

## **Accelerating Takeoff: The UT Martin Retention and Progression Plan**

### **The University of Tennessee at Martin**

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The University of Tennessee at Martin, like many institutions across the country, is facing an “enrollment cliff” within the next few years. The number of traditional fresh-out-of-high-school students is decreasing, which critically increases the need to recruit transfer students and adult learners and to retain all students in order to remain a vibrant and healthy campus. In examining these challenges, UT Martin has identified institutional performance gaps among subpopulations of students—in terms of both retention from one semester to the next and progression to the attainment of 30-hour, 60-hour, and 90-hour benchmarks—that provide ample opportunities for self-examination and improvement.

**Accelerating Takeoff: The UT Martin Retention and Progression Plan** focuses on one overarching objective: to improve student success through activities focused on increasing the retention and progression of first-year students. To achieve this goal, UT Martin will revise the first-year student experience by focusing on two fundamental goals:

1. Preparing first-year students for success at the institution.
2. Preparing the institution for the needs of first-year students.

These fundamental goals are comprised of distinct approaches with measurable outcomes designed to maximize the use of existing resources and best practices and to invest in areas of opportunity that further support the success and retention of first-year students. The Accelerating Takeoff Plan was developed in part to respond to strategic planning goals addressing performance gaps as identified using institutional data. In Fall 2021, UT Martin began a process developed by the John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education called the Foundations of Excellence (FoE), which required the institution to take an honest, in-depth look at the current state of first-year student experiences and determine opportunities to improve those experiences, both inside and outside the classroom. The FoE process involved more than 70 faculty, staff, and students as leaders in this investigation. Subsequent work to date has involved more than 100 additional faculty and staff contributing ideas, questions, and suggestions for further investigation. This FoE investigation, resulting recommendations, and subsequent work inform the core approaches that will be used to address the two fundamental goals of the Accelerating Takeoff Plan.

The Accelerating Takeoff Plan includes both formative assessment strategies designed to provide opportunities to adjust the plan as needed and summative assessment strategies designed to determine the overall impact on student retention and progression. Conservatively, UT Martin predicts over the next five years, the Accelerating Takeoff Plan will result in increasing the overall retention rate of first-year students by 3% and the overall progression rate by 4%, with some subpopulations experiencing significantly higher improvements in these rates.