

Texas Public Policy Foundation

Toward Strengthening Texas Public Higher Education:

10 Areas of Reform

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Toward Strengthening Texas Public Higher Education: 10 Areas of Suggested Reforms

by Dr. Thomas K. Lindsay

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Executive Summary

Texas' system of public higher education, like that of every state in the union, finds itself today fighting a war on two fronts: it simultaneously is battling to restore not only affordability but also quality. The average cost of tuition at Texas public universities has increased five percent a year—every year—since 1994. In this Texas is far from unique: in the last 25 years, tuitions across the nation have increased 440 percent—twice the rate of the increase in health-care costs.¹ To pay for these historic price increases, students and their parents have been burdened with historic debt. Total student-loan debt today stands at roughly one trillion dollars. For the first time in American history, total student-loan debt exceeds national credit-card debt.

Exacerbating the deleterious effects of skyrocketing tuitions is a crisis of perhaps still-deeper proportions: student-learning outcomes are alarmingly low. A landmark national study conducted last year documents that, after four years in college, 36 percent of today's students demonstrate little to no increase in their capacity to think critically, engage in complex reasoning, and write effectively, or in their knowledge of the fundamental principles of the democracy in which they live and of which they shall in time become leaders.

"If a nation expects to be ignorant and free ... it expects what never was and never will be."
~Thomas Jefferson

1 Our Underachieving Civics Curriculum: Toward an Education for Informed Citizenship

"Whenever the people are well-informed, they can be trusted with their own government; that, whenever things get so far wrong as to attract their notice, they may be relied on to set them right." ~Thomas Jefferson

"The best service that can be rendered to a Country, next to that of giving it liberty, is in diffusing the mental improvement equally essential to the preservation, and the enjoyment of the blessing." ~James Madison

"If a nation expects to be ignorant and free ... it expects what never was and never will be."
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We begin our discussion with the topic of education quality, paying special attention to "education for informed citizenship," because we agree with both Jefferson and Madison that, if we fail to restore to universities the civic-education function with which they have been entrusted, in short order we shall lose the capacity for self-government on which individual liberty and limited government ultimately depend.

Education for Informed Citizenship

While nearly all of us expect students to acquire employable skills while in college, at the same time, we hope for something more, something higher, than job training alone. This hope is reflected in the distinction we draw between “vocational” and “liberal” education. Vocational education is oriented chiefly by what it might enable students to *do* with their education. Liberal education is oriented chiefly by what it might enable students to *be* by virtue of the education they have received. It is not accidental that the word “liberal” in “liberal education” has the same root as the word “liberty.” Liberal education is an education for and through liberty. In one important respect, Western civilization may be said to be built on Socrates’ premise that the “unexamined life is not worth living.” From this it follows that the highest liberty of which human beings are capable is the liberty of the mind, that is, freedom from unexamined assumptions; for example, swings in intellectual fashion, politics, and ideology. Liberty at its peak is thus identical with the quest for truth. This quest not only defines a university’s deepest and highest purpose but also constitutes the best defense of its claim to academic freedom.

The cultivation of free minds simultaneously transcends and depends on the political freedom enshrined in the American Constitution.

In the course of educating students, those in our universities should come to recognize that the intellectual liberty they pursue depends on their being situated in a system of political liberty. That is, the cultivation of free minds simultaneously transcends and depends on the political freedom enshrined in the American Constitution. This dependence, along with the commitment to enhancing their students’ self-knowledge, should lead all universities to require of all their students, regardless of major, that they study in a comprehensive fashion the principled foundations of American democracy, beginning with the Founding documents—the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and *The Federalist*—as well as the other sources that both informed the Founding and reacted to it.

Such an approach is required if we are to fulfill both Jefferson’s and Madison’s mandates, which grow out of the unique character of the American experiment in self-government. This uniqueness becomes clear on examination of the document that seeks to provide the justification for our very existence as an independent nation—the Declaration of Independence. Its claims are meant to be universal, addressed not only to King George III, but to a “candid world.” The Declaration announces that, in the new American order, blood, creed, and national origin—the constituents of citizenship throughout history—have been dethroned. Instead, U.S. citizenship entails adherence to moral and political principles the truth of which, says the Declaration, is “self-evident” to those who reason rightly. These principles, which form what has been called the “American theory of justice,” argue for human equality; for the inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; for government established by popular consent; and for the right of the people to rebel should government cease to fulfill the purposes for which it was instituted. On this basis, the United States is more than a mere address, more than its history, and more than its demographics. It is, in its essence, an *idea*.

Yet how many of us today can recount the Declaration’s four self-evident truths? More crucial, how many of us have even a rudimentary grasp of the moral and intellectual foundations of the American theory of justice? For years, surveys have told us that the answer to both questions is, precious few. This cannot help but alarm those of us who believe, with the Declaration’s author, Thomas Jefferson, that no nation can expect to be “both ignorant *and* free.” But neither should we be surprised at the surveys’ results, says Derek Bok. The former president of Harvard University argues in *Our Underachieving Colleges* that American higher education can and must do better at providing the democratic or civic education on which he, Jefferson, and the Texas Constitution deem democratic health to depend.

Bok laments the fact that most colleges in the country today do not require even an introductory course in American government, the result of which, according to Department of Education statistics, is that only one-third of undergraduates ever complete such a course. With such a paucity of college courses, how are today's students to become tomorrow's leaders? How can we the people fully defend what we do not fully understand? Bok adds a lesser yet legitimate point that the obligation to provide civic instruction is not limited to state-funded public institutions of higher learning: Because our private universities benefit from tax exemptions and federal financial aid, they too have a duty to provide civic education as part of their claim to providing a "public good."

The issue becomes clearer when we survey the history of higher education in this country, from which we discover that required courses constituting a "Core Curriculum" of studies in American history and government, economics, and the history of Western civilization were attacked during the late 1960s and early 1970s as irrelevant to the crises of the day. There followed a gradual withering away of such requirements. Forty years later, a study by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA), entitled, "The Hollow Core," finds that Core Curriculum requirements have not been reinstated in the overwhelming majority of our colleges and universities.²

In 2007, the Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI), a non-profit educational organization, issued a study that finds today's undergraduates fail at civics.³ Nationwide, 50 universities were surveyed, three of them in Texas—Baylor University, West Texas A&M, and the University of Texas at Austin. Nearly 1,000 Texas freshmen and senior students were given a 60-question test on American history and institutions.

Again, Texas is not alone in attempting to deal with this problem, which has been with us for some time. For example, in 2000, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni commissioned the Roper Organization to conduct a survey of seniors from the nation's 55 best colleges and universities. The results were published in *Losing America's Memory: Historical Illiteracy in the 21st Century*.⁴ The survey found that "four out of five seniors—81 percent—received a grade of D or F on test questions drawn from a basic high school history curriculum."

Recommendation:

With the view to enhancing fidelity to Jefferson and Madison's vision, university regents and other administrators should be encouraged to institute reforms that place more focus on teaching students basic American history, government, economics, and Western Civilization, whether through a standardized test or more course options/requirements.

The study of American government should focus on our polity's core principles of human equality and individual liberty. This focus should proceed through examination of a number of fundamental documents and major speeches. The questions regarding the meaning of human equality, inalienable rights, popular consent, and the right of revolution require study of the Declaration, along with Frederick Douglass's 1852 address, "The Meaning of the Fourth of July for the Negro," and Chief Justice Taney's infamous opinion for the majority in the *Dred Scott* case (where Taney denies that African-Americans have any rights that whites are bound to respect). Against Taney, Frederick Douglass's and Lincoln's scathing critiques of the *Dred Scott* opinion need to be taught.

The Declaration needs also to be scrutinized in its relation to the pro-woman's-suffrage, 1848 Seneca Falls "Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions" and the Reverend Martin Luther

Most colleges in the country today do not require even an introductory course in American government ... With such a paucity of college courses, how are today's students to become tomorrow's leaders?

King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, delivered on the National Mall in 1963. Students' attention should be directed to these questions, among others: Why did Elizabeth Cady Stanton look to the form and substance of the Declaration of Independence in crafting the Seneca Falls Declaration? What did the Reverend King mean by asserting, contrary to Taney, that the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution constituted a "promissory note to which every American was to fall heir"?

The U.S. Constitution, of course, must be taught to all Texas students. As both critics and admirers of the Constitution agree, there is no more authoritative commentary on that document than *The Federalist*, the series of 85 newspaper essays defending and explaining the Constitution, written during the period that the states were debating its ratification. Specifically, the issues of representation, minority rights, and the economics of democracy require examination of the Constitution and *The Federalist*, which should then be contrasted with Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt's writings and speeches on economic democracy.

To its credit, Texas receives a "B" grade from ACTA on core curriculum requirements. However, our state can do better.

To argue for the need to reform Texas' public universities' civics curriculum is not to deny its merits. Far from it. To its credit, Texas receives a "B" grade from ACTA on core curriculum requirements. However, our state can do better. For example, few of our public universities require the study of economics as well as a foreign language. In the ACTA survey, for example, Texas is shown to require courses in Comparative Literature, Government and History, Mathematics and Science, but not Economics. In a global economy, we can ill afford to be indifferent to our students' need to master economics. More important, the Founders of this country believed that history demonstrates that where there is no protection of property rights, there is no reliable protection of human rights. For both reasons, Texas students need to understand economics generally as well as its relation to politics. Accordingly, the Governor of Texas should appoint a commission to examine whether, how, and at what cost the core curriculum requirements at Texas public community colleges, colleges, and universities might be increased to incorporate economics.

The commission also should be directed to ascertain what percentage of the Texas higher education system's core curriculum is available via the Internet. The commission should explore the question of whether opening access to these courses via the Internet could improve the civic education of Texas' college students and citizenry.

2 Texas Higher Education Adrift? Addressing the Crisis of Poor Student-Learning Outcomes

The sobering statistics cited above should lead us to wonder whether Texas higher education is somehow exempt from the alarming results of the 2011 landmark national study of collegiate learning, *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*.⁵ *Adrift* employed the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) to measure what our undergraduates are learning in college. Of the students across the country whom it surveyed, 45 percent showed "small or empirically non-existent" gains in "general collegiate skills"—critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing skills—after two full years in college. After four years in college, 36 percent continued to show only small or empirically non-existent gains.

In March 2012, the *Washington Post*, through a public records request, found that the University of Texas at Austin scores in the 23rd percentile among peer institutions on the Collegiate Learning Assessment; that is, 77 percent of UT's competitors scored higher.⁶ More-

over, ACTA's survey of core curriculum requirements at the nation's college and universities, titled *What Will They Learn?*, assigns "A" grades to only two Texas public universities: Texas A&M, Corpus Christi and the University of Texas at San Antonio.⁷ Given the role that history, government, and economics play in developing critical thinking—coupled with the fact that Texas students suffer a comparative disadvantage nationally in the number of such courses taken—there appears to be good reason to conclude that we in the Lone Star State can do better. None of this denies that Texas boasts some of the most prestigious universities in the world, UT-Austin among them. Nevertheless, the results reported above indicate our need for improvement.

Additionally, the results reported in *Academically Adrift* should make us more wary of any approach that would measure educational progress by an increase in graduation rates *alone* or even *primarily*. This is in no way to deny the need to improve graduation rates significantly. Quite the contrary. While most of us expect college students to graduate in four years, the average graduation rate after four years at Texas universities is only 29.9 percent, according to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. The average time to degree is 5.3 years, with 58.4 percent of students taking six years. One cause of this disappointing statistic may be that current higher-education funding formulas overwhelmingly encourage universities to enroll students, but not to graduate them. Nor do they at this time encourage them to graduate students with an externally verifiable level of competence, such as is provided by the Collegiate Learning Assessment.

The Legislature took an important step toward remedying this with the passage of HB 9 in 2011. On this important foundation the Legislature should consider building further. Rather than continue to appropriate the bulk of funding on the basis of the number of students enrolled, it should further adjust the formula so that graduation—i.e., the successful completion of the university's central mission—is taken more into account. Students who fail to graduate leave school burdened with student-loan debt, the repayment of which is made all the more difficult by their lack of a degree.

That said, to be a true marker of progress, increased graduation goals must be tied to documented increases in learning, as measured by an external testing instrument such as the Collegiate Learning Assessment. The need to pair graduation rates with validated learning outcomes is not lost on employers, who see first-hand what skills and knowledge the average college graduate brings to the table on entering employment. In a story analyzing a recent survey of prospective employers, the inadequacy of relying on graduation rates alone was explained: "... [I]n discussing the possibility of holding colleges accountable for the percentage of students that graduate in four years, they [the interviewed business leaders] worried that schools would be incentivized to water down quality to hit their targets. Nevertheless, interest in accountability is strong."⁸

To repeat, to date, what interest there has been in funding outcomes, rather than merely enrollment, has focused primarily on increasing graduation rates. To do so to the exclusion of learning outcomes is wrong-headed, as it only incentivizes the dilution of standards, as the survey of business leaders attests.

Recommendations:

- Institute reforms that tie university funding to student success results, such as the number of degrees issued and learning outcomes, as measured by, e.g., the Collegiate Learning Assessment.

While most of us expect college students to graduate in four years, the average graduation rate after four years at Texas universities is only 29.9 percent, according to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

- Simultaneous with the above, encourage university regents to institute measurements of learning outcomes at the freshman and senior years in order to gauge more accurately whether and how much students increase in learning during their four years at Texas public colleges and universities.

3 Before the Bubble Bursts: Arresting the Unsustainable Increases in Tuition and Student-Loan Debt

In Texas, and nationwide, college tuition and student-loan debt are escalating at unsustainable rates. According to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, between 2003 and 2009, statewide average academic charges for a student taking 15 semester credit hours at a public university increased 72 percent in constant dollars.⁹ Yet median family income in the state declined 1.5 percent from 1999-2009.¹⁰ To pay for tuition, students and their parents have taken on historic levels of debt. At one trillion dollars, total student-loan debt is now—and for the first time in our history—greater than credit-card debt. Moreover, 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.”¹¹ The surge in tuition is 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 children. But families in between are being squeezed increasingly.

Fueled by easy money in the form of federally-subsidized student loans, decreased teaching productivity and increased spending on administration have come to serve as both cause and effect of skyrocketing tuitions. According to research conducted by the Center for College Affordability and Productivity, “at research universities in the United States between 1988 and 2004, it is estimated that teaching loads fell 42 percent.¹² Even in private liberal arts colleges that pride themselves on their attention to instruction, those loads fell 32 percent.” Falling teaching loads are the natural, logical response to the incentives currently operating in higher education. Faculty promotion and prestige are based in large part on publications, which enhance a school’s national reputation. Faculty publications play a role in a college’s ranking in *U.S. News Best Colleges*, the holy grail of academic status. In contrast, excellent teachers are known by a comparative few. Aside from perhaps a once-in-a-career teaching award, they are less likely to be rewarded than are their more-research-oriented peers. Small wonder, then, that under the current system, both faculty and administrators see lower teaching loads as a verification of excellence.

Along with decreased teaching productivity, increased administrative staffing raises the price of college. “Forty years ago,” reports Benjamin Ginsberg, “U.S. colleges employed more faculty than administrators. But today, teachers make up less than half of college employees.” As documented in Ginsberg’s *The Fall of the Faculty*, “forty years ago, the efforts of 446,830 professors were supported by 268,952 administrators and staff. Since then, the number of full-time professors increased slightly more than 50 percent, while the number of administrators and administrative staffers increased 85 percent and 240 percent, respectively.” Adjusting for inflation, from 1947 to 1995, “overall university spending increased 148 percent. Administrative spending, though, increased by a whopping 235 percent. Instructional spending, by contrast, increased only 128 percent, 20 points less than the overall rate of spending increase.” Senior administrators have done particularly well under the new regime. From 1998 to 2003, deans and vice presidents saw their salaries increase as much as 50 percent, and “by 2007, the median salary paid to a president of a doctoral degree-granting institution was \$325,000.”¹³

Given the straitened circumstances within which students, parents, taxpayers, and state legislatures find themselves these days, the above statistics are disconcerting. Perhaps more alarming still is the fact that the affordability crisis in higher education appears to have had little effect on the growth in administration nationally. According to the *Higher Education Employment Report*, “colleges and universities continued to focus more on hiring administrators and executives over faculty in Q1 2012, although the rate of change has slowed.”¹⁴

All of this has not been lost on prospective students and their parents. According to a recent Pew Research Center study, 57 percent of potential students nationally say that the higher education system fails to provide good value for the cost, and 75 percent say college is unaffordable.¹⁵ In Texas in late 2010, Baseline and Associates conducted a public opinion survey commissioned by the Texas Public Policy Foundation. The survey reveals that strong and, at times, overwhelming majorities of Texas voters think the state’s public colleges and universities can reduce their operating costs while improving teaching. The survey found:

- Eighty percent of Texas voters think Texas colleges and universities can be run more efficiently, with 50 percent strongly believing so.
- Seventy-one percent of voters—44 percent strongly—believe that Texas colleges and universities can improve teaching while reducing operating costs.
- Eighty-seven percent of Texans believe that the most important purpose of a university is to educate students, while only 6 percent say it is to conduct research.
- By a margin of 81 percent to 14 percent, respondents believe that tuition dollars should be used to teach students and not be used to subsidize research.
- Eighty-seven percent of voters believe college professors should be required to teach in the classroom at least six hours per week (nine percent disagree).
- When asked how universities should deal with the budget shortfall, the **top three choices** of voters were:
 - (1) Reduce administrative overhead;
 - (2) Delay new facilities; and
 - (3) Require professors to teach more students and do less research

Raising tuition or taxes were the **least favorable options**, at 6 percent and 10 percent respectively.

- Ninety percent of voters believe there should be measurements in place to determine the effectiveness of the education delivered and material learned by students at colleges and universities, while only 7 percent disagreed.

Recommendations

- Require all public institutions to increase aggregate credit hours taught by tenured and tenure-track faculty by 10 percent.¹⁶
- In order that precious taxpayer dollars might be redirected to teaching and learning, the Legislature should mandate that all universities conduct feasibility studies for a 10 percent reduction in their administrative staff budgets.

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- Expand the online-degree rider that was added to HB 1 in 2011. The rider requires colleges and universities to submit cost studies of the four most popular degree plans that can be offered online. These studies should be expanded to include all STEM courses not covered by the first study, plus all lecture courses in all fields.
- Require all public institutions of higher education to submit to THECB feasibility studies for crafting \$10,000 degrees in their four most popular degree plans as well as for all degrees they offer in STEM subjects.
- Place a two-year moratorium on all new building projects, to take advantage of the increasing popularity of online courses. More students studying online means less need for bricks and mortar. The growth of Web-based instruction is impressive already. 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, I. Elaine Allen, who is Professor of Statistics & Entrepreneurship at Babson College.¹⁷ According to the survey’s web site, 31 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 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 2 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.¹⁸

- Require all non-Tier I public institutions to submit to the THECB feasibility studies for changing the academic calendar to three semesters a year. Following the model of BYU-Idaho, students at a three-semester-a-year campus take classes only two semesters a year on a prearranged semester schedule. This allows the university to ensure that the campus is full all year-round. A three-semester calendar will allow for a more efficient use of university resources. Employing campus facilities year-round will reduce the relative per-student cost.

4 Ensuring That Taxpayers Are Getting What Their Tax Dollars Pay For: The “Returned Value” Model of University Assessment

University Ventures, a New York-based venture fund specializing in investments in American higher education, argues that rating an institution’s performance relative to other institutions requires definition of the relevant outcomes institutions can demonstrate.¹⁹ To this end, it has published a list of outcomes by which universities might be compared:

1. Tuition relative to other institutions
2. Net price, after grants and scholarships, relative to other institutions
3. Retention rate relative to other institutions
4. Graduation rate relative to other institutions
5. Average student debt relative to other institutions

6. Loan repayment rates relative to other institutions
7. Employment potential relative to other institutions.

To this list of seven we also would add two: The first is not an outcome but an “input”: admissions criteria. If one Texas university admits 92 percent of freshmen who come from the top 10 percent of their high school class and another admits only 12 percent who come from the top 10 percent of their high school class, this important information should be easily accessible online for prospective students and their parents.

Finally, we would add an additional outcome that is in fact the most important of all: academic rigor, with which we shall deal at length in a later section.²⁰

Recommendation:

The criteria listed above should be made easily accessible online to prospective students and their parents. Compiling and publishing information on each of the above measures would do much to provide the transparency needed to educate the public about the value and costs of the various degrees offered by institutions in Texas. This effort to enhance transparency finds its parallel in the requirement of lenders to apprise borrowers of the full scope of their indebtedness. In both cases, the citizens’ right to know is or should be paramount.

This effort to enhance transparency finds its parallel in the requirement of lenders to apprise borrowers of the full scope of their indebtedness. In both cases, the citizens’ right to know is or should be paramount.

5 Producing Better Informed Consumers of Higher Education: Transparency Regarding The Market Value of the Various College Degrees

Texas State Technical College System (TSTC) recently took an unprecedented step by offering to be judged—and paid—on the basis of results. TSTC, a system of public two-year postsecondary institutions offering technical (vocational) training, is crafting a model on the basis of which all of its state funding will depend on the employment and earnings of its graduates. Simply put, under the plan, TSTC will not receive state funding for a student until and unless that student is placed in a job.

This is not to say that every institution should be judged on the basis of job placement. As discussed earlier in this paper, education in the highest sense has value independent of future income. Moreover, the difference in mission between TSTC and other higher-education institutions prevents it from being instantly applicable universally.

But what does apply—and more than ever in these days of rising tuitions and declining student-learning outcomes—is the principle animating TSTC’s “returned-value model,” which is that results matter in every other aspect of life, and it is time that they matter more in higher education. The current funding formula for Texas public higher education—as in most other states—is based primarily on the number of students enrolled at each institution, and not on the results achieved by each university in educating those students. The principle behind TSTC’s actions should be looked to and incorporated by all Texas public institutions of higher learning. In this way alone will students and parents glean a fuller picture of their likely return on their educational investment.

Another positive step in the direction of accountability was taken this May by Texas A&M University, with the launch of its “accountability dashboard.”²¹ This is a welcome development, despite the charges of critics that the site lacks the faculty-specific data without which real ac-

countability—specifically, *individual* accountability—gets lost in the averages that tend to dominate such metrics. The needed specificity will likely come in time; what matters today is that the ground is beginning to shift, as evidenced by the fact that an “accountability dashboard” is being attempted at all. This is all to the good.

With total student-loan debt at an all-time high, students and their parents need urgently to know what sorts of careers await upon their receipt of a college degree. Upon graduating, a typical student will have incurred roughly \$25,000 in loan debt, which, with interest, could total as much as \$40,000 by the end of the payment period.

In addition to University Ventures’ seven criteria listed above, full transparency regarding market value would break down starting salaries by school, department, and major. Again, all of this information should be made easily accessible online.

Such transparency would help produce knowledgeable, price-sensitive college consumers who would, in turn, create market pressures on colleges and universities.

Recommendation:

Following the pioneering efforts of TSTC and Texas A&M, all Texas public colleges and universities should track job placement of students within the first three years of graduation and income of college alumni over the first 20 years of their careers. This information should be updated annually and published on their institutional websites. The U.S. Department of Education has reached an agreement with the Social Security Administration to track federal student loan recipients using Social Security payroll data, and that information will be provided to Title IV participating institutions. Thus we now have better means at our disposal than previously to make students more aware of the likely market value of the degree programs in which they are contemplating enrolling.

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6 Enhancing Fidelity to the Central Mission of Public Higher Education: Transparency on Student-Learning Outcomes

At this writing, roughly 500 universities have administered the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) to their students. The University of Texas System has been doing so for eight years. This is a positive development in response to the depressing results reported in the landmark national study, *Academically Adrift*, recounted above.²²

Recommendation:

To be accountable for its education quality, every Texas public university should administer the CLA. A somewhat 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.

Full transparency regarding student learning would break down each institution’s CLA scores along the lines of schools, departments, and majors, and would provide comparisons with all other schools.

Also beneficial in this regard would be for all universities to include on all student transcripts not only the grade the student received for each class, but also the average grade for

the entire class. This would tell prospective employers whether or not a given student's high grade point average was the product of truly exceptional work or that of enrolling in a majority of what the past generation labeled "gut" courses, and today's students call "mick" (for "Mickey Mouse") courses.

It should be noted that there is a correlation between grade inflation and graduation rates. Institutions with significant grade inflation have higher six-year graduation rates. This constitutes an additional warning against undue emphasis on increasing graduation rates without simultaneously measuring student-learning outcomes.²³

All of this information should be made easily accessible online at the website of every Texas public university.

- Current estimates place the cost for administering the CLA to all Texas public college and university students at slightly under \$100 per student over the period of four years in college (under \$25 a year per student). This cost, though relatively meager, nonetheless requires a corresponding plan to pay for it. This can be accomplished without undue difficulty through reducing costs elsewhere. In the third section of this paper, "Before the Bubble Bursts," above, we supply the mechanism through which the cost of a universal Texas CLA can be paid. This consists in taking the funds required for the CLA from the money saved through cutting administrative costs at every Texas public college and university by 10 percent. (Recall that the second recommendation of Section III stated, "In order that precious taxpayer dollars might be redirected to teaching and learning, the Legislature should mandate that all universities conduct feasibility studies for a ten-percent reduction in their administrative staff budgets.")

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7 Questioning Unexamined Assumptions: To What Extent Are Universities "Drivers of Economic Growth?"

Some education analysts argue that universities—like airports and light rail—are drivers of economic growth. Higher education, it is argued, promotes "human capital formation" and innovation. While there is certainly some truth to the notion that the knowledge gained in college in some cases makes students more productive workers, and there are some examples of university-based research propelling economic innovation, the conventional wisdom ignores the law of diminishing returns.

As investments in universities increase, the marginal value added decreases. For example, some students are not well suited for college. Roughly half of students who begin college never graduate. The recent, well-intentioned emphasis on college as a goal for everyone has had the unfortunate effect of pushing too many students into a college environment when other alternatives would better exercise their talents.

Economic output falls when resources are taken from the competitive, market-disciplined private sector and reallocated to the far less efficient higher education sector—where market forces are muted and distorted by various government subsidies and private philanthropy. This is confirmed by statistical analysis of the relationship between state government appropriations for higher education and the rate of economic growth of the states. The positive economic spillover effects of higher education that many assert exist (and which often are cited as justification for large public subsidies) are more imaginary than real.

In Florida, for example, the Legislature directed the Florida university system to create programs in computer programming because Florida attracts a great number of software-related companies. In order to preserve the state’s high rank in this economic sector, the state government picks the computer technology industry for special treatment while ignoring other sectors of the economy that could benefit from education programs that develop a skilled workforce. Behind this action of the state legislature is the notion that education can drive economic development and growth. But in picking winners, the legislature asserts that its judgment is superior to market forces that may drive the economy of Florida in other directions. And by focusing on Florida’s public institutions, it ignores the vital private education sector that has proven to be more responsive to market signals than the stodgy bureaucracy of the state’s university system.

The recent, well-intentioned emphasis on college as a goal for everyone has had the unfortunate effect of pushing too many students into a college environment when other alternatives would better exercise their talents.

Recommendation:

The state of Texas should reopen the question whether it is ultimately in its interest to pick winners and losers in the race for excellence in education. In the process, it should consider whether the state might not be better served by relying more on market forces residing in the private-education sector to achieve ends disclosed by the millions of private decisions of the state’s education consumers.

The previous seven subjects address ways that the current system might be improved from within. The final three explore how the Texas higher education system can be improved from without—through admitting new competition into the Texas higher education marketplace.

8 Lighten Texas Workforce Commission Regulations

Under current law, any career school or college subject to the jurisdiction of the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) must make application to TWC for a Certificate of Approval under the Career Schools and Colleges Act.

The Texas Workforce Commission is the gatekeeper for non-public institutions operating in the state, including liberal arts institutions. If an out-of-state institution wants to offer programs in the liberal arts or other academic subjects at classrooms physically located within Texas, it may obtain an exemption from TWC regulations by meeting certain conditions. One of those conditions is that at least 51 percent of the credits offered by the institutions be transferable to a tax-supported state institution located in the same region where the classes are being offered.

In other words, Texas statutes currently protect the Texas public university system against competition from new institutions because exemptions from TWC regulations depend, in part, on the willingness of a public university to enter into an articulation agreement with the new institution. In one recent case, an out-of-state institution sought an articulation agreement with a regionally accredited non-profit university. That was found to be insufficient to qualify for an exemption. Only agreements with tax-supported institutions exempt institutions from TWC regulations.

Recommendation:

Expand the current exemption found in Texas Education Code §132.002(a)(6) so that it applies not just to institutions “supported entirely or partly by taxation,” but also to any “private or independent institution of higher education” as defined by Texas Education Code §61.003(13) and as recognized by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.²⁴

9 Employing Information Technology to Expand Access: Dual Credit

Higher education in Texas is rich in variety, consisting of private, non-profit colleges and universities; for-profit institutions, including career colleges offering vocational programs and degrees; public universities and colleges; and public community colleges.

High school students in Texas are given the opportunity to earn at least 12 college-level academic credits that may be applied to graduation requirements for a high school diploma. More than 90 percent of courses for dual credit are offered by Texas community colleges at a cost estimated at \$181 million in the 2009-2010 academic year.

Participating colleges must negotiate articulation agreements with local school districts. Colleges may be paid up to \$400 per course, with the local school district paid \$80 for administrative costs. The costs of books—which can be substantial—are borne by students, though some districts and colleges strive through a variety of means to limit this.

Recommendation:

Texas has for more than two decades implemented dual-credit programs. Given the advances in information technology during this period, Texas now has the opportunity to make these programs accessible to a much larger segment of the Texas high-school population. Improvements in online learning make it no longer necessary to limit participation to campus-based and regionally accredited institutions. It is now possible to provide Texas students access to the wealth of Web degree programs that have been developed since the explosion of Internet commerce.

In addition to increasing student access to dual-credit courses, the following recommendation promises to accomplish this purpose in a manner that will help keep the cost to students at a minimum. Those institutions offering new Web degree programs should be requested to submit a list of all Internet-based courses that they offer and which make up the general education requirements of two years of college. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board should explore methods to expand the accessibility of courses under the dual credit programs, such as conducting a “Dutch auction” in which the vendors bid on the tuition cost that they will accept for each student completing a course. The winning bidders would then be certified by THECB to offer these courses to any Texas resident qualifying for enrollment in a degree program. Financing would be provided by annual appropriations.

More than 90 percent of courses for dual credit are offered by Texas community colleges at a cost estimated at \$181 million in the 2009-2010 academic year.

10 Employing Information Technology to Better Address the Needs of At-Risk Students: Texas Early College High School

Texas “Early College High School” (ECHS) is a program defined by the Texas state legislature in 2005 as consisting of “small high schools, often located on a college campus and focused on a population of students who are lost in transition between high school and college.” Currently, 48 ECHS programs operate with participating colleges. ECHS is differentiated from “Dual Credit” programs that enable high achieving high school students to earn college credits in high school. ECHS partner with local colleges thus tethering the ECHS program to physical campuses. Though this physical proximity to college level classroom instruction may provide the support that some ECHS students need, many more students can be given access to college level instruction via the Internet.

Recommendation:

In order to increase access to the opportunity to participate in an ECHS program and thereby rescue a greater-number of those in this at-risk group, the Texas Legislature should decouple the Texas Early College High School program from traditional brick-and-mortar colleges, and include a curriculum of Internet-delivered courses provided by private non-profit and for-profit institutions that are regionally and nationally accredited. ★

The Texas Legislature should decouple the Texas Early College High School program from traditional brick-and-mortar colleges, and include a curriculum of Internet-delivered courses provided by private non-profit and for-profit institutions that are regionally and nationally accredited.

Appendix A: “What Will They Learn?” American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) 2012

Two private Texas universities also received “A” grades in the ACTA report: the University of Dallas and Baylor University. According to its web site, ACTA assigns grades to colleges and universities according to the following criteria:

What Will They Learn?TM rates each college on whether the institution (or, in many cases, the Arts & Sciences or Liberal Arts divisions) requires seven core subjects: Composition, Literature, Foreign Language, U.S. Government or History, Economics, Mathematics, and Natural or Physical Science. The grade is based on a detailed examination of the latest publicly-available online course catalogs at the time of review.

The fact that a college has requirements called “Literature” or “Mathematics” does not necessarily mean that students will actually study those subjects. “Distribution requirements” on most campuses permit students to pick from a wide range of courses that often are overly-specialized or even outside the stated field altogether. To determine whether institutions have a solid core curriculum, we defined success in each of the seven subject areas as follows:

Composition. An introductory college writing class focusing on grammar, clarity, argument, and appropriate expository style. Remedial courses and SAT/ACT scores may not be used to satisfy a composition requirement. University-administered exams or portfolios are acceptable only when they are used to determine exceptional pre-college preparation for students. Writing-intensive courses, “writing across the curriculum” seminars, and writing for a discipline are not acceptable *unless* there is an indication of clear provisions for multiple writing assignments, instructor feedback, revision and resubmission of student writing, and explicit language concerning the mechanics of formal writing, including such elements as grammar, sentence structure, coherence, and documentation.

Literature. A comprehensive literature survey or a selection of courses of which a clear majority are surveys and the remainder are literary in nature, although single-author or theme-based in structure. Freshman seminars, humanities sequences, or other specialized courses that include a substantial literature survey component count.

Foreign Language. Competency at the intermediate level, defined as at least three semesters of college-level study in any foreign language. No distinction is made between B.A. and B.S. degrees, or individual majors within these degrees, when applying the Foreign Language criteria.

U.S. Government or History. A survey course in either U.S. government or history with enough chronological and topical breadth to expose students to the sweep of American history and institutions. Narrow, niche courses do not count for the requirement, nor do courses that only focus on a limited chronological period or a specific state or region. State- or university-administered, and/or state-mandated, exams are accepted for credit on a case-by-case basis dependent upon the rigor required.

Economics. A course covering basic economic principles, preferably an introductory micro- or macroeconomics course taught by faculty from the economics or business department.

Mathematics. A college-level course in mathematics. Specific topics may vary, but must involve study beyond the level of intermediate algebra and cover topics beyond those typical of a college-preparatory high school curriculum. Remedial courses or SAT/ACT scores may not be used as substitutes. Courses in formal or symbolic logic, computer science with programming, and linguistics involving formal analysis count.

continued

Natural or Physical Science. A course in astronomy, biology, chemistry, geology, physical geography, physics, or environmental science, preferably with a laboratory component. Overly narrow courses, courses with weak scientific content, and courses taught by faculty outside of the science departments do not count. Psychology courses count if they are focused on the biological, chemical, or neuroscientific aspects of the field.

Half-Credit. If a requirement exists from which students choose between otherwise qualifying courses within two What Will They Learn™ subject areas (e.g., math or science; history or economics, etc.), one-half credit is given for both subjects.

With these criteria in mind, we assign grades based on how many of these seven subjects students are required to complete. If a core course were an option among other courses that do not meet the What Will They Learn?™ criteria for a certain subject, the institution did not receive credit for that subject. Credit is given only for what an institution requires of its students, not what it merely recommends. The grading system is as follows:

- A 6-7 core subjects required
- B 4-5 core subjects required
- C 3 core subjects required
- D 2 core subjects required
- F 0-1 core subjects required

Appendix B: Texas Education Code § 132.002.EXEMPTIONS

(a) The following schools or educational institutions may be exempted from this chapter by the commission under Subsection (d):

- (1) a school or educational institution supported by taxation from either a local or state source;
- (2) a nonprofit school owned, controlled, operated, and conducted by a bona fide religious, denominational, eleemosynary, or similar public institution exempt from property taxation under the laws of this state;
- (3) a school or training program that offers instruction of purely avocational or recreational subjects as determined by the commission;
- (4) a course or courses of instruction or study sponsored by an employer for the training and preparation of its own employees, and for which no tuition fee is charged to the student;
- (5) a course or courses of study or instruction sponsored by a recognized trade, business, or professional organization for the instruction of the members of the organization with a closed membership;
- (6) a private college or university that awards a recognized baccalaureate, or higher degree, and that maintains and operates educational programs for which a majority of the credits given are transferable to a college, junior college, or university supported entirely or partly by taxation from either a local or state source;
- (7) a school or course that is otherwise regulated and approved under and pursuant to any other law or rulemaking process of this state or approved for continuing education credit by an organization that accredits courses for the maintenance of a license, except as provided by Subsection (c);
- (8) an aviation school or instructor approved by and under the supervision of the Federal Aviation Administration;
- (9) a school that offers intensive review of a student's acquired education, training, or experience to prepare the student for an examination, other than a high school equivalency examination, that the student by law may not take unless the student has completed or substantially completed a particular degree program, or that the student is required to take as a precondition for enrollment in or admission to a particular degree program;
- (10) a private school offering primary or secondary education, which may include a kindergarten or prekindergarten program, and that satisfies the compulsory attendance requirements of Section 25.085 pursuant to Section 25.086(a)(1);
- (11) a course or courses of instruction by bona fide electrical trade associations for the purpose of preparing students for electrical tests required for licensing and for the purpose of providing continuing education to students for the renewal of electrical licenses;
- (12) a nonprofit arts organization that has as its primary purpose the provision of instruction in the dramatic arts and the communications media to persons younger than 19 years of age;
- (13) a course or training program conducted by a nonprofit association of air conditioning and refrigeration contractors approved by the Air Conditioning and Refrigeration Contractors Advisory Board to provide instruction for technical, business, or license examination preparation programs relating to air conditioning and refrigeration contracting, as that term is defined by Chapter 1302, Occupations Code;
- (14) a course of instruction by a plumbing trade association to prepare students for a plumbing test or program required for licensing, certification, or endorsement or to provide continuing education approved by the Texas State Board of Plumbing Examiners; and
- (15) a course of instruction in the use of technological hardware or software if the course is offered to a purchaser of the hardware or software or to the purchaser's employee by a person who manufactures and sells, or develops and sells, the hardware or software, and if the seller is not primarily in the business of providing courses of instruction in the use of the hardware or software, as determined by the commission.

continued

(b) Schools offering a course or courses of special study or instruction financed or subsidized by local, state, or federal funds or by any person, firm, association, or agency other than the student involved, on a contract basis and having a closed enrollment, may apply to the commission for exemption of such course or courses from this chapter and such course or courses may be declared exempt by the commission where the commission finds the course or courses to be outside the purview of this chapter.

(c) If a state agency that issues a license or other authorization for the practice of an occupation elects not to regulate or approve course hours that exceed the minimum education requirements for the issuance of the license or other authorization, the licensing agency shall enter into a memorandum of understanding with the commission for the regulation of those excess course hours under this chapter. Any course taught under a letter of approval or other written authorization issued by the licensing agency before the effective date of the memorandum is authorized under state law until the course is reviewed by the commission. The licensing agency may terminate the memorandum of understanding on notice to the commission.

(d) Except as provided by Subsection (g), a school or educational institution is exempt from regulation under this chapter only if:

(1) the owner of the school or educational institution:

(A) applies to the commission for an exemption under this section; and

(B) provides to the commission any information considered necessary by the commission to support the owner's application for an exemption; and

(2) the commission declares that the school or educational institution is exempt after finding that the school or institution is a school or institution listed in Subsection (a).

(e) After a school or educational institution is declared exempt by the commission under this section, the commission may inspect the school or institution or require the owner of the school or institution to provide any information the commission considers necessary for the commission to ensure the school or institution's continued compliance with the requirements of the exemption.

(f) A school or educational institution listed in Subsection (a) may seek a certificate of approval under Subchapter C. . . .

Endnotes

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- ⁵ Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa, *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). See also Arum, Roksa, and Cho, "Improving Undergraduate Learning." See also Scott Nalchik, "Academically Adrift," *Inside Higher Ed* (2011).
- ⁶ Daniel Devis, "Trying to assess learning gives colleges their own test anxiety," *Washington Post* (14 Mar. 2012).
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- ⁹ "Higher Education Cost Efficiencies" Report of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (1 Nov. 2010) 3-4, 37.
- ¹⁰ Tuition deregulation overview. Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (Apr. 2010).
- ¹¹ Thomas K. Lindsay, "Higher Education Affordability," in Texas Public Policy Foundation Guide to Legislators: 2013.
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- ¹³ Benjamin Ginsberg, *The Fall of the Faculty: The Rise of the All-Administrative University and Why It Matters* (Oxford University Press, 2011).
- ¹⁴ *Higher Education Employment Report: 2012*.
- ¹⁵ "Is College Worth It? College Presidents, Public Assess, Value, Quality and Mission of Higher Education," Pew Research Center (15 May 2011).
- ¹⁶ "Higher Education Cost Efficiencies," The Higher Education Coordinating Board (2010), p. 16. This is also the recommendation of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. "Institutions of higher education should improve credit hours produced per full-time equivalent faculty member by 10 percent. This recommendation reflects the strong belief of the Advisory Committee that targets and benchmarks be established at the state level by the THECB, but that the means by which these goals are achieved must be left to decision makers at the campus and system level."
- ¹⁷ "Going the Distance: Online Education in the United States, 2011," The Sloan Consortium.
- ¹⁸ Thomas K. Lindsay, "The Future Face of Higher Education: Online Learning in the New Economy," Texas Public Policy Foundation (June 2012).
- ¹⁹ "The University is Not Flat," *University Ventures* (Nov. 2012).
- ²⁰ See Section 6 of this report, "Enhancing Fidelity to the Central Mission of Public Higher Education."
- ²¹ "Measuring the Pursuit of Teaching, Research, and Service Excellence," Texas A&M web site (2012).
- ²² See Section 2 of this report, "Texas Higher Education Adrift?"
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ "Texas Education Code – Section 132.002.Exemptions." (See Appendix B.)

About Dr. Thomas K. Lindsay

Tom Lindsay joined the Texas Public Policy Foundation in September 2011 as Director of the Center for Higher Education. He has more than two decades' experience in education management and instruction, including serving as the thirteenth president of Shimer College, "the Great Books College of Chicago." He was named Deputy Chairman and COO of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) in 2007. He joined the NEH staff in 2006, as director of the agency's signature initiative, We the People. When he became Deputy Chairman, he remained director of We the People, providing national leadership and support for the program's efforts to increase understanding of our country's history and founding principles. In the preceding year, he sat on the National Council for the Humanities, a presidentially appointed board that oversees the NEH.

Prior to that, he served as the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs of the University of Dallas, where, as the chief academic officer of the university, he was responsible for the administration, direction, integrity and quality of its programs, for the recruitment and development of all faculty, and for the allocation of instructional and academic support resources. He supervised the deans of the University's three Texas-campus colleges (the College of Liberal Arts, the Graduate School of Liberal Arts, and the College of Business, which includes a graduate school of management) as well as the University's Rome, Italy, campus. Before becoming Vice President for Academic Affairs, Lindsay served as Dean of the University of Dallas' Braniff Graduate School of Liberal Arts and Director of its Institute of Philosophic Studies.

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. His doctoral dissertation compared ancient and modern conceptions of democracy. 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*. In recognition of his scholarship, he was made the Lynde and Harry Bradley Resident Scholar at the Heritage Foundation in Washington, D.C., for 1992-93. This was followed by his being awarded a Research Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities. In 2002, he received his graduate certificate from the Institute for Educational Management Program at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education.

Lindsay's efforts as a teacher and scholar were honored in 1997, when the Iowa State Board of Regents presented him the Faculty Excellence Award. In 1999, the leading national organization of political scientists, the American Political Science Association (in conjunction with Pi Sigma Alpha, the national political science honor society) presented Lindsay its Award for Outstanding Teaching in Political Science.

Lindsay recently completed a textbook, titled *Investigating American Democracy: A Core Questions Approach*. The book was published by Oxford University Press in June 2012.

Texas Public Policy Foundation

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