

Strategic Plan



The University of Texas at Austin
College of Natural Sciences

Fall 2022 Update and Key Priorities

The University of Texas at Austin's College of Natural Sciences aims to become the world's highest-impact public research university for science, mathematics and computing. To review the strategic plan commitments towards reaching this goal, please visit cns.utexas.edu/deans-office/strategic-plan

What We've Done

✓ Professional-track faculty task force

A task force convened over the summer suggested changes in practice and resources to support investments in professional-track faculty members' success. The college is implementing these strategies beginning this academic year. Dean David Vanden Bout is leading a campus-wide task force on professional track faculty for the provost's office.

✓ Staff development and growth supported

The college hired a senior training coordinator who has developed training programs for supervisors, new employees and lateral communities, informed by a series of focus groups and surveys with staff and supervisors. The first new professional development offerings—related to employee support, strength-finding and leadership development—rolled out this fall.

✓ New funding secured for scholarships

Students of limited financial means will benefit from the last year's record fundraising. By the August 31 end of fiscal year, 1,200 Natural Sciences students had received scholarships, and the development team had raised \$12 million in new scholarship support—an all-time high for a single year.

✓ Local external research collaborations advance.

The NSF awarded a pilot grant to university researchers collaborating with health leaders in the City of Austin and other external partners to establish a new Center for Pandemic Decision Science. Meanwhile, a university-wide Business for Innovation and Opportunity task force is being led by Natural Sciences Dean David Vanden Bout and Cockrell School Dean Roger Bonnacaze.

✓ Co-enrollment with Austin Community College launches.

The college welcomed its first class of UTeach Access students who will help to build the STEM teacher workforce. These undergraduates pursue teaching certifications, as they simultaneously secure degrees in the College of Natural Sciences.

✓ Counseling resources expanded

To support mental health and well-being of both undergraduates and graduate students, the Counselors in Academic Residence Program (CARE) that initially provided one professional counselor devoted to Natural Sciences has been increased to three full-time counselors.

✓ Undergraduate summer research experiences

More than \$200,000 in support was allocated to 156 students (131 of them in the Freshman Research Initiative) to support research experiences over the summer.

✓ Data insights team's role expands

The college recently restructured the institutional data team in the college, placing it in the Office of Strategy, Planning and Equity Initiatives. The move will help broaden and streamline access to information, helping individuals and groups improve outcomes across multiple domains.

✓ Faculty professional development continued

Teaching Discovery Days spanned two days in October for all who teach. The Associate to Partner retreat for promoted tenure-track faculty also happened in October, and a new group of college Emerging Leaders was named.

✓ Online master's programs grow

Three Option III (100% online) master's programs in the college—for computer science, data science and nutritional science—have helped to roughly double the total number of graduate students that CNS serves in recent years. There are currently 1,881 students served in these master's programs, compared to 1,400 in residential master's and Ph.D. programs in the college.

✓ Statistics and data science major is added

The college added its 16th major and welcomed 50 new undergraduates into the program as statistics and data science majors.

✓ Spark Grants awarded

In its first cycle, the college program made awards to six faculty members who were selected for four-year grants totaling \$1.2 million (i.e., \$200,000 each). The faculty members in the first cohort of grantees hail from multiple disciplines including chemistry, molecular biosciences and astronomy.

✓ Texas Biologics launched

Over the summer, it distributed its initial set of four grant awards to support faculty and other researchers across campus. With \$5.7 million in initial seed funding, the initiative establishes UT Austin's one of the fastest-growing pharmaceutical sectors, representing over 26% of the new drugs approved in 2020

Where Our Sights Are Set Next

→ **A mentoring task force convened over the summer** and reached recommendations about how better to ensure effective mentoring for graduate students, postdocs and others. Implementation groups have formed and are being charged with moving these recommendations forward.

→ **The DEI Fellowship programs will launch this academic year**, with applications opening soon for opportunities for faculty members and graduate students to gain new experiences and receive compensation for contributions to the culture of belonging and equity we are seeking to advance throughout the college.

→ **Further promoting a widespread culture of belonging in Natural Sciences**, we are continuing to act upon clear commitments and next steps in advancing diversity, equity and inclusion priorities across our college with efforts such as a college-wide climate survey.

→ **With engineering, a new Robotics offering for undergraduates** is in the works to help meet industry's demands as well as students' interest in skill-building. This academic offering will be available to students entering the university as soon as next year. An online master's in artificial intelligence is also in development.

→ **The 2023 Texas Science Festival** will take place Feb. 21–March 4 and be free to the public, with online and in-person offerings that allow for an extended reach.

→ **Revitalizing and reopening spaces to welcome the science-interested public** is underway. The Patton Marine Science Education Center just reopened to the public at the UT Marine Science Institute (MSI) with new exhibits and offerings, and new investments in the Texas Memorial Museum will allow it to reopen in fall 2023.

→ **The Giant Magellan Telescope construction is accelerating with new commitments**, as the university plans an additional \$45 million in investments in the GMT, the world's most powerful telescope. This additional funding brings the university's total commitment to \$110.3 million.

→ **The Texas Field Station Network is continuing to expand**, as MSI and the White Family Outdoor Learning Center, have recently joined Stengl Lost Pines, Brackenridge and the Wildflower Center as officially designated UT field stations.