March 22, 2013

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 and over 200,000 students we are fortunate to represent, we would like to express our appreciation to the Board of Regents for providing us with the opportunity to present our recommendations for the 2012-2013 academic year.

This year, we have been afforded the opportunity to collaborate with the Faculty Advisory Council and to serve as representatives on committees that seek to improve student life and academic performance throughout the System. Our work is ongoing in these matters, and we are grateful to be included in vital discussions impacting current and future students in our System, and in some cases, our state and beyond.

The loss of Dr. Edwin Baldwin this past year has deeply impacted the members of the Student Advisory Council but his memory lives on with the profound legacy Dr. Baldwin left. Despite this loss, the Student Advisory Council members would like to express our sincere gratitude to the service and leadership of Dr. Wanda Mercer, Ms. Meredith Goode, Mr. Chris Lyons and of the many System staff who have assisted us in the past year.

The beauty of the Council is that it provides a platform for student leaders from every institution to meet and exchange ideas. We seek to advance recommendations that will positively impact students’ experiences and education throughout the institutions in the System. The Council students’ dedication to higher education is noteworthy, and we are pleased that our perspective is taken seriously. Significant time, effort, and energy are spent by each member to adequately represent the entire System.

With this letter, we are submitting recommendations passed by the Council during our February meeting as well as copies of legislative resolutions passed during the November meeting. We are honored by the invitation to discuss these recommendations and resolutions in more detail with the Board in May.
With sincere appreciation,

Xavier Johnson  
Chair, Student Advisory Council  
The University of Texas System

Enclosures
Cc:    Dr. Pedro Reyes  
       Dr. Kenneth I. Shine  
       Dr. Wanda L. Mercer
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

A Recommendation for Mentoring Programs

The University of Texas System Student Advisory Council recommends that the Board of
Regents enhance and/or implement formalized and well-supported peer, alumni and professional
mentoring programs across the institutions of The University of Texas System. The professional
and personal development of our students is critical in their transition periods. Current mentoring
programs on some of our campuses are already showing impressive evidence of building
students' skill sets and confidence levels as they prepare to face their next academic or
professional challenges. We encourage the Board of Regents to build on this momentum and
help create a rich culture of mentoring on all of our campuses.

The addition and enhancement of peer mentoring programs in our schools will benefit entry-
level students by having a positive influence on their adjustment to college life, their career
choices, and their perseverance in achieving educational goals1 (Ferrari 2004). These programs
also have the potential to positively benefit retention rates. A college student mentor is both a
friend and a role model who supports and encourages a younger partner in his or her academic
and personal growth, leading to an enhancement of his or her college experience. The upper-
level student mentor becomes a guide to entry-level students in their transition period from high
school to college and their adaptation to student life. There are benefits for both mentors and
mentees to participate in such programs, including a great sense of belonging and community. In
addition, the mentoring culture promoted in our schools can also involve more alumni and
professional help with upper-level students transitioning to post-graduate life, whether that
includes graduate or professional school or the beginning of their careers.

The importance of mentors in a student’s academic experience cannot be
overemphasized. While mentors come in many forms, alumni and professionals can offer a
unique perspective on changes in job outlook, what employers are looking for, and how to make
a resume more competitive for entry into a desired field. In addition, for students unsure of what
they want to pursue in the future, the opportunity to interact with alumni who graduated in their
discipline can be invaluable. This is especially relevant today with a still-recovering economy
and more students entering professional fields unrelated to their degrees.

Many of the schools in the UT System have mentoring programs associated with specific schools
within the university. For example, UT Austin has well developed mentoring programs for pre-

health profession students, women in engineering, and for students in the School of Law. UT Arlington has an arrangement with the AT&T legal department to guide their pre-law students, and UT El Paso has recently launched a new program called the Career Mentoring Program, an alumni and professional mentoring initiative. Health institutions such as UT Health Science Center Houston and UT Medical Branch have also implemented programs that allow students to network with graduate school alumni either in person, at specific career fair days or online. This access allows graduate students to look at a range of potential careers outside of academia.

While these are great programs, they are not inclusive of the diverse range of disciplines for which degrees are conferred by the UT System institutions. Currently UT Dallas, UT Permian Basin, and UT San Antonio all offer comprehensive career mentor networks utilizing both area professionals and alumni. With all the areas of study represented students are better able to make an informed decision about their career goals. The programs in place at these institutions could serve as models for the other institutions to improve upon already existing mentoring services.

Mentoring, whether done through peers, faculty, staff, alumni or members of the professional community, is an essential part of the college and graduate school experience. It builds networking and communication skills, opens doors of opportunity and helps prepare our students in meeting their next personal, academic or professional challenge. By supporting a culture of mentoring at all UT institutions, the Board of Regents could make a meaningful impact on our students' experience and enhance the top quality education they are already receiving in the classroom.

Financial and Legislative Affairs

A Recommendation for Referendum Responses

Student referenda are an important part of student self-governance and provide a meaningful way for students to provide input regarding issues affecting them and rectify needs on their campuses. Student referenda have been used to fund sustainability programs, student unions, activity and fitness centers, and to amend student government constitutions for various institutions in The University of Texas System.

The University of Texas System Student Advisory Council recognizes that the Board of Regents holds ultimate authority over the outcome of such referenda. However, the status of referenda once they have left the hands of the students is often unclear. Past failure to clearly approve or reject student referenda has led to uncertainty and a lack of transparency between the Board of Regents and students.

Therefore, in order to ensure that student referenda remain an impactful and substantial mechanism for student self-governance, the Council strongly recommends the Board of Regents formally respond to student referenda in a timely and reasonable manner with an official written declaration of its decision. Additionally, we ask that the Board of Regents notify the leaders of the institution's student government, or respective body, regarding the Board's decision and
announce the decision as a matter of record. If a referendum is rejected by the Board of Regents, we also request that an explanation of the decision be put forth.

Health and Graduate Affairs

_A Recommendation for Changes to the Milestones Agreement Form for Graduate Degree Programs_

The University of Texas System Student Advisory Council would like to acknowledge the University of Texas System Milestones Agreement Form template as an important step to provide structure for graduate degree programs. However, the Student Advisory Council feels that this structure would be further improved by a document that functions as an agreement of mutual understanding between the student, the academic advisors, the supervising professor, and the graduate studies committee. The current agreement between the student and academic advisor is insufficient because the supervising professor and graduate studies committee also play an important role in the progress of the student. The institution’s Milestones Agreement Form should be drafted with involvement from students and should clearly outline the responsibilities of each party as determined by individual programs.

The Milestones Agreement Form currently outlines consequences for the student should they not reach their milestones. Recognizing the importance of providing a supportive environment for students, we recommend that this be extended to any party that fails to meet their obligation of responsibilities as outlined in the agreement. Acknowledging that the success of an individual’s course of study is fully contingent upon the student’s relationship with their mentoring professor and laboratory, the Milestones Agreement Form should include a mechanism for effective third party consequence resolution between the advisor, student, and mentoring professor.

It would further be beneficial to implement a system by which all students have the option of exploring relationships with different supervising professors and the individual cultures of laboratories available before committing to a program and its associated research. This measure would maximize efficient time in the laboratory and better ensure productive, successful relationships during the tenure of the student’s program. These measures are already in place at some campuses, and have been demonstrated to be effective at addressing these concerns. This is especially important to international students, whose study time is constrained by a visa, requiring graduation within the expected time.

These suggestions would further the goals of Focus Seven of the Framework for Advancing Excellence throughout The University of Texas System: Action Plan. Under point B “mentor and advise Ph.D. students” it would “improve Ph.D. student advising to shorten time to degree” by mandating clear and mutually accepted requirements for advancement. More than the current Milestones Agreement Form, it would further point C “incentivize shortened time to complete
Ph.D. to "set clear criteria and expectations in an agreement, between student and department regarding time-to-completion including incentives, deadlines, and consequences for failing to meet expectations," by including consequences for all involved parties that fail to meet expectations -- not just students. These inclusions will result in a more comprehensive, balanced, and successful Milestones Agreement Form and help fulfill its ultimate goal of improving graduate education.

A Recommendation for the Consideration of a Network of Opportunities for Students

The University of Texas System makes a significant investment in identifying, attracting, matriculating, and educating high quality undergraduate and graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and junior faculty members. It is in the interest of the University to consider a mechanism between the individual institutions to further the return it receives on these investments in human capital. By creating a network that centralizes information concerning opportunities in research and employment, the System would both increase the number of post-graduation opportunities for its students and would increase the number of high quality applicants to fill positions within the system. Such a facilitation of transitions within the University of Texas System as students progress through their career improves the quality of training and expands career opportunities for students. This initiative will provide an opportunity to retain high quality students and further foster pride within the University of Texas System.

To leverage the investment in these students, we therefore recommend the Board of Regents consider the possibility of developing an inter-campus network of students engaged in academic fields. We envision an effective conduit of information to match students with opportunities and opportunities with students. We recommend that this pursuit engage a representative assembly of faculty members, program administrators, and students from representative campuses to outline the goals of such a network, and to consider possible mechanisms to deliver upon these aims. The UT System careers network and the myEdu framework both represent potential mechanisms to deliver these services.

Recognizing that diversity in academic background is critical for the continued success of and pursuit of excellence in our institutions, we neither propose nor intend to create a single point of entry for the institutions but rather to provide an opportunity to streamline the process of transition for parties interested in remaining within the university. We believe that the consideration of a mechanism to promote these transitions strengthens, rather than hinders, the goals of the university by providing the best opportunities to high quality students within the University of Texas System in accordance with the mission of the University.
Campus Life

Our first campus life recommendation regarding online representation is provided as a response to recommendations from the System for SAC to consider representation of online students in campus student governments. Given the complex and varied structures of our student governments across the system, SAC thought it best that online representation be determined at the level of individual institutions. The details and rationale are contained below:

Campus Life Recommendation on Online Representation

After much deliberation and discussion on the suggestion to reserve a seat for online and distance education students on student governments across the UT system, the Campus Life Committee is not convinced that a Senate seat should be reserved for students enrolled in distance education and online programs. Recognizing the fact that the UT system is composed of 15 diverse institutions with varied population and demographics, the committee recommends the institutions to increase their outreach to this student group in ways they feel appropriate.

All 15 institutions have varied student government structures and election systems that do not necessarily co-align with this recommendation. Certainly, the population of distance education and online students varies across the system campuses. In addition, Student Governments across the system already have programs in place to increase their outreach to students. Furthermore, we believe these students are already represented in their institution’s current structure.

SAC recommends that the Board of Regents recognize the unique nature of these individual institutions and allow Student Governments to evaluate these issues individually.

Campus Life Recommendation for an Electronic-Textbook Library

The University of Texas System Student Advisory Council recommends that the UT System implement an electronic-textbook library service such as Vital Source Bookshelf to be initiated at the discretion of the institutions. These services would be beneficial to both the institution and students, as it would provide textbooks to the students in a cost effective manner. Forbes recently cited a study conducted by Trenton College which reported in 2011 that a college student on average spends $1,168\(^2\) on books and supplies per year. Additionally, the integration of these services would allow for the use of innovative content delivery systems. Since providing effective online learning resources is central to the mission statement of the Institute of Transformational Learning, we also recommend that these programs be supported by the aforementioned Institute. The decreased financial burden placed on the student would allow more focus to be placed on academics and thereby advance the System’s goal of timely graduation rates.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS SYSTEM STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL
RESOLUTIONS 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 resolutions to the U. T. Board of Regents. These resolutions concern a wide variety of students at multiple institutions in the U. T. System.

Resolution 1

Higher Education Funding

WHEREAS state appropriation revenue as a percentage of overall funding for the University of Texas System has decreased at an approximate average rate of 1.5% per year for three years as funding has decreased from $2.2 billion in FY 2010 to $1.9 billion in both FY 2012 and FY 2013; and,

WHEREAS this decline in funding has occurred as enrollment in the University of Texas System has increased by an average of 2.6% annually since 2007 from 194,199 students to over 215,109 students in 2012; and,

WHEREAS this decline is further aggravated by the effects of inflation, which has increased by an average of 2.23% each year since 2007; and,

WHEREAS this combination has severe consequences for the cost and quality of education received, such as: increased student-to-faculty ratios, decreased course availability, reduced student services, academic department reductions, inadequate facilities; and,

WHEREAS all of these consequences combine to adversely affect the ultimate goal of education of Texas students by hindering progress in the improvement of retention and graduation rates; and,

WHEREAS every 5% cut in state appropriations results in increased costs amounting to $500 per student at academic institutions and $7,000 per student at medical and nursing institutions; and,

WHEREAS investment in higher education is a proven form of economic stimulus, resulting in an eightfold return on every dollar invested; and,

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3 University of Texas System Operating Budget Summary Reports: Fiscal Years 2010 - 2013
4 University of Texas System: Tuition & Revenue Analyses 2012, IPEDS
5 US Inflation Calculator, Historical Annual Average 2007 - 2011
7 The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Key Recommendations for 81st Legislature 2009
http://www.oeddbetterlifeindex.org/topics/education/.
WHEREAS the higher education of Texas citizens increases the competitiveness of the Texas economy, produces new research and ideas, and increases civic understanding and participation⁸; therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED that the University of Texas System Student Advisory Council urges the Texas State Legislature to renew its financial support for the University of Texas System by considering the ratio of state appropriations as a portion of the overall operating budget as an important metric when considering funding allocations for higher education and working to restore recession era cuts to higher education funding.

⁸ [Link](http://www.texastribune.org/texas-education/higher-education/texas-university-chancellors-brace-for-budget-cuts/)
Resolution 2
Continue Aid For Undocumented Students Attending UT System Schools

WHEREAS undocumented students face economic struggles and have limited access to career opportunities; and,

WHEREAS these students positively contribute to diversity, cultural awareness, and education within the University of Texas System in a manner that benefits all students; and,

WHEREAS in 2009, the number of international and undocumented students enrolled in Texas higher education institutions was 12,138, roughly one percent of the student population¹⁹; and

WHEREAS by 2020, an estimated 325,000 international and undocumented students in Texas are projected to qualify for the DREAM Act²¹⁰; and,

WHEREAS the University of Texas System informs national representatives about the importance and benefits associated with the passage of the DREAM (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) Act, a bipartisan legislation developed by U.S. Senator Orin Hatch (R-UT) and U.S. Senator Richard Durbin (D-IL), where qualifying undocumented students could be eligible for a 6-year process to attain citizenship that requires the completion of a bachelor’s degree or two years of military service; therefore,

WHEREAS undocumented students can be a functional part of the economy and as a result, the state of Texas could gain $66 billion in economic activity by 2030 through areas such as tax revenue and labor income if DREAM Act students were eligible to apply for jobs after graduation²; therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED that the University of Texas System Student Advisory Council urges the University of Texas System to actively recognize and help undocumented students in Texas so that they can be afforded the opportunity to be active, contributing members of society in a positive way; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the University of Texas System continues to support in-state tuition for undocumented immigrants through House Bill 1403 during the 77th Legislative Session in 2001, which has been an evident assistance for undocumented students who are attending a college or university.

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¹⁹ Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

¹⁰ Center American Progress
Resolution 3
Funding Hazlewood Exemptions

WHEREAS the University of Texas System Schools offer many programs unique to veterans including tutoring services, peer-to-peer mentoring programs, counseling and mental health services, and career and job placement services; and,

WHEREAS according to surveys done by the University of Texas System Office of Academic Affairs the University of Texas System Institutions served 8,603 veterans in fall 2011; and,

WHEREAS there are over 950,000 veterans in the state of Texas; and,

WHEREAS section 54.203 of the Texas Higher Education Code, otherwise known as the Hazlewood Exemption, provides phenomenal access to higher education for veterans and their dependents by exempting them from “the payment of tuition, dues, fees, and other required charges;” and,

WHEREAS the University of Texas system academic and health institutions serve more than 15% of the population of Hazelwood recipients statewide and benefits/exemptions at the University of Texas System institutions were close to $17 million in 2011, an amount that has increased by about $10 million since 2008; and,

WHEREAS the universities in the state of Texas lost $72 million in revenue in 2011\textsuperscript{11}; therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED that the students of the University of Texas System need the Texas Legislature to provide funding to cover the revenue lost as a result of Hazlewood Exemptions;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED the University of Texas System Student Advisory Council speaks only to the needs of the students at our respective institutions, and makes no statement for the University of Texas System.

\textsuperscript{11} The Texas Tribune
http://www.texastribune.org/texas-education/higher-education/tuition-exemptions-veterans-under-microscope/
Resolution 4
Concealed Handgun Carry on University Campuses

WHEREAS, colleges and universities have a legal duty to adopt policies to promote a safe environment for students, faculty, and staff; and

WHEREAS, school shootings at Virginia Tech (2007), Northern Illinois University (2008) and other universities across the nation have led to a heightened demand for security; and

WHEREAS, following the Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University shootings, legislation was introduced in at least 18 states regarding the possession of firearms on campus\(^{12}\); and

WHEREAS, one state - Utah - passed legislation in 2004 that prohibits public schools or state institutions of higher education from adopting or enforcing any "policy pertaining to firearms that in anyway inhibits or restricts the possession or use of firearms on either public or private property\(^{13}\);" and,

WHEREAS, 23 state governments allow institutions to adopt their own gun policies\(^{14}\); and

WHEREAS, educational, law enforcement professionals and students at various institutions have non-concurring opinions on the bill; and,

WHEREAS, many of our students oppose permitting concealed handguns on campus; and

WHEREAS, permitting concealed carry presents safety and financial implications that are unique to each individual campus; and

BE IT RESOLVED that the University of Texas System Student Advisory Council is against permitting concealed handgun carry on campus but at a minimum the Texas Legislature should defer the policy decision pertaining to firearms on campuses to the respective institutions (student input); and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED the University of Texas System Student Advisory Council speaks only to the needs of the students at our respective institutions, and makes no statement for the University of Texas System.

\(^{12}\) The Arizona Daily Star
http://azstarnet.com/article_82a2e010-74c6-11df-bca4-001cc4c002e0.html

\(^{13}\) Ibid.

\(^{14}\) The National Conference of State Legislatures
Resolution 5
Increase in Number of Medical Residency Positions in Texas

WHEREAS the addition of the University of Texas at Austin Medical School and potential establishment of a medical school in the Rio Grande Valley, along with the increasing class sizes of already established programs, will lead to a rapidly increasing number of medical students graduating from Texas medical schools; and,

WHEREAS the continuous pursuit of excellence in the training of Texas physicians requires medical students to complete an Accredited Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) residency training program; and,

WHEREAS the University of Texas System Executive Vice Chancellor for Health Affairs, Dr. Kenneth Shine, recognizes the need for concomitant increases of in-state ACGME residency positions with rising enrollment numbers; and,

WHEREAS the increasing number of medical school graduates seeking to further their education will aggravate the limited capacity of the currently funded ACGME accredited residency positions in Texas. Furthermore, Texas has a 0.98:1 residency position to medical student ratio, as compared to a 3:1 ratio in the state of New York\textsuperscript{15,16}; additionally,

WHEREAS this deficit, compounded with the nearly 100% fill rate for available Texas residency positions, will continue to drive Texas-funded and trained medical students out of Texas unless the number of ACGME accredited residency positions is concomitantly increased; and,

WHEREAS the majority of physicians set up practice within 100 miles of their residency training\textsuperscript{17}; and,

WHEREAS inadequate residency positions for Texas medical graduates contributes to about 45% of graduates accepting out of state positions\textsuperscript{18}; and,

WHEREAS the state of Texas invests more than $200,000 per medical graduate\textsuperscript{15} and 1,498 students graduated from Texas medical schools in 2011\textsuperscript{14}, Texas forfeited approximately $135 million last year due to inadequate availability of ACGME residency positions\textsuperscript{16,19}; and,

\textsuperscript{17} Udall, Pam, Brent Annear. \textit{Texas Medical Students Forced to Leave the State}. Texas Medical Association. www.texmed.org. September 2010
\textsuperscript{18} Ackerman, Todd. \textit{Too few doctors: Texas' shortage of medical residency positions puts all of us in a bind}. Houston Chronicle. www.chron.com. November 2010
WHEREAS this loss of physicians contributes to an urgent and unmet need for qualified physicians\textsuperscript{20} and the state of Texas ranks 42nd nationally in physicians per capita, falling well below the national average; therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED the University of Texas System Student Advisory Council strongly encourages the restoration and expansion of Texas legislative support for existing residency programs as well as support for additional ACGME residency positions within Texas to meet the urgent demand for quality physicians and protect investments in medical student education and training.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED the University of Texas System Student Advisory Council recommends that expansion of the medical residency program within Texas be developed with the focus of creating nationally competitive residency positions to attract and retain the best physicians to serve the State of Texas, and that this aim be pursued by the expansion, rather than the reallocation of current funding strategies.