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***Governing Boards and Academic Best Practices:
A National View***

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Informed, active boards are essential for effective higher education governance. Such boards receive the information they need with ample time to review and analyze it. Their independent observations are welcomed and facilitated by academic administration. In addition to ongoing dialogue with campus administrators, they hear directly from faculty, students, and taxpayers. They vigorously support their institutions; but they also show their loyalty by being the gadflies who ask the hard questions and publicly illuminate challenges to academic quality and efficiency.

A university community makes many competing claims on its members. Faculty have a professional commitment to an academic discipline. Their research and professional world may well be centered as much outside the institution as within. Administrators tend to be committed to the growth of their institutions: more faculty, innovative programs, more buildings, increased endowments. It is on the governing board that accountability to the citizens of the state ultimately rests to adjudicate competing priorities.

Effective boards of public universities are responsive to the initiatives of the governor and state legislature to support the interests of students and taxpayers. They feel accountable to their states to keep academic quality high and tuition costs affordable. They balance institutional aspirations and the competing needs of the state as a whole.

In this testimony, I will address several of the most important duties of governing boards and provide examples of how different boards have met these responsibilities, often in conjunction with engaged governors and legislatures.

As we all know, these are challenging times. And, more than ever before, the public is demanding greater accountability. Despite high expectations, public confidence in our institutions of higher education has declined. Nearly half of the respondents in a survey by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education said that public higher education in their state should be “fundamentally overhauled.” A similar number indicated that college costs are not justified by the education students receive.¹

Moody's Investors Service predicted in March of this year that more public colleges will declare "financial exigency." And since 2008, we have seen a number of higher education credit ratings go down. Yet, two years ago, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* concluded, “as the country passes the first year of a supposed New Normal, few signs of revolutionary change are apparent.”² Challenging times demand courageous actions. And I am pleased to say that proactive boards, have not waited for catastrophe to exercise sound management.

Academic program prioritization, as Robert Dickeson's excellent book³ shows, is a difficult process, complicated by the competing claims of academic departments and personal interest. Yet effective governing boards have made it happen. Within the last year, Louisiana's Board of Regents engaged in a rigorous review of every academic program. The Regents designated as "low-completers" those programs that failed to graduate more than a handful of students. Each campus had the opportunity to explain why the low-completers made sense both from a financial and from a mission point of view for the school. The Board approved termination of 109 programs, consolidation of 17 programs, and combination consolidation/termination of 172 programs.⁴ In 2010, Missouri Governor Jay Nixon called for a review of every academic program at each of the state's two and four year institutions, a total of 700 programs. A review by the gubernatorially appointed Coordinating Board for Higher Education resulted in the termination of 72 four year programs and 46 two-year programs, with a much larger number of programs flagged for further review.⁵ Another example comes from the Minnesota State College and University System. The 15 member gubernatorially appointed Board of Trustees took seriously the dangers of program expansion long before the recession: between 2007 and 2009, the board approved 191 new programs but closed 345.⁶ These are crucial, albeit painful actions. As Dickeson observed, failure to make choices between programs means that that every program--and the institution as a whole--will suffer.

Governing boards need to review capital projects with extreme care. Waste in higher education is never tolerable, but it is a particular outrage when budgets – especially the budgets of those who pay tuition – are under such extreme pressure. Since the 1970's, campus building has ballooned, often at taxpayer expense: the average assignable space per student appears to have tripled. We need to keep in

mind, too, that with the excitement of opening a new building comes maintenance costs that can amount to 70% of the cost of construction over the life of the structure.⁷

Here is an excerpt, for example, from “Priorities for Excellence: The Penn State Strategic Plan 2009-10 through 2013-14” (emphases added):

The University has invested heavily in both the construction of classroom and laboratory facilities and the renovation of existing facilities to accommodate new modes of teaching and learning and the greater use of technology. *Too often, these facilities are not fully utilized—and the University constructs additional facilities—because of lack of use outside of certain “prime time” class periods or times of the day.* Classroom space at University Park, for example, is near fully utilized between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. on a typical day, but much capacity is under-utilized at other times of the day. *While a notable reduction in classroom utilization has occurred at 8:00 a.m., in response to student (and some faculty) preferences, mid- and late-afternoon scheduling remains significantly lower.*⁸

I hasten to add that Penn State is hardly unique, except, perhaps in the blunt disclosure of the problem. ACTA’s studies of classroom underutilization have found similar examples of significant waste in other locations. Governing and coordinating boards can step in to control unnecessary building. In South Carolina, the Commission on Higher Education collects data on classroom usage: it provides the information policymakers and taxpayers need to address the problem of an average weekly utilization at public institutions of 27 hours, with average weekly use of any given workstation at 18 hours.

Texas has itself modeled a best practice – indeed the Society for College and University Planning (SCUP) cited Texas in its 2007 Campus Facilities Survey as a model of transparency.⁹ This is no small achievement, since the director of

planning at SCUP was quick to point out that typically campuses do not want outsiders to know how they use (or don't use) their facilities!

In addition to ensuring transparency, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board has created a Space Usage Efficiency system that incorporates facilities demand, utilization rate, and use of work stations. It has clear benchmarks and allows inter-campus comparability. It acts as an important “brake” on building projects at campuses where there is uncertainty about need. The recognition of areas of space underutilization throughout the system has encouraged innovations, ranging from block scheduling, and classes in non-peak hours, especially evening times.¹⁰

Governing boards – as well as the public and lawmakers - need to see efficient, clear indicators of both financial and academic issues. This is not a new issue in Texas or the nation: Representative Branch has called for these indicators and they are part of the framework that Chancellor Cigarroa has recently brought to the UT Board. It is because of their urgent importance for policy making and public information that ACTA has steadily produced state and regional report cards, setting out in clear, tabular form, key indicators of curricular quality, general education, academic freedom, cost and efficiency metrics, and governance practices.¹¹ Have increases in administrative costs outstripped instructional spending? Have increases in tuition and fees outstripped inflation? Claimed a larger share of median household income? These are questions that all stakeholders need to be able to answer at a glance.

If financial metrics are the indicator of the costs incurred by institutions, then learning frameworks and outcomes measurements are the indicators of the value

added by institutions. Again, Texas has stood forth with its best practices. When it comes to core curricula, Texas institutions have offered students a far more coherent educational framework than most institutions around the country. In a recent survey of over 1000 colleges and universities, www.whatwilltheylearn.com, Texas institutions ranked well above the national average. Every single public institution requires the systematic study of American history and government, and almost all require math, composition, and natural science. Several require economics. Two Texas campuses received an “A” rating – Texas A&M Corpus Christi and University of Texas San Antonio. At a time when employers are finding it hard to find college graduates with the skills and knowledge needed in the rapidly- changing marketplace, many Texas schools offer a model of educational excellence – a model for which the legislature can take credit. These fine standards are now under review: it is imperative that governing boards and the legislature resist any initiative to weaken or water down core curriculum requirements.

Meanwhile, the National Assessment of Adult Literacy and, most recently, Professor Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa’s study, *Academically Adrift*, reveal that many students leave college without the basic skills they need in writing and critical reasoning.¹² They are “college graduates” in name only. It is imperative that governing boards receive and analyze information on student learning gains, along with other academic outcome measures, such as licensure and professional examination results. A best practice model can be found in South Dakota. Beginning in 1998, the South Dakota Board of Regents mandated that every incoming student and every rising junior would take the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Progress (CAAP). It has been a major diagnostic tool for identifying areas of academic weakness, both individual and institutional, and the results are

published in a Regent's report every year. The South Dakota Board of Regents offers several examples of the positive steps that this data enables:

After one university fell below the national mean in English five out of six years, that university implemented an additional writing requirement for all of its students. Another university has placed a new focus on math after receiving lower than expected scores in that subject.

According to Lesta Turchen, the Chief Academic Officer for the Board of Regents responsible for the implementation of the assessment initiative: "The CAAP exam has become a primary tool for working with individual students to improve their skill levels so that they can be successful in upper-division courses in their majors."¹³

Texas is well-positioned efficiently to provide governing boards with this key data. Most Texas public institutions already post the results of the CLA or other standardized, nationally normed instrument to measure growth in core collegiate skills. And much of that data is already available on the Voluntary System of Accountability College Portrait site (<http://www.collegeportraits.org/>). Texas institutions, especially the UT System, distinguished themselves by their early implementation of the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA).

The bottom line: this data needs to be used actively in academic policy decisions. When campus results show learning increases above or below those expected at comparable institutions, much can be gained if Regents carefully consult with faculty and administrators to consider *why* students perform as they do and allocate resources to remedy deficiencies and maximize student achievement.

There has been much discussion and controversy surrounding initiatives in Texas to separate research and teaching budgets and to develop metrics for faculty

productivity. Developing a fair and effective metric is not easy, but the Regents' efforts to ensure productivity are entirely appropriate.

Indeed, several systems already have effective new metrics and measures in place. At Iowa State, a faculty member can develop a Position Responsibility Statement (PRS) in consultation with the department chair and dean that adjusts expectations for teaching, research, and service to the needs of the university -- and the skills of the professor. In other words, Iowa State recognizes that it is simply not productive or efficient to assume there is one "standard" allocation of faculty time. It is, moreover, entirely appropriate for a governor, a legislature, and a governing board to want an accounting for how valuable faculty time and expertise is allocated. A common allocation of faculty time at research universities around the nation is 40% teaching, 40% research, 20% service. In other words 3/5 of an academic salary is likely to be devoted to activities and responsibilities outside the classroom. A strong case can be made for the direct relevance of these activities to effective teaching, but as tuition costs escalate, it is the fiduciary duty of a governing board to weigh competing academic priorities. Bottom line: just as Iowa State -- and a number of other universities -- found that there is no appropriate "standard" for allocation of faculty time -- governing boards in Texas are right to look for budgetary and performance metrics that illuminate the use of scarce and precious resources in higher education.

The Texas "7 Breakthrough Solutions" have drawn attention, positive and negative in Texas and even outside of the state; as recently as this month, the President of Florida State University approached the school's Board of Trustees with a proposed framework similar to that already proposed in this state, but provocatively titled "Florida Can Do Better than Texas." Alternatives to the status

quo deserve a rational, careful hearing. The Texas model emphasizes seven areas: in addition to splitting research and teaching budgets noted above, measuring teaching efficiency and effectiveness; publicly recognizing and rewarding extraordinary teachers; ; requiring evidence of teaching skill for tenure; using “results-based” contracts with students to measure quality; putting state funding directly in the hands of students; and creating results-based accrediting alternatives. The common theme among all of these goals is encouraging incentives for faculty, administrators, and trustees to all work towards a shared vision of academic excellence and affordability—adding value to students’ lives by providing them the tools to participate not only in the workforce, but as a citizen of the state of Texas. These suggestions deserve the careful attention of Texas governing boards.

Phyllis Krutsch, who was twice appointed by Wisconsin Governor Tommy Thompson to the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents, observed:

To be sure, boards cannot be successful without forging stronger and more constructive working relationships with the elected officials who appropriate a large portion of instructional budgets, with the faculty who teach and do research, with the K-12 institutions that prepare students, and with the corporate world and communities that create jobs. ...Faced with state budget challenges, engaged and responsible lay boards have both the ability and the authority to look at the big picture without being bound to a particular way of doing things, to ask the uncomfortable questions, and to make the tough choices.¹⁴

I conclude with an example of the alignment of political – in this case, mayoral vision and effective board action. The dramatic rise in academic standards at CUNY, the City University of New York, is a story of active trustees responding to mayoral leadership. Benno Schmidt, chairman of the CUNY Board and former president of Yale University concluded: “*Change in institutional strategy can only come from trustees.*” And Schmidt did not restrict his vision to budgetary issues.

“Reviewing an institution’s academic strategy and deciding whether change is called for is a trustee’s most important responsibility.”¹⁵

The Board received clear direction from a task force that then-mayor Rudolph Giuliani commissioned; it found that the 30% system-wide graduation rate was unacceptable, as was the cost of remediation for nearly 10,000 students annually. The task force also called for a dramatic rise in academic standards. Acting on the report of the mayoral task force, CUNY trustees took actions such as shifting remediation from four-year to two-year campuses, instituting high-school bridge programs, and strengthening general education requirements. There was an immense uproar, and trustees were pilloried for daring to question the status quo. Today, average SAT scores for CUNY freshmen are in the top third nationwide; graduation rates have increased dramatically, CUNY core curricula justifiably gain high ratings in ACTA’s What Will They Learn?™ evaluations, and the diversity of the student population has increased.¹⁶

The CUNY story is a paradigm of effectiveness in governance: a reform-minded mayor answerable to the electorate combined with the expertise and insight of the task force and trustees he appointed to effect positive change. The Board performed its fiduciary duties by appointing a highly effective chancellor and being willing to stand behind difficult and controversial decisions.

¹ John Immerwahr and Jean Johnson, *Squeeze Play. How Parents and the Public Look at Higher Education Today*, a report prepared by Public Agenda for the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (Washington, D.C., 2007).

² Goldie Blumenstyk, "In a Time of Uncertainty, Colleges Hold Fast to the Status Quo. *Chronicle* survey shows officials expect more financial fallout on campuses," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 25, 2009. <http://chronicle.com/article/In-a-Time-of-Uncertainty/48911/>. See further, Jack Stripling, "Bond Issue(s)," *Inside Higher Education*, June 18, 2009. <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2009/06/18/bonds>; Audrey Williams June, "Declaring Financial Exigency Could Be a Positive Step for Colleges, Report Says," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 7, 2011. <http://chronicle.com/article/Declaring-Financial-Exigency/126630/>

³ Robert Dickeson and Stanley O. Ikenberry, *Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services: Reallocating Resources to Achieve Strategic Balance*, Revised and Updated (San Francisco: John Wiley and Sons, 2010)

⁴ Louisiana State Board of Regents, "Board of Regents Minutes," 27 April 2011. http://regents.louisiana.gov/assets/docs/Academic/Board_2011_0427_Low_Completer_Report.pdf ; http://www.regents.doa.louisiana.gov/assets/docs/Board/Minutes/2011/BoR_Minutes_2011_0427.pdf

⁵ Missouri Department of Higher Education, "Statewide Academic Program Review Report to the Governor," February 2011 <http://www.dhe.mo.gov/documents/ProgramReviewSummaryReport.pdf> ; Office of Missouri Governor Jay Nixon, "Gov. Nixon receives final report on Statewide Academic Program Review from Higher Education Board," March 3, 2011. http://governor.mo.gov/newsroom/2011/Gov_Nixon_receives_final_report_on_Statewide_Academic_Program_Review_from_Higher_Education_Board

⁶ Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Board of Trustees, Board Minutes. <http://www.mnscu.edu/board/index.html>

⁷ Scott Carlson, "Campus Officials Seek Building Efficiencies, One Square Foot at a Time," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 17, 2009. <http://chronicle.com/article/Campus-Officials-Seek-Building/3292>

⁸ "Priorities for Excellence: The Penn State Strategic Plan 2009-10 through 2013-14, Strategy 7.2." <http://strategicplan.psu.edu/utilize>

⁹ Society for College and University Planning, *Campus Facilities Inventory, 2007 CFI Executive Summary*. <http://www.scup.org/asset/49554/scup-2007-cfi-exec-summary.pdf>

¹⁰ Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Overview of Space Usage Efficiency (SUE) (Austin: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board 2009) <http://www.theccb.state.tx.us/reports/PDF/1831.PDF?CFID=21721428&CFTOKEN=31323190> ; Susan Combs, *Financial Allocation Study for Texas 2010, Part IV* (Austin, TX: Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, Research and Analysis Division, 2010). www.FASTexas.org

¹¹ Phyllis Palmiero, *Shining the Light. A Report Card on Georgia's System of Public Higher Education* (Washington, D.C.: American Council of Trustees and Alumni, 2008) <https://www.goacta.org/publications/downloads/GAFinalReport.pdf> ; Sandra Czelusniak and Phyllis Palmiero, *Show Me. A Report Card on Public Higher Education in Missouri* (Washington, D.C.: American Council of Trustees and Alumni, 2008) <https://www.goacta.org/publications/downloads/ShowMeFinal.pdf> ; Sandra Diaz, Heather Lakemacher, and Charles Mitchell, *For the People. A Report Card on Public Higher Education in Illinois* (Washington, D.C. : American Council of Trustees and Alumni, 2009) <https://www.goacta.org/publications/downloads/ForthePeopleFinal.pdf> ; Sandra Diaz, Heather Lakemacher, and Charles Mitchell, *At a Crossroads. A Report Card on Public Higher Education in Minnesota* (Washington, D.C.: American Council of Trustees and Alumni, 2010)

<https://www.goacta.org/publications/downloads/MNReportFinal.pdf> ; Heather Lakemacher, Eric Markley, *What's Happening Off the Field? A Report on Higher Education in the Big 12* (Washington, D.C.: American Council of Trustees and Alumni, 2010) <https://www.goacta.org/publications/downloads/Big12Report.pdf> ; Heather Lakemacher, Eric Markley, and Michael Poliakoff, *Here We Have Idaho. A Report Card on Public Higher Education* (Washington, D.C.: American Council of Trustees and Alumni, 2011) <https://www.goacta.org/publications/downloads/IdahoReportCard%20FI.pdf> ; Eric Markley, and Michael Poliakoff, *Made in Maine, A Report Card on Public Higher Education* (Washington, D.C. : American Council of Trustees and Alumni, 2011).

¹² Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa, *Academically Adrift. Limited Learning on College Campuses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). See also Richard Arum, Josipa Roksa, and Esther Cho, *Improving Undergraduate Learning* (Brooklyn, New York: 2011) http://www.ssrc.org/workspace/images/crm/new_publication_3/%7Bd06178be-3823-e011-adeb-001cc477ec84%7D.pdf ; Richard Arum, Letter to Trustees, August 3, 2011 <http://www.goacta.org/press/PressReleases/2011PressReleases/RichardArumLetter.pdf>

¹³ ACT, "Case Study: Evaluating General Education Programs in South Dakota." http://www.act.org/caap/case_sodak.html

¹⁴ Phyllis M. Krutsch, *Governing Public Colleges and Universities: A Trustee Perspective*. Essays in Perspective 2 (Washington, D.C.: ACTA's Institute for Effective Governance, Spring 2004) <https://www.goacta.org/publications/downloads/Krutsch2004-2.pdf>

¹⁵ Benno C. Schmidt, Jr., *Lessons of the CUNY Transformation*. Remarks Accepting the Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education, with Tributes from Colin Powell, Floyd Abrams, and Matthew Goldstein (Washington, D.C.: American Council of Trustees and Alumni, 2010) <https://www.goacta.org/publications/downloads/SchmidtSpeech.pdf>

¹⁶ Benno C. Schmidt, Jr., et al., *The City University of New York: An Institution Adrift*, A Report of the Mayor's Advisory Task Force on the City University of New York, 1999.

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