

Address on the State of the University

The University of Texas at Austin

October 6, 1998

Chairman Evans, members of the Board of Regents, Chancellor Cunningham, past presidents, distinguished guests and alumni, students, members of the faculty and staff, friends of The University, I stand before you today as the very proud President of an exquisite creation of the people of Texas. I am glad to report that your university is strong and healthy; that it is poised to enter a period of great opportunity; that it faces its challenges with genuine talent and resolve. We are ready to work.

Texas was born as a grand dream. It was a republic--independent and fiercely proud of the commitment that its people made to be that way--treasuring personal freedom, fostering audacity, honoring achievement, believing in the future. Texans still possess these qualities, and they still want to have heroes. They believe that individual men and women can rise to greatness and play large roles to the benefit of society.

Even in the early days of the Republic, Texans spoke of establishing a university at which to educate the young people of this state. The Constitution of 1876 mandated the State of Texas to "establish, organize and provide for the maintenance, support and direction of a university of the first class." We are the heirs of that legacy. We are also the heirs of a continuing responsibility to expand that legacy.

In the fall of 1883, 115 years ago, the dream first became manifest as The University of Texas formally opened on the site that we now know as the Forty Acres. Thomas Jefferson described the ideal university community as an "academical village." The early University of Texas, with a population of a hundred students and eight members of the faculty, fit that description well. In those years, higher education everywhere was the province of a select few and its engagement with society was largely on an individual level. Times have changed, and with them the role of the university has evolved, but the dreams of the early Texans are still alive. We meet today to celebrate 115 years of achievement--and to extend those dreams into the next century.

The founders of Texas sought freedom and opportunity above all. Surely they sought a university of the first class principally to enhance these civic and personal values. Over its entire history The University of Texas has striven to meet that responsibility.

At the close of the 20th century, we look out upon a new Texas--a Texas with scale and power that none but the most audacious founder could have imagined. Indeed, we Texans stand before the nation as its second largest population, not simply as stewards of the second largest area. We have a big, influential economy with a demonstrated capacity for invention and adaptation. We have a distinctive, coherent culture, with our own roots and values, and our own ways of living, our own ways of creating, and our own ways of going about business. We are also astride the most substantial and most serviceable lines of communication between the United States and a developing Latin America; thus we

have a strategic position as the story of the Western Hemisphere unfolds in the 20 years before us. For all of these reasons, Texas has the opportunity to lead like never before. In the affairs of the nation, Texas can and should have a voice comparable with those of California and the East Coast.

But if Texas is to seize its opportunity, it must have consistent access to intellectual capital of top quality. Never has Texas needed a university of the first class more than now. In this era, that ideal must be more than a dream. Our people must have

A place where their best talents can find a vibrant community of accomplishment and learn from each other

A place where the ablest expertise is available to teach and inspire them

A place where the best of libraries and information networks is available to inform them

A place where they can see and use the most advanced tools of exploration

A place where the boundaries of knowledge are understood from the personal experience of engaged scholars

A place from whence new understanding emerges to buttress and advance a new economy of knowledge

A place that willingly supports their highest and best ambitions for personal achievement

A place where they can develop legitimate pride in themselves and a sense of citizenship toward their society

These are the hallmarks of a university of the first class, which indeed remains the marvelous nurturer of freedom and opportunity that the founders sought for us. They also are the hallmarks of a university that fulfills our declared core purpose, "to transform lives for the benefit of society."

Over its 115 years, The University of Texas at Austin has come a long way. Let me share with you a personal view of our progress. A short 33 years ago, my wife Mary Ann and I visited the Tower. From there we looked down on this beautiful and elegant campus--a monument to the faith Texans placed in education and to their hope for future generations. We took photographs of the views to the north, south, east and west. A few weeks ago Mary Ann found those pictures. What struck us as having most changed the character of the Forty Acres in the intervening years were not the buildings, but the trees. Once-youthful oaks have grown into graceful, magnificent trees with broad reach and grand stature. So too has The University grown into a mature institution with broad reach and grand stature. Many of our academic programs are now among the nation's best. Our

faculty includes many distinguished leaders in their disciplines, and the student body that arrived on campus this fall has stronger credentials than ever before. And impressive buildings have replaced the aging barracks that characterized the outlying parts of the campus 30 years ago.

Through its history, this university has moved forward in cycles. At times, the hard work of this community, the fortunes of our state, and the leadership of those who love Texas have come together to foster periods of great advancement.

During the 1930s, after the creation of the Permanent University Fund, ten new buildings were funded at once, including some of our most beloved structures--the Texas Union, Goldsmith Hall, Mary Gearing Hall, the Hogg Building, and of course, the Main Building and the Tower. The Texas Union and Hogg Auditorium were funded, despite the Great Depression, by Ex-Students whose devotion to the endeavor is captured in their slogan--"For Texas, I will." These magnificent buildings formed the basis for the campus as we know it today.

About 25 years later, the Committee of 75 reevaluated the institution on its 75th anniversary in 1958. Their work led to far greater emphasis on research, which was understood to be essential if UT were to assume a position among the strongest institutions of the land.

In the period surrounding the Centennial in 1983, The University focused once more on its possibilities for advancement and took many steps to strengthen its ability to secure talent. In a bold stroke, under the leadership of then President Peter T. Flawn, 32 faculty chairs were endowed at once, and the era saw academic programs at Texas emerge broadly into the front ranks.

The gold standard of higher education is membership in the American Association of Universities, the AAU, which comprises 60 leading public and private universities, 58 in the United States and two in Canada. The names of these schools are household words--Harvard and MIT; Wisconsin, North Carolina, and Michigan; Berkeley and UCLA; Yale, Stanford and Caltech. The University of Texas became a member early in the century and for decades was the only member from our state. Rice University now holds the only other membership from Texas. Is it a surprise to you that our faculty holds enough memberships in the National Academy of Science, the National Academy of Engineering, and the Institute of Medicine to place us in the top third of this top group? Only four institutions without medical schools have more members. It may not come as a surprise to you that UT is in the upper half of the AAU in Federal research and development expenditures, but are you aware that among members without medical schools, only MIT and Berkeley garner larger support? Texas is third in the nation in doctoral degrees produced, and it is second only to Harvard in National Merit Scholars among undergraduates. In terms of aptitude test scores and high school class rank, our undergraduates offer qualifications comparable with the strongest profiles in public and private universities in America. This is but a handful of indicators, but they illustrate the undeniable quality that has been established here.

After a journey of a hundred years, The University of Texas at Austin has arrived in the small circle of America's best institutions of higher education and research. It is indeed a university of the first class--a public asset of inestimable value. We can and should take great pride in this achievement. We should also recognize our indebtedness to all of the men and women who helped to realize the bold vision of The University's founders--people who have devoted their careers and their dreams to making UT the extraordinary university it has become. Faculty, staff, students. Alumni, supporters, and friends. Present and past. I thank you and I salute you.

So is it now true that The University is "good enough?" One hears this question out loud at times. More often it hangs as an unspoken implication in conversations about public policy in Texas. The answer is "yes" or "perhaps" only if one is also willing to admit that Texas, as a state and as a society, is already "good enough." It is a rare Texan who will admit that. I spoke earlier about the role that Texas can play, in the nation and in the world, in the decades to come. To achieve that kind of future, Texas needs to strengthen its educational assets in several ways, but it surely needs to continue to build excellence here in Austin. We have a state culture that demands the best. We have ambition and resolve. Let us exploit these strengths and strive to excel. Let us make this place more than a university of the first class. Let's take it to the head of the class!

When I say that, I'm not just talking about rankings. At UT, we are strong enough to look beyond rankings, toward the real needs of our society, and toward the real opportunities for leadership in the future. We need to answer for ourselves the question, "What makes a great university great?" In my view, it is not possible for a university to achieve greatness without a faculty of superb quality, but even with such a faculty, a university may fail its promise because it engages poorly with the society it was created to serve. My goal for The University of Texas at Austin is that we do the best complete job of serving the real needs of the people of Texas and the nation. Greatness is to be found in what a university does, not in what it is.

According to Socrates, "Wisdom begins in wonder." It's my job--and that of all members of the UT family--to wonder at what role this fine university will play in the years ahead. We will surely continue to be one of the nation's top public universities, an institution of national stature and regional preeminence. But I know we can be more.

Today, on the eve of a new millennium, in the early months of a new university administration, and almost one year into UT's comprehensive capital campaign, we have an opportunity to make another major leap in improving the quality of The University.

But it is important for us to understand that the capital campaign should not mainly be about raising money. It ought to be a time for us to focus on purpose, quality, and achievement. If we can understand our proper role in society and actually fulfill it to the best of our ability, if we can perceive and present compelling opportunities for better service in the future, the resources will come.

Let me open my discussion of agenda by setting out three challenges:

First, I challenge every member of the UT community to engage in the capital campaign with this broader spirit and with the general goal of advancing The University to the top of the class.

Second, I challenge every member to focus consistently on improving the quality of performance. Moving to the top of the class means getting better in all that we attempt--in courses and curricula, in facilities and holdings, in services to students and to the public, and in services rendered internally among the faculty and staff.

Third, I challenge every member to help us to foster a sense of ownership of UT among all of the people of Texas. As we position The University to help our state play a major role in the 21st century, we also must see that UT has meaning in the daily lives of Texans. They need to understand that they have a public asset of the first magnitude here in Austin. They need to feel that they can take advantage of it personally. That means we must ensure access. That means that our student body must reflect the diverse cultures of our state. That means welcoming Texans to this campus to visit, to use our resources, to feel the spirit of knowledge and possibility that makes this place special. The Tower is certainly the most famous collegiate symbol in Texas. It needs to be Texas's best symbol of hope, opportunity, and achievement.

We may have reached the inner circle of leading public universities, but that does not mean that we are able to compete on equal footing. Some public universities have funded their services and achievements with strong state support while others have used high tuition and fees. UT, on the other hand, operates with relatively low state support and low tuition.

Our state appropriation per student is half of that of UCLA and Berkeley, less than 60 percent of Wisconsin's, and about two-thirds that of Michigan and Illinois. Even if all of UT Austin's allocation from the Permanent University Fund is added to the state appropriation, the total is still less than the state appropriation per student at all of these five peers.

Our total of tuition and fees per student is approximately one-third that at Michigan, about 60 percent of the figure at Berkeley, and roughly two-thirds that of UCLA and Wisconsin. That means that UT Austin is more affordable than the others, but that our resource base is concomitantly weaker.

The total resource base for UT, aside from research grants, is essentially the sum of state appropriations, allocations from the Permanent University Fund, and collected tuition and fees. At UT, this total revenues per student is last among these peers--only about half of that at Michigan and about 70 percent of the average of the others.

At Texas, we have done an outstanding job of building excellent programs because we have invested judiciously, we have been venturesome in ways that have paid off, and we have an attractive local environment. But we have entered a new league--the major league. Our competition is intelligent, experienced, and visionary. We must not deceive ourselves that we will be able to compete consistently, year after year, for the talent and facilities that Texas needs against the best universities in America with 70 percent of their resources.

Our funding structure hurts us in many demonstrable ways. We are weak in graduate student stipends, staff and faculty salaries, start-up funding to recruit and establish new faculty members, and matching funds that can help us attract important grant support. Our faculty size is too small for the student body; hence our student-faculty ratio is high. Budgets for library acquisitions and information services are too constrained for the UT libraries to meet the top-level information needs of a sophisticated state.

Our highest priority must be to expand the revenue base and to focus the proceeds on adding brains, heart, muscle, and sinew. This university simply has to become stronger in the fundamental ways that I have just mentioned if it is to do for Texas what Texas needs and expects.

With any revenue base, it is important that all leaders of the campus, in the administration, in colleges and departments, in staff and student offices, think very carefully about the use of all resources--not only money, but also appointments, space, and facilities--to see that each counts most effectively toward quality in performance. This is doubly true for us in this period where we are competing for genuine leadership with a weaker resource base than our peers; thus I challenge every member to examine, consistently and critically, our use of resources. Quality will be built at Texas in the near term principally by our success in making wise choices among competing goods, not all of which can be effectively supported.

During the next three years--the millennial transition of 1999, 2000, and 2001--we do need to focus on this challenge of building strength and improving effectiveness, but I also challenge The University during this same time to create a plan to guide our development of education, research, and outreach over the next 20 years. It is important that we emerge not only with greater strength, but also with clear ideas about where we need to go as an institution. That is, we need guiding concepts for investment in our programs much like those that we have assembled in the Master Plan for investment in our physical space. In this Time for Texas, 1999-2001, we will concentrate on changes that may occur in Texas over the next two decades and focus on how The University can best situate itself to serve the needs of the people and the State. Today's symposium was the first such event, and I much appreciate the effort made by the contributors, who got us off to an excellent start.

As I personally look toward the future, I see four areas where we could concentrate to great benefit:

The first is to examine and to enhance the undergraduate experience comprehensively. Although I have been very impressed by the quality of undergraduate education here, we must cope with a high student-faculty ratio and the fact that we have almost 49,000 students. The quality of the undergraduate experience pervades most important aspects of a university. It influences learning, our sense of community, student retention, institutional loyalty, our reputation among prospective students and their parents, alumni giving, and, of course, the ability to achieve our purpose of transforming lives beneficially. It bears heavily on the greatness of The University as measured by our effectiveness in meeting the needs of society. There is room for improvement in many respects, not least in our low retention and graduation rates. We know from the experience of other fine universities that students with an academic profile as good as ours can and do succeed at higher rates. We need to identify the problems and fix them.

We have made progress by means of our Freshman Seminars program, our Gone to Texas welcome program for new students, and this year, with the creation of our Freshman Interest Groups. These groups of 25 or fewer students enroll together in three thematically related courses during the fall, with weekly out-of-class meetings led by an advisor. We expect these groups to integrate newcomers into our academic community and to help them make friends who share their interests.

We all understand that opportunity at UT is vast. Let us do a better job of making the campus a more friendly, welcoming, and supportive community where our students can thrive. Let us also be sure that we are doing the best possible job for our students academically--through our curricular concepts, through our efforts in individual courses, through our advising. Let us especially focus on improvement of the experience in the first two years, when students are exploring an expanded world in ways that have great influence over their ultimate success.

Earlier I expressed the view that greatness in a university is found in what it does, not in what it is. The great public university of the 21st century cannot stand apart from the most important issues faced by its society. It must engage them in ways that best serve the public need. My remaining three areas of emphasis all involve academic opportunities related to the pressing needs of Texas and the nation.

We cannot doubt that the quality of life in Texas and the nation will be influenced greatly by ways in which the Western Hemisphere develops over the next two decades. In my view, our university ought to do the best it can to see that relationships between the United States and Latin America develop as beneficially as possible. We should become the nation's most important source of expertise about Latin America--about its culture, its language, its issues and politics, its relationships with other regions of the world, its business practices, its technical development. I would like to see this university be one of the most important North American centers for the education of students from Latin America, and I would like to see more of our students taking advantage of a study abroad experience in Latin America.

UT already has renowned Latin American scholars, research centers, library and art collections, and cultural exchange programs. UT's Institute of Latin American Studies is the oldest such program in the nation. Our group of faculty members with expertise in Central America is the largest among universities in North America. And as an example of our activities in the region, last year UT was awarded a \$3 million grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development to operate a program to help Guatemala modernize its Congress. But I believe that we can and should broaden our expertise.

The next item in my list of four is, like undergraduate education, closely tied to our core purpose -- "To transform lives for the benefit of society." Texas is working hard to improve the quality of its public schools. I am impressed by the imagination and effort that people here in Texas are giving to this area of concern. In many ways, we are far ahead of the nation. But the problem is huge and the need for improvement is urgent. Students in Texas earn high school and college degrees at rates that are below the national average. In a world where the ability to succeed and to thrive is so closely tied to knowledge and educational attainment, this is a fundamentally unhealthy situation. Texas is a state with ambitions for leadership in this nation, but it is graduating too small a fraction of its students from high school and from college to meet its requirements for the future. We need to improve and we need to do so in a decade or less.

The University is contributing solutions. We have many programs that are helping improve education from kindergarten through high school. We are proud of our role in the Governor's reading initiative.

But I believe we can make even greater contributions. In my view, we cannot solve the problems that face Texas simply by educating teachers at the top level or by introducing improvements school-by-school or classroom-by-classroom. The scale of the need is too big and the time for change is too short. I challenge our university, a major intellectual center of the nation, to turn its considerable brainpower toward one, two, or three programs that can bring real leverage on this problem. We need to see if we can find ways, perhaps in partnership with other major educational institutions in Texas, to improve the performance of the educational system by reaching millions of students, millions of parents, and tens of thousands of teachers. I do not have the answers. But the problem is worthy of the attention of our best talent and effort. Nothing is more important to the future of Texas than her children. Today's Longhorns will be running Texas tomorrow. Today's first graders are tomorrow's Longhorns.

Finally I want to draw attention to our need to support the new knowledge-based economic sectors in Texas. Our state's emergence in the technology industries during the past 15 years is an indicator of how The University of Texas at Austin, in particular, can have a profound impact on the lives of millions of Texans. UT played a critical role in attracting and sustaining that growth. The decisions to locate the industrial research consortia MCC and Sematech in Texas were dependent on UT's ability to provide a leading, active research environment and employees with advanced skills. The computer and electronics industry now accounts for about eight percent of the gross state product and more than 40 percent of exports from Texas. In addition, Texas now leads all states

in the manufacture of semiconductors and leads all states but California in total manufacturing employees. These industries, like other new elements of the Texas economy, are based on fast-changing knowledge.

Technology is a part of the larger continuum of change, but the information age has accelerated the pace of that change. For Texas to lead in the future--or even to sustain what it has already assembled--we must have in this state a core of critical talent; a productive volume of research, development, and enterprise in critical technical domains; strong mutual support between individuals and organizations; a venturesome spirit; and the willingness to form productive partnerships with the private sector. The University has an important place in all of these aspects. I challenge our community to develop our related programs to the highest levels of achievement in education and research, and to be open to opportunities for effective alliances across organizations or disciplines. Every new idea is not a good idea, but good new ideas will come and will transform the landscape. Some of the best need to come from Texas.

We must also find ways to develop and disseminate knowledge more rapidly to the broader public. Our students, our research endeavors, our private sector partners, and the Texas economy will benefit greatly if we can be responsive to the constant change that characterizes these markets. I challenge our community to devise and to experiment with new ways of educating people beyond the campus, using advanced methods of delivery and innovative ways of packaging educational offerings to suit postgraduate needs in fast-changing fields.

A principal founder of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, John Winthrop, aboard a ship in the Atlantic in 1630, spoke to his band of colonists bound for the New World. The group faced much uncertainty. But they had a vision. There in the Atlantic, with no land in sight, Winthrop said, "We must consider that we shall be as a city, set upon a hill, and the eyes of all people will be upon us." Here at The University, we have transcended the concept of Jefferson's academical village and have created a great city upon a hill--the city that the research university of the 21st century must be. And the eyes of Texas are upon us. Let us work together to make our state, our nation, our world, more abundant in knowledge, innovation, personal opportunity, and artistic expression.

It is the highest privilege for me to serve The University as its President. For the remainder of my life, I expect none greater. I am deeply grateful to the Regents and to the Chancellor for their investment and confidence, and I am deeply grateful to the faculty, staff, students, alumni, and friends of The University for their support and commitment to its excellence. In return, I pledge to serve through my season in this office with the greatest possible integrity and imagination. The great public universities of America are among the most exquisite creations of the human spirit. They see and foster the best in human nature. They are indeed doors to the future. They are worthy places in which to invest our lives.