THE UNIVERSITY of TEXAS SYSTEM
FOURTEEN INSTITUTIONS. UNLIMITED POSSIBILITIES.

Final Report

University of Texas System Student Success Affinity Groups on Finances, Advising, Belonging and Assessment of Student Learning

A Signature Project of the Student Success Quantum Leap

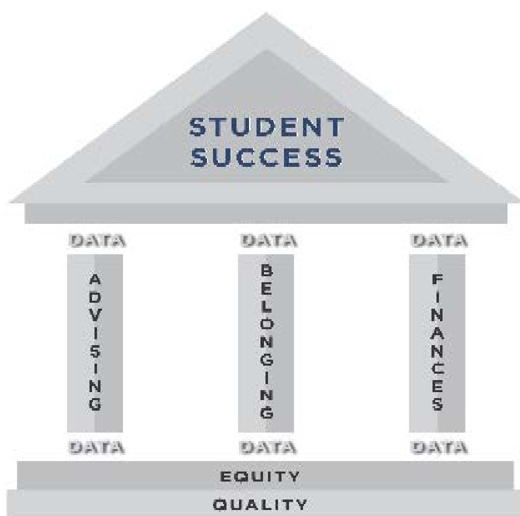


Table of Contents

I
Executive Summary

THE UNIVERSITY *of* TEXAS SYSTEM

FOURTEEN INSTITUTIONS. UNLIMITED POSSIBILITIES.

Executive Summary
University of Texas System Student Success Affinity Groups

Request to UT System Executive Leadership

The Student Success Affinity Groups request endorsement from Chancellor McRaven, Deputy Chancellor Daniel, and Executive Vice Chancellor Leslie of the following:

1. Designation of provosts, in consultation with presidents, as responsible for reviewing the Affinity Group reports with support from System, including recommendations and proposed metrics, and identifying what, if any, implementation and follow-up action should be taken by institutions and the UT System, in alignment with institutional strategic planning and priorities.

2. Formulation of a systemwide student success data strategy to leverage and grow the data infrastructure currently in place in OSI, allowing enhanced UT System support of and service to UT institutions (per need and interest), including data-mining and predictive analytics. This will build on, strengthen and leverage the System's data-driven culture in fulfillment of Board of Regents expectations and in alignment with 60x30TX goals.

Affinity Group Charge, Process and Deliverables

Between February and December 2017, four affinity groups were convened to focus and deliver on key outcomes of the Chancellor's Quantum Leap on Student Success. Affinity groups on Finances, Advising and Belonging, as well as an Assessment of Student Learning affinity group, met to:

- Define and scope out the three initiative pillars: Finances, Advising, and Belonging.
- Develop recommendations to System and institutional leadership on how best to fulfill the System's commitments to students on Finances, Advising and Belonging, including the identification of meaningful strategies, interventions, measures and evidence. The Assessment Group's work focused on the how to strengthen, assess and provide evidence of the quality of student learning in the UT System.
- Examine research and data to determine drivers and best practices to be implemented at academic institutions.
- Identify common metrics for each pillar and for the assessment of student learning, including both traditional and expanded or non-traditional metrics.

Members included: faculty, including designated FAC members for each group; institutional research directors; financial aid directors; AVPs and AVCs for student affairs, academic affairs and enrollment management; directors of advising; one bursar; directors of other student services units, including veterans and disability and career service offices; assessment and accreditation AVPS and directors; and UT System members from OAA, OSI, and Facilities Planning. Each group was led by one institutional chair, if not two, with support from System staff.

Over the nine-month period, the groups met in person and virtually. Each affinity group dove deep into available data and produced substantive reports in fulfillment of the charge. Reports include the identification of best practices, recommendations and proposed metrics to be adopted voluntarily by UT institutions and the UT System, per the process recommended above.

Advancement of a Data-Driven Student Success Culture

The work of the Affinity Groups fulfilled an additional goal of the Student Success Quantum Leap: to strengthen the UT System's data-driven student success culture in order to improve retention and graduation rates systemwide. Staff from the UT System Offices of Strategic Initiatives and Academic Affairs conducted data analysis of first-year student retention data that resulted in metrics by which to measure student financial well-being and social and academic belonging. This emerging work has enormous potential for predicting student success and improving outcomes for students from the time they enter our universities through graduation, and for enhancing the data infrastructure at System and institutions. The analysis, *UT System Student Success Data Exploration: A Focus on First-Year Attrition (Student Success Quadrants Analysis),* is available upon request.

Themes and Categories of Recommendations and Proposed Metrics

The combined set of Affinity Group recommendations number 25 and reveal themes and categories that can be articulated as follows:

1. **Tools** defined as instruments or implements used to carry out a particular function focused on student success at the institutions. These tend to be supported in partnership by the UT System and institutions. Tools should produce long-term outcomes that can be measured.
2. **Convenings** supported by UT System, including professional development and affinity groups and networks.
3. **Institution-led Engagement**, with support coming from institutional leadership.

The 11 proposed metrics serve as drivers for improvement in retention and graduation rates, as well as the means by which to provide evidence for how we are meeting commitments to students. Recommendations and metrics come with statements of resource implications and responsible parties for implementation.

Alignment with Institutional Strategic Planning and Advancement and other UT System Initiatives

The Affinity Group work dovetails with other UT System and institutional endeavors related to improving student outcomes and institutional advancement:

- Development of Annual Presidential Scope of Work and Strategic Priorities
- BOR-approved revisions to the UT System Faculty Workload Policy and current development of institutionally specific policies
- Development of Institutional Tuition and Fee Proposals, which include requests to improve Student Success
- Task Force on Peer Selection and Development of 60x30TX Goals

Conclusion: Moving Forward

THE UNIVERSITY of TEXAS SYSTEM
FOURTEEN INSTITUTIONS. UNLIMITED POSSIBILITIES.

The work of the Affinity Groups represents the culmination of a year's work to establish a solid foundation for how the UT System can and should move forward to fulfill its student success mission. This is just the beginning and next steps are critical for building on the foundation to move the needle on student outcomes through a student-centric and data-driven approach that honors our commitment to students and respects institutional autonomy, mission, and culture.

Affinity Group Productivity Metrics

Number of Members: 59; Groups ranged in size from 9-15, except for Belonging which had 22 members and was divided into two sub-groups, Academic and Social.

Number of Meetings
- In person: 3 for full groups (including at September 2017 Student Success Summit) with a 4th for Belonging
- Virtually (by phone and skype):
  - Finances - 10
  - Advising - 9
  - Belonging - 8
  - Assessment of Student Learning - 5
  - Co-Chairs – 6 collective; 50 total for individual group co-chairs
  - UT System Delivery Team - 15

Number of Recommendations=25
- Finances - 12
- Advising - 5
- Belonging - 4
- Assessment of Student Learning - 4

Number of Proposed Metrics=11
- Finances - 4
- Advising - 2
- Belonging - 3
- Assessment of Student Learning - 2

Full reports are available in a OneDrive folder and as a combined pdf, upon request.

II
Introduction: History, Context, Summary and Impact of Student Success Affinity Groups

I. Introduction: History, Context, Summary and Impact of Student Success Affinity Groups

1) History and Context of Student Success Initiative

Making a Quantum Leap in Student Success

In July 2016, Chancellor William McRaven identified Student Success as one of his strategic goals, called Quantum Leaps, part of a bold set of initiatives designed to strengthen the University of Texas System's ability to provide the citizens of Texas the very best in higher education, research and health care. In recognition that too many students enter UT academic institutions underprepared, and that certain student outcomes across the System have remained stagnant and troublingly low, the Chancellor called for a new framework by which System administration and academic institutions would think differently about student success, overturn orthodoxies, suspend habitual explanations for why the needle does not move on certain outcomes, take some risks, and problem-solve with unprecedented levels of collaboration, institution-wide engagement, and shared responsibility.

The framework developed in response, with input from institutional leaders (administrators, faculty, staff and students), is *Making a Quantum Leap in Student Success*. It is important to note that the "branding" of this work around the effort to make a quantum leap in student success has resonated in powerful ways with the System's academic universities and many of the faculty and staff who dedicate their work lives to helping students be successful and meet their educational goals. While, moving forward, the initiative may no longer be called a quantum leap, we know the entire UT System's commitment to student success is unwavering and many key aspects of the work will continue.

The student success initiative design rests on a solid foundation of *quality* and *equity*, ensuring that each and every UT student is prepared and positioned to succeed in high-quality learning environments, supported by three pillars, and reinforced with data. While the initiative seeks to improve student outcomes—retention and graduation rates, above all—the framework leads with commitments to students in three areas, Finances, Advising and Belonging:

- **Finances**: The University of Texas System will do everything in its power to ensure that no student drops out of college because of finances.

- **Advising**: Each and every UT student will receive the advising they need to follow clear pathways to degree completion and beyond.

- **Belonging**: Each and every UT student will feel like they belong in college. No student would be unable to persist or graduate because of a lack of engagement or a sense of not belonging.

In alignment with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's *60X30 Plan*, through this initiative the UT System in partnership with institutions is working to (1) graduate more students, and (2) motivate and facilitate more students' earning degrees *on time*.

There are additional core principles of the initiative, including a collective impact model of change, in which UT System leaders collaborate with institutional colleagues to build system-wide and institutional engagement to promote greater shared responsibility for student success through: backbone support and resources provided from the UT System to academic universities, including project funding; identifying shared metrics; convening to plan and implement change; facilitating deep dives into data that is actionable; and providing and subsidizing professional development opportunities for institutional faculty, staff and administrators.

2) History and Charge of Affinity Groups

As one of the first steps in implementing the new student success framework, affinity groups were convened around the three pillars of the Chancellor's Quantum Leap on Student Success—**Finances, Advising and Belonging**—to focus and deliver on outcomes necessary to implement the Chancellor's Quantum Leap on Student Success. A fourth group on assessment of student learning was convened to identify shared measures and evidence of the quality of the learning of our students.

Between February and December 2017, the Student Success Affinity Groups played a vital leadership role in determining how best to deliver on the outcomes necessary to fulfill the Chancellor's Quantum Leap. The groups focused on what is needed to directly and concretely help more students persist, graduate and achieve their educational goals. Comprised of institutional leaders who are both experts and practitioners, and selected by institutional leadership as well as UT System staff, the Affinity Groups worked to:

- Define and scope out the three initiative pillars: Finances, Advising, and Belonging.
- Develop recommendations to System and institutional leadership on how best to fulfill the System's commitments to students on Finances, Advising and Belonging, including the identification of meaningful strategies, interventions, measures and evidence. The Assessment Group's work emphasized how to strengthen, assess and provide evidence of the quality of student learning in the UT System.
- Examine research and data, UT System as well as national, to determine drivers and best practices to be implemented at academic institutions.
- Identify common metrics for each pillar and for the assessment of student learning, including both traditional and/or non-traditional metrics.
- Make the UT System nationally recognized as a leader for its innovative quality educational attainment initiative, metrics (traditional and non-traditional) included.

The purpose behind the metrics work has always been to provide information to institutions that they could act on and use formatively to identify and address gaps in student success outcomes, in academic and student affairs programming and student services, in allocation of resources, etc. The Assessment Group's metrics work has been focused on the quality of student learning in the UT System, and to answer the question: do our students learn what we teach them and how do we know?

Moreover, the diversity of students within the UT System requires us to move beyond traditional student success metrics and using innovative analytic approaches to identify opportunities for improvement. Overall, the metrics project has been designed to provide internal accountability and evidence, quantitative and qualitative, for how UT students are succeeding or not, and on the efficacy of our student success work across the entire System. The proposed metrics are not intended to be punitive to institutions in any way; rather, they provide institutions with data that can facilitate a better understanding of our students—both those who are and who are not completing, along with reasons why. The metrics serve as drivers for improvement in retention and graduation rates, as well as evidence for how we are meeting commitments to students.

Affinity Group members included: faculty, including designated FAC members for each group; institutional research directors; financial aid directors; AVPs and AVCs for student and academic affairs and enrollment management; directors of advising; one bursar; directors of other student services units, including veterans and disability and career service offices; assessment leaders; and UT System members of OAA, OSI, and Facilities Planning. Each group was led by one, if not two institutional chairs, with support from System staff. A list of members can be found in *Appendix A*.

3) Process, Key Findings and Deliverables

The groups met in person in February, May and September 2017 (as part of the Second Annual Student Success Summit). The Belonging group had a fourth in-person meeting in November. Each group also met regularly by phone between February and December, as did co-chairs and the System staff for each group.

Each affinity group has met the charge and deliverables by producing substantive reports describing the territory covered, research undertaken and reviewed, identification of best practices and strategies, evaluation of available data and identification of additional data critical to helping students be successful. Finally, each group arrived at a set of recommendation and proposed metrics for further consideration by institutional and System leadership.

- The Finances Affinity Group developed a strategic roadmap for helping more students achieve financial well-being through a multi-directional approach including deeper understanding of actual student finances by all university personnel and financial literacy for students, among other strategies.
- The Advising Affinity Group created an extensive advising framework that would elevate advising on campus, bolster advising efficacy, and empower students to make strong decisions throughout their educational pathways.
- The Belonging Affinity Group developed definitions and metrics for belonging where there were none, and constructed a template for a Belonging Campaign, customizable for those institutions interested in pursuing.
- The Assessment of Student Learning Group isolated the assessment of critical thinking in undergraduate research experiences for the first phase of a multi-pronged strategy for demonstrating through student work the quality of our students' learning.

These are comprehensive reports with important—indeed, unanticipated—breadth, and the commitment of groups members to student success is palpable on every page. While groups were given a general template to follow, each group was given the autonomy and authority to determine the ultimate format, content, and voice for the final reports. The results are distinct reports reflecting the diverse perspectives and expertise of members.

4) Student Success Quadrant Analysis

In support of the Affinity Group, staff from the UT System Offices of Strategic Initiatives (OSI) and Academic Affairs embarked on a deep dive into data analysis to help the affinity groups 1) understand more deeply who UT System students are; and 2) fulfill the charge to identify expanded metrics by which to measure student financial well-being, advising efficacy, and social and academic belonging. Named the Student Success Quadrant Analysis, it sought to identify common drivers of first-year student attrition in the UT System so that institutions might develop or enhance predictive models to identify students at-risk as they enter their freshman year.

The Quadrant analysis proved pivotal for the Finances and the Belonging Affinity Groups in developing meaningful metrics and, critically, allowed us to understand the deep connections between the pillars and the improvement of retention and graduation rates. While students often cite financial reasons for leaving higher education, the analyses indicate that academic and social belonging issues also have significant consequences on first-year retention.

While still evolving, the analysis was shared with many of the System's provosts in November. The provosts expressed deep interest in seeing more of the analysis, in particular their institutional data. Plans for moving the affinity group findings forward include engaging campuses in this work.

The working report, *UT System Student Success Data Exploration: A Focus on First-Year Attrition (Student Success Quadrants Analysis)*, is included as part of the full Affinity Group reports. As noted by the authors, the "application of these findings can serve the UT academic institutions in profound ways. Through further analysis of the Four Quadrants of First-Year Attrition in the UT System and the development of predictive models, these data can support the strategic allocation of resources and evaluation of campus interventions for first-year students. Thereafter, the quadrant framework can similarly be used to understand the drivers of second- and third-year attrition, creating a complete picture for institutions of the risk factors associated with attrition at different stages of enrollment, ultimately increasing 4- and 6-year graduation rates."

5) Recommendations

In fulfillment of their charge, the affinity groups made a large number of recommendations and the full set is articulated in *Appendix B*. The combined set of Affinity Group recommendations number 25 and reveal themes and categories that can be articulated as follows:

1. **Tools** defined as instruments or implements used to carry out a particular function focused on student success at the institutions. These tend to be supported in partnership by the UT System and institutions. Tools should produce long-term outcomes that can be measured.
2. **Convenings** supported by UT System, including professional development and affinity groups and networks.
3. **Institution-led Engagement**, with support coming from institutional leadership.

Each recommendation also includes indication of responsible parties and owners and of resource implications for implementation. Fuller explanations and context are contained in the reports.

The recommendations enumerated are just that: recommendations. Some are worded as invitations and as suggestions; some are worded more forcefully as actions or initiatives to be implemented. *None of them is a mandate of any kind, from group members or from System.* Each of them should be evaluated independently for the ways in which the recommendation may or may not serve, support, and strengthen the student success work of University of Texas System academic universities. A recommendation for how this evaluation should occur is proposed in the executive summary that precedes this introduction.

6) Proposed Metrics

Also in fulfillment of their charge, each affinity group developed a set of proposed metrics by which the UT System might assess and evaluate the recommended work and actions from each affinity group. The metrics proposed are articulated in *Appendix B*, again with resource implications and responsible party also named, and with fuller explanations contained in the reports.

The identification of metrics represented the most innovative, risk-filled and challenging component of work for groups. Group members recognize the proxy nature for several of the proposed metrics and believe they nonetheless remain meaningful and allow for measuring what we say matters, i.e., the three pillars at the foundation of the System's student success initiative. The 11 proposed metrics serve as drivers for improvement in retention and graduation rates, as well as the means by which to provide evidence for how we are meeting commitments to students. A recommendation for how proposed metrics might be pursued for adoption is proposed in the executive summary that precedes this introduction.

7) **Promoting System-wide and Institutional Engagement**

It is important to note that other signature activities and directions as a part of the Student Success Quantum Leap have worked to advance discussion, interest and engagement with the three pillars across the UT System, thus expanding beyond the membership of the affinity groups. The institutions have their own examples, not captured here. Some of the System-sponsored activities are indicated below. They include grants to institutions, convenings and professional development opportunities subsidized by the UT System and the Board of Regents. Select examples include:

i. The Student Success Quantum Leap RFP, with generous support from the Board of Regents, in which funding of varying amounts was awarded to all eight academic universities for proposals focused on student finances, advising and belonging (Spring 2017).
ii. Student Success Summits (September 2016 and September 2017) with participation by teams of 8-12 people from all eight academic universities.
iii. Stakeholder group discussions: SAC, FAC, Academy of Distinguished Teachers, Library Directors
iv. Conference Presentations featuring UT Austin and UTEP student success initiatives at AAC&U and SHEEO (January and August 2017).
v. Participation by members of the Assessment of Student Learning Affinity Group in the AAC&U General Education & Assessment Institute (May-June 2017).

8) Conclusion

The culmination of the Affinity Group project represents completion of Phase I of the UT System's effort to make a quantum leap in student success. The Affinity Groups were able to take the framework of the three pillars and build a foundation beneath it.

Because of the remarkable commitment of the affinity groups and their 59 members, this signature endeavor successfully met the Year 1 goals of the Student Success Quantum Leap to build system-wide engagement in the three student success pillars, to change conversations on campuses, to break down silos, build trust, and develop relationships within and across campuses. Members have expressed these impacts again and again on the work at their institutions.

Members gave their time, put their faith in an unchartered process without a map to the endpoint. In the end, members took ownership of the pillars, the metrics, and the over-arching goals. It's worth highlighting, also, the key role played by System staff, who, for some groups, not only facilitated convening their groups but also led the report writing.

Inspired by Chancellor McRaven and the framing of the initiative, many group members internalized the aspiration to make quantum-leap-worthy change. Group members expressed repeatedly that the focus on commitments to students and the three pillars is what has been most compelling to faculty, staff, administrators and students across the UT System. That is where the Quantum Leap has resonated and allowed for individuals across the System to see their place in the work.

Moreover, developing metrics to measure financial well-being, effective advising, and the sense of belonging for our students is a vital step in delivering on the commitments we have made to them, honoring the diverse students we serve, and holding ourselves accountable. And, it proves critical to improving retention and graduation rates.

Moving forward, the overarching recommendation (see the Executive Summary) is for the academic provosts to review the reports, recommendations, and proposed metrics and determine what kind of implementation and follow-up activity should be taken by institutions and the UT System. We know that many of the recommendations have resource implications for UT System and the academic universities interested in implementation. Where the work allows for mission adherence and the advancement of institutional strategic plan and priorities, appropriate to campus culture and students served, we hope some of the recommendations and metrics will be adopted and/or customized.

In whatever capacity the work of the Affinity Groups moves forward, it will be data-driven and integrated into institutional planning, strategic prioritization and resource allocation for student success that is aligned with presidential scoping of work, Board of Regents expectations for progress on student outcomes, approved tuition and fee increases, peer selection and 60x30TX goal-setting, and revised faculty workload policies. This integration and alignment will constitute Phase 2 of the System's student success initiative, along with a strong focus on the faculty role in student success. Phase 2 will continue the attention to equity and quality, and the efforts to broaden stakeholder engagement in taking responsibility for student success

The UT System's decision to design a "completion agenda with a difference," i.e., one laser-focused on improving student outcomes yet articulated as commitments to students in the areas of finances, advising and belonging, has resonated with the dedicated faculty, administrators and staff who work, day-in-and-day-out, on our campuses. It is a holistic student success ethos and approach that honors the people—above all, the students—we serve as we work to fulfill our mission and the commitments to students are unassailable.

And, of course, this work is needed for students, for institutions, for the System, the BOR, the State of Texas and its educational attainment plan, 60x30TX. It is evidence-based, allows for "best-in-class" strategies and interventions, and the second phase of the initiative must lead to a shared understanding of how we ensure ROI for the resources the System commits to student success. Equally important is that this work reinforces the vital role public higher education plays in sustaining and strengthening American democracy, the knowledge economy, civil society, and civic engagement. The metrics don't drive the Quantum Leap—the students do. Our students succeed in immeasurable ways. The work of the Student Success Affinity Groups allows us to go beyond the traditional and figure out how to measure our students in ways that are novel, authentic and respectful of who they are and how they go through our universities. The metrics will measure how impactful we are and must be.

III
Finances Affinity Group Report

THE UNIVERSITY of TEXAS SYSTEM

FOURTEEN INSTITUTIONS. UNLIMITED POSSIBILITIES.

Final Report of the U. T. System Finances Affinity Group

December 2017

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

The Finances Affinity Group ("the group"), comprised of faculty and institutional experts in financial aid, student accounts, institutional research and student services, was charged with an aspirational goal: to ensure that no undergraduate student drops out due to financial hardship. The group met ten times between January and December 2017 and employed a data-informed approach, grounded in research and informed by practitioners, to guide recommendations on best practices and to propose metrics for success. The group recognized that the primary way to limit student financial stress and prevent dropout due to financial hardship is to keep tuition and student fees affordable for our Texas families. The next critical component is for institutions to support students through financial aid packages appropriate for their needs, emphasizing grants and scholarships. Given that each UT institution already strives to keep tuition and fees affordable and create strong financial aid packages, and that those strategies are already well understood by our institutions, the work of the group instead focused on other structural and programmatic ways to mitigate financial barriers for students. The final recommendations for best practices and metrics outlined in this report fall into four key themes:

Matching Financial Resources to Students' Needs

Institutions should strategically allocate financial resources to support students' continuation to graduation. Leveraging predictive financial analytics to identify at-risk students can assist institutions in making critical decisions about which students get what resources based on data-driven insights. Connecting students with emergency financial assistance and campus, community, and government resources is also important in supporting students to graduation.

Financial Literacy

Institutions should improve the degree to which students are able to access, understand, and feel empowered to make decisions based on their personal financial situation as it relates to succeeding in college and beyond. Financial literacy is a shared responsibility between universities, students, and families, and requires institution-wide engagement, from the financial aid and bursar's office, to academic advising and academic departments.

Institution-Wide Engagement in Student Financial Well-Being

By confronting long-held beliefs about "the way we should do things," universities can identify and eliminate financial policies and procedures – formal or informal – that present unintended roadblocks to student financial well-being. Institutions should strive to nurture a university atmosphere where unprecedented levels of collaboration between and among academic departments, student financial services, student affairs, student success offices, and alumni and development offices ensure that students facing financial hardship are connected with resources.

Student-Centered Financial Statements and Communication

Institutions should ensure that financial statements and communications accommodate students' reading comprehension and financial literacy levels, and clearly communicate the information. Unfamiliar language and processes regarding student fees, balances, and financial aid packages can create barriers rather than supporting students. Each university office is responsible for ensuring that its financial statements and communications are easy to understand for students and their families.

Introduction

Finances play a critical role in college student persistence. National data indicates that a middle-class family background and awarding of grants and scholarships both contribute to higher retention rates.[1] While we recognize that UT students lead complex lives and juggle competing life demands that might directly or indirectly lead to students leaving, a review of UT system data was conducted in order to provide a basic characterization of the potential financial challenges faced by our students.

UT System Snapshot

Student Demographics

All UT academic institutions serve low-income students, and several are located in regions where the median household income is below the national and state medians (UT El Paso, UT Rio Grande Valley, UT San Antonio, and UT Tyler).[2] UT System academic institutions are focused on serving their regional populations, with two-thirds or more of resident undergraduates coming from local areas at every institution except at UT Austin and UT Permian Basin.[1] The percentage of undergraduate students who are Pell-eligible is substantial at each academic institution, and represents more than 50 percent at two UT institutions (UT El Paso and UT Rio Grande Valley; table 1).[3]

Table 1. Percent of Pell-Eligible and Underrepresented Minority Undergraduate Students Enrolled at U. T. System Academic Institutions, Fall 2015

	Pell-Eligible	Underrepresented Minority
U. T. Arlington	40.3%	60.0%
U. T. Austin	24.1%	52.8%
U. T. Dallas	31.8%	59.4%
U. T. El Paso	55.8%	87.7%
U. T. Permian Basin	27.2%	66.8%
U. T. Rio Grande Valley	64.6%	94.4%
U. T. San Antonio	43.0%	71.3%
U. T. Tyler	36.1%	40.5%

Tuition and Fees

Annual undergraduate resident tuition and fees at UT academic institutions range between $12,162 and $7,124, and at four institutions, these costs are lower than the state average at public four-year universities.[4] Tuition and fees, however, only make up thirty to forty percent of the total cost of

[1] Gross, J. P. K., Hossler, D., & Ziskin, M. (2007). Institutional aid and student persistence: An analysis of the effects of institutional financial aid at public four-year institutions. *Journal of Student Financial Aid*, 37(1), 28-39.
[2] Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, *Access and Affordability at Texas Public Universities, 2014-2015*.
[3] UT System SmartBook, December 2016.
[4] Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, College for All Texans. (2017). *College Costs - 2017-2018 - Public Universities*. Retrieved from: http://www.collegeforalltexans.com/apps/collegecosts.cfm?Type=1&Level=1.

attendance.[5] The other sixty percent relate to room and board, allowances for books and supplies, transportation and other necessary living expenses. UT academic institutions are focused on providing scholarship and grant aid to low-income students. On average, approximately ninety percent of tuition and fees are covered by grants, scholarships and waivers (e.g. Hazelwood exemption) for students with family incomes between $60,000 and $80,000, and over one hundred percent of tuition and fees are covered for students from families making less than $60,000 who apply for aid.[6]

Loans

While the UT System academic institutions strive to cover 100 percent of tuition and fees for students with a family income of less than $80,000 through a combination of grants and scholarships, students sometimes choose to pursue loans to cover other costs of attendance including room and board, supplies and other expenses. Well over half of UT undergraduate students have loans. However, UT System baccalaureates borrow less than average in comparison to both national and Texas data. [7] The median undergraduate student loan debt across UT System academic institutions is approximately $20,000. With first-year earnings for UT System graduates at nearly $45,000[8] and average loan payments of less than $200 per month, the debt-to-income ratio of UT baccalaureates is 5.3 percent one year after graduation. This is well below the 9 percent threshold for moderately risky borrowing and even slightly below the 6 percent that is considered cautious borrowing.[9]

Unmet Need

Unmet need, defined as the total cost of attendance minus grants, scholarships and loan aid, is a common indicator of college student financial risk. Unmet need focuses on the gap between the cost of attending college and the financial resources that are readily available to students and their families. An analysis conducted by the UT System Office of Strategic Initiatives indicated that across UT academic institutions in Fall 2015, approximately sixty percent of undergraduate students had some level of unmet need, and approximately forty percent of students had greater than $6,000 of unmet need.

Based on research conducted by EAB, it was hypothesized that as the level of unmet need increased, first-year retention would decrease, with a precipitous drop at a certain point of unmet need. Following the methodology recommended by EAB, an "unmet need cliff analysis" was conducted by the University of Texas System Office of Strategic Initiatives to determine if there was a level of unmet need that results in a sharp drop in first year student retention. The results were mixed, with UT El Paso and UT Permian Basin showing significant declines in first-year retention at greater than $10,000 and UT Arlington and UT Dallas at greater than $15,000 of unmet need. Contrary to the hypothesis, first-year retention at UT Rio Grande Valley slightly increased as the level of unmet need increased. At three

[5] The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. (2017) College for all Texans. College Costs - 2017-2018 - Public Universities. Retrieved from: http://www.collegeforalltexans.com/apps/collegecosts.cfm?Type=1&Level=1

[6] UT System Dashboard. Keeping College Affordable. (2017). Retrieved from: https://data.utsystem.edu/data-visualization.

[7] The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), Financial Aid Database (FADS), and CBM001 (Enrollment Report).

[8] The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), CBM009 (Degree Report) and Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) wage records.

[9] UT System Fast Facts 2016. (2017). Retrieved from: https://www.utsystem.edu/documents/docs/strategic-initiatives/fast-facts-2016

institutions (UT Austin, UT San Antonio and UT Tyler), there were no significant differences in first-year retention for students at different levels of unmet need. These findings suggest that unmet financial need alone is not a primary driver of first-year retention, thus highlighting a need to also move beyond traditional financial risk indicators to identify students who are at risk of leaving for financial reasons. Appendix B shows the level of attrition at various levels of unmet need for each UT academic institution for the fall 2014 and 2015 cohorts. Rows highlighted in green represent precipitous drops in retention.

Conclusions

Data indicate that UT institutions are focused on serving students from their region, and from Texas, and continue to strive to keep tuition and fees affordable and below national averages. Institutions have been fairly successful in supporting students from low-income families with tuition and fee costs. When compared to other state and national averages, student loan debt is low. Although traditional financial risk indicators, such as family income and unmet financial need, continue to be important in understanding student finances, findings from the unmet need cliff analysis demonstrate a need to also move beyond traditional financial risk indicators to identify students who are at risk of leaving for financial reasons.

Recommendations for Systemwide Adoption

There are many promising practices emerging across the country that could be useful in supporting students confronting financial barriers to higher education. In discussions with the group, the following practices emerged as potential promising or best practices and are recommended for adoption by UT institutions.

Matching Financial Resources to Student Needs

1. Students who have the majority of tuition and fees covered by financial aid still experience financial hardship related to unemployment and underemployment, rising costs of living, and more. There is a need to move beyond traditional financial risk indicators (e.g. Pell eligibility, unmet need, etc.) to identify students who require additional support. **We recommend that institutions more aggressively develop financial risk indicators that could better identify these students for additional outreach and support.**

2. Academic advisors are often in a position to have frank conversations with students about factors that may impact their academic progress, including factors outside of the classroom such as housing or food instability. **We recommend that academic advisors be provided with appropriate training and resources so that they can make referrals to campus, community, and government resources, when appropriate.**

3. Students can experience unforeseen financial emergencies that jeopardize their ability to persist. An unanticipated trip to the emergency room, an automobile accident, temporary unemployment or underemployment, all can create situations where students on a tight, fixed budget have to take a break from their education to pay for unforeseen costs. In many of these cases, small amounts of additional assistance could provide a lifeline to keep students enrolled and on-track to graduate. **It is recommended that each UT System institution put in place an**

emergency aid grant program to help eligible students during unforeseen financial emergencies.

4. Many students experience intermittent food, clothing and housing insecurity throughout their time in college. Even students who can usually meet their basic needs might occasionally benefit from opting into receiving mobile "push notifications" about campus and community resources that do not have strict eligibility requirements or lengthy applications. **We recommend that institutions explore the procurement or development of technology applications that provide referrals to university and community resources (e.g. leftover pizza in student union; emergency housing resources).**

Financial Literacy

5. Students should receive formal and informal instruction in financial literacy to help them develop strong financial decision making skills. This will be helpful to students both in making decisions about financial choices in seeking their college degrees and in financial planning and decision-making after graduation. To assist institutions in incorporating high quality instruction into students' experiences, **we recommend that financial literacy modules be developed that can be incorporated into a variety of formal and informal curricula and made available to System institutions.**

6. Students drop courses during the semester for a variety of reasons including work responsibilities, time needed for social and family commitments and transportation issues. Financial aid professionals have reported, however, that students often do not understand the full consequences of dropping courses, such as impacts on financial aid eligibility and timely degree completion. **We recommend that institutions explore the procurement or development of tools that illustrate to students the full financial impact of dropping courses mid-semester**.

Institution-Wide Engagement in Students' Financial Well-Being

7. Though institutional leaders may be sympathetic to student financial risk and hardship, they may not be fully aware of the state of their student body unless data regarding student finances is regularly available to them. Enrollment and retention data is regularly reviewed by leadership at all institutions of higher education. **We recommend that student financial metrics should also regularly be presented to institutional leadership, including deans, department chairs, vice presidents and president.** We believe this will facilitate programming and decision-making that better supports students, taking into account their finances.

8. Fostering frequent and strategic communication among campus business areas and departments can help identify roadblocks to timely graduation and align academic calendars, policies and procedures with institutional student success goals. **We recommend that institutions put in place a standing interdisciplinary committee with the goal of sharing information and creating campus-wide engagement in supporting a culture of student success with a focus on student financial health.** It is critical that this committee include representation from financial aid and bursar units, who are sometimes overlooked in other student success interdisciplinary committees.

9. All UT institutions strive to provide a basic student support safety net through a variety of programs including food pantries, emergency grants, and emergency housing. However, lack of awareness of these services by faculty and staff creates missed opportunities for informal referrals to take place through every day interactions with students. **We recommend that institutions develop strategies to build awareness among faculty and staff about basic student support services available both on and off campus that may be of particular use to students who are struggling financially.**

10. Often, academic cost discussions are focused on tuition and fees, but the cost of textbooks and other required resources frequently create additional burdens for students that can directly impact their ability to succeed in their courses. Therefore, **we recommend that institutions and faculty actively develop a systematic approach to ensure that students have access to open educational resources (OER) for their courses or other no- or low-cost alternatives, and to provide education and training to incoming faculty, both full-time and adjunct, on available resources.**

Student-Centered Financial Statements and Communications

11. Student financial interactions with our institutions are, by their nature, unfamiliar to students and can be anxiety-provoking. UT System institutions should strive to make it as easy as possible for students who do not have advanced knowledge about finances to 1) find and understand their statements, 2) find and understand their financial aid awards, 3) pay any outstanding balances, and 4) receive answers to their questions about their finances. **We recommend that each institution review these components of student financial interaction with the institution with student stakeholders with an eye towards improving readability and usability.**

12. Institutions have multiple supports that may be useful to students who are at financial risk for not completing their degrees. However, students may not be aware of those resources at times that they may be particularly helpful and may benefit from more targeted and more frequent institutional contact. **We recommend that institutions regularly track the frequency of institutional contact with students who are at risk of not graduating due to finances.** Institutions may use this tracking to improve outreach or programming.

Promising Practices

UT System institutions and other institutions/groups are working to remove financial barriers to student success through a variety of program and policy innovations. Several promising practices were identified that can be adapted for use at other intuitions of higher education as they also seek to improve the financial well-being of their students.

One-Stop Resource for Student Finances

For many students, the task of enrolling in and paying for college is complex and involves visiting or speaking with multiple offices. Setting up a One Stop allows students to speak with a single staff member for most enrollment and financial aid questions without sending the student to multiple locations around campus. A prospective student will often have questions about document submission for admissions, FAFSA or TASFA questions, and registration and billing questions. One Stop staff can also take a case management approach to students who come in with questions, proactively problem-solving related issues in a single interaction. This can be a particular support for students who are struggling with the complexity of financial statements and interactions with the institution.

One Stop staff are trained to answer questions for the home offices served, which can include Financial Aid, Registrar, Bursar, Undergraduate Admissions, and/or other services. A call center can also be included in the structure as well as web and social media functions. Rather than taking a narrow approach to students' questions, One Stop Counselors can assist the student holistically. If the student is having difficulty registering, does the student have a financial hold preventing registration? If so, does he or she qualify for aid to help take care of the balance? This holistic approach encourages student success and limits the campus shuffle that students often undertake when having to visit multiple home offices. A well-trained One Stop Counselor can handle the overwhelming majority of student questions received and rarely will have to escalate to specialists within the home offices. As the clearinghouse for many urgent student questions, One Stops are also in a good position to aggregate question patterns, proactively post clarifications on social media sites and university websites, and review processes to reduce student questions and road blocks over time.

The ultimate goal of implementing a One Stop is to break down barriers and simplify the college enrollment process for students. This holistic approach can also assist home offices with streamlined processes and collaboration on initiatives. In addition, with One Stops devoted to excellence in customer service, having a One Stop conveys to students a deep university commitment to service excellence.

Launching a One Stop

Prior to launching a One Stop, university leadership should decide which services will be available to students through this resource. Once that decision is made, this structure must be communicated to home offices and staff selected to join the new One Stop. Taking time to meet with each of the home offices to develop service-level agreements about how much staff will be expected to know and how students' questions can be escalated to home offices is a necessary and critical part of establishing a comprehensive and successful One Stop. Many best practices involve using a ticketing system to track student contacts and to escalate issues to home offices.

A unified physical and virtual space that is welcoming and easy for students to understand is also an important step. Web resources that address the same topics and student services in the same way as the physical staff and space address those services help students to more easily find services.

Monitoring customer service is essential. Develop a customer service survey that students can easily access to rate the level of service they encounter with the One Stop staff. Tracking numbers and tracking key call center metrics will allow managers to track performance and accommodate student traffic. It is also important to develop rubrics to rate staff performance. These rubrics should set both a subject matter fluency and a customer service standard that can be tied to performance evaluations.

Costs/Resources

Typically, One Stops begin by taking staff from each of the home offices already in a student advisory role and transferring them to the One Stop. If possible, a manager from at least one home office should be transferred to the One Stop to help bring a breadth of knowledge and management experience. A training position in the One Stop office is strongly recommended. One Stop Counselors are required to know a large amount of information and given the rapid pace of change facing colleges and universities, keeping up with changes is daunting. A trainer can facilitate training not only for new hires, but also continuing education. Dedicated staff time to managing online resources and social media is also a good investment and can significantly reduce in-person service time.

Hiring the right staff is essential. Rather than focusing on higher education experience, demonstrated customer service experience and working in a fast-paced environment typically yields more effective employees. Being constantly on the front-line can be tiring, so salary rates need to be competitive and commensurate with the amount of knowledge expected of the staff. Starting salaries are critical to the success of a One Stop. Many institutions start their One Stops with generalists, with lower salaries than more specialized employees in the home offices. Instead, salaries should be competitive with the home offices so that staff have a desire to stay in the office and do not have a salary incentive to shift to the home offices once they are fully trained. These positions can be challenging in terms of both knowledge base and pace of work, and staff should be paid accordingly.

Additional Information

Both UT Rio Grande Valley and UT San Antonio have successful One Stop centers. For additional information on those centers, contact:

- Erica Cox (erika.cox@utsa.edu), Director of One Stop Enrollment Center, UT San Antonio
- Debbie Gilchrist (debbie.gilchrist@utrgv.edu), Director of the Student Service Center and Undergraduate Admissions, UT Rio Grande Valley

Student-Centered Financial Statements and Communication

Understanding the various financial interactions that occur between a student and an institution of higher education can be very stressful, particularly for first-generation students or students with limited financial literacy. Students often do not fully comprehend what the relationship is between their financial aid award and their bill with the institution. It may not be clear where they go to see their billing statement or how to interpret what portion of the bill is, or is not, covered by financial aid. If the student has an outstanding balance after the application of financial aid, they often do not understand the processes involved in paying outstanding balances, nor where to go if they have questions regarding their financial situation. Additionally, students often do not understand what a credit balance is or how disbursements are handled.

Institutions should employ a student-centered approach when communicating with students and their families about financial aid and student accounts. Unfortunately, in an effort to be complete and 100% accurate, financial communications with students are sometimes unduly formal and peppered with language that is part of the specialized language of financial aid or higher education. This can deepen student confusion and their experience that their institution is unhelpful and that they won't be able to understand their financial interactions with the institution.

Instead, all communications should be clear and concise, with little or no jargon and easily accessible online. FAQs and additional resources should be easily accessible at the same online locations and in formats that are appealing to students, such as in searchable text and video. All standard communications should be reviewed for readability and jargon, ideally with student feedback on each standard significant communication, including, at minimum, the Financial Aid Award Notification and the financial billing statement (see, for example, the Gunning-Fog Index for evaluating readability and the terminology translation and jargon reduction exercises described by EAB).[10,11]

The location of students' bills and/or financial aid awards should be readily available and known by staff across campus including admissions, housing, or academic and peer advisors. Institutions should consider cross-training various units across campus on a regular basis to ensure that staff remain current in their knowledge base on these topics so that students who have questions can be assisted in the moment by staff that they are already often interacting with.

The Financial Aid Award Notification requires special attention because of its importance to students. Specific awards should be clearly identified by award type (grant, scholarship, loan, etc.). Information regarding student loan programs should be clearly indicated in a way that allows students and families to understand the obligations that come with borrowing student loans. Award notifications should include how to accept the awards, the timeframe to do so, and any additional required steps. Tools to evaluate award letters are available, informed by students' families questions and needs. For example, the Award Letter Self-Assessment guide is a tool developed by the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators to assist schools in evaluating their award letters to determine if they include the information that families want to know in a language that will be easily understood.[12]

University financial billing statements also require special attention. Statements should accurately reflect the outstanding balance a student owes in as concise a format as possible, recognizing that the term "balance" may be unfamiliar to students and be misunderstood as a credit to the student rather than an amount owed. Payment deadlines should be clear, and information regarding payment options such as installment plans should be clearly stated. The information provided should make it clear to the student and the family the charges and amounts owed directly to the institution and what any remaining balance would be after all aid is applied. Other costs used in the financial aid calculation should be identified as indirect costs with a clear definition of terms. An explanation of how the bill might change if a student adds or drops classes should also be included. We emphasize again that financial statement should be reviewed for readability and jargon with direct student feedback, such as through focus groups, regarding whether the statements meet their needs.

[10] http://gunning-fog-index.com/

[11] "Transforming the First-Generation College Student Experience: 17 Strategies for Enhancing Student Success", EAB Student Affairs Forum resource, 2016.

[12] https://www.nasfaa.org/uploads/documents/Award_Letter_Evaluation_Tool.pdf.

Safety Net Programs

The gap between the financial resources provided to students by universities and the cost of attendance can be the result of a number of issues. In some cases, students may receive outside scholarships provided to high school graduating seniors for their first year only. While these monies are critical for many students in providing access to higher education, they can mask the student's overall financial aid picture, with additional unmet need emerging in subsequent years. In other cases, family resources simply run out as savings are expended as the student progresses. There are also occasions where the student's eligibility for aid changes over the years due to increases in family income. For at-risk students and their families, they may not be in a position to make up even small differences created by resulting changes in eligibility for financial aid. Furthermore, students who transfer from a community college to a four-year institution sometimes reach their lifetime limit on loan eligibility before they complete their degree. Similarly, students who earn significant dual credit in high school may reach their maximum degree hours for financial aid purposes prior to completing their degrees, even though they would otherwise have grant funds available.

Students also experience unforeseen financial emergencies that jeopardize their ability to persist. An unanticipated trip to the emergency room, an automobile accident, temporary unemployment or underemployment, all can create situations where students on a tight, fixed budget have to take a break from their education to pay for unforeseen costs.

In many of these cases, small amounts of additional assistance could provide a lifeline to keep students enrolled and on-track to graduate. While some emergency aid programs are structured to cover education-related costs (tuition, fees and books), others extend to students experiencing personal financial emergencies that threaten their ability to persist such as unforeseen auto repairs, medical expenses or evictions. A recent Student Affairs Administrator's in Higher Education (NASPA) survey of over 400 universities indicated that more than one-third of colleges provide unrestricted grants of $1,000 or more to students in crisis. [13] Research from the Wisconsin HOPE lab suggests that emergency grant aid improves both retention and graduation rates. [14] Another report suggested that in addition to a monetary boost, recipients of emergency grants receive a psychological boost from receiving support from their institution during a time of crisis. [15]

Completion Grants

The University of Texas at Austin, along with nine other University Innovation Alliance (UIA) institutions, is participating in a pilot program within the UIA to study the feasibility of scaling up completion grant programs across institutions and to explore the scope of the impact of programs such as these. Funding for the pilot comes from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Great Lakes Foundation. Partners in the UIA pilot have agreed to match funds received over a four-year period.

---

[13] https://www.naspa.org/images/uploads/main/Emergency_Aid_Report.pdf

[14] https://community.mygreatlakes.org/mglstatic/community/forms/EG_Emergency_Grant_Closing_Report_2012-15_0216.pdf

[15] http://hcmstrategists.com/maximizingresources/images/Tuition_Paper.pdf

The pilot is based on Georgia State University's Panther Grant program. Georgia State was able to determine that they were dropping hundreds, if not more than a thousand, academically qualified and fully registered students per semester. In looking at the balances for these students, the balances owed were as low as $200 in some cases. They opted to fund students who had unmet need per federal definitions, who were on track to graduate, and who owed balances of $1,500 or less, starting with seniors. Staff from Financial Aid and Student Success worked in collaboration to identify the students. In the first semester, Georgia State invested $40,000 in the program and brought 41 students back into the classroom. Since that time, the institution has determined that over 7,000 students have been retained through this effort.

The UIA pilot began in the Fall of 2017. Students who meet the following criteria are considered for the grant:

- Have achieved senior level status as defined by the institution.
- Are currently enrolled (or enrolled within the last 2 terms) and are within 2 semesters (or three quarters) of graduation.
- Are in good academic standing (2.0 or above).
- Have an estimated family contribution of $7,000 or less with preference given to Pell recipients. [Note: Students must have accepted and received all available financial aid (including loans) for which they are eligible.]
- Have an unpaid balance of $1,000 or less on enrollment for the current or following semester.

Beyond these parameters, it is up to the participating institutions to determine how to identify potential recipients. At The University of Texas at Austin, the Office of Financial Aid (OFA) is collaborating with Enrollment Analytics and Student Accounting to identify potential recipients. Depending on the resulting number of eligible students, OFA may also reach out to Academic Advisors to assist in developing the pool of applicants. UT Austin will be monitoring and assessing the retention and graduation rates of these students along with the challenges and successes of working with these populations.

The University of Texas at Austin is providing completion grants with support from a University Innovation Alliance grant and institutional matching funds; however, there are other ways to fund similar programs. Georgia State University uses general fund monies to fund the program, with internal data indicating that the additional tuition and fees recouped from the students retained more than pays for the program.[16]

Emergency Grant Programs

Emergency grant programs are designed to address unexpected student financial hardships that threaten the ability of the student to continue his/her education, beyond typical academic costs. This is in contrast to the completion grants described above that focus on academic costs. For example, if a student requires a car to commute to school and to practicum sites and the car breaks down, a student without emergency funds to repair the car may be forced to immediately stop attending. Many institutions can work individually with students who come forward with financial emergencies through

[16] http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/getting-hundreds-students-graduation-georgia-900-grants/

combinations of a re-evaluation of financial aid availability (depending on the student circumstances), grants, loans, and donor support, but without a program that is visible to the campus, very few students are assisted and those with the greatest need may not be identified.

To provide a more systematic solution to emergency financial need, UT Arlington developed an Emergency Aid Fund (EAF) in 2014 that has developed into a robust program. In Fall 2017, the fund allocated $59,000 to approximately 122 students with an average award of $484. An additional 54 students were assisted via alternative funding sources after applying to the EAF. During the program's duration, 77% of students remain enrolled at UTA after receiving assistance. The financial crisis addressed is usually a result of a sudden emergency, accident, or unforeseen event. Typical expenses may include, among other things, rent, utilities, groceries, replacement of essential personal items due to fire, natural disaster or theft, funds for immediate emergency shelter, safety needs (changing locks, for example), and prescriptions or other medical costs. Funds are distributed as university policy allows but are typically dispersed as a scholarship and cost of attendance is adjusted accordingly. In extreme circumstances, such as facing eviction or disconnecting utilities, students are provided a VISA gift card to resolve their financial crisis.

The EAF has now evolved to also assist students beyond financial resources. At times, UTA has been able to provide alternative resources to meet student needs, such as temporary shelter, meal plans, and book assistance.

UT Arlington does not utilize tuition, fees, or state accounts to fund the EAF. Instead all funding comes from gifts, grants, and donations to the fund via corporations, student organizations, or individuals.

The University of Texas at San Antonio has also recently developed a formal program for emergency aid. This developing program will be marketed broadly to the campus so that all stakeholders are aware, including a visible website, email communications to students, staff and faculty, and highlights of the program in news releases. Student circumstances that may qualify for emergency aid include temporary job or income loss, sudden loss of housing, overdue rent or utility bills, loss of childcare, unexpected medical emergency, theft of property (computer, books, clothing), food or transportation needs, and other circumstances.

Additional Information

For more information about completion grants, or the University Innovation Alliance pilot program, contact Diane Todd Sprague, Director, Office of Financial Aid, dtsprague@austin.utexas.edu.

For more information about UT Arlington's Emergency Aid Fund, contact Lisa Nagy, Vice President for Student Affairs, nagy@uta.edu.

For information about UT San Antonio's emergency grant program, contact Lisa Blazer, Sr. Associate Vice President for Student Affairs, Lisa.Blazer@utsa.edu.

Enhancing Interaction among Advisors, Financial Aid and Student Accounts

Students would benefit from a closer relationship between academic advisors and financial aid personnel. Both fields are designed primarily to support students in reaching their academic goals, so there is significant common ground between them. Both fields also tend to be highly specialized with a large body of constantly changing information to master and significant consequences for students if they are poorly advised by either office. Because of the high stakes nature of their work and their specialized fields of knowledge, significant cross-training between academic advisors and financial aid advisors seems unmanageable. However, a close relationship in which academic advisors feel comfortable calling on financial aid personnel, and vice versa, would 1) improve seamless case management of students with difficult situations, 2) encourage development of training opportunities for both offices in content that would be useful for them in working with students, and 3) assist in direct referrals of students needing immediate assistance.

One approach to developing closer ties between these offices is to create direct staff-to-staff connections for referral purposes. For example, individuals in the Financial Aid and Student Accounts offices could be designated as the lead staff for contacts regarding student issues in a particular college. These designated staff would be the individuals that academic advisors could reach out to when dealing with complicated interacting financial and academic issues with a student in that college. Having a personal contact encourages staff to make the personal outreach to improve student case management. We recognize that some student accounting and financial aid offices have a limited number of staff so that, in this model, staff may serve as liaisons for multiple student groups in addition to their regular duties. However, we do not anticipate that this would significantly increase staff workload. The number of students served and the complexity of their issues would remain the same. Only the coordination and, hopefully, the quality of service would improve.

Fostering personal connections between offices may also open up opportunities and uncover needs for additional training of academic advisors on basic financial literacy concepts and student accounts, as well as training of financial aid staff on academic advising concepts. Financial aid staff could assist advisors with feeling more comfortable with basic financial discussions so that students could be more efficiently served. At minimum, academic advisors should feel comfortable answering frequently asked student questions such as “Where can I see my bill?”, “How do I know how much I owe?”, “How do I pay my bill?”, “What does X, Y, or Z mean on my financial aid award letter?”, “How do I accept my financial aid package?”, “What does it mean that I’ve been selected for verification?”, “How might dropping a class or changing my major affect my financial aid?”, and “I didn’t get awarded financial aid before. Why should I do a FAFSA again this year?”. They should also feel comfortable asking basic questions about financial stressors, just as they sometimes do about personal or academic stressors, such as “You’ve mentioned you’re working a lot of hours and it’s getting in the way of your classes. How are you doing with your finances? I want to be sure that I understand the whole picture of what’s going on with you in case there are resources I could connect you with.”

We recognize that advising models differ by institution and that developing connections between offices and training resources is more complicated in institutions that have a decentralized or faculty-heavy advising model. In those cases, a designated liaison model for financial aid and student accounts may be even more critical, since decentralized staff or faculty advisors may be less likely to have developed working relationships with those offices. Training on student finances for decentralized staff and faculty academic advisors may also need to be adapted as just-in-time online training.

Recommendations for Systemwide Metrics

We recommend the following metrics for Systemwide use and suggest that these metrics be regularly reviewed by institutional and college leadership. Institutions may also find that adapting these metrics to particular questions and contexts may yield improved programs. For example, metric #3, the percentage of students who leave after their first year with loan debt, could be examined by college major or first-year course experience at the institutional level. This may generate ideas that result in better first-year performance for students, and a decrease in students leaving with loans after the first year. Other promising metrics were also discussed, such as proportion of students reporting significant financial hardship (food or housing instability, etc.), proportion of students reporting difficulty purchasing course materials due to financial burdens, or reports of financial hardship by students who are retained versus those not retained. These rich metrics would be unwieldy to assess at the System level. However, we encourage institutions to consider these, and other, deeper measures of student financial hardship to better understand and respond to their students' experiences.

1. The percentage of first-year attrition likely attributable to finances (students in good academic standing but with unmet need greater than a particular cutoff who did not enroll elsewhere; $5500 in unmet need is suggested as an initial cutoff).

2. Percentage of students who fill out a FAFSA or TASFA
    a. By federal deadline (for FAFSA)
    b. By institutional priority deadlines

3. The percentage of students that leave after their first year with loan debt.

4. Average loan debt of students who leave after 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th year, and after graduation.

Conclusion

Keeping college affordable is critical for maintaining access, improving student success, and for developing an educated workforce prepared for the future. We have focused in this report on mitigating financial barriers for students through structural and programmatic considerations. By committing to improve the financial literacy of students while also making it easier for students to find and understand their statements, financial aid awards, and to pay their balances, institutions can help students develop the self-efficacy needed to manage financial challenges during and beyond college. Matching financial resources to students' needs through a combination of predictive analytics and safety net programs will help to address the fixed costs of education as well as financial hardships associated with other elements of the cost of attendance. Finally, fostering an institution-wide culture of student financial well-being will help to accelerate cost-saving innovations such as open educational resources.

Appendix A – Affinity Group Members

Kristin Croyle, Co-Chair	Vice President for Student Success and Professor of Psychology	UT Rio Grande Valley
Stephen Harris, Co-Chair	Director, Strategic Design & Initiatives	UT System
Karen Krause	Executive Director, Office of Financial Aid & Scholarships	UT Arlington
Diane Todd Sprague	Director, Office of Financial Aid	UT Austin
Cheryl Friesenhahn	Director, Financial Services	UT Dallas
Roy Mathew	Associate Vice President, Center for Institutional Evaluation, Research and Planning	UTEP
Ed Kerestly	Director of Financial Aid (through July)	UT Permian Basin
Michelle Alvarado	Assistant Vice President for Student Success	UT Rio Grande Valley
Lisa Blazer	Senior Associate Vice President for Student Affairs	UT San Antonio
Susan Doty	Founding Director of the Center for Economic Education and Financial Literacy & Senior Lecturer in Economics	UT Tyler
David Coursey	Associate Professor of Public Affairs	FAC/UT Arlington
Scott Lapinski	Director of Student Financial Aid	UT Tyler
Lydia Riley, Staff	Research and Policy Analyst	UT System

Appendix B – Unmet Need Cliff Analysis

Table 1. First-Year Retention of First-time, Resident Freshmen by level of Unmet Need, Fall 2014 and Fall 2015 Entering Cohorts.*

	Unmet Need	Initial Cohort	Students Retained	Percent Retained
UT Austin	**No Unmet Need**	7,851	7,447	94.9%
	$1 - $5,000	1,987	1,854	93.3%
	$5,000 - $8,000	1,243	1,157	93.1%
	$8,000 - $12,000	1,307	1,206	92.3%
	$12,000 - $15,000	510	473	92.8%
	>$15,000	406	380	93.6%
	Total	13,304	12,517	94.1%
UT Arlington	**No Unmet Need**	1,851	1,255	67.8%
	$1 - $5,000	1,292	919	71.1%
	$5,000 - $10,000	1,324	899	67.9%
	$10,000 - $15,000	596	400	67.1%
	>$15,000	149	85	57.1%
	Total	5,212	3,558	68.3%
UT Dallas	**No Unmet Need**	2,751	2,350	85.4%
	$1 - $5,000	579	501	86.5%
	$5,000 - $8,000	437	371	84.9%
	$8,000 - $15,000	911	766	84.1%
	>$15,000	229	150	65.5%
	Total	4,907	4,138	84.3%
UT El Paso	**No Unmet Need**	1,151	754	65.5%
	$1 - $6,000	1,642	1,298	79.1%
	$6,000 - $10,000	1,524	1,155	75.8%
	$10,000 - $15,000	1,121	592	52.8%
	$15,000 - $20,000	401	211	52.6%
	>$20,000	120	49	40.8%
	Total	5,959	4,059	68.1%
UT Permian Basin	**No Unmet Need**	374	256	68.5%
	$1 - $3,000	153	105	68.6%
	$3,000 - $6,000	115	85	73.9%
	$6,000 - $10,000	112	78	69.6%
	>$10,000	92	45	48.9%
	Total	846	569	67.3%

UT Rio Grande Valley	**No Unmet Need**	865	660	76.3%
	$1 - $6,000	1,200	881	73.4%
	$6,000 - $7,000	1,215	947	77.9%
	$7,000 - $10,000	573	486	84.8%
	>$10,000	212	189	89.2%
	Total	4,065	3,163	77.8%
UT San Antonio	**No Unmet Need**	3,347	2,157	64.5%
	$1 - $4,000	1,500	1,043	69.5%
	$4,000 - $8,000	2,183	1,544	70.7%
	$8,000 - $12,000	1,532	1,098	71.7%
	$12,000 - $15,000	696	478	68.7%
	>$15,000	425	299	70.4%
	Total	9,683	6,619	68.4%
UT Tyler	**No Unmet Need**	791	467	59.0%
	$1 - $5,000	210	136	64.8%
	$5,000 - $8,000	156	95	60.9%
	$8,000 - $12,000	139	81	58.3%
	>$12,000	107	65	60.8%
	Total	1,403	844	60.2%

*Rows highlighted in green represent precipitous drops in retention.

IV
Advising Affinity Group Report

THE UNIVERSITY of TEXAS SYSTEM
FOURTEEN INSTITUTIONS. UNLIMITED POSSIBILITIES.

Final Report – University of Texas System Student Success Affinity Groups on Advising

A Signature Project of the Student Success Quantum Leap

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND BACKGROUND

On November 5, 2015, Chancellor William McRaven shared his vision for excellence in The University of Texas System (UTS or System).[1] Taking the approach of a "team of teams," Chancellor McRaven committed to solving complex problems facing both UTS and the State of Texas. Central to this vision were "Quantum Leaps"—bold steps forward that System would take in meeting the needs of the people of Texas. One of those Quantum Leaps is laser focused on improving student success. In partnership with its institutions and in alignment with The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's 60x30 Initiative, the UT System is providing leadership and resources to fulfill the responsibility to help every student be prepared and positioned to succeed in college.

The UT System worked closely with leadership across the UT System to form "affinity groups," established to focus on the three pillars of student success that are central to the improvement of student success—Belonging, Finances, and Advising. This report focuses on the work of the advising affinity group. The charge provided to the advising affinity group is as follows:

> ***"All UT students will receive the advising they need to help them discover clear pathways to degree completion and beyond."***

While UT System serves a vital coordinating function, its work finds meaning in the education provided to students at each campus. These are distinct institutions with very different student bodies, and as a result, each institution conducts advising differently. Institutions vary greatly in size and needs of each population as well as in the approach to advising models, practices, technology, and philosophies. Despite the regional anomalies, size, and differences in institutional missions, every student should have an equitable opportunity to receive quality advising experiences that lead them toward the path of a degree and toward a successful and fulfilling post-graduate experience. The challenge for the advising affinity group was to devise common standards for excellence in advising which recognize and celebrate the unique situations that exist at each institution. Since each campus provides undergraduate advising differently, Table 1 below includes descriptions of each model currently operating each campus during AY 2017 - 2018:

Table 1: UT System Academic Institutions – Undergraduate Advising Model Descriptions

Institution	Enrollment[2]	Undergraduate Advising Model
UT Arlington	39,700	The University Advising Center (UAC), located in University College, advises all new freshmen. Students who are undecided and have less than 45 hours are also advised in the UAC. Students with a declared major are seen within their academic department.[3]
UT Austin	51,000	The university views sound academic advising as a major responsibility in educating students. Whether a student is required to see an advisor before registering for classes varies by major.[4] The School of Undergraduate Studies advises and serves as a home for students exploring majors.[5]
UT Dallas	26,800	“Undergraduate advising and graduate advising are provided by various offices in each academic area.” Whether a students is required to meet with an adviser prior to registration varies by program.[6]
UT El Paso	25,078	The UTEP Academic Advising Center provides holistic, cohort-based advising designed to guarantee every student seamless, personalized advising from admission through graduation. Every student works with an assigned advisor in the AAC to develop an academic, financial, and engagement plan based on their individual interests, aspirations, and commitments. In addition, the AAC has integrated a financial social work pilot program in the advising center to

		help students navigate the financial challenges that can lead to stop out decisions.
UT Permian Basin	7,100	Two by two. For the first two years, students are served by a centralized advising center. For the junior and senior years, students are served by a faculty adviser within their major.[7] UTPB is unique in relying on faculty advisers for a large part of their student population.
UT Rio Grande Valley	28,600	The Academic Advising Center serves as a centralized resource for all students. Starting in their second year, visiting with the Academic Advising Center prior to course registration is optional for most students.[8] UT RGV also makes degree roadmaps available to all undergraduate students.[9]
UT San Antonio	28,800	UTSA's Academic Advising unit utilizes professional academic advisors and follows a centralized-caseload advising model. UTSA utilizes standardized advising campaign practices and provides electronic degree maps to all undergraduate students.
UT Tyler	9,900	Freshmen who are first time college students are seen by the University Advising Center.[10] Additional academic advising is conducted within each College or School.[11]

Each of these models offers advantages, and each model was born out of the unique circumstances of campus cultures, needs, and resources. The challenge of the advising affinity group was to recognize those challenges while still providing support and setting a standard for excellence which could apply across the System. This common commitment to student success has resulted in notable gains in retention and graduation rates and a commitment to a continuous improvement process spearheaded by the UT System Guiding Coalition and, in this context, represented by the Advising Affinity Group.

On January 2, 2017, Dr. Rebecca Karoff, Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Quantum Leap Lead, sent formal notification to each of the members of the affinity groups. Members of the Advising Affinity Group include:

MEMBERS:

- ***Cassandre Alvarado***, Director of Special Initiatives in Enrollment and Graduation Management, UT Austin
- ***Gabriel Bermea***, Director of the Academic Advising Center, UT Rio Grande Valley
- ***Lupita Camarillo***, Director of Undergraduate Advising, School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, UT Dallas

- ***Kerri Camp***, Assistant Professor of Marketing and Director of Undergraduate Programs for the Colleges of Business and Technology, UT Tyler
- ***Betsy Castro***, Director of the University Career Center, UT El Paso
- ***Kellie Hanford***, Assistant Director of Transfer Student Services, UT Dallas
- ***Liz Hannabas***, Director, University Advising Center, UT Arlington
- ***John Indiatsi***, Director of Academic Advising, UT Permian Basin
- ***Tom Ingram***, Parliamentarian of Faculty Advisory Council, UT Arlington
- ***Ivette Savina,*** Assistant Vice President for Outreach and Student Access, UT El Paso
- ***Tammy Wyatt***, Associate Vice Provost for Student Success, UT San Antonio

CO-CHAIRS:

- ***Ashley Purgason,*** Assistant Vice President for Strategic Initiatives, UT Arlington
- ***Bill Harlow***, Dean of Undergraduate Success and Professor of Communication, UT Permian Basin
- ***Meredith Goode,*** Director of Academic Policy and Analytics, UT System

The group first met in Austin on February 2-3, 2017. From that meeting emerged a system of weekly phone calls between the three co-chairs and monthly phone calls between the entire team. As the affinity groups were set in motion, another UT System organization, the 2016 – 2017 Student Advisory Council (UTSSAC) was also working to research and provide recommendations related to best practices in advising. The group consists of two student leaders from each of the 14 system component institutions, and the issue of improved advising has been a priority for UTSSAC for the last several years. The 2016 – 2017 UTSSAC shared institutional information and data that they collected on various advising models and practices as well as recommendations for improved advising. After a discussion with student and affinity group leadership, a comprehensive framework began to emerge based on a shared vision for improved advising. In November 2017, nearing the completion of this report, the 2017 – 2018 UTSSAC Academic Student Success Working Group reviewed the proposed recommendations and provided feedback that is implemented throughout this report. The Advising Affinity group appreciates the students' dedication to advancing this effort.

The vision for the advising affinity group has been to support Quantum Leap efforts by outlining a framework allowing the group to recommend bold initiatives around advising for the eight academic campuses and the UT System to pursue collaboratively and to select appropriate metrics for which advising can be assessed. The group's recommendations are informed by best practices as communicated in the literature and clearly linked to retention and graduation outcomes. The affinity group continued meeting via phone and in-person between February and November of 2017 to develop a final report and other deliverables.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For decades, the principal trend in American higher education was to provide greater access. Where previously university education was the province of a small elite, a changing society meant that more students demanded that education. U.S. universities responded robustly, and they have indeed provided educational opportunity to a much wider audience. Unfortunately, in providing wider access, universities have not always done a good job of seeing students through to degree completion. As Tinto explains[12]:

> For over 40 years access to higher education has improved, and college enrollments swelled from nearly 9 million in 1980 to over 20 million today. But while enrollments have more than doubled, overall college completion rates have increased only slightly. Only about half of all college students in the U.S. earn a degree or certificate within six years… The facts are clear. Despite our success in improving access to college, we have been unable to convert those gains into higher completion rates, especially among the low-income students who most need the economic payoff that comes with a degree or credential.

The question, then, is how to narrow the gap between access and completion. Olson and Carter[13] report that one key variable is simple caring—students must perceive that a faculty member or someone else on campus is concerned with their success as a student. One particular opportunity to demonstrate that caring is in the academic advising relationship. Higgins discusses the relationship between adviser and advisee as central to student learning.[14] Speaking specifically about transfer students, Azeke (2015, p. 562) calls adviser knowledge of the student population, "a recipe for effective advising, on-campus engagement, satisfaction and overall success of the student."[15] Students need someone on campus who knows them and cares about their welfare, and academic advising plays a critical role in establishing that connection.

While it is well-established that advising serves a critical role in connecting students to the institution that begs the question of how to go about doing it well.[16] Indeed, the variety of advising models that exist—

even just inside the UT System—make it exceedingly difficult to create a single set of suggestions on how to do it well. Grisham, Johnson, and Freeman highlighted this problem while also stressing how important it is to create a common advising community on campus[17]:

> Different institutional missions, student populations, budget restrictions, and organizational structures create different advising models. Both decentralized and shared advising models, which represent the majority of institutional advising programs, share some level of separate organizational structures with advising programs reporting to separate individuals or departments across campus… Since high quality advising should be an institutional priority for all students regardless of advising organizational structure, administrators should seek ways to create an advising community across departmental lines. These collaborative efforts are considered a necessity for all student services to help create a focus on student success and engagement.

As discussed in the first section of this document, several of those distinct organizational structures and institutional missions are present in the UT System alone. While we are united in our recognition of the importance of academic advising to student success, we also recognize that the different System schools have very different structures for serving their students. Acknowledging this, the Advising Affinity Group looked to develop recommendations consistent with the charge which would be broadly applicable regardless of institutional context. The next section of this document looks at those recommendations in greater depth while simultaneously providing the scholarly literature relevant to each item.

In addition to a thorough review of the literature related to academic advising practices, resources, and student success outcomes, we also surveyed what data already exist for institutions to utilize as indicators of advising effectiveness and student satisfaction with advising. Additional information on related data will be discussed in subsequent sections. In addition to the information gathered from the UT System Student Advisory Council (largely interviews with students and advising leadership), we primarily relied on questions in three different modules of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).

The “5E” FRAMEWORK – ACHIEVING A QUANTUM LEAP IN STUDENT SUCCESS

Initial conversations among Affinity Group members and members of the Student Advisory Council helped to establish an initial premise, or framework, about the importance of advising. One premise that carried through our work is the concept that (1) “advising is teaching” and that (2) interactions with advisors and students should be relational, not transactional. In discussing what would be needed to effectively implement those two concepts, we delineated a few ideas:

- Both students and advisors need tools and information that would empower them to make decisions;
- Advising should occur in an environment using a variety of communication tools, that reinforce and strengthen the relational aspects; and
- Advising should be elevated as a profession so that high quality advisors are retained and promoted and so that institutions invest in future success.

From those initial concepts, the “5E Framework” emerged. The “5E Framework” provides the lens through which we apply any recommendations, initiatives, and practices that may be recommended with the goal of improving the advising experience of all students on any UT System academic campus. Before recommending actions and programs, especially those that may require considerable investments in time, staff resources, infrastructure, and finances, each recommendation was considered in relation to the potential impact on each framework. In order to impact Quantum-leap worthy change, any programs/initiatives recommended from this group must clearly demonstrate the ability to impact more than one of the 5Es. ***To meet the charge that “All UT students will receive the advising they need to help them discover clear pathways to degree completion and beyond,” we are working to ensure that any recommendation that could be adopted aligns with the five framework ideas so that it rises to the level of quantum leap worthy. In other words, it checks all, or many, of the important “boxes” that define success.***

The 5E framework and recommendations are essential to creating a foundational understanding through which policy makers, faculty, administration, and even students might begin to work toward a shared vision of achieving student success goals. This report outlines the framework and illustrates the relationship between each of the framework ideas, the organization of ideas and practices that naturally flow from those ideas, and specific models and practices that encapsulate recommendations that could serve to advance the implementation of advising affinity group work. Any innovation that is Quantum Leap worthy should meet at least one of the five framework criteria listed below:

EDUCATE: Effective advising requires that institutions must educate students by ensuring they are knowledgeable of policies and procedures to best equip the student with the understanding necessary for self-efficacy and optimal choices related to academic planning.

EMPOWER: Effective advising requires that institutions empower students by providing, in a readily accessible and consumable format, the information necessary to make the most common decisions around academic planning. Educate and Empower go hand-in-hand so that students can self-actualize and achieve learning outcomes in a similar manner that they might learn inside the classroom. However, each student must be empowered – equipped – with the tools to obtain fundamental, relevant information about his or her choices.

ENHANCE: To achieve improved advising, institutions must work to enhance the interactions occurring between students and advisors so that students can progressively pursue more informed decision making regarding changing majors, finances, co-curricular activities, career planning, and other higher-order subject matter. Students want a relationship with an advisor, not a transactional interaction.

ELEVATE: Elevate the career pathways of advising staff to recognize the indispensable functions they perform on academic campuses and the role that they play in forming relationships with students and guiding them on their chosen path. Advisors should be highly respected for their contribution to the profession and provided opportunities for professional development, earning credentials, awards, and recognition that help them advance in their field.

EVALUATE: Effective academic advising can only occur when there is continuous assessment, evaluation and data-driven improvement. We must first measure that the advising programs implemented perform in a manner intended. Then we must begin to measure improvements in outputs and outcomes, especially as they are tied to retention, graduation, and equity to ensure accountability for all stakeholders.

Components of the 5E Framework are discussed in more detail below, along with a key strategy, or recommendation, other promising practices, and additional relevant literature. It should also be noted that the key recommendations are based on formal theories of adoption of innovation and emphasizes that implementation must be accompanied by the understanding of primary pitfalls to avoid:

(1) Each element must not be too complex;

(2) Each cannot be completely incompatible with the culture of an individual institution;

(3) Recommendations must not be so prescriptive that an individual institution cannot adapt it to their campus model and culture; and

(4) Most importantly, each element must be implemented with a clear mechanism for other advisors to observe the elements in practice.

THE 5Es EXPLAINED: KEY RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROMISING PRACTICES

EDUCATE:

Effective advising requires that institutions must educate students by ensuring they are knowledgeable of policies and procedures in order to equip the student with the understanding necessary for self-efficacy and optimal choices related to academic planning.

Quality advising is more than simply knowing curriculum requirements and institutional policies. True quality advising requires a humanistic approach that helps students juggle academic demands with personal and work life.[18] "Advising is a process in which advisor and advisee enter a dynamic relationship respectful of the student's concerns. Ideally, the advisor serves as teacher and guide in an interactive partnership aimed at enhancing the student's self-awareness and fulfillment."[19] Academic advising is a locus of learning and contributes to the teaching and learning process that helps students understand the 'logic of their curricula'.[20] New directions in academic advising recommend the shifting of prescriptive advising methods (e.g. telling and informing) to interpretive and developmental advising methods (e.g. appreciative, Socratic, and reflective) along a continuum. Learning-centered advising serves as the base or anchor of this continuum blending and synthesizing passive and active advising practices as needed and when appropriate depending upon the advising objective and unique needs of the student.[21]

The relationship between the academic advisor and student should mirror that of a goal-oriented partnership in which the student plays an active and integral role in his/her degree planning and progress. The interactions are heavily focused on mentoring and relationship-building to enhance student self-efficacy and thus less transactional in nature.

Through the goal-oriented advisor-advisee partnership, students must understand what courses predict success in particular field of study or major as well as the impact of switching majors on one's degree plan and progress toward graduation. Access to technology and online tools is critical to developing that level of understanding and self-efficacy. Electronic degree maps or semester-by-semester plans must be readily available to students. Likewise, students must be taught how to effectively utilize this tool to better monitor and evaluate their own success. Similarly, advisors must have up-to-date software and technology tools (i.e. EAB SSC Campus) to support their students by tracking/reviewing their progress and intervening in a timely manner.

KEY RECOMMENDATION:

Educate students and advisors by creating a central portal and/or external website for communicating best practices in advising across UT System.

(See 1-page proposal: UT System Advising Institute)

> As a profession, academic advising is continuously improving and changing. As innovations and enhancements are identified at one campus, there must remain outlets for dissemination beyond the yearly advising institute proposed above. A central portal, or website, allows for simple updates and quick curation of best practices, as well as serving as a clearinghouse of materials in support of advising training and assessment. Examples of this innovation at a campus level are plentiful, and the creation of this tool at a system wide level would elevate UT System's reputation as a leader in advising. The greatest opportunity that this tool presents is a cost-effective and easily accessible tool for maintaining and sustaining innovations in advising. Continuous support at a system level, through a small committee, ensures that innovations move beyond the campus level.
>
> UT System will work with institutions to create a system-wide website, much like The University of California System's Advising Matters. The website will feature content aimed at prospective students, students, and advisors on each campus. The site will feature interviews with students and advisors about the importance of advising, tools that are available at each institution, and best

practices. The website will link closely with institutional pages that are already in existence and will help to educate and establish the importance of advising and the role it plays in student success.

Institutions will also be asked to review institutional advising website materials and to update periodically to ensure a seamless link between UT System and institutional information.

In addition to providing materials for students, important materials about the advising profession, including the best practices and recommendations outlined in this report, will be featured and disseminated through the site.

As we consider models for adopting best practices within the framework outlined, communication will remain a central tenet of great advising models and service. As a profession, academic advising is continuously improving and changing. As innovations and enhancements are identified at one campus, there must remain outlets for dissemination beyond the yearly advising institute proposed above. A central portal, or website, allows for simple updates and quick curation of best practices, as well as serving as a clearinghouse of materials in support of advising training and assessment.

Examples of innovation at a campus level are plentiful, and the creation of this tool at a system wide level would elevate UT System's reputation as a leader in advising.

Implementation of this recommendation could involve five major steps:

1. Identify examples of portals to replicate.
2. Identify members of the website working group to make decisions about content and to review and update content; establish a point-person at each campus to maintain institutional websites.
3. Curate resources from each campus.
4. Support dissemination of innovations developed in support of advising institute.
5. Set up systems to evaluate the use of the tool and the impact of the portal in helping advisors attain key success measures.

Other Promising Practices and Action Items:

(1) Establish a standardized advising curricular with clear links to standardized student learning outcomes.

This helps to foster a goal-oriented advisor and advisee relationship with the purpose of educating each student. Likewise, students will learn of state and institutional policies and procedures as well as numerous action steps and expectations (i.e. meet with a career counselor to build a resume; complete an internship; study abroad, etc.) critical to academic success and engagement throughout one's undergraduate career (first-year, second-year, third-year, and fourth-year).[22]

Similarly, standardized student learning outcomes should be created and systematically assessed (i.e. following orientation, after each advising appointment, annual via a campus-wide survey) across all academic advising units in UT System. This will allow for a deep dive into the level of understanding and knowledge that undergraduate students have with regard to the aforementioned action steps/expectations, statewide undergraduate education policies (i.e. 6-drop rule, 30-hour excess fee, common core, etc.) as well as institutional policies and procedures.

(2) Establish Aspirational Student goals for undergraduate students in the advising model.

For example, All UT System Undergraduate Students Will . . .

- Understand the necessary steps and actions expected of them to enhance their academic success and social engagement at each classification level (first-year, second-year, third-year, and fourth-year).
- Understand the policies (statewide and institutional) and procedures related to academic advising and their impact on one's academic success and progress toward graduation.
- Understand what courses predict success in his/her major.
- Understand the implications of switching majors on his/her degree plan and progress toward graduation.
- Have access to and understand how to effectively utilize a variety of tools (i.e. electronic degree maps) to monitor and evaluate their academic success.

EMPOWER:

Effective advising requires that institutions empower students by providing, in a readily accessible and consumable format, the information necessary to make the most common decisions around academic planning. Educate and Empower go hand-in-hand so that students can self-actualize and achieve learning outcomes in a similar manner that they might learn inside the classroom. However, each student must be empowered – equipped – with the tools to obtain fundamental, relevant information about his or her choices.

Research indicates that an academic coaching framework and having students participate in a strategic mapping of academic endeavors and engagement leads to satisfaction, retention, and ultimately, to degree completion.[23] A variety of tools and models have been utilized by other institutions to empower students in academic planning and advising settings. One model, known as "appreciative advising," uses an asset-based approach to (1) build rapport and trust with students (disarm), (2) uncover strengths based on past accomplishments (discover), (3) encourage students to share their dreams and be inspired by them (dream), (4) co-author educational plans to make each student's dreams a reality (design), (5) support students throughout their educational journeys (deliver), and (6) challenge students to do and become better (don't settle). The aim of this model is to strengthen advising interactions with students in order to help them feel **'empowered'** in their pursuit of higher education. Academic advisors use positive, attentive and active listening and questioning strategies to engage students. Findings appear to be positive and it seems that the phases of 'appreciative advising' can be applied in other areas. The appreciative advising model has been used in the advising center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, in a tutoring center and in the college admissions cycle.[24]

Research specifically related to the needs of first-generation student empowerment points to the use of "intrusive advising" as a model that involves deliberate, intensive, advising interventions with at-risk students design to facilitate informed and responsible decision making. One example of an intrusive-advising approach could be the "major switch" model that facilitates transfer out of a course for majors in which they may be struggling and into another course for non-majors so that they can have time to think about academic and career pathways without a negative impact on grades or financial aid.[25]

Each student must have access to the tools that are foundational to empowering choices about academic pathways. Prescriptive degree maps which show students the proper timing and pacing of the major and general education requirements necessary to ensure graduation in 4 years, and degree milestones ensure that students follow the degree map and stay on-track toward timely graduation. Major Maps and degree audit tools are also indicated in the literature[26] as a primary tool for empowering students, "Beginning freshman year, provide students and advisors with one-page, major-specific maps containing integrated academic and career advice spanning the four-year college experience; also include information on co-curricular activities and career possibilities related to each individual major.[27]

KEY RECOMMENDATION:

Implement online, interactive 4-year degree plans and tracking for all undergraduate students using a platform that works best with your existing campus infrastructure.

(See 1-page proposal: Interactive 4-year degree maps)

> A key component of supporting student success through advising is helping students navigate their degree plans efficiently and effectively. Four-year degree planners are a key way to help educate students about the optimal paths through their educational experience. Traditional advising focuses on helping students navigate on a semester-by-semester basis; four-year plans help students visualize their entire degree experience while reinforcing the goal of timely graduation. By creating planners for every degree in the UT System, and making them available to students online, advising will continue to empower students to make decisions by putting information in their hands.

The creation or enhancement of an already-existing data-driven within institutional advising shops is a primarily and critical goal for offering technology-based tools and platforms such as interactive degree maps and degree audit that help to introduce the opportunity for real-time intervention to help students remain on track. Analytic tools and the creation of a data-driven culture can help institutions problem-solve and implement solutions; however, the closer that the data-driven "alerts" are to real-time actions, the better, and they can help to serve students most effectively.

Other Promising Practices and Action Items:

(1) In addition to interactive degree maps, there are many other student-empowerment tools that can help facilitate timely degree completion while empowering each student to make a decision about his or her academic and career pathway. A list of student-empowerment tools includes the following:

- ✔ ***Degree audit tools*** **-** An analysis tool designed for students and advisors, to enable them to gage student progress and degree completion. A tool of this nature is intended to match the coursework each student has completed with the requirements of his/her specific degree plan, having established that the plan of study fits the student's professional goals.

- ✔ ***Interactive degree to career pathways*** **-** Building on the foundation set by major maps and degree audit tools, interactions with professionals will support students' aspirations and career goals. Students will have the opportunity to learn what others educational journey has been, to receive feedback and insight in regard to their own pathways. This method will support students' decision-making abilities and their educational and professional pathways as they complete their degrees. Resources such as *College Majors 101* may be used to tie in students' current or prospective majors, with their professional aspirations.

- ✔ ***Use of data-driven tools to ensure course availability*** **-** Detailed data collection regarding enrollment numbers will provide advisors with critical information to determine the availability of the courses most requested/required by students' educational pathways. University-based reports can be employed to determine these numbers. Based on this data, advisors and university officials will be able to ensure that the courses students most need are available, to support student access and success.

- ✔ ***Locked degree plan*** **-** A tool used by advisors to communicate to students that their designated plan of study will lead them to successful completion of their degrees for graduation. This method serves to emphasize the courses that are most critical to students' degree completion, by strengthening the message coming from advisors and helping students avoid missing important coursework.

- ✔ ***Calendar on website*** **-** In an effort to facilitate student communication with their advisors and their subsequent course registration, advising calendars can be posted on the university's website and be made readily available for students to access. This will allow students to take a degree of autonomy in their preparation, as they will be able to manage their advising concerns and necessary processes for registration along with any other responsibilities they may be dealing with.

- ✔ ***Campus-wide Appointment System*** **–** Another tool to facilitate student communication and dedicated time between the student and advisor.

- ✓ ***Campaigns for certain time slots* -** The driving principle behind this campaign is student access to coursework, and establishing a measure of consistency to ensure student success. Based on enrollment metrics and interactions with students, advisors can determine the best and/or most common window of time during which students are able to attend courses, and take steps to build classes around this timeframe. This will allow for a predictable schedule to facilitate student access to relevant coursework, and will be particularly helpful for students dealing with family, professional, or other obligations.

- ✓ ***Semester by semester plans* -** A tool prepared by advisors to help students understand what courses predict success in particular field of study or major, as well as the impact of switching majors towards their graduation and continuing plans. Students will be supported in their ability to critically understand their course of study and become empowered in this regard, from the onset of their college education. To accomplish this, students must be taught how to effectively utilize this tool to better monitor and evaluate their own success.

- ✓ ***Information on course rotations and course availability* -** Certain majors will require very specialized coursework that may not be available every term. In some cases, this may result in the delay of a student's degree completion. Enrollment information, analyzed over a considerable period of time, will grant advisors insight into this matter, to determine if any changes are needed to support timely degree completion.

(2) Empower students by using communication tools that link students to the people and tools needed to succeed.

Students and advisors must be empowered to make meaningful connections with other people that can help guide students on their academic and career journeys. Meaningful, high-quality, relationship-oriented connections with people who are already empowered with information can help students to

- <u>Connect those who demonstrate interest into social or academic activities to create a more meaningful sense of belonging; and</u>

- <u>Talk about career internships/study abroad, and other high-impact practices that also improve student success</u>

It is important to use modern tools such as electronic advising, chat, and email (when appropriate), but it is also critical that students are encouraged to have face to face appointments and walk-in opportunities. Students should also be empowered to seek information from other campus resources or offices for information that is not handled by academic advising.

(3) Implement a Major Switch Program for undergraduate students at each campus so that students can identify early obstacles and switch courses/majors without consequence early in the semester.

Such a program should include: the option for students to switch majors early in the semester if they are not achieving success. Students can move into a non-majors course in the middle of the term and therefore avoid losing time and money by remaining in a course the rest of the term. Intrusive advising based upon historical data. For example, if a student is intending to be a Nursing major and their GPA at a certain point in time indicates that they will likely never enter the Nursing program, alternative plans should be actively and sometimes aggressively pursued with the student.

(4) Empower students with a more flexible major option early on by creating "meta majors."

"Meta Majors" provide new students time and space to explore groupings of courses within potential areas of academic interest without causing a significant loss of credit if students change pathways. "Meta Majors" are broad categories assigned to certain fields and/or professional goals designed to help students select a plan of study that best aligns with their goals and aspirations. A few examples include Business Administration, Health Sciences, and Engineering and Technology, among others. Common courses among different majors are identified through the use of meta majors, as a means to focus and maximize student progress by helping them avoid courses that will not count towards their degree completion. As students identify their meta majors, their academic advisors will be able to provide focused and specific guidance, in line with the student's projected major and career aspirations.

ENHANCE:

To achieve improved advising, institutions must work to enhance the interactions occurring between students and advisors so that students can progressively pursue more informed decision making regarding changing majors, finances, co-curricular activities, career planning, and other higher-order subject matter. Students want a relationship with an advisor, not a transactional interaction.

Academic advising has a positive impact on student retention, according to Lee Noel, a nationally recognized student-retention scholar, "In our extensive work on campuses over the years, [we] have found that institutions where significant improvement in retention rates has been made, almost without exception, give extra attention to careful planning and to academic advising.".[28] According to Wes Habley, "academic advising is the only structured activity on campus in which all students have the opportunity for on-going, one-to-one interaction with a concerned representative of the institution."[29] Therefore, we must **enhance** the interactions occurring between students and advisors to help students progressively pursue more informed decision making regarding changing majors, finances, co-curricular activities, career planning and other higher-order subject matter.

A first step in enhancing interactions is helping an advisor understand today's student. This is crucial for determining how best to serve students. For example, online students have different communication needs than on-campus students. So, who are our students? According to the Gates Foundation, 62% of today's college students are working full or part-time jobs while attending school; 47% of students are over 21 years old, and 61% are receiving Pell Grants (2014). In Texas, 53% of our college students are working fulltime; 48% of students are at least 21 years old and 52% of college students are attending a 2-year institution.[30] These data accentuate the need for academic advisors to elevate the services they are providing to students who are carrying multiple responsibilities, like jobs, while looking for ways to improve their futures. Capturing this information on our campuses and sharing this with the advising community will support a universal approach to helping our students meet their desired goals.

KEY RECOMMENDATION:

Implement a case management model/philosophy across the UT System by assigning every student an academic advisor.

(See 1-page proposal: Case Management Advising)

To begin, advising services need to be aligned with the expectations of our students; and, to do this, academic advisors need to be trained on specific services and tools that can support and build lasting relationships between themselves and the student. A Case Management approach supports this model; ***"The focus is on services that are comprehensive and that address the multitude of an individual's needs through the use of advocacy, on-going communication, and service linkage.***[31] This approach allows the advisor to guide the student through their academic career and get to know their students on a more holistic level. This model is practiced at Southern University, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Students are continuously encouraged to meet with their academic advisor and the advisor focuses on five essential components when working with their students: "outreach, referral, on-going assessment, advocacy and evaluation."[32] This model encompasses all the student's needs and requests.

Creation of a case-management model utilizes professional staff members, peers, and perhaps even students from relevant programs (social work) who help guide students in the areas of advising and even financial aid. It is difficult for a student to register for coursework if he or she is unsure if, when, and how to pay for the costs of that coursework. A case management model is student-centric, bring a customer-service relational approach, rather than a transactional approach, to higher education administration.

Today's students are bombarded with information and are in need of a relational – not transactional—interaction with a trusted advisor. Attention to building the relationship through case management will aid in the success and persistence of our students. These include: creating a menu of co- and extra-curricular activities at each institution associated with career goals, co-advising and co-enrollment with local community colleges and high schools to prevent excess hours, on-going improvement of developmental advising that defines the differences between transactional (prescriptive) items and non-transactional, providing

Through a case management approach to advising, every student at a UT System academic institution will have an assigned advisor throughout their entire educational journey. The advisor will work across a team of student affairs/success professionals to care for the student holistically. Examples of different university professionals that may work on case management include: an academic advisor, financial aid administrator, residence hall coordinator, success program and even tutoring and learning centers.

This is analogous to proven approaches to health care improvement where multiple professionals, such as social workers, physical therapists, physicians, and speech therapists come together to provide holistic support patients. Case management ensures that information about a student is tracked and managed in a way that allows information to be captured, understood and shared to best support the student, similar to shared medical records.

The relative advantage of a case management approach compared to other approaches include:

1. Continuity of care as advisors change and as students move across majors/degrees/programs, and even, across the UT System.
2. Provides an opportunity to collect data on students so that advising can move from anecdote to data-driven profession.
3. Supports students' sense of belonging by connecting them to one advisor who can help coordinate and manage their care.

We conceive the immediate work of adopting a case management model as unfolding in five phases:

1. Assign an academic advisor to every student in the UT System who has responsibility and authority for the student. Student to advisor ratio is an important metric that should be closely monitored and tied to best practices.
2. Train advisors on best practices in student case management
3. Specify and implement innovations in data collection and case note management so that campus support partners can easily track student needs
4. Set up systems to evaluate the scale of case management model adoption on the campus and the impact of case management in key success
5. Complete outcomes analysis

Other Promising Practices and Action Items:

(1) Offer Cross Training for Academic Advisors in Financial Aid and Career Planning.

Keeping the Case Management model in mind, and to support the holistic approach to enhance advising across campus, academic advisors need cross-training in both financial and career planning. Virginia Gordon's "3-I Process" (Inquire, Inform and Integrate) can help.[33] Career preparation is one of the key components of most colleges' missions. "Integrating career and academic advising, while not a new concept, is now discussed at more institutions. New economic realities may be the driving force behind recent decisions to integrate career and academic advising, however, these challenges present unique opportunities to better serve our students."[34] Therefore, it is also important for advisors to know about career opportunities and expectations in the area(s) for which they advise students.

While thinking about Gordon's "3-I Process" and realizing it is frequently referenced when integrating career advising with academic advising, this process could be applied to integrate financial advising, as well. "The relatively small amount of time it takes to become familiar with the financial aid system in one's college will be amply repaid in time saved from advisee return visits [and] less time will be spent rebuilding student's schedules and soothing frantic students whose funding has fallen through."[35] Training all advisors on key points about financial aid can provide consistent messaging. While financial aid has many policies and procedures that differ for each student, knowing the general processes can enable advisors to understand and communicate academic information that may impact financial aid (such as the impact of withdrawing from a class).

When speaking with advisors about adding these topics to their advising tool box there is frequently some fear shared by the advisor about giving out the wrong information or not having enough time to share this information with a student. However, addressing these fears can be alleviated by having open discussions about what these interactions would look and feel like when an advisor meets with a student. Offering support and creating open dialogue with the advising community and providing rationale will alleviate some concerns. According to McCalla-Wriggens, "Administrators can demonstrate a commitment to helping advisors succeed by asking them to share their thoughts and feelings about this new initiative, soliciting their ideas about how to facilitate this integration for both the individual and the unit, and working collaboratively with each advisor to develop a professional development plan."[36]

If 59% of Texas college students are taking out loans or are working to pay for college[37]advisors must be cognizant of these situations and it's time we cross-trained academic advisors so they are empowered to share this information with students in a manner that is consistent as if the student spoke directly with a financial aid or career counseling representative. This training will allow the advisor to speak intelligently and confidently with the student about their specific situation; and, educate the student. Lastly, these conversations will also connect these student to resources that will carry them through their entire academic career and prepare them as they take personal responsibility for their education.

(2) **Launch proactive communication campaigns.**

Targeted Student Campaigns: Campaigns generally consist of an advisor identifying a specific student population and then targeting communication to them. For example, an advisor may identify students whose GPAs are "borderline" and then communicate with them about resources that can help them succeed academically, such as tutoring. Best practices for campaigns include providing students with a follow-up item that encourages them to be proactive. Limiting the number of students in a campaign is also a best practice, as the advisor can actively follow up with students and track their progress.

Intrusive Advising: Intrusive advising is very intentional and it's the advisor's way of building an open and mutually respected relationship with a student. The advising session is typically an honest and direct approach to helps students stay motivated about attending college. Being intrusive with students can involve having open conversations about grades: 4-week, mid-term and final grades. But, it doesn't *only* have to be conversations about grades - staff and faculty can also be intrusive by attending student events and engaging in conversations that are beyond the office or classroom. Enhancing academic advising services for students can impact student involvement. Data produced by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and shared by George Kuh, in 2002, showed that "students who reported quality academic advisement were most likely to demonstrate the highest levels of student engagement in college."[38]

Professional Organizations: Within the advising community, it is important for advisors to know what is happening on their campuses. Policy changes and other important communication can occur through a campus-wide advising organization. Monthly meetings that inform college representatives of important dates and also informing them of new software updates provides an environment for advising professionals to feel connected with their peers. This forum allows department leaders to also share new programs and business procedures that are taking place in their colleges. Information like this keeps advising professionals informed and also inspires open dialogue about best advising practices across a campus. Frequently, there are discussions that also highlight the need for new business processes so the advising community stays informed of how students are using services across all departments.

(3) Utilize and Implement Effective Assessment Tools for Determining Advising Effectiveness.

While Assessment will be discussed in greater detail in the "Evaluate" section, it is important to note that assessment is a key component of determining the effectiveness of advising services. General satisfaction is typically not the best assessment measure. However, a student's satisfaction may be impacted by the message delivered by their advisor. Rather, it is more meaningful to measure how a student views the services they received. Looking at services will require consistent monitoring and reviewing, and conclude with possible modifications, if necessary. Referring once again to the Case Management approach, the advising process and the effectiveness of it will require feedback from the advisors using this model, as well as feedback from students. Because expectations can affect the way a student perceives their advising experience, communicating to students about what they should anticipate from advising early in their college career is important.

ELEVATE:

Elevate the career pathways of advising staff to recognize the indispensable functions they perform on academic campuses and the role that they play in forming relationships with students and guiding them on their chosen path. Advisors should be highly respected for their contribution to the profession and provided opportunities for professional development, earning credentials, awards, and recognition that help them advance in their field.

Many UT System academic institutions are already national leaders in academic advising. Despite the innovations and improvements in the profession that have been made in recent years, institutions still struggle with recruitment, retention, and professional opportunities/career ladders for professional advisors. Award-winning and nationally-recognized programs and models exist at several campuses, but that innovation rarely extends beyond its home campus. In addition to UT-System grown innovations, the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) has its own recommendations for best practices in advising that are not yet customized for the unique nature of each UT campus. In short, opportunities for innovation in advising are lost when not shared across the UT System. Shared innovations and professional development are needed to elevate the profession and increase retention and staff satisfaction.

KEY RECOMMENDATION:

UT System should work with institutions to create an annual advising institute for training on best practices and professional development.

(See 1-page proposal: UT System Advising Institute Proposal)

An advising institute encompasses both structure and innovation: providing a central gathering for academic advisors across the UT System to learn from one another and from national experts in academic advising.

The creation of an Advising Institute serves multiple stakeholders and drives both students and professional advisors toward shared expectations and accountability. By providing access to a credentialing ladder, professional development opportunities, and a common website/resources from which advisors, staff, and students can rely on to provide timely and accurate information and pathways, an institute could represent upward mobility and share responsibility.

At the national level, NACADA hosts a national convening of academic advisors to share best practices. This is an important model, but one that is so broad that opportunities to select the practices that are most likely to succeed in the political, social, economic and student environments of the system campuses are lost. An institute will be a yearly gathering of best practices in advising, enhanced by a system-wide advising training protocol. A training protocol will establish the principles of good advising at the system-level and support innovation at each campus to implement those principles.

The relative advantage to a UT-System wide advising institute compared to current approaches to advisor training is:

- Supporting expansion of isolated systems of innovation beyond the home campus
- Elevating academic advising professionals by providing credentials and transferrable skills across the UT System
- Supporting time and money savings by consolidating trainings and institute capital.

System-wide protocols make clear the expectations of good advising while providing support for achieving the goals of good advising for those tasked with this important goal.

A UT System-wide advising institute will be an iterative process that continuously builds and strengthens the adoption and diffusion of best practices in advising.

Goals of the Institute:

1. Gather advising representatives from each campus to affirm the UT-System wide best practices in advising
2. Invite each campus to present at a convening of system-wide advisors, examples of programming, systems, models and protocols that support those best practices in advising

3. Support the diffusion of those innovations by replicating best practices and trainings in online or easily accessible modules.
4. Create micro-credentials and badges for advisors that they can place on public profiles (this makes observable, FYI!)
5. Set up systems to evaluate the scale of best practices from advising institute on the campus and the impact of the institute in key success measures
6. Complete outcomes analysis
7. Update the system wide website to include relevant training materials, videos, and interactive opportunities for advisor training (for those not able to attend in-person).

Organizational Features of the Institute:

- An annual event held in the Austin or Dallas-FW Metro Area each summer that is designed by UT System and campus committee
- Has a budget of approximately $50,000 annually, to pay for the following:
  - ✓ Food, accommodations, conference space, and travel for at least 6 advisors from each undergraduate campus for two days
  - ✓ Outside speakers and professional advising experts
  - ✓ Video recording for digital content
  - ✓ Curriculum developed by committee that relates to the 5E Framework including student development theory, theoretical frameworks for advising, data-driven advising, effective communication strategies, working with unique student populations, and case load advising (partnering with faculty, financial aid, etc).
  - ✓ Institutions will work with UT System to provide a credential for attendees
  - ✓ In-depth exit surveys focused on training efficacy and advisor retention

Other Promising Practices and Action Items:

(1) Create a UT System Administration award to recognize outstanding innovators in undergraduate advising system-wide and outstanding advisors, both faculty and professional.

Modeled after the UT System Regents' Outstanding Student, Faculty, and Staff awards, a financial award program can help the Institute and UT System recognizing outstanding advisors and innovations in advising. A committee comprised of inaugural institute attendees and affinity group members will determine the criteria for awards and will serve as administrators of the award process (with external judges). A financial award of between $5,000 and $10,000 per person is recommended, with approximately three winners annually.

EVALUATE:

Effective academic advising can only occur when there is continuous assessment, evaluation and data-driven improvement. We must first measure that the advising programs implemented perform in a manner intended. Then we must begin to measure improvements in outputs and

outcomes, especially as they are tied to retention, graduation, and equity to ensure accountability for all stakeholders.

Many frameworks exist for evaluating Academic Advising Programs as a whole; the most familiar of these is the Council for the Advancement in Standards (CAS) for Academic Advising.[39] This framework invites administrators to assess the mission, program, organization and leadership, human resources, professional personnel, ethics, law, policy and governance, diversity, equity and access, technology and resources related to advising. This framework provides important tools for self-assessment, and is sufficiently vague to provide guideposts for different campuses, recognizing the importance of aligning expectations to the institution's mission, vision and goals. The entire framework for CAS Standards and a system for campus self-study can be found here.

Outside of the CAS Standards, most advising professionals look to the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) whose extensive history as the voice of advising professional across the country has led to the development (2005) and subsequent revision (2017, in press) of Core Values of Academic Advising.[40] These core values and the Academic Core Competencies Model was developed "to identify the broad range of understanding, knowledge, and skills that support academic advising, to guide professional development, and to promote the contributions of advising to student development, progress, and success. The model is an important step in the professionalism of the field and also provides tools for academic advising programs to align their professional development of advisors to competencies necessary across the profession.

The Core Competencies from three major core areas of training necessary for successful advisors: Conceptual, Informational and Relational. These core areas align closely with the Educate, Elevate and Enhance areas of the proposed framework for UT System academic advising. This framework is an important guide for advisor training and could serve as a foundational document for the inaugural UT System Advising Institute.

What is lacking in the documentation about CAS Standards and NACADA Core Competencies is specific context to the role academic advisors play in student success. Indeed, very little empirical data exists about the impact of advisors on student success. Only one study meets the threshold for the *What Works Clearinghouse Evidence Standards without reservations*[41].

KEY RECOMMENDATION:

To move forward a Quantum Leap-worthy agenda in Academic Advising, a different kind of advising assessment is needed: an academic advising SCORECARD.

(See 1-page proposal: UT System Advising Assessment Scorecard)

> The scorecard represents the aspirational goal of improving advising across the UT System. The rubric is designed to reflect the distinct phases of improvement as programs attempt to reach full execution of the ideals of advising, and the goals are closely tied to many of the practices recommended throughout this report. Before any specific outcome or output measures are considered, institutions should utilize a scorecard to measure implementation. This scorecard helps assess the questions, "Are we effectively implementing the goals that we identified?"

GOAL	EXEMPLARY	ACCOMPLISHED	DEVELOPING	BEGINNING
Required Advising	Academic advising is required of all students every semester; holds are placed to help track advising	Academic advising is required of most students; holds are placed to help track advising	Academic is required of some students; priority is given to those with identified risk factors; holds may or may not be used	Advising is available but not required
Caseload Advising	Every student has an assigned advisor who is responsible for the student throughout their academic career	All students have an assigned advisor; that advisor may change as student progresses through the institution	Some students have an assigned advisor; others have access to advising services that are not caseload-based	Students have access to an advisor but the advisor may not be assigned to the student
Holistic Advising	All advising is customized to each student by taking into consideration each student's needs, strengths and aspirations	Advising may be customized to student needs	Advising may be customized to meet needs of large groups of students but is not individualized	Advising is not customized; is largely prescriptive
Four degree maps	Every student has access to a four-year degree map that is updated and customized for the student every semester by an advisor	Every student has access to a generic four-year degree map; map may or may not be customized by an advisor	Students receive limited information about the four-year map of a degree; degree maps may not be available for all students or all majors	Four-year degree maps are absent or unavailable beyond what is printed in catalog
Advising materials available 24/7	All advising materials are accessible outside of standard business hours for all students; may include online tools, non-standard hours and other technology	Most advising materials are accessible outside of standard business hours; options may be limited	Some advising materials are available outside of standard business hours; options may be limited	Advising materials are only available in-person during standard business hours

GOAL	**EXEMPLARY**	**ACCOMPLISHED**	**DEVELOPING**	**BEGINNING**
Advisors are trained to a campus-wide standard	All advisors are trained to a campus-wide standard	Most advisors are trained to a campus wide-standard OR all advisors are trained within a department standard only	Some advisors are trained to a campus wide-standard OR most advisors are trained within a department standard only	Advisor training is largely non-standard and may not be available to all advisors
Advisors participate in annual professional development	All advisors participate in some form of formal professional development annually	Most advisors participate in some form of formal professional development annually	Some advisors participate in some form of formal professional development annually	Professional development for advisors is largely absent or occurs infrequently
Timely progress to Degree	Advisors maintain documentation on the degree progress of all students following best practices (15 to finish)	Advisors maintain documentation on the degree progress of most students following best practices (15 to finish)	Advisors maintain documentation on the degree progress of some students and/or may not follow best practices (15 to finish)	Advisors maintain little to no documentation on the degree progress of students and do not follow best practices (15 to finish)
Advisors verify student schedules using "post-registration checking"	Advisors follow up with every student to verify registration records against advisor recommendations; students are contacted to correct errors in a timely manner	Advisors follow up with most student to verify registration records against advisor recommendations; students are contacted to correct errors in a timely manner	Advisors follow up with some students to verify registration records against advisor recommendations; students may or may not contacted to correct errors in a timely manner	Advisors rarely verify registration records against advisor recommendations
Advisors have access to data about their students	Advisors have access to data about all their students, the student progress and can act on it in real time rather than after the fact	Advisors have access to data about all their student, but may not be able to act on it in real time	Advisors have access to data about some of their students, but mostly rely on post-event records to conduct advising	Advisors have limited access to data about their students
Advisors can give feedback on curriculum discussions	Advisors are regular consultants with faculty or curriculum committees about curricular decisions/degree plans	Advisors are infrequent consultants with faculty or curriculum committees about curricular decisions/degree plans	Advisors are rarely consultants with faculty or curriculum committees about curricular decisions/degree plans	Advisors are NEVER consultants with faculty or curriculum committees about curricular decisions/degree plans
Student satisfaction with advising interactions	Students are always satisfied with their advising interactions	Students are mostly satisfied with their advising interactions	Students are somewhat satisfied with their advising interactions	Students are infrequently satisfied with their advising interactions

Other Data and Metrics:

(1) **After institutions have utilized a scorecard to assess satisfaction with implementation, institutions should then start to consider output and outcome metrics that can help measure the impact of advising goals on undergraduate students**. Institutions should create meaningful metrics to assess each category listed above and to collect the kind of data needed for assessment.

Metrics that measure student satisfaction in addition to the impact of advising interventions on caseload retention and student success (retention, graduation, and career placement) are needed to demonstrate the importance of advising and the impact of these relationships on each student.

Institutions should bear in mind that some student satisfaction and feedback may already exist in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) or Student Experience in the Research University (SERU).

Seven of the UT System academic institutions participate in the general NSSE survey annually, and UT Arlington, UT Dallas, and UT San Antonio also participated in the 2016 Advising Module (with others agreeing to participate in 2017).[42] Additionally, UT Arlington, UT El Paso, and UT Rio Grande Valley participate in the Senior Transitions Module – all of which have some relevant questions that institutions could use to determine progress over time or compare against benchmarks. Related to either academic or career advising, we identified the following questions and recommend them for consideration when advising effectiveness is being assessed at each institution. We found the analysis of the questions and modules listed below of particular value in measuring interaction with advisors and student satisfaction.

NSSE Full Survey

- ✓ **To measure the student perception of quality interactions with both academic advisors and career services, we recommend consideration of Question 13 in the NSSE full survey module.**

Question 3A: During the current school year, how often have you done the following? (talked about career plans with a faculty member)

Question 13B, 13C, 13D: Indicate the quality of your interactions with the following people at your institution. (B) Academic Advisors; (C) Faculty; (D) Career Services

NSSE Advising Module

- ✓ **If possible, we recommend that institutions participate annually in this survey if time and resources can be allocated to analyzing results and recommending improvements. Questions of relevance are:**

Question 1: During the current school year, about how many times have you and an academic advisor discussed your academic interests, course selections, or academic performance?

Question 2A – I During the current school year, to what extent have academic advisors done the following?
(a) Been available when needed
(b) Listened closely to concerns and questions
(c) Informed you of important deadlines

(d) Helped you understand academic rules and policies
(e) Informed you of support options
(f) Provided useful information about courses
(g) Helped you when you had academic difficulties
(h) Helped you get information on special opportunities (High Impact Practices)
(i) Discussed career interests and post graduate plans

Question 3: How often have your academic advisors reached out to you about academic progress?

Question 4: Which of the following has been your primary source of advice regarding academic plans? (List, including faculty, advisors, catalogs, websites, etc.)

NSSE Senior Transitions Module

Question 8: Open Ended: Is there anything your institution could have done to better prepare you for your career or further education?

As other affinity groups, including the assessment group, analyze NSSE and Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) outcomes from each of the eight academic institutions, we support the use of these tools and funding of institutions to utilize feedback on student experiences related to belonging, advising, and finances as well as overall satisfaction with their experience at the university. We believe there is an important opportunity to reiterate a data-driven culture among campus staff and administration so that feedback can be best utilized to inform change.

ENDNOTES

[1] Chancellor McRaven's Vision and Quantum Leaps for the UT System, https://www.utsystem.edu/offices/chancellor/chancellors-vision-university-texas-system (Accessed August 23, 2017).

[2] Note: Enrollment figures are approximate figures for the total student enrollment at the institution.

[3] The University of Texas at Arlington Advising Center, https://www.uta.edu/universitycollege/current/academic-planning/uac/index.php (Accessed August 24, 2017).

[4] The University of Texas at Austin, Office of the Registrar, "Getting Advised," https://registrar.utexas.edu/students/registration/before/advising (Accessed August 24, 2017).

[5] The University of Texas at Austin Office of Undergraduate Studies, https://ugs.utexas.edu/ (Accessed August 24, 2017).

[6] The University of Texas at Dallas Office of the Registrar, Getting Advised," http://www.utdallas.edu/registrar/registration/academic-advising/ (Accessed August 24, 2017).

[7] The University of Texas of the Permian Basin Academic Advising Center, http://www.utpb.edu/academics/undergraduate-success/academic-advising-center (Accessed August 24, 2017).

[8] The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Academic Advising Center, "Second Year Advising and Beyond" http://www.utrgv.edu/advising/advising-guides/second-year-and-beyond-advising-guides/index.htm (Accessed August 24, 2017).

[9] The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Advising Roadmaps http://www.utrgv.edu/advising/_files/documents/roadmaps.pdf (Accessed August 24, 2017).

[10] The University of Texas at Tyler University Advising Center, https://www.uttyler.edu/advising/ (Accessed August 24, 2017).

[11] The University of Texas at Tyler, Academic Advising by Program, http://www.uttyler.edu/advising/advisors.php (Accessed August 24, 2017).

[12] Tinto, V. (2011, February). Taking student success seriously in the college classroom. Retrieved from https://www.sdbor.edu/administrative-offices/student-affairs/sac/Documents/Tinto-TakingStudentSuccessSeriouslyintheCollegeClassroom.pdf on October 17, 2017.

[13] Olson, J.N., and Carter, J.A. (2014). Caring and the college professor. *Focus on Colleges, Universities, and Schools, 8* (1), 1-9.

[14] Higgins, E.M. (2017, June). The advising relationship is at the core of academic advising. Retrieved from http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Academic-Advising-Today/View-Articles/The-Advising-Relationship-is-at-the-Core-of-Academic-Advising.aspx on October 17, 2017.

[15] Azeke, M.O. (2015). Understanding transfer students: A strategy for effective advising. In *The Proceedings of the 11th Annual National Symposium on Student Retention* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma), 561-568.

[16] Kuh, G.D., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J.H., Whitt, E.J. & Associates. (2005). *Student success in college: Creating conditions that matter.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

[17] Grisham, S., Johnson, E, and Freeman, Y. (2015). Campus-wide connections: Building an advising community. In *The Proceedings of the 11th Annual National Symposium of Student Retention* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma), 100-110.
[18] Delmas, P. (2002). The 'quality' in advising. Academic Advising Today, 25(2). Retrieved from http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Academic-Advising-Today/View-Articles/The-Quality-in-Advising.aspx.

[19] O'Banion, T. (1972). An academic advising model. Junior College Journal, 42, 62-69.

[20] Lowenstein, M. (2013). Envisioning the future. In J.K. Drake, P. Jordan, & M.A. Miller (Eds.), *Academic advising approaches: Strategies that teach students to make the most of college* (pp. 243-258). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

[21] Wilcox, E. (2016). An end to checklist thinking: learning-centered advising in practice. Retrieved form NACADA Clearinghouse of Academic Advising Resources Website: http://nacada.ksu.edu/tabid/3318/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/6101/article.aspx

[22] The University of Texas at San Antonio, Expectations Matrix and Academic Syllabus

[23] Robinson, C. and Gahagan, J. (2010). Coaching Students to Academic Success and Engagement on Campus, *About Campus*, v15 n4 p26-29 Sep-Oct 2010

[24] Pulcini, B. (2016). Appreciative Advising to Promote Degree Completion by Appalachian Women, Ohio University. NACADA Journal: 2016, Vol. 36, No. 2, pp. 47-53.

[25] Longwell-Grice,R., Zervas-Adsitt, N., Mullins, K., and Serrata, W. (2016). T he First Ones: Three Studies on First-Generation College Students. NACADA Journal: 2016, Vol. 36, No. 2, pp. 34-46.

[26] Educational Advisory Board (EAB) Advising Resource List https://www.eab.com/research-and-insights/academic-affairs-forum/toolkits/academic-advising-resource-center

[27] Next-Generation Advising, Elevating Practice for Degree Completion and Career Success, University Leadership Council 2012, The Advisory Board Company

[28] Noel, L. (1985). Increasing student retention: New challenges and potential. In L. Noel, R. Levitz, & D. Saluri (Eds.), Increasing student retention (p. 5). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

[29]Habley, Wes. (1994). Key Concepts in Academic Advising. In Summer Institute on*Academic Advising Session Guide* (p.10). Available from the National Academic Advising Association, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS.

[30] Gates Foundation. (2017). Today's college student infographic. Retrieved July 6, 2017 from https://postsecondary.gatesfoundation.org/100-college-students-ver2/

[31] Case Management Society of America. (2008). *What is a case manager?* Retrieved August 4, 2017, from http://www.cmsa.org/Home?CMSA/WhatisaCaseManager/tabid/224/Default.aspx

[32] (Richardson, 2008, p. 2).

[33] Gordon, V. N. (2006). *Career advising: An academic advisor's guide.*San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

[34] McCalla-Wriggins, B. (2009).Integrating Career and Academic Advising: Mastering the Challenge.Retrieved July 13, 2017 from *NACADA Clearinghouse of Academic Advising Resources* *w*ebsite: http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Integrating-career-and-academic-advising.aspx

[35] Gregory, J.L. & Zabokrtsky, J.L. (2009). The Cash Connection: Understanding the Role of Financial Aid in Academic Advising. Retrieved -insert today's date- from NACADA Clearinghouse of Academic Advising Resources website http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/tabid/3318/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/1170/article.aspx

[36] McCalla-Wriggins, B. (2009).Integrating Career and Academic Advising: Mastering the Challenge.Retrieved July 13, 2017 from *NACADA Clearinghouse of Academic Advising Resources* *w*ebsite: http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Integrating-career-and-academic-advising.aspx

[37] Gates Foundation. (2017). Today's college students in Texas. Retrieved July 6, 2017 from https://postsecondary.gatesfoundation.org/college-students-texas-infographic/

[38] Cuseo, J. (2003). Academic advisement and student retention: Empirical connections and systemic interventions. *National Academic Advising Association.* Retrieved July 6, 2017 from http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/clearinghouse/advisingissues/retain.htm

[39] Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (2014). CAS Standards for Academic Advising. Retrieved from http://standards.cas.edu/

[40] NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising. (2017). NACADA academic advising core competencies model. Retrieved from https://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Pillars/CoreCompetencies.aspx

[41] Bettinger, E. & Baker, R. (2014). The effects of student coaching: An evaluation of a randomized experiment in student advising. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, Vol. 36, No. 1, pp.3-19. DOI: 10.3102/0162373713500523.

[41] National Survey of Student Engagement: Findings, Tools, and Survey Modules; The University of Indiana, http://nsse.indiana.edu/

OTHER RESOURCES

Nudge students toward better academic choices, "Strategic changes to institutional design can improve student outcomes," Expert Perspective (March 12, 2015)

Education Advisory Board, Sample Academic Advising Career Ladder, 2015 The Advisory Board Company

Education Advisory Board, Elevating the Advising Professionm http://www.ncpn.info/downloads/cp_toolkit.pdf

Career Pathways Advisory Committee Toolkit, http://www.ncpn.info/downloads/cp_toolkit.pdf

Education Advisory Board, Academic Affairs Forum, A Student-Centered Approach to Advising: Redeploying Academic Advisors to Create Accountability and Scale Personalized Intervention, https://www.eab.com/research-and-insights/academic-affairs-forum/studies/2014/a-student-centered-approach-to-advising (2014)

Creating a Career Path, Management Opportunities Help to Recruit and Retain High Performers, The Mercy College Model, The Advisory Board Company (2015)

Sam Houston State University, Advising Career Ladder, http://www.shsu.edu/centers/sam-center/advising/index.html

NACADA, Academic Advising Handbook (Sample for University Adoption), Prepared by Jerry Ford https://www.nacada.ksu.edu/portals/0/Clearinghouse/AdvisingIssues/Example_Univ_Handbook.pdf

Fox Valley Technical College, Academic Advising Training Series 100 and Series 200m https://www.fvtc.edu/training-services

State Advisor Training Session by Type and Date and Advising Guides, https://www.pdx.edu/sba/advising-guides

Rochester Institute of Technology, Suggested Diagnostic questions for advising sessions, http://www.rit.edu/academicaffairs/advising/

Jayne K. Drake, "The Role of Academic Advising in Student Retention and Persistence." About Campus (July/August 2011), http://advising.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/jaynearticle%20(3).pdf

Mark. A Taylor, Professional Advisor Credentials, Career Ladders, and Salaries, NACADA (2011), http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Professional-Advisor-Credentials-Career-Ladders-and-Salaries.aspx

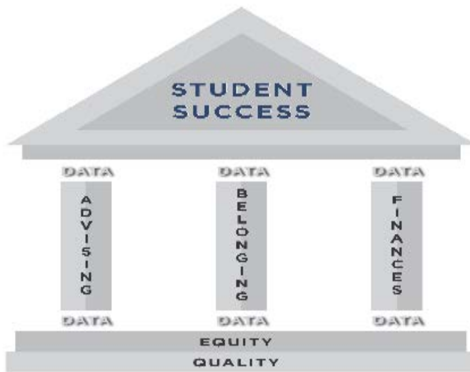
Gregory, J.L. & Zabokrtsky, J.L. (2009). The Cash Connection: Understanding the Role of Financial Aid in Academic Advising. Retrieved -insert today's date- from NACADA Clearinghouse of Academic Advising Resources website http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/tabid/3318/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/1170/article.aspx

V
Belonging Affinity Group Report

December 2017

THE UNIVERSITY of TEXAS SYSTEM

FOURTEEN INSTITUTIONS. UNLIMITED POSSIBILITIES.



Belonging Affinity Group Report

All UT students should feel like they belong in college. No student should fail to graduate because of a lack of engagement or a sense of not belonging.

UT System Belonging Commitment to Students

Preface

As faculty, staff, and administrators across the University of Texas System, we understand that belonging is fundamental to every student's opportunity to achieve their individual academic and professional goals. However, the work of creating belonging for every student on our various campuses has often not received the level of attention commensurate with its value in terms of retention, time-to-degree, degrees awarded, and successful transition to graduate school and career. This effort of the UT System Belonging Affinity Group highlights the foundational significance of this universal student reality and advocates for a more holistic view of the college student experience.

As the UT System Belonging Affinity Group brings to a close this formal effort, we do so understanding that developing a positive sense of belonging for our students is fundamental to their ability to achieve their aspirations and unleash their unlimited academic and professional possibilities. We are aware and appreciative of the thoughtful insight that led to belonging being established as one of the three pillars of student success identified by the UT System in its framework for student success, and—still more—of the powerful grounding of that framework in stated commitments to students in the areas of finances, advising, and belonging.

Introduction: Belonging as a Pillar of Student Success

As one of four affinity groups convened by UT System leaders charged with implementing UT System Chancellor William H. McRaven's initiative to "make a quantum leap in student success," the Belonging group embraced the challenge of defining belonging, reviewing those practices that would best contribute to and support students' sense of belonging, and identifying metrics by which to measure this critical student success pillar. Like the other affinity groups, the Belonging group was inspired by the Chancellor's vision to make real, positive change on behalf of all UT System students.

Prior to seeking nominations from university provosts, the size of the Belonging affinity group grew in a necessary effort to divide into two equally important sub-groups, one focused on Academic Belonging and the other on Social Belonging; this was done in recognition of the complexity of the group's charge and scope. Group members included UT System Administration staff and institutional staff from academic and student affairs, as well as faculty leaders from the System's eight academic institutions. These members, collectively, work with cohorts and populations of students who are from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, students of color, veterans and disabled students, and students sometimes identified as "academically under-prepared" or "at-risk." Members come from provosts' offices, from enrollment management, student affairs, dean of students, and advising offices; members are academic deans, faculty, and faculty governance leaders. The diversity of the roles, responsibilities, and backgrounds of members has strengthened the group's process and the products, and has been critical to defining belonging in a holistic way. A full list of members can be found in Appendix A.

Starting point: Charge, Goals and Assumptions

In recent years, institutions of higher education across the country have increasingly identified a sense of belonging as a critical factor in student success, and there is a growing body of research on student engagement, including belonging. We are not aware, however, of any other university system in the country that is placing belonging at the center of its student success initiative. While it was clear to all involved with the affinity group work that the Belonging group would have an especially difficult task—adding definition and concrete shape to an amorphous concept—from day one of their affiliation, group members applauded the Chancellor and other System leaders for recognizing the influence that a sense of belonging has on students' lived experiences on our campuses, on their wish to stay enrolled, and on their academic and lifelong success.

Indeed, in identifying belonging as one of three pillars, and in crafting a stated commitment to student belonging, the UT System stands out. It stands out further in: 1) seeking to develop clear definitions; 2) articulating the ubiquity of belonging touchpoints across our campuses and proposing intentional action to help more students feel like they belong; and 3) identifying metrics for measuring student belonging in both social and academic terms. In so doing, and because those touchpoints for belonging are so ubiquitous at our institutions, the work contributes deeply and intentionally to helping everyone take responsibility for student success, from faculty to staff, administrators, and students. This, too, is a tenet of the System's framework.

Charge and Goals

Separately and together, the belonging sub-groups brought to bear the research and member experiences on best practices to fulfill their charge to:

1) Define Academic and Social Belonging as discrete and intersecting;
2) Investigate, identify, and assess the “touchpoints” of belonging for students;
3) Recognize and highlight barriers that diminish a student's sense of belonging;
4) Compile best practices and policies for fostering belonging into a UT System Belonging Campaign, <u>voluntary and</u> <u>customizable at each institution</u>; and
5) Identify existing and develop new metrics by which belonging can be measured:
    a. As a means of improving student success; and
    b. As an indicator and as a means of improving the quality of the academic, curricular, co-curricular, and support services experiences offered to students at UT institutions.

The belonging group agreed also that, in addition to their formative purpose of advancing student success at UT institutions, the belonging metrics were intended to provide evidence and accountability to all stakeholders that the UT System is delivering on the goals of the Student Success Quantum Leap.

Assumptions

Certain assumptions guided the Belonging Affinity Group from the outset, some connected to the overall Student Success initiative, and others more specific to the work of the group.

Student Success QL Assumptions

- *Belonging is both a primary determinant of student success and an indicator of the quality of the academic, curricular, co-curricular, and support services experiences offered to students at UT institutions.*
- *Belonging must be considered through an equity lens as it relates to diverse student populations.*
- *Improving the sense of belonging for every student across all UT System institutions will require an inclusive, mindful approach to students’ lived realities.*
- *Intentional investment in the three pillars—student finances, advising, and belonging—will improve student success.*
- *Improving students’ sense of belonging will require shared responsibility and a sustained partnership among Academic and Student Affairs, Institutional Research, and other primary stakeholders.*
- *The UT System should be held accountable by stakeholders for student belonging through innovative and student-centric metrics.*

Process and Work Accomplished: Territory Covered by the Affinity Group

Between February and December 2017, the Belonging Group met four times in person (February, May, September and November) and held four phone meetings each for the academic and social sub-groups. Many additional meetings were held among the three co-chairs, and among group members who took on responsibility for researching and developing primary components of the report and its recommendations.

Overall, the group focused on:

- reviewing the research and defining belonging;
- discussing belonging experiences from the perspective of both students and employees on campuses;
- exploring belonging touchpoints at every UT institution;
- examining the NSSE survey and its utility and applicability towards better understanding our students and measuring their belonging;
- designing the Belonging Campaign;
- and investigating and deciding upon potential metrics by which social and academic belonging could be measured.

The System's Belonging endeavor generated engagement with additional stakeholders across the UT System, much of it taking place at campuses already deeply focused on student success, and increasingly on the three pillars of the Student Success Quantum Leap. In response to the UT System's RFP for Quantum Leap funding provided by the Board of Regents, institutions submitted innovative and quality proposals, many of which sought and received funding to enhance student belonging.

Group members from several institutions conducted belonging focus groups of students towards the end of the Spring 2017 semester, making use of a group-devised question guide (see *Appendix D*). The September 2017 Student Success Summit featured a panel of students describing their sense of belonging at UT Dallas and UT Arlington, facilitated by Affinity Group member Rhonda Gonzalez (UTSA). Two group members, Jonikka Charlton (UTRGV) and Jessica Murphy (UT Dallas), presented a session focused on academic belonging; another four, Louie Rodriguez (UTEP), Tonya Paulette (UTRGV), Lydia Bueno (UTSA) and Ona Tolliver (UT Tyler), presented a session on social belonging. Throughout 2017, Associate Vice Chancellor Rebecca Karoff engaged in several conversations with the Faculty Advisory Council, the Academy of Distinguished Teachers, and the Student Advisory Council, focused on academic and social belonging (see *Appendix E*).

Research and Literature Review

Collectively, the Belonging Affinity group members have considerable knowledge around the research on student success and the challenges of academic and social belonging, which proved invaluable to the definition of and directions for belonging described in this document. Even more significant to this work was each group member's expertise, experience, and daily interactions with students based on their diverse and multifaceted institutional roles.

The literature review in *Appendix B* provides an overview of the existing research on belonging, with a few examples highlighted. This includes the smaller number of studies that actually name belonging, and also points to the growing body of research that is subsidiary to and aligned with belonging. It is by no means comprehensive. The biggest sub-set of the research is in the field of student engagement, which has grown extensively in the last decade, and is practical as much as scholarly. While belonging and student engagement are not identical, the student engagement research is wholly relevant and the evidence emerging from student engagement research, in particular its relationship to impacts on retention and graduation rates, serves as strong indicators of and proxies for belonging. It is worth noting that the UT System and institutions are in a distinct position to fill gaps in the research on belonging.

Belonging Working Definitions/Guidelines

The Belonging affinity group quickly arrived at a consensus for both framing and creating working definitions for Academic and Social Belonging. We focused on the need to be as empathic and student-centric as possible in our thinking, and determined that the language we use is critical to realizing the vision and values we hold for belonging. The group reached agreement on the working definition below at its May in-person meeting, and continued to upgrade the definition through its final in-person meeting in November.

Working Definition

Introduction to Belonging

The concept of belonging concerns a student's sense of academic and social connectedness to their campus. When a university succeeds in cultivating a campus-wide sense of belonging, students will perceive that university staff and faculty are there both for and because of them. They witness staff and faculty working collectively and synergistically to create and deliver comprehensive services that anticipate and address student needs, and this attentiveness communicates to students that they are respected, valued, and welcomed across all campus environments. In these conditions, students perceive that all university employees are present to encourage their sense of purpose and ability to achieve their educational, personal, and professional goals.

Working Definition

Belonging means that all students recognize that they are respected, valued, and included in all aspects of the campus environment. With the support of fellow students, faculty, staff, and other internal and external champions, each student develops a sense of purpose and agency to achieve educational, personal, and professional goals. Belonging can be described as occurring in two related and sometimes intersecting realms—academic and social—in ways that validate students' complex and shifting senses of identity and community.

- *Academic belonging is fostered at all levels of curricular design and delivery, in classrooms and other learning environments, and through integrative and applied learning experiences.*

- *Social belonging is fostered through all aspects, spaces, and activities of student life, including in classrooms, organizations, residence halls, libraries, shared learning and community settings, and many more.*

All university personnel are essential to academic and social belonging. They are collectively invested in creating and sustaining an engaged campus environment in which students learn, connect, and contribute to the campus community, as they pursue academic and lifelong success.

Inventory of Belonging Touchpoints

The Belonging Group spent time grappling with many questions, including: How do we convey to our students that they belong in college and on our campuses? How do we—whether through inattention, indifference or bias—convey to students that they do not belong? Moreover, how can we proactively and intentionally cultivate opportunities for their increased sense of social and academic belonging? There are countless programs, activities, and initiatives that we develop and support on our campuses that contribute to belonging. Interventions can be large or small, formal or informal interactions, and they occur in many spaces and places across our campuses. All are foundational to the ways in which universities—and we as educators—deliver education. At their most impactful, the educational opportunities that we provide will take shape within and beyond our classrooms. These touchpoints, however, carry peril, too, as they can stand as barriers, constraints, and inhibitors to students' sense of belonging, however inadvertently imposed.

Ideally, what we call *belonging touchpoints* begin well before students decide to enroll, are enhanced during their period of onboarding at our institutions, develop throughout their college careers and graduation, and continue into career. In all of these efforts, there are countless people at each UT institution who take responsibility, consciously and unconsciously, for cultivating our students' sense of academic and social belonging.

The Academic Belonging sub-group discussed belonging in the classroom, identifying what we call curricular touchpoints to belonging, including: syllabus design; how content knowledge is conveyed and delivered; integration of essential learning outcomes (higher-order cognitive skills, abilities, and habits of mind); pedagogical practices; assignment design and grading; and office hours.

Belonging Exemplars

In discussing and defining what it means to foster a sense of social and academic belonging across the UT System campuses, our Belonging Affinity Group realized that a full inventory of touchpoints was not possible (it would be endless, among other things). The group elected, instead, to showcase in this report one or two belonging exemplars from each academic university. Whether new or long-standing, these programs have, as part of their mission, a commitment to ensuring that each student feels a sense of academic and/or social belonging. Some of these programs are designed for limited cohorts or populations of students; others are intended to benefit all students at the institution. Some of these programs have strong evidence for their efficacy; for others, particularly those that are newly launched, initial assessments are ongoing. These exemplars were selected by the Belonging Affinity Group members as particularly creative and intentional efforts to help increase students' sense of belonging, connection and community. There are countless others.

The University of Texas at Arlington

The **Innovation, Diversity, Excellence, Access and Success (I.D.E.A.S.) Center** is a hub of services to UT Arlington students undergoing a transition to a four-year university. The center is funded by a Department of Education grant aimed at partnering with transfer students, veterans, sophomores, and students re-entering school after a break, to help pave a path to student success. The Center offers free tutoring and mentoring, as well as other services in coordination with academic success partners in the Central Library's Academic Plaza.

A promising program under IDEAS is the **Maverick Educational Associates (MEAs)**, a math-focused embedded tutor/mentor model for Latino, transfer, first-generation, veterans and sophomore students. The MEA model has more than doubled the total number of unduplicated students served in Math gateway courses with high D, F, W rates. Data indicates that in Sept 2017, 212 students were served and Nov's numbers jumped to 526, totaling 1771 visits. The Math department is expanding with additional Provost support. MEAs: Latino, Transfer, 1st Generation, Veterans, Sophomores.

Additional Information: IDEAS Center @ Central Library http://www.uta.edu/ideas/index.php

The **University College Scholars** is a workshop series for high-achieving and near-high-achieving first-year students. The program is now in its second year and participation at workshops this semester was consistent. A presentation of this program was sponsored by the Advising High Achieving Students Commission for NACADA and we were solicited for an article to be published in Academic Advising Today.

Additional Information: http://www.uta.edu/universitycollege/current/academic-support/university%20college%20scholars/index.php

The University of Texas at Austin

The Multicultural Engagement Center (MEC): UT Austin established the MEC in 1988 to provide educational and leadership resources for Black and Latino students. Founder Michael L. Davis envisioned the MEC would centralize services to address Latino and Black students' academic, social and financial concerns. According to Davis, the basis for the MEC's approach came from a recognition that "minority" student populations often encountered feelings of isolation. "Students of color often came from small school environments or from a tight familial network to this very large university. It was easy for them to feel lost. We realized students needed a bridge," said Davis. MEC provides this bridge.

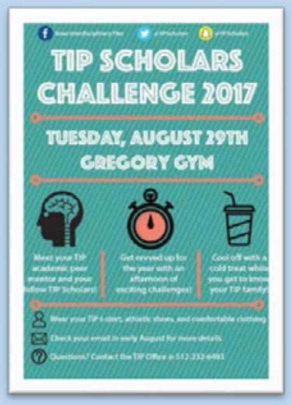
Today, the MEC houses six student-run agencies open to all students, but primarily serving students of color. The agencies are: Afrikan American Affairs (AAA); Asian Desi Pacific Islander American

Collective (ADPAC); Latino Community Affairs (LCA); Native American and Indigenous Collective (NAIC); Queer & Trans People of Color Agency (QTPOCA); and, Students for Equity and Diversity (SED). Within these agencies, students find friends, build networks, and share common ground.

Through the MEC students can participate in leadership development opportunities, learn through peer-facilitated social justice and education trainings, and receive support services for their student organizations. As well, the MEC hosts community outreach programs such as culturally relevant campus tours and student panels.

Additional Information: http://diversity.utexas.edu/multiculturalengagement/

Texas Interdisciplinary Plan Scholars (TIP)
TIP Scholars provides a small academic community and fosters a sense of belonging for 500 first and second year students admitted to the College of Natural Sciences at the University of Texas at Austin. The TIP Scholars community can be characterized by the core values common to all of its members: scholarship, integrity, enterprise, and community.



The Provost's Office identifies TIP Scholar candidates primarily based on their low likelihood to graduate in four years, which is generally less than 40% combined with a lower half of the admitted class's SAT scores. Most TIP Scholars come from a low socioeconomic status, a small rural high school, a traditionally underrepresented population, and/or are first in their family to attend college.

The three priorities of TIP Scholars are:

1. Establish a strong academic transition to UT Austin
2. Create a strong sense of belonging and connection both in and out of the classroom
3. Support students beyond their first year through leadership and professional opportunities

From 2013 to 2017, TIP Scholars increased their 4-year graduation rate by 49%!

Additional Information: (utexas.edu/tip) (www.youtube.com/watch?v=gUDaDazsCIM&t=55s)

The University of Texas at Dallas

Gender Inclusive Housing

The University of Texas at Dallas welcomes students of all gender identities and expressions and is committed to providing an equitable and inclusive community for all residents. Gender Inclusive Housing is a housing option designed to contribute to an enhanced sense of social and academic belonging by providing a comfortable living environment conducive to the development of positive social relationships with roommates and a safe space for each student to study in their on-campus residence.

This housing option is available to all on-campus residents. Any resident is welcome into the community. It is important to note that gender inclusive housing is available in all floor plans, including the Living Learning Communities, so this program is financially accessible to all on-campus residents. Residential Life and the Galerstein Gender Center are working together to assess the first cycle of Gender Inclusive Housing options offered in Academic Year 2018.

Additional Information:
Interactive content – video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cP2457WYaAo
Website: http://www.utdallas.edu/housing/gih/

Undergraduate Success Scholars

The Undergraduate Success Scholars (USS) program at UT Dallas invites non-scholarship underrepresented minority students (African American and Hispanic) freshmen who enter the university without a departmental support network to participate in a four-year guided pathway program infrastructure. The program fosters social and academic belonging by providing each cohort monthly workshop content specific to their classification, facilitated online goal setting, one-on-one meetings with program staff, leadership development within the program, and coordinated opportunities to receive and provide mentorship. The monthly workshops and academic support events organized by student leaders consist of activities designed to deliberately foster both social and academic belonging. A key to fostering academic belonging among URM students in the USS program is setting high academic expectations for each student regardless of their level of college readiness during mandatory one-on-one meetings with program staff. In addition, students complete required student success plans that prompt self-assessment of academic progress, university engagement, and long-term goals to ensure that enhanced academic belonging contributes to the alignment of personal abilities with professional aspirations. The program fosters social belonging through social and service activities organized by student leaders and a "family" model of mentorship. The family mentorship initiative groups all incoming freshmen and continuing students who opt-in for mentorship into families by academic major or school. Each family group of three to four students is led and mentored by a student leader who receives mentorship from an assigned faculty, staff, alumni, or community supporter who volunteers to serve as family mentor liaison.

There are currently more than 50 faculty, staff, alumni, and community supporters serving as mentor liaisons. Thus far in Academic Year 2017-18, those mentors have reported that they contribute to academic belonging by providing emotional support at times of high stress and guidance on how to overcome academic adversity. While the first three cohorts of the program have averaged first-year retention rates above 90 percent, more indicative of success for this group of students is their academic trajectory at UT Dallas. A student in the USS target population may struggle initially or later as they enter more rigorous coursework, so the overarching goal of USS is to ensure that all students utilize resources and take advantage of opportunities to either improve academically or maintain high performance. A majority of USS participants (77 percent) either maintained their cumulative GPA or improved their GPA from year one to year two. At the conclusion of Academic Year 2017-18, the USS program will deliberately assess its contribution to each participant's sense of belonging.

Interactive content – video: https://youtu.be/zYWceI-Gc0s?t=51
Website: https://oue.utdallas.edu/special-programs/undergraduate-success-scholars

The University of Texas at El Paso

An approach to physical space that is reflective of our 95% commuter student population:

One example of this effort is the comprehensive conversion of the UTEP Library into a daily, long-term student hub, responsive to our students' need for a "home away from home." From updating strict and traditional food and drink policies to providing badly needed secure storage space, the Library staff met with students and reviewed customer satisfaction survey data to identify the specific ways to be more supportive of student needs and wants. Other meaningful changes included providing microwaves, re-thinking seating arrangements, creating more group study areas, and adding more computers. As a result, the Library saw staggering increases in key metrics, including:

- Library gate entries increased from 653,000 per year prior to the conversion to over 1,000,000 per year after the conversion.
- Electronic searches of library catalog and databases went from 2,091,500 per year to 5,712,700 per year from pre- to post-conversion, demonstrating that improvement in social/academic space enhanced the research component of undergraduate education.
- More than 80% of students logged in to a Library computer during the last three academic years. This figure does not include the widespread use of laptop computers in the library.

Being aware of students wants and needs, gathering information, ideas, and data by way of focus groups and surveys, and then creating a more student-friendly culture in the most popular space on campus not only improved students' sense of social belonging, but has the added impact of bolstering academic belonging as well.

In a similar vein, UTEP undertook a complete redesign and transformation of the center of campus into Centennial Plaza, the first true "heart of campus," creating a more robust and inclusive college environment suitable for student, faculty, staff, family, and community interactions. As students pass by this newly inviting, beautiful, and active space multiple times a day, they experience an environment where they not only feel welcomed but also see how other students are connecting with each other and the campus community. From a pick-up game of Frisbee to study groups taking advantage of the El Paso weather, students are seeing their commuter campus as a welcoming environment where they can easily connect with others and extend their learning.

Understanding Your Assets and Values

Every new incoming student--whether freshman, transfer, or Early College High School student--is now required to go through a faculty- and staff-led workshop to help them identify, prioritize, and align their assets, values, and aspirations.

Rather than focusing solely on compliance, advising, registration, and campus tours, UTEP's New Student Orientation now begins with this powerful workshop that forces students to look comprehensively at their motivation in pursuing a college education and how that drive aligns with their talents, assets, and aspirations. Early data is showing that four clear values continue to emerge as the most important to our students across all incoming cohorts:

- Family
- Happiness
- Success
- Love

All students come to college with assets, values, and aspirations—the keys to self-motivation and success. With the students, faculty, and staff, UTEP is now activating these factors and using them to optimize each student's abilities, agency, and powerful and empowering desire for lifelong success.

The University of Texas of the Permian Basin

The First Year Experience and Seminar is a program for freshman students to help them with their transition to college. Many of our freshman are first generation college students, and through this program we make sure that they have all of the information and help that they need to be successful in the college career. Through this program, we connect them with student services, from financial aid, to advising, to tutoring, and many other places around our campus that can help them thrive in college. Moreover, we run social events so that students can form peer groups that will help them feel like they belong at out institution.

This program serves all students on campus for the first semester of college. We are still working on measurements for the success of this program, but, currently we look at retention rates between a student's first and second semester, along with graduation rates.

Additional Information: https://www.utpb.edu/academics/undergraduate-success/first-year-seminar/index

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

The UTRGV **Veteran Writing Program** consists of a series of creative writing workshops which offer student veterans a means of processing and synthesizing their multi-faceted experiences, both military and those related to reintegrating into civilian life, including higher education. Through the support of published authors, writing instructors, and mental health counselors who volunteer their time, student veterans share intensely personal experiences, memories, and emotions. The program contributes to social belonging among student veterans since the process of sharing their stories in a supportive environment results in a strengthening of ties. A program participant noted, "It took me 10 years to realize I had an issue, which turned out to be PTSD. The reason for taking that long was that I did not have anyone to talk to who could relate to my issues. With this group, veterans can talk to each other

regarding the feelings and the issues they face on a daily basis. It is easier to open up when you know others around you can relate to what you are going through."
During Summer – Fall 2017, three workshops were held with an average of 26 participants per session. Future plans include additional writing workshops, a video documentary about the writing program, and developing a play, in collaboration with the university's theater department, based on the students' writings.

Jumpstart Summer Bridge Program: Designed to foster both academic and social belonging, Jumpstart, UTRGV's mandatory summer bridge program for first- year students who are not yet college ready, immerses students in a five-week academic curriculum which aids them in meeting college readiness standards while enhancing their ability to access and leverage the vast resources and opportunities available at our institution. The program is intentionally crafted to build a comprehensive academic network of support for students, with recognized faculty, supportive peer mentors, engaged academic advisors, and knowledgeable tutors helping to create a learning experience centered on students' needs. For UTRGV, the power of the program comes from a shared belief in the value these students bring to the institution and its commitment to taking these students' intellectual contributions seriously, something many of these students have never experienced before. Serving ~500 students in most summers, pass rates, especially for the reading/writing course have been impressive, ranging from 83% in Summer 2015 to 97% in Summer 2017. Math pass rates, in courses designed for three separate degree pathways, have also been much higher than previous interventions, with a low of 62% to a high of 97%.

Additional Information: http://www.utrgv.edu/universitycollege/jumpstart/index.htm

UTSA. The University of Texas at San Antonio™

The University of Texas at San Antonio

First to Go and Graduate (F2G&G) is a first-generation faculty coach, peer mentor and mentee program for first-generation students, including anyone whose parent(s) or guardian(s) did not complete a four-year bachelor's degree. The faculty member, along with peer mentors and mentees, form a *familia*. *Familias* use social media to stay in contact, and they schedule face-to-face meet-ups where they connect over coffee or a meal. *Familias* also take part in organized workshops, potlucks, de-stress days, panel discussions, and more. Participating students have indicated increased sense of belonging and utilization of various campus services such as the Career Center, Scholarship and Fellowship Applications, and On-Campus Employment. Assessment is underway.

Additional Information: http://pivot.utsa.edu/f2gg/

Math Matters uses Math Emporium Model Courses for STEM and Business core math courses. The Emporium Model, designed using the National Center for Academic Transformation (NCAT) guidelines, provides math instruction delivery in which students participate in active math learning via a supportive, student-centered, engaged-learning lab environment. With only one lecture averaged per week, instructors spend all other student-contact hours in the student-centered lab with Emporium enrolled students and student tutors. This facilitates and increases the number of outside lecture, class-time hours in which instructors are engaged and actively supporting students. The Emporium lab is an incubator for fostering a sense of belonging and engagement among students and faculty. The Emporium's high-impact, student-centered and high-faculty and tutor engagement will significantly increase the probability of student persistence, retention, and graduation.

Additional Information: http://pivot.utsa.edu/mathmatters/

The University of Texas at Tyler

Swoop Camp is a new, extended orientation program for incoming freshmen that is designed to serve as a community builder that strengthens the student's connection to the university, introduces them to the university's history and traditions, and fosters relationships with fellow students, faculty and staff. At Swoop Camp, students learn about resources that will help them be successful, spend time taking a deep dive into their majors, and create a success plan that will lead them to successful careers at the end of their tenure at UT Tyler. The camp is conducted over a 5-day period the week before the fall semester begins. Each day is focused on various topics that will aid the student's transition into the university while building belonging to the university.

Assessment is already underway, with data collection focused on measuring retention rates from fall-to-spring, and fall-to-fall of students who participated in the camp versus non-participants. Satisfaction assessment for the inaugural 2017 camp indicated that over 94% of participants were satisfied to extremely satisfied with their camp experience, and 92% felt prepared for the semester after attending camp.

For more information regarding Swoop Camp e-mail pfc@uttyler.edu
or go to: http://www.uttyler.edu/sll/newstudentprograms/swoopcamp/faq.php

The Lyceum is an annual tradition, held each April, that promotes research on our campus for both undergraduate and graduate students. This day-long event features interdisciplinary student panels and a large poster session from all colleges and disciplines. Students submit their research for either oral or poster presentations. All student presentations are judged by numerous faculty members from different disciplines to give constructive and educational feedback. This event is open to the entire campus to encourage research, the life of the mind, and connection to the community.

The third annual Lyceum will occur April 26, 2018.

Belonging Campaign

The Belonging Affinity Group dedicated itself to conceptualizing a Belonging Campaign, and developing a Belonging Campaign Template that would be customizable and easy to adopt for those campuses interested in doing so. The intent of the Campaign Template is to assist UT System universities with creating a belonging campaign that aligns the objectives of new and existing work toward clearly defined common goals and to encourage the sharing of data and best practices across university divisions.

The following is taken from the purpose statement of Belonging Campaign Template (found in *Appendix C)*.

In validating the significance of student belonging, campuses:

- *Enhance the depth of knowledge around the student experience and student success*
- *Increase the number of informed student success champions who understand their value and role in a holistic college experience*
- *Improve implementation of effective new and existing belonging efforts*
- *Enrich discourse in the classroom and better connect students to faculty, staff, other students, as well as to high-impact academic, co-curricular, research, and community opportunities*

The Belonging Campaign Template provides a framework to assist all university personnel as they examine their role and those of others in:

- *Cultivating belonging;*
- *Becoming familiar with related data sources;*
- *Developing a goal-oriented student belonging action plan; and*
- *Aligning related assessments within a continuous improvement framework.*

In coordination with the role of NSSE in understanding student belonging (described in the next section), the Campaign Template develops several action steps and proposes assessment around NSSE. If some of the expanded metrics recommended by the Belonging Group are adopted by campuses, those, too, could become areas of increased focus and attention for campus stakeholders.

NSSE Examination

Belonging members reviewed NSSE and SERU questions that were relevant to belonging. NSSE, the National Survey of Student Engagement, is conducted annually at all UT institutions except UT Austin. UT Austin uses an analogous survey designed for research universities, SERU, the Student Experience in the Research University Survey. The group engaged in productive discussion regarding the utility of the surveys in respect to better serving students on their campuses, in terms of both the potential and inherent limitations. The group also discussed the surveys' potential in helping to identify a belonging metric.

With the help of Cathy Delgado, group member and staff in the Office of Strategic Initiatives (OSI), we reviewed relevant questions, along with a sample of aggregated student responses from across the UT System. In the end, we selected two questions around which one of our belonging metrics would be developed: one question focused on student-faculty interactions, and one on the number of hours students spent participating in co-curricular activities which, as the research demonstrates, serve as potential drivers of students retention and completion. Using baseline responses from 2018, we can measure progress over time.

The group also was able to articulate a multi-purpose role for NSSE in the Belonging Campaign. Campaign participants will work with their IR directors and other institutional stakeholders to: 1) improve the student response rates to NSSE, to add volume and therefore value to the data provided; and 2) make better use of/act on NSSE data to address student needs and concerns and enhance institutional programming on behalf of student learning and success. In this way, the NSSE, which is already administered, can be used with heightened intentionality and impact, with little additional cost (in the form of staff time) and clear potential benefits.

Finally, the Belonging Affinity Group discussed the development of more focused, UT-specific questions on Belonging that can be asked system-wide in future administrations of NSSE to garner better data on the student success pillars as indicators of student engagement and success. Several UT campuses are already adding specific belonging questions to the internal campus surveys they conduct. For example, UT Dallas is adding questions to a campus survey, and these questions may well serve as models for other campuses and for what we propose to NSSE.

While the work of the group will be formally completed at the close of 2017, with input from campuses, the UT System Office of Academic Affairs and OSI will work with NSSE to add targeted belonging questions. We believe NSSE will be receptive to this request based on the UT System's work to increase awareness about the importance of belonging in terms of student retention and completion, work that is and will be relevant to other IHEs across the country.

As a result of the Belonging group's work, as well as that of the Advising and Assessment of Student Learning Groups, the following three directions relating to NSSE are being recommended to System and institutional leadership:

1. Change systemwide NSSE Administration from annually to biannually
2. Use NSSE in proposed metrics of UT System Student Success Affinity Groups
3. Improve response rates to, strategic use and utility of NSSE across the UT System and in the service of student success

Endorsements have already come from provosts and, with the help of OSI, institutional research directors. The UT System Office of Academic Affairs and OSI will work with institutions, and with NSSE, in 2018 to pursue these directions. See *Appendix F* for a fuller discussion of the changes and enhanced usage being recommended.

Student Success Quadrant Analysis of Student Attrition

In support of the Affinity Group, staff from the UT System Offices of Strategic Initiatives (OSI) and Academic Affairs embarked on a deep dive into data analysis that would help the affinity groups fulfill their charge to identify expanded metrics by which to measure student financial well-being, advising efficacy, and social and academic belonging. This analysis proved pivotal for the Finances and the Belonging Affinity Groups in developing meaningful metrics and, critically, has allowed us to understand the deep connections between the three pillars and the improvement of retention and graduation rates.

Led by David Troutman from OSI, and Lydia Riley, from Academic Affairs, the analysis focused on entering “at risk” freshman cohorts of students, because first-year retention is a leading indicator of future graduation rates and, across UT System academic institutions, approximately one in five students do not return after their first year. This was the approach used at UT Austin that led to a 15-point increase in over a five-year period.

Using a series of data-mining techniques, the analysis isolated the student characteristics associated with students who leave, thereby helping to identify the underlying causes and common drivers of first-year attrition. The potential of this analysis is enormous: it can provide actionable data to UT institutions and UT System to develop or enhance predictive models to identify students who are at risk as they enter their freshman year; it can be expanded to look at retention in years 2 and 3, and to look at predicting and improving graduation rates.

An explanation of the analysis and its contribution to identifying Belonging metrics is contained in *Appendix G*. A full description of the entire analysis can be found in the paper, “UT System Student Success Data Exploration: A Focus on First-Year Attrition,” and will accompany the combined affinity group report dissemination and be shared with System and institutional leadership.

Emerging Metrics: coalescence and elaboration around three areas

By September, the Belonging Affinity Group had coalesced around four recommendations and three metrics by which Belonging could be measured. They adhere to the areas of discussion and focus described above: the Belonging Campaign, better use of NSSE data, and the data-mining of the Student Success Quadrant Analysis.

We are hopeful that UT System and institutional leadership will support the voluntary adoption of these recommendations and metrics, in ways that are meaningful to advancing the success of our students and aligned with strategic priorities of individual institutions.

Recommendations and Proposed Metrics

BELONGING

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Invite UT academic universities to develop and launch a Belonging Campaign (following the customizable template developed by the Belonging Affinity Group), in alignment with their existing efforts, strategic priorities, and planning.

Resource Implications: The resource requirements will depend on campus strategies to develop, market, and implement a Belonging Campaign. Assessment of the Campaign is recommended, and may require additional resources.

Responsible Party: UT academic universities

Recommendation 2

Change the administration and enhance the use of NSSE at participating UTs (all but Austin) by

- Administering the survey every other year instead of every year
- Adding new, more tactically specific belonging questions to survey
- Working to increase student responses to survey
- Supporting institutions in better deployment of NSSE data to improve student belonging and success, including better communication of import and results of NSSE data and how it can be used formatively by many institutional stakeholders.

Resource Implications:

Administering NSSE every other year instead of every year would generate savings in financial and staff resources, as the UT System subsidizes this effort and both System and institutional staff play roles in survey administration. IR directors and provosts are supportive of this recommendation. Helping institutions use their NSSE data better could require more work for OSI by providing more in-depth analyses of NSSE results to campuses. Getting more students to take the survey, and then making better use of the data with campus stakeholders will entail some new work for institutions.

Responsible Party:

UT academic universities and UT System. UT System will work with NSSE on changes to administration and questions, and on developing institutional analyses along with a guide for how NSSE data should be interpreted and used. Institutions would be responsible for improving student response rates (this could be part of Belonging Campaigns), sharing the data well, and using their data in formative ways.

Recommendation 3

Continue convening a systemwide affinity group or network focused on promotion and measurement of academic and social belonging across UT System institutions. Network could be provost-led and should include academic and student affairs staff, as well as faculty. The network should include the development of a micro-site to continue a focus on best practices, storytelling, institutional features of students, staff and faculty, and analysis and metrics producing actionable data.

Resource Implications:

Convening costs for institutional representatives and development and maintenance of a micro-site housed at UT System. Intention is to seek external funding to sustain and grow UT System's Belonging Initiative.

Responsible Party:

UT System Office of Academic Affairs will play convening role and oversee micro-site. UT academic universities will be asked to identify members and support their participation in largely non-financial ways.

Recommendation 4

Partnering with receptive institutions, UT System Office of Academic Affairs and the Office of Strategic Initiatives will develop a process to share annually the data generated from the Student Success Quadrant Analysis, focused on students who leave for identified academic and social belonging reasons. This will be used to strengthen data-driven decision-making and inform resource allocation for institutions to develop targeted interventions for students who are at risk of leaving the institution. Over time, and pending resources and the interest of institutions, these data can be used to develop predictive analytics to include not only entering FTIC but also transfer and other student populations.

Resource Implications:

UT System OSI has all the data for conducting this analysis, and staff resources will be required to work with receptive institutions on conducting and sharing the analysis. Developing predictive analytics will require additional resources. To make this work meaningful, institutions will need to act on the data and design and implement targeted interventions for students who are at risk of leaving. This recommendation has significant ROI potential, for both students and institutions.

Responsible Party:

UT System Office of Academic Affairs and Office of Strategic Initiatives, in partnership with UT System institutions.

BELONGING

Proposed Metrics

Proposed Metric 1

a. Academic Belonging: Percent of first-year attrition attributable to a lack of academic belonging, measured by identifying those students who are not retained at UT System academic institutions who have low unmet financial need (less than $5,500) and a low GPA (less than 2.0) upon leaving.

b. Social Belonging: Percent of first-year attrition attributable to a lack of social belonging, measured by identifying those students who are not retained at UT System academic institutions who have low unmet financial need (less than $5,500) and a passing GPA (greater than or equal to 2.0) upon leaving.

Resource Implications:

First-year Retention data are available at UT System from reporting that institutions submit to THECB; however, tracking, analysis, and dissemination back to institutions will require UT System staff time. Data and metrics will be most meaningful and actionable if staff and infrastructure resources are available to develop predictive analytics and models, contingent on UT System and/or institutional capacity.

Responsible Party:

UT System Office of Strategic Initiatives and Office of Academic Affairs will conduct analysis with the expectation that interested UT institutions will use results to address findings and identify and implement targeted interventions and strategies to create a stronger sense of belonging and strengthen the conditions by which students will remain enrolled and progressing towards degree.

Proposed Metric 2

Following consultation with interested institutions, two metrics will be articulated from the NSSE questions below, identified by Affinity Group members as indirect, proxy measures for Belonging:

- **About how many hours do you spend in a typical 7-day week doing the following? Participating in co-curricular activities (organizations, campus publications, student government, fraternity or sorority, intercollegiate or intramural sports, etc.) 0 hrs through Greater than 30 hrs**
- **Indicate the quality of your interactions with the following people at your institution. Faculty 1 Poor through 7 Excellent**

The metrics will be tied to percentage of responses coming in at agreed-upon thresholds.

Resource Implications:

These questions are part of current NSSE surveys, which every UT except Austin administers (Austin administers the SERU survey). Institutions receive their own results, and UT System receives responses for all campuses. OSI and/or institutional staff time will be needed to analyze responses and share results with interested and relevant stakeholders. This analysis has the potential both to bolster the sharing of best practices across institutions and to otherwise create a sense of shared purpose and collaborative success on behalf of all UT students.

Responsible Party:

Analysis could be done by UT System Office of Strategic Initiatives and Office of Academic Affairs, or by UT institutions. However, the expectation is that interested campuses will use responses to these questions to address findings and work to improve, as needed, through interventions or strategies. Crosswalk with UT Austin's SERU data is being pursued.

Proposed Metric 3

Belonging Campaign Participation: number of UT institutions with belonging campaigns, including equivalent initiatives focused on addressing belonging. This will be a process rather than an outcomes measure, and can track campaign activities (numbers and types), as well as indicate whether campuses are conducting their own assessments of such campaigns.

Resource Implications:

The real implications are tied to the kinds of customizable campaigns or equivalent initiatives institutions are already doing or may elect to do. Again, this analysis has the potential both to bolster the sharing of best practices across institutions and to otherwise create a sense of shared purpose and collaborative success on behalf of all UT students.

Responsible Party:

Participating UT institutions (designated Belonging Champion) and UT System Office of Academic Affairs will determine and oversee collection of available information.

Conclusion

As the Belonging Affinity Group finalizes its recommendations within the pages of this report, we exit these conversations with a new appreciation for collegiality, mentorship, and the spirit of unity we all experienced while considering, from a student perspective, what it means to "belong." We view belonging as a lynchpin of student success, and fundamental to the goal of the System's Student Success initiative to help everyone at institutions take responsibility for student success, from faculty to staff, to administrators to students. Throughout our process of discovery, we have found that there is value in our collective work and that cultivating a sense of belonging for our students is fundamental to unleashing their unlimited possibilities.

As a group, we believe we have been engaged in trailblazing work, in terms of both process and product. We remain appreciative of System leadership's framing of its student success agenda in the form of commitments to students, and the placement of belonging as one of those commitments. This holistic approach honors the people—above all—the students we serve as we work to fulfill our mission. Finally, we remain dedicated to the effort and the importance of measuring what we say matters as a critical component to helping each and every one of our students know that they belong in college and at each of our universities.

Appendices A-G Follow:

- ***i.*** ***Appendix A: Belonging Affinity Group Member***
- ***ii.*** ***Appendix B: Research and Literature Review***
- ***iii.*** ***Appendix C: Belonging Campaign Template (Attached)***
- ***iv.*** ***Appendix D:*** **Recommendations and Suggested Script for Belonging Conversations**
- ***v.*** ***Appendix E:*** **Belonging Discussion Questions with the Faculty Advisory Council (FAC) and the Academy of Distinguished Teachers (ADT)**
- ***vi.*** ***Appendix F: NSSE Recommendations for the UT System***
- ***vii.*** ***Appendix G:*** **Findings from Student Success Quadrant Analysis for the Belonging Affinity Group**

Appendix A: Belonging Affinity Group Members

Belonging Affinity Group: Academic			
NAME	**TITLE**	**CAMPUS**	**EMAIL**
Antoinette Sol	Professor of Modern Languages and Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs	UT Arlington	amsol@.uta.edu
Jody Jensen	Professor of Kinesiology and Health Education, and Past Chair, Faculty Council	FAC (UT Austin)	jljensen@austin.utexas.edu
Sue Harkins	Assistant Dean, Lecturer, College of Natural Sciences	UT Austin	sharkins@austin.utexas.edu
Jessica Murphy	Dean of Undergraduate Education and Associate Professor of Literary Studies	UT Dallas	jessica.c.murphy@utdallas.edu
Courtney Brecheen	Associate Dean, Undergraduate Education	UT Dallas	courtneyb@utdallas.edu
David Ruiter, Co-Chair	Associate Provost and AVP for Academic Affairs; Associate Professor of English	UT El Paso	druiter@utep.edu
Michael Frawley	Assistant Professor of History and FYE Coordinator	UT Permian Basin	frawley_m@utpb.edu
Jonikka Charlton	Associate Vice President for Student Academic Success	UT Rio Grande Valley	Jonikka.charlton@utrgv.edu
Rhonda M. Gonzales	Associate Vice Provost for Strategic Initiatives and Professor of History	UT San Antonio	RHONDA.GONZALES@UTSA.EDU
Rebecca Karoff, Co-Chair	Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs	UT System	rkaroff@utsystem.edu
Elizabeth Mayer, Staff	Senior Research and Policy Analyst	UT System	emayer@utsystem.edu
Wycliffe Njororai	Professor, Health and Kinesiology, and Faculty Senate President- Elect	UT Tyler	wnjororai@uttyler.edu

Belonging Affinity Group: Social			
NAME	**TITLE**	**CAMPUS**	**EMAIL**
Lisa Nagy	Senior Associate Vice President for Student Affairs	UT Arlington	nagy@uta.edu
Carol Longoria	Deputy to Vice President for Student Affairs	UT Austin	caroll@utexas.edu
Kimshi Hickman	Assistant Vice President, Office of Enrollment Management	UT Arlington	kimshi.hickman@uta.edu
Louie Rodriguez, Co-Chair	Associate Vice President for Student Affairs	UT El Paso	lrodriguez35@utep.edu
Nicole Aguilar	Director of Student Engagement and Leadership Center	UT El Paso	nicole@utep.edu
Tonya Paulette	Director of Student Accessibility Services	UT Rio Grande Valley	tonya.paulette01@utrgv.edu
Lydia Bueno	Assistant Dean of Students	UT San Antonio	LYDIA.BUENO@UTSA.EDU
Rebecca Karoff, Co-Chair	Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs	UT System	rkaroff@utsystem.edu
Cathy Delgado, Staff	Senior Research and Policy Analyst	UT System	cdelgado@utsystem.edu
Sarah Bowdin	Assistant Vice President for Enrollment Management	UT Tyler	sbowdin@uttyler.edu
Ona Tolliver	Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students	UT Tyler	OTolliver@uttyler.edu

Appendix B: Research and Literature Review

The Belonging Affinity group members have considerable knowledge around the research on student success and the challenges of academic and social belonging, and this research contributed to the definition of and directions for belonging arrived at by group members. More important to developing the definition, recommendations, and metrics for belonging, however, was group members' expertise and experience with students based on their institutional roles in academic and student affairs, and as faculty.

The literature review below provides an overview of the existing research on belonging, with a few examples highlighted. This includes the smaller number of studies that actually name belonging, and also points to the growing body of research that is subsidiary to and aligned with belonging. It is by no means comprehensive. The biggest sub-set of the research is in the field of student engagement, which has grown extensively in the last decade, and is practical as much as scholarly. While belonging and student engagement are not identical, the student engagement research is wholly relevant and the evidence emerging from student engagement research, in particular its relationship to impacts on retention and graduation rates, serves as strong indicators of and proxies for belonging.

Research on Belonging

The research on belonging has been primarily focused on social belonging and the co-curriculum, although newer and still evolving research on academic belonging is taking hold and informing college curriculum and other academic reforms and practice, specifically in the area of how the classroom environment can contribute to students' sense of belonging.

Definitions of Belonging

A review of the literature on belonging revealed several definitions. Hausmann, Ye, Schofield and Woods, (2009) "define students' sense of belonging as their psychological sense of identification and affiliation with the campus community." The authors continue by asserting that "when students become integrated into the social and academic systems of the university, they develop a psychological sense of belonging to the university community, which is an important precursor to desirable outcomes such as increased commitment and persistence." Another definition of belonging in the literature was "the cohesion a student has with a particular institution" (Maestas, et. al. 2007).

The most influential work for the affinity group was Terrell L. Strayhorn's *College Students' Sense of Belonging* (2012). This work also provides the most frequently cited definition in recent literature. Strayhorn defines a sense of belonging as "…students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g. campus community) or others on campus (e.g. faculty, peers)."

Despite the variety of definitions of belonging that exists in the literature, research shows that students "with a sense of belonging are likely to achieve valuable educational outcomes" (Vaccaro, et. al. 2016).

Student Engagement and Belonging

For decades some of the most prominent academic and student success researchers (Tinto, Pascarella &

Terenzini, Astin, Hurtado, Kuh, *et al*) have identified a number of factors that influence student engagement. Although some literature refers to student engagement and belonging interchangeably, delving deeper into the research reveals that, although they are indeed related concepts, they are not necessarily the same. Maestas, Vaquera, and Zehr (2007) contend that "Academic integration is measured most often by academic performance, participation in academic activities and an assessment of intellectual growth." The authors go on to explain that these activities do not measure the actual subjective connectedness or the students' sense of belonging. However, these and other measures of student engagement serve as informative and powerful proxies to measure the belonging of students.

Student Sub-Populations

A substantial amount of the research around belonging relates to specific student sub-populations including: social class, race/ethnicity, gender, class level (freshman, sophomores, etc.), first-generation status, as well as students attending different types of institutions (i.e., institutions attended by predominately white students, Hispanic serving institutions, community colleges, and universities) (Ostrove, et. al., 2007, Newman, et. al., 2015, Vaccaro et. al, 2016). This research is often focused on how to develop appropriate interventions to facilitate the belonging of the specific sub-population being studied, as well as how to contribute to the students' overall student success.

Until very recently, there has been much less research on the sense of belonging for LGBTQ students, students with disabilities, and students from lower socio-economic statuses (Vaccaro, et. al., 2016). The gap of research for these student populations may be due to the inability to collect the necessary student-level data, rather than a lack of interest in these specific populations. NSSE (see below) has been adding multiple questions to their surveys addressing LGBTQ students.

Growth Mindset Research

Another growing body of research relevant to understanding and fostering student belonging is found in the work of David Yeager, Assistant Professor of Developmental Psychology at the University of Texas at Austin. Yeager is a co-chair of the Mindset Scholars Network, created to advance scientific understanding of learning mindsets in order to improve student outcomes and expand educational opportunity. The Network conducts interdisciplinary research on Growth Mindset, Belonging and Purpose & Relevance. It also builds capacity for high-quality mindset scholarship and interventions, and disseminates the latest scientific knowledge through outreach to education stakeholders, both in higher education and K12.

One emerging example of institutions of higher education implementing and operationalizing belonging as a growth mindset is St. Cloud State University in Minnesota, which is in the process of developing and piloting a Belonging Index. The Index is intended to identify, understand, and provide outreach to students who may struggle with belonging and are, therefore, at risk of not being retained.

NSSE

Many research studies on student belonging use indirect measures (surveys, focus groups, and interviews) and qualitative data in assessing both social and academic belonging. The best known and utilized of these, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is considered an established and valued survey tool for gathering data on student engagement.[1] This nationally normed survey has been providing data to institutions about their students' experiences since 2000 and is used by over 1600 colleges and universities. George Kuh and others have asserted the value of NSSE in multiple ways: how it provides information about the engagement patterns and behaviors of students; how the results raise additional questions about diverse groups and sub-populations of students, disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, low-income and first-generation, among other characteristics; and how results speak to the quality of and practices undergirding undergraduate student experiences, including many that institutions promote and implement as part of student success initiatives. NSSE includes many questions related to belonging, although the survey does not currently ask direct questions about belonging.

High Impact Practices

Among the practices assessed by NSSE and which have been proven to be strong indicators of student engagement are High Impact Practices, or HIPs. There is a growing body of research on the benefits of HIPs to student engagement and success, including improved retention and graduation outcomes. Defined by George Kuh as "learning practices that have been widely tested and have been shown to be beneficial for college students from many backgrounds," institutions across the country have dedicated increased resources to ramping up HIP offerings in the curriculum and co-curriculum. These practices vary and can take different forms based upon the institution. These practices include:

- First-year seminars and experiences;
- Common intellectual experiences;
- Learning communities;
- Writing-intensive courses;
- Internships and service learning;
- Study abroad and study away;
- Collaborative assignments and projects and capstone projects; and
- Undergraduate research.

Although not an exhaustive list, these practices illustrate the kinds of activities in which a student can engage that have been shown to lead to deeper learning and improved success. Research has shown that HIPs benefit all students, but the impacts are most profound for historically underrepresented and underserved students.

Kuh, O'Donnell, Brownell and Swaner, *et al*, have also identified a set of characteristics that yield deeper student engagement, whether independently attended to or embedded in formal HIPs. These characteristics include assignments, experiences, and projects that demand considerable time and

[1] From the NSSE Website: *The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) collects information from first-year and senior students about the characteristics and quality of their undergraduate experience. Since the inception of the survey, more than 1,600 bachelor's-granting colleges and universities in the United States and Canada have used it to measure the extent to which students engage in effective educational practices that are empirically linked with learning, personal development, and other desired outcomes such as persistence, satisfaction, and graduation. NSSE data are used by faculty, administrators, researchers, and others for institutional improvement, public reporting, and related purposes.*

effort, facilitate learning outside of the classroom, require meaningful interactions with faculty and students, encourage collaboration with diverse others, and provide frequent and substantive feedback.

Fostering Belonging in the Classroom

The classroom is the center of the academic experience for students in college, and it is essential that students have a sense of belonging in order to succeed. Since the classroom is the locus of students' academic success, the faculty play a key role in ensuring that the classroom environment fosters students' sense of belonging. Although there is existing research concerning various ethnic and minority communities' sense of belonging (Walton, et. al, 2007, Newman, et. al., 2015, Vaccaro et. al, 2016), there is a gap in the research on belonging and the classroom. Sharon Zumbrunn, *et al*, found that faculty and peers play an influential role for students and that more sharing of the information about belonging with faculty "has the potential to not only improve instructional techniques, but also influence student learning and success in the classroom."

A recent example of this type of instructional awareness was developed by Sara Goldrick-Rab, who inserted a statement about basic need security (food and housing) resources in her syllabus. She explained that adding this information to the syllabus was important in acknowledging the financial struggles that some students may be facing, which could ultimately affect how they do in the course. This and other intentional information in the syllabus can be instrumental to ensuring a sense of belonging for students.

Another relevant example of how belonging can influence academic performance was borne out with experiments that were performed by Claude Steele and his colleagues. The researchers identified a phenomenon known as "stereotype threat." The researchers found that negative or positive stereotypes can influence the performance of individuals, specifically looking at testing results for African American students versus White students. Despite matching SAT scores, the African American students performed less well based on how the test was framed. This research reveals how even minimal comments or actions by those in the classroom can influence student performance.

Other Curricular Reforms aligned with Student Engagement and Success

The Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) and the Lumina Foundation for Education have sponsored another body of emergent research that is focused on changing practice more than research. This includes implementation and evaluation of curricular and co-curricular design and reforms that increase student engagement and provide evidence of the quality of degree programs and student learning. The guiding principle is that increasing students' engagement in their educational pathways—general education, the major, the co-curriculum—contributes to the quality and depth of student learning, as well as improved retention, graduation, and post-collegiate success. This work includes institutional involvement with work on general education reform, high-impact practices, integrative learning, and proficiency- or outcomes-based curricular redesign. Examples include AAC&U's VALUE Rubrics and GEMS projects, Lumina's Degree Qualifications Profile, and SHEEO and AAC&U's Multi-State Collaborative for the Assessment of Student Learning. These projects have been shown to enhance a sense of student agency by making learning and learning pathways more transparent, intentional and purposeful, and by providing evidence of student learning and engagement in new ways.

Conclusion

The research on belonging is a work-in-progress. Much of the work referenced above contributes to the understanding of social and academic belonging and provides fruitful pathways for operationalizing, improving, and assessing belonging. The work of the Belonging Affinity Group—and what we anticipate will be continued and growing attention to belonging at University of Texas institutions—contributes to this understanding, identifies additional directions to pursue, and proposes novel ways to measure it. As such, this work also offers new and emergent research, publication, and grant opportunities for UT institutions and the system as a whole, as well as a clear pathway to national leadership in this vital area of student success.

Works Cited

ACUE. (2017). Course in effective teaching practices. http://acue.org/course/#designing

Belongingness Research Group Final Report | Student Success Team | Appalachian State University. (n.d.). Retrieved September 18, 2017, from http://achievement.appstate.edu/belongingness-research-group-0

Carini, R. M., Kuh, G. D., & Klein, S. P. (2006). Student engagement and student learning: Testing the linkages*. *Research in Higher Education*, *47*(1), 1–32. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-005-8150-9

Demetriou, C., Schmitz-Sciborski, A. (2011). Integration, motivation, strengths and optimism: Retention theories past, present and future. In Hayes, R. (Ed.), Proceedings of the 7th National Symposium on Student Retention, 2011, Charleston (pp. 300-312). Norman: The University of Oklahoma.

Goldrick-Rab, Sara. (2017). Basic needs security and the syllabus. Retrieved September 28, 2017, from https://medium.com/@saragoldrickrab/basic-needs-security-and-the-syllabus-d24cc7afe8c9

Graunke, S.S. and Woosley, S.A. 2005. An exploration of the factors that affect the academic success of college sophomores. *College Student Journal*, 39: 367–76.

Haussmann, L. R., Feifei, Y., Schofield, J. W., & Woods, R. L. (2009). Sense of belonging and persistence in White and African American First-Year students. *Research in Higher Education, 50*, 649–669.

Hoffman, M., Richmond, J., Morrow, J., & Salomone, K. (2003). Investigating “sense of belonging” in first-year college students. *Journal of College Student Retention*, *4*(3), 227–257.

Institute for Student Identity and Success. (2016). http://www.heritage.edu/Institute

Kuh, George D. (2003). What We're Learning About Student Engagement From NSSE: Benchmarks for Effective Educational Practices, *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning, 35:2*, 24-32, DOI: 10.1080/00091380309604090

Kuh, G.D., Cruce, T., Shoup, R., Kinzie, J., & Gonyea, R. (2008). Unmasking the effects of student engagement on first year college grades and persistence. *Journal of Higher Education*, *79*, 540–563.

Kuh, G.D. and S. Hu (2001). The Effects of Student-Faculty Interaction in the 1990s. *The Review of Higher Education, 24*, 309-332.

Maestas R., Vaquera, G.S., Zehr, L.M. (2007). Factors impacting sense of belonging at a Hispanic-serving institution. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education, 6(3),* 237–256.

Masika, R., & Jones, J. (2016). Building student belonging and engagement: insights into higher education students' experiences of participating and learning together. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *21*(2), 138–150.

Newman, C., Wood, J.L., Harris, F., (2015). Black men's perceptions of sense of belonging with faculty members in community colleges. *The Journal of Negro Education, 84 (4),* 564-577.

Ostrove, J., & Long, S. (2007). Social class and belonging: Implications for college adjustment. *The Review of Higher Education*, *30*, 363–389.

redOrbit. (2007, April 13). Sense of belonging in college freshmen at the classroom and campus levels. Retrieved September 18, 2017, from http://www.redorbit.com/news/education/900740/sense_of_belonging_in_college_freshmen_at_the_classroom_and/

Ross, Kathleen A. (2016). Breakthrough strategies: Classroom-based practices to support new majority college students. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Stereotype threat widens achievement gap | American Psychological Association | Retrieved December 15, 2017, from http://www.apa.org/research/action/stereotype.aspx

Strayhorn, T. L. (2012). *College students' sense of belonging: A key to educational success for all students* (1 edition). New York; London: Routledge.

To improve learning, more researchers say students should feel like they belong in the classroom. (n.d.). Retrieved September 18, 2017, from http://www.ewa.org/blog-educated-reporter/improve-learning-more-researchers-say-students-should-feel-they-belong

Transparency in learning and teaching in higher education | Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost | University of Nevada, Las Vegas. (n.d.). Retrieved September 18, 2017, from https://www.unlv.edu/provost/teachingandlearning

Vaccaro, A. & Newman, B. (2016). Development of a sense of belonging for privileged and minoritized students: An emergent model. *Journal of College Student Development, 57,* 925-942. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2016.0091

Walker, C. O. (2012). Student perceptions of classroom achievement goals as predictors of belonging and content instrumentality. *Social Psychology of Education*, *15*(1), 97–107. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-011-9165-z

Walton, G.M. & Cohen, G.L. (2011). A brief social-belonging intervention improves academic and health outcomes of minority students. *Science, 331,* 1447-1451.

Zumbrunn, S., McKim, C., Buhs, E., et al (2014). Support, belonging, motivation, and engagement in the college classroom: a mixed method study. *Instructional Science, 42*, 661-684. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11251-014-9310-0

(n.a.) (n.d.). Sense of Belonging Literature Review — University of Leicester [File]. Retrieved September 18, 2017, from http://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/ssds/projects/student-retention-project/dissemination/papers-and-publications/Sense%20of%20Belonging%20Lit%20Review.docx

Appendix C – Belonging Campaign Template

UT System Student Success Template: Belonging Campaign

Every university faculty and staff member plays an essential role in developing each student's sense of academic and social belonging. Collectively, they create and sustain an engaged campus environment in which students learn, connect, and contribute to the community, as they pursue academic and professional goals. Enhancing student belonging positively affects traditional metrics used to assess university performance, including retention, persistence, time to degree, and degrees awarded. More importantly, the impact of student belonging transcends the college experience and enriches a student's academic, personal, professional, and lifelong success. This success, in turn, leads to the positive development of communities, regions, the UT System, and the state.

In validating the significance of student belonging, campuses:

- Enhance the depth of knowledge around the student experience and student success
- Increase the number of informed student success champions who understand their value and role in a holistic college experience
- Improve implementation of effective new and existing belonging efforts
- Enrich discourse in the classroom and better connect students to high-impact academic, co-curricular, research, and community opportunities

The UT System Belonging Affinity Group designed the Belonging Campaign Template to provide a definition of belonging and guide development of belonging campaigns at UT System institutions. Specifically, the intent is to assist UT System universities with creating a belonging campaign that aligns the objectives of new and existing work toward clearly defined common goals and to encourage the sharing of data and best practices across university divisions.

Academic literature and facilitated dialogues among a diverse group of UT System campus representatives informed our shared definition of belonging. The Belonging Affinity Group purposefully constructed this definition to encompass both academic and social contexts and to provide campuses flexibility to operationalize, assess, and institutionalize the value of belonging in ways beyond the scope of this document. The Belonging Campaign Template provides a framework to assist all university personnel as they examine their role and those of others in:

- cultivating belonging
- becoming familiar with related data sources
- developing a goal-oriented student belonging action plan
- creating related assessments within a continuous improvement framework

Demonstrated System Commitment

"All UT students should feel like they belong in college. No student should fail to graduate because of a lack of engagement or a sense of not belonging."

Affinity Group Definition of Belonging

Belonging means that all students recognize that they are respected, valued, and included in all aspects of the campus environment. With the support of fellow students, faculty, staff, and other internal and external champions, each student develops a sense of purpose and agency to achieve educational, personal, and professional goals. Belonging can be described as occurring in two related and sometimes intersecting realms—academic and social—in ways that validate their complex and shifting senses of identity and community.

• Academic belonging is fostered at all levels of curricular design and delivery, in classrooms and other learning environments, and through integrative and applied learning experiences.

• Social belonging is fostered through all aspects, spaces, and activities of student life, including in classrooms, student organizations, residence halls, libraries, shared learning and community settings, and many more.
All university personnel are essential to academic and social belonging. They are collectively invested in creating and sustaining an engaged campus environment in which students learn, connect, and contribute to the campus community, as they pursue academic and lifelong success.

Tailored Definition of Belonging for your Campus (optional)

Data Sources on Student Belonging

1. Identify primary student belonging survey (e.g. NSSE/SERU)

2. Improve feedback loop on the surveys by sharing data with key campus stakeholders:

- **a. Students**
- **b. Faculty**
- **c. Staff**
- **d. Alumni**
- **e. Administration**

3. Pick secondary assessment tool (optional)
(e.g. exit surveys/other existing surveys with belonging-specific questions)

4. Strategy for sharing data (e.g. "NSSE 101" workshop, establish and clear and consistent repository for posting data/make it visible, engage students, etc.)

One-Team Approach to Student Success

How can you your campus approach student success even more collaboratively across divisions and departments?

1. As partners, what are the faculty roles?
- a. New faculty
- b. Teaching assistants/associates
- c. Online faculty
- d. Contingent faculty
- e. Tenured/Tenure-track faculty

2. As partners, what are the staff roles?
- a. New staff
- b. Advising staff
- c. Student Affairs staff
- d. Academic Affairs staff
- e. Business Affairs staff
- f. Other staff

3. As partners, what are the student roles?
- a. Belonging ambassadors
- b. Student organization leadership
- c. Resident Assistants/Advisors
- d. Supplemental Instructors
- e. Peer Mentors

4. As partners, what are roles for alumni?
- a. Regional
- b. National
- c. International

5. As partners, what are roles for the community stakeholders?
- a. Not-for-profit
- b. For-profit
- c. School districts
- d. Community colleges
- e. Advisory groups (boards, committees, etc.)

6. As partners, what are the roles for administration?

7. As partners, what are the roles for University Communication/Marketing?

Short-term Goals and Action Steps

1. Short-term Goal 1
(For example: Identify opportunities to assess belonging quickly and easily)
- a. Action step 1 (For example: Work with Dean of Students and Student Affairs departments to incorporate questions into existing departmental measures in order to survey students about sense of belonging.)
- b. Action step 2 (For example: Work with college Deans to consider adding a question about student belonging on course- or major-specific evaluations.)
- c. Action step 3, collect baseline data on these measures

2. Short-term Goal 2
- a. Action step 1
- b. Action step 2
- c. Action step 3, collect baseline data on meeting this goal

Long-term Goals and Action Steps

1. Long-term Goal 1

(For example: Create a cross-campus committee [Students, Academic Affairs/Faculty, Student Affairs, HR, Institutional Research, etc.] to analyze NSSE/SERU results and make recommendations concerning:

Action step 1

a. Assess students' sense of belonging in academic major and among peers

Action step 2

b. Assess faculty and staff sense of belonging

Action step 3

c. Inventory diversity practices

Action step 4

d. Establish campus performance goals and assessment metrics (in respect to key questions)

2. Long-Term Goal 2

a. Action step 1

b. Action step 2

c. Action step 3, collect baseline data on this goal

Accountability: Outcomes and Metrics

1. Does your campus have a Belonging Campaign?

2. Is it making a difference?

a. Have you chosen relevant metrics?

b. Have you established a baseline?

3. How do you know it is making a difference?

a. Initiative-level assessment?

b. Program-level assessment?

c. Activity-level assessment?

Appendix D

Recommendations and Suggested Script for Belonging Conversations

UT System Belonging Affinity Group

Participants

For student participants, consider transfer students, student employees, athletes, military-affiliated students, part-time, and "non-traditional" students (as your campus might define that term).

For faculty participants, consider tenured/tenure-track and contingent faculty from a variety of colleges; also, consider early-, mid-, and later-career members.

For staff participants, consider academic advisors, recruiters, enrollment services, student affairs, tutoring, military student support, disability services, academic department staff, and more.

By way of brief background, you can explain to your invitees/participants that as part of the Chancellor's Student Success Quantum Leap, the UT System is committed to creating a System-wide environment in which no student leaves one of our campuses due to a lack of finances, advising, or a sense of belonging. To further the work of the Belonging Affinity Group, in particular, their participation in these conversations is extremely valuable.

1. What would you say are the top touchpoints that give your students a sense of belonging? Think in terms of spaces, people, programs, courses, etc.

2. What would you say are the most obvious barriers or challenges to your students' sense of belonging? Again, think in terms of spaces, people, programs, courses, etc.

3. What could you see as real possibilities and opportunities to increase student belonging on your campus? Which of these are most impactful to the most students? Are there specific groups of students who would greatly benefit from additional belonging efforts? Which efforts or initiatives are feasible in the near future?

Appendix E

Belonging Discussion Questions with the Faculty Advisory Council (FAC) and the Academy of Distinguished Teachers (ADT)

AVC Rebecca Karoff – 4/13/17 and 8/23/17

Personal Experience

1. What made you feel like you belonged in college?
2. What made you feel like you didn't belong?
3. Are these examples academic or social?

Your Students' Experience

4. What do you do in your classrooms to make your students feel like they belong?
5. What do you do in your classrooms that might inhibit student belonging?
6. Are these examples academic or social?

Curricular Belonging

7. How might you define curricular belonging?
8. Curricular Touchpoints of (Barriers to?) belonging:
    a. Syllabi
    b. Conveying content knowledge
    c. Essential Learning Outcomes (higher-order cognitive skills, abilities, habits of mind)
    d. Pedagogical practices
    e. Assignments
    f. Office hours

Quality Student Learning

9. How do you define quality student learning?
10. What are your most important pieces of evidence that tell you that your students are learning what you are teaching?

Appendix F

NSSE Recommendations for the UT System

In support of the Student Success Initiative

The Student Success Affinity Groups have identified three areas of recommendation relating to NSSE:

1. Changes to systemwide NSSE Administration from annually to biannually
2. Use of NSSE in proposed metrics of UT System Student Success Affinity Groups
3. Improving response rates to, strategic uses and utility of NSSE across the UT System and in the service of student success

NSSE Administration

Currently, the UT System requires UT System academic universities to administer NSSE (the National Survey of Student Engagement[2]) annually. The requirement is not a formal policy but was instituted under the previous Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. The UT System pays for institutions to participate. While NSSE results in useful data on student perspectives of their educational experiences, annual administration can be a burden to institutions and, for many of them, results in more data than most campuses can use in formative ways to improve student experiences and outcomes.

[As a research-intensive university, UT Austin uses SERU (Student Experience in the Research University). UT Austin is not included in the recommendation below.]

Per the recommendation of institutional research directors, and with the endorsement of institutional provosts and the EVC for Academic Affairs, the UT System Office of Strategic Initiatives (OSI) would like to change NSSE administration from annually to biannually.

NSSE and Student Success Affinity Groups

The Student Success Affinity Groups, constituted as a part of the Chancellor's Quantum Leap on Student Success, have been working to identify best practices and expanded metrics in the areas of Finances, Advising, Belonging (the System's three student success pillars), and the Assessment of Student Learning. In analyzing the questions asked by NSSE and SERU and reviewing institutional results, the

[2] *The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) collects information from first-year and senior students about the characteristics and quality of their undergraduate experience. Since the inception of the survey [in 2000], more than 1,600 bachelor-granting colleges and universities in the United States and Canada have used it to measure the extent to which students engage in effective educational practices that are empirically linked with learning, personal development, and other desired outcomes such as persistence, satisfaction, and graduation. NSSE data are used by faculty, administrators, researchers, and others for institutional improvement, public reporting, and related purposes.*

Affinity Groups have determined that NSSE provides useful metrics and data in the areas of Advising, Belonging, and Assessment of Student Learning.

At the same time, it should be stated that the Affinity Groups recognize that, while providing important data that can be useful to institutions in multi-faceted ways, NSSE data are self-reported by students and indirect measures of student engagement and success. As a result, NSSE's utility has some limitations. NSSE is most effective when used with additional diagnostic tools to identify gaps in institutional attention to students, including sub-populations of students, and to design needed changes and strategic interventions.

The Affinity Groups worked to isolate key questions from NSSE and SERU from which to establish baseline data on student engagement in the areas of Finances, Advising, Belonging, and Student Learning. In addition, the Belonging Affinity Group developed more focused questions on Belonging that can be asked UT System-wide in future administrations of NSSE in order to garner better data on the student success pillars as indicators of student engagement and success. The Advising Affinity Group is recommending the adoption of the NSSE Advising Module by all participating NSSE institutions. This work will be continued with campus input and the OSI and Academic Affairs staff will work with IR directors and NSSE on this endeavor.

Campus members of the Affinity Groups will also work with their IR directors and other institutional stakeholders to 1) improve the student response rates to NSSE, to add volume and therefore value to the data provided; and 2) make better use of NSSE data to address student needs and concerns and enhance institutional programming on behalf of student learning and success.

For those campuses who elect to participate in a Belonging Campaign, as recommended by the Belonging Affinity Group, the Campaign Template includes action steps and assessment linked to NSSE.

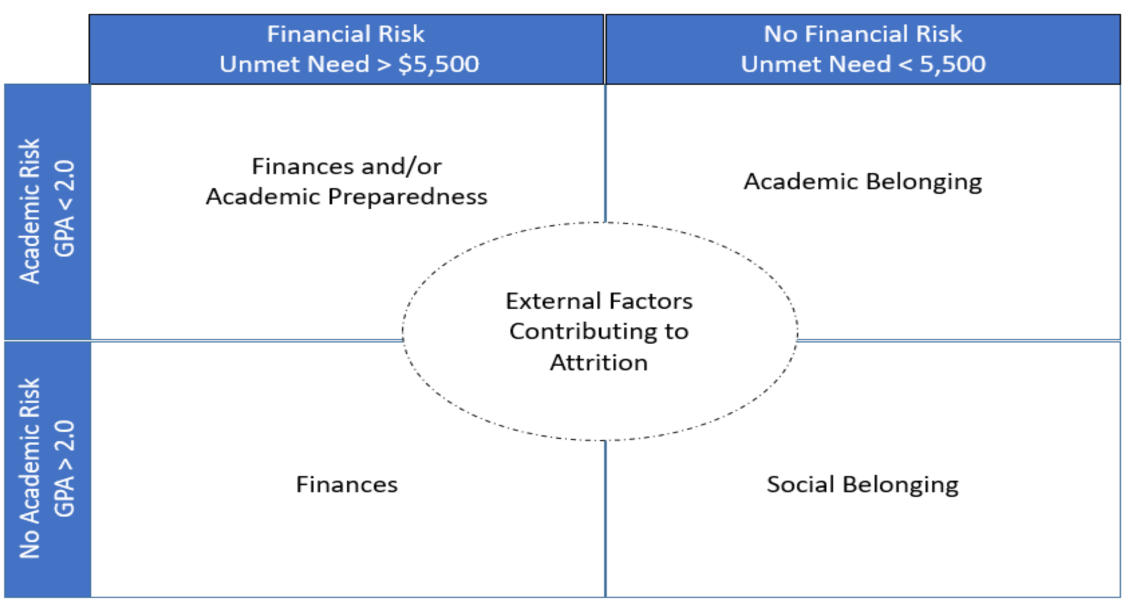
Appendix G
Findings from Student Success Quadrant Analysis for the Belonging Affinity Group

Overview/Methodology

The UT System Office of Strategic Initiatives (OSI), with support from the Office of Academic Affairs, provided data based upon a cluster analysis that was initially developed to inform the work of the Finances Affinity Group, one of the System's three pillars of student success. As additional data was explored, it was clear that the work had significant implications for the Belonging Affinity Group.

Known as the Student Success Quadrant Analysis, and using a series of data-mining techniques, the analysis allowed for the identification of metrics by which belonging could be measured. While these metrics remain proxies, the Belonging Affinity Group is confident of the methodology, definitions, and analysis—and complemented by the group's research, expertise, and experience—leading to the identification of either academic or social belonging as reasons for student attrition.

The analysis was conducted on the 4,480 first-time in college (FTIC) students that enrolled at a UT System academic institution in fall 2015, but were *not retained* in fall 2016. The cluster analysis highlighted primary drivers of the attrition of students at UT System institutions. From the cluster analysis, four quadrants of student attrition were developed: **Finances/Academic Preparation** *for those students not in good academic standing and having high financial risk*; **Finances** *for those students in good academic standing and having high financial risk*; **Academic Belonging** *for those students not in good academic standing and having no financial risk*; and **Social Belonging** *for those students in good academic standing and having no financial risk*.



The descriptions below are for students that left UT System institutions who were in either the Academic Belonging or Social Belonging quadrant.

Academic Belonging

Data were run for students who had low financial risk, defined as having unmet financial need less than $5,500, and who were not in good academic standing, defined as having a grade point average (GPA) less than 2.0. Of all UT System FTIC students that did not return in fall 2016, 1,021 students (23%) met these criteria. Based upon pre-matriculation data on SAT scores and high school rank, these students, on average, entered college academically prepared, yet they failed to perform well in college-level coursework. The Belonging Affinity Group, at the recommendation of OSI, considers these students to have left because of academic belonging issues.

Student Characteristics

Demographics

Of the 1,021 students who were not retained for academic belonging issues, 652 (64%) were male. Of those male students, 70 percent, based upon National Student Clearing House data, did not enroll at another institution of higher education in fall 2016. The majority of students not retained were Hispanic (51%), and 71 percent of the Hispanic students were not enrolled in higher education the following fall semester.

Academics

Students who decided not to return to a U.T. System institution in fall 2016, potentially due to a lack of academic belonging, had an average entering SAT score of 1056, meaning that they were, on average, above the benchmark for college readiness of 1050[3] when they were admitted. Once enrolled at the UT System institution the students did not perform well academically and left the institution with an average GPA of 0.9.

Finances

These students did not struggle financially based upon available data. On average, the expected family contribution for these students was $18,947, and the average unmet financial need was $2,039, which is low, especially when considering the number of hours a student would need to work to earn this amount. Students taking out loans who did not enroll in another institution of higher education in fall 2016 had an average loan amount of $4,160. It is unfortunate that there are so many students who are not retained at our institutions, but who do acquire debt and leave higher education with no credential.

Academic Belonging Metric

Based upon the findings, the affinity group proposes adoption of the measure defined by the percent of

[3] The state's college readiness benchmark SAT score was recently changed to 1070, which complicates the analysis and will be addressed for future cohorts.

attrition attributable to a lack of academic belonging. Per the interest of receptive partner institutions, this will be measured annually by identifying those students who are not retained at UT System academic institutions who have low unmet financial need (less than $5,500) and a low GPA (less than 2.0) upon leaving. This analysis can be done by the UT System OSI. The Belonging Affinity Group believes that, upon sharing this analysis and data, institutions will begin looking at this population of students and develop appropriate interventions to prevent student attrition and help more students be retained. This work would have a significant impact on improving retention rates and, in the process, institutional and student ROI.

Social Belonging

For students who were not retained, data were run based upon low unmet need (less than $5,500) and who left the institution in good academic standing, i.e., with a passing GPA greater than or equal to 2.0. Of all the UT System FTIC students in fall 2015 not retained in fall 2016, 1,109 students (25%) met the criteria of low unmet need and a passing GPA. Based upon the data, these students possessed neither academic nor financial risk factors. At the recommendation of OSI, the Belonging Affinity Group identifies these students as leaving for social belonging reasons.

Student Characteristics

Demographics

Of all the students that left due to social belonging, 50 percent were not enrolled at another institution of higher education in fall 2016. The gender of the students in this quadrant were about equal, with 53 percent female and 47 percent male. A substantial number of the students in the quadrant related to social belonging were Hispanic (37%) or White (32%).

Academics

The average SAT for students in this quadrant was 1,122–well above the 1050 (now 1070) standards for college readiness–and they had an average GPA upon leaving of 3.2. These data show that these students were academically prepared and that other reasons contributed to why they were not retained at a UT System institution.

Finances

These reasons were not financial. These students had low financial risk, as evident by high expected family contributions ($25,092), and low unmet financial need ($1,490). Approximately a quarter (24%) of these students, however, did take out student loans for an average of $4,997. Again, it is unfortunate that there are so many students who are not retained at our institutions, but who acquire debt and leave higher education with no credential.

Social Belonging Metric

Based upon the findings, the affinity group proposes adoption of the measure defined by the percent of attrition attributable to a lack of social belonging. Per the interest of receptive partner institutions, this will be measured annually by identifying those students who are not retained at UT System academic institutions who have low unmet financial need (less than $5,500) and a passing GPA (greater than or equal to 2.0) upon leaving. This analysis can be done by the UT System Office of OSI. As stated above, the Belonging Affinity Group believes that, upon sharing this analysis and data, institutions will begin looking at this population of students and develop appropriate interventions to prevent student attrition and help more students be retained. This work would have a significant impact on improving retention rates and, in the process, institutional and student ROI

Conclusions and Next Steps

The substantial number of students who were not retained at UT System institutions due to what is likely a problem with academic belonging (23 percent of those who were not retained) or social belonging (25 percent) provides an opportunity for institutions to address student attrition and troubling retention rates. This analysis identifies clear populations of students for whom institutions should target interventions so that they do not leave due to academic or social belonging reasons.

For institutions that are interested in partnering with UT System to further explore this data, the Office of Academic Affairs and the Office of Strategic Initiatives plan to develop a process that provides these data to institutions annually. The insight these data provide could be instrumental in improving student success, including more strategic prioritization and allocation of student success funding. Moreover, this work could and should lead to the development of predictive analytics to reach out to students in the two belonging quadrants as they enter UT institutions as FTIC, developing and targeting appropriate interventions to help more students be retained, attain their degrees, and achieve heightened levels of academic, personal, and professional success.

VI
Assessment of Student Learning Affinity Group Report

THE UNIVERSITY of TEXAS SYSTEM
FOURTEEN INSTITUTIONS. UNLIMITED POSSIBILITIES.

Final Report – University of Texas System Student Success Affinity Group on Assessment

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND BACKGROUND

On November 5, 2015, Chancellor William McRaven shared his vision for excellence in The University of Texas System (UTS or System). His vision was defined by "Quantum Leaps"—bold steps forward that System would take in meeting the needs of the people of Texas. Under Dr. Rebecca Karoff's leadership, one of those Quantum Leaps is focused on improving student success across the UT System, particularly for undergraduate students at academic institutions. Dr. Karoff has outlined three pillars that define the foundational work of the student success initiative: Finances, Advising, and Belonging. In addition to the three pillars, the framework acknowledges the importance of the assessment of student learning, along with equity, as foundational to achieving any of the recommendations aligned with the three pillars of success. To measure both the impact of success interventions and to assess the value of higher education to students, a critical assessment of student learning outcomes is a necessary step toward identifying successful practices, assessing their impact, and providing feedback that could guide institutional decision-making and prioritization of funding.

To engage campuses as partners with UT System in this initiative, Dr. Karoff formed four "affinity groups" comprised of campus subject matter experts and co-directed by UT System staff and institutional staff. The affinity group on assessment was formed in Spring 2017 and commenced with working group meetings that would culminate in a thorough review of data and literature and provide a set of recommendations to UT System leadership. Assessment Affinity Group membership is listed below

Group Members:

Lou Ann Berman, Assistant Vice President for Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness, UT Tyler
Gloria Shenoy, Director of Assessment, UT Dallas
Jeff Freels, Director of Institutional Assessment, UT Austin
Marilyn Kaplan, Clinical Professor of Management, UT Dallas
Rebecca Lewis, Interim Assistant Vice Provost, UT Arlington
Kasey Neese-Fielder, Assistant Vice Provost for Assessment, UT San Antonio

Group Co-Chairs:

Toni Blum, Assistant Provost, UT El Paso
Kevin Lemoine, Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, UT System
Loraine Phillips, Assistant Vice Provost for Institutional Effectiveness and Reporting, UT Arlington

Four key questions initially guided the work of the affinity group on assessment:

1. What practices are in place to support and coordinate Undergraduate Research at each campus?
2. What student work could be collected at each campus to pilot this assessment?
3. What practices are in place to support and coordinate Student Leadership at each campus; and
4. What student work could be collected at each campus to pilot this assessment?

Affinity group members shared high-impact practices (HIPs) at their campuses and discussed how that would guide the recommendation process. Through that discussion, it was determined that the primary focus of this group would be ***on undergraduate research as a HIP*** and that more time was needed to thoroughly and accurately identify practices related to student leadership. Ken O'Donnell, Associate Vice Provost at California State University, was a guest at one of our meetings and offered some important commentary and guidance that helped us further refine our efforts. After some discussion, we agreed that the primary context of our work is to ***(1) make it clear that any student success agenda must address the quality of student learning, not just the retention, persistence, and graduation of students*** **and** ***(2) clearly address why we are recommending the use of specific metrics in the assessment of student learning.*** In addition to providing recommendations related to undergraduate research and metrics related to student learning assessment, we have also provided a review of relevant research, data, and institutional programs.

REVIEW OF RESEARCH, DATA AND RESOURCES

High-Impact Practices and Student Success

High-impact practices, or HIPs, have been the subject of intense discussion and research in higher education since 2008. According to George Kuh, who first coined the term in 2008, HIPs are educational practices involving undergraduate students that "demand considerable time and effort, require meaningful interactions between faculty and students, encourage collaboration with diverse others, and provide frequent and substantive feedback."[1] When well-crafted, these practices allow students to apply knowledge and skills they have obtained within and across the curriculum and augment them with practical experience.[2] By encouraging more purposeful engagement and integrative learning, a substantial body of research suggests that students involved in HIPs are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of academic achievement and persist and complete their college degrees.[3] Additionally, the knowledge and skills that students develop within HIPs map closely to the knowledge and skills that contemporary employers seek from new college graduates, which makes them beneficial from the perspective of workforce development.[4] All in all, the available research supports the idea that high-impact practices are an effective way to promote deep learning, on-time completion, and workforce success among today's college students.

Undergraduate Research as a High Impact Practice

The Association of American Colleges & Universities' (AAC&U) Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative has identified ten high-impact educational practices, including first-year seminars and experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, undergraduate research (UGR), and service and/or community-based learning.[5] In particular, UGR has attracted a great deal of attention from the higher education community because of its potential to "enrich the curriculum, lead to more creative and dynamic learning environments, generate opportunities for meaningful cross-campus discussions on curricula and pedagogy, foster research collaborations among faculty and departments, and enhance interdisciplinary activities." [6] Malachowski et al. (2015) further described UGR as "a high-impact practice that sparks students' interest in learning and love for the discipline and that improves retention, student success, graduation rates, and post-graduation achievement."[7] Recent studies support these conclusions, finding that participation in UGR led to higher levels of student attainment on a variety of educational outcomes,[8] gains in cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes and increased likelihood of graduating within six years,[9] and higher fourth-year student GPAs and first-year satisfaction levels.[10] Scholars investigating the efficacy of HIPs generally agree that UGR is one of the most effective of the high-impact practices at promoting a range of desired outcomes.

Current limitations of Assessment and Research into Undergraduate Research

Despite the encouraging state of research on UGR, the scholars who have explored the topic all agree on the need for further research and more rigorous methods in order to isolate its effects and highlight its most important aspects. These arguments are in concert with general calls to integrate more rigorous and direct assessment of student learning into research on HIPs.[11] Researchers contend that most of the studies on UGR rely entirely upon student self-reports, fail to control for students' self-selection into UGR experiences, and use inconsistent criteria to define UGR experiences.[12] Hansen and Schmidt (2017) called for fuller descriptions of the interventions that make up UGR experiences and direct assessment of students' learning within them.[13] Both argue that new approaches to the research of UGR are necessary in order to bring greater consistency and quality to new and existing UGR programs.

To more fully document and assess students' experiences within HIPs, innovative and modified approaches need to be considered. For example, the use of common analytic rubrics, such as the AAC&U Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) rubrics, "can be used to measure the extent that researching students apply skills in the areas of critical thinking, quantitative literacy, and teamwork."[14] Scholars in this area tend to agree that rigorous and integrated assessment approaches, with "multiple indicators of success," are needed to study the effects of HIPs and UGR and encourage further progress in advancing student success.

The Role of Systems in Implementing and Assessing Undergraduate Research HIPs

Research on the effectiveness of HIPs is compelling, but implementing them in a way that benefits students maximally can be a significant challenge. One possible method for doing so revolves around leveraging the influence and resources of systems and consortia.

The experience of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) is one model that bares out this argument. Partnering with multiple external organizations, PASSHE embarked on an initiative to improve students' educational outcomes and promote retention in which the expansion of system-wide UGR opportunities was a central part. PASSHE worked with institutions to develop a common measure of UGR, provided a collaborative space for component institutions to develop UGR programs appropriate to their unique contexts, and provided strategies and support for tracking data and monitoring success. The assistance provided by PASSHE in terms of developing the common measure and supporting monitoring and data acquisition was particularly important because, as researchers assert, "the lack of standard measures and an inability to demonstrate impact at the individual campus, let alone across a system or consortium" is a significant obstacle to scaling HIPs across campuses.[15] The success of the PASSHE effort in this area is attested to by the integration of UGR into the system-wide strategic plan approved in 2014.

Another relevant effort described in detail by Pelco and Babb exists at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) to establish a "systematic institutional assessment model … to investigate the impact of high impact educational practices (HIPs) on undergraduate student success." Using institutional data and direct and indirect assessments of students, VCU analyzed the rates at which diverse and traditionally underserved student populations participated in HIPs, the degree to which participation in a HIP impacted retention and graduation, and the relationship between participation in HIPs and student learning and development. As part of analyzing the relationship between HIPs and student learning, VCU asked students to respond to a survey and write a reflective response to a standardized prompt; students' responses were then evaluated using a five-part rubric. Although the VCU study was confined to students who participated in service learning and learning communities, the findings are nonetheless instructive.

Current UT System Undergraduate Research Initiatives

The working group engaged in data and information collection efforts in a review of existing Undergraduate Research Initiatives as described by UT System academic institutions on each public institutional website. Initiatives are described in Table 1 below:

Table 1: The University of Texas System -- Catalog of Undergraduate Research Programs and Efforts

Institution	Central office, or its closest equivalent	Major programs	Events	Publications
UT Arlington	Facilitated through the Office of the VP for Research	• Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program • Search for research expertise across disciplines	• Undergraduate Research Showcase Week in the fall • Annual Celebration of Excellence by Students (ACES) symposium in the spring	
UT Austin	Office of Undergraduate Research	• Freshman Research Initiative, in the College of Natural Sciences • EUREKA: searchable database of research opportunities	• Texas Student Research Showdown video competition • Research Week every spring	
UT Dallas	Office of Undergraduate Education	• Patti Henry Pinch Scholarship for Undergraduate Research • Research Explorer: searchable database of research opportunities	Research Week every spring, including a UG student research panel, poster contest, and "match day"	The Exley: The UT Dallas Undergraduate Research Journal
UT El Paso	Campus Office of Undergraduate Research Initiatives	• UGR zero credit course • BUILDING Scholars Grant • Summer Undergraduate Research Programs • Mentored Experiences program • Summer Program UGR assistantships	Symposia each spring and summer	
UT Permian Basin	No central office, but a faculty member appears to be a nominal director of UGR	• Research grants in 2016-2017	• Research day in the spring (?)	

UT Rio Grande Valley	The Office of Engaged Scholarship and Learning facilitates UGR and they have two coordinators dedicated to it	• Engaged Scholar Award for UGR • List of courses with UGR component	Engaged Scholar Symposium each spring	
UT San Antonio	Office of Undergraduate Research	• OUR Scholarship • A proposal is currently pending that would create a UGR certificate	Annual research showcase in the spring	UTSA Journal of Undergraduate and Scholarly Works
UT Tyler	Handled through the Honors program, known as the Lyceum	• Lyceum Honors program	Annual research showcase in the spring	

Data Review

The assessment group also analyzed data provided by the UT System Office of Strategic Initiatives on institutional data outcomes and metrics reported in both the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) for seven institutions and Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) data for UT Austin. In the NSSE data, the group focused on outcomes related to two specific questions in the primary module:

Question 11: Which of the following have you done or plan to do before you graduate?

- Participating in an internship, co-op, field experience, student teaching, or clinical placement
- Hold a formal leadership role in a student organization or group
- Participate in a community of learning or some other formal program where groups of students take two or more classes together
- Participate in a study abroad program
- Work with a faculty member on a research project
- Complete a culminating senior experience (capstone course, senior project, comprehensive exam, portfolio, etc).

Question 12: About how many of your courses at this institution have included a community-based project (service learning)?

We also reviewed the corresponding items from the SERU, in order to identify similar benchmarks for UT Austin. The attached crosswalk identifies the items.

Our review of the data show that all UT System schools are doing as well or better than their corresponding Carnegie classification in many of the High Impact Practice areas, though each institution has particular strengths. Several institutions have made recent strides in improving response rates for the NSSE and shared practices that should bolster these efforts for others. These instruments are well established and making better use of these data in a way that is more transparent to institutional constituents will benefit each campus in measuring changes in these practices over time.

RECOMMENDED METRICS

The Assessment Affinity Group proposes a multi-pronged approach to the assessment of student learning in the UT System, to include both indirect and direct measures:

(1) **We propose to monitor participation in High Impact Practices, via the review of specific items already collected through the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Student Experience in the Research University (SERU).** For the NSSE, these items would include questions 11 (a-f) and 12. For the SERU, see the attached crosswalk.

(2) **Because the specific learning outcome of interest is Critical Thinking, we propose to review data from NSSE items 2a, 2d, 2f and items 4, a-e, and the corresponding SERU items** (see attached crosswalk). These items relate to critical thinking, analysis, and higher-order learning.

(3) **For the direct measure of student learning, we propose to measure critical thinking proficiency among undergraduate students attending any UT System academic institution, specifically through artifacts related to a particular High-Impact Practice: undergraduate**

research activities. All UT System academic institutions would be encouraged to participate in the project and contribute sampled undergraduate student research artifacts.

In Phase 1 of the project (the first year) volunteer faculty assessment teams would convene at the end of the academic year to score sampled student work using the AAC&U Critical Thinking VALUE Rubric. After piloting this project with artifacts connected to Undergraduate Research, we expand this process to collect appropriate artifacts from students participating in other HIPs, such as Student Leadership activities. Long-term plans include adding additional general education student learning outcomes assessment.

All identifying information would be redacted so that faculty assessment team members would not know the names of the students, faculty, courses, or institutions during the scoring sessions. The student artifacts would be coded by assessment organizers in order to provide disaggregated results back to each participating institution for analyses and planning back on each home campus.

The first day of scoring include norming exercises in the morning session. Faculty teams would score the student documents during the afternoon session. Faculty would convene on the second day to analyze the direct assessment results and to review reports on corresponding SERU/NSSE items related to HIPS participation and to Critical Thinking. Faculty would then make recommendations on potential strategies at the System level that may enhance critical thinking proficiency for students on all campuses for discussion back on each home campus.

Participating faculty volunteers would be invited to complete a follow-up survey on the quality of their experience and to share information on ways to improve future scoring sessions.

Phase Two of the plan adds assessment of a Student Leadership Experience, to be selected in part based on a program or programs that 1) target under-served students and 2) include defined criteria/characteristics to ensure some commonality across those programs being assessed.

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) **The Assessment Affinity group recommends seeking support from the AAC&U Value Institute for organizing the calibration and review sessions using the Critical Thinking Value Rubric.** We ask that the UT System commence discussions with the Value Institute to determine what resources would be needed to compensate faculty raters, arrange for their training/calibration, and bring them together for the rating session.

(2) In addition, we recommend **that a single online platform** be used for uploading and maintenance of the student artifacts and rating data, similar to the platform used in the Multi-states Collaborative project.

(3)) The Assessment Affinity group also recommends that **the UT System coordinate the requests** from other Affinity groups using NSSE/SERU data within their metrics and consider if using the UT System consortium to create a custom set of questions for NSSE/SERU might benefit the project more broadly. Co-Chairs from each group could potentially collaborate to determine the feasibility of this step.

(4) (7) Once the pilot year is completed, we recommend **exploring the development of a pre-post indirect measure** that explores growth in specific aspects of Critical Thinking, to be developed along the lines of the Design-Thinking measures developed by Stanford's Helen Chen.

This recommendation would require modest resources, such as securing the cooperation of the VALUE Institute, travel and compensation for faculty raters, and an infrastructure tool for collecting and maintaining artifacts. To whatever extent possible, we recommend using existing tools. This recommendation may require consultation with outside experts and travel for those involved in the development of the tool.

Executive Summary

The three pillars of Finances, Belonging, and Advising are designed to retain students, to engage them in the life of the university and community, and to guide them to completion of a degree and into a life of fruitful employment and contribution to society. Ultimately, any metrics of student success must include measures of the quality of student learning, as well. The metrics we suggest for evaluating learning are aligned precisely with the goals of engagement and completion represented in the other pillars. Moreover, resources will be manageable, as the methods propose reviewing student work arising from these already recognized efforts (engagement in undergraduate research, student leadership activities, and other similar curricular and co-curricular practices), using a well-established rubric (the Critical Thinking VALUE rubric), and taking advantage of available resources (NSSE/SERU data, AAC&U VALUE Institute). Our review of campus practices shows that our institutions are ready to take this step and begin a pilot year of collecting and reviewing these student artifacts with a common set of goals, while retaining campus autonomy in establishing growth benchmarks over time. Feedback from the higher education community indicates that taking these steps will place the UT System at the forefront of best practices in implementation and measurement of learning in high-impact practices, leading the way to a new definition of student success.

Attachment 1: SERU Crosswalk (link):

NSSE-SERU Question Crosswalk

ENDNOTES

[1] Kuh, G. D. (2008). *High-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

[2] Landy, K. (2015). Structure, connectivity, and authenticity: The how and why of high-impact practices. *About Campus*, *19*(6), 29–32. https://doi.org/10.1002/abc.21177 and

Pelco, L., & Baab, J. (2016). *High impact practices (HIPS) assessment model: 2015-2016 pilot mid-year report* (p. 21). Richmond, VA: Virginia Commonwealth University.

[3] Finley, A., & McNair, T. (2013). *Assessing underserved students' engagement in high-impact practices* (p. 68). Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities and

Kilgo, C., Sheets, J., & Pascarella, E. (2015). The link between high-impact practices and student learning: Some longitudinal evidence. *Higher Education*, *69*(4), 509–525. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-014-9788-z

[4] Association of American Colleges and Universities. (2015). *Falling short? College learning and career success* (p. 13). Washington, DC. and

Moran III, J. D., Wells, M. J., & Smith-Aumen, A. (2015). Making undergraduate research a central strategy in high-impact practice reform: The PASSHE journey. *New Directions for Higher Education*, *2015*(169), 61–71. https://doi.org/10.1002/he.20123

[5] Kuh, G. D., & O'Donnell, K. (2013). *Ensuring quality and taking high-impact practices to scale*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

[6] Malachowski, M., Osborn, J. M., Karukstis, K. K., & Ambos, E. L. (2015). Realizing student, faculty, and institutional outcomes at scale: Institutionalizing undergraduate research, scholarship, and creative activity within systems and consortia. *New Directions for Higher Education*, *2015*(169), 3–13. https://doi.org/10.1002/he.20118

[7] Malachowski, M., Osborn, J. M., Karukstis, K. K., Ambos, E. L., Kincaid, S. L., & Weiler, D. (2015). Fostering undergraduate research change at the system and consortium level: Perspectives from the Council on Undergraduate Research. *New Directions for Higher Education*, *2015*(169), 95–106. https://doi.org/10.1002/he.20126

[8] Kilgo, C., Sheets, J., & Pascarella, E. (2015). The link between high-impact practices and student learning: Some longitudinal evidence. *Higher Education*, *69*(4), 509–525. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-014-9788-z

[9] Rodenbusch, S. E., Hernandez, P. R., Simmons, S. L., & Dolan, E. L. (2016). Early engagement in course-based research increases graduation rates and completion of science, engineering, and mathematics degrees. *CBE Life Sciences Education*, *15*(2), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.16-03-0117

[10] Bowman, N. A., & Holmes, J. M. (2017). Getting off to a good start? First-year undergraduate research experiences and student outcomes. *Higher Education*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-017-0191-4

[11] Swaner, L. E., & Brownell, J. E. (2010). *Outcomes of high impact practices for underserved students: A review of the literature*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

[12] Linn, M. C., Palmer, E., Baranger, A., Gerard, E., & Stone, E. (2015). Undergraduate research experiences: Impacts and opportunities. *Science*, *347*(6222), 1261757, 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1261757

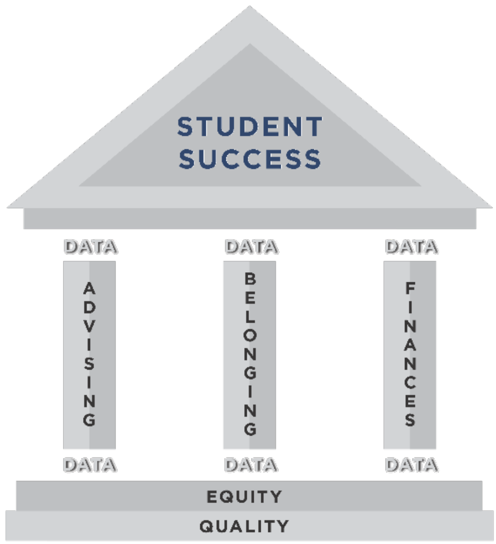
[13] Hansen, M. J., & Schmidt, L. (2017). The synergy of and readiness for high-impact practices during the first year of college. *Journal of The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, *29*(1), 57–82.

[14] Zilvinskis, J. (2015). Using authentic assessment to reinforce student learning in high-impact practices. *Assessment Update*, *27*(6), 7–8, 12. https://doi.org/10.1002/au

[15] Gagliardi, J. S., Martin, R. R., Wise, K., & Blaich, C. (2015). The system effect: Scaling high-impact practices across campuses. *New Directions for Higher Education*, *2015*(169), 15–26. https://doi.org/10.1002/he.20119

VII
UT System Student Success Data Exploration: A Focus on First-Year Attrition (Student Success Quadrants Analysis)

UT System Student Success Data Exploration: A Focus on First-Year Attrition



University of Texas Offices of Strategic Initiatives and Academic Affairs

David Troutman, Ph. D., Associate Vice Chancellor, Office of Strategic Initiatives

Lydia Riley, Research and Policy Analyst, Office of Academic Affairs

Working Paper

December, 2017

Table of Contents

Background and Introduction

As part of the University of Texas System's Quantum Leap in student success, Affinity Groups were established as communities of practice to provide leadership in recommending best practices and metrics to support students in the areas of finances, advising and belonging. **The purpose of this brief report is to describe the data-driven process put in place by the Affinity Groups to inform their final recommendations and metrics, and to highlight key findings.**

There is an expectation for institutions of higher education nationally to increase their 4- and 6-year graduation rates. It is critical for institutions to determine which population to focus on–given that budget constraint make it nearly impossible to meet the financial, academic and social needs of all students. One approach is to focus on entering "at risk" freshman cohorts of students since first-year retention is a leading indicator of future graduation rates–this was the approach used at UT Austin that led to an increase in 4-year graduation rates of fifteen points in five years. Across UT System academic institutions, approximately one in five students do not return after their first year. Based on national surveys and exit interviews, college students often cite financial reasons, academic preparation and performance issues, and competing family and social obligations as factors for why they do not complete a degree.

Currently, UT System does not require the academic institutions to collect exit interviews or surveys for students who leave the institutions so there is a lack of insight for why UT students leave. Using a series of data mining techniques, we can begin to understand student characteristics associated with students who leave and thus help identify the underlying causes of first-year attrition. Therefore, The University of Texas Offices of Strategic Initiatives and Academic Affairs, in collaboration with the Affinity Groups, conducted several analyses to identify common drivers of first-year student attrition in the UT System so that institutions might develop or enhance predictive models to identify students at risk as they enter their freshman year.

Data and Methods

A dataset was created of more than 44,600 first-time-in-college (FTIC) freshmen from fall 2014 and 2015 cohorts attending the eight UT System academic institutions (UT Rio Grande Valley had only one cohort in the dataset because the campus' first cohort is fall 2015) Variables in the dataset included student demographics, academic characteristics (pre- and post-matriculation), financial aid information and student success outcomes (GPA and retention). A linked data set was created using National Student Clearinghouse to determine whether students enrolled at another institution of higher education. The purpose of the dataset was exploratory in nature; it was intended as a critical starting point to develop ad hoc analytic plans that would lead to the identification of common drivers of first-year attrition.

Due to the complexity of the data, there will be multiple phases to the data mining approach. Phase one will include three steps: 1) descriptive (unmet need cliff analysis), 2) exploratory data mining techniques (cluster analysis), and 3) analysis of quadrants. These techniques will provide the information needed to identify unique student characteristics associated with student attrition at each institution. Using what is learned from the exploratory data mining, phase two will employ predictive analytics (regression) to create a predictive model of attrition for each institution. Phase three will provide actionable tools and strategies based on phase one and two findings that can be implemented at the institutions. This paper will provide a description of the findings for phase one efforts.

Phase One Findings

Step One: Unmet Need Cliff

Unmet need, defined as the total cost of attendance minus grants, scholarships, loan aid and parental expected contribution, is a common indicator of college student financial risk. Unmet need focuses on the gap between the cost of attending college and the financial resources that are available to students. Presumably, students will have to fill this gap with earned income. Across UT academic institutions in Fall 2015, approximately sixty percent of undergraduate students had some level of unmet need, and approximately forty percent of students had greater than $6,000 of unmet need. Based on research conducted by EAB, it was hypothesized that as the level of unmet need increases, first-year retention would decrease, with a precipitous drop at a certain point of unmet need. Following the methodology recommended by EAB, an "unmet need cliff analysis" was conducted to determine if there was a level of unmet need that results in a sharp drop in first year student retention.

The results were mixed, with UT El Paso and UT Permian Basin showing significant declines in first-year retention at greater than $10,000 and UT Arlington and UT Dallas at greater than $15,000 of unmet need (Table 1). Contrary to the hypothesis, first-year retention at UT Rio Grande Valley slightly increased as the level of unmet need increased. At three institutions (UT Austin, UT San Antonio and UT Tyler), there were no significant differences in first-year retention for students at different levels of unmet need. **These findings suggest that unmet financial need alone is not a primary driver of first-year retention, thus highlighting a need to also move beyond traditional financial risk indicators to identify students who are at risk of leaving for financial reasons.** Appendix A shows the level of attrition at various levels of unmet need for each UT Academic institution for the fall 2014 and 2015 cohorts. Rows highlighted in orange represent precipitous drops in retention.

Step Two: Cluster analysis

Next, a series of cluster analyses were conducted to identify specific student risk profiles for first-time freshmen who are not retained. Cluster analysis is a data mining tool that "groups data objects based only on information found in the data that describes the objects and their relationships. The goal is that the objects within a group be similar (or related) to one another and different from (or unrelated to) the objects in other groups" (Tan, Steinbach, & Kumar, 2006).

The analysis yielded for each UT academic institution three or four unique "clusters" of students, each consisting of students that shared a set of distinguishing characteristics. In-depth review of the data revealed commonalities among the clusters across institutions. For example, most institutions had one or more cluster that could be characterized by a conspicuous lack of risk factors; they tended to have–relative to other students that were not retained at their institution– lower levels of unmet financial need and/or higher expected family contribution (EFC), higher SAT scores and GPAs (Table 1). If these students alone were retained their first-year, UT System could increase its first-year retention rate by 4%.

Table 1. UT System Cluster Analysis: Students with Low Risk Factors That Were Not Retained After Their First Year

	Number of Students	Average EFC	Average Unmet Need	Average SAT	% with GPA above 2.0
UT Arlington	302	$28,476	$571	1151	79
UT Austin	159	$27,076	$1,655	1300	81
	25	$6,673	$1,334	1245	84
UT Dallas	187	$42,702	$1,151	1250	87
UT El Paso	175	$23,282	$1,490	980	69
UT Permian Basin	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
UT Rio Grande Valley	21	$3,924	$2,697	1100	63
UT San Antonio	907	$30,789	$1,382	1,118	78
UT Tyler	54	$20,496	$2,145	1,238	87

Approximately 437 of these students enrolled at UT Austin the following fall as part of the Coordinated Admissions Program (CAP).

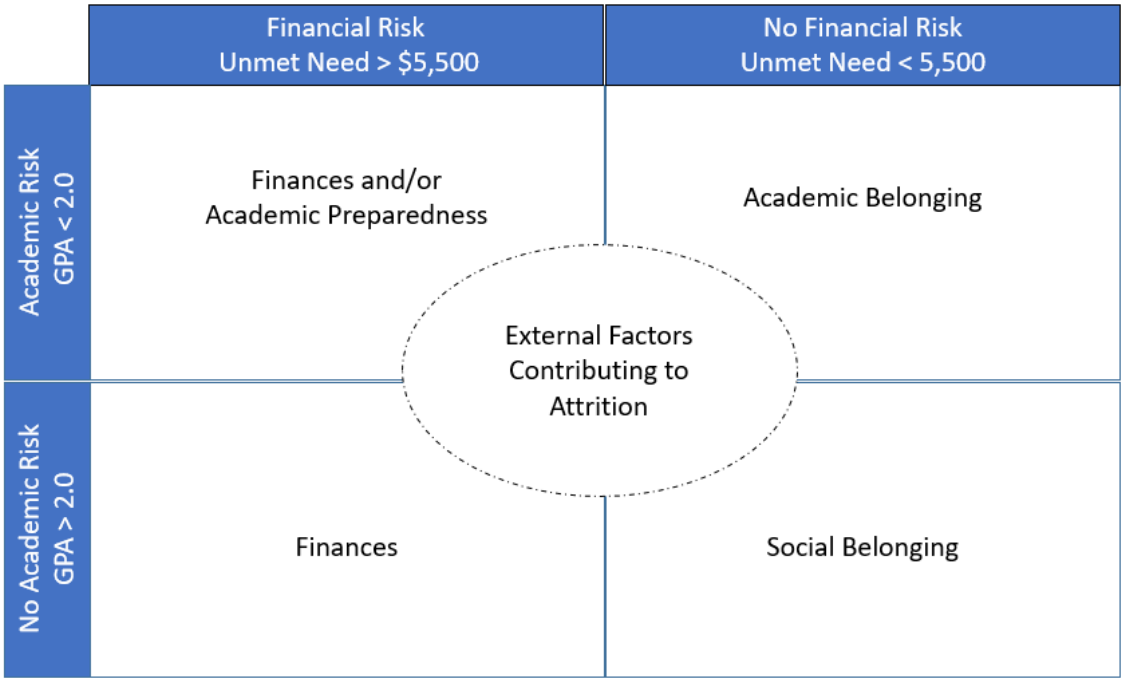
Overall, clusters of students who were not retained after their first year could be categorized into four distinct groups: 1) students with academic and financial risk factors; 2) students with academic risk factors only; 3) students with financial risk factors only; and 4) students with neither academic nor financial risk factors.

Step Three: Analysis of The Four Quadrants of Student Attrition

Through the findings of the cluster analysis emerged a new framework for which to study student attrition in the UT System (Figure 1). The *Four Quadrants of First-Year Attrition* for the fall 2015 cohort was developed and categorizes students who are not retained based on combinations of financial risk, defined as having unmet financial need of greater than or less than $5,500, and academic risk, defined as having above or below a 2.0 GPA. The threshold of $5,500 for unmet need is based on a student making minimum wage having to work no more than 19 hours per week to fill the financial gap. It was decided to set the threshold for GPA at 2.0 because students typically receive their lowest GPAs in their first two semesters.

While each quadrant is intended to represent the underlying reason for student attrition, we recognize that our students are complex and leave for reasons other than finances, academics and social belonging. Please note that students who were admitted into the Coordinated Admission Program were excluded from all analyses in step three.

Figure 1. Four Quadrants of First-Year Attrition

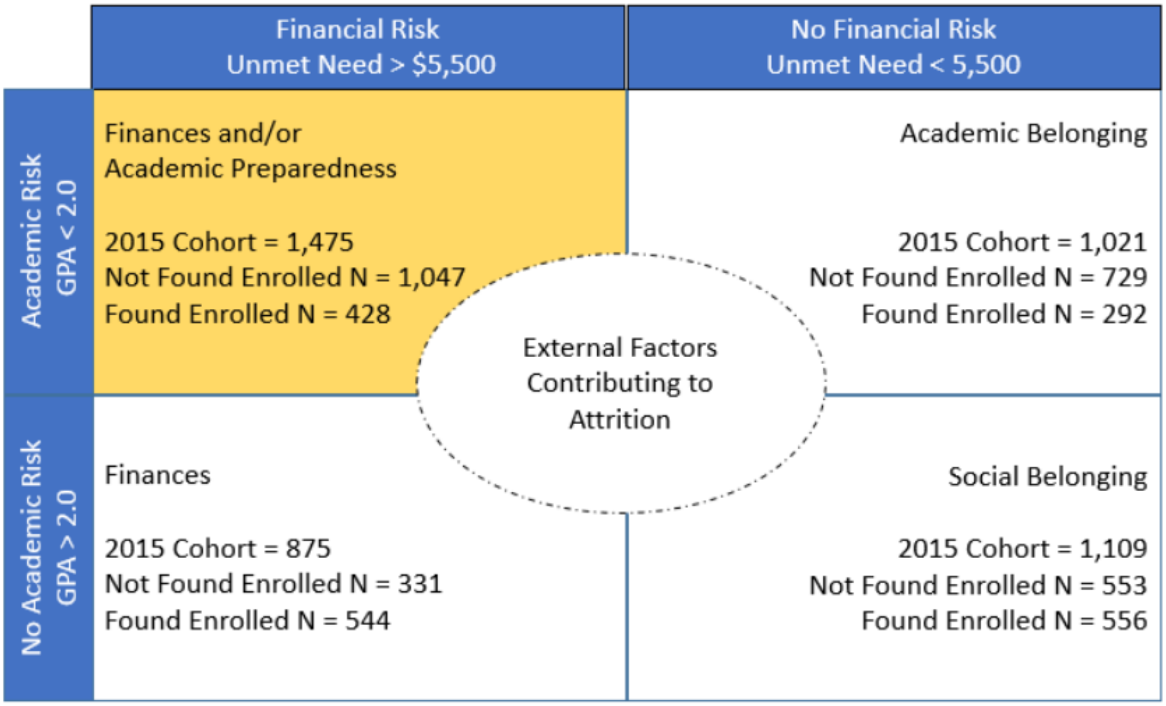


Finances and Academic Preparedness

The risk profile of students in the upper left-hand quadrant–since they have low GPAs and high unmet need–is represented as Finances and Academic Preparation. This quadrant represents the largest of the four groups, with 1,475 of the 4,480 students falling into this category (33 percent) (Figure 2). The majority of students in this quadrant did not enroll elsewhere (71%), were Hispanic (75%) and were receiving Pell grants (89%). Their average unmet need (excluding loans) was $11,424. Approximately half took out loans (48%) and the average amount was $4,703. Very few of these students were receiving scholarships (9%) or work study (1.6%). The average GPA of these students upon leaving the institution was 1.0 and the average SAT score of was a 962–significantly lower than the 1070 standard to be considered by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board as "college ready".

High levels of unmet need, coupled with low participation in the work study program suggests these students were likely employed off-campus and working in excess of 20 hours per week. These students could have benefited from on-campus employment not only to help meet their financial needs, but also to increase access to academic support programs through keeping them on campus. The low average SAT scores and GPA suggest that these students were not adequately prepared for college-level coursework and could have benefited from a variety of academic support interventions such as learning communities, peer tutoring and supplemental instruction.

Figure 2. The Four Quadrants of First-Year Attrition, Finances and Academic Preparedness



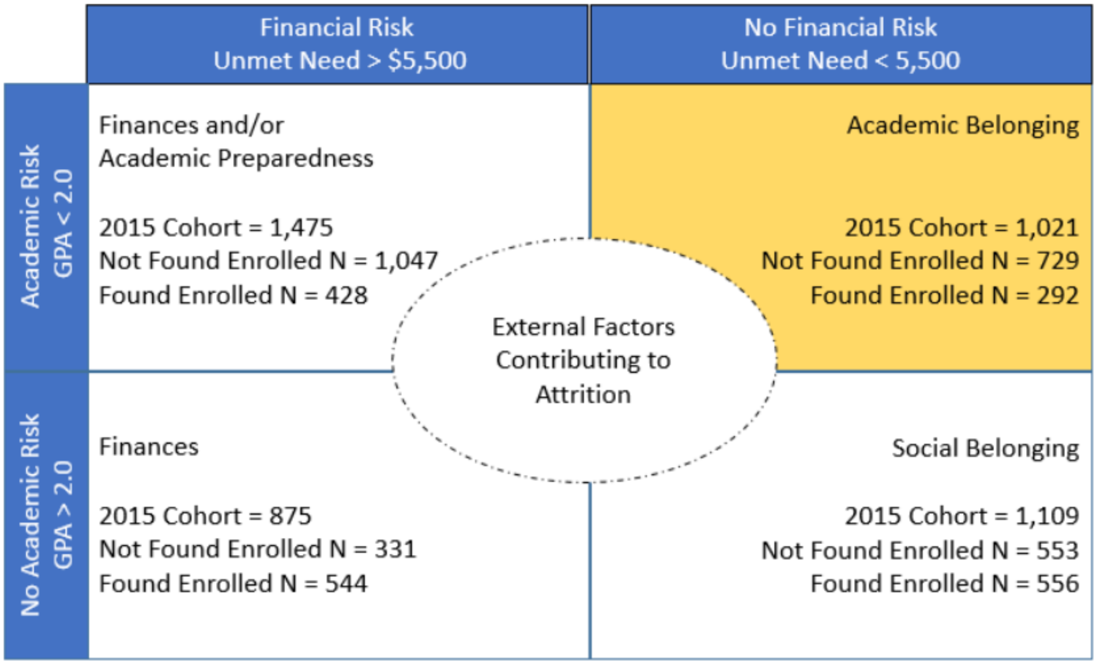
Academic Belonging

The risk profile of students in the upper right-hand quadrant was conceptualized as Academic Belonging, because these students, on average, met the "college-ready" standard based on SAT scores, yet performed poorly once enrolled. The average SAT of these students was 1056 but their average GPA upon leaving the institutions was 0.9. Therefore, the poor performance of these students in college-level coursework does not appear to be due to a lack of preparation but instead due to a lack of engagement. Furthermore, these students did not possess financial risk factors; on average, the expected family contribution for these students was $18,947 and the average unmet financial need was only $2,039.

Of the 1,021 students that were not retained for academic belonging issues, 652 (64%) were male. Of those male students, 70 percent, based upon National Student Clearing House data, did not enroll at another institution of higher education in fall 2016. The majority of students not retained were Hispanic (51%), and 71 percent of those students were not enrolled in higher education the following fall semester.

Interventions for this quadrant of should seek to engage students in academically meaningful and challenging activities. High-Impact Practices (HIPs), such as undergraduate research, learning communities and service learning projects could be a potential solution to help renew these students' sense of academic belonging. Expanding opportunities for faculty-student interactions could also be beneficial, particularly with faculty within their intended area of study or specialization.

Figure 3. The Four Quadrants of First-Year Attrition, Academic Belonging



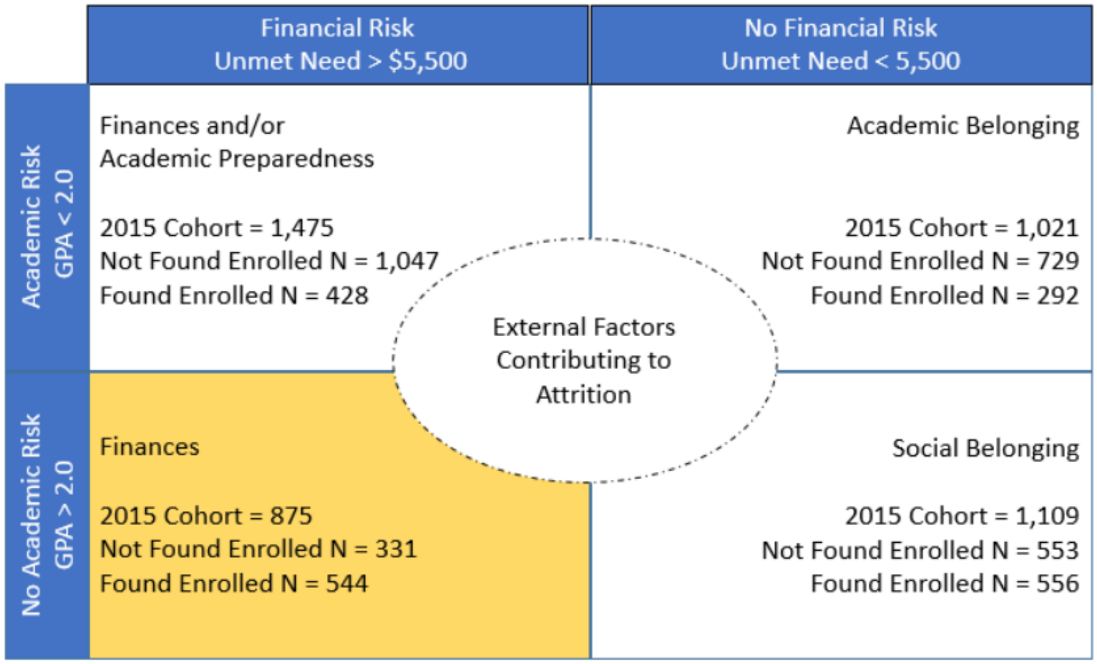
Finances

The lower left-hand quadrant–students who have GPAs above 2.0 but unmet need above $5,500–represents students who left due to Finances. Out of the four quadrants, this group was the smallest representing approximately twenty percent of attrition, and the students were most likely to enroll at another institution after leaving; nearly one-third were found enrolled elsewhere, often at community and technical colleges. Fifty-six percent of students in the Finances quadrant were female and the majority (66%) were Hispanic.

On average, the unmet financial need (excluding loans) of this group was $11,215, and expected family contribution was $3,328. Upon leaving, their average GPA was 2.9. These students were the most likely to take out loans; approximately fifty-two percent had a lone for an average of $5,052. The majority were Pell Grant recipients (70%), and fourteen percent were receiving scholarships.

These students performed well academically in spite of high levels of unmet financial need (excluding loans). The average level of unmet need of this group suggests that these students work off-campus jobs in excess of 20 hours per week to make ends meet, making them particularly vulnerable to dropping out due to underemployment or unemployment. These students should be connected upon enrollment to campus career centers that can help locate employment either on campus or in the community. Additionally, these students should be made aware of the availability of campus and community programs such as food pantries and emergency aid programs.

Figure 4. The Four Quadrants of First-Year Attrition, Finances



Social Belonging

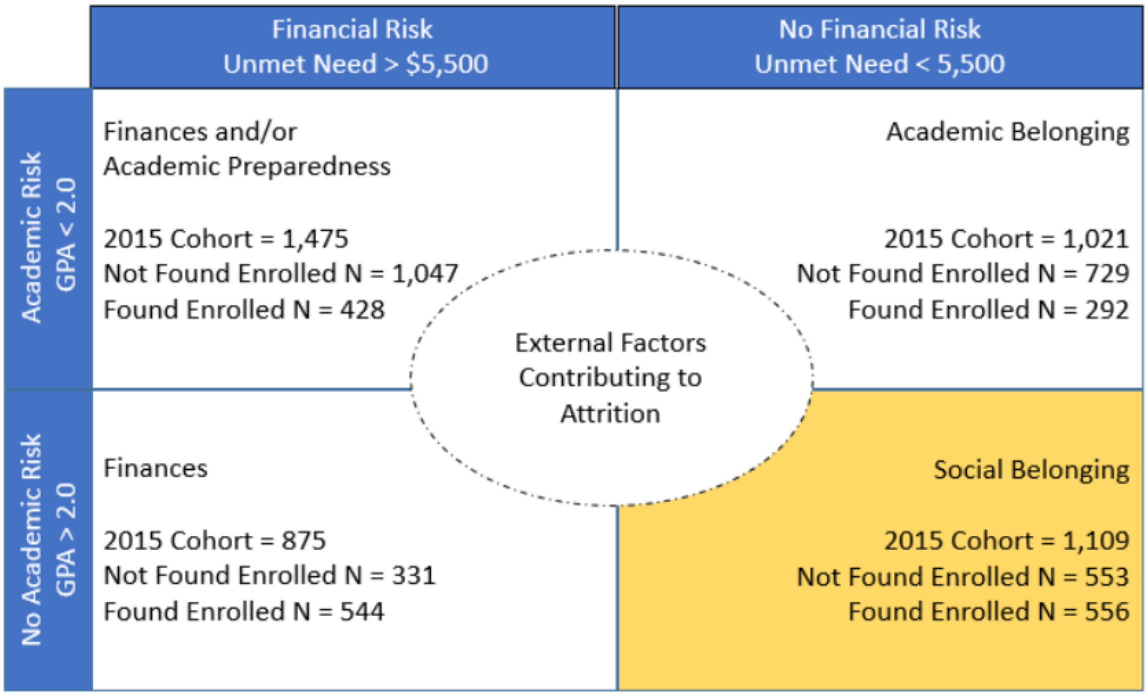
The risk profile of students in lower right-hand quadrant is conceptualized as Social Belonging because these students do not possess either academic or financial risk factors. The average SAT for students in this quadrant was 1122–well above the standards for college readiness–and they had an average GPA upon leaving of 3.2. The average family contribution of these students was $25,092 and their average level of unmet need (excluding loans) was approximately $1,500. These data suggest that these students did not leave for due to academic or financial hardship. Therefore, it is conceivable that these students dropped out due to a lack of social belonging.

Whether or not students are found enrolled elsewhere the following fall can further characterize the issue; students found enrolled at another institution may have felt they did not belong at their UT institution, while students not found enrolled may have felt they did not belong in college at all. Of all the students that left due to social belonging, fifty percent were not enrolled at another institution of higher education the following fall.

The social belonging quadrant represents the second largest of the four groups, with twenty-five percent of students falling into this category. The gender of the students in this quadrant were evenly split, with 53 percent being female and 47 percent being male. A substantial number of the students in the quadrant related to social belonging were Hispanic (37%) or White (32%).

Providing opportunities for these students to engage in activities that foster a sense of belonging may result in the biggest return on investment since these students are not likely to require additional financial assistance or academic support. First-year experience programs, living/learning communities, student organizations and other co-curricular experiences could help provide the social connections that are foundational to a positive college experience and increase the likelihood for student retention.

Figure 5. The Four Quadrants of Student Attrition, Social Belonging



Conclusion

The diversity of students within the UT System requires us to move beyond traditional student success metrics and using innovative analytic approaches to identify opportunities for improvement. While students often cite financial reasons for leaving higher education, our analyses indicate that academic and social belonging issues also have significant consequences on first-year retention. Therefore, Affinity Groups developed new and innovative metrics to track the percentage of attrition attributable to Academic and Social Belonging across the UT System.

The application of these findings can serve the UT academic institutions in profound ways. Through further analysis of the Four Quadrants of First-Year Attrition in the UT System and the development of predictive models, these data can support the strategic allocation of resources and evaluation of campus interventions for first-year students. Thereafter, the quadrant framework can similarly be used to understand the drivers of second- and third-year attrition, creating a complete picture for institutions of the risk factors associated with attrition at different stages of enrollment, ultimately increasing 4- and 6-year graduation rates.

References

Tan, P., Steinbach, M., & Kumar, V. (2006). Introduction to data mining. Boston, MA: Pearson Addison Wesley.

Appendix A

Table 1. First-Year Retention of First-time, Resident Freshman by level of Unmet Need, Fall 2014 and Fall 2015 Entering Cohorts.

	Unmet Need	Count	Retained	Retention
UT Austin	No Unmet Need	7,851	7,447	94.9
	$1 - $5,000	1,987	1,854	93.3
	$5,000 - $8,000	1,243	1,157	93.1
	$8,000 - $12,000	1,307	1,206	92.3
	$12,000 - $15,000	510	473	92.8
	>$15,000	406	380	93.6
	Total	13,304	12,517	94.1
UTA	No Unmet Need	1,851	1,255	67.8
	$1 - $5,000	1,292	919	71.1
	$5,000 - $10,000	1,324	899	67.9
	$10,000 - $15,000	596	400	67.1
	>$15,000	149	85	57.1
	Total	5,212	3,558	68.3
UTD	No Unmet Need	2,751	2,350	85.4
	$1 - $5,000	579	501	86.5
	$5,000 - $8,000	437	371	84.9
	$8,000 - $15,000	911	766	84.1
	>$15,000	229	150	65.5
	Total	4,907	4,138	84.3
UTEP	No Unmet Need	1,151	754	65.5
	$1 - $6,000	1,642	1,298	79.1
	$6,000 - $10,000	1,524	1,155	75.8
	$10,000 - $15,000	1,121	592	52.8
	$15,000 - $20,000	401	211	52.6
	>$20,000	120	49	40.8
	Total	5,959	4,059	68.1
UTPB	No Unmet Need	374	256	68.5
	$1 - $3,000	153	105	68.6
	$3,000 - $6,000	115	85	73.9
	$6,000 - $10,000	112	78	69.6
	>$10,000	92	45	48.9
	Total	846	569	67.3
UTRGV	No Unmet Need	865	660	76.3

	$1 - $6,000	1,200	881	73.4
	$6,000 - $7,000	1,215	947	77.9
	$7,000 - $10,000	573	486	84.8
	>$10,000	212	189	89.2
	Total	4,065	3,163	77.8
UTSA	**No Unmet Need**	3,347	2,157	64.5
	$1 - $4,000	1,500	1,043	69.5
	$4,000 - $8,000	2,183	1,544	70.7
	$8,000 - $12,000	1,532	1,098	71.7
	$12,000 - $15,000	696	478	68.7
	>$15,000	425	299	70.4
	Total	9,683	6,619	68.4
UTT	**No Unmet Need**	791	467	59.0
	$1 - $5,000	210	136	64.8
	$5,000 - $8,000	156	95	60.9
	$8,000 - $12,000	139	81	58.3
	>$12,000	107	65	60.8
	Total	1,403	844	60.2

VIII
Appendices

Appendix A
Affinity Group
Members

STUDENT SUCCESS AFFINITY GROUP MEMBERS

Finances Affinity Group

NAME	TITLE	CAMPUS	EMAIL
Kristin Croyle, Co-Chair	Vice President for Student Success and Professor of Psychology	UT Rio Grande Valley	Kristin.croyle@utrgv.edu
Stephen Harris, Co-Chair	Director, Strategic Design & Initiatives	UT System	sharris@utsystem.edu
Karen Krause	Executive Director, Office of Financial Aid & Scholarships	UT Arlington	kkrause@uta.edu
Diane Todd Sprague	Director, Office of Financial Aid	UT Austin	dtsprague@austin.utexas.edu
Cheryl Friesenhahn	Director, Financial Services	UT Dallas	cherylf@utdallas.edu
Roy Mathew	Associate Vice President, Center for Institutional Evaluation, Research and Planning	UT El Paso	rmathew@utep.edu
Ed Kerestly	Director of Financial Aid (through July)	UT Permian Basin	kerestly_c@utpb.edu
Michelle Alvarado	Lecturer III, University College department	UT Rio Grande Valley	michelle.alvarado1@utrgv.edu
Lisa Blazer	Senior Associate Vice President for Student Affairs	UT San Antonio	LISA.BLAZER@UTSA.EDU
Susan Doty	Founding Director of the Center for Economic Education and Financial Literacy & Senior Lecturer in Economics	UT Tyler	SusanDoty@uttyler.edu
David Coursey	Associate Professor of Public Affairs	FAC/UT Arlington	david.coursey@uta.edu
Scott Lapinski	Director of Student Financial Aid	UT Tyler	SLapinski@uttyler.edu
Lydia Riley, Staff	Research and Policy Analyst	UT System	lriley@utsystem.edu

Advising Affinity Group

NAME	TITLE	CAMPUS	EMAIL
William Harlow, Co-Chair	Dean of Undergraduate Studies and Professor of Communication	UT Permian Basin	harlow_w@utpb.edu
Ashley Purgason, Co-Chair	Associate Vice Provost for Strategic Initiatives	UT Arlington	purgason@uta.edu
Meredith Goode, Co-Chair	Director of Academic Policy and Analytics	UT System	mgoode@utsystem.edu
Liz Hannabas	Director, University Advising Center	UT Arlington	hannabas@uta.edu
Cassandre Alvarado	Director of Special Initiatives in Enrollment and Graduation Management	UT Austin	cassandre.alvarado@austin.utexas.edu

STUDENT SUCCESS AFFINITY GROUP MEMBERS

Lupita Camarillo	Director of Undergraduate Advising, School of Natural Sciences & Mathematics	UT Dallas	Gxc122130@utdallas.edu
Kellie Hanford	Assistant Director of Transfer Student Services	UT Dallas	kellie@utdallas.edu
Ivette Savina	Assistant Vice President for Outreach & Student Access	UT El Paso	isavina@utep.edu
Betsy Castro	Director, University Career Center	UT El Paso	bcastro@utep.edu
John Indiatsi	Director of Academic Advising	UT Permian Basin	indiatsi_j@utpb.edu
Gabriel Bermea	Director, Academic Advising Center	UT Rio Grande Valley	gabriel.bermea@utrgv.edu
Tammy Wyatt	Associate Vice Provost for Student Success	UT San Antonio	TAMMY.WYATT@UTSA.EDU
Kerri Camp	Associate Professor of Marketing	UT Tyler	KCamp@uttyler.edu
Tom Ingram	Parliamentarian of FAC and Associate Professor, Communications	FAC/UT Arlington	ingram@uta.edu
Amanda Longtain, Staff	Project Manager	UT System	alongtain@utsystem.edu

Belonging Affinity Group: Academic

NAME	TITLE	CAMPUS	EMAIL
David Ruiter, Co-Chair	Associate Provost and AVP for Academic Affairs; Associate Professor of English	UT El Paso	druiter@utep.edu
Rebecca Karoff, Co-Chair	Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs	UT System	rkaroff@utsystem.edu
Jessica Murphy	Dean of Undergraduate Education & Associate Professor of Literary Studies	UT Dallas	jessica.c.murphy@utdallas.edu
Antoinette Sol	Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs & Professor of Modern Languages	UT Arlington	amsol@uta.edu
Sue Harkins	Assistant Dean & Lecturer, College of Natural Studies	UT Austin	sharkins@austin.utexas.edu
Courtney Brecheen	Associate Dean, Undergraduate Education	UT Dallas	courtneyb@utdallas.edu
Michael Frawley	Assistant Professor of History & FYE Coordinator	UT Permian Basin	frawley_m@utpb.edu
Jonikka Charlton	Associate Vice President for Student Academic Success	UT Rio Grande Valley	Jonikka.charlton@utrgv.edu
Rhonda Gonzales	Associate Vice Provost for Strategic Initiatives & Professor of History	UT San Antonio	RHONDA.GONZALES@UTSA.EDU

STUDENT SUCCESS AFFINITY GROUP MEMBERS

Wycliffe Njororai	Professor, Health and Kinesiology & Faculty Senate President-Elect	UT Tyler	wnjororai@uttyler.edu
Jody Jensen	Professor of Kinesiology and Health Education, and Past Chair, Faculty Council	FAC/UT Austin	jljensen@austin.utexas.edu
Elizabeth Mayer, Staff	Senior Research and Policy Analyst	UT System	emayer@utsystem.edu

Belonging Affinity Group: Social

NAME	TITLE	CAMPUS	EMAIL
Louie Rodriguez, Co-Chair	Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs	UT El Paso	lrodriguez35@utep.edu
Rebecca Karoff, Co-Chair	Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs	UT System	rkaroff@utsystem.edu
Carol Longoria	Deputy to Vice President for Student Affairs	UT Austin	carol@po.utexas.edu
Kimshi Hickman	Assistant Vice President, Office of Enrollment Management	UT Arlington (formerly UT Dallas)	kimshi.hickman@uta.edu
Nicole Aguilar	Director of Student Engagement and Leadership Center	UT El Paso	nicole@utep.edu
Tonya Paulette	Director of Student Accessibility Services	UT Rio Grande Valley	tonya.paulette01@utrgv.edu
Lydia Bueno	Assistant Dean of Students	UT San Antonio	LYDIA.BUENO@UTSA.EDU
Sarah Bowdin	Assistant Vice President for Enrollment Management	UT Tyler	sbowdin@uttyler.edu
Lisa Nagy	Vice President for Student Affairs	UT Arlington	nagy@uta.edu
Ona Tolliver	Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students	UT Tyler	OTolliver@uttyler.edu
Cathy Delgado, Staff	Senior Research and Policy Analyst	UT System	cdelgado@utsystem.edu

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

NAME	TITLE	CAMPUS	EMAIL
Kevin Lemoine, Co-Chair	Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs	UT System	klemoine@utsystem.edu
Toni Blum, Co-Chair	Assistant Provost	UT El Paso	tlblum@utep.edu
Jeff Freels	Director of Institutional Assessment	UT Austin	jeff.freels@austin.utexas.edu
Gloria Shenoy	Director of Assessment	UT Dallas	gloria@utdallas.edu

STUDENT SUCCESS AFFINITY GROUP MEMBERS

LouAnn Berman	Assistant Vice President for Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness	UT Tyler	LBerman@uttyler.edu
Kasey Neece-Fielder	Associate Vice Provost for Assessment	UT San Antonio	kasey.neece-fielder@utsa.edu
Rebecca Lewis	Director of Assessment & Accreditation	UT Arlington	rebeccal@uta.edu
Marilyn Kaplan	Associate Dean of Undergraduate Programs & Clinical Professor Management, Naveen Jindal School of Management	UT Dallas	mkaplan@utdallas.edu
Loraine Phillips (through July when she took a job in Georgia)	Assistant Vice Provost for Institutional Effectiveness and Reporting	UT Arlington	

Appendix B
Full Recommendations and Proposed Metrics

FINANCES

Recommendations

Recommendation 1
Students should receive formal and informal instruction in financial literacy to help them develop strong financial decision making skills. This will be helpful to students both in making decisions about financial choices in seeking their college degrees and in financial planning and decision making after graduation. To assist institutions in incorporating high qualify instruction into students' experiences, **we recommend that financial literacy modules be developed that can be incorporated into a variety of formal and informal curricula and made available to System institutions.**

Resource Implications:
Implementing this recommendation will primarily require faculty and staff time to develop in-house content. UT System could potentially provide support by coordinating with the Faculty Advisory Council and/or the Academy of Distinguished Teachers to establish standards and best practices.

Responsible Party:
UT System, UT System academic institutions

Recommendation 2
Students drop courses during the semester for a variety of reasons including work responsibilities, time needed for social and family commitments and transportation issues. Financial aid professionals have reported, however, that students often do not understand the full consequences of dropping courses, such as impacts on financial aid eligibility and timely degree completion. **We recommend that institutions explore the procurement or development of tools that illustrate to students the full financial impact of dropping courses mid-semester**.

Resource Implications:
Exploring technology resources will require staff time. The procurement and development of tools will require financial resources. Development costs could be offset if the technology is commercialized. If existing tools and technology exist, UT System could support this recommendation through the purchase or coordination of a systemwide license.

Responsible Party:
UT System and UT System institutions

FINANCES

Recommendations
Recommendation 3 Students who have the majority of tuition and fees covered by financial aid still experience financial hardship related to unemployment and underemployment, rising costs of living, and more. There is a need to move beyond traditional financial risk indicators (e.g. Pell eligibility, unmet need, etc.) to identify students who require additional support. **We recommend that institutions more aggressively develop financial risk indicators that could better identify these students for additional outreach and support.** *Resource Implications:* Staff time and for some institutions, financial resources to enhance analytic capabilities either through technology or additional staff. *Responsible Party:* UT System institutions **Recommendation 4** Academic advisors are often in a position to have frank conversations with students about factors that may impact their academic progress, including factors outside of the classroom such as housing or food instability. **We recommend that academic advisors be provided with appropriate training and resources so that they can make referrals to campus, community, and government resources, when appropriate.** *Resource Implications:* The Advising Affinity Group is proposing a UT System-funded advising institute, which aligns with this recommendation. Institutions would additionally need to provide ongoing training and support to maintain a current referral list. *Responsible Party:* UT System administration and UT System institutions **Recommendation 5** Many students experience intermittent food, clothing and housing insecurity throughout their time in college. Even students who can usually meet their basic needs might occasionally benefit from opting into receiving mobile "push notifications" about campus and community resources that do not have strict eligibility requirements or lengthy applications. **We recommend that institutions explore the procurement or development of technology applications that provide referrals to university and community resources (e.g. leftover pizza in student union; emergency housing resources).**

FINANCES

Recommendations
Resource Implications: Exploring technology applications will require staff and/or faculty time and in-house development of technology would require significant financial support. These costs could be offset if the technology is commercialized. If existing tools and technology exist, UT System could purchase a systemwide license to save costs. *Responsible Party:* UT System Administration and UT System institutions **Recommendation 6** Students can experience unforeseen financial emergencies that jeopardize their ability to persist. An unanticipated trip to the emergency room, an automobile accident, temporary unemployment or underemployment, all can create situations where students on a tight, fixed budget have to take a break from their education to pay for unforeseen costs. In many of these cases, small amounts of additional assistance could provide a lifeline to keep students enrolled and on-track to graduate. **It is recommended that each UT System institution put in place an emergency aid grant program to help eligible students during unforeseen financial emergencies.** *Resource Implications:* If additional money should become available through another UT System Student Success RFP process, institutions could request funding to implement these programs. Institutions can additionally fund these programs through enhancing philanthropic donations. *Responsible Party:* UT System and UT System institutions **Recommendation 7** Though institutional leaders may be sympathetic to student financial risk and hardship, they may not be fully aware of the state of their student body unless data regarding student finances is regularly available to them. Enrollment and retention data is regularly reviewed by leadership at all institutions of higher education. **We recommend that student financial metrics should also regularly be presented to institutional leadership, including deans, department chairs, vice presidents and president.** We believe this will facilitate programming and decision-making that better supports students, taking into account their finances. *Resource Implications:* This recommendation requires no additional resources beyond staff time.

FINANCES

Recommendations
Responsible Party: UT System institutions **Recommendation 8** Fostering frequent and strategic communication among campus business areas and departments can help identify roadblocks to timely graduation and align academic calendars, policies and procedures with institutional student success goals. **We recommend that institutions put in place a standing interdisciplinary committee with the goal of sharing information and creating campus-wide engagement in supporting a culture of student success with a focus on student financial health.** It is critical that this committee include representation from financial aid and bursar units, who are sometimes left out of other student success interdisciplinary committees. *Resource Implications:* This recommendation requires no resources beyond staff and faculty time. *Responsible Party:* UT System institutions **Recommendation 9** All UT institutions strive to provide a basic student support safety net through a variety of programs including food pantries, emergency grants, and emergency housing. However, lack of awareness of these services by faculty and staff creates missed opportunities for informal referrals to take place through every day interactions with students. **Therefore, we recommend that institutions develop strategies to build awareness among faculty and staff about basic student support services available both on and off campus that may be of particular use to students who are struggling financially.** *Resource Implications:* This recommendation requires no resources beyond staff and faculty time and minimal costs for marketing materials. *Responsible Party:* UT System institutions

FINANCES

Recommendations

Recommendation 10

Often academic cost discussions are focused on tuition and fees, but the cost of textbooks and other required resources frequently create additional burdens for students that can directly impact their ability to succeed in their courses. Therefore, **we recommend that institutions and faculty actively develop a systematic approach to ensure that students have access to open education resources (OER) for their courses or other no- or low-cost alternatives, and to provide education and training to incoming faculty, both full-time and adjunct, on available resources.**

Resource Implications:

At the System level, there might be an opportunity to fund or coordinate a systemwide repository of open education resources or application to the THECB newly-established OER grant program. Institutions can support the adoption of OER through providing faculty education and support, and by working with librarians to establish institutional policies and practices that support alternatives to purchasing textbooks.

Responsible Party:

UT System administration and UT System institutions

Recommendation 11

Student financial interactions with our institutions are, by their nature, unfamiliar to students and can be anxiety provoking. UT System institutions should strive to make it as easy as possible for students who do not have advanced knowledge about finances to 1) find and understand their statements, 2) find and understand their financial aid awards, 3) pay any outstanding balances, and 4) receive answers to their questions about their finances. **We recommend that each institution review these components of student financial interaction with the institution with student stakeholders with an eye towards improving readability and usability.**

Resource Implications:

Institutions would need to dedicate staff and/or faculty time to examine existing financial statements and documents and to coordinate the gathering of feedback from students. Minimal financial resources might be required in order to compensate students for their time and feedback or to provide training to staff on best practices for student-friendly financial statements.

Responsible Party:

UT System institutions

FINANCES

Recommendations

Recommendation 12
Institutions have multiple supports that may be useful to students who are at financial risk for not completing their degrees. However, students may not be aware of those resources at times that they may be particularly helpful and may benefit from more target and more frequent institutional contact. **We recommend that institutions regularly track the frequency of institutional contact with students who are at risk of not graduating due to finances.** Institutions may use this tracking to improve outreach or programming.

Resource Implications:
Institutions would need to dedicate staff and/or IR time to examine existing outreach processes and develop methods to document and track interface with students. The information would also be used to evaluate customer service and support the overall One Stop initiative.

Responsible Party:
UT System institutions

Proposed Metrics

Proposed Metric 1
The percentage of first-year attrition likely attributable to finances

Resource Implications: The Finances Affinity Group has spent a considerable amount of time deliberating this metric and exactly how to measure it. It was decided that a student leaves an institution due to finances is a student: 1) that has a GPA above a 2.0, (2) that does not enroll at another institution of higher education, and (3) that has unmet financial need over $5,500. It is anticipated that The UT System Office of Strategic Initiatives will be able to pull this metric annually and provide it to institutional leadership.

Responsible Party: UT System and UT System institutions.

FINANCES

Proposed Metrics
Proposed Metric 2 The percentage of students who fill out a FAFSA or TASFA, by the federal deadline (for FAFSA) and by institutional priority deadline(s). *Resource Implications:* Gathering data for this metric will require institutional IR staff time and some institutional staff time. *Responsible Party:* UT System institutions **Proposed Metric 3** The percentage of students that leave after their first year with loan debt. *Resource Implications:* Gathering data for this metric will require institutional IR staff time. *Responsible Party:* UT System institutions **Proposed Metric 4** Average loan debt of students who leave after the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th year, and after graduation. *Resource Implications:* Gathering data for this metric will require institutional IR staff time.

ADVISING

Recommendations

Recommendation 1
Educate students and advisors by creating a central portal and external website for communicating best practices in advising across UT System. The website will feature content for prospective and current students as well as professional advising staff.

Resource Implications: UT System Academic Affairs staff will work with UT System External Relations to identify resources that could include a contract with third party vendors for development of a microsite. A small committee of institutional experts will be called upon to create and update content using both the Advising Affinity Group's final report as well as other relevant resources and new ideas. It is expected that such a site would cost approximately $40,000 for third party development.

Responsible Party: UT System offices will be largely responsible for website development and committee organization.

Recommendation 2
Implement online, interactive four-year degree plan tools for all undergraduate students using a platform that works best with existing campus infrastructure. Four-year plans help students visualize the entire degree experience while reinforcing the goal of timely graduation.

Resource Implications: Products must be explored and compared to identify the most effective software and tools available to institutions to deploy a fully interactive degree planning model to meet the needs and goals of students and the campus. Typically, such products are a significant investment. UT System could play a role in negotiating prices and leveraging purchasing power. In addition to the technology costs, it is expected that there would be a substantial commitment of time from institutional faculty and staff.

Responsible Party: It is recommended that the UT System Office of Academic Affairs forms a committee of institutional partners to investigate potential software products. Institutional stakeholders might include professional advising staff, budget and finance administrators, institutional reporting offices, students, student success professionals, faculty and curriculum committees.

ADVISING

Recommendations
Recommendation 3 Implement a case management model of advising at each UT System institution that assigns every student to an academic advisor. Such a model incorporates elements of intrusive advising, proactive versus reactive approaches, holistic assessment and service plans, continuous evaluation and relies on a network of assigned professionals in key areas such as student financials, student affairs, counseling services and more. Much of this model is dependent upon a cultural shift in the way that campus units solve problems that students face and a relational versus transactional approach. *Resource Implications:* Successful implementation often involves three things. Additional full-time advising staff, professional development funding and the use of technology to create efficiencies with regard to appointments, assessment and resource allocation are expected needs. Depending on current institutional resources, implementing this model could cost a few million dollars annually if developed across an entire campus for all undergraduate students. Because of the high cost, pilot projects prioritizing students with the perceived greatest need may be a reasonable first step. *Responsible Party:* Institutional stakeholders might include professional advising staff, budget and finance administrators, institutional reporting offices, students, student success professionals, and staff in student affairs and financial aid. Networks of assigned case management support should be robust and include staff on the front lines of student-facing issues that impede completion. Such staff might include behavioral intervention teams, counseling services, housing and meal services, academic support (e.g. tutoring), student financials (including student money management), faculty as appropriate, community partners, veterans affairs, registrar and more.

ADVISING

Recommendations
Recommendation 4 UT System will work with institutions to create and manage an annual advising institute that offers training on best practices and other professional development. By providing access to a credentialing ladder, professional development opportunities and common resources, an institute represents upward mobility and increased excellence for advising staff. *Resource Implications***:** The UT System Office of Academic Affairs has budgeted $50,000 in FY18 for an advising institute. Ideally, this would be an annual allocation and allow an institute to occur each summer in the Dallas-Fort Worth area or other appropriate venue. The budget would cover some travel, lodging and meals as well as conference space, speakers and supplies for 6-8 campus-appointed professionals from each academic institution. UT System will work with a small committee of campus leaders to identify national experts and to plan the structure and curriculum of the institute. *Responsible Party:* UT System staff and institutional advising leaders will be charged with executing the advising institute. **Recommendation 5** To move forward a quantum-leap worthy agenda in academic advising, a different kind of assessment is needed: an academic advising scorecard. The scorecard is a rubric designed to reflect the distinct phases of improvement as programs move toward implementation of advising goals. Such a scorecard helps answer the question, “Are we effectively implementing the goals that our campus has identified for academic advising?” *Resource Implications:* It is expected that staff time would be necessary to ensure that the scorecard is effectively measuring the stated goals. It is possible that technology may also be needed to actually collect data for the items that are on the scorecard. *Responsible Party:* Institutional stakeholders might include professional advising staff, institutional reporting and possibly information technology.

ADVISING

Proposed Metrics
Proposed Metric 1 The NSSE tool is a nationally recognized and utilized measure of student engagement. To measure the student perception of quality interactions with both academic advisors and career services, we recommend all institutions analyze results and take actions related to Question 13. Question 13 asks a student to "Indicate the quality of your interactions with the following people at your institution: academic advisors, faculty and career services." *Resource Implications:* The only anticipated resource is staff time to analyze survey results and campus leaders' time to discuss solutions. *Responsible Party:* Persons at each institution who administer the NSSE tool are responsible. **Proposed Metric 2** As UT System academic institutions implement case management models of advising, institutions should move toward the national median of advising caseloads for public doctoral institutions as provided by NACADA surveys (currently 285:1). *Resource Implications:* To move toward median advising caseloads, hiring more advising staff would increase operational costs. *Responsible Party:* Executive leadership at each institution and student success leadership would be responsible for tracking and prioritizing hires.

BELONGING

Recommendations

1. **Recommendation:**

Invite UT academic universities to develop and launch a Belonging Campaign (following the customizable template developed by the Belonging Affinity Group), in alignment with their existing efforts, strategic priorities and planning.

Resource Implications: The resource requirements will depend on campus strategies to develop, market and implement a Belonging Campaign. Assessment of the Campaign is recommended, and this will also require some resources.

Responsible Party: UT academic universities

2. **Recommendation:**

Change the administration and enhance the use of NSSE at participating UTs (all but Austin) by:

- Administering the survey every other year instead of every year;
- Adding new, more tactically specific belonging questions to survey;
- Working to increase student responses to survey; and
- Supporting institutions in better deployment of NSSE data to improve student belonging and success, including better communication of import and results of NSSE data and how it can be used formatively by many institutional stakeholders.

Resource Implications:

Administering NSSE every other year instead of every year would generate savings in financial and staff resources, as the UT System subsidizes this effort and both System and institutional staff play roles in survey administration. IR directors and provosts are supportive of this recommendation. Helping institutions use their NSSE data better could require more work for OSI by providing more in-depth analyses of NSSE results to campuses. Getting more students to take the survey, and then using the data with campus stakeholders will entail some work for institutions.

BELONGING

Recommendations
Responsible Party: UT academic universities and UT System. UT System will work with NSSE on changes to administration and questions, and on developing institutional analyses along with a guide for how NSSE data should be interpreted and used. Institutions would be responsible for improving student response rates (this could be part of Belonging Campaigns), sharing the data well, and using their data in formative ways. **3. Recommendation:** **Continue convening a systemwide affinity group or network focused on promotion and measurement of academic and social belonging across UT System institutions.** Network could be provost-led and should include academic and student affairs staff, as well as faculty. The network should include the development of a micro-site to continue a focus on best practices, storytelling and institutional features of students and others, and analysis and metrics producing actionable data. *Resource Implications:* Convening costs for institutional representatives and development and maintenance of a micro-site housed at UT System. Intention is to seek external funding to sustain and grow UT System's Belonging Initiative. *Responsible Party:* UT System Office of Academic Affairs will play convening role and oversee micro-site. UT academic universities will be asked to identify members and support their participation in largely non-financial ways.

BELONGING

Recommendations

Responsible Party:

UT academic universities and UT System. UT System will work with NSSE on changes to administration and questions, and on developing institutional analyses along with a guide for how NSSE data should be interpreted and used. Institutions would be responsible for improving student response rates (this could be part of Belonging Campaigns), sharing the data well, and using their data in formative ways.

4. **Recommendation:**

Partnering with receptive institutions, UT System Office of Academic Affairs and the Office of Strategic Initiatives will develop a process to share annually the data generated from the Cluster Analysis, focused on students who leave because of identified academic and social belonging reasons. This will be used to strengthen data-driven decision-making and inform resource allocation for institutions to develop targeted interventions for students that are at risk of leaving the institution. Over time, and pending the interest of institutions, these data can be used to develop predictive analytics to include not only entering FTIC but also transfer and other student populations.

Resource Implications:

UT System OSI has all the data for conducting this analysis and staff resources will be required to work with receptive institutions on conducting and sharing the analysis. Developing predictive analytics will require additional resources. To make this work meaningful, institutions will need to act on the data and design and implement targeted interventions for student at risk of leaving. This recommendation has significant ROI potential, for both students and institutions.

Responsible Party:

UT System Office of Academic Affairs and Office of Strategic Initiatives, in partnership with UT System institutions.

BELONGING

Proposed Metrics
1. Proposed Metrics: **a. Academic Belonging**: Percent of first-year attrition attributable to a lack of academic belonging, measured by identifying those students who are not retained at UT System academic institutions who have low unmet financial need (less than $5,500) and a low GPA (less than 2.0) upon leaving. **b. Social Belonging**: Percent of first-year attrition attributable to a lack of social belonging, measured by identifying those students who are not retained at UT System academic institutions who have low unmet financial need (less than $5,500) and a passing GPA (greater than or equal to 2.0) upon leaving. *Resource Implications:* First-year Retention data are available at UT System from reporting that institutions submit to THECB; however, tracking, analysis and dissemination back to institutions will require UT System staff time. Data and metrics will be most meaningful and actionable if staff and infrastructure resources are available to develop predictive analytics and models, contingent on UT System and/or institutional capacity. *Responsible Party:* UT System Office of Strategic Initiatives and Office of Academic Affairs will conduct analysis with expectation that interested UT institutions will use results to address findings and identify targeted interventions and strategies to create a stronger sense of belonging and strengthen the conditions by which students will remain enrolled and progressing towards degree.

BELONGING

Proposed Metrics
2. **Proposed Metric:** **Following consultation with interested institutions, two metrics will be articulated from the NSSE questions below, identified by Affinity Group members as indirect, proxy measures for Belonging:** • **About how many hours do you spend in a typical 7-day week doing the following? Participating in co-curricular activities (organizations, campus publications, student government, fraternity or sorority, intercollegiate or intramural sports, etc.)** ***0 hrs through Greater than 30 hrs*** • **Indicate the quality of your interactions with the following people at your institution. Faculty** ***1 Poor through 7 Excellent*** The metrics will be tied to percentage of responses coming in at agreed-upon thresholds. *Resource Implications:* These questions are part of current NSSE surveys, which every UT except Austin administers (Austin administers the SERU survey). Institutions receive their own results and UT System receives responses for all campuses. OSI and/or institutional staff time will be needed to analyze responses and share results with interested and relevant stakeholders. This analysis has the potential both to bolster the sharing of best practices across institutions and to otherwise create a sense of shared purpose and collaborative success on behalf of all UT students. *Responsible Party:* Analysis could be done by UT System Office of Strategic Initiatives and Office of Academic Affairs, or by UT institutions. However, the expectation is that interested campuses will use responses to these questions to address findings and work to improve, as needed, through interventions or strategies. Crosswalk with UT Austin's SERU data is being pursued.

BELONGING

Proposed Metrics
3. **Proposed Metric:** **Belonging Campaign Participation: number of UT institutions with belonging campaigns, including equivalent initiatives focused on addressing belonging.** This will be a process rather than an outcomes measure, and can track campaign activities (numbers and types), as well as indicate whether campuses are conducting their own assessments of such campaigns. *Resource Implications:* The real implications are tied to the kinds of customizable campaigns or equivalent initiatives institutions are already doing or may elect to do. Again, this analysis has the potential both to bolster the sharing of best practices across institutions and to otherwise create a sense of shared purpose and collaborative success on behalf of all UT students. *Responsible Party:* Participating UT institutions (designated Belonging Champion) and UT System Office of Academic Affairs will determine and oversee collection of available information

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

Recommendations

(1) **The Assessment Affinity group recommends seeking support from the AAC&U Value Institute for organizing the calibration and review sessions using the Critical Thinking Value Rubric.** We ask that the UT System commence discussions with the Value Institute to determine what resources would be needed to compensate faculty raters, arrange for their training/calibration, and bring them together for the rating session.

(2) In addition, we recommend **that a single online platform** be used for uploading and maintenance of the student artifacts and rating data, similar to the platform used in the Multi-States Collaborative project.

(3) The Assessment Affinity group also recommends that **the UT System coordinate the requests** from other Affinity groups using NSSE/SERU data within their metrics and consider if using the UT System consortium to create a custom set of questions for NSSE/SERU might benefit the project more broadly. Co-Chairs from each group could potentially collaborate to determine the feasibility of this step.

(4) Once the pilot year is completed, we recommend **exploring the development of a pre-post indirect measure** that explores growth in specific aspects of Critical Thinking, to be developed along the lines of the Design-Thinking measures developed by Stanford's Helen Chen.

This recommendation would require modest resources, such as securing the cooperation of the VALUE Institute, travel and compensation for faculty raters, and an infrastructure tool for collecting and maintaining artifacts. To whatever extent possible, we recommend using existing tools. This recommendation may require consultation with outside experts and travel for those involved in the development of the tool.

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

Proposed Metrics
The Assessment Affinity Group proposes a multi-pronged approach to the assessment of student learning in the UT System, to include both indirect and direct measures: (1) **We propose to monitor participation in High Impact Practices, via the review of specific items already collected through the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Student Experience in the Research University (SERU).** For the NSSE, these items would include questions 11 (a-f) and 12. For the SERU, see the attached crosswalk. (2) **Because the specific learning outcome of interest is Critical Thinking, we propose to review data from NSSE items 2a, 2d, 2f and items 4, a-e, and the corresponding SERU items** (see attached crosswalk). These items relate to critical thinking, analysis, and higher-order learning. (3) **For the direct measure of student learning, we propose to measure critical thinking proficiency among undergraduate students attending any UT System academic institution, specifically through artifacts related to a particular High-Impact Practice: undergraduate research activities.** All UT System academic institutions would be encouraged to participate in the project and contribute sampled undergraduate student research artifacts.