



**TEXAS A&M**  
UNIVERSITY  
CENTRAL TEXAS

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# Academic Master Plan

## 2024-2030

Connection—Transformation—Success

October 5, 2023

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## **Overview of Texas A&M University-Central Texas**

Texas A&M University-Central Texas (A&M-Central Texas) traces its roots back to 1973 at the formation of the American Technological University (ATU). In September of 1973, more than thirty years before it would become known as A&M-Central Texas, ATU opened its doors, marking an historical effort on behalf of citizens in the area to establish upper-division higher education in the Central Texas area. While the early curriculum placed a great deal of emphasis on technological programs, offering baccalaureate degrees in programs such as general technology, computer science, and industrial technology, among others, ATU had continued to progressively take the shape of a liberal arts college, with degrees in counseling, psychology, criminal justice, and social work.

To reflect this shift, in September 1989, ATU officially changed its name to the University of Central Texas (UCT), and concurrently experienced a growth in enrollment from approximately 550 students in 1988 to more than 1,000 in 1997. In October of 1998, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) supported Tarleton State University's proposal to create a university system center in Central Texas. The organization of the new public university included UCT gifting more than \$7 million in assets to Tarleton.

A&M Central Texas was formed on September 1, 1999, as Tarleton State University-Central Texas, and became a stand-alone university on May 27, 2009, one of eleven universities within The Texas A&M University System. A&M-Central Texas is an upper-level institution offering junior- and senior-level coursework needed to successfully complete baccalaureate degrees and all coursework leading to the completion of graduate (master's and specialist) degrees. A&M-Central Texas became a separately accredited institution in June 2013 through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), retroactive to January 1, 2013.

The student population at A&M-Central Texas is diverse and growing, currently serving over 3,000 students. In the 2022-2023 academic year, 37% of students reported that they were White, 25% reported they were Black or African American, 27% reported they were Hispanic or Latino, and 11% reported that they were Asian/Pacific Islander/Native American/Other. More than 10,000 students have graduated with a baccalaureate or graduate degree since 2009.

A&M-Central Texas is located on 672 beautiful acres of land at the intersection of State Highway 195 and State Highway 201 in Killeen. The land was transferred to The Texas A&M University System from the U.S. Army in the summer of 2009. In addition to classes being offered on the main campus, classes are also offered at several other convenient sites, including Fort Cavazos and the East Williamson County Higher Education Center in Hutto, TX. The university provides a wide range of flexible course schedules, including online, hybrid, evening, and weekend classes.

Full-time faculty, advisors, and support staff are available to assist students with admission, financial aid, degree plans, and career planning during both day and extended evening hours. As an upper-level institution, A&M-Central Texas has developed partnership agreements with Alamo College District, Austin Community College District, Blinn College District, Central Texas College, Dallas College, LoneStar College, McLennan Community College, Temple College, and Texas State Technical College to provide the quickest and most affordable route to a Bachelor's degree. In addition, A&M-Central Texas faculty and staff actively engage in dialog with representatives from area community colleges to monitor instructional need and to ensure appropriate access to educational opportunities at all levels.

A&M-Central Texas offers the Bachelor of Arts (BA), Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences (BAAS), Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA), Bachelor of Science (BS), Bachelor of Music (BMus), Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and the Bachelor of Nursing (RN to BSN) at the undergraduate level and the Master of Arts (MA), Master of Business Administration (MBA), Master of Criminal Justice (MCJ), Master of Education (MEd), Master of Science (MS), and Specialist in School Psychology (SSP) at the graduate level. Specific undergraduate degree majors are available in English, History, Criminal Justice, Music, Anthropology, Aviation Science-Aviation Management, Aviation Science-Professional Pilot, Biology, Liberal Studies, Mathematics, Mechanical Engineering Technology, Political Science, Sociology, Nursing, Social Work, Accounting, Computer Information Systems, Finance, Human Resource Management, Management, Marketing, Business, Information Technology, Computer Science, Psychology, Education, and Exercise Physiology and Human Performance. Graduate degrees are available in English, History, Criminal Justice, Homeland Security, Liberal Studies, Mathematics, Business Administration, Accounting, Information Systems, Leadership for Sustainability, Teaching, Curriculum and Instruction, Educational Leadership, Higher Education Leadership, Applied Psychology, Clinical Mental Health Counseling, Marriage and Family Therapy, and School Psychology.

## **Mission**

Texas A&M University–Central Texas empowers students through innovative education and transformative experiences, fostering personal growth, economic mobility, and lifelong success in a supportive environment.

## **Vision**

Texas A&M University–Central Texas will be a national leader in assisting students in earning high-quality credentials that lead to educational, economic, social, and personal fulfillment.

## **Core Values**

### **INTEGRITY**

Evidence-based decisions guided by our mission and values demonstrate integrity and accountability in our commitment to student success.

### **INNOVATION**

Through strengthened connections and collaborative partnerships, our community drives innovation and meets diverse needs.

### **CREATIVITY**

Anticipating and shaping the future of education, our creativity and flexibility embody adaptability and innovation.

### **EXCELLENCE**

Our commitment to excellence in academics and scholarship drives us to uphold high standards for critical thinking and continuous improvement.

### **CARING SUPPORT**

We actively cultivate a caring environment where empathy and support guide our interactions, ensuring that the needs of each individual are met with understanding.

### **COMMUNITY CONNECTION**

Fostering a welcoming environment, we value and connect with each individual in our community.

## **Academic Master Plan (2024-2029)**

Recognizing the value of faculty involvement for long-term academic planning, in 2022 Provost Gray-Vickrey called for the establishment of an academic master plan (AMP) task force to be composed of faculty representatives from the three academic colleges and the University Library. The seven faculty representatives were a diverse group with collectively over 89 years of experience at A&M-Central Texas.

That committee solicited input from faculty and staff across the university regarding the essential academic priorities of A&M-Central Texas. During the Spring 2022 semester, the committee met frequently to review this feedback and discuss their own experiences in the context of the university's mission, vision, and core values to develop a clear articulation of academic goals that could guide the development of policies and allocation of resources in the coming years.

In this time of rapid change, it is clear that strategic plans must be flexible and responsive to changing conditions. As such, it may be necessary to revise planned academic interventions in response to data from ongoing assessments of progress or significant shifts in setting conditions. However, the goals identified by the committee were intentionally constructed in such a way that they are expected to be of enduring significance and relevance through the horizon of this academic master plan.

In the second stage of plan development another task force was established to help design strategies for accomplishing the goals identified in phase one and to identify potential mechanisms for assessing progress toward the goals. This task force was again comprised of faculty representatives from the three academic colleges and the University Library, and it additionally included representatives from Student Affairs and Institutional Research. Although each proposed strategy is primarily associated with a single goal, they were all designed intentionally to impact multiple goals identified in the plan. Additional input was solicited from faculty and staff of a draft with strategies and assessment plans. It was then submitted for review to Faculty Senate and then to Academic Council for review and approval.

### **Goals**

- I. Cultivate a transformative learning environment.**
- II. Foster a shared responsibility for academic development and student success.**
- III. Promote a sense of belonging, connection, and engagement.**

## **Goal I: Cultivate a transformative learning environment.**

Debates over the role of universities in a democratic society are not new, but the volume of the rhetoric about what a university *should* be seems to be louder than at any point in recent history. Regardless, all those who dedicate their time and talents to serving in an institution of higher learning can agree that transformation is essential to a university's purpose. We are catalysts for knowledge creation; we are instruments of occupational preparation; we are explorers for truth and producers of knowledge. Beyond all that, we are agents of transformation. We create an academic milieu where difficult conversations lead to expansion of awareness and identification of new questions to be asked. We are charged with cultivating curiosity, fanning the flames of a passion for life-long learning, and preparing students for jobs and challenges that do not yet exist.

Just as students may undergo transformative experiences, so too do faculty, staff, and even the University itself. Each member of the university community brings to it their own blend of knowledge and experiences, and it is in the unity of our diversity that we experience the greatest change and growth.

Our transformative ambitions go far beyond the walls of our institution. When we confer degrees upon graduates of the academy, they are reminded that, along with the rights and privileges pertaining thereto, the degree also comes with responsibilities. They are responsible for transforming their communities to best align with our shared values for *Excellence and Achievement, Compassion, Integrity, Knowledge, Diversity, Initiative, and Collaboration*. Additionally, the scholarly and artistic contributions of our faculty and staff have the potential to positively transform our communities given our emphasis on applied scholarship and community engagement.

### **Strategies:**

University Symposium on Current Advances in Teaching & Learning: A symposium will be conducted once per academic year focusing on a timely topic relevant to teaching and learning in higher education. A panel of volunteers will be recruited to lead a discussion of the chosen topic (latest empirical findings and relevance to the A&M-Central Texas community). Optimally, this panel would include at least one CAS faculty, COBA faculty, CEHD faculty, library faculty, CFE faculty, non-faculty staff member, undergraduate student, and graduate student.

Tracking & Incentivizing Out-of-Classroom Student Learning Experiences: Support the development/implementation of a system for tracking students' engagement in out-of-classroom learning experiences (e.g., community-engagement activities, study abroad, etc.) as well as a plan for incentivizing engagement in these experiences.

Tracking & Incentivizing Student Engagement with the University: Support the development/implementation of a system for tracking students' engagement in academic

support services (e.g., library, writing center, etc.) as well as a plan for incentivizing use of these services.

High Impact Practices Fellows Program: Support the implementation of a fellowship program for faculty to develop materials to implement/refine high-impact practices (HIPs) in a course/program. Fellows will serve as resources to support students, staff, and faculty regarding the development and implementation of HIPs (grounded in evidenced-based practices) as a means to support student success.

Critical Review, Revision, and Creation of Faculty Reward Structures to Support Student Success: Identify areas to improve faculty reward structures (e.g., tenure and promotion, post-tenure review) to recognize and weight faculty participation in activities that support student success.

#### Assessment:

In addition to assessing the degree to which each of these strategies is implemented, multiple quantitative and qualitative indicators of transformation will be evaluated to determine the degree to which students, faculty, and staff are experiencing transformation relevant to their respective roles and that supports the mission of the university. The primary foci of transformation to be evaluated are knowledge and skills, individual growth, and well-being.

Potential indicators of success include year-to-year increases in:

- Percentage of students reporting, via course evaluations, a “remarkable increase” in knowledge and skills in courses identified by the faculty as essential courses for transformation/growth within their disciplines.
- Percentage of students who participated in out-of-the-classroom student learning experiences.
- Percentage of students who engaged with student support services at the university.
- Percentage of senior students reporting via the NSSE that they “very often” engaged in “Reflective and Integrative Learning” activities in their courses.
- Percentage of senior students reporting via the NSSE that they completed at least two HIPs.
- Percentage of first-generation students who have completed an undergraduate degree program within four years of matriculation at the A&M Central Texas.
- Number of graduates from an undergraduate program at the university who are enrolled in or have completed a graduate degree program within two years of earning their bachelor’s degree.

- Percentage of faculty who engaged in formal professional development activities related to pedagogy or scholarship in an academic year.
- Percentage of faculty who engaged in formal professional development activities related to knowledge/skills specific to their field of study in an academic year.
- Percentage of staff who engaged in formal professional development activities related to their role at the university in an academic year.
- Percentage of faculty/staff participating in events/initiatives that involve discussions of student, institutional, and societal factors that impact student success.
- Percentage of faculty/staff serving in a leadership/mentoring role.
- Percentage of eligible faculty applying for promotion
- Percentage of students who “strongly agree” with items on the Student Experience Survey indicative of the university’s role in supporting transformation (e.g., My courses are preparing me to achieve my career goals.)

**Goal II: Foster a shared responsibility for academic development and student success.**

The primary focus of A&M-Central Texas is the academic development of our students and support of their pursuits of success. Unfortunately, as in many large organizations, there is sometimes segmentation and “silo-ing” across different units and areas dedicated to this focus. While some differentiation in function is necessary for efficiency and optimization of specialized knowledge and skills, coordination across student-focused functions is essential. It is easy for many of us to understand that student success happens in the classroom, but we often fail to appreciate that this success is the culmination of a symphony of coordinated services. In accordance with our value of *Collaboration*, we seek a coordinated approach in which students will perceive a seamless supportive process from initial contact through graduation and beyond.

Shared commitment to a unifying goal does not mean that we will adopt a monolithic view of student success and academic development. Rather, the involvement of diverse viewpoints will lead to a truer and deeper shared understanding of the many different facets of student success and academic development. This shared understanding is expected to better position each of us to support all efforts to develop our students and guide them on a path toward successful outcomes.

**Strategies:**

Success Circles: Faculty and staff will be provided opportunities to join “circles” of individuals with a shared interest, characteristic, or life experience (e.g., first-generation student, multilingual, interest in artificial intelligence, etc.). Groups are encouraged to invite student participation and/or input to help promote the ecological validity of the group’s work. Each circle will be provided with an online platform to facilitate



interaction and collaboration among the members. Given that groups tend to have greater longevity and vitality when they have a shared goal, each circle will be charged with developing recommendations for an intervention and/or change in policy/process to increase student success. These “Circles” will be given an opportunity to present their recommendations annually at an appropriate university-level committee.

Access to Data on Student Success: To support program-level efforts to understand the challenges faced by students, programs will have access to program-specific data on risk factors related to persistence as well as qualitative feedback from students who have withdrawn from courses and/or from the university.

Early Alert System: To support the implementation of an early alert system that monitors risk factors related to student retention, all relevant staff and faculty stakeholders will be provided sufficient training related to this system and clear guidelines will be established for communicating with students regarding alerts and opportunities for resource engagement.

Student Success Collaborative: An interdisciplinary/interprofessional team will be established to support the coordination of the university’s response to students who have been identified as being at risk of stopping out prior to degree completion. Rather than dictating action, the primary focus of this group will be facilitation of communication to increase efficiency of student support efforts.

#### Assessment:

In addition to assessing the degree to which each of these strategies is implemented, progress toward achievement of this goal will be assessed by evaluating multiple qualitative and quantitative indicators of two factors:

- the degree to which members of the university community collaborate to support academic development and student success, and
- the degree to which each member of the university community contributes to the shared goal of supporting academic development and student success.

Data will be gathered from students and from faculty/staff that have a direct role in supporting academic development and student success as well as those who have an indirect role in providing support.

Potential indicators of success include year-to-year increases in:

- Percentage of students reporting that their instructors “Promoted an environment helpful to learning” via course evaluations.
- Percentage of senior students reporting via the NSSE that they “very often” experienced activities in the category of “Effective Teaching Practices.”

- Percentage of students who “strongly agree” with items on the Student Experience Survey indicative of a supportive advising experience (e.g., TAMUCT advisors have helped me plan my education.).
- Percentage of faculty reporting via the FSSE that they “very much” engage in “Effective Teaching Practices.”
- Percentage of senior students reporting via the NSSE that they “very often” engaged in “Collaborative Learning” to support the success of their peers.
- Percentage of senior students reporting via the NSSE that they “very often” experienced “Student-Faculty Interaction(s)” supportive of success.
- Percentage of senior students reporting via the NSSE that they “very often” experienced a “Supportive Environment” at the university.
- Percentage of senior students reporting via the NSSE that their interactions with academic advisors, faculty, student services staff, and other offices were “Excellent.”
- Percentage of faculty reporting via the FSSE that they “strongly agree” that they know where to get help with teaching.
- Percentage of students reporting via the Student Experience survey that they “strongly agree” that “at a minimum, I know whom to go to that will redirect me to the information I need.”

### **Goal III: Promote a sense of belonging, connection, and engagement.**

One of the great ironies of the global pandemic that began in 2020 is that in many ways it brought us together via universal experiences, but it also drove us into isolation and disconnection. Now, more than any time in our institution’s history, it is vital that we work to support engagement and establish a sense of belonging and connection in and among the members of our university community. This is a special place, not just another job or another university. We are unique in our structure, in our student population, in our stage of development, and in our university culture. Recent challenges have made it difficult to maintain all the valuable aspects of our culture or to share it with newcomers to the university. However, one thing has remained true: we are all here with a purpose. The reasons our students are drawn here are numerous, but they are certainly different in important ways from the reasons students attend other universities. Faculty and staff who choose this place usually do so because they are attracted to some aspect of its uniqueness: characteristics of the student population (first-generation, veteran-affiliated, real-world-experienced), the opportunity to inform the development of a university, the connections to the community, etc.

This truth of our shared purpose has no relevance if it has no visibility. Belonging without connection will not help us advance together. Only through dialogue will the evolution of the university have direction. The university is one of the few places where dialogue is expected to promote growth because we are not seeking to win a debate.

While so many others today are focused on magnifying points of contention, we are contending to find points of connection as we seek to establish a sense of place within the university and within our surrounding region.

#### Strategies:

Collaborative Conversations to Address Community Issues: A public conversation will be held on a regular schedule (e.g., annually or biennially) where university representatives will work collaboratively with each other and community partners to share their work to illustrating how the various viewpoints of the academic disciplines at the university can be helpful in addressing a challenge we face in our community. Ideally, presentation teams will include representation from diverse stakeholder groups (e.g., faculty, staff, students, and community leaders). This work will be showcased in the annual/biennial conversations, and all stakeholders will be invited to participate.

University Newsletter: An electronically-transmitted newsletter will be regularly delivered to the university community that succinctly identifies important University happenings and provides links to documents/websites with more detailed information.

Discipline-Specific Student Orientation Materials/Process: Academic departments and programs will identify how they orient students to their academic programs and how the curriculum will support students in pursuit of their academic and professional goals. This may include collaborations with Student Affairs in support of New Student Orientation, intentional curriculum design related to academic orientation, program-specific orientation events/materials, etc.

Discipline-Specific Faculty Orientation Materials/Process: Academic departments and programs will identify how they orient new faculty to their academic programs and to policies and procedures of the University. This may include collaborations with the Center for Faculty Engagement, the Office of the Provost, Human Resources, and other internal stakeholders.

Collaborative Investigations of Factors Associated with Faculty Retention: Faculty volunteers from each college in the university will research and identify factors associated with faculty attrition and make recommendations for addressing these issues to increase faculty retention.

#### Assessment:

In addition to assessing the degree to which each of these strategies is implemented, multiple quantitative and qualitative indicators will be evaluated to determine the degree to which students, faculty, and staff are experiencing a sense of:

- belonging to and welcome at the university community,
- connection to other members of the university community, and

- engagement in activities aligned with fulfilling their purpose at the university.

Potential indicators of success include year-to-year increases in:

- Percentage of senior students reporting via the NSSE that they “very often” engaged in activities in the category of “Discussions with Diverse Others.”
- Percentage of senior students reporting via the NSSE that they “strongly agree” that they feel a “Sense of Belonging” at the university.
- Percentage of students who report on the Student Experience Survey that they use student support services.
- Student satisfaction with support services reported on the Student Experiences Survey.
- Percentage of students that “strongly agree” with indicators of a sense of belonging/connection on the Student Experience Survey.
- Number of university-sponsored opportunities for social/communal engagement in an academic year.
- Percentage of faculty reporting via the FSSE that they “strongly agree” that they feel a “Sense of Belonging” at the university.
- Faculty retention rate.
- Staff retention rate.
- Student retention rate.
- Number of university programs and events sponsored by Staff Council.
- Number of wellness programs offered by the university.
- Number of professional development programs offered to staff and faculty.

Academic Master Plan Task Force—Stage 1:

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