



## REFLECTING TEXAS

*How the Texas A&M University System Board of Regents and Prairie View A&M University demonstrate good financial stewardship and reduce financial barriers for students to better serve Texans.*

.....

Governing Board Best Practices  
on College Affordability

.....

FEBRUARY 2022



**Partners for  
College Affordability**  
AND PUBLIC TRUST



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February 2022

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Acknowledgments: Thank you to the Partners for College Affordability and Public Trust Board of Directors for their support and Dr. James V. Koch for his advice on the project. This project would not have been possible without the participation of the Texas A&M University System Board of Regents and Prairie View A&M University and the generosity of The Michelson 20MM Foundation and ECMC Foundation.



## INTRODUCTION

The project focuses on the affordability strategies of the governing boards of five U.S. higher education institutions or systems. The project seeks to explain the role governing board members play in bringing about affordability measures and their relationship with college executives and their agendas. What strategies do they employ? And how has the COVID-19 pandemic changed their approach?

This study of the Texas A&M University System Board of Regents focuses on how the Board has set a tone of affordability for the System through tuition control, targeted financial aid, data transparency, and strong financial oversight. The study also highlights how the Board's values pervade the 11 universities it governs, with a specific focus on one of them – Prairie View A&M University, a land-grant historically Black university. Prairie View is characterized by highly responsive leadership and impressive cost-cutting efforts that helped steer them successfully through the COVID-19 pandemic.

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“One of the great challenges for educational leadership is to try and be consistent in our messages. On the one hand, you can't argue that the cost – the internal rate of inflation – is such that you have no choice but to raise tuition, and then have people see that what is creating all of that pressure on the internal rate of inflation is the kind of decisions you're making.”

**Dr. Ruth J. Simmons**  
President  
Prairie View A&M University



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## ABOUT TAMUS AND PVAMU

The Texas A&M University System (TAMUS) is a public university system in Texas created in 1948 by the Texas Legislature, with a history reaching back to 1876 at the founding of land-grant institutions, including Texas A&M University – the system’s flagship – and Prairie View A&M University (PVAMU).<sup>1</sup> With over 152,000 students across its 11 universities and a budget of \$9.6 billion, TAMUS is one of the largest university systems in the country.<sup>2</sup>

The Texas A&M University System – along with The University of Texas System – benefits from a public endowment – the Permanent University Fund (PUF) – which was first established by the Texas Legislature in 1876 through the appropriation of land grants. These vast land holdings – now 2.1 million acres – generate revenue for the fund primarily through oil and gas production.<sup>3</sup> Each year, a portion of PUF returns is distributed into the Available University Fund (AUF), providing critical resources and funding stability over time. While 21 institutions across the two systems are eligible for AUF funds for capital-related expenditures, only three universities – Texas A&M University, University of Texas at Austin, and Prairie View A&M University – and the two Systems’ administrative offices are eligible to use the fund for other purposes.<sup>4</sup> The amount of funds allocated to individual institutions is determined by the Board of Regents of the Texas A&M University System and The University of Texas System. The PUF’s net asset value as of June 2021 was more than \$24 billion.<sup>5</sup>

Prairie View A&M University is a public, historically Black land-grant university in rural east Texas, located just 50 miles outside of Houston in Waller County. Established in 1876 as the Alta Vista Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas for Colored Youth, PVAMU was the first state-supported college in Texas for Black Americans, as well as the second oldest public postsecondary institution in Texas. According to *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, PVAMU is the top ranked institution in the country when it comes to producing minority engineers and architects.<sup>6</sup>

Prairie View A&M University is top 10 in their category in the researchers’ own ranking of Public Value Universities, including #3 for value added, #4 for percent of Pell grant students, #8 for social mobility, and #12 for both net price and lowest net price increase over time. In December 2020, Prairie View was the recipient of a \$50 million donation from philanthropist MacKenzie Scott – the largest single gift to a historically Black college and university (HBCU) ever.<sup>7</sup>



*Figure 1. Prairie View A&M University Campus, 2013. (Photo by the Prairie View A&M University Facebook Page, <https://www.facebook.com/pvamu/>)*

Table 1. Total Head Count and Net Price by Institution, The Texas A&M University System

University	Location	Fall 2021 Total Head Count	2019-20 Average Net Price <sup>i</sup>
Prairie View A&M University	Prairie View, TX	9,353	\$13,794
Tarleton State University	Stephenville, TX	13,995	\$15,181
Texas A&M International University	Laredo, TX	8,145	\$4,165
Texas A&M University	College Station, TX	66,057	\$19,906
Texas A&M University at Galveston <sup>ii</sup>	Galveston, TX	2,168	NA
Texas A&M University-Central Texas	Killeen, TX	2,218	\$3,637
Texas A&M University-Commerce	Commerce, TX	10,966	\$12,853
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi	Corpus Christi, TX	10,762	\$14,294
Texas A&M University-Kingsville	Kingsville, TX	6,375	\$13,466
Texas A&M University-San Antonio	San Antonio, TX	6,858	\$11,175
Texas A&M University-Texarkana	Texarkana, TX	2,078	\$11,201
West Texas A&M University	Canyon, TX	9,545	\$13,105
Texas A&M Health Science Center <sup>iii</sup>	Bryan, TX	3,304	NA

Note: 2019-20 Average Net Price is for full-time, in-state first-time students.<sup>i</sup> The Texas A&M University at Galveston is a branch campus of Texas A&M University.<sup>ii</sup> The Texas A&M Health Science Center is a component of Texas A&M University.<sup>iii</sup>  
 Sources: Office of Budgets and Accounting, The Texas A&M University System (Fall 2021 Total Head Count); "Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System," U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics (2019-2020 Average Net Price).

## GOVERNANCE CHARACTERISTICS

The Texas A&M University System is governed by the Texas A&M University System Board of Regents, which oversees the system's 11 universities and eight state agencies.<sup>9</sup> The Board consists of nine voting members appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Texas Senate to staggered six-year terms. The governor also appoints a non-voting student member to serve a one-year term. The System's day-to-day operations are overseen by a chancellor, and each of its universities has a president.

In 2013, the Texas Legislature deregulated tuition by amending the Texas Education Code to give governing boards of public institutions the authority to set designated tuition rates, allowing amounts to vary by program, course level, and academic period.<sup>9</sup> At public universities in Texas, there are three distinct types of tuition: statutory tuition, designated tuition, and Board authorized tuition. While statutory tuition is a minimum tuition amount for undergraduate students – currently set in statute at \$50 per semester credit hour (SCH) for resident undergraduates – governing boards are authorized to charge additional tuition amounts for undergraduate or graduate students, called designated tuition, at their discretion, with no upper limit.<sup>10</sup> Board authorized tuition is tuition charged for graduate programs, which governing boards are authorized to set at rates up to twice that of undergraduate statutory tuition.<sup>11</sup>



Figure 2. Texas A&M University campus from above, 2020. (Photo by the Texas A&M University Facebook Page, <https://www.facebook.com/tamu/photos/a.10150604569223172/10157863322158172>).

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1.

The Texas A&M University System Board of Regents prioritizes affordability by limiting tuition increases to the rate of inflation and reducing financial barriers for students.



2.

The Board of Regents adopted a culture of data transparency that features a unique “Datapolooza” event.



3.

By exerting strong financial oversight, the Board of Regents demands institutions maximize their resources, which generates positive institutional responses.



4.

Prairie View A&M University conveyed austerity by cutting unnecessary costs.



## 1. The Texas A&M University System Board of Regents prioritizes affordability by limiting tuition increases to the rate of inflation and reducing financial barriers for students.

The buck stops with the Board of Regents.

And while affordability is a goal shared by administrators and faculty up and down the ranks of the Texas A&M University System, it's the Board who ultimately sets that expectation.

"We certainly set the tone, set the priority, and set the accountability for [keeping college affordable] across all of our institutions," said immediate past Board chair Elaine Mendoza.

For the Board, setting the tone includes controlling tuition by limiting any annual increases to the rate of inflation, which they quantify using the higher education price index (HEPI), a more generous index of inflation, based on a fixed basket of higher education costs, than the better recognized consumer price index (CPI).

This HEPI rate change is "the ceiling," says Board vice chair Bill Mahomes.

In recent years, the Board has held tuition increases at inflationary levels. At Prairie View, the one-year variable tuition rate and the five-year guaranteed tuition rate for fall of 2022 were held at the previous year's rates and only increased 1.8 percent and 2.1 percent, respectively, on average each year since the fall of 2016.

System office staff would get "grilled endlessly," said deputy chancellor and chief financial officer Billy Hamilton, if staff tried to get the Board to adopt, say, a five percent increase in tuition.

The Board may allow tuition to rise, but before they would consider it, they would "make sure that we have scraped all the dough out of the bowl," said Hamilton.

But system leadership and the college presidents aren't pushing the upper limits of the Board's tolerance for price increases.

Dr. Ruth Simmons, president of Prairie View A&M University said affordability is among the highest – if not the highest – priorities of her institution and that high published tuition rates produce sticker shock for potential students.

"Because of the population that we serve, we know that the possibility of families being discouraged to buy the advertised cost is very strong," she said. "The shock that people get from looking at the cost of education is very real."



**On keeping college affordable:**  
"We certainly set the tone, set the priority, and set the accountability for making that happen across all of our institutions."

**Elaine Mendoza**  
Immediate Past Chair  
Texas A&M University System  
Board of Regents



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President  
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Simmons continued, “Especially if you are earning \$30,000 a year and you’re looking at an education that’s going to cost you pretty much all of your take home [pay], then what do you do other than walk away and say, ‘Well, it’s just not affordable.’ So, we have to be very clear about what avenues we have for families to be able to afford to go to college.”

That’s where the system’s focus on reducing financial barriers for underrepresented students come in. And in-state students stand to benefit, primarily.

In 2020, the system approved \$100 million in scholarships over ten years to ensure the system’s universities better reflect the demographics of the state and “make the A&M System look like Texas.”<sup>12</sup>

At a place like Prairie View, where many students are on federal financial aid, affording tuition is just one part of the equation, said Dr. James Hallmark, the system’s vice chancellor for academic affairs. The system and institutions look for ways to offset the

costs of “all that other life stuff,” such as paying for transportation and medical care, that are barriers to pursuing and finishing a college education.

In 2018, the Board of Regents approved a new financial aid program – the Regents’ Grant – providing \$30 million over ten years for one-time grant funding for students facing financial hardship.<sup>13</sup> The grant program was created after identifying a gap in financial aid among students who do not qualify for Pell Grants, but whose family income is not enough to cushion against unexpected expenses and avoid taking out additional educational loans.

On campus and among donors, Simmons has rallied behind additional financial aid in the form of emergency funds for students in a short-term financial pinch who lack a safety net. She sees this as critical to enrollment.

“I was surprised by the extent to which students sometimes leave college because of what I would consider a minor amount of money that they just can’t find a way to secure,” said Simmons. “And sometimes that’s as little as \$200. And they have a particular problem that needs to be solved, they cannot solve it and therefore they just give up and leave school.”

And fewer students are stopping out of Prairie View. According to System data, the first year persistence rate has improved more than five percentage points since 2012.<sup>14</sup>

## 2. The Board of Regents adopted a culture of data transparency that features a unique “Dataplooza” event.

The higher education industry is awash with data. By tracking postsecondary statistics, college and university leaders are able to measure educational quality and progress. At the state level, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) publishes and tracks detailed higher education statistics through the Texas Higher Education Data website.

The Texas A&M University System began a data transparency initiative of their own, which sprang from a meeting Mendoza, then-chairing the Board’s Committee on Academic and Student Affairs, had with the System’s university presidents in 2011.

“And not one president in the room could tell you what their graduation rate was. Not a one. None. It was embarrassing. Others could, but not the presidents,” said System administrator Hallmark. “Until then, the presidents were all focused on fundraising, and ‘what am I going to do with that donor?’ and the NCAA, etc. They weren’t focused on the nuts-and-bolts issues of why we’re here.”

The System launched a website, called “EmpowerU,” which features comprehensive data related to college completion and time to degree, using data reported to THECB.<sup>15</sup> While the website includes data tracking graduation rates and enrollment, it also contains financial factors like average tuition and fees and operational costs per student.

Prior to posting the dashboard, the lack of public information “played into the narrative that higher education wasn’t worthy of investment by the citizens of the state and that, you know, people left there with no degree and high debt,” said Mendoza. “So, we wanted to make sure that the data was out there for ultimate accountability.”

Today the situation is very different. In the Texas A&M University System, regents as well as college presidents are familiar with key performance indicators and know how to put this information to work – and the public has the same access to that information.

Although the initial push for data transparency was motivated by the Board’s goal of getting the information out in the open for discussion, it took two or three years to fine-tune the metrics, according to Mendoza.

“There’s a huge dashboard on every institution,” said Mendoza. “All the metrics, you can slice and dice them demographically, you name it... And we make these numbers available publicly.”

This all transpired prior to Simmons’ hire as Prairie View president – and the newfound data transparency didn’t paint Prairie View and the previous administration in the best light.



**On data transparency:**  
“So, we wanted to make sure that the data was out there for ultimate accountability.”

**Elaine Mendoza**  
Immediate Past Chair  
Texas A&M University System  
Board of Regents



“Well, for Prairie View, yeah, it was sobering to see those numbers. And what we would ask is, ‘How are you addressing these issues, what’s your strategy?’ et cetera. We were given excuses. I don’t want to be crass, but I mean they were just excuses,” said Mendoza.

Simmons, on the other hand, isn’t shirking responsibility. With so many constituents depending on them – and because of the value universities are expected to deliver – college presidents can no longer “fly by the seat of your pants,” she said. And if the data indicates the wrong kind of institutional focus, then leaders need to make changes.

The systemwide approach to data collection and transparency – including investments in data scientists – has benefitted Prairie View and other TAMUS institutions because some don’t have the capacity to perform these functions on their own.

TAMUS’ culture of data transparency isn’t beyond critique. System administrator Hallmark worries consumers might get lost in the data. “There’s so much out there, there’s the view we’ve hidden the needle in the haystack” he said.

Internally, the System has harnessed this plethora of data to make data-informed decisions for the public good.

### Datapolooza

Once a year, the Board of Regents hosts a “Datapolooza.”

While the meeting’s name might be easy to poke fun at – the “most exciting day of the year” said one interviewee, tongue-in-cheek – the subject of Datapolooza is no laughing matter.

The meeting brings together all the college presidents, provosts, and agency heads with their key department leaders in front of the regents to look at how each institution is tracking against their key performance indicators and engage in discussion about how they are performing and what needs to change.

What makes Datapolooza unique to other meetings is an intense, exclusive focus on data and performance and the fact that administrators are expected to be answerable for problems out in the open. On this day, there’s no sweeping problems under the rug.

“No president wants to admit to their regents something is wrong. We’ve managed to create an environment where they can have some pretty open discussions about data.”

**Dr. James R. Hallmark**  
Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs  
Texas A&M University System



While leaders are held accountable for progress towards goals, Board members insist they also want the institutions to learn from each other and use the information to make a bigger impact in the areas that matter most.

Said Hallmark, “It took us a couple of years to get there, but the presidents have realized it’s not a ‘gotcha’. It’s a sharing, community of practice model that happens to occur in front of regents. No president wants to admit to their regents something is wrong. We’ve managed to create an environment where they can have some pretty open discussions about data.”

## COVID-19 INSIGHT:

As the COVID-19 pandemic dragged on into its second year, higher education accessibility has eroded. From the fall of 2019 to the fall of 2021, enrollment at U.S. colleges and universities fell by 5.1 percent.<sup>16</sup>

But the Texas A&M University System has defied these national enrollment trends. Over the same 2-year period, enrollment increased 0.8 percent systemwide and a whopping 4.6 percent at Prairie View.<sup>17</sup>

Around the country, graduates of low-income high schools appear to be most adversely affected post-pandemic, enrolling in college at a rate 2.3 percent lower than their counterparts from wealthier high schools.<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps it's no coincidence that TAMUS – laser-focused on reducing financial barriers for students – has seen enrollment increase.

In addition to issuing \$48 million in refunds or credits to students for dining and housing services not rendered, TAMUS has been mindful of students who lack access to the technological resources necessary for a fully online education.<sup>19</sup>

Said PVAMU President Simmons, “Suddenly, everybody goes online and then we discover that our students don't have everything they need to be fully online. And then what do you do? Well, in the middle of the year you have to find the resources to buy a whole ton of devices that you make available to our students. And we have over 9,000 students so that's a lot of devices. And when they leave and they go to their homes, they don't have Wi-Fi often and so on. And so we have to invest a very significant amount of money in that.”

TAMUS spent nearly \$10 million in equipment and training to build infrastructure for remote learning and keep its students on the path to completion. To “make [online resources] as accessible as possible,” Wi-Fi was installed in campus parking lots for students who lived off campus but lacked home Wi-Fi, said TAMUS Chancellor John Sharp.<sup>20</sup>



**3. By exerting strong financial oversight, the Board of Regents demands that institutions maximize their resources, which generates positive institutional responses.**

The role of a higher education governing board – beyond basic fiduciary responsibility – remains in dispute. Some preach a hands-off approach, others activism. Some are advocates or champions.<sup>21</sup> Others define their role as a “gatekeeper” for the public.<sup>22</sup> How about “guardian?”<sup>23</sup>

However you label it, the Texas A&M University System Board of Regents sees their role as providing oversight. The Board makes sure everyone, from the system chancellor to the college presidents and agency heads, is playing their distinct roles – and playing them well. Prairie View’s Simmons says system administration provides regular guidance to the institutions. In addition to budget approval, they monitor ongoing costs, ask for justification, and make suggestions. “But don’t think for a moment that the Board of Regents isn’t immersed in that as well,” said Simmons.

She continued, “The administration can help with more routine matters because the Board cedes to the System administration the ability to approve some things, but not major fiscal items. [The Board does] that themselves. So, there is a close relationship, actually, with the Board of Regents in terms of the budgets and the decisions we make with regards to fiscal matters.”

Exerting strong financial oversight involves instigating a variety of periodic financial reviews – reviews that the schools and agencies should probably do themselves but perhaps don’t have the capacity to do so.

In 2013-14, the System office, with the Board’s support, conducted a systemwide administrative staffing analysis, the results of which were put in the hands of the college presidents and agency heads. The analysis focused on non-faculty administrative positions, honing in unused positions, duplication, and unnecessary levels of management.

**“**  
**The systemwide staffing analysis collectively saved a whopping \$294 million over five years.**  
**”**

The objective, former Board chair Mendoza said, was “trimming up the overhead in making sure we have the right balance of administration. The president shouldn’t have a million vice presidents serving them. And then there’s the deans.”

And while the Board and chancellor didn’t mandate that the universities take corrective action where the report found duplication or bloat, the expectation was that the universities would work with the chancellor to take action themselves without the need for Board intervention.

“There was lots of angst” initially, said System vice chancellor Hallmark. “But once the presidents understood they would make the final decisions, they tended to do the right thing.” The actions collectively saved a whopping \$294 million over five years.

Holding down administrative costs and promoting greater efficiency is also emphasized in the Board of Regents' budgetary review process. According to budget instructions issued by the System to its institutions, operating expenses should reflect "careful estimates of actual needs" and take into account "every possibility for savings."<sup>24</sup> In 2018, administrative costs at System institutions accounted for just nine percent of operating budgets.<sup>25</sup>

Exerting strong financial oversight also means not acting as a rubber stamp. "If anything is out of sync, we will note that and would want to know why and to go into it," said Board vice chair Mahomes. Like the time the Board of Regents confronted Prairie View for holding a bigger financial reserve – "hoarding" as Simmons later called it – than what the Board believed was necessary.

Mahomes recounted, "[Prairie View leaders] would come to us and say, 'We need this or that.' And we would say, 'Hey, you have funds over there. Spend your own funds. It's not our role to continue to booster your reserve.'"

In general, Board members felt the previous PVAMU administration had let the funds sit as a matter of financial comfort rather than putting the funds to work to meet campus needs. The System typically recommends holding only three to four months of reserve. According to Mendoza, the school had been encouraged to leverage some of their reserve to address student housing in lieu of borrowing money for construction.

Simmons said that once she understood the Board's point of view, she knew they were right. So, PVAMU leaders poured additional funds from the reserve into financial aid, including immediate relief for students, and they also pumped some money into faculty development, investments that reflect their institutional ideals.

And even though the Board provides high-level oversight, occasionally it exercises its prerogative to get into the weeds when something seemingly routine doesn't pass their smell test. And sometimes the universities are told outright to go back to the drawing board.

There was another time when the Board rejected the compensation and retention plan of an athletic coach. The Board noticed the coach's unit was running a budget deficit and that the revenue the coach had brought in for the sport was paltry. Simmons said they went about satisfying the deficit and proposing a more reasonable plan for retaining the coach.

"The regents do reach down into our campus, on fiscal matters especially and to determine whether or not we're doing good stewardship," said Simmons.

**"If anything is out of sync, we will note that and would want to know why and to go into it."**

**Bill Mahomes**  
Vice Chairman  
Texas A&M University System  
Board of Regents



#### 4. Prairie View A&M University conveyed austerity by cutting unnecessary costs.

Some university presidents would have rested on their laurels.

But not Ruth Simmons. Despite shattering PVAMU fundraising marks in just a few years, buffering institutional revenues – including \$50 million, the largest philanthropic gift to an HBCU in history – Simmons pays close attention to the cost-side of the ledger.<sup>26</sup>

And as a university president with deep executive experience, she’s very sensitive to how administrative financial decisions are perceived by university stakeholders.

Prior to Prairie View, Simmons was president of Smith College and Brown University; she was the first Black woman to serve as president of an Ivy League school. She knows that if the public believes college is a place students rack up debt with little to show for it, then – true or not – universities can’t just sit idly by or take actions that mistakenly reinforce that perception.

Simmons worries about the messages that colleges and universities send when they raise tuition without a great amount of care.

“One of the great challenges for educational leadership is to try and be consistent in our messages,” she said. “On the one hand, you can’t argue that the cost – the internal rate of inflation – is such that you have no choice but to raise tuition, and then have people see that what is creating all of that pressure on the internal rate of inflation is the kind of decisions you’re making.”

Sure, some of these decisions might be made in Board meetings, but others are campus-based decisions concerning planning, programming and operations.

“We have to be very clear about the efforts that we make to control costs. And we have to be very clear in the way that we spend our resources,” said Simmons. That includes trying to be frugal and transparent in their public explanations, she said.

They’ve done away with some luxuries they had become accustomed to on campus. While rolling out the red carpet for visiting VIPs is commonplace in higher education culture, Simmons saw easy opportunities to make adjustments and reduce costs. No longer would honoraria – which leave the impression colleges have money to spare – be paid to campus speakers, regardless of whether private resources were available.

Instead of hosting university guests or holding university events at hotels and fancy restaurants, they took greater advantage of campus facilities and food services, according to Simmons. They reduced money spent on meals and flowers. “We’re making choices every day based on what is appropriate and what is affordable.”



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**Dr. Ruth J. Simmons**  
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“I do think it’s very important for policies, budget policies, and for practices to mirror the kind of environment that we’re in and the way that our students and their families are feeling about what is affordable for them.”

**Dr. Ruth J. Simmons**  
President  
Prairie View A&M University



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Said Simmons, “We just have to be so careful in education today because so many people look at us as being profligate – in our own bubble, spending like crazy, paying very high salaries, doing all kinds of things that no other sector dares do. And instead of being very measured and appropriate, some people think that we’re off the rails already.”

The COVID-19 pandemic and the unstable economic climate heightened Simmons’ sensitivity to these concerns.

“I do think it’s very important for policies, budget policies, and for practices to mirror the kind of environment that we’re in and the way that our students and their families are feeling about what is affordable for them,” she said.

Simmons declared that a recently announced center for race and justice would be funded entirely from private sources, “Because we should not spend one penny from our operating budget to support the center in an environment in which the economy is so stressed and where the predictions of a timely recovery are basically not there at this time.”

Capital projects, including the construction of an on-campus house for the president, were also on the chopping block.

Some people were unhappy with her decision to cancel certain capital projects because the funds had already been allocated, but Simmons was uncomfortable with the idea of commencing a “building frenzy” at a time when students were financially strained and in need of financial aid. “[It] just doesn’t seem right to me and doesn’t send the right message to our students,” she said. Students wouldn’t know that building funds had restricted uses. “To them, it’s all fungible.”

Regent Mahomes applauded Simmons’ for her “wise decisions.” And he gave assurances that although the system would look for savings during the pandemic, cost cutting wouldn’t come at the expense of quality or mean higher tuition for students.

## METHODS

Cases were selected from a list of Public Value Universities who are doing the heavy lifting in state higher education. This set of schools was in the top 10 nationally in one of three categories – flagship, metro leader, and regional – out of 196 public universities total. The universities were ranked according to the average of eight factors: net price; net price increase over time; ratio of instruction to institutional support; percent in-state; percent Pell-eligible; six-year graduation rate; Brookings value added; and Harvard mobility index. Two factors, net price and percent Pell-eligible students, were double weighted to account for the fact this study focused on affordability, especially for underrepresented students. When issuing case study final invitations, consideration was given to geographic diversity among the top 10 as well as different governance structures.

The project director conducted interviews, using a semi-structured interview guide, with TAMUS Board of Regents members and system and university administrators, including: Elaine Mendoza, former chair of the TAMUS Board of Regents; Bill Mahomes, vice chair of the TAMUS Board of Regents; Dr. Ruth J. Simmons, president of Prairie View A&M University; Dr. James R. Hallmark, TAMUS vice chancellor for academic affairs; and Billy C. Hamilton, TAMUS deputy chancellor and chief financial officer.

The researchers did not preselect the affordability strategies described in this study. The interviewees were asked to describe the factors they believed contributed to their system or institution’s affordability, and the strategies described are contained therein. In addition to the interviews, the researcher and publication author conducted a document review of current and past board policies, historical board documents and media releases, and other relevant sources and documentation.



## END NOTES

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- <sup>2</sup> “About,” TAMUS website.
- <sup>3</sup> “Understanding PUF: What is the Permanent University Fund,” Office of the Chancellor, The University of Texas System, 22 Aug 2016, <https://www.utsystem.edu/offices/chancellor/blog/what-is-the-permanent-university-fund>.
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