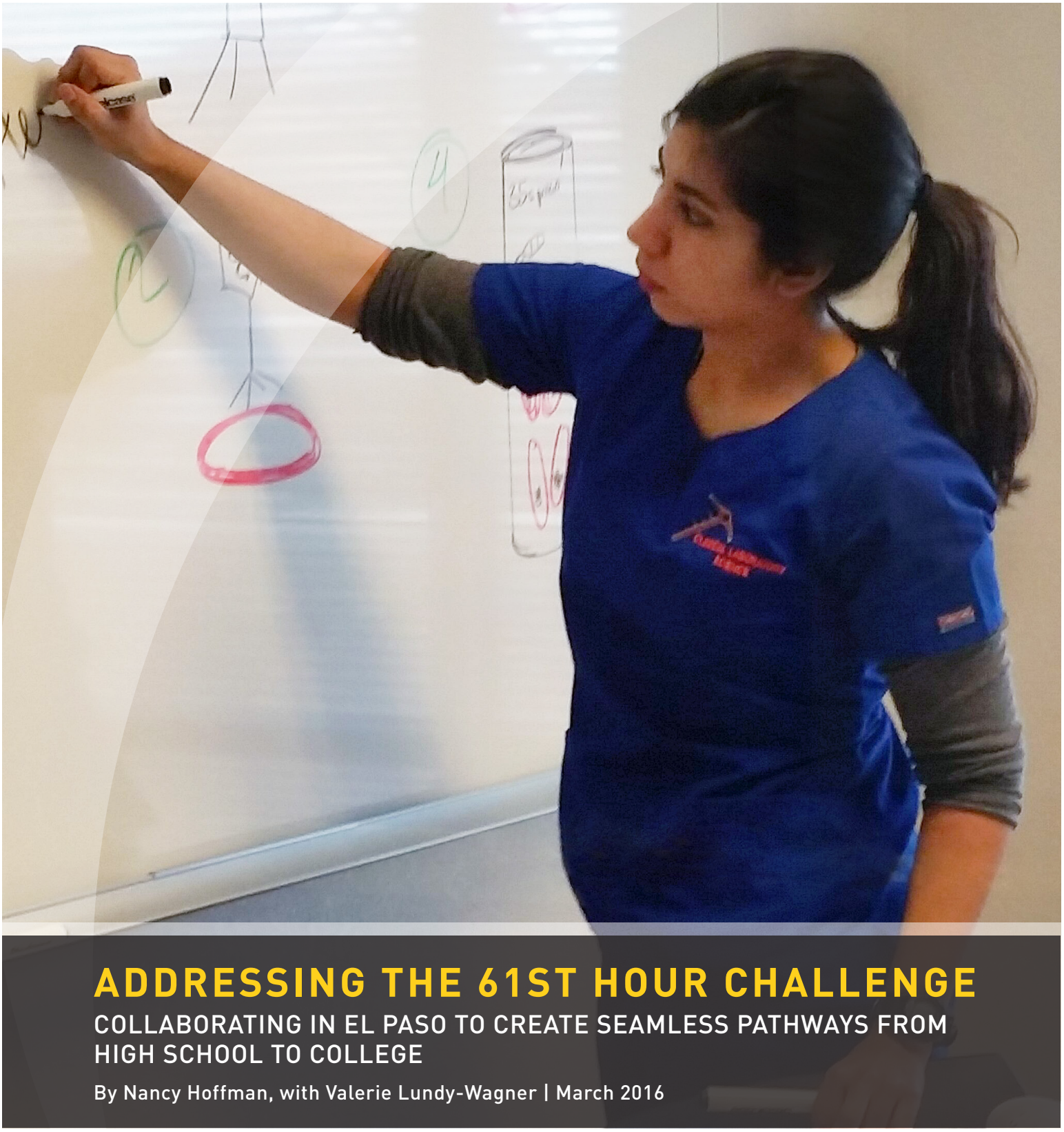

ADDRESSING THE 61ST HOUR CHALLENGE

COLLABORATING IN EL PASO TO CREATE SEAMLESS PATHWAYS FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE

By Nancy Hoffman, with Valerie Lundy-Wagner | March 2016

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank the Mission Early College High School teachers, students, and staff; EPCC administrators; and UTEP students, faculty, and administrators, who gave generously of their time, answered our questions openly and honestly, and took care to help us tell the El Paso story. We are especially grateful to Dr. Donna Ekal who arranged our visit to El Paso and to Leslie Gurrola and Wynn Rosser, Greater Texas Foundation, for their support of early college students.

PHOTOGRAPHY courtesy Mission Early College High School and UTEP

AUTHOR'S NOTE

A superficial look at the list of articles and books about El Paso confirms that this community of 833,000 has a distinctive place in American geography and history. El Paso is often portrayed as a city of contradictions—poor and regularly ranked as one of the safest cities in the U.S., upending stereotypes that poverty, crime, and immigrants go together. The recent violent crime of Ciuidad Juarez is just feet away across the Rio Grande bridge to Mexico. The city's isolation from the rest of the U.S.—mountains and desert surround it on three sides—has forced it to develop a culture and way of life all its own. With a population 80 percent Hispanic, it is uniquely Mexican-American. Given that I've only visited once, it would be irresponsible to say anything about the city itself that hasn't already been said eloquently by residents, writers, and scholars, but I can say that its education institutions—at least those I visited—are permeated by warmth and groundedness. I would characterize the spirit as follows: These are our students, they live here, most don't have choices to try the school or college down the road, nor do their families know how to guide their educational pathways. They are isolated, and it's our obligation and passion to exploit their many assets and make this a place for them and their families to thrive. We are dedicated to introducing them to the world of serious ideas, to giving them tools and knowledge to improve themselves, their families, and this place or another across the desert and mountains if they choose.

While the early college story is only one aspect of the education story in El Paso, the facts and spirit that make for its success are writ large in the way that UTEP describes itself. "UTEP's geographic location along the U.S.-Mexico border has enabled generations of students to pursue their goals through higher education in one of the largest bi-national communities in the world.... UTEP is dedicated to becoming the first national research university serving a 21st century student demographic." Indeed, our conversations with students, faculty, and administrators confirmed that they operate with confidence that high standards, unwavering support, and the careful deployment of limited resources will result in student success. A similar spirit pervades EPCC and Mission Early College. There is much to learn from this community's educators. As the person who, with many colleagues, led the early college high school initiative from Jobs for the Future beginning in 2002, I was moved and inspired by what I learned and experienced in El Paso. This is a story to inspire a much broader audience of educators, community leaders, families, and students to action.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over a decade ago, when the early college movement began in the United States, the ambition of those starting these new small schools was to put students at risk of not completing high school on an accelerated pathway to college completion. Early college high schools (ECHSs) are small public schools with built-in academic and social supports that integrate college courses with high school requirements, starting in ninth grade. With about 300 such schools now serving about 80,000 students across the U.S., the results are impressive.[1] The majority of students are graduating from high school with an average of one year of college credit, at least one third graduate with a full associate's degree, and 71 percent go on to postsecondary education.[2]

The Texas Education Agency and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board working with the Communities Foundation of Texas and Educate Texas were among the first adopters of early college in the nation. Texas early colleges were built on the state's dual enrollment policy and a community college culture that encourages partnerships with high schools.[3]

As of the 2015-16 year, Texas had 154 early colleges including 5 Texas-STEM (T-STEM)/ECHS that blend early college and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). In addition, 4 career and technical education (CTE) early colleges were designated in 2015-16.

Because of the proliferation of early colleges and the positive policy environment, an increasing number of Texas students are completing their associate's degrees well before graduation from high school, often as juniors. Greater Texas Foundation (GTF), the organization that commissioned this paper, has been a long-time supporter of Texas's early college students and established a financial aid program for them in 2011. In following the progress of cohorts of early college students, GTF became concerned that high school students were continuing to take community college courses along with high school classes beyond the 60 credits required for the associate's degree. As a result, ECHS students were losing an average of 18 credits in the transition to a four-year institution, credits that did not "count" toward degree requirements. Thus students' time and cost to degree were extended unnecessarily. Thus embedded within this success is what we are calling the 61st Hour® problem.

The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) has been particularly successful in reaching the goal of graduating large numbers of ECHS students with minimal loss of college credit in the transfer to university. Practices at UTEP, El Paso Community College (EPCC), and the partner El Paso feeder early college high schools hold lessons for early college advocates and leaders. In El Paso, educators are close to implementing a truly seamless system from grade nine through the bachelor's degree. Since 2009, over 1,100 early college students have entered UTEP with junior-level status having completed an associate's degree either before high school graduation or concurrent with it. These 16-18 year olds are on their way into the professions with their BA degrees, despite many coming from families that have no college experience. To form such a seamless system requires concentrated effort. The pathways that have been developed in El Paso since the program's inception suggest that Texas in general and El Paso in particular can provide a national blueprint for successful development of early college programs that move large numbers of young people through to the bachelor's degree. Texas's success demonstrates that early college programs work and that they can be scaled and replicated.

THE EL PASO STORY

In fall 2015, 193 students between the ages of 16 and 18 began their first semester at The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) as *college juniors*. These young people—the majority first-generation college goers, low-income, Hispanic, and from families where English is not the first language—are graduates of El Paso's early college high schools (ECHSs) and El Paso Community College (EPCC). Early college high schools are small public schools with built-in academic and social supports that integrate college courses with high school requirements starting in ninth grade. The 193 El Paso students had completed their associate's degrees either before or concurrent with high school graduation.

UTEP has been particularly successful in reaching the goal of graduating large numbers of ECHS students with minimal loss of college credit in the transfer from community college to university. Thus, these students are well positioned to graduate from college in a timely manner, and a number have already gone on to graduate and professional school. But students in other early colleges who accumulate college credits in high school often lose credits when they transfer to four-year institutions. According to a Greater Texas Foundation study, they take credits beyond the 60 required for the associate's degree, and lose on average 18 credits—slowing their time to degree and incurring additional costs.

Practices at UTEP, EPCC, and the partner El Paso feeder early college high schools hold lessons for early college leaders and advocates nationally as well as for others committed to improving the college

"I look back on that first cohort of 23 early college students who came here from Mission as 17 year olds in 2009 to enter junior level coursework at UTEP and am amazed at how far we have come. I'm so proud of now over 1,100 young students who are on their way in the professions with their bachelor's degrees."

—Donna Ekal, Associate Provost, UTEP

success rates of low-income and underserved students. If there is one takeaway of utmost significance from the El Paso experience, it is the close relationship between the ECHSs, EPCC, and UTEP that allows for implementation of seamless pathways from ninth grade to the bachelor's degree and beyond to graduate and professional degrees.

Indeed, while many states aspire to have seamless education systems in which students accelerate from level to level as soon as they are able, most states are still far from this goal. In miniature, the El Paso early colleges, community college, and university are close to a seamless system. In fact, UTEP may well be the institution that best exemplifies the dream of those who started the early college movement in 2001—that large cohorts of low-income students would have a low-cost, accelerated pathway to the bachelor's degree.[4] Characteristics of this seamless system in El Paso include:

- Incremental exposure of ECHS students to the academic and social expectations of college starting in ninth grade.
- Coordinated, sequenced, and very carefully planned academic programs of study.
- Support services and guidance in the ECHS and a special "home" at UTEP dedicated to ECHS students.
- Constant communication (including regular face-to-face meetings) between the three collaborating institutions so that professionals working with ECHS students participate in a feedback, continuous improvement, and troubleshooting loop.
- High expectations and intense pride among students, teachers, and administrators in student accomplishments and an attitude of "you can do it"—no matter the high poverty rates and challenges of the El Paso community.

THE 61ST HOUR

Over a decade ago, when the early college movement began in the United States, the ambition of the funders and the implementing nonprofit organizations they funded was to design schools for students at risk of not completing high school.[5] With about 300 such schools created by the initial philanthropic and public investments and serving about 80,000 students[6] now up and running across the U.S., the results are impressive. The majority of students are graduating from high school with an average of one year of college credit, at least one-third graduate with a full associate's degree, and 71 percent go on to postsecondary education.[7]

One particular advantage of guiding students through the associate's degree in high school is that they are attached to postsecondary education very early, identify as college goers, and begin to understand the academic and social expectations of college. Another is that ECHS students are required to be in school full-time as high school students, have built in support from their high school teachers as well as the community college faculty, and, if they work at all after school, it is for fewer hours than many college students. A third advantage is that at-risk young people are motivated by the chance for free college credits to work hard and prove themselves capable of being on an accelerated pathway.

If students achieve an associate's degree in high school, many will want to transfer immediately to universities as juniors, with the goal of completing their bachelor's in two years. Greater Texas Foundation, a long-time supporter of early college students, discovered that in transferring, ECHS graduates were losing an average of 18 college credits. They were taking credits beyond the 60 needed for the associate's degree, without a carefully planned program of study that met the requirements of the university without credit loss. Hence the 61st Hour problem.

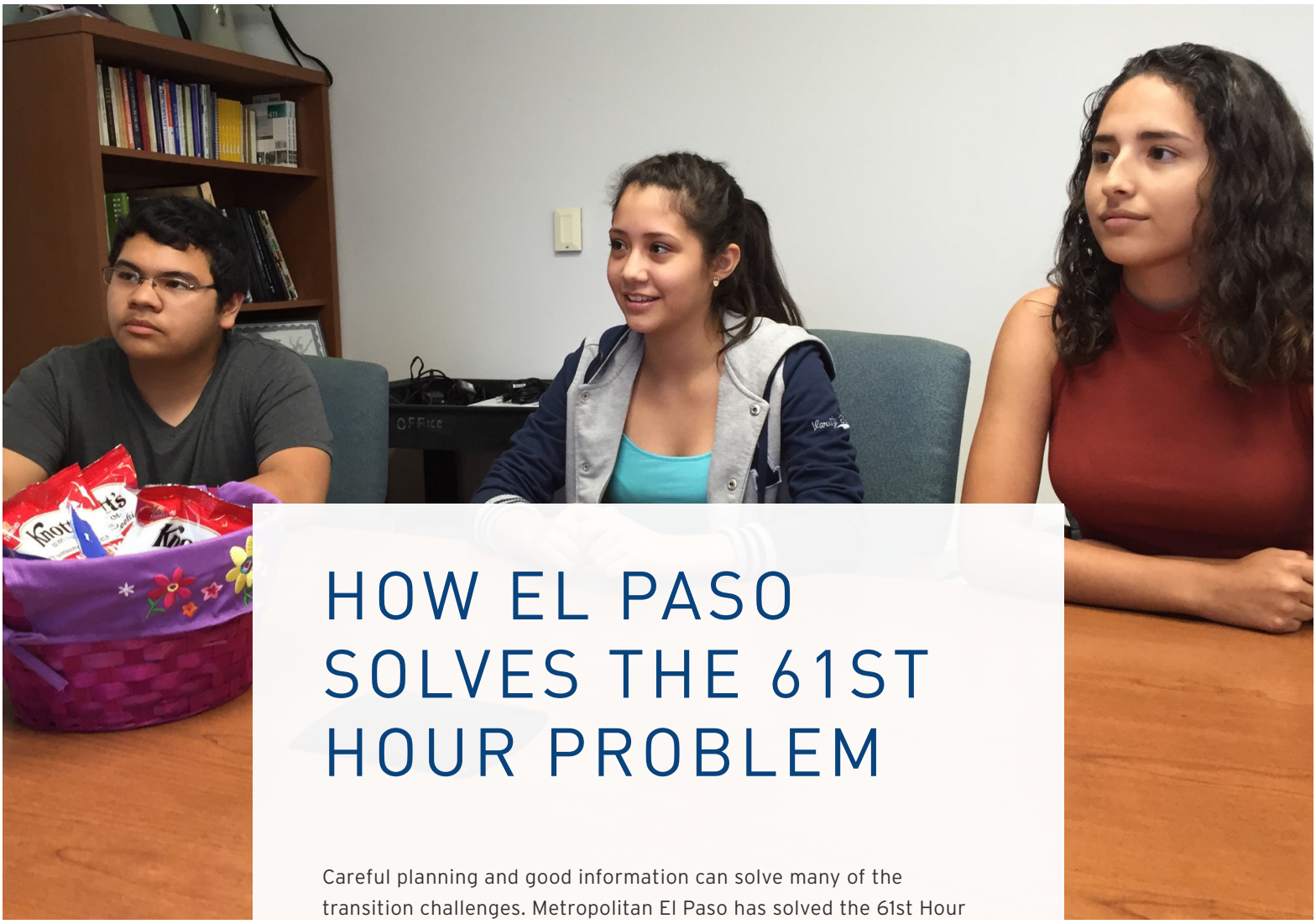
Texas is home to the largest number of early colleges in the country, and more students in the state graduate with associate's degrees than elsewhere. Thus, Texas students have much to gain from solving the 61st Hour problem.

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), working with the Communities Foundation of Texas and Educate Texas, were among the first adopters of early college in the nation and invested smartly to ensure fidelity to the early college model and to assure that the populations most at-risk were targeted for entry into the program.[8] Texas early colleges were built on the state's dual enrollment policy and a community college culture that encourages partnerships with high schools. As of the 2015-16 year, Texas had 154 early colleges including 5 T-STEM/ECHSs that blend early college and STEM. In addition, 4 CTE early colleges were designated in 2015-16.[9]

Many of the schools are concentrated in the Rio Grande Valley (41) and El Paso (9), among the most economically challenged areas of Texas. For example, South Texas College (STC) in McAllen supports 31 early college high schools; a third of this year's STC graduating class, or 485 students, were Pharr-San Juan-Alamo (PSJA) ISD early college high school students who were completing the associate's degree two weeks before high school graduation.

In Texas, early college high schools apply for and receive ECHS designation from the TEA. They have formal agreements with their partner community colleges, may not charge for tuition, books, or fees, and may provide students with as many college courses as they are able to take and pass, beginning with ninth graders.[10] And in this generous policy also lies the "problem" that gives this brief its title, a problem we should wish on more early colleges across the U.S.

Because of the proliferation of early colleges, Texas is ahead of the curve in supporting young people at risk of not completing a postsecondary credential to achieve a college degree.[11] The 61st Hour problem, however, raises a host of issues. Some university majors are sequenced in such a way that certain courses must be completed in the first and second year of university, and comparable courses are not offered in community college. In other instances, while the student might be able to transfer the excess courses as electives, the requirements to complete the upper division include a specific 60 credits, which the community college courses do not match. This causes the 61st Hour problem. A much better practice is for the sending high school and community college to make an academic plan with the student that ends at 60 credits. The student then begins the 61st Hour at the university in a specific program of study.



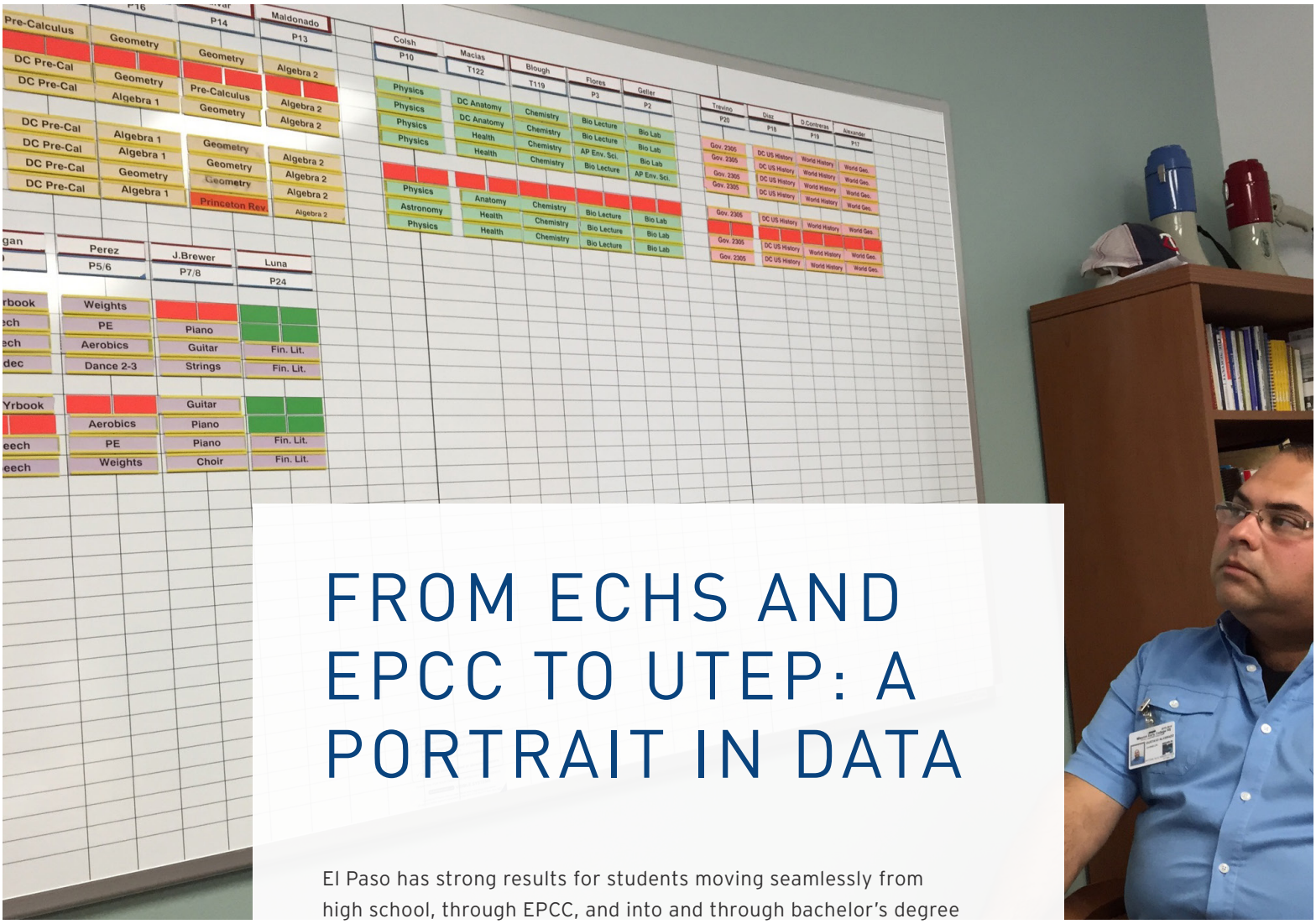
HOW EL PASO SOLVES THE 61ST HOUR PROBLEM

Careful planning and good information can solve many of the transition challenges. Metropolitan El Paso has solved the 61st Hour problem and turned the acceleration of early college students into a highly valued and impressive asset for all involved. Since 2009, 1,137 ECHS students with associate's degrees from EPCC have either graduated from UTEP or are currently on track for bachelor's degrees. This group is comprised of two categories of students who enter UTEP as college juniors: "accelerated" students who completed the associate's degree *prior* to high school graduation, and "traditional" ECHS students who completed the associate's degree concurrently with high school and then immediately enrolled in UTEP. In fall 2015, approximately 850 ECHS affiliated students were enrolled at UTEP, with an additional 24 former ECHS students with bachelor's degrees enrolled in a master's program. A number of graduates are in law or other graduate and professional programs in other parts of the country.

The nine El Paso area early colleges, EPCC, and UTEP work closely together to ensure that ECHS students who complete their EPCC associate's degree can enroll at UTEP as juniors even before high school graduation to minimize credit loss. The students get support from their high school, EPCC, and UTEP as they take advantage of a head start on completing their bachelor's degrees. The high schools and community college advising staff work closely with the UTEP

liaison to ensure that students choose a transferable program of study and that the 60 credits required for the associate's degree all count toward their UTEP program of study.[12] Just as important, UTEP has developed an array of orientation and support services that facilitate the transition for early college high school students during their matriculation into UTEP with junior-class standing, taking into account that most of these students are between 16 and 18 years old and have never had the experience of being full-time college students on a university campus. In many cases, these students are entering UTEP while they are taking high school courses, although they have completed the associate's degree. The design work took years to perfect, and gathering teams and liaisons from multiple campuses, school districts, and schools is not easy.[13]

Student Gabriela Torres poses with The University of Texas at El Paso mascot, Paydirt Pete, on Commencement Day.

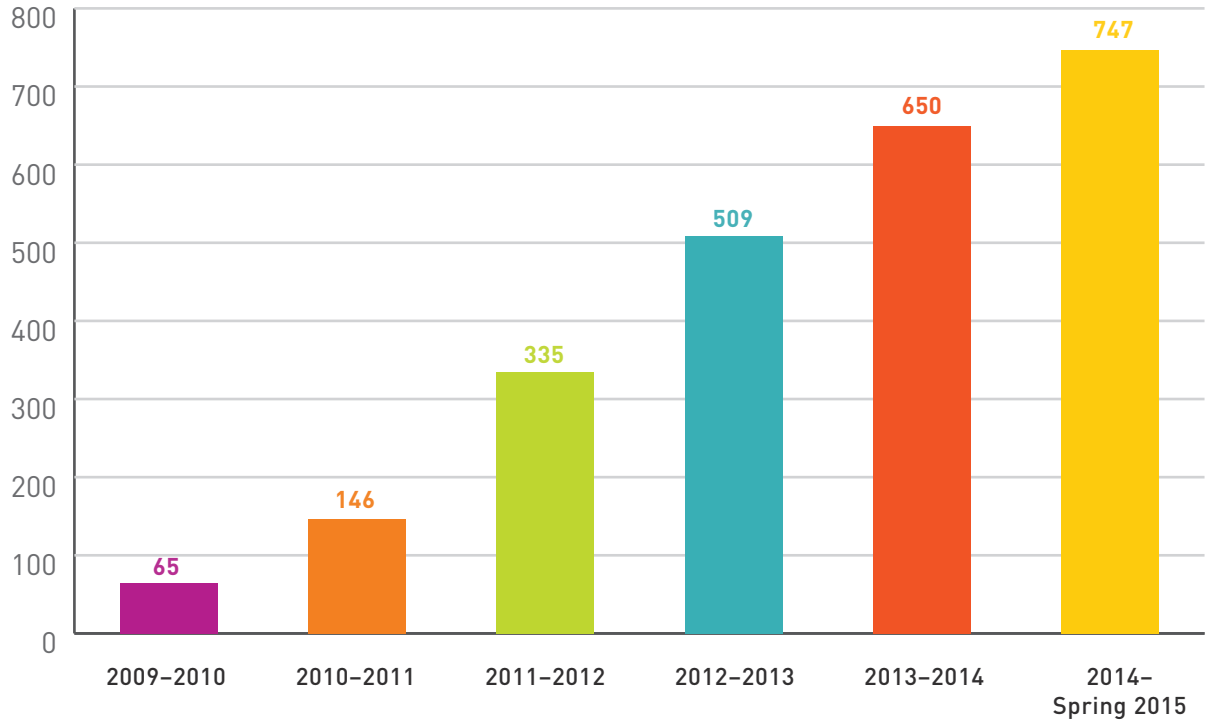


FROM ECHS AND EPCC TO UTEP: A PORTRAIT IN DATA

El Paso has strong results for students moving seamlessly from high school, through EPCC, and into and through bachelor's degree programs. In five years, the number of students enrolling at UTEP from ECHSs has grown dramatically from 65 in 2009-10 to 757 in 2014-15.[14] The four-year graduation rate (54 percent) for Mission Early College High School students, the first early college established ECHS in El Paso, is higher than the traditional transfer student rate of 43 percent.[15] UTEP would like to increase the number of ECHS students completing their bachelor's degrees within two or three years of entering UTEP, but students often elect to take additional time for a variety of reasons.

Students may change or add a major, complete a minor, participate in study abroad, or simply take advantage of major-specific coursework they were previously unaware of, a pattern that is often encouraged by UTEP advisors and professors. In interviews with current UTEP ECHS students, several identified themselves as "accelerated" but were taking longer than two years to graduate. They identified strong interests that caused them to go deeper into areas like microeconomics and literature, and several were planning to enroll in graduate school after commencement, so the time frame appears to be an indicator of academic commitment and engagement rather than its opposite. Clearly, the program is shifting some low-income and first-generation students' ambitions from prioritization of immediate

Figure 1. ECHS to UTEP Matriculation



economic need (i.e., workforce entry immediately after college) to a deliberate investment in longer-term academic and career success.[16] While these are good reasons for extending time to degree, students who wish to graduate after two years at UTEP should be able to do so without credit loss.

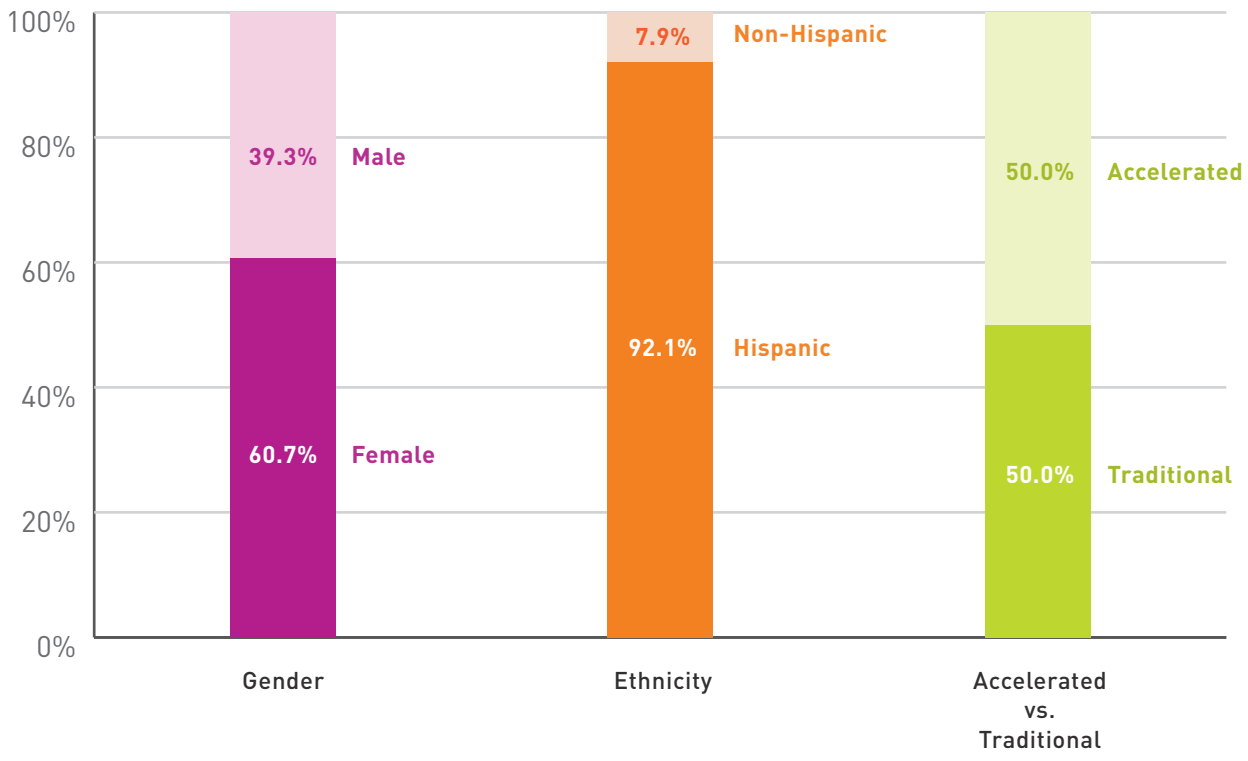
Of the six ECHSs in El Paso that have graduates—the two newest schools are open but do not yet have graduates—a total of 1,551 EHCS students have received their associate of arts or associate of science degrees. And of the 800-plus students starting or continuing their junior or senior years at UTEP this fall, approximately 50 percent are "accelerated." Those who completed their associate's as juniors or first semester high school seniors attend UTEP during their senior year of high school. The first accelerated cohort comprised 23 students in 2009. In fall 2014, there were 96 first-time ECHS students considered accelerated (43 percent of the 220 in that entering cohort). An additional, and usually larger, cohort of accelerated ECHS students starts in the spring semester.

Students from early college enter a university recognized nationally for its outstanding performance in getting low-income students through to the

"You feel so special as an accelerated student. It sets you apart, it sets you up for success, and it gives you self-esteem."

—UTEP student, August 2015

Figure 2. Selected Characteristics of ECHS Students at UTEP, Fall 2009–Spring 2015 (N= 1,137)



bachelor's degree.[17] In Academic Year 2014-2015, 66.2 percent of UTEP students who filled out a FAFSA application were likely to qualify for Pell grants because of an estimated family contribution lower than $5,158. According to the metric used by *Washington Monthly*, UTEP outperforms predictions in graduating first-generation and low-income students. UTEP has also won many awards as an outstanding Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI).[18] However, even though UTEP outperforms graduation rate predictions, rates still appear low compared to highly selective universities because only summer/fall first-time, full-time degree-

Table 1. First-Time in College: High School Graduation Time to Degree Completion

(Fall 2009–Summer 2015; high school graduation no later than Summer 2012)

TYPE OF STUDENT	# AT LEAST 2 YEARS AT UTEP	# GRADUATED (%)	< 3 YEARS (%)	≥3 AND ≤4 YEARS (%)	>4 YEARS(%)
Accelerated	330	135 (40.9%)	24 (17.8%)	103 (76.3%)	8 (5.9%)
Traditional	261	54 (20.7%)	14 (25.9%)	36 (66.7%)	4 (7.4%)

How It Works in El Paso: Every Step Anticipated and Scaffolded

To understand how the pieces fit together so well in El Paso, let us hear the story of a "student" who is a composite of those the authors interviewed both at an ECHS and at UTEP.

Now a poised senior sitting confidently in a UTEP classroom just after her afternoon microeconomics class, Susanna remembered who she was at age 13. "I was just an ordinary kid, not very good in school; actually I was pretty slow. I wouldn't have gotten into ECHS except there was a lottery. Now it's like a dream to be on this beautiful campus all day. Studying microeconomics is so much fun. I pretty much get A's and I want to go to law school, so I'm applying now. I had trouble getting into the future law students organization (Law School Preparation Institute)—they kept saying, "you're in high school, you're only 15," but I convinced them that I was about to be at junior at UTEP. I was in Washington, DC last summer on an internship. Here at UTEP there's support for every step—we have special advisors at the ECHS Academic Success Center. Yes, you can get too rushed and always want to go fast, but I'm so sure I'll take a year off before law school.

"So high school. That was really hard. My teachers pushed and pushed, and we had to meet with them every three weeks to see how we were doing. We had a summer camp before high school started and before that my parents had to go to meetings about early college with me so we could sign up. I also had to fill out a survey saying why I was interested, but they really didn't care about my scores. The first year of high school, we didn't travel to college, but we had these really hard biology and technical writing college courses. After that it was a mix of going to the community college, taking college and high school courses in our building, and, my last year I was going to three schools—finishing up high school, taking a final EPCC course, and starting at UTEP.

"But even now, high school is a home base, and they helped me figure stuff out but also to take charge of myself. The first time, they helped us register for college classes, but after that it was, 'ok, it's how they do at college. You can do it yourself.' Because I was going to graduate from college, not just high school, they taught me to pick my classes really carefully, so I knew all about what I needed for my economics major by the time I was in tenth grade. When I got to UTEP, I didn't lose any credits. One more thing: It was interesting, in my community college art appreciation class this summer, maybe because we're encouraged to work in groups and ask questions, the early college students participated most.

"My family is so proud. This June, I'm going to be the first high school and college graduate in the family."

seeking students are counted in the rate, with transfer and part-time students excluded. Including the high numbers of transfers and part time students who ultimately graduate would make the graduation rate substantially higher. *(For more on graduation rate calculations, see Technical Challenges section.)*

ACCELERATED PROGRAM DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

In speaking with Mission ECHS students, as well as graduates from EPCC and other El Paso area ECHSs currently enrolled at UTEP, what stands out is the clarity they have about academic and other requirements. According to UTEP staff, "these are not students who will register late, make errors in the schedule and requirements for financial aid application, take a course that doesn't 'count,' or precipitously change their major"—all factors known to increase time to degree or facilitate stop-out or drop out. UTEP staff member Lily Romo told us, "EPCC prepares them so well for UTEP. They know exactly what they want; they never say, 'no one told me.'" ECHS and EPCC students learn how to achieve academic success (e.g., ask questions, seek out tutoring, manage time, take notes etc.); they also understand the planning required for an efficient program of study and can navigate the bureaucracies associated with registration and financial aid. The high schools, EPCC, and UTEP all work together to provide the advising and transition advice needed for students advancing to their 61st Hour before high school graduation. In consultation with both the high school and community college, UTEP has developed outreach, orientation and social/academic support services appropriate for high school students entering university as juniors. The key policies and practices at the three levels (high school, community college, and university) are built in such a way that each step is anticipated in the student's academic plan.

To provide concrete detail about how these policies and practices operate, the rest of this paper takes a careful look at Mission, the first early college high school to partner with EPCC and UTEP. Mission Early College High School was founded in 2005; in 2009, 23 Mission students entered UTEP, making up the first cohort of ECHS students with associate's degrees that matriculated at UTEP. The paper examines the school's relationship to EPCC and to UTEP across several dimensions: leadership; academic program planning and implementation; advising and other supports; and financial aid. These are the key components that make the program work so well, and can be generalized to all the El Paso early college high schools. In addition, this paper reviews the complex technical issues that come with collecting and analyzing data about early college students. Because they are not following the traditional educational trajectory and may be enrolled in two institutions at once, they pose challenges in coding, data collection, transcript generation, and, above all, figuring out how to credit each level with the degree achieved and the time frame in which students complete it.

Mission Early College High School

In August 2005, Socorro Independent School District and the El Paso Community College jointly created Mission Early College High School. This unique school is founded on the belief that many young people are ready and eager to do serious college work. It enables highly motivated students to move in four years from the ninth grade through the first two years of college, earning the associate of arts degree. Students from many different backgrounds who have a strong record of excellence and diverse interests will benefit from MECHS curriculum. Using primary source materials and experimental data for research, students will become equipped with the analytical skills needed to pursue their intellectual and artistic passions.

Who are Mission students? About 300 students apply to Mission with 125-135 accepted for each class. No state standardized test scores or GPAs are required in the application. There are no entrants after ninth grade. About 80 percent are economically disadvantaged, first generation, and at risk of not completing high school. Fifty percent are LEP or ELLs. In the current class, several students are homeless, and one has a child. In the 2015 graduating high school class, 125 of 129 students completed at a two-year degree prior to high school graduation (30 to 40 percent as juniors).

The steering committee's commitment to meeting is illustrated in this observation from one of its members: "The El Paso service area is vast, and there's a mountain in the middle of it."

—EPCC administrator, 2015, describing the landscape of the El Paso area and the challenges of travel to meetings

LEADERSHIP

El Paso ECHS students have champions at each step of their education pathways—in the high school building and on the community college and university campuses. The institutions' leaders ensure that the students are provided the tailored academic and social supports necessary to enable them to accelerate smoothly despite their youth and inexperience with four-year university practices and requirements. Many El Paso educators have deep roots in communities on the Texas-Mexico border and know from personal experience how important higher education is to the future well-being of the region. Dr. Diana Natalicio, the UTEP president, began her tenure as a professor at UTEP in the 1970s and has been president since 1988. Dr. Donna Ekal, Associate Provost, Office for Undergraduate Studies, came to El Paso in 1991 having worked in the Peace Corps in Thailand. She has been at UTEP for a decade. She leads nine departments, coordinates the university's programming with EPCC, and played a key role in the creation of the ECHS Academic Success Center, which she supports and continues to shape and reshape today.

Dr. William Serrata, appointed president of EPCC in 2012, came to EPCC from South Texas College in McAllen, Texas, a college that pioneered in growing dual enrollment and is now the host of 31 early colleges, as noted earlier.[19] Dr. Richard Rhodes, the former president of EPCC, and now president at Austin Community College, set the stage for early college in a decade of leadership at EPCC and continues to champion ECHS in Austin. These leaders, however, could not count on the success of ECHS students without the hard work of mid-level administrators also devoted to this student group. It is they who do the hard work of coordinating between ECHSs, EPCC, and UTEP.

To ensure the pathways work well and that each level is synchronized with the prior and futures ones, a steering committee, the ECHS Leadership Council, meets once a semester for information sharing and problem solving. This group of 70 to 75 people is chaired by Dr. Serrata, and includes ECHS principals, five or six EPCC deans with responsibility for ECHS students, representatives from the ECHS school districts, and the ECHS support team from UTEP. At each level, there is a dedicated liaison between the schools and the higher education institutions. There is no doubt that the work involved is satisfying and inspiring to the adults who devote themselves to it. As Donna Ekal said recently, "I don't think any of us expected in 2009 that only seven years later we would have welcomed over 1,137 early college high school graduates to UTEP and how many of them have gone on to graduate from UTEP and are now in internships, careers, graduate school, law school, on their way to medical school, and so much more, competing successfully with students from all over the U.S. Working with these students has been a major influence on my personal educational philosophy in thinking about the capabilities and aspirations of our student population."

ACADEMIC PROGRAM

Credit loss is a persistent problem for transfer students in general and for ECHS students, too. It is imperative—if the advantage and intent of the early college experience is to accrue to ECHS four-year university graduates—that there be smooth pathways to minimize credit loss when ECHS students transfer to a university. More attention must be given to alignment of academic programs. The term "alignment" is often used in education to signal the need to sequence a program of study across grades and levels of education according to a logic or hierarchy, but there is a difference between the easy use of the term as a recommended practice and actually working out the details. While students are, of course, encouraged to move from high school to community college to university, the pathways across systems are full of potholes, speed bumps, and curves. States do not have higher education systems that are uniformly well aligned, although alignment improvements are underway in many places. Alignment efforts are designed to prevent the duplication of course work, to avoid student enrollment in sequences with dead ends, and to amend course schedules so that students can enroll in the courses they need.

The El Paso partnership is rare in that UTEP, EPCC, and the early college high schools have designed pathways by mapping backwards from the bachelor's degree, taking into account the availability of courses, the schedule at each institution, and the sequencing of requirements. This careful work with schools has enabled students to take UTEP courses their senior year of high school. While ECHS students still lose some credits for a variety of reasons, the basics of the design process work to minimize credit loss. The three sectors

are still working out some kinks: for example, while the sciences, engineering, and math are sequenced in a hierarchy which makes pathways design relatively transparent, majors in the arts and humanities are organized differently, and courses required for the freshman fine and performing arts majors at UTEP do not always have a comparable EPCC course that also satisfies high school educational requirements. (Why public institutions cannot or do not better align their curricula is a complex question and beyond the scope of this paper.)

Administrators from EPCC Explain the Process for Program Alignment

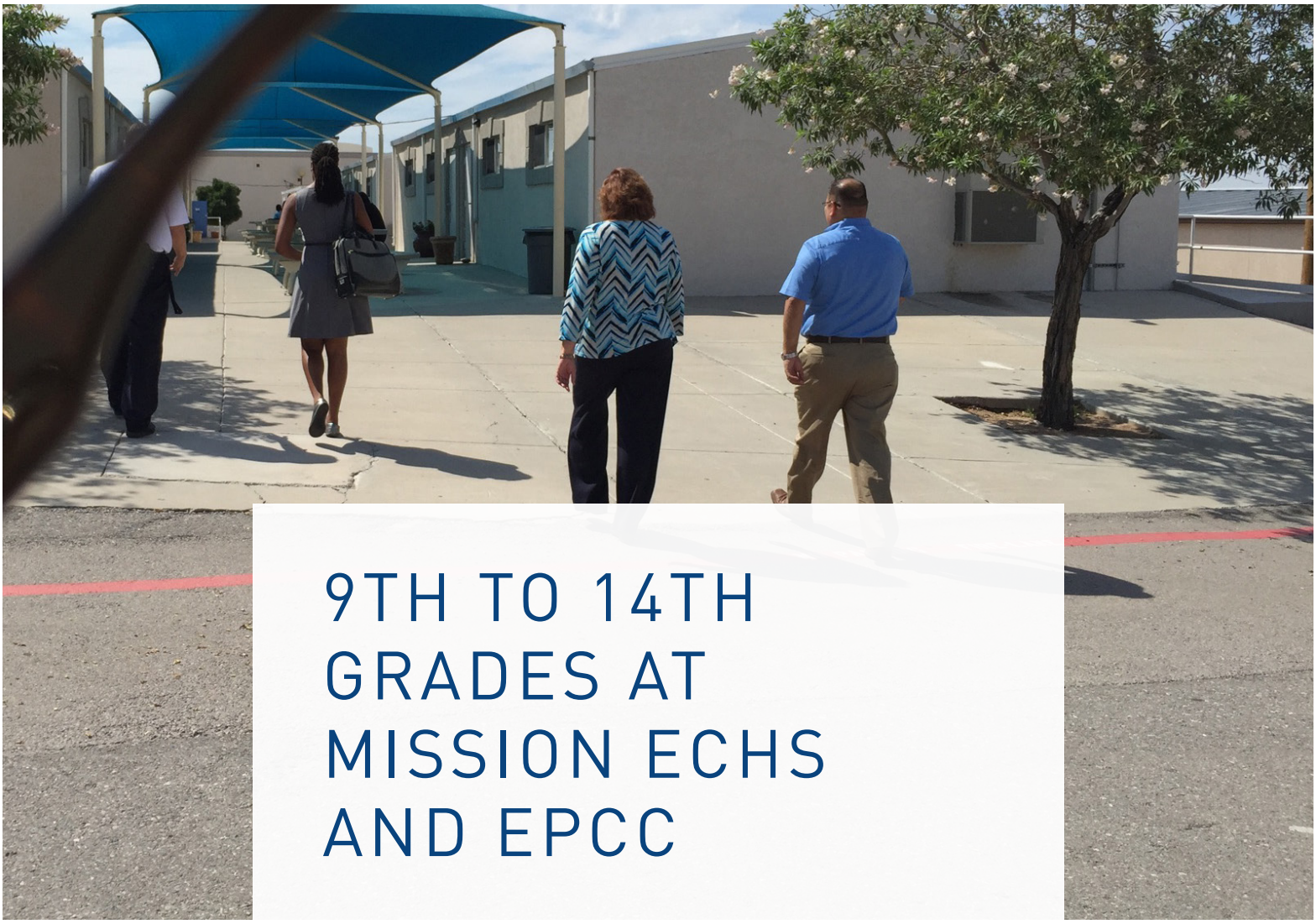
The description below is a composite of comments from a set of EPCC administrators discussing how they work with the early college and UTEP.

The work entails aligning the high school and EPCC curriculum and figuring out which community college courses can replace high school courses—for example, helping the high school find out what you need for pre-nursing or IT. We have a crosswalk in which we look at the master schedules and degree plans for the colleges, and make a plan. Deans looked at the plan with the disciplinary coordinators at the colleges and with the director of the UTEP Academic Success Center. And then we get sign off.

There's not a whole lot of wiggle room because you have to match each course with the state's exams and requirements. Sometimes the state exams cover more or less than a community college course. If that's the case, then the high school has to cover that separately. It's a complicated dance.

And for moving on, say a student wants to be pre-med, the degree plan is largely driven by the nine medical colleges in the state that have a common application and requirements for biology, chemistry, biochemistry, and physics. There's a lot of basic labor to establish the aligned curriculum, but once it's done we're set until courses change, which is not all that often.

When students reach the 42 credits for the general education transfer requirements, we send them a letter and a report telling them what they've taken, and what is needed to get to the 60 units for associates each semester. "Congrats you're on the road for . . . ." We just started that a year ago, so they can start contacting UTEP for orientation. Before we instituted this process, they weren't finding out until after graduation and by then UTEP registration had already happened.



9TH TO 14TH GRADES AT MISSION ECHS AND EPCC

Mission Early College High School was the first ECHS in El Paso, and it is taken here as representative of all the El Paso early college schools whose practices are similar. As soon as students are admitted to Mission—while they are still eighth graders—they matriculate at EPCC, signaling that high school and college are integrally connected. The high school curriculum is designed so that students can complete all their requirements for the associate's degree within the four years of high school, although a good number do so in three or three-and-a-half years. All students take two college courses in their high school building as 9th graders: Biology I and Education 1300, a writing course at Mission Early College High School called Mastering Academic Writing. The course includes writing, but also note-taking, study skills, and time management. By the end of the year, ninth graders can write a college research paper despite many having been categorized as English language leaners in elementary or middle school. Dual enrollment courses required for the associate's degree are included in the required curriculum.

Most students take all their college general education requirements (the first 42 credits, or Texas transfer core) at the high schools with high school teachers who are qualified as adjuncts or with faculty visiting from EPCC. In year two, however, students begin to take

courses in their intended major or career area at the EPCC campus across the parking lot from Mission or at the main EPCC campus or another of the five EPCC campuses as they begin to zero in on a program of study.

As Figure 3 shows, these schedules are complex to put together and require that the staff keep track of dual enrollment courses, AP courses, and other variables.

The high school schedule is often a stumbling block for early college planners since high school classes generally meet daily while college classes meet two to three times a week. At Mission, the school schedule follows an A-B block design with regular classes meeting twice a week either Monday and Wednesday or Tuesday and Thursday to accommodate college course taking. As a consequence, students become familiar with college course schedules from day one—classes do not meet daily as they would in a traditional high school. Flexible Fridays are set aside for specific purposes such as science labs, clubs, catch up/tutoring, and electives. In the sample Friday schedule (see Figure 4 on page 17), students can retest after a failure or low grade, get tutoring, join a club, take an elective course, or attend a mandatory extra class session such as a science lab or session of college English or government.

> The authors of this paper observed at the end of Week I, fall 2015, in a ninth grade EDUC 1300 class. Students had already learned the basics of working in small groups, and were energetically discussing and debating issues of income inequality. They were writing short pieces in class, critiquing each other's work, and were engaged at a level and with a playful seriousness that belied their age and inexperience. In Biology I, students were preparing for a game of "cell bingo" to test their knowledge of the complex terminology needed to describe the functions and parts of a cell. Again, they were working in small groups, with the very enthusiastic teacher circulating to check on their preparation for a game that moved very fast and had rules that the teacher explained only once.

Figure 3. MECHS Master Schedule

2015-2016 MECHS Master Schedule *Final - June 16*

	Michel	*Vandervort*	*Valenzuela*	*Alvarado*	*Edwards*	*Bonilla*	*A. Maldo*	*Saldivar*	*L. Macias*	*Colsh*	*Blough*	*Flores*
	P22	*P4*	*P21*	*P25*	*P15*	*P16*	*P13*	*P14*	*T122*	*P10*	*T119*	*P3*
A1	LC	LC	LC	LC	Pre Cal	Geom	Alg. II	Geom	Anat	Phys.	Chem	Bio • Lec
A2	Eng. IV	Eng. III	Eng. II	Eng. I	LC	LC	LC	LC	Anat	Phys.	Chem	Bio • Lec
A3	Eng. IV	Eng. III	Eng. II	Eng. I	Pre Cal	Geom	Alg. II	Pre Cal	Health	Phys.	Chem	Env. Sci.
A4	Eng. IV	Eng. III	Eng. II	Eng. I	Pre Cal	Alg. I	Alg. II	Geom	Health	Phys.	Chem	Bio • Lec
B1	Creative Wr.	Eng. III	Eng. II	Eng. I	Pre Cal	Alg. I	Alg. II	Geom	LC	LC	LC	LC
B2	Eng. IV	Eng. III	Eng. II	Eng. I	Pre Cal	Alg. I	Alg. II	Geom	Anat	Phys.	Chem	Bio • Lec
B3	Eng. IV	Eng. III	Eng. II	Eng. I	Pre Cal	Geom	Alg. II	Geom	Health	Astronomy	Chem	Bio • Lec
B4	Eng. IV	Princ Review	Eng. II	Eng. I	Pre Cal	Alg. I	Alg. II	Princ Review	Health	Phys.	Chem	Bio • Lec

A section of the curriculum plan the principal of Mission has on his office white board. Dual enrollment courses are green, and AP courses are orange. (Yellow signals elective.) In the math sequence, pre-calculus is a dual credit course, as are anatomy, biology and English. Environmental science is an AP course that also "counts" for college credit if students pass the exam with a score acceptable to the higher education institution providing credit.

Figure 4. Sample Friday Schedule

ALGEBRA II TEST 3 RE-DO	ALGEBRA II TEST 3 RE-DO	ROBOTIC TEAM	ALGEBRA II TEST 3 RE-DO
Smash Club: A meeting for the members of the Super Smash Bros. Club Dedicated Members only. (must be on the list)	**English Workshop:** Work on your Creative Writing, Critical Analyses, Scholarship Essays, Academic Papers, Letters, etc. (must sign up; 25 student limit)	**American Music:** Upon hearing The Beatles' Rubber Soul, Brian Wilson said, "That's it…I'm going to make an album that's really good…" He made the greatest album of all time: The Beach Boys' Pet Sounds (must sign up; 25 student limit)	**British Music:** In 1996, Bruce Johnston met with John Lennon and Paul McCartney to play Pet Sounds for them. Afterward, work on Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band began in "an attempt to equal Pet Sounds." They succeeded. (must sign up; 25 student limit)
BPA Meeting in the Cafeteria	Closed	Closed	Closed
Meditation 25 (LIMIT sign up; only Introduction and Breathing Process Continued)	Ghostbuster Choreography 40 (LIMIT sign up; can only sign up for this class once: morning or afternoon)	FLAMES ONLY HOMECOMING PRACTICE	
Pre-cal Study Hall	Geometry MathXL lab	Chess Club	Chess Club
GOVT 2305 (Mandatory or A-day; must sign up)	Make-up Class for excused absentees only (Not for assignment redo's; must sign up)	GOVT 2305 (Mandatory or A-day; must sign up)	Essay writing tutoring and assistance (must sign up)
English II: Mandatory (sign up for 2A, 3A, or 4A)	Class of 2018: Prep for Homecoming Activities	English II: Mandatory (sign up for 2A, 3A, or 4A)	Class of 2018: Prep for Homecoming Activities
MANDATORY A-Day Eng 1301 Class (sign up for 2A, 3A, or 4A; Life Skills)	National Honor Society General	MANDATORY A-Day Eng 1301 Class (sign up)	Homecoming Decorating Class of 2017 (LIMIT sign up)

Mission Early College High School Students, Vicente, Valeria, and Alessandra in August 2015. All three are 15 years old and ready to start UTEP courses, one in business and two in pre-medicine. Vicente had already completed college-level Accounting I and as he began his junior year of high school, he was enrolled in Accounting II and Music Appreciation. His goal is a business degree. Valeria and Alessandra both had aspirations to attend medical school, so they were taking courses that would put them on the pre-medicine pathway at UTEP.

ADVISING AND SUPPORT SERVICES

"Even if high school students are off-site or not taking college credits, they must visit the college at least six times a year. So they do the orientation, get a student ID, visit the library, learn about academic dishonesty, and have a lot of contact with the college campus. Each step has to be coordinated and planned, and the liaison helps coordinate and scaffold all the steps."

—Margie Nelson Rodriguez, English Professor and ECHS Coordinator at EPCC

While the academic program design and alignment starting from grade nine are the bedrock and foundation for the El Paso success, getting the academic pathways right would not alone produce such impressive results. In a process of trial and error over the first several years of collaboration, the ECHSs, EPCC, and UTEP leadership developed the wraparound services and supports that make acceleration possible. While students attend both ECHS and EPCC, the bulk of the advising

takes place at the high school. Students first interact with their high school academic advisor as eighth graders after they are accepted to the ECHS. During these initial interactions, students begin a conversation with their advisors about subjects of interest and careers, all of which contributes to individual academic course planning. ECHS students also meet with the ECHS academic advisors when they are concurrently enrolled at EPCC or UTEP. ECHS academic advisors encourage students early on to choose an EPCC associate's degree program that aligns to UTEP bachelor's degree programs of interest to clarify their course taking prior to high school graduation. However, students are not locked into early decisions given that completion of the Texas academic core is a priority.

When they enter UTEP, even if they are still enrolled in high school and getting support there, the academic and other demands become much greater and advising takes place at or is coordinated through UTEP's ECHS Academic Success Center, which was established in 2014.

It took UTEP a few years to create a system that works well. What exists today is labor intensive and costly, so the results or returns must be in keeping with the investment; the data suggest that is the case. The Center has one professional staff member and two undergraduate student employees who are ECHS graduates. The UTEP ECHS Handbook details the Center's support services; these include help with the initial application process, the financial aid contract (see financial aid section on page 24), mapping a program that can be completed in two years or less, and most unusual, opportunities for a study abroad program exclusively designed for ECHS graduates. The Handbook also captures student voices and experience at UTEP, for example, opening with a student's page-long advice about reading every course syllabus carefully. *(See box, "Taking College Level Courses at UTEP.")* It also contains such tips as: "At UTEP, advisors are not called 'counselors,'" a hint to students to abandon the terms used in high school. The UTEP Academic Success Center, dedicated exclusively to ECHS alums, is known to all as the place to go to get information or referrals about majors, financial aid, or any area of interest.

Taking College Level Courses at UTEP: Tips for having a great first semester

From ECHS at UTEP 2015-2016 Handbook

The importance of reading your syllabi:

Think of your syllabi as the terms and agreement between you and your professor on how to successfully complete a course. As a student you are responsible for knowing the instructor's contact information, class requirements, and lecture schedule, while your professor is responsible for providing you the information you need to complete the course, and adhering to the terms stated on the syllabus. Remember to always read your syllabi. If an issue were to arise regarding class scheduling, requirements or policies, the syllabus provided to you will be used as a determining factor in decision making.

The Texas core curriculum (*see Texas transfer policy overview in Technical Challenges*) is required for the UTEP bachelor's degree programs, but the extent to which students must take additional UTEP courses varies by major. Thus careful advising and teacher support must start at the ECHS. For example, students seeking fine- and performing-arts bachelor's degrees might not realize that while their EPCC coursework covered year one and year two of the UTEP degree program, the courses required for the UTEP major do not have EPCC equivalents. As another example, students seeking entry to medical and health sciences bachelor's degrees must be advised while still at ECHS about academic course-taking as well as about the value of participating in extracurricular activities that can strengthen their graduate or professional school application (e.g., undergraduate research, volunteering in a hospital). Students pursuing engineering degrees have fewer challenges associated with the transition since their high school and EPCC math and science courses match those required in the first two years of the major at UTEP. In addition, students tend to arrive from ECHS with strong math and science backgrounds. In the small ECHS classes, students are immersed in rigorous math and science courses that have built-in learning communities and significant personalized attention.

UTEP Academic Success Center Homepage

Our core responsibility is to serve as a point of contact and central resource for ECHS community members. We are committed to assisting ECHS students from before admission to after graduation as well as serving as a resource for ECHS counselors, faculty, and administration. Our goals include improving the quality of the university experience for ECHS students, increasing the number of ECHS students attending UTEP, and preparing ECHS students for successful transition to post baccalaureate studies or career engagement. Feel free to contact us with any questions you may have and we look forward to working with you.

"We tried inviting the ECHS students to our first year orientation, but that didn't work. ECHS students already knew a lot of what we want first years to learn (e.g., where the library is or the importance of academic dishonesty), and they didn't need to take placement tests or other assessments. Furthermore, they weren't really first years since they were typically transferring with junior-level standing. We then tried inviting them to join transfer orientation, but that didn't work either. They are 16- and 17-year-olds, and they need advice appropriate to their age and level of academic experience. In particular, they didn't need significant guidance on courses and majors, since all of that had already been made clear to them with their high school and EPCC experience. Finally, UTEP decided to create a third orientation and support service model that is housed within the ECHS Academic Success Center, a 'one stop shop' established especially to support ECHS students and their successful transition to and through UTEP. Students complete their first UTEP course registration during ECHS orientation, and the Center manages all transition, orientation, and other activities during the year."

—Donna Ekal, Associate Provost, UTEP

Along with the ECHS Academic Success Center, other offices address structural barriers to better meet the special needs and nuances of ECHS/EPCC graduates. For example, to enter the School of Nursing, students are ranked by their GPAs in UTEP courses, but ECHS students do not typically have a UTEP GPA until they have completed at least one term. If the ECHS student does not have an established UTEP GPA, the School of Nursing will use their GPA from EPCC for ranking purposes, assuming they have all of their prerequisites completed.

Finally, UTEP embraces the principle that just because ECHS students have accelerated their timeline to university they should not have to sacrifice key university experiences. If there were a single principle that exemplifies the UTEP commitment to ECHS students, this is it. Thus, the Academic Success Center and advisors in certain academic areas deliberately communicate the value of existing pre-professional programs for supporting applications to medical school and law school, decisions students must make in their junior year which is also their first year of four-year university. In addition, UTEP has made provision for ECHS students to study abroad, thus making good on the commitment to provide out-of-classroom academic and social experiences available to traditional freshman admits or transfer students. While ECHS students are eligible for the traditional UTEP study abroad programming, participation is challenging given that

Student Perspective on Studying Abroad: Julia Hettiger (Transmountain ECHS alum)

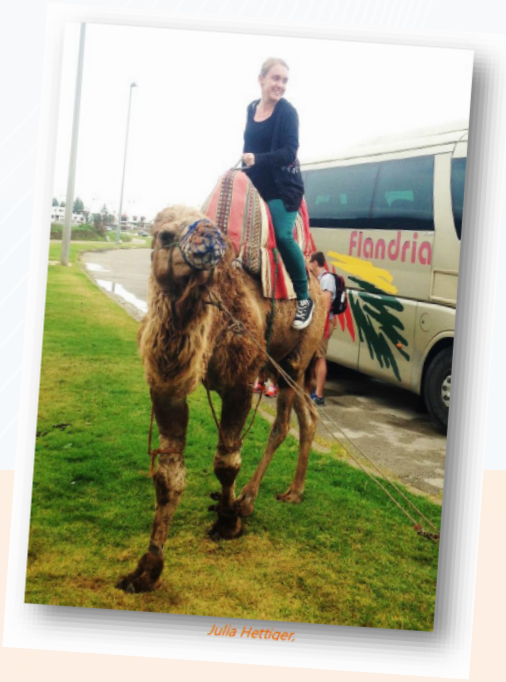
Trip to Spain 2015 – Julia Hettiger, Christian Monzon, Natalie Delgado, Mark Riesech

Has your perspective changed in how you see the world, others, or yourself?

My perspective has changed for all three of these things. I feel more connected with the world and others, and was able to discover new things about myself I wouldn't have, had I not traveled abroad. Even with language barriers and being many miles apart, humans are all one species and seeing the way that people who live far away from me go through the same everyday things as me, made me feel more understood and down to earth.

Could you share with us one of your favorite moments?

One of my favorite moments from my trip was when I rode a camel in Morocco. Camels have always been one of my favorite animals and it was awesome getting to be so close to them. Riding it was scary, but well worth it!



Julia Hettiger,

Studying Abroad

From ECHS at UTEP 2015-2016 Handbook

Studying abroad while in college will allow you to: **visit other parts of the world at a much lower price**, **meet other students and locals**, **explore new traditions**, **history**, and more!

We hope you decide to enrich your educational journey with an experience that will change your perspective on how you see yourself, other people, and the world. *For more information on upcoming trips, and the application process, please contact the ECHS Academic Success Center.*

they are at UTEP for a short period of time. Thus, the uniquely tailored ECHSplorers Program now in its third year (2015-16), was put in place to provide ECHS students at UTEP with a chaperoned seven-to-ten day international experience. Like other study abroad programs, ECHSplorers requires students to conduct research on their area of study that is incorporated into the trip for academic enrichment.

ACADEMIC INTERVENTION

While ECHS students take all their general education college courses in high school and typically have no need for remediation by the time they enter UTEP, they do have academic and other challenges just as any students would. At Mission ECHS, students who fail a test in a specific course three times are required to sign up for extra help. (See the sample Friday schedule on page 17 for how some of this is structured.) But

> "ECHSs do an excellent job with college knowledge. So even when students have academic challenges, ECHS students are much better prepared to deal with them."
>
> *—EPCC administrator*

since college courses are taught in the high school, it is difficult for students to seek help from EPCC instructors. To solve this problem took particular commitment and creativity from the partners. In one discipline, EPCC set up a "fast react" team and hired a tutor to meet with students for 10 minutes every day after class. While on either the EPCC or UTEP campuses, students are free also to access any of the colleges' support services such as writing centers, libraries, math centers, and tutoring, since they are matriculated college students.

TECHNICAL CHALLENGES FOR ACCELERATED PROGRAMS

GRADUATION RATES

Traditional modes of calculating graduation rates do a major disservice to the vast majority of postsecondary institutions, especially two-year institutions. Postsecondary graduation rates are typically calculated using 150 percent of anticipated time to degree and are based on the level of postsecondary institution. That is, community college graduation rates for two-year programs are calculated within three years, whereas four-year college and university graduation rates are calculated within six years. These calculations are limited to fall term first-time, full-time students to reflect historical matriculation patterns, with the exclusion of students participating in dual or concurrent enrollment, students who enroll in more than one postsecondary institution, and individuals starting college in spring or summer terms. While this methodology is appropriate for highly selective four-year colleges and universities with few transfer or part-time students and where 90 percent or more of students start and end at the institution of initial enrollment, it is not a good formula for measuring the graduation rates at postsecondary institutions that serve high proportions of low-income,

first-generation and other nontraditional students whose attendance patterns are much more complex.

Accordingly, institutions that participate significantly in dual enrollment, enroll a relatively high number of students outside of the fall term, or receive a substantial number of transfer students have depressed graduation rates given attentiveness to apples-to-apples comparisons using the limited paradigm for graduation rate calculations. At UTEP, only 12 percent of all undergraduates are full-time freshmen, which is slightly lower than the average among four-year public institutions in Texas (15 percent) and across the nation (16 percent).[20] Further, in 2014, 1,848 transfer students enrolled at UTEP, most coming from EPCC.[21]

ECHS students in El Paso pose a particular challenge to postsecondary systems attempting to capture graduation rates. For example, eighth grade students admitted to Mission ECHS are enrolled at EPCC so that they can immediately begin to take college courses through dual enrollment. At registration, students receive an EPCC ID number and enroll part-time, thus they are not included in the primary fall first-time, full-time cohort for the EPCC graduation rate calculation. When ECHS students begin taking courses at UTEP prior to high school graduation, they are enrolled part-time. Upon completion of the high school diploma, ECHS students are allowed to matriculate and are considered first time in college UTEP students, even if they took college courses during high school, including upper-division courses at UTEP.

Given the varying times that ECHS students enter UTEP relative to their high school graduation, UTEP's Center for Institutional Evaluation, Research, and Planning and the Office for Undergraduate Studies have identified alternative methods for clarifying time-to-graduation for ECHS students, and assessing how graduation rates for this group of students compare to a) traditional EPCC transfer students enrolled at UTEP, and b) traditional four-year UTEP students.

FINANCIAL AID

Getting ECHS students the financial aid they need is complicated too, since these students are in high school and enrolled part time in college, making them ineligible for most federal financial aid programs.[22]

The Academic Success Center collaborates with the Office of Student Financial Aid to provide information to ECHS students, the majority of whom are from low-income families. Access to college for ECHS students is solidified through agreement and accommodation. In Texas, ECHSs consist of partnerships between school districts and community colleges, as well as several public universities where among other things, high school students are able to earn up to 60 college credit hours toward a bachelor's degree at no cost. While community college partners waive tuition and fees for the ECHS students, there are outstanding costs associated with attending and succeeding in college that the school districts often cover. For example, Mission ECHS in El Paso provides transportation for students to and from various EPCC campuses and purchases required textbooks. When high school students pursue an associate's degree through ECHS, they have no need to pursue financial aid.

That said, ECHS students who matriculate at UTEP are subject to costs associated with tuition and fees. These students are ineligible for state or federal financial aid because, as noted above, they are still in high school. In 2009, President Natalicio allocated financial resources to students in this situation. ECHS students are eligible for a scholarship program to cover up to 9 credits per semester for up to 2 semesters, on the condition that they maintain a 3.0 GPA. Once students complete their high school diploma, they become eligible for state, federal, and other institutional financial aid. UTEP provides all its students with an array of financial aid options, including loans. In comparison to other public four-year postsecondary institutions, UTEP students are less likely to take out federal loans (43 percent at UTEP vs. 48 percent national average). Among those who do take out loans, full-time freshmen entering UTEP in 2011-2012 took out loans averaging $4,021, which is lower than the other public four-year colleges in Texas ($5,572).

TEXAS TRANSFER POLICY

The United States still has a long way to go in creating seamless transfer pathways from two to four year institutions even within the same state and higher education system. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board mandates that all public institutions

of higher education provide a 42-credit core curriculum that, if completed satisfactorily, will transfer with no credit loss to any other public Texas university. Such a core is standard in many states, and is a step in the right direction. Nonetheless, even with a completed core, students may need to take courses beyond the 120 hours required for graduation. A given course may count as core, but may not count as a requirement for the major. Students may complete another 18 credits or more, but the receiving university has discretion over the extent to which these additional credits can count—as electives or as part of a major. Thus, any credits beyond the 60 needed for the associate's degree may not "count" toward bachelor's degree completion, and some credits may even be lost among the 18 credits beyond the 42-hour transfer core. This policy requires careful choice of a program of study for all students who plan to graduate in four years, as well as knowing the policies at each university in regard to transfer credit in each discipline.

For ECHS students on an accelerated pathway, the transfer policy means that they must be making decisions about majors and careers as early as age 14 or 15 when they take their first college courses. El Paso ECHS students are counseled against taking additional college-level courses beyond the 60 hours required for the associate's degree, but even more important, their programs of study are back-mapped from the bachelor level to ninth grade course taking to maximize credit transfer into a chosen program of study.

CONCLUSION

The El Paso story is one of hope, hard work, and collaboration. There are special circumstances—a junction of place, people, and moment in time—that made for the development and growth of this extraordinary education pathway. But there are lessons here that can be translated to other regions of Texas and beyond that do not call for new policies, large infusions of dollars, or lowered expectations. Perhaps the best phrases to characterize the El Paso success are: mutual respect across the three education sectors and a willingness to invent and compromise. High school teachers were willing to transform their courses for college credit; community college deans figured out how to tutor young students who were rarely on campus at the critical moments after class; and the university experimented until it found just the right quotient of support services. All the program supporters and designers came together regularly to move the mountain in the middle of their city, and thereby launch young people into healthy, productive, professional lives.

ENDNOTES

[1] These figures are from the last data collection, 2013-14. ECHSs continue to proliferate.

[2] This statistic is based on data collected in 2013, the most recent collection. See *Early College Expansion: Propelling Students to Success, at a School Near You*, Jobs for the Future, 2014. http://www.jff.org/publications/early-college-expansion-propelling-students-postsecondary-success-school-near-you

[3] In many states, high schools and colleges both lose funding in providing dual enrollment. That is, colleges—both two- and four-year—cannot count the student as a full-time equivalent enrollment (FTE) and high schools lose a percentage of participating students' average daily attendance (ADA) either to pay college tuition or because funding per student is based on hours or minutes in the classroom. A model policy among states, Texas's "hold harmless" provisions of dual enrollment policy and funding incentivize schools, community colleges, and four-year institutions to work together. High schools can count a student for purposes of ADA even while she or he is taking college classes on a college campus or with a qualified college instructor at the high school. In addition, the college may count the student as an "FTE." Texas colleges may charge tuition and students may be asked to pay for tuition, fees, books and transportation, but many community colleges waive tuition. These policies are decided locally and vary depending on the degree to which the community college sees recruiting students and enrolling them while they are still in high school as an advantage.

[4] Jobs for the Future was the national lead (with 13 nonprofit implementation partner organizations) of the initial philanthropic investment in early college high schools. Nancy Hoffman, the lead author of this brief, led the early college initiative at JFF from 2001 through 2010. For more information about JFF's education strategies and work, see www.jff.org.

[5] Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Carnegie Corporation, and Kellogg Foundation were the initial funders, with the Gates Foundation support remaining ongoing for many years. The model has been widely adapted across the U.S.

[6] These figures are from the last data collection, 2013-14. ECHSs continue to proliferate.

[7] This statistic is based on data collected in 2013, the most recent collection. See Early College Expansion: Propelling Students to Success, at a School Near You, Jobs for the Future, 2014. http://www.jff.org/publications/early-college-expansion-propelling-students-postsecondary-success-school-near-you

[8] For legislation detailing the purpose of the early college designation and requirements, see http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/SOTWDocs/ED/htm/ED.29.htm#29.908

[9] See: Texas Education Agency, http://tea.texas.gov/About_TEA/News_and_Multimedia/Press_Releases/2015/TEA_announces_early_college_high_school_designations

[10] Frequently Asked Questions, Dual Enrollment, Texas Education Agency

[11] For more information on at-risk indicators in Texas, see: http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/peims/standards/1314/index.html?e0919

[12] UTEP allows students to transfer up to 66 credits, but they may not all "count" toward the major or graduation requirements.

[13] Socorro ISD, Ysleta ISD, Canutillo ISD, El Paso ISD, Fabens ISD, Tornillo ISD, Ft. Hancock ISD, and Clint ISD all host early colleges.

[14] UTEP banner data pulled through Cognos, 2015.

[15] The Center for Institutional Evaluation, Research and Planning at UTEP.

[16] When we posed the idea to a student group of taking some time for the Peace Corps or work before graduate school, several were intrigued but appeared not to have considered the idea since they were so fixed on getting graduate degrees immediately.

[17] See: http://news.utep.edu/?p=31253

[18] For more on Hispanic-serving institutions, see: https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/edlite-minorityinst-list-pg4.html

[19] For a recent article about Dr. Serrata and EPPC, see "How one community college is changing the landscape of western Texas," Public Radio International, 11/26/15, http://www.pri.org/stories/2015-11-26/how-one-community-college-changing-landscape-western-texas

[20] National Center for Education Statistics, 2015.

[21] See: http://news.utep.edu

[22] In fall 2015, the U.S. Department of Education announced it would provide $20 million of Federal aid in an experiment to give high school students in dual enrollment courses access to Pell Grants. The grants to higher education institutions target 10,000 low-income students. If successful, these funds may go a long way toward solving the problem of sustainable funding for early college programs. https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/fact-sheet-department-education-launches-experiment-provide-federal-pell-grant-funds-high-school-students-taking-college-courses-credit

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