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Austin Community College contracted with MGT of America, Inc. in spring 1999 to develop peer and benchmark/best practices analyses on key indicators. The peer indicators were updated in Spring 2002 with data from eight Texas community colleges and four non-Texas institutions that represent a sample of large, comprehensive, urban community colleges.

A “peer” is a college that is “most like” Austin Community College based on similarities on a group of variables like size, location, and mix of programs. “Benchmarking” is used for the purposes of this study as a systematic approach for conducting comparative statistical analyses of an organization relative to others. A benchmark or “best practice” college is one whose method of operation or whose process in a particular area has been designated as one of the best in the nation or state. Institutions use benchmarking to identify who is doing something best and how their own practices compare; benchmarking then permits a college to plan to close the gap between itself and the best. In addition, the Association of College and Research Libraries (a division of the American Library Association) provides for college libraries and learning resource centers a set of benchmarks at both the minimal and exemplary levels. The Association of Physical Plant Administrators and the Council for Educational Facilities Planners, International also provides benchmarks for facilities and space utilization.

A survey was sent to each of the comparison colleges to collect information on their programs, students, space, facilities, library holdings, staffing, revenues, expenditures, and operations. The findings that follow result from the survey results, from information collected from the National Center for Education Statistics, the League for Innovation, the National Association of College and University Business Officers, the
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College Board, the Association of College and Research Libraries, the Association of Physical Plant Administrators, the Council for Educational Facilities Planners, International, and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Major findings include the following observations.

Enrollments:

- Austin Community College enrolls more headcount students but fewer full-time equivalent students (FTES) than do peer colleges. Austin Community College enrolled a total of 25,735 students in Fall 2000, 402 than the peer or benchmark colleges that enrolled 25,333 students, on the average. Austin Community College enrolled 12,772 full-time equivalent students, 10 percent less than the average 14,120 enrolled at the peer institutions.\(^1\) This means that a larger percentage of the headcount students at the peer colleges are enrolled as full-time students.

- Austin Community College enrolls a smaller proportion of minority students than do the peers. Minority students comprise 49.3 percent of the student body at peer colleges, compared to 35.2 percent at ACC.

- When compared to the adult population in its service area, Austin Community College enrolls a smaller proportion of minority students than are represented in the population, as do the peer community colleges.

Faculty:

- The headcount student to faculty ratio at ACC declined from 88.2 in 1997-98 to 68.1 in 2000-01, but still exceeded the peer average of 60.4 students per full-time faculty member.

- The full-time equivalent student to faculty ratio at ACC was 33.8, compared to 33.7 for the peer institutions.

- Based on full-time equivalent faculty, Austin Community College faculty members taught fewer contact hours than did faculty at the other large, Texas urban community colleges: 11,768 contact hours per faculty member at ACC compared to 14,550 per faculty at the other Texas colleges.

\(^1\) The number of full-time equivalent students displayed here is not the same as the number calculated by Austin Community College by dividing the number of credit hours generated by 15. Full-time equivalent students in this report are calculated by adding one-third of the part-time headcount students, to the number of full-time headcount students. This calculation methodology is used in reports of the National Center for Education Statistics, from which the enrollment data were obtained.
Revenues and Expenditures:

- ACC received about $250 less per student in total revenues than did peers in FY2000. If ACC were to be funded at the level of the peers, ACC would receive about $3.1 million more per year.

- ACC received $950 less per student in revenues derived from property taxes than did the peer colleges. ACC received a larger proportion of its budget from tuition and fees and state appropriations than did peers, but a smaller proportion from property taxes. This means that students were funding more of the cost of their education at Austin Community College than at the peer colleges, and that ACC is more dependent of tuition and fees paid by students than are the peer colleges.

- ACC also received a smaller proportion of its budget from federal grants and contracts than did the peers. This is an important fact because the majority of federal grants and contracts revenue at community colleges is received in the form of student financial aid.

- Tuition and fees at ACC are higher than that charged at the peer colleges in Texas, on average. In 2001-02 Austin Community College charged an average of $44.58 per semester credit hour compared to an average $35.05 at other large, urban Texas community colleges.

- Since 1997-98, ACC’s tuition and fees per credit hour have increased at different rates than those at its Texas peers. In–district tuition increased 17.3 percent at ACC compared to 28.3 percent at the peers, while out-of-district tuition at ACC increased 50.1 percent compared to 25.6 percent for the Texas peers.

- ACC expended about $350 more per student than did the Texas peers. When the differences between revenues and expenditures are compared, Austin Community College spent about $25 less per student than it received, while the comparator colleges spent about $290 less per student than they received. This implies that ACC is able to retain less for capital investment and other projects than the peers do.

- ACC expended a smaller share of its budget on student financial aid than did the peer colleges. This means that ACC students may not be receiving all the federal financial aid to which they are entitled. On the other hand, ACC expended a larger share of its budget on Instruction and Academic Support than did the peer colleges. This implies that a larger share of ACC’s budget was spent on the mission of providing educational services to the students in its service area.

- ACC expended about $120 more per full-time equivalent student on Instruction than did the peers, and spent $10 more per student on Academic Support (which includes the Learning Resources Center) than did the peers.

- ACC spent $643 more per student for Institutional Support than did the peers, but $240 less per student for Student Services and $220 less for Physical Plant than did the peers.

- ACC received about $220 less per full-time equivalent student in federal student financial aid than did the peers. Since federal financial
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aid is based on need, this difference may reflect variations in the make-up of the student body.

**Tax Base, Tax Collections, and Service Area:**

- ACC enrolled 1.5 percent of its service area population compared to an average of 1.6 percent for the Texas peer colleges.
- When the taxing district is used as the basis of comparison, ACC enrolled a significantly higher percentage of the taxing district population than did the peers, 2.9 percent at ACC compared to an average of 1.8 percent for the Texas peer colleges.
- ACC’s taxing district had a much smaller population than the average of the other large, urban Texas community colleges. ACC had the highest ratio of population served to taxing district population (1.92) when compared to the Texas peers and the peer average of 1.18.
- The net assessed value per FTES of the Texas peer districts was 33 percent more than ACC’s ($2.4 million compared to ACC’s $1.8 million).
- ACC’s tax rate of 0.05 per $100 of assessed value was the lowest rate in the state.
- In FY2000, ACC collected less than half the taxes per fulltime equivalent student than did the other large, urban Texas community colleges, $1,021 at ACC compared to $2,059 at the peers.

**Library and Learning Resource Centers:**

- ACC’s expenditures for libraries or learning resource centers did not reach the Association of College and Research Libraries benchmark minimal level of 6 percent of E & G expenditures. ACC’s expenditures were about 3 percent of E & G expenditures.
- The ACRL standard for hours a learning resource center should be open is a minimum of 80 hours per week. ACC’s learning resource centers are open an average of 70.5 hours per week, while the peer libraries are open an average of 74.4 hours per week.
- ACRL sets a standard or benchmark for the number of bound volume equivalents that a collegiate library should hold in its collections. At a minimum, ACC should hold 332,220 BVEs to meet the ACRL benchmark. In 2002, ACC holds a total of 131,744 BVEs, or 40 percent of the ALA standard.
- ACRL also sets facilities benchmarks for learning resource centers at 10 percent of the FTES enrollment should be accommodated by seating. ACC has sufficient seating for about 5 percent of the students, half the benchmark.
ACC has fewer books or bound volume equivalents\textsuperscript{2} available per student than do the peers. ACC has 4.6 books per student, while the peer average is 9.1 books per student.

ACC had less space in the learning resource center than did the peer colleges, and fewer electronically equipped classrooms.

The ACRL benchmark for space for ACC’s LRC is 114,380 square feet. ACC has a total of 41,354 square feet of space on the campuses, about 40 percent of the benchmark. To reach the benchmark would require addition of 70,000 square feet, which would cost in excess of $8.7 million.

**Faculties:**

- The Association of Physical Plant Administrators sets as a benchmark for community colleges a range of between 14 and 22 assignable square feet of classroom space per full-time equivalent student. ACC has about 11 square feet of space per FTES. To reach the minimum benchmark would require acquisition of over 50,000 assignable square feet of classroom space.

- The Council of Educational Facilities Planners International sets benchmark classroom utilization rates of 60 percent of hours available, Monday through Friday, from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. All of the ACC campuses meet the benchmark utilization rate.

- ACC has less investment in physical plant per student than do the peers or comparable Texas community colleges. In FY2000 ACC had a plant value of $4,024 per student compared to an average $9,487 per student at the peers and $8,906 for the Texas peer colleges. ACC would need to more than double its plant investment to reach the level of the Texas peer colleges.

**Staffing and Compensation:**

- The other large, urban Texas peer colleges have relatively more total non-instructional staff to meet the needs of students than does ACC. Each non-instructional staff member at ACC serves 23 students, while each staff member at the Texas peer colleges serves 9 students.

- Salaries and wages at Austin Community College comprised a larger proportion of the budget than did salaries and wages at the national peers or the Texas peer colleges. ACC expended over 70 percent of its budget for Educational and General Expenditures while the peers spent 65 percent of their budgets, on average. This means that ACC has a smaller proportion of its funds available for other items, such as books, computers, and other commodities.

\textsuperscript{2} A Bound volume equivalent, or BVE, is a term coined by libraries to unitize library materials so that comparisons may be made among libraries. Included in bound volume equivalents are audiovisual materials, microforms, books, and other materials.