



STUDENT GOVERNMENT

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

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

I wanted to share with you my impressions after visiting Tempe, Arizona and spending the day on the campus of Arizona State University. First, I would like to sincerely thank Regent Cranberg, Regent Pejovich, and System officials for including me on the trip to Arizona. The site visit was thought provoking, and quite the experience to have in my first full day in office serving as Student Body President at The University of Texas at Austin. I hope we have more opportunities to collaborate as the year progresses.

A number of things struck me about ASU, its current initiatives, and its plans for the future. My general impression is that ASU has made some dramatic changes in recent years that have been nothing short of transformative. What remains to be seen, however, is what impact these reforms will have on the long-term quality and mission of ASU.

Though it appears as if these changes, including increased access to online classes, the consolidation and streamlining of departments, and a focus on use-inspired rather than intellectually-inspired research, have put ASU closer to its goals, these goals are not appropriate for all universities. Particularly, I do not think they are in line with the mission and direction of The University of Texas at Austin.

I was struck by the vast differences between ASU and UT-Austin. Officials at ASU made it clear that ASU wanted to be an institution defined by its high degree of inclusiveness and ability to manufacture a significant number of degrees at a low cost. I think this goal is admirable, and perhaps there are institutions in the State of Texas that could serve this purpose. However, UT-Austin cannot be expected to be such an institution. UT-Austin, rather, is defined by its academic rigor, excellence, and support for the intellectually curious who are looking to answer the world's questions. Academic research and the ability to recruit top students, both graduate and undergraduate, are essential to UT's identity.

ASU and UT are not comparable in many ways other than size. According to several of the meetings we had during our visit, when ASU was looking to cut costs, they dismantled and consolidated academic departments in many of the traditional disciplines. This was not detrimental to their standings because most of these departments did not have significant standing to begin with. I found it particularly telling that one of ASU's top programs nationally, the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism, was left virtually untouched during many of these changes. Clearly ASU understood that it would be harmful to attempt to reinvent a top-notch program. At UT, many of our departments are comparable in standing to the Cronkite School; it would be unwise to think that such

highly regarded and important programs should be dismantled, as their prominent national standing would be dramatically and negatively impacted.

I think it is important to be aware of where ASU and UT-Austin have been, and where they are going. ASU has graduation rates hovering around 50 percent after 6 years of undergraduate work, and it is ranked outside of the top 100 colleges and universities by U.S. News and World Report. UT-Austin, on the other hand, has graduation rates around 80 percent and is consistently ranked among the top 50 institutions in the nation.

It is clear to me that these two institutions are not comparable. I think it is detrimental to UT-Austin to attempt to compare it to Arizona State University. This severely undermines UT's reputation of excellence. Additionally, attempts to apply aspects of ASU's model to UT-Austin would be damaging to one of the country's top institutions. ASU and UT-Austin are serving different constituencies and needs, and should be allowed to continue to do so. From a student perspective, I value having researchers teach my classes, and my courses in the vast array of disciplines have added immeasurable worth to my education. I cannot speak about the other institutions in The University of Texas System, but I know UT-Austin values its place as the flagship institution in our system and place in the State.

I am from Tempe, and I spent more than 10 years living and going to school about six miles from Arizona State University. There are important reasons I did not go to ASU and why I left and chose to attend The University of Texas at Austin. I wanted to be challenged, to grow intellectually, and to go to a school where I would be surrounded by students with similar drive. I knew that I would find none of these things at ASU. Our trip last week showed me that I had indeed made the right decision. ASU's model may work well for ASU, but would be harmful if we attempted to make it fit at UT-Austin. What I value about my education at UT-Austin is our commitment to excellence, our dedication to research and inquiry, and our environment that encourages growth and learning.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [REDACTED] or at [REDACTED]. Thank you for your time and for considering my perspective on this important matter. I hope that you will continue to seek student involvement and perspective as the various Task Forces meet to discuss our great institutions. I look forward to working together in the coming year.

Sincerely,



Natalie Butler  
Student Body President, The University of Texas at Austin