



August 31, 2020

**Chancellor of the
Blinn College District**

Mary Hensley, Ed.D.

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Dear Chairman Chris Turner and Members of the Texas House of Representatives Higher Education Committee,

To support the 60x30TX Higher Education Plan, the Blinn College District has partnered with institutions from across the State of Texas to develop collaborative programs that expand entry points and decrease higher education barriers for students.

These partnerships include:

- the TEAM Program offered in partnership with Texas A&M University;
- the Texas A&M Engineering Academy at Blinn-Bryan in partnership with the Texas A&M University College of Engineering;
- The Texas A&M Engineering Academy at Blinn-Brenham in partnership with the Texas A&M University College of Engineering;
- the RELIS Academic Alliance in partnership with The Texas A&M University System and its member institutions – Prairie View A&M University, Tarleton State University, Texas A&M International University, Texas A&M University-Central Texas, Texas A&M University-Commerce, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, Texas A&M University-Kingsville, Texas A&M University-San Antonio, Texas A&M University-Texarkana, and West Texas A&M University;
- and a co-enrollment nursing partnership with the Sam Houston State University School of Nursing.

Blinn and Texas A&M set the standard for co-enrollment partnerships when they established the TEAM Program in 2001. Through this unique program, students are selected for participation through the Texas A&M freshman admissions process. TEAM students enroll in one or two academic courses at Texas A&M each semester and take the remainder of their courses at Blinn College.

TEAM students enjoy the benefits of enrollment at both institutions, including Texas A&M's residence hall life, sporting events, and range of student activities, as well as Blinn's smaller class environment and lower tuition and fees. According to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's Higher Education Almanac, out-of-district Blinn students save 44% in tuition and fees compared to the average state university.

Office of the Chancellor, Blinn College District

Students who complete 45 credit hours at Blinn and 15 credit hours at Texas A&M while maintaining the program's academic standards are guaranteed to transition to full enrollment in a degree-granting major at Texas A&M. Additionally, an early transition opportunity allows many TEAM students to progress to full Texas A&M enrollment in less than two years.

Approximately 1,200 students participate in the program each year. In 2013, the TEAM Program was recognized with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's "Recognition of Excellence," and was awarded the Star Award the following year as the top educational initiative in Texas.

In 2013, Blinn collaborated with the Texas A&M College of Engineering to establish the Texas A&M Engineering Academy at Blinn-Bryan, which was modeled after the success of the TEAM Program. Through this program, students are selected from the Texas A&M freshman applicant pool to co-enroll at Texas A&M and Blinn. As members of the two-year program, Engineering Academy students take their Texas A&M engineering courses on the Texas A&M campus and their math and science courses at Blinn's Walter C. Schwartz Building on the RELIS Campus in Bryan.

Engineering Academy students can apply for entry to Texas A&M as early as the end of their first year, and those who earn at least a 3.5 cumulative grade point average at both Blinn and Texas A&M while completing the required coursework earn automatic admission to their first-choice Texas A&M engineering major at the end of their second year. Students in the Engineering Academy save between \$1,500 and \$2,000 per semester in tuition and fees compared to students in Texas A&M's traditional engineering programs. Approximately 500 students participate in the Texas A&M Engineering Academy at Blinn-Bryan each year.

In 2015, Texas A&M and Blinn built upon the success of the Texas A&M Engineering Academy at Blinn-Bryan when they introduced the Texas A&M Engineering Academy at Blinn-Brenham, which adds a residential component to the program. Like the original academy, the Texas A&M Engineering Academy at Blinn-Brenham allows students to co-enroll at both institutions and puts students on the path to full matriculation to the Texas A&M College of Engineering.

Unlike the Bryan program, Texas A&M professors teach Texas A&M engineering courses on the Blinn-Brenham Campus and Engineering Academy students live together in Mill Creek Hall at Blinn-Brenham, creating a living and learning community of high-achieving engineering students. Approximately 100 students participate in the Texas A&M Engineering Academy at Blinn-Brenham each year.

In 2016, Blinn embarked on its most ambitious partnership to date when Texas A&M University System Chancellor John Sharp announced his vision for the RELLIS Campus, a cutting-edge research, technology development, higher education, and workforce training campus located in Bryan. Through the RELLIS Academic Alliance, which includes 13 Texas A&M System regional universities and the Blinn College District, students have an affordable, seamless pathway toward the bachelor's degree of their choice.

Students complete their freshman- and sophomore-level courses with Blinn at the RELLIS Campus, then complete their higher-level bachelor's degree courses with The Texas A&M System regional universities also located at RELLIS. Blinn and these universities have entered into transfer agreements to ensure that students transition seamlessly from Blinn to their bachelor's degree-granting institution. Students also enjoy considerable cost savings, paying Blinn tuition and fee rates for their Blinn courses and a \$295 per semester credit hour tuition rate for their upper-level RELLIS courses.

This Fall, Blinn has partnered with The Texas A&M System and the Texas A&M University Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communications to open the RELLIS Agriculture and Workforce Education Center, a 38,000-square-foot complex where students will prepare for high-demand careers in secondary education and the construction industries. To coincide with the opening of the new facility, Blinn has introduced four new Associate of Applied Sciences degrees in carpentry, facilities maintenance, HVAC, and water purification. Each of these degrees lead to high-demand leadership positions in their fields and transfer to related bachelor's degrees.

RELLIS Campus students also have access to unparalleled research and technology development opportunities in partnership with the Texas A&M Transportation Institute (TTI), the Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service (TEEX), and the Texas A&M Engineering Experiment Station (TEES), as well as the academic, corporate, and private partners also located at RELLIS.

In its inaugural semester in Fall 2018, Blinn welcomed 1,500 students at the RELLIS Campus. In Fall 2019, campus enrollment climbed to 2,500 students, and preliminary enrollment data indicate more than 2,700 students will enroll for Fall 2020.

Just as the Engineering Academies serve to meet the state's growing demand for engineering graduates, Blinn's Associate Degree Nursing (ADN) Program partnered with the Sam Houston State University School of Nursing in 2019 to meet the statewide need for qualified nursing graduates. Through this collaboration, Blinn ADN students can co-enroll at Sam Houston State and reduce the time necessary to complete their bachelor's degree by up to six months.

Eligible Blinn ADN students who have completed at least one semester of the program can begin taking courses at Sam Houston State to earn credit toward their Bachelor of Science in Nursing degrees. Upon completion of Blinn's ADN program, qualifying students transition into Sam Houston State's School of Nursing and complete the BSN program coursework. Blinn students could have as few as four classes remaining to complete their BSN upon transfer. Students enjoy lower tuition rates while completing their coursework at Blinn, and the accelerated pathway toward a bachelor's degree reduces barriers while helping to fill the critical statewide shortage of nursing leaders.

Each of these partnerships – the TEAM Program, the Texas A&M Engineering Academies at Blinn, the RELIS Academic Alliance, and the nursing partnership with Sam Houston State – rely upon open communication and dedicated collaboration between the partner institutions. That commitment helps to ensure a seamless transfer pathway for students. Additionally, Blinn's low tuition and fee rates provide a more affordable, accessible option for students. That affordability, combined with Blinn's dedication to providing a rigorous academic foundation, create unique degree pathways for students from across the State of Texas.

As a result of these pathways, Blinn attracts students from across the state, with more than 70% of its students coming from outside its 13-county service area. Blinn's academic transfer rate of 45.9% is the highest in the state, exceeding the statewide average of 24.1%, and no other community college in the state exceeds 40%.

Blinn's groundbreaking success in transferring students to four-year universities and to supporting the goals of the Texas 60x30 Higher Education Plan is a credit to its dedicated faculty and to the College's collaborative programs designed to expand entry points and decrease higher education barriers for students. Through these programs, Blinn will continue to help the State of Texas meet the goals of the 60x30 Higher Education Plan by increasing accessibility, providing a streamlined path to degree completion, providing students with marketable goals, and minimizing student debt.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mary Hensley", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mary Hensley, Ed.D.
Chancellor of the Blinn College District