



UT Faculty Productivity Gets High Marks in New Report

by [Reeve Hamilton](#) 11/13/2011

Despite the arguments of critics in recent months, Marc Musick, the University of Texas at Austin's College of Liberal Arts associate dean of student affairs, makes the case in a new faculty productivity report that his institution provides "an incredible return on investment for the state."

Using data from the 2009-10 academic year [made public](#) by the [University of Texas System](#) this summer, Musick found that UT professors generated revenue of more than twice their compensation of \$257 million in state funds for salary and benefits. By combining the amount of money paid by the state via a student enrollment-based formula and external funding for academic research, Musick concluded that the UT faculty generated about \$558 million in total revenue for the university.

Musick's report is the latest in a [series](#) of [similar](#) productivity studies that have been released over the course of a year marked by questions about the effectiveness of the state's higher education system. The studies have come from a variety of sources using differing methodologies and reaching a wide range of conclusions, some of them strikingly negative. The latest release comes at a time when many of the key players in the state's ongoing debate over higher education are poised to take the discussion on how to measure faculty productivity to a national level.

The topic became a hot-button issue in the spring, due in large part to a set of seven controversial proposals for higher education written by Austin businessman Jeff Sandefer in 2008 and promoted by Gov. [Rick Perry](#) and the [Texas Public Policy Foundation](#), a conservative think tank of which Sandefer is a board member.

On Friday, Sandefer and others tied to the TPPF are participating in a higher education conference in Washington, D.C., put on by the Cato Institute, a prominent national conservative organization. According to information the institute [posted online](#) about the event, "One key question the conference will take on is how to assess the productivity of faculty members, including examining the groundbreaking — and highly controversial — efforts recently undertaken in the state of Texas."

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An early December closed-door gathering in Indianapolis organized by UT President [Bill Powers](#) for the presidents and provosts of public universities in the Association of

American Universities, an elite organization of research institutions, will also tackle the subject. “In particular, I would like to explore how we might foster richer deliberations about higher education productivity than we have seen recently in Texas and other states,” Powers wrote in his invitation.

While Musick’s new study demonstrates a high level of faculty productivity at the university, he acknowledged that it omits key elements of professors’ workload. “All it’s doing is measuring two things that the faculty do,” he said. “It’s measuring grants and its measuring teaching. But faculty do lots of different things. The data we have are extremely limited in what they can tell us.”

Still, Musick saw in the data opportunities to encourage more productivity. He recommends enhancing offerings for faculty mentorship, since the strongest-performing faculty tend to be more experienced. He said the number of students in some mid-size classes could be increased without sacrificing quality, freeing up resources for more of the smaller classes that students prefer. He also recommended that the university provide greater incentives for professors to pursue grants and more assistance with their submissions so that less of their time is spent on paperwork.

Most importantly, Musick said, faculty need to be evaluated based on accurate, comprehensive data that conveys their productivity over time as opposed to a single year.

“I completely agree with the idea of going out and getting data and analyzing it,” said Musick, who also released a [report on university efficiency](#) in September, “but it’s got to be helpful, it’s got to be thoughtful, its got to be done in the right way to make sure we are finding the truth and not just doing what’s easy to find quick answers.”