



Marketable Skills Goal Implementation Guidelines

The Big Picture

The *60x30TX* plan was designed to tie together all four student-centered goals. 60x30, which measures the educated population in Texas, is the overarching goal at the center of the plan and calls for 60 percent of 25- to 34-year-olds in Texas to hold a credential or degree by 2030. The 60x30 goal is supported by the other three goals (completion, marketable skills, student debt) that will get Texas to 60 percent by 2030. The second goal of completion counts the number of degrees (associate, bachelor's, and master's) and undergraduate certificates conferred at Texas institutions. Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics make clear that students do not get much economic lift from college attendance unless they complete a degree or undergraduate certificate. Also, completing a degree ensures students will gain full exposure to all the skills available to them through academic programs.

Students who can effectively market their skills to potential employers can secure employment that pays competitively. Higher earnings should position graduates to pay off their student debt without undue burden on them or their families. Student debt ties back to completion. The fourth goal of student debt is not about removing debt, or even reducing debt. It's about managing student loan debt in a way that supports student's educational and career aspirations. Incurring debt should not be a barrier to reaching those aspirations. Student debt is a tool, a resource for achieving completion and gaining marketable skills, the third goal in *60x30TX*.

THE THIRD GOAL: MARKETABLE SKILLS

By 2030, all graduates from Texas public institutions of higher education will have completed programs with identified marketable skills.

Marketable Skills Defined

Marketable skills include interpersonal, cognitive, and applied skill areas, are valued by employers, and are primary or complementary to a major. Marketable skills are acquired by students through education, including curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities. Marketable skills are often called employability skills in other countries, or transferable skills here in the states. They include both technical and soft skills. This definition purposefully is left broad to allow institutions the freedom to hone in on those skills valued by their industry partners. The marketable skills goal was designed to help students market themselves to employers.

Higher Calling → Graduate Success

The marketable skills goal emphasizes the value of higher education in the workforce. Texas public two- and four-year institutions must ensure that students are aware of, and graduate with marketable skills. The marketable skills goal enhances higher education's mission to produce well-rounded and well-informed individuals familiar with all fields of human activity and with a strong understanding of civic responsibilities.

All programs develop skills of value in the marketplace. The plan requires institutions to formally identify those skills for each of its degree programs so that students are aware of and can communicate these skills to future employers. The Higher Education Strategic Planning Committee (HESPC) that created 60x30TX felt the need to include a goal for marketable skills because of national discussions around graduate employability. Employers are looking for more than hard or technical skills. They need staff who can communicate, synthesize, and improve information.

“The marketable skills goal does not diminish higher education’s obligation to produce well-rounded and well-informed individuals familiar with all fields of human activity and with a strong understanding of our country’s founding principles (p.vi, 60x30TX).”

Graduates from the liberal arts and humanities are especially good at these kinds of soft skills but may not realize the value those skills hold in the workplace. The marketable skills goal is designed to help students understand the full array of marketable skills and talents they are accruing through their college experience. During the process of developing the marketable skills goal, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) staff and the HESPC believed students were graduating with desired skills, but simply not realizing it. A [2017 article in Forbes](#) articulated this well. The author argued the skills gap is really an awareness gap, “Simply put, this is the inability for college graduates to make employers aware of the skills they actually have.” The marketable skills goal is designed to close this awareness gap.

What is Required?

To implement this goal, institutions will need to (1) identify and document the skills offered in their programs, (2) communicate those skills to students, and (3) update documented skills on a regular basis (and continue to communicate them to students). Much of these guidelines is dedicated to helping institutions with the first step – identifying and documenting marketable skills. The first target in the 60x30TX plan for the marketable skills goal is that institutions will create and implement a process for identifying these skills. Ideally, this process will be identified **and implemented** by 2020.

Target to Reach the Goal	2020	2025	2030
By 2020, institutions will have created and implemented a process to identify and regularly update marketable skills for each of their programs, in collaboration with business and other stakeholders.	100% Implemented		Continuously Updated

Once identified, marketable skills should be communicated to students in a way that makes it easy for them to communicate their skills to potential employers. Essentially, marketable skills should be “résumé ready” to help students build a résumé that has relevance in the workforce. Once marketable skills are identified and communicated to students, the process will start over again. This repeat mechanism is part of the goal to help institutions document their ongoing alignment with industry, and

to capture continuous improvement in curriculum design and delivery. The target years for the repeat mechanism can be modified to accommodate institutional program review cycles.

Tracking the Marketable Skills Goal

The THECB is tracking progress toward the 60x30TX goals and targets in the Texas Higher Education [Accountability System](#). Staff developed a high-level reporting mechanism for the marketable skills goal that is part of the accountability system's institutional portal. This reporting mechanism asks institutions to report the number and percentage of programs for which a process to identify marketable skills has been created and implemented. This measure is "behind the scenes" and will not be public-facing in the 2017 Accountability System (the system where 2017 is the most recent data posted). We expect this measure will be posted and available to the public when the 2018 Accountability System is released in early 2019. In future collections, THECB staff may also ask how your institution is sharing marketable skills with students.

60x30TX Texas Higher Education Accountability System

Data Entry

Accountability Year
2017 (Draft)

Questions
Percentage of Programs with Identified Marketable Skills

Enter the number and percentage for which marketable skills have been identified. For example, 62.5% should be entered as 0.625.

All Programs Programs with Identified Marketable Skills Percentage

Number Number Submit

THECB staff is using the accountability system to track the progress of 60x30TX because that is the purpose of the system. Our [legacy accountability system](#) tracked the progress for the state's previous strategic plan for higher education, *Closing the Gaps by 2015*. **This does not mean the THECB will use identified marketable skills, in and of themselves, for accountability purposes. THECB staff will not.** Some institution's leaders and faculty may be wary of this goal for several reasons, including being held accountable to external stakeholders. The HESPC discussed the merits of measurement, and its potential value to educators and employers. The HESPC decided the value of measuring marketable skills was not significant because there are many student assessments and methods that inform student progression and mastery of course material, including course grades, student learning outcomes, recommendation letters from faculty, and commendations from institutions. Thus, assessment of marketable skill is not part of the design of this goal. The marketable skills goal is intended to provide students with a clearer picture of how courses, curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities relate to workforce opportunities.

As workforce opportunities change over time, so will marketable skills. That is why the plan calls for the skills to be continuously updated. The HESPC recognized these updates would be cumbersome for maintaining assessment, another reason it is not required for this goal. Instead, the committee chose to monitor success of this goal indirectly, through a target that reports graduate placement in the

workforce. This target measures whether graduates are found enrolled in higher education or in the workforce one year after completing an undergraduate certificate or degree. The target is set at 80 percent, which is based on data from the last 15 years; this metric has remained within 5 percentage points since 2000.

Targets to Reach the Goal	2020	2025	2030
Maintain the percentage of students who are found working or enrolled within one year after earning a degree or certificate.	80%	80%	80%

Getting Started

The first target for the marketable skills goal is “By 2020, institutions will have *created and implemented a process* to identify and regularly update marketable skills for each of their programs, in collaboration with business and other stakeholders [emphasis added].” The first step your program or institution should take toward the marketable skills goal is creating a process for identifying marketable skills, if such a process does not already exist. Be sure this process is replicable, since the skills will be updated regularly. This is an important component of this goal. No one knows exactly what the job market will look like in 15 years or what jobs will exist in 15 years. Continually updating the skills that are in demand and in development is crucial. Also, faculty – your content experts – are critical to the marketable skills goal; the suggested starting points should actively include faculty as drivers of and partners in implementation.

Here are some ideas on how to start developing a skills identification process:

Work with Career Services. Collaborate or confer with your Career Services colleagues to identify business partners. Consider including both for-profit and nonprofit employers as stakeholders that can contribute to your skills identification process. Your career services office may also be able to help you identify the marketable skills offered in your program. Consider sharing your degree plan with them to start the conversation. You also might invite your career services’ colleagues for classroom observations; it is possible they will identify a skill that is not obvious to you. These colleagues also may be better positioned to connect internships to marketable skills. Ideally, career services will become part of the first-time-in-college experience in order to embed marketable skills into the college-going experience.

Use Available Resources. There are a number of resources already available that can help you both create a process and identify skills in your programs.

- **First Destination Survey.** Check with your institution or department leadership to learn if you can conduct an annual “first destination survey,” a survey of your recent graduates. Visit the National Association of Colleges and Employers ([NACE](#)) website or the [Gallup-Purdue Index](#) for survey examples. You may learn where graduates from your program work shortly after they complete their degrees. This might help you lay out the skills your graduates are leveraging to enter the workforce. You also may want to add questions to this survey to learn what marketable skills were

of value to graduates as they entered the workforce. *Note: The THECB is working to design a statewide survey of this kind.*

- **O*NET Online.** The Occupational Information Network (O*NET) is a free [online database](#) developed by the U.S. Department of Labor/Employment and Training Administration that contains hundreds of occupational definitions. For each job, O*NET provides:
 - Personal requirements - the skills and knowledge required to perform the work,
 - Personal characteristics - the abilities, interests and values needed to perform the work,
 - Experience requirements - the training and level of licensing and experience needed for the work,
 - Job requirements - the work activities and context, including the physical, social, and organizational factors involved in the work, and
 - Labor market - the occupational outlook and the pay scale for the work.

O*NET is a tool that could guide your identification of marketable skills. If you drill down to the jobs you think your graduates are qualified for, you can use the “personal requirements” and “personal characteristics” to tease out the skills embedded in your programs. The Commissioner of the Bureau of Labor Statistics presented on O*NET at the 2016 Marketable Skills Conference in Austin; her presentation is [online](#).

- **[Launch My Career TX](#).** This site offers information about colleges and majors, as well as showing the “hot jobs” in Texas, the skills that can help graduates maximize their salaries in those jobs, and the return on investment of time and money in college as students graduate and look for employment. Skills are listed in several places on this site and are pulled from Burning Glass, the data source for job openings shown on this site. On the sidebar of the Launch My Career TX homepage, you can select “Top Picks for Texas” and any of the “top picks” to see a profile for each job. The profile will contain a table called “Add a Skill,” provided Burning Glass data provide a summary of skills that add salary value to this position. You also can see “Hot Jobs” on the homepage. The profiles for the openings here include a table for the “Skills & Duties” that are required in each posting. This may help acclimate you and your stakeholders to the language used in job postings, should you choose to adopt that kind of wording in your identification process. You also may have access to other resources with similar skills information, such as data from Burning Glass. Or you may use job search sites, such as Indeed, Glassdoor, LinkedIn, or Monster.com.
- **Pipeline Partners.** Collaborate with your existing partners: university, community college, industry, or organizations. Your neighboring or pipeline institution may be making strides toward identifying marketable skills for each program. Consider reaching out to them for assistance or collaboration. If you have established relationships with industry or business for job placement, internships, apprenticeships, or for work-study (see the first bullet on career services), those partners are well suited to help you identify the marketable skills offered in your programs. Your established relationships with organizations like the [Texas Skill Standards](#), or regional/local groups like [workforce development boards](#) may also be helpful. In addition, you may want to consider the Texas Education Agency [endorsements](#), depending on your student pipeline. Those endorsements include (1) STEM, (2) business & industry, (3) public services, (4) arts & humanities, and (5) multidisciplinary studies. Your K-12 partners are [required to offer at least three](#) of these endorsements.
- **[Degree Qualifications Profile \(DQP\)](#).** The DQP is a partnership effort by the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA), the Institute for Evidence-Based Change (IEBC), and Lumina Foundation, which began in 2009. The DQP offers an important step toward consensus on

what degrees should mean in terms of actual student learning. The DQP proposes in direct, simple language what a degree recipient should know and be able to do, *regardless of the field of study* [emphasis added]. The DQP defines the following five essential areas of learning -- each of which should be included in the associate degree, the bachelor's degree and the master's degree -- as: specialized knowledge, broad and integrative knowledge, intellectual skills, applied and collaborative learning, and civic and global learning. The "essential areas" identified in the DQP may provide an excellent **starting point** for your programs to identify marketable skills.

- **[Liberal Education and America's Promise \(LEAP\)](#)**. As noted in the 60x30TX plan, the Association of American Colleges and Universities' LEAP initiative may be another resource to springboard the conversation about marketable skills on your campus. This is especially true of the LEAP [Essential Learning Outcomes](#). If you are a member of [LEAP Texas](#), this may be particularly helpful. LEAP Texas also ties their work to the DQP.
- **[NACE Competencies](#)**. NACE has defined career readiness as "the attainment . . . of requisite competencies that broadly prepare college graduates for a successful transition into the workplace." NACE delineates this readiness by listing eight core competencies that support this transition. These competencies may be a good place **to start** for your programs when identifying marketable skills. One organization has already developed a common framework and definitions of marketable skills for its members by creating a crosswalk between the core objectives already assessed in the Texas Core Curriculum and the in-demand skills sought by employers using the NACE competencies.

Creating this process may be challenging. It might help to understand how this process can help your students. Consider requesting résumés from an assortment of students in their senior year. If they have not started a résumé, that is perhaps a signal showing lack of student readiness to transition to the next phase in life, be that the workforce or graduate studies. Review these résumés from your perspective. Do they truly represent what each student can do, based on your knowledge of your institution or program? What would you change to help these students market themselves better to potential employers and graduate programs?

The marketable skills goal calls for every institution in Texas to articulate the identified skills to students. How your institution articulates those skills is up to you. One suggestion on how to do this came from the [Marketable Skills Conference](#) in 2016. Eluned Jones, President, United Kingdom Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services and Director of Student Employability, University of Birmingham, shared that all institutions in the United Kingdom are required to reference marketable skills (called transferrable or employability skills) on their program websites. This is an excellent way to communicate efficiently with students before they begin a program at your institution. At a minimum, it is hoped each Texas institution will engage students with the idea of marketable skills on their first day of their programs. You can find Jones' presentation from the conference [online](#). All the presentations from the conference are posted online under "Meeting Materials."

Another UK resource that may be useful is the list of transferrable skills posted on the [Prospects website](#). Indeed, THECB staff have modified this list for your convenience and posted it as a resource on [www.60x30TX.com](#). Both Ireland and Canada also have made significant strides in terms of marketable skills. These skills are called transferrable skills in Ireland and employability skills in Canada. [Gradireland.com](#) shares information directed at recent undergraduate completers. The Irish Universities

Association also produces a [skills statement](#) for graduate-level students. Resources are available online from the [Centre for Skills and Post-Secondary Education](#), but there are fees associated with these products.

Marketable Skills ≠ Learning Outcomes, But PLOs and SLOs are Great Place to Start

We expect that many institutions will be well poised to respond to the marketable skills goal because of the work done to create learning outcomes. Learning outcomes relate directly to the subject matter content of a program. In developing student learning outcomes (SLOs), the focus is on the knowledge and skills students when they complete and exit a program. In many majors/disciplines, there is congruence between SLOs and marketable skills. In the process of mastering an SLO, or set of SLOs, a student also may have mastered a complementary marketable skill. In accounting, for example, an SLO might be to demonstrate knowledge with tax accounting as it applies to a sole proprietorship. A marketable skill associated with this SLO could be advanced use of a spreadsheet, or simply “specialized tax accounting.” A [2017 Forbes article](#) explained how SLOs could be leveraged to appeal to employers.

We encourage faculty to think about and discuss the connection between what students are taught and how that instruction can lead to a functional workplace skill. What other skills are you teaching during programs that do not relate directly to an SLO? Could those also be marketable skills? For example, a student who “masters” statistics for social science has acquired a skill with broad application in private and public sectors.

Another way to think about the relationship between learning outcomes and marketable skills is to ask yourself, “If I gave a learning outcome to a student, would it make sense to him or her? Would it make sense to an employer if that student put it on a resume?” The idea is to help students make the connection between what they learn and the functional value of that learning. As mentioned earlier, marketable skills should be “résumé ready” to help students build a profile of their present their backgrounds and skills that has relevance in the workforce. *SLOs are internal mechanisms to inform faculty, administrators, and accrediting bodies. Marketable skills are external mechanisms to inform students, employers, and families.* Marketable skills are an opportunity to help students take what they have learned and show how it fits into a potential workplace.

Your Role

Implementing the marketable skills goal on your campus will require an “all hands on deck” approach. It may well require a [shift in thinking](#) on campuses to integrate transition to the workforce – what students think of as “getting a job” or career – into regular practice. In a [national study](#) by the UCLA Higher Education Research Institute, most students surveyed identified “getting a better job” as the most important reason for attending college. Students who can articulate their marketable skills are better positioned to get a better job.

Institution leadership will play a vital role in achieving the marketable skills goal. They will advocate for policy and practice that guide implementation on campuses. *60x30TX* provides latitude for two- and four-year institutions and encourages local creativity in pursuing the plan’s goals as institutions continue to pursue their own unique missions. Your leadership may decide that part of your unique mission now includes marketable skills. This could foster discussion around questions like, “What characteristics do

you want employers and communities to associate with your graduates? Decision-making (skill = leadership), invention (skill = creativity), policymaking (skill = systems thinking)?”

Heads of colleges and programs, as well as other administrators, will implement policies and practices set forth by your leaders and will inform leadership of what works at department levels. Leadership at any level may design incentives for programs to identify their programs’ marketable skills. As mentioned earlier, faculty are critical, as they are most informed of the marketable skills their programs are designed to impart. They are also the frontline for sharing and reminding students of the skills they are acquiring through academic programs. All the administration and faculty stakeholders likely have relationships with industry to help identify relevant marketable skills.

Our Role

The THECB staff will continue to facilitate discussions around marketable skills. Many still do not know about 60x30TX or the marketable skills goal. Staff will also fold marketable skills into the coordination work. For example, THECB staff is drafting proposed rules to integrate marketable skills into new program approvals. Though the plan sets a deadline of 2020 for identifying marketable skills, it behooves new programs to identify the marketable skills being offered sooner rather than later.

Our planned activities include:

- Presentations on 60x30TX and marketable skills – ongoing (as invited)
- Draft proposed rules for including identified marketable skills in new program proposals, fall 2017
- Small group discussion with industry, spring 2017
- Statewide learning community convening, spring 2017
- Second marketable skills conference, April 2018

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Is graduate education included in the 60x30TX plan?

A: Yes, graduate education is embedded into the plan, and it appears in three of the goals:

Goal	Undergraduate	Graduate
60x30	certificates, associates bachelor’s	master’s, doctoral, professional
Completion	certificates, associates bachelor’s	master’s
Marketable Skills	certificates, associates bachelor’s	master’s, doctoral, professional
Student Debt	certificates, associates bachelor’s	--

Q: Are guidelines for graduate programs different?

A: This will be a local decision, by your leadership and faculty. It may be that marketable skills for undergraduates are phrased to have general application. For example, your undergraduate liberal arts majors may include “ability to evaluate information” as a marketable skill. Your graduate marketable skills may be more specific. For example, your history graduate programs may include “ability to evaluate information as historically valid” as a marketable skill.

Q: How will institutions and the state know if we are doing a good job with marketable skills?

A: Ideally, some aspect of “doing a good job” or quality assurance will be built into the process institutions create to identify marketable skills and communicate them to students.

Q: Will every course be required to have identified marketable skills?

A: No. The goal is for programs to have identified marketable skills, not courses.

Q: Does the marketable skills goal ask for more than what institutions have implemented for the core curriculum?

A: Yes, this goal is asking for more. The goal is for all programs to have identified marketable skills. The Texas Core Curriculum identifies knowledge and skills all students should have upon exiting a degree program, regardless of major. The Core Objectives include a minimal level of proficiency in three often-cited skills needed by business and industry: communications, critical thinking, and teamwork. Programs may well build on these core objectives, and include other marketable skills, especially those determined to be desirable during the stakeholder process of identifying marketable skills.

Q: Will we be accountable for assessment of marketable skills?

A: No, assessing student mastery of marketable skills is not included in the plan. Assessment may be something you decide to pursue at your institution, but the plan does not require it. Be sure any plans you make for assessment are aligned with your institution's vision for this goal.

Q: Do we come up with marketable skills independent of other institutions?

A: You may choose to work independently at your institution. However, you are welcome to work as a group, or as a consortium of institutions. The plan does not dictate how you will identify the marketable skills associated with your programs.

Q: How will you differentiate between "marketable skills," as used in the strategic plan, versus the "marketable skills award," as reported on the CBM 00M?

A: THECB staff worked with stakeholders to rename the "marketable skills awards" to the "occupational skills award" to avoid confusion. This change occurred in August 2016.

Q: The marketable skills "80 percent" target sounds like gainful employment. Is that what it is?

A: This target measures whether graduates are found enrolled in higher education or in the workforce one year after completing an undergraduate certificate or degree. The target is set at 80 percent, which is based on data from the last 15 years; this metric has remained within 5 percentage points since 2000. We assume regional and state economic fluctuations are captured in the historical data and that fluctuations similar to those occurring in the past 15 years will occur in the next 15 years. This target allows stakeholders to monitor the market. If the metric falls to 70 percent, then something has changed, and we should know what that is, or if it jumps to 90 percent, then again, something has changed, and we should know what that is. In a 2012 national study, as mentioned earlier, 88 percent of surveyed students said a better job was the motivation for going to college. These results underscore why it is important that a substantial portion of completers are employed or pursuing additional education one year after earning a degree or certificate.