

House Committee on Higher Education RFIs
Interim Charge 1

Organization/Entity Name: Alamo Colleges District (Alamo Colleges)
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Interim Charge #1

Monitor the agencies and programs under the Committee's jurisdiction and oversee the implementation of relevant legislation passed by the 86th Legislature. Conduct active oversight of all associated rulemaking and other governmental actions taken to ensure intended legislative outcome of all legislation, including the following:

HB 1638 (85R) which relates to statewide goals for dual credit programs. Review best practices for providing opportunities to high school students to earn college credit while ensuring that courses taken reflect authentic, college-level rigor.

The Alamo Colleges District supports dual credit as a proven means for students to earn college credit while in high school, and for its critical role as a gateway to affordable and accessible higher education, while meeting the state's 60X30TX plan. The Alamo Colleges' Strategic Plan: [*Our Voices, Our Vision, Our Plan*](#) focuses on three pillars: student success, principle centered leadership, and performance excellence. Ensuring our dual credit and early college high school programs are aligned and constantly improving is a key element of our student success strategic objective.

Q1. What challenges have institutions faced with dual credit prior to and as a result of the pandemic?

Prior to the pandemic, ensuring the reach, quality and sustainability of dual credit and early college high school programs was of concern for the Alamo Colleges. As part of our 2019 legislative agenda we recommended a weighted state funding stream for low-income students to access dual credit, which gives community colleges more flexibility in charging some tuition, while still serving the population that most needs early access to free college. This continues to be a focus for us especially as we continue to expand our opportunities for high school students in our service area. Additionally, ensuring instructors meet the same qualifications as those required at the college level is a continuous challenge as there are costs for training and credentialing.

Post-pandemic, we have encountered several issues with dual credit and early college high school programs to include:

- Budget. Prior to COVID-19 Instructional Material (IM) fees primarily covered textbooks/course reading material but now IM fees will have to consider the costs of mobile

technology and software for courses at a greater rate. If there doesn't exist a mechanism for the IHE and ISD partners to use the same devices and/or the same learning management systems (LMSs), the potential challenges will increase. We have experienced one such challenge with one partner ISD which has resulted in students receiving multiple devices in order to have the ability to take their dual credit course with one of our colleges.

- Dual Credit instructors thrust into online teaching without prior training or experience with online instruction.
- High schools using a different Learning Management System (LMS) than our colleges. As mentioned earlier, if this is the case it can result in double-costs associated with the student and the technology needed by the student to complete the course.
- Both students and instructors understanding the concept of synchronous/asynchronous teaching of courses as a result of remote learning.
- Required class observations in online courses.
- Ensuring dual credit students and instructors were aware that college support services continued online as part of our remote learning.
- Services of students with learning disabilities. The variation in policy regarding IHE DSS and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act for K-12 education creates great concern for student support and faculty development. While we are continuing to work to ensure all our students are receiving needed services, the challenge does exist and is felt by both our college support services and the K-12 system.
- Calendaring. In a typical year it would be common for our internal teams to meet with our ISD partners and align academic work across our differing calendars. However, with the varying and often changing allowances for our ISD partners in how many weeks they could remain remote or transition to in-person instruction forced our colleges to quickly transition their instructional plans for those courses. This also caused some colleges to expend funds to prepare classrooms for in-person instruction that in the end will not be used this semester and might have been spent on other technology for the students.

Q2. How have institutions addressed these challenges?

Prior to the pandemic, the Alamo Colleges was continuing to work with our K-12 partners on addressing budgetary and instructor challenges. One of our colleges specifically has worked to provide one of its own instructors to teach dual credit courses in the absence of qualified instructors at the high school.

Post-pandemic, we have done the following to address these challenges:

- College training provided to high school dual credit instructors that focused on the use of our Learning Management System as well as the Zoom (online audio and web conferencing system).
- Class observations are conducted via Zoom as long as the dual credit course has a presence in the college's LMS.
- College training of dual credit instructors and administrators which included the availability of academic support services.

- Continuous training and communication with high schools and their school districts.

Q3. What changes, if any, are needed to ensure that students have opportunities to earn college credit which fulfills the criteria outlined above?

After COVID-19 hit, challenges ensued in the delivery of standardized tests, specifically the TSI. As a result, and through flexibility provided by the THECB, our Academic and Student Success teams were able to work through and create a Multiple Measures standard providing a way for students to access our dual credit and early college high school programs. Incoming High School freshmen registering for the Fall 2020 will undergo an individual review by the High School Program (HSP) liaison and director. Courses requiring TSI, but do not include a college readiness standard, will be subject to individual review. This new process will allow for increased access for students and provide a more accurate placement of the student based on academic needs. For more information on our Multiple Measures plan please visit this [LINK](#).

SB 25 which relates to measures to facilitate the transfer, academic progress, and timely graduation of students in public higher education. Monitor the process by which the Higher Education Coordinating Board adopts rules via negotiated rulemaking. Monitor the progress of institutions developing recommended course sequences and the progress of the feasibility study to implement statewide meta majors.

In September 2019, the Alamo Colleges hosted the annual South and Central Texas Transfer Compact – bringing together leaders from colleges and universities across Texas as part of a collaborative effort to increase the ease of efficiency of transferring to a four-year college or university for both the Alamo Colleges District and Austin Community College District students. Eight new universities – Schreiner University, Texas Tech University, Texas A&M University Kingsville, Sam Houston State University, Texas A&M University-Central Texas, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, Angelo State University, and the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley –were added to the partnership increasing it to a total of 20 total members.

The South and Central Texas Transfer Compact streamlines the transfer process through the creation of Transfer Advising Guides (TAGs). TAGs provide Alamo Colleges’ students with an outline of a transfer advising guide offered at a South and Central Texas Transfer Compact partner institution, so they take only the courses they need and they can be sure that when their credits transfer the credits are degree applicable. TAGs also provide students with valuable information including special requirements, deadlines, and considerations for transferring. The Alamo Colleges currently has more than 1,200 TAGs and Workforce Degree Plans (WDPs) completed and available for students.

The South and Central Texas Transfer Compact’s approach reflects the latest research, which supports the use of guided pathways to positively impact student completion and success. To date, 70 percent of all TAGs created provide students a transfer pathway with less than 3 semester credit hour (SCH) loss, where students on average, in Texas, lose 24 semester credit hours. As a result,

TAGs have yielded an average student savings of more than \$8,800 at a public university and more than \$52,000 at a private institution.

At the Alamo Colleges, the guided pathway model has been implemented through AlamoINSTITUTES, which organizes all courses into six groups directly related to career goals. All degrees and certificates offered throughout the five Alamo College campuses have been organized into ten areas of study and program maps have been created for all degrees and certificates that include both career and transfer information.

Q1. In what ways can data collection and sharing between THECB and TEA improve and assist institutions with college credit transferability?

As articulated by the Texas Association of Community Colleges (TACC) a statewide database of degree requirements at IHEs and course equivalencies from one institution to the next will help high school guidance counselors, college advisors, students and their families understand what courses need to be completed throughout their postsecondary journey. For multiple sessions, we have advocated a need for a common course numbering system that will assist and ease the burden on students and families to understand program pathways. When universities use course equivalencies versus common course numbers it requires the student and family to engage in increased work and research providing increased challenges in advising. If all IHEs used the same numbering systems, the equivalency database would be unnecessary. Additionally, real time data is always helpful along with publishing more examples of credit crosswalks and transfer guides could be useful resources—especially as a functional dashboard.

Q2. What role can school counselors and advisors play in the success of transferable credits? Are there ways in which the state can utilize their expertise and student relationships more effectively?

Consistent and detailed conversations between our college advisors and our partner ISD counselors are critical to assisting students and families understand the impact of each course selected and how it may or may not transfer to an IHE. What we always want to avoid is a student with excess credit because their transfer university does not accept all their credits or requires different courses. As long as we meet often about changes and how to best communicate the possible implications to students and families, then we allow for more informed decisions. High School Program coordinators are creating an advising cross walk for dual credit based on major “clusters” creating and sharing tools that allow for clear and direct information to be shared. Additional technical assistance and resources for school counselors and college advisors would be welcomed especially as case loads continue to increase for all.