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April 27, 2011

### **Texas Could Offer a Stripped-Down Degree for Just \$10,000, Commissioner Says**

*By Katherine Mangan*

Austin, Tex.

Gov. Rick Perry's call for Texas universities to develop a four-year baccalaureate degree that costs no more than \$10,000 isn't as far-fetched as it seems, the state's commissioner of higher education said on Wednesday after a staff member of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board presented preliminary strategies for developing a stripped-down degree.

Those strategies, which the commissioner said the coordinating board plans to pursue aggressively, could involve statewide online courses, more opportunities for students to spend their first two years in community colleges, and accelerated and self-paced course formats.

Key to any plan would be faculty support and rigorous standards.

In his State of the State address, in February, the Republican governor urged public college and university leaders to come up with "a bold, Texas-style solution" to the challenge of rising higher-education costs by developing bachelor's degrees that cost no more than \$10,000 for four years of tuition, fees, and textbooks.

The low-cost programs should eventually account for at least 10 percent of degrees conferred, Mr. Perry said.

Skeptics have questioned whether that is possible, or even desirable.

The chair of the Faculty Council at the University of Texas at Austin remains unconvinced.

"I can't imagine we could deliver the same quality of education that we currently do here at the University of Texas at such a price point," Dean P. Neikirk, a professor of electrical and computer engineering, said in an interview on Wednesday. "I don't see how it could be done."

'This Isn't a Crazy Idea'

But Raymund A. Paredes, commissioner of higher education, said finding lower-cost strategies was crucial.

"Almost 50 percent of the students coming through the pipeline are low-income," he said, "and the current pattern of spiraling costs is going to make higher education inaccessible to them."

While the \$10,000 ceiling may be ambitious, "I hope we've established that this isn't a crazy idea," he added during a break in the meeting.

Mr. Paredes said the low-cost degrees would not be for everyone and would not replace existing degrees. "We're talking about making sure we have a range of options for young people so they can select a path to a baccalaureate that makes the most sense to them," he said. "We in Texas should embrace the challenge and become a national leader."

Average tuition and fees at a public university in Texas last year was \$6,483, for a four-year total \$25,932, according to the coordinating board. That doesn't account for annual tuition and fee increases. With books, the total would probably top \$30,000, the board members noted.

Students who spend their first two years at a community college before transferring to a university can, in some cases, complete four-year degrees for under \$10,000, according to the board. Expanding those "2 plus 2" models could save money.

Universities could also trim costs by teaming up to offer statewide online degree programs in fields that are in high demand, the board suggested. Online courses could also incorporate open-source lecture videos or textbooks developed at other universities.

Stronger student advising through social media and other methods would help students make more efficient use of their time, pass their courses, and graduate within four years, the board noted. Students would also graduate more quickly if universities created different course formats, including semester-long, six-week accelerated, and self-paced asynchronous courses that students could take throughout the year, said Van L. Davis, the program director for the coordinating board who presented the plan.

David Young, the governor's adviser in the state Office of Budget, Planning, and Policy, told the board the \$10,000 degree was a bold challenge.

"If we don't hit that dollar figure right on the mark," he said, "at least we can make progress."

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**mlsmmaemsa** 1 day ago

Isn't a stripped down bachelor's degree an associate's degree?

48 people liked this.



**tee\_bee** 5 hours ago

Exactly. I was just going to write "this would be a degree, but not a \_college\_ degree. I think you put it nicely. And I wonder about the employability of the graduates, and their (low) propensity for getting into any sort of graduate or professional school.

2 people liked this.



**davi2665** 23 hours ago

Great! Texas style degree for \$10,000. Sure to be a really solid foundation for a career. It sounds more like something else produced in profusion in cattle country.

26 people liked this.



**virtue\_is\_boring** 16 hours ago

Indeed, are they nuts or what? It is plain demeaning to our profession. My friend gastroenterologist would plain laugh at whoever suggests he wants to have a colonoscopy at 1/3 of its price. My lawyer's reaction would have been very similar. I think we need to subtly inform the public that \$10k degree would be vastly inferior to the regular one.

10 people liked this.

**robert\_wyatt** 6 hours ago

"\$10k degree would be vastly inferior to the regular one."

That would make it "a bold, Texas-style solution" as requested

7 people liked this.



**nacrاندell** 23 hours ago

1) "Students who spend their first two years at a community college before transferring to a university can, in some cases, complete four-year degrees for under \$10,000, according to the board. Expanding those "2 plus 2" models could save money."

This isn't new and many have taken advantage of this kind of transfer.

2) "Universities could also trim costs by teaming up to offer statewide online degree programs in fields that are in high demand, the board suggested. Online courses could also incorporate open-source lecture videos or textbooks developed at other universities."

And the other university could be Mumbai U?

3) Mr. Paredes said the low-cost degrees would not be for everyone and would not replace existing degrees. "We're talking about making sure we have a range of options for young people so they can select a path to a baccalaureate that makes the most sense to them," he said. "We in Texas should embrace the challenge and become a national leader."

Not for everyone? It sounds like a model to replace the current BA/BS system by outsourcing the teachers.

22 people liked this.



**neudy** 23 hours ago

"And the other university could be Mumbai U?"

The Tennessee Board of Regents has done this with their group of 2yr & 4 yr insitituions. It seems to be working - it is intended to help keep the costs of education down by offering online classes through professors at every TBR institution throughout the state.

Additionally, the State of Washington is creating a similar format.

"Not for everyone? It sounds like a model to replace the current BA/BS system by outsourcing the teachers."

Isn't that the model now? Look at what is going on in the education world - colleges hire adj's or grad students to take on a large bulk of classes.

This seems to be the wave of higher education - online teaching for everyone who wants it. I can't say I'm a fan of it but it does not replace every current program...

5 people liked this.



**uwstaff** 23 hours ago

"Stronger student advising through social media and other methods would help students make more efficient use of their time, pass their courses, and graduate within four years, the board noted."

Hilarious stuff.

22 people liked this.

**neudy** 23 hours ago

You should read this article then...

<http://chronicle.com/article/T...>

 **archman** 23 hours ago

"I hope we've established that this isn't a crazy idea"

The very first thing I did upon reading this was look up Raymund Parede's qualifications. I am shocked to find that he is (or was) an actual academic, and not some political crank pandering to the Texas governor.

So now the only thing that I think "we've established" is that Dr. Parede is crazy.

"Key to any plan would be faculty support and rigorous standards."

This is so completely delusional and insane a statement, I truly fear for Texas faculty. It doesn't even make any logical sense if analyzed for more than 10 seconds. How on earth does one get "rigorous standards" with "statewide, online courses", "lecture videos", and "accelerated, self-paced formats"?? Has this man had any contact with students or faculty in the last few decades? Read up on current trends in educational research? Broken down a college budget???

They are not drinking Kool-Aid in Austin, they are drinking liquid cocaine. They're so high they're suffering from oxygen deprivation. The really annoying thing is that no one relishes adversity more than a Texan. The more people poo-poo them, the more entrenched in their position they become. As a fellow texan I know all about the pitfalls of this behavior...

35 people liked this.

 **22185161** 5 hours ago

Mr. Paredes may be a former academic, but those of us who have or still do work in public higher education in Texas are well aware that his pandering skills are excellent. In other words, he's saying whatever the current regime wants in order to keep his job.

2 people liked this.

 **david\_brown** 23 hours ago

It would be easy to hit the \$10,000 mark for the total cost of a degree. The state legislature simply has to pay a higher proportion of the cost to educate a college student. Done! Why does anyone think this is a bold challenge?

61 people liked this.

 **archman** 23 hours ago

I vote you to be the next Texas Commissioner of Higher Education. You actually say things that are rational and make sense.

12 people liked this.

 **jracca** 23 hours ago

That doesn't make the cost 10,000, it makes the students share of the cost 10,000.

As I was reading the article I had the same idea, are we talking about a degree that cost 10,000 or where the student only had to pay 10,000? Big difference. A Total cost of 10,000 is probably not achievable in the US. Student cost of 10,000 probably is, use community colleges. That is a reasonable plan.

Even community colleges are subsidized, usually by the counties where they are located.

I think the community college transfer model makes more sense if you really want a shot at getting close to 10,000 for a BS/BA degree. Rather than re-creating the wheel, or doing something that might have questionable value in the marketplace.

19 people liked this.



**david\_brown** 23 hours ago

"Average tuition and fees at a public university in Texas last year was \$6,483, for a four-year total \$25,932, according to the coordinating board."

Given that the comparison is to a state-subsidized tuition rate and as you mentioned the community colleges are subsidized, I have to assume the \$10,000 target is what students would pay rather than the total cost.

2 people liked this.



**rowlett** 23 hours ago

The fundamental assumption in constructing the stripped-down, online degree program is that a college education is simply the accumulation of additional facts and some testing to verify one has learned those facts. What is missing is the collaborative, problem-solving methodology necessary in many disciplines of study (and interdisciplinary fields). On-line formats are not very good ones for the kind of discussion and interchange that real people use to solve real problems. In addition, solitary, on-line learning, or learning through looking at videos or books alone misses out on the power that group inquiry and peer tutoring brings to the equation. The most effective learning is a highly personal, social, and interactive experience. One of the highest-impact educational practices, undergraduate research, is probably too cost-prohibitive in the minimalist paradigm. Finally, there is a tacit (and incorrect) assumption, that there are no up-front or continuous development or administrative costs with conducting on-line learning. Learning materials don't write themselves, nor do students evaluate themselves, or answer all their own questions.

The likely result of all of this is to ensure that only wealthy students have access to a first-rate college education within a community of peer and faculty scholars, with rich opportunities for in-depth study afforded by faculty-student collaborative research. As an employer, I would be afraid that the 'minimalist' graduates perhaps know a lot of facts, but don't know how to DO anything. You can't learn everything from a book, online tutorial, and multiple-choice test.

39 people liked this.



**clearsight** 9 hours ago

Oh, that's right .. the "student," IS suppose to be able to get a job and actually do something after graduating. You mean, like actually apply materials .. hummmm???



**12073063** 3 hours ago

"What is missing is the collaborative, problem-solving methodology necessary in many disciplines of study (and interdisciplinary fields). On-line formats are not very good ones for the kind of discussion and interchange that real people use to solve real problems."

My husband works for a Fortune 100 company with offices located around the world. In his "real person" job solving "real problems" he spends 60-70% of his time engaged with his co-workers via the internet...so, yes you are spot on - let's not encourage students to learn how to engage with others using technology and other modern inventions - let's wait and let their future employers teach them these vital skills... BTW, we are engaging with each other and attempting to discuss/solve real world problems via the internet (on-line) here....

1 person liked this.

**11122741** 23 hours ago

educational rationing has begun.

12 people liked this.



**electronicmuse** 7 hours ago

Educational rationing has always been here.

2 people liked this.



**jeff\_winger** 23 hours ago

Yeah, I heard that Yale and Harvard and the rest of the Ivy schools are working on similar programs.

They're trying to make sure their graduates have a similar education to the one poor people can afford.

At least, that's what I heard.

9 people liked this.



**drewmer** 23 hours ago

Interesting that the "thinkers" of the world are not even willing to give something new a try. We seem to think it is possible for everyone to get a college education, it is possible for the state to find more funding, it is possible for everyone to have a great job etc but there is no way to make education more efficient and less expensive. Sad how easy we give up when it is our profession but how much we expect from others

18 people liked this.



**david\_brown** 23 hours ago

In the state of Washington, the cost to educate a student at a state university has been flat over the past two decades as measured in constant inflation-adjusted dollars. This has been achieved despite component costs (e.g. health insurance) that have substantially outstripped inflation. So yes, we have become more efficient. Rising tuition has been due to declining state support, not increases in the cost to educate students.

11 people liked this.



**clearsight** 9 hours ago

Yeah WA State .. yup, I live and teach here!

1 person liked this.



**neudy** 23 hours ago

When I read most of the posts on here - I think back to the Recording Industry Executives and how they thought the same thing. 'Nobody would listen to music free online...bla bla...those pundits are crazy to think that way.'

I worked in Finance for many years and stockbrokers thought the same thing - "nobody could buy stocks online for \$7 a trade...we charge them \$147 for a round trade now...how could that be."

Well - it all happened and I bet education is in for the same treat.

If you want to change it - professors better start putting up some money to the lobbyists. That is how healthcare and for profits companies do it :)

10 people liked this.



**dopefein** 16 hours ago

Neudy, if in fact you are right and education does become an online education mill, then that will spell the end of the university system and EVERYTHING that comes with it (and out of it). Bottom line: the end of the middle class, the end of American dominance in higher education, and then end of American dominance in research and innovation. So, if you do believe this will happen, I hope you are making plans for the America to come!

11 people liked this.



**clearsight** 9 hours ago

The concern, at least from my perspective is not that "there won't be students willing to take this academic option," but that this option is not the "equivalent" as presented in this article, of the current "full BA." You bet, there will always be some that will go for this rather than have nothing. My concern is the currently duplicity in presenting this current proposal as "substantially similar," to the "traditional BA." People deserve full disclosure (in plain English) about what they are actually getting with this "scaled down and accelerated" degree. With full disclosure, then folks have no surprises after they graduate, and there is congruency between what they actually have and what they thought they were getting and worked hard. Reputation and transferable knowledge and skills from the "scaled down" degrees when applied to job performance and acceptability for admissions to graduate training will be the two primary determinations about the "worth" of this education.

5 people liked this.



**jeff\_winger** 23 hours ago

I mean, obviously no one wants the wealthy to have a dramatically better education than middle class, working class, and poor people--when, that is, they manage to get an education past elementary school level.

8 people liked this.



**rpm13** 23 hours ago

On-line courses with "rigorous standards" might make getting a degree more convenient, but they would not do anything to make degrees less expensive. If you want to throw something together without "rigorous standards" there might be some savings. Doesn't anyone read the literature?

13 people liked this.



**electronicmuse** 7 hours ago

Yeah, online education is not the bargain-basement entity that is sometimes breathlessly ballyhooed.

4 people liked this.

**snachbar** 23 hours ago

Here's what can be done to keep tuition and fees close to \$10,000 over four years:

+ Give the community college math and language arts placement examinations in the tenth grade in place of the state test. Those students who score at grade level or better can go right into the introductory courses at the community college. Those students who score below grade level receive their remedial instruction in the high school where they are enrolled--and are brought to a level where they can take a different version of that test.

+ Those who go into the community college as early admittants receive tuition for up to 36 credits plus a transportation voucher, paid for by a combination of school district, county, state and private funds. These students take the classes at the community college or the students take the community college courses

at a convenient location, perhaps their own high school. Or they can take them online.

---so, there's two years free for the family through a state-local partnership

+ Those students who come from families earning less than \$75,000/year who have a GPA of 3.25 to 3.5 get a half-tuition scholarship, pegged to the in-state rate of the most expensive state university; in this case it's probably UT-Austin. UT-Austin charges approximate \$10,000 in flat rate tuition, so the value of the half-scholarship is \$5,000.

+ Those students who come from the same income level with a GPA of 3.5 or higher get full tuition.

+ Those students who earned the half-tuition scholarship may receive a bump to full-tuition for their next year, if they earn a GPA of 3.5 or better.

So, you'll get decent students from low and moderate income families getting an education for slightly more than \$10,000 in tuition and fees and excellent students under the same economic conditions paying no tuition at all. Room and board, which varies from campus to campus, could be covered by the student, their family or any resources provided by their college. In addition, the private colleges could offer merit-based aid to compete with the public colleges.

Not to mention the state gets rid of a silly high stakes test and saves on another budget line.

29 people liked this.



**Elizabeth Switaj** 7 hours ago

Regarding your first point: have a look at the state of Washington's Running Start Program which has been running since 1990. Students who can meet the minimum requirements for non-remedial courses at community colleges can spend their last two years either full time at the CC or split between high school and CC courses. I did this a bit over a decade ago, paying only for books and lab fees, and came away with an AAS.

4 people liked this.



**pedrolorenzomartinez** 3 hours ago

Shachbar,

Hooray that is forward thinking not winning like many other posts. The factors in the equation are, cost, remediation and persistent. I agree with your proposal. I was nauseated by Mr. Paredes' comment that the poor will have a better chance to pay for their education. The poor by the very nature of the schools they attend and probably no through a fault of their own, get an inferior education with a high school diploma. If students earn their high school diploma why should students take remediation courses? Here is the first major leak in the pipeline. Something is wrong with this system!

Yes indeed, align high school testing with college readiness, the state of Texas has already outlined this in very specific ways, let's make sure that high school execute that plan. Lack of persistence and the use of Pell grants is a major contributor to this cost. If we use a business model, the state of Texas second to California, eat up a great portion of these funds and its considered a poor investment when students do not return their second semester and/or their second year. Let's increase the Pell grant amount for those students that complete an additional year of college. Students have to take that responsibility as well. Let's make colleges and universities responsible for retention and graduation and not remediation! Let's charge the high schools a percentage for the cost of remediation since they have not been able to prepare students well. Let's make each system accountable for preparing their students in their educational trajectory.

Finally, if cost is the problem, the state of Texas should put a cap to tuition cost just like other states have done. Ask Texas legislators to continue to support the tax credits such as the American Opportunity Act, let's reward students and colleges who have been able to move students to their junior year, and give students a full tuition credit from the state and the federal government for completing their degree. The senior year should be completely tuition free when students complete their degree. Let the colleges and universities provide a fee waiver for students during their senior year. Let 10% of college/university budget depend on their efforts to retain and graduate students with an increase of a 5 % budget incentive bonus for those that have done it exceptionally well. The shared sacrifice is spread out throughout the system. Let's put a cap on the amount of federal funding that the for profits get for delivering degrees based on the mean cost for public education

cost at each of our states. Let's all of shared the sacrifice we have to make. Let's also remind the Governor that similar proposals has failed in other states such as the state of Illinois. Yes, it time of financial crisis, we require austerity bu tempered with common sense! Please be reminded that this is the Martinez Plan.



**fulrich** 1 hour ago

Who pays for all these tuition breaks when the state is cutting university budgets? A great deal of the problem to begin with is that states have cut back dramatically on support for higher education leaving the main avenue for financial survival tuition.



**auntieintellectual** 23 hours ago

Given that Waco, TX. residents freak out when told the Moon reflects sunlight rather than glows like in the Bible and Science is struck from textbooks when it conflicts with Scripture, one would have to assume ANY degree in Texas is "stripped down" as Science, Mathematics, Technology, and virtually ANY Field of Study that is at odds with The American Taliban (also known as Christianity) is struck from the books and buried in a cornfield. Yehaaaaaw!!!!

16 people liked this.



**electronicmuse** 7 hours ago

I believe the proper form of expression would be "yahoo." (You wouldn't be one of those people with a \$10 000 degree, would you?)

By the way, love your moniker.



**bdbailey** 23 hours ago

It is amazing to me how stilted, resistant and cynical academics are. If you choose to not be part of the solution, do not be upset when it is forced upon you.

13 people liked this.



**akprof** 19 hours ago

There amy be an attempt to "force this" on academe - but forcing it won't work - no one is better at obstructing cahnge that university faculty! And in this case, they should obstruct away.

4 people liked this.

**tee\_bee** 5 hours ago

It is amazing to me how people with scant experience in a field feel qualified to weigh in on topics that, as suggested by their posts, they know nothing about.

I'm off now to share my insights on a thoractic surgery blog.

2 people liked this.



**panthernation** 2 hours ago

So...someone comes in and says, "A degree now costs \$10,000. It will consist of two years of a community college and online courses." To me, that sounds like a solution that is being forced on academics. Any disagreement with this proposal and any alternative to the proposal has been labeled as "stilted, resistant and cynical." So, the difference is only if academics go along with the "solution" like good lemmings or have it forced on them. That is an interesting view of the world.

1 person liked this.

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