

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Graduation Rates and Beyond

- In 2006, the UT System Board of Regents launched the Graduation Rates Initiative to improve the graduation success of students at UT institutions.
- Even though the full impact of institutional efforts that began in 2006 won't show up for several more years, some promising trends exist for many of the UT institutions.
- More improvements are needed to ensure upward trends on all metrics.
- National best practice warns against using the traditional graduation rate metric as the primary measure of graduation performance. Reasons cited:
  - Limited by how few students are captured—only first-time, full-time, degree-seeking (traditional) students.
  - Misses the mark for universities that serve less traditional populations.
  - Could penalize systems that serve disadvantaged and non-traditional students.
  - Could provide incentives for universities not to serve students from lower socio-economic backgrounds or to lower academic standards to increase graduation rates.
- National best practice provides recommendations to improve the measuring of performance:
  - Use broader, multi-faceted approach to capture all aspects of performance for all students.
  - Use appropriate peer groups to contextualize performance.
  - Expand beyond the traditional graduation rate metric.

### Comprehensive Analyses

- Excluding UT Austin, only about 31% of UT students are included in the traditional graduation rate measure.
- Student preparedness is correlated to graduation rates. Some institutions serve greater numbers of students who have to take at least one developmental education course.
- Overall, comparing recent persistence and graduation rate performance using multiple metrics, some positive news emerges: upward trends for almost all of the UT universities.
- Still, on several of the metrics, some universities are not yet trending up and more work needs to be done.
- A broader picture emerges when performance is benchmarked nationally and when the degree production metric is added.
- Compared to benchmarks, even though gaps exist for 4- and 6-year graduation rates for virtually all UT institutions, all but two campuses outperform their own baseline national peers on degree production.
- The rate doubles for most UT institutions when traditional graduation rates are compared to composite graduation and persistence rates that include students who are still enrolled or who have graduated from another Texas institution.
- Performance trends are mixed on community college graduation rates, and improvements are needed.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

- The UT System should consider focusing performance evaluation for graduation success around five core metrics to provide a multi-faceted, comprehensive approach to monitoring progress and success:
  - 4- and 6-year graduation rates, benchmarked (traditional students).
  - First-year persistence rates (traditional students)
  - Degree production ratio, benchmarked (bachelor's degrees awarded relative to undergraduate enrollment).
  - Composite graduation and persistence rates (also includes students who are still enrolled or who have graduated from another Texas institution).
  - Community college graduation rates (success of UT universities in getting community college transfers to complete a bachelor's degree).
- The UT System should consider whether to re-evaluate benchmarks as indicated by the various peer groups to ensure more meaningful performance comparisons.

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