

## The faculty council are imbeciles?

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In late May at an education summit orchestrated by Gov. Rick Perry, retired House Majority Leader Dick Arme y called faculty senates "an imbecile institution" and suggested that regents reduce the faculty's role in university governance. Some Daily Texan readers may share Arme y's opinion. If you do, at least consider the following.

The imbecile institution at UT known as the Faculty Council was recently headed by Michael Granof, chair of the UT Coop Board and Ernst and Young Professor of Accounting, the top-ranked program in the nation. Next year, biology professor David Hillis will lead us. A MacArthur fellow, Hillis has just been admitted to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. With such deficient leadership, no wonder the faculty council at UT behaves like imbeciles.

In the last two years, UT's faculty council took the advice given by the national committee on higher education chaired by former head of the UT Board of Regents Charles Miller. It also considered carefully how to implement the recommendations of UT's own Commission of 125, appointed by then-president Larry Faulkner, now President of the Houston Endowment and Director at Exxon Mobil Corporation.

The members of the Commission included a rear admiral, a former governor of Texas, prominent CEOs and CFOs, bank presidents, partners in prestigious law firms, judges, community and civic leaders and a humorist and emeritus university president — nobody's idea of professors running amok.

With President Bill Powers' active support, UT's imbecile institution has implemented the Commission's curricular reforms and addressed long-standing problems in undergraduate education. One of the most serious is the University's 19:1 student-to-professor ratio.

The new Office of Undergraduate Studies is bringing senior faculty together with UT's incoming freshmen in innovative small courses on important issues that reach across academic disciplines. Meanwhile, the University continues to add new faculty in targeted areas, despite being constrained by caps on tuition and by biennial legislative appropriations that regularly fail to match increased costs.

But the Faculty Council's role in most matters is advisory. We imbeciles can study problems and make proposals, but we cannot allocate funds and we do not make final administrative decisions. Contrast Gov. Perry's approach. Perry's Higher Education Summit for the heads of the UT, A&M and Texas Tech state university systems had no democratic fair-and-balanced representation of ideas. It was run by a conservative think tank known as the Texas Public Policy Foundation.

The governor's summit worked like a think tank. A think tank is a place where doctrinaire thinkers go to reinforce their shared opinions, sheltered from alternative viewpoints found in the outside world, particularly those from good state universities. The head of the Acton School, a five-year-old business school offering a one-year "entrepreneurial degree," presented "break-through solutions" at the summit. The Acton School has a total of eleven faculty and a 2:1 student-to-faculty ratio. All its students receive full \$35,000 tuition fellowships.

Gov. Perry wants to apply the Acton School model to the three major public university systems that serve hundreds of thousands of students of diverse backgrounds, talents, educational interests and needs.

Two obvious ideas would be to offer full tuition support in our state's university systems and drastically reduce high student to professor ratios by adding many more faculty. Both would cost money. It is easier to blame Faculty Councils than to call attention to the fact that state appropriations cover a mere 16 percent of the annual operating budget of the University.

The governor's summit did propose that students be given contracts that specify for each major the starting salaries relative to student SAT scores. As a certified imbecile, I propose we devise a contract that would remind our governor that students attend state universities in Texas to learn how to think and to benefit society, not to evaluate majors or their own educations by average starting salary.

We could also invite the governor and the regents to an imbeciles summit at UT where we would discuss why the United States is being outstripped in virtually every measure of higher education by rival countries, what solutions we have devised already and what increased state support is needed to make these solutions really work.