**Best Practice Area**

**Statewide Articulation of a Core Curriculum:**

**Texas Legislation**

The current statute, Texas Education Code (TEC) Chapter 61, Subchapter S, [Sections 61.821-61.832](http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/ED/htm/ED.61.htm#S), continues the state-level focus on excellence in undergraduate education, while facilitating the transfer of lower-division course credit among public colleges, universities and health science centers throughout the state.

One of the most important provisions of the core curriculum is that it allows students who successfully complete a 42 semester credit hour (SCH) core curriculum at one institution to transfer the entire set of completed courses to another Texas higher education institution without having to repeat any core courses. Students who transfer without completing the entire 42-SCH core curriculum also receive credit for each of the core courses they successfully complete. Although the courses included in the core curriculum may vary by institution, every Texas higher education institution's core curriculum must include the following foundational component areas and semester credit hours:

* Communication (6 SCH)
* Mathematics (3 SCH)
* Life and Physical Sciences (6 SCH)
* Language, Philosophy and Culture (3 SCH)
* Creative Arts (3 SCH)
* American History (6 SCH)
* Government/Political Science (6 SCH)
* Social and Behavioral Sciences (6 SCH)
* The Component Area Option (6 SCH)

**Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Rules**

The Coordinating Board was required by law to adopt rules that include "a statement of the content, component areas, and objectives of the core curriculum" - a framework for a consistent statewide curriculum.

Each institution selects the specific courses it will offer to fulfill that framework in a way that takes into account the individual role and mission of the college, university, or health science center. The TCC implementation at each institution must receive approval from the Coordinating Board and institutions must evaluate the effectiveness of their TCC at regular intervals.

**Best Practice Area:**

**Traded Clusters**

*Traded clusters drive the economy and have higher wages, higher productivity, and much higher rates of innovation. These productivity gains and innovations rely extensively on the talent of engineers, highly skilled technicians, and scientists.*

John W. Ahlen, Past President of the Arkansas Science & Technology Authority

According to cluster expert Michael Porter, it is important to understand the structure of the economy. Local industries, such as utilities, retail, and health care, are important, but they don’t compete with other locations. The majority of all jobs are local jobs. In addition to local clusters, there are also traded clusters. They compete. A cluster is defined as a critical mass in a particular field. Clusters are not just manufacturers, but also services and supporting organizations like universities that all come together and create expertise and technology. This is how productivity gets built and how innovation happens. These traded clusters drive the economy. They have higher wages, higher productivity, and much higher rates of innovation. State government can help grow strong clusters, which have, in addition to higher wages, faster job growth, more patents, and more new businesses. New businesses don’t grow randomly; they grow out of clusters and are fundamental to the success of one’s state.

Given the importance of clusters to economic development, state leaders will recognize a few of the important clusters in Arkansas.  As researchers collected information about clusters, it found that virtually every education and workforce agency may see clusters through its individual agency lens and speak about clusters using its own vocabulary.  For example, it was found that a variety of cluster initiatives among its agencies, in research, workforce development, economic development, and Porter’s cluster analysis for Arkansas.  Despite this, research found that there was overlap and commonality among clusters.  The conclusion is that clusters, called by whatever name and seen from whatever perspective, are pervasive and offer a way for business and education providers to reach a common vision through clusters that they have in common. The initial review of clusters suggests that four are of special interest:

1. Computer and Information Technology,
2. Nano-Related and Advanced Materials and Applications,
3. Biotechnology, Bioengineering, and Life Sciences, and
4. Agriculture, Food, and Environmental Sciences.