

Undergraduate Retention and Graduation Report from the Task Force on Academic Success

June 18, 2004

Task Force Membership for 2003-2004

Chairperson: Dr. Judith Bean, Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs

Dean: (1)

Advising Center: (1)

Department Chairs: (2)

Faculty:

Arts and Sciences (4)

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Health Sciences (2)

Nursing (2)

Student Life: (2)

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Disorders

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Ms. Heather Speed, Director, Center for Student Development

Chestin Borque, Student

Mamawah Kandah, Student

Report Author: Dr. Judith Bean

Undergraduate Retention Report
from the
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Executive Summary

The first part of the report presents key retention risk factors, and data analyzing TWU enrollment and retention patterns in relation to regional, state, and national retention. From these perspectives, the TWU six-year graduation rate (35%) appears to be comparable to the state average, similar to four of the five public north Texas institutions in number of part-time students, and near the state average in graduation rates for minorities. TWU appears to have an unusually high proportion of non-FTIC students (primarily transfer students). Therefore, the small number of full-time, first-time-in-college students (FTIC) on which TWU graduation rates are usually reported makes the TWU six-year graduation rate misleading as an indicator for TWU effectiveness in undergraduate education. Among all baccalaureate degrees granted, approximately 20% began as FTIC students (10 year average). What may be more representative for TWU is the 74% graduation rate of community college transfers.

In the second part of the report best practices for retention are reviewed and the status of best practices at TWU are detailed. With each of twelve best practices, suggestions are offered for making improvements in retention. The third part of the report provides a summary of recommendations with 23 suggested strategies that could be employed centrally and by academic units to improve retention. The appendix offers a preliminary proposal for establishing a program of supplemental instruction, guidelines for departmental retention plans, and additional enrollment and graduation data. The report notes the significance of resources to improve retention rates, but does include some suggestions that would not require significant new resources.

Undergraduate Retention and Graduation Report

Introduction

The following report summarizes work done by the Task Force on Academic Success in the 2003-2004 academic year. Monthly meetings began October 31, 2003 and concluded April 7, 2004. The general goal of the task force is to increase student retention at all levels. The focus for this academic year was increasing undergraduate retention.

This report will present results following the charge given to the task force:

1. Evaluate data on best practices in academic support and retention.
2. Evaluate current TWU data to determine academic areas for improvement in retention.
3. Develop a retention plan for academic programs.
4. Recommend mechanisms to implement and oversee the academic retention plan.

Because this task force was charged with working on the academic aspects of retention, the committee did not directly address non-academic issues which are related to retention except to put TWU graduate rates in perspective. These include financial aid, demographic influences (gender, ethnicity, age), or student life influences. TWU undergraduate students are likely to have more than one risk factor for retention to graduation related to income, ethnicity, age, and employment.

Risk factors for retention and graduation (Horn and Malizio 2002)

- Delaying enrollment by a year or more,
- Attending part time,
- Being financially independent (without family support),
- Being a single parent,
- Working fulltime while enrolled,
- Being a high school dropout or GED recipient.

Other risk factors

- Being older than traditional age
- Having academic preparation deficiencies (as shown by SAT, placement exams),
- Attending part-time,
- Being a member of an ethnically underrepresented group,
- Having a disability.

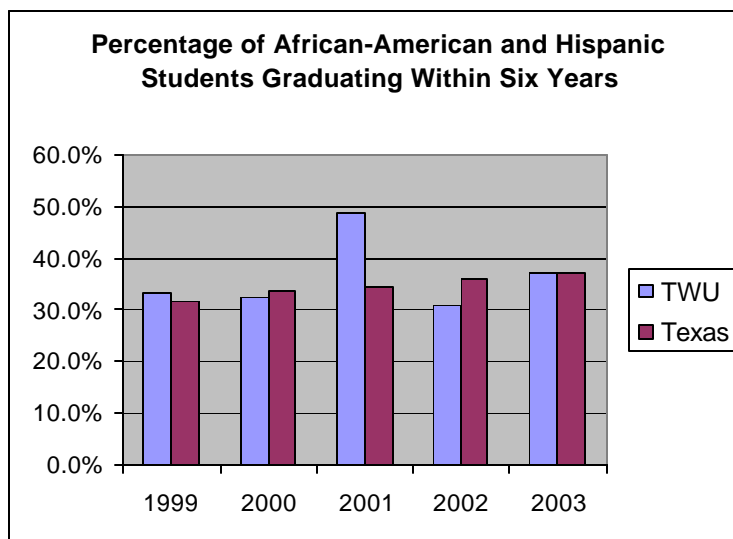
One study showed that when students had 3 or more of the risk factors, their probable graduation rates dropped from 64% to 43%.

I. Current TWU Retention Data in Perspective

In order to assess where TWU stands now, to establish goals, and to focus on areas for improvement, the task force considered data on TWU graduation rates, research on academic best practices, and options for strengthening current programs or initiating new ones.

At TWU approximately one-third of undergraduate students are members of ethnically underrepresented groups. Consistent with other studies, TWU graduation rates for these students were 2%-13% lower than Anglo rates. However, TWU has generally remained at or above state average in graduation rates of African-American and Hispanic students as shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1



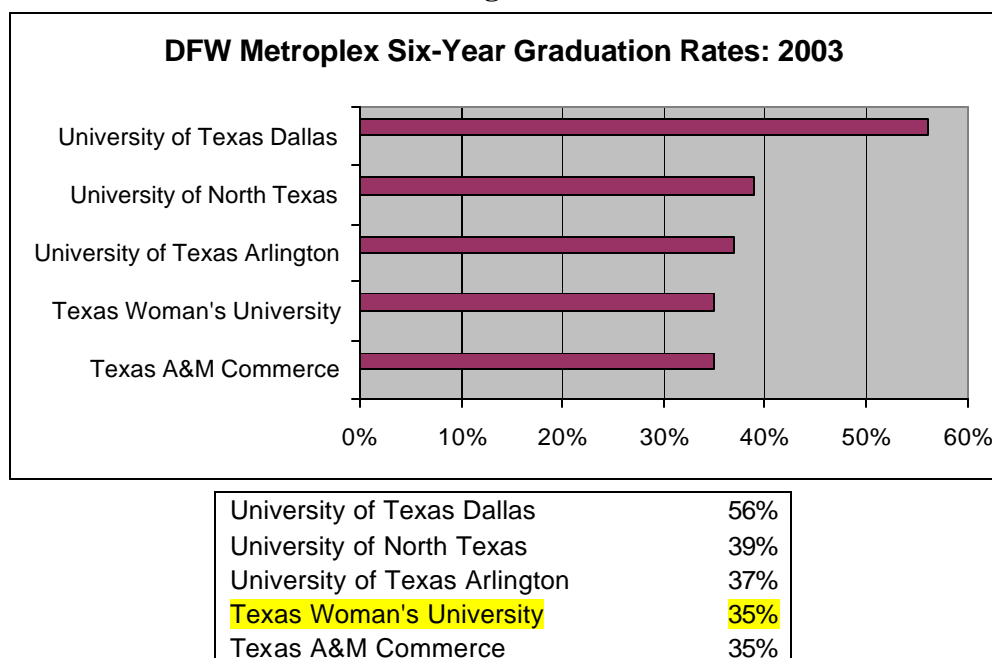
	TWU	Texas
1999	33.3%	31.7%
2000	32.5%	33.9%
2001	49.0%	34.6%
2002	30.7%	36.0%
2003	37.2%	37.2%

Sources: LLB Budget and Performance Assessments (1999-2003), Institutional Research & Planning

Regarding all TWU undergraduate students, the graduation rate is below the national and state average. The average TWU undergraduate graduation rate of FTIC (*first-time-in-college, full-time, degree seeking*) students over the last 6 years is 35%. To provide perspective, we compare TWU graduation rates with regional, state, and national graduation rates, offering some possible explanations for the difference between TWU and state or national rates. As the chart below illustrates, TWU is relatively consistent with metroplex universities in FTIC graduation rates.

In the THECB 2003 Budget and Performance Report, the state average 6-year graduation rate for *public institutions* was 36%. The TWU graduation rate for that period was 35% (ranking TWU at number 14 among 29 institutions). TWU rates are also similar to those at most Dallas-Ft. Worth metroplex public universities. Like all other state public institutions, the challenge at TWU is to improve graduation rates beyond the current rates. However, TWU has unique undergraduate enrollment patterns that make the FTIC graduation rate less significant than the community college transfer student graduation rate.

Figure 2



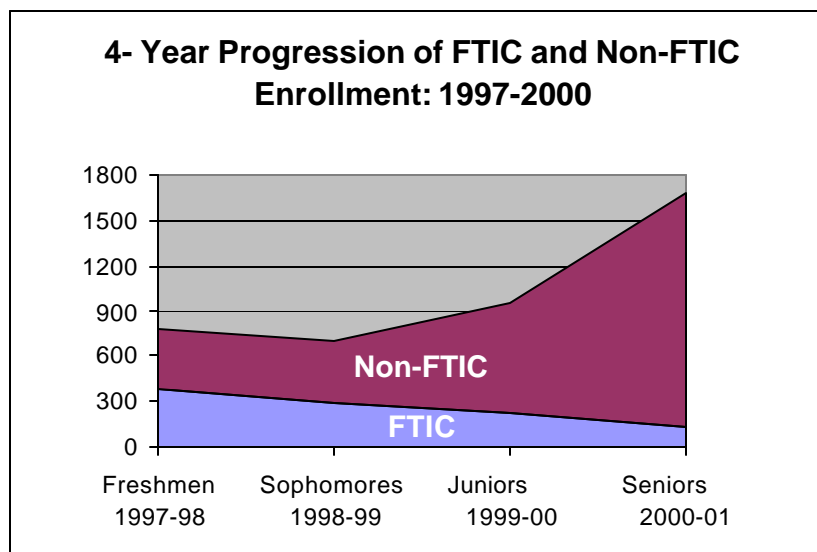
Source: LLB Budget and Performance Assessment (1999-2003)

Nationally, the average retention rate for FTIC students is 55% (NCES study). The task force compared current data on retention at TWU with a report summarizing retention data from the Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE) which analyzed data from 344 colleges and universities. That data showed that retention at TWU parallels national trends, usually appearing near average graduation rates, except when compared to the 63% graduation rate of doctoral/ research intensive institutions.

As several analysts have noted, FTIC graduation rates may not be a faithful representative of retention effectiveness. FTIC graduation rates do not completely represent the TWU track record in undergraduate education for two reasons: (1) the small number of FTIC students and (2) the higher rate of transfer degree completions. At TWU only half of freshmen (five-year average) are counted as FTIC. Due to the large number of transfers and part-time students (non-FTIC), those FTIC students represent a small proportion of undergraduates receiving degrees. Among all baccalaureate degrees granted, approximately 20% began as FTIC students (10 year average).

In order to understand the flow of students and the comparative number of FTIC and non-FTIC students, Figure 3 below illustrates the comparatively low number of FTIC students and how the difference between those two groups increases as we follow a four-year progression of students from the freshmen to the senior year. In the freshman year about half of all students are FTIC, and half are non-FTIC, but due to the large number of transfers, the non-FTIC group becomes 80% of the total students enrolled in the senior year.

Figure 3



Fall Semester	FTIC	Non-FTIC
Freshmen 1997-98	385	384
Sophomores 1998-99	292	406
Juniors 1999-00	229	712
Seniors 2000-01	137	1540

Source: Institutional Research and Planning

Approximately 80% of baccalaureate students transfer into TWU; half of those come from community colleges, many to the nursing program. When we examine degree completion rates of community college students, we find that at TWU, an average of 74% of full-time community college transfer students complete their degrees in four years (a performance measure for Texas Legislative Budget Board).

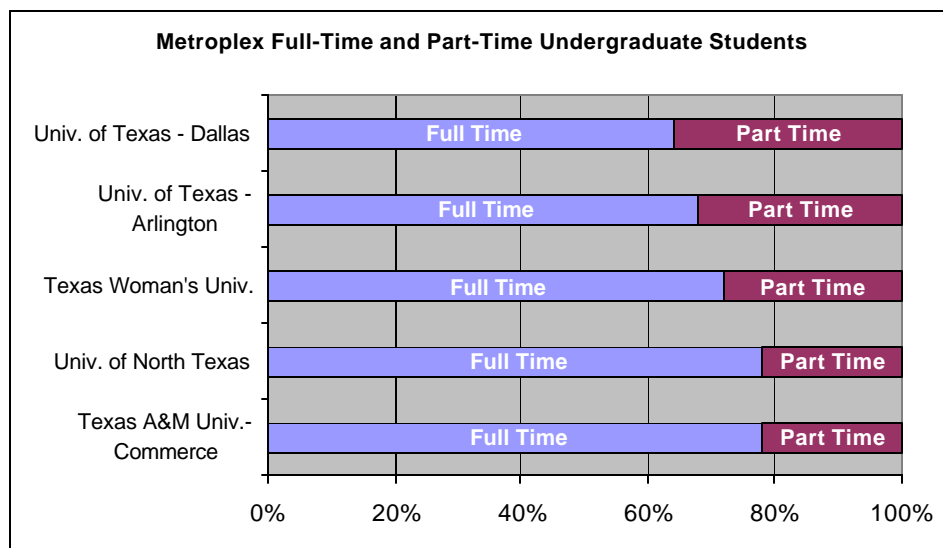
One factor accounting for TWU graduation rates being below national averages may be the high proportion of part-time undergraduate students; for the last 10 years, part-time undergraduates are approximately 30% of the undergraduate student body. In the last five years the proportion of part-time graduates has ranged between 27% – 40%. The CSRDE study showed that when part-time students exceeded 20%, the six-year graduation rate was 39% - near the TWU average (37%) for the last 10 years.

The north Texas area public universities, including TWU, are located near urban centers, although TAMU-Commerce is somewhat more distant. Research shows that students in a metropolitan/urban area (1) are more likely to perform multiple roles while they attend school; in particular, they are more likely to have extensive work and family obligations, and (2) represent cultural, economic, social, and academic diversity.

The urban university, therefore, must respond to a wide range of student talents and support needs. Recent enrollment trends at TWU show an increase in full-time undergraduate students which should support increased retention in the future. Full-time undergraduates (defined by

number of hours taken) are currently 72% of the undergraduate population (up by 2% in the last 6 years).

Figure 4



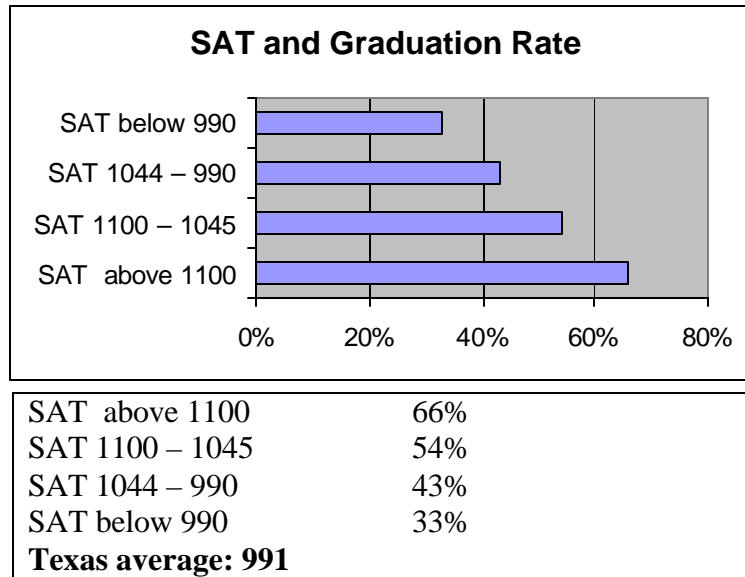
University	% Full Time	% Part Time
University of Texas – Dallas	64%	36%
University of Texas – Arlington	68%	32%
Texas Woman's University	72%	28%
University of North Texas	78%	22%
Texas A&M - Commerce	78%	22%

Source: Office of Institutional Research and Planning(2001 data)

Differences among graduation rates also relate to academic preparedness of students. SAT scores are correlated to graduation rates as shown in Figure 5. At TWU the required SAT admission score is 950 and that below-average score correlates with our below-average FTIC graduation rate.

Although these part-time student ratios predict below-average graduation rates, UTD is the exception. As shown in Figure 2, the UTD graduation rate is 56% despite their high proportion of part-time students (36%). However, this supports the findings of the CSRDE study that show that differences in academic preparedness of students, specifically SAT scores, are correlated to graduation rates. The mid-50th percentile SAT scores for TWU (850 – 1020) are substantially below that of UTD (1080 – 1290), and the average SAT score for TWU (937) is below the national average of 1021 and the Texas average of 991. (The average scores for all universities are probably lower than they would be if the top 10% did not have to supply scores.) Figure 5 below shows that the graduation rates for TWU are consistent with the SAT profile of incoming freshmen. Figure 14 (Appendix) shows SAT averages for metroplex universities.

Figure 5



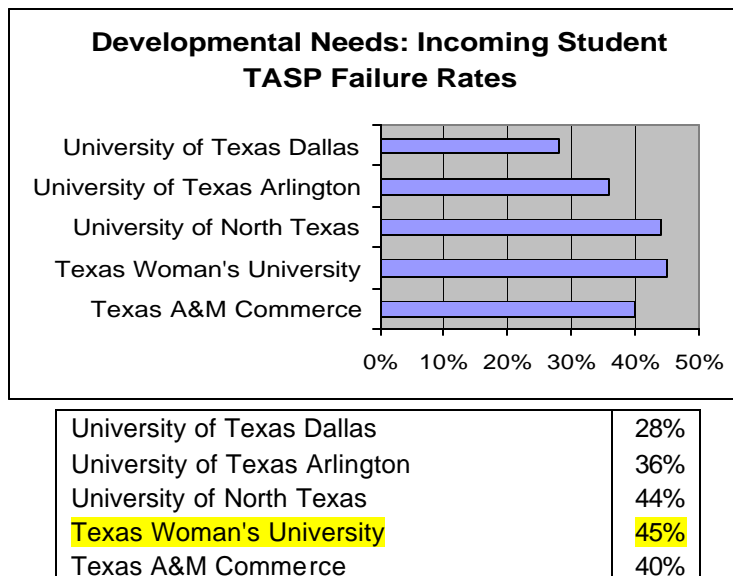
Source: CSRDE Report, 2000-2001, p. 3.; NCES.

Levels of academic preparedness at TWU suggest the need for developmental classes and academic support programs at TWU to improve retention and to maintain access to college education for a diverse student population which is targeted by the state “Closing the Gaps” plan.

Developmental Needs of Entering Students

State data show that at TWU (1999-2001) an average of 45% of incoming students required remedial course work to ready them for first-year academic work. The TASP/THEA examination, SAT scores, and other placement tools are used to assess student needs for developmental courses.

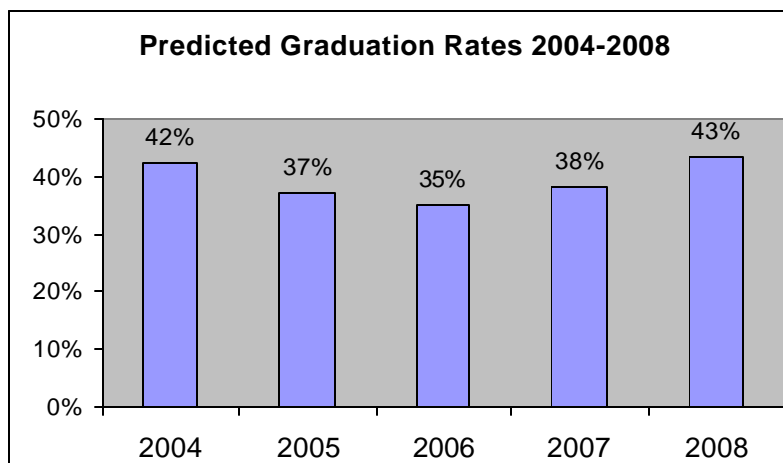
Figure 6



Source: TWU Developmental Education Report, 2002 (J. Bean)

Graduation rates are usually predictable from the university's freshman year retention rates. If TWU continues to graduate the same average number of students retained *after the first year* (32%), the graduation rates can be predicted as shown below.

Figure 7



Source: Institutional Research & Planning

First-Year	First-Year Retention	6-Yr Graduation	Predicted Graduation Rate*
1998	74%	2004	42%
1999	69%	2005	37%
2000	67%	2006	35%
2001	70%	2007	38%
2002	75%	2008	43%

*Assumes average 32% graduation after first-year retention.

It is important to remember that the students identified for FTIC tracking are a cohort that is formed in the first year, and that no additional students can be added at later dates for cohort tracking.

Conclusion

As these data show, for a variety of reasons, TWU is graduating students at rates consistent with the population enrolled: their demographic characteristics, socio-economic status, urban residence, and educational background. Moreover, the university's role in educating students at the baccalaureate level cannot be conveyed with only FTIC graduation rates.

TWU is at the front lines in "closing the gaps" for ethnically diverse populations and increasing the rates of graduation for community college students. Success in closing the gaps in access is often at odds with high retention rates. Increasingly, the state and nation are emphasizing increasing access of diverse populations to higher education and recognizing that retention rates for economically disadvantaged students – often minorities – are below average (Burd, p. A19).

II. Undergraduate Retention: Academic Best Practices and TWU Practices

After reviewing the key indicators for undergraduate retention outlined above, and other factors that affect retention, the task force examined scholarship and current practices at this university on undergraduate retention. The following are identified as best practices for academic support of degree completion. Some of these practices are already in place at TWU. The task force received reports from the following TWU programs and services which support student retention.

Retention Support at TWU

1. Nursing Success program
2. Honors Scholar Program
3. MBRS Program (Minority Biomedical Research Support)
4. McNair Scholars Program (supports minority and first-generation students)
5. “Early Warning” pilot program
6. Academic Advising Center (advising first year students and undeclared majors)
7. Career Services (career counseling for all students)
8. Disability Support Services
9. Learning Assistance Office
10. Math & Computer Science Tutoring
11. Science Learning Resources Center
12. Write Site (Writing Lab)
13. Supplemental Instruction pilot program
14. NET program

The reports from these programs and services revealed that there are many factors to retaining students: their academic and career expectations, their individual limitations, and the availability of services. Some practices emerged as common to successful programs: frequent proactive advising with active intervention and contact with faculty or support staff, peer support networks, and mentoring. Notable for their high graduation rates (85% or above) are the Honors Scholar Program, MBRS Program, McNair Program, and Nursing Success Program.

The task force also heard reports on what various academic departments are doing to support retention.

For example:

- Mathematics & Computer Science department participated in MentorNet and encouraged students to seek a mentor from industry; it has two scholarship programs - our Women in Engineering (WIN) program and NSF CSEMS grants that provide scholarships, tutoring for upper level classes, speakers, field trips, and social events. The department hosts a majors luncheon each fall. Faculty and students are encouraged to attend ACM/KME meetings and social functions.
- The English, Speech, and Foreign Languages department has two honor societies, Sigma Tau Delta and Omega Rho Alpha, that host a fall social event for English majors and minors and a homecoming honors and awards program.

- Family Sciences provides students with several student organizations and six hours of practicum classes where they get hands-on experience.
- Nursing Success Program, winner of a Star Award from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, combines instruction in needed skills, mentoring, and advising to increase retention rates for nursing majors at-risk for leaving the program.

Finally, the task force considered exemplary retention programs recognized by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board:

- **Prairie View A&M University:** The Academy for Collegiate Excellence and Student Success (ACCESS) motivates "at-risk" students to succeed in college. The program has two primary components: an intensive, residential pre-college effort in the summer and a holistic, centralized student support effort during the freshman year.
- **Stephen F. Austin State University:** Academic Assistance and Resource Center (AARC) provides educational support services, including one-on-one peer tutoring and student-led study groups, to help ensure the academic success of students at the university.
- **Texas A&M University-Kingsville:** The Supplemental Instruction (SI) Program helps improve student pass rates in history, mathematics, English and developmental algebra, which are traditionally difficult courses for students at Texas A&M-Kingsville. Students taking these courses are offered regularly scheduled review sessions led by peers trained and counseled by appropriate faculty.

After reviewing best practices and programs that enhance retention and graduation, the task force developed a list of suggestions for increasing retention at TWU. Below is a list of best practices followed by current TWU practices and possibilities for improvement.

Status of Best Practices at TWU

1. Introductory courses in learning skills and developmental courses.

To enhance retention of students through the critical first year and into the second year, TWU offers a one-hour introductory course (UNIV 1011) in learning skills, personal management and resource utilization. It is required for students with provisional admission. In fall 2003, 62% of freshmen took UNIV 1011. Students who enroll in UNIV 1011 usually raise their GPA. Of the students who took UNIV 1011 during spring, 2003, 62.5% increased their GPA with an average increase of .398 during that semester.

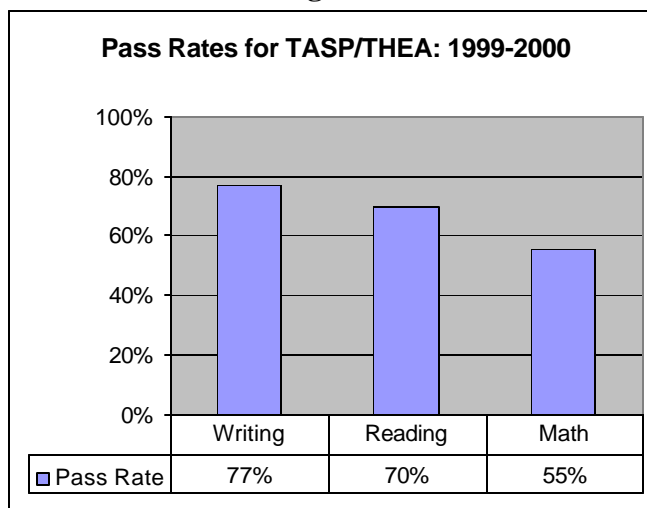
Developmental courses are offered in math, reading, and writing to prepare students for college level academic work.

- The number of students in developmental education courses has remained fairly steady over the last 3 years, averaging 448 per year, and declining since the highest number of 664 students in 1997.

- The two developmental **math** courses we offer enroll 81-91% of students in developmental education. The remaining students are enrolled in writing and reading courses. Student readiness for first-year mathematics and remediation for math is a challenge for all Texas universities.

In a 2002 statewide report, the effectiveness of developmental education was measured by the percentages of students who passed the TASP when they took it after remedial work (*based on 1999-2000 data*).* In these data, scores of 197 TWU students who retook the TASP after developmental education were analyzed and rates for retaking TASP appear in Figure 8 below.

Figure 8



Source: THECB and Bean, *Developmental Education Report*

In the last five years, additional efforts have been made to increase TWU success rates in the math area of THEA/TASP. New approaches to teaching math problem solving skills are being tested. In Spring 2004, the grading system was changed in developmental courses to motivate students to complete needed skills in developmental courses.

- Possibilities for improvement: One way to improve student readiness would be to provide more developmental courses in the summer. Another way would be to increase tutoring services in mathematics and strengthen developmental mathematics courses. Analysis of resources required is the first step for both these options.
2. **Tutoring** (individual); centers/ labs with tutoring (e.g. writing lab, science learning resource center, math lab).

TWU offers individual tutoring in most departments which have high enrollment in first-year and core courses, and also through several tutoring centers: Math & Computer Science Center, Science Learning Resources, the Learning Assistance Office, and the Write Site. Departmental tutoring services are offered in history and government, and psychology (through its honor society).

- Possibilities for improvement: A centralized tutoring center that provides services beyond traditional office hours might increase student use of tutoring. Current tutoring services are well-used, but may not be reaching all students who need it. The task force evaluated this possibility and agreed that when resources are available, this would be a way to support increased retention.
- Increase tutoring beyond traditional hours with current tutoring centers.

3. **Supplemental Instruction** (peer-led study sessions) in high-risk courses.

In Fall 2003, a supplemental instruction pilot program was begun in high-risk courses in chemistry, biology, and mathematics (coordinated by department chairs and Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs). Student leaders in science sections reported that the sessions were very helpful. In mathematics, students did not take advantage of the services in sufficient numbers to determine the usefulness of supplemental instruction.

- Possibilities for improvement: To have a successful program of supplemental instruction, a budget and coordinator is needed and students need additional motivation to attend in some areas. Course fees have been increased modestly in the high-risk first-year courses to provide funds for supplemental instruction beginning in fall 2004. However, this will not produce sufficient funds to provide for a coordinator and adequate number of peer-leaders. A proposal for developing a supplemental instruction program appears in Appendix 1.

4. **Learning Communities**

TWU undergraduate learning communities are established through several programs: Minority Biomedical Research Program (MBRS), McNair Scholars program, and Honors Scholar program; these programs have strong retention/ graduation rates (approximately 85%).

The Neighbors Educated Together (NET) program combines academic and living environments for first-year students. It encourages peer support and mentoring as well as linking activities to courses, and assists learning communities by scheduling NET members into a block of the same classes. From fall of 2000 to fall of 2003 the NET program has seen a 32% increase in the number of students participating. The overall *one-year* retention rate has also increased from 71% in 2000 to 78% in 2003.

Living Learning Communities at TWU provide student learning opportunities outside of the classroom that strengthen student intellectual and personal growth. They are designed to integrate curricular and co-curricular experiences that complement and extend classroom learning by fostering faculty and resident interaction that enhances the intellectual and personal development of the residents. First Year Connections are developed around special interest themes structured so that students have a high degree of involvement in the program.

- Possibilities for improvement: Current goals include a 5% expansion in student participation in learning communities.

5. Peer mentoring

At TWU peer mentoring is a feature of several programs; COLORS, for example, offers three levels of mentoring:

1. **Group-** Year-round activities are incorporated to help the protégés create a supportive network with one another.
2. **Peer Mentoring-** Junior and seniors will facilitate smaller group mentoring (satellite group).
3. **Faculty/Staff Mentoring-** will mentor protégés during the spring semester.

- Possibilities for improvement: The COLORS mentoring program has set a goal for a 30% increase in participation. Mentoring in other organizations and academic units could help increase retention.

6. Unique programs for majors

The TWU Nursing Success Program (NSP) was designed to increase retention of at-risk baccalaureate nursing students who begin nursing courses as juniors. Because earlier attempts to provide elective classes and tutoring for identified students were not effective, at-risk students are required to participate in the NSP. At first, many of the students identified by faculty identified as having the greatest need for academic support chose not to participate in elective offerings. Now those at-risk students obtain the support they need to succeed as nursing students.

The Nurse Entrance Test (NET) reading comprehension score was used as the advisement tool for determining which students would enter the NSP. In the three classes admitted prior to NSP, from 50% to 75% of those with NET reading comprehension scores below 55% were not retained. And in one class only 25% of students with scores of less than 55% graduated. Although the NSP program is fairly new, preliminary data indicate that well over 80% of these at-risk students have been retained since initiating NSP.

- Possibilities for improvement: The task force supports the principle of each academic component having its own retention plan. Suggested guidelines for retention plans appear in the Appendix: Guidelines for Departmental Retention Plans for Undergraduate Programs.

7. Early warning programs (alerts for potential problems in passing a course) accompanied by timely feedback from instructors on student performance

An early warning pilot program by the Academic Advising Center in fall 2002 met with mixed results. Some students were unhappy to be contacted with their apparent potential

to fail a course based on early assessment. However, others did appear to appreciate the notice and the accompanying guidance to tutoring and academic support programs. Student leaders for the 2003 supplemental instruction pilot project reported that many students give up hope of passing when they fail the mid-term exam. These leaders urged earlier assessment practices so that students develop successful study habits early enough to enable them to succeed in mid-term exams. This is one area that departments can assist with course pass rates and retention rates.

- Possibilities for improvement: A more systematic, on-going early warning system could be effective in improving course pass rates and retention. Effectiveness could be enhanced by maintaining a positive framework for the program (as support for success) and by increasing faculty support and cooperation so that assessment activities are completed in time for early warnings to be useful.

8. Summer prep or “bridge” courses for freshmen

TWU does not currently have summer preparation workshops for under-prepared students. Among the THECB Star Award 2003 finalists, several institutions were recognized for their intensive, residential pre-college efforts in the summer.

- Possibilities for improvement: At TWU preliminary discussions with the Academic Advising Center, Student Life, and faculty in math and science found general support for such a program when resources are available and when retention goals are focused so as to select students in ways that will address specific TWU needs.

9. Enhancing student engagement in learning activities.

Enhancing student engagement in learning usually refers to extending the range of pedagogy beyond the traditional faculty lecture. Technology- enhanced classrooms are one method for enhancing engagement; TWU has upgraded 15 computer classrooms to provide for active learning with computer classrooms and with web access in most classrooms.

Research shows that experiential learning through internships, practica, service learning, and problem-based learning are means of enhancing engagement in learning activities which can produce higher success in learning than the traditional lecture method. A preliminary survey indicated a broad range of internship programs across the university. In academic year 2002, 560 undergraduates participated in internships or cooperative education in the colleges of Health Sciences and Arts and Sciences. In the college of Nursing, all students participate in clinical/ experiential learning throughout the curriculum (1,387 undergraduate nursing majors in 2002; 1,684 majors in 2003). Career Services coordinates and tracks internships in cooperation with departments. Community service learning is provided in some courses such as music and dance, but direct numbers on these courses has not been developed. The TWU student research symposium provides opportunities for problem-based learning experiences as students engage in guided research and creative activities and present them for audiences. Participation in this event has continued to demonstrate active student learning.

- Possibilities for improvement: Some institutions are engaging in campus-wide planning to increase experiential or problem-based learning as a retention strategy. Given the TWU mix of programs, if faculty agree to include courses in the curriculum to require experiential or problem-based learning, this might work well

10. Increased contact between faculty and student

At TWU faculty mentoring through undergraduate research is one method of increased faculty and student contact. Two grant programs, McNair and MBRS, require faculty mentors for undergraduate research and the annual student research symposium provides opportunities for faculty and students to work together in developing research projects.

A second method for increasing contact between faculty and students is student organizations within the disciplines and in the university as a whole. TWU has a wide variety of student organizations, all of which have faculty sponsors.

- The task force did not discuss means of increasing contact between faculty and students.

11. Quality advising at each academic stage:

- a. Assessment and placement
- b. First-year and second-year advising
- c. Upper level major advising
- d. Career counseling

Assessment and placement of incoming students is done at the TWU Academic Advising Center. Placement tests are both national (SAT, ACT, THEA) and local (math, writing, science). Local placement tests are managed by academic departments.

As part of the examination of retention efforts, the staff of the Academic Advising Center analyzed the effectiveness or predictive accuracy of current placement exams. Following that analysis and a meeting with department leaders in math and sciences, recommendations for raising the exemption levels for placement exam scores in math and science were made.

The changes would help avoid placing students in courses for which they are unprepared. In addition, the Advising Center will work with departments and Institutional Research and Planning to develop a central process for recording local placement exam scores so that they can be more available for academic advising and course placement.

First-year advising is managed through individual sessions, group sessions, learning community activities, and online advising. At present, second year advising is done in the Advising Center for students who have not yet decided on a major, for those who have not met academic requirements of their preferred major, and those who are on probation/suspension recovery plans. Upper level advising is done by departmental faculty. A faculty advisor's handbook is available on the Academic Advising Center website.

Career counseling is done through Career Services and through the UNIV 1011 introductory courses, including aptitude/ career testing. All undecided majors are referred to Career Services for testing. Numerous workshops are presented by staff of Career Services to classes on preparation for career entry. A career exploration class is offered every fall in the psychology department, and job fairs are held twice each year.

Possibilities for improvement:

- New faculty development and training for upper-level advising could be increased and be more systematic.
- Automating some advising with a degree audit system could help keep students mindful of required courses needed to graduate and provide a valuable advising tool. TWU plans to implement this feature in the near future.
- Increasing student awareness of graduation incentives (state tuition rebate) could shorten time to degree and increase retention.
- Advising nursing majors in their first two college years to develop a back up plan to use if they are not accepted into the nursing program could enhance retention of those students at TWU.

12. Non-traditional hours of availability of courses and academic support services.

TWU offers a large number of evening and weekend classes. However, as yet, academic support services largely are available only during regular work day hours. Some online services are available in the writing and advising centers.

- Possibilities for improvement: As indicated above, a centralized tutoring center that could provide tutoring beyond traditional office hours could increase student access to and use of tutoring.
- Increase hours of availability for current tutoring and student support services.

Additional Suggestions to Improve Retention

Throughout meetings of the task force, ideas were discussed for improving academic programs and services to support increased graduation rates. The group considered ideas for increasing retention in courses, in programs, and at the university as a whole. Below are some of the ideas that received committee support for increasing retention at the course, program, and university level.

- Systematically track retention rates and make data available to academic components.

In order to assist academic programs in determining their graduation rates, the Office of Institutional Research and Planning has developed an interactive retention tracker which creates reports as needed on graduation rates for undergraduates and graduates. This resource will soon be available online. Information about graduation in individual

academic programs will enable targeted or comprehensive planning for improvements in graduation rates. Reports on each department's graduation rates are being distributed to the colleges and departments in May, 2004.

- Develop tracking of course pass rates to identify challenging courses (with high failure rates). This could help focus efforts where needed to increase pass rates. The Office of Institutional Research and Planning will explore this idea and implement it if possible.
- Record placement test scores centrally for tracking and advising.
- Establish program-specific targets and strategies for increasing retention.
- Create TWU program-to-program (internal) "transfer" agreements to assist those who change majors. Preliminary data show that approximately one-third of students change majors at least once.
- Create an Academic Success Council including AAC advisors, faculty advisors, directors of tutoring centers, and others as needed.
- Hold an annual "Pick-a-Major" Fair for undecided students to meet and speak with faculty from undergraduate majors.
- Establish and maintain a "Hot-Line" for students who are thinking they must leave college that can refer them to appropriate support services and support them in times of crisis.
- Develop an internal marketing strategy to support undergraduate retention.
- Raise admission standards simultaneously with increased provisional admissions, and require provisionally admitted students to participate in supplementary education activities (tutoring, etc.)

III. Recommendations and Conclusions

Academic Readiness/ Development Efforts

1. Provide more developmental courses in the summer.
2. Establish summer preparation workshops for under-prepared students as academic bridges to college work.
3. Record placement test scores centrally for tracking and advising.
4. Raise the placement test passing scores for placement exams in math and science.
5. Raise admission standards, increase provisional admissions with more requirements for supplemental education activities.

Academic Support/Tutoring

6. Increase tutoring services in mathematics and strengthen developmental mathematics courses.
7. Create a centralized tutoring center that provides tutoring beyond traditional office hours.
8. Increase tutoring beyond traditional hours with current tutoring centers.
9. Create a program of supplemental instruction, required for students whose placement scores indicate they are at risk.

Central Advising and Tracking

10. Develop tracking of course pass rates to identify challenging (high risk) courses.
11. Establish a systematic, on-going early warning system to improve course pass rates and retention.
12. Increase and regularize faculty development and training for upper-level advising.
13. Automate some advising with degree audit system to help keep students on track with required courses needed to graduate.
14. Advise nursing majors early in their career at TWU to have a back up plan if they are not accepted into the nursing program.

Academic Component Retention Measures

15. Require that each academic component have its own retention plan.
16. Establish program-specific targets and strategies for increasing retention.
17. Create internal TWU program-to-program “transfer” agreements to assist those who change majors.
18. Increase experiential or problem-based learning (internships, practica, service learning).

Centralized Retention Efforts

19. Create an Academic Success Council including Academic Advising Center advisors, faculty advisors, directors of tutoring centers, and others as needed.
20. Hold an annual “Pick-a-Major” Fair for undecided students to meet and speak with faculty from undergraduate majors.
21. Establish and maintain a “Hot-Line” for students who are considering leaving TWU to refer them to appropriate support services and support them in times of crisis.
22. Develop an internal marketing strategy to support undergraduate retention.
23. Increase student awareness of graduation incentives (state tuition rebate).

Conclusions

If retention is approached systematically and if the university centrally commits resources to retention, increasing graduation rates becomes a realistic goal. Some suggestions offered by the task force do not require extensive resources, but rather require the commitment and cooperation of faculty and staff. Other suggestions, however, require resources. A major study of national graduation rates revealed that among many correlates for retention to graduation, the highest correlation was found between available resources and graduation rates. In other words, “Money trumps all other factors in the ability of institutions to engage and retain students” (Swail). In a time of tight resources, finding means of increasing retention will be a challenge.

Appendix 1

Supplemental Instruction Proposal

Supplemental Instruction is an established successful retention measure supported by 25 years of practice and research. It is well established at University of Texas (Austin, Dallas) and Texas A&M Universities in Texas, with sessions scheduled as regularly as classes and sections published in class schedules. Supplemental Instruction employs successful students as study group leaders (supervised by faculty) for students in courses with high failure rates. The availability of supplemental instruction to all students is recommended, but students at risk (as shown by placement tests) should be required to participate when it is offered.

- 1) Potential Courses
 - a) Chemistry introductory courses
 - b) Microbiology
 - c) History 1013
 - d) Psychology 1013
 - e) Math introductory courses
- 2) Request/Track percentage failure from each department for potential courses
- 3) Suggestions for rules/guidelines
 - a) Supplemental Instruction Leaders (SIL)
 - i) Undergraduates
 - ii) Received A in course within the previous two years
 - iii) Sophomore or Junior status
 - iv) Possibly students enrolled in Honors Scholar program
 - b) Identification of group members
 - i) Self identified
 - ii) Instructor recommended
 - iii) Introduced to class via Academic Advising
 - c) Supplemental Instruction Leader Coordinator Possibilities
 - i) Departmental GA
 - ii) Staff member with teaching experience
 - iii) VP for Academic Affairs
 - d) General guidelines
 - i) Group meets one time a week for one hour
 - ii) Group size - 20 students per student leader
 - iii) Per Course Section - 2 student leaders
 - iv) Each SIL – meets with 2 student groups
 - v) Student leaders paid for a 10 hour position
 - (1) 3 hours - attend class
 - (2) 2 hours - lead groups
 - (3) 5 hours - prep time

Appendix 2

Guidelines for Departmental Retention Plans Undergraduate Programs

1. Describe factors influencing retention of students in your department.

Are there specific factors related to a) departmental majors and/or b) students enrolled in core curriculum offerings?
2. Examine the relationship between *recruitment* (i.e., communicating program mission, marketing, admission criteria, preparation and potential for success) and *retention* (i.e., student perceptions of the discipline, program fit, academic success, climate/environment).
3. Analyze current retention trends for undergraduate programs. (Data now available from Office of Institutional Research)
4. Outline specific retention strategies currently being used within the department.
5. Describe strategies for assessing the effectiveness of specific retention initiatives.
6. Provide goals for retention, addressing trends (based on retention data) and specific departmental actions (current and future strategies).

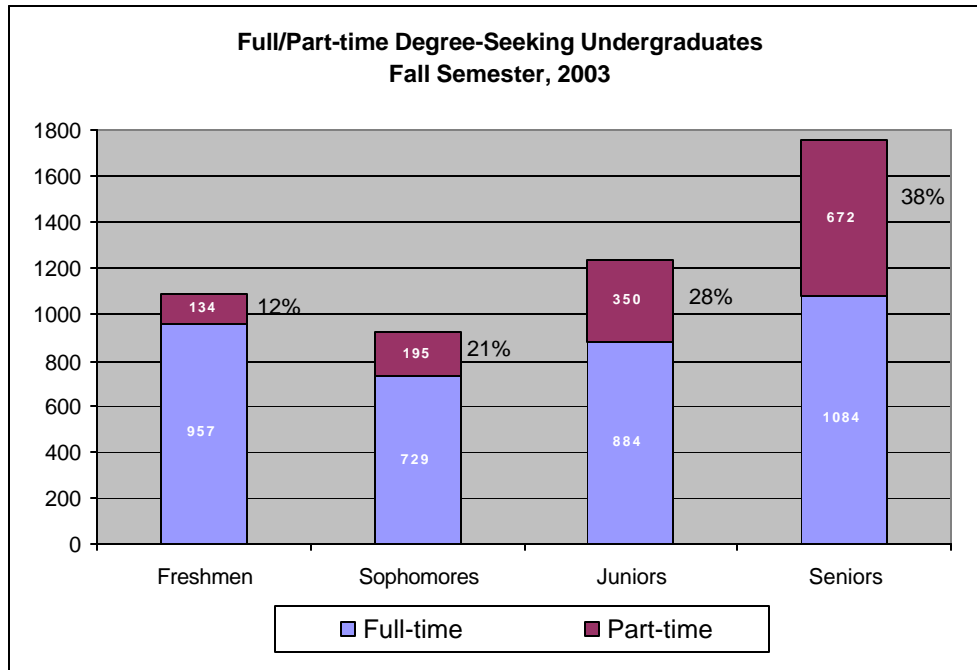
Appendix 3 Additional TWU Enrollment/ Graduation Data

Enrollment/ graduation research questions

Considering Fall 2003 undergraduate degree-seeking student body :

1. What was the total degree-seeking undergraduate enrollment? 5,005; Full/part-time students in each class?

Figure 9

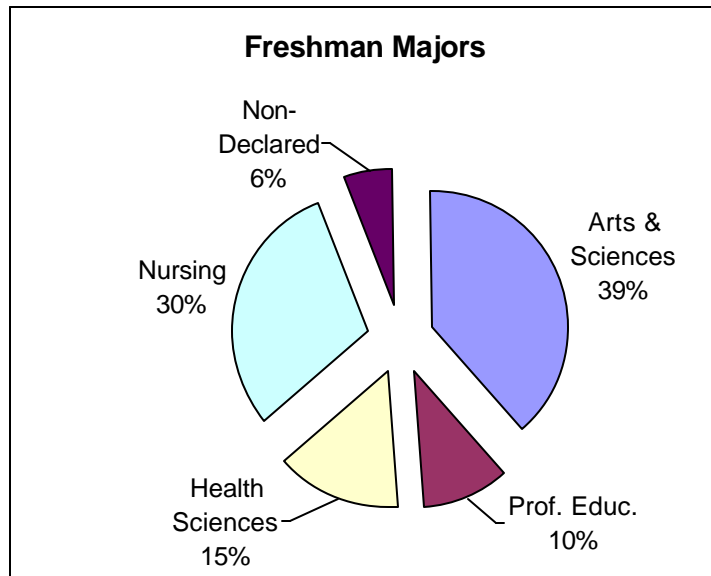


	Full-time	Part-time	Part-time %	Total
Freshmen	957	134	12%	1091
Sophomores	729	195	21%	924
Juniors	884	350	28%	1234
Seniors	1084	672	38%	1756
Total	3654	1351		5005

* There were 16 non-degree seeking freshman students only.

2. How many freshmen? Their majors by college?

Figure 10

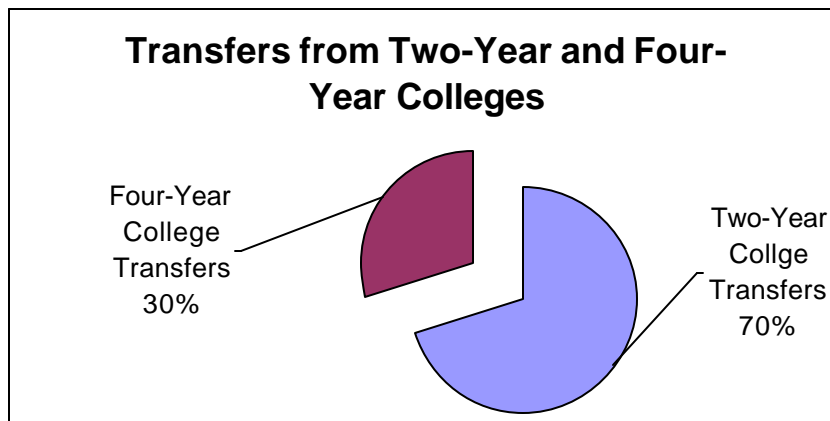


Freshmen Majors		
Arts & Sciences	423	39%
Professional Educ.	112	10%
Health Sciences	161	15%
Nursing	333	30%
Non-Declared	65	6%
	1094	

See file: Retention/ Majors by class

2. What percent of ALL UG entered from community/technical colleges?

Figure 11



New transfers: 516 / 70% of new transfers from community colleges

218/ 30% of new transfers from four-year institutions

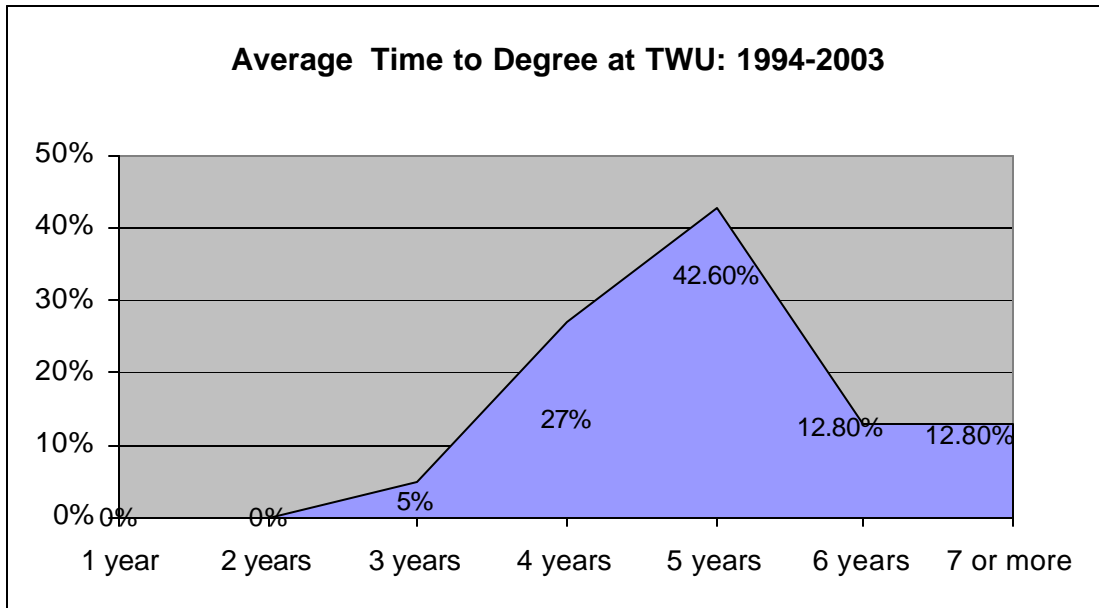
3. What percent of ALL UG entered as FTIC? **25.6%**

II. Considering all the **baccalaureate degrees granted in 2003:**

1. How many/ percent were granted to FTIC? 141 students/ **17.6%**

2. What is the average time to baccalaureate degree? **5 years**

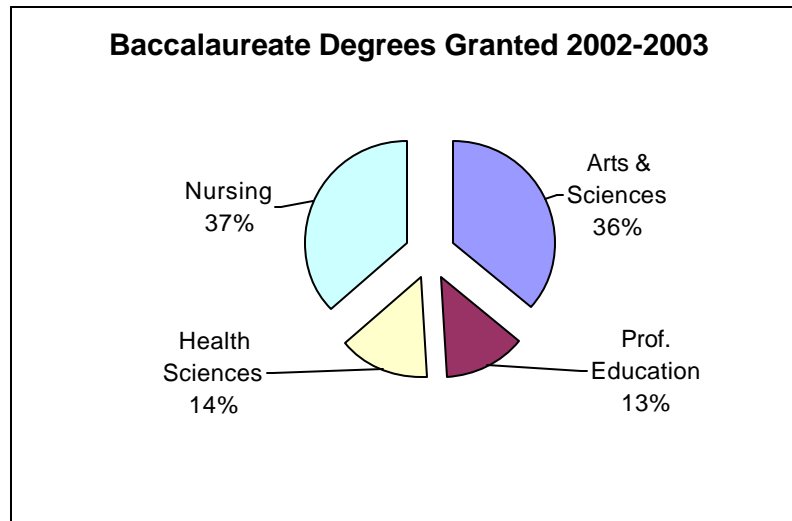
Figure 12



1 year at TWU	0%
2 years at TWU	0%
3 years at TWU	5%
4 years at TWU	27%
5 years at TWU	42.6%
6 years at TWU	12.8%
7 or more	12.8%

3. What percent of degrees granted in each college?

Figure 13

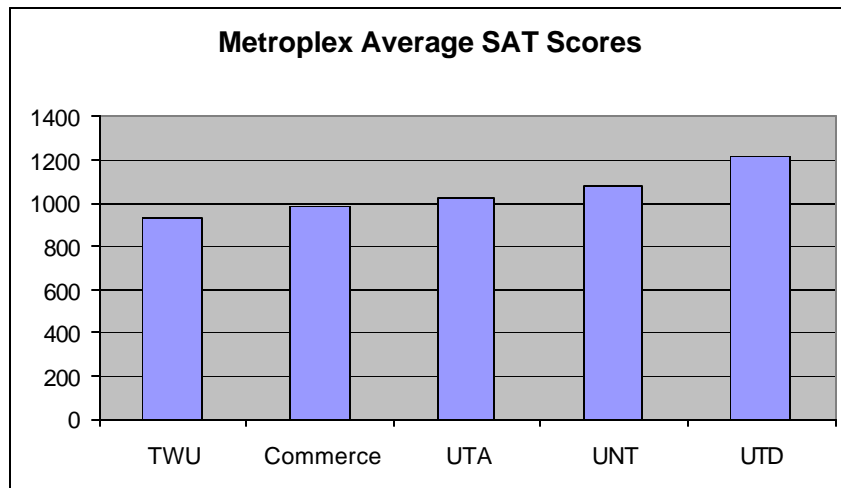


Degrees Granted by College 2002-03

Arts & Sciences	289	36.1%
Professional Education	104	13.0%
Health Sciences	114	14.3%
Nursing	293	36.6%
Total	800	

4. What are average SAT rates in metroplex universities?

Figure 14



University	Average SAT Scores: 2002
TWU	937
Commerce	982
UTA	1029
UNT	1086

UTD	1213
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