

University of Texas-Pan American
Fall 2008 Report in Response to
Section 1. H.B 1172 Timely Graduation Report Requirements

In response to H.B. 1172 legislation requiring reporting of institutional efforts to promote timely graduation, the University of Texas-Pan American submits the following responses to the five questions:

- **To ensure that undergraduate students graduate in a timely manner.**

During the 2007-2008 academic year, the University of Texas-Pan American (UTPA) engaged in several efforts in order to ensure the timely graduation of undergraduate students. Below is a brief description of these efforts.

(1) One of the most important efforts was the reduction of the core curriculum from 48 semester hours to 43 semester hours. In addition, all degree programs were reviewed and reduced to 120 semester hours, with the exception of some degree programs that ranged from 121-127 semester hours. The new degree plans went into effect in Fall 2008. This effort resulted in the streamlining of all degree programs, not only in terms of number of semester hours required but also in terms of the content of the curriculum,

(2) A systematic and comprehensive advisement effort continued to be provided to all students at UTPA. The Academic Advisement and Mentoring (AAM) Center is a significant component of a comprehensive plan to ensure that all students who are not in need of developmental education receive quality professional advisement. All entering freshmen students are provided one-to-one academic advisement during the orientation process; freshmen and sophomore students are required to obtain academic advisement each term; academic advisors are assigned to each UNIV 1301 (Learning Framework) sections; retention advisement is provided for at-risk students; career advisement is provided for undecided and changing major students; and students are assisted in the application process for specific academic programs. Academic Road Maps in each major program are provided to students early in their career once the student has indicated a choice of major or interest in a particular major.

(3) The Sophomore Academic Mentoring Program, another effort to improve retention and the timely graduation of students, is designed to assist UTPA sophomore students in reaching their individual academic goals through mentoring by junior and senior students. These mentors serve as role models in the areas of academic and co-curricular involvement in order to support sophomore students in the successful completion of their second year. This academic support service gives sophomore students the opportunity to increase self-confidence and independence.

(4) The Academic Advisement Center staffed by five academic advisors provides quality academic advisement for all students who have not completed all three areas of the Texas Success Initiative (TSI) for college readiness. During New Student Orientations

the Center advises all new students who are TSI affected and those who have not yet tested on a state approved instrument and are not exempt from TSI requirements. An Academic Advisement Plan is completed for each student which includes updates on TSI requirements, updates on academic policies (e.g. Three-Peat, Enrollment Cap, and Six-Drop Rule), courses restricted for enrollment due to TSI requirements, core courses specific to the student's major, financial aid status, academic status and interventions warranted (e.g. Early Warning and QEP Math attendance). The advisor will also answer all questions the student may have regarding their course schedule, career planning and other University services.

(5) Additional strategies for enhanced student success included the development of a Supplemental Instruction (SI) program in 2005. Supplemental Instruction is a student service under the Learning Assistance Center (LAC) designed to improve the students' academic performance and increase retention. The SI program targets traditionally difficult courses and provides regularly scheduled, out-of-class, peer-facilitated group study sessions. SI leaders attend the courses they work with and conduct two or three study sessions per week, reviewing lectures, class notes and assignments, and facilitating group discussions.

- **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 program.**

UTPA has implemented a three-peat policy to discourage students from taking courses more than once. The policy requires payment of an additional \$100 per credit hour for courses taken more than twice. In addition, the University provides those students with the opportunity to receive a \$1,000 rebate on their tuition if they complete their degrees within the specified units for the degree.

The phased-in approach of the excess credit hour fee began in fiscal year 2007. For students initially enrolling in the fall 1999 and subsequent terms, but before the fall 2006 term, excess credit hours are those exceeding by at least 45 hours the minimum hours required for the degree program (including the additional hours required for minors and double majors) in which a student is enrolled. For students initially enrolling in the fall 2006 and subsequent terms, this limit is reduced to 30 hours in excess of the minimum required for the degree. The fee for FY08-09, 09-10 is \$90.00 /SCH.

Degree audits are further being expanded to include concentrations for degree programs that may be completed with teacher certification. This will further guide students to enroll in appropriate coursework that applies to their area of concentration.

UTPA has also changed the Drop policy which enforces a deadline for students to drop courses (must be dropped within the first 75% days of the semester) to encourage students to complete courses in which a significant amount of time has been invested.

Academic Road Maps that delineate the courses in the degree program in which a student might enroll each semester, including summer terms, are given to entering freshmen students who have declared a major or who express an interest in a major field. Advisors with the AAM Center use the Road Maps during individual advisement sessions to help students plan the completion of their program so that they do not attempt excessive number of semester hours.

Student Development Specialists (SDSs) under the University Retention Advisement Program advise students who are near or nearing the “excessive hours” limit. During advisement sessions, the SDSs review the student’s transcript with him/her and help the student plan for the completion of his/her degree program based on the student’s record.

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

A university-wide Academic Advisement and Mentoring (AAM) Center was established in Fall 2005. Nine Academic Career Advisors (ACAs) provide guidance and advisement primarily to freshman and sophomore students at a centralized location. Twelve Professional Guidance Counselors (PGCs), two for each college, provide guidance and advisement to sophomores, undeclared majors and to majors within each college. A total of 12 Professional Guidance Counselors and 9 Academic Career Advisors provide systematic and comprehensive advisement to all undergraduate students. In addition, faculty serve as mentors for students with declared majors, helping students develop official degree plans in the major.

The Academic Advisement Center, staffed by five advisors, provides advisement for students who have not completed Texas Success Initiative (TSI) requirements for college readiness. During each advisement session students are informed of how a delay in completion of developmental coursework can impact time to graduation.

- **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.**

An online degree audit system has been built for all current undergraduate programs and catalogs. The degree audit gives the student a progress report of the courses completed, credit earned and the courses still needing to complete for the degree. This report allows the student to plan his/her own progress toward degree completion and advisors to assist students in making decisions about their degree plans.

The degree audit system is part of the Student Information System and is available for students to use on the Web for Students site:

<http://www.utpa.edu/assist/>

In addition to the online degree audit system, online prerequisite checking is being implemented to ensure students are fully prepared for the courses they plan to take and are completing the coursework in the prescribed sequence. Pre-requisite checking has been fully implemented within the College of Business of Administration and the College of Science and Engineering since Spring 2006. Pre-requisite checking will be built and tested in the Colleges of Education and Arts and Humanities from August-October 2009 and implemented for Spring 2010 registration. Prerequisite checking for the Colleges of Social Behavioral Sciences and Health Sciences and Human Services is scheduled to be completed by the end of Summer 2010.

Another process which complements the degree audit system is the concept of "waitlisting." Students can request to be wait listed during the registration process and are notified when a seat in the course becomes available. The student then has a designated period of time in which to either register for the course or be removed from the waitlist. The waitlist process is currently being piloted for 50 high demand courses in the Fall 2009 semester, and will be implemented for all courses in Spring 2010.

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

In an effort to encourage students to make progress toward degree completion and timely graduation, tuition policies have been instituted.

Incentives to Promote Timely Graduation

14-Hour Cap: UTPA will continue to cap designated tuition at 14 SCHs as an inducement for students to enroll in more than 14 hours and therefore reduce their time-to-degree.

Excess Credit Hour Tuition: Charging an additional amount of designated tuition for excess credit hours, in addition to recovering lost formula funding for the University, will encourage students to focus on degree-required coursework and will discourage dropping classes. It is presumed that this allowance to recover foregone revenue has been provided by the legislature with the intent to promote timely graduation.

Additional information on tuition incentives can be found at the following website:

<http://www.utpa.edu/tuition/cost.htm>

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

For the past five years, the University of Texas-Pan American (UTPA) has been engaged in several initiatives to ensure that undergraduate students are retained after the first year and graduate in a timely manner. Recent data indicate that these initiatives are leading to improvement in retention and graduation rates. Retention for the Fall 2004 first-time, full-time entering freshman cohort was 68.0%. For Fall 2005 first-time, full-time entering freshman cohort, the retention rate is 72.7%.

In the Fall of the 2005-2006 academic year, UTPA established the university-wide advisement center called the Academic Advisement and Mentoring (AAM) Center. The goal of the Center is to advise and track every individual freshman and sophomore student to assist them in making informed decisions about a major as early in their academic career as possible and ensure that they register for the appropriate courses every semester. Freshman and sophomore students are being advised at a centralized location by Academic Career Advisors. Juniors and seniors are being advised by Professional Guidance Counselors and faculty in each of six colleges.

In Fall 2004, the UNIV 1301—Learning Framework course was instituted as a requirement for all entering freshman students with less than 30 semester hours of course credit. The course is designed to help entering freshmen understand the principles of learning and motivation and apply them to their own university experience. Its focus is on helping students understand their own learning styles and acquaint them with the expectations of learning in college. One of the goals is to help entering freshmen, early in their college experience, make conscious choices and appropriate decisions about their chosen career. The retention rate for the Fall 2005 first-time, full-time entering freshmen cohort was 72.7%. The retention rate for Fall 2005 first-time, full-time cohort of entering freshmen who enrolled in and satisfactorily completed the UNIV 1301 course was 82.4%. Analysis indicates that enrollment in and satisfactory completion of the UNIV 1301 course is significantly correlated to the retention rate of students. Increased retention rates at the end of the freshman year contributes to timely graduation.

During Fall 2005, UTPA initiated a Fast-Track pilot project with a developmental writing course (ENG 1320) and ENG 1301—Composition. The instructor is integrating the content of both courses into a 16 week semester, each course meeting the required amount of time. Students will receive six semester hours credit for both courses. The purpose of this strategy is to decrease the time it takes the developmental course student to meet eligibility for college level courses.

Supplemental Instruction (SI) is an academic enrichment program that is offered in traditionally difficult courses. SI discussion and review sessions are facilitated by trained student SI Leaders who have successfully completed the course. Designed to supplement –

not replace – class lectures and recitations, SI sessions are interactive and collaborative. Students who attend sessions learn to integrate how to learn with what to learn. SI sessions are usually held twice weekly for one hour; additional sessions are held prior to exams. Attendance at sessions is voluntary.

Supplemental Instruction targets historically difficult courses, not poorly skilled students. Historically difficult courses are characterized by a 30% failure rate. Gatekeeper and critical courses are targeted for academic intervention, not a particular student population. SI programs across the country have shown a 15% increase in passing rates for students who participate in the program.

Spring 2006 piloted Supplemental Instruction for the following courses:

Biology 2403-Anatomy and Physiology

English 2300-Intro to Literature

Philosophy 1310: Intro to Philosophy

Math 2306: Foundations of Math I

The program has been expanded in FY07.

Freshman Orientation was expanded to a two-day event. A general Overview of all Academic Programs presentation was added, as well as more personalized attention during registration and advisement

- 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 program.

The University has implemented a three-peat policy to discourage students from taking courses more than once. The policy requires payment of an additional \$100 per credit hour for courses taken more than twice. In addition, the University provides those students with the opportunity to receive a \$1,000 rebate on their tuition if they complete their degrees within the specified units for the degree.

The phased-in approach of the excess credit hour fee began in fiscal year 2007. For students initially enrolling in the fall 1999 and subsequent terms, but before the fall 2006 term, excess credit hours are those exceeding by at least 45 hours the minimum hours required for the degree program (including the additional hours required for minors and double majors) in which a student is enrolled. For students initially enrolling in the fall 2006 and subsequent terms, this limit is reduced to 30 hours in excess of the minimum required for the degree. The fee for FY07 is \$42.00 /SCH.

Advisors with the University Retention and Advisement Program (URAP) and AAM Center have been working with students to ensure their true and complete academic program is recorded in the SIS system and that intent of double majors and minors is noted in the SIS System.

- To provide academic counseling concerning timely graduation.

A university-wide Academic Advisement and Mentoring (AAM) Center was established in Fall 2005. Six Academic Advisors for a centralized advisement center were hired to provide guidance and advisement primarily to freshman and sophomore students. Six Professional Guidance Counselors, one for each college, were hired to provide guidance and advisement to undeclared majors and to majors within each college. In Fall 2006, an additional 6 Professional Guidance Counselors were hired to advise students in each of six colleges and 3 additional Academic Career Advisors were hired to advise students at the centralized AAM Center. This brings the total of advisors from 12 to 21—12 Professional Guidance Counselors and 9 Academic Career Advisors.

In addition, faculty serve as mentors for students with declared majors, particularly at the junior and senior levels.

The Academic Advisement and Counseling Center, staffed by seven advisors, provides advisement for students who have not completed Texas Success Initiative (TSI) requirements for college readiness.

- 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.

A degree audit system is part of the Student Information System and is available for student use on the Web for Students site:

<https://tassist2.panam.edu/ahomepg.htm>

The degree audit gives the student a progress report, on a semester by semester basis, of the courses completed, credit earned and the courses still needed to complete the degree. This report allows the student to plan his/her own progress toward degree completion and advisors are available to assist students in making decisions about their degree plans.

On-line prerequisite checking, to ensure students are fully prepared for the courses, successfully tested in the College of Business Administration and the College of Science and Engineering Spring 2006. Program will be fully implemented to all Colleges in the spring of 2008.

- To implement tuition policies that encourage timely graduation.

In an effort to encourage students to make progress towards degree completion and timely graduation, policies related to tuition reduction have been instituted. One example can be found at the following website:

https://tassist2.panam.edu/help/xc_benhours.htm

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In Fall 2001, UTPA initiated a University Writing Center to provide students an opportunity to practice and improve their writing skills outside of class time with the help of trained tutors. Many of our students demonstrate difficulties with writing and, therefore, find it difficult to be successful in writing-intensive courses. As part of the Writing Center initiative, UTPA also began a Writing-Across-the-Curriculum effort. Workshops for faculty in a variety of disciplines have been offered and have been well attended by faculty.

During Fall 2005, UTPA initiated a Fast-Track pilot project with a developmental writing course (ENG 1320) and ENG 1301—Composition. The instructor is integrating the content of both courses into a 16 week semester, each course meeting the required amount of time. Students will receive six semester hours credit for both courses. The purpose of this strategy is to accelerate the time it takes the students who must take a developmental education course before being allowed to take a college level course.

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