

# **THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS SYSTEM STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE BOARD OF REGENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS SYSTEM**

After careful consideration, we the members of The University of Texas System Student Advisory Council (SAC), respectfully submit the following recommendations to The University of Texas Board of Regents. These recommendations concern a wide variety of students at multiple institutions in The University of Texas System.

## **Academic Affairs Committee**

### **Recommendation 1**

In order to provide a quality classroom experience for students and faculty alike, the U. T. System Student Advisory Council requests that all U. T. System academic institutions implement a mid-semester course evaluation. To assess the progress of the course, instructional methodology, and the clarity of material presented, all instructional professors should administer these evaluations to their students in a manner deemed most appropriate for each institution. These evaluations should be completed by the students and reviewed by the professor before the midpoint of the semester. We also ask that the results of these evaluations contribute to the overall assessment of the instructor.

These assessments allow professors to target and identify areas where students are having difficulty learning. Providing this positive feedback mechanism enables students to excel in the course where they would otherwise struggle. The implementation of mid-semester evaluations allows sufficient time for students and instructors to make necessary changes to ensure the success of all. Similar evaluations have proven beneficial at other prominent institutions such as The University of California-Berkeley, Michigan State University, University of Michigan, Cornell University and Princeton University.

Data from these evaluations can be collected from surveys conducted through systems such as Blackboard or resources similar to U. T. Austin's Ongoing Course Assessment.

## **Financial and Legislative Affairs Committee**

### **Recommendation 2**

The U. T. System Student Advisory Council understands that a restructuring of the Board of Regents requires legislative approval. However, if the Texas Legislature renews interest in the benefits of increasing student representation on the Board of Regents for the U. T. System, then, the U. T. System Student Advisory Council recommends granting voting rights to the Student Regent and the addition of a non-voting Student Regent Designate, both appointed with staggered two-year terms. The Designate position provides the appointee a full year to become familiar with the roles and responsibilities of a Student Regent and the operating procedures of the U. T. System before gaining voting rights.

This proposed model is currently utilized by other nationally recognized public education systems such as The University of California and The University of Tennessee Systems.

## **Health and Graduate Affairs Committee**

### **Recommendation 3**

After conversations with members of the faculty, students, and staff, the U. T. System Student Advisory Council (UTSSAC) believes it important to revise and improve the accommodations and services available to students with disabilities. The most recent UTSSAC recommendation concerning this topic was presented in 1998 - 1999 when the Multicultural and Minority Affairs Committee addressed compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Recent advances in the field of assistive technologies allow today's institutions the opportunity to upgrade the services available to their student populations. Therefore, in an effort to improve the educational experience of all students, UTSSAC recommends that the universities and health science centers across our system consider the following areas of accommodations: awareness, technologies, staffing, and facilities:

**Awareness** – The U.S. Department of Education states that on average 11% of the nation's undergraduate students report a disability, however, our research indicates that some of the universities within the U. T. System have considerably lower reporting rates when compared to this national figure. For example, at The University of Texas at Arlington, only 2% (600) of students are registered with the Office for Students with Disabilities. UTSSAC believes that such a discrepancy may result from students'

unawareness and a lack of understanding of available services across the U. T. System.

In an effort to increase awareness and improve students with disabilities reporting rates, the Health and Graduate Affairs Committee of UTSSAC recommends that each institution implements the following initiatives:

- Provide more direct access to the Office for Students with Disabilities website from the main university home page
- Facilitate an annual disability services awareness week
- Host disability services information sessions at new student orientations

**Technologies** – Increased awareness of disability services may increase the demand for such services. In anticipation of this surge, we recommend a systemwide review focusing on:

- Sharing of best practices among Offices for Students with Disabilities across the U. T. System
- Identification of new opportunities for campuses to increase assistive technologies available for students. UTSSAC proposes such equipment to include:
  - Screen navigation software
  - Screen magnification software
  - Voice recognition software
  - Visual mapping, outlining, writing software
  - Reading, writing, and learning software
  - FM systems for hard of hearing individuals
  - Note taking assistance devices
  - Adaptive keyboards and track balls
  - Braille embossers
  - Textbook conversion to electronic text (e-text)

**Staffing** – Following multiple dialogues with some of the directors of the Offices for Students with Disabilities across the U. T. System, an apparent need for specific staffing positions became evident. Based on this discussions, we recommend that all Offices

for Students with Disabilities maintain at least one staff member responsible for, but not limited to, the following responsibilities: Director, Certified Counselor, Psychoeducational Diagnostician, Recreational Therapist, Assistive Technology Training Center Coordinator, Interpreter, Web Accessibility Center Director, Exam Scheduling Coordinator, Auxiliary Services Administrator, Specialty Tutor, and Sport/Recreational Activity Coordinator.

**Facilities** – The ADA Accessibility Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities list the technical requirements to be applied in the design, construction, and alteration of buildings and facilities. While these guidelines represent the minimum level of accommodation required, UTSSAC believes that additional improvements could provide a more hospitable environment for students with disabilities. For example, the standard push buttons for automatic doors could present a challenge for a person with limited arm mobility, in such cases, an automatic sliding door could facilitate access. In addition, because of more difficult maneuverability of electric wheelchairs, more space than that dictated by ADA requirements could ease utilization of restroom facilities. Finally, we recommend that universities ensure that an “accessibility plan” is included as part of each campus’ overall master plan.

## **Campus Life Committee**

### **Recommendation 4**

The U. T. System Student Advisory Council recommends that the Board of Regents revise the current U. T. System nondiscrimination policy, and that all U. T. System institutions update their specific policies to include, but not be limited to, the policy of The University of Texas System. A recent review of nondiscrimination policies of U. T. Systems institutions revealed that there is a large degree of variability between schools, and more importantly, between the policies of each school and the U. T. System policy.

According to the U. T. System, our mission is to provide a quality education to students “from a wide range of social, ethnic, cultural, and economic backgrounds, thereby preparing educated, productive citizens who can meet the rigorous challenges of an increasingly diverse society and ever changing global community.” To be consistent with the U. T. System mission, the Board of Regents should revise the U. T. System nondiscrimination policy to provide equal opportunities to diverse groups.

A comparison of the U. T. System policy to the policies of each institution, as well as The University of Michigan and The University of California Systems, identifies additional groups that should be included in the U. T. System nondiscrimination policy.

These additional groups are: creed, ancestry, gender identity and gender expression, marital status, citizenship, and medical condition (e.g. pregnancy, cancer).

We recommend that the revised U. T. System nondiscrimination policy reads (additions underlined):

It is the University of Texas System policy that no person including students, faculty, staff, and temporary workers will be excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any program or activity sponsored or conducted by The University of Texas System or the institutions on the basis of race, color, creed, national origin or ancestry, religion, sex (including gender identity and gender expression), sexual orientation, veteran status, marital status, citizenship, age, disability, or medical condition. Retaliation against persons who oppose a discriminatory practice, file a charge of discrimination, or testify for, assist in, or participate in an investigative proceeding relating to discrimination is prohibited.

Furthermore, we recommend that all U.T. System institutions update their specific nondiscrimination policies to include, but not be limited to, the policy of The University of Texas System. The addition and implementation of these changes to the U. T. System nondiscrimination policy will serve to further support the mission of the U. T. System, to reflect an increasingly diverse society, to solidify nondiscrimination policies throughout the System, and to avoid future potential conflicts and liabilities.

#### Recommendation 5

One of the main factors that students consider prior to entering an institution is safety. Although the U. T. System has good safety standards, additional measures are needed to raise awareness of on-campus safety procedures. The lack of student, faculty, and staff awareness of on-campus safety procedures is an issue that directly affects an institution in the event of an emergency. We thus want to improve on-campus safety across the U. T. System. We recommend that the U. T. System asks each campus to implement a set of measures (stated below) which would increase the on-campus safety for students as well as faculty and staff. Upon implementation of this recommendation, students, faculty, and staff throughout the U. T. System would be aware of, and familiar with, the safety procedures which the U. T. System follows and it would better enable each campus to maintain a high safety standard. It is our humble request that the Board of Regents take into consideration the implementation of this recommendation.

In order to increase students' awareness of emergency evacuation procedures:

- Professors, faculty, and staff should be regularly reminded about building and classroom evacuation routes.
- Information about classroom evacuation routes, or a web link to the information, should be included in course syllabi and handed to students on the first day of class.
- Campus directories should include evacuation routes and be posted in high traffic areas around campus (indoor and outdoor).
- Campus Emergency Drills should be administered on a regular basis to ensure proficiency, and
- Informational packets or emergency response guides, like the one provided to students at The University of Texas at San Antonio, should be made available. The packet should contain a listing of emergency contacts, recommended procedures in cases of medical emergencies, fire or explosion, evacuation of the mobility-impaired, severe weather hazards and threats (bomb, physical, and terrorist).