**South Texas College**

News Center – June 2020

**Smarter than Your Average Bachelor’s: Flexible CBE Degrees Fueling Futures**

With the average debt for a bachelor’s in Texas ringing up at a staggering $25,863, according to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, a college degree might seem out of reach … unless you know the best-kept secret in the state.

South Texas College students are picking up bachelor’s degrees for around $9,700 — or less than *$4,500* with an associate already under their belts. In fact, STC is ranked *number one* in the nation for affordable online bachelor’s degrees by [onlinecollegeplan.com](https://www.onlinecollegeplan.com/most-affordable-online-bachelors-degree-colleges/).

For STC grad Sabrina Mendoza, who polished off her bachelor’s in only *two years* while also working full time and raising a young child by herself, it was the difference between stagnation and success.

“I was a single mom, so I was trying to save pretty much any way that I could,” says Mendoza, who had planned to transfer to a university after earning her associate degree in general studies … before the hefty price tag prompted a change of plans.

That’s when she discovered competency-based education (CBE) bachelor’s programs, right in her backyard at STC.

For just $850 per seven-week accelerated term, Mendoza was able to take as many classes as she could fit into her busy schedule*.* Not only did her tuition include books, but she could complete her bachelor’s 100-percent *online* and *on her own time*.

“It was everything I needed,” says Mendoza. “The fact that this was online helped so much because it gave you that flexibility — especially for someone in my situation.”

At South Texas College, Mendoza had her choice of four CBE programs in diverse and in-demand fields, including the Bachelor of Applied Technology in Computer & Information Technologies, Medical & Health Services Management, and Technology Management. Ultimately, Mendoza decided to follow her passion for business in the Bachelor of Applied Science in Organizational Leadership (BASOL) Program, where she found the versatile skills to move ahead with her career goals.

Best of all, she could apply her years of work experience and previous education to her competency-based coursework and zip ahead.

“I probably would have taken two classes in a regular semester, but instead, I was able to take four, which would be like a full-time student,” says the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society member. “But because I’m working and I have my kid, that would have been hard for me to do.”

Not only was Mendoza able to finish well ahead of her original timeframe, but she also graduated *magna cum laude*. Now, she has plans to become a trainer for her current employer, T-Mobile.

“After life threw me all these curveballs, I’m really glad to have accomplished what I accomplished,” shares Mendoza. “And I did it with a pretty good grade point average if you ask me!”

The grateful graduate credits her success to teachers like Dr. Emma Miller, who inspired her throughout the program. “To have someone who genuinely cares about you and your success and wants you to do better, I just think that makes all the difference,” says Mendoza, recalling the many times her instructors’ encouragement inspired her through late-night study sessions.

“We have a lot of empathy,” says Miller, Organizational Leadership Program Department Chair and Assistant Dean of Bachelor Programs. Like many of her students, Miller was also the first in her family to go to college, and she understands the unique challenges that they face.

“We tell our students, ‘We know what you’re going through — we have been there ourselves.’”

Having earned her doctorate amid the *ultimate* challenge, Miller can speak to the power of persistence. Inspired by her husband to stay in the program in the time before he passed away from lung cancer, Miller has since channeled that determination into uplifting her students.

Had she allowed the tragedy to stop her, Miller believes she might have dropped out and never earned her degree. Now, she goes above and beyond to support students during difficult times, so they, too, can stay in school. It’s the kind of high-touch and individualized support that South Texas College’s bachelor programs are known for.

“That personalization, I think, is what makes our programs very successful,” says Miller.

STC’s nurturing approach is backed by the numbers – about 85 percent of students finish their bachelor’s in three years or less. And though courses are self-paced, faculty are profoundly involved in supportive efforts to ensure success. On top of weekly, recorded live sessions, instructors are moving at “100 miles an hour” to assist students who are completing modules at different times.

It’s learning *tailor-made* to harmonize with students’ busy work and family lives. Because programs are 100-percent online, it doesn’t matter if students are local, remote, or even stationed abroad on active duty. And according to Miller, the program had no issues keeping students connected to their educational goals during the COVID-19 health crisis.

“Our bachelor’s degrees are just as good as any other university,” the professor says about the fully accredited and externally reviewed programs.

The programs have also received accolades from various organizations promoting progressive education. In 2016, the Computer & Information Technologies degree was listed among the “Most Affordable Online Baccalaureate Degrees” by OnlineU.org. A year later, the BASOL program was named an *Example of Excelencia!* from the Excelencia in Education organization.

About a quarter of program grads go on to complete master’s degrees, with some advancing to earn doctorates. South Texas College CBE grads have gone on to teach in local school districts, become leaders and top technology management professionals in the city administration, and land director positions in medical health services.

“Lives are being transformed by our program,” says Miller. “Every student who graduates makes a huge impact, not only on their families but also on the community.”

With the stakes so high, it’s not uncommon for students to feel overwhelmed, especially in the face of exterior challenges. That’s when the motivational support of engaged faculty like Miller makes *its* impact.

“If it had not been for Dr. Miller, I probably would have left the program,” says recent grad Perla Sandoval, whose mother passed away while she was in the middle of the BASOL program. With genuine, experience-rooted empathy, Miller sat her student down and urged her to follow through on her dreams despite the sorrowful event. Says Sandoval: “I will be forever grateful to her for that.”

Graduating this past March at the age of 61, Sandoval says she always wanted to get her degree, and at STC, she finally found her chance. The online classes allowed her the freedom she needed to maintain her job and manage her life. And for a bachelor’s on a budget, there was no better choice.

“The college is very, very affordable. For me, it made a huge difference,” says the thankful alumna, citing the inclusion of course materials in addition to the already low tuition. “You didn’t have that added stress because some of those books are so… expensive!”

Thanks to her new bachelor’s degree, she feels “absolutely prepared” to follow her dreams and work for a nonprofit or the county. She’s excited to use the innovative tools she learned at STC to launch a fresh career and make a positive impact on the world.

“For me, being somewhere where you make a difference, where you are helping people, and where your leadership matters … I would love that.”

**Hashtags**

#affordablecollege #affordable #studentdebt #studentloans

#onlinelearning #onlineeducation #elearning #onlinelearning #elearning #onlinecourse #distancelearning

#southtexascollege #STC #lajoyatx #mcallen #rgv #southtexas #texas #mcallentx #riograndevalley #rgvlife #rgvlifestyle

#communitycollege #college #education #highereducation #careergoals #studentlife #collegelife #collegestudent #educational #educationiskey #educationispower #educationisthekey #educationforall #educationisimportant #learn #school #career

Instagram only:

#teachersofinstagram #instacollege #studygram

**Bachelor’s Stats**

1. The more you learn, the more you *earn.* According to a recent study by the [Federal Reserve Bank of New York](https://libertystreeteconomics.newyorkfed.org/2019/06/despite-rising-costs-college-is-still-a-good-investment.html), college grads pull in *$30,000* *more* than their counterparts with only a high school degree.
2. Bachelor’s degree-holders are: 24 percent more likely to be employed; 3.5 less likely to experience poverty; 47 percent more likely to have health insurance; and 72 percent more likely to have a retirement plan, according to a study by the [Lumina Foundation](https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/its-not-just-the-money.pdf).
3. According to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](https://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2018/data-on-display/education-pays.htm?view_full), higher education levels correlate to lower unemployment rates. Grads with bachelor’s degrees bear a low, 2.5 percent unemployment rate, compared with 4.6 percent for high school grads with no college, and 6.5 percent for those without a high school diploma.