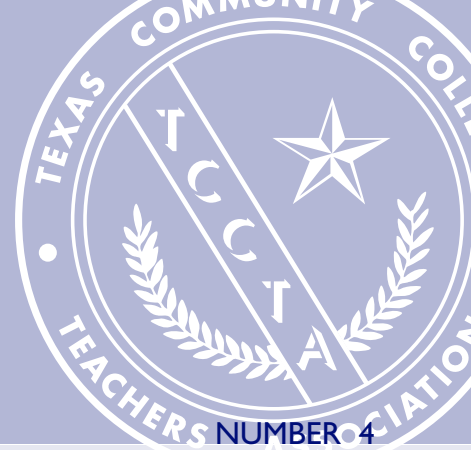


TCCTA MESSENGER

www.tccta.org

A Publication of the TEXAS COMMUNITY COLLEGE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

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TCCTA Responds to Budget Crisis

The 2011 Regular Session will not adjourn until late May (with one or more possible Special Sessions after that), but it is clear that community colleges and their employees are headed for drastic changes due to cuts in the budget for all state programs.

"We've never seen anything like this before," said TCCTA Executive Director Richard Moore. "The state economy is improving, but not in time to avoid a terrible financial situation for two-year colleges."

TCCTA has responded on a variety of fronts. The following is a partial list of strategies used so far during this Regular Session.

- **First Responders.** Last summer the association began recruiting campus volunteers to make a special effort to stay informed and respond quickly to the latest information from the state office on legislative developments. These individuals have become indispensable to the TCCTA communications structure.
- **Professional Lobbying.** TCCTA Lobbyist Beaman Floyd meets with lawmakers daily, urging them to support the objectives of our association.
- **Lobbying by educators.** In addition to participating in Community College Day at the Capitol, which involved all stake holders in two-year schools, TCCTA arranged for groups of faculty members to meet with

lawmakers directly in Austin.

- **Bill Tracking.** TCCTA maintains an ongoing list on our Web site, updated daily, of bills potentially affecting two-year college professionals.
- **Legislative Resources.** A convenient link on the TCCTA Web site provides all the information needed to communicate effectively with lawmakers.
- **Talking Points.** In order to avoid ineffective digital petitions and "automatic" responses, TCCTA provides bullet points stressing the most effective case for various issues of concern.
- **E-mail Alerts.** In urgent situations, TCCTA distributes messages to all current members.
- **The Blog.** Available each day, the Blog provides timely updates and crucial information on events in Texas and around the nation.
- **Testimony.** TCCTA leaders frequently offer oral and written testimony before House and Senate committees of the Legislature.

More legislative news is found on pages three and six of this issue of the *Messenger*. ☆

More legislative information is found on pages three and six of this issue of the *Messenger*, and on the TCCTA website at www.tccta.org/legis.

A Small Victory by Beaman Floyd TCCTA Lobbyist

On the night of April 1, the House passed a budget amendment that we, and the Texas Association of Community Colleges, supported with enthusiasm. You may recall a flurry of e-mails and blog posts on the so-called Aycock amendment. The measure places all cuts to two-year colleges in one line item, so lawmakers will be compelled to see (and, we hope, improve) the combined devastation of reductions to formula funding and employee benefits to community colleges.

Please thank Rep. Jimmie Don Aycock (R-Killeen) if you have not already done so.

All three words of the title above should be considered with equal emphasis. However, I want to take this opportunity to salute you for your quick and constructive responses to TCCTA's requests to contact members of the House.

We won't know the outline of the forthcoming budget for a few weeks. The heavy lifting is just beginning.

So staying informed is crucial right now. Please be on the alert for urgent updates. ☆



Beaman Floyd

Also In This Issue...

- State President Annie Benifield reflects on the challenges and opportunities of the coming year Page 2
- Become informed about the latest news of importance regarding the current Session of the Texas Legislature Page 3
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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



It is truly an honor to serve as your president for the coming year. Although summer is approaching, rest assured that your TCCTA leadership is working hard to make 2011-12 successful for you and your colleagues.

Let me get directly to the point. There has never been a Regular Session of the Texas Legislature like this one in terms of its prospective damage to all levels of education.

Obviously the outcome is on all of our minds, particularly when it comes to our institutional budgets. Those of us who have been around for a while realize that Sessions come and go. However, the current crisis strikes even seasoned veteran observers as truly alarming. The mission of community colleges is at stake, as well as the future of our profession, especially in terms of health benefits.

Is there any hope? Yes. Let me give you a couple of examples, in addition to the "small victory" described by Beaman Floyd, on the previous page.

In the early days of the current Session, the House Appropriations Committee approved a budget that eliminated funding for four Texas community colleges. Not cuts—*elimination*, as in employees terminated and students forced to find a college elsewhere. But it didn't happen and the funds were restored. Why?

Because people in the four communities responded to the emergency. Faculty, parents, trustees, students, and media outlets spoke loudly and clearly that their community college is important. So don't be fooled into thinking that changing a dire scenario is impossible. The lesson here is obvious for the rest of us.

Here's another lesson.

TCCTA membership went up this year—*of all years*—to over 6,000, for the first time since 2002. As a government teacher and political scientist, I can tell you that voluntary organizations like ours tend to decline in hard times. But not TCCTA.

Part of the back story to our gain in membership involves an unprecedented effort this year to reach out to those who have never joined our association. But we have also noticed a surge in more casual members who, depending upon the year, may or may not join TCCTA. This was one of those years during which they came back with renewed enthusiasm, defying all expectations. It is truly noteworthy, and heartening in its implication.

TCCTA does an amazing job addressing the vital issues that concern our profession, as a mere perusal of the *Messenger*, or our fine Web site, will confirm. We are respected in Austin for integrity, clear thinking, constructive behavior, and the accuracy of our communications.

Your association has made a deliberate decision to include the membership fully in the legislative process. Significantly, we don't write messages for you. Capitol insiders agree that form letters and other "automatic" means of communication are not as effective as personal phone calls and e-mails to representatives and senators.

Please keep the pressure on, and thank you for your enthusiasm.

And hats off to TCCTA Immediate Past President Fred Newbury, Richland College, for his leadership and testimony before legislative committees this Session!

In spite of our difficult situation, your association continues its emphasis on providing quality professional development programs at unbelievably low prices to individuals and colleges. Every season of the year brings a new opportunity for professional growth with TCCTA. The next two events, the Great Teaching Round-Up and the Leading from the Middle Conference, are described on pages 10-11 of this issue of the *Messenger*.

These are interesting times, to put it mildly. So there is much to be done. But I am confident that policy makers will appreciate the vital role we play in educating the next generation of Texans. Please make an extra effort to stay informed and participate, by following the suggestions listed below.

And don't hesitate to contact any of our leaders or the state office in Austin if we can be of any assistance.

Stay in touch!

Get Connected!

In these extraordinary times, members are urged to visit the TCCTA Web site frequently.

The home page contains information on important and timely subjects, both in the Texas Legislature and around the country. Developments from the Coordinating Board will be posted here, as well as any news regarding Social Security in Congress.

Also on the home page is the Blog, which features current events from the Capitol, calls for action by members, headlines on teaching techniques, and news summaries from a host of journalistic and professional sources. Members are urged to subscribe to the Blog for the most timely updates.

The "Events" section is the best place to find out about upcoming TCCTA conferences, webinars, and dates to keep in mind for planning ahead.

"Legislative Resources" has all the information community and technical college educators need to stay informed and participate in the political process, with links to find out "Who Represents Me?" and contact information for policy makers. The association has also assembled a concise and handy series of "Talking Points" on the issues most likely to affect the profession during this Regular Session of the Texas Legislature.

The "News and Publications" area contains links for all past updates, the annual salary survey, and past editions of the *Messenger*.

www.tccta.org



Four Colleges Spared Closure

This is a Regular Session in which “victory” can mean mere survival.

An early version of the budget approved by the House of Representatives eliminated all state funding for four community colleges: Brazosport College, Frank Phillips College, Odessa College, and Ranger College. All the schools had experienced growth in enrollment, but at a slower pace during the period selected by House budget writers. Incredibly, the purported savings to the state relied upon an assumption that the affected students would simply not enroll in any college or university.

Local communities in the affected areas responded with impressive enthusiasm and support for their schools, and the funds were restored in the House bill.

Benefits Picture Extremely Precarious

Among the cuts announced by House and Senate budget writers, perhaps the most disturbing involve state funding for community college educators under the Group Benefits Program. Going well beyond reductions for state employees, the appropriations bills in both chambers, at this point, reduce these benefits by 82 percent below levels for the previous biennium.

TCCTA has been working with the Texas Association of Community Colleges to get funding restored. Among the obstacles to overcome is a lingering view among some lawmakers that the state is obligated to fund health care relative only to state funding levels for overall college costs—a perspective labeled previously, as many members will recall, as “proportionality.”

Some lawmakers also believe that community college health care should be in the same pool as public school teachers under the Texas Teacher Retirement System, in a program known as TRS-Care. TCCTA is working to keep community college educators in the Group Benefits Program administered by the Employees Retirement System.

Retirement plans for TRS and ORP have also experienced proportionality-style reductions for community college employees. Furthermore, the state’s contribution rate has been reduced to six percent, pending other enabling legislation.

Bill Would Reduce Core Curriculum

HB 3025, a bill introduced by Rep. Dan Branch (R-Dallas), would reduce the minimum core curriculum requirement for a baccalaureate degree in Texas from 42 to 36 semester hours.

The core curriculum constitutes the bulk of transfer-oriented coursework at two-year schools. Therefore, if enacted as currently written, HB 3025 would reduce the academic mission of all community colleges in the state. The list of courses to be included in the new core would be determined by the Coordinating Board “with the assistance of advisory committees” (including at least a majority of faculty members on each) during the next biennium. However, the minimum core would still shrink from 42 to 36 semester hours under HB 3025.

TCCTA 2011 Legislative Program

- Support the funding goals of the Texas Association of Community Colleges.
- Support approaches to incentive funding that are based upon valid measures, recognize the primary role of faculty in upholding academic standards, and do not diminish base formula appropriations or penalize workforce training.
- Support the Legislature’s historical commitment to full participation of community college educators in the Group Benefits Program for state and higher education employees under the Employees Retirement System of Texas, including adjustments for rising costs.
- Support efforts to maintain and improve benefits for community and technical college employees and retirees in TRS and ORP.
- Support institution-based developmental education while encouraging new programs derived from demonstrated best practices.
- Support efforts to address the cost of textbooks that do not restrict the professional judgment of faculty in selecting academically appropriate materials for students.

The program was recommended by the TCCTA Legislative Committee and approved by the Executive Committee on November 20, 2010.

TCCTA Opposes Guns on Campus

TCCTA President Fred Newbury, on March 16, spoke in opposition to several bills that would allow licensed carriers of concealed handguns to bring their weapons into campus buildings. He testified before the House Committee on Homeland Security and Public Safety, chaired by Rep. Sid Miller (R-Stephenville).

Most media prognosticators predict passage of such a measure this Session.

Dr. Newbury informed the committee at the outset of his testimony that he is an experienced faculty member at Richland College.

“Because of the variety of opinion on the campuses of our 50 colleges,” he explained, “we decided to survey our members. We asked our members: *Do they favor a law to allow guns on campus?* Eighty percent of the members surveyed answered ‘no.’ Then we asked, *If such a law were passed, would they favor a local control option for community colleges?* Eighty percent said ‘yes.’

“I would urge you consider the enormous variety of our campuses, not just in student population, but in physical location and structure. Some are spread out in remote areas and others are hi-rises in urban environments.” This presents a strong argument for local control, he said.

For the latest news or bulletins on the most urgent developments, please visit www.tccta.org.

Creating Effective Learning Communities

An Interview with Tracey McKenzie
2010 U.S. Professor of the Year
Council for Advancement and Support of Education
Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

by George Jackson
Collin College



Tracey McKenzie



George Jackson

Tracey McKenzie is a pillar of knowledge in the field of Learning Communities, having led the award-winning initiative at Collin College and serving as a resource to peer institutions. Other colleges have reported a lack of success. What is Collin doing differently? I sat down with Dr. McKenzie to find out.

Q: Dr. McKenzie, how do you define a Learning Community?

A: Collin College defines a learning community as the pairing of two classes around a central theme or question. Although two separate courses in two separate disciplines, these two classes are taught as one. They are fully integrated, and by that I mean everything is integrated. The two curricula are interwoven. Each assessment involves questions from both subjects. Although one professor may be the lead for a particular lecture, both professors participate in each class. Both contribute to student learning. The students earn one overall grade for the Learning Community, but it appears on their transcript as two separate courses, as if they earned the same grade in each.

Q: Collin College has been very successful with Learning Communities, while some other colleges have had little or no success. Why is that?

A: We have found that, to be successful, Learning Communities must be faculty driven, and they must be marketed to attract students.

It's a faculty driven program. It won't work if faculty are told what to teach or with whom to teach. You are creating a partnership with the other teacher. This must be someone you want to work with. Reconciling different teaching styles can be a challenge. You have to agree beforehand on the class policies. Students can play one teacher off the other, just like with parents. I once did a Learning Community with a teacher who wanted every detail of the class locked down, but I don't like a lot of structure in my classes. That was quite a challenge.

Marketing of your Learning Community is a key to success. You have to market the central theme or question. "Let's Talk about Sex – the Politics of Gender and Sexuality in Society" was a Learning Community combining sociology and government. It was sold out.

Here's another: "OMG! Is This My Space or Your Space? IDK!" This was a Learning Community pairing an English class with a speech class. "Sensational Trials in History" combined a History class with a Criminal Justice class.

Marketing is essential to success. It is the central theme or question that makes the Learning Community relevant for today. The students see how two disciplines relate to each other, and how they combine to deal with real life

issues. With proper marketing, the students see this and enroll in the Learning Community.

Q: It sounds like a lot of work for faculty.

A: It is. It is much easier to teach two standalone classes than one Learning Community. You really are teaching both classes. You are constantly jumping in to add something, even when the other teacher is lecturing. Students often forget who teaches what. It keeps you on the ball. You are accustomed to being the expert in the classroom, but your colleague is really the expert on half of your class. In that sense, it is great professional development. I learn as much about the other discipline as the students.

Learning Communities require a huge commitment on the part of faculty. There is a lot of advance planning that must be done in integrating the two courses. Faculty must be involved in marking the Learning Community. Until the students have had one, they don't know what a Learning Community is all about. Once you explain to students what it is, they are interested, but getting the word out is difficult. Some of us do student orientation in order to talk about Learning Communities. Some of us do workshops with the advisors, and we provide them with fliers on each of the upcoming Learning Communities. Some of us visit other classes to talk about Learning Communities being offered the following semester. The face to face interaction seems to work best.

Q: How much does the college get involved in this?

A: Learning Communities require a large commitment from the college. One Learning Community counts as two classes when computing faculty load. You really are teaching both classes.

Because each teacher must be in the classroom for the full six hours each week, compensation for each teacher is six hours.

If the Learning Community doesn't make, that's two classes that didn't make for each faculty member. That means I have to take two classes away from part-time faculty, and the other teacher has to do the same. That's hard on our part-time faculty.

It also requires a higher commitment on the part of students. If they are absent from one class, they are really absent from both. They can't register for one class without registering for the other. They can't drop one class without dropping the other. Students are really making an investment in two classes for each Learning Community, but I have never had a problem with this. Your goal is to make them feel like this is one class, not two.

Students sometimes feel like they are doing a lot more work, but they are really not. If they took each class separately, they would be doing however many papers

in each class and however many exams in each class. In Learning Communities, the papers are combined and the exams are combined. They are really doing less work, but sometimes it doesn't feel that way.

Q: Collin College chose Learning Communities as the focus of its Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) for SACS. Why?

A: Our Learning Communities are nationally recognized, and we think Learning Communities are of great benefit to our faculty and to our students, but we needed to find out how to increase the benefit and how to measure the benefit. We think students achieve higher quality learning in a Learning Community than they would in two standalone classes taught separately, but we needed a way to measure this. Students say they learn more. Students say they interact with faculty more. We needed to investigate this. We came up with a research design, and SACS seems pleased with it.

We can point to regular success rates, retention rates, and passing rates as evidence of success, but we also use student focus groups asking, "What is your perception of the experience?" This is where we always score the highest. Once students have taken a Learning Community, they seek them out. They want to take more. Why? They say they are fun.

One of our QEP goals is to have the entire core curriculum available in Learning Communities. We currently offer between 15 and 18 Learning Communities each semester. We're trying to add some every year, especially in disciplines that are not represented or are under-represented.

The following passage was taken from Dr. McKenzie's statement to the Council for Advancement and Support of Education and Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching:

"Collin College's Learning Communities interdisciplinary, team-taught courses designed around a theme have broadened my vision of teaching and learning. The goal of Learning Communities is to address what Ernest Boyer and other educational theorists have described as a 'disconnect' in education—a disconnect between disciplines, students and faculty. Building a community of learners, making cross-disciplinary connections and emphasizing active learning are a few of the many benefits of Learning Communities."

Those interested in more information on Learning Communities are urged to visit the Web site of the Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education, at www.evergreen.edu/washcenter.

Below is a brief sample of sources from the Center:

- *Diversity, Educational Equity, and Learning Communities*, Lardner, E., with others. 2005. Olympia, WA: The Evergreen State College.
- *The Pedagogy of Possibilities: Developmental Education, College-Level Studies, and Learning Communities*. NLCP Monograph Series. Olympia, WA: The Evergreen State College.
- *Transforming the First Year of College for Students of Color*. Rendon, L. I., M. Garcia, and D. Person (Eds.). 2004. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The First Year Experience and Students in Transition. ☆

Feeling Disconnected?

by Jan Anderson
Central Texas College

- An organization's push for the use of technology but no projectors, laptops, Internet connection, or wireless access in the classroom
- Mandatory professional development training offered during class times
- Bookstores closed for inventory during registration
- Printing departments closed during the first week of school

According to surveys from institutions of higher education, these issues happen all the time—little disconnects that set off a flurry of complaints and negative discussions among students, faculty, and staff. Although they're not as deadly to an institution as budget and pay cuts, they are surely one subset of 21st century morale-busters that can undermine smooth operations.

How do institutions avoid creating these kinds of situations that make them look either out of touch with reality or, worse, unconcerned with the needs of employees when neither may be true?

Faculty senates and associations are convenient vehicles for connecting faculty and staff, and it's not unusual for faculty organizations to extend invitations to staff offices to speak at meetings. However, when offices and departments visit faculty organizations, many simply give a presentation rather than being part of an actual conversation on issues.

One problem with a one-time presentation is that a comfortable rapport has not been established before an issue occurs. Then when one arises, it often sets up a reactive rather than a proactive situation. One staff member at my school actually arrived at a faculty meeting wearing a bullet-proof vest. (Hilarious, but perhaps he wasn't kidding.)

To be effective, these dialogues should regularly take place so that a relationship has been established before a difficulty surfaces. Both parties must learn to be comfortable discussing uncomfortable issues.

Some schools have college assemblies. Different than executive councils where department heads and division heads meet, assemblies consist of staff members who meet regularly with faculty on a yearly rotating basis. Members are not only directors and department heads, but are employees at all levels who are "at the front line."

Although invitations to join campus committees are often offered (or mandated) by department heads and administration, voluntary participation is often perceived as a good will gesture that sets the tone for more fruitful conversations.

Obviously, good communication is the key, and since there are many best practices for building communication and rapport among campus constituencies around the state of Texas, we have much to learn from each other.

We invite you to join our TCCTA blog and share some of the disconnects at your school and their resolutions. After all, we are educators, and love to learn ourselves. ☆



Jan Anderson

The articles on these two pages were generated by the TCCTA Publications Committee.

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2011 Talking Points Offered

The following is a partial list of constructive assertions TCCTA makes when discussing our concerns with public officials. Members are urged to consult the association's Web site, under "Legislative Resources," for a full list of "Talking Points" on a range of subjects.

The Talking Points are designed for individualized and selective use by educators who may also possess expertise or interest in a particular topic. Campus-specific information, such as the prospective impact of budget cut proposals, should certainly be included in any communications as well.

As pointed out in the *TCCTA Guide to Political Participation*, Capitol insiders have long maintained that form letters and petitions are not nearly as effective as individually written messages from constituents. Members are encouraged to consult the *Guide* (under "Legislative Resources" at www.tccta.org) for useful strategies. The site also contains a convenient link to find out "Who Represents Me?"

IMPORTANT: Do not use college equipment or e-mail accounts when communicating with policy makers. Also, it is crucial to be constructive at all times when contacting public officials. Be sure to thank them for their hard work on behalf of the people of Texas.

On General Appropriations

- Community colleges now enroll over 70 percent of new students under the Closing the Gaps initiative. They also enroll over 75 percent of the state's freshmen and sophomores.
- Community college faculty salaries during the last decade have consistently lagged behind the cost of living, as measured by the Consumer Price Index.
- Community college faculty teaching academic transfer courses are required to possess the same minimum credentials as university faculty in order to be certified by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Teachers in workforce disciplines must also meet the rigorous standards of accrediting agencies.
- The state is now funding 51 percent of the instructional formula, despite principles in the Coordinating Board's Master Plan of 1969, which projected local funds and tuition to be reserved for construction and maintenance of facilities.
- The gap between the cost of instruction and the funds provided by the state results in deferred maintenance of infrastructure, increased local taxes, and increased tuition and fees.
- The average age of community college students is 25. Sixty-three percent attend part time. Fifty-eight percent are female.
- Seventy-eight percent of minority freshmen and sophomores attending public institutions of higher education are enrolled at Texas public community colleges. These students almost precisely mirror the ethnic diversity of Texas, making these schools crucial to the success of the Closing the Gaps initiative.
- Community and technical college educators are full participants in the higher education Group Benefits Program administered by the Employees Retirement System of Texas. These individuals were hired with the understanding that, while salaries may be lower than what is often offered in the private sector, health benefits would be guaranteed by the state. These benefits

must remain competitive in order to attract and retain talented faculty.

- Community and technical college employees participate in the Texas Teacher Retirement System or the Optional Retirement Program. It is important for the state's contribution to these programs to remain consistently robust, to allow educators to plan for a secure retirement.
- Most community and technical college faculty members teach at least five classes a semester, and many are required to add extra "overloads," without proportionate increases in pay.

On Incentive Funding

Background: Commissioner of Higher Education Raymund Paredes and the Coordinating Board have endorsed a proposal to fund higher education, based partially on "Momentum Points" achieved by students, as they complete developmental education course work, transfer successfully, or accomplish milestones of semester hours with passing grades. Ten percent of the funding formula would be devoted to such achievement by colleges.

- Community colleges are held accountable by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the regional accrediting agency for professional standards. Faculty in many workforce disciplines must report to accrediting agencies at the state or national level. Colleges are also accountable to local taxpayers through policies enacted by elected trustees. Faculty members are evaluated routinely by college administrators under local board policies. Student evaluations are an important component of this process. Colleges are now implementing HB 2504 (81st Regular Session), which mandates that schools formulate a plan to post course and faculty information online, including student evaluations.
- No one wants students to succeed more than teachers. The Coordinating Board's proposal to reward student success assumes that a new funding mechanism will create a novel motivation.
- Policy makers wishing to use revenue efficiently to enhance student success are encouraged to concentrate on early assessment and intervention programs while they are in high school. College readiness is crucial.

On Developmental Education

Background: Texas Higher Education Commissioner Raymund Paredes has testified repeatedly in legislative hearings that developmental education needs a "complete overhaul" because it "isn't working." Pilot programs are currently being examined to determine the best funding strategy, including "non-course" approaches.

- Educators in the field report that the statistics gathered by the Coordinating Board are often confusing and difficult to interpret. Since TASP was replaced by TSI, each school has designed its own approach, making generalizations problematic if not impossible.
- Developmental education courses that receive adequate funding to hire talented faculty, and to provide necessary resources and training, are more successful.
- Teachers in the field are among the most creative, collaborative, and resourceful professionals in higher education. For a look at "best practices" currently being shared, please examine The Network, a resource provided by TCCTA and its partners, at www.txpod.org.

Members are urged to consult the association's Web site, under "Legislative Resources," for a full list of "Talking Points" on a variety of issues.

www.tccta.org/legis

News Briefs and Links

Why Students Don't Learn: One Teacher's Perspective

Since the publication of *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* (University of Chicago Press, 2011), by Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa, there has been abundant chatter by policy makers, think tanks, and educational reformers.

In a nutshell, the book purportedly reveals that 45 percent of undergraduates demonstrated “no improvement in critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing skills in the first two years of college, and 36 percent showed no progress in four years.” Obviously there are measurement issues worthy of debate about such findings, but few faculty members seem surprised.

Significantly, the book's focus is on four-year schools. However, in an article in the February 20 issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* by frequent contributor Thomas H. Benton (which is the pen name of William Pannacker, an associate professor of English at Hope College in Michigan), the author takes on potential causes that may not always get much publicity as the nation debates the presumed flaws of higher education.

Below are some of the reasons raised by the writer for low levels of student learning. (Note: The list has been abridged for reasons of space.)

Lack of student preparation. Undergraduates are not prepared adequately in any academic area but often arrive with strong convictions about their abilities. So college professors routinely encounter students who have never written anything more than short answers on exams, who do not read much at all, who lack foundational skills in math and science, yet are completely convinced of their abilities and resist any criticism of their work, to the point of tears and tantrums: “But I earned nothing but A's in high school,” and “Your demands are unreasonable.” Such a combination makes some students nearly unteachable.

Student evaluations of teachers. The common wisdom... is to expect little, smile a lot, gesture freely, show movies, praise them constantly, give high marks, bring cookies on evaluation day. Wise administrators may read confidential evaluations in context, but students can now use the Internet to retaliate against professors.

Enrollment minimums. Students gravitate to lenient professors and to courses that are reputedly easy, particularly in general education. Some students may rise to a challenge; many won't. They'll drop, withdraw, or even leave a college that they find too difficult. If you are untenured and your courses do not attract enough students, then you can become low-hanging fruit for nonrenewal.

Contingent teaching. Now undergraduate teaching relies primarily on graduate students and transient, part-time instructors on short-term contracts who teach at multiple institutions and whose performance is judged almost entirely by student-satisfaction surveys.

Former TCCTA President Dies at 61

Larry Shirts, Lone Star College–North Harris, passed away January 19 in Houston. A professor of political science, he was president of TCCTA in 1988-89 and served in a variety of leadership positions, including as campus representative for his school for many years. He is remembered fondly by all who knew him.

Memorial contributions can be made to: Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo Scholarship Fund, P.O. Box 20070, Houston, Texas 77225-0070.

Facebook Gives Blackboard Competition

If you want to stir up a pedagogical conversation on campus, mention Blackboard. For many years, the company's learning management system has dominated the higher education market. Some faculty members swear by the package and others refuse to use it. Most are probably somewhere in between.

Then there are the student comments, which have given “the dog ate my homework” a whole new format.

Interestingly, some teachers have switched to Facebook, which is certainly not as comprehensive or robust in its applications, but is completely free and students are, more likely than not, logged on as we speak. And the “free” part may be increasingly attractive right now. Faculty members report that they simply create a Facebook page for instructional purposes only, and then post all the links, documents, videos, and messages they wish. Obviously privacy is an issue with Facebook as well.

According to an article by Steve Kolowich in *Inside Higher Ed.* (Feb. 22), Blackboard is embarking on a number of new projects designed to solidify its position.

Students Held Accountable for Low Graduation Rates

The majority of Americans believe that students and their parents are largely responsible for poor college graduation rates, according to a poll conducted by the Associated Press and Stanford University.

The poll, conducted last fall, also found that most people were happy with the quality of higher education in their states. The poll was featured on December 9, in an article by AP education writer Eric Gorski.

According to the report: “The belief that students are most at fault for graduation rates is a troubling sign for reformers who have elevated college completion to the forefront of higher education policy debates and pushed colleges to fix the problem, said Michael Kirst, professor emeritus of education and business administration at Stanford.”

When asked where the blame lies for graduation rates at public four-year colleges, seven in ten said students shouldered either a great deal or a lot of it, and 45 percent felt that way about parents, according to the report.

Perhaps it says something about our times that such a discovery is worthy of a headline.



Larry Shirts is

remembered

fondly by all

who knew him.

“A Measure of Hope”

by Matthew Detweiler
Richland College
International President
Phi Theta Kappa



Matthew Detweiler

“Because of the encouragement and support of my teachers and professors, I am a different person today.”

[Note: Following are remarks by Matthew Detweiler, International President, Phi Theta Kappa, at the General Session of the 2011 TCCTA Annual Convention in San Antonio. He is a student at Richland College.]

Good evening and thanks for asking me to speak to such a distinguished group of scholars. When I saw your conference theme, I had mixed emotions. I thought about student success, and I knew this would be a breeze. When I went to write a speech about student success, my initial thoughts were of excitement and relief at the ease at which it should have been written. But when I sat down at my desk, with my blank screen, there was simply nothing but jumbled thoughts. I had quotes from philosophers that have helped me along the way, quotes from friends about their thoughts on success, and even more from teachers and administrators on how they view the topic.

But alas, my screen remained blank.

I took the studious route and decided to look up the definition. Therefore, I need to thank the verbose individuals at Random House. What these illustrious lexicographers had to say simply astounded me. *Student: noun, a person formally engaged in learning.* That seems pretty straightforward. Next, *success: also a noun, a person or thing that is successful.* Combined, a person formally engaged in learning that is successful. So, I am right back to where I began—thank you so very much for the definition that simply defines itself.

So back to my blank screen. How do I approach this topic? Well, I certainly know someone successful when I see them. Take for instance all of you, who are obviously among the best educators in the state, if not the country, bar none. That being said, I plan to give you some of the dismal facts regarding where we stand, of which you undoubtedly are aware, and share with you my story of how I got here today, so that you may see the brighter side of education, and that you may judge for yourself whether you deem me to be a successful student.

I wish to begin with the worst, and build up to the brighter information. A 2009 study by the National Center for Education Statistics estimates that somewhere between one in five and one in ten of community college students will receive their degree. The reason this is so horrifying: over half the nation's higher education students are enrolled in community colleges. And the biggest reason many do not complete? Funds!

Most often it isn't just tuition and books, despite their 437 percent increase in price over the last 30 years, states Anya Kamenetz, author of *DIY U: Edupunks, Edupreneurs, and the Coming Transformation of Higher Education*, but because of the small costs that can be associated with life. For example, your car breaks down, a dentist bill, and a doctor's bill, and so on and so forth.

The goal set forth by President Obama is simple: double the number of graduates by the year 2020. Current projections by the National Center for Education Statistics see this number falling short by almost 5 million graduates. For the first time

in American history, our next generation may not surpass the current one, educationally speaking.

The statistics are frightening to say the least, but there is some hope. Every day another success story comes from community colleges across the nation. But so often, we fail to recognize just how many of these stories are successful in the eyes of the student. It is long thought that degree or certificate completion is the standard by which a student is deemed to have been successful in this endeavor. However the reality is that simply setting and achieving a goal should be a more appropriate measure, in my humble opinion.

Take for instance the student who returns to community college so that he or she may learn to weld, in an effort to find a new job skill or a new job. Though no certificate or degree is granted for learning this skill, if the individual learns a skill, and finds a job, then that student is most certainly successful.

Or consider an adult student returning to learn more about the process by which elections take place. A more educated, engaged, and active citizen is most certainly a success in the greater good of our society. These are just a couple of examples of how our colleges interact with the greater community surrounding them and help them to be successful, even if is according to their standard and not the institution's.

Here is where I shall impart my story, and how my college experience has forever altered my life. I graduated high school with a 3.93 GPA and was accepted to Texas Tech University. My high GPA was good enough to land me in the BOTTOM half of my graduating class. By the time I had arrived to my first collegiate experience, I had already set myself up to fail.

My last semester of high school, I had the great misfortune of watching my then current girlfriend and high school sweetheart die in a car wreck. To say that some images cannot be erased from your mind is an understatement. I was truly and completely lost, and no one knew how to help me. Seeking some form of solace, I went off to college, joined a fraternity my first week, and fulfilled the typical stereotype. My goals were to drink as much as possible, attend class as little as possible, and somehow get by.

This was not exactly what the university was looking for, so after a year of “school” and a 1.47 GPA, Texas Tech thought it most appropriate that we part ways as amicably as possible and that I simply not seek to return. I went on to work and live, until I decided to attend a technical school in Wyoming, in an effort to learn to build cars. I did well as I was excited about the subject, but still continued to drink whenever I could. Six weeks before graduation, I was offered a job building custom hot rods in Dallas. As this was my dream job, I quickly accepted.

Moving down the road a couple years, I bought a house, had the wrong friends, and was by many accounts a rather horrible person. I was arrested on a DWI in 2006. The penalty I paid a year later in court was enough

to get my attention. By the time it was all said and done, I had spent almost \$15,000. Shortly thereafter, I decided perhaps returning to school would be my best option.

Here lies the most important decision I have made to date, enrolling in class at Richland College. I have never really been afraid of much, save for clowns and heights, but walking through the doors and showing my transcripts to the advisors terrified me. There was a quote that prefaced a book I was reading at the time, and it moved me deeply. The philosopher Johann Wolfgang von Goethe said, "The moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves as well. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen accidents, meetings and material assistance that no one could have dreamed would come their way. Whatever you can do or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Begin it now."

Up to this point, I had pretty much been a failure, and had become accustomed to accepting this fate and moving on. I was an out-of-county student, and decided to dive in headlong. After my first semester as a full time student, I received my grades the same day my little sister received her bachelor's degree from Texas State, with straight A's. I later had to apologize to her for "stealing her thunder."

I was asked to join Phi Theta Kappa, and did so, but missed my induction because I was moving under a court-ordered eviction due to a foreclosure on my home. Last year, I ran for, and was selected as the International President of Phi Theta Kappa. I am currently enrolled in 13 hours, work full time, and preside over the largest student-run organization in the world. I am going to graduate in May with an Associates of Art with a GPA of 3.68, and am hopeful that I will transfer to Cornell University to study communications.

Success is a never-ending upward spiral. After completing one step, another appears, slowly ascending. I think it is important to understand that my journey could not have become what it was without the aid of my college. It is because of teachers who write, "What is this? Do it again" on my paper that I have become a better writer. It is because of Dr. Newbury, whose class I took online, receiving C, that I realized that the way I was studying was not sufficient enough. Or my Phi Theta Kappa advisor, who smacks me upside the head to help keep me humble, or if I just happen to get out of line. Or the teacher that told me to man-up when I talked to him about dropping out after my home was foreclosed. I have another instructor who physically drags me around campus to ask students if they have met the International President of Phi Theta Kappa. My school president has helped me in ways I didn't know were possible, but still insists I call her if there is anything the school can do for me. Likewise with our chancellor, who continues to ask if there is anything the college district can do.

Student success starts, continues, and ends with instructors like yourselves, who dedicate themselves to their field, their profession, and their students. I am quite certain that by the time you add up the countless hours you spend with students, your hourly wage probably closely resembles that of an indentured servant.

That reminds me of a quote from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., in reference to the Bible: "He who is greatest among you shall be a servant." That's the best definition

of greatness. By applying this definition, everybody can be great, because everybody can serve. And you continue to do this during budget cuts, and increasingly difficult odds. You educate over half the country's college students, but do it on a budget roughly one third the size of a research university, and for that, you should be applauded.

The 2010 findings by the Center for Community College Student Engagement show that when a student is engaged in their classes, and other organizations that they are more likely to be successful. Though I am confident that this is true, I think what is more important is being pushed by your instructor to achieve at a higher level. You do this daily, and all the while so many students take it for granted, constantly bickering about how big a pain this or that instructor may be. I am personally quite grateful for the fact that you have not become complacent in your jobs, and wish to thank you on behalf of the students who you undoubtedly find so frustrating.

Somewhere close to 60 percent of students are entering college with the need to take remedial courses, and by the time they graduate, have surpassed what most expected of them, and for that, I thank you. When I look about the room, I see a measure of hope, and the resilience against apathy that will continue to lead students down a path that is, to say the least, unexpected, and for that I thank you.

I mentioned before that I am a communications major, but more than that, I wish to be a college professor, preferably at a community college, and one day, I hope to inspire students like so many of you have inspired me. I leave you with a quote from the philosopher Henry David Thoreau. Perhaps this will help inspire your students as you continue on your journey of leading successful students. "I learned this, at least, by my experiment: that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him; or the old laws be expanded, and interpreted in his favor in a more liberal sense, and he will live with the license of a higher order of beings. In proportion as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty nor weakness weakness. If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them."

Thank you.

☆

TCCTA Membership Surges to 6,000

For the first time since 2002, the membership of TCCTA has exceeded 6,000. Many professional organizations have declined in membership over the last several years, particularly those that are not devoted to one specialized area of activity.

The 6,000 figure is important, as it gives the association enhanced credibility with policy makers. It is noteworthy also in these times of budget cuts and grim economic news. Morale is low on many campuses, but community and technical college educators still believe in their profession. They believe in TCCTA. ☆

“The interaction and learning that occurs at these retreats offers faculty a meaningful respite from the ongoing demands of academic work, as well as a rich mine of ideas and inspiration.”

*—Terry Stewart Mouchayleh,
Austin Community College*

Come to the Great Teaching Round Up!

“One of the most respected professional development programs for Texas community college teachers” The Great Teaching Round Up, founded by Don Bass at College of the Mainland in 1982, is scheduled for *May 23-26, 2011 at the YO Ranch Resort in Kerrville, Texas.*

Expectation The Great Teaching Round Up differs from most conferences in that, for the most part, *the program is created by the participants themselves.* The staff's major role is facilitation. The format varies but often includes: teaching clinics, panels, organized discussions, “hands on” workshops, and presentations by participants or Round Up staff. It also features choices among activities. The exchange takes place not only in scheduled sessions but also informally around the pool, in conversations at dinner, or on excursions around Kerrville.

Focus The goals of the seminar include: Sharing methods and techniques ... Celebrating good teaching ... Creative, realistic problem solving ... An exploration of new ideas ... Serious introspection and self-appraisal ... Professional and personal renewal.

Process Assemble a group of people who really care about teaching and place them in an isolated, unstructured setting in the beautiful Texas hill country. *The rewards can be astounding:* Over the years, many teachers have reported that the Round Up allowed them to believe in their chosen profession as never before.

Facilitators Helen Jackson, Houston Community College; Vickey Andrews, Del Mar College; and George Johnson, St. Philip's College



*“This was an
illuminating retreat.”*

*“I am able to
...**fill in my gaps**
and
...**feel more confident**”*

*“Fabulous! Absolutely perfect—
restful,
relaxing,
and **renewing.**”*

—Past Round Up Attendees



WWW.TCCTA.ORG/ROUNDUP



GREAT TEACHING ROUND-UP
KERRVILLE, TEXAS
MAY 23-26, 2011

REGISTER TODAY FOR 2011 GREAT TEACHING ROUND UP

EARLY REGISTRATION: \$550.00 for members or \$595.00 for non-members
(Price based on rooming with fellow attendee. Includes room and meals, but not transportation. Additional \$135.00 for single occupancy.) AFTER MAY 1 include an additional \$25.00. My check in the amount of \$_____, payable to TCCTA, is enclosed. I understand that no refunds will be made if reservations are cancelled after April 11.

SEND TO: GREAT TEACHING ROUND UP, TCCTA, 5113 Southwest Parkway, Suite 185, Austin, Texas 78735. Fax: (512) 328-1086. For more information or to verify availability, contact Carol Fricke, at (800) 288-6850, Ext. 11. E-mail: cfricke@tccta.org.

PRINT NAME: _____

COLLEGE: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY, STATE, ZIP: _____

PHONE: _____ E-MAIL: _____

TEACHING DISCIPLINE: _____

REQUEST VEGETARIAN MEALS (please circle): YES or NO

“Leading from the Middle”

Join us for this intensive three-day leadership program



Omni Southpark Hotel

Austin, Texas

July 17 - 19

Deadline to Register: June 17

www.tccta.org/leading

— TO REGISTER FOR THE CONFERENCE —

To register for the “Leading from the Middle” conference, please complete the registration form and send it, by mail, email, or fax, to the TCCTA State Office by June 17, 2011. *Hotel accommodations should be arranged directly with the Omni Southpark by June 17th.*

TCCTA State Office:

5113 Southwest Parkway
Suite 185
Austin, Texas 78735
Phone Number: (800) 288-6850
Fax Number: (512) 328-1086

Omni Southpark Hotel:

4140 Governor’s Row
Austin, Texas 78744
Phone Number: (512) 448-2222
Fax Number: (512) 442-8028

— ESTIMATED COST —

Payable to TCCTA:

Conference Registration: \$300.00
Includes registration, Sunday evening dinner,
two luncheons, and refreshments throughout the
conference.

Payable to Omni Southpark Hotel:

Accommodations (based on 2 nights*): \$198.00
This does not include any applicable taxes or
incidentals, but *includes complimentary
breakfast.*

Approximate Total: \$498.00

**Cost of hotel is approximate and should be paid directly to the hotel
at time of checkout.*

NAME _____

TITLE _____

COLLEGE _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____

E-MAIL _____

PHONE _____

FAX _____

YEARS IN CURRENT POSITION _____

PRIMARY MOTIVATION FOR ENROLLING:

DIETARY OR DISABILITY CONSIDERATIONS:

METHOD OF PAYMENT:

CHECK VISA MASTER CARD

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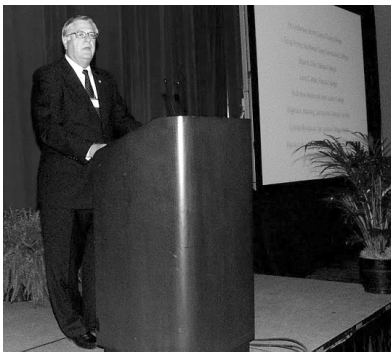
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TEXAS COMMUNITY COLLEGE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

5113 Southwest Parkway, Suite 185
Austin, Texas 78735

PERIODICAL

2011 CONVENTION HIGHLIGHTS

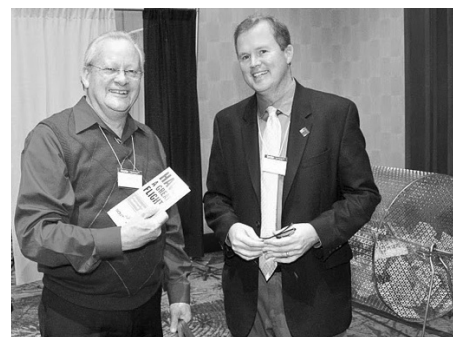


TCCTA PRESIDENT Fred Newbury, Richland College (left), convenes the General Session, January 27, at the Marriott Rivercenter Hotel in San Antonio.

MUSIC prior to the General Session was provided by a group of talented students in the Lamar State College-Port Arthur Touring Band (right).



CELEBRATING SUCCESS took on extra meaning for this group of educators from El Paso Community College, who received an award from TCCTA for their Early College Start Program, presented by executive director Richard Moore (left). Also receiving recognition for their achievements in student success were representatives from Houston Community College and Brazosport College.



ANOTHER LUCKY WINNER at the highly popular TCCTA Raffle receives a ticket from Southwest Airlines. Raffle tickets are distributed in the Exhibit Hall during the annual convention each year. Contributors at the 2011 convention also included American Technical Publishers and Hawkes Learning Systems.