



TEXAS A&M INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY
A Member of The Texas A&M University System

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Good morning, Senator Shapiro, Senator Zaffirini, members of the Senate Committee for Education and the Senate Committee for Higher Education. It is both a pleasure and an honor to share with you today thoughts concerning the large question of how schools and universities, in Texas, should interact. Only a few years ago, this discussion would not have taken place. Well-prepared students flourished in the transition from high school to university; poorly-prepared or non-traditional students encountered a freshman curriculum designed to weed out those unable to make the transition.

We today embrace a very different mode of thinking. Retention of all students is a goal of all public universities in Texas. And we have learned, in pursuit of this new goal, that most students can succeed, even if they arrive

poorly prepared, if the university has in place an aggressive first-year program: learning communities, a first-year course, adequate advising and tutoring, effective student mentors, and counseling. Enroll, retain, graduate. These are our principal performance measures, and I think all of us in higher education embrace these markers as necessary and appropriate.

Our students, however, continue to find transition to college a difficult one. (Slide 2) For the class of 2007, 37% (25% of Hispanics) of all Texas high school graduates met college readiness standards (ACT or SAT). For the class of 2008, that number had improved: 44% (32% of Hispanics) of high school graduates met college readiness standards. In Laredo in 2007, United Independent School District (UISD), 32% met the standards; in 2008, that number stood at 34%. In the Laredo Independent School District (LISD), 13% met standards in 2007, 27% in 2008.

A number of strategies have emerged to address what is still an inescapable fact: for Texas students, the move from high school to college is more akin a jolt or bump than a step. In addition, many non-traditional students have no idea of what a career path might look like, or how to engage the process of moving from high school to college. The dual credit program, made a statewide mandate in HB 1 of the 79th legislature, challenges

academically prepared high school students; at the same time, this intervention puts them on the road to continued study.

In the spring of 2008, Texas A&M International University and Laredo Community College (LCC) met with both LISD and UISD to discuss how the University and College might make available four courses offered for dual credit. We at the University and LCC believe that unless students come to our campuses and take these courses with our regular college faculty, we will in the end have little sense of what is being delivered. And if we are unsure as to how and what is taught, we find it difficult to assess the effectiveness of this initiative.

Accordingly, both districts agreed to bus students interested in dual credit to the College or University campus nearest the high school, bring the students into our classrooms, and put before them the same faculty teaching our freshmen. I cannot overstate how strongly we embrace this approach. Were the classes offered on the school campuses, a sense of what follows high school, which is the second goal of the dual-credit experience, would be altogether lost.

The data we have gathered over two years is enormously interesting and informative. The courses marked for dual credit are History 1302 (US

history from Reconstruction to the present), College Algebra, and English 1301 and 1302 (reading and writing at a college level).

In two years, these four courses attracted 7,731 enrollees. (Slide 3) In History 1302, HB 1 students earned an average grade of 2.21. (Slide 4) Our own full-time students, taking the same course, earned an average grade of 2.08. In College Algebra, dual-credit students earned 2.16, while our own students earned 2.0. (Slide 5) In English 1301, high schoolers earned an average grade of 3.05, while our own students earned 2.42. (Slide 6) In English 1302, HB 1 students earned 2.7, while our own students earned 2.44. (Slide 7)

Impressive work by the high school students, right? Two additional features of this program are especially noteworthy. First, we were able to achieve, from the very first day, an exceedingly harmonious relationship between the high school and college faculty. Second, high school faculty attended all lectures, read all assignments, and most important, used the two periods per week not spent at the University to offer their students supplemental instruction, following up on the most difficult or obscure elements in the assignments.

What we have found is an ideal model. Students receive an unedited, unaltered academic experience at the University. Because they are on our

campus and in our lecture halls, students enrolled in dual credit courses quickly come to know what lies before them, how to navigate successfully new waters. Early this fall, when we know where the Class of 2010 lands after graduation, we can compare the college-going rate of students with and without a dual-credit experience. We believe the data will show dual-credit courses to offer a powerful strategy for effectively achieving the goals of Closing the Gaps. (Slide 8)