

## **I. ASSUMPTIONS**

The Student Success theme was developed by using the following assumptions in developing a plan to promote and to increase student success at the University of Texas at San Antonio.

### **Student population and enrollment management**

By 2016, UTSA's student population will total 35,000 and will be composed of approximately 80% Undergraduate students (28,000) and 20% Graduate students (7,000). Undergraduate admission standards will have to be raised to manage this mixture of student enrollment; however, UTSA will maintain a path for access to higher education by providing specific support programs for those students who do not meet the new standards. Strategies that will assist the university in meeting both of these goals include a three-tiered admission profile, expansion of the Academic Development Program to provide support to those students who do not meet the general admissions criteria, and an expansion of a joint admission program with area community colleges. As part of the university's growth, an increased percentage of the UTSA student body will originate from outside the San Antonio metropolitan area.

### **Campus environment**

There will continue to be a deficit in classroom space in 2016; however, the gap will have improved through strategies designed to make the most of the space available through expanded/modified scheduling and alternative methods of teaching. The student-faculty ratio will stabilize at [18:1 down from 22:1] in fall 2005. The number of residential students will increase to 20% (approx. 7,000 students), an increase from 3000 residential students in 2005. The increased number of residents will reflect a higher proportion of graduate students, in addition to married students. The growth in the number of residents will spur near-campus development to include additional housing, restaurants, and services to serve the student population. In addition, on-campus services will have expanded to include additional food venues, health services, postal services, and dry cleaning.

### **External environment**

Although the university will achieve an enhanced reputation, state funding will not keep up with our rise in enrollment. A significant challenge in UTSA's ability to garner public resources and support is the emergence of a Texas A&M campus in south San Antonio. Additionally, the rising cost of attending the university along with the management of growth has led to an increased number of San Antonio residents electing to enroll at community colleges before coming to the university.

### **Technological Advances**

The portability of course content for students represents a great opportunity to reinforce the classroom, whether it is Web enabled, data streamed lectures, or the use of IPOD technology that would allow a student to download lecture content. Possible increased enrollments in online courses and online degrees will require an adaptation in delivery of student services, i.e., advising and academic support. On-line courses will build flexibility for students and facilitate timely graduation.

## II. DEFINITIONS

### Student Success

From an institutional perspective, student success is the provision of instruction, opportunities, and resources that allow the greatest number of students to achieve their academic and personal goals. The goals must be consistent with the students' academic abilities, choices, and efforts. Students are successful when their abilities and efforts produce progress consonant with academic and personal goals, and students' success usually results in timely graduation, employment, and an enriched intellectual life.

### Quality Education

**A quality education includes opportunities to develop the following skills that support student success:**

***Writing/Communication*** – The ability to clearly express one's ideas is a skill common to all disciplines and careers. Writing and oral communication skills are developed by multiple iterative experiences over the course of a student's educational career.

***Critical thinking/Problem solving*** - The ability to locate, evaluate, and synthesize information and to form judgments regarding its validity is a critical skill for the information age. Critical thinking/problem solving skills are developed through learning experiences that require the integration of new ideas with previously held knowledge.

***Research*** - The ability to find answers to questions or problems in a systematic way is a critical skill for broadening our understanding of the world. Research skills can be developed in numerous ways to include but not limited to course assignments, experiential learning, and service learning. Graduate education offers the opportunity to expand this skill by developing a student's capacity to perform independent research.

***Collaboration/Interpersonal*** – The ability to work efficiently and effectively with a diverse array of individuals is a key skill required for success in the expanding the globalization of the world. Interpersonal skills, such as the capability to interact with others in a respectful and harmonious way, to accept responsibilities, and to resolve conflicts, are developed through collaborative and interpersonal skills, developed by collaborative learning experiences, involvement with student organizations, and participating in team sports and activities.

### III. FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE STUDENT SUCCESS

How a student interacts with the university environment is a key to understanding the factors that influence student success. In Pascarella and Terrenzini's review of student success theories (2005, p. 425), they observe a common theme that student success is dependent on "a series of academic and social encounters, experiences, and forces that shape persistence and attainment.

#### **Student Factors**

**Preparation** – A student's previous academic experience has a significant impact on student success. Deficits in educational preparation can be overcome by timely assessment and placement into appropriate courses to develop prerequisite knowledge.

**Commitment** – Students who recognize the value of education and find a major that is congruent with their interests, aptitudes, and skills tend to be more committed to succeeding and are more likely to persist and graduate.

**Expectations** – Expectations are a double-edge sword. Students expect to be challenged when they enter the university. When the challenge falls short of the expectation set, they become less involved and committed to learning. Also, presenting students with a challenge for which they are not prepared can lead to the same lack of commitment and a higher risk for attrition.

**Involvement** - Students who are spending more time on task and are actively involved in learning are more likely to learn and are more likely to persist. In addition, students who form a social bond with at least one member of the university community are more likely to persist.

#### **Environmental Factors**

**Commitment** – Institutions that are successful in enhancing student success invest the resources and provide incentives and rewards to achieve the goal of increasing student success.

**Expectations** – Setting high academic expectations, along with an expectation to succeed, leads to increased student persistence.

**Learning** - Students are more likely to persist and graduate at an institution that fosters learning.

**Feedback** – Providing students early and prompt feedback is critical to learning and allows students to take actions that enhance their chance to succeed.

**Support** – Providing academic, social, and financial support promotes student persistence and graduation.

## IV. STUDENT SUCCESS GAP ANALYSIS

### A. Undergraduate students

UTSA has made progress toward closing the gaps in student success. However, much more progress is needed to make substantial improvements in student success. As shown in Table 1, first-year retention has increased from 58% for the 1999 cohort to 64.7% for the 2004 cohort. However, it remains to be seen if this increase in retention will result in a higher graduation rates. Across UT-System, UTSA six-year graduation rate is higher than only two institutions, Pan American and El Paso (Table 2). With few exceptions, UTSA's retention and graduation rates are lower than other significant peer groups (Table 3). In response to closing the success gap, earlier this year UTSA provided UT-System with 4- 5- and 6-year graduation rate goals to meet to the national average rates as shown in Table 4. These challenging yet achievable goals will require broad participation and committed contribution from the entire campus community.

**Table 1: Recent UTSA Retention and Graduation Rates**

**THECB New Full Time Freshmen Cohort Retention, Persistence, and Graduation Rates**

	1999 cohort		2000 cohort		2001 cohort		2002 cohort		2003 cohort		2004 cohort	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
<b>Retained</b>												
1 year	960	58.0	1085	62.9	1069	63.7	1590	63.9	1841	61.9	2225	64.7
2 years	781	47.2	819	47.5	811	48.3	1234	49.6	1448	48.7		
3 years	705	42.6	724	42.0	744	44.3	1063	42.7				
4 year	563	34.0	592	34.3	585	34.9						
5 years	295	17.8	334	19.4								
6 years	174	10.5										
<b>Graduated</b>	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
1 year		0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
2 years		0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	0.1		
3 years	5	0.3	5	0.3	6	0.4	17	0.7				
4 year	105	6.3	120	7.0	128	7.6						
5 years	365	22.1	361	20.9								
6 years	497	30.0										

**CB Cohort:** Includes all first time, full time freshmen (summer and fall starters) who are degree seeking at UTSA. This cohort eliminates CAP students, Clinical Laboratory Science majors, and Occupational Therapy majors because they do not intend to graduate from UTSA or do not ultimately receive their degrees from UTSA.

**Table 2: UT-System Peers Graduation Rates (1997 Cohort)**

Institution	Graduation Rate (1997 Cohort)		
	Four-year rate	Five-year rate	Six-year rate

Arlington	20%	34%	37%
Austin	36%	64%	71%
Brownsville	-	-	-
Dallas	32%	52%	57%
El Paso	2%	15%	26%
Pan American	6%	18%	26%
Permian Basin	15%	26%	29%
San Antonio	6%	19%	28%
Tyler	28%	39%	44%

**Table 3: Other Peer Groups Retention and Graduation Rates (1998 Cohort)**

	Retention Rate	6-year Graduation Rate
<b>Aspirational Peers</b>		
Univ. Nevada – Las Vegas	72.0%	41.5%
Univ. Wisconsin -Milwaukee	73.0%	38.1%
Univ. of Memphis	62.0%	35.7%
Cleveland State DRE	68.0%	27.0%
Univ. of New Orleans	70.0%	24.5%
<b>Texas Emerging Research Peers</b>		
UT Dallas	81.0%	56.1%
Texas Tech	82.0%	54.4%
Univ. North Texas	77.0%	39.6%
Univ. Houston –University Park	79.0%	38.7%
UT Arlington	69.0%	37.6%
UT El Paso	70.0%	27.2%
<b>Out-of-State Peers</b>		
Cal State – Fresno	81.0%	45.8%
Eastern Michigan Univ.	71.0%	41.0%
San Francisco State	77.0%	40.3%
Univ. North Carolina - Charlotte	77.0%	46.6%
Boise State	60.0%	30.2%

**Table 4: UTSA Retention and Graduation Rate Targets for 2015**

Year for 6-yr Target Rate Achievement	CB Freshman Cohort	1-yr Retention Rates	2-yr Persistence Rates	3-yr Persistence Rates	4 -yr Graduation Rates	5 -yr Graduation Rates	6 -yr Graduation Rates
2003	1997						
2004	1998						
2005	1999						
2006	2000						31%
2007	2001					23%	34%
2008	2002				10%	25%	36%
2009	2003			45%	11%	28%	38%
2010	2004		51%	47%	<b>13%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>40%</b>

2011	2005	66%	53%	50%	15%	32%	42%
2012	2006	70%	56%	53%	18%	35%	44%
2013	2007	73%	60%	56%	21%	39%	47%
2014	2008	75%	63%	59%	24%	43%	50%
2015	2009	78%	66%	62%	<b>26%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>53%</b>

**BOLD** indicates the targets submitted to UT System using the same definition of cohort as in Table 1.

## B. Undergraduate Barriers to Graduation

During spring 2006, the Taskforce for Improving Student Success and Graduation Rates studied the barriers perceived by UTSA students to impact their progression toward degree completion. An excerpt of this work is provided here to provide context for the strategies developed in this plan. The most commonly cited barriers were **course offerings/availability, conflicting priorities, and academic advising.**

**Course Offerings/Availability:** The greatest concern to upper division students was the availability of courses, what courses were offered and when. Students expressed frustration that courses, especially upper division degree requirements, were only offered once per year. In addition, students frequently encountered limited time choices; students reported that when a required class was offered, often, there was only one time offering or that other required courses would have conflicting times during the semester, so the student could not take both.

**Conflicting Priorities:** This category was defined as outside student concerns that affected academic progression, but were not within the control of the university.

- Work
- Money, or lack thereof, and financial concerns
- Motivation
- Family obligations
- Personal issues that included drug addiction, alcoholism, lack of child care, or poor health.

**Academic Advising:** This category pertained to specific mention of the advising received or the advising center attended. The concerns included incorrect information from academic advisors; inconsistencies between advisors within the same center, as well as inconsistencies between centers; access to their advisors; advisor indifference; and, in general, the lack of advisors' helpfulness.

Other barriers cited in these studies include "Campus Issues," study skills, rising cost of attendance, degree requirements, teaching, university policies, and availability of support. These barriers are presented in decreasing order based on how the frequently each barrier was cited.

**Campus Issues:** Those barriers concerning the university or barriers within university's control made up this category.

- Financial Aid. Experiencing issues with the Financial Aid Office was the top trend in this category. Typical responses were confusing paperwork/process, not enough financial aid received/available and office personnel not being helpful.
- Parking. Students reported leaving campus and not attending classes because they were unable to find adequate parking.
- Outdated Equipment. Substandard equipment in the computer and science labs were reported, as well as insufficient hours of operation and accessibility to such resources.
- Lack of Prestige. A few students perceived UTSA as not having enough prestige.
- Low Admission Standards. Low admissions standards were often stated as a reason for low graduation rates and contributed to the lack of prestige at UTSA.
- High Textbook Cost. Students stated they were unable to take as many courses as they would like each semester due, in part, to the high cost of textbooks.
- Other Issues. Other barriers reported were inadequate faculty-to-student ratio, problems with CAPP and the registration process, a lack of campus activities to promote campus involvement, lack of knowledge regarding campus resources, and not enough child care available on campus.

**Study Skills:** Students reported that having poor study skills affected their progress and that being under prepared for college was an important barrier.

**Cost of Attendance:** The cost of education and the continual rise of the cost were of great concern to students. Many reported that cost of education was their reason for "taking a break" or stopping-out.

**Degree Requirements:** The most consistent complaint was that some programs have too many prerequisites for degree required courses. Other concerns were the number of credit hours required, vague degree plans, and differences in degree requirements between catalogs.

**Teaching:** Bad pedagogy was the principal complaint. Other concerns were testing policies, a lack of professor availability to students, and impressions that research was more important than teaching.

**Policies:** Issues with policies, such as acceptance of transfer credits even when they had followed transfer plans from a local community college, UTSA's no-grade replacement policy for upper division students, the "3-Peat Policy," and the time-span to drop an individual course were mentioned.

**Support Programs:** This category was least frequently cited, largely due to the wide range and number of academic support services at UTSA. The barriers cited were a lack of support in upper division courses, lack of a mandatory career assessment, and a desire for more tutoring and Supplemental Instruction (SI) sessions.

### **C. Graduate Student**

Currently, standardized accountability measures are under development within UT-System. A baseline for potential measures is under development.

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