

The University of Texas at Austin

Report of the Second Task Force on Enrollment Strategy

December 2009

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INTRODUCTION

In October 2002, then President Larry R. Faulkner appointed a Task Force on Enrollment Strategy and charged it to recommend a reasoned strategy for managing student enrollment at The University of Texas at Austin (UT) into the indefinite future. The final report that the Task Force submitted in December 2003 included twenty-seven recommendations with a provision that a review of progress on the recommendations be undertaken in five years. Honoring that provision, in fall 2008, Executive Vice President and Provost Steve Leslie appointed a Second Task Force on Enrollment Strategy composed of twenty members, eleven of whom had served on the first Task Force. Provost Leslie asked the Second Task Force to review the previous recommendations, determine if any recommendations should be changed, and make new recommendations where appropriate. This report should be viewed as a companion to the December 2003 Report of the Task Force on Enrollment Strategy.

THE TASK FORCE'S GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Second Task Force on Enrollment Strategy has largely adopted the Guiding Principles established by the previous Task Force. The only addition to those principles was recognition of the changes made in the undergraduate curriculum as a result of the work of the 2005 Task Force on Curricular Reform.

1. UT should be internationally renowned for its teaching, research, and service to society.
2. UT should provide a graduate and undergraduate education second to none.
3. UT should strive to carry out its central education mission on a contiguous campus.
4. UT should continue to increase the percentage of undergraduates who complete their degrees and shorten time to graduation.
5. Undergraduate curricula should be flexible enough to allow students to explore academic areas outside their majors without prolonging time to graduation.

6. UT should continue to implement the five recommendations of the Task Force on Curricular Reform to provide coherence and integrity to its students' overall undergraduate education.
7. UT should continue to decrease the student-faculty ratio to a level similar to our national comparison group of institutions.
8. UT should be diverse in its students, faculty, and staff. Diversity includes ethnicity, gender, residency (Texas, U.S., foreign), and socioeconomic status, among other factors.
9. UT should have adequate resources to accomplish all of the above while remaining an economically viable choice for all Texans.
10. UT's size should be consistent with these guiding principles.

Recommendations

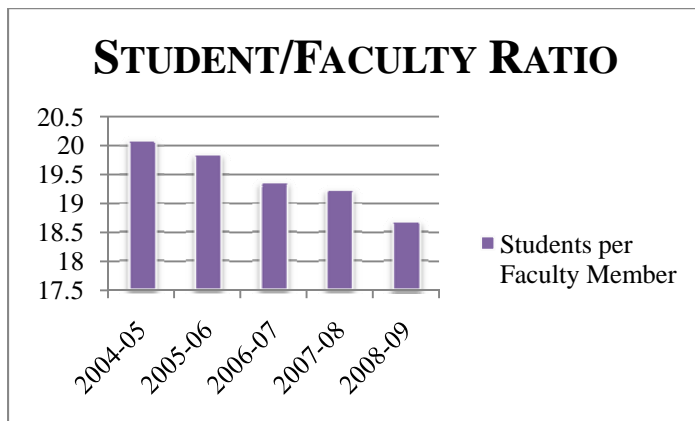
The Task Force on Enrollment Strategy focused on issues that will help in three areas:

- Controlling growth of the student body
- Improving the quality of the undergraduate experience
- Increasing the pace at which students earn their degree

All recommendations of the Task Force are related to these areas.

THE SIZE OF THE STUDENT BODY

This Task Force concurs with the 2003 report that the “quality of education must be the first priority.” We recommend that UT continue to improve its student-faculty ratio to achieve parity with the leading research universities in its national comparison group. We recognize that UT has committed resources to attract and hire additional faculty each year, which has reduced the student-faculty ratio during the last five years.



A review of the physical, economic, and human resources available on the contiguous campus at UT indicates that a major increase of its undergraduate student body would not be possible without compromising the quality of education.

Recommendations:

1. Achieve a total student population of about 48,000 until the student-faculty ratio of 16 to 1 is attained.
2. Continue to increase the size of its faculty, thereby reducing the student-faculty ratio. We recommend new faculty be added to achieve the goal set by President William Powers, Jr. and the Commission of 125—a student-faculty ratio of 16 to 1—while maintaining the high quality of our faculty.

ADMISSIONS

Freshman applications exceeded 31,000 for the 2009-10 academic year. An estimated 86% of UT freshmen who graduated from Texas high schools were admitted to UT under the Top 10% Law.¹ The Task Force believes that admitting such a large percentage of students based on a single criterion restricts UT's ability to admit a diverse class and excludes many outstanding students.

Recommendations:

3. Modify the top 10% admission policy to allow UT greater control over the admissions process.²
4. Review admission and financial aid processes annually to ensure effective admission and enrollment of qualified students and a diverse student body, including international and out-of-state students.
5. Establish a work group to investigate correlations between freshman and transfer student enrollment practices and student progress toward degree.

¹ The Top 10% Law (House Bill 588 passed by the Texas Legislature in 1997) requires state universities to automatically admit Texas high school students who graduate in the top 10% of their class.

² In Texas Senate Bill 175, the 81st Texas Legislature changed the Top 10% Law to limit automatic admissions to no more than 75% of Texas high school students who graduate in the top 10% of their class.

6. Determine merit-based funding needs required to ensure the admission and enrollment of outstanding undergraduates.
7. Expand summer enrollment for students to help quicken the pace to graduation.

COORDINATED ADMISSIONS PROGRAM AND TRANSFERS

The Task Force discovered that the academic performance of students who transfer to UT through the Coordinated Admission Program (CAP) is comparable to that of freshman admitted during the summer and traditional transfer students. At present, the CAP program does not pose a problem for UT. The Admissions and Registration Policy Committee of the University Faculty Council is charged with reviewing the program requirements if CAP transfer students exceed 60% of all undergraduate transfers.

Recommendations:

8. Continue to follow the 2003 policy for review of Coordinated Admissions Program structure and admission requirements. If necessary, limit the number of students admitted under both CAP and non-CAP transfers by adjusting the grade-point average required for admission.
9. Limit CAP as a percentage of all transfers to 75%.
10. Develop a program to help transfer students make a successful transition to the university and graduate in a timely fashion.

CONTINUING ENROLLMENT AND READMISSION

With few exceptions, UT does not limit readmission. Undergraduate students are permitted to continue enrolling in courses at UT after graduation and students who have been absent from UT for one semester or longer are permitted to return with minimal screening. However, students who have already earned their degrees and those who are not making adequate progress to degree reduce UT's capacity to admit new students. Moreover, their

enrollment can adversely affect course availability for students who are trying to complete a bachelor's degree in four years.

Recommendations:

11. Review scholastic dismissal policies to determine whether they effectively promote improvement in academic performance and timely graduation.
12. Establish more rigorous readmission requirements for returning students who have been absent for one semester or longer.
13. Place continuing students in a degree holder/non-degree seeker status when their degrees are awarded.
14. Limit degree holders who are not seeking an additional degree to two semesters, with subsequent extension granted on a semester-by-semester basis after review by their dean.
15. Determine how the Division of Continuing and Innovative Education can better serve the needs of alumni and the Austin community, especially by serving non-degree seeking students.

DEGREES

Among the most important recommendations are those which prompt and help students toward timely graduation. The 2003 Task Force made several recommendations intended to reduce undergraduate time to graduation. Some of those were implemented, some were adopted but not enforced, and others received no action. But time to graduation remains a fundamental issue for enrollment management.

The traditional length of time to a bachelor's degree is 8 semesters (cf. "timely graduation"). On average, undergraduates at UT take 8.5 semesters to complete their degrees. And because under present policy there is no limit on the number of semesters a student may take to complete a bachelor's degree, many undergraduates remain longer

than usual and fail to graduate in a timely fashion. By remaining at the university for extended periods, these students reduce the university's capacity to serve other students who wish attend UT, i.e., both freshmen and transfers. Other universities (e.g., the University of Virginia and the University of California, Berkeley) have addressed this problem by limiting the number of semesters a student may pursue a baccalaureate degree. The Second Task Force on Enrollment Strategy recommends a requirement that would limit time to graduation, while also recommending initiatives and services to help students graduate in a timely fashion.

Recommendations:

16. Require all degree programs to be in compliance with the basic core requirements mandated by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and defined by the Faculty Council.
17. Make degree requirements for all majors more easily accessible and easily understood for review on the Web for first-year and prospective students.
18. Charge the deans with ensuring that students receive appropriate advising services and require mandatory advising for all students.
19. Establish a 10-semester limit to complete a baccalaureate degree. This recommendation was made in 2003, approved by President Faulkner, and referred to the Office of the Provost. The Task Force recommends that the 10-semester limit policy be developed and apply only to long-session semesters and that students retain the right to appeal when there are special circumstances. This rule would not apply to programs that are designed to be completed in more than 4 years.
20. Require that Interactive Degree Audits be completed and electronically acknowledged each semester by all undergraduate students.
21. Charge the deans to systematically notify students each semester about the status of their progress towards degree.

Often undergraduates earn more than the minimum number of hours required for their degree. There are many reasons for this. Some students do not qualify for the major in which they are most interested while others are deterred by prerequisites in required course sequences. In some cases, graduation is delayed as these students drift from one program to another, taking courses that are not necessary for their desired major or attempting to raise their grade-point average to meet course or program prerequisites.

Recommendation:

22. Develop new degree programs that are interdisciplinary or college-bridging that include the following features:

- They must be attractive to a large range of students.
- They must be designed so as not to put an excessive burden on the teaching capacity of any one department or college.
- They must be accessible to students who have already accrued 30 hours or more and who plan to graduate in four years. (This means that the defining course for such a major cannot be a first-year course.)
- They must have academic rigor comparable to our current major programs.
- They should include a set of majors that are similar in structure to the Bridging Disciplines Program.

MONITORING PROGRESS TO DEGREE

UT's Interactive Degree Audit (IDA) enables students, advisors, and deans to monitor a student's progress towards degree. Although all departments automatically provide degree audits, students are not required to use this tool. If students made greater use of the IDA, they could avoid some of the misunderstandings and delays that occur as they approach graduation.

Recommendations:

23. Form a work group to assess degree progress methodology that can improve the degree audit and advising systems.
24. Require deans to notify students each semester regarding their progress toward the degree within the context of the 10-semester limit.
25. Give deans the authority to take appropriate action with students not making satisfactory progress.
26. Require that Interactive Degree Audits be completed and electronically acknowledged each semester by all undergraduate students.
27. Develop electronic systems to support advising and monitoring of student degree progress.

CHANGING MAJORS AND MULTIPLE MAJORS

There is a positive correlation between the number of semesters taken to graduate and the number of times students change their majors. On average, undergraduates who do not change majors complete their degrees with fewer total hours—and sooner—than those who change majors multiple times. A 10-semester limit would reduce a student's ability to change majors and would make both students and advisors aware of the adverse effect that changes of major has on timely progress toward degree. And to foster careful choices and timely progress, the Task Force also recommends new requirements regarding changes of major.

Recommendations:

28. Require students to declare a major or majors by the completion of 60 hours or by the end of the fourth long semester in residence, whichever is later.

29. Allow students one change of major prior to completion of 90 hours with the permission of the home college and department and the receiving college and department.
30. Permit students after their first semester at UT to transfer to a different college only (a) if their grade-point average is at least 2.0 for coursework in the receiving college and (b) if they demonstrate that they can graduate within the 10-semester limit.
31. Develop similar policies for transfer students that will restrict the number of hours they can take in residence before declaring a major and define the number of semesters they may take in residence.
32. Limit the number of times a student may apply for internal transfer to restricted programs within the same college.

COURSE DEMAND AND REPEAT REGISTRATION

Repeating courses prolongs a student's time to graduation. Undergraduates repeating courses represent 2.2% of all enrollment, or 4,730 registrations in fall 2007.³ More than 600 courses were attempted for the third or more time, resulting in exclusion from formula funding. UT lost an estimated \$468,000 in formula funding as a result of repeated courses in 2007-2008.

Recommendations:

33. Develop a university-wide policy regulating repeat registration in same course.
34. Form a work group to develop a course demand analysis and projection methodology to inform and aid in offering the number of course sections needed to meet course demand. This would help reduce class unavailability as a contributing factor to poor four-year graduation rates.

³ These figures exclude "allowable" repeated courses such as special topics, individual instruction, and certain music and physical education courses.

35. Make available an adequate number of courses to allow students to make satisfactory progress toward their degrees.
36. Continue to provide course access priority to seniors for courses required for graduation.
37. Require colleges and schools to provide adequate enrollment capacity for non-majors.
38. Revise the use of topics courses to ensure all courses, including multiple topic offerings listed under the same course number, are eligible for formula funding.⁴

CURRICULUM REFORM

UT is engaged in the reform of its undergraduate core curriculum, as recommended by the Commission of 125. The most thorough description of these endeavors is included in the 2005 Report of the Task Force on Curriculum Reform. At least two resulting initiatives have the potential to significantly affect progress to degree, which in turn influences enrollment capacity. The Signature Course program will require all undergraduates to enroll in a rigorous first-year course with a number of specific characteristics. In addition, undergraduates will be required to earn credit in courses that require proficiency in writing, speaking, quantitative reasoning, global cultures, multicultural perspectives, ethics, and independent inquiry. Courses that meet these requirements are “flagged” as such, and thus meet the so-called “flag” requirements.

Recommendations:

39. Implement Signature Courses by 2010-11. This program should be implemented in a way that does not increase time to graduation for any group of students, including transfers.

⁴ When a course with the same course number is taken more than twice by the same student, that enrollment is not eligible for state formula funding.

40. Support the implementation of the “flags” as defined by the Task Force on Curriculum Reform and subsequent Faculty Council legislation.

UNIVERSITY FACILITIES

A shortage of teaching facilities is an obstacle to implementation of many of the preceding recommendations. To successfully implement these recommendations, UT must expand its classroom and laboratory capacity.

Recommendations:

41. Add more classroom space on the campus.
42. Implement and enforce a campus-wide policy for reserving classrooms.
43. Appoint a work group to study current practices and by December 2010 recommend ways to optimize the use of classrooms. Among the issues the work group should consider are the following.
 - Enforce standard class meeting timelines during peak class times from 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.
 - Require departmental classrooms to be scheduled via the Registrar’s Room Scheduling System.
 - Require departments to request rooms based on seating capacity and classroom attributes (media, continuous writing surface, etc.) rather than physical proximity to department or faculty offices.
 - Install consistent technology in all general purpose classrooms so that audio-visual equipment availability is not a determining factor in scheduling classrooms.
 - Optimize seating capacity based on class enrollment. This should include establishing a reasonable occupancy rate for classrooms and denying assignment to a room if the occupancy rate was not met for the same course in the previous semester.

- Require departments to have a percentage of classes offered early morning, late afternoon, and evening.

CONCLUSION

The University of Texas at Austin has emerged as one of the nation's leading public universities. But to continue its progress, UT must have the ability to manage enrollment effectively. The Task Force believes that the recommendations contained in this report provide strategies to make effective enrollment management a reality.