

Hello. Welcome to an audio extra with the Chronicle of Higher Education. I'm Paul Fing, a reporter here. More than half of today's college students will transfer at least once during their academic careers. One institution with a great deal of experience with transfer students is the University of North Texas, and our guest today is the University's president, Gretchen M. Bataille. Now on to the conversation:

I'm here at the Chronicle's office with Gretchen Bataille, president of the University of North Texas. President Bataille, thanks for being here.

Thank you. Happy to be here.

I saw that your institution has about 35,000 students and, uh, not all the students began at the University of North Texas. Is that correct?

Absolutely. The University of North Texas is the institution in the state of Texas with more transfer students than any other institution and [we're even or we're leading] the country in a number of transfer students. So we recognize that not all students start at a four-year school right out of high school.

Now this isn't unique -- I understand that you're among the forefront of this but there are a lot of institutions that see a large number of transfers. Is that correct?

Absolutely. I mean, Florida and California probably are the two states that see a lot. North Carolina certainly does--and Texas, because when you have so many students, uh, coming through the pipeline and many of the students quite honestly are not prepared for four-year institutions or perhaps their circumstances just make it impossible -- whether it's financial or family circumstances -- to attend a four-year institution. They need to begin somewhere if they're going to get their education.

And just to give it a raw number, is this in the ballpark of -- I've heard half of students at four years...

About half the students in four-year schools did not begin there.

Now, how in particular has your institution worked with many colleges to make this process smoother?

We have articulation agreements with the community college districts that are within about 50 to 100 miles of our campus because those are the more likely students to transfer to UNT. And because in Texas there are six systems of four-year schools, plus some that are not even affiliated with systems, uh, there are really pockets of community colleges and universities that have these articulation agreements. Our goal of the state is, of course, to have a better process of articulation for the entire state. We have common course numbering systems. There are a number of... of things that have been done to improve the transfer opportunities for students.

Are there any... I'm sure you have quite a few community colleges near your campus. Any in particular that you have developed a strong partnership with and how does that work, specifically?

Well, there are different kinds of partnerships. With Hill College, for example, we actually, uh, have faculty who go down there and we're teaching their faculty to prepare them to get Ph.D.'s in community college administration. So, it's not always just undergraduates who are swirling in and out and among the schools. But very often we're working with community colleges to enhance the, uh, opportunities for their faculty to advance.

So, I know that this is meeting the needs of a large number of students in the state on the whole but it doesn't always help institutions with the rankings or in other metrics. Is that the case?

It is and one of the most frustrating things for me is that graduation rates from colleges and universities do not include transfer students. They include only those students who come as freshmen. So when you look at four-year and six-year graduation rates, in our case we're ignoring half the students who are on our campus.

And you have just large numbers of students who then go on and graduate somewhere else -- and you don't even know about it at times?

Well, and that's why it's so important for us to track students. In Texas, we can check them, uh, if we find out -- we can find out what institution they went to in Texas. And now with the national clearinghouse that most states have adopted and Texas now is using, we can track students if they go out of state. Because we have students who may leave and, you know, go across the state line to Oklahoma and finish their education there and for us that would look like a loss. For the student, it's a gain. Anytime you can get a student to finish, it's a positive thing.

Yeah, that certainly sounds like success to a student but not necessarily to you and have you been able to -- do you hope at some point to be able to use these numbers to better make the case for the need that you're serving in the state and beyond?

Absolutely. Texas, as you know, is the state that declared that we were going to close the gaps in education. And UNT is taking that very seriously. And we have made more progress than other institutions in the state, to enroll more students, graduate more students (particularly African-American/Hispanic students). We're one of the top 100 institutions in the country for graduation and retention of African-Americans and Hispanic students. So we take very seriously our role in meeting the needs in the state of Texas.

Uh, I've heard one of the ways that you've done that is with your Emerald Eagle Scholar Program. Could you talk briefly about that?

Sure. We decided when I -- when I arrived there, looking at what our needs were and sort of coincidental with the inauguration and activities, I didn't want to spend money on a party. I said we could have an event but it had to be something that made a difference for the institution. And so, at the end of the day after we paid all of the expenses from the inauguration and the inaugural ball, we had raised about \$350,000 to start an endowment for Emerald Eagle Scholars. So we combined the funds that we raised there, plus other funds that come in each year that don't go into the endowment but support the Emerald Eagle Scholars, to give scholarships for tuition and fees for four years to students whose family income is \$40,000 or less. And the students commit to taking 15 credit hours a semester or 30 a year. They commit to making a 2.5 GPA every year. They commit to working 10 hours a week on campus or in a work-study program and they agree to have two mentors -- a student mentor and a faculty or staff mentor. And many of those students now completing their first year have agreed to be mentors for Emerald Eagle Scholars next year.

You, yourself have been a mentor, is that...

I have two mentees and their fabulous. And they both had very successful years.

Well, that's all the time we have. Dr. Bataille, thanks for being here.

Thank you.