



# STRATEGIC ENROLLMENT PLANNING & MANAGEMENT

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## THE NEED:

The University of Tennessee at Martin launched a strategic enrollment planning process in 2020 to seek to sustain and grow its enrollment and ensure its financial stability in the face of the looming demographic shift that will see the traditional age college population projected to decrease considerably between 2025 and 2032, and to support its “Soaring to New Heights” strategic plan.

The past decade has seen a decline in the overall enrollment at the University of Tennessee at Martin with an approximately 20% drop in FTE enrollment over that time. While the graduate enrollment has recently increased, it does not nearly offset the decline in enrollment at the undergraduate level. While the incoming first-time, first-year student population has stabilized, there will soon be a significant decline in the traditional college-age population, and that could be particularly acute for UT Martin.

Nationally, there will be a significant decline in the number of high school graduates beginning in 2025. This decline will be driven almost entirely by the decline in the number of white students graduating from college. In the state of Tennessee, the pattern is the same, with 2025-26 representing the peak number of high school graduates with the coming decline being driven by the decrease in the number of white students graduating from high school.

For the University of Tennessee at Martin, where 95% of the enrollment is at the undergraduate level, of whom most are the traditional age population, and of whom 80% are white, these demographic changes are cause for immediate concern. This concern is only heightened when one examines the high schools where most UTM students matriculate.

If the university added no new markets but can increase by 10% the fraction of the high schools graduates from those high schools it enrolls (which would be a remarkable outcome), it will see first-time, first-year students remain flat over the next 6 years, about 3% below 2019 levels, before seeing 8% drops in 2028/2029.

If the university continues to receive the same percentage of high school graduates as it has in recent years, it will see undergraduate enrollments about 10-11 % below 2019 levels consistently over most of the the next decade before seeing a further decline in 2028.

If increased competition from other institutions facing the same enrollment challenges were to see the yield decrease by 10%, first year enrollments will be 15% below 2019 levels as soon as 2022 and consistently 20% below those levels by 2028.



## THE PROCESS AND THE PLAN:

UT Martin's first strategic enrollment plan was built with an organizational structure with five working groups each with eight to twelve team members, coordinated by a central SEP steering committee, and supported by a data team. All told, nearly one hundred members of the UTM community directly and meaningfully participated in the work at some stage.

Those five working groups were: (1) Undergraduate Programs (2) Graduate and Other Programs (3) Student Success (4) Marketing & Recruitment (5) Finance & Financial Aid.

Over the course of nine two-day summits, these teams engaged four interactive and recursive phases: Preparation and data collection, Strategy development, Setting enrollment goals, and Implementation.

The first three of those phases initially unfolded within the first eight visits with a Ruffalo Noel Levitz consultant and are on-going along with implementation through the work of the strategic enrollment management council.

In the initial phase of strategy ideation, approximately one hundred different potential strategies were considered. The working groups narrowed the list down to approximately thirty. These were pitched to the steering committee in a shark tank like event, narrowing the list further. Additional review by the leadership team and strategic enrollment management group further winnowed the list.

### The strategies currently undergoing implementation are:

- A comprehensive marketing plan to allow the university sufficient bandwidth to target certain key subpopulations and more directly recruit students into new and existing academic programs where growth is most likely.
- New Bachelor of Science in Cybersecurity
- New Bachelor of Science in Veterinary Science and Technology
- Master of Business Administration concentration in Human Resources
- Master of Science in Education with a concentration in Special Education Autism
- Faculty to support graduate offerings at the five UTM Regional Centers
- Advising support for students at the Regional Centers
- Comprehensive articulation agreement with regional community colleges
- Onboarding programs for non-first year students
- Financial literacy strategy

## STRATEGIC ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT & IMPLEMENTATION:

The implementation, evaluation, and evolution of the strategic enrollment plan is the responsibility of the strategic enrollment management council. This group is composed of the chairs of the five original working groups along with key personnel representing different areas of the campus.

In the initial year of implementing the plan, this group will oversee the implementation of the initial set of strategies and support the implementation of the second round of strategies. This group has developed exit strategies for the implemented plans to preserve the university's resources in case one of the plans is not successful at the level needed to sustain the investment. The SEM Council has also determined the subpopulations to focus on in the initial round for the comprehensive marketing plan and worked with IT, Academic Affairs, and University Relations to enable the launch of the marketing effort.

With the recent hire of the new director of Institutional Research, the group will also move to create visual dashboards to allow the university to track the success of the plans. The council is also revising projections to reflect the impact of COVID-19 on both the local, state, and the national enrollment landscapes.

The council continues to consider new strategies to support the enrollment growth of the institution, with a particular interest in supporting retention efforts as students move through the university.

