

## The Big Orange Path

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An overwhelming number of applications combined with a new guaranteed admissions policy in 2023 caused admissions to the Herbert College of Agriculture to plummet as students were admitted primarily into a relative few campus majors (e.g., Business, Engineering). Agriculture and natural resource stakeholders across the state were frustrated their students could not get into Herbert. Our mission became focused on providing access to students to change the perception of “if” one goes to UT to “When I go to UT.”

### **How the Program Will Function**

Students who apply to the Herbert College of Agriculture and are denied by the University for capacity reasons will receive an invitation from Herbert to join after completing an associate degree at an in-state community college (CC). The offer will include the name and contact information for a Herbert advisor.

Herbert advisors will work closely with CC advisors and faculty to ensure curriculum remain aligned with the goal of all 60 credit hours transferring into the four-year degree requirements at UT. Herbert advisors will have one or more “visit” days on each of the cc campuses to meet with students. Other highlights are described below:

Upon matriculation at UT, admitted students may be assigned a different advisor, depending on the chosen major. It is intended that all of the credit hours completed at the CC will transfer to the appropriate Herbert major. Prior understandings should minimize the need for any petitions. It will be incumbent upon the UT advisors to update changes in CC curriculum offerings and Herbert majors requirements, with curriculum plans changed accordingly.

### **Big Orange Path Highlights**

- Assignment of an advisor from Herbert
- Potential assignment of a faculty mentor to assist with professional networking
- Assistance with summer internship placement while attending or finishing the associate degree
- Social media tags for Herbert
- Newsletters from Herbert and the department/program
- Invitation to Herbert/department/program events both on the Knoxville campus and across the state

September 2025

- Annual Open House at Herbert for CC students who have committed to the program
- Guaranteed \$2K scholarship/year for the final two years of a bachelor's degree program for students who complete their associate degree with at least a 3.0+ UT-calculated grade point average (based on admission GPA)
- Herbert will pay the UT transfer application fee for participating students

### **Big Orange Path Benefits**

- Students receive a UT degree at lower cost than if they had attended UT for four years, as CC costs are lower and can be free for Tennessee residents
- Assistance with internship placement. Data show internships are an invaluable doorway to careers, and are often associated with higher starting salaries
- Robust opportunities for experiential learning such as undergraduate research, study abroad, and internships
- Students will earn degrees from two institutions, thereby broadening their network for career purposes

The Big Orange Path program creates meaningful value for Tennessee's community colleges, the Herbert College of Agriculture, the University of Tennessee, and the state as a whole. It encourages students to begin their academic journey at a Tennessee CC and rewards them for completing an associate degree before transferring to UT. This pathway allows more students to earn a UT degree while optimizing university resources, as students will more likely spend only two years on campus, reducing the demand to hire additional faculty. Ultimately, the program contributes to a more educated workforce, strengthening Tennessee's economy and enhancing the overall quality of life for its residents.

### **Progress through August**

A plan to develop agreements with the 13 in-state CC's was developed based on existing pipelines and capacities. Multiple visits have been held with the three most strategic community colleges. Draft MOUs and course equivalency charts have been developed. Multiple discussions and revisions of documents for the plan have been generated between Herbert and the Office of Undergraduate Enrollment. Draft plans for several of the CCs should be finalized in October. Brochures are under development for distribution to CCs and the public, including Extension offices. A webpage is under development. We hope to start messaging to applicants in spring 2026 for the Fall 2026 community college cohort. These students would then matriculate to UT by Fall 2028. We expect about 100 students will take advantage of the offer next year, with a doubling within three years.

### **How FSLI has helped**

The large organization-communication role-playing helped shape how we developed the plan which involves people at multiple levels from some of the highest levels on campus to entry level staff.