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## WHICH MAJORS MAKE MONEY? NEW TEXAS LAW AIMS TO LET COLLEGE APPLICANTS KNOW

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*By Bob Sechler*

Texas business leaders say they're all for college students pursuing their passions, even if it means majoring in contemporary dance, sculpture or something similarly esoteric.

They'd just like to convey a few financial details first — like the probability of earning a bigger paycheck as a computer programmer or even a plumber.

"A lot of people have no clue" how many jobs are available in various occupations and what they pay, said Tony Bennett, president of the Texas Association of Manufacturers. "If you know that going in and you still pick whatever (major or profession), that's fine."

Beginning in the new year, wage and workforce statistics will have a higher profile during the application process for Texas colleges and universities under a measure backed by Bennett's organization and other business groups around the state and approved by lawmakers during this year's session of the Texas Legislature.

The law requires a "prominent link" to the data on the standardized electronic college application — called ApplyTexas — used by about 450,000 prospective students annually.

A link to the information has previously been included on the website where students access the application, ApplyTexas.org, but now it will be on the actual electronic form as well, according to the Texas Workforce Commission. A redesign to make the interactive database — called Texas CREWS, for Consumer Resource for Education and Workforce Statistics — more user-friendly also is underway, although that effort isn't expected to be finished until late next year at the earliest.

The database provides comparisons of public two- and four-year postsecondary institutions in Texas, including statistics on average earnings and debt burdens for graduates of various programs.

For instance, annual wages earned by a 2015 graduate with a bachelor's degree in fine arts from a Texas institution averaged about \$36,000 after three years, according to the data, compared with about \$81,000 for a computer science major and \$56,000 for a graduate of a plumbing certification program. The figures don't make clear whether graduates are actually working in their fields of study.

Backers of boosting the profile of such workforce-related information say it's more important than ever for students

to consider, because the cost of higher education and the amount of debt needed to pay for it have risen dramatically.

But the effort isn't entirely altruistic. With the Texas labor market stretched thin and the unemployment rate historically low, business advocates say it's essential for the economy that the skills of new graduates match up relatively well on average with the qualifications being sought in the multitudes of help-wanted postings across the state.

"We need to organically grow more Texas students with certain skills that businesses are looking for," said **Justin Yancy**, president of the Texas Business Leadership Council.

Still, the workforce data, no matter how prominently it's displayed, is merely a resource for prospective students to consider when deciding on career paths, **Yancy** said, and they're free to click on the link or to ignore it.

"This is not intended to dissuade someone from following their dreams," he said.

Officials who work in college admissions say that's unlikely to happen regardless, partly because many prospective students already have factored in financial considerations by the time they've reached the point of filling out the electronic form.

"They may go double-check (the workforce data), but I don't know how much influence that might have on students backtracking after doing months of preparation" to decide on a major, said Miguel Wasielewski, executive director of admissions at the University of Texas.

Wasielewski said he views the link as a convenient resource for students, so he isn't opposed to seeing it moved onto the electronic form.

But he said a statistic such as average wages shouldn't be a student's sole criterion when choosing a major.

"For us, it really is about the comprehensive picture when we're counseling students (on possible majors), and that is one piece of information," Wasielewski said. "We wouldn't want it to be the only piece of information they use."

State Rep. Tom Oliverson, who co-authored the measure — House Bill 277 — in this year's legislative session, said he simply wants to get the workforce data in front of as many prospective college students as possible, whether they use it or not. Putting a link to it on the electronic form is a clever means of doing so, he said.

It's "the one time where we know for a fact that every high school student is thinking about where to go to college — because they are filling out a college application," Oliverson, R-Cypress, said during a hearing on the bill.