

The University of Texas System Graduation Rates Initiative Progress Report

April 2007

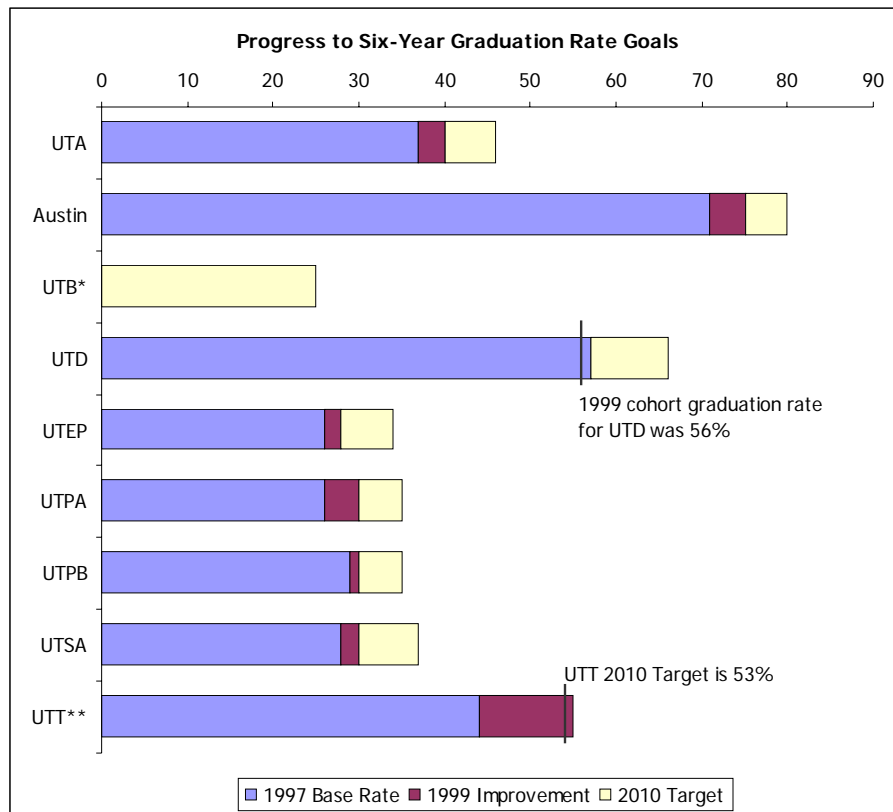


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I. Executive Summary

The University of Texas System Graduation Rates Initiative began in May 2006. Thus, the impact of this initiative will not be fully felt until the student cohort of fall 2006 graduates in years 2010 through 2012. This follows the timetable agreed upon by the Board of Regents in their resolution. Yet, the institutions have enacted a series of programs, some of which were in place before this new System initiative, that have already demonstrated a positive effect on current students. However, those students entering in fall 2006 and 2007 will be able to benefit fully from the new set of programs designed to speed up graduation rates. The following are trends for all academic institutions are for the cohorts entering in fall 1998 and 1999:

1. Four out of nine institutions increased their 4-year graduation rate by an average of 4.2 percent. The highest increase was 10 percent. The lowest was a decrease of eight percent.
2. Five out of nine institutions increased their 5-year graduation rate by an average of 4.0 percent. The highest change in percentage points was 12 percent. The lowest saw no change in its 5-year graduation rate.
3. Seven out of nine institutions increased their 6-year graduation rates by an average of 3.3 percent. The largest increase was 11 percent. The lowest saw no change in its 6-year graduation rate.
4. One institution (UT Austin) far exceeds the national graduation rates in the 4-year, 5-year, and 6-year categories.
5. UT Dallas and UT Tyler have already exceeded the average national graduation rate (53%) for 6-year graduation category and are well under way to meet their own targets which are higher.
6. Assuming a two percent yearly increase in graduation rates for every institution, eight of nine institutions should meet their target goal for 2010.



*1997 and 1999 graduation rate data not available for UT Brownsville.

**UT Tyler did not admit lower division students until 1998; thus, the 1998 cohort was used as the base rate.

Conclusions

To meet the aggressive targets set by the Board of Regents, institutions have moved forward with a number of activities to improve graduation rates. Their initiatives have included a range of new structural, policy, and academic programs to promote timely graduation. The following are highlights:

1. Tuition structures have been modified to incentivize students to take a greater number of credit hours per semester, accelerating time to graduation.
2. Institutions have made policy changes that will encourage students to re-enroll and finish their coursework.
3. Institutions have created employment opportunities so that students remain on campus. There is some evidence that students employed at the university are more likely to perform better academically.
4. Institutions have developed new retention programs that will help keep students in college and thus able to finish coursework on time.
5. Some institutions have combined academic advising with financial aid advising so that students understand how continuous enrollment, supported by financial aid packages, will accelerate their time-to-graduation.
6. Some institutions have begun to redesign courses and add supplemental instruction to ensure student success and to avoid having students repeat courses to master the material.
7. There is significant activity at all institutions to strengthen their relationships with community colleges. Collaborations have been developed with local community colleges, that, in some cases, involve financial aid and curriculum reform.

Recommendations

Program and policy changes have been recently implemented or are in the process of implementation. It is too early to determine their effectiveness in improving graduation rates. Thus, five recommendations are suggested as next steps:

1. The UT System will continue to monitor and report graduation and persistence rates for all campuses every year.
2. The UT System will help institutions expected to have difficulty achieving their 2010 graduation rate target develop an action plan to improve the chances of achieving their goals.
3. The campuses will develop early assessment programs for all the programmatic and policy changes that have been implemented. It is the only way to understand the effectiveness of a program vis-à-vis graduation rates success. These assessments can only be done by the individual campuses.
4. The UT System will develop a website to share best practices associated with increasing graduation rates.
5. The Office of Academic Affairs will analyze and develop alternative measures of student success in addition to the basic four-, five-, and six-year graduation rate trends currently tracked.

II. The University of Texas System Resolution to Improve Graduation Rates

In February 2006, the Board of Regents unanimously passed a resolution that made improving graduation rates one of its highest educational priorities.

RECOMMENDATION

The Chancellor recommends that the Board approve the following resolution to improve the graduation rates at all U. T. System academic institutions:

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, The Board recognizes the importance of the State of Texas Initiative "Closing the Gaps by 2015," a plan to close the educational gaps in student participation and success within Texas, as well as between Texas and other states;

WHEREAS, Graduation rates are a critical component of such plan;

WHEREAS, Although the Board recognizes the progress in student participation among the academic institutions, the Board is not satisfied with the status of student success (graduation rates) among the academic institutions;

WHEREAS, The Board understands that each academic institution has a set of contextual factors that affect graduation rates, such as the proportions of students who are full-time, part-time, Coordinated Admissions Program enrollees, joint degree students, and transfer students; and

WHEREAS, The Board wishes to enhance the quality of the educational experience and does not approve lowering academic standards nor inflation of grades among academic institutions.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that on behalf of The University of Texas System, the Board expresses concern about the student success rates among all academic institutions and thus makes improving graduation rates one of its highest educational priorities for the next decade, and the Board directs:

- That all academic institution presidents align institutional policies to maximize their positive impact on graduation rates -- policies such as financial aid, academic advising, performance reviews, tuition, course scheduling, campus housing, curriculum, admissions, and any other institutional policy that improves graduation rates;
- That all academic institution presidents develop specific targets by April 15, 2006, to meet or exceed national averages for four-year, five-year, and six-year graduation rates for full-time, part-time, and transfer students;
- **That students, faculty, and staff at all academic institutions be involved in discussions to improve graduation rates; and**
- That all academic institution presidents report each quarter the specific steps taken to align policies and to improve graduation rates and that they provide statistics and progress toward the specified targets annually to the Board for each group of students.

III. Data Report and Analysis

Table I lists the graduation rates of 1997-1999 entering first-time, full-time, degree seeking undergraduate cohorts. Overall, UT System academic institutions showed an increase in their rates over the last few years.

Table 1
UT System Graduation Rate Targets
Academic Institutions

	Actual Graduation Rates			Targets		National Average
	1997 Cohort	1998 Cohort	1999 Cohort	2010	2015	1997 Cohort
Arlington						
Four-year Rate	20%	12%	15%	26%	30%	26%
Five-year Rate	34%	30%	32%	40%	44%	47%
Six-year Rate	37%	38%	40%	46%	50%	53%
Austin						
Four-year Rate	36%	39%	42%	55%	60%	26%
Five-year Rate	64%	67%	69%	73%	75%	47%
Six-year Rate	71%	74%	75%	80%	85%	53%
Brownsville/TSC						
Four-year Rate	n/a	n/a	n/a	10%	26%	26%
Five-year Rate	n/a	n/a	n/a	20%	47%	47%
Six-year Rate	n/a	n/a	n/a	25%	53%	53%
Dallas						
Four-year Rate	32%	38%	30%	38%	47%	26%
Five-year Rate	52%	51%	51%	57%	62%	47%
Six-year Rate	57%	56%	56%	65%	72%	53%
El Paso						
Four-year Rate	2%	4%	5%	10%	20%	26%
Five-year Rate	15%	16%	18%	23%	40%	47%
Six-year Rate	26%	27%	28%	34%	53%	53%
Pan American						
Four-year Rate	6%	n/a	8%	18%	26%	26%
Five-year Rate	18%	n/a	21%	30%	47%	47%
Six-year Rate	26%	27%	30%	35%	53%	53%
Permian Basin						
Four-year Rate	15%	17%	15%	18%	26%	26%
Five-year Rate	26%	27%	32%	35%	47%	47%
Six-year Rate	29%	31%	35%	40%	53%	53%
San Antonio						
Four-year Rate	6%	7%	6%	11%	26%	26%
Five-year Rate	19%	21%	22%	27%	47%	47%
Six-year Rate	28%	29%	30%	37%	53%	53%
Tyler*						
Four-year Rate		28%	38%	26%	28%	26%
Five-year Rate		39%	51%	47%	49%	47%
Six-year Rate		44%	55%	53%	55%	53%

Notes:

Graduation rates are for first-time, full-time, degree-seeking undergraduates who begin in the summer/fall of the enrollment year and graduate at the same institution. The cumulative rates represent the sum of degrees conferred at the end of the fourth,

Most students at Brownsville/TSC matriculate at TSC, so historical graduation rates could not be accurately calculated for the campus.

Tyler did not admit freshmen until summer/fall 1998, so their graduation rates begin with the 1998 entering cohort.

Graduation rate targets were submitted by U. T. System institutions and approved by the Board of Regents in May 2006.

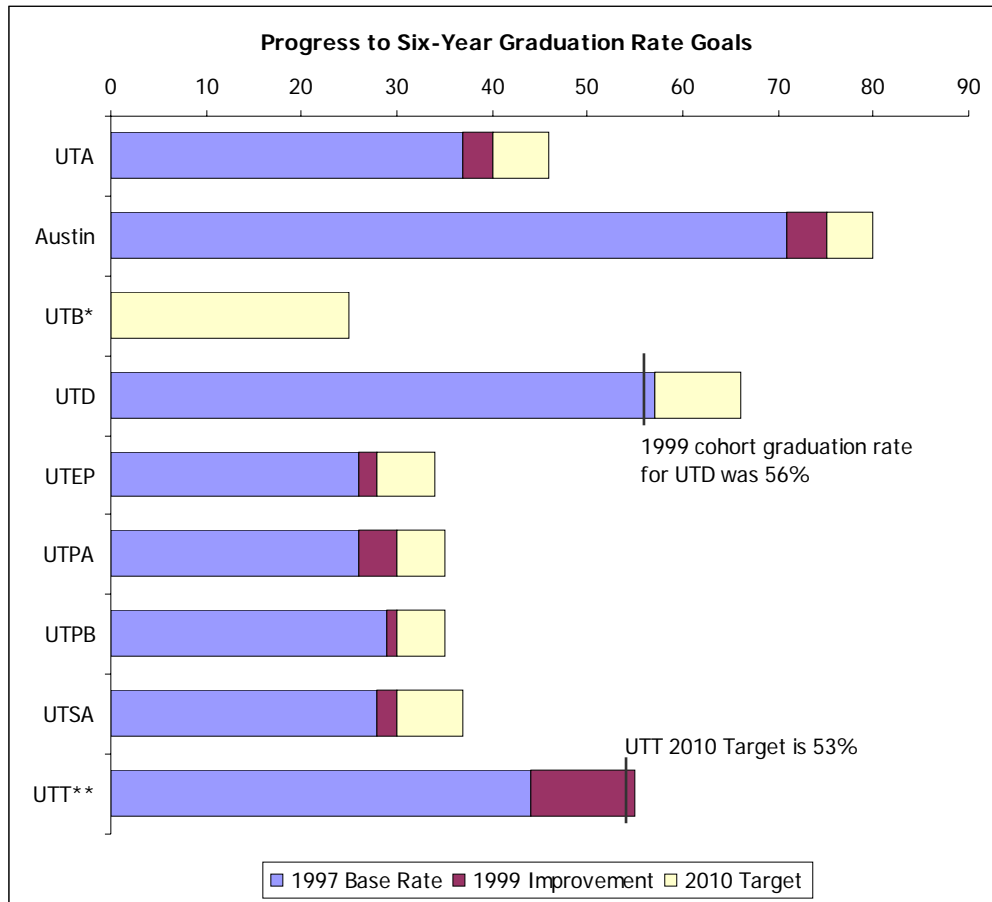
Source: IPEDS Graduation Rate Survey Data and U. T. Academic Institutions

Analysis

Table 1 and Figure 1 show the progress each academic institution has made toward achieving their six-year graduation rate goals. They also show how many percentage points each institution needs to meet its target goal for year 2010.

- Seven of out of nine institutions made progress from the benchmark year (1997 cohort) to the 1999 cohort. One institution was flat in its growth; while the other institution did not have the necessary data to calculate their graduation rates.
- The average change has been two or more percentage points per year.
- UT Austin has far exceeded the average national graduation rates.
- UT Dallas and UT Tyler have exceeded the national graduation rate average (53%) and are on track to meet their own target goals, which are higher than the national average.

Figure 1



*1997 and 1999 graduation rate data not available for UT Brownsville.

**UT Tyler did not admit lower division students until 1998; thus, the 1998 cohort was used as the base rate.

Will institutions meet the target goals for 2010?

Assuming a two percent yearly increase in graduation rates for every institution, eight of nine institutions should meet their target goal for 2010:

- UT Arlington will need to increase their graduation rate from 40 percent to 46 percent in four years.
- UT Austin will need five percentage points to achieve 80 percent graduate rate.
- UT Brownsville will face the toughest challenge to increase its graduation rate to 25 percent.
- UT Dallas will need a nine point increase to achieve a 65 percent graduation rate.
- UT El Paso will need to increase its rate by six percentage points from 28 percent to 34 percent over the next four years.
- UT Pan American will need to increase its graduation rate by five percentage points from 30 percent to 35 percent over the next four years.
- UT Permian Basin will need to increase its graduation rate from 35 percent to 40 percent.
- UT San Antonio will need to increase by seven percentage points.
- UT Tyler has already exceeded the target rate for 2010.

In summary, three institutions (Austin, Dallas, Tyler) have already exceeded the national average graduation rates. The rest of the institutions are on track to meet their target goals for 2010. Only one institution does not seem to be on target to meet the goal.

IV. Institutional Initiatives to Improve Graduation Rates

All academic institutions developed programs to improve graduation rates over the next decade. Below is a sampling of such programs for all nine academic institutions, including a brief profile containing total enrollment statistics, percent of part-time student body, and percent of undergraduates receiving financial assistance.

The University of Texas at Arlington

In fall 2006, a total of 24,825 students enrolled at The University of Texas at Arlington and 30 percent of the 19,205 undergraduate students were enrolled part-time. There were 2,120 first-time undergraduate students. The average SAT score of entering students in fall 2005 was 1066. In the 2005-06 academic year, 37 percent of the undergraduate student body received need-based financial aid. Tarrant County, in which UT Arlington is located, has a median family income of \$47,660.

Modified Tuition Structure

In fall 2006, UT Arlington adopted a modified flat rate tuition structure. The new model consolidates tuition and most academic fees into a single tuition and fee rate. A small number of special fees may still be charged for certain programs or activities that do not involve all students on campus. UT Arlington now caps tuition and fee charges at 14 semester credit hours to provide students with additional incentives to take heavier course loads.

IMPACT: In fall 2006, the percentage of undergraduates taking 15 or more hours was 22.9 percent, up from 20.4 percent in fall 2005. The first run of "final" spring numbers showed that the percentage of undergraduates taking 15 or more hours was 25.1 percent, up from 23.4 percent in spring 2006.

Short-term indicator: SCH loads.

Long-term indicator: improved graduation rates.

Freshman Retention Strategies

In an attempt to get students on the right track, UT Arlington has improved its freshman orientation. Freshman orientation is now required for all entering students.

The university implemented a policy in fall 2006 that requires full-time freshmen who earn below a 2.0 grade point average their first semester to take an academic skills course during the subsequent semester as a condition of remaining enrolled at the university. The course, called Potential for Academic Success (PAS), is a one-credit course focused on providing students with the skills necessary to succeed, including time management strategies, study skills, test preparation techniques, and methods of coping with test anxiety and stress. The course also introduces students to the writing lab, math clinic, and university libraries. In spring 2007, 320 students were enrolled in this new course.

IMPACT: Too early to assess.

Indicator: improved retention for students on academic probation.

Policy Revisions

UT Arlington amended its policy related to dropping classes. Students entering in fall 2006 are limited to 15 hours of dropped courses over the course of their academic career. Before dropping a class, a student is required to meet with an academic advisor to learn about the consequences of dropping, such as the impact of progress toward the degree, financial aid, and the ability to enter subsequent courses which use the dropped course as a prerequisite.

IMPACT: Too early to assess.

Indicator: improved graduation rates.

The University of Texas at Austin

In fall 2006, a total of 49,697 students enrolled at The University of Texas at Austin and over 92 percent of the 36,775 undergraduate students were enrolled full time (or just under 8 percent were enrolled part time). There were 7,410 first-time undergraduate students. The average SAT score of entering students in fall 2005 was 1242. In the 2005-06 academic year, 47 percent of the undergraduate student body received need-based financial aid. Travis County, in which UT Austin is located, has a median family income of \$45,245.

Flat Rate Tuition Structure

To encourage undergraduate students to increase their course loads, and thus reduce their time-to-graduation, UT Austin adopted a flat-rate tuition model for all undergraduate colleges/schools in fall 2005. Tuition and mandatory fees are combined into a single fee. The flat rate tuition system is based on a 14 semester credit hour course load.

IMPACT: The average undergraduate course load increased from 13.26 in 2005 to 13.33 in 2006.

Student Cohorts

UT Austin is increasing the number of first-year interest groups. First-year interest groups are groups of 20-25 freshmen that take a group of courses together. The courses are organized around a common career interest or academic theme. The student cohorts help freshmen develop academic and social relationships with their peers. UT Austin has found that students that participate in these cohorts generally have higher grade point averages and are more likely to stay at the university beyond their freshman year.

An expansion of the freshman seminar program—classes of 15 or fewer students—is underway that will expose more freshmen to tenured and tenure-track faculty in a small-class setting early in their UT experience. This should lead to better first-year retention rates and higher graduation rates.

IMPACT: The four-year graduation rate has increased to 48% for the 2002 cohort and freshman retention rates continue to improve.

Transfer Policy

The minimum amount of completed coursework required for a transfer student has been raised from 24 to 30 hours. Transfer students will therefore arrive with greater progress toward a degree. Also, policy was changed to require a dean's permission for a student to make an *internal* transfer between UT Austin colleges after completing 60 hours or 4 long semesters. This encourages students to make decisions about their majors earlier and promotes timely graduation.

IMPACT: It is too early to determine the impact of these policy changes.

The University of Texas at Brownsville

In fall 2006, a total of 15,677 students enrolled at The University of Texas at Brownsville/Texas Southmost College and 61 percent of the 14,835 undergraduate students were enrolled part time. There were 1,453 first-time undergraduate students. In the 2005-06 academic year, 58 percent of the undergraduate student body received need-based financial aid. Cameron County, in which UT Brownsville is located, has a median family income of \$26,330.

Flat Rate Tuition Structure

In fall 2006, UT Brownsville implemented a flat fee for students taking 15 or more semester credit hours. Having seen a significant increase in the number of students taking 15 or more semester credit hours, the university will charge students taking 14 or more SCH a flat-rate beginning in fall 2007.

IMPACT: For fall 2006, 590 students, a 71 percent increase over fall 2004, have benefited from the flat rate fee 15 hour cap, resulting in tuition and fee savings in excess of \$173,000. The flat-rate fee structure will remain at 15 or more semester credit hours for fall 2007/spring 2008.

The Early Alert Program

In order to improve student retention and graduation rates for students struggling academically, UT Brownsville instituted an Early Alert Program in 2005. The program is a collaborative effort between faculty and the counseling center. This retention initiative aims to identify first- and second-year students who are academically at risk during the first weeks of the fall and spring semesters. Faculty are asked to identify and refer students who have demonstrated poor academic progress. Then, the counselor and student collaborate on an "action plan" specifically addressing identified concerns in the referral. A follow-up session is scheduled to discuss student progress or difficulties that may have arisen in carrying out the "action plan." Through the students' interaction with faculty and counseling staff, they learn what actions need to be taken to achieve academic success and are provided an early opportunity to take full advantage of campus resources.

IMPACT: In fall 2006, UTB received 576 student referrals. Every student referred received an e-mail and telephone call. Letters were sent to the student's class, if no telephone number or e-mail was on record. All students contacted were asked to immediately meet with their instructor regarding the referral. An action plan was developed with every student who had a one-on-one visit with a counselor. Of the 576 students referred to the EAP, 116 students (20%) of the students referred to EAP had at least one one-on-one visit with a counselor, reflecting a 7 percent increase over Spring 2006.

Mentoring Programs

To meet the academic challenges faced by students enrolled in developmental courses, UT Brownsville has incorporated a new STING (Students Together, Involving, Networking and Guiding) Success Series Peer Mentor Program. The program offers entering freshmen a retention support program that helps students navigate the college environment, take advantage of campus resources and opportunities, and increase student confidence in their ability to succeed academically. Students who are not in compliance with the Texas Success Initiative policy and are not considered college ready must enroll in the STING program and meet with a peer mentor, staff instructor, and tutor in a lab on a weekly basis. Outside of the lab, peer mentors and tutors are available to work with students on an individual basis during office hours.

IMPACT: STING had 417 students participating in the program during the fall 2006 term. The group attempted an average of 10 hours and successfully completed 90 percent of the hours attempted with an overall GPA of 2.23 for fall 2006.

College Survival Series

UT Brownsville determined that it could not afford to implement a new academic skills course for freshmen. Instead, the university required that all the assignments given in the required freshman speech course relate to college survival.

IMPACT: Even though hundreds of students from all levels enroll in the course, the university's target group is first-time freshmen. From fall 2002 to fall 2006, improvements have been seen in enrollment and success. The number of first-time freshmen enrolled in SPCH 1315 increased from 155 to 280; the first semester GPA increased from 2.09 to 2.17; and, the percent of first-time freshmen enrolled for the following spring semester increased from 83 percent to 85 percent.

Scholarships

UT Brownsville began the University Scorpion Scholars (USS) program in fall 2006 to address the retention rate and time-to-graduation. The program is designed to attract college-prepared students and fully assist them financially to move efficiently through their undergraduate career. The scholarship is awarded on a yearly basis for up to 115 high school graduates in the top 10 percentile

of their class. The scholarship covers the cost of tuition and fees, textbooks, and on-campus housing for four or eight consecutive fall and spring semesters, allowing scholarship recipients to obtain their degrees without having to fund the cost of college out-of-pocket. This scholarship is awarded for as long as recipients maintain certain eligibility requirements, including completing 100 percent of credit hours attempted.

IMPACT: USS had 102 students participating in the program during the fall 2006 term. The group attempted an average of 15 semester credit hours and successfully completed 93 percent of the hours with an overall GPA of 3.24 for fall 2006.

On Campus Employment

In consideration of the constraints faced by working students, for two years UT Brownsville has used a Student Employment Initiative (SEI), which provides student employment opportunities on campus. In order to be eligible to apply for employment through the SEI, students must be enrolled for at least 15 semester credit hours and maintain a minimum 2.75 GPA. Participants will work a maximum of 20 hours a week in a job related to his or her major field of study. As an added incentive, the hourly wage is \$7.00, which is above the minimum wage rate and is more than what a majority of students would be paid working elsewhere. Available positions include peer mentors, peer facilitators, lab coordinators, supplemental instruction leaders, instructor assistants, and research assistants. SEI participants gain critical campus connections, and the university taps into support services for other students by utilizing their own students as mentors and facilitators.

IMPACT: During the three past semesters, the average credit hours completed have exceeded the required 15 hours per semester with 90 percent of students completing more than 15 hours. A similar result has been observed in the semester and cumulative GPAs with a minimum 2.75 requirement, the percentage of students maintaining a GPA of greater than 3.0 increased from 87 percent to an outstanding 98 percent. The average GPA for all UTB/TSC undergraduates is 2.4 vs. 3.3 for SEI students.

The University of Texas at Dallas

In fall 2006, a total of 14,523 students enrolled at The University of Texas at Dallas and 33 percent of the 10,086 undergraduate students were enrolled part time. There were 1,085 first-time undergraduate students. The average SAT score of entering students in fall 2005 was 1245. In the 2005-06 academic year, 30 percent of the undergraduate student body received need-based financial aid. Dallas County, in which UT Dallas is located, has a median family income of \$41,147.

Undergraduate Advising

UT Dallas is in the ninth year of a redesigned undergraduate advising system that employs 30 professional advisors who last year made over 50,000 contacts with students. The director of undergraduate advising provides uniform training for advisors, a computerized system for managing advising contact information, a degree audit process for degree checking, and an annual student survey of advising satisfaction. In addition, this office publishes advising handbooks and minor handbooks for faculty and staff.

UT Dallas has also initiated specialized advising teams for students in pre-professional school programs (health and legal) that assist with exam and interview preparation and offer enrichment opportunities and career counseling. Students partaking of these services are being offered positions in prestigious schools at high rates.

IMPACT: Changes in retention and graduation rates over time as function of advising effort level. Specialized advising results in increasing numbers of placements in prestigious schools.

First Year Experience, RHET 1101

All first time freshmen are required to take this first-semester, one-credit-hour course, which serves as the culmination of the First Year Experience program, providing students the guidance and tools they need to be successful at UT Dallas. The 11-week course addresses issues such as connecting to campus, introducing students to available services and resources, recognizing personal learning styles, and understanding the nature of the college experience. Classes are small - less than 20 students per instructor - to enable in-depth discussion and effective topic coverage. Students also have the choice of enrolling in a major-specific section, in order to share the experience with students of like interests.

IMPACT: Student evaluations; change in retention since inception.

New Drop Policy

Beginning in fall 2004, new procedures and deadlines for undergraduates regarding course withdrawal were imposed. This new policy was accompanied by a change in the method by which students' requests to withdraw from classes after the final 'drop date' were considered. Changes in the procedures and deadlines for withdrawing from classes have resulted in a process that is more equitable and uniform than our previous system.

IMPACT: A 50 percent reduction in the percentage of students who withdraw from classes; a 3 percent improvement in the overall class completion rate for undergraduate students; over 1,000 additional student class completions in a typical long semester.

Mid-term Grades

Freshmen make a transition from the high school classroom with daily assignments and weekly evaluations to the college classroom where evaluation is less frequent. For many, much of the semester has passed before they realize they are in trouble. For this reason, UT Dallas began issuing mid-term grades to freshmen in 2000. Any student who receives a mid-term grade less than 'C' is referred to an academic advisor to discuss remediation while still in the semester. This program has proven so successful that it has been extended to the entire undergraduate university.

IMPACT: Numbers/fractions of students contacted, number of respondents, success rates of responders and non-responders.

Learning Resource Center

The Learning Resource Center offers assistance to students in the areas of reading, writing, mathematics, and study skills. These services are available through individual appointments, group workshops, short courses, and audio and video tapes. The Writing Lab offers one-to-one assistance with writing assignments and general writing skills. Appointments are required. The Math Lab gives short-term and semester-long support for a variety of mathematics courses. Students may drop in or visit these labs on a regular basis. The Supplemental Instruction program offers facilitated group study sessions as a supplement to many UT Dallas courses. Students should check with the center for availability of individual tutoring in specific subjects. The Learning Resource Center also offers developmental math, reading, and writing classes. These classes are for credit, but they do not count toward graduation.

Assistance is also available in study skills; note-taking; writing; test-taking; algebra; and preparation for the THEA (required for teacher certification) GRE, GMAT, and LSAT. In addition, students can receive help with time management, basic mathematics improvement, test-anxiety reduction, and various other study techniques and strategies. All students enrolled at the university are eligible for these services.

IMPACT: Evaluations, comparative pass rates for clients relative to general population control group.

Supplemental Instruction

Supplemental Instruction (SI) is an academic support program sponsored by Learning Resources. SI provides academic assistance to students in historically difficult classes. The SI sessions help with content mastery and with learning and study strategies that are applicable to all subject areas. SI sessions are facilitated by a trained SI leader. SI leaders have taken the same course, done well, and then during the semester attend classes, take notes, and re-read all assigned materials in preparation to conduct the SI sessions three times a week.

IMPACT: Evidence collected over a large number of years indicate that students who participate in SI make better grades and are less likely to withdraw from the class than others in the class that do not participate in SI.

Gateway Courses

As a main component of its SACS self-study, UT Dallas is conducting a comprehensive review of curriculum and instruction in "Gateway" courses.

IMPACT: Comparisons of grades, standardized test results, inter-university comparisons.

"Flat-rate" tuition structure

Over the last two years, UT Dallas has moved to a tuition structure in which students may enroll in semester credit hours over and above 15 SCH at no additional cost. The intent is to encourage faster progress toward graduation.

IMPACT: Increase in SCH per undergraduate student.

Fixed tuition guarantee

The Guaranteed Tuition Plan available to incoming students in fall 2007 is designed to help families predict the final cost of a college education while providing students incentives for timely graduation. The new plan will "lock in" tuition for a four-year period, encouraging undergraduates to complete their degree within this time span. In combination with the flat-rate tuition policy, this program should enhance both retention and earlier graduation.

IMPACT: Plan awaits implementation, then compare to prior data.

Freshman Orientation

A multi-day program, both on and off-campus that provides all students with a common perspective that is important for college survival.

IMPACT: Success rates for students who do and do not participate fully in orientation; comparison of alternative approaches; evaluations. New student programs has parent and student evaluation information on freshmen orientations going back a number of years.

Campus Housing

It is generally believed that students, particularly freshmen, who live on campus succeed at higher rates than the peer control group. In this context, UTD continues to strive to encourage undergraduates to live on campus and to provide the necessary housing and dining facilities to make this possible. UTD is continuing its efforts to provide high-quality, programmatically coordinated housing for all of its undergraduate students who can be persuaded to live on campus.

IMPACT: Rates for students in campus housing relative to total population. All UTD freshmen (residential and non-residential): 2.69 GPA. Waterview freshmen (residential, non-LLC): 2.78 GPA

Living-Learning Communities (LLC)

The University of Texas at Dallas began the fall 2006 school year with three Living-Learning Communities: pre-health, pre-law, and outreach.

IMPACT: There were 47 students in pre-health, 18 in pre-law, and 3 in outreach. LLC student GPAs were an average 8.7 percent higher than all UTD freshmen and 6.7 percent higher than residential, non-LLC freshmen. LLC students earned an average of .56 more credit hours last semester than other residential freshmen. LLC students had a 7.5 percent higher retention rate than all UTD freshmen and a 3.5 percent higher retention rate than other residential freshmen.

The University of Texas at El Paso

In fall 2006, a total of 19,842 students enrolled at The University of Texas at El Paso and 33 percent of the 16,793 undergraduate students were enrolled part time. There were 2,706 first-time undergraduate students. The average SAT score of entering students in fall 2005 was 920. In the 2005-06 academic year, 47 percent of the undergraduate student body received need-based financial aid. El Paso County, in which UT El Paso is located, has a median family income of \$31,086.

College Readiness Initiative

The College Readiness Initiative (CRI) is a collaborative effort among UT El Paso, El Paso Community College, and Region 19 Independent School Districts with the goal of helping high school students become better prepared academically for college-level course work once they have completed their high school requirements. The components of CRI include an orientation to the ACCUPLACER placement exam, early testing during a student's junior and/or senior year(s), high school intervention for students who place into developmental math, reading, or writing, and retesting in their subject areas of intervention.

IMPACT: CRI is designed to increase the academic preparation of students who plan to attend college by administering the university's placement exam in the high schools and enabling the schools to provide interventions as needed based on those test results. In 2005-06, the test was given to 3,543 students in six school districts; twelve school districts are now involved for 2006-07. Testing has expanded from seniors to juniors in several districts, and all eventually plan to test juniors, which will give schools the entire senior year to provide any additional academic support that may be needed. We will monitor the number of CRI participants who actually enroll at UTEP each fall semester.

New Student Orientation/Enhanced New Student Orientation

Entering students are encouraged to attend a new student orientation prior to the start of their first semester of study. During the fall 2006 orientation cycle, the orientation program was expanded to include a mandatory math review workshop for students who placed into developmental math courses. This Enhanced New Student Orientation (ENSO) consisted of a three-day, six-hour math review conducted by math tutors from UT El Paso's Tutoring and Learning Center. After the conclusion of the math review, students were able to retake the placement exam with the hope of higher placement in mathematics. Forty-eight percent of the 1,603 students participating in this program retested at least one course higher and 31 percent retested from developmental math to college-level math.

IMPACT: ENSO is a new initiative (summer 2006) designed to improve students' math placement by moving them into college-level courses as soon as possible with the help of the math review. Positioning students to take college-level courses required on their degree plans helps them experience success and make progress in their academic careers, increases their incentive to re-enroll, and shortens time to degree. With 48 percent of students improving one or more course levels and 31 percent going from developmental to college-level math, the ENSO math review has

proven effective, and we will monitor how these students perform in their math courses compared to those who place directly into college-level courses.

Course Redesign

UT El Paso redesigned math, reading, and writing courses so that first-year students would not be delayed in long holding patterns of developmental coursework. The course redesign accelerates students' movement through developmental courses, enrolling them as quickly as possible into college-level courses, some with academic support.

IMPACT: Allowing students to take courses required for their degrees as soon as possible engages them with the institution, instills in them an early sense of accomplishment, decreases the number of prerequisites, increases the incentive to re-enroll, and shortens the time needed to earn degrees. In fall 2006, the course redesign and change in placement resulted in 522 students in math and 443 students in writing placing into college-level courses instead of the developmental courses into which they would have formerly placed. In reading, the redesigned developmental course support allowed students to enroll in reading-intensive courses from which they had previously been restricted. We will monitor students' performance in the courses into which they are placed to validate the effectiveness of their placement.

Advising and Financial Aid

Both the Academic Advising Center and the Office of Student Financial Aid advise students to take 15 credit hours each semester. UT El Paso has added a number of advisors over the past year to advise students at all levels – pre-majors, majors, and general studies. These additional advisors allow the university to manage increases in enrollment while maintaining individualized service. Advising sessions stress how continuous enrollment, supported by financial aid packages, accelerates students' time-to-graduation.

IMPACT: Additional staffing in academic advising provides students greater assistance in making informed decisions regarding majors, more direction on career and academic decisions, increased awareness of their academic progress, and improved realization of their investment in higher education. Directing students into appropriate fields of study, encouraging them to take 15 hours each semester and providing more supportive financial aid packages will help increase retention and shorten students' time to degree completion.

Entering Student Program

UT El Paso's Entering Student Program (ESP) assists first-year students with the transition to the university environment and increases their opportunities for academic success. The program includes seminars, learning communities, and a student leadership institute.

IMPACT: The First-Year Seminar (UTEP's Learning Framework course) is the cornerstone of the ESP. First-year students may also participate in learning communities as part of their freshman courses. There is also a Student Leadership Institute through which they develop leadership skills that can be employed across campus and in the workplace. The ESP experience enables students to make connections on campus more quickly, teaches them how to navigate the educational system, and accelerates their time to graduation. Retention rates appear to be higher for participants in all of these ESP elements and studies are underway to attempt to isolate the impact of each.

Welcome Back Miner

The Welcome Back Miner program is a university-wide effort that crosses all academic colleges. The program encourages students who have stopped-out for one or more semesters to return to UT El Paso and finish their degrees. Stop-out students are contacted each long semester by representatives of their academic dean's office to offer them information, incentives, and referrals

that may encourage them to complete their studies. Students are also offered the option of completing the Bachelor of Multidisciplinary Studies degree.

IMPACT: By providing personal attention to students who have interrupted their academic careers, specific issues that may act as barriers to continuing their education can be addressed. For our spring 2006 calling campaign, 1,046 students were contacted; of those who responded, 7 percent decided to register for the spring. For fall 2006, 663 students were contacted, and 13 percent decided to register. Without the personal contact, these students might otherwise not re-enroll. Our ability to provide them with information about areas such as financial aid, registration, flexible classes, day care, and degree plan options enables them to take advantage of opportunities that they may not have known were available to them, thereby helping them re-enter the educational system to complete their degrees. We will continue to target and monitor special populations to encourage their return to the university.

Scheduling

UT El Paso continues to increase course offerings in the afternoons, evenings, and on weekends to accommodate non-traditional and part-time students. Many courses in the university core curriculum are offered in a hybrid format (combining online learning with reduced and concentrated face-to-face sessions on campus), making these courses more accessible to students who must work off campus to help pay for their education and provide for their family responsibilities. UT El Paso has also expanded its minimesters and parts-of-terms, providing even greater scheduling opportunities for students.

IMPACT: During fall 2006, UTEP offered 20 courses (40 sections total) in a hybrid format. Hybrid courses were available in three of the nine curricular blocks of the core curriculum. UTEP is at the forefront in the state in offering multiple parts-of-term courses to give students the options and flexibility they need to complete their degrees. UTEP offered 42 parts-of-term courses, providing students with 5-week, 3-week, and other options as well as traditional 15-week versions. We will continue to monitor these delivery modes and use student and faculty feedback to decide future strategies that will make degrees more accessible to our students.

Success in the Middle Years

Unlike traditional students, UT El Paso students' middle years extend beyond two years to as long as ten years or more. The "Success in the Middle Years" plan – building upon successful first-year programming and high marks in student satisfaction once students enter into their major area of study – provides a university-wide course of action for focused improvements in learning and learning outcome assessment in students' "middle years." The two components of the plan are: (a) curriculum review and renewal in each degree program and the core curriculum, providing students an efficient and purposeful pathway to demonstrate mastery of general education proficiencies and major field knowledge, skills, and dispositions; and (b) academic and career advising redesign to provide students with personal and career guidance. As a part of this plan, all degree granting programs are currently reviewing their degree requirements in order to minimize the time-to-degree and to ensure compliance with the new 120 hour degree requirements.

IMPACT: All degree plans are currently being reviewed to meet the 120 hour baccalaureate degree requirement. All College of Science degree plans, Theatre, Art, Nursing, about half of Health Science programs, and Business are nearing completion. In addition, academic advising and career services are collaborating in a coordinated effort to help students see the career implications of their educational choices and to help them with their decision-making regarding choice of major. The curricular and academic/career advising redesign will enable students to progress more quickly toward their degrees, saving them time and money and making them eligible to enter the workforce or continue on to professional programs sooner than is currently occurring.

The University of Texas - Pan American

In fall 2006, a total of 17,337 students enrolled at The University of Texas - Pan American and almost 27 percent of the 15,076 undergraduate students were enrolled part time. There were 2,803 first-time undergraduate students. The average SAT score of entering students in fall 2005 was 949. In the 2005-06 academic year, 66 percent of the undergraduate student body received need-based financial aid. Hidalgo County, in which UT Pan American is located, has a median family income of \$25,894.

Raising Admissions Standards

In fall 2005, UT Pan American introduced minimum admissions standards. Prior to this time, the university was considered an open-enrollment campus. Almost 600 students were unable to meet the minimum ACT score of 15 (SAT 710) in fall 2005. UT Pan American will slowly raise its admission standards through fall 2011, when the minimum ACT requirement will be 18 (SAT 850). Students are now required to have graduated from high school with the recommended or higher curriculum.

IMPACT: With the advent of minimum admission standards, UTPA has experienced an increase in the average ACT composite score for entering freshmen (full-time/part-time) from 18.14 in fall 2004 to 18.87 in fall 2006. The number of entering freshmen (full-time/part-time) who were in the top 10 percent of their graduating high school class has increased from 457 (16.2%) in 2004 to 508 (17.8%) in 2006. More of UTPA's entering freshmen registered for a full-time course load of 15 or more hours in fall 2006; 36.7 percent of entering freshmen took 15 or more hours. Twenty-five percent of entering freshmen took 15 or more hours in fall 2004. The proportion of part-time students has decreased from 15 percent in fall 2000 to 4.7 percent in fall 2006.

Supplemental Instruction

UT Pan American offers students Supplemental Instruction (SI), an academic enrichment program that is offered in traditionally difficult courses. SI discussion and review sessions are facilitated by trained student SI leaders who have successfully completed the course. Designed to supplement – not replace – class lectures and recitations, SI sessions are interactive and collaborative. SI targets historically difficult courses that are characterized by a 30 percent or greater failure rate.

IMPACT: The Supplemental Instruction program was expanded in FY 07. For fall 2006, a total of 448 students out of a potential 1,195 participated for a 37.5 percent participation rate. Successful results after fall 2006 show that the mean GPA of students in SI was 2.3; the mean GPA of students not in SI was 1.9. Additionally, 26 percent of non-SI students received a D or F or withdrew from the course; for SI students the rate was 18 percent.

K-12 Outreach

UT Pan American has begun working with high school students to promote concurrent enrollment. Forty-nine percent of the fall 2006 incoming freshman class began the year with college credit.

IMPACT: UTPA's Concurrent Enrollment Program was designed to encourage more rigorous course taking for high school students and to allow them to earn college credit while in high school. In AY 2006, the program had increased its enrollment by more than 730 percent compared to its enrollment in 1998. AY 2006 enrollment was 1,227 while AY 1998 had only 167 students. UTPA has seen a remarkable increase in the number of entering freshmen with and average of 14 hours of college credit. In fall 2001, 28.7 percent of entering freshmen had college credit; in fall 2006, 49.6 percent of entering freshmen had college credit.

Students entering UTPA with prior college credit are driving improved retention and graduation rates. The fall 2005 entering freshmen retention rate of students in the Concurrent Enrollment Program was 89.3 percent versus 72.8 percent overall. UT Pan American's overall four-year graduation rate is 13.4 percent.

Learning Frameworks Course for freshmen

As of fall 2004, incoming freshman are required to enroll in a "Learning Frameworks" course custom-designed to meet the information and skills needs of new students. The goal of the course is to help students understand how people learn and provide them with the skills that are needed to be successful in college. The course focuses on the research, theory, and application of the psychology of learning, cognition, and motivation.

IMPACT: During AY 2004-05, approximately 80.8 percent (2,118 of 2,620) of the fall 2004 cohort of first-time, full-time entering freshmen attempted the Learning Framework course. Of this group, 91.0 percent (1,927 of 2,118) passed the course and had a first-year retention rate of 83.9 percent (1,617 of 2,118). The first-year retention rate for the total fall 2004 cohort of first-time, full-time students was 68 percent.

During AY 2005-06, 91.5 percent (2,095 of 2,289) attempted the course. Of this group, 93.1 percent (1,951 of 2,095) passed the course and had a first-year retention rate of 82.1 percent (1,602 of 1,951). The first-year retention rate for the total fall 2005 cohort of first-time, full-time entering freshmen was 72.7 percent.

Addressing Bureaucratic Obstacles

UT Pan American has been addressing bureaucratic blocks that have affected re-enrollment. For example, it was discovered that there were more than 7,000 recent students still on the records with some form of "hold" preventing them from enrolling. To address the issue, students with money-related holds of less than \$300 were immediately moved to a "transcript hold" rather than a "registration hold." This made 174 students eligible to return with no additional processing and 2,832 students of recent vintage eligible to return upon re-applying for admission. The university is reaching out to these students by phone, mail, and email.

IMPACT: During summer 2006, UTPA successfully switched 10,542 registration holds to transcript holds for students with balances less than \$300. Since a number of students had multiple holds, 7,987 students were actually affected by the change. Of the 7987, 174 continuing students were eligible to return in fall 2006 with no additional process; 2,832 "former" students were eligible to return upon re-applying for admission.

Academic Advisement and Mentoring (AAM) Center

In fall 2005, UT Pan American instituted a comprehensive, university-wide Academic Advisement and Mentoring (AAM) Center to serve all students. A director and nine academic advisors were hired to staff the centralized advisement center. Twelve professional guidance counselors, two per college, were hired to staff decentralized advisement centers in six colleges. The center is supported by two full-time support staff and five part-time support staff. To help improve time-to-graduation and graduation rates, advisors are utilizing Academic Road Maps for four-, five- and six-year graduation timelines as part of the advisement process with students.

IMPACT: There has been a dramatic increase in number of freshmen and sophomores seeking academic information and academic advisement and the number advised by professional advisors. Office visits by students seeking academic advisement and information increased substantially (fall 2005 total = 2,932; fall 2006 total = 5,949). Due to the increase in advisement personnel and focus, the advisement of freshmen and sophomores is now being tracked and monitored. AAM Center fall 2006 results: 88.1 percent of freshmen advised; 85.8 percent of sophomores advised.

Early Warning System (EWS)

In fall 2000, UT Pan American initiated a computerized Early Warning System that allows faculty to identify students who are having difficulty in a course at mid-semester. Student Development Specialists, working under the University Retention Advisement Program, alert students via letter, email, and/or telephone calls that they are at risk of failing the course and encourage them to meet

with the professor and/or seek assistance. The EWS initiative has grown over the years to now include all courses in the core curriculum.

IMPACT: During the FY 2005-06 a total of 6,670 letters were mailed out to students having been identified by faculty as having academic difficulty in their course and at risk of failing the course. Of this number, 73.3 percent of the students obtained grades of "C" or better at the end of the semester.

University Scholars

The University Scholars program is designed to encourage high school students to enroll in rigorous academic courses that would prepare them for success at the university level. The program began in fall 1998 with 19 students. Scholarships are awarded to students who successfully earned college credit through Advanced Placement examinations and/or Concurrent Enrollment at UTPA and who are from counties in the South Texas area. It is the only primary scholarship that UTPA has to recruit top students in *any* discipline.

IMPACT: Since its inception in fall 1998, each year there has been at least a 20 point difference in the retention rate for University Scholars compared with all other entering freshmen. In fall 2005, the retention rate for all entering freshmen was 72.8 percent; the retention rate for University Scholars was 95.8 percent. The University Scholars program was recognized by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board as a Texas Higher Education Star Award Winner for 2002 "for an exceptional contribution toward the goals in *Closing the Gaps* and for the creative way UTPA has tied high school rigor to a UTPA scholarship program."

The University of Texas of the Permian Basin

In fall 2006, a total of 3,462 students enrolled at The University of Texas of the Permian Basin and almost 36 percent of the 3,000 undergraduate students were enrolled part time. There were 339 first-time undergraduate students. The average SAT score of entering students in fall 2005 was 988. In the 2005-06 academic year, 36 percent of the undergraduate student body received need-based financial aid. Ector County, in which UT Permian Basin is located, has a median family income of \$33,045.

Freshman Seminar

At UT Permian Basin, every new freshman is required to enroll and attend the freshman seminar which covers degree planning extensively. Students develop a degree plan as a requirement for the course, and registration for the spring semester is done in the seminar. All course activities emphasize both the incentives for timely graduation and the regulations on excessive credits.

IMPACT: Retention indicators from fall to spring indicate an 84 percent retention rate. Follow-up checks have been implemented this year for the spring semester in order to impact the fall 2007 retention rate.

Freshman Interest Groups (FIGs)

Freshman Interest Groups are freshman seminar sections organized around a special interest such as pre-health professions, teacher education, business, coaching, or STEM majors. In addition to the normal freshman seminar topics, the FIG sections have greater career interest exploration, guest speakers from related fields, and meetings with faculty from the field. Most FIG sections also share one or more other classes and are encouraged to form study groups, join professional student organizations, and pursue other activities that promote an early identification with a profession or interest area.

IMPACT: The FIGs were first organized in fall 2006 with approximately one-third of the entering freshman students in FIG sections.

Career Counseling

Through an Hispanic Serving Institution (HSU) grant a career center was established four years ago. The career center offers initial help with selecting a major and a career. Other services include part-time job placement and career services for those who are graduating. The director extends an invitation to all accepted freshmen to meet for individual career counseling.

IMPACT: Career planning starts with all freshmen with the career center staff working with every freshman seminar section. In addition, the center staff met with 292 university students for individual career counseling and 1,414 high school students in group meetings on career planning.

Mentoring Program

The student mentor program was started three years ago and targets students who are conditionally admitted and those who have not done well during their freshmen year. Students meet weekly with a mentor who has been successful in college and they participate in a variety of activities designed to help with social, academic, and personal adjustment. The program was recently expanded to include transfer students from the community college. The program is sponsored by two HSI grants.

IMPACT: Approximately 50 students per year participate in the mentor program. About 35-40 were still enrolled a year after entry into the program.

ExCET/TEExES (Teacher Certification) Study Sessions

This program was started about six years ago and targets students in teacher education. Students are provided study materials and study sessions that help them prepare for practice tests and for the ExCET/TEExES exams. This helps retain students in the teacher certification program who might otherwise drop out of the program and/or leave the university.

IMPACT: About 225 students participate each year in the program, resulting in a 99 percent passing rate on the ExCET/TEExES exams.

Literacy Center

This center was established one year ago through Title V funding. The center provides a variety of reading and writing skill development, including preparation for exams, textbook comprehension, vocabulary development, study skills for high failure rate classes, time management, note taking skills, and other study skills. A full range of reading assessments is available. Students who are placed on academic probation are required to attend study sessions in the literacy center to improve their skills.

IMPACT: Approximately 275 students have used the center for various activities and many report improving their grades from the study skills provided for targeted courses.

Supplemental Instruction

Offered through the PASS Office, the supplemental instruction program provides a student tutor who has demonstrated excellence in a high failure rate class. The SI tutor attends the class again with the students and works with the professor to provide outside tutorials and study sessions to assist students in grade improvement.

IMPACT: Students who attend SI study sessions achieve 37 percent higher grades than those who do not attend.

Community College Transfer Assistance

About 40 percent of the incoming undergraduates to UT Permian Basin enter as transfer students, most from area community colleges. To help these students graduate in a timely fashion, UT Permian Basin has developed its Direct Connect program with area community colleges. Students at area community colleges who declare their intent to transfer to UT Permian Basin are provided academic advising, financial aid advising, and other assistance while attending the community college.

Advisors work with community college staff to help transfer students prepare a degree plan through which they will earn an associates degree from the community college and a bachelor's degree from UT Permian Basin in the most efficient manner possible. Because of earlier articulation agreements and other less formal efforts to align the university and community college curriculum, students in the Direct Connect program typically do not have to take any extra hours to earn both the associates and the bachelor's degree. The development of the degree plans includes discussion of the incentives and the regulations related to timely graduation.

IMPACT: Our community college graduation rate is up by 4.3 percent over the past year.

LEAD West Texas

The LEAD West Texas program is a collaborative HSI grant with Howard College in Big Spring. This teacher education pipeline program provides a shared academic advisor that works on the Howard College campus part of the week and the UTPB campus the other part. It also has a number of activities designed to encourage students at Howard College to go into teacher education by finishing their degrees and certification at UT Permian Basin.

IMPACT: LEAD West Texas started in fall 2005. About 35 students at Howard College impacted by the program should be transferring starting in AY 2007-08. Approximately 15 have already transferred to UTPB.

The University of Texas at San Antonio

In fall 2006, a total of 28,379 students enrolled at The University of Texas at San Antonio and almost 26 percent of the 24,738 undergraduate students were enrolled part time. There were 4,783 first-time undergraduate students. The average SAT score of entering students in fall 2005 was 996. In the 2005-06 academic year, 47 percent of the undergraduate student body received need-based financial aid. Bexar County, in which UT San Antonio is located, has a median family income of \$38,521.

Required Advising and Degree Plans

Academic advisors are working to implement a new policy that states that all students must complete a semester-by-semester degree plan with expected graduation date with their advisors by fall 2007. All students are required to be advised each semester or they will receive a hold on their records.

IMPACT: More students are coming in for advising. We are exploring purchasing software that not only tracks student degree plans, but also aggregates courses for all advised students by semester so that we can better determine what courses need to be scheduled in future semesters to ensure course availability.

Task Force for Student Success and Graduation

The university's provost appointed a Task Force for Student Success and Graduation, which made recommendations on improving graduation rates in summer 2006. In fall 2006, the provost named an associate dean for retention and graduation, who is tasked with implementation of Task Force recommendations, oversight of policies affecting graduation rates, and reporting. An assistant vice provost for assessment was hired to facilitate the development of student learning outcome assessment and assist in research regarding retention and graduation.

UT San Antonio has instituted a three-year course schedule so students can determine what they need to take and when they can take it, and adjust their work and family schedules accordingly in advance. In addition, college compacts include projections for anticipated enrollment for all courses taught so that adequate sections will be available for students who follow their degree plans.

IMPACT: (See note above on software.) We continue to work on task force recommendations. This semester we implemented dropout recovery program for seniors, providing special outreach for those seniors with few hours left to graduate who had not yet enrolled and working to remove barriers so they could return, including additional financial aid.

The University of Texas at Tyler

In fall 2006, a total of 5,926 students enrolled at The University of Texas at Tyler and 26 percent of the 5,143 undergraduate students were enrolled part time. There were 636 first-time undergraduate students. The average SAT score of entering students in fall 2005 was 1079. In the 2005-06 academic year, 42 percent of the undergraduate student body received need-based financial aid. Smith County, in which UT Tyler is located, has a median family income of \$38,561.

Community College Collaborations

UT Tyler is working with community colleges to ensure students are aware of the first two years of curriculum needed for baccalaureate degree completion. A full-time academic advising position was filled in fall 2006 to advise all transfer students who are not core-complete upon admission.

IMPACT: UT Tyler transfer students represent a higher percentage of all new students than all other UT campuses. The academic advising position was filled in October 2006 and 106 transfer students were advised. The University has also collaborated in the Phi Theta Kappa junior college honor society and the Tyler Chamber of Commerce Progressive dinner for Hispanic families.

Learning Communities

Student Learning Communities (SLC) are offered to freshmen to facilitate a successful first semester experience. All SLC participants enroll in a Freshman Year Experience class that provides information and activities that help students attain academic goals. Three SLC groups will participate in a second semester learning community experience in spring 2007.

IMPACT: In fall 2005, 155 freshmen participated in 10 Learning Communities. This represents 27 percent of the first time, full time freshmen. The one-year retention rate of these students was slightly better than the overall freshman class: 61 percent vs. 58.7 percent.

Supplemental Instruction

The Supplemental Instruction Program was expanded from three sections in fall 2005 to nine sections in fall 2006. A full-time administrative position was filled to oversee the Academic Support Center, including the Supplemental Instruction Program, and to develop an expanded tutoring program.

IMPACT: Students participating in SI have higher grades and are more likely to persist to their sophomore year. In fall 2005, the mean grade for SI students was 2.21 compared to 1.81 for non-SI students. In fall 2006, the mean grade for SI students was 2.39 compared to 1.99 for non-SI students. 68.4 percent of freshmen who entered in fall 2005 and participated in SI returned for their sophomore year compared to 58.7 percent of all freshmen.

Developing a Campus Community

The first residence hall was opened in fall 2006, three sororities colonized in spring 2006, and two fraternities will be on campus in spring 2007. A full-time Greek advising position is posted for spring 2007.

IMPACT: Freshmen who live on campus and participate in UT Tyler residence life programs are more likely to persist to their sophomore year. 89.5 percent of residential students in Patriot Village returned for their sophomore year compared to 58.7 percent of all freshmen. A new residence hall opened in fall 2006 with 189 freshman residents. 82 percent of these residents were still enrolled in spring 2007. In spring 2006, 79 women were initiated into three sororities.

Sources:

1. The University of Texas System Board of Regents Accountability and Performance Report 2006-2007, <http://www.utsystem.edu/osm/accountability/2006/studentaccess.pdf>
2. The University of Texas System Statistical Handbook 2006, <http://www.utsystem.edu/isp/StatHndbk/2006/Enrollment.pdf>

V. Alternative Approaches to Understanding Graduation Rates

It is widely recognized that the traditional method of calculating graduation rates focuses on a subset of all students, omitting part-time students, those who enter after fall, and those who transfer elsewhere before completing a degree. To provide a more complete and accurate assessment of student success, additional metrics should be considered in evaluating the performance of an institution. This section covers three such alternate measures: 1) composite graduation and persistence rates; 2) time to degree; and 3) the degree completion comparison.

Composite Graduation and Persistence Rates

A shortcoming of the traditional 4-, 5-, and 6-year graduation rate metrics is that institutions get no credit for students who begin as entering freshmen at their institutions and transfer to another institution. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, through their state-wide tracking system, has compiled graduation and persistence information on students who begin at any Texas four-year institution and transfer to another public or private institution within the State. So, information is now available to give a more complete picture of student success. These data are presented in the UT System accountability report and show, for first-time, full-time, degree-seeking undergraduates, the progress of students after six years. Graduation rates from the same institution, from any Texas institution, as well as the proportion still enrolled at the same institution and at another Texas institution, give a more complete picture of the pathway many students take.

For UT System academic institutions, the proportion of first-time, full-time, degree seeking undergraduate cohorts which graduate from another Texas institution ranges anywhere from 3 to 13 percentage points higher than the traditional 6-year graduation rate. The combined graduation and persistence rates can be 12 to 30 percentage points higher. Looking at those students who have not yet graduated but are still enrolled acknowledges that many students are unable to sustain full-time enrollment, stop out for a time and may re-enroll on a part-time basis. While they have not graduated, they have not given up their goal of pursuing a degree, even if it may take them longer than the traditional time to obtain it.

Table 2

**Six-Year Composite Graduation and Persistence Rates
Students Enrolled at U. T. Academic Institutions**

	Enrolled Fall	Graduating from Same or Another Texas Institution	Persisting at Same or Another Texas Institution	Composite Graduation and Persistence Rate*
Arlington	1997	43.3%	18.7%	62.0%
	1998	44.1	16.2	60.3
	1999	48.5	15.6	64.0
Austin	1997	73.8	8.0	81.8
	1998	78.0	7.4	85.4
	1999	78.7	6.8	85.5
Dallas	1997	62.9	9.9	72.8
	1998	65.6	11.0	76.6
	1999	64.1	12.8	76.9
El Paso	1997	28.4	23.3	51.7
	1998	29.7	25.9	55.6
	1999	31.6	25.2	56.8
Pan American	1997	29.6	23.5	53.0
	1998	31.2	23.1	54.3
	1999	33.5	23.5	57.0
Permian Basin	1997	36.6	20.5	57.1
	1998	42.9	17.9	60.7
	1999	47.5	8.2	55.7
San Antonio	1997	35.4	21.1	56.5
	1998	37.0	23.6	60.6
	1999	37.9	21.8	59.7
Tyler	1998	55.6	11.1	66.7
	1999	NA	NA	NA

* Beginning in 1998, the composite graduation and persistence rates include students enrolled or graduating from private institutions. Prior years' rates only track students enrolled or graduating from public institutions in Texas.

Tyler did not admit freshmen until summer/fall 1998. The graduation rate for the fall 1999 cohort was corrected by UT Tyler. Six-year composite rates on the revised cohort are not available.

Source: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

Time-To-Degree

Another measure also recognizes that many students, because of financial or personal constraints, do not begin as full-time undergraduates, may stop out for a semester or more, transfer from community colleges or other four-year institutions, but still obtain a baccalaureate degree. Time-to-degree examines the enrollment records of students graduating from UT System four-year institutions and accumulates the number of fall or spring semesters these students were enrolled at any institution in Texas, two-year or four-year.

In response to Section 1 of HB 1172, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board provides time-to-degree information for a subset of students who first enrolled in a Texas public institution and subsequently earned a bachelor's degree from a Texas public higher education institution in FY 2005. Transfer students from outside the state of Texas were excluded as were students who took longer than 10 years to complete their degrees. Of the 68,029 baccalaureate graduates statewide, a total of 46,692 (69%) met these criteria. Hence, the information reported in Table 4 represents a partial sample of the total graduates of the UT System academic institutions.

Table 3

Average Semesters Completed by Baccalaureate Degree Recipients at UT System Academic Institutions and All Texas Public Four-Year Institutions, AY 2004-05		
	Number of Baccalaureate Degrees	Average Semesters Completed ¹
Arlington	1,821	10
Austin	7,083	9
Brownsville	349	12
*Texas Southmost College	137	14
Dallas	1,261	10
El Paso	1,035	12
Pan American	1,272	11
Permian Basin	221	11
San Antonio	1,823	11
Tyler	418	11
University of Texas System with Austin	15,420	10
University of Texas System without Austin	8,337	11
Texas Public Institutions State-Wide Average	46,814	10

¹ Fall and spring semesters only

*TSC tracked for a total of six years.

Source: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

Table 3 shows that, on average, baccalaureate recipients in Texas attend 10 fall or spring semesters at any Texas institution. The average for baccalaureate recipients is 9 semesters for Austin; 10 semesters for Arlington and Dallas; 11 semesters for Pan American, Permian Basin, San Antonio and Tyler; and 12 semesters for Brownsville and El Paso.

Degree Completion Comparison

This table compares the total number of students entering as freshmen, regardless of status, (full-time, part-time and transfers) in fall 2004 to the number of bachelor's degrees awarded by the institution annually.

This comparison addresses two major limitations associated with traditional graduation rates. First, it considers all freshmen who enter the university during the fall semester, and does not exclude part-time students and transfer students. Second, the measure does not consider time-to-degree, which is a complex mix of both of student characteristics and institutional efforts. One limitation of this comparison is that fast growing institutions, such as UT San Antonio, will have lower ratios.

Table 4

Baccalaureate Degrees Awarded and Freshman Enrollment[^], 2004-05

	Fall Entering Freshmen [^] 2004	Baccalaureate Degrees Awarded 2004-05	Ratio
Arlington	2,470	3,316	1.34
Austin	6,864	8,705	1.27
Brownsville*	2,110	681	0.32
Dallas	1,236	2,020	1.63
El Paso	2,666	1,957	0.73
Pan American	3,115	1,987	0.64
Permian Basin	322	437	1.36
San Antonio	4,816	3,272	0.68
Tyler**	600	792	1.32

* Brownsville includes first-time undergraduates and freshmen transfers from both UTB and Texas Southmost College.

** In 1998, UT Tyler began enrolling freshmen and sophomores. Prior to this time, it was an upper-division institution.

[^]Full and part-time first-time undergraduates plus freshmen transfer students.

Source: The University of Texas System Statistical Handbook 2006

VI. Other Institutional Initiatives

UT System academic institutions have examined their institutional policies to determine ways to provide access to all students, regardless of their financial circumstances. Tuition deregulation, coupled with cuts to state student aid funding, have changed the way financial aid is distributed. Increased focus on retention and graduation has led to large investments in advising.

Guaranteed Financial Aid Programs

In January 2007, The University of Texas System announced that its nine academic institutions had established guaranteed financial aid programs for students who come from low-income families. These programs basically guarantee that qualifying students will have their tuition and mandatory fees covered if they perform well and graduate on time. For those institutions that have not already begun offering the guarantee, the guarantee will begin this fall for all incoming in-state freshmen with household incomes of \$25,000 or less per year.

UT Arlington will offer the Maverick Promise to provide grant assistance to cover all fall and spring in-state tuition and fees for undergraduate Texas residents who receive a Federal Pell Grant, and who are admitted and complete the financial aid application process including all required forms by April 1, 2007. The Maverick Promise is open to all undergraduate students who are enrolled at least half time (6 credit hours). Students may renew the Maverick Promise if they continue to meet program requirements, including meeting the Satisfactory Academic Progress requirements outlined by UTA. New freshmen students are eligible for the Maverick Promise for up to 5 years and new transfer students are eligible for up to 3 years.

UT Austin began offering its financial aid guarantee program in 2003. Eligible students have had all increases in flat-rate tuition covered by the program if they come from households with incomes of \$40,000 or less per year. On average, eligible students have had all of their tuition and fees paid by financial aid. Students whose family incomes are in the \$40,000 to \$80,000 range are also eligible for some financial assistance.

UT Brownsville will offer the UTB/TSC Imagine College! Program, which will cover all tuition and fees for first-time freshman Texas residents who are taking 15 hours or more and who also qualify for the Pell Grant. It is estimated that as many as 700 freshmen could qualify.

UT Dallas has announced the UT Dallas Tuition Promise to cover the tuition and mandatory fees for new, full-time undergraduate students who are Texas residents. To benefit from the plan, students must be eligible to receive federal Pell grants and must be full-time – taking 12 semester credit hours of classes or more at UT Dallas. In order to continue to remain eligible for the program, students must complete 30 credit hours each year with a minimum 2.5 grade point average, and must continue to meet income and grant eligibility requirements. The Promise will be effective for four years or until a student graduates, whichever comes first.

UT El Paso began offering its program, the UTEP Promise, in the fall 2006. Approximately 600 students took advantage of the program, which covers tuition and mandatory fees for 30 SCH per year for new freshmen (Texas residents) with family incomes of \$25,000 or less per year.

At UT Pan American, as many as one-half of the student population may meet the financial qualifications for the program. As a result, UTPAdvantage is expected to have a positive impact on the college graduation rate for the Rio Grande Valley. The plan is available for four years of study and students must take 30 semester credit hours each year to continue to be eligible for benefits. Both new and current undergraduate students will be eligible for UT Pan American's program.

UT Permian Basin will offer the UTPB Promise financial aid program. The program, which began in spring 2007, is open to freshmen with family incomes of \$25,000 or less and covers all tuition and mandatory fees for 30 semester credit hours each year. The plan is available for four years of study and students must take 30 semester credit hours each year to continue to be eligible for benefits.

UT San Antonio's program, UTSAccess, will include a work-study component that will allow students to earn additional money to offset the costs of room and board. The program will also include support programs to aid students in maintaining eligibility and graduating on time. UTSA estimates that 500 students may be covered by the plan's guarantee.

UT Tyler will offer the Pathway to Success Program. The program will be offered to first-time resident freshmen who meet UT Tyler admissions requirements, who complete all required financial aid documentation, and who enroll in a minimum of 12 credit hours at UT Tyler each fall and spring semester. The plan is available for four years and students must take 30 semester credit hours each year to continue to be eligible for benefits.

Tuition Incentives

Tuition Rebates

UT Arlington offers students who take a full course load tuition rebates in order to encourage its students to take additional courses and graduate sooner. In fall 2005, UT Arlington offered a rebate of \$200 per year (\$800 maximum) for any student who successfully completed 30 SCH in the combined fall and spring semesters while maintaining at least a 2.25 GPA. In fall 2006, UT Arlington increased the amount of its rebate to \$500 and expanded eligibility for its tuition rebates to students completing 28 SCH in two full terms. Over four years students could earn up to \$2,000 in tuition credit. The minimum grade point average was raised slightly to 2.5.

UT Arlington also provides a \$3 per SCH designated tuition discount to students who pay their full tuition and fee bill on time. Prior to instituting the discount, only about 25 percent of UT Arlington's students paid in full and on time; with the discount, the on-time payment rate is over 50 percent. Early payment helps UT Arlington finalize its course schedule and faculty assignments at an earlier date, leading to improved use of resources.

UT Permian Basin began its "Cash for College" Program in spring 2004. The program was established as an incentive for students to graduate on time and as a means to off-set tuition increases. It is funded by designated tuition set-asides. Students qualify for a \$200 award by maintaining a 2.0 GPA and completing at least 30 SCH each year (September to August). Summer sessions are included, enabling part-time students to qualify by attending year-round. Eligible students also must complete a bachelor's degree with no more than 130 credit hours. As of fall 2006, 722 students have earned more than \$320,000 in tuition rebates through Cash for College.

UT Tyler offers a "Free Senior Semester Tuition Rebate" program that rewards those students who enroll in 15 or more SCH and maintain consecutive semester enrollment. Students can receive up to 15 credits without paying designated tuition in their senior year by participating in the program. At current designated tuition rates (\$85 per SCH); the rebate is worth up to \$1,275.

Tuition Discounts

Discounting tuition rates to encourage students to take courses at times when facilities are underutilized is often cited as an example of how tuition flexibility can help universities achieve greater efficiencies.

To encourage students to take courses at times when facilities are underutilized, UT Brownsville discounts designated tuition and certain fees by 25 percent for students who enroll in 7:00 a.m. and weekend classes and offers a discount of 10 percent to students enrolling in classes from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. Tuition discounts save students money and result in better-utilized classroom and lab facilities. In turn, this provides the institution with more capacity and flexibility to handle students that want to take larger course loads.

Tuition Guarantee Plans

A number of universities have instituted "tuition guarantee" plans. Under this arrangement, tuition and fees are guaranteed not to increase over the four years (or longer if a degree program is more than four

years) that is required to obtain a baccalaureate degree. Students who do not complete their degree program in the allotted time lose the guarantee. Students and their families are better able to plan for college expenses because they know that tuition and fees will remain the same if they complete their degree program on time. Because the guarantee expires at the end of the time period required for a degree, students have a powerful incentive to complete their program on time to avoid annual increases in tuition and fee charges.

In fall 2006, UT El Paso became the first institution in Texas to offer a tuition guarantee plan. The university's voluntary Guaranteed Tuition Rate Plan provides entering freshmen who qualify for and select the program a guaranteed tuition and mandatory fee rate of \$194 per credit hour for four years. The plan requires students to take at least 30 credits each academic year and thus will encourage graduation in as close to four years as degree requirements permit. Entering freshmen in fall 2007 will pay \$208 per credit hour.

Beginning in the 2007-2008 academic year, new students entering UT Dallas for the first time will be guaranteed fixed tuition and academic fees for four years. The tuition and fee rates for new students in 2007-2008 will be 13 percent higher than the 2006-2007 rates, but will remain unchanged for this cohort for four years. The increase would be equivalent to an average increase of 5 percent per year if distributed over 4 years.

A unique feature of UT Dallas' program is its agreements with local community colleges. Admitted students can enroll at a community college for two years, and then at UT Dallas for their final two years at the UT Dallas tuition rate applicable when they first enrolled at the community college.

Advising

Over the last several years, institutions have begun focusing on the importance of tracking student progress. Ensuring that students succeed their freshman year and return to the institution to continue their education is vital to reaching the aggressive graduation rate targets that each institution has set for itself. Advising is a key element to improving retention and graduation. UT System academic institutions have been investing in their advising centers to provide more direction to students, from the time they enter the university through to graduation.

UT Austin has the largest number of full-time advisors available. Over 130 advisors offer guidance to students. UT Austin provides extensive academic advising at the department and college levels to insure that students have the specific information needed to help them graduate in a timely manner. Each advisor is expected to have at least a bachelor's degree with relevant experience in the field. UT Austin's Provost's Council on Academic Advising and its Student Deans group provide university-wide oversight and planning for academic advisors. The university has increased its freshman seminars and signature course offerings in its first year curriculum, providing counseling on study skills and study groups and monitoring their progress.

UT Brownsville's Academic Advising Center hired ten new advisors in fall 2006, increasing the number of academic advisors on campus to 27. The Academic Advising Center has recently moved to a new location on campus. This new location has provided more room and more offices to house all the advisors, and, most importantly, has provided the privacy that the students need when they talk to an advisor. To assist students who are having academic difficulties, an Academic Recovery Plan is required for students on suspension/academic probation in order to encourage remediation and retention.

UT Dallas is in the ninth year of a redesigned undergraduate advising system that employs 30 professional advisors who last year made over 50,000 contacts with students. The director of undergraduate advising provides uniform training for advisors, a computerized system for managing advising contact information, a degree audit process for degree-checking, and an annual student survey of advising satisfaction. In addition, this office publishes advising handbooks and minor handbooks for faculty and staff.

UT El Paso has an Academic Advising Center staffed with eight full-time advisors and eight program advisor lecturers. In addition, each college has at least one full-time advisor. Larger colleges, such as

the College of Education, have more advisors available for pre-major and major academic advising needs. UT El Paso is working on implementing a plan to integrate more career advising with academic advising. The university's "Success in the Middle Years" Quality Enhancement Plan will also make use of electronic advising tools and provide for better training and evaluation for advisors.

UT Pan American, prior to 2005, did not have a university-wide academic advising center. The institution relied on faculty in each department to provide guidance to students. Today, in addition to twelve guidance counselors distributed among the colleges, UT Pan American has nine academic advisors available in a university-wide advisement center called the Academic Advisement and Mentoring (AAM) Center. The goal of the center is to advise and track every individual freshman and sophomore students. Advisors assist students in making informed decisions about a major as early in their academic career as possible and ensure that they register for the appropriate courses every semester. Freshman and sophomore students are being advised at a centralized location by academic career advisors. Juniors and seniors are being advised by professional guidance counselors and faculty in each of six colleges. In fall 2006, an additional six professional guidance counselors were hired to advise students in each of six colleges and three additional academic career advisors were hired to advise students at the centralized AAM Center. Faculty advisors are now relied upon to serve as mentors to students. UT Pan American will continue to focus on advising, with plans to hire an additional six professional guidance counselors and three academic advisors in 2007.

UT Permian Basin has five professional academic advisors in the Academic Advising Center and the School of Business Academic Advising Office. UTPB Academic advisors maintain weekly office hours on the campuses of Howard College, Midland College, and Odessa College. The academic advising staff work with undergraduate students on initial entry advising, degree plan development, and registration. The Center director conducts regular faculty development programs on common problems being found in student degree plans, changes in academic regulations, and ways to improve academic advising to students.

UT Tyler opened its Academic Advising Center in 2004. Four full-time academic advisors provide services to all freshman and all transfer students who have not completed the core curriculum. All freshmen are required to meet with a professional academic advisor to plan their first-year coursework. Students must declare a major no later than the completion of 60 semester credit hours. Most majors require that students declare their major and have degree plans completed by their second semester.

As part of its new advising center and services, UT Tyler developed the Mentoring and Advising for Patriot Success (MAPS) program. The MAPS program includes personalized mentoring, referrals to appropriate campus resources, the development of a personalized MAPS plan, and consistent contact with a designated academic advisor based on the student's declared major. MAPS participants receive a Student Success Checklist for them to follow that includes a thorough review of the university academic policies for undergraduate students. The checklist is completed with an end-of-semester interview with the academic advisor and fall registration. The goal of the MAPS Program is to provide an intensive individualized program to help students on academic probation restore their grades and attain the college success skills necessary to continue their academic endeavors.

All UT System academic institutions have plans to expand their advising capabilities. Each institution will hire at least one additional advisor in 2007, with UT Brownsville and UT San Antonio pursuing fairly aggressive growth with plans to add nine to ten advisors over the next year.

VII. Conclusions

To meet the aggressive targets set by the Board of Regents, institutions have moved forward with a number of activities to improve graduation rates. Their initiatives have included a range of new structural, policy, and academic programs to promote timely graduation. The following are highlights:

1. Tuition structures have been modified to incentivize students to take a greater number of credit hours per semester, accelerating time to graduation.
2. Institutions have made policy changes that will encourage students to re-enroll and finish their coursework.
3. Institutions have created employment opportunities so that students remain on campus. There is some evidence that students employed at the university are more likely to perform better academically.
4. Institutions have developed new retention programs that will help keep students in college and thus able to finish coursework on time.
5. Some institutions have combined academic advising with financial aid advising so that students understand how continuous enrollment, supported by financial aid packages, will accelerate their time-to-graduation.
6. Some institutions have begun to redesign courses and add supplemental instruction to ensure student success and to avoid having students repeat courses to master the material.
7. There is significant activity at all institutions to strengthen their relationships with community colleges. Collaborations have been developed with local community colleges, that, in some cases, involve financial aid and curriculum reform.

All these changes will have profound effects on how students make academic progress and graduate on time. No other system-wide initiative in the state or the nation is known to have envisioned the strategic steps to improve graduation rates.

Finally, all academic institutions have adopted other strategies that, directly or indirectly, will impact graduation rates.

1. All institutions adopted guaranteed financial aid programs for students who are economically disadvantaged. These programs require that students take a 15 credit hour course load per semester or 30 hours for the academic year, including the summer.
2. A few institutions have developed flat rate tuition, encouraging students to take a heavier course load by not charging them for any hours over some pre-set limit, for example, taking 18 hours but paying tuition for only 14.
3. Some institutions have provided tuition rebates. These programs encourage students to take more courses per semester, resulting in faster time-to-graduation.
4. Some institutions have provided tuition discounts so that students are motivated to take courses at off-peak times; thus, students are not stuck waiting for courses closed because of being oversubscribed and institutions realize greater resource efficiencies.
5. All institutions have redesigned the academic advising centers. The institutions have developed electronic tracking mechanisms to make sure students do not register without academic advising. All institutions have developed electronic degree checkers so that student can check their degree requirements anytime. Some institutions have added a significant number of new academic advisors to their staff. These new additional advisors will make sure that every student has timely academic counseling.

VIII. Recommendations for Next Steps

Program and policy changes have been recently implemented or are in the process of implementation. It is too early to determine their effectiveness in improving graduation rates. Thus, five recommendations are suggested as next steps:

1. The UT System will continue to monitor and report graduation and persistence rates for all campuses every year.
2. The UT System will help institutions expected to have difficulty achieving their 2010 graduation rate target develop an action plan to improve the chances of achieving their goals.
3. The campuses will develop early assessment programs for all the programmatic and policy changes that have been implemented. It is the only way to understand the effectiveness of a program vis-à-vis graduation rates success. These assessments can only be done by the individual campuses.
4. The UT System will develop a website to share best practices associated with increasing graduation rates.
5. The Office of Academic Affairs will analyze and develop alternative measures of student success in addition to the basic four-, five-, and six-year graduation rate trends currently tracked.