

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

FALL CONVOCAATION

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 1996

2:00 P.M. MAGOFFIN AUDITORIUM

(AS GIVEN)

Last year on this occasion, I spoke at some length about the major societal changes that are profoundly affecting higher education in the United States. Economic and demographic changes, changes in public and policy-makers' attitudes about and support for higher education, re-engineering, globalization, and new technologies. I pointed out then that UTEP is better positioned than most universities, not only to cope with these changes, but to capitalize on them.

1995-96 presented its own set of challenges to higher education. Last year will be remembered for the Fifth Circuit Court's decision concerning race-based admissions policies and the broad implications of that decision for universities in Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Together with other challenges to affirmative action, this decision threatens to reduce opportunities for those populations that have been historically underrepresented in higher education.

UTEP's student demographics, which mirror those of the region from which we draw more than 90% of our enrollment, present a different and far healthier picture. They are the result of this university's authentic commitment to serve this region well, not the result of special admissions policies designed to ensure diversity. As is often the case, UTEP was well ahead of national trends, though we sometimes fail to recognize our own leadership role.

In 1961 UTEP was also well ahead of national trends when we stepped forward to provide training for the first group of Peace Corps Volunteers, 43 surveyors and engineers who went to Tanganyika to help plan and build roads. Sargent Shriver, head of the Peace Corps Program at the time, came to El Paso to speak at their graduation ceremony. Some of those first Volunteers are with us today, together with Dr. Clyde Kelsey, director of that first training program, and other Peace Corps representatives. I invite them to stand and be recognized. They and the UTEP Heritage Commission invite all of us to stop by the Heritage House to view a special exhibit commemorating the 35th anniversary of the first Peace Corps training project.

We are also pleased to welcome several other special guests to the Convocation ceremony today:

Mr. Carlos Villa, El Paso's representative on the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Dusty Rhodes, City Representative and his wife Rebecca, chair of the Thelma White Network.

Jose Luis Sanchez, representing Congressman Ron Coleman

Dr. William Harris, Assistant Director of the Math & Physical Sciences Directorate of the National Science Foundation.

Dr. Al Bridgewater, Director of the Model Institutions for Excellence Program at the National Science Foundation.

Members of the Development Board, Alumni Association Board, and other friends and supporters of the university.

Several weeks ago, I had the opportunity to visit for the first time UTEP's recently completed Swimming and Fitness Center, which is part of a growing recreational complex at the north end of the campus, in Charlie Davis Park. The sight of this extraordinarily beautiful new facility, a sparkling diamond in the desert, is truly breathtaking.

Several days later, I joined other members of the UTEP community, the architect, and all of the workers who are responsible for the construction of the new Undergraduate Learning Center for a "topping out" celebration. We all watched as the large construction crane picked up and set in place the uppermost portion of that building's roof. A small evergreen tree, which accompanied the roof section on its journey to the top of the tall tower, proudly proclaimed the achievement of this major milestone in the construction of our beautiful new campus facility.

Such construction milestones have been numerous at UTEP during the past year. In fact, there is probably more construction and renovation activity underway on this campus now than at any other single moment in our history. During 1995-96, Wynn Anderson, Bert Navar, Juan Ontiveros and Facilities Services staff supervised more than \$28 million in construction and renovation projects. Thanks to the Texas Legislature and its funding of the South Texas/Border Initiatives, we are not only constructing the Undergraduate Learning Center, but also renovating a number of major campus facilities, including two heavily used stalwarts, the Liberal Arts and Physical Science buildings. The splendid new \$5 million Swimming and Fitness Center was funded entirely by a recreation fee established

and paid for by UTEP students. Special thanks to Brian Carter for his commitment to excellence in every aspect of this facility's design and operations.

As we think about these new facilities, our thoughts and our conversations shift to the future tense. We consider how they will be used by students in years to come, and we try to anticipate future needs as we plan and design them.

Nearly 80 years ago, similar planning was underway as the Texas School of Mines began the construction of this campus. The first campus building, Old Main, was built in 1917 in what has become UTEP's signature architectural style, "Border Bhutanese." For those of you who do not know the story, the wife of the dean of the College, Kathleen Worrell, had seen in the April 1914 issue of the National Geographic magazine, a photo essay about the Kingdom of Bhutan. Noting a resemblance between the Franklin Mountains and the Himalayas pictured in the magazine--she must truly have been a flatlander!--she encouraged her husband to design the new college's buildings in the style of the Bhutanese temples she saw in the photographs. He agreed, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Through the eight decades of this university's history, we have consistently sought to build on our architectural origins, creating a campus coherence which is the envy of many of our colleagues across the country. So, even as new buildings carry us toward the future, they draw heavily on our past. This relationship between UTEP's past and its future will be celebrated today as we re-dedicate Old Main in its sparkling new reincarnation. The architect responsible for the renovation project, Joe Gomez, worked to balance today's and tomorrow's needs of the Sociology and Anthropology programs, which are housed in Old Main, with a strong commitment to preserve and protect the major architectural features of the 1917 original. The result is absolutely beautiful, as you will see when you join us after this Convocation, when we will celebrate together our "New" Old Main.

In addition to these major construction and renovation projects, many other campus facilities were remodeled and repaired this year to accommodate new or growing programs, to comply with ADA requirements, and to ensure the long-term health and attractiveness of our physical plant. Portions of the newly acquired Stanton Building, adjacent to the College of Nursing and Health Sciences, have been reconfigured for UTEP's Development Office, for the cooperative

Master's program in Public Health, and for the new cooperative program in Pharmacy. This facility promises to provide growth space for many years to come, particularly for UTEP's many new health professions programs, and—together with the expanded presence of Cathedral High School and the El Paso Community College's Rio Grande Campus—helps stabilize an important central El Paso neighborhood.

As part of our commitment to provide improved access to the disabled, UTEP has during the past several years completed more than \$2.5 million in ADA-related improvements to the campus, including this year the installation of elevators in the Fox Fine Arts and Union buildings. And, like any responsible property owner, we have completed a variety of repair projects this year, including the re-roofing and stucco repair of a number of campus buildings. Our campus grounds continue to be a source of pride not only to the dedicated Facilities Services staff members who care for them, but to all of us who enjoy the beauty of the campus and the compliments of our many visitors.

UTEP welcomed a steady stream of visitors to the campus during 1995-96, including such distinguished speakers as UTEP alumnus/ABC

newsman Sam Donaldson, Nobel Laureate Leon Lederman, Chief NASA Scientist France Cordova, Director of the National Institute of Environmental Health Science Ken Olden, U.S. Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson, and Texas Governor George W. Bush. In addition, UTEP was pleased to host a meeting of the University of Texas System Board of Regents in February, creating a special opportunity for us to acquaint new Regents with our campus, our programs, and our strong community support, and share with all Regents and UT System staff our pride in the progress that has been achieved since their last visit. I am pleased to tell you that they were very impressed with what they saw and what we have accomplished.

Many staff, faculty, and students are involved in hosting special visitors to UTEP, and they are in many ways the key to the success of these visits. Our students in particular always communicate well not only their talents and skills, but also their pride in being at UTEP and their aspirations to make us very proud of them as alumni. Most visitors that I talk with cannot stop singing the praises of UTEP students they meet...many offer them graduate/professional school or job opportunities on the spot!

Coordinating most visits to UTEP--and ensuring that we are consistently gracious hosts--is the Office of External Relations, capably directed by Beto Lopez. Working behind the scenes, always ready to accommodate the unexpected, Beto and his staff smoothly facilitate everything from major national and international conferences to special events such as this convocation ceremony. Last year commencement ceremonies doubled in number because the Special Events Center was not large enough to accommodate the growing number of graduates, and the many family members and friends who join us in celebrating this major milestone in their lives. What a great problem to have to solve! The conversion from two to four ceremonies was accomplished without a hitch, thanks to the good work of the External Relations staff and the commencement committee.

A large team of visitors, representing universities throughout the southeastern U.S. and led by Dr. Don Zacharias, President of Mississippi State University, came to the campus in late spring as a culminating event in the decennial review of UTEP's accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The review process itself began more than two years ago with the design of a comprehensive self-study of all aspects of UTEP's operations by a

team of more than 50 faculty, staff, students, alumni, and friends under the able--and tireless--leadership of Jon Amastae, and supported by Sally Andrade and the staff of the Center for Institutional Evaluation, Research, and Planning. In designing and conducting the self-study, a variety of strategies were used to elicit broad-based input from the campus and El Paso communities, and what we learned both reinforced our pride in our many accomplishments and provided us with helpful insights into how we can be an even greater resource in the future to the students and the region we serve.

Although the final outcome of the SACS re-accreditation process will not be announced until December, preliminary feedback from the visiting committee is highly positive. In fact, while visiting committees normally add recommendations to those identified by the institution, in UTEP's case committee members reduced our self-reported recommendations from 29 to 21, demonstrating once again that we are our most severe critics!

Three additional accreditation site visits were conducted at UTEP during the past year by professional accrediting bodies in Engineering, Business, and Teacher Education. All three colleges

received high marks from their respective visiting teams for the quality of their academic programs and their commitment to our regional-mission. Dean Frank Hoy in Business, Dean Andy Swift in Engineering, Dean Arturo Pacheco in the College of Education, and the faculty, staff, and students in those colleges are to be congratulated on the success of these professional accreditation reviews.

Academic program development at UTEP, particularly at the doctoral level, continued to be a priority during 1995-96. UTEP's sixth and newest doctoral program, in Educational Leadership and Administration, was approved by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board this past spring and has enrolled 20 outstanding students this fall. At this time I'd like to ask those students to please stand. We welcome Dr. John Daresh, who brings his extensive experience to UTEP as director of this new program and chair of the Educational Leadership and Administration Department.

Enrollment in the Ph.D. program in Environmental Science and Engineering has grown to 21 students, as Dr. Chip Groat re-joined UTEP as director of this program and of the Center for Environmental Resource Management. Twenty students are currently enrolled in

UTEP's doctoral program in Psychology. One student will complete the Ph.D. degree in Psychology this fall, and four students have received highly competitive fellowships from the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health. Finally, with 24 students currently enrolled, the doctoral program in Materials Science and Engineering is nearing maturity, with four students expected to complete their degrees this year, while more mature programs in Computer Engineering and Geological Sciences continue to be productive.

Two other doctoral program proposals are expected to be considered by the UT System and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board this year. In Biological Sciences, faculty members have developed a Ph.D. program with a specialization in Environmental Pathobiology which will complement the applied Ph.D. degree in Environmental Science and Engineering. A proposal for a History Ph.D. capitalizes on UTEP's location and faculty expertise in U.S.-Mexico border history.

Preparations were made during the past year to begin to transfer to UTEP responsibility for cooperative programs in Physical and Occupational Therapy. These programs, which have been offered in

cooperation with the UT Medical Branch in Galveston, have created career opportunities for students in this region and satisfied some of the need for health care professionals in regional hospitals and other health care settings. With a demonstrated student demand for these programs and a sustained need for their graduates, UTEP is now prepared to assume full responsibility for them.

Another professional career, pharmacy, will soon be accessible to students in this region, thanks to start-up funding from the Texas Legislature, strong support from local pharmacy professionals, and the cooperation of the UT Austin School of Pharmacy. Student interns from UT Austin gained practical experience in El Paso clinical settings during the past year, space was allocated in the Stanton Building, and we are pleased that Dr. Lloyd Young has joined UTEP as director of this new cooperative program.

It is interesting to note that with the medical training provided in El Paso by Texas Tech, and the broad range of health science programs now offered by UTEP, El Pasoans finally have access to health professions career opportunities and comprehensive health care which have historically been unavailable in this large metropolitan area.

Several of UTEP's interdisciplinary programs are expected to move in new directions as they greet this academic year with new leadership. The African American Studies program welcomes its first director, Dr. Maceo Dailey, who also holds a faculty position in the History Department. Women's Studies will be directed by Dr. Shelly Armitage, who served as a visiting faculty member in UTEP's English Department prior to accepting this administrative assignment and a faculty position in English. And, anthropologist Duncan Earle assumes the directorship of the Inter-American and Border Studies program.

We also extend a warm welcome to all other new faculty and staff. We are delighted that they have become members of the UTEP community, and we look forward to working with them. Search and screening processes to fill administrative, faculty, and staff positions are time-consuming and demanding on those involved, and we are grateful to all those faculty, staff, and students who participated in these very important processes during the past year.

One of the most exciting moments of the past year occurred when we received word that UTEP had been designated by the National

Science Foundation as a Model Institution for Excellence, one of only six universities recognized nationally. This designation and the five-year, \$12.5 million grant it conveyed offer us a rare opportunity to embark on fundamental changes in undergraduate science and engineering education at UTEP, with a goal of developing successful models which can be extended to other programs on the UTEP campus and to other universities across the country. MIE focuses our collective attention on how best to create conditions which maximize student learning. Vice Presidents Steve Riter and Richard Padilla serve as co-PI's of this important program, reflecting the critical partnership between academic and student affairs required to achieve MIE goals, and Andy Bernat is the program director.

The MIE grant was one of a large number awarded to UTEP last year, as we continued our highly successful record of attracting external funding for research, educational programs, and student support. 1994-95 data provided by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board reveal that UTEP ranked fourth in annual sponsored projects expenditures among 37 public universities in Texas, exceeded only by Texas A&M, UT Austin, and the University of Houston. Annual sponsored projects expenditures increased by 10 percent over 1993-94, to more than \$39.2 million. This is an extraordinary accomplishment,

one in which all of us can take great pride. We congratulate the faculty and staff who write competitive proposals and administer these funded projects, and we thank the Office of Sponsored Projects staff, under Julie Sanford's capable leadership, whose expertise enables us to successfully manage this large portfolio of proposals, grants and contracts.

With support from a variety of sources, four new research centers successfully began their operations during 1995-96: the NASA-funded Pan American Center for Earth and Environmental Studies (PACES), the Air Force Office of Scientific Research-supported FAST Center for Structural Integrity of Aerospace Systems; the U.S. Army-supported Center for Electronics Manufacturing (CEM), and the UTEP Anthropology Research Center, initially supported by a major contract from Ft. Bliss. PACES, CEM and the FAST Center held inaugural events this year that brought to the UTEP campus top officials of the sponsoring federal agencies and representatives of the Centers' university and industry partners.

All of these centers provide outstanding research opportunities to UTEP students, and many involve pre-college students as well. For example, last year 15 undergraduate and 12 graduate students worked

at PACES on a variety of projects, including geological studies of northern Mexico using LANDSAT imagery, analysis of groundwater in the El Paso-Juarez area, programming language development, and a fascinating study of the northward migration of Africanized bees. Collaborating with the Rio Grande Council of Girl Scouts, PACES also offered a program for more than 30 sixth, seventh, and eighth grade girls who learned about science through a variety of hands-on activities, including a rocket launch in the Sun Bowl. As a former Girl Scout, I too had the thrill of launching a rocket especially made for me!

New sponsored project awards totaled more than \$32 million last year, the third consecutive year in which we have generated more than \$30 million in grants and contracts that help strengthen UTEP's infrastructure, research, and instructional capabilities. A number of UTEP faculty were the recipients of major NSF grants this year: an interdisciplinary team led by Nicholas Pingitore in Geology, David Carmichael and John Peterson in Anthropology, and Jorge Gardea in Chemistry received a grant from the Academic Research Infrastructure program to acquire a new x-ray microfluorescence laboratory for research in geology, archaeology, and environmental science; Jorge Lopez in Physics received a grant to establish a

computer-based laboratory for UTEP's Modern Physics course; and two new faculty members in Biological Sciences, Elizabeth Walsh and Douglas Allchin, received grants to pursue their scientific research in molecular biology and the history of science, respectively.

In Electrical and Computer Engineering, Gregory Lush received a NASA Faculty Award for Research to pursue his work on the processing of Cadmium/Tellurium solar cells.

In the College of Education, Lawrence Ingalls and Elena Izquierdo received a major grant from the U.S. Department of Education for Project LISTOS, which is designed to prepare special education personnel to work with children and youth from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds.

The grant awards to Jorge Lopez and Elena Izquierdo are particularly gratifying because both of them are UTEP alumni who went on to earn doctorates and teach elsewhere prior to returning to UTEP as members of this faculty. I am especially proud of Elena Izquierdo's accomplishments because she completed her master's degree thesis in linguistics under my supervision...it seems like just yesterday!

UTEP's success in private fund-raising also continued to set new records in 1995-96, thanks to the superb coordination provided by Jan Cavin and the staff of the Development and Alumni Office. For the second consecutive year, UTEP was selected by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) to receive the 1995 Circle of Excellence Award for exemplary performance in fundraising. Private giving increased 10% overall last year, compared to a .3% increase nationwide in donations to higher education. We are extremely grateful to our many friends in this community whose generosity supports a host of programs and special initiatives and greatly strengthens our resolve to be worthy of their confidence in us. The Alumni Fund for Excellence grew by 32%—compared to a 3.2% increase nationally—and 16% more alumni were contacted during the campaign this year. We are grateful to the many faculty, staff, students, and alumni who participated in this fundraising effort, and to Yolanda Ingle, coordinator of alumni affairs, for her fine work in building alumni support for UTEP.

The Alumni Association has been active on a number of other fronts, publishing the first-ever alumni directory, fostering the development of new alumni chapters in San Diego, San Jose, and San Francisco, and organizing a number of campus events including the annual

Minerpalooza celebration, which drew almost 5,000 participants last year, and to which all of you are invited this Saturday. The Association's alumni affinity credit card realized a \$22,000 profit last year, and all proceeds will be invested in the expansion of their beautiful Season of Lights project.

Projects such as the Season of Lights not only strengthen bonds between UTEP and its alumni, but also build bridges between UTEP and the surrounding community. In fact, UTEP is recognized nationally for our successful efforts to serve as a resource to this community. Community programs in Continuing Education, under the able direction of Conni Quintana, offer more than 500 personal and professional development classes each year, ranging from Birdwatching to World Class Manufacturing. The Center for Lifelong Learning continues to grow and prosper, and it has received national recognition as a model program. The Fine Arts departments, the Dinner Theatre, the Centennial Museum, the Library, Union Programs, and the Special Events Center bring to local audiences musical and theater performances, films, exhibits, and special lectures and presentations, often collaborating with other community organizations, such as the El Paso Symphony, Pro Musica, the El Paso Museum of Art, and the City's Arts Resources Department. Special

congratulations to the Dinner Theatre for its production of "Metropolis" which was ranked among the top ten in a national competition of 900 college productions last year.

UTEP's intercollegiate athletics program also provided entertainment opportunities to the El Paso community through its many competitive events in men's and women's sports, and stimulated our collective pride in the exciting athletic performance of Coach Bob Kitchens' nationally ranked track teams, and the academic success of many student athletes who completed their degrees and were named to the all-WAC academic team. We are also delighted to report that intercollegiate athletics is now operating in the black, thanks to the fine work of Hank Humphreys, and the support of Juan Sandoval. The coming year ushers in major changes in academic advising and support for student athletes, the inauguration of UTEP's new women's intercollegiate soccer program under the direction of Coach Veronica O'Brien, and the Western Athletic Conference's expansion from 10 to 16 teams. We particularly welcome the addition to the WAC of three Texas universities, TCU, SMU and Rice, creating new opportunities for UTEP to gain visibility in other parts of the state.

Texas Western Press had an enormously successful year, producing the largest number of books and the highest sales figures in its distinguished 45-year history. Among its successful publications was the beautiful Tom Lea: An Oral History, edited by Rebecca Craver and Adair Margo. Congratulations to Marcia Daudistel and Jack Bristol for another terrific year.

Community leaders increasingly recognize UTEP as a major player in regional development. The Institute for Manufacturing and Materials Management (IM3) and the Texas Centers for Border Economic Development, both under Manny Pacillas' fine leadership, have played a significant role in regional planning and infrastructure building. For example, the recently established Manufacturing Assistance Center, supported by the Texas Department of Commerce, provides technical assistance to small and mid-sized manufacturing operations throughout this region. In the College of Business, the Family Business Forum, Franchise Center, and Center for the Study of Western Hemispheric Trade have clearly demonstrated the commitment of Dean Frank Hoy and business faculty and staff to the economic development of this region.

Faculty, staff, and student expertise, UTEP's intellectual capital, contributes significantly and broadly to this community's well being. Higher education institutions throughout the United States have come to recognize the importance of sharing their knowledge and skills with the society that surrounds them, and students represent both major resources and primary beneficiaries of such partnerships. Once again, UTEP finds itself in the forefront of a national movement toward what is called "service learning." We are at the forefront because our vision and mission have for some time included a strong regional focus, and because faculty and staff members have recognized the powerful role of service in student learning, particularly in a setting such as ours, where students can contribute their developing skills to their own community.

Thanks to the vision and determination of Dean Pat Castiglia, the College of Nursing and Health Sciences has been a leader in academic outreach efforts with the establishment of four primary care clinics in El Paso County. Students in nursing and other health professions programs augment their classroom learning through the active provision of health care and health education to historically underserved populations. The clients are served, and the students learn. The Kellogg Foundation, a primary sponsor of this community

partnership, has been so impressed with the success achieved by the clinics that they have invited UTEP to broaden the scope of this activity beyond health, a challenge being led by Dean Howard Daudistel in the College of Liberal Arts and Dean Frank Hoy in the College of Business.

The College of Education has also sought to increase its active service learning opportunities for prospective teachers through partnerships with area school districts. Dean Arturo Pacheco is nationally recognized for his leadership in fostering the simultaneous reform of K-12 and teacher education. Students gain valuable practical experience in the schools earlier in their academic programs, and schools benefit from the added personpower available to work with their children.

Other academic programs have also recognized the value of incorporating service into the learning process. Archeology students, under the supervision of John Peterson, and biology students directed by Bill Mackay are working in El Paso's Lower Valley and at Ft. Bliss on projects of direct relevance to this region. Civil Engineering students who year after year surveyed the UTEP campus--perhaps when the legendary Cap Kidd and his dynamite inhabited the campus,

the earth really did move!—but now they survey and prepare topographic maps of the Mission Trail. More and more UTEP students recognize that they have expertise to share with their community, and more and more faculty are finding ways to create meaningful active learning opportunities for their students, an effort that will be greatly reinforced by the Model Institution for Excellence initiative.

Service learning also occurs on the UTEP campus. Students apply their skills to a broad range of university operations such as the Multi-Media Teaching and Learning Center where Mike Kolitsky and a team of students work with faculty members from a variety of academic programs to develop new teaching strategies and materials.

As the emptiness of the campus in early August is replaced by throngs of students at the beginning of the fall semester, a new energy surges through the buildings and grounds. Students are, after all, the heart of the university, indeed they are our primary reason for being here. Students come to us with their dreams and aspirations, their talents and motivation, their opportunities and their constraints. And, it is our responsibility — I would say our privilege — to foster their personal and professional development.

Enrollment growth, which had been increasingly hard to manage in a context of declining state appropriations, has leveled off not only at UTEP, but at institutions across the state and region. A decline in the number of high school graduates, rising higher education costs, and reductions in financial aid have all likely contributed to enrollment declines here and elsewhere. But, all projections indicate that enrollment in higher education will rebound strongly beginning in 1998.

Enrollment is important to UTEP because El Paso is an undereducated community, and 85% of the students we serve come from El Paso County. Our goal must be to encourage more and more residents of this region to choose to pursue post-secondary education and, once that choice is made, to ensure that our academic programs foster student learning and success.

Recognizing the role that the pre-college experience plays in students' preparation for higher education, UTEP has been an active partner in the El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence, ably directed by Susanna Navarro. Joined by Governor George W. Bush, the Collaborative publicly released this year a set of academic standards at three grade levels (4th, 8th, and 12th) in seven academic disciplines,

which all children in all schools will be expected to achieve.

Simultaneously, UTEP has adopted a new set of admission requirements which will be phased in over the next six years, thereby ensuring that all students will be better prepared tomorrow for college--or the workforce--than they are today. Outreach programs such as Upward Bound and the Mother-Daughter Program directed by Sandra Braham and Jose Tinajero, also help develop the skills, aspirations and self-confidence of pre-college students in this region.

Recognizing that cost has become a major factor in students' decisions about where to enroll, and that UTEP's tuition and fees are approximately twice those at the El Paso Community College, we have made a commitment to establish even closer ties with the College to ensure that students who wish to pursue baccalaureate degrees have the information and the encouragement that they need to transfer. To that end, UTEP's Enrollment Services staff have developed and distributed articulated degree plans which clearly spell out the pathways to successful transfer, and they have established a transfer center at the community college to provide EPCC students the information they need about UTEP.

Recognizing that student retention involves far more than academic programs, the Division of Student Affairs has focused considerable attention during the past year on improving students' experiences while at UTEP. With support from the MIE grant, student orientation programs have been revamped and coordinated with programs in academic affairs. Dean Sylvia Rodriguez has identified better integrated and more customer-sensitive service as a primary goal of offices within Enrollment Services. Study Skills and Tutorial Services, under the able direction of Gladys Shaw, continues to receive national recognition for its innovative programs. In a new cooperative agreement, the College of Nursing and Health Sciences has assumed responsibility for the management and delivery of health services in the Student Health Center, with an expectation of improved primary health care for all UTEP students and valuable hands-on training for nursing, nurse practitioner, and other health professions students.

Student success is our primary goal, and UTEP's students demonstrate day after day that we are achieving that goal...and then some. Our students regularly bring us national recognition through their performance at major conferences and competitions, students such as those in computer science and engineering mentored by

Professor Chitta Baral, who recently finished among the top three in their first appearance at a national robot contest, ahead of some of the top robotics teams in the country.

At the heart of this university's success is the commitment of UTEP faculty and staff members to this institution and the students we serve; faculty and staff members such as those who were honored today. Like me, many of them probably find it difficult to believe that they have been here so long, and like me, they undoubtedly pause at a professional milestone such as this to enjoy the satisfaction of what they have accomplished and to consider the many goals yet to be achieved.

There are also loyal volunteers, those community members who have become close friends of the university through the generous dedication of their time and talents to a variety of programs and activities. Such a friend is Ruth Taber, who in addition to spreading the word across the country about UTEP's Center for Lifelong Learning, supported Victor Chacon and Yolanda Ingle's efforts to bring a highly acclaimed Zarzuela production to the UTEP campus this summer. Another such friend is Tom Laborious, who, for the past 14 years has served our intercollegiate athletics program as volunteer

statistician for all UTEP football and men's and women's basketball games. Others are the many community members who give generously of their time to advisory committees, boards and fundraising campaigns.

Today, we would like to honor one very special volunteer who has devoted an enormous amount of his time to UTEP during the past several years, providing leadership to our efforts to plan and organize a major fundraising campaign. That volunteer is Peter de Wetter, and I ask him and his wife, Mardee, to come forward at this time so that I can present Peter the Gran Paseno Award, the highest honor UTEP bestows on friends of this university.

Thank you, Peter, for all that you have done--and will continue to do--for UTEP; thanks to Mardee for sharing you so generously with us, and thanks to the many other volunteers for all that you do. You are our true partners in achieving UTEP's mission.

Partnerships are the key to all that we do at UTEP. We partner with school districts and the community college, with civic and cultural organizations, with other colleges and universities, with foundations and federal agencies. But, our first and foremost partnerships are

with our students. We must focus on their learning, their development, their success. As we celebrate the beginning of yet another academic year, let's take a moment to recall all of the many partners who helped each and every one of us reach our goals, and reaffirm our commitment to reciprocate by creating similar opportunities for our students, commitments such as those reflected in a letter received several weeks ago from a recent history graduate who wrote:

“Again and again and again, History faculty took special time out of very busy schedules to sit with me and guide my decisions, to listen very carefully to my dreams, goals, and desires, and to give me options I could not have known about on my own. They spoke very frankly and honestly about difficulties I would have and the rewards I could reap. Most of all, people in the History Department convinced me that I could do what I really did not think I could do.”

Or the enduring commitment of Stephanie Cox-Cornelio, former director of the UTEP Women's Center, whose husband's transfer took her from UTEP to West Point. Stephanie recently wrote:

“I have to admit that I miss UTEP terribly. Mostly I miss our students and all of their unique gifts!...reflecting on UTEP student life, I am overwhelmed at how much students [at UTEP] do because they are working for an education and a better way of life...they are something special!”

They are indeed special, as are you the faculty and staff members who give generously of your time and expertise to foster the achievement of our students’ goals and aspirations. Together we have built a strong university which has served this community well, and together we will continue to help shape this region’s future.