April 8, 2014

Dr. Robert S. Nelsen, President
The University of Texas-Pan American
1201 W. University Drive
Edinburg, TX 78539

Dear Dr. Nelsen,

As part of our fiscal year 2013 Audit Plan, we completed a risk based audit of the Degree Checkout and Posting Process. DegreeWorks is the software program that provides students with information on their degree plan and degree plan completion status. It is used by students and meant to be a tool to complement and facilitate the duties of academic advisors.

The Office of the Registrar implemented DegreeWorks in March 2012. In December of 2012, the Academic Affairs Executive Team agreed that the degree plans recorded in DegreeWorks would become the official undergraduate degree plans for students.

The objective of the audit was to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of the degree checkout and posting process. The degree checkout and posting process is the compilation and maintenance of degree plan information from academic departments, tracking student progress, informing students of their progress, and confirming whether students have fulfilled their degree plan requirements. The scope of the audit consisted of FY2013 (September 1, 2012 through August 31, 2013).

We concluded that the efficiency and effectiveness of the degree checkout and posting process was adequate. Based on the procedures performed, we confirmed that the Registrar reviews student degree plan completion status and sends emails to students to notify them of their degree progress. We also confirmed that DegreeWorks contains information that undergraduate students need to monitor their degree plan status. However, we identified areas where improvements could be made to enhance the process. The detailed report is attached for your review.

We appreciate the courtesy and cooperation received from management and staff during our audit.

Sincerely,

Eloy R. Alaniz, Jr., CPA, CIA, CISA
Executive Director of Audits, Compliance & Consulting Services
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

One of the goals of The University of Texas – Pan American (UTPA) is to graduate as many students as it can, as quickly as it can, while at the same time offering students the very best education that it can provide. To achieve this goal, assisting students with their degree plans and their graduation process is crucial. To facilitate this process the Office of the Registrar (Registrar) implemented DegreeWorks in March 2012. DegreeWorks is the software program that provides students with information on their degree plan and degree plan completion status. Although DegreeWorks is maintained by the Registrar, it is meant to be used by students and academic advisors. It is a tool to complement and facilitate the duties of academic advisors. The Academic Advisement Center and faculty advisors play an important role in the success of DegreeWorks as well as graduation goals.

In December of 2012, the Academic Affairs Executive Team agreed that the degree plans recorded in DegreeWorks would become the official undergraduate degree plans for UTPA students. Degree plans are created by academic departments and must comply with Texas Education Code (TEC). The TEC Chapter 61, Subchapter C, Section § 61.0515, Semester Credit Hours Required for Baccalaureate Degree and all sections of Subchapter S, Transfer of Credit. In addition, degree plans must be approved by the undergraduate Curriculum Committee or the Graduate Council, as appropriate, and comply with the principles of accreditation requirements set forth by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). SACS is the regional body for the accreditation of degree-granting higher education institutions in the Southern states.

Effective July 16, 2013, Governor Perry signed Senate Bill 24 which authorized the creation of a new university and medical school in South Texas that will combine the talent, assets, and resources of UT Brownsville, UT Pan American, and the Regional Academic Health Center. On December 12, 2013, the UT System Board of Regents voted unanimously to name this new university The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV). The creation of UTRGV will result in many changes, including the implementation of a new student information system. PeopleSoft will replace UTPA’s Banner Student Information System, and other solutions may be considered to replace DegreeWorks. Until a decision is made, UTPA will continue to use DegreeWorks to assist students with ensuring they meet degree plan requirements for graduation.

The objective of the audit was to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of the degree checkout and posting process. The degree checkout and posting process is the compilation and maintenance of degree plan information from academic departments, tracking student progress, informing students of their progress, and confirming whether students have fulfilled their degree plan requirements. The scope of the audit consisted of FY2013 (September 1, 2012 through August 31, 2013).

We concluded that the efficiency and effectiveness of the degree checkout and posting process was adequate. Based on the procedures performed, we confirmed that the Registrar reviews student degree plan completion status and sends emails to students to notify them of their degree progress. We also confirmed that DegreeWorks contains information that undergraduate
students need to monitor their degree plan status. The sample of students we tested met all their degree plan requirements and 99% of students that signed up to attend the 2013 summer graduation ceremony met their degree requirements on or before the graduation ceremony.

Although the degree checkout and posting process appeared to be operating as intended, we found the following:

- Attendance records for training were not maintained.
- Differences existed between catalog, department, and DegreeWorks degree plans.
- No process existed to ensure or monitor that students were accessing their degree plans through DegreeWorks.
- No process existed to identify students that might have had enough credits to graduate but had not applied for graduation.

Opportunities for improvement exist to help students understand their degree plans and improve timely graduation. We have made recommendations to improve the training program, ensure that all DegreeWorks degree plan requirements are updated, ensure consistency between the degree plans in DegreeWorks and the degree plans maintained at the departments, upgrade DegreeWorks to take advantage of the enhanced functionality for advising, and develop a process to identify students who have enough credits to graduate but have not applied for graduation.
BACKGROUND

One of The University of Texas – Pan American’s (UTPA) goals is to graduate as many students as it can, as quickly as it can, with the very best education that it can provide. To graduate as many students as possible, the collaboration and commitment of every University department is important. In particular, the Registrar and the University Academic Advisement Center play a vital role in students’ academic experience from enrollment to graduation. The Registrar assists students through the graduation process and enforces curricular and academic policies. The University Academic Advisement Center helps students understand their degree plan requirements and degree plan completion status.

To accomplish these objectives the Registrar compiles and maintains degree plan information from approved curriculum and academic policy, tracks and informs students of their progress, and confirms whether students have fulfilled their degree plan requirements. To facilitate these tasks, the Registrar implemented DegreeWorks in March 2012. DegreeWorks is software that provides students with academic information, including classes taken, grades earned, classes needed for their degree plans, and grade point average. Students may access the information in DegreeWorks through UTPA’s student services web portal called ASSIST.

Currently, DegreeWorks only contains undergraduate degree plans. Review and revision of graduate degree plans in collaboration with the Office of Graduate Studies is currently underway.

AUDIT OBJECTIVE

The objective of the audit was to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of the degree checkout and posting process.

AUDIT SCOPE & METHODOLOGY

To accomplish the audit objective, we performed the following procedures:

- Gained an understanding of the University's degree checkout and posting process.
- Reviewed documentation maintained by departments.
- Reviewed operating procedures.
- Reviewed the Texas Education Code Chapter 61, Subchapter C, Section § 61.0515, Semester Credit Hours Required for Baccalaureate Degree and all sections of Subchapter S, Transfer of Credit.
- Conducted interviews with University Registrar and Associate Registrar.
- Obtained a list of FY2013 graduates and selected a sample to test.

The scope of the audit consisted of FY2013 (September 1, 2012 through August 31, 2013).
The audit was conducted in accordance with guidelines set forth in The University of Texas System’s Policy 129 and The Institute of Internal Auditors’ International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing. The audit was conducted between the months of July 2013 through February 2014.

AUDIT RESULTS

Training

The Registrar offers DegreeWorks training to faculty and staff. Without this training, faculty and student serving staff will not be well prepared to assist students with their degree plans. When DegreeWorks went live in March 2012, there were 10 to 12 training sessions per week. By the fall of 2012, training sessions were conducted once a week. After the fall of 2012, training sessions were conducted monthly. Currently, attendance at trainings is low, averaging one or two attendees at each session.

According to the Registrar, DegreeWorks training for students was offered in the spring of 2013; however, there was not a significant response from students to these trainings. Most of the students that attended these trainings needed academic advising rather than actual DegreeWorks training. DegreeWorks training is also provided to new students as part of their new student orientation.

We requested training records from the Registrar and determined that attendance records were not maintained. Therefore, we could not determine how many individuals attended the trainings or whether training was effective.

Recommendation:

1. The Registrar should develop a training plan for faculty and student serving staff that includes, but is not limited to, the following:
   - Identifying target population for trainings,
   - Obtaining feedback from people that participate in training through evaluations,
   - Maintaining attendance records.

Management’s Response:

1. The Office of the Registrar will continue its offering of DegreeWorks training, targeting all advising personnel on campus, as well as offering training upon request to departments wishing for in-depth, program-specific assistance. We will build an evaluation tool to be used to collect effectiveness information at the close of each training session, and we will immediately begin maintaining records on attendance at training sessions.

Implementation Date: Immediately
Degree Plans

Catalog, department, and DegreeWorks degree plan requirements were compared. A test sample was obtained from the 2011-2013 undergraduate catalog. A total of 10 out of 53 (19%) undergraduate degree programs listed in the catalog were selected for testing. A summary of the test results is provided below.

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<td>Degree plans with no differences.</td>
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<td>Differences in degree plans</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Degree plan did not have major core information in DegreeWorks.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Degree plans did not specify electives in DegreeWorks. DegreeWorks allows students to take a wide range of electives.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Degree plans had class differences between catalog, department, and DegreeWorks and one degree plan in DegreeWorks had incorrect total hours.</td>
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<td>Degree Plans</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Bachelor of Science in Health</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Bachelor of Science in Communication Sciences and Disorders</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Bachelor of Social Work</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies in Mathematics 4-8</td>
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<td>• Bachelor of Music</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Bachelor of Arts in Economics</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Bachelor of Arts in French</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Bachelor of Music</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Bachelor of Science in Computer Science</td>
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Recommendation:

2. The Registrar should ensure that all the degree plans are accurate in DegreeWorks, specify major block requirements, and list the correct total hours to graduate.

Management’s Response:

2. We will continue our consultation with the Academic Affairs to ensure that all plans in DegreeWorks match what was approved, respectively, by the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee and Graduate Council.

Implementation Date: Already begun; ongoing
Differences in multiple sources of degree plan information (catalog, department, and DegreeWorks) may confuse students and prevent them from graduating on time. During the course of this audit, we discovered that paper degree plans are freely available to students in most departments. With various sources of degree plan information available, the likelihood of confusion increases, especially with inaccurate paper degree plans.

The Academic Affairs Executive Team agreed to make DegreeWorks undergraduate degree plans the University’s official degree plans; this was implemented in December 2012. Currently, DegreeWorks hosts undergraduate degree plans. Review and revision of graduate degree plans in collaboration with the Office of Graduate Studies is currently underway.

**Recommendation:**

3. The Director of the Academic Advisement Center should recommend that the Academic Affairs Executive Team discontinue the use of departmental paper undergraduate degree plans and only use DegreeWorks to advise students.

**Management’s Response:**

3. The Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education and Dean of University College will recommend that the Academic Executive Team discontinue the use of departmental paper undergraduate degree plans and only use DegreeWorks to advise students.

**Implementation Date:** May 13, 2014

**Degree Checkout and Posting Process**

We also verified whether students that had graduated fulfilled their degree plan requirements. For this test, we selected 30 students out of the 3,211 (1%) that graduated in FY2013 academic semesters. The students in the test sample were randomly selected from six of the ten undergraduate degree programs tested in the degree plans test. All students tested fulfilled their degree plan requirements.

Additionally, we verified whether students who signed up to participate in the graduation ceremony had actually graduated. Before students obtain their tickets for graduation, they must register for graduation and have their degree plans reviewed by the Registrar. For this test, we selected all the students that signed to participate in the summer 2013 graduation ceremony. A summary of the test results is provided below.
As of summer 2013, the seven (7) students that did not graduate either did not pass all their classes, did not have enough credits to graduate, or they did not meet the grade point average required to graduate. Final grades are submitted to the Registrar after the graduation ceremony. During the graduation ceremony, the provost’s speech includes the phrase “subject to final confirmation” prior to asking the president to confer degrees. Therefore, the University is willing to accept the risk of a small number of students participating in the graduation ceremony without meeting their degree requirements. While there may be some options to address this risk, these options are not practical.

Although students who sign up for graduation are in fact meeting the degree requirements necessary to graduate, the extent to which students use DegreeWorks to track their individual degree plan progress is unknown. We inquired if processes exist to ensure that students are using DegreeWorks to access their degree progress. We determined that there are no reports to indicate who has or has not logged into DegreeWorks. DegreeWorks does not have the functionality to provide these reports. In addition, DegreeWorks is missing a key upgrade that offers enhanced functionality. This added functionality will improve the advisement process and assist student advisors to identify and target students that need advisement. The features of this upgrade include:

- Transfer equivalency mapping for incoming transfer students,
- Enhanced reporting functionality,
- Web-based management of curriculum requirements and program setup,
- Improvements to the student educational planner.

**Recommendation:**

4. The Registrar should upgrade DegreeWorks to take advantage of the enhanced functionality for advising.

**Management’s Response:**

4. Upon receipt of a decision from the UTRGV administration on the future use of DegreeWorks, we will determine if implementing the upgrade is a viable business decision.

**Implementation Date:** Pending decision from UTRGV administration.
We inquired if processes exist to ensure that students are aware of their graduation eligibility. Only students that have applied for graduation are informed of their graduation eligibility. The Registrar reviews the degree progress of students that have applied for graduation and sends emails to students to check on their progress in DegreeWorks. The Registrar does not have a process to identify students that might have enough credits to graduate but have not applied for graduation.

**Recommendation:**

5. The Registrar should create a process to identify students who have enough credits to graduate but have not applied for graduation and provide this information to college deans.

**Management’s Response:**

5. We are currently hiring two part-time personnel to assist with review of DegreeWorks data. They will begin by reviewing the plans for seniors who have not applied for graduation. The degree checkout team will notify those who are eligible for graduation, as well as sending deficiency notices to those who are not.

**Implementation Date:** April 2014

**CONCLUSION**

We concluded that the efficiency and effectiveness of the degree checkout and posting process was adequate. However, opportunities for improvement exist to help students understand their degree plans and improve timely graduation. We have made recommendations to improve the training program, ensure that all DegreeWorks degree plan requirements are updated, ensure consistency between the degree plans in DegreeWorks and the degree plans maintained at the departments, upgrade DegreeWorks to take advantage of the enhanced functionality for advising, and develop a process to identify students who have enough credits to graduate but have not applied for graduation.

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