

The Texas Plan: A Formula for Failure

The Texas plan for higher education came out of a Tea-Party-style think tank, the Texas Public Policy Foundation, which advocates reducing all state programs to a limited set of business operations designed with the sole aim of cutting costs. The plan for higher education (“Seven Solutions”) is an attempt to reduce everything to a formula for the mass production of teaching and research -- dismissing concerns about the quality of the education students receive the quality of faculty who would work within such a system, and the integrity of the missions of the educational institutions.

Gov. Rick Perry tried the Texas “Solutions” at only one university, Texas A&M, where the resulting uproar caused Perry’s plan to be abandoned. The University of Texas system never implemented the plan.

The fact that the plan failed in Texas did not deter Florida’s Governor Rick Scott from endorsing the plan and challenging legislators and university officials to prove it cannot work in Florida -- or else accept the Governor’s implementation of the plan. Although he claims to be listening to critics, he already began appointing members to university and college boards who told him they agree with the plan.

The Texas formula for evaluating and rewarding teaching is to reduce faculty compensation to merit bonuses (instead of merit pay raises) for teaching that is rated in student “customer satisfaction” surveys as within the top 25%. Faculty members who rate as the very best in these customer satisfaction surveys would receive a one-time-only bonus of \$10,000 and others in the top 25% would receive smaller bonuses. The Texas formula for compensating research is to give a similar range of bonuses to faculty in the top 25% of those pulling in contract and grant dollars for the university in any year. The best and brightest will supposedly be attracted to this system which (unlike other systems, it is claimed) truly rewards merit.

Will the Texas formula work in Florida?

1. **Florida universities and colleges will lose talent by adopting this plan.** It will drive away professors who expect real professional achievements to be rewarded with real dollars in the salary base, not through one-time only bonuses. No one who is successful in writing research grants for a university will be tempted to stay in Florida by the promise of the same salary for years to come, while rewards come only in the form of

annual bonuses depending upon circumstances. No one who excels in teaching will think a bonus is a pay raise.

2. **From the beginning, faculty and university officials have objected to the imposition of a producer/consumer model to define the faculty/student relationship and direct the allocation of resources.** Because students are not customers who have had previous experience with a particular course “product,” they should not be expected to know and evaluate properly the quality of expert instruction they are getting. The “customer satisfaction” surveys cannot reveal whether the faculty member has actually introduced the course content in a way that makes sense to a professional. That is why it takes a faculty peer review system to make sure students learn the content and skills of the course.
3. It will not improve teaching if a professor packs more students into a class to nail down a bonus for the next year. A factory system that rewards faculty only for speeding up production cheats the student out of the quality of time spent with the professor. Mass production also means that grading will not be done as thoroughly, carefully, and effectively. **The Texas plan sacrifices quality for quantity in the lives of students who get cheated in every way while paying the same tuition.**
4. Florida desperately needs to diversify the economy to escape dependency on tourism, agriculture, and housing as the basis for an economy. Florida’s economy now enters a recession earlier than other states, when people stop spending disposable income, and stays in a recession longer, after the economy picks up. **We need a more recession-resistant economy: a diversified, knowledge-based economy developed through higher education programs. North Carolina has experienced a dramatic change by pursuing this path.**
5. **Investing in higher education is the only path to diversifying the economy through research and innovation in an emerging knowledge-based economy, with technological and commercial spinoffs from faculty research, while preparing students for the challenges they will face in redesigning and retrofitting an obsolete economy.** No other government agency can claim such a direct financial benefit from spending public dollars. Texas-style cut-backs will not take us into the economy of the future.
6. **The Texas Plan is not a formula for success in recognizing faculty merit, improving learning conditions for students, or revitalizing a state economy. The Texas Plan is a formula for failure.**