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TPPF: Texas universities need to be more transparent

Austin Business Journal

A policy brief from the Texas Public Policy Foundation calls for state policymakers to increase transparency in higher education.

The brief argues that not enough information is readily available to show students, their parents and Texans at large how the money being funneled into Texas universities is being spent. Also, there is no way of knowing that the information universities do provide is accurate since the only oversight is internal.

Lack of consistent data makes it "exceedingly difficult to track rising tuition rates."

According to the brief, the statewide average operating cost per student was \$10,665 in 1991. That had risen 64 percent to \$17,506 a student by 1997. "An increase this pronounced should cause some to question the spending habits of Texas universities, but since the current level of transparency is inadequate, there is no way to determine whether increased spending has improved education quality," the brief states.

Several recommendations are called for in the brief.

- Require universities to make easily available: budgets, faculty salaries, curriculum vitae, student evaluations of faculty, course syllabi, graduation reates, student surveys and other information that measures efficiency or student learning;
- Ensure data consistency from year to year;
- Post all collected data on a public Web site that is easily accessible, searchable and understandable;
- Consider alternatives that could end the negative effects of internal, behind-closed-doors bureacratic accountability;
- Place detailed check registers online.

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