

# Revolution Rising?



## *Update on Texas' Affordable Baccalaureate Degrees*

March 2015

Thomas K. Lindsay, Ph.D.



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Center for Higher Education  
Texas Public Policy Foundation

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# Revolution Rising?

## *Update on Texas' Affordable Baccalaureate Degrees*

by Thomas K. Lindsay, Ph.D.

### Executive Summary

When in 2011 Governor Rick Perry challenged Texas public universities to craft bachelor's degrees costing no more than \$10,000, the proposal met with controversy. But shortly thereafter, a number of schools announced, "Mission accomplished." However, these fledgling programs were, in turn, criticized for having reached this lower price point through "accounting gimmicks" rather than through genuinely cutting their costs.<sup>1</sup>

Defending the \$10,000 degree initiative, I responded that this criticism misses the larger point:

Until now, the debate over how best to address the crisis of runaway tuitions has resulted in calls to action on two fronts: (1) increasing federal taxes in order to reduce interest rates on federal student loans so that students can pay more in tuition, and (2) increasing state subsidies to higher education in order to spread the growing tuition burden among the state's taxpayers as a whole. But Texas' \$10,000 degree initiative represents a new model, and a challenge: For the first time, the college-affordability crisis is being approached with a focus on how public colleges and universities might lower the tuition and fees they charge students, parents, and taxpayers.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to changing the terms of the college-affordability debate, Governor Perry's bully pulpit challenge produced this year the first \$10,000 bachelor's degree—now called the "Texas Affordable Baccalaureate Program"—that incorporates the means specified by the governor toward the end of affordable degrees: online courses and competency-based criteria. In so doing, the Affordable Baccalaureate Program, launched through a partnership among Texas A&M-Commerce, South Texas College, and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, answers the critics' demands that the cost to colleges of providing the degree be lowered in real terms, and not merely "shifted."

Given the real progress the Affordable Baccalaureate Degree offers in battling tuition inflation, it is incumbent on the Legislature to incentivize all Texas public universities to replicate these programs for those students most in need of them. To do this, the Legislature should calculate how many taxpayer dollars are saved per Affordable-Baccalaureate-Degree student versus the traditional route, and then kick back to participating schools a portion of the tax savings. This method of incentivizing the growth of Affordable Baccalaureate Programs would thus incur no tax increases.

### Key Points

- The Legislature should seek to incentivize universities to craft more Affordable Baccalaureate Programs through passing along to schools some of the tax-savings these programs produce.
- Require all public institutions of higher education to submit to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board feasibility studies for crafting Affordable Baccalaureate Programs in their four most popular degree plans as well as for all degrees they offer in STEM subjects.
- To monitor the quality of the Affordable Baccalaureate Degrees, require all Texas public colleges and universities to measure student learning outcomes in the first and last semesters of these programs through administration of the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) and publish the results.
- Institute reforms that tie university funding of Affordable Baccalaureate Degrees to student learning outcomes, as measured by the Collegiate Learning Assessment.
- For the first time, the college-affordability debate is focusing on how schools themselves can lower their prices, rather than how taxpayers can come up with more money to subsidize public higher education.

## Three Years After: A Breakthrough in College Affordability?<sup>3</sup>

In his February 2011 “State of the State” Address, Texas Governor Rick Perry issued a call to Texas public higher education. “Today,” he said, “I’m challenging our institutions of higher education to develop bachelor’s degrees that cost no more than \$10,000, including textbooks.” He went on to specify the means by which he hoped to see the end of greater affordability accomplished: “Let’s leverage Web-based instruction, innovative teaching techniques and aggressive efficiency measures to reach that goal.”<sup>4</sup>

The challenge was not issued in a vacuum. In the past quarter-century, average college tuitions have risen roughly 440 percent. Outstanding student loan debt now stands at \$1.2 trillion—more than total national credit-card debt.<sup>5</sup> However, the higher-education establishment’s take on Perry’s charge was summed up in the title that the *Austin American-Statesman* gave its story covering the speech: “Perry’s call for \$10,000 bachelor’s degrees stumps educators.”<sup>6</sup> The skepticism was understandable. After all, at the time, average tuition and fees for a four-year degree at Texas universities stood at roughly \$27,000, and many were predicting that prices would need to go up still further.<sup>7</sup>

“We’re certainly interested in efficiency, but it’s extremely unlikely that at a tier one university it’s going to be possible to do something like (the governor’s proposal) without the equivalent of a large subsidy,” said Dean Neikirk, chairman of the University of Texas-Austin’s Faculty Council and a professor of electrical and computer engineering.<sup>8</sup> “I don’t think it’s a very practical idea,” said Peter Hugill, professor of geography at Texas A&M and then-president of the Texas Conference of the American Association of University Professors. “Do you really want a stripped-down, bare-bones degree?”<sup>9</sup> Hugill went on to argue that “\$10,000 seems to me a number someone pulled out of the air. . . . I’m afraid my general response to this is that it’s yet another attempt to reduce a highly complex subject to a sound bite.”<sup>10</sup>

*“If we keep going the way we are, a baccalaureate degree at a public university will cost \$100,000 at some institutions in five years. We can’t go there.”*

But Raymund Paredes, chairman of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, argued that to refuse at least to attempt to create \$10,000-degree programs is unthinkable: “If we keep going the way we are, a baccalaureate degree at a public university will cost \$100,000 at some institutions in five years. We can’t go there. The state does not have the resources, we are not going to have enough financial aid to cover those costs. We have got to find different models. . . . Nobody is talking about everybody offering this low-cost, no-frills degree. We are talking about providing students an alternative and reinventing higher education.”<sup>11</sup>

Thirteen months after the governor’s State of the State Address, Texas A&M-San Antonio announced a partnership with the Alamo Colleges community college system and neighboring high schools to offer a bachelor’s degree in applied arts and sciences in information technology, with an emphasis on information security. The entire degree would cost \$9,672, not including the price of books. High-school juniors would be admitted to the program on the basis of their test scores and prior coursework. Once accepted, they could obtain up to 60 college credits at no cost, although not all of their coursework would necessarily be college level. The precise mix of courses would vary for each student, after consultation with the program’s academic advisers. Once they had completed high school, the students would spend a year at one of the community colleges in the Alamo system. They would finish their degree with an intense year at A&M-San Antonio.

The program would put several quality controls in place. While taking the dual-credit courses in high school, students would be taught either by Alamo Colleges faculty or by a high-school teacher certified to teach college-level coursework. In addition, by virtue of a Texas mandate, these dual-credit courses would be taught at the same standard as all other college-level courses. Finally, the Alamo Colleges system is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), the same body that accredits Texas A&M.



Students in the program would graduate from college at around the age of 20, and they would do so virtually if not entirely free of student-loan debt. Even in the worst-case scenario, where these students acquire some loan debt, it would constitute a fraction of that borne by their similarly situated counterparts in traditional college programs.<sup>12</sup> Given the number of information-technology companies in the San Antonio area, current holders of the degree reasonably could expect to make between \$16 and \$40 an hour.<sup>13</sup>

In contrast, the average student today graduates five-plus years after completing high school. More troubling are the results of a new study, *Aspiring Adults Adrift: Tentative Transitions of College Graduates*, by Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa (University of Chicago Press).<sup>14</sup> *Aspiring Adults* tracks roughly one thousand “recent [on-time] college graduates’ successes and hardships, and the extent to which post-college outcomes are associated with collegiate experiences and academic performance.” What it finds is alarming: Two years after graduation, 24 percent of graduates have been forced to move back home with their parents. No less shocking, 74 percent of college graduates “are receiving financial support from their families.” Moreover, 23 percent of graduates who are “in the labor market are unemployed or underemployed,” that is, they find themselves in jobs in which they work fewer than “20 hours per week” or where the majority of peer employees “have not completed even a year of college.” Finally, a mere 47 percent of working graduates enjoy fulltime jobs that “pay \$30,000 or more annually,” and this at a time when the average debt-load for students who borrowed to attend college stands at \$29,400, according to the Project on Student Debt, which adds that 71 percent of students who graduated last year “had student loan debt.”

Since Texas A&M-San Antonio and Alamo Colleges announced their pioneering initiative, 12 other Texas public universities have followed suit by announcing low-cost bachelor’s degrees of their own.<sup>15</sup>

## Revivifying an Exhausted Higher-Education Business Model

When Texas public universities began to announce they were implementing the low-cost degrees envisioned by Governor Perry, the critics who denied such degrees were possible remained unsatisfied.<sup>16</sup> Kevin Kiley, writing in *Inside Higher Ed*, argues that the cost drivers in education—“a highly trained, expensive labor force; a student body that expects certain services; and employers who expect graduates to be trained in specialized technologies”—afford little opportunity for institutions to offer high-quality degrees in most academic majors for “anywhere close to \$10,000.” Kiley cites David Feldman, a professor of economics at the College of William and Mary and co-author of *Why Does College Cost So Much?* “If you say can you provide a quality education for a price to the student of \$10,000, that’s one thing,” said Feldman, noting that various forms of subsidies can drive down the price of a degree. “But if you’re talking about getting costs down to \$10,000, I just don’t see how you can do that.”<sup>17</sup>

However, and as Feldman notes, the “various forms of subsidies” have come under attack in Texas and other states, because their effect has been to squeeze further middle class students and their families.<sup>18</sup> As reported by the Institute for Research on Higher Education, Texas “students and their families, already burdened by tuition hikes, have been forced to assume more responsibility for funding financial aid, too, through set-asides from tuition increases.” This practice, it is argued, is contributing to pricing our top public universities out of the reach of middle-class families: Lower-income students have access to scholarships, grants, and other need-based aid. Higher-income parents can afford tuition for their students. But families in between are being squeezed increasingly.<sup>19</sup>

In light of all these forces—decreasing state funding, both now and for the foreseeable future; depressed private giving to universities; the inability of students and their parents to shoulder further tuition increases; and an unwillingness generally on the part of the public to acquiesce in further tax increases—Feldman and Archibald’s formula for producing \$10,000 degrees through increasing subsidies is less a solution to the college-affordability crisis than it is an articulation of the true depth of the crisis. That is to say, the criticisms of the early \$10,000 degree programs—that they are open only to a relatively small number, that they lack replicability, and, most importantly, that they

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do not actually reduce education *costs*—are employed first to point to the need to increase subsidies, be they governmental, private, or from “other students.” But the recognition that increasing subsidies is impossible under the current circumstances then leads the discussion to the apparently inescapable conclusion that affordable baccalaureate degrees cannot be produced on a sufficient scale without a “significant change in the traditional model of higher education.”<sup>20</sup>

To their credit, Feldman and Archibald’s arguments clarify the alternatives that policymakers must consider if they are effectively to deliberate about measures to enhance college affordability. To his credit, Governor Perry, in his State of the State Address, already envisioned the requirement of “significant change in the traditional model of higher education.” In his 2011 speech, Perry postulated “web-based instruction, innovative teaching techniques and aggressive efficiency measures” as the means toward the end of enhancing affordability.<sup>21</sup>

## Spring 2014: The Launch of Texas’ First “Real \$10,000 Degree” Program

If the criticisms above of the low-cost degrees suggested that Rick Perry was out of step with the higher-education establishment, the public’s reaction suggested that defenders of the status quo had fallen out of step with students, their parents, and taxpayers. Baseline and Associates conducted a public-opinion survey commissioned by the Texas Public Policy Foundation, finding that 81 percent of Texas voters believed public universities could be run more efficiently. Nationally, a 2011 Pew study found that 57 percent of prospective students believed a college degree no longer carries a value worth the cost. Seventy-five percent of respondents declared college simply unaffordable.<sup>22</sup>

Not only are many in the higher-education establishment largely out of step with the public, but their criticisms of the early low-cost degree programs in Texas fail on two counts: (1) They ignore the fact that Perry requested only that 10 percent of public undergraduate degrees meet the \$10,000 standard, a quota echoed by Florida Governor Rick Scott. (2) They fail to notice that these programs were not employing the tools—online learning and competency-based programs—that the governor stressed as means to the end of greater affordability.

All of that appears to be changing now. In the spring semester of 2014, three higher-education partners—Texas A&M University-Commerce, South Texas College, and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB)—launched the “Affordable Baccalaureate Program,” the state’s first public university bachelor’s degree combining online learning and competency-based standards.<sup>23</sup> Developed by community-college and university faculty, with an eye to meeting the needs identified by community and business leaders, a new degree in organizational leadership can cost as little as \$750 per term and allows students to receive credit for as many competencies and courses as they can master each term. According to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board’s website, students arriving “with no prior college credits should be able to complete the degree program in three years at a total cost of \$13,000 to \$15,000.” Students who enter having already satisfied their general education requirements can complete the degree in two years, while those entering with “90 credit hours and no credential” can complete the degree “in one year for \$4,500 to \$6,000.”

## As Texas Goes in Higher Ed, So Goes the Nation?

Although Governor Rick Perry’s Affordable-Baccalaureate-Degree concept provoked controversy in the Lone Star State, the reception nationally has been not only more sympathetic but, in fact, flattering—if, indeed, “imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.” The growth of lower-cost degree alternatives has not been confined to Texas. This

year, Iowa Governor, Terry Branstad followed Perry's lead by proposing that his state's public universities craft low-cost degrees for their four most-popular majors.<sup>24</sup>

Also this year, the Education Task Force of the American Legislative Exchange Council gave its approval to a similar model proposal seeking to incentivize the development of low-cost bachelor's degrees in all 50 states. The model policy was approved by the American Legislative Exchange Council at the end of 2014.<sup>25</sup>

The state of Iowa and the American Legislative Exchange Council are but the latest followers of the Texas initiative. In January of 2013, Florida governor Rick Scott's office "announced that 11 additional state colleges have accepted his challenge to work to develop quality bachelor's degree programs costing students no more than \$10,000. To date, all of the 23 institutions in the Florida College System that offer baccalaureate degrees have announced their support to Governor Scott's higher education affordability challenge."<sup>26</sup>

Finally, the low-cost bachelor's degree went truly national in May 2014, when College for America at Southern New Hampshire University announced "the launch of the first nationally available, fully accredited \$10,000 Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree in the country, offered through a competency-based curriculum designed specifically for working adults and their employers."<sup>27</sup> The initial degree to be offered is a Bachelor's of Arts in Communications. A Bachelor's of Arts in Healthcare Management will follow.



## The Challenge: How to Ensure the Quality of the Affordable Baccalaureate Program?

If in fact the movement in the direction of \$10,000 degree programs is inevitable, is it also desirable? That is to say, can an academically rigorous degree be provided at such a dramatically lower cost?<sup>28</sup>

These are the concerns voiced by many of the critics of the initiative. For them, measures such as relying more on adjunct faculty, increasing the average class size, and moving to online learning "could reduce the quality of the education offered."<sup>29</sup> Cary D. Wintz, who teaches history at Texas Southern University and serves on the executive committee of the Texas Faculty Association, "wonder[s] what education a student will attain with that \$10,000 degree. ... I am not sure that it is mathematically possible to get a \$10,000 degree anywhere without shortcuts like dual-credit courses or discounted online courses."

*... it is right that this criticism carries such weight, for higher education is just that—education. Cost-savings alone cannot justify shortchanging our students on learning outcomes.*

To this point it must be rejoined that, in point of fact, a large number of studies suggest that online learning carries no reduction in quality. Quite the contrary: there is considerable evidence that online coursework produces learning outcomes at least equal to, and in some formats, superior to traditional methods.<sup>30</sup>

Feldman fears "the push to reclassify high school credit as 'dual enrollment,'" citing doubts about the quality of instruction at many high schools. This criticism appears to ignore or discount the fact that, by virtue of a Texas mandate, dual-credit courses must be taught at the same standard as all other college-level courses.<sup>31</sup>

The concern over quality is the most powerful criticism offered of the vision for and consequences of the movement in the direction of Affordable Baccalaureate Programs. And it is right that this criticism carries such weight, for higher education is just that—education. Cost-savings alone cannot justify shortchanging student learning.

Given the economic factors pointing toward further expansion in the direction of lower-cost degree programs, the focus for policymakers must move next to whether this expansion can be accomplished without lowering student learning outcomes and, if so, how will we know—that is, how will we measure to ensure that greater affordability is not bought at the price of lower education quality? To begin, the new, lower-cost degree programs should be subjected to learning-outcome measurements identical to those that this writer has recommended elsewhere should be applied to all Texas public colleges and universities.<sup>32</sup> The regents of the Texas university systems should follow the example of the University of Texas System and institute the Collegiate Learning Assessment to measure learning outcomes at students' entry and exit years.<sup>33</sup> Through this, Texas students, parents, and legislators would be able to gauge more accurately whether and how much students increase in learning during their years at Texas public universities.<sup>34</sup> In tandem with this, the Legislature might consider instituting reforms that tie some portion of university funding to student learning outcomes for each university, thus incentivizing our schools to focus more intensely on what is their core mission—educating students.

In addition, the state should take measures to maximize transparency regarding student learning outcomes. This could be accomplished through breaking down each institution's CLA scores along the lines of schools, departments, and majors, and providing comparisons with each school's peer institutions, both in-state and nationally. All of this information would need to be made easily accessible online to prospective students, their parents, and legislators.

The measures cited above would accomplish two objectives. First, they would help us to monitor the quality of the new Affordable Baccalaureate Programs.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, recall that the governor's challenge asked only that these new programs grow to cover programs serving 10 percent of Texas public university students. Therefore, the second objective would be even more beneficial than the first: Through requiring testing and greater transparency of all of the state's public colleges and universities, policymakers would be better able to monitor the quality of the schools and programs populated by the remaining 90 percent of Texas public college and university students.

In sum, the enhanced transparency that these measures presage would serve not only to answer the quality concerns of the Affordable Baccalaureate Degree's critics, but also, and more importantly, it would increase the transparency and accountability of all of public higher education. As a result, the majority of Texas students and their parents may come once again to believe that the value offered by higher education is equal to its costs. ★



## Appendix A:

# Affordability in Real Life, Interview with One of the First Low-Cost Degree Students

### Interview of Texas A&M-San Antonio Alamo Colleges student, Raymond Hernandez, by the Texas Public Policy Foundation's Thomas Lindsay

**Tom Lindsay (hereafter, “TL”):** Thank you for taking the time here, I’m—as Joe Reddish and Carol Green might have told you—I’ve been writing over the past year about A&M San Antonio’s pioneering program with the \$10,000 degree. So what I wanted to talk to you about today, Raymond, was simply—and you just tell me in your own words—just how you became aware of this, you know at what age, where you were, and then, how it was getting signed up, and then most importantly what your life has been like since you did sign up for it.

**Raymond Hernandez (hereafter, “RH”):** Okay, no problem.

**TL:** When was it that you first became aware?

**RH:** When I was a student at Palo Alto Community College, an A&M representative would come every couple of weeks and just let you know about the stuff they have to offer at the University and just the different programs they had. And I was interested in the IT program.

**TL:** Ah, alright. Well that’s interesting, because you know initially, it looked like when the IT degree, the \$10,000 IT degree was established, the impression people had just reading about it was that you had to know about this and sign up for it by the time you started your junior year in high school.

**RH:** Yeah, I’m not sure how—the university part I did not know about—and when I was in high school I took some dual credit courses through the Information, Technology, and Security Academy which was offered through Palo Alto College that had professors there and I would go in the mornings during my junior and senior year and I would take these IT courses but like the beginner ones, “Intro to PC Operating Systems” and “Introduction to PC IT” and they were real college credit so when I graduated high school, I went to Palo Alto College and I was already ahead of the game—I had 27 college credits.

**TL:** So that’s how you first found out about this \$10,000 degree option?

**RH:** That’s when I really started looking at the option. That’s when I started looking at the \$10,000 degree which is the Bachelor’s in Applied Arts and Sciences. It was nice because all these credits I had that I had gotten when I was in high school, they were going to transfer; they weren’t going to get neglected or anything.

**TL:** So you’ve been on the campus of A&M San Antonio for how long now?

**RH:** I started school on August 26th [2013]. I still have to do about three semesters here. Then I’ll be finished.

**TL:** So you’re looking to be a December 2014 graduate?

**RH:** Yes, December 2014.

**TL:** Has this degree proven affordable?

**RH:** It’s definitely affordable. One of my brothers is going to Texas State, and the other is going to Texas A&M in College Station and they’re paying a lot more than I am.

**TL:** Well, that’s excellent. Do you have to take out any loans for this \$10,000 degree?

**RH:** Actually no, since I got two scholarships. One of them is the Marine Scholarship foundation, because my father was a Corporal, and also got another, the ISE Information Security scholarship which is an international scholarship.

**TL:** Congratulations!

**TL:** Right now, what is your judgment? If you had to grade the \$10,000 degree program, what grade would you give it?

**RH:** Oh, definitely an “A.”

**TL:** Very good. Any feeling yet for how your job prospects are going to look come December 2014?

**RH:** I'm not sure. I'm looking to become a network engineer. I am right now looking at internships, and one of the ones I'm looking at is with the NSA as a data system management technician or intern. There's a data center here in San Antonio that opens up.

**TL:** Do you know of any companies in the San Antonio region that are hiring people with IT degrees?

**RH:** Oh yes.

**TL:** It sounds like you've got a promising future in IT. Well, that is great. Do you think that your two younger brothers—it's three boys?

**RG:** Yeah.

**TL:** Do you think your two younger brothers—or more precisely your parents—wish that all three of you were in \$10,000 degrees?

**RG:** Oh, definitely. My mom has been pushing us since we were in high school. You know, "Do this. And do that." And she took me every morning, at 5 in the morning, to go to this Academy because it was over in that area, I think they call it the Advanced Technology Center. It's owned by Alamo Colleges, and I would go over there 5, maybe 6 A.M. and she would then drop me off at school every morning, and then I would take the bus over there and come back, and it was rough, but totally worth it.

**TL:** Well, I'm glad to hear that.

**RG:** I had to get up way earlier than all my peers in high school.

**TL:** Well, you know that is normally the formula for success. It's when you're working harder than others. There's really no substitute. And it sounds like you have a very good work ethic, which is necessary, but not sufficient. You also have to have the opportunity for that work ethic to be rewarded, and it appears that, with this \$10,000 degree program, you've found it.

**RG:** Yes, definitely.

**TL:** That is a very nice story. I'm very happy for you. And congratulations on all the hard work you've put into this.

**RG:** Thank you.

**TL:** Raymond let me ask you this. If you had a chance right now to address students who are in high school and are starting to think about college, given your experience, what would you advise them?

**RG:** Well, definitely start looking at scholarships and stuff, because those things have early deadlines, probably January. Another scholarship that I've been focusing on is the Smart Scholarship which is a STEM scholarship.

**TL:** It also sounds like a lot of credit here also goes to your mom?

**RG:** Yes.

**TL:** What does your mom do?

**RG:** She's a nurse. My father is a bus driver.

**TL:** You're fortunate to have parents that took the time and effort to help you develop what you need to succeed in life. Raymond, anything else about the program that you can tell me?

**RG:** No, it's just been a really good degree. I haven't been there that long to really do a complete judgment on the whole program. I'm a full time student now, but there are plenty of professors whom I really wish I had taken classes with, but haven't. I'm really looking forward to it when I start next semester.

**TL:** Now, let me ask you this. Palo Alto College, that's part of the Alamo Colleges System, right?

**RG:** Yes.

**TL:** And these are all Palo Alto teachers?

**RG:** Yes, in the Computer Science program. Yeah, they all teach Computer Science courses and Computer Information Systems.

**TL:** Thanks. It's been a pleasure talking to you Raymond.

**RG:** You too, sir.

## Appendix B:

From Babson Survey Research Group's *Grade Change: Tracking Online Education in the United States*, by I. Elaine Allen and Jeff Seaman, January 2014

# THE TEXAS AFFORDABLE BACCALAUREATE PROGRAM

LEVERAGING PRIOR LEARNING AND YEAR-ROUND LEARNING TO SHORTEN THE PATHWAY TO DEGREE

“We've always known that students learn better one on one, when you're able to meet their specific needs. Now, with technology, we have the ability to do that very effectively.”

VAN DAVIS, TEXAS HIGHER EDUCATION COORDINATING BOARD

### AT A GLANCE:

**Targeted Degree Program:** Bachelor of Applied Science with emphasis in Organizational Leadership

**Organizations:** Coalition of public, nonprofit higher education institutions

**Opening Date:** Spring 2014

**First-Year Enrollment:** 215

**Anticipated Students Served in First Five Years:** 6,600

**Tuition Model:** 7-week, flat-rate fee

**Geographies Served:** Texas

**Targeted Students:** Those with little or no college credits or work experience; with some college credit and work experience; and those with an earned associate degree

**Project Partners:** The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, South Texas College, Texas A&M University-Commerce, and the College for All Texans Foundation

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) will launch the “Texas Affordable Baccalaureate Program” in spring 2014. This new Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS) degree uses a competency-based model and year-round flat-rate tuition to shorten the path to college completion. The project is a joint venture by THECB, South Texas College, Texas A&M University-Commerce, and the College for All Texans Foundation.

The program was designed with two critical challenges in mind: (1) the rising cost of tuition for students and (2) a growing adult population, particularly Hispanic, that often lacks the right credentials and academic training to thrive in today's economy.

In the program, students pay a flat, seven-week rate to enroll and can work through as many courses within that time period as their sched-

ules allow. Advancement is based on showing competency in the subject area rather than spending hours in class.

The model is centered on three main principles:

- Students learn better when content is personalized and delivered at their level.
- Students need targeted supports most in the first years and direct faculty instruction in their final years.
- Students need a degree and an experience that will have value in the workforce.

To deliver a model that is both efficient and grounded in 21st-century skills, THECB has revamped the faculty role, engaging full-time faculty and industry experts in the develop-

### HALLMARKS:

Year-round enrollment

Flat-rate tuition

Competency-based model

Core coursework, electives delivered online in self-paced modules

Upper-level coursework and problem-based learning sessions delivered face-to-face and online

Course competencies defined by faculty and industry leaders through Texas Tuning process

Capstone e-portfolio projects

### PROGRAM OVERVIEW

#### General Core Curriculum

42

(SEMESTER CREDIT HOURS)

Students can work through traditional introductory courses, divided into competencies, using online, self-paced modules. They can complete as many competencies as possible in the year-round program.

#### Lower-Division Electives

48

(SEMESTER CREDIT HOURS)

Students can demonstrate competency in a variety of related fields, including a foreign language, using online modules or applying for credit for work or military experience. Students may also receive academic credit where appropriate for industry certifications using ACE Credit recommendations.

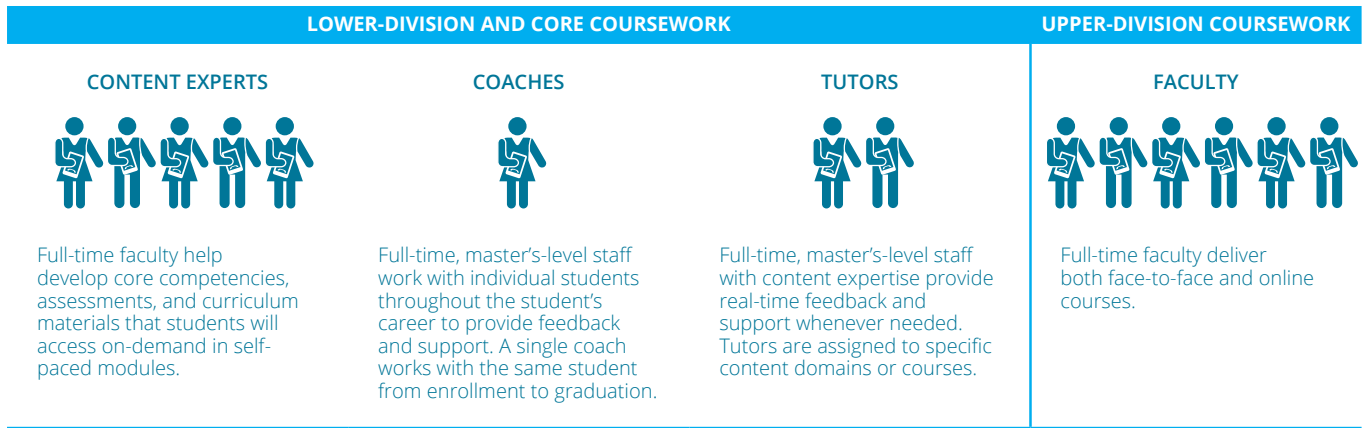
#### Upper-Division Applied

30

(SEMESTER CREDIT HOURS)

Upper-division courses will be offered both online and face-to-face and will culminate with an applied, digital capstone experience evaluated by faculty and business leaders.

## STUDENT SUPPORT MODEL



### TEXAS TUNING OVERSIGHT TEAM

Full-time faculty and business leaders will work together to develop competencies for both the degree program and upper-division courses, assessments, and curriculum materials. A second team of full-time faculty will work together to develop competencies, assessments, and curriculum materials for the lower-division general education curriculum and lower-division prescribed electives that students will access on-demand in self-paced modules.

ment of course competencies, assessments, and curriculum materials that students can access anytime, anywhere in an on-demand online system. Students are supported in lower-division courses by individual coaches who provide feedback and support across disciplines and tutors who provide on-demand, discipline-specific support. Faculty offer upper-division courses both online and face-to-face: these include a series of real-world management problems to solve and culminate with a digital capstone experience evaluated by faculty and business leaders. Student work is captured in an e-portfolio that is portable beyond the institution, providing graduates with a way to document those skills that often fail to appear on a transcript.

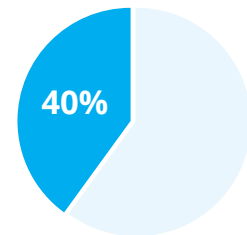
From the outset, ensuring that graduates have a meaningful degree and not just a credential has been central to curriculum development. THECB has used the Texas Tuning

process, aided by both faculty and industry experts, to outline course outcomes that include 21st-century skills such as leadership, team building, conflict resolution, communication, and applied learning alongside clear competencies with relevance to the workplace. The goal is to graduate students with both the right credentials and the right skills for the workplace.

### Intended Outcomes:

- Reducing the time to degree below the average of 5.3 years for full-time students
- Realizing an 80 percent degree completion rate for the program
- Maintaining an annual retention rate of at least 80 percent
- Achieving sustainability by year five

### PELL ELIGIBLE STUDENTS:



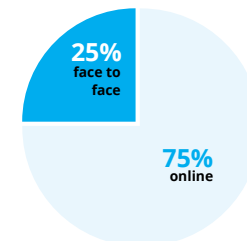
### PRICE TO STUDENTS:

\$4,500/year

### COST PER FTE:

\$4,000

### DELIVERY:



### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Institution: <http://www.theccb.state.tx.us/> | Contact: Van Davis, [van.davis@theccb.state.tx.us](mailto:van.davis@theccb.state.tx.us)



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## Appendix C:

### Low-cost Bachelor's Degrees at Texas Public Universities

#### **The University of Texas at Arlington, Tarrant County College System, and Mansfield and Arlington School Districts**

**Degrees:** Not specified

**Cost:** Less than \$10,000

**Start date:** Fall 2012

**Description:** The initiative will encourage high school students who complete 24 SCHs of dual credit college courses in their junior and senior years to advance to Tarrant County College to earn their associate degree. High-performing transfer students would be eligible for a UT Arlington scholarship of up to \$10,000. Students who complete all three phases of the program and qualify for the scholarship could save \$25,000 off the total cost of their undergraduate education and earn a college degree for less than \$10,000 in tuition and fees.

#### **The University of Texas of the Permian Basin**

**Program:** Geology, chemistry, computer science, information systems, and math

**Cost:** \$10,000

**Name of initiative:** Texas Science Scholar Program

**Start date:** Fall 2012

Eligibility requirements:

- Maintain full-time status
- Maintain minimum GPA of 3.0

#### **The University of Texas at Brownsville**

**Degrees:** Not specified

**Start date:** The university has had these programs for several years.

**Cost:** Approximately \$10,000 in tuition and fees, or less with a scholarship.

**Description:** There are two programs, which are similar. In one, students earn 60 SCHs in the Brownsville ISD Early College High School and then take the last two years at UT Brownsville. In the other, students earn 60 SCHs in the Texas Academy of Math and Science and then take the last two years at UT Brownsville.

#### **Tarleton State University**

**Cost:** The three A&M system degree plans will start at \$9,800

**Start date:** Fall 2012

**Program:** Bachelor of Sciences in Applied Sciences in Business Administration and Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences in Business Occupations.

#### **Texas A&M University – Commerce and South Texas College**

**Cost:** \$4,500 to \$15,000, depending on number of hours needed to complete the degree

**Program:** Bachelor of Applied Scienc-

es in Organizational Leadership

**Start date:** Spring 2014

**Description:** This is a competency-based program that focuses on leadership skills applicable to business, government, non-profit, or educational settings. The degree's first 90 SCHs will be available through online modules. The last 30 SCHs of upper division, problem-based coursework will be offered in both a face-to-face and online format and include instruction in organizational planning, dynamics of leadership, finance, team building, conflict resolution and mediation, communication, and other management skills. Learning will culminate with a digital capstone experience where students will apply their knowledge and skills to real-world business problems. The degree is flexible and allows credit for work experience, military training and other forms of nontraditional experiences.

#### **Texas A&M International University**

**Degree:** Bachelors of Science in Nursing

**Cost:** Approximately \$10,000

**Start date:** Fall 2012

**Description:** Program is designed to help current registered nurses (RNs) advance their career. The program utilizes online teaching technologies and enables working nurses to secure this degree. The completion degree has been a part of the university for some time, but technology now enables the institution to compress both time and distance to further help students by allowing them to complete the program in 18 months.

#### **Texas A&M University – San Antonio and Alamo Colleges**

**Program:** Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences in Information Technology with an emphasis on Information Security

**Cost:** \$10,026

**Start date:** Fall 2012

**Description:** Students must begin taking college courses in their junior year of high school. The program also requires students to take a year of classes with the Alamo Colleges.

#### **Texas A&M University-Texarkana**

**Degree:** Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences

**Cost:** \$10,500 if students get credit for previous training; otherwise, \$11,500

**Start date:** The university has had this program for several years

**Description:** For students maximizing their dual credit work while in high school, their academic pursuits at the community college, in particular, Texarkana College, and the efficient use of their time while enrolled at A&M-Texarkana.

#### **Angelo State University**

**Degree:** Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies

**Cost:** \$9,974

**Start date:** Fall 2013

**Description:** Program will be open to Texas residents who present an ACT score of 27 or greater or a combined SAT critical reading and math score of 1220 or better. Students would be required to maintain a GPA of 3.5 or better. The program would also be open to transfer students with a 3.5 or better GPA. The interdisciplinary studies degree program provides students an opportunity to apply coursework in multiple fields toward an undergraduate degree. It is well suited for students whose career goals call for training in more than one discipline or who want a breadth of knowledge in several fields rather than a single area. Applicants with a 27 ACT or 1220 SAT score would qualify for a \$5,000 scholarship administered by ASU. With that scholarship, a participant could complete 120 SCHs at ASU for \$9,974, which would cover all tuition and fees at current rates. Each qualifying student would need to take 15 SCHs each long semester.

**Sul Ross State University Rio Grande College (SRSU-RGC) and Southwest Texas Junior College (SWTJC)**

**Cost:** The institutions would award deferred scholarships to qualifying students to cap student costs at \$10,000. To earn the scholarships, students must maintain a GPA of 3.0 or higher and enroll in 15 hours of coursework during each term. As an incentive for completion, the deferred scholarships, worth \$2,122, will be awarded in two phases – first, upon completion of an associate’s degree at SWTJC and completion of the student’s first semester at SRSU-RGC and, second, upon graduation from SRSU-RGC.

**Programs:** Bachelor’s degrees in biology, chemistry and mathematics

**Name of initiative:** \$10,000 Scholars Program

**Description:** Students who take dual credit courses in high school can complete their associate degree in a year and then take upper level courses at Rio Grande College. Scholarships help bring the cost down to \$10,000.

**Start date:** Fall 2012

**Eligibility requirements:**

- Graduate from high school with a GPA of 2.5 or higher
- Complete 30 dual credit hours which apply to the core curriculum

**University of Houston-Clear Lake**

**Cost:** \$10,014 to \$10,372, depending on the community college attended

**Degrees:** Bachelor of Applied Science in Early Childhood Education, Bachelor of Applied Science in Healthcare Services, and Bachelor of Applied Science in Information Technology

**Start date:** January 2013

**Description:** Students transfer 75 hours from a community college and then take 45 hours at the University of Houston-Clear Lake. The total cost includes Pell Grants.

**University of Houston-Downtown**

**Cost:** \$9,116 to \$9,801, depending on the community college attended

**Program:** Bachelor of Applied Arts and Science (Major in Applied Administration), and Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies

**Start date:** January 2013

**Description:** Students transfer 75 hours from a community college and then take 45 hours at the University of Houston-Downtown. The total cost includes Pell Grants.

**University of Houston-Victoria**

**Name of initiative:** \$10,000 Dn3

**Cost:** \$9,999

**Programs:** English, history, communication, psychology, Spanish and criminal justice

**Start date:** January 2013

**Description:** This is an accelerated bachelor’s degree that is available to full-time students who complete their bachelor’s degree in the following six majors in three years: English, history, communication, psychology, Spanish and criminal justice. The cost of degree assumes students complete 40 hours a year for three years. Tuition and fees of \$24,468 would be reduced by the average Pell Grant of \$3,593 per year and a UH-Victoria continuation scholarship of \$1,845 per year.

\*\*\*\*\*

# Appendix D: Affordable Baccalaureate Degree Act

(DRAFT)

(Approved by the Education Task Force of the American Legislative Exchange Council in August 2014; awaiting final approval by ALEC's senior leadership)

## *Summary*

To aid students and their parents in their efforts at pursuing a college degree, the Affordable Baccalaureate Degree Act would require all public four-year universities to offer bachelor's degrees costing no more than \$10,000, total, for four years of tuition, fees, and books. The Act would require that ten percent of all public, four-year university degrees awarded reach this price-point within four years of passage of this act.

To achieve this price-point, universities would be instructed to capitalize on the opportunities and efficiencies provided by (1) web-based technology and (2) competency-based programs.

## *Model Legislation*

**Section 1. Title.** This Act shall be known as the "Affordable Baccalaureate Degree Act."

### **Section 2. Applicability.**

(A) In this Act, "institutions of higher learning" is restricted to four-year, public colleges and universities, as defined in this section.

(B) This section applies to all four-year public institutions of higher education.

### **Section 3. Affordable Baccalaureate Degree.**

(A) The **{insert appropriate state education board}** shall maintain for each institution to which this subchapter applies all relevant information regarding which degrees at which schools satisfy this requirement, and will make this information publicly available online for use by prospective students of the institution and their parents, but also available to the public, legislators and other interested policy makers.

(F) The powers and duties of **{insert appropriate state education board}** apply to the Affordable Baccalaureate Degree Act as outlined in **{insert state higher education regulations if applicable}**.

(G) The duties of institutions of higher education apply to the Affordable Baccalaureate Degree Act as outlined in **{insert state higher education regulations if applicable}**.

(H) Information regarding the content and availability of degree programs satisfying the Affordable Baccalaureate Degree Act will be made available to the public, legislators and other interested policy makers on the **{insert appropriate state education board website and the institution's website}** in accordance with procedures outlined in **{insert state higher education regulations if applicable}**.

**Section 4. {Severability clause.}**

**Section 5. {Repealer clause.}**

**Section 6. {Effective date.}**

\*\*\*\*\*

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This study updates my 2012 research paper, "Anatomy of a Revolution? The Rise of the \$10,000 Bachelor's Degree" (published by the Texas Public Policy Foundation).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> This section draws from the section titled, "'What Will \$10,000 Get Me?' Criticisms of the \$10,000 Degree," in my "Anatomy of a Revolution?" (see note 1, above).

<sup>4</sup> "Text of Gov. Perry's State of the State Remarks, February 8, 2011," *Texas Tribune*.

<sup>5</sup> Approximately one week after his State of the State Address, the governor offered further details in a follow-up letter to university presidents: "Programs may include online and blended classes; classes at no-frills campuses; credit for prior learning, dual credit and Advanced Placement; and open-source textbooks," he wrote. His letter to the university presidents also envisioned that 10 percent of their degrees ultimately would be available for \$10,000. Cited in "Texas Has a \$10,000 Degree — But for How Long?" by Reeve Hamilton, *Texas Tribune* (10 Feb. 2011.)

<sup>6</sup> Ralph K.M. Haurwitz, "Perry's call for \$10,000 bachelor's degrees stumps educators," *Austin American-Statesman* (11 Feb. 2011).

<sup>7</sup> According to an article by Steve Kolowich that appeared in *Inside Higher Ed*, "Perry is not the first Republican governor to turn heads by suggesting that colleges could use technology to vastly reduce the cost of degree programs without sacrificing quality. Last summer [of 2010], Tim Pawlenty, then the governor of Minnesota, suggested that students should be able to pay \$199 per course for "iCollege." (While Pawlenty was inspired by Steve Jobs, Perry's muse was rival tech cynosure Bill Gates. At a conference in San Francisco last August [2010], Gates said that a four-year bachelor's program should cost \$2,000 per year, not \$20,000. Accounting for textbooks, Perry's math roughly matches Gates's.)" Cited in "The \$10,000 Question" by Steve Kolowich, *Inside Higher Ed* (14 Feb. 2011.)

<sup>8</sup> "Perry's call for \$10,000 bachelor's degrees stumps educators."

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ralph K.M. Haurwitz, "Agency embraces Perry's \$10,000 degree plan," *Austin American-Statesman* (27 Apr. 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Melissa Ludwig, "A four-year degree for \$10,000? It's possible," *San Antonio Express-News* (11 Feb. 2011).

<sup>12</sup> See Appendix A: "Affordability in Real Life: Interview with One of the First Low-Cost Degree Students"

<sup>13</sup> For further details, see my article, "Texas' \$10,000 Degree," *National Review Online* (5 Apr. 2012).

<sup>14</sup> *Aspiring Adults* is Arum and Roksa's follow-up to their 2011 landmark national study of collegiate learning, *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> For a list of the schools that have announced low-cost bachelor's degrees, as well as descriptions of each program, see Appendix B: Low-cost Bachelor's Degrees at Texas Public Universities.

<sup>16</sup> See Kevin Kiley, "What Will \$10,000 Get Me?" *Inside Higher Ed* (9 May 2012).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. This section draws from my "Anatomy of a Revolution?"

<sup>18</sup> See Kevin Kiley, "Not From My Wallet," *Inside Higher Ed* (29 Feb. 2012).

<sup>19</sup> Thomas K. Lindsay, "Higher Education Affordability," in Texas Public Policy Foundation Guide to Legislators: 2013.

<sup>20</sup> "What Will \$10,000 Get Me?"

<sup>21</sup> "Text of Gov. Perry's State of the State Remarks, February 8, 2011," *Texas Tribune*.

I argued the following in my 2012 paper, "Anatomy of a Revolution": With regard to Web-based instruction, the growth of this sector has been impressive. For the last nine years, the Babson Survey Research Group, in collaboration with the College Board, has tracked online learning through surveys of over 2,500 academic leaders across the country. Its latest survey, "Going the Distance: Online Education in the United States, 2011," testifies that online learning has skyrocketed in the last decade. More important, this initial growth is predicted to be trumped by that which follows.

"The rate of growth in online enrollments is 10 times that of the rate in all higher education," writes the study's co-author and Professor of Statistics & Entrepreneurship at Babson College, I. Elaine Allen. According to the survey's web site, thirty-one percent of higher education students currently are enrolled in one or more online courses. Over six million students enrolled in at least one online course during the fall 2010 term, an increase of 560,000 students over the previous year. The real weight of this number is illuminated by the fact that the 10 percent growth rate for online enrollments far exceeds the two percent growth in the overall higher education student population. Student satisfaction is comparable for online and traditional courses, according to the academic leaders surveyed. Moreover, two-thirds of the higher education institutions surveyed testified that online education today has become critical to their long-term education strategy.

Perhaps chief among the "innovative teaching techniques" called for in the governor's State of the State Address is the competency-based model. In June 2012, the University of Wisconsin System (UW) and Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker announced the creation of self-paced, competency-based online programs aiming to help adults with some college credit finish their degrees. As described on its web site:

... [T]he UW Flexible Degree will draw upon the expertise of UW faculty members from across the state to develop a new, self-paced online delivery model. This model promises to offer a more personalized college experience to every student in which students can begin and complete courses at any time. Competency exams can be taken from home or work to ensure flexibility and special computer software can be utilized to ensure academic honesty. One goal is to offer students smaller course segments or "modules." Rather than molding coursework around a set timeframe, these modules can be designed to contain only the knowledge required within a specific competency. This could benefit working adults who need to start and pause their studies because of work and personal commitments. It could also benefit highly motivated students who are able to move through course materials at a faster pace. Courses in this new program will be based on competency, not seat time, so students can move on to the next topic when they have mastered the current material. Students ... can graduate as soon as they can prove their mastery of the material.

The new program's courses and modules also will "make use of students' prior learning." Knowledge "from the workplace, free open courseware, or other life experiences will be "assessed and credited." The program is aimed especially at "adult learners," who will be able to finish their degrees at a relatively low cost "without having to set foot on campus."

The UW-Scott project is patterned most closely after Western Governors University (WGU). WGU is an accredited, private, nonprofit university founded in 1997 by 19 governors. Its courses are offered primarily online; the focus of its bachelor's and master's degrees is career-oriented. In 2011, with Governor Perry's support, Western Governors University established a Texas branch. Students in the new Texas branch are eligible for federal financial aid, as well as other forms of assistance. WGU-Texas Chancellor, Mark Milliron, estimates that the university will grow to enroll 20,000 students by the end of the decade: "There's such a large market of transfer students and working adults that have some college and no credential."



WGU-Texas offers degrees in education, health, information technology, and business. Employing “competency units” and a “learning-progression model,” students pay a flat rate of approximately \$3,000 every six months. The average student graduates in 30 months, which results in the average degree costing approximately 15 thousand dollars. Student age ranges from 25 to 55, with the average student being in the mid-30s. The typical student is already employed and likely enters WGU with some college credit already accumulated.

<sup>22</sup> A 2012 study conducted by the educational lender Sallie Mae suggests that the public’s discontent is likely only to intensify, as *vox populi* translates into economic decision-making. Titled *How America Pays for College 2012*, the study provides evidence that outlooks and behaviors about how—and how much—to pay for college are shifting. Sallie Mae surveyed of 1,600 18-24 year-old college students, as well as their parents. The report documents numerous and growing examples of increased cost-consciousness. The salient conclusions of the survey, as listed on Sallie Mae’s web site (*How America Pays for College 2012*, a national study by Sallie Mae and Ipsos<sup>23</sup>), consist in the following:

- “83% of college students and parents strongly agreed that higher education is an investment in the future, college is needed now more than ever (70%), and the path to earning more money (69%).
- “Drawing from savings, income and loans, students paid 30% of the total bill, up from 24% four years ago, while parents covered 37% of the bill, down from 45% four years ago.
- “The percentage of families who eliminated college choices because of cost rose to the highest level (69%) in the five years since the study began. Virtually all families exercised cost-savings measures, including living at home (51%), adding a roommate (55%), and reducing spending by parents (50%) and students (66%).
- “In 2012, families continued the shift toward lower-cost community college, with 29% enrolled, compared to 23% two years ago. In fact, overall, families paid 5% less for college compared to one year ago.
- “35% percent of students borrowed education loans to pay for college: 25% borrowing federal loans only, 9% using a mix of federal and private loans, and 1% tapping private loans only.”

The report finds that the amount paid for college has fallen in each of the last two years. “American families reported taking more cost-saving measures and more families report making their college decisions based on the cost they can afford to pay.” The primary means by which this trend in cost-cutting is occurring is through enrolling in less-expensive colleges and universities and/or living in the parents’ home. Also noteworthy is the fact that the increase in cost-consciousness appears most pronounced at the highest income levels. The percentage of students from high-income families opting to live at home has nearly doubled in only two years: rising from 24% in 2010 to 47% in 2012.

<sup>23</sup> See Appendix C.

<sup>24</sup> This report appeared in the September 10, 2014, *Globe Gazette*: “Branstad, Reynolds offer higher education plan”

DES MOINES | Gov. Terry Branstad and his running mate, Lt. Gov. Kim Reynolds, traveled to college campuses Tuesday offering their plan for making higher education affordable and reducing student debt.

The GOP team proposed offering fixed-price degrees or \$10,000 bachelor’s degree for popular majors at public universities to cut costs for a limited number of in-state students and tax credits for being volunteers in qualifying community activities.

They made stops at Iowa State University in Ames and Drake University in Des Moines.

Branstad, a five-term governor seeking re-election in the Nov. 4 general election, said he and Reynolds hope to reduce the cost of higher education by challenging the state Board of Regents to offer \$10,000 bachelor’s degrees on popular majors at public universities and to cut by half or more the cost of tuition in at least half of a university’s major course offerings via fixed-price degrees.

“This is something that we think makes a lot of sense for us to do in the state of Iowa to address the concerns that students and families have about the extreme high cost of higher education today,” Branstad said during his Drake event. “This is a concept that I believe can make a real difference.”

According to campaign spokesman Tommy Schultz, the goal would be for the four most popular degree tracks to be attainable from start to finish with \$10,000 in tuition. The initiative would use dual credit, online learning and other efficiencies.

Branstad said the idea is modeled after successful programs in Texas and Florida and he believes the regents could make the limited offerings within their existing funding. He said a regent review is identifying savings that could be reallocated and he held out hope that overall tuition for resident undergraduate at state universities could be held to modest increase below the inflation rate.

“This is a bold approach to reducing costs and making it more affordable for our state universities,” he said.

To reduce debt that is among the nation’s highest for college students, Branstad and Reynolds said they would work with the Legislature in 2015 to create a state tax credit that would allow students to reduce debt by participating in volunteer activities within their community through a qualified Student Debt Reduction Organization.

Details and specifics of the tax credit would be worked out so it would encourage community volunteerism while also maintaining the strength of other successful tax credit programs, such as the Student Tuition Organization Tax Credit, Schultz said. Branstad noted that taxpayers who contribute to the program also could deduct the charitable donation.

“This is a win-win for taxpayers and Iowa students,” he said.

<sup>25</sup> See Appendix C for the full text of the proposed model policy presented to the Education Task Force at the August 2014 Annual Meeting of the American Legislative Exchange Council in Dallas, Texas. This writer proposed the model legislation at the Dallas meeting.

<sup>26</sup> From a press release issued by the office of Florida Governor Rick Scott:

“Gov. Scott Announces All 23 Florida State Colleges with Baccalaureate Degrees Have Accepted \$10K Degree Challenge”: 11 more state colleges have accepted affordability challenge

Governor Rick Scott today announced that 11 additional state colleges have accepted his challenge to work to develop quality bachelor’s degree programs costing students no more than \$10,000. To date, all of the 23 institutions in the Florida College System that offer baccalaureate degrees have announced their support to Governor Scott’s higher education affordability challenge.

Representatives from Miami Dade College, Polk State College, Edison State College, Florida Gateway College, Florida State College of Jacksonville, Gulf Coast State College, Indian River State College, Lake-Sumter State College, Pensacola State College, St. Johns River State College and the State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota have contacted the Florida Department of Education to accept the Governor's challenge and identify which programs would be offered for \$10,000 or less. Many of the programs would be in high-demand areas.

Brevard Community College, Broward College, Chipola College, College of Central Florida, Daytona State College, Northwest Florida State College, Palm Beach State College, Santa Fe College, Seminole State College, St. Petersburg College, South Florida State College and Valencia College previously accepted the Governor's \$10,000 degree challenge.

Governor Scott said, "Higher education is key to helping our students succeed in the 21st century economy and to grow jobs in Florida. It is important our students can get an affordable education, and our state colleges have stepped up to the challenge to find innovative ways to provide a quality education at a great value. Our goal should be that students do not have to go into debt in order to obtain a degree—and today's announcement of nearly all of our state colleges meeting this challenge puts us closer to achieving that goal for our students and families."

Governor Scott first issued his \$10k degree challenge last November and made today's announcement at Miami Dade College's North Campus while touring the college and learning about the \$10k degrees the institution plans to offer.

Commissioner of Education Tony Bennett said, "The Florida College System is a leader in ensuring access for higher education. The colleges in the system have always focused on affordability. This shows a continued commitment, especially in the workforce area where we offer bachelor degrees. I commend all of the colleges in the Florida College System for their commitment to access and affordability and look forward to working with our colleges."

Chancellor of the Florida College System Randy Hanna said "College affordability is a key ingredient in providing opportunities for Floridians to move into their careers. All of these programs will be designed for bachelor degrees in the area of workforce development. Many of our colleges are targeting high demand programs where there can be a significant impact in the local community. We look forward to working with the Governor and the Legislature and business and industry as we develop these programs."

Miami Dade College President Dr. Eduardo J. Padron said "Miami Dade College applauds Governor Scott for his leadership in advocating for greater access and affordability to higher education. We at MDC have long been committed to these goals and are pleased to unveil a 'Pathway to the Baccalaureate' initiative that will provide interested students the opportunity to complete one of the most affordable, high-quality workforce oriented bachelor's degrees in the nation."

St. Johns River State College President Joe Pickens, J.D. said, "St. Johns River State College is pleased to accept Governor Scott's '\$10,000 Degree Challenge' and pledges to bring this opportunity to the residents of its district in the fall of 2014. We are committed to promoting the economic strengths of our communities by providing a variety of affordable, educational pathways that will lead to employment opportunities. This \$10K degree program will complement the associate degree, bachelor's degree and certificate programs currently available to students at SJR State."

Gulf Coast State College President Dr. Jim Kerley said, "We focus on quality and value, and we believe our students receive both. We and the Board of Trustees are dedicated to offer the lowest tuition, currently the lowest in the state, and we are committed to move forward with a \$10,000 bachelor's degree. We will continue to offer workforce bachelor degrees that lead to jobs and are adamant about the affordability of higher education so students can truly start here and go anywhere. That's our vision and our promise to the community."

State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota President Dr. Carol F. Probstfeld said, "SCF has accepted Gov. Scott's \$10,000 baccalaureate degree challenge as a new opportunity to be even more inventive as we work with our partners to identify programs, existing and new, that offer the most immediate application to today's workforce needs. I have assigned a task force to work with all due speed on ideas and bring forward proposals for developing a feasible model that can be implemented in a reasonable and timely manner."

Polk State College President Dr. Eileen Holden said, "We are very proud of Polk State's tradition of access and affordability, and we are proud and grateful that the Governor is spotlighting examples of innovation at Polk and throughout the Florida College System."

<sup>27</sup> Announcement from CollegeforAmerica.org (5 May 2014):

"First Nationally Available \$10,000 Bachelor's Degree to be Launched by College for America": *More than 50 employers nationwide partner with the nonprofit school to offer the competency-based, newly accredited degree to working adults.*

College for America at Southern New Hampshire University announced today the launch of the first nationally available, fully accredited \$10,000 Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree in the country, offered through a competency-based curriculum designed specifically for working adults and their employers. The announcement was made at the American Society of Training and Development's annual conference in Washington, DC. The initial degree is a BA in Communications; a BA in Healthcare Management will be submitted to the college's regional accreditor for review in the fall.

More than fifty employers nationwide are already partnering with College for America to make the degree opportunity available to their employees—including McDonald's, Wellpoint/Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield, and some of the largest hospital systems in the country. More than two hundred additional employers have expressed interest in launching similar partnerships in the coming year.

"We finally have the nation's first truly \$10,000 bachelor's degree, and it required two things: exceptional partnering with employers and a radical new model of delivery that promises quality and relevance in the workplace," said Southern New Hampshire University President Dr. Paul LeBlanc. He continued, "This is the most remarkably priced college degree in the country, and the truth is that the price is the least remarkable thing about it. What draws students and employers is the promise of mastering competencies they can immediately apply in their workplace. The price is just our way to make it accessible as widely as possible."

Full details about the degree are available at [www.collegeforamerica.org/BA](http://www.collegeforamerica.org/BA).

College for America administers competency-based college degrees designed to be more applicable in the workplace and more accessible and affordable for working adults. The nonprofit's students demonstrate mastery of workplace-relevant competencies by completing real-world projects—

instead of traditional courses, lectures, and credit hours—that are directly informed by industry, academic and subject-matter experts. Student work is submitted online in a flexibly scheduled, self-paced program designed for working adults with busy lives. Degrees are awarded by Southern New Hampshire University, a respected and accredited 80 year old nonprofit university that offers both in-person and online college degree options. College for America launched its first degree—an Associate of Arts in General Studies—in 2013.

While the \$10,000 milestone for a BA degree is a historic one, most students will actually pay far less out of pocket for the degree. Tuition is \$2,500 a year with no additional costs, and students proceed through the degree at their own pace—fueled both by what they learn in the school and by what they already know have mastered through life and work experience. Most employers offer to reimburse the tuition costs for their employees.

The new BA degrees will require students to demonstrate mastery of 240 total competencies—including 120 core competencies included in the original Associate of Arts degree launched last fall and an additional 120 advanced competencies reserved for BA students.

The bachelor's degree was approved last week by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, one of the country's seven regional accrediting bodies sanctioned by the U.S. Department of Education. Employees of companies or nonprofits partnering with College for America are eligible to apply beginning May 1st for enrollment as BA students this fall.

CORRECTION: This press release has been updated from its original version in order to reflect that the BA in Healthcare Management will be submitted for regional accreditation in the fall of 2014.

<sup>28</sup> This section draws on my earlier study, "Anatomy of a Revolution?"

<sup>29</sup> "What Will \$10,000 Get Me?"

<sup>30</sup> I present the results of the latest studies of online education's learning outcomes in "The Future Face of Higher Education; Online Learning in the New Economy." There I write that in 2009, the U.S. Department of Education published a review of 44 studies evaluating post-secondary students. The Department report concluded that "students who took all or part of their class online performed better, on average, than those taking the same course through traditional face-to-face instruction." In its concluding section, the report's authors are quick to qualify the above statement with the following: "When used by itself, online learning appears to be as effective as conventional classroom instruction, but not more so. However, several caveats are in order. Despite what appears to be strong support for blended learning applications, the studies in this meta-analysis do not demonstrate that online learning is superior as a medium. In many of the studies showing an advantage for blended learning, the online and classroom conditions differed in terms of time spent, curriculum and pedagogy. It was the combination of elements in the treatment conditions (which was likely to have included additional learning time and materials as well as additional opportunities for collaboration) that produced the observed learning advantages."

It is important to note that the Department report next qualifies its own qualification: After appearing to walk back from the conclusion that "online learning is superior as a medium," the reports adds, "At the same time, one should note that online learning is much more conducive to the expansion of learning time than is face-to-face instruction. That is to say, the Department report is reluctant to grant online learning any superiority other than that it is more conducive than face-to-face learning to "the expansion of learning." Some wonder whether this distinction constitutes a true difference.

In any event, the Department report is far less guarded when it comes to the superiority of blended learning over face-to-face instruction: "In recent experimental and quasi-experimental studies contrasting blends of online and face-to-face instruction with conventional face-to-face classes, blended instruction has been more effective, providing a rationale for the effort required to design and implement blended approaches."

A more recent analysis has far fewer reservations. "When technology is used, it boosts student achievement," writes John E. Chubb in the April 2012 study, *Education Reform for the Digital Era*, prepared for the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. While his focus is on K-12 education, Chubb's observations are equally applicable to higher education: "Online programs allow schools to customize instruction to individual student needs. They also offer students one-on-one tutoring by teachers working remotely. ... In sum, technology can bring many instructional tools to the student that a regular classroom teacher simply cannot."

<sup>31</sup> "What Will \$10,000 Get Me?"

<sup>32</sup> Thomas K. Lindsay, "Higher Education Quality." Texas Public Policy Foundation's *Guide to Legislators: 2013*.

<sup>33</sup> The University of Texas System has been one of the pioneers in tracking student learning through the Collegiate Learning Assessment. At this writing, the UT System had been administering the CLA for eight years.

<sup>34</sup> A comparable instrument, the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP), is required by all of South Dakota's public colleges and universities. Per the order of the state's board of regents, every South Dakota public college and university student takes the CAAP.

<sup>35</sup> CLA is currently developing both a high school and a community college version of its test of learning outcomes. This expansion would make it especially valuable in monitoring the quality of each of the unique aspects of \$10,000 programs such as that offered by Texas A&M-San Antonio (TAMU-SA), whose program consists of 60 hours of dual-credit courses in high school, one year at a local community college, and one final, intense year at TAMU-SA.

## About the Author



**Thomas K. Lindsay, Ph.D.**, is director of the Foundation's Center for Higher Education. He has more than two decades' experience in education management and instruction, including service as a dean, provost, and college president.

In 2006, Lindsay joined the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) staff as director of the agency's signature initiative, We the People, which supports teaching and scholarship in American history and culture. He was named Deputy Chairman and Chief Operating Officer of the NEH in 2007.

Lindsay received his B.A., *summa cum laude*, in Political Science, and went on to earn his M.A. and Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Chicago. Oxford University Press published Lindsay's American Government college textbook, *Investigating American Democracy* (with Gary Glenn). He has published numerous articles on the subject of democratic education, many of which have appeared in the world's most prestigious academic journals, including *American Political Science Review*, *Journal of Politics*, and *American Journal of Political Science*.

Lindsay has published articles on higher-education reform in *Real Clear Policy*, *Los Angeles Times*, *National Review*, *Inside Higher Ed*, *Washington Examiner*, *Knight-Ridder Syndicate*, *Dallas Morning News*, *Houston Chronicle*, *American Spectator*, and *Austin American-Statesman*, among others. He has just accepted an offer to become a contributor to *Forbes*.

In recognition of his scholarship on democratic education, Lindsay was made the 1992-93 Bradley Resident Scholar at the Heritage Foundation in Washington, D.C.

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