

UT Academic Institutions Reports on Timely Graduation Required by House Bill 1172

Background

House Bill 1172 passed by the 79th Texas Legislature requires that general academic teaching institutions report to their governing boards on efforts implemented to:

- ensure that undergraduate students graduate in a timely manner,
- ensure that undergraduate students do not attempt an excessive number of semester credit hours beyond the minimum number required to complete the students' degree programs,
- provide academic counseling concerning timely graduation,
- develop an online student degree progress report which compares the courses taken and credit received by a student to the courses completed and needed for degree and graduation requirements for each academic term, and
- implement tuition policies that encourage timely graduation.

In addition, the bill requires that the report provide data on how long undergraduates take to complete degree programs. The bill requires that the report "state, for each undergraduate degree program, the average number of semester credit hours attempted and the average number of fall and spring semesters attended by a student completing the program."

The legislation requires that institutions report to their governing boards by November 1 of each year. However, instructions concerning what to include in the reports were not provided by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board until October 2005. As a result, very few Texas public universities met the November deadline. UT academic institutions have submitted their reports to the Office of Academic Affairs and to THECB. The following is a summary of the reports on efforts to foster timely graduation. The data on time to degree required by the bill are provided in a table following the summary.

Summary of UT Academic Institution Reports on Efforts to Encourage Timely Graduation

To ensure that undergraduate students graduate in a timely manner.

To ensure that undergraduate students do not attempt excessive number of semester credit hours beyond the minimum number required to complete the students' degree programs.

To provide academic counseling concerning timely graduation.

Raising graduation rates is a key goal for the University of Texas System academic institutions. The system's annual accountability report provides data on graduation rates and trends for each UT institution. Improving graduation rates and reducing time to degree are essential elements of each UT institutional compact—written agreements between the Chancellor and each institution president that summarize the institution's major goals and priorities, strategic directions, and critical issues. Each presidential workplan also must address efforts to improve graduation rates.

UT academic institutions cite a number of different strategies for addressing timely graduation. Every UT academic institution cites the critical role of academic advising to ensure that students have the specific information needed to help them graduate in a timely manner and avoid taking excessive credit hours. Additional approaches cited by UT academic institutions include, but are not limited to:

- hiring additional faculty to ensure that the faculty/student ratio is appropriate,
- hiring additional advisors to work one-on-one with students to plan their courses and degree programs,
- requiring periodic audits with advisors of student progress,
- offering summer bridge programs address the transition to college life,
- accelerating developmental education,
- providing tutors, and
- providing more courses in the afternoons, evenings and weekends to accommodate nontraditional and part-time students.

UT institutions each employ some of these strategies, tailoring their approaches to the characteristics of the students that attend that institution. For example, enhanced developmental education and tutoring programs are strategies cited by several UT institutions that have less stringent admission standards but they generally are not the focus of efforts at UT academics institutions with more rigorous admission requirements.

To develop an online student degree progress report which compares the courses taken and credit received by a student to the courses completed and needed for degree and graduation requirements for each academic term.

UT Arlington is in the process of switching to a new student information system, PeopleSoft. The university is developing a training module for the advising degree audit function of the new system.

UT Austin provides a degree audit system for students pursuing degrees at the university. This system is used by administrators, advisers, students, and guests. The web-based version (Interactive Degree Audit or IDA) is easily accessible by students and provides a computer-generated report of a student's progress towards completion of specific program requirements at UT Austin. All undergraduate programs and a limited number of graduate programs are available.

UT Brownsville has plans to continue development of a Degree Audit Report System (DARS) and E-Advisor electronic-advising files system in the current year.

UT Dallas has an online degree audit (On Course) which an advisor can use to audit a student's remaining degree requirements. A student can also run this audit at any time, as well as engage in 'what if' scenarios to determine the impact of changing majors. For community college students, the university provides comprehensive articulation guides for transfer students so they can plan their community college careers to maximize their transfer credits.

UT El Paso has implemented an online degree audit program: Course Audit and Program Planning (CAPP), a module in the "Banner" student information system. The CAPP program is currently being used in five of the seven colleges and will be available to students and advisors in all colleges by the end of the spring semester 2006. The CAPP program provides students and advisors with "real-time" degree audit information. In addition, it can be used to calculate the effects of change of major on time to degree completion.

UT Pan American provides a degree audit program available to students on the web that gives the student a progress report, on a semester by semester basis, of the courses completed, credit earned and the courses still needed to complete the degree. This report allows the student to plan his/her own progress toward degree completion and advisors are available to assist students in making decisions about their degree plans.

UT Permian Basin has purchased a degree audit system and will be implementing it in FY 2006. This online system enables students to quickly find which earned credits meet degree requirements and find information regarding required credits needed for various majors. The system will provide the required student degree progress report each academic term.

UT San Antonio has implemented and is revising an automated degree checking program to provide accurate and timely information to students about degree requirements. Once this system is fully-functional, mandatory semester-by-semester degree plans with expected graduation date will be developed for all students with their advisors. In addition, all students will be required to develop degree plans with their advisors showing coursework to be taken each semester until graduation with an anticipated graduation date.

UT Tyler offers an online student degree progress report which compares the courses taken and credit received to the courses needed for core completion requirements. The report is available to all students via *Campus Connect*.

To implement tuition policies that encourage timely graduation.

Tuition deregulation has given Texas public universities the flexibility needed to develop and adopt tuition policies that encourage timely graduation. Since the passage of deregulation in 2003, UT academic institutions have been exploring how to use tuition policy at their respective institutions to provide incentives that are tailored to each university's unique student population. For the 2006-2007 academic year, many UT institutions are proposing new timely graduation initiatives. The following section describes both current and proposed tuition policies; action on the 2006-2007 proposals will be taken at a spring 2006 Board meeting.

Starting in fall 2006, UT Arlington proposes to consolidate most course and program fees into a single rate and cap charges at 14 semester credit hours; additional hours would be at no cost to the student. UT Arlington also offers a tuition rebate to students who complete 30 semester credit hours during the academic year to provide an incentive to students to take additional courses and graduate sooner.

UT Austin implemented a pilot flat rate tuition program for the Colleges of Liberal Arts and Natural Sciences in fall 2003. The success of the pilot project, as measured by an increase in the average course load for Liberal Arts and Natural Sciences students, led UT Austin to adopt flat rate tuition for all undergraduate students beginning in fall 2005. With flat rate tuition, a student may take additional courses at no additional cost, providing a clear financial incentive to reduce the time to graduation.

UT Brownsville has implemented flat tuition and compulsory fees for students taking 15 credits or more. A pilot program is being planned for next year to provide flat rates for students taking more than 14 hours.

UT Dallas will offer a tuition guarantee to entering students beginning in fall 2007. Under this guarantee program, tuition and fees will remain fixed for the four years that it takes to earn a baccalaureate degree. At the end of the guarantee period, a student who continued at the university would have to pay the new higher tuition rates in effect at that time. This program will provide undergraduate students, as well as their parents, with a powerful incentive to complete a degree program on-time.

UT El Paso will provide a voluntary version of the tuition guarantee concept beginning in fall 2006. UTEP's pilot program will guarantee eligible entering freshmen in 2006 a fixed tuition and mandatory fee rate for coursework completed within four academic years. Based upon a review of the pilot, the university expects to submit a proposal for a similar guaranteed tuition program for freshmen entering in fall 2007.

UT Permian Basin has developed a *Cash for College* program. Under this program, any student who completes thirty semester credit hours in an academic year (fall through summer school) earns a \$400.00 tuition credit that can be used in their senior year. The thirty credits must fulfill degree requirements. Credits that repeat courses already taken do not count for the *Cash for College* tuition credit. *Cash for College* is designed to provide an incentive to complete the senior year. Historically, many UT Permian Basin students "stop out" from college in order to earn funds to pay for college. This has led to many instances where students reach their senior year, but then may take several years to complete the degree. The *Cash for College* program will provide extra funding that senior year so that students will be able to complete their degree program.

Finally, at UT Tyler, the *Free Senior Semester Tuition Rebate* program rewards those students who enroll in 15 or more credit hours and maintain consecutive semester enrollment. Students can receive up to 15 credits tuition-free in their senior year by participating in the program.

In summary, UT academic institutions are taking advantage of the flexibility provided by tuition deregulation to develop and implement tuition policies that give students opportunities and incentives to complete their degrees in a timely manner.

UT System Academic Institutions

**Average Credits Attempted and Mean Semesters toward Baccalaureate Degree in Program Areas
Fiscal Year 2004 Graduates**

<u>Institution Name</u>	<u>Program</u>	<u># Grads</u>	<u>Credits Attempted at Any Texas Univ.</u>	<u>Mean Semesters (not including Summer) at Any Texas Univ.</u>
UT Arlington				
	Science and Math	123	152	10
	Arts and Architecture	506	154	11
	Business	589	151	10
	Engineering*	155	156	10
	Health	126	152	11
	Social Sciences and Service	285	151	10
Total Graduates		1,499		
Institutional Average			152	10
UT Austin				
	Science and Math	1,026	138	9
	Arts and Architecture	2,316	129	9
	Business	1,044	124	9
	Engineering*	754	139	9
	Health	172	140	9
	Social Sciences and Service	1,917	129	9
Total Graduates		7,229		
Institutional Average			131	9
UT Brownsville				
	Science and Math	40	172	12
	Arts and Architecture	115	164	11
	Business	86	150	10
	Engineering*	1	142	8
	Health	6	141	12
	Social Sciences and Service	118	156	11
	Technology	8	145	10
Total Graduates		374		
Institutional Average			158	11
UT Dallas				
	Science and Math	228	146	10
	Arts and Architecture	166	144	10
	Business	359	143	10
	Engineering*	74	148	10
	Health	17	132	10
	Social Sciences and Service	172	138	10
Total Graduates		1,016		
Institutional Average			143	10

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Average Credits Attempted and Mean Semesters toward Baccalaureate Degree in Program Areas Fiscal Year 2004 Graduates

<u>Institution Name</u> <u>Program</u>	<u># Grads</u>	<u>Credits Attempted at Any Texas Univ.</u>	<u>Mean Semesters (not including Summer) at Any Texas Univ.</u>
UT El Paso			
Science and Math	109	166	11
Arts and Architecture	278	170	12
Business	188	159	11
Engineering*	80	165	12
Health	106	165	12
Social Sciences and Service	198	157	11
Total Graduates	959		
Institutional Average		164	11
UT Pan American			
Science and Math	122	166	11
Arts and Architecture	377	168	11
Business	257	163	11
Engineering*	57	171	10
Health	115	174	12
Social Sciences and Service	252	167	11
Total Graduates	1,180		
Institutional Average		167	11
UT Permian Basin			
Science and Math	38	151	12
Arts and Architecture	71	149	11
Business	36	155	11
Social Sciences and Service	76	150	11
Total Graduates	221		
Institutional Average		151	11
UT San Antonio			
Science and Math	204	161	11
Arts and Architecture	369	156	11
Business	505	154	11
Engineering*	76	180	13
Health	16	172	12
Social Sciences and Service	428	150	11
Total Graduates	1,598		
Institutional Average		156	11

UT System Academic Institutions

**Average Credits Attempted and Mean Semesters toward Baccalaureate Degree in Program Areas
Fiscal Year 2004 Graduates**

<u>Institution Name</u> <u>Program</u>	<u># Grads</u>	<u>Credits Attempted at Any Texas Univ.</u>	<u>Mean Semesters (not including Summer) at Any Texas Univ.</u>
UT Tyler			
Science and Math	32	155	11
Arts and Architecture	103	155	11
Business	73	153	11
Engineering*	12	162	12
Health	54	153	11
Social Sciences and Service	80	149	10
Technology	10	152	10
Total Graduates	364		
Institutional Average		153	11

* Engineering programs typically require more semester credit hours than most other undergraduate degree programs.