New Transfer Student Success

The University of Texas at Dallas' Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP)

Executive Summary

The University of Texas at Dallas' Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), New Transfer Student Success (NTSS), is designed to create a culture of transfer student success by implementing two high-impact practices: (1) peer mentoring and (2) a first-year transfer student seminar course to increase transfer students' sense of belonging. For the purpose of the QEP, The University of Texas at Dallas (UT Dallas) defines belonging as: students' sense of purpose and agency to achieve educational, personal, and professional goals as they recognize that they are respected, valued, and included in all aspects of the campus environment. This definition is derived from a definition of belonging from an existing student success initiative of The University of Texas System, of which UT Dallas is a component institution. Hence, the overarching goal of NTSS is to improve transfer student success and retention by creating a campus community in which transfer students are engaged and feel a sense of belonging toward UT Dallas.

UT Dallas proposes that belonging and engagement encompass four major areas: (1) knowledge of UT Dallas resources, opportunities and supports; (2) involvement at UT Dallas; (3) relationships within UT Dallas communities; and (4) perceived connection to UT Dallas. Specifically, transfer students will perceive a connection to UT Dallas; will develop and maintain relationships with UT Dallas peers, faculty, and staff; will be actively involved with the UT Dallas community; and will identify UT Dallas resources that are used to overcome common challenges that transfer students face academically, socially, and personally. The institution will, in turn, increase its retention from year one to year two for transfer students to 85%, an increase of about 5% over current values for fall-to-fall retention and spring-to-spring retention. These objectives and outcomes will be measured by multiple indirect and direct measures, including reflection essays and surveys.

The focus on transfer students for the QEP was determined after the SACSCOC on-site reviewers provided feedback and recommended that the institution re-evaluate whether it wanted its overall first-year student success initiative, Orbit: Keeping New Comets on Course, to also serve as its QEP. Orbit is a comprehensive first-year student success initiative that helps all new Comets—whether first-time in college, transfer, graduate, or first-year international students—engage, explore, and discover pathways to success during their first year at UT Dallas. Because in its 49-year-history UT Dallas evolved from a graduate institution to including upper-division transfer undergraduates to then adding freshmen, and because international students comprise such a significant percentage of the University's graduate enrollment, the University believes it is uniquely suited to offer an initiative that targets each of these populations. Collectively, the Orbit initiatives build the foundation for success by bolstering students' academic and co-curricular engagement as well as their sense of belonging at UT Dallas. Although Orbit will continue as a university initiative, university stakeholders selected the transfer student

population as the focus for the QEP after a closer inspection of available data, institutional capacity, and an ability to impact positively a segment of students who identified through surveys and interviews a desire to feel more engaged to campus. The QEP will be administered by an Oribit Director in collaboration with existing faculty, schools deans, staff in the Office of Undergraduate Education and in the Provost's Office, as well as with existing staff within Student Affairs, specifically the Office of Transfer Student Services.

I. Introduction

Conceptual Framework: University Mission, Vision, Strategic Planning

The University of Texas at Dallas' selection of New Transfer Student Success (NTSS) for the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) is an extension of the University's mission and vision statements and strategic planning priorities.

UT Dallas Mission

The University of Texas at Dallas provides the State of Texas and the nation with excellent, innovative education and research. The University is committed to graduating well-rounded citizens whose education has prepared them for rewarding lives and productive careers in a constantly changing world; to continually improving educational and research programs in the arts and sciences, engineering, and management; and to assisting the commercialization of intellectual capital generated by students, staff, and faculty.

UT Dallas Vision

To be one of the nation's best public research universities and one of the great universities of the world.

Our commitment to excellence remains as strong today as it was in 1969. Our aspirations for The University of Texas at Dallas (UT Dallas) are based on a culture of excellence, innovation and improvement:

- A top-tier public research university with collaborative centers of excellence, prepared to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing, technology-driven global society
- A force in innovative, transdisciplinary research and education in emerging areas of technology, science and learning
- A groundbreaking leader in both framing and answering the questions faced by business, policymakers, health care and the public
- A synergistic partner with local industry, government and cultural organizations as well as local K-12 schools, community colleges and universities
- A responsible global citizen that enthusiastically attends to our duty to create a sustainable environment
- One of the most creative, innovative universities in the nation and world.

UT Dallas Strategic Plan

In June of 2017, UT Dallas President Richard C. Benson called for a new University Strategic Plan which was finalized in July of 2018. The 2018 Strategic Plan, https://www.utdallas.edu/strategicplan, includes the aforementioned Mission and Vision. As part of the strategic plan development process, working groups were developed to address several recommended strategic themes; among them, "Enrich the Student Experience: Guarantee a Comprehensive Approach to Student Success." The overarching aspirational objective of the student success theme is to take student opportunities and services to the next

level for all years of study–from matriculation to graduation. The charge of this initiative is to reinforce student success efforts to ensure all students accomplish judicious progress toward earning a degree. To answer the charge, the University will offer students robust engagement opportunities both in and out of the classroom that will cultivate leadership, service to the community, and encourage attainment of marketable skills that will lead to meaningful and gainful employment. The University will strive to increase student success related services and high-impact, inclusive opportunities while involving faculty and staff in the charge to support student success. The aspirational goals in this strategic initiative align with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's 2015-2030 statewide higher education Strategic Plan, 60x30TX (http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/reports/PDF/ 9306.PDF?CFID=57485581&CFTOKEN=60423954) and with former University of Texas System (UT System) Chancellor William McRaven's Student Success Quantum Leap.

UT System's Student Success Framework: Quantum Leap

To further lend to the importance of improving student engagement, in September 2016, then-UT System Chancellor William McRaven, who had identified "quantum leaps" to move UT System forward, declared student success through engagement and students' sense of belonging as crucial components of the Student Success Quantum Leap. To quote Chancellor McRaven, "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" (https://go.utdallas.edu/repnav3193) (UT System, 2016b). The expectation that all UT System campuses will commit to improving student engagement further supports UT Dallas' commitment to implement and sustain this QEP. As a result of the UT System student success imperative (https://www.utsystem.edu/offices/academic-affairs/undergraduate-student-success-initiative) (UT System, 2015), UT Dallas has developed initiatives responding to the Quantum Leap's four pillars: belonging, advising, finances, and assessment. UT System has provided its institutions with three-year grants to cover some expenses, and UT Dallas used a portion of the grant awarded to them to pilot one of the high-impact practices identifed for the QEP: the Transfer Mentor Program. Thus, the QEP is a natural extension of the university's and UT System's larger commitment to student success.

Informed QEP Process

Through a robust selection process that included open-submission and focused-proposal periods, coupled with vetting of proposals by campus constituency groups including students, faculty, staff, administrators and alumni, and an evaluation of assessment data from both the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the UT Dallas Office of Strategic Planning and Analysis, a need to improve an important component of student success - retention - through the critical pathways of engagement and belonging, emerged. UT Dallas' original QEP, Orbit: Keeping New Comets on Course (Orbit), was developed to provide important opportunities on these pathways to student success through an increased engagement and sense of belonging for

new to UT Dallas students: first-time-in-college (FTIC), transfer, graduate, and international students. Subsequent to the site review, though, UT Dallas stakeholders, including representatives from the division of Student Affairs and the division of Academic Affairs, determined that focusing on only one population of students for the QEP's five-year reporting window was appropriate. This decision was largely informed by existing data that indicated there is a significant unmet need to increase transfer students' retention and sense of belonging. UT Dallas first recognized this in a ten-year UT Dallas enrollment management plan submitted to UT System in 2012 (UT Dallas, 2012) and has since built upon this knowledge with additional data. For example, several of UT Dallas' recent survey results, such as the 2018 Transfer Student First Semester Experience Survey, Transfer Orientation Survey, and spring 2018 Graduating Students Survey, coupled with the Transfer Mentor Program pilot data from fall 2017-spring 2018, have demonstrated the need to assist undergraduate transfer students to feel that they belong at UT Dallas. Hence, the NTSS program has been chosen for the revised QEP. Throughout NTSS, UT Dallas will expand the Transfer Mentor Program piloted in fall 2017-spring 2018 and will develop and implement a new transfer student seminar course, which will provide transfer students, particularly those who commute, an opportunity in the classroom to build community among their peers. In essence, the successful implementation of these two High-Impact Practices will improve transfer students' engagement and sense of belonging.

UT Dallas proposes that belonging and engagement encompass four major areas of the transfer student experience:

1. Knowledge of UT Dallas resources, opportunities, and support systems
2. Involvement within UT Dallas communities: both one-on-one interactions and participation in groups/events
3. Relationships with UT Dallas faculty, staff, and peers
4. Perceived connection to UT Dallas

Enrollment Data for Transfer Students

In the fall of 2017, UT Dallas enrolled 27,641 total students (UT Dallas, 2017). The Office of Strategic Planning and Analysis (OSPA) indicates in Table 1 that the total number of reported new transfer students in fall 2017 was 1,984; the spring 2018 figure was 807. Summer 2018 preliminary data indicated 109 new transfer students. The number of new transfer students has been steadily consistent each respective term since fall 2014.

Table 1. Number of Reported New Transfers by Semester

Semester	Number
Fall 2014	1,941
Spring 2015	684
Summer 2015	123
Fall 2015	2,025

Semester	Number
Spring 2016	800
Fall 2016	2,006
Spring 2017	754
Summer 2017	116
Fall 2017	1,984
Spring 2018	807
Summer 2018 Preliminary Data	109

The most recent academic year overall retention rates for transfer students from the first year to second year is 80.2% (Freshman Transfers: 61.2%; Sophomore: 78.7%; Junior: 81.8%; and Senior: 85.7%).[1] OSPA provided additional analyses showing the retention rates for transfer students from first year to second year and from first year to third year as well as the graduation rates from two years to six years.[1]

Transfer Student Population Definition

For the purpose of NTSS, first time transfer student cohorts are defined as degree-seeking undergraduates who are transferring from another institution to enroll at UT Dallas for the first time in a fall or spring term. This definition and student data system coding excludes post-baccalaureate students, non-degree seeking students, and other populations, such as traditional transient students who are here for only one semester to take coursework that will transfer back to their home institution.

Transfer Student Challenges Related to Belonging, Engagement, and the Transfer Transition

At UT Dallas, transfer students are predominantly traditionally aged students from the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area. Approximately 80% of UT Dallas' transfer students are 25 years old or younger—60.4% range in age from 17 to 22—and more than 70% transfer to UT Dallas from local community colleges. In these ways, UT Dallas' transfer students are similar to their FTIC counterparts, however they often worry about whether they will feel as though they are a part of the campus community. In UT Dallas' Transfer Orientation Survey, students reported that the ability to acclimate to the University, being accepted into the University community, and making new friends were their most anticipated challenges as new transfer students. Transfer students also indicated that they were interested in becoming involved in campus activities such as study groups and various social organizations but expected this would be difficult for transfer students.[2]

These concerns may not be unfounded. After completing their first semester at UT Dallas, transfer students reportedly struggled to connect with peers and establish a good school-work-life balance.[3] In the spring 2018 Graduating Student Survey, transfer students recommended that UT Dallas provide more opportunities for transfer students to become involved in groups and activities as well as prioritize their ability to connect to the campus community.[4]

Students felt that these opportunities were important for their academic success, indicating that friendships with other UT Dallas students and participation in student organizations or study groups were among the most helpful support systems for them as students.

This is not to suggest that UT Dallas is lacking events geared toward transfer students. In UT Dallas' spring 2018 Transfer Student First Semester Experience Survey, students reported that they received several email invitations to transfer student specific events throughout the semester. However, 61% of respondents stated that they never or rarely attended campus events, and 72% felt there was nothing additional UT Dallas could do to encourage them to attend these events.[5] Theoretically, this is because unlike FTIC students, UT Dallas' transfer students typically commute to campus and often work outside the University or have family obligations, all of which make attending events challenging and inconvenient. Moreover, because of their other commitments, transfer students may prioritize academic and co-curricular functions over extra-curricular events, indicating that the type of transfer student support matters.

Transfer students have expressed a desire to belong to UT Dallas and have shown interest in being actively engaged at the University, but with only 61% of students reporting a high sense of belonging to UT Dallas on graduation day—arguably the best day of their academic career—the transfer student resources and supports that currently exist are insufficient.[4]

Programming for UT Dallas Transfer Students

UT Dallas must provide programming that is tailored to the unique needs of its transfer students. To accomplish this, UT Dallas will implement, through NTSS, two initiatives: (1) the Transfer Seminar and (2) the Transfer Mentor Program. These will provide students with one-on-one interaction with peers, a community of fellow transfer students, and knowledge of resources needed to succeed and be involved at the University. UT Dallas believes that the combination of personalized mentorship and a seminar will help students to develop important relationships within the University community and, in turn, will improve their overall sense of belonging at UT Dallas. The co-curricular nature of these programs will not only provide the academic support that students may need, but also will promote active involvement in social organizations that are relevant to transfer students.

Together, the Transfer Seminar and Transfer Mentor Program will build a strong foundation that will help to retain new transfer students beyond their first year at UT Dallas. Since 2014, UT Dallas' transfer students' first-to-second year retention rates have hovered between 78-80%,[1] while their two- and four-year graduation rates are 50% and 67%, respectively.[1] UT Dallas' goal is to improve transfer students' sense of belonging and engagement through these interventions in an effort to increase overall retention rates, and ultimately successfully graduate higher numbers of students.

Through reviews of the literature, a deep dive into evidence-based best practices, and an inventory of all existing programs for new transfer students, proposed pathways to student success were developed based on models of belonging and student engagement that lead to academic retention. These initiatives include program supports that will ensure a sustainable infrastructural framework, High-Impact Practices, and easily accessible student resources.

Supporting Documents

[1] OSPA New Transfer Student Retention and Graduation Data
PDF Document, 3 Pages, 143.60 KB (repnav3198)

[2] Transfer Orientation Survey Selected Answers
PDF Document, 1 Page, 46.81 KB (repnav3190)

[3] 2017-2018 TMP Mentee Evaluation-Challenges Experienced
PDF Document, 1 Page, 53.16 KB (repnav3204)

[4] Graduating Student Survey Summary June 2018
PDF Document, 1 Page, 110.54 KB (repnav3196)

[5] UT Dallas Transfer Student First Semester Experience Survey-Spring 2018
PDF Document, 2 Pages, 217.97 KB (repnav3202)

II. Literature Review: Belonging and Engagement Addressing Needs of Transfer Students

Understanding the needs and challenges faced by transfer students in higher education is a vital task if universities hope to provide them with the resources and means to succeed in higher education (Flaga, 2006; Glass & Harrington, 2002; Townsend, 1995). Research has shown that a sense of belonging is a basic human need and behavior motivator for all people, college students included (Maslow, 1943). Additional research has found student success to be synonymous with increased engagement, which in turn, leads to improved student learning outcomes (Thomas, 2012). More recently, research has focused on the relationship between belonging and engagement in higher education, the importance of both in determining retention and students' overall academic success, and practices and interventions designed to target and increase these feelings in students - including transfer students (Flaga, 2006; Hausman et al., 2009; Masika & Jones, 2016; O'Keefe, 2013; Pittman & Richmond, 2008; Strayhorn, 2012).

Transfer Student Needs

Transfer students face many challenges unique to their population during their transition to new higher education institutions. One challenge often faced by transfer students is learning about their new institutions. Townsend (1995) found transfer students attempting to understand their new institution seek out informal resources (e.g., friends and family), rather than formal systems, which may restrict their ability to obtain necessary information about institutional resources. Further, she also found that community college transfer students felt the academic standards and demand were much higher at the universities they transferred to (Townsend, 1995). Prior and subsequent research has also found that transfer students often struggle academically at the arriving institutions, which can result in lower grade point averages (Hills, 1965; Glass & Harrington, 2002). A recent study, found that compared to their peers, transfer students are also less likely to participate in High-Impact Practices (HIPs), or programs that are proven to increase the likelihood of student success, and less likely to engage at their new institutions (Zilvinskis & Dumford, 2018). However, transfer students can be aided during their time of transition in order to help them engage, gain the information they need about their new institution, and put them in a position to succeed academically (Flaga, 2006; Zilvinskis & Dumford, 2018).

Belonging

As the number of studies looking into the correlation between students' sense of belonging and their success and satisfaction levels has grown, so has the number of varying definitions of belonging. Hagerty and colleagues (1992) defined belonging as "the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment" (p. 173). Other researchers have provided further support for this definition, which is centered on the idea that valued involvement and an

individual's perception of how they fit in are integral aspects of belonging (Hausman et al., 2009; Hoffman et al., 2002; Pittman & Richmond, 2008). To guide all campus initiatives relating to belonging, a University of Texas System (UT System) Quantum Leap affinity group (UT System, 2016a) for belonging considered the various definitions that have emerged from belonging research and developed the following definition in its report that provides the framework for UT Dallas' QEP:

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 (UT System, 2017, p. 6).

Belonging and Engagement

When it comes to student engagement in higher education, there are many different approaches to defining the concept but they often embody the same ideals. Engagement is often concerned with the interaction between the efforts, including time and resources, both students and institutions invest to improve student and institutional success (Kuh, 2009; Trowler, 2010). Further, several studies have found positive correlations between student engagement and improved student outcomes such as improved learning and increased retention (Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006; Graham et al., 2007; Krause, 2005; Pascarella, Seifert, & Blaich, 2010).

A growing body of literature has begun to highlight the importance of considering student belonging along with engagement when focusing on improving student outcomes in higher education (Anderson-Butcher & Conroy, 2002; Masika & Jones, 2016; Thomas, 2012). A large study from the United Kingdom concluded that evidence from data "firmly points to the importance of students having a strong sense of belonging in [higher education]" (Thomas, 2012, p. 12). Specifically, Thomas (2012) found that belonging results from engagement, which can be targeted through activities all students participate in with an academic purpose such as a course or seminar. Masika and Jones (2016) studied the impact of a blended learning model designed to increase belonging and engagement. They found belonging is closely associated with engagement, and both correlated with improved retention and academic success. Further, a 2014 report on belonging in higher education found across a multitude of studies that a perceived feeling of belonging or not belonging is a behavioral motivator and that the absence of a sense of belonging can decrease engagement in higher education (Appalachian State University, 2014). Laanan (1996) showed that high levels of engagement are not only favorable for college students in general, but can specifically help smooth the transition of transfer students and positively affect their educational outcomes.

Interventions

High-Impact Practices (HIPs) have gained traction in research as fundamental programs that are proven to increase the likelihood of student success. Many of these HIPs have been shown to influence student's sense of belonging and engagement in higher education, making them key interventions when targeting

belonging and engagement to improve student outcomes (Kuh, 2008). However, based on recent findings from Zilvinskis and Dumford (2018), which indicate transfer students are less likely to participate in HIPs or engage, care should be taken to ensure transfer students are encouraged to engage and participate in HIPs. UT Dallas' QEP, New Transfer Student Success (NTSS), includes two HIPs as interventions in order to increase transfer student retention and success: seminars and peer mentoring.

Seminars

One HIP targeting transfer students within NTSS is introduced in the form of new Transfer Student Seminars. Kuh (2008) describes seminars as an important HIP in a recent report on HIPs for the Association of American Colleges & Universities. This stems from the fact that seminars often demand that students devote considerable time to purposeful tasks, such as a paper or project, while also ensuring that students receive face-to-face interaction with peers and faculty members as the small class size of most seminars make anonymity impossible and fuels feedback for students (Kuh, 2008). Additionally, Flaga's (2006) research centered on transfer students, found crucial aspects of successful transitions include providing students with learning resources, or, means for students to gain information and learn about the campus environment, and fostering their development of connection, which she recommends addressing with transfer student seminars.

Peer Mentoring

Another important HIP focused on by NTSS is peer mentoring for new transfer students. A review of several studies indicates peer mentoring, when done right, can have a high impact on student development in the undergraduate years (Shook & Keup, 2012). Astin (1993) argues that "the student's peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years" (p. 398). Further, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) indicate that "students' interactions with their peers… have a strong influence on many aspects of change during college, including intellectual development and orientation; political, social, and religious values; academic and social self-concept; intellectual orientation; interpersonal skills; moral development; general maturity and personal development" (pp. 620-621). In a recent study, researchers found peer mentors served an important role in assisting new students with balancing the demands of the first year, helping them to understand these demands and struggles are common, and through connecting students to campus services (DeMarinis et al., 2017). Additionally, the reliance of transfer students on less formal networks to obtain institutional information and their lack of campus connections can be addressed with a peer mentor program. Peer mentor programs put transfer students in close contact with a reliable source of institutional information and provide them with a campus connection in the form of an experienced peer who has been through the transfer process (Flaga, 2006; DeMarinis et al., 2017).

Conclusion

New students in higher education face a multitude of obstacles to their success, and transferring to a new education institution can add to these obstacles (Flaga, 2006; Glass & Harrington, 2002; Townsend, 1995). Research shows that increasing student engagement and belonging through HIPs can have a positive academic impact for all students, including those that transfer (Kuh, 2009; Laanan, 1996; Pascarella, Seifert, & Blaich, 2010). Further, studies of student transition support the use of seminars and peer mentoring programs to address some of the unique challenges faced by transfer students making them ideal programs to develop through NTSS (Flaga, 2006; Glass & Harrington, 2002; Laanan, 1996).

III. QEP Plan Objectives

New Transfer Student Success (NTSS) is intended to improve student success by creating a campus community in which new transfer students are engaged and feel a sense of belonging towards the University.

New to UT Dallas transfer students will:

- Perceive a connection to UT Dallas.
- Develop and maintain relationships with UT Dallas faculty, staff, and peers.
- Be actively involved within the UT Dallas community through one-on-one interactions, group affiliations, and event attendance.
- Identify UT Dallas resources and supports that are used to overcome common challenges that students face academically, socially, and personally.

Institutional outcomes are:

- UT Dallas will see an increased retention from year one to year two for transfer students.
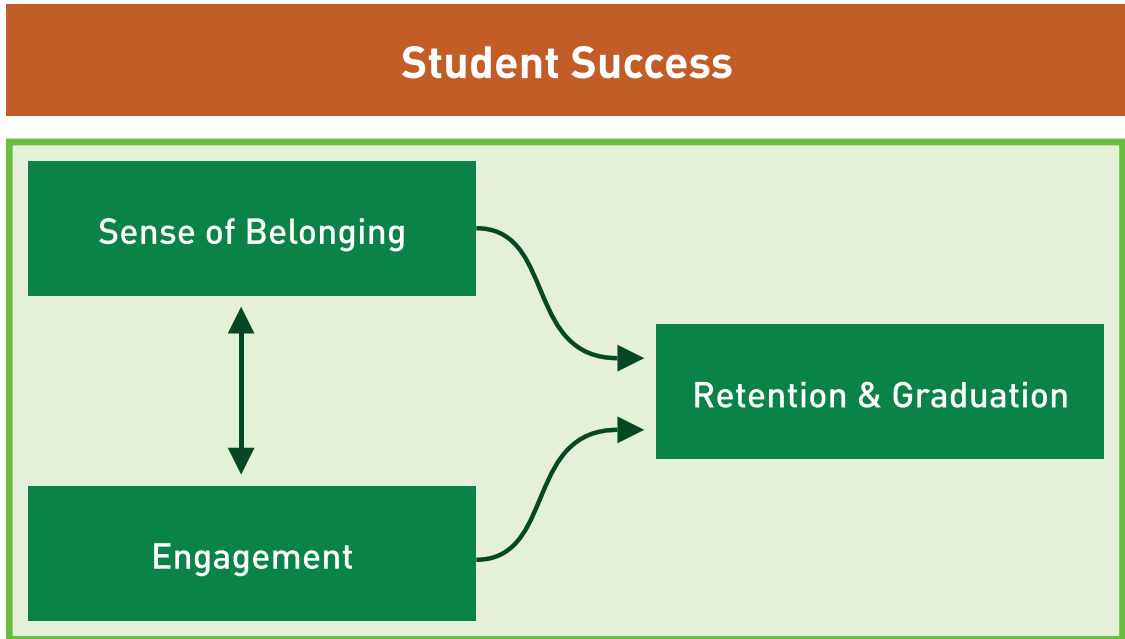- UT Dallas will see an increased retention from semester one to semester two for transfer students.

Figure 1. QEP Model for Student Success

IV. QEP Initiatives for Transfer Students

The Transfer Mentor Program's successful pilot results from 2017-2018 reinforced UT Dallas' decision to select the transfer student population as the target for the QEP. Transfer students' responses to surveys also support the development of a new transfer student seminar course, which will provide transfer students to build community and develop a sense of belonging by interacting with other new transfer students.

Peer Mentoring: Transfer Mentor Program (TMP)

The mission of the TMP is to cultivate a stronger connection to UT Dallas for incoming transfer students by providing concentrated support that addresses the specific needs and challenges of today's transfer student. Components emphasized through the TMP are leadership development through role-modeling and sharing of decision-making processes, programming to encourage positive academic and retention outcomes, and increasing a sense of student belonging through shared social and service experiences for both incoming and returning transfer students. Collaboration between the UT Dallas Transfer Student Services Office in Student Affairs and the Office of Undergraduate Education (OUE) through program planning and execution, as well as the collection and assessment of qualitative and quantitative program data, comprises the staff infrastructure to support the new program.

UT Dallas piloted a version of the TMP in fall 2017-spring 2018. The OUE TMP Pilot team promoted the program during the "Intro to Academics" portion of incoming transfer student orientations and sent one email to fall 2017 incoming transfer students on August 15, 2017. The OUE team shared promotional content with the Transfer Student Services Office to distribute via social media. Despite the intentional limited marketing of the pilot, a total of 173 incoming transfer students requested a mentor by submitting the online request form. This demand for transfer mentorship demonstrated that the pilot would address a significant existing need. The mentor request form asked incoming transfer students to describe the challenges they anticipated facing during their first year. Figure 2 illustrates the categories of challenges mentees indicated they expected to encounter at UT Dallas.
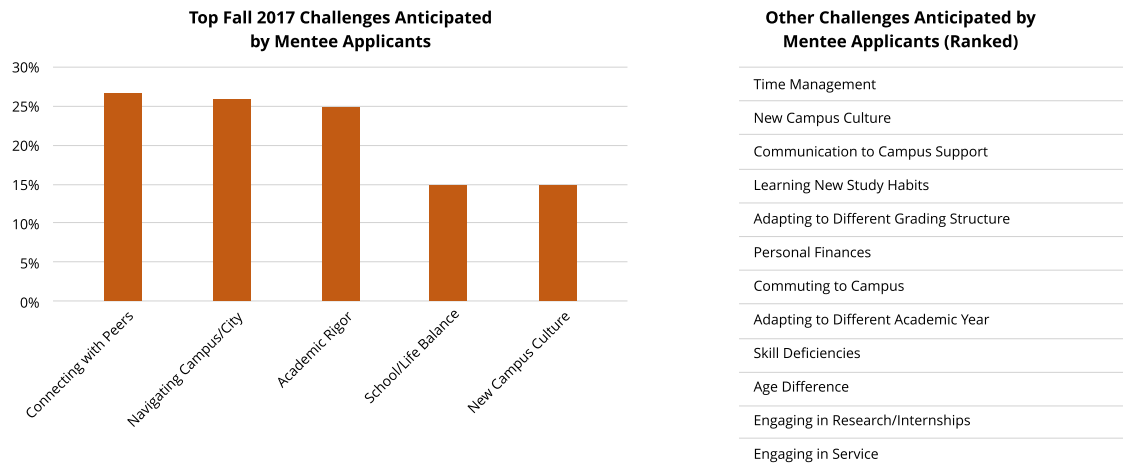
Top Fall 2017 Challenges Anticipated by Mentee Applicants

Other Challenges Anticipated by Mentee Applicants (Ranked)

Time Management

New Campus Culture

Communication to Campus Support

Learning New Study Habits

Adapting to Different Grading Structure

Personal Finances

Commuting to Campus

Adapting to Different Academic Year

Skill Deficiencies

Age Difference

Engaging in Research/Internships

Engaging in Service

Figure 2. Pre-Program Participation Data—Anticipated Challenges

To recruit mentors to serve the incoming transfer students, the OUE TMP Pilot staff sent one email to fall 2017 returning transfer students who possessed above a 3.0 cumulative grade point average on August 15, 2017. Again, OUE shared promotional content with the Transfer Student Services Office to distribute via social media. The OUE received 31 returning transfer students' mentor applications. Out of the 31 applicants, 90% of those students indicated that they experienced challenges during their time as a new transfer student at UT Dallas. Figure 3 summarizes the categories of challenges that mentor applicants reported having experienced at UT Dallas.
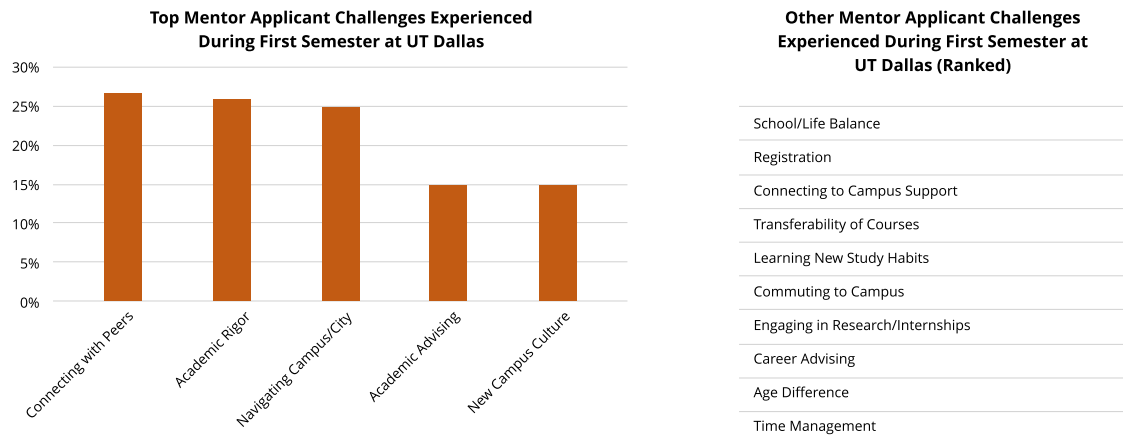
Top Mentor Applicant Challenges Experienced During First Semester at UT Dallas

Other Mentor Applicant Challenges Experienced During First Semester at UT Dallas (Ranked)

School/Life Balance

Registration

Connecting to Campus Support

Transferability of Courses

Learning New Study Habits

Commuting to Campus

Engaging in Research/Internships

Career Advising

Age Difference

Time Management

Figure 3. Pre-Program Participation Data—First Semester Challenges

A majority of requests for mentorship and applications to serve as mentors came from students in the Erik Jonsson School of Engineering and Computer Science, Naveen Jindal School of Management, School of Arts, Technology, and Emerging Communication, and School of Brain and Behavioral Sciences. In addition to providing insight into the common challenges encountered by entering transfer students, the mentor application yielded rich qualitative data in response to free text prompts. The following section displays excerpts from

several mentor applications that further reinforced the TMP Pilot staff's belief that a transfer mentor program could assist with transfer student academic and social integration at UT Dallas.

Selected Responses to Mentor Application Question, **"Describe some of the challenges you experienced during your time as a new transfer student at UT Dallas."**

- The biggest challenge I experienced during the first semester was the feeling of loneliness. I was new to the city and don't know anyone or have family that is close by. It was difficult to adapt and deal with feeling home sick for the first couple of months. I ended up trying to work three jobs to keep myself occupied.

- At a community college level, I never had to study and still received As because the concepts were pretty straight forward. However, the school can be challenging and I didn't adapt my study habits to match the intensity of the curriculum.

- When I first came I did not know how to look up classes, or find them. At my second semester I was not notified that registration was late, and ended up taking only two classes. I did not socially engage with anybody because I felt as a stranger on campus.

- As a transfer student coming from community college, the transfer itself was daunting. I was suddenly expected to navigate a larger academic frontier, and felt that the expectations were set much higher for me than they had been in community college. I felt inferior to my peers as I felt that they were established, and I was not.

- I had to commute to school and was unsure how to navigate the campus and became late to class due to not knowing the routes to take to cut my walking to class. I also had a hard time with the large lecture size and felt rushed when learning the chapters.

- I failed my first semester; this was my first time EVER failing a class in my years as a student, I did not know how to handle the situation. Failing the class almost made me lose my financial aid and it made me feel extremely ashamed of myself. In my first few weeks at UTD, I did not make an effort. I spent most of my time in class or in my dorm room. I spent my time feeling lonely and depressed. I didn't know anyone, I wasn't making an effort to know anyone and no one made an effort to know me. Over time, I decided to stick myself out there and join an organization. This changed my experience at UTD drastically, I made new friends in the organization and it gave me something to do other than go to class. I struggled when I first came to UTD because it was difficult to get involved and make friends.

- It was hard learning how the school system worked when I did not know what questions to ask.

- There almost seems to be a slight disadvantage to transfer students because opportunities for enrichment and advancement seem to be very well-catered to scholarships recipients. In my experience, I almost feel that there is an ever-so slightly negative stigma associated with non-traditional students.

- The biggest challenge I feel transfer students faces is alienation. I personally

wasn't involved or connected with the campus when I first arrived, so I felt alone and disconnected. This impacted my studies, and would push me to get more involved the following semesters. It's incredibly important transfer students feel welcomed and involved with the UTD community. It's easy for us to get stuck in the school-work-sleep routine.

- I had last priority enrollment, which meant I had to take classes that did not count towards my degree in order to have the financial aid status I needed to afford attending UTD. My schedule was hazardously staggered out in ways that made getting between classes, or home and back to campus, much harder than it had to be. I did not know the buildings, and would often get lost looking for my classes. I also had a real hard time finding adequate parking because I had not budgeted for a better parking pass at the time. I ended up gaining almost 15 pounds in my first semester from excess stress.

Academic Year 2017-2018 Programming

Programming

In Academic Year 2017-2018, the TMP Pilot team engaged 22 new transfer students in a tailored, long-term, targeted mentor program, through a one-on-one pairing with 22 continuing transfer students. The remaining 150 new transfer students who requested a mentor were contacted by the Assistant Director for Student Transition Programs, ensuring that students not in the formal mentoring program received the support and opportunities needed to feel connected to the University and subsequent academic success. Given the success of the existing Freshman Mentor Program at UT Dallas, which does not provide mentors or mentees any monetary incentives, the TMP mentors and mentees participated on a voluntary basis in all programming. The following table, Table 2, provides the TMP Pilot timeline of engagement activities. The OUE team created these timelines using feedback provided by participants and staff in the Office of Student Transition Programs. The OUE TMP Pilot team led an in-person update meeting with mentor participants during the month of October 2017. Twelve mentor students attended the session, and the remaining mentor students were scheduled to attend a one-on-one makeup meeting at an alternate time. Topics covered during the meeting include Goal Mapping Results, Everyday Leadership, and Results of Incoming Transfer and Returning Transfer Student Data Collection. Finally, over one-half of program participants attended a Kickoff Mixer event with program staff, the Dean of Undergraduate Education, the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Programs, and the Assistant Director of Transfer Student Services.

Table 2. TMP Timelines of Engagement

Timeline of Engagement Fall 2017		Timeline of Engagement Spring 2018	
Selection of Mentors/ Mentees	Mid-August 2017	Spring In-Person Training for Mentors	Mid-January 2018
Pairing of Mentors/ Mentees; Email introduction	Late August 2017	Welcome Back Breakfast	Late January 2018

Timeline of Engagement Fall 2017		Timeline of Engagement Spring 2018	
Fall In-Person Training for Mentors	Early September 2017	Academic Support Event (on-campus)	Mid-February 2018
Off-Campus Mixer Program Kickoff	Early October 2017	Monthly In-Person Mentor Meeting	Mid-February 2018
Academic Support Event (on-campus)	Mid-October 2017	Off-Campus Service Event	March 2018
Monthly In-Person Mentor Meeting	Mid-October 2017	Monthly In-Person Mentor Meeting	Late March 2018
Off-Campus Social Engagement Event	Late October 2017	Off-Campus Social Engagement Event	Early April 2018
On-Campus Service Event with Comet Cupboard	November 2017	Monthly In-Person Mentor Meeting	Late April 2018
Monthly In-Person Mentor Meeting	Early December 2017	Wrap-up Event	Early May 2018

Preliminary Pilot Data from the Transfer Mentor Program

Preliminary data from the fall 2017-spring 2018 Transfer Mentor Program pilot were collected before, during, and after its implementation. Prior to the start of the pilot program, transfer students predicted that they would rely on academic advising for assistance more often than any other support system, but instead found peer mentoring and independent study groups to be most helpful.[1] Transfer students reportedly felt that their mentors provided academic, emotional and social support,[2] indicating that they were satisfied with their mentor pairing because of their personal connection and shared academic interests. Mentees stated that interacting with their mentors was the primary factor that contributed to their sense of academic and social belonging, which in turn allowed them to do things such as meet new people, participate in more extra-curricular events and activities, and socialize with peers.[3] These transfer students also stated that their mentors helped them to expand their network, and provided other advice on how to succeed at UT Dallas. The mentors reported similar experiences, stating that they felt a strong personal connection to their mentees. Additional information is included in Section V within the TMP program sections.

Mentor Training

To ensure that transfer mentors were properly prepared to support their peers, the OUE TMP Pilot team provided a combination of both in-person and online training modules that covered the following topics:

- Changing culture of transfer students
- Common challenges facing students in transition, first generation students, and transfer students (transfer shock)

- Transfer student trends and demographics
- Maslow's Hierarchy and student belongingness
- Benefits of Peer Mentoring for mentors and mentees
- Everyday Leadership
- Face-to-Face Mentoring
- Goal Mapping
- Transfer Student Services at UT Dallas
- Student Transition Programs at UT Dallas
- Program Components, Logistics, and Communication

Mentor Training Data Collection

Selected mentees submitted a program agreement form that asked participants to inform program staff of topics on which they desired further support and information. Mentors submitted similar input regarding topics on which they would have desired further support and information during their first semester at UT Dallas, via a post-training session survey. The post-training survey also gauged the effectiveness of the in-person training session and provided an opportunity for mentors to identify other areas for which they desired further training. The TMP Pilot staff utilized information from both survey instruments when determining cogent topics for monthly mentor meetings as well as areas of emphasis for academic and social event programming during the pilot. Figure 4 below displays the topics transfer mentees indicated they would like to know more about during their first year at UT Dallas. Other topics cited by respondents included time management, information about fast-track programs, student organizations, and networking strategies.
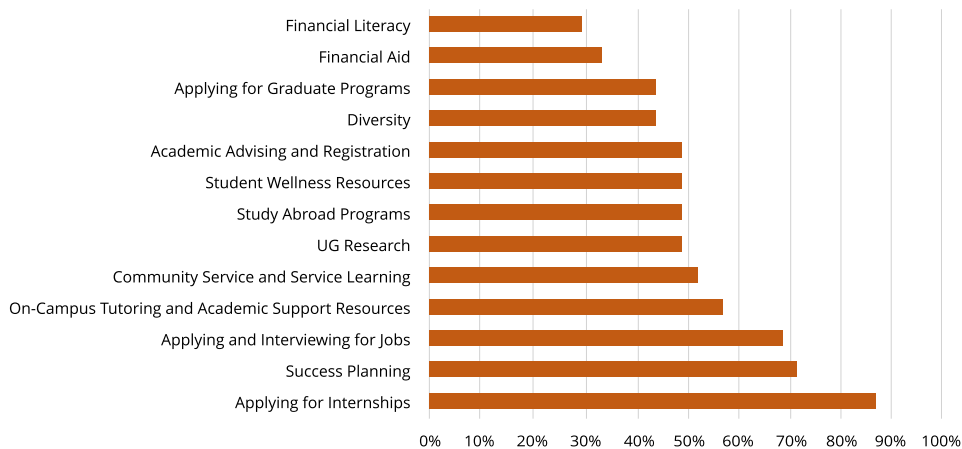

Figure 4. Topics for Exploration

The plan for assessing the pilot program involved similar methods and metrics used in the UT Dallas' existing Freshman Mentor Program, which measures participants' satisfaction with, level of engagement with, and contribution to student belonging from involvement. This includes, but is not limited to data collected from the following:

- Phone interviews with mentor applicants (Live interview utilizing Qualtrics survey)
- Mentor participant application (Qualtrics survey)
- Mentee participant application (Qualtrics survey)
- Program satisfaction surveys for mentor and mentees (Qualtrics survey, distributed at fall and spring semester end)
- Event satisfaction surveys (Qualtrics surveys)
- Phone post-interviews with mentor applicants (Live interview utilizing Qualtrics survey)

The TMP Pilot team used existing data sources to track academic progress, retention, and number of participants returning for Academic Year 2018-2019, as well as exploring new methods for tracking participation and satisfaction metrics for specific populations within the program, contribution to participants' sense of belonging, effectiveness of marketing efforts, and career readiness.

The TMP program will be fully launched in the fall 2018 semester based on the successful pilot program in fall 2017-spring 2018. The TMP program will be under the helm of the Office of Undergraduate Education (OUE).

As indicated by the large number of mentee applications during the TMP pilot program in fall 2017, not every incoming transfer student can be paired with a mentor at this time. Due to the high demand and significant need by transfer students, the Office of Transfer Student Services within Student Affairs created an additional engagement opportunity for new transfer students who will not be selected as a mentee. While the TMP program is managed by OUE, the Office of Transfer Student Services will provide programming that prepares the non-selected transfer students to become a future Transfer Mentor, thus alleviating the situation in which new transfer mentees far outnumber transfer student mentors.

Programming

Student Transition Programs will work in partnership with Student Leadership Programs to provide a leadership series of events including the following:

- **Model the Way:** Students will learn to clarify values by finding their voice and affirming shared ideals and set the example by aligning actions with values.
- **Inspire a Shared Vision:** Students will learn to envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities and enlist others in common vision by appealing to shared aspirations.
- **Enable Others to Act:** Students will learn to foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships. The student will strengthen others by increasing self-determination and developing competence.
- **Encourage the Heart:** Students will learn to recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence. The student will celebrate values and victories by creating a community.

Student Transition Programs will provide social events and small group activities to the Transfer Leadership Program participants through:

- **Welcome Event: Resource Refresh:** Transfer Students attend a mandatory Transfer Orientation. However, many students attend six months prior to starting at UT Dallas. The purpose of this event is to introduce the students to their group leader and refresh them on available resources at UT Dallas.
- **Transfer Thirsty Thursday:** This is a monthly evening social event. It will serve as an opportunity for leaders to connect with students and students to connect with one another. The goal is to encourage a sense of belonging.
- **Coffee and Conversations:** This is a monthly morning social event. It will serve as an opportunity for leaders to connect with students and students to connect with one another. The goal is to encourage a sense of belonging.
- **Small Group Social Activities:** Transfer Leadership participants will be housed in small groups organized by Student Welcome and Transition Team (SWAT) members. SWAT members are paid student workers in the Student Transition Program office. The small group activities will range from dining together, studying together and attending on campus events.
- **Twice Monthly Check-ins from Group Leaders:** Group leaders will survey their members for their preferred contact method. The group leader will use this information to develop a contact plan for their group. The leaders will be required to make at least two one-on-one contacts per month.

Student Transition Programs will launch the Non-Selected Mentee Programming Transfer Leadership Program during the fall 2018 semester. Participants will be given a pre- and post-survey to assess the effectiveness of this alternative programming. In addition to surveying the participants, grade point averages and future semester enrollment will be reviewed.

Seminar: Transfer Seminar

Mandatory Seminar Course for New Transfer Students

UT Dallas currently has a course (UNIV 3010) that was designed as a "Transfer Transitions" course, but the course has not been taught in several years. After the course is further developed to tailor to transfer students' unique needs, the QEP will revive a revised course in order to implement the mandatory transfer seminar initiative. Currently, the course description reads as the following:

UNIV 3010 Transfer Transitions (0 semester credit hours) This course is designed to introduce incoming students transferring from another college or university to the academic and cultural environment of UT Dallas. The course encompasses topics such as: student life at UT Dallas, leadership opportunities, ways to get involved, academic and wellness resources on campus, and other pertinent information to help maximize your time at the university. The purpose of the course is to help you develop strategies and tactics that will lead to a successful experience at UT Dallas. Credit/No Credit Only. (1-0) S

The previous years' initial attemps to offer this course were met with criticism that it was more of an orientation rather than an actual course. Indeed, UT Dallas began offering a transfer orientation instead and stopped offering the course.

Based on preliminary information from transfer students, though, and based on information gleaned from current literature, including studies conducted by the National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students, UT Dallas believes it can develop a more meaningful transfer student seminar course. The intent of this course is to assist first-time at UT Dallas transfer students with navigating the college experience at a diverse university, while also introducing them to information that will provide a connection to engagement opportunities on the UT Dallas campus. The seminar course also provides transfer students, many of whom commute to campus, with the opportunity to build community with other new transfer students. The new Orbit Director will develop and refine this seminar course in collaboration with faculty, staff, and current transfer students. Depending on the feedback received during the course development year (2018-2019), the course may include such components as a required group project, information about student services, cultural awareness training, student organization and leadership opportunities exploration, and a service learning component. Course-embedded assessments include the Transfer Seminar Resource Quiz and Transfer Student Reflection Paper. After the development year (2018-2019), the Orbit Director and the Provost will work with the deans on identifying faculty to teach the course. The Orbit Director will then host a workshop for training and preparing faculty to teach this specialized course for transfer students. Hence, because the course will take careful deliberations and collaborations to develop properly, including the administrative steps to revise the course for the catalog, and because the selection and development of faculty teaching it will be intentional, UT Dallas will first offer the revised course in fall 2020. Although this will lessen the number of years of data to have available for the QEP's fifth-year impact report, UT Dallas is committed to informed course and faculty development. UT Dallas will provide faculty, both tenure and non-tenure systems, who will teach the course with workload credit. Although it is currently a zero-hour course, the university is currently revising its faculty workload policy as referenced in UT Dallas' Certification of Compliance Report, and if this course remains zero-hour, it still will be identified as counting toward a faculty member's overall work load.

Supporting Documents

[1] 2017-2018 TMP Goal Mapping and Mentee Application-Services Used to Maintain Academics
PDF Document, 1 Page, 91.71 KB (repnav3203)

[2] 2017-2018 TMP Mentee Evaluation-Mentor Assistance
PDF Document, 1 Page, 48.85 KB (repnav3205)

[3] 2017-2018 Transfer Mentor Program Mentee Evaluation-Belonging and Involvement
PDF Document, 1 Page, 217.59 KB (repnav3206)

V. Overview of QEP Assessment Plan

The assessment of New Transfer Student Success (NTSS) will primarily focus on student engagement, sense of belonging, and retention, which UT Dallas considers to be three central components of transfer student success. The QEP Assessment Committee consists of the following members:

- **Gloria Shenoy, Ph.D.** *Director of Assessment, Office of the Provost*
- **Michael Carriaga, Ph.D.** *Director, Office of the Provost*
- **Josh Hammers** *Director, Student Affairs Assessment*
- **Melissa Ray, Ph.D.** *Assistant Director of Assessment, Office of the Provost*
- **Pending Hire** *Orbit Director, Office of the Provost*

Based on the literature and the University's preliminary data, the assessment of UT Dallas' QEP is guided by a model of student success that suggests that belonging and engagement are critical pathways to students' academic retention. UT Dallas proposes that belonging and engagement encompass four major areas of the transfer student experience:

1. Knowledge of UT Dallas resources, opportunities, and support systems
2. Involvement within UT Dallas communities: both one-on-one interactions and participation in groups/events
3. Relationships with UT Dallas faculty, staff, and peers
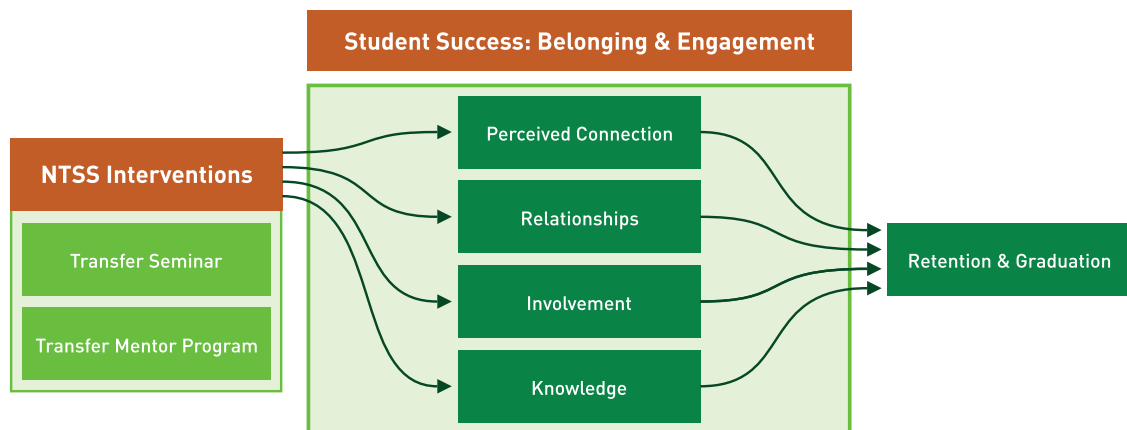4. Perceived connection to UT Dallas

Figure 5. New Transfer Student Success (NTSS): Belonging & Engagement

NTSS consists of two primary interventions:

1. Transfer Seminar
2. Transfer Mentor Program

Students will also receive support through a new student web portal, which will provide students with information regarding university resources and how to access them. NTSS assessment will focus on measuring transfer students'

knowledge of resources, involvement, self-reported quality of relationships, and feelings of connection to UT Dallas prior to, during, and after their first semester and first year at UT Dallas.

New Transfer Student Success Outcomes

New to UT Dallas transfer students will:

- Perceive a connection to UT Dallas.
- Develop and maintain relationships with UT Dallas faculty, staff, and peers.
- Be actively involved within the UT Dallas community through one-on-one interactions, group affiliations, and event attendance.
- Identify UT Dallas resources and supports that are used to overcome common challenges that students face academically, socially, and personally.

Institutional outcomes are:

- UT Dallas will see an increased retention from year one to year two for transfer students.
- UT Dallas will see an increased retention from semester one to semester two for transfer students.

QEP Measures

NTSS assessment measures are designed to capture engagement, sense of belonging, and retention during and after transfer students' first year and will include surveys, student work, behavioral measures, follow-up interviews, and institutional data. As a result, measures will permit the examination of both immediate and long-term impacts of the NTSS.

Knowledge of UT Dallas Resources, Opportunities, and Support Systems

Through UT Dallas' Transfer Seminar, new to UT Dallas transfer students will learn about university resources, opportunities, and support systems designed to help them succeed. This intervention will inform transfer students about the University and its available resources and will encourage them to have an increased desire to know more about the University. UT Dallas will measure what transfer students know with respect to these services, as well as their ability to identify which resources, opportunities, and support systems are most appropriate for the various types of challenges students face.

Measures for knowledge of UT Dallas resources, opportunities, and supports will include the Transfer Orientation Survey and Transfer Seminar Resource Quiz. A full description for each of these measures is included below.

Involvement at UT Dallas

The Transfer Mentor Program and the Transfer Seminar are also designed to increase students' participation in university related events and activities. Involvement encompasses the frequency with which students attend campus events, participate in formal (e.g., student organizations), and informal (e.g.,

study groups) group activities, and report using campus resources/services. Please note self-reported use of resources will also be used to measure knowledge of campus resources.

We will measure the extent of students' involvement by tracking participation in campus events and asking students to report on the frequency of their participation in university related activities, including use of certain services. Specific measures include: Transfer Orientation Survey, Student Engagement Database, Presence Membership Lists, Transfer Student First Semester Experience Survey, Transfer Mentor Program Mentor Evaluation, Transfer Mentor Program Mentee Evaluation, Non-Returning Student Survey, Transfer Mentor Program Follow-up Interviews, and UT Dallas Common Survey.

Relationships within UT Dallas Communities

Both the Transfer Mentor Program and the Transfer Seminar are intended to encourage students to establish and maintain relationships with other students as well as UT Dallas faculty and staff. Relationships include membership in registered student organizations, participation in mentorship, both formal (e.g., Transfer Mentor Program) and informal, interactions with faculty and staff, and presence of personal connections (e.g., friendships, informal study groups).

Measures of relationships will rely primarily on students' self-reports of the quantity and quality of the relationships that they have with UT Dallas faculty, staff, and students. These measures will include: Presence Membership Lists, Transfer Orientation Survey, Transfer Student First Semester Experience Survey, UT Dallas Common Survey, Transfer Mentor Program Mentor Evaluation, Transfer Mentor Program Mentee Evaluation, and Follow-up Interviews.

Perceived Connection to UT Dallas

Transfer students who participate in the Transfer Mentor Program and the Transfer Seminar will develop and maintain a perceived connection to UT Dallas. We will assess transfer students' self-reported feelings of connection to the University both academically and socially, including their perceptions that they matter as individuals and that their contributions matter to the University community.

Measures related to students' perceived connection to the University include: Transfer Orientation Survey, Transfer Student First Semester Experience Survey, Transfer Mentor Program Mentor Evaluation, Transfer Mentor Program Mentee Evaluation, Transfer Seminar Student Reflection Paper, Transfer Mentor Program Follow-up Interviews, UT Dallas' Non-Returning Student Survey, and the UT Dallas Common Survey.

Retention

Measures of transfer student retention will include first-to-second semester retention, first-to-second year retention, enrollment beyond the second year (where applicable), and degree completion. Retention and graduation data will be obtained from the UT Dallas Office of Strategic Planning and Analysis for the new transfer student group.

Description of QEP Measures

	Measures			
	Prior to 1st Semester	**During 1st Semester**	**After 1st Semester**	**Follow up after 1st year**
Perceived Connection	• Transfer Orientation Survey	• Transfer Seminar Student Reflection Paper	• Transfer Student 1st Semester Experience Survey • TMP Mentor & Mentee Evaluation	• UTD Common Survey • TMP Follow-up interviews • Non-Returning Student Survey
Relationships	• Transfer Orientation Survey		• Transfer Student 1st Semester Experience Survey • TMP Mentor & Mentee Evaluation • Presence Membership Lists	• UTD Common Survey • Presence Membership Lists • TMP Follow-up interviews
Involvement	• Transfer Orientation Survey		• Transfer Student 1st Semester Experience Survey • Student Engagement Database • TMP Mentor & Mentee Evaluation	• UTD Common Survey • TMP Follow-up interviews • Student Engagement Database • Presence Membership Lists • Non-Returning Student Survey
Knowledge	• Transfer Orientation Survey	• Transfer Seminar Resource Quiz		

Figure 6. Mapping and Timeline of QEP Measures

Transfer Orientation Survey

All incoming transfer students are required to attend Transfer Orientation within one year prior to the start of their first semester at UT Dallas. During Transfer Orientation, students are invited to take the Transfer Orientation Survey.[1] Historically, participation rates for this survey have been above average, with a 27% response rate for the 2018 administration. The survey includes Likert-type scale items which asks students to report their familiarity with UT Dallas and campus resources (e.g., "My knowledge of UT Dallas has increased considerably."; "I am more familiar with career services offered at UT Dallas"). It also contains open-ended items that ask students to write about anticipated challenges as new transfer students and what they hope to accomplish in the first semester. Data from these items will serve as a baseline measurement for students' knowledge of university resources, opportunities, and support systems. Responses to open-ended questions can also provide insight into students perceived connection, as well as anticipated involvement and relationships. The Transfer Orientation Survey will be updated to include more specific questions related to belonging, involvement, and relationships. The dissemination of the revised survey will begin following the spring 2019 orientation sessions.

Transfer Mentor Program Measures

Two of the measures associated with the Transfer Mentor Program, are derived from the pilot which was conducted during the 2017-2018 academic year: the mentee and mentor evaluations. All mentees are expected to complete the mentee evaluation. Likewise, all mentors are expected to complete the mentor evaluation. In addition to these measures, we plan to conduct follow-up interviews with students who were mentees in the program.

Mentee Evaluation

After the mentoring program, mentees will complete a final program evaluation. The Transfer Mentor Program Mentee Evaluations[2] contain items about quality of the mentor-mentee relationship, types of mentorship received, belonging, the perceived impact of the program on their involvement, and self-assessment of whether initial goals were met. Questions about the quality of the mentor-mentee relationships, include Likert-type items that ask students rate agreement with statements like "I believe my mentor is trustworthy" and "I believe my mentor is invested in my academic success." An item about type of mentorship, mirrors the mentee application, asking "In which ways did you mentor assist you the most?" Items related to belonging, include "Which program components contributed to increased social belonging?," for which students could select answer choices like "Interactions with my mentor." A question related to involvement prompted to students to respond to the statement "Because of my involvement with the Transfer Mentor Program, I..." by selecting from a variety of activities, which include "Visited the Student Success Center" and "Socialized more with my peers." Items from the mentee evaluation will be used as a post-mentoring assessment of relationships, particularly the mentor-mentee relationship, involvement, and perceived connection to UT Dallas. The Mentee Evaluation will be updated to include more specific questions related to belonging.

Mentor Evaluation

After the mentoring program, mentors will also complete a final program evaluation. Questions from the Transfer Mentor Program Mentor Evaluation[3] address the mentors' perception of mentees' engagement with the program ("Which statement bests describes your mentee's level of engagement with the Transfer Mentor Program?") as well as the quality of the relationship between mentors and mentees ("How satisfied were you with your mentee pairing?"). The questions will be used to measure mentee involvement in the program and to examine mentor-mentee relationships.

Transfer Mentor Program Follow-up Interviews

During their second year at UT Dallas, former mentees will be invited to participate in interviews to further explore the impact of the Transfer Mentor Program on their perception of connection and belonging to UT Dallas. The interviews will also provide an opportunity to ask students about their involvement in the university community and the relationships they have

developed. These interviews will be transcribed, coded, and analyzed for emerging themes and areas for program development. The interviews will be used to measure involvement, relationships, and connection.

Transfer Seminar Measures

Two measures will be associated with the Transfer Seminar: the resource quiz and the student reflection paper. Both measures are course-embedded assessments that all transfer students are expected to complete as part of the course.

UT Dallas Resource Quiz

In the Transfer Seminar, students will be given scenarios where they must select the appropriate resource or support to assess the knowledge that students have about UT Dallas. This course-embedded assessment will be developed during Year 1 of the QEP. This measure will be used to assess knowledge of UT Dallas resources, opportunities, and support services.

Transfer Student Reflection Paper

In the Transfer Seminar, students will be assigned a reflective paper on how they see themselves as Comets, reflecting on their transition to UT Dallas. These papers will be collected and coded as evidence of feelings of connection to UT Dallas. This measure will be further developed during Year 1 of the QEP.

Transfer Student First Semester Experience Survey

After their first semester at UT Dallas, transfer students are invited to participate in the Transfer Student First Semester Experience Survey,[4] which contains items that address use of university resources, opportunities, and support systems, participation in campus organizations, relationships with faculty, staff, and students, and perceived connection to UT Dallas. The question about use of resources provides a list of university supports and asks students "Please indicate the services or offices you have used/visited during your first semester and the frequency of use." A question about campus involvement asks "How often do you participate in campus events?" and prompts student to select the frequency of participation. Questions associated with relationships include an item that asks "Are you currently involved in one or more of the following" and provides various types of groups to select from such as "A student organization" and "Academic/Departmental or professional organizations". In addition, the survey contains Likert scale items that ask them to rate their agreement with statements such as "I have relationships with UT Dallas faculty" and "I have relationships with UT Dallas students." With respect to connection to the university, students are asked to rate agreement with the items including: "I feel that I am a member of the UT Dallas community" and "I feel involved with others at the university."

The Transfer Student First Semester Experience Survey is currently being updated to include additional questions related to belonging and engagement and will be administered in its updated form in December 2018. Participation

rates for this survey are high and encouraged through incentives. During spring 2018 administration, there was a 46% response rate. Items from the Transfer Student First Semester Experience Survey will used to assess involvement, relationships, and perceived connection to UT Dallas.

Presence Membership Lists

UT Dallas, starting fall 2018, will begin using Presence, https://utdallas.presence.io, a new platform for managing and updating membership rosters. Presence will also track students who attend events, but are not official members. The software also captures data on all registered student organization memberships, and will include information related to students' roles within the institution (e.g., leader, president, etc.). Member information will serve as indicator of students' relationships and involvement.

Student Engagement Database

Card swipe activity and sign-in data will be used to examine transfer students on-campus involvement. All Student Affairs events (e.g., lectures, recreation events, study breaks, concerts, etc.) require students to swipe Comet cards for admission to track attendance. These data will be collected and organized by type of event and tied to individual student data. Student attendance at specific events for transfer students will be collected for the database as well (e.g., Coffee & Conversations and Thirsty Thursdays). These data are collected, analyzed, and tied to individual student data to determine the frequency of participation and serve as an indicator for students' involvement.

Non-Returning Student Survey

Transfer students who do not return to UT Dallas for a second year are invited to participate in the Non-Returning Student Survey.[5] Several questions in this survey address reasons why the student chose not to re-enroll and include some items related to involvement such as "Extracurricular options"; "Social environment." The survey also asks non-returning students about their feelings of connection and belonging to UT Dallas. Questions about belonging include items that ask them to rate their agreement to the statements, "I felt a sense of academic belonging at UT Dallas" and "I felt a sense of social belonging at UT Dallas." This measure will service as a follow-up measures of connection to and involvement at UT Dallas, for those students who leave the University after their first year.

UT Dallas Common Survey

The UT Dallas Common Survey will be a centralized voluntary survey developed and implemented by Academic Affairs and Student Affairs in spring 2019. UT Dallas Common Survey will be administered each semester to all undergraduate and graduate students. The survey will contain items related to student engagement and belonging as well as students' academic and co-curricular experiences at UT Dallas. For the QEP, we will collect survey

responses from transfer students in the spring of their first and second year, in order to obtain follow-up information about student involvement, relationships, and connection to UT Dallas.

Retention Data

Enrollment data similar to the data provided by the Office of Strategic Planning and Analysis, discussed in the Introduction section, from transfer students' first year at UT Dallas will be used to calculate first-to-second semester retention (i.e., whether a student enrolls for a second term immediately after their first term). For students who begin in the fall, first-to-second semester retention will capture fall to spring retention. For students who start in the spring semester, spring to fall retention will be assessed. In addition, students' first-to-second year retention will be calculated during students' second year at UT Dallas. For new transfer students whose degree programs extend beyond one year, we will also determine whether they remained enrolled beyond the second year.

Graduation Data

Graduation data will be collected as follow-up measures for the transfer student group. We will begin collecting graduation data for cohorts after their first year at UT Dallas. We will calculate the number and percentage of undergraduate degrees earned. Because the assessment period for NTSS only spans five years, graduation data will likely be available for a limited number of students.

Additional Measures of Student Success

Other indicators of student success, such as grade point average (GPA), will also be considered when analyzing the relationship between belonging, engagement, and student success.

Targets

By the end of transfer students' first year, more than 50% of students will report a supportive relationship at UT Dallas, be it a friend, a staff or faculty mentor, peer mentor, or a study group as measured by items on the UT Dallas Common Survey. By the end of their second year, more than 75% of students will report this.

All transfer students should feel a moderate to high sense of belonging to the University after their first year at UT Dallas measured through selected questions on the Transfer Student First Semester Experience Survey.

There will be a decrease in the number of students who report they did not belong or a low sense of belonging when leaving as measured through select items on the Non-Returning Student Survey. This is similar to the 2017 UT System Affinity belonging group recommendations for assessing student belonging (https://dox.utdallas.edu/report26350/dccmxgcsia) (UT System, 2017, pp. 18-20).

By the end of NTSS, Year 5, the first-to-second year retention rate for transfer students will be at or above 85%.

Additionally, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) has charged Texas institutions with increasing college completion rates to 60% by 2030 (http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/index.cfm?objectid=EDCAFB08-D542-11E7-A03300505694284C) (THECB, n.d.). NTSS not only aims to improve students' sense of belonging and engagement, but also to aid students in their persistence toward graduation, and thus, also supports the THECB's student success initiative. By the end of NTSS, Year 5, four-year graduate rates will be at or above 70% for students who enter with 30 or more semester credit hours. Two-year graduation rates will be at 55% putting us on track to meet these goals by 2030.

Data Collection

NTSS outcome measures will be used to assess each intervention (i.e., the Transfer Seminar and the Transfer Mentor Program) and will continue through the end of Year 5. Measurement data will be collected from new transfer students at four points throughout their first year at UT Dallas:

1. prior to the start of their first semester,
2. during their first semester,
3. immediately following their first semester, and
4. at the end of their second semester.

Additional institutional measures (e.g., UT Dallas Common Survey) related to belonging and engagement will be collected during transfer students' first and second years as follow-up. Retention data will be collected annually for all five years.

Prior to students' first semester at UT Dallas, data will be collected from the Transfer Orientation Survey. During transfer students' first semester at UT Dallas, course-embedded data will be collected from the Transfer Seminar. Immediately following the first semester, data from the Transfer Student First Semester Experience Survey, the Transfer Mentor Program Mentor and Mentee Evaluations, as well as student participation and membership data will be collected. At the end of students' second semester, students' participation and membership data will be collected again, and first-to-second semester retention rates will be calculated. Follow-up data will be collected from the UT Dallas Common Survey at the end of students' first and second years and follow-up interviews will be conducted with Transfer Mentor Program participants during their second year.

We will collect data on students' first year belonging and engagement (perceived connections, relationships, involvement, and knowledge), and retention for five cohorts of new to UT Dallas transfer students: 2018-2019 (Cohort 1), 2019-2020 (Cohort 2), 2020-2021 (Cohort 3), 2021-2022 (Cohort 4), and 2022-2023 (Cohort 5). Follow-up data on belonging, engagement, and retention will be collected for four cohorts: 2018-2019 (Cohort 1), 2019-2020 (Cohort 2), 2020-2021 (Cohort 3), and 2021-2022 (Cohort 4). Each cohort will follow the same data collection timeline.

NTSS measures will be administered through the individual intervention programs, and the Office of Assessment will receive access to survey data. The departments in Student Affairs will collect card swipe, sign-in data, and membership data for the Student Engagement Database, and the Office of Strategic Planning and Analysis (OSPA) will collect enrollment, retention, and graduation data. These offices will then disseminate these data to the Office of Assessment each year. The Office of Assessment will coordinate the administration of the UT Dallas Common Survey in collaboration with Student Affairs. Under the leadership of the Orbit Director, the Office of Assessment will maintain and analyze NTSS data.

Year 1

The Transfer Seminar will be developed during Years 1 and 2 with plans for a full launch in Year 3. Pre- and post-seminar measures will be collected from the Transfer Orientation Survey (pre-seminar) and the Transfer Student First Semester Experience Survey (post-seminar). The Transfer Mentor Program, which was piloted in Year 0 (2017-2018), will be fully implemented during Year 1 (2018-2019). Measures will be collected from the Transfer Mentor Program Mentee and Mentor Evaluations during Year 1.

During the spring of Year 1, first year transfer students' card swipe activity, sign-in data, membership activity, and first-to-second semester retention data will be collected. Additionally, the UT Dallas Common Survey will be piloted. The collection of card swipe activity, sign–in data, membership activity, first-to-second semester retention data, and data from the UT Dallas Common Survey will be collected for each cohort in their first year.

Year 2

In Year 2, the Transfer Mentor Program will enter its second year of full implementation. Pre- and post-measures will be collected for the Transfer Mentor Program using the Transfer Orientation Survey, the Transfer Student First Semester Experience Survey, and the Transfer Mentor Program Mentee and Mentor Evaluations.

The following first year measures will be collected: card swipe activity, sign-in data, membership activity, first-to-second semester retention data, and data from the UT Dallas Common Survey. First-to-second year retention data will also be collected during Year 2 as well as Year 2 data from the UT Dallas Common Survey.

Years 3-5

The Transfer Seminar will launch in Year 3. During Years 3 through 5, the Transfer Seminar and the Transfer Mentor Program will continue to be implemented. Pre- and post-measures will be collected from both initiatives via the Transfer Orientation Survey, Transfer Student First Semester Experience Survey, and the Transfer Mentor Program Mentee and Mentor Evaluations.

First year measures (e.g., UT Dallas Common Survey data, Student Engagement Database, retention data) will be collected from all new transfer students. These data will be collected from Year 3 through Year 5. We will continue to collect retention data for all cohorts through Year 5.

Data Analysis Plan

University-level and QEP intervention outcome measures will be used to explore the following questions related to the impact of QEP:

1. Does participation in any of the NTSS interventions predict student engagement, sense of belonging, and/or retention within the first year?
2. Does participation in multiple NTSS interventions lead to increased levels of student engagement, sense of belonging, and/or retention?
3. Does participation in NTSS interventions predict student success over time?
4. Does the degree of student success vary within and/or between cohorts of the transfer student population for those participating in NTSS interventions?

All analyses will account for potential covariates such as students' SAT/ACT scores, age, gender, and employment status.

Plans for Data Use

Each year, these results will be shared with the New Student Engagement Board (NSEB) and the programs in which the QEP interventions are housed in order to determine whether changes to NTSS are needed. Additionally, the results will be discussed with the appropriate institutional governing bodies and then shared with UT Dallas faculty, students, and staff. Discussions of these findings will focus on what, if any, institutional changes may be necessary to ensure UT Dallas transfer students are engaged, perceive a connection to the University, and persist in their academic careers. This may include the development of new programs to address any gaps in transfer students support programs and services.

Supporting Documents

[1]   Transfer Orientation Survey-Relevant Questions
PDF Document, 2 Pages, 67.59 KB (repnav3191)

[2]   TMP Mentee Evaluation Select Questions
PDF Document, 4 Pages, 82.94 KB (repnav3188)

[3]   TMP Mentor Evaluation Select Questions
PDF Document, 2 Pages, 33.14 KB (repnav3189)

[4]   2018 Transfer Student First Semester Experience Survey-Select Questions
PDF Document, 2 Pages, 202.14 KB (repnav3207)

[5] Non-Returning Student Survey Select Questions
PDF Document, 2 Pages, 50.01 KB (repnav3197)

VI. Organizational Structure

Orbit Director

The position announcement for the Orbit Director, the name for the position that will also serve as the QEP director, was posted in July 2018[1]; it is anticipated that the position will be filled by mid-September 2018.

The Orbit Director will report to the Office of Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost as shown in the organization chart (Figure 7) and will take responsibility for oversight, coordination, and sustainability of UT Dallas' university-wide new student success initiative, Orbit, as well as NTSS. The complexity of the organization chart shows how the Orbit Director will be responsible in coordinating first-year student success efforts through a network of existing offices within Academic Affairs and Student Affairs. The Orbit Director will have direct oversight of the development and implementation of the Transfer Seminar and will serve as a coordinator and collaborator with the assessment team, the Transfer Mentor Program staff, and the Office of Transfer Student Services support programming staff.
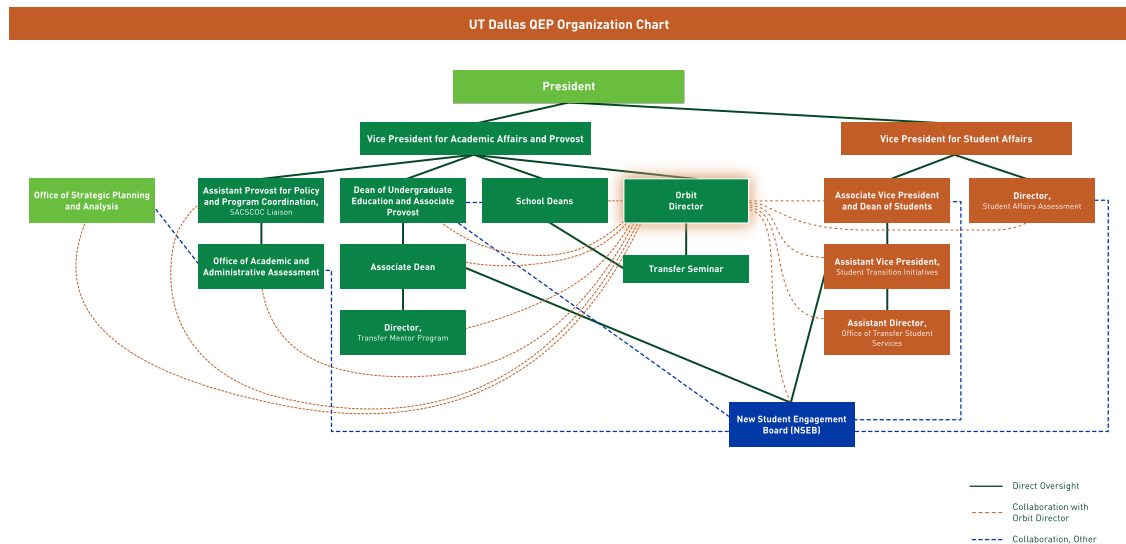

Figure 7. UT Dallas QEP Organization Chart

In 2017, the University created a New Student Engagement Board (NSEB) that facilitates communication and collaboration among the units on campus responsible for new student engagement. The NSEB, which has over 30 members representing multiple Divisions across campus, allows for a coordinated effort among all campus stakeholders for the sharing of best practices across units. The NSEB is advisory to the Orbit Director.

Essential job functions of the Orbit Director will include:

- coordinating NSEB meetings and discussions in collaboration with co-chairs representing new graduate students, first-time-in-college students, new transfer students, and new international students;
- working with the Dean of Students, Office of Undergraduate Education,

Office of Graduate Studies, and the International Center to develop and coordinate proposed programming;

- assisting with the development of the Transfer Mentor Program, piloted successfully in fall 2017-spring 2018;

- developing and launching, in cooperation with faculty and staff, a transfer student first-year seminar course;

- developing and leading professional development for faculty teaching the transfer seminar course;

- collecting and analyzing program and institutional data in cooperation with the assessment staff in Student Affairs and the Provost's Office and the Office of Strategic Planning and Analysis in order to assess Orbit initiatives;

- researching and implementing best practices in new student success, with a particular focus on distinguishing the unique needs of the various populations of first-year students;

- developing, with input from the NSEB, monitoring, updating, and evaluating the effectiveness of a new student electronic resource, a new interactive online site to guide new students; and

- seeking grants or other external funding sources to aid in the sustainability of the Orbit initiatives for each population.

The Orbit Director will document whether the QEP has met the criteria within the established metrics, and share the analysis with university leadership, the NSEB, and the appropriate institutional governing bodies, in presentations and annual reports.

Supporting Documents

[1]   UT Dallas Orbit Director Official Job Posting
PDF Document, 2 Pages, 85.41 KB (repnav3174)

VII. Resources

Budget

The successful implementation of NTSS will require a combination of existing and new financial resources. UT Dallas is committed to supporting the plan at least from September 1, 2016 through August 31, 2022 (the plan preparation period through the September 2018-August 2022 five-year QEP period). While Orbit will require the coordination of existing efforts, the two initiatives for NTSS will require an appropriate new infusion of resources, both human capital as well as monetary support. The following resources will be allocated to NTSS:

The new Orbit Director's salary range is set between $70,000 – $85,000, pending the qualifications of the hired applicant. The budget currently assumes a beginning salary of $85,000. UT Dallas will commit just over $855,000 of new fiscal resources in support of the plan in addition to leveraging approximately $393,000 of existing university resources (primarily in the form of existing faculty for course development and delivery as well as administrative support). Additionally, $94,000 is expected to be received from UT System's Student Success Initiative program, which awarded UT Dallas a three-year grant. In total, just over $1.34 million will be invested in the QEP through the implementation period. The recurring funding commitment, post-QEP (steady state), is expected to total $202,350 annually.

The budget summary in Table 3 outlines the new and existing resources that UT Dallas has and will allocate to the NTSS plan from plan preparation through the five-year QEP period (fiscal years 2018-2022). The new funding will be used to hire new personnel; support faculty development, course workshops, and course development and delivery; purchase course materials; support peer mentors; expand the technical and assessment infrastructure; and develop and implement a communications plan to promote the program to UT Dallas prospective and existing new students.

Table 3. New Transfer Student Success: Budget Summary

	Existing & UT System-Supported Resources	New Resources	Total
Faculty and Academic Staff • QEP curriculum development • QEP curriculum teaching/facilitating • QEP-specific advising • Faculty Administrative Leadership	$256,000	$38,000	$294,000
Peer Mentors	$34,000	$4,000	$38,000
QEP Plan Marketing and Communications	$12,000	$29,000	$41,000
Operating Budget, including plan assessment, materials and travel	$117,000	$80,800	$197,800

	Existing & UT System-Supported Resources	New Resources	Total
QEP Leadership Team, including student assistants	$67,750	$703,221	$770,971
Total	**$486,750**	**$855,021**	**$1,341,771**

A more detailed budget for the new funding allocated to each initiative is located in Table 4. The university leadership is committed to providing the necessary resources to the program. The QEP budget has been incorporated into the annual budget planning and resource allocation process.

Table 4. New Transfer Student Success: Detailed Budget - New Resources to Be Allocated

	Prep.		Development/ Implementation					Steady State
QEP Goals and Inverventions	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**Total**	**Annual Budget Commitment**
Commitment to Success								
Establish New Student Engagement Board (NSEB)								
Meetings & Events	‗	‗	‗	‗	500	‗	500	500
Establish New Student Engagement Board Subtotal	-	-	-	-	500	-	500	500
Establish Transfer Seminar & Transfer Peer Mentor Program								
Curriculum and Course Development, Course Delivery	1,000	1,000	10,000	10,000	5,000	5,000	32,000	5,000
Peer Mentor Program	‗	‗	‗	‗	2,000	2,000	4,000	2,000
Establish Transfer Seminar & Transfer Peer Mentor Program Subtotal	1,000	1,000	10,000	10,000	7,000	7,000	36,000	7,000

	Prep.	Development/Implementation						Steady State
Transfer Student Leadership Programs, Events, Activities								
Designing/Planning	-	1,000	2,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	6,000	1,000
Events	-	1,400	2,800	1,400	1,400	1,400	8,400	1,400
Giveaways/Prizes	-	100	200	200	200	200	900	200
Transfer Student Leadership Programs, Events, Activities Subtotal	-	2,500	5,000	2,600	2,600	2,600	15,300	2,600
Commitment to Success Subtotal	**1,000**	**3,500**	**15,000**	**12,600**	**10,100**	**9,600**	**51,800**	**10,100**
Create Supporting Institutional Infrastructure								
Communications and Marketing	2,000	10,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	2,000	29,000	1,000
Travel (directors/program managers)	2,500	2,500	10,500	10,500	10,500	10,500	47,000	10,500
Create Supporting Institutional Infrastructure Subtotal	**4,500**	**12,500**	**15,500**	**15,500**	**15,500**	**12,500**	**76,000**	**11,500**
Plan Assessment								
Administrative Oversight and Support	-	-	-	-	15,000	5,000	20,000	5,000
Materials and Supplies	-	-	-	-	2,000	2,000	4,000	2,000
Plan Assessment Subtotal	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**17,000**	**7,000**	**24,000**	**7,000**

	Prep.		Development/ Implementation					Steady State
Plan Management and Faculty Leadership								
Director	-	-	110,500	112,710	114,964	117,263	455,438	120,000
Administrative Assistant	-	35,000	45,500	46,410	47,338	48,285	222,533	50,000
Student Assistants	-	5,000	5,500	5,500	5,500	3,750	25,250	3,750
Plan Management and Faculty Leadership Subtotal	-	**40,000**	**161,500**	**164,620**	**167,802**	**169,298**	**703,221**	**173,750**
Total	**5,500**	**56,000**	**192,000**	**192,720**	**210,402**	**198,398**	**855,021**	**202,350**

Periodic Budget Review

The multi-year budget will be reassessed annually during UT Dallas' budget planning and review process. Any increases or decreases required from one year to the next will be allocated following the annual review to ensure consistency with QEP goals and responsiveness to assessment results, as well as to address any shifts in programmatic priorities.

Overview of Major Components

Plan Management

The Orbit Director, supported by an administrative assistant, will coordinate the overarching Orbit and the NTSS operations and program implementations as outlined in the Organizational Structure section (VI). Additionally, the Director will seek external funding opportunities and ensure a successful transition of program initiatives from the NTSS' implementation to steady state. Student assistants will provide support to the management team in areas such as web site maintenance, general clerical support for workshops and focus groups, and data entry.

Assessment

The existing Office of Assessment staff will assume some of Orbit and NTSS assessment duties as described in the Assessment section (V). New funding will be provided for additional staff to assist with the initial measure development, data collection, and analysis. Funds are also provided for survey and assessment-related materials as well as supplies.

Awareness

In addition to planned programmatic activities such as the establishment of a New Student Engagement Board (NSEB) and expansion of student seminar programs, seed funding will be made available for student- and/or faculty/staff-led initiatives and campus events supporting the QEP.

New Student Engagement Board (NSEB)

As mentioned in the original Orbit report, the NSEB has been formed and brings together individuals on campus responsible for new student engagement and programming. This Board will continue to meet for both the Orbit initiatives as well as the QEP's transfer student interventions.

Infrastructure Development

Updates to existing web pages and online databases will be required. Funds will also be provided for printed materials, video production, other-non-print media, and outreach via external communication channels in support of marketing and communications of program initiatives.

Marketing Initiatives

The new Orbit Director will work closely with the Office of Communications, specifically the Marketing Departments in both Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, to create and sustain an awareness of both Orbit and NTSS among students, faculty, and staff.

New Student Electronic Resource

The NSEB will continue to oversee the development of an electronic student engagement resource. With the understanding that students prefer to receive answers to many of their educational process questions electronically, this resource will provide information to assist new students in successfully navigating the critical first year at UT Dallas. Because this is an Orbit initiative, transfer students will be among those who benefit.

Faculty Leadership

The university-wide development of Orbit has been led by the Dean of Students and the Dean of Undergraduate Education, who is also an Associate Professor of Literary Studies. Beginning in fall 2018, management of Orbit will transition to the Orbit Director, reporting to the Office of Vice President of Academic Affairs and Provost. As was the case during the development period of Orbit, the new Director will continue to work closely with faculty and staff leaders in developing, implementing, and administering program initiatives for transfer students.

Educational Programming

Resources will be available for faculty members to create and/or enhance courses for the Transfer Mentor Program. These funds will provide salary support and resource materials needed to explore and develop new curricula. Funding will be made available for workshops, travel, faculty course and online module development and delivery, as well as faculty-facilitated events.

Plan for Recruiting, Selecting, and Preparing the Campus Community

The new Orbit Director will also be responsible for developing a plan in consultation with the school deans for recruiting, selecting, and preparing the faculty, staff, and students who will be engaged and vested in both Orbit and NTSS, with emphasis on the QEP implementation. The new Orbit Director will work closely with the Provost and school deans to refine the recruitment, training, and on-going development for faculty and staff involved in the Transfer Seminar and the Transfer Mentor Program.

Conclusion

UT Dallas enthusiastically embraces the opportunities and challenges associated with ensuring strong student engagement. The University fully supports the QEP NTSS designed to improve student engagement for new undergraduate transfer students.

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