UGS EVENTS ADAPT AND INCREASE ENGAGEMENT

Overwhelmingly, the university’s focus during the spring 2020 semester was on the many difficulties presented by COVID-19 and the health and safety of students, staff, and faculty. It can be easy to take for granted how successfully our programs met the challenges of being forced, overnight, to reimagine the academic services the School of Undergraduate Studies (UGS) provides to students across campus.

One example of such a success was the Office of Undergraduate Research’s (OUR’s) annual student poster session. In past semesters, this event attracted an average of 500 attendees. Holding the event in person during a pandemic was not an option, so OUR developed a way to host the 2020 Longhorn Research Poster Session online.

Students presented more than 115 research posters on interdisciplinary topics ranging from history to molecular biology. Presenters uploaded images of their posters, along with supporting materials like audio recordings and videos.

In just two days, the research posters were viewed almost 17,000 times by a global audience of more than 5,600 visitors who left 391 comments. The new format also allowed students’ families and friends to leave notes of encouragement.

Thanks to a gift from Kimberly and Scott Martin, several students received financial awards for their contributions to the poster session. Award finalists spoke with judges via Zoom, fielding questions and elaborating on their work just as they would have in person. Students were judged on their explanations of research problems and methodology, their results and conclusions, and their poster design. Top presenters were given $2,000, $1,000, and $500 awards, and UT undergraduates voted online for a $1,000 “audience choice” award.

“Pivoting to a virtual event was a win-win situation. Students still had the valuable experience of presenting their work in an academic context, but with the added benefit of a global audience.”

—ROBERT REICHEL, OUR DIRECTOR
MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN

One of the most memorable scenes in the movie Apollo 13 is when flight director Gene Kranz, played by Ed Harris, overhears two NASA directors discussing the dire situation of the crippled spacecraft.

“I know what the problems are, Henry,” one says. “This could be the worst disaster NASA has ever experienced.” “With all due respect sir,” Kranz intervenes, “I believe this is going to be our finest hour.” As co-chair of the Online Education Task Force this past summer, charged with helping faculty on campus get prepared to take their classes online from start to finish this fall, including my own large Organic Chemistry class, that scene’s dialogue summed up my thoughts going into this semester.

It is now safe to say that although it has been a bumpy ride in many ways, the fall semester of 2020 was a remarkable success overall. Up against unprecedented personal challenges and extraordinary disruptions of our normal modes of operating, The University of Texas at Austin’s faculty, staff, and students made a successful pivot to mostly remote education. And School of Undergraduate Studies programs made the successful pivot as well. All of our programs are thriving, remarkably so. We have created new ways of doing things, and they are working. Our Signature Courses and First-Year Interest Groups (FIGs) became the face of the university for all first-year students. Mid-semester student surveys reported an all-time high in engagement and appreciation for these programs. Against all odds, the Bridging Disciplines advisors found a record number of student internship opportunities, many of these were exciting and virtual. Our annual student research poster session went online and was more popular and well-attended than ever. The Sanger Learning Center and Vick Center for Strategic Advising continued to serve students and hold appointments remotely without missing a beat. They were there to help our students when they needed it most, both inside and outside the virtual classroom.

This success was hard-won. UGS staff and the faculty teaching in our programs worked countless hours getting ready, solving technical problems, reimagining everything. In the end, their tireless effort, creativity, and ingenuity made the difference. And all the while, many of these same people were dealing with their own extraordinary personal challenges. 2020 will be remembered as a lot of things, many of them singularly bad, but I personally see this past year as the university’s, and especially UGS’s, finest hour.

Brent Iverson
Dean
FOCUS ON THE NUMBERS

UGS STUDENTS

FALL 2019 ENROLLMENT BY RACE AND ETHNICITY
UGS continues to be one of the most diverse schools or colleges at UT.

- UT, non-UGS
- UGS

White: 41%
Hispanic: 39%
Black: 24%
Asian: 12%
Other: 9%

627 INCOMING UGS STUDENTS, MAKING IT THE 6TH LARGEST INCOMING CLASS AMONG UT COLLEGES OR SCHOOLS

1,041 STUDENTS ENROLLED IN UGS STARTING IN FALL 2019, MAKING IT THE 8TH LARGEST SCHOOL AMONG UT COLLEGES OR SCHOOLS

TOP 6 UT SCHOOLS/COLLEGES UGS STUDENTS TRANSFERRED INTO

- Natural Sciences
- Business
- Education
- Liberal Arts
- Communication
- Engineering

638 UGS STUDENTS CHOSE A MAJOR AND TRANSFERRED TO ANOTHER SCHOOL OR COLLEGE AT UT

$5,000 AWARDED IN SUMMER EXPLORATION GRANTS to UGS students seeking funds to promote academic and career exploration

bit.ly/ExplorationGrants

34% OF UGS STUDENTS WERE THE FIRST GENERATION TO ATTEND COLLEGE COMPARED TO UT’S 23%

41% OF UGS STUDENTS CAME FROM FAMILIES WITH HOUSEHOLD INCOMES < $80K COMPARED TO UT’S 34%

6 UGS STUDENTS WERE RECOGNIZED FOR THEIR OUTSTANDING ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AT UT’S HONORS DAY
UNDECLARED IS A MAJOR DECISION

For new students, deciding where to apply to college is just one important decision they must make about the future. Choosing a major once they get there is another. With all the options available, that decision can seem a little overwhelming.

That’s one of the reasons the university created the School of Undergraduate Studies—to make sure students know it’s typical to be undecided about a major, and to provide the resources and support to help them find a path that is uniquely theirs. That makes UGS the best place for many UT students to begin their college experiences.

The school has a number of programs specifically targeted at helping UGS students find majors that fit their passions and talents, including:

- **First-Year Interest Groups**—small cohorts meet weekly to support students as they transition to college
- **Vick Center for Strategic Advising**—advisors work with students to explore options and also navigate the transfer process to their chosen majors
- **Discovery Scholars**—coaches work with students to choose a major, discuss ways to improve study habits, and point out key campus resources
- **Transfer-Year Experience**—not just for UGS students, the TYE program helps students transfer smoothly and connect with their UT peers
- **Summer Exploration Grants**—scholarships that allow students to try out a career for the summer, take an unpaid internship, or volunteer for a worthy cause
- **Career Conversations**—round-table events that bring successful professionals to campus and allow students a chance to ask in-depth questions about potential career paths
- **Interdisciplinary Studies Week**—UGS students are paired with upperclassmen in the majors in which they’re interested so they can shadow a peer and gain insight

83% OF TEXAS PUBLIC UNIVERSITY GRADUATES END UP CHANGING THEIR MAJOR AT LEAST ONCE; 43% CHANGE THEIR MAJOR TWO OR MORE TIMES

Find out why former UGS student Mariel Calara’s sister is applying to UGS

[bit.ly/UGS-we-are-family]
As a first-generation former UGS student, Rani Bhakta knows a thing or two about the importance of dedication and hard work when achieving one’s goals. These lessons were instilled at an early age, thanks to supportive parents who worked tirelessly to give Rani opportunities they did not have. “Being a first-generation college student means a lot to me because my parents have worked really, really hard for me to get here,” Rani explained. “They weren’t able to go to college, but they still made something from nothing for us.”

Salutatorian of her high school class, Rani arrived at The University of Texas at Austin interested in biology with plans to pursue medicine. After shadowing several doctors, she began to question her chosen career path and decided to make a last-minute switch into the School of Undergraduate Studies to take advantage of the school’s programs and resources. As a Discovery Scholar, Rani quickly found her community on the Forty Acres. “The Discovery Scholars Program made you feel like you had someone there for you at this huge university,” she said.

After utilizing Wayfinder to explore possible major and career paths, Rani recognized her passion for business, the same path her parents followed as small business owners since their immigration to the United States. She recently transferred into the McCombs School of Business to study management. “Business is in my blood. My mom likes to remind me that she knew it from day one,” she laughed.

As she reflects on her time in the School of Undergraduate Studies, Rani is grateful for the freedom she has had to explore her career options, and for the advice and support she has received along the way. “My advisors helped me stay on track and guided me through the internal transfer process. UGS really created a space of freedom and inclusion for me—I always felt like I belonged at UT.”

Learn more about Wayfinder at wayfinder.utexas.edu
VICK CENTER FOR STRATEGIC ADVISING

Vick academic advisors serve students across campus who are exploring majors and careers, as well as work with UGS students to tailor classes and experiences to prepare them to be academically successful.

6,088 APPOINTMENTS OR DROP-INS AND 2,591 UNIQUE STUDENTS SERVED

97% OF STUDENTS SURVEYED AGREED VICK COUNSELING WOULD BE HELPFUL TO THEIR PEERS

“My Vick advisor helped me identify people who were doing things I was excited about and then backtrack to figure out how they got there.”
—Ishi Tripathi, Chemical Engineering/Engineering Honors and Mathematics

DISCOVERY SCHOLARS PROGRAM (DSP)

DSP coaches support students as they transition from high school to the university and learn to navigate their unique paths to graduation.

1,050 APPOINTMENTS WITH STUDENTS

56% OF DSP STUDENTS ARE THE FIRST IN THEIR FAMILIES TO ATTEND COLLEGE

“In DSP, I discovered that you don’t have to have an exact plan. Everyone is still figuring it all out.”
—Mohamed Mohamed, Mathematics

See what DSP students have to say about their mentors at bit.ly/thankyou-DSP
When management information systems major Shawn Torres registered for a Transfer-Year Interest Group (TfIG) as a junior, he was merely looking for a way to get additional support in tackling a challenging class. “I knew my classmates would be taking Economic Statistics with me, and I figured a TfIG would be a good way to get through a difficult course and leverage the experience as a new student,” he explained. It didn’t take long, however, for Shawn’s TfIG to become more than just an academic resource.

Originally from Miami, Florida, Shawn arrived at The University of Texas at Austin without knowing anyone. Connecting with other transfer students who were also new to the university, and a caring mentor and facilitator, was transformative. His weekly TfIG meetings quickly became the hub of his new community on the Forty Acres. “I didn’t anticipate that the TfIG would be where I made friends, or how important my awesome mentor and facilitator would become to me,” he reflected.

One year later, Shawn is now in the TfIG mentor role himself, inspired by the support he received from the Transfer-Year Experience (TYE) office. “When you’re asking for help from someone at TYE, you can see that it’s so much more than just a job; they have a genuine interest in making sure that you’re doing well,” he said. “Being a TfIG mentor has been really fun! I’ve gotten to meet people, I love getting to help new transfer students, and it’s just been an all-around really good experience.”

Shawn says he would recommend the TfIG program to all incoming transfer students. “Participating in a TfIG gives you better access to information and tools to be successful in college. A TfIG is a really multifaceted approach to helping transfer students figure out how to navigate UT.”
UGS SUPPORTS ALL UT STUDENTS

In addition to being the home for undeclared students, UGS’s programs futureproof all UT students by ensuring that they have a world-class education and the skills they need to be successful and adaptable in a work world that will constantly be changing in exciting but unexpected ways.

DELIVERING A WORLD-CLASS EDUCATION

UGS shapes undergraduate education through the following programs, ensuring students develop a well-rounded academic foundation:

- **Core Curriculum**—required for every UT student, the core is the foundation of a strong, broad, academic experience
- **Signature Courses**—facilitate the successful transition to college and beyond by connecting every first-year student with a distinguished faculty member
- **Skills and Experience Flags**—give students opportunities to practice effective communication, engage in ethical decision-making and independent problem-solving, and to understand the diverse, data-dense world around us

BUILDING SKILLS FOR THE WORK WORLD

In addition to providing a rigorous academic background, UGS has several programs that develop interdisciplinary and soft skills vital for success in an ever-changing career landscape:

- **Office of Undergraduate Research**—connects students with faculty from all disciplines who are conducting ground-breaking research
- **Bridging Disciplines Programs**—students earn certificates in secondary areas of specialization that complement a major
- **The LaunchPad**—helps students navigate the UT entrepreneurship ecosystem and connect with business mentors
- **Archer Fellowship Program**—gives students a unique opportunity to live, learn, and intern in Washington, D.C.
- **Home to Texas**—a summer internship program where students work in their hometowns, contribute, and learn about the core values of their communities

PROVIDING STUDENT SUPPORT

To help students succeed in their classes and examine what it means to be a healthy Longhorn, UGS provides support via these programs:

- **Sanger Learning Center**—helps students reach their academic potential through tutoring, workshops, and class reviews
- **SHIFT**—aims to engage students in changing the culture on campus from one of substance misuse to one of well-being

Find out more about the core curriculum and Flags at UT bit.ly/core-flags
SHIFT AND UGS
PARTNER TO REDEFINE CAMPUS CULTURE

It’s fairly common for conversations about college life to segue into stories of substance use or other unsafe behaviors. In fact, substance use is so interwoven within campus culture that it is often seen as an inevitable rite of passage.

Associate Dean Lori Holleran Steiker has experience bringing interdisciplinary groups together around her area of expertise, as she did with the 2018 Youth Addiction Pop Up Institute. She has now spearheaded a collaboration between academic settings—where students and faculty are—and student affairs—home of prevention experts and programs. Under Steiker’s leadership, in partnership with director Kate Lower and the First-Year Experience team, SHIFT was launched in fall 2019 with a donation from the Hildebrand Foundation. The program has developed several pilot initiatives that engage faculty, staff, students, and the community to challenge assumptions about campus culture and start a conversation about what it means to be a healthy and thriving Longhorn.

“We want to be realistic and meet students where they are. We’re going into the classrooms. We’re equipping faculty with resources they can offer their students.”

—MILES GREENFIELD, SHIFT STUDENT ADVISORY BOARD MEMBER

SHIFT naturally got its start in the classroom. To help Signature Course faculty find ways to holistically support students, SHIFT provided targeted, training on facilitating student dialogues about risk and substance misuse, protective factor enhancement, and wellness, seen as an essential first steps in shifting cultural norms.

After the training, the SHIFT leadership team turned its attention to the remaining pilot initiatives. Staff have been hard at work training Longhorn student mentors, increasing campus opportunities to socialize without the presence of drugs and alcohol, and expanding community partnerships in the Austin area.

To generate more innovative ideas, competitive SHIFTovation grants were awarded to faculty, staff, and students to fund their own initiatives tackling the substance use culture at UT. As the entire country grapples with the unprecedented changes brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a growing focus on the importance of community and individual wellness. SHIFT’s mission is more relevant than ever in ensuring a healthier and more mindful UT when the Longhorn community returns to campus.
THE SANGER LEARNING CENTER

The Sanger Learning Center (SLC) provides academic support for all UT Austin students. In addition to tutoring, the center provides academic coaching, study groups, and public speaking consultations.

11,522
STUDENTS VISITED SANGER TO USE ONE OR MORE OF THEIR SERVICES

53%
OF ALL UT FRESHMEN USED AT LEAST ONE OF SANGER’S SERVICES

SLC CELEBRATED ITS 70TH ANNIVERSARY

“I came from a small high school where we didn’t have as many resources, so being able to schedule tutoring or drop-in advising was really helpful.”

—Andres Nevarez Vega, Economics and International Relations, double major/Honors and Mathematics

5,600
VISITORS VIEWED THE LONGHORN RESEARCH POSTER SESSION ONLINE

99%
OF GRADUATION SURVEY RESPONDENTS AGREED THEIR RESEARCH EXPERIENCE WAS VALUABLE

“When I got the opportunity to research topics I was passionate about, I learned to love the research process as a whole.”

—Alexis McDonald, Psychology

OFFICE OF UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH

The Office of Undergraduate Research connects students with faculty from all disciplines who are conducting ground-breaking research.

@UTSangerCenter utsangercenter

@OURUTAustin our_utaustin
Some of Katy Roberson’s most vivid childhood memories came from an unlikely source: the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History. As a child, Katy regularly visited the internationally acclaimed museum with her family and spent hours in the children’s section, experimenting with everything from dinosaur bones to water splash pads. “Some of my favorite memories of being a kid were at that museum,” she reflected.

Katy’s love for museums didn’t stop there. As a sophomore history major, Katy took advantage of The University of Texas at Austin’s proximity to the Bullock State History Museum and began volunteering on Sunday afternoons. “It helped me decide on my career path in the museum industry,” she explained. “So when a friend of mine was doing the Museum Studies [Bridging Disciplines Program (BDP)] certificate, it sounded like something I really wanted to explore.”

Katy’s Connecting Experience internship turned out to be drastically different from those in previous years. As the coronavirus spread throughout the United States, museums were forced to rethink their roles and relevance within the community and adjust accordingly. “The Irving Archives and Museum is a smaller museum that just had their soft opening right before the pandemic began,” she explained. “My internship with them was a great opportunity for me to be a part of this ground-breaking approach for how museums can exist in these times. For example, we used social media to connect with visitors virtually, and even started a video series showcasing our children’s activities.”

Looking back, Katy is grateful for her time in the BDPs. “My BDP has been such a good opportunity for me to make friends with people who are also pursuing a career in museum work; it’s amazing to connect with others who share this niche passion,” she said. “I love that BDP offers so many different certificates and allows you to choose your own path. I’d absolutely recommend it to anyone.”
SIGNATURE COURSES

Signature Courses connect students with distinguished faculty members. By way of this rigorous intellectual experience, students develop skills in research, writing, speaking, and discussion through an approach that is interdisciplinary, collaborative, experiential, and contemporary.

9,500 STUDENTS WERE ENROLLED IN A SIGNATURE COURSE

89% OF STUDENTS SURVEYED AGREED THEY COULD EXAMINE IDEAS FROM A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE THANKS TO THEIR SIGNATURE COURSE

205 SIGNATURE COURSES OFFERED

Find out more about students developing critical thinking skills as part of their Signature Course at bit.ly/signature-course-skills

“My UGS Signature Course is one of the only places where I’ve seen people from every possible major in the same room together—bringing students from every part of the university together is really helpful.”

—Jack Speer, Radio, Television, and Film

THE LAUNCHPAD

Part of the global Blackstone LaunchPad & Techstars network of 30 campuses, the LaunchPad at UT Austin helps students explore entrepreneurship at their own pace and cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset that better prepares them for the modern workforce.

$665,800 REVENUE GENERATED FROM UT AUSTIN LAUNCHPAD COMPANIES

1,360 STUDENTS HAVE VISITED THE LAUNCHPAD FOR MENTORING, PITCH PRACTICE ASSISTANCE, GUEST SPEAKERS, OR WORKSHOPS

“Even if you’re only mildly interested in entrepreneurship or starting something of your own, the LaunchPad is a great resource to turn an idea into something very tangible.”

—Aditi Merchant, Biomedical Engineering
Last fall, former UGS student Fernando Fuentes received an email letting him know his hometown of Del Rio was participating in the Home to Texas internship program. Jump ahead six months and the world looked a lot different in the spring of 2020, but his plans were still intact. Fuentes still found a way to spend his summer gaining professional experience in finance, the major into which he would eventually transfer. If the summer had gone as planned, Fuentes would have worked at Texas Community Bank in Del Rio in their customer outreach program, but that all changed with the pandemic. Instead, he ended up working in a much more hands-on role at the bank as a financial services representative.

“This situation has only made me appreciate banking more,” Fuentes said. “During a pandemic, banking is an absolutely essential service.” At the bank, he was serving members of his community in a time when they needed it most. His experience showed him how finance directly affects people’s lives and ultimately strengthened his decision to choose finance as his major.

Fuentes also credits his UGS Signature Course for his decision to major in finance. “What initially sparked my interest in finance was how money was involved in almost every crisis that we covered in my Signature Course, Crises and Regulations, with Professor Stathis Tompaidis. Whether it was a political or a public crisis, money was always a facet of the crisis,” he said.

Home to Texas is a summer internship program developed through a collaboration between the IC² Institute and the School of Undergraduate Studies that provides undergraduates at The University of Texas at Austin with a chance to work in their hometowns and learn about the core values of their communities. In addition to the paid internships, students engage in interviews and discussions with community, business, and government leaders.
CONGRATULATIONS
AWARDS, RECOGNITION, AND MILESTONES

UGS STAFF AND FACULTY AWARDS

CIVITATIS AWARD
FOR OUTSTANDING FACULTY
CITIZENSHIP
Lori Holleran Steiker, associate dean and director of instruction, engagement, and wellness

CALE MCDOWELL AWARD
FOR INNOVATION IN UNDERGRADUATE STUDIES
Jennifer Fritz, assistant professor of biology; Mary Rose, associate professor of sociology; Jeff Mayo, assistant director of the First-Year Experience Office

HOLLERAN STEIKER AWARD
FOR CREATIVE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT
Michelle Habeck, professor of theater and dance

BDP FACULTY MENTOR AWARD
Mary Poteet, lecturer and Provost’s teaching fellow, Department of Geological Sciences

2019–2020 ACADEMIC COUNSELORS ASSOCIATION ADVISING EXCELLENCE AWARD
Shannon Rose, senior academic advisor, Bridging Disciplines Programs

UT/UGS STAFF SERVICE AWARDS
Patty Moran Micks, assistant dean, First-Year Experience, 20 years of service; Jennifer Morgan, program manager, 20 years of service

HOMERAN STEIKER AWARD
FOR OUTSTANDING FACULTY
CITIZENSHIP
Lori Holleran Steiker, associate dean and director of instruction, engagement, and wellness

UGS SUPPORTS STUDENTS FROM ALL MAJORS WITH THESE ANNUAL AWARDS

SUMMER EXPLORATION GRANTS
Christopher Linares, Sydney Gray

HONORS DAY OUTSTANDING ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT
Arbaaz Manjiyani, Michael August Caldwell, Alex Kozh, Allison Claire Pappas, Payton Reynolds Parker, Kaden James Wade

UGS STUDENT SCHOLARSHIPS
Keely McBrayer, Courtney and Doug Swanson Endowed Scholarship in Undergraduate Studies; Jilian Ellis, W. Sue Ragle Career Exploration Scholarship; Lucy Wang, Macalik Endowed Scholarship in Undergraduate Studies

TEXAS STUDENT RESEARCH SHOWDOWN
Audience Award Robbie Hutton, Amanda Macfarlane, Heny Patel, Mamadou Balde, Andrea Gonzalez, and Iann Karamali

Science, Technology, and Engineering Winners First Place Maxx Wilson and Seong Hyo Ahn; Second Place, Philip Tan

WRITING FLAG AWARDS
Critical/Persuasive Category Pia Sen; Jerry Yang; Mae McConley

Research: Humanities Category Cole Chism; Bailey McDonald; Dea Sala

Research: Lab Category Darius Zincubedini and Nikhil Arora; Matthew Yu and Arnad Ahab; Weatherly Sawyer

Creative/Reflective Category Kati Chen; Kathryn McCullough

LONGHORN RESEARCH POSTER SESSION
Audience Award Winner Zaria El-Fil
First Place Ezzeddine Elmir
Second Place Liam Verses
Third Place Simren Lakhotia

Visual Design Award Oliver S. Zhao, Nikhil Kolluri, Annie Anand, Nicholas Chu, Ravali Bhavaraju, Aditya Ohja, Sandhya Tiku, Dat Nguyen, Ryan Chen, Adrian Morales, Deepthi Valliappan, Juhui Patel, Kevin Nguyen

SIGNATURE COURSE INFORMATION LITERACY AWARD
First Place Thomas Jennings
Second Place Brandon Curl
Third Place Joseph Punke, Hriman Shah, and Kevin Buck

BDP OUTSTANDING ALUMNI AWARD
Taylor McCaslin, Product Manager, GitLab

BOB AND ANN WEISS UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT PAPER AWARD
Jordan Rickaway and Kylie Northam, UGS Public Speaking Center consultants

HOME TO TEXAS SCHOLARSHIPS
Jacob Garza, Montrell Johnson, Roberto Fraga, Jaqueline Lugo, Mussarrat Rehman

BOB AND ANN WEISS UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT PAPER AWARD
Jordan Rickaway and Kylie Northam, UGS Public Speaking Center consultants

56 scholarships awarded totaling $49,500 supporting students’ internships, research, and creative projects