



# What's happening off the field?

A Report on Higher Education in the Big 12



**ACTA**  
AMERICAN COUNCIL OF  
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American Council of Trustees and Alumni

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## Acknowledgments

This report was prepared by the staff of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, primarily by Heather Lakemacher and Eric Markley, in consultation with the Platte Institute of Omaha, Nebraska.

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## Overview

The Big 12 is famous for its athletics—and well it should be. But what about the rest of the conference—the academic part? The Big 12’s website says, “Performance in the classroom is just as important as accolades on the field.” So what’s happening off the field? How do the Big 12 schools fare when it comes to cost and quality?

The fact is, across the country, schools are at a crossroads. And schools in the Big 12 are no exception. Nationally, reductions in state funding for higher education have been massive. Although these cuts have been partially offset by the influx of federal stimulus money, that money has been spent, and it’s not likely there will be more.

For years, colleges and universities have had a simple solution to funding challenges: just raise tuition. But increasingly, that well is being tapped out. In the wake of stock market volatility and the crash of the housing market, there has been growing concern that higher education is in a “bubble,” with the cost of a four-year degree far outstripping the benefits of acquiring one. More than half of the respondents in a recent survey by Public Agenda said they think colleges could spend less without decreasing educational quality, and more than 80 percent agreed that students are having to borrow too much to go to college.<sup>1</sup>

In an uncertain environment, it is imperative that leaders of colleges and universities ensure that money spent on higher education—whether that money comes from students, parents, donors or taxpayers—is being invested wisely. So how do the universities in the Big 12 conference fare compared to the national trends? And how do they compare to each other? This study reflects a snapshot of the Big 12 universities in terms of those investments.<sup>2</sup> It asks how much families are paying to attend Big 12 schools, how the schools are spending that money, and what students get in return.

Nationally, families are having to borrow more and more money to pay for tuition, which eats up an ever larger percentage of household income. And, as we outline in the following pages, schools in the Big 12 are part of this troubling trend. If current increases continue, Big 12 schools will expect the average family

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1 John Immerwahr, Jean Johnson, et al., *Squeeze Play 2010: Continued Public Anxiety on Cost, Harsher Judgments on How Colleges Are Run* (New York: The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education and Public Agenda, 2010), 11-12.

2 The report studies the Big 12’s membership as it exists at the publishing of this report, November 2010.

with a middle school student to spend a full quarter of its annual household income on that child's college tuition.

And what exactly are families paying for? Not always instruction! Our study revealed that several schools in the Big 12 are suffering from massive administrative growth. Texas Tech, Kansas, and Oklahoma all doubled their spending on administration in just five years. Kansas State and Colorado also allowed administrative spending to grow faster than spending on instruction. And at many of the Big 12 schools, growth in athletic spending outpaced growth in instructional spending.

Is all this spending ensuring student success? Not really. A baccalaureate degree is supposed to take four years. But for students entering a Big 12 university in 2003, only one in three actually graduated in four years. Even at the very best of the Big 12 schools, one in five students does not graduate from those institutions even in six years. Not only are costs going up, but many students are paying tuition for more than the expected four years. While the Big 12 does slightly better than the national average, these are problems that institutions urgently must address.

With prices rising, are students at least getting a quality education? In far too many surveys, employers say that students are not prepared for the workforce, lacking necessary skills in writing, reading, and mathematics. The good news is that Big 12 schools offer relatively sound General Education requirements compared to the national average. Most Big 12 schools require their students to take courses in composition and college-level math and science. However, most do not require broad coursework in literature, U.S. government or history, or economics. The Big 12 requirements should be tightened so that they clearly point students to essential knowledge.

As outlined in the following pages, Big 12 schools are faced with many of the same problems plaguing institutions across the country: rising costs, low graduation rates, and curricular gaps that make real and proactive engagement imperative. Our hope is that institutional leaders—governors, regents, trustees, and administrators—will use this report to make the Big 12 as prominent off the field as it is on it.

# 1 How much are students paying for college?

The cost of higher education has gone up all over the country, but it has exploded among Big 12 institutions. Nationwide, four-year public colleges charged 21 percent more for tuition and fees in 2009-10 than they did in 2004-05, even after adjusting for inflation.<sup>3</sup> In the Big 12, however, the average tuition increase for the eleven public universities was 30 percent, with Colorado recording an astounding 61 percent rise in its tuition and fees.

While Oklahoma State was the least expensive institution during the five years studied, it is Iowa State that has done the best job at keeping increases down. But even they have raised tuition and fees nearly 8 percent during a recession. Three other schools (Texas Tech, Missouri, and Nebraska) kept their increases markedly under the national average, but still raised their pricetags a full 13 to 15 percent in just five years.

There doesn't seem to be a significant pattern to the increases. Baylor, the only private institution in the Big 12, raised tuition at about the same rate as the eleven publics. Smaller schools did much the same as larger ones. Geography made no difference; Colorado and Kansas had the biggest increases, while Nebraska and Iowa State were the lowest. Even within states there were great variations. Texas Tech raised tuition by 13 percent, for example, while the neighboring University of Texas raised it by 37 percent. This suggests that the increases cannot be written off to larger trends beyond the control of the institutions themselves. Big 12 schools must learn to contain spiraling tuition. The current rise in costs is simply not sustainable for families.

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<sup>3</sup> "Table 4: Average Published Tuition and Fee Charges in Constant 2010 Dollars, 1980-81 to 2010-11 (Enrollment-Weighted)," College Board, accessed 19 November 2010 <[http://trends.collegeboard.org/college\\_pricing/report\\_findings/indicator/40#f110](http://trends.collegeboard.org/college_pricing/report_findings/indicator/40#f110)>.

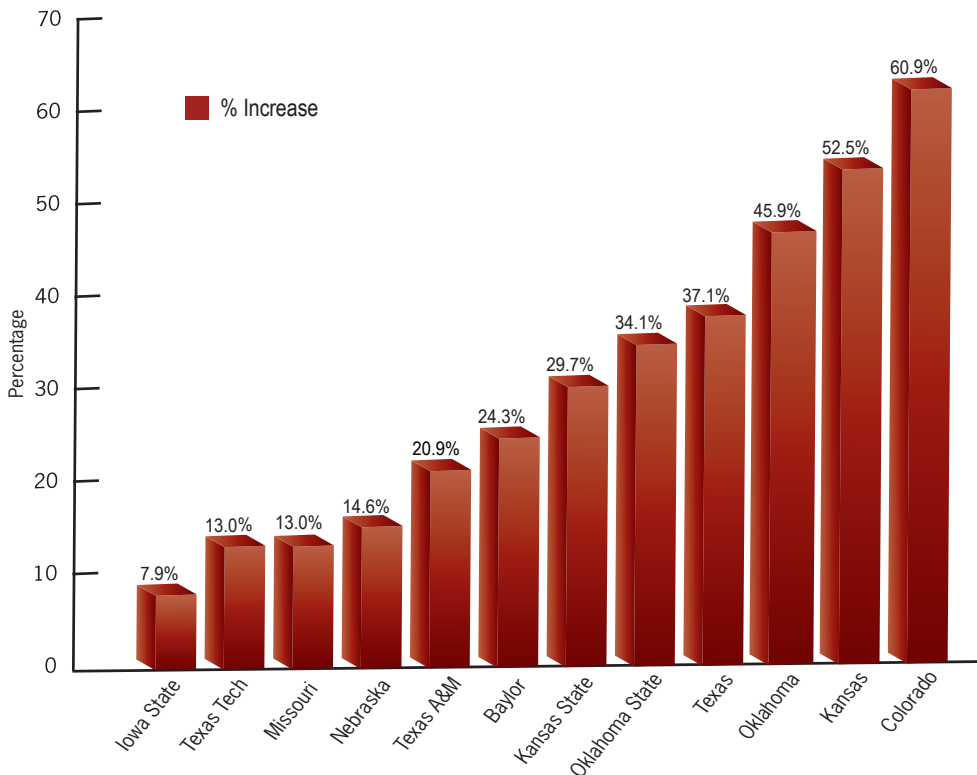


### PERCENTAGE INCREASE IN TUITION FROM 2004-05 TO 2009-10

INSTITUTION	2004-05	2009-10	% Change
Baylor University	\$22,578	\$28,070	24.3%
Iowa State University	6,162	6,651	7.9
Kansas State University	5,298	6,870	29.7
Oklahoma State University	4,624	6,202	34.1
Texas A&M University	6,763	8,176	20.9
Texas Tech University	5,497	6,210	13.0
University of Colorado	4,930	7,932	60.9
University of Kansas	5,380	8,206	52.5
University of Missouri	7,521	8,501	13.0
University of Nebraska	5,983	6,857	14.6
University of Oklahoma	5,128	7,483	45.9
University of Texas	6,513	8,930	37.1

Source: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)

Note: 2004 dollar amounts are expressed in 2009 inflation-adjusted numbers.



## 2. How do tuition rates compare to family income?

Increases in college costs are paid for by families who, in many cases, are already straining to pay mortgages and put food on the table. The charts on the following page illustrate this challenge by showing the rise in tuition and fees as a percentage of each state's inflation-adjusted median household income. In 2009, undergraduate tuition and required fees at all twelve universities required a greater percentage of household income than they did just five years earlier.

In 2004, families sending students to Big 12 schools were already expected to pay an average of 15 percent of their household income for annual tuition and fees. In 2009, the price rose to 19 percent of median household income. This represents an inflation-adjusted increase of more than 25 percent for the five-year period. At this rate of increase, families with children currently in middle school will be expected to pay more than a quarter of their income to send one child to a Big 12 school. Middle-class families with multiple college-bound students often have no choice but to incur massive debt to finance their children's education.

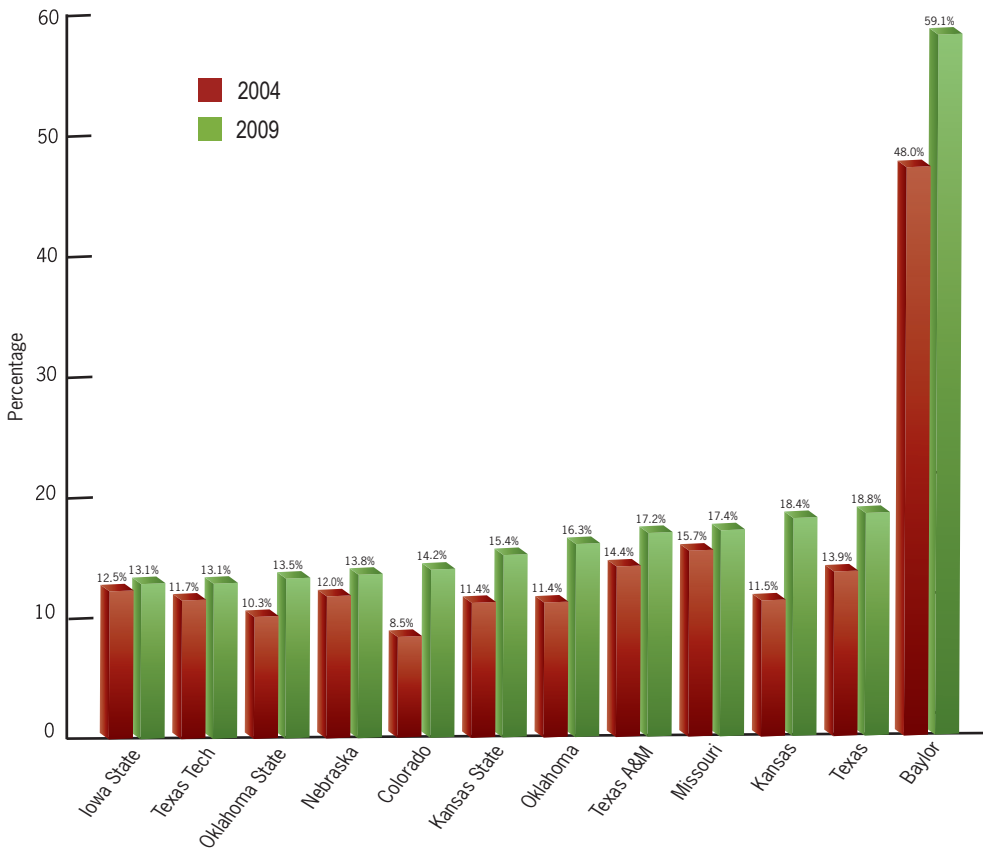
Again, Iowa State did the best job of containing the growth of costs during the last five years, holding the increase to 4.9 percent. No other school even came close to keeping the cost of college proportionate to families' incomes. Colorado households saw the sharpest increase, rising 66 percent in five years.

### UNDERGRADUATE TUITION & FEES AS A PERCENTAGE OF MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

INSTITUTION	2004	2009	Change in %	
			Points	% Change
Baylor University	48.0%	59.1%	11.1%	23.1%
Iowa State University	12.5	13.1	0.6	4.9
Kansas State University	11.4	15.4	4.0	35.2
Oklahoma State University	10.3	13.5	3.2	31.5
Texas A&M University	14.4	17.2	2.8	19.7
Texas Tech University	11.7	13.1	1.4	11.9
University of Colorado	8.5	14.2	5.7	66.2
University of Kansas	11.5	18.4	6.9	59.1
University of Missouri	15.7	17.4	1.7	10.9
University of Nebraska	12.0	13.8	1.8	14.9
University of Oklahoma	11.4	16.3	4.9	43.1
University of Texas	13.9	18.8	4.9	35.8

Sources: IPEDS and U.S. Census Bureau

Note: "Median household income" refers to the median household income of the state in which the institution is located.



### 3 What are the universities spending money on?

Increases in college costs might be defensible if the increases were going strictly to improve instructional quality, but that is hardly the case. Instead, a growing share of school funds is paying for layers and layers of administration. Some support staff are integral parts of instruction. However, the long-term trend is very clear. From 1976 to 2005, the ratio of non-instructional staff to instructors in American colleges and universities nearly doubled, rising from 4.5-to-10 to 8-to-10.<sup>4</sup>

In the five-year period ending in 2008, nine of the Big 12's institutions increased spending on administration, and they did so by an average of 59 percent. However, in this case, an overall average is misleading. Texas Tech, Kansas, and Oklahoma all *doubled* their spending on administration in just five years. Kansas State and Colorado also allowed administrative spending to grow faster than spending on instruction.

There are numerous rationales given for this kind of growth. Many administrators point to expensive technology, for example. Yet such arguments run into an inconvenient fact. During the period evaluated, three Big 12 colleges—Iowa State, Texas A&M, and Missouri—managed to make major *cuts* in administrative spending. At Missouri, the cost of administration was slashed nearly 40 percent. Such excellent performance undermines the myth that there are no cuts to be found and starkly highlights the failures of the schools whose administrative spending continued to rise. While their peers were finding ways to trim fat, some Big 12 schools were feasting on it.

And what about athletic spending? Universities are not required to report their athletic department's expenditures to the Department of Education as a separate item, so it's harder to say what exactly is going on. However, based on information obtained by *USA Today* through a Freedom of Information Act request, it appears that in recent years at least half of the Big 12 schools have allowed their athletic spending to grow at a higher rate than their instructional spending.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Vedder, *Over Invested and Over Priced: American Higher Education Today* (Washington, DC: Center for College Affordability and Productivity, 2007), 9.

## INSTRUCTIONAL VS. ADMINISTRATIVE SPENDING

INSTITUTION		2002-03 FY	2007-08 FY	\$ Change	% Change
Baylor University	<i>Instruction</i>	\$151,186,000	\$214,170,000	\$62,984,000	41.7%
	<i>Administration</i>	42,004,000	48,269,000	6,265,000	14.9
Iowa State University	<i>Instruction</i>	224,360,541	290,352,868	65,992,327	29.4
	<i>Administration</i>	34,832,473	27,934,951	(6,897,522)	-19.8
Kansas State University	<i>Instruction</i>	158,023,285	205,914,793	47,891,508	30.3
	<i>Administration</i>	18,736,212	27,220,408	8,484,196	45.3
Oklahoma State University	<i>Instruction</i>	150,191,488	198,045,747	47,854,259	31.9
	<i>Administration</i>	17,755,086	21,876,967	4,121,881	23.2
Texas A&M University	<i>Instruction</i>	497,704,264	602,693,410	104,989,146	21.1
	<i>Administration</i>	71,226,569	69,137,757	(2,088,812)	-2.9
Texas Tech University	<i>Instruction</i>	181,585,342	224,564,807	42,979,465	23.7
	<i>Administration</i>	21,410,255	43,685,216	22,274,961	104.0
University of Colorado	<i>Instruction</i>	275,443,907	342,767,027	67,323,120	24.4
	<i>Administration</i>	22,919,811	34,095,752	11,175,941	48.8
University of Kansas	<i>Instruction</i>	205,205,286	367,736,623	162,531,337	79.2
	<i>Administration</i>	23,858,224	52,580,178	28,721,954	120.4
University of Missouri	<i>Instruction</i>	225,556,259	333,870,426	108,314,167	48.0
	<i>Administration</i>	36,646,606	22,289,294	(14,357,312)	-39.2
University of Nebraska	<i>Instruction</i>	178,791,900	223,687,982	44,896,082	25.1
	<i>Administration</i>	29,351,670	35,729,568	6,377,898	21.7
University of Oklahoma	<i>Instruction</i>	170,267,000	258,305,000	88,038,000	51.7
	<i>Administration</i>	23,157,000	54,157,000	31,000,000	133.9
University of Texas	<i>Instruction</i>	507,494,162	660,919,857	153,425,695	30.2
	<i>Administration</i>	76,159,238	89,134,494	12,975,256	17.0

Source: IPEDS

## ATHLETIC SPENDING

INSTITUTION		2004-05 FY	2007-08 FY	\$ Change	% Change
Baylor University		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Iowa State University		\$28,227,582	\$38,642,012	\$10,414,430	36.9%
Kansas State University		34,394,621	41,362,747	6,968,126	20.3
Oklahoma State University		55,433,091	89,801,118	34,368,027	62.0
Texas A&M University		58,873,096	77,426,317	18,553,221	31.5
Texas Tech University		46,287,452	51,275,866	4,988,415	10.8
University of Colorado		36,614,714	48,368,255	11,753,541	32.1
University of Kansas		40,761,354	65,748,366	24,987,012	61.3
University of Missouri		46,351,896	51,779,677	5,427,781	11.7
University of Nebraska		55,799,485	74,981,110	19,181,625	34.4
University of Oklahoma		62,897,773	76,945,882	14,048,109	22.3
University of Texas		82,400,829	110,996,365	28,595,536	34.7

Source: <http://www.usatoday.com/sports/college/ncaa-finances.htm>, updated 02 April 2010

Notes: USA Today filed a Freedom of Information Act request to obtain the data above. Baylor is a private university and not subject to FOIA requests.

# 4

## What are students actually learning?

One of the simplest ways to control costs while enhancing educational quality is through a solid General Education program. General Education (sometimes called the core curriculum) refers to required undergraduate courses outside the student’s specialization or major. Many colleges give the appearance of providing a core curriculum because they require students to take courses in several subject areas other than their major—often called “distribution requirements.” However, within each subject area, it is not uncommon for students to have dozens or even hundreds of courses from which to choose—many of them on narrow or trendy subject matters. The chart on the following page reflects the institutions’ general education requirements in seven key categories. In most of the seven subjects, credit is given for requiring a broad, college-level survey course. (For further details on the criteria used, please see the Appendix.)

When resources are tight, reforming the core curriculum offers both financial and academic gains. Requiring standard courses in foundational subjects is a far more cost-effective model than distribution requirements, and general surveys of major fields give students a broader, more comprehensive education than do narrowly-focused courses.

Compared to the national average, Big 12 schools offer sound General Education programs. Nationally, less than 3 percent of schools receive an “A” for requiring six or seven of the core subjects. The average college requires courses in only three of the seven subjects. In contrast, three Big 12 schools receive an “A” (Baylor, Texas A&M, and University of Texas), and the conference’s schools require an average of 4.6 of the seven subjects.

Yet, even with this good performance, the Big 12 can do better. For example, only four of the 12 require an introductory literature survey. The others instead let students pick any course from a long list of generalized Arts or Humanities courses. Similarly, half the Big 12 schools do not require a U.S. government or history survey, instead accepting narrow or specialized history courses. Such courses are often preferred by faculty, who want to focus on their academic specializations.

Big 12 schools do an excellent job of requiring foundational courses in composition, mathematics, and science. In order to ensure their students acquire

the knowledge they need with the limited resource they have, they should tighten their requirements to ensure that students take broad courses in literature, U.S. government or history, and economics.

The Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), or a similar test of core collegiate skills, is now being used by most Big 12 institutions. Texas Tech and the University of Texas are the first to post their results on the CLA: in comparison with peers, University of Texas undergraduates showed expected learning gains; Texas Tech students exceeded expectation.

## GENERAL EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS BY INSTITUTION

INSTITUTION	Comp	Lit	Lang	Gov/ Hist	Econ	Math	Sci	GRADE
Baylor University	√	√	√	√		√	√	A
Iowa State University	√					√	√	C
Kansas State University	√		√			√	√	B
Oklahoma State University	√		√	√		√	√	B
Texas A&M University	√	√	√	√		√	√	A
Texas Tech University	√		√	√		√	√	B
University of Colorado	√		√				√	C
University of Kansas	√	√				√	√	B
University of Missouri	√		√			√	√	B
University of Nebraska	√		√			√	√	B
University of Oklahoma	√		√	√		√	√	B
University of Texas	√	√	√	√		√	√	A

### Notes:

*Iowa State:* No credit given for Foreign Language because students may fulfill the requirement with elementary-level study.

*Kansas State:* No credit given for U.S. Government or History, because, while the Western Heritage requirement has some solid offerings, students may fulfill the requirement with narrow topical courses.

*University of Colorado:* No credit given for U.S. Government or History because the Historical Context and United States Context requirements may be satisfied by courses narrow in scope. No credit given for Mathematics because the Quantitative Reasoning and Mathematical Skills requirement may be satisfied by courses with little college-level math content.

*University of Kansas:* No credit given for U.S. Government or History because the Historical Studies requirement does not specifically require the study of U.S. history.

*University of Missouri:* No credit given for U.S. Government or History because even though the State of Missouri has a Constitutions requirement, students may fulfill it by taking a course in Missouri history or U.S. history courses that are narrow in scope.

## 5. Are freshmen returning?

Just as businesses track their repeat customers, colleges and universities track their freshmen retention rates. This measure examines the percentage of first-time, full-time freshmen who continue the following year as sophomores. In effect, this is the first-year drop-out rate. It is an important measure for two reasons. First, remaining after the first year is an indicator that the student is more likely to complete his or her degree. Second, it can also suggest—especially to an institution that has a large drop-out rate after the first year—that the students were not sufficiently prepared to succeed. The cost of such errors is large. State and federal governments spent an estimated \$9 billion between 2003 and 2008 on students who dropped out of college during their freshman year.<sup>5</sup>

Once more, Big 12 schools have done better than the national average on this crucial measure—but not as well as they can do. The national average for first-year retention is 78.4 percent,<sup>6</sup> and 11 of the Big 12 schools do better than that. Only Kansas is slightly lower. However, that still means that about one in six freshmen are dropping out before their sophomore year. What is most alarming, however, is the trendline on this crucial statistic. The majority of Big 12 schools are losing ground. Only four member institutions managed to improve their freshman retention rates over the last five years.

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5 Eric Kelderman, “College Dropouts Cost Taxpayers Billions, Report Says,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 11 October 2010 <<http://chronicle.com/article/College-Dropouts-Cost/124883/>>.

6 “Performance across the 1,576 Colleges on CollegeMeasures.org,” American Institutes for Research, accessed 19 November 2010 <<http://collegemeasures.org/reporting/national/>>.

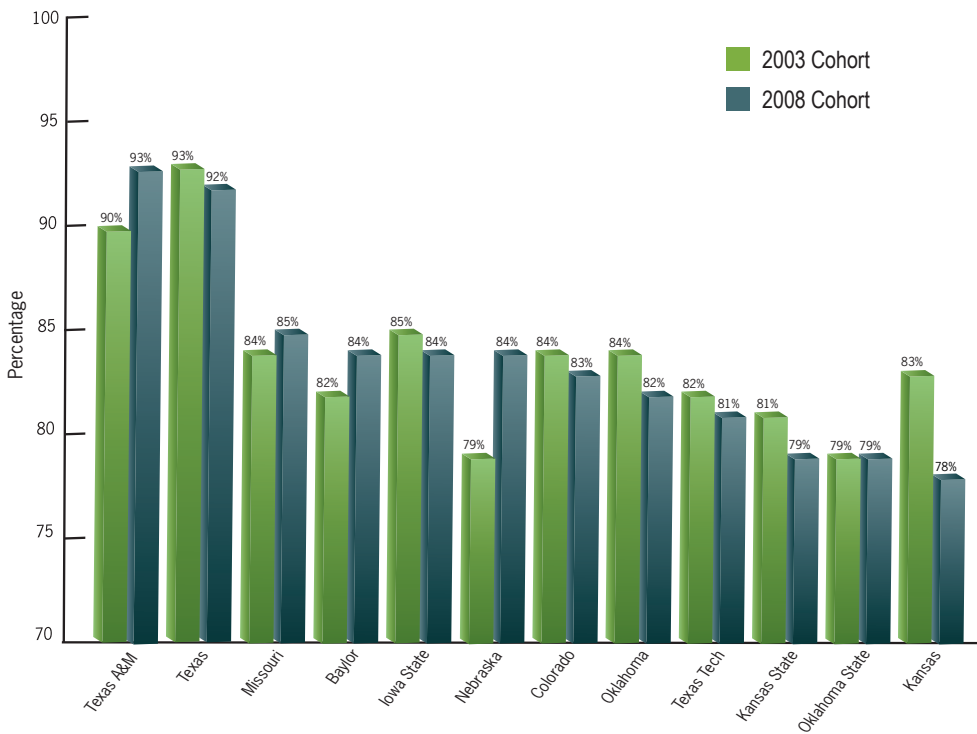


### FIRST-YEAR RETENTION RATES FOR FIRST-TIME, FULL-TIME FRESHMEN

INSTITUTION	2003 Cohort	2008 Cohort	Change in % Points
Baylor University	82.0%	84.0%	2.0%
Iowa State University	85.0	84.0	-1.0
Kansas State University	81.0	79.0	-2.0
Oklahoma State University	79.0	79.0	0.0
Texas A&M University	90.0	93.0	3.0
Texas Tech University	82.0	81.0	-1.0
University of Colorado	84.0	83.0	-1.0
University of Kansas	83.0	78.0	-5.0
University of Missouri	84.0	85.0	1.0
University of Nebraska	79.0	84.0	5.0
University of Oklahoma	84.0	82.0	-2.0
University of Texas	93.0	92.0	-1.0

Source: IPEDS

Note: Original data were reported without decimal places.



## 6 Are students graduating and doing so on time?

Nationally, less than 58 percent of today's students graduate in six years.<sup>7</sup> Such low rates put the U.S. behind global competitors. Despite spending more on higher education than any other OECD country, the U.S. ranks 14th in college completion.<sup>8</sup> Students who enter college but do not graduate represent a failed investment, and there are consequences for the student, the institution, and taxpayers.

The Big 12 does slightly better than the national average, with every school graduating between 60 and 81 percent of its students within six years. Once again, however, being better than the national average is not necessarily a cause for celebration. Even at the very best of the Big 12 schools, one in five students does not graduate, even after six years, and at most schools it is closer to two in five.

Of course, a baccalaureate degree is supposed to take only four years, not six. Students who entered a Big 12 university in 2003 expected to graduate in 2007—but fewer than one in three actually did. It is, however, a hopeful sign that every Big 12 school has increased its four-year graduation rate in the last few years, with Texas A&M and Texas posting remarkable improvements.

7 "Performance across the 1,576 Colleges on CollegeMeasures.org," American Institutes for Research, accessed 19 November 2010 <<http://collegemeasures.org/reporting/national/>>.

8 *Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators* (Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2010), 58, 188.

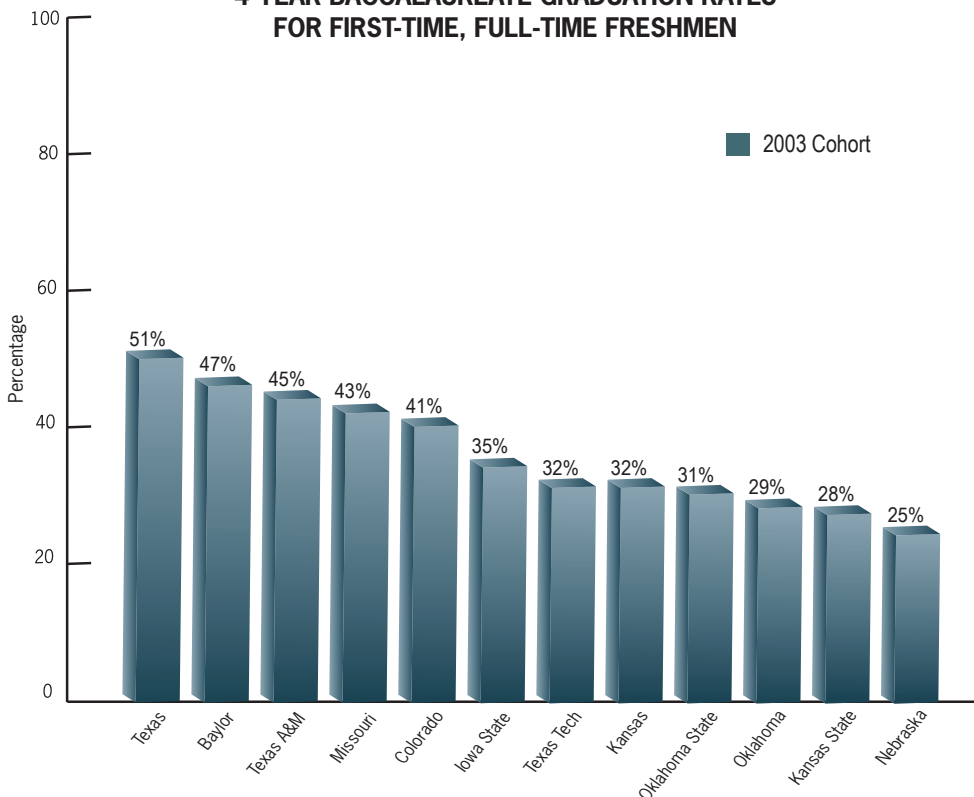
**BACCALAUREATE GRADUATION RATES FOR FIRST-TIME, FULL-TIME FRESHMEN**

INSTITUTION	1998 Cohort Graduation Rate		2003 Cohort Graduation Rate		Change in % Points	
	4-Year	6-Year	4-Year	6-Year	4-Year	6-Year
Baylor University	43.0%	72.0%	47.0%	70.0%	4.0%	-2.0%
Iowa State University	29.0	66.0	35.0	69.0	6.0	3.0
Kansas State University	26.0	63.0	28.0	63.0	2.0	0.0
Oklahoma State University	24.0	58.0	31.0	60.0	7.0	2.0
Texas A&M University	32.0	76.0	45.0	80.0	13.0	4.0
Texas Tech University	26.0	54.0	32.0	60.0	6.0	6.0
University of Colorado	36.0	66.0	41.0	67.0	5.0	1.0
University of Kansas	26.0	57.0	32.0	61.0	6.0	4.0
University of Missouri	38.0	68.0	43.0	68.0	5.0	0.0
University of Nebraska	22.0	62.0	25.0	63.0	3.0	1.0
University of Oklahoma	20.0	55.0	29.0	63.0	9.0	8.0
University of Texas	39.0	74.0	51.0	81.0	12.0	7.0

Source: IPEDS

Note: Original data were reported without decimal places.

**4-YEAR BACCALAUREATE GRADUATION RATES FOR FIRST-TIME, FULL-TIME FRESHMEN**



## Appendix A

### SELECTION CRITERIA FOR CORE COURSES

Distribution requirements on most campuses today permit students to pick from a wide range of courses that often are narrow or even outside the stated field altogether. Accordingly, to determine whether institutions in fact have a solid core curriculum, ACTA defined success in each of the seven subject areas as follows:

#### **Composition**

A college writing class focusing on grammar, style, clarity, and argument. These courses should be taught by instructors trained to evaluate and teach writing. “Across-the-curriculum” and “writing intensive” courses taught in disciplines other than English do not count if they constitute the only component of the writing requirement. Credit is not given for remedial classes, or if students may test out of the requirement via SAT or ACT scores or departmental tests.

#### **Literature**

A literature survey course. Narrow, single-author, or esoteric courses do not count for this requirement, but introductions to broad subfields (such as British or Latin American literature) do.

#### **Foreign Language**

Competency at the intermediate level, defined as at least three semesters of college-level study in any foreign language, three years of high school work, or an appropriate examination score.

#### **U.S. Government or History**

A course in either U.S. history or government with enough breadth to give a broad sweep of American history and institutions. Narrow, niche courses do not count for the requirement, nor do courses that only focus on a particular state or region.

#### **Economics**

A course covering basic economic principles, preferably an introductory micro- or macroeconomics course taught by faculty from the economics or business departments.

### **Mathematics**

A college-level course in mathematics. Specific topics may vary, but must involve study beyond the level of intermediate algebra. Logic classes may count if they are focused on abstract logic. Computer science courses count if they involve programming or advanced study. Credit is not given for remedial classes, or if students may test out of the requirement via SAT or ACT scores.

### **Natural or Physical Science**

A course in biology, geology, chemistry, physics, astronomy, or environmental science, preferably with a laboratory component. Overly narrow courses and courses with weak scientific content are not counted.

### **Assigning Letter Grades**

ACTA assigned a grade to each institution based on how many of these seven subjects it requires students to complete. The grading system is as follows:

- A      6-7 subjects required
- B      4-5 subjects required
- C      3 subjects required
- D      2 subjects required
- F      0-1 subjects required





**ACTA**  
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