

Address on the State of the University

The University of Texas at Austin
September 15, 1999

Audacity has been a part of our heritage since the moment Texans adopted a constitution charging themselves and their leaders to establish "a university of the first class." How bold and daring -- how audacious -- a charge it was. In 1876, the state was hardly a stronghold of scholarship and refinement. Few had experience with any university at all. But, Texas was fertile ground for democracy, and Texans understood the importance of education to a democratic society. They saw themselves as building for the ages. They would surely marvel at what has already come from their dreams.

The Constitution survives. Its language remains. The University is, at the same time, approaching what Texans of 1876 charged and far greater than they could have believed possible. The audacity continues as a part of our speech. We need to be sure that it remains a part of our plans. Toward that end, I address you today.

First, let me declare that the current state of the University is sound and strong. Knowledgeable observers consistently judge us to be the best university within a thousand miles. We possess outstanding academic standards and strong traditions. Our city and our state are favorably situated. All of this has created an opportunity for us to lead in the America of the future.

We are all fortunate to be a part of one of the world's most stimulating learning environments. To aim high is as much a part of our heritage as the longhorn, the Tower and singing "The Eyes of Texas." I am glad to report that the past year has been marked by achievements worthy of high standards.

Members of our faculty have been honored with a MacArthur Fellowship, the Pauling Medal, and election to the British Academy. Our students have won Rhodes, Marshall and Truman scholarships, the Prix de Rome and the Heisman Trophy. Three alumni recently won the Pulitzer Prize. The list goes on.

New facilities valuable to the mission of the University are under way or in the design phase. Let me name some of them:

- The Applied Computational and Engineering Sciences Building, crucial to our computer science and engineering programs, is scheduled to open in early summer.
- The Seay Building, which will house the Department of Psychology and the Center for Child Development and Family Relations, is now in site preparation.
- The Blanton Museum of Art is being designed for a groundbreaking next year.
- The first new dormitory on campus since the 1960s is now under construction.
- The Connally Center, a large addition to the School of Law, will be completed in a few months.

- The Gebauer Building is being renovated and restored as a new home for the College of Liberal Arts.
- And, major improvements to our athletics facilities, including Myers Stadium and Soccer Field, the renovation of Royal-Memorial Stadium and the Moncrief-Neuhaus Athletics Center are supporting a new age of achievement for our student-athletes.

Many of these projects were made possible by gifts to the Capital Campaign, which has now raised more than \$405 million in received gifts and commitments. In all of this work, we are mindful of the Campus Master Plan and its goals of building a stronger community, enhancing aesthetics and improving life on the campus.

There have also been noteworthy achievements in our operations:

- Innovative scholarship programs and other initiatives have allowed us to achieve remarkable gains in minority participation among freshmen.
- The reorganization of our programs in the biological sciences has positioned them better with respect to the new intellectual structure of biology and with respect to the needs of students.
- And there have been wonderful additions to our treasures, including the Suida-Manning Collection of European paintings and drawings, the historic Alamo Diary, David Douglas Duncan's lifetime archive, the Flip Schulke photography collection; and the papers of Jorge Luis Borges -- all of which will contribute to education, research and service to the public.

In last year's Address on the State of the University, I outlined an institutional agenda based on six strategic themes:

- Consistent improvement of quality
- Broadened sense of ownership
- Enhanced undergraduate experience
- Contribution to improved public education
- Support for the New Texas Economy
- Leadership in Latin American programs

Last January, seven university-wide steering groups were convened to identify specific goals of high value toward these themes that could be achieved in six to 18 months. More than 40 goals emerged. They have all been assigned to specific individuals or groups, who are proceeding with them. Several have already been accomplished.

Let me recount a few notable achievements of the past year relating to each of the strategic themes:

In 1998-99, the most pressing needs with respect to quality were to reinforce our financial base and to enhance our competitiveness for talent, which is the central asset of any university. For the fiscal year that started on Sept. 1, we were able to improve

compensation by 10 percent for graduate assistants, 6.6 percent for staff, and 6 percent for faculty. We were also able to do so in a way that ameliorated some clear inequities and reduced our vulnerability to raiding from the outside. This invaluable progress was possible only through the combined efforts of state leaders, the regents, the chancellor, the UT System, and the UT Austin community.

We also have worked to give the people of Texas a greater sense of ownership and involvement in the University. One success story is the Longhorn Opportunity Scholarship program, which awards scholarships to graduates of high schools that have been historically underserved by UT. And, in March of this year, we hosted UT Interactive, the biggest open house in Texas. That event shared the excitement of learning and research with tens of thousands of visitors to our campus.

Our outreach programs -- combined with the fine academic achievements of our applicants -- have restored minority enrollments in this year's freshman class to levels that existed before the Hopwood decision. African-American enrollment among freshmen is up more than 40 percent in one year alone.

According to a study published earlier this year in *Hispanic Outlook*, UT is now No. 5 in the nation in baccalaureate degrees awarded to minorities and No. 1 in the nation in doctorates awarded to Hispanics. For bachelor's degrees conferred on Hispanics, we are No. 4 nationally, and first in the AAU. While we can and will do better, we should not overlook the fact that UT Austin is making a major contribution to minority education in the United States, and has been doing so for many years.

Provost Sheldon Ekland-Olson is chairing the steering group on enhancing the undergraduate experience. One of the goals of this initiative is to engage students in highly stimulating and intellectually challenging learning experiences as soon as possible after their arrival on the 40 Acres.

A very successful example is the Freshman Interest Group program, which originated last fall and has been doubled this year. These groups of 25 or fewer freshman take three courses together during the fall semester and attend a weekly seminar with a peer mentor and an academic adviser.

Ka' rin Thornburg, from Humble, Texas, enrolled in a Freshman Interest Group offered in the College of Natural Sciences last year. She said, "I didn't know anyone, and I didn't live on campus, so I felt on the outside. I quickly joined a study group and made a lot of friends. And, the weekly meetings with mentors and advisers helped me plan the semester and learn a lot about the campus and the research facilities. I recommended the program to a friend from my high school who will be a freshman this year." This year, Ka' rin is a student mentor, helping new students adjust to campus life.

Our research indicates that students who live on campus for at least one year have higher retention and graduation rates than those who do not. A new dormitory now under construction on Waller Creek will be ready next fall, the first phase of three new projects

that we expect to bring UT's housing capacity to 8,000. Upon completion, these new facilities will make it possible for us to provide housing for all members of the freshmen class who wish to live on campus.

The University is actively involved in improving public education in Texas. I'd like to describe just one example. This summer the UT College of Education, in partnership with the Texas Education Agency, helped to strengthen the skills of reading teachers throughout the state. Our Texas Center for Reading and Language Arts designed the curriculum and prepared trainers who led Kindergarten Teacher Academies available to all 17,000 kindergarten teachers in the public schools. Next summer, a similar program will be offered to the 26,000 first grade teachers in Texas public schools.

Another of our themes is to provide support for the New Texas Economy, knowledge-based industries that have transformed our state's economic landscape during the past two decades. We have created a campus-wide infrastructure, with representation from 18 colleges and administrative units, to address private sector needs. In addition, we have established a service-oriented web site to promote coordination between the University, business and industry.

Earlier this month, the College of Business Administration started a two-year educational program tailored for senior managers and engineers at Motorola's new manufacturing plant in Tianjin, China. They will study global leadership and marketing with UT faculty members while acquiring on-the-job training at Motorola's Austin plant. Motorola is bearing the full cost of this program, which meets its particular needs and gives us an opportunity to experiment with new ways to address the changing educational requirements of a dynamic economy.

The University is one the nation's leading centers of expertise on Latin America, and we are expanding our ties to Latin America in the form of new exchange programs, additional scholarships and increased interdisciplinary research. This fall's new class in our joint MBA program with Monterrey Tech in Mexico City is more than double the size of last year's and possesses sharply improved qualifications. In the months ahead, we will establish an Argentine Studies Center, and we are expanding our relationships with Mexico, Guatemala, Brazil and Chile, among other Latin American countries.

Let me summarize all that I have reported -- and more -- simply by saying that our University is in confident, purposeful motion and is stronger than a year ago.

Now let us shift our view to the year ahead. Here are the targets that I am setting for 1999-2000:

- To provide a strong focus on the quality theme.
- To create a centerpiece year for the We're Texas Campaign.
- To accomplish at least two thirds of the goals of the steering groups.
- To establish a five-year financial strategy.

- To achieve compensation improvements for 2000-2001 comparable to those of 1999-2000.
- To improve administrative operations.
- To lay the foundation for the next Legislative session.

For most of these items, the purpose and motivation are self-evident, but I would like to speak further upon two, the stress on quality and the item relating to our campaign.

In this year of the millennium, I ask our community to raise, across a broad front, our hopes for achievement and our standards of performance. I made the point earlier that audacity -- daring -- surprising boldness -- is a part of our cultural heritage and ought to be a part of our plans. A consistent focus on improved quality is the way to make it so. This is a theme that applies to every unit, every department, every program, and every individual here at the University.

It goes far beyond the vanity of rankings. It goes directly to the question of whether the Texas of the early 21st century, at a pivotal point in her history, will or will not have access to top-level expertise, top-level educational opportunities, and top-level intellectual holdings. It goes to the heart of whether we will succeed in the mission of service for which this university really exists.

This is not a matter of rhetoric. It is a practical matter, if we take the challenge seriously. There are three parts to my recipe for action:

- To calibrate against the best, program by program.
- To imagine what would allow us to become better than today's best Ñ in the world that will exist a decade from now.
- To frame and to take practical steps to close the gap.

The first element in this trio is simply a way of saying that the benchmark for any individual program at Texas, academic or not, should be the defined by the best performers of the same type in the nation: Department of Philosophy or Division of Housing and Food Service; Department of Accounting or Office of Accounting; Department of Computer Sciences or Administrative Computing Services; President's Office or Physical Plant. If you look at academic rankings of any kind, you will find that in virtually every field we have a program ranked in the top 25 in the United States. In most cases it is the best in Texas. But rarely are we ranked at the very top nationally, or even in the top handful. There is room for improvement in every corner of this campus. And improvement is fundamental to our mission.

The second element of my recipe respects the fact that the target is moving. Serious improvement in the top ranks takes time and patience. It also takes imagination, because the world to come is not the world of today.

The third part -- to focus on practical steps -- has an obvious purpose, but it is also a countermeasure against defeatism, the most dangerous enemy of aspiration. It may well

be true that the gap between present performance in a given program and that of the best cannot be closed in short order. But it does not follow that nothing can be done to make ours closer to the benchmark.

When the authors of the Texas Constitution of 1876 mandated the establishment of "a university of the first class," no amount of treasure or effort could have created one in the Texas of that time. But the goal was kept and the foundations laid, most effectively with the great grant of public land that later gave rise to the Permanent University Fund. Our forebears set their sights on an audacious ambition and it was reached. We are the beneficiaries. We have also inherited the obligation to extend that tradition.

The We're Texas Capital Campaign, now in progress, is perhaps our most important vehicle for doing just that. If we are to take greatest advantage, the campaign will not be mainly about money. Rather, it will be a framework for concentrating the energy of the University on getting better. Only through a commitment to quality will we earn, and can we expect, serious private and public support. We have had substantial success in the first two years of our campaign, but the main work is still to come. This is the year when we must define, unit by unit, steps that we can take toward improved quality. This is the year when we must communicate our vision effectively. And, this is the year when we must build a core of giving commitments that will show broadly that Texas is on the move.

As a means of observing our 116th anniversary, and as a gesture symbolic of our desire to enhance every Texan's sense of ownership of the University, we will formally reopen the observation deck of the UT Tower about six hours from now. It is my hope that we will come to view this event as the beginning of new, constructive chapter in the history of the Tower and of the University.

The Tower plays a central role in the daily life of the campus. Everything from marriage proposals to commencement ceremonies to spirited public debate takes place in and around this magnificent building. The Tower is linked to our experiences on the 40 Acres -- moments of triumph and elation, of sadness and loss. Today, we will climb the stairs to the observation deck once again. We will savor the view of this special corner of the world -- and renew our commitment to build a stronger University.

The late Willie Morris, alumnus and former editor of *The Daily Texan*, described his first morning on campus in his famous memoir, "North Toward Home". "On a slight rise dominating the place was...a skyscraper called the 'Tower'," he wrote. "...The words carved on the white sandstone said, 'Ye Shall Know the Truth and the Truth Shall Make You Free,' causing me to catch my breath in wonder and bafflement. That first morning I took the elevator to the top, and looked out on those majestic purple hills to the west, changing to lighter shades of blue or a deeper purple as wisps of autumn clouds drifted around the sun; this, they would tell me, was the Great Balcones Divide, where the South ended and the West began..."

Architect Paul Cret wrote in 1931 that the Tower was to transcend its role as a library to become "the image carried in our memory when we think of the place." Indeed, the

Tower has become the most powerful symbol of higher education in Texas, and we are proud to share it fully once again.

This will be a memorable academic year. In addition to the Tower reopening, we will unveil the much anticipated and magnificent Martin Luther King Sculpture on our campus next week, and in about 100 days a new millenium begins.

Our ambitions are lofty, our prospects bright. On this 116th birthday of The University of Texas at Austin, let us, audaciously, renew our resolve to make the Tower stand for true and consistent excellence, and for the best hopes of young and old everywhere in Texas.

It remains a privilege for me to serve as your president. Thank you for listening.