



TARLETON STATE  
UNIVERSITY

PUBLIC // 4-YEAR // PART OF TEXAS A&M SYSTEM



## Fastest Growing University in Texas Partners with Nearpeer to Continue Enrollment Momentum

### GROWTH STRATEGIES

Tarleton State University is one of the fastest growing universities in the country. A founding member of the Texas A&M System, Tarleton State has been expanding rapidly, increasing enrollment by a whopping 49% in just the last few years – and they have no plans of slowing down any time soon.

With a growth mindset, Tarleton is thinking several steps ahead, not just seeking new ways to attract and convert more recruits but also identifying tools that are proven to make students more resilient and more likely to persist. This is what led them to Nearpeer – and the technology’s ability to provide a more personalized experience to each student is leading them to greater success.

### KEY FINDINGS

In search of a next-level engagement platform to support the recruitment and retention of incoming students, Tarleton chose Nearpeer for its fit with Tarleton’s culture – and achieved record enrollment.



**63%**

of Tarleton’s students using Nearpeer joined the platform to **reduce anxiety** in the college-going process



**59%**

of Tarleton’s students using Nearpeer reporting “social fit” was a top concern



**16X**  
Return on  
Investment

for **every \$1** invested in Nearpeer, Tarleton **generated \$16** in tuition

# FOSTERING FRIENDSHIP: TARLETON'S NUMBER-ONE ENROLLMENT STRATEGY

**TARLETON  
STATE UNIVERSITY**

Member of The Texas A&M University System

## A MAN AND HIS DUCK WALK TO TEXAS AND START A UNIVERSITY...

"Friendship" is foundational to the history and branding of Tarleton State University, and it is a key element of their recruitment and retention strategy. Have you heard about the duck that waddled from Tennessee to Texas? His name was Oscar P, and in the late 1800s, he braved wildlands, navigated rivers, and weathered intense storms alongside his best friend, John Tarleton, who had a dream of starting his own university. Once the two arrived in Stephenville, Texas, they established the John Tarleton Agricultural College – which today, over 120 years later, is the fastest growing university in Texas and the second-largest campus in the Texas A&M System.

The leaders in Enrollment Management relay to every prospective student that if they enroll at Tarleton State, they will make enduring friendships that will change their lives and better the world. In fact, from their earliest communications with prospects, Tarleton State's recruitment team ensures that every applicant is familiar with the story of John

Tarleton and Oscar P, and the university makes it clear that Tarleton's campus is the place where they will make lasting friendships that will result in "a remarkable journey that leaves a legacy." No wonder Tarleton State is known as "The Friendliest Campus on Earth."

This is why finding a tool that could help prospective students meet their "Oscar Ps" early in the recruitment journey was top of mind for Dr. Javier Garza, Vice President of Strategic Enrollment Management at Tarleton State University. Dr. Garza knew that "creating space" for admitted applicants to build meaningful community with other peers also considering Tarleton could bolster admit-to-deposit conversions by helping them make "sticky" connections that give Tarleton the edge over competing institutions.

*"Nearpeer just fits. It aligns and advances our strategic efforts, and it helps us nurture and facilitate engagement in a way that supports our recruits."*



**Dr. Javier Garza**

Vice President for  
Enrollment Management

# TRADITIONAL SOCIAL MEDIA IS NOT THE ANSWER TO HIGHER ENROLLMENT

Dr. Garza was not satisfied with the flawed technologies that many schools rely on: to him, traditional social platforms repurposed for “community building” in the college recruitment process are unhealthy, unsafe, and could be more of a liability when trying to recruit students intentionally. However, at AACRAO SEM, higher-ed’s premier annual conference on strategic enrollment management, Dr. Garza found precisely what he was looking for.

After attending a panel discussion on Nearpeer, Dr. Garza learned that a number of leading universities were finding success with the peer-connection app because it was created as a healthy alternative to social media and designed with “belonging” at its core. Impressed by what Cal State, the University of Colorado, and the University of Utah achieved with Nearpeer, Dr. Garza was inspired to learn more. Nearpeer was a bullseye.

Fast-tracking Nearpeer, Dr. Garza and his team were able to launch the platform just a few weeks later to start driving immediate impact, and the app began sparking thousands of friendships within Tarleton’s admit pool months before the university’s deposit deadline. Making this investment filled a gap in the university’s already impressive growth strategy and super-charged yield conversions, contributing to Tarleton State shattering its all-time enrollment record. As Dr. Garza reiterates, “Nearpeer just fits.”

As Dr. Garza observed, “on Nearpeer, our recruits help each other navigate the enrollment process and communicate in a way that’s authentic to them.” Further, **Nearpeer enabled the Tarleton admissions team to better forecast** a student’s commitment to the university. “We value how Nearpeer provides us non-transactional engagement signals that supplement other forecasting milestones like housing assignments, course registration, and orientation attendance.”

## NEARPEER ADDS TO TARLETON STATE’S RECORD-BREAKING GROWTH

In its first year with Nearpeer, Tarleton helped spark more than 22,000 friendships among incoming recruits and nearly **3,000 hours of active community building** and lively engagement – all before any of these admitted applicants set foot on campus, a feat that would not have been possible with any other digital platform. While Nearpeer is a voluntary tool that Tarleton makes available to their incoming class, the platform attracted 50% of the fall recruits – a clear signal that finding friends early was top of mind for these prospective students as they prepared to transition into college. Such robust and steady adoption showed Tarleton’s leadership that **the Nearpeer platform was filling a gap**, and after assessing student feedback, it was clear that investing in Nearpeer had a positive influence on thousands of Tarleton’s newest recruits.

# REDUCING ANXIETY, HELPING STUDENTS “FIND THEIR FIT”



According to surveys, 63% of Tarleton’s Nearpeer users downloaded the app to help them **feel less nervous about the college-going process**. Also, 49% reported that they used Nearpeer to help them feel more socially connected before starting classes and with the hopes of finding new friends. This was no surprise since 59% reported that finding their social “fit” at Tarleton was a top concern.

In addition, nearly half of the Nearpeer users in Tarleton State’s incoming class said they found the platform helpful in getting questions answered and gathering key information regarding the admissions process, deadlines, orientation, and the start of classes. As one student expressed, “I felt hesitant to ask questions that I thought were ‘dumb’ in the group chat, but seeing all my peers ask each other the same questions and looking out for

each other changed my mind and made me realize that this is a welcoming and helpful community.” And, another student affirmed that Nearpeer was most helpful at “gathering insights, learning important advice, and set me up with lots of information from peers and staff about the admissions process and start of classes.” Many students said that these dynamic group chats on Nearpeer were very reassuring and made them feel more prepared. “Everyone in the group chat is very friendly and helpful,” one student said with relief. Another expressed that “the 2025 group chat on Nearpeer had all the answers to my questions.”

Nearpeer was a space where incoming students wanted to be. Tarleton’s recruits logged into the platform multiple times a week in the months leading up to the start of classes, making Nearpeer a powerful tool for disseminating announcements and important information without needing to rely solely on email communications.



# BUILDING COMMUNITY TO INFLUENCE DECISION BEFORE COMMITMENT

Plus, Tarleton went a step beyond simply inviting staff members to the platform – they also made sure to have student ambassadors on the app, too, to serve as more approachable resources for these incoming teens. This was a very helpful strategy.

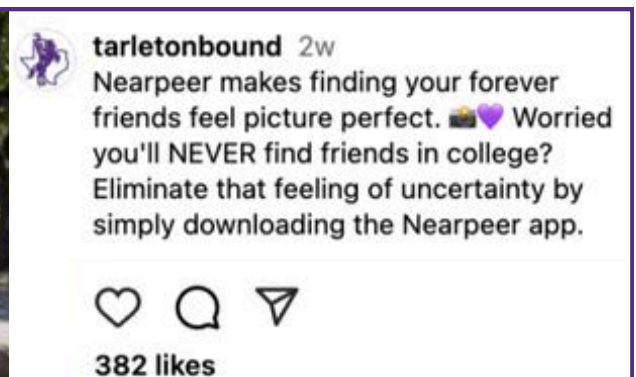
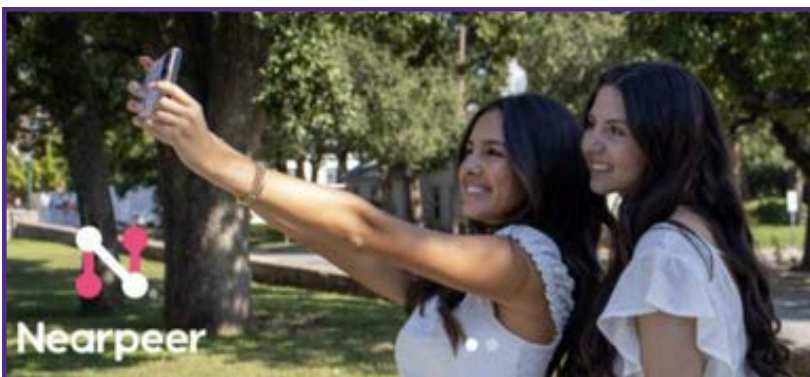
“The upperclassmen on Nearpeer have been able to answer all my questions and explain what theatre is like on campus, and that has been a major help for me,” one student said. “I found my tour guide on Nearpeer and she helped me with a lot of information I needed and helped me feel so safe at Tarleton,” another expressed. Perhaps this student put it best, though: “Having Nearpeer allowed me to see the amount of support that Tarleton has for incoming students, and just that made me not scared.”

## TARLETON ACHIEVES 16X RETURN ON INVESTMENT WITH NEARPEER

For Tarleton’s leaders, all of these revelations proved that their single investment in Nearpeer was paying off in myriad ways.

For example, **students using Neapeer had a 2X higher matriculation rate** with the largest melt reduction for first-generation students and Pell-eligible students. Also, Tarleton learned that one in four Nearpeer users downloaded the app before the decision deadline to ensure that Tarleton was the right school for them prior to accepting their admission. Many students reported that their Nearpeer experience pre-commitment influenced them to choose Tarleton over competing schools.

These tangible gains added up quickly. A calculation of Nearpeer’s impact on enrollment at Tarleton showed that for every dollar invested in Nearpeer, the university generated \$16 due to the increases in headcount and first-year persistence. In addition, Tarleton achieved a 12% lift in early orientation registrations after implementing Nearpeer. This early and strong signal forecasted a record-breaking year for Tarleton, and by the Fall semester, Nearpeer had helped the university achieve its largest enrollment ever.



# GIVING TARLETON STATE THE EDGE OVER COMPETING INSTITUTIONS

## NEARPEER GIVES TARLETON THE EDGE IN THE LONE STAR STATE

According to survey data, 20% of Tarleton's Nearpeer users who lived in Texas were debating between enrolling at Tarleton or going to school out of state. And, 42% of Tarleton's Nearpeer users expressed that they were considering other Texas A&M campuses in addition to Tarleton. Further, 9% of Tarleton's Nearpeer users were also considering a campus in the University of Texas System, and 8% were considering enrolling at Texas State. Having access to Nearpeer and making so many friends at Tarleton before deciding where to deposit was the thing that helped many of Tarleton State's newest students to ultimately choose the university.

Competition among colleges in Texas is fierce, but Tarleton stays ahead of the rest by going the extra mile to ensure their admitted applicants feel a strong sense of belonging from their earliest engagements with the campus, and Nearpeer has been a powerful extension of this mission by also preventing these new recruits from being poached away. Nearpeer's super-power is helping new students "find their people" and enables rich, multi-faceted friendships to sprout almost immediately on the platform.



**TEXANS ARE HERE**

## NEARPEER HELPS TARLETON STUDENTS MAKE "IRL" FRIENDSHIPS

For example, a male admitted student expressed concern about making friends, but said that Nearpeer allowed him to see that "a lot of people have a lot more in common than I thought, and this made me less anxious about attending." Specifically, he was grateful that he "found another person that rides bulls that I could practice with. He seems really cool and I can't wait to meet him this fall."



And, to the delight of many recruits (and the university), Nearpeer sparked many "in-real-life" meetups off campus and before school started. "One of the friends I met on Nearpeer came to my graduation party," one student revealed. "I met someone on Nearpeer and we met up at a local Chick-fil-A," another student expressed. She continued, "I am so happy that I now have her as a friend, and we actually plan to room together next year."

# UNDERSTANDING STUDENTS BETTER THAN EVER BEFORE

Fun meetups like this were quite common for Tarleton's Nearpeer recruits. In fact, one student even shared, "On Nearpeer, I got invited to a guy's birthday fishing trip within the first day of being on the app!" But, it wasn't just meeting new people on Nearpeer that was such a delight but also recognizing familiar faces that made some students feel less alone. Multiple students expressed their relief at using Nearpeer and discovering a neighbor, another student from their high school, or someone from their childhood that would also be going to Tarleton State. As one student shared, "I was reunited with one of the girls I went to Texas Bluebonnet Girls State with and it was a great way to strengthen our connection!"

For example, some of the top engagement within Tarleton's Nearpeer came from recruits sharing their passion for unique interests like joining Future Farmers of America, horseback riding and barrel racing, weightlifting, Dr. Pepper, volleyball, photography, dance, the card game Uno, and... Radiohead. Yes, RADIOHEAD. The 90s British rock band. While country music is the favorite genre for Tarleton's incoming recruits, Radiohead was the musical group that their incoming recruits were most passionate about. So while these prospective students were weighing Tarleton against other universities, they were building deep connections (and commitment) at Tarleton based on these meaningful mutual interests while simply leafing through pamphlets, scrolling websites, reading emails,

or attending highly choreographed tours at other competing schools. This gave Tarleton a tremendous edge in recruiting and retaining more prospects.



## NEARPEER RESONATES WITH GEN Z BY FORGING AUTHENTIC FRIENDSHIPS

But, getting back to Radiohead – why was a band that formed forty years ago the musical group that Tarleton State's recruits were most passionate about on Nearpeer? In the past year, Radiohead's song "Let Down" has become an anthem for Gen Z youth, resonating particularly with college-going students because of its themes of loneliness, isolation, and the feelings of despair that come from feeling no sense of belonging (specifically because of the toxic nature of traditional social media). The song has become so meaningful to this generation of teens that it even entered the Billboard Top 100 for the first time in 28 years and was one of the top 20 most popular songs globally on TikTok nearly three years after it was released. The song references

# STUDENTS EXPRESS THEIR GRATITUDE FOR TARLETON'S INVESTMENT IN NEARPEER

"the emptiest of feelings... it's so, so disappointing... let down and hanging around" with no genuine friends. Yet, these are the same feelings that Nearpeer was able to dispel and remedy for Tarleton's incoming recruits and hundreds of thousands of college students each year. In closing, here are just a few examples of what students had to say about how Nearpeer helped them feel less isolated and alone.

One student, who lived nearly five hours from campus near the Louisiana border said:

***"For the longest time, I've been looking for a genuine friendship - and now I've joined Nearpeer, and for the first time, someone else was the one to first contact me instead of it always being me reaching out first. Nearpeer has helped me connect to people that will be long-lasting friends during my time at Tarleton State."***

*- Incoming Tarleton Recruit*

Another student - one who lived within 30 minutes of campus - reported being anxious about starting college, even though she would be close to home. She said, "Nearpeer has made me feel more connected to my peers because I can see that other people are interested in the same things I am while also being so different! It truly shows how even though we all come from different backgrounds we are all connected in one way or another!"

A recruit from League City, Texas, shared that the greatest relief about Nearpeer was

***"Knowing I wasn't doing this alone and that I had other people I could go to for advice. Seeing the amount of similarities that I have with other people coming into Tarleton was very comforting. Nearpeer created an overall friendly and helpful atmosphere that has made me a little less anxious to meet people."***

*- Incoming Tarleton Recruit*

And, a student from Grapevine, Texas, put it best when she said, "Just seeing so many people that live lives just like I do, experiencing the same things like meeting new people and adjusting to college life, it's comforting. It truly shows how even though we all come from different backgrounds we are all connected in one way or another."

Nearpeer is proud to be helping so many incoming Tarleton State students find their "Oscar Ps," and the app has proven to be the perfect service for "The Friendliest Campus on Earth." Tarleton's leadership has been so encouraged by the platform's impact that they are now extending Nearpeer to support graduate students and the parent and family community, too - expansions that will bolster Tarleton State's momentum as Texas's fastest growing university. As Tarleton State University's president, Dr. James Hurley likes to state, "There has never been a more exciting time to be a Tarleton State Texan!"

# THE Nearpeer® EXPERIENCE



## LAUNCH QUICKLY

Nearpeer is a turnkey solution that can be implemented with minimal lift from university partners. With no system integration or university staffing required, the platform has launched in as little as 24 hours for clients seeking immediate help growing enrollment, improving retention, and supporting greater sense of belonging among students.

## SEE SIGNIFICANT RESULTS

Institutions using Nearpeer can achieve 3X higher yield rates, up to 93% melt reduction, 17% year-over-year retention increases, and 16% higher four-year graduation rates. Students also report reduced anxiety and isolation, along with greater inclusion and belonging, making Nearpeer the top choice for improving student success and mental health.

## TRUSTED PARTNER AND REAL IMPACT

Nearpeer partners with institutions of all sizes to support diverse learners, from undergraduates to adults and early-college students. Nearpeer conducted the largest clinical trial on belonging's impact on student success in higher education, establishing itself as a leader the field. This transformational work is backed by philanthropic leaders like The Lumina Foundation and The Lilly Endowment.

## ENHANCE EXISTING INVESTMENTS

Nearpeer is a powerful standalone tool that seamlessly enhances universities' existing systems, including student information systems, res-life platforms, marketing tools, student success platforms, and resources for tutoring, mentorship, and mental health.

## CONSIDERABLE ROI

Nearpeer is a proven, high-ROI investment for universities, driving increased yield, reduced melt, and improved persistence. Partner schools see a 10x (or higher) return through higher enrollment that increases tuition revenue, with some achieving up to 97x ROI. No wonder *Forbes* calls Nearpeer "A very big deal."

## HIGH ADOPTION

"Will I fit in?" is today's top concern for college students, and without an early sense of belonging, enrollment and persistence decline sharply. Nearpeer addresses this need by helping students form meaningful friendships before orientation, leading to an average 50% voluntary adoption—rising to 95% at some schools.

# Forbes

## Forbes on Nearpeer

“For those in the know, or who follow the razor’s edge world of college recruitment, boosting enrollment is gold. But also boosting retention, as was shown in this study [of Nearpeer], is platinum...

**This is a very big deal.”**

# ABOUT NEARPEER

Nearpeer is a peer-to-peer engagement platform that strengthens students' sense of belonging from their first touchpoint, pre-enrollment through graduation. By using advanced matching algorithms, Nearpeer creates personalized, healthy 1:1 connections that help every student feel seen, supported, and part of a community. Institutions partner with Nearpeer to offer a custom-built, safe, and inclusive virtual community space proven to increase confidence, commitment, and connection across the student lifecycle. This approach consistently drives measurable gains in enrollment, persistence, resilience, and graduation rates — while also reducing loneliness, anxiety, and isolation among students. It's why so many colleges and universities trust Nearpeer to power belonging at scale—and why Forbes called Nearpeer “a very big deal.”



For more information, visit [nearpeer.com](https://nearpeer.com).