

**ApplyTexas Advisory Committee Meeting Notes
October 21, 2016**

Members Present:

Candace Appleton-Kuntz—Texas Christian University
Drew Canham—McLennan Community College
Melinda Carroll, Co-Chair—North Central Texas College
Joy Frazier—The University of Texas at Arlington
Christine Gann—Sam Houston State University
Sheila Grey for Jamie Hansard—Texas Tech University
Lisa Hernandez—Angelo State University
Rebecca Lothringer, Co-Chair—University of North Texas
Pooja Mallipaddi—The University of Texas at Arlington (Student member of Committee)
Nichole Mancone—Tarrant County College
Michelle Walker—Texas A&M University
Michael Washington—The University of Texas at Austin

Members Attending the Meeting via Telephone:

Melissa Gallien—Lamar University
Connie Garrick—Lone Star College System
Matthew Hebbard—South Texas College

Members Not Present:

Nick Cioci—Lamar Institute of Technology
Margaret Dechant—Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi
Todd Fields—Collin County Community College District
Nidia Arellano Hassan—Tyler Junior College
Vanessa Maldonado (for Whitney Carter)—Texas State Technical College
Mary Beth Marks—Sul Ross State University
Scott Smiley—The University of Texas of the Permian Basin

Ex-Officio Members Present:

Tim Brace—Apply Texas Technical Team
Rebecca Kindschi—ApplyTexas Technical Team
David Muck—ApplyTexas Technical Team

CB and Apply Texas Staff present:

Jane Caldwell—Coordinating Board
Diana Foose—Coordinating Board

Welcome and Introductions

Co-Chair Melinda Carroll called the ApplyTexas Advisory Committee (ATAC) meeting to order and welcomed everyone. She then asked members to identify themselves and the institution they represent.

Review and Adoption of Minutes

Melinda Carroll then presented the minutes from the September 22, 2016 meeting. Five minor changes were made. A motion for adoption of the amended minutes was made by Michelle Walker, was seconded by Joy Frazier, and was passed by the committee.

Discussion of Required Contents of a Dual Credit Module for US Freshman and 2-year Applications

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) Office of Legal Counsel is looking into issues regarding residency for students applying to take dual credit courses. Therefore, the committee focused its discussion on how the 2-year and 4-year freshman applications could be improved for use by these students.

A significant issue is the inexperience of the students trying to navigate the applications, some of whom are 13 or 14 years old and unfamiliar with language related to college. How can we make it possible for students applying for dual credit courses to skip questions unrelated to their eligibility to enroll? The following are the types of questions that fall in that category:

- Questions dealing with extracurricular activities
- Questions dealing with previous employment
- Questions that call for test scores
- Questions dealing with majors

In addition, the Apply Texas System needs to allow institutions to indicate a separate fee structure for dual credit students than what they charge entering freshmen. Often, the dual credit charges are lower, but there is no way to indicate that in the System. Let colleges opt in or out for showing charges for enrolling in dual credit courses.

For the Apply Texas System to let students applying for dual credit courses skip certain questions, it must be able to clearly identify these students. The current freshman and 2-year applications include the following question:

Are you completing this application to apply for dual credit classes or concurrent enrollment at this institution while still in high school? Yes No

“No” is the default response. Only 50 of the 130 institutions participating in Apply Texas have chosen to use this question. The others use a custom question to get this information or use a local (non-Apply Texas application) for persons applying for admission to dual credit courses.

Several suggestions were made to improve the situation or explore options:

- Add an editable text field near the question used to identify students applying for dual credit courses, where institutions can add instructions on how to answer the question.
- Check with institutions using home-made applications for students applying for dual credit courses, to see how they identify the students.

- Bring the question up at the “Hot Topics” session at the Texas Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (TACRAO) conference in November, to get feedback from admissions officers and registrars on how this should be handled.

Nichole Mancone volunteered to draft a message to go on the TACRAO listserv, requesting suggestions for making the 2-year and freshman applications better serve students applying to attend dual credit courses. The following is her draft language:

The Apply Texas Advisory Committee is reviewing the language on the Dual Credit/Early High School question on the application.

Are you completing this application to apply for dual credit classes or concurrent enrollment at this institution while still in high school?
 Yes No

We are looking for feedback from institutions on the following questions:

1. *Are you using the ApplyTexas Dual Credit question?*
2. *If you are not using the Dual Credit question, is there a reason why you are not?*
 - a. *If you are using a custom question instead of the provided Apply Texas question, what is the wording on your custom question?*
3. *Do you have any additional feedback on the ApplyTexas dual credit question? (For example, does it work for you? Do you receive a lot of questions about it? Do students have trouble responding to the question?)*

Discussion of Additional Questions Needed for International Students

The 4-year institutions have an international freshman application. The 2-year institution application includes some questions for international students but lacks some of the questions included in the 4-year application.

The committee was asked to consider two approaches for handling the growing international applicant pool at 2-year institutions – (1) modify the 4-year application so that 2-year institutions may also use it, or (2) create a more complete international student module for the 2-year application.

Among the items included in the 4-year application but missing from the current 2-year application are:

- A question about the applicants’ knowledge of English (whether they have taken the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or International English Language Testing System (IELTS))
- An option for applicants to identify and provide contact information for a representative with whom institutions may share their information
- A question about the student’s need to change his/her visa status to attend, and the type of visa that is expected
- Questions about the student’s sources of support (critical for applicants wishing to acquire student (M-1 or J-1) visas)

Tim Brace indicated it would be harder to make the 4-year application an option for the 2-year institutions than to modify the 2-year application. To add an international module to the 2-year form, the System will need a clear way of identifying the students who would be required to complete the international module.

The suggestion was again raised to bring this topic up at the "Hot Topics" session at the TACRAO conference, to get feedback from admissions officers and registrar on how to proceed.

Jane Caldwell was asked to check with the THECB legal counsel about triggers to use to route applicants to the international student module.

Discussion of Using a Poll to Solicit Institution Feedback on Establishing an Earlier Starting Date for Admission Application Cycles

As of fall 2017, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) will open its applications on October 1 prior to the fall term for which the application is being submitted (for instance, on October 1, 2017 for the 2017-18 academic year). Previously, the cycles opened on the January 1 prior to the opening of the relevant academic year. The committee was asked to decide whether the opening date of Apply Texas Application cycles should be moved from August 1 to July 1 (from 12 to 13 months prior to the relevant fall term).

Other national and/or local application systems are considering this change. The Coalition Application will open in July, and the Common Application is expected to do so, though it has not yet formally announced it. Some other states with application systems are moving up their deadlines.

If the opening date for the Apply Texas cycles is moved up to July 1, Texas institutions will not be required to open their applications earlier than in the past. They would have the option to do so.

To make this option available to any Texas institution, however, the Apply Texas System would have to implement and test any changes for the new cycle (2018-19) earlier than it has done so in the past. The Advisory Committee will have to finalize its list of changes earlier than in the past, and colleges choosing to open earlier will have to do their application set-ups and testing earlier than in the past. One concern was whether institution Information Technology (IT) departments, especially in some of the smaller institutions, will be able to meet the earlier schedule.

The committee concluded it would be best to poll institutions about their preferences and ability to accommodate an earlier schedule.

Tim volunteered the use of the Apply Texas IT and Administrator listservs to send out the poll. Responses would be forwarded to and tallied by the THECB support staff for Apply Texas.

The following is the draft of the questions to be included in the poll:

The Apply Texas Advisory Committee is considering a request to open the annual application cycle on July 1 instead of August 1. The Apply Texas Committee is considering

this change in order to keep Apply Texas in line with other state and national applications that will open their applications on July 1 and also accommodates the earlier opening of the FAFSA.

The suggestion is to make this change beginning July 2017 for the 2018-2019 application cycle. This change would provide each institution the opportunity, but not require them, to open the application as early as July 1.

Please answer the following questions to assist us in determining if we should move in this direction.

Are you in favor of this change?

What challenges/concerns exist that would preclude you from making this change or make this change difficult for your institution?

Could your technical team complete testing and be prepared to receive the Apply Texas application on July 1?

Do you rely on the Apply Texas Workshop in order to prepare for the testing and opening of the Apply Texas application?

If yes, when is the best month to schedule this workshop to occur in order for you to be prepared for Apply Texas to open July 1?

How can the Apply Texas team assist you to successfully make this transition?

Comments:

Discussion of Summer 2017 SPEEDE/EDI/Apply Texas Workshop

The summer SPEEDE/EDI/ApplyTexas workshop traditionally provides training for institutions using the Apply Texas System. It includes sessions for administrators and for IT staff. If the application cycle opening date is moved to June 1, the question arises as to when the workshop must be held in order to provide timely information.

Options for 2017 are further complicated by efforts underway to schedule the workshop to join the summer TACRAO meetings (thus enabling more people to attend while lessening travel costs to the institutions). Unfortunately, the TACRAO meetings are held in mid-July, which would be later than the proposed new opening date for application cycle.

In 2016, the workshop was held approximately 6 weeks prior to the cycle's opening date. If the new cycle is to open on July 1 and the same lead time is provided the schools, the workshop would need to be held in mid-May, which is a bad time for institutions because of graduations. The possibility of a mid-April meeting was raised.

This issue was not resolved. Additional information/decisions are needed:

- Institutions' responses to the poll about moving the opening date to July 1;

- Contractual commitments that may have been made regarding joining the Workshop with the TACRAO meetings;
- When the workshop should be scheduled to give institutions enough time to be ready for the new cycle; and
- Where the workshop could be held if it is not joined with TACRAO? Is the Pickle Center available on an appropriate date?

Identification of Workgroups, their Charges and Selection of their Chairs

Joy Frazier suggested that the question of workgroups be discussed at the "Hot Topics" session at the fall TACRAO conference. She recommended the committee identify someone to be the main contact for each of the main applications – 2-year, U.S. Freshman, graduate, and international applications.

Tim Brace indicated the Apply Texas listservs could be used to get the word out about the contacts.

Jerel Booker, THECB Assistant Commissioner for the Division of College Readiness and Success, came to the podium and asked why subcommittees were needed.

The response was that they could get more schools involved in the committee's considerations. The Apply Texas System needs more feedback from the users if it is to continually improve. Traditionally, subcommittees allowed participation of persons who were not members of the committee. Conferences do not provide sufficient opportunities to receive feedback. Attendance was too low, especially when travel budgets were tight. Christine Gann commented that the TACRAO conference can generate suggestions, but recently (while the workgroups have not been active) there has been a lull in the inputs from the field.

Mr. Booker asked if the committee would allow the THECB to come back to it in December with a plan for reaching out to the institutions – a systematic communications approach that could provide information and generate input.

Rebecca Lothringer mentioned tools used in the past for communication – the TACRAO listserv and the Apply Texas listserv. Michelle Walker said the high school counselor panel that met with the committee earlier in the year was very informative, and recommended having such interactions with counselors and students in the future. Nichole Mancone suggested it would be ideal if there was a link available for users to submit ideas in real time as they work in the system.

It was agreed that the THECB would come back to the committee at the December 5 meeting with suggestions.

Review of Proposed Changes to Apply Texas Applications or Procedures

Tim Brace (Apply Texas Team Manager) led this discussion.

As the discussions began, Tim Brace was asked to indicate the level of difficulty of the various proposed changes, to help the committee get a sense of its options for the next cycle. The following is a list of the items discussed, and the conclusions reached at the October 2016 meeting.

1. Show all custom questions at once instead of one at a time. Project Type: Large. This is a large project since each custom question per institution has to be reformatted individually. Michelle Walker asked whether it would be possible to bring required custom questions to the front of the list and leave the optional questions as one question per page. Tim wasn't sure this would lessen the project, but agreed to look into it.
2. Remove question in scholarship application about parental income. Project Type: Small. Michelle Walker indicated this question was critical to Texas A&M University as it pre-screens applicants for scholarships. Fewer than 10 institutions use the scholarship application and the decision was to not delete the question.
3. In residency questions, add "n/a" to parent visa question (currently some applicants choose "none of the above", which has a different meaning than "n/a" (not applicable)). Project Type: Small. This has been implemented.
4. Parental education level questions: second parent can be "unknown or not applicable" for relationship. Project Type: Small. It would add consistency to the wording of questions related to parents.
5. Update "father/mother" to "parent 1/parent 2" in scholarship application. Project Type: Small. A question was again raised about whether this could be pre-populated from another question.
6. Address deliverability. Project Type: Medium/Large. More research is needed. Involves the purchase of vendor service to confirm that mail can be delivered to the address provided by the applicant. An error message would be generated when the student "saved" the relevant page of the application. Committee members asked if the System could be set to prompt more information from the applicant when the address is determined to be undeliverable. The members do not want an "undeliverable" status to keep a student from submitting an application. They also asked how this would be funded. The funds would come from the payments of participating institutions; there is a provision for "professional services" under which this could perhaps fall. No conclusions reached.
7. Add text to translate legalese on some items. Project Type: Small. The Tech Team will look further into this and report to the committee. No changes will be made without committee approval.
8. Add CEEB codes for colleges to the EDI files. Project Type: Withdrawn. This suggestion was withdrawn by the committee member who had proposed it. The institution has found a "work-around."
9. Add word count to custom questions and scholarship short answers. This has been implemented.

10. Add deadlines for essays. Project Type: Medium. Suggestions were made to make the use of essay deadlines optional for institutions. It would have to be implemented as an additional field in the application set-up, and would allow different deadlines for different types of applications. No conclusion reached.
11. Open application cycles later in the morning than 12:01 am. Project Type: Small. There was agreement about the logic of making this change, so that full technical support would be available when the cycle opened.
12. Open the application cycle earlier [than August 1] next year. Project Type: Large. Discussions still under way. See notes above, under "**Discussion of Using a Poll to Solicit Institution Feedback on Establishing an Earlier Starting Date for Admission Application Cycles.**"
13. New. Have class course information and extra-curricular information be copied when applications are copied from one institution to another. Project Type: Small. Tim indicated the applications should be allowing this now. More research is needed. Students need to understand that they need to fully complete an application and then copy it to another institution in order for all the data to transfer. The two applications are not linked in any way. Adding information to one form does not automatically add it to the second one. Ideally, students would ID all institutions to which they want to apply, fully complete the one requiring the most information, and then make their copies to other schools. It was agreed that additional instructions are needed for applicants copying applications.
14. New. Change wording in the confirmation page for institution charging a \$0 application fee to indicate no charge is levied, rather than wording that implies no decision has been made by the institution. Project Type: Small.
15. New. Require high school graduation dates for those who indicate they have or will have graduated from high school. Project Type: Small. More clarification is needed about how to handle students completing the high school equivalent programs. There appears to be an audit in the programming that deletes a high school graduation date for someone who also answers a GED question. Further study needed.
16. New. Give 2-year institutions the ability to break down the major sections into "colleges/schools" in a way similar to that available to 4-year institutions. Project Type: Small. The discussion indicated some confusion about whether this is already an option. This will be checked. Melinda Carroll also suggested that the 2-year major selection text use the term "program of study" rather than "college/school." The committee conclusion was that institutions should be polled on this topic.
17. New. Share a list of administrative options for 4-year institutions with representatives of 2-year institutions. Project Type: Small. This would give 2-year institutions an opportunity to see if any of the unique 4-year options would be helpful to 2-year institutions.
18. New. Clarify how students enrolling in dual credit or early college programs are to answer questions about college credit. Project Type: Small. Currently such students

should describe themselves as “freshmen entering with college credits” in the “Education Background” section of the 4-year application, but to answer “no” to the Residency Information question about attending college in the prior fall or spring. Jane Caldwell agreed to confer with the THECB legal staff for additional instructions that might help students.

19. New. Change birth year on community/volunteer page from a text question to pull-down box. Project Type: Small. Corrections were made to the topic. The intended topic was to change the service year on the extracurricular page.
20. New. Add respondent name and email as optional items on the application survey. Project Type: Small. This would enable the ApplyTexas Help Desk to reach out to students with complaints and receive more details about the problems to be addressed.
21. New. Confirm with committee that the essay word limits added to the 2017-18 applications are meeting their needs. Project Type: Small. Mike Washington admitted that The University of Texas at Austin has found the lower limit of 350 words to be too low. Their goal is to receive essays that are approximately 1 1/2 pages long. The decision of the committee was to increase the recommendations from 350-500 with a suggested maximum of 650 words to a recommendations of 500-750 words with no maximum requirement.
22. New. Investigate extracurricular/volunteer/awards section for ways to make it easier. Project Type: Small/Medium. Further investigation needed. The surveys submitted by students when they submit their applications, if we collect names and email addresses might give the System a way to find out what makes this section so difficult. (50% of the respondents indicated this was the hardest section of the application.)
23. New. Make test scores optional for schools that do not require that information for their admissions decisions. Project Type: Medium. A correction was made to the topic. The intended topic was to make the test page optional under these conditions.

Rebecca Lothringer went through the list of topics and asked the committee members to indicate if they agreed that the following items should be sent to the THECB at this time as items the committee approved. The items included in this list were:

4. Allow response to second parent in parental education level question to be “unknown or not applicable” for relationship.
5. Update “father/mother” to “parent 1/parent 2” in scholarship application.
11. Open application cycles later than 12:01 am on the cycle opening day.
14. Change wording in confirmation page for institutions with \$0 application fees.
19. Change service year on extracurricular page to pull-down box.
20. Add respondent name and email as optional fields in applicant survey.
21. Revise essay word counts from 350-500, with 650 max to 500-750 range.

Jane Caldwell agreed to present these items to the THECB staff for review.

The discussion included comments about the form and procedures to be followed when people wish to submit suggestions for improvement to the Apply Texas Advisory Committee. The blank form could be posted on the Apply Texas website at the THECB.

How should the suggestions be routed for acknowledgement and response? A recommendation was made that they be forwarded via email to the THECB (Jane Caldwell and/or Diana Foose). It was also agreed that the Monday after the fall TACRAO conference (November 21) would be the deadline for the THECB to receive proposals for the 2018-19 cycle.

Before the meeting concluded, Rebecca Lothringer provided a brief summary of "to do's" for committee members:

1. The proposal template needs to be posted on the TACRAO (and THECB) websites. Michelle Walker volunteered to draft the form.
2. The poll regarding moving the cycle date to July 1 needs to be finalized and sent out to the institutions via the Apply Texas IT and Administrator listservs.
3. Questions about ways to improve the applications for students enrolling in dual credit courses need to be prepared for discussion at the "Hot Topics" session at the TACRAO conference.
4. Questions about ways to improve the international student questions in the 2-year application need to be prepared for discussion at the "Hot Topics" session at the TACRAO conference.
5. Jane Caldwell and Jerel Booker are to develop a plan for broad participation in the Apply Texas decision-making process, to be presented to the committee on December 5.
6. Jane Caldwell is to confer with the THECB legal department about (1) instructions for applicants for admission to dual credit courses regarding how to respond to the residency question on continuous enrollment, and (2) how best to identify persons to complete the international rather than US Freshman application.
7. Jane Caldwell will share the list of proposals passed by the committee with relevant THECB staff for review and approval for action.

Next Meeting

The committee was reminded that it had agreed to have its next meeting on Monday, December 5, 2016, beginning at 9:00 am.

Adjourn

After concluding the current meeting's work was complete, the Co-Chairs asked for a motion to adjourn. The motion was voiced by Nichole Mancone and seconded by Christine Gann.