

QEP Proposal: Bridges to Success

Title

Bridging People, Places, Programs, and Partners for S.U.C.C.E.S.S.

(Students Uncovering Curricular and Co-curricular Experiences that Support Systematic change)

Summary

Chattanooga is a city of bridges, and many of them are in walking distance from UTC's beautiful campus. Bridges provide accessibility and connection to communities. They offer a great way to access a place that was not previously accessible. Bridges also create opportunities to bring communities together by connecting neighborhoods and other areas for easier reach. With that in mind, the program, *Bridges to Success*, is an opportunity to intentionally and strategically connect UTC stakeholders (faculty, staff, students, offices, and divisions) on campus with resources and spaces that support student engagement, on and off campus, with the goal of increasing student achievement and success. UTC stakeholders will have better accessibility to internal and external resources, build a stronger community while doing so and connect stakeholders from various backgrounds, "neighborhoods" and places together.

Campus offices on college campuses unfortunately tend to operate in silos, making it difficult for students to navigate and access the resources needed to matriculate from semester to semester, the goal being graduation within five years. By employing the *Bridges to Success* program, UTC can start to align (or connect) the processes, people, programs, and partners that will help students transition from semester to semester at UTC with less anxiety, and a stronger, more established sense of belonging that leads to successful matriculate through the university.

Bridges to Success Model bridges:

- **People:** Ensuring equity-minded and culturally competent individuals are teaching and mentoring student populations and cohorts most at risk for not completing college. Example: Having members of the Black Faculty and Staff Association and BIPOC faculty and staff mentor students. Also, partnering with EMSA and their First Generation program to have First Generation faculty members mentor students who are also first in their family to attend and graduate from college.
- **Places:** Connecting students to "places" they can feel safe and thrive. Creating places and spaces on and off campus that bridge UTC stakeholders together. For example, living in the same LLC (Living Learning Community) or Residential Learning Community (RLC). Students will also be encouraged to study abroad through scholarships that allow them to see and experience other cultures. Partnering with UTC's study abroad program and other divisions to make this a reality for those less represented in the study abroad seekers.
- **Programs:** The underlying benefit of a cohort program is the fact that people learn better as they study as part of a group. There will be a strong focus on cohort models within this program. For example, enrolling students in the same section of UTSU 1250 and taking general education courses together; or, having students participate in engagement activities and high impact practices as a group.

- **Partners:** Creating and enhancing on and off campus partnerships that provide opportunities like internships/externships; partnering with research programs, such as URaCE (Undergraduate Research and Creative Endeavors), to provide students from underrepresented populations research opportunities. Community partners could provide fellowships with city government, nonprofit organizations that support civic engagement.

Rationale/Problem Statement/Growth Opportunity - Describe why this concept is important to UTC at this time, and how our students and the overall institutional will benefit from the proposed plan. You could include relevant data here (quantitative, qualitative, or experiential). Clearly demonstrate the connection to cohorts, collaborative learning, and diversity, as appropriate.

UTC's graduation rate is currently 50% and its current retention rate is 73% (down 5% since the pandemic). While the community around the institution is getting increasingly diverse, the institution is not. Its student and faculty populations do not mirror the diversity the community in which the institution sits. There is abundant opportunity for UTC to increase student success and provide meaningful and diverse opportunities that allows the campus community to grow and become competitive in this globally diverse society.

UTC is uniquely positioned to support first generation college students and those students who reside in underserved communities throughout the state of Tennessee. As college campuses become more diverse regarding ethnic background, age, and lived experiences, it is imperative to ensure that college campuses are equipped to meet the needs of the whole student. Education can serve as a vehicle for economic and social mobility, in addition to better health outcomes. College campuses provide students multiple opportunities to be exposed to and explore endeavors that connect them to research ventures, studying abroad, active community engagement, and professional development. In addition, general education and core curriculum for majors allows students to broaden their knowledge of liberal arts education. These experiences increase students' confidence, self-efficacy, and ability to effectively engage with diverse populations. Ultimately, these experiences coupled with strategic programming centered on the development, implementation, and assessment of cohort-based programs that focus on diversity, cultural humility, and multiculturalism.

Success for college students, particularly for students of color, is challenging. Moving towards institutional action is needed to change the current landscape for students of color (Tinto, 2012)

Institutions must be designed for student success. Given that demographics of today's student is changing, colleges and universities should consider new and better ways to effectively support their students on the path to graduation. Students are working more than they ever have to support their families. Veteran populations on campus are growing. UTC has seen an increase in the number of LatinX students. As students with diverse and varied backgrounds are becoming the norm, the traditional support system typically found on campuses, will eventually be insufficient.

As outlined in UTC's strategic plan (to be approved October 2021), student success is highlighted as a goal. UTC aims to improve student performance and

- 1) Increase first-year fall-to-fall retention from 73% to 83%
- 2) Reduce achievement and learning gaps
- 3) Increase six-year graduation rate from 50% to 63.7%

The *Bridges to Success* program could serve as a catalyst that allows the University to reset and rethink the way it operates and encourages more divisions to work together for one common goal: improving the success rates of our students.

Expected Outcomes/Impact on Student Learning or the Learning Environment-Describe the impact of this concept on student learning and success and explain the expected outcomes in terms of student knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, or behaviors. How will UTC be fundamentally different and better when your concept QEP is implemented?

The impact of this concept on student learning and success will be dependent on the coordination of multiple offices and divisions across the campus. As a result of this concept, expected outcomes will include:

- Enhancement and utilization of current UTC resources
- Removing overt and covert barriers to student success
- Transforming learning environments to be more inclusive and equitable
- Building a community of active research and engagement for diverse students
- Increasing recruitment and retention of BILPOC and those from historically resilient and underserved areas
- Developing a comprehensive, integrated, and holistic approach to student success
- Application of clear pathways for student learning, success, and pivoting

Utilizing best practices and high-impact practices (HIPs), BRIDGES will be different in its ability to track, monitor, and provide intentional pathways from high school to completion of a 4-year degree at UTC. Students will increase their sense of belonging by intentionally recruiting those identified students during their formative years in high school. *University High*, a new initiative could be one avenue to support students by engaging students in more meaningful ways to address:

- Understanding students' individual stories and lived experiences
- Understanding students "why"- for pursuing college, choosing a major
- Developing deeper strategies to address the whole student that addresses their precise needs with purposeful collaboration that builds trust and connectivity throughout the campus and community
- Developing a holistic advising approach that addresses the "5 P's": people, place, person, purpose, and population
 - *People* refers to a core group of individuals (e.g. family, friends, mentors, coaches) that will support them in their journey.
 - *Place* refers to helping students think critically about the type of work environment they want to pursue (e.g. school, community, clinical setting, traveling, etc.).

- *Person* refers to students thinking about the types of responsibilities they want to hold in their profession (leader, team-players, working alone).
- *Purpose* allows students to consider the unique skills, talents, and gifts they can share with the world.
- *Population* refers to the specific groups of people that students desire to serve (e.g., athletes, school-age children, older adults, etc.).

Strategies/Actions to be implemented-Describe how this concept would be implemented to improve student learning or student success. What steps or actions are needed?

The first year of implementation is the most critical. That is why we propose to use the spirit of a collective impact model to launch implementation for this program. Broadly defined, Collective Impact is an approach to social challenges (and in UTC's case, institutional challenges) that are too complex for one organization (or campus division) to address on its own.

Through UTC's collective impact process, multiple units will work together to achieve two goals: 1) increasing our institution's graduation rates and 2) increasing UTC's retention rates.

[Chattanooga 2.0](#) is a notable example of our city's collective impact model in which UTC is a partner. We will benchmark our *process to implementation* closely to the Collective Impact Model with our UTC community and Greater Chattanooga community as partners. A toolkit for implementation can be found [here](#). Keep in mind that we are trying to solve institutional challenges—those that impact our students, faculty, and staff.

Collaborative action almost always begins with the establishment of an oversight group, often called a steering committee or executive committee. The main key structural components of UTC's collective impact approach will be the creation of a **steering committee, working groups, backbone support, and campus and community engagement**.

Here are examples of committees, key champions and programs that could result from UTC's "collective impact" model for *Bridges to Success*.

- On campus and off campus champions (i.e., UTC's ELT members, CEOs, philanthropists)
- Advisory Council which will include but not limited to high school student representatives, high school guidance/career counselors, community stakeholders (business, industry, non-profit, etc.). UTC staff: admissions, financial aid and scholarships, Mocs One Center, student success program, Center for Global Education, health services, academic outreach, career services, housing, and academic support and advising.
- Establishment of BRIDGE Pathway Program:
 - Sample source: [EAB Barriers to Equity in Success](#)
- Establishment of University Alliance of Innovation and Collaboration
- Hiring of staff:
 - Executive Director of program
 - Coordinators (communications & administrative/logistics)

Students- Identify which students will be impacted by this concept. For example: undergraduate students, graduate students, full-time first-year students, all first-year students, etc. Note: The programs that the QEP supports does not intend to impact every student directly, but it does need to offer a significant enhancement to student learning at UTC by using the cohort model for greatest impact. However, the collective impact model, by its very nature, intends to shift cultures and systems over time so that impact reaches more audiences.

The following cohorts could be impacted by this program concept and process model:

- Undergraduate students
- First-time full-time first-year student
- Students from historically resilient backgrounds
- Students from underserved geographic areas
- First generation students
- Coordinating pathways for students in the identified groups will also provide guided pathways for other student groups. This requires coordination of culture, communication, community, collaboration, and celebration ([Inside Higher Ed, 2019](#)).

Assessment - Describe how this concept would be implemented to improve student learning or student success. What steps or actions are needed?

- Align concept with UTC strategic plan, mission, and vision of the University
- Completion of Needs Assessment
- Develop an Assessment Strategy
- Identify benchmarks and baseline for student success based on the following parameters:
 - Recruitment of students to UTC
 - Retention of students from first year to second year at UTC
 - Retention of students from second year to third year at UTC
 - Retention of students from third year to fourth year at UTC
 - Grade point average of 2.75 or higher
 - Utilization of services and resources at UTC (advising, academic experience, college navigation)
- Determine criteria for success
- Identify outcomes, curriculum pathway mapping
- Select methods and conduct assessment for data collection: surveys, focus groups, interviews
- Analyze and interpret results
- Proposed action plan/improvement plan

Resources Needed-Describe resources necessary to implement this concept successfully. A detailed budget is not required at this time, but if possible, include needed staff, physical space, software, etc.

- 2-3 staff members
 - 1 Executive Director of program
 - 2 Coordinators (communications & administrative/logistics)
- Physical space
 - 2-3 Offices and possible space for student workers/volunteers

- RLC (Residential Learning Community) or LLC (Living Learning Community)
- Faculty or Staff in Residence
- Stipends for University leaders who would assume responsibility for leading working groups (we do not want faculty to take on additional responsibilities without fair consideration of their time spent in class and working on this initiative)
- Financial resources for study abroad for 20-25 students and multiple UTC representatives
- Financial resources for cultural immersion experiences throughout the academic year

Research/Best Practices Gathered to Date- Describe any research, data, or best practices that you have found thus far in thinking about your concept. Is your concept novel, based on another model, or based on your own research?

An assessment and data plan will include the following:

- The [Healthy Campus Framework](#)
- The Collective Impact [Community Toolbox](#)
- [National Institute for Student Success](#)
- Data analysis, collection, and storytelling (UTC [OPEIR](#) and [Hominumero](#))
- Specialized programs like the University of Central Florida: [University Innovation Alliance](#), “which develops and shares innovative solutions that help students overcome barriers to success in earning their degree.”
- [Tennessee Service-Learning Consortium](#): UTC is currently not a member
- [Black First-Generation College Students Matter: A Call to Action](#)

References:

Tinto, V. (2012). Completing college: Rethinking institutional action. University of Chicago Press.