

House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Oversight Field Hearing for the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity
"Texas' Innovative Approaches to Jobs and Employment for Veterans"

Presentation by
Texas State Technical College System
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Background and History

Texas State Technical College was established in 1965 as the James Connally Technical Institute (JCTI) of Texas A & M University to meet the state's evolving workforce needs. JCTI was located in Central Texas at the former James Connally Air Force Base in Waco. In 1967, JCTI expanded to include a South Texas campus in Harlingen. Additional locations soon followed.

JCTI separated from Texas A&M University in 1969 and became an independent state system with its own nine-member Board of Regents and the name Texas State Technical Institute (TSTI). In 1991, the Texas Legislature elevated the status of TSTI's campuses by designating them as technical colleges with the name Texas State Technical College.

The four independent colleges within the Texas State Technical College System (TSTC) are co-educational, two-year institutions of higher education offering occupationally oriented programs with supporting academic courses for certificates or associate degrees. Emphasis is on advanced and emerging technical programs not commonly offered by public junior colleges with a core focus on placement and earnings outcomes. For 48 years, TSTC has been producing top-quality graduates, who are nationally recognized for their highly specialized, technical capabilities and job-ready skills. TSTC's strong relationship with business and industry ensures that coursework focuses on the regional and statewide needs of Texas' employers and leads to success in the job market.

TSTC is Texas' only state-supported technical college system. Its statutory mission is to provide an articulated and responsive technical education system aimed at identifying and addressing industry needs. These two features make TSTC unique among institutions of higher education. The TSTC System currently has campuses in Waco, Harlingen, Marshall and West Texas, with locations in Abilene, Breckenridge, Brownwood and Sweetwater. The System also has extension centers in Hutto, Ingleside, Red Oak and Richmond, in addition to partnerships with many of the state's public junior colleges.

Accolades

TSTC's colleges consistently rank as top producers of associate degrees in engineering, precision production, computer information systems, computer & information sciences, and enrollment of Hispanic students. In *Community College Week's* annual report titled "Top 100 Associate Degree Producers," TSTC has ranked number one in Texas numerous times in one or more categories and has consistently stayed among the top 50 colleges in the nation in nearly every applicable category.

In the 2012 report, TSTC Waco ranked number one in Texas for graduating the most students in the categories of precision production, engineering technologies/engineering-related fields, and computer & information sciences & support services. In both 2012 and 2013, the college ranked third in the nation for conferring engineering-related associate degrees.

TSTC offers more than 151 Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degrees and certificates and has produced more than 93,570 graduates in its 48-year history. TSTC Harlingen also offers seven Associate of Science (AS) degrees in biology, computer science, engineering, mathematics, physics, nursing preparatory and health professions.

Since 2009, the TSTC System has generated a 32 percent increase in graduates and a 36 percent increase in job placements. The combined first-year earnings of TSTC graduates are projected to surpass \$55 million in new salaries for Texas – a 54 percent increase over the last four years.

Demographics

TSTC students across the System are a diverse group demographically. They are 65.7 percent minority (56.91 percent Hispanic, 8.60 percent black, 0.19 percent other minorities) and 34.3 percent white. The student body is comprised of 39.83 percent females and 60.17 percent males. Students come from 200 of Texas' 254 counties, and nearly 63 percent are economically disadvantaged.

Veterans at TSTC

TSTC is proud to have many veterans of the armed services among its graduates. Since 2010, TSTC Waco alone has graduated 279 veterans. Roger Hinojosa, from Brownwood, Texas, served in the United States Army as a combat medic prior to attending TSTC Waco. Roger completed his Associate of Applied Science degree in Avionics and is currently working for L3 Communications as an avionics cable assembly technician. Travis Beach, from Chester, New York, served in the United States Army as a generator mechanic. Travis completed his Associate of Applied Science degree in Aviation Maintenance, also from TSTC Waco, and is currently working for L3 Communications as a night shift supervisor for the Manufacturing Division.

➤ TSTC System – Competency-Based Education, A New Approach to Workplace Readiness

Central to TSTC's efforts to assist veterans in their transition into the workplace is a new initiative intended to shorten the time necessary to earn an award. The new competency-based education model, however, does not sacrifice the quality of skills learned. TSTC began offering this competency-based approach in the fall of 2013 at two locations. The model aligns particularly well with the needs of veterans, displaced workers and career-focused high school graduates.

TSTC Harlingen has implemented the first competency-based certificate in Industrial Systems Technology, part of the growing field of Mechatronics. This prototype decouples skills development from semester credit hours and is recognized as being among the first competency-based certificates in Texas by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

TSTC's multi-institution teaching center in Hutto, the East Williamson County Higher Education Center (EWCHEC), has implemented competency-based instructional delivery across multiple certificate and degree programs. The primary emphasis is on skills mastery. Lecture materials are delivered online, and class time is focused on applied learning in state-of-the-art labs where students work both individually and in teams. Students are routinely assessed for their ability to demonstrate competency in skills which are linked to courses within a semester.

Competency-based programming is designed to allow a student to demonstrate mastery of real-world job skills at his or her own pace. In this way, a student will not spend unnecessary "seat time" in classes reviewing information he or she already knows, either through past job experience or through military service. As a result, a two-year welding degree can now be completed in as few as four semesters – saving time and money while minimizing a student's deferred wages. Competency programming also ensures that the student learns and masters each required skill, rather than simply earning an average score for a semester-long course.

➤ TSTC Waco – Veterans Enrichment Efforts

Although TSTC's smaller locations work with state and community organizations to provide services to assist veterans, the larger campuses have implemented a number of special programs for veterans. For the sake of brevity and this Congressional Field Hearing, the services and programs listed below are specific to TSTC Waco.

- Veterans' Council – Created in the spring of 2011, the Veterans' Council meets monthly on the TSTC Waco campus in order to bring awareness to activities, issues and/or challenges that pertain to veteran students. The council is comprised of TSTC staff, faculty, students and representatives from several community support organizations. The council also coordinates an annual Veterans' Day Appreciation Luncheon for students, faculty and staff who are veterans. The 2013 luncheon will be held November 7th at the Student Recreation Center on campus.
- Credit Crosswalk – Developed through a grant in 2010, the Credit Crosswalk provides veterans a tool to determine if college credit can be awarded for their military training. The Crosswalk compares military occupations to TSTC's coursework and is used to determine if military training is transferrable to TSTC. The Crosswalk is available online at <http://www.waco.tstc.edu/veterans/militaryoccupations>, an efficient tool available at the fingertips of any veteran searching for the right place to continue his education.
- Targeted Recruiting at Fort Hood in Killeen – TSTC Waco's staff and faculty regularly make targeted recruiting trips to Fort Hood, located nearby in the Central Texas area. Hundreds of people transition from military assignments to civilian life each month from this installation. Recruiters attend transition events, along with job and career fairs. TSTC Waco's information is disseminated to interested persons and help is offered to veterans who wish to begin the enrollment process. Also, Fort Hood personnel are regularly apprised of the opportunities for veterans at TSTC Waco.

- Veterans' Support Services Center – A Wagner-Peyser grant proposal is currently under consideration within the Texas Governor's Office. Although TSTC Waco traditionally enrolls a significant population of veteran students, the college's success in retaining and placing veteran students needs improvement. During the 2012 – 2013 academic year, 571 veterans attended TSTC Waco, about 13 percent of the student population. Historically, however, many of them leave without earning a certificate or degree (see addendum). The college currently has only one full-time staff member devoted to the needs of veteran students. The Wagner-Peyser funding will launch a Veterans' Support Services Center with the goal of improving TSTC Waco's ability to recruit, enroll, retain and graduate veteran students into high-demand occupations.

TSTC Waco's Veterans' Support Services Center will be located within the Division of Student Development and will provide the following services:

- Expanded recruiting efforts, especially at Fort Hood which is located approximately one hour south of campus (In fiscal year 2013, approximately 11,000 soldiers will exit the service from Fort Hood.)
- Enhanced intake assistance, including review of military training transcripts and TSTC Waco program recommendations and including the use of Credit Crosswalk software to review military transcripts for college credit
- Expedited benefits assistance, processing and validation
- Social services support and referrals
- Specialized counseling support and referrals (PTSD, social adjustment, etc.)
- Educational support (coaching, mentoring, tutoring, etc.)
- Enhanced placement assistance

The project will utilize strategies from the Texas Workforce Commission's College Credit for Heroes, along with the Credit Crosswalk developed at TSTC Waco, to ensure that military training can be applied to a technical training program.

TSTC Harlingen recently created a similar full-service Veterans' Center, serving approximately 200 veteran students. Services offered include benefit assistance, referrals for support services, scholarships, tutoring, academic advisement and veterans' event coordination with outside service agencies. The college is also actively involved in the College Credit for Heroes Scholarship Program.

Conclusion

Without exception, the colleges within the TSTC System are committed to serving U.S. military veterans. That commitment has led to the creation of a Veterans' Service Center on one campus and to the development of plans for another. TSTC is also committed to finding innovative educational pathways for the efficient and cost-effective transition of veterans into the workplace. The competency-based learning prototype is but one such pathway. As part of Texas' Skilled Workforce Initiative, the prototype is intended for statewide implementation and is geared toward assisting veterans wanting to maximize military training and earn a college credential. With the competency-based learning model in place and access to the Credit Crosswalk, veterans attending TSTC will be able to make the most of their military training as they successfully transition into the civilian workforce.