



Texas Schools Project and Texas Success Center

Research Opportunity: Congressionally Earmarked Study to Support Pandemic Recovery Efforts

Summary

This study will collect quantitative and qualitative data to describe pandemic-related student enrollment and completion challenges in Texas community colleges as well as the many efforts the colleges have undertaken to support students. The study's findings will help the state, community colleges, and the general field better understand the effects of the pandemic on higher education attainment and will highlight colleges' approaches to improve student success.

Background

Recent national studies collectively demonstrate that the pandemic has caused massive disruption in the higher education sector marked by an unprecedented decrease in enrollment and hurried shift toward online and hybrid modes of instruction. The pandemic has levied enormous financial, psychological, and physical stress on students. Taken together, these challenges threaten recent progress towards increasing higher education enrollment and success, particularly for traditionally underserved students, if not meaningfully addressed.

Study Approach

The research team will lead an action-oriented mixed-methods research study that will offer timely information on how colleges can best support students most affected by the pandemic. The quantitative component will use student-level administrative data to describe shifts in student enrollment, course modality and student success in Texas community colleges since the start of the pandemic. This analysis will systematically refine statewide findings to give community colleges a granular view of which types of students have experienced the largest declines in both enrollment and success (e.g. academically prepared vs academically underprepared). We will conduct a complementary analysis focused on four-year universities and colleges to allow for comparison of the four-year and two-year higher education sectors.

We will also conduct a qualitative study to better understand how Texas community colleges are supporting student success during the pandemic. This component will focus on documenting how the pandemic has affected Texas community colleges, how colleges have sought to address challenges exacerbated by the pandemic (e.g. child care needs, mental health struggles, underdeveloped online instruction), and their efforts to both scale and sustain these new success initiatives. For this component, the research team will draw on quantitative results to determine two sets of community colleges from which to recruit. The first set has experienced a less than expected loss in enrollment or success because of the pandemic; the second set has experienced a greater than expected loss in enrollment or success. This sampling approach will allow us to compare experiences and efforts across different contexts. The research team will conduct focus groups with college administrators at these institutions that will identify the specific challenges that these institutions faced, the strategies they implemented to address them, and identify both the barriers to implementing those programs and the necessary supports required for those programs. The focus groups will also seek input on what colleges need moving forward as they emerge from the pandemic.

Data collection for the qualitative component will start in Spring 2023. Colleges selected for the study will be required to complete a 15-minute online survey that will gather college-specific information on specific initiatives to support student success during the pandemic. In addition, college administrators and staff will need to participate in one or two online focus groups that will collect information on how the pandemic has affected their institution (e.g. budget shortfalls; hiring freezes), the measures their institution imposed to support student success, and the challenges they continue to face as they emerge from the pandemic.

Products and Dissemination

This project will produce two primary reports targeted at policymakers and practitioners. Each report will be accompanied by a research brief and disseminated with the support of TACC to Texas college leaders and practitioners via in-person learning sessions at the Texas Pathways Institute and a recorded webinar. More information on the focus of the two reports is below.

Timeline

Table 1 shows the timeline for the two-year study. The study will commence in Fall 2022, with ongoing quantitative analysis throughout the course of the project. Qualitative data collection will occur in Spring and early Summer of 2023. The first report -- released in Summer 2023 -- will share findings from the study’s quantitative component. The second, and final, report, which will be released in Summer 2024, will share findings from the study’s qualitative component and will update the quantitative findings released the previous year.

Table 1: Timeline

	2022		2023				2024	
	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2
Quantitative Analysis	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Qualitative Data Collection			X	X				
Reporting				Interim				Final

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