

## Institutional Description

The University of Texas at Austin (UT-Austin) is a tier-1, public research institution and serves as the flagship school of the University of Texas System. UT-Austin is home to more than 51,000 students and 24,000 faculty and staff. Austin Community College (ACC) is a nationally recognized two-year college serving Central Texas. The college currently enrolls more than 43,000 credit students and serves an additional 15,000 students each year through noncredit programs.

## Program Development



Established in 2013 in an agreement between the two institutions' presidents, the Path to Admission through Co-Enrollment (PACE) is a shared program between ACC and UT-Austin. The goal of PACE is to increase channels to admission into UT-Austin while helping students expand their understanding of the many pathways that exist to reach their goals. Given the constraints on admissions by the Texas Legislature, many outstanding students, especially those from non-ranking high schools or under-resourced schools, are shut out of the admissions process. This program fosters the collaborative relationship between the two institutions and allows students to capitalize on their ability to accomplish goals through diverse pathways as they transition into undergraduate education. Granted full-time status at both institutions, participants attend small classes in a supportive learning environment, and at the same time gain access to game-changing resources available only at a world-class university. Currently in its fourth cohort, PACE has enrolled close to 550 students since its inception.

## **Advising Goals and Objectives**

The objective of PACE advising is rooted in NACADA's core value of exposition, with particular focus on fostering individual potential. The academic advising team aims to give students agency to explore diverse pathways and successfully accomplish goals as they transition to undergraduate education.

### **Mission Statement**

PACE employs a student-focused comprehensive advising model to help participants successfully matriculate while navigating issues common for first-year students.

Advisors support students by cultivating the use of holistic perspectives in developing and accomplishing personal, academic, and professional goals. In addition to assisting with academic planning, advisors work closely with students to promote a growth mindset, assist in development of life skills, and positively impact the UT-Austin and ACC campus communities.

### **Core Values**

PACE advisors believe there are many valid paths available to students in their academic endeavors and that embracing the journey is as important as reaching the goal. In an institutional climate that often demands students be creative and flexible in their academic and career planning, the advising team focuses on promoting proficiency in the following core areas:

**Panoramic Perspective** – *developing the ability to view situations with a wide*

*lens, understanding the many tenets and facets that surround a goal or an issue*

**Active Adaptability** – *capacity to be flexible in pathways to complete an objective,*

*ability to learn and thrive in diverse environments and changing conditions*

**Creative Solutions** – *ability to provide unique visions, deliver imaginative and*

*resourceful ideas and resolutions*

**Engaged Participation** – *proactively approaching endeavors with intent to be*

*successful, taking responsibility for personal actions and efforts*

## **Program Description**

PACE students are integrated into life on both campuses through program-specific academic and student-life support services. Program participants have two long semesters (fall and spring) to complete 24 hours of in-residence transferrable coursework at ACC and a total of 6 hours in residence coursework at UT-Austin.

Students must maintain a minimum 3.2 cumulative grade point average (GPA) at ACC and a minimum 2.0 cumulative GPA at UT-Austin. Completion of program requirements guarantees admission into most majors in the College of Liberal Arts (CoLA), however students are eligible to apply for transition to other competitive majors and colleges at UT-Austin. Enrolled students have the opportunity to take advantage of services, use facilities, join organizations, and attend events at both ACC and UT-Austin. They have access to a dedicated team of advisors at both institutions whose job it is to ensure their success. Advising at UT-Austin is coordinated out of the College of Liberal Arts, with a dedicated PACE-only advisor. Financial aid offers are coordinated through UT-Austin's Office of Financial Aid through an agreement that allows students to be considered full-time between the two campuses. In addition to their academic courses, students take a

PACE-only first-year seminar and receive mentoring from both UT-Austin and ACC advisors as well as trained mentors who are themselves former PACE students.

### **Integrated Advising**

Cross-coordination between ACC and UT-Austin ensures a seamless experience and promotes student success. Advisors maintain integrity and accuracy by utilizing customized shared data systems that allow them to view and record student data, notes, and course information between the institutions. The PACE advising staff includes licensed counselors for additional support in addressing emotional and situational issues that arise with the unique stressors of the first-year experience. Advisors collaborate with programs and departments across both campuses to educate them about PACE students and requirements, and to stay current on admission policies for their respective programs. Dedicated collaboration has contributed to the excellent rapport and mutual respect shared between PACE advisors.

### **Parallel Planning**

Until a PACE student is fully accepted into UT-Austin, their major classification remains undeclared. Although some students in the program have strong ideas about a choice of major, many others are still in the exploratory phase. The PACE advising philosophy accommodates for growth and flexibility by requiring all students to work on Parallel Plans. Advisors help students identify a minimum of two different academic paths that will prepare them for their future career. The purpose of having Parallel Plans is to help students find creative ways to reach their goals and relieve some of the anxiety that first-year students have about limitations they may face by choosing one singular

path. This is particularly important because students in the program are not guaranteed admission to restricted majors at UT-Austin at the end of their PACE experience.

### **New Student Orientation**

The work of the advising team begins as soon as students receive their offer of admission to the program. Advisors work closely with the Office of Admissions to counsel students about the benefits and opportunities available in the program. Advisors also begin communication with students about the unique steps to enrolling in the program, including preparing transcripts of dual-credit work, sending AP and other test scores, and understanding how to navigate the two campuses.

The Advising program coordinates a joint orientation between the two campuses. Students attend the three-day UT-Austin summer orientation with special PACE-only sessions. During those sessions, advisors from both campuses present and share information critical to student success. Advising is accomplished in a joint session where advisors work to seamlessly integrate the coursework expectations at both campuses. Students are bussed between the campuses to explore and take tours.

The Advising Program also coordinates and facilitates the PACE Family Orientation session. This is an important opportunity for representatives from both campuses to articulate the program expectations to parents, to offer support and information, and to prepare families for the reality of navigating two campuses.

## **PACE Peer Mentors**

The Advising Team is also responsible for the selection, training, and supervision of the PACE Peer Mentors (PPM). Created in response to student request for more information about the unique PACE experience, the PPM Program serves as an extension of program advising as it connects former and current PACE students. Mentors advise current students on the first-year experience and best practices for navigating two institutions. There are currently six students from the previous cohort that serve in this role. PACE Peer Mentors support their mentees through targeted event planning, co-facilitation of weekly courses, and conducting group and individual meetings.



## **PACE Courses**

Data clearly demonstrate the value of strong support for students in the first year of college. It is particularly essential for students who have the challenge of navigating two entirely different college systems. The Advising Program is responsible for designing all curriculum and supporting materials for two PACE-specific courses to help students with their transition: PACE Seminar (fall semester) and PACE Workshop (spring semester). These weekly, one-hour non-credit courses serve as an extension of comprehensive advising and seek to provide students with the support and tools they need to be successful. Sessions are led by PACE peer mentors and the lead UT-Austin advisor, with support from advisors at ACC. Students develop a sense of community as they attend classes, study, and participate in various activities and events with their mentors and fellow PACE first-years. In addition to providing support for academic

transition, the courses provide students an opportunity to learn more about co-curricular programming at both campuses and promote major, career, and parallel path exploration. Integrated program advising is a key component of the curriculum, as students are exposed to academic planning resources and group advising.

### **Reverse Transfer**

Every PACE student can take advantage of recent legislation in Texas supporting reverse transfer. The structure of the program facilitates students meeting minimum requirements for reverse transfer (a process by which the associate's degree is earned AFTER transition to UT-Austin). Once a student completes all requirements, ACC will grant them an associate's degree. PACE advisors at UT-Austin and ACC continuously communicate to keep student transcripts updated between the institutions and streamline the award process.

### **Technology Resources**

Two tools exist that support the successful integrated advising of students in the PACE program. These tools, jointly developed by both campuses, creates an impression of a seamless experience for students, even when the records systems of both campuses don't necessarily sync.

#### **PACE Tracker**

PACE Tracker is an electronic records-sharing system developed by UT-Austin. It allows PACE staff to view limited student record data combined from both campuses. This record includes student registration at both institutions, grades, program status, and includes a space for shared notes regarding student

advising. This innovation significantly improves the advising program because it allows for transparency and communication across two campuses.

### **Shared Electronic Advising Plan**

The Shared Electronic Advising Plan allows information to be shared across advising teams. This electronic document is also shared with each individual student, thus increasing their likelihood of follow-through with advising recommendations. This tool integrates advising recommendations with both campuses, includes a GPA calculator so students can calculate their program eligibility, and reduces confusion by maintaining a three-way electronic record of advising sessions.

### **Events and Socials**

**PACE Parallel Planning Pizza Party (fall)** - This event gives PACE students an opportunity to connect with faculty, advisors, and current students in programs and majors in the College of Liberal Arts. Students leave excited about the many paths available to achieving their goals.

**Mentor Mixers (fall and spring)** - PACE Peer Mentors host mixers for students with similar interests where they give personal accounts of their experiences. Mixer topics have included: Pre-Health Professions, Pre-Law, Financial Literacy, Greek Life, Students Organizations, Internships, and Scholarships.





The “After” Party! (spring) - Students spend a fun-filled evening with advisors, mentors, and former PACE students where they receive information about what to expect academically and socially as they transition out of the PACE program.

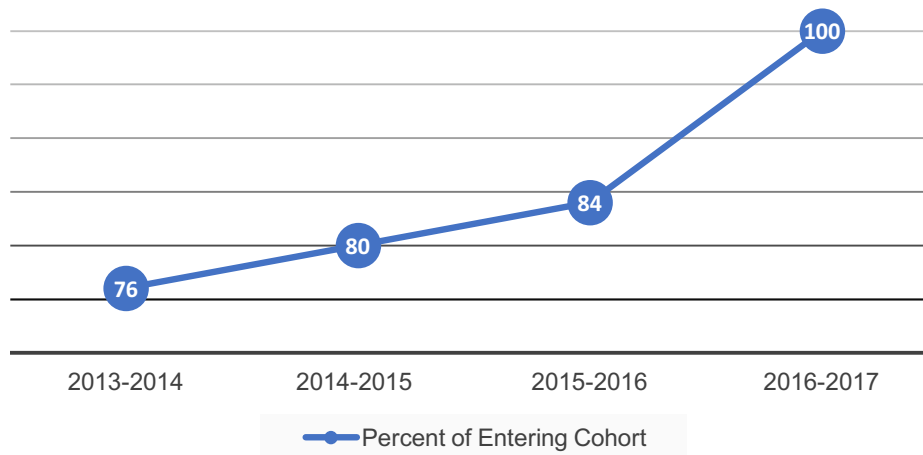
## **Procedures Used in Program Evaluation**

Assessing the efficacy of a program with shared advising responsibility is especially challenging. The institution measures the success of the program by the percentage of students who successfully complete program requirements and thus transition to UT-Austin full time. While this measure does require students to perform at sufficiently high levels, it is an important proxy for the efficacy of the advising program.

### **Transition Rate**

Although the program began in the fall of 2013, the current iteration of the Advising Program reflects strategic programming changes implemented in summer of 2015. Of important note, in years 2013 and 2014, there were students whose eligibility to transition was impacted by poor course selection (i.e., failing to register for the appropriate number of hours). Since implementation of the more intensive advising programming, not a single student has been ineligible because of advising failures. Successful transition is indicated by students who met all program requirements. Transition rates are below, including current (mid-year) enrollment.

## Successful Transition



### PACE Peer Mentor Reports

PACE students are required to complete a minimum of three one-on-one meetings with their assigned PPM throughout the year. After each meeting, mentors submit an electronic report documenting qualitative data pertaining to efficacy of programming and advising. Results from the reports overwhelmingly demonstrate that students are aware of program requirements, are utilizing resources on both campuses, and are actively working on parallel planning.

### Student Comments

Student input is a vital component of our measured success. Listed here are some comments submitted by current students:

"I am loving the support that is given to me as a PACE student from both schools' advisors. The constant guidance comforts me in this new environment and weekly PACE seminars allow me to meet and engage with other students in the program. Overall, I am enjoying my time as a PACE student, being able to learn something new from both schools. I am looking forward to transitioning full time to UT."

"PACE is honestly one of the best things that could have happened to me as an unexperienced, naïve freshman at one of the biggest and most competitive public universities in the country. My transition from high school to college has gone more smoothly than I ever imagined, and it is all thanks to PACE."

"I can't wait for what is in store for me and I am very grateful for the PACE program. The support and encouragement has been more than I would have ever expected out of my first year in college. I wanted to say thank you for everything the TA's and all of the advisor's have already put into all the students and the program, and I hope that the program is successful."

"Through the PACE admission, my parents and I were able to explore an alternative option that wouldn't just provide myself a better transition into higher education, but would also lead me towards an opportunity to explore what I really wanted to get out of my college experience. This all worked out unexpectedly, yet it felt like everything was finally coming all together."

"Because I chose PACE I am now able to decide and think about my options in economics and business and I know my mentors will help lead me to the right choice. At the end of the day my goals stay the same regardless of what school of choice I attend next year"

## **Applied Parallel Planning**

CoLA degree plans offer the most flexibility and foster intellectual independence by offering students many ways to fulfill their degree requirements. The increasing number of PACE students who change their first-choice college to CoLA is one indicator of the effective application of parallel planning promoted by PACE advising.

## **Results/Outcomes**

### **Admission and Graduation Rates**

Since its inception, PACE has provided close to 550 students the opportunity to earn a bachelor's degree from UT-Austin. The first cohort of students enrolled in the PACE program will graduate from UT-Austin this spring. Those students are currently on track for a timely four-year graduation.

### **Degree Attainment**

PACE advisors successfully established a partnership with ACC's Graduation Office and Reverse Transfer Specialist, and coordinated efforts to identify students from previous cohorts who have met requirements for an associate's degree. Since completion of an associate's degree is an important measure of success for Austin Community College, the work synchronizing between both campuses is essential. All PACE students are eligible to receive their associate's degree from ACC upon completion of requirements, an important measure of their academic progress.

## **Vick Advising Award**

Lead PACE advisor for UT-Austin, Jasmine Rose (JR) Schmitt is a 2017 recipient of the prestigious *Texas Exes James W. Vick Award for Academic Advising*. This highly-selective award recognizes individuals who improve students' overall experience at UT-Austin through outstanding advising. Of important note is the nomination and selection process is done *solely by UT-Austin students*. One PACE student nominator commented, "Her advising has helped me decide what future career I will be most passionate about. She motivates us and pushes us to do the best we can."

## **Honors Enrollment**

Thanks to increased collaboration among the advising teams, more students in the program participated in the Honors Program at ACC. Since meeting with an advisor is the primary way that students learn about, and enter into the honors program, this is an important measure of the efficacy of the advising relationship. Beginning with the 2015-16 cohort, at least 20% of PACE students enrolled in at least one Honors Program Course at ACC. Prior to the 2015-16 year, only 2% of students had enrolled in an honors course.

## **Potential for adaptation by other institutions**

There are numerous partnerships that exist between four-year universities and community colleges, but rarely have those programs extended into a collaborative advising relationship. Because PACE advisors coordinate their efforts, students are not surprised by deadlines, requirements, or expectations of both campuses. By

committing to the success of the students in the program, UT-Austin and ACC have opened a window to the possibilities for student success.

The approach is simple: created shared expectations for student success; promote data sharing between campuses; coordinate experiences; and create an environment of student support. Any campus could take on this opportunity if committed to creating a seamless transition.