April 2, 2014

Francisco G. Cigarroa, M.D.
Chancellor
The University of Texas System
601 Colorado St.
Austin, TX 78701-2982

Dear Chancellor Cigarroa:

On behalf of The University of Texas System Student Advisory Council (UTSSAC or “the Council”) and the over 200,000 students we represent, I thank you and The U. T. System Board of Regents for providing an avenue for student input through our recommendations for the 2013-2014 academic year.

Recently, we were afforded the opportunity to collaborate with you, the Vice Chancellors, and Student Regent Horne regarding Regents’ Rule 40401. The Council is optimistic that the compromise requiring that a student(s) accompany the institutional president to the proposal meeting will adequately represent the students while additionally increasing interaction between the Board of Regents and student leaders.

This year we have seen a great deal of change. On behalf of the Council, I would like to thank you, Chancellor, for your time and service to the U. T. System. Your efforts to advance our education have added immense value to our education. We also welcomed Dr. Raymond Greenberg to The University of Texas System. We are excited for his leadership through these changing times in health education and during the opening of new medical schools in Austin and the Rio Grande Valley.

I have treasured my three years on the Council. During our 6 days of meetings, student leaders across the whole System interact by problem solving, exchanging ideas, and learning about the greater academic system. Perhaps the most inspiring aspect of the Council is the optimism and belief in change. Each member is dedicated to the experience and value of higher education. We hope that our hard work will positively affect all the students we represent. It has been an honor and a privilege to serve as Chair this year to a candid, committed and clever Council.
With this letter, we are submitting recommendations passed by the Council during our February meeting. We are honored by the invitation to discuss these recommendations in more detail with the Board in May.

With sincere appreciation,

[Signature]

Emma L. Dishner  
Chair, Student Advisory Council 2013-2014  
The University of Texas System

Enclosures

Cc:  Dr. Pedro Reyes, Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs  
     Dr. Raymond Greenberg, Executive Vice Chancellor for Health Affairs  
     Dr. Wanda L. Mercer, Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs
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.

Academic Affairs Committee

Recommendation - ADA Online Compliance

The University of Texas System Student Advisory Council commends the Board of Regents for employing technology in a 21st century education. Equal access to and the utilization of these services is a modern necessity. However, it is important to bring awareness to the needs of students with disabilities in the implementation of technological advancements.

Students with disabilities should be provided the accommodations necessary to take advantage of academic technologies, in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504). For example, it is the case that online, hybrid, and traditional courses require the use of specific software, some of which have limited compatibility with screen readers required by the visually impaired.

To address this issue, SAC asks the Board of Regents to establish a means of evaluation and to continue improving learning tools for ADA compliance. Additionally, we recommend that the Board of Regents consider the active involvement of students with disabilities and the offices that support them in the implementation of online learning tools. By lending students a voice in this matter, we will ensure that all students are offered the quality of education and opportunities they deserve.

Academic Affairs Committee

Recommendation - Institute for Transformational Learning Online Resources

SAC recommends that The University of Texas System create a unified online learning resource platform consisting of eBooks, eJournals, databases, and educational applications. This would make high quality online educational resources available to graduate and undergraduate students in a more uniform and cost-efficient manner.

The Institute for Transformational Learning (ITL) seeks to ensure that all Texans have access to an affordable, elite-calibre education, emphasizing inquiry, exploration, active learning, and rigorous assessment.

Currently, institutions individually manage the online learning resources that are made available to their students. Students across various institutions have vastly different access to educational materials despite being a part of the same system. Collaboration among institutions, perhaps through ITL, can alleviate these issues.
Similar to the U. T. System Board of Regents, we endorse the research and implementation of the ITL, and acknowledge that many of the institutions and programs are very innovative in making online resources available to students whether the programs are online, blended, or traditional classroom. However, SAC believes that a structured collaboration of the institutions can combine the purchasing power of all U. T. System institutions so that the contracts may be less costly and facilitate institutional-level discussions on possible basic resources that should be commonly available to all students Systemwide.

By unifying online learning resources such as eBooks, eJournals, databases, and educational applications, the U. T. System will increase buying power in public-private partnerships, which will ultimately lead to both improved learning for all students and reduced costs.

Health and Graduate Affairs Committee

_Recommendation - Alternative Research Funding Recommendation_

The University of Texas System Student Advisory Council appreciates the consideration of the Higher Education Funding Resolution by the U. T. System Administration. The resolution was provided by the 2012–2013 SAC prior to the 83rd Texas Legislative Session. The resolution supported the reconsideration of state appropriations as a portion of the overall operating budget. The Legislature’s decision, stated in their August 2013 summary, suggests an optimistic step towards improving alternative funding for institutions and students across Texas. However, the numbers fall short in regard to support of student-based research funding. Considering the Fiscal Year 2013 sequester, which affected federal funding nationwide, students were left without financial support and unable to complete the research opportunities for graduation. This decreases completion and retention rates statewide.

Federal and state funding provide some of the best support for students and institutions. With the decrease in federal funding, there is also a limited capacity to increase funding from state sources. Alternative funding options must be considered for the success of students both actively in research for their degree and for those pursuing scholarly endeavors within the U. T. System. While being explored, these resources are more difficult for students to attain on their own.

Other avenues for alternative funding have yet to be fully explored at both System and institutional levels, including institutionally derived student-professor collaborative grants, departmental seed grants, tuition revenue bonds, research/academic need-based funding, emergency hiatus funding, and various National Institutes of Health research mentoring programs. (See Appendix A for additional information.)

The Council urges the Board of Regents to actively communicate with institutional leadership to ensure that no student is left behind due to underfunding and missed research opportunities. We strongly propose that the Board consider the following to mediate student impact:

1. Advocate for funding alternatives at both the state and federal level;
2. Encourage institutions to improve efficiency at utilizing the grant enterprise;
3. Seek alternatives outside of government funding; and
4. Stay actively informed on funding throughout students' academic tenure.

The Council recommends that U. T. System Administration actively identify and distribute information to institutions about alternative funding in an effort to supplement any financial deficits in student-based research opportunities. By providing Systemwide approved alternative methods as well as other currently underutilized funding mechanisms, the U. T. System can help improve overall student success for students who rely on research funding to complete a degree.

Health and Graduate Affairs Committee

Recommendation - Support in Implementation of Guidelines for Graduate Student Advising

The University of Texas System trains over 40,000 graduate students in diverse and varied fields at fifteen campuses across the System. These students are engaged in training in advanced fields of academic scholarship, and to meet the continuing needs of the State of Texas. More than ever before, our graduates face challenging times. Federal research funding sources, including National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Science Foundation (NSF), and National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), are in decline. In stark contrast to years past, our graduates face tremendous challenges in finding opportunities upon graduation.

While U. T. System graduate programs continue to attract and train very competitive students, these individuals suffer the consequences of monumental shifts in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields, humanities, and social sciences. Facing difficult decisions upon graduation, former students often choose options for short-term stability over long-term opportunities for career satisfaction, growth, and success. As no guidelines for graduate career advising exist within the U. T. System, many students struggle to seek the employment opportunities for which they are qualified.

Academic administration in our graduate programs has long compelled graduates to seek positions within academia. However, there has been an overall reduction in academic track positions due to an increased pool of qualified applicants, low faculty turnover, and reduced promotion of junior researchers to faculty positions. The prolonged imbalance of opportunities has led to increased competition from a backlog of current postdoctoral fellows. Recent studies demonstrate that less than 23% of students graduating from accredited Ph.D. programs in STEM fields ever acquire tenure-track academic positions. Indeed, changes in the funding mechanism and hiring practices within academia have led to a situation in which the number of graduates cannot be accommodated as faculty within the current organizational structure. This conflict of institutional bias towards academic careers often leads to a shortage of career advising in non-academic track careers, thus perpetuating the problem and preventing graduates from effectively seeking opportunities outside academia.

While challenges in identifying and seeking the best opportunities are faced by graduate students across the board, historically underrepresented groups are especially likely to suffer the effects of poor or inadequate guidance in their graduate training. These groups are represented in considerable numbers in graduate education, but their prevalence in postdoctoral and faculty populations remain disproportionately low. Additionally, these groups are significantly more likely to suffer unemployment than their counterparts.
Therefore, the Council recommends the development of System-level guidelines regarding formal student advising and career services for graduate students in the U. T. System. The development of these programs should be focused on improving student outcomes Systemwide, by preparing our graduates to effectively seek and compete for the best opportunities for their qualifications.

Furthermore, the Council recommends the utilization of data regarding trends in career placement to tailor career advising and training to the needs of students, wherever feasible, including nonacademic career tracks. Finally, the Council recommends that these guidelines be incorporated into the existing Milestones Agreement for Graduate Students\textsuperscript{12,13} to ensure that this framework continues to meet its intended goals.

The development of such graduate level advising programs is anticipated to pay short-term benefits, including improved placement rates, reduced time to graduation, and reduced transitional unemployment. Furthermore, implementation of graduate advising is anticipated to provide long-term dividends, such as reduced attrition, expanded presence, and competitiveness of U. T. System graduate education.

Health and Graduate Affairs Committee

Recommendation - Support for Graduate Medical Education in Texas

It is with great gratitude that SAC recognizes the success of the Board of Regents in the expansion of residency programs in Texas. Additionally, SAC requests that the Board of Regents and U. T. System Administration continue to prioritize the expansion of graduate medical education in Texas to meet the growing needs of the state.

In 2012, SAC encouraged legislative support for existing residency programs and for additional Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) residency positions within the state. Given that the ratio of graduating medical students to first-year residency positions in Texas was 0.98:1, along with the addition of the Dell Medical School at U. T. Austin and the establishment of a medical school in the Rio Grande Valley, there is a continuously increasing discrepancy in positions for the Texas-funded students.\textsuperscript{14}

Current numbers show that 45% of Texas medical school graduates accept out-of-state residency positions\textsuperscript{15}, and the majority of these physicians will set up practice within 100 miles of their residency training program.\textsuperscript{16} It was clear that the expansion of residency programs within the state would help keep quality physicians in the state and address the urgent and unfulfilled need for physicians in Texas, which ranks 42nd nationally in physicians per capita.

In May 2013, with the urging of the U. T. System Administration, the Texas Legislature responded. Funding for graduate medical education (GME) was expanded by $16.35 million with allocations primarily to the expansion and innovation of existing programs. Hospitals that have never had ACGME programs could receive part of the $1.875 million to pursue developing programs and $7.375 million would help to expand and increase the number of
1st year residency positions in existing GME programs.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) estimates that achieving the desired 1:1:1 ratio of residency positions to medical school graduates in the state will require $11.7 million in the 2014-2015 biennium, $32.4 million in 2016-2017, and $41.63 million by 2018-2019. Therefore, continued legislative and U. T. System support will be essential.

Health and Graduate Affairs Committee

Recommendation - In Support of Exit Surveys for Graduate and Professional Students

The U. T. System Student Advisory Council recommends adopting and implementing exit surveys for graduate and professional students (with or without a degree) upon their departure from their institutions to improve the quality of graduate programs and better the student experience.

U. T. System institutions do not currently conduct standard exit surveys of graduate students to evaluate their academic and socio-cultural experiences upon completion of their period of study at each institution. It has been brought to the attention of SAC that some academic and health institutions administer exit surveys based on the Association of American Universities Data Exchange (AAUDE) requirements.

SAC has been made aware of and independently verified, similar comprehensive exit surveys conducted on graduate students by multiple institutions across the United States, such as University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, University of Wisconsin-Madison, University of Washington-Seattle, and University of California at Berkeley.

The Council recognizes that an exit survey will provide insight into many aspects of the graduate and professional students experience throughout their tenure at a U. T. System institution. An exit survey will help identify possible areas for improvement that are necessary for building academic excellence within the graduate and professional programs as well as identify key components of the institutional experience that help sustain current academic excellence within the U. T. System.

Typical exit surveys provide a compilation of questions and solicit comments regarding all facets of graduate student life at the institutions including, but not limited to, the following areas: academic advising, essential research availability, scholarly resources accessibility, work-research environment, financial conditions provided by academic appointments, housing circumstances, and general student life at System institutions.

Therefore, SAC recommends the collection of exit surveys for graduate and professional students upon their severance from the University with or without degrees to address issues of attrition and time to degree, and to seek improvements in graduate programs by collecting information about important aspects of their holistic experience at each institution. The exit survey shall provide a compilation of questions and solicit comments regarding all facets of graduate student life at the institution, including but not limited to, the areas mentioned above. To meet the needs of the students served by the U. T. System, the Council recommends that exit survey questions be drafted with input from individual institutions and programs with insight from graduate student representatives to address the changing needs
and experiences of graduate students.

Links to relevant exit surveys from other institutions are provided below. Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Texas A&M University have exit surveys that could be adapted and utilized by U. T. System institutions:

Massachusetts Institute of Technology:

Texas A&M University:
http://oqs.tamu.edu/aaude-graduate-education-exit-survey/

Financial and Legislative Affairs Committee

Recommendation - Expansion of Financial Literacy Programs for Undergraduate and Graduate Institutions

The University of Texas System Student Advisory Council recommends the U. T. System Board of Regents facilitate the implementation of financial literacy programs Systemwide in accordance with the guidelines set forth by Texas Education Code Section 51.305. Financial literacy programs can be defined as any program that aids students in their "ability to make informed judgments and take effective actions regarding the current and future use and management of money." These programs should be established and strongly promoted across the System in response to the national student debt, which is currently over 1 trillion dollars and the average debt of a student in the U. T. System, which is approximately $20,958 upon graduation.

The ever-increasing federal loan interest rates (currently at 3.86% and 5.41% for undergraduate and graduate unsubsidized loans), the removal of graduate-level subsidized loans, and students' lack of financial knowledge has impaired the success of U. T. System alumni. While there are some successful programs within the U. T. System, there is a need for uniformly effective and efficient financial literacy programs. This would allow institutions to inform their student populations about the importance of making wise financial decisions, provide much needed student support, and consequently promote time-efficient graduation rates.

The Council recommends that the Board of Regents facilitate the implementation and subsequent upkeep of financial literacy programs. We believe these programs would be most effective if they meet the following criteria:

1. Be Systemwide and easily accessible to all students and alumni;

2. Emulate effective programs currently established within the U. T. System; and

3. Address the specific financial needs of both undergraduate and graduate students.

If met, we believe the U. T. System will benefit greatly from having financially educated students that are capable of simultaneously achieving a world-class education while being able to manage their financial responsibilities.

Campus Life Committee

Recommendation - International Student Engagement Process

According to the U. T. System Fast Facts of 2013, 16,804 international students were
enrolled within our academic and health institutions as of Fall 2012. If current student population growth trends continue, there is evidence that enrollment of international students is likely to increase as well.

Each U. T. System institution is a primary point of contact for prospective international students. Most schools facilitate the acclimation of their new international students through a centralized international office that assists with advising, financial aid, counseling, and registration help to ensure that these future U. T. System students receive the highest quality educational experience that each of our respective campuses has to offer.

However, international students require a more adaptive education in order to effectively incorporate them into their new local community and student body. The Council recommends that each institution within the U. T. System develop a welcoming and engagement process to help international students with this transition, not only into the institution, but in daily life activities within the United States. For instance, U. T. Dallas provides an array of international student services, including but not limited to immigration advising, integration workshops, and peer mentoring.

Implementing similar programs will aid communication throughout international students' tenure within the U. T. System through increased involvement on campus. Ultimately, we believe this will enhance campus diversity which will benefit domestic and international students alike. We anticipate that a more invested international student population will create a more gratified student population that could help recruit students statewide and worldwide.

Therefore, in order to accommodate the needs of the U. T. System population at-large, the members of The University of Texas System Student Advisory Council propose the creation of an international student welcoming and engagement process to enhance the services provided by our respective universitites.
APPENDIX A:

Alternative Research Funding: Pertinent Data

- The U. T. System is one of the largest and most comprehensive institutions of higher education in the country, as well as one of the largest employers in Texas. The System’s nine general academic campuses educate one-third of Texas public university students, and its six health-related campuses educate two-thirds of the health professional students attending Texas public health-related institutions of higher education.\(^{24}\)

- Student enrollment at academic institutions increased significantly since 2007 from 132,487 students to over 202,138 students in 2012.

- The NIH has a $29.15 billion budget for Fiscal Year 2013, which is a decrease of approximately five percent from appropriations in Fiscal Year 2012.\(^{25}\)

- The U. T. System relies heavily on physician billing as a constant revenue stream and there is research indicating that the new Affordable Care Act may heavily impact that monetary contribution. Changes in health care delivery may have strains on other revenue sources.

- U. T. System’s Fiscal Year 2013 operating budget reports areas of growth include tuition anc fees (8.1%, $11.2 million), net sales and services of hospitals and clinics (16.5%, $626 million), and net professional fees (7.6%, $89 million). These growth areas are offset by the reduction in Federal Sponsored Programs (-4.1%, $63 million) resulting from the conclusion of many awards funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.\(^{26}\) State appropriated revenue as a percentage of overall funding for the U. T. System has decreased at an approximate average rate of 1.5% per year for three years as funding decreased from $2.2 billion in Fiscal Year 2010 to $1.9 billion in both Fiscal Year 2012 and to $1.7 billion for Fiscal Year 2013.\(^{27}\)
NOTES


14 Graduate Medical Education Report: 82nd Texas Legislature, Regular Session House Bill 2908. Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. (April 2012)


21 The U. T. System, Office of Strategic Initiatives (calculated from various data sources) (Current 2014)


