EVERY STUDENT GRADUATES

The University of Texas at Austin
Strategies to Increase Graduation Rates
2012-2017
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Finally, we are grateful to the alumni, friends, foundations, and companies that have invested their time and resources to support students at the university, especially those in the University Leadership Network.

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ALL PHOTOS

The University of Texas at Austin
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Overview

Starting in 2012, The University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin) has strategically worked to achieve the ambitious goal of increasing the 4-year graduation rate for undergraduate students from 52% to 70% in 5 years. The university created the office of Student Success Initiatives (SSI) within the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost (Provost Office) in 2012 to oversee and manage the implementation of programs and initiatives to achieve this significant goal. Through a collaborative effort with colleges, schools, and units across campus, the university has achieved impressive results.

The keys to UT Austin’s success in increasing graduation rates include:

- Collaboration with campus partners to define and support student success in every process
- Firm commitment of leadership and resources from all colleges, schools, and units
- University-wide effort, including students

Since the initiatives were implemented, student first-year persistence has increased to 95% overall\(^1\) and the 4-year graduation rate to 66%, with significant improvement for students with the lowest entering academic scores.\(^2\) Most importantly, the dedicated focus on student success resulted in improvements for traditionally underserved students, including first-generation students, low-income students, and underrepresented minorities.\(^3\)

The overall 4-year graduation rate increased to 66% in 2017 — a 26% increase over 5 years — and is predicted to reach 70% in 2018.

SSI oversaw the creation of many innovative new initiatives during the past 5 years, including the creation of the 360 Connections program for all freshmen students, the expansion of success programs for students requiring academic support, the strategic use of the Progress Toward Degree tool for advisors to increase engagement with students who are off track to graduate, a Graduation Help Desk to help students facing administrative roadblocks to timely completion, and the nationally recognized University Leadership Network, which provides incentive-based scholarships combined with experiential learning for UT Austin's students who are most in need of support.

The university's efforts to foster timely graduation have been recognized by the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), PBS, and The New York Times, and many universities from around the world visit UT Austin to learn about these initiatives. Working within the Division of Enrollment Management, SSI will continue to build on these successes by assessing areas for improvement within existing programs and developing new supports for student populations, such as transfer students and those who leave the university before completing a degree.

6 Woodruff, J. (2015, August 17). Why poor students drop out even when financial aid covers the cost. PBS News Hour.
Background

In 2011, the university started an ambitious campaign focused on helping students succeed and graduate in 4 years. A committee was tasked with developing and recommending strategies to increase the university’s 4-year graduation rate from 51% to 70% by 2017. The Task Force on Undergraduate Graduation Rates offered 60 specific recommendations in a comprehensive report\(^8\), and SSI has focused on creating programs to improve the educational experience for students and achieve the university goals outlined in the final report. Of the original 60 recommendations made by the Task Force, more than 70% have been implemented or are in progress. A detailed accounting of all the Task Force recommendations is included in the appendix.

Setting an ambitious target to increase graduation rates was a recognition that an extra year of college creates a financial hardship for many students and also delays their pursuit of starting a

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\(^8\) Diehl, R. (2012). *Final report of the task force on undergraduate graduation rates*. Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin.
job or graduate school.⁹ Students graduating in 4 years also make more room on the campus for new students. More than 1,000 additional students graduated in 2017 because of the increase in graduation rates¹⁰, which allows more students to enter as freshmen. UT Austin’s commitment to this ambitious goal fulfills its mandate to be “a University of the first class” and its corresponding responsibility for institutional excellence and educational leadership not just in the state of Texas but globally.¹¹

UT Austin has a unique admissions process that is regulated by Texas law. Texas law offers eligible freshman applicants automatic admission to public colleges and universities. The initial legislation, passed into law in 1997, offered automatic admission to eligible students in the top 10 percent of their high school class. In 2009, the law was modified for The University of Texas at Austin. Under the new law, the university must automatically admit enough students to fill 75 percent of available Texas resident spaces. Each fall, the university notifies Texas school officials of the class rank that current high school juniors need to attain by the end of their junior year in order to be automatically admitted.¹²

The result supports a more diverse student body representative of the state, and because of the disparity in resources across Texas high schools, students may arrive at UT Austin with vastly different levels of preparedness. An example of this is the large variance in SAT score distribution¹³ across the first-year class, with nearly 400 points dividing the top and bottom quartiles. To reach a 70% 4-year graduation rate for the entire cohort, special focus was placed on students in the bottom quartile based on their SAT scores. For the current Class of 2021

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⁹ Grant, K. B. (2016, June 22). College ‘victory laps’ can cost an extra $300K. CNBC.
¹⁰ UT Austin. (2017, September 20).
¹¹ Texas Constitution, Article 7 - Education (1876).
¹² Texas Senate Bill 175, 81st Congress (2009).
¹³ Although the SAT scale has changed during this time, these data are reported on a 1600-point scale equivalency.
(incoming first time in college [FTIC] freshmen in 2017), the average SAT equivalent score is 1308. Although more than 1,100 students have SAT scores between 1500 and 1600, almost the same number of students — 1,048 — have SAT scores of 1100 or less. Of those, 300 students have SAT scores below 1000. These students represent the top students in their high schools and have great potential to succeed when given the necessary academic support and when a sense of belonging is fostered.

To meet the challenge of increasing graduation rates, the university created a more holistic approach to the student experience, starting with the first year through graduation — especially for those students most likely to face obstacles in their progress to degree completion. All freshmen now benefit from 360 Connections, a program to ensure all first-year students are placed into a 20-student small community during their crucial first year. In addition, a dedicated effort was made to support the students in the bottom quartile of academic preparedness when arriving at UT Austin — roughly 2,000 students. An emphasis on academic support improves outcomes for many underprepared students, but significant hurdles also exist outside of the classroom that can inhibit student progress to graduation. The need for a student to have a paying job off campus can compete with academic success and involvement in the campus community that is vital for students' development, sense of belonging, and, ultimately, their likelihood of graduating. A key focus in the efforts to boost the 4-year graduation rate included creating a student internship program that would provide financial support while building a sense of community for students arriving on campus both academically underprepared and with the greatest financial need.


IMPLEMENTATION AND INSTITUTIONAL BUY-IN STRATEGY

The mandate to raise graduation rates centered a focal point for campus-wide efforts and provided unprecedented resources to create and scale up student success initiatives. The relatively short period to reach the ambitious 70% goal for a 4-year graduation rate by 2017 required the campus move quickly. Following a primary recommendation of the Task Force, in 2012, the university appointed Dr. David Laude to lead this important effort. It was designed to bring together campus units across the undergraduate experience — the Office of Admissions, the Office of Financial Aid, the Office of the Registrar, academic colleges, advisors, technology, and facilities — toward the common goal of supporting student progress toward 4-year graduation. The SSI team was hired to implement and oversee these myriad projects, working with numerous academic and co-curricular units across campus. Appealing to students directly early on was a crucial avenue to changing campus culture. Full buy-in from faculty for increasing 4-year graduation rates — or even from advisors — takes time, but substantial change is more likely if students lead the way in defining their own goal of graduating in 4 years and expecting the resources and opportunity to do so.

Increased teamwork and communication across campus was also critical in shifting the culture for staff and faculty to a central focus on helping students succeed in the classroom and beyond. Although there was not universal agreement with the goal of a 70% graduation rate among some faculty and staff at first, simply having a quantifiable goal dramatically increased the opportunity to discuss strategies and collaborations necessary to understanding the barriers and opportunities to succeed. Over the last few years, many of the critics have become advocates, as they see the institution improving 4-year graduation by removing roadblocks rather than forcing the timeline on students.
Dr. Laude met regularly with student deans to discuss the new initiatives and foster transparency so that all units were working together. Councils were created with representatives from various academic units to focus on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) and writing curricula, and a Provost Council on Student Advocacy was redirected to engage advisors and other program staff who work directly with students. Other collaborative teams began redesigning essential processes like course availability and registration to reduce roadblocks to graduation. The discussions connected representatives from across campus, resulting in holistic, thoughtful solutions influenced by a variety of viewpoints.

Besides changing the culture of academic administration and faculty, an essential part of the collaborative leadership strategy was inclusion of non-academic units — especially the Division of Student Affairs (Student Affairs) — since both curricular and co-curricular realms are central to a student’s overall experience at the university. The redesign of freshman orientation, another primary recommendation of the Task Force, is an example of a key initiative that was only feasible through the close cooperation of academic colleges, Student Affairs, and the Provost Office.

Utilizing institutional structures already in place was a core strategy of SSI. For example, the first-year experience was branded as 360 Connections to serve each of the roughly 8,000 incoming freshmen each year by building upon the many first-year programs already in place. Not only did this reduce the need for additional new resources for all the programs, it also created a new “360 Connection” marketing name for these programs. Incoming freshmen accept that every student is assigned to a 360 Connection that best matches their needs.
Impressive Results

The university’s 4-year graduation rate for FTIC students increased by almost 26% between 2012 and 2017 — a 13.5 percentage point rise from 52.2% to 65.7%.

These efforts narrowed the achievement gap between the least and most prepared students. Using SAT scores as a proxy for preparedness, the gap for 4-year graduation rates between the top quartile of prepared students and the bottom quartile has been halved from 26% to 13% since 2012.16

Substantial improvements in graduation rates have been made for first-generation and Pell-eligible students. In 2017, the number of first-generation and Pell-eligible students who graduated in 4 years rose to 59% (from 41% for first-generation and 40% for Pell-eligible students). Traditionally underrepresented students have also improved. The graduation rates of Hispanic students increased 40% (from 43% to 60%), and the graduation rates of African-American students increased 58% (from 37% to 58%).

Looking toward continuing improvement, it is also important to understand who did not graduate in 4 years. There are four distinct groups of students within the original 7,118 FTIC students in the Class of 2017. Of the students who did not graduate in 4 years, 20.4% (1,450) were still enrolled in Fall 2017. Based on historical data, 30% of these enrolled students were likely to graduate in Fall 2017, and an additional 28% were within one or two courses of graduating. In reality, the 4-and-a-half year graduation rate for the Class of 2017 is 74.5%, reflecting an almost 43% graduation rate for the cohort that remained enrolled through Fall 2017.

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17 ibid.
18 Student Success Initiatives. (2017, September 21). TX17 4-year graduation projections. [Internal report].
19 ibid.
20 Enrollment Analytics. (2018, February 8). TX17 and TX 18 grad rates as of spring 2018. [Internal report].
persist due to academic performance make up only 2.7% (194)\textsuperscript{21}, and SSI is continuing to work with the colleges and schools to identify students on probation to ensure they have additional academic support to improve. For the 11.2% (799) of students who left before graduating, an analysis of National Clearinghouse Data shows that 233 of the students left after the first year. Of those, 194 students, or 83% of those who left in the first year, were enrolled in other universities after leaving UT Austin. Of the 182 students who left in their second year, 140 students, or 78%, were enrolled in other universities after leaving UT Austin.\textsuperscript{22} Additional analysis is ongoing to look at these students to determine if their leaving was for financial, academic, or personal reasons. A “leavers” campaign will be developed to help identify these students prior to their departure and determine if the university can assist them in remaining at UT Austin. The data reviewing students who did not graduate on time bears out the reality that many students graduate just one following fall semester after their expected graduation.

A majority of students who were within the mathematical possibility of graduating by Summer 2017 who did not graduate indicated that a desire to complete a second major, degree, or credential was the reason for staying an additional semester.\textsuperscript{23} The next most common reason for not graduating was “unknown,” meaning there was no evidence of advising notes that would indicate that someone at the university knew the student’s status. Both areas are ripe for additional research and policy and procedure examinations. Historically, 93% of those enrolled at the beginning of their fifth year graduate within 6 years\textsuperscript{24}, which would result in an overall 84% to 85% 6-year graduation rate for the incoming 2013 cohort. That would be a 4% increase over the current 6-year graduation rate.

\textsuperscript{21} ibid.
\textsuperscript{22} National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. (2017, Fall).
\textsuperscript{23} Student Success Initiatives. (2017, October 5). TX17 grad rate lessons learned. [Internal report].
“At UT, more students than ever before are earning degrees within four years. Since 2012, our four-year graduation rate has increased by nearly 14 percentage points. This remarkable accomplishment by students and UT educators cannot be overstated — it is an improvement in academic quality and a decrease in cost to families that has gained national attention.”

Gregory L. Fenves
President
Programs and Accomplishments

In 2013, in collaboration with campus partners, SSI began creating and implementing a comprehensive set of initiatives that now reach students at every step in their progress to degree, from before they arrive on campus for orientation through to graduation. To support these efforts, the Provost Office designated one-time seed funding, as well as recurring funds, to provide for student success initiatives university wide. Leveraging existing practices and current staff in creative ways enabled a cost-effective transformation.

**PREDICTIVE ANALYTICS**

Identifying the students who are most at risk of not persisting is a crucial step in increasing student success. Predictive analytics calculate the likelihood of graduation in 4 years for each admitted first-year student using statistical models based on more than a decade of historical academic and demographic student data. The ability to assign a predicted 4-year graduation rate to students prior to their arrival at orientation allows the university to proactively connect students with the appropriate college-based academic learning community that also fosters a social community and sense of belonging when they arrive on campus. The predictive model to determine a student’s likelihood of graduating in 4 years has been critical in identifying students who need additional support. The model includes demographic and academic factors, and there are multiple models based on a student’s admitted major since the 4-year graduation rate varies by college. Each year, the model is updated with the prior year’s results, and the predicted 4-year graduation rates continue to climb overall.
STUDENT PROGRAMS DATABASE

Sharing information gathered through the predictive model and other institutional data is critical for leadership at all levels to make informed decisions to best help students. An online Student Programs Database (SPD) was built by SSI to provide the college, school, and unit directors and managers of student programs with a tool to quickly access and share data about their students across campus. This relational database offers program directors the ability to assign first-year students to success programs using data like the predicted 4-year graduation rate to identify the students most likely to need extra support. It then provides them with comprehensive academic and demographic information for each student and for their program overall, connecting various data sources from the Office of Admissions and the Office of the Registrar with program rosters. Since the university still utilizes a legacy mainframe data system, this was the first resource for program directors and advisors combining different data sources from the Office of Admissions and the Office of the Registrar into a new aggregate reporting tool for program rosters.

The SPD enables coordinated support and selection of students — program directors can quickly identify a first-year’s current support network or find incoming students not yet included in a program. Assignment in programs is data driven: Students predicted to need the most assistance are assigned to the best program for their needs rather than relying on a student’s self-selection of a program. Not only is this a powerful tool for connecting students to appropriate resources, it also helps institutions avoid duplication of services or overserving some students to the exclusion of other students. The tool provides consistent reporting to assess and evaluate how programs are impacting student success and progress to graduation. It also allows speedy compilation of student data, updated after each semester, to facilitate evaluation of current programs, as well as guiding the development of new programs.
ORIENTATION REDESIGN

Starting in 2013, an innovative collaboration between SSI, New Student Services (NSS), and academic colleges resulted in a redesigned orientation to focus on academics and building communities for all students. The now-mandatory freshman orientation experience has been improved as part of the culture change to better define and emphasize academic expectations as students are starting their college experience. Students experiencing the campus environment for the first time now hear consistent messaging about the importance of academic success and on-time graduation. In addition to learning about community expectations, students learn about the importance of campus life, resources, history, traditions, and the logistics of becoming a student to maximize their overall UT Austin experience. A new university-wide series of events called Longhorn Welcome was created to blend co-curricular and academic gatherings starting a week prior to fall classes and including the convocation for new students, Gone to Texas, the evening before the first class day.
CHANGING STUDENT CULTURE

In 2013, SSI created a new “Class of” campaign that uses unique logos to create a brand for each cohort of students based on their expected graduation year, e.g. “Class of 2017” or “Texas ’17.” This individualized class brand is used in all communications to students starting with their admissions process, at orientation, and throughout their 4 years at UT Austin, supporting an expectation for each cohort that they will graduate together after their fourth year. All areas of the university participate, including the Office of Admissions, colleges and schools, and all areas under Student Affairs.

This was the first time at UT Austin that it was communicated to students that there is an expectation for them to graduate in 4 years. It has helped build new communities, and students now regularly state which “Class of” they belong to. A logo has been created for each class since, and SSI is currently designing the logo for the Class of 2023.

Social media channels managed by SSI and designated email lists for each group also were created to help build brand awareness and target messaging for each cohort. For instance, students in their sophomore year can receive messages to encourage them to participate in study abroad during the spring semester of their junior year, while seniors receive messages about planning for graduation.

360 CONNECTIONS

To foster a sense of belonging for new students, the 360 Connections program ensures every incoming first-year student is part of a small community, building upon pre-existing structures, including First-Year Interest Groups (FIGs), honors programs, success programs, groups managed through Student Affairs, and many others. By coordinating community formation across programs, the university delivers a consistent message to students about how to achieve academic and personal success within a 4-year graduation model.
Additional initiatives were created to promote student involvement and success within the campus community, including targeted advising for students falling behind in their progress to degree, placement of mental health and counseling services within academic advising offices (the Counselors in Academic Residence, or CARE, program), and increased experiential and co-curricular learning opportunities for all undergraduate students.

**EXPANSION OF SUCCESS PROGRAMS**

After the predicted 4-year graduation model identifies the incoming freshmen most likely to benefit from assistance, academic success programs give those students a home on campus and a network of support. Academic success programs provide academic, social, and developmental support to students throughout their first year. In order to broaden the network of opportunities for these students and minimize gaps in opportunity, SSI provided significant resources to expand existing academic success programs and create new programs in the colleges so they could serve 25% of freshmen identified as most at risk of not graduating in 4 years.

Programs now include Texas Interdisciplinary Plan (TIP) Scholars in the College of Natural Sciences, Discovery Scholars in the School of Undergraduate Studies, Foundation Scholars in the College of Liberal Arts, McCombs Success Scholars in the McCombs School of Business, and Ramshorn Scholars in the Cockrell School of Engineering. Two new success programs in the College of Education and the Moody College of Communication will start in Fall 2018. Students in other colleges are served by Gateway Scholars, a success program managed by the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement.
The programs' combined rosters totaled about 2,000 students in 2017, roughly twice as many students as they did in 2011. These academically focused success programs are distinct, reflecting the particular environment and pedagogy of their associated colleges and student populations. They also share best practices aimed at improving student persistence, retention, and graduation.

Each program provides an academic learning community of linked classes that includes small sections, peer mentoring, group and individualized advising, learning skills training, tutoring, and peer-to-peer teaching. A common goal is to provide a small-college feel at our large institution and ensure first-year students have a home on campus where they are known and valued. Organizing the success programs under the umbrella of 360 Connections helped minimize the sense that students selected for the programs were singled out since taking part in a 360 Connection is a common element of the first-year experience for all students.

The first cohort of students to participate in the expanded success programs in 2013 started with a 19 percentage point difference in their predicted 4-year graduation rates: 41% compared to 60% for those not in a success program. In 2017, these students achieved a 57.3% 4-year graduation rate, compared to 67.4% for students not in a success program — reducing the gap by more than half.\textsuperscript{25}

\begin{center}
\textbf{COURSE AVAILABILITY AND REGISTRATION SLOTTING}
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Based on the guidance of the Course Availability and Registration Slotting (CARS) committee, SSI identified the top 50 courses that new students (first-year and transfer) are likely to consume. Seat demand for those 50 courses was shared with the offering departments, along

\textsuperscript{25} ibid.
with procedure changes to remove waitlists from those courses and release an allotment of seats at every orientation session. The results for 2016 and 2017 orientations suggest that this was successful: 99% of first-year students left orientation registered for 12 or more hours. Another measure of the success of this initiative was a decrease in the number of related course availability cases seen at the Graduation Help Desk during Summer 2017.

**PROGRESS TOWARD DEGREE**

In collaboration with SSI, the Enrollment Analytics team created a new Progress Toward Degree (PTD) tool using data from the Office of the Registrar’s Interactive Degree Audit (IDA). The tool is used to display students' progress toward completing their degree-specific coursework within 4 years. Each semester, the PTD tool provides academic advisors with data so they can easily see details on every student who may be off track for their 4-year graduation. This early warning system helps advisors reach out to individual students to help them adjust their coursework to get back on track. Students are also encouraged to regularly check their progress through the Office of the Registrar's IDA.

**GRADUATION HELP DESK**

A new Graduation Help Desk (Grad Help Desk) was created by and is managed by SSI to provide an outlet for students who run into administrative or policy barriers to graduating within 4 years. Since its inception in April 2014, the Grad Help Desk has resolved more than 1,200 cases of issues preventing students from graduating on time. Although initially created to respond to student requests regarding course availability and scheduling conflicts, the Grad Help Desk is

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*Student Success Initiatives. (2017, June 29). Orientation registration report. [Internal report].*
now a primary resource for advisors as well. Advisors also turn to the Grad Help Desk to resolve what could be an administrative roadblock. For instance, individual senior students in different colleges will alert the Grad Help Desk if a course is not offered but is required to graduate. The department may be unaware that the canceled section has a far-reaching impact across multiple colleges and students. The centralized Grad Help Desk is able to identify the problem and ensure the course is taught so seniors can graduate on time.

“I was living in Los Angeles and had been offered a position with a company when UT informed me that I had not actually graduated due to a misunderstanding with an outstanding math credit I had. Many of the people with whom I corresponded simply said they were unable to help. I was on the verge of having to turn down the job offer when I found the Help Desk. They were prompt, impassioned, beyond helpful, and truly changed the course of my life. Because of them, I got the job. I am forever grateful to them — what an extraordinary service the students of UT are fortunate enough to have.”

Lorraine Caffery
Class of 2014
SENIOR COUNTDOWN

Senior Countdown provides juniors and seniors with incentives to graduate by reinforcing the expectation of a 4-year graduation. The countdown works when students and advisors review a student’s degree plan and very specifically map out what is left for their last semester or year. The tracking helps triangulate data in the PTD dashboard so advisors can be confident in the plans they have made for students. Since the program started, more than 29,500 students have declared a graduation date, with an accuracy rate of about 92% for both the FTIC 2012 and FTIC 2013 cohorts.²⁷

AUTO GRADUATION PROCEDURE

As part of the review of historical reasons why students didn’t graduate, SSI determined that current procedures that require a student to apply to graduate are often misunderstood. The process of applying allows colleges to gather information necessary for commencement ceremony procedures and updating degree audits but often leads to confusion among students who believe that their degree is conferred when they complete their degree requirements. Historically, as much as 2% of a graduating class may not have completed their application for graduation.²⁸

Working with the colleges and schools, Auto Graduation procedures help identify students who have completed all their degree requirements (meaning their degree audit is 100%) but have not applied to graduate by the published deadline each semester. The total number of students whose graduation was facilitated by the procedure represents 1.95% of the FTIC 2013 graduation rate.²⁹

²⁷ Student Success Initiatives. (2017, October 14). Senior Countdown report. [Internal report].
**MAJOR SWITCH**

Recognizing that many students attempt STEM coursework but ultimately find that they have neither the interest nor the aptitude to continue, the Major Switch program was created to proactively identify students who might be struggling in introductory STEM courses and intervene to get them on the right path. The program identifies students in designated introductory biology, chemistry, calculus, and pre-calculus courses who are underperforming after the first exam. These courses have some of the highest historical drop/failure rates, so identifying students early is critical for deploying resources.

Now students for whom STEM is not a good academic fit can switch into sections of the courses for non-STEM majors, which still meet their core science requirements. SSI also connects students with advising resources to explore other major options. Students who participate in Major Switch show greater success outcomes than students who are underperforming and do not participate. SSI’s increased tracking of all these students has demonstrated the importance of early and frequent identification of students with a low likelihood of success in these STEM courses after early struggles.

**MAAPS ADVISING**

SSI is participating in the Monitoring Advising Analytics to Promote Success (MAAPS) federally funded First In The World grant as part of the university’s participation in the University Innovation Alliance (UIA), a consortium of 11 large public research universities committed to graduating an additional 68,000 graduates by 2020. The project will track the impact of a series of analytics-informed proactive interventions on 10,000 low-income and/or first-generation students across the 11 UIA universities over the next 3 years. MAAPS will be the
first validated study of the impacts of academic advisement across multiple universities. Two advisors and a data analyst are part of the SSI team through this grant, and they advise the students who are participating in the advising intervention. The intervention involves intrusive advising using 4-year degree maps. Although this is a longitudinal study involving a single cohort across 4 years, early results and innovations from the grant are promising: 67.7% of students are on track for 4-year graduation based on their PTD, and 100% of students who are still enrolled have met with their advisor.³⁰

Two important innovations in advising have also resulted from this grant and are being implemented in phases across campus: texting and success program data dashboards. Using the Signal Vine client, detailed in the Technology section, the advising team has strategically deployed one-to-one and group texting to support students and to provide timely “nudges” that improve student success. MAAPS advisors have more than a 96% engagement rate with their students over text³¹—a number that far exceeds the typical engagement rate of advisors using other methods of communication. The second innovation involves the creation of dashboards that help consolidate information about student progress in real time, thus helping advisors quickly find information on their specific cohort of students. The dashboards track individual student data on courses enrolled, dropped classes, PTD, and other metrics. It also connects to Advisors Toolkit, the university advising notes system.

PATH TO ADMISSION THROUGH CO-ENROLLMENT

The Path to Admission through Co-Enrollment (PACE) program, started in 2013, is an innovative co-enrollment program providing select students with a defined pathway to admission to UT Austin. SSI oversees the PACE program in collaboration with the Office of Admissions, Austin Community College, and the College of Liberal Arts.

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³⁰ Student Success Initiatives. (2017, November 16). PTD data all MAAPS students. [Internal report].
³¹ Student Success Initiatives. (2017, December 8). UT Austin SSI-advising message export. [Internal report].
Students in PACE participate for one academic year, during which they enroll in one course at UT Austin and three or more courses at Austin Community College while preparing for a full-time transition to UT Austin. The PACE program has enabled UT Austin to expand opportunity for Texas residents through a defined pathway of co-enrollment.

PACE students’ rates of retention and being on track to graduate exceed that of the UT Austin cohorts overall. Their cumulative GPAs are in line with their FTIC peers, and their total hours are only about 6 hours behind the UT Austin cohorts, though still ahead of the amount needed to graduate.32

The PACE program was awarded the 2017 National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) Outstanding Advising Program Award.

DEVELOPMENT OF INTERDISCIPLINARY DEGREES

In order to address the continuing issue of high demand and limited capacity for the volume of students wanting STEM majors, SSI provided seed funding to colleges for the creation of five new interdisciplinary degrees to provide alternative paths for students. SSI worked collaboratively with colleges to develop new majors that would be of interest to students who were not able to be admitted to majors in Engineering, Business, and pre-med and computer science in Natural Sciences. The new majors, with numbers of students in 2017, are: Health and Society (286), Human Dimensions of Organization (70), and Sustainability Studies (93) in the College of Liberal Arts; Arts and Entertainment Technologies (202) in the College of Fine Arts; and Communication and Leadership (33) in the Moody College of Communication.33 These new majors are successfully providing students with exciting new areas of study and career paths.

PROGRAMS FOR STRATEGIC PRIORITY COMMUNITIES

SSI staff provide support to four strategic student communities to promote student success.

PRESIDENTIAL SCHOLARS

The Presidential Scholars program provides an annual $5,000 scholarship, as well as community and support, to high-achieving low-income students. The vast majority of Presidential Scholars also are first-generation students. SSI program staff also administers the Individual Opportunity Scholarship to help support experiential learning. This additional one-time $1,500 scholarship encourages and helps students to study abroad, participate in undergraduate research and/or internships, and attend professional conferences. As of Fall 2017, more than 450 Presidential Scholars had taken part in at least one of these experiential learning opportunities. Most importantly, Presidential Scholars exceeded the 70% 4-year graduation goal for the FTIC 2013 cohort with a graduation rate of 72.5%.

POSSE

As part of UT Austin’s contractual obligation with the Posse Foundation, SSI supports five cohorts of 10 students. These students are often overlooked in the college search process but have demonstrated significant leadership and commitment to their communities.

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35 ibid.
KIPP SCHOLARS
As part of UT Austin's Memorandum of Understanding with the KIPP through College Foundation and KIPP Schools, SSI coordinates community and support for former KIPP students on campus. Support for scholars includes a KIPP Alumni Ambassador who serves as a mentor and helps to connect students' prior experiences in KIPP to the parallels at UT Austin. The program coordinator also coordinates community-building activities, connects students to academic and financial resources, and tracks student progress while at UT Austin. There are approximately 45 KIPP alumni (former students of KIPP schools) currently on campus.

COOKE SCHOLARS
As part of UT Austin's ongoing relationship with the Cooke Foundation, SSI provides community building and campus support for the small group of students who are recipients of the Cooke Scholarships. Activities include connecting students to each other, providing information on campus resources and enrichment activities like study abroad, internships, and undergraduate research, and supporting scholars as they navigate financial aid and academic requirements at UT Austin.

UTELL US SURVEY
The UTell Us survey is administered regularly to all UT Austin undergraduate students. The results help administrators, faculty, staff, and student leaders improve the undergraduate experience on campus. Input from students is highly valued and used to improve curricula, increase research opportunities, improve campus services, and inform policy related to various aspects of the university.

Formerly administered by Student Affairs, the Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) survey — branded as UTell Us for UT Austin — came under the umbrella of SSI administration beginning in 2013. SERU is a consortium of research universities and includes many UT Austin peers, including the University of California System schools, the University of
Virginia, the University of Minnesota, and the University of North Carolina. The SERU consortium provides benchmark data collected from the survey to help the university better assess and improve services to students.

SSI coordinates SERU design, deployment, and data collection with the managing institution for the consortium, the University of Minnesota. In addition, SSI coordinates publicity and manages data analysis. In 2016 and 2017, UT Austin secured response rates high enough to pass the threshold for a 99% confidence level, within a 3-5% margin of error. SSI’s efforts to improve communication with students increased the response rate in 2017 a full percentage point from 18% to 19%, and nearly 7,000 students participated in the UTell Us survey in 2017. These response rates are on par with comparison schools.

SSI has also produced reports based on SERU responses on several important campus priorities, some in coordination with units across campus. Reports produced to-date include:

- Athletics
- Assessment
- Campus Climate
- College to Career
- Disabilities
- Experiential Learning
- Finances
- Four-Year Graduation
- Leadership
- Research
- Study Abroad
- Sustainability

These reports are now being used to make strategic decisions on how to improve services and engagement with students across campus.

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TECHNOLOGY AND SPECIAL PROJECTS

MYUT

As part of the 4-year graduation rate initiative, the university determined it needed a new online student portal that could be customized based on a student’s individual attributes and be sizable for mobile platforms. Launched in 2016, the new portal, MyUT, provides students single sign-on access to campus resources including Canvas (LMS), the Office of the Registrar, the Office of Financial Aid, and Student Accounts Receivable, as well as customized pages for each college and school. It also alerts students to emergency messages from the university and features banners from other units across campus, including the Office of Financial Aid and University Health Services. During the last 12 months, from January 25, 2017, to January 25, 2018, more than 180,000 users visited MyUT, initiating 941,000 sessions.37

SIGNAL VINE

A new texting platform, Signal Vine, was piloted with the advisors participating in the MAAPS grant. This robust system allows advisors to broadcast messages to their students and also respond to one-on-one texting conversations. The system has been so successful in reaching and communicating with students that the tool was expanded to serve students and coordinators in the University Leadership Network. SSI is working to expand this tool to all success programs in 2018.

UT APPOINTMENTS

Another new tool launched by SSI was the implementation of UT Appointments. This software is used by the University Writing Center, the Sanger Learning Center, and some colleges and

schools to provide a centralized tool for students to schedule appointments with advisors and counselors.

**STUDY AREAS**

SSI also provided funds to help renovate and build new study areas in both the Perry-Castañeda Library (PCL) and the Fine Arts Library to facilitate collaborative and innovative learning environments for students in key areas. The STEM Study Area in the PCL is a newly renovated section of the library dedicated for students studying STEM courses. There are special areas for supplemental TA instruction that can be prescheduled for various classes, as well as areas for tutoring and collaborative learning. The space was designed with University of Texas Libraries and input from the College of Natural Sciences and the Cockrell School of Engineering. The Fine Arts Library Foundry is a makerspace with a visual and performing arts focus that integrates engineering and computer science, resulting in a STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) teaching and learning center. SSI helped fund the space along with UT Libraries and the College of Fine Arts.

**SCHOLARSHIP SUPPORT**

The university provided SSI with one-time scholarship resources in 2012 to strategically use to improve graduation rates. Scholarships were used as startup funds for key programs until other resources could be identified, as well as to encourage student development behaviors. Scholarships included the first 2 years for all students in the University Leadership Network, the Individual Opportunity Scholarship for Presidential Scholars, Academic Excellence Awards for students in success programs, and the Summer Bridge program for 3 years.
scholarships were provided to support students who the Office of Financial Aid could not support due to limited funds and restrictions for use of discretionary aid.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS AND PHILANTHROPY

SSI staff have also been instrumental in addressing the need for more philanthropic funding for student success programs and the University Leadership Network.

Since 2015, the SSI team has raised more than $10M in gifts from individual donors and foundations to support the ULN program and scholarships for students.38

Major foundation support includes Houston Endowment and the Sid Richardson Foundation. New gifts and endowments from SSI efforts also support general scholarships housed in the Office of Financial Aid. Many additional prospective donors and friends are now regularly invited to participate in professional development opportunities and events with ULN students. SSI will continue to cultivate donors to provide future funding for these areas.

ASSESSMENT PROCESS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Assessment of SSI programs and initiatives has been critical to ensure success. Every program is evaluated on several academic metrics for student performance and improvement, including persistence, GPA, and hours completed toward a degree. Each program is compared to other similar cohorts, as well as the overall student body. Directors and other representatives from the academic success programs meet every two weeks to discuss common issues and assess and improve upon current practices.

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In addition to receiving program leadership and support from the associated academic colleges, program staff collaborate with other UT Austin offices, such as the Office of Financial Aid, the Office of the Registrar, and New Student Services and the Counseling and Mental Health Center in Student Affairs to create a more integrated support system for students. This cooperation and interchange aids top-down efforts to join academicians and non-academic staff on committees and teams to increase communication among colleges, administrative offices, and student services. Such cooperation not only makes sense in terms of providing a seamless campus experience, it is crucial to the overall success and personal development of the students being served. In addition, programs are assessed for their return on investment and, in some cases, are discontinued if the results do not show significant improvement.
University Leadership Network

The most innovative new program created by SSI in 2013 aims at removing non-academic barriers to success for those students who arrive at college with multiple risk factors and the highest financial need. The University Leadership Network (ULN) is a groundbreaking, nationally recognized student success program that combines incentive-based scholarships with leadership training to provide 500 students each year with the support and incentive to graduate in 4 years.

Students selected for ULN demonstrate significant financial need and typically attend under-resourced high schools in Texas, making them great candidates for additional support at UT Austin. A majority of ULN students are first-generation college students. The program provides financial aid that incentivizes behavior consistent with graduating in 4 years, as well as facilitating experiential learning opportunities to help students prepare for their lives after college. The program includes community building to provide these students with a sense of belonging at UT Austin.

All ULN students participate in one of UT Austin's academic learning communities, or success programs, during their first year and also receive leadership training through participation in
professional development and internship experiences that progress in scope over their 4 years. Students receive focused leadership training in year 1. In years 2 through 4, students are required to participate in internships, including those on campus or with companies or organizations off campus. They also are encouraged to participate in other experiential learning opportunities like study abroad, research, or service learning during their junior and senior years. Paired with the professional development that begins in year 1, these experiences support the development of real-world, transferable skills during all 4 years of college, including self-reflection and coaching on how to communicate and apply those skills effectively.

The $5,000 annual ULN incentive scholarship is provided to students in 10 monthly $500 payments during the academic year and is dependent upon their completion of program requirements. Requirements include their attendance at ULN programming, completion of written reflections, and participation in internships in their sophomore through senior years. This is a strategic application of financial aid designed to maximize the power of each dollar while incentivizing behaviors that support student success.

ULN is facilitated with a relatively small program staff along with a network of peer mentors, resulting in a cost-efficient program. The program supports up to 2,000 students with six full-time and one part-time professional staff. Including staffing and other expenses like the community-building events that occur two to three times per semester, the program cost is approximately $300 per student.

ULN takes advantage of institutional resources to operate efficiently at scale. Since ULN students also participate in other university-provided academic learning communities in their first year, the ULN staff strategically provide other needed support to students to avoid duplication of limited resources. ULN also benefits from dozens of trained student mentors and hundreds of campus staff who provide professional development through on-campus internships. A diverse mix of more than almost 300 campus units have invested time in training ULN students and have received many hours of student help in return.
“The University Leadership Network Program establishes a highly motivated and prepared student cadre ready to tackle the everyday rigors that an internship in a workplace setting offers. Students engage in developing transferable skills, embrace experiential learning experiences, and enhance their marketability that is essential post-graduation. The interaction is invaluable for both the student and the campus partner organization. They are core to our success. They come in as students and leave as family.”

Jimmy Johnson
Interim Associate Vice President for Campus Safety & Security
ULN is increasing persistence and, ultimately, completion rates for the students with the lowest predicted 4-year graduation rates from UT Austin. Based on predictive analytics, the first class of ULN students who entered college in 2013 had a 33% predicted 4-year graduation rate based on various academic and demographic factors comprising the statistical model. These same students had an actual 55% 4-year graduation rate in 2017, and 20% of the cohort are still enrolled and on track to graduate in 5 or 6 years.39

Importantly, the ULN 2013 and 2014 entering cohorts did significantly better than a reference group from the UT Austin 2010 entering cohort who had similar SAT scores and financial need. The rate for students leaving after 1 year for ULN students was roughly half that of the pre-ULN comparison group (9.1% left from ULN compared to 17.7% from the pre-ULN comparison group). The first four cohorts of ULN students (entering 2013-2016) had an average first-year persistence rate of 92.8%.40 By comparison, the national average for full-time, FTIC students returning for their second year at a 4-year public institution was only 72.5%.41

Notably, ULN is making a difference for groups that historically have been underrepresented in Texas higher education. ULN students represent a variety of backgrounds: 56% are Hispanic, and 13% are African-American (compared to 21% Hispanic and 5% African-American FTIC undergraduates); 70% are first generation in college; 78% reported parent annual income below $60,000; and more than 80% receive a Pell grant.42 The remarkable success of ULN students is contributing to a more diverse campus, graduating class, and new generation of leaders for Texas and beyond.

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40 ibid.
42 Student Success Initiatives. (2017, October 11).
Next Steps

UT Austin is committed to identifying, enrolling, educating, and graduating an excellent, high-potential student body that is racially, ethnically, economically, and geographically diverse. Part of that commitment is to support students’ educational and personal success, from college through career development and lifelong learning. The university is also focused on ensuring more low-income and first-generation students have the opportunity to achieve the upward mobility of a college degree from UT Austin. A recent Gallup-Purdue survey of UT Austin alumni reported that our alumni are thriving and are more likely than their national peers to say their education prepared them for lifelong success and well-being. Research from the Equality of Opportunity Project presented at CLIMB Conference 2017 shows that the earnings of students of color from UT Austin outperform white students at age 30. It is our mission to continue to help all of our students succeed and thrive after graduation.

As part of the Division of Enrollment Management, led by Senior Vice Provost Rachelle Hernandez, SSI is continuing to work with partners across campus to maintain the growth in persistence and improved graduation rates for all students. SSI is focusing on three primary areas for continued improvement:

- Increasing 4-, 5-, and 6-year graduation rates
- Closing the gap in graduation rates for first-generation and low-income students
- Improving first-, second-, and third-year retention rates for all colleges

Efforts are under way to analyze factors that will help to identify students who left the university prior to graduation, as well as those students in the middle and top quartile of SAT scores who did not graduate in 4 years, to determine assistance to improve their graduation rates. This includes working with the colleges to improve advising to students to take appropriate coursework to stay on track to graduate, discussions about the impact of students attempting to

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complete multiple majors, and course availability for required prerequisites. SSI is also beginning analysis of transfer student persistence and retention with a focus on helping them graduate in 3 years.

The radical change in student success at UT Austin was empowered by a firm commitment of leadership and resources, followed by a willingness to improve how we define and support student success in every institutional process affecting the student experience. The change began — and continues — with a cultural shift to prioritize graduation within 4 years and with the joint responsibility of university staff and undergraduates to make this a real possibility for each student. Collaborative problem-solving with a broad set of institutional tools and processes in place brings revolutionary improvements to student success outcomes. The Student Success Initiatives team will continue working with campus partners and the other units within the Division of Enrollment Management in the Provost Office to meet the university's ambitious and important goals of improving student success and timely graduation.
Appendix

STATUS OF RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE TASK FORCE ON UNDERGRADUATE GRADUATION RATES

In 2011, the Task Force on Undergraduate Graduation Rates offered 60 specific recommendations in a comprehensive report, and Student Success Initiatives has focused on creating programs to improve the educational experience for students and achieve the university goals outlined in the final report. Of the original 60 recommendations, more than 70% have been implemented or are in progress.

PRIMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation #1: Enhance the First-Year and Orientation Experience

*Proposed Action*

- Make changes to freshman advising:
  - All incoming freshmen during the first semester will be advised in a newly created freshman advising center located in Undergraduate Studies (UGS).

  *Status: tabled.* All first-year students are advised through their college or school, including the School of Undergraduate Studies, so a new freshman advising center has not been created. The Vick Center for Strategic Advising and Career Counseling serves all UGS students and non-UGS students in transition between majors.

  - Students with a declared major must also consult the advisor of the major in their home department.

    *Status: implemented.* Students with a declared major are advised by their home department or college, school, or unit (CSU); undeclared students are advised at the Vick Center in the School of Undergraduate Studies. Approximately 85% of incoming freshmen are admitted to their first choice major.

  - Beginning the second semester of their freshman year, those students who have demonstrated certainty about their major will be allowed to transition fully into their departments for academic advising.

    *Status: tabled.* See points above; students in their first year with a declared major meet with academic advisors within their home department.

  - Criteria for making the transition might include a degree audit plan that is clearly understood and established, an academic major that is clearly planned for the course of 4 years at UT Austin, and a GPA of 2.75.
Status: ongoing. Students and advisors use the Office of the Registrar’s improved Interactive Degree Audit (IDA) 2.0 tool to assess progress to degree in a 4-year timeframe. As described above, students visit the advisor associated with their declared major or a Vick Center advisor if they are undeclared.

- Carefully monitor student performance in the first year and intervene as early as possible using advisors, faculty, and academic support specialists to prevent poor performance.

Status: implemented. The Office of the Registrar’s enhanced the university’s IDA in 2013 to include Progress Toward Degree calculations for students to track their progress and provide colleges with an early warning system for students off pace to graduate in 4 years. The new enhancement presents progress to degree in a 4-year timeframe along with a percent toward degree calculation. All first-year students are placed into a 360 Connection cohort, a small group of about 20 students who meet weekly during the first semester in a seminar led by a faculty member, advisor, or program coordinator. Many of these 360 Connections programs integrate with other university-wide initiatives that promote student involvement and success within the campus community, including strategic advising practices that ensure students falling behind in their progress to degree receive timely support and teaching help-seeking behaviors. Students in the bottom quartile based on predicted 4-year graduation are placed in an academic success program as their 360 Connection; the success programs provide specialized academic support and group and individualized advising throughout the first year.

- Require that all first-year students live in university housing in their first year.

Status: tabled. About 74.5% of first-year FTICs live in residence halls, but there is insufficient space for all first-year students to live in university housing. Due to resource and real estate limitations, it has been difficult to create additional on-campus housing; however, substantial private development in West Campus has created ample housing opportunities adjacent to campus. University Housing and Dining is working on plans for additional housing to support undergraduate students.

- Work with residence hall staff to ensure greater academic and social integration within the campus residential communities.

Status: implemented. In addition to ample social programming within the residence halls, Residence Hall Academic Community Centers (in Jester and Kinsolving) partner with CSUs to provide advising, tutoring, mentoring, and other academic support services within the residence hall environment. A second program started in 2017, Living Learning Communities (LLCs), creates residential communities that introduce and integrate academic and social learning through faculty/staff involvement and holistic education. A new position was created in Residence Life to support the LLCs.

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Restructure campus freshman orientation to make it mandatory and to offer activities to promote academic integration and to sustain social networking and learning communities that would be continued in the first semester.

*Status: implemented.* New Student Services (NSS) coordinates and partners with all colleges and schools and multiple departments across campus to provide orientation programming for all incoming undergraduate freshman and transfer students. The now-mandatory freshman orientation experience has been improved as part of the culture change to better emphasize and define academic expectations as students start their college experience. Students experiencing the campus environment for the first time now hear consistent messaging about the importance of academic success and on-time graduation. The theme for orientation is Longhorn State of Mind and was initially developed as a concept for the Class of 2018 cohort (incoming 2014) to champion as they worked toward successfully graduating in 4 years. Messaging also reinforces the academic culture and core purpose and values of UT Austin. In addition to learning about community expectations, students learn about the importance of campus life, resources, history, traditions, and the logistics of becoming a student in order to maximize their overall UT Austin experience. The redesigned orientation experience incorporates more events aimed at engaging students in academic communities and promoting the importance of help-seeking behaviors. This theme continues during the week before classes, when a university-wide event series, Longhorn Welcome, blends co-curricular and academic gatherings and concludes with the convocation for new students, Gone to Texas, the evening before the first class day. Strategic and logistic committee governance, evaluations, and data collection from new students, student orientation advisors, colleges, schools, and departments aid in sustaining delivery of high-quality orientation experiences for incoming students.

Create and offer a new form of orientation that:

- is an extension of the existing Camp Texas, run by the Texas Exes;

  *Status: tabled.* Due to limited space, Camp Texas is unable to accommodate all incoming first-year students at this time. However, the new mandatory freshman orientation complements Camp Texas, extending new students' exposure to UT Austin’s traditions, core values, and history.

- is available to all students and focuses on integration, community-building, and attachment to the university;

  *Status: implemented.* These elements are incorporated into the new freshman orientation, which is mandatory and encourages students to engage in on-campus communities (see above). A separate Transfer Orientation is tailored to transfer students new to UT Austin. NSS works closely with the Deans’ Core Transfer Team (DCTT) to maintain strategic discussions that support the transfer orientation and the overall transfer student experience at UT Austin. DCTT, composed of representatives from the Provost Office, UGS, the Division of Student Affairs, and the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement was developed in 2014 and is responsible for comprehensively assessing transfer student experiences that
extend from enrollment through graduation.

- recognizes the mandatory campus orientation and builds upon it;
  
  **Status: implemented.** See previous.

- and allows camp counselors (UT Austin junior and senior volunteers) to identify socially at-risk students and work with them to improve their sense of connectedness to other students and the campus community.
  
  **Status: ongoing.** Orientation has significant coordination with success programs and CSUs to meet with students and build community while they are on campus during the summer.

Recommendation #2: Changes to Advising and Student Tracking

**Proposed Action**

- Create a university-wide evidence-based document on advising that lays out a philosophy that values and demands 4-year graduation.
  
  **Status: ongoing.** SSI, in cooperation with campus success programs, developed a set of best practices for student success that includes developing a clear mission and providing appropriate academic support. Further work is ongoing to disseminate this work among all advising communities. In addition, UT System launched a Quantum Leap on Student Success, which includes the development of best practices and metrics to measure advising. These recommendations will be distributed to UT System institutions in Spring 2018. The university is also part of an 11-institution, 4-year grant-funded study to examine academic advising efficacy. The results of this study will provide empirical evidence of best practices in advising.

- Employ a universal format for all degree plans on campus so that all degree plans look the same.
  
  **Status: ongoing.** In November 2011, the Office of the Registrar drafted a proposal to reevaluate, revise, and clarify the visual presentation and content of degree plans as published in the undergraduate catalog and on departmental websites. This will require agreement on consistent format for degree plans and structure. Multiple parties are examining ways to reimagine existing degree plans and reduce the complexity of requirements with the goal of increasing flexibility, including the Office of the Registrar and Project 2021.

- Redesign the Interactive Degree Audit (IDA) to:
  
  - provide a more user-friendly graphical interface;
    
    **Status: implemented.** IDA 2.0, live since 2013, has a much improved user interface
that includes a graphic indicator of time to degree and percent toward degree completion.

- tell students whether or not they are on track for 4-year graduation;

  *Status: implemented.* IDA 2.0 includes time to degree and percent toward degree calculations for students to track their progress. In addition, SSI provides colleges with a visual tool using PTD data that is an early warning system to identify students off pace to graduate in 4 years. Advisors use the tool to discuss with students their progress to degree.

- correlate the degree audit format to the universal degree plan format (noted in the bullet above) to aid students’ understanding of their current progress;

  *Status: ongoing.* Doing so was proposed by the Office of the Registrar in November 2011 and will require agreement on a universal degree plan format (see above).

- incorporate this information in students’ course registration interface and show how any registered course will satisfy requirements, i.e., students will register through the IDA;

  *Status: implemented.* IDA 2.0 planner can show progress to degree information that includes currently registered courses and courses planned in the future in addition to completed courses. IDA 2.0 degree audits are also automatically run for FTIC students following registration during orientation, which introduces students at time of matriculation to the usefulness of IDA 2.0.

- and accommodate dual degrees and double majors.

  *Status: ongoing.* Currently, IDA 2.0 must be run separately for multiple majors but can evaluate progress to degree and requirements for both a major and a transcriptable minor (in the 2016–18 catalog).

- Require that IDAs be completed and electronically acknowledged each semester by all undergraduate students.

  *Status: tabled.* Students are encouraged to regularly run or review IDAs, but it is not required. However, at registration, students confirm the classes for which they are registering do satisfy their degree requirements (as per state law).
Recommendation #3: Appoint a Champion of Graduation Rates

Proposed Action

- Create a new administrative position, the “champion” of graduation rates, that reports to the President and Provost, is specifically tasked with improving graduation rates, and remains in place for 3-5 years.

  *Status: implemented.* Dr. David Laude was appointed to this position from 2012 to 2017.

- Create a separate administrative position that reports to the Provost, oversees course management across the university, and is indefinite in duration.

  *Status: ongoing.* There are multiple initiatives under the Provost Office looking into curriculum, including Project 2021 and the Course, Calendar, and Catalog (3C) Committee. A committee on Course Availability and Registration Slotting (CARS) was also created in 2015 to begin redesigning course management and registration to reduce roadblocks to graduation. The discussions involved representatives from among the student deans, advisors, the Office of the Registrar, the Office of Admissions, New Student Services, and student program directors and focused heavily on the role of data to support identification of barriers for students in UT Austin’s registration systems. The effort included developing new forecasting methods to analyze demand for courses and redesigning the course management system to more effectively provide students with seats in required classes and avoid bottlenecks. Outcomes of these collaborations included strategic management of seats in high demand, introductory-level courses for freshmen, and a restructuring of the course registration system during freshman orientation to ensure more students can enroll in the courses they need.

- Provide sufficient resources in staff and funding to implement the Task Force recommendations.

  *Status: implemented.* Resources for the initiatives described here were provided from the Provost Office and one-time funds from UT Austin.

- Encourage the champion to hold colleges accountable for increases in retention and 4-year graduation rates.

  *Status: implemented.* The champion required accountability from the colleges and schools through continuous communication, collaboration, and assessment. Annual reports on student success programs are collected from the colleges with status updates on 4-year graduation initiatives funded by the Provost Office, and participation and collaboration is encouraged through regular meetings with student deans to discuss the new initiatives and foster transparency so all units are working together. Councils were created with representatives from various academic units to focus on STEM and writing curricula, and a Provost Council on Student Advocacy was created to engage advisors and student support staff.
SECONDARY RECOMMENDATIONS

ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Integrate, Educate, and Graduate (IEG)

Proposed Action

- Create a new campaign around the message “Integrate, Educate, Graduate.”

  Status: implemented. Consistent messaging to students and the UT Austin community about graduation in 4 years is delivered through the “Class of” campaigns, beginning at orientation and continuing through all 4 years. Students now identify themselves as part of the class of their graduating year. In their first year, all new students participate in 360 Connections, designed to help them integrate socially, academically, and developmentally to ensure successful retention and on-time graduation.

- The mission statement of this new campaign: All members of the university community must work together as a team to ensure that our students become integrated, get educated, and be graduated in 4 years.

  Status: implemented. In addition to the campaigns described above, having a quantifiable goal of a 70% 4-year graduation rate by 2017 dramatically increased the opportunity to discuss — among the entire UT Austin community — the strategies and collaborations necessary to understanding the barriers and opportunities for graduation success. The successes of improving retention and graduation rates are due to the collaborative efforts of all colleges, schools, and units involved.

Improving Integration through Campus Enrichment Experiences

Proposed Action

- Prioritize programs in undergraduate research, study abroad, academic service learning, and other similar programs.

  Status: implemented. As noted by the 2017 College to Career Task Force, UT Austin has been a national leader on this front in many disciplines, with evidence found in the more than 200 examples collected from UT Austin faculty and program websites; forms of experiential engagement include student research, service learning, internships, leadership, study abroad, and entrepreneurship. Many programs require students to take part in experiential learning each semester, like the University Leadership Network, which began in 2013 and serves 500 students in each cohort. Since 2013, the Presidential Scholars (PS) program has provided an Individual Opportunity Scholarship of $1,500 to be used for study abroad, internships, or undergraduate research.

- Prioritize social involvement in other forms of campus life that continually integrate students into the daily life of the campus community.

  Status: implemented. Student social integration is encouraged beginning at orientation and in their first-year 360 Connections and is supported through all 4 years by a large
number of curricular and co-curricular opportunities that students hear about starting in their first year. There are more than 1,100 registered student organizations at UT Austin that provide students opportunities to be engaged and involved in areas of their interest.

- Tie these programs into the IEG framework noted above to provide students a broader view of the implications of their work in these areas.

*Status: implemented.* The groundwork laid by messaging at orientation and in 360 Connections teaches students to view their involvement in the campus community and their learning experiences inside and outside the classroom as part of their holistic college experience. There are also multiple social media channels designated for each graduating class so that students have the opportunity to engage and communicate with their peers.

**ACADEMIC POLICY**

**Policies on Internal Transfers**

*Proposed Action*

- Allow students to apply to a restricted college one time; students who are denied cannot reapply to that college.

*Status: implemented.* Policy on Transfer from One Division to Another Within the University has been updated, effective beginning with the 2013-2014 General Information catalog, to limit the number of times a student may apply to transfer to each new college or school that has limited space for internal transfers to two times. For these colleges and schools, the student must apply within the student’s first four long-term semesters of enrollment at the university.

- Do not allow students to change their major or college after four long semesters in residence without showing they can graduate in 4 years.

*Status: implemented.* Existing policy states students may not transfer to another college or school after they have completed 60 semester hours of coursework in residence or after they have completed four long-session semesters in residence regardless of the amount of credit they have earned. Effective with the 2013-2014 General Information catalog, the policy was updated to include the following: “A student who wishes to seek an exception to this rule should petition the dean’s office of the college into which he or she would like to transfer. Approval of the petition will take into account the student’s ability to graduate within four years of entering the University.”

- Do not allow students to declare more than two majors without showing they can graduate in 4 years.

*Status: ongoing.* Effective with the 2014-2016 Undergraduate Catalog, the policy was updated to include the following: “Approval of the student’s application for simultaneous major will take into account the student’s ability to graduate within four years of entering the University.” Additionally, the policy on earning multiple degrees was updated to
remove the requirement of completing 24 hours in addition to the number of hours required for the degree with the higher number of hours. However, work is ongoing to ensure that the spirit of this recommendation is enforced on a case-by-case basis.

- Require restricted colleges to set aside 20% of each cohort for internal transfers (using a time limit consistent with other recommendations).

  **Status: tabled.** Continued demands on enrollment in restricted colleges and increased efficiencies in managing FTIC and transfer enrollment coupled with increasing retention rates provides little opportunity for colleges to set aside space for internal transfers. Opportunities for movement into restricted majors continues to be a challenge and bottleneck for some students. An internal transfer committee meets regularly and includes representatives from the colleges, the Office of Admissions, and SSI to improve the internal transfer process.

- Expand interdisciplinary programs and degrees such as Business Foundations and the Bridging Disciplines Programs in an effort to accommodate students who cannot gain admission to selected colleges.

  **Status: implemented.** Five new interdisciplinary degrees were funded and developed in three colleges to provide students with alternatives, including Health and Society, Sustainability Studies, Human Dimensions of Organization (all Liberal Arts); Art and Entertainment Technology (Fine Arts); and Communication and Leadership (Communication). The new Bachelor of Science and Arts (BSA) degree in the College of Natural Sciences (effective with the 2014-2016 Undergraduate Catalog) has fewer hours than the traditional Bachelor of Science degree, providing space for the student to earn a transcriptable minor or certificate. More than 100 transcriptable minors or certificates are now available to students, including the popular Business Foundations, Health Professions, and Elements of Computing. The Bridging Disciplines Programs is very successful, with students across campus participating every year.

**Programs for Students in Academic Jeopardy**

**Proposed Action**

- Require colleges to create and administer intervention programs for students in academic jeopardy and those returning from academic dismissal.

  **Status: ongoing.** Colleges are not required to administer intervention programs for students in academic jeopardy, although most colleges have some support programs for these students. Notable examples exist, including the UTurn program in the College of Liberal Arts and special academic support seminars for students in success programs (e.g. ULN and TIP) who are on academic probation.
DEGREE PLANS AND COURSE AVAILABILITY

Identify and Mitigate “Bottleneck” Courses

Proposed Action

- Request that colleges and departments conduct audits to identify bottleneck courses that are created through a lack of sections offered or the restriction of seats; once bottleneck courses are identified, departments should employ additional resources to mitigate those problems.

**Status: implemented.** A committee on Course Availability and Registration Slotting (CARS) was created to begin redesigning course management and registration to reduce roadblocks to graduation. The effort included developing new forecasting methods to analyze demand for courses and redesigning the course management system to more effectively provide students with seats in required classes and avoid bottlenecks. Data is also collected by the Graduation Help Desk to identify and document course bottlenecks. The complexity of the university curriculum structures impedes the university’s ability to follow a structured methodology for conducting true predictive course demand analysis and forecasting. In August 2011, the Office of the Registrar proposed enhancements to various university operations and curriculum structures that would permit predictive analytics to support course demand analysis and forecasting.

- Identify courses that require a number of stealth hours and request that colleges and departments reconsider the course numbers for those classes in an effort to more closely align them with the time requirements for the course.

**Status: ongoing.** Enrollment Analytics has begun analysis of degree requirement complexity to identify areas of difficulty for timely completion. Project 2021 and the Faculty Innovation Center are working closely with teams of faculty in departments on curriculum redesign to address issues including high numbers of hours required and redundancy in courses. The Office of the Registrar has conducted a number of studies related to “hidden hours” in degree plans, degree complexity, minimum vs. aggregate hours required for degree, proposed refinements to degree plan structures, and visual presentation of degree requirements; issued recommendations to better support course relations; and issued a set of recommended curriculum guidelines that would streamline the university’s administration of curriculum without affecting class content.

Core Course Instruction

Proposed Action

- Provide financial incentives for faculty to teach these courses and teach them effectively.

**Status: implemented.** The Faculty Innovation Center and Project 2021 annually award small grants to UT Austin faculty to develop or scale promising innovations in undergraduate education. In the past, similar course transformation grants funded through the Provost Office have provided a vehicle for faculty to implement and assess new classroom practices that utilize innovative teaching methods and technologies in large gateway courses. In several courses including biology, chemistry, and statistics, non-
passing rates for freshmen in their first semester were reduced by roughly half (comparing 2010 to 2015 passing rates) without a reduction in the large numbers of students and rigorous curricula.

- Assign resources for core courses based on enrollment and quality of instruction rather than on historical funding levels.

  **Status: ongoing.** The committee for Course Availability and Registration Slotting (CARS) has helped direct some limited resources where projected enrollment suggested a need.

- Instill a culture within the faculty that encourages the best teachers to teach these courses.

  **Status: ongoing.** The Faculty Innovation Center (FIC) provides teaching and learning resources and innovation grants that enhance teaching excellence, promote the use of technology in teaching and support, and support the development of graduate teaching assistants. FIC also houses the Provost’s Teaching Fellows program, begun in 2013, which supports faculty-led initiatives to improve teaching and learning across departments at UT Austin. Another initiative from the Provost Office, Campus Conversation, was launched in the 2014-2015 academic year and has engaged hundreds of UT Austin faculty in discussions about the future of the residential experience, instructional technology, and the design of degree programs to educate leaders for the future.

**Following the Core Curriculum Sequence**

**Proposed Action**

- Provide incentives (e.g. registration priority) to students to encourage following the proper core curriculum sequence.

  **Status: ongoing.** The sequencing of students for registration was changed from scheduling students alphabetically by last name within classification (seniors, juniors, sophomores, freshmen) to sequencing students in descending order based on their percent toward degree completion; those closest to 100% complete register first. In addition, the use of priority registration was significantly reduced to only those students whose affiliation with the university prohibits the student from managing their own schedule (note: there are a very few exceptions to this). This provides an incentive for students to complete a pre-specified percentage of degree requirements by the end of every semester to increase their registration slotting and thus stay on track to graduate.

- Provide disincentives (e.g. bars for entering major sequence) to students to discourage taking courses out of sequence.

  **Status: tabled.**
• Require that students complete a pre-specified percentage of the core requirements by the end of their sophomore year.

*Status: tabled.* However, in 2016, the Office of the Registrar changed how credit for having taken courses which satisfy the state-mandated core curriculum requirement is attached to students' permanent academic records. Previously, core credit was attached to a list of courses as specified in a specific catalog, and since the list could be altered, the student was not guaranteed to retain core curriculum credit if the student changed to another catalog. As of Fall 2016, students are guaranteed to keep any core curriculum credit at the time in which it was earned. Additional changes have been made to ensure that classes that satisfy the same degree requirements will bequeath the same core curriculum credit even if only one of the courses was officially designated as a “core” course. Changes were also made to optimally evaluate transferred coursework for awarding students core curriculum credit.

• Communicate to students why the sequence matters.

*Status: ongoing.* Students hear regular messaging about the importance of progress to degree in 4 years, and advisors now more consistently talk to students about how their registration choices impact their timely graduation.

**Student Classification Consistency**

*Proposed Action*

• Make student classification consistent with progress toward a degree.

*Status: ongoing.* Classification has not been redefined to reflect Progress Toward Degree (PTD) calculation. However, students are now slotted for registration times based on their progress to degree rather than alphabetically within classification. Therefore, a student with hours toward their specified degree will have the opportunity to register before a student with 90+ hours who has not made similar progress toward their degree. Traditional classifications remain but are no longer used in registration time slotting.

**Reworking Five-Year Programs**

*Proposed Action*

• Request that existing 5-year programs explore the possibility of awarding a bachelor’s degree at the end of 4 years and the master’s degree in an additional graduate year.

*Status: ongoing.* Discussions are ongoing to modify 5-year programs such that a bachelor’s degree is awarded after 4 years. An example of a program that has already made this change is the integrated MPA in the McCombs School of Business, which now expects students to complete their BBA accounting degrees within 4 years as a milestone toward their MPA degrees and automatically awards the BBA accounting degree at the end of 4 years unless the student opts out (effective with the 2014-2016 catalog).
• Encourage colleges to develop new packages for students to earn bachelor’s degrees in 3.5 to 4 years and then a graduate or professional degree in the fifth or sixth years.

Status: tabled.

Better Utilize Summer Resources

Proposed Action

• Create a summer admissions cohort for students to take core requirements and become acquainted with UT Austin prior to the start of the first fall semester; these programs would be targeted at students who are in at-risk categories or who meet some area-specific criteria.

Status: tabled. A Summer Bridge program was created and piloted for three cohorts of roughly 200 students in the entering classes of 2013-2015. A scholarship covered all costs for tuition, housing, orientation, and other expenses. Students completed a rhetoric and math class during the second summer session and received an additional $1,000 scholarship for successfully passing the classes. Analysis of student performance among Summer Bridge participants and students with similar characteristics who did not attend the program revealed that the benefit to student progress to graduation was small compared to the high costs of the program47, and it was discontinued.

• Create flat-rate summer tuition to encourage students to take more than three hours during the summer.

Status: tabled.

FINANCIAL AID, TUITION INCENTIVES, AND SEMESTER LIMITS

Reconsidering the Structure of Financial Aid

Proposed Actions

• Explore ways to lower the net price of attendance to low-income and at-risk students.

Status: ongoing. Efforts to direct financial aid to low-income and at-risk students are ongoing. One example of a new initiative addressing this is Texas Advance, launched in Fall 2014, to encourage economically disadvantaged Texas students to apply to UT Austin. Using existing scholarship resources, the Texas Advance initiative offers scholarships to students ranging from $20,000 ($5,000 for 4 years) to $72,000 ($18,000 for 4 years) and enrolls approximately 1,000 students per year. The President has announced more financial aid will be provided to low- and middle-income students in the coming year. A new Strategic Enrollment Management Faculty Working Committee is researching options to ensure the strategy for enrolling a diverse, high-potential undergraduate student body aligns with the core purpose and values of the university.

• Increase summer institutional grant funding to offset the loss of federal Pell Grants.

  *Status: ongoing.* Note that, effective in 2017, the Department of Education is making available summer Pell Grants.

• Increase to 15 hours the minimum number of hours that students must take to maintain certain merit-based scholarships.

  *Status: ongoing.* Though this is not a universal requirement for merit scholarships, some programs have 4-year graduation behaviors as a requirement. One example is Presidential Scholars, which requires students (in cohorts of about 400 per year) to complete 30 hours per year.

• Generate more on-campus undergraduate jobs.

  *Status: ongoing.* This effort is limited by resource availability, but some new programs have been developed to increase on-campus work for undergraduates. One example is the University Leadership Network, launched with the incoming 2013 cohort. The program provides 500 students from each incoming cohort who have significant financial need a $5,000 annual scholarship. The students complete professional training and on-campus internships (10 hours per week in years 2 through 4) to develop leadership skills that will help them achieve academic success and graduate in 4 years. Students who participate all 4 years in the University Leadership Network can earn up to $20,000. In years 3 and 4, students participate in experiential learning opportunities on or off campus, continued leadership development, and opportunities to engage in community and university service.

• Provide mandatory academic support (e.g. tutoring and academic counseling) for freshmen financial aid recipients.

  *Status: tabled.* This is not a mandatory requirement; however, many success programs that include a higher proportion of students receiving financial aid provide students with additional academic support in their first year.

### Tuition Incentives and Disincentives

*Proposed Actions*

• Enforce the “slacker” rule to allow the university to charge non-resident tuition to Texas residents who do not earn a degree in a certain number of hours.

  *Status: tabled.* State law allows colleges and universities to charge a Texas-resident undergraduate the nonresident tuition rate if the student has attempted an excessive number of hours beyond the number required for their degree or repeats a course they have already completed. Per the Office of the Registrar as of Fall 2017, the university does not charge undergraduates additional tuition for an excessive number of hours or for repeated courses.
• Promote the State Be on Time loan program. This program is one where, should the student graduate “on time,” the loan becomes a forgivable grant.

   Status: tabled. The Office of Financial Aid promoted this program until it was discontinued by the Texas Legislature.

Creating Semester Limits

Proposed Actions

• Establish a 10-semester limit to complete a bachelor’s degree with careful consideration of 5-year programs and dual degrees; students who exceed the 10-semester limit would be required to reapply to the program.

   Status: tabled. This rule has not been implemented and would require significant buy-in across campus. Ideally, an eight-semester limit could be considered, similar to policies at institutions like the University of Virginia.

Additional Considerations on Incentives and Resources

Proposed Actions

• Require all core courses to include on syllabi information relating to tutors or other academic support services relevant for the course.

   Status: tabled.

• Establish a “Class of 20xx” mentality among students to create a cohort identity by using promotional materials, orientation activities, and other reinforcing elements.

   Status: implemented. Since 2012, Student Success Initiatives has created new “Class of ...” brands that are marketed to students starting with their admission to the university and are further established during orientation through messaging and promotional materials from New Student Services and individual colleges and schools. Using social media and other communications channels, students refer to themselves as the “Class of 2017,” “Texas ’17,” and “UT ’17.”

• Consider a graduation recognition token for students who graduate in 4 years.

   Status: implemented. Students who pledge to graduate on time by participating in Senior Countdown receive a special class gift.
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