

Address on the State of the University

The University of Texas at Austin
September 19, 2000

In my two previous addresses on the state of The University, I have spoken about The University's condition within the context of the challenges and opportunities facing Texas as a larger society. This I shall continue to do, for The University cannot be separated from the land of Texas, or from her people, or from her problems. The University is a powerful engine for Texas and is one of the important places where Texas meets her future. A proper purpose of an address on the state of the University is to take stock of our recent progress in the long view--in the context of how The University can best serve Texas and her people.

One of my most important tasks as president is to inform and remind the people of Texas, and the people who govern Texas, of just why Texas needs a great university. In a complex and, at times, fragmented region such as ours, the reason is not always obvious. But let us contemplate a few simple questions:

- Should Texans have access to academic programs of highest quality without leaving the state?
- Should business and government be able to draw upon top-level expertise in software engineering or the protection of water quality or the management of human resources here in Texas?
- Should Texas have its own major knowledge centers, comparable with those of California or the East, with which to compete in the new economy?
- Does Texas want the strongest possible connections to centers worldwide where research is creating new knowledge that will change the future?
- Should Texas be a part of national leadership in the arts, in the media, in journalism, and in the world of ideas?

If Texas intends to succeed, the answer to all of these questions must be, "Yes!"

On this occasion in 1998, I looked out upon what I described as "a new Texas--a Texas with scale and power that none but the most audacious founder could have imagined." I asserted that our state was poised to become an even greater force in our nation's technology, culture, politics, and commerce. I stated that with abundant intellectual capital, the future of our state would be limitless, and that the University had a pivotal role in realizing the aspirations of Texas. What has happened during those two years? Our state and our city have certainly moved into the technological, political, and cultural foreground. But where are we--the University--today?

I am happy to report that on several fronts, we have made enormous progress and that some of our goals are well within reach. The last 12 months have been extremely productive. Today I can mention just a few of the significant achievements.

First, a few individual honors. This is a community of achievers and we share a passion for excellence, so there are always people to brag about and I enjoy doing that.

- This summer molecular biologist Alan Lambowitz and colleagues published a compelling article describing a new technique for disrupting individual genes and adding new genetic material to specific strands of DNA. The work, which made headlines around the world, is an important step in the development of gene therapy and the study of diseases of the immune system.
- Last month a team led by UT astronomer William D. Cochran announced the discovery of 10 previously unknown planets orbiting stars beyond the sun. One of the bodies, approximately the size of Jupiter, is a mere 10.5 light years from Earth, making it the closest planetary companion to a star yet found.
- Sara Galvan, a 21-year-old senior in Plan II/Architecture from Houston, was awarded a prestigious Truman Scholarship earlier this year. Sara worked on reconstruction efforts in Bosnia this summer and in 1999 she traveled to St. Petersburg, Russia, to study urban issues. After graduation she will attend graduate school to pursue her interests in law and historic preservation.
- Seven current UT students, eight former Longhorns, and three coaches are now in Sydney, Australia, competing for the United States in the Summer Olympic Games in volleyball, swimming, diving, and track and field events. The total Longhorn medal count thus far is one gold and five silver medals--all in swimming events. We congratulate the winners and wish every success to those yet to compete. Other Longhorns are representing the Olympic teams from Canada, Jamaica, and Russia.
- Last fall we opened the observation deck of the UT Tower, and for a year now people from all over Texas and the world have been savoring an unrivaled view of our campus and our capital city.
- And last year, Martin Luther King, III, came to the campus to help us dedicate the Martin Luther King, Jr. statue on the East Mall, a magnificent student-financed memorial to the life and work of the late civil rights leader.

I am proud of these and countless other achievements by members of the UT family.

A CELEBRATION OF THE FACULTY

Today's symposium, immediately following, marks the beginning of a year-long celebration of the faculty. The faculty is the foundation of this scholarly community, providing the intellectual leadership that shapes and distinguishes the academic enterprise.

This year we have begun the critical process of increasing the size of the faculty--to reduce the student-faculty ratio and enhance the learning experience at UT, to strengthen our ability to perform in our other missions, including research, and to gain much needed capacity to experiment in a world with new tools and new opportunities. As a result of Proposition 17, which was passed by Texas voters last November, we received an extraordinary one-time increase of \$17 million in recurring payments from the Permanent

University Fund. In a remarkable cooperative effort between students and campus officers, this money was leveraged with an increase in student fees to fund the first step in expanding the faculty. We also funded improved library and information technology services. Our goal is to lower the student-faculty ratio toward the range of our peers by recruiting 300 new professors within the next 10 years. Thirty new faculty members will be recruited this year beyond those who will be hired to offset normal turnover. In addition, undergraduate grants were increased by \$3 million to ease the burden of higher fees for our most needy students.

I believe that expanding the faculty is critical to our success. As we proceed, however, we must make a conscious effort to build a faculty reflecting the diverse population of our students. We have made a good deal of progress during the past several years, but we must do better still. It is critical to a university serving a state like ours with a future like ours. I charge all members of the academy to assign this a high priority.

STAFF ADVANCEMENT

Since my very first day in office, I have devoted a large portion of time and resources to addressing the needs of the UT staff. We must continue to focus on three major goals:

- Increasing salaries
- Improving opportunities for training and career development
- Expanding the voice of staff members in decision-making

I know that an array of issues has been raised by various staff groups, but I think we can help the greatest number of staff members, and deal with many of the ancillary concerns, by working on these three fronts.

I am proud of the progress we have made on staff compensation. Our compensation pool for classified staff has increased a total of more than 12 percent for the 1999-2000 and the 2000-2001 fiscal years. The custodial staff has received average raises of more than 15 percent during the same period. Those are *average* figures--not across-the-board raises--but they are the most accurate way to quantify these increases.

We also have implemented an educational benefit for all full-time employees. Staff may now enroll in one academic class per semester at no cost. Classes in English as a second language and high school equivalency exam preparation, previously available to employees in certain departments, will be available to all staff. We want our staff to have access to educational and career advancement at UT. In addition, we have created a Staff Leadership Development Forum to develop the leadership skills of staff members from around the campus. After a nomination process this fall, the first forum will get under way in January of 2001.

The Staff Advisory Council, an elective body that will represent the interests of all staff, is being established this fall with elections scheduled later in this academic year. A year ago, I instructed the deans, executive officers, and department heads to include staff

members consistently in their appointed committees. We need to take advantage of the vast body of expertise, experience, and creativity represented by the staff when shaping institutional policy and making decisions on this campus.

One of my favorite recent examples of staff ingenuity and resourcefulness is the development of UT Direct, a personalized web page for each student and prospective student that brings together all web-based interactions with the University. Each student's own information regarding admissions, enrollment, fees, financial aid, library activity, and much more is now available on UT Direct. This initiative was the product of our staff, working together across many, many departmental lines. They proposed the job in November, mapped it out in January, and had it up and running in August. UT Direct is a splendid example of staff members making a difference in the life of the University. My hat is off to them.

MAJOR TASKS FOR 2000-2001

Today, I propose an initiative that can have a profound impact on the University and on the lives of our students. Over the next year, we need to make a concerted effort to encourage students to raise the average course load by two credit hours per semester, from the current average of 12.7 credit hours toward 15 hours. Why do I suggest this?

First, the cost to students of remaining in school longer than four years is extremely high. For the typical graduate, the lost income alone for each year beyond a fourth year of study amounts to from \$25,000 to \$50,000. One year of this is as great as the total cost of a four-year education for a Texas resident at UT. Moreover, there are extra costs for tuition and fees, and many students acquire additional debt in the fifth and sixth years, to drive those figures still higher. UT's four-year graduation rate is only half to two-thirds of the rate at other leading American flagship campuses, which tells us that not all universities share this problem. The University of Virginia graduates 80 percent in four years.

If we can encourage undergraduates to raise their average course load by approximately two hours per semester, dramatic improvements in our overall performance could be attained. These include:

- Elevating the four-year graduation rate into the competitive range for peer institutions.
- Improving our contribution of new graduates to the Texas economy and society by a significant margin.
- Providing space for as many as 1,000 additional freshmen per year.
- Generating enough new funding to expand the faculty to accommodate the additional instruction while lowering the student-faculty ratio.
- Helping to support improved compensation for faculty and staff.

I believe that the current pricing system for higher education in Texas, in which tuition and fees are charges by the semester hour, discourages students from taking a full

academic load and graduating on schedule. Consequently, I have supported a flexible tuition proposal that would allow tuition rates to be set by each institution's own governing board. We expect the plan to be considered by the Legislature during the next session. If approved, I would recommend to the Regents that we set a fixed tuition rate for 12 or more semester hours, providing an incentive for students to take a larger course load. Thus a student enrolled in 16 hours would pay a proportionately lower tuition per semester credit than the student taking only 12 hours.

- We are calling this overall effort "4 for Texas." Some of you may remember a 1963 Western of the same name starring Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin. I'm afraid you will have to settle for a less entertaining pair--Larry Faulkner and Sheldon Ekland-Olson. I do hope that the students and faculty will embrace the concept, and that 4 for Texas will result in a more effective university and lower overall educational costs for our graduates and their parents.
- Preparing for the 2001 Legislative Session is another important item on the agenda. The University will be focusing not only on tuition reform, but also on increasing our allocation of indirect research costs generated by our faculty's research activity, as well as increased state support through formula funding. Students and parents helped enormously this year to support improved compensation and expansion of the faculty. We hope the Legislature will recognize the powerful statement made by their commitment and will help us to extend progress in these critical areas.
- In budget planning for 2001-2002, I am placing the highest priority on a program of Compensation Improvement of 5 percent or better. Reaching that target is critical to our being able to attract and hold the talent needed among faculty, staff, and graduate assistants to support the role that this university must fill for the people of Texas. Legislative help will be important.
- Last year, I said that we needed to make 1999-2000 a "centerpiece year" for the *We're Texas* Campaign. It was indeed. At the close of the third year of this seven-year campaign--last August 31-- the total of contributions and commitments was about \$690 million. In the last year alone, we raised over \$250 million. These are record-setting numbers for UT and they show the commitment of our supporters for a university that aspires to lead. The last few years of the campaign, during which we expect to reach and to exceed our \$1 billion goal, provide a chance to take another critical step toward making UT even greater.

There are many wonderful individual stories that have come out of the campaign. Two remind us of the impact that private gifts can have on the quality of our programs. The newly opened Applied Computational and Engineering Sciences Building, given in completed form as a gift from the O'Donnell Foundation of Dallas, is an outstanding example of the ability of the Campaign to dramatically improve educational and research opportunities here. The building offers faculty and students state-of-the-art facilities in emerging and rapidly evolving areas of computer science and engineering. The magnificent gift of Red and Charline McCombs will enable UT to take a dramatically stronger position of leadership in business education and research. It will be used, above all, to allow UT to recruit

and to develop talent of the highest order in its faculty. There is no surer path to leadership.

- A major review of our admissions policies is being conducted in light of the current intense demand. Some changes must be made in our practices to allow us to regain control over the population of the campus, already the largest in America. We intend to propose to the Regents new summer admissions procedures as well as cooperative agreements with other UT System institutions.
- Last year steering committees were established to pursue our themes on quality, improving the undergraduate experience, public education, Latin America, the new Texas economy, and building a greater sense of ownership by the people of Texas. Our goal was to complete two-thirds of the action items that the committees identified to strengthen the University in these key areas. We succeeded.

For example, one action item was to open a Dallas Admissions Center. The Center, which opened last spring, has greatly enhanced our recruitment in an important region. Our Dallas staff has already made hundreds of visits to area high schools and contacted thousands of prospective students. The Center, which also conducts one-on-one admissions and financial aid counseling, complements our Houston Admissions Center.

Another action item was to develop cooperative programs with Latin American universities. Earlier this month, I traveled to Brazil to sign an agreement with the Brazilian Ministry of Education to establish undergraduate, graduate, and faculty exchange programs with select universities there. UT will gain a chair in Brazilian studies and form research teams with Brazilian institutions in earth science, technology, social sciences, and environmental science. This agreement recognizes the breadth of UT teaching and research activities related to Brazil and will build on our current preeminence in Latin American Studies.

This year the steering committees will reconvene to review progress and to set new goals.

- Finally, we will complete the administrative reorganization begun last year. As you know, Pat Clubb was named Vice President for Employee and Campus Services, and national searches are almost completed for the new positions of Vice President for Information Technology and Vice President for Public Affairs. I have been extremely pleased with the smoothness with which the reorganization has proceeded, and I express my appreciation to all who have had a part. When we are fully staffed and all of the pieces are in their intended places next spring, UT will be much better positioned to handle the enormous range of business that it must handle to excel as it should.

We are in the middle years of a long journey to an era of greater excellence for The University. In 1828, the Mexican official Jose Maria Sanchez was sent on a fact-finding

mission to Texas. Midway across our state, his entourage encountered sickness, heat, thirst, hunger, flooded trails, and--as UT Professor Robin W. Doughty writes-- "omnipresent, hellish insects. But suddenly, toward the end of his trek, Sanchez entered a clearing and immediately his spirits soared." As Sanchez observed, "There is nothing that affords the traveler in these solitary regions greater joy than the sight of a plain after coming out of the long, endless thick woods."

Every day, in a hundred different ways, we make progress on our trek together. Let us not forget to savor that progress; and on good days, to let our spirits soar. For ours is a noble cause. I extend my gratitude to every member of the UT family for your part in another year's progress in the life of this great institution. Thank you so much.