



Exemplary Student Pathways

An initiative of The University of Texas System

The **Exemplary Student Pathways Project** uses powerful data and a proven change model to redesign curricular pathways to support students in completing degrees at UT System institutions. The ESP Project:

- **Positions the curriculum as the locus of change** to promote student success.
- **Cultivates data agency** through an iterative process focused on institutional cohort-based participation, data discovery, reflection, and action – the ESP Change Model.
- **Is developing tools and artifacts based on learning from 22 different** projects to facilitate ongoing engagement, assessment, sustainability, and institutionalization of the change model by teams and practitioners.

The **ESP Change Model** centers **data agency and curricular redesign as levers of change** to remove barriers to student success and gaps in student outcomes.



Core Questions

The ESP Project as a whole and the project teams that participate in the ESP Change Model seek to answer some core questions:

1. How do our students experience the curriculum—general education, gateway courses, majors—and the co-curriculum?
2. How do students enter, persist in, and complete degree programs and credentials?
3. What curricular barriers impede student progress, in terms of structure, operations, content, and pedagogy?
4. Once we have responsibly interpreted the data and are ready to act on it, what actions do we need to take to remove the barriers and improve student pathways and mobility?
5. Finally, how will we know if we are successful?

Answering these questions requires deep dives into data, and this is the piece of the ESP Change Model focused on **data agency**. Answering these questions also requires **a holistic and expansive look at the curriculum and the domains that underpin it: structure, operations, content and pedagogy**.

This document provides foundational information on the Exemplary Student Pathways Project's Change Model. It was revised in April 2025 to reflect the change model name change.

The ESP Change Model is an iterative theory of change applied to an identified curricular problem or challenge, or to a student success problem or challenge requiring closer examination of the curriculum. The theory of change encourages refinement of the identified problems and challenges through ongoing data discovery, action, and assessment of the actions and outcomes of those actions. Continuous improvement, therefore, is a desired outcome. The graphic above represents the structured and facilitated stages that make up the ESP Change Model's theory of change, and reflects the process experienced by the 22 funded ESP projects and cohorts.

Domains and Criteria for Data Agency and Curricular Redesign

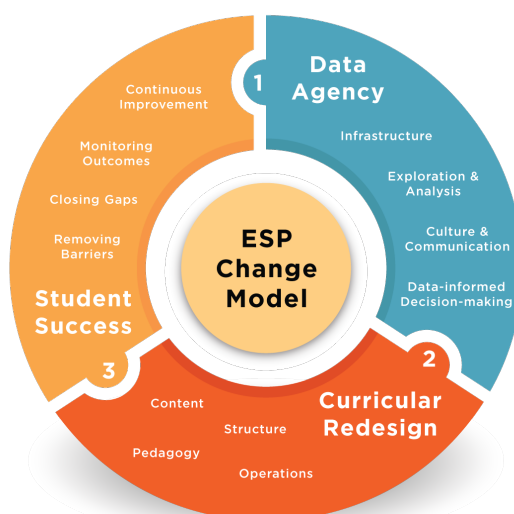
The Exemplary Student Pathways Project posits an expansive vision for holistic curricular redesign—including pathways into and through majors, an entire major, one or more courses in a major, and/or gateway courses. The vision results in a curriculum with coherence and transparency for students, faculty, advisors, administrators and others to understand the value of the degrees offered, pursued, and completed.

In early 2024, the ESP Impact Assessment Framework Working Group began meeting to develop an assessment and accountability framework building from and aligned with the work and action plans of the 22 ESP projects. Their work has resulted in deeper unpacking and synthesis of what we mean by data agency and curricular redesign, including the identification of metrics to evaluate the efficacy of the ESP Change Model, and rubrics for assessing progress on advancing data agency and curricular redesign.

The ESP Change Model concepts “data agency” and “curricular redesign” can be understood in terms of **domains**, *broad categories of assessment or evaluation*, and **criteria**, *measurable components within each domain category that demonstrate whether the domain is present and to what extent*. Reflecting on the extent to which criteria are present allows teams and institutional leaders to determine areas of opportunity and success.

The next graphic represents the ESP Change Model through the lens of the domains of data agency leading to curricular redesign, leading to the overarching student success outcomes and ongoing changes the model is intended to achieve.

This document provides foundational information on the Exemplary Student Pathways Project’s Change Model. It was revised in April 2025 to reflect the change model name change.



ESP Change Model
Data-informed curricular redesign to improve student success

The UT System and its institutions have reached a pivotal phase in the Exemplary Student Pathways Project, where we are actively working to institutionalize **data agency and curricular redesign**—as both concepts and practice—as critical means to removing barriers to student success and gaps in student outcomes.

The tables on the following pages define each construct’s domains and provide a description of corresponding and measurable criteria.

ESP Change Model Approach to Data Agency

Data Agency Definition: The ESP Change Model defines the phrase ‘data agency’ as the ability to create utility from data. It enables institutional leaders and higher education practitioners to develop a clear strategy and capacity for data with a student-centered lens across four domains: infrastructure, exploration and analysis, culture and communication, and data-informed decision-making.

Domains and Criteria:	
1. Infrastructure: Ensuring documentation for processes around data collection and storage, processes and practices for data definitions, governance, validation.	
Criteria: This is accomplished through attention to operational process, practices, and equipment to ensure proper storage, access, and validation of data.	
2. Exploration & Analysis: Ensuring the use of data assets to support analysis, training to staff, faculty, leadership, guidance on asking questions, interrogating findings, conducting analyses and identifying metrics.	
Criteria: This is accomplished by providing support data analysis and interpretation including expert support, subject matter expertise, and training.	

This document provides foundational information on the Exemplary Student Pathways Project's Change Model. It was revised in April 2025 to reflect the change model name change.

3. Culture & Communication: Ensuring communication of data analysis and interpretation to campus leaders to inform and guide decisions and action in terms of policy, interventions, curricular change, presence of culture using data to inform the formation and/or challenge of assumptions.
Criteria: This is accomplished by cultivating a culture of leveraging data to inform decision-making, policy creation, and interventions through collaboration and communication.
4. Data-informed Decision-making: Ensuring decision-making that includes regular data review, the involvement of subject-matter experts, a range of perspectives and stakeholders, ongoing evaluation and continuous improvement.
Criteria: This is accomplished by collaborative and regular review of data to evaluate outcomes and inform continuous improvement efforts.

ESP Change Model Approach to Curricular Redesign

Curricular Redesign Definition: The ESP Change Model defines the phrase ‘curricular redesign’ as a comprehensive process of evaluating and transforming the domains of structure, operations, content, and pedagogy of academic programs and courses. The primary goal is to provide students with learning experiences that equip them with the skills, knowledge, abilities, and habits of mind necessary for success in college, careers, and civic life. This is achieved through the development of clear degree pathways with well-defined learning outcomes resulting in curricula that are coherent and transparent.

Domains and Criteria
1. Structure: Ensuring the curriculum sequence is transparent and positions students to enter, persist, and complete degrees.
Criteria: This is accomplished through attention to curriculum mapping, degree maps, identifying and removing curricular barriers, targeted and personalized interventions, and continuous improvement.
2. Operations: Ensuring the curriculum is delivered in alignment with student needs and institutional capacity.
Criteria: This is accomplished through attention to scheduling practices, instructional capacity, process alignment, and credit for prior learning.
3. Content: Ensuring the curriculum is current, relevant, and responsive to student, disciplinary, career/workforce, and societal needs.
Criteria: This is accomplished through attention to curriculum design, course-level learning outcomes, instructional materials, and post-graduation preparation.
4. Pedagogy: Ensuring the curriculum is delivered well, ensures student engagement and learning, and includes appropriate support for instructors.
Criteria: This is accomplished through attention to professional development, pedagogical approaches, program-level assessment, accessibility and modality, learning profiles, student belonging

This document provides foundational information on the Exemplary Student Pathways Project's Change Model. It was revised in April 2025 to reflect the change model name change.

Towards Institutionalization of the ESP Change Model through Deeper Understanding of Data Agency and Curricular Redesign

The following section provides context and guidance as the UT System and institutions begin to focus on institutionalizing the ESP Change Model.

What We Mean by Institutionalization:

Institutionalization is the process of embedding a concept within an organization, social system, or society by establishing rules and norms that shape human interactions.

Why Institutionalization Matters:

For meaningful change to take root, all key actors—leaders, practitioners, stakeholders and decision-makers at all levels—must have a shared understanding of why the work matters. In our case, that means ensuring clarity around data agency as a driver for curricular redesign and reinvigoration to close student outcome gaps and eliminate barriers to success. This shared vision should be transparent, aligned with institutional strategic goals, and embraced collectively. Institutionalization strengthens the case for systemic change where change is needed while also allowing for scaling and sustaining those practices, policies, cultural norms and infrastructure that are working and already in place.

For UT institutions and the Exemplary Student Pathways Change Model, institutionalization can take many forms: it may lead to formalized policies and structures, or it may manifest through shifts in norms, practices, and both individual and cultural mindsets that shape how students enter, navigate, and succeed within UT institutions.

Ensuring Sustainability:

To make institutionalization resilient to leadership and staff turnover, to competing demands that always come our way, to external factors and forces that take our attention away from the things that should matter most, coalition-building is essential. This includes transparency in defining and refining the vision, stakeholder engagement, executing implementation, and ensuring long-term sustainability through resource allocation, succession planning, assessment and accountability.

Where We Are Now:

More specifically, why does institutionalization matter for us now, for the Exemplary Student Pathways Project and the ESP change model at its center?

Institutionalization includes engaging with the definitions and domains of data agency and curricular redesign, allowing institutions/project teams to address core questions holistically and in a manner that keeps the focus on student experiences and outcomes, and that uncovers barriers—policy, practice, resource, etc.—that leaders and practitioners can and should address on behalf of students.

Three years and 22 projects in, we are moving from one-off projects implementing the components of the ESP theory of change toward an approach utilized and embedded across an institution, as part of daily practice/operations (how we do things).