

Response to the Washington Advisory Group Report University of Texas at San Antonio

1. UTSA is most appreciative of the support of the Washington Advisory Group (WAG). In many instances, the recommendations they have made support initiatives already underway at UTSA, and in other cases they affirm our current plans for future development. In still other cases, they provide ideas that we can build on in achieving our goal of Tier 1 Research status. We will take all of their recommendations quite seriously.
2. As the report indicates, our most glaring weaknesses involve the “sub-critical” size of our faculty and the lack of doctoral programs in some basic fields of science and engineering. We are aware of the faculty shortage and are currently conducting 90 faculty searches. We anticipate hiring at least 70 faculty members this year and a similar number each year over the next five years. Hiring in Science is especially strong this year.
3. We are likewise rapidly moving our doctoral programs forward. We anticipate Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board approval for our doctoral program in chemistry within the next six months, our doctoral proposal in public policy is now at the University of Texas System, and our doctoral proposal in physics (proposed jointly with Southwest Research Institute) will be up for consideration by the Board of Regents at the August, 2004, meeting. We implemented doctoral programs in Environmental Science and Engineering, Cell and Molecular Biology, and Biomedical Engineering this past fall, and doctoral programs in applied mathematics, neuroscience, and other areas are currently under development.
4. The WAG report also recommends the hiring of a scientist or an engineer in a senior-level administrative position. Even as the report was being written, we were recruiting a nationally known scientist for such a position. We anticipate that his person will begin at UTSA in December 2004, and we plan to evolve our current administrative structure to include a Vice President for Research over the next year.
5. The WAG reports recommends that we improve our strategic planning process, with specific suggestions for what should be included. This is currently being addressed through the compact process.
6. As the WAG Report notes, we need to upgrade and expand our research development infrastructure and our development office. We have plans for doing both beginning September 2004. We are also continually reviewing and revising our capital plan in light of our program development and faculty hiring plans.
7. The WAG Report suggests that the Computer Science Department is not as strong as it needs to be. We are currently hiring at least two additional research faculty for Computer Science and looking for ways to link the department more closely with the College of Engineering.
8. The WAG Report includes an unfortunate factual error and an unfortunate misconception. The report suggests that the Department of Applied Mathematics had been found “in deficit” in teaching. It is not clear to us to what the report is referring in this case. Applied Mathematics is certainly not running a budgetary deficit at this time, and their teaching is solid. The report does not indicate who is supposed to have found them “in deficit,” so we are not sure what it means. The assertion is factually inaccurate and unfair to the department. A misconception in the WAG Report regards the Break Even Analysis Report (BEAR) that is used as a management tool at UTSA. The report misunderstands both how the BEAR works and also its purpose (it is designed for departments and colleges, not for individual faculty members). Unfortunately, the WAG visitors received their information from someone who did not fully understand the concept rather than from the Provost’s Office.
9. Finally, the WAG Report makes two suggestions with which we respectfully disagree. First, it suggests that we limit our faculty hiring to 30 per year. At the same time, it recommends providing faculty with smaller teaching loads. While we agree that teaching loads should be reduced, they cannot be substantially reduced if we hire only 30 faculty members per year – even if we freeze enrollment at current levels. We now have 450 tenured/tenure-track faculty members and typically experience a retirement/resignation rate

of about 5% per year (roughly the national average). In other words, we lose about 23 people each year. If we hire 30 faculty per year, we have a net gain of only 7 – not enough to make a significant difference either in faculty teaching loads or in research capacity. Hiring 50-70 faculty a year will clearly be a challenge for us and we will have to be vigilant in maintaining high standards for faculty, but we believe that is the only realistic way to address the “sub-critical” size of our faculty.

Second, the WAGS Report recommends that we slow enrollment growth and that we rely less on the income that growth provides. We acknowledge that rapid enrollment growth provides significant challenges, and at times handling it appropriately has been a struggle. However, the issue is somewhat more complicated than the report suggests. Four points deserve further consideration.

- The current enrollment growth at UTSA might seem unplanned and unchecked, but a large part of it is actually the result of a carefully developed plan (1) to increase graduate enrollments (at a 50% greater rate than undergraduate enrollments), (2) to increase retention rates, (3) to increase the percentage of fulltime students, and (4) to increase the percentage of students from outside Bexar County. Since 1999 graduate enrollments have grown by 44%, a rate that is 52% greater than the rate of undergraduate growth. Between Fall 2002 and fall 2003, our graduate enrollment grew by 971 students, or 37%, while our undergraduate enrollment grew by 1678, or 9%. Graduate students now comprise roughly 17% of the total enrollment; ultimately, we would like for them to comprise 25%. Likewise, since 1999 our retention rates have increased from 59% to 65%, and the number of students who are fulltime and from outside of the home county have increased by 7% and 14% respectively. We believe that this type of enrollment growth strengthens UTSA considerably and should be maintained.
- CAP students comprised another large component of the enrollment growth over the last two years. The 1136 CAP students comprised two thirds of UTSA’s enrollment growth at the undergraduate level between Fall 2002 and Fall 2003 and 43% of our total enrollment growth. While we strongly support the CAP program and are delighted to participate in it, it provides significant challenges for enrollment management. It is difficult to plan for the number of CAP students, and while CAP provides us with some of our best students, it also has provided students with a mechanism for working around our admission standards. Again, we strongly support the CAP program, but it accounts for a large part of our enrollment growth that was unplanned.
- We are currently implementing an expanded provisional admissions program at UTSA that will help us raise our admission standards while still maintaining our commitment to access. An experimental version of the program was implemented this year and was very successful.
- While the WAG Report recommends less reliance on formula funding and tuition, it unfortunately makes no recommendations about other sources of revenue. We are open to all suggestions. It also ignores the role that enrollment growth has played historically as public universities move to Tier I status. For instance, during the 1960s and early 1970s, a period during which it made substantial progress in its research development, UT-Austin added just under 1500 students per year. In 1960, UT-Austin had an enrollment of 20,396; in 1975, its enrollment stood at 42,598. Likewise, during the 1970s and early 1980s, a period during which it added a number of new doctoral programs and grew its research capacity substantially, Texas A&M-College Station added almost 1600 students per year. In 1970, its enrollment stood at 14,221; in 1984, it was 36,669. During the critical 5-year period between 1970 and 1975, Texas A&M grew by some 10,000 students. Enrollment growth provides public universities with many (although certainly not all) of the resources they need to build a nationally prominent faculty, and it is faculty who propel a university to Tier 1 status. Our current period of enrollment growth provides a unique opportunity for UTSA to hire the faculty that will allow it to move in this direction.