

# The University of Texas at El Paso



## University Response to HB 1172: Timely Graduation Report November 26, 2008

Pursuant to HB 1172, this document reports The University of Texas at El Paso's (UTEP) efforts to facilitate undergraduate students' timely graduation.

### **1. To ensure that undergraduates graduate in a timely manner.**

Efforts to enhance students' efficient progress towards graduation are part of the mission of academic affairs, academic support services, and student affairs. Indeed, this is the primary aim of the UTEP Student Success Initiative developed in our 2006 reaffirmation of accreditation process. In addition, UTEP has developed a number of initiatives in cooperation with area school districts and El Paso Community College that reach students from high school through completion of a baccalaureate degree. The following narrative illustrates the comprehensive student success efforts at UTEP:

**1.1 College Readiness Initiative.** Studies show that students who place directly into college-level courses persist and graduate at a higher percentage than students who have developmental non-credit requirements. For this reason, the College Readiness Initiative (CRI) was first implemented in Fall 2005. The CRI is a collaborative effort among UTEP, El Paso Community College (EPCC), and the Region 19 Independent School Districts with the goal of helping high school students become better prepared academically for college-level course work. The components of CRI include an orientation to the ACCUPLACER placement exam; early testing during a student's junior and/or senior years; high school interventions for students who place into developmental courses and, retesting in their subject areas of intervention.

**1.2 New Student Orientation/Enhanced New Student Orientation.** Entering and transfer students are encouraged to attend an orientation prior to their first semester. A variety of orientation sessions are offered, including a one-day transfer student session and a five-day session. At orientation, students are shown the impact on time to graduation of enrolling in 12 as opposed to 15 semester credit hours, and attending or not attending summer school. Financial consequences of the decisions are emphasized.

For the last two years the orientation program has been expanded to include a mandatory math review workshop for students who placed into developmental math courses. This Enhanced New Student Orientation (ENSO) consists of a three-day, six-hour math review conducted by math tutors. After the math review, students retake the ACCUPLACER placement exam with the hope of higher placement in mathematics.

Fifty-six percent (56%) of the 2,045 students participating in this program retested at least one course higher and twenty-eight percent (28%) retested from developmental math to college-level math. This innovative program saves students time and money while accelerating their time to graduation.

**1.3 Course Redesign.** UTEP redesigned math, reading, and writing courses so that first-year students are not delayed in developmental holding patterns. The redesign accelerates students' through developmental courses, enrolling them as quickly as possible into college-level courses, some with academic support. This compact format accelerates time to graduation. The course redesign includes these changes in instructional format, course support, and course options:

### 1.3.1 Mathematics

- **Math compressed sections** are eight-week courses that allow completion of two courses in a single 15-week semester, thereby accelerating their time through the developmental mathematics sequence and into college-level mathematics.
- **MATH 1320 (Mathematics for Social Sciences I) with Math 0120:** Students who place in the upper half of the placement bracket for MATH 0311 and whose major requires MATH 1320 may enroll in MATH 1320 with the support of a mathematics lab, MATH 0120. This combination of academic support (MATH 0120) with the college-level course saves students one entire developmental mathematics class.
- **MATH 1319 (Mathematics in the Modern World)** is a new course appropriate for Education or most Liberal Arts majors. Focusing on conceptual mathematics, MATH 1319 completes the students' core curriculum mathematics requirement.
- **Mastering Developmental Math** is a volunteer summer program that has been offered at no charge to entering freshmen and allows them the opportunity to complete their developmental math sequence. The students use a system called ALEKS and are required to work 14 hours per week on-line. Students must master a topic before moving to the next topic. Students take the ACCUPLACER for placement into the program and retake it once they have completed it. At the end of the program students are placed into their next math course.
- **Math Lecture Courses** are offered using an online homework component. The students use a system called Mathzone to access their homework and gradebook, and for communication with the faculty.

### 1.3.2 Reading & Writing

- **ENGL 0310 Learning Communities:** Sections of developmental reading, ENGL 0310, are linked with reading-intensive courses (e.g., history, sociology) and use the content course text as the reading text to help students improve college-level reading skills while helping them succeed in a core curriculum course.

- Additional sections of ENGL 0310 are taught in compressed eight-week sessions with linked reading-intensive courses to allow students to gain reading skills earlier in the semester for successful application to their linked core curriculum course.
- **ENGL 1311 with ENGL 0111:** Students whose test scores place them in the upper bracket of developmental writing may enroll in college-level English with the support of ENGL 0111, which is a writing workshop with individualized instruction. This combination of academic support (ENGL 0111) with the college-level course saves students one entire developmental writing class, thereby accelerating their time towards their degrees by enrolling them in the college-level required writing class more quickly.

**1.4 Academic Risk Early Intervention System.** In Fall 2008, an early intervention system was piloted in Math 0311 and Engl 0311 classes. The design tested two levels of intervention to see if some early warning signs, such as absences or missed assignments, used as points of intervention by faculty to contact students and encourage their re-engagement would result in higher pass rates in the course. Follow up data collection will include analyzing pass rates and grades both this semester and next.

**1.5 Entering Student Program.** UTEP's Entering Student Program helps first-year students with their transition to the University environment and increases their opportunities for academic success. This program has received state and national recognition, including the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Star Award.

**1.5.1** The required **First-Year Seminar** (UNIV 1301 – Seminar in Critical Inquiry) is a 3-semester-credit-hour core curriculum course that addresses critical thinking, academic success skills, and transitional issues through an academic theme determined by instructors based on their areas of expertise. Each section is taught by an instructional team that consists of the instructor, a peer leader, a librarian, and an advisor. An electronic financial-impact module, created especially for UTEP students, helps students examine ways of paying for college, the long-term cost of not completing a degree or delaying degree completion, and the impact on time-to-degree of part-time vs. full-time employment. A custom-published textbook written specifically for the course provides college-going success strategies and information to help students make decisions that support their progress to a degree.

**1.5.2 Learning Communities** link courses so students are enrolled in two or more classes. The shared enrollment in courses helps students make interdisciplinary connections through assignments that are linked in the learning community courses. Learning communities provide students with academic and social support. The learning communities link core curriculum courses or major-specific courses that satisfy degree requirements for the students enrolled in them.

**1.5.3** The **Student Leadership Institute (SLI)** is designed to develop UTEP students into campus leaders. It consists of two semesters with 120 hours of instruction that include classroom management, campus resources, and cooperative learning as well as experiential learning through on-campus work. SLI graduates serve as peer leaders, orientation leaders, peer tutors, and peer advisors. Former SLI students are found in positions of leadership across campus and are an excellent resource for other students to gain information on navigating the university experience.

**1.6 Welcome Back Miner** program is an effort that crosses all academic colleges. Administered out of UTEP's Enrollment Services, the Welcome Back Miner program encourages students who have stopped-out for one or more semesters to return to UTEP and finish their degrees. Stop-out students are contacted by Enrollment Services and representatives of their academic Dean's office to offer them information, incentives, and referrals that may encourage them to complete their studies at UTEP. These results for the Fall 2007 cohort are evidence of the program's effectiveness:

- Out of 3,317 stop-outs contacted to reenroll for the Fall 2007, 1,218 (36%) reenrolled.
- After 1 year, 1,043 (85%) of the 1,218 who reenrolled were still enrolled at UTEP.
- Of the 1,218 who reenrolled, 120 (9.85%) graduated.

Students are also offered the option of completing the Bachelor of Multidisciplinary Studies degree.

**1.7 Bachelor of Multidisciplinary Studies (BMS).** UTEP's BMS degree provides students with the opportunity to customize their degree plans. It was designed especially for students who have completed a significant number of credit hours in different interest areas, transfer students who have a significant number of semester credit hours, and entering students who want an individualized plan of study not available through traditional degree plans. The degree is especially appealing to students who have accumulated more than 90 semester credit hours in a variety of subject areas, are returning to school after an absence, and are seeking the professional advancement that only a bachelor's degree can provide.

**1.8 Scheduling.** UTEP continues to increase course offerings in the afternoons, evenings, and on weekends to accommodate students. Many courses in the university core curriculum are offered in hybrid format (combining online learning with reduced, concentrated face-to-face sessions), making these courses more accessible. UTEP has also expanded its minimesters and parts-of-terms, providing even greater scheduling opportunities for students. One such example is Summer semester 2008. UTEP offered over 100 more course section offerings to aid students in moving to timely graduation.

**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.**

Specific initiatives include the following:

**2.1 Advising and Financial Aid.** Both the Academic Advising Center (AAC) and the Office of Student Financial Aid advise students to take 15 credit hours, minimum, each semester. Advising sessions stress how continuous enrollment, supported by financial aid packages, accelerates students' time to graduation. This perspective is contrasted with following a slower path to graduation as a part-time student or sporadic attendance while working to pay for college. UTEP has added a number of advisors in recent years in the AAC and colleges.

**2.2 Advising Task Force.** In 2007-08, an Advising Task Force comprehensively examined advising across campus and identified ways to improve its effectiveness. Strategies developed include more integration with Career Advising, campus-wide training and development for staff and faculty advisors, and developing more advising support materials so students can independently make informed decisions.

**2.3 Successful First-Attempt Course Completion Advising.** In an effort to encourage students to complete courses on their first attempt, UTEP enhanced communication informing students of timely graduation incentives. Students are given brochures promoting the financial advantages of the Texas B-On-Time Program and the \$1,000 Rebate program. These programs are also highlighted in the [Undergraduate Catalog](#), [Schedule of Classes](#), and on university websites.

**2.4 Advisor Training.** A variety of forums are available to update faculty and staff advisors on new program requirements, policy changes, and student success resources. The AAC also coordinates the university-wide Academic Advisor Council and the UTEP/EPCC Articulation Advisor/Counselor Subcommittee. These groups meet regularly each semester and are tasked with developing strategies that encourage students to take full loads and complete at least thirty credit hours each academic year.

### **3. To provide academic counseling concerning timely graduation.**

In addition to those approaches identified in the response to item 2, UTEP focuses efforts on scheduling and sequencing courses that students need for program completion and providing that information to students. The communication begins at New Student Orientation and continues in academic and career advising sessions throughout their academic experience. Increasingly, information is available on websites and Banner.

### **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.**

UTEP has implemented an online degree audit program: Course Audit and Program Planning (CAPP), a module in the "Banner" student information system. The CAPP program provides students and advisors with real-time degree audit information and can

be used to calculate the effects of change of major on time to degree completion. UTEP is in a “rebuild” phase of the CAPP program to enhance its capabilities. Once completed, CAPP will feed into UTEP’s Ad Astra scheduling software enhancing each College’s ability to determine by semester the needed course offerings based upon degree plans in Banner. The CAPP system is being integrated with El Paso Community College’s and UTEP’s joint “Check Status” portal. From this portal, with CAPP, students at both institutions can run degree audits from either institution no matter which they are currently attending.

## **5. To implement tuition policies that encourages timely graduation.**

Rising tuition, required to ensure quality in UTEP’s academic programs and support services, has a particularly challenging effect on low-income students such as those enrolled at UTEP. All tuition increase proposals are vetted through a highly consultative process, and careful attention is paid to students in that process. Every effort is made to work closely with students to develop policies that will be most beneficial to the greatest number of students, enabling them to complete their degree programs as efficiently as possible.

**5.1 Innovative Financial Assistance Programs.** Three new financial assistance programs were implemented for the Fall 2006 semester. These programs continue to provide financial resources that help cover tuition and fees, emphasize the importance and benefits of student loans, and provide information on where to seek assistance regarding financial aid.

**5.1.1 UTEP Promise** continues to provide incoming freshmen who are Texas residents and whose family income is \$25,000 or less with renewable grants that cover the full tuition and fee costs for 30 semester credit hours per year. In fall 2008 the income level to qualify for the program was raised to \$30,000 or less and expanded to include first time transfer students to UTEP.

**5.1.2 Guaranteed Tuition** locks in the cost of tuition and mandatory fees for qualified freshmen (must be Texas residents) entering UTEP during Fall 2007 semester. Students paid \$208 per credit hour for four consecutive years as long as they complete 30 semester credit hours each year and maintain at least a 2.0 cumulative GPA. While the rate is higher than regular tuition during the first two years of a student’s college career, it will be lower than regular tuition during the last two years after anticipated tuition increases go into effect. Each fall, the Guaranteed Tuition Program rate will be adjusted based on the current regular rate of tuition.

**5.1.3 UTEP Success** provides a personalized financial aid package to all students regardless of family income level. Packages may include grants, loans, scholarships and/or work study.

**5.1.4 Set-asides for Student Support.** The university continued to provide funds in the amount of \$625,000 dedicated to increasing student employment opportunities on campus. This funding continues to allow for 125 on-campus student jobs. In addition, increased

book loans to \$250, assisted 1,876 students in 2007-2008. Given the severe economic challenges faced by many UTEP students, targeted financial support programs such as these can make the difference between steady progress toward a degree and stopping out for a semester or more.

**5.1.5 Financial Literacy Program.** A comprehensive financial literacy program was developed and implemented during the summer 2008 semester for presentation at New Student Orientation. The 20 minute presentation highlights concepts related to personal finance, budgeting, paying for college and basic economics.

**5.1.7 KEYS for Future Success Program.** This program was developed and implemented in the fall 2007 semester. It is an information session aimed at students receiving the: TEXAS Grant; UTEP Promise; UTEP Grant; Academic Competitiveness Grant (ACG); and SMART Grant (National Science, Mathematics Access to Retain Talent) Grant. This program concentrates on assuring students understand the requirements of these programs and provides additional resources they can utilize to help them such as the Advising Center; Counseling Services and Career Services.

# The University of Texas at El Paso



## University Response to HB 1172: 2007 Timely Graduation Report November 15, 2007

Pursuant to HB 1172, this document reports on efforts at The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) to facilitate undergraduate students' timely graduation.

### 1. To ensure that undergraduates graduate in a timely manner.

Efforts to assist undergraduate students' efficient progress towards graduation are part of the mission of academic support services and programs across the UTEP campus. In addition, UTEP has developed a number of initiatives that reach students during their high school years, are emphasized during the critical first year of university enrollment, and continue through the academic majors to successful degree completion. The following efforts illustrate the comprehensive and holistic student success efforts that are in place at UTEP:

- **College Readiness Initiative.** Students who place directly into college-level courses persist and graduate at a higher percentage than students who have pre-college course requirements. For this reason, the College Readiness Initiative (CRI) was first implemented during the Fall 2005 semester. The CRI is a collaborative effort among UTEP, El Paso Community College (EPCC), and the Region 19 Independent School Districts with the goal of helping high school students become better prepared academically for college-level course work once they have completed their high school requirements. The components of CRI include an orientation to the ACCUPLACER placement exam; early testing during a student's junior and/or senior years; high school interventions for students who place into developmental math, reading, or writing; and, retesting in their subject areas of intervention. As part of CRI, 3,732 high school students were tested in AY 2005-06; 9,796 high school students were tested in AY 2006-07.
- **New Student Orientation/Enhanced New Student Orientation.** Entering students are encouraged to attend a New Student Orientation (NSO) prior to the start of their first semester of study, and for Fall 2007, 99% of UTEP's incoming students attended NSO. UTEP's five-day New Student Orientation sessions for incoming freshman include 2 days of College-specific information targeted at the student's major of choice. A 1-day Orientation session is optional, but recommended, for new transfer students with at least 12 hours of transfer course work. Transfer students are instructed to get one-on-one advising prior to attending their session.

Additionally, at orientation, students receive information illustrating the impact on time to graduation, as well as on their life-time earnings, of enrolling fulltime in 12 as opposed to 15 semester credit hours, and attending or not attending summer school. Financial

consequences of such enrollment decisions are also emphasized as well as the many services and benefits that are made available to all UTEP students.

Beginning with the fall 2006 orientation cycle, the orientation program was expanded to include a mandatory math review workshop for students who placed into developmental math courses. This Enhanced New Student Orientation (ENSO) consisted of a three-day, six-hour math review conducted by math tutors from UTEP's Tutoring and Learning Center. After the conclusion of the math review, students were able to retake the ACCUPLACER placement exam with the hope of higher placement in mathematics. Forty-eight percent (48%) of the 1,603 students participating in this program retested at least one course higher and thirty-one percent (31%) retested from developmental math to college-level math. In 2007, of the 1,117 students who placed originally into developmental math, 573 (51%) retested at least one course higher and 268 (24%) retested into college level math after the ENSO math review. This innovative program saved students time and money while accelerating their time to graduation.

- **Course Redesign.** UTEP redesigned math, reading, and writing courses so that first-year students would not be delayed in long holding patterns of developmental coursework. The course redesign accelerates students' movement through developmental courses, enrolling them as quickly as possible into college-level courses, some with academic support. This compact format also accelerates their time to graduation.

The course redesign includes the following changes in instructional format, course support, and course options:

### **Mathematics**

- **Math Hybrid (on-line text, technology-enhanced mathematics)** sections meet regularly for face-to-face instruction/lecture; however, all homework assignments are on-line through MathZone, an internet-based algebra tutorial and assessment application that has been piloted over the past three semesters. This semester the textbook is an on-line component of the course being piloted in all sections of MATH 0311. (Students do not have a physical textbook.) Hybrid sections are offered during the 15-week conventional semester or in a compressed 8-week format.
- **Math Compressed sections** are eight-week courses that allow students to complete two courses within a single 15-week conventional semester, thereby accelerating their time through the developmental mathematics sequence and into college-level mathematics.
- **MATH 1320 (Mathematics for Social Sciences I) with Math 0120:** Currently the upper two-thirds of all students who place in MATH 0311 (developmental math) and whose major requires MATH 1320 may enroll in the college-level course with the support of a mathematics lab, MATH 0120. This combination of academic support (MATH 0120) with the college-level course saves students one entire developmental mathematics class.

- **MATH 1319 (Mathematics in the Modern World)** is a newly developed course appropriate for Education or Liberal Arts majors (excluding Psychology majors). Focusing on modern concepts of mathematics, MATH 1319 satisfies the core curriculum mathematics requirement. Currently an experiment is under way to let students enroll in Math 1319 if they successfully complete Math 0310. This saves students one entire semester of developmental mathematics course work.
- **Mastering Developmental Math (MDM) Program** was a program piloted in the Summer and Fall of 2007. During New Student Orientation, students were recruited who placed into developmental mathematics (MATH 0310 or MATH 0311) following the six-hour math review workshop and ACCUPLACER retest. The students used an on-line smart-learning technology, ALEKS, to progress through their developmental mathematics courses at their own pace. Students were given permission to enroll in college-level mathematics if they completed the MDM Program.

### Reading

- **ENGL 0310 Learning Communities:** Sections of developmental reading, ENGL 0310, are linked with reading-intensive courses (e.g., history, sociology) and will share the “content course” text in order to help students improve college-level reading skills while helping them succeed in a core curriculum course.

### Writing

- **ENGL 1311 with ENGL 0111:** Students whose test scores place them in the upper bracket of developmental writing (ACCUPLACER scores: Essay 5 with Sentence Skills 79 and below) may enroll in college-level English with the support of a supplemental workshop with individualized instruction, ENGL 0111. Thanks to a Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Phase II course redesign grant, ENGL 0111 has been redesigned as a hybrid section which meets once a week for face-to-face instruction and provides additional instruction through modules which were designed by Developmental English faculty. The combination of academic support (ENGL 0111) with the college-level course (ENGL 1311) saves students one entire developmental writing class, thereby accelerating their time towards their degrees by enrolling them in the college-level required writing class more quickly
- **Advising and Financial Aid.** Both the Academic Advising Center and the Office of Student Financial Aid advise students to take 15 credit hours each semester. Advising sessions stress how continuous enrollment, supported by financial aid packages, accelerates students' time to graduation. This perspective is contrasted with following a slower path to graduation as a part-time student or through sporadic attendance while working to pay for college. In addition, UTEP has added a number of advisors over the past few years who advise students at all levels—pre-majors, majors, and general studies. These additional advisors allow UTEP to manage increases in enrollment while maintaining individualized service.

To provide students with the best possible advising, UTEP's advisors are trained and evaluated. All new advisors receive two weeks of structured training in addition to time spent shadowing an experienced advisor. Ongoing training is provided throughout the year for all advisors in a number of formats: an on-campus Council of Academic Advisors, regularly scheduled workshops with El Paso Community College advisors, and professional development opportunities at regional and national conferences. The current evaluation model focuses on student satisfaction and success: advisors are evaluated based on the number of students advised, the number of semester credit hours each student attempts and completes, student GPA, and student retention. Student advisees complete a satisfaction survey following their advising sessions.

To keep advisors up-to-date on both institutional issues and professional topics, the Academic Advising Center provides additional topic-based training to address changes to campus policies and/or procedures, holds an annual planning retreat, invites campus-based guest speakers who provide updates on new UTEP programs or policies.

The newly renovated Academic Advising Building facility houses the Academic Advising Center, Student Assessment and Testing, and New Student Orientation. The centralization of these services will provide greater student convenience and satisfaction.

- **Entering Student Program.** UTEP's Entering Student Program comprises a number of programs to assist first-year students with the transition to the University environment and to increase their opportunities for academic success. Many of these programs have received state and national recognition, including the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Star Award.
  - The required **First-year Seminar** (UNIV 1301 – Seminar in Critical Inquiry) is a 3-semester-credit-hour core curriculum course that addresses critical thinking, academic success skills, and transitional issues through an academic theme determined by the instructor's area of expertise. Each section is taught by an instructional team that consists of the instructor, a peer (student) leader, a librarian, and an academic advisor. This team works to answer advising questions and helps students understand degree plans and time-to-degree based on hours completed in long semesters and summer school. An electronic financial-impact module, created especially for UTEP students, helps students examine ways of paying for college, the long-term cost of not completing a degree or delaying degree completion, and the impact on time-to-degree of part-time vs. full-time employment. In AY 2006-07, 2,889 students enrolled in UNIV 1301; in fall 2007, 2,134 students enrolled in UNIV 1301.
  - **Learning Communities** link courses so that students share enrollment in two or more classes. The shared enrollment in courses helps students make interdisciplinary connections through assignments that are linked or shared in the learning community courses. Learning communities also provide students with important academic and social support. In AY 2006-07, 1,493 students participated in learning communities; in fall 2007, 1,155 students enrolled in learning communities.

- The **Student Leadership Institute (SLI)** is designed to develop UTEP students into campus leaders. It consists of two semesters with 120 hours of instruction that include classroom management, campus resources, and cooperative learning as well as experiential learning through work in campus offices. SLI graduates serve as peer leaders, orientation leaders, peer tutors, and peer advisors. For 2007-08, the Undergraduate Studies Division and Student Affairs are working together to involve more UTEP students in SLI by increasing the class size to 100.
- **Welcome Back Miner.** The Welcome Back Miner program is a university-wide effort that crosses all academic colleges. Administratively run out of UTEP's University College, the Welcome Back Miner program encourages students who have stopped-out for one or more semesters to return to UTEP and finish their degrees. Stop-out students are contacted each long semester by representatives of their academic Dean's office to offer them information, incentives, and referrals that may encourage them to complete their studies at UTEP. Students are also offered the option of completing the Bachelor of Multidisciplinary Studies degree.
- **Bachelor of Multidisciplinary Studies (BMS).** UTEP's BMS degree provides students with the opportunity to customize their degree plans. It was designed especially for students who have completed a significant number of credit hours in different areas of interest, transfer students who have a significant number of semester credit hours, and entering students who want an individualized plan of study not available through traditional degree plans. The degree is especially appealing to students who have accumulated more than 90 semester credit hours in a variety of subject areas, are returning to school after an absence, and are seeking the professional advancement that only a bachelor's degree can provide. For the 2006-2007 year, 189 students earned the BMS degree.
- **Scheduling.** UTEP continues to increase course offerings in the afternoons, evenings, and on weekends to accommodate non-traditional and part-time students. Many courses in the University Core Curriculum are offered in a hybrid format (combining online learning with reduced and concentrated face-to-face sessions on campus), making these courses more accessible to students who must work off campus to help pay for their education and provide for their family responsibilities. UTEP has also expanded its minimesters and parts-of-terms, providing even greater scheduling opportunities for students.
- **Student Success Initiatives.** Curriculum review and renewal and redesigning academic and career advising are ongoing across campus; they were raised to a top institutional priority in UTEP's 2006 SACS reaccreditation process and the accompanying QEP: Success in the Middle Years. To ensure that these efforts in support of students' timely graduation and their overall success receive persistent attention, UTEP appointed an Associate Provost for Student Success whose primary responsibility includes oversight for the following:
  - curriculum reform in each degree program, reducing degree program requirements to be consistent with the 120 semester credit hour state expectation, and, thereby, minimizing students' time-to-degree; and
  - the integration of academic and career advising to provide students with combined academic and career advising using a coaching model.

Over the 2006-2007 academic cycle, UTEP completed nearly 100% of the curriculum reform efforts. The integration of academic and career advising is well under way.

**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.**

Specific initiatives include the following:

- **Advisement on Successful First-Attempt Course Completion.** In an effort to encourage students to complete courses on their first attempt, UTEP has enhanced its communication informing students of incentives for timely graduation. Students are given brochures promoting the financial advantages of the Texas B-On-Time Program and the \$1,000 Rebate Program. These programs are also highlighted in the Undergraduate Catalog, Schedule of Classes, and on university websites.
- **Improved Initial Placement at Orientation.** A three-day Math Review Workshop conducted during Enhanced New Student Orientation (ENSO) helps students refresh their math skills after which they retake their math placement test. Many of these students (48%) place into a higher level math course often moving them out of developmental coursework and accelerating their placement into college-level courses.
- **Advisor Training.** A variety of forums are available throughout the year to update faculty and staff advisors on new program requirements, policy changes and/or student success resources. The Academic Advising Center also coordinates the university-wide Council of Undergraduate Advisors and the UTEP/EPCC Articulation Advisor/Counselor Subcommittee. These groups meet regularly throughout the semester and are tasked with the development of strategies that encourage students to take full credit loads and complete at least thirty credit hours each academic year.

**3. To provide academic counseling concerning timely graduation.**

In addition to those approaches identified in the response to item 2, UTEP focuses efforts on the courses that students need for the programs they wish to complete. These efforts begin at New Student Orientation prior to the first semester of college and continue in students' academic and career advising sessions throughout their academic experience. Academic and career advising are fundamental to this goal; these services occur in many settings at UTEP, from the Academic Advising Center, to the Dean's Offices in the Colleges, to daily contacts between students and faculty/staff members with whom they interact. In addition, both the Academic Advising Center and the Office of Student Financial Aid advise students to take 15 semester credit hours each semester.

**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.**

UTEP is implementing an online degree audit program: Course Audit and Program Planning (CAPP), a module in the “Banner” student information system. The CAPP program provides students and advisors with real-time degree audit information and can be used to calculate the effects of change of major on time to degree completion.

## 5. To implement tuition policies that encourage timely graduation.

Rising tuition, required to ensure quality in UTEP’s academic programs and support services, has a particularly challenging effect on low-income students such as those enrolled at UTEP. All tuition increase proposals are vetted through a highly consultative process, and careful attention is paid to student voices in that process. Every effort is made to work closely with students to develop special policies that will be most beneficial to the greatest number of students, enabling them to complete their degree programs in as efficient a manner as possible.

- **Innovative Financial Assistance Programs.** Three new financial assistance programs and a financial aid advising/support program were implemented for the Fall 2006 semester. The programs provide financial resources that help cover tuition and fees, emphasize the importance and benefits of student loans, and provide information on where to seek assistance regarding financial aid.

UTEP Promise – Provides incoming freshmen who are Texas residents and whose family income is \$25,000 or less with renewable grants that cover the full tuition and fee costs for 30 semester credit hours per year. This innovative program became a model for other universities in the state of Texas and elsewhere in the country. In its inaugural year, 511 student qualified.

Guaranteed Tuition – Locks in the cost of tuition and mandatory fees for qualified freshmen (must be Texas residents) entering UTEP during Fall 2006 semester. Students pay \$194 per credit hour for four consecutive years as long as they complete 30 semester credit hours each year and maintain at least a 2.0 cumulative GPA. While the rate is higher than regular tuition during the first two years of a student’s college career, it will be lower than regular tuition during the last two years after anticipated tuition increases go into effect. Each fall, the Guaranteed Tuition Program rate will be adjusted based on the current regular rate of tuition.

UTEP Success – Provides a personalized financial aid package to all students regardless of family income level. Packages may include grants, loans, scholarships and/or work study.

Keys for Future Success - Information sessions aimed at students participating in the following financial Aid programs: TEXAS Grant; UTEP Promise; Academic Competitiveness Grant (ACG) and SMART (National Science Mathematics Access to Retain Talent) Grant. To continue being funded in any of these programs, students must maintain specified academic and enrollment requirements. The “Keys for Future Success” program session concentrates on making sure students understand the programs’ requirements; it also provides the students with additional resources about the Academic Advising Center, Career Services, Counseling Services, and the math and writing centers. A full time staff person has been assigned to follow the progress of the cohorts of students in these financial aid programs.

- **Set-asides for Student Support.** A portion of funds derived from all recent tuition increases has been dedicated to increasing student employment opportunities on campus. New funding in the amount of \$625,000 has led to 114 new on-campus student jobs. In addition, \$200,000 of institutional funds has been designated to increase book loans to \$250; this additional funding resulted in an increase in the number of students served from 715 to 1,625 students per year. Given the severe economic challenges faced by many UTEP students, targeted financial support programs such as these can make the difference between steady progress toward a degree and stopping out for a semester or more.

# The University of Texas at El Paso



## University Response to HB 1172: Timely Graduation Report November 30, 2006

Pursuant to HB 1172, this document reports on efforts at The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) to facilitate undergraduate students' timely graduation.

### 1. To ensure that undergraduates graduate in a timely manner.

Efforts to assist undergraduate students' efficient progress towards graduation are part of the mission of academic support services and programs across the UTEP campus. In addition, UTEP has developed a number of initiatives that reach students during their high school years, are emphasized during the critical first year of university enrollment, and continue through the academic majors to successful degree completion. The following efforts illustrate the comprehensive and holistic student success efforts that are in place at UTEP:

- **College Readiness Initiative.** Students who place directly into college-level courses persist and graduate at a higher percentage than students who have pre-college course requirements. For this reason, the College Readiness Initiative (CRI) was first implemented during the Fall 2005 semester. The CRI is a collaborative effort among UTEP, El Paso Community College (EPCC), and the Region 19 Independent School Districts with the goal of helping high school students become better prepared academically for college-level course work once they have completed their high school requirements. The components of CRI include an orientation to the ACCUPLACER placement exam; early testing during a student's junior and/or senior years; high school interventions for students who place into developmental math, reading, or writing; and, retesting in their subject areas of intervention.
- **New Student Orientation/Enhanced New Student Orientation.** Entering students are encouraged to attend a New Student Orientation prior to the start of their first semester of study. A variety of orientation sessions are offered, including a one-day transfer student session, a three-day freshman session, and a five-day session for students majoring in business, engineering, or science. At orientation, students receive information illustrating the impact on time to graduation of enrolling in 12 as opposed to 15 semester credit hours, and attending or not attending summer school. Financial consequences of such enrollment decisions are also emphasized.

During the fall 2006 orientation cycle, the orientation program was expanded to include a mandatory math review workshop for students who placed into developmental math courses. This Enhanced New Student Orientation (ENSO) consisted of a three-day, six-hour math review conducted by math tutors from UTEP's Tutoring and Learning Center. After the conclusion of the math review, students were able to retake the ACCUPLACER placement exam with the hope of higher placement in mathematics. Forty-eight percent

(48%) of the 1,603 students participating in this program retested at least one course higher and thirty-one percent (31%) retested from developmental math to college-level math. This innovative program saved students time and money while accelerating their time to graduation.

- **Course Redesign.** UTEP redesigned math, reading, and writing courses so that first-year students would not be delayed in long holding patterns of developmental coursework. The course redesign accelerates students' movement through developmental courses, enrolling them as quickly as possible into college-level courses, some with academic support. This compact format also accelerates their time to graduation.

The course redesign includes the following changes in instructional format, course support, and course options:

### **Mathematics**

- **Math Hybrid** sections meet twice each week for face-to-face instruction and provide additional instruction through MathZone, an internet-based algebra tutorial and assessment application that has been piloted over the past three semesters. Hybrid sections are offered during the 15-week conventional semester or in a compressed 8-week format.
- **Math Compressed sections** are eight-week courses that allow students to complete two courses within a single 15-week conventional semester, thereby accelerating their time through the developmental mathematics sequence and into college-level mathematics.
- **MATH 1320 (Mathematics for Social Sciences I) with Math 0120:** Students who place in the upper half of the placement bracket for MATH 0311 (developmental math) and whose major requires MATH 1320 may enroll in the college-level course with the support of a mathematics lab, MATH 0120. This combination of academic support (MATH 0120) with the college-level course saves students one entire developmental mathematics class.
- **MATH 1319 (Mathematics in the Modern World)** is a newly developed course appropriate for Education or Liberal Arts majors (excluding Psychology majors). Focusing on modern concepts of mathematics, MATH 1319 completes the students' core curriculum mathematics requirement.

### **Reading**

- **ENGL 0310 Learning Communities:** Sections of developmental reading, ENGL 0310, are linked with reading-intensive courses (e.g., history, sociology) and will share the "content course" text in order to help students improve college-level reading skills while helping them succeed in a core curriculum course.

### **Writing**

- **ENGL 1311 with ENGL 0111:** Students whose test scores place them in the upper bracket of developmental writing may enroll in college-level English with the support of ENGL 0111, which is a writing workshop with individualized instruction. This combination of academic support (ENGL 0111) with the college-

level course saves students one entire developmental writing class, thereby accelerating their time towards their degrees by enrolling them in the college-level required writing class more quickly.

- **Advising and Financial Aid.** Both the Academic Advising Center and the Office of Student Financial Aid advise students to take 15 credit hours each semester. Advising sessions stress how continuous enrollment, supported by financial aid packages, accelerates students' time to graduation. This perspective is contrasted with following a slower path to graduation as a part-time student or through sporadic attendance while working to pay for college. In addition, UTEP has added a number of advisors over the past year who advise students at all levels—pre-majors, majors, and general studies. These additional advisors allow UTEP to manage increases in enrollment while maintaining individualized service.

To provide students with the best possible advising, UTEP's advisors are trained and evaluated. All new advisors receive two weeks of structured training in addition to time spent shadowing an experienced advisor. Ongoing training is provided throughout the year for all advisors in a number of formats: an on-campus Council of Academic Advisors, regularly scheduled workshops with El Paso Community College advisors, and professional development opportunities at regional and national conferences. The current evaluation model focuses on student satisfaction and success: advisors are evaluated based on the number of students advised, the number of semester credit hours each student attempts and completes, student GPA, and student retention. Student advisees complete a satisfaction survey following their advising sessions.

Construction has just concluded on the renovation of a new Academic Advising facility that will house the Academic Advising Center, Student Assessment and Testing, and New Student Orientation. The centralization of these services will provide greater student convenience and satisfaction.

- **Entering Student Program.** UTEP's Entering Student Program comprises a number of programs to assist first-year students with the transition to the University environment and to increase their opportunities for academic success. Many of these programs have received state and national recognition, including the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Star Award.
  - The required **First-year Seminar** (UNIV 1301 – Seminar in Critical Inquiry) is a 3-semester-credit-hour core curriculum course that addresses critical thinking, academic success skills, and transitional issues through an academic theme determined by the instructor's area of expertise. Each section is taught by an instructional team that consists of the instructor, a peer (student) leader, a librarian, and an academic advisor. This team works to answer advising questions and helps students understand degree plans and time-to-degree based on hours completed in long semesters and summer school. An electronic financial-impact module, created especially for UTEP students, helps students examine ways of paying for college, the long-term cost of not completing a degree or delaying degree completion, and the impact on time-to-degree of part-time vs. full-time employment.
  - **Learning Communities** link courses so that students share enrollment in two or more classes. The shared enrollment in courses helps students make interdisciplinary connections through assignments that are linked or shared in the

- learning community courses. Learning communities also provide students with important academic and social support.
- The **Student Leadership Institute (SLI)** is designed to develop UTEP students into campus leaders. It consists of two semesters with 120 hours of instruction that include classroom management, campus resources, and cooperative learning as well as experiential learning through work in campus offices. SLI graduates serve as peer leaders, orientation leaders, peer tutors, and peer advisors.
  - **Welcome Back Miner.** The Welcome Back Miner program is a university-wide effort that crosses all academic colleges. Administratively run out of UTEP's University College, the Welcome Back Miner program encourages students who have stopped-out for one or more semesters to return to UTEP and finish their degrees. Stop-out students are contacted each long semester by representatives of their academic Dean's office to offer them information, incentives, and referrals that may encourage them to complete their studies at UTEP. Students are also offered the option of completing the Bachelor of Multidisciplinary Studies degree.
  - **Bachelor of Multidisciplinary Studies (BMS).** UTEP's BMS degree provides students with the opportunity to customize their degree plans. It was designed especially for students who have completed a significant number of credit hours in different areas of interest, transfer students who have a significant number of semester credit hours, and entering students who want an individualized plan of study not available through traditional degree plans. The degree is especially appealing to students who have accumulated more than 90 semester credit hours in a variety of subject areas, are returning to school after an absence, and are seeking the professional advancement that only a bachelor's degree can provide.
  - **Scheduling.** UTEP continues to increase course offerings in the afternoons, evenings, and on weekends to accommodate non-traditional and part-time students. Many courses in the University Core Curriculum are offered in a hybrid format (combining online learning with reduced and concentrated face-to-face sessions on campus), making these courses more accessible to students who must work off campus to help pay for their education and provide for their family responsibilities. UTEP has also expanded its minimesters and parts-of-terms, providing even greater scheduling opportunities for students.
  - **Success in the Middle Years.** Curriculum review and renewal and redesigning academic and career advising are ongoing across campus; they have been raised to a top priority in UTEP's "Success in the Middle Years" plan. The Middle Years are the period of time between students' completion of the first year and their progress into the senior year. It is the time when students identify their majors and make progress through the major curriculum. Unlike traditional students, UTEP students' middle years extend beyond two years to as long as ten years or more. The "Success in the Middle Years" plan – building upon successful first-year programming and high marks in student satisfaction once students enter into their major area of study – provides a University-wide course of action for focused improvements in learning and learning outcome assessment in students' "middle years." The two components of the plan are the following: (a) curriculum review and renewal in each degree program and the core curriculum, providing students an efficient and purposeful pathway to demonstrate mastery of general education proficiencies and major field knowledge, skills, and

dispositions; and (b) academic and career advising redesign to provide students with personal and career guidance. As a part of this plan, all degree granting programs are currently reviewing their degree requirements in order to minimize the time-to-degree and to ensure compliance with new 120 hour degree requirements.

**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.**

Specific initiatives include the following:

- **Advisement on Successful First-Attempt Course Completion.** In an effort to encourage students to complete courses on their first attempt, UTEP has enhanced its communication informing students of incentives for timely graduation. Students are given brochures promoting the financial advantages of the Texas B-On-Time Program and the \$1,000 Rebate Program. These programs are also highlighted in the [Undergraduate Catalog](#), [Schedule of Classes](#), and on university websites.
- **Improved Initial Placement at Orientation.** A three-day Math Review Workshop conducted during Enhanced New Student Orientation (ENSO) helps students refresh their math skills after which they retake their math placement test. Many of these students (48%) place into a higher level math course often moving them out of developmental coursework and accelerating their placement into college-level courses.
- **Advisor Training.** A variety of forums are available throughout the year to update faculty and staff advisors on new program requirements, policy changes and/or student success resources. The Academic Advising Center also coordinates the university-wide Council of Undergraduate Advisors and the UTEP/EPCC Articulation Advisor/Counselor Subcommittee. These groups meet regularly throughout the semester and are tasked with the development of strategies that encourage students to take full credit loads and complete at least thirty credit hours each academic year.

**3. To provide academic counseling concerning timely graduation.**

In addition to those approaches identified in the response to item 2, UTEP focuses efforts on the courses that students need for the programs they wish to complete. These efforts begin at New Student Orientation prior to the first semester of college and continue in students' academic and career advising sessions throughout their academic experience. Academic and career advising are fundamental to this goal; these services occur in many settings at UTEP, from the Academic Advising Center, to the Dean's Offices in the Colleges, to daily contacts between students and faculty/staff members with whom they interact. In addition, both the Academic Advising Center and the Office of Student Financial Aid advise students to take 15 semester credit hours each semester.

**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.**

UTEP has implemented an online degree audit program: Course Audit and Program Planning (CAPP), a module in the “Banner” student information system. The CAPP program provides students and advisors with real-time degree audit information and can be used to calculate the effects of change of major on time to degree completion.

**5. To implement tuition policies that encourage timely graduation.**

Rising tuition, required to ensure quality in UTEP’s academic programs and support services, has a particularly challenging effect on low-income students such as those enrolled at UTEP. All tuition increase proposals are vetted through a highly consultative process, and careful attention is paid to student voices in that process. Every effort is made to work closely with students to develop special policies that will be most beneficial to the greatest number of students, enabling them to complete their degree programs in as efficient a manner as possible.

- **Innovative Financial Assistance Programs.** Three new financial assistance programs were implemented for the Fall 2006 semester. The programs provide financial resources that help cover tuition and fees, emphasize the importance and benefits of student loans, and provide information on where to seek assistance regarding financial aid.

UTEP Promise – Provides incoming freshmen who are Texas residents and whose family income is \$25,000 or less with renewable grants that cover the full tuition and fee costs for 30 semester credit hours per year.

Guaranteed Tuition – Locks in the cost of tuition and mandatory fees for qualified freshmen (must be Texas residents) entering UTEP during Fall 2006 semester. Students pay \$194 per credit hour for four consecutive years as long as they complete 30 semester credit hours each year and maintain at least a 2.0 cumulative GPA. While the rate is higher than regular tuition during the first two years of a student’s college career, it will be lower than regular tuition during the last two years after anticipated tuition increases go into effect. Each fall, the Guaranteed Tuition Program rate will be adjusted based on the current regular rate of tuition.

UTEP Success – Provides a personalized financial aid package to all students regardless of family income level. Packages may include grants, loans, scholarships and/or work study.

- **Set-asides for Student Support.** A portion of funds derived from all recent tuition increases has been dedicated to increasing student employment opportunities on campus. New funding in the amount of \$625,000 has led to 114 new on-campus student jobs. In addition, \$200,000 of institutional funds has been designated to increase book loans to \$250; this additional funding resulted in an increase in the number of students served from 715 to 1,625 students per year. Given the severe economic challenges faced by many UTEP students, targeted financial support programs such as these can

make the difference between steady progress toward a degree and stopping out for a semester or more.

- **Financial Literacy Program.** A comprehensive financial literacy program is currently being developed for implementation during the summer 2007 semester. Central to the program is a 10-12 minute UTEP-produced video highlighting concepts related to personal finance, budgeting, paying for college and basic economics. The video will be presented at New Student Orientation and made available to UNIV 1301 (first-year seminar) classes. Students will also be able to view the video from UTEP's website. A student financial literacy workbook is under production and will serve as a companion piece to the video.

The University of Texas at El Paso

**University Response to HB 1172:  
Timely Graduation Report**

November 30, 2005

This document reports on efforts at The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) to facilitate undergraduate students' graduating more quickly, pursuant to HB 1172.

**1) To ensure that undergraduates graduate in a timely manner**

Efforts to assist undergraduate students' efficient progress towards graduation are part of the mission of academic support services and programs across the UTEP campus. In addition, UTEP has developed a number of special initiatives that begin in New Student Orientation, are emphasized during the critical first year of enrollment, and continue through the academic majors to successful degree completion. For example, the following efforts are in place at UTEP:

- **New Student Orientation.** At New Student Orientation, a special session has been introduced that enables students to see the impact on time to graduation of enrolling in 12 as opposed to 15 semester credit hours, and attending or not attending summer school. Time and money consequences of enrollment decisions are emphasized.
- **SmartStart Program:** UTEP's summer bridge program, SmartStart, helps ease students' transition into college while they earn credits towards their degree. The program helps them get off to a quick start toward completing their degree programs by taking selected core curriculum courses during the summer preceding their initial fall enrollment.
- **Developmental Education.** Students receive developmental education assistance through one of two routes: they are placed into developmental education courses (Reading, Writing, and/or Mathematics) as the result of their placement test scores; or they are referred to the Tutoring and Learning Center (TLC) by faculty or advisors. To receive the help they need before they find themselves in academic difficulty, students also often consult the TLC on their own.

In addition, the pedagogical approach to developmental education is changing in both English and mathematics to enable more students begin their first semester in college-level core courses. Students who need additional support are provided with supplemental instruction in a variety of formats. This pedagogical approach will accelerate students' progress into and through the first college-level core curriculum courses, rather than spending time in semester-long developmental courses. Additionally, UTEP works closely with El Paso Community College to ensure that students' developmental education needs are well aligned across the two institutions.

- **Advising & Financial Aid.** Both the Department of Student Financial Aid and the Academic Advising Center advise students to take 15 semester credit hours each

semester. The importance of financial aid is discussed thoroughly in advising sessions in which the advantages of graduating more quickly through full-time attendance with financial aid support are contrasted with following a slower path to graduation as a part-time student or through sporadic attendance while working to pay for college.

- **First-Year Experience.** UTEP's First-year Experience has a number of components that, taken together, contribute to students' progress toward degrees. The required First-year Seminar (UNIV 1301—Seminar in Critical Inquiry) is the focus of a learning community framework in which nearly every first-semester student is enrolled. An academic advisor is part of the course's instructional team, making information readily available, answering advising questions, and helping students understand degree plans and time-to-degree based on hours completed in long semesters and summer school. An electronic financial impact module, created for UTEP students, has been incorporated into the First-year Seminar. This module helps students examine ways of paying for college, the long-term cost of not completing a degree or delaying degree completion, and the impact on time-to-degree of part-time vs. full-time enrollment.
- **Transfers.** UTEP and the El Paso Community College have earned statewide and national recognition for their close cooperation in transfer articulation, joint admissions processing, joint financial aid processing, and close partnerships with K-12. Many students enroll seamlessly at both UTEP and EPCC, taking advantage of scheduling options for particular courses. Seamless transfer and concurrent enrollment are vital elements in accelerating students' progress towards degree completion.
- **Scheduling.** UTEP continues to increase course offerings in the afternoon, evening and week-end to accommodate non-traditional and part-time students. For example, the Criminal Justice Program (with nearly 700 majors) now offers courses in both traditional semester-long formats and in shorter more concentrated time periods during evening hours throughout the year. The compressed formats are especially suitable for working professionals seeking undergraduate degrees. More courses in the University Core Curriculum, especially in English composition are offered in a blended format (combining online learning with reduced and concentrated face-to-face sessions on campus), making these courses more accessible to students who must work off campus to support their education and family responsibilities. The College of Liberal Arts has developed a coordinated scheduling system intended to cluster courses at times most convenient for students, especially for those who cannot attend classes during morning hours. Additional History and English sections required as part of the University Core Curriculum are now being offered throughout the day and on weekends.
- **Curriculum.** Curriculum redesign is ongoing across campus and has been raised to a top priority in UTEP's Quality Enhancement Plan. Examples include the following: a greater variety of courses to meet general education requirements; a new streamlined curriculum for pre-service secondary teachers in Social Studies; and more efficient class scheduling and internship placements for students seeking "all levels certification" in Art and Music.

**2). To ensure that undergraduates do not attempt an excessive number of semester credit hours beyond the minimum required to complete the students' degree programs**

At UTEP, efforts to focus students on the courses they need for the program they wish to complete begin at New Student Orientation prior to the first semester and continue in students' academic and career advising sessions throughout their academic experience. Academic and career advising are fundamental to this goal, and occur in many settings at UTEP, from the Academic Advising Center, to the Deans' Offices in the Colleges, to daily contacts between students and faculty/staff members with whom they interact. Specific initiatives include the following:

- **Improved initial placement at Orientation.** A three-day Math Review Workshop conducted during New Student Orientation helps students refresh their math skills after which they retake their math placement test. This review has proven to be successful with pre-science and pre-engineering students in the past, and extending it to all students has resulted in 25% to 33% of the students placing into higher-level math classes upon retesting at the end of the review workshop.
- **Advisement on the Costs of Repeating Courses.** In an effort to encourage students to complete courses on their first attempt, a new repeat policy was adopted that assesses additional fees for repeated courses. This policy is discussed with students during Academic Advising Center advising sessions. In addition, students are given brochures promoting the financial advantages of the Texas B-On-Time Program and the \$1,000 Rebate program.
- **Outreach to Near-Completers.** UTEP recently launched a Welcome Back, Miners Program to identify, locate, and contact individual students who discontinued enrolling despite having completed 90 semester credit hours or more and who are in good academic standing.
- **New Curriculum.** A new Bachelor of Multidisciplinary Studies degree has been recommended that provides additional curricular flexibility for students, especially those who may have interrupted their progress toward degree completion. Working closely with faculty advisors to develop customized programs that incorporate course work already completed, students can pursue non-traditional paths to graduation.
- **Comprehensive Curricular Review and Renewal.** As a central focus of UTEP's SACS re-accreditation process and Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), faculty are developing a program for systematic review of all major programs to ensure they offer students the most transparent and efficient pathways to the degree they are seeking.

### **3). To provide academic counseling concerning timely graduation**

As noted above, academic counseling takes place all across the UTEP campus. Specific initiatives developed recently include the following:

- Upon initial enrollment, students who are advised by the Academic Advising Center are given appropriate decision-making tools: departmental degree plans in their areas of interest and core curriculum checklists. Advisors encourage and assist students to follow closely the pathway toward a degree contained in these plans.
- Professional academic advisors have been added to most of the Deans' offices to provide program-specific advising in students' majors; moreover, additional pre-major advisors have been added to the central Academic Advising Center.
- The Academic Advising Center staff guides undecided students toward introductory courses in areas of potential interest to help them narrow down their list of possible major choices as quickly as possible.
- During advising sessions, a transcript review is regularly conducted to be sure that core curriculum and pre-major requirements are being completed

### **4). To develop an online student degree program 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.**

UTEP has implemented an online degree audit program: Course Audit and Program Planning (CAPP), a module in the "Banner" student information system. The CAPP program is currently being used in five of the seven colleges and will be available to students and advisors in all colleges by the end of the spring semester 2006. The CAPP program provides students and advisors with "real-time" degree audit information. In addition, it can be used to calculate the effects of change of major on time to degree completion.

### **5). To implement tuition policies that encourage timely graduation**

Rising tuition, required to ensure quality in UTEP's academic programs and support services, has a particularly negative impact on low-income students such as those enrolled at UTEP. One-third of UTEP's students report annual family incomes of \$20,000 or less. All tuition increase proposals are vetted through a highly consultative process, and careful attention is paid to student voices in that process. Every effort is made to work closely with students to develop special policies that will be most beneficial to the greatest number of students, enabling them to complete the degree programs in as efficient a manner as possible.

- **Set-asides for Student Support.** A portion of funds derived from all recent tuition increases has been dedicated to increasing student employment opportunities on campus. More than 200 additional on-campus jobs have been created in the past two years. In addition, institutional funds have been designated to increase the resources available for a revolving emergency book loan fund. Given the severe economic challenges faced by many UTEP students, targeted financial support such as this, on the margin, can make the difference between steady progress toward a degree and stopping out for a semester or more.

- **Guaranteed Tuition Option.** A Guaranteed Tuition Plan has been included in UTEP's tuition and fee proposal for 2006-2007. It will provide four years of tuition predictability for students who enter in the fall of 2006 (and for their parents). The plan is based on students' completing at least 30 credit hours each year.
- **Advising Students on Tuition Strategies.** Last year, UTEP proposed to students, but ultimately did not implement, a flat-tuition strategy, because student feedback objected to it on the grounds that it would be unfair to those students whose family or economic circumstances absolutely prevented them from taking the higher course loads required to capitalize on the flat-tuition opportunity. Students didn't believe that those students who already had the greatest burdens should "subsidize" the education costs of those students who were more able to enroll in a heavier course load. Instead, we launched an advising initiative, making students better aware of the academic and career advantages of taking a heavier course load and expediting their path to graduation and the financial aid mechanisms available to support this strategy. The first-year results are highly encouraging: for the fall 2005 semester, the numbers of resident undergraduate students enrolling for 15, 16, and 17 semester credit-hours increased by 20%, 25%, and 41% respectively compared to the previous year.