advising Development Program

Rationale: There are significant differences between the roles of a traditional advisor and the roles of an advisor who adopts the strengths-based, talent/development approach. The same approaches that lead to success for students produce similar outcomes for advisors, namely that fully utilizing and capitalizing on strengths and talents will lead to excellence and maximize effectiveness (Anderson & McGuire, 1997).

Actions:

- Investigate options for a formalized, on-going advising development program with existing advising bodies (e.g., UAAC, UTAAA)
- Move from stand alone advisor training curriculum currently offered to a series of developmental events

8. Recommendation: Change Faculty Workload System Allowing Faculty to Average Teaching Loads

Rationale: To increase both aspects of scholarship—teaching and research--simultaneously, it may make sense to allow faculty to average their teaching loads over the semester. For example, if the usual load of formal courses for a faculty member is 2/2, the person may opt to teach 4/0 or 3/1. In this way, faculty may concentrate on developing pedagogy, course content and delivery methods using the newer technologies during the “teaching-intensive” semester; in the alternate semester, focus could be shifted to research, publications, creative projects and grant writing. During the latter semester, faculty may be more able to use libraries,

museums, field sites and to engage in closer collaborations with colleagues both near and far.

Action:

- Conduct a pilot study with selected departments or programs, to have a better estimation of the productivity gains realized through such an effort. In consultation with deans and chairs, volunteer faculty would be allowed to teach on “overload” during the first semester and delineate objectives for research to be conducted during the second semester. Of course, this arrangement may not be feasible for all faculty members since curriculum matters (e.g., course sequence constraints, the progress of dissertations, etc.) may necessitate faculty engagement in teaching during both long semesters. However, teaching load averaging may prove to be the best strategy for some faculty and certain departments at key periods of department growth or program development.
- Encourage Colleges/Deans to review their standards, policies, and missions to define effective instruction and to develop a system of recognition for excellence in teaching and mentoring of students.

9. Recommendation: Developmentally-Focused Orientation Programs

Rationale: Having a developmentally-focused orientation for new students could address institutional expectations and perceptions, through a compelling program mix emphasizing student responsibility for their personal development/career planning, as well as UTA's ability to advance these students on the paths they are choosing.

Actions:

- Design a developmental orientation program that includes programming with multiple points of contact that would support student success and provide a “cognitive map” of the college experience and UTA's expectations.
- Convene an *ad hoc* committee with broad representation to be involved in giving input regarding a new programming model for Orientation
- Mandate attendance at Freshman and possibly Transfer Orientation

10. Recommendation: Graduation-Related Outcome as Part of Unit Effectiveness Plan

Rationale: Linking graduation rate outcomes to UEP's will promote institutional alignment and assist with a more pronounced focus of attention regarding responsibility and ownership. Different academic units have different conditions with respect to retention and graduation. Each unit should evaluate its own needs to identify a graduation-related outcome into its Unit Effectiveness Plan

Action/Status: ➤ Next iteration of UEP will prescribe how departments and academic units need to connect graduation practices and outcomes to unit/institutional effectiveness plans (UEP)

Conclusion

Simply stated, students who succeed in the classroom are indeed, more likely to persist and graduate. (Carey, 2005a) Two perceived factors from the 2004 report produced by the Education Trust (Carey, 2004) emerged as key contributors 1) the institutions worked hard to connect students to campus and 2) the institutions cared about the quality of teaching and learning and actively sought to improve ineffective teachers.

In carrying out the charge to the GRTF to find ways to improve graduation outcome rates, the concept of student success is ever present. Starting with the institutional mission, one can readily determine that while there is a commitment to student success by way of conceptual language such as 'retaining scholars' and 'engaging student actively in the learning process' there is no clearly articulated goal directly related to undergraduate experience. Strategies are apparent with many programs and departmental initiatives in place, however, the basic underlying assumptions (perception, beliefs) regarding student success is not as evident across the institution as desirable. While Graduation rate goals are articulated and communicated, and the means for measuring them in place, there needs to be further degree of commitment regarding the extent the goals are emphasized among the important things to do at UTA. The perception that retention/graduation is a personal job responsibility needs to become compelling for all UTA employees.

Institutional leadership must continue the work of communicating and prioritizing to faculty, staff, students, and outside stakeholders the importance of increasing our graduation rates and decreasing the time to graduation. For example, to what extent is the commitment to student success a criterion in faculty hiring and what message is sent in doing so? If faculty attitude is "sort and select" vs. "all students can succeed" in gatekeeper courses, it will impact student progression. Issues such as trying to match incoming students with the mission of the institution and clearly communicating institutional expectations and values to our students is another protocol that affects institutional culture. Policy enforcement and data dissemination are other artifacts of culture. How much attention and discussion is devoted to student success, retention and graduation compared to other often-dominant campus issues (i.e. research support, budget, and curriculum) by faculty, Deans, staff. Do we effectively use the result of data analysis to inform programming and policy? Intentionality builds community through engagement in the vision and mission of the university, and the culture is supported through actions of accountability.

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Response to THECB Section 1, H.B. 1172

In September 2004 the University of Texas at Arlington elected to increase attention to its retention practices, success initiatives, low graduation rates, and length of time-to-degree imperatives by convening a Graduation Rates Task Force (GRTF). The final GRTF report is attached as a partial response to the directive to report timely graduation efforts. The text of the GRTF report contains numerous lines of inquiry developed as broad categories influencing graduation rates, and also contains recommendations designed to ensure that undergraduate students attain their degree in a timely manner. Specific measures are outlined to promote academic success and retain students through graduation.

Subsequent to the June 2005 release of the GRTF, several recommendations were selected for immediate attention. Below is a summary status report:

Recommendation A1: Review early intervention programs for improvement and use multiple approaches to addressing student needs. Construct these programs with a clear understanding of the populations served.

The following implementation plan is underway; campus-wide participation in the CLT database reporting requirements. Currently, The College Learning Team provides program description, details on student use, information on general effectiveness of many, but not all, student success and retention programs at UTA. To increase the breadth and depth of the CLT, an implementation team has been selected, a one-year timeline developed and process tasks assigned. An on-line survey was deployed mid-October with the expectation that incoming information will provide the basis for formulating a more sophisticated measurement mechanism for **all** identified student success and retention programs with intended outcomes of promoting timely graduation. Funds to undertake implementation of Recommendation A1 of the Graduation Rates Task Force will be budgeted once technical requirements for mandatory reporting for departments and programs is ascertained.

Recommendation A2: Review readmission processes for dismissed students.

Follow-up on this recommendation is presently underway. This encompasses the continuation of reviewing enrollment patterns, and

the evaluation of current dismissal and readmission policies by the offices of Undergraduate Academic Advising and the Office of the Registrar. As part of a new student information system implementation, prerequisite checking for appropriate course sequencing is being built in to the degree audit module of the system. All academic departments are conducting program reviews with in-depth consideration of prerequisite requirements.

Recommendation A3: Utilize the Advising Degree Audit Functionality of PeopleSoft.

As the rollout of this module approaches, a training program for the advising functionality is currently under development. Input from numerous university constituents, including the University Academic Advising Association is being sought and a 'fluid' flowchart is on-line for all parties to provide feedback regarding the process.