

UT MARTIN ASSESSMENT NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER–OCTOBER 2024

Our most important job is to help our students succeed!

QEP Update – Year 1

In this issue of the Assessment Newsletter, we are excited to present an update on the first year of our Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) that we submitted as part of our reaccreditation efforts. We asked Dr. Brad Baumgardner, Director of the QEP, to provide a report on our 2023-24 activities:

Accelerating Takeoff: The UT Martin Retention and Progression Plan

As a required component of the SACSCOC reaccreditation procedure, institutions are required to complete a quality enhancement plan (QEP) intended to reflect the institution's commitment to overall quality and effectiveness and is closely linked to ongoing strategic planning and evaluation processes.

UT Martin's approach to the QEP was informed by institutional strategic planning, faculty, staff, student, and community input via the Foundations of Excellence process including focus groups and survey data, and data supported assessments of current practices and their impacts and outcomes.

The full QEP document that was submitted to SACSCOC is available on the website <https://liveutk.sharepoint.com/sites/UTMQEP>, and the executive summary is included below.

Executive Summary

The University of Tennessee at Martin, like many institutions across the country, is facing an "enrollment cliff" within the next few years. The number of traditional fresh-out-of-high-school students is decreasing, which critically increases the need to recruit transfer students and adult learners and to retain all students in order to remain a vibrant and healthy campus. In examining these challenges, UT Martin has identified institutional performance gaps among subpopulations of students—in terms of both retention from one semester to the next and progression to the attainment of 30-hour, 60-

hour, and 90-hour benchmarks—that provide ample opportunities for self-examination and improvement.

Accelerating Takeoff: The UT Martin Retention and Progression Plan focuses on one overarching objective: to improve student success through activities focused on increasing the retention and progression of first-year students. To achieve this goal, UT Martin will revise the first-year student experience by focusing on two fundamental goals:

1. Preparing first-year students for success at the institution.
2. Preparing the institution for the needs of first-year students.

These fundamental goals are comprised of distinct approaches with measurable outcomes designed to maximize the use of existing resources and best practices and to invest in areas of opportunity that further support the success and retention of first-year students. The Accelerating Takeoff Plan was developed in part to respond to strategic planning goals addressing performance gaps as identified using institutional data. In Fall 2021, UT Martin began a process developed by the John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education called the Foundations of Excellence (FoE), which required the institution to take an honest, in-depth look at the current state of first-year student experiences and determine opportunities to improve those experiences, both inside and outside the classroom. The FoE process involved more than 70 faculty, staff, and students as leaders in this investigation and resulted in 40 recommendations regarding ways the institution could change to meet the evolving needs of students. Subsequent work to date has involved more than 100 additional faculty and staff contributing ideas, questions, and suggestions for further investigation. This FoE investigation, along with the resulting recommendations and subsequent work,

informed the core approaches being used to address the two fundamental goals of the Accelerating Takeoff Plan.

UT Martin is strongly committed to investing the resources needed for the Accelerating Takeoff Plan to succeed. Substantial financial resources and personnel hours will be devoted to the implementation of the plan to provide support for its objectives. The Accelerating Takeoff Plan includes both formative assessment strategies designed to provide opportunities to adjust the plan as needed and summative assessment strategies designed to determine the overall impact on student retention and progression. Conservatively, UT Martin predicts over the next five years, the Accelerating Takeoff Plan will result in increasing the overall retention rate of first-year students by 3% and the overall progression rate by 4%, with some subpopulations experiencing significantly higher improvements in these rates.

QEP Leadership Team

Brad Baumgardner
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Goals

To achieve the overarching retention and progression goal, UT Martin has defined two fundamental goals, each with two main objectives, addressing specific elements directly related to the retention and progression of first-year students.

Fundamental Goal 1: Preparing first-year students for success at the institution.

- Objective 1: Revise the General Studies 101 (GENS 101) Freshman Seminar course.
- Objective 2: Invest in infrastructure and personnel for First-Year Programming.

Fundamental Goal 2: Preparing the institution for the needs of first-year students.

- Objective 3: Create a Center for Teaching and Learning dedicated to professional development for faculty.

- Objective 4: Enhance current academic support programs (tutoring, supplemental instruction, Math Lab, Writing Center).

In addition to specific progress toward achieving these goals and objectives, UT Martin has also recently engaged in related projects within multiple areas that will contribute to overall QEP goals. These important steps reflect our university's commitment across all divisions to recruit, welcome, and retain students at the institution. Though some of these efforts may not be directly related to QEP initiatives, it is important to recognize the important contribution to first-year student success that these changes may create. Retention relies on the work of every employee. While the list below pertains primarily to significant structural or programmatic changes within individual units, the meaningful day to day work done across our campus, regional centers, and online programs continues to greatly contribute to student success even if it is not highlighted in this short list.

- UTM recently received a Title III grant from the Department of Education funding 1.5 million dollars over 5 years to create our Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) in conjunction with a Library Learning Commons. This funding and the interdisciplinary approach to this project will help us to kickstart our CTL and will create a centralized space within the Paul Meek Library for faculty development as well as increased space and personnel for tutoring efforts across the general education curriculum.
- With support from the Office of the Provost, all academic units have contributed to a "Catalog Refresh", solidifying a core general education curriculum and simplifying some degree parameters. This will contribute to more streamlined pathways for transfer students and facilitate smoother change of major procedures between programs.
- Recent changes in the self-assignment housing process for returning students require that students are first registered for courses during the term in question. This not only encourages returning students to

register earlier (leading to stronger retention trends), but also allows Housing stronger predictive models to prioritize beds for incoming students.

- Retention and award criteria and some award amounts for most UTM merit-based scholarships were adjusted to align with the HOPE Lottery Scholarship criteria and to be more regionally competitive. This should result in more students retaining these awards, potentially contributing to increased retention for students.
- Multicultural Affairs in partnership with the Student Success Center has initiated specific programming for First Generation students. Initial efforts have included a first-generation graduation celebration, a first-generation dinner hosted by the Student Government Association, and the creation of a first-generation mentorship program within the Office of Multicultural Affairs.
- In partnership with Admissions and our Deans, the Student Success Center has created programming for National Transfer Week (Oct. 21st – 25th) to highlight our transfer students, celebrate their successes, and to engage with our current transfers to continue to develop approaches that help students streamline the transfer process. As a culminating event for the week, a Transfer Experience Day has been planned. This event will invite prospective transfer students as well as faculty and administrators from our largest partner schools to visit UTM, engage in conversation and workshops surrounding the transfer experience, and to learn about our academic offerings, resources, and campus culture.

For each of our established goals and objectives, the university has assembled an implementation team to guide the progress toward each goal. As some of the objectives will require multiple efforts and there is no one action that will achieve our desired outcomes, formative and summative assessments will continue to inform approaches throughout the five-year span of the QEP and beyond. Detailed efforts related to each goal and objective are outlined in the following narrative.

Fundamental Goal 1: Preparing first-year students for success at the university.

- Objective 1: Revise the General Studies 101 (GENS 101) Freshman Seminar course.

GENS 101

An implementation team has been created consisting of a representative from each academic college as well as representation from Student Affairs and the student body. This implementation team worked to craft a mission statement for the GENS 101 course that aligns with our institutional mission and goals and to build on the past successes of the course by refining its Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) to reflect the intent and mission of the course. Mission Statement: At UT Martin, GENS 101 serves our institution's mission by investing in our First-Year students to explore and connect with the University and Martin community, create a foundation for academic success, and encourage them to become responsible citizens who can lead and serve in a diverse world.

GENS 101 Student Learning Outcomes

- A. Create a foundation for academic success.
Students will:
Explore and utilize academic strategies and university resources, policies, and procedures, related to students' courses and learning experiences.
- B. Explore and connect with UT Martin and the community.
Students will:
Identify and engage with university and/or community resources, cultural, experiential, co-curricular, and/or professional opportunities, events, and experiences that contribute to learning both in and out of the classroom.
- C. Demonstrate a commitment to personal growth and community responsibility.
Students will:
Engage with campus-wide initiatives to promote a sustainable, equitable, and inclusive learning environment that benefits the well-being of the UTM community.

In order to assess these learning outcomes, the implementation team has created five Core

Assignments that will be common to all GENS 101 sections and will comprise twenty percent of the overall grade. While specific elements of these assignments will be variable depending upon the pedagogical preferences of the instructors, the overall activities and approaches will provide similar shared experiences for students taking the course. Each assignment is directly linked to one or more of the SLOs. Each assignment carries an embedded grading scheme with an accompanying rubric where appropriate, allowing aggregated data gathering on student progress for accreditation standards.

While the content of the course is important, the opportunity to connect with instructors, classmates, student leaders, and the UTM community is also an integral part of the GENS 101 course and the first-year experience. For this reason, the core assignments often feature high-impact practices and provide opportunities for community connection. Developing rapport as a cohort is also critically important within GENS 101. While the leadership team has made activities, resources, course planning documents, and supplementary assignments available to any instructor in the GENS 101 program, only requiring the five core assignments is intended to allow instructors the flexibility to shape specific elements of the course in ways that speak to content in their disciplines or to more closely work with their teaching styles. Course design support and a repository of planning resources are available for newer instructors, but aside from the core assignments no other required elements exist. All instructors teaching GENS 101 will receive a Canvas Blueprint shell with the required core assignments and optional instructor resources.

In addition to assessment via the core assignments, survey tools to assess instructor, student, and Pep Leader perceptions are being created and will be used to provide formative assessment for future GENS 101 development. Clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of the Pep Leader and the instructor are outlined in a guiding principles document. Whereas these roles and responsibilities have existed within a broad understanding in the past, clearly defined responsibilities will allow instructors and Pep Leaders to work together more effectively.

The GENS 101 leadership team has worked to create more equitable access to this high impact course for our first-year students by expanding the number of sections offered to

include sections for students studying exclusively online, sections at regional centers, and special interest sections. Pep Leader selection has also been adapted to encourage participation of the strongest student leaders regardless of major. Pairing Pep Leaders with sections and instructors related to their majors is still a priority, but overall Pep Leader selection will now depend more heavily on the leadership abilities of the student rather than their specific major.

Fundamental Goal 1: Preparing first-year students for success at the university.

- Objective 2: Invest in infrastructure and personnel for First-Year Programming.

Programming and Engagement

An implementation team with representatives from Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and Information Technology has been created to address this goal. This goal is being approached in two primary ways: streamlining the infrastructure and procedures needed to successfully onboard our new students (new freshmen and transfers), and creating and refining opportunities for new students to connect with UTM.

Experiences for new students can vary and many units and departments have traditionally been involved in elements of the new student experience. From SOAR and advising, to new student move-in and Welcome Weekend, many of these elements that contribute to a student's initial impression and experience at UTM have traditionally been coordinated by different departments. In an effort to enhance communication and emphasize the importance of UTM's commitment to assisting students transitioning to study at UTM, the university has created a new position – Assistant Director of First Year Experience – and hired Benjamin Ort as our inaugural Assistant Director. This role will oversee and implement the day-to-day operations of GENS 101 including Pep Leader selection and training and all logistical planning needs for GENS 101. This role also includes the development and execution of Welcome Weekend including communication and logistical planning for all involved departments. Additional outreach and engagement opportunities will also fall under the scope of this position, including assistance in developing specialized communication plans for first-year

students to be implemented by the Student Success Center.

Assessment measures from previous years are already informing updates to Pep Leader training and the structure of Welcome Weekend. Based on feedback from students, Pep Leaders, faculty, and staff, Welcome Weekend activities have been revised to offer more flexibility for students and present multiple avenues of engagement. This work has largely been completed by a Welcome Weekend committee assembled by the Assistant Director of First Year Experience. This committee will continue to refine the Welcome Weekend experience by defining intended outcomes for students and assessing student experiences related to these outcomes.

Surveys of Pep Leaders have also led to training updates to assist our student leaders with the skills and knowledge they need to perform the role. As the roles of instructors and Pep Leaders have been more clearly defined in GENS 101, less emphasis on classroom instruction will be included in Pep Leader training and preparation. While basic presentation and organizational skills needed to facilitate classroom activities will be covered, the focus of Pep Leader professional development will now also heavily include student leadership development and training on approaches and techniques to foster engagement with new students.

The Assistant Director of First Year Experience has also updated existing programs and developed outreach approaches to assist new students at UTM. The Registration Celebration hosted by the Student Success Center during each registration cycle has been scheduled to align with “I heart UTM” activities in the Spring, allowing efforts by multiple departments to work toward common goals. This realignment led to meaningful registration interactions with 317 students in the Spring of 2024 – representing an increase in student participation of 127%. UTM has also initiated a “First Flight Lunch” celebrating new students arriving in the Spring term. Much of the programming designed to assist new students at UTM (Welcome Weekend, Organization and Information Fairs, City of Martin Fair, etc.) is not available to students who start in the Spring term. The “First Flight Lunch” offers students a chance to get to know UTM’s support networks via an informal lunch event. By hosting a lunch specifically for

these students, we can show them that UTM values their presence at our university. We also have an opportunity to connect them to the personnel and resources that will assist them during their time at UTM. The inaugural “First Flight Lunch” served twenty-two new UTM students.

Infrastructure Updates

In addition to programmatic updates, this QEP team has also been working on infrastructure refinement that will assist both students and UTM personnel during the new student onboarding process. Though these efforts focus primarily on procedures related to onboarding new students, some of the results have positively impacted processes for all students at UTM.

In advance of the busy summer orientation season, UTM conducted an initial advising survey at the request of Chancellor Freeman. Analysis of the preliminary information is informing a more comprehensive survey conducted in conjunction with the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), a nationally recognized thought and practice leader on advising theory, process, and implementation. Our SOAR surveys for parents and students were also updated and analyses of the responses will help to shape some of the customizable features of the NACADA survey.

Unintended registration for courses held at centers and for online courses has been a problem during past SOAR registration periods. In partnership with our regional centers, cohort codes used as registration prerequisites for courses offered at our regional centers were reintroduced in the Spring of 2023 as a pilot to gauge efficacy. These measures proved to be successful and these cohort codes were continued for the Fall 2023 term. During the summer 2023 registration cycle, no student registered in error for courses primarily held at center locations. For reference, 312 distinct registration errors of this type were recorded and addressed in the previous summer. Students often didn’t understand the section designations for centers and this simple step helped to streamline the process. Our student success counselors also follow up after each SOAR with any new freshmen who may have added online coursework in error to confirm that this is what they intended. This allows us to address any

schedule alterations long before the first day of classes each fall.

Other logistical challenges routinely encountered during initial advising and registration were also addressed during the Summer 2024 orientation cycle. Catalog language surrounding initial placement for students was sometimes vague and open to interpretation. Though some placement procedures were published, not all prerequisites or placement metrics were available or transparent for students in the catalog. Some of the catalog language addressing “mandatory placement” was not completely clear. Confusion around required placement metrics coupled with the way that pre-SOAR placement reports were presented to advisors often resulted in students registering for coursework counter to placement guidelines, or failing to register for required learning support courses altogether. Further analysis showed that placement metrics listed in the 2023 catalog would require more seats in learning support courses than the university could offer – specifically in the READ 100 course. Based on these data and the inconsistency of catalog language surrounding placement, the faculty senate approved a revision to the cut score for READ 100 to allow the course to be available to students most in need of this support.

A new ARGOS report was developed to help advisors prepare for students during SOAR. This report is available on demand, allowing advisors the ability to prepare for incoming students days or weeks in advance. This report provides more information than was readily available in previous approaches and instead of showing all MATH or ENGL courses a student may qualify to take – it only displays information on whether or not a student is required to take MATH 100, ENGL 105, or READ 100. Paired with this new ARGOS report, advisors now have access to an advising guide for initial placement and access to high school transcripts via either Slate or Xtender. The advising guide provides details on placement and prerequisite structures for MATH, READ, and ENGL courses as well as helpful information for other general education coursework that may have prerequisites or optional placement tests. Answers to frequently asked questions, contacts for department chairs, and resources related to understanding and applying credit by examination (AP, CLEP, SDC, IB, etc.) are also provided. Though our

placement procedures still need fine tuning, these changes have helped to reduce the number of students enrolling in inappropriate courses. From Fall 2017 to Fall 2021, an average of 303 new students (roughly a third of all freshmen) had registered for an ENGL course that did not align with their placement. With these updates in place, 29 errors in ENGL placement were documented in the Summer of 2024. While this procedure is still far from perfect, this represents a reduction of just over 90%.

Changes to the UTM’s entrance deficiency policies have also led to a more streamlined approach for advisors and students. Though entrance deficiencies still play a role in the admissions process, other than the U.S. History component required at the state level, individual entrance deficiencies will no longer need to be addressed via coursework taken at UTM. This simplifies the understanding of degree requirements and the appearance of the degree audit for both students and advisors. Our catalog has been updated to reflect this. Other than the U.S. History requirement, no other entrance deficiency should show in degree audits moving forward.

Student Health and Counseling has also updated approaches for tracking compliance with state required immunizations by implementing more complete use of a feature in Banner Admin. that allows those with access to update and monitor compliance with specific vaccination requirements. Tracking this information in Banner also allows the creation of ARGOS reports to more easily identify students with missing records. This tool, along with broader access to state records, may help us reduce registration holds related to immunization requirements.

As we continue to think about ways to bolster support for our transfer students, new tools that may assist advisors and academic leaders in evaluation of transfer credit have been investigated and evaluated. At the request of the Chancellor, UTM will soon begin working with a College Source resource - Transfer Evaluation System (TES). This product provides quick and easy access to thousands of catalogs, institutional profiles, and course descriptions allowing academic leaders the ability to more easily evaluate potential equivalencies or substitutions. This resource should not significantly change our existing approval procedures, but will provide a strong research

tool to allow decision makers access to course descriptions, gen ed requirements at other universities, and accreditation information for other schools in addition to back catalogs and information on courses changes over time. Training and access information will be available soon.

Fundamental Goal 2: Preparing the institution for the needs of first-year students.

- Objective 3: Create a Center for Teaching and Learning dedicated to professional development for faculty.

An implementation team with representatives from Academic Affairs, Access and Engagement, and IT has been created. This team has already crafted an initial vision statement for the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) and initiated the task of cataloging and formalizing the existing professional development support opportunities, training, and technology support resources available for faculty, staff, and student leaders. These resources include our revised faculty onboarding procedure, CANVAS and instructional technology training, GENS 101 workshops, and formalized training for our student peer tutors. In the future these functions (in addition to other professional development opportunities) will either be directly administered or supported and informed by the CTL. Planning for tracking participation and impact in these activities has started, with a goal of using these data to create future opportunities in areas of need and interest. Dr. Adnan Rasool has been named the inaugural director of the CTL and will begin his new post in the Spring semester 2025.

To serve the objectives directly associated with our second fundamental goal, UTM applied for and recently received a Title III grant from the Department of Education totaling \$1.5 million over the course of five years. This grant will provide direct funding assistance for the creation and support of a Library Learning Commons, the expansion of our student peer tutoring efforts, increased distance learning capabilities within the library, and initial support for our Center for Teaching and Learning. The Title III grant is led by project director Dr. Jamie Mantooth.

As a component of the assessment of the grant, specific high DFWI coursework has been identified and targeted for increased support. Impacts of efforts made by the CTL and expanded tutoring availability (covered in more detail in the next objective) will be assessed to measure efficacy. These formative assessments will help us refine and adapt our approaches where needed.

Fundamental Goal 2: Preparing the institution for the needs of first-year students.

- Objective 4: Enhance current academic support programs (tutoring, supplemental instruction, Math Lab, Writing Center).

An implementation team with representatives from Academic Affairs, the student body, and all university wide academic support areas has been created. The initial goal of this team was to create a comprehensive account of the types of tutoring/peer education currently provided for students and to assess usage patterns, availability, and impact of current tutoring efforts. Any gaps in coverage or needed subject areas will continue to inform approaches to staffing and training efforts for our tutoring units.

UTM's recently awarded Title III grant also serves our tutoring efforts. Within the structure of the grant are monies allocated for the expansion of tutoring availability via the establishment of a physical space (the Library Learning Commons), additional personnel (Learning Commons Tutors), and increased distance learning (synchronous instruction capability) via updated technology within the library. Paired with the efforts of the CTL, this expanded capability for tutoring and peer mentoring is intended to create opportunities for collaboration between faculty and student mentors/tutors, while increasing the availability and accessibility of tutoring services on campus.

As a component of both our QEP and the Title III grant, updated tracking and monitoring of the usage of tutoring services and an evaluation of their outcomes has begun. Standardized baseline assessments have been created by the QEP implementation team and will be applied across all university-wide tutoring efforts during the 2024-2025 academic year. In conjunction with required Title III benchmarking, specific high enrollment and

traditionally challenging coursework across the general education curriculum will be prioritized for supplemental instruction and monitored for outcomes related to these extra efforts.

While grant funding will help to establish expanded tutoring, a more permanent funding solution has long been needed to cover the expenses of supplemental instruction and STEM lab tutoring. These student resources have proven to be very effective, in some instances resulting in up to half a letter grade difference for those that take advantage of these resources when compared to those that don't. But in the past, permanent funding was difficult to secure.

During the Spring of 2024, the Student Government Association passed a resolution addressing the need for a permanent funding solution to support student tutoring efforts on campus and proposed a modest student fee in support of these efforts. UTM's administration supported this effort, and the fee was approved by the Board of Trustees during the Summer 2024 meeting. Initial plans for these monies include full funding for supplemental instruction and the STEM lab (personnel and operational budgets), additions to the budgets of both the Hortense Parrish Writing Center and the Mathematics Learning Lab (allowing competitive and equitable compensation for all student tutors), funding to support student tutoring in the Call Me MiSTER program, a pilot program to offer expanded in-person tutoring at our regional centers, and funding for expanded training and professional development opportunities for our student tutors.

To support our student tutors and mentors, an initial training and professional development program has been developed. Students working in these peer support roles will be expected to complete baseline proficiency modules and will have the option to continue to more advanced training in areas of specific interest.

Our implementation team has also created a unified website and fliers to advertise all existing academic support offerings at UTM. Links to schedules and specific information on individual support areas are featured on the site. More details may be found at the website: <https://www.utm.edu/academics/academic-support.php>

Next Steps

Efforts related to all four of our primary objectives are well underway and now that the summer orientation and enrollment period is behind us, our implementation groups will reconvene to assess our approaches and look at adjustments or additional needs. We will continue to collect data and perform assessment measures on the changes that have already been implemented. These outcomes will inform any adjustments to goals or processes for year two of our QEP.

Our new strategic plan could potentially impact some directions taken with the goals already outlined and our implementation teams will adapt as needed to serve the overall goals of the institution.

Just for Fun – Songs for Assessment Inspiration

A recent thread on an assessment listserv began with an email asking for assessment-inspiring songs. A lengthy conversation ensued, with one of the best responses coming from Nicholas Gewecke from Dalton State College:

One song that includes a full assessment cycle is David Allan Coe's "You Never Even Called Me By My Name." In the recording, there's a large chunk of the song that occurs and then there's a spoken section talking about how there was a claim (statement of an expected outcome) that the song up to that point was the perfect country and western song. But then deficiencies are identified through application of a rubric/checklist (Does the song involve: Mama? Trains? Trucks? Prison? Gettin' drunk?). These results are then used to pursue improvement (in this case, through addition of another verse). And then the new artifact (song with the added verse) is assessed.

Other suggestions:

- “How Will I Know?”- seeking direct evidence
- “Seasons of Love” (from Rent) – identifying appropriate measures
- “Stuck in the Middle With You” – measures of central tendency
- “It’s Hard to be Humble (When You’re Perfect in Every Way)” – importance of authentic assessment