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Office of the Chancellor

601 Colorado Street Austin, Texas 78701-2982

Memorandum

August 7, 2014

MEMORANDUM

TO: Executive Officers
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FROM: Francisco G. Cigarroa, M.D. *Francisco G. Cigarroa*

SUBJECT: Guidance on Admissions at U. T. System Institutions

When the U. T. System offices of General Counsel and Academic Affairs issued a report on the U. T. Austin admissions' inquiry in May 2014, it offered several findings and recommendations. As followup, Drs. Greenberg and Reyes provided guidance to the academic campuses and health institutions, and I wanted to share with you my direction on System Administration's new processes on admissions.

The first of those is to stress that no System Administration employee may purposefully interact with any of our campuses to inquire about the status of a student applicant or to make verbal recommendations related to such students.

The second point is related to providing letters of recommendation for college admissions applicants – whether those letters are received from an outside source or if you have been asked personally to provide a letter of recommendation. Writing letters of recommendation for admissions is an age-old tradition, but one that we must look at carefully and critically going forward.

It is of the utmost importance that all letters of recommendation for any prospective college admissions applicant must be submitted through the

established campus process, never directly to the president or a dean, including letters received from others. If you are formally asked to provide a letter of recommendation, you should know the student personally and provide information of substance about the applicant that would be an important addition to their application. You should use personal letterhead, not official U. T. letterhead. You may identify your official position, particularly if it is relevant to the recommendation, such as when the applicant worked in your office. If you receive a letter of recommendation for an admissions applicant, please reply to the sender that all letters of recommendations should be submitted through the establish campus process. A resource for best practices related to letters of recommendation is attached.

Please convey these new processes to your respective departments and feel free to call my office if you or others have questions regarding these new directives.

FGC/jbp

Resources on Letters of Recommendation

One of the best sources for guidance on letters of recommendation can be found at the U. T. Austin Plan II Honors Program site and is provided below.

<http://www.utexas.edu/cola/progs/plan2/admission/application/recommendations.php>

Letters of Recommendation

A letter of recommendation is not required to complete a Plan II Honors application.

Are there any circumstances when an applicant should submit a letter of recommendation?

An applicant should submit a letter of recommendation (or explanation) if he or she has a record of activity, leadership, internship or other experience that is unusual and outstanding for a high school student, or if there are unusual circumstances in the applicant's family life, or at the school, with the applicant's [or a family member's] health or financial situation or if the applicant has accomplished, survived, instigated or sailed through experiences/activities/circumstances that are extremely unusual for a high school student. Then by all means have someone write a letter addressing, detailing or explaining the circumstances.

Note an emphasis on outstanding and unusual experiences and circumstances. A few examples are:

- *A summer internship assisting a university professor with research or conducting individual research;*
- *A position of leadership in a national organization;*
- *A summer internship with a Fortune 500 company;*
- *The student (or close family member) experiences life-threatening or chronic illness or injury;*
- *The student loses a close family member;*
- *The student's family experiences life-changing financial set-back.*

Of course, these are by no means the only circumstances in which a letter of recommendation should be submitted.

The U. T. Austin School of Business has a specific form for recommenders to use: <http://www.utexas.edu/student/admissions/giadownload/mbaref08.pdf>

Other helpful guidance is paraphrased below and can be found at the U. T. Austin Undergraduate site at:

<http://bealonghorn.utexas.edu/freshmen/admission/recommendations>

Recommendations & More

Recommendations are not required when applying for admission to the university. However, meaningful information about you from someone who can speak of you as a student/young adult in an unbiased way may help us to make the best decision possible when your admissions application is reviewed.

If you ask someone to submit an admissions recommendation for you:

- *Select someone you know will send us a well-written, sincere, personal recommendation about you as an individual.*
- *Select someone who knows you well enough to do more than send a letter that'll be just like the one they sent for 20 or 30 of your classmates.*
- *Try not to select someone who knows you too well to be unbiased (like family members, for instance).*
- *Request recommendations (from counselors, teachers, etc.) well in advance so that they (or you) will have plenty of time to get them to us by the deadline.*

Guidance from the U. T. Austin School of Law:

Letters of recommendation are not required; however, candidates are strongly encouraged to submit at least one letter but no more than three. Letters should be submitted to the Law School Admissions Council (LSAC) through their letter of recommendation service.

Experience has shown that letters of recommendation are most useful when they provide insights and information about the candidate that are not reflected in the application. The most useful letters are from professors and/or employers with whom the candidate has had a close working relationship. Letters from judges, politicians, and family friends tend not to be useful except in those instances where the letters are based on a working or supervisory relationship.

Applicants are urged to send letters of recommendation to LSAC as early as possible in the admissions process. Applications will not be held for optional materials not received with the completed application.

UT Graduate Programs:

Letters of recommendation are required for almost all applications to graduate school. Most graduate programs use our online recommendation system. Check with the graduate program to which you are applying to determine how to submit your letters.