



Founding Members Meeting Key Outcomes Document March 2, 2012

On Friday, March 2, 2012, nearly 100 members of the Texas Coalition for Excellence in Higher Education met for the inaugural Founding Members Meeting in Austin, Texas. The Coalition leadership lined up an all-star panel of presenters to discuss the ongoing debate over the value of public higher education in Texas. The purpose of the meeting was to bring members up to speed about the wide variety of issues under discussion that impact our institutions, and demonstrate the ongoing importance of the Coalition’s involvement, advocacy and vigilance.

What ensued was a vigorous discussion about the important public good that our institutions of higher education provide for the people of Texas, the tremendous economic impact our institutions make on the state and nation, the ongoing attacks that our institutions continue to face and the important the role the Coalition has played – and must more aggressively play – to preserve and promote the quality and excellence of our public institutions of higher education.

Below are key excerpts from the program:

Dr. Ray Bowen, National Science Foundation, Former Texas A&M President

Dr. Bowen provided an overview of how our nation’s universities rank in the world in respect to math, science and engineering degrees, innovation, and research.

“Our universities play a fundamental role in basic research – they conduct basic research, create knowledge, develop the people, the human resources, and encourage knowledge and innovation. That innovation creates competitiveness in our industries and creates new industries, new businesses, expansion of old businesses and, of course, higher wages and presumably a better quality of life for our people.”

“We face a fundamentally large aggressive global competition for our nation, and just to give you some indication of that, historically, we’ve led the world in our investments, in research and development, and you see, we still do, but by a very small amount and the margins are closing.”

“Another sort of indicator of great concern, if you look at the nation’s production of Ph.D.’s and degrees in natural science and engineering, China dominates the world in both categories.”

Speakers:

Dr. Ray Bowen

*National Science Foundation,
Former Texas A&M President*

Dr. Larry Faulkner

*Outgoing President of the
Houston Endowment,
Former UT Austin President*

Dr. Randy Diehl

*Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at
UT Austin*

Leslie Cedar

*Executive Director and CEO of the
Texas Exes*

Dr. Jaime Grunlan

*Associate Professor and Gulf Oil/Thomas
Dietz Development Professor I, Texas
A&M University*

Dr. Michael McLendon

*Associate Professor of Public Policy and
Higher Education, Vanderbilt University*

Natalie Butler

UT Austin Student Body President



Dr. Larry Faulkner, Outgoing President of the Houston Endowment, Former UT Austin President

Dr. Faulkner, speaking from multiple positions of experience, illustrates the critical role higher education institutions play in the economic well-being and future of Texas and our nation.

“Undergraduate education is, for any university, its largest sphere of influence on the future. It is where the institution has the largest leverage. The impact of undergraduate education is so great on future productivity—on the future ability of people to contribute.”

“Why are universities organized with so many missions? To take maximum advantage, in the most flexible way, of the most important asset that the university has—its faculty. These are the people who know what they’re talking about, in particular subject areas; they make up the delivery mechanism of the institution.”

“I ask you to contemplate what the GDP of Texas or the GDP of the United States would be if universities would just stop doing what they do. What would our future be like, and more than that, what would the quality of our access be to important things like healthcare, the arts, human services and national defense? These universities have traditionally adapted to new circumstances, and do it best from the bottom up, not the top down.”

“Fundamentally, the role of the university is to prepare, educate and train the next generation of leaders for our society. The major universities – especially the major public universities – carry a disproportionate share of that load. There aren’t very many tasks in society that are more important than preparing the leadership of the next generation.”

Dr. Randy Diehl, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at UT Austin

Dr. Diehl gave the Coalition an overview on the recent report issued by the Task Force on Undergraduate Graduation Rates and explained why that report is significant to the current broader higher education debate.*

“Every additional year a student spends on campus costs that student somewhere between \$10 and \$15 thousand. Student loan burdens tend to accelerate during those years. So, this is important because the issue of high cost of higher education is critical. If we can improve the graduation rates we will reduce, or at least moderate, the cost of higher education. It can be done without compromising rigor or quality.”

“I would submit to you that UT Austin has had a succession of very highly reform-minded presidents – certainly Bill [Powers] is included in that, with the curricula reform, with the course transformation initiative and now this initiative on improving graduation rates.”

*Visit: www.utexas.edu/graduation-rates for more on the Task Force



Leslie Cedar, Executive Director and CEO of the Texas Exes

Ms. Cedar provided the perspective of the UT Alumni Association, and its current concerns and future plans to continue to move the needle in the conversation about higher education.

“What happens in, and to higher education in the next decade, will define higher education for the rest of the century.”

“As an independent association communicating the value of UT, we intend to take on the naysayers who say UT is too expensive, it’s too rich, it’s too liberal, or it’s too conservative. Whatever the viewpoint may be, we see it as our role to really convey the value of UT to the broader world.”

“We continue to have a concern about governance. I think there is no reason in the world why we shouldn’t expect our Board of Regents to stand up and champion one of the very best assets we have in this state.”

“We are at a critical moment in time when it comes to funding, when it comes to admissions policies and everything else on the board, from research to how faculty are evaluated. What happens in the next legislative session, and the next two or three sessions, will impact the next 100 years of higher education. And, what happens in Texas is influencing the nation. I know you are all well aware that we are at the forefront of this conversation, people are looking to us and they will follow our lead whether it is good or bad. We’re in the bull’s-eye and we have a responsibility to act.”

Dr. Jaime Grunlan, Associate Professor and Gulf Oil/Thomas Dietz Development Professor I, Texas A&M University

Dr. Grunlan delivered a spirited defense of the quality of education offered at Texas’ two flagship universities, highlighting achievements made through research and innovation at these Tier One institutions.

“Do students attend or not attend UT or TAMU because of cost? I never hear that. Of course, everyone complains about the cost of anything – your car, everything – but the reality is, on a daily basis, students aren’t making the decision based upon cost, because there are numerous campuses in the State of Texas that are cheaper, that are dying for students, and why aren’t students flooding those schools if cost is the single biggest factor?”

“The TPPF’s simplistic approach would have us model for-profit universities that currently educate 11% of our college students, but account for 25% of all federal financial aid. These same for-profit schools sponsor professional sports stadiums, do no research, have a six-year graduation rate of just 27% and account for 40% of all student loan default. If you take the time to add up their costs, you’ll see they are more expensive than Texas or Texas A&M and provide an inferior education.”

“Research universities maintain a strong undergraduate mission, but they also have a strong graduate component and research holds equal importance to classroom teaching. Learning in the classroom is directly applied in a research setting that provides students with real world skills and also furthers knowledge designed to help solve the most difficult societal problems.”



“While some of this research does not receive significant funding from external organizations, all of it improves the education of our students by honing writing, critical thinking and organizational skills (all necessary to be competitive in today’s job market).”

Dr. Michael McLendon, Associate Professor of Public Policy and Higher Education, Vanderbilt University

Dr. McLendon previewed a report on the performance of UT Austin and Texas A&M University that will be made public in the coming weeks. Top-line findings include:

“The two universities [UT Austin and Texas A&M] are making considerable gains in improving their four-year graduation rates. Texas A&M has improved its rate by 40.63% since 2004, while the University of Texas has seen improvements of greater than 30%. These improvements far exceed the universities’ peers and other top-tier research institutions.”

“The University of Texas and Texas A&M University perform at the very top of their peer groupings in the production of bachelor’s degrees. The University of Texas ranked second among its peers and sixth among all Tier One research universities in the number of bachelor’s degrees awarded in 2010; Texas A&M University ranked fourth and seventh, respectively.”

“Tuition and fee levels for full-time undergraduates at both the University of Texas and Texas A&M University today are competitive with peer institutions: the University of Texas charges roughly \$1,000 less than its peers, while Texas A&M charges roughly \$2,000 less than its peers, making it the fourth-least expensive among its peers. Notably, each university charges less than that of the median institution within its peer group. The two universities have developed and implemented best practices for years.”

Natalie Butler, UT Austin Student Body President

Ms. Butler offered the perspective of the student at the March 2 meeting, emphasizing the notion that the value of the university must be protected.

“Current students can do a lot, there are a lot of us on campus and we have a loud voice when we get together, but there’s a point where we can only do so much, and we’re stronger when we’re joined by all of those who have come before us. We were speaking and saying the same things and finally came together to use the same voice and I think that has only enhanced the credibility of what it is we have to say when it comes to higher education in Texas.”

“What we’re doing is so important because we have to preserve and protect that value so that they have the same experience you had and I’ve had and that I want the next generation to have.”

“It’s clear from your commitment to the universities that you had a really wonderful experience from your time on campus and you benefited from your degree. I’ve only just begun to benefit from my degree. And the students that are going to come to the universities after me have not had that opportunity yet.”