

Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
**Hearing on “Attaining a Quality Degree:
Innovations to Improve Student Success”**
Tim Hall, President, Austin Peay State University
October 31, 2013

Chairman Harkin, Ranking Member Alexander, and members of the Committee: my name is Tim Hall. I am the president of Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, Tennessee, Tennessee’s fastest growing public university and one which serves many students at risk for not completing college. More than 50% of our students receive the Pell grant, and roughly 40% are adults. As you know, both categories of students have traditionally experienced retention and graduation rates significantly lower than other students. At Austin Peay, we are working overtime to defeat demography on behalf of our students. We know that we can't replace their motivation and efforts, but we’ve discovered there things we can do to support their success. My goal today is to summarize two of the innovations that have helped more of our students persist and graduate.

The first is in the area of developmental education. Like many institutions of higher learning, one of our most pressing challenges is how to help students who arrive at college not ready for college work. More than 50% of our students fall into this category. Traditionally, such students have been required to take—and required to pay for—noncredit courses designed to get them up to speed for college level work as a prerequisite to taking required credit-bearing courses. Students not ready for college math, for example, would be required to take one or more noncredit math courses to catch them up, and then whatever college-level math course they needed to graduate. The success rate for that prerequisite model was

abysmal. Only about 10% of our students made it through the noncredit courses and then successfully completed the college-level course. Those results paralleled success rates around the country.

Looking back, we can see why the prerequisite model was not likely to produce the results we needed. It was expensive, for us and for our students. It was demoralizing for our students—many of them the first in their families to attend college—to arrive on campus and be told they weren't ready to take on real college courses. And it was risky, because it tended to extend the time it took our students to move forward toward graduation; and, as we now know, time is the enemy, especially for our low income and adult students.¹ The longer it takes for them to graduate, the more likely it is that life will intervene and throw them off track.

Beginning in 2007, Austin Peay replaced the traditional developmental studies model with a co-curricular model. Now, students with deficiencies in mathematics, writing, or reading move straight into credit-bearing college courses, with additional required workshops to help them succeed. We use talented students to lead these workshops. In mathematics, for example, the workshops include individual diagnostics to pinpoint problem areas for each individual student and computer exercises to help address these problems. The results of the new model have been astonishing. Now, better than 70% of our students who arrive unprepared for college mathematics, for example, are able to successfully complete the introductory mathematics course for their discipline, *and do so within a single semester*. Results for students with deficiencies in reading or writing ability have

¹ See http://www.completecollege.org/docs/Time_Is_the_Enemy.pdf.

been comparable. And instead of paying for two or more courses and receiving credit for only one, students pay for a single course, with a modest \$75 additional fee to cover the cost of the supplemental workshops. These successes have caused the National Center for Academic Transformation (NCAT) to include Austin Peay's developmental course model as one of the six recommended models for redesigning developmental courses.² Similarly, Complete College America has featured Austin Peay's co-curricular redesign of developmental studies as one of the recommended strategies for meeting the needs of students who arrive at college unprepared for college-level work.³

At Austin Peay we have also harnessed the power of technology to guide students on the path to a successful degree. Our revolutionary program, Degree Compass, created by Dr. Tristan Denley and now licensed to Desire2Learn,⁴ is a personalized, web-based course recommendation tool that uses predictive analytics to guide students' course selection in a way that not only enhances their rate of academic success but also the timely completion of their degree. Degree Compass compares each student's academic record with every other student's record to make remarkably accurate predictions about a student's likelihood of success in a particular course or a particular major. It then makes real-time recommendations available to both our students and their faculty advisors. Spotlighted by the publications such as the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, and *The*

² For NCAT's report on Austin Peay's redesign, see http://www.thencat.org/States/TN/Abstracts/APSU%20Algebra_Abstract.htm.

³ See <http://www.completecollege.org/docs/CCA%20Co-Req%20Model%20-%20Transform%20Remediation%20for%20Chicago%20final%281%29.pdf>.

⁴ See <http://www.desire2learn.com/products/degree-compass/>.

Chronicle of Higher Education, and recognized by President Obama⁵ and Bill Gates,⁶ Degree Compass is making a difference in the success rates for students not only at Austin Peay State University, but at other universities and community colleges that have made it available to their students. Across multiple institutions, we are seeing the average credit hours earned by students increase in correlation to the extent they take courses recommended by Degree Compass. Furthermore, the achievement gap that tends to exist between low income or minority students and other students is being dramatically narrowed where students build schedules using the courses recommended by Degree Compass.

The result of the innovations I've described at Austin Peay have been dramatic. You may know that state funding for higher education in Tennessee is now based 100% on institutional performance, especially as measured by the retention and graduation of our students. I am pleased to tell you that for the first two years of this new funding model, Austin Peay State University has led the state in increased performance and funding. We have also seen our six-year graduation rate increase by 25% over the past six years.

In closing, I thank you for the opportunity to address the important subject of innovation in higher education. Now, more than ever, we know that innovation in service of student success is necessary to achieve the degree-completion results America needs over the next decade. The results we have seen at Austin Peay State

⁵ See <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/08/22/fact-sheet-president-s-plan-make-college-more-affordable-better-bargain->.

⁶ See <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/GatesonP>.

University demonstrate that innovation to support student success is within our grasp. Thank you.