My name is Marc Cutright. I am an associate professor of higher education at the University of North Texas. Thank you for this opportunity to appear before the committee and offer testimony on these important issues.

My written testimony focuses on the substantial research project conducted by those affiliated with the National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students, founded and headquartered at the University of North Texas. Funding for the project was generously provided by the TG Public Benefit Grant Program here in Austin and the final report is anticipated to be released next month.

We spoke to administrators and students, on a confidential basis, at seven universities and six community colleges across the state. Several hundred people were involved in interviews and focus groups. We endeavored to get input on how Texas law and policy helps—or hinders—the successful transfer and degree completion by students from community colleges to universities.

I will summarize the findings, elaborations on which are contained in the written testimony.

ONE: The Texas Common Course Numbering System has proven valuable to universities in evaluating and crediting prior coursework. But the voluntary nature of the system, particularly at the university level, impedes advising community college students. Even when

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1 The research team members were Dr. Amy Fann, Dr. Janet Marling, Dr. Beverly Bower, Dr. Bonita Jacobs, Dr. Marc Cutright, and several graduate students in the Higher Education Program.
university websites offer additional guidance, some participants found the information thus posted can be literally years out of date.

TWO: The Six Course Drop Rule\(^2\), while having a sound basis in fiscal efficiency for the state, impedes many transfer students in degree completion. They have more often reached their limit in the developmental environment of the community college, and are low on options when getting to the university. Many noted that universities have some discretion on implementation, and are doing a good job of regularly reminding students of the rule; others are not. Similar issues follow the 3-Peat Rule.\(^3\)

THREE: The consequences of the 30 Excess Hour Rule\(^4\) fall more heavily on transfer students. There are several contributing factors to this, but substantial factors are the non-acceptance of credits by universities, or their unwillingness to apply credits to degree programs.

FOUR: House Bill 3025\(^5\), Credit Transfer for the Associate Degree, formalizes the awarding of associate degrees for those who complete required courses at the university. We view this as an improvement. But we have learned subsequently from universities that monitoring and maintaining this procedure have the potential to put resource drains on institutions that are uncompensated.

FIVE: Respondents at both universities and community colleges reported that while the acceptance of credits has improved, the application of those credits to degree programs is still an issue. Many attributed this to unsupported, unexamined assumptions of a lack of

\(^2\) Students are permitted six dropped courses at Texas public universities and colleges. Subsequently, they must stay enrolled in a course and receive a grade. The purpose is to provide terminus on the awarding of state subsidy without academic progress.

\(^3\) The three-peat rule is similar to the six-drop rule, but applicable to a single course.

\(^4\) 120 hours is the standard for a bachelor’s degree in Texas universities. A student is allowed 30 hours beyond that. After that, no state subsidy is awarded and students are then typically charged out-of-state tuition.

\(^5\) This law requires universities to report back to community colleges the hours earned by transfer students. The community college can then award an associate degree through this “reverse transfer” procedure, if all other requirements for the associate degree are met.
rigor in community college courses. They expressed frustration with the slow pace of credit evaluations, often delayed until the student had already transferred, and with the irregular willingness of university faculty to enter into discussions on curricular structure alignment to alleviate these problems.

SIX: There appears to be little incentive for community colleges to shape student course taking for the most efficient transferability of credits to bachelor degree programs. Community colleges are fiscally incentivized in two primary ways: Enrollment numbers and degree completions. And many at community colleges believe that the common core policy, which guarantees the transferability of credits short of being able to issue a degree, in fact depresses associate completion rates. There isn’t any feature of formula funding that rewards community colleges for the kind of advising that would result in the highest articulation and application of credits. Not only is this kind of counseling thought to be cost and personnel intensive, but community colleges that regularly deal with multiple universities encounter issues that make the work all the more difficult.

SEVEN: Texas universities generally believe that they should receive more credit for bachelor degree completions by students who were not first-time students at universities. Higher subsidy is available for junior and senior level courses. But universities, which often provide 75% or more of the instruction and course credits for transfer students and their attainment of bachelor degrees, believe that they should be more rewarded for that accomplishment.

EIGHT: The lack of a consistent Texas transcript format, and a lack of student record transparency across institutions, inhibits collaborative efforts to track student progress, and inhibit the timely evaluation of transcripts for credit evaluation.

I will conclude my remarks and will be happy to answer your questions to the best of my ability.