



Testimony

Interim Charge 4

Texas House Higher Education Committee

by Andrew Gillen, PhD

Chair Turner and Members of the Committee:

My name is Dr. Andrew Gillen, and I am a senior policy analyst with the Texas Public Policy Foundation. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide information for interim charge 4. Question 2 of the interim charge reads:

What information and data is available regarding long-term student success for those taking courses primarily online—both in general and specific to Texas institutions?

As for most of higher education, there is very little data available regarding learning outcomes for either in-person or online learning.

However, earning-outcomes data is available. In 2019, the U.S. Department of Education began releasing program-level earnings and debt data (e.g., the typical earnings and debt for students earning a political science degree from the University of Texas at Austin). The Texas Public Policy Foundation has created an [interactive online web tool](#) that lets students, parents, and policymakers explore these data to help inform their decisions.

The data can also provide some insight into the relative long-term success of online and in-person education by utilizing Gainful Employment Equivalent, which is a debt-to-earnings test that asks whether a program's graduates earn enough to be able to repay their student loans.

Nationwide, online programs have similar performance to in-person programs, with 64% of in-person programs and 63% of online programs across the country passing Gainful Employment Equivalent. This indicates that graduate's earnings relative to debt are similar for online programs, compared to in-person programs. The main caveat to these data is that the online programs studied here were designed to be online. In-person programs that are now online due to COVID-19 may not be as successful as naturally online programs.

There are not enough exclusively online programs in Texas to draw meaningful conclusions if looking just at Texas.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this information, and I look forward to future discussions.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Andrew Gillen, PhD, is a senior policy analyst at the Texas Public Policy Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, non-partisan, free-market think tank. He is an adjunct professor of economics at Johns Hopkins University. Dr. Gillen's recent work has focused on how to reform federal financial aid, how state disinvestment is a myth, and how post-college earnings and debt should be used to inform student choice and government accountability.

Prior to joining the Foundation, Dr. Gillen spent over a decade at nonprofit and philanthropic organizations researching and trying to improve higher education. He was a program officer for the Charles Koch Foundation and served in research roles for American Institutes for Research, Education Sector; the American Council of Trustees and Alumni; and the Center for College Affordability and Productivity. He was also on the U.S. Department of Education's Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance.

Andrew has a PhD in economics from Florida State University and a BBA (business) degree from Ohio University.

