



Office of the  
Student Body President

Student Government

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February 6, 2017

Dr. Joseph Rallo, Commissioner  
Louisiana Board of Regents  
1201 N. Third Street, Ste. 6-200  
Baton Rouge, LA 70802

Dear Commissioner Rallo,

This letter is LSU Student Government's response to the TOPS-related portion of the Board of Regents' Draft Response to Act 619 of the 2016 Regular Session:

Each spring LSU Football signs dozens of high school athletes who come to campus and play for the Tigers. When a single Louisiana athlete decides to leave the state for another university, it makes front page news; we feel betrayed; we lost true talent to a competitor. The Regents' proposals on TOPS create a disincentive to attend Louisiana universities and opens the door for the poaching of our students to rival states. The proposals actually create a **BRAIN TAX**; the more academically talented a student is, the more they must give up to remain in-state.

LSU Students:

- **OPPOSE** Proposal 5.6. The Board of Regents suggests scaling TOPS awards based on the student's classification (80-90-100 rule), and the TOPS scholarship will be distributed at a flat rate across institutions. A flat rate would cover a large percentage of tuition at some colleges while covering a smaller percentage of tuition at other colleges. *This creates a reward to attend certain colleges. Why would the Regents recommend policies based on the institution rather than the students? Lawmakers should 100% fund TOPS, but if not, keep the proportional TOPS award as an equitable distribution related to proportionality of tuition costs. This would not favor one college over another.*
- **OPPOSE** Proposal 5.9. The Regents staff recommends an annual 30-credit hour requirement for TOPS. Nowhere else is there such a requirement. *Again, this speaks to creating a disincentive to remain in Louisiana because rival out-of-state universities would not demand 30 credit hours. For TOPS students who work, this will make it more difficult to get educational experience of a job and to make the money needed to pay for college. For the thousands of TOPS students on Pell, this just exacerbated an already difficult challenge. Lastly, and most egregiously, this creates a double standard of having colleagues achieve varying goals despite being in the same cohort and class. It will create a double standard of academic success in the state of Louisiana.*

Other states understand that we are in the midst of a **TALENT WAR**, and states that accumulate the most talent have the most diversified, innovative economies. These



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TOPS proposals are a capitulation in the talent war and are inviting Louisiana's talented students to join other teams and join other economies. Are we prepared to self-impose measures that put us at an immediate disadvantage to Texas A&M and the University of Alabama? We should flaunt TOPS' proven record of keeping the leaders of tomorrow in the state of Louisiana. It is time to shift the conversation to making strong investments in our future. It is time to ask what is best for the thousands of students in the state. It is time to defeat the brain drain problem that plagued Louisiana prior to the creation of TOPS but still lingers.

In just one week, Louisiana legislators will offer solutions to the state's budget problems—some calling for major alterations to TOPS. Lobbyists, higher education employees, policymakers and government officials will testify to the House and Senate committees on education and finance on the best ways to make appropriate modifications, but in reality, the modifications are only quick fixes to a long-term problem at the expense of Louisiana's students.

As long as we continue to accept mediocrity as success, we will follow the same path. However, we have the opportunity to reverse the trend, but we must stay true to the goal of rewarding performance. It is not fixed overnight, nor in an election cycle, but takes years of dedication to the goal. We, the students, are the ultimate stakeholders in the higher education debate, yet seldom do we have a seat at the decision-making table. Although student tuition and fees compromise a majority of higher education funding, we only hold 5 of the 80 seats on higher education boards. We are quick to work together to ensure meaningful reform like Senator Donahue's SB48, but we will also be the first to say that the Board of Regents' proposed changes to TOPS are detrimental to student success and Louisiana's ability to compete for talent.

If Louisiana wants to be a national competitor, much like LSU Football, we need to feel a sense of defeat when our five-star talent in the classroom decides to leave the state. This past weekend, 50 top high school scholars visited the LSU campus for the annual Scholars Weekend. The reality is that less than half of those top-performing students will choose LSU and Louisiana as their home. As students, we acknowledge the complexities of the state's budget situation. However, to ensure we retain the state's top long-term investments, legislators must fully fund TOPS and propose common-sense reforms to the program through the lens of becoming a nationally competitive state with a nationally competitive flagship university. We are happy to assist legislators, higher education leaders, and government officials in any way possible to prevent Louisiana from falling further behind.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Zachary Faircloth', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Zachary Faircloth  
LSU Student Body President