

HIGHER EDUCATION & THE 86TH LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Investing in higher education is an investment in the future of our state. As Chair of the House Committee on Higher Education, I am proud of what we were able to accomplish during this recent legislative session. There's still much to do in order to reach the state's 60x30TX Plan goals. For more information on the state's higher education plan, [click here](#).

To follow is a snapshot of some of the measures passed into law and a majority missed opportunity. If you would like to see the full list of higher education measures passed into law, [click here](#).

IMPROVING TRANSFERABILITY OF COLLEGE CREDITS

A number of measures were filed to streamline the pathway to graduation for students who transfer credits from dual credit or two-year colleges to four-year general academic institutions. [SB 25](#), an omnibus transferability law which I sponsored, does several things to address the transferability of college credits. The new law:

- Requires institutions to create course sequences to help ensure that college credits taken at the junior college level transfer to four-year universities
- Requires public institutions report non-transferring courses;
- Requires that students file a degree plan or major earlier in their academic career.

Two other laws that I authored and passed make free course materials more accessible to instructors, college students and high school dual credit course takers by promoting the use of Open Educational Resources (OER). [HB 3650](#) requires that as a part of dual credit partnerships, a school district and the partnering higher education institution consider the use of free or low-cost OER materials in the courses offered. [HB 3652](#) creates a statewide OER repository that may be used by institutions of higher education across Texas. In addition to passing the measure to create the repository, budget writers also added \$250,000 to the two-year state budget to cover the cost.

PROTECTING COLLEGE STUDENTS

Despite past legislative reforms geared toward reducing sexual assault on college campuses, it is an issue that requires further action. As a result, we passed a number of bills to address sexual assault and other code of conduct issues on college campuses.

[HB 1735](#) amended the overarching policies in place at Texas institutions in regard to sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, and dating violence. It adds provisions such as counseling, requiring a designated Title IX Coordinator and trainings for peace officers on trauma-informed investigations.

[SB 212](#) establishes penalties for employees who fail to report information involving a student enrolled at the university concerning sexual assault, sexual harassment, dating violence, or stalking.

[HB 449](#), a bill I filed and have worked on for several years, will require all Texas universities to place a notation on a student's transcript if they are ineligible to re-enroll at an institution as a result of a serious disciplinary code of conduct violation, including sexual assault. Prior to this bill becoming law, several Texas institutions already placed a notation on the transcripts of students who had been expelled or suspended, including all of the institutions within the University of Texas, Texas A&M University and Texas Tech University systems. This bill simply ensures that the practice is consistent among all state institutions and that if a student who has been expelled or suspended applies to a new institution, the institution is notified of the serious disciplinary violation. It's important to note that suspensions and expulsions are rare at institutions and the law allows for removal of the notation if the student is once again eligible to re-enroll or for other good cause.

You may remember from my social media posts and email communications, the story of Sierra Smith, who, in large part, inspired this law. Over the course of two legislative sessions, Sierra traveled to Austin to tell her story. I am very grateful for her bravery and resilience. In case you missed it, you can watch her testimony [here](#).

In addition to sexual assault, the Legislature also passed measures related to drug, alcohol and hazing incidents on college campuses. Over the past year, we have seen [many examples of the impact](#) hazing can have on college campuses. To address this issue, [SB 38](#) changes the definition of hazing by expanding it to include acts involving coercing a student to consume an alcoholic beverage, liquor, or drugs.

Another measure I authored will require drug and alcohol overdose awareness and response training for residential advisors and officers of student organizations at institutions of higher education. This ensures that those in these roles are able to recognize the signs of overdose in time to alert emergency medical services and take interim steps in order to save a student's life.

MAJOR MISSED OPPORTUNITY

In the past, the Legislature would consider funding major infrastructure projects at our general academic institutions, health related institutions and Texas State Technical College System institutions via tuition revenue bonds (TRB). These are normally passed every four years in order to keep up with growth and aging facilities. The last TRB bill was passed in 2015 and included the Science and Engineering Innovation and Research Building (SEIR) at the University of Texas at Arlington.

This year, I filed [HB 2000](#), which would have authorized additional projects, including a sorely needed building to replace UTA's crumbling School of Social Work building and house its School of Nursing and Health Innovation's Smart Hospital. The measure had broad bi-partisan support

in the House, with more than 70 joint and co-authors. It also had the support of the governor. Unfortunately, the lieutenant governor and the Senate were unwilling to consider this legislation. It is my hope that we will be able to get TRBs back on track next session in order to address infrastructure and growth needs.

BIG NEWS FROM UT AUSTIN

Earlier this month, the University of Texas System and the University of Texas at Austin announced the [creation of a \\$160 million endowment](#) that will fully cover the tuition and fees for an estimated 8,000 lower- and middle-income students whose families earn less than \$65,000 per year. In addition, the money will also be used to provide additional financial aid to students with family incomes less than \$125,000.

The change puts UT on similar footing with Texas A&M, which has provided free tuition to students from families with income of \$60,000 or less since 2011.

This is great news and we need to build on this by expanding financial aid at other Texas universities to provide even more opportunity to deserving young Texans. I look forward to working with the University of Texas System, other systems and fellow legislators to make that happen.