



The University of Texas System
Nine Universities. Six Health Institutions. Unlimited Possibilities.

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August 4, 2014

The University of Texas at Arlington
The University of Texas at Austin
The University of Texas at Brownsville
The University of Texas at Dallas
The University of Texas at El Paso
The University of Texas–Pan American
The University of Texas
of the Permian Basin
The University of Texas at San Antonio
The University of Texas at Tyler

Dr. Hunter R. Rawlings, III
President
Association of the American Universities
1200 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 550
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Dr. Rawlings:

As a former university president at several prestigious universities, you no doubt have dealt with high-level personnel matters involving those who reported directly to you. It is likely that in those situations, only you knew all of the issues. You probably had to make decisions that were unpopular, but you were in the best position to make them based on the best interests of your institution, despite outside opposition or criticism. With that in mind, we were very disappointed to read your recent op-ed and statements [Texas Makes an Appalling Mess of Education 'Reform', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 9, 2014] criticizing The University of Texas System and more importantly, citing inaccurate allegations without perhaps checking your facts, or even more collegially, talking with us first.

You have every right to state your opinions on whether you believe higher education is being politicized; however, to dedicate almost your entire op-ed to rehashing phrases from a six-year old proposal developed by an individual outside of the U. T. System (Seven Breakthrough Solutions) that was *never* adopted, and *never* implemented by the U. T. System, paints an unfair picture of the System and higher education in Texas. We feel strongly that it would have only been appropriate if you had sought factual information before using your position as president of the AAU to criticize Texas' higher education system. In fact, in collaboration with the presidents of all the institutions within the U. T. System, the Chancellor developed the Framework for Advancing Excellence throughout the U. T. System (Framework), an initiative that has been broadly discussed and has received national recognition. The implementation of the Framework actions and the accompanying funding, were designed to help propel Texas' AAU jewel, U. T. Austin, into being one of the nation's greatest universities. We love our flagship university and have provided it with countless resources, human and fiscal, to assist it in its mission – indeed, what starts at U. T. Austin does change the world. We are also allocating resources to ensure that U. T. plays a prominent national leadership role in the areas of engineering and energy.

The University of Texas
Southwestern Medical Center

The University of Texas
Medical Branch at Galveston

The University of Texas
Health Science Center at Houston

The University of Texas
Health Science Center at San Antonio

The University of Texas
M. D. Anderson Cancer Center

The University of Texas
Health Science Center at Tyler

www.utsystem.edu

Furthermore, this current Board of Regents – the very group of individuals you criticized – and former board members have allocated more than one-half billion dollars, above and beyond the steady stream of funding to support U. T. Austin’s education and research agenda, upon the recommendation of the Chancellor. This includes the leadership and funding necessary for the new Dell Medical School, the first new medical school to be established at an AAU university in approximately 37 years. Did you know that our Regents’ Outstanding Teaching Awards offer the highest level of cash awards in the nation – \$25,000 per faculty member to honor them for excellence in teaching, through a peer review process by other faculty? Of the approximately sixty faculty who receive the Regents’ awards each year, almost half of those are allocated to U. T. Austin faculty. Did you know that our Regents allocated millions of dollars in additional resources to help U. T. Austin recruit and retain the top research faculty in America through its STARS program, or that they created new Regents’ awards to honor student performance in the visual and performing arts and in humanities? Of the more than \$500 million in additional funds to U. T. Austin, nearly two-thirds was awarded during Chancellor Cigarroa’s term in office, with more to come in the next months. We can assure you that none of our leadership is “lame duck” as you referred to in your piece. Each one of us, including Chancellor Cigarroa, comes to work fully committed and completely focused on a shared goal to propel U. T. forward everyday – hardly a “lame duck” attitude.

While you cited the politicization of higher education in your message and implied that the situation between President Powers and Chancellor Cigarroa was politically-driven, be assured that it was not. It originated exclusively through the appropriate ranks of the U. T. System Office of Academic Affairs, led by a tenured faculty member of U. T. Austin, and then to the Office of the Chancellor. You must have followed the same kind of process at some point in your tenure as a president – process is important in these matters so that no one person has the authority to make this kind of important employment decision. We follow our Regents’ Rules with all personnel matters and believe in shared governance.

It is also important to note that we share the same vision for the future of our nation’s research universities, a fact that cannot be ignored. You served on the National Academies’ Committee on Research Universities together with Chancellor Cigarroa, clearly sharing the same ideals and commitments to protect and uphold our nation’s research universities. The University of Texas System respectfully and aggressively pursues advancement opportunities for its academic and health institutions, with a shared focus on a mission of research, education, healthcare and service. Surely this ideal is one that you embrace as head of the AAU.

August 4, 2014

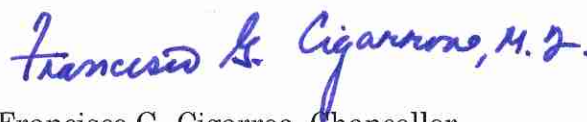
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Dr. Rawlings, you clearly understand scholarly activities and research, and you also likely gather appropriate information before you write your papers. Perhaps you could have applied the same methodology before you published your statement attempting to shine a negative light on higher education in Texas. Our institutions, including U. T. Austin, continue to recruit the highest caliber faculty from around the country and world. Your proclamations are not consistent with our data or results, so in the future, we respectfully request that you will join us in advancing higher education in Texas and the nation.

Sincerely,



Paul L. Foster, Chairman
U. T. System Board of Regents



Francisco G. Cigarroa, Chancellor
U. T. System

PLF/FGC:em

c: Members, AAU Executive Committee
Commissioner Raymund Paredes, Ph.D.
Members, U. T. System Board of Regents
Executive Vice Chancellor Pedro Reyes, Ph.D.

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

COMMENTARY

Texas Makes an Appalling Mess of Education 'Reform'

By Hunter R. Rawlings III JULY 09, 2014

[Updated (7/9/2014, 5:20 p.m.) to reflect the announcement that William C. Powers Jr. will step down next year.]

Another year, another ham-handed attempt by a governing board to fire a successful public-university president. What has happened to responsible governance of our flagship research universities? First the University of Virginia, now the University of Texas at Austin, two superb institutions with notable stature and excellent leadership.

In the former case, the Board of Visitors retracted its decision (<http://chronicle.com/article/Teresa-Sullivan-Reinstated-at/132417/>) to terminate Teresa Sullivan when confronted by mobilized faculty members and public outrage. In Texas, a last-minute agreement has enabled UT-Austin's president, William C. Powers Jr., to retire on his own timetable, but it followed an unfortunate effort by the governor, Rick Perry, and the system chancellor, Francisco G. Cigarroa, both lame ducks, to force his immediate departure.

What is going on here? Several things at once: Major universities are larger and more important than ever in the economy and cultural life of their states; too many politicians and their board appointees want, therefore, to shape them as their ideology sees fit. This often means treating universities as businesses (<http://chronicle.com/article/Texas-Governor-Thinks-of/124603/>) in which productivity and efficiency are the primary goals, and the academic and research principles that have been so important to our country's leadership in talent and innovation are sacrificed to utilitarianism. "Accountability" is the watchword—everything that can be counted is counted, and everything that cannot be counted doesn't count.

In UVA's case, a few board members tried to commit an overnight June coup without even holding a board meeting. In Texas, the battle between the governor and President Powers has been long and public and bitter, but in the end, on July the Fourth, it came

down to the same intention: to remove a highly accomplished and popular president who has consistently stood up for academic values, for faculty autonomy, for excellence in research, and for making effective undergraduate teaching a high priority.

It is tempting to see the Texas case as one of clashing personalities and egos. Tensions in university systems are, after all, legion and easily understood, given short lines of authority and competing campus priorities. But underlying the long conflict between the governor and his board on one hand, and President Powers on the other, is something much more fundamental, as well as pertinent to the current condition of public higher education across America: a clash between conflicting views of the purpose of universities in society.

Starting in 2008, Governor Perry, with the help of the Texas Public Policy Foundation, began to promote an agenda for higher education that centers around transparency and accountability, and that treats universities as businesses and students as customers. Through his support for proposals such as the "seven breakthrough solutions" (<http://www.texastribune.org/2011/09/21/higher-education-experts-testify-texas-universitie/>) for higher education, the governor advocated requiring universities to publish balance sheets that measure how much money individual professors generate and cost the university, by counting research dollars and the number of students taught; awarding faculty members bonuses based solely on student evaluations; pressuring universities to create a "\$10,000 degree," with no standards stipulated; and requiring universities to post faculty members' salaries and benefits, the number of students they teach, the results of teaching evaluations by students, and the grades faculty members give out.

Transparency and accountability are laudable goals and sound good as populist slogans, but, to be applied effectively to universities, they need academic substance and depth. We are all concerned about the cost of college. But we cannot separate cost from value. Cheap does not mean good; it just means cheap. The real question is, What is the value of one's education?

With "customer satisfaction" as the goal, along with undue emphasis on the production of large numbers of graduates, the agenda is clear. Texas has, under Rick Perry, led the way in reinventing the university as a business. This factory model does not distinguish among types of universities, does not concern itself with quality, except as measured in the most superficial manner, and treats professors not as professionals but as piece workers. Since Perry has now appointed nearly every regent of every governing board in Texas, and has replaced many university administrators with his friends and supporters, he has had his way with most of the state's higher-education leadership.

But not with William Powers Jr. Powers has for years repeatedly and respectfully stood up to the governor, defended academic values, and enunciated the core principles that have helped make American research universities the best in the world. Those principles include academic freedom, institutional autonomy, shared governance, and a commitment to high quality in teaching and research. And Powers has built a loyal following among UT's faculty, staff, students, and alumni, as well as major Texas leaders who know what a research university is, its value to a state and the nation, and what it takes to build and sustain one.

Universities are not factories turning out products—they are places where the goal is knowledge, not profit. They do produce major economic benefits in the form of research discoveries that lead to patents and new businesses and economic development on a grand scale. But those are byproducts. The main purposes of the university are the creation and dissemination of knowledge and the development of graduates who become the next generation of informed citizens and leaders in many sectors of society.

Knowledge is a matter of quality, not quantity. William Powers knows that—and he espouses it, effectively and publicly. Fortunately for us all, he will continue to do so for the next academic year.

Hunter R. Rawlings III is president of the Association of American Universities.

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