

Final Report of the Task Force on Undergraduate Graduation Rates

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RANDY DIEHL,
TASK FORCE CHAIR
DEAN OF THE COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS

TASK FORCE MEMBERS

DR. RANDY DIEHL (CHAIR)
Dean, College of Liberal Arts

MS. SHANNON ALLPORT
Senior, Biology/Premed

DR. CHARLES RAMIREZ BERG
Professor, Department of Radio-Television-Film

DR. ROWENA FONG
Professor, School of Social Work

DR. ROBERT GILBERT
Professor, Department of Civil, Architectural, and
Environmental Engineering

DR. BEVERLY HADAWAY
Associate Professor, Department of Finance

DR. BRENT IVERSON
Professor, Department Chair,
Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry

MR. GILBERTO ORTEGA-RIVERA
Senior, English

MS. ILSE QUIJANO
Senior, Communication Studies/Political Communication

DR. ELIZABETH RICHMOND-GARZA
Associate Professor, Department of English

DR. MARY STEINHARDT
Professor, Department of Kinesiology and Health Education

MR. FRANCISCO J. TAMAYO
Senior, Accounting-Professional Program

DR. PHILIP URI TREISMAN
Professor, Department of Mathematics

MR. WESLEY WILLIAMS
Senior, Government

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Preamble

The University of Texas at Austin is committed to providing the highest quality educational experience for its students. They leave the university not only with a firm grounding in their own majors, but also with substantive exposure to topics across many different disciplines. This is important for preparing our graduates for further study and employment, and also for building a knowledgeable citizenry that is able to participate in public life and to offer leadership for the state and nation.

Recent concerns raised by our stakeholders have prompted the university to examine trends in undergraduate student progress with the aim of improving graduation rates. Our four-year graduation rate lags behind that of some of the nation's best public universities. We therefore welcome serious discussion on how to improve our graduation rates, and we are willing to take the bold steps needed to achieve this goal.

An easy way to improve graduation rates is to water down the course curriculum, but we entirely reject such an approach. Rather, the solutions to the graduation rate problem must be found in ways that keep the high quality of the educational mission intact. The solutions must also support non-classroom academic enrichment experiences, such as study abroad, internships, and undergraduate research. For many students, those activities are a crucial part of their educational experience at UT Austin, and no recommendations to improve graduation rates should be made to reduce their frequency or quality. Because those activities are often highly enriching and integrating, the campus should instead endeavor to make them available to even more students.

Improving graduation rates will not be easy. Over the past 20 years the four-year graduation rate has risen significantly, but that rise has been coupled with the admission of better-prepared students and the institution of a campus-wide professional advising structure and culture. Even greater gains will be difficult without further improvements in the preparedness of admitted students and the quality of advising resources across campus.

The task force has identified fundamental issues that must be addressed if we are to reach our goals. Restrictions on available spots in highly sought-after majors, for example, often lead to students enrolling in other areas in hopes that a slot will eventually open in a preferred major. Not only does this lengthen time to degree, but those who are unsuccessful in their bid must make the difficult choice to remain in a less desirable major or enroll in another university that will provide access to their major of choice. Without fundamental reforms that foster a campus culture that recognizes and addresses this central problem, it will be difficult for the university to reduce attrition and speed students' time to a degree.

Colleges that show high rates of four-year graduation should be celebrated for their successes and used as models where appropriate. In contrast, colleges with slower graduation rates must find ways to significantly improve progress to a degree, and the campus community as a whole must rally to support them through the provision of resources, advice and other forms of support.

The University of Texas at Austin faces a serious challenge. Current behaviors and cultures will not allow the university to succeed in the long term; instead, a fundamental shift in the orientation of the university is required. Success will require strong leadership from the President and Provost, but it will also require college administrators, faculty, student leaders, advisors, and many others from across campus to work together as a community.

Why is this goal so important? Because it will reduce the cost of higher education to students, parents and taxpayers, give more students the opportunity to learn and grow at a major Tier 1 research university, and ultimately help our state and nation build future generations of strong citizens and leaders.

Introduction

The Task Force on Undergraduate Graduation Rates was formed in June of 2011 to make a set of recommendations meant to increase the four-year graduation rate of first time in college (FTIC) students at The University of Texas at Austin. Specifically, UT Austin President Bill Powers asked the task force to make recommendations that would increase the four-year graduation rate from its current level of about 51% to 70% by 2016. That end date implies that the 2012 FTIC cohort must achieve the 70% graduation rate if the efforts of the committee are to be judged successful. Very few public research universities in the United States have a four-year graduation rate of 70% or higher, and achieving such a goal will require fundamental changes in our institutional practices.

Under the leadership of Dean Randy Diehl, the task force set to work to meet this goal. Meeting weekly from June to December of 2011, the task force engaged in detailed discussions for improving the graduation rate. During that time the task force also undertook several other activities to support its discussions, including:

- meeting with university administrators, former task force (e.g., Task Force on Enrollment Strategy) leaders, and other professionals around the university about their thoughts on improving graduation rates;
- meeting with student leaders to discuss their thoughts on graduation rates;
- conducting focus groups of advisors and undergraduate students to get their opinions on issues related to graduation;
- reviewing previous task force reports (e.g., Task Force on Enrollment Strategy) to determine what ideas relating to graduation rates had been previously proposed;
- conducting original research on student retention and success using data from student records, financial aid services, and the Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) survey;
- commissioning the College of Liberal Arts Advising Leadership Team to visit several other public research universities including Penn State, University of Michigan, UCLA, and University of Florida, and write a report on best practices meant to improve graduation rates;
- reviewing research literature on student retention and success;
- discussing new course planning and credit tracking tools such as MyEdu.

With this background information, the task force believes it can produce a set of recommendations that, with rigorous implementation, will achieve President Powers' stated goal.

REPORT OVERVIEW

The overarching goal of this report is to provide recommendations meant to improve undergraduate students' graduation rates. A secondary goal is to help educate campus community members and others on the issues that the university faces in decreasing time to degree. The report begins by outlining, in general terms, the most important proposals being suggested by the task force. The remainder of the main section of the report examines in more detail specific actions that should be taken to achieve the overall goal.

Throughout the report, reference is made to other reports that were reviewed by task force members. Those reports include:

- Report of the Task Force on Enrollment Strategy (2003)
- Report of the Task Force on Curriculum Reform (2005)
- Draft Report from the Progress Toward Degree Committee of the Task Force on Enrollment Strategy (2008)
- Report of the Second Task Force on Enrollment Strategy (2009)
- Raising Four-Year Graduation Rates and Increasing Capacity at The University of Texas at Austin (2011)

The first four of these reports were made available by the various task forces that compiled them. The Liberal Arts Advising Leadership Team produced the final report. It has not yet been widely distributed but is included in its entirety as an appendix to this document.

A second appendix in the document provides an overview of the original research conducted by the task force to inform its recommendations. As described in the appendix, this research was conducted using several data sets on campus. The review of the research is quite extensive and is meant to provide the university community with additional insight into the graduation rate issue.

ADMISSIONS ISSUES

The recommendations outlined in the report do not fully address the issue of admissions on campus. Yet, a serious examination of admissions issues is warranted. As shown in Appendix B, the university has achieved successively higher graduation rates over the past 20 years, but those rising rates have been coupled with better college preparedness among entering students. Over the past several years the level of preparedness has remained steady, meaning that this source of graduation rate growth has ceased for the moment.

The Office of Admissions and the colleges must make a greater effort to match students to majors. Students must be selected who are able to handle the rigors of their specific coursework and who are committed to a degree in that field. Too many students in the university enter the university only desiring to switch to another field of study as soon as possible. Steps must be taken to admit more students into majors that truly interest them and fit with their skills and abilities.

AN OVERVIEW OF RETENTION AND THROUGHPUT

Before proceeding to the recommendations, it is important to note the contours of the problem and the possible solutions. Although UT Austin's four-year graduation rate is only 51%, its six-year graduation rate is about 81%. Of the 19% who do not graduate in six years, very few, maybe 2-4%, eventually graduate. Of the 30% who do not graduate in four years but do so in six, most graduate in either four and a half or five years. Indeed, the five-year graduation rate is about 75%, well above the stated four-year goal of 70%. Thus, achieving a 70% four-year graduation rate really means reducing the time to degree for many students by only one or two long semesters.

Given these numbers, the 19% who do not graduate and the 30% who graduate in more than four years offer potential sources of improvement for increasing the four-year graduation rate. First, the university could work to lower the percentage of students who do not graduate and so boost the four-year rate in the process. Of those 19%, about 6% were dismissed for academic reasons and the remainder dropped out. Policies and programs to increase the graduation rates in that population would necessarily focus on retention and success efforts. For the second group, the 30% who graduated in more than four years, the issue is throughput: making certain that future similar cohorts graduate more quickly. Given that many students who graduate in more than four years take only one or two extra semesters to do so, throughput is an especially important factor in allowing the university to reach its goal.

In this report an effort is made to show which of the two problems, retention or throughput, specific recommendations are meant to address.

POSSIBLE COSTS

Although it was beyond the purview of the committee to look at possible costs associated with the recommendation, it is nevertheless important to note that some recommendations will result in additional costs, while others will be cost-neutral. Additionally, some costs will be one-time or limited-term. The task force emphasizes the importance of cost accountability in every sector, and believes that some costs will be offset by greater efficiencies realized through implementation of the recommendations.

Primary Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION #1: ENHANCE THE FIRST-YEAR AND ORIENTATION EXPERIENCE

RATIONALE

Creating modest gains in overall graduation rates is in itself a difficult task; to improve graduation rates by almost 20 percentage points within five years is a very challenging one. For the university to achieve this goal it must rethink some of the most venerable and longstanding practices and cultures on campus. New students to campus must perceive the university and its expectations in different ways from existing cohorts. So too must they navigate the university in new ways meant to support and reinforce the path to a four-year graduation.

Along these lines, research conducted by the task force and others underscores the importance of the first year at the university for student success. Students at UT Austin who perform well in their first year are more likely to graduate in four years. This effect of first-year success holds up in the face of controls for academic preparedness, family background, number of hours taken and many other factors. Indeed, according to our findings, it could be argued that the GPA achieved in the first semester is the single best predictor for graduating at all and one of the best predictors for graduating in four years. Thus, regardless of the backgrounds of entering students, the university should strive to ensure that during their first year students are as successful as possible.

Student success in the first year relies heavily on a successful freshman orientation and on strength in freshman advising. Currently, freshman orientation is not mandatory for our students and tends to focus heavily on non-academic issues. In discussions with students, advisors, and others, the task force repeatedly heard that orientation must be reformed in various ways with a new emphasis on academics and integration into the university culture. More importantly, the positive experience of freshman orientation should be built upon in the first semester to create a sense of continuity and campus integration. This continuity must be supported by rigorous advising practices during the freshman year.

PROPOSED ACTION

- Make changes to freshman advising.
 - All incoming freshmen during the first semester will be advised in a newly created freshman advising center located in Undergraduate Studies.

- Students with a declared major must also consult the advisor of the major in their home department.
- Beginning the second semester of the freshman year, those students who have demonstrated certainty about their major will be allowed to transition fully into their departments for academic advising.
- Criteria for making the transition might include a degree audit plan that is clearly understood and established; an academic major that is clearly planned for the course of four years at UT Austin and a GPA of 2.75.
- Carefully monitor student performance in the first year and intervene as early as possible, using advisors, faculty and academic support specialists, to prevent poor performance.
- Require that all first-year students live in university housing in their first year.
- Work with residence hall staff to ensure greater academic and social integration within the campus residential communities.
- Restructure campus freshman orientation to make it mandatory and to offer activities to promote academic integration and to sustain social networking and learning communities that would be continued in the first semester.
- Create and offer a new form of orientation that:
 - is an extension of the existing Camp Texas, run by the Texas Exes;
 - is available to all students and focuses on integration, community-building and attachment to the university;
 - recognizes the mandatory campus orientation and builds upon it; and
 - allows camp counselors (UT junior and senior volunteers) to identify socially at-risk students and work with them to improve their sense of connectedness to other students and the campus community.

SUPPORT FROM OTHER REPORTS

The report on raising four-year graduation rates recommended making freshman orientation mandatory and reconfiguring it to better emphasize academics. This recommendation was based on observations made during visits to the University of Michigan and Penn State. At Michigan, attending orientation was required for admission, and both schools offer more than 30 orientation sessions to their incoming students. The report authors argue that at those two schools, it is clear that orientation provides a strong foundation for success of their students. The report also argues that first-year students should be required to live on or near campus. The report's authors argue that living in proximity to campus creates a better sense of community among first-year students, improves integration into the social and academic life of the campus, and lays the groundwork for future success.

RESOURCES NEEDED

It is possible that the resources needed to implement these recommendations could be considerable. The creation of a new advising center may necessitate the hiring of a number of new advisors in

Undergraduate Studies. Depending on the availability of space in campus dorms, requiring residence on campus could either involve new construction or working with off-campus dorms to ensure that the experiences of students in university residence halls extend into the private residences as well. A new form of freshman orientation may require additional staffing resources, and the new Camp Texas will almost certainly require large initial expenditures to create and launch the new venture.

RETENTION OR THROUGHPUT

These recommendations are intended to improve both processes. The first will be improved by helping to ensure that more first- and second-year students remain on campus through those especially challenging years. The second is improved by conveying the messages and creating the habits that help ensure timely graduation.

RECOMMENDATION #2: CHANGES TO ADVISING AND STUDENT TRACKING

RATIONALE

Many in the academic community at UT Austin and across the nation recognize the critical importance of academic advising to student success. Advisors commonly help students understand their degree plans and find the courses necessary to complete their degrees. But advisors help students in many other ways as well, including counseling on suitable majors, post-college planning, good classroom and study habits, and many other issues related to academic success. Given the complexity of many of the degree programs at UT Austin, they are also essential for helping our students navigate the maze of courses that are necessary to graduate.

There is ample evidence in the research literature on the importance of advising for student success. At UT Austin, the evidence suggests that advisors are the catalyst that ties rising SAT scores to higher graduation rates. As shown in Appendix B, SAT scores at UT Austin were rising throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, but there was no real rise in graduation rates during that time. In 1993, something changed: As SAT scores went up, so too did graduation rates. That mirrored movement continued through the 1990s and persists up until today. In effect, those data show that 1993 was a watershed year for UT Austin in terms of graduation rates. Research and discussion with administrators around campus yields one explanation for this: 1993 was the year that professional advisors came onto campus in large numbers and fundamentally changed the university for the better.

The limited research among students on the quality of advising on campus shows, in general, that students are very satisfied with the advising they receive. Yet, in discussions with students and advisors, the task force learned that advising could still be improved through modifications to the advising culture and the technology used by advisors and students.

PROPOSED ACTION

- Create a university-wide evidence-based document on advising that lays out a philosophy that values and demands four-year graduation.
- Employ a universal format for all degree plans on campus so that all degree plans look the same.

- Redesign the interactive degree audit (IDA) to:
 - provide a more user-friendly graphical interface;
 - tell students whether or not they are on-track for four-year graduation;
 - correlate the degree audit format to the universal degree plan format (noted in bullet #2 above) to aid students' understanding of their current progress;
 - incorporate this information in students' course registration interface and show how any registered course will satisfy requirements, i.e., students will register through the IDA;
 - accommodate dual-degrees and double majors.
- Require that IDAs be completed and electronically acknowledged each semester by all undergraduate students.

SUPPORT FROM OTHER REPORTS

The Report of the Task Force on Enrollment Strategy (2003) recommended boosting average numbers of hours taken per semester from just over 13 to 14. Such a change would require advisors to encourage students to take 15 hours and to discourage students from registering for part-time status or dropping hours. The Report of the Second Task Force on Enrollment Strategy (2009) further recommends developing more electronic resources to support advising and monitor students' progress toward the degree. The report on four-year graduation rates (2011) has many recommendations related to advising and student tracking. Primary among these recommendations is the creation of an electronic academic warning system. Students who triggered the warning system would be required to see an advisor. Similarly, that report recommends creating online tools, similar to those employed at the University of Florida, Penn State and UCLA to better track student success and progress toward the degree.

RESOURCES NEEDED

It is likely that current staffing levels are sufficient to create the document on advising and make changes to existing degree plans. It is also likely that current staffing on campus is sufficient to create a new version of the IDA that meets these stated goals. The new champion of graduation rates (see Primary Recommendation #3) would be expected to work with various offices on campus to ensure that these staffing resources are prioritized in a way that allows for swift implementation of the goals.

RETENTION OR THROUGHPUT

The primary intention of these recommendations is to increase throughput by making it easier for students to manage and plan their degree progress. It is possible that they could aid in retention by giving students in their first two years a clearer picture of the route to graduation.

RECOMMENDATION #3: APPOINT A CHAMPION OF GRADUATION RATES

RATIONALE

The changes outlined above are ambitious but necessary to achieve the university's undergraduate graduation rate goal. Not only must the changes be put into effect, but if the university is to meet the goal within five years, they must be made relatively quickly. To move an organization as large as UT Austin forward in a short amount of time will take concerted effort on the part of a small number of individuals who are solely dedicated to reaching the goal. Thus, even in an era of limited budgets and resources, it seems essential to create a new position designed to oversee improvements in undergraduate graduation rates. This new position might informally be dubbed the “champion” of graduation rates.

This newly appointed champion of graduation rates would be expected to implement the task force recommendations, working with members of the university and college administrations to identify resources, convincing various constituencies that the goal is a worthwhile one; and making certain that progress toward the goal is made in a timely way. At the moment there are no administrative personnel either in the President's or Provost's offices who have the ability to commit all of their time to such a task. Thus, it is essential that the university create a new position, the champion of graduation rates, to oversee this program. It is likely that once most of the major recommendations are implemented, this position will no longer be needed; consequently, the position should be created with an expected lifespan of 3-5 years.

Research conducted by the task force also revealed that for many students an impediment to graduation is availability of courses needed to graduate. It is easy to see how course availability could play such an important role. In some majors, missing one course in a sequence, either because the course was not being taught in the semester it was needed, or because all of the seats were full, could mean a delay of graduation by one semester or by a full year. With a four-and-a-half year graduation rate of about 64%, those half-semester delays add up to many students delaying graduation beyond the four-year mark. Given the importance of course availability for overall graduation rates, it is critical that the university appoint a member of the administration to oversee availability of courses that are required for graduation. This course administrator should report to the provost and have access to the resources necessary to offer new sections of courses as needed to prevent bottlenecks. Part of these resources would include the ability to track student flow in an effort to anticipate where classes are needed. The course administrator should also work with colleges to develop summer course offerings that meet student academic needs.

Both of these positions would be expected to meet regularly with key administrative personnel in the university to implement the task force proposals. These personnel include but are not limited to the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, the Dean of Undergraduate Studies, the Registrar, and the Director of Financial Aid. The champion would also be expected to meet quarterly with the Task Force on Undergraduate Graduation Rates to update the members on progress towards the goal. Likewise, the champion would meet annually with the President, Provost and task force to discuss progress over the year. This would help ensure that the issue never fades into the background and that there is clear accountability for progress.

PROPOSED ACTION

- Create a new administrative position, the “champion” of graduation rates, that reports to the President and Provost, is specifically tasked with improving graduation rates, and remains in place for 3-5 years.
- Create a separate administrative position that reports to the Provost, oversees course management across the university, and is indefinite in duration.
- Provide sufficient resources in staff and funding to implement the task force recommendations.
- Encourage the champion to hold colleges accountable for increases in retention and four-year graduation rates.

SUPPORT FROM OTHER REPORTS

The report on raising four-year graduation rates (2011) in Appendix C proposes centralized oversight of plans and programs meant to improve graduation rates. That report recommends that the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education coordinate such oversight. We agree that such oversight is necessary, but given all of the duties currently assigned to the vice provost position, the task force considers it is well beyond the position’s capacity to take on such an enormous task; hence, our recommendation that the centralized oversight consist of new positions.

RESOURCES NEEDED

The resources to fulfill these recommendations will primarily be the salaries necessary to staff the two new positions. Staff support will also be necessary to help the persons in these positions perform their duties.

RETENTION OR THROUGHPUT

These recommendations should aid both retention and throughput. Given that the champion will oversee the implementation of the recommendations, he or she will be responsible for working on both issues.

Secondary Recommendations

Early in the deliberative process, the task force created a driver diagram meant to inform and structure its thinking on graduation rates. Based on this diagram, the task force identified several key areas that warranted attention in an effort to improve graduation rates. These five areas included (1) advising and choice of major ; (2) academic and social integration; (3) degree plans and course availability; (4) academic policy; and (5) financial aid, tuition incentives and semester limits. Once these areas of focus were decided, the task force broke into subcommittees to investigate the issues associated with each area and make recommendations for improving graduation rates. The work of these subcommittees was substantial and consumed much of the effort that the task force undertook to create the list of final recommendations.

This section of the report provides the recommendations made by each of the subcommittees. All of the recommendations reported in the primary recommendations above originated in the subcommittees but will not be repeated in this section. In other words, these recommendations do not overlap with those described above, though they originated in the same committees.

ADVISING AND CHOICE OF MAJOR

The advising and choice of major subcommittee, chaired by Professor Brent Iverson, examined the role that academic advising and degree planning played in helping students to graduate in a timely manner. The task force as a whole agreed that the recommendations made by this subcommittee were central to reaching the overall graduation rate goal and should be placed into the primary recommendation category. Thus, all of the proposed actions created by this group are discussed in the section above. It is important to note that this subcommittee was the largest on the task force, and the issues raised by the group were discussed at great length by the entire task force. In short, the task force agreed that the university advising community, and the value that the advisors bring to the students, is extremely important and must be supported and extended.

ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION

The academic and social integration subcommittee, chaired by Professor Rowena Fong, examined the role that integration plays in the success of students on campus. Decades of research on student success have shown quite clearly that an important predictor of student success is the connectedness students

feel toward the campus, their coursework, other students on campus, and the values of the university community. The subcommittee agreed that for graduation rates to improve, the university must place a renewed emphasis on increasing the integration felt by students.

One of the primary ways of increasing student integration is a freshman orientation that lays the groundwork for a welcoming and integrated campus environment. Given the importance of freshman orientation, this subcommittee spent considerable time reviewing our freshman orientation and that of other universities. Discussions with students, advisors and others around campus on how to improve orientation and extend its effects resulted in a list of recommendations noted in the primary recommendations section on freshman orientation. They also made recommendations about the first-year experience that are included in the section above.

Integrate, Educate and Graduate (IEG)

RATIONALE

The university must make a greater effort to prioritize and value both social and academic integration. Too often students feel left out of the university community because they are not sufficiently connected to the academic and social opportunities on the campus. Many students, especially those from smaller high schools, come to the campus and are overwhelmed by the sheer size and scope of the university. Given the size, it is easy for students to fall between the cracks and feel disconnected from the life of the campus. Some of these students will remain disconnected and not fulfill their true potential, while others will simply drop out. Consequently, it is incumbent on the university to prioritize the values of academic and social integration and promote those values across the campus community.

PROPOSED ACTION

- Create a new campaign around the message, “Integrate, Educate, Graduate.”
- The mission statement of this new campaign: All members of the university community must work together as a team to ensure that our students become integrated, get educated, and be graduated in four years.

SUPPORT FROM OTHER REPORTS

None.

RESOURCES NEEDED

Funding and staffing necessary to create and employ this new messaging campaign.

RETENTION OR THROUGHPUT

The purpose of these recommendations is to improve both retention and throughput. By creating this campaign, it sends a message to all students that integration is important for success on

campus. That message will help newer students find their place on campus but will also encourage more experienced students to remain actively engaged throughout their time at the university.

Improving Integration through Campus Enrichment Experiences

RATIONALE

Many students on campus undertake academic opportunities outside of the classroom that promote integration into the campus community. Research, including some conducted at UT Austin, has shown that students who engage in academic enrichment programs, such as undergraduate research and study abroad, outside of the classroom are more successful in their classes, better connected and more satisfied with the university, and are more likely to graduate; consequently, it is in the best interests of the university and its students to increase the levels of activity in these areas. Moreover, UT Austin must take steps to help students understand how these experiences fit into an overall framework of academic integration and so can contribute to their success. Given the importance of the first-year experience, new enrichment programs should be especially attuned to students in that year of study.

PROPOSED ACTION

- Prioritize programs in undergraduate research, study abroad, academic service learning, and other similar programs.
- Prioritize social involvement in other forms of campus life that continually integrate students into the daily life of the campus community.
- Tie these programs into the IEG framework noted above to provide students a broader view of the implications of their work in these areas.

SUPPORT FROM OTHER REPORTS

The Task Force on Curricular Reform report argues that academic units should create more capstone experiences for their students.

RESOURCES NEEDED

Colleges and departments will likely need additional funding resources necessary to increase activities in these areas. Likewise, the Study Abroad Office would need additional resources to ensure that financial considerations are not an issue for students wishing to study abroad. To help students become more integrated in terms of social involvement, assistance will be required from divisions within Student Affairs, such as Recreational Sports, Housing and Food Services, the Texas Union, and the Dean of Students office. Each of these organizations has a special mission to the university and can organize and integrate students in ways that are unavailable to the academic units.

RETENTION OR THROUGHPUT

Given the research on integration and campus success, it is likely that because many of these integrating activities happen during the junior and senior years, they will assist more with throughput than retention. However, to the extent that these activities, and especially those in the social sphere, can be oriented toward first- and second-year students, they should assist with retention as well.

ACADEMIC POLICY

The academic policy subcommittee, chaired by Professor Mary Steinhardt, examined university policies to determine whether they were aligned with the goal of timely graduation. Their review of previous task force reports and the policy recommendations contained within revealed an important insight: Previous task forces had made astute observations about the need for certain policy changes and had proposed effective recommendations for dealing with those issues, yet most of their recommendations were never implemented. Thus, the subcommittee determined, above all, that for meaningful change to take place on campus, a champion of graduation rates must be recruited to implement the recommendations made by this task force. That recommendation was discussed in more detail in the primary recommendations noted above. In addition to that recommendation, the subcommittee made several others.

Policies on Internal Transfers

RATIONALE

Many students on campus change their majors and transfer between colleges. Indeed, research has shown that a majority of students at UT Austin will change their majors at least once before graduation. The subcommittee understands that students must have the flexibility to change majors and to find the course of study that best fits their abilities and plans for the future. Nevertheless, it is also the case that some of these transitions can be detrimental to students in terms of delaying their time to graduation. Research on student records at UT Austin supports this contention: In general, students who change their majors or transfer between colleges after the fourth semester in residence are less likely to graduate in four years. Moreover, some students who attempt to get into restricted colleges and fail will spend semesters or years in the hope that they will one day be accepted. These students often never get into those colleges and thus are put behind in the programs of study that are available to them. Given all of these considerations, the subcommittee made several recommendations.

PROPOSED ACTION

- Allow students to apply to a restricted college one time; students who are denied cannot reapply to that college.
- Do not allow students to change their major or college after four long semesters in residence without showing they can graduate in four years.

- Do not allow students to declare more than two majors without showing they can graduate in four years.
- Require restricted colleges to set aside 20% of each cohort for internal transfers (using a time limit consistent with other recommendations).
- Expand interdisciplinary programs and degrees such as Business Foundations and the Bridging Disciplines Programs in an effort to accommodate students who cannot gain admission to selected colleges.

SUPPORT FROM OTHER REPORTS

Several of these recommendations are supported by recommendations made in other reports. For example, the report on raising four-year graduation rates makes several recommendations related to the timing of major changes and adding second majors. The report from the Task Force on Curricular Reform advocated allowing 20% of seats in restricted colleges being made available to internal transfers. The Task Force on Enrollment Strategy recommended that students would not be allowed to apply to a restricted program more than once.

RESOURCES NEEDED

These recommendations are primarily changes in policy and so require few resources. However, resources are needed to track students so that they can show a path to timely graduation if they want to change majors after the fourth semester or add more than two of them. Likewise, sufficient advising resources must be available to discuss these issues with students and review their plans for timely graduation.

RETENTION OR THROUGHPUT

These recommendations are primarily aimed at throughput as they focus on students who are increasing time-to-degree through repeated attempts to be admitted to closed colleges or through multiple changes of major.

Programs for Students in Academic Jeopardy

RATIONALE

As noted in the introductory section to this report, about 6% of UT Austin's students are dismissed for academic reasons and another 11% drop out. Those who drop out are more similar to the dismissed students in terms of academic success (e.g., GPA) than those who eventually graduate. Thus, to improve retention and lower levels of dismissal and disengagement from the university, colleges and departments must prioritize programs meant to work with students in academic jeopardy or those at risk of dropping out.

PROPOSED ACTION

- Require colleges to create and administer intervention programs for students in academic jeopardy and those returning from academic dismissal.

SUPPORT FROM OTHER REPORTS

The Second Task Force on Enrollment Strategy advocated reviewing dismissal policies and establishing more rigorous readmissions policies. The report on four-year graduation rates argued that students at-risk for attrition should be enrolled in academic support programs. The report further argues that the university should try to develop a diversity of programs that target students with different backgrounds and time in the university.

RESOURCES NEEDED

Some colleges (e.g., College of Liberal Arts) already have programs in place meant to help students in these situations, yet even these colleges would need the financial resources necessary to expand their programs. For colleges with no existing intervention efforts, substantial resources may be necessary to create and administer new programs.

RETENTION OR THROUGHPUT

Given that a major source of attrition is academic dismissal, this recommendation is primarily meant to improve retention efforts.

DEGREE PLANS AND COURSE AVAILABILITY

The degree plans and course availability subcommittee, chaired by Professor Robert Gilbert, examined how complexity in degree plans and availability of required courses impeded overall time to graduation. Previous task forces had spent considerable time and effort reviewing these same issues, but many of the recommendations made by those groups were never implemented. The subcommittee reviewed those previous recommendations but also spoke to students and administrators around the university to learn more about problems with course availability and progression through highly structured majors. In their deliberations they also relied upon the recommendations made by the four-year graduation rate report provided in Appendix C.

The work of the subcommittee was also informed by the original research reported in Appendix B. This research found that, in general, students graduating in five years had about the same number of hours completed after four years as students graduating in four years. Although the research was unable to look at issues of sequencing and course availability, the patterns revealed in the data suggested that having enough hours to graduate may be less of a barrier to timely graduation than having the courses required to graduate. This belief is supported by another finding from the student records research showing that the typical student graduates with over 25 hours of credit-by-exam and transfer work, roughly the equivalent of one year of in-residence coursework. These findings do not suggest that number of hours taken should be ignored. Rather, they suggest that efforts to improve graduation rates should include

programs and policies meant both to increase the number of hours completed in a semester and also to modifying degree programs and course availability in ways that speed time to graduation.

Identify and Mitigate “Bottleneck” Courses

RATIONALE

One issue repeatedly raised through the subcommittee’s research was the preponderance of bottleneck courses. In general, bottleneck courses are those that are required to graduate, either as core or major-specific requirements, but that do not provide enough seats to meet student demand. Some bottlenecks are created because not enough sections are offered, others are created because the seats that are offered are restricted to students in certain majors. Another source of bottlenecks are “stealth” hours, or the hours required in laboratory and practicum courses that are not truly represented in the course hours assigned to the class. Students enrolling in these sections, often one-hour classes, are prevented from adding other courses because of the time commitment necessary to adequate completion of those low-credit classes. Research conducted by the task force revealed that satisfaction of students with the university was lowest for the availability of courses, a finding that supports this set of recommendations.

PROPOSED ACTION

- Request that colleges and departments conduct audits to identify bottleneck courses that are created through a lack of sections offered or the restriction of seats; once bottleneck courses are identified, departments should employ additional resources to mitigate those problems.
- Identify courses that require a number of stealth hours and request that colleges and departments reconsider the course numbers for those classes in an effort to more closely align them with the time requirements for the course.

SUPPORT FROM OTHER REPORTS

The four-year graduation report advocates for addressing bottleneck course issues through review of existing courses and availability of resources needed to correct problems with availability.

RESOURCES NEEDED

Colleges and departments will need the technical resources necessary to track and identify courses that create bottlenecks for their students. Departments and colleges may also need additional resources to offer the sections and seats that would be necessary to eliminate the bottlenecks. The resources associated with these proposed actions could come through the course management position described in the primary recommendations section.

RETENTION OR THROUGHPUT

The goal of these recommendations is to improve throughput by increasing the availability of classes needed to graduate.

Core Course Instruction

RATIONALE

Core courses are what their name suggests, the courses that are required for all undergraduates and are the foundation of undergraduate education at UT Austin. The core course designation is an indicator of their importance to the university, its students and the larger society. Yet, too often core courses at the university are overloaded with students and poorly taught. Many of UT Austin's students will encounter these courses early in their careers, and because of their quality, may either become alienated or suffer academically. Other courses that are not core courses but are nevertheless required by many majors on campus suffer from similar problems. Over the past few years, colleges have identified issues with some of these courses and have attempted to make improvements, but it is clear that more action is needed.

PROPOSED ACTION

- Provide financial incentives for faculty to teach these courses and teach them effectively.
- Assign resources for core courses based on enrollment and quality of instruction rather than on historical funding levels.
- Instill a culture within the faculty that encourages the best teachers to teach these courses.

SUPPORT FROM OTHER REPORTS

The report on four-year graduation argues for reviewing core course availability to ensure sufficient seats are made available to students. The Task Force on Enrollment Strategy report advocates for a review of the core curriculum, partly in an effort to ensure needed flexibility in degree plans given resource constraints.

RESOURCES NEEDED

Funds for course offerings would have to be reallocated in an effort to achieve these goals. Additional financial resources may also be needed to incentivize faculty to teach the courses.

RETENTION OR THROUGHPUT

These recommendations primarily affect throughput in that they help ensure adequate high-quality staffing for core courses needed to graduate.

Following the Core Curriculum Sequence

RATIONALE

As discussed above, the core courses are meant to lay a foundation for future learning. Optimally, they would be taken near the beginning of students' careers so that other courses could build upon those academic foundations. Yet, too often students take core classes late in their careers; at times the courses are taken so late that they delay timely graduation. Encouraging students to take core courses early will both prevent students from delaying graduation and will help ensure their later academic success in upper-division courses.

PROPOSED ACTION

- Provide incentives (e.g., registration priority) to students to encourage following the proper core curriculum sequence.
- Provide disincentives (e.g., bars for entering major sequence) to students to discourage taking courses out of sequence.
- Require that students complete a pre-specified percentage of the core requirements by the end of the sophomore year.
- Communicate to students why the sequence matters.

SUPPORT FROM OTHER REPORTS

The four-year graduation report advocates for an electronic warning system that would track progress toward degree in terms of proportion of the degree completed.

RESOURCES NEEDED

The proposed actions entail mostly a change in policy and should not require additional resources. However, students falling out of sequence will need to meet with advisors, which might imply the need for more advising resources.

RETENTION OR THROUGHPUT

These recommendations are meant to improve throughput by helping ensure students follow the proper course sequences on the route to timely graduation. Taking core courses early also guarantees that they will not be needed when close to graduation and thus are less likely to cause delays in that outcome.

Student Classification Consistency

RATIONALE

At the moment students are classified (i.e., first-year, sophomore, junior, senior) based on number of hours completed. Ideally these classifications would reflect progress toward the degree, but in reality they simply reflect the number of hours completed. Students should know that these classifications matter in the sense that they reflect real progress and not just accumulated hours. Because some benefits on campus are tied to these classifications, they should reflect what is meaningful about students' progress through the university. It would also allow the university to end the all-to-common practice of classifying first-year students as sophomores or juniors due to the number of credit-by-exam hours claimed.

PROPOSED ACTION

- Make student classification consistent with progress toward a degree.

SUPPORT FROM OTHER REPORTS

The report on four-year graduation argues for basing student classification based on semesters completed rather than on hours completed.

RESOURCES NEEDED

This fairly minor recommendation might entail an entire reworking of the technology that classifies students. The degree audits would have to be able to quantify progress toward the degree based on hours completed, required courses taken, and other requirements fulfilled, and then establish cut-points that divide students based on levels of completion. Depending on the capabilities of the current audit systems, this effort may entail a significant expenditure of resources. Yet, this effort would be consistent with the recommendations made above about a new IDA, and should be considered in that context.

RETENTION OR THROUGHPUT

This recommendation is meant to improve throughput by helping to ensure that students at different stages of their academic careers receive proper priority levels for university practices, such as registration.

Reworking Five-Year Programs

RATIONALE

Some master's programs that require five years of instruction do not provide for receiving an undergraduate degree at the end of four years. As a consequence, students in these programs, who could have graduated in four years, are instead counted as not having graduated in four years and thus lower the overall four-year graduation rate. There is no clear benefit to this system; in

contrast, a system that allows a student to finish the bachelor's degree in four years and then the master's degree in the fifth year would still accomplish the goals of the master's program but would also increase the four-year graduation rate. This issue is not widespread across the university but in certain areas can contribute significantly to graduation rates.

Discussions with students and advisors also revealed that students sometimes take on additional majors because they believe the majors will provide them with an advantage for graduate/professional school or on the job market. Unfortunately, there is no strong support for this idea, thus students who are pursuing additional majors for that reason may be unnecessarily delaying graduation. A better option for students who want to stay a fifth year and increase their credentials in the process would be to earn a bachelor's degree in three-and-a-half or four years, and then spend that extra time pursuing a master's degree in their own course of study. Few programs of this kind on campus exist, yet the potential benefits to students and the university are great.

PROPOSED ACTION

- Request that existing five-year programs explore the possibility of awarding a bachelor's degree at the end of four years and the master's degree in an additional graduate year.
- Encourage colleges to develop new packages for students to earn bachelor's degrees in three-and-a-half to four years and then a graduate or professional degree in the fifth or sixth years.

SUPPORT FROM OTHER REPORTS

None.

RESOURCES NEEDED

It is unclear what resources would be needed to implement these solutions. In the initial stages of planning, some resources may be necessary to offset the faculty time necessary to create new programs or modify existing ones. But, once those new programs are in place, they will likely be able to draw on existing resources. Indeed, in some areas of the university where graduate courses are undersubscribed, adding a new set of students to the mix could actually boost revenue and ensure the continuation of those undersubscribed courses.

RETENTION OR THROUGHPUT

These recommendations are meant to improve throughput by allowing students to graduate in four years but still receive advanced degrees in a short amount of time.

Better Utilize Summer Resources

RATIONALE

Over the past several years the university has recognized that too few students take courses during the summer. Various efforts have been undertaken across the campus to increase summer enrollment, but to date little progress seems to have been made on this front. Yet, increasing summer enrollment is in the best interests of students as it can speed time to degree and help fill the large amount of unused instructional capacity available in the summer. Prior to the first year, summer can also be used as a time to help students who are less prepared for the academic rigors of the university. Students identified with these lower levels of preparation can be given access to core courses and special programs meant to bring them in line with many other students and put them on a relatively equal footing in their first semester on campus.

PROPOSED ACTION

- Create a summer admissions cohort for students to take core requirements and become acquainted with UT Austin prior to the start of the first fall semester; these programs would be targeted at students who are in at-risk categories or who meet some area-specific criteria.
- Create flat-rate summer tuition to encourage students to take more than three hours during the summer.

SUPPORT FROM OTHER REPORTS

The Second Task Force on Enrollment Strategy report mentions expanding summer enrollment in an effort to speed time-to-degree. The four-year graduation report argues that summer tuition should be cheaper as the university cannot compete with community colleges on price.

RESOURCES NEEDED

Because of the underutilization of the instructional capacity in the summer, additional resources may be necessary to field new classes. Depending on the mix of students admitted into a summer admissions cohort, additional funds may be necessary to help these students offset the costs of attendance during that time.

RETENTION OR THROUGHPUT

The summer admissions cohort is meant to improve retention by helping under-prepared students get ready for the academic rigors of the university. The summer tuition program is meant to improve throughput by increasing the number of hours taken during summer semesters.

FINANCIAL AID, TUITION INCENTIVES AND SEMESTER LIMITS

The financial aid, tuition incentives, and semester limits subcommittee, chaired by Professor Beverly Hadaway, considered the financial issues that affect timely graduation. In the course of their research

they reviewed materials provided by the Office of Student Financial Services, spoke to administrators around the university, examined data from student and financial aid records, and in general considered the literature on student success related to finances. They discovered that student finances are a significant barrier to degree completion for some students, but for many others finances impose no significant hardship that would delay timely graduation. Indeed, the finances of some students and their families are so strong that staying a fifth or sixth year is an enticing alternative to entering a competitive and depressed job market. Thus, the subcommittee considered some actions that would target students who need additional financial support and other actions that would provide financial disincentives to staying longer than four years.

Reconsidering the Structure of Financial Aid

RATIONALE

Too often students do not receive enough financial aid to pay their way through school. That fact combined with a general aversion to student debt means that many students will attempt to work for pay, sometimes for long hours, in an effort to pay for their educations. An aversion to student debt and willingness to work instead is understandable, but taking jobs off-campus lowers levels of campus integration and likely hinders success. One way to combat this problem is for the university to offer more on-campus employment that both fulfills the financial needs of students and helps keep them connected to campus.

Likewise, students receiving merit-based scholarships will sometimes take fewer hours than possible in an effort to preserve a high GPA and thus the merit scholarships. Yet, research at UT Austin (see Appendix B) and elsewhere has indicated that taking more hours actually increases academic integration and in so doing improves academic performance. In short, it is in the best interests of our students to get the financial aid they need to avoid off-campus employment and to take the number of hours necessary to complete degrees in a timely manner.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

- Explore ways to lower the net price of attendance to low income and at-risk students.
- Increase summer institutional grant funding to offset the loss of federal Pell Grants.
- Increase to 15 hours the minimum number of hours that students must take to maintain certain merit-based scholarships.
- Generate more on-campus undergraduate jobs.
- Provide mandatory academic support (e.g., tutoring, academic counseling) for freshman financial aid recipients.

SUPPORT FROM OTHER REPORTS

The Task Force on Enrollment Strategy report includes the recommendation that 15 hours be the minimum for certain scholarships.

RESOURCES NEEDED

It is almost certainly the case that substantial amounts of financial resources would be necessary to lower the cost of attendance, provide more grant funding, and offer more on-campus employment. To provide mandatory academic support, it might also be necessary to increase staffing at the Sanger Learning and Career Center and other similar organizations on campus.

RETENTION OR THROUGHPUT

These proposed efforts are meant to increase both retention and throughput. For example, increasing grant funding to offset the loss of Pell funding will aid in retention. Likewise, increasing the number of hours required to receive certain scholarships will mean more hours taken per semester and thus more throughput.

Tuition Incentives and Disincentives

RATIONALE

Although some students at the university struggle to pay for their educations, many do not. It is the case that tuition and other costs at UT Austin have been rising over the past decade, but the costs at UT Austin are still significantly lower than those for many of its peer universities. Many students recognize the great value and high quality of the UT Austin education and are happy to enter. Unfortunately, some of those students become too attached to the university, or become afraid to enter the job market, and opt to stay past four years. To encourage these students to graduate, it may be necessary for the university to provide financial disincentives, in the form of increased tuition, for students who wish to stay past the four-year mark. These disincentives would not prevent students from staying past four years, but the money raised by them could be rerouted to students in financial need who wish to graduate in a timely manner. Thus, the disincentive likely would both increase graduation rates in the incentivized population and increase them in the population with financial need.

At the moment the university has a tuition rebate program based on state law. This program specifies that graduating students can receive a \$1,000 rebate if they complete no more than three hours above the number of hours needed for their degree plan. This program is admirable in design but does not really address the four-year graduation rate issue. Students often will quickly go above the rebate because of transfer and credit-by-exam hours, thus making the rebate a useless incentive for them. Others will miss it by one or two hours, which creates consternation on the part of students, parents and university administrators. A program that targeted four-year graduation, rather than hours completed, would be much more effective in helping the university reach its goal.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

- Enforce the “slacker” rule to allow the university to charge non-resident tuition to Texas residents who do not earn a degree in a certain number of hours.
- Promote the existing tuition rebate program.

SUPPORT FROM OTHER REPORTS

The four-year graduation report argues for enforcing the “slacker” law and disallowing students in the ninth semester or later from receiving scholarships.

NEEDED RESOURCES

Enforcing the slacker rule would cost little in resources, as would promoting the existing tuition rebate program. A new program meant to provide incentives for graduating in four years would require substantial additional resources.

RETENTION OR THROUGHPUT

The goal of these recommendations is to improve throughput by providing financial incentives to graduate in a timelier manner.

Creating Semester Limits

RATIONALE

Other than the financial considerations noted above, the university currently has no structure in place for disincentives to graduating in the fifth or sixth years. In other words, students staying a fifth or sixth year incur more costs, but otherwise there is no real penalty for staying that length of time. Students are also not made aware of the importance of graduating in four years or of the progress they are making toward that goal. For the graduation rate to increase, changes in incentives, values and information must change to align with the goal.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

- Establish a 10-semester limit to complete a bachelor’s degree with careful consideration of five-year programs and dual degrees; students that exceed the 10-semester limit would be required to reapply to the program.

SUPPORT FROM OTHER REPORTS

The Second Task Force on Enrollment Strategy report specifically advocates for the 10-semester limit to complete a baccalaureate degree.

RESOURCES NEEDED

These proposed actions represent a change in policy that would require no additional resources beyond those that would need to be committed to the items above.

RETENTION OR THROUGHPUT

This recommendation is meant to improve throughput by encouraging students to graduate faster. It attempts to free up resources by keeping students from taking classes in the sixth year and beyond.

Additional Considerations on Incentives and Resources

RATIONALE

Students often are not aware of the resources that are available to help them with specific coursework. Throughout campus these academic support services do exist and can be of help, but students often underutilize them due to a lack of information. Likewise, students at the university are not encouraged to identify with an entering class or to value graduating with their matriculating cohort. Increasing a feeling of solidarity with a cohort would encourage students to make progress consistent with the group and so graduate with them. Because the modal graduation rate is four years, students more closely identifying with their incoming cohorts will be more likely to graduate in that modal year.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

- Require all core courses to include on syllabi information relating to tutors or other academic support services relevant for the course.
- Establish a “Class of 20xx” mentality among students to create a cohort identity by using promotional materials, orientation activities, and other reinforcing elements.
- Consider a graduation recognition token for students who graduate in four years.

SUPPORT FROM OTHER REPORTS

None.

RESOURCES NEEDED

Some funding would be needed to create materials meant to create and solidify cohort identity. The syllabus requirement could be met with existing instructional resources.

RETENTION OR THROUGHPUT

The primary goal of these recommendations is to increase throughput by creating a culture that values four-year graduation.

Priority Recommendations from the Raising Four-Year Graduation Rates Report

During the summer of 2011 the Task Force commissioned the College of Liberal Arts Advising Leadership Team to write a report consisting of recommendations to improve the undergraduate graduation rate and time-to-degree. To help compile the information they would need to make effective recommendations, the members of the team visited UCLA, Penn State, the University of Michigan and the University of Florida to learn more about the practices and policies that encourage high graduation rates at those universities. The team then met repeatedly to share information about the visits with one another and to devise the policy and practice recommendations that might encourage faster time-to-degree at UT. As a result of these discussions, the team produced a report of 50 recommendations that ranged from simple changes in policy to complex ones requiring significant additional resources. Regardless of the content, all of the recommendations were meant to improve graduate rates and time-to-degree. They are reproduced in their entirety in Appendix C.

The Task Force reviewed the team's recommendations and selected the 10 that they felt would have the largest impact on undergraduate graduation rates. Some of the team's proposed solutions were included in the primary and secondary recommendations made above, but these ten selected solutions were significant enough that the Task Force felt they should be highlighted on their own. Listed below are those ten recommendations taken directly from the report. The numbering used to list these items corresponds with the numbering used in Appendix C in order to facilitate their review in the context of the entire set. They are also listed in their order of importance as gauged by the Task Force.

RECOMMENDATION 18: Make new student orientation mandatory, and renew emphasis on the academic mission of the university in orientation programming.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Institute an academic “warning” category to supplement the current table of scholastic standards (i.e., probation and dismissal rules).

RECOMMENDATION 4: Create a “universal” bar.

RECOMMENDATION 14: Do not prorate flat-rate tuition for students taking fewer than 12 hours.

RECOMMENDATION 28: Each college or school should review its degree requirements in search of opportunities to simplify and streamline for the purpose of facilitating timely graduation.

RECOMMENDATION 9: In order to declare any simultaneous (second) major, students must demonstrate that they will be able to complete all degree requirements for all majors on a four-year timetable

RECOMMENDATION 50: Create online tools that allow students and advisors to better monitor degree progress.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Contact enrolled students who have fallen off the radar, as well as potential dropouts, in order to assess and to encourage.

RECOMMENDATION 19: Entrust the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education with, and provide authority for, creating an atmosphere of accountability.

RECOMMENDATION 21: Each unit must be required to assess its own course offerings and productivity, ensuring that course availability is not an obstacle to graduation for either its own majors or for non-majors.

Concluding Remarks

In May 2011, the President of The University of Texas at Austin set a goal for the university: achieve a 70% four-year undergraduate graduation rate within five years. Many observers knew that such a goal would be daunting and would require fundamental change in the university. To help reach the goal the President appointed a task force of students and faculty to propose the essential changes to policy and practice. He knew the task would be challenging, yet he urged them to complete their work by the end of that year. The task force set about their work over the next seven months to devise a set of more than sixty individual recommendations meant to help students achieve their goals, obtain a high-quality education, and graduate in a timely manner.

Those recommendations, discussed in the preceding sections of this report, set a blueprint for change that could affect the way that all undergraduates navigate the university. Some of the recommendations, such as communicating with students the need to follow proper course sequences, are relatively minor in nature. Other recommendations, such as fundamental changes to freshman orientation or reworking the online Interactive Degree Audit system, could possibly require substantial resources and time to enact. Yet, as the results in the analysis appendix show, fundamental change is necessary, and additional resources may be needed to support it.

The findings in the analysis appendix bring into relief the nuances of the problems that the university will face in meeting its goal. Over the past twenty years the four-year graduation rate has risen substantially, but that rise has likely been fueled by the increases in college-preparedness of incoming students, as reflected by SAT scores. Unfortunately, over the past several years SAT scores have flattened, meaning that no new increases in the graduation rate are likely to come from increases in preparedness. Instead, the university must increase the rates through changes in the ways that students perceive and navigate the university.

Yet, the results also show a more positive finding: the 4.5-year graduation rate is more than 60%, and the five-year graduation rate exceeds 75%. Thus, for the university to reach its goal, it must only reduce the time-to-degree by a semester or two for many students on campus. Put in that context, the goal of achieving a 70% four-graduation rate is not so daunting and could be accomplished with the right changes. The results also show that the need to improve rates differs greatly by college, which suggests that the route to success will vary across the university. Colleges should be held accountable for their students' success in this new endeavor, but they should also be provided with the resources and support necessary to make needed changes.

The road ahead is difficult, but the recommendations and analysis provided in this report will help the university find the way to a successful outcome. Navigating that course will nevertheless require leadership, will and determination at all levels of the university. Thus, in many ways, this report is only the first step in a journey that will require the cooperation of many to complete.

Appendix A: People and Resources Consulted by the Task Force

In arriving at the recommendations in the report, it was essential for task force members to talk to people around campus to learn from their knowledge and experience relating to these issues. The task force also undertook research of its own by reviewing data and the relevant research literature on the topic of graduation rates. Listed below are the people and resources consulted by the task force to help generate their recommendations.

MEETINGS WITH THE TASK FORCE

The task force met as a group with a number of campus administrators and students throughout the summer and fall of 2011. These members of the university community provided important insight into the graduation rate problem and how it might be improved. Some also provided materials and reports that were used by the task force in its deliberations. The visitors to the task force are as follows.

UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS AND FACULTY

WILLIAM POWERS, JR.
President Office of the President

HARRISON KELLER
Vice Provost for Higher Education Policy and Research
Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost

STEVEN W. LESLIE
Executive Vice President and Provost
Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost

SHELBY STANFIELD
Vice Provost and Registrar
Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost

GRETCHEN RITTER
Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education
Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost

ISABELLA CUNNINGHAM
Chair, Ernest A. Sharpe Centennial
Professor of Communication
Department of Advertising

KRISTI FISHER
Associate Vice Provost and Director
Office of Information Management and Analysis

TOM MELECKI
Director
Office of Student Financial Services

DAVID TROUTMAN
Associate Director for Research
Office of Information Management and Analysis

STUDENT GOVERNMENT AND SENATE REPRESENTATIVES

NATALIE BUTLER
President
Student Government

CARISA NIETSCHKE
President
Senate of College Councils

LAUREN RATLIFF
Former President
Senate of College Councils

OTHER MEMBERS OF THE UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

SARA MARTINEZ TUCKER
Former Under Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education

MEETINGS OUTSIDE OF THE TASK FORCE

Early in the deliberations of the task force, it split into several subcommittees each meant to address a specific set of issues. These subcommittees were charged with talking to people around campus who might have insights into the issues being considered. Following is a list of the people these subcommittees met with to discuss issues related to graduation.

UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS AND FACULTY

CHARLES ROECKLE
Deputy to the President
Office of the President

KATHLEEN MABLEY
Director of Brand Initiatives
Office of the President

HEATHER BARCLAY HAMIR
Director
Study Abroad

MICHAEL RANEY
Assistant Dean
College of Natural Sciences

DIANE TODD SPRAGUE
Associate Director
Office of Student Financial Services

TRICIA GORE
Assistant Dean
Cockrell School of Engineering

MIGUEL WASIELEWSKI
Program Manager
Office of Student Financial Services

JERRY SPEITEL
John J. McKetta Professor in Engineering
Associate Dean for Academic Affairs
Cockrell School of Engineering

KIM KRIEG
Assistant Dean
College of Liberal Arts

DEPARTMENTAL ADVISORS
Cockrell School of Engineering

2011-12 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
Faculty Council

EDWARD L. FERNANDEZ
Assistant Director
Sanger Learning Center

SHARON WOOD
Chair
Department of Civil, Environmental and
Architectural Engineering

RICHARD HOGEDA
Academic Advising Coordinator
College of Education

KIM GUNDERSON
Associate Executive Director
Texas Exes

MARK BLANKENSHIP
Business Analyst
Information Management and Analysis

LAURENCE ABRAHAM
Associate Dean
School of Undergraduate Studies

HELEN MAYHEW
Senior Software Developer/Analyst
Liberal Arts Instructional Technology Services

JAMES L. HOLMES
Associate Director for Operations
Information Management and Analysis

ALAN CONSTANT
Director
Sanger Learning Center

TIMOTHY FACKLER
Senior Information Technology Manager
Liberal Arts Instructional Technology Services

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

VINCENT ALLPORT
College of Communications
Majors: Radio-Television-Film, Advertising

RACHEL MESCALL
College of Liberal Arts
Majors: Int'l Relations & Global Studies, Geography

SAMANTHA ROBLES
College of Liberal Arts and School of Social Work
Majors: Hispanic Linguistics and Social Work

ASIA ODHAMS
College of Natural Sciences
Major: Biology BS

OTHER ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

The task force consulted many other resources in creating its recommendations. For example, as explained in the introduction to this report, several previous task force reports were reviewed. The task force undertook extensive research of student data; the findings from that research are provided in Appendix B. The task force also conducted focus group research efforts and reviewed existing literature on the topic of student integration and retention.

FOCUS GROUPS

Campus-wide Advisor Focus Group

Moderator: Marc Musick

Campus-wide Undergraduate Student Focus Groups

Moderator: Kathleen Mabley

Civil Engineering Undergraduate Student Focus Groups

Moderators: Bob Gilbert and Sharon Wood

LITERATURE REVIEWED

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UNIVERSITY MEMBERS CONTRIBUTING INFORMATION AND SUGGESTIONS

RICHARD A. CHERWITZ
Professor and Director
Intellectual Entrepreneurship Consortium

YOLANDA C. PADILLA
Professor
School of Social Work

HANK DUGIE
President
Liberal Arts Council

OTHER INFORMATION USED

Materials on Fish Camp from Texas A&M University

- Fish Camp Constitution
- Fish Camp Overview
- Fish Camp Presentation Materials

Appendix B: An Analysis of Graduation Rates at The University of Texas at Austin

The purpose of this appendix is to present an overview of some of the data that were reviewed by the task force when deciding their recommendations. Because the task force wanted a broad view of graduation rates over time, the effects of student characteristics and behaviors on graduation rates, and the effects of financial aid on timely graduation, multiple data resources were necessary. Pulling together these disparate sources of data was a time-consuming effort that required the cooperation of multiple offices on campus, including the Office of Student Financial Services, the Office of Information Management Analysis, and Liberal Arts Instructional Technology Services. Some data were obtained from publicly available records whereas others took extensive work simply to compile for analysis. In short, putting together the separate sources of data was a major undertaking.

Most of the analysis in the appendix is based on student records and financial aid data pulled for first-time-in-college (FTIC) students in the 2004 entering cohort. Because definitions used by federal agencies to calculate graduation rates are based on FTIC students, only those students were used in the analysis. Even though transfer students were ignored in these analyses, they nonetheless make up an important part of the student population and deserve similar attention in terms of data analysis and interpretation. However, given time constraints, such an analysis was not possible here and so should be conducted in the future.

The appendix is divided into five sections, each of which examines the graduation rate issue from a different perspective.

SECTION 1. GRADUATION RATE HISTORY

This section examines graduate rates over time to determine whether rates have increased or decreased over the past two decades. The section also examines whether sources of change can be identified.

SECTION 2. DEGREE COMPLETION IN THE 2004 COHORT

This section examines one cohort, FTIC students entering in 2004. The findings show how the cohort progressed over time in terms of graduation and attrition.

SECTION 3. PREDICTORS OF GRADUATION

Analyses in this section again rely on student record data for the 2004 FTIC cohort but focus on how factors such as background characteristics, major switching, and hours taken affect overall and four-year graduation rates.

SECTION 4. FINANCIAL AID AND GRADUATION RATES

Drawing on data provided by the Office of Student Financial Services and combining it with student records data, this section examines whether different types of financial aid affect graduation rates. The section also seeks to determine overall levels of financial aid provided to students with different outcome statuses.

SECTION 5. STUDENT SATISFACTION AND TIME USE.

The final section of the report relies on a different data set, the Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) survey. Although the data in the SERU survey are quite extensive, a very small subset is used in these analyses. These data are primarily used to determine how satisfied students are with different aspects of the university and whether those satisfaction levels are useful for understanding graduation rates. Time-use data from the SERU survey are also examined to determine overall levels of paid work and other types of behavior among students.

SECTION 1. GRADUATION RATE HISTORY

The four-year graduation rate at UT Austin now hovers around 50-52%. That rate stands in contrast to four-year graduation rates of over 60 or 70% at many of our peer universities around the US. Given this low relative rate, President Powers set forth the goal of achieving a 70% four-year graduation rate within five years. Indeed, his naming of this task force was done with the intention of helping the university reach the 70% goal within five years.

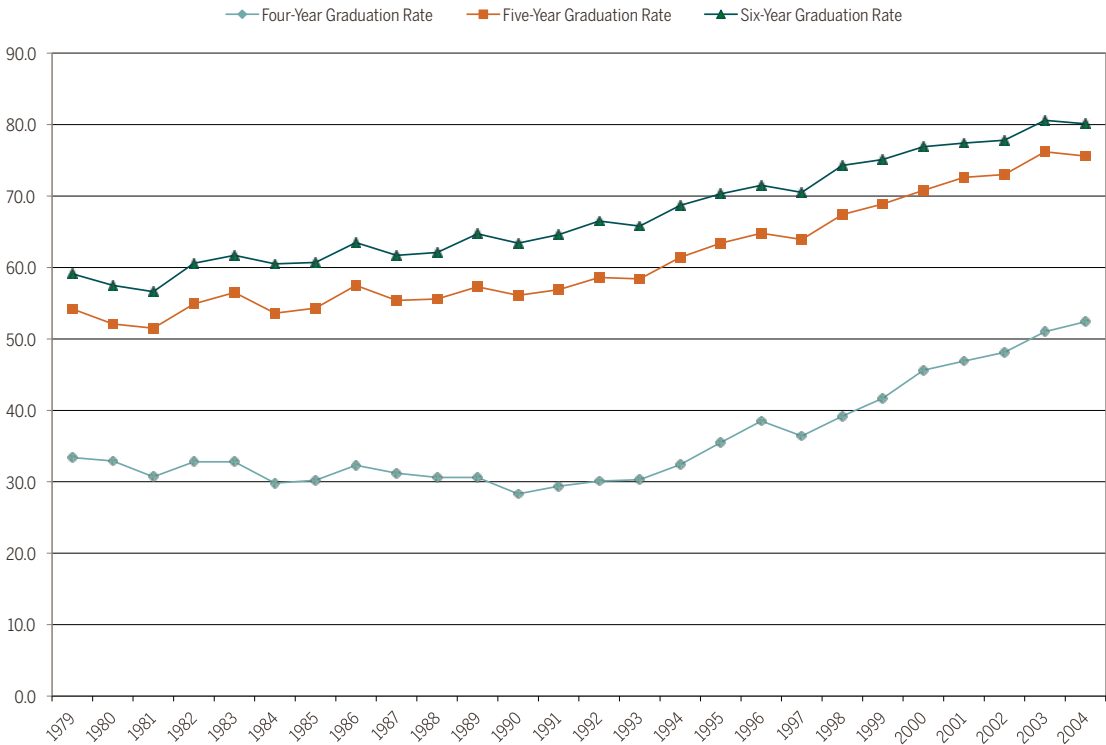
CURRENT GRADUATION RATES IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

What is less commonly understood, however, is the progress UT Austin has made over the past thirty years in improving its graduation rates. The Office of Information Management and Analyses (IMA) publishes yearly statistical handbooks that provide information on many aspects of the university, including its graduation rates. Some of these handbooks are posted on the office's website and go back to 1975-76. Using these posted handbooks, and getting additional information from IMA to fill gaps in the posted figures, it is possible to create a chart of four, five- and six-year graduation rates spanning the 1979-2004 cohorts. The initial findings from this review of the handbooks are shown in Figure 1.1.

A quick review of the chart reveals an obvious trend: in general, overall graduation rates, as measured by the six-year graduation rate, have been on the rise at UT Austin since 1979. This rise has not been uniform, but it is nonetheless consistent with only a few years of downward trend. Overall, during the past three decades the six-year rate has risen about 20 percentage points, from 60% for the 1979 cohort to 80% for the 2004 cohort. The five-year graduation rate closely parallels the six-year rate. The four-year rate, however, differs in significant ways. From 1979 to 1993, the four-year graduation rate remained essentially flat, even in the face of increases in six-year graduation rates. That difference

in trends suggests that the overall gains in overall graduation rates seen in the 1980s were less due to moving students through faster (i.e., throughput) and more due to decreasing attrition. Attrition is driven by students dropping out or being dismissed; thus the higher graduation rates in the 1980s are largely due to less of those outcomes. In 1993, four-year graduation rates began to rise, and those rates have been going up consistently over the past decade. To put the current four-year rate of 50% in perspective, the same rate in 1992 was only 30%. Thus, it is true that UT Austin's four-year graduation rate is somewhat lower than its peers, but it has consistently improved over time, especially starting in the early 1990s.

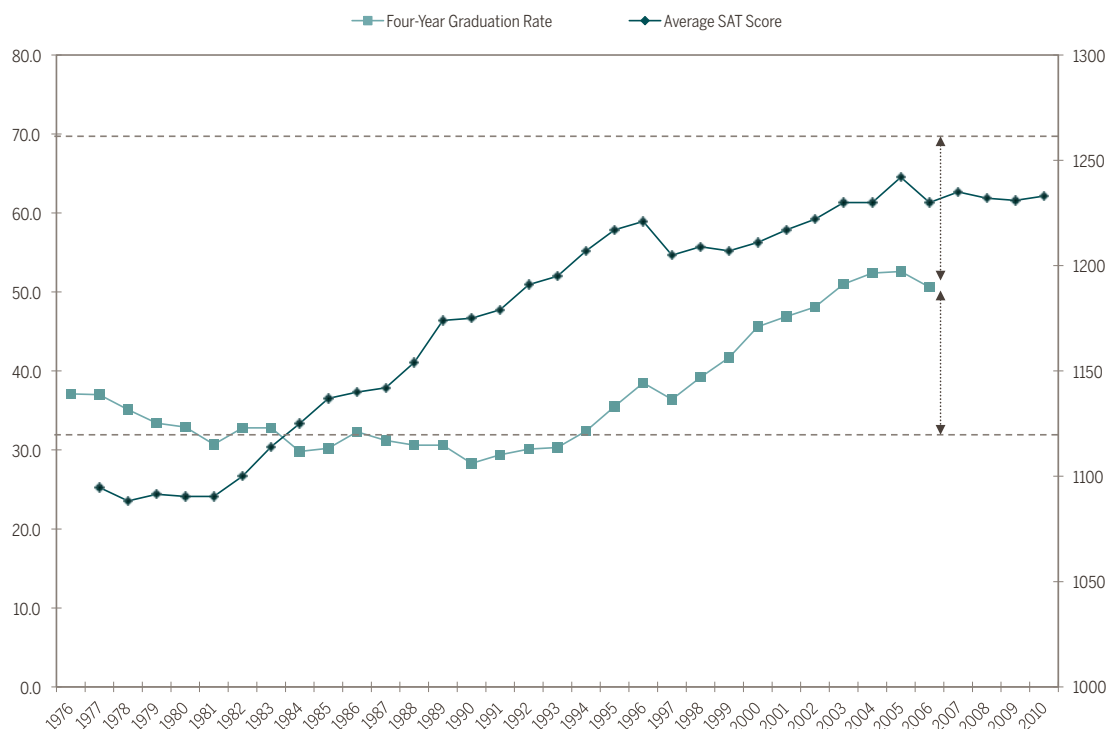
Figure 1.1 Graduation Rates among FTIC Students, 1979 - 2004 Entering Cohorts.



THE DRIVING FORCE OF SAT SCORES ON FOUR-YEAR GRADUATION RATES

What happened in the early 1990s that started driving the four-year graduation rate upward? Figure 1.2 attempts to answer this question by showing the four-year graduation rate along with average SAT score for each entering FTIC cohort. SAT scores are useful for this purpose given the common understanding that those scores are, at an institutional level, very strong predictors of overall graduation rates. Like the graduation rate data, SAT score data were also obtained from IMA records. Gaps in the posted data were filled by requests to IMA. Re-centering of SAT scores was performed, as needed, to ensure uniformity in those scores over time.

Figure 1.2 Four-Year Graduation Rates & Average SAT Scores among FTIC Students, 1975-2010 Entering Cohorts



The figure shows that in the late 1970s and early 1980s, average SAT scores were essentially flat and hovered just below 1100. Beginning in the mid-1980s, SAT scores began to rise and kept doing so, with some exceptions, until 2005. Since 2005, SAT scores again have been essentially flat, hovering around 1230. In contrast, four-year graduation rates were either flat or declined throughout the 1980s and early 1990s until about 1993. But something peculiar happened at that moment: starting in 1993, four-year graduation rates began to closely mirror the movements of SAT scores. Indeed, every year that SAT scores increased, so did the four-year graduation rate. In the two years (i.e., 1997 and 2006) that SAT scores decreased, four-year graduation rates decreased as well. We would expect that the four-year graduation rate would have mirrored SAT scores throughout the study period, but it was only during 1993 and later that such a pattern appeared.

So what happened in 1993 that fundamentally changed the university and allowed higher SAT scores to translate into higher four-year graduation rates? The discovery of this finding prompted a great deal of thought and discussion, but one possibility rose to the top and remains the most likely explanation. As many of the more experienced advisors know, 1993 was the year that professional advising took hold on campus. Before that year, students could see advisors, but usually those visits were limited to degree checks and other regulatory activities. In contrast, in 1993 advisors were being hired in departments to assist students with registration, course selection, and a variety of other issues. The appearance of advisors on campus and the fundamental change in the nature of four-year graduation rates is no simple coincidence. Rather, the finding is clear: professional advising changed this university for the better and has allowed the relatively high four-year graduation rates that it currently enjoys.

But, the figure also paints a somewhat more disheartening picture. Much of the rise in graduation rates over the past 15 years has been largely due to SAT scores. Indeed, the correlation between SAT scores

and four-year graduation rates since 1990 is about 0.89, suggesting an extremely high association between the two factors. Although this finding in itself is not problematic, what is worrisome is the fact that SAT scores have flattened over the last several years. Thus, we can predict that if the pattern over the past 15 years holds, four-year graduation rates will also flatten over the next several years. Increases in those rates in the face of flat SAT scores, especially to the level of 70%, will require fundamental change in the university. Half-measures simply will not allow the university to reach its goal.

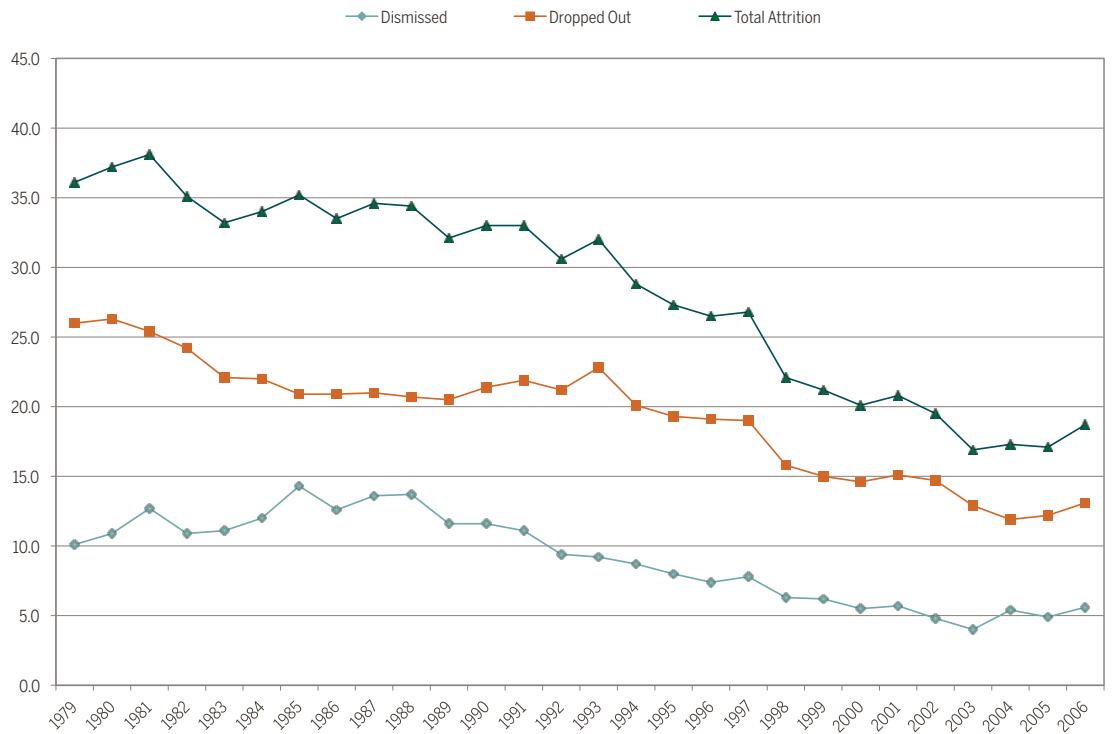
ATTRITION'S ROLE IN GRADUATION RATES

There are two primary ways to improve the four-year graduation rate. One is to increase throughput; that is, have the students who will eventually graduate do so more quickly. Increasing throughput aims to move many of the students who would graduate in five or six years into the four-year graduation rate category. Doing so will likely free up resources for other students as the smaller number of five- and six-year graduates will mean more seats in classes and more access to advisors and faculty. The other method of improving the four-year rate is to decrease attrition. Right now, students attrit either through dropping out of the university or being dismissed, mostly for academic reasons. By lowering these forms of attrition, the university can move more students into graduation, and likely, into graduating in four years. But because many students will be dismissed or drop out in their first or second years, increasing graduation rates through decreases in attrition will actually mean more resources are necessary for the current cohorts. Currently the university staffing of courses and other student services inherently assumes a certain amount of attrition. If that attrition were to disappear, more students would be on campus, and more resources would be necessary.

In short, increasing four-year graduation rates has the potential to free up resources, but in reality, it is almost certainly the case that it will not happen even if the four-year graduation rate increases. A vast majority of students who do not graduate in four years do so in five, so for every student who graduates in four, the university only “saves” about a year of resources. In contrast, for every student saved from attrition, the university will need an extra two or three years of resources, depending on the timing of the attrition. If the rate is increased evenly by decreasing attrition and increasing throughput, then, on balance, the university will actually require more resources over time to educate the same incoming cohort sizes. This difference between throughput and attrition is both fundamental to understanding what needs to be done to change graduation rates but also to understanding the consequences of those changes.

The next figure, Figure 1.3, examines attrition over time to see how the university has improved on these measures. From the first two figures we know that, by definition, because overall graduation rates have gone up, attrition has decreased. But, without the information shown in Figure 1.3, it is unclear how the decrease has occurred.

Figure 1.3 Average Attrition Rates among FTIC Students, 1979-2006 Entering Cohorts.



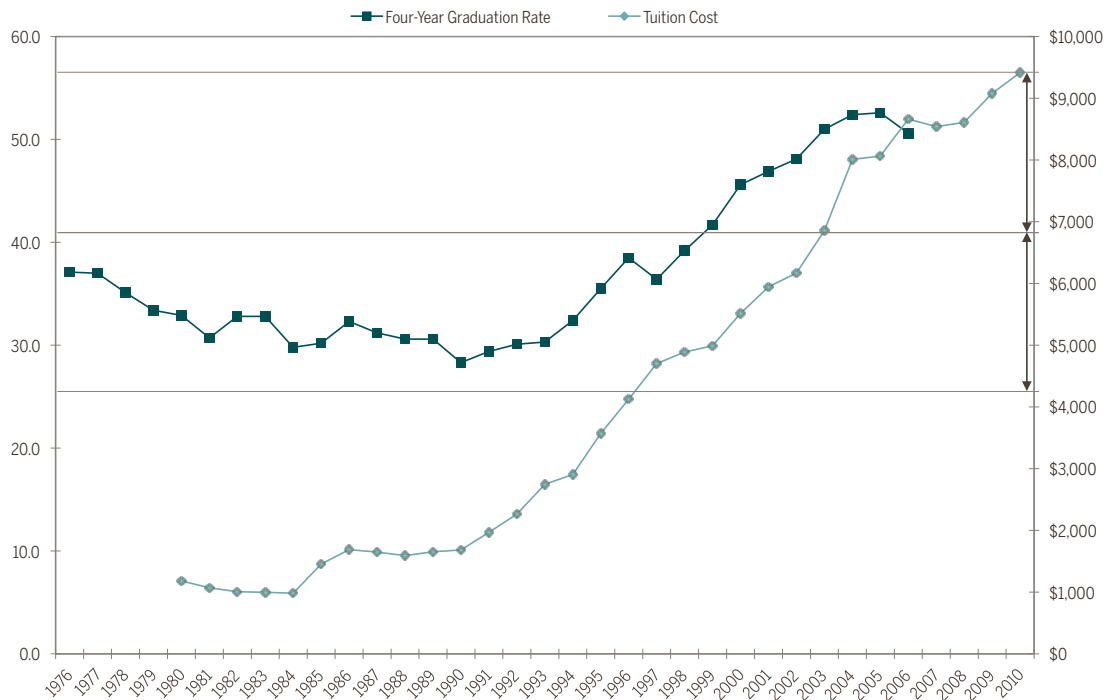
According to the figure, total attrition has dropped from about 36% in 1979 to 18% in 2006, basically being cut in half over that time. Historically students dropping out has been the major source of attrition, and although it has varied over time, about two-thirds of attrition has been due to that source. Currently, about 13% of our students attrit due to dropping out while 5% are dismissed. These findings should be celebrated by the university as they show that UT Austin has done a good job of reducing attrition over the past two decades. But from the perspective of increasing graduation rates, they also provide some warning. These two attrition rates cannot go below zero, and every point closer to zero they get, the more resource-intensive the next point is likely to be. Consequently, the 5% dismissal rate shown in the figure indicates that reducing dismissal levels even more will be both difficult and costly given their current close proximity to zero. Rates of dropping out are somewhat higher. Thus reducing those levels in an effort to boost graduation rates would likely be less resource-intensive. Regardless of where the effort is placed on attrition, given the already relatively low rates of those outcomes, reducing them will likely be difficult and costly, but of the two, solving the drop-out problem may yield the greatest results for the lowest cost.

TUITION AND GRADUATION RATES

Another method of examining trends in graduation rates is to compare them to underlying tuition costs. There is some speculation that tuition costs might actually drive graduation rates lower by placing an increasing burden on students and their families. Observers of higher education in Texas and around the nation know that tuition costs have been steadily increasing at UT Austin and most other public universities around the US. If it were the case that higher tuition costs lead to lower graduation rates, then we should see, over time, those rates falling. But, as the previous figures have shown, the opposite has

occurred: in the face of rising tuition, graduation rates have risen as well. Figure 1.4 further sheds light on these patterns by showing four-year graduation rates and tuition costs at UT Austin in 2010 dollars.

Figure 1.4 Four-Year Graduation Rates and Average Tuition Costs in 2010 Dollars, 1976-2010.



The findings in Figure 1.4 show that throughout the late 1970s and 1980s, four-year graduation rates were either flat or decreasing in general. In contrast, tuition costs, measured in 2010 dollars, were decreasing through the beginning of the 1980s, experienced a jump in the middle of the decade, leveled off again into the early 1990s. In the early 1990s, both the four-year graduation rate and tuition costs began to move together in an upward direction. Given the likely correspondence between tuition costs, selectivity in the student body, levels of college preparedness, and other factors, it is unclear whether rising tuition costs have a positive effect on graduation rates or whether higher tuition costs lead to more selectivity in the student body. It could also be the case that higher tuition costs encourage students to graduate in a more timely manner because of the increased additional costs of staying more than four years. Likewise, more investment in students' educations, via higher tuition costs, may make them more committed to receiving a degree. Clearly more research needs to be done on the issue to better understand the correlation of trends shown in Figure 1.4, but even with this brief examination, there seems to be little evidence that higher tuition costs lead to lower graduation rates.

Another useful finding on the figure concerns the deregulation of tuition. In 2003, the Texas Legislature allowed the university to set its own tuition, and, as shown in the figure, tuition experienced a significant jump in the following year. After that point, however, tuition increases have been relatively modest. The arrows in the chart show the distance in tuition covered since deregulation and then the same distance before deregulation. They show that the rise in tuition from 1996 to 2003 was about the same as 2003 to 2010. In other words, tuition has increased about as much since deregulation as it had before that change in policy over a seven-year period of time. Looking back to the years before 1996, the figure shows that the university significantly increased tuition over a five-year span. In contrast, since 2005, tuition costs have not risen nearly as much, and as the university moves forward in time, it

is likely that they will continue to rise only incrementally if at all. Assuming that trend holds true, then five years from now it will almost certainly be true that tuition costs rose at a much higher rate in the years leading up to deregulation than in the years following it.

A CLOSER LOOK AT TRENDS IN GRADUATION AND ATTRITION

It is useful to examine other trends in these outcomes as they suggest patterns that appear in the first or second year of a cohort that will be played out over subsequent years. The patterns in the early years are also important as they provide a baseline for what is even possible in terms of graduation rates in the latter years of a cohort's time at UT Austin. The figures shown in Table 1.1 provide a breakdown of graduation, attrition, and continuation for up to 10 years across the 2000-06 FTIC cohorts.

Table 1.1 Student Flow among FTIC Students, 2000-2006 Entering Cohorts.

	1 Year	2 Years	3 Years	4 Years	5 Years	6 Years	7 Years	8 Years	9 Years	10 Years
FALL 2000										
% Graduated	0.0%	0.1%	3.6%	45.6%	70.8%	76.9%	78.8%	79.8%	80.5%	80.9%
% Continuing	92.0%	85.8%	79.8%	34.2%	7.9%	2.9%	1.5%	1.0%	0.7%	0.5%
% Dismissed	2.3%	3.8%	4.7%	5.5%	6.0%	5.9%	5.8%	5.8%	5.8%	5.7%
% Dropped Out	5.7%	10.4%	11.8%	14.8%	15.4%	14.3%	13.9%	13.4%	13.1%	12.8%
FALL 2001										
% Graduated	0.0%	0.2%	4.0%	46.9%	72.5%	77.4%	79.1%	80.1%	80.8%	--
% Continuing	91.0%	84.9%	78.4%	32.5%	6.7%	2.4%	1.4%	1.0%	0.7%	--
% Dismissed	3.0%	4.2%	5.1%	5.7%	6.1%	6.1%	6.0%	5.8%	5.7%	--
% Dropped Out	6.0%	10.7%	12.6%	14.9%	14.7%	14.2%	13.5%	13.1%	12.8%	--
FALL 2002										
% Graduated	0.0%	0.2%	4.1%	48.0%	72.9%	77.8%	79.8%	80.8%	--	--
% Continuing	91.8%	85.2%	78.8%	32.3%	6.8%	3.0%	1.2%	0.7%	--	--
% Dismissed	2.4%	3.7%	4.6%	5.3%	5.6%	5.6%	5.6%	5.5%	--	--
% Dropped Out	5.8%	11.0%	12.4%	14.3%	14.7%	13.6%	13.4%	13.0%	--	--
FALL 2003										
% Graduated	0.0%	0.1%	4.3%	50.9%	76.2%	80.6%	82.1%	--	--	--
% Continuing	93.2%	86.9%	81.0%	31.9%	6.0%	2.3%	1.2%	--	--	--
% Dismissed	1.9%	3.1%	3.8%	4.3%	4.7%	4.7%	4.8%	--	--	--
% Dropped Out	4.9%	9.9%	10.9%	12.9%	13.2%	12.4%	11.9%	--	--	--
FALL 2004										
% Graduated	0.0%	0.1%	4.0%	52.4%	75.6%	80.1%	--	--	--	--
% Continuing	93.1%	86.9%	81.6%	30.3%	6.4%	2.2%	--	--	--	--
% Dismissed	2.4%	4.0%	4.7%	5.3%	5.8%	5.8%	--	--	--	--
% Dropped Out	4.4%	9.0%	9.7%	12.0%	12.2%	11.8%	--	--	--	--
FALL 2005										
% Graduated	0.0%	0.1%	4.1%	52.6%	76.5%	--	--	--	--	--

	1 Year	2 Years	3 Years	4 Years	5 Years	6 Years	7 Years	8 Years	9 Years	10 Years
% Continuing	92.5%	87.6%	81.4%	30.3%	6.0%	--	--	--	--	--
% Dismissed	2.3%	3.6%	4.3%	4.9%	5.0%	--	--	--	--	--
% Dropped Out	5.1%	8.7%	10.2%	12.1%	12.5%	--	--	--	--	--
FALL 2006										
% Graduated	0.0%	0.1%	3.7%	50.6%	--	--	--	--	--	--
% Continuing	91.9%	86.9%	81.0%	30.7%	--	--	--	--	--	--
% Dismissed	2.8%	4.0%	4.8%	5.6%	--	--	--	--	--	--
% Dropped Out	5.3%	9.0%	10.5%	13.1%	--	--	--	--	--	--
% Dismissed	2.8%	4.0%	4.8%	5.6%	--	--	--	--	--	--
% Dropped Out	5.3%	9.0%	10.5%	13.1%	--	--	--	--	--	--

The first important statistic on the table is shown in the first year column. The continuing entry in that column is what is commonly referred to as the first-year retention rate. The goal of all universities is to achieve a high first-year retention rate given that timely graduation is predicated on staying past that first year. According to the findings in the table, the first-year retention rate for the last several years has hovered around 92%. One way of increasing the four-year graduation rate would be to increase that retention rate figure, possibly taking it above 95%. A majority of the attrition during that first year is due to students dropping out. Thus to increase retention, the university would need to find ways to avoid that specific outcome.

Another important result coming from this table is found by comparing graduation, continuation and attrition in the fourth and sixth years. Comparing these years, one sees that the percentage of students having dropped out and been dismissed is very similar over time. These are not necessarily all the same students within a given cohort, but the overlap is no doubt extremely large. More importantly, their comparability shows that the majority of students who graduate in five or six years rather than four are not coming from the attrition categories; rather, they are coming from students who were continuing in the fourth year and simply graduated later. Put another way, if these patterns hold, by the fourth year it is fairly easy to predict, with some accuracy, what the six-year graduation rate will be.

Finally, the table shows that although the six-year rate is, for the most part, the total graduation rate, some students do continue to graduate after the sixth year. Across the cohorts for which we have more than six years of data, it appears that the graduation rate rises two percentage points in the seventh year and then another two points across years eight, nine, and ten. Thus, based on the six-year graduation rate, we can fairly accurately predict the total graduation rate.

GRADUATION BY SEMESTER

As shown in the previous table, graduation is most common in the fourth and fifth years, with the majority of graduations in the fourth. For the past several cohorts, the fifth-year rate is above 70%, and for the 2003 and 2004 cohorts, it was well above 70% at about 76%. Those figures suggest that to meet a four-year graduation rate of 70%, the university would simply need to find a way to shave a single year off of the educational experience of many of the five-year graduates to achieve the goal. The reality

is that for many of the five-year graduates, the university has to reduce their time-to-degree by only a single semester to have them hit the four-year mark. Table 1.2 shows how graduation rates vary by semester in an effort to understand just how much change would be necessary to hit the 70% threshold.

Table 1.2 Graduation Rates by Year and Semester Graduated among FTIC Students, 1998-2006 Entering Cohorts.

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Cohort Size	6,597	6,925	7,559	7,208	7,845	6,485	6,750	6,791	7,369
After 4 Years									
Number	2,577	2,886	3,444	3,383	3,769	3,300	3,540	3,572	3,731
Percentage	39.1%	41.7%	45.6%	46.9%	48.0%	50.9%	52.4%	52.6%	50.6%
<i>Plus Additional Semester</i>									
Number	3,381	3,705	4,331	4,211	4,674	4,033	4,303	4,338	4,482
Percentage	51.3%	53.5%	57.3%	58.4%	59.6%	62.2%	63.7%	63.9%	60.8%
<i>Plus Two Semesters</i>									
Number	4,199	4,541	5,113	5,054	5,523	4,803	4,986	5,052	5,312
Percentage	63.7%	65.6%	67.6%	70.1%	70.4%	74.1%	73.9%	74.4%	72.1%
After 5 Years									
Number	4,430	4,772	5,351	5,226	5,720	4,941	5,105	5,193	--
Percentage	67.2%	68.9%	70.8%	72.5%	72.9%	76.2%	75.6%	76.5%	--
<i>Plus Additional Semester</i>									
Number	4,651	4,956	5,567	5,391	5,887	5,062	5,242	5,337	--
Percentage	70.5%	71.6%	73.6%	74.8%	75.0%	78.1%	77.7%	78.6%	--
<i>Plus Two Semesters</i>									
Number	4,811	5,127	5,742	5,521	6,049	5,187	5,363	5,459	--
Percentage	72.9%	74.0%	76.0%	76.6%	77.1%	80.0%	79.5%	80.4%	--
After 6 Years									
Number	4,880	5,195	5,810	5,576	6,100	5,225	5,410	--	--
Percentage	74.0%	75.0%	76.9%	77.4%	77.8%	80.6%	80.1%	--	--

Fourth-year graduation is calculated based on the number of students who have graduated before the fall of the fifth year after matriculation and includes the summer in the fourth year. Consequently, for the 2004 FTIC cohort, fourth-year graduates are those who finished before the fall of 2008. According to Table 1.2, we see that the four-year graduation rate is 52.4% among the 6,750 FTIC students entering with that cohort. The next item in that column reflects fourth-year graduation plus an additional semester, ie., for the 2004 cohort, graduating in fall 2008. That number is 63.7%, substantially closer to the 70% goal. Adding another semester yields a graduation rate of 73.9%. In short, for UT Austin to hit a graduation rate of 70% in four years, it would need to lower the time-to-degree a single semester for about 800 students and two semesters for another 400. From that perspective, the task of achieving a 70% four-year graduation rate is much less daunting. Meeting that goal does not mean reducing time-to-degree by two years for a large number of students; rather, it means reducing it by a single semester for many and then two semesters for a few hundred more. Cohorts since 2004 have shown

similar patterns, suggesting that reaching the goal does mean reducing time-to-degree by a small amount for many students.

SECTION 2: DEGREE COMPLETION IN THE 2004 COHORT

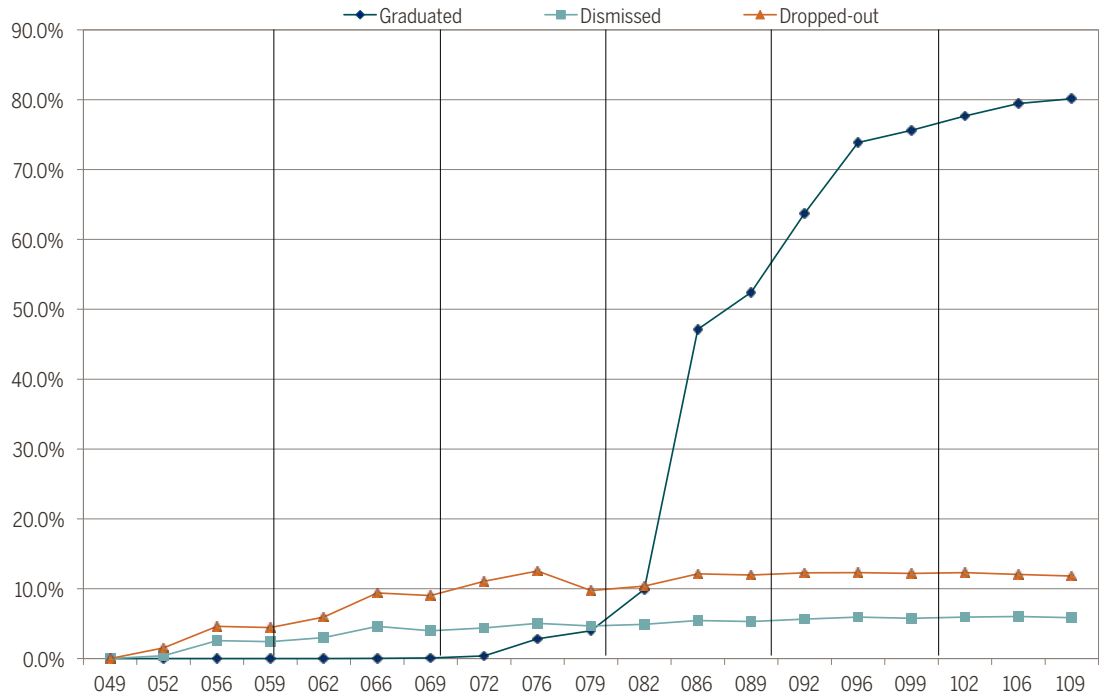
This section begins to focus directly on the 2004 FTIC cohort. This cohort was chosen for study because it is the most recently available cohort that is also able to provide at least six years of data. Numerous elements of data were pulled from students' records to compile the data set. The data included incoming characteristics, such as credit-by-exam, SAT scores, high school rank, and parental information. It also included majors, hours completed, hours attempted, GPAs, and a variety of other factors for each semester over the six-year period. The final data set included over 40 such variables from the 6,750 students in the cohort measured over 19 semesters. This data set allowed for a very fine-grained examination of the factors that lead to graduation rates and attrition. Although the findings from the data may not perfectly reflect what would be found if other cohorts were used, it is no doubt indicative of patterns in other cohorts.

Yet, there are two issues with these data that do not reflect current incoming cohorts. First, the data set contains students who were admitted in the Summer Freshman Class (SFC) and counted as FTIC students. The SFC program no longer exists, thus the data are incomparable on that point to current cohorts. Second, the 2004 cohort began before the formation of the School of Undergraduate Studies. Most of the students in more recent cohorts who began in Undergraduate Studies likely were similar to some of those who started in the Colleges of Liberal Arts and Natural Sciences (the two cascade colleges) in this data set. Nevertheless, even with these two differences, it is likely that the data are useful for helping us understand graduation rates.

PROGRESSION OVER TIME OF THE 2004 COHORT

The first part of the analysis of the 2004 cohort, as discussed in this section, provides an overview of the progression of the cohort over time and by college. Figure 2.1 shows graduation and attrition rates for the cohort over a six-year period. Semesters are labeled according to university convention: the first four digits are the year, the final is the semester (9 = fall; 2 = spring, 6 = summer). The points in the chart are read to reflect the status as of that semester, thus the event in question actually happened in the previous semester. For example, to find the four-year graduation rate, one would locate the graduation rate line in the chart and reference it against the value for '089' (i.e., fall, 2008). The largest jump in the chart on the graduation rate occurs for 086, meaning students who graduated in spring, 2008. There is a small upward trend for summer 2008 and then two larger ones for fall 2008 and spring 2009.

Figure 2.1 Graduation and Attrition Rates over Time for the 2004 FTIC Cohort.



Per the attrition lines, the chart shows that most of the attrition happens in the first two years. By the end of the second year, about 10% of the cohort has dropped out, and few more drop out after that point in time. Likewise, a vast majority of the dismissed students have achieved that status by the end of the second year; after that point, the trend line for dismissals is essentially flat.

If this pattern is true for other cohorts, it leads to two conclusions. First, as shown in the previous section, increasing throughput in a way that meaningfully boosts four-year graduation rates means cutting a semester or two off of time-to-degree for a few hundred students. Second, if the university is to improve graduation rates by reducing attrition, it must focus on the first two years and especially the first year. The most efficacious efforts will likely involve focusing on the prevention of attrition rather than on helping those who have left or been dismissed go on to graduate. Indeed, according to findings not shown here, the data reveal that of the students who are dismissed once, only about 10% go on to eventually graduate. Put another way, practically speaking, once a student is dismissed, the likelihood of eventual graduation is small. Thus, the university should put most of its effort in preventing that first dismissal.

GRADUATION AND ATTRITION OUTCOMES BY COLLEGE

The next portion of the analysis breaks up the 2004 cohort by starting college. The first part of this work is shown in Table 2.1. The table shows the number and percentage of students entering each college, attrition and graduation rates by college, and the percentages graduating in the same college or a different one by the four-year mark.

Table 2.1 Graduation Rates and Attrition by Starting College among FTIC Students, 2004 Cohort.

	Cohort Composition		Six-Year Status among Non-Graduates			Graduated			Finishing College for Four-year Graduates	
	#	%	Enrolled	Dismissed	Dropped	4 years	5 years	6 years	Different	Same
Business	776	11.5%	0.8%	3.0%	4.1%	61.7%	28.4%	2.1%	4.5%	57.2%
Education	248	3.7%	1.2%	3.6%	9.7%	56.5%	25.0%	4.0%	12.5%	44.0%
Engineering	1,246	18.5%	3.0%	8.1%	12.5%	38.9%	31.6%	5.8%	9.3%	29.6%
Fine Arts	208	3.1%	1.9%	6.3%	13.0%	53.8%	20.7%	4.3%	14.9%	38.9%
Architecture	50	0.7%	0.0%	2.0%	2.0%	36.0%	44.0%	16.0%	20.0%	16.0%
Communication	469	6.9%	1.3%	2.6%	9.6%	70.4%	14.1%	2.1%	9.0%	61.4%
Natural Sciences	1,747	25.9%	3.4%	6.7%	14.0%	47.6%	22.1%	6.2%	17.5%	30.1%
Liberal Arts	1,863	27.6%	1.6%	5.7%	12.9%	57.8%	18.3%	3.7%	18.6%	39.2%
Nursing	112	1.7%	2.7%	8.0%	18.8%	45.5%	24.1%	0.9%	17.0%	28.6%
Social Work	31	0.5%	0.0%	6.5%	19.4%	58.1%	12.9%	3.2%	12.9%	45.2%

The findings show that the modal starting college for this cohort was Liberal Arts with 27.6% of the entering students. Natural Sciences was a close second with 25.9% of the students, and Engineering was third with 18.5%. The colleges with the smallest incoming cohorts were Social Work (0.5%), Architecture (0.7%), and Nursing (1.7%).

Based on the sixth-year status values, rates of dropping out and dismissal varied widely among colleges. Architecture recorded the lowest attrition rates at 2% dropping out and 2% being dismissed. Business recorded similarly low levels of attrition. In contrast, Nursing and Engineering recorded relatively high levels of dismissal at about 8%. Drop-outs were most frequent in Nursing and Social Work, both at about 19%. Although the attrition rates are high for these colleges, because their entering cohort sizes are relatively small, combined they comprised only 2.2% of the total entering cohort, their overall attrition levels have a small effect on the graduation rate for the cohort as a whole.

The next panel in the table shows four-, five- and six-year graduation rates by college. The highest four-year graduation rate occurs in Communication; indeed, their rate, 70.4%, already matches the four-year graduation rate goal set forth by the President. The next highest four-year graduation rate occurs for Business at 61.7%. The Business rate is actually substantially higher if their five-year Master in Professional Accounting (MPA) program is removed from the calculation. The lowest four-year rates occur in Architecture (36.0%) and Engineering (38.9%). Because of Architecture's small size, its low four-year rate has little bearing on the overall cohort rate; however, Engineering's relatively large size means that its low rate has a substantial effect on the overall graduation rate.

The final panel examines four-year graduates but differentiates by whether students starting in a particular college graduated in that same college or in another. Like their overall high graduation rates, Business and Communication have few students who enter those colleges yet graduate elsewhere. In contrast, several other colleges, including Liberal Arts and Natural Sciences, matriculate relatively large groups who graduate in four years in other colleges. Given the status of those two colleges as the cascading colleges for this cohort, it is not surprising that some students who start there will finish elsewhere.

INCOMING STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS BY COLLEGE

The next table, Table 2.2, continues the examination of students by college but instead shows student-entering characteristics by college. The examined characteristics include high school percentage ranking, entering course credit through credit-by-exam and transfer work, and SAT scores. All of these measures are thought to predict student success, including graduation rates, and might help explain the differences between colleges shown in Table 2.1

Table 2.2 Incoming Student Characteristics by Starting College among FTIC Students, 2004 Cohort.

	High School Percentage Rank				Incoming Credits		SAT Scores						
	.01 – 5	5.01 – 10	10.01 – 15	15.01 +	CBE	Trans.	Avg.	< 1000	1000 – 1099	1100 – 1199	1200 – 1299	1300 – 1399	1400 +
Business	81.1%	11.6%	1.5%	0.6%	13.0	6.2	1277	4.8%	7.5%	14.8%	22.4%	27.2%	23.3%
Education	14.9%	25.0%	14.5%	37.9%	3.4	4.5	1123	16.9%	22.2%	28.2%	25.8%	6.0%	0.8%
Engineering	37.5%	26.2%	12.0%	15.9%	10.8	5.4	1279	5.0%	6.9%	16.2%	21.5%	27.0%	23.4%
Fine Arts	17.8%	13.9%	15.9%	35.6%	6.3	3.6	1218	4.3%	9.1%	33.7%	24.0%	20.2%	8.7%
Architecture	54.0%	12.0%	14.0%	6.0%	9.6	4.3	1360	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	30.0%	36.0%	34.0%
Communication	45.0%	31.3%	6.0%	8.5%	8.2	5.9	1217	6.8%	11.7%	23.0%	26.2%	22.2%	10.0%
Natural Sci	34.1%	30.2%	14.4%	14.3%	6.6	6.0	1219	9.2%	11.6%	19.5%	26.4%	20.5%	12.7%
Liberal Arts	19.0%	34.2%	16.6%	20.4%	8.8	4.2	1201	10.9%	12.0%	22.0%	25.7%	19.8%	9.7%
Nursing	55.4%	42.0%	1.8%	0.0%	3.5	6.6	1060	33.9%	20.5%	27.7%	12.5%	4.5%	0.9%
Social Work	6.5%	54.8%	16.1%	16.1%	4.1	2.8	1109	22.6%	16.1%	38.7%	12.9%	9.7%	0.0%

The first panel of the table shows the percentages of students matriculating into each college by high school percentage rank. The panel shows, for example, for the students entering Business, 81% were ranked among the top 5% in their high school class, the largest such accumulation of high ranking students in the university. Architecture and Nursing also matriculate a high percentage of their students from the top 5% of high school classes. In contrast, fewer than 20% of the entering classes of Education, Fine Arts, Liberal Arts, and Social Work are from this pool of highly ranked students. Those same colleges tend also to enroll the largest numbers of students who are ranked 15% or below in their high school graduating classes.

The next two columns of Table 2.2 show incoming course credit through credit-by-exam (CBE) and transfer work from other colleges and dual-enrollment. CBE credit is highest in Business, Engineering, and Architecture. Transfer credit is more evenly distributed across colleges, though students in Social Work and Fine Arts report relatively low numbers. Combining these two types of credits shows that, for example, the typical student entering the Business school starts with about 19 hours of course credit before a single class is taken at UT Austin. At the other end of the spectrum, students starting with Social Work begin with only about seven hours of credit on average.

The final panel of the table breaks down average SAT scores by college. As was the case for high school rank, students with the highest SAT scores clustered in Business, Engineering, and Architecture. The

lowest SAT scores were recorded for Education, Nursing, and Social Work, again patterns similar to those found for high school rank.

Comparing the patterns in Table 2.2 to those in 2.1, we find unsurprising results. The colleges enrolling students with the highest class ranks, SAT scores, and incoming course credit, tend, on average, to also be the colleges with the lowest drop-out and dismissal rates. Engineering, however, does not follow this pattern: Its students report relatively high incoming scores, but its attrition rate is about 20.6%. That attrition rate makes it similar to or higher than other schools with lower incoming scores, such as Education and Liberal Arts.

Four-year graduation rates do not track as closely on incoming scores. Indeed, the college with the highest four-year graduation rate, Communication, has a lower average SAT score and high school rank than several other colleges that have lower four-year rates. Some of this difference is no doubt due to the five-year programs in two of the colleges, Business and Architecture, which sets back their four-year graduation rate. If it were the case that Business were to modify its MPA program so that four-year graduation was possible, and Architecture modified its degree plans to accommodate the same goal, it is likely that both schools would significantly increase their four-year graduation rates and perhaps surpass those for Communication.

TOTALING THE COST OF EXCESS TIME-TO-DEGREE

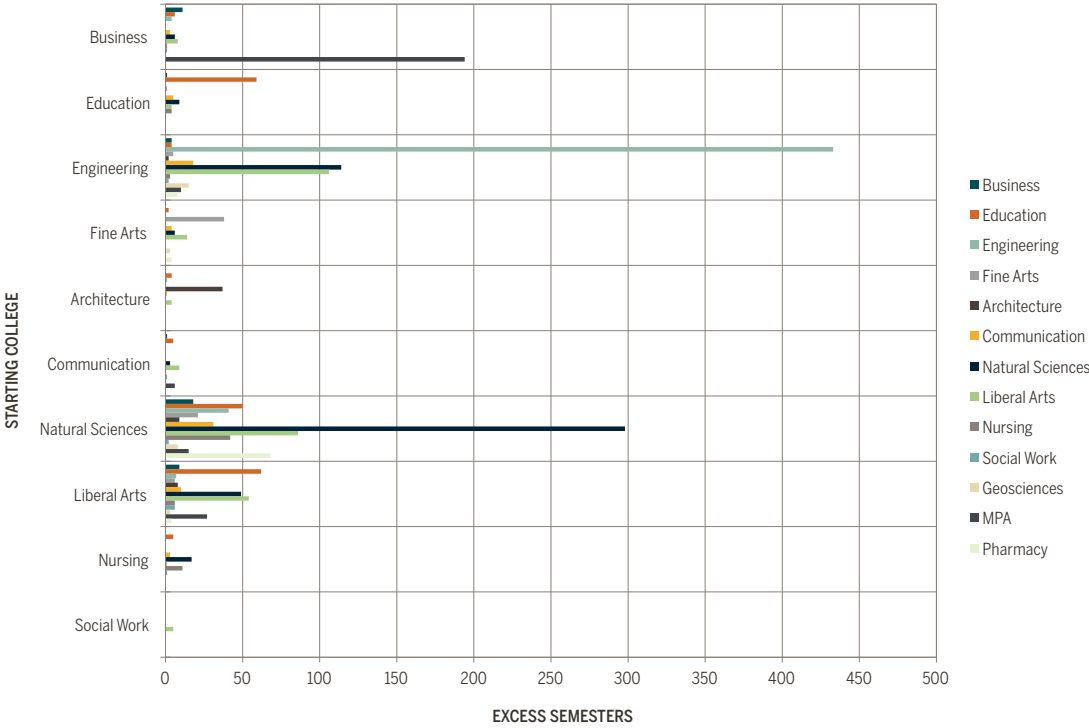
As noted earlier, longer time-to-degree in some colleges does not have a large effect on the overall four-year graduation rate due to the small size of the incoming cohorts for those colleges. In contrast, other colleges with large incoming cohorts and long time-to-degree have a large impact on the overall rate. To quantify these differences by colleges, a simple score was created that counts the number of excess long semesters above eight that each student in that college took to graduate. These excess semesters were then summed across all students in the college to determine how many excess semesters were contributed by all students in the college. Higher scores on this count indicate larger negative effects on the university-wide four-year graduation rate. Thus, they provide, in a sense, a snapshot of where the most problems in the four-year graduation rate are occurring.

But to perform such an analysis correctly, we must also distinguish between where students started and ended their careers at UT Austin. Many students switch colleges, and it is likely that these switches add extra semesters to time-to-degree. An analysis that simply examined only starting or finishing college would ignore this meaningful complexity that likely leads to longer time-to-degree.

The findings in Figure 2.2 show the results of this analysis. Starting colleges are listed on the left side of the chart, and the bars represent the finishing colleges. The length of the bar indicates the excess number of semesters, above eight, that students took to graduate in that starting-finishing college pattern. For example, the top college in the chart, Business, shows very small bars for all college combinations, except one, the Business-MPA combination. Students following this path contributed almost 200 total semesters to the overall excess number of semesters for the university. In Education, the largest contributor were students who started and finished in Education, but comparatively speaking, those students as a whole contributed few excess semesters with a total under 50. The next college, Engineering, shows the largest contribution to excess semesters. Students who started and finished in Engineering contributed about 440 excess semesters, far above any other college combination in the university. Students who switched out of Engineering and finished in Natural Sciences and Liberal

Arts also contributed more excess semesters than almost any other combination in the university. The combination that provided the second-most excessive hours was starting and finishing in Natural Sciences, with an excess of about 300 semesters. Students switching out of Natural Sciences into other colleges also contributed more than many other combinations across the university. It is important to note one finding for Communication: Even though it is not shown in the figure, some of the bars for that college are negative. Those negative values indicate that many students in those combinations took fewer than eight semesters to graduate and drove their excess below zero.

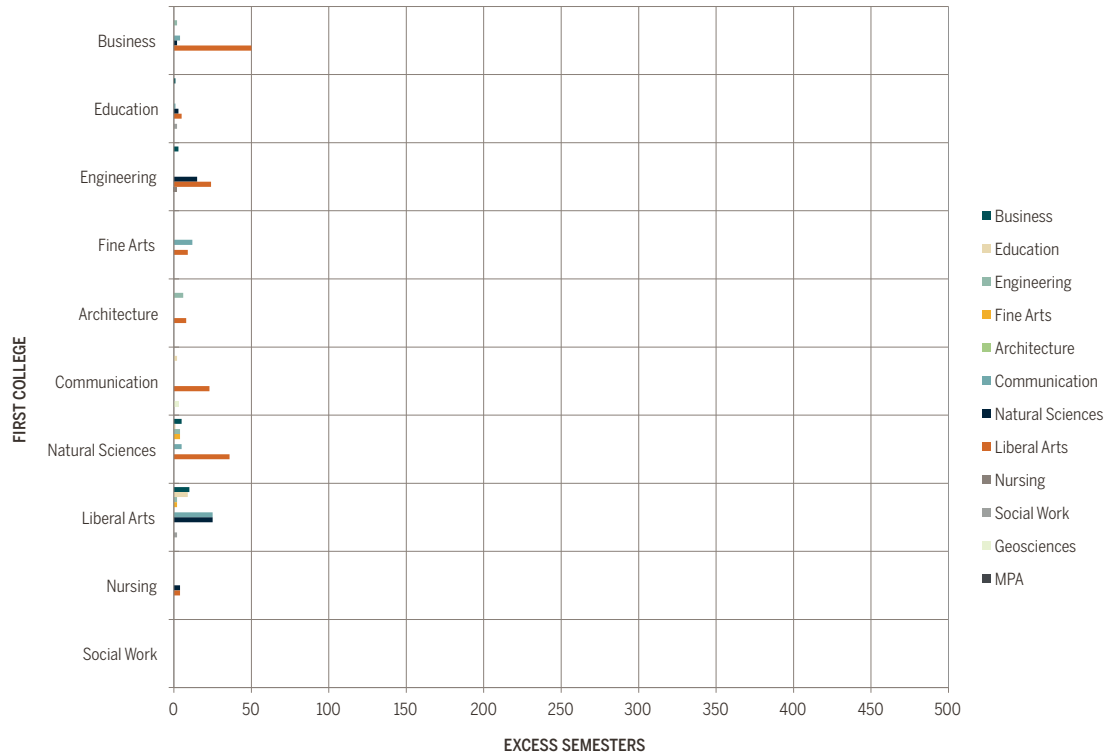
Figure 2.2 Excess Semesters above Four-Year Graduation among Single and Double Majors by Starting and Finishing College, 2004 FTIC Cohort. (Total semesters = 2,122)



Across the university a total of 2,122 excess semesters were generated by all of these patterns. If these excess semesters are multiplied by tuition costs for each college, that number translates into more than \$10 million in excess tuition paid to complete degrees. Most of those excess semesters did not come from students changing schools; rather, they came from students who started and finished in the same colleges. It may be the case that changing schools increases time-to-degree, but those small increases, combined with the relatively small number of students who make those switches, means that college changers have a smaller impact on the overall number of excess semesters.

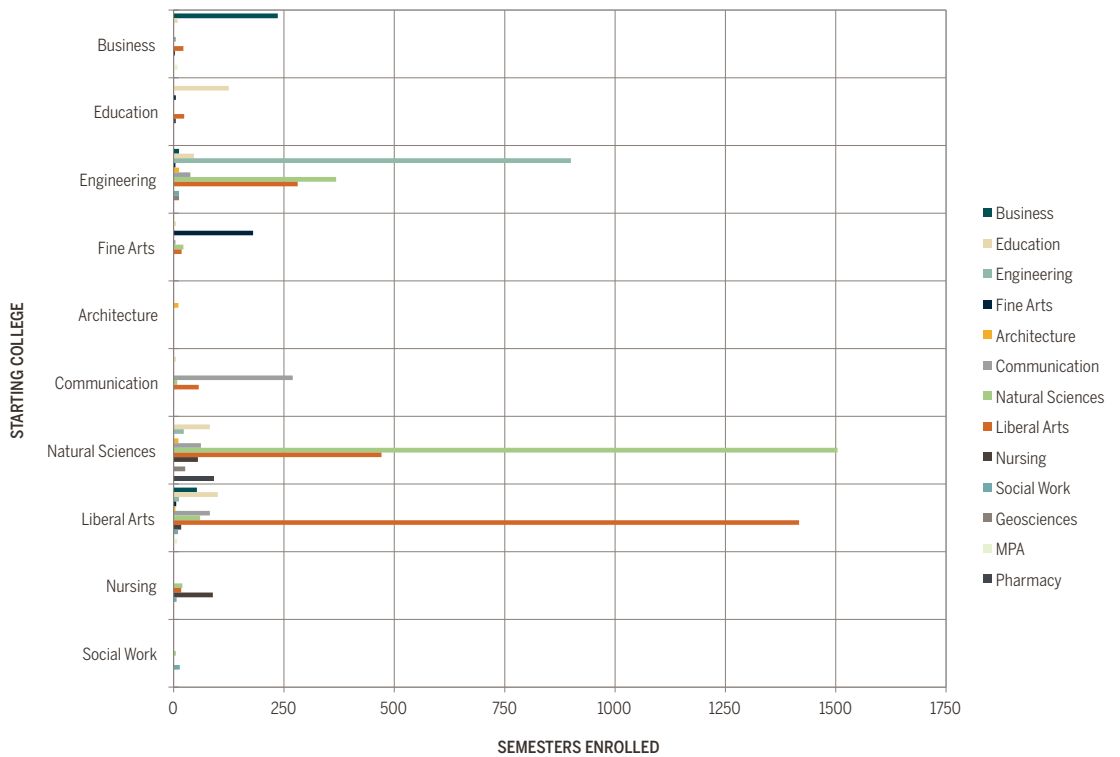
Figure 2.2 examined only excessive semesters for students with single and double-majors. Dual degree students were excluded from that figure but are shown on their own in Figure 2.3. The bars in this figure are set to the same scale as those in Figure 2.2. The colleges listed on the left side and in the bars are the two colleges making up the dual-degree upon graduation. The findings from this figure are readily apparent: Although dual-degrees may increase time-to-degree, because few students pursue them, they contribute a very small part to the overall number of excess semesters for the university. Efforts meant to boost four-year rates in total might benefit from improving time-to-degree among these students, but as the figure shows, the potential gain is very small for any given dual degree combination.

Figure 2.3 Excess Semesters above Four-Year Graduation among Dual Degree Students by College Combination, 2004 FTIC Cohort. (Total semesters = 314)



The previous two figures examined the issue of throughput, that is, how much extra time students took to graduate. Figure 2.4 examines a different issue, the number of semesters that were completed among students who had not finished a degree by the end of the sixth year. As noted previously, some of these students, perhaps up to 4% of all students, will go on to receive a degree. But a vast majority of them will not, meaning that from the perspective of UT Austin, these are semesters used that did not contribute to the graduation rate in a positive way. As was the case with Figure 2.2, colleges shown on the left are the starting college, and the bars are the last college in which students were enrolled.

Figure 2.4 Semesters Completed among Single and Double Majors who did not Graduate within Six Years by College Combination, 2004 FTIC Cohort. (Total semesters = 6,954)



The patterns in Figure 2.4 are similar to those in 2.2 but vary in some very meaningful ways. First, the students who contributed the most to the “lost” semesters were students who started and finished in Natural Sciences. The second largest contributors were students starting and finishing in Liberal Arts. Students in Engineering, and those switching from Natural Sciences to Liberal Arts, also contributed relatively high numbers. In total, 6,954 of these semesters were recorded by this cohort, which translates into a tuition cost of over \$33 million.

An examination of both Figures 2.2 and 2.4 show where, from the college perspective, work is needed. For Engineering and Natural Sciences, both attrition and throughput are issues that contribute heavily to overall time-to-degree for the university. For Liberal Arts, the driving issue is attrition. For other colleges, such as Communication, throughput is not an issue at all, but strides could be made in attrition.

In sum, these figures show that across the university, the drive to increase four-year rates may vary based on the underlying needs of the college. Communication, for example, may not benefit much from efforts to increase throughput, but they could benefit from efforts to reduce attrition. Liberal Arts clearly needs to focus efforts on attrition but cannot completely neglect throughput issues. Finally, the results indicate that without substantial reductions in these figures for Natural Sciences and Engineering, it is unlikely that the university as a whole will see dramatic increases in the four-year graduation rate.

SECTION 3: PREDICTORS OF GRADUATION

The previous section of the report showed that graduation rates, time-to-degree, patterns of attrition, and other factors varied substantially across colleges. A look at incoming ranks, scores, and course credit revealed some patterns, but they were not large and not always consistent. Thus, to better understand overall rates in four-year graduation and other outcomes, it is necessary to look at individual level data to find the predictors of those outcomes. This section of the report attempts to accomplish that goal by again relying on the student record data for the 2004 FTIC cohort.

The section begins by looking at relationships between potential predictors and outcomes without adjustments for other predictors. These analyses give a first glance at how predictors are related and reveal findings that are commonly assumed to be true by many. As the section progresses, the work becomes more complex and ends with an analysis that combines all potential predictors into a single model. In those models one can see whether commonly assumed factors, such as first generation status or SAT scores, continue to predict success even in the presence of hours taken per semester and other factors.

Some of the measures used in this section are counts of activities undertaken over the first four years of students' careers. Because the goal of much of the analysis is to predict four-year graduation, to make meaningful comparisons between students, all students in the analysis must be exposed to that same window of time for behaviors to take place. Thus, even for five- and six-year graduates, in some of the analyses only the first four years of their time at UT Austin are used. Similarly, students who finished in fewer than four years are excluded from analysis because they did not have that potential four-year window of opportunity. In the places where the sample is modified to account for this four-year window, the text makes note of the procedure.

BACKGROUND FACTORS AND GRADUATION OUTCOMES

The section begins by looking at the association between demographic characteristics and graduation outcomes. Other literature has pointed to the importance of factors such as parental education and Pell grant eligibility as important predictors of graduation and attrition. The first table, Table 3.1, examines these two factors along with race/ethnicity and sex.

According to the findings in Table 3.1, attrition and graduation rates vary substantially by race/ethnicity. Among all groups, attrition tends to be lowest, and four-year graduation rates the highest, among Asian and White students. In contrast, attrition is highest and four-year rates are lowest among Black and Hispanic students. The differences between the sexes also appear: In general, women have lower attrition rates and shorter time-to-degree. Indeed, the percentage of women graduating in four years is over 10 percentage points higher than men graduating in that same number of years. Women also constitute a larger portion of the cohort, a trend reflected at many other universities around the US.

Table 3.1 Average Graduation and Attrition Rates by Demographic Characteristics.

	Cohort Composition		6-Year Status			Graduated		
	#	%	Enrolled	Dismissed	Dropped	4 years	5 years	6 years
Race/Ethnicity								
American Indian	29	0.4%	3.4%	0.0%	10.3%	41.4%	31.0%	13.8%
Asian	1,239	18.4%	2.1%	3.6%	10.3%	54.7%	25.3%	4.1%
Black	307	4.5%	2.9%	13.7%	17.6%	39.1%	23.5%	3.3%
Foreign	128	1.9%	3.9%	5.5%	15.6%	43.8%	28.9%	2.3%
Hispanic	1,143	16.9%	2.5%	11.5%	14.9%	40.1%	24.9%	6.1%
White	3,887	57.6%	2.0%	4.4%	10.9%	56.8%	21.7%	4.3%
Sex								
Female	3,695	54.7%	1.9%	4.3%	11.1%	57.2%	21.5%	4.0%
Male	3,055	45.3%	2.6%	7.7%	12.7%	46.7%	25.2%	5.1%
Parents' Education								
No college	668	9.9%	2.7%	12.7%	17.1%	38.5%	23.7%	5.4%
Some college/no degree	1,194	17.7%	3.1%	9.1%	16.1%	42.7%	23.7%	5.3%
One 4-year+ degree	1,646	24.4%	3.1%	6.7%	12.2%	50.8%	22.5%	4.7%
Two 4-year+ degrees	3,242	48.0%	1.3%	2.7%	9.0%	59.7%	23.3%	3.9%
Pell Eligibility								
Pell eligible	1,311	19.4%	3.5%	10.6%	14.6%	39.1%	25.6%	6.5%
Not Pell eligible	2,346	34.8%	1.8%	5.1%	10.9%	57.2%	21.3%	3.7%
No financial aid application	3,093	45.8%	1.9%	4.4%	11.3%	54.5%	23.6%	4.3%

Two factors that are often considered important predictors of student outcomes show expected patterns here. According to the rows for parental education, students whose parents had no college experience (i.e., first-generation college students) had the highest attrition rates at almost 30% and the lowest four-year graduation rate at about 39%. In contrast, students whose parents both have four-year degrees report a 60% four-year graduation rate. Previous speculation over the association between graduation and parental education has focused on the first-generation effect, that is, the relatively low graduation rate among first-generation students. But this table shows that even students who are not first-generation are still disadvantaged in terms of graduation rates if their parents did not both earn at least a four-year degree. Indeed, students whose parents have some college, but no degree, are much more analogous to first-generation students than they are to students whose parents have at least a four-year degree.

The Pell eligibility findings are also not unexpected. Eligibility for Pell grants is based on the expected financial contribution to students' educations that can be made by their families (EFC). These estimates are based on financial aid applications made to the Office of Student Financial Services, and for the 2004 cohort, Pell eligibility in the first year required an EFC of less than \$3,850, a very low amount. Students whose families could contribute more, even marginally so, are not considered Pell eligible. Thus, the Pell eligibility category itself is a somewhat arbitrary dividing line of family financial contributions that might overlook important differences in the abilities of families to help their students. In addition, for students who did not complete the financial aid application, Pell eligibility cannot be determined;

consequently, it is almost certainly the case that some students who are actually Pell eligible are not recorded as such due to the application requirement.

In this table, a distinction is made between students who met the Pell eligibility criterion, those who completed the financial aid application but were not eligible, and those who did not complete the application. The results show that students who were eligible reported the highest attrition rate at about 25% and lowest four-year graduation rate at about 39%. Those who filled out the forms but were not eligible had the best outcomes, and those who did not complete the forms fell between the two. The latter finding might reflect the students with very low EFC levels but who did not complete the application and thus were not coded as Pell eligible.

The next table, Table 3.2, examines the academic characteristics of the incoming students. The table includes an examination of SAT scores, credit-by-exam hours, transfer hours, high school class rank, and mode of admission. Given previous research and the likely relationship between college readiness, as indicated by these scores, and college success, it is likely that most are strong predictors of graduation rates.

As expected, students with higher incoming SAT scores had lower attrition rates and shorter time-to-degrees. The difference in four-year graduation rates between those with the highest and lowest scores was about 32 percentage points. Put another way, those with the highest scores were about twice as likely to graduate in four years as those with the lowest.

Similar patterns are shown for credit-by-exam. Those with no hours of incoming CBE had a 35% four-year rate compared to a 72% rate for those with 31 or more hours of CBE. This gap is actually wider than the SAT gap, perhaps because of what CBE represents. Much of the CBE hours are based on AP courses taken in high school. Passing the courses and tests needed to claim credit are difficult and likely indicative of student ability. But the availability of these courses across the state varies widely and may reflect the underlying characteristics of the high schools from which students graduated. Thus, to have high levels of CBE, students must both perform well and attend the kind of schools that provide the opportunity to complete a large variety of AP courses. Students with low CBE hours likely did not have access to those courses or could not complete them at the level needed to pass the exams that grant credit.

High levels of incoming CBE also means more than just strong college preparedness: It gives those students a firm advantage over students with little or no such credit. Registration at UT Austin is based on number of hours completed such that students with more hours get to register ahead of those with fewer hours. Consequently, in a given incoming class, registration priority will vary across students based on the amount of CBE, and transfer work, that they claim. It is common to hear stories of students starting at UT Austin in their first year and immediately claiming sophomore, or even junior, status due to incoming course credit. These credits put those students at a great advantage in terms of readiness, but because of UT's registration policies, it doubles that advantage through the priority registration system.

It is not surprising then that students with high levels of transfer work at matriculation also have higher four-year rates. In contrast to CBE, however, the rate for the highest group is only about 12 percentage points higher than the lowest group, a substantially smaller gap than that shown for CBE. Moreover, high levels of CBE provide significant protection against attrition, especially in terms of dismissal, but transfer hours do not show the same value. Indeed, those with the most hours have similar or higher attrition rates than many groups below them.

Table 3.2 Average Graduation and Attrition Rates by Academic Background Factors.

	Cohort Composition		Six-Year Status			Graduated		
	#	%	Enrolled	Dismissed	Dropped	4 years	5 years	6 years
SAT Score								
< 1000	591	8.8%	2.9%	15.6%	19.6%	32.0%	23.5%	6.4%
1000 - 1099	727	10.8%	2.8%	8.7%	15.7%	44.6%	24.1%	4.3%
1100 - 1199	1,359	20.1%	2.2%	5.8%	15.3%	49.0%	23.8%	3.9%
1200 - 1299	1,651	24.5%	2.4%	4.5%	10.7%	54.7%	23.0%	4.7%
1300 - 1399	1,462	21.7%	1.9%	3.2%	8.5%	57.8%	24.0%	4.5%
1400 +	960	14.2%	1.5%	4.0%	5.9%	63.9%	20.6%	4.2%
Initial CBE hours								
0 hours	1,360	20.1%	3.1%	11.9%	21.8%	34.9%	22.6%	5.7%
1 - 6 hours	1,356	20.1%	2.7%	7.4%	12.4%	46.2%	26.8%	4.6%
7 - 9 hours	553	8.2%	1.8%	5.8%	10.5%	57.1%	21.5%	3.3%
10 - 15 hours	852	12.6%	3.2%	4.7%	8.7%	53.6%	24.8%	5.0%
16 - 21 hours	986	14.6%	1.5%	4.0%	11.4%	53.7%	24.4%	5.1%
22 - 30 hours	895	13.3%	1.5%	1.8%	5.9%	67.4%	20.3%	3.1%
31+ hours	748	11.1%	0.8%	0.5%	4.8%	71.5%	18.9%	3.5%
Initial Transfer Hours								
0 hours	3,823	56.6%	2.3%	7.0%	12.9%	49.3%	23.9%	4.6%
1 - 6 hours	1,130	16.7%	3.3%	3.7%	9.0%	54.1%	25.8%	4.2%
7 - 9 hours	374	5.5%	1.6%	5.1%	8.6%	54.8%	24.3%	5.6%
10 - 15 hours	745	11.0%	1.1%	5.0%	12.1%	57.9%	20.3%	3.8%
16 - 21 hours	353	5.2%	1.4%	5.7%	11.0%	57.5%	19.0%	5.4%
22 - 30 hours	208	3.1%	1.9%	2.9%	12.0%	64.9%	13.9%	4.3%
31+ hours	116	1.7%	0.9%	3.4%	12.1%	61.2%	19.0%	3.4%
HS % Class Rank								
0 - 2%	1,054	15.6%	1.9%	2.9%	7.2%	65.3%	19.3%	3.4%
2.01 - 5%	1,368	20.3%	1.5%	5.0%	11.5%	54.6%	23.7%	3.6%
5.01 - 7%	816	12.1%	2.9%	5.0%	13.7%	51.8%	19.9%	6.6%
7.01 - 10%	1,074	15.9%	2.1%	8.1%	12.8%	45.8%	26.4%	4.7%
10.01 - 15%	832	12.3%	1.9%	7.1%	13.9%	48.3%	23.9%	4.8%
15.01 - 30%	835	12.4%	3.6%	7.9%	12.1%	46.8%	24.4%	5.1%
30.01% +	213	3.2%	3.3%	11.3%	20.2%	33.3%	26.8%	5.2%
No Rank	558	8.3%	1.4%	3.0%	9.7%	58.4%	23.7%	3.8%
Mode of Admission								
Out-of-State	410	6.1%	1.7%	3.4%	14.6%	52.7%	25.6%	2.0%
Summer Freshman	707	10.5%	2.5%	5.2%	12.6%	54.9%	19.5%	5.2%
Texas High School	5,633	83.5%	2.2%	6.1%	11.5%	52.1%	23.5%	4.6%

Turning to class rank, it appears there is an almost monotonic decrease in four-year graduation rates as class rank gets worse. Students graduating in the top of their class are almost twice as likely to graduate in four years as students graduating in the 30th percentile range or lower. Attrition is fairly even across all ranks, though it is lowest among the best ranked and highest among the worst. Those who report no class rank, largely because they graduated from private high schools with no ranking system or were home-schooled, were most similar to the highest ranking graduates in terms of attrition and time-to-degree.

The final portion of the table shows outcomes based on mode of admission. These findings show that attrition does not differ greatly by mode. In terms of four-year graduation rates, students in the summer freshman class performed marginally better than the other two groups.

FIRST-YEAR PERFORMANCE AND GRADUATION OUTCOMES

As shown in Section 1, the first-year retention rate over the past several years is about 92%. A substantial amount of attrition also happens after the second year, after that overall attrition tends to flatten out. Given these patterns it is likely that what happens to students in their first year on campus is an important portent of eventual graduation and time-to-degree. Table 3.3 attempts to quantify these effects by examining the relationship between grades in the first year and graduation outcomes.

In this table the analyses reveal the largest gaps in graduation and attrition rates. Of those who earned a zero GPA in the first semester, 66% left the university and only 6% went on to graduate in four years. Students who make a zero GPA in the first semester are automatically dismissed for the spring but can return the following fall to resume classes. As such, it is possible to recover from such a GPA, but it rarely happens in a timely way. Similarly, students with a GPA below 2.0 showed both very high rates of attrition and low rates of four-year graduation. As GPA in the first semester climbed, outcomes became much better. Of those with the highest GPAs of 3.51 or higher, only 5.5% were lost due to attrition and 68% graduated in four years. These results show that every level of GPA below 3.51 is at a higher risk for both attrition and graduating after four years compared to those with the highest GPAs. But, most importantly it shows that those with GPAs below 2.5 are at especially high risk.

The next portion of the table shows changes in GPA between the first and second semesters. In essence, this analysis asks whether change itself, over and above the underlying GPA, can affect outcomes. Students who earned a zero GPA either in the first or second semester are included as a separate category as many zero GPAs are due to students not completing coursework but also not withdrawing from the university. The results show that students whose GPAs were consistent across the two semesters had the best outcomes; in contrast, those whose GPAs either rose or fell over one point were at a much higher risk for attrition and longer time-to-degree. Of the two ends of the spectrum, those who saw a decrease of more than one point were by far at the greatest risk.

The third part of the table simply sums the number of hours of F earned by students in the first semester. Those who earned no Fs during that time reported a 56% four-year graduation rate, which is four points higher than the university as a whole. In contrast, students who received any Fs were much more likely to be lost or graduate after four years. To this point in the analysis, these findings represent the strongest predictors of graduation outcomes. They show, in no uncertain terms, that what happens in the first year is an incredibly powerful predictor of eventual outcomes. They further demonstrate that any attempt to raise four-year graduation rates must include programs to boost performance in the first year and to help students who perform poorly during that time.

Table 3.3 Average Graduation and Attrition Rates by First-year Performance.

	Cohort Composition		Six-Year Status			Graduated		
	#	%	Enrolled	Dismissed	Dropped	4 years	5 years	6 years
First Semester GPA								
0.00	99	1.5%	10.1%	33.3%	32.3%	6.1%	10.1%	8.1%
0.01 – 2.00	813	12.0%	3.6%	28.3%	23.0%	19.3%	19.1%	6.8%
2.01 – 2.50	764	11.3%	2.7%	9.6%	18.5%	37.0%	25.8%	6.4%
2.51 – 3.00	1,356	20.1%	2.6%	2.7%	13.3%	51.2%	25.9%	4.4%
3.01 – 3.50	1,558	23.1%	1.4%	1.0%	9.3%	59.8%	24.7%	3.7%
3.51+	2,160	32.0%	1.5%	0.3%	5.2%	68.0%	21.6%	3.5%
First-Second Difference								
Decreased over 1 point	94	1.4%	5.3%	11.7%	18.1%	23.4%	30.9%	10.6%
Decreased 1 point	422	6.3%	5.9%	5.5%	15.2%	37.2%	30.1%	6.2%
Decreased .5 points	1,202	17.8%	2.1%	4.8%	12.0%	50.7%	25.6%	4.7%
Stayed the same	2,907	43.1%	1.7%	5.6%	8.4%	59.0%	21.3%	4.0%
Increased .5 points	1,227	18.2%	1.4%	3.2%	10.3%	57.0%	24.8%	3.4%
Increased 1 point	473	7.0%	2.1%	1.7%	11.2%	57.5%	21.6%	5.9%
Increased over 1 point	135	2.0%	0.7%	1.5%	14.1%	39.3%	37.8%	6.7%
0 GPA either semester	290	4.3%	5.9%	30.7%	45.2%	4.1%	8.3%	5.9%
First Semester F's								
None	6,171	91.4%	2.1%	3.1%	10.7%	55.9%	23.9%	4.3%
1 – 3 hours	264	3.9%	3.0%	24.2%	27.3%	19.3%	17.0%	9.1%
4 – 6 hours	200	3.0%	4.0%	32.5%	22.0%	16.5%	19.0%	6.0%
7+ hours	115	1.7%	3.5%	66.1%	16.5%	6.1%	7.0%	0.9%

HOURS COMPLETED AND TIME-TO-DEGREE

A great deal of discussion about time-to-degree revolves around hours completed by students. Previous university task forces have examined this issue and have pointed to the fact that many students graduate with more hours than is necessary to actually graduate. Others have argued that students are taking too few hours per semester, and that by boosting those totals, students will graduate more quickly.

Is it the case that many students graduate with too many hours, or is it true that by boosting hours per semester the university can improve timely graduation? Table 3.4 begins to look at this issue by examining the hours taken and other characteristics of students who graduated in four, five, and six years. In reading this table it is important to note that the values on the left side of the table are not predicting rates of graduation, as was shown in the previous tables in the section. Rather, this table shows values of hours taken and other factors based on the number of years it took to graduate.

Table 3.4 Characteristics of Graduating Students by Number of Years Needed to Graduate.¹

	Among Those who Graduated in...		
	4 years	5 years	6 years
Long Semesters Completed with...			
0 hours	0.1	0.2	0.6
11 or fewer hours	0.7	1.0	1.9
12 hours	2.3	2.1	1.8
13 hours	1.1	1.2	1.0
14 hours	1.1	1.2	1.0
15 hours	1.8	1.4	1.0
16 or more hours	1.0	0.9	0.7
Cumulative Hours			
Total hours completed	140.7	135.5	122.6
UT Austin hours completed-long semesters	106.4	102.5	90.5
Pre-fall admission hours	0.9	0.8	1.1
Total summer hours	4.5	6.6	6.7
Credit-by-exam hours	15.9	12.6	11.4
Transfer hours	13.0	13.0	12.8
Any Hours Completed			
Summer hours	52.5%	66.5%	67.2%
Credit-by-exam hours	86.1%	79.4%	71.8%
Transfer hours	83.1%	83.1%	77.0%
Final Degree Status			
Dual degree	9.4%	11.0%	12.5%
Double major	10.7%	6.9%	9.8%
Single major	79.9%	82.1%	77.7%
Hours Per Semester			
Fall-1 st year	13.4	12.8	12.2
Spring-1 st year	13.8	13.2	12.3
Fall-2 nd year	13.7	13.0	11.2
Spring-2 nd year	13.6	12.8	10.9
Fall-3 rd year	13.5	12.7	11.0
Spring-3 rd year	13.0	12.4	11.0
Fall-4 th year	13.1	12.7	10.9
Spring-4 th year	11.8	12.4	10.7
Hours per Semester w/out < 12 hours			
Fall-1 st year	13.9	13.7	14.1
Spring-1 st year	14.3	14.2	14.2
Fall-2 nd year	14.3	14.1	13.8
Spring-2 nd year	14.2	14.1	14.1
Fall-3 rd year	14.1	14.0	14.9
Spring-3 rd year	13.8	13.9	15.1
Fall-4 th year	13.7	13.9	14.2
Spring-4 th year	13.4	13.5	14.2

Notes: ¹ Only students graduating in four or more years were included.

The first part of the table shows the number of semesters completed with different numbers of hours. These counts are made only in the first four years and exclude students who graduated in fewer than four years. By limiting the count and sample in this way the table is able to provide consistent comparisons among the three graduation groups. The figures show that among four-year graduates, the average student completed 2.3 semesters with 12 hours. In comparison, those graduating in five years took 2.1, and those in six took 1.8. Put another way, four-year graduates, on average, finished with more semesters at 12 hours than the groups that took longer to graduate. They also took more semesters with 15 and 16 or more hours completed. Four-year graduates finished fewer semesters with one to 11 hours and zero hours (i.e., did not enroll or withdrew). Based on these numbers the case can be made that students can take 12 hours per semester and still graduate on time, but taking fewer or not enrolling at all can contribute heavily to time-to-degree.

The next part of the table shows total cumulative hours by the end of the fourth year. Four-year graduates have amassed, on average, about 141 hours by that point. In contrast, five-year graduates have accumulated only five fewer hours at 136. For most majors on campus, that number of hours is sufficient to graduate in four years; consequently, it is unclear why many of the students who took five years to graduate did not do so in four given that they had enough hours to do so at that point. For all three groups, UT Austin hours completed during long semesters made up the majority of all hours completed. Yet, for no group was the number of UT Austin long-semester hours enough, on average, to permit graduation in any major on campus. The lowest number of hours required on campus is 120, which means that for the typical four-year graduate, CBE, transfer or summer hours would be needed to finish by that point. The four-year graduates do bring in a substantial number of those extra hours: Between CBE and transfer credit, four-year graduates accumulated 29 hours of credit, more than most students complete in two long semesters of UT coursework. Those graduating in five or six years also built up large numbers of CBE and transfer work, though the total were not as high as those for the four-year graduates.

Summer hours completed were higher in the five- and six-year graduates, and according to the next part of the table, the likelihood of finishing any summer work was higher in those groups as well. In contrast, the likelihood of having any CBE or transfer credit was lower in the five- and six-year groups.

In terms of degree patterns, it appears that dual degree status decreases time-to-degree, but having a double major does not. Among those graduating in four years, 9.4% were dual-degree compared to 11% in the five-year graduates and 12.5% in the six-year ones. The differences in these groups certainly are not large and probably do not play a major role in time-to-degree for the university as a whole. The findings also show that students double majoring are more common in the four-year graduate group than the others, suggesting that having two majors does not hinder timely graduation. Two important issues should be noted about these figures. First, most of the students who complete two majors are in Liberal Arts. Some colleges do not allow double majoring except for certain majors, but Liberal Arts has no such rules. Second, most of the dual degree students also have Liberal Arts as one of their colleges. The outcome of these two patterns is that Liberal Arts has a smaller percentage of students with a single major than any other college in the university. Finally, it must be noted that the data only allowed counting two majors; students who had more than two majors were counted as having only two. It could and probably is the case that having three, four, or five or majors slows time to graduation, but the number of students with those high numbers of majors is likely small and contributing little to the overall graduation rate.

The final part of the table examines the number of hours taken over the course of students' four years at UT Austin. In the first two of these panels, the table shows that students graduating in four years consistently complete more hours than students in the other groups. However, as the final panel shows, if students completing fewer than 12 hours are removed, the number of hours completed across groups looks very similar. This finding suggests that reducing the number of students who complete fewer than 12 hours will be an important part of increasing the four-year graduation rate. Students finishing few hours can stem from a number of sources, such as registering part-time, failing classes, dropping classes, or withdrawing entirely for the semester. Correcting the problem would require addressing each of these sources, and the solutions to those problems may differ across them.

Table 3.5 re-examines the issue of number of hours completed per semester in a slightly different way. The table shows graduation rates based on the number of semesters in which a specific number of hours were completed. These findings show that certain numbers of hours, when taken across multiple semesters, can severely hinder time-to-degree.

Table 3.5 Time-to-degree by Semesters Completed with Specific Numbers of Hours.¹

	Cohort Composition		Graduated		
	#	%	4 years	5 years	6 years
0 Hours Completed					
0 Semesters	4,134	87.2%	64.1%	30.8%	5.0%
1 Semester	476	10.0%	42.2%	47.5%	10.3%
2 Semesters	102	2.2%	17.6%	54.9%	27.5%
3 Semesters	14	0.3%	7.1%	42.9%	50.0%
4+ Semesters	15	0.3%	0.0%	13.3%	86.7%
1 - 11 Hours Completed					
0 Semesters	2,246	47.4%	64.5%	31.7%	3.8%
1 Semester	1,468	31.0%	66.1%	30.0%	3.9%
2 Semesters	646	13.6%	52.6%	36.5%	10.8%
3 Semesters	217	4.6%	36.4%	47.9%	15.7%
4+ Semesters	164	3.5%	19.5%	45.1%	35.4%
12 Hours Completed					
0 Semesters	824	17.4%	56.6%	35.9%	7.5%
1 Semester	1,081	22.8%	59.6%	32.7%	7.8%
2 Semesters	1,063	22.4%	58.2%	34.8%	7.0%
3 Semesters	747	15.8%	62.9%	32.0%	5.1%
4+ Semesters	1,026	21.6%	65.5%	29.9%	4.6%
13 Hours Completed					
0 Semesters	1,742	36.7%	61.8%	30.5%	7.7%
1 Semester	1,521	32.1%	62.4%	31.8%	5.8%
2 Semesters	908	19.2%	56.8%	37.8%	5.4%
3 Semesters	410	8.6%	58.0%	36.1%	5.9%
4+ Semesters	160	3.4%	57.5%	36.3%	6.3%

	Cohort Composition		Graduated		
	#	%	4 years	5 years	6 years
14 Hours Completed					
0 Semesters	1,661	35.0%	61.3%	31.2%	7.5%
1 Semester	1,606	33.9%	62.5%	31.3%	6.2%
2 Semesters	977	20.6%	57.9%	36.6%	5.4%
3 Semesters	337	7.1%	58.8%	35.0%	6.2%
4+ Semesters	160	3.4%	53.1%	42.5%	4.4%
15 Hours Completed					
0 Semesters	1,094	23.1%	49.6%	38.6%	11.8%
1 Semester	1,379	29.1%	58.3%	34.5%	7.2%
2 Semesters	1,183	25.0%	63.9%	31.9%	4.2%
3 Semesters	662	14.0%	67.5%	29.9%	2.6%
4+ Semesters	423	8.9%	75.9%	21.7%	2.4%
16+ Hours Completed					
0 Semesters	2,331	49.2%	56.5%	35.1%	8.4%
1 Semester	1,243	26.2%	63.6%	31.5%	4.9%
2 Semesters	616	13.0%	65.3%	31.3%	3.4%
3 Semesters	293	6.2%	65.9%	30.0%	4.1%
4+ Semesters	258	5.4%	65.1%	28.7%	6.2%

Notes: † Only students graduating in four or more years were included.

As discussed above, completing fewer than 12 hours in a semester is a large barrier to timely graduation, and doing so over several semesters virtually guarantees delays in graduation. Looking at the first panel of students completing zero hours, of those who never completed zero hours, 64% graduated in four years. Note that this is not the four-year graduation rate for that group because only students who graduated are in the analysis. Rather, it shows that students never missing a semester are most likely to graduate at the four-year mark. In contrast, virtually no students who complete two or more semesters with no hours are able to finish in four years.

The situation is not as bad for students completing one to 11 hours, but the trend is nevertheless there. Students finishing zero or one semesters with one to 11 hours were most likely to graduate in the four-year group. Those finishing two semesters with one to 11 hours still were most likely to graduate in four years, but beyond that number, the four-year graduates drop significantly. In general, the data show that students can complete one semester or so with fewer than 12 hours and still graduate on time, but too many more such semesters will cause delay.

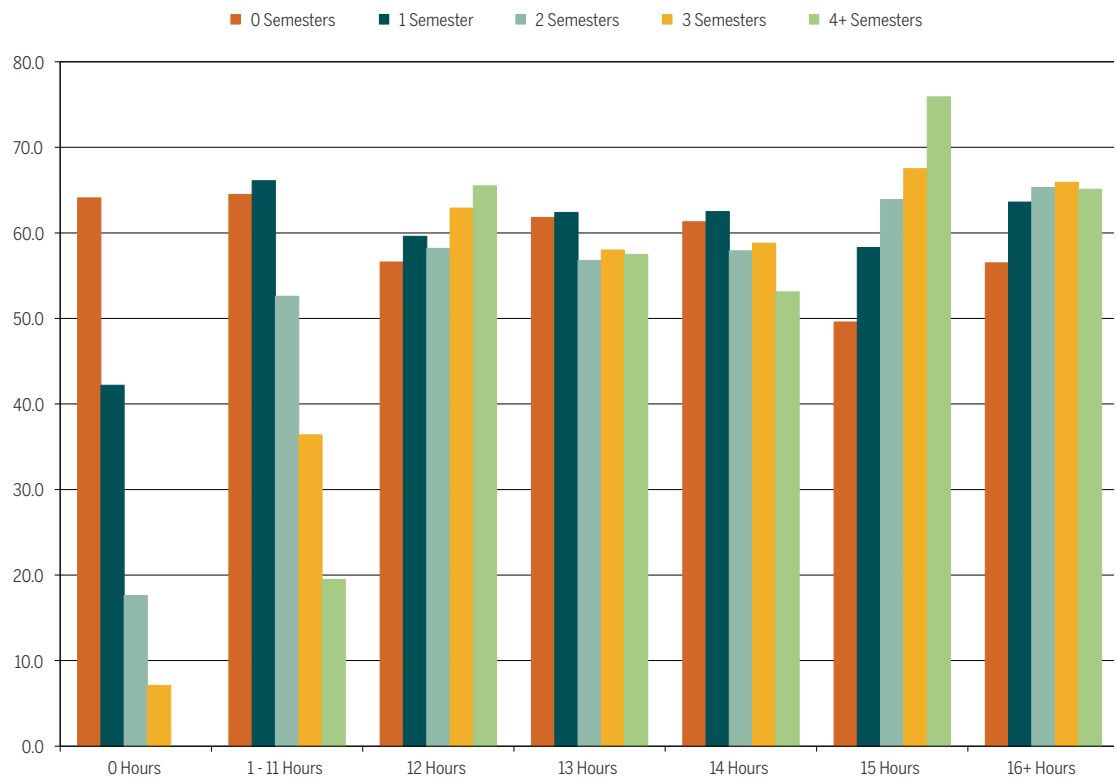
Contrary to speculation about hours and time to graduation, many who completed four or more semesters with 12 hours still graduated in four years. Given the findings in the previous table, it is easy to see how this pattern is possible: Many of the four-year graduates leave with CBE and transfer course credit, meaning that the number of hours students need to complete during long semesters at UT Austin is typically far below 120. Students can meet the hours needed by taking multiple semesters with 12 hours and then a few with more.

Interestingly, completing more semesters with 13-14 hours actually drives down the likelihood of graduating in four years. It is unclear why this would be the case, and after much discussion among task force members and others, no readily evident answer appears. It could be the case that the kinds of courses that lead students to complete 13 or 14 hours are four- and five-hour classes or those with attached lab sections. It is unclear why those kinds of courses would pose barriers to graduation, but it is a question that deserves further research.

The table further makes clear that students completing more semesters with 15 hours stand the best chances of graduating in four years. Only about half of the students who finish no semesters with 15 hours are able to graduate in four years, but those who finish four or more semesters with that number are very likely to graduate in that time.

Figure 3.1 reproduces all of these numbers for the four-year graduation rate, and it is in this figure that one can easily see the beneficial effect that taking 15 hours has on the likelihood of graduating in four years. The figure also shows the devastating effect that completing fewer than 12 hours can have on the chances of graduating in four years.

Figure 3.1 Four-year Graduation Rate by Numbers of Semesters Completed with Specific Numbers of Hours.



The next table, Table 3.6, further extends this analysis by looking at the number of semesters completed with 12 hours among four-year graduates by degree status and college. The analyses in this table are necessary because it may be the case that taking 12 hours in some colleges can be beneficial for timely graduation, but in other colleges completing that course load is a serious barrier to graduation. It is important to note that the percentages shown here are not four-year graduation rates as they only reflect the students graduating in four years out of students who graduated in four, five, or six years.

Table 3.6 Numbers of Semesters with Twelve Hours Completed among Four-Year Graduates.¹

	% Graduated in 4 years	Percent of Four-year Graduates Completing 12 Hours in...				
		0 Semesters	1 Semester	2 Semesters	3 Semesters	4+ Semesters
Final Degree Status						
Double major	69.1%	14.6%	19.5%	24.4%	19.2%	22.4%
Dual degree	56.3%	27.4%	27.0%	20.4%	14.8%	10.4%
Single major	60.1%	15.1%	22.3%	21.3%	16.2%	25.1%
Different college	48.9%	10.5%	17.6%	22.2%	20.1%	29.5%
Final Colleges						
Business	75.5%	10.4%	20.4%	24.6%	22.0%	22.8%
Education	53.6%	5.3%	14.1%	17.1%	21.2%	42.4%
Engineering	51.0%	40.2%	37.9%	16.6%	4.2%	1.1%
Fine Arts	61.1%	25.0%	19.8%	16.7%	14.6%	24.0%
Architecture	13.5%	0.0%	20.0%	60.0%	20.0%	0.0%
Communication	70.6%	7.2%	11.0%	16.0%	19.2%	46.6%
Natural Sciences	58.5%	27.1%	30.6%	24.6%	10.8%	6.9%
Liberal Arts	64.4%	13.1%	20.9%	23.3%	18.8%	23.9%
Nursing	49.0%	6.4%	40.4%	23.4%	21.3%	8.5%
Social Work	51.3%	20.0%	10.0%	25.0%	15.0%	30.0%
Geosciences	40.7%	27.3%	36.4%	27.3%	0.0%	9.1%
Graduate Business	7.1%	27.3%	36.4%	36.4%	0.0%	0.0%

Notes: ¹ Only students graduating in four or more years were included.

The first panel shows that students taking one or two majors in the same college could complete several semesters with 12 hours and still graduate in four years. However, students who were seeking a dual degree were much less likely to finish three or more semesters with 12 hours and still graduate in four years.

The table shows very different patterns across the university when students are sorted by their finishing colleges. Many students, almost a majority, in Education and Communication were able to complete four or more semesters with 12 hours and still finish in four years. In stark contrast, almost no students in Engineering, and no students in Architecture, were able to complete four or more semesters with 12 hours and graduate in four years. Engineering students who stood the greatest odds of graduating in four years either completed one semester or less with 12 hours; any more semesters than that severely limited the chances of timely graduation.

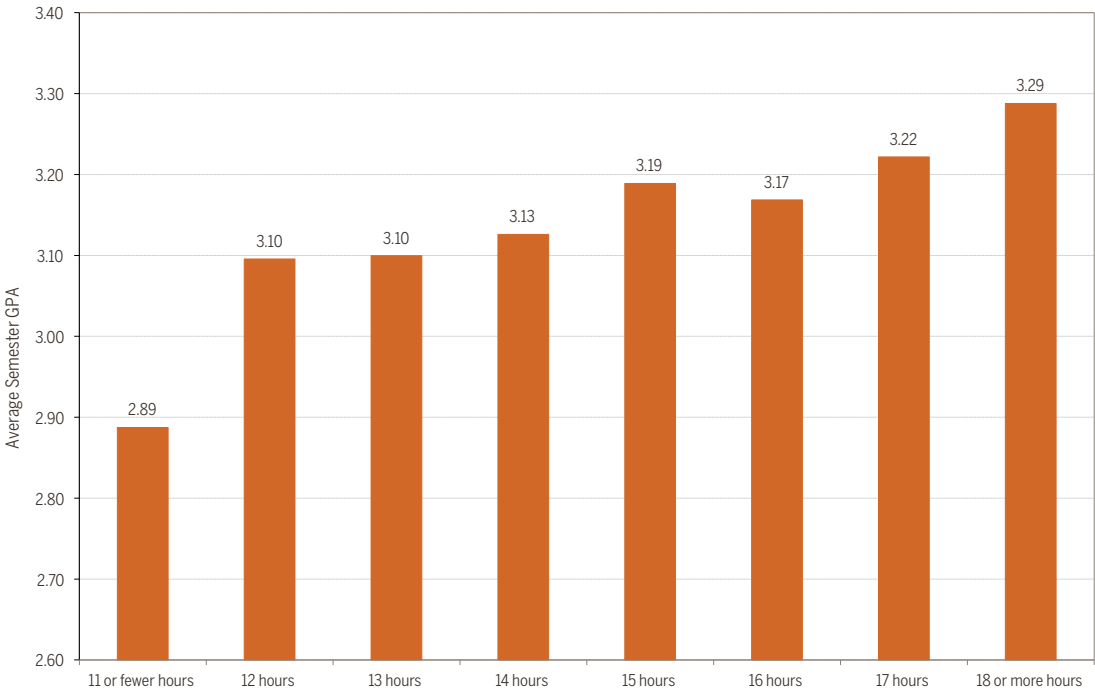
HOURS TAKEN AND GPA

The findings from Tables 3.5 and 3.6 show the value of completing 15 hours for timely graduation, although students in some colleges can still finish multiple semesters with 12 hours and graduate

on time. When advisors and other professionals around campus discuss these issues, they know, at some level, that taking more hours likely speeds time to graduation. However, the problem they cite in encouraging students to take more hours is a fear that taking those hours might reduce GPAs and so hurt students who want to pursue post-graduate education or other opportunities that require a strong GPA. These concerns are understandable, but are they valid? That is, is it the case that students who take more hours are less likely to make good grades?

Answering this question is fairly complicated and requires multiple waves of data to examine. Fortunately, the student records data set used here provides the necessary information to answer the question. To do so, GPAs in a given semester were regressed on hours undertaken for that semester and a host of other factors, including overall GPA as of the previous semester, demographic characteristics, initial academic characteristics (e.g., SAT score), and starting college. This analysis was done repeatedly for every long semester past the first over the first four years (a total of 7 times). Fall semesters used GPAs from the previous spring rather than summer GPAs, even if those were available. The results of the seven models were averaged to achieve a single score reflecting the average GPA of students taking different numbers of hours. In short, this modeling strategy was meant to determine, net of a host of factors that would predict the number of hours taken and GPA during a given semester, whether the number of hours taken in that semester actually led to a higher or lower GPA. The findings from this analysis are shown in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2 Average Semester GPA by Number of Hours Undertaken in that Semester.



The figure shows that, in general, as the number of hours taken increases, so too does the GPA obtained for that semester. Differences between 12 to 14 hours are minimal but increase noticeably for students taking 17 or more hours. The clear danger area occurs among students taking fewer than 12 hours. It is important to note that these hours are not hours completed, they are hours taken. As such, the average

for the 11 or fewer category does not just reflect students who failed courses and did not receive credit for them. Rather, it reflects students who registered for 11 or fewer hours.

The findings from this table are well in line with research on campus integration and academic success. A long history of scholarship has argued that students who are the most socially and academically integrated into campus life will also perform the best. Taking more hours is able to increase integration because it means more time needed to be spent on campus and in doing all of the work associated with the academic side of the university. Students taking fewer hours have more free time and are able to find ways to more easily disengage from campus life in any number of ways. Some students will simply spend more time off-campus or travel home more frequently. Others may use the time to participate in extracurricular activities off of campus or work more hours in paid employment. Others may succumb to the lure of online communities and in so doing displace the communities that should be created on campus. Regardless of the consequence, students taking fewer hours will find more ways to spend those hours, and many of the options available will disengage them from campus. It is no surprise then that students who take the most hours are also more likely to be engaged in campus life and so are the best performers. In short, encouraging students to take fewer hours is likely doing them no favors. At worst, taking more hours will mean a similar GPA to fewer hours. At best, it will be a higher GPA, more integration, shorter time-to-degree, and ultimately more success overall.

CHANGING MAJORS AND GRADUATION OUTCOMES

Many students at UT Austin change their majors at least once before they graduate from the university. The findings in Section 2 showed that some patterns of switching colleges can lead to delays in graduation that contribute substantially to longer time-to-degree, but those figures did not show the actual effect of changing a major or the timing of the change.

Table 3.7 attempts to explain the effects of switching majors on time-to-degree. The findings in the table reflect students who graduated in four or more years and examine how changing colleges and majors affected falling into different graduation years.

The first panel of the table examines whether switching colleges slows time-to-degree. The majority of students (67%) do not switch colleges before graduation, and among them, over 66% graduate in four years. In contrast, among the students who switch colleges, only 49% graduate in four years. This difference suggests that changing colleges can slow time-to-degree. Similarly, the next panel provides a finding consistent with those in earlier tables: Taking a double major does not slow time-to-degree, but pursuing a dual degree seems to do so.

The next part of the table examines the number of major changes students undertook before graduation and how those numbers led to time-to-degree. A minority of students, 37.4%, did not change their major before graduating. Among those, about 65% graduated in four years. More students, 43.7%, changed their majors once, either within their college or across colleges, and among those, 61.3% graduated in four years. The number for the students who switched once is similar to those who never switched, but beyond that first switch, the likelihood of graduation falls dramatically. Only 49% of those who switched majors two or three times were able to graduate in four years. Those who switched four times were even less likely to graduate in four years, but that number composed a very small part of the overall cohort and has little effect on the overall rate.

Table 3.7 Time-to-degree by Changes in Major and College.¹

	Cohort Composition		Graduated		
	#	%	4 years	5 years	6 years
Switching Colleges					
Same college	3,175	67.0%	66.3%	28.4%	5.3%
Different college	1,566	33.0%	48.9%	42.3%	8.8%
Final Degree Status					
Double major	446	9.4%	69.1%	24.2%	6.7%
Dual degree	480	10.1%	56.3%	35.8%	7.9%
Single major	3,815	80.5%	60.1%	33.7%	6.2%
Number of Changes					
No change	1,773	37.4%	65.5%	29.4%	5.1%
1 change	2,072	43.7%	61.3%	32.2%	6.5%
2 changes	736	15.5%	49.3%	41.7%	9.0%
3 changes	143	3.0%	49.7%	42.0%	8.4%
4 changes	17	0.4%	35.3%	47.1%	17.6%
Last Major Change					
No change	1,773	37.4%	65.5%	29.4%	5.1%
2 nd long semester	312	6.6%	67.3%	27.9%	4.8%
3 rd long semester	699	14.7%	67.4%	30.0%	2.6%
4 th long semester	649	13.7%	66.3%	30.2%	3.5%
5 th long semester	592	12.5%	52.5%	38.0%	9.5%
6 th long semester	329	6.9%	48.0%	41.9%	10.0%
7 th long semester	248	5.2%	37.5%	45.2%	17.3%
8 th long semester	139	2.9%	26.6%	54.0%	19.4%
Second major/degree added					
None added	3,848	81.2%	59.6%	33.8%	6.5%
1 st long semester	126	2.7%	62.7%	29.4%	7.9%
2 nd long semester	51	1.1%	76.5%	17.6%	5.9%
3 rd long semester	168	3.5%	72.0%	25.6%	2.4%
4 th long semester	141	3.0%	69.5%	25.5%	5.0%
5 th long semester	172	3.6%	61.0%	34.3%	4.7%
6 th long semester	103	2.2%	64.1%	29.1%	6.8%
7 th long semester	92	1.9%	59.8%	30.4%	9.8%
8 th long semester	40	0.8%	32.5%	55.0%	12.5%

Notes: ¹ Only students graduating in four or more years were included.

Although the number of changes appears to be important, the timing of the change seems much more so. The next part of the table examines the last time that students switched majors and the likelihood of graduating in differing numbers of years. Again, about 65.5% of students with no major change graduated in four years. Among those who switched for the last time in the second long semester, the number graduating in four years is actually higher at 67.3%. A similar finding is shown for switching for

the last time in the third or fourth long semesters. But, after that point, switching majors precipitously drops the likelihood of graduating in four years. The findings from this part of the table make a very important point: Switching majors is, in itself, not a barrier to timely graduation so long as it is done by the end of the fourth long semester. Switches after that, however, do reduce the odds of graduating in four years.

The final part of the table examines the effects of the timing of adding a second major or degree. The findings show that such an addition, in general, does not greatly reduce the odds of graduating in four semesters, but that adding one after the fourth semester can reduce the odds by a small degree. Adding a second major or degree in the eighth semester, however, does substantially reduce the odds of graduating in the fourth year.

Table 3.8 examines the same issue but based on students graduating at different points in time. That is, it shows the percentage of students graduating in, for example, four years who had differing numbers of major changes and timing of the last change. Among four-year graduates, about 40% had no major change compared to 33% of five-year graduates and 30% of six-year ones. Each of the three graduating groups reported similar percentages with one change, but the five- and six-year groups had higher percentages of students with two or three changes. In terms of the timing of the changes, the findings indicate that among four-year graduates, changes after the fourth semester were relatively uncommon. In contrast, they were somewhat more common in the five-year graduates and much more common in the six-year ones. In sum, as the table before it showed, switching majors can be done without lengthening time-to-degree, but it should be done within the first four long semesters.

Table 3.8 Changes in Major Among Students Graduating at Different Times.¹

	Among Those who Graduated in...		
	4 years	5 years	6 years
Number of Changes			
No change	40.4%	33.4%	29.5%
1 change	44.2%	42.7%	43.9%
2 changes	12.6%	19.6%	21.6%
3+ changes	2.7%	4.3%	4.9%
Last Major Change			
2 nd long semester	7.3%	5.6%	4.9%
3 rd long semester	16.4%	13.4%	5.9%
4 th long semester	15.0%	12.5%	7.5%
5 th long semester	10.8%	14.4%	18.4%
6 th long semester	5.5%	8.8%	10.8%
7 th long semester	3.2%	7.2%	14.1%
8 th long semester	1.3%	4.8%	8.9%

Notes: ¹ Only students graduating in four or more years were included.

NET EFFECTS OF PREDICTORS ON FOUR-YEAR GRADUATION RATES

To this point, the analyses have revealed a number of factors that predict four-year graduation rates. Yet, as discussed at the beginning of the section, because most of these analyses were done in isolation without controls for other factors, primary drivers of four-year graduation are unclear. The final part of this section is meant to address this issue by regressing four-year graduation on all of the predictors among students who graduated in four, five, or six years. In these models, the findings indicate whether net of all other factors, variables predict a larger or smaller likelihood of graduating in four years versus graduating in five or six. The table reports two values for each variable, an odds-ratio and chi-square. The odds-ratio shows higher or lower odds of graduating in four years based on that characteristic. The chi-square value provides an indicator of the strength of the relationship compared to the underlying error associated with it. On the odds-ratios, values farther away from one indicate larger effects, and on the chi-squares, higher values indicate stronger ones. The findings from the models are shown in Table 3.9.

In the first model, four-year graduation is regressed only on the background demographic factors. Of those factors, the ones showing larger chi-square values, indicating stronger effects, include sex, Hispanic ethnicity (compared to White), parents having some college education (compared to having two four-year degrees), and being eligible for Pell grants (compared to students who did not submit an application). Of these, the strongest effect occurs for sex and shows that women are about 40% (OR: 1.40) more likely than men to graduate in four years (compared to graduating in five or six years). The second most powerful effect, Hispanic ethnicity, shows an odds-ratio of .66, indicating that Hispanic students are about 34% less likely to graduate in four years than White students. The bottom of the table reports various model fit statistics, which are general indications of how well the model resembles what appears to be true in the data. The primary such measure here is pseudo R^2 , which ranges from 0 to 1 and shows a very poor model fit with a value of .03. In other words, these background factors, issues that many people raise when discussing graduation rates, actually tell us very little about graduation rates. Of them, the most important predictor is sex.

The next model includes academic background factors such as SAT score, initial credit-by-exam, high school class rank, and mode of admission. Of those factors, both initial CBE and high school class ranks have stronger effects on four-year graduation. The odds-ratio for CBE shows that for every hour of credit claimed, the odds of graduating in four years increase by 2% (OR: 1.02). The odds-ratios for all high school rank categories are below one, meaning that every level of class rank below the top rank is less likely to graduate in four years. Although the effect is somewhat weaker, students entering in the summer freshman class were about 32% more likely to graduate in four years compared to students from Texas high schools not entering through the SFC program. The pseudo R^2 for this model is .06, indicating that even though several effects were substantial, the model is still a poor fit to the data.

Model 3 adds only two variables, first semester GPA and changes in GPA between the first and second semester. The latter measure is coded by subtracting second semester GPA from first, meaning that higher scores reflect higher GPAs in the second semester than in the first. This variable was coded in multiple ways to test for a U-shaped effect that would allow for effects based on both positive and negative differences set against static GPAs. However, all of these tests revealed that the simple subtraction of second semester from first yielded the largest results. The findings in this model reveal the strongest effects to this point. First semester GPA produces a chi-square value of 145.3 and an odds-ratio of 1.99. The latter indicates that each point of GPA increases the odds of graduating in four years by about 100%. Similarly, the large chi-square and positive odds-ratio for GPA change shows that each point of GPA increase from the first to

second semester increases the odds of graduating in four years by 75%. These two factors alone lead to an additional five points in pseudo R² and significantly improve the fit of the model.

Table 3.9 Estimated Net Effects of Background Characteristics and Other Factors on Four-year Graduation (n = 4,741)^{1,2}

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	OR	X ²	OR	X ²	OR	X ²	OR	X ²	OR	X ²
Background Factors										
Female	1.40	30.85	1.43	32.17	1.31	16.86	1.26	10.42	1.26	8.22
Race/Ethnicity (REF: White)										
Asian	1.00	.00	.90	1.57	.92	1.05	1.05	.33	.98	.03
Black	.87	.82	.98	.01	1.02	.01	1.01	.00	1.02	.01
Foreign	.79	.94	.75	1.38	.71	1.79	.69	1.93	.65	2.11
Hispanic	.66	20.18	.65	20.54	.71	12.54	.72	9.92	.76	5.59
Parents' Education (REF: Two 4-year+ degrees)										
No college	.81	2.87	.87	1.24	.96	.12	.96	.09	1.05	.09
Some college	.75	9.58	.81	4.69	.85	2.53	.89	1.27	.89	1.00
One 4-year+ degree	.86	3.87	.93	.94	.96	.32	.95	.33	.97	.10
Pell Grant Eligibility (REF: No application)										
Eligible	.82	5.05	.79	6.12	.81	4.94	.78	5.95	.83	2.90
Not eligible	1.14	3.44	1.06	.58	1.07	.67	1.08	.82	1.04	.15
Acad Background Factors										
SAT Score	--	--	1.00	1.51	1.00	1.46	1.00	.26	1.00	2.79
Initial Credit-by-Exam	--	--	1.02	27.14	1.01	14.89	1.02	26.34	1.03	58.32
Initial Transfer Hours	--	--	1.01	6.62	1.01	6.02	1.01	11.49	1.03	26.61
High School Class Rank (REF: ≤ 2%)										
Rank 2.01 - 5%	--	--	.72	10.18	.81	3.94	.76	5.70	.69	8.28
Rank 5.01 - 7%	--	--	.73	6.98	.87	1.26	.70	7.19	.71	5.54
Rank 7.01 - 10%	--	--	.57	26.08	.70	9.80	.59	18.20	.62	12.10
Rank 10.01 - 15%	--	--	.57	20.89	.74	5.65	.63	11.50	.64	9.20
Rank 15.01 - 30%	--	--	.51	27.44	.74	5.29	.67	8.11	.66	7.24
Rank 30.01%+	--	--	.41	19.58	.63	5.04	.53	8.44	.56	5.84
No Rank	--	--	.61	11.58	.78	2.73	.66	6.78	.68	4.96
Mode of Admission (REF: Texas high school)										
Summer freshman class	--	--	1.32	5.22	1.38	6.54	1.19	1.72	1.32	3.64
Out-of-state student	--	--	1.10	.43	.98	.03	1.00	.00	1.01	.00
First Year Performance										
First semester GPA	--	--	--	--	1.99	145.28	2.47	210.93	1.49	26.59
GPA change	--	--	--	--	1.75	97.96	1.99	132.13	1.49	32.60
Final Primary College (REF: Liberal Arts)										
Business	--	--	--	--	--	--	.93	.35	.88	.80

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	OR	X ²	OR	X ²	OR	X ²	OR	X ²	OR	X ²
Education	--	--	--	--	--	--	.64	9.62	.36	37.99
Engineering	--	--	--	--	--	--	.36	80.21	.18	137.10
Fine Arts	--	--	--	--	--	--	.50	13.65	.32	29.35
Architecture	--	--	--	--	--	--	.04	41.98	.02	58.92
Natural Sciences	--	--	--	--	--	--	.58	30.07	.50	31.60
Communication	--	--	--	--	--	--	1.08	.47	1.18	1.44
Nursing	--	--	--	--	--	--	.28	30.58	.22	35.88
Social Work	--	--	--	--	--	--	.56	2.79	.48	3.64
Geosciences	--	--	--	--	--	--	.30	7.91	.36	4.79
BBA + MPA	--	--	--	--	--	--	.01	177.25	.01	173.37
Patterns upon Graduation										
Degree Status (REF: Single major)										
Double-major	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.74	4.11
Dual degree	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.28	82.15
Changed colleges	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.66	17.41
Total hours failed	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.88	66.04
Summer hours transferred	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	1.03	16.87
Summer hours at UT	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	1.00	.01
Number of semesters completed (REF: 15 hours)										
0 hours	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.29	168.38
1 - 11 hours	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.79	21.84
12 hours	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.86	13.90
13 hours	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.82	23.08
14 hours	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.77	39.45
16+ hours	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.97	.56
Last semester of major switch (REF: None)										
Second long semester	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.90	.44
Third long semester	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.93	.29
Fourth long semester	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.75	4.57
Fifth long semester	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.46	31.57
Sixth long semester	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.39	35.78
Seventh long semester	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.33	37.42
Eighth long semester	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.21	39.12
Intercept		.43		.22		-1.29		-1.64		.98
Likelihood Ratio / df		107.99 / 10		221.54 / 22		399.47 / 24		935.36 / 35		1617.43 / 54
△ Likelihood Ratio / df		--		113.55 / 12		177.93 / 2		535.89 / 11		682.07 / 19
Pseudo R²		.03		.06		.11		.24		.39

Notes: ¹ Only students graduating in four or more years were included.

² Odds-ratios and chi-square statistics from multivariate logistic regression models are reported.

The next model includes measures of final primary college with Liberal Arts serving as the reference. Odds-ratios above one here indicate that students finishing in that college are more likely to graduate in four years compared to students finishing in Liberal Arts. Odds-ratios below one mean that students in those colleges are less likely to finish in four than Liberal Arts students. The largest chi-square values here accrue to Engineering and the BBA+MPA program. The odds-ratios for both are substantially below zero and indicate that students in those programs are much less likely to graduate in four years compared to Liberal Arts students. Across every college, except two, students are less likely to graduate in four years compared to Liberal Arts. The small chi-square for Business indicates that their rate of four-year graduation is roughly the same; the positive odds-ratio coupled with small chi-square for Communication indicates students in that college may be slightly more likely to graduate in four years, but the effect is not strong. But, in general, the findings show that even for controlling for a host of background factors and first-year performance, the colleges and programs previously shown to have longer time-to-degrees still produce those outcomes. The addition of the college variables substantially increases the Pseudo R^2 of the model to .24.

The final panel of the model adds behaviors while at UT Austin, including hours taken, degree status, changes in major, summer hours, and other factors. In terms of degree status, the findings show that dual degree seekers are much less likely to graduate in four years than single majors. Students who changed colleges are also less likely to graduate in four years, though the effect is not as large as the dual-degree one. Failing coursework is a major hindrance to timely graduation, as one would expect for a variety of reasons. The strongest effect for this model occurs in the section on hours completed. Here the findings show that the strongest effect occurs for the number of semesters in which zero hours were completed. Each such semester completed lowered the odds of finishing in four years by over 70% compared to students who took 15 hours. Completing between one and 11 hours reduces the odds by about 20%. All other categories reduce the odds compared to the 15 hour group except for those taking 16 or more hours. The odds-ratio and chi-square for that variable are very small and indicate similar outcomes compared to the 15 hour group. The timing of major changes indicates that switching majors in the second or third semester is virtually identical to no switches, and switching in the fourth semester marginally decreases the odds of finishing in four years. However, switches in the fifth long semester or after substantially decrease the odds of graduating in four years. The line for switching majors is clear-cut based on these findings: Making the change in the fourth semester or earlier generally presents no problems, but after that point in time, switches reduce the odds of finishing in four years.

With these measures in the model, the pseudo R^2 again climbs, this time to .39. That number indicates that the final model is not nearly a perfect fit of the data, but that it is fairly strong. Comparing across models, we see the biggest changes in model fit tend to occur for the variables measured after students arrive at UT Austin. Looking just at the final model and reflecting back on the demographic and academic background factors, we see that sex remains a predictor though not as strong. Hispanic ethnicity lost much of its strength, as did Pell eligibility and parents' education. Credit-by-exam actually became a stronger effect and in the final model is one of the more important predictors of four-year graduation. The college from which a student graduates remains a powerful predictor in the final model. In sum, these findings show that to increase our graduation rates, the campus should focus on issues that we largely control and less on the background factors that are commonly raised in discussions of this topic.

NET EFFECTS OF PREDICTORS ON GRADUATION

The final part of this section examines the contribution of background factors and first-year performance on any graduation. The previous model was really a model of throughput, i.e., among those who graduated, the factors that predicted graduating more quickly. This model addresses attrition, the other potential source for increasing the four-year graduation rate. The analyses in this model are carried out similarly to those in the model above but include all students and compare those who graduated by the end of six years to those who did not. Data on hours taken and major switching cannot be used because some students dropped out or were dismissed in the first and second years, making reasonable comparisons difficult. The findings for this analysis are shown in Table 3.10.

Table 3.10 Estimated Net Effects of Background Characteristics and Other Factors on Graduation among All Students (n = 6,750).¹

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	OR	X ²	OR	X ²	OR	X ²	OR	X ²
Background Factors								
Female	1.52	44.61	1.63	54.06	1.29	12.78	1.28	10.28
Race/Ethnicity (REF: White)								
Asian	1.22	4.80	1.05	.25	1.05	.20	1.11	.96
Black	.52	24.03	.75	3.86	.85	1.13	.88	.67
Foreign	1.09	.17	.96	.03	.84	.44	.84	.44
Hispanic	.71	15.84	.77	8.13	1.02	.06	1.05	.20
Parents' Education (REF: Two 4-year+ degrees)								
No college	.36	79.61	.45	44.15	.54	23.28	.54	21.98
Some college	.41	94.07	.50	51.26	.59	26.71	.59	25.22
One 4-year+ degree	.55	55.92	.63	30.21	.69	16.64	.70	16.17
Pell Grant Eligibility (REF: No application)								
Eligible	1.03	.12	.95	.29	.97	.10	.98	.06
Not eligible	1.18	4.73	.99	.01	.99	.01	1.00	.00
Academic Background Factors								
SAT Score	--	--	1.00	33.65	1.00	1.35	1.00	1.14
Initial Credit-by-Exam	--	--	1.04	74.78	1.03	34.43	1.02	29.31
Initial Transfer Hours	--	--	1.02	19.02	1.02	13.44	1.02	13.60
High School Class Rank (REF: ≤ 2%)								
Rank 2.01 - 5%	--	--	.77	4.59	1.00	.00	1.03	.07
Rank 5.01 - 7%	--	--	.63	11.54	.89	.65	1.08	.26
Rank 7.01 - 10%	--	--	.64	12.69	1.04	.08	1.24	2.40
Rank 10.01 - 15%	--	--	.53	22.20	.87	.91	1.03	.04
Rank 15.01 - 30%	--	--	.46	30.66	.84	1.28	.98	.03
Rank 30.01%+	--	--	.32	35.44	.76	1.72	.90	.26
No Rank	--	--	.69	4.26	1.17	.68	1.35	2.34
Mode of Admission (REF: Texas high school)								

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	OR	X ²	OR	X ²	OR	X ²	OR	X ²
Summer freshman class	--	--	1.06	.19	1.33	4.53	1.46	7.14
Out-of-state student	--	--	.85	1.16	.71	4.32	.72	3.91
First Year Performance								
First semester GPA	--	--	--	--	2.84	566.11	2.88	553.62
Starting College (REF: Liberal Arts)								
Business	--	--	--	--	--	--	2.35	26.14
Education	--	--	--	--	--	--	2.08	11.87
Engineering	--	--	--	--	--	--	.95	.19
Fine Arts	--	--	--	--	--	--	.70	3.04
Architecture	--	--	--	--	--	--	5.34	4.47
Natural Sciences	--	--	--	--	--	--	.81	4.77
Communication	--	--	--	--	--	--	.98	.02
Nursing	--	--	--	--	--	--	.76	1.23
Social Work	--	--	--	--	--	--	.79	.25
Intercept		1.64		-.12		-1.94		-2.12
Likelihood Ratio / df		314.73 / 10		616.43 / 22		1282.85 / 23		1360.13 / 32
Δ Likelihood Ratio / df		--		301.70 / 12		666.42 / 1		77.28 / 9
Pseudo R²		.07		.14		.27		.29

Notes:¹ Odds-ratios and chi-square statistics from multivariate logistic regression models are reported.

The first column of the table shows the effects only for demographic factors, the second adds academic background characteristics, the third adds first semester GPA, and the final one includes starting college. An examination of the final model reveals that the single most important predictor of graduation is first semester GPA. This variable is far and away the strongest effect in the model and dwarfs all other effects. It shows that every point increase in first semester GPA improves the odds of graduating by 188%. Other strong effects are produced by parental education, credit-by-exam and transfer work, and starting in Business or Education. Sex also shows a relatively strong effect, not as strong as CBE and parents' education, but substantially stronger than race/ethnicity, Pell eligibility, and high school rank. These findings reinforce those shown in the previous table: Much focus should be placed on the first-year experience as the GPA in that first semester largely determines who will graduate and who will not. All other considerations seem secondary compared to that central issue.

SECTION 4: FINANCIAL AID AND GRADUATION RATES

Discussions of the four-year graduation rate often include mentions of the role that financial aid plays in producing timely graduation. On one hand, it is argued that when financial aid is paid out in ways that provide incentives to timely graduation, students will in fact be more likely to graduate in four years. Others argue, however, that one source of financial aid, student loans, tends to burden students and can increase time-to-degree.

Another conversation in this domain focuses on the cost of graduation beyond the fourth year to students, their families and the taxpayers that support the university. By definition it is true that, on average, students who graduate in more than four years will incur more cost than students who finish in four. But, it is unclear how much extra it costs them to stay longer and whether those extra costs are borne through additional loans or other forms of financial aid. In general, making the case that four-year graduation rates are important partly relies on the premise that taking longer to graduate is costly both in terms of what the students must pay and what the university must use in resources to support them.

The goal of this section is to examine, in a brief way, the role that financial aid plays in timely graduation and the cost of excessive time-to-degree. Data for this section were provided for the 2004 FTIC cohort by the Office of Student Financial Services (OSFS). Once the data were provided they were vetted by the task force and then combined with the student records data. This combination of sources allowed the task force to examine financial aid, including loans, over time and in conjunction with time-to-graduation and all of the other factors discussed in Section 3. To the knowledge of the task force, no study of this kind has been conducted on campus over the past several years. And this study, in itself, is only a brief examination into myriad issues that are entailed with the distribution of financial aid on a campus as large as UT Austin. As such, this examination should only be seen as the first step of a larger investigation of these issues that is needed by the campus.

FINANCIAL AID AWARDS BY GRADUATION OUTCOMES

The first two questions asked of the financial aid were fairly basic: How much financial aid goes to students with different graduation outcomes? Does the university provide the most aid to students who go on to graduate, or does much of it go to students who never receive a diploma? The first table in the section, Table 4.1, addresses these questions by looking at the distribution of financial aid over six years by graduation outcome.

Table 4.1 Financial Aid Awarded to all Students over Six Years.

	Total	Student Loans			Grants and Scholarships			Federal Work-Study		
	Students	Per student	Total Aid	Any Aid	Per student	Total Aid	Any Aid	Per student	Total Aid	Any Aid
Continuing	149	\$31,832	\$2,864,841	60.4%	\$25,382	\$2,360,546	62.4%	\$3,498	\$52,477	10.1%
Dismissed	394	\$12,842	\$3,030,747	59.9%	\$13,741	\$3,586,446	66.2%	\$1,760	\$68,627	9.9%
Dropped	797	\$15,568	\$6,118,110	49.3%	\$15,891	\$7,357,354	58.1%	\$2,800	\$170,773	7.7%
Grad 4 years	3,540	\$19,112	\$28,476,961	42.1%	\$18,124	\$41,322,706	64.4%	\$4,347	\$1,138,820	7.4%
Grad 5 years	1,565	\$24,568	\$18,327,483	47.7%	\$23,147	\$23,285,705	64.3%	\$4,716	\$716,789	9.7%
Grad 6 years	305	\$31,991	\$5,502,467	56.4%	\$28,148	\$5,939,148	69.2%	\$4,552	\$132,018	9.5%
Total	6,750	\$20,569	\$64,320,608	46.3%	\$19,437	\$83,851,905	63.9%	\$4,085	\$2,279,503	8.3%
Among non-graduates	1,340	\$16,709	\$12,013,698	53.7%	\$16,284	\$13,304,346	61.0%	\$2,538	\$291,876	8.6%
Among graduates	5,410	\$21,722	\$52,306,910	44.5%	\$20,174	\$70,547,559	64.6%	\$4,487	\$1,987,626	8.2%
Percentage to graduates	--	--	81.3%	--	--	84.1%	--	--	87.2%	--

The first main panel in the table shows the distribution of subsidized and unsubsidized student loans, the second of scholarships and need-based grants, and the third of federal work-study awards. The scholarship values reported here only reflect those administered by OSFS and do not include scholarships that may have been awarded directly by colleges or other organizations.

According to the totals near the bottom of the table, the 2004 FTIC cohort took out approximately \$64 million in student loans, was awarded almost \$84 million in grants and scholarships, and over \$2.2 million in federal work-study funds. In terms of loans, \$52 million was taken out by graduates, representing about 81% of all loans made to this cohort. \$70 million of grants and scholarships went to graduates and a vast majority, \$2 million, of the work-study funds went to graduates. These figures show that across categories, in general, financial aid funds go primarily to graduates. Given that the six-year graduation rate in this cohort is about 80%, the financial aid funds disproportionately go to graduates, especially for grants and scholarships and work-study.

Looking specifically at graduates, about 42% of four-year graduates took out any student loans compared to 48% of five-year graduates and 56% of six-year ones. Among four-year graduates who took out loans, the average amount was \$19,112. The amounts taken by other graduates were higher, but they also had the extra years of schooling to fund. In terms of grants and scholarships, all three graduation categories were similarly likely to have received awards, and as was the case for loans, average amounts among those receiving any funds were higher for the fifth and sixth year graduates. Work-study awards were relatively uncommon across all graduation groups, and the average amounts received by each group were very similar.

Table 4.2 is similar to 4.1 in layout but only examines the financial aid awarded during the first four years. The goal of this table is to see whether patterns of financial aid differ during the window of time that all graduates share. It shows that even during this time, four-year graduates were the least likely to take out loans, though the amount they received during that time were very similar to those who went on to graduate in five or six years. The four-year graduates were about as likely to receive grants and scholarships during that time, though the amounts they received on average were somewhat less than the other groups. And again, in terms of work-study, the amounts were very similar. This table shows that, in general, four-year graduates do not differ significantly in terms of financial aid awarded during the first four years except that they were somewhat less likely to take any student loans. But even on that measure, the differences were not large: Between fourth and fifth, the difference was 3.5 percentage points, and between fourth and sixth, it was about 10 percentage points.

In the next table the results show the amount of financial aid accumulated in the fifth and sixth years. Four-year graduates have zero values in this table because they had graduated by that time and received no additional aid. Looking at the totals shown in Table 4.3, students accumulated about \$8.9 million in student loans in the latter two years. Of that total, about \$6.2 million went to students who would go on to graduate. About \$5.7 million in grants and scholarships were disbursed, most again going to graduates. Very little work-study funding was provided during this period of time.

Table 4.2 Financial Aid Awarded to all Students over the First Four Years.

	Total	Student Loans			Grants and Scholarships			Federal Work-Study		
	Students	Per student	Total Aid	Any Aid	Per student	Total Aid	Any Aid	Per student	Total Aid	Any Aid
Continuing	149	\$18,313	\$1,519,999	55.7%	\$20,039	\$1,683,268	56.4%	\$3,098	\$40,270	8.7%
Dismissed	394	\$11,526	\$2,697,102	59.4%	\$13,186	\$3,441,428	66.2%	\$1,719	\$67,043	9.9%
Dropped	797	\$13,194	\$5,132,550	48.8%	\$14,833	\$6,778,853	57.3%	\$2,625	\$157,491	7.5%
Grad 4 years	3,540	\$19,112	\$28,476,961	42.1%	\$18,124	\$41,322,706	64.4%	\$4,347	\$1,138,820	7.4%
Grad 5 years	1,565	\$20,228	\$14,402,622	45.5%	\$20,726	\$20,435,846	63.0%	\$4,403	\$656,094	9.5%
Grad 6 years	305	\$20,358	\$3,216,543	51.8%	\$22,543	\$4,486,113	65.2%	\$4,123	\$107,194	8.5%
Total	6,750	\$18,084	\$55,445,777	45.4%	\$18,315	\$78,148,215	63.2%	\$3,947	\$2,166,912	8.1%
Among non-graduates	1,340	\$13,243	\$9,349,651	52.7%	\$14,842	\$11,903,549	59.9%	\$2,364	\$264,805	8.4%
Among graduates	5,410	\$19,532	\$46,096,126	43.6%	\$19,118	\$66,244,665	64.0%	\$4,353	\$1,902,107	8.1%
Percentage to graduates	--	--	83.1%	--	--	84.8%	--	--	87.8%	--

Table 4.3 Financial Aid Awarded to all Students in the Fifth and Sixth Years.

	Total	Excess Student Loans			Excess Grants and Scholarships			Excess Federal Work-Study		
	Students	Per student	Total Aid	Any Aid	Per student	Total Aid	Any Aid	Per student	Total Aid	Any Aid
Continuing	149	\$17,695	\$1,344,842	51.0%	\$9,030	\$677,278	50.3%	\$2,441	\$12,207	3.4%
Dismissed	394	\$9,268	\$333,645	9.1%	\$5,578	\$145,018	6.6%	\$1,584	\$1,584	0.3%
Dropped	797	\$11,874	\$985,560	10.4%	\$7,417	\$578,501	9.8%	\$2,656	\$13,282	0.6%
Grad 4 years	3,540	\$0	\$0	0.0%	\$0	\$0	0.0%	\$0	\$0	0.0%
Grad 5 years	1,565	\$7,241	\$3,924,861	34.6%	\$4,974	\$2,849,858	36.6%	\$1,958	\$60,695	2.0%
Grad 6 years	305	\$15,874	\$2,285,924	47.2%	\$10,021	\$1,453,035	47.5%	\$2,758	\$24,824	3.0%
Total	6,750	\$10,074	\$8,874,831	13.1%	\$6,359	\$5,703,690	13.3%	\$2,208	\$112,591	0.8%
Among non-graduates	1,340	\$13,662	\$2,664,047	14.6%	\$7,826	\$1,400,797	13.4%	\$2,461	\$27,072	0.8%
Among graduates	5,410	\$9,054	\$6,210,785	12.7%	\$5,993	\$4,302,893	13.3%	\$2,138	\$85,519	0.7%
Percentage to graduates	--	--	70.0%	--	--	75.4%	--	--	76.0%	--

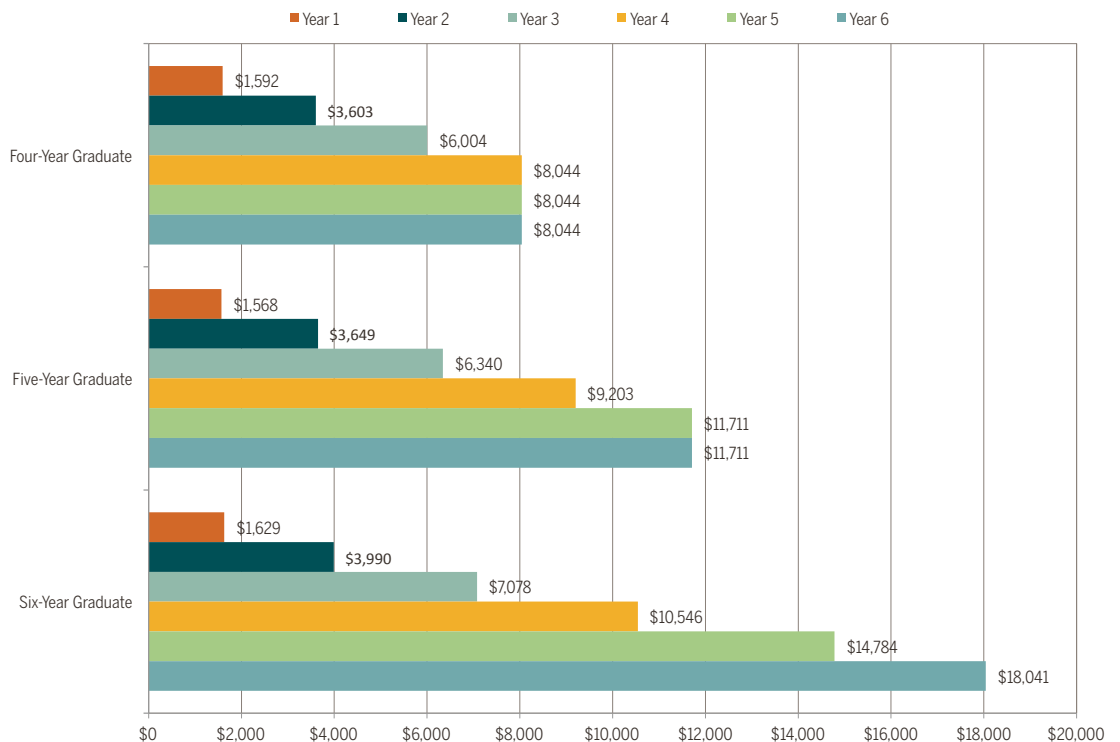
Among students who graduated in five years, 34.6% took on new debt during the fifth year at an average amount of \$7,241. Among six-year graduates, 47.2% took on new debt during those two years for an average amount of \$15,874. Five-year graduates who received grants and scholarships during this time received an average of \$4,974 compared to the \$10,021 received by six-year graduates. These findings make that clear taking additional years to graduate leads to higher student loan burdens and the provision of resources that could go to students in later cohorts who have a chance to graduate in four years. Put another way, these findings show the cost of excess years of graduation in terms of the

resources that students and families must pay to receive the diploma. They also show the costs the university bears, in financial aid terms, to support these excess years.

STUDENT LOANS OVER TIME

Given the high volume of discussion of the role of student loans on timely graduation, it is worth exploring further the role that those loans seem to play in these processes. Figure 4.1 provides a breakdown of cumulative student loans among all students (including those who received no loans) by graduation year. The goal of this figure is to determine whether there are very different patterns in loan distribution over time for students graduating in different years. It could be the case that five and six-year graduates do, in fact, take on substantially more loan debt earlier in their careers in a way that creates burden later. Alternatively, similar patterns across graduation categories would suggest that loans do not play a substantial role in generating time-to-degree.

Figure 4.1 Average Student Loan Levels among All Students by Graduation Year.

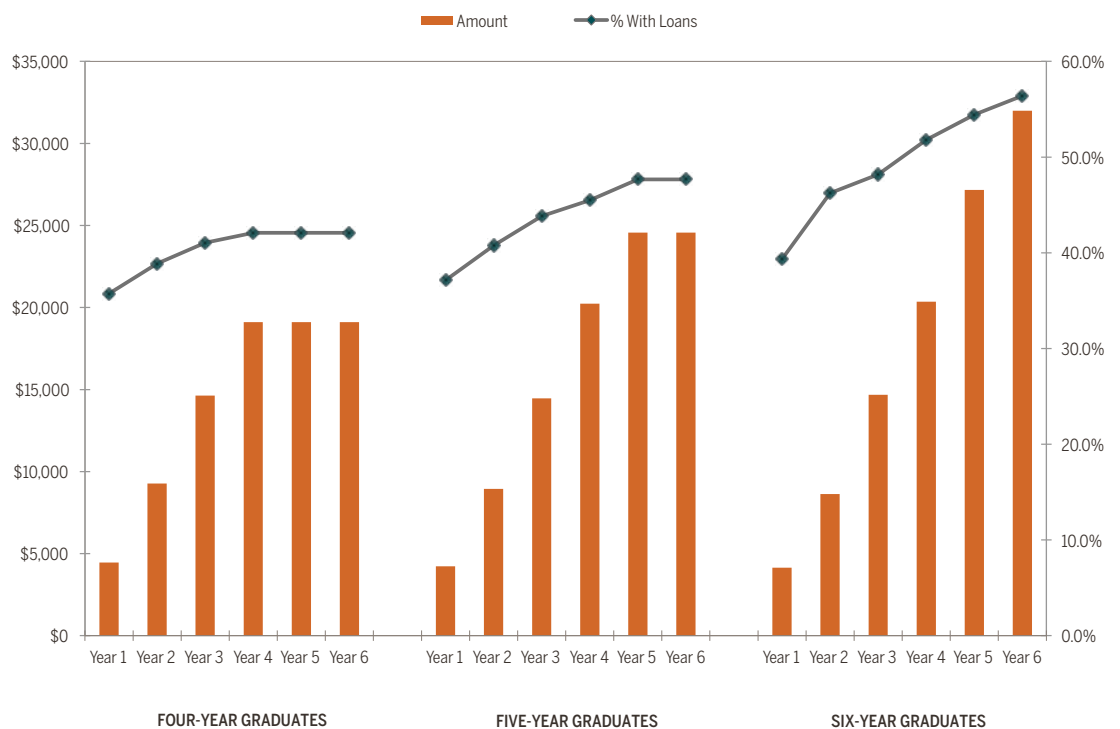


According to the figure, all graduates, regardless of endpoint, took out about \$1,600 in loans by the end of the first year. This figure includes all students, even those with no loans, so the number only among students with loans will be somewhat higher. By the end of the second year, the averages for four- and five-year graduates were similar at \$3,600 but were somewhat higher for six-year graduates at \$3,990. In the third year, debt among four-year graduates grew to about \$6,000 on average, compared to \$6,340 for five-year and \$7,078 for six-year graduates, again, fairly similar totals. By the end of the fourth year, the numbers start to diverge, with four-year graduates having the least debt at \$8,044 on average and six-year graduates having \$10,546. This difference of \$2,500 over four years

is substantial, but most of the difference occurred in years three and four. Excessive burden, were it to occur and have a lasting effect, would likely occur in the first or second years, but the data do not support such a finding. It is also noteworthy that the real differences between four-year graduates and the other groups occur in the fifth and sixth years when the later graduates are still building debt but the four-year ones are finished. Again, this finding points more to the importance of finishing in four years than debt early in students' careers being a burden to timely graduation.

The next figure, Figure 4.2, provides a similar analysis but provides lines indicating the percentage of students with any cumulative loan debt at that point in time and bars representing the average amount of debt among those who hold it. In the first two years the findings reveal very similar patterns across all three graduation groups. In terms of the average amount taken, all three groups are also similar across all of the first four years. However, in terms of the percentage of students taking on any debt, the number tends to climb least rapidly among the four-year graduates and most rapidly among the six-year ones. But again, the major differences really appear after the end of the fourth year, when five- and six-year graduates continue to take on debt, but four-year graduates are finished with their educations.

Figure 4.2 Average Amount of Loans among Students with Loans over Time and by Graduation Year.



Another issue to keep in mind when reading these figures is the underlying size of each group. The four-year graduate group is by far the largest, with over 3,000 students. The six-year group is substantially smaller at a little over 300 students. Thus, even if that group reports a 50% debt rate by the end of year four, that is only about 150 students. By way of comparison, the 40% debt rate among the four-year graduates represents approximately 1,400 students. Given that both groups have about the same amount of debt at that point in time (close to \$20,000), something else must be happening that would allow the 1,400 to graduate in four years but the 150 to wait an additional two years to do so. It almost certainly cannot be the accumulated debt, though it could be difficult personal situations of which the

accumulated debt is an indicator. Whatever the case, the findings do not support the idea that student loan debt increases time-to-degree.

NET EFFECTS OF FINANCIAL AID ON GRADUATION OUTCOMES

The final test of the effects of financial aid comes in the context of the multivariate logistic regression model discussed in Section 4. For this test, measures of financial aid are added to the final models shown in Tables 3.9 and 3.10. As shown in Table 4.4, the first test examines the effect of receiving any aid, and the amount of aid, on any graduation. The second model examines the effects of the same factors on four-year graduation among students who graduated. Again, these variables were added to the final models shown in the previous section, though, in the interests of space, only the effects for the financial aid variables are shown.

Table 4.4 Net Effects of Financial Aid Factors on Any Graduation and Four-year Graduation.¹

	Any Graduation (n = 6,750)		4-Year Graduate (n = 4,741)	
	OR	X ²	OR	X ²
Any Aid				
Student Loans	.71	6.55	1.17	1.22
Grants	.76	4.07	1.04	.09
Scholarships	1.06	.39	.86	2.53
Work-study	.72	.83	1.49	3.14
Total Amount				
Student Loans	1.04	3.65	1.00	.60
Grants	.97	1.97	.99	2.26
Scholarships	1.04	3.34	1.01	8.24
Work-study	1.50	3.62	.98	.22
Intercept	-2.08		.98	
Likelihood Ratio / df	1393.77 / 40		1637.35 / 62	
Δ Likelihood Ratio / df	33.64 / 8		19.92 / 8	
Pseudo R²	.30		.40	

Notes: ¹ Odds-ratios and chi-square statistics from multivariate logistic regression models are reported.

In terms of any graduation, the model shows that taking any student loans or any grants decreases the odds of graduation, though the effects are not strong. Assuming that loans are taken, higher amounts lead to a greater likelihood of graduation. Higher amounts of work-study and scholarship aid also increase the likelihood of graduation, but only marginally so. In terms of time-to-degree, no financial aid variable has a non-marginal effect except for the amount of scholarships received. In that case, higher amounts of scholarships increase the odds of graduating in four years. Compared to the findings in Tables 3.9 and 3.10, these results suggest that financial aid plays a marginal role in predicting graduation outcomes.

It is important to note that these findings do not imply that financial aid is not necessary; rather, it shows that financial aid on this campus, as distributed, basically allows students with need to pursue their educations in much the same way as students without that need. If the financial aid were to go away, it is likely that the effects of factors such as family background and other measures of socioeconomic status would skyrocket because the field is no longer being made level through the provision of financial aid. More importantly, many students currently on campus would simply be unable to attend without financial aid. Clearly aid plays an important role in the lives of students, but in terms of timely graduation, other factors are more important. Nevertheless, as mentioned at the outset of this section, much more research is needed on this topic. The data from OSFS and student records are rich in complexity, and the brief analysis reported here cannot begin to do justice to the nuances they contain.

SECTION 5: STUDENT SATISFACTION AND TIME USE

Although the analyses in the section above have shed a great deal of light on the processes that drive graduation and time-to-degree, they have also left open significant questions. Of these remaining questions, perhaps the most important involves differences among colleges. That is, as shown in Section 3, even after adjustments for college preparedness, background factors, hours taken, switching majors, and many other measures, some colleges still produce graduates more quickly than others. Some of these differences are easily explained. For example, the MPA program in Business is a five-year degree, thus students in the program will find it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to graduate in four years. Similarly, although the bachelor's degree in Architecture is, ostensibly, a four-year degree, the fact that it requires at least 167 hours of coursework to complete means that few students can actually finish it in four years.

However, in other colleges, questions remain. Why is it, for example, that students in Engineering and Natural Sciences have relatively lengthy time-to-degrees? In general, the number of hours required to receive a degree in Engineering is about 130, not much more than degrees in other colleges, such as Liberal Arts and Communication. Part of the answer may lie in these differences in hours requirements, but given the small gaps, it is unlikely that much of the explanation resides there.

Another possible explanation is the availability of courses needed to graduate. In discussions with advisors and students around campus, one of the commonly cited reasons for delays in graduation are a lack of courses that fulfill degree requirements. In some cases, the courses are nested within a sequence such that if a particular course cannot be taken, it delays completion of the entire sequence.

The data used in the sections above doesn't shed any light on this issue. It contains hours taken, GPA and many other factors, but it does not address courses taken or the availability of courses. Indeed, collecting such information, in general, would be a difficult undertaking but is necessary for helping answer this question. Until such data are made available, it is possible to rely on the Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) data for hints as to whether course availability is an issue.

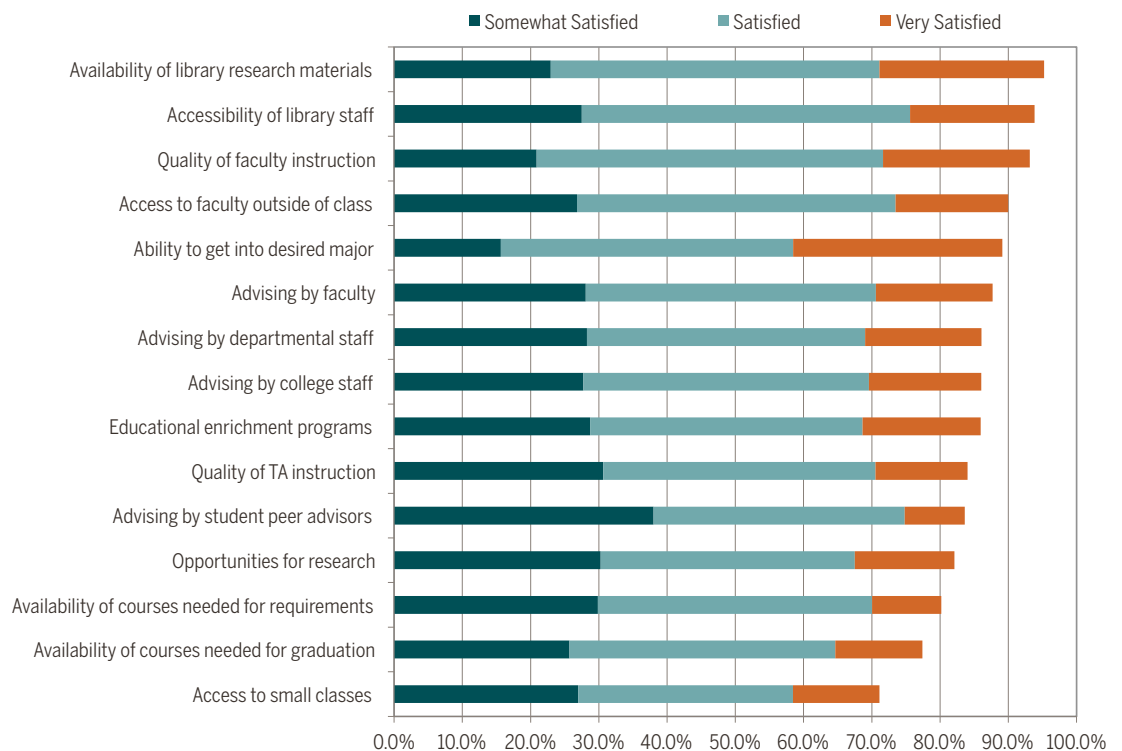
The SERU survey is a yearly project conducted at UT Austin in conjunction with several other public research universities around the US. The online survey contains hundreds of questions related to student experiences on campus and has been widely used by researchers around the country to better understand how students navigate research universities. At UT, the survey is conducted by staff in the Division of Student Affairs along with collaborative effort from faculty, staff and students across

the university. The last wave of the survey was conducted in spring 2011 and was administered to all undergraduate students on campus. Response rates for the survey varied by college but in general were 35-50%. The final data set yielded over 11,500 useable responses.

STUDENT SATISFACTION

The SERU survey asked students a number of questions related to their satisfaction with various aspects of the university. In total, there were 15 of these items, and for each, students could report that they were very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, somewhat satisfied, satisfied, or very satisfied. Figure 5.1 shows the 15 aspects of the university that students rated. The bars in the chart indicate overall levels of satisfaction, but only those who answered on the satisfied side of the scale are shown. Items are ordered based on overall satisfaction, with the items garnering the most satisfaction at the top of the chart and those with the least at the bottom.

Figure 5.1 Students' Satisfaction with Various Aspects of the University.

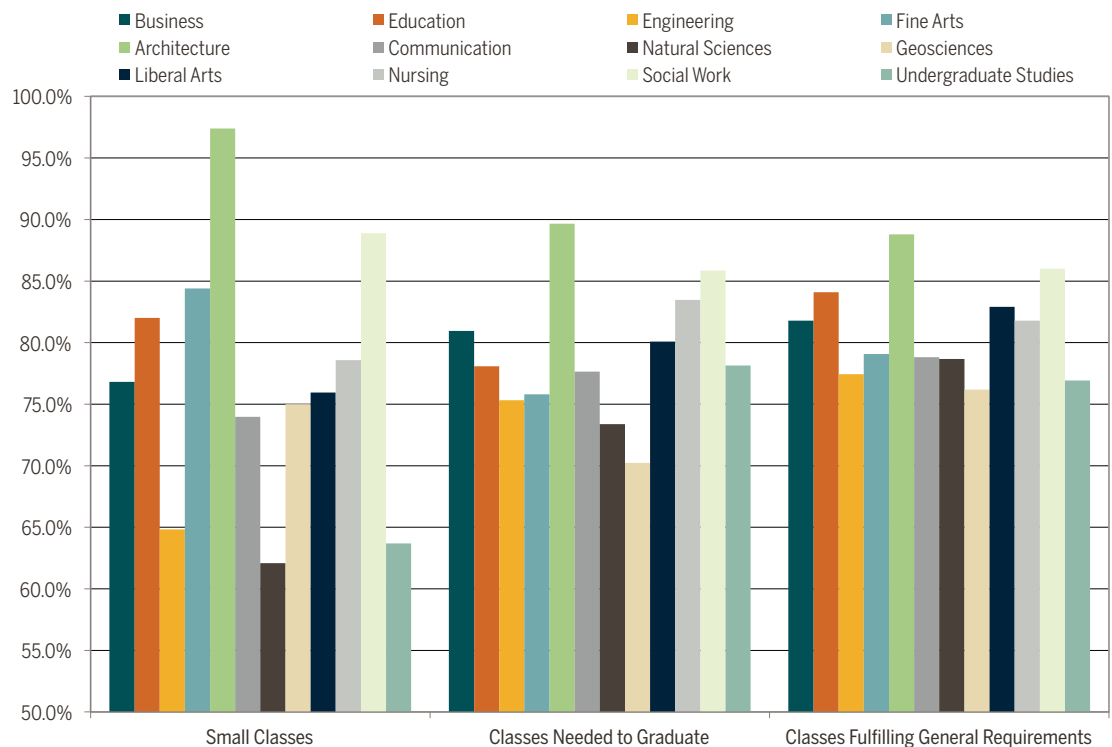


According to the figure, students report the highest satisfaction levels with the university libraries. Indeed, for both of the library measures, about 95% of students report somewhat satisfied or better for these items. Students are also extremely satisfied with the quality of faculty instruction: Overall, about 93% of students reported being somewhat satisfied or better with that aspect of the campus. Students were also very satisfied with access to faculty outside of class and their ability to get into a desired major. Falling farther on the list were issues such as advising, the quality of TA instruction, and opportunities for research. But even for all of these issues, overall satisfaction levels were over 80% across the university.

However, the bottom of the list is made up of the issues that might be driving the differences in colleges observed above. That is, of all the items on the list, students were least satisfied with the “availability of courses for general education or breadth requirements” (80% satisfied), “availability of courses needed for graduation” (77% satisfied), and “access to small classes” (71% satisfied). Although these items are not meant to measure the lack of needed courses per se, the fact that students are the least satisfied with them is a strong indication that problems in this domain exist on campus.

The next figure, Figure 5.2, further explores this issue by examining satisfaction with course availability by college. If it is the case that delays in graduation in colleges such as Engineering and Natural Sciences are due to course availability issues, then the findings should reveal that students in those colleges are in fact less satisfied with availability of courses.

Figure 5.2 Student Satisfaction with Course Access by College.



Because of the number of colleges around campus, Figure 5.2 is necessarily complicated. Nevertheless, some findings readily stand out. For example, in satisfaction with access to small classes, students in Engineering, Natural Sciences and Undergraduate Studies report less satisfaction than all other colleges. In terms of classes needed to graduate, the differences are not as strong but are similar: Students in Engineering, Natural Sciences and Geosciences report the lowest satisfaction levels. In terms of courses that fulfill general requirements, all colleges cluster fairly evenly, but again, the same colleges tend to report the lowest levels of satisfaction. Given these findings, it is possible that the differences observed in previous sections might be due to course availability or the sequencing of courses needed to graduate. The SERU data have provided some important insight into the issue, but much more work is needed on the topic.

Although not shown in the figure, the task force also examined satisfaction with students’ ability to get into desired majors. Across the university the satisfaction with this item is very high, almost 90%.

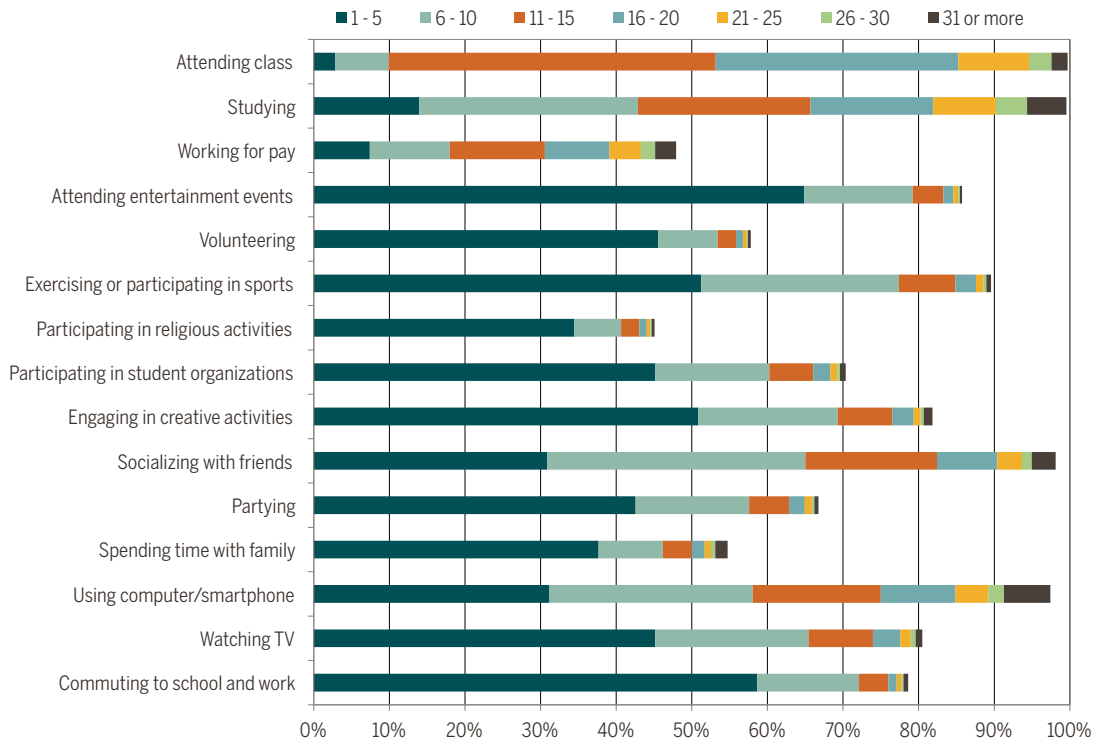
However, by college the satisfaction levels vary widely. In the colleges of Business and Architecture, satisfaction levels are the highest at over 95%. Other colleges, including Education, Engineering, Fine Arts, Communication, Geosciences and Social Work all report satisfaction levels of 90% or higher. For the remaining colleges, satisfaction levels are somewhat lower and in the range from 85 to 88%. The one college that falls below this number is Undergraduate Studies: For students in that college, satisfaction with ability to get their desired major is at the bottom, with 60%. As noted in Section 2, attrition levels are relatively high in Liberal Arts and Natural Sciences, and part of the reason might lie in students' inability to get the majors they want. If this factor is a significant predictor of attrition, then it portends problems with retention for students entering Undergraduate Studies. Clearly, this work is brief and speculative. Thus much more research is needed to understand the role that the ability to get a desired major plays in overall attrition levels.

TIME USE

In discussions with advisors and students, one commonly cited reason for students taking fewer than 15 hours per semester is a lack of time to study or otherwise prepare for a large number of courses. Some members of the campus community have remarked that many students engage in paid employment, and the hours required of those jobs make it difficult to complete 15 hours or more. Throughout the task force's discussion with members of campus, this time availability issue continued to be raised as a source of concern.

But is it really the case that students lack the time to take a large number of classes? Similarly, are students working so many hours in paid employment that they cannot take 15 hours a semester on a regular basis? Again, the SERU data provide some clues as to the time availability of students on campus. In the survey, students were asked, "How many hours do you spend in a typical week (7 days) on the following activities?" Possible response categories included 0, 1-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, 21-25, 26-30, and more than 30. For the purposes of this analysis, midpoints were coded for all categories, with the top category being coded as 33 hours. The activities included in the survey are shown in Figure 5.3.

Figure 5.3 Breakdown of Hours Spent in a Typical Week on Various Activities.

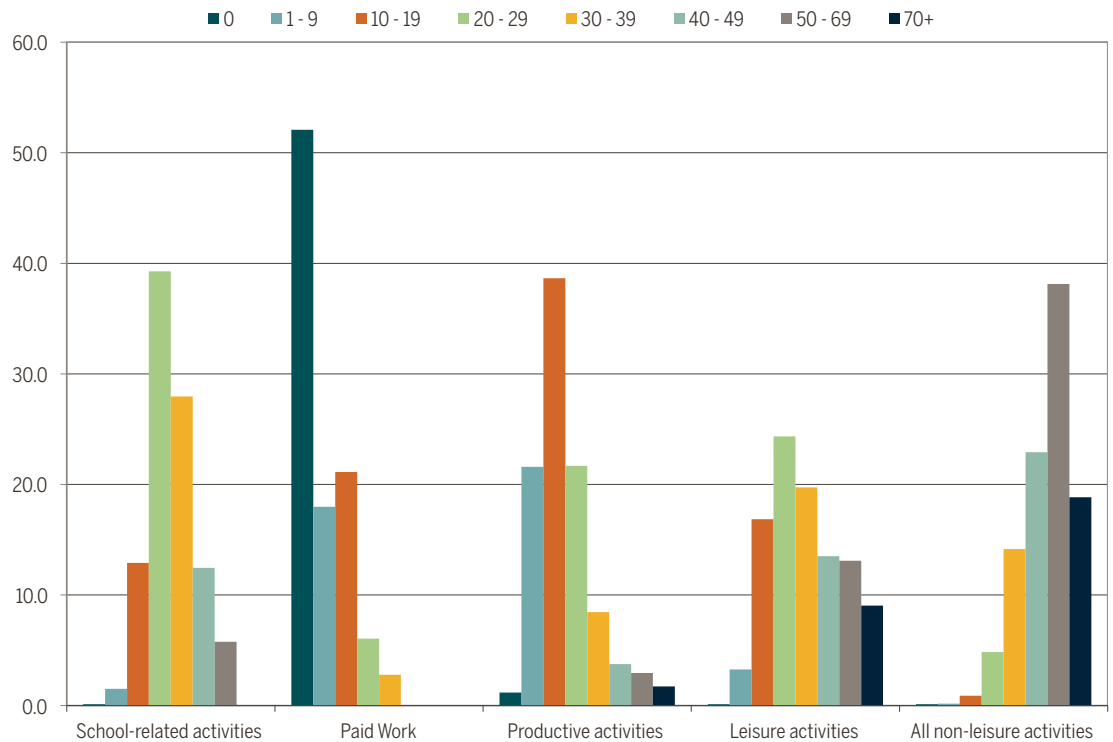


Students reporting zero hours are not shown on the figure. Thus the length of the bar is an indication of the percentage of students who engaged in any level of the activity. The colored bands show the percentages of students who engaged in the activity at different amounts of time. The longest bars are shown for time spent attending class, studying, socializing with friends, and “using the computer or smart phone for non-academic purposes (games, shopping, e-mail/instant messaging, etc.)” For each of the academic items, about 100% of students spent time on the activities; for the other two the percentages were over 95%. Other common activities included exercising, watching TV and attending entertainment events (“movies, concerts, sports or other entertainment events”). In contrast, the least common activities were paid work, participating in religious activities and spending time with family.

Given concerns about paid employment, the low level of activity in that domain is especially noteworthy: as the figure shows, only about 48% of students reported any paid work. Among all students, about 31% work one to 15 hours a week, 9% work 16 to 20 hours a week, 4% work 21 to 25 hours a week and about 5% work 26 hours or more a week. In short, paid work is common on campus, but a minority of students engages in the activity in a typical week. Working large numbers of hours, however, is fairly rare.

To better understand the role of paid employment in students’ time use, it is important to look at it in comparison with other activities. Figure 5.4 performs this task by aggregating hours according to general types of activity. School-related activities include attending class and studying; paid work makes up its own category; productive activities include volunteering, exercise, engaging in creative activities, participating in student organizations, and participating in religious activities; and leisure activities include the remaining items.

Figure 5.4 Hours Spent in a Typical Week on Various Activities by Broad Category.



Unlike the previous figure, this one includes students who spent no time on the activity. Of all categories of effort, the one with the highest level of no activity was paid work. In contrast, every other category had significant levels of engagement across all students. In terms of productive activities, the modal category, at about 40%, was engaging in those activities about 10 to 19 hours per week. Twenty to 29 hours a week of productive activity also was commonly cited by students. After that, more hours were much less common.

In contrast to productive forms of behavior, students spent a great deal more time in leisure activities. The modal category for this type of behavior was again 10 to 19 hours per week, but levels of engaging in these activities were relatively high across all more time-intensive categories. Indeed, about 20% of students in the survey reported spending 50 hours or more in leisure activities in a typical week. Juxtaposing time spent in leisure activities against paid work shows even greater differences.

In sum, these findings do not support the argument that students lack the time to take more coursework. It is true that many students work, but over half do not, and among those who do, the vast majority work fewer than 20 hours a week. In contrast, students engage in very high levels of leisure activities. This time could be repurposed to focus on classes and other academic work and still leave plenty of time for paid work, productive activities, and some leisure pursuit. It is important to further note that many of these activities are not associated with campus life. Thus, as students spend more time engaging in them, they spend less time behaving in ways that integrate them into campus life. As previous research has shown, campus integration is crucial to the success of students; consequently, it is important for the university to find ways to reduce the time spent on leisure activities and redirect it toward the behaviors that better integrate students into campus life.

Appendix C: Raising Four-Year Graduation Rates and Increasing Capacity at The University of Texas at Austin

INTRODUCTION

One of the roles of academic advisors is to serve as liaison between university administrators and students. Perhaps the world of computer programming provides an apt analogy. In most cases, to ask computer programmers to explain their products to software users would be folly. Similarly, to ask laymen to put their needs in terms that programmers could tolerate would be a challenging enterprise. Academic advisors are the university equivalent of the technical writers, customer support specialists, and professional development trainers who act as buffer and interpreter between the two groups. It is in this capacity that we think we are ideally situated to offer commentary on four-year graduation rates at The University of Texas at Austin, and greatly appreciate the opportunity to do so.

Early in the fall semester, College of Liberal Arts Associate Dean Marc Musick suggested that we make site visits to peer institutions in search of innovations and practices for the promotion of four-year graduation. Through the generous support of the Office of the President, we were able to carry out that goal.

We selected schools to visit based upon a number of factors. First, we limited our search to other schools on the *U.S. News and World Report* list of Top Public Schools (National Universities). Next, we compared and contrasted UT Austin with those schools on several angles, including undergraduate enrollment size, acceptance rates, student standardized test scores, costs, need-based aid percentages, student-faculty ratios, and four-year graduation rates.

Of the items we studied, college readiness, as measured by standardized test scores, presented the strongest correlation with four-year graduation rates. While we do suggest that making wholesale improvements to the Texas public school system would be one remedy to four-year graduation woes, we assume that quagmire is beyond the scope of the task force.

Of the schools that were most strikingly similar to UT Austin in the areas we examined, The University of Florida (Florida) and Pennsylvania State University-University Park (Penn State) were chosen because of their achievements in graduating students in four years. We felt it important to visit one University of California System campus, and the University of California-Berkeley and the University

of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) made the most sense in terms of cultural match and impressive four-year graduation rates. We settled on UCLA because the disparity in college readiness between its students and our own was less wide. Finally, the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor (Michigan), though dissimilar to UT Austin in terms of the college readiness of its students, nonetheless offered an aspirant four-year graduation rate at a top public school of comparable size.

We then turned our attention to crafting a set of questions for our discussions at these schools. We looked carefully at the results of a four-year rate focus group conducted by Dean Musick with academic advisors from across our campus. Vice Provost Gretchen Ritter solicited feedback from the Academic Counselors Association on four-year graduation matters. Though these comments were delivered more informally at a Provost's Council meeting, we did consider them, as well. Our final list of topics covered many aspects of university operations, including admissions, student support programs, advising, academic policies, new student orientation, and technology.

We cannot overemphasize the value of these visits. Each recommendation in this report was informed by our conversations with administrators at our peer institutions. In some instances, we've committed outright theft of their methods. We've tried to give credit where due, though many approaches were shared by most or all of the schools we called upon and are not attributed, consequently. And our meetings also served as both confirmation of our own suspicions and catalyst for our own ideas.

In our search for a root cause to UT Austin's problematic four-year graduation rates, we discovered numerous contributing factors, each presenting unique challenges and requiring careful contemplation. To those hoping for a panacea, none will be forthcoming: Combination therapy is the order of the day for tackling this problem.

The 50 recommendations in this report aim to address some of the myriad obstacles to raising four-year graduation rates and to increasing capacity at UT Austin.

I. MONITOR ACADEMIC PROGRESS

One commonality among the four universities we visited was a concrete effort to track students' progress toward a degree and to more closely monitor other aspects of students' academic development. UT Austin should adopt strategies that allow for proactive involvement when students appear to be venturing in directions at odds with timely graduation.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Institute an academic "warning" category to supplement the current table of scholastic standards (i.e., probation and dismissal rules).

RATIONALE

The 2.0 GPA marker for probation does not catch all students who may be experiencing academic difficulty. In particular, first-year students who are performing poorly, relative to their work in high school, may be at risk for dropout. Students on academic warning would be required to meet with an academic advisor. Warning status would not be reflected on a student's transcript. We recommend the following revision to the table of academic standards:

	1 long semester completed	2 long semesters completed	3 long semesters completed	4 or more long semesters completed
Warning GPA	less than 2.4	less than 2.35	less than 2.3	less than 2.25
Probation GPA	less than 2.0	less than 2.0	less than 2.0	less than 2.0
Dismissal GPA	0	less than 1.7	less than 1.85	less than 2.0

RECOMMENDATION 2: Create an academic warning and suspension system based upon credit hours completed per semester enrolled.

GPA isn't the only barometer of academic progress. Students should be required to make degree progress by earning sufficient credit hours, as well. Any experienced UT Austin advisor can cite examples of students who Q-drop, withdraw, repeat courses, or receive incompletes with such regularity that they cannot be considered as serious candidates for four-, five-, or even six-year graduation, 2.0 GPA notwithstanding.

Students on warning would be required to meet with an advisor. Students on suspension would not be eligible to return to UT Austin for a **long** (fall or spring) semester until they have completed a minimum number of hours, according to the table below. They would be eligible to enroll at UT Austin in the summer semester, or could otherwise complete hours through online or community college offerings. For most, academic suspension simply mandates summer school. For those who are far behind, though, the hope is that they'll spend time at a community college and return more fully prepared for UT Austin courses. For all, the threat of academic suspension will send a clear message that timely completion of degree is important. Checkpoints would be annual in order to allow a student to make up for one aberrant semester, as well as to align suspension with the summer semester for most students. Warning status would not be reflected on a student's transcript. We recommend the following guidelines:

	2 long semesters completed	4 long semesters completed	6 long semesters completed	8 long semesters completed
Expected Credits	30	60	90	120
Warning	18 - 29	48 - 59	78 - 89	108 - 119
Suspension	17 or fewer	47 or fewer	77 or fewer	107 or fewer

RECOMMENDATION 3: Where appropriate, gear policies toward long semesters (fall or spring) enrolled, rather than credit hours undertaken. A number of items in this report, including those above, are predicated on this proposed shift.

RATIONALE

The advent of dual credit and advanced placement subverts the intentions of some UT Austin policies and procedures. Policies related to academic probation, scholastic dismissal, college transfer, pass/fail changes, registration, and others are tied to credit hours earned, rather than semesters completed. Some of these policies work to the detriment of the many students who have earned credit by exam and dual credit, while others operate to their benefit.

We believe that basing some policies upon a student's matriculation at the university makes sense. The new "one-time exception" drop policy follows this philosophy by imposing a different standard for those who have been enrolled at UT Austin for a longer period of time, rather than credit hours obtained.

For policy purposes, transfer students would be assigned a "semester enrolled" status based upon credit hours upon entry, with one semester accrued for every 15 credit hours completed (e.g., new transfer students who have completed 49 credit hours would be entering their fourth long semester, regardless of time spent at their prior institution).

RECOMMENDATION 4: Create a "universal" bar.

RATIONALE

Students on academic probation are currently barred from registering for an upcoming semester until they have met with an advisor. The optimal time for advising probationary students is early in the semester, when proposed interventions can have the most impact and when advisors may devote more time to students due to lighter traffic. In spite of repeated attempts from advisors to compel these students to do so, many wait until registration arrives to speak with an advisor. The advising period surrounding registration is an incredibly busy one, and the odds of completing a meaningful advising session during that time are slim unless one does so to the neglect (and consternation) of other students in need of advising services.

UCLA utilizes a universal bar ("hold") to prevent targeted students from accessing most campus services (library, recreational center, etc.). Should UT Austin employ this type of bar, the odds of an appropriately-timed, substantive advising session would rise exponentially. Students would be given fair warning and ample time to meet with an advisor before the bar would be placed.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Contact enrolled students who have fallen off the radar, as well as potential dropouts, in order to assess and to encourage.

RATIONALE

At an institution the size of UT Austin, it is far too easy for student difficulties to go unnoticed. And at institutions of any size, the tracking of dropouts is an arduous task. Though we mention this in the context of four-year graduation rates, the university surely is equally invested in the welfare of its current and former students.

Instructors are able to send "absence/failing" reports to students. Aggressively promote the use of these reports to faculty. If a student receives multiple reports in a single semester, make a coordinated effort to contact the student and to offer appropriate assistance.

Most students take advantage of pre-registration opportunities for the upcoming semester(s). When they do not, it is often an ominous sign of planned separation from the school. Each semester, the Office of the Registrar should generate a report of students who have neither applied to graduate nor pre-registered for the following semester. Contact those students, as well. Consider the use of highly trained student employees in this effort, as the at-risk students may be less intimidated by them, and, thus, more receptive to a candid exchange.

Though they may not be receptive to surveys and other intrusions, also attempt to reach out to students who do drop out, with persuading return and determining cause as simultaneous goals. UCLA sends postcards (“We’re ready when you are”) to students who have not enrolled. Consider a similar effort.

II. CHANGE CAMPUS CULTURE

The type of institution we strive to be is neither a country club nor a commuter school, but our student behaviors indicate that they may believe otherwise. We must change outdated policies and procedures to reflect loftier expectations.

In 2001, UCLA mandated a policy called Expected Cumulative Progress as a response to concerns similar to our own. It applied to all majors and was implemented swiftly, to howls of protest not only from students, but also from faculty and staff. The result? Ten years later, undergraduate graduation rates have risen by more than 15%. Current UCLA students do not complain, in part because they are oblivious to the existence of prior policies.

RECOMMENDATION 6: Require all students to declare a major prior to registering for their fifth long semester.

RATIONALE

Choosing a major is a prerequisite for degree progress.

Prior to registration, fourth-semester undeclared students should be alerted to this requirement. Schools and colleges will likely need to develop new models for the advising of students who declare just prior to registration.

Ideally, the Registrar’s Office would create a website that provides the following:

- Information about internal transfer requirements for various majors.
- Students’ current major(s).
- Instructions for declaring a major for which a student is eligible.
- Eventually, students would also be able to declare or confirm their major through this website, and would be required to do so in conjunction with registration for the first through fifth semesters.

RECOMMENDATION 7: Students must transfer to one UT Austin college or school from another, or add a simultaneous major in a second college or school, no later than the beginning of their fifth long semester.

RATIONALE

Students declare a major, but continue to aim for transfer to another school/college. Similarly, they may declare a major in one college while planning to add another in a second college at a later, unspecified date. According to the *General Information Catalog*, students who have completed four long semesters or 60 or more hours in residence aren’t eligible for internal transfer, but this rule is not enforced. It should be.

This recommendation is intended to include students who have transferred to UT Austin from another school, meaning that admissions will need to make it clear to prospective transfer students who have completed 60 or more hours that “internal” transfer, if admitted to UT Austin, will not be permitted. The Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education must approve any exception to this policy.

RECOMMENDATION 8: Allow students to declare a second major in their home school or college through the beginning of their sixth long semester.

RATIONALE

Degree requirements vary less between majors in a single school or college than they do between colleges, making the addition of another major in one college less problematic. With this in mind, students will have something akin to a one-semester grace period to add another major in their own college, contingent upon permission of that college.

RECOMMENDATION 9: In order to declare any simultaneous (second) major, students must demonstrate that they will be able to complete all degree requirements for all majors on a four-year timetable.

RATIONALE

Students are often admitted to simultaneous majors in a timely manner, but don’t complete degree requirements in four years. The Registrar’s Office will create a planner form for students to map out remaining semesters. Ideally, this form may be produced in conjunction with the Interactive Degree Audit planner. Academic advisors will assist students with this process. In order to declare a simultaneous major, a student must obtain the approval signatures of representatives from each department (generally, academic advisors) on this form.

This proposal is based upon Florida’s model, which does not permit students to declare a major unless and until they prove that it may be completed without disruption to four-year graduation.

RECOMMENDATION 10: Administrators for each certificate (e.g., Bridging Disciplines, Business Foundations, etc.), study abroad, or special program (UT in LA, etc.) must be charged with ensuring that all students who enter a program will be able to complete both degree and program requirements on a four-year timetable.

RATIONALE

These activities have the potential to delay graduation, as well. Though no university form will be required, each program must monitor degree progress as part of its selection process.

RECOMMENDATION 11: Students who are unable to complete requirements in eight long semesters will be limited to one degree and one major.

The best-laid plans of mice and men often go awry, and some students will be unable or unwilling to follow the second major plans they have created. The efficacy of any policy hinges on enforcement. We are hoping to achieve a sea change in our student culture (from “more is more” to “on time”). In order

to do so, mere suggestion is not enough. Students who do not complete a bachelor's degree by the beginning of their ninth long semester will be ineligible for dual degree, double major, or certificate programs: Only one degree (and one major) will be awarded, even if the student successfully completes the requirements for additional degrees, majors, programs.

A student who does graduate with his/her first degree on time may return to complete additional majors as they desire, but will be ineligible for funding. Financial aid will be granted only according to current guidelines (e.g., students who need additional time to complete teacher certification requirements may be awarded financial aid).

RECOMMENDATION 12: Because many students have the financial means to afford additional semesters at UT Austin, the university must take other measures to disabuse students of the notion that delayed graduation is acceptable.

RATIONALE

UT Austin must be less hospitable to stragglers. We recommend implementation of the following rules for this purpose:

- Enforce so-called slacker laws, allowing the university to charge non-resident tuition for Texas residents who accumulate an excess of hours without earning a degree.
- Change registration access periods to align with semesters enrolled: Undergraduates entering their seventh or eighth semester register first, followed by those entering their fifth or sixth, etc. Students who are entering their ninth or later long semester will register last.
- Limit ninth-semester students to the same athletics ticketing options as students in their first semester.
- As mentioned above, disallow students in their ninth or later long semester from receiving UT Austin scholarships or financial aid, except by appeal.

RECOMMENDATION 13: Make accommodations to the above policies for majors that require more than eight semesters of coursework for degree completion.

RATIONALE

Programs in which more than eight long semesters of coursework is the expectation may operate on an adjusted timetable for all transfer, declaration, and special program policies. These must be approved by the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education and included in the *General Information Catalog*.

RECOMMENDATION 14: Do not prorate flat-rate tuition for students taking fewer than twelve hours.

RATIONALE

UT Austin leaders will have to determine how part-time students will fit within a model where four-year graduation is the expectation and admission to the institution is at a premium. Many of our peer institutions follow a traditional model, but external pressures at odds with that are certainly in play. In the long term, though, it is to a student's economic advantage to enroll full time each semester. If we

do want to emphasize full course loads and rapid progress toward degree completion, the move to true flat-rate tuition will surely telegraph that to students.

Do, however, make one exception to flat-rate tuition: Provide a 50% semester tuition rebate to eighth-semester graduating seniors who enroll in nine or fewer hours. They must graduate in that semester in order to receive the rebate, obviously. This will assist in freeing up space in courses and further incentivize four-year graduation.

Additionally, some mechanism for students to appeal for prorated tuition should be created. This reduction would be approved only when full course loads and/or full tuition creates a hardship for medical, financial, or other reasons.

RECOMMENDATION 15: Accelerate the timeline for resolution of incomplete (X) courses; do not allow an X as a default grade.

RATIONALE

At this time, students have a full long semester to resolve an incomplete (X) in a course, even though the X is ostensibly permitted only for a missed final exam, incomplete assignment, or final reexamination. Because so much time is provided to students to complete the test/assignment, though, professors will often assign an incomplete in order to allow a student to complete a substantial amount of required work, or even to retake an entire course. Many students who request an incomplete struggle to complete a regular course load, much less to complete it while also attempting to retake prior courses. Change the timeline for resolving an incomplete to better reflect the intent of the option: Students must resolve an incomplete by a substantially earlier deadline.

Additionally, incompletes make it difficult for academic advisors to monitor the progress of students, in that a student's GPA can be artificially inflated by courses where an X has been assigned in lieu of an F. Currently, it is our understanding that the Registrar's Office assigns a grade of X, rather than an F, when an instructor has not assigned a course grade. In order for our proposed academic warning system (Recommendation 1) to be effective, X cannot serve as a default grade.

Michigan does not allow students who are not earning a C- or better in a course to receive an incomplete, and requires that a final grade be assigned no later than the fourth week of the following term.

RECOMMENDATION 16: Reduce course shopping through changes to add/drop policies.

RATIONALE

How do we ensure that space will be available in courses? As the pressure to graduate on time begins to compete with students' desire to make high grades, we anticipate fewer course drops. And, presumably, the number of dual degree and double major seekers will decrease, providing some breathing room. But that will not be enough. We must reduce student course shopping.

Students register for more courses than they intend to complete. They then go to courses, check them out, and drop down to fewer hours. Unfortunately, by the time they do so, other conscientious students are no longer looking for courses to add, and/or professors are rightfully wary of allowing late adds. For example, at one point almost every fall section of English 316K was full. By the time the Department of

English stopped allowing students to add, though, many seats went unclaimed. More than 250 seats in E 316K went unfilled this semester as a result of course shopping.

Given the availability of course descriptions and syllabi, course-instructor surveys, and online registration, it no longer makes sense for the add/drop period to last through the 12th class day. We must shorten the add/drop window. Additionally, we should provide an opportunity for our students to add courses after the drop period ends. We advocate allowing students to add and drop through the fourth class day, following that with an online add (and add only) day on the fifth class day, and then allowing departments to add for additional days as it sees fit, through the 12th class day. In this model, any drop after the fourth class day would be a Q-drop.

Most of the peer schools we visited had a much briefer period for students to make schedule adjustments at the beginning of a semester. When we described our add/drop process, one Florida administrator, whose own system is similar to our proposal, commented that we are saddled with a “crazy” add/drop system. We agree.

RECOMMENDATION 17: Emphasize the value of four-year graduation in UT Austin publications (*Undergraduate Catalog*, *General Information Catalog*), at New Student Orientation, and in other appropriate venues.

RATIONALE

At Florida, the importance of graduating in four years is a pervasive message. A campaign to educate students about the significance of four-year graduation, as well as to inform them of the expectation of same, is a critical element in changing campus culture.

RECOMMENDATION 18: Make new student orientation mandatory, and renew emphasis on the academic mission of the university in orientation programming.

At Michigan, attendance at orientation is a condition for admission to the university. Orientation sets the tone for a student’s entire college career. Michigan and Penn State each host more than 30 student orientation sessions per summer, allowing each student to receive more individual attention. In contrast, we offer 10.

A student who does not attend orientation misses vital information and, more importantly, key prompts for making wise academic choices. Many aspects of a student’s development are postponed by one or more semesters when s/he opts out of this introduction to UT Austin.

During orientation, our students are asked to process more information than humanly possible in such a short time, and often do so on limited sleep. Additionally, orientation suffers from mission creep. The lack of focus may leave various campus offices at cross-purposes with one another. Better define the purpose of orientation, and make a student’s successful transition to academic life at the university priority one.

III. CENTRALIZE OVERSIGHT

A lack of available, pertinent courses is a common grievance of UT Austin students who plan to take more than four years to graduate. Though too often used as an excuse for a number of university ills, course availability persists as a scapegoat because there is some truth to the assertion.

None of our visited peer institutions shared this problem. As we delved deeper, it became clear that strong central leadership on curriculum matters was the common thread that separated those schools from our own. At UT Austin, colleges and departments are largely left to their own devices, and the result is that the tail often wags the dog. If we are to improve our capacity and graduation rates, this must change.

RECOMMENDATION 19: Entrust the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education with, and provide authority for, creating an atmosphere of accountability.

RATIONALE

For any plan for improving graduation rates to succeed, someone must be responsible for minding the store. At present, a decentralized approach to the many facets of timely graduation is not succeeding. Many of the recommendations below call for the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education to serve as a central figure for improving graduation rates.

RECOMMENDATION 20: The Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education must be tasked with the responsibility of coordinating course offerings, as well as the authority to require units to offer courses or additional seats in courses.

RATIONALE

Without central coordination, units may be oblivious to course availability issues and/or unwilling to allocate resources to address “bottlenecks” in degree completion. Presumably, supplemental or withheld funding to those units will act as carrot or stick, respectively, for carrying out this duty.

RECOMMENDATION 21: Each unit must be required to assess its own course offerings and productivity, ensuring that course availability is not an obstacle to graduation for either its own majors or for non-majors.

RATIONALE

With increased pressure on enrollments, students will be forced to take 8 a.m. courses, courses with unpopular professors, or courses on subjects that aren’t interesting to them. Yes, that is understood. But that is not to imply that centers and departments are not accountable for facilitating timely degree completion. Each unit must review its course planning with an eye on improving course availability. This endeavor must involve both faculty and staff. The product of these discussions will be a scheduling template: a list of courses that will be offered each and every fall, spring, or summer semester. The list must be approved by the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education and will serve two functions:

- Students will be able to plan future schedules with more certainty. These lists will be public, available on a centralized website administered by the Office of the Registrar.

- Because of this commitment, units will only be able to offer specialized, “boutique” courses once regular undergraduate curricular needs are met.

The list should include only courses that may be taught by multiple instructors (i.e., base topics courses are fine, but numbered topics are not) and may include either/or pairings (e.g., ten sections of either History 315K or History 315L will be offered each fall) to allow for instructor preferences. (Each either/or pairing will need to fulfill the same degree requirement, of course.)

Dean’s approval would be required to stray from the list when urgent, extenuating circumstances occur. If a unit finds either creating the list or following it to be problematic, the unit should revise its degree requirements to allow for more flexibility.

RECOMMENDATION 22: The Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education must establish principles for internal transfer policy, and centers/departments must apply for permission to control enrollment.

RATIONALE

Many students don’t make progress toward a “Plan B” major while waiting to transfer because they overestimate their odds of internal transfer. Academic advisors accept the responsibilities of informing students of internal transfer processes and counseling students to plan for alternatives. To assist advisors in this, though, internal transfer processes should be consistent across all majors, and, most importantly, students must be given information to allow them to assess the likelihood of internal transfer. Additionally, enrollment controls must be permitted only when absolutely necessary. Below are our recommended guidelines:

- Enrollment controls (the ability to restrict admission to a major) must be based upon resource limitations.
- Enrollment controls must be limited to majors (centers, departments, etc.), not to colleges or schools: If Communication Sciences and Disorders cannot make a case for restricted enrollment, for example, it should not be permitted to do so simply because it is part of a college where resource limitations are the norm.
- UT Austin GPA must be the sole criterion for admission to a major for eligible students.
- Majors may require students to complete as many as four “indicator” courses, with minimum grades, in order to be eligible to apply; no more than two courses that do not also fulfill UT Austin core curriculum requirements may serve as indicators.
- Majors should also establish a minimum average hours completed per long semester at UT Austin in order to be eligible to apply; this will prevent students from dropping challenging courses or taking fewer courses in a semester in hopes of boosting GPA for transfer (e.g., to be eligible to apply, students must average 14 or more hours of graded coursework, in residence, each long semester).
- Majors that desire students who possess special talents (e.g., Studio Art) should create a degree-applicable course where those talents may be assessed; a minimum grade in that indicator course may be required for transfer eligibility; interested students must have reasonable access to this course.
- Majors must collect and publish recent internal transfer GPA statistics.

RECOMMENDATION 23: Establish a “guarantee” GPA for admission to a major, based upon prior internal transfer numbers.

RATIONALE

The transfer process outlined above will provide more clarity to students, but the minimum GPA for internal transfer to some programs may be erratic. Students (and parents and advisors) would appreciate some assurance, some guarantee, that transfer will be permitted if a student meets an established standard. So, for example, the lowest *mean* GPA for students admitted to Psychology over the last 5 years was a 3.31. Perhaps students aiming for admission to Psychology could be guaranteed admission by obtaining a 3.3 UT Austin GPA and satisfying all other eligibility requirements. Penn State follows a similar model.

RECOMMENDATION 24: Require enrollment-controlled units to provide a reasonable number of course offerings to non-majors, as determined by the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education.

RATIONALE

Some units, including those in the McCombs School of Business, have already provided access to non-majors for substantive study in their discipline(s). In the spirit of a university, students should have opportunities to study in a number of academic fields. Moreover, students who are aiming for careers in areas in which they cannot (or have chosen not to) major should be offered meaningful training. This will assist advisors in providing alternatives to students who are not admitted to their first choice of major, as well. More importantly, this may help students to explore their many and varied interests without compelling them to add a second major in order to do so.

RECOMMENDATION 25: The Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education should create a small committee, made up of a representative from the Office of the Registrar (Registration), academic advisors/advising administrators and students, for the purpose of providing information and counsel on course access, internal transfer guidelines and registration processes (see section VIII).

RATIONALE

These are significant tasks, and the Vice Provost will need assistance in identifying items that need improvement. If needed, also hire a Senior Program Coordinator to carry out these new functions.

IV. PROVIDE SUPPORT

Our compact with admitted students requires that we provide support, that we funnel resources toward a goal of positioning students for success. Our recommendations work best when implemented in tandem with one another, and one of our chief concerns is that academic policies will be enacted without sufficient attention to student support.

In our introduction, we asserted that improving Texas' elementary and secondary schools would lead to higher graduation rates. Indeed, some of our students need more than cheerleading in order to thrive in this academic environment. These recommendations address the needs of both those students and students who merely need routine help in navigating their way toward a bachelor's degree.

RECOMMENDATION 26: Assign every student to a primary academic advisor. Assign some students to an additional mentor.

RATIONALE

Research confirms the value of academic advisors in the success of students. Our colleagues at peer institutions who study advising further suggest that a "caseload" approach to advising aids in retention, degree completion, and student satisfaction. The Director of the Division of Undergraduate Studies at Penn State believes that caseload advising has been a critical component in their success. With that in mind, each UT Austin student should be assigned a primary advisor. These primary advisors should be recorded on a student's record.

Students in academic support or honors programs may receive advising from both an academic advisor and a program mentor, who may or may not hold an academic advisor title. Similarly, faculty and student affairs staff may also mentor students. In addition to recording the name of a student's academic advisor, whatever system is utilized should also offer the ability to record the name of a student's mentor.

RECOMMENDATION 27: Create a uniform, parsimonious, university-wide format for advising aids.

RATIONALE

Combined, we have more than 175 years of advising experience, yet sometimes find interpreting the advising aids ("degree plans") for programs other than our own to be challenging. If the advising aids were more consistent and straightforward, students would be less likely to make costly course selection missteps. Creating a template for user-friendly advising aids requires expertise: Uniformity is useless if the documents make no sense to students.

RECOMMENDATION 28: Each college or school should review its degree requirements in search of opportunities to simplify and streamline for the purpose of facilitating timely graduation.

RATIONALE

Advising aids are rendered unintelligible primarily because they attempt to explain excessively complicated degree requirements. Courses should be difficult; understanding degree requirements should not. As degree plans have been modified, a frequent approach has been to add new wrinkles to existing requirements, rather than to start from scratch. As a result, requirements have begun to look something like an old cabinet: covered in layer after layer of paint, in dire need of stripping. Changes to requirements need to be incorporated with elegance and simplicity. With a bit of effort, this can be done without diluting academic rigor.

RECOMMENDATION 29: An ad hoc committee should be appointed to determine preparation benchmarks (standardized test scores, etc.) for likely student success at UT Austin in the absence of any special programming or intervention. The Office of Admissions probably has relevant data for making this calculation at its fingertips. Once that is settled, require that any admitted student who does not meet that standard must be invited to join an academic support program.

RATIONALE

Do we do enough to identify and assist students who are admitted with less preparation than is ideal for our school? Anecdotally speaking, we've seen students who

- Were ranked outside the top 10% of their high school class.
- Have relatively low standardized test scores.
- Have not been invited to any academic support program.

Our suggestion is not that the Office of Admissions should change its policies; we are confident that these students would not have been admitted had they not been projected for success. That said, are we, as an institution, holding up our end of the bargain if we do not provide academic support for underprepared students?

More academic support programs, or increased funding to existing ones, will likely be needed. Expand the most successful programs.

Additionally, existing academic support programs should be cautious about admitting students who are well above the standard so that more attention can be given to those who are not.

RECOMMENDATION 30: Aim for innovation in providing academic support services.

RATIONALE

Many of the existing support programs seem fairly similar. We should attempt diverse approaches in academic support for meeting the needs of a diverse student body.

- In our observation, some students in academic support programs perform well in the special sections of courses provided by the program, but then crash in later courses when competing with non-program students. Do the special sections of courses risk increasing the preparation gap? If existing research points to any success with an immersion model (e.g., supplemental instruction, not separate instruction), we should attempt that at UT Austin.
- Many would agree that the summer between high school and the fall semester of the freshman year is an ideal time to attempt to close knowledge and skill gaps. The problem with summer programs, we speculate, is that many of the students targeted for this approach do not have the means to pay for summer tuition, housing, etc. We should create a summer “boot camp” for underprepared students and incentivize participation by offering housing, tuition, etc., at a greatly reduced cost.
- Most academic support programs are targeted at incoming freshmen. Create a university-wide program for students who have struggled in the classroom during their first two semesters at UT Austin. Students who are already participating in another program will continue in that program, instead.

- Consider some centralization of academic support services. Michigan’s Comprehensive Studies Program serves as a support hub for all students, offering “personalized advising services and enhanced courses to students who can benefit from holistic advising and instructional support during their undergraduate years.”
- Our understanding is that campus academic support programs meet as a group on a somewhat routine basis. Ask that group to design a new program.

RECOMMENDATION 31: Invest, financially and otherwise, in Career Services endeavors.

RATIONALE

Students delay graduation because they fear that they will not find gainful employment. Encourage centers and departments to incorporate the development of marketable skills into curricula. Consider centralizing some functions of campus Career Services offices.

RECOMMENDATION 32: Increase residence hall capacity with a goal of requiring freshmen to live in a campus residence hall or a private dormitory in close proximity to campus. Waivers would be provided to Austin residents living at home.

RATIONALE

Reports indicate that living on campus enhances not only classroom success, but also a student’s overall university experience. The freshman year sets the tone for a student’s college career, making it imperative for students to connect with the academic community. Living on campus clearly boosts the odds for integration.

RECOMMENDATION 33: As part of a student’s financial aid package, offer low-cost university housing. Rooms in every residence hall should be earmarked for this purpose.

RATIONALE

Low-income students often live and work off campus. Out of sight, out of mind.

RECOMMENDATION 34: Investigate whether a summer flat-rate tuition based upon a six-hour schedule is financially feasible; if so, implement it.

RATIONALE

As the disparity between UT Austin tuition and community college tuition has grown, our summer enrollments have declined. Though various summer enrollment initiatives may have modest success, the cost of attending UT Austin in the summer is problematic. This is doubly true for upper-division students who cannot satisfy remaining degree requirements through community college offerings. If we want upper-division students to be able to “catch up” in the summer, is there a way to make that a more affordable option? Will our lower-division students be better prepared for later courses by taking courses at UT Austin, rather than a community college? Seats in summer courses often go unfilled. Thus, we have the capacity to teach more students in the summer at no additional cost. Is it

possible for enough revenue to be generated through increased enrollment and subsequent formula funding gains to minimize or eliminate any negative financial impact to decreased summer tuition? Reducing the tuition rate for summer coursework at UT Austin would greatly incentivize enrollment and, consequently, timely graduation.

RECOMMENDATION 35: Assist students who are employed in attending full time.

RATIONALE

More emphasis needs to be given to spreading undergraduate course offerings across the work week: The Office of the Registrar should take a more nuanced approach to course scheduling.

While non-UT online courses may be problematic, UT Austin online learning may serve as a place for experimentation. Web-based courses are both politically expedient and revenue friendly, provided that the courses are designed with integrity and that they supplement and mimic classroom instruction, rather than supplant it.

V. REMOVE BUREAUCRATIC OBSTACLES

If we demand efficiency of our students, we must also create an efficient system in which they may operate.

RECOMMENDATION 36: Remove administrative hurdles to applying to graduate in a semester in which all required courses are completed.

RATIONALE

Students should be awarded a degree upon completion of degree requirements. Student records, and university statistics, reflect a later graduation date for many students who were unable to receive a diploma in their final semester due to red tape. We suggest the following changes:

- Allow students to appeal to apply to graduate after the deadline if courses will be completed in a given semester (and always approve appeal).
- When reasonable, allow post-certification additions to the list of graduates (retroactive graduation).
- Move the *In Absentia* deadline from the mid-semester date to the last day of final exams; streamline the *In Absentia* process, or eliminate *In Absentia* enrollment as a condition for graduation altogether.
- Accept graduation applications from students who are concurrently enrolled at another institution; adjust graduation certification processes accordingly.
- Require schools/colleges to accept concurrent enrollment credit: Concerns about concurrent enrollment should be addressed through residency requirements.
- After the graduation application deadline, the Office of the Registrar should generate a report of all students for whom degree audits are “clear” for graduation. Colleges and schools should

check that list against their own list of degree applicants. Any students who are eligible to graduate but have not applied must appeal to their student dean to delay graduation. Financial aid policy should NOT be the basis for any appeal to be approved.

- Require students to claim or to forfeit any earned credit by exam by the end of the sixth long semester.
- Enhance the automated prerequisite checking system in an effort to increase departmental participation. When the system prevents students who have not fulfilled prerequisites from registering, course spots remain available for other students. The system also rescues students who would otherwise register for a course for which they are not prepared and allows for staff to devote energies to concerns other than monitoring prerequisites.

RECOMMENDATION 37: Now that UT Austin has established a 60-hour residency requirement for all graduates, examine other residency requirements through the lens of timely graduation.

RATIONALE

At this time, students are required to complete 24 of their final 30 hours in residence. This makes it difficult for students who may struggle to complete certain non-major courses at UT Austin to graduate on time. Yes, the integrity of the degree must be protected. That said, community college transfer students were permitted to apply those very same courses, so why not a student who attended UT Austin for four years? Perhaps a more appropriate reinterpretation of the rule would be to require no fewer than 30 hours of upper-division in residence, thus allowing students to complete some general educational requirements away from UT Austin while maintaining a high standard on the whole.

RECOMMENDATION 38: Create or identify more minimal-prerequisite, upper-division courses that may satisfy core requirements. Establish maximum credit hours prerequisites for lower-division courses when upper-division options are available.

RATIONALE

Through poor planning, admittedly, students often take unnecessary lower-division courses because they have few options for completing remaining core requirements on the upper-division level, and they also need upper-division hours to graduate. Approval of more upper-division courses for core requirements will obviate this problem.

Advanced students who fear taking certain upper-division courses must also be limited to these options, lest they continue to take “extra” lower-division courses. If we no longer allow students who have completed, say, 75 or more hours to register for English 316K, they will have no choice but to enroll in an upper-division equivalent should they delay tackling the humanities requirement. This also has the potential to create more room in lower-division courses, incentivizes early completion of core requirements, and boosts formula funding.

RECOMMENDATION 39: Require each school or college to supplement any university-wide measures for increasing four-year graduation with its own initiatives.

RATIONALE

Varying cultures, requirements, and policies in the schools/college makes crafting a comprehensive four-year graduation campaign difficult. Students, faculty, and staff in each unit, however, will be familiar with bureaucratic and other perceived barriers to four-year graduation. Accordingly, local-level plans for solving these problems should be formulated. The university task force should review these plans with an eye on finding tools and principles that could be applied on a larger scale.

VI. REFORM PROCEDURES FOR TRANSFER STUDENTS

Though not relevant in four-year graduation rate calculations, transfer students contribute to the cultural environment, are a significant factor in capacity issues, and are consequential in the context of course availability and resource allocation.

RECOMMENDATION 40: Provide for a more holistic evaluation of transfer admission applicants.

RATIONALE

Our understanding is that GPA is the primary driver in transfer admission decisions. But that GPA can be manipulated by students who opt to take fewer hours in order to devote more time to each course, or who opt to drop more challenging courses in order to preserve high grades. Why should we expect a transfer student who has completed only 9 hours per semester at a community college to be able to excel in a 15-credit semester at UT Austin? Hours completed per semester should be part of the equation, as should the relative difficulty of the institution and of the courses taken. If a calculus course from MIT and a pottery course from a community college carry the same weight, we're not giving transfer admission enough attention. Finally, compatibility of prior courses to the proposed degree plan is critical. For example, if we value four-year graduation, a junior transfer student who has not completed a calculus sequence should not be admitted to the Economics major. If needed or desired, centers and departments could play a larger role in the comprehensive evaluation of transfer applicants.

RECOMMENDATION 41: Evaluate out-of-state transfer courses with care and with regard to core curriculum applicability.

RATIONALE

At this time, many transfer courses are given generic designations (“HRS” or “ADV” in place of UT Austin numbers), and the onus is on the student to prove to the arbiters of various requirements that the courses they completed are a match. The petition process is cumbersome, and students have difficulty maneuvering through the bureaucracy (e.g., a syllabus is required in order to submit many petitions, and a syllabus is not readily available). Instead, admissions evaluators should be trained on the elements of the core curriculum, evaluate courses based upon standard catalog descriptions, and provide core curriculum credit when courses clearly meet the spirit of the law regarding the core curriculum. A “COR” designation could be created to allow for credit to be applied to the core for a course that matches the goals of a core requirement, even if not a direct equivalent to a UT Austin course in the core (e.g., BIO 3COR could satisfy a core science requirement, sans petition).

Admissions should be receptive to course evaluation inquiries and requests from academic advisors. Petition processes should be user-friendly. Experienced, reputable advisors should be given some authority for approving course substitutions in areas of expertise.

RECOMMENDATION 42: Provide more orientation opportunities for transfer students.

RATIONALE

As evidenced above, evaluating a transfer student's prior courses for degree applicability takes great care. And introducing transfer students to the academic components of the institution takes time. For many departments, the window for accomplishing these tasks is small and the volume of students high, making it difficult to provide more than a few minutes of one-on-one time with each transfer student.

Penn State's first-year student orientation provides a model worth emulating: Have a series of rah-rah, Hook 'em Horns sessions for all transfer students just prior to the beginning of classes ("Welcome Week"). Have a large number of smaller, one-day academic orientation sessions throughout the summer on days that do not coincide with first-year student orientation. Schools/colleges with few transfer students may choose not to offer services for every available session. For others, though, the reduction in the number of students per session will allow for more thorough and informative advising sessions. Orientation session closing limits would need to be set according to major, not college.

If this format proves to be successful, consider modifications to first-year student orientation sessions, as well. Our freshmen are inundated with information during orientation sessions, far more than they can process. The presentation of social and spirit activities alongside more serious academic and policy ones makes for a situation rife for inappropriate conflation.

VII. ENFORCE DISMISSAL POLICIES

On the surface, the promotion of more rigid dismissal policies may be counterintuitive. After all, any ostensible gains in capacity resulting from dismissal will be negated by decreased retention rates, and student dismissals certainly do not improve four-year graduation rates. Or do they? While our primary concern is our own four-year rate, it is also worthwhile to embrace another mission: to assist students in earning a bachelor's degree, in as few years as possible, from any institution of higher learning. These recommendations are introduced with that goal in mind.

Attending UT Austin is a privilege, at least from the perspective of those who are not admitted. They expect that those fortunate enough to earn admission will be held to a demanding standard or be asked to step aside in order to provide an opportunity for another. In honoring that mindset through a humane, reasonable dismissal policy, our capacity is increased, resources are not drained, and the integrity of the degree is preserved.

RECOMMENDATION 43: Change academic dismissal policies to reflect new goals.

RATIONALE

In contrast to some of our peers, our dismissal policies allow students to languish in various states of probation and dismissal for years. Under the current system, students whose GPAs fall below a 2.0 are dismissed for one long semester (and any intervening summer) if they do not improve their grades to a stated standard. If they return and again fail to meet that standard, the consequence is a three-year dismissal. Only upon returning again, and failing to improve, does a dismissal become permanent. Classroom success is sometimes intermittent, withdrawals and drops sometimes stave off the inevitable, and the entire process may literally take several years, at great expense to both the student and the university.

Is that three-year exile truly in the best interest of a student who is eligible for transfer? Would it be reasonable to evaluate a student's odds for degree completion upon a student's second dismissal? Yes, some students do return from a second dismissal to earn a degree. But it is reasonable to assume that those students could have found that same success at another institution on a more accelerated timeline. A relatively expeditious framework for dismissal is needed.

We propose that the GPA standards for scholastic dismissal remain unchanged, but that the second dismissal be permanent, save one exception: Allow dismissed students who are within 30 credit hours of graduation to return to UT Austin upon achieving a 2.0 overall GPA through University Extension courses. All residency requirements must be satisfied, as well.

RECOMMENDATION 44: Enforce scholastic dismissal policies.

RATIONALE

This argument is built upon a belief that UT Austin utilizes every available means to put its students in a position for accomplishment, and that it admits only those students who have a reasonable chance at classroom success.

Some schools and colleges have created separate dismissal “appeal” policies that allow a portion of dismissed students to continue at UT Austin in spite of failing to meet institutional academic standards. Though it would be impossible to articulate the issues related to that in all their depth and complexity, a central theme does emerge: The schools and colleges do not want to deprive these students of an opportunity to earn a UT Austin degree. That mindset, though, fails to account for the student who is deprived of access to UT Austin due to capacity concerns. More importantly, it deprives the appealing student of the opportunity to earn a degree, in a timely manner, from another institution that offers a learning environment more compatible with the student's needs.

Additionally, we believe that our proposed warning and dismissal policies will allow academic advisors to more quickly identify students who aren't yet prepared for the challenges of UT Austin. In doing so, students with fewer accumulated credit hours may transfer to a community college, solidify their classroom skills, and return to a four-year institution, UT Austin or another. Advisors must encourage these students to return to UT Austin only when they are able to thrive, not immediately upon eligibility. If we do not treat dismissal as a tragedy, they are less likely to view it as such.

RECOMMENDATION 45: Create a central board for adjudicating academic dismissal and suspension appeals.

RATIONALE

Approaches to dismissal appeals vary across colleges and schools at the university: A student in one school could receive a different response to a dismissal appeal than a student in identical circumstances enrolled in another. That inconsistency is problematic. College and school arbiters of dismissal appeals are unquestionably conscientious and principled in evaluating dismissal appeals. Undoubtedly, they could also reach common ground on a set of policies and procedures related to dismissal appeals. Because the persons in positions responsible for deciding appeals change with some frequency, though, continuity is an issue. By establishing a university appeals board for both dismissal and suspension (low credit hours) appeals, consistency and continuity will be improved. The board will be able to glean a more complete sense of the problems our students face, and may then develop programs and policies according to the trends they observe.

Michigan’s central “Academic Standards Board” not only reviews all dismissal appeals, but also applies early intervention methods, such as mandating the use of particular support services to a struggling student, in order to minimize academic casualties.

RECOMMENDATION 46: Provide dismissed students with a route to degree completion.

RATIONALE

Students who have completed their “gen ed” requirements have no degree use for community college courses and are unlikely to be able to transfer to a four-year institution, given that most do not accept students who are ineligible for return to UT Austin. We should attempt to convince our Coordinated Admission Program partners to create provisions for the transfer of our dismissed students, details to be determined. Under the Coordinated Admission Program (CAP), students attend other UT System schools as a steppingstone to UT Austin. CAP schools participate in the program in hopes of boosting enrollment by keeping students who do not earn the grades required for transfer. We neither want to insult our CAP partners, nor to be accused of arrogance. That said, CAP benefits UT Austin, and seems to benefit the CAP feeder schools. Perhaps a similar symbiosis may be achieved through a new initiative (CAP II?). This assumes that a case can be made that former UT Austin students have immense potential for achievement at another UT system school, if for no other reason than the sense of opportunity (and relief!) that accompanies a clean slate. It is unquestionably in the best interest of the state of Texas for its investment in students to reap dividends in the form of an educated, degreed populace.

VIII. IMPROVE TECHNOLOGY

UT Austin is lagging behind peer institutions in technology to aid students and staff in promoting and monitoring four-year graduation. Some technology recommendations have been embedded in previous suggestions, such as a website on major declaration and a better online course planner. We propose further improvements be made to systems that pertain to timely graduation.

RECOMMENDATION 47: Make improvements to our registration system to facilitate access to required courses and provide clarity in the registration process.

RATIONALE

Though our registration system is fairly sophisticated, a number of possible enhancements should be considered:

- Make the number of students on a wait list for a course visible to all.
- Set the wait list system up to automatically delete students after a certain number of promotion errors.
- Refresh wait lists more than once daily.
- Change the default size of wait lists from 50 to 5 to guard against wait lists that serve no purpose other than to provide students with false hope that they will obtain a seat in a course.
- Set up the system so that students may view the “restriction” on a course (the system would translate advising codes, etc.).
- Students confuse “restriction” with prerequisite, leading to many telephone calls to advising offices, and also believe that “restricted” is a permanent condition. Change that wording in the *Course Schedule* to “reserved” or “controlled.”
- Provide for controls on course enrollment to be based upon classification or first semester enrolled, so that seats may be reserved for incoming freshmen; something similar to this is done for UGS signature courses, but either the ability to do so or the knowledge of how to do so is not widespread.
- Through the *Course Schedule*, allow students to see the number of seats available in a course.
- Cancelled courses clutter the *Course Schedule*: Remove courses upon cancellation.
- Greatly diminish the number of students granted priority registration: Priority registration creates enrollment bottlenecks in high demand/need courses and also creates a sense of inequity among students.

RECOMMENDATION 48: As a function of the Committee on Undergraduate Degree Program Review (CUDPR), proposed curriculum changes must be vetted for degree audit programmability.

RATIONALE

Any degree requirement that is too complicated to program is likely to be inherently confusing to a student. More importantly, students rely upon degree audits for an accurate account of progress toward degree. When a student’s degree audit is inaccurate, or must be modified manually to function correctly, the opportunity for error (taking an inappropriate course, miscalculating remaining hours, etc.) and delayed graduation is high.

At Florida, students may not enter a newly offered major until its degree audit has been programmed. At UT Austin, months may pass before students have access to degree audits for new or revised majors.

RECOMMENDATION 49: Centralize degree audit coding processes in the Office of the Registrar.

Currently, the Office of the Registrar serves as a resource for the many degree audit administrators scattered across campus who manage coding on a local level. Given the complexity of the degree audit systems, specialization is needed. It is our understanding that the Office of the Registrar has proposed a centralized model for degree audit programming. Such a model would remedy a number of ills, including inconsistent programming of cross-listed courses, poor integration of university core requirements into audits, lack of continuity in staff leading to backlogs and errors, and the like. Colleges and schools would retain control of less critical functions (e.g., manual modifications to audits (“overrides”), updating of major course lists, etc.).

RECOMMENDATION 50: Create online tools that allow students and advisors to better monitor degree progress.

RATIONALE

Our peer institutions have introduced a number of sophisticated degree tracking devices that serve as an impetus for four-year graduation. Through these tools, students are able to adhere to university expectations. These applications also provide advisors with the intrusive measures necessary for the assertive promotion of four-year graduation. Among the many technological innovations demonstrated to us, the following are particularly relevant to four-year graduation:

- At UCLA, an online monitoring system identifies students who are off-track, automatically bars them, and sends notification that they must meet with an advisor.
- At Penn State, advisors may preview a student’s future class schedule, along with their major/intended major and prior semester’s grades, and notify the student as to fitness of the future schedule.
- At Florida, seats in courses are released programmatically across freshman student orientation sessions, unlike UT Austin, where staff members must manually adjust closing limits.

CONCLUSION

The Commission of 125’s final report spoke of a disciplined culture of excellence, defined as “excellence in all University endeavors, characterized by strong leadership and an engaged intellectual community, combined with individual and institutional accountability.”

Individual and institutional accountability are at the forefront of our recommendations. To reset expectations in our community requires action, and difficult decisions must be made. We feel that these recommendations, if carried out, will lead to substantial gains in four-year graduation rates. On a more personal level, we agree that these actions also will empower academic advisors to support a climate of academic efficiency.

Make no mistake, though; it will take time for students, faculty, and staff to adjust to that climate. It is likely to be a painful transition. To mitigate that, it is important that we educate students on the economics of timely graduation. They must understand that dillydallying is not to the benefit of their pocketbooks. They must also be taught that their education is subsidized by the people of Texas, to whom they are responsible and to whom they owe a great debt.

KIMBERLY KRIEG
Assistant Dean for Advising
College of Liberal Arts

MEGAN CONNER
Advising Coordinator
Liberal Arts Student Division

BRAD HUMPHRIES
Advising Coordinator
Department of English

ALICE ANDREWS
Advising Coordinator
Department of Psychology

ELIZABETH HASTINGS
Advising Coordinator
Department of Spanish and Portuguese

NANCY SUTHERLAND
Advising Coordinator
Department of History

OTHELL BALLAGE
Advising Coordinator
Liberal Arts Student Division

JO ANNE HUBER
Advising Coordinator
Department of Government

JANA COLE
Advising Coordinator
Department of Economics