

## **Satisfying Parents with Freshman Central**

**Emily Parrish**

**MBA Graduate Student Assistant**

**The University of Tennessee at Martin**

## **Abstract**

*The University of Tennessee at Martin has implemented Freshman Central to accommodate parents of first-time college freshmen on move-in day. Freshman Central is part of the University of Tennessee at Martin's Freshman Experience, which also includes an interactive registration process, an intense orientation for students, and an informative class. The purpose of Freshman Central is to incorporate numerous campus offices into one location, giving parents the hassle-free opportunity to pay expenses and gain important information about their student's new college life. Benefits of Freshman Central consist of efficiency and customer satisfaction through an accessible, caring, and well-informed environment. UTM continuously modifies the process to satisfy parents, enlighten students, and inform employees about the freshman enrollment process.*

## **Introduction to the University of Tennessee at Martin**

**Chancellor:** Nick Dunagan

**Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration:** Al Hooten

The University of Tennessee at Martin (UTM) originally opened its doors as the Hall-Moody Institute, founded in 1900 by the Baptists of Martin. In 1927, Hall-Moody Institute, now named Hall-Moody Junior College, merged with its sister institution Union University due to waning enrollment rates and rising financial difficulties. During Hall-Moody Junior College's consolidation process, citizens of Martin and Weakley County appealed to the State of Tennessee in effort to organize a junior college as part of the University of Tennessee system. Senate Bill Number 301 was passed in March of 1927, establishing Tennessee Junior College in Martin and emphasizing agriculture, industrial arts, and home economics. On September 12, 1927, Tennessee Junior College, with 9 members of faculty, greeted 120 students.

Over the next two decades, enrollment and prosperity tapered, due to the Great Depression and World War II. However, in 1946, war veterans contributed to the tripling of students enrolled, which totaled 649 for the fall semester. The steady increase in enrollment throughout the 1950's triggered the construction of new classroom, administration, student life, and housing buildings. During this time, Tennessee Junior College was changed to a four-year college and renamed the University of Tennessee, Martin Branch, later changed to the University of Tennessee at Martin.

The 1960's brought the college a new generation; student enrollment grew from 1,123 to 4,197 as UTM aesthetically and academically expanded its campus with building construction and degree offerings. The Agriculture, Business Administration, Education, Home Economics, and Liberal Arts departments were promoted to schools; a degree in Engineering Technology was initiated; and graduate programs in Education and Home Economics became available. Enrollment leveled out in the 1970's and fluctuated in the 1980's, partially due to the economic recession. During the 1990's, an enrollment rebound occurred with full-time student enrollment ranging from 5,300 to 6,012, a record set in 1997 that remained in place until 2004. The average enrollment for 1998-2003 was approximately 5,800. The current fall 2004 enrollment status is 6,104, a significant increase from the previous year.

*Source: A Virtual History of the University of Tennessee at Martin.*

*<http://www.utm.edu/~utmlife/historical.html>*

The increase in student enrollment is contributed to the Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship. Fall 2004 is the first semester that the scholarship has become available. First-time, full time freshman for fall 2004 consists of 1,132 students, a 19 percent increase compared to fall 2003.

## **Statement of the Problem/Initiative**

The influx of freshman makes UTM's missions of being "a home away from home" and "the campus that cares" challenging to fulfill. Parents, facing either the mourning or the gladness of their child emptying the nest, become a prime target for customer satisfaction. Walking all over the campus to pay for a student's varied expenses is frustrating for the parent. Requiring payment at different places for tuition, parking, textbooks, and meal plans causes parents to question the organization's efficiency. Also, having multiple locations for faculty advisors, housing officials, and financial aid assistants aggravated parents and students.

University employees have little knowledge of what other departments require, and often are unable to do anything but direct confused inquirers to yet another location on campus. Weary after lugging boxes of their child's belongings to their new "home," parents have only one thought rambling in their head: You better take good care of my child. The University of Tennessee at Martin accommodates freshmen and their parents during the Freshman Experience.

## **Design**

The Freshman Experience consists of four components designed to satisfy freshmen's and parents' concerns. First, the Summer Orientation and Registration (S.O.A.R.) program enhances students' and their parents' knowledge of UTM. Students can take

placement tests, meet with faculty advisors, and register for classes. Parents can join their child in campus tours and obtain information on campus events and services.

Second, Freshman Welcome Week is a time when freshmen are divided into groups by academic interest and are prepared for college life. Faculty mentors and student Peer Enabler (PEP) leaders are assigned to each group, advising and orientating the student to adjust to their new life. The goal of Freshman Welcome Week is to make the freshman fully comfortable with and knowledgeable of campus life at UTM while enhancing certain skills like study habits and money management.

The third element of the Freshman Experience is composed of a class that expands on the Welcome Week. Students meet with a member of faculty in their major and further increase the skills introduced during Welcome Week. Emphasizing time management, goal setting, and study habits, the Freshman Experience Class teaches students how to make intelligent college and career decisions.

While S. O. A. R., Freshman Welcome Week, and the Freshman Experience class efficiently managed students' needs; parents' needs were not being addressed. Parents were still left to wander around campus to pay for their students' college expenses and to gain perspective on what kind of life their child would lead for the next four years. Questions about campus security and student life would go unanswered because

authoritative figures weren't present during the time that parents appeared on campus: move-in day.

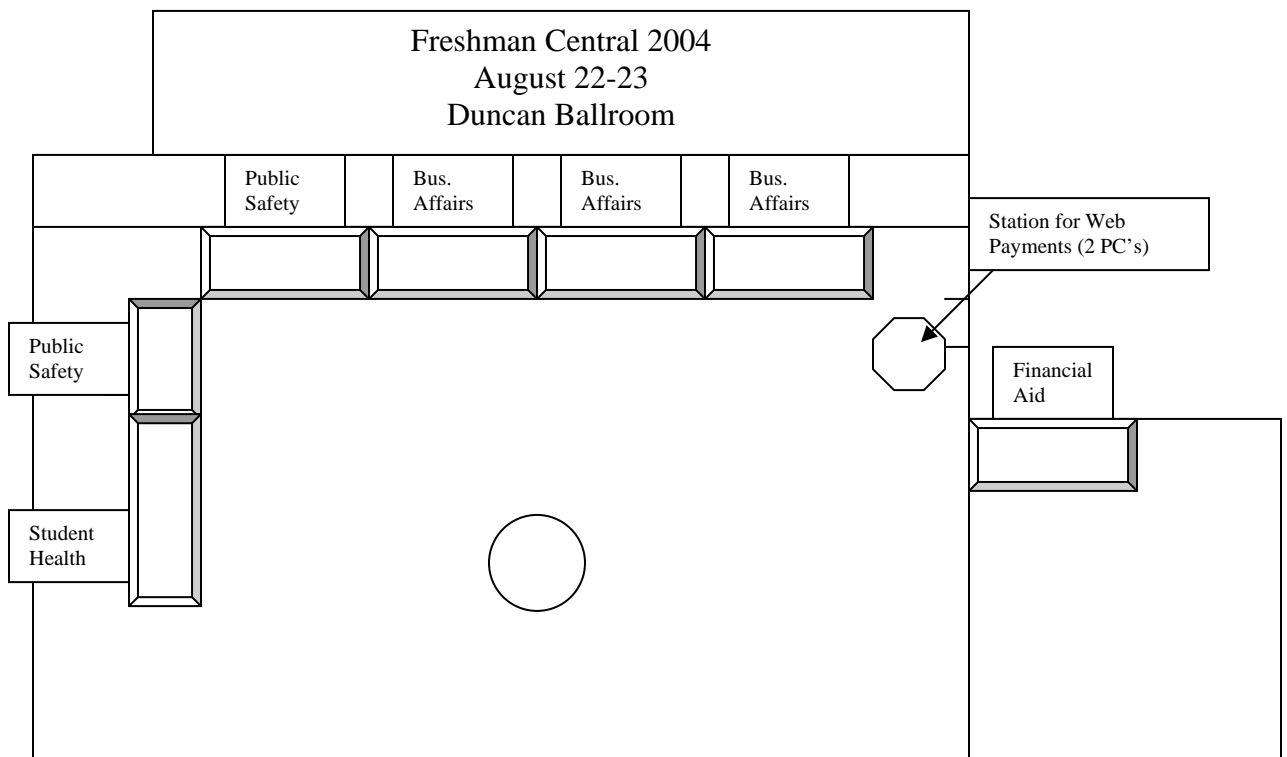
The final component of the Freshman Experience is designed to generate a more positive feeling for parents on move-in day. Freshman Central is comprised of various offices that come together in one place to accommodate parents' and students' business needs and other issues. Representatives from each office are present to answer questions, ranging from laundry to financial aid. Additional staff is in attendance with tips, such as how to handle homesickness and paying fees. All expenses can easily be taken care of with minimum effort. Parents can place money on their child's account (Skyhawk card) to be designated for specific uses, or make the loop around Freshman Central and personally pay the expenses. The bookstore is located next door, and the dining hall is available for parents and students. The purpose of Freshman Central is to make the emotional first day of college easier for both students and parents.

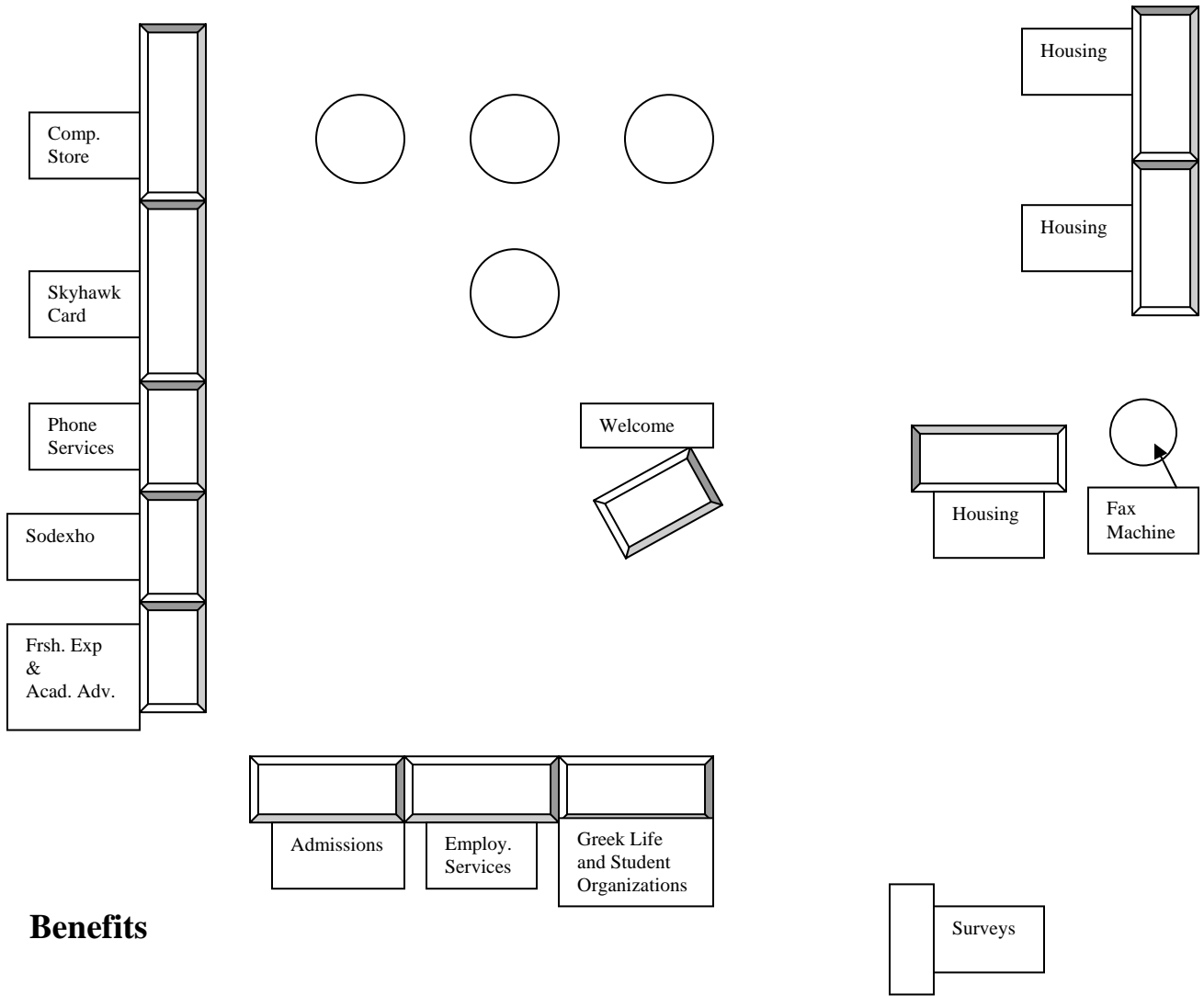
## **Implementation**

The goal of the Freshman Experience is to enlighten students and parents while making the transition into college easier. Over 900 students plus their parents participated in Freshman Central. Implementing Freshman Central involved the cooperation of various departments. As noted in Exhibit A, leaders of the Student Government Association welcome each visitor to Freshman Central. The Admissions department representatives

have a table to answer any question regarding admission requirements. Employment Services and Student Organizations present students and parents with job and social opportunities. Academic Advisors give customers insight on major and class schedule selection. Dining services, phone services, and computer store officials help parents and students chose the best plan for a new college life. Student Health Services provides information on immunizations and other available health care services. At the Public Safety tables, officials answer any questions parents might have regarding campus safety, and offer parking decals for students. Housing and Financial Aid administrators cater to parents and students who have concerns about where students will live and eligibility for financial aid. Employees of the Business Affairs department give parents the opportunity to pay for college expenses and assist users of the web payment stations. By assembling these offices, UTM is able to satisfy parents of freshmen.

## Exhibit A





## Benefits

The Freshman Experience has benefited the University of Tennessee at Martin in two ways: efficiency and customer satisfaction. First, Freshman Central has provided UTM a more efficient environment. Parents, students, employees, and leaders all congregate in one location to save time and energy. The close proximity of officials provides a synergistic effect. Employees become more knowledgeable about the freshman process and can better help students and parents with any issue that arises.

The prime benefit of the Freshman Experience is the satisfaction of parents, students, and employees. Parents have peace of mind by easily becoming familiar with the campus and providing for their child's needs. Students feel first-hand that UTM cares about them through orientation and preparation for college life. With a central location for numerous offices, employees become more knowledgeable about other areas of UTM. Customers of UTM are satisfied through an accessible, caring, and well-informed environment.

## **Retrospect**

The University of Tennessee at Martin is continually improving the "Freshman Experience" process. Freshman Central stations should be modified to better accommodate the traffic flow and provide an efficient work environment. Surveys are passed out to participants, giving UTM insight on how to modify Freshman Central.