



## **Texarkana College:** Strategic Goals and Strong Outcomes

In the past five years, Texarkana College (TC) has consistently had one of the highest graduation rates among Texas community colleges, and this accomplishment was a dramatic change.

“In 2012 and 2013, our completion rates were almost in single digits,” recalls President Jason Smith. “And that was something we really wanted to change.”

Today, TC has one of the highest completion rates in the state. The college’s current six-year graduation rate is 51 percent (for the 2017 cohort year), compared to the Texas state average of 44 percent.

### **Faculty Advisors Keep Students on Track**

One key to this success was beginning to use faculty advisors, a change TC introduced in 2017. The college provided professional development to faculty who volunteered to serve as advisors. At first, about a third of faculty members volunteered to be advisors, and the number gradually grew.

“Around 2020, we started to make advising an expectation of faculty, and then Covid hit,” Smith says. “Fortunately, by that time about 80 percent of the faculty were advising, which was critical because students’ needs were so high.”

By 2021, more than 90 percent of TC faculty were serving as advisors. When the college made advising an expectation of faculty, it also provided a stipend for doing this additional work. Today, most credit students are assigned a faculty advisor within their field of study, while the college’s full-time advisors provide support to workforce students and new students who have not yet chosen a pathway.



“We saw higher persistence and higher completion rates for students who had faculty advisors,” Smith says. “Of course, at that time we had other efforts underway, including creating and strengthening our pathways.”

When TC implemented guided pathways, the college also focused on reducing the number of credit hours students were taking. “Back in 2012, students, on average, were graduating with 92 hours,” Smith says. “Graduates now average 70 credit hours upon graduation, which saves the students time and money and saves the taxpayers money as well.”

### **Strategic Planning Engages All Stakeholders**

TC refreshes its strategic plan every two years. The college’s strategic plan for 2024–26 has five focus areas — Opportunity, Excellence, Success, TC for All, and Community — each of which has measurable goals.

For example, in 2021, the college had a strong focus on supporting nontraditional students. The average student at TC is 27 years old, and the college was concerned about the lack of scholarship opportunities available to students in this age group.

“Our trustees set a goal of raising a quarter of a million dollars to cover tuition for 100 nontraditional students,” Smith explains. “Our board believed that would remove a big stumbling block for those students and meet a big need in our community.”

“We worked with our foundation, and one foundation board member in particular led the work. Within four weeks, he raised a quarter of a million dollars,” Smith recalls. “We continued to raise money, and ultimately, we created an endowment that pays for nontraditional students every year. It is now part of who we are.”

He continues, “Everything is tied to our strategic plan, and it is ingrained in who we are. It’s a living document. Our board, our leadership, and our faculty discuss it all the time, and sometimes I’ll even hear our students talk about it.”

### **TSC: With Us the Whole Way**

“The Texas Success Center (TSC) has been right there with us the whole way,” Smith says. “Texas Pathways helped us align everything we were trying to accomplish. It helped us streamline how we enroll students and how we get students on a path to success quickly.”



He continues, “The Texas Pathways Institutes are the best experiences that I’ve ever had professionally. We look at our ideas, and we work as a team to figure out how to accomplish what we set out to do. And we do that twice a year, every year. It just keeps propelling us forward.”

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