



Fall Convocation 2017
State of The University Address
President Diana Natalicio
September 28, 2017

As-Given
The University of Texas at El Paso
Fall 2017 Convocation Remarks
September 28, 2017

Good afternoon. *Buenas tardes*. Welcome/Bienvenidos to the annual Fall Convocation.

I'll begin by thanking our Student Ambassadors, student volunteers and representatives of the university staff for serving as ushers. I also thank Christiane Williams and Aaron Rice for providing our interpretation this afternoon, and the members of the UTEP Drum Line for providing our opening fanfare as we arrived at the auditorium. Thanks to you all!

I'm now pleased to introduce members of the stage party. I'll ask them to stand as I introduce them, and I'll ask you to hold your applause until all have been introduced.

- Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, CAROL PARKER
- Vice President for Research, ROBERTO OSEGUEDA
- Vice President for Student Affairs, GARY EDENS
- Vice President for Asset Management and Development, BEN GONZALEZ
- Dean of the College of Business Administration, ROBERT NACHTMANN
- Interim Dean of the College of Education, WILLIAM ROBERTSON
- Dean of the College of Engineering, THERESA MALDONADO
- Dean of Extended University, BETH BRUNK-CHAVEZ
- Dean of the Graduate School, CHARLES AMBLER
- Dean of the College of Health Sciences, SHAFIK DHARAMSI
- Interim Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, STEPHEN CRITES
- Dean of the School of Nursing, ELIAS PROVENCIO-VASQUEZ
- Dean of the School of Pharmacy, JOSE RIVERA
- Associate Dean of the College of Science, MICHAEL KENNEY
- President of the Faculty Senate, ELENA IZQUIERDO
- Chair of the Graduate Council, JACK CHESSA
- Chair of the Staff Council, MARIA HERNANDEZ
- President of the Alumni Association, BOBBY GONZALES
- and President of the UTEP Student Government Association, KRISTEN AHUMADA

Thank you all again for your many contributions to UTEP, and most of all, to the students we serve.

The beginning of each new academic year brings with it renewed energy and enthusiasm, and this year has been no exception. The rhythm on the UTEP campus has picked up more than a beat, and there's an unmistakable optimism in the air. For

students, educators and support staff alike, this annual opportunity to refresh perspectives and re-set aspirations and goals is one of the very appealing dimensions of being on a university campus.

Institutions, too—especially those moving as fast as UTEP has been—have a similar opportunity at the beginning of each academic year to review the contexts in which they work, to assess recent and cumulative accomplishments, study changing internal and external trends, identify new opportunities and challenges and, where necessary or desirable, re-calibrate priorities and plans.

This new academic year at UTEP got off to an especially energizing start. Fall enrollment again set a new record with 25,078 students. What's more exciting is that this represents a 4.5% increase over last year, the largest enrollment increase since 2010, and cumulative growth of 45% over the past 15 years. This is excellent news, not only because more students are choosing to pursue their higher education aspirations at UTEP, but because more young people in this region clearly understand the important role that higher education can play in determining their and their families' life trajectories. And, in the process, they and UTEP are working together to build this region's future economic prosperity and quality of life.

Special thanks to Vice President for Student Affairs Gary Edens and his teams in outreach and recruiting, and scholarships and financial aid, for their outstanding work to ensure that all talented and motivated young people in this region have the information and support they need to enroll at UTEP. Thanks, too, to our scholarship donors—individuals, foundations and corporations—who enable us to provide financial support to entering and returning students who excel academically.

The decision to enroll at UTEP has become increasingly appealing for a majority of students in this region, who represent 84% of our total enrollment. In fact, more than two-thirds of the region's Top Ten Percent high school graduates who attend public universities in Texas now choose to enroll at UTEP. UTEP's combination of quality and affordability represents a huge advantage to students by enabling them to complete degrees that are very highly valued by employers and graduate and professional schools, without incurring the student loan debt too often required to attend competitive research/doctoral institutions elsewhere. In fact, UTEP has recently received national recognition in the *New York Times*, and a #1 ranking in a Brookings Institution study of all U.S. research universities for our success in fostering student social mobility.

The healthy enrollment increase this fall also continues a pattern of steady growth in UTEP's student population over the past two decades, largely attributed to two major factors. First, a college-going culture has been very intentionally and systemically developed across this region through UTEP's engagement with partners—school districts, EPCC, business and civic leaders—forming in the El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence, which celebrated its silver anniversary just last week. The Collaborative was established 25 years ago in response to evidence from high school graduates' enrollment patterns at UTEP that too many of this region's talented young

people—especially Hispanics from low-resourced backgrounds—were not seeking to pursue higher education. After 25 years, the evidence now shows that UTEP's growth has been due largely to the enrollment of those Hispanic students who were for the first time strongly encouraged to pursue their big dreams through higher education. Since 1990, UTEP's Hispanic enrollment has grown from 58% of all students to more than 80% today, and now appropriately reflects the demographics of this region.

The beginning of each year also brings to our campus new members of the UTEP team, faculty and staff who make a major commitment to our access and excellence mission and in whose capable hands we entrust the assets and challenges of our unique student population. I extend a very special welcome to new academic leadership team members: Carol Parker, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs; Theresa Maldonado, Dean of Engineering; and Shafik Dharamsi, Dean of Health Sciences. Let me also recognize with thanks two UTEP faculty members who have stepped up to serve as interim deans this year: Steve Crites in Liberal Arts and Bill Robertson in Education. Thanks to you all!

Riding the crest of our successful administrative searches last year, we have embarked on three more this fall: Dean of Liberal Arts, Dean of Education and Athletic Director. Three outstanding committees will lead this work, chaired by Beth Brunk-Chavez, Charles Ambler and Richard Aduato, respectively. However, knowing that searches for leadership positions are most successful when there is broad engagement across the campus, we hope many of you will join in helping us identify and recruit top candidates to ensure a highly competitive pool, and then participate actively in the on-campus interview and cultivation processes.

UTEP's faculty members are at the heart of our research and educational programs and the standards to which all UTEP students are held. In classrooms, laboratories, field and study abroad settings and online, they share their high expectations, innovative ideas and passion for their disciplines, creating a learning environment that excites and motivates UTEP students to achieve at ever higher levels. UTEP's teaching excellence was again recognized by the UT System this year with the presentation of Regents' Outstanding Teaching Awards, and the \$25,000 prize which accompanies them, to three UTEP faculty members: Dr. Isabel Baca, Associate Professor of English; Dr. Ann Brannan Horak, Associate Professor of Practice in Religious and Women's Studies; and Dr. Song An, Assistant Professor of Mathematics Education. A number of UTEP faculty members are previous recipients of this prestigious teaching award, and some of them have joined us today. Will all previous ROTA winners who are present, please rise? Congratulations to all of you and thank you for all you do for UTEP and the students we serve.

Another healthy sign of UTEP's growth and development has begun to emerge at the western gateway to the campus: a new Interdisciplinary Research Building. This \$85 million project, funded largely through Tuition Revenue Bonds, is expected to be completed in early 2020, and will add 150,000 sq. ft. of critically needed space for continued growth in research activity, and enhance our competitiveness for the funding

that supports it. Thanks to Bill Hargrove, chair of the planning committee, and to all committee members for their fine work on this important addition to the UTEP campus.

During the past year, UTEP faculty and staff were again successful in securing highly competitive external funding to support research and sponsored programs. A total of 184 new grants valued at \$62.3 million were awarded to UTEP. More than \$53 million of these funds came from federal sources, especially the National Science Foundation, which awarded UTEP 42 grants totaling \$17 million. The College of Engineering was the top producer of grant funding this past year, with 67 grant awards totaling more than \$26 million.

Attracting external grant and contract support has been a critically important strategy in successfully executing and leveraging the integration of UTEP's access and excellence mission over the past several decades. Most major funding has supported research activity and the infrastructure development required to enable it, thereby advancing the excellence mission to which we are committed. Important too, however, is the highly competitive funding secured from such U.S. Department of Education programs as Upward Bound and Educational Talent Search which seek to promote a college-going culture among historically underserved populations, as well as from NASA, NIH and NSF, whose focus is on combining research and expanded access to science and technology careers for more U.S. students, especially underrepresented minorities. We offer our congratulations to all the faculty and staff members across our campus who successfully secured new grant funding during the past year! We also thank all of you who submitted proposals, whether funded or not, and to Roberto Osegueda and the team in the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, for your commitment of talent, time and effort to engage in an ever more challenging competition for funding.

The quest for external grant and contract support has taken on greater urgency at UTEP and other public universities because state higher education funding has not kept pace with growing enrollments and the rising costs of providing quality higher education. In the 1980s, state funding comprised 60% of UTEP's total revenues, compared to only 23% today. Especially disappointing this year were the Texas Legislature's reduced appropriations for all public universities, including a \$5 million decline at UTEP, which was especially challenging with this fall's enrollment growth.

Traditionally, the two primary sources of support for educational and student development programs at UTEP and other public universities have been state appropriations and student tuition and fees, which can work like counterweights: when state appropriations decline, tuition and fees tend to rise to make up the difference. Although tuition increases are seldom warmly applauded, they are especially difficult at institutions like UTEP that serve students of very limited financial means. Every two years, all UT System universities conduct a campus-wide tuition/fees review and consultation process. This process, which has already been launched this fall under Gary Edens' leadership, will result in a proposal to be submitted to the Board of Regents for approval early next year. The recent decline in legislative funding make this tuition review process especially critical this year, and as the Tuition & Fees Advisory

committee does its work this fall, we encourage students, faculty and staff to become informed and engage in the process.

One of the major academic program accomplishments of the past year was our success in gaining pre-candidate status toward accreditation of UTEP's new Doctor of Pharmacy degree program and establishing the new School of Pharmacy. Some of you may have already noticed the beautiful new Pharmacy School banner on today's stage! New Pharmacy faculty and administrative leadership were hired and are in place, and the inaugural cohort of 41 Pharm. D. students, 39 of whom are from El Paso, celebrated their white coat ceremony in late August. Our sincere congratulations to Dean José Rivera and his capable team for successfully delivering on UTEP's promise to offer access to an affordable and high-quality Doctor of Pharmacy program in this historically underserved region.

(Let me interrupt myself for just a moment here to mention that the Pharmacy white coat ceremony was actually held on this very stage on August 26, which, as you may recall, was the morning after a fierce "microburst" wind and rainstorm that hit the campus the night before, leaving this Auditorium in a sorry state: part of the roof collapsed, and water covered large sections of the floor. Our dedicated facilities team went into action, working the entire night to repair and dry out this venue, so that our pharmacy students and their many family members and friends could proceed to celebrate this happy milestone in their lives. I often say that everyone at UTEP plays a role in student access and success. Our facilities staff don't usually capture headlines for their contributions, but once in a while, their work takes center stage. That night in August was a powerful reminder of just how critical a role they too play. Thanks to all of them and to all the other UTEP staff who competently and, mostly unsung, go about their business to ensure the quality of our campus programs and surroundings!)

The addition of Pharmacy to our academic program offerings represents another major investment in health professions education on the UTEP campus, a process that began in 1992, when we enrolled fewer than 1,000 students in a set of five health-related undergraduate programs, primarily nursing. With the addition of Pharmacy, UTEP now offers 6 bachelor's, 12 master's, and 4 doctoral degree programs in the health professions, enrolling more than 4,500 students, a majority of whom are El Pasoans who will remain here to practice professionally after graduation, and thereby enhance the quality of healthcare for all of us. UTEP is committed to work collaboratively with both EPCC and Texas Tech to avoid program duplication and increase the range of locally prepared healthcare professionals, a majority of whom will have the bilingual skills and bicultural sensitivity that is of critical importance in this U.S.-Mexico border setting. And, beyond the enhanced quality of healthcare that this growing number of health professions graduates will offer, the well-paying jobs they secure locally upon graduation will enable them to contribute to our region's economic prosperity and quality of life.

Another group of UTEP degree recipients with good prospects for professional careers in El Paso are the teachers and other school personnel who earn degrees and credentials in UTEP's College of Education in cooperation with the Colleges of Liberal Arts, Science, and Health Sciences. Most of these graduates remain in El Paso to pursue their careers in area school district settings, providing future generations of El Pasoans such high-quality educational experiences as dual language and dual credit programs, while contributing to the region's economy and civic engagement, and directly impacting our collective quality of life. This region's educational interdependence—more than 80% of UTEP's students are graduates of high schools in this region, and an estimated 75% of area teachers are graduates of UTEP—means that we have a mutuality of interests and a shared stake in our collective success, and huge opportunities for innovative collaboration, data sharing and reciprocal accountability.

Unfortunately, however, this same deep and very positive long-term UTEP impact on this region has not been the norm over the past ten years for our 15,000 business and STEM graduates, most of whom do not find competitive employment in El Paso. Highly talented, very well educated and 70% Hispanic, these graduates are eagerly recruited elsewhere by such employers as Goldman Sachs, Exxon-Mobil, Google, Microsoft and Lockheed-Martin, that offer them both professional experience and nationally competitive salaries, as well as exciting opportunities for future professional growth and career advancement, none of which are available locally. The result has been the exodus of more than an estimated two-thirds of all Engineering graduates, and at least half of all those in Business.

A high priority for UTEP over the next several years will be to build stronger ties with regional economic developers to help shift the focus of their recruitment efforts toward employers able and willing to establish operations here to capitalize on the availability of highly skilled UTEP graduates in such areas as computer science, aerospace, mechanical and electrical engineering, cybersecurity, logistics/supply chain, finance and biosciences, as well as on UTEP's research strengths in such areas as additive manufacturing, security studies, biomedical sciences and engineering, and water desalination. Under the leadership of Ben Gonzalez, we will also focus on capitalizing more strategically on such UTEP assets as the Keck and cSETR Centers in Engineering, the Border Biomedical Research Center in Science, and the Hunt Institute for Global Competitiveness in the College of Business, as well as UTEP's real estate properties in the region, including our forthcoming acquisition of the ASARCO site.

With rapid growth in the number of UTEP alumni—40,000 over the past ten years—and their geographic dispersion across the globe, Alumni Relations and Asset Management and Development are placing strong emphasis on developing a more robust and interactive alumni data network, less focused on traditional alumni fundraising, and more on enabling us to maintain closer ties with them, and them to interact more readily with each other. Access to this enhanced alumni engagement will be facilitated by a new *Lifelong Email Forwarding Addresses* system and a new alumni database called *MinerLink*, which will include such information as job titles, employers, and current

locations that will enable us to strengthen contact with our alumni and, specifically, to link our current students with alumni who are in a position to serve as role models and mentors and assist them as they approach interviews, internships or employment-related relocation.

The initiative to establish closer ties with UTEP alumni is also being tightly wound with a major campus-wide student success initiative called the UTEP Edge that was introduced to the campus earlier this fall semester. Fostering student success has been and will continue to be UTEP's primary goal. As proud as we are of the impressive 45% growth in UTEP's enrollment over the past 15 years, we can take even greater pride in the fact that the total number of degrees awarded has more than doubled (+113%) during the same time period, reflecting significant progress in promoting students' retention and their success in completing their degrees.

As impressive as total diplomas earned may be as a measure of student success, we all also know that each of those diplomas must serve as a validation of the quality of the preparation provided to and internalized by the student who earned it. A large team of UTEP faculty and staff has been working intensely, and in close partnership with UTEP students, over the past year to develop a new, broader-based and more explicit understanding of UTEP student success, an approach that begins with the special strengths and assets that our students themselves bring to our campus, and builds on those attributes through a range of experiences designed to foster their development and ensure that, upon graduation, they are fully prepared with the robust competence and confidence that they will need to compete successfully with their peers anywhere and at any time. It's my pleasure now to hand off this Convocation program to a group of UTEP Edge team members who will tell you more about this exciting, campus-wide initiative. Thanks again to all of you for being with us today.....and Go Miners!