



## Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

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### Higher education partners launch Texas Affordable Baccalaureate Degree

**Feb. 6, 2014 – Austin, Texas** – Three higher education partners have launched an innovative Texas Affordable Baccalaureate Program, creating the state’s first competency-based bachelor-level degree from a public institution. This unique, low-cost degree will give Texas students the opportunity to acquire a high-quality bachelor of applied science degree with an emphasis in organizational leadership. This degree is designed to provide the skills employers have identified as necessary for the 21st century, at the same time allowing students to accelerate time to completion and potentially save considerable money as they pursue their higher education dreams.

“In 2011, Governor Perry called on Texas higher education to develop low-cost alternatives for earning a college degree,” Higher Education Commissioner Raymund Paredes explained. “The launch of this program answers that call and demonstrates to institutions around Texas and the nation that faculty-driven collaboration and the adoption of game-changing innovations in higher education delivery can create new, affordable pathways to degree attainment.”

The new degree program was developed through collaboration between the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), South Texas College and Texas A&M University-Commerce, partnering under the College for All Texans Foundation and supported by EDUCAUSE and the Next Generation Learning Challenges Grants. The Texas Affordable Baccalaureate Program is a faculty-driven initiative, developed by community college and university faculty with input from community and business leaders, that evolved from a deep understanding of what is needed of graduates in the workplace, according to Van Davis, Ph.D., director of innovations in higher education for the THECB.

“To make sure that students in the program graduate with a degree that is meaningful, relevant and rigorous, we used the Association of American Colleges and Universities’ Liberal Education and America’s Promise general education framework,” Davis said. “We also listened to what national and regional employers are saying they really want: graduates with critical thinking skills who are quantitatively literate, can evaluate knowledge sources, understand diversity, and benefit from a strong liberal arts and sciences background. This isn’t just another business degree.”

The program was initiated with the first seven-week term which began in late January at South Texas College and A&M-Commerce. The program focuses on leadership skills applicable to business, government, non-profit, or educational settings. The degree’s first 90 semester credit hours (SCH) will be available through online modules. The last 30 SCH of upper division, problem-based coursework will be offered in both a face-to-face and online format and include instruction in organizational planning, dynamics of leadership, finance, team building, conflict resolution and mediation, communication, and other management skills. Learning will culminate with a digital capstone experience where students will apply their knowledge and skills to real-world business problems.

“This new program is a transition from colleges measuring student competencies based on time in a seat to now allowing students to demonstrate competencies they have acquired in previous employment, life experiences or personal talents,” said Shirley Reed, Ph.D., president of South Texas College. “The competency based approach to this bachelor of applied science degree will open opportunities for students who already possess the knowledge and skills to demonstrate mastery of coursework in this organizational leadership degree. It is an opportunity for students to earn an affordable bachelor’s degree with the cost as low as \$750 per term, and allows students to complete as many competencies and courses as possible in that term.”

A student coming in with no prior college credits should be able to complete the degree program in three years at a total cost of \$13,000 to \$15,000. If students come in with general education credits completed, they can finish in two years. If they come in with 90 credit hours and no credential -- and Texas has thousands of students in this category -- they can complete in one year for \$4,500 to \$6,000.

This degree program will focus on relevant application of knowledge and skills and will allow students to accelerate their degree completion by demonstrating mastery of what they know and can do. Furthermore, the degree is flexible and allows credit for work experience, military training and other forms of nontraditional experiences.

"This is a game-changing innovation for higher education that has the potential to reshape the way that we deliver higher education in Texas," said Dan R. Jones, Ph.D., president of A&M-Commerce. "But the Texas Affordable Baccalaureate Program is also firmly grounded in the A&M-Commerce mission of creating a pathway for students to earn the degree that will forever transform their lives and reshape their futures."

Texas is one of the fastest growing states in the U.S. This rapid growth is expected to continue for the foreseeable future and economic projections indicate an increased need for work-ready college graduates. To achieve current higher education goals of better access and affordability, new and innovative modes of degree attainment, such as the Texas Affordable Baccalaureate Program, are imperative to address demographic, economic and policy trends.

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**Background:** In June 2012 the College for All Texans Foundation received a \$1 million grant to help design, pilot and scale the Affordable Baccalaureate Degree Program — a low-cost alternative to a traditional postsecondary degree, with special focus on students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The grant was awarded to support a partnership between the THECB, A&M-Commerce and South Texas College working to develop a low-cost, high-quality bachelor of applied sciences degree in organizational leadership. The two-year grant was part of the Next Generation Learning Challenges grant program and continues to represent national recognition and support of the state's efforts to create affordable pathways to postsecondary education in response to Governor Perry's \$10,000 degree challenge.

**THECB Mission:** *The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's mission is to work with the legislature, the governor, governing boards, higher education institutions, and other entities to help Texas meet the goals of the state's higher education plan, Closing the Gaps by 2015, and thereby provide the people of Texas the widest access to higher education of the highest quality in the most efficient manner.*

**South Texas College Mission:** *Founded in 1993, South Texas College remains steadfast in its commitment to student success and credential completion. Today, with 31,000 students in credit classes, STC is the largest institution of higher education south of San Antonio. In the last five years, STC has served 24,649 students with non-credit courses and programs through their Continuing, Professional and Workforce Education Department and has served 17,442 workers through the Institute for Advanced Manufacturing. In addition, since 2003, STC has provided tuition-free dual enrollment to over 81,000 students in 68 school sites, saving families over \$85 million in tuition.*

**Texas A&M Commerce Mission:** *Texas A&M University-Commerce provides a personal educational experience for a diverse community of life-long learners. Our purpose is to discover and disseminate knowledge for leadership and service in an interconnected and dynamic world. Our challenge is to nurture partnerships for the intellectual, cultural, social, and economic vitality of Texas and beyond.*

#### **About College for All Texans Foundation**

*The mission of the College for All Texans Foundation is to increase participation and success in higher education for all Texans. The Foundation is a 501 (c)(3) supporting organization for the THECB in raising awareness and financial support for its Closing the Gaps by 2015 initiative.*

#### **About NGLC**

*Next Generation Learning Challenges is a collaborative, multi-year initiative created to address the barriers to educational innovation and tap the potential of technology to dramatically improve college readiness and completion in the United States, especially among low-income and minority students. NGLC is led by EDUCAUSE in partnership with the League for Innovation in the Community College, the International Association for K-12 Online Learning, and the Council of Chief State School Officers.*