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# **A Descriptive Study of Persistence Rates for International Students in Texas Community Colleges**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to identify the 5 Texas community colleges with the highest and the lowest 1-year persistence rates for International students in the 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013 academic years, and to identify any consistencies that might be present for these Texas community colleges. The use of descriptive statistics revealed that 2 Texas community colleges (i.e., Lone Star College - Cy-Fair and Victoria College) were consistent with their high 1-year persistence rates for all 3 academic years. One Texas community college (i.e., Central Texas College) was consistent with its low 1-year persistence rates for all 3 academic years. Results from this descriptive study could be used by community college leaders to examine more closely any program they have related to improving student persistence rates. Moreover, results could be used by International students searching for a Texas community college in which to enroll.

## **1. Introduction**

The number of students enrolling in Texas community colleges has been increasing [1]. In fact, about 50% of all undergraduate students in Texas attend community colleges. In the fall of 2009, over 80%, (i.e., 82%) of all freshmen who attended a public higher education institution were enrolled in 2-year colleges [2]. During the same period, Texas community colleges increased their enrollment by about 22%. In contrast, 4-year universities increased by less than half that percentage, only about 10% [3]. Not only are United States students enrolling in Texas community colleges, International students are also enrolling in Texas community colleges. In fact, some Texas community colleges have partnered with foreign community colleges to attract more International students. For example, the Houston Community College partnered with the Community College of Qatar to create programs that develop and prepare Qatari students for Qatar workforce. The same idea of partnership was established between Mohawk Valley Community College, which is based in Utica, New York, and Kien Giang Community College, which is located in Vietnam [4].

In general, persistence rates and retention rates have been decreasing in community colleges. In fact, community colleges had about 67% lower persistence rates and retention rates than 4-year universities [5]. Moreover, about 30% of the students who attend community colleges take longer than two years in college and still do not graduate [6]. In addition, about 50% of the students who attend community colleges do not earn a degree [7]. More important for this study, International students also have low persistence rates and do not graduate from college. [8] examined some of the challenges that might have prevented some International students from achieving their educational goals (e.g., graduating). Language was a challenge for many International students. For

example, International students could not communicate with their advisor effectively and vice versa. Moreover, many International students were not aware of the United States higher education system. In fact, some International students do not know the difference between community colleges and 4-year universities. In addition, they do not know the process of transferring credits from different institutions, and they also do not know how to ask for help (e.g., asking their advisors for help). Not being aware of the United States culture and being in conflict with that culture and with their own culture is a main challenge for International students [8].

Even though students who attended Texas community colleges have demonstrated some improvements in terms of persistence and attainment, a need exists for Texas community college leaders to assist these students in attaining their educational goals. These types of investigations would also help determine the reasons behind why some of Texas community colleges have high 1-year persistence rates for International students, and why some of Texas community colleges have low 1-year persistence rates for International students.

### **1.1. Statement of the Problem**

Many International students leave their home countries and come to the United States to continue their education. Some of these International students face difficulties persisting to graduation for different reasons such as not adapting the new environment. Therefore, these students fail to achieve their educational goals. Many community colleges offer special programs for International students that help them adapt the new culture, adapt the new environment, and understand the school system. However, some community colleges do not offer these kinds of programs that could support and help International students. Therefore, these community colleges might have low 1-year persistence rates for International students.

### **1.2. Significance of the Study**

Many researchers [e.g., 9, 8] have emphasized the importance of offering supportive programs that could help International students socially and academically while they are attending college. International students who intend to attend a community college in Texas should be aware of the community colleges that have the lowest 1-year persistence rates in different academic years. More important, they should be aware of the community colleges that have the highest 1-year persistence rates in different academic years. The analysis of persistence rates of International students in Texas community colleges is important, because it will provide data that might help other International students decide which specific Texas community college they might consider enrolling in, due to having a high 1-year persistence rate for their International students.

### **1.3. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to determine the Texas

community colleges that had the highest 1-year persistence rates in the 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013 academic years and to identify the Texas community colleges that had the lowest 1-year persistence rates for International students in the 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013 academic years. Moreover, the goal of this study was to determine the consistencies for Texas community colleges that had the highest and lowest 1-year persistence rates in these three academic years. By determining these community colleges, community colleges could be provided with empirical evidence regarding the efficacy of any existing programs they might have to improve persistence rates. Such information could provide an impetus for community colleges to generate programs to improve the persistence rates of their International students.

### **1.4. Research Questions**

The following research questions were addressed in this investigation: (a) What are the five Texas community colleges that had the highest 1-year persistence rates for International students in the 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013 academic years?; (b) What are the five Texas community colleges that had the lowest 1-year persistence rates for International students in the 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013 academic years?; (c) What consistencies are present, if any, in the five Texas community colleges that had the highest 1-year persistence rates for International students during the 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013 academic years?; and (d) What consistencies are present, if any, in the five Texas community colleges that had the lowest 1-year persistence rates for International students during the 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013 academic years?

## **2. Method**

### **2.1. Research Design**

A quantitative nonexperimental design was used as a research design for this study [10]. Archival data were obtained from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Interactive Accountability System, and then the data were analyzed to answer the four research questions. The assumption was that these archival data were free of errors and were accurate. Moreover, the archival data that were obtained for this study could not be manipulated or modified [10]. These data contained the 1-year persistence rates for International students in Texas community colleges in the 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013 academic years. These years were the most recent years of data available at the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board website.

### **2.2. Procedures and Participants**

The data in this study were obtained from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Interactive Accountability System. This organization is responsible of collecting and providing statistical data for higher

educational institutes in the state of Texas. Participants in this study were 72 Texas community colleges that provided data for 1-year persistence rates for International students in Texas community colleges in the 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013 academic years. The data were obtained as Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) file, and then they were converted to Microsoft Excel file, which was easier and faster to use.

### **2.3. Definition of Terms**

Two terms are important to define in this study: persistence rates and International students. Persistence rates were defined in this study as the percentages of students who completed their first-year in higher education [11]. In other words, International students who completed 1-year in Texas community colleges were measured by their completion percentages (i.e., persistence rates). International students were defined in this study as “an internationally mobile student has left his or her country, or territory of origin, and moved to another country or territory with the singular objective of studying” [12].

## **3. Results**

For the first research question regarding the five Texas community colleges that had the highest 1-year persistence rates for International students in 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013 academic years, different Texas community colleges were identified in the three academic years. The five Texas community colleges that had the highest 1-year persistence rates for International students in the 2010-2011 academic year were (starting from highest 1-year persistence rates to lowest): (1) Lone Star College - Cy-Fair, (2) Lone Star College – Tomball, (3) Alamo Community College - Northwest Vista College, (4) Wharton County Junior College, and (5) Victoria College. Between these community colleges, Lone Star College - Cy-Fair had the highest 1-year persistence rates for International students, and Victoria College had the lowest 1-year persistence rates for International students with a difference of 7.30%. Delineated in Table 1 are the descriptive statistics for the five Texas community colleges that had the highest 1-year persistence rates for International students in the 2010-2011 academic year.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics for the Five Texas Community Colleges with the Highest 1-Year Persistence Rates for International Students in the 2010-2011 Academic Year.

Community College	% age
Lone Star College - Cy-Fair	79.60%
Lone Star College - Tomball	73.90%
Alamo Community College - Northwest Vista College	73.10%
Wharton County Junior College	72.50%
Victoria College	72.30%

The five Texas community colleges that had the highest 1-year persistence rates for International students in the 2011-2012 academic year were (starting from highest 1-year

persistence rates to lowest): (1) Lone Star College - Cy-Fair, (2) San Jacinto College South Campus, (3) Alamo Community College - Northeast Lakeview College, (4) San Jacinto College Central Campus, and (5) Collin County Community College District. Between these community colleges, Lone Star College - Cy-Fair had the highest 1-year persistence rates for International students, and Collin County Community College District had the lowest 1-year persistence rates for International students with a difference of 4.60%. Presented in Table 2 are the descriptive statistics for the five Texas community colleges that had the highest 1-year persistence rates for International students in the 2011-2012 academic year.

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics for the Five Texas Community Colleges with the Highest 1-Year Persistence Rates for International Students in the 2011-2012 Academic Year.

Community College	%age
Lone Star College - Cy-Fair	77.30%
San Jacinto College South Campus	75.90%
Alamo Community College - Northeast Lakeview College	74.60%
San Jacinto College Central Campus	74.40%
Collin County Community College District	72.70%

The five Texas community colleges that had the highest 1-year persistence rates for International students in the 2012-2013 academic year were (starting from highest 1-year persistence rates to lowest): (1) Lone Star College - Cy-Fair, (2) Lone Star College - University Park, (3) Alamo Community College - Northeast Lakeview College, (4) San Jacinto College South Campus, and (5) Wharton County Junior College. Between these community colleges, Lone Star College - Cy-Fair had the highest 1-year persistence rates for International students, and Wharton County Junior College had the lowest 1-year persistence rates for International students with a difference of 5.70%. Table 3 contains the descriptive statistics for the five Texas community colleges that had the highest 1-year persistence rates for International students in the 2012-2013 academic year.

**Table 3.** Descriptive Statistics for the Five Texas Community Colleges with the Highest 1-Year Persistence Rates for International Students in the 2012-2013 Academic Year.

Community College	% age
Lone Star College - Cy-Fair	81.20%
Lone Star College - University Park	80.90%
Alamo Community College - Northeast Lakeview College	79.50%
San Jacinto College South Campus	75.70%
Wharton County Junior College	75.50%

For the second research question regarding the five Texas community colleges that had the lowest 1-year persistence rates for International students in the 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013 academic years, different Texas community colleges were identified in the three academic years. The five Texas community colleges that had the lowest 1-year persistence rates for International students in the 2010-2011 academic year were (starting from lowest 1-year persistence rates to highest): (1) Texarkana College, (2) Central Texas

College, (3) Temple College, (4) Angelina College, and (5) Galveston College. Between these community colleges, Texarkana College had the lowest 1-year persistence rates for International students, and Galveston College had the highest 1-year persistence rates for International students with a difference of 7.30%. Revealed in Table 4 are the descriptive statistics for the five Texas community colleges that had the lowest 1-year persistence rates for International students in the 2010-2011 academic year.

**Table 4.** Descriptive Statistics for the Five Texas Community Colleges with the Lowest 1-Year Persistence Rates for International Students in the 2010-2011 Academic Year.

Community College	% age
Texarkana College	44.10%
Central Texas College	45.80%
Temple College	50.00%
Angelina College	50.80%
Galveston College	51.40%

The five Texas community colleges that had the lowest 1-year persistence rates for International students in the 2011-2012 academic year were (starting from lowest 1-year persistence rates to highest): (1) Howard College, (2) Central Texas College, (3) Dallas County Community College - Cedar Valley College, (4) Clarendon College, and (5) Paris Junior College. Between these community colleges, Howard College had the lowest 1-year persistence rates for International students, and Paris Junior College had the highest 1-year persistence rates for International students with a difference of 8.10%. Table 5 contains the descriptive statistics for the five Texas community colleges that had the lowest 1-year persistence rates for International students in the 2011-2012 academic year.

**Table 5.** Descriptive Statistics for the Five Texas Community Colleges with the Lowest 1-Year Persistence Rates for International Students in the 2011-2012 Academic Year.

Community College	% age
Howard College	44.90%
Central Texas College	47.20%
Dallas County Community College - Cedar Valley College	49.30%
Clarendon College	52.70%
Paris Junior College	53.00%

The five Texas community colleges that had the lowest 1-year persistence rates for International students in the 2012-2013 academic year were (starting from lowest 1-year persistence rates to highest): (1) Central Texas College, (2) Howard College, (3) Alamo Community College - St. Philip's College, (4) Trinity Valley Community College, and (5) Angelina College. Between these community colleges, Central Texas College had the lowest 1-year persistence rates for International students, and Angelina College had the highest 1-year persistence rates for International students with a difference of 3.20%. Presented in Table 6 are the descriptive statistics for the five Texas community colleges that had the lowest 1-year persistence rates for International students in the 2012-2013 academic year.

**Table 6.** Descriptive Statistics for the Five Texas Community Colleges with the Lowest 1-Year Persistence Rates for International Students in the 2012-2013 Academic Year.

Community College	% age
Central Texas College	51.00%
Howard College	53.10%
Alamo Community College - St. Philip's College	53.80%
Trinity Valley Community College	54.10%
Angelina College	54.20%

For the third research question regarding the consistencies in the five Texas community colleges that had the highest 1-year persistence rates for International students in the 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013 academic years, consistencies were present in some of Texas community colleges in the three academic years. Lone Star College - Cy-Fair had the highest 1-year persistence rates for International students in all three academic years. Moreover, even though Victoria College was not one of the five Texas community colleges that had the highest persistence rates for International students in 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 academic years, Victoria College was the sixth Texas community college that had the highest persistence rates for International students in these academic years. Table 7 contains a summary of the community colleges with their consistencies that had the highest 1-year persistence rates for International students in the 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013 academic years.

**Table 7.** Summary of Consistencies in Texas Community Colleges with the Highest 1-Year Persistence Rates for International Students in the 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013 Academic Years.

Community College	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013
Lone Star College - Cy-Fair	79.60%	77.30%	81.20%
Victoria College	72.30%	72.40%	74.40%
Wharton County Junior College	72.50%		75.50%
San Jacinto College South Campus		75.90%	75.70%
Alamo Community College - Northeast Lakeview College		74.60%	79.50%

For the last research question regarding the consistencies in the five Texas community colleges that had the lowest 1-year persistence rates for International students in the 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013 academic years, consistencies were observed in some of Texas community colleges in the three academic years. Central Texas College had the second lowest 1-year persistence rates for International students in the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 academic years, but it had the lowest 1-year persistence rates for International students in 2012-2013 academic year. Moreover, even though Temple College was not one of the five Texas community colleges that had the lowest persistence rates for International students in the 2011-2012 academic year, Temple College was the sixth Texas community college that had the lowest persistence rates for International students in the 2012-2013 academic year. Presented in Table 8 is a summary of the community colleges with their consistencies that had the lowest 1-year persistence rates for International students in the 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013 academic years.

**Table 8.** Summary of Consistencies in Texas Community Colleges with the Lowest 1-Year Persistence Rates for International Students in 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013 Academic Years.

Community College	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013
Central Texas College	45.80%	47.20%	51.00%
Angelina College	50.80%		54.20%
Temple College	50.00%		54.80%

## 4. Discussion

In this study, data were analyzed from 72 Texas community colleges in terms of 1-year persistence rates for International students in the 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013 academic years. Five Texas community colleges were determined that had the highest and lowest 1-persistence rates for International students in the three academic years. Some Texas community colleges (e.g., Lone Star College - Cy-Fair and Victoria College) were consistent with their high 1-year persistence rates for International students for all three years. In other words, these Texas community colleges had the highest 1-year persistence rates for International students in all three years. The assumption is that these colleges had good practices or ways that supported and helped the International students have high 1-year persistence rates. Moreover, another possibility is that the International students who attended these Texas community colleges were at an advantage in terms of family support, financial support, and peer support. Furthermore, these International students might have received the academic support from their faculty and might have received the social support from their advisors who helped them understand the new culture, the new environment, and the school system. Therefore, they were able to adapt the new culture and the new school system, and they were able to complete their 1-year at these Texas community colleges.

On the other hand, one Texas community college (i.e., Central Texas College) was consistent with its low 1-year persistence rates for International students for all three years. Other Texas community colleges (e.g., Angelina College and Temple College) were consistent with their low 1-year persistence rates for International students in 2010-2011 and 2012-2013 academic years. The assumption for these Texas community colleges is that they did not have good practices and ways that supported and helped the International students persist through their 1-year. However, the responsibility cannot be placed only on these colleges. It is possible that these International students did not care about persisting through their 1-year.

In fact, these International students might have chosen to go to these Texas community colleges just to attend college and maintain their legal status. Almost all International students carry a student visa (i.e., F1 visa) that requires them to be enrolled in at least 12 credits each semester. Therefore, they attend these colleges to justify their stay in the United States. According to [13], some International students attended community colleges to stay legally in the United States. In other words, they did not attend a community

college to get a degree or a certificate, but they attended a community college just to remain legally in the United States with a student visa.

Similar to other students (e.g., first-generation students), International students face many challenges during their time in college and during their time in the United States. According to [14], "all International students, regardless of country of origin, experience a disorientation (or 'culture shock') upon their arrival to the United States, whether in terms of language, food, customs, weather and climate, or something else" (pp. 471-472). International students face many challenges adapting to new environments. In fact, not all International students experience the same challenges, some of them such as Saudi students experience more challenges than other students who come from Europe [15]. These challenges could lead International students to have low 1-year persistence rates and they could prevent them from achieving their educational goals, such as graduating from college.

If these challenges are not addressed and solved, the chances are high that these International students would struggle during their time in college. Therefore, International students need to understand the possible challenges that they might face during their time in the United States and during their time in college. Understanding these students and helping them overcome the challenges they face might help them achieve their goals and earn the degree they intended to earn when they decided to study abroad [8]. Moreover, by helping and supporting International students, leaders in higher education (e.g., Texas community colleges) might encourage more International students to study abroad, which will help them increase their bottom line as well.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, two Texas community colleges were consistent in their high 1-year persistence rates for International students in all three academic years, and three Texas community colleges were consistent in two academic years. On the other hand, one Texas community college was consistent with its low 1-year persistence rates for International students in all three academic years, and two Texas community colleges were consistent in two academic years. Different reasons might exist behind having high 1-year persistence rates and low 1-year persistence rates for International students in these Texas community colleges. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate why some Texas community college had high 1-year persistence rates for International students and why some Texas community college had low 1-year persistence rates for International students. In addition, investigating the factors that helped International students complete their 1-year and investigating the factors that did not help International students complete their 1-year are important to identify to understand the relationships between these factors and the 1-year persistence rates.

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