

# GRADUATION SUCCESS PERFORMANCE & STRATEGIES

*2010 Update for the Board of Regents*

## UT ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS



THE UNIVERSITY of TEXAS SYSTEM

*Nine Universities. Six Health Institutions. Unlimited Possibilities.*



NOVEMBER 2010

*Office of Strategic Initiatives*

## Table of Contents

Executive Summary ..... 3

Background: Regents’ 2006 Graduation Rates Initiative ..... 4

Reasons to Expand Beyond the Graduation Rate Metric ..... 4

Comprehensive Analyses ..... 7

Conclusions & Recommendations.....11

### Tables and Figures

Fig. 1 Entry Status of Undergraduate Students Receiving a Baccalaureate Degree ..... 5

Table 1 Entry Status of Undergraduate Students Receiving a Baccalaureate Degree ..... 5

Fig. 2 Impact: Student Preparedness & Graduation Rates ..... 6

Fig. 3 Performance Comparison: First-Year Persistence Rates ..... 6

Fig. 4 4-Year Graduation Success, 2001 and 2005 cohorts ..... 7

Fig. 5 6-Year Graduation Success, 1999 and 2003 cohorts ..... 7

Fig. 6 Performance Comparison: 4-Year & 6-Year Graduation Rates .. 8

Fig. 7 Performance Comparison: Degree Production Ratio..... 8

Fig. 8 6-Year Graduation vs. 6-Year Composite Rates ..... 9

Fig. 9 4-Year Graduation Rate for Community College Transfers..... 9

Table 2 Ongoing Initiatives to Improve Performance..... 10

## About this Research Brief

Few would likely argue with the premise that the most important job of a university is to produce educated citizens. One of the highest educational (and economic) priorities in our state is to increase the number of people earning a bachelor’s degree. It is considerably more difficult to accurately and completely measure how well universities are accomplishing this task, and the traditional graduation rate metric only tells part of the story. This research brief will provide the following:

- An update concerning the progress made by University of Texas institutions related to the Regents’ 2006 Graduation Rate Initiative;
- Baseline understanding of the complexities of measuring graduation success performance;
- Summary of the challenges and limitations associated with the traditional graduation rate measure;
- Documentation and contextualization of current graduation performance trends;
- Recommendations regarding how to expand and improve accountability measures associated with graduation; and
- Summary of ongoing initiatives at each university for improving graduation success.

The goal is not to rationalize poor performance where it exists, but rather to honestly and accurately evaluate how well UT universities should be performing given the differences in student populations and resources that they each legitimately face. The goal is to identify and hold the universities accountable for performance variables that are within their control and not penalize them for factors they have no ability to impact.

*For more information on this research brief please contact:*  
 Dr. Sandra Woodley, Vice Chancellor  
 The Office of Strategic Initiatives  
 Ph) 512-499-4798  
[www.utsystem.edu/osm](http://www.utsystem.edu/osm)  
[swoodley@utsystem.edu](mailto:swoodley@utsystem.edu)

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Graduation Rates and Beyond

- In 2006, the UT System Board of Regents launched the Graduation Rates Initiative to improve the graduation success of students at UT institutions.
- Even though the full impact of institutional efforts that began in 2006 won't show up for several more years, some promising trends exist for many of the UT institutions.
- More improvements are needed to ensure upward trends on all metrics.
- National best practice warns against using the traditional graduation rate metric as the primary measure of graduation performance. Reasons cited:
  - Limited by how few students are captured—only first-time, full-time, degree-seeking (traditional) students.
  - Misses the mark for universities that serve less traditional populations.
  - Could penalize systems that serve disadvantaged and non-traditional students.
  - Could provide incentives for universities not to serve students from lower socio-economic backgrounds or to lower academic standards to increase graduation rates.
- National best practice provides recommendations to improve the measuring of performance:
  - Use broader, multi-faceted approach to capture all aspects of performance for all students.
  - Use appropriate peer groups to contextualize performance.
  - Expand beyond the traditional graduation rate metric.

### Comprehensive Analyses

- Excluding UT Austin, only about 31% of UT students are included in the traditional graduation rate measure (Figure 1, Table 1).
- Student preparedness is correlated to graduation rates. Some institutions serve greater numbers of students who have to take at least one developmental education course (Figure 2).
- Overall, comparing recent persistence and graduation rate performance using multiple metrics, some positive news emerges: upward trends for almost all of the UT universities (Figures 3, 4, and 5).
- Still, on several of the metrics, some universities are not yet trending up and more work needs to be done (Figures 3, 4, and 5).
- A broader picture emerges when performance is benchmarked nationally and when the degree production metric is added (Figures 6 and 7).
- Compared to benchmarks, even though gaps exist for 4- and 6-year graduation rates for virtually all UT institutions, all but two campuses outperform their own baseline national peers on degree production (Figures 6 and 7).
- The rate doubles for most UT institutions when traditional graduation rates are compared to composite graduation and persistence rates that include students who are still enrolled or who have graduated from another Texas institution (Figure 8).
- Performance trends are mixed on community college graduation rates, and improvements are needed (Figure 9).

### Conclusions and Recommendations

- Table 2 is a summary of many of the initiatives to improve persistence and success that are ongoing at the institutions.
- The UT System should consider focusing performance evaluation for graduation success around five core metrics to provide a multi-faceted, comprehensive approach to monitoring progress and success:
  - 4- and 6-year graduation rates, benchmarked (traditional students).
  - First-year persistence rates (traditional students)
  - Degree production ratio, benchmarked (bachelor's degrees awarded relative to undergraduate enrollment).
  - Composite graduation and persistence rates (also includes students who are still enrolled or who have graduated from another Texas institution).
  - Community college graduation rates (success of UT universities in getting community college transfers to complete a bachelor's degree).
- The UT System should consider whether to re-evaluate benchmarks as indicated by the various peer groups to ensure more meaningful performance comparisons.

## BACKGROUND: REGENTS' 2006 GRADUATION RATES INITIATIVE

In February 2006, the UT System Board of Regents passed a resolution that launched the Graduation Rates Initiative. The resolution acknowledged the accomplishments made by UT System academic institutions in increasing access but expressed concern over graduation rates that were then (and most still are) below national averages.

The Board directed the presidents of the academic institutions to align policies to raise graduation rates and to set specific graduation rate goals for both 2010 and 2015. It is important to note that the impact on 4-year graduation rates of initiatives that began in 2006 cannot be wholly understood until 2011 when the 2010 data are available. It will be 2013 before we can fully document performance for the most widely used metric—the 6-year graduation rate. So we are early in a long process to improve our performance.

However, we can begin to look at our trend data to see if our performance is starting to turn around and also to find a more comprehensive and meaningful way to measure and benchmark our performance over time.



## REASONS TO EXPAND BEYOND THE GRADUATION RATE METRIC

### *Measuring Graduation Success: National Best Practice*

National literature and best practices (including the National Governors Association and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities) recommend the following:

- Avoid using the traditional graduation rate as the sole measure of graduation success.
- Context is important to measure and benchmark performance because so much of the performance differences are reflected by factors beyond the control of the universities.
- Appropriate peer groups are crucial for contextualizing performance and for setting meaningful targets.
- Disaggregating rates to reflect different student groups can help to better explain performance differences.
- Other measures should be incorporated to express the full picture of performance for all students, not only the first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students captured in the graduation rate metric.

### *Traditional Graduation Rate Has Serious Limitations*

Fortunately, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's state system of accountability doesn't use the traditional 4- and 6-year metric as the sole indicator on graduation performance. Nationally, however, the 6-year graduation rate has been the primary measure of university performance in graduating students since it was established as part of the federal Student Right to Know Act of 1990. Following is a synopsis of the many concerns about the metric expressed in numerous national publications:

- It is severely limited by the fact that it excludes the majority of students (excludes transfer and part-time students).
- It remains a significant indicator, but only for an increasingly small slice of students. This metric is meaningful only when considered in the context of factors such as student demographics, preparation levels, and attendance patterns.
- It is most relevant for more traditional universities that have greater numbers of traditional students—the only students who actually count in the metric.
- Graduation rates tend to miss the mark when explaining performance for universities that serve greater numbers of historically disadvantaged, underrepresented, and less traditional student populations.
- There is national concern that a sole focus on the traditional graduation rate metric could lead to the unintended consequence of providing incentives for universities not to serve students from lower socio-economic backgrounds or to lower academic standards in order to improve graduation rates.
- Using a single factor fails to recognize the diversity of institutions, changing demographics, and complex attendance patterns.
- Strict formulas or accountability systems that focus on this single metric could penalize institutions that serve disadvantaged or non-traditional students.

## *Differences in Student Characteristics Matter*

At issue are research findings, as demonstrated by numerous national studies, that indicate most of the variations in graduation rates are attributable to factors beyond the control of the universities. The most influential factors include student preparation before attending college (level and rigor of math and science course work completed) and socio-economic status.

This partly explains why colleges that are most selective in admissions tend to have higher graduation rates. They are able to attract larger numbers of students who are more likely to graduate. These universities still have to work hard to reach the highest levels but are able to achieve relatively high rates based on the kinds of students they attract.

For universities with a mission to educate underserved and disadvantaged students, the problem is more complicated and the ability of university policies and practices to achieve higher levels of graduation rates is more limited. The state's *Closing the Gaps* initiative resulted in programs to increase access for traditionally underserved populations who typically take longer and need more assistance to graduate. To be successful, universities must maintain a balance of providing programs and strategies that will help students become more self-directed academically, while at the same time encourage more timely graduation. This doesn't mean that low graduation rates are acceptable; it just means that the standards for achievable increases will, by necessity, vary depending on the kinds of students each university serves.

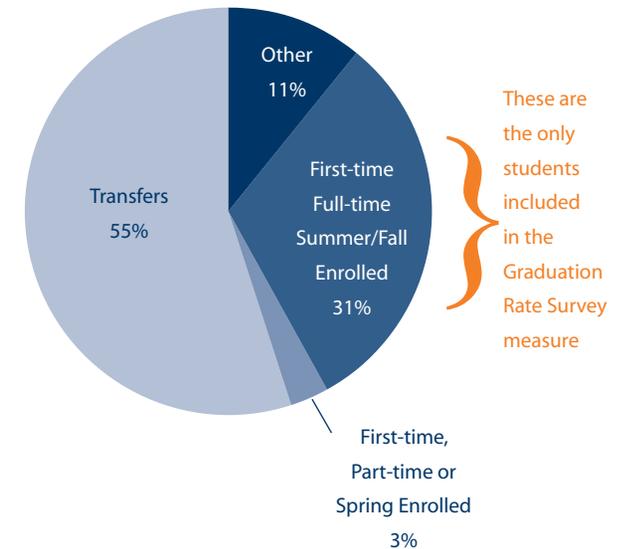
## *Most Students Not Captured in the Measure*

This issue is complicated by the fact that the graduation rate measure captures such a small portion of the student population. Figure 1 illustrates that of the most recent graduating class (excluding UT Austin), less than one-third of graduates would have been included in the traditional graduation rate metric. In other words, over two-thirds would have been excluded.

For example, transfer students made up the largest proportion of baccalaureate degree awardees in 2009; however, they are not captured in the graduation rate measure. The "Other" category represents students who could not be tracked in the data that were available.

Table 1 shows institutional detail.

*Fig. 1 Entry Status of Undergraduate Students Receiving a Baccalaureate Degree in AY 2008-09*



*Table 1 Entry Status of Undergraduate Students Receiving a Baccalaureate Degree in AY 2008-09*

	FTFT, Summer/Fall Enrolled		FTPT or Spring Enrolled		Transfer		Other		Total #
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
UTA	916	23	91	2	2,507	64	424	11	3,938
UT Austin	5,676	69	101	1	2,124	26	303	4	8,204
UTD	705	31	16	1	1,443	63	139	6	2,303
UTEP	1,029	34	131	4	1,211	40	622	21	2,993
UTPA	1,136	42	194	7	1,045	39	330	12	2,705
UTPB	112	20	3	1	368	65	82	15	565
UTSA	1,271	33	86	2	2,211	58	256	7	3,824
UTT	228	19	11	1	884	72	105	9	1,228
Total	11,073	43	633	2	11,793	46	2,261	9	25,760
Total excl Austin	5,397	31	532	3	9,669	55	1,958	11	17,556

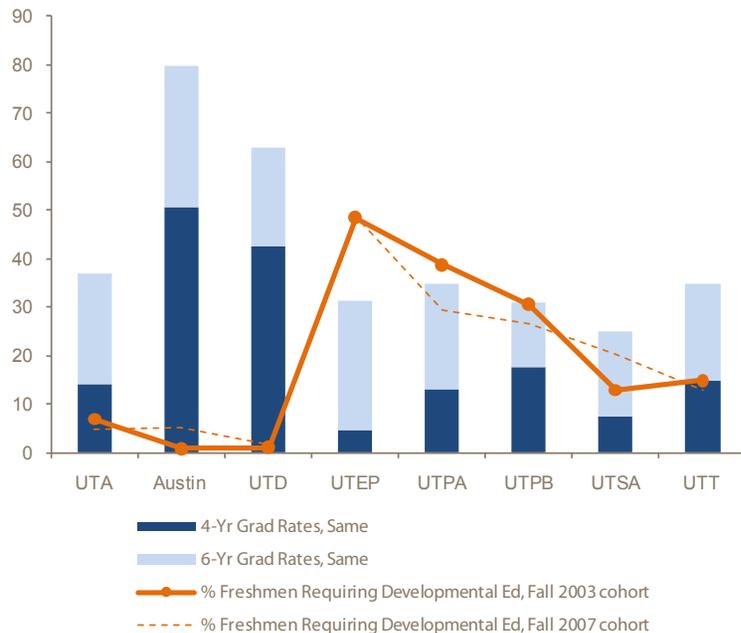
Source: data from The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board; analysis by Office of Strategic Initiatives

## *Student Preparedness Matters*

Additionally, Figure 2 sheds some light on one of the challenges that institutions face: providing students with developmental education in one or more subject areas. In general, the higher the proportion of students who may require developmental education, the lower the graduation rate.

This is most strongly reflected in the example of UTEP and UTPA. The campuses have similar student populations, but UTPA has higher 4- and 6-year graduation rates (Figures 4 and 5). The proportion of UTEP's 2003 cohort that may have required developmental education was 10 points higher than at UTPA. For the 2007 cohort, the proportion of UTEP's entering students requiring developmental education remained flat while UTPA's fell. The gap in developmental education requirements between UTEP's and UTPA's 2007 cohorts is nearly 20 points. It will be several more years before the correlation to graduation rates can be determined.

*Fig. 2 Impact: Student Preparedness and Graduation Rates  
fall 2003 cohort*



## COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSES

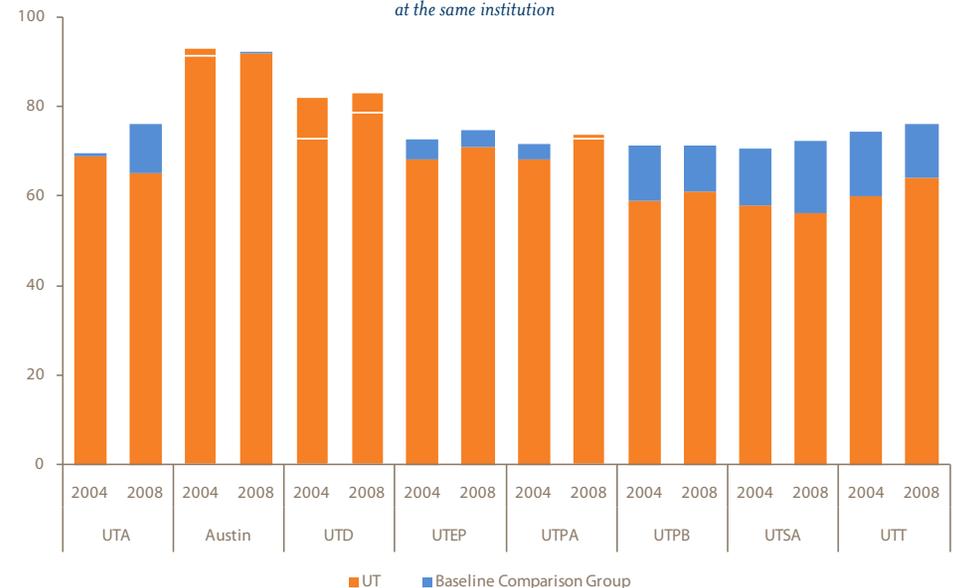
- What follows are five measures to broaden the scope of performance evaluation of graduation success and to incorporate national best practices in tracking and benchmarking progress.
- First-year persistence rate performance as a strong early predictor of graduation rates, compared to national benchmark (Figure 3).
- Graduation rate performance, 4-year, 6-year, and combined; compared to national benchmark (Figures 4, 5, and 6).
- Degree production ratio, compared to national benchmark (Figure 7).
- Composite graduation and persistence rates as a more expansive definition of student success (Figure 8).
- Graduation rate performance for community college transfers (Figure 9).

### *The Coordinated Admission Program & Student Success*

CAP students begin as freshmen at another UT System university and may transfer to UT Austin to complete their studies if they successfully complete the program requirements.

Institutions with large numbers of CAP students (e.g., UTA, UTSA) will see a negative impact on first-year persistence and traditional graduation rates.

*Fig. 3 Performance Comparison: First-Year Persistence Rates  
at the same institution*



## Performance Trends: First-Year Persistence

- The blue in Figure 3 indicates performance gaps to a baseline national average benchmark statistically calculated for each university based on a model that determined similar institutions in student characteristics, research intensiveness, program mix, and size.
- Research shows that freshmen who persist to a second year in college are more likely to complete a degree. First-year persistence is highly correlated to graduation rates.
- Monitoring first-year persistence rates provides an early indicator of future graduation rate trends.

## Performance Trends: Graduation Rates

When comparing the performance for the most recent graduates (2009) we have to track back to when the students first enrolled since graduation rates follow a specific cohort of first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students from the date they first enrolled.

It bears repeating that the performance trends documented below cannot fully reflect the impact of initiatives, most of which began in 2007, when institutions first had the opportunity to respond to the 2006 Graduation Rates Initiative. It will take several more years for these efforts to show up in graduation rates. So, the performance trends in Figures 3 and 4 most fully reflect efforts that began prior to the initiative.

- Figure 4 shows the most recent 4-year graduation rates reported by the Coordinating Board. The graph reflects marked improvement from the 2001 to 2005 cohorts at nearly all universities, including increases by more than 5 points at UT Austin, UTD, UTEP, and UTPA.
- The dark blue portion of Figure 5 details progress on the traditional 6-year rate, which is the most widely-used metric. Half of the universities show improvement (UT Austin, UTD, UTEP, and UTPA). The remaining institutions are showing declines.
- However, Figure 5 also shows that when students who started at a UT campus but graduated from another Texas institution are included—also called the combined graduation rate—the six-year graduation picture is much better: six universities (UTA, UT Austin, UTD, UTEP, UTPA, and UTSA) increased their 6-year combined graduation rate.
- UTA, UTPB, UTSA, and UTT gain between 10 and 20 percentage points when using the combined graduation rate metric versus the traditional 6-year graduation rate metric. UTSA experiences the greatest increase, moving from 25 percent to 45 percent.
- For institutions with small cohort sizes like UTPB (and UTT), the change in 4- and 6-year percentages may reflect more about the inherent instability of the small cohort numbers than actual declines in performance. For example, for UTPB the 4-point

drop in their 4-year graduation rate from 2001 to 2005 was the difference of 7 additional students graduating in 2001.

- UTT had atypical graduation rates for its early freshmen cohorts because of the limited size and selectivity of the freshmen class. UTT did not admit freshmen until summer/fall 1998 (50 students) and class size increased incrementally by 50 students until fall 2003. The fall 2000 cohort is presented as the comparison group because of data reporting inconsistencies (for fall 1999 cohort) with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Fig.4 4-Year Graduation Success, 2001 and 2005 cohorts

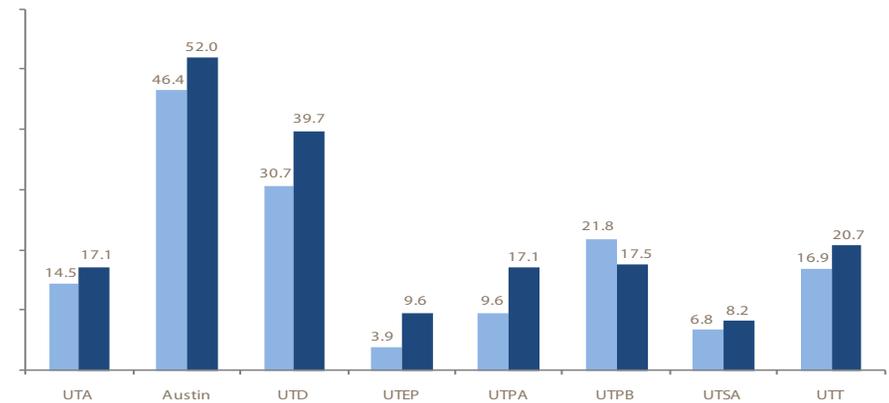
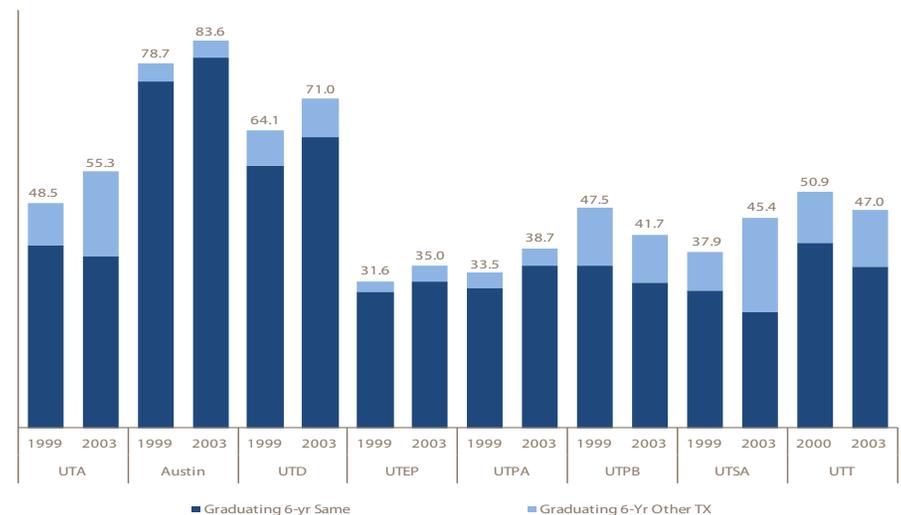


Fig.5 6-Year Graduation Success, 1999 and 2003 cohorts



## *Graduation Rate Performance Measure*

Figure 6 illustrates how UT universities (in orange) compare to their same baseline comparison group that was statistically determined by the model described earlier. The 4-year and 6-year graduation rate measures illustrate what we already know about performance gaps between all UT universities and the benchmarks, particularly on the 4-year rate.

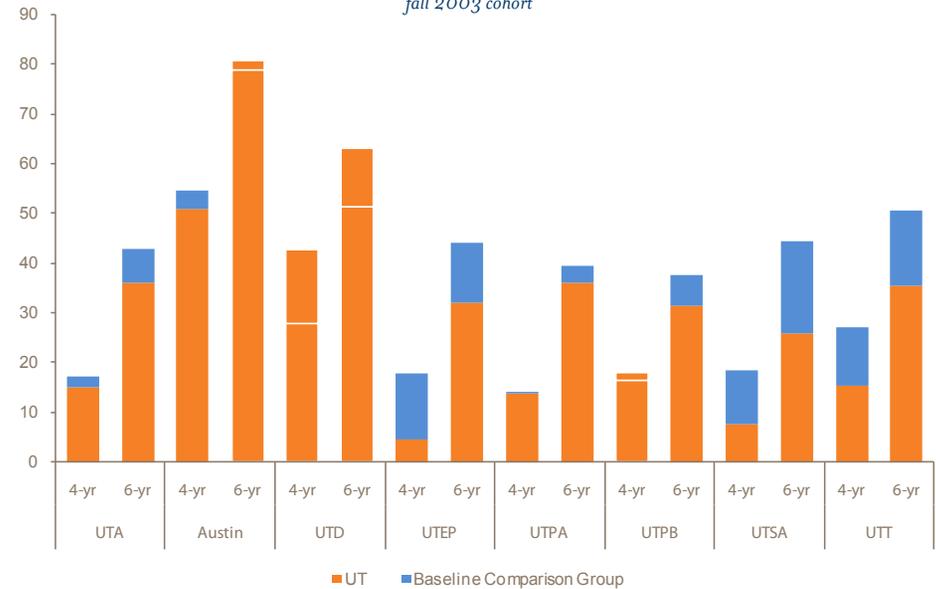
Performance gaps, shown in blue, illustrate that significant improvements are needed. Even though the graduation rate covers only a small percentage of our recent graduates (31% excluding UT Austin) as illustrated in Figure 1, the UT System is focused on improving performance for this group of traditional students. A comprehensive review of the current peer groups may also be advisable in order to ensure that targets and benchmarks for improvements are meaningful.

## *Degree Production Measure*

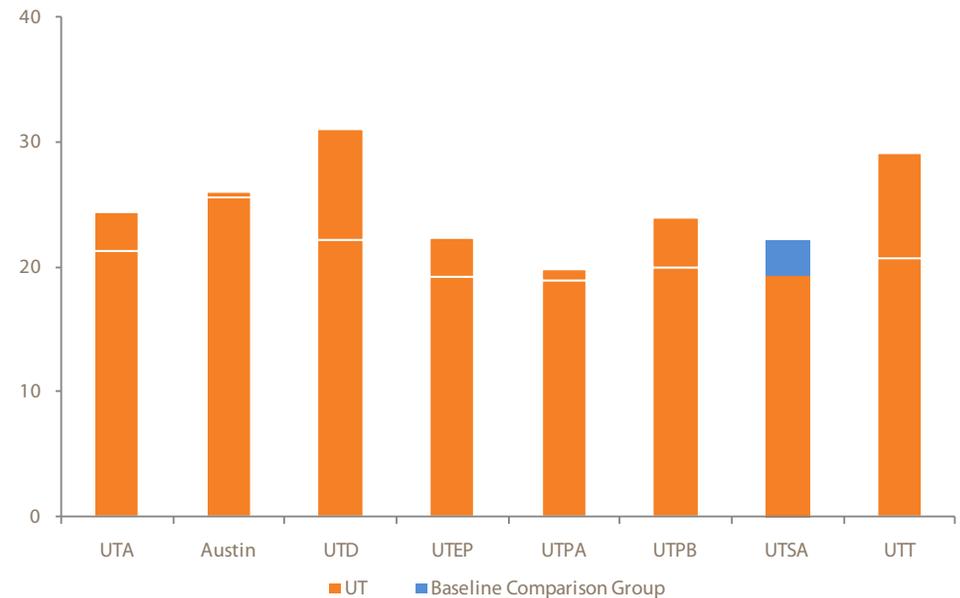
Figure 7 presents the ratio of bachelor's degrees awarded in relation to the size of the undergraduate student body. It is not cohort based. In other words, it is not tied to a particular set of students followed from entry to graduation, but rather a simple ratio to show the relationship between graduates in proportion to the total number of full-time equivalent undergraduates enrolled four years earlier. A few observations:

- Seven UT universities perform about the same or above the statistically determined baseline benchmark in the degree production measure.
- UTSA is below the benchmark in the degree production measure.
- Overall, performance in graduation success is significantly higher for most UT universities when using the degree production measure as compared to the graduation rate measure.
- The degree production measure, while not a cohort metric like graduation rates, is much more inclusive and incorporates all students and graduates, thereby not excluding large portions of the student population.

*Fig. 6 Performance Comparison: 4-Year and 6-Year Graduation Rates  
fall 2003 cohort*



*Fig. 7 Performance Comparison: Degree Production  
Bachelor's Degrees Awarded per 100 FTE Undergraduates*



## Composite Graduation & Persistence Rate Measure

Figure 8 compares the traditional 6-year graduation rate to the composite graduation and persistence rate. The composite rate expands the definition of success to include traditional students who graduated from the same institution (as in the 6-year graduation rate measure) and also students who are still enrolled in that or another Texas institution and those who graduated from other universities in Texas. This is one of the metrics currently included in the Coordinating Board's accountability system.

This metric is also gaining traction nationally as part of the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA), an initiative by public 4-year universities to supply comparable information on the undergraduate student experience.

- **Composite rates show a different picture.** All UT universities show a dramatic difference in performance on the composite graduation rate when compared to the traditional graduation rate—for example, UTSA's 6-year graduation rate of 25 percent more than doubles to a 64.5 percent success rate.
- **Double the performance for most.** For six of the UT universities, the composite graduation and persistence rate is almost twice as high as the rate calculated in the traditional graduation rate measure.
- **Limited Benchmarking available.** Unlike the graduation rate metric, data on the composite rate are only available nationally for some universities that participate in the VSA since the data must come from detailed student unit record systems that are not available in every state. Therefore, national and peer comparisons are limited at this time.

## Transfer Graduation Rates

- Performance trends are mixed and efforts are underway to improve success rates for community college transfers.
- The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board also tracks graduation rates for students transferring from a community college with 30 or more semester credit hours. As noted earlier, transfer students make up the greatest proportion of baccalaureate degree awardees in 2009. Because transfer students represent such a significant number of students attending UT universities, it is equally important to monitor their graduation rates.
- Figure 9 demonstrates that 4-year transfer graduation rates are above 60 percent at UT Austin, UTD, and UTPA, and are above 40 percent at the other UT universities. Since fall 2001, transfer graduation rates improved at four UT universities: UT Austin, UTD, UTEP, and UTPA.

Estimated # of 2005 Community College Transfer Students	
UTA	2,035
Austin	465
UTD	893
UTEP	739
UTPA	566
UTPB	260
UTSA	1,412
UTT	648

Fig. 8 6-Year Graduation vs. 6-Year Composite Graduation & Persistence Rates fall 2003 cohort

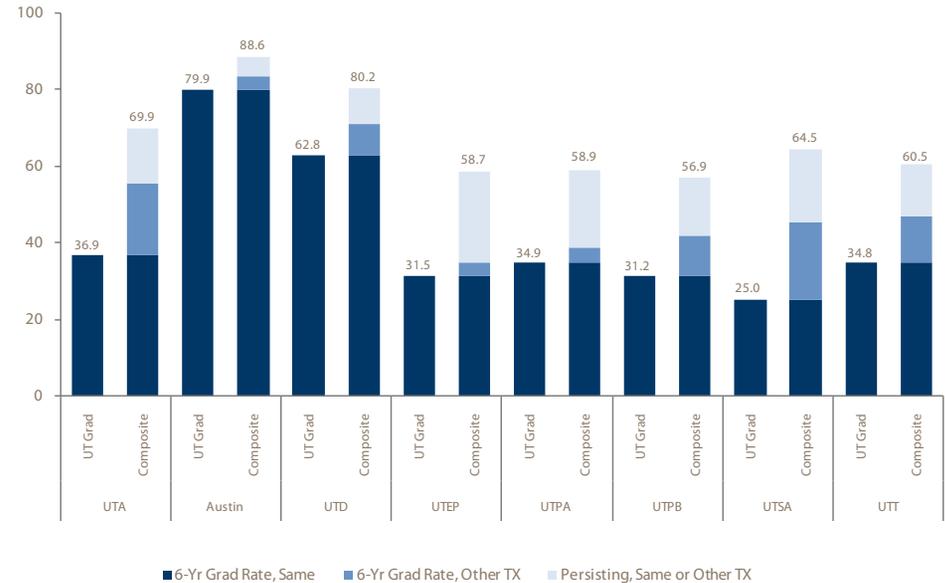
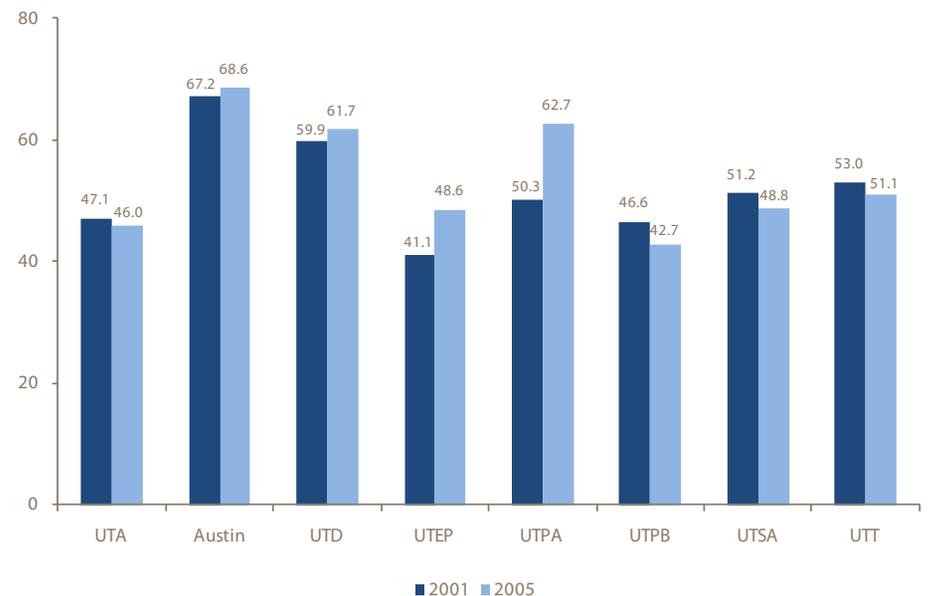


Fig. 9 4-Year Graduation Rates for Community College Transfers, 2001 and 2005 fall cohorts



*Table 2 Ongoing Initiatives to Improve Performance*

<i>Strategy Categories</i>	<i>Programs/Initiatives</i>	<i>Success Issues Targeted</i>	<i>Selected University Specifics</i>
<b>Admission Standards</b>	Increased or began new minimum admissions requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• College readiness</li> <li>• Alignment of K-12 to college expectations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UTA – increased standards; limited Gateway and CAP participation.</li> <li>• UTPA, UTPB, UTSA – began/expanded new minimum admissions standards.</li> <li>• UTEP – College Readiness Initiative with EPCC and area school districts.</li> </ul>
<b>Degree Audits / New B.A. Programs</b>	Programs aimed at students in good standing with significant credit hours towards a degree (Universities Studies degree); providing online audits to find nearest pathway to a degree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Graduation rates, completions</li> <li>• Retention</li> <li>• Time to degree</li> <li>• Cost management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UTA, UTB, UTEP – new Bachelor’s degrees in university/multidisciplinary studies.</li> <li>• UTA, UTEP, UTPB – Bachelor’s Accelerated Completion program</li> <li>• UTEP, UTSA – “Welcome Back” programs to recover students who stop out.</li> <li>• UTEP, UTPB – collaborative online BAs in multidisciplinary studies and humanities.</li> <li>• All campuses – online audits to match credits toward nearest degree.</li> </ul>
<b>Tutoring and Assessment</b>	Programs that address the need for academic tutoring and learning centers and that monitor and intervene when academic progress is at risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• College readiness</li> <li>• First-year retention</li> <li>• Persistence</li> <li>• Graduation rates, completions</li> <li>• Closing The Gaps: diversity</li> <li>• Cost management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UTB, UTD, UTPA, UTPB, UTT – early warning programs to intervene when problems arise.</li> <li>• UTA – academic skills class required when GPA drops.</li> <li>• UTB – Satisfactory Academic Progress program to track at risk students.</li> <li>• UTD – GEMS (Gateways to Engagement, Mastery and Success) Center centralizes services for gateway STEM and core courses, curriculum alignment and realignment, course redesign, etc.; GEMS Writing Center services extend to residence halls and library.</li> <li>• UTEP – new classroom management software tool to track student performance. New student orientation provides freshmen a 6-hour math refresher to help with placement testing. Freshmen needing developmental math can work through both courses in summer prior to fall enrollment.</li> <li>• UTPA – University 1301 learning framework course for at risk students.</li> <li>• UT Austin, UTB, UTEP, UTPA, UTPB, UTT – various learning centers, Texas Success Initiatives aimed at core subjects and at risk students, freshman seminars, etc.</li> <li>• UTPB – AVID program to assist students who may lack skills needed for college.</li> <li>• UTSA – tutoring in core curriculum and gateway courses; learning assistance and academic coaching; midterm intervention for at-risk students provided by freshman advising units.</li> </ul>
<b>Mentoring and Advising</b>	Programs aimed at effectively and properly advising students through the course of their studies and also at providing mentoring and community building to link academic success to social opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First-year retention</li> <li>• Persistence</li> <li>• Graduation rates, completions</li> <li>• Closing The Gaps: diversity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UT Austin, UTD – First Year Interest Groups link students socially and academically.</li> <li>• UTB – STING (Students Together Involving Networking and Guiding) support group for new students; also ASPIRE, a support group for low-income, first-generation students.</li> <li>• UTB, UTSA – Late Intervention Program works one-on-one with fifth-year students to encourage them to complete their degree program.</li> <li>• UTD – GEMS Center coordinates peer-led team learning sections supporting 20+ STEM gateway courses; success coaching offered by appointment and in workshop formats.</li> <li>• UTPA – Sophomore Academic Mentoring Program.</li> <li>• All campuses – various advising centers, workshops, seminars, summer boot camps, Jump start programs, web-based tools, student mentor programs, faculty mentor programs, etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Supplemental Instruction</b>	Instructional learning strategies, pairs students with other students for structured study sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First-year retention</li> <li>• Persistence</li> <li>• Graduation rates, completions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All campuses – supplemental instruction programs on campus.</li> <li>• UTEP – peer leader programs in freshman seminar, chemistry, calculus, career center, etc.</li> </ul>

*table 2 continues >>*

**Table 2** *Ongoing Initiatives to Improve Performance (continued)*

<i>Strategy Categories</i>	<i>Programs/Initiatives</i>	<i>Success Issues Targeted</i>	<i>Selected University Specifics</i>
<b>Tuition and Financial Aid Programs</b>	Guaranteed tuition programs, flat rate tuition, financial aid “promise” programs, tuition rebates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time to degree</li> <li>• Persistence</li> <li>• Graduation rates, completions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All campuses – financial aid guarantees.</li> <li>• UTA, UT Austin, UTD – flat rate tuition.</li> <li>• UTB, UTT – tuition discounts for courses when facilities are underutilized.</li> <li>• UTD, UTEP – four-year tuition guarantee.</li> <li>• UTA, UTB, UTPB, UTT – tuition rebates.</li> <li>• UTB, UTEP, UTSA – financial advising programs teach students financial benefits of full-time attendance.</li> <li>• UTPA – 14-hour cap on designated tuition.</li> <li>• UTSA – Graduation Incentive Award targets fifth-year students.</li> </ul>
<b>New Academic Units</b>	Programs targeted to freshmen: align critical services like advising, counseling, access to financial aid counselors, career planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time to degree</li> <li>• First-year retention</li> <li>• Persistence</li> <li>• Graduation rates, completions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UTA, UTB – all freshmen assigned to new “University College”.</li> <li>• UT Austin – new School of Undergraduate Studies is initial home to all entering students who have not declared a major.</li> </ul>
<b>Academic Policies and Curriculum</b>	Changes to academic policies and course scheduling; redesign of courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time to degree</li> <li>• Persistence</li> <li>• Graduation rates, completions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All campuses – implementing six-drop rule.</li> <li>• UTB – strengthened Satisfactory Academic Progress requirements.</li> <li>• UTB, UTEP – redesign of math, reading and writing courses to limit time spent on developmental education, course scheduling to offer classes in the afternoon, evening, and on weekends.</li> <li>• UTPA – course scheduling initiative expands opportunities for nontraditional and part-time students.</li> </ul>
<b>High School/Community College to University Transition</b>	Programs to assist students with the transition from secondary to postsecondary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First-year retention</li> <li>• Persistence</li> <li>• Graduation rates, completions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UTB – Summer Bridge program for high school/dual enrollment students, STEPS program to increase community college transfers in STEM fields.</li> <li>• UTB, UTPA, UTPB – concurrent enrollment programs to assist high school students enrolled in college courses.</li> <li>• UTD – Comet Connection linking community college transfer students to the university, Academic Bridge program. GEMS Center trains local community college districts to implement peer-led team learning in gateway STEM courses.</li> <li>• UTEP – enrollment and academic advising services provided to transfer students on site at the EPCC Valle Verde campus. Reverse transfer policy with EPCC to award AA or AS degrees to students who complete degree requirements at UTEP; ASSIST freshman-to-sophomore summer bridge program; Early College High School multiple programs for successful transition.</li> <li>• UTEP, UTPA – required first-year courses that address transition to college.</li> <li>• UTPA – 21 academic articulation agreements with community colleges.</li> <li>• UTPB – Summer Bridge and TexPrep for high school students (in partnership with UTSA); transfer academic advisor visits area community colleges to create degree plans; seamless student transfer agreements with 17 community colleges.</li> <li>• UTSA – Learning communities and freshman seminar program for first time in college students.</li> </ul>

## CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- Analyses of UT System institutions find that:
  - Even when addressing the traditional measure in context, there is still much to be done to improve the 4- and 6-year graduation rates of our first-time, full-time, degree-seeking, traditional students.
  - When using two other nationally recognized graduation metrics—degree production and composite graduation and persistence rate—UT institutions perform significantly better compared to benchmarks on the traditional graduation rate measure.
  - Peer comparisons are important to contextualize performance. A new evaluation of peer sets is recommended in order to create appropriate benchmarks for more meaningful comparisons.
- Measuring graduation success performance requires a multi-faceted approach. UT System must remain engaged in careful analysis of graduation data to ensure a more accurate depiction of success that is broader in scope and fair to different institutional student populations.
- The UT System should consider focusing performance evaluation for graduation success around five main metrics to provide a comprehensive approach to monitoring progress and success:
  - 4- and 6-year graduation rates, benchmarked: traditional students.
  - First-year persistence rates, benchmarked: traditional students.
  - Degree production ratio, benchmarked: degree production relative to undergraduate enrollment.
  - Composite graduation and persistence rates: adds graduates who start at original university but graduate elsewhere or who are still enrolled.
  - Community college transfer graduation rates: success of universities in helping community college transfers complete a bachelor's degree.

## Sources

Adelman, C. The Toolbox Revisited: Paths to degree completion from high school through college. U.S. Department of Education. Washington, D.C.; 1-192, 2006.

Adelman, C. Making Graduation Rates Matter. *InsideHigherEd*. Washington, D.C. March 12, 2007.

American Association of State Colleges and Universities. Accountability and Graduation Rates: Seeing the forest and the trees. New York, NY; 1-4, 2002.

American Association of State Colleges and Universities. Graduation Rates and Student Success: Squaring means and ends. *Perspectives*. New York, NY; 1-13, 2006.

Common College Completion Metric Work Group. Metrics that Inform and Drive Improvement in College Completion. National Governors Association. Washington, D.C.; June 2010.

Culver, T. A New Way to Measure Student Success. *Noel-Levitz White Paper*. Iowa City, IA; 2008.

Doyle, W. R. Open-Access Colleges Responsible for Greatest Gains in Graduation Rates. *Policy Alert: The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education*. San Jose, CA; 1-5, 2010.

Gold, L. and L. Albert. Graduation Rates as a Measure of College Accountability. IN: American Academic. American Federation of Teachers, ed., Washington, D.C.; 89-106, 2006.

Jaschik, S. Challenging the Measure of Success. *InsideHigherEd*. Washington, D.C.; June 6, 2007.

Jaschik, S. Alternative Measure of Success. *InsideHigherEd*. Washington, D.C.; October 22, 2008.

Milam, J. New Measures of Student Success in Public Higher Education. *HigherEd.org*. January 2009.

NGA Center for Best Practices. Measuring Student Achievement at Postsecondary Institutions. National Governors Association, Washington, D.C.; 1-11, 2009.

The University of Texas System. The University of Texas System Graduation Rates Initiative and Timely Graduation Progress Report. Austin, TX; 1-53, 2010.