

# Ensuring that Motivated Poor Kids Get Degrees

## *Testimony before the House Higher Education Committee*

by Thomas K. Lindsay, Ph.D., director of the Center for Higher Education Policy

### **Background**

I write to testify in support of HB 30, which would create transfer compacts between junior or technical colleges and degree-granting institutions for coursework in “major degree fields.” For associate degrees, institutions may not require more than the minimum number of credit hours, unless required for the degree. This bill would make it easier for students to learn what courses to take in order to transfer credit from a junior college to a public institution.

Animated by a spirit akin to that behind HB 30, I penned three op-eds in the last two months defending an arrangement with important elements comparable to HB 30. What I envisioned was a pilot program between DCCCD and UT-D. I was happy to learn last week that such a pilot would not require a new law, but could be enacted under the following:

“Sec. 51.662. PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS. With the approval of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, the governing boards of a public community/junior college and another institution of higher education that are located in the same state uniform service region as adopted by the coordinating board may enter into a partnership agreement designed to coordinate the management and operations of the institutions. The agreements shall in no way abrogate the powers and duties of the boards with regard to the governance of their respective institutions.

“Added by Acts 1985, 69th Leg., ch. 647, Sec. 1, eff. June 14, 1985. Amended by Acts 1993, 73rd Leg., ch. 901, Sec. 2, eff. Aug. 30, 1993; Acts 2003, 78th Leg., ch. 820, Sec. 41, eff. Sept. 1, 2003.”

HB 30, as well as the pilot mentioned above (should it be effectuated) would go no small distance toward addressing the problem of community college students taking courses that do not transfer to four-year institutions. By some estimates, the average community college student takes 1.3 years of community college courses that ultimately do not transfer to a four-year institution. This adds time, cost, and effort to the already formidable challenge of obtaining a four-year degree. The extra 1.3 years also adversely affects graduation and completion rates.

I address these issues in more detail in the op-eds previously mentioned (*see Appendix on back*).

Links to appendix op-eds: “Ensuring that motivated poor kids get degrees;” “Helping low-income students get a college degree;” and “It’s time for Texas to eliminate the credit transfer hurdle.”

## Appendix

*Dallas Morning News*, December 27, 2012

# Thomas Lindsay and Ronald Trowbridge: Ensuring that motivated poor kids get degrees

By **Thomas K. Lindsay** and **Ronald L. Trowbridge**

In 2000, Texas embarked on a bold higher education reform initiative, Closing the Gaps by 2015. With support from educational, corporate and political leaders, the initiative aimed to remedy disparities in our state, as well as between Texas and other states, in four areas: student participation, student success, excellence and research.

Now Texans need to take the next step. A 2012 University of Pennsylvania study documents that, despite the progress made, “Huge inequities persist in Texas higher education. Among younger adults ages 25-34, 43 percent of whites hold at least an associate degree, compared with 28 percent of blacks and only 15 percent of Hispanics.”

Furthermore, a 2011 study by the American Enterprise Institute reveals marked class inequality. The study “Cheap for Whom?” finds a huge disparity between rich and poor schools, with the richer securing a vastly wider wedge of the pie: “Among not-for-profit institutions, the amount of taxpayer subsidies hovers between \$1,000 and \$2,000 per student per year until we turn to the most selective institutions. ... Among these already well-endowed institutions, the taxpayer subsidy jumps substantially to more than \$13,000 per student per year.”

Jorge Klor de Alva, co-author of the AEI study, concludes: “If the country is to retain its competitive edge, it must reverse the current policies that result in providing the lowest levels of taxpayer support to the institutions that enroll the highest percentage of low-income, nontraditional and minority students—the fastest-growing segments of the population.” More than half of postsecondary students in Texas are nontraditional—over the age of 25 and employed in outside jobs. What’s more, for grades K-12, more than 50 percent of students in Texas are Hispanic.

One way to increase the success of poor and minority students is for the Legislature to emulate the model codified by Virginia, which establishes simultaneous dual enrollment at community colleges and residential universities. Virginia’s model requires the development of “transfer, dual enrollment and admissions agreements” between its two- and four-year pub-

lic colleges and universities, “including programs for qualified students to be simultaneously accepted” by a community college and a four-year public institution. Under the plan, all who complete their associate degree program from the community college are automatically enrolled in the four-year institution.

This model expedites transfers and graduation by guaranteeing admission to a regional university to students successfully completing an associate degree or the requisite core courses at a local community college. Such a model would also enable poor and minority students to attend college at vastly less expense than is charged by a residential university.

There are legislative efforts to facilitate the pathway between community colleges and residential colleges, such as Dallas GOP Rep. Dan Branch’s HB 30, which would direct the Coordinating Board “to develop statewide transfer compacts in which public and private institutions of higher education, including career schools or colleges, may participate.”

This is an excellent start, but to help assure the continuity needed for student success, simultaneous dual enrollment in community colleges and residential colleges would get us even further. To ensure that dual enrollment maintains academic rigor, faculty committees, drawn from the two- and four-year colleges, would need to agree on common-course outcomes.

We do not endorse the misguided expectation that a bachelor’s degree is good for all. But by following Virginia’s model, Texas stands a better chance of ensuring that bright, motivated poor kids will not be deterred from a four-year degree through financial hardship and bureaucratic barriers.

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*Houston Chronicle*, January 31, 2013

## It's time for Texas to eliminate the credit transfer hurdle

*Proposed bill would remove a key barrier to higher education*

By Thomas K. Lindsay and Ronald L. Trowbridge

Texas community college students today face serious obstacles. Many are eager to attend a four-year school but confront two burly barriers: money to pay for it and the nightmare of credit transfers. On average, community college students waste one year of schooling through taking courses that won't transfer to a four-year school.

This is not simply a Texas problem. The country loses many millions of dollars annually because of inefficient credit transfer systems. This need not be. If we can get a man to the moon, surely community colleges and four-year schools can work out a process of seamless transfer. What is needed is the will to do so.

Texas is taking the lead on this. We presented a position paper to Raymund Paredes, commissioner of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, recommending a pilot program with a simultaneous dual-enrollment process. We have in mind for the pilot the Dallas County Community College District and the University of Texas at Dallas. The commissioner "heartily endorsed" the pilot concept.

The time is ripe. Rep. Dan Branch, R-Dallas, chairman of the House Committee on Higher Education, has proposed HB 30, which advocates "transfer compacts." Sen. Kel Seliger, R-Amarillo, new chairman of the Senate Committee on Higher Education, has expressed his support of "early college high school" and Gov. Rick Perry is championing a "\$10,000 degree" model. The 2011 passage of Branch's HB 9 advanced a new system of metrics incentivizing the transfer of community college students "to a general academic institution." HB 9 "recognizes the growing role of community colleges" as gateways to four-year degrees.

Jorge Klor de Alva, coauthor of the American Enterprise Institute's study "Cheap for Whom?," concludes, "If the country is to retain its competitive edge, it must reverse the current policies that result in providing the lowest levels of taxpayer support to the institutions that enroll the highest percentage of low-income, nontraditional and minority students—the fastest-growing segments of the population." More than half of postsecondary students in Texas and nationwide are nontraditional—aged 25 and older and working

full time. What's more, for grades K-12, over 50 percent of Texas students are Hispanic.

A word about elitism and academic rigor: One of us (Trowbridge) taught at a Texas community college for 12 semesters and can attest that there are many bright students in these schools who are kept from attending a four-year college almost exclusively through lack of funds. The proposed simultaneous dual-enrollment pilot with DCC and UT-Dallas would permit students who complete their associate degree program at the community college to proceed seamlessly to the partner four-year school. Working together, faculty members from the two institutions can resolve academic rigor concerns, including expected course outcomes and accountability.

To better ensure the pilot works as planned, the THECB commissioner should be given responsibility for evaluating the dual-enrollment program authorized by the legislative bill that Rep. Branch is championing. This pilot program is shovel-ready because of the work already done last session by Branch. Of course, the dual-enrollment program needs to be rigorously evaluated for its effectiveness in relation to cost, its impact on the number of credits transferred and its effect on student persistence and completion. To increase transparency and accountability, the commissioner should set the standards for this evaluation and ensure that it is conducted by persons not directly involved in the program's administration.

There is an immeasurable beneficence to this dual-enrollment symbiosis: It would serve as "The Texas Model" for the rest of the country, and more importantly, it would be of great benefit to countless motivated kids who could not heretofore afford to get a four-year college degree. There are too few instances in which the political stars align to create a win-win piece of legislation. Happily, this is one of those moments.

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*Rio Grande Guardian, February 18, 2013*

## Lindsay & Trowbridge: Helping low-income students get a college degree

By Thomas K. Lindsay and Ronald L. Trowbridge

AUSTIN, TEXAS - It has long seemed to us a matter of self-directed pride that many four-year colleges can't sit down with community colleges and work out seamless transfers for students.

Today the country loses billions of dollars in inefficient credit-transfer systems, and those who suffer the most are poor students who can least afford higher college costs. On average, community-college students waste one year of schooling by taking courses that won't transfer to a four-year school.

This does not have to be. If we can get a man to the moon, surely community colleges and four-year schools can work out a process of seamless transfer. The only thing needed for this is the will to do so.

We proposed to Dr. Raymund Paredes, Commissioner of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, a pilot program that codifies a simultaneous dual-enrollment partnership between a community college and a four-year school partner. The Commissioner "heartily endorsed" the pilot concept.

Next we approached the chairman of the House Committee on Higher Education, Rep. Dan Branch. The pilot concept fit perfectly with his proposed House Bill 30 that advocates "transfer compacts." Then we contacted Sen. Kel Seliger, chairman of the Senate Committee on Higher Education. He approved the pilot, having earlier expressed his support of "early college high school." The pilot concept also dovetailed smoothly with Governor Rick Perry's championing of a "\$10,000 degree" model.

We had in mind for the pilot the Dallas County Community College District and the University of Texas, Dallas. Dr. Wright Lassiter, Chancellor of the DCCCD, stated that his system was keen on "degree pathways that would provide students with a very specific set of courses to take prior to transferring to UTD with minimal 'waste,'" adding that "in our opinion, [the pilot] is a true dual-enrollment option that would represent a huge step-up and set the tone for the state." He concluded, "This is not just out-of-the-box thinking, but it is designing a new box altogether."

Rep. Dan Branch is eager now to introduce a House bill codifying the simultaneous dual-enrollment pilot.

Jorge Klor de Alva, co-author of the American Enterprise Institute's study, "Cheap for Whom?" observes: "If the country is to retain its competitive edge, it must reverse the current policies that result in providing the lowest levels of taxpayer support to the institutions that enroll the highest percentage of low-income, nontraditional and minority students—the fastest growing segments of the population." More than half of postsecondary students in the nation are nontraditional—age 25 and older and working fulltime. In Texas for grades K-12, more than 50 percent are Hispanic.

One obvious concern, of course, is to assure that the curriculum of the community-college courses matches the academic standards of the four-year institution. Faculty members at the partner schools working together can resolve issues of academic rigor.

While we don't believe a college degree is the only pathway to workplace success, genuinely motivated students should be given a chance for a degree. One of us who taught at a Texas community college for 12 semesters can attest that there are many very bright, motivated students in these schools who are kept from attending a four-year college almost exclusively through lack of funds. By reducing the overall cost for a bachelor's degree, this pilot would help to open another pathway to an affordable degree.

Our proposal recommends that the Commissioner of THECB evaluate the pilot, setting standards and ensuring that the evaluation is conducted by persons not directly involved in the program's administration.

There is an immeasurable beneficence to this dual-enrollment symbiosis: The "Texas Model" could be emulated throughout the country, and it would be of great benefit to countless motivated kids who could not otherwise afford to get a four-year college degree.

In Texas there are 50 community-college systems, and 36 public universities. Thousands of students could be helped by dual-enrollment partnerships.

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