The Challenge of a $10,000 Bachelor's Degree – Summary

At a time of spiraling higher education costs, Texas must finds ways to create lower cost alternatives for students. The Governor's call to create a $10,000 bachelor's degree is an important and timely challenge. Our goal is not to create an affordable degree at the expense of the high quality that our institutions already offer. Our goal is to find ways to make a quality education more affordable for all Texans and *close the gaps* in higher education.

There is no "one size fits all" model of higher education. There are multiple ways that college costs can be lowered, and we anticipate that there are many ways that a $10,000 bachelor's degree could be constructed. There are, though, common critical elements that any affordable degree program should possess.

- Low cost does not equate to low rigor.
- Faculty must play a crucial role in establishing curriculum and assuring rigor.
- The curriculum should be focused with a prescriptive core and few options for undesignated electives.
- Flexible fee structures should be examined.
- Recognition that these degrees will not fit everyone or every subject and are not meant to eliminate degree programs that already exist.

The preliminary framework that we are presenting today should be a starting point for further discussion. This discussion and the subsequent degrees must take into account the voices of multiple stakeholders—students, faculty, and Texas business.

Leveraging our existing efforts:

- **Average tuition and fees** at a public Texas university in 2010 was $6,483 per 30 semester credit hour year for a four year total of $25,932.
- Community college tuition and fees are lower than that found at Texas' public universities. Students who complete their first two years at a community college and then transfer to a university can realize significant savings. There are already a number of these **2+2 agreements** across the state, and some can result in a baccalaureate degree where the tuition and fees are less than $10,000 (*Cost Efficiencies Report's* "*Creating Clear Pathways for Successful Student Outcomes*").
- Collaborative arrangements such as the **Virtual College of Texas** can help institutions pool resources and prevent the need for the development of duplicative lower-division courses and programs (*Cost Efficiencies Report's* "*Creating Clear Pathways for Successful Student Outcomes*").

Taking advantage of technology:

- One cost inefficiency found in higher education is a **duplication of effort**.
- By allowing institutions to compete for the right to deliver **statewide online degree programs** in high-demand fields, duplication of efforts could be reduced, the costs associated with the creation of degree programs could be minimized, and subsequent savings could be passed on to students.
- Technology can be used to develop **alternative delivery systems** that allow students to choose a program that best meets their goals and learning styles.

Developing degree programs with multiple pathways:

- By **developing competencies** for all courses, students will have more opportunities to prove their mastery and receive credit through numerous ways such as Advanced Placement, CLEP, or other prior learning assessment (*Cost Efficiencies Report's "Creating Clear Pathways for Successful Student Outcomes"*).
- By **creating different course formats** such as full semester courses, six-week accelerated courses, and self-paced asynchronous courses, students will have the opportunity to choose the format that best suits them. Additionally, this flexibility will allow students to enroll in coursework throughout the year and accelerate their time to degree (*Cost Efficiencies Report "Meeting Demand with New Approaches to Delivery"*).

Integrating the best materials

- There are a number of **high-quality, open source materials** developed by leading universities and available for use. Videos of classroom and special lectures, experiments, etc. can easily be incorporated into online courses as required or optional materials (*Cost Efficiencies Report's "Meeting Demand with New Approaches to Delivery"*).
- Open-source textbooks such as those found in the award winning Connexions repository at Rice University could also be easily incorporated into classes as a means of reducing textbook costs (*Cost Efficiencies Report's "Meeting Demand with New Approaches to Delivery"*).
- For those courses that do not have appropriate open source materials available, textbooks and materials could be developed by Texas faculty and researchers (*Cost Efficiencies Report's "Meeting Demand with New Approaches to Delivery"*).

Providing dynamic student support services

- Student retention and satisfactory academic progress are crucial elements in reducing the cost of a degree to students. In order to graduate in a timely manner without the need to take extraneous coursework, students must receive **consistent and informed advising**.
- Social networking tools can be adapted to help build community. Twitter and texting can be used by advisors and instructors to instantly connect to students. Programs such as the one being piloted at Austin Peay State University, dubbed Netflix for advising, can be used to recommend courses to students and evaluate their readiness.
- The development of on-demand student learning resources such as "just in time" online tutoring or face-to-face learning support centers can provide students with the resources to successfully complete courses.

No matter the model, a $10,000 bachelor's degree program must:

- Be rigorous
- Be targeted
- Be highly structured
- Be competency based
- Leverage technology
- Include multiple pathways to the degree
- Have faculty buy-in