

Friday, September 24, 2010

Higher ed in Round Rock still growing

South U. may join ACC, A&M, Tx State

Austin Business Journal - by [Sandra Zaragoza](#) ABJ Staff



Nick Simonite

Students are flocking to college courses in Round Rock north of Austin.

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When the first school bell rang this fall, Round Rock became a hub for higher education, with two major Texas universities and one community college that serve thousands of students combined. And a private, corporate-owned university is considering joining them.

The first phase of **Austin Community College's** Round Rock campus, which opened in August, is already beating enrollment expectations, ACC President and CEO Stephen Kinslow said. He expected enrollment at the new campus to reach capacity by the third semester, but it might do so next semester.

Similarly, Texas State University's **Round Rock Higher Education Center** and the Texas **A&M Health Science Center** are progressing well. All three higher educational institutions and **Seton Medical Center** are represented at the 1400-acre **Avery Centre** on University Boulevard and State Highway 1460, just east of I-35.

"Texas State, ACC and Texas A&M have helped to create that synergy that is going to make the education component a big deal in Round Rock," said Charley Ayres, vice president of business retention and expansion for the **Round Rock Chamber of Commerce**.

Having the three institutions in Round Rock has been a draw for other institutions, Ayres said, citing **The Art Institute of Austin**, which opened in Round Rock in 2008.

A few weeks ago, the city of Round Rock approved incentives for **South University**, a private institution that is considering opening a campus in Round Rock.

South University — part of **Education Management Corp.**, a leading private operator of universities — has its flagship university in Savannah, Ga. It also has campuses in Alabama, Florida, Michigan, South Carolina and Virginia. South University has built campuses in some markets and leased space in others. A Round Rock campus would be its first in Texas.

The university is seeking accreditation with Texas regulatory entities, and it hopes to make an announcement in the next few weeks, said Mark Toth, senior director of communications at Education Management Corp.

At its other campuses, South University offers four-year degree programs and graduate degrees in areas such as nursing and criminal justice.

South University would be a welcome addition to a higher education hub that has become an asset for Round Rock, Ayres said.

“The most critical component of economic development has become: Where is the talent located? Where are the brightest, most educated and innovative people? I think that Texas State, Austin Community College and **Texas A&M Health Science Center** are positioning Round Rock to become one of the prime locations in the region,” Ayres said.

Collaborate to educate

ACC’s Kinslow said the collaborative environment provided by the Avery Centre is good for students and the institutions.

“It’s cost-effective for the local residents to have that kind of synergy between our three institutions, and it’s cost-effective for the state,” he said. “The three institutions really cooperate and do not duplicate what the others are doing. It helps make a wider menu of choices for the local community.”

Kinslow said the institutions’ leaders meet regularly, as does Round Rock’s education committee.

This semester, ACC’s Round Rock campus has 5,039 students, which is nearly its full capacity. And enrollment at all ACC campuses by students from Round Rock ZIP codes is 5,230, up 17 percent from fall 2009. ACC is offering nursing, welding, automotive and building construction technology, among other programs, in Round Rock.

Texas State’s Round Rock Higher Education Center, which has been open since 2005, has 1,984 students, up from about 1,739 in fall 2009. The university’s nursing building opened this year with 100 students.

Texas State Provost Perry Moore said the university’s most popular programs are nursing, management, computer science, business and public administration.

Texas State offers only junior, senior and graduate courses in Round Rock, Moore said, so that ACC can serve freshmen and sophomores there. As ACC grows, so will demand for Texas State’s upper-level courses and baccalaureate programs.

Eventually, Texas State plans to move its entire health professions college to Round Rock, which would require new buildings. The university plans to request funding for the expansion during the legislative session that starts in January.

With ACC, Texas A&M Health Science Center and a concentration of hospitals in the Round Rock area, positioning Texas State’s campus there as health-oriented was a logical step, Moore said.

“I think there is a great future in Round Rock. We just need the space to accommodate the students,” Moore said, adding that night classes in the university’s Avery building are at capacity.

Opened in January 2010, Texas A&M Health Science Center’s Round Rock campus has its College of Medicine, College of Nursing and the **Irma Lerma Rangel College of Pharmacy**.

There are 10 students enrolled in the nursing program, and that number will double in January, said Sharon Wilkerson, dean of the College of Nursing.

Wilkerson is excited to see the collaboration between the health science center and other institutions, especially in nursing.

Students “have the option to get an associates’ through ACC and get a traditional baccalaureate through Texas State, or go through our accelerated nursing program,” she said.

Courtesy of JB Goodwin