

## **UTSA Project LEAD (Leadership, Engagement, Academics, and Dedication): Onboarding and Bridging to Improve Student Success, Retention, and Graduation**

First-year academic performance sets the foundation for a student's overall success in college. Common reasons cited for college student attrition include limited academic preparation, a lack of sense of belonging (academic and social), and financial hardship. The University of Texas at San Antonio is a Hispanic-Serving Institution, 46% of our students self-identify as first-generation, and often face the aforementioned academic, social, and financial challenges at disproportionately higher rates than non-first-generation and/or majority students. Those challenges are reflected in UTSA's retention and graduation rates.

Research clearly shows the positive impact of bridging and academic support programs on participants' GPA and University level retention and graduation rates. Programs have reported that students who get off to a strong start with a GPA of 2.5 or higher early in their academic career are retained at higher rates than those with lower GPAs. Likewise, programs that intervene with students on academic probation or warning have been shown to increase GPA and retention rates. UTSA's Project LEAD (Leadership, Engagement, Academics, and Dedication) Keystone Initiative aims to increase student success and retention by creating targeted programming for academically at-risk students at early stages of their academic career: (1) incoming first-time, full-time freshmen admitted by holistic review and (2) students on academic probation or warning at the conclusion of their first-year. Project LEAD incorporates high impact practices such as learning communities, service learning, and signature experience opportunities. All Project LEAD I and II participants will take course-work that applies to their respective degree while receiving intensive academic support and advisement, peer mentoring and coaching, social engagement experiences, and financial literacy training during a Summer LEAD Academy. Lead I and II participants will also receive intense academic and social support programming throughout the academic year following the Summer Academy.

Key indicators for success of Project LEAD will include increases in LEAD I participants earning a GPA of 2.5 or higher in their first year and LEAD II participants increasing their GPA beyond a 2.0 and thus no longer being on academic probation or warning. In addition, a greater sense of belonging not only to UTSA but also to the academe in general among participants will indicate success. The ultimate indicator of success will be increased retention and graduation rates.