

A Proposal To Establish an Out-of-State Student Mentorship Program

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE, KNOXVILLE

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Executive Summary:

Program Proposal

To stimulate the retention of out-of-state students, and facilitate their engagement with the University of Tennessee campus, I propose the creation of a campus mentorship program to directly benefit out-of-state students. This program would be adopted by one of multiple proposed offices on campus, and begin in the summer of 2014.

The program would strive to influence the following three areas:

1. Summer Orientation
2. Ignite
3. Welcome Week

While different offices coordinate each of these programs, the proposed Graduate Assistant would work to coordinate with each aspect of the Division of Student Life.

Impact:

Out-of-State student retention will increase and the University of Tennessee-Knoxville will increase its total number of out-of-state applicants and admitted students. According to the 2010 & 2011 University of Tennessee *Leaver Survey*, a lack of connectedness to the campus and disappointment in on-campus programs were cited as top reasons for Out-of-State students not returning to school. The breakdown of each leaver survey is included in Appendix [A]. As student involvement research indicates, retention levels directly correlate with the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the overall academic experience¹. As a result, the overall out-of-state student experience will flourish and improve with the addition of:

- 1-on-1 peer mentoring
- Structured monthly programming
- Regional group meetings
- Out-of-State student network
- Informational Newsletters

Staffing Needs:

In consultation with other universities and specific out-of-state student programs, the likelihood for this program to function alone as a student organization is improbable. Therefore, the recommended staff is a part-time Graduate Assistant or a practicum student within the College Student Personnel program to serve as an advisor. The advisor's primary role on campus would be the oversight of the mentor programming, student recruitment, program logistics, and supervision of the student leaders who would lead the program (Regional Leaders).

Cost/Funding Needs:

The key funding needs will be the Graduate Student stipend of \$1167 and \$500 for program materials (publications, nametags, shirts, etc.).

¹ Astin, Alexander W. *Involvement: The Cornerstone of Excellence*. Change, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Jul.-Aug., 1985), p. 34-39. Taylor & Francis, Ltd. JSTOR. 22 April 2013.

Big Orange. Big Ideas.

At the University of Tennessee, we're all about Big Ideas. Our research, our scholarship, our creative activity, and our public service transform lives. The energy of Big Orange pulses through our classrooms and our labs. It drives our volunteer spirit and fires up our fans on Rocky Top. It's in everything we do and say, and it's a driving force behind our Top 25 initiative.

As referenced in the University of Tennessee's *Vol Vision: Pursuit of the Top 25* initiative, "Retaining and graduating a diverse body of well-educated undergraduate students" exists as a top priority for the University of Tennessee. Out-of-State students make up roughly 10% of this body, and currently no University sponsored program exists to further improve their retention and education, specifically.

In recent years, "Did not fit in at UT" and "Disappointed in on-campus programs" reside at the top of the list of reasons Out-of-State students leave the University of Tennessee after their first year, according to the annual *Leaver Survey* administered to all students that elect to leave the University of Tennessee (See Appendix A). The creation of a mentorship program facilitated by current Out-of-State student leaders for incoming Out-of-State students will positively contribute to the University's quest for Top 25 status. A program model at the University of Connecticut supports this impact (See Appendix C) and literature surrounding Involvement Theory suggests student involvement directly benefits retention rates (See Appendix B).

Given the lack of Out-of-State student programming and the demonstrated need for improved on-campus programs, a University sponsored program is needed to address these concerns.



Out-of-State Student Perspective

Out-of-State students at the University of Tennessee present a unique set of needs that currently are not specifically addressed. A recent focus group study of Out-of-State students, both undergraduates and recent graduates consisting of two males and two females, produced the following student comments regarding the Out-of-State student experience at UT.

- *"I felt adjusting to the University of Tennessee was especially difficult for me. I looked at students from the state of Tennessee and realized that they already understood their identity*

and niche on campus. Specific Out-of-State support would have helped the first few weeks seem less intimidating.”

- *“I would have liked to know other students at UT from my home state.”*
- *“I began to feel comfortable at the University of Tennessee when I started joining student organizations.”*
- *“There are programs available for specific student groups, but not us [Out-of-State Students].”*

In response to this stated need for an improved Out-of-State student experience, I have prepared the following proposal to establish an Out-of-State student mentorship program.

Core Outcomes of the Out-of-State Student Mentorship Program

Core outcomes of the Out-of-State Student Mentorship Program

As a result of participating in the *Out-of-State Student Mentorship Program*, students will:

- Articulate an increased ability to develop personal relationships amongst fellow Out-of-State students of all class levels
- Engage in at least one student organization or campus involvement opportunity
- Identify feeling a personal sense of belonging as a student at The University of Tennessee
- Identify at least three resource areas for support and engagement on campus
- Persist at a greater rate to their sophomore year than non participating students
- Articulate a greater sense of institutional affinity for The University of Tennessee

Additionally, a recommended outcome of this program is the creation and distribution of an annual report on Out-of-State student engagement and persistence which will allow for a continued focus on retaining this student population.

Recruitment and Target Participants

The program will target all incoming, first-year, Out-of-State students to fulfill the mentee role. For the role of the mentors, it will target 40 Sophomore-Senior Out-of-State student leaders. This will create approximately a 10:1 ratio for all group related activities.

Proposed Mentorship Program Model

The proposed model includes the creation of a mentorship program to influence the overall Out-of-State student experience at UT, while specifically targeting Student Orientation, Ignite, and Welcome Week. Sophomores-Seniors will serve as mentors to incoming out-of-state students. In addition to the mentorship aspect, this program would target the Orientation Leader, Ignite Team Leader, and Welcome Leader team positions as a supplementary involvement level for the current Out-of-State student leaders serving as mentors.

Following summer orientation, mentors will shape different mentee groups that include students all from the same state/region. These groups will help out-of-state students to find their niche on campus and develop important student relationships. Participants will be notified of their regional group and mentor shortly before arriving in Knoxville. The United States will be divided up into five (5) regions (to expand as the program expands), with regional leaders for each.

1. Northern Region
2. Southern Region
3. Eastern Region
4. Western Plains Region
5. Western Pacific Region

These regional groups will conduct at least one (1) activity per month with out-of-state students, led by the mentors. In addition to social outings (Intramural teams, campus shows/events), these

activities will include informational topics to expand the new students' knowledge of campus resources (974-HELP, OIT Helpdesk, student organization listings, etc.).

The recommended staff is a part-time Graduate Assistant or a practicum student within the College Student Personnel program to serve as an advisor. The advisor's primary role on campus would be the oversight of the mentor programming, student recruitment, program logistics, and supervision of the student leaders who would lead the program (Regional Leaders). One of the specific duties of the advisor would be to coordinate a full-day training session, once a year in August, for all of the Sophomore-Senior Out-of-State mentors that participate in the mentorship program.

The Out-of-State student mentorship program will exist as a program within the Division of Student Life. This partnership creates greater likelihood for student success, due to the advisors readily available to student leaders and participants. Moreover, Student Life is the most likely home to make this program a priority. While its influence will span different areas of Student Life, it will be included in one of the following offices:

- Office of New Student & Family Programs
 - This office focuses on new students. Through Orientation and the incorporation of the Welcome Leaders, this office supports the student experience. With a narrowed focus on Out-of-State students, programs within Orientation and during the formal Welcome Week can be expanded. The office's established administrative support system would aid the initial construction and logistical approach of the mentor-mentee programming.
- Office of Student Activities
 - The Out-of-State mentorship program's component of extending past Welcome Week and throughout the year would greatly benefit from this office. The connections through different student groups would hopefully stimulate student recruitment.
- Center for Leadership & Service
 - The programming side of the mentorship program would derive many educational benefits from this office. With a firm commitment to developing the undergraduate student's leadership component, this office would provide the program with structure beyond social interaction.
- Dean of Students Office

- The diverse advising roles of this office would help attract mentors and mentees to the program. Additionally, the office would be able to present different avenues of involvement for the program participants.

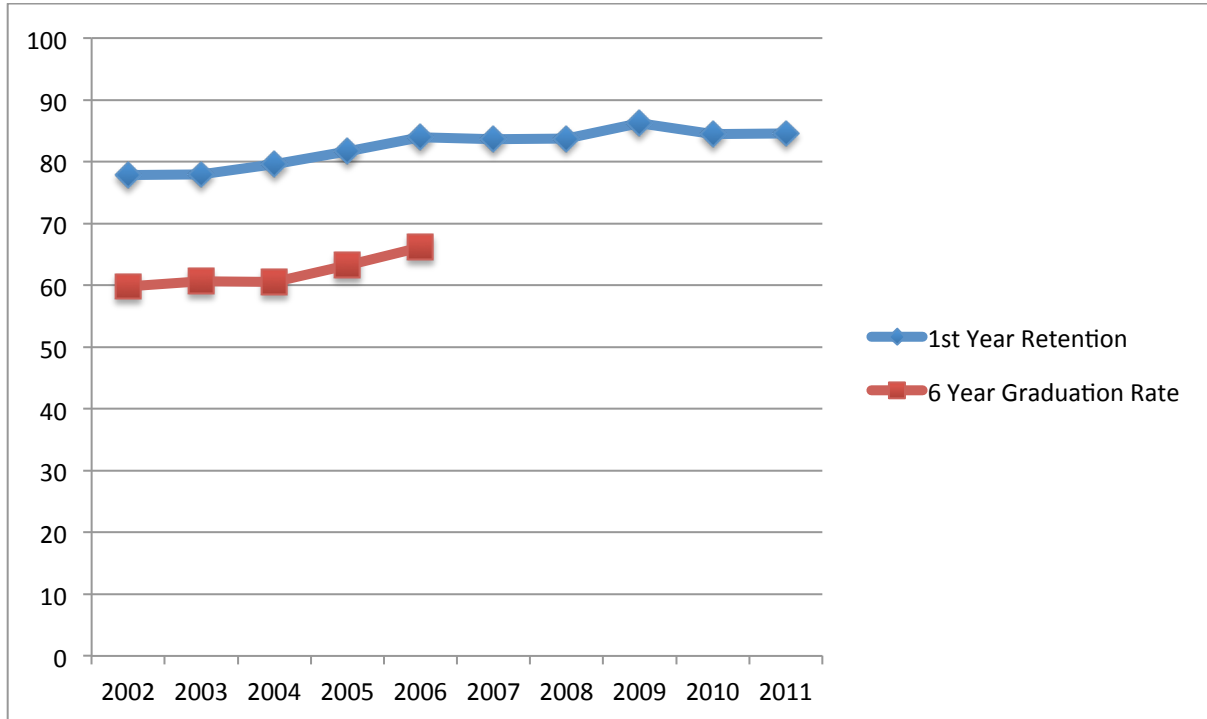
Hopefully the Out-of-State mentorship program will receive support from each of the offices listed above and exist through cross-collaboration. However, its permanent residence would reside in whichever option Student Life believes that it will best fit.

Funding Request

To fully support this mentorship program, a part-time graduate assistant position would require funding comparable to other graduate assistant students working throughout the multiple divisions of Student Life at the University of Tennessee, in addition to programming fees of \$500.

Appendix A: University of Tennessee Admissions & Retention Data

Retention and Graduation Rates
First-Time Full-Time Freshmen
Fall Cohorts, 2002-2011
University of Tennessee, Knoxville



Source: Student Information System, University of Tennessee, Knoxville
UTK OIRA Fact Book 2012-2013

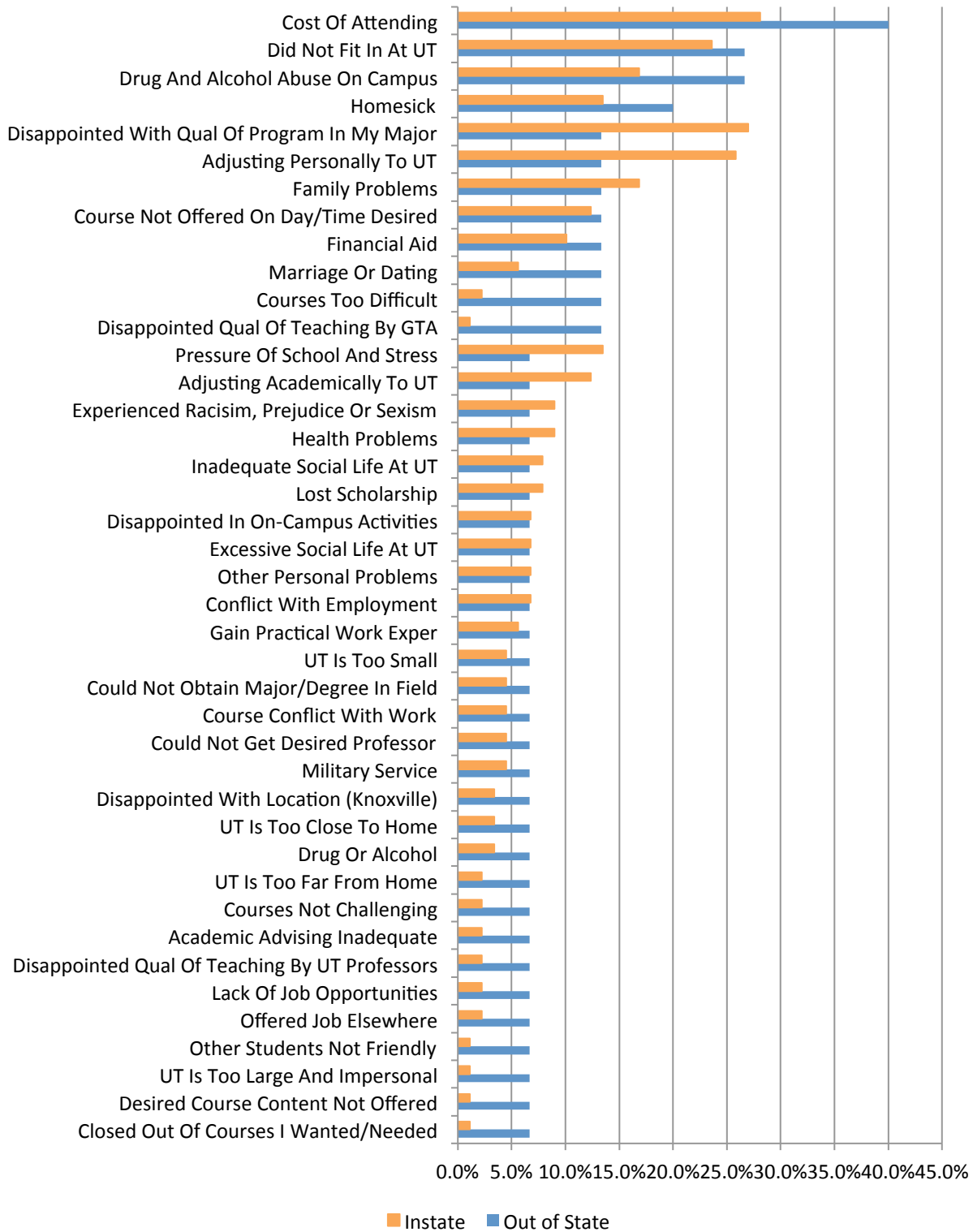
First-Time Freshmen Enrollment
By Place of Permanent Residence
Fall 2008-2012
University of Tennessee, Knoxville



Permanent Residence	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Tennessee	86.7%	88.8%	88.7%	88.6%	89.8%
Other States	12.6%	9.8%	10.3%	9.8%	9.7%
Foreign	0.7%	1.3%	1.0%	1.6%	0.5%

Source: Student Information System, University of Tennessee, Knoxville
UTK OIRA Fact Book 2012-2013

**Percent of Student Responses "Very Important Reason for Leaving UT" Fall 2011 Leaver's Survey
N=104 Instate 89, Out of State 15**



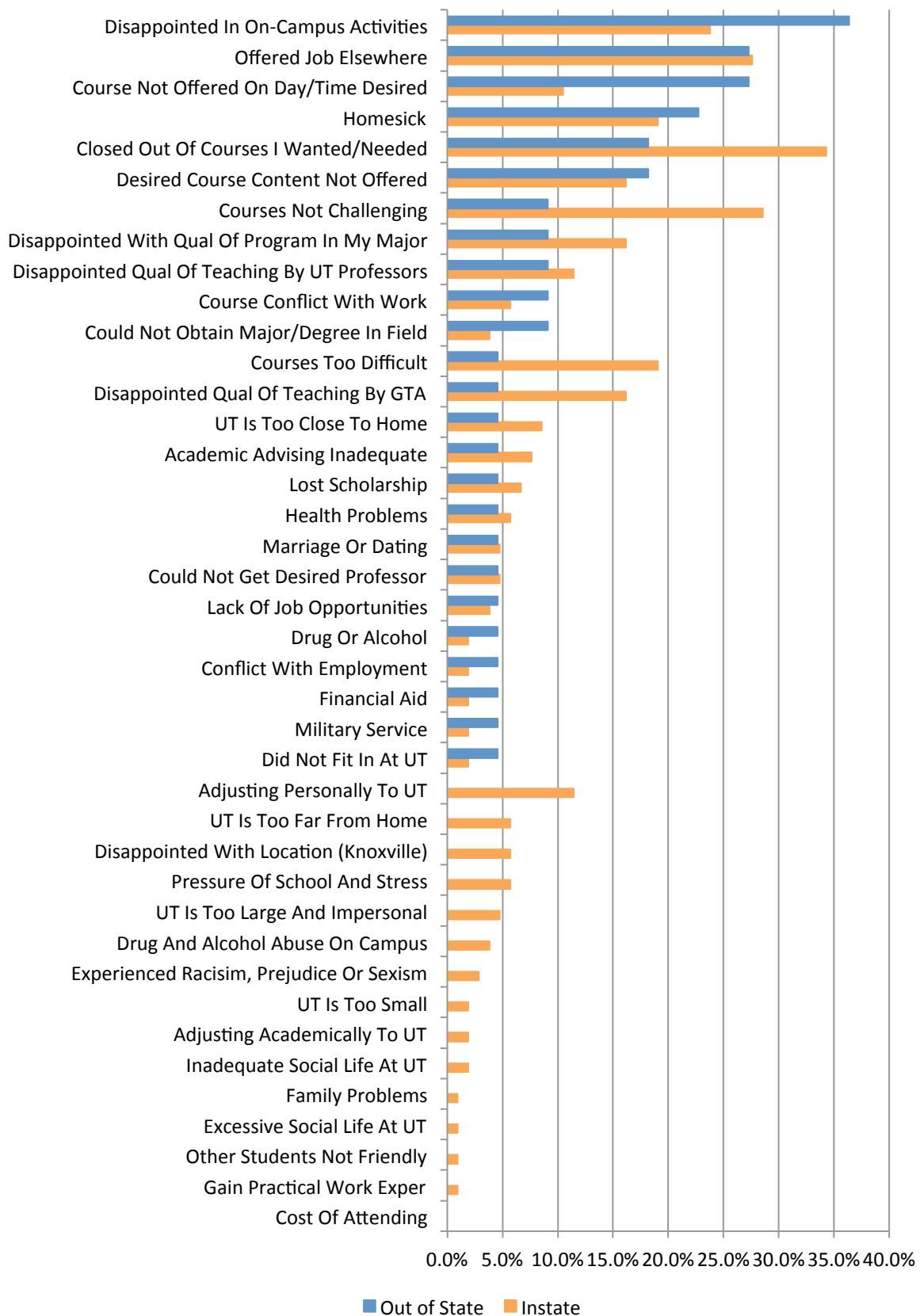
Percent of Student Responses "Very Important Reason for Leaving UT" Fall 2011 Leaver's Survey N=104		
Issue	Out of State n=15	Instate n=89
Closed Out Of Courses I Wanted/Needed	6.7%	1.1%
Desired Course Content Not Offered	6.7%	1.1%
UT Is Too Large And Impersonal	6.7%	1.1%
Other Students Not Friendly	6.7%	1.1%
Offered Job Elsewhere	6.7%	2.2%
Lack Of Job Opportunities	6.7%	2.2%
Disappointed Quality Of Teaching By UT Professors	6.7%	2.2%
Academic Advising Inadequate	6.7%	2.2%
Courses Not Challenging	6.7%	2.2%
UT Is Too Far From Home	6.7%	2.2%
Drug Or Alcohol	6.7%	3.4%
UT Is Too Close To Home	6.7%	3.4%
Disappointed With Location (Knoxville)	6.7%	3.4%
Military Service	6.7%	4.5%
Could Not Get Desired Professor	6.7%	4.5%
Course Conflict With Work	6.7%	4.5%
Could Not Obtain Major/Degree In Field	6.7%	4.5%
UT Is Too Small	6.7%	4.5%
Gain Practical Work Experience	6.7%	5.6%
Conflict With Employment	6.7%	6.7%
Other Personal Problems	6.7%	6.7%
Excessive Social Life At UT	6.7%	6.7%
Disappointed In On-Campus Activities	6.7%	6.7%
Lost Scholarship	6.7%	7.9%
Inadequate Social Life At UT	6.7%	7.9%
Health Problems	6.7%	9.0%
Experienced Racism, Prejudice Or Sexism	6.7%	9.0%
Adjusting Academically To UT	6.7%	12.4%
Pressure Of School And Stress	6.7%	13.5%
Disappointed Quality Of Teaching By GTA	13.3%	1.1%
Courses Too Difficult	13.3%	2.2%
Marriage Or Dating	13.3%	5.6%
Financial Aid	13.3%	10.1%
Course Not Offered On Day/Time Desired	13.3%	12.4%
Family Problems	13.3%	16.9%

Adjusting Personally To UT	13.3%	25.8%
Disappointed With Quality Of Program In My Major	13.3%	27.0%
Homesick	20.0%	13.5%
Drug And Alcohol Abuse On Campus	26.7%	16.9%
Did Not Fit In At UT	26.7%	23.6%
Cost Of Attending	40.0%	28.1%

Percent of Student Responses "Very Important Reason for Leaving UT"

Fall 2010 Leaver's Survey

N=127 Out of State 22, Instate 105



Percent of Student Responses "Very Important Reason for Leaving UT" Fall 2010 Leaver's Survey N=127		
Issue	Instate n=105	Out of State n=22
Cost Of Attending	0.0%	0.0%
Gain Practical Work Exper	1.0%	0.0%
Other Students Not Friendly	1.0%	0.0%
Excessive Social Life At UT	1.0%	0.0%
Family Problems	1.0%	0.0%
Inadequate Social Life At UT	1.9%	0.0%
Adjusting Academically To UT	1.9%	0.0%
UT Is Too Small	1.9%	0.0%
Experienced Racism, Prejudice Or Sexism	2.9%	0.0%
Drug And Alcohol Abuse On Campus	3.8%	0.0%
UT Is Too Large And Impersonal	4.8%	0.0%
Pressure Of School And Stress	5.7%	0.0%
Disappointed With Location (Knoxville)	5.7%	0.0%
UT Is Too Far From Home	5.7%	0.0%
Adjusting Personally To UT	11.4%	0.0%
Did Not Fit In At UT	1.9%	4.5%
Military Service	1.9%	4.5%
Financial Aid	1.9%	4.5%
Conflict With Employment	1.9%	4.5%
Drug Or Alcohol	1.9%	4.5%
Lack Of Job Opportunities	3.8%	4.5%
Could Not Get Desired Professor	4.8%	4.5%
Marriage Or Dating	4.8%	4.5%
Health Problems	5.7%	4.5%
Lost Scholarship	6.7%	4.5%
Academic Advising Inadequate	7.6%	4.5%
UT Is Too Close To Home	8.6%	4.5%
Disappointed Qual Of Teaching By GTA	16.2%	4.5%
Courses Too Difficult	19.0%	4.5%
Could Not Obtain Major/Degree In Field	3.8%	9.1%
Course Conflict With Work	5.7%	9.1%
Disappointed Qual Of Teaching By UT Professors	11.4%	9.1%
Disappointed With Qual Of Program In My Major	16.2%	9.1%
Courses Not Challenging	28.6%	9.1%
Desired Course Content Not Offered	16.2%	18.2%
Closed Out Of Courses I Wanted/Needed	34.3%	18.2%
Homesick	19.0%	22.7%
Course Not Offered On Day/Time Desired	10.5%	27.3%
Offered Job Elsewhere	27.6%	27.3%
Disappointed In On-Campus Activities	23.8%	36.4%

Appendix B: Student Involvement Theory

Background

With contributions from multiple researchers, but specifically in this example Alexander Astin, this theory of student involvement has evolved to monitor different levels of student involvement and engagement. This theory, however, possesses several virtues. Simply it states that “Students learn by becoming involved.” It represents a guide to monitor student and faculty development, but also a tool to design more effective learning environments on college campuses around the world. (Astin 36)

This theory has evolved since the 1970s in which research was conducted on college dropouts. Its work was aimed at, “Identifying factors in the college environment that significantly affect the student’s persistence in college.” (Astin 37) According to Astin, researchers found that “The factors that facilitate persistence [success, and ultimately graduation] all signified high involvement.” (Astin 37)

Student Involvement

The phrase *student involvement* refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience. (Astin 36) According to Alexander Astin, professor and director of the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles, “A highly involved student is one who, for example, devotes considerable energy to studying, spends a lot of time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students. Conversely, an un-involved student may neglect studies, spend little time on campus, abstain from extracurricular activities and have little contact with other students.” (Astin 36)

One of the primary goals of the Out-of-State Student Mentorship program is to increase the level of student involvement experienced by incoming Out-of-State students. Upon analyzing the theory of student involvement, if involvement is viewed as occurring along a continuum, the act of “dropping out” or leaving the University of Tennessee can be viewed as the ultimate form of non-involvement. (Astin 38)

Activities at the University of Tennessee that seek to engage students and develop the overall college experience, similar to the goals of the Out-of-State Student Mentorship program, facilitate an increase in the amount of *student involvement* experienced. As a result, students who participate in these activities move along the involvement continuum away from the end of non-involvement associated with “dropping out” and instead move closer to a likelihood of undergraduate success and successful graduation. This program will exist as an additional example of a factor that facilitates persistence in college.

Astin, Alexander W. *Involvement: The Cornerstone of Excellence*. Change, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Jul.-Aug., 1985), p. 34-39. Taylor & Francis, Ltd. JSTOR. 22 April 2013

Appendix C: A Program Imitation Model

“Huskies Away from Home”

Extensive research was conducted in reference to one of the most highly regarded Out-of-State student programs in the country at the University of Connecticut. Cleverly coined *Huskies Away from Home*, the University of Tennessee Out-of-State Mentorship Program will strive to emulate the core characteristics of the University of Connecticut’s model. Additionally, this program will serve as a benchmark for annual evaluations.

Existing as a Division of Student Affairs at the University of Connecticut, the program is described as follows:

“*Huskies Away from Home* was established in fall of 2005 to help incoming out-of-state students make connections with upperclassmen from out-of-state and from the state of Connecticut. The main focus of *Huskies Away from Home* is to help new out-of-staters become acclimated to UConn and the community of Storrs by creating a supportive social network to help students feel more at home. Over 1,300 students have participated in the program since its first full year in 2006-2007.”

The goals of this program will also serve as similar goals for the program at the University of Tennessee. After speaking with Shana Clarke, Graduate Assistant and Director of *Huskies Away from Home*, the model for this program was constructed.

According to Ms. Clarke, “This program helps students adjust to a new environment at the University of Connecticut. Upperclassmen get involved in the organization to continuously better the experience for Out-of-State students at UCONN. Students really enjoy it.”

Current programming on the *Huskies Away from Home* website includes:

- 1-on-1 Peer Mentoring
- State/Region Groups
- Participation on Intramural Teams
- Information about Activities on Campus
- Informational Newsletters
- Facebook Group to Aid in Networking

The University of Tennessee program will strive to facilitate similar programs to achieve results.

Ms. Clarke provided the following comments and recommendations in regards to the creation of a similar program at the University of Tennessee:

Advisor Position

At the University of Connecticut, this program was first attempted as a student organization. However, it failed due to fluctuations in the students’ passion for the organization. As the advisor she ensures the program continues and improves each year. She is a Graduate Assistant, rather than a

full-time employee. She oversees the pairing of mentors and mentees, sends monthly newsletters, and troubleshoots all issues between mentor groups. Ms. Clarke credits her partnership with Student Affairs as a key to the program's success.

Regional Groups

UCONN operates with ten (10) different regional groups. In the above suggestion, the University of Tennessee will begin with five (5) and slowly expand as the program expands. Each one of these groups has a regional leader. These leaders coordinate and organize monthly activities for the groups. The graduate assistant does not facilitate training for the mentors or regional leaders. Additionally, the graduate assistant does not regularly meet with the groups. The regional leaders host "collaboration meetings" to discuss ideas and upcoming events.