



# State of the School: 2014–2015

*The School of Undergraduate Studies serves students by sustaining a dynamic common curriculum and enriching the undergraduate experience through innovative advising, academic support, learning communities, interdisciplinary programs, and undergraduate research.*

The School of Undergraduate Studies (UGS) is a cornerstone of the university's infrastructure, as essential as the buildings that define the campus. Undergraduate Studies is charged with managing the common curriculum in a way that incorporates broadly representative faculty input and that encourages innovation, rewards excellence, and addresses the educational needs of students. Along with the first-year Signature Course, common curriculum refers to the core curriculum and flag requirements in writing, ethics, quantitative reasoning, independent inquiry, global cultures, and ethnic diversity.

For students who begin in Undergraduate Studies, the school offers a powerful combination of career counseling with major exploration advising to put them on the road to degrees and careers they are excited about.

In fall 2009, the school admitted its first cohort of 708 students. In fall 2014, 1,008 new students enrolled in Undergraduate Studies, bringing the total enrollment to 2,098. All were students in exploration mode, seeking majors in which they could successfully graduate. Students from UGS have successfully transferred into all of the university's colleges with undergraduate programs. No student remains in the school after the fourth semester.

## Governance

Faculty, staff, and students from across campus are involved in UGS programs. During the 2014–15 school year, advisory committees and councils worked with school leadership to set policy and provide input.

- UGS Advisory Committee comprised seven members of the general faculty, seven associate and assistant deans, and two students
- Signature Course Advisory Committee had four faculty members and one student
- Five Flag Committees had 62 faculty members
- Texas Success Initiative Advisory Committee had eight faculty members
- 11 Bridging Disciplines Programs Committees had 127 faculty members
- UGS Advisory Council had 26 volunteer community stakeholders
- UGS Student Council had 20 students

## Fundraising

During 2014–2015, the School of Undergraduate Studies raised over a half a million dollars and created two new endowments: the Sheri and Christopher J. Beggins Endowment and the Hamilton Endowment for Entrepreneurship. The Director for Development worked with the school's Advisory Council and leadership to determine funding priorities. The continued focus was on building endowments to meet ongoing needs.

## Assessment

The core course list for the 2014–2015 academic year integrated the revised state component area definitions and required objectives in all of the core courses offered on campus. In order to better understand how these changes are being implemented and how courses in the core curriculum influence student learning, Undergraduate Studies began a multi-year assessment of each of the eight core component areas, with plans to assess two areas per year.

In 2014–15 the assessment team facilitated the pilot assessment starting with the Visual and Performing Arts and Government core component areas by collecting and reviewing samples of student work from 26 courses. Aggregated results were shared with all faculty involved in the core assessment process in fall 2015.

In an effort to understand the professional needs and interests of the school's staff and to inform planning for future staff development, the assessment team administered a needs assessment survey in spring 2015. The assessment team will coordinate a series of staff professional development workshops addressing these topics in 2016.

## Summary of Programs

### First-Year Experience

The First-Year Experience Office continued to serve all first-year students at the university, assisting them with the transition to the Forty Acres. The Signature Courses connect students with distinguished faculty members in rigorous classes. Students develop essential skills in research, writing, speaking, and discussion through an approach that is interdisciplinary, collaborative, experiential, and contemporary. Signature Courses are a required part of the core curriculum for every entering undergraduate student at the university, including transfer students. During the 2014–15 academic year, 10,600 students enrolled in 221 different Signature Courses.

The assessment team assisted in administering the Signature Course mid-semester survey to collect student feedback about the quality of their experiences and conducted a series of focus groups about the quality of their First-year Interest Group (FIG) experiences. Results were used to inform future program activities.

Published in May 2015, *Signature Course Stories: Transforming Undergraduate Learning* paints a personal picture of the Signature Courses and how they have transformed the undergraduate core curriculum UT Austin. The book is a collection of student and faculty essays that describes the power of these groundbreaking courses.

The fall 2014 University Lecture Series showcased five leading faculty members discussing leadership, scholarship, and research. Signature Course students were required to attend one of the events, held over two nights in October 2014, each designed to create a campus-wide conversation.

First-year Interest Groups (FIGs) are groups of 18–25 first-year students who take two to four classes together during their first fall semester. FIG students develop a sense of community as they attend classes, study, and participate in various activities with fellow first-year students. In fall 2014, 4,500 students participated in 295 cohorts. In addition, the FIG program trained and employed almost 300 peer mentors who led weekly, one-hour seminars and social activities to help students become better acquainted with each other, faculty members, and the UT community.

360 Connections is a campus-wide initiative that aims to ensure that all incoming first-time-in-college students can spend their first semester in a small community like a FIG. Each connection has approximately 20 students, meets regularly outside class, and is connected with a peer mentor and a faculty or staff member. Students explore topics like academic integrity, leadership, and university traditions. In fall 2014, 7,084 students were enrolled in at least one connection, so 95% of all first-year students were in a connection.

## Center for the Skills and Experience Flags

Staff from the Center for the Skills and Experience Flags continued to coordinate the implementation, assessment, and ongoing improvement of flag requirements in Cultural Diversity in the U.S., Global Cultures, Ethics and Leadership, Independent Inquiry, Quantitative Reasoning, and Writing.

With the new 2016–18 undergraduate catalog, we will have reached full implementation of the flag requirements across all undergraduate degree programs, with the exception that some colleges will require two instead of three Writing flags. In the 2014–16 catalog, six colleges and schools had fully implemented all of the flag requirements (three Writing flags, and one each of the other five flags), and another four colleges and schools had implemented all except for the third Writing flag. Only two colleges—Liberal Arts and Natural Sciences—had not yet required all of the flags. In the 2016–18 catalog, Liberal Arts will require all of the flags, including the third Writing flag, and Natural Sciences will require all except the third Writing flag. Because Writing is so labor intensive to teach, additional instructional budget resources will be needed in order to have capacity for the entire campus to require three Writing flags. In the absence of additional resources for Writing, we now consider the flags to be fully implemented.

Importantly, the systems and relationships developed with faculty committees and departments to incorporate flags have provided the mechanisms required for a responsive core curriculum in perpetuity. In 2014–15, Undergraduate Studies approved 500 course flags and undergraduates took 19,951 seats in Cultural Diversity courses, 24,836 seats in Global Cultures courses, 20,526 seats in Ethics and Leadership courses, 13,442 seats in Independent Inquiry courses, 50,188 seats in Quantitative Reasoning courses, and 31,161 seats in Writing courses. 39% of the seats taken in undergraduate courses at UT Austin carried one or more flags.

## James W. Vick Center for Strategic Advising & Career Counseling

Advisors in the Vick Center continued to work closely with advisors across campus to provide academic advising, including major exploration assistance, to undecided and transitional students at the university. 1,008 new students enrolled in Undergraduate Studies in 2014–15, of which over 750 have now transferred to the colleges from which they will graduate. Academic advisors conducted over 8,000 student appointments during the academic year.

Career counselors met with 1,126 students to explore careers, graduate school options, or academic paths at the university. The center offered additional career content through classes and workshops, with over 650 students attending.

Events called Magellan's Circles connected prominent professionals with the school's students for round table discussions about choosing a major, life after college, and pursuing careers. Held twice a semester, they were limited to small sessions of students enrolled in the school.

## Bridging Disciplines Programs

These academic concentrations allow undergraduates to earn interdisciplinary certificates, recognized on their official transcripts, through study integrating classroom, research, and internship experiences. The 15 BDPs had 620 students actively enrolled in 2014–15. Since the program's inception in 2002, 829 students have graduated with certificates. The program worked on development of a new BDP certificate in Museum Studies, which will admit its first students in fall 2016.

## Sanger Learning Center

During the 2014–15 academic year, the center delivered 110,000 instructional hours enhancing the academic success of 16,000 UT students. The primary vehicle for this support are the 500 student educators the Sanger Center's 15 professional learning specialists prepared for their roles through 243 hours of training.

Specifically, the Sanger Learning Center provided tutoring to 3,500 UT students. Staff counseled 1,000 students on essential learning skills and enhanced the learning

experience of 7,000 students by offering course-based, academic assistance. In addition, they provided large-scale workshops and reviews to 12,900 UT students.

In 2014, the Dean of Undergraduate Studies asked the Center to create a new learning intervention for one of UT's Student Success Programs, the Discovery Scholars Program (DSP). Sanger staff operate as a team with Vick Advisors and DSP coaches, providing academic counseling and content support to a group of approximately 700 UT students.

In addition to these core services, Sanger Center professional staff continued coordinating graduate student teacher training for the Signature Course program and supporting the training efforts of other academic support units across campus.

## Discovery Scholars Program

The Discovery Scholars Program (DSP) selects incoming first-year students in Undergraduate Studies and serves as the students' 360 Connection learning community. A team-based approach involving staff in the Vick Center, Sanger Learning Center, and DSP provides comprehensive support to assist in the transition from high school to college. In its second year, 2014-15, an additional 300 students joined the original 200 students in the program.

## Texas Success Initiative & College Readiness

This program identifies students who have not met the statewide standard for college readiness in reading, writing, and mathematics and provides them advising, academic courses, and enrichment services. In 2014–2015, staff worked with more than 2,500 students. Of those, 300 students needed intensive advising services and/or testing to determine readiness.

2014–2015 was anomalous in its small numbers of students requiring services due to a confluence of rule changes set forth by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB).

Through the course of the academic year, 31 students enrolled in four sections of reading and writing interventions, while 45 students enrolled in five sections of math interventions. Numbers for the next academic year are expected to increase. Non-Course-Based Options (NCBOs), interventions that pair an entry-level, credit-bearing course with support from a TSI instructor, expanded, serving approximately 30 students. NCBOs reduce the time it takes for students to earn college credit and enrollment in them is expected to continue to grow over upcoming years.

## Freshman Reading Round-Up

Many of the university's best professors sponsor books for summer reading and lead small discussions with incoming students the day before fall classes begin. New students connect with fellow freshmen and often form a lasting relationship with a

faculty member who teaches only upper division courses. In fall 2014, over 950 freshmen participated in 56 unique book sessions.

## Wayfinder

Nearly 100,000 unique visitors accessed this interactive website in 2014–15. With specifics on all majors offered at the university, along with career and certificate information, this resource was used by advisors working with undeclared students across campus and by prospective students. In 2014–2015 over 10,000 prospective students completed activities involving choosing a major in a special portal for UT applicants.

## Honors Colloquium

The summer Honors Colloquium, an annual recruitment effort, brought 600 high-achieving high-school seniors to campus to experience classes and life at the university. Of all 2014 attendees, 80% were admitted into the university, many of them into a first-year honors programs.

## Archer Fellowship Program

Program staff continued to support highly competitive student internships in Washington, D.C. Of the 80 students selected as Archer Fellows from the entire UT system for the 2014–2015 academic year, 13 were from UT Austin in fall 2014, and 18 in spring 2015.

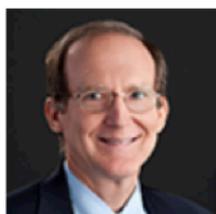
## Office of Undergraduate Research

Program staff gather information about ongoing research from across campus and serve as a university-wide resource for involving undergraduate students in faculty-led research opportunities. The office continued to co-host the annual Research Week with the Senate of College Councils. 740 students attended information sessions in 2014–15.

# 2014–2015 Staff



**Brent Iverson**  
Dean of Undergraduate Studies



**Lawrence Abraham**  
Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies

## Dean's Staff

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