

Tennessee Board of Regents
SWOT Analysis Summary Report: October 2009

Planning Assumptions

1. Fiscal decision-making must be predicated on the assumption that operating funds will be limited with no new monies anticipated and that current federal stimulus dollars are fixed and finite.
2. Job growth will be dynamic for all post-secondary certificate and college degree earners especially in STEM, sustainability and health-related fields.
3. The entrepreneurial expectations of a global economy coupled with demands of complex worldwide social and political challenges will require augmented instruction in and exposure to international issues, peoples and places.
4. For Tennessee to be highly competitive in the global economy, it will be necessary to increase the number of higher education students who successfully earn a postsecondary credential.
5. Changing lifestyles, high demand for continuous education and increased use of new communication devices will require the rapid deployment of innovative uses of technology in both higher education instruction and educational operations management.
6. Dramatic state demographic changes and ever greater demands on the quality of preparation for all students entering higher education will necessitate the development of new approaches to access and instruction that assure equal opportunity and optimum results for all.

Focal Area 1: Access and Student Success

- **Theme 1: Preparation of Incoming Students**
 - **Strength:** Higher standards for high school diplomas plus Tennessee's merit based scholarship system provide opportunity and incentive for students to remain in Tennessee for higher education.
 - **Weakness:** Because a large portion of students entering our institutions do not have an adequate preparation to attend college, they have a low chance of success and must take remedial and developmental courses before beginning a college track.
 - **Opportunity:** Our institutions can work with Tennessee high schools, where graduation rates have increased markedly, to ensure that graduation requirements align with freshmen level coursework through P-16 agreements and initiatives like the American Diploma Project. Additionally, agreements for dual-credit and dual-enrollment may alleviate the transition process for many students.
 - **Threat:** Our institutions rely heavily on adult students who will be unaffected by improvements to high school graduation requirements. Furthermore, future enrollment gains are expected to come from previously underserved populations that historically are less prepared for college.

- **Theme 2: Increasing Access**

- **Strength:** The Tennessee Board of Regents offers multiple points of entry to higher education including universities, community colleges, and technology centers. In addition, the Regents Online Campus Collaborative (ROCC) offers an additional delivery method for access to higher education.
- **Weakness:** Enrollment growth will continue to rely on traditionally underserved and adult populations. These students often have greater barriers to access and success than traditional students, such as family and work constraints, which are not always fully addressed by TBR institutions.
- **Opportunity:** New technologies, like social networking, will make it easier to recruit and advise students who might otherwise not be reached by traditional marketing strategies.
- **Threat:** The comparatively low percentage of Tennessean's with degrees could lead to an environment that undervalues the need of a higher education. Also, a decreasing enrollment of male students will threaten future opportunities for growth.

- **Theme 3: Retention Initiatives**

- **Strength:** TBR campuses have implemented a variety of initiatives such as first-year seminars orientation programs, co-curricular activities and campus sponsored events to help increase the freshmen year retention and help all students stay engaged.
- **Weakness:** TBR's production of degrees falls below the United States and Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) average. Many campuses still do not have a fully integrated plan for student retention and persistence to degree attainment.
- **Opportunity:** Institutions have the opportunity to increase student engagement by reaching out to the surrounding community, publicizing chances to study abroad, expanding internship opportunities, and enhancing students' roles in research with faculty.
- **Threats:** State appropriations for higher education are not expected to improve. Thus, time and resource intensive initiatives including student life events that foster student engagement will be threatened as campus budgets become more constrained.

- **Theme 4: Technology**

- **Strength:** The Board of Regents online learning initiatives both through ROCC and campus-specific courses are well established and have had considerable enrollment growth. Many initiatives have been implemented at the campuses to better integrate technology into the classroom, and new technology such as the Banner system has improved collection and reporting of student data at the campus and state-wide levels.
- **Weakness:** Technology centers, community colleges, and universities all have different IT needs, and many of their IT infrastructures are not currently equipped to handle the demands of such new technologies as HD interactive broadcasts.
- **Opportunity:** Emerging technologies could facilitate reaching even more distance education students as well as reduce costs especially for the ROCC.
- **Threat:** Large gaps exist in the availability of technology to different parts of the state, and many populations may not have access to online learning or campus websites.

Furthermore, falling behind other systems or proprietary schools in the use of technology could put the system at a competitive disadvantage for future enrollment.

Focal Area 2: Institution Quality

- **Theme 1: Faculty and Staff Quality**

- **Strength:** All faculty meet expectations for institutional re-accreditation by the Southern Association for Colleges and Schools (SACS) and are encouraged to take advantage of professional development opportunities that further enhance their teaching and research credentials.
- **Weakness:** Because faculty and staff salaries remain below SREB and United States averages at both universities and community colleges, attracting and retaining quality personnel is difficult. The scope of professional development opportunities may be jeopardized by budgetary restrictions, which will make it increasingly difficult to assure the quality of ongoing training.
- **Opportunity:** Economic difficulty in other states makes this an excellent time to hire highly qualified faculty and staff that might be out of work. Further development of system-wide faculty training opportunities may provide faculty enrichment in a cost effective manner.
- **Threat:** A reduction in state appropriations has caused campuses and the system office to lose many highly trained employees to buyouts. Reductions are expected to continue to eliminate staff and threaten buying power for new faculty even as enrollment increases.

- **Theme 2: Scholarly and Creative Activity**

- **Strength:** Research performed by TBR institutions and creative arts programs provided at TBR campuses add prestige to the system, provide meaningful student learning experiences, and enhance the quality of life for our citizenry.
- **Weakness:** Many departments lack sufficient facilities for research or have facilities that are subpar by current standards. Faculty with strong research potential are likely to be lured away by institutions with better facilities and higher salaries.
- **Opportunity:** Federal dollars are available for research that relates to environmental conservation. As local companies seek to capitalize on the “green” movement, research partnerships will be available. Also, Tennessee’s strong ties to the music industry could provide growing support for creative activity on campuses.
- **Threat:** TBR institutions could lose large grants if researchers do not have ample support, and gubernatorial support is focused on only a few campuses. Funding for creative activities in the music and arts are threatened at every level of education due to financial hardships.

- **Theme 3: Academic Program Quality**

- **Strength:** Academic program quality is monitored by accreditation, program review, academic audit, and performance funding requirements. Programs with standardized licensure exams are competitive with national averages. Also, established and newly developed articulation agreements help students move from technology centers to community colleges to universities easily.

- **Weakness:** Some programs do not have established methods for ensuring rigor and validity with regards to ever-changing expectations of the job market. Furthermore, campus infrastructure is aging to the point that upgrades to facilities for student learning and research are needed to sustain and continuously improve academic programs.
- **Opportunity:** Pilot programs in such areas as developmental studies, e-learning, and the Teaching Quality Initiative are developing ways to improve program outcomes while making the college experience more valuable and more economically viable for students. New software makes it possible to better track student outcomes and provide feedback to academic programs.
- **Threat:** Enrollment growth, outside monitoring, and industry partnerships may threaten institutional identity if not consistently aligned with the mission of each institution. A continued need for remediation could threaten the rigor of some programs.

Focal Area 3: Affordability, Awareness, and Aspiration

- **Theme 1: Cost of Attending College**

- **Strength:** Tuition and fees in Tennessee are below the US average, and technology centers and community colleges offer more affordable opportunities. The availability of the HOPE and Wilder Naifeh scholarships provide financial aid at all levels. Campuses are implementing new initiatives such as textbook policies to lower costs for students.
Weakness: The cost of tuition, textbooks, ROCC courses and other costs associated with college attendance are progressively rising and shifting to the student while need-based scholarships or scholarships for adult students are limited.
- **Opportunity:** TBR could partner with others such as the Board of Education and the Voluntary System of Accountability to enhance the public's understanding of higher education costs. Discussing costs and financial aid options early in high school as well as implementing reliable cost estimators for attending institutions would help future students plan ahead for college.
- **Threat:** Potential students may opt out of higher education entirely if rising higher education costs are not explained or supported by adequate advice on family financial planning. Furthermore, state and federal financial aid might not be able to keep pace with rising tuition and other costs.

- **Theme 2: Resourcefulness**

- **Strength:** Institutions have successfully increased private donations and research funding over the last five years. Collaborative activities such as ROCC and agreements among TBR campus libraries help to eliminate the duplication of resources by campuses.
- **Weakness:** There is an under-utilization of grant opportunities due to time and staff constraints. Also, in some cases, courses have similar content but are duplicated because of program affiliation.
- **Opportunity:** An increased investment up-front in fund raising and grant writing could potentially show strong returns. The Board could implement workshops to educate faculty and staff how to apply for grants or best raise funds.

- **Threat:** An economic slowdown could reduce levels of private donations as well as diminish grant opportunities from government and private sources.

Focal Area 4: Environmental Conditions

- **Theme 1: Leadership and Governance**

- **Strength:** Institution leaders are well respected and highly engaged in their respective communities, which enhances community life and also adds regard for the institution. The structure of TBR allows for close interaction between leadership of technology centers, community colleges, and universities that facilitates articulation agreements and other collaborative activities.
- **Weakness:** Efforts to increase institution accountability have led to increased bureaucracy and reporting which threaten institutional identity.
- **Opportunities:** Campus leaders can continue to use their high-profile position to bring in new community partnerships for the institution. Restructuring the system could better align goals and priorities leading to a more streamlined educational system.
- **Threat:** Over commercializing campuses through partnerships could lead to the loss of independent and unbiased teaching and research. Furthermore, restructuring of the campuses would require buy-in which may not be present and could lead to unrest at the institutions.

- **Theme 2: Economic Leadership**

- **Strength:** TBR institutions are adept at fulfilling the changing needs of the workforce by providing immediate training for a new career, especially the technology centers, community colleges and Regents Online Continuing Education (ROCE). Furthermore, the technology centers and community colleges emphasize job placement for their graduates and demonstrate a history of success.
- **Weakness:** Resources to hire faculty who are qualified to teach and train students in new careers produced by the changing economy are restricted. Partnerships between industry and TBR institutions to train employees for existing jobs are limited or isolated to particular regions. Also, institutions may not have sufficient capacity or flexibility to handle sudden enrollment spikes or declines.
- **Opportunity:** All institutions have the opportunity to train students to fill shortages in STEM related fields. By partnering with industry, federal government, and the department of education, institutions could create new programs and gain funding for endowed faculty to fill shortages.
- **Threat:** There is a lack of a clear vision at the state government of what role public higher education plays in attracting new jobs to Tennessee, and therefore opportunities may be lost to other states.

- **Theme 3: Competitive Environment**

- **Strength:** TBR institutions provide a wide spectrum of attractive options to people seeking advanced education including out-of-state students from a certificate to professional and

- terminal degrees that directly support growth and development of the Tennessee workforce.
- **Weakness:** Inability to produce sufficient numbers of students who earn a postsecondary credential may hamper growth of existing businesses as well as the ability to attract new high paying industries to Tennessee.
 - **Opportunity:** TBR could market to Tennessee's growing Hispanic and other minority populations as well as to the large number of adults without degrees. Additionally, the state's low tax rates for industry could bring new training opportunities for all TBR institutions.
 - **Threat:** Even as tuition rises, per FTE funding at TBR institutions is in the lower range compared to other SREB states. As the state's population is growing disproportionately from one area to the next, some institutions may see spikes in enrollment while others see little change or declining enrollment. Growth in proprietary schools could also affect enrollment growth.