

# WT 125 White Paper

## Graduate Pipeline Programs to Texas A&M University (College Station)

### Abstract:

Students at WTAMU have access to nationally ranked graduate program opportunities at WTAMU and at Texas A&M University. To that end, WTAMU is partnering with each College and School at Texas A&M University (TAMU) for the purpose of developing a mutually beneficial graduate pipeline relationship to bring highly qualified WTAMU students to TAMU master's and doctoral programs, especially in areas where WTAMU does not have similar programs. In doing so, these *College to University* agreements: 1) enhance collaboration and develop a mutually beneficial relationship between the associated TAMU College or School and WTAMU; 2) support capacity for graduate study (masters and doctoral); 3) provide academically qualified WTAMU students a pathway to graduate programs; and 4) mutually improve student opportunities at both institutions.

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### Introduction:

West Texas A&M University serves first, but not solely, West Texas and the Panhandle. The communities in the top 26 counties of the Panhandle are home to hard working people who value individual freedom, effort and dedication. Those values are alive on the WTAMU campus. People prize hard work and dedication, all-the-while welcoming risk, reward and self-reliance. They dedicate themselves to this high calling. These are the same qualities that are the essence of success in competitive graduate programs.

At West Texas A&M University (WTAMU), we recognize the need for our well-educated undergraduates to continue their education so they can help the Texas Panhandle build a stronger, more robust local economy. Graduate education provides essential workforce needs. "Jobs that require a master's degree are expected to grow 21.7 percent through 2020, faster than the growth at any other level" (Legg, 2014, p. 1).

According to Deb Stewart, president of the Council of Graduate Schools (Quoted in Legg, 2014, p. 1), "Graduate-degree holders are the key to solving some of the country's most pressing problems — health care, security, energy, global warming." Students often find an increased depth of knowledge, career path changes, career advancement

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opportunities, competitive career advantage, increased salary, new skills, new focus and personal satisfaction in graduate degrees. The U.S. Census Bureau issued a publication in 2002 entitled "The Big Payoff" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002) in which they reported that individuals with masters degrees earn on average twice what those with only high school diplomas earn, while those with doctoral and professional degrees can expect to earn three to four times what an individual with only a high school diploma earns. That translates into between \$1.3 and \$3.1 million dollars more in lifetime earnings for those with advanced degrees. In 2016, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that average weekly earnings for people with a high school diploma were \$679, while the figure for those with a baccalaureate degree was \$1,155. Holders of advanced degrees averaged \$1,435 a week (Longley, 2017). These additional earnings not only translate into a better way of life for those with advanced degrees, but also contribute to a stronger tax base for the communities they live in.

## **Background:**

To support students who seek graduate education, WTAMU offers more than 40 exceptional and highly competitive graduate programs. It should be noted that we want the exceptional undergraduates at WTAMU to have access to graduate student opportunities at WTAMU and at other universities, as best fit student need and availability. To that end, WTAMU is partnering with each College and School at Texas A&M University (TAMU) for the purpose of developing a mutually beneficial graduate pipeline relationship to bring highly qualified WTAMU students to TAMU master's and doctoral programs, especially in areas where WTAMU does not have similar programs. In doing so, these *College to University* agreements: 1) enhance collaboration and develop a mutually beneficial relationship between the associated TAMU College or School and WTAMU; 2) support capacity for graduate study (masters and doctoral); 3) provide academically qualified WTAMU students a pathway to graduate programs; and 4) mutually improve student opportunities at both institutions.

As of November 1, 2017, WTAMU has completed memorandums of agreement (MOAs) for graduate pipelines with the following TAMU Colleges and Schools: The Bush School of Government and Public Service, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, College of Architecture, College of Engineering, College of Geosciences, College of Liberal Arts, College of Medicine, School of Public Health, College of Science and College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences. In progress are the following: School of Law, College of Nursing, and the Irma Lerma Rangel College of Pharmacy. These MOAs vary in detail but basically state that the associated program will provide admission for up to five qualified graduates from WTAMU in any masters or doctoral programs (in the

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college or schools associated programs) where there is space and WTAMU students meet the admission standards. As available, WTAMU students will be provided support which include, but is not limited to, scholarships, summer research experience, academic and career mentoring or other resources available to qualified and admitted graduate students. We are actively pursuing opportunity for our WTAMU graduates where we think there might be positive mutual benefit for WTAMU and for TAMU. We believe that the existence of an “agreement” could be a salient point in conversations with WTAMU students.

The development of recruitment, advisement and admission processes are underway for our pipeline programs. A website has been developed to support the pipeline programming at URL: <https://www.wtamu.edu/academics/pipeline-to-graduate-students.aspx>. WTAMU Graduate School has identified a WTAMU/TAMU graduate pipeline coordinator: Tracy Helbert will serve as the predominate channel for most ‘Pipeline’ oriented questions and marketing and will serve as a vital link between the identified program contacts at TAMU and WTAMU. Additionally, the WTAMU Office of National Competitive Scholarships will assist students in the preparation of pipeline admission materials, as needed.

The graduate pipeline programming is already paying dividends. WTAMU’s pipeline with the TAMU College of Veterinary Medicine (CVM) guarantees admission to five WTAMU graduates who meet the admission requirements at the internationally competitive CVM. Nine WTAMU students were eventually accepted for the 2017 class. Two WTAMU McNair Scholars, Ms. Liliana Vasquez and Mr. Joshua Castro, attended the TAMU College of Medicine fall recruiting event, *Aggie Recruit Day*, on Saturday October 21, 2017. This pipeline associated opportunity provides WTAMU students a chance to be introduced to the TAMU Medical Science graduate program and the TAMUS campus and facilities, at ‘no cost’ to WTAMU students and helps prepare them for medical school and associated careers. Additionally, other WTAMU pipeline students participated in the Bush School of Government & Public Service ‘Public Service Institute’ on October 20-21, 2017. This opportunity, at ‘no cost’ to WTAMU students, prepares students for careers in government agencies, nonprofits, government contracting, think tanks, and related fields. The Public Service Institute attracts the best and brightest student in Texas, including WTAMU student Mr. Jonathan Espinoza, the recipient of the prestigious Harry S. Truman Scholarship.

Another example of a student benefit is connected to our graduate pipeline program with TAMU College of Engineering. WTAMU students have an opportunity to attend, at ‘no cost,’ the TAMU College of Engineering summer research experience, where students conduct research projects that prepare them for research work at the doctoral

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level. Three WTAMU students participated in the summer 2017 research program: Ms. Melissa Chavez, Mr. Andy Pimentel and Mr. David Jacob Martinez. Andy and David worked with TAMU professor, Dr. Sevan Goenezen, and conducted biomechanical materials research utilizing a digital image correlation system. David was part of a team that designed a modular biometric data recording system for the *Aggies Invent Competition*. Melissa worked with TAMU professor, Dr. Tanil Ozkan, and was involved in additive manufacturing research and 3D print pharmaceuticals. Melissa won honorable mention in the *Tech Brief Contest* with the exoskeletal mesh project and 2nd place for the *Aggies Invent Competition* (cast). As part of the WTAMU/TAMU College of Engineering MOA, up to five WT students, who meet the identified criteria, will have support that includes, but not limited to, scholarships, summer research experience, and academic and career mentorships. This translates into a 'no cost' doctoral opportunity for qualifying students.

## **Graduate Pipeline Impacts:**

While primarily designed to benefit our students, WTAMU has a selfish goal in creating pipeline programs. We want our well-educated undergraduates to have graduate study opportunities, and hopefully stay or return to the Texas Panhandle and help build a stronger, more robust local economy. WTAMU, like our students, seeks no special treatment through pipeline programs, only opportunity. Pipeline programs have the ability to contribute to enrollment and retention of an institution's diversity. Through graduate pipeline programs, WTAMU students, in target populations such as Hispanic and first generation, are provided an opportunity for access and graduate study resources which prepares needed workforce positions. Student opportunities, often built into the pipeline programs, include training, education and support in areas such as: study skills, ethics, social responsibility, personalized advising, writing, research projects, grant writing, internships, workshops, mentor access, peer mentoring, career and other counseling.

The TAMU pipelines can even assist us with recruiting undergraduate students to attend WTAMU. The 2016 nationwide survey of high school seniors, undertaken by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program at the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA (CIRP, 2016, p. 39), reveals that 41% of surveyed students plan to earn a master's degree and 34.2% of graduating seniors plan to earn a professional or doctoral degree. By expanding the opportunities for our incoming freshman to complete graduate studies, either at WTAMU or at TAMU, we may appeal to their desire to continue their education beyond the baccalaureate level. Similarly, the pipeline program

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would be appealing to the more than 1,000 junior and senior level transfer students who join our campus each year.

As we look to the future, WTAMU sees additional pipeline collaborations with the Texas A&M University System developing from these current pipeline opportunities . . . for students and faculty. For example, the WTAMU Department of English, Philosophy, and Modern Languages and Department of History are working more closely with the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum (PPHM) through an institute called the Center for the Study of the American West (CSAW) (<http://www.wtamu.edu/museum/csaw-home.aspx>). Adding to the well-qualified faculty at WTAMU, the collections of the PPHM offer great opportunities for CSAW and for scholars and students of history at TAMU and throughout the Texas A&M University System. Thus, a “scholar in residence” opportunity for a PhD student or faculty member to spend a semester or academic year at PPHM working with the CSAW would provide access to a first rate collection and archive unavailable anywhere else.

## **Recommendations/Suggested Next Steps:**

It is recommended that WTAMU continue to move forward with this graduate pipeline initiative. Next steps, currently underway, include:

- Finalizing remaining TAMU Colleges and School MOAs
- Determining how to publicize pipeline programs to WTAMU students
- Developing methods to track students who move through these pipeline programs
- Determining how to leverage these pipeline programs in terms of recruitment and positive publicity for the University
- Consideration of expanding the graduate pipeline program to other universities besides TAMU

## **Conclusion:**

The TAMU Graduate Pipeline Program has multiple advantages to WTAMU and its students. It strengthens our relationship with Texas A&M University, enhances our institutional reputation, and provides access and in some instances funding and unique opportunities for talented WTAMU graduates to pursue advanced degrees. Ideally, some of those graduates will return to the Panhandle as professionals in a variety of needed fields. Their enhanced earnings will benefit not only them, but their local communities, as well.

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