

Our Relationship to Community Colleges

Date of Report

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Theme Group Name

Our Relationship to Community Colleges

Members

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Introduction

Our Theme Group met six times: Sept. 27, Oct. 11, Nov. 3, Dec. 1, Jan. 26 and March 23. Each meeting took place on the WT campus with a conference-call number available for those who could not join the meeting in person. We enjoyed robust discussion from group members concerning the multifaceted topic of "Our Relationship to Community Colleges." Members shared ideas in an atmosphere of openness and positive collaboration. There have also been several sub-committee meetings on particular topics.

Innovation

Innovation in the Context of Our Relationship to Community Colleges

From the very first meeting, Denese Skinner encouraged us all to have the mindset of plenty rather than scarcity. In other words, WT does not need to feel threatened by community colleges or to see them as competitors. Skinner articulated the idea of stackable credentials

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and the valuable entry point of community college.

Other innovative thoughts from our group included: developing dedicated living spaces for transfer students; creating a section on the website where potential transfer students can check how their transfer courses would fit their intended degree; helping our Panhandle-area community college students feel like they're part of the WT family; and expressing the value of lower-division coursework through a change in messaging.

Resources Needed

WT will need to increase the capacity of institutional research to provide data on proposed metrics. In addition to the ability to gather and analyze data, WT will need personnel to convert the data into easily understandable infographics and short-form messaging written for all of the relevant stakeholders (e.g., students, potential students, parents, faculty, staff, alumni, community college partners, media).

In order to build deeper relationships with community colleges and to create program articulation agreements, additional personnel will be needed with the role of encouraging and monitoring program-to-program articulation across the university (perhaps at a big-picture level like Campus to Community) or across individual colleges (perhaps like the new college retention coordinator roles).

A collaborative effort between IT and Admissions would be needed to create the online program for checking degree-fit for transfer courses.

Card readers would need to be configured to read ID cards from Amarillo College, Clarendon and Frank Phillips in addition to WT, allowing those community college students to attend events on campus and become more comfortable making the move to WT.

Finally, for the residential living innovative ideas (dedicated space for transfer students, including spaces fit for married couples and spaces geared for international students with access to kitchens), the resources needed would involve architecture and construction crews to make needed adjustments to the existing dorms.

Key Idea (1)

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Key Idea (1)

Dual Credit and Transfer to WT

The practice of high school students taking dual credit courses, which earns them both high school and college credit is an established and growing practice in Texas. It is important for the university community to understand the concept, practice, value, importance, and economic advantage of dual credit courses for today's students and their parents and to know how to best advise them on their academic choices. We recognize the value to parents as dual credit can save time and money, but we are concerned about students entering upper-level courses with a lack of maturity needed. We are also concerned about the pressure students may feel to rush to finish a degree.

With Amarillo College's new Diplomas and Degrees program, the number of students entering WT with dual credit hours from high school is guaranteed to grow. (Amarillo College has Memorandum of Understanding agreements with Amarillo ISD, Canyon ISD, Bushland ISD, Highland Park ISD, Ascension Academy and Amarillo Collegiate Academy for students to be able to earn both high school and college credits resulting in both a high school diploma and an associate's degree).

Goal 1:

A university conversation and dialogue among faculty and administrators would be a productive strategy in better understanding dual credit and its importance, as well as how the university community can best help those students entering with a large number of hours.

Action 1.1:

The President or Provost may appoint a committee comprised of faculty and administrators to thoroughly examine the practice of students participating in dual credit courses that are transferred to the university. Committee dialogue can promote a better understanding of dual credit and how Advising Services and faculty can best guide first-time, full-time freshmen who enter the university with sophomore or junior-level hours.

Measurable Outcome 1.1.1:

Faculty comfort levels with advising these special students could be evaluated through research (surveys, focus groups).

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Action 1.2:

A review of current Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and Legislative policy relative to dual credit can be conducted, including House Bill 1638.

Measurable Outcome 1.2.1:

A checklist could be used to see where WT follows THECB policies and where WT does not.

Action 1.3:

WTAMU institutional research should be conducted to ascertain the educational performance and success of students at WTAMU who have transferred dual credit courses to the university as compared to the educational success and performance of native students without dual credit courses.

Measureable Outcome 1.3.1:

Track the number of dual credit hours coming into WT with the freshman class each year and monitor those students' success via GPA, graduation rates and speed to degree compared to students without dual credit hours.

Action 1.4:

Because some students end up with excess hours due to dual credit courses in high school, which lead to higher tuition, another "player" should be brought into the discussion: high schools. Because of the recent agreements made between Amarillo-area secondary schools (public and private) and Amarillo College for the Diplomas and Degrees program, it is especially important to remain aware of the growth and success of dual-credit offerings and to involve these schools in the conversation.

Measurable Outcome 1.4.1:

Interviews or surveys could be conducted with high school counselors to be sure they understand the impact of dual credit courses and the consideration needed when enrolling students.

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Measurable Outcome 1.4.2:

Track how many students with dual credit hours end up with excess hours, and therefore, higher tuition.

Measurable Outcome 1.4.3:

Track students entering WT after completing the Diplomas and Degrees program in the coming years to evaluate completion rates, time to degree, GPA, and participating school's performance.

Key Idea (2)

Key Idea (2)

Reverse Transfer

"Reverse Transfer" can be a positive and useful practice for WTAMU community college transfer students. "Reverse transfer" is the practice that allows community college transfer students who have earned 40+ hours of credit at a community college to transfer university course credit back to their community college in order to be awarded an associate's degree.

The advantage of "reverse transfer" is that the student is awarded a degree for which he/she has completed all course requirements. Attainment of the associate's degree may prove helpful to the student in the future (e.g., life issues sometimes force students to "stop out" prior to completing their baccalaureate degree).

Emphasizing and assisting students with the "reverse transfer" process will help create goodwill and foster relationships between WTAMU and community colleges.

Goal 1:

Raise awareness of the practice of "reverse transfer" for WTAMU community college transfer students.

Action 1.1:

Publicize the opportunity of "reverse transfer" and its value to community college transfer students enrolled at WTAMU.

Measurable Outcome 1.1.1:

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Conduct a survey to test awareness of the opportunity for “reverse transfer” before and after a publicity campaign designed to raise awareness of this opportunity.

Action 1.2:

Have WTAMU advisors explain the process and value of “reverse transfer” during the initial advising session with community college transferring students.

Measurable Outcome 1.2.1:

Keep track of the number of students who are advised regarding “reverse transfer.”

Action 1.3:

Ask the Registrar’s Office how many community college transfer students at WTAMU have used the reverse transfer process in order to earn an associate’s degree. Also, investigate the current WTAMU policy regarding promoting and assisting students with “reverse transfer.”

Measurable Outcome 1.3.1:

Collect data regarding the number of students currently enrolled who have applied for “reverse transfer” to earn associate’s degrees. This number could be tracked to see if it increases over the period of the awareness campaign and after its completion.

Measurable Outcome 1.3.2:

Collect data regarding the number of students graduating with an associate’s degree.

Key Idea (3)

Key Idea (3)

Serving the Panhandle of Texas by Serving Our Students

A vitally important role for WTAMU is to successfully serve the needs of the Texas Panhandle and the surrounding region by educating students to fill important local and

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regional positions in business, healthcare, engineering, education, technology, agriculture, communication, fine arts, and more.

President Walter Wendler has quoted Iris Palmer: "Regional institutions can no longer 'emulate' research flagships and must define mission to be responsive to the general education needs of students and segments of the employment market that are distinctive."

Goal 1:

Continue to identify key academic programs at WT that are strong and successful and which prepare graduates to meet local and regional employment needs.

Action 1.1:

Establish robust, positive, and meaningful relationships with key local and regional business and industry leaders in order to keep them apprised of the quality of WTAMU graduates.

Measurable Outcomes 1.1.1:

Monitor the list of top industries in the Panhandle, and compare them to the current programs offered.

Action 1.2:

Promote programs at WTAMU that connect to high-need jobs in the Panhandle.

Measurable Outcomes 1.2.1:

Track how many programs WT has that match the high-need job list and promote them. The applications to those programs could then be tracked to see how well this promotion works. The second step would be tracking graduation rates and employment rates of the graduates in those programs.

Goal 2:

Create and utilize successful strategies in matching graduates with excellent job opportunities or securing entry into graduate programs.

Action 2.1:

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Continue to support and enhance the current work of Career Services at WTAMU.

Measurable Outcome 2.1.1:

Track the number of placements made for jobs posted through Career Services.

Measurable Outcome 2.1.1:

Track the number of attendees at the Career Expo.

Measurable Outcome 2.1.1:

Conduct survey research to ask employers whether WT graduates meet their needs.

Goal 3:

Develop positive, collaborative and meaningful relationships with local and regional community college leaders, faculty, and students.

Action 3.1:

Schedule meetings in order to establish meaningful relationships between key WTAMU administrators and faculty with administrators and faculty at local and community colleges (Amarillo College, Frank Phillips College, Clarendon College, South Plains College, Western Texas College, Odessa College, Midland College, Cisco College, etc.).

Measurable Outcome 3.1.1:

Track the number of meetings between WTAMU administrators/faculty and community colleges and the programs covered (e.g., to make sure the meetings are not limited to one or two programs, but are spread across the institution).

Key Idea (4)

Key Idea (4)

Revolutionizing the Residential Experience

Currently, students entering the university with fewer than 60 hours must reside on

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campus. This can cause a negative experience for transfer students because of their age and maturity level compared to traditional students in the dorms. Brandy Carr said about half of her conversation time at South Plains, Frank Phillips and AC is about the 60-hour requirement, and others in our group shared anecdotal evidence of the rule being the deciding point for students who chose not to attend WT.

If transfer students were able to have an on-campus space with students of similar experience, we believe this could mitigate some of the issues they face. These common living spaces could help them engage and, therefore, persist, by connecting them with classmates coming from similar situations.

Because of the desire of university officials to make WT an attractive transfer destination school and because of the reluctance of some students considering transferring to WT, the appropriateness of current WT residential requirements concerning age and college credit earned should be studied. Recognizing the importance of the chance to embed – to become a Buff and get some of the “special sauce” referred to by Denese, our group discussed several options: (1) counting dual credit courses from high school toward the 60; (2) lowering the required number to 45; and (3) make the living arrangements such that they would WANT to live on campus.

Our group also wondered about the impact on those students living at home (e.g., study the persistence, GPA, time to degree of those who live at home compared to those on campus or those on their own). We also discussed the changing nature of college students and the college experience and how this shift might impact the traditional on-campus experience and whether residential life is still a predicting factor for persistence.

Goal 1:

Create residential spaces dedicated to transfer students, including married students and international students.

Action 1.1:

Establish halls or floors of residential living spaces dedicated to transfer students, including married students and international students. For international students in particular, these spaces should have access to a kitchen so they are able to cook food they prefer, as this is a common challenge we have heard voiced by international students.

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Measurable Outcome 1.1.1:

Track the number of units set aside for transfer students.

Measurable Outcome 1.1.2:

Track the rental rates of those units.

Measurable Outcome 1.1.3:

The newly established housing discount offer for transfer students will be thoroughly analyzed.

Measurable Outcome 1.1.4:

Conduct research (survey and/or interviews and focus groups) with transfer students on their residential living experiences at the end of each semester.

Action 1.2:

The residential living requirements should be revisited in light of the changing nature of college students.

Measurable Outcome 1.2.1:

Track the academic success for transfer students living in the residence halls and determine the value added from such an experience. (Research from other universities should also be examined).

Goal 2:

Create residential spaces where non-traditional populations feel comfortable.

Action 2.1:

Establish halls or floors of residential living spaces dedicated to non-traditional populations.

Measurable Outcome 2.1.1:

Track the number of rooms set aside.

Measurable Outcome 2.1.2:

Track the rental rates of those units.

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Measurable Outcome 2.1.3:

Conduct research (survey and/or interviews and focus groups) with non-traditional students on their residential living experiences at the end of each semester.

Key Idea (5)

Key Idea (5)

Being a Top University

Our group had a lengthy discussion based on the suggested bullet point "Things People Like About Good Universities." We want WTAMU to be considered in that list of "good universities" that come to people's minds.

Goal 1:

Meet the expectations people have of an excellent university.

Action 1.1:

Consider the common characteristics of top universities (e.g., good reputation; national recognition; people: faculty, staff, administrators; culture; affordability; quality programs, both traditional & innovative; program pathways; curb appeal/attractive campus; resources; traditions; alumni "blowing the horn for the university"; students prepared for the workforce; innovative culture; successful extra-curricular activities; impressive website, college publications and media coverage; opportunities: study abroad, experiential learning, job placement)

Measurable Outcome 1.1.1:

Conduct three surveys: one of alumni; one of regional community college students; and one of regional citizens to gauge their ratings of WT in these areas (e.g., reputation, recognition, people, culture, affordability).

Action 2.1:

Find ways to adjust practices to better meet some of these expectations.

Measurable Outcome 2.1.1:

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Collect data to see which “common characteristics of top universities” have been mastered by WT and which ones need further efforts or investment.

Action 3.1:

Provide more swag for alumni. We can make it easier for them to brag on their alma mater with WT gear in hand.

Measurable Outcome 3.1.1:

Create a message to be posted allowing alumni to request swag. Track the responses to that message, and follow up with questions for the alumni. Or the awarding of swag could be a surprise for those who respond to the survey mentioned under Measurable Outcome 2.1.1.

Action 4.1:

Provide students and faculty with talking points so they are ready to share about WT’s programs, facilities and successes. In other words, create a bulleted list of “bragging” points for each program to share with the faculty, staff and students in that department/major/school/college.

Measurable Outcome 3.1.1:

Measure how many programs have talking points distributed to their departments.

Measurable Outcome 3.1.2:

Survey students to see if they know the talking points.

Key Idea (6)

Key Idea (6)

Transfer Articulation for Community College Partnerships

Simplify and improve articulation agreements in specific majors between WTAMU and community colleges. Ensure the guided pathways between appropriate community

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college associate degree programs align directly to the degrees offered at West Texas A&M University.

Goal 1:

The articulation agreements should outline in detail the specific coursework that will transfer into the degrees offered at West Texas A&M University resulting in 100% alignment of the curricula between the two schools.

Action 1.1:

Department-specific faculty teams will meet initially to work out the alignment and will continue to meet as needed afterwards to ensure that any particular design plans are known and agreed upon by each partner.

Measurable Outcome 1.1.1:

Track the number of detailed articulation pathway agreements in place and with whom.

Measurable Outcome 1.1.2:

Monitor for proof of an annual review of the articulation pathway agreements. Reviews must be signed-off by the academic departmental head and the VPAA of each institution to ensure the pathways are accurate and supported.

Measurable Outcome(s) 1.1.3:

Chart progress of the program-to-program approach via articulation, GPA, graduation rates and speed to degree.

Goal 2:

Develop and maintain relationships between community colleges and WT at the program level.

Action 2.1:

Take a group of WT faculty to the Texas Community College Association conference each spring to meet faculty teaching similar areas at community colleges.

Measurable Outcome 2.1.1:

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Have faculty attending the conference evaluate the usefulness of the experience.

Action 2.2:

Select three departments at AC and WT for a major-specific pilot program.

Measurable Outcome 2.2.1:

Evaluate the usefulness of the experience by faculty who participate in the pilot program, including strengths and weaknesses.

Goal 3:

Create an easy way for students to check for transfer equivalency on the WT website based on their degree.

Action 3.1:

Create a section on the WT website where students who have applied to attend and have been given a Buff ID can log in to check how well their transfer courses will fit with their intended major.

Measurable Outcome(s) 3.1.1:

Monitor the website for traffic.

Key Idea (7)

Key Idea (7)

First-Choice Destination for Transfer Students

WT should become the model in Texas and across the country for successfully educating transfer students.

Goal 1:

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Raise awareness of the opportunities for transfer students at WTAMU.

Action 1:

Publicize the successes of transfer students enrolled at WTAMU.

Measurable Outcome 1.1.1:

Track the number of transfer applications.

Goal 2:

Study other destination options within the state for comparison.

Action 2.1:

Study programs/options/financial aid offered by universities currently considered the best places to transfer.

Measurable Outcome 2.1.1:

Conduct research to determine what factors are most desired by transfer students. Track where WT aligns with those desired aspects and where the university needs to expand its offerings.

Measurable Outcome 2.1.2:

Conduct focus groups and interviews with current transfer students to discover what prompted them to come to WT, what they think sets WT apart, and where they think WT can improve in order to become the first-choice transfer institution.

Key Idea (8)

Key Idea (8)

Student Success through Partnerships with Community Colleges and West Texas A&M University

Students will move smoothly, expeditiously and successfully from high school through community college and through West Texas A&M University and will graduate with both associate and baccalaureate degrees.

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Goal 1:

Ensure students an expeditious, streamlined, smooth transition from high school through graduation from West Texas A&M University.

Action 1.1:

Create effective and productive relationships and processes with high schools and community colleges that lead students on to graduation from WT.

Measurable Outcome 1.1.1:

Discover the percentage of community college graduates who transfer to WTAMU immediately following the completion of an associate's degree.

Measurable Outcome 1.1.2:

Examine the GPA performance of community college transfer students by specific community college and specific WT program compared to native WT students in those programs.

Measurable Outcome 1.1.3:

Analyze the persistence rate and graduation rate of community college transfers by specific community college and by specific WT program compared to native WT students in those programs.

Measurable Outcome 1.1.4:

Examine the time to baccalaureate degree completion for community college transfer students who enter WTAMU with an associate's degree.

Measurable Outcome 1.1.5:

Monitor the annual enrollment management progression of community college transfer students at WTAMU (number of transfers, percent enrolled at WTAMU, percent persisted, and percent graduated).

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Goal 2:

Create a shared external database for the Texas Panhandle.

Action 1.1:

Create a data repository so that students and counselors can easily see how decisions in community college can impact the requirements left to fulfill at a 4-year university.

Measurable Outcome 1.1.1:

Track the progress of the creation of the database and the demands for it from the region.

Goal 3:

Create a sense for Panhandle community college students of being part of the extended family of WT.

Action 3.1:

Allow students with IDs from AC, FP, CC to enter WT events.

Measurable Outcome 3.1.1:

Track how many of those community college IDs are used to attend events at WT.

Measurable Outcome 3.1.2:

Survey transfer students (later) to see how many took advantage of the access and then came to WT. Could also interview transfer students to ask about their thoughts of the program (e.g., How did that ID access impact your decision to attend WT?)

Action 3.2:

Regularly share Distinguished Lecture Series and Guest Artist Series calendars of events with contacts at AC, FP, and CC.

Measurable Outcome 3.2.1:

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Track how many community college students and faculty are on the Distinguished Lecture Series emailing list.

Key Idea (8)

Key Idea (8)

Valuing Lower-Division Coursework and the Faculty Who Teach Them

Frequently the phrase “get it out of the way” is used when enrolling students in lower-division courses, whether those students are signing up for dual credit courses in high school, community college classes or at a 4-year university.

Goal 1:

Express the value of foundational courses.

Action 1.1:

Encourage administrators to change their messaging to reflect the value of lower-division courses and to share that mindset with their faculty members and advising/counseling staff.

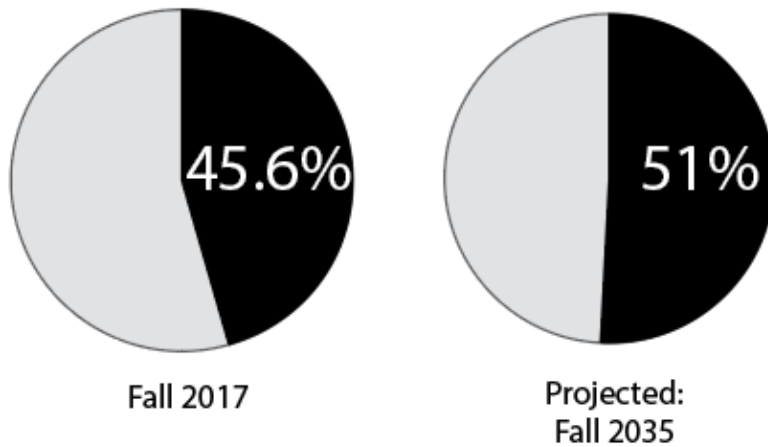
Measurable Outcome 1.1.1:

Track the number of administrators who agree to encourage new wording.

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Appendices and Additional Facts and Analysis

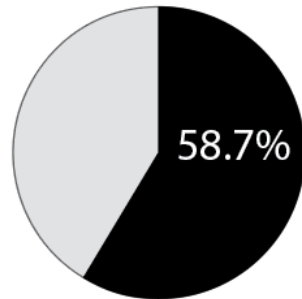
Percentage of Transfer Students at WT



(Office of Institutional Effectiveness, 2017)

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Percentage of Students
Entering WT with Some
College Credit



(Office of Institutional Effectiveness, 2017)

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