

## EXCERPT FROM THE MINUTES

MAR 10 2009

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### U. T. System Board of Regents: Adoption of resolution regarding enhanced academic efficiency and productivity

On May 21, 2008, Governor Perry convened a meeting of members of the Boards of Regents of all public institutions of higher education in Texas to discuss seven proposed "breakthrough solutions" related to higher education. Two solutions, related to putting State funding directly in the hands of students and creating new accrediting alternatives, were reported as beyond the purview of the State's public institutions of higher education and were not the subject of this discussion. The remaining five solutions are summarized as follows:

Breakthrough solution 1 – Measure teaching efficiency and effectiveness and publicly recognize extraordinary teachers

Breakthrough solution 2 – Recognize and reward extraordinary teachers

Breakthrough solution 3 – Split research and teaching budgets to encourage excellence

Breakthrough solution 4 – Require evidence of teaching skill for tenure

Breakthrough solution 5 – Use "results-based" contracts with students to measure quality

During a subsequent smaller telephone meeting of invited Regents, each public university system was asked to provide a summary of what was currently being done related to the proposed solutions. The University of Texas System responded, as requested, with detailed statements concerning the five proposals.

Additional meetings of invited Regents and higher education officials were held in December 2008 and February 2009 to further discuss higher education reforms. On January 13, 2009, a document titled *Higher Education Reforms* was sent to U. T. System calling for actions within specific timeframes.

Executive Vice Chancellor Prior provided the remarks set forth on the following page concerning efforts of the U. T. System to enhance academic efficiency and productivity in relation to the proposed higher education reforms described as "breakthrough solutions."



Remarks by Executive Vice Chancellor Prior on Higher Education Reforms  
A University of Texas System Perspective

As requested, this report will provide The University of Texas System perspective on the proposed higher education reforms that arose from the Governor's Higher Education Summit last May (2008), and that have been the subject of subsequent meetings.

I will also report on some of the ways in which the U. T. System continuously seeks excellence in teaching, research, and service in a context of transparency, accountability, rewards, and incentives, thus addressing the topics of the reforms.

I would like to begin by stating unequivocally that the U. T. System, with its 15 diverse institutions, strongly embraces change and innovation.

All across the System, our institutions are continuously innovating to provide the very best educational experiences for our students.

Not surprisingly, our new Chancellor's leadership vision is for us to "strive for continual improvement if we are to achieve preeminence." He says to build a "state-of-the-art 21st century university system" we must have as our base "a paradigm of creative renewal."

Throughout our System, such creative renewal builds on educational processes, practices, and policies that have been evolved thoughtfully and systematically, that have been rigorously tested, and that are found to be effective.

The Board is aware that a series of "breakthrough solutions" later defined as "Higher Education Reforms" have been brought forward by Governor Perry. As noted in the Agenda Book, two of the solutions are not relevant to this discussion, and the other five solutions are listed as follows:

1. Measure teaching efficiency and effectiveness and publicly recognize extraordinary teachers
2. Recognize and reward extraordinary teachers
3. Split research and teaching budgets to encourage excellence
4. Require evidence of teaching skill for tenure
5. Use "results-based" contracts with students to measure quality.

At the request of the Governor's Office, we provided a summary of what is currently being done related to those concepts, which included more than 40 statements about current activity related to:

- teaching effectiveness
- evaluation of teaching
- recognition of outstanding faculty
- our Accountability Report
- teaching and research budgets
- the importance of teaching and tenure
- the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA)
- the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) accreditation focus on learning outcomes.

The U. T. System views these issues to be very important but differs in detail with some of the solutions in the proposed reforms in favor of proven and successful System policies and practices. Subsequently, and again at the request of the Governor's Office, we provided another detailed description of existing policies and practices in response to questions regarding implementation of specific suggested reform actions. Our response indicated different approaches and methods to achieve the same objectives, and though the U. T. System response was not exactly as described in the breakthrough reforms, it was nevertheless a comprehensive statement. It addressed, for example:

- faculty roles and teaching load reporting
- the annual Accountability Report
- an ongoing study of faculty activities
- faculty evaluations
- the importance placed on teaching
- the new U. T. System Regents' teaching awards
- teaching and tenure based upon comprehensive assessments.



On January 13, 2009, a document titled *Higher Education Reforms* was received from staff in the Governor's Office as a directive calling for specific actions by Systems and institutions on specific timelines. This list of reforms and dates can be found in the document provided to you under the broad headings of transparency, accountability, and incentives and rewards. (Dr. Prior's handout is on Page 9.) The topic of transparency requires that students evaluate faculty performance for each course, and that faculty make course syllabi available in a timely manner. The topic of accountability includes making a wide range of information available to prospective and current students about individual faculty, courses, and degree programs. The topic of incentives and rewards calls for faculty teaching awards based solely on student evaluations. It has been made clear that implementation of these reforms is not optional, with actions taken and updates of progress to be provided to the Governor's Office.

Accordingly, the U. T. System Office of Academic Affairs has been carefully considering and analyzing each of the reforms to understand their purpose, predict benefits, and identify potential unintended consequences.

As a very positive step forward, a meeting was held with Governor's staff last week to seek further understanding of the reforms, clarification of their objectives, to understand whether present and planned U. T. System policies and practices comply, and to what extent further action is necessary.

As the Regents will know, transparency, incentives and rewards, and accountability have been, and continue to be, key focus areas for the U. T. System. The structured linkage between the System Strategic Plan, institutional strategic plans, annual institutional compacts, annual presidential work plans, and the System's annual Accountability Report, which addresses all levels of the System, is a model for others.

As such, it is possible to report some important areas of compliance with the *Higher Education Reforms* where we believe our practices may be superior to those proposed, and some areas that are the focus of our continuous improvement practice. In our discussions with the Governor's staff, it appeared that we had a general, shared understanding, and in many areas, agreement, certainly regarding the transparency and incentives and rewards themes.

Considering first the transparency theme:

- We are in compliance with the reforms as stated for both faculty evaluations and course syllabi.
- We already conduct student evaluations of faculty for each course. Examples of faculty evaluation forms have already been forwarded to



the Governor's Office. It should be noted that different institutional, disciplinary missions, and modes of instruction mean there are necessarily differences in evaluation details.

- We are examining the suitability of a structured approach in which some evaluation questions are common across the System and then supplemented by others that are more targeted.
- U. T. System institutions that presently do not make student evaluations of faculty available online are addressing this issue.
- We agree on the importance of syllabus information for students and each course syllabus will be posted on the departmental or faculty Web site by the registration period for the semester in which the course will be taught.
- As part of our continuous improvement practice, we are currently engaged in an ongoing, comprehensive study of faculty activity. With the support of the U. T. System Faculty Advisory Council (FAC), the study will include a review of teaching, research, and service roles; System policies on teaching; teaching data for each institution and discipline; and research productivity.

Considering next the incentives and rewards theme:

- We have in place at each institution an annual faculty evaluation process in which teaching is one of several criteria. Each institution also gives awards that recognize excellence in teaching, based both on student and peer input.
- We have designed and introduced an entirely new system of teaching awards, following the Governor's first Summit last May. As you know, this Board has created and funded the Regents' Outstanding Teachers Awards with an extremely rigorous and objective selection process. The successful candidates must have clearly demonstrated their commitment to teaching, a sustained capability to deliver excellence to the undergraduate learning experience, sustained high performance in student exit (end-of-course) evaluations for more than one undergraduate degree course, evidence of high evaluation scores and trends, absence of grade inflation patterns, and positive written comments.
- We believe these awards, involving a total commitment by this System of \$10 million over the next five years, are among the most positive incentives to high-quality teaching in the nation.
- We believe that the selection process is very rigorous, comprehensive, and involves complementary factors such as student evaluations, peer review, and external reviews and is a much more reliable measure of teaching excellence than one based solely on student evaluations.



Finally, considering the accountability theme, it became clear in discussion with the Governor's staff that there remain opportunities for further clarification of objectives and the institutional actions that would be considered to be compliant. For example, one objective clearly described by the Governor's staff is the provision of information that will assist prospective students and families in their choice of institutions and degree programs. On the other hand, contrary to the original document, it was made clear that comparison of individual faculty was not an objective.

- We believe our annual Accountability Report contains a wealth of information, which describes activities and outcomes at both the System and institutional levels.
- We further believe our System's participation in the national Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) addresses the key objective of providing a wide range of summary information in an attractive, easily accessible format to a wide variety of constituencies. This is done via a Web-based template where each institution provides data regarding several key topics, including institutional profile data, student success, student satisfaction, student learning outcomes, a college cost calculator, links to specific schools, colleges or degree programs, and other information prospective students may want to know about a particular institution.
- As a System, we are in various stages of implementation of the VSA, but we believe we are far ahead of others in the State. An important near-term goal is complete implementation by all System institutions.
- We believe that an important area of continuous improvement will be greater continuity of institutional and degree program information through Web sites, providing more local detail and complementing the VSA format.

In summary, the Board should know that we share the objectives of the *Higher Education Reforms* and are generally compliant with the spirit of many of them, but in many areas we are using approaches that we consider to be superior. At the very least, they are consistent with strongly held U. T. System principles and values that are successful in the pursuit of academic excellence. Very simply, we do not believe one size fits all. Some details of the reforms suggest fundamental differences about the way higher education should be organized and managed, especially with regard to the role of the faculty.

Moreover, there are widely and nationally accepted best practices and standards that we aim to exceed. Our reputation depends upon it. At the same time, you will know that we never reject change out-of-hand, and embrace continuous innovation linked closely to accountability.

We welcome the attention being drawn by the Governor's Office to various opportunities for improvement within the themes of transparency, accountability, and incentives and rewards.

Such issues are of critical importance to all public institutions and we will continue to assess the efficacy of our existing policies and practices.

Finally, let me reaffirm our commitment to creativity and innovation for educational excellence so that we serve the very best interests of generations of young Texans who seek opportunity through higher education.