



## ACADEMIC PROGRAM WORKING GROUPS

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES

February 14, 2014

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**Academic Assessment  
February 14, 2014**

**Executive Summary**

**Introduction**

At UTPA, Academic Assessment is coordinated under the division of Academic Affairs, reports to the Provost, and has approximately 6 faculty and staff members supporting the academic assessment processes and ensuring it remains continuous and integrated. At UTB, Academic Assessment is centralized under the Office of Institutional Research, Planning and Effectiveness (OIRPE), reports to the Provost, and has 2.75 FTE staff supporting the coordination of academic assessment processes.

For a list of key services and the processes used at each institution, refer to **Appendix A —Key Services Offered**

Key policy differences generally relate to the reporting structure for academic assessment activities at UTB and UTPA. All assessment and institutional effectiveness processes are centralized at UTB in the OIRPE reporting to the Provost, while at UTPA, OIRE at UTPA oversees administrative plans and assessment, and reports to the President. The academic assessment function at UTPA is coordinated by the Office of Undergraduate Studies/University College and reports to the Provost, with the Office of Graduate Studies coordinating the Academic Program Review function.

**Philosophy**

The Philosophy guiding the work of the Academic Assessment Work Group was based around the goal of creating an authentic culture of evidence-based decision-making .

Because Academic Assessment represents critical compliance areas and encompasses the interwoven processes of continuous improvement and accountability through multi-faceted assessment functions that include the assessment of program-level student learning outcomes, core curriculum assessment, academic program review, administrative goal setting and evaluation in support of institutional and college strategic plans, and ongoing evaluation of the academic program and/or the learning environment, the Work Group agreed that Academic Assessment must be assigned greater value and given priority attention at UTRGV.

**Context of Academic Assessment at UT RGV**

***Process for development of recommendations:***

The members of the Academic Assessment Work Group representing UTB and UTPA met formally on five occasions and supplemented the meetings with research and discussions via email between meetings. The process followed included a discussion about current practices at UTB and UTPA, research into best practices (including organizational structures at multi-campus institutions), and consultations with experienced national leaders involved in academic assessment.

***Key Issues:***

Both the situation analysis of each institution's processes and research into best practices led to early consensus about key issues facing the development of a robust assessment function at UTRGV, with both institutions finding similar issues and struggles at each institution.

Essentially, representatives from both UTB and TSC found that because assessment is "everyone's responsibility," but has not been given the value and importance it requires, neither institution has been able to move beyond assessment as a function of compliance to assessment as a worthy function that demonstrates the significance of faculty's work, while charting the course for continuous quality improvement. Key issues, their prevention, and mitigation strategies served to guide recommendations regarding both effective assessment practices and how institutional structures would best support the work. Key issues include:

- Not charging individuals with the direct ownership of assessment, documentation of results, and demonstration of improvement based on assessment results, therefore it is not fully supported by all deans, chairs, faculty, and other participants in the assessment process;
- Assessment processes continuing to be equated to compliance activities, thus diminishing the value it brings to the improvement of programs and instruction;
- Faculty charged with assessment of their programs and the core curriculum do not feel supported through the assessment process resulting in the paradigm that assessment is an obstacle as opposed to an opportunity; and
- Assessment is not valued by executive administrators and as result, is presented as an additional "other duties as assigned" task without recognition that the work is involved and time-consuming, warranting course releases, stipends, professional development, incentives, and acknowledgement that faculty time must be dedicated to the processes.

### **Key Recommendations**

Thirteen recommendations are being submitted by the Academic Assessment Work Group. The following briefly summarizes them:

1. Academic assessment should be a faculty driven process overseen by Academic Affairs and should be purposely designed and viewed as an integral component of institutional effectiveness, with Deans and other administrators clearly communicating the value of academic assessment and its importance.
2. A one-stop-shop should be created that will serve colleges, programs and faculty in the form of access to data, faculty workshops, and technology training so that faculty, programs, and colleges should not have to seek assistance beyond this office to complete assessment tasks.
3. The roles and responsibilities of faculty, department chairs, deans, staff, directors, and others in the academic assessment process must be clearly delineated and include identification of assessment directors/coordinators/assistant deans of assessment within each college who will take the lead roles in assessment efforts
4. Incentivize participation in academic assessment by program faculty assessment leaders through stipends and/or release time.
5. Create a permanent core curriculum committee responsible for evaluating the alignment of assessment to curriculum, and create a SLO review committee responsible for providing feedback to programs on their *student learning outcome* assessment plans, *student learning outcome* data, and program improvements. Additionally, create a program review oversight or advisory committee to provide input on the institution's periodic review process for all academic undergraduate programs and graduate programs to assure its efficacy and consistency from program to program.
6. Develop or identify technology to be used consistently among all academic units.



**Academic Policies  
February 14, 2014**

**Executive Summary**

The Academic Policies Working Group framed their discussions with the following philosophy in mind:

*It is the responsibility of UTRGV to ensure that academic policies and practices are designed to promote, and never hinder, a student's academic progress and success. All policy decisions must be data-driven and student-centered.*

In addition, the Working Group used the UTRGV guiding principles as the foundation for its discussions, with a specific focus on the following guiding principles:

- re-designing processes to increase productivity and promote a student- and service-centered mode of operation
- promoting access to postsecondary education to a diverse student body
- integrating next generation technology

The Academic Policies Working Group is comprised of 12 members, all of who have direct line responsibility for the adoption and/or enforcement of academic policies on their respective campuses: five representatives from Enrollment Management, two representatives from the Offices of Graduate Studies, three faculty who serve on academic policy committees, and two academic affairs administrators.

The Working Group began by inventorying innovative initiatives currently in place at one campus or the other, but then focused its efforts on published research of best practices and high impact policies and practices in place at peer and aspirant institutions.

Three specific themes continued to surface in the group's discussions. The need for UTRGV to have an established protocol in place to (1) identify the academic policies that present barriers to students; (2) rationalize and adopt policies for the new university; and (3) use data to measure the effectiveness of existing academic policies. Such a protocol must be in place prior to the first registration period for UTRGV and prior to the first publication of the UTRGV 2015-2016 undergraduate and graduate catalogs.

- (1) Identify the academic policies that must be in place for UTRGV, including those that may present barriers to students

The Working Group reviewed the most common policies that impact access to the university and impact the student's experience while at the university. Included in [Appendix B](#) is a listing of both UTB's and UTPA's undergraduate academic policies and in [Appendix C](#) is a listing of UTB's and UTPA's graduate academic policies.

- (2) Rationalize and adopt policies for UTRGV

The Working Group recommends that each of the campuses' standing committees, or a subset of such, be responsible for reviewing academic policies be asked to work together to make recommendations for UTRGV based on the research already conducted by the Working Group



**Academic Support Services  
February 14, 2014**

**Executive Summary**

**Introduction, Framework, and Philosophy**

This committee began by considering two questions: “what should a successful student be able to do at graduation” and “what does a student need at different points in their development.” We generated three skill sets as a result of those discussions (see Appendix A for further details) that framed all of our subsequent deliberations. The skill sets are as follows:

- *UTRGV graduates are scholars* with a thirst for life-long learning and academic grit and resilience in the face of challenges. They are skilled in the use of language and quantitative knowledge and 21st century digital literacies. They are critical thinkers who are aware of the role of culture in a global world.
- *UTRGV graduates are civically engaged* individuals who recognize their responsibility and role in their communities and the world. They invest their talents and gifts in their communities and act as global citizens and skilled leaders. They are ambassadors that the university is proud to recognize.
- *UTRGV graduates are prepared to solve real-world problems* with skills that have been honed through experiential learning opportunities. They are sought after for their capabilities and skill sets.

Throughout our discussions, we have also been guided by our beliefs about the necessary characteristics of successful interventions:

- *A foundation in the classroom.* Interventions that occur on the periphery of coursework are not as valued or as effective as ones that are centered within the curriculum and direct instruction (Tinto, 2012).
- *A personal touch.* We believe that students more highly value messages and assistance that comes from identifiable personal sources who can communicate in a caring and individualized way. For example, students are more responsive to messages that come from their individual advisor whom they have met than they are to messages that come from a faceless advising center.
- *Timeliness.* Student supports and interventions should be delivered as close as possible to the point that the student demonstrates need or the university can anticipate that a student would have that need. For example, academic supports that are tied to an early warning system need to be able to be delivered at the point that the warnings are provided by faculty, not weeks or months later.
- *A smooth integration with the wealth of data that we have to predict and characterize student success.*

**Recommendations**

Taking into account the characteristics of successful graduates and how to construct programming that can meet their needs, as well as best practices of universities across the country, our recommendations are as follows:

- *Transition to the University.* To facilitate students' successful transition and integration to the university, we recommend 1) a three stage orientation, 2) a required common first year course such as UNIV 1301 Learning Framework, and 3) individualized advising and mentoring for all first year students led by the faculty instructors of the common course. A smooth transition to the university and strong start in the first year builds student retention, success, and graduation rates throughout the four years of a student's undergraduate career. The use of the Learning Framework course as a common first year course provides a strong foundation to university-level studies, facilitates self-understanding and academic major selection which can save the student time and money in the future, and provides a nurturing peer and faculty environment to smooth adjustment for new students. The Learning Framework course at UTPA has contributed to strong first year retention rates in comparison to other UT schools, even with our higher risk student population.
- *Advising Beyond the First Year.* The committee recommends adoption of a "declared and prepared" split advising model in which students who first enter the university are advised by dedicated faculty (their UNIV 1301 instructors) and then transition to major-specific advising staff when they have firmly declared a major and have cleared all TSI requirements. An important component of this model is that all students will be provided with a supportive advising relationship in all stages of their undergraduate degrees, regardless of risk or need. Offering individualized support to students only after academic need is demonstrated, such as academic failure, guarantees that students will have difficulties that could have been prevented by a supportive proactive advising relationship. Advising information and services should also be available face to face at a central location, as well as at all significant instructional locations and online.
- *Success in First Year Writing Classes.* To facilitate student success in first year English classes, we recommend the creation of a multilingual University Writing Program, which would bring together the First-Year Writing Program (including developmental reading/writing), the Writing Center, and an arm which would be responsible for providing campus leadership on writing across the curriculum and writing in the disciplines initiatives. This would make UTRGV one of a very few, if not the only, university-wide multilingual writing program which integrates all of our university's writing programs and initiatives into a single, cohesive unit. We also propose continuing UTPA's highly successful co-requisite model for delivery of developmental reading and writing, in which students enroll simultaneously for credit-bearing English courses and their developmental courses.
- *Success in First Year Math Classes.* To facilitate student success in first year math classes, we recommend 1) differentiated developmental pathways leading to core level math courses that are tailored to students' major needs and 2) self-paced computer-assisted courses with embedded undergraduate/graduate student classroom facilitators. This builds on recent success in developmental math courses at UTPA.
- *Academic Supports Beyond the Classroom.* The committee recommends a centralized structure that would oversee tutoring and academic support services. An important and innovative focus of the proposed center is to both support students in self-initiated tutoring in areas of academic difficulty *and* to support academic departments and faculty in selection of the best course-based learning assistance model for their particular program and student needs. Rather than





**Core Curriculum  
February 14, 2014**

**Executive Summary**

The Core Curriculum Working Group began with the Guiding Principles set forth by The University of Texas System as a philosophical framework. Focusing on the specific needs of the student population for the new university, the group sought to design a core curriculum to serve as the foundation of an excellent education.

Prior to the start of the working group, each university had already developed a core curriculum through similar, faculty driven processes that focused on student needs and the missions of each university. Working within the regulations prescribed by the state, the working group identified the intersections between the previously developed curricula. Fortunately, these intersections were substantial, and the two curricula aligned well.

The group endorsed innovations present within the new proposed core. In particular, the proposed new core includes up to six hours of explicitly integrative and experiential course work. This is in addition to high quality courses within the more traditional core areas that are taught with experiential components or from an interdisciplinary perspective. These integrative and experiential courses are designed to engage students in their first two years in the type of courses that will capture their interest, challenge them to connect ideas across disciplines and experiences, and motivate them to continue to more in depth study. The proposed core is also flexible enough to accommodate special curricular initiatives, such as interdisciplinary learning community strands led by faculty, and incorporates a balance of institutional and student choice.

The group also focused on student support initiatives within the core as a key means of promoting student success and innovative learning. The group endorsed the Academic Support Services Working Group's recommendations and the following design innovations are recommended:

- *Structured Learning (mandatory tutoring) for students enrolled in high DFW first-year core courses*
- *Student Success Collaborative predictive analytics and benchmarks*
- *Major Maps*
- *Clear Pathways for Success*

In addition to these support services, the group recommends three innovative characteristics across the undergraduate curriculum that build upon the new core curriculum:

- (1) a writing intensive course within the major that builds on the writing intensive sequence within the core (the first-year writing sequence),
- (2) a capstone course within the major to both pull together learning across the undergraduate career and assist with core and major assessment, and
- (3) a flag for courses that fulfill the guiding principle focused on creating a bilingual and bicultural university.

To achieve these innovations and implement the new core, the working group developed a submission process for approval of new core courses and a timeline for submissions. Additionally, an assessment plan is outlined that assesses students' experiences at four stages in their academic careers. This plan



**Distance Education  
February 14, 2014**

**Executive Summary**

**Distance Education Working Group Philosophy Statement**

The Distance Education working group recommends a framework that leverages next generation technologies and customized learning to expand education access opportunities in the Rio Grande Valley and the rest of the Americas. The recommended framework will rely on an institutional foundation of best practices in distance education, local/ international partnerships, leverages innovative educational trends, and supports faculty/students with state-of-the-art technology and infrastructure to promote academic rigor, teaching excellence, and research innovation in distance learning.

**Executive Summary**

The Distance Education Working Group presents general concept to strengthen the foundation for a 21<sup>st</sup> century university, prepare students to become lifelong learners through online/blended education opportunities, and support faculty through streamlined academic and development programs that promote teaching effectiveness, facilitate scholarly work, and leverage innovative technologies. A concise narrative of the Distance Education Working Group's general goals/guiding principles aimed to fulfill its philosophy follows.

The critical role of online/hybrid education at UTRGV makes it imperative to establish an academic support unit/center and physical facilities for distance education development and delivery, fulfill support/capacitation needs of faculty/students, and provide appropriate innovative infrastructure to sustain a comprehensive distance education support team to facilitate excellence in online/hybrid teaching/learning. The distance education support unit/center would leverage teams at existing campuses to support services for faculty/students: instructional design, instructional technology support, academic programs support and advisement, online supplemental instruction/ tutoring services, library resources, admissions, and financial aid related to distance teaching/learning. A governance process should be part of a distance education support unit, established with stakeholders for the strategic planning of UTRGV's Distance Education.

The distance education support entity may lead the development and adoption of institutional guidelines to facilitate availability and adequate delivery of online/hybrid courses and instruction to promote UTRGV student success through quality online/hybrid education. These guidelines will help stakeholders ensure that online & hybrid course offerings are accessible to students, meet a minimum set of quality and academic rigor standards, and ensure that faculty members teaching these courses are properly capacitated and equipped to teach in online or hybrid environments.

**Suggested General Guidelines:**

- Establish a uniform and streamlined process to design, develop, and deliver online course offerings
- Institutionalize a continuous quality improvement program to design, develop, and implement distance education courses/academic programs with high-quality standards and exemplary

academic rigor. This program would incorporate peer reviewers, subject matter experts, and qualified online instructional design/development staff.

- Offer online/hybrid courses with curriculum content faculty designed and developed for this delivery method

Such guideline adoption will require UTRGV to prepare faculty for online instruction through professional development programs, incentives, and support infrastructure to move from traditional to hybrid/online instruction. A comprehensive professional development plan for UTRGV faculty in online/hybrid teaching and instructional design can be accomplished with focused offerings of faculty workshops, trainings, conferences, and mentoring programs in distance education topics and provide the faculty members with access to “Distance Education Faculty Fellows” that, in collaboration with the distance education support unit, can serve as peer consultants. This would strengthen the philosophy and culture of adopting best practices and quality standards in online/hybrid education. Some focused support areas include:

- Digital skills for online & hybrid teaching
- Online & hybrid course management and communication
- Using Technology to promote active learning and delivering academically rigorous online learning activities
- Building online learning communities and establishing a sense of presence in the online and hybrid environment
- Delivering and facilitating competency-based education in online and hybrid environments

Faculty development will increase online and hybrid course offerings that will reduce time-to-degree and expand access to educational programs and opportunities. Distance education expansion is accomplished by identifying strategic courses for online delivery. Working with stakeholders like College Deans or Department Chairs will aid in identifying specific academic departments that may offer key strategic courses with critical impact on time to graduation for students. These courses may be part of the general education requirement courses or of current or forthcoming online degree/certificate programs.

UTRGV can further leverage online/hybrid course offerings by partnering with local, national, and international communities to expand access to quality education, address community needs, and fulfill industry demands through community outreach initiatives, continuing education, and specialization programs. For instance, educational technology hubs can be strategically placed between metropolitan areas in the RGV. These strategically placed hubs (i.e. community/ public library) may benefit individuals who otherwise would find it difficult to reach different UTRGV campuses and access available online course offerings. To assure that students have multiple options for program completion in a timely fashion, and to ensure program sustainability and growth, we propose that each campus invest in a single building/wing devoted exclusively to half dozen classrooms equipped with audio/visual equipment, easy for anyone to operate and remote interconnect among campuses. Such physical and technological infrastructure will minimize student commute across the RGV and avoid unprofitable small-sized sections intended to meet student graduation needs.

Instructional design/instructional technology support staff in the distance education support unit is essential to sustain and integrate “next generation technologies and customized learning to increase affordability and maximize student success”. The proper skill-knowledge combination in this support

unit will allow UTRGV to leverage innovative educational trends like immersive simulations, gamification, adaptive learning, competency-based approaches to teaching/learning, Massively Open Online Courses (MOOCs), and other ways to award academic credit for previous learning in distance education.

Because of the aforementioned rigorous online pedagogical practices, academic standards, and resulting student success, several scholarship and grant-funded research opportunities may arise for faculty consideration. The distance education support unit would establish a distance education research support system that conducts, organizes, and facilitates evidenced-based research in online and blended learning for scholarly work and outside funding opportunities.

Furthermore, the distance education support unit would manage a sensible budgeting process for distance education courses and programs' sustainability, such as faculty and academic department incentives. To promote guidelines and best practices adoption, to be good stewards of funds generated by distance learning fees, and to accomplish the goals of this document, the distance education support unit would facilitate funds distribution to the different entities.

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**Faculty Affairs and Development**  
**February 14, 2014**

**Executive Summary**

A centralized, unified **Office/Division of Faculty Affairs** will support UT-RGV faculty through every stage of their careers, from recruitment to retirement, by providing holistic programming and support services in five essential areas: 1) **Faculty Recruitment and Diversity**; 2) **Faculty Development, Support, and Advancement**; 3) **Faculty Policies, Compliance, and Shared Governance**; 4) **Recognition and Awards**; and 5) **Climate and Well-being**. It is imperative that this office will be inclusive of all faculty, including contingent faculty.

Using the American Psychological Association's "Psychologically Healthy Workplace" as a framework (see Appendix II), our recommendations reflect a **comprehensive** approach to faculty needs. Significant research studies have shown that a **holistic** approach to faculty development leads to greater productivity in research, teaching, and service, ultimately ensuring that the highest quality faculty members are recruited, retained, and supported to achieve global excellence in teaching, research, healthcare, and service

The Office of Faculty Affairs will **consolidate faculty development efforts** currently underway in multiple departments and divisions across campuses, which will result in significant **cost savings**. Faculty Affairs staff will, for example, centrally oversee the logistics of scheduling, advertising, and facilitating workshops and other development activities across campus, freeing up other departments' staff. The **increased faculty retention**, resulting from the above holistic programming and support, will also yield significant **cost savings**.

The Faculty Affairs and Development Working Group started by identifying the **needs of the faculty across the life cycle of their experience**, from recruitment and orientation, through advancement and promotion, and finally through post-tenure review and retirement. The committee then mapped the needed support not only for teaching, research, and service, but also for personal and family needs using the above-mentioned framework. Based on those findings, and after reviewing successful models from other institutions of higher education, the committee identified five primary/focus areas along with the corresponding programming and services to be offered under each area:

**Recruitment and Diversity**

- ✓ A centralized Online Recruitment Portal (information for prospective and new faculty including demographics and regional information, university and benefits information, faculty support programs, dual career policies, etc.)
- ✓ Training information and support for search committees and for Tenure and Promotion and other Evaluation committees (including best practices for Excellence & Diversity in hiring, limiting implicit bias)
- ✓ Diversity training, information, and support (including NSF ADVANCE)

• **Development, Support and Advancement**





**Faculty Governance  
February 14, 2014**

**Executive Summary**

The UTRGV Faculty Governance Workgroup began working from the basic premise the success of the new university and its students begins with positive working relationships and a positive environment. From a faculty perspective, this is best accomplished through shared governance which provides active and meaningful participation in the governance process by, not just academic faculty, but by all university stakeholders including students and staff. Accommodations must be made for incorporating the new medical school faculty into the faculty governance structure. A corollary of this important principle is that transparency, openness and sufficient information to evaluate key decisions must be a hallmark of UT RGV's shared governance structure.

Focusing on the faculty aspect of shared governance, the representative faculty structure (be it a Faculty Senate, Faculty Council or some other entity) must be inclusive of faculty interests, whether academic or health sciences; tenured or tenure-track; lecturers or clinical faculty.

UT RGV must be mindful of *Regents' Rule 40101* which mandates faculty have a major role in any policies dealing with general academic policies; student life and activities; requirements of admission and graduation; honors and scholastic performance; approval of candidates for degrees; and faculty rules of procedure. Accordingly, any procedure, process, and/or guideline involving any of the theses areas should be promulgated in consultation with the faculty of UT RGV by and with the consent of the Faculty Senate thereof.

With these tenets in mind, the Faculty Governance Workgroup met 6 times beginning in October 2013, had numerous email conversations, and met informally several times to address how best to address issues of meaningful participation, transparency, inclusiveness, and ensuring respect for the role of the faculty in all policies directly and/or tangentially affecting faculty. As many of these concerns are already being addressed we arrived at the following key recommendations:

1. Development and implementation of a Faculty Handbook which will incorporate, not only HOP Policies affecting faculty as well as UT RGV Procedures and Guidelines that have an impact on faculty, but also other useful information for faculty all in one place.
2. Identification and/or recommendation of a faculty governance structure that is most inclusive of all UT RGV faculty and ensures meaningful stakeholder input at all levels of governance.
3. Delineation of three categories of regulation relating to governance—(1) substantive policies and statute or regulation required policies; (2) non-substantive procedures; and (3) guidelines.
4. Identification of UT RGV HOP and other policies in which faculty are mandated to play a major role in the creation of policy.



**Graduate Enrollment Management and Admission Policies**  
**February 14, 2014**

**Executive Summary**

The Graduate Enrollment Management and Admissions Policies Working Group is pleased to submit recommendations to innovatively structure a Graduate School for the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) that provides the services to recruit and serve the graduate students and graduate programs of an emerging research university of the first class. The mission of the UTRGV Graduate School will be to:

Create a culture that treats the student as a valuable customer, emphasizing superior customer service and utilizing a business model approach that incorporates the latest technology, to recruit, admit, retain and graduate students and that highlights and leverages the assets of the Graduate School – its faculty and graduate programs.

The overarching goal is to serve students, faculty and programs efficiently at all UTRGV sites, utilizing the latest technology, from recruitment through graduation. The UTRGV Graduate School will work closely and collaboratively with the admissions office of the UTRGV Medical School to ensure that medical students and faculty have access to all services provided by the UTRGV Graduate School.

The UTB and UTPA Offices of Graduate Studies currently offer a comprehensive array of recruiting, admissions, retention, degree certification as well as program development and enhancement activities. Assimilation of these activities into a unified UTRGV Graduate School provides the opportunity to incorporate innovations in these activities as well as best practices of Graduate Schools across the country.

The four primary functional areas are (1) marketing and recruiting, (2) admissions, (3) retention and degree certification, and (4) administration, including graduate program development, curricular enhancements, program review, Graduate Council, and policies to support graduate education. The following are the top priorities of the innovative initiatives identified. A detailed description of these, along with other recommendations, is included in the Recommendations section of this report.

- **Marketing:** Use of technology and internet-based marketing to recruit graduate students to UTRGV.
- **Retention:** Create a Graduate Student Success Center.
- **International Admissions:** Incorporate international admissions and support functions into the Graduate School for graduate students admitted to UTRGV, with a special emphasis on potential students from Latin America.

A more in-depth discussion of these innovations is included below along with enhancements and efficiencies to be incorporated into existing activities that will continue to be offered by UTRGV.



**International Programs and Global Initiatives**  
**February 14, 2014**

**Executive Summary**

The International Programs and Global Initiatives Working Group envisions the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) as a globally engaged university, represented by comprehensive internationalization with a special focus on Latin America. The guiding principles established by the Board of Regents of The University of Texas System strongly commit to creating a new university that promotes access to higher education and building a diverse student body to become a premier university of the first class as well as the nation's largest and most successful Hispanic-serving institutions.

The working group recommends establishing an Office of Global Engagement to develop relevant internationalization strategies based on the UTRGV mission, vision and strategic goals and specific academic needs of the University's colleges. The main activities to be integrated under a broad umbrella organization include:

- Centralized administrative Office of Global Engagement
- Center for Latin American Studies
- International Admission and Recruitment
- International Student and Scholar Services
- Global Initiatives and Partnerships
- Study Abroad
- Language Institute

The activities listed above are interrelated and significant synergies will arise from bringing them together. For example, international scholars can be housed at the Global Village and interact with international students as well as UTRGV faculty and students associated with the Center for Latin American Studies. They can also improve their English-speaking skills at the Language Institute. As the Language Institute prepares students to linguistically meet university standards, they will be included in International Student and Scholars cultural and campus events from day one to facilitate their transition to academic programs.

The working group recommendations embrace a strong commitment to the international student – centered approach, service excellence, and utilization of the newest technology to better serve them. The following summarizes the top three priorities for innovative programs to be implemented at UTRGV. A detailed description of these, along with other recommendations is included in the Recommendations section of this report.

- **International Student One-Stop Shop** – streamlining academic and administrative programs with redesigned processes to promote a student service-centered mode of operation. Integrating international students into the campus culture beginning with the application process will enhance their success at UTRGV.



**Library Infrastructure and Support Services**  
**February 14, 2014**

**Executive Summary**

UTRGV libraries mission and philosophy is to focus on technology and apply the latest trends and research in revitalizing our current and future campus libraries to better meet students' needs. Support research and plan accordingly into what role the next UTRGV Libraries should play on each campus. Work together as we transform our current and future university libraries in becoming the learning commons and intellectual hub of each campus the students deserve. Dedication, hard work, teamwork, careful planning and attention to detail is guiding us to press forward to meet our goal of becoming outstanding modern academic libraries while preserving our unique regional culture and history by expanding special collections of each campus. Research and evaluate on our investments in physical and digital materials, in centralized and distributed library services, and in the best use of each library building. Serving as the chief information center on campus, and playing a strong role as a regional information hub.

**Key issues identified**

- UTRGV libraries will need **continued financial support** to meet the demand of increasing cost of operating an academic library in order to have libraries that can meet the expectations of faculty and students in an emerging research university.
- In order to cut some of the cost associated with the operation of the library, the working group has recommended **consolidating some of the operating functions**. These functions include the purchasing and processing of materials in all formats, interlibrary loan services to all the campuses and administrating the library website and Social Media. Due to the size and resources available at the Edinburg campus it was recommended that these functions should be administered and managed out of Edinburg campus. More detail is included in the final report.
- We propose that we adopt Brownsville campus library's **student credit hour fee of \$5.00 per credit hour**. Edinburg campus student library fee per credit hour is \$3.25. As part of the unification, student library fee per credit hour should be consistent at all campuses. The library student fee is used to purchase library electronic resources and databases as well as technology related items and supplies. The cost of electronic resources has increased by 14.56% at UTPA since last year. UTPA offers free printing to all students. As the number of students increased, the amount of printing supplies needed has increased. The adoption of the higher library fee would help pay for the additional cost associated with increased printing and supplies and subscription of electronic databases. This would enable the university libraries to continue offering free printing for all the students regardless of which campus they attend. We also propose that the student printing fee at Brownsville campus library be eliminated. (UTB library computer and supplies are currently provided by the university IT department) this **fee** needs to be established by the time students are registering for fall of 2015.
- The working group also recommends having one set of late fees and fines for all students, such as lost book fee, late fee for books, audiovisual materials, equipment, reserve items, etc.
- The working group is highly recommending more support for professional development and suggests establishing a **career ladder for the librarians at UTRGV libraries**. Currently UTB and UTPA libraries do not have career ladder for librarians. This will encourage professional



librarians to be engaged in more research and service activities and would also help with the retention and attraction of better qualified librarians.

- The working group is recommending to Implement **staff cross-training** to streamline library public services and assist those whose job duties will change due to the elimination of duplicated efforts, and shifts in responsibilities.
- The working group recommended for the **cancellation of all duplicated electronic resources** and evaluation of **unique sources** to better support the new curriculum, research and services offered by UTRGV. A list of all duplicate and unique E- resources has been prepared. The Library administrators will start the process as soon as an approval is received.
- **Create a new position** to be a liaison between the campus libraries that could also coordinate information literacy at all campuses and increase the presence of librarians in online courses which will be very important in the new university. Both Edinburg and Brownsville campus libraries are providing services with minimum level of personnel. This and a few more positions may be required to provide a quality service, and meet the demand of library work in a digitized environment.
- Establish a **single advisory board** representing all counties and campuses including the Medical School within the new University to advise and assist the university libraries in fund raising issues for various services (A single advisory board would result in the dissolution of the current Lower Rio Grande Valley Advisory Board). UTB library does not have any advisory board.
- Re-think current print collection shelf space to **create high-tech collaborative open study and computer lab space, multimedia labs for video production, conferencing, webcasting and distance education** as well as modern group study rooms and hundreds of digital connection points that allow students to share, connect, and better utilize library materials. Create more space for students to do all their school work at one place (Information Commons), and make the buildings more accessible for technology use.
- Work with academic design experts to select **functional furniture and equipment** that will promote active learning and enhance connectivity to library resources and services. According to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) Space Projection Model which “provides a fair and equitable assessment of space needs at Texas public universities” the Edinburg campus Library as of now is short by 84,908 SF. The shortage of space will increase as the number of the students increases in the future. The Brownsville campus library as of now is short by 40,405 SF. Currently the 57,000 SF of library is not entirely used for the library functions. A new library building will need to be designed to have multiple roles on the college campus. Design spaces that promote group study and collaboration, which is critical to students’ success, also needs to provide individual, quiet and contemplative spaces that blend the formal and informal learning styles of each individual student. Individual and group study rooms are in high demand at both campuses and will continue to be the issue for those who need that kind of space. The current library buildings do not have the capacity to accommodate the increasing number of students, nor do they have the capability to design the 21<sup>st</sup> century library. This recommendation needs to be considered for the long term planning and be included in the master plan for both campuses.

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**Other Accreditation and Institutional Effectiveness**  
**February 14, 2014**

**Executive Summary**

The goals of the Other Accreditation and Institutional Effectiveness Working Group are to (1) ensure that each agency accrediting an academic program is notified of the consolidation; (2) ensure that all accrediting agency requirements resulting from the consolidation are met; and (3) to identify the best practices to innovatively provide institutional research and effectiveness activities to support the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

**Program Accreditations**

The work of notifying accrediting bodies of UTB and UTPA academic programs is progressing as scheduled. Appendix 1 provides the listing of these with the date of the next scheduled review. Notifications have been submitted to the accrediting bodies with the same accredited programs at both universities: ABET, AACSB, and NASM. In addition, CCNE and NCATE have been notified about the consolidation related to UTPA's nursing program and UTB's education programs, respectively. In these cases, one university has an accredited program and the same program at the other university is not accredited. Notification to accrediting agencies where only UTB or UTPA offers a program that holds accrediting is proceeding with all notifications to be sent by March 2014.

**Institutional Effectiveness**

The Institutional Effectiveness activities were considered by a sub-group with membership as shown above. The framework guiding their work was to establish a "One-Stop Shop" for institutional data, assessment, planning, policies, course evaluations, administrator evaluations, special projects, internal/external surveys, and other related services. The key issues identified were:

- Maintaining the integrity of data at a multi-campus institution.
- Ensuring a culture of evidence built into the foundation of UTRGV.
- Ensuring that sufficient human and technology resources and technology are available to serve data and information needs of all constituents.
- Centralized expertise in providing support for assessment, online surveys, and institutional data.
- Professional development for staff in both institutional research and assessment techniques.

Staff from UTB's OIRPE and UTPA's OIRE conducted research on various institutional research and effectiveness operations nationwide and then met twice for day-long sessions discussing innovative ideas and structure for the new Institutional Research and Effectiveness (IRE) office for UTRGV. Their key recommendations include:

- Create a division of "Institutional Research & Effectiveness (IRE)" that reports to the President of UTRGV. This division will serve as a one-stop-shop for institutional research, institutional reporting, assessment, program review, planning, SACS, policies, course evaluations, administrator evaluations, internal/external surveys, special projects (i.e., making sure all





**Sponsored Research and Grants and Contracts**  
**February 14, 2014**

**Executive Summary**

**Framework and Process**

The working group members were encouraged to gather information and develop recommendations that will better position the University of Texas – Rio Grande Valley (**UT-RGV**) **to become an emerging research university**. The working group had four face-to-face meetings and follow-up input via e-mail in the preparation of this report. The Co-Chairs also had phone conversations to explore various aspects to shape the recommendations outlined here. The discussions within the working group and recommendations in this report are in the context of research defined in a broad sense which includes basic and applied research and other sponsored projects. The focus of other sponsored projects can be to promote student success or promote community engagement and development. Both faculty and staff make important contributions in this broad definition of research and sponsored projects. Any reference, in this report to faculty in the context of research is inclusive of staff who may be engaged in securing external funding and managing projects. In order to better prepare the UT-RGV research administration unit and the research enterprise to support efforts towards this goal there are a few questions that the working group considered. These questions include:

1. What new initiatives have to be in place to support the growth in external research funding?
2. Based on complementary faculty research interests on various campuses, what opportunities for new thematic research clusters exist for trans-disciplinary collaboration?
3. What operational functions and what new services have to be in place to support faculty success in securing external funding and successfully administering these projects?
4. What new services have to be in place to support faculty efforts for research growth, efficiency of the processes, productivity and compliance?
5. How best to incentivize faculty to be actively engaged in research, scholarship and creative activities?

**The recommendations below are in three broad categories related to the research enterprise. These include:**

1. Implementation of specific actions necessary for research administration so that UT-RGV is ready for operation on day one.
2. A comprehensive infrastructure of research administration services to support faculty and staff in grant seeking and administration of awards.
3. Seize new opportunities based on existing strengths and more importantly where synergies exist.

**1. Specific logistical actions for implementation**

There are a number of specific actions that need to be implemented so that no time is lost in the continuation of existing grant awards and the submission of new proposals on both campuses. These are outlined under the section "Required Actions for Implementation – Fall 2015."

**Action:** Begin the implementation of these specific actions prior to the launch of UT-RGV **4-6 months prior to the Fall of 2015.**

## **2. Comprehensive research administration support infrastructure**

In order to support the growth of the research enterprise so that UT-RGV can be better positioned to become the next emerging research university, it will be necessary to strengthen the research administration infrastructure with appropriate resources so that UT-RGV is ready to support faculty and staff. The following organizational structure will build efficiency, productivity and appropriate support to faculty needed to be successful.

- ***Pre-Award Services***

It is recommended that in the Office of Sponsored Projects the proposal development services be offered through a team effort in three specific areas that include staff dedicated to **Research Development** to identify funding opportunities and connect with individual faculty and more importantly with multi-disciplinary teams of faculty, guide the process to formulate the scope of the proposal, develop an outline for the proposal, a timeline and action items. The **Proposal Development** staff as part of this team will then provide the necessary templates for various sections of the proposal, appropriate for the funding agency targeted. Once the final proposal is ready for submission, a few staff members who will be dedicated to **Proposal Submission** will do the final check that the proposal meets all of the guidelines required by the sponsor and submit. Such a team approach will build efficiency and productivity in the process and also help develop competitive proposals, thus maximizing the chances for external funding. This will also make the process of proposal development a rewarding experience for faculty and staff.

It will be necessary to address the workload issues and incentives for faculty to engage in proposal development and research. Thus **internal seed funding** to help generate preliminary data to strengthen the proposals and also **increasing UT System STAR program start-up funding** levels to be competitive in recruiting and retaining talented research faculty will be necessary.

- ***Post-Award Services***

The post-award administration will also use a team approach. The non-financial and the financial parts of the post award administration within the Office of Research will work together as an integrated team. They will bring representatives from all other departments relevant to the proposal to facilitate the efficient administration of all aspects of the award while complying with all federal requirements.

- ***Technology Transfer Services***

It is critical that Technology Transfer services be provided to support the legal protection and commercialization of any intellectual property resulting from research. This has implications for the regional economic development. The specifics of services for faculty and students, necessary to maximize the chances of commercialization are outlined under detailed recommendations. This would provide our science and engineering graduates a competitive edge in the job market and also facilitate research collaborations with industry to support regional economic development.

- ***Research Compliance Services***

Office of Research Compliance (ORC) will focus on federal requirements such as Institutional Review Board (IRB), Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC), Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR), Time and Effort Certification and Export Controls. The office will play an important role in





**Student Engagement and Experiential Learning**  
**February 14, 2014**

**Executive Summary**

**Introduction and Philosophy**

A critical mission of UTRGV is to develop students as scholars who, in partnership with faculty, produce, disseminate, and apply knowledge in the service of public good. As such, we strive to offer experiences to our students in academic research, professional review and dissemination of scholarship, application of knowledge to enhance the public good, application of knowledge to new situations and contexts, and field-work and observation of cultural contexts where existing knowledge is challenged and new knowledges develop. Engagement of students as scholars through these activities also captures students' interests and enriches their educational experiences in unique ways resulting in greater student achievement, retention, graduation rates, and post-graduate success.

The committee holds that significant academic experiences, such as experiential learning, are most successful when 1) they are anchored in classroom/curricular experiences, 2) they are led at the individual student level by faculty who oversee the student learning experiences, and 3) students experience a number of cumulative and building experiential learning activities throughout their curricula.

Although experiential learning is clearly applicable to both undergraduate and graduate experience, the committee focused solely on undergraduate students.

**Key Recommendations**

The working group examined experiential learning programming best practices across the country as well as particularly successful practices at both UTPA and UTB and generated six key recommendations, elaborated below:

1. Experiential learning should be a signature feature of all undergraduate degrees from UTRGV.
2. Experiential learning should be integrated throughout the four years of the undergraduate curriculum beginning with a common course for first year students and culminating with a senior capstone course in each major that includes a significant experiential learning component.
3. A robust program of professional faculty development should be offered at UTRGV, based on established standards and best practices.
4. Faculty should receive formal recognition in personnel actions for faculty involvement in experiential learning activities.
5. Students should receive formal recognition of their experiential learning activities on the academic transcript and through a co-curricular transcript.
6. A central unit in Academic Affairs should be responsible for coordination of all experiential learning.

Experiential learning should be integrated throughout the four years of the undergraduate curriculum with experiences appropriate to the students' level of development at each point. University structures that bookend the undergraduate curriculum can facilitate this with service learning integrated into a



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