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 U. T. Board of Regents. These recommendations concern a wide variety of students at multiple institutions in the U. T. System.

Financial and Legislative Affairs

Recommendation 1

Recognizing the unique nature of each U. T. institution, SAC is concerned that the focus on 4-year graduation rates does not provide an accurate measurement of institutional success. Given that only about 30% (excluding UT Austin) of U. T. System students are included in the calculation for 4-year graduation rates, SAC recommends that the Board of Regents modify the definition of the current 4-year graduation rate used by the System or focus on other metrics that provide a more complete picture of institutions.

While current 4-year graduation rates are measured against peer institutions, given the large portion of students left out of that statistic, SAC recommends a more comprehensive evaluation of institutions that takes into account the diversity of each student body. There are growing numbers of nontraditional students matriculating in the U. T. System, and they are being marginalized by this measure. Preferred metrics include, but are not limited to, degrees conferred, transfer rates, acceptance rates to graduate and law schools, and board pass rates as they relate to each institution's mission.

SAC further recommends that these comprehensive metrics be considered by the Board in regard to tuition decisions because they provide a clearer understanding of the needs of each institution for improvement, in addition to a more well-rounded definition of quality. We believe this comprehensive focus is consistent with the Chancellor's call for improving value and quality, while respecting the individuality of each institution.

Recommendation 2

Recognizing that the U. T. System is comprised of a heterogeneous group of campuses requiring tailored action to their specific agendas, SAC is concerned that several avenues for student input regarding tuition and fee setting are not being adequately heard. Therefore, SAC recommends that student opinion, including perspectives expressed in campus-wide referenda and student input in the campus' tuition recommendation process, be given greater consideration by the Board of Regents. This is increasingly important as the state and federal contributions to higher education continue to fall.

While student success and access to affordable higher education should be priorities, there are instances of pressing student initiatives needing to be addressed that are not directly related to graduation rates. These include interest in new student unions, facilities, and sustainability initiatives. In the recent tuition setting cycle, students were asked to consider graduation rates and containing costs related to our tuition recommendations. This stymied the ability to discuss other institutional goals, such as seeking Tier One status, transportation needs, the quality of student life, or becoming the nation's best public research institution.

Student representatives are attuned to the diverse needs of their respective campuses and take the responsibility of communicating important issues to the Board of Regents for consideration seriously. We ask that the U. T. System Board of Regents remain open-minded to student-led initiatives and fee proposals backed by a majority vote of the student population at the individual campuses and to the student input given in matters of tuition setting.

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by the Office of Academic Affairs
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Academic Affairs

Recommendation 3

In January of 2012, the U.S. Department of Education reported that hybrid courses are "increasing the availability of learning experiences,"[1] reflecting the positive influence these courses have on students. Some benefits of these courses include accommodating a variety of learning styles and scheduling needs.

Hybrid courses combine traditional classroom and Internet instruction with significant portions of the class activities occurring online. Hybrid courses promote optimal space utilization for campuses experiencing a space deficit, aid a significant population of nontraditional students, and enhance learning outcomes across student populations.

To ensure our students receive the highest quality education, in conjunction with continued opportunity for educational advancement of technology within the classroom, SAC recommends that the U. T. System Board of Regents continue the further development and research of hybrid courses that will meet the needs, missions, and goals of each institution.

Recommendation 4

In 2006, SAC proposed the creation of an online degree audit program. The Chancellor acknowledged this recommendation as an ongoing process.

Effective outlining of course requirements is an essential component of timely degree completion. The Council requests revisiting progress made on this recommendation since in some cases the creation of online degree plans has yet to be fully implemented. The Council further recommends full utilization of online tools to aid in academic advising. Specifically, this should include the following:

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[1] Bakia, M., Shear, L., Toyama, Y., and Lasseter, A. (2012). "Understanding the Implications of Online Learning for Educational Productivity" U.S. Department of Education.
http://gsehd.gwu.edu/documents/users/juliestella/implications-online-learning.pdf

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- Creation of program specific online degree plans

- Online scheduling of appointments between student and advisor

- Degree plans adaptable to individual student progress and planning

- Student accessibility to degree audit.

Health and Graduate Affairs

<div align="center">Recommendation 5</div>

U. T. System has been very active in improving the quality of care at student health centers. However, patient experience with student health care services has been unsatisfactory at multiple institutions. As such, SAC recommends that each institution implement a means of evaluating patient satisfaction of student health care.

In order to further improve the standard of care received by students at The University of Texas System institutions, we recommend each institution:

- Develop a Student Health Advisory Committee or appoint a student representative in any existing committee to serve as a liaison between the Health Advisory Committee and the student body

- Create a patient satisfaction evaluation process

- Ensure oversight of the evaluation process with periodic reviews by the U. T. System.

<div align="center">Recommendation 6</div>

Given the rising cost of living near many of the U. T. System campuses, SAC recommends that the Board of Regents establish a cost-of-living evaluation system for graduate students on each campus. Evaluation for graduate stipends differs widely across the U. T. System and is based on competitiveness, cost-of-living, or a combination thereof. This issue is of particular importance to non-STEM fields where no stipend levels are set by a federal agency. There should be a minimum standard to ensure the U. T. System will continue to attract high quality students.

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In addition, implementation of a cost-of-living evaluation system will aid tuition and fee discussions, and help determine allocation of graduate and professional school loans. This measure will help relieve the student debt burden, especially with the recent loss of subsidized loans and changes in the management of unsubsidized loans for graduate and professional students. Therefore, we request a cost-of-living evaluation system be implemented across the U. T. System.

Student Involvement and Campus Life

Recommendation 7

Multiple institutions of the U. T. System have more than 1,000 students who receive military and/or veteran benefits. In light of current events, there is evidence that various institutions will be increasing their military and/or veteran enrollment, such as U. T. Pan American estimating a 25% increase for Fall 2012.

By providing military and veteran-dedicated personnel in a centralized location to assist with advising, financial aid, counseling, and registration, we will ensure that our United States military personnel and/or veterans and their dependents are receiving the highest quality of educational experience that each of our respective universities has to offer.

In the 82nd Legislative Session, Senate Bill 1621 was proposed to establish regional military and/or veteran affairs offices. The bill did not pass due to potential negative fiscal impact. However, we recommend the creation of institutional centers within the U. T. System schools, which will meet the needs of each campus.

This will encourage our military personnel, veterans, and their dependents to obtain an education with the U. T. System institutions. Adoption of this initiative will justify the application for grants to aid in providing the best educational services to our respective military personnel and/or veterans and their dependents.

Therefore, in order to accommodate the needs of the U. T. System population at-large, the members of SAC propose the creation of a population-based center to enhance the

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services provided to our United States military personnel and/or veterans and their dependents.

Recommendation 8

Current research shows that student stress levels are increasing in higher education. Students face the rigors of demanding workloads, difficult classes, and time-consuming extracurricular activities, which easily can lead to mental and behavioral problems affecting student success. Various institutions in the U. T. System have adopted successful intervention teams to address circumstances resulting from the negative impacts of stress, and these teams have been largely effective in managing troublesome situations.

SAC recommends that the Board of Regents encourage all U. T. System institutions to form behavioral intervention teams and market this preventative mechanism for central reporting of disruptive, threatening, or concerning student behavior.

Effective team implementation includes the following:

- Gathers and manages reported information from concerned faculty and staff

- Assesses the level of threat a student's behavior poses to persons or property in the University community or to disruption of University activities in accord with policies stated in the Student Code of Conduct

- Consults with administration, faculty, staff and other students affected by inappropriate behaviors

- Develops strategy to manage the threatening behavior with regard to safety and rights of others and minimize the negative impact to the University community

- Intervenes, as necessary, with students and connects them to support services.

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