

DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

**THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN
STATE OF THE UNIVERSITY ADDRESS**

Gregory L. Fenves, President

Iden Payne Theatre

September 13, 2016

Thank you, Jody, for your generous introduction. It has been an honor to work with you and the Faculty Council during my first year as president. We have already achieved much together. The Council, and the 3,000 faculty you represent, are at the center of our shared aspirations for The University of Texas at Austin.

I am pleased to be joined by leaders with whom I serve the university: the chancellor, Bill McRaven, the chairman of The University of Texas System Board of Regents, Paul Foster, and our outstanding deans and vice presidents.

In recent months the university has welcomed three new deans and five new vice presidents who bring a diverse range of experience and expertise as we usher in a new era at UT.

I am glad to see so many staff members, and thank you for being here. This wonderful event today would not have happened without you — nor would any of our other accomplishments. Your dedication day and night makes this vast campus dynamic, beautiful, and safe. I appreciate all that you do.

I welcome our students. Each of you brings unique talents to UT, along with commitment, ambition, and curiosity inside and outside the classroom.

Many Longhorn alumni are here. From traveling across Texas, the nation, and world, I have seen firsthand the love and the loyalty the alumni have for the Forty Acres. Texas Exes are fervent advocates and ambassadors for this great university.

As a community, we have a commitment to respect one another and value different ideas.

I am proud — of our students, faculty, and staff — as we have met challenges by listening to, and learning from, one another. Even on “campus carry,” where many passionately disagree we have had an open and constructive debate where all voices were heard. I thank you for that.

As we begin the new year, there is tremendous optimism, especially for Longhorn Football. I am very proud of our Coach Charlie Strong, his staff, and the student-athletes, not only because of their huge wins over UTEP and Notre Dame, but because Longhorn football is dedicated to winning the right way. And I look forward to returning to Cal this weekend.

One hundred forty years ago, the people of Texas laid out their will in the state Constitution that this be a university of “the first class.” We are the flagship university of Texas, with a proud history. UT’s alumni, research, scholarship, and service have contributed to enormous progress: From the shale revolution that redefined energy production, to the technology innovations that launched the high tech industry in Texas, to the cultural treasures of our priceless collections that attract scholars from around the world — our university and our people have served as the intellectual center of Texas.

UT’s impact on Texas is unparalleled. We receive the most federal research funds of any Texas university. In 2016 we will graduate more than 10,000 students with bachelor’s degrees, the largest number in university history. This August, we welcomed over 8,700 freshmen, into the class of 2020 — another record.

The University of Texas has no match within our state, and few peers beyond our borders. Just look at some of our recent achievements:

- UT researchers have engineered an FDA-approved drug to treat and prevent anthrax.
- NSF granted \$30 million to develop Stampede 2, keeping the Texas Advanced Computing Center at the forefront of scientific and engineering computation.
- A Liberal Arts professor's scholarship led to an important exhibit chronicling racial tensions along the U.S.-Mexico border a century ago that provides vital lessons for us today.
- UT researchers helped solve the "cold case of Lucy" — shedding new light on human evolution, concluding Lucy likely spent time in a tree, and died falling from its branches.
- And just this past Sunday the Dell Medical School bestowed white coats on the 50 medical students in the inaugural class of the first new medical school at an AAU university in nearly 50 years.

These are just a few examples of our relentless pursuit of possibility as we unleash the enormous potential of students and scholars to change the world.

But even the best can do better. Governor Greg Abbott, a tremendous supporter of higher education who will be recognized next month as a Distinguished Alumnus of The University of Texas, said about our university, "Great is not good enough."

My purpose today is to chart a path where The University of Texas sets the standard among public universities in education and research. To reach that goal, we must prepare students to be successful leaders, conduct research with unprecedented global impact and influence, transform the health-care system, and nurture a campus culture where every voice is heard and valued.

America is a nation that believes opportunity is the right of everyone, regardless of income, race, ethnicity, or origin. High-quality education is the gateway to opportunity, and our unique role at The University of Texas is to educate the leaders of tomorrow.

A UT education allows the sons and daughters of sales clerks and factory workers to one day own the store, run the plant, build the next generation of businesses, or lead in a profession or the arts.

For students to obtain such an outstanding education, it must be accessible and affordable, no matter their personal and family circumstances. College affordability is a shared responsibility of the university and the state.

We know a degree from The University of Texas is one of the best values in America in terms of cost, quality and benefit. We are dedicated to keeping UT affordable and accessible. UT students from families with annual income under \$60,000 — which is more than the median income in Texas — typically pay no tuition after grants and scholarships.

Yet many other families struggle to pay tuition and often do not qualify for state or federal grants. So I am announcing today an additional commitment of \$15 million in financial aid over the next two years for students from middle-income families. For families with annual incomes starting at \$60,000, their students will be eligible for these new grants beginning in the fall of 2017.

I look forward to working with the Texas Legislature to continue to provide financial aid for students for whom a college education would otherwise be out of reach.

Once students arrive on the Forty Acres, we want them to succeed. Thanks to the dedication of many here today, UT is a national leader in new strategies and tools to help all students not only graduate but graduate on time.

At UT, more students from every socio-economic category are staying in school than ever before. In a state where half the students who enter college do not graduate, we can be proud that at UT more than 80 percent of our students finish their degrees here.

For the first time, more than 60 percent of the class of 2016 graduated in four years, a giant step toward 70 percent of students earning bachelor's degrees in four years.

We not only want more students to graduate on time, but to participate in innovative degree programs that reflect both the timeless nature of knowledge and the fast-changing pace of the world.

By 2021, we want the majority of our students to be able to enroll in degree programs that incorporate the most effective approaches to classroom instruction, leverage the potential of technology to enhance learning, and focus more time and resources on the unique learning experiences that distinguish undergraduate education at a leading research university.

In January, we launched Project 2021, led by psychology professor Jamie Pennebaker, to support faculty, departments, and colleges in developing bold curriculum redesigns.

As just one example, the Government department and LBJ School have already developed a course in the Innovations for Peace and Development lab where students have their credits broken into an hour each for classroom learning, research, and internships. Students in this course have won prestigious research awards, presented at international conferences, conducted fieldwork in Africa and Asia, and taken internships or begun careers in the White House Council of Economic Advisors and the Federal Reserve Bank.

Our commitment to education, which begins even before our students enroll, must continue as they prepare to enter the workforce. So I am announcing today that we will expand our career services for new graduates and recent alumni. The goal will be to connect UT students with internship, job, and alumni networking opportunities that both develop and benefit from their unique talents.

The strength of the university depends on our excellent and diverse faculty. UT has distinguished and dedicated faculty who inspire students, who conduct groundbreaking research and scholarship, and who spur innovation.

In my inaugural speech last year, I said the toughest questions facing humanity and the world cross the boundaries of existing knowledge, and that we must take an interdisciplinary approach to address them. Achieving excellence in the disciplines means we must collaborate across disciplines. Breakthroughs happen when we break down silos of knowledge. And we are doing that now.

We are on the cusp of unleashing our potential in many fields — developing new sciences; advancing our understanding of societies and culture; gaining new insights from history, literature, and the arts; and nurturing thoughtful, ethical leaders.

The Dell Medical School is an excellent example, in many ways, of crossing disciplines. For example, the Texas Health Catalyst, launched last year, draws support from the schools of Medicine, Engineering, Natural Sciences, Pharmacy, and the Office of Technology Commercialization to accelerate translational research for value-based health products.

We are also crossing disciplines through the creation of what we are calling “pop-up” collaborations. These bring together experts in different fields to address specific challenges in a short time-frame. We have already established pop-up collaborations to better understand individual and population variations in biology, medicine, and society; to study the impact of discrimination in creating health disparities; and to build a digital humanities ecosystem for research in the liberal arts.

To move us forward, Provost Maurie McInnis and Vice President for Research Dan Jaffe are creating a new initiative for faculty and researchers to collaborate on answers to the tough questions. We are calling it Bridging

Barriers. This interdisciplinary effort, driven by our faculty and research scientists, will tackle some of the hardest questions in the natural and human-made worlds and the world of ideas.

UT's scholars will develop areas of study through proposals, in-depth interviews, and small-group discussions to generate ideas. To support Bridging Barriers and advance our research mission, we will make substantial investments by adding 50 new faculty positions over the next several years.

As we break down barriers to advance knowledge, we know the spirit of discovery recognizes no borders. As the flagship university of Texas, we must have a global vision.

This year I led a delegation of more than 40 — including faculty, researchers, and deans — to a familiar place from my youth, Mexico City. In the 1960s, I spent several summers there when my father taught engineering courses at UNAM, La Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. That early experience expanded my horizons and helped me appreciate that, while cultures may be different, there are connections across them.

Our delegation in Mexico City saw a 16th century book preserved at the National Archives, handwritten from the office of the King of Spain. It contains the king's instructions to colonists for exploring the upper reaches of Northern Mexico, what is now Texas.

Just as the quest for knowledge transcends these borders, so do the obstacles posed by health, economic inequity, energy and water needs, and injustice. The University of Texas is uniquely positioned to be a global leader in addressing those challenges.

I was struck by our pervasive influence when I traveled to Asia in June. In Shanghai, I met dozens of UT students studying at partner universities and doing internships with companies in China. These Longhorns have a global perspective and are prepared to lead in any region of the world. Why is this important?

T.S. Eliot, some of whose papers are in the Harry Ransom Center, said, "We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time." By collaborating with partners in Latin America, in Asia, in Europe and around the globe, we will strengthen who we are and what we aspire to be: a university dedicated to knowledge and discovery throughout the world.

Yes, we have ambitious goals — from transforming our curriculum, to accelerating new knowledge, to improving health care. Achieving these goals will require support from policymakers, benefactors, industry partners, and alumni.

And on campus we must be willing to make hard choices, spend resources wisely, and be accountable to the taxpayers of Texas and to the parents and students who pay tuition. So this year I will work closely with Senior Vice President and Chief Financial Officer Darrell Bazzell, the provost, and campus leaders to spend resources even more effectively to educate our students and advance our academic mission.

Excellence depends on fostering a culture on campus that includes all students — and that has diversity and inclusion as top priorities. Let me say that again: Diversity and inclusion will always be among my top priorities.

The essence of a UT education lies in learning in a community where every student knows they belong, where their voice is heard, where their experience is valued. A great university must push us to examine beliefs, even those that we hold closely.

The songwriter Ani DiFranco said, "I know there is strength in the differences between us. I know there is comfort, where we overlap." We strive every day to promote a culture that welcomes differences, and the expression of those differences, while nurturing the commonalities that bond us together.

And we have been recognized as a national leader, just one of 10 American universities honored as a Diversity Champion by Insight into Diversity magazine.

The University of Texas won a crucial victory when the United States Supreme Court upheld our admissions policies. What were we defending?

It is this: We educate students for leadership in a complex and interconnected world. Preparing leaders means providing the opportunity to learn with, and from, a wide range of people — to be exposed to diversity in its many forms: race and ethnicity, thought and religious beliefs, and different family background and life stories.

We will not rest with a single Supreme Court ruling. Vice President for Diversity and Community Engagement Gregory Vincent and Vice President for Student Affairs Soncia Reagins-Lilly this summer began developing a campus-wide Diversity Action Plan.

Collaborating with them and with UT students, we will complete and implement the action plan. It will clearly define the needs for improving diversity and inclusion, identify shortcomings, and chart a course for advancing our values. We will examine ongoing efforts to increase inclusion for underrepresented and traditionally underserved members of the university and develop new ways to improve success for students, faculty, and staff from all backgrounds.

From recruiting diverse students more effectively, to responding to hate incidents more quickly, to ensuring that underserved students have access to appropriate counseling, transportation, and other services, we must take action.

Diversity cannot just be measured in numbers but in assuring that every student has access to all the aspects of a high-quality college education, both on and off the campus. While we have made progress in overcoming the legacy of past injustices, our efforts must not wane as a society, or as a university.

It is the unique role of a university to illuminate past chapters of our story to inform the present and guide us in the future. Our students and graduates will lead the way.

I was reminded of that last December. Standing on the steps of the Supreme Court, under the inscription “equal justice under law,” I watched Crystal Nrowa, an Outstanding Student Award winner, speak with conviction about her experience at UT. We are not only educating individuals, we are preparing leaders like Crystal, who will make an indelible imprint on the world.

We see this in business, film, media, and the arts, and in the Longhorn sprinters, shot putters, swimmers, and one outstanding jump shooter, who achieved Olympic gold in Rio.

We see it in the form of new ideas, including an app designed by a Texas alumnus that enables people to go on virtual treasure hunts around the world — Pokemon Go.

The journey at The University of Texas is limitless when we foster a climate that brings out the best in every student.

Another responsibility we must meet is for every student, faculty member, and staff member to feel safe on campus. We experienced a tragedy earlier this year. One of our students fell victim to a senseless crime, Haruka Weiser. Her death shook the foundation of everything we expect — a campus where any family can send their loved one without fear of harm.

Haruka spent much of her short time at UT in this building. And she was preparing for a performance on this stage the evening she was killed. In her memory, we have joined with the Weiser Family to create a campaign — “Walk with Me” — that empowers students to look out for one another.

As I said in a message last month we will improve campus safety and security. We will hire additional police officers and guards, upgrade lighting and video monitoring, improve building-access controls, and engage with the community to address concerns about transient individuals on and around campus.

We will also strengthen our education and Title IX programs to put a stop to sexual assault, harassment, and misconduct. Unfortunately, UT is not immune from this grave national problem.

We must recognize the problem and make this a university where we do everything we can to prevent sexual assault, harassment, and misconduct, where everyone is empowered to report it, and where survivors are confident the university takes them seriously, investigates expeditiously, has due process, and disciplines offenders whether they are student, faculty, or staff.

We can reach our goals when we are joined by our common values and aspirations.

I ask each of you to come with me on this journey as we elevate The University of Texas at Austin's role as a world leader in research and education.

Some will measure excellence in terms of rankings and dollars. They are important, but the ultimate measure of success is preparing leaders, transforming society, and creating a better world.

We are limited only by the scope of our vision and the Texas-size of our ambitions.

We are the flagship university for the world's 12th largest economy. We are uniquely positioned by the blessings of our scale, resources, and pioneering spirit to drive change and accelerate the pace of progress.

When we invest in our people, when we break down barriers, when we pursue knowledge, and when we invigorate our culture with a shared purpose, we will chart a bold path and legacy of achievement that exceeds the most glorious days.

Now is the time for us to work together — through a commitment to scholarship and discovery, to solve great challenges, to reach new heights, and to change the world.

Thank you, and Hook 'em!