

The University of Texas at El Paso  
Fall Convocation Remarks  
September 5, 1991

I find it hard to believe that it was 20 years ago this fall that I first arrived at the University of Texas at El Paso as a Visiting Assistant Professor of Linguistics. At the time, both my temporary faculty position and my lack of prior acquaintance with the El Paso area led me to believe that my tenure here would be brief. Today, as my name appears on the list of those who have received 20-year awards for service to the university, I cannot help but reflect on my changing perspectives on higher education and its role in our society, and, more importantly, on the very significant changes that have occurred at the University of Texas at El Paso during this 20-year period.

When I arrived on this campus, I sensed an isolation driven not only by the very real geographic distances separating El Paso from other major metropolitan areas, but also by the psychological distance that seemed to separate UTEP from other universities with which I had had contact. This sense of isolation manifested itself in a variety of ways, including, for example, a relatively low level of faculty participation in national meetings and organizations. But what was perhaps most striking to the newcomer at that time was a pervasive attitude of helplessness which translated into comments about how UTEP and El Paso more generally had been abandoned or forgotten by policy- and appropriation-makers, particularly in Austin.

Prevalent too was the self-deprecating humor characteristic of individuals or institutions with low self-esteem. All of us who were here then will recall the bumper stickers that proclaimed UTEP as "Harvard on the Border."

In one sense, this proclamation could be viewed as amusing--a good natured jab at inflated self-importance. On another level, however, it seemed to me that there was more than a bit of pathos in that message. Were we as an institution striving to be something that we weren't, couldn't be, and shouldn't want to be? Were we really trying to grow ivy in the desert? Perhaps. Perhaps we were attempting to compensate for what we perceived to be our non-competitiveness as a major academic player nationally by establishing highly self-critical internal criteria designed to prove to someone, somewhere, that although we were isolated, we knew from quality. It seemed to me that we sometimes spent more time and effort on internal comparisons of quality--comparing, for example, the GRE scores of entering graduate students in various UTEP departments-- than we did establishing our professional reputations and that of this institution in a broader national or international context. Like most generalizations, this one had its exceptions--faculty who were highly visible in a broader context--but in general, our vision was inward.

I will not attempt here to summarize all of the many changes that have occurred during the past 20 years at UTEP, but I think we would all agree that they have been profound. There is not a department on this campus that has not changed significantly, with new faces, new programs, and, most importantly, new attitudes. We have dared to dream, to think beyond the many constraints that were and will always be with us, and to share in a sense of institutional pride which fosters further individual and collective development. Today it is no longer necessary for us to seek awkwardly to imitate institutions and programs inappropriate to our setting. Instead, other institutions now look to UTEP for models to be applied in their settings.

Many factors have contributed to the profound changes that have occurred at UTEP, but none is perhaps as important as our positive and creative response to a changing student population. Understanding our students, their needs, and their aspirations has been a major factor in our recent success, and we have come to understand that working with non-traditional students does not involve lowering standards--for as graduates, our students must be able to compete successfully with students from all other universities--but rather it requires devising strategies and procedures which enable students to meet the high standards we maintain in our classrooms and laboratories. To be truly effective, we as a university community had to be willing to engage in serious and in-depth self-analysis, to understand our challenges and opportunities, to redefine our institutional mission, and to work to understand the needs of those who entrust their dreams to us. Although this self-examination and redefinition of mission has not always been easy nor without disagreement, the important point is that it has occurred and that we have emerged from it a stronger, more authentic and self-confident institution, fully capable of confronting the challenges that lie ahead.

As we move forward each year with greater confidence, our accomplishments increase in both number and magnitude, and 1990-91 continued that trend. To say that the past year was a good one at UTEP would be to carry modesty to an extreme. It was, in fact, a great year. Let me share with you just some of the bases for that assessment.

Perhaps the single most significant accomplishment of the 1990-91 year was the receipt of over \$26 million in new grant and contract awards, an all-time high for one year, which brings the cumulative total for the past three years to over \$60 million in external funding to UTEP. With the continued support of Julie Sanford and the outstanding Office of Sponsored Projects staff she directs, over 270 proposals were submitted during the past year, and faculty and staff members from all parts of the campus now actively participate in grant and contract activity. Our funding success rate of 53% is considered remarkably high by any standard, and attests to the quality of the proposals we submit.

Three important themes emerge from a review of the grant and contract activity of the past year. First, UTEP is increasingly applying its expertise to issues critical to the future of this region. Perhaps the best example is a \$6 million, four-year grant from the Kellogg Foundation for a project involving UTEP's College of Nursing and Allied Health, El Paso County, and the Texas Tech Health Science Center in El Paso, to develop community-based health professions education in nursing, allied health, medicine, and dentistry, and to provide primary care services for residents of El Paso's Lower Valley. This grant also reflects a second theme in extramural funding activity, the growth of collaborations, both intra- and extra-mural. Such collaboration is involved in another recent award, \$1.9 million from the Environmental Protection Agency for first-year activities of the Southwest Environmental Research and Policy Consortium, which pairs UTEP's Institute for Manufacturing and Materials Management and the Center for Environmental Resource Management with New Mexico State, Arizona State, and the University of Utah to conduct research and conferences

dealing with environmental problems of the U.S. Southwest and, particularly, the U.S.-Mexico border region. A third theme in UTEP's recent grant and contract activity is its emphasis on support for students, both undergraduate and graduate. The Minority Biomedical Research Support program (MBRS), one of UTEP's oldest extramurally funded initiatives, received a competitive renewal grant of \$3.5 million for four years from the National Institutes of Health, and it is anticipated that the 25 undergraduate and graduate students who will be supported will join almost 200 graduates of this program who for the past 20 years have gone on to successful careers in medicine, dentistry, and biomedical research. The U.S. Department of Education awarded UTEP's Graduate School \$176,000 to support eleven graduate students in Engineering, Science and Liberal Arts for up to three years under the Patricia Roberts Harris program, and a 2-year grant of \$143,000 to Student Affairs to create a wellness program and an expanded drug and alcohol awareness program for students.

Increased grant and contract activity is both a cause and an effect of UTEP's growing national and international visibility. When I used to say to people in Washington or elsewhere that I was from UTEP, they would usually wonder aloud where--or what--that was. Now, when I say that I represent the University of Texas at El Paso, they almost invariably reply, "Oh, you're from UTEP"! They have not only heard of us, but they know of the many good things we are doing. UTEP's growing image is the product of the contributions of nearly everyone on this campus, whose efforts and achievements cast this university in a most favorable light.

UTEP's image is greatly heightened by our representation at meetings and conferences, on state and national committees, and grant review panels, and through the publication of articles and books. The success of Rick Demarinis' recent book has, for example, brought much favorable publicity to UTEP, through reviews and interviews in major national publications and broadcasts. Although we all occasionally tire of getting on yet another airplane, the fact is that UTEP and El Paso cannot afford to wait to be "discovered". We must go places and see people and we must be able to provide them with attractive and informative materials which tell UTEP's story. Acknowledging the need for quality in content, there is no question that "packaging" has become an increasingly important factor in attracting attention and resources, and in this arena, UTEP has made enormous strides through the efforts of Art Vasquez and his capable staff in the News and Publications Department.

UTEP has also gained valuable exposure through recent efforts to host professional meetings and conferences on campus. Because too few people have been to El Paso, and because seeing really is believing, we have encouraged a variety of organizations to hold their meetings on our campus, and we can always count on Robert Stakes and his staff for highly professional coordination of such events, Beto Lopez and his staff for informative campus orientations, and the Food Service and Union staffs for attractive arrangements. Among events that we have hosted during the past year were the annual meeting of the Conference of Southwest Foundations, an International Organosilicon Symposium, a conference on "Fostering Diversity" sponsored by the State Higher Education Executive Officers organization and the Education Commission of the States, and a meeting of the Ford

Foundation Board of Directors. Based upon comments expressed to me during these meetings and in subsequent correspondence, I can assure you that UTEP has made many important new friends as a result of these campus visits.

The UTEP campus always creates a very favorable impression on those who come to visit. Adding considerably to its beauty is the newly completed Geological Sciences Building, which will be dedicated at Homecoming this Fall. This renovation of the old library building has not only contributed significantly to the "border Bhutanese" architectural coherence of our campus, but also provided a first-rate teaching and research facility which will serve as a model for UTEP's future campus development. Also quite impressive in both attractiveness and functionality is the new Liberal Arts Center for Instructional Technology. Supported in part by grants from the Burlington Resources Foundation through El Paso Natural Gas and from Apple Computer, this facility which is located on the fourth floor of the Liberal Arts Building, promises to greatly enhance language and writing instruction with state-of-the art multi-media computer hardware and software applications. Another fine new computer laboratory was installed in the Computer Science Department, thanks to a gift from IBM. This laboratory and other equipment acquired through a grant from NSF will soon be relocated to facilities vacated by Geological Sciences, as the Computer Science Department gains much-needed additional space. Plans for the renovation of Burges Hall have been completed and construction will soon begin. Supported by a grant to the Institute for Manufacturing and Materials Management, this renovated facility will house the Institute itself, the Center for InterAmerican and Border Studies and the Bureau of Business

and Economic Research, as well as numerous technology-transfer laboratories for outreach to regional businesses and industries.

Continued progress was also made in creating additional classroom space to accommodate UTEP's growing enrollment, which reached 17,000 students this fall; planning the renovation of several other campus buildings to respond to both growth and changing teaching and research needs; extending the fiber optic communication system to 13 buildings; proceeding with the campus signage project; completing several major remodeling projects in the Union, including a total refurbishing of the Union Theater; and completing a multi-use, soccer / softball field, the first phase of a recreational complex in Charlie Davis Park. All of these improvements and those which will be undertaken in the years ahead are part of a Campus Master Plan for space use and building sites completed this past year to ensure that future campus development will reflect a commitment to long-term strategic planning rather than ad hoc responses to immediate space or facilities needs. With its continued enrollment and research growth, UTEP will undoubtedly soon need to construct new facilities, but our primary challenge at the present time is to creatively and efficiently utilize the square footage we have, by adapting it to new teaching and research requirements. The relocation of people and programs and the renovation of campus facilities will thus dominate the next several years of UTEP's campus development.

UTEP also distinguished itself during 1990-91 with its extensive outreach to the community which surrounds us. As was mentioned earlier, the University serves as a resource to this



community through the applied research and outreach initiatives of such entities as the Institute for Manufacturing and Materials Management, the Center for Environmental Resource Management, the Center for InterAmerican and Border Studies, and the Bureau of Business and Economic Research, as well as the efforts of individual faculty and staff who generously contribute their time and expertise to a variety of community agencies, school districts and businesses on both sides of the border. Increasing its outreach activity, the Centennial Museum hosted 117,000 visitors last year at its exhibitions and special events, twice the previous year's total attendance. Fine Arts departments, the Student Programs Office, the Dinner Theatre and the Special Events Center attracted large and appreciative audiences to their many events. The Center for Professional and Continuing Education has experienced enormous growth in all areas of non-credit instruction, including programs for senior citizens, youth, professionals and the general public. Especially noteworthy is the Center for Lifelong Learning, which in its first year has grown to a membership of over 300 El Pasoans who participate in a broad range of courses and special activities and who help the University host Elder hostel participants, five groups of whom have come during the past year to the UTEP campus from all over the United States, Canada and Mexico to spend a week studying about this region. Programs for El Paso area youth continue to grow in both number and variety, as UTEP attempts to foster the development of talent and raise the level of aspiration of young people in this region. Programs such as Upward Bound, Youth Opportunities Unlimited, the National Youth Sports Program, the Comprehensive Regional Center for Minorities, the Mother- Daughter Program, various summer Engineering programs, and the Materials Research Center of Excellence make federal, state and private sector

funds available to support special summer and academic- year learning experiences for area youth. The NYSP program brought us very favorable publicity when it was featured on a 10-minute ESPN segment. The Center for Professional and Continuing Education also offered a variety of self-supporting summer classes and camps, which brought large numbers of youngsters to our campus. In fact, it is estimated that last year over 10,000 elementary, middle and high school students visited UTEP, confirming faculty veterans' perceptions that students get younger every year! There is good reason to believe that these youngsters are far more likely to be future university students-- and future UTEP students--because of outreach efforts such as these.

And, UTEP's investment in this region, in area youth, in collaborations with school districts, businesses and community agencies is reciprocated by this community's investment in UTEP. Despite many economic uncertainties, private contributions to UTEP increased by 20% in 1990. Of 152 comparable universities, UTEP ranked 19th in dollars raised from non-governmental sources. One out of every four UTEP alumni contacted during the 1990 Alumni Fund for Excellence campaign contributed, for a grand total of almost \$500,000. Through bequests, UTEP's friends committed over \$1 million in deferred gifts to the University in 1990. This is a record in which we can all take pride.

Although fundraising occupies the time and energy of many individuals on this campus, particularly within a context of declining State support for public higher education, it is not, of course, an end in itself. The funds we seek enable us to fulfill our important institutional mission of fostering the human and economic development of this region.

The challenges--and the opportunities--grow, as more and more individuals and organizations in this community look to UTEP for leadership and inspiration, and as UTEP is increasingly acknowledged to be a national--and even international--model for successfully serving as a catalyst for regional social, political and economic change. Extramural funds support not only the many sponsored research, instruction, and outreach programs mentioned earlier, but they also provided over \$1 million in undergraduate and graduate scholarships last year. These scholarship opportunities and UTEP's growing national reputation for academic program excellence have enabled us to recruit not only more students, but the very best students who graduate from high schools in this region. In the years ahead, we hope to be able to contribute to improving the preparation of all of UTEP's entering students through a major collaborative project with area school districts, and to enhance UTEP students' success through a comprehensive student development program involving both Student and Academic Affairs.

New degree programs are also on UTEP's future agenda. Two doctoral program proposals are awaiting action in Austin: a Ph.D. degree program in Psychology is scheduled for a Coordinating Board site visit this Fall; a Ph.D. degree in Materials Science and Engineering awaits U. T. System review and approval prior to its submission to the Coordinating Board. Proposals for several master's degree programs are either awaiting Coordinating Board consideration or are about to be transmitted to the U. T. System, including: Developmental Education, and Nurse Midwife, Nurse Administrator, and Nurse Practitioner degrees. In addition, the University will initiate new cooperative

degree programs during the next biennium in Public Health (with U. T. Health Science Center-Houston), in Physical and Occupational Therapy (with U.T. Medical Branch-Galveston), and Library Science (with U. T. Austin).

Such an agenda would be ambitious in the best of times, with full funding support from the State; it is even more challenging under present circumstances. As we are all by now well aware, the outcome of the recent legislative session was better than our worst fears, but hardly a prizewinner in terms of ongoing state support for higher education. On the negative side, the erosion of state funding for our instructional programs which began in 1985 has continued, with an additional 3.2% reduction in our annual operating budget. Coupled with major increases in the costs of utilities, health care premiums and nearly everything else, this reduction cannot help but make it more difficult to stretch limited resources to meet our own and others' expectations of us. Particularly vulnerable is our institutional infrastructure which has not kept pace with program, research, and enrollment growth. On the positive side, UTEP did receive additional special item funding for the new programs in Public Health, Physical and Occupational Therapy, and Library Science, and additional state funding for the Institute for Manufacturing and Materials Management and the Center for InterAmerican and Border Studies.

UTEP's many achievements and its ambitious agenda succeed only because of the talented people who dedicate themselves to this institution and its special mission. Individuals such as Juan Sandoval, Assistant Vice President for Finance and Administration, who, together

with his staff has labored tirelessly--and certainly without fanfare--to install a new Business Information System that will replace UTEP's accounting, personnel, payroll, purchasing, budgeting, and general campus information database. Or, the other Juan Sandoval, Reference Librarian, whose attentiveness to the needs of those he serves reflects so well UTEP's generous spirit. Or, the Facilities Services personnel who maintain and upgrade our buildings and grounds to create an attractive and productive working environment. Or, the faculty and staff members who spend extra time with students who may be confused about the subject matter of a course, about University procedures, or about life itself. Or, all of you here today, members of the faculty and staff in Student, Business, and Academic Affairs, who in thousands of ways help our students build their self-confidence and develop their talents. While your actions may not grab headlines, you may be sure that they are noticed by those to whom they are directed, and their impact often changes the course of a student's--or a colleague's--life. This Fall we are pleased to welcome to UTEP another outstanding group of new faculty and staff members, including Frank Hoy, a UTEP graduate who has returned here to serve as Dean of the College of Business Administration; Mike Acosta, another UTEP graduate who is here as an IBM loan faculty member; and Mary Clare Robbins, the first woman faculty member in Engineering. We know that you will find UTEP's mission a challenging one, and we hope that you will share the joy and satisfaction that we UTEP veterans have experienced as we work to achieve that mission.

Finally, as an illustration of UTEP's impact on the students we serve, I would like to tell you about Philip Garcia. Early this summer, Beto Lopez and I traveled to northern New Mexico

to visit the high schools of two of our highly successful graduating seniors who had been awarded UTEP presidential scholarships four years ago. Riding in his truck from Mora, New Mexico, his hometown, to Raton, Phil told me of his excitement at having been recently awarded a highly prestigious, nationally competitive GEM fellowship for graduate study in Electrical Engineering, and of his plans to attend the University of Colorado to pursue a master's degree. He said that a year ago he had faced a major crisis of confidence as a result of numerous academic and personal pressures, but because three individuals at UTEP--Scott Starks, Manny Pacillas and Beto Lopez--took the time to let him know that they believed in him, he was able to regain his momentum and successfully complete his bachelor's degree in EE. More importantly, Phil found that his self-confidence had grown so much that he was able to decline an offer to pursue his master's degree at Notre Dame University, an institution which, throughout his childhood, had been held up as the ultimate objective. UTEP's faculty and staff not only nurtured Phil's talents, we also enabled him to say "no" to a lifelong goal--to say "no" to Notre Dame--because through his experience at UTEP he developed his own set of dreams and aspirations. This is the empowerment that is ours to give every day, in small increments or large, as we contribute to the success of those whose lives we participate in shaping. There can be no greater privilege and no greater responsibility. We thank you--members of the UTEP community and all those who support our efforts--for believing in us and our special mission, for sharing our dreams, and for working so hard to fulfill our aspirations.