SMU
in
FOUR

START SMART. FINISH STRONG.

Quality Enhancement Plan 2020–2025

Well into our second century of achievement, SMU looks to the future and is more committed than ever in these unprecedented times to the pursuit of academic quality. We are building upon and reaffirming our founding principles and values as we rally behind our commitment to the continued improvement of our programs and the creation of unparalleled opportunities for our students – tomorrow's innovators, leaders and informed citizens – to successfully achieve their educational objectives. It is in support of these goals that we share "SMU in Four" – SMU's Quality Enhancement Plan.

Refining the Student Experience at SMU

Quality Enhancement Plan
2020–2025

Prepared for

<Placeholder: Name of Accreditation Agency here>

<Placeholder Month XX, 2021>

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SMU's Office of Student Academic Engagement and Success (SAES) is pleased to submit to <Placeholder Name of Accreditation Agency here> the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) for the University. This proposal addresses SMU's efforts to better monitor and support our students' academic progress and improve our first-year retention and four-year graduation rates.

Table of contents

SMU in Four – SMU's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) – is the University's comprehensive approach to improving SMU's retention and four-year graduation rates. To this end, our QEP advances student academic success through its most essential form: progress toward degree. The strategies in this QEP build upon existing University practices to integrate three important levers, which will be activated across academic majors and student-support resources to address the needs of all SMU students and ultimately lead them to greater levels of success.

Executive Summary

In its 2016–2025 Strategic Plan, SMU committed to meeting its goal to "enhance the University's ability to recruit, retain and graduate academically and creatively gifted undergraduate students from diverse backgrounds." Since 2016, first year student retention has remained largely unchanged: 91% of the first-year class returns in the fall. The four-year graduation rate remains around 73%. "SMU in Four" – SMU's Quality Enhancement Plan – is the University's effort to better monitor and support students to improve student success and first-year retention and four-year graduation rates. We will pay particular attention to closing even modest retention and graduation gaps among our diverse student body.

Research and reflection on improving student retention at SMU, especially in the first two years, have led to our focus on fostering student academic success through its most essential form: progress toward degree.

First, SMU's QEP implements three essential pillars that will direct changes to help students in their early years:

- **Early Alert Pillar**

  o Improve the collection of early and midterm progress report data to support student interventions to promote student success.

  o Faculty will understand the importance of providing students with early and midterm feedback in order to increase the chances of student success in the course.

  o Students and faculty will have an increased understanding of what resources are available to students who are earning a deficient grade.

- **Academic Advising Pillar**

  o Implement improvements to academic advising through the integration of technology solutions and changes to academic policies, and by empowering advisors to require at-risk students to meet with advising staff.

  o Implement changes to the advising experience so that students view their assigned advisors as important resources on campus who care about their situation.

- **First-year and Gateway Course Pillar**

  o Improve the design and instruction in first-year and gateway courses to promote student engagement and success and reduce any unintended equity gaps that might exist.

  o Expand faculty information on the best practice research based on strategies to engage students.

Our goals are to improve the first-year retention rate from 91% to 94% within three years and the four-year graduation rate from 73% to 74% within three years. We will also address gaps in these outcomes by race and ethnicity, first-generation students, and Pell-eligible students.

Second, SMU's QEP will adopt new business processes and technological solutions underlying these pillars in order to improve the student experience with our campus student information system and in order to increase staff and faculty awareness of student experiences and outcomes. In addition, we will improve information sharing and record keeping among staff and faculty advisors in order to improve the effectiveness of our early alert system and to understand differences in first year and gateway courses. We will increase faculty understanding in our first year and gateway courses as to how the early alert system operates and how to engage effectively with university advisors. In other words, these three pillars are intentionally designed to build synergies across the pillars to collectively improve our first year retention and four year graduation metrics.

In order to assess the success of efforts to improve progress reports, advising and first-year and gateway courses, we will use direct and indirect measures to advance toward the goal of improved retention and four-year graduation rates. The measures include progress-report data, course-level data and surveys of students and faculty. Together, this data will allow the University to evaluate and improve strategies to reach the QEP goals.

The planned improvements to progress reports, academic advising and first-year and gateway courses present a comprehensive approach to improving SMU's retention and four-year graduation rates. These strategies cut across academic majors and student-support offices to address the needs of all SMU students. The strategies in this QEP build upon existing University practices that have led to significant successes in retention and graduation. Ultimately, these strategies have the potential to lead to greater levels of student success.

Frankly, SMU has already achieved a great deal of student success in these outcomes. That said, we believe we can continue to improve; however, improvement will require addressing student success on multiple fronts. Our campus conversations lead us to focus explicitly on the student's academic experience in the classroom and with academic support services in the first two years, which lead to our focus on the three pillars identified above. Furthermore, we believe that we need to address even the modest gaps in outcomes that exist between racial and ethnic groups, our first-generation, and our Pell-eligible students. Using an identity conscious approach to our retention and student success work, we believe we will be able to close these gaps while we seek improvements (Pendakur 2016).

The beginnings of SMU's QEP may be traced to the 2015 release of *Launching SMU's Second Century,* our University-wide strategic plan that amplified the ambitions of SMU and identified more than 100 ambitious goals that would challenge all areas of campus to improve. The QEP arose from purposeful efforts to implement this 2016–2025 Strategic Plan, including discerning academic forces that impact student engagement, collaborating with campus partners to advance academic quality and academic success, and determining solutions to support and improve student outcomes.

Process used to develop the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP)

In the following sections, we provide an overview of the evolution of the process by which SMU determined that our Quality Enhancement Plan would focus on the undergraduate retention and the four-year graduation rate of first-year students, and that it would officially launch spring 2021.

2015: Launch of the SMU Strategic Plan

SMU marked its first century in 2011. At that time, SMU had grown to be a leading university of more than 10,000 students and almost 100 buildings spread over a verdant campus in Dallas, Texas. In December 2015, the SMU Board of Trustees released the 2016–2025 Strategic Plan. This plan – *Launching SMU's Second Century: Shaping Leaders for a Changing World* – resoundingly amplified the ambitions of SMU and identified more than 100 goals that would challenge all areas of campus to improve. By 2020, we had met many of these goals, and have increased enrollment to more than 12,000 students across eight degree-granting schools. Five of the eight schools award undergraduate degrees.

Today, undergraduates number more than 6,800 of the enrolled students at SMU. They are no longer overwhelmingly from Texas, white or even Methodist, as in the past. In fall 2020, approximately 57% of SMU undergraduates came from outside of Texas. About 64% are white, 13% are Hispanic and about 5% are Black or African-American. In addition, about 5% of students are from outside the United States. Average SAT and ACT scores have been steadily climbing over the last 10 years. The entering cohort in 2015 had an average ACT of 29.5 and SAT of 1309. The fall 2020 cohort came in with an average ACT of 30.6 and SAT of 1343. Socioeconomic diversity has remained steady with about 10% of the first-year class identified as Pell-eligible. Approximately 75% of the Class of 2016 graduated in four years; however, there remain significant equity gaps with only 57.6% of Black or African American students graduating in four years from that same cohort. Six-year graduation rates for these groups were 74.7%, while the class average was 80.9%

Launching SMU's Second Century focused on what was necessary for SMU to become a leading university in the nation: the continued pursuit of academic quality. *Launching SMU's Second Century* pronounced Goal One: "To Enhance the Academic Quality and Stature of the University."[1] This was to be done via improvements in quality to two fundamental components of the University: the faculty and the student body. Undergraduate and graduate students would continue to be of higher and higher academic quality. They would be retained by enhancing the student experience of the University both intellectually and administratively.

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1 *Launching SMU's Second Century: Shaping Leaders for a Changing World. 2016–2025 Strategic Plan*, p. 13.

An April 2016 document, "Implementing the Strategic Plan 2016–2025," was appended to the Strategic Plan. This implementation plan presented six foundational goals that the SMU Board of Trustees identified to meet the lofty requirements of its Strategic Plan. The plan gave all sectors of SMU clear and identifiable guidelines to fulfilling the expectations of the leadership of the University. The first goal of the implementation plan outlined explicit objectives to increase the retention rate from first to second year for undergraduate students to 92% by 2020 and 94% by 2025, and increase the four-year and six-year graduation rates for undergraduate students to 74% and 82%, respectively, by 2025.[2]

TABLE 1. OVERVIEW OF CURRENT RETENTION AND GRADUATION OUTCOMES BY COHORT

	2011	2016	2019	Strategic Goal 2020	Strategic Goal 2025
First Year Retention	90.7%	91%	90%	92%	94%
4 Year Graduation	71%	75%			74%

First-year retention for students admitted in fall 2019 was 90%; 75% of students admitted in 2016 graduated in May 2020. Although these are strong outcomes nationally, there are reasons SMU strives to see improvements even though we have now met our strategic goal for four-year graduation rates.

The key lies in the single heading in the introduction of the Strategic Plan: "Competitive Environment." The Strategic Plan noted:

> To improve its competitiveness, SMU must continue to advance its standing among preeminent national universities through a number of indicators commonly used to rank schools by quality. It must convey effectively the University's academic quality… to the public, in particular to prospective students, both undergraduate and graduate. It must increase the national and international recognition of its faculty and academic programs…. Similarly, SMU must improve its retention and graduation rates across all student demographic cohorts…. SMU's standing on selectivity, retention and graduation rates, however, does not yet match benchmark schools outside its region, such as Duke, Emory, Vanderbilt, and the University of Southern California.[3]

This charge made two points glaringly evident. First, the Strategic Plan centered on measures of academic quality. But it also made amply clear that it was about SMU's ambitions for substantial academic improvement along prominent, public, academic measures. SMU identifies minimally two groups of universities as a way to measure its standing: Cohort institutions (those it is ranked with and most similar to) and aspirational institutions (those it takes steps to equal). The 2016 strategic implementation plan centered on SMU's ability to achieve outcomes similar to those

of its aspirational institutions, not to those of its cohort institutions. Good levels of retention of undergraduates were not good enough. They had to be better.

Table 2 shows SMU's ranking on four-year graduation rates relative to those of our cohort and aspirational peers. Although SMU has achieved its four-year strategic goal of 74% for our 2015 cohort, we still lag behind the average rate among our aspirational peers. A list of SMU's peer and aspirational institutions can be found in Appendix 1.

TABLE 2. SMU FOUR-YEAR GRADUATION RATES – TIME AND PEER COMPARISONS

IPEDS Reporting Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018		2019	2020	2021
Cohort	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	Average	2013*	2014*	2015
Southern Methodist University	67	67	67	68	71	68	68	72	73	75
Cohort Peers Average	69	69	69	71	71	NA	70	NA	NA	NA
Aspirational Peers Average	74	74	74	75	75	NA	74	NA	NA	NA

Has not been reported to Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) yet

Another reason SMU must continue to focus on meeting our four-year graduation goal is so that we can achieve this goal across all of our students, including those who historically graduate at a lower rate. Between 2010 and 2018, we see a fairly consistent pattern that shows that students who are Pell-eligible in their first semester are as likely to return for their second year, while first-generation students are less likely in some of our first-year cohorts (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1: SOCIOECONOMIC DIFFERENCES IN FIRST-YEAR RETENTION
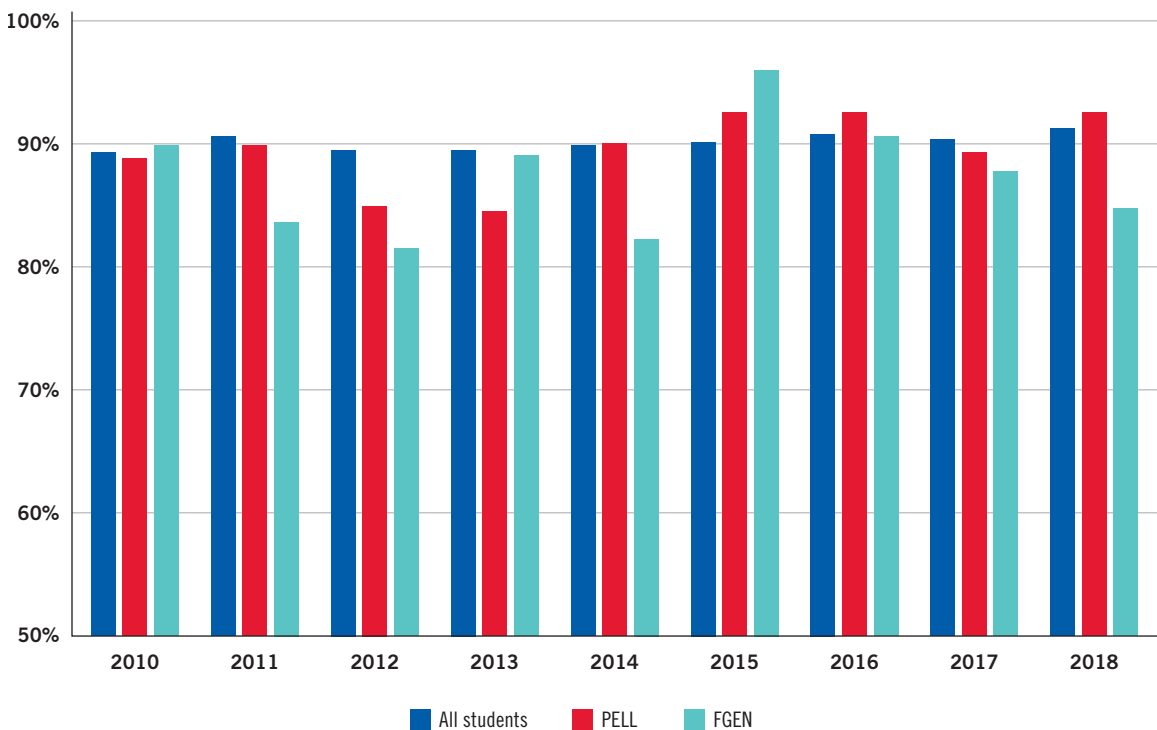
Looking at first-year retention by race and ethnicity in Table 3, we find modest differences in first-year retention, with white students regularly achieving the campus average, while Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino and Asian students vary considerably from year to year.

TABLE 3: FIRST-YEAR RETENTION RATE BY ETHNICITY, 2015–2019

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Overall Cohort	90.5%	90.9%	90.6%	91.5%	90.3%
White	90%	90.1%	90%	91%	90.3%
Black/African American	96.2%	89.4%	87%	90.2%	95%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Hispanic/Latino	88.6%	92.3%	95.8%	91.9%	90.4%
Asian	87.6%	92.2%	86.2%	96.7%	88.7%
Two or More	94.5%	95.5%	87%	92.6%	90.4%

Source: Office of Institutional Research Enrollment Reporting

Looking at these trends, we conclude that the transition from first to second year is not always the period of time where racial and economic gaps are most prominent; yet we know differences appear at the point of four-year graduation. Figure 2 displays a consistent gap where Pell-eligible and first-generation students at SMU graduated at a lower rate in four years. Table 4 presents significant gaps by race and ethnicity. The persistent gap between our overall cohort and Pell-eligible students lowers our *U.S. News & World Report* ranking on the social-mobility index, and has been identified as a gap that needs to be addressed quickly.

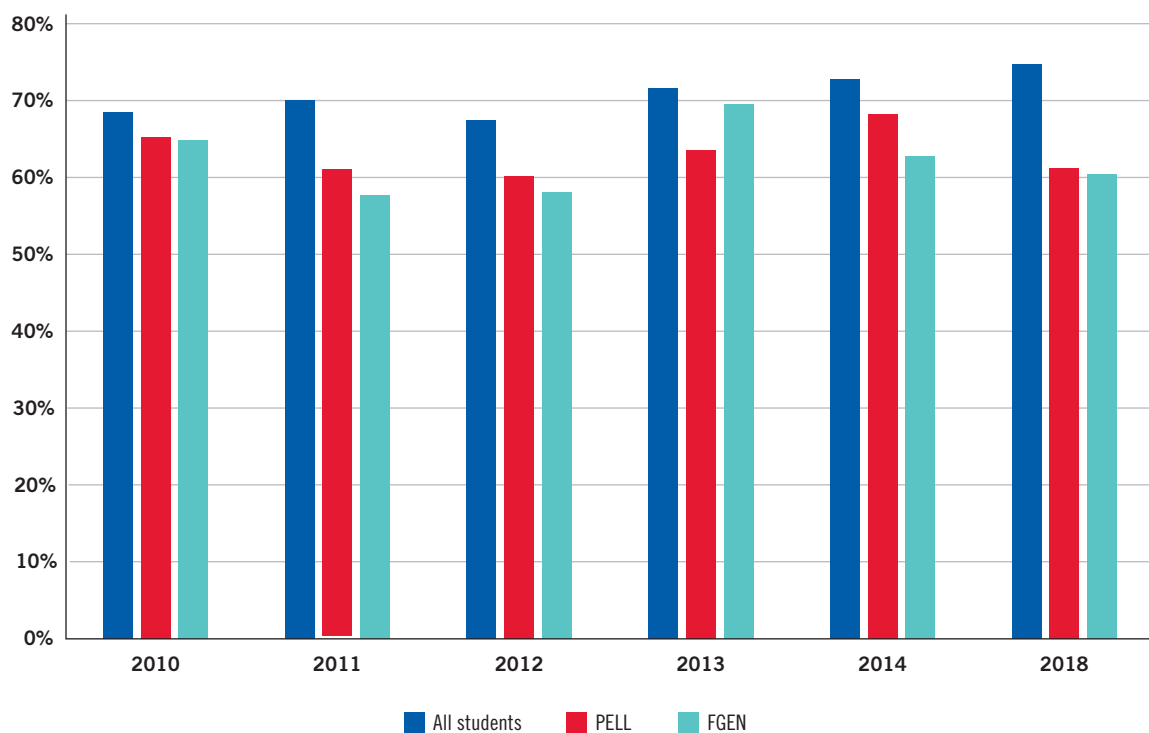**FIGURE 2: SOCIOECONOMIC DIFFERENCES IN FOUR-YEAR GRADUATION RATES**

TABLE 4: FOUR-YEAR GRADUATION BY ETHNICITY, 2016 TO 2020 (GRADUATION – SPRING TERM)

Ethnicity	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total Cohort	67.6%	71.6%	73.1%	74.7%	75%
Black/African American	44.3%	59.5%	65.6%	65.4%	57.6%
American Indian/Alaska Native	50%	50%	75%	66.7%	100%
Asian	66.7%	77%	73.6%	71.1%	80%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	100%	100%	50%	100.0%	100%
Hispanic/Latino	65.5%	66.7%	65.8%	69.7%	73.8%
International	53.8%	68.8%	61.6%	69.9%	76%
Two or More Races	72.5%	67.3%	66.7%	74.5%	75.9%
Unknown/Other	100%	50%	50%	-	75%
White	70.3%	73.3%	76%	76.8%	76.1%

Source: Office of Institutional Research Enrollment Reporting

2017: Campuswide Dialogue on Academic Quality and Academic Success

At the end of 2017, the director of student retention launched a series of campus presentations entitled "A Conversation about Retention at SMU" to increase campus understanding about the nature and scope of the retention and graduation problem. These conversations demonstrated to the wider University administration, staff and faculty that SMU did not have a sufficient understanding of why students were leaving – a fundamental shortcoming. Not all students "leaving" SMU were accounted for in exit interviews. Also not accounted for in student interviews: discontinued student data distinguishing between students transferring to other institutions and those discontinuing academic study altogether. This made deeper investigation into the reasons for student departures more difficult, and, in turn, led to a renewed effort at comprehensive data collection.

Meanwhile, the provost oversaw a campuswide dialogue on "Enhancing the Academic Quality and Stature of SMU: Analyses and Opportunities." The document opened a campuswide discussion of how to meet the ambitious goal of improving SMU's academic quality. This dialogue included several task forces and the senior leadership of the University, which considered over 300 comments and suggestions. During fall 2017 and early 2018, several discussions took place – across the campus community, in person and electronically. The provost held two town hall meetings in November 2017, with almost 200 faculty and staff attending. The provost also met with the Faculty Senate to engage in these discussions. Deans met in eight smaller group gatherings in their colleges with over 150 of their faculty who signed up to hold small group discussions. Finally, the chair of the Academic Affairs Committee of the SMU Board of Trustees led numerous discussions with Board members.

The result of these efforts was the publication in April 2018 of a report by the president and the provost: "Continuing the Ascent: Recommendations for Enhancing the Academic Quality

and Stature of Southern Methodist University." This was a statement of the academic goals and the resources identified to bring them to reality at the end of this long dialogue. The third recommendation from this document related to student success and retention and called for "develop[ing] a unified support system for retention and graduation by creating an Office of Student Success and Retention." These plans presented an exciting challenge and opportunity to engage everyone at SMU in this central defining activity of the University.

The "Enhancing the Academic Quality and Stature" document was an inspiration for the provost to appoint the Task Force on Student Success and Retention in March 2018. Chaired by the vice president for enrollment management and composed of members from the Division of Student Affairs, the Office of the Provost and Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences, the task force was charged with examining the current efforts at retention and success of undergraduates, with determining how best to create an office to take on these challenges within the Office of the Provost, and how to define the office's functions and scope to tackle the issue of student success and retention in the most effective way. This nine-member task force met frequently from March to May 2018.

The task force recommended the appointment of an associate provost for Student Success and Retention with a budget for an office designed for its administrative flexibility. The new positions and staff were established to oversee, from a central point, the improvement of student retention and graduation rates at SMU. SMU's retention and graduation rates were already good; it would take subtle changes, likely of many kinds, to improve the University's performance. The task force found, not surprisingly, that SMU had a large number of offices that were contributing to retention and graduation.[4] The problem was coordinating them to operate in their most effective ways to aid retention and graduation. The task force noted that "a stronger 'culture of success and opportunity' must involve all students – not just those traditionally identified as 'at risk' due to their demographic background, socioeconomic status, or academic performance." And it made clear that "the Provost's Office should lead SMU's efforts in aligning student success programs and opportunities with the University's strategic priorities"[5] since the tasks ahead were many and complex.

The task force uncovered some of the problems of retention at SMU. University-wide reporting of students in academic trouble at midterm was spotty; departments within Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences reported that they did not feel qualified to help students in academic trouble; advising centers and the Altshuler Learning Enhancement Center reported that the students who most needed their help often avoided using tutoring and academic counseling services available to them. Clearly, further gains in retention would come from more effective collaborations among administrative units, academic departments and the

4 By one count, there were 18 SMU programs and offices, from Orientation to Violence Prevention; and seven student groups and activities, from special scholars' programs to intramural sports and fraternities and sororities.

5 "Academic Engagement and Student Success: Report of the Provost's Task Force on Student Success and Retention," p. 1.

undergraduate schools. An additional concern raised was that SMU was also losing students who were academically flourishing, but found the atmosphere of student life too often centered on social activities. Some of these students were recruited for their academic accomplishments. In our case, a stronger "culture of success and opportunity" must involve all students, not just at-risk students.

The central theme of the task force report, "Academic Engagement and Student Success: Report of the Provost's Task Force on Student Success and Retention," focused on the creation of a flexible administrative team in the Office of the Provost to undertake the difficult task of changing the culture of success and opportunity on the entire campus. To guide the "widespread collaboration" needed to improve student success and retention, it called for a high-level academic leadership position focused on academic engagement and student success.

2018: Supporting Student Academic Engagement and Success

During fall 2018, the newly established associate provost for Student Academic Engagement and Success began assembling data and facilitating conversations across campus to understand why students were leaving SMU at the end of their first year and to identify obstacles to graduating in four years. Conversations were intentional to include the voices of SMU students. The associate provost held regular bimonthly meetings with leaders of student senate and various scholar groups. These discussions uncovered student concerns about the access and quality of academic advising, as well as inconsistencies in faculty and teaching in first-year courses.

These conversations and the patterns found in the data suggest that the academic forces contributing to a student's decision to leave at the end of the first year are not unique to SMU. Students leave SMU for the following academic reasons: We do not provide the major they develop an interest in, there are unmet personal academic expectations and opportunities, there are too few opportunities for academic engagement with peers and faculty, and there is a desire for a different type of classroom experience.

My institution needs to better equip academic advisors with the knowledge of courses and efficient course progression.

Campus partners also highlighted the importance of the additive impact of social, personal and financial experiences in explaining first-year departures. In addition, exit interviews with students and by faculty and staff who worked with students prior to their departure also highlighted how complicated the decision to leave is for many students. *There was a general belief across campus partners that had we been able to intervene sooner or offer an alternative experience, many of these students would have remained at SMU.*

While we know addressing the factors beyond the academic experience will be critical to our overall efforts to improve the first-year retention rate, we concluded that our best opportunity in the next five years was to focus on academic support and engagement. Specifically, understanding why students transferred to higher-ranked or closely ranked institutions, and why students with such strong academic profiles from high school struggled when they arrived at SMU. We believe focusing on these groups of students will lead to changes in the academic experience that will benefit all undergraduates at SMU.

Academic outcomes reflected important differences between students who left SMU at the end of their first year and those who remained. Table 5 provides an overview of the median grade-point average and hours passed for students in the last five cohorts in comparison with those who returned to SMU and those who did not return. On the whole, the students who did not return had a lower end-of-term GPA and earned between 9 and 12 fewer credit hours. Clearly, the completion of credit hours and possibly not meeting academic goals were important factors in the decision to leave SMU.

TABLE 5: TRADITIONAL FALL FIRST TERM STUDENTS WHO DID NOT RETURN THIRD SEMESTER BY COHORT

Cohort	Total in Cohort			Returned Third Semester			Did not Return Third Semester		
	Count	Median GPA	Median Hours Passed	Count	Median GPA	Median Hours Passed	Count	Median GPA	Median Hours Passed
2015	1666	3.41	44	1506	3.42	45	160	3.33	34.5
2016	1809	3.49	44	1635	3.51	45	174	3.08	35
2017	1701	3.48	44	1527	3.50	45	174	3.14	35.5
2018	1778	3.49	45	1619	3.51	46	159	3.12	32
2019	1834	3.63	45	1650	3.63	46	184	3.50	37

While SMU reports modest differences in first-year retention rates across groups of students (see Figure 1 and Table 3) there is not consistent or overwhelming evidence that points to differences by race or socioeconomic status. That said, we do see important differences over time, and realize that we will need to examine differences in academic outcomes such as median GPA and hours passed by these same characteristics in order to fully determine how they might explain the four-year graduation rate which does vary by race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status at SMU (Figure 2 and Table 4).
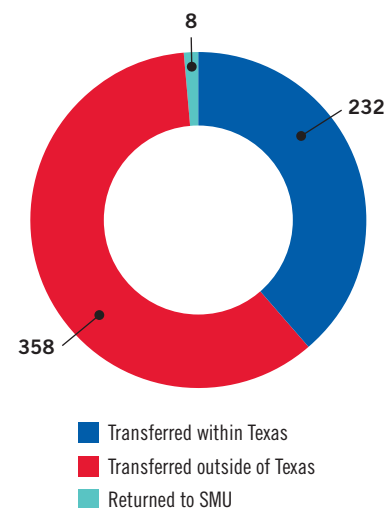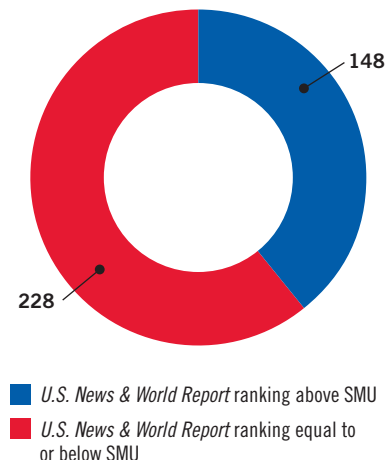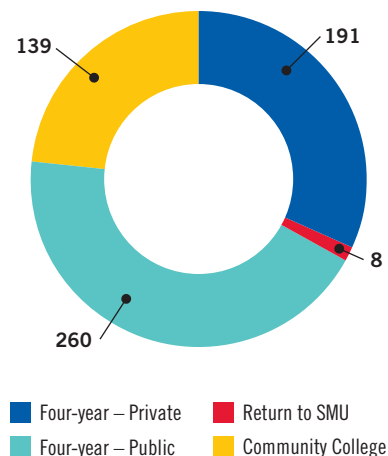
Finally, the campus conversations in 2018 highlighted that student support staff in both academic and student affairs believed students transferred for very different reasons and to very different places. Using data provided by the National Clearinghouse, we are able to determine the first transfer destination for our first-year students. While the majority choose to transfer to a four-year public school, approximately 35% will transfer to another four-year private school. Between 10% and 15% of each cohort will choose to transfer to one of SMU's cohort and aspirational peer schools. Between 35% and 45% transfer to a school ranked by *U.S. News & World Report* as above SMU. Slightly more than half will transfer to a school outside Texas.

At the same time that SMU was trying to understand more about first-year retention, we began a campuswide conversation around possible topics for the next Quality Enhancement Plan. These conversations primarily took place among the academic leadership team and focused on outcomes identified either in the 2016–2025 Strategic Plan or in the "Continuing the Ascent" report put forward by the provost and the president. Given the importance of meeting our two strategic goals of improving first-year retention and four-year graduation rates and our firm belief that we could retain and graduate more of our students, the provost announced in June 2019 that the 2021 QEP would be focused on student retention and academic success. We then turned our attention to the work of identifying the key components.

2019: Developing the QEP – SMU in Four

During summer 2019, a group of campus stakeholders was charged with considering a campuswide technology solution to track student engagement and well-being and to identify ways to improve the accuracy and efficiency of advising through improvements in our student information system, PeopleSoft. A student success consultant with experience in software solutions led campus stakeholders in a series of conversations to identify our current strengths and weaknesses and our system requirements. At the same time, the associate provost for Student Academic Engagement and Success conducted hourlong

FIGURE 3: TRANSFER DESTINATIONS BY TYPES OF INSTITUTIONS FOR COHORTS 2015–2019

139
191
8
260

- Four-year — Private
- Four-year — Public
- Return to SMU
- Community College

148
228

- *U.S. News & World Report* ranking above SMU
- *U.S. News & World Report* ranking equal to or below SMU

8
232
358

- Transferred within Texas
- Transferred outside of Texas
- Returned to SMU

intensive conversations with peer and aspirational schools to ask about their experiences with solutions such as Starfish by Hobsons and EAB Navigate. This work culminated in campus visits to New York University, which recently implemented Starfish, and to Duke University, which worked with HighPoint to improve the student experience with PeopleSoft.

By the end of the summer, the group recommended three changes. First, that we implement HighPoint to significantly improve the student experience and to create degree plans to help students and departments plan course offerings. Second, that we utilize features within PeopleSoft to improve our early-alert efforts and record-keeping among advisors. Finally, to change many of our business processes and some of our academic policies and practices in order to help students know when they are getting off-track toward a four-year completion goal.

With a concrete understanding of how technology and changes in business processes might improve student outcomes and our ability to identify students at academic risk, we began campus presentations and held strategic conversations with critical stakeholders during fall 2019. From these, we were able to determine the scope and primary areas of emphasis for the QEP, and we developed a schedule for implementing technology solutions. In addition, a QEP strategy team was named and formally tasked with moving the QEP strategy forward, and we began introducing the Board of Trustees and campus partners to the basic features of "SMU in Four."

During spring 2020, the strategy team appointed Larry Winnie and Molly Ellis as co-directors of the QEP initiative at SMU. Over the spring, data was reviewed to understand more about our existing early-alert efforts, the student experience with advising and student outcomes in first-year and gateway courses in order to determine which of these might be our focus. Based on what we learned from examining these three possible areas of focus, we determined that SMU was in a position to allow us to focus simultaneously on improving an early-alert system, academic advising across all four years and experiences in courses that the majority of SMU students completed in their first or second year. These three areas of focus became the agreed-upon pillars of our efforts.

SMU in Four Pillars
- **Early Alert Pillar**
- **Advising Pillar**
- **First-year and Gateway Courses Pillar**

Early-alert pillar
Undergraduate faculty are asked to complete early and midterm progress reports each semester. During the fall semester, request for reports from faculty occur during September and October and for the spring semester in February and March. Faculty members report on any deficient grades by students and may indicate if students are failing due to attendance or

due to tests. A detailed review of participation by faculty in early and midterm progress reports indicates that approximately 75% of all grades are reported. There is significant variation in participation across the five undergraduate schools at SMU. During academic year 2019–20, faculty members in the Simmons School of Education and Human Development completed 94% of early-term grades, while faculty members in the Cox School of Business completed 45% of their midterm grades. Improving faculty participation could improve the ability of the University to identify students struggling in specific courses and to provide academic support and tutoring early in the semester. With over 1,100 full- and part-time faculty teaching each academic term, efforts to improve the quality and response rates of progress reports will require widespread efforts across campus to increase understanding of how we use the information to identify students who might need additional academic support. In addition, we learned that very few students actually knew how to access the reports or how to use the reports to evaluate how they were doing in their courses. From communicating with faculty about the importance of the progress reports to helping students understand how to use the information, improvements in the progress-report process can contribute to the QEP goals.

TABLE 6: EARLY INTERVENTION GRADING PARTICIPATION BY SCHOOL (2015–2020)

Early Intervention (% of Grades Reported)										
	Spring 2015	Fall 2015	Spring 2016	Fall 2016	Spring 2017	Fall 2017	Spring 2018	Fall 2018	Spring 2019	Fall 2019	Spring 2020*
Cox	33.9	54.3	29.5	20.3	38.1	31.3	52.1	53.9	48.4	53.0	54.2
Dedman	54.4	72.3	62.2	64.8	65.5	71.1	63.2	75.3	68.0	81.3	79.1
Lyle	52.5	71.0	43.4	53.7	47.3	52.7	49.3	46.8	51.3	52.8	48.1
Meadows	37.1	53.7	30.9	49.0	35.3	35.7	31.3	43.7	32.9	54.6	47.2
Simmons	83.4	75.9	87.2	98.6	89.2	93.1	93.0	89.0	87.9	94.4	88.3
Total University	53.7	69.5	56.7	64.4	60.4	66.3	59.6	70.3	63.2	76.4	72.1
Midterm Intervention (% of Grades Reported)										
	Spring 2015	Fall 2015	Spring 2016	Fall 2016	Spring 2017	Fall 2017	Spring 2018	Fall 2018	Spring 2019	Fall 2019	Spring 2020*
Cox	69.9	75.9	70.4	60.1	54.6	65.7	66.7	58.9	62.6	59.0	45.2
Dedman	74.6	77.9	83.5	86.9	81.3	77.0	84.7	80.8	81.1	85.0	68.8
Lyle	72.8	61.6	71.5	62.1	48.4	68.0	71.2	57.5	72.0	58.1	43.7
Meadows	57.9	53.0	55.9	58.9	56.2	58.3	62.5	48.4	64.2	53.8	52.3
Simmons	95.7	92.6	93.7	96.0	95.8	91.5	79.6	89.7	95.6	82.5	80.7
Total University	73.0	74.1	77.2	79.3	72.5	73.9	77.2	73.2	76.8	75.5	60.9

Student advising pillar

It is widely accepted that very high undergraduate retention and four-year graduation rates rely heavily on active and careful advising and monitoring of progress. Successfully completing an undergraduate degree in four years inevitably includes disappointments and setbacks. During these periods, students should be able to contact professional staff at the University to help them navigate their paths forward. Unfortunately, anecdotal stories by faculty, current students and students leaving SMU indicated that academic advising may not be meeting many student's expectations. In addition, an analysis of open-ended responses in the graduation survey indicated that current graduates felt that advising was an area where SMU could improve. Finally, the Academic Affairs Committee of the SMU Board of Trustees expressed specific concerns regarding student access to professional advising.

As a result of these factors, the second pillar of SMU in Four focuses on academic advising. The student experience with advising at SMU is complicated due to a decentralized system where students are assigned more than one advisor during their time at SMU. While premajors are all advised by professional staff in two clearly identified offices, declared majors are advised in very different ways across the undergraduate schools. More than half of the majors at SMU have prerequisites for major declaration that cause some students to take longer to declare their majors or will require other students to consider alternative majors when they fail to meet the requirements for their first preference. In addition, SMU prides itself on the number of students who are able to graduate with more than one degree. As a result, double majors often have more than one advisor working with them to complete their degree programs. Advisors at SMU find it difficult to share notes or to work collaboratively to help students navigate multiple degree requirements.

All these factors contributed to our decision to systematically try to understand the student experience with advising before considering how it should be addressed in our QEP. In 2019, SMU had an opportunity to participate in the NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement). We also choose to administer the advising module, which has provided us with a rich understanding of both first-year students' and seniors' experiences. Another advantage of the NSSE data is that it allows an institution to compare its student experience with that of a national sample. We highlight three findings from our first-year and senior respondents in Table 8 below.

TABLE 7: KEY FINDINGS FROM NSSE 2019[6]

First-year Experience with Advising	Senior Experience with Advising
60% of first-year students at SMU said advisors were only "some" or "very little" help	Fully 33% of seniors reported meeting with the academic advisor assigned to them only once or not at all during the past year.
56% reported academic information on websites and the undergraduate catalog provided only "some" or "very little" help.	65% of seniors reported that the academic advisors assigned to them were "very little" or only "some" help.
47% of first-year students reported that the institution actively listened to their concerns only "infrequently," "some" or "very little."	The experience of our seniors was clearly one where they relied on themselves and their peer mentors far more than on their assigned advisors.

This survey data will provide us with an important understanding of where we should focus our efforts on changing advising resources and practices. From these findings, our central concerns were the following: We need to increase contact and improve communication with our students so that we can provide them with better and more effective advice at the right moments in their academic career. We need automated solutions to notify academic advisors and counselors when students decide to withdraw from courses or when they are uncertain how to access the academic support services they could benefit from.

In addition to students and advisors expressing concerns about the advising experience, we also realized that our academic policies and advising practices could be improved in order to help with student retention and graduation. Universities with four-year graduation rates that exceed 80% share these characteristics: very strong academic policies and clear expectations for what is required when a student starts to fall behind on their degree plan. Students are often required to meet with advisors as part of the enrollment process, particularly when they are no longer making satisfactory progress.

Under SMU's current academic policies, students are placed on probation only when their overall GPA falls below 2.000. SMU has no enforceable rule on the rate of progress toward the bachelor's degree. This is sometimes defined by the term Academic Good Standing or Satisfactory Academic Progress – 120 hours are required for the bachelor's degree at SMU, meaning students should be earning at or close to 30 credit hours per academic year if they are to finish in four years. SMU currently uses the federal minimum for eligibility for financial aid, which is only 12 credit hours. Academic progress at SMU is not defined further than the statement: "The University sets the goal and expects that all undergraduate students will make regular academic progress toward their degrees." This might imply 10 terms, or five years toward the degree.

Since we do not currently have an academic policy that requires students to maintain academic progress towards graduation in four years, we unintentionally create conditions

for students to take longer to graduate than necessary, and this may negatively impact their ability and desire to ultimately graduate from SMU. Examining the student experience for the entering cohorts between 2011 and 2015 revealed important information: First, about 50% of students who did not complete 27 credits by the end of their second term were still behind at the end of their second year. These students graduated at a rate of about 30%. However, those students who were able to make up the credits and had at least 57 credits by the end of their second year greatly increased their chances of graduating – to roughly 75%. Students who were encouraged and able to make up the credits in the summer via interterm classes or transfer credits ultimately performed distinctly better. Second, not only did the students who made up the credits graduate at a higher rate, they were also less likely to earn failing grades or to withdraw from courses during subsequent terms. Failing to earn 27 credit hours by the start of the second year was a remarkably good predictor of future pace and performance. Without clear rules or at least consistent expectations among advising staff concerning the accumulation of course credit hours, SMU has allowed itself to overlook these students, and has not efficiently identified and supported them.

TABLE 8: FIRST-YEAR CREDIT HOUR COMPLETION AND GRADUATION RATES

Fall Cohort (FYR)	Cohort	Total First Year – Under 27 Hours		Second Year – Under 57 Hours				Second Year – At Least 57 Hours				Second Year – Not Enrolled	
		Count	Four Year Graduates	Count	Percentage	Four Year Graduates	Graduation Rate	Count	Percentage	Four Year Graduates	Graduation Rate	Count	Percentage
Fall 2011	1382	140	33	67	48%	17	25%	22	16%	16	73%	51	36%
Fall 2012	1426	177	45	90	51%	21	23%	30	17%	24	80%	57	32%
Fall 2013	1430	143	40	72	50%	23	32%	25	17%	17	68%	46	32%
Fall 2014	1459	134	31	68	51%	16	24%	24	18%	15	63%	42	31%
Fall 2015	1374	126	41	70	56%	26	37%	18	14%	15	83%	38	30%
Fall 2016	1522	146	43	62	42%	23	37%	24	16%	20	83%	60	41%
TOTAL	**8593**	**866**	**233**	**429**	**50%**	**126**	**29%**	**143**	**17%**	**107**	**75%**	**294**	**34%**

Looking at this same data by race and ethnicity in Table 9, we gain an increased understanding of how credit-hour accumulation affects the likelihood of graduation for students of color. For example, falling behind in the first year increases the likelihood of Asian and African American students not returning to SMU for their second year. We recognize that small sample

sizes must be taken into consideration; however, one of the most alarming conclusions from this table is that there appears to be strong evidence that falling behind in the first year and remaining behind in the second year significantly impacts four-year graduation rates for nonwhite students to an even greater degree than for white students.

TABLE 9: FIRST-YEAR CREDIT-HOUR COMPLETION AND GRADUATION RATES BY RACE/ETHNICITY (COHORTS FALL 2011–FALL 2016)

Ethnicity	Total First Year – Under 27 Hours		Second Year – Under 57 Hours				Second Year –– At Least 57 Hours				Second Year – Not Enrolled	
	Count	Four Year Graduates	Count	Percentage	Four Year Graduates	Graduation Rate	Count	Percentage	Four Year Graduates	Graduation Rate	Count	Percentage
American Indian/Alaska Native	3	0	2	67%	0	0%	0	0%	0	N/A	1	33%
Asian	30	8	13	43%	6	46%	2	7%	2	100%	15	50%
Black or African American	52	2	23	44%	1	4%	5	10%	1	20%	24	46%
Hispanic of Any Race	101	24	47	47%	13	28%	19	19%	11	58%	35	35%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	2	1	1	50%	1	100%	0	0%	0	N/A	1	50%
Nonresident Alien	83	25	43	52%	14	33%	17	20%	11	65%	23	28%
Race and Ethnicity Unknown	2	0	1	50%	0	0%	0	0%	0	N/A	1	50%
Two or More Races	22	4	9	41%	2	22%	4	18%	2	50%	9	41%
White	571	169	290	51%	89	31%	96	17%	80	83%	185	32%
Total	**866**	**233**	**429**	**50%**	**126**	**29%**	**143**	**17%**	**107**	**75%**	**294**	**34%**

Though all students are instructed by the undergraduate regulations to meet with their advisor during registration for the upcoming semester, there is no University-wide enforcement of this expectation. Students may simply go online and register. Further, there is no method in place to require, minimally, a meeting of student and advisor when a student withdraws from a course during a term, or fails one at the end of a term, before the subsequent term begins. By implementing new rules and expectations, the University might better mobilize to identify and support our first- and second-year students at a crucial time when they need help to regain their footing on a path to academic success.

From this work we determined that an advising pillar within SMU in Four would focus on the effective implementation and adoption of technology solutions such as Advising Notes and Schedule and Degree Planner within HighPoint. In addition, working with advising staff across the University, we will recommend changes to academic policies and/or advising practices that should help advisors intervene with students as they make critical decisions about enrollment.

First-year and gateway courses pillar

The final factor identified as playing a key role in both first-year retention and four-year graduation is the student experience in first-year courses and courses that are identified as gateways to the major. Prior research has clearly established that effective and engaging classroom instruction is associated with college persistence and has an indirect relationship to students' graduation from college in four years (Loes, An, Pascarella 2019). SMU in Four provides us with a critical opportunity to improve the classroom experience.

The role of first-year and gateway courses in student retention is well established. At SMU, we became aware of the specific way these courses can negatively impact first year retention and graduation in four years by reviewing student feedback from our exit interviews, looking at our NSSE survey results, and grade outcomes for different groups of students. From these three data sources, we identified two specific areas for improvement. First, identify and address equity gaps in course outcomes. For example, students in the Rotunda Scholars Program shared they were not always as prepared for our introductory math and science programs in comparison to their peers who often graduated from private high schools. Second, we want to increase student engagement in courses by helping faculty design in and out of class opportunities for engagement and active learning. While SMU has developed several programs and initiatives to support the retention of underrepresented students (see Appendix 2) we have not had this explicit conversation with our faculty.

Currently, SMU's support for faculty teaching in first-year courses is decentralized across campus. There are three primary support areas that focus on improving teaching. The Center for Teaching Excellence provides support for faculty and their teaching across all areas of campus through workshops, observations and consultations. The Office of Information Technology has staff dedicated to support the application of technology and instruction within each school with undergraduate majors. SMU Libraries has librarians dedicated to undergraduate success in particular for research and writing within courses.

Together, these units offer a range of supports to faculty who seek their assistance. Over the past few years, the faculty support units have increased their coordination and efforts to support faculty. Whether to take advantage of these services is left to the discretion of individual faculty. Further, teaching-related supports tend to focus on individual instructors and their classes rather than looking holistically across courses or multiple sections of the same courses.

Similarly, there are a variety of internal stakeholders who play a role in the development and delivery of first-year and gateway courses, including the Council on General Education, the Office of Institutional Planning and Assessment, deans, department chairs and individual instructors. All these stakeholders play critical roles in the oversight, implementation and success of first-year and gateway courses. However, there is opportunity to bring together stakeholders from across campus to improve the design and teaching of these courses.

2020: Anticipated Launch of SMU in Four

SMU welcomed a new provost in July 2020. With the full support of Elizabeth G. Loboa, we moved forward on our plans to simultaneously work on improving student outcomes and experiences under all three pillars. A faculty steering committee was identified and working groups were established for each pillar. Each working group was instructed to identify a five-year phased approach to improving outcomes in their area. The faculty steering committee was charged with making sure that the three pillars were working in parallel and to identify ways that we could reinforce efforts among the three areas. The strategy committee continues to firmly believe that once we get efforts aligned across these three areas, we will begin to see improvements in our first-year retention rate and, over time, in our four-year graduation rate.

The best way to summarize our shared initiatives is by summarizing our pillars:

1. **Early Alerts**
   - Improve the collection of early and midterm progress report data to support student interventions to promote student success.
   - Faculty will realize the importance of providing students with early and midterm feedback in order to increase the chances of student success in the course.
   - Students and faculty will have an increased understanding of what resources are available to students who are earning a deficient grade.

2. **Academic Advising**
   - Implement improvements to academic advising through the integration of technology solutions and changes to academic policies, and by empowering advisors to require at-risk students to meet with advising staff.
   - Implement changes to the advising experience so that students view their assigned advisors as important resources on campus who care about their situation.

3. **First-year and Gateway Courses**
   - Improve the design and instruction in first-year and gateway courses to promote student engagement and success and reduce any unintended equity gaps that might exist.
   - Expand faculty information on the best practice research based on strategies to engage students in class.

The subsequent sections of this document will explain in detail the likely changes SMU intends to put into place as we work to improve these three areas.

Because of the complexities of student retention and graduation, we recognize that our QEP strategies must be pervasive, at an institutional level, to be truly effective. To this end, we focus on making significant changes in three areas of academic support and engagement – early alerts, advising, and first-year and gateway courses. These three essential levers – three pillars of the QEP – will boost SMU's response to helping students overcome obstacles to success, and thus improve the University's retention and graduation rates.

Identification and implementation of strategies for improvement

As previously discussed, SMU in Four is designed to improve the first-year retention and four-year graduation rates at SMU and to make sure that we do not have socioeconomic or racial and ethnic differences in these two measures of student success. To do this, we will focus on significant changes in three areas of academic support and engagement that will enhance SMU's response to the problems identified. They are changes best positioned to improve the University's retention and graduation rates.

Literature Review

SMU is well aware that student retention and graduation are complex phenomena. They rely on many factors. We believe that the strategy of this QEP to undertake three initiatives, each a pillar, will truly provide us with the leverage to improve retention and graduation for our undergraduates.

Research concerning student retention and success has been around for several generations, even as the issue of low completion rates of undergraduates nationwide has become a public issue in the last two decades. This extensive body of research centers around several themes, or theories. Most center not on detachment and separation, but on attachment and persistence of undergraduates. Some focus on the daily structure, habits or skills they need (if they do not have them) to get them through to graduation. Those students who do not receive these things often leave.

The principle behind this area of higher education research is that institutions admit students and should support them through their entire college career. It doesn't matter that some students are "better prepared" or "poorly prepared"; all deserve to finish if admitted, and institutions have a strong professional and moral obligation to help them. Still, behaviors or temperament may influence success or failure to earn a degree. Colleges and universities have always known that personality, habits and expectations are often essential to completion. None of this is new.

SMU loses students who are succeeding academically and students who are obviously struggling academically. Additionally, SMU's retention and completion rates for students of color is a persistent concern (more on this below). We understand that the causes and remedies are not found only in student academic performance or student demographics.

We rely on foundational theories of student success and retention to ground our enhanced practices central to SMU in Four:

Integration

Vincent Tinto's integration model (1987, 1993) is the foremost one, where students are thought to be made part of – or feel they are part of – the social and educational setting. Tinto's model uses behavioral interactions with peers and faculty to measure integration within the institution. Residential undergraduate life may play a significant role here. Basically, those who are more integrated are more likely to persist. As students feel at home, part of the larger group, they are less likely to leave it.

Involvement

Alexander Astin's model of student involvement (1984) sees retention and success in measures of student involvement. Involvement is easier to measure than attachment. Astin posited five basic assumptions about involvement. He argues that involvement requires an investment of psychosocial and physical energy. Second, Astin says, involvement is continuous, and that the amount of energy invested varies from student to student. Third, aspects of involvement may be qualitative and quantitative. Next, what a student gains from being involved (or their development) is directly proportional to the extent to which they were involved (in both aspects of quality and quantity). Last, academic performance is correlated with student involvement. Others, too, have noted that engagement tends to improve academic outcomes of all students, including transfer students (Laanan, 1996).

Sense of Belonging

Literature on student success and retention has thus also developed around the student's sense of belonging. Research has made clear that a student's "subjective sense of belonging" is a valid and unique factor in student intention to persist and actual persistence (Haussmann et al., 2009). This internal, emotional sense is a valid concern for researchers and administrators. Bad or unpleasant experiences with administrators, staff or faculty may erode a feeling of belonging. A bad experience with peers may also lead to departure, but peer relations and social connectedness may also create a sense of belonging (Allen, et. al., 2008). Literature has grown around the sense of belonging for students of color. Students who experience a hostile campus environment because of race or ethnicity may turn to community-building and fostering their critical navigation skills. These serve as a way to cope with the wider environment of hostility (Yasso, et al., 2009). Such community-building requires greater and more thoughtful ways to reimagine and evaluate student belonging.

Student Engagement and Expectations

Student engagement is one of the key factors in retention, and one of the significant ways students can be engaged is through demanding more work and by setting higher expectations

for them in the first year. Orientation can accent the importance of the hard work necessary to achieve a bachelor's degree through "clear, consistent messages about what they can expect academically and socially" (Upcraft, et al. 2005, p. 100). Students in four-year colleges tend to work less hard than they initially expect. But following through on their high expectations tends to foster students who are readier and more willing to engage in activities early.[7] Students need to work harder and take advantage of more of the learning opportunities colleges and universities offer. Institutions need to hold students accountable for meeting mutually espoused standards of performance. (Upcraft, et al. 2005, p. 106)

Student response to academic demands placed on them from the start is itself a form of engagement. Common readings and first-year seminars are just two obvious ways in which the foundation for engagement, and first-year retention, can be established, according to research. (Ibid, 2005) Several strategies related to student engagement and expectations have proven effective for learning. (Thomas, 2012) More-structured courses have measurably improved student performance (Freeman, et al 2011; Freeman et al 2014; Eddy et al 2014; Haak, et al 2011). One of the other successful strategies for promoting student engagement and success is active learning, both expected components of our QEP pillar on first-year and gateway courses. Active learning tends to benefit all students and appeals to students with different learning styles. Active learning methods additionally have a clear positive effect on UMS and first gen students in STEM courses especially (National Research Council 2012; Horwitz et al 2009; Beichner, et al 2007). By including active learning practices as part of our QEP, SMU in Four will have taken a provably fruitful path toward narrowing equity gaps in student academic performance – and we expect that discussion of course improvement and active learning strategies will focus campus attention on student academic success in general.

In addition to building our ideas based on these four foundational theories of student success and retention, we also considered the literature on when and why students leave a university.

Pattern of Departure

The literature confirms the case at SMU that most departures occur during the first year and before the second year (Upcraft, et al. 2005). This is not surprising and is consistent with national research on predominantly white institutions similar to SMU. Lack of preparation, uncertain plans, flickering motivation or poor time management can make for a poor fit quite quickly. Adding to this is the growing financial cost of college as well; parents and students are loath to remain in the "wrong" institution any longer than necessary.

Research has focused on the perils of the sophomore year, where students may still leave, despite their overcoming the adjustment to the first (Boivin et al., 2000). SMU also shows losses of students in the second year of about 5%. In four-year institutions nationwide, about 40% of all leave-taking occurs in the first year and 30% in the second year (Tinto, 2012).

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7 The literature shows that, unfortunately, transfer students tend to rely on information about four-year colleges from friends and family and to be less engaged than entering first-year students (Townsend, 1995).

Second-year students may frequently take all 60 credit hours they have earned with them as transfer students – so this may be an important transfer-out point. We may expect this is another important factor. A recent 2005 study of 1,000 second-year students enrolled at a residential Midwest public university clarified the important concerns of sophomores. The greatest factors that contributed to their academic success and satisfaction (measured in GPA) was their certainty in the choice of a major and their happiness with faculty interactions (Graunke & Woolsey, 2005). These are, of course, the main academic concerns of second-year students. Improvements in advising might focus on these issues for these students.

Cornelia Connolly (2016) has noted that the literature on problems of dropout behaviors, the obverse of literature on persistence, does not promise much reliability. It tends to be plagued by an inability to identify whether these behaviors reflect characteristics that students already had, or how the institution did not become the minimally "good fit" for that student. She writes, "Mansell and Parkin have advised institutions against undertaking further research into the causes of withdrawal, arguing that a number of studies have already been conducted and that the reasons vary from individual to individual (Mansell and Parkin 1990; McGivney 1996). Despite this they recognize that the extent of early withdrawal could be reduced by concentrating on … student support …" (Connolly. "Student Retention Literature – Tinto's Model." corneliathinks.wordpress.com, Sept. 2016)

Connolly adds a cautionary note: "Retention research efforts are affected by the difficulty of trying to generalize retention study results across institutions." Each institution and each student differ from the others; and retention is, after all, "due to the complex, interrelationships between the student and the institutional culture and the effect on a student's experience."[8] This caution is in order as well due to the nature of the research of students in higher education. The terms of many of these categories are hard to compare. For example, Laanan's study (1996) of transfer students was an examination of survey responses of 868 transfer students into UCLA in fall 1993. The response rate was 26% for one group studied, 54% for the control group. But how well does this apply to all transfer students? It is natural for authors to wish to spread the implications of their research as broadly as possible. But several years later, the group "transfer students" may be older, or younger, may have shifted gender or minority composition. These variables have effects. Research in this field might better be seen as a form of literature, on a shifting and complex set of behaviors. We are clearer in understanding what these mean if we are more modest. Perhaps we should consider that they do not so much "prove" as "imply" trends or behaviors. Certainly, Connolly is right to remind readers of the value of the experience of each institution.

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8 https://corneliathinks.wordpress.com/2016/09/20/
   tintos-model/

Roughly two years of attempting to meet with and record all students who requested leaves of absence or withdrawals from SMU have certainly uncovered to the Office of the Provost the complexities of persistence and withdrawal at SMU. The widest quantitative account, utilizing 445 responses to a National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) analysis, asked students whether or not they had considered leaving campus. SMU students in this survey who were most likely to consider leaving campus due to dissatisfaction with only three aspects of their experience on campus: (a) the quality of interactions (QI); (b) the supportive environment (SE); and (c) the amount of collaborative learning (CL). These factors are generally congruent with both the larger anecdotal evidence and the literature on persistence and completion.

A striking turn has taken place in the research focus in the past 15 years. After so many small and medium-size studies of student behaviors and completion or noncompletion across various types of institutions of higher education, the central question has turned to "what works" in keeping students through to graduation.

The premier theorist, Vincent Tinto (2012), noted: "Much of the research on student attrition has not been particularly useful to those in the field who seek to develop and implement programs to improve retention and completion because it assumes, incorrectly, that knowing why students leave is equivalent to knowing why students stay and succeed. The process of persistence is not the mirror image of the process of leaving…our knowledge of effective action remains fragmented and poorly organized."

The same can be said of institutional action. (p. 5) That is, institutions need to know what does work, and what does not. Tinto summarizes the results of what we know under four headings: (a) Expectations. "High expectations are a condition for student success, low expectations a harbinger of failure." (b) Support. "Without academic, social, and, in some cases, financial support, many students, especially those who enter college academically underprepared, struggle to succeed."(c) Assessment and feedback. "Students are more likely to succeed in institutions that assess their performance and provide frequent feedback in ways that enable students, faculty, and staff alike to adjust their behaviors to better promote student success." (d) Involvement. "The more students are academically and socially engaged with faculty, staff, and peers, the more likely they are to succeed in college."

Overview of SMU in Four: Three Pillars

The difficult task for successful retention and graduation efforts, the truly useful research informs us, is to make them pervasive and effective. Because they are being done in our own way, in many forms, at present, it is easy to consider SMU is attending to these matters already. It is. But to make them more effective will require the difficult task of institutional change. This will require a three-pronged approach for immediate and long-term impact on retention and graduation of all students. Combined, the three kinds of enhancements we have developed, referred to as "pillars" of the QEP, are designed to give us reasonably greater ability to improve how we provide these sources of contact, support and feedback to all our students. Our three pillars of enhanced practice are:

Early-alert Pillar: Early alerts are formal programs of identifying and directing students who need academic help. They have been extensively described (Moore-Harrison, et al. 2015), and are part of institutional efforts to identify and give feedback to undergraduates early in a term. Early alerts have a positive effect on student learning and retention. (Felten, et al. 2016; Upcraft 2005). They may also assist in providing intervention before poor study habits or attendance go wrong. A recent study has shown that early timing of alerts yields a significant improvement in outcomes over later ones (de Monbrun 2019). SMU in Four focuses efforts on growing our understanding of our present early-alert practices, which rely primarily on academic performance of students, and broadening our efforts to include self-perceived achievement of students and co-curricular experiences that add to a student's sense of belonging (Haussmann et al., 2009).

Advising Pillar: Advising is perhaps the oldest means of support for undergraduates, described by King and Kerr (Upcraft, et al. 2005) as "the hub of the wheel that establishes links to all other support services on campus" (p. 320). Ideally it should span from the student's education plans to their career goals and their life plans. (Crockett, 1984). Yet there are a variety of advising models, from faculty models to those that include professional advisors and peer advisors. Results on research into student success and retention and the quality of advising have been mixed (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991). Two studies showed that advising affected persistence, grades and satisfaction (Upcraft, Srebnik and Stevenson, 1995; Habley and Morales, 1995; McKenzie et al, 2017; Burt et al 2013). Light (2001) considers that advising "may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience." (p. 81). Recognizing the important role that advising plays into student success and retention, the goal of advising under SMU in Four is to understand the current advisor and student experience, enhance advising and provide resources for improved training and technology to fill gaps in current practices.

First-year and Gateway Courses Pillar: First-year and gateway courses have been seen as one of the important places where new students first experience college-level demands (Kuh, 2007). Some students remain unaware of where to find academic help early in their time as undergraduates (Collins and Sims, 2006), and this is exactly where instructors in these courses can provide guidance to new students, whether new to the undergraduate experience or new to a field of study. More than just academic guidance can be developed in these courses. Faculty may develop their own pedagogical expertise aimed especially at entering students in these courses (Angelo, 2003). This effort tends to improve student learning. (Condon, et al., 2016). These courses may also be opportunities for faculty to help shape habits and expectations of entering students (Felten, et al. 2016, Mayhew, et al., 2016) at a crucial time. SMU in Four focuses on educating faculty and departmental leadership on the importance of pedagogical practices that reinforce student engagement and, ultimately, lead to better student learning outcomes and greater student retention (Thomas, 2012).

A range of comprehensive strategies for each of the three pillars we have identified as essential to student success – early alerts, advising, and first-year and gateway courses – will be activated from Year One (2021) to Year Five (2025) of the QEP to help us better monitor and support students in their progress to degree completion. These enhancements will create an immediate and long-term impact on the retention and graduation of all students.

Timeline

For each of the three QEP pillars, we discuss our current practices and our expected enhanced practices, to be implemented by each of the implementation teams assigned to the specific pillar outlined in the Organizational Structure section (see).

Early Alert Pillar

Current Practices

Presently, SMU expects faculty to complete two grade alerts each semester. As already noted, faculty respond unevenly across the colleges, and even departments, to this request. Some divisions report 90% of grades, while others report only a fraction – 34%. Overall, 75% of early and midterm grades are currently reported.

Early Progress Reports (EPRs) are sent out at the end of the fourth week of the semester and Midterm Progress Reports (MPRs) at the end of the eighth week by the University Registrar. While EPRs are generated for a subset of students (all first- and second-year, return and transfer students with 30 or fewer credit hours), MPRs are requested for all students. The early grade reports ask faculty to identify students in their classes with academic deficiencies defined as those whose work is earning C- or below. EPRs and MPRs are closed after 10 days, and the information is shared with the student, academic support services, University advisors and directors of student academic programs, such as the University Honors Program. This information is also available to those with authorized access to the student's record, such as a parent.

Currently, students who have three or more deficiencies receive direct outreach from the University Advising Center (UAC) and the Altshuler Learning Enhancement Center (A-LEC) in the form of separate emails to meet and to discuss possible changes to their enrollment status or to offer academic support services including free tutoring. The break point of three or more deficiencies was informed by an extensive analysis by the Office of Institutional Research in fall 2019. Those who have fewer than three may hear from a designated program director. At present, if students have one, two or even three deficiencies early in the term, the decision to seek academic support is up to them. In fact, some students with no reported deficiencies (NR) request additional academic support. Although all University-designated major advisors may see their advisees' grade deficiency reports, at present, very few of them actively use the information.

Enhanced Practices

Strategy 1: Increase Participation in Current Early-alert Efforts

As part of SMU in Four, we intend to broaden faculty participation in both EPRs and MPRs. We will begin to disseminate the faculty participation data in a user-friendly dashboard to deans and department chairs to make it easier to identify those faculty and departments who need improvement in reporting their grades. Deans will be more motivated to act upon this information with the implementation of performance-based funding put in place by the new provost. Additionally, plans are in place to add a comment box to the current EPR and MPR reporting system. The boxes are intended to help elevate the quality of information obtained from faculty regarding students. Training and awareness will be provided to faculty on this once it is implemented.

Strategy 2: Broaden Data Used in Early-alert Efforts

A consensus across members of staff, faculty and students is that additional more-holistic data, beyond EPR and MPRs, is needed to inform SMU's early-alert efforts. Piloted on campus in 2020, Dropout Detective, a retention tool based on Canvas (our learning management system), will serve as a supplement to current grade reports. Drawing on faculty-inputed and student-usage Canvas data, Dropout Detective provides real-time dashboards to faculty and staff to identify at-risk students. This data will be viewed in tandem with EPRs and MPRs to help inform student outreach efforts.

We will also work with academic support services in the A-LEC and SMU Libraries as well as with staff in Residence Life and Student Housing (RLSH) to provide academic support to students who need it and to actively encourage them to take advantage of the opportunities. The director of academic initiatives within RLSH is a critical member of the early-alert team, and will have access to EPR/MPR data sorted by Residential Commons so that additional programming might be made available where on-campus students live. In addition, a joint initiative between RLSH and A-LEC has already piloted **an expanded midterm query to all students**, asking students how they view their academic performance in the term. Thus, we hope to identify those students who are not performing as well as they expect of themselves. In this way, we hope to reach out to students who are frustrated, yet motivated and looking for ways to be better scholars at SMU.

Strategy 3: Expand Parameters for Student Outreach

We will expand outreach from advisors to students with two or more deficiencies and actively work with major advisors to encourage them to use the grade reports to identify majors at risk. We will begin to disseminate the student grade report data in a user-friendly dashboard to department chairs, advisors and records offices to make it easier to identify students at risk, and to look for patterns related to sex, race, Pell-grant eligibility and indicators of academic risk such as probationary status. Training will be provided to advisors. Department chairs will

be trained on the reasons driving the data and how to use the new dashboards. This effort will directly connect the early-alert pillar with the advising pillar.

Strategy 4: Formalize a New Early-alert System

Finally, we want to integrate information from across the University to create a real-time system of early alerts that brings together data from across the University. The first phase will involve evaluating the quality of the data currently available in Canvas – our learning management system – and comparing deficiencies identified in Canvas at the same time we identify deficiencies reported by faculty in EPR/MPR. A concerted effort will be made to work with the first-year and gateway pillar initiative to build capacity and interest among the faculty to use Canvas. The second phase of data integration will focus on bringing together data from RLSH and the Office of the Dean of Students to consider students holistically.

Implementation Plan

Because data about the use and effectiveness of a fully utilized early-alert system remains partial, the pillar committee studying early alerts resolved on the following steps for 2020 through 2025 to make the early alert network more effective:

TABLE 10. EARLY-ALERT PILLAR PLAN OF IMPLEMENTATION

Early-alert Pillar Enhanced Practice	Implementation Year					
	2020	Year 1 2021	Year 2 2022	Year 3 2023	Year 4 2024	Year 5 2025
Capture baseline metrics	X					
Increase participation in current early-alert efforts		X	X	X	X	X
Broaden data used in early-alert efforts		X	X	X	X	X
Expand parameters for student outreach			X	X	X	X
Formalize new early-alert system				X	X	X

Advising Pillar

Current Practices

Undergraduates of SMU are registered for degrees in one of the following schools: Cox School of Business, Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences, Lyle School of Engineering, Meadows School of the Arts or Simmons School of Education and Human Development. With some exceptions, students are not admitted to these programs as first-year students. In their first two years, premajor students are considered the responsibility of the UAC, which assists all beginning students with registration and planning their courses to fulfill University-wide requirements of the Common Curriculum. These general education requirements apply to all undergraduates.

The UAC consists of a single advising staff, with a director and 13 advisors and support staff. Students are assigned to the UAC for general academic advice and, especially, to guide them through the general education requirements for their bachelor's degrees. Most of these requirements are to be fulfilled in the first two years of enrollment, but this is not always the case, as professional prerequisites may require adjustments in the early semesters of a student's career.

Students first encounter their advisor over the summer before matriculation and meet face-to-face in the fall term. Students are assigned an advisor by several criteria. Unless students have special learning needs, or are varsity athletes, they are normally assigned an advisor by last name or by their premajor interest. Students enrolled outside Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences are also advised as first-year students in the schools of business, engineering or the performing arts. These advisors are expert in guiding students not only in their first year or two, but all through their academic training, toward meeting the academic and professional demands of the school. These advisors thus share, in important ways, in advising first- and second-year students at SMU.

Undecided students are classified as DC I (for Dedman College) students, until they declare their majors. After they decide on their majors, students are provided with academic advising from a faculty or staff member in their departments. In addition to major advisors, the schools also have records offices, which monitor the progress of all undergraduates in their respective schools and track their academic requirements within their degree programs. But it is also the case that within many of the schools, the records offices serve as resources for students with academic deficiencies and, in some cases, serve the primary advising function. The records offices often enforce restrictions on students with academic deficiencies in order for them to return to good standing. This usually occurs over one or two terms. Needless to say, advising undergraduates takes place in many additional places and forms throughout the University.

Enhanced Practices
Strategy 1: Understanding the Advisor Experience
While opportunities exist to shed light on our understanding of the student experience with advising (NSSE, graduation survey, anecdotal experiences, etc.), little effort to date has been made to understand our advisors' perceptions of their work. Working with the student success consultant for the QEP, several business processes were identified that make the work of advising more difficult because many students complete degrees in more than one school. These conversations highlighted a need to better understand the major advisor experience at SMU. More than 100 faculty and staff are identified as major advisors.

During summer 2021, we will continue small-group conversations with advisors in order to create a survey instrument that will capture important information about how each major

advisor approaches their work and where they need additional support and training. Through this survey we will be able to evaluate pain points, opportunities for improvement and evaluate the overall sense of satisfaction among our faculty advisors. In our first year of SMU in Four, we will need to dedicate time and resources to understanding what major advisors need and to evaluate their capacity to engage more deeply in our early-alert system, for example. We can then use this same survey in Year Three and Year Five to determine if our efforts at providing additional support to advisors are effective.

Strategy 2: Improved Advisor Training and Increased Access to Resources

The enhanced practice for advising for SMU's QEP will focus in the first year on expanding advisor training in the use of new features within HighPoint and Advising Notes. In the second year, we will focus on increasing communication across advisors and between major advisors and their assigned students. By Year Three, we will provide advisors with additional resources to respond in real time to early alerts as that system evolves. Advisor training will be the responsibility of the UAC and provided to first-year and major advisors through a previously established but largely defunct group called Mustang Advising Network Group. The director of the UAC is a member of the advising pillar strategy group and looks forward to reestablishing this network and working with records offices and the registrar to increase adoption of technological solutions. We expect to resume the Mustang Advising Network Group activities in fall 2021.

Certainly, more resources will be needed for advisor support in order to improve our advising outcomes. We believe the implementation of Advising Notes will dramatically improve communication across advisors working with the same student and the information that a student receives over time. The student and the advisor will always be able to go in and access these notes. In addition, we are building in features that will allow us to query the advising notes for particular concerns expressed by students. For example, there is a tag to identify a student as considering leaving the institution.

We will also present major advisors with opportunities to receive additional training in mentoring students as they begin to think about the transition from college to graduate. For example, major advisors may choose to work with the Mustang Mentors program in the Office of Engaged Learning to create and track connections between majors and departmental faculty.

In addition, the implementation of HighPoint will provide new features such as a schedule builder and a degree planner, which will improve the advising experience for students and advisors. These two features will save valuable time on advising appointments on transactional questions and, give the advisor more time to focus instead on relational topics or holistic well-being.

Strategy 3: Creating Consistent Advisor Practices

As we increase trainings and provide additional technology, a more carefully designed set of advising practices will need to be institutionalized, such as appointment-tracking, documenting outreach as a result of early alerts, and using the searchable fields to proactively identify which students may be at higher risk. An exploratory analysis of the impact of advising appointments on first-year outcomes indicates that first-year students benefit the most from three appointments per year. Within the UAC where there is one supervisor, it is then realistic to set an expectation that each advisor will meet three times with each advisee. This is an unrealistic expectation for many major advisors, and we don't currently know if it is necessary within each major. Consistently tracking appointments and looking at outcomes will allow each school to determine the ideal number of appointments for its majors.

In addition, premajor and major advisors will be expected and motivated to use the index fields within Advising Notes in a consistent way in order to quickly identify those advisees who have previously expressed an interest in transferring or to identify students who are not making progress toward a four-year degree. Enrollment delays among these students should "trigger" outreach from the advisor to the student.

We believe the implementation of consistent advisor practices will improve the overall student experience with advising. While we do have students who report a less-than-satisfactory experience with advising, we also have students who remark upon how wonderful and supportive their academic advisors were throughout their time at SMU. We believe identifying those practices that meet student needs and ensuring that students have greater access to advisors who are well trained and supportive will also improve our student experience with advising.

Strategy 4: Implementing Academic Policy Changes

Academic policies are determined by the Faculty Senate and the Educational Programs Committee (EPC) at SMU. Records offices, however, are tasked with upholding, explaining and implementing these policies. The records offices within each school should play a vital role in identifying improvements in current academic policies and identifying inconsistencies in the application of policies across the schools that contribute to delays in graduation. Each year of the QEP, the associate provost for Student Academic Engagement and Success will invite members of the Academic Policies Committee, the EPC and the records offices to come together to review in depth those key academic policies that we believe may unintentionally contribute to delayed graduation at SMU. We will consider policies such as credit-hour accumulation; wider access to the pass/fail option for courses; and the six-course repeat policy.

Implementation Plan

The pillar committee studying advising resolved on the following steps for 2020 through 2025 to make advising at SMU more effective:

TABLE 11: ADVISING PILLAR PLAN OF IMPLEMENTATION

Advising Pillar Enhanced Practice	Implementation Year					
	2020	Year 1 2021	Year 2 2022	Year 3 2023	Year 4 2024	Year 5 2025
Capture baseline metrics	X					
Understanding the Advisor Experience		X		X		X
Improved Advisor Training and Technology Resources		X	X	X	X	X
Creating Consistent Advisor Practices		X	X	X	X	X
Implementing Academic Policy Changes			X	X	X	X

First-year and Gateway Courses Pillar

Current Practices

Currently the comprehensive assessment of courses only occurs when the course is part of the Common Curriculum or when the course has been identified by a department as necessary for meeting program outcomes. While courses are evaluated for the extent to which they meet learning outcomes, we do not as a rule look for differences in outcomes with respect to D, F, W rates or differences in earned grades based on student characteristics. We believe evaluating courses in this way should begin in departments and should be supported by the resources and expertise in the Center for Teaching Excellence. See Appendix 3 for additional context on DFW rates of first year courses.

The first-year and gateway courses that form the focus of this pillar are those that:

- Have a large enrollment (50+) primarily composed of first- and second-year students.

- Enroll a significant percentage of first-year students.

- Are often taught by multiple instructors and offered at least annually.

- Serve as a gateway to a major and/or varying levels of student success.

In order to achieve the institution and QEP goals for improved student success and retention, there are distinct areas where additional dialogue, coordination and focus can improve the teaching within first-year and gateway courses. The research clearly establishes the importance of teaching and academic success in promoting student success and retention (Giaquinto, 2009; Tinto, 2012).

The problem of instilling student success in first-year and gateway courses is not simple: They are typically taught by a large number of instructors. They are taught at least every year, if not every term. Analysis has shown that there is a significant range of success with students at this level, at least as measured by student grades. In fact, a scrutiny of courses with substantial first-year student enrollment indicates that there is a significant variation in these first-year courses. For example, approximately 250 students enroll in CHEM 1303 during their first semester; approximately 25% of these students will earn a D or F or withdraw before the end of the semester. Another example is PSYC 1300, in which approximately 180 first-semester students will enroll; 17% of these students will earn a D or F or withdraw before the end of the semester.

Enhanced Practices

The pillar committee studying first-year and gateway courses resolved on the following steps for 2020 through 2025 to make these courses at SMU more effective:

Strategy 1: Course Redesign Initiative

The first strategy to improve teaching and course design in first-year and gateway courses is a Course Redesign Initiative. Focused on the critical intersection of faculty and students early in a student's academic experience, this initiative will focus on redesigning courses to promote student success by focusing on student learning outcomes, assessment strategies, student feedback and emphasizing engagement with course content.

An established strategy used by many universities across the country, such as the University of Houston and the University of Michigan, the Course Redesign Initiative will provide a forum for select faculty and faculty support units to work together over the course of an academic year to improve the course design and teaching of key SMU courses to improve student success in these courses.

The pillar subcommittee (described in greater detail on pg. 42) composed of faculty support staff from the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE), the Office of Information Technology (OIT) and SMU Libraries designed a nine-month process based on experience working with SMU faculty and guided by the principles of backward design (Wiggins and McTighe, 2005). The faculty steering committee reviewed this plan and made refinements. Table 12 identifies a 9-month timeline for the course redesign. The months are labeled sequentially to allow flexibility in start time based off of what is best for the faculty teaching the course(s). The table outlines the tasks for the month, the key stakeholders involved and the specific elements that will be included to connect to the research on student success and other elements of the QEP.

TABLE 12: COURSE REDESIGN PROCESS

Month	What gets done?	Who is involved?	Connections to student success
Month 1	• Kickoff meeting • "Level-set" technology options (Canvas, mastery paths) • Review student success data • Understand what has "worked" with the course previously • Identify course goals and learning outcomes	• Faculty teaching course • Office of Information Technology (OIT), Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE), Enrollment Management Research Group (EMRG), SMU Libraries • Department chair • Director of Undergraduate Studies • Faculty who have taught the course previously • A-LEC/Writing Center/Student support units (as appropriate)	Bring together student and faculty support units
Month 2	• Design assessments • Establish course structure • Establish clear picture of where we want to get to – capstone, final, etc.	• Faculty teaching course • OIT, CTE, SMU Libraries	Assignment(s) to collect early information to inform alert systems
Month 3	• Design learning activities • Course content (Weeks 1– 3)	• Faculty teaching course • OIT, CTE, SMU Libraries	Consider building in activities for student to familiarize with Canvas – potentially ungraded Activities emphasize student engagement
Month 4	• Design learning activities • Course content (Weeks 4 – 7)	• Faculty teaching course • OIT, CTE, SMU Libraries	Activities emphasize student engagement
Month 5	• Design learning activities • Course content (Weeks 8 – 12)	• Faculty teaching course • OIT, CTE, SMU Libraries	Activities emphasize student engagement
Month 6	• Design learning activities • Course content (Weeks 13 – 15)	• Faculty teaching course • OIT, CTE, SMU Libraries	Activities emphasize student engagement
Month 7	• Finalize activities and content • Quality assurance • Check alignment across course	• Faculty Teaching Course • OIT, CTE, SMU Libraries • Department chair • Director UG Studies • ALEC/Writing Center/Student Support Units (as appropriate)	Ensure positive student experience through alignment, properly running technology, etc.
Month 8	• Course finalized • Option for an iterative process post conclusion of the first-time course is taught • Establish work plan going forward during the semester	• Faculty teaching course • OIT, CTE, EMRG, Libraries • Department chair • Director of Undergraduate Studies • A-LEC/Writing Center/Student support units (as appropriate)	Assess course elements for student success
Month 9 (Flex)	Extra time to be used during process to account for unforeseen delays in the schedule		

For the first year of the initiative, we will redesign all sections of one course and include all faculty teaching the course in the redesign process. This will also allow us to focus on both the course and adjusting the process as necessary. In future years, we anticipate redesigning two courses per year. Courses will be selected for participation in the course redesign process through a data-informed approach looking at metrics such number of students enrolled, number of sections and instructors, D, F and W rates, prerequisite status for future courses,

and expressed interest and commitment by the department. Note: Each course will likely have multiple sections extending the reach of the initiative to a significant percentage of first- and second-year students.

Strategy 2: Student Engagement Institute

Providing faculty with pedagogical development opportunities can improve understanding of best teaching practices, develop faculty community and offer an opportunity to learn more about SMU students. The Center for Teaching Excellence, along with the other faculty support units, will organize a Student Engagement Institute to provide support for faculty teaching first-year and gateway courses. The goal of the institute is to help faculty learn how to better engage their students.

Academic engagement offers a critical element in supporting SMU's student success and retention efforts. Promoting academic engagement can be particularly useful for improving the success of students of color, first-generation students and low-income students (Pendakur, 2016). The institute will provide faculty with the research basis, strategies and practical suggestions to increase student engagement. Through hands-on activities, the goal of the institute will be to help faculty increase student engagement and participation.

The Student Engagement Institute will be continually improved based on lessons from the Course Redesign Initiative to include elements that other faculty found worked well to improve engagement at our University. Additionally, the institute will be an opportunity to promote pedagogical development in faculty at a scale beyond what can be achieved through the Course Redesign Initiative.

Strategy 3: Improve Process for Assigning Instructors

Given that academic departments manage course assignments and faculty load, they play a substantial role in the teaching of first-year and gateway courses. However, little discussion, coordination and planning of these assignments occurs within or across departments. The third strategy aims to engage department chairs as collaborators in the student retention and student success initiative. First, research will be conducted to understand how these teaching assignments are made and the considerations that go into this decision-making process. Second, based on the research findings, collaborative opportunities will be developed, such as at the annual department chair retreat or at a brown-bag session to discuss the importance of first-year and gateway course instruction and teaching assignments. Through formal and informal gatherings, department chairs will be encouraged to put SMU's best instructors in first-year and gateway courses to ensure a strong academic foundation for undergraduate students.

Implementation Plan

The pillar committee studying first-year and gateway courses resolved on the following steps
for 2020 through 2025 to enhance instruction at SMU:

First-year and Gateway Pillar Enhanced Practice	Implementation Year					
	2020	Year 1 2021	Year 2 2022	Year 3 2023	Year 4 2024	Year 5 2025
Capture Baseline Metrics	X					
Course Redesign Initiative		X	X	X	X	X
Student Engagement Institute Launch		X	X	X	X	X
Improving Process for Assigning Instructors		X	X	X	X	X

SMU in Four is a comprehensive plan to improve our efforts to successfully help students move through their academic journeys at SMU. Thus, discrete parts of the University will need to engage and collaborate with one another as we seek to increase our understanding of and eliminate obstacles to student success while enhancing communication across offices that offer support. As a campuswide initiative, SMU in Four is organized by three layers of leadership: the strategy team, the faculty steering committee and key personnel and strategy team members with oversight of the three pillars of the QEP. Because the implementation of SMU in Four will require ever-widening circles of dedicated administrators, faculty and staff, the QEP organizational structure includes a communications group to steward the clear communication that is key to the success of SMU in Four.

Organizational structure

The catchphrase "retention is everyone's responsibility" has become commonplace across institutions of higher education. While there is tremendous truth to this saying, it is imperative that someone or some office have primary responsibility for formulating a University-wide retention strategy (Hoover, 2008). SMU in Four is the University-wide strategy for the next five years. The associate provost for Student Academic Engagement and Success is formally identified as the person responsible for the success of SMU in Four.

Institutional Support for SMU in Four

SMU in Four is also a comprehensive plan to change how discrete parts of the University engage in providing academic support to students while simultaneously seeking to change our institutional culture to increase understanding of obstacles and communication across offices that offer support, and to improve our efforts to successfully support students as they move through their academic journey at SMU. Appendix 4 provides a comprehensive list of institutional leaders and key personnel from areas directly involved in the implementation of the enhanced practices we have identified. This list further illustrates that SMU in Four truly intends be a campuswide initiative.

SMU in Four: Organizational Structure

The core team of campus stakeholders for SMU in Four is organized by three layers of leadership: the strategy team, thefaculty steering committee and pillar working groups. These individuals served a key function in the planning process for SMU in Four. In the following section we provide greater detail on the specific personnel who have or will work to inform the direction of SMU in Four and will serve on the respective implementation teams for outlined key strategies. An organizational chart of the three layers of leadership is provided in Figure 4.

FIGURE 4. SMU IN FOUR TEAM STRUCTURE

STRATEGY TEAM

| Sheri Kunovich
Associate Provost for Student Academic Engagement and Success | Larry Winnie
Co-director, QEP | Michael Harris
Director for the Center for Teaching Excellence | Patty Alvey
Associate Provost for Institutional Planning and Effectiveness | Molly Ellis
Co-director, QEP, and Associate Director for Learning Analytics and Student Success | Curt Herridge
Applications Support, OIT |

FACULTY STEERING COMMITTEE

| Randall Griffin
Art History | Bruce Levy
English | Brian Zoltowski
Chemistry | Tim Jacobbe
Teaching and Learning | Stephen Sekula
Physics | Stephanie Amsel
Writing and Reasoning Program |
| Brandi Stigler
Mathematics | Elizabeth Russ
World Languages | Scott Norris
Mathematics | Sid Muralidharan
Advertising | Thomas Carr
Mathematics | Mark Fontenot
Computer Science |

EARLY ALERT PILLAR	**ADVISING PILLAR**	**FIRST YEAR COURSES**
Sheri Kunovich Associate Provost for Student Academic Engagement and Success	**Larry Winnie** Co-director, QEP	**Michael Harris** Director for the Center for Teaching Excellence
Pillar Steering Committee	**Pillar Steering Committee**	**Pillar Steering Committee**
Sue Bierman Director of A-LEC	**Barbara Mohrle** Director UG Advising and Records for Cox	**Caroline Kirschner** EMRG
Susan Flanagan OIT/SSR	**Dayna Oscherwitz** Assistant Provost for General Education	**Jonathan McMichael** Libraries
Dustin Grabsch Residential Life	**Ellen Richmond** Director of Advising Center	**Addy Tolliver** Center for Teaching Excellence
Elsie Johnson Caring Community Connections	**Nancy Skochdopole** Director, Transfer and Transition Services	**Faye Walter** Academic Technology School Director
Jay Orenduff Director of Student Success and Retention	**Matt Wilson** Chair, Academic Policy Committee	

Student Steering Committee (To be established Fall 2021)

The six members of the strategy team are from the Office of the Provost, the Center for Teaching Excellence, the Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness and the Office of Information Technology. The three main pillars of the QEP, early alerts, advising and first-year and gateway courses, are directed by members of the strategy team, but consist of personnel from over a dozen special offices and resources of the University, including the Altshuler Learning Enhancement Center, the University Advising Center, Residence Life and Student Housing, the Office of Student Support, SMU Libraries, OIT and the chair of the Faculty Senate Academic Policies Committee. The three pillar groups seek direction from the faculty steering

committee, made up of dedicated and skilled senior faculty who can offer their insights to all these groups in order to ensure their effectiveness and their success in a long-term process that inevitably will see some setbacks and new approaches. Because the planning and ongoing implementation of SMU in Four will require ever-widening circles of concerned and dedicated administrators, faculty and staff, clear communication will be key to the success of SMU in Four. A communications group, with similar structure to the pillar teams, will be formed to help further facilitate campuswide conversations.

Key Personnel for Implementation of Strategies for Improvement

As we look toward implementing our strategies for improvement, the key personnel listed below will play important roles in the success and assessment of each initiative. Additional details on the resources expected of these positions are provided in the next section, Resources. (See page 46.)

Associate Provost for Student Academic Engagement and Success

The associate provost will review the work of the QEP co-directors and coordinate the work of those areas of campus necessary to implement the three pillars. In addition, the associate provost will provide the provost with regular updates, monitor the budget, and determine when and if significant changes need to occur during the five-year implementation. The associate provost will also serve as chair of the early-alert pillar.

QEP Co-Director

This QEP director will coordinate the meetings of the faculty steering committee, chair the advising pillar and write the annual report to document progress.

QEP Co-Director/Director of Assessment

The QEP co-director/director of assessment will partner with key members of the offices of Institutional Research, Student Academic Engagement and Success, and Institutional Planning and Effectiveness to coordinate all QEP assessment efforts.

Chair of Early-alert Pillar, Chair of Advising Pillar and Chair of First-year and Gateway Courses Pillar

The three chairs of these three pillars will organize, coordinate and report back to the faculty steering committee.

In-kind Contributions from Existing Positions

Much of the important work of SMU in Four will be achieved using current staff capacity. See additional information regarding in-kind contributions in the next section, Resources (page 46).

The projected budget for the five years of the implementation of SMU in Four was created in partnership with campus stakeholders and in consultation with the faculty steering committee. The budget makes room for crucial investments ranging from integrating technology to improve advising, communication, data-gathering, risk assessment and more, to the hiring of full- and part-time staff as key resources. SMU in Four will also feature in-kind contributions from select members of its key leadership and personnel teams.

Resources

Budget

SMU has sufficient resources to implement SMU in Four over the five years of its implementation. The projected budget was created in partnership with campus stakeholders and in consultation with the faculty steering committee. The 16 budget line items are annotated in the pages following the table.

TABLE 14: SMU IN FOUR BUDGET

Budget Item #	Description	AY 2020	AY 2021	AY 2022	AY 2023	AY 2024	AY 2025
Technology Investments							
1.	Project Manager	$159,000					
2.	HighPoint Technology	$140,000	$140,000	$140,000	$140,000	$140,000	$140,000
3.	Tableau	$60,000	$13,000	$13,000	$13,000	$13,000	$13,000
4.	Dropout Detective	$37,000	$37,000	$37,000	$37,000	$37,000	$37,000
5.	Technology Adoption	$10,000	$10,000	$10,000	$10,000	$10,000	$10,000
6.	Marketing and Printing	$20,000	$20,000	$20,000	$20,000	$20,000	$20,000
7.	Professional Development		$10,000	$10,000	$10,000	$10,000	$10,000
Early-alert Pillar							
8.	Department Workshops		$2,000	$2,000	$2,000	$2,000	$2,000
9.	Dashboard Buildout		$25,000				
Advising Pillar							
10.	Mustang Advising Network Group		$2,500	$2,500	$2,500	$2,500	$2,500
11.	NSSE Assessment Instrument		$5,000	$5,000	$5,000	$5,000	$5,000
12.	Dashboard Buildout		$25,00				
First-year Pillar							
13.	Two Advanced Ph.D. Students		$55,000	$55,000	$55,000	$55,000	$55,000
14.	Course Redesign Initiative		$50,000	$50,000	$50,000	$50,000	$50,000
15.	Student Engagement Institute		$5,000	$5,000	$5,000	$5,000	$5,000
16.	Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) Assessment Instrument		$2,500			$2,500	
TOTAL		**$416,000**	**$417,000**	**$339,500**	**$364,500**	**$342,000**	**$339,500**

Annotated Expenses

1. Project Manager

- With the knowledge that improved software may be highly useful in improving advising and communication with students, a full-time consultant was hired in spring 2019. The consultant assists in re-examining procedures and software and has been a part of most discussions concerning advising, communication and data-gathering. This has already proved invaluable in determining the appropriate software and procedures for SMU.

2. HighPoint Technology

- The technology added onto PeopleSoft to improve the student experience with enrollment, managing their financial aid information, and maintaining their four-year degree plans.

3. Tableau

- Technology to present and distribute data to stakeholders.

4. Dropout Detective

- Risk-assessment tool that analyzes Canvas course activity and outcome data to identify students who are not doing well and those who are.

5. Technology Adoption

- Resources to provide comprehensive training to users on campus to develop and use Tableau dashboards. Hopefully, users would complete the official Tableau certifications process appropriate for their level of use.

6. Marketing and Printing

- Resources to promote the SMU in Four initiatives among staff and students during the 5-year implementation.

7. Professional Development

- Resources to support QEP staff to attend annual Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) conference.

8. Early-alert Department Workshops

- Resources to provide afternoon snacks to department advisors and chairs to participate in the required workshops.

9. Early-alert Dashboard Buildout

- Resources to hire a part-time Tableau-certified specialist to build the dashboard designed to securely provide specific users with the data for their specific areas. Each department chair would go to the same dashboard where they can see the overall University data and their department in sufficient detail.

10. Mustang Advising Network Group

- Resources to create training videos and materials to support the monthly topics.

11. NSSE Assessment Instrument

- Resources to pay license for using the survey and modest incentives to encourage participation.

12. Advising Dashboard Buildout

- Resources to hire a part-time Tableau-certified specialist to build the dashboard designed to securely provide specific users with the data for their specific area. Each major advisor would go to the same dashboard where they can see the overall University data and see their department in sufficient detail.

13. Two Advanced Ph.D. Students

- Toward the efforts of the first-year and gateway courses pillar, two advanced Ph.D. students will be hired. It is expected that these students will have appropriate disciplinary knowledge to assist faculty in designing discipline specific assignments, content and activities. Working closely with faculty and CTE, these students will enable CTE to support departments in redesigning courses in such a way as to increase student learning, student success and retention. Given that first-year and gateway courses are among the most enrolled at SMU, the two Ph.D. students will improve the quality of these courses for hundreds of enrolled undergraduate students and the University's teaching mission.

14. Course Design Institute

- Anticipated cost to provide release time during the summer and academic year. Additional resources for technology (hardware and software) and other items to support teaching in redesigned courses. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

15. Student Engagement Institute

- Resources to provide materials and incentives for participation.

16. FSSE Assessment Instrument

- Resources to pay license for using the survey and modest incentives to encourage participation.

In-kind Contributions

	Name	SMU in Four Position	% FTE Commitment
17.	Dr. Sheri Kunovich	Associate Provost for SAES Chair of Early Alert Pillar	15%
18.	Dr. Larry Winnie	Co-director of QEP Chair of Advising Pillar	25%
19.	Dr. Michael Harris	Strategy Team Member Chair of First-year and Gateway Courses Pillar	10%
20.	Dr. Molly Ellis	Co-director of QEP Assessment	50%
21.	Dr. Addy Tolliver	Member of First-year and Gateway Courses Pillar	10%
22.	Ellen Richmond	Member of Advising Pillar	5%
23.	Achievement Advisor from University Advising Center, TBD	Member of Advising Pillar	25%
24.	Curt Herridge	Member of Strategy Team and Technology Implementation	5%
25.	Student Success Project Manager from the Division of Enrollment Services, TBD	Technology Implementation	10%

17, 18. Student Academic Engagement and Success

- The Associate Provost
- The co-director of the QEP helps coordinate the meetings of the faculty steering committee and serves as chair of the advising pillar.

19, 20, 21. Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE)

- The director of CTE serves on the SMU in Four strategy team and as the leader of the first-year & gateway courses pillar initiatives.
- The co-director/director of QEP assessment is the associate director for learning analytics and student success in CTE. She will lead the coordination of tracking assessment efforts.
- The senior instructional designer will lead efforts specific to the proposed Course Redesign Initiative.

22, 23. University Advising Center

- The director of UAC provides essential leadership in the planning and implementation of the advising pillar enhanced practices.
- Achievement advisor will provide support on ongoing initiatives related to the success of advising pillar.

24, 25. OIT and Division of Enrollment Services

- The executive director of applications serves as a member of the strategy team, offering guidance on the planning and implementation of proposed technology central to the success of SMU in Four.
- Student success project manager will provide ongoing support as additional changes are identified.

Our measured rates of retention and graduation will be monitored by the associate provost for Student Academic Engagement and Success, the director of Student Success and Retention and the director of the Center for Teaching Excellence, as well as by University leadership. Our assessment strategy aligns with our pillar-based strategies for improvement, with each of the three pillars serving to improve our retention and graduation rates. Assessment results will be reviewed on a semester basis by the strategy team, the faculty steering committee and pillar working groups, and used to modify pillar activities and plans as needed.

Assessment

As stated in the introduction to this QEP report, our goal is to improve first-year retention from 91% to 94% within three years, and to see the four-year graduation rate of 74% be achieved for all racial and ethnic groups at SMU and for Pell-eligible and first-generation students.

Because the QEP outcome itself is a set of statistical goals, assessment methods for the QEP outcomes are, at first consideration, relatively direct. Our measured rates of retention and graduation will improve to the point that they meet our goal. These measures will be directly monitored by the associate provost for Student Academic Engagement and Success, the director of Student Success and Retention, and the director of the Center for Teaching Excellence. They will be calculated following the present standard method with data from the registrar and the Division of Enrollment Management. These goals, being widely shared and aligned with the University's strategic plan, will be monitored as well by University leadership.

Our assessment strategy follows the same pillar-based enhanced practice organization discussed in Section III: Identification and Implementation of Strategies for Improvement. Each pillar serves a vital function in the advancement toward and achievement of our outlined retention and graduation rate goals. The following sections, organized by pillar, provide details and timing on our planned assessment measures for each proposed enhanced practice strategy. Where feasible, we draw on already available and routinely collected data sources such as University-wide surveys and student information system data. Additional details on the methodology and timeline for each measure is provided in Table 17: Detailed Assessment Plan by Pillar.

Early-alert Pillar Assessment Instruments & Measures

The overall goal of the advancements to the current early-alert practice at SMU is to create a more complete, data-informed system for identifying at-risk students and informing staff outreach strategies. Three enhanced practices are at the heart of the early-alert pillar. These are the proposed measures we will put in place to track progress toward outcomes specific to these efforts:

Early Progress Reports (EPR) and Midterm Progress Reports (MPR): Progress grades are collected twice per semester to support student academic performance, success and retention. The grades captured are used only for advising purposes, but are not recorded on the permanent academic record. Early Progress Reports are requested from instructional faculty in in the fourth week of instruction for all new first-year and transfer students, VA benefit recipients, undergraduates with fewer than 30 hours and students on probation regardless of hours completed. Beginning with the spring 2020 term, midterm progress grades are requested for all undergraduate students in the eighth week of instruction.

Two metrics related to EPRs and MPRs are of particular interest to SMU's QEP efforts. The first is the faculty participation rate in completing EPRs and MPRs, as previously illustrated in Table 6 (see page 14). With improved communications to faculty and more focused attention on engaging departmental-level leadership, we seek to see growth toward 90% participation of faculty in these reports over the next five years. However, increased faculty participation alone will not fill the gaps in SMU's current early-alert efforts; thus, our second metric of interest is the percentage of students with EPR and MPR grades reported. Ultimately, our target goal for grades reported is 90% of faculty completing 90% of grades reported. The participation metrics are anticipated to evolve to include the faculty use of comment boxes on EPR and MPR reports. This is an advancement to the current system, which would allow faculty to add notes about students in addition to reporting their grades. This is anticipated to be available during the 2021–2022 academic year.

Canvas and Dropout Detective Student Data: As a student-retention-and-success software solution, Dropout Detective integrates directly with Canvas, SMU's learning management system, to provide a "risk index" of how likely it is that each student will drop out of or fail their course(s). As designed, Dropout Detective makes it easy to quickly identify at-risk students and further understand what might be happening with a specific student and determine an appropriate course of action or intervention. For the QEP, Dropout Detective will serve two purposes:

1. Be an incentive for faculty to use Canvas.
2. Work in conjunction with other early-alert initiatives (EPR, MPR and micro assessment) on campus to create a more holistic understanding of students leaving SMU.

Student Micro-assessment Survey: The micro assessment is intended to capture the self-reported academic performance of student respondents for the current term. The micro assessment supplements the Midterm Progress Reports (MPR). Whereas the MPR is a tool where faculty members report struggling students based on deficient grades, the two-question, Qualtrics-based, micro assessment enables students to receive support based on self-reported struggles with academic performance. The micro assessment is intentionally distributed around midterms and has built-in interventions to connect struggling students to SMU campus support resources.

Student Exit Survey Data: At the conclusion of each semester, the Office of Student Retention reaches out to departing students to better understand their reason for leaving SMU. Until summer 2020, this student exit data was collected via phone interview. Starting with fall 2020, the mechanism for collecting this information transitioned to a Qualtrics survey sent to departing students.

Advising Pillar Assessment Instruments & Measures

As a key touchpoint to all undergraduate students, SMU endeavors to devote more resources to our advising team. As part of SMU in Four, the advising pillar focuses on understanding the current advisor experience and providing more carefully curated advisor training and technological supports to create more consistent advising practices and policies to aid in the success of all students. The following newly proposed and already-in-place measures will serve to help inform and track improved advising practices.

Advisor Experience Survey: Faculty Fellows from the Office of the Provost plan to develop a survey instrument to fill a hole of present institutional knowledge on advisors' perceptions of advising and their experiences as advisors at SMU. The survey will be administered three times over a five-year period via Qualtrics, and the results will inform any changes needed to proposed enhanced practices of the advising pillar.

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) Data: SMU administers the NSSE to all first-year students and seniors every year. The next administration is scheduled for spring 2022 so that we are able to capture the change from first to senior year. In addition to the general NSSE survey, SMU will also be administering the Academic Advising topical module created by NSSE, and that is most closely related to the work of the QEP. This module examines students' experiences with academic advising, including frequency, accessibility and types of information provided. We will request permission to administer this module annually to a random sample of SMU students. (https://nsse.indiana.edu/)

SMU Graduation Survey: The University's graduation survey is a tool used to measure student achievement and provide information on students' post-graduation plans. The graduation survey is a confidential survey that tracks graduating undergraduate and graduate students' future pursuits and activities that include employment and continuing education plans as well as their experiences while at SMU. The survey is administered each fall, spring and summer by the Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness. Specifically, we plan to use responses to current survey questions related to academic advising as well as to develop and add a question specifically seeking information around the advising experience, beginning in spring 2021.

The Graduation Follow-up Survey: As a follow-up to the graduation survey, a survey is administered each fall, spring and summer to undergraduate and graduate alumni six months after they complete their SMU degrees. The survey is intended to examine specific attitudes toward the University's communications, events and engagement efforts. This survey also asks questions similar to those in the graduation survey, including information regarding employment, graduate school and salary. Similar to the graduation survey, responses to current survey questions related to academic advising as well as a new question specific to the advising experience will be used as part of the QEP.

Student Semester Enrollment Data: Captured through PeopleSoft, SMU's enrollment management system, student semester enrollment data will be collected with the goal of understanding what students do and do not register for at least 12 hours during their allotted registration time.

Advisor Meeting and Scheduling Data: Students are expected to meet with their academic advisor before each semester. During this time, they are tasked with designing their schedule for the following semester. Using data from booking.com, SMU's scheduling system, advisor meeting data will be collected to track at what rate students meet with their advisors each semester during open advising windows.

First-year and Gateway Courses Pillar Assessment Instruments & Measures

Recognizing that student engagement is an essential component to student success and retention, the enhanced practices of the first-year and gateway courses pillar focus on increasing awareness and practicing student engagement strategies. The following measures allow SMU to understand from faculty-, student- and data-informed perspectives the occurrence and salience of student engagement at SMU.

Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE): As a complement to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), FSSE measures faculty members' expectations of student engagement in educational practices that are empirically linked with high levels of learning and development. In addition, the survey also collects information about how faculty members spend their time on professorial activities, such as teaching and scholarship, and what kinds of learning experiences their institutions emphasize. (https://nsse.indiana.edu/fsse/)

Course-level Data: Upon selecting the courses for participation in the Course Redesign Institute, myriad data regarding the course will be pulled by a statistician from the Office of Institutional Research in conjunction with members of the Center for Teaching Excellence. Course-level data will include looking historically at the grade distributions over time, number of sections, number of faculty who have taught the course, course evaluations and EPR and MPR data for each course, among other available measures. The data culled will create a picture of the current course to serve as a baseline from which to measure improvement. At the conclusion of the course redesign process, and annually after completion of the redesign, the same metrics will be recorded to understand if improvement is occurring. Continued modifications will be made to the course if data indicates such a need.

Student Performance Data: Given that first-year and gateway courses largely serve as prerequisites, future student performance (on specific assignments as available and grades overall) in major and other sequential courses that build on the content of courses that go through the course redesign process will be collected. Such data will be analyzed to ensure that first-year and gateway courses adequately prepare students for future success.

Department Chair and Faculty Participation: Central to the first-year and gateway courses pillar is the engagement of faculty at the departmental level. Department chairs and advising faculty will be invited to participate in workshops and institutes to help increase awareness of student engagement strategies. The first step leading to the success of these initiatives is faculty attendance and participation. We will closely monitor faculty participation with a goal of increasing participation toward total faculty involvement.

Student Engagement Institute Program Assessment: One of the key initiatives of the first-year and gateway courses pillar is the Student Engagement Institute. The main purpose of the Institute is to enable participating faculty to be able to evaluate their courses and implement student engagement strategies. The program assessment will evaluate the effectiveness of the institute in achieving this goal.

TABLE 16: EARLY ALERT DETAILED ASSESSMENT PLAN

Pillar	Enhanced Practice Strategy	Outcome/Measure	Instrument/Tool	Methodology	Data Collection
Early Alert	Increase participation in current early-alert efforts	Faculty will understand the role and resources of early-alert reporting in supporting students Goal to increase faculty participation to 90% participation in reporting; resulting in at least 90% of early student grades reported each semester.	EPRs and MPRs	Grades requested from all undergraduate faculty during September/October in the fall and February/March in the spring.	Semesterly collection starting fall 2020
	Broaden data used in early-alert efforts	Students will be aware of academic support services	Micro-assessment survey A-LEC and library utilization data	Qualtrics survey administered via email to all students at mid-semester in the fall and spring Use existing student participation data in workshops and tutoring in both settings	Semesterly collection starting Fall 2020 Data is currently tracked in real time, but we will align with EPR and MPR outreach at the end of each semester
	Expand parameters for student outreach	Academic advisors and counselors will use proactive advising during the semester	Dropout Detective/ Canvas Analytics/ Other student services data	Export of student-level data from Canvas and other student service systems	Collected at mid-semester and end of semester starting fall 2020
	Formalize a new early-alert system	Administrators will review institutional data of students who depart the University each academic year	Advisor Experience Survey	Qualtrics survey to be developed in summer 2021	Administered three times over five years

TABLE 17: ADVISING DETAILED ASSESSMENT PLAN

Pillar	Enhanced Practice Strategy	Outcome/Measure	Instrument/Tool	Methodology	Data Collection
Advising	Understanding the advisor experience	Advisor training will be informed by the experience of advisors	Advisor Experience Survey	Qualtrics survey to be developed in summer 2021	Administered three times over five years
	Improved advisor training and technology resources	Students will show improvements in their reported engagement with advisors and their experiences with advisors Goal to increase student responses to the NSSE Advising Module questions indicating increased engagement with advisors	Select questions on NSSE Academic Advising Module: 1. *Thinking about academic advising, how much have people and resources at your institution done the following?* 2. *Thinking about academic advising, about how often did someone at your institution discuss the following with you?*	NSSE is administered every year in the spring to all first-year students and seniors	Baseline – spring 2019 Annually starting spring 2021
	Creating consistent advisor practices	Students will be able to name their primary advisor Students will be less likely to report advising as an area of weakness	Graduation Survey Select questions from SMU's Graduation Survey: 1. *Reflecting upon your time at SMU, what would have improved your experience as a student?* 2. *An advising-specific question to be developed*	Administer via email to all graduating students fall, spring and summer	Baseline – spring 2020 Every fall, spring and summer
			Graduation Follow-up Survey	Administered via email to all graduating students fall, spring and summer six months after their graduation term	Baseline – spring 2020 Every fall, spring and summer
		Students will use HighPoint to manage their degree plans	Advisor meeting for academic progress.	Export from enrollment management system, PeopleSoft and HighPoint	Prior to the start of each fall and spring semester
		Students will use Schedule Builder after completing their advising appointments	Advisor meeting for schedule creation	Export from scheduling system, booking.smu, to confirm if students meet with advisor to create semester schedule	At the conclusion of each semester

TABLE 18: FIRST-YEAR AND GATEWAY COURSES DETAILED ASSESSMENT PLAN

Pillar	Enhanced Practice Strategy	Outcome	Instrument/Tool	Methodology	Data Collection
First Year & Gateway Courses	Course Redesign Initiative	Instructors of first-year and gateway courses will use pedagogical approaches that support student engagement and success	FSSE Data Select questions from the FSSE: 1. *TBD*	FSSE is administered every year in the Spring to an SMU-provided sample of instructional faculty	Baseline – spring 2021 Annually starting spring 2022
		Goal of reduction in DFW rates of re-designed courses	Course-level metrics	With help from the Office of Institutional Research, data queried from PeopleSoft and other sources as needed	Baseline – fall/spring 2016–2020 Annually at the conclusion of each semester, a redesigned course is taught
			Student performance metrics	Queried data from Peoplesoft	Baseline – fall/spring 2016–2020 Annually at the conclusion of each semester, a major or sequential course is taught
	Student Engagement Institute	Participating faculty will be able to evaluate their courses and implement student engagement strategies Goal to increase faculty participation in the Student Engagement Institute year over year	Student Engagement Institute Program Assessment	Evaluation administered at the conclusion of the Student Engagement Institute to all participating faculty	Annually at the conclusion of the program
	Improving process for assigning instructors	Department chairs will be aware of the importance of instructor assignments in first-year and gateway courses	Department chair and faculty participation	Scheduling system, booking.com, for faculty attendance	Annually after the Student Engagement Institute

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Implementation of the Assessment Plan

In coordination with the offices of Institutional Research, Student Academic Engagement and Success and Institutional Planning and Effectiveness, the associate director for learning analytics in the Center for Teaching Excellence will coordinate all QEP assessment efforts and data collection. Assessment results will be reviewed on a semester basis by the strategy team, the faculty steering committee and pillar working groups, and used to modify pillar activities and plans as needed. A semester assessment report summarizing the findings and any recommended modifications to the QEP will be completed each term.

Appendix 1: SMU Aspirational & Peer Universities 2018-present

Aspirational Peer Universities

Aspirational universities are institutions with which SMU seeks to be comparable in characteristics and quality.

Boston College
Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts

Boston University
Boston, Massachusetts

Brandeis University
Waltham, Massachusetts

Carnegie Mellon University
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Emory University
Atlanta, Georgia

Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts

Tufts University
Medford, Massachusetts

Tulane University
New Orleans, Louisiana

University of Notre Dame
Notre Dame, Indiana

University of Rochester
Rochester, New York

University of Southern California
Los Angeles, California

Wake Forest University
Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Cohort Peer Universities

These universities are those defined as operationally comparative.

American University
Washington, D.C.

Syracuse University
Syracuse, New York

Baylor University
Waco, Texas

Texas Christian University
Fort Worth, Texas

Fordham University
Bronx, New York

University of Denver
Denver, Colorado

George Washington University
Washington, D.C.

University of Miami
Coral Gables, Florida

Lehigh University
Lehigh, Pennsylvania

University of Tulsa
Tulsa, Oklahoma

Pepperdine University
Malibu, California

Villanova University
Villanova, Pennsylvania

G14

The G14 is a consortium of fourteen universities formed by the Provosts of the universities, and supported by the Institutional Research offices through data exchanges and information sharing.

Boston College
Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts

Southern Methodist University
Dallas, Texas

Boston University
Boston, Massachusetts

Syracuse University
Syracuse, New York

Brandeis University
Waltham, Massachusetts

Tufts University
Medford, Massachusetts

George Washington University
Washington, D.C.

Tulane University
New Orleans, Louisiana

Lehigh University
Lehigh, Pennsylvania

University of Miami
Coral Gables, Florida

New York University
New York, New York

University of Notre Dame
South Bend, Indiana

Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts

Wake Forest University
Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Appendix 2: NSSE findings spring 2019

Program Name	Program Description	Sponsoring Department
Rotunda Scholars	The Rotunda Academic Scholars Program (Rotunda) is a premier scholars program that seeks to promote leadership, scholarship and service. Through individualized academic counseling, intentional programming that caters to the developmental needs of each scholar as they progress in school, and unique and targeted opportunities to nurture and develop a leadership skill-set, Rotunda strengthens connectedness to the institution thereby increasing retention and cultivates a population of adept "world changers" as they begin their post-undergraduate life.	Provost & Multicultural Student Affairs (OMSA)
CONNECT Mentor Program	The CONNECT Mentoring Program for First Years is dedicated to helping first-year students become effective, successful and engaged members of Southern Methodist University. Mentors serve as a resource for students of color to assist first-year students in becoming successful, independent, high achieving leaders in the SMU community. Mentors also assist mentees to develop personally and academically by introducing students to the many resources and variety of learning opportunities offered in the University community.	Multicultural Student Affairs
Caring Community Connections	The Caring Community Connections system is designed for the SMU community (students, staff and faculty) to report concerns they have about current students.	Dean of Student Life
Decision Making Workshop	The Decision Making Workshop was designed to be an interactive workshop facilitated by members of the SMU community outside of staff in the Office of Student Conduct & Community Standards. During the two-and-a-half-hour workshop, students participate in nine different activities developed to encourage the students to identify and reflect on their personal values and to determine how they make decisions based on their values.	Student Conduct and Community Standards
Graduate Assistant for Multicultural Student Recruitment and Retention	OMSA and the Office of Undergraduate Admission worked to create a new and innovative graduate assistantship that will be highly involved in the recruitment and retention efforts of students of color at SMU. The position is the first of its kind at SMU and will allow this graduate assistant to engage with students of color from the time they are visiting SMU to their participation in OMSA retention programs like CONNECT. Having a graduate assistant focused specifically on this area allows both offices to truly understand the needs and areas of opportunity that exist for recruiting and retaining underrepresented students at SMU.	Multicultural Student Affairs & Undergraduate Admisisons
Emergency Fund	Every year there are students in need who, through no fault of their own, find themselves in a financial crisis. In most of these cases, the availability of immediate cash is the only real resolution. There are several loan options at SMU, but the Student Emergency Fund is the only fund that provides a quick and immediate grant on a one-time emergency basis. In the past, grants from the Student Emergency Fund have funded a variety of needs.	Vice President for Student Affairs
Financial Literacy	Teach students to manage/make informed decisions with all financial resources.	Bursar - DES/B&F
Payment Plans	Allows students/parents to pay annual tuition costs in 10/12 month installments or 6/5 month installments depending on their program.	Bursar - DES/B&F
FA Professional Judgment – Changes to student budget/ cost of attendance	Advisors regularly perform Professional Judgement based on a family's financial situation. This is used, for example, when a family has experienced extraordinary educational costs such as daycare, medical expenses, course supplies or computer, and expenses incurred from transportation. These adjustments permit the student to acquire other financial aid resources.	Financial Aid Office - DES
Hardship Fund account(s)	Awards to continuing undergraduates that are experiencing financial hardships that preclude their ability to persist. This specifically enables students to focus on their education and eventually graduate.	Financial Aid Office - DES
Prelude	Conditional admission program. Required academic support for select incoming students.	Admission - DES
Resource for Special Populations: i.e. cultural, transfer, and international	Train staff to intervene when a student/parent/counselor communicates that a student might not be returning.	Admission - DES
Ad hoc reports	Produce reports as requested to support identifying and following up on at-risk and non-returning students.	University Registrar - DES
First-Generation Initiative (FGI)	FGI is a program that was established in September of 2019 and is being carried out by the Academic Center for Excellence (ACE). The goal of FGI is to support first-generation students as they pursue higher education.	Academic Center for Excellence (ACE)

Appendix 3

	Top 50 Enrolling FY Classes with Total DFW > 10%											
Cohort	Fall 2016 (N=1810)		Fall 2017 (N=1702)		Fall 2018 (N=1780)		Fall 2019 (N=1835)		Total (N=7127)			Additional Information (Fall 2019)	
Course	# of Enrollments	# DFWs	# of Enrollments	# DFWs	# of Enrollments	# DFWs	# of Enrollments	# DFWs	# of Enrollments	# DFWs	% DFWs	# of Sections	Avg. Enrollments Per Section
CHEM 1303	237	55	235	66	239	67	215	52	926	240	26%	5	43
ME 1302	72	9	70	15	79	23	66	11	287	58	20%	2	33
MATH 1304	120	20	85	16	64	14	77	18	346	68	20%	4	19
MATH 1337	268	33	283	52	325	58	282	60	1158	203	18%	9	31
PSYC 1300	179	33	147	37	162	27	227	28	715	125	17%	3	76
CHEM 1113	213	36	234	41	233	37	213	32	893	146	16%	10	21
ECO 1311	737	140	746	96	759	115	743	105	2985	456	15%	9	83
GEOL 1301	80	14	84	9	68	10	74	9	306	42	14%	10	7
PHYS 1303	83	13	54	5	107	19	87	7	331	44	13%	2	44
SOCI 1300	51	9	73	20	108	7	108	8	340	44	13%	5	22
PHIL 1305	68	10	73	5	60	7	29	6	230	28	12%	6	5
PLSC 1320	50	7	42	7	50	8	53	1	195	23	12%	4	13

Appendix 4: SMU in Four Implementation Staffing

Office of the Provost

Need department name

Elizabeth Loboa, *Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs*

Sheri Kunovich, *Associate Provost for Student Academic Engagement & Success*

Lydia Allen, *Writing Center Director*

Caitlin Anderson, *Assistant Director*

Scott Bartlett, *Assistant Director*

Josh Beaty, *Assistant Director*

Sue Bierman, *Executive Director of the Altshuler Learning Enhancement Center*

Kate Bell-Miller, *Transfer Student Specialist*

David Doyle, *Assistant Dean University Honors Program*

Susan Harris, *Senior Academic Advisor*

Janet Hopkins, *Academic Advisor*

Marta Krogh, *Director of the Hilltop Scholars Program*

Beth McConville, *Academic Advisor*

Pamela McNulty, *Director of Pre-Health Advising*

Nikole Melgarego, *Academic Success Counselor*

Chris Meyers, *Senior Academic Probation Counselor*

Brandon Miller, *Associate Director University Honors Program*

Sheumona Miller, *Senior Academic Advisor*

Dee O'Banner, *Academic Advisor*

Jay Orenduff, *Director of Student Success and Retention*

Dania Ortiz, *Academic Advisor*

Alyssa Reiman, *Academic Advisor*

Jeanene Renfro, *Senior Academic Advisor*

Ellen Richmond, *Director of the University Advising Center*

Matthew Robinson, *Director of Student Persistence and Achievement*

Becca Umobong, *Director of Academic Skill Development*

Prisna Virasin, *Academic Advisor*

Ben Walter, *Academic Counselor*

Larry Winnie, *Manager of Second Century Initiatives*

Kerry Wright, *Academic Counselor*

Need department name

Patricia Alvey, *Associate Provost for Institutional Planning and Effectiveness*

Ed Collins, *Executive Director of Assessment*

Yan Cooksey, *Associate Director of Assessment*

Molly Ellis, *Associate Director of Learning Analytics and Student Success*

Michael Harris, *Director of the Center for Teaching Excellence*

Addy Tolliver, *Senior Instructional Designer*

Need department name

Michael Tumeo, *Director of Institutional Research*

Matt DeMonbrun, *Associate Director*

Stephen Forrest, *Senior Data Analyst*

Caroline Kirschner, *Data Analyst*

Salma Mirza, *Senior Data Visualization Specialist*

Peter Moore, *Associate Provost for Curricular Innovation and Policy*

Dayna Oscherwitz, *Assistant Provost for General Education*

Need department name

Wes Wagner, *Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management*

Nancy Skochdopole, *Director of Transfer Services*

Need department name

Daniel Eady, *Chief of Staff*

SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY

Office of Information Technology

Michael Hites, *Chief Information Officer*

Curt Herridge, *Executive Director of Application Support*

Cassidy Porter, *Course Management & eLearning Systems Manager* Faye Walter, *Dedman College Academic Service Director*

Jason Warner, *Executive Director of Academic Technology*

SMU Libraries

Holly Jeffcoat, *Dean*

Johnathan McMichael, *Undergraduate Success Librarian*

Student Affairs

K.C. Mmeje, *Vice President for Student Affairs*

Melinda Carlson, *Assistant Vice President & Dean of Residence Life and Student Housing*

Dustin Grabsch, Director of Academic Initiatives

Elsie Johnson, *Director of Student Support*

Mindy Sutton Noss, *Associate Vice President & Dean of Students*

Development and External Affairs

Brad Cheves, *Vice President for Development and External Affairs*

Regina Moldovan, Assistant Vice President

Appendix 5. Internal Documents List

2015
1. "Launching SMU's Second Century, Shaping Leaders for a Changing World." 2016–2025 Strategic Plan

2016
2. "Implementing the Strategic Plan 2016–2025"

2017
3. "A Conversation about Retention at SMU"
4. "Enhancing the Academic Quality and Stature of SMU – Analyses and Opportunities."

2018
5. "Academic Engagement and Student Success: Report of the Provost's Task Force on Student Success and Retention" May 2018

World Changers Shaped Here

SMU®

For more than 100 years, SMU has shaped minds, explored the frontiers of knowledge and fostered an entrepreneurial spirit in its eight degree-granting schools. Taking advantage of unbridled experiences on the University's beautiful campuses and SMU's relationship with Dallas – the dynamic center of one of the nation's fastest-growing regions – alumni, faculty and more than 12,000 graduate and undergraduate students become ethical leaders in their professions and communities who change the world.