

The University of Texas at El Paso
Fall 2005 Convocation
Diana Natalicio

**“Do not follow where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.”
Ralph Waldo Emerson**

The milestone of our 90th anniversary provided the extended UTEP family with an outstanding opportunity to review our fascinating institutional history...from our origins as the Texas State School of Mines and Metallurgy in 1914, to national leadership as an institution that is achieving the balance between access and excellence that will be required for success in 21st Century higher education.

UTEP's 90th birthday commemoration also created a platform for planning our future institutional development, from both internal and external vantage points.

To capture the perspectives of our external stakeholders, 100 alumni, supporters and new acquaintances of the University, were invited to participate in a Centennial Commission to help us envision UTEP in 2014, our 100th anniversary, and build on the progress that we have achieved during the past 20 years.

The Centennial Commission's report will be formally released in November and will help us chart our course toward 2014, ensuring that UTEP's strategic planning and future development are well aligned with the vision of our external stakeholders. We are grateful to all of the individuals who served on the Commission for their generous commitment of time and expertise, and we especially appreciate the leadership of UTEP alumni Philip Martinez and Larry Durham, who so capably served as co-chairs.

To provide a starting point for strategic planning, three internal task forces, consisting of a broad cross-section of UTEP faculty, students and staff members, tackled three critical topics: Student Success, Campus Climate and Research. The reports of these task forces will soon be released as a working document, to help guide planning in such areas as tuition, graduation rates, research infrastructure, technology, and, yes, parking.

Amid all of this thinking and planning for UTEP's future, faculty, students and staff worked hard during the past year to continue building on our accomplishments, and achieving new and ambitious goals. By nearly all measures, the past year was another exceedingly successful one at UTEP.

Perhaps the most conspicuous of our achievements was the amazing range of major construction projects that were underway during most of the year. Construction cranes, truck traffic, and parking displacement are all potential annoyances, but they are also symbols of the infrastructure investment required for UTEP's growth and development.

From a student perspective, one of the most important projects completed during the past year was the new Academic Services Building, supported by the U.T. System Permanent University Fund. Its majestic profile has greatly enhanced UTEP's face to the south, its location on Schuster makes it readily accessible, and its inner space provides an efficient one-stop academic support service center for UTEP students.

A beautiful new wing has been added to the Engineering Building, thanks to support from the Permanent University Fund and the generosity of UTEP alumnus Steve Palko. Work was also completed on the new Helen of Troy Softball Complex on Sun Bowl Drive, one of the finest such

facilities in the country, whose grand opening we celebrated just last week. Construction on the new Biology building continues, as does the second phase of the Kelly Hall renovation project, and both should be completed within the next year.

In addition to this major construction activity, Facilities Services oversaw many other projects designed to improve the campus climate for students, faculty and staff. The Union Plaza underwent a major facelift, including the installation of shade structures which make this area a more comfortable gathering place. Thanks to a number of generous donors, students in the College of Business now have two beautiful new work spaces: the Student Center and the Student Financial Center. And, Art students have a new cutting-edge Graphic Arts Laboratory in the former gallery space in Fox Fine Arts.

This, the largest single construction program in UTEP's history, required the participation and cooperation of staff, students and faculty from across the campus, who helped conceptualize, plan and implement the many projects. Thanks to all for the fine work that they have done to ensure that UTEP facilities continue to be supportive of our mission and this region's needs, and a source of pride to us all. Special thanks to Greg McNicol for his leadership and his special commitment to incorporating authentic Bhutanese elements into campus development; the new Bhutanese flags on the Centennial Museum grounds are a beautiful example.

A major new step was taken this past year when UTEP entered into a ground lease with a developer to construct a hotel on the corner of University and Oregon, the former home of the Campus Police. This innovative public-private partnership promises to offer comfortable and convenient accommodations for the many visitors who come to UTEP each year, and additional conference facilities to help relieve pressure on campus buildings. The two major hospitals, and businesses and residents in UTEP's neighborhood are also likely to benefit from this nearby hotel option, whose completion is eagerly anticipated next summer. Thanks to UTEP alumnus Russ Vandenburg for spearheading this innovative project and to Cindy Villa, Richard Adauto and UT System staff for their help in launching it.

Parking is very much on our minds these days, as UTEP's enrollment and level of activity continue to grow. The remote parking at the former Rudolph site on North Mesa was expanded, as was the shuttle service. Although students continue to tell us that there is no place for them to park, the Rudolph lot remains more than half empty, even at peak periods. Thanks to a partnership with Providence Hospital, UTEP staff members now have access to reserved parking in the hospital's garage, with a new footpath linking it to our campus. UTEP has its own garage plans in the works, with construction to begin in January 2006 on a garage in the parking lot at the south end of the Sun Bowl, behind Fox Fine Arts. With space for more than 2000 vehicles, this garage should provide parking relief for UTEP students, football fans and fine arts patrons alike. The second project, a partnership with the City of El Paso, will create a transit terminal and parking garage across from the Don Haskins Center at Baltimore and Oregon to serve both UTEP and the adjacent entertainment district.

Facilities and parking are major infrastructure elements in creating a campus climate that is secure, efficient, and supportive of student, staff and faculty productivity. But a campus climate is also very much about people, their work and their attitudes. Three departments—Campus Police, Facilities Services, and Environmental Health and Safety, have primary responsibility for ensuring a safe and secure environment on the campus, and their efforts at continuous improvement are greatly appreciated.

Campus Police's usual business was made a little more challenging during the past year as they vacated the new hotel site and relocated to temporary quarters in the Ross Moore Building,

without missing a beat. They eagerly await new space in the Facilities Services Complex, which will be completed later this fall. Special thanks to the entire police force for their continued efficiency and good will during this relocation process. As we welcome new Police Chief Cliff Walsh, we want to express appreciation to Charlie Subia, who served admirably as Interim Chief during this critical transition.

In Environmental Health and Safety, Robert Moss and his team have been proactive and creative in responding to a growing set of responsibilities associated with the expansion of research activity on the UTEP campus. Efforts such as laboratory inspections and consolidation of biohazard waste disposal not only promote campus safety, but also contribute significantly to providing the infrastructure necessary for UTEP's development as a research university.

Greater efficiencies have been achieved in Facilities Services through Juan Guerra's outstanding leadership during the past year. Reorganization of custodial services and maintenance functions has resulted in greater productivity and improved service. We thank him and the entire Facilities Services staff for their cooperation and good will during that challenging transformation. We applaud too efforts to accelerate water conservation efforts through better landscape management and the conversion of 80,000 square feet of campus space to xeriscaping.

Achieving greater efficiency in business operations continues to be a goal to which we are all are committed. Business practices are largely transparent to us as we go about our daily work, or they should be. We tend to notice them only when they complicate or impede our work, yet they obviously have a major impact on our productivity and our attitudes. Vice President Cindy Villa and her team took the lead, supported by Dennis Soden and the Institute for Policy and Economic Development, to conduct an organizational assessment to help us bring a variety of UTEP's business practices into sharper focus. As a result, specific policies and procedures were targeted for improvement, and during the past year many new web-based services were introduced, and procurement procedures streamlined. This important work will continue during the coming year.

One of the principal reasons that improving business policies and procedures has become such a high priority at UTEP is that our mission has grown far more complex, in a context of shrinking state support. Our expanding research and doctoral program portfolio and many other initiatives place far greater demands on our business practices, while resources to respond to such demands are severely constrained. As reduced state funding requires students to pay a greater share of the cost of the University's operations through their tuition, we recognize the importance of redoubling our efforts to achieve efficiencies that increase our productivity and improve the quality of our work life.

Strategic doctoral program development continues to be a high priority at UTEP, and we now offer doctoral education in all six colleges on the campus. Four new programs—in Rhetoric and Composition, Civil Engineering, International Business and Interdisciplinary Health Sciences—admitted their first student cohorts last year, and a new doctoral program in Computer Science was approved, as was a General Psychology Ph.D. We thank Chuck Ambler and the many faculty members involved in launching these important new programs.

At the master's level, a new Master of Arts degree in Leadership Studies was developed, approved and offered in coordination with the Captain's Course at Ft. Bliss. This innovative program, spearheaded by Dennis Soden, provides the opportunity for military officers to earn a master's degree during the time they are stationed in El Paso, and to do so together with civilian enrollees. With programs such as the College of Business accelerated MBA degree and the special Executive Education program conducted in collaboration with the El Paso Electric Company, this M.A. degree in leadership represents an important future direction in master's education at UTEP. We

will continue to seek to respond to regional and key constituency workforce needs, and provide educational opportunities in convenient formats that are tied to career advancement.

During the past year, there have been many indicators of the growing quality and attendant national visibility of programs across the campus. The College of Engineering, for example, received major national recognition through a \$169 million in-kind commitment of cutting-edge technology and training from General Motors, EDS, Sun Microsystems, and UGS through the Partners for the Advancement of Collaborative Engineering Education, a worldwide program that prepares students at selected universities for careers in automotive engineering. Today, UTEP is on the key university list of all major corporations that employ engineers, and UTEP engineering graduates are being recruited to outstanding career opportunities throughout the world.

The College has also received numerous recent and highly visible honors. Hispanic Business magazine named UTEP the #1 Graduate Engineering Program in the U.S. for Hispanics. Civil Engineering doctoral student Jorge Villalobos was awarded a highly competitive National Science Foundation Graduate Fellowship, and two Civil Engineering students, Brenda Bustillos and Liang Zhou, mentored by Professor Yi-Chang Chiu, were honored in Berlin, Germany with an international prize for their work with two students from China to develop an urban transportation system for the city of Shanghai. Congratulations to all!

As a result of all of this attention, there is growing local awareness that UTEP is a major economic development asset for this region. Companies have discovered the gap between the number of engineering graduates and engineering jobs in this region, and they are beginning to consider locating some of their operations here to capitalize on this highly sought-after workforce. Thanks to Dean Barry Benedict, Roberto Osegueda and many engineering faculty who have provided strong leadership in guiding the College toward these exciting new opportunities.

High-visibility innovation in teacher education has been achieved through a partnership among the colleges of Liberal Arts, Science and Education. One of 11 universities nationally supported by the Carnegie Corporation's "Teachers for a New Era" program, UTEP is taking a lead in designing integrated approaches to teacher training and professional development that ultimately lead to improved student learning among children in this region and greater job satisfaction among teachers. Thanks to Pablo Arenaz, Howard Daudistel, Mike Eastman, Josie Tinajero, and UTEP faculty members Brian Giza, Michael Topp, Kate Miller, Wendy Francis, Keith Polette, and others who have invested their time and talent in this broad-based team effort.

Despite the uncertainties associated with a leadership transition, the College of Business Administration was active on many fronts, implementing a new doctoral program in International Business, inaugurating its new student center facilities, and preparing for AACSB accreditation. We thank Gary Mann for his service as interim dean and welcome new dean, Bob Nachtmann, whose extensive international experience and commitment to UTEP's mission present very exciting opportunities to us.

The College of Health Sciences has been working hard to meet rising expectations for the preparation of health care professionals in this region. It is implementing a new interdisciplinary doctoral program, which has the potential to relieve health science faculty shortages at UTEP and across the U.S. At the undergraduate level, it has developed a fast-track degree program in Nursing, which enables individuals who already have a bachelor's degree and necessary prerequisites, to complete the B.S.N. degree in 15 months. This innovative program, developed by Bob Anders and his team, is designed to address efficiently the strong regional need for nurses. On the research front, a grant from U.S. AID to Drs. Meg Weigel and Rodrigo Armijos provides support for a research collaboration with colleagues at the University of Juarez to study

tuberculosis along the U.S.-Mexico border, and for the enrollment of a group of Juarez health professionals in our master's degree program in Health Promotion. This project is prototypical of the many successful cross-border initiatives of UTEP faculty and staff members who understand the importance of capitalizing on the assets of UTEP's border location.

In the College of Science, we were pleased to welcome Dean Michael Eastman back to this campus. His knowledge of UTEP and his recent administrative experience in other settings give him a unique leadership perspective, and we look forward to working with him to fulfill the college's potential to contribute to UTEP's access and excellence agenda. External funding continues to be a priority in Science, and major grant awards advanced individual investigators' work, enhanced research infrastructure, and created a Bioinformatics Laboratory. We welcome the new Biology Department chair, Rob Kirken, and look forward to working with him to build UTEP's biomedical research portfolio and to meet the growing undergraduate and graduate student interest in the biological sciences.

The College of Liberal Arts developed a number of new and innovative undergraduate programs to respond to the needs of special student populations. A good example is the partnership between the Criminal Justice program and Professional and Continuing Education to offer an accelerated program for personnel in the regional law enforcement community who are pursuing a bachelor's degree.

Several departments in Liberal Arts have capitalized well on UTEP's regional location and bilingual/bicultural context. A new Creative Writing Department was established under the leadership of Johnny Payne, the innovative bilingual MFA curriculum was enhanced, and a new undergraduate bilingual program developed. In Anthropology, Joe Heyman spearheaded new undergraduate concentrations leading to certificates in Applied Cultural Anthropology and Cultural Heritage Management. In Communication, the Spanish language journalism program has attracted increasing national attention, as print and broadcast media throughout the country seek to connect with the fast-growing Hispanic population. Thanks to the growing demand for UTEP's bilingual graduates and the good work of Zita Arocha and Pat Witherspoon, UTEP students are enjoying outstanding internship and career opportunities with such major national media organizations as Scripps Howard, Univision and ABC News.

The Center for Civic Engagement, under Kathy Staudt's able direction, received another major validation of its fine work. The Kellogg Foundation awarded the Center a \$1.2 million grant to expand its work and establish the Nonprofit Enterprise Center that provides technical assistance to organizations in this region.

A number of Liberal Arts departments contribute significantly to UTEP's high visibility in the Paso del Norte region and beyond. The Art Department's stunning new Stanlee and Gerald Rubin Center for the Visual Arts has attracted a very positive regional response to its programming, including the recent Andy Warhol exhibition, and has already gained recognition in several major national arts publications as one of the premier contemporary galleries. Thanks to Kate Bonansinga for her leadership in realizing our dream of a top-flight art gallery at UTEP, and to Greg Elliott for his sustained support of these efforts.

The UTEP Dinner Theatre hit a home run during the past year with its production of "Beauty and the Beast." Everything about this production reflected the high standards of quality that Greg Taylor has always set, and audiences responded by record-setting attendance: 7,500 patrons attended 40 sold-out performances.

The Music Department hosted more than 80 musical performances, and Music faculty participated in productions throughout the world. The second annual Music Gala, offered by the Music Department to the El Paso community, showcased the enormous talent of UTEP students. This annual event is one that you don't want to miss next time around.

UTEP takes seriously its responsibility to offer a variety of cultural and arts programs and entertainment events to residents of this region. The Office of External Relations coordinates a large number of campus conferences and events each year, and large UTEP teams work together to create such special programs as the Bhutan Days celebration, which this year introduced UTEP and the El Paso community to Bhutanese music. By the way, you will be pleased to know that six Bhutanese students are now enrolled at UTEP. The Special Events staff, led by Carol Roberts Spence, also works hard to offer programs for every taste and preference. They managed 323 events during the past year, everything from Juanes and HBO pay-per-view boxing event in the Haskins Center, to a Monster Truck show in the Sun Bowl, which attracted more than 43,000 fans.

But, the biggest entertainment of all last year was offered to us by Intercollegiate Athletics. Coach Mike Price brought his extensive and highly successful coaching experience, his national visibility, and his positive thinking to UTEP, and made believers of us all. We thank Coach Price, his assistants and the UTEP football team for putting a spring in every El Pasoan's step, a smile on every face....and, after the recent Houston game, an irregularity in every heartbeat! UTEP football has broken into the national spotlight in a way that few could have imagined just a couple of years ago. The image on television and in major national publications of Coach Price proudly holding up the Miner pick has become a symbol of UTEP pride and an icon of UTEP's growing national identity. Is everyone drinking their Miner Milk?

And those football-generated smiles didn't diminish even slightly during basketball season when Coach Doc Sadler and his team took us to the WAC Championship and the NCAA Tournament. Congratulations to Doc, his assistants and the Miner basketball team on a terrific season. We look forward to another great season this year, the 40th anniversary of our 1966 NCAA Championship. Adding to the celebration of this special anniversary will be the release of the Disney film, "Glory Road," which chronicles the amazing story of Coach Haskins' underdog Texas Western team and its remarkable road to victory. We expect to host a special premiere of the film at the Haskins Center. Stay tuned for that.

The past year brought us many other successes in Athletics, including winning the WAC outdoor track and field championship, and great seasons in women's soccer and rifle. With new facilities and new energy, the prognosis for UTEP athletics is definitely healthy. We thank Bob Stull and all who work with him for bringing success, excitement and pride back to UTEP athletics, and we look forward to many happy years ahead.

UTEP's visibility grew appreciably during the past year on the research front as well with two major events. First, the National Science Board, 24 distinguished scientists and engineers appointed by the President of the United States, came to the UTEP campus for an off-site meeting. They came to UTEP because of our national reputation as an institution that is achieving research excellence in a setting that is equally committed to providing access to non-traditional students. It should be gratifying to all of us to know that the NSB members left El Paso with an even more positive attitude about UTEP than the one that led them to come here in the first place.

The second high-visibility research-related event was the official lighting of the Internet 2 connection between the U.S. and Mexico, through UTEP and the Universidad Autonoma de Ciudad Juarez. This important research infrastructure investment underscores the importance of UTEP's growing set of partnerships with Mexican colleagues and institutions. Thanks to Paul

Maxwell, Steve Riter and Ken Pierce, and those who worked with them, for their tireless efforts to “light the I2 fiber.”

UTEP’s research activity continued to grow during the past year, thanks to the efforts of faculty and staff members who produced more than 400 competitive proposals. Those efforts resulted in the award of 256 new grants totaling nearly \$40 million. UTEP continues to rank 5th among public universities in Texas in total annual federal R& D expenditures, and, at the national level, on the National Science Foundation’s list of Top 200 universities. That is a huge achievement, especially in today’s increasingly intense competition for research dollars. New grants will support a broad range of research and education initiatives, as well as investments in research infrastructure, such as the new Regional Geospatial Service Center with Steve Riter playing a lead role; a clean room facility for work on semiconductor and electronics materials and wireless communication led by David Zubia; and an IBM grant to Pat Teller to build on UTEP’s supercomputing capacity.

External funding is increasingly critical in the absence of state investment in research. The Texas Legislature’s failure during the last session to authorize Tuition Revenue Bonds for facilities upgrades at UTEP represents a major setback in our efforts to achieve the research funding targets articulated in the Washington Advisory Group report. Nonetheless, we remain fully committed to seek other sources of support to continue our progress toward achieving that goal, which is critical to UTEP’s and this region’s development. We are very pleased that Roberto Osegueda has agreed to lead those important efforts as Vice Provost for Research.

There is little doubt that 2004-2005 was another high-achieving year at UTEP, continuing a succession of outstanding years which collectively represent an extraordinary institutional journey. We have reinvented UTEP, transforming ourselves from an institution whose pretensions were misaligned with its setting, to an institution that has achieved success and national prominence by becoming an authentic resource to the region it serves. We listened to, but did not heed, the warnings of those who cautioned us to stay on the well-marked trail that requires a trade-off between access and excellence. Instead, we set off on our own path to demonstrate that access and excellence are not only compatible in a setting like UTEP, they are reciprocally beneficial and essential to both our local success and our national reputation.

We may be too busy, or too modest, to realize just how powerful the UTEP model has become on a national, even international, scale, and how respected this institution has become as higher education seeks to cope with shifting demographic trends, global competition, technological changes, and a host of other major challenges and opportunities. And, we achieved this recognition by being true to a mission that has focused on creating top-quality educational opportunities, both access and excellence, for the residents of the Paso del Norte region. We have learned that playing the hand we are dealt, rather than wishing for another set of cards, is the key to our success. We have committed ourselves to be the best possible UTEP we can be...and in the process, we have achieved national recognition.

Word of UTEP’s access and excellence model has gone well beyond national boundaries. It has come to the attention of universities in such diverse settings as Glasgow, Scotland, Santiago, Chile, and Melbourne, Australia, where, like here, there is growing recognition that higher education has an extraordinarily important role to play in catalyzing human and economic development across geographic boundaries, ethnicities, and socioeconomic levels. Representatives of higher education institutions in those countries have traveled to UTEP to learn firsthand how we have achieved what they call “massification,” which is critical to their global competitiveness, just as it is for the Paso del Norte region.

However satisfying our progress and recognition may be, we acknowledge that there is still much work to be done to complete the “UTEP model.” During the past several years, we have committed significant institutional and external resources to develop the two ends of UTEP’s broad spectrum of activity: on the one end, access through a focus on pre-college preparation, partnerships, and the entering student program; on the other, excellence through the development of research and doctoral programs. Although both of these will require continued work, the progress we have achieved now enables us to pay greater attention to the critical challenge of connecting them by improving students’ success in what we will call the “middle years” of their undergraduate experience, the time between the end of their first year of enrollment and graduation.

How do we go about improving undergraduate student success in the “middle years” at UTEP, when most of the models available to us were developed in settings that are markedly different from ours? Once again, we will forge our own path, creating a new model of undergraduate success that responds to today’s students in new and creative ways. Our goal will be to provide students with the best possible curricula at the most affordable cost, presented in the most transparent ways, and delivered in the most efficient and flexible formats, sequences, and schedules. This new model will enable UTEP students to make steady and more efficient progress toward their degrees. It will likely also lead to an increase in the number of graduates and a reduction in the time to degree, and thereby respond to those for whom these metrics have become the primary measure of student success. Meanwhile, we will also seek to contribute to the development of alternative metrics which more effectively capture the value added by universities like UTEP that serve largely non-traditional student populations. We are very proud, for example, that such alternative metrics resulted in UTEP’s recognition by the National Survey of Student Engagement, and an article in USA Today, as one of the top 20 universities in the U.S. in fostering student success.

The president of the Faculty Senate, Greg Rocha, and I will chair this “Student Success in the Middle Years” initiative, with the able leadership of Provost Richard Jarvis and a campus-wide team that he has begun to put together. Let me take this opportunity to welcome our “almost new” Provost who brings extensive higher education knowledge and experience to UTEP; we are very fortunate to have him as a part of the UTEP family.

The first priority task for improving the “middle years” success of undergraduate students at UTEP seems clear: we must develop a more in-depth understanding of our students, the opportunities and challenges they face, and UTEP’s responses to them. We need to identify more clearly those factors—both external and internal to UTEP—that lead to steady progress toward graduation and those that impede such progress. A grant from the Lumina Foundation and the Quality Enhancement Plan associated with SACS re-accreditation provide us with resources and an appropriate context to focus time and expertise on such in-depth research.

This research will enable us to learn more about the financial, health, family and employment issues that students bring with them to our campus and their effect on the undergraduate educational experience. It will also include a close examination of institutional policies and procedures—everything from class schedules and locations, to advising and financial aid policies, to the operating hours of food service and childcare—that may accelerate or delay students’ progress toward completing their degrees. Some of these policies and procedures, however well intended when originally formulated, may be out-of-step with today’s students’ needs; vestiges of the “old UTEP.”

This comprehensive and systematic review of current and proposed policies and procedures will enable us to be more purposeful in evaluating and aligning them with what we learn about our

students' needs. A good example of such re-alignment was the re-design of UTEP's book loan program that resulted from carefully listening to feedback from students during dialogues with them about tuition increases and their related cash flow issues. Although this may appear to be a small matter in the bigger scheme of UTEP's operations, it is important to realize that it is exactly these "small matters" that make a big difference: for some students the cost of books and cash to pay for them at the time of registration may be the factor that ultimately discourages them from enrolling.

Also playing a key role in this effort to improve student success in the middle years will be a faculty-driven curriculum review and renewal process involving all departments and colleges on the campus. As faculty members "unpack" degree programs, many questions should be examined: Do UTEP's degree requirements prepare today's students well for their future professional and civic responsibilities? Do the core competencies expected of UTEP graduates align appropriately with the careers they seek to pursue, and prepare them well to compete successfully with graduates from other universities across the country—indeed across the world—to meet the expectations of those who seek to recruit them? Respecting constraints on UTEP students' time and financial resources, and recognizing that more is not necessarily better, are curriculum requirements as efficient as they can be? Is a 120-hour degree an attainable target for all programs at UTEP? Are prerequisites reasonable and clearly articulated? These and other questions will help us evaluate curriculum requirements to ensure that the preparation we provide students is purposeful in its design and well informed by our knowledge of them and the career and life demands they will face.

Students' improved understanding of the relationship between the courses they are required to take and their career and life goals will likely lead to more purposeful and therefore successful progress toward a degree. Such understanding is particularly critical during the "middle years," as students make the transition into their academic majors. Advising plays a major role here, not the simple approval of a semester class schedule, but engaged conversations that help all students—and especially first-generation students—learn more about how the education they pursue today translates into the quality of their future lives.

Reconceptualizing academic and career advising at UTEP is not a task to be delegated to a small group of veteran staff and faculty advisors. Instead, we invite faculty members in all departments and colleges, both those with experience in undergraduate advising and those who haven't previously been involved, to work together with others who can contribute to this more robust advising model, including staff and peer advisors in the Advising Center, Career Services, Enrollment Services and departments and colleges across the campus. We all know the role that good advising and mentoring have played in our lives. Our responsibility is to ensure that our students benefit from the best advice we can offer them.

Both enhanced advising and curriculum renewal should also recognize the outstanding opportunity UTEP has to help students capitalize on the very special bilingual/bicultural skills that a majority of them bring to our campus. More than 70% of UTEP's 19,264 students are Mexican American, reflecting the demographics of El Paso County from which more than 80% of them originate. Another 1,690 come from Mexico, the largest concentration of Mexican students at any university in the U.S. These students' bilingual/bicultural skills are huge assets in today's world, providing them with a competitive edge that is unavailable to most students across this country. We and our students must understand better how these assets can be leveraged. How, for example, do we make students better aware of the value of their bilingual/bicultural skills in the career marketplace? How do we incorporate development of these special assets into degree programs to ensure that UTEP graduates can utilize their bilingual/ bicultural skills comfortably in professional settings? Do our successful bilingual degree programs in journalism and creative

writing offer a model for bilingual certification in such fields as construction management, accounting or marketing? Can we capitalize on our border location by developing closer ties with the Autonomous University of Juarez to enhance such programs?

Finally, we can effectively help our students navigate the “middle years” only if we believe in them and in our fundamental responsibility to serve them as well as we possibly can. After all, they have placed their trust in us, and their dreams and aspirations in our hands. This is both an awesome responsibility and a source of immense joy and satisfaction when they succeed. Our immediate and long-term impact on students will be far more positive if we communicate to them regularly and sincerely, through our words and actions, that we value and respect them and their talent, and believe strongly in their capacity to achieve the high standards that we set for them.

Research by Laura Rendon and others suggests that such “validation” from faculty and staff members is a particularly significant factor in Mexican-American students’ success, apparently even more important than involvement in campus life. Such “validation” builds students’ self-confidence by assuring them that we too are confident in them. Conversely, our students may be more vulnerable to thoughtless comments or impatient reactions, which although unintended may be perceived as reflecting our lack of confidence in them.

“Validation” reflects an attitude about UTEP and our students which may be expressed in a variety of ways by all of us on the campus, wherever we work and whatever we do: a reassuring smile, a kind word of encouragement, campus directions to a confused freshman; a timely reply to an email message asking for help; an impromptu after-class explanation of a concept not well understood; an engaged career advising session; or a sincere expression of interest in a student’s hopes, dreams and challenges. “Validation” isn’t really hard to do, it is sometimes not even fully intentional, its impact can be long-lasting, and it can be enormously satisfying.

Such satisfaction comes regularly, sometimes unexpectedly, and often many years later. I recently received a note from a 1984 microbiology graduate who forwarded to me a letter I wrote to him in 1976 when I was chairman of the then Modern Languages Department and he was a pupil at Ross Middle School. My purpose in writing to him at the time was to congratulate him on his success in a Spanish Literary Festival that we hosted for children in area schools. That letter—that validation—meant far more to him—and to his mother!—than I could ever have imagined at the time; and you can be sure that it meant a lot to me when he sent it back to me 30 years later.

The words and actions of all of us on this campus—those veteran faculty and staff members whose service we recognized today, and the many newcomers who have become part of the UTEP family this year—contribute to the “validation” of our students. We thank you for you all that you do to foster their success, and, most of all, we thank you for believing in them and our mission to serve them. Your willingness to join us in building a new university model to meet the needs of today’s students will have a significant impact, both here in the Paso del Norte region and elsewhere in the world. We are creating new trails, rather than walking on well-trodden paths. To be sure, such trail-blazing presents some additional risks, but it is a far more interesting journey, with far greater potential benefits. Thank you for being a part of our efforts to continue reinventing UTEP and, ultimately, U.S. higher education. We have already seen strong evidence of the impact of our efforts, and working together, we will surely see that impact grow in the years ahead.