2023-2029 TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY PLAN

CHANGE, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES

Background Briefs to Assist with Planning Efforts

Compiled here is a series of five background briefs, with material for each contributed by a background brief task force consisting of key stakeholders at the university who are the most familiar with the individual topics. The environment within which higher education, particularly Texas State University, operates is a challenging maze of constantly changing influences. The President's Cabinet has chosen select topics most likely to affect and inform this cycle of strategic planning.

These relatively short documents are designed to support you in your planning by providing a general assessment of a specific environmental facet that should give some sense of the "lay of the land" and the anticipated changes and other challenges. Though they are mostly separate topics, they should not be viewed or consumed as independent vertical "smokestacks." There are many overlaps and cross-influences apparent here and it is recommended that you consider all of the topics as potentially useful. For instance, the Discovery, Innovation, Creativity, and Research brief has as many implications for student engagement in research, graduate program and student development, and research infrastructure as it does for direct research areas. And the same is true for the other topics, too.

Though the variations in topics mean variations in content, each brief starts with a concise overall concept of what is included, followed by an **Overview** summarizing the state of affairs in general. The **Status** section then talks specifically about where Texas State is in the context of the overall environment, and **Implications** cover what the expected ramifications are for the university over the term of the next strategic plan. Finally, the contributors include some **Further Readings**, and names of the task force co-chairs and general membership.

The brief topics for the 2023-2029 planning cycle include:

- **Student Success**
- **Academic Excellence**
- **Discovery, Innovation, Creativity, and Research**
- **Inclusion and Collaboration**
- **Infrastructure and Resources**

Please view these briefs as a resource to be used by all involved in the planning process in your unit.

STUDENT SUCCESS

Addressing the diverse needs of students to ensure their success

College students must be presented with opportunities and provided support to achieve their higher education goals. More than ever, students are seeking educational environments that foster a sense of belonging and opportunities for curricular and co-curricular involvement and engagement. Historical challenges preventing access, persistence, and graduation continue. Challenges include growing concerns regarding affordability of higher education, mental health and wellness issues, and academic preparedness. It will take a university-wide effort to ensure that we are serving and supporting all students in their pursuit of post-secondary education and achievement of student success.

Overview

State of Texas Goals and Enrollment – At the state level, Texas is making progress toward the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) 60x30TX plan, which sets the goals of at least 60 percent of Texans ages 25-64 will have a certificate or degree and at least 550,000 students will complete a certificate, associate's, bachelor's, or master's degree from an institution of higher education in Texas by 2030. Recent updates to the 60x30TX focused on Building a Talent Strong Texas. The plan expanded the reskilling or upskilling opportunities for the 35 to 64-year-old population, raised the bar in increasing the number of credentials of value available, and focused on low to no debt after earning a credential. Enrollment in secondary schools influences access and enrollment in higher education. The number of high school graduates in the United States shows a slowing growth from 2020 to 2025 followed by a decline from 2025 to 2037. While the United States is projected to experience a 4 percent decline in the number of secondary school graduates between 2013 and 2030, the state of Texas is projected to see an increase of about 5 to 10 percent. In the next 10 years, white and Hispanic graduates will

continue to make up the largest number of secondary graduates. Yet the largest percentage increase will be apparent in graduates representing two or more races and Asian/Pacific Islanders.

Texas State University Goals and Enrollment – Texas State establishes its own access and enrollment, student success, and affordability goals and monitors trends. *Access and enrollment* goals, such as total headcount, minority student headcount, student credit hours, and fully online credit hours, measure the institution's ability to contribute to the broader educational needs of the state. *Student success* goals, including measures such as persistence rates, graduation rates, degrees awarded, degrees awarded to specific demographic groups, and time to completion, provide evidence of the university's ability to engage students and guide them to the completion of their degrees. *Affordability,* including the net price, average financial aid award, Pell recipient headcount, average debt of graduates, and graduates without debt, contribute to the perceived value of higher education.

In 2021, Texas State's student body consisted of 37,864 students of which 96 percent were enrolled at the San Marcos campus leaving the remaining 4 percent enrolled at the Round Rock Campus. The vast majority of students (87.6 percent) were enrolled in undergraduate programs while the remaining 12.4 percent enrolled in post-graduate, master's, and doctoral programs. The current student body reflects the multi-ethnic and cultural diversity of the state with more than 58 percent representing ethnic minorities. Texas State has been designated as a Hispanic-serving institution for more than ten years, which is in part a reflection of its diverse enrollment. Approximately 60 percent of the students are female, and nearly half (44 percent) of the undergraduate students are classified as first generation, those with neither parent having completed a bachelor's degree.

The majority of students come from middle class families with a median annual parental income around $68,000. Approximately 33 percent of students have attended a different institution before transferring to Texas State. Approximately 20 percent of student reside on campus, while 83 percent of students live nearby in off campus housing.

Embracing a holistic, institutionally-adopted approach for Student Success will guide initiatives, services, resources, policies, and practices to meet the needs of the diverse Texas State student population and elevate student success for all Texas State students. Pathways to eliminate the achievement gap existing between the socioeconomically diverse and disadvantaged students and their counterparts need to be explored. Collaborative partnerships across divisions can ensure accountability and promote synergy toward this common Student Success aim for all students.

Status

Affordability

Higher education provides students many socioeconomic benefits and increases the global competitiveness of the United States. Yet, rising costs have increased student loan debt which has sparked a debate over federal lending policies. Student loan debt in the United States has grown enormously in recent years and is now one of the largest forms of consumer borrowing in the country.

Financial concerns, including the ability to pay for higher education and availability of financial support, continue to be cited as one of the biggest threats to student success and the primary reason students stop out. Financially insecure students who struggle to meet their basic needs, also struggle to succeed academically.

The rising cost of tuition and fees, learning materials and class resources, and the overall cost of living are at odds with university aims to educate a more socioeconomically diverse student population. Though the benefits of a college education outweigh the costs, many graduates question the value of the degree, are concerned about entering a recessional market, and worry that lingering debt could hinder their financial future.

Statistically, student loan debt disproportionately affects Hispanic students who see college debt as a financial burden that can affect their family's financial security and stability. Universities must clarify and strengthen the cost vs. benefits message and emphasize the development of marketable skills for the ever-changing job market to ease these concerns and reinforce long term value of higher education.

More than half of Texas State students fund their college education through student loans and students often work on and off campus while simultaneously enrolled in classes. Low-income students are more likely to work more than 20 hours per week, a critical threshold that negatively influences academic performance. Low-income students are also typically less prepared to manage their finances.

The net price of tuition and fees at Texas State in 2020 averaged $10,971 for full-time, first-time undergraduate students who paid in-state tuition. In a recent survey, 21.1 percent of students reported having major concerns about financing college and most worry about having enough money to pay for school. At Texas State, 36.1 percent of students received Pell grants in 2021 compared to the national average of 33.6 percent. The average native Texas State student loan debt for 2020 graduates was $25,526 with 65.2 percent of those graduating with debt. Both figures report higher than the Texas public university average. Further, Texas public school enrollment data projects the percent of economically disadvantaged students in the public school to higher education pipeline to increase in the foreseeable future and will continue to impact college access, affordability, institutional financial aid, and grant funding from state and federal programs. The gap between net cost and growing numbers of financially vulnerable students will require careful planning and state support to achieve the state of Texas' and institution's student achievement goals.

The amount of time and resources supplementing the student experience has shifted to become the institution's responsibility. An intentional shift toward an assets-based approach to student success serves as a cornerstone to becoming a student-ready institution, rather than focusing on a more deficit-focused approach on "college-

readiness." Yet, both are critical aspects impacting student success.

College Readiness

College bound students often lack the knowledge and skills to successfully navigate the college environment. Their diverse backgrounds and experiences suggest that variations to the traditional single application and onboarding processes need to be explored to ensure success for the broader, more diverse student base.

First-Generation Students – The definition of first-generation students varies; however, it generally defines a student whose family lacks prior experience in attaining a college degree or credits and has limited exposure to higher education. Approximately 44 percent of Texas State students self-report as first-generation. While academically capable of successfully completing a post-secondary degree, first-generation students may come from underprivileged backgrounds, lack understanding of how to navigate higher education, and struggle to persist in college. Consequently, first-generation students are statistically less likely to graduate. Likewise, first-generation students may not be engaged; have a difficult time balancing academic tasks with a need to work and support their families; and carry the pressure of being the first in the family to attend college and serving as a role model for younger siblings. These students may benefit from services, financial assistance, and encouragement to enable them to be the first in their families to successfully navigate higher education.

Dual Credit – More than 80 percent of public high schools allow students to take dual credit course where they earn high school credit while earning credit toward advanced degrees. Most commonly dual credit courses include general education courses that apply to most college degrees. Nationally, more students enter college with credits earned than in the past, and students start with more dual credit hours than in the past. Ideally this phenomenon shortens the time to degree, reduces the costs of higher education, and leads to a greater chance of success in college. Yet, the rigor of such dual credit classes and preparation of students for college vary extensively.

The number of Texas students participating in dual credit grew by 753 percent between fall 2000 and fall 2017. In fall 2021, 40.9 percent of first-time-in-college (FTIC) students at Texas State transferred course credits, and 8.5 percent of those same FTIC students began at the sophomore level. A little over 16.5% of the 6,625 FTIC students in 2021 had 21 or more hours, and close to 25% entered with over 15 hours. This increasing dual-credit trend, the number of hours transferred, and the specific courses transferred may influence a student's first-year progress and experience, resulting in a situation where students need special yet appropriate academic advising and assistance to successfully onboard and navigate college life and their educational pathway.

Student Engagement and Disengagement

Student success and student engagement are highly related, suggesting the need for a broad and holistic approach to student success that accounts for the multitude of psychological, sociological, and economic variables influencing learning. Student engagement, often defined as *the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught which extends to the level of motivation they have to learn and progress in their education,* helps students to build better relationships, enhance their sense of belonging, and foster deeper learning. Student engagement has an impact on student achievement, persistence, and graduation in higher education.

Knowing the importance of student engagement, the trend of students more frequently showing signs of disengagement are disconcerting. Students today more often seem disconnected, lack a sense of belonging, and struggle to return to traditional academic expectations after the disruption caused by the pandemic. Disengagement often manifests in students skipping class, failing to complete assignments, struggling to focus within and outside of class, and dropping out completely.

Students have also lost their connection to higher learning and adopted a completion mentality. Many question their decision to go to college, fail to see value in what they are learning, or fail to see relevance in classes or readings that do not seem related to their degree. Their focus has shifted from

the process of learning to building stellar credentials for a post-college job.

Reengaging and reconnecting students will be essential to long term student success. With faculty and staff support, students will build relationships in and out of the classroom, which will fuel their commitment to higher education.

Mental Health and Wellness

Health, counseling, and wellbeing are important contributors to student success. The demand for mental health resources has grown significantly and has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Demand for mental health services continues to exceed availability despite investment in additional counseling and clinical services. Students of color may present greater unmet mental health needs than their counterparts. Causes for anxiety or depression can be intensified by other socioeconomic circumstances. Student mental health will continue to challenge college campuses making it imperative that institutions focus on holistically addressing the needs of students in crisis, especially when caused by financial need, housing or food insecurities, and other basic needs.

Mental health directly impacts academic success. Mental health challenges have been associated with declines in student performance and increases in attrition. Studies have also shown that graduate students are more likely to experience depression and anxiety disorders. In response, universities must prioritize the health and wellness of their students, faculty, and staff by focusing on preventative education coupled with intentional outreach initiatives and services. Through the adoption of holistic measures, institutions can support student well-being while promoting academic success.

The mental health needs of Texas State students align with national trends. Results from the 2019 National College Health Assessment survey revealed that Texas State students experience higher levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation than their national peers. Records also indicate that one-third of all appointments at the Student Health Center involve a mental health issue. Texas State has been working to create a climate where students learn how to engage in behaviors that will improve health and wellbeing, enhance coping skills, build resiliency, and learn self-advocacy. Yet, with the anticipated rise in demand for health and wellness services, these actions will need renewed attention.

Implications

~Enhancing student success starts with the pre-enrollment experience of incoming students. Improving students' transition to college, exploring career options, and addressing the needs of the underserved and under-resourced students will have a positive effect on retention, graduation, and student achievement.

~The cost of attending college remains a significant financial commitment for students and their families. Understanding the financial burden shouldered by students is essential in supporting student success. Mechanisms for offsetting the financial burden and reducing expenses need to be addressed. The appropriate level of tuition discounting to remain competitive must be achieve. Providing financial support to a level that enables students to take on less debt and work fewer hours allows students to progress toward degree completion while carefully considering additional expenses such as learning materials help address the rising cost of attendance. Mitigating concerns about finances, clearly defining value, of a degree, and providing clarity regarding the costs and benefits of higher education may have the added benefit of decreasing student anxiety and lessen the strain on counseling resources.

~Removing barriers to reenrollment and the streamlining of processes for students to return and remain on track will improve persistence and graduation. Providing appropriate services, including advising, especially for marginalized students, will be imperative to ensuring student progress.

~Parents and family members play a unique role in the lives of students. Early engagement with families, thoughtful planning of culturally relevant programming, and materials translated for non-English speaking families will aid in the development of partnerships to promote student success.

~The student onboarding process needs to incorporate strategies to address their diverse backgrounds and experiences and direct them toward student success. Considerations for advising and student support will be paramount in enabling student to successfully navigate college life and their educational pathway.

~Thoughtfully developed, meaningful, and collaborative opportunities will promote student engagement and enrich the student learning experience. Access to strategic student services will assist students in overcoming their obstacles and encouraging involvement. Further, those responsible for reengaging students and providing student services may benefit from faculty and staff support and development opportunities.

~Increased student investment of physical and psychological energy in the academic experience through intentionally designed and delivered activities will yield a positive impact on student success.

~An intentionally designed learning environment addressing cross-cultural learning while concurrently enhancing academic and co-curricular experiences will better serve the needs of students and improve student achievement. Facilities, programs, and services should be uniquely tailored, employ universal design, incorporate identity-conscious principles, and maximize access for all students.

~The residential experience provides an avenue to enrich student engagement in co-curricular activities, connect students with support services, and encourage student health and wellbeing. Through collaborative partnerships, a holistic transformative learning experience that merges curricular and co-curricular opportunities will reinforce student learning.

~A holistic approach to address student mental health and wellness requires a broad-based strategy. Texas State must prioritize the limited counseling resources to maximize efficiency and effectiveness to best serve student needs. Rebranding group services, enhancing virtual services, providing self-service resources, and expanding peer mentoring may also help address wellness concerns. Further, partnering with faculty and staff will be imperative; however, those individuals will need training, resources, tools, and guidance to integrate well-being concepts into their activities and classes.

~ A renewed focus on preventative education coupled with intentional outreach initiatives may ease the burden and lessen the demand for reactive and long-term counseling support services. Awareness and creation of preventive and ongoing assistance that addresses mental health care, basic needs, child-care support, housing and food insecurity, and emergency aid and develops coping skills, resilience, and self-advocacy will be important to students' long-term success.

~Segments of the student population whether enrolled in graduate programs, on the Round Rock Campus, and through distance education have some unique needs. Adjustments to the types, access, and delivery of academic and student support services may be required to effectively support these students.

Further Reading

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National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (2022, March). *The Compass Report: Charting the Future of Student Affairs.*
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Student Success
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ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE
Ensuring engagement, expanding capacity, and cultivating innovative instruction

Texas State University continues to pursue academic excellence as we strive to achieve Carnegie R1 and National Research University Fund (NRUF) eligibility. Key elements of academic excellence include discovery-based learning; dedicated faculty and staff; student success; the creation and dissemination of knowledge by an inclusive community of active learners; a diversity of ideas, disciplines, and peoples; the pursuit of innovation and continuous improvement; contributions to the cultural, economic, and civic goals of society; translation of scholarship, creative works, and discoveries for the betterment of local and global communities; and external recognition, reputation, and visibility.

Overview

Achieving academic excellence is best accomplished through an intentional approach at multiple levels of the institution. Thoughtful planning is required that produces an impact across the entire spectrum of academic offerings, particularly faculty excellence, graduate studies, internationalization, diversity and inclusion, curriculum, and career readiness and workforce preparation.

Given variability on these dimensions and others within a large comprehensive institution like Texas State, an intentional approach will meet students, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders where they are, with what they need, when they need it.

Status

This brief examines key variables consolidated under five thematic subgroupings: faculty excellence, graduate studies and internationalization, diversity and inclusion, curriculum, and career readiness and workforce development.

Faculty Excellence
Texas State's success is directly tied to the dedication and accomplishments of faculty in their roles as teachers, scholars, and academicians. To achieve its goals, the university needs satisfied and valued faculty members who fully participate in various and equally important capacities in San Marcos and Round Rock, contribute to a vibrant intellectual culture, and commit fully to the university's mission and shared values.

A vital component of Texas State's academic excellence has always been a student-centered and intellectually engaged faculty body. An equally compelling need for the university's strategic future is the ability to expand the current capacity of its faculty by recruiting, compensating, and supporting talented instructors, researchers, and scholars dedicated to student success and academic excellence. However, there is significant competition for diverse and talented faculty members.

Texas State increased full-time and part-time faculty during periods of significant growth in student enrollment and student credit hours (SCH). In fall 2018, total faculty numbered 2,087, up by 15 percent since 2015. Given the impact of COVID-19 in fall 2020, the total number of faculty decreased to 1,877. Fall 2021 represented the start of a rebuilding process, with total faculty numbering 1,917. Given slight declines in enrollments and SCH since 2017, net new faculty positions have been authorized and funded through new academic program proposals.

Competitive market data for faculty salaries are derived from College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA) surveys and are tied to discipline-specific medians from comparable institutions. CUPA provides a starting point for negotiations that may be affected by market and labor factors. Faculty compensation at

Texas State is below average as compared to state averages and faculty salaries at Research and Emerging Research Universities (ERU) in Texas.

Texas State employs many non-tenure line faculty members who teach a significant percentage of the university's SCH. The university's non-tenure line workload release program, clinical, practice, and research faculty titles, part-time teaching awards, election to Faculty Senate, specialized faculty development, and other programs are indicators of its commitment to this faculty group. Texas State does not have a promotion-eligible career ladder for faculty engaged in teaching/instructional roles.

Senior leadership has sought to stimulate and empower a culture of shared governance and transparency. The president, as well as the provost and vice president for Academic Affairs, speak frequently of their commitment to this important value and meet monthly with the Faculty Senate to engage directly on critical issues, opportunities, and challenges. Shared governance, with active participation by faculty and administrators, not only ensures transparency and open dialogue for decision-making, but also builds and sustains faculty and academic excellence.

Texas State encourages innovation and interdisciplinary approaches, often at the intersection of societal needs, issues, and opportunities. Faculty engage in interdisciplinary collaboration through centers, courses and degree programs, research, scholarly, and creative initiatives, development opportunities, and internal and external partnerships. Current interdisciplinary foci include translational health, innovation and entrepreneurship, data science and big data, human expression, materials with artificial intelligence, and augmented reality/virtual reality.

Graduate Studies and Internationalization
Graduate Education – Graduate students are central to the research and teaching mission of public universities. Their retention and graduation rates are key evaluation criteria for attaining Carnegie R1 and NRUF-eligibility status. However, with improvements in the economy and job market, the growth trend in graduate education is not projected to last and institutions will increasingly compete for students.

The development of more than 9,000 new master's degrees over the past decade, and the shift to online education, have resulted in a 51 percent increase in the number of individuals in the United States who hold a master's degree. Texas State has fewer online programs and online students than its current and aspirational peers. Texas State currently offers fewer Ph.D. programs in comparison to its ERU peer institutions in Texas.

Internationalization - Graduate education, as well as reputation and recognition, have a strong impact on institutional internationalization plans. In a recent report, the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), concluded that "Internationalization has become recognized across APLU member institutions as essential to a world-class education in our globally connected world." Despite their recommendation, studies suggest that currently internationalization efforts at many universities are ad hoc, fragmented, and marginal rather than strategic, comprehensive, and central in policies.

These trends are reflected at Texas State. Significant functionality and personnel in the Office of International Affairs are supported by self-funded sources. Compared to both state and national peers, Texas State has a small number of international students. Meanwhile, recruitment of international students is constrained by what can be accomplished through uncertain, self-funded resources. Texas State can design a new strategic plan that implements comprehensive internationalization informed by expert input, best practices, and goals for academic excellence. Further, this message could not be timelier for Texas State as it formulates plans to advance the goals of achieving Carnegie R1 and NRUF-eligibility designations.

Diversity and Inclusion
Between 1996 and 2016, the percentage of non-White university students in the U.S. grew from 29 to 46 percent. Texas State followed a similar pattern and today, approximately 57 percent of students identify as Hispanic, Black/African American, Asian, or multi-racial. The numbers of underrepresented students are somewhat lower at the graduate level (38 percent). However, the growing number of underrepresented students in

higher education is a call for diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) competencies for Texas State staff and faculty. The most common DEIA competencies are understanding implicit bias, microaggression development and understanding, cultural competency and cultural humility, promotion of civility, and social justice development. These competencies should lead to a better understanding of challenges faced by all underrepresented students, including first-generation students, those from lower socio-economic groups, veterans, adults returning to college, students with disabilities, and others who need social networks to access various forms of social capital and economic and support resources.

Issues related to DEIA outside the workplace, in communities, and within society, impact the way DEIA is framed, understood, and experienced within the institution. Students, faculty, and staff have been vocal about their desire for greater faculty diversity and stronger DEIA competencies by all faculty and staff at Texas State. The lack of diversity in faculty representation maintains a racial status quo that limits the diversity of education, curriculum, and mentors for students of color.

Research supports that an institution with predominately white faculty limits perspective in cultural awareness, potentially creating a disconnect for students of color and increasing instances of implicit bias. The percentage of total faculty at Texas State who identify as black/African American, Hispanic, Asian, or multi-racial increased from 24.5 percent in fall 2020 to 25.9 percent in fall 2021, representing an increase from 460 to 496 faculty members. The fall 2021 number is slightly higher than the pre-pandemic era (490 in fall 2019). However, the total number of faculty at the institution decreased during that timeframe. As a percentage of full-time faculty compared to the other seven Emerging Research Universities in Texas, Texas State ranks first in women, third in Hispanic faculty, fifth in black/African American faculty, eighth in Asian faculty, and eighth in non-resident foreign faculty.

Both faculty representation and DEIA competencies are imperative for instructional methods. Examples include culturally responsive teaching (CRT), mentoring that improves student success, providing cultural, practical, and peer support for diverse students, staff, and faculty, and engaging in dialogue that truly values diverse perspectives and achieves a more inclusively educated citizenry. Researchers and scholars from diverse backgrounds stimulate creative approaches and provide different perspectives and critical inquiry, all of which are necessary to expand and enhance academic excellence. Numerous reports point to the ongoing challenge to recruit and retain a diverse professoriate, especially in tenure-line positions at research-oriented institutions. While there are challenges in competing for highly sought-after faculty, Texas State offers compelling and attractive factors, to include its culture, affinity groups, research trajectory and teaching commitment, locations, and others.

Curriculum

The future of pedagogy includes new forms of teaching, learning, and assessment that take place in a highly connected, highly interactive setting. There are opportunities to consider artificial intelligence, real-world open data for personally relevant learning, learning from animations and esports, as well as multisensory learning. In educating future citizens, institutions will be expected to sharpen their focus on social justice and address injustice in lives and society (including academia) while considering the ethical use of data in digital life and learning. Concurrently, there is an impetus for CRT, which improves academic achievement of diverse students by teaching them through their own cultural and experiential lens. Texas State degree programs hold several accreditations, which now require demonstration of a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Future indicators suggest that DEI topics will be assessed as part of the accreditation process for curriculum as well as for an equitable and inclusive environment for students, faculty, and staff.

As adult learners return for degree completion or new career directions, an extended repertoire of offerings and program delivery plans will be essential. Competency-based education (CBE), stackable micro-credentials, distance education, and other engagement approaches can coalesce to support non-traditional and traditional students to learn effectively and efficiently. Working more closely with partners and employers will also inspire innovations that better align curriculum with employment goals and marketable skills needs.

Well-crafted interdisciplinary programs that offer technical and professional skills can attract students and prepare them for unique and emerging employment opportunities in this region and beyond.

Experiential and active learning, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, and intentional engagement opportunities are attractive to high quality students and lead to greater student success, including improved retention, persistence, timely graduation, and stronger learning outcomes. Many degree programs feature internships, clinical experiences, education abroad, study in America, service learning, outreach activities, student organizations, Honors College programs, and career-oriented activities. Such activities provide students with practical experience, confidence, and marketable skills. In tandem, the integration of research, creative, and scholarly opportunities into the undergraduate curriculum will deliver both modernization and student recognition of new career paths and graduate education. In pursuing Carnegie R1 and NRUF-eligibility status, the elevation of all curricular initiatives to reflect a commitment to research excellence will be imperative.

In relation to national and state trends in curriculum, the status of Texas State varies by topic. New and exciting practices are occurring on both campuses, but there is disparate utilization of these practices, often based on unique faculty interests or disciplinary preferences. Texas State has also experienced a mixed growth in distance learning enrollments and programs.

Career Readiness and Workforce

Nationally and locally, there is a growing demand for a talented workforce, including a science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) workforce. However, the supply of skilled labor in all kinds of industries is a significant concern impacting businesses, economic growth, and aspiring workers in the Central Texas area and most of the U.S. Significant growth of existing and new businesses along the Austin-San Antonio Corridor is responsible for a current shortage of labor, with the Austin metropolitan area ranked as a top three market for STEM job growth in the STEM Job Growth Index. Employers, many with graduate degrees, are needed in healthcare and related

services, education, data science and analysis, management in multiple industries, and other fields. Employers, however, describe a lack of skills, including knowledge, technical knowhow, and soft skills. Career readiness of graduates, in addition to talented workers, are concerns. To become career ready, students should attain a certain level of proficiency in career competencies. Included among these competencies is metaliteracy, which builds off the foundation of digital, data, and information literacies.

Students gain exposure to many competencies and skills through supervision at their places of work, internship/cooperative education sites, service learning and volunteer experiences, and from student organization activities and advisors. Career advising through the Office of Career Services is often helpful to students in identifying these competencies and skills, how they have been learned, and how to become more proficient when put into practice. Yet, difficulty connecting with and navigating higher education in general might impede the growth of external learning opportunities for students. Therefore, Texas State should continue to strongly support centralized offices that facilitate interaction between external partners and the university by providing a "one stop shop" for effectively addressing workforce and upskilling needs, including the Office of Career Services, corporate partnerships, and others dedicated to experiential and community engaged learning, and program development. The establishment of Alkek One, a hub of technology-focused spaces in the Alkek Library, has paved the way for digital literacy education needed by all students.

Implications

The five key variables influencing academic excellence in the upcoming years provide context and suggest implications to consider while developing 2023-2029 strategic plans.

~Successful strategies to recruit and retain satisfied and engaged faculty require the participation of the entire university community and the recognition that academic excellence and attainment of Carnegie R1 and NRUF-eligibility depends on effective strategic planning and decisions on the appropriate balance of distinct types of faculty positions, support

structures, rewards, assessment and accountability systems, and resource allocation that support and sustain teaching and research priorities. Faculty excellence requires competitive salaries and commensurate workloads. Of equal importance are career development opportunities (particularly a promotion-eligible career ladder for faculty engaged in teaching/instructional roles), effective shared governance, reward and recognition systems, and a supportive environment and culture.
~Texas State should make considerable investments in strategic marketing and targeted recruitment efforts for its graduate programs in domestic and international markets. The creation of online and Ph.D. degree programs with clear market demand and compelling benefits to students and employers represents an opportunity to increase the institution's graduate enrollment and reputation for academic and research excellence. To address impacts from the pandemic, including mental health concerns, programs should target the improvement of support services, professional development activities for graduate students, and training for graduate advisors and graduate faculty. Since program cost is typically cited as the greatest barrier to enrollment, affordability and financial support through fellowships, assistantships, and tuition scholarships will be paramount.
~Texas State must design a new strategic plan that includes implementing comprehensive internationalization informed by expert input, best practices, and goals for academic excellence. Internationalization could not be timelier for Texas State as it formulates plans to advance the goals of achieving Carnegie R1 and NRUF-eligibility designations. Our internationalization efforts should include expanding education abroad and collaborative online international learning. We must also leverage sustainable funding and strategic partnerships to increase the number of international students and faculty and provide them with a more welcoming experience. A necessary step towards achieving these goals will be developing a strategy that both assesses impact of global engagement and promotes the return on investment of global activities.
~In alignment with the university's shared values, Texas State needs to enhance DEIA competencies and recruit and retain a more diverse faculty body. The university has made strides in programming, professional development, hiring toolkits, and other areas, but more effort is needed.

~ Increased exposure to advances in curriculum development will enhance faculty awareness and close utilization gaps. Some of the avenues for increasing this awareness include faculty development sessions and information gleaned from professional and economic development associations. Changes in cultural and structural paradigms at Texas State should be leveraged to position distance learning and traditional instruction as complementary rather than mutually exclusive strategies. Such change could further assist Texas State in amplifying investments in faculty professional development and instructional technologies while meeting student demand for flexible and accessible educational options. Strategic investments in instructional technology and instructional design supporting both distance learning and traditional instruction will strengthen academic program inventories and advance the capabilities of faculty to deliver on the promise of academic excellence for an increasingly diverse student body. In support of student success, policies and procedures should be developed that encourage and guide the adoption of newer pedagogies and modalities such as competency-based education and stackable micro credentials.
~Since Texas State is large, complex, and multifaceted, ongoing outreach from the university to current and potential partners is critical. Multiple areas of the university, including academic units, academic centers, University Advancement, and the offices of Career Services, Distance and Extended Learning, and Research and Sponsored Programs should partner with economic and workforce development associations, chambers of commerce, and leaders in all industry sectors. Partnerships may lead to curriculum revision, experiential, career and community engaged education, class projects, faculty externships, continuing education, research and scholarly opportunities, micro-credentialing, certificate programs, and badging. The establishment of a centralized coordination of university-wide, "siloed" pockets of excellence in experiential, career, and community engaged learning will encourage strategic support and growth in these activities and facilitate student success. Continued investment in technology, maker spaces, external partnerships, and specialized initiatives on the San Marcos and Round Rock campuses will further enhance career readiness and marketable skills of Texas State students.
~ Enrollment numbers of both new and established

academic programs should be carefully reviewed with an eye towards redesigning them to enhance enrollment success. Factors such as student recruitment, student success measures, affordability, internationalization, engagement opportunities, marketable skills development, and delivery modalities and location, as well as overall demand for the skills the program teaches, should all be carefully considered when making changes to a program.

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DISCOVERY, INNOVATION, CREATIVITY, AND RESEARCH

Looking at the Texas State landscape, our current position, and our trajectory

Research universities are engines of workforce development, revenue generation, and technological innovation for the state, region, and country. They help navigate fluctuating economic and educational dynamics, global crises, and competition, requiring an innovative and creative response. The country faces social and economic challenges as well as increasing national needs. Higher education as a whole may face lingering questions about revenue and relevance, but research universities will help Texas thrive in the face of change.

Overview

Several trends emerging from the state of affairs in higher education, government priorities, and current events are important for strategic plans to address.

Higher Education Trends

Student enrollments are shrinking as the economy grows and the job market strengthens, birth rates are declining nationally, and a new generation of students have unique ways of thinking, doing, and engaging with technology to which higher education must adapt and change. Public universities must compete with private institutions. They must rise to the challenge and innovate in how they provide education. Post-pandemic, these underlying fundamentals are exacerbated by the great resignation of faculty and staff leaving *en masse* for more pay, job flexibility, and satisfaction.

Research adds value to education and positively impacts the learning experience of students. It provides active, high impact learning opportunities, and it introduces state-of-the-art concepts and methods. Research also differentiates the quality of education at an R1 university from a community college or primarily teaching institution. Furthermore, a robust research enterprise also attracts excellent scholars, creators, and researchers to the university where they have impactful interactions with students, colleagues, and the community.

Universities are an important source of innovation and workforce development for states and regions in the country. They generate new insights and information about the world's emerging problems and potential solutions, and they create knowledge for the advancement of society. Interdisciplinarity in STEM and medical research can help make important societal advancements. Arts and humanities complement medical and technological advancement by focusing on human connection, reconnection, growth, empathy, and justice. A well-rounded portfolio of research and creative activity help bring value, not just revenue, to society. Overall, research offers an area of growth for universities by supporting high impact learning, adding value to the educational experience, and proving the worth of universities to the communities and nations they serve.

Governmental Trends

Federal and state legislative priorities are crucial factors that anticipate and determine research funding trends. For example, recent federal legislative priority on infrastructure will yield multiple opportunities for applied researchers to partner with local municipalities and industries to deliver related evidence-based goods and services. On another front, there are many government initiatives to retool and diversify the workforce in response to technological advancements and societal change. The fast pace of growth in the job market and industry requires agile workforce development and educational strategies such as micro-credentialing that allows workers to stay current with little or no debt to overcome. Furthermore, machine learning (ML) and artificial intelligence (AI) are among the first items in state and national lists of growing industry

needs, elevating data science skills as a top priority for workforce development, and they have penetrated so many sectors that training and development require multidisciplinary attention.

Finally, governments are prioritizing commercialization and corporate partnerships. Texas State University's location in the Innovation Corridor, where industries are increasingly relocating, positions us in ways to increase public-private partnerships (P3). National motivation to expand P3 and expedite technology transfer (e.g., ARPA-H, NSF TIP, CHIPS, I-Corp, and Convergence Accelerators) will require collaborations with multidisciplinary expertise in applied research. These are but a few examples of how the country is quickening the pace of moving basic research and discovery toward applications and solutions to societal challenges.

These issues and priorities must be addressed with diverse and multidisciplinary responses. As the population becomes increasingly diverse, Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), and Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) are well-positioned at the forefront of funding opportunities for workforce development such as Bridge programs. Furthermore, the multidimensional problems that emerge from technological advancements as they shift employment trends, impact quality of life, challenge public health, test community resilience, and beg questions about personhood, identity, and equity require contributions of the arts, humanities, and social sciences.

Funders increasingly prioritize community engagement and partnership that require expertise from the arts and humanities to ensure broader impacts and equity in how insights, innovation, and findings are used. Indeed, increasing numbers of federal funding opportunities require and encourage interdisciplinarity, community participation, and a clear positive and direct impact on communities. Responding to governmental priorities will require engaging the close relationships forged by the arts, humanities, and social sciences with community partners such as schools, museums, and other stakeholders.

Dynamics in the state of Texas also impact the research landscape. Although state funding may never increase contributions to public university budgets, Texas still invests in research to expand the state economy, support industry, and provide a highly qualified workforce. Research universities will be integral in growing the state's research capacity to create new knowledge, develop a highly skilled workforce, deliver world-class education, and increase economic development. For example, the Governor has assembled a National Semiconductor Task Force bringing together stakeholders from industry, higher education, and the community to attract semiconductor investments into the state.

Current Events

Global crises, shifting national security needs such as the CHIPs act, and grand challenges such as pandemics and climate change continue to drive research priorities. On one hand, crises can slow or halt research and creative activity significantly. On the other hand, they can inspire innovation in research collaboration and methodology. Research and creative activity persisted thanks to digital technology and creative thinking. Universities instituted new strategies to mitigate the long-term impact of disruptions. The pandemic foregrounded the importance of supporting and enhancing mental health, human connection, community resilience, public health, science education and communication, human factors, and fast production of technologies such as vaccines. Smart technology, sustainability, water resources, climate change, global warming, and environmental crises call for multidisciplinary teams to rise to the challenge.

Status

Texas State has made some progress in addressing these external factors, but the university still has room for growth. Fortunately, Texas State proposals have enjoyed success aligning with federal funding initiatives. As a result, approximately 80 percent of the university's research expenditure comes from federal funding agencies. Texas State has several sponsored programs in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. Furthermore, we have a few awards over $1 million. However, targeting and winning more awards worth several millions of dollars across multiple years will increase our research footprint and ensure future research growth. The Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP) will

expand its research development strategy to accomplish this goal.

There is also room to improve the conversion rate from internal grant program submissions to external grant applications, as well as improve the quality of grants and thereby the success rate of external grant submissions. In the past four years, about 20 percent of Texas State faculty have submitted external grant applications. ORSP has collaborated with Faculty Development to offer workshops and programming that encourages faculty to pursue external funding, but there are additional strategies of enhanced research development such as cohorts and mentorship to increase grant activity.

Texas State has emerging strengths in public-private partnerships. Initiatives such as Connected Infrastructure for Education, Demonstration, and Applied Research (CIEDAR), STAR Park, JSC Engineering & Technical Support (JETS), Materials Application Research Center (MARC), and partnership with the MITRE Corporation are opening doors to form longstanding, productive relationships with industry, local and state governments, and businesses. These partnerships often require a different kind of agility and adaptation for research activities. The timelines are often shorter, the turnaround is often faster, and the projects are contingent on community and industry needs. Texas State must use best practices for accommodating and adapting more traditionally configured research agendas to meet industry and community needs.

Texas State has grown in research and development (R&D) expenditure consistently for the past 15 years. Federal funding comprises about 80 percent of R&D expenditures at Texas State, which is comparable to other research institutions. However, most of the annual federal R&D funding is comprised of funding from certain federal departments and agencies, including the Department of Defense (DOD), Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS, including the National Institutes of Health [NIH]), Department of Energy (DOE), National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), National Science Foundation (NSF), Department of Agriculture (USDA), Department of Commerce (DOC), and Department of Transportation (USDOT). Texas

State's strengths lie in materials science, environmental studies, public safety, translational health, education, and human expression. Expanding our strengths in life sciences research will also improve success with funding from the National Institutes of Health. The emergence of data science overlapping many disciplines and industries also calls for a concerted and unified research strategy at Texas State, including intentional hiring and program development. Diversity and multidisciplinary also open opportunities for future funding success. Texas State qualifies for many federal funding opportunities set aside for HSIs. Since becoming an HSI in 2011, we have received $58.7 million in HSI-related external funding.

Research administration must grow in tandem with the expansion of our research enterprise. Faculty will need more support across the span of pre- and post-award activities. Failing to do so will hamper progress toward achieving the Carnegie Classification of research university with highest research activity status and our bid for eligibility for the State of Texas National Research University Fund (NRUF). The two distinctions are different. Doctoral graduation rates and postdoctoral activity must increase to improve Carnegie Classifications. NRUF eligibility requires meeting two mandatory criteria (including emerging research university designation and at least $45 million in restricted research expenditures for two consecutive fiscal years) and four out of five additional criteria (including a $400 million endowment for two consecutive years, designated membership in organizations providing institutional recognition of research capabilities and scholarly attainment such as the Association of Research Libraries, a freshman class of high academic achievement, high quality faculty who earn NRUF-eligible faculty distinctions, and high-quality graduate education).

Growth will require streamlining processes for collaboration across colleges and disciplines and developing additional policies and procedures for research-related services such as purchasing, hiring, and information technology. Texas State continues to improve its technological and facilities infrastructure and raise its research profile. But the fast pace of advancements and increasing competition to recruit highly sought-after faculty, staff, and students will require concerted and multi-

divisional efforts to support the research enterprise. An active research ecosystem can serve to help attract the best and brightest faculty, staff, and students; enrich learning experiences; and engage community and industry partners.

Implications

~ Texas State must remain agile and responsive to meet challenges and opportunities. We must streamline the process of engaging in research and reduce the administrative burden placed on the researchers. We must also provide research-active faculty with additional time to carry out research efforts while holding faculty accountable for increasing outputs. Failure to do so will decrease our competitiveness in winning research awards; recruiting top-notch students, staff, and faculty; generating revenue; and relevance. Without deliberate plans for advancing discovery, innovation, creativity, and research, we will lose valuable engagement opportunities for students, industry, and community partners.

~Major priorities must include interdisciplinary teams, multimillion-dollar awards, and community and industry participatory applied research. Furthermore, policies and procedures must adapt to enable fulfilment of these priorities.

~ Expand multiyear, multimillion dollar opportunities for discovery, innovation, creativity, and research at Texas State to advance our bid for Carnegie One Classification and eligibility for the National Research University Fund. Both require increased intensity of research activity.

~ Administrative response strategies might include collaborating with existing programs, departments, and colleges to support doctoral and post-doctoral success; and facilitating research transactions between university divisions; promoting university centers and their research activities and collaborations; and expanding and streamlining existing research-related processes and services.

~ Faculty-focused response strategies might include recruiting and retaining highly productive faculty with competitive start up packages; offering more faculty development for research, scholarship, and creative activity; incentivizing research activity with acknowledgment and resources; investing in facilities and infrastructure to enable world class research capacity; and increasing strategic investments from research accelerators and internal

funding mechanisms to help seed pilot projects with potential for external funding.

~ Highly active research universities provide students with active learning, high-impact learning opportunities with innovative science, and knowledge formation. Increasing research expenditures and including more student engagement, doctoral student recruitment, and post-doctoral appointments will expand these opportunities; decreasing them will have the opposite effect. If Texas State is not proactive in preparing students with research fluency and competency, our students will not be competitive in the job market. Texas State must accelerate and prioritize research to attract the best faculty, staff, and students.

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INCLUSION AND COLLABORATION
Establishing Connections and a Culture of Belonging

Post-secondary institutions across the nation continue the pursuit to create meaningful experiences and connections for diverse university communities with the goal of establishing a sense of belonging. An important part of this pursuit is the implementation of initiatives that support and promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and access (DEIA). This can be achieved by providing diverse and inclusive opportunities and experiences that encourage engagement; elevate the importance of a shared, holistic commitment to inclusion, equity, and accessibility; and ensure that all communities members know they belong.

Overview

In the midst of the last strategic planning cycle, Texas State University and the nation experienced the effects of a perfect storm – a global pandemic, an economic downturn, and a national reckoning of social and racial inequality. Texas State has not only weathered this storm but emerged with a stronger commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) for faculty, staff, and students.

The next strategic planning cycle for 2023-2029 will be crucial in keeping up the momentum and moving forward with this renewed sense of urgency to ensure that all feel welcomed and valued in their authentic identities as a member of our Texas State community. It will be important for Texas State community members, specifically contributors to each respective strategic plan, to look for ways in which each unit can meaningfully contribute initiatives to the collective effort and commitment to diversity, inclusion, and collaboration. In essence it is important that we focus on creating experiences and opportunities that increase DEIA awareness, celebrate identity, and encourage academic achievement particularly for historically underrepresented groups. We must also continue to create opportunities and initiatives that are

integrated and embedded in all we do at Texas State and not simply as an add on to what we do.

Current Events – Considering that Texas State does not exist in a vacuum, it is important to contextualize historical and current events occurring around the world, nationally, and on our Texas State's doorstep. Toward the end of 2016 and through 2019, we as a nation experienced and witnessed an increase in hate crimes, white supremacist propaganda on college campuses, mass shootings, hazing-related student deaths, and the uncertainty around the future of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. These events and social unrest, specifically following the tragedy of George Floyd's murder in 2020 underscored the inequities that persist in the United States. This was our call to a renewed commitment and introspection at the institutional and individual level regarding our contributions to inclusion. Though difficult, this type of honest reflection can create a positive and meaningful movement toward impactful change. It can also make a true difference in the lives of our university community, and in many cases, establish a legacy of sustainable inclusion.

This brief will highlight ways Texas State can reemerge with a renewed commitment to DEIA though the implementation of innovative programming, activities, events, and collaborations. Inclusive practices are also introduced such as those used in universal design that effectively integrates inclusion in all practices. Examples include recruitment and outreach, student services, academic settings, libraries, admissions offices, registration, advising, career services, tutoring and learning centers, as well as student organizations and employment.

Status

DEIA was added as one of the university's five institutional priorities in the 2023-2029 strategic planning process.

Dialogue and Listening Opportunities

Texas State University began to take a hard look at its responses to constituent's concerns regarding DEIA awareness among faculty and staff and institutional accountability to marginalized communities. It is imperative to continue this self-reflection to dispel inequities and contribute to an inclusive community.

Beginning January 2021, over 100 students, staff, and faculty, including the president and all President's Cabinet members, engaged first in individual, then in integrated, dialogue sessions. These conversations focused on racial injustice and restorative justice with the goal of producing a report that reflected the interests, concerns, and voices of our Texas State community. The resulting report provided a framework to build and maintain equitable relationships across the university. Although these activities can be seen as strides, it is imperative to keep the momentum for there is still much to be done. Texas State must continue to provide opportunities to celebrate its diversity and promote inclusion.

As an institution we made deliberate decisions regarding organizational infrastructure so DEIA efforts would become more informed, coordinated, and collaborative. Inclusive Excellence became a stand-alone division in June 2022 with an inaugural Vice President for Inclusive Excellence. The creation of this new division elevates the importance of inclusion and supports institutional commitment to creating a place where all identities experience a sense of belonging. However, implementing DEIA is a collective institutional responsibility. Although the establishment of this division is important, it should not detract from inclusion work across Texas State by all units.

In addition to this organizational restructuring, Texas State's leadership began this time of self-reflection by working with key constituent groups to hold listening-sessions with students, faculty, and staff of color. A university-wide Day of Reflection and Solidarity was held to recognize and acknowledge the challenges, grief, and struggles the community was collectively experiencing. In addition, two town halls were held to facilitate important conversations about race, transgenerational trauma, justice, and law enforcement. Providing these types of opportunities remains important so the Texas State community can continue to engage in events and activities that allow for diverse "voices" to be heard.

Demographic Diversity

Texas State has demonstrated success in diversifying our student body which currently closely mirrors Texas' state demographics. Data from the 2020 Texas census shows the state's racial profile reflects 39.3 percent Hispanic, 12.2 percent Black, and 5.4 percent Asian. Similarly, Texas State's 2021 student body is 39.7 percent Hispanic, 11.2 percent Black, and 2.6 percent Asian. This intentional initiative to diversify the Texas State community was, in part, a result of achieving HSI Status in 2010. Diversification was also, in part, a result of strategically implementing initiatives that celebrate diverse perspectives and honor persons from historically marginalized communities as evident in the renaming of streets and buildings.

Although these initiatives were important in demonstrating Texas State's commitment to supporting a diverse university community, they fall short when full inclusion is the goal. Texas State as a community must work to continue this trajectory toward full inclusion. These inclusive practices would positively impact retention, persistence, and completion for our students and would provide a thriving community for our Texas State employees.

Student Profile

It is important for Texas State to understand the diversity of our students. Currently, student profiles span several generations and predominantly consists of Millennials and Generation Z. Cultural identity and self-identification is important to this cohort of students. Nationally they are more racially and ethnically diverse than any previous cohort, with one in four members of Generation Z self-identifying as Hispanic. They discuss intersectional identities comfortably and find activism essential to their university experience. They are socially conscious and interested in social and environmental justice. Further, they expect faculty and staff who engage with them to rise to their

level of consciousness. These students embrace gender neutrality, are comfortable with using gender-neutral pronouns, and are digitally savvy. They look for ways to not only express their collective cultures but also their individual and intersectional identities. Some self-identify as first generation; DACA recipients; veterans; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, and asexual/agender (LGBTQIA); and international students. They use their influence and platform comfortably to advocate for a society where everyone can feel connected and experience a sense of belonging.

As students continue to be comfortable in exploring DEIA, they will use opportunities to demonstrate their increased level of consciousness. It will be important for Texas State to recognize and respect these students. The university must also find ways to support this level of cultural relevancy, identity development, and socially consciousness of students, faculty, and staff.

Institutional Commitment to DEIA

Demonstrating its commitment to DEIA, Texas State implemented a range of diversity training and coursework approved by the President's Cabinet for faculty, staff, and executive officers. Opportunities such as these will continue to be available to all faculty and staff including the newly established diversity certification program called the Bobcat J.E.D.I. (Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) Program. It is especially important for all faculty and staff to create and utilize programs that support a sustainable inclusive university community.

The following institutional highlights serve as a foundation for future initiatives.

- Texas State achieved Hispanic Serving Institute (HSI) status in 2010, a goal achieved two years ahead of the projected timeline reflected in the Texas State University 2004-2009 University Plan. This critical designation unlocked more than $53 million in HSI/MSI targeted grants and program. Texas State needs to find ways to effectively tell our HSI story while leveraging this major accomplishment for future grants and programs.
- Two new residence halls (Angelina and San Gabriel) on the San Marcos Campus and two streets on the Round Rock Campus were re-

named after distinguished Texas State members from the Black and Hispanic communities. It will be important to continue this momentum by supporting additional renaming opportunities and supporting initiatives to increase the number of physical markers that honor persons from marginalized and underrepresented communities.
- Recent initiatives such as the establishment of the Texas State Monarch Center for Immigrant Students, the LGBTQIA Advisory and Resource Network, and the Texas State Inclusive Excellence Showcase add to the many ways inclusion is being explored by students, faculty, and staff. Texas State must continue to find ways to highlight innovative DEIA programs and activities that reinforce institutional commitment to inclusion.
- Texas State sought opportunities to create greater accountability and engagement. It convened a group of over 100 cohort members to develop a report now known as the "Themes and Recommended Strategies to Building Equitable Relationships across Texas State University." The Council on Inclusive Excellence served an essential role in this document by identifying themes and recommending strategies to be addressed by the President's Cabinet. This report, endorsed by the Council for Inclusive Excellence, opens the door for divisional leadership to use the document to inform their planning. This trajectory towards accountability will be essential in building trust and addressing key concerns from university students, faculty, and staff.

Implications

Demonstrating our commitment to a sustainable inclusive university community where everyone can experience connections and belonging requires an intentional trajectory of inclusive excellence practices.

~Highlighting Texas State University's initiatives related to our Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) status will allow for a centralized approach to telling our Latino student success story.
~Texas State must employ a DEIA framework and best practices that can be embraced and used by university constituents in creating, coordinating, and implementing strategic DEIA initiatives. One example is the use of universal design, a framework

that involves an inclusive approach to implementing DEIA. It demonstrates an efficient method in addressing ways inclusion can be integrated and incorporated in many areas across an institution. Universal design can be used to reinforce inclusive practices in many areas including curriculum, student services, institutional technology, campus climate, assessment, and practices of engagement with Texas State community members (Bass, 2020 and Burgstahler, 2021). In addition, universal design goes beyond accessible design for people with disabilities to make all aspects of the educational experience more inclusive for students, staff, instructors, administrators, and visitors with a variety of characteristics, including those related to gender, race and ethnicity, age, stature, disability, and learning preference.

~Utilizing the "Themes and Recommended Strategies to Building Equitable Relationships across Texas State University" report as a guide will be crucial in building trust with our Texas State community. It also opens the door for divisional leadership to use the document to inform their planning.

~ It will be important for Texas State to be prepared to respond in a timely manner to communication and inquiries particularly those on social media. As current events related to social injustice unfold on the world stage, Texas State needs to ensure that our responses are informed, engaging, and culturally relevant.

~Texas State should incorporate ways to receive feedback and use this data to implement productive change. Findings from the previous and future campus climate surveys may inspire change and encourage additional forms of feedback.

~While Texas State continues to create, coordinate, and implement DEIA programming, we must find ways to spotlight inclusion initiatives such as in the Texas State Inclusive Excellence Showcase to highlight faculty research related to inclusion.

~Texas State must provide opportunities to increase awareness related to marginalization. Examples could include the use of professional development opportunities, DEIA courses, and group activities and events at the division, college, and department level.

~Funding should be secured to address the need for physical markers across both campuses that honor the contributions of individuals from marginalized communities as a continued commitment to diversity and inclusion.

~Texas State needs to diversify leadership at all levels to ensure that diverse perspectives are included in all aspects of decision-making.
~Demands for recruitment and retention of diverse talent will require a concerted effort to fund and conduct innovative outreach to attract individuals with diverse perspectives.
~Developing a Texas State research environment steeped in DEIA best practices ensures not only more robust research advances, but also impacts the future social and economic mobility of students engaged in the research.

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INFRASTRUCTURE AND RESOURCES

Attaining our strategic goals relies on sufficient resources and reliable infrastructure

While many traits and activities are highly visible to the university community, others may be just as important but much less apparent. Such is the case with many aspects of the university's infrastructure and resource base.

Overview

This background brief provides succinct summaries of infrastructure and resource environmental factors to keep in mind as we begin the strategic planning process for 2023-2029.

This planning cycle begins during a time of global economic uncertainty in the wake of three years of a pandemic and an American economy entering a period of recession and historic inflation. Our plans should assume resources will continue to be constrained and our longstanding skill at doing more with less will need to continue. Given this context, we need to be more strategically focused than ever on providing a student-centered experience, a world-class education, and groundbreaking research while crafting our goals.

This document highlights specific issues for consideration in five areas having a material impact on our future strategic planning. Those areas are Financial Resources, Employee Hiring and Retention, Physical Infrastructure, Technology Resources, and Information.

Status

Financial Resources

The financial outlook for the coming six years is far from certain, but much is known or can be expected and should be incorporated in our planning. The economic resources of college-bound Texas students will decline over the coming decade, and state funding of higher education will continue to shrink as a percentage of the revenue necessary to run the university, as it has for the past two decades. Added to this is the fact that the value of what we provide is being actively challenged by the national conversation questioning whether a college degree is worth the expense, despite volumes of data clearly demonstrating the value. The convergence of these factors places the university in a challenging position in the coming years requiring us to carefully balance student affordability and the value of higher education with revenue generation.

Financial Condition – Texas State University enters our next strategic planning cycle with a strong financial foundation but faces significant headwinds. We have an exceptionally strong balance sheet and cash reserves. However, after five consecutive years of no growth in our enrollment, there is virtually no room in the annual budget for any recurring expense increase such as raises for employees or funding new, ongoing programs or activities.

Growing Enrollment – Student enrollment is the primary driver of revenue at Texas State, whether directly from tuition and fees paid by students, external financial aid, or appropriated formula funding allocated based on our size. We must continue to grow our enrollment to remain financially strong and to meet the needs of the state of Texas. Luckily, the projected college-bound population for the state of Texas, taking into consideration net in-migration from other states, is not the problem it is in most other states. However, the growth rate is significantly slowing, and other states' universities are placing greater focus on recruiting Texas students. The net result is that we must prepare for more competition for students in the next planning cycle than we have seen in the past. We must remain competitive by promoting a compelling and differentiated value proposition and strengthening our brand as a university that

provides a high-quality, accessible, and affordable student experience and education.

Diversifying Revenue Streams – While we must remain focused on enrollment growth and modest increases to tuition and fees, diversification of our revenue streams will allow the university to be better protected from unforeseen declines in revenue. Diversification can take many forms, but chief among them are grants, auxiliary revenue sources, and entrepreneurial activities. Plans to create new or enhance existing alternative revenue streams will be viewed favorably in the coming planning cycle.

Understanding Profit and Loss – Universities play many roles in American society. In addition to teaching and research, they frequently play key roles in economic development; they provide services at the state, regional, and national levels; and they serve as cultural and community centers. In a resource-constrained environment, it is important to understand which of the many functions at the university are profitable and which we engage in for non-monetary reasons. Universities will always correctly choose to invest in some things that are not money-makers. It is essential, however, that those decisions are made from an informed position. We should make those kinds of decisions with all the correct information at our disposal.

To that end, our past practice of using an incremental budgeting approach will not serve us well in the long term. This approach to budgeting assumes everything you have done in the past should continue with no rigor or effort devoted to assessing its continuing value. Incremental budgeting focuses almost entirely on allocating new revenue to new activities or needs. Obviously, this model breaks down when there is little or no new revenue. Most universities now use more advanced forms of budgeting, such as Performance-Based budgeting, Responsibility Center Management, Activity-Based budgeting, or Zero-Based budgets that provide incentives and rewards for revenue generation and cost efficiencies. Regardless of which budget model we decide to employ at Texas State in the future, understanding these alternative budget models will serve our leaders well as we develop our strategic plan for the next six years.

Employee Hiring and Retention
Historically, Texas State University has had strong employee retention and been able to successfully attract large applicant pools containing many highly qualified candidates. As we plan for the next six years, both of these historical strengths are being challenged, and we expect both to continue to be a challenge given the strength of the Central Texas economy. The pandemic also has ongoing impacts on the job economy. As the nation emerges from operating under pandemic restrictions, a significant portion of the workforce, nearly 4 million people per month since mid-2021, voluntarily terminated employment, triggering what has been dubbed "The Great Resignation" that has seen an 11 percent reduction in the total higher education workforce across the country. These factors combine to indicate we need to place more effort than ever toward keeping the good employees we have and attracting new talent in a highly competitive marketplace.

We Recruit Staff Locally – Texas State has a positive reputation locally as a good employer. This is important since most of our staff candidate applications come from within the Austin Metropolitan Statistical Area. However, when recruiting faculty and leadership talent, we have much weaker national employer brand recognition, and we have not incorporated employment as part of our marketing and branding campaigns. Sourcing qualified candidates for positions from outside of the state of Texas, where the university's employer brand recognition is low, continues to pose a challenge as compensation becomes even more important in the absence of a strong reputation as a great place to work. With over two-thirds of our staff positions paid below their market benchmark, it comes as no surprise that only 37 percent of all candidates, faculty and staff combined, were hired from outside the 30-mile area surrounding Texas State's San Marcos campus where our good reputation has more of an impact, and only 15 percent came from outside of the state of Texas. This is important if we plan to do more hiring for remote work where local market challenges with expensive housing, for example, will not be as much of a factor.

The Central Texas Housing Market – Hays county was officially the fastest growing county over 50,000 people in the entire country in the most

recent decennial census, and Williamson County, home of Round Rock, is not far behind. The inventory of homes has not kept pace with this population growth. This gap in demand versus available housing units has driven up the cost of housing. Area median home prices for San Marcos have risen $139,000 or almost 60 percent in just the past few years, with the current median price being $378,000. At this price, home ownership is out of reach for many Texas State staff employees, who earn a median annual salary of $59,431. In the face of the booming Central Texas economy and hyperinflation in the housing market, employee wages continue to climb rapidly at most area employers. This puts additional pressure on the university to keep up with the local market to remain an employer of choice.

It's a Job Seeker's Market – Over the course of the last few years, the hiring dynamic has shifted from an employer's job market to an employee's job market. Applicants can demand higher pay and more flexible working conditions, and it is increasingly difficult to attract qualified candidates. The recruitment challenges are primarily due to the lack of available, qualified labor to fill the number of vacant positions in the marketplace. Nationally, this has created a tight labor market, resulting in increased wage inflation. With staff in particular, Texas State has historically taken a passive approach to employee recruitment, relying on public and online job postings and our good local reputation. This approach is proving less effective in our current historically tight labor market which has led to measurably smaller staff applicant pools. In just the past two years, the number of staff position searches closed with no hire increased by 65 percent.

Retention is Key – Texas State has historically enjoyed a stable staff employee turnover rate of around 12 percent, which is similar to our peers. In 2021, however, the university's turnover rate increased to 15 percent. The top three reasons employees state for leaving based on exit interview feedback collected over the past 12 months are: 1. Accepted a higher-level or higher-paid position; 2. Job dissatisfaction; and 3. Lack of remote work options.

Because top-quality talent is increasingly hard to find, all employers have increased their focus on retention efforts. There are a wide range of strategies employed which include increasing benefit offerings, building a stronger workplace culture, and expanding flexible work opportunities. Employees expect employers to take a holistic and personalized approach to well-being, and provide broad-spectrum benefits that meet their physical, social, financial, career, and community needs. As we emerge from the pandemic, mental health issues are on the rise which has an impact on the workforce, whether direct or indirect.

Employees are increasingly basing their decisions to work for an employer based on value alignment, which is a significant part of the workplace culture. A recent survey found employee/employer values alignment is so important that about half of workers say they would quit their job, and only about a quarter would accept one if company values are not consistent with their personal values. As such, employers with strong workplace cultures are better positioned to retain employees and are experiencing comparatively better retention rates in the tight labor market.

Flexibility, including hybrid and remote work options for many knowledge workers has moved from a 'nice to have' to a 'must have' for select professions in this economy, and it has become possible for other groups who may have never considered it so in the past. Savvy employers have begun to move away from the trend of creating immersive and evocative workplaces to attract employees, focusing instead on marketing lifestyle flexibility to meet changing workforce demands. Employers not offering flexibility are seeing increased turnover as employees gravitate to those providing it as part of their employee value proposition.

Physical Infrastructure
A Mix of Old and New – Texas State University manages 8.7 million gross square feet of facilities along with supporting utility production and distribution infrastructure, roadways, parking lots, and grounds stretching across central Texas. A combination of focused facility investment and disciplined management of space inventory has mitigated aging buildings and infrastructure risk while supporting our extremely high levels of use compared to peers. Moving forward, Texas State

will need to manage the growing risk associated with aging building systems and infrastructure while simultaneously creating adaptable spaces to support a growing student enrollment and research enterprise. This requires focused strategic capital planning to develop projects that extend building system life, balanced against interior renovations. Larger investments should be strategically applied, integrating new construction, comprehensive renovations, and demolition.

Texas State's facilities portfolio includes 261 buildings stretching back to the early 20th century. University buildings can be categorized into three generations; pre-war (built before 1951 and characterized as "durable" construction), post-war (built 1951-1990 and characterized by lower quality construction requiring frequent repairs), and complex (post-1990 and characterized as technically complex, higher quality, cost-intensive). The largest portion of Texas State's facilities square footage (46%) is complex. In addition to the age groupings, buildings can be categorized based on their effective age considering renovation and modernization. Using this effective age methodology, 54 percent of Texas State's inventory is classified as highest or higher risk. While still creating a challenge moving forward, the 54 percent is the result of effective renovation and is better than the national university average of 66 percent in these categories.

Deferred maintenance and aging infrastructure create a significant risk to Texas State in relation to maintaining adequate education and research space to meet institutional priorities. Texas State currently projects a 10-year campus need of $538.1 million in facilities and campus infrastructure requirements, not including athletics, housing, dining, or other auxiliaries, of which $227.5M is already past due. This equates to $144 per Gross Square Foot (GSF), which exceeds the national average of $106/GSF. Capital investment models recommend a recurring annual investment of $20.7M be made into existing Texas State spaces just to maintain overall space conditions and systems with additional one-time funding to address the accumulated backlog repair and modernization requirements.

We are Leaders in Density – One of Texas State's strengths has been its disciplined management of space. As a result, campus density (users/GSF) and classroom/laboratory utilization rates are the best amongst our peer institutions. Texas State averages over 500 students, staff, and students per 100,000 GSF compared to a peer average of less than 400 users per 100,000 GSF. Classroom utilization rates averaged 37 hours per week with an average fill rate of 71 percent. Laboratory utilization rates averaged 38 hours per week with an average fill rate of 76 percent. These are all very high rates compared to peers. However, despite these comparatively high classroom and laboratory utilization rates, the university has low utilization during evenings, Fridays, and on weekends, which presents opportunity for increased use. This higher density use leads to additional wear and tear on the facilities requiring more frequent renewals and difficulty in scheduling space for technology and interior renewals.

The Importance of Dedicated Student Spaces – Many of the physical spaces supporting student affairs were designed and constructed with a smaller student population in mind. For example, the Student Health Center and Counseling Services were designed when Texas State had 10,000 fewer students than it does today. Given the increasing focus on mental health and wellness, these spaces are in higher demand than ever before. Facing similar space constraints, the Department of Housing and Residential Life can provide on-campus housing for 6,853 students. With a mandatory requirement for students to live on campus as freshmen, and an expected freshman class size of more than 7,000 in the fall of 2022, Texas State faces the need to either build more housing or revisit the live-on campus requirement.

Features to consider in future spaces should include integrated health and wellness spaces that support and promote cooperation amongst disparate departments across divisions. Enrollment growth will also require the development of more spaces where student groups can collaborate and gather. Over recent years, many shared spaces in buildings that previously accommodated these uses have been captured to create more office, research, and teaching space. For the sake of our future alumni, master planning should develop spaces and pathways that promote pride, traditions, and involvement in the university community.

Technology Resources
Security and Compliance Become More Onerous –
Information security and compliance will assume an increasingly important role over the coming six years. From an information security standpoint, Texas State University enjoys an effective security posture and is protected to an above average degree. However, some of our infrastructure will need to be replaced with newer, more capable components. Additionally, it will become less appealing for us to continue with some of our homegrown tools and processes as cloud-based alternatives are much more feature-rich and flexible. This trend should be balanced with other alternatives: Robotic Process Automation (RPA) and Low-code applications (LCA), which are both used to rapidly deploy custom applications with minimized hand coding to improve workforce efficiency. These solutions are gaining momentum and maturity in the workplace.

As our research footprint grows, Texas State will become an attractive target of more sophisticated cyber adversaries including advanced persistent threat (APT) actors supported by nation states. As we have seen with recent global-scale cyber incidents, the information technology supply chain will become a common target of cyber threat actors. Incidents related to the supply chain will have wide-reaching impacts to organizations including those in higher education (e.g., SolarWinds). Enhanced technology and governance mechanisms will be vital to ensure the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of our information resources in the face of advanced threats targeting research data and the global technology supply chain.

In terms of compliance, we will see increased emphasis on ensuring our risk management, Disaster Recovery and Continuity of Operations Plans are in place and are widely understood. These have all been recently tested through the pandemic and the 2020 winter storm. Additionally, the growing number and scope of federal, state, and local laws and policies we must adhere to will become more onerous and expensive to implement and maintain; examples include NIST SP 800-171 and TX-RAMP.

Accessibility will continue to play a significant role in the acquisition, development, and support of all technology resources as the issue of equity and inclusion will continue to be prominent. While the institution is in a very good position now, every few years the requirements tighten and become more difficult to meet. Selection of technologies meeting our accessibility standards will become more of an issue, and we will rely less on any exceptions. Nevertheless, the tension between speed of implementation and agility will exert constant pressure on our security and accessibility review processes and requirements.

Demand for Bandwidth, New Software, and Processing Capacity Increases – We anticipate continued growth in network bandwidth requirements at all campuses and externally, encompassing wired and wireless equipment replacements, cellular 5G integration, and Wide Area Network connectivity to the internet and internet2. The costs of these resources have been steadily increasing, and the expectation is their costs will continue to rise, making implementations and replacements more expensive.

Improving our efficiency will be important to our workforce, so we need to train in the effective and efficient use of technology to complete work. This will aid in keeping our administrative costs down. Additionally, we will need to spend more effort helping faculty and staff utilize technologies we own, such as Microsoft 365.

Classroom technologies demand great attention since our core mission is education. We should expect to see newer classroom cameras and enhanced audio that also caters to remote participants in Hybrid-Flex or streaming scenarios. We will also see new overlays on top of our web conferencing tools tailored for online, collaborative, synchronous teaching and learning.

The cost of technology and its support will continue to be a challenge for the university. There is already a type of technology long-term debt payment associated with the annual recurring costs of many software products, some of which are not used to their full potential or even used much at all. We have many software licenses, some with overlapping capability. Whereas in the past we saw escalation factors of 2 or 3 percent, we now see factors as much as 20 percent per year, which is unsustainable in the long term. Additionally, with so many licenses, just supporting the purchasing

process, security reviews, ADA reviews, and technical support will be an issue.

Information

Information is core to all university operations. Over the coming decade, the amount of information collected and utilized will continue to grow. Proper data management, including its quality, security, and availability, will become increasingly important. Information silos will need to be eliminated to connect information and produce actionable insights across campus.

Proper use of information requires it to be timely, accurate, accessible, and understandable. Data integrity will play a critical role as chatbots, dashboards, and artificial intelligence engines make use of the information for consumers.

Comprehensive data and analytics governance at all levels will be key to improving student success, enhancing scholarly productivity, advancing academic programs, and promoting equity.

Information security and regulatory compliance will become increasingly complicated. There is a push and pull between requiring data about the institution and students to be more available while ensuring individual privacy. The security and compliance efforts needed to balance the competing goals of availability and privacy will be significant.

Implications

The factors mentioned above touch only briefly on the context in which the next six-year university plan is to be created. This context provides direct implications to keep in mind while developing plans.

~Enrollment is the university's primary funding source and must grow.
~Modest annual tuition and fee increases are crucial to offset inflation.
~Funding for new programs, positions, and activities will continue to be limited. New expenditures should target revenue generation opportunities to help offset their cost. Accountability for significant expenditures must be enforced.
~While plans for growing enrollment are often targeted in select programs, we must recognize

that, without growth in overall paid semester credit hour enrollment as a university, there is no new revenue.
~While Texas State moves closer to Research One Carnegie status in a resource constrained environment, the purely incremental approach we have always followed for university budgeting will not continue to serve the university well. Rather, more sophisticated models should be explored.
~Recruiting new employees will continue to be challenging, and we must take every action possible with our limited funding to make Texas State an employer of choice. This challenge demands we consistently seek ways to be more efficient and train and motivate our staff to perform at a high level.
~Funding constraints also demand that any reduction to faculty teaching load to support research be mitigated with metrics demonstrating research productivity.
~Alternative academic funding models that support new lines of revenue generation and resource reallocation must be explored.
~Similarly, any investment in making graduate student enrollment more attractive must be met with increased expectations for graduate teaching and research productivity, or increased reliance on grant funding for graduate student incentives.
~Increasing complexity and need for information connectedness and availability, combined with increasing demands for information security, will necessitate more mature and formal information and technology governance and ownership models.
~Admitting larger first-year student cohorts will require more residential and student-serving facilities should the university choose to continue requiring all first-year students to live on campus.
~The university must remain focused on sufficiently funding facilities maintenance and capital renewal to remain attractive to students and employees, and to provide the reliability critical to a large research university.
~Demands for future space must be measured against future hybrid, flexible, and remote teaching and working opportunities.
~Future spaces and information systems must embrace universal design.
~ A clear and distinctive strategic plan for the future of the Round Rock campus that capitalizes on its uniqueness must be prioritized
~With the national average price for a gallon of gasoline surpassing $5 per gallon in June 2022 and

nearly 1,000 primarily gasoline-powered vehicles in the university's fleet, alternative fuels and charging stations must be considered.

Further Reading

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