During Fall, 2006, approximately one-third of the Faculty Council responded to an open-ended survey asking about the important issues they saw facing the Council and The University now and in the future (survey appended). These survey results have been used in setting some of the agenda for this Spring\(^1\). Listed below, with annotated faculty elaboration condensed from various commentary, are questions arising from the major issues identified by the survey that can be used as a basis for discussion with the President in our Faculty Council Open Forum with the President on March 19, 2007.

Over and over again, the survey results show that the faculty are concerned in one way or another with our remaining or being “competitive with top universities in the nation”. The goal of our being a very highly-ranked public institution is clearly shared by faculty across disciplines. On behalf of the Faculty Council, I am submitting these results as an opportunity for Presidential comment in the Open Forum today. This is offered as informative of the issues as seen by the faculty responding, so that the Faculty Council and the President may have an open dialogue. Due to time constraints, it is not expected that we will be able to discuss every issue identified below. Thank you to all of the respondents and to the President for his willingness to hold this Open Forum with the Faculty Council.

Linda L. Golden, Faculty Council Chair for 2006-07

**Issues for Potential Discussion with Annotation of Elaborated Survey Results**

Since our dialogue with the President can be a two-way exchange, each issue below suggests an opportunity for the President to express his ideas (and/or actions) on it. At the same time, the faculty can share their ideas and thoughts on actionable directions or ideas for the administration to consider. Again, the issues below have been identified empirically as important to at least a sub-segment of faculty.

**Issue #1:** There is faculty concern over the state of the facilities at The University of Texas at Austin, since many of our buildings are “getting up in years”. In addition, there is a general lack of space (e.g., UT plans to add 300 more faculty, but where will they be housed?).

*Faculty Elaboration:* Many of our classroom buildings and research laboratories are in desperate need of repair/renovation. The University appears to not act until there are critical breaking points (e.g., The Experimental Science Building is now only being replaced after being condemned). Failing facilities takes away from our ability to continue with excellence in academics, scholarship and research, and the ability to recruit excellent faculty and students.

**Issue #2:** The faculty would like to see The University continue to grown in excellence of faculty and students. In that regard, they see the following issues as important now and in the future.

- The need for smaller classes (for teaching effectiveness) and “managed growth”.

*Faculty Elaboration:* Maintaining quality instruction with increasing enrollment and decreasing budgets is extremely difficult. The work load in some departments has increased to the point where people are going to start leaving. Many other universities...

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\(^1\) One of the issues that faculty in some colleges brought up is the need for a computerized student paper citation analysis (e.g., TurnItIn.com). The University once subscribed to TurnItIn.com and some faculty are requesting its return. In responding to faculty requests, there are current and on-going discussions with the Provost’s Office and the student Senate of College Councils, as well as the Division of Instructional Innovation and Assessment.
(A&M among them) are announcing aggressive hiring campaigns. I have heard some mention at UT, but wonder if this is really happening. Some reports suggest that it takes, on average, two to three years in most disciplines to hire a new faculty person.

**Faculty Elaboration:** The teaching budget is the most critical part of UT. Class sizes have grown considerably in the past few years, and we need to either turn people away or get some more faculty. There does not seem to be much interest at the dean’s level for more faculty in some colleges, so if we want to maintain some semblance of quality in the classroom, we need to reduce the class sizes in some way (e.g., fewer admissions or student attrition).

**Faculty Elaboration:** On growth: We need to decide how big we really need to be to provide quality education and to foster time and space for quality research. That means devoting more time to hiring faculty that research and teach, and providing real sabbaticals equally to faculty with a component of accountability to them (i.e., produce tangible evidence of how you spent your time of benefit to UT while not teaching). It means providing research and travel money to faculty in disciplines who do not have readily available federal and state funding opportunities, and providing incentives to address issues of growth (or not) from the department level on, up or down. That is, incentives for departments to investigate what other departments (in large and small, research and liberal arts institutions) are doing in order to get innovative ideas in play. Ironically, as proud as we are of our research tradition, we keep reinventing the wheel with “new” programs. As a result, we grow, but we do not lead when we should.

- **Faculty Development, Leadership, and Communication enhancement needs emphasis across campus.**

  **Faculty Elaboration:** We need communication across campus and we need leadership at the departmental level. That should only mean more autonomy of chairs if it also means more accountability. It means providing leadership within departments, so that chairs and their departments can deal with growth and evolving their visions for the future (instead of maintaining the status quo). It starts with innovative training for department chairs—real training (not motivational consultants)—and includes regular chair meetings that go beyond budgets and forms. It means addressing the real problems of a department, such as personnel decisions, creating a collaborative department, working with different personalities in department—including the chair’s own personality/style and how it impacts others in the workplace. It also means that chairs should not be chairs for more than six years or so—with focus on planning and training for a successor before that is in “crisis mode”. It is about: incentives for chairs, regard for leadership, managerial and college planning, and about farsighted strategic hiring.

- **Recruiting and retention of faculty, as well as salary compression,** were frequently occurring survey issues. In order to recruit the “best and the brightest”, we must be competitive with other top-ranked universities nationally in terms of salaries, leave policies, travel, and research support. This is especially challenging given our low tuition and limited resources. **In the face of resource challenges, including our low tuition, how can we can attract and retain strong faculty?**

  **Faculty Elaboration:** Recruiting the best and brightest in any field requires incentives such as great facilities, etc.. These need to be in place BEFORE the faculty recruitment takes place (the modus operandi presently in place is to only renovate or create new facilities when a faculty commits rather than having great facilities to attract competitive candidates). Having a great faculty is obviously key to making UT-Austin a top-tier university at all levels. There is a general insufficiency of resources, ranging from parking and office space to travel and research funding.
Faculty Elaboration: Hiring of new faculty presents some major problems to be addressed. When the new curriculum reforms go into effect, it is sure to exaggerate teaching stresses (teaching classes that are too large for the good of the student OR the professor), rearranging teaching and service obligations, unless many more faculty are hired quickly. The University is going to have to make a serious and extended commitment towards this. In general, faculty have teaching loads and service obligations that are too overwhelming to allow substantive work with graduate students and research. The obligations for service have begun to interfere significantly with teaching/research (for example, it is possible to have twelve meetings a week to attend).

Faculty Elaboration: There is a lack of research and travel funds, as well as the lack of a sabbatical program here at UT. The new changes increasing the amount of funds available for airfare and conference registration are certainly a step in the right direction, but hotel expenses (and, ideally, meals) ought to be covered as well for conference travel. Moreover, funds should be available to cover the cost of professional memberships. All of the above are basic to doing our jobs in the ways that we are expected to do them. Perhaps even more importantly, if research is central to the basic mission of the university, more support needs to be available for research in terms of time off and in terms of regular funds for research trips and other associated costs. Support—and leave time—varies from department to department. But in the university-wide FRA program, there is not even enough money to support all of the excellent proposals. When arriving at UT, a “Research One” university, one can be quite surprised by the lack of support for research. This is the single-most important factor that holds this university back from being among the very top-ranked public institutions.

Faculty Elaboration: Funding for UT faculty is a major concern. We have made progress in terms of funding infrastructure and making competitive offers to attract faculty. Nevertheless, we are still relatively weak compared to our peers in terms of providing raises and making research funds available. Salary compression is high and research funding is scarce. Until recently, the conference travel money available at UT-Austin ($325 annually) was laughable. Third and fourth tier universities typically provide twice that much. More conference travel money is available now, but I find it very problematic that these funds cannot be used to pay for hotels, meals, etc..

Issue #3: Lack of “intercollege collegiality” and support for cross-disciplinary endeavors are areas of concern for some faculty. It has been said that, “Cross-functionality is often given ‘lip service,’ yet punished in our environment of academic silos, especially in publishing”. Some faculty believe that the only way this will change is “top down”.

Faculty Elaboration: Related to the more research-oriented comment above, undergraduate reform will essentially require more communication among colleges and coordination of curricula. Thus, the communication issue and cross-college, as well as cross-disciplinary, acceptance (or lack thereof) must be addressed by the upper administration.

Faculty Elaboration: Our tenure and promotion systems will need to be modified to recognize increasing importance of interdisciplinary, collaborative research.

Issue #4: Faculty commented that, “The TAKs-ization—no college student left behind!—model of higher education is the single greatest threat our university faces for the future.”

Faculty Elaboration: UT needs to reassess its new commitment to the “business model” of education, which involves a great deal of busy work (SACs, etc.) that is not merely tangential to but actually injurious to our teaching mission. Education as career credentialing is ruinous in the long run for our general culture as well as for the
inventiveness of mind and cross-cultural understanding necessary for success in the international corporate world.

**Issue #5:** Many faculty are concerned about graduate student attraction and funding. They believe that we are not competitive with other institutions we consider our peers.

*Faculty Elaboration:* Faculty see graduate student attraction and funding as clearly related to their research missions. All forms of both faculty and student support seem to depend upon money, but they also depend upon university priorities. As we work to implement curricular reform, one challenge we face will be trying to find a way to maintain a balance between strong graduate programs and becoming a first-rate place for undergraduates. And, related to this, we also need to find a way to do a better job of funding graduate students (in the same way that better research resources for faculty are essential). It is not clear if this is a faculty or an administration issue, yet faculty can help to set the priorities of the administration.

*Faculty Elaboration:* We need better funding for our Ph.D. students. UT-Austin remains a bargain for undergraduates and even master’s students, but not for Ph.D. students. Many of our peer institutions offer more generous stipends and benefits. If we are to attract better students, we need to address Ph.D. student funding, in particular.

**Issue #6:** Ethnic and gender diversity of the student body at both graduate and undergraduate levels is a concern for many faculty.

*Faculty Elaboration:* It is sometimes difficult teaching knowing that although our tuition is so low that it poses little economic strain on most of the students who come here (e.g., students from higher and middle income families), students of color and from low incomes are offered no financial aid to attend UT and, thus, are shut out.

**Issue #7:** One series of comments sparks the following question: How can we enhance “community” on campus?

*Faculty Elaboration:* There is a lack of communication that promotes real community on campus. We are sometimes “lulled” into believing we have communicated with our abundance of forms of publication, including email and websites. Communication means communicating about how and who we are by looking outside of ourselves—communicating with the world. Communication does not result from one way messages or the comfort that one has “sent an email”.

*Faculty Elaboration:* This institution, under the guise of collaboration and shared governance, still does things through handshakes and backdoor deals way too much. It is often difficult for faculty to access chairs and for chairs to access their deans. There is often no real accountability for those who act inappropriately. From the top down and bottom up, administrators need to communicate with each other and faculty about what is expected, about accountability, about assessing the work we think we are doing, and about setting goals that are mutually generative. These thoughts appear to be consistent with some of those coming from the Commission of 125.

**More Survey Results**

1. As we move toward electronic teacher evaluations, an action is needed to ensure a good response rate. One idea is to plan on having eCIS administered after the final exam and before the student can access his/her grade. It might be required that students complete the evaluation if they want to see their grade before for a set period (maybe two weeks).
2. Other “important faculty/UT issues” identified by survey respondents included the following.

- The need for more attention to and funding of the Arts and Humanities at UT.
- Attention needs to be focused on helping faculty be able to stay up-to-date with rapidly changing technology.
- Faculty powerlessness is an important issue as is faculty’s apparent lack of input into appointments, budgets, and athletic expenditures and programs.
- The fragmentation of undergraduate education with almost exclusive emphasis on math, science, and engineering with the resultant lack of attention to languages, arts, and classics in some disciplines (e.g., business). An issue is the development of undergraduate education as per the Miller report of the Department of Education.
- Grade inflation and “education as entertainment,” including an over-emphasis on athletic spectacles is a major problem.
- More teaching services are needed for faculty training and support.
- The lack of faculty development programs, especially for tenured faculty.
- Athletics has gotten out of control with their spending recently. The disparity in funding between athletics and academics is so gross that it is demoralizing.
- We need more outreach to Texas high schools to help them produce quality students who will succeed in competitive schools like UT. There is already some of this going on. A review may be in order to decide if it should become more of a priority, possibly by doing more teaching of the teachers by the UT faculty. The college application process alone is so daunting as to prohibit students who could have been developed from pursuing any college, let alone UT.
Appendix: Membership Survey

FACULTY COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP SURVEY TO PLAN PRIORITIES
FOR SPRING, 2007

Please answer each question below and return this survey to mkllg@mail.utexas.edu by December 8, 2006. You will remain anonymous (*see below), as your results will be printed and combined with all others. I will report back to the Faculty Council on December 11, 2006. The results will be used to help me and your Executive Committee set additional priorities (including standing committee charges and ad hoc committees) for Spring, 2007. With your participation, our agenda can be better focused on what you, the Faculty Council and faculty, want as priorities.

I welcome and encourage everyone’s participation. Yet, for reporting classification purposes, I do wish to separate the results by voting and non-voting members, so would you please “X” all categories below that apply to you?

_____ Voting Member: _____ Faculty or _____Student

OR

_____ Non-voting Member or Associate: _____ staff, or _____ student, or _____faculty, or _____ administrator (college or above)

Thank you very much for your participation, Linda L. Golden (2006-07 Faculty Council Chair

PS: Since this is email, you may expand the spaces below to meet your needs.

1. What do you believe is the single most important issue facing UT-Austin faculty CURRENTLY (other than undergraduate curricular reform)? Please elaborate.

2. In their order of priority (1st being most important), what do you see as the three most important issues that will be facing UT-Austin faculty in the FUTURE? Again, please elaborate, if possible.

   1.

   2.

   3.

*I will print out your returned survey (attached to an email), and the paper copy will be forever separated from your email transmittal. Thus, you will not be identified as I compile responses (unless you intentionally write your name on the survey itself, of course). Once printed, I will delete your email from my email files and “trash,” so your now anonymous printed copy will be the only one I will have and use for results compilation. I am not going to keep a tally of who voted and who did not.