



Highlighting a S.T.A.R.—System with Targeted Actions and Results

Today we are highlighting a S.T.A.R. from “around them there parts” in South Texas: Laredo, Texas, to be exact. Laredo College is practicing some of the Texas Peer Mentor Network (TX-PMN) tenets, including (1) Leadership: through implementing systems that provide structural changes and (2) Student Services: by removing barriers for students that allow access to pathways and completion. Notably, the high regard for the Adult Education and Continuing Education programs by the college is solid. Upon arrival of the TX-PMN site visit team, leadership was there to welcome and show support for the Network’s initiative. The team met with the Provost/VP of Academic Affairs, Dr. Marisela Rodriguez; VP of Student Success and Enrollment, Dr. Fred Solis; and Interim Dean of Arts and Sciences, Dr. Horacio Salinas. During lunch, Dr. Ricardo J. Solis, President of Laredo College, came to greet the group. Close relationships are evident with mutual respect. Inevitably those tight-knit relationships lead to systemic changes at Laredo College.

In the first place, the campus is beautiful, well-designed, and rich with architecture. For those who do not know, Laredo’s downtown campus sits on an historical landmark, Fort McIntosh. Driving along the streets, one can see the names of officers, both on buildings and street signs that honor the fallen soldiers in the Mexican-American War. Signs with dates listed from 1886 are posted in several locations: over 133 years of archeological landmarks are present on Fort McIntosh. Then there is the eccentricity of the Traffic Control Officer. She performs her job with zeal as her arms motion in multiple directions. It is as though she is honoring the fallen officers of the past and by completing her duty with honor. Another cool fact: President Solis resides in unit P-9 on the Fort McIntosh campus. History states this was the Post Commander’s residence in the 1800’s. How many of us will ever tell stories about living in a historic building rich with history? What an honor!

Additionally, the campus felt ALIVE! The energy level (on a scale of 1-10, ten being fabulous) was no doubt fab-u-lous! The cafeteria was filled with students eating from a variety of food choices. The atmosphere? Well, it felt like a “Fiesta” during the lunch hour. (Fiesta is “party” in Spanish.) Clearly, this is a factor as to why the campus was filled with students’ beautiful smiling faces. To know is to experience; so, if ever in Laredo, Texas, be sure to tour the campus, which is exciting, full of student life, and buzzing with activities. Plus, the campus’s architecture is breathtaking!

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So, what is the news that can be used from the TX-PMN team visit to Laredo, Texas? There is lots to tell, but the highlight will focus on one of Laredo’s most exciting S.T.A.R.s — the “Articulation Process.”

Articulation, simply put, considers a process that can utilize one program or system's form of credit and articulates the system's designated credit to another program or system's form of credit. There are different types of credits: Dual credit, Continuing Education credit, and Semester Credit Hours (SCH). At Laredo College, it is common to see articulation agreements to process dual credit to SCH, continuing ed units to SCH, and even community college SCH to university SCH. One key element when forming an articulation agreement is to ensure that the same educational content is shared between the two credit programs/systems. The TX-PMN team had the pleasure of learning about Laredo's Continuing Ed to SCH articulation process.

Laredo native Sandra Cortez, Dean of Community Education, has a unique role and relationship within Laredo's college system. Sandra's position incorporates both the Adult Education and the Continuing Education programs under her leadership. Both programs share the Eloy Garcia Building, where classes are scheduled. Sandra's Deanship provides the significant ability to speak the language from both sides of the table that supports AE and CE students. Having this unique role, Sandra and her team were able to develop an articulation process in 2016 that will last throughout 2021, including five essential programs from the targeted occupation demand list. The articulation agreement was ignited by two grants that focused on career pathways: Project GROW (Growing Regional Opportunities for Workforce) and Project VAST (Vocational Advancement of South Texas). Both projects ended in 2015, but this did not cause the workforce team to lose momentum. They continued the success of having students earn a marketable skill and further achieving a level I certification by getting the right leaders and programs to the table, and that was the easy part.

Denise A. Flores, Workforce and Career Services Coordinator, shared that the necessary individuals that must be at the table to develop articulation successfully for Laredo are the President of Laredo College, Provost, Senior Director of Workforce, Senior Director of Community Education, Deans of intended programs, and the curriculum committee. Denise further stated that the requirement to ensure educational content aligned from CE to academic credit was accomplished by direct comparison between the CE and academic curricula. Laredo uses the same academic textbooks in a chosen articulated CE course and ensures that the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) qualifications for staff are met for classes that are up for consideration for articulation. A well thought out memorandum of understanding (MOU) was developed and followed. In the MOU there is no charge for articulation between CE units to academic credits for anyone involved. That means neither the CE program nor the AE program pay to articulate, and neither do the students. It is a "FREE" service.

Adult learners are typically the most significant benefactors from an articulation agreement because it ensures that students will not experience delays or duplication in services. However, students are rarely aware that there is a process in place to keep them moving along the career pathway. Student grades are simply translated from a CE pass/no pass grading system to an Academic letter grade on the student's transcript. The other stakeholder that directly benefits from articulation agreements is the educational institution. Articulation agreements may increase completion rates at a faster rate because of the vastly different scheduling systems between CE courses and semester credit hour (SCH) courses.

Another insightful initiative shared by Eduardo Martinez, Instructional and Professional Development Coordinator, is his current venture in comparing HISET and GED practice test scores among HSE students. This initiative could lead to better guidance for students taking the HSE test within the community. Which test will show higher completion rates? Only time will tell, and the Network looks forward to hearing about both the research and the results.

Check out Laredo's articulation PowerPoints:

<http://bit.ly/LaredoArt> • <http://bit.ly/LaredoOSA2019>