



Chapter Title: Introduction

Book Title: Assessing the Potential to Expand Community College Baccalaureate Programs in Texas

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Published by: RAND Corporation

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/j.ctt14bs21q.9>

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1 Introduction

From 2000 to 2010, the annual number of undergraduate degrees awarded in the United States increased nearly 40 percent, with more than 800,000 associate degrees and 1.6 million bachelor's degrees awarded in 2009–10 (NCES, 2012a). In Texas, the annual number of undergraduate degrees awarded has increased at an even faster pace, jumping from 116,000 in 2001 to 186,000 in 2011 (THECB, 2012a). Yet there remains a need to increase educational attainment to meet the demand for baccalaureate-degreed workers (Achieve, 2012; Deloitte and the Manufacturing Institute, 2011; Faberman and Mazumder, 2012). Increasing human capital also can increase individual income and employment satisfaction and yield broader societal benefits. Yet many students, particularly those who are working adults or have low income, face several challenges in completing degree programs.

There are many different approaches to meeting the needs of employers, individuals, and society for increased educational attainment. Traditionally, the community college provided the first two or three years of education and awarded associate degrees, which allowed students to transfer to universities and complete baccalaureate degrees. Now the community college is increasingly becoming a way to provide baccalaureate-level education. In 2003, the state of Texas authorized three community colleges—Brazosport College, Midland College, and South Texas College—to offer baccalaureate degrees in the applied sciences. These three community colleges now offer a total of seven baccalaureate programs in fields such as organizational management, health administration,

and computer and information technology and have produced more than 600 graduates with Bachelor of Applied Technology (BAT) degrees.

Supporters of community college expansion argue that current higher education pathways are not sufficiently meeting workforce needs, and there is a demand for new opportunities for baccalaureate-level education to meet local workforce needs. Community college baccalaureate programs also offer individuals more ways to improve their knowledge and skills and to attain career credentials. Other stakeholders, however, contend that offering baccalaureate programs may affect the ability of community colleges to continue

-serving their traditional mission and create counterproductive competition with universities over students, state funding, and other limited resources (Floyd, 2006; Russell, 2010).

To assess the implications of expanding community college baccalaureate-degree programs in Texas, the Texas Legislature in May 2013 approved Senate Bill 414, mandating a study on regional need for community college baccalaureate programs and to identify the metrics for determining such needs, with a focus on potential baccalaureate programs in nursing and specified applied fields.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) asked the RAND Corporation to partner with the Texas Higher Education Policy Initiative (HEPI) to conduct a study with the following objectives:

- Assess unmet workforce-development needs for baccalaureate-degreed individuals in nursing and the applied sciences.
- Assess the arguments for and against baccalaureate expansion and other key evidence to support THECB and legislative policymaking related to community college baccalaureate expansion.
- Recommend potential activities to support implementation of any new policies undertaken, including possible expansion.

Our work included a literature review, descriptive data analysis, and interviews and focus groups with more than 300 stakeholders in Texas, as well as interviews with stakeholders in several other states.

This report describes the study's findings. In Chapter 2, we provide some background on Texas higher education, applied baccalaureate degrees, and the expanding role of community colleges in baccalaureate-level education. Chapter 3 provides a framework that can be used to model the decisionmaking process for meeting workforce needs through higher education programs, identifies the research questions for the study, and explains the study's methodological approaches and limitations. In Chapter 4, we assess the potential unmet workforce needs of five specific occupations or occupational groups corresponding to the degree fields of nursing, computer and information technology, management in fire sciences, management of science/operations technicians, and health information technology. After identifying unmet workforce needs, we describe the potential benefits of community college baccalaureate programs in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 presents concerns about community college baccalaureate expansion. State policymakers also will want to consider unmet workforce needs, including the alternatives to community college baccalaureate expansion, the cost of the various options, and funding for those options, which we discuss in Chapter 7. Chapter 8 describes the range of policy options that the state can consider in addressing the issue of community college baccalaureate expansion, and it outlines some principles on which to base these decisions. In Chapter 9, we make recommendations for the processes and implementation efforts that should be considered to support state policy decisions. Finally, we conclude with a brief summary of the study's findings and the implications for community college baccalaureate expansion in Texas.