

February 14, 2008

Chancellor Mark Yudof
University of Texas System
201 W. 7th Street
Austin, Texas 78701-2981

VIA HAND DELIVERY

RE: High Quality + Competitive Price = Competitive Education
Case Study: UTEP's Masters in Education Counseling Program

Dear Chancellor Yudof:

I write with respect to serious concerns about the Masters in Education Counseling program at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). I ask you to investigate UTEP's Masters program and report to me and the Regents on your solution. Our community needs quality, accredited programs at affordable cost, especially in key disciplines that affect our ability to compete.

Currently, the program has an abysmal 1-to-23 student-to-faculty ratio, over twice the nationally recommended average and well below that of comparable regional competitors. Further, contrary to specific representations made to students, UTEP administrators decided to not to seek national accreditation from the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) for the Masters Program. This misrepresentation has forced students to reassess whether the UTEP is attempting to deliver them the best quality education or maximize profits at the students' expense. Without CACREP accreditation, UTEP counseling graduates may find it difficult to get licensed in other states and will not be able to become nationally certified until two years after graduation and with the appropriate professional experience. Further, graduates may not be accepted into accredited doctoral programs for counselors and may not be as competitive in the job market, especially in doctoral positions. These students have potentially wasted hundreds of hours of semester credit time.

Meanwhile, several regional competitors offer Masters counseling programs with CACREP accreditation. Thus, students who might have chosen from other regional accredited programs are stuck in a program that is more expensive with less quality. Some students have

come to our office asking to be reimbursed for paying tuition on a program that did not deliver the quality promised.

Here are the facts on the UTEP program. The number of students entering the graduate counseling program has increased dramatically over the last five years. The program is now the second largest graduate program at UTEP, second only to the MBA program in the Business College. An urgent need for more school counselors in the El Paso school districts is what primarily led to the increase of enrollment. Currently, there are close to 180 graduate students enrolled in the program.

Unfortunately, there has not been a corresponding sustained increase in the number of full-time, tenure-track faculty to teach and supervise the increased number of counseling students. Nor have there been additional adjunct faculty hired to help with teaching and supervision. In fact, in the last year there has been a severe reduction in the ranks of professors in the department. Two professors were denied tenure by the provost in spite of the unanimous recommendations by their department colleagues, department chair, and college committee. One of the untenured professors was specifically hired in 2001 to deliver an accredited program.

Another professor, hired in 2003 with the promise that the counseling program would actively seek accreditation, resigned and has since relocated. Additionally, the department chair retired last August, and that position is still not filled with a permanent replacement. There are now five counseling professors. As a consequence of this reduction in faculty and increased enrollment, some graduate counseling classes now have 50 or more students.

The department has a counseling center in the College of Education building. The program was denied their request to hire a graduate assistant and adjunct supervisors to provide live supervision in the center. As a result, the counseling center is devoid of real clients. Instead, graduate students in clinical practicum practice and hone their counseling skills on each other. This is contrary to national counseling accreditation standards and the intent of clinical training specified in the Texas State Board of Examiners of Professional Counselors, Title 22, Texas Administrative Code, Chapter 681.

At the end of this May, the counseling program will be further reduced to four professors. While a job search is supposedly underway to fill the vacant positions, to date there has not been any job announcements placed in the most widely distributed counseling periodical, *Counseling Today*. National counseling accreditation standards by CACREP specify student-to-faculty ratios of 10 full-time equivalent students for every faculty member. UTEP's counseling program currently has a faculty to student ratio of about 23 students for each faculty member. This is over twice the national counseling accreditation standards.

The UTEP administration, in particular the provost Dr. Richard Jarvis, denied the department's request for additional faculty lines and/or a slight reduction in student enrollment. Dr. Phillip Barbee, the counseling department's CACREP committee chairperson, prepared a talking paper for the provost in November 2006, which indicated that only one additional full-time faculty would have to be hired in order to get provisional accreditation. At that time there

were 150 students enrolled in the program, which as mentioned previously, has now grown to 180 students.

Regarding a slight reduction in counseling graduates, the *Counselor Connection*, a collaborative consisting of all guidance directors in El Paso County, certainly want more school counselors – but they also want them adequately trained. They officially endorse CACREP accreditation for the UTEP counseling program, as evidenced by minutes from their monthly meeting.

For clarification, CACREP accreditation is not the same as UTEP's accreditation with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). The former is a specialized accreditation for practitioners, while the latter is a general accreditation of the University as a whole. Given the controversial tenure decisions, the reduction in faculty, and the delay in hiring replacement faculty, one could conclude that the UTEP administration is intentionally providing less quality while at the same time increasing tuition rates for the purpose of maximizing revenue, not quality. Although the program curriculum does meet the minimum state licensure codes, one would seriously have to question the effect this lack of faculty and clinical practicum supervisors, lack of real world clients in the counseling center, and refusal to have the program accredited with national standards have on the competency of the UTEP counseling graduates and, ultimately, the community at large.

By comparison, the University of Texas at San Antonio has approximately 300 graduate counseling students with 14 faculty members. This robust program is in the process of getting CACREP accreditation. It will be the first accredited counseling program in the UT system. New Mexico State University, which is about 45 miles north of El Paso, has a much smaller CACREP counseling program with only around 30 students. The program has 13 professors available for teaching and supervision, with 3 specifically identified as counselor educators. Texas Woman's University in Denton, also CACREP accredited, has 23 faculty for 141 graduate students. Currently, there are 10 CACREP accredited counseling programs in Texas, with several in the active process of obtaining accreditation. This includes Webster University located at El Paso's Fort Bliss. In all three programs, the faculty-to-staff ratio aligns with national accrediting standards.

El Paso is in desperate need of many more mental health and school counselors. Within five years, over 54,000 troops and dependents will come to El Paso. On the following page is the chart showing expected deployment dates:

Expected Growth at Fort Bliss, 2006-12

	Baseline 2005		2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	Endstate 2012
Soldiers	9330	+/-	3844	948	2778	2790	9785	4074	3787	28006
		Cumulative	13174	14122	16900	19690	29475	33549	37336	37336
Spouses	4945	+/-	2230	550	1611	1618	5675	2363	2196	16243
		Cumulative	7175	7724	9336	10954	16629	18992	21188	21188
Children	10385	+/-	2952	728	2134	2143	7515	3129	2908	21509
		Cumulative	13337	14065	16199	18341	25856	28985	31894	31894
6-12 years (34%)	3531	+/-	1004	248	725	729	2555	1064	989	7313
		Cumulative	4535	4782	5508	6236	8791	9855	10844	10844
13-18 years (29%)	3012	+/-	856	211	619	621	2179	907	843	6237
		Cumulative	3868	4079	4698	5319	7499	8406	9249	9249
Total School Age	6543	+/-	1860	459	1344	1350	4734	1971	1832	13550
		Cumulative	8403	8862	10206	11556	16290	18261	20093	20093

Source: Team Bliss Base Transformation Office. Current as of December 2007.

With expected growth near the size of a small city, our community must have competent, adequately trained counselors. In recent BRAC hearings in Washington, D.C. and El Paso, the Army has publicly expressed concerns for the variety of mental health issues, in particular Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, with the ever-increasing numbers of returning troops from Iraq and Afghanistan. In fact, last session I filed S.B. 961, which would have, among other things, allowed schools to increase the number of counselors that serve children whose parents have been deployed.

I find it most troubling that students essentially were admitted into a non-accredited counseling program after they were told on several occasions that UTEP would seek such accreditation. UTEP hired Dr. Barbee and others with the goal of seeking accreditation and enrolled students based on this premise. Then, without justification, UTEP now tells the 180 enrollees who will now spend over \$15,000 getting an unaccredited degree that UTEP has changed plans. Had prospective UTEP Masters candidates known exactly what effect an unaccredited degree meant to their career, they could have made the informed decision to seek an accredited program at NMSU, UT-San Antonio or any one of the other 10 accredited counseling programs in Texas.

Amazingly, students continue to be misled, as evidenced by recent statements on January 17, 2008 by Dr. Josie Tinajero, the College of Education dean. She told two counseling classes that the SACS institutional accreditation will suffice and that CACREP is strictly optional and would have no effect on their careers as counselors. She further told the students that the counseling program would have to be cut in half and that accreditation could jeopardize student financial aid. These statements are disingenuous at best and intentionally deceitful at worst. Even if this were true, UTEP had a duty to deliver this information at the start of a Masters course, not after the first semester.

What is the bottom line? The bottom line is that a decision was made to maximize profit to UTEP and minimize benefits to students. Our community is surrounded by predatory models in payday loans, subprime lending, and even student lending. In my view, the model of low

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quality at high price represents a new “predatory education model” that is not acceptable to the students I represent.

Accordingly, I want to know the following:

- The status for hiring additional full-time faculty members for the UTEP counseling program;
- The status of this program and why it is not accredited with CACREP;
- Whether the program will be accredited with CACREP;
- If not, whether the students be refunded their money so that they can make a decision on what program delivers the best value for them; and
- If in the future the students will be advised that another option exists at other accredited universities because this program does not carry the value that was advertised.

I look forward to your response in the near future. With your support, we can work to make Texas education the best. In my view, the UT System owes a first duty to the students and a quality education, not maximizing the bottom line.

Please provide your reply in the next 10 days so that we may inform the students of all options available to them.

Very truly yours,



Eliot Shapleigh

ES/jlp

Enclosure: *Counselor Connection* Meeting Minutes

cc: Mr. H. Scott Caven, Jr.
Mr. James R. Huffines
Mr. Paul Foster