

Undergraduate Student Success through a Strengths-Based Lens

Higher education is in transition as technology, finances, changing demographics of our country, and enrollment challenges are at the forefront of our competitive landscape. As such, to remain competitive, we must move beyond merely recruiting and retaining student scholars through traditional measures. Generation Z wants more—they are questioning the value of higher education.

UT can set itself apart by creating the conditions in which each undergraduate student scholar feels empowered to thrive. We propose developing a positive alternative to most student success programs that often operate from a deficit-oriented perspective with little focus on college student scholars' unique strengths that they bring to post-secondary education. Empirical evidence supporting positive psychology in higher education continues to emerge as researchers recognize the relation between a person's wellbeing and personal and professional goals and dreams. Consequently, we believe strengthening our curricular and co-curricular experiences through a strength-based perspective will be particularly useful to prepare UT's undergraduate student scholars to change the world, not just change with it.

Working closely with the campus community, we propose three preliminary strategic pathways to transform the UT undergraduate experience through a personalized strength- and talent-based initiative.

Preliminary Strategic Pathways

1. Person. Maximize each student's innate talents and build the relationships necessary to:
 - a. Meet their academic, career, and leadership potential
 - b. Increase self-awareness and learn ways to enact new knowledge of self
 - c. Understand, appreciate, and draw upon the talents of others
2. Infrastructure. Evaluate and reimagine academic and social support infrastructure to facilitate student success, high-resiliency, and self-efficacy.
3. Community. Reimagine the curricular and co-curricular efforts that elevate transformational, strengths-based, active-learning deliberately woven throughout the UT undergraduate experience across time and diverse experiences.

Preliminary Metrics for Success

1. Students' strengths awareness will positively impact fall and spring GPA and academic persistence through students' engagement, heightened awareness, and academic self-efficacy.
2. Increased knowledge of self and appreciation of others' perspectives will increase students' ability to identify and solve problems and communicate with others more effectively.
3. Increased engagement in Vol Success teams, student organizations, leadership experiences, and co-curricular activities (such as co-op experiences, internships, undergraduate research)
4. Student scholars will respond to academic belongingness survey questions at the following rates:
 - a. I feel a part of the UT community—70% agree or strongly agree
 - b. I believe that I will excel academically at UT—70% agree or strongly agree
 - c. I would rate my current overall stress level since enrolling at UT this fall is—70% average or less than average stress.

Strengths-Mindset Consultants

Strengths-Based Consultants' Charge

To advise the Office of the Provost on strategically moving the campus towards a strengths-based approach by summer 2021 by:

- Advise on the comprehensive strategic pathways to support student curricular, co-curricular, and academic engagement
- Develop metrics and timelines to assess our progress
- Recommend a campus-level advisory board to support these initiatives

Consultants

- Amber Williams, Vice Provost for Student Success & Chair
- Mary Jane Moran, Professor and Department Head for Child and Family Studies
- Betty Sue Sparks, Assistant Professor of Practice and Co-Director of Center for Educational Leadership
- Michael (Lane) Morris, Associate Dean, Haslam College of Business
- Missy Parker, Director of Advising Services, College of Arts & Sciences
- Diane Kelly, Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs
- Shea Kidd Houze, Associate Vice Chancellor & Dean of Students
- Joe Scoggins, Associate Provost and Senior Associate Athletics Director for UT Athletics
- Janelle Coleman, Executive Director for Diversity and Engagement