Regent Hall

Task Force Board Report

First, I would like to thank you, Chairman Powell, for this privilege in chairing this Task Force and for the challenge. It has been an honor to work in tandem with my fellow task force members: Vice Chairman Hicks, Regent Gary, UT El Paso President Natalicio, UT San Antonio President Romo, UT Arlington President Spaniolo, and our ex-officio members, Student Regent Kalkwarf, Student Regent Rutkauskas (rut-cos-cuss), Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Dr. Prior and UT Austin Vice Provost of Higher Education Policy and Research Dr. Harrison Keller and, of course, our enthusiastic Chancellor and Chairman. Also special thanks to Mr. Art Martinez and all of the dedicated and professional UT System staff who do so much to support our efforts and initiatives.

Our meetings and discussions were thought provoking, challenging, and far reaching in their scope. We are extremely excited about the recommendations of our Task Force and their future impact on our students, our institutions, and the State of Texas.

To summarize our two major recommendations, they are as follows:

One, it is our recommendation that the UT System immediately establish The Institute for Transformative Learning (ITL) to promote instructional innovations within and across System campuses. We propose that the Institute be

funded with a $50m investment from the System to support its efforts. Under the leadership of Chancellor Cigarroa, we envision a national search for the Institute's senior director and the selection of an independent oversight committee composed of nationally recognized experts and practitioners, from outside of the state, on the subject of using technology to improve student learning, create greater access to higher education, and improve on the productivity and efficiency of the classroom.

The Institute has three major goals:

First, to establish UT institutions as world leaders in the development and implementation of best-in-class for blended and online learning resources and establish the UT Online Brand as synonymous with excellence in technology-enhanced education;

Second, to expand access to educational programs that will improve learning outcomes and reduce costs for students and their families, universities, and taxpayers; and

Third, to promote a culture of educational innovation throughout the UT System.

We propose that the Institute will accomplish its goals through a combination of competitive grants, matching awards, and awards for leading innovators, as well as through public/private ventures. For our institutions,

departments, and faculty that choose to participate, this competitive environment and rigorous selection process should incentivize our institutions to create the very best blended and online courses available anywhere.

As an example...

The Institute will notify our campuses that it will be accepting applications for a particular online course for consideration of a competitive grant award. No school or department must compete, although all will be encouraged to do so. The selection committee will review entrants' proposals and select a winner. The winner will receive a significant financial award for creation and implementation of the course that will then be recognized as a "best-in-class" course and part of the official UT Online Brand. In addition, we envision the institution and/or Dept and faculty members for each selected course will benefit in any future revenue streams generated from its course.

Our hope is that these efforts will yield a selection of the very best online and blended courses in a myriad of gateway classes and disciplines that will then be available for course and degree credit to all of our students, regardless of which System institution they attend. Through these significant incentives, we believe the online courses and blended learning methodologies selected by the Institute will create a powerful brand of the highest rated courses of their kind.

Our second recommendation is that the UT System should support the development of data infrastructures and learning analytics platforms on all

System campuses to monitor and streamline student pathways through undergraduate and graduate programs- and to create a coordinated structure for reporting student learning outcomes. This will be an important step in being accountable to the public.

We recommend that the UT System support these infrastructures at three levels:

One, through a common Learning Management System installed across System campuses, which would offer substantial savings in terms of scalability, hosting, technical support, and acquisition costs;

Two, establish Early Academic Warning Systems that would inform students, faculty, and academic advisors about students' academic progress and identify emerging problems; and

Three, through E-advising Systems, which will assist our students and their families in presenting options that are available to them to reduce the cost of a degree by advising the student of such options as dual credit courses, community college courses, or online courses that can be used to meet their degree requirements. This will have an impact on a major challenge for higher education – the need to improve on graduation rates. It will also increase the productivity and efficiency of our institutions by more accurately predicting course demand and room scheduling.

The UT System is, we believe, uniquely positioned to combine substantial direct support for educational innovations on our campuses and targeted investments in the campus infrastructures to leverage our world class faculty to compete more effectively in delivering the highest quality education to our students.

It was evident to this task force that new technology and educational innovations bring the promise of improving higher ed for the benefit of all, but to do so successfully, we must aggressively compete and innovate or risk being left behind.

Many thanks again to the Task Force members, Chancellor Cigarroa, Chairman Powell, and the UT System staff.