

**The University of Texas at El Paso
2007 Convocation
President Diana Natalicio**

When UTEP alumnus and NASA Astronaut Danny Olivas lifted off toward the International Space Station, we realized that not even the sky is the limit for UTEP! Thanks to Danny, we know that our loftiest dreams and ambitions are attainable. In fact, as Danny proudly unfurled his UTEP flag and wore his UTEP shirt on the Space Station, and as he signaled the Miner pick during his space walk, UTEP became one of the very few universities on earth with an alumni chapter in space!

Just as the movie *Glory Road* brought visibility to UTEP athletics in 2006, Danny Olivas' performance as a NASA Astronaut, put a bright spotlight on UTEP's success in providing opportunities to talented young people in this Paso del Norte region, and validated the quality of the educational programs that we offer them.

That same UTEP quality was recognized in other, more quietly celebrated, ways during the past year. A major accomplishment was UTEP's re-accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). Preparation for this process, which is required once every ten years, consumed the time and expertise of a large number of UTEP faculty, staff and students who worked together to prepare the re-accreditation report and to interact with the 11-member site visit team.

A new and interesting requirement for SACS accreditation was a Quality Enhancement Plan to address a specific issue of particular importance to UTEP. We elected to focus our plan on how we can more effectively foster "Student Success in the Middle Years," the period of time between the end of the first year of enrollment and successful degree completion. This focus on the "middle years" recognized the success of UTEP's investment in the Entering Student Program and the strong first-year foundation it provides, but also acknowledged that despite this good start, many UTEP students' progress toward degree completion continues to be disappointingly slow...to them and to us.

A large and diverse group of faculty, staff and students participated in the development of the Student Success Plan, which rested firmly on UTEP's strong commitment to both access and excellence, and, drew on Laura Rendon's pioneering research on Latino students, to create a campus culture of "validation." The Plan included two principal components identified as critical to student success—curriculum renewal and academic and career advising.

The number of individual contributions to the SACS re-accreditation process is far too large to recognize today, but I will take a moment to acknowledge the fine work of Provost Richard Jarvis and the leadership team who worked with him: Pablo Arenaz, Cynthia Villa, Richard Padilla, Steve Riter, Sandra Hurley, Maggy Smith, Steve Aley and

Vince Burke, as well as the support of Roy Mathew, Chuy Mena, Sandy Vasquez, and the cooperation of the UTEP Faculty Senate, under the leadership of Presidents Greg Rocha and Lawrence Ellzey.

To develop effective Student Success interventions, we must understand better those factors that enhance students' progress toward degree completion and those that impede such progress. During the past year, Roy Mathew and his CIERP team have focused considerable attention on an in-depth analysis of the academic progress of a cohort of UTEP students, to identify specific factors that appear to distinguish those students who graduated, from those who did not. This research, funded by the Lumina Foundation, has offered us interesting insights into UTEP students' experiences and helped inform specific interventions in such areas as tutoring and supplemental education, advising and career counseling, personal financial management training, and developmental education options.

Work in the area of developmental education has been particularly energizing because it has involved partnerships with the El Paso Community College and all 12 independent school districts in this region. The goal of this College Readiness Initiative is to enable all high school graduates to enroll at EPCC or UTEP with sufficient preparation to move directly into college-level-credit courses without the need for remediation. The Accuplacer test, which is used by UTEP and EPCC to determine college readiness in mathematics, reading and writing, is administered by partner high schools during students' junior or senior years, and additional instruction is provided to those who do not pass it, followed by an opportunity to re-take the Accuplacer exam. As a result of this initiative, many more students now enter UTEP ready for college-level work, and enrollments in our developmental courses have trended downward.

At UTEP, the College Readiness Initiative was incorporated into an Enhanced New Student Orientation program for all first-year students whose Accuplacer test scores place them into developmental math. A total of 1,603 students were provided an intensive math refresher course followed by an Accuplacer re-test. The results were impressive—48% placed at least one course-level higher, and 31% moved from developmental into college-level math—strongly suggesting that students' Accuplacer performance in mathematics reflects what they have forgotten more than what they may or may not have known. We will continue this important work to help students achieve successful traction toward degree completion from the very first semester of their enrollment.

Successful and timely undergraduate degree completion is also partly tied to curriculum requirements, which at UTEP and many other universities had grown substantially beyond the 120-credit-hour norm. During the past year, nearly all UTEP departments and colleges completed a review of their degree program requirements and recommended changes that updated their curricula and reduced the required courses in each degree program toward that 120-hour goal. We thank the many faculty who devoted their time and expertise to this often difficult curriculum renewal process, and the Faculty Senate, particularly the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee under John Wiebe's leadership, for their timely and careful review of all proposed changes. We look forward to

continuing to work during the coming year with those departments whose curricula remain under review.

Another curriculum innovation, the Bachelor's in Multidisciplinary Studies degree, has proved its value to many UTEP students, especially those whose personal and employment responsibilities have fragmented their pursuit of a bachelor's degree. By re-packaging their previous academic work, often completed at other institutions, students discover that they are far closer to completing a degree at UTEP than they expected. Since its establishment in June, 2006, 170 students have already graduated with BMS degrees, and 270 students were registered as BMS majors in spring 2007. Thanks to Maggy Smith and Diana Guerrero for their good work in launching this important degree option for UTEP's diverse student population.

The second major initiative in UTEP's Student Success plan is a comprehensive program of competent, carefully structured advising that provides all students at major transition points on the path toward degree completion with individualized and integrated opportunities for thoughtful academic and career advice. We welcome the contributions of George Barton, newly appointed Director of Career Services, to this important initiative.

You may have noted that up to this point I have talked about "degree completion" rather than "graduation rates." Why do I make this distinction? Because the traditional graduation rate metric presents a severely distorted picture of the performance of most U.S. universities, especially those, like UTEP, that serve first-generation and low-income students in large urban settings. The problem is with the metric itself, not with the students or the universities that serve them.

The calculation of graduation rates is deceptively simple: the denominator consists of all the first-time, full-time, degree-seeking freshmen who enroll at a university in a given fall semester, and the numerator is the total number of that original group—and only that group—who graduate four, five or six years later. So, to be counted in the graduation rate calculation, a student must initially enroll as a full-time freshman and graduate from the same university. At UTEP, we awarded more than 2,100 undergraduate degrees last year, and an astonishing 70% of those UTEP graduates did not count in our "official" graduation rate. Why? Because for the most part they didn't begin their enrollment as first-time, full-time freshmen at UTEP; they came to us as transfer students from EPCC or another college or university, or they may have enrolled as part-time students. What's even worse, many of these successful UTEP graduates were counted against the graduation rate of the institution where they may have initially enrolled as full-time freshmen, just as many UTEP freshmen who transfer to and graduate from another university are counted as UTEP drop-outs when calculating our graduation rate.

As media and elected officials increasingly used this flawed metric to criticize the performance of UTEP and most other public universities, it became clear that few of the critics—indeed few people anywhere, including on most university campuses—understood what graduation rates actually measure. It also became clear that we had to

shift from defense to offense to attack this serious misunderstanding at state and national levels, where much of the rhetoric originated. Roy Mathew, David Novick and I worked with a group of UTEP faculty members to develop a presentation, using “express” and “commuter” trains as metaphors for different types of universities. I have now delivered this presentation to many audiences ranging from the Rotary Club of El Paso to the U.S. Department of Education in Washington, D.C. Its purpose is to educate audiences on what graduation rates actually measure—who gets counted, who doesn’t, and why. The response has been overwhelmingly positive, with frequent comments such as “Why hasn’t anyone ever told us this before?”

The presentation argues that there are two basic types of higher education institutions in the U.S. One is what we call an “express train” institution. Most small and more affluent private colleges fall into this category. Students typically enroll as first-time, full-time, degree-seeking freshmen, and most of them graduate from the same institution four or five years later. These students board the express train as a cohort in, say, fall 2006, and ride together as the “Class of 2010” on the express train to their graduation destination. The traditional graduation rate metric is nicely aligned with this kind of higher education experience.

In contrast, the experience of students at most public universities is often more analogous to a ride on a “commuter (or local) train.” At each semester break, the commuter train stops at a station, where some students get on (transferring in from other colleges and universities or returning to school after a hiatus), and others get off, to tend to personal, employment, military or other obligations, or to earn money to be able to return to school later. Although some students at “commuter train” institutions begin the journey to degree completion as first-time, full-time, degree-seeking freshmen and ride straight through to the graduation destination, a majority of them do not. The 70% of UTEP graduates who are not counted in our graduation rate reveals just how seriously misaligned this metric is to the experience of students at “commuter train” institutions.

So where did this graduation rate metric come from? We have the NCAA to thank for creating it and the U.S. Congress and U.S. Department of Education for extending its impact far beyond intercollegiate athletics. The NCAA created the graduation rate metric in 1991 to ensure that student athletes’ progress toward completing their academic degrees was uniformly monitored. Although student-athletes represent a very special subset of university students, the availability of this measuring tool was irresistible to those seeking greater accountability in higher education...and highly satisfying to those traditional universities whose marketing and national rankings benefited from the obvious advantage that this metric affords them.

With today’s increasing interest in performance measures and proposals to link funding incentives to them, institutions like UTEP can no longer allow judgments to be made about our effectiveness based on a metric that ignores 70% of the students we successfully educate. Although we are confident that implementing our Student Success Initiative plan will result in some improvement in UTEP’s “official” graduation rate, we also know that we must continue to work hard to develop alternative and more

informative metrics to assess the performance of today's students and the universities that serve them. Such metrics might include growth in the number of degrees awarded, number of "at risk" students who complete degrees, and degrees awarded in high priority areas, such as engineering or nursing.

During the past year, UTEP granted a total of 2,106 bachelor's, 700 master's, and 44 doctoral degrees in such high-demand professions as health care, teaching, science and engineering. That is a huge and growing contribution to the lives of graduates and their families and to the workforce needs of this region and beyond. Ignoring that accomplishment, while continuing to rely on the flawed graduation rate metric, grossly undervalues the contributions to our society made by most universities, and especially those that serve low-income and first-generation students, and it gives policymakers and the general public the false impression that they are achieving a very low yield on their investment in public higher education. As one of our alumni said after hearing my presentation at a local meeting, "Dr. Natalicio, I may not have counted in UTEP's graduation rate, but UTEP sure did count for me and my family." And that's really the point, isn't it?

Dwindling state support of public higher education in Texas, and the resulting pressure to increase tuition at all state universities, plays a more significant role in successful degree completion at UTEP than it does at institutions with more affluent student populations. Even small tuition increases, when coupled with rising costs of everything from textbooks to gasoline, affect the enrollment decisions of UTEP students. Our students also tend to be loan-averse—UTEP ranks among the top three universities nationally with the smallest student debt burden upon graduation. Instead of borrowing money to finance their education, UTEP students often adopt a "pay as you go" strategy. They may decide to enroll for fewer hours or even stop-out completely for a semester or more to secure the financial resources needed to support their pursuit of a degree. Others may choose to start or to co-enroll at EPCC, where tuition increases have been ameliorated by the availability of ad valorem tax revenues.

UTEP has tried to respond to students' financial challenges through a variety of innovative strategies, including the UTEP Promise program, which offers all students with an annual family income of \$25,000 or less a financial aid package which eliminates all out-of-pocket expenses for tuition and fees. During the recent legislative session, we enthusiastically supported a modification in installment tuition regulations, eliminating a requirement that students pay one-half of their tuition and fees at the time of registration. UTEP now offers students the option of paying their tuition and fees in five equal installments over the course of the entire semester. And to enable students to consider the financial implications of the work-school choices they make, we are also incorporating personal financial management modules into the first-year seminar and a variety of advising settings.

Financial resources—both UTEP's and our students'—are an ever-present factor in decision-making on this campus. One of our greatest challenges is to balance our commitments to access and excellence in determining tuition increases in the face of

declining state support. In a setting where one-third of the students report an annual family income of \$20,000 or less, we recognize that the tuition decisions we make will have a direct impact on the affordability of a UTEP education for a majority of our students. So, we are extremely conservative in setting tuition rates when compared with peer institutions across the state. This fall, for example, UTEP's tuition and fees for a 15-semester credit hour load total \$2,863, compared with \$3,647 at UT Arlington and \$4,196 at UT Dallas. As we again begin deliberations to establish tuition and fee rates for 2008 and 2009, we will work closely with students—both those who are members of the Tuition and Fee Advisory Committee and those who attend tuition meetings scheduled across the campus—to ensure that their perspectives are an integral part of the decision-making process.

Of critical importance to any conversation with students about tuition increases is an assurance that UTEP continues to seek greater efficiencies in all our operations. For example, thanks to the leadership of Greg McNicol, Juan Guerra and Robert Moss in Facilities Services, a variety of efficiency strategies have reduced energy consumption by approximately 10%, or more than \$400,000 per year. Recycling has been given high priority. We purchase carpeting and paper products made from recycled materials, and we recycle the University's own solid waste. During the past year, approximately 350,000 pounds of paper and cardboard were recycled together with 36 tons of steel and 1 ton of copper. And what's even better is that the proceeds from the sale of recycled materials are re-invested in our continuing efforts to xeriscape the UTEP campus, which, in turn, result in water conservation and cost-savings.

Thanks to Ken Pierce and his team in Information Technology, and to Cindy Villa and hers in Business Affairs, UTEP students, faculty and staff are enjoying both enhanced and more efficient business services in many areas of the University's operations, such as expansion of Miner Gold Card applications. The volume of our business transactions continues to grow, as do the challenges to ensure accuracy, speed, and security. During the past year, UTEP issued more than 77,000 vendor payments, 47,000 payroll disbursements, and 11,500 purchase orders. Student Business Services processed over 105,000 payments, and Financial Aid provided nearly \$103 million in grants and loans to more than 14,000 students. We look very much forward to working with David Batten, UTEP's newly appointed web designer, to make our many web interfaces more appealing and user friendly.

Robert Stakes, Interim Library Director, increased services to students and achieved more efficient utilization of a major university facility by converting the Library's main floor into a new hub of student learning activity. The Collaborative Learning Center provides 250 open-access computers in an environment designed to promote interaction and collaborative learning. Student response to the CLC, and other changes in the Library such as the Jazzman's coffee house in the main lobby, has been overwhelmingly positive: library attendance has increased 31%, to more than 855,000 this past year, and log-ins in the CLC have grown from 132,000 to more than 560,000. So, beginning this fall, at the request of the Student Government Association, the Library will extend its operating hours until 1:00 a.m. from Sunday through Thursday. Special thanks to Samuel

Gonzalez, SGA President last year, for his leadership on this and so many other important student issues.

At the same time that we work to identify efficiencies and cost-reduction opportunities, we also recognize that our commitment to access and affordability must always be coupled with an equal commitment to excellence. Offering access without excellence will not serve UTEP students well, because when these students graduate, they must compete with their counterparts from universities across the world, and we must prepare them to do that. What that means is that we must attract and retain competitive faculty, acquire state-of-the-art equipment and technology, and invest in research and academic programs, particularly at the graduate level. Our costs to compete for faculty talent and to upgrade facilities and equipment are the same as those incurred at other universities, but we cannot simply increase tuition, as they often do, to generate the necessary resources. We must be more creative and entrepreneurial in developing strategies that assure continuing progress toward excellence while maintaining our commitment to provide access to the students in this region for whom UTEP represents a life-changing opportunity.

UTEP has made great progress in identifying new sources of revenue to invest in building excellence on a variety of fronts. The most visible commitments to excellence and student success are the many new and renovated facilities across the UTEP campus. Perhaps the biggest news of the past year was the announcement of two extraordinarily large facilities investments.

- First, the Texas Legislature and The University of Texas System partnered to provide support to expand and upgrade science and engineering core facilities at the heart of the UTEP campus. Students and faculty have been engaged in planning how best to maximize the yield on this transformative \$120 million investment. We will construct a new \$65 million building at the south end of the Engineering complex, which will provide much needed space for Chemistry and Computer Science students and faculty, together with new Computational Science and other interdisciplinary science and engineering programs. The balance of funds will be used to finish out the last sections of shelled space in the Engineering Annex and the Bioscience Research building, as well as to renovate and upgrade the current Physical Sciences, Biology and Engineering buildings.
- The second major validation of UTEP by The University of Texas System Board of Regents occurred just last month with the commitment of \$50 million to construct a new College of Health Sciences and School of Nursing facility on or contiguous to the UTEP campus. This has been a top UTEP priority for nearly a decade, and we are thrilled that we will finally be able to create an opportunity for students and faculty in the health professions to move from their off-campus location to the main UTEP campus, and from facilities designed for other tenants and purposes into a new state-of-the-art health sciences complex that will foster growth and high achievement in academic and research programs. A committee of faculty and students has already begun planning this major new addition to the UTEP campus.

- Of special interest to undergraduate students is the recently completed renovation of the Academic Advising Building on Hawthorne Street, where Academic Services used to be located. Housing the Academic Advising Center, Testing Services and the Miner Athlete Advising Center, this attractive facility provides larger and more functional space for these critical and high-volume student services.
- We have just put the finishing touches on UTEP's beautiful new parking garage. It seems odd to refer to a parking garage as beautiful, but this one surely is! Accommodating nearly 1,700 vehicles, this facility is not only UTEP's first parking structure, but also the first Bhutanese-style parking garage on the planet!
- In conjunction with the construction of the garage, Sun Bowl Drive was widened and sidewalks added to ease traffic flow and improve pedestrian safety in that area. Work to continue widening and improving Sun Bowl Drive will be an ongoing priority in the coming years.
- Next door to the garage, on the corner of University and Sun Bowl, we will soon break ground on UTEP's new bookstore, a 25,000 sq. ft. facility which will provide UTEP students, faculty and staff, as well as visitors to our campus, a more spacious and attractive shopping experience for everything from textbooks to the ubiquitous Miner picks.
- Further south on Sun Bowl, the second phase of the Kelly Hall renovation project was completed, and happy new occupants include the Office of Strategic Initiatives, Regional Geospatial Center, Technology Transfer Office and Purchasing.
- Although it's not officially a UTEP facility, a beautiful new structure definitely looks like one and is built on our campus. I am referring of course to the new Hilton Garden Hotel that was completed last fall and that has been serving as a huge new asset to UTEP and other residents of our campus neighborhood. With more than 150 rooms and meeting facilities, the hotel has changed the lives of campus visitors and those of us who host them. How happy we all are to have attractive accommodations that are convenient to the campus...and no more shuttling visitors across the city!
- As if this weren't enough good news, UTEP is also going to build a new men's and women's basketball practice facility and ticket center, thanks to the generosity of major donors Paul Foster and Jeff and Sharon Stevens and many other supporters of UTEP athletics. To be located on the corner of Mesa and Glory Road, this beautiful facility will for the first time place UTEP's Border Bhutanese face on Mesa.
- Finally, after students strongly supported a referendum to increase their recreation fee to support the expansion of their Swimming and Fitness Center, the Texas Legislature authorized a bill sponsored by Senator Shapleigh and Representative Haggerty to permit UTEP to proceed with this project. An enthusiastic committee of students and staff members is working hard to ensure that this greatly expanded recreation facility will address the many needs and interests of UTEP's diverse student population.

We thank Greg McNicol and the entire Facilities Services team for their good work in overseeing all of these projects; Cliff Walsh and the University Police Department for helping us all maneuver safely around the construction sites, and Cindy Villa and her team in Business Affairs for the many ways in which they support this intense activity. Most of all, however, we thank our principal investors—The University of Texas System Board of Regents, the Texas Legislature, and our generous private donors for their confidence in UTEP and the students we serve. They have invested heavily in UTEP's success, and students and faculty for generations to come will be the beneficiaries of the extraordinary campus facilities transformation that their support has made possible.

UTEP is not only growing in size, it is also increasingly recognized as one of the most beautiful university campuses in the United States. The Bhutanese architecture of our buildings, ranging from our original Old Main in 1917, to more recent facilities such as Academic Services and Biosciences Research, offers a coherence and serenity that is rare on large urban campuses. As many of you know, I was privileged to travel to Bhutan in March. While there, I was delighted to learn of plans to establish Bhutan's first university, and of the architects' interest in visiting UTEP to see what a Bhutanese university campus looks like. What a nice opportunity for reciprocity!

Another major investment in UTEP's success is external grant funding generated by talented and hard-working faculty and staff members, whose proposals have excelled in intense peer-review competition. During the past year, 446 proposals with a total value of more than \$207 million were submitted to a broad range of federal agencies, foundations and corporations, and more than \$47 million in new grant awards were received. UTEP continues to rank fourth among all public universities in Texas in total federal grant support, after Texas A&M, UT Austin, and the University of Houston; and total federal research funding has grown to nearly 30% of UTEP's General Revenue appropriation, ranking us third in the State, after UT Austin and Texas A&M.

Enumerating all of the major grants that have come to UTEP during the past year would surely exhaust your patience and good will, but a few examples may give a flavor of the scope of UTEP's growing research enterprise.

A number of grants involve interdisciplinary collaborations:

- A broad multi-disciplinary team of UTEP faculty, led by Computer Science Chair Ann Gates, won a five-year, \$5 million award from NSF to establish the Cyber-ShARE Center of Excellence. Participating faculty include Aaron Velasco in Geology, Craig Tweedie in Biology, Leticia Velazquez and Miguel Argaez in Math, Paulo Pinheiro da Silva in Computer Science, Patricia Nava in Electrical & Computer Engineering, and Brian Giza in Teacher Education. That's multidisciplinary!
- Pat Teller in Computer Science and Leticia Velazquez in Math are conducting major research projects as part of UTEP's participation in the new Army High Performance Computing Center. In addition, this grant will provide a summer program in the College of Engineering for middle and high school students to engage in hands-on projects related to high-performance computing.

- Felicia Manciu in Physics led another interdisciplinary team of colleagues from Chemistry and Biology to compete successfully for an NSF Major Research Instrumentation grant.
- UTEP has received a competitive renewal of its 4-year, \$6 million MBRS-SCORE grant to support biomedical and health research by 12 faculty members in four departments (Biology, Chemistry, Math and Clinical Laboratory Science).

The sources of support for UTEP research are becoming more diversified as well:

- Cesar Carrasco in Civil Engineering and Jack Chessa in Mechanical Engineering have negotiated a one-year, \$628,000 contract with Lockheed Martin to provide test fixtures for the development of a safer, more reliable “Crew Exploration Vehicle” for NASA human space exploration.
- UTEP’s Center for Transportation Infrastructure Systems (CTIS) continues to be highly successful. Researchers Soheil Nazarian, Kelvin Cheu and Sergio Rocha secured \$1.2 million in support from a variety of agencies, including the Texas Department of Transportation and the El Paso MPO.

A number of recent grants bring direct benefits to students at UTEP and in school districts in this region:

- UTEP’s Upward Bound program under the leadership of Tita Yanar received highly competitive 4-year renewals of two major grants, totaling \$3 million. Many UTEP alumni are proud Upward Bound graduates, and we are very pleased that future generations of UTEP students will continue to enjoy the opportunities that this program offers.
- Peter Golding in Metallurgical and Materials Engineering is leading a 3-year, \$500,000 U.S. Department of Education funded project to develop a model for university/community college collaborations to foster greater STEM participation by women and minorities.
- Dennis Soden has received a five-year, \$2-million grant from the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency to establish a multi-dimensional Intelligence Center for Academic Excellence, which includes a pre-college program to introduce middle and high school students, teachers and university faculty to intelligence career opportunities.
- Under the leadership of Ruben Moreno, UTEP received a 5-year, \$2 million renewal of its College Assistance Migrant Program which helps migrant or seasonal farmworker students succeed in college and earn a degree.
- UTEP led a UT System consortium in securing a 5-year renewal of NSF funding for the Alliance for Minority Participation program, which provides support for undergraduate and graduate students and faculty at UT System institutions. Thanks to Ben Flores in Engineering and Helmut Knaust in Science for their leadership of this statewide initiative.
- An interdisciplinary team led by biologist and environmental scientist Craig Tweedie, and including Aaron Velasco in Geology, Bill Robertson in Teacher Education and Vanessa Loughed in Biology, received nearly \$500,000 from NSF to fund International Polar Year research and educational opportunities in Antarctica. Through this program a group of undergraduate and graduate

students and high school science teachers will participate in an academic program which culminates in a three-week field trip aboard a ship from Tierra del Fuego to the Antarctic Peninsula. Rumor is that several UTEP faculty and staff are plotting to slip aboard as stowaways!!!

UTEP has been particularly active in building its research strengths in biomedical and health sciences research, as evidenced by several recent and highly competitive individual investigator grants:

- Igor Almeida in Biological Sciences received a highly competitive NIH-funded RO1 grant to research Chagas' disease which affects more than 11 million people in Latin America and causes severe cardiac and digestive disorders.
- Laura O'Dell in Psychology received an NIH RO1 grant award to research effects of nicotine exposure and withdrawal on molecular targets related to stress, reward, and neurogenesis across age, sex and cognitive dimensions.
- Ryan Wicker, Director of the W.M. Keck Center for 3D Innovation, received a 3-year, \$270,000 grant from NSF for a research collaboration with colleagues at the University of Utah and Wm. Beaumont Army Medical Center in El Paso to develop and test implantable medical devices designed to regenerate injured nerves.
- Theodore Cooper in Psychology has received two grants from the Paso del Norte Health Foundation that are aimed at smoking cessation at UTEP and in the greater El Paso area.
- With a \$2.4 million RO1 grant from NIH, June Kan-Mitchell in Biological Sciences seeks to develop more effective vaccines to help combat the global AIDS epidemic.

These grants and the many others awarded to UTEP faculty and staff members during the past year represent a major financial investment in UTEP as well as a validation of our research capacity. We are also very proud that we have become a national model for demonstrating that strategic investments by federal agencies in capacity-building to promote greater Hispanic participation in research careers yield strong returns. Evidence of this high yield is found in both the growth in UTEP's annual research expenditures, and the proportion of such funding that comes through intensely competitive peer review processes.

Let me take a moment to thank Roberto Osegueda for his fine work in leading UTEP's research and sponsored projects activity. Roberto has been tireless in his commitment to improve the coordination and oversight of UTEP's expanding research portfolio; upgrade the Technology Transfer Office and UTEP's growing commercialization activity; and update a broad range of policies and procedures—from IRB, IACUC and patents, to indirect cost return—to ensure that they keep pace with UTEP's growing research appetite and serve as incentives for faculty and staff entrepreneurship.

Completion of the new Bioscience Research building, construction of the Chemistry and Computational Science building, renovation of the engineering/science core complex, and construction of the new College of Health Sciences/School of Nursing building, all of

which will occur during the next three years, will have a highly positive impact on our efforts to recruit and retain outstanding faculty and to become even more competitive in securing external grant funds to conduct cutting-edge research in biomedical and health sciences as well as other areas of science and engineering strength at UTEP. And thanks to the continuation of The University of Texas System STARS program, we will be able to offer critical start-up support to recruit outstanding faculty research leaders.

Many of you will recall that the Washington Advisory Group report to The University of Texas System in 2004 established for UTEP a goal of \$100 million in annual research expenditures by 2015. We responded at that time that we would indeed achieve this ambitious goal if significant investments were made in our human resources and facilities infrastructure. Thanks to The University of Texas System and the Texas Legislature, significant investments have been made. Those investments, and our demonstrated competitiveness to date in growing annual research expenditures, convince us that the WAG goal is well within our reach.

During the past year we also applauded the long-awaited investment by the Texas Legislature in the establishment of Texas Tech's four-year medical school in El Paso, and Paul Foster's generous contribution to it. The medical school represents many new opportunities, including possible clinical/translational research collaborations between UTEP faculty members and their new Texas Tech colleagues. UTEP is committed to be supportive of Texas Tech's efforts to assemble the faculty and facilities required to admit its first cohort of medical students in fall 2009.

Successful growth in UTEP's research agenda is closely tied to the development of graduate programs, particularly at the doctoral level. UTEP continues to invest in implementing recently established doctoral offerings and planning additional programs in areas of strategic importance to UTEP, to this region and to the nation. UTEP granted a total of 44 doctoral degrees during the past year, and 395 doctoral students are enrolled this fall, both record-high figures. But we know that these records will quickly be surpassed as our maturing doctoral programs produce more graduates, and several new programs are launched.

During the past year, the Psychology Department admitted students to its new Ph.D. program in General Psychology where they will pursue concentrations in Social, Cognitive and Neuroscience and in Language Acquisition, the latter in partnership with Languages and Linguistics. Our proposal for a Ph.D. in Chemistry was officially approved by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, becoming UTEP's 14th doctoral program, and the first students were admitted this past spring. Two additional doctoral proposals—in Computational Science and Teaching, Learning and Culture—were recently endorsed by the U.T. System Board of Regents and await action by the Coordinating Board, and several other Ph.D. program proposals are in preparation, including Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Biomedical Engineering, Communication, Public Administration, and Transnational Society, Culture and Politics. And reflecting our continued efforts to build strengths in the health sciences, we are beginning to plan doctoral programs in Nursing Practice and Physical Therapy.

Doctoral programs are well aligned with UTEP's access and excellence mission. They create opportunities for residents of this region to pursue advanced post-graduate education, and they help attract and retain highly competitive faculty members who challenge colleagues and students—both graduate and undergraduate—to continue making major strides toward excellence. Growth in the number and size of UTEP's doctoral programs, combined with our student demographics, has led to our ranking among the top ten universities in the U.S. in granting doctoral degrees to Hispanics in engineering. We are of course pleased at this national visibility among doctoral/research universities, but even more pleased that UTEP is changing the demographic profile of doctorally prepared professionals nationally, including enlarging the pool of Latino candidates for faculty positions at universities across the country.

Undergraduate education also received our close attention during the past year. The College of Liberal Arts, in partnership with the University College and the Library, and supported by the Carnegie-funded Teachers for a New Era program, developed a comprehensive plan to integrate and re-focus writing and English language programs across the campus and establish a University Writing Center that will help provide services tailored to meet individual students' needs. The goal is to improve student writing through an integrated set of programs, develop appropriate uses of technology to enhance writing instruction, and vertically align English and language arts programs with those in the public schools. Thanks to Howard Daudistel, Maggy Smith, Robert Stakes and others involved in this comprehensive writing initiative.

Many Liberal Arts departments were active in introducing new degrees and options, as well as more flexibly formatted courses and programs for special student populations. Among them are a new Bachelor of Arts in Teaching English; an Hispanic Entrepreneurship program in Chicano Studies; an online bilingual MFA program in Creative Writing; an online certificate program in Technical and Professional Writing; Spanish language media and journalism for both students and professionals; an interdisciplinary Master's in Leadership Studies for military officers at Ft. Bliss and other installations; and an interdisciplinary program in national security and intelligence.

UTEP is not only offering more academic options to residents of this region, we are also assuring them that these programs are of the highest quality, enabling graduates to perform extremely well on professional licensure exams and to compete successfully for exciting career and post-graduate educational opportunities. Last year, 94% of all Nursing graduates—and 100% of all participants in the Fast-Track Nursing Program—passed the national licensure exam. The Medical Professions Institute, very ably directed by Donna Ekal, reported that 33 UTEP graduates were admitted to highly competitive medical, dental and veterinary schools across the country this past year, and we expect that number to continue to grow as the Institute helps talented UTEP students target their aspirations through such activities as a 2,000-mile bus trip that 48 students took across Texas this summer to visit all major medical schools in the state. (I haven't heard about any faculty stowaways on that trip!)

More good news is the fact that this region's best and brightest young people are increasingly recognizing UTEP's growing national stature, and making UTEP their first-choice enrollment option: 56% of the area's top ten percent high school graduates who enrolled at Texas public universities last year chose UTEP. This is a strong validation from El Paso's talented high school graduates who entrust us with their talent, dreams and future opportunities. We look forward to focusing greater attention on Honors and other undergraduate enrichment programs at UTEP and integrating them into a comprehensive excellence program for students who seek more varied and rigorous academic challenges.

The College of Science has had a highly successful year in building strengths in both research and education. Particularly promising for the College's future is an outstanding group of recently recruited faculty members who have brought both diversity and highly competitive research agendas to UTEP and already played a major role in attracting grant funding. Math and science teacher preparation has become a priority in the College, thanks to the commitment of Associate Dean Kate Miller, who has played a key role in planning and securing external support for these important programs. We express special appreciation to Michael Eastman for his dedicated and effective leadership as Dean of the College of Science during the past three years and look forward to welcoming Dr. Anny Morrobel Sosa, who officially assumes that role next month.

The College of Business Administration enjoyed a high-achieving year with reaccreditation of all business and accounting programs by AACSB, the premier business college accreditation body. Of more than 9,000 collegiate schools of business worldwide, UTEP is one of only 180 to have this validation of all of its programs at all levels. Special thanks to Dean Bob Nachtmann and Associate Dean Pat Eason for their leadership, and the College of Business faculty for their support during this critically important process. The College has also directed considerable time, attention and resources toward new and creative strategies to increase student engagement through its Professional Development Center, and toward developing stronger cross-border ties with partner organizations in northern Mexico. The College's highly successful faculty recruitment this year reflects those priorities.

Closer relationships with institutions in Mexico, especially teacher preparation programs in our neighboring State of Chihuahua, have also been a focus of Dean Josie Tinajero in the College of Education. Of special note are a grant award from US-AID for a collaborative project with Monterrey Tech and the Chihuahuan State Department of Education, which will bring to UTEP 12 master teachers from four normal schools in Chihuahua to complete master's degrees, and a Border Fulbright grant awarded to Dr. Judith Munter, Associate Dean of the College, to pursue collaborative work with colleagues in Mexico.

With leadership from new dean Kathleen Curtis and almost-new dean Bob Anders, the College of Health Sciences and School of Nursing are making major strides in responding creatively to the growing demand for UTEP's health professions graduates and the many research opportunities fostered by UTEP's U.S.-Mexico border setting and

population demographics. These efforts were given a huge boost by the recent U.T. System Board of Regents' commitment of \$50 million to construct a new facility for health sciences education and research.

The College of Health Sciences also welcomed the recent transfer from Liberal Arts of UTEP's Social Work program, and welcomed back to the Paso del Norte region newly appointed Social Work director Mark Lusk. The School of Nursing celebrated two milestones this past year: the 30th anniversary of its association with UTEP, and the record-high conferral of 151 bachelor's and 24 master's degrees. Nearly all of these new graduates are now employed in this region and contributing significantly to the quality of our health care.

The UTEP College of Engineering was the recipient of an especially large number of major national recognitions during the past year for its success in achieving UTEP's mission of access and excellence and helping meet this nation's critical engineering workforce needs. UTEP again ranked first among all Engineering programs in the U.S. in the number of degrees awarded to Hispanics. In addition, the college was named by Hispanic Business magazine as the #1 engineering graduate school for Hispanics; received the 2006 ABET President's Award for Diversity; was honored with the Rising Star Award from the National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering; and our Model Institutions for Excellence program was recognized with one of two national awards from Excelencia in Education for accelerating the higher education success of Latino students.

Ann Quiroz Gates, Professor and Chair of Computer Science, was named to Hispanic Business magazine's "100 Influentials List"; Roberto Osegueda, Professor of Civil Engineering and Vice President for Research was selected as one of the "100 Most Important Hispanics in Technology and Business" by Hispanic Engineer and Information Technology magazine; and Interim Dean Steve Stafford was one of 15 Texas university faculty members to be honored with the Minnie Stevens Piper Award. Even the College's concrete canoe team was recognized for its best finish ever in the Texas Section competition, winning second place out of 15 universities...that's a particularly impressive accomplishment for a group of desert canoe paddlers! We thank Steve Stafford for his service as interim dean during the past year and welcome newly appointed dean Richard Schoephoerster, with whom we look forward to working to continue building on the College's proud legacy.

Many individual faculty, staff and students in other colleges also received honors and awards during the past year. Among them, Christian Meissner was selected by the American Psychological Association to participate in a national "celebration of psychological science and of the amazing contributions of 22 researchers...who represent the best and the brightest of our discipline." In Creative Writing, recent graduate Betina Gonzalez was the winner, among 815 contestants from 10 countries, of the 2006 Premio Clarin, which was accompanied by a \$32,000 prize.

UTEP faculty, staff and students have also made a strong commitment to extend our expertise and resources into the surrounding region, and expand opportunities for residents of this region to come to UTEP for a broad range of programs.

- The Institute for Policy and Economic Development conducts research on a variety of topics of importance to regional policy- and decision-making, and offers degree programs of special interest to, and specially formatted for Ft. Bliss personnel. An expansion of UTEP programs at Ft. Bliss is expected as its population grows and as UTEP develops a stronger presence there. Thanks to Dennis Soden, Maggy Smith, Bob Nachtmann, Joe Riojas and Robert Stakes for spearheading this effort.
- The UTEP Dinner Theatre continued to shine, selling out all performances of every production, for a total of 28,700 satisfied customers.
- The Office of Strategic Initiatives, under Joe Riojas' leadership, has had a very effective first year of operation, successfully developing a new range of opportunities for UTEP to serve as a regional economic development asset, and for faculty, staff and students to develop educational and research programs in such areas as defense systems and border security.
- In its 10th year, the Center for Civic Engagement has received more than \$3.9 million in grants, involved 90 faculty members and more than 11,000 students from all colleges, in over 291,000 hours of service with 100 community partner organizations.
- The University Ticket Center issued more than 412,000 tickets, and the Special Events department coordinated 350 events in various campus venues, including a Monster Truck Show that brought 47,000 fans into the Sun Bowl Stadium.... again!
- Professional and Continuing Education offered 29 summer camps that involved more than 2,700 youngsters from across the community, and several new professional programs, such as a certificate in Environmental Administration in cooperation with the Asociacion de Maquiladoras in Cd. Juarez.
- The UTEP GO Team under the direction of Yvonne Carranza traveled the region, performing for local middle and high school audiences and reaching over 2,500 students with their message about the importance of education.
- The Department of Music sponsored more than 90 performances, in addition to special summer programs and festivals in band, choir and strings for regional school children.
- The Stanlee & Gerald Rubin Center for the Visual Arts continued to gain international attention as a major venue for exhibits of contemporary art, especially works relevant to the El Paso-Juarez region. The current exhibition brings together for the first time in the U.S. the collected works in all media and from all phases of the career of renowned Mexican artist Francisco Toledo of Oaxaca. The show leaves UTEP at the end of this week for Princeton, its only other U.S. stop, so if you haven't seen it, you may want to head in that direction for the reception following this Convocation.
- In addition to the fourth annual Border Security Conference co-sponsored again with Congressman Silvestre Reyes, several other conferences took place on the UTEP campus during the past year. Among them, the Communication

Department and the Sam Donaldson Center hosted the National Hispanic Advertising Conference, and the Languages and Linguistics Department hosted its 12th annual Congreso de Literatura Mexicana Contemporanea.

- University departments joined in co-sponsoring the Millennium and Mexico Today lecture series, which were well attended by on- and off-campus audiences. There were also hundreds of lectures, seminars and symposia sponsored by individual departments. Among them:
 - Sonia Nazario, Pulitzer Prize winning writer and reporter for the LA Times, participated in the McCormick Tribune Visiting Lecturer Program in the Department of Communication.
 - Sam Tanenhaus, editor of the New York Times Book Review, was featured in the annual English Department lecture series.
 - The History Department hosted a symposium called “Memory and Monuments,” which grew out of the community debate surrounding the Juan de Oñate statue.

A major component of UTEP’s outreach to the surrounding region involves the Miner Athletic program, which touches the lives of so many residents of this region year after year. Although football and men’s basketball attract the largest crowds, nearly every sport—track and field, golf, women’s soccer, basketball, softball, tennis and volleyball—enjoys an avid following of local fans who attend games and cheer on their favorite Miner teams. Special thanks to Bob Stull and his staff for the extraordinary progress that they have achieved in increasing the quality of all aspects of Miner sports, and to the many El Pasoans and UTEP alumni whose support has been both generous and sustained.

And support for UTEP athletics is also apparent when the Miners compete in other locations around the country. It’s often the case that loyal UTEP fans outnumber those cheering for home teams in such places as Dallas and Houston, where there are large numbers of UTEP alumni. We are pleased to welcome Richard Daniel as our newly appointed Assistant Vice President for Alumni and Constituent Relations, and look forward to working with him to build even stronger alumni support across Texas and wherever else UTEP alumni are concentrated. Such support will be a major dimension of our forthcoming fundraising campaign leading to the celebration of UTEP’s 100th anniversary in 2014. Robert Nava is working with the deans, the UTEP Development Board and other members of the UTEP extended family to provide leadership for this Centennial Campaign, which you’ll be hearing a lot more about during the coming year.

Throughout my remarks today, I’ve described many high-profile investments that have been made in UTEP’s mission to achieve both access and excellence: creating high-quality educational opportunities for residents of this region; preparing a workforce for this region, Texas and the world beyond; and contributing to the quality of life in our community. As I have described these investments, and the huge yields that UTEP has achieved on them during the past year, it may be tempting to conclude that investment is mostly about external stakeholders, such as the National Institutes of Health, the UT System, and supportive alumni; or that it’s mostly a matter of financial contributions.

However, to make UTEP the success story that we have become, it's important to emphasize that investment is also very much about each of us on this campus. We are all investors in UTEP too, committing our talents and expertise to foster our students' success, build excellence, and optimize the impact of external investments. The faculty and staff members whose service to UTEP was recognized earlier in this program exemplify the broad range of individuals, their roles and responsibilities that constitute our collective investment in this university and the students we serve. Each of us is a major stakeholder in UTEP students' success, and working together, we seek to make a profound difference in the quality of their lives and in the life of this entire region.

As we begin another academic year, let us re-commit ourselves to the more than 20,000 students who have come to us with their dreams and aspirations, and to the promise that we will do everything that we can to help make those dreams come true. When Danny Olivas carried UTEP with him into space, we couldn't have been sent a clearer signal that our graduates' accomplishments are the strongest validation of UTEP, and the best measure of the quality of our work. On behalf of all UTEP students, I thank each of you for the generous investment that you will make in their success—and ours—during the coming year.