

*Undergraduate
Graduation
Improvement Plan*
College of Public Policy

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Introduction

In the research conducted for this document, including discussions and reviews with the college's administration, we sought to identify what helps and hinders undergraduates in the pursuit of their degrees. Certainly, there are many people, activities, programs, and policies within the college that aid students in reaching their goal of graduation. The bulk of our efforts, however, have been focused on identifying and analyzing barriers to undergraduate success – gaining an understanding of what gets in the way of student progress. From our analyses, we sought to identify actions for overcoming those barriers. These actions form the core of the Graduation Improvement Plan.

NOTE: The College of Public Policy is unique among UTSA's seven colleges in that its entire undergraduate program consists of a single academic department, Criminal Justice. As such, this Graduation Improvement Plan focuses on actions that affect the Criminal Justice department of the College of Public Policy.

The remainder of this document consists of the following sections:

- **Environment for Change**
Overview of recent political events pushing for improved graduation rates.
- **Understanding Graduation Rates**
How undergraduate graduation rates are calculated for the state, along with past and targeted rates for both the college and the institution.
- **Enrollment Profile**
Enrollment statistics for both the college and the institution.
- **Overcoming Barriers**
Actions for reducing or eliminating barriers to graduation – the core of the Graduation Improvement Plan.
- **References**
Sources cited within this document.

We understand that improving graduation rates involves many variables in a multi-faceted and complex environment. With that in mind, this document aims to address a number of those variables, barriers that, if overcome, will allow more students to reach their goal of an undergraduate degree.

Environment for Change

“We have to improve graduation rates.” Everyone in higher education has heard this repeatedly. We know the rates are important, that they affect the prestige of the university and the public perception of our performance as an institution. We know the benefits our students receive from achieving a baccalaureate degree include such things as an improved quality of life, greater earnings potential, and better health. We may not, however, have considered the current political forces that drive the need for improving graduation rates. In Texas, the impetus is economic necessity.

Texas needs skilled, well-educated citizens to sustain itself economically. If we cannot produce more college graduates, the poverty rate will increase and average household income will drop. This cycle places an increasing burden on public support services, while at the same time reducing the tax base used to support such services (Murdock, 2002).

In 2000, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) launched *Closing the Gaps: The Texas Higher Education Plan* aimed at closing educational gaps within Texas, as well as between Texas and other states. The plan outlined four primary goals: participation, success, excellence, and research. All institutions of higher education in Texas were required to set targets for these goals and report annually on their progress. Further, the THECB recommended that the state, “fund colleges and universities to reward increases in retention and graduation while sustaining quality programs” (THECB, 2000).

Recognizing the importance of improving graduation rates, several recent legislative acts and executive orders have established higher education reporting and performance expectations. In 2003, the legislature passed HB 3015, essentially deregulating tuition for state institutions of higher education. In addition to allowing institutions to set their own tuition amounts, they were charged with improving their graduation rates and other measures of performance (HB 3015, 2003).

The following year, Governor Rick Perry reinforced the focus on graduation rates by issuing an executive order requiring comprehensive accountability reporting for public institutions of higher education. The order links this accountability, which includes graduation and persistence rates, to state funding, stating that “systems and institutions of higher education must be able to clearly define the need for additional state-funding in a manner which will justify the public’s continued investment of resources” (Executive Order No. RP31, 2004).

These governmental efforts put pressure on universities to improve graduation rates with the clear implication that not doing so could result in reductions of state funding. Related legislative efforts have applied pressure to students as well. Two recent bills have focused on timely graduation. In addition to its requirements for increased academic counseling, implementing online degree progress systems, and changes to TEXAS grant program funding, HB 1172, effective in 2005, places a cap on the number of courses a student can take in excess of those required to attain a degree. At 30-credit hours beyond that required for the student's degree, state funding for classes cease (HB 1172, 2005). At UTSA, the net result is that students wind up having to pay an additional \$121 per semester credit hour for every class taken beyond the 30-credit hour cap. In a related effort to encourage timely graduation, SB 1231 limits to six the number of courses a student may drop during the student's entire undergraduate higher education career (SB 1231, 2007).

Each of these changes in the laws governing higher education places additional reporting requirements on universities. As a result, documentation of compliance with the laws comprise required sections in such documents as, *The University of Texas System Graduation Rates Initiative Progress Report*, *University of Texas System Board of Regents Accountability and Performance Report*, university compacts with the UT System, and institutional strategic plans. It is within this environment of increased governmental scrutiny of graduation rates that we find ourselves. The action items in this plan are aimed at overcoming barriers to graduation and in helping students reach their goal of an undergraduate degree.

Understanding Graduation Rates

To focus on improving something, we must first develop an understanding for current performance. Since our purpose lies in improving undergraduate six-year graduation rates, it follows that we should identify current and targeted graduation rates.

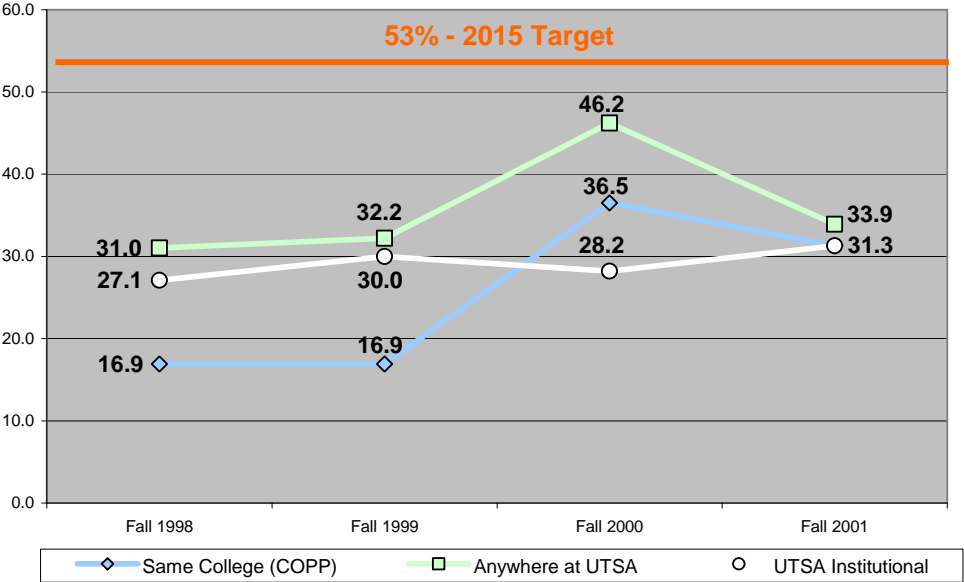
Additionally, it is important to understand the methodology used in calculating graduation rates, as these rates do not take into account all students within the university who are seeking a bachelor's degree.

We focus here on the undergraduate graduation rate reported to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). In calculating this rate, UTSA uses a cohort of students representing a subset of all students who achieve a baccalaureate degree within six-years. This cohort consists of individuals who enter the institution as full-time students during the fall semester and who have not previously attended another college or university. Additionally, these are students who intend to pursue a degree offered by UTSA. The calculation of graduation rates does not include the following students: (1) those entering in the spring semester (some summer entering students may be included), (2) part-time students, (3) students transferring from other institutions, such as community colleges, and (4) students intending to pursue a degree from another institution, such as those individuals participating in UT Austin's Coordinated Admission Program (CAP). This last may soon be included in our state reported graduation rate.

As reported by the Office of Institutional Research (OIR), UTSA's most recent six-year graduation rate for freshmen entering the institution in the 2001 fall semester was 31.3-percent. President Ricardo Romo has committed to raising UTSA's six-year graduation rate to 40-percent by the year 2010 and to 53-percent by the year 2015. Applying the same methodology for calculating the institutional graduation rates, the OIR calculated six-year graduation rates for individual colleges within the institution. As a component of UTSA, the College of Public Policy can be viewed as having both its own undergraduate graduation rate, as well as contributing to the overall institutional rate.

Therefore, we look at two distinct graduation rates for the college: (1) those undergraduate students who started with and remained with the College of Public Policy (essentially undergraduate students in the Department of Criminal Justice) and (2) those undergraduate students who started with the College of Public Policy and graduated from the College of Public Policy or anywhere else within the university. These rates, *Same College (COPP)* and *Anywhere at UTSA* respectively, are illustrated in Figure 1, along with the *UTSA Institutional* rate for comparison.

**Figure 1: College of Public Policy and UTSA Six-year Undergraduate Graduation Rates
By Entry Year of Respective THECB Student Cohorts**



Data included here originally obtained from the UTSA Office of Institutional Research

Enrollment Profile

The following enrollment profile is based on the 2007 UTSA Fact Book, produced by the Office of Institutional Research (OIR). The College of Public Policy enrolled 1,099 total students in the fall semester 2007. It is the second smallest of the seven colleges that comprise UTSA accounting for 3.9% of UTSA's enrolled student population. Only the College of Architecture is smaller. The college offers one doctoral level degree, three master's level degrees, and one undergraduate degree. Undergraduates make up the vast majority of the College of Public Policy with 814 students or 74.1% of all enrolled students in the college. Undergraduates have only one major, Criminal Justice, which is housed in the Department of Criminal Justice.

From the academic perspective, College of Public Policy faculty in Criminal Justice taught 5,733 semester credit hours of undergraduate classes during the fall 2007 semester, 2,016 were lower division and 3,717 were upper division. Tenured and tenure-track faculty taught 32% of all lower division and 56% of all upper division classes (UTSA, 2008).

In general, over half of the undergraduate students at UTSA meet the age expectations for traditional undergraduates with 58.7% of students being younger than 23 and 80% younger than 28. UTSA students are overwhelmingly Texans (94.7%) with half originating from Bexar County alone. Minority students comprise the majority of all students in both the College of Public Policy (69.6%) and UTSA overall (58.7%)¹. In line with national trends, more women than men are enrolled in classes with a 52:48 ratio for UTSA. The same holds true for the college with a 56% female and 44% male enrollment. In the college, 58.6% of students are enrolled full-time, taking 12 credit hours or more per semester, compared with the university's full-time enrollment rate of 70% (UTSA, 2007).

A typical undergraduate Criminal Justice student in the College of Public Policy, as extrapolated from the above OIR data, is a minority female under the age of 28 who went to high school in the local area and is more likely than her peers in other colleges to be enrolled part-time. Approximately one-half of her classes in the college are taught by non-tenured/tenure track instructors.

¹ Calculation of minority percentage omits "International" and "Unknown" from the denominator.

Overcoming Barriers

While the College of Public Policy offers many affordances for undergraduate student success, barriers to success do exist. This section, the core of the Graduation Improvement Plan, identifies actions for reducing or overcoming these barriers. We present these barriers in the following thematic groups:

1. Large Classes and Lack of Student Engagement
2. Supplemental Instruction Sessions
3. Meeting Program Needs
4. Inadequate Writing Skills of Students

In addition to specific actions for addressing these barriers, the following sections identify ownership to ensure completion, suggest resources, and enumerate a list of high-level tasks.

Barrier 1: Large Classes and Lack of Student Engagement

Fifty percent of the COPP Criminal Justice faculty interviewed cited large classes (i.e., 80+ enrollments) as a barrier to student success. In particular, the courses discussed during the interview process were CRJ 1113, American Criminal Justice System, and CRJ 2153, Nature of Crime & Justice, which are critical “gateway” courses for this major. Faculty members attributed the following to large enrollments in classes: reduced student and instructor interactions, delayed feedback on tests, low attendance, no easy means of measuring class participation, and no writing assignments.

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), state that when using course grade as the sole measure of student success “increasing class size has a statistically significant, negative influence on subject matter learning” (p.94). One would argue then that class participation is an important factor in the learning process. If class participation cannot be measured easily and effectively, it is not used, as in the case of large class enrollments and no attendance-taking. Additionally, Tinto (2006) supports the premise that what faculty do in the classroom is critical to the institution’s efforts to improve student persistence. The lessening of this barrier may actually require a paradigm shift among instructors and faculty.

Pilot Test “Clicker” Technology

Pilot the use of “clicker” technology in at least one section of each introductory/gateway course - CRJ 1113, American Criminal Justice System, and CRJ 2153, Nature of Crime & Justice. This technology allows the professor to take attendance and to measure student

participation and learning through on-the-spot testing. Instructors should use the technology to take attendance daily and to quiz students for learning outcomes, providing immediate feedback of performance.

Primary Responsibility Criminal Justice Department Chair

Resource Possibilities Designated faculty, Office of Information Technology, Academic Technology Office, book publishers, bookstore buyer, Retention and Graduation Analyst

Anticipated Outcomes

- Attendance in the pilot sections using this technology will improve by 10% over the same sections not using the technology.
- Decreases in D's and F's earned will outpace those earned in sections not using this technology.

Anticipated Measures

- Daily attendance will be measured using the clicker technology.
- Grade distributions of pilot course sections and non-pilot sections will be compared.

	Activity	Owner	Due
1	Research the different clicker technologies; review online demos or invite reps to demo technology; invite faculty currently using the technology to share experiences with CRJ faculty.		
2	Determine the rollout semester, the course and the sections to pilot the use of this technology.		
3	Submit order for clickers, receivers, software to bookstore or directly to technology manufacturer, if applicable.		
4	Schedule time for faculty using this technology to train and practice.		
5	Evaluate students' performance against those in sections not using the clicker technology.		
6	If data shows enough improvement in attendance and class engagement, expand technology into all sections of the two gateway courses.		

Establish a Venue for Faculty Idea Exchanges

Establish events that will expose professors and instructors to new teaching styles, student development theories, adult learning styles, and alternate pedagogical approaches for student engagement within the Criminal Justice department and across the university. The college will also establish a forum for disseminating current literature and research on retention and related subjects to Criminal Justice professors, instructors, and staff.

Primary Responsibility Criminal Justice Department Chair

Resource Possibilities Designated event coordinator, Academic Technology Office, faculty researchers in Criminal Justice field, designated teaching faculty, Retention and Graduation Analyst, T.E.A.M Center

Anticipated Outcomes

- 50% of faculty and part-time instructors will attend the idea-exchange events.
- 25% of those attending the events will modify their teaching pedagogy for large-enrollment classes, resulting in a higher level of student success.

Anticipated Measures

- Students participating in these modified-pedagogical classes will have fewer D, F, and W's than their peers in the traditional lecture-style sections.

	Activity	Owner	Due
1	Designate a faculty committee to determine pedagogical topics and to identify peers across the criminal justice discipline to invite for presentations and discussions.		
2	Designate an event coordinator to plan and schedule each event.		
3	Identify UTSA professors noted for excellence in teaching large classes and invite for presentation or demonstration.		
4	Conduct events.		
5	Determine a communication method for the Retention and Graduation Analyst to disseminate current articles and research papers addressing student retention, persistence, and pedagogy.		
6	Evaluate measures for achievement of outcomes.		

Barrier 2: Supplemental Instruction Sessions

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) endorsed the benefits of a Supplemental Instruction program because it increases course mastery in “historically difficult courses” (p.106). These courses are defined by the percentage of students receiving grades of D, F, and W. As an already established program at UTSA, Supplemental Instruction is successful in increasing students’ grades, persistence, and rates of graduation. The Supplemental Instruction program goal is to have a student participation rate that approaches or exceeds 30% of the class members.

Since 2006, SI sessions have been conducted for the two “gateway” Criminal Justice courses, CRJ 1113, The American Criminal Justice System and CRJ 2153, Nature of Crime and Justice. Sessions are being attended by 12% - 17% of the section enrollments. While supplemental instruction statistics show that session attendance directly correlates with grade improvement (the more one attends, the higher the grade), it remains unclear why such a small percentage of criminal justice students attend the sessions for their introductory CRJ courses.

Increase Attendance in Supplemental Instruction Sessions

Determine and implement ways to advocate to students the value of attending the sessions. The Criminal Justice department should work collaboratively with the Associate Director of Supplemental Instruction to boost supplemental instruction session attendance. Experience at UTSA has revealed that the most powerful means of boosting attendance at supplemental instruction sessions comes from professors valuing the effectiveness of supplemental instruction and making that known to their students.

Primary Responsibility Criminal Justice Department Chair

Resource Possibilities Designated faculty, Associate Director for Supplemental Instruction, Supplemental Instruction leaders, students attending supplemental instruction sessions

Anticipated Outcomes

- Faculty will more actively encourage students to attend.
- Attendance at sessions will increase.

- Anticipated Measures*
- Course syllabi state the importance of attending supplemental instruction sessions.
 - Student attendance increases to 25% of enrollments.
 - Grades of D, F, and W decrease for these students attending.

	Activity	Owner	Due
1	Determine ways that faculty can positively endorse the importance of attending SI sessions and encourage students to participate.		
2	Collaborate with the SI Administrator to determine ways to encourage SI session attendance among students.		
3	Implement identified means for boosting attendance.		
4	Evaluate the impact of faculty endorsements.		

Offer Additional Supplemental Instruction Sessions

Pursue offering more supplemental instruction sessions on courses other than introductory ones. Once the additional sessions are established, efforts should also be placed upon encouraging student attendance.

Primary Responsibility Criminal Justice Department Chair and Associate Director for Supplemental Instruction

Resource Possibilities Designated faculty, Supplemental Instruction leaders, students in designated sessions

- Anticipated Outcomes*
- Courses that have substantial enrollments will be supported by Supplemental Instruction sessions.
 - Supplemental Instruction session will be funded and students will attend.

- Anticipated Measures*
- Number of Supplemental Instruction sessions will match allowable funding.
 - Student attendance will be 25% or more of enrollments.
 - Grades of D, F, and W will decrease for these students attending the Supplemental Instruction sessions.

	Activity	Owner	Due
1	Collaborate with the Associate Director of Supplemental Instruction to determine funding availability and optimal number of sessions to support.		
2	Based upon outcome of #1, determine which non-intro CRJ courses to offer Supplemental Instruction sessions.		
3	Recruit Supplemental Instruction leaders.		
4	Emphasize ways that faculty can positively endorse the importance of attending Supplemental Instruction sessions and encourage students to participate.		
5	Evaluate effectiveness of the additional Supplemental Instruction sessions.		

Barrier 3: Meeting Program Needs

In our evaluation of program needs, we focused upon the Criminal Justice undergraduate degree program and its course-offering frequencies and course scheduling within the context of a 31% enrollment increase over the past four academic years. All of the upper division students interviewed and/or surveyed cited their inability to enroll in needed courses as the number one barrier to graduation. Additionally, 31% of the faculty thought this was a barrier to student success as well.

Forty-one percent of COPP students are enrolled part-time – significantly higher than the university-wide rate of 30%, (UTSA, 2007). Part-time student concerns relate to course offerings at traditional times during the day or to large gaps of time between courses, making commuting difficult.

A review of criminal justice course offerings and enrollment over the past nine long semesters revealed that the number of course offerings have remained constant while enrollment increased by 31%. Several factors may impact current and past course offerings – faculty attrition; difficulty in hiring faculty at competitive salaries; difficulty in keeping faculty due to recruiting by other state institutions; a reduced teaching load for faculty to pursue research projects; and a lean faculty roster teaching both undergraduate and graduate courses.

Develop a 3-Year Academic Cycle of Course Offerings

In particular, the junior and senior criminal justice students commented that upper division courses required for their concentrations were not being offered on a regular basis, leaving them to “scramble” for alternatives in their semester of graduation. The Criminal Justice department will develop a 3-year calendar of course offerings. This

calendar will be published to faculty and academic advisors, who will advise criminal justice students on planning their remaining semesters' schedules. We recommend that the department create an action plan for substitutions and adjustments due to unavoidable schedule changes so the impact upon degree progress will be minimized. This action plan should be shared with the academic advisors.

Primary Responsibility Criminal Justice Department Chair

Resource Possibilities Faculty, academic advisors, classroom coordinator

Anticipated Outcomes ○ More students will progress to graduation due to course predictability.

Anticipated Measures ○ The number of graduating students increases.

	Activity	Owner	Due
1	Determine the course needs of the current seniors in the pipeline.		
2	Determine percentage of faculty resources to dedicate to undergraduate course offerings.		
3	Create action plan for possible limitations and cancellations and define how graduating seniors will be assisted.		
4	Publish and distribute 3-year calendar of course offerings to faculty and academic advisors.		
5	Collect feedback from academic advisors and faculty as to the usefulness of a 3-year calendar when working with students.		
6	Monitor course changes during the 3-year cycle and their impact upon students' degree progress.		
7	Evaluate usefulness of a 3-year cycle in order to develop subsequent calendars.		

Develop Online or Hybrid Courses

Select courses from the undergraduate curriculum that are appropriate for being developed into online courses and hybrid courses. These are alternate modes of delivery and should not totally replace face-to-face instruction as not all students benefit from online delivery. Additionally, the department should consider non-traditional times to offer face-to-face courses. Scheduling courses to meet the needs of criminal justice students may be difficult due to the greater number of part-time students compared to other colleges at UTSA.

- Primary Responsibility* Criminal Justice Department Chair
- Resource Possibilities* Designated faculty, Academic Technology staff, faculty from other disciplines experienced in online delivery
- Anticipated Outcomes*
- Courses will fill and not be subject to cancellations
 - Students taking these courses will report a higher satisfaction with availability
 - Time to graduation will be reduced for students completing these courses.
- Anticipated Measures*
- Average semesters to graduation by major and department will be compared with previous years.
 - Satisfaction of students enrolled in hybrid or online courses compared with students not in those courses will be evaluated using a class survey.

	Activity	Owner	Due
1	Identify faculty who would be well suited and interested in the development of online course materials.		
2	Determine which courses would lend themselves well to a hybrid or online format.		
3	Faculty member works with academic technology through the development process.		
4	Schedule room with appropriate technology.		
5	Conduct a pilot online or hybrid course.		
6	Evaluate measures for achievement of outcomes.		

Barrier 4: Inadequate Student Writing Skills

Of the CRJ faculty interviewed, 31% cited poor writing skills as a barrier to student success. The faculty felt that many students come from high schools that do not emphasize writing basics and many students require remediation upon entering UTSA. Interestingly, COPP CRJ students seem to agree with the faculty. In a 2006 study, CRJ students indicated that writing, the amount of writing, lack of preparation for writing assignments, and using the APA style were barriers to graduation.

Additionally, there are no writing assignments in the lower-division, introductory CRJ courses that would prepare students for the writing required in upper division courses. The reason for not assigning writing directly relates to the number of large classes and

the lack of support for grading. It was clear to us that the upper-division CRJ courses attempted to be writing-intensive but that the professors spent a great deal of time assisting students with writing basics, therefore not reaching the goal of a true writing-intensive course.

Collaborate With the Writing Center

To date the UTSA Writing Center can only support one course section due to funding limitations. The Criminal Justice Department Chair will select a course and faculty member for engaging in a collaborative effort with the UTSA Writing Center. The enrollment in that course will be limited to 30 students and the professor will work closely with the Writing Center staff to provide opportunities for their students to increase their writing skills. Workshops in writing, taught by Tomás Rivera Center staff, could be integrated into the course syllabus.

- Primary Responsibility* Criminal Justice Department Chair

- Resource Possibilities* Designated faculty, Writing Center staff, Tomás Rivera staff

- Anticipated Outcomes* ○ Students in the selected courses will increase their writing skills.

- Anticipated Measures* ○ Grades increase on writing assignments and the overall grades of these students are higher than students in non-writing supported classes

	Activity	Owner	Due
1	In collaboration with the Writing Center, develop the writing assignments and the process for supporting students and faculty in these courses.		
2	Determine the courses and professors that will be supported by the Writing Center.		
3	Limit course enrollments to facilitate writing assignments and assistance.		
4	Evaluate final grade distribution for writing support effectiveness.		
5	Follow the performance of these students in the next level course or courses to determine writing efficacy.		
6	Evaluate measures for achievement of outcomes and, if successful, expand Writing Center support to other criminal justice courses if funding allows.		

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