

May 10, 2004

Members of the Task Force on Enrollment Strategy
Members of the University Leadership Council
Members of the Faculty Council Executive Committee
Members of the Staff Council Executive Committee
Members of the Presidential Student Advisory Committee

Dear Colleagues:

I have carefully considered the report of the Task Force on Enrollment Strategy and have reviewed all of the comments that have arrived in writing or have been given to me in conversation. I am now prepared to report my general conclusions and to define a course of action.

In October, 2002, the Task Force was created to look broadly at issues concerning enrollments here at the University. Here is the language that I used to define their charge:

Because of rapidly rising demand for admission and improved retention of students who enter our programs, our enrollment continues to grow, and it is now well beyond the avowed target of 48,000. But the reality is that we do not have any explainable basis for the target. We do not know the financial implications or the educational consequences of becoming smaller or larger, and we do not understand, in any explicit way, the capacity of our educational spaces and tools. The University needs to take a fresh look at our policies concerning enrollments.

Your charge is to recommend a reasoned strategy for managing student enrollments at UT into the indefinite future. In developing your recommendations, you should examine all relevant issues, including the rising demand for entry, the educational integrity of our programs, the capacity of our spaces and teaching staff as they might evolve in the years ahead, the balance among undergraduate, graduate, and professional enrollments, the balance between freshman admissions and transfer admissions at the undergraduate level, and the financial implications of various options.

The report of the Task Force was received in January, 2004, and was made broadly available to the members of the University and to important external constituencies. It brought forth comment from faculty (including leaders of the Faculty Council), administrative officers (including deans), staff (including academic advisors), students (including student leadership), and alumni (including many active members of the Commission of 125).

The report commands very broad support, especially with respect to the main goals. There is enthusiasm for its focus on improvement in the educational environment, and there is agreement that reduction in the student-faculty ratio must be a high priority. There is also broad support for the detailed recommendations concerning student progress.

Virtually all criticisms or suggestions for modification relate to one or more of the proposed changes in specific operational policies, rather than the philosophy defined in the report or the overall goals.

Accordingly, I accept the report with enthusiasm and will now move toward its implementation. My acceptance includes:

1. Full endorsement of the nine Guiding Principles laid out by the Task Force as a foundation for its conclusions and recommendations.
2. Agreement that the overall size of the University should be controlled college-by-college according to the capacity of the teaching environment in each college to support an educational experience comparable with that in the leading public universities nationwide. The most important factor in this consideration is the size of the faculty serving students in a given college, as expressed in the student-faculty ratio; however it also includes additional factors such as the capacities of advising, teaching space, and instructional equipment.
3. Agreement with the general concept that policy changes should be made to promote faster progress toward degrees and to give priority to degree candidates. By reducing the average residence time of students within the University, we can improve the student-faculty ratio and lower the overall population of the campus without having to reduce so sharply the opportunities for new students to attend the University.

Even though I accept all principles, my action on the report cannot imply immediate adoption of the operational changes suggested in the report. Many require decisions and actions by others. All require careful review, and perhaps some modification or expanded interpretation, by those who will have to implement the changes.

Over the summer, members of my office will catalogue each of the points of action implied by the report. In addition, they will ascertain, for each point, the officers or bodies within the University who are responsible for defining policy and practice. Before the fall semester begins, each action will be referred appropriately, so that

decisions on all proposed changes can be made as early as possible in the next academic year.

A part of our referral for each point will be the entire body of relevant comments obtained during the reaction period. In this way, those considering any change will have the benefit of the particular advice that I have received or will receive prior to the referral.

The proposals that evoked the greatest degree of comment were the limitation on the number of long semesters and the mandate for a 14-hour minimum load under certain conditions. These matters, like all others proposed by the Task Force, will receive further scrutiny within the process I laid out above. It may turn out that the proposals made by the Task Force will be modified to make them more workable. Due care must be taken.

However, I also must express my strong view that more rapid completion of degrees is a critical matter for our university. While I recognize that some degree programs and some personal circumstances cause students, for good reasons, to take longer than the expected term to completion, it is also true that the average rate of progress here is not comparable to that in leading public peer universities nationally. I do not believe that our university and its students should expect or accept a lower level of achievement. This is indeed a matter of competitiveness, and it does reflect upon the perceived quality of the University. In that regard, it should be of concern to every student, every parent, every alumnus, and to many others, both inside and outside our community. But there are other reasons why it is important. Slow progress toward degrees literally denies the opportunity for qualified freshmen to enter the University, because their spaces are still occupied by others who could have moved along. And slow progress toward degrees raises the total cost of education dramatically for students and families. We can and must do better.

I invite any additional comment that you might wish to offer by mail or email. As I indicated above, your comments on particular operational issues will be conveyed to those who will be examining the proposals for change, as long as the comments are received before we make the referral.

Please let me close with an expression of deep appreciation to Professor Isabella Cunningham, who chaired the Task Force on Enrollment Strategy, and to the members of the Task Force. This was a strong team that strove consistently to find policies that would make The University of Texas at Austin a still more valuable

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asset for the individuals and the public that it serves. They produced a remarkable product, and I am confident that it will guide this university for years into the future.

Sincerely,

Larry R. Faulkner
President

cc: Chancellor Mark G. Yudof
Executive Vice Chancellor Teresa A. Sullivan
Vice Chancellor Tonya Moten Brown
Counsel and Board Secretary Francie A. Frederick