

Executive Summary

Over the last two years, our office has led state efforts to measure college and university undergraduate performance. *U.S. News and World Report* has long published performance measures for the 1,361 colleges and universities of America.¹ To launch the Texas accountability initiative, we authored and passed S.B. 286 (78th Legislative Session), the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Sunset Bill, and for the first time, set performance standards for Texas colleges and universities.

As a result, the University of Texas System (UT System) published its first performance report,² and other similar performance reviews have been done of Texas universities.³ What is striking about all these performance measures is that University of Texas-El Paso (UTEP) ranks among the lowest in the country in graduation rates and among the highest in the country in remediation rates. Out of the 35 public higher education institutions in Texas, UTEP has the lowest four-year graduation rate, the fifth lowest six-year graduation rate, and the sixth highest remediation rate.

The result is that UTEP serves as a constriction in the El Paso academic pipeline for students to achieve college graduation and success. Nearly all UT System Border universities present a similar challenge, but none more so than UTEP. As such, it presents the essential challenge on how to reform higher education, provide essential accountability, produce a quality undergraduate education, and finance a student population with fewer financial resources than almost any in the United States. Provided in this notebook and on the following page is a chart which shows the remediation and graduation rates for universities in the UT System:

Undergraduates Graduating in Four Years or Less from the Same UT Academic Institution

¹ *US News and World Report* "Americas Best Colleges", 2005

² The University of Texas System Board of Regents Accountability and Performance Report, 2004-2005

³ Legislative Budget Board Performance Review, "Higher Education-Texas A&M University, 2005,"
"Higher Education-University of Texas-Austin, 2005"

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
UT-Arlington	9.6%	13.2%	12.7%	12.3%	14.5%
UT-Austin	35.6%	39.2%	36.5%	38.9%	41.3%
UT-Dallas	32.0%	30.3%	31.7%	37.7%	29.6%
UT-El Paso	2.1%	2.9%	2.5%	3.6%	4.5%
UT-Pan American	5.3%	5.9%	6.2%	7.8%	8.4%
UT-Permian Basin	10.0%	9.3%	15.2%	17.0%	15.5%
UT-San Antonio	5.2%	5.5%	6.3%	6.3%	6.1%
UT-Tyler*	--	--	--	26.3%	49.7%

* Tyler did not admit freshmen until Summer/Fall 1998

Source: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

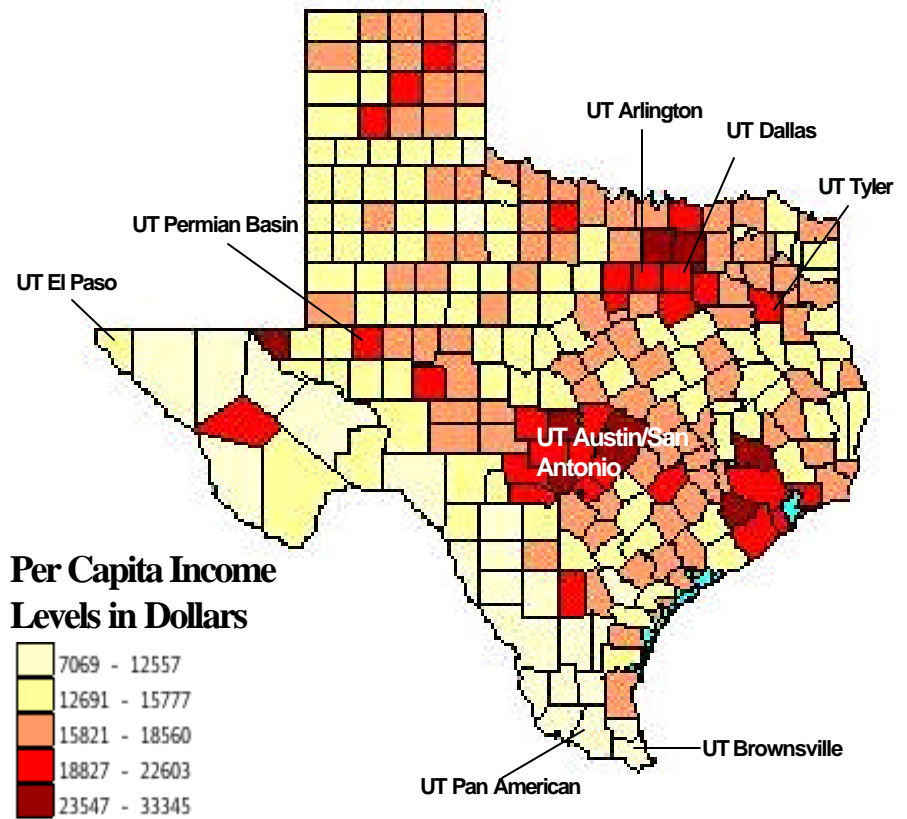
Percent of Students Requiring Developmental Education

	1997-1998	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002
UT-Arlington	20.6%	25.7%	24.4%	23.4%	23.0%
UT-Austin	3.2%	6.6%	6.6%	4.5%	0.9%
UT-Brownsville*	73.7%	45.2%	35.3%	28.0%	37.4%
UT-Dallas	4.8%	6.0%	23.7%	12.5%	19.1%
UT- El Paso	48.1%	66.7%	66.0%	64.5%	61.5%
UT-Pan American	47.9%	54.9%	68.4%	70.0%	74.0%
UT-Permian Basin	37.9%	32.4%	29.8%	8.2%	8.0%
UT-San Antonio	25.1%	24.6%	25.1%	26.3%	34.2%
UT-Tyler	13.2%	11.1%	23.5%	1.6%	0.8%

*Separate reporting by UTB/TSC may produce anomalous results.

Source: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

Obviously, part of the challenge facing UTEP is financing a college education for a low-income population that has historically avoided loans. On the following page is a map that portrays a snapshot of a UTEP student=s personal income situation:



SOURCE: US Census Bureau, 1999

The third poorest student population in the state and one of the poorest student populations in the country will be paying the recent tuition increases at UTEP. The five percent increase approved by the UT Board of Regents on March 11, 2005 adds another \$60 per semester for a total of \$270 more per semester since Fall 2003. With a 4.5 percent four-year graduation rate, this is not a course of action that is beneficial to UTEP students or El Paso. Recently, Dr. Terry Sullivan, Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at UT System, said at their conference on graduation rates that "improving access without improving success is not getting the job done." The increased cost of tuition will only further delay graduation for our income-sensitive students as the extension of what should be an eight semester education to over 12 semesters creates damaging consequences by cutting two years off the work life of thousands of Texas college students.

UT System Tuition Increase 2003-2004

	Total Statutory & Designated Tuition Fall 2003	Total Statutory & Designated Tuition Fall 2004	Percent Increase in Statutory & Designated Tuition	Percent Increase in Designated Tuition
UT- Arlington	\$1,380.00	\$1,815.00	31.52%	30.36%
UT-Austin	\$1,380.00	\$2,130.00	54.35%	34.29%
UT-Brownsville	\$1,170.00	\$1,290.00	10.26%	18.75%
UT-Dallas	\$1,380.00	\$2,040.00	47.83%	33.33%
UT-El Paso	\$1,380.00	\$1,890.00	36.96%	21.88%
UT-Pan American	\$1,170.00	\$1,252.00	7.01%	10.83%
UT-Permian Basin	\$1,380.00	\$1,500.00	16.28%	15.56%
UT-San Antonio	\$1,380.00	\$1,860.00	34.78%	24.59%
UT-Tyler	\$1,380.00	\$1,650.00	19.57%	19.23%

Source: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

In addition, unlike other UT components, UTEP faces stiff competition at New Mexico State University (NMSU). After NMSU offered in-state tuition to El Paso residents in 1996, UTEP's enrollment experienced a serious decline. Today, 11 percent of NMSU's student population comes from El Paso. Even UTEP's Center for Institutional Evaluation, Research and Planning cited NMSU as a source of declining enrollment.⁴ UTEP's decisions regarding tuition increases should be price sensitive with respect to NMSU. As the chart on the following page shows, UTEP now charges \$140 more per year in tuition and fee than NMSU. The recently approved tuition increases make UTEP \$332 more per year than NMSU.

NMSU vs. UTEP

	NMSU	UTEP (current)	UTEP (Fall 2005 Tuition Increase)
Undergraduate Tuition and Fees per semester (12 credits)	\$1,833	\$1,903	\$1,999

⁴Center for Institutional Evaluation, Research, and Planning, University of Texas-El Paso, www.cierp.utep.edu/StrategicPlan/sec5e.html

In addition, over the years, countless students have come to our office with the following complaints:

1. Unavailable courses for timely graduation, especially upper division courses
2. Ineffective and inadequate counseling and advising
3. The 45 percent increase in tuition since 2003 is excessive and cost prohibitive
4. Student outreach is disorganized, chaotic and unproductive
5. Academic and student free speech rights are violated and curtailed

To put it bluntly, in order to compete we need systemic reform at UTEP. Our university is the key to El Paso's economic success. To attain Tier I status, UTEP's student undergraduate education must improve. The Washington Advisory Group acknowledged as much when it stated:

The fact that more than 40% of the student population have not received a degree 10 years after entering the University is troublesome. UTEP's administration is well aware of this problem and is working on developing ways of addressing it. It should redouble its efforts in this area, and continue to work with the local community college to develop solutions.⁵

We believe that we as a community must make UTEP's graduation rates a top priority as success at UTEP can transfer to other institutions. Included in this notebook is background and data on UTEP as well as four initiatives we believe must be instituted at UTEP in order to succeed:

1. *Create a Top Draft choice program.* The Top Draft program is a multi-level program which would seek to bring the strongest academic talent to UTEP through methods such as early recruiting, full-ride scholarships, job placement and cash stipends. Most of the money for this program is already in various funds and programs at UTEP.
2. *Create a competitive honors program for advanced students.* Similar to the Plan II program at the University of Texas at Austin, UTEP needs a competitive honors program that would offer highly motivated undergraduates an opportunity to be part of a small, selective academic honors program. The program would offer more challenging classes and have stricter requirements for admission than regular UTEP academic programs such as a minimum SAT/ACT and GPA requirement.

⁵Report of The Washington Advisory Group, LLC on Research Capability Expansion for The University of Texas at El Paso.

3. *Create a Contract For Our Future* with UTEP students regarding tuition and course availability. Offered to incoming freshman, the "Contract For Our Future" would include a clear degree plan, an academic calendar, and incentives from the University to graduate on time. Participants will be held responsible for completing their undergraduate degree in four years by taking 15 credits a semester or five years by taking 12 credits per semester. In return, the University would be responsible for ensuring that students will not have to postpone graduation because of unavailable classes or tuition increases. Student contracts have been established at universities across the country as a way to improve advising programs for students and increase graduation rates.
4. *Create a Road Map to Graduation Degree Plan.* A comprehensive degree plan would ensure that every student knows exactly how many hours and courses are needed to graduate in their degree program. At a minimum, UTEP should implement a uniform degree plan template that is used by all colleges in the University and is available online. The ideal degree planning tool would be an online degree progress report for all of the academic departments.

The notebook also includes two papers regarding academic and student free speech issues and how best to achieve academic excellence at UTEP and create economic opportunities for El Paso. In order to achieve these reforms, there must be involvement not only from University administration, but also by UTEP students, alumni, the El Paso business sector, and the entire El Paso community. We ask that you review the enclosed materials and welcome your input and assistance in achieving these goals. If Mike Price can make us "believe" on the football field, than we can surely accomplish this in the classroom.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eliot Shapleigh". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Eliot Shapleigh