

## **The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College Fall 2008 Report on Timely Graduation**

The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College (UTB/TSC) serves a student population with a majority of first-generation and lower income level college students. In fiscal year 2007-2008, more than half (56%) of UTB/TSC baccalaureate graduates were first-generation students. In addition, more than 90% of UTB/TSC students reside in Cameron County, in which the largest city is Brownsville. According to the Census Bureau's 2006 American Community Survey, Brownsville was named the most impoverished city in the nation. Not surprisingly, 40% of part-time students and 59% of full-time students receive Pell. Most UTB/TSC students work as well as attend school, resulting in a large percentage of students (66%) attending college on a part-time basis. Furthermore, as an open access institution, a majority (59%) of UTB/TSC first-time freshmen students were required to enroll in developmental courses in fiscal year 07-08. In effect, the high number of students attending part-time and enrolled in developmental courses result in higher average time-to-degree completion rates. With regard to "full-time" students, 49% of those students enroll for only 12 credits. Given these circumstances, it takes a student who passes all courses in a sequential fashion at least six years to graduate, further affecting timely graduation for UTB/TSC.

Despite the challenges faced by students, many student success indicators have continued to climb at UTB/TSC. Persistence counts for our students. Students are graduating in record numbers at the associate, baccalaureate and graduate level; passing external certification exams well into the 90th percentiles; and increasing their participation in service learning. This success has occurred as a result of a concerted campus-wide effort dedicated to providing high quality higher education to the region.

### **To ensure undergraduate students graduate in a timely manner:**

Multiple initiatives and student support services have been implemented to help our students achieve their academic goals. These efforts have been guided by learning more about our students and adopting best practices.

In consideration of the constraints faced by working students, since 2004, UTB/TSC has utilized the Student Employment Initiative (SEI), which provides students employment opportunities on campus. As a commuter campus, where most students are employed either full or part-time while enrolled, creating jobs on campus enables them to earn money while they learn. In the process, relationships with university faculty, staff, and students are strengthened, adding greater unity to their educational experience. In order to be eligible to apply for employment through the SEI, students must be enrolled for at least 15 Semester Credit Hours and maintain a minimum 2.75 GPA. Participants work a maximum of 20 hours a week in a job related to his or her major field of study. As an added incentive, the hourly wage is \$8.00, which is above the minimum wage rate and is more than what a majority of students would be paid working elsewhere.

Available positions include peer mentors, peer facilitators, lab coordinators, supplemental instruction (SI) leaders, instructor assistants, and research assistants. Positions offered through SEI must meet program expectations and are meant to positively affect the student's learning experience. SEI participants gain critical campus connections, and the university taps into support services for other students by utilizing our own students as mentors and facilitators. The program supports 80 participants per semester with more than 450 students having benefited from SEI. The participants have an average GPA of 3.27 and complete just over 15

semester credit hours. The program has twice been named a Star Award Finalists by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

In fall 2006, to further address the retention rate and time to graduation, UTB/TSC began the *University Scorpion Scholars* (USS) program. The program is designed to attract college-prepared students and fully assist them financially to move efficiently through their undergraduate career. The scholarship is awarded on a yearly basis for up to 115 high school graduates in the top 10 percentile of their class. A total of 301 students have been recruited into the program.

This scholarship covers the cost of tuition and fees, textbooks, and on campus housing for four or eight consecutive fall and spring semesters, allowing scholarship recipients to obtain their associate's or baccalaureate degrees without having to fund the cost of college out of pocket. This scholarship is awarded for as long as recipients maintain certain eligibility requirements such as completing 100% of credit hours attempted. The University Scorpion Scholars is designed to successfully retain students in college by encouraging them to take full advantage of campus resources and opportunities and providing them a program advisor for mentoring and guidance. Service learning opportunities are also provided, allowing students to connect to different aspects of campus life. Opportunities are created to develop leadership through workshops, travel, and special programs and events. Successful retention of the students has been achieved.

In 2007, the University implemented *Imagine College*, a program to scholarship the costs of tuition and fees that are not covered by financial aid for Pell-eligible students who take 15 or more semester credit hours. To remain eligible, students must complete 30 semester credit hours each academic year. After reviewing the first year's data, the University plans to increase the maximum annual family income from \$25K to \$30K to benefit more students.

In what may be a first for a community college district, the Trustees of Texas Southmost College approved scholarship stipends for in-district students who move on to the junior and senior levels of college at UTB. The students are required to take 15 semester credit hours and meet all Satisfactory Academic Progress measures to remain eligible for this assistance. This support helps financially when students have been traditionally paying more for tuition.

**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:**

In an effort to systematically increase student success, in 2007 the campus community worked diligently to review and revise the UTB/TSC policy on Satisfactory Academic Progress, or SAP. The topic was initiated through a faculty workgroup, but quickly took hold in departments across campus as data were gathered and financial implications both to the students and the institution emerged. Because of the way SAP had been previously defined, this fall many students with low GPAs and/or low coursework completion rates were allowed to enroll in fall 2007. As a result, 20% of the 10,548 student (non-dual undergraduate) population enrolled with a GPA of less than 2.0 and/or a course completion rate of less than 70% from the previous spring semester. Data also indicated that while many of the students not achieving at least a 2.0 GPA were dropping and/or failing an excessive number of semester credit hours, they were still allowed to continue on this path for three or even four semesters with the previous SAP policy. The combined effect of low academic performance and poor completion rates has propelled these students into an almost irrecoverable downward spiral.

In addition to the academic problems that students face when failing or withdrawing from classes, there are also serious financial consequences. Pell grants have failed to keep up with

the actual costs of attending college, meaning that financially needy students are borrowing more each year in order to attend college. The loan amount for UTB/TSC students is now, in fact, larger than the amount distributed annually through Pell. In the 2007-2008 Academic-Year, \$20.8 million was distributed in Pell grants while the total amount borrowed by students was 28.2 million. For many students who are not succeeding in their courses, both their educational and financial futures become quite grim. As they continue to receive loans while making little forward progress toward a degree, they amass high amounts of debt. With a low GPA that continues over multiple semesters, these students have little likelihood of ever recovering. Most in this situation will drop out for good, taking their accumulated debt with them, with no credential to show for the time they spent at the University.

The revision of the UTB/TSC SAP policy is intended to guide students toward graduation more rapidly while curbing excessive loan indebtedness. Because of the large percentage of UTB/TSC students receiving Pell funds, it was useful to examine the federal financial aid model, as it relates to SAP as well as in making our final policy revision. Federal financial aid policy requires each institution set a minimum GPA requirement and a fixed percentage of hours completed. Federal financial aid policy also limits the number of hours students can attempt before running out of aid to 150% of the hours required for their degree. Seeking to simplify and communicate expectations to students, one SAP definition was set in place that would set guidelines for both receiving financial aid and for being in good standing at UTB/TSC. With the newly revised SAP, if a student takes 30 hours a year and completes 70% of those hours, a student will successfully complete approximately 126 hours in 6 years, about the total number of hours needed to complete a bachelor's degree.

The results of the implementation have been predominantly encouraging:

For Fall 2007, students attempted 108,475 semester credit hours (SCHs) and completed 89,683 hours or 82.7% of them with a passing grade. This number is up from the 79.7% completed in the previous fall term and represents about 130 more students completing than in the previous fall.

Students also withdrew from 5,356 hours or 4.9% of the hours that they enrolled in. This number is about ½ of the number of hours withdrawn from (10,491, 9.5%) in Fall 2006 or the equivalent of 499 fewer students.

By the same token, even though students persisted to complete their courses, failing grades were reported for 13,370 hours or 12.3% of the hours that they enrolled for as compared to 10.8% in the previous fall. This represents about 135 more students than in the previous fall term.

The gain in credit hours completed indicates the success that the University wanted. This fall additional support programs have been put in place this fall to increase the likelihood of students completing their courses and maintaining a successful academic status.

The six-drop policy was implemented in fall 2007 as required by the state. Freshmen were advised of the policy through multiple media and advising.

#### **To provide academic counseling concerning timely graduation:**

UTB/TSC recognizes the pivotal role of academic advising and counseling in improving the time to graduation. In order to better serve our growing student population, the Academic Advising Center hired ten new advisors in Fall 2006, increasing the number of academic advisors on campus to 27. Hiring these ten new advisors has reduced the student/advisor ratio considerably. In addition, the Advising Center has been decentralized with advisors located not only at the main center but at the School of Education, the School of Business, the College of

Science, Math and Technology, the College of Applied Technology and General Studies, and the College of Liberal Arts.

The academic advising department is now housed in a newly renovated former student center. This new location allows students enough privacy to speak openly with their advisors.

Academic advisors are also available to meet with students at information centers in high volume areas on campus. The increase in advisors has allowed the Advising Center to plan more outreach events and workshops to better serve and inform the student population. A case management approach to advising is in place, which assigns each student an advisor based on his or her major, promoting efficiency in the utilization of campus staff and increasing student understanding and knowledge of course options and degree plans.

To meet the academic challenges faced by students enrolled in developmental courses, UTB/TSC has incorporated a new STING (Students Together, Involving, Networking and Guiding) Success Series Peer Mentor Program. The program offers entering freshmen a retention support program that helps students navigate the college environment, take advantage of campus resources and opportunities, and increase student confidence in their ability to succeed academically. Students who are not in compliance with the Texas Success Initiative policy and are not considered college ready must enroll in the STING program and meet with a peer mentor, staff instructor, and tutor in a lab on a weekly basis. In these labs, a college success curriculum covers various topics that will teach students strategies to succeed in college as well as provide tutoring in their specific developmental area(s) of need, which could include reading, writing or math. Outside of the lab, peer mentors and tutors are available to work with students on an individual basis during office hours. The program shows success for students who participate and complete the recommended support efforts. In Fall 2007, of the STING cohort (295 students) who actively participated 71% met SAP, attempted 13.8 hours and earned 11.9 hours; in contrast, of the STING cohort (174) who did not participate only 20% met SAP and completed an average of 6 credits earned.

Many student support programs have been established to help incoming students smoothly transition and successfully meet the academic rigors of postsecondary education. The Student Support Services/ASPIRE program provides opportunities for academic development, assists students with basic college requirements, and serves to motivate low income, first-generation college students towards the successful completion of their postsecondary education. The ASPIRE program provides grant aid to participants who are receiving Federal Pell Grants. The goal of ASPIRE is to increase the college retention and graduation rates of its participants and facilitate the process of transition from one level of higher education to the next. Services provided by the program include academic tutoring and mentoring, financial and personal counseling, academic advisement, registration assistance, career counseling, financial assistance in the form of grants and scholarships, access to computer labs and free printing services, and academic and personal development seminars. To continue receiving services, ASPIRE members must maintain good class attendance, a 2.0 GPA, and attend advisement, tutoring, and other special appointments and seminars throughout the semester.

**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.**

Technological advances have allowed the university to increase efficiency and ease of communication as well. TALISMA, a nationally acclaimed tool for electronic mass and target

group communications, has been implemented, enabling university staff to provide systematic and helpful information to current and prospective students via email, chat, and ground mail. In addition, an instant messaging "CHAT" is now in place to connect current and prospective students with all of Enrollment Planning functions.

To ensure timely graduation of its students, in 2007, UTB/TSC hired a consultant to set up an online degree audit program of which 100% has been completed for the 2006 and 2007 catalogs. Entering the data for the degree requirements from the 2008 catalog is in progress.

**To implement tuition policies that encourage timely graduation:**

In fall 2005, UTB/TSC implemented a flat-rate tuition and mandatory fees initiative for students taking more than 15 credits. This was expected to encourage students to enroll in additional hours while lessening the effect of rising tuition costs on the average student credit load. In fall 2006 and fall 2007, 591 and 752 students respectively availed themselves of the flat-rate tuition policy by enrolling in more than 15 credit hours. In fall 2008, 687 students are expected to complete their load of 16 or more semester credit hours. Given the new SAP policy, this number, even though less than fall, shows that students are being prudent in their course selection while still pushing themselves to do more.

As previously stated, the in-district scholarship for juniors and seniors taking 15 SCHs was established in fall 2007.

The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College provides dual enrollment services for school districts throughout our service area. The students and their parents become more familiar with expectations of university-level coursework. By completing these courses while still in high school, these students save their parents thousands of dollars in tuition and fees. There is evidence that these students are attending the University and achieving at a higher rate than students who did not take advantage of dual enrollment.

**Conclusion**

The highlights of the endeavors described above show that all students are welcomed, expected to achieve, and supported in their efforts by faculty and staff. Graduates from the University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College are achieving their goals and using their achievements to impact this region as well as throughout the nation.

## **The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College Fall 2007 Report on Timely Graduation**

The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College (UTB/TSC) serves a student population with a majority of first-generation and lower income level college students. In fiscal year 2006-2007, almost three quarters of UTB/TSC baccalaureate graduates were first-generation students. In addition, more than 90% of UTB/TSC students reside in Cameron County, in which the largest city is Brownsville. According to the Census Bureau's 2006 American Community Survey, Brownsville was named the most impoverished city in the nation. Not surprisingly, 40% of part-time students and 59% of full-time students receive Pell. Most UTB/TSC students work as well as attend school, resulting in a large percentage of students (62%) attending college on a part-time basis. Furthermore, as an open access institution, a majority of UTB/TSC first-time freshmen students were required to enroll in developmental courses in fiscal year 06-07. In effect, the high number of students attending part-time and enrolled in developmental courses result in higher average time-to-degree completion rates. With regards to "full-time" students, a majority enroll for only 12 credits. Because of this, it takes a student who passes all courses in a sequential fashion at least six years to graduate, further affecting timely graduation for UTB/TSC.

Despite the challenges faced by students, many student success indicators have continued to climb at UTB/TSC. Students are graduating in record numbers at the associate, baccalaureate and graduate level; passing external certification exams well into the 90th percentiles; and increasing their participation in service learning. This success has occurred as a result of a concerted campus-wide effort dedicated to providing high quality higher education to the region. However, in contrast to the successes of many students, almost 20% of UTB/TSC students are not making progress towards graduation and are behaving in ways that are counterproductive to their academic success. At the end of the spring 2007 semester, 17% (1,805) of 10,347 non-dual enrolled undergraduates had a GPA of less than 2.0. In addition, during the same semester, 24% of non-dual undergraduate students completed less than 70% of hours attempted.

In an effort to systematically increase student success, the campus community has worked diligently to review and revise the UTB/TSC policy on Satisfactory Academic Progress, or SAP. The topic was initiated through a faculty workgroup, but quickly took hold in departments across campus as data were gathered and financial implications both to the students and the institution emerged. Because of the way SAP had been previously defined, this fall many students with low GPAs and/or low coursework completion rates were allowed to enroll in fall 2007. As a result, 20% of the 10,548 student (non-dual undergraduate) population enrolled with a GPA of less than 2.0 and/or a course completion rate of less than 70% from the previous spring semester. Data also indicated that while many of the students not achieving at least a 2.0 GPA were dropping and/or failing an excessive number of semester credit hours, they were still allowed to continue on this path for three or even four semesters with the previous SAP policy. The combined effect of low academic performance and poor completion rates has propelled these students into an almost irrecoverable downward spiral.

In addition to the academic problems that students face when failing or withdrawing from classes, there are also serious financial consequences. Pell grants have failed to keep up with the actual costs of attending college, meaning that financially needy students are borrowing more each year in order to attend college. The loan amount for UTB/TSC students is now, in fact, larger than the amount distributed annually through Pell. In the 2006-2007 Academic Year, \$21 million was distributed in Pell grants while the total amount borrowed by students was \$25.5 million. For many students who are not succeeding in their courses, both their educational and financial futures become quite grim. As they continue to receive loans while making little forward progress toward a degree, they amass high amounts of debt. With a low GPA that continues

over multiple semesters, these students have little likelihood of ever recovering. Most in this situation will drop out for good, taking their accumulated debt with them, with no credential to show for the time they spent at the University.

The revision of the UTB/TSC SAP policy is intended to guide students toward graduation more rapidly while curbing excessive loan indebtedness. Moreover, the previous SAP policy, which worked on a multi-level semester credit hour scale, was confusing for faculty, staff and students both to understand and apply. So the Academic Standards and Student Records Committee recommended a simple 2.0 minimum GPA for students to meet the standard for satisfactory academic progress. In addition, the Committee also recommended tighter standards for students on probation, including retaking failed courses and reduced course loads.

Because of the large percentage of UTB/TSC students receiving Pell funds, it was useful to examine the federal financial aid model, as it relates to SAP as well as in making our final policy revision. Federal financial aid policy requires each institution set a minimum GPA requirement and a fixed percentage of hours completed. Federal financial aid policy also limits the number of hours students can attempt before running out of aid to 150% of the hours required for their degree. Seeking to simplify and communicate expectations to students, one SAP definition was set in place that would set guidelines for both receiving financial aid and for being in good standing at UTB/TSC. With the newly revised SAP, if a student takes 30 hours a year and completes 70% of those hours, a student will successfully complete approximately 126 hours in 6 years, about the total number of hours needed to complete a bachelor's degree. A more detailed explanation of the UTB/TSC revised SAP policy can be found in Appendix A.

It is anticipated that the new SAP guidelines will have a positive impact on student enrollment in the long term. The policy will be more easily understood by faculty, staff, and students, and therefore easier to apply fairly. Intervention measures will be implemented earlier in students' academic careers to prevent them from ending up hopelessly in debt. The SAP policy will also increase capacity in high-demand courses. Each semester, freshman and sophomore level courses fill to capacity during early registration, restricting many students from enrolling for required courses. With clear criteria in place regarding completion rates, students will be less likely to register for unnecessary classes or for courses from which they are likely to withdraw. This will free up class space for students who are motivated as well as academically and mentally prepared to learn. Thus, these students will be more likely to successfully complete course requirements and continue on to earn their college degree.

In conjunction with the revised SAP policy's intent to expedite time to graduation and lessen student loan debt, in fall 2005, UTB/TSC implemented a flat-rate tuition and mandatory fees initiative for students taking more than 15 credits. This was expected to encourage students to enroll in additional hours while lessening the effect of rising tuition costs on the average student credit load. In fall 2006 and fall 2007, 591 and 752 students respectively availed themselves of the flat-rate tuition policy by enrolling in more than 15 credit hours. This 27% increase in fall to fall numbers reflects the effectiveness of the new tuition policy in raising the average number of credits taken by students per semester.

In fall 2006, to further address the retention rate and time to graduation, UTB/TSC began the University Scorpion Scholars (USS) program. The program is designed to attract college-prepared students and fully assist them financially to move efficiently through their undergraduate career. The scholarship is awarded on a yearly basis for up to 115 high school graduates in the top 10 percentile of their class. There are 172 students currently participating in the USS program. This scholarship covers the cost of tuition and fees, textbooks, and on campus housing for four or eight consecutive Fall and Spring semesters, allowing scholarship recipients to obtain their associate's or baccalaureate degrees without having to fund the cost of college out of pocket. This scholarship is awarded for as long as recipients maintain certain eligibility requirements such as completing 100% of credit hours attempted. The University Scorpion Scholars is designed to successfully retain students in college by encouraging them to

take full advantage of campus resources and opportunities and providing them a program advisor for mentoring and guidance. Service learning opportunities are also provided, allowing students to connect to different aspects of campus life. Opportunities are created to develop leadership through workshops, travel, and special programs and events.

In order to improve student retention and graduation rates for students struggling academically, UTB/TSC instituted an Early Alert Program in 2005. The program is a collaborative effort between faculty and the Advising Center. This retention initiative aims to identify first and second year students who are academically at risk during the first weeks of the fall and spring semesters. Faculty are asked to identify and refer students who have demonstrated poor academic progress due to excessive absences, low test/quiz scores, incomplete/missing assignments, weak skills, poor classroom behavior, or personal issues. The counselor and student collaborate on an "action plan" specifically addressing identified concerns in the referral. A follow-up session is scheduled to discuss student progress or difficulties that may have arisen in carrying out the "action plan." Through the students' interactions with faculty and counseling staff, they learn what actions need to be taken to achieve academic success and are provided an early opportunity to take full advantage of campus resources. Students benefit from increased interaction with faculty and campus support services and become aware that there is a genuine concern about their lack of success and a strong desire to remedy the underlying problem.

In consideration of the constraints faced by working students, for three years UTB/TSC has utilized the Student Employment Initiative (SEI), which provides students employment opportunities on campus. As a commuter campus, where most students are employed either full or part-time while enrolled, creating jobs on campus enables them to earn money while they learn. In the process, relationships with university faculty, staff, and students are strengthened, adding greater unity to their educational experience. In order to be eligible to apply for employment through the SEI, students must be enrolled for at least 15 Semester Credit Hours and maintain a minimum 2.75 GPA. Participants work a maximum of 20 hours a week in a job related to his or her major field of study. As an added incentive, the hourly wage is \$8.00, which is above the minimum wage rate and is more than what a majority of students would be paid working elsewhere. Available positions include peer mentors, peer facilitators, lab coordinators, supplemental instruction (SI) leaders, instructor assistants, and research assistants. Positions offered through SEI must meet program expectations and are meant to positively affect the student's learning experience. SEI participants gain critical campus connections, and the university taps into support services for other students by utilizing our own students as mentors and facilitators.

Many student support programs have been established to help incoming students smoothly transition and successfully meet the academic rigors of postsecondary education. The Student Support Services/ASPIRE program provides opportunities for academic development, assists students with basic college requirements, and serves to motivate low income, first-generation college students towards the successful completion of their postsecondary education. The ASPIRE program provides grant aid to participants who are receiving Federal Pell Grants. The goal of ASPIRE is to increase the college retention and graduation rates of its participants and facilitate the process of transition from one level of higher education to the next. Services provided by the program include academic tutoring and mentoring, financial and personal counseling, academic advisement, registration assistance, career counseling, financial assistance in the form of grants and scholarships, access to computer labs and free printing services, and academic and personal development seminars. Currently, there are 271 ASPIRE participants. To continue receiving services, ASPIRE members must maintain good class attendance, a 2.0 GPA, and attend advisement, tutoring, and other special appointments and seminars throughout the semester.

To meet the academic challenges faced by students enrolled in developmental courses, UTB/TSC has incorporated a new STING (Students Together, Involving, Networking and Guiding) Success Series Peer Mentor Program. The program offers entering freshmen a retention support program that helps students navigate the college environment, take advantage of campus resources and opportunities, and increase student confidence in their ability to succeed academically. Students who are not in compliance with the Texas Success Initiative policy and are not considered college ready must enroll in the STING program and meet with a peer mentor, staff instructor, and tutor in a lab on a weekly basis. In these labs, a college success curriculum covers various topics that will teach students strategies to succeed in college as well as provide tutoring in their specific developmental area(s) of need, which could include reading, writing or math. Outside of the lab, peer mentors and tutors are available to work with students on an individual basis during office hours. Successful completion rate of credit hours for active STING participants have been markedly higher than those students who initially enrolled in STING but did not participate. 417 students actively participated in STING in the fall 2006 term and successfully completed 88.2% of semester hours attempted. Similarly, in spring 2007, 127 students participated in the program and successfully completed 82% of coursework.

As part of a continuing effort to help students feel connected to the campus and local community, UTB/TSC has created the Leadership and Mentorship Program (LAMP). The program creates strong relationships between students and faculty. LAMP provides structured mentoring of new students by pairing each student with a well qualified mentor that acts not only as a role model but also as a resource to that student. Professional leadership workshops are presented by LAMP mentors, university staff and faculty, and outside community leaders. The main goal of LAMP is to increase retention of students by providing incoming freshmen and new transfer students an opportunity to learn from mentors who serve as coaches, role models, and advisors and to enhance their first-year experience to insure that these students are motivated to continue on with their academic career. LAMP is designed to attract and retain students by offering the following: a high quality of campus life; support for academic achievement; opportunities for leadership development; opportunities for social, cultural, and ethical development; support for wellness; and opportunities for career planning.

As a community university on the border, UTB/TSC serves a number of migrant students. To serve this student population, the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) grant was received, which allowed us to implement the program. The goal of the CAMP is to facilitate academic success of first-time migrant freshmen students at UTB/TSC and to assist students in making a smooth transition to university life and its expectations. Services provided by CAMP include peer tutoring and mentoring, outreach, recruitment, academic advisement, and financial assistance. Students eligible to participate must be migrants, seasonal farm workers, or dependents of a migrant or a seasonal farm worker.

UTB/TSC recognizes the pivotal role of academic advising and counseling in improving the time to graduation. In order to better serve our growing student population, the Academic Advising Center hired ten new advisors in the Fall of 2006, increasing the number of academic advisors on campus to 27. Hiring these ten new advisors has reduced the student/advisor ratio considerably. The Academic Advising Center has recently moved to a new location on campus, which has provided more room and more offices to house all the advisors, and, most importantly, has provided the privacy that the students need when they talk to an advisor. In addition, the Advising Center has been decentralized with advisors located not only at the main center but at the School of Education, the School of Business, the College of Science, Math and Technology, the College of Applied Technology and General Studies, and the College of Liberal Arts. Academic advisors are also available to meet with students at information centers in high volume areas on campus. The increase in advisors has allowed the Advising Center to plan more outreach events and workshops to better serve and inform the student population. A case management approach to advising is in place which assigns each student an advisor based on

his or her major, promoting efficiency in the utilization of campus staff and increasing student understanding and knowledge of course options and degree plans. To assist students who are experiencing academic difficulties, an Academic Recovery Plan is currently in place for students on suspension/academic probation in order to encourage remediation and retention.

Technological advances have allowed the university to increase efficiency and ease of communication as well. TALISMA, a nationally acclaimed tool for electronic mass and target group communications, has been implemented, enabling university staff to provide systematic and helpful information to current and prospective students via email, chat, and ground mail. In addition, an instant messaging "CHAT" is now in place to connect current and prospective students with all of Enrollment Planning functions. To ensure timely graduation of its students, this year UTB/TSC hired a consultant to set up an online degree audit program of which 95% and 70% has been completed for 2006 and 2007 respectively. It is anticipated that these technological advances will enhance campus-wide efforts to promote timely graduation and success of UTB/TSC students.

# Appendix A

## UNDERGRADUATE SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PROGRESS

*(Applies to new and returning UTB/TSC students registered for classes in the 2007-2008 academic year)*

UTB/TSC monitors academic progress every fall and spring semester/term to identify those students who are experiencing difficulty with their courses. Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) is based upon two components: GPA and course completion. Academic progress is computed every fall and spring term for every student.

### Minimum GPA Requirements

Students are expected to maintain a level of academic achievement that allows them to meet the grade requirements for graduation (Note: Some Programs of Study may have higher GPA requirements). Students remain in good standing with the university when they maintain a UTB/TSC grade point average (GPA) of **2.0 or higher**. Students who fail to maintain the minimum required grade point average of 2.0 in all work attempted at UTB/TSC will be placed on probation or suspension as appropriate.

### Minimum Course Completion Requirements

Students are expected to **successfully complete at least 70% of the semester credit hours attempted**. This is calculated by evaluating the ratio of cumulative hours attempted vs. earned. Attempted hours are those credits for which a student is registered for on the official record date of each term or session. Earned hours are those credits for which a student receives a passing grade (according to Grade Standards published in the Undergraduate/Graduate Catalog).

### Standards for Satisfactory Academic Progress

**Good Standing:** The Good Standing standard is awarded to students maintaining a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or higher and who maintain a cumulative completion rate of 70% or higher.

**Probation:** If at any time a student's cumulative GPA falls below 2.0 and/or a student's cumulative completion rate falls below 70%, the student is placed on probation. The **conditions of probation** are as follows. Students who do not meet the following conditions will be subject to academic dismissal: Students are limited to registering for 12 semester credit hours and are required to participate in specific programs designed to help them succeed academically.

### First Probationary Term

If at the end of the first probationary term, the student has a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or higher and a cumulative completion rate of 70% or higher, the student is no longer on probation and returns to **good standing** (as defined above).

If at the end of the probationary term, the student does not have both a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or higher and a cumulative completion rate of 70% or higher, the student can continue on **probation** if the term GPA is 2.0 or higher and the term completion rate is 70% or higher.

However, if the term GPA is less than 2.0 and/or the term completion rate is less than 70%, the student will go on **suspension** and will not be eligible to take courses at UTB/TSC for one long term.

**Subsequent Probationary Term**

The same conditions as above will apply to students who are on **probation** for subsequent probationary terms.

**Suspension and Reinstatement:** Upon return from suspension, students will be limited to 7 credit hours, required to meet with an advisor to select appropriate courses, and required to participate in specific programs designed to help the student succeed academically. Students seeking reinstatement must apply for admission with the Admissions Office according to the posted deadlines.

First Academic Suspension – one regular term (excluding summer)

Second and Subsequent Academic Suspensions – two regular terms (excluding summer)

To appeal suspension from the university, students must submit a written appeal (with supporting documentation) to the office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs. The appeal must explain the mitigating circumstances that prevented the student from meeting required academic standards. The student may also be required to present the appeal in person. A decision will be rendered within two weeks; the decision is final.

<b>Strategic Direction (Objective)</b>	<b>Performance Indicator (Measure)</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
Implement the revised Satisfactory Academic Progress policy.		Interim Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, Vice President for Student Affairs, Director of Academic Advising, Director of Financial Aid, Registrar, and Faculty.
	Define and implement an information campaign to inform students of the policy and their status.	Same as above
	Create an interface in Blackboard and Scorpion Online to allow students to check their SAP status on a semester-by-semester basis.	Same as above

	Launch a “Will you be Zapped by SAP?” campaign using the Collegian, Talisma emails, mailers, brochures, phone calls, classroom announcements, and other student-centered initiatives.	Same as above
	Launch an educational campaign for faculty and staff by meeting individually with every department on campus and with staff to inform students of the new policy and to receive feedback and suggestions for improvement.	Same as above
Require a student contract for probationary students	Monitor effectiveness of contract by tracking increased use of the Learning Enrichment Center and the increased access to faculty mentors.	Same as above
Develop an appeal process for students placed on probation	Monitor decisions	Same as above
Monitor the impact SAP will have on students.	Gather the data necessary to track students placed on probation, students suspended, and students returning to good standing.	Institutional Research and Planning
Monitor the drops of students.	Gather the data necessary to track the campus trend for dropping courses.	Same as above
Develop a two-day orientation to educate and inform students about SAP and college readiness. Include an advising and registration component.	Gather the data necessary to track the students who attend, including but not limited to GPA, completion rate, and persistence.	Student Affairs
Develop a semester-long university experience course	Gather the data necessary to track the students who attend, including but not limited to GPA, completion rate, and persistence.	University Experience Task Force
Develop a Sting II course for students with a GPA less than 1.0	Gather the data necessary to track students who attend, including but not limited to GPA, completion rate, and persistence.	Student Affairs
Provide ongoing training and professional development to create a student-centered culture	Conduct a student satisfaction survey measuring the enrollment management functions	Institutional Research and Planning

## **The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College Fall 2006 Report on Timely Graduation**

The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College serves a student population with a majority of first-generation college students. In fiscal year 2004-2005, almost three quarters of our baccalaureate graduates were first-generation students. In addition, 67% of our students are Pell grant recipients. Most UTB/TSC students work as well as attend school, resulting in a large percentage of students (62%) attending college on a part-time basis. Furthermore, as an open access institution, 54.2% of UTB/TSC students were required to enroll in developmental courses in fiscal year 04-05. In effect, the high number of students attending part-time and enrolled in developmental courses results in higher average time-to-degree completion rates. A majority of our "full-time" students take only 12 credits. Because of this, it takes a student who passes all courses in a sequential fashion at least six years to graduate.

Beginning Fall 2005, UTB/TSC implemented a flat-rate tuition and mandatory fees initiative for students taking more than 15 credits. This was expected to encourage students to enroll in additional hours while lessening the effect of rising tuition costs on the average student credit load. In effect, 591 students took more than 15 credit hours, availing themselves of the flat-rate tuition policy and reflecting the effectiveness of the new tuition policy in raising the average number of credits taken by students per semester.

This fall, to further address the retention rate and time to graduation, UTB/TSC began the University Scorpion Scholars (USS) program. The program is designed to attract college-prepared students and fully assist them financially to move efficiently through their undergraduate career. The scholarship is awarded on a yearly basis for up to 115 high school graduates in the top 10 percentile of their class. There are 102 students participating in the USS. This scholarship covers the cost of tuition and fees, textbooks, and on campus housing for four or eight consecutive Fall and Spring semesters, allowing scholarship recipients to obtain their associate's or baccalaureate degrees without having to fund the cost of college out of pocket. This scholarship is awarded for as long as recipients maintain certain eligibility requirements such as completing 100% of credit hours attempted. The University Scorpion Scholars is designed to successfully retain students in college by encouraging them to take full advantage of campus resources and opportunities and providing them a program advisor for mentoring and guidance. Service learning opportunities are also provided, allowing students to connect to different aspects of campus life. Opportunities are created to develop leadership through workshops, travel, and special programs and events.

In order to improve student retention and graduation rates for students struggling academically, UTB/TSC instituted an Early Alert Program in 2005. The program is a collaborative effort between faculty and the Counseling Center. This retention initiative aims to identify first and second year students who are academically at risk during the first weeks of the fall and spring semesters. Faculty are asked to identify and refer students who have demonstrated poor academic progress due to excessive absences, low test/quiz scores, incomplete/missing assignments, weak skills, poor classroom behavior, or personal issues. The counselor and student collaborate on an "action plan" specifically addressing identified concerns in the referral. A follow-up session is scheduled to discuss student progress or difficulties that may have arisen in carrying out the "action plan." Through the students' interactions with faculty and counseling staff, they learn what actions need to be taken to achieve academic success and are provided an early opportunity to take full advantage of campus resources. Students benefit from increased interaction with faculty and campus support services and become aware that there is a genuine concern about their lack of success and a strong desire to remedy the underlying problem.

In consideration of the constraints faced by working students, for two years UTB/TSC has used a Student Employment Initiative (SEI), which provides students employment opportunities on campus. As a commuter campus, where most students are employed either full or part-time while enrolled, creating jobs on campus enables them to earn money while they learn. In the process, relationships with university faculty, staff, and students are strengthened, adding greater unity to their educational experience. In order to be eligible to apply for employment through the SEI, students must be enrolled for at least 15 Semester Credit Hours and maintain a minimum 2.75 GPA. Participants will work a maximum of 20 hours a week in a job related to his or her major field of study. As an added incentive, the hourly wage is \$7.00, which is above the minimum wage rate and is more than what a majority of students would be paid working elsewhere. Available positions include peer mentors, peer facilitators, lab coordinators, supplemental instruction (SI) leaders, instructor assistants, and research assistants. Positions offered through SEI must meet program expectations and are meant to positively affect the student's learning experience. SEI participants gain critical campus connections, and the university taps into support services for other students by utilizing our own students as mentors and facilitators.

Many student support programs have been established to help incoming students smoothly transition and successfully meet the academic rigors of postsecondary education. The Student Support Services/ASPIRE program provides opportunities for academic development, assists students with basic college requirements, and serves to motivate low income, first-generation college students towards the successful completion of their postsecondary education. The ASPIRE program provides grant aid to current ASPIRE participants who are receiving Federal Pell Grants. The goal of ASPIRE is to increase the college retention and graduation rates of its participants and facilitate the process of transition from one level of higher education to the next. Services provided by the program include academic tutoring and mentoring, financial and personal counseling, academic advisement, registration assistance, career counseling, financial assistance in the form of grants and scholarships, access to computer labs and free printing services, and academic and personal development seminars. Currently, there are 275 ASPIRE participants. To continue receiving services, ASPIRE members must maintain good class attendance, maintain a 2.0 GPA, and attend advisement, tutoring, and other special appointments and seminars throughout the semester.

To meet the academic challenges faced by students enrolled in developmental courses, UTB/TSC has incorporated a new STING (Students Together, Involving, Networking and Guiding) Success Series Peer Mentor Program. The program offers entering freshmen a retention support program that helps students navigate the college environment, take advantage of campus resources and opportunities, and increase student confidence in their ability to succeed academically. Students who are not in compliance with the Texas Success Initiative policy and are not considered college ready must enroll in the STING program and meet with a peer mentor, staff instructor, and tutor in a lab on a weekly basis. In these labs, a college success curriculum covers various topics that will teach students strategies to succeed in college as well as provide tutoring in their specific developmental area(s) of need, which could include reading, writing or math. Outside of the lab, peer mentors and tutors are available to work with students on an individual basis during office hours. 417 students actively participated in STING in the Fall 2006 term and successfully completed 88.2% of semester hours attempted.

As part of a continuing effort to help students feel connected to the campus and local community, UTB/TSC has created the Leadership and Mentorship Program (LAMP). The program creates strong relationships between students and faculty. LAMP provides structured mentoring of new students by pairing each student with a well qualified mentor that acts not only as a role model but also as a resource to that student. Professional leadership workshops are presented by LAMP mentors, university staff and faculty, and outside community leaders.

The main goal of LAMP is to increase retention of students by providing incoming freshmen and new transfer students an opportunity to learn from mentors who serve as coaches, role models, and advisors and to enhance their first-year experience to insure that these students are motivated to continue on with their academic career. LAMP is designed to attract and retain students by offering the following: a high quality of campus life; support for academic achievement; opportunities for leadership development; opportunities for social, cultural, and ethical development; support for wellness; and opportunities for career planning.

As a community university on the border, UTB/TSC serves a number of migrant students. To serve this student population, the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) grant was received, which allowed us to implement the program. The goal of the CAMP is to facilitate academic success of first-time migrant freshmen students at UTB/TSC and to assist students in making a smooth transition to university life and its expectations. Services provided by CAMP include peer tutoring and mentoring, outreach, recruitment, academic advisement, and financial assistance. Students eligible to participate must be migrants, seasonal farm workers, or dependents of a migrant or a seasonal farm worker.

UTB/TSC recognizes the pivotal role of academic advising and counseling in improving the time to graduation. In order to better serve our growing student population, the Academic Advising Center hired ten new advisors in the Fall of 2006, increasing the number of academic advisors on campus to 27. Hiring these ten new advisors has reduced the student/advisor ratio considerably. The Academic Advising Center has recently moved to a new location on campus, which has provided more room and more offices to house all the advisors, and, most importantly, has provided the privacy that the students need when they talk to an advisor. In addition, the Advising Center has been decentralized with advisors located not only at the main center but at the School of Education, the School of Business, and the College of Liberal Arts. Academic advisors are also available to meet with students at information centers in high volume areas on campus. The increase in advisors has allowed the Advising Center to plan more outreach events and workshops to better serve and inform the student population. A case management approach to advising is in place which assigns each student an advisor based on his or her major, promoting efficiency in the utilization of campus staff and increases student understanding and knowledge of course options and degree plans. To assist students who are having academic difficulties, an Academic Recovery Plan is currently in place for students on suspension/academic probation in order to encourage remediation and retention.

Technological advances have allowed the university to increase efficiency and ease of communication as well. TALISMA, a nationally acclaimed tool for electronic mass and target group communications, has been implemented, enabling university staff to provide systematic and helpful information to our current and prospective students via email, chat, and ground mail. In addition, an instant messaging "CHAT" is now in place to connect current and prospective students with all of Enrollment Planning functions. SMART registration and E-Advisor are new colleague modules that will benefit our students by improving retention and time to graduation in the very near future.

## **The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College Report on Timely Graduation**

The average credits-to-degree data for The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College (UTB/TSC) graduates reflect the academic profile of its student population. For example, 58% of the students who graduated with a Bachelor's degree in fiscal year 2002-2003 were enrolled in one or more developmental courses at UTB/TSC. On average, these students completed more than 11 credits of developmental coursework as a part of their degree program at UTB/TSC.

In fiscal year 2002-2003, 75.9% of our baccalaureate graduates were first generation students. A majority of these students allocate much of their time to the challenges of managing multiple priorities in addition to schoolwork. As a result, 58% of UTB students attend college on a part-time basis. The large proportion of part-time students results in higher average time-to-degree completion rates.

Sixty-seven percent our students are recipients of Pell grants. Although Pell grants do not cover all costs of attending college (there is a large unmet financial aid need), student needs to take at least 12 credit hours per semester to be eligible for the grant. A large majority of our "full-time" students take 12 credits - and no more, since they cannot afford more. Because of this, it will take a student who passes all courses in a sequential fashion at least six years to graduate. We have implemented a flat tuition and compulsory fees for students taking 15 credits or more, and a work assistance plan for 70 students. A pilot program is being planned for next year for students taking more than 14 hours.

UTB/TSC has formulated a comprehensive advising plan to help student complete their educational goals more efficiently. The new model makes new tools and resources available to students, advisors and faculty to ensure students success. In the last fiscal year alone, 10 new student advisors were hired to improve student academic progress through active interventions and ongoing one-to-one interaction. In fiscal year 2006-07, UTB/TSC plans to add 10 additional advisors to assist students more efficiently and effectively. In the past year, UTB/TSC has implemented Talisma, a nationally acclaimed tool for electronic mass and target group communications. It also has plans to continue development of Degree Audit Report System (DARS) and E-Advisor electronic-advising files system in the current year.

To assist the vast majority of its first-generation students, UTB/TSC has adopted best practices such as freshmen experience courses and peer mentoring programs that help students develop a range of coping skills such as time management, adjustment to college, effective study methods and stress management. This year, UTB/TSC plans to hire 10 undergraduate peer advisors to augment the outreach advising activities and provide hands-on assistance with tutoring, coping skills and degree program planning.

In the past few years, UTB/TSC has developed numerous transfer and articulation agreements with other higher education institutions to eliminate degree program inefficiencies. By allowing seamless articulation of credits and courses, UTB/TSC helps transfer students complete their degree programs in less time without any course duplication. It is expected that all of these measures will translate into higher average course loads, and higher expectations for all time graduation.