UT Arlington's Emerging National Stature Fueled by Online Degrees that Make Higher Ed More Accessible and Affordable

A Sleeping Giant Awakens

In 2012, a research paper from The Parthenon Group asked the question, "Are the Sleeping Giants Awake?" The paper explored the early impact of non-profit public universities delivering online programs at scale. At that time, for-profit universities – which previously held the burgeoning market for non-traditional students largely to themselves – were beginning to feel the ramifications of a relative handful of state universities that had begun delivering online degree programs to large numbers of students.

> *"UT Arlington offers online programs as a dynamic extension of our historic mission. It's all about solving the challenge of accessibility and affordability, which are critical issues that have a major impact at the societal level."*
>
> **-- Vistasp Karbhari**
> President, UT Arlington

Among those early public-university adopters: The University of Texas at Arlington. In 2008, when UT Arlington launched an online nursing program designed to scale rapidly, the university was primarily a regional commuter school with 19,672 full-time equivalent students enrolled. By the time the Parthenon paper was published four years later, enrollments had grown to 33,500. Amazing growth has continued for UT Arlington, which had approximately 52,000 students enrolled for spring 2016. Today, mass numbers of online students are drawn from across the country and around the world.

Online Pioneer Among Public Institutions

In 2008, UT Arlington -- like most public universities at the time – had been through several years of stagnant enrollments. In addition, university leaders foresaw upcoming reductions in state appropriations for higher education due to the financial crisis. Indeed, between 2008 and 2015, the state's funding for all public universities dropped an inflation-adjusted 22.8 percent.

Seeking to protect its market share and sustain its economic viability, the university decided to partner with Academic Partnerships (AP) as its online services provider (OSP) to deliver high-demand degree programs online to un-served or underserved populations of students, thereby expanding its addressable audience.

UT Arlington's 100% Online Programs

- Master of Public Administration
- BS in Nursing
- RN to BSN
- RN to MSN
- MSN Nurse Educator
- MSN Nurse Administrator
- MSN Family Nurse Practitioner
- Master of Education in Leadership and Policy Studies
- Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction—Science
- Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction—Math
- Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction—Literacy
- Superintendent Certification

AP brought UT Arlington a capability to rapidly grow the university's revenue and enrollment. The company assisted UT Arlington's faculty in the conversion of their traditional courses into an online format, marketing and recruitment of students for online programs, and student retention through graduation. The university was entirely responsible for admissions, curriculum and instruction.

The partnership between AP and UT Arlington has expanded over the years and now encompasses more than 10 degree programs from the College of Nursing and Health Innovation, the College of Education, and the School of Urban and Public Affairs. UT Arlington's online expansion has been a critical component of the university's rise as a leading national public university. In fact, UT Arlington now serves more than 55,000 students in campus-based and online programs, making it the second-largest institution within the University of Texas System. It is also one of just six universities nationwide to be named a "Next Generation

University" in a 2013 study published by the New America Foundation. The report cited the university's online courses and degree programs, enrollment growth, and position as an emerging research institution as key drivers of this recognition.

Why it Matters

Today, more than 70 percent of college students are classified as "non-traditional." That is, they are at least 25 years old, have a family and hold a job. They are working adults who balance multiple responsibilities while seeking an advanced degree to improve their lives and career opportunities. Their needs are very different from "traditional" students who are recent high school graduates attending on-campus programs full time.

This super-majority segment of the student population places a high value on accessibility, convenience and affordability. The importance of cost has been made more acute as tuition has risen sharply conversely to the level of state appropriations. In Texas, average tuition at public universities has risen 55 percent since the state legislature allowed governing boards to set their own rates in 2003. Tuition at some Texas schools has jumped 85 percent. In fact, Texas has ranked 5th in the nation for fastest-rising tuition. This pace of tuition inflation is pricing out middle class families from a college education at a time when U.S. median household income actually declined 8 percent, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

The magnitude of this issue manifests in aggregate student debt, which now stands at $1.2 trillion nationally – an unbearable burden for families and an unsustainable situation for society. Meanwhile, though the employment situation improved in 2015, young people in America were having the most difficult time finding appropriate employment since the early 1990s, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York.

In this environment, many families and prospective students are starting to question the value of a college education. And they are not the only ones concerned about the direction and future of higher education. A Gallup poll of university business officers showed that only 42 percent were confident about their institution's sustainability over the next 10 years.

By taking bold action in the late 2000s, UT Arlington took the reins of its own destiny. Today, the institution is a national powerhouse and is positioned to be unassailable in today's highly competitive higher education marketplace.

The Rise and Decline of For-Profit Universities

As non-profits launched online programs at scale, the fortunes of for-profit universities took a general turn for the worse. In 2008, when UT Arlington took its RN-BSN and education programs online, for-profit universities dominated America's online learning market, serving primarily working adults. Since their inception in the 1980s, the for-profits grew their market share to 8 percent of all enrollments by 2008 and to 12 percent by 2012. Some became huge providers. For example, in 2010, the University of Phoenix alone had nearly 500,000 students enrolled nationwide.

With this dramatic growth came withering criticism about the for-profit's quality and student outcomes. With the entrance of progressive, early movers among public universities into online education and its high-quality and affordable degree programs, the demise of many for-profits with their expensive tuitions and questionable quality was just a matter of time. Today, stories of for-profit campus closures and declining enrollments is daily news, showcasing that public universities that embrace online and its competitive model will be the ultimate leaders in higher education.

A Model Approach

How did UT Arlington and AP collaborate to secure a vibrant future for the university? They first identified a few high-demand programs for online delivery that were sure to gain immediate interest among the un-served or underserved Texas population. The online programs preserved academic integrity and the primacy of faculty. They also adhered to the university's mission and values, and they addressed the real-world needs of working adults who wanted to advance in their lives and careers. The essential attributes of UT Arlington's online programs were accessibility, affordability and scalability.

Accessibility was critical, since most working adults lack the time to attend on-campus programs. They need flexibility to access learning anytime and anywhere on their own terms. AP helped UT Arlington implement a model where all courses, including pre-requisites, were offered online, with multiple start dates throughout the year. The program also accommodated step-ins and step-outs from courses without any penalties.

> ### Highly Competitive Online Market
>
> *Online technology has created more choices in higher education than any other consumer category. Prospective students typically look at programs from 10 or more universities. Programs without a competitive model are immediately rejected with a mere click of a mouse or press of a thumb.*
>
> *These students seek programs that are competitive on admissions standards, program structure, program duration and pricing. Being "on model" for success is essential for achieving and sustaining enrollment and revenue growth.*

Affordability was critical, because the number one consideration for working adults in selecting a university is cost. UT Arlington's price point was not only extremely competitive, but the model also allowed students to pay course-by-course rather than cover a full year or semester of tuition and fees at once. Since many employers offered tuition reimbursement, students were able to use the reimbursement from their first course to cover the cost of their second and succeeding courses.

Scalability of UT Arlington's online programs was essential to keeping low operating costs of the partnership. Here, UT Arlington kept its overall costs in check by using virtual teaching assistants to support the faculty of record who select them.

AP Model with Latin American Roots

The AP model emerged from its founders' experience in Latin America where, in 2006, they established Whitney University System. Known today as Illumno Network, the system operates and partners with nine universities across the region, serving nearly 200,000 students.

As Ilumno's enrollment outgrew the physical capacity of its 32 campuses and 520 learning centers, the Network embraced innovative approaches to online education and distance learning to meet the surging demand. The model included unique features, which permitted scalability and affordability of the offerings.

AP adopted these attributes as it moved to provide its services to a few partners in the United States. The Latin American innovations included:

- **Course Carousel**, which helped arrange courses in a cohesive sequence, eliminating pre-requisites and substituting them for co-requisites. It also permitted students to temporarily step out from a program based on personal needs and jump back in without having to wait long periods of time for a course offering.
- **Coaching,** or virtual teaching assistants, who supported faculty and students in online programs. These individuals are subject experts who graded assignments, managed discussion threads and monitored overall performance of individual students under direction of the faculty of record.
- **Accelerated course format,** which allowed students to complete a course in a matter of weeks rather than months, while still maintaining rigorous adherence to academic standards.
- **Compressed program duration**, which was designed to facilitate program completion more quickly than on-campus offerings, due in large part to accelerated course structure.
- **Multiple start dates,** which gives students opportunities to begin a program six to eight times each year, when they were ready, rather than only twice a year on a traditional academic calendar.
- **Retention services,** a team of student success coordinators who stayed with the same student from the beginning of the program through its completion, leading to high student success rates in terms of course-to-course persistence, retention and graduation.

All of the features of the Whitney model were predicated on providing a high-quality, low-cost higher education to the cost-conscious, emerging middle class of Latin America. By controlling the cost of providing its services and focusing on generating a high volume of enrollment, replication of the Whitney model permitted AP to establish market leadership for its partners, including UT Arlington, in a very short period.

UT Arlington's embrace of the essentials of the Whitney model resulted in rapidly scaling enrollments, high retention rates, excellent value for students and substantial new revenue for the university.

What AP Does for UT Arlington

The essence of AP's work is to help non-profit universities – primarily public institutions – to dramatically increase their enrollments and revenue through the online delivery of high-quality instruction. To do that, AP provides a comprehensive range of services, which allow universities and faculty to do what they do best: focus on academics and students.

> At UT Arlington, 98% of students are already employed when they first enroll in an online graduate program.
> -- *U.S. News & World Report*

The primary services that AP provides towards that goal are:

- **Recruitment:** AP integrates advanced digital and consumer-based marketing strategies across multiple recruitment channels to bring prospective students to partner universities. **Digital Marketing** addresses prospects through a host of digital channels. **Traditional Marketing** includes TV, radio, direct mail, and print and outdoor advertising. AP's unique **Field Sales** team builds relationships on behalf of AP partner universities with organizations that employ potential students: corporations, hospital systems, school district, teachers' unions, municipal governments, military, community colleges and other professional organizations. The affiliate network comprises more than 3,000 members, who can be recruiting funnels for AP partners for years to come. AP's **Public Relations** team collaborates regularly with UT Arlington's communications teams to provide extra resources in the promotion of the university and its programs.

- **Academic Services**, which helps faculty convert their on-campus courses into an online formats that facilitate student success. Intellectual property always remains with the faculty and the university. AP also supports instructors through ongoing professional development opportunities related to learning technologies and effective online pedagogy.

- **Partner Support**, which consults and collaborates with university admissions, registration, financial aid, IT and other administrative offices to prepare university systems and processes to support effective marketing and recruitment activity. Our data integration strategy provides secure access to information at several key stages of the student lifecycle.

- **Enrollment Services**, where team members serve as dedicated points of contact for prospective students during the enrollment process. The team

member helps prospects with applications, deadline reminders, supporting document collection and submission, assistance through post-acceptance registration, and helping with first-course prep.

- **Retention Services**, where a team member maintains the personal touch after classes begin. AP's retention specialists help students stay motivated and on-track toward graduation using a controlled suite of strategies predicated on a student's tenure, academic success, engagement with coursework, and overall performance in the program. These interactions help maximize student satisfaction and encourage program completion.

- **Virtual Assistants**, who support faculty in rapidly scaling online programs. The university leverages AP's strategic relationship with Instructional Connections, Inc., a service company that provides virtual teaching assistants to support faculty by managing discussion threads, grading work, responding to questions and monitoring overall student performance. The selection of all virtual teaching assistants is performed by the faculty of record and meets their credentialing and profile requirements.

Winning Accolades

UT Arlington has won tremendous accolades in recent years, many related to online learning programs. Honors for the university as a whole include:

- In 2016, UT Arlington was named to the elite group of R-1: Doctoral Universities – Highest Research Activity by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education.
- UT Arlington is one of six universities nationwide to be named a "Next Generation University" in a 2013 study published by the New America Foundation, citing the University's online courses and degree programs, enrollment growth, and position as an emerging research institution.
- The university leads all four-year Texas universities in the number of fully distance education students.
- In 2014, UT Arlington led all four-year Texas universities in the number of 100 percent online education students.
- It was named one of the best universities to acquire an affordable online postgraduate degree by College Education Online in 2014.
- Texas Star Award from the Higher Ed Coordinating Board
- Among best Texas colleges for military veterans (Military Times)

Honors for specific academic programs include:

- *U.S. News & World Report* 2015 national rankings of UT Arlington include:
  - No. 30 for online graduate education programs, and
  - No. 31 for online graduate nursing programs.
  - No. 27 for Best Online Programs for Veterans (nursing program)
  - No. 4 for nursing student services and technology (how well a school prepares qualified faculty to teach remotely).
- The online Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree is ranked No. 6 on Value Colleges' Top 50 Best Value Online RN to BSN list.
- *Diverse Issues in Higher Education* ranked the College of Nursing and Health Innovation No. 3 nationally in 2014 for producing minority nurses with bachelor's degrees.
- In 2014, GraduatePrograms.com ranked the School of Urban and Public Affairs' online public administration program No. 4 in the nation.
- Top 15 percent for College of Education Online Graduate Programs by U.S. News & World Report
- Top 10 Taxation Master's programs in the U.S.
- Top 20 fastest-growing public research universities in the U.S.

Case Study:
How UT Arlington Became the Largest
Public Provider of Nursing Education

The Challenge

In 2008, Texas was facing a significant and urgent shortage of nurses. The University of Texas at Arlington's College of Nursing and Health Innovation (CONHI) decided to address that challenge head on, radically redesigning its Bachelor of Science in Nursing completion program to be more accessible, help more registered nurses obtain higher-level credentials and prepare them for the increasing complexities of the health care industry. This new program would have to address two fundamental resource barriers for working nurses: flexible scheduling and competitive pricing. It would have to fit the unique needs of both traditional and nontraditional students while preserving the quality, academic integrity, instructional independence and prerogatives of a major university and its faculty. And it had to be flexible enough to be able to absorb the latest innovations in online learning on a continuous basis.

UT Arlington's embrace of online learning has transformed nursing education in Texas, and even the nation. More than 97% of UTA College of Nursing graduates pass their state exams.

Today, UTA:
- *Serves 80% of all Texas RN to BSN students*
- *Enrolls more online California RN to BSN students than any public university in California*
- *Achieved a retention/graduation rate of approximately 90%*

The Solution

At that time, the College of Nursing was admitting about 150 RN-to-BSN students annually. Taking a look at potential solutions to growing its enrollment, UTA considered approaches used by other universities; for example, distance learning sites. The Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex, however, encompasses more than 9,000 square miles and an area larger than Rhode Island and Connecticut combined. Even with additional sites, students were likely to
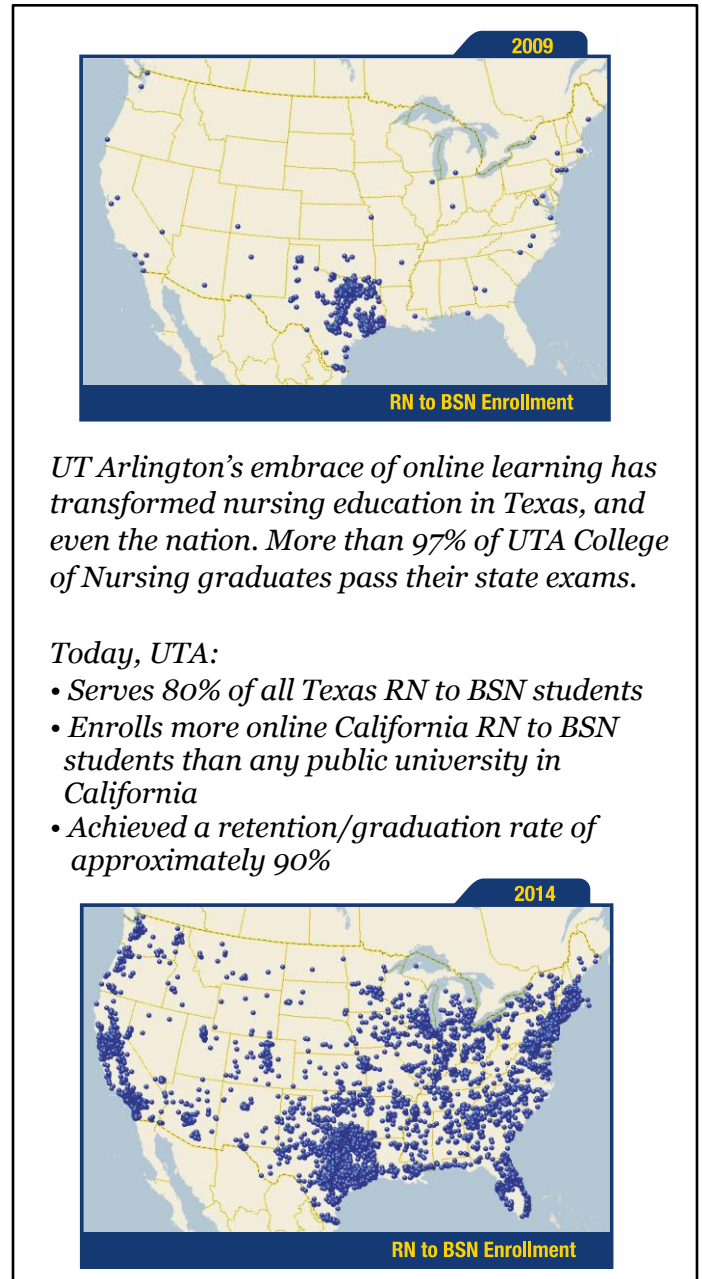
experience barriers to on-campus class participation. UTA administrators soon determined that online programs could effectively serve far more than the approximately 1,900 total nursing students enrolled on the campus in 2008.

This focus on rapid expansion fortuitously coincided with the Institute of Medicine (IOM) calling for 80 percent of all registered nurses to obtain a bachelor's degree by 2020. Fifty percent of nurses held BSN degrees in 2010. The IOM's goal is to improve outcomes through more advanced training that helps nurses address what has become a more demanding industry.

Existing options for BSN programs were inadequate to address the need. A report from the American Association of Colleges of Nursing pointed out that colleges of nursing nationwide turned away more than 79,500 qualified applicants due to insufficient number of faculty, clinical sites, classroom space, clinical preceptors and budget constraints.

This environment simply affirmed that the most cost-effective and impactful way to expand the reach of UTA's RN-BSN program was through online learning. CONHI reached out to AP to facilitate the development of an innovative and rigorous program that would meet the needs of working nurses by eliminating the obstacles that traditionally prevented them from obtaining a BSN.

UT Arlington College of Nursing and Health Innovation	2007-2008 Enrollments	2014-2015 total enrollment (on-campus and online)	2014-2015 Online-only enrollees
BSN	1,687	3,563	1,741
RN to BSN	173	12,139	12,079
MSN in Education	6	287	251
NP	1,150	2,932	820
BSN to Ph.D.	3	6	0
Nursing Total	**2,274**	**17,897**	**14,892**

Flexibility

The flexible learning model imported by AP from its Latin American sister company, Whitney, addressed the problem of access by providing all prerequisite courses online and offering multiple start dates during the year. The online RN-to-BSN program offers the nursing college's curriculum in five-week sessions versus traditional 15-week semesters. This schedule gives students eight opportunities each year to begin their studies, rather than having to wait to start classes once or twice a year, as in typical semester programs. With classes running in five-week sessions, the program follows a "carousel model" that lets students step out for a five-week term if needed to accommodate their schedules, instead of sitting out for

three to nine months for the next semester to begin before they can resume their classes.

Affordability
The CONHI-AP collaboration increased affordability by offering a course-by-course payment structure and 50 percent lower tuition. While many health care facilities do offer nurses partial or full tuition reimbursement, those institutions typically reimburse nurses only after each course has been successfully completed. UTA's RN-BSN students, however, may begin their studies for the cost of a single course, versus an entire semester's worth. Reimbursement for the first course covers the second course, and so on, until a student has completed the program.

Scalability
CONHI's partnership with AP has allowed the College of Nursing to enroll thousands of new students, minimize the number of new faculty positions needed, and greatly reduce the additional burden on existing faculty. Academic coaches allow for the fixed costs of adding additional students to be kept low.

The coaching model expands bandwidth of faculty of record by having masters-qualified virtual teaching assistants, each assigned to a section of approximately 30 students. The coaches grade papers, monitor discussion threads and interact with students on non-academic matters. Students also are supported by Student Success Coordinators who stay with them from the beginning of the program through its completion, leading to high student success rates in terms of course-to-course persistence, retention and graduation.

Scalability is indeed the key to affordability: UTA's current online program is $8,995 compared with $22,000 at some for-profit online programs, and is 6.8 percent lower than UTA's traditional on-campus program.

Courses and curriculum
The task of converting classroom courses and curricula to an online format is substantial. Online courses must capture both the essence of the course content and the methodologies vital to ensuring that students understand and apply that information. AP came with expertise in online instructional design, and the company worked alongside CONHI faculty to transform their courses for maximum online success. The online RN-to-BSN curriculum has been carefully designed to meet the same teaching objectives as the college's traditional, on-campus course offerings.
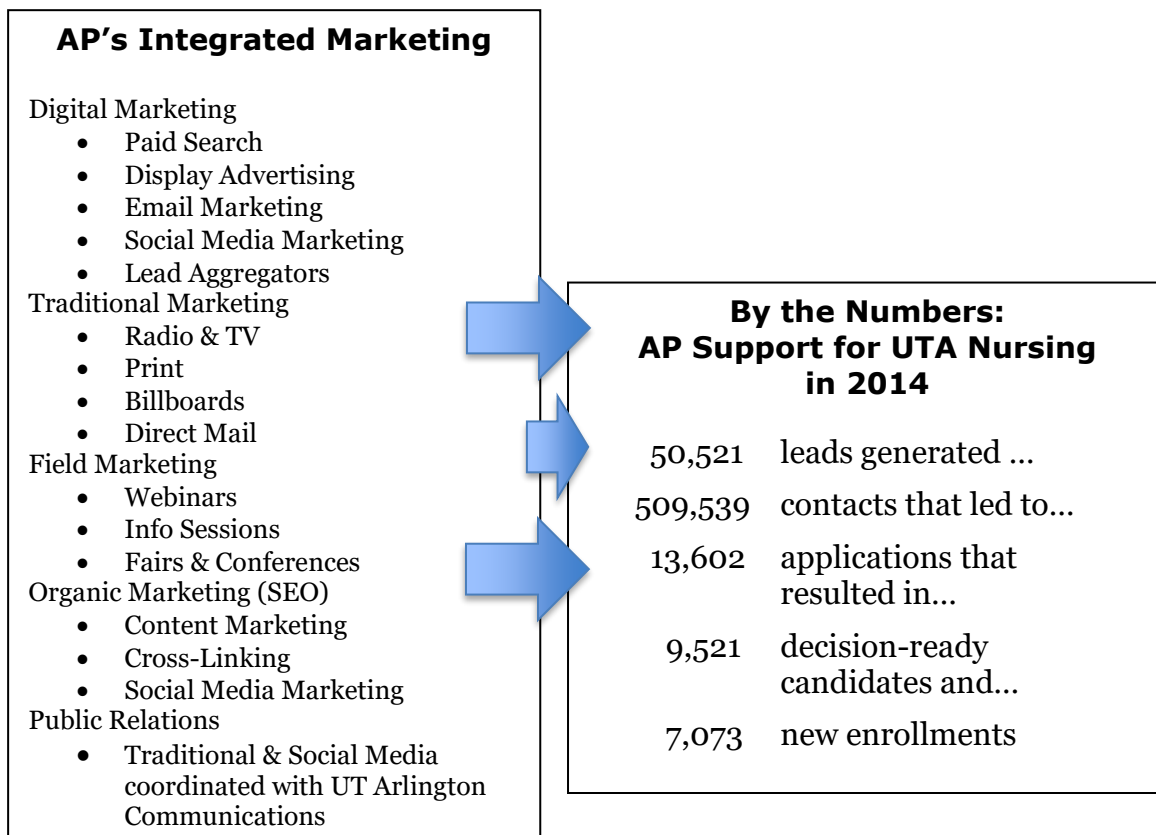
Administration and recruiting

In order to accommodate multiple start dates and much higher enrollments, UTA revised its admissions, registrar and bursar procedures. The university's College of Liberal Arts and College of Science also converted their traditional prerequisite courses to an online format, each with a five-week duration.

Many, if not most state universities do not have the in-house expertise or infrastructure that is necessary to recruit large numbers of students and expand their geographic reach. AP provided UTA with proven marketing strategies to identify qualified prospective students and convert them to applicants. The company also applied a variety of digital marketing and search-engine optimization methods to boost its recruiting efforts.

The Results

In just seven years, UTA has become the leading educator and source of RN-to-BSN graduates, not just in Texas, but nationwide. From approximately 175 enrollees in 2007-2008, the program has grown to almost 12,000 RN-to-BSN students in combined on-campus and online courses nationwide in 2014-2015.

AP's Integrated Marketing

Digital Marketing
- Paid Search
- Display Advertising
- Email Marketing
- Social Media Marketing
- Lead Aggregators

Traditional Marketing
- Radio & TV
- Print
- Billboards
- Direct Mail

Field Marketing
- Webinars
- Info Sessions
- Fairs & Conferences

Organic Marketing (SEO)
- Content Marketing
- Cross-Linking
- Social Media Marketing

Public Relations
- Traditional & Social Media coordinated with UT Arlington Communications

By the Numbers: AP Support for UTA Nursing in 2014

50,521	leads generated ...
509,539	contacts that led to...
13,602	applications that resulted in...
9,521	decision-ready candidates and...
7,073	new enrollments

Persistence rates of the CONHI online programs remain high: Approximately 90 percent of students who started the program have graduated or are actively progressing through their coursework. Quality also remains high, with the college continuing to control all aspects of curriculum and instruction, while AP focuses on marketing, student recruitment and retention.

The success of the university's online RN-to-BSN program has generated increased demand from partner hospitals and health care systems around the country. Today, the CONHI enrolls nurses from more than 335 hospital systems nationwide, including Baylor, Texas Health Resources HCA, M.D. Anderson, Children's Hospital Los Angeles, and the University of California-Irvine Medical Center through its AP-enabled field sales organization. Today, UTA is the No. 1 public university online RN-to-BSN program in several states, including California.

Partnering Pays Dividends, Generates Seismic Shift for RN-BSN in Texas, U.S.

When the UT Arlington College of Nursing partnered with AP to launch an online RN-BSN program, the university was not the #1 public university program in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, much less the nation.

At that time, a different public university in Texas was #1 in the state and #5 in the nation. This school had grown with a model that defined state of the art in the 20th Century: physically locating on-campus programs within huge medical districts in Houston and Dallas, and recruiting from the surrounding population of working nurses. In the late 2000s, the state's No. 1 provider at the time offered an online option but chose not to partner with an online service provider.

When UTA CON went online in 2008, the program had roughly 175 students in total. In going online, UT Arlington restructured their online RN-BSN program to serve working nurses. The program offered eight start dates annually, a modular format, and five-week courses with one week off in between. All general education requirements were also available completely online.

With this approach and working collaboratively with Academic Partnerships, UTA's RN to BSN program grew to account for almost 80 percent of RN-BSN enrollments among all universities in the state.

Students have gone on to do great work. According to a survey of 1,005 employer feedback forms, 97 percent of UTA's nursing students have been rated as consistently using evidenced-based practice by their employers, and 53 percent of graduates are regarded as role models for evidence-based practice. Furthermore, 71 percent of graduates are rated by their employers as role models for interprofessional collaborative practice – and 99 percent are consistently seen as change agents within the workplace.

CONHI leaders have grown the entire college from approximately 2,275 total nursing students in 2007-2008 to almost 18,000 total nursing students in 2015. In recognition of these results, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) awarded UT Arlington's RN-to-BSN program the Texas Higher Education Star Award in recognition of "exceptional contributions toward ... student participation, student success, academic excellence, and research."

The CONHI has also received additional accolades for innovation, including:
- One of only 12 schools in the U.S. to be designated a 2015 Center of Excellence by the National League for Nursing
- Designated by THECB as a "high-performing school" based on first-time NCLEX pass rates and pre-licensure graduation rates of 85 percent or higher. Both online and on-campus graduates consistently top state and national test averages.
- Ranked No. 6 on Value Colleges' Top 50 Best Value Online RN to BSN list
- No. 7 top online nursing degree program as determined by OnlineSchoolsCenter.com
- #1 Public College of Nursing in US by total enrollments and graduates
- #1 Public RN to BSN provider in US by enrollments
- #1 Public MSN provider in US by enrollments
- 82% of the RN to BSN students enrolled in Texas-based institutions are enrolled at UT Arlington
- 58% of RN to BSN graduates from Texas-based schools graduated from UT Arlington

Ultimately, students say it best: According to Carylin Holsey – a UT Arlington online graduate who served as president of the National Student Nurses Association and as chair of the International Council of Nurses Student Network – the

UT Arlington is the #1 producer of RN to BSN graduates from all Texas colleges of nursing 2011 to 2013
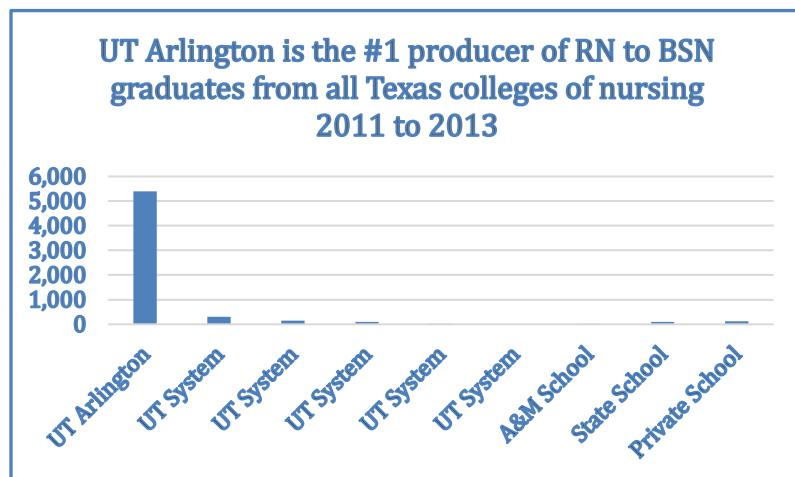
university's rigorous RN to BSN program is noteworthy for delivering "flexibility" and "extensive student support" as well as its "high quality and effectiveness."

Success Stories in Education:
Online Master's Graduates Win National, State Honors

Shanna Peeples accepts the 2015 National Teacher of the Year award, presented at the White House by President Barack Obama. "As National Teacher of the Year," Shanna said, "I represent all the people who love what they do."

Something amazing is happening with UT Arlington's online programs for educators, based on recognition at the national and state levels.

Two years after Shanna earned her Master's in Educational Curriculum & Instruction from UT Arlington, Shanna Peeples was named U.S. Teacher of the Year for 2015. Shanna, an 11th grade English teacher at Palo Duro High School in Amarillo, Texas, was selected for the national honor by the Council of Chief State School Officers. She received her award during a ceremony in April 2015 at the White House in Washington DC.

A particular challenge she faces is working with students who have no cultural context for a modern U.S. city. Amarillo has the nation's highest per-capita population of international refugees, and Peeples has learned how to teach students from these families. Some of her charges had never seen indoor plumbing before, while others had no concept of a kitchen. Many had no previous schooling.

UT Arlington's online program allowed Shanna to further develop her skills and credentials at the same time she continued her daily life in Amarillo. "The program helped me to do what I didn't think was possible for me: earn my master's degree while staying in the classroom."

"With UTA's online program, I used vast resources through technology to create, collaborate and synthesize my learning." – Austin Aeschbacher, UTA online graduate and Texas PTA Elementary Teacher of the Year

Motivation drives the pursuit of a graduate degree -- motivation to improve one's life and to make the world a better place. Such motivation is evident in the accomplishments of Austin Aeschbacher, a graduate of UT Arlington's College of Education who recently was named Elementary Teacher of the Year by the Texas Parent Teacher's Association.

"I chose the University of Texas at Arlington online program for several reasons," he said. "Early on, I could see myself moving into an educational leadership position eventually, and I heard about UT Arlington's online offerings from a colleague who had recently completed their master's program."

He wanted a degree from a highly regarded institution, that was affordable and that was flexible to meet his needs. "My UT Arlington experience challenged me at the right pace, and it allowed time for me to experience real-world problems that educators face today," he said. "I was able to maintain my teaching schedule and immediately apply what I was learning to various aspects of my career.

"I had thought a master's would be impossible for me, but UT Arlington made it possible," he concluded. "Now I am considering pursuing a doctoral degree in education to advance my learning and career even farther."

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