

Fall 2006 Convocation Remarks

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The 2005-2006 year at UTEP was certainly eventful, fast-paced, productive ... even glorious! However, the most apt characterization of the past year may be “teamwork.” Time after time, the UTEP team was called upon to step up to new challenges, and time and again, we showed that more than 4,000 staff and faculty members and 19,000 students can come together as one.

The most recent and salient example of UTEP’s teamwork took place just a month and a half ago when unprecedented rains began falling in the Chihuahuan Desert ... and falling ... and falling. Like most others in the El Paso area, UTEP had to respond quickly to a large number of challenges. Roofs on almost all campus buildings leaked. Campus retaining walls and streets were undercut by excessive rain and flood waters. The arroyo that runs through the campus filled with fast-flowing water, carrying larger and larger rocks with it, and drains were blocked by debris. A rockslide rumbled down the mountain on the east side of the Sun Bowl. Work on a project to reconstruct Sun Bowl Road, which was to be completed before the start of classes on August 21st, was repeatedly disrupted. The rain didn’t stop, nor did the new demands on many of us on the campus.

That was the bad news. The really good news is that members of the UTEP team responded like the champions that they are. Facilities Services and Campus Police worked incredibly long hours, responding to endless emergency situations that developed over the course of at least two weeks, and, nearly two months later, they continue to deal with the aftermath of those storms.

We are grateful for the fine work of Greg McNicol, Cliff Walsh, Juan Guerra, Robert Moss, and the outstanding Facilities Services and Campus Police teams that worked with them. Under very stressful circumstances, including worries about their own homes and families, they were absolutely dedicated to ensuring the safety of everyone on the UTEP campus and protecting our property.

Cindy Villa and Richard Adauto worked to assure that real-time problem solving was effective and well coordinated. The UT System Office of Risk Management, the Chancellor, and the Board of Regents were quick to offer whatever assistance we might need, including emergency funds to repair major damage to campus infrastructure. Faculty members like Karl Putnam in the College of Business showed

enormous patience and good will as roof leaks forced them from their offices.

One of the best examples of UTEP teamwork during the August storms was brought to my attention by Gary Edens, who was responsible for a New Student Orientation program that happened to be scheduled on August 1, the day of the most torrential rains and serious flooding. More than 400 new students were at UTEP for orientation when a decision was made to close the campus at noon so that most of us could head safely home and tend to personal rain-related challenges. Jaime Mendez and the orientation leaders calmly guided the new students through the confusing changes in plans. The Campus Police quickly provided vehicles to transport students between Magoffin Auditorium and their cars in the Schuster parking lots. Mike Spence kept Magoffin open for extended hours to accommodate students who were waiting for rides home. Charlie Gibbens, Kevin Marshburn and the Miner Village staff immediately offered food and housing to those students — several of them from Juárez — who had no way of getting home due to road conditions or disabled vehicles. And Maggy Smith and Richard Aduato provided their support and leadership, as details and decisions were communicated throughout the day and well into the evening. In Gary's words, "Today was another shining example of the amazing staff and students we have the privilege of working with on campus. The teamwork was truly outstanding." Gary, we certainly agree!

UTEP's very special teamwork was also evident under far more pleasant circumstances earlier this year when "Glory Road," the feature film about our NCAA Basketball Championship in 1966, was released by Disney Studios. As soon as we learned of the anticipated date of "Glory Road's" release, the UTEP team mobilized, ideas crystallized, plans developed, and the fun began. We hosted a special "pre-premiere" screening of the film in late November, with the 1966 team members and the actors who portrayed them in attendance.

We had a "Hollywood premiere" party at the Larry K. Durham Center prior to the screening, and our very own walk down the red ... er, orange ... carpet. The next day, we celebrated the unveiling of the 1966 team's special Wheaties box. UTEP fans from across the El Paso community joined us for a giant pep rally in Memorial Gym, the site of the 1966 team's home games. Our new friends from Hollywood — producer Jerry Bruckheimer, director James Gartner, the actors who played the team members, and Josh Lucas, who played Coach Haskins — joined all of us and the 1966 players for the festivities. We then moved outside to Baltimore Street, which we renamed "Glory Road."

Planning and guiding the implementation of all of these activities was a creative and energetic UTEP team coordinated by Liz Thurmond, Bob Stull, Mack Rhoades, Darren D'Attilio, Estrella Escobar and Richard Aduato, and staff from Facilities Services, University Communications, University Relations, Special Events, Campus Police, Union Services, Intercollegiate Athletics, Don Haskins Center, the Union and Bookstore, Recreational Sports, as well as Paydirt Pete and the UTEP Cheerleaders. Thanks to the commitment and hard work of this large and broad-based team, all of

us on the campus and everyone in the community had an opportunity to join in celebrating this extraordinarily special occasion.

The movie also offered us huge national visibility, and a rare opportunity to communicate UTEP's message to audiences that we would never otherwise have been able to reach. Our first priority was to ensure that everyone who saw "Glory Road" — particularly those born after 1966! — understood that the Texas Western College depicted in the movie is today the University of Texas at El Paso. Second, we wanted to communicate our pride in being the institution that successfully changed the face of college athletics in 1966 by starting five black players for the first time in the history of the NCAA championship game. And, finally, we wanted to proclaim proudly that today UTEP is changing the face of higher education by creating opportunities for Hispanics, who have been underrepresented on U.S. university campuses. Thanks to "Glory Road" and our success in leveraging the opportunities it offered, UTEP's presence on the national radar screen has definitely grown larger during the past year.

UTEP's success in achieving its important mission to help change the face of U.S. higher education is both an exciting opportunity for recognition and a major leadership responsibility. There are few U.S. universities — probably none! — that are as well-positioned to demonstrate that the goals of access and excellence, which many in higher education have viewed as incompatible, can be achieved simultaneously and successfully.

During the past year, this UTEP commitment to access and excellence was once again subjected to external review in conjunction with our re-accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). The success of our preparation for this SACS review is a third shining example of UTEP teamwork in action.

The first step in the SACS re-accreditation process was to complete a self-study report to assess institutional compliance with 80 standards. The preparation of this report engaged faculty, staff and students in every area of the campus during more than a year. Leadership of this aspect of re-accreditation was ably provided by Cindy Villa, Steve Riter and Pablo Arenaz. In addition, we acknowledge the fine work of David Novick and Chuy Mena, who developed and populated hundreds of Web sites and links; Elizabeth Flores and Sandra Hurley, who compiled the report itself; and Sandy Vasquez, who ensured that faculty credentials and appropriate supporting materials were all in place for this review and where they will be secure until — hold your breath! — 2016, when SACS again pays us a visit! Most importantly, we want to express appreciation to the hundreds of individuals in departments across the campus who generously invested their time and expertise in this mammoth undertaking. We couldn't have asked for a better team!

Meanwhile, many other members of the UTEP team were working on the second major requirement for SACS accreditation: the development of the Quality

Enhancement Plan, or QEP. Rather than view the QEP as simply another accreditation requirement, UTEP saw it as an opportunity to continue developing our vertically integrated strategy to enhance student success. Building on our pre-K–16 partnerships, first-year experience, and student engagement programs, we turned our attention toward the quality and efficiency of students’ experience between the end of their first year of UTEP enrollment and degree completion, or what we now refer to as the “middle years.”

All of us recognize that the undergraduate experience for most students at UTEP and other public universities in urban settings is very different from that on more affluent and traditional college campuses with which we may be compared. Although national rankings continue to ignore such differences, UTEP has received considerable acclaim for our pioneering work in tackling the cutting-edge issues in U.S. higher education. For example, our sustained Collaborative for Academic Excellence with El Paso County school districts and the Community College continues to be the gold standard for pre-K–16 partnerships nationally. The Entering Student Program that UTEP created to enable our majority first-generation student population to build a solid foundation for a successful undergraduate experience is widely cited as a national leader. In each instance, a broad-based team of UTEP faculty and staff members committed substantial time and expertise to understanding the fundamental issues, and designing programs that respond to them. And by seeking to address these UTEP challenges, we are contributing significantly to the State’s “Closing the Gaps” goals and serving as a model for other institutions that are increasingly expected to serve what’s now called the “new demographic” on U.S. university campuses.

With our new “Student Success in the Middle Years” initiative, we are taking on another major state and national challenge: the low degree completion and extended time-to-degree rates of students on campuses like UTEP. Our data reveal that many UTEP students succeed eventually, but they often spend a very long time achieving their graduation goals. The challenge for us is to understand better those factors that accelerate progress toward degree completion and those that impede it. The goal of our Student Success initiative is to ensure that more UTEP students complete their undergraduate degrees, and that their progress toward degree completion is steady and efficient.

The key to this initiative was, once again, broad-based teamwork. Greg Rocha, President of the UTEP Faculty Senate, joined me in charging two work groups with responsibility for addressing what the UTEP Centennial Commission and related Task Forces had identified as core issues: curricular reform and renewal, and academic and career advising. Special recognition for this work goes to Provost Richard Jarvis for his overall leadership; Steve Aley and Vince Burke, who chaired the work groups; and to members of the QEP Steering Committee: Pablo Arenaz, Elizabeth Flores, Beverley Chapman, Rebecca Duran, Greg Elliott, Art Gloria, Richard Padilla, Kristin Sanchez, Maggy Smith, Sandra Hurley and Roy Mathew. Everyone worked together, worked hard, and achieved a highly positive immediate outcome: the SACS Visiting Committee responded enthusiastically to UTEP’s

Student Success plan, referring to it as “ambitious” and “exciting.” More importantly, we are confident that over the longer term, UTEP students will be the ultimate beneficiaries of the good work that is now being done to continue to develop and implement this plan. Achieving that outcome for our students will also, surely and once again, thrust UTEP into the national spotlight ... just where we belong!

The UTEP teamwork that I have just described to you occurred under special circumstances — a natural disaster, an extraordinary opportunity created by a Hollywood movie, and a once-in-10-years re-accreditation process. But similar teamwork occurs every day across the campus, as members of the UTEP team go about their daily business.

Everyday teamwork at UTEP derives from the clear vision and mission to which we have all made a commitment. We are here to serve as a resource to this region, creating educational opportunities for those who come to us with their dreams and aspirations, and fostering their success. Recently, we have adopted “validation” as an underlying theme of our Student Success initiative. Inspired by the work of Laura Rendon and our own extensive experience, we understand that for first-generation students such as those served by UTEP, engagement is an important, but not sufficient, condition for success. These students’ success also appears to be heavily contingent on our individual and collective validation of them and their potential to succeed. Such validation comes in many different forms — our time, our advice, a friendly greeting — and it comes from many different sources on the campus. We are all important players, no matter where we work or what our professional responsibilities may be. Students’ success in achieving their highest aspirations is UTEP’s No. 1 priority ... and all of us are members of the UTEP Student Success team!

Student success starts with access, and recognizing that more than 80 percent of UTEP’s students reside in El Paso County, the university has worked closely with colleagues at EPCC and in school districts throughout this region to raise the level of their educational aspirations and their academic preparation. During the past year, El Paso Collaborative partners organized a college-readiness initiative to develop innovative senior-year math assessment and college placement strategies in area high schools and redesign the first-semester college math experience. Thanks to Helmut Knaust, Art Duval and Nancy Marcus, and their colleagues in Math; Susana Navarro, Alicia Parra and Lucy Michal with the Collaborative; and Maggy Smith and David Harvey in the University College for their contributions to this highly promising math-alignment effort.

Creating access to UTEP also means communicating often and effectively to young people in this region our desire to serve as their partners in fulfilling their educational dreams. From programs that bring elementary, middle and high school students to our campus, to advising potential transfer students at EPCC or Fort Bliss, to disseminating UTEP information at community events on both sides of the border, UTEP’s presence in this region is ubiquitous. We greatly appreciate the efforts of the

recruitment, admissions and financial aid teams in the University College; outreach programs such as Upward Bound, GEAR-UP Educational Talent Search, HEP, Student Support Services and CAMP; students and faculty involved in the Center for Civic Engagement; the faculty who participate in our field-based teacher preparation programs and Teachers for a New Era; and the hundreds of UTEP faculty and staff who regularly dedicate their time, energy and talents to building smooth pathways to UTEP from across this region.

Access also involves understanding and accommodating the needs of students whose educational aspirations are often accompanied by personal and employment obligations that shape how — and how quickly — they can achieve them. Many UTEP faculty and staff members strive to identify those special needs and respond creatively to them.

One such program that was launched during the past year is the bachelor's degree in Multidisciplinary Studies. This more flexible degree program attracts students who seek a more general undergraduate experience, and it is especially appealing to individuals who, for a variety of reasons, were not able to finish their bachelor's degrees on their initial timetables, but who have long dreamed of returning to UTEP to close that loop. More than 300 students have already enrolled, and the first B.M.S. degrees were awarded in August to 34 graduates, who ranged in age from 22 to 60. Their broad range of backgrounds and experiences, and their joy and excitement at being able to complete a degree that met their needs, validated the fine efforts of Maggy Smith, Howard Daudistel, Diana Guerrero, and others who worked with them to expedite the implementation of this important new degree program.

Improved accessibility for students whose employment obligations prevent them from participating in traditionally scheduled classes has been achieved through instructional delivery alternatives offered by a number of UTEP programs.

- An accelerated instructional format was developed by faculty in Criminal Justice, in a joint venture with Professional and Continuing Education, to respond to the needs of their more than 700 majors, many of whom are already employed in law enforcement and related agencies in this region.
- The Institute for Policy and Economic Development created an innovative master's degree in Leadership Studies taught at Fort Bliss.
- The Department of Communication's Sam Donaldson Center responded creatively to a proposed partnership with El Diario newspaper to offer its staff a customized master's degree program in border journalism.

Access alone is obviously insufficient, however. Once students entrust us with their educational dreams, we have a responsibility to provide them with a high-quality experience that equips them with the professional and interpersonal skills required to compete successfully with peers from other universities, whether from across the country or across the world. There are many good examples of this commitment to

excellence at the undergraduate level.

- In the College of Business, Dean Bob Nachtmann has moved decisively to plan and implement a broad-based set of professional-development activities that will parallel students' progress from freshman through senior years, starting with a customized and expanded new-student orientation.
- The Medical Professions Institute, under the leadership of new Director Donna Ekal, created opportunities for more than 100 UTEP students to participate in preparatory and pre-admission programs at professional schools in 10 states and three countries, including six of the eight medical schools in Texas.

Technology and information resources also contribute significantly to the quality of degree programs and the competitiveness of UTEP graduates. Faculty and staff responsible for academic programs work to ensure that such resources remain up-to-date and readily available to students in settings across the campus.

- In the Art Department, a new Digital Arts Studio gives students in the rapidly growing graphic design program the opportunity to explore the latest technology applications.
- The University Library has taken steps to play a more active role in our Student Success initiative by converting a large section of the ground floor into a Collaborative Learning Center, providing easy access to a broad range of information technologies and extended hours of operation. Students from all UTEP colleges will find their information resources readily available in this large and welcoming facility. And, in a move that is certain to startle some traditionalists, the library now houses a café in the entry atrium, where patrons can enjoy a variety of food and drink selections. Special thanks to Interim Director Robert Stakes for leading the Library in bold new directions.

Acquainting UTEP students with other people and places and giving them opportunities to test their level of preparation against external metrics are also critical to our Student Success agenda. Such experiences not only expose students to new contexts and ideas, but also build their self-confidence. Thanks to the generous Les and Harriet Dodson Endowment and other sources of grant and gift support, our students represent UTEP in a variety of settings, and whenever they do, they are sure to represent us well!

- Junior Music major Frank Gonzalez went to Wisconsin and won first place in a competition among 22 of the best percussion mallet players in the U.S., scoring 97.5 of a possible 100 points, one of the highest scores in the event's history.
- Danielle Escontrias, Political Science major, was one of only 80 university juniors in the U.S. to be named a Truman Scholar, an award that recognizes high-achieving students who are committed to public service and carries with it a \$30,000 prize. This is the second year in succession that a UTEP student

has received this major national honor.

UTEP's growing research agenda also plays a critical role in fostering a climate of academic excellence on the campus. Vice President for Research Roberto Osegueda is leading an effort to strengthen research infrastructure, streamline policies and procedures, and provide greater support to faculty and staff members in both pre- and post-award processes. Work is also underway to expand technology-transfer activity and strengthen our research capacity in border security and defense systems, thereby enabling UTEP to serve as an even more valuable asset in this region's efforts to move toward higher-end economic development. We recently created a new Vice President for Strategic Initiatives position, and are very pleased to have recruited to it an eminently qualified individual, Gen. Jose Riojas, former commander of Joint Task Force North.

During the past year, 223 grants were awarded to UTEP faculty and staff for a total of more than \$42 million in new research funding, a 9 percent increase over the previous year. Annual research expenditures grew 8 percent to \$29 million. And as a promising sign of continued growth in research funding, more than 400 proposals were submitted this past year with a total value of \$199 million, a 44 percent increase over the year before.

Special efforts are being made to encourage greater interdisciplinary research collaboration, which is increasingly required to address the complexity of today's research problems. Recent grants reflect our success in building these interdisciplinary research teams.

- A \$4 million grant from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) brings together a team led by Nick Pingitore in Geology and including Maria Amaya in Nursing, Wen Whai Li in Civil Engineering, Homer Nazaran in Electrical and Computer Engineering, and Bob Currey in the Center for Environmental Resource Management, as well as colleagues at the University of New Mexico Health Science Center, to study air quality and its possible links to the incidence of asthma in this U.S.-Mexico border region.
- Researchers affiliated with UTEP's Center for Transportation Infrastructure Systems, led by Soheil Nazarian and including faculty from Civil Engineering, Computer Science, Electrical and Computer Engineering, and Geology, have received 17 awards totaling more than \$1.7 million to study such issues as transportation and traffic modeling, intelligent transportation systems, binational models for mass evacuation, pavement performance and transportation infrastructure management.

Individual grants also continue to be an important dimension of UTEP's overall research performance. The competitiveness of new faculty members such as Rob Kirken, Tim Miller and Craig Tweedie in Biology; Michela Taufer in Computer Science; Christian Meissner in Psychology; and Judy Reinhartz in Education

underscores the important role that strategic recruitment plays in UTEP's ongoing quest to achieve the research funding goals articulated in the Washington Advisory Group (WAG) report.

Perhaps the fastest-growing area of research activity at UTEP is health related. Faculty across the campus are conducting funded research and outreach focusing on health issues on the U.S.-Mexico border.

- In the School of Nursing and the College of Health Sciences, Martha Cruz has an NIH grant to study the prevention of diabetes in obese Hispanic adolescents; Leslie Schulz is working with Hector Balcazar of the UT Houston School of Public Health in El Paso on a project to ascertain the effect of promotoras on clinical outcomes for chronic diseases; and Meg Weigel is funded by NIH to study the impact of nutritional supplementation on Hispanic patients.
- Jon Amastae, in the Center for Inter-American and Border Studies, and Leticia Fernandez in Sociology are collaborating on two studies, one on oral-contraceptive use on the border and the second on border identities and access to health care.

Other recent grants have focused on UTEP's role in raising the level of educational aspirations and preparation of the next generation of UTEP students who are currently enrolled in schools in El Paso County.

- A team led by Kate Miller in Geology, and including Jerry Johnson in Biology and Eric Hagedorn in Physics, received a \$1.7 million grant from the NSF to work with the El Paso ISD to transform the cognitive level of learning in middle school classrooms and engage student interest in science and engineering careers.
- The Dean's Office in the College of Education took the lead in securing three major grants from the U.S. Department of Education to increase the number and quality of pre-college teachers in such high-demand areas as mathematics, science, and bilingual and special education.

Still other grants focus on creating new opportunities for UTEP students.

- The College of Science received one of only 50 grants awarded to leading research universities by the Howard Hughes Medical Institute to build bold and effective new instructional and research programs in biosciences. Thanks to Steve Aley, Rob Kirken, Eppie Rael, Kristin Gosselink and Dean Michael Eastman for their commitment to provide UTEP students with cutting-edge educational opportunities in the rapidly changing and increasingly interdisciplinary biosciences.
- Bob Anders and Karen Lyon collaborated on a successful proposal to the Health Resources and Services Administration to support an accelerated Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing.

- Ann Gates in Computer Science led the formation of an alliance of universities that secured \$2 million from NSF to increase the number of Hispanic faculty members in computer science and promote competitive education and research programs at Hispanic-serving institutions like UTEP.

UTEP faculty and staff members are also receiving more state, national and international honors.

- Aaron Velasco (Geology) was elected president of SACNAS, a national organization committed to the advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in science.
- Robert Bledsoe (English), Sandra McGee-Deutsch (History), and Howard Campbell (Anthropology) received National Endowment for the Humanities research support.
- Josie Tinajero (Education) was named by Hispanic Business magazine as one of its 20 Elite Women of 2006.
- Mimi Gladstein (English) was elected president of the John Steinbeck Society of America.
- Mike Acosta (Engineering) was elected national president of Mexican Americans in Engineering and Science.

National recognition for quality has come to a number of UTEP programs as well. For the second year in succession, Hispanic Business magazine ranked UTEP's graduate engineering program No. 1 among all programs in the U.S. for Hispanics. The Model Institution for Excellence program, under Ben Flores' able direction, received both a Star Award from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and a national Excelencia in Education Award for its successful efforts to increase the number of minority students who graduate with degrees in science, technology, engineering and math.

Graduate-program development continues to be a priority at UTEP, and several major milestones were celebrated during the past year. We granted a total of 32 doctoral degrees, the largest number ever, including the first three Ph.D.s in History. Several new graduate programs are currently in the approval pipeline, including a Ph.D. in Chemistry, which is awaiting action by the Coordinating Board; an innovative master's degree in Forensic Science in collaboration with the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez; and doctoral programs in Computational Science and in Teaching, Learning and Culture.

At the undergraduate level, UTEP granted 2,083 degrees during the past year, the largest number ever. This is very good news for the graduates themselves, whose lives will be more productive and satisfying as a result of their educational preparation. It's also good news for the Paso del Norte region, whose economy and quality of life will benefit from the presence of an increasing number of residents with university degrees, and for the state of Texas, as UTEP contributes significantly to its "Closing the Gaps" goals.

And these graduation trends are likely to continue, because of the Student Success initiatives that are being implemented and because UTEP enrollment also continues to grow. Total enrollment of 19,842 this fall represents an all-time high for UTEP and an increase of 3 percent over last year. Graduate enrollment exceeded 3,000 students this year; 397 of them are enrolled in doctoral programs, a 6.5 percent increase over last year.

Enrollment growth is a strong sign of progress, especially in a historically under-served region such as this. We are particularly pleased that recent tuition increases have not adversely affected students' decisions to pursue their educational aspirations at UTEP. As the Texas Legislature's support for higher education has declined, all public universities have had no other option but to raise tuition to be able to continue offering quality educational opportunities to a fast-growing population. Tuition increase proposals at UTEP, where students are far less affluent than their peers on other campuses in the state, require careful deliberation and close consultation with students.

During the past year, the tuition review process was again ably led by Student Affairs Vice President Richard Padilla and drew on perspectives from across the campus. A major focus during this round of deliberations was how best to ensure that students had access to, and were well aware of, all possible sources of financial support, and several new plans were devised to meet specific student needs. The "UTEP Promise" plan covers all tuition and fees for entering UTEP students whose annual family incomes are \$25,000 or less. The "UTEP Success" program packages financial assistance (grants, work study jobs, loans and scholarships) to meet students' specific needs. The "Guaranteed Tuition Plan" offers entering freshmen an opportunity to lock in the cost of their tuition and fees for four years. Student response to these options has been very positive, and creative work continues to be done by staff in financial aid and scholarships to ensure that a UTEP education remains affordable for all students, whatever their socioeconomic circumstances.

Accommodating enrollment growth also places on us major new resource demands. The most critical resources on this or any other university campus are the faculty and staff whose expertise and experience help assure the quality of all we do. During the past year we were once again able to attract to UTEP a very talented group of new faculty and staff members who have come from across the U.S. and other parts of the world. We welcome these new players on the UTEP team, and thank them for the new energy and ideas that they will share with us, and, especially, for their trust in UTEP and our special mission. They join a large group of experienced faculty and staff members whose deep understanding of our students and strong commitment to our mission have enabled us to make significant progress in building a new higher-education model of access and excellence.

Facilities are another critical resource, and during the past year, UTEP celebrated the opening of several new buildings, while construction continued on others. The new

Academic Services Building, which successfully completed its first full year of operation, has convincingly demonstrated that the integrated student support functions it houses and its convenient location at the perimeter of the campus are a winning combination for students.

The Engineering Building addition came closer to completion last year, thanks to a generous gift from engineering alumnus Steve Palko. Progress continued on the new Bioscience Research Building, which we expect to complete later this academic year. The UTEP Police Department moved into its handsome new headquarters in the Facilities Services Complex, and Phase II of the Kelly Hall renovation was completed.

Perhaps the most exciting news on the campus-facilities front came this summer with approval of Tuition Revenue Bonds from the Texas Legislature to construct a new science/engineering teaching and research laboratory building, and Permanent University Fund bonds from the UT System to reconfigure and renovate the science and engineering core facilities at the heart of the UTEP campus. This combined \$124 million investment represents the largest construction and renovation initiative in UTEP's history, and a singular opportunity to transform science and engineering facilities on the campus for many years to come.

Keeping pace with enrollment and research growth also requires technology upgrades. Under Ken Pierce's leadership, the Information Technology team has been proactive in seeking to ensure that we have the tools we need to do our work efficiently. More than 1,000 IP phones have already been installed across the campus in a remarkably seamless process, and the remainder will be deployed by the end of this fall semester. IT opened the High Performance Computing Center, with partners such as Pat Teller, Michela Taufer, Raed Aldouri and a number of faculty colleagues, to manage efficiently these critical resources and establish UTEP as a leader in high-performance computing and its application in a variety of disciplines.

The beginning of the fall semester always offers a resounding reminder that parking is probably the toughest challenge of UTEP's growth. The long-term solution is to construct parking garages that accommodate more vehicles on a given surface footprint, and the first of these is under construction on the corner of University and Sun Bowl. When finished, this 1,700-space garage will triple the number of vehicles to be accommodated on that site. Meanwhile, Cindy Villa and the newly established Parking and Transportation Department focused attention on other transportation strategies as well, including expansion of the Miner Metro shuttle service and, in collaboration with the City, a new Sun Metro Eastside Express bus that travels from the terminal at Cielo Vista Mall to UTEP and back, from 6:45 a.m. to 9:45 p.m. daily, for a modest 50-cent fare ... at the current price of fuel, that sounds like a real bargain! Response has been positive, and we hope that this will serve to jump-start greater acceptance of public-transportation access to UTEP.

Some of our campus traffic is the result of success in reaching out to the surrounding

region and beyond, sponsoring conferences, lectures, continuing education, athletic and entertainment events, and other activities that bring visitors to our campus. We recognize our responsibility to serve as a regional resource for cultural, arts, educational and entertainment programming, and we seek to reach a broad range of audiences through a variety of activities sponsored by many different UTEP departments.

Several major conferences were held on the campus during the past year.

- The third annual Border Security Conference, hosted by UTEP in cooperation with Congressman Silvestre Reyes, was the largest ever, attracting many high-profile guests, including U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Tony Garza, and Mexican Ambassador to the U.S. Carlos de Icaza.
- Political Science faculty took the lead in bringing together partner institutions NMSU, UACJ and COLEF to host the Lineae Terrarum International Borders Conference that drew an estimated 600 participants from across the globe. Special thanks to Tony Kruszewski for his generous support of this major conference.

Countless general-interest presentations and specialized seminars were offered during the past year, including a Mexico Today lecture series co-sponsored with the Mexican Consulate in El Paso that focused on issues associated with the approaching Mexican presidential election, and a very special dialogue with native El Pasoan and recently retired Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor.

On the entertainment front, more than 500,000 patrons attended more than 800 special events at UTEP during the past year, ranging from Bob Dylan and Shakira to Monster Trucks. The Don Haskins Center was recognized again in 2005 as the No. 1 venue of its size in Texas, and a capacity crowd is expected in the Sun Bowl next month for the Rolling Stones' concert.

Visitors to the UTEP campus will soon have the option of spending even more time with us, as the new Hilton Garden hotel prepares to open. It is expected to be a major asset to UTEP, and to hospitals, businesses and individuals in our neighborhood. Constructed in UTEP's signature Bhutanese style, the hotel also creates an inviting new east entrance to the campus. Thanks to UTEP alumnus Russ Vandenburg for his commitment to this important new campus and neighborhood asset.

All of these events and amenities contribute to what is known as "campus climate," which was assessed last year by a special Centennial Commission Task Force, whose recommendations are now being reviewed and implemented. High on UTEP students' priority list has been expansion of the recreational facilities at the north end of the campus, and last year, they decisively supported a referendum to increase their recreation fee to support construction of a \$32 million addition to them. The final step before construction can actually begin will be to secure legislative authorization for this fee increase next spring.

Athletic programs contribute significantly to campus and community climate, and UTEP Athletics had another great year under the leadership of Bob Stull. UTEP athletic teams were winners last year, not only on the playing field but in the classroom. For the second year in succession, the Miner football team was ranked in the top 25 nationally and played in a post-season bowl game. The men's basketball team posted 21 victories and made its third straight post-season tournament appearance. The men's track and field team captured Conference USA indoor and outdoor titles, and was ranked second in the nation during the season. The women's soccer team won 20 games and, for the first time in its history, went to the NCAA Tournament ... and defeated UT Austin in the first-round game. How sweet that was!

Loyal fans helped UTEP set numerous attendance records, including the highest-ever total season home attendance in football of 287,394 and average home attendance of 47,899, ranking us first in C-USA. The transition from the WAC to Conference USA was seamless, thanks to the goodwill of the Conference staff and the good work of UTEP athletic administration and coaches.

On the academic side, 19 Miner student-athletes were awarded the Conference USA Commissioner's Academic Medal for earning a GPA of 3.75 or higher, and 99 were appointed to the Honor Roll for GPAs of 3.0 or above. Thanks to all the coaches and to Heather Smith and the staff of the Miner Athletic Academic Center for their commitment to the academic success of student-athletes.

Continued progress was made in improving athletic facilities. The splendid new Helen of Troy Women's Softball Complex was inaugurated, and plans for a new basketball practice facility were announced, thanks to the generosity of donors Paul Foster and Jeff and Sharon Stevens. The Sun Bowl Stadium got a number of attractive facelifts, including a new Bhutanese façade on the west side, with support from the Associated General Contractors.

The athletic year came to a close with the excitement of hiring a new basketball coach, as Doc Sadler succumbed to the charms of Nebraska. Thanks to the efficient efforts of Bob Stull, Brian Wickstrom and Richard Aduato, UTEP was able to recruit in record time a highly promising new coach, Tony Barbee, who is off to a great start in continuing the proud men's basketball tradition at UTEP.

Looking forward, the new academic year holds immense promise. We expect enrollment to continue to grow in all colleges and at all levels, as more young people in this region opt for higher education ... and opt to become UTEP Miners. New degree programs, especially at the graduate level, will be authorized and implemented. Several new and newly configured facilities will be completed, including the new Bioscience Research Building, the first half of the new parking garage, and the conversion of the former academic services building into an Advising and Testing Center.

Continuing our quest to demonstrate that access and excellence are not only compatible but highly desirable goals in a setting such as UTEP's, we will continue our efforts to broaden access to higher education in this historically underserved region, and continue to be one of the major contributors to the State's "Closing the Gaps" participation goal.

Despite declining state support and rising tuition, our Student Success initiative will help students make steady and timely progress toward completion of their UTEP degrees, and increase UTEP's contribution to the State's "Closing the Gaps" success goal. This too will be a team effort, with leadership provided by the Provost's Office and the involvement of faculty, staff and students from across the campus.

We will continue to implement the valuable recommendations contained in "UTEP 2014," the report of UTEP's Centennial Commission, which was released last year, and draw on them as we update our strategic planning document. Steve Riter and Roy Mathew are leading this team effort, which will be closely aligned with the UT System's recently published Strategic Plan.

One of the most energizing activities during the coming year will be planning the expenditure of the \$124 million in capital funds provided by the Legislature and UT System. This unprecedented investment in UTEP facilities presents us with both an exciting opportunity and a huge responsibility. After many years of resource limitations to support facilities upgrades in science and engineering, we now have the funding to undertake a complete transformation of core research and instructional laboratory facilities in the heart of the UTEP campus. This will be another broad-based team effort, with participation by faculty, students and staff in Engineering, Science, and interdisciplinary research centers, and led by Roberto Osegueda, Mike Eastman and Steve Stafford. We are all going to have to think bigger and bolder as we design a facilities transformation that will serve generations of students and faculty for decades to come. They are counting on us to get it right!

The coming year will also find us working hard to increase research productivity and funding as we continue to pursue the stretch goals included in the WAG Report. Under Roberto Osegueda's leadership, a reorganized Office of Sponsored Projects will guide strategic research planning and provide enhanced support and services.

In Development, planning will begin for a major fundraising campaign in conjunction with our approaching centennial celebration in 2014. We are delighted to welcome back to UTEP alumnus Robert Nava, who will lead these planning efforts and the Centennial Campaign itself. We will once again turn for participation and support from our many alumni and friends in this region and elsewhere.

Finally, we are going to focus considerable attention on UTEP's role in regional economic development. This is the next strategic step in achieving our vision of UTEP as a catalyst for raising the educational level of this entire region. We recognize that the impact of our successful efforts to raise educational aspirations and

achievement in the El Paso area cannot be transformative unless we also create new opportunities for our graduates to pursue locally the careers for which we have prepared them. We know that not all UTEP graduates want to remain in El Paso after completing their degrees and that others, including health care professionals and teachers, already have competitive career options in this region. However, many other alumni, especially in engineering and science, have far too few options to pursue their careers here. We hope to change their career horizons in El Paso by serving as an economic-development asset and partner to those who are working to attract major corporations to this region. This is important not only to graduates who may prefer to remain here, but also to all of us whose quality of life will improve as the number of educated El Pasoans increases.

We have lots of exciting work to do and many major opportunities before us, and we are increasingly comfortable in taking big, bold steps to achieve our ambitious goals. UTEP is a different university today than it was 20 years ago, because we have not hesitated to set high expectations for ourselves and never faltered in working as hard as we can to meet them.

We thank the faculty and staff members whose professional commitment to UTEP validates this institution and the students we serve. Reciprocally, we thank UTEP alumni and currently enrolled students who, through their many accomplishments, so strongly validate the commitment that we have made to them. We're an unbeatable UTEP team!