A promise kept

In 2004, the Commission of 125 challenged The University of Texas at Austin to “develop a new undergraduate core curriculum to better prepare students for lives of accomplishment.” President Larry Faulkner, soon followed by President Bill Powers, promised to respond to that challenge with a reimagined core curriculum. The promise was kept. Our groundbreaking and dynamic core curriculum, anchored by the highly successful Signature Courses and innovative Flags, is now fully implemented. Detailed assessments are proving the many ways in which this is advancing the quality of education at the university.

While the core curriculum now provides a unique set of universal skills like critical thinking, ethical decision-making, and effective communication, the School of Undergraduate Studies (UGS) is future-proofing UT graduates in other ways as well, from connecting more students to research experiences to improving their oral communication skills.

The core was just the beginning

Students who start in UGS are successfully transferring to every undergraduate school or college at the university. Even better, those students report overwhelming satisfaction with the majors they chose.

The Vick Center for Strategic Advising & Career Counseling is now the campus source for career counseling and intercollege advising, visited by nearly 2,000 non-UGS students this past year. Our First-Year Interest Groups, Transfer-Year Experience Office, Discovery Scholars Program, and Sanger Learning Center’s many services support the success of most UT undergraduate students in multiple ways. And the increasingly popular Bridging Disciplines Programs offer a powerful vision of a more interdisciplinary and customizable future of higher education.

The school’s future will be built on the foundation of these successes. By incorporating a strong emphasis on entrepreneurship, student wellness, and teaching every student how to become a lifelong learner, our programs will continue to anticipate the needs of tomorrow’s Longhorns.

UGS is now the university’s infrastructure for systemic academic change, and I am exceedingly proud to be a part of it.

“By incorporating a strong emphasis on entrepreneurship, student wellness, and teaching every student how to become a lifelong learner, our programs will continue to anticipate the needs of tomorrow’s Longhorns.”

Brent Iverson
Dean
“The modern world presents challenges that our graduates must be prepared to meet. . . . A narrow education, no matter how deep in its field, will not be sufficient. Future citizens will need to think critically and have a confident grasp of the arts, the humanities, mathematics, science, and technology.”

—Commission of 125 Report

Celebrating 10 Years of UGS
Implementing the recommendations of the Commission of 125 and the Task Force on Curricular Reform

2008
UGS established as an official school at the university

2009
Vick Center for Strategic Advising created for undecided students
First class of UGS students admitted

2010
Signature Courses required for all undergraduates, taught by some of UT’s most distinguished faculty

2011
The Sanger Learning Center joins UGS, adding career counseling to the school’s advising resources

2012
The Sanger Learning Assistance Fund endowment created

2013
Set up a Professorship for Excellence in Undergraduate Studies
360 Connections rolled out, increasing number of FIGs dramatically

2014
Implemented team advising with a coach, advisor, academic specialist, and career counselor for each Discovery Scholar

2015
Transfer-Year Experience created to help transfer students acclimate and find resources

2016
Skills and Experience Flags implemented in all degree plans ensuring transferable skills for all
Public Speaking Center opens

2017
Bridging Disciplines Programs celebrate 15 years of steady growth
Blackstone LaunchPad opens and creates a footprint for student entrepreneurship
Success Starts Here
UGS prepares students to thrive in college and beyond

Each fall, hundreds of new Longhorns begin their studies at The University of Texas at Austin without knowing for certain what majors they will pursue. In fall 2016, a diverse group of 815 incoming freshmen enrolled in the School of Undergraduate Studies.

From the moment students begin in UGS, they have a distinct advantage: they get personalized academic advising paired with career counseling, along with a wide range of programs that help them and all other UT undergraduates integrate seamlessly into the pace and demands of college.

We know that starting out undecided doesn’t delay graduation because UGS students are graduating in four years at similar rates to students who begin in UT’s other colleges and schools.

UGS is the ideal starting point for students who go on to flourish in and graduate from every UT college and school. We’re proud of our thousands of graduates who started in UGS, found their paths, and have gone on to become distinguished University of Texas at Austin alumni.

“My UGS advisor did a great job of talking me through my interests and suggesting majors that corresponded to those interests. She was also very helpful in planning my coursework both during and immediately after I decided on a major.”

—UT Austin student who uses the Vick Center’s services
“They encouraged me to seek out what my strengths and passions were to help guide my decision. Because if I didn’t know what I was good at and what I really liked to do, I wouldn’t have been able to narrow down the decision process of choosing a major.”
—UT Austin student who uses the Vick Center’s services

UGS programs build a strong foundation for success

**Vick Center for Strategic Advising & Career Counseling**
Students explore majors, identify goals, investigate career options, and discover strengths

**Discovery Scholars Program**
Team-based holistic approach to support students with coaching, academic support, career counseling, and advising

**First-Year Interest Groups (FIGs)**
Small-group communities that help students integrate into college life, academically and socially

**Sanger Learning Center**
Students receive tutoring, group study sessions, one-on-one help from peers and professionals, and public speaking coaching

**Transfer-Year Experience**
Support for the large population of students transferring to UT from other institutions

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**8,108** incoming freshmen (93%) participated in FIGs or other small-group learning communities

**3,449** students came to the Vick Center for advising and career counseling (1,941 non-UGS)

**54%** of incoming freshmen (4,691) used the Sanger Learning Center’s services

**80%** of UGS students surveyed said they were admitted to their first choice of major when transferring
Michael Pontikes
Electrical and computer engineering major

CHOOSING TO START IN UGS

WHEN MICHAEL PONTIKES WAS ACCEPTED into The University of Texas at Austin, he was put on a waitlist for his desired major, computer science. Unenthusiastic about the other majors available to him, he decided to enroll in the School of Undergraduate Studies. “I knew it was for students exploring options,” Michael says, “but besides that I had no expectations.” It was during that fall’s UGS Leadership Summit when Michael says he was able to fully grasp the opportunities afforded to him as a UGS student. “I understood that I was in a position to explore and diversify my interests in ways other students didn’t necessarily have.”

Michael started by securing a seat on student council to explore his academic interests. Interacting with students from different majors and colleges allowed him to better understand the requirements and characteristics of each major. Michael registered for an engineering-based First-Year Interest Group, where his FIG mentor was a former UGS student who transferred into the School of Engineering. That ended up being a valuable connection, providing Michael with specifics about changing schools.

While Michael has always had an interest in engineering, he was unsure which major would best match this interest; he points to the Vick Center for Strategic Advising & Career Counseling as the resource that helped him conceptualize his current values and future career path. After exploring a number of options, including management information systems, he decided to major in computer engineering. Michael says that his experience and time spent in UGS helped connect him to many of the university resources he uses to this day.

“UGS helps you understand what college is all about. They give you the resources you need to make an informed decision about your future.”
“The Sanger Learning Center has been extremely invaluable to me. I learned so many great study techniques, time management skills, how to create a balance between school and fun, and so much more.”
—UT Austin student who uses Sanger Center services

Success Starts Here

UGS students successfully transfer to all UT schools and colleges
And once they transfer to their major, 81% say they are satisfied with the major they’re now pursuing.

73,658
instructional hours
delivered to students by Sanger Learning Center specialists

80%
increase in the number of FIGs offered between 2011 and 2016

89%
of students surveyed said their understanding of course material improved after using the Sanger Learning Center

70%
of students surveyed said their career goals had changed since starting in UGS
“Wayfinder is a great resource to quickly assess and compare UT majors and degree plans across colleges. Even after I declared my major, Wayfinder helped me see how my double major and certificate could fit neatly together.”

—Meagan O’Brien, anthropology and sociology majors, with a minor in Spanish, and a certificate in forensic science

**Success Starts Here**

**WAYFINDER**

Helping students find the majors that lead to extraordinary futures

Trying to wade through the array of choices can be overwhelming. With 107 majors, 62 minors, and 42 certificates, the university offers 11,128 possible combinations of one major with a minor or certificate. Wayfinder is a one stop shop for major and career exploration where students can access in-depth information on the requirements for any major, minor, or certificate. Students use the site to research degree options, figure out how to pursue internship and volunteer opportunities, take inventory of their strengths with self-assessments, and watch videos of UT alumni sharing candid insights about the path from graduation to career.
Dulce Trejo
Architectural engineering major

FINDING YOUR WAY

OVERWHELMED BY THE SHEER NUMBER of available majors at the university, Dulce began her undergraduate career as a UGS student. “I didn’t know what I liked,” she says.

Dulce credits her inclusion in the Discovery Scholars Program for jump-starting her search for an academic track and career. It was during her time as a Discovery Scholar that Dulce found her aptitude for linguistics, a field she never had the opportunity to explore in high school.

Caught between her newfound interest in linguistics and her strong background in the STEM fields, Dulce credits her Discovery Scholars academic coach for providing her with the framework she needed to compare and contrast her strengths, potential career fields, and academic interests. It was through this self-assessment process that Dulce developed an interest in architectural engineering.

Dulce points to the Vick Center as one of the most important resources that helped her navigate the transfer process. “Their doors are always open,” she says “you just have to go and get the help.” The Vick Center connected Dulce with an advisor in the School of Architecture, who gave her an in-depth explanation of what was required to successfully transfer.

Currently a sophomore in the Cockrell School of Engineering, Dulce fondly looks back on her time as a UGS student.

“UGS gave me the skills and the resources I needed to explore and then apply that knowledge to my major.”
UGS Is Future-Proofing UT Graduates
Providing undergraduates the education that will shape the world

According to studies, only 25–30% of recent graduates hold jobs related to their majors. And top employers agree that broadly useful skills, like critical thinking, writing, and communication, are far more important than an applicant's major (Wall Street Journal, 2013).

In response, UGS is focused on giving students the experiences and learning they need to future-proof their careers. No matter what happens in an ever-shifting job market, our graduates must have the adaptability they’ll need to prosper in the future—a future where some careers are disappearing, others are just taking shape, and some have yet to be imagined.

To ensure a UT degree is always world-class, we assess and maintain a quality, modernized core curriculum so new Longhorns learn fresh perspectives and then evolve into analytical thinkers who can tackle complex problems. Every student, in every major, takes a Signature Course that establishes critical skills like good writing, research methods, and problem solving. All students earn Flags by taking courses enriched in six areas: ethics and leadership, global cultures, quantitative reasoning, independent inquiry, cultural diversity, and writing. We also offer 15 interdisciplinary certificates, partnerships with faculty conducting research, access to internships, and help with starting a company.

“The internship and research aspect of the program helped me form important networking relationships and gave me a glimpse into future careers that I am now pursuing.”
—Bridging Disciplines Programs alumnus
“I took Sociocultural Influences on Learning only because I needed a Cultural Diversity Flag and it looked different than my normal courses. To this day, it is one of my favorite classes at UT. It gave me a new perspective on education that I still use.”

—Micky Wolf, business honors and Plan II major

Future-Proofing

UGS programs provide future-proofing for students in every discipline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature Courses</th>
<th>Skills and Experience Flags</th>
<th>Bridging Disciplines Programs</th>
<th>Undergraduate Research</th>
<th>Blackstone LaunchPad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interdisciplinary first-year courses taught by some of the best faculty at UT</td>
<td>Enriched course content in six areas like effective communication, ethical decision-making, and critical thinking</td>
<td>BDP students earn interdisciplinary certificates that combine coursework with research and internships</td>
<td>Students can assist faculty conducting ground-breaking research in an array of academic disciplines</td>
<td>Center designed to promote the exchange of ideas and an entrepreneurial student mindset</td>
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220
Signature Courses available to first-year incoming students

99%
of BDP alumni surveyed agreed that their BDP was a valuable part of their education at UT

702
students advised about their research by the Undergraduate Research team (up 37%)

93%
of students surveyed said their flagged Independent Inquiry course was valuable
Bryan Klingner
Software engineer, Google

CURRENTLY A SOFTWARE ENGINEER AND RESEARCHER at Google, Bryan Klingner graduated from UT Austin in 2003 with a Bachelor of Arts in Plan II and a Bachelor of Science in Electrical and Computer Engineering. While neither of his degrees taught him the specific knowledge required to succeed at Google, “both of them gave me the skills I need to succeed at my current job on a day-to-day basis.” Bryan identifies communication, especially written communication, as one of the most important skills he acquired as an undergraduate. “If you can’t convince people of the validity of your idea, it doesn’t matter how good it is,” he notes. From running meetings to communicating with counterparts across the globe, to making effective presentations of technical content, communication is an essential skill in his industry.

“Another skill that makes people stand out more than any other at Google is the ability to tackle hard problems and to know how to approach them.” Bryan’s undergraduate study of differential equations and Russian literature gave him a framework that allows him to tackle new and difficult technical concepts with a strategy and confidence. While problem solving opportunities in technology might differ from those found in undergraduate coursework, Bryan says he’s continually grateful for his UT classes, where he was given the opportunities to solve very hard problems in a structured environment where the solutions are known.

Bryan believes that majors that apply to many potential jobs instead of just one allow for flexibility in the shifting job market. His advice for students who haven’t yet picked a major: “If you like something and it challenges you, go for it, and chances are, what you learn there you can transfer to whatever you end up actually doing after you graduate.”

“Assume that you will change your mind about what you want to do for a living . . . seek out a major that’s going to teach you new skills and how to handle and tackle difficult problems.”
“When hiring recent college graduates, employers say they place the greatest priority on a demonstrated proficiency in skills and knowledge that cut across majors. Written and oral communication skills, teamwork skills, ethical decision-making, critical thinking skills, and the ability to apply knowledge in real-world settings are the most highly valued.”


98% of graduating seniors surveyed said participating in research was valuable

914 unique flagged writing courses improved students’ ability to communicate effectively

90% of Signature Course students surveyed said listening to classmates’ ideas was a valuable learning experience

352 research projects, internships, and creative projects completed by BDP students
WHILE MOST STUDENTS’ FIRST FEW WEEKS of college are hard, Hifza Hamid’s were especially difficult. Tearing her ACL a few days before the start of class, she had to navigate a new university with limited mobility. A member of the Discovery Scholars Program (DSP), Hifza points to Emily, her DSP academic coach, as one of the key figures who helped her adjust to life at the university.

Emily connected Hifza with the Office of the Dean of Students, who provided her with the accommodations she needed to navigate campus. Because she missed several days of class, Emily walked Hifza through the process of communicating with her professors and making up missed work. What could have been a hopelessly stressful and difficult situation was transformed into a valuable introduction to UT resources.

Though she began her undergraduate career with the clear goal of becoming a pediatrician, Hifza was unsure of which major to pursue. Faced with competing interests in neuroscience, nutrition, and sociology, she leveraged her status as a UGS student to explore majors.

Connecting with students from prospective majors allowed Hifza to get a better sense of the requirements of each field and decide if it was right for her before committing. She enrolled in a BDP certificate program called Social Inequality, Health & Policy, which will greatly expand her grasp of the social factors that impact health.

UGS was one of the key resources that helped Hifza adjust to college life, and exploring majors allowed her to engage in interdisciplinary scholarship instead of focusing solely on hard science. She’s certain this background will help her in her future career as a pediatrician.

“I remember a sheet that listed my career counselor, my Discovery Scholars coach, my academic advisor, my learning specialist, and my CARE counselor, and thinking wow, I have a whole team dedicated to my success.”
Walt Saunders
BBA 1958

WHY I SUPPORT UGS’s MISSION

WALT SAUNDERS (BBA ’58) COMES FROM a long line of Longhorns dating back to his grandfather, John William Matlock, who graduated in 1898. While Saunders studied accounting, members of his extended family have pursued a wide range of majors including English, education, and economics. He remembers this advice from his mother, Miriam Matlock Saunders (MA ’32), “Everything you learn may be of use one day.” With this multidisciplinary UT legacy, and the spirit of learning inherited from his mother, Saunders was looking for a way to give back to the university. He found it in the School of Undergraduate Studies.

Saunders credits his introduction to UGS to his granddaughter, with whom he attended undergraduate orientation in 2013. Realizing that many students come to UT without the same tradition of higher education as his family, he was impressed with the guidance UGS provides to all undergraduate students. “The worst assumption you can make is that the world is always going to be the same, because it’s not,” he says.

Having worked with clients in about 30 different industries over the course of his life, Saunders is no stranger to the ebb and flow of job markets. He believes UGS is vital in helping students learn to be flexible, adaptable, and nimble.

Saunders understands the integral role UGS plays in helping students embrace change and create a broad educational experience that equips them for whatever lies ahead. By supporting the school with a bequest in his estate plans, he is ensuring students have the resources and help they need to be successful in whatever career paths they choose.

“Incoming students should keep an open mind. This doesn’t mean you don’t eventually determine what you’re going to do. But don’t prematurely jump to a conclusion based on limited information.”