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The University of Texas at Tyler

March 7, 2008

The Honorable Eliot Shapleigh  
Texas Senate  
P.O. Box 12068  
Austin, Texas 78768

Dear Senator Shapleigh:

Thank you for your recent letter regarding The University of Texas at El Paso's Master of Education Counseling Program accreditation. It is certainly our goal to have the necessary professional accreditations where certification would improve the academic standing of our educational programs and opportunities for our students. We believe that UTEP's decision not to pursue program accreditation from the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP) at this time for its Masters in Education Counseling Program is reasonable and that its course of action regarding future accreditation is properly measured.

In your February 14<sup>th</sup> letter, you asked us to review certain aspects of UTEP's Master of Education Counseling Program and to provide a response to specific questions. In response to your inquiry, we provide the following:

- The status for hiring additional full-time faculty members for the UTEP counseling program

UTEP is currently recruiting for an assistant or associate professor in counseling education. The position was first posted in October and advertised in major publications, including *Counseling Today*. The search is in its final stages and finalists are expected for interviews on campus within the next few weeks.

The recruitment process that UTEP has followed is fairly typical.

- The status of this program and why it is not accredited with CACREP

UTEP's counseling program is not currently accredited and UTEP has no current plan to apply for accreditation through CACREP. UTEP's decision not to do so results from its consideration of the certain costs to the institution versus the uncertain benefits to student opportunities as well as the program's reputation.

You should be aware that none of the other UT System institutions are currently accredited with CACREP. Our review does show that The University of Texas at San Antonio has applied and The University of Texas – Pan American is looking into accreditation. Importantly, The University of Texas at Austin has not sought accreditation with CACREP for its counseling programs.

Furthermore, our review suggests that less than half of the educational counseling degree programs in the United States are accredited with CACREP.

UTEP's decision not to pursue accreditation at this time is not unreasonable.

- Whether the program will be accredited with CACREP

I have been assured that UTEP will objectively study accreditation with CACREP for its educational counseling program to gauge whether accreditation will actually improve the program's reputation and provide meaningful benefits to students. I have asked UTEP to consider The University of San Antonio's application and The University of Texas – Pan American's consideration of joining CACREP in its objective study of the issue.

The University of Texas System Administration will assist UTEP, as it does with all system institutions, in determining whether accreditation with any particular professional association is warranted.

- If not, whether the students be refunded their money so they can make a decision on what program delivers the best value for them

There is no evidence to suggest that UTEP's decision to not pursue CACREP accreditation has negatively impacted the program or student opportunities. UTEP's graduates are finding employment or admission to graduate school, and the pass rates for school counselor professional certifications for the past several years continue to be 100%. These meaningful indicators suggest that students already receive a tremendous value from the program as it currently exists.

While CACREP accreditation might add value to the program, we conclude that UTEP's decision not to pursue accreditation does not and has not jeopardized the program's reputation or opportunities for its students.

- 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

For the reasons provided above, and because it is poor public policy to require an institution to advertise what it is not, it is unnecessary to advise students as you suggest.

Finally, you suggest that UTEP's decision regarding CACREP accreditation for the Master of Education Counseling Program "represents a new predatory education model" classified along with "payday loans, subprime lending, and even student lending." We found absolutely no evidence that UTEP's decision not to seek CACREP accreditation was to "maximize profit to UTEP and minimize benefits to students" and has no basis in fact. Such an assertion is wholly unjustified.

We take your concerns seriously, and trust you will find our review of the issue adequately satisfies your concerns. Please feel free to call on me should you have additional questions or need more information.

Respectfully,



David B. Prior  
Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

DBP/ddj

cc: Mark Yudof, Chancellor  
Francie Frederick, Counsel to the Board of Regents  
Diana Natalicio, President