The University of Texas at El Paso

Centennial Commission Task Force on Student Success

The Student Success Task Force was one of three internal task forces constituted as part of the Centennial Commission. The Task Force met throughout the Fall of 2004 and Spring of 2005. The Student Success Task Force was co-chaired by Pablo Arenaz, Vice Provost, and Maggy Smith, Dean of the University College. Its membership included the following UTEP faculty, staff, and students: Tammie Aragon-Campos, Sandra Braham, Pat Caro, Briane Carter, Irasema Coronado, Greg Elliott, Louis Everett, Ben Flores, Connie Gamboa, Harmon Hosch, Helmut Knaust, Antonio Lopez (student), Greg Lush, Gary Mann, Mick Martinez (student), Roy Mathew, Sidney McDougall (student), Audrey Price, Jazmine Sausameda (student), Josie Tinajero, Nick Zweig.

Background: Understanding Student Success

To understand and address student success at UTEP, the Committee looked to the research on student persistence and graduation and examined those factors that the research indicates influence student success. This body of research identifies a complex set of issues that influence students’ decisions to remain in or depart from higher education. The research has pointed to the fact that no single issue (or characteristic) determines a student’s decision to leave or to continue at a particular institution. Representative of the body of research on student persistence and graduation, the study by Brazziel and Brazziel identified several key factors that appear to influence a student’s decision to remain in college. These included financial considerations, poor academic preparation leading to academic problems, lack of understanding of what is needed to be successful in college, work outside college, the curriculum, traditional instructional practices and gatekeeper courses. They also cited a lack of career objectives as a key reason for leaving college.

In a recent study of Latino student success, Swali and co-workers followed a group of middle school students longitudinally from 1988 to 2002. They noted that the major factors influencing student success in higher education were the following: socioeconomic status, high parental expectations, pre-college planning and college course-taking patterns. Parental and peer expectations that students would complete college were major factors influencing Latino students’ decisions about staying in college. Interestingly, Swali and co-workers found no strong correlation between financial aid and retention. However, there was a correlation between success and the type of financial aid package that an individual received, although they did not define the specific combination of grants, loans, and/or scholarships that affects persistence. Another major impact on college completion was course-taking patterns. When Latino students attended college part-time or inconsistently (drop/stop out), they were more likely not to complete college.

How do we apply these research findings to the study and understanding of UTEP students in regards to student success? The breadth and depth of the kind of study needed is beyond the scope of this committee’s work; however, the committee recommends that UTEP identify the research parameters, gather the appropriate qualitative and quantitative data, and thoroughly
analyze it to better understand UTEP’s degree completers, stop-outs, and dropouts. The Committee recommends that UTEP initially focus its research efforts on understanding the differences between those who complete the degree, those who voluntarily depart, and those who do so involuntarily. We also need to distinguish between departure from UTEP and departure from higher education altogether. In addition, we need to understand why some students progress at a normal pace while other students appear to spend more time than expected at a particular level (e.g. sophomore or junior). Once the data are analyzed, we can begin to refine our understanding of those factors that shape student success and compare our findings to those of other studies. Although we may discover unique factors that influence student success at UTEP, we expect that there will be similarities with like institutions.

Much of the national research points to “student engagement” as the primary critical measure that ensures student success\(^3\). In the nationally-normed survey of student engagement (National Survey of Student Engagement or NSSE), UTEP consistently ranks better than the average on all five benchmarks (level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interactions, enriching educational experiences, supportive campus environment). Because of our students’ better-than-predicted scores on the five NSSE student engagement benchmarks, UTEP was selected (one of only 20 institutions nationally) to participate in Project DEEP\(^4\) (Documenting Effective Educational Practice), a study funded by the Lumina Foundation designed to examine the reason(s) for institutional success. If student engagement is the criterion used to determine student success, UTEP’s NSSE results and the subsequent invitation to participate in Project DEEP indicate that we are very successful.

In contrast, other research reports \(^5, 6\) identify UTEP as an underperforming institution, based on our graduation rates, when compared to a specific peer group of institutions whose secret to success is claimed to be student engagement. Table 1 shows UTEP’s four- through ten-year graduation rates for those fall cohorts entering the institution between Fall 1994 and Fall 2000. The results of these reports seem to offer conflicting assessments of UTEP’s performance. If student engagement is the key to student success, then, how could UTEP be identified as one of the best at student engagement, yet be identified as an underperforming institution when student engagement is concluded to be the primary determining factor? The Education Trust\(^4, 5\) based its assessment entirely on graduation rates; we believe that student success is much broader than that.

**Table 1: UTEP Four- to Ten-year Graduation Rates: Fall Cohorts Entering 1994-2000**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduation</th>
<th>Fall 1994</th>
<th>Fall 1995</th>
<th>Fall 1996</th>
<th>Fall 1997</th>
<th>Fall 1998</th>
<th>Fall 1999</th>
<th>Fall 2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Four Years</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five Years</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six Years</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
<td>25.8%</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven Years</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
<td>32.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eight Years</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nine Years</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten Years</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Committee recommends that, as an institution, UTEP establish a clear framework for understanding student success, and then, explore what factors impact students’ success at UTEP: why some students are successful while others are not. Then, we need to identify possible strategies that could be effective in increasing student success at UTEP. In essence, we need to create an experimental culture that supports innovative approaches to identifying the causal factors that affect student success, retaining “expected leavers,” and moving “intended completers” along more quickly.

**Process of the Student Success Task Force**

The Task Force met throughout the Fall of 2004. In Spring 2005, subcommittees were formed that examined specific topical areas. The areas chosen were informed by the discussions of the Committee. In late Spring 2005, the Task Force held a retreat where we heard the subcommittee reports and developed our recommendations.

To begin the process of examining the parameters of student success and theories about success, the Task Force reviewed the following background materials:

- National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) 2003 Overview
- NSSE Institutional Benchmark Report, November 2003
- Project DEEP (Documenting Effective Educational Practice) Interim Report
- Building Engagement and Attainment for Minority Students (BEAMS) information
- The American Association for Higher Education’s (AAHE) Summer Academy information on the use of NSSE data, “Negotiating Change on Campus” (Engelkemeyer & Landry article) and results of UTEP’s BEAMS team Summer Academy work
- Preliminary Lumina Foundation proposal

**Charge of the Student Success Task Force**

The charge to the Student Success Task Force was to identify those factors that either contribute to or impede students’ progress toward degree completion at the undergraduate level.

Initially, two questions guided the task force discussions:

- What defines student success (in the context of degree completion)?
- What are some strategies that could move students to degree completion more quickly, without compromising academic excellence?

Early discussions of the Task Force centered on members defining what was meant by student success and what measures are used to assess success. Members of the Task Force described success as follows:

- earning a degree with a satisfactory GPA within an appropriate time frame;
- finding and progressing in an area of study about which the student is passionate;
- developing competency in the chosen field of study;
- identifying and achieving individual educational goals over time;
• becoming well-rounded individuals who are life-long learners; and
• experiencing college as adding value to life, whether a degree is obtained or not.

Ultimately, for the purpose of its assigned work, the Committee defined success as “obtaining a degree, no matter how long.”

The Task Force felt strongly that the process must be data driven. It is important that we use multiple measures of student success in collecting and analyzing data. In addition to graduation rates, the committee felt that we should be tracking graduate school and job placement, hours attempted, time to completion of the core curriculum and the value added nature of the experience as measured by increased literacy; enhanced critical thinking, reading, and writing skills; better mathematics abilities; and enhanced computer literacy.

As a result of our discussions, the Student Success Task Force identified four areas for focused examination: academic advising, course availability and scheduling, barriers to degree completion, and retention/persistence/progress (undergraduate student leavers). Four subcommittees—one dedicated to each topic—were created. The subcommittee membership was as follows:

**Academic Advising:** Pat Caro (Chair), Irasema Coronado, Daniel Duarte, Ike Ledesma, Nancy Marcus, Lupita Salas, David Vasquez, Jeannie Webb

**Course Availability and Scheduling:** Angel Aguirre, Tammie Aragon-Campos (Chair), Albino Barrios, Gary Edens, David Harvey, Cathe Lester, Judith Munter, Mike Sifuentes, Rebecca Suarez; students Adriane Skye Fortier, Franco Marquez

**Barriers to Degree Completion:** Stephen Aley, Greg Elliott, Louis Everett, Harmon Hosch (Chair), Wen-Whai Li, Gary Mann

**Student /Persistence/Progress (Undergraduate Student “Leavers”):** Briane Carter, Joe Heyman, Helmut Knaust, Greg Lush, Roy Mathew (Chair), Maggy Smith

A synopsis of the findings and the recommendations of each subcommittee follows.
SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

Three common themes emerged from the subcommittee reports and the culminating retreat: 1) we need to better understand our students and their unique needs; 2) we should assess and improve advising across campus; and 3) we should address academic barriers to student success. In addition, one recommendation appears universally in the subcommittee reports and in the results from the retreat: to make a difference in student success at UTEP, our efforts need to be data driven. To that end, we must conduct substantial research about UTEP students, both those who stay and those who leave.

1. ACADEMIC ADVISING SUBCOMMITTEE

The Academic Advising Subcommittee examined academic advising practices across campus, including departmental, college, and University-level advising programs, their procedures, policies, and the people who advise. This research found that many different models for delivery of advising exist on campus, with no uniform set of expectations. The subcommittee looked specifically at the following: the services provided to students, advisor-advisee caseload ratio, advisor training, and use of technology in advising.

The subcommittee identified several academic advising factors that appear to contribute to or impede students’ progress toward undergraduate degree completion. They used multiple data gathering strategies, including the following:

- Surveying the six academic colleges regarding their advising models, the number of advisors employed in advising roles, the number of students each advises, and which majors require academic advising
- Examining departmental advising policies and procedures to isolate the similarities and differences in academic advising policies across campus
- Reviewing data from the Center for Institutional Evaluation, Research and Planning (CIERP)
- Surveying students

Findings: Academic Advising

The subcommittee reported the following major findings:

- **Definition of advising:** No institutional definition of what constitutes academic advising exists. The subcommittee discovered that advising may consist of long-term academic planning (developmental advising), facilitation of registration (prescriptive advising), or a combination of the two. As a result, substantial differences exist in the services that students receive as they transition from one advising model to another. In addition, the roles and responsibilities of academic advisors (both staff and faculty) are poorly defined. Factors such as caseload ratios, the absence of clearly articulated responsibilities, very different models for advising, and differing departmental expectations of academic advising contribute to the uneven quality of advising that exists on campus.
• **Advisor Training and Responsibilities:** The subcommittee learned that very little systematic training for advisors is available. What is available is poorly attended; there seems to be little accountability for advisors to be conversant with all university policies.

• **Technology & Advising:** The survey of colleges indicated that a number of different databases are used to supplement and track academic advising. No degree audit program is being used universally across campus, even though the degree audit module CAPP (Curriculum, Advising and Program Planning) is available on Goldmine. It is being used only by the Colleges of Business, Health Sciences, and Engineering. Many advisors do not understand the potential benefits of using CAPP because they are not aware it exists, lack training in its use, or because CAPP is not being maintained by their departments. For example, one significant attribute of CAPP makes it possible for a student or advisor to audit the degree requirements that remain to be satisfied for graduation. CAPP also makes it possible for a student to do “what if” scenarios, asking the system questions such as “What will my requirements be if I change my major from English to Biology?” As an alternative to CAPP, or simply out of immediate necessity, colleges and departments are using other software to meet advising needs. For example, Education uses a database called T-Prep to monitor student progress. To a lesser degree, advisors use Microsoft Access or Excel or paper and pencil to maintain records of advisees. Providing students with comprehensive degree plans on demand is not possible with the use of multiple degree audit systems.

• **Customer Service/Accessibility:** While customer service is an institution-wide concern, the subcommittee discussed it in relation to advising. They point out that customer service and advisor accessibility are critical to streamlining processes and eliminating inefficiencies that impede student success. Advisors must be accessible and approachable to prospective, new, and continuing students, either on a walk-in or appointment basis as well as by e-mail.

• **Evaluation of Data:** A set of data compiled by CIERP identifies student retention and graduation rates by individual college and department. The Subcommittee believes that this information is important for consideration in conjunction with advising structures in each college.

**Short- and Long-term Recommendations: Academic Advising**

• **Student Evaluations (short-term).** The subcommittee recommends that student evaluations about advising services be a regular part of any advising service on campus. Surveys must ask about specific advising experiences. Survey questions should also be time-specific, asking about the experiences of entering students, continuing students, and students preparing for graduation. A survey instrument that is developed to adequately sample students’ advising experiences can be used to find correlations with other data on student retention. Student evaluations should also be integrated into advisors’ performance evaluations.
• **Customer Service & Accountability (short-term).** It is also recommended that a major component of UTEP’s academic advising policy entail a model of service delivery that focuses on improving customer service and student access to advisors and information.

• **Advising Policy (short/long-term).** The subcommittee recommends that the University develop broad university-wide policies and procedures for academic advising at all levels. These policies must include an operational definition for academic advising, clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and accountability measures for advisors (both staff and faculty). By implementing such a policy, and/or more specific college and/or departmental policies, colleges, departments, and programs may determine the amount of advisor training needed, allocate the amount of time needed to effectively advise a student, determine the appropriate caseload size, and allow for advising follow-ups required to meet advising objectives. The same will be true for the Academic Advising Center.

• **Training (long-term).** Develop systematic training opportunities for all campus advisors with the expectation that they will participate in these training programs designed to help them deliver accurate, timely, and customer-friendly information to all students.

• **Technology (long-term).** The use of software and paperless environments must benefit the student and complement advising activities, not supplant the important interpersonal relationship between advisor and advisee. It is recommended that a committee be appointed to make recommendations about the use of technology for advising. Possible questions include the following: Should Banner’s degree-audit module, CAPP, be implemented in all departments? Should CAPP maintenance be handled by departments and colleges in conjunction with the Information Technology (IT) Department? Is it advisable for departments to purchase or create their own electronic advising systems?

• **Evaluation of Data (long-term).** It is recommended that a longitudinal study be conducted to determine if correlations can be identified between retention and graduation rates and the various advising patterns across campus.

This subcommittee recommends that the Office of the Provost form an advisory committee on advising with representation from each of the seven colleges, to include a professional advisor and an Assistant or Associate Dean. Participation from individuals at this level is important to help clarify advising goals for each college. Further findings and insights from the new committee would be used as a basis for the recommendations pertaining to advising policies, advising models, student advising experience, and use of technology.

### 2. COURSE AVAILABILITY AND SCHEDULING

The Course Availability and Scheduling Subcommittee discussed impediments to student success related to course availability and scheduling. They reviewed the current situation at UTEP from the perspective of students on the Subcommittee as well as the data provided by CIERP, which included the results of the 2000, 2002, and 2004 Campus Experience Surveys and
2003-04 Graduating Senior Survey. Course scheduling strategies used at other campuses were also considered.

Findings: Course Availability, Scheduling, and Academic Information

Student satisfaction with course scheduling and course availability was gathered on the 2000, 2002, and 2004 Campus Experience Surveys. While these survey results go beyond the undergraduate scope of this report, we have included the full summary because it provides an informative comparison. All students were asked what class scheduling options they would like to see available; graduating seniors were asked about their satisfaction with course availability and scheduling in their majors on the 2003-04 Graduating Senior Survey; and the undergraduate, master’s, and doctoral students were asked how satisfied they were with course availability in their majors, in the core curriculum (undergraduate students), and in their programs (master’s and doctoral students). The major findings from the analysis of the survey data include:

- Students desire more class scheduling options, improved class availability, and better access to academic information.

  o Class Scheduling Options. Students completing the Spring 2004 Campus Experience Surveys reported they would like the following alternative class scheduling options available to them:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scheduling Options</th>
<th>Undergraduates</th>
<th>Master's</th>
<th>Doctoral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More summer school courses</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-campus distance learning</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More evening courses</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensive minimester courses</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compressed weekend courses</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More frequent upper-division course offerings</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

  o Class Availability

    ▪ Survey findings revealed that overall, between the Spring 2002 and the Spring 2004 surveys, undergraduates have become less satisfied with course availability in their majors (47% were dissatisfied in 2003; 52% in 2004).

    ▪ Dissatisfaction with course availability in the core curriculum has remained fairly stable (approximately 30%). In addition, approximately 30% of seniors who completed the Graduating Senior Survey and graduated in 2003-04 were not satisfied with course availability in their majors.

  o Access to Academic Information

    ▪ Students want access to automated, individualized degree plans that indicate courses taken and courses still needed for graduation, such as that available through CAPP. Ideally, degree plans would be available in real-time on the Web and would interact with course scheduling software to provide students with recommended schedule options that would tie directly to degree requirements.
Students experience frustration with the registration process and would like more communication regarding processes, approvals, and course availability. Real-time course availability would help students during the registration process.

Improvements in the Schedule of Classes are needed to provide specific information about items such as prerequisites, corequisites, learning communities, language of instruction, and instructors (rather than Staff).

- Class scheduling, closed sections and hidden prerequisites are often barriers to students’ ability to get into courses that may be required for progression in sequential classes. The subcommittee recommends that we explore scheduling software that would provide department chairs and deans with information about student course-taking patterns and would allow them to anticipate course needs more accurately.

- Technology may provide new tools for streamlining registration processes, providing planning data, and communicating with students.
  - Degree audit information available through CAPP can provide departments and colleges with information about student cohort needs for course offerings and would help chairs and deans more effectively schedule courses. Most importantly, students would be able to forecast their own progress to degree and easily calculate the impact a change of major would have on their progress to degree.
  - Prerequisite requirements and waivers should be reviewed with department administrators and the Registrar to ensure that there is a clear understanding of how the students are impacted.

- Academic advisors can provide course recommendations for students but cannot overcome the hurdles students face in the registration process.
  - New students are often the last group to register and may find it difficult to get into a combination of courses, including core and developmental courses.
  - Working students may have difficulty finding evening and weekend courses.
  - Students may not be aware of the need for departmental waivers and often share frustration with academic advisors. Empowering colleges and departments to assist in providing students with registration services would allow students to complete the process with less “runaround.”

**Short- and Long-Term Recommendations: Course Availability and Scheduling**

The Course Availability and Scheduling Subcommittee makes the following recommendations:

- Explore alternative course scheduling options to expand offerings throughout the day,
including afternoons, evenings, and weekends.
  o Collect data about student preferences (short-term).
  o Consider evening and weekend offerings that would allow students to complete
degree programs and certificates without the requirement of attending morning
classes (short-term).
  o Consider delayed-start course sections for entering students similar to the late-start
course-offering program at El Paso Community College (long-term).

• Improve communication with students, faculty, and staff regarding course scheduling,
registration processes, and degree program requirements.
  o Develop the capacity to provide real-time updates of course availability and closed
classes (short-term).
  o Explore ways to improve dissemination of information about co- and prerequisites
and departmental approval requirements (short-term).
  o Implement software features that collect wait-list information for courses and notify
students when courses are available (long-term).

• Encourage colleges and departments to register students in college or department offices.
  (short-term).

• Identify effective scheduling strategies for special populations such as the following
  (short-term):
  o Students who require multiple developmental education courses or ESL courses
  o Graduate students
  o Professionals returning to school for career advancement
  o Military

• Purchase and implement software that will enable colleges and departments to better
predict class needs and plan accordingly.
  o Provide alternative schedule options for closed classes while students are registering
  (short-term).
  o Predict student needs for classes to complete degree requirements (long-term).
  o Use actual course demand data as an alternative to rolling over the schedule from
  previous years (long-term).

3. BARRIERS TO DEGREE COMPLETION SUBCOMMITTEE

The Barriers to Student Success Subcommittee discussed those things that can create obstacles
for student success. The subcommittee limited its discussion to those barriers identified by the
Student Success Task Force and over which the University has some control. The barriers that
were discussed included the following: curriculum, course delivery (including scheduling and
class availability), advising, support services for students, and EPCC transfers.
Findings: Barriers to Degree Completion

The subcommittee identified the following areas where barriers to student success potentially exist:

- **Curriculum:** The subcommittee identified the absence of “curriculum transparency” as a curricular barrier for students. Students are confused by what appear to be hidden prerequisites and a lack of curricular forecasting. In addition to transparency, the Subcommittee discussed the growth in baccalaureate degree completion requirements above the THECB minimum of 120 credit hours and suggests a review of degree requirements with a goal of lowering those requirements.

- **Course Delivery:** The traditional 15-week semester, governed by 50- and 80-minute class meeting times, 5-day time frames is often a barrier for today’s students, especially UTEP’s non-traditional student population. In an effort to remove barriers for these students, UTEP has begun to create diverse formats for both class delivery and course offering times. These and other alternatives to the traditional formats could relieve some of the constraints for students who work, have other obligations, or just prefer the less-traditional format.

  UTEP currently offers a number of alternate course delivery systems that include the following: distance learning and on-line course offerings; the minimester format, such as Winternester and Maymester, appropriate for specific educational experiences; and compressed courses (a format in which students pursue a single course over a several week period, but less than a traditional 15-week semester). The compressed course format appears to be quite attractive to students who are employed full-time and want to pursue a college degree. Classes are often offered at locations off-campus, but close to the constituent students’ work (e.g., a class was recently taught at a police station on the East side of El Paso), and at times that fit shift changes.

  Last, the Subcommittee discussed weekend and evening courses. The College of Business Administration has been quite successful in providing courses at night, on Saturdays, and, with their Professional MBA program, off-campus. Similarly, the Criminal Justice Program is providing courses at easily accessible locations in the community for active duty police officers.

- **Advising:** The “Barriers” Subcommittee raised issues surrounding academic advising as a likely barrier to students’ steady progress to degree completion. Their findings and recommendations regarding advising are merged with the Academic Advising Subcommittee section of this report.

- **Scheduling:** The findings regarding scheduling barriers addressed three issues, all of which require additional research to determine if there is any feasibility to the ideas.
  - Examine alternative scheduling options to maximize course availability. For example, devote Fridays to special recitations, laboratory sections, the beginning of a weekend college.
Consider an expansion of UTEP’s summer offerings. We need to survey students to determine whether or not they would take full advantage of an expanded summer school.

Coordinate scheduling across departments to maximize availability of core curriculum course options. Students would be less likely to find the courses they need offered during overlapping times.

- **Student Support Services:** There is anecdotal evidence that UTEP students would like to have support services available evenings and weekends. For example, students state they want to be able to use the Library, the Union, advising, and other services when they come to campus for class—whether daytime, evenings or weekends. It was suggested that the University Day Care expand its hours to include more evening and Saturday times, as well as some “off-class” hours to provide daycare for students to have dedicated study time. Additional survey research would confirm these ideas.

Because the first-generation student often does not have a role model in the home, the subcommittee thought it desirable to increase UTEP’s efforts to inform prospective students and their families about attending college. For example, we might develop a program for prospective students and their parents on “what college is about and how to become a successful college student.” This program would include topics on the financial aspects of attending the university and the options for meeting those obligations, managing time as a university student, and the nature of the college learning environment.

**Short- and Long-term Recommendations: Barriers to Degree Completion**

- Print co- and pre-requisites in the electronic and paper class schedules as well as on degree plans (short-term).

- Do a thorough and systematic study of every UTEP major and minor: (1) ensure the curriculum is streamlined and up to date and (2) compare with like majors in Texas and if necessary, the US, to ensure that UTEP’s curricula are up-to-date and comparable in requirements (short-term).

- To reduce total required semester credit hours, permit core curriculum courses to satisfy major requirements where sensible and possible (short-term).

- Explore more opportunities for minimester courses. For example, could the intense, brief minimester format be useful for students who must repeat a course? Repeating the course in Wintermester would allow the student to keep on schedule for Spring semester (short-term).

- Conduct a thorough and systematic review of course offering patterns. Follow this with regularly published course rotation patterns so that students and their advisors can plan their academic careers through graduation (long-term).
• Consider the feasibility/desirability of building a substantial weekend and evening college. In addition to offering traditional course formats for students at these non-standard times, the weekends and evenings are ideal for the compressed course format (long-term).

4. STUDENT PERSISTENCE/PROGRESS SUBCOMMITTEE

The Student Persistence/Progress Subcommittee explored the issue of “leavers,” students who leave the institution before they graduate. The subcommittee identified issues that may cause students to leave, based on the research on persistence, anecdotal evidence, and personal experiences. In addition, institutional student survey data (Leavers Survey, Graduating Senior Survey, and the Campus Experience Survey) were used to look at the prevalence of these issues in leavers and the entire student population.

Findings: Student Persistence/Progress

It is clear that many factors converge to engage students with or disconnect them from an institution. The subcommittee members identified the following three major categories as factors affecting student attrition at UTEP: financial issues related to work and need; institutional/academic issues; and social/personal issues. These were identified from data from the Fall 2003 First-Time Full-Time Freshman (FTFTF) Leaver’s Survey and the Spring 2004 Undergraduate Campus Experience Survey. Below is a summary of the factors contributing to attrition drawn from those surveys:

• Employment
  o Employers’ lack of cooperation with students regarding their work schedule
  o Working too much (5.6% work over 20 hours on campus, and 32.4% work over 20 hours off-campus)
  o Working to pay for a new vehicle
  o Returned to work/found a job
  o Active military

• Financial need
  o Relatively scarce financial aid
  o Emergency financial needs
  o Cost of education

• Institutional Issues
  o Degree requirements changed/unclear degree plans
  o Advising; lack of academic guidance
  o Availability of classes and rigid class scheduling
  o Class conflict
  o Documents not renewed for international students
- Gate-keeping (GPA, credit hours, etc.)
- Major of interest not offered at UTEP

- **Social Issues**
  - Marriage; pregnancy or new baby; military dependent
  - Family emergency, death in the family
  - Child-care services

- **Personal/Emotional Issues**
  - Not prepared for college; not able to perform college work; not knowing how to study
  - Lack of motivation
  - Academic probation or suspension

**Short- and Long-term Recommendations: Student Persistence/Progress**

- Develop a program of University mentors for students. If faculty and staff were trained to identify potential at-risk students and had the ability to contact them immediately if signs of dropping out occurred, interventions could be initiated more quickly through the appropriate support services. (Short-term)

- Examine how students determine their individual educational goals; develop strategies to help them clarify their goals, including a pathway to attain them. (Short- and long-term)

- Continue to foster those student support interventions that have a positive impact on student engagement and identification with UTEP, such as academic and career advising, counseling, involvement in social and professional student organizations, and other campus-based activities. It is critical to explore ways to engage departments and administrative groups to work together to investigate and address these issues. (Long-term)

- Many of our students express generalized financial or family issues as reasons for leaving. We need to explore ways to build students’ sense of connection to UTEP so that when personal, family, and/or financial crises occur, students stay in school, at least partially, or return quickly and with a minimum disruption in their path to graduation. For example, we need to find new and more frequent means to disseminate information on emergency and short-term financial assistance available to assist students when they encounter financial crises, more frequent and consistent policies on withdrawal from college, and additional information about available student counseling services. (Long-term)
STUDENT SUCCESS TASK FORCE REPORT SUMMARY

We do believe that with a better understanding of why students do or do not persist, UTEP can make a difference in its students’ success. Based on UTEP student surveys, the key factors in students’ decision to stay or leave include the following: financial concerns, academic advising, faculty interactions, academic and student support services, and student engagement. We need to explore this issue more closely, establish a clear framework to understand the problem, and continue to collect and analyze information about our students and their needs. This will allow us understand students’ patterns of behavior more clearly and enable us to react accordingly to ensure high levels of student success at UTEP.

References