CONVOCATION SPEECH FALL 1990

Each year at UTEP's Fall Convocation, we take time to review briefly the previous year's accomplishments and to consider the challenges of the years ahead. This year, we also mark the end of the 1980s, a decade which presented a set of opportunities and constraints that required enormous institutional resilience and adaptability and a major re-thinking and re-definition of our mission, programs, and program delivery systems. Although all of that did not occur without some difficult moments, UTEP is today a stronger and more self-confident institution, and I think that we can all be proud of our success and the role that all of us--faculty, staff, and students--have played in contributing to it.

The first significant change that occurred during the 1980s was a major shift in the university's funding base. The downturn in the state's economy had a decidedly negative effect on appropriations to public institutions of higher education and to other state agencies. Little or no increases in most budget categories and actual reductions in others have forced UTEP and other universities to manage growth with fewer state resources and to look increasingly toward other funding sources for support. In 1980, UTEP received 61% of its $40 million annual operating budget from the state; by this year, only 42% of an $80 million budget is derived from state sources. It is significant that UTEP was able to double its total budget during a decade in which there was little or no increase in state funding, and major credit for that achievement must be given to faculty and staff who, working collaboratively with an increasingly effective and active Office of Sponsored Projects, have prepared highly competitive research and student support program proposals which have attracted funding from federal and state agencies, foundations, and
corporations. In 1980, UTEP was awarded $2.8 million in contract and grant funding; in 1989-90 such awards totaled over $15 million.

The impressive growth in UTEP's external funding for research and student support programs has had a major impact on both the campus and the El Paso community. Job opportunities have been created, particularly for UTEP students who are able to "earn while they learn," and local expenditures for supplies and services have increased substantially. Still, it must be remembered that external funding is directly applicable only to the project or program it supports. Only rarely does it reinforce or augment the institution's budget for day-to-day operations. Thus, while the University is engaged in a broad range of new research and student support programs, the infrastructure to support such activity stretches ever thinner when State appropriations fail to keep pace.

Another source of non-state appropriated income during the 1980s was derived from tuition increases mandated by the Texas Legislature in 1985. In-state tuition, inexpensive when compared with almost any other state's, has increased from $4 to $18 per student credit hour since 1980. Non-resident tuition increased more dramatically, from $40 to $122 per student credit hour. This tuition increase caused a particular hardship on Mexican students who had traditionally enrolled at UTEP in large numbers and whose pesos had suffered devaluation. The University's response was immediate and creative. Sponsored by members of El Paso's delegation, a bill passed the 1987 Texas Legislature permitting Mexican nationals who can demonstrate financial need to enroll at UTEP at the Texas-resident rate. This legislation is viewed throughout the State, in other states such as California and Arizona, and by numerous agencies of the U.S. and Mexican governments, as a
model that should be adopted in other settings.

Student fees also rose during the past decade, as Texas' political leadership adopted the position that students should pay a greater share of the cost of their public higher education opportunities. Simultaneously, at the federal level, there was a shift in student financial aid from grants to loans, a move which had a negative impact on students at UTEP, a majority of whom depend upon some form of financial aid to pursue their educational aspirations.

A second major institutional transition that occurred at UTEP during the 1980s involved a growing emphasis on research as an integral part of both individual faculty and institutional agendas. Research, the creation of new knowledge, is an essential component of all universities, and its pursuit can serve as a major enhancement to student instruction, as has been so well demonstrated with programs such as MBRS and MRCE. The challenge is to ensure that the relationship between teaching and research remains balanced, that the natural tensions between the two activities serve to energize and stimulate both faculty and students. At a predominantly undergraduate university like UTEP, it is absolutely essential that the primary teaching mission not be sacrificed in the pursuit of research; at the same time, however, the rich learning opportunities offered within the research context are far too valuable to ignore, if we are truly committed to excellent teaching.

More and more of UTEP's faculty members are engaged in research in 1990, and more and more of them are receiving external funding to support their endeavors. The Colleges of Engineering and Science have traditionally been best able to attract research support from industry and federal and state agencies, and funding in these
two colleges continues to increase. I am pleased to announce today that the National Science Foundation has awarded over $1.5 million to the Computer Science Department for a 5-year project to improve the education of Computer Science students and enhance the research productivity of the faculty. Computer Science has also just received a major commitment from IBM of a 37-station instructional laboratory valued at more than $500,000. Andy Bernat and his colleagues are to be congratulated. External funding is not restricted to Science and Engineering, however. I am also pleased to announce today that a group of faculty members in the Psychology and Sociology Departments have received a 3-year grant of $1 million from the National Institutes of Health for alcohol, drug abuse, and mental health research; and, faculty in the College of Nursing and Allied Health have just been informed of a grant from the Kellogg Foundation in the amount of $950,000 for a school-based health careers recruitment and education program.

A third and most important transition through which UTEP passed during the 1980s was demographic. At the start of the decade, UTEP's student population was 42% Hispanic; today Hispanics account for over 55% of the UTEP student body. In 1986, we became a majority-minority institution. This demographic transition thrust UTEP into national prominence as the largest Hispanic-majority university in the continental United States. As one of the few minority universities with a robust research agenda, UTEP became increasingly recognized as a source of high quality graduates, and increasingly competitive in the pursuit of external funding support.

These demographic changes have also required that the University undertake efforts to ensure that all faculty and staff clearly understand the special nature of this
institution and the opportunities and challenges that it presents to them. To be effective, an institution's mission must relate to its context and it must be well communicated to all who are expected to carry it out; to the credit of all staff and faculty, UTEP has successfully integrated its programs and goals with the needs and aspirations of the region it serves, while at the same time protecting the traditional academic values to which we are all committed.

The decade of the 1980s was also characterized by a trend toward inter-institutional cooperation. UTEP and other universities in the state, notably UT Austin have worked together to bring academic programs to the El Paso area; the Master's degree in Social Work program has already graduated over 100 professionals. Such programs will likely be expanded in the 1990s in such areas as education and health. At the local level, UTEP became much more active in extending its resources and its interests through partnerships with local school districts and the El Paso Community College. Transfers from the Community College to UTEP have increased significantly, and UTEP's many outreach programs in area school districts, many of which are supported by grant funding, are considered to be models for a metropolitan university's commitment to the community it serves.

Finally, the 1980s witnessed a major increase in this and many other universities' involvement in economic development activities. The Bureau of Business and Economic Research has long been a source of professional expertise and advice for the El Paso-Juarez business community. During the 1980s it was joined by such initiatives as the Manufacturing Consortium in Engineering and the Institute for Manufacturing and Materials Management. UTEP is clearly viewed as a partner in the human and economic development of El Paso-Juarez, and university faculty and staff
are increasingly called upon to apply their knowledge and expertise to addressing the many challenges facing this binational region.

Let me share with you now just some of the accomplishments with which UTEP ended the 1980s. What is striking about them is their broad base. Excellence at UTEP is not defined in terms of one or two outstanding programs or projects; UTEP's ambitious agenda is contagious, and departments across the campus are participating in it.

In the area of academic programs, there have been several important developments, including a major re-structuring of all teacher education programs to conform with requirements of recently enacted state legislation. Faculty in the Colleges of Education, Liberal Arts, and Science now share responsibility for teacher education. Effective teacher preparation must be a goal to which we are all committed; the quality of UTEP's future students and the quality of life in this region are at stake.

New degree programs included the much-awaited Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering; eight students are already enrolled in this, UTEP's second doctoral program. Also approved were Master's degrees in Special Education and Manufacturing Engineering. Awaiting Coordinating Board approval are a Master's degree in Developmental Education and a Ph.D. degree in Psychology. Considerable progress has also been made in preparing a proposal for a doctoral degree in Materials Science, a program which has been greatly strengthened through the support UTEP has received from the NSF-sponsored Materials Research Center of Excellence and federal appropriations to the Institute for Manufacturing and Materials Management.
UTEP researchers continued to be highly successful in securing funding support this past year. In the College of Engineering, for example, the Energy Center generated $2 million in newly funded projects, and Professor Soheil Nazarian in Civil Engineering received over $1 million in grants to support his research efforts. Laboratory facilities such as the new, state-of-the-art analytical transmission electron microscope in Metallurgical and Materials Engineering; interdisciplinary research units such as the Center for Environmental Resources Management; reorganization of Purchasing and Receiving departments into a Materials Management unit; and a strong environmental health program; should all contribute to the infrastructure needed to support future research initiatives.

Several instructional programs at UTEP benefited from the introduction of new technologies and the renovation of their physical facilities. In a partnership with IBM, UTEP's Academic Development Center responded effectively to the diagnostic and remediation challenges presented by the legislatively mandated Texas Academic Skills Program. In the College of Science, two new computer-assisted instructional laboratories promise to enhance introductory courses in Chemistry and Biological Sciences. In Chemistry, the University is proud to be the site of the first interactive laser-disk computer laboratory of its kind in the United States. Purchased with funds provided by the NSF-sponsored Comprehensive Regional Center for Minorities, this laboratory enables chemistry students to conduct laboratory experiments via computer simulation. A similar effort will be undertaken in Biological Sciences in the soon-to-be-dedicated Anton Berkman Learning Center, made possible by an endowment from National Medical Enterprises and many of Dr. Berkman's former students. In the College of Business Administration, a new artificial intelligence laboratory has been established, thanks to a major gift of
equipment from the Hewlett-Packard Corporation. And, with support from the Burlington Resources Foundation, through El Paso Natural Gas, the Liberal Arts Building will soon house an innovative Language Laboratory which will include television links to foreign language programming from throughout the world.

In other technological advances, the Computer Center began the installation of a fiber optic network which will greatly improve communication on this campus and link UTEP users to databases and networks worldwide, and touchtone registration was successfully implemented to enthusiastic student response. The installation of new systems does not occur without the dedication of a large number of individuals, and we thank all of them for their efforts.

Other physical facilities renovated and programs relocated during the past year included the Speech and Hearing Clinic which moved into fine new quarters in the College of Nursing and Allied Health. Texas Western Press and News and Publications now occupy a renovated facility that once housed the Physical Plant, and the building they vacated has, in turn, been transformed into the University's new child care center. The Dean's Office in the College of Liberal Arts has been remodeled, and on the fourth floor of that building much progress has been made in converting classrooms into computer-assisted instructional laboratories. The most visible project has been the transformation of the Old Library Building into a teaching-research facility for the Department of Geological Sciences. This $6.8 million, PUF-funded project will not only provide a much-needed home for Geology; it has also created a "border Bhutanese" presence in the center of the campus. And, all of the University's buildings will soon be made more "user-friendly" with implementation of a comprehensive plan developed this past year for campus signage;
buildings and directions to them will soon be presented on attractive signs throughout the campus. We have grown too large to continue to rely on the oral transmission of campus directions.

Speaking of growth, UTEP's enrollment of nearly 16,600 students this Fall has exceeded the estimates of even the most optimistic prognosticators. This large enrollment is not only a tribute to the fine outreach efforts of many UTEP departments, but also to the generosity of donors who provide much-needed scholarship support to the region's most talented young people, and to the efforts of faculty and staff across the campus who ensure the quality of the programs that we offer and their responsiveness to the student population we serve. It is with some frequency now that parents whose children have transferred to UTEP from other universities throughout the country report to me that they believe that the undergraduate education provided here is equal to or better in quality than that offered at those well-known universities and that UTEP is certainly more responsive to the needs of undergraduate students than those institutions appear to be.

With enrollment growth come expanded student services. A major new addition to the south end of the campus is a child-care center with capacity to provide 137 children of students, staff, and faculty with an innovative and stimulating pre-school learning environment. A comprehensive disabled student support program has been established. A shuttle bus service has been inaugurated to encourage the UTEP community to consider utilizing remote parking lots which, for the most part, remain empty while competition for inner-campus parking becomes ever more keen. Recreational facilities are being developed in Charlie Davis Park, with site preparation already begun on a soccer field complex. In time, we hope to be able to
locate all of UTEP's outdoor recreational facilities—soccer, tennis, softball, and swimming—in that area.

But, universities are far more than buildings and budgets. They are fundamentally human organizations which should have as their primary goal to provide opportunities for people—students, faculty, and staff—to develop to their full potential. To achieve that goal, the University strives to assemble on this campus the best qualified, most committed people we can identify. Each faculty and staff vacancy creates for us an opportunity to seek not only outstanding professional credentials, but also the human qualities that will enhance this university's growing reputation as an institution that understands and accepts enthusiastically its important mission. I am pleased to say that during the past year we have added many new faculty and staff whose qualifications and commitment to UTEP's goals should greatly contribute to our growing success. Deans, department chairmen, directors, and, especially Richard Adauto in the EEO office, deserve the credit for this major achievement in a highly competitive recruiting environment.

UTEP's people—students, staff and faculty—brought us national visibility through their many achievements during 1989-90. Let me cite just a few examples.

UTEP's Dinner Theatre was selected as one of only six university companies out of 466 that competed for the privilege of performing at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. The Music Department's choir and the Lab Band were invited to make European tours, the latter for a return performance at the prestigious Montreux Jazz Festival in Switzerland. In team activities, the forensics squad brought numerous national honors to UTEP, as did the fencing club; and the UTEP
soccer club won the National Collegiate Club Championship. UTEP's intercollegiate athletic teams brought us a WAC basketball championship, and national rankings in indoor and outdoor track, rifle, and golf. NOVA, UTEP's alumni magazine, place third among 266 competing publications nationally, for its design. And, last but certainly not least, faculty and staff continued to bring honors to UTEP through their many publications, presentations, fellowships, and awards.

On a regional level, UTEP's visibility received a major boost last year from the publicity attendant upon the Diamond Jubilee celebration. In addition, the Centennial Museum continued its fine efforts to expand the horizons of residents of this region, especially young people, with stimulating exhibits and special events; a record 54,000 people visited the Museum last year. The campus was filled this past summer with thousands of youngsters who participated in a variety of programs designed to help develop their educational aspirations and define their career goals. Supported by federal, state, corporate, foundation, and university funds, these special programs meet an ever-growing demand for outreach activities for young people in this area. El Paso's retired community has also begun to find a source of intellectual and cultural stimulation at UTEP through the Center for Lifelong Learning, a promising new initiative undertaken by the Center for Professional and Continuing Education. Under the able leadership of Herbert Schwartz, and with the cooperation of many UTEP faculty, the Center will begin its first series of organized classes this fall; they even convinced me to dust off my linguistics books and teach a couple of classes!

We can all take great pride in what this university has been able to accomplish during the past several years, and each year, those accomplishments grow more
impressive, much as interest compounds on initial investments. The University of Texas at El Paso is a very special institution, and, importantly, we are not the only ones to know that. Three factors make us distinctive:

First, our location on the U.S.-Mexico border creates great opportunities for academic, cultural, and research programs with counterpart institutions in Mexico and for binational human and economic development initiatives; the importance of our role in Mexico is likely to increase substantially as progress is made in enacting a Free Trade Agreement between our two countries. Mexican student enrollment at UTEP now exceeds 860, by far the largest concentration of Mexican students at any university in the United States, and an estimated 15% of all Mexicans enrolled in U.S. higher education.

Second, UTEP is the largest Hispanic-majority university in the continental United States, and our programs are in the forefront of addressing the challenges presented by the major demographic changes facing this state and nation. Known for the quality of our programs and the caliber of our graduates, UTEP is widely regarded as a model institution in minority education. UTEP faculty and staff regularly return from professional meetings surprised at "how far ahead" we are in our thinking and in our student support programming. We have much to be proud of, and the 1990s will bring even greater visibility to the UTEP model.

That model is especially attractive because of a third factor which distinguishes UTEP from other institutions with a strong commitment to the undergraduate preparation of first-generation and minority students, namely, a robust research agenda. UTEP is competing successfully for research funding, not only within the framework of earmarked programs for minority institutions, but also in highly
competitive mainstream grant programs; 90% of UTEP's proposals are submitted to such grant competitions, and the funding rate, 54%, in 1989 compares favorably with that at any university in the country. The successful balance between effective undergraduate teaching in a majority-minority context and a nationally competitive research agenda makes this a most unusual university.

The momentum that UTEP has been able to generate during the last years of the 1980s will serve as the impetus for greater success and growing recognition in the 1990s. With a strengthened infrastructure and outstanding faculty and staff across the campus, UTEP's future is bright indeed. We demonstrated during the 1980s that we had the resilience and determination to adjust to major changes in our funding base and student demographics. We are a larger, stronger, and better balanced institution than we were at the beginning of the 1980s, and we are well prepared to meet the challenges that the 1990s will present to us. There are few institutions in the United States that offer the promise that UTEP extends to all of us today. It is a great privilege for me to serve as UTEP's president in these exciting times, and, as we move confidently into the 1990s, I thank all members of the University community for the talent, hard work and commitment that they have so willingly contributed to make this the dynamic institution that it is today. Thanks too are due all of UTEP's many supporters who believe in us and express that belief by donating their time and money to help us achieve our goals.

The members of the U.T. El Paso 2001 Commission perhaps best summarized the growing confidence in our capacity for leadership with their ambitious set of recommendations for UTEP's role in fostering this region's human and economic development through the turn of the century. I promise them and you here today
that, however ambitious those recommendations might be, UTEP is prepared to achieve them...and then some!