

Tennessee

Tennessee Higher Education Commission
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- 1) Does the state have an identifiable “P-16” effort visible? Who is in charge of this effort?

Tennessee has an established state-wide P-16 effort, directed by a State P-16 Council. The Council is coordinated by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) as a function of its Master Plan focus on increasing educational attainment rates through the cooperative efforts of K-12 and higher education. The nine-member P-16 Council has representation from higher education, K-12, government, community, and business. Complementing the State-wide policy framework of the P-16 Council is the network of local P-16 groups for which the Tennessee Board of Regents system provides leadership. See “P-16” at www.state.tn.us/thec.

Operated by THEC and guided by the State P-16 Council, Tennessee also has a GEAR UP grant that coordinates direct services to promote aspiration and preparation for postsecondary opportunities in nine high-need counties -- as demonstrated by county scores on the Educational Needs Index (www.educationalneedsindex.com) -- and has begun statewide work in postsecondary aspirations, academic and financial preparedness, and college access and success through communications, an online portal (www.CollegeforTn.org), and professional development.

- a) Does the agency include a utility or function on its website designed explicitly to help potential students locate an appropriate college or university to attend?

CollegeforTN.org (www.CollegeforTN.org) is the online, one-stop college shop where students and parents can plan, prepare, pay and apply for college. CollegeforTN.org helps students create an academic plan, select a postsecondary institution, research financial aid opportunities, apply online and more. The "Select a School" module offers students several ways to find the perfect postsecondary institution match. Students and parents can use the comparative view to evaluate institutions across the state based on factors such as tuition and fees, type of institution and enrollment numbers. Through virtual campus tours, users can learn more about admissions, financial aid, academics and student life at each institution. A matching assistant tool allows students to search for an institution based on specific requirements such as major. Students and parents may also learn the distance of the state's postsecondary institutions by entering their zip code in the distance search tool.

- 2) Is a mandated or recommended college preparatory curriculum in place in the state's public high schools?

Tennessee currently has a recommended, but not required, college preparatory curriculum in place in the state's public high schools. That recommended curriculum aligns with the course entry requirements to Tennessee's public colleges and universities. While that recommended curriculum exists, students are allowed to enter public colleges and universities with deficits they must remove. Work is underway among the State Board, the State Department, higher education, and the Governor's Policy Office that would strengthen that curriculum, align high school exit requirements with college entrance requirements, and make it the default curriculum for most students.

- 3) Has the state articulated a set of explicit competencies or skills that define what it means to be "college ready?"

"College ready" for the Tennessee Board of Regents, the larger system in the state, has for two decades been defined as a composite score of 19 or above on the ACT (or SAT equivalent) and sub scores of 19 or above on the math and English ACT sub tests. These sub scores represent what a student should know and be able to do upon college entry. Currently the State Department, State Board, and higher education are considering adoption of the ACT college readiness benchmarks (ACT math 22 in particular) and the learning outcomes that define them as "college ready" indicators.

- 4) Are systematic programs in place in the state that encourage students to accelerate progress by taking college-level courses while still enrolled in high school?

High school students can accelerate progress toward high school graduation and earn college credit through dual enrollment. Students must be admissible to the college or university and meet high school eligibility requirements. From lottery funds, Tennessee awards Dual Enrollment grants (maximum of \$600 per year for high school juniors and seniors earning up to 12 semester hours) to eligible students.

- 5) Is there a statewide policy present that governs placement into college-level courses or remedial courses? Is a standard set of placement tests recommended or required? If yes, are common cut scores for placement decisions in place or do institutions get to set their own?

Tennessee does not have a state-wide course placement policy, though the Tennessee Board of Regents' six universities and thirteen community colleges are governed by a System policy that prescribes placement into college-level or remedial/developmental according to ACT cut scores (or SAT equivalents) common to all nineteen institutions. The standard set of placement indicators are: an ACT math sub score less than 19 places a student in remedial/developmental courses; an ACT English sub score less than 19 means remedial/developmental English placement, and an ACT composite below 19 dictates remedial/developmental Reading placement. Students over 21 without an ACT score take the COMPASS tests and are placed by COMPASS-ACT equivalent cut scores. Not only are the cut scores common to all 19 institutions, remedial/developmental courses are the same at all institutions (see TBR Guideline A-100 at www.tbr.state.tn.us. The University of

Tennessee System does not prescribe placement by test scores but screens students in college-entry courses for needed remediation.

- 6) Is there a visible statewide transfer and articulation policy? Does this cover all institutions or only public institutions? What are the specifics of this policy?

In 2000, the Tennessee General Assembly legislated actions to address improved transfer and articulation. In response to this legislation, Public Charter 795, Acts of 2000, THEC has coordinated public higher education's actions. Specifically, these requirements have been met:

- The THEC adopted in 2000 a 60-hour module for associate degrees and a 120 semester hour requirement for the baccalaureate to facilitate efficient transfer. This provision clarifies transfer "blocks" to ensure that "any student who successfully completes the sixty-hour module may transfer to a public university and thereby meet the academic requirements for a bachelor's degree for junior status." To bring about greater ease of transfer within the modules, the Tennessee Board of Regents has established a 41-hour General Education Core common to all universities and university parallel programs. The University of Tennessee campuses review their General Education requirements on a regular basis to promote efficient transfer within the UT system and to TBR institutions.
- TBR has added significant provisions to assure the transferability of General Education courses. Students who complete blocks of the General Education subject categories (communications, humanities, social/behavioral sciences, history, natural sciences, and mathematics) and who transfer among TBR institutions are determined to have completed these requirements, thus avoiding any repetition of these courses.
- The UT System is committed to equivalence in course transfer credit and credit earned by an enrolled UT student. Additionally, each UT campus maintains academic major program articulation agreements with participating community colleges.
- The TBR has established a task force to consider ways to address greater ease of transfer of Associate of Arts and Associate of Science non-General Education courses applied to the baccalaureate major by convening disciplinary groups to consider standard expectations for the 19 hours above the 41-hour General Education Core required for the 60-hour associate degree. To date, particular attention has been given to establishing an associate curriculum articulating with teacher preparation majors at the universities.
- All institutions in the UT and TBR systems have identified a high-level administrative office to be the central point of contact to coordinate the transfer process for students (both before transfer and after enrolling). This office acts as liaison with other campuses, maintains and disseminates transfer/articulation agreements, and assists students with transfer processes.

- a) Is the transfer/articulation policy accompanied by a statewide transferable general education requirement? Does this name actual courses and/or credits? Are specific competencies identified that the student should meet through this coursework? Is testing used to guarantee student competency for progress or transfer?

The 19 institutions of the Tennessee Board of Regents subscribe to a common general education core and requirement (please see Undergraduate Degree Requirements Policy 2:01:00-00 at www.tbr.state.tn.us). This 41-hour course has distribution hours and required learning outcomes for each distribution cluster of hours. For example, all math courses satisfying the general education requirement must meet or exceed a set of learning goals, all Social Science courses must meet the prescribed learning outcomes for that cluster of disciplines, and so on. Institutions periodically audit their courses to certify that they address the learning outcomes. Institutions are not required, therefore, to have the same courses but the same learning outcomes.

Transfer of the general education core is guaranteed among TBR institutions for students completing the entire 41-hour core. Completion of cluster requirements (e.g. math, science, humanities, social sciences, etc.) guarantees transfer of each completed cluster for students who do not have the entire 41-hour core. The TBR maintains a course matrix indicating equivalent courses for all system institutions.

Testing is not required for general education course transfer among TBR or UT institutions. If a student presents a course for transfer from an institution outside the systems or one for which the individual institution has not established an equivalency, the department of the discipline evaluates the course syllabus, learning outcomes, and other information to determine the equation.

- b) More specifically, does an AA or AS degree from a community college in the state meet general education requirements at public four-year institutions? What mechanisms are in place to make sure this actually happens?

An AA or AS graduate from a TBR institution can take the entire 41-hour core in transfer to another TBR institution and generally to universities in the University of Tennessee System. Additionally, completion of the appropriate general education course selection is governed by 2 + 2 program articulation agreements between community colleges and universities. Student completion of the program requirements is transcribed.

- c) Does credit from transfer courses meet specific course requirements at the transfer institution (e.g. American History counts for American History) or do just the credits transfer to count against the total needed for graduation?

The credit transfers as course to course among TBR institutions and generally at UT universities. The exception could be that a student completes a general education requirement at the community college that is not the correct course selection for the baccalaureate major selected. For example, a student could complete a lab science sequence at the community college to satisfy general education requirements but find that he must additionally complete the appropriate science courses for the major at the university. The general education requirement is satisfied by the transferred hours, but

the student must complete additional course to meet the degree major completion requirements. For TBR general education requirements see www.tbr.state.tn.us/student_information/transferinfo2.htm.

- 7) Are there statewide test-out or competency-based provisions that will allow a student to accelerate progress toward a degree?
Public colleges and universities in Tennessee award credit based on CLEP scores, though score requirements are not consistent statewide. Public institutions also honor AP. Individual departments at individual institutions have departmental course tests for which students may apply to sit for credit by examination. All Tennessee public institutions are SACS-accredited; therefore, their practices regarding experiential credit and test-based credit meet accreditation standards.
- 8) Does the state have an easily-accessible state-supported alternative institution that allows students to complete their degrees more quickly or conveniently than through attendance at a traditional public institution?
The two systems of higher education have complete on-line programs in majors specific to on-line delivery. The Tennessee Board of Regents On-Line Degree programs offer AA, AS, BS, and MS completion in specific majors entirely on-line. Please see www.rodv.org. The University of Tennessee's on-line specialized major program is sponsored by the University of Tennessee at Martin, please see web site at: www.utm.edu
- a) Does the state have an accessible central bank or catalog of on-line courses contributed by many institutions that enable students to do "one-stop shopping" for electronic courses?
The master list of courses offered through Tennessee Board of Regents Online Degree Programs is posted on the RODP website at: www.rodv.org. This list includes courses contributed by all TBR community colleges and universities to the RODP programs at associate, baccalaureate, and master's levels. Students who are not pursuing RODP majors can also enroll in these RODP courses on a space-available basis. Tennessee is also a participant in the Southern Regional Education Board's Electronic Campus, and Tennessee students have access to these online courses with the SREB site at: www.SREB.org providing a central catalog of courses.
- 9) Does the state provide incentives to institutions for improvements in degree production or graduation rates? For minimizing the number of students graduating with excessive numbers of credits (e.g. more than 120 SCH)?
A component of the Tennessee's performance funding program is devoted to improvements in graduation rates. The performance funding program is an incentive program that financially rewards public colleges and universities for successful institutional performance on selected student outcomes and related academic and institutional assessments. Institutions can earn up to 5.45 percent of their state operating appropriations. The program is based upon a point scale from 0 to 100, depending on institutional performance on assessment

standards during an academic year. Institutions can earn up to 15 points to improve student retention and graduation rates. Based on the total 2007-08 performance funding calculation of \$50 million and the average points received on the retention and persistence standard, approximately \$6.3 million was earned by institutions. The performance funding program does not specifically address improvements in degree production or limiting the number of degree credits.

- 10) Does the state provide incentives for students who successfully complete their degrees (e.g. tuition rebates or cash bonuses)? For students who complete their programs without amassing additional credits (e.g. within 120 SCH)? Are there financial disincentives for students to take more than the number of credits needed to graduate (e.g. full or out-of-state tuition)?

The state currently provides no incentives for students who complete degrees or who do so without amassing additional credits. The primary disincentive for students to take more than the number of credits needed for graduation is that student eligibility for the lottery-funded state merit scholarship runs out after 120 SCH.