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2018

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MASTERING YOUR SUCCESS

A Texas Guide to Graduate Programs
2018



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Web developer Amanda Wisniewski took home a second-place prize at the 2018 South By Southwest Hackathon for the idea of ConcertBilia, which immerses people anywhere into a live concert via virtual reality. She gained her skills at The Coding Boot Camp at the University of Texas at Austin.

MBA alternatives grow to satisfy student, employer demand

BY KIMBERLY REEVES
Contributing writer

The addition of non-credit certificates and micro-credentials to course catalogs at four-year universities in Texas reflect a hot trend in higher education. Students are jumping on them, usually because it's time to swap careers or because their employer has new demands.

Many Texas universities – including Rice, Southern Methodist and Texas Christian – have long offered on-campus professional development courses for education graduates. TCU has a well-established certified public communicator program, which caters to public information officers in city, county and public-sector agencies.

Rice University's Glasscock School of Continuing has offered non-credit courses for 30 years: financial planning, paralegal services, nonprofit leadership. This fall, the university will expand into the software development space, offering a 24-week part-time data analytics boot camp.

"That's in the non-credit space," said Dean Bob Bruce. "We really took a look around the city to see what the needs were for the greater Houston area. What were the job postings? Should we be offering these programs on the public side or on the credit side?"

To offer a credit course would require admitting a student to one of the degree programs at Rice, Bruce said. That would be

a major step, but one many other universities have considered. Harvard's Extension School, for instance, offers multi-course graduate certificates in topics that range from museum studies to data science.

A certificate out of Harvard's Extension School typically requires a sequence of four courses, online, that can be completed within 18 months. The typical cost is around \$11,000.

"The question for us, as an institution, is should we approach this and make these open certificates? I can tell you my opinion is yes," Bruce said. "You have a student population, an adult population, out there that are already working. They may have family members – dependents. They're not seeking a master's degree, but they still need that educational program that will help them, in data analytics or business foundations or whatever the area is."

Workforce training once was the bailiwick of community colleges in Texas, usually under a long-term relationship with a company. But with higher education enrollment dropping and a growing need for new skills in the technology arena, it's just as likely major employers will turn to Southern Methodist University or the University of Texas at Austin to provide new coding or even a tailored employer-specific training module for employees.

SMU has a well-established online master's of data science graduate degree, with an optional waiver of graduate entrance exams. The program draws

from three different colleges at SMU, and courses include both offline and online small class participation.

Associate Provost Larenda Mielke, who coordinates the program, said SMU starts the creation of credential classes with a thorough market research study rather than faculty expertise. So far, software user experience, or UX, courses are hot, as well as graphic design. The campus also added a number of boot camps for coding and data analytics.

"We don't do competency-based education, but we have very skills-based non-credit certificates," Mielke said. "So it's very hands on, very active learning, things you can apply immediately, and that's really what our students want. We really want them to go back to the office and apply it right away to what they're doing and then come back for feedback."

The university also will customize training for project teams at Dallas-area companies, working directly with the students' supervisor to walk through the instruction.

"Sometimes, we have certain projects that (the company) creates themselves," Mielke said. "And the students do the work and get feedback from our faculty. In other cases, the company gives us certain data, and we create the group project. So, in a way, the company gets free work, and our students get a real-life work project."

That puts universities such as SMU in competition with for-profit coding

boot camps at General Assembly in Austin or CodeUp in San Antonio. Training in the for-profit model is not a two-year program with multiple credit hours. A four-month full-stack course at CodeUp, which guarantees employment or a 50 percent tuition refund, costs \$22,500.

Certificate programs in TCU's extended education program often are a partnership between the university and local associations. It was the Texas Association of Municipal Information Officers that came to TCU to develop the non-credit professional communicator program.

The five-year-old public communicator program will run one cohort of public information officers each year, with new and experienced classes overlapping each summer. Participants bring in real-life work situations to review with faculty, and each participant will create a three-year communications plan for their respective agency or department.

The coursework certainly can be added to a LinkedIn profile, but it's not a nationally recognized certification; nor does it carry any type of TCU classroom credit.

Graduate-level certificates – those that count as credit towards an advanced degree – are still a small part of the Texas higher education landscape. Data out of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board says Texas universities have issued between 820 and 940 certificates each year between 2014 and 2017, mostly in the health-related fields.

SMU is looking seriously at creating courses that will ultimately be part of a credential. At the University of Texas at Austin, the certificate programs are both heavily publicized and decentralized from the university's graduate and undergraduate programs.

Liliya Spinazzola, director of the Center for Professional Education at UT Austin, said the goal of the center is to expand the university's resources into the greater Austin community. The Center, already more than 20 years old, originally focused on preparing people to sit for exams.

"We partnered not only with local industry, but also professional associations like the Project Management Institute that oversees human resource professionals," Spinazzola said. "We prepared professional interested in obtaining the educational hours needed so they could sit and take their credentialing test. That was the original intent."

But the center has moved far beyond exam prep, partnering with Trilogy Education Services to close some of the skills gaps in Austin, especially in technology. The center offers both part-time and full-time boot camp options for interested students.

"The idea behind that is that there are more jobs than qualified applicants in Austin," Spinazzola said. "We provide the preparation for individuals who are interested in either a career change or in excelling in a particular skills set."

Data and technology are the most popular topics, with the Center for Professional Education running two to three cohorts of students each semester. As soon as a classroom of 25 to 30 students is filled, the boot camp experience begins. Classes are primarily in a classroom.

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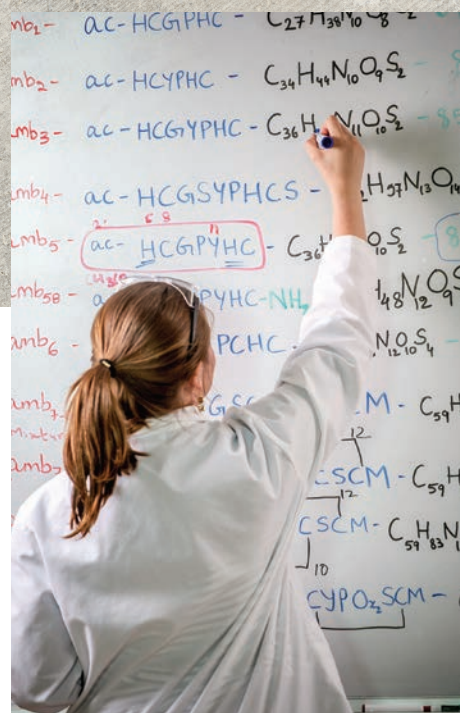
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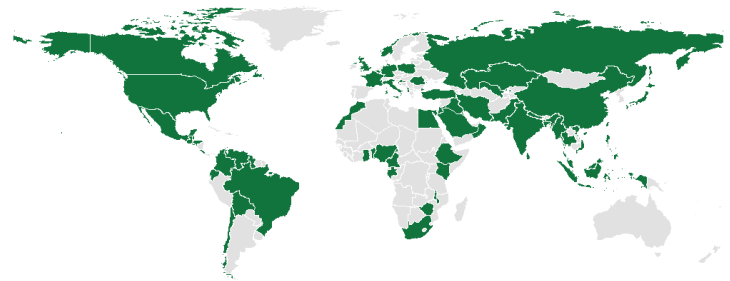
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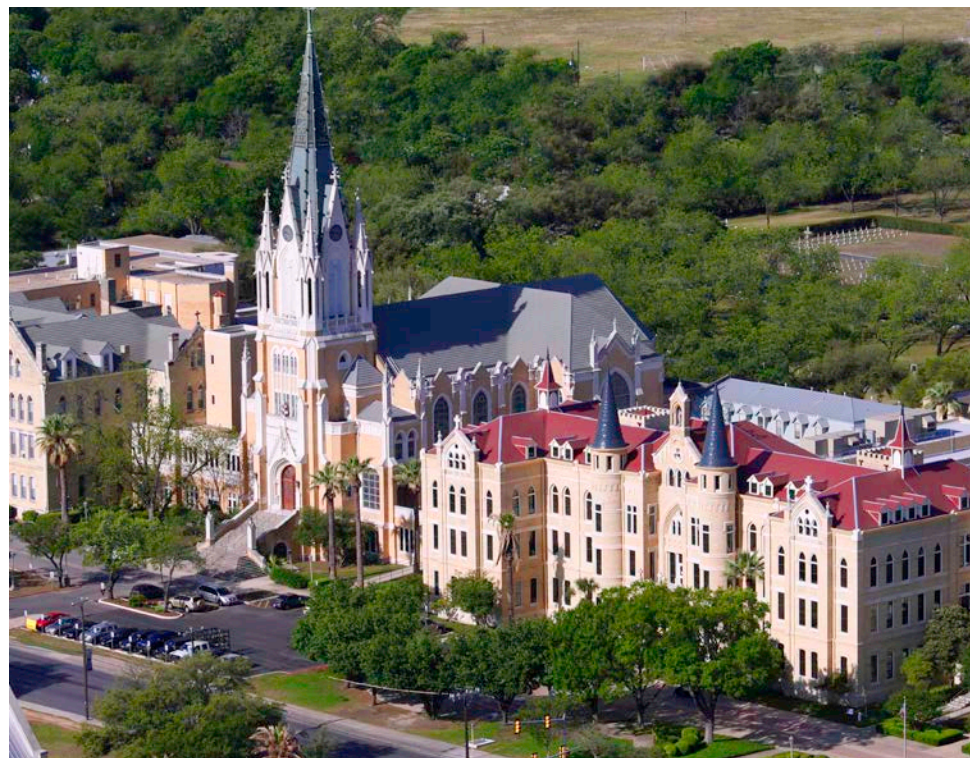
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