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Higher Education in Texas: a Brief Overview

Abstract: Institutions of Higher Education in Texas develop, support, and enhance the economic, cultural, and social wellbeing of the state and the country. These institutions offer courses and degrees in all disciplines. They are strategically located across the state to support the economic activity while reflecting on the historical and cultural makeup of the region. There are both public and private institutions. The primary focus of this article is on the public university systems in Texas. An overview of the processes of accreditation and governance is presented.

Key words: Higher education systems, public education, governance, accreditation

Introduction

The components of higher education in Texas is the result of its' history, culture, geography, and good fortune. Rich in opportunities for its residents, the state has the natural resources, agriculture, manufacturing, health care, service industries, seaports (Texas Almanac) and diverse population that demands and receives systems of higher education to support all aspects of a successful American society. This paper will provide a brief introduction to the organization of the higher education programs in Texas. To ensure currency of information, reliable sources of information were obtained primarily from the internet.

1. Higher Education in Texas

Texas owes the centralized nature of its public education system, in part, to the historical origin of the state. It is the only state in the United States of America that was originally an independent nation. The carryover sense of independence is still manifested in multiple ways, including the administration of public education in Texas.

Given the size and complexity of the State of Texas, it is not surprising that higher education in Texas is likewise a large and complex system of many component parts. While there are 148 total institutions of higher learning in Texas, this number is comprised of universities, community colleges, technical colleges, and health-related institutions. This paper offers a brief history and overview of the interesting and unique system of higher education opportunities that exist in Texas.

Health-related institutions include medical schools and health sciences centers that prepare doctors, nurses, dentists, and other professionals in health-related fields. Texas currently has 11 of these highly specialized institutions, spread across every major metropolitan area of the state; additionally, two private schools of chiropractic are also part of Texas' overall higher education system. Health-related institutions are subject to a vast number of distinct requirements from multiple accrediting bodies related to the fields they serve; for this reason, they have a breadth and depth that is unique in many ways and will not be a focus of this paper.

Technical colleges offer certificates or licensure programs that may be non-degree based or may lead to an associate's degree; these degrees or certificates are designed to prepare students for a specific profession, often technical in nature, such as mechanics, electronics, technology, and many other fields. As a component of higher education, technical schools in Texas were created over 55 years ago by then-Governor John Connelly with a statewide role and mission to meet Texas' evolving work force needs. Their charge today is to efficiently and effectively help Texas meet the advanced technical needs of a more global economy, in partnership with business and industry, government agencies and other educational institutions. In 2020, six technical institutes exist today across the state today, each with a regional affiliation to the Texas State Technical College¹.

Community colleges in Texas offer lower-division coursework typically designed for freshman and sophomore level (i.e., first and second year) students. These courses may lead to associate's degrees, often called two-year degrees. These degrees, as well as community colleges in general, are designated as open access opportunities in Texas, which means the community colleges are required to accept and enroll all eligible students who apply. Texas has 50 community college systems, many of which have multiple campuses. Thus, they are by far the most accessible and available higher

1 Texas State Technical College, www.tstc.edu (2.08.2020).

education opportunity in the state and can be found in rural areas as well as urban and suburban communities. Community colleges are significantly less expensive than four-year universities and colleges, again allowing for greater accessibility for a diverse group of constituents. They are governed and funded quite differently than four year colleges and universities. They are served by elected governance boards (rather than appointed boards) and have funding that is dependent upon the local ad-valorem tax base. Community colleges are typically seen as important agents of the geographic area in which they are located, often offering multiple non-credit or degree-related opportunities as well, such as courses for English-language learners, community outreach options, and bridge programs for high schools as well as area four-year colleges and universities.

Universities typically offer baccalaureate degrees in various disciplines, with many also authorized to offer master's and doctoral level degrees as well. More so than community colleges, they typically rely on full time faculty, with many hired on what is known as the tenure track, a system of peer review of a faculty member's productivity, usually in the areas of teaching, research, and service. Universities often have faculty research expectations, such as publishing, grant writing, and/or conference presentations; these institutions tend to invest in research opportunities that help support and advance program, college, and faculty goals. Research expenditures, investments, and expectations often depend on the size, scope, and prestige of the university; institutions with large graduate and advanced programs of study are more likely to have higher research expectations. Many universities are comprised of multiple colleges that house a variety of academic departments and programs, organized by discipline and focus of study.

An additional distinction among institutions of higher education in Texas is funding. The majority of higher education institutions are publicly funded (i.e., "public" universities or colleges), with a large number of non-publicly funded (i.e., "private") colleges and universities also found across the state. Public institutions in Texas are funded by the State through a complex system of formula funding. These funds are awarded based on multiple factors, the primary one being student enrollment numbers. Other factors include the degrees awarded (certain disciplines are awarded more funding than others) as well as legislative appropriations that result in additional funds. The percent of university budgets that are funded by the State continues to decline in recent years, resulting in higher percentages of budgets, even at public universities, funded by tuition, fees, and other sources of revenue.

2. Public and Private Universities in Texas

Not unlike other places in the United States, higher education in Texas has its earliest roots tied to religious organizations. The establishment of colleges and

universities of higher education by religious organizations for the study of religion and other subjects in Texas followed a pattern set by Harvard University, the first institution of higher education in the United States, founded in 1636 by the Great and General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and named after its first donor John Harvard, a Puritan minister. The oldest continuously operating university in Texas was founded by the Baptist Church, with the chartering of Baylor University in 1845. Classes began in 1846 in Independence, Texas. In 1886 Baylor and Waco University merged to become what continues to be known as Baylor University in Waco, Texas. Southwestern University was established by the Methodist Church in Georgetown Texas, in 1873; it was formed from a revival of collegiate charters first granted in 1840, which makes it actually five years older than Baylor and thus considered by some to be the first university in Texas, though not known at that time by its current name.

Today there are 38 independent or privately funded (i.e., “private”) colleges and universities in Texas. While most would be considered small, comparatively speaking, several of these private schools are quite large and many are considered prestigious institutions with strong reputations for academic excellence. Most, but not all, have some affiliation with a church or religious organization.

At the present time there are thirty-seven public universities in Texas. All but four of these universities are spread across six university systems: (a) the Texas A&M University System, (b) the University of Texas System, (c) the Texas State University System, (d) the University of Houston System, (e) the Texas Tech University System, and (f) the University of North Texas System. All public universities in Texas are governed by a board of regents, each composed of nine members, three of whom are appointed every two years by the governor for terms of six years each, subject to confirmation by the Texas Senate. For those universities in a system, the Board of Regents governs the entire system; for those not in a system, the Board of Regents is specific to the university.

Four public universities do not belong to a system within the state, including Midwestern State University in Wichita Falls, Texas; Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas; Texas Southern University in Houston, Texas; and Texas Woman’s University in Denton, Texas. Texas Southern University is a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) founded in 1927 to serve African American students who, at that time, were not allowed to attend other public institutions of higher learning. Texas Woman’s University is the largest university in the United States whose focus is for women.

Each of the Texas University Systems has multiple component institutions and, as described previously, is governed by a unique Board of Regents, appointed by the Governor of Texas. A brief description of each System is described below.

3. The Texas A&M University System

The Texas A&M University System is comprised of ten institutions of higher education across Texas. Texas A & M University, the System's flagship institution, is in College Station and was founded as the original land-grant institution in Texas. The Texas A&M University System is Texas' largest university system and, in addition to the flagship university in College Station, is comprised of the following universities (the city in which each university is located is noted in parentheses after the name, unless the city is an official part of the institution's name): (1) Tarleton State University (in Stephenville); (2) Texas A & M International University (in Laredo); (3) Texas A & M University – Galveston; (4) Texas A & M University – Commerce; (5) Texas A & M University - Corpus Christi; (6) Texas A & M University – Kingsville; (7) Texas A & M University – Texarkana; (8) Prairie View A & M University (in northwest Houston); (9) West Texas A & M University (in Canyon).

4. The Texas State University System

Founded in 1911, the Texas State University System was Texas' first university system and is the third-largest system in the State. It was created originally to include the State of Texas' normal institutes, or universities that were specifically created for the preparation of teachers. The Texas State University System is unique in that, unlike the other systems, it does not have a designated flagship institution. The Texas State University System is comprised of the following universities and colleges: (1) Sam Houston State University (Huntsville); (2) Texas State University (San Marcos); (3) Sul Ross State University (Alpine); (4) Lamar University (Beaumont); (5) Lamar State College-Orange; (6) Lamar State College-Port Arthur; and (7) Lamar Institute of Technology. The Texas State University System is also unique in that it is the only system that includes both four-year universities and two-year colleges.

5. The Texas Tech University System

The Texas Tech University System is one of the newest systems in Texas, as well as one of the smallest. It includes (1) Texas Tech University (Lubbock) and (2) Angelo State University (San Angelo).

6. The University of Houston System

The University of Houston System is comprised of three universities and is unique in that it is the only system whose flagship institution's president, Dr. Renu Khator, is also the chancellor of the System. The University of Houston System

includes (1) the University of Houston; (2) the University of Houston-Clear Lake; (3) the University of Houston-Downtown (an open-access campus); and (4) the University of Houston-Victoria.

7. The University of North Texas System

Another of the smallest and newest systems of higher education in Texas is the University of North Texas System. This system is comprised of (1) the University of North Texas (Denton) and (2) the University of North Texas-Dallas.

8. The University of Texas System

The second largest system in Texas is the University of Texas System. In addition to its flagship institution, the University of Texas (Austin), this system includes the following universities: (1) the University of Texas at Arlington; (2) the University of Texas at Dallas; (3) the University of Texas in El Paso; (4) the University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley (in Edinburg); (5) the University of Texas at San Antonio; (6) the University of Texas in Tyler; and (7) the University of Texas Permian Basin (in Odessa). This system houses multiple Tier-1 research institutions, which is a unique characteristic compared with other Texas university systems.

9. Governance Structures

Governance of the public universities is centered in Austin, Texas' state capital.² The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board assists the administration of the public universities in Texas through programs "to promote access, affordability, quality, success, and cost efficiency"³. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board includes nine members appointed by the Governor of Texas, each who serves a six year term; a student representative is also appointed annually to serve a one year term. The Board appoints the Commissioner of Higher Education who serves as the executive leader of the agency. Among other things, the Higher Education Coordinating Board is strongly involved with educational policy development, workforce education, academic quality, and college readiness and the ensuing pursuit of a successful career. A full staff is dedicated to supporting these efforts on behalf of the State.

2 For selected governing statutes see: Texas Constitution and Statutes, <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/?link=ED> (1.08.2020).

3 Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, <https://www.highered.texas.gov> (1.08.2020).

In addition to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, all public universities in Texas are governed by their own board of regents, each composed of nine members, three of whom are appointed every two years by the Governor for terms of six years each. The Board of Regents for universities typically meets quarterly and approves actions related to academics and finance. Texas universities operate under the local governance of a president, appointed by the Board of Regents. Typical infrastructure includes vice presidents of academic affairs, finance and operations, student services, and advancement. Depending on size and scope, some universities may have vice presidents or designated administrators for enrollment management, governmental affairs, diversity and inclusion, or other important aspects of university operations.

Historic Origins of Higher Education Funding

Funding is the lifeline to any endeavor. This is especially true with universities. In Texas, public universities are supported by ad-valorem (real estate) taxes from the counties to the state, federal (U.S. government) grants, grants from private foundations, gifts from alumni, corporation sponsored research monies, and tuition and fees from students. Texas also has a somewhat unique source of funding for its two flag ship systems – the University of Texas and Texas A&M University. The Permanent University Fund (PUF), developed in 1876, was included in the Texas Constitution in the form of land in West Texas to be used as financial support for The University of Texas and Texas A&M University systems; today the Permanent University Fund supports higher education in the form of more than 2.1 million acres of land whose revenue (generated both from oil and gas as well as agriculture) directly flows through a nonprofit corporation under the direction of the University of Texas and Texas A&M Boards of Regents and is allocated to the two Systems⁴. The governmental setting aside of land for the purpose of establishing or supporting institutions of higher education for a specific purpose began with the passage of the Morrill Act of 1862, which provided for the establishment of Texas A&M University as the official land-grant university in Texas⁵.

10. Accreditation of Higher Education

All public universities in Texas are required to be regionally accredited. Accreditation is accomplished through non-profit accrediting agencies that are specific to the type of institution and/or programs it offers and is designed to ensure standards of quality and effectiveness. The accreditation process for higher education in the United States is decentralized, and most Texas degree-granting institutions are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on

4 The Permanent University Fund, <https://www.utsystem.edu/puf> (1.08.2020).

5 The Morrill Act of 1862, <https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/morrill.html> (1.08.2020).

Colleges (SACSCOC)⁶. In addition to Texas, SACSCOC also serves as the accrediting body for Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and Latin America, as well as other international sites that offer associate, baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral degrees. Reaffirmation of the accreditation must take place at least every 10 years and involves a thorough, rigorous review and site visit. The tenets of the accreditation process are reflected in the core values of SACSCOC and include integrity, peer review, self-regulation, student learning, continuous quality improvement, accountability, and transparency.

Conclusion

Public education in Texas reflects and serves the diversity of the cultures, economies, and geographic locales of the State. From the Sacramento mountains in the west to the Piney Woods forest in the east, and from the southern Great Plains in the north to the Gulf coast and Mexico in the south, Texas includes 268,597 square miles of land⁷. Texas business focuses on all the major and most of the minor businesses and industries found throughout the United States, and it is home to an extremely diverse population of almost 29 million people. While the history and current state of higher education in Texas demonstrates almost two centuries of growth and development, the importance of continuing and supporting a robust higher education environment that meets the dynamic needs of this vast and diverse state cannot be overstated. Offering online classes will continue to be important as the technology for education improves. The ability to serve diverse populations at a distance offers opportunities for higher education to serve an increasing number of people beyond the traditional service areas or even political boundaries. Knowledge grows when it is shared, and higher education offers the best opportunities for this to occur.

6 Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, <https://sacscoc.org> (1.08.2020).

7 Texas – State, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Texas-state> (1.08.2020).