



SENATE OF COLLEGE COUNCILS  
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

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April 25, 2011

Dear Members of The University of Texas System Board of Regents,

On behalf of the students at The University of Texas at Austin, we want to first thank you for your service on the Board of Regents and for your dedication and commitment to higher education. During this time of pressing economic concerns, we, as students, also want to express our views on current discussions concerning research and teaching, as well as blended and online learning. Furthermore, we would urge the Board to be more transparent and to seek out and consider student opinion as these discussions occur.

As students who will be impacted by these discussions, we desire to have a role in the decisions being made that will affect our institution. We are eager to provide the student perspective on decisions being made, particularly regarding the Task Force on Blended and Online Learning and the Task Force on University Excellence and Productivity. Students are impacted by the decisions made at all levels and we want to work together with the Board of Regents to ensure that we maintain an education of excellence at UT-Austin.

While we understand that each System school has a unique mission, we want to ensure that the core mission of UT-Austin is achieved and that it remains an institution whose students can “transform lives for the benefit of society.” The primary responsibility of UT-Austin is to train the future leaders of Texas and to empower students to make a positive difference in our state. We believe that lives cannot be transformed without significant teacher-student interaction in the classroom and without a strong emphasis on the core values of our University, especially learning and discovery, and the need for those values to remain intermingled.

Recent conversations at the Regent level concerning students have considered separating research and teaching. The Boyer Report, often referred to as “A Blueprint for America’s Research Universities,” states that “everyone at a university should be a discoverer, a learner. That shared mission binds together all that happens on a campus. The teaching responsibility of the university is to make all its students participants in the mission.” While some argue that students at the research university do not have world-class researchers as teachers, this is simply not true at UT-Austin. In fact, according to teaching load policies, many of our colleges and schools mandate tenure-track faculty to teach at least two undergraduate courses to meet student demand. Additionally, we understand that the value of our institution rests on its cutting-edge research and world-class faculty.

Another conversation that students would like to be a part of concerns the role of “soft” research in public institutions. As students at UT-Austin, we support any type of research, technical or “soft,” because we recognize that all types of research are central to UT-Austin’s mission of promoting intellectual curiosity, equipping students with critical thinking skills and fostering in students the zeal to engage in inquiry-based learning. While some may argue that “soft” research fails to provide a substantial return to the economy and does not aid UT in university rankings, the rank and prestige of our peer and Ivy League institutions prove otherwise. Texas must continue its commitment to research in higher education and

continue to produce leaders in all fields of study or the University will be left behind by states and our peer institutions that continue a commitment to research.

Research has a substantial impact on the quality of our institution and the state of the Texas economy. Diluting the role of research in undergraduate education at UT would decrease the value of the degrees sought by students and would diminish the competitiveness of Texas' students when applying to jobs and graduate schools across the country. At UT-Austin, we are committed to maintaining the University's research priority in order to remain competitive with our fellow Tier 1 institutions and to enable students to remain competitive in the job market.

UT-Austin's students are also concerned about the ongoing discussions regarding blended and online learning. One of the reasons students are attracted to UT-Austin is its world-class faculty. If the Board of Regents elects to transfer a percentage of courses online, UT-Austin student risk losing one of the most important parts of their education: their relationship with faculty. Students believe they can be engaged in technology in the classroom, particularly in their large classrooms; however, the decision is not one or the other. Students still want and need interaction with faculty members. Technology should be used to enhance the classroom experience, not replace it. The quality of our institution, and the value of our degrees, is something students do not want sacrificed. At UT-Austin, the Course Transformation Program aims to integrate technology tools into classroom learning, while not replacing the faculty member in the learning process. Students believe a hybrid model that integrates technology into the classroom is more effective than replacing courses with online coursework.

Any decisions made will significantly impact our education. Access and affordability may well need to be part of the conversation, but we are extremely concerned with the quality of our institution and degrees. We encourage you to make high quality education the bottom-line in all of your discussions. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at our respective e-mails listed below. Thank you for your time and for taking the student perspective into consideration. We hope that you will continue to seek student involvement and feedback as the Task Forces meet to discuss UT-Austin and the other System schools. We are ready to engage in discussions immediately and look forward to working with you in the upcoming year.

Sincerely,



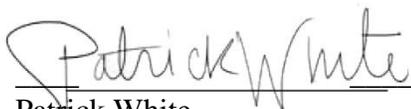
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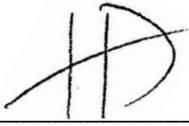
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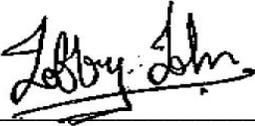
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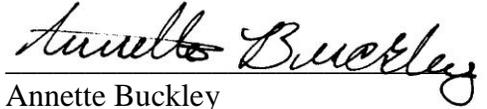
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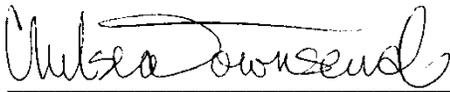
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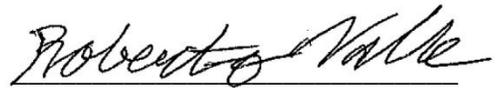
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