

Low-Producing Degree Program Review

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Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board



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Agency Mission

The mission of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) is to provide leadership and coordination for Texas higher education and to promote access, affordability, quality, success, and cost efficiency through *60x30TX*, resulting in a globally competitive workforce that positions Texas as an international leader.

Agency Vision

The THECB will be recognized as an international leader in developing and implementing innovative higher education policy to accomplish our mission.

Agency Philosophy

The THECB will promote access to and success in quality higher education across the state with the conviction that access and success without quality is mediocrity and that quality without access and success is unacceptable.

The THECB's core values are:

Accountability: We hold ourselves responsible for our actions and welcome every opportunity to educate stakeholders about our policies, decisions, and aspirations.

Efficiency: We accomplish our work using resources in the most effective manner.

Collaboration: We develop partnerships that result in student success and a highly qualified, globally competent workforce.

Excellence: We strive for excellence in all our endeavors.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age or disability in employment or the provision of services.

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Executive Summary

As of September 1, 2013, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) issues recommendations for closure or consolidation to institutions' governing boards for programs that have consistently produced low numbers of graduates. The THECB posts on its website a list of these programs based on its annual Low-Producing Degree Program (LPP) review of degree programs. The THECB also issues an annual report of programs that have been on the annual list of low-producing programs for three or more consecutive years.

Standards for numbers of graduates of Low-Producing Degree Programs are:

- fewer than 25 graduates in five years for undergraduate programs;
- fewer than 15 graduates in five years for master's programs; and
- fewer than 10 graduates in five years for doctoral programs.

In addition, Texas Administrative Code, Title 19, Chapter 4, Subchapter R, Rules 4.285 to 4.290 provides the following rules:

- a) A new degree program is exempted for the first five years of program implementation.
- b) Completers of career technical certificate programs with the same Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) code as an applied associate degree program are counted with the applied associate degree program.
- c) Academic associate degree programs are not considered to be low producing since they lead to transfer into bachelor's programs.
- d) Master's degree programs requiring only courses taught in the corresponding doctoral program are permanently exempted from low-producing status.

If an institution's governing board does not accept the THECB recommendation, then the university system (or the institution, where a system does not exist) must identify the programs recommended for consolidation or closure on its next Legislative Appropriations Request. In those situations, a system or institution also must develop a plan for the degree program to achieve the minimum standard for the degree awarded, or the institution must provide a rationale describing the merits of continuing the degree program if the standard is not attainable.

The LPP review aids institutions in planning and degree program management, including the creation of new programs, consolidation of existing programs, and closing programs that have outlived their usefulness.

The Low-Producing Degree Program Review Process

Review Criteria

The rules for the annual review of graduates of degree program from Texas public institutions of higher education are in Texas Administrative Code (TAC), Title 19, Chapter 4, Subchapter R, Rules 4.285-4.290. The rules are based on Texas Education Code, Chapter 61, Subchapter C, Section 61.0512 (f), which authorizes the THECB to make recommendations for consolidation or closure of degree programs.

The TAC defines the process THECB staff follow to determine which programs are low producing. In order for a degree program to be identified as low producing, the number of its graduates is, over a cumulative five-year period:

- fewer than 25 graduates for undergraduate programs;
- fewer than 15 graduates for master's programs; and
- fewer than 10 graduates for doctoral programs.

New degree programs are exempt from the low-producing review for the first five years of operation. The first review to determine whether a program is low producing is done in year eleven, as the first five years are exempt, and the LPP review requires five consecutive years of data regarding the number of program graduates.

Graduates are counted using each program's eight-digit [Classification of Instructional Programs \(CIP\) code](http://www.txhighereddata.org/Interactive/CIP) (<http://www.txhighereddata.org/Interactive/CIP>) as reported in the Graduation Report of Coordinating Board Manual 009 (CBM 009). If a program is changed, THECB staff continue to count the graduates by CIP code and degree level. If there is a one-for-one CIP code change or a clear distinction of degree designations (e.g., MIE, MS, etc.), the previous graduates are counted together with graduates of the new CIP code. If the old CIP code is kept active because of another program with the same degree level and degree designation, previous graduates cannot be counted together with graduates of the new CIP code. At times, counting of graduates over the five-year time windows can become difficult, if there were multiple consolidations, multiple CIP code changes, or program splits caused by CIP code changes.

Graduates of joint programs, i.e., programs administered jointly by two or more institutions, are combined in the count. Joint programs have one CIP code and the same degree level.

Second major graduates are counted separately from their first major, together with graduates of the program of their second major CIP code.

Counting of Associate Degrees. Academic associate degree programs (Associate of Arts, or AA, Associate of Science, or AS, and Associate of Arts in Teaching, or AAT) are not considered to be low producing if they lead to transfer into four-year programs. Academic associate degree programs are permanently exempted from LPP review because they are intended to give students a pathway from two-year institutions into baccalaureate programs.

The number of graduates of applied associate degree programs (Associate of Applied Science, or AAS) and corresponding career technical certificate programs are combined by program CIP code for LPP purposes. Numbers of certificates and degrees with the same award year are combined. For these awards, graduates are reported by award CIP, i.e., by six-digit

CIP. However, for the LPP review, award-level graduates are added to determine the program-level number of graduates, which in most cases has a four-digit CIP but could also have a six-digit CIP.

Certificate programs are not affected by THECB recommendations based on the LPP review of applied associate degree programs.

Neither occupation skills awards, nor enhanced skills certificates count for the LPP degree/certificate count of career and technical workforce programs. Occupation skills awards are below the level 1 certificates, in that they require fewer semester credit hours (SCH). Enhanced skills certificates are level 3 certificates, are given in addition to associate degrees, and are not counted independently from associate degrees.

Counting Bachelor's Degrees. Counting graduates is done by CIP codes and degree level. If a program has different degree designations (e.g., Bachelor of Arts, or BA, and Bachelor of Science, or BS degrees) but the same CIP code, graduates are counted together. The THECB does not distinguish between degree tracks.

Counting Master's Degrees. Master's degree programs that lead directly to a doctoral degree are permanently exempted from LPP review. These degrees are, in effect, terminal master's degrees available to students who are unable to meet doctoral requirements. Master's degree programs that are exempt must have the same CIP code as the doctoral program.

Counting Doctoral Degrees. Doctoral programs include research programs leading to the award of Doctor's Degree-Research/Scholarship ("level 4" degree), such as the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and Doctor of Education (EdD). Graduates of Doctor's Degree-Professional Practice ("level 5" degree) programs are counted separately and include professional degrees such as the Juris Doctorate (JD), Doctor of Medicine (MD), and Doctor of Audiology (AUD), etc.

Notification of Low-Producing Degree Programs

The THECB posts an annual list of low-producing programs on its [website](http://www.theccb.state.tx.us/LPP) (www.theccb.state.tx.us/LPP). The list, in the form of a spreadsheet, provides seven consecutive years of graduation data, and serves as the base for three consecutive years of LPP review. All programs that were low producing for the report year are listed.

The new annual list is posted in the spring. The list is compiled after data from the previous academic year are reported and verified the previous fall and are processed for LPP review. If programs were low producing in the past, but either recovered for the most recent year or were closed or consolidated, they are not kept on the list.

THECB staff alerts an institution's governing board each year when a degree program has not met the minimum standard of graduates for three consecutive years, i.e., when it was low producing for three consecutive years of review. The notification is done through an emailed memo copied to institutions' presidents and chief academic/instructional officers. The notifications include a recommendation to the governing boards for their low-producing program(s).

Notification to governing boards is sent following the April board meeting of the THECB. At the same time, the new LPP report is posted on the agency's website as a PDF document. The report summarizes THECB review outcomes and recommendations.

Recommendations to Close or Consolidate Low-Producing Degree Programs

The THECB is authorized to make recommendations to close or consolidate low-producing degree programs. Recommendations to close or consolidate are made for non-exempt degree programs that have been on the annual list of low-producing degree programs for three or more consecutive reviews. These recommendations are made to the governing board of a public institution of higher education or directly to an institution, if it does not have a governing board.

The THECB makes recommendations to institutions' governing boards for closure or consolidation of low-producing degree programs in odd-numbered years. This allows systems and institutions ample time to decide on appropriate action, in the year prior to the submission of their Legislative Appropriation Request (LAR), which is done in even-numbered years. (See *Institutional Response to Low-Producing Degree Programs*.)

Since the THECB does not close or consolidate programs based on LPP review, temporary exemptions from review cannot be granted. THECB staff will keep recommending a program to be closed or consolidated every odd-numbered year, as long as the program is low producing for three or more consecutive reviews.

Institutional Response to Low-Producing Degree Programs

In response to the THECB's recommendation the university system (or the institution, where a system does not exist), may close a low-producing program, consolidated the program with one or more other programs, or may retain the program. Staff welcomes working with institution representatives on questions regarding graduate count, related issues regarding the history of program changes, and data reporting.

Closing a Program. Institutions may request via letter to close out a program. The letter is submitted by the institution through the THECB [Document Submission Portal](https://www1.thecb.state.tx.us/apps/proposals/) (<https://www1.thecb.state.tx.us/apps/proposals/>).

When closing a program, the institution must choose a teach-out time period. For bachelor's and PhD degree programs, an appropriate teach-out is up to six years; for master's degree programs it is up to three years. During teach-out, students must not be enrolled or re-enrolled after the close-out of a program. Closed-out programs are removed from the low-producing program review. If there is, for unforeseen reasons, a need for a student to graduate immediately or soon after the end of the teach-out period, the institution may request an adjustment to the close-out date.

Consolidating a Program. Institutions may request consolidation of one or more programs into one existing program or, sometimes, a new program. If a new program is created, it will keep the oldest start date of the previously existing programs. The institution must submit a request form through the THECB Document Submission Portal. The [Request for Consolidation of Programs Form](http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/reports/7176.docx) (<http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/reports/7176.docx>) is available on the THECB webpage "Existing Program Changes."

An institution may consolidate programs that share resources. A consolidation requires at least one other degree program to be brought into an existing major as a concentration to create a single, effective, and efficient degree program. Programs that are consolidated should

share a common set of courses comprising at least 50 percent of the major coursework. A consolidated program would not need additional faculty or changes in existing faculty expertise.

Retaining a Program. If a governing board does not accept the THECB recommendation and retains a low-producing program, the university system (or the institution, where a system does not exist) must identify the low-producing program(s) recommended for closure or consolidation on its next LAR. In such situations, a system or institution must also develop a plan for the degree program to achieve the minimum standard for the number of degrees awarded, or the institution must provide a rationale describing the merits of continuing the degree program if the standard is not attainable.

If a governing board (or institution) decides to retain a low-producing degree program that was recommended for closure or consolidation, it must make this decision in each year following a recommendation in an odd-numbered year and must keep the program identified on the LAR each even-numbered year.

Identification of retained low-producing programs should be made in the Administrative Statement section of the LAR, with reference to "Low-Producing Degree Program Review" and Texas Education Code, Chapter 61, Subchapter C, Section 61.0512 (f).

Conclusion

Since its inception in 2010, the Low-Producing Degree Program (LPP) review has served institutions as a resource that aids in planning and degree program management, including the creation of new programs, consolidation of existing programs, and closing of programs that have outlived their usefulness. In the first two years alone, Academic Years (AY) 2010 and 2011, institutions voluntarily closed or consolidated nearly 500 low-producing programs. Between 2011 and 2013, 55 programs were closed or consolidated. As of September 1, 2013, the THECB makes recommendations for closure or consolidation to the institutions' governing boards for programs that are low producing for three or more consecutive reviews. Institutions and governing boards chose to close or consolidate 70 low-producing programs based on THECB recommendations between AY 2014 and 2018.

If an institution's governing board does not accept a THECB recommendation for closure or consolidation, the university system (or the institution, where a system does not exist) must identify the programs recommended for consolidation or closure on its next Legislative Appropriations Request (LAR). In such situations, a system or institution must also develop a plan for the degree program to achieve the minimum standard for the number of degrees awarded, or the institution must provide a rationale describing the merits of continuing the degree program if the standard is not attainable.

The THECB makes recommendations to institutions' governing boards for closure or consolidation of low-producing programs in odd-numbered years, while systems and institutions submit their LAR in even-numbered years. This allows systems and institutions ample time to decide on appropriate action in the year before the submission of their LAR.

Appendix A: Texas Education Code

Texas Education Code, Chapter 61, Subchapter C

Section 61.0512. Board Approval of Academic Programs (Excerpt)

- (c) The board shall review each degree or certificate program offered by an institution of higher education at the time the institution requests to implement a new program to ensure that the program:
- (1) is needed by the state and the local community and does not unnecessarily duplicate programs offered by other institutions of higher education or private or independent institutions of higher education;
 - (2) has adequate financing from legislative appropriation, funds allocated by the board, or funds from other sources;
 - (3) has necessary faculty and other resources to ensure student success; and
 - (4) meets academic standards specified by law or prescribed by board rule, including rules adopted by the board for purposes of this section, or workforce standards established by the Texas Workforce Investment Council.
- (d) The board may review the number of degrees or certificates awarded through a degree or certificate program every four years or more frequently, at the board's discretion.
- (e) The board shall review each degree or certificate program offered by an institution of higher education at least every 10 years after a new program is established using the criteria prescribed by Subsection (c).
- (f) The board may not order the consolidation or elimination of any degree or certificate program offered by an institution of higher education but may, based on the board's review under Subsections (d) and (e), recommend such action to an institution's governing board. If an institution's governing board does not accept recommendations to consolidate or eliminate a degree or certificate program, the university system or, where a system does not exist, the institution, must identify the programs recommended for consolidation or elimination on the next legislative appropriations request submitted by the system or institution.

Appendix B: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Rules

Texas Administration Code, Title 19, Part 1, Chapter 4

Subchapter R, Review of Low-Producing Degree Programs

4.285 Purpose

This subchapter establishes rules regarding the periodic review of low-producing degree and certificate programs at public institutions of higher education.

4.286 Authority

Unless otherwise noted in a section, the authority for these provisions is provided by Texas Education Code, §61.0512 which describes the Board's role in the Texas system of higher education.

4.287 Definitions

The following words and terms, when used in this subchapter, shall have the following meanings, unless the context clearly indicates otherwise:

- (1) Board--The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.
- (2) Degree or certificate program--Any grouping of subject matter courses which, when satisfactorily completed by a student, will entitle the student to receive a degree or certificate from an institution of higher education.
- (3) Institution of higher education or institution--Any public technical institute, public junior college, public senior college or university, medical or dental unit, or other agency of higher education as defined in Texas Education Code, §61.003.
- (4) Low-Producing Degree Programs--Degree programs that do not meet the following minimum standards for degrees awarded in the program:
 - (A) For career technical certificates, associate and bachelor's programs, an average of five degrees awarded per academic year, to total not fewer than twenty-five degrees awarded for any five-year period;
 - (B) For master's programs, an average of three degrees awarded per academic year, to total not fewer than fifteen degrees awarded for any five-year period; and
 - (C) For doctoral and special professional degrees, an average of two degrees awarded per academic year, to total not fewer than ten degrees awarded for any five-year period.
- (5) Permanent Exemption--Exemption for degree programs which removes them from the list of low-producing degree programs indefinitely.
- (6) Related Degree Program--A degree program for which an institution may use common faculty and other resources.

4.288 Notification of Low-Producing Degree Programs

- (a) Coordinating Board staff will post online an annual list of low-producing degree programs.
- (b) The Board will alert an institution's governing board each year when a degree program has not met the minimum standards for three consecutive years.
- (c) Completers of career technical certificate programs that are reported under the same CIP code as an existing applied associate's degree program will be counted as completers of the corresponding applied associate's degree program for purposes of determining low-producing status.
- (d) Academic associate degree programs are not considered to be low producing if they lead to transfer into four-year programs.

4.289 Exemptions

New programs or programs that are granted exemption will be noted on the annual list of low-producing programs, according to the following criteria:

- (1) A new degree program is exempted for the first five years of program implementation. Annual review begins in the sixth year of implementation.
- (2) A Master's degree program requiring only courses taught in the corresponding doctoral program is permanently exempted from low-producing status. These degrees are, in effect, terminal master's degrees available to students who are unable to meet doctoral requirements. No additional cost is associated with these degrees.

4.290 Consequences for Non-Exempt Low-Producing Degree Programs

Coordinating Board staff may recommend to the institution's governing board the closure of any non-exempt degree program which has been on the annual list of low-producing programs for three or more consecutive years. If the governing board does not accept the recommendation to close the program, then the university system or, where a system does not exist, the institution must identify the program recommended for closure on the next legislative appropriations request submitted by the system or institution. If a system or institution is required to identify a degree program on its legislative appropriations request, the system or institution should also develop a plan to allow the degree program to achieve the minimum standard for the degree awarded, or if the standard is not attainable, provide a rationale describing the merits of continuing the degree program.

Appendix C: History of Low-Producing Degree Program Review

The THECB adopted new rules in April 2010 (TAC, Chapter 4, Subchapter R, Section 4.285-4.293), under authority of TEC, Chapter 61, Subchapter C, Section 61.051, establishing procedures for the annual review of the number of graduates produced by degree programs at public institutions of higher education to determine which are low-producing degree programs. Prior to the 2013 Senate Bill 215, 83rd regular session of the Texas Legislature, which established TEC, Section 61.0512 (f), the THECB could deny an institution's request for a temporary exemption from action and closed low-producing programs.

The rules established thresholds for programs, set the review cycle as five years, incorporated notification to institutions of low-producing programs at the third and fourth years, incorporated a review procedure in the fifth year, and clarified exemptions and consequences. Programs were classified as low producing if, over a five-year period, they had fewer than 25 graduates for associate and baccalaureate programs, fewer than 15 graduates for master's programs, and fewer than 10 graduates for doctoral programs.

The THECB notified institutions in the third and fourth years of review of their low-producing programs (based on three- and four-year averages of graduates) before requiring institutions to propose action for a low-producing program in the fifth year (based on five-year averages). Institutions were required to (a) phase out the program, (b) consolidate the program with another program, or (c) receive a temporary exemption from review.

THECB granted temporary exemptions for three reasons:

1. The low-producing program significantly contributed to meeting specific initiatives from the state's strategic plan, *Closing the Gaps*, or other THECB policies, including workforce needs in specific industries.
2. The low-producing program was composed primarily of courses required for other existing degree programs at the institution and there was minimal or no additional cost associated with the program.
3. The low-producing program contributed to other state and regional needs as justified by the institution.

To request an exemption, institutions were required to submit to the THECB a written justification and detailed action plan specific to the program. THECB staff undertook in-depth reviews of all programs for which a temporary exemption was requested, and after evaluating the data, THECB staff either approved a temporary exemption for a limited time period deemed appropriate or a low-producing program was closed or consolidated. A closed program could not be reinstated for at least 10 years and would then be required to follow the approval process for a new program.

Institutions could appeal the staff decision to the board of the THECB to receive a temporary exemption.

The THECB conducted the Low-Producing Degree Program (LPP) reviews under these rules in Academic Years (AY) 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013. All actions in AY 2010, in response to the first LPP review, were voluntarily taken by institutions. That year institutions closed 150 programs and consolidated 110. Results of the reviews between AY 2010 and 2013 are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of Programs Closed, Consolidated, or Exempted from Review Based on Low-Producing Degree Program Review in AY 2010 through 2013.

LPP Action	AY 2010 Review	AY 2011 Review	AY 2012 Review	AY 2013 Review
Review of one 5-year period	AY 05-09	AY 06-10	AY 07-11	AY 08-12
Total LPP	731	527	81	113
Consolidated	110	89	11	12
Institution phase-out	150	144	25	14
Exempted	0	234	33	82
Closed or consolidated	0	60	12	5

Source: THECB Program Inventory accessed July 2014

The THECB adopted changes to its rules for the review of low-producing programs in July 2013, based on Senate Bill 215, 83rd Texas Legislature, Regular Session and codified as TEC, Chapter 61, Subchapter C, Section 61.0512(f). As of Sept. 1, 2013, the THECB no longer had the authority to order the closure or consolidation of programs at institutions of higher education. Instead, THECB staff can issue recommendations for closure or consolidation to the governing boards of the institutions.

In 2014, institutions were allowed to reinstate programs that were in the process of being phased out under previous LPP rules, i.e., all programs that were closed based on LPP reviews in AY 2011 and 2012. Programs in phase-out were still operating but were not admitting new students. Of 72 program closures resulting from the 2011 and 2012 reviews, governing boards chose to reverse the closure or consolidation of 17 programs. Programs scheduled to be closed as a result of the LPP review in AY 2013 were notified that they need not be closed. Of five programs recommended for closure in the 2013 review, governing boards chose to consolidate one and keep four active.

Programs that received temporary exemptions from review in previous years kept the exemptions from review going forward. These programs typically were being restructured and needed to build up declared majors and graduates. No new temporary exemptions were issued starting with the AY 2014 review.

Table 2 shows the numbers of programs consolidated or closed for the years of review between AY 2014 and AY 2018.

Table 2. Number of Programs Closed or Consolidated, Recommended for Closure or Consolidation, and Recovered from Low Graduate Numbers Based on Low-Producing Degree Program Review in AY 2014 through 2018.

LPP Action	AY 2014 Review For AY 07-13	AY 2015 Review For AY 08-14	AY 2016 Review For AY 09-15	AY 2017 Review For AY 10-16	AY 2018 Review For AY 11-17
Review of three five-year periods					
Total LPP	64	181	178	190	206
LPP three years in a row	0	17	54	118	112
Sufficient number of graduates the following year to not be LPP	14	37	26	33	43
Closed or consolidated the following year	5	11	15	8	31
Recommended for close-out	0	2	0	118	0

Source: annual LPP reports



This document is available on the [Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board website](#).

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