

The Urban System: The University of Houston

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By Bill Hobby

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Never have urban systems been as valuable as they will be in highly urbanized twenty-first century America. This is a case study of a dynamic, successful urban university system in troubled times and the steps it took to address several problems concerning its mission and identity. There are many ways of defining an urban university. Location, student population, and philosophy are all important (Elliott, 20). By all of these criteria, the University of Houston System (UHS) is a textbook example of an urban university system. UHS has four universities located in or near the nation's fourth largest city, Houston, on the Texas Gulf Coast. Houston has a population of 3 million within its extensive city limits. See Table 9.1.

University	Location	Founded	Enrollment Fall 1997	Budget FY 1998 (Appropriated)
University of Central Houston	Houston	1927	31,602	\$157,932,031
University of Houston- Downtown	Downtown Houston	1974	8,194	\$21,894,756
University of Houston-Clear Lake	Southeast Houston	1973	6,947	\$27,130,457
University of Houston-Victoria	150 miles southwest of Houston	1973	1,491	\$7,213,332

Its links to a prosperous, dynamic city, its diverse academic offerings, its areas of excellence and emerging excellence, its strong and growing research centers, and its record of reaching a diverse student body in innovative ways make UHS one of the best-equipped institutions to meet the demands of the twenty-first century. Yet, in 1995, the University of Houston System was a troubled institution, beset by declining enrollment, diminishing tax support, and conflict over its role. History and Structure of the System.

The University of Houston, the oldest and by far the largest of the universities, was created in 1927 as a dynamic young city sought a way to provide postsecondary education for its high school graduates. Houston doubled in size between 1920 and 1930, fueled by cotton, lumber, trade, and the robust young offspring of the Spindletop oil strike--petroleum and petrochemicals. The new institution was named Houston Junior College and was administered by the Houston Independent School District. Classes met from 4 to 9 p.m. in San Jacinto High School near downtown. (It is a beginning that has benefited and plagued the university, as it struggled hard to throw off the "Cougar High" nickname.) When classes began with 230 students, about two-thirds of the student body were employed full or part time. It is not that different today. About 40 percent of students attend part time and take longer to graduate--the mean is 6.2 years (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 1996, Appendix A). Few of them live on campus.

At all the UH universities, the population is similar. Students are older than those in traditional residential universities. In 1996, only one-third of the 47,200 students were age 18 to 22. About 26 percent were over 30, and another 40 percent were over 23 (University of Houston System 20). Such a student profile

is not uncommon to many urban colleges and systems. The new college's goals were set out in a 1927 bulletin: "To give to Houston and vicinity an institution which shall serve to the very best advantage the needs of the citizens of this section of Texas under conditions which shall make it available to all, and organized and conducted on such a basis as to assure every student two years of high grade standard college training" (Nicholson, 45). Houston Junior College existed side by side with the Houston College for Negroes, operating out of Jack Yates Junior-Senior High School, which later became Texas Southern University in 1947 and today is located a few blocks east of UH.

Junior College to University

The junior college became the University of Houston, a four-year institution, in 1933. It offered arts and industries, science as applied to technical and vocational pursuits, liberal arts and culture, extension and adult education. It rapidly outgrew its high school environs, and in 1938, a new campus started to rise on 108 donated acres of blue gumbo mud and pine forest southeast of downtown. The new campus was made possible by the generosity of wildcatter Hugh Roy Cullen, who left school in the fifth grade to work in a candy factory. He was interested in UH "if it gives a chance for an education to youngsters whose fathers have to work for a living" (Nicholson, 112). Cullen contributed \$335,000 for the liberal arts building, the foundation for tens of millions of dollars the Cullen family would contribute to their beloved university.

UH was officially separated from the school district in 1945 when a Board of Regents was created by the legislature. In 1947, it acquired its mascot, the cougar. In 1963 it became a state university. In 1971 its successful athletics program won it acceptance into the Southwest Conference. In 1996 it had 14 colleges, 281 degree programs, 30,000 students, and 1,927 faculty. It awards about 200 doctoral degrees annually and is ranked a Carnegie Research University II with sponsored research totaling \$55 million.

In another era in another place, UH might have been an institution with a main campus and three or more branch campuses. But in fast-growing Texas after World War II, the custom was to create full-blown, freestanding universities. So UH-Downtown, UH-Clear Lake, and UH-Victoria were created by statute and have their own presidents, student bodies, logos, and school colors. Clear Lake and Victoria are upper-level institutions, partnered with community colleges. UH-Downtown is an open admissions institution, specializing in moving students from the barrio to the college classroom and in giving fully employed Houstonians a place to earn a degree by attending nights and weekends. Each university has a distinct, important identity and plays an important role in its community.

UH-downtown

UH-Downtown was until 1997 the only Texas university limited to undergraduate programs. With a location in the middle of downtown Houston, a student body of 8,000 that is the most ethnically diverse in Texas, a complete weekend university and exemplary outreach programs for high school students, UH-Downtown is an urban university in the classic sense (Bartelt, 16). It started as South Texas Junior College and became a part of UH in 1974. UH had had a Downtown School (that name still rankles faculty at UH-Downtown since it is rarely used in a complimentary way) since 1942. The troubled private junior college occupied a 613,000-square foot site at One Main Street, and the Downtown School was losing its lease at another location.

The junior college and its building were acquired in 1974, and the school became a college. It filled a number of needs: it maintained a downtown presence for UH; it satisfied the growing demand for an open enrollment institution so that UH could preserve its more rigorous admission standards; and it had potential, soon fulfilled, to expand service to the community. Partnerships, public and private, now reached through inner-city high schools and middle schools to elementary schools to prepare low-income, minority students for college. An urban teaching program, conducted almost entirely in inner-city schools, helps prepare students, some of them reared in the neighborhood, to teach in those schools.

In 1995, funding was the major challenge at UH-Downtown. Limited to undergraduate courses, which return less in state dollars than graduate courses, it was less well financed than comparable institutions. In FY 1995, it spent \$5,436 per full-time student equivalent, compared to \$10,156 at UH, \$8,299 at Victoria, and \$8,125 at Clear Lake. The state average was \$9,806, according to the 1996 expenditure report by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

UH-Clear Lake

UH-Clear Lake, located "between the ultimate technology of the LBJ Manned Spacecraft Center and the pristine quiet of Armand Bayou," is a suburban institution even though located within Houston city limits. Its programs are closely linked to its neighbor, now called the Johnson Space Center, Mission Control for many historic space missions. It was begun to offer "goal-directed professional training to a high level of skill" (Nicholson, 455) as well as a liberal education. Its student body is 62 percent female and has an average age of 32. This university pioneered in linking itself closely to the nine community colleges in its region, forging student contracts to ensure student success. An exemplary program called Gator-Bear reaches into elementary schools to find students likely to pursue teacher education. UH-Clear Lake was authorized in 1971. The university opened in 1973, with classes meeting in the Clear Lake Graduate Center. It enrolls 7,000 students and offers 72 degree programs.

UH-Victoria

UH-Victoria, 150 miles southwest in what is called the Golden Crescent area, is the youngest university; it was created when a group of education-hungry citizens and community leaders started lobbying for a university in 1969. Victoria, a trading center for an agricultural and petrochemical economy, had a junior college but no university. By 1973, the University of Houston had been given approval by the Coordinating Board, Texas College and University System, to create an off-campus center in Victoria. The student body consisted of 105 students.

Ten years later, in 1983, the Texas Legislature created the UH-Victoria. Today, it offers 28 bachelor's and master's degree programs in the arts and sciences, business administration, and education. Its student body numbers 1800. It has 91 faculty and an annual budget of \$10.4 million. In 1995, the main concern was growth. The population curve in its 15-county region was flat, and UH-Victoria had responded with aggressive entrepreneurship. One of its efforts was to offer off-campus courses in fast-growing Fort Bend county just southwest of Houston.

System Culture and Evolution

By the mid-1960s it was clear, as Nicholson wrote, that a University of Houston System was "inevitable, given the dynamic energy of the Houston metroplex and the possibility of requests for educational services in areas historically and economically linked to the city." In that era of manifest destiny for higher education, expansion was a given. In 1968, the Coordinating Board recommended two branch campuses, one north and one south, for UH. The south institution became the upper-level UH-Clear Lake. The northern outpost was mired in political controversy and finally achieved reality only in 1997 as the University Center, a multi-institution teaching center in which UH and UH-Downtown participate with six other institutions.

The system administration to govern the four universities was created by statute in 1977, but the appropriation to finance the new administrative structure was vetoed by then Governor William Clements. Legislative language directed the universities to financially support the structure for services rendered, setting the stage for perpetual conflict over whether services were needed and reasonably priced.

Even before the system officially existed, there were differences of opinion over the future of the University of Houston. During a 1976 self-study, faculty charted a future for UH as a flagship campus, with

enrollment limited to 30,000. The number of undergraduates would be reduced, support for research increased, and weak programs targeted for elimination or removal to one of the other universities.

In the same self-study, faculty expressed a concern that UH's future was threatened by new system components. The debate was framed when members of the Southern Association accrediting team questioned why faculty wanted to create "a watered-down MIT, Illinois or University of Southern California instead of a vigorous, independent-minded institution reflecting the unique needs, challenges, strengths and opportunities of Houston itself" (Nicholson, 459-460).

Nearly 20 years later, that debate had only intensified. One faction of UH faculty feared that the system administration and the other universities were draining resources that would have propelled UH to the coveted Carnegie Research I ranking. Though its budget (about \$22 million) was modest by comparison with the University of Texas System and the Texas A&M; University System, the cost of the system administration was a far more contentious issue than in those larger systems. The issues were difficult: the imbalance in size and dimensions between UH and its sister universities, the difficulty of dividing a diminishing pie, and the tension between those who saw UH as a unique urban institution and those who preferred that it follow a more traditional path to excellence.

Conflict was aggravated by pressure on resources. Enrollment had begun a decline in 1992 and had dropped nearly 3,000 by 1995. Part of this could be explained by the demographic curve. The number of traditional college-age students dipped as baby boomers aged, and their children were not yet college age. But the enrollment decline occurred as the population of Houston was rising and as enrollments were growing at other large Texas universities.

Meanwhile, the diminishing resources that plague all of higher education had an especially adverse impact on the UH System. In Texas, the state general revenue contribution per student declined 24 percent between 1985 and 1997. Shrinking revenue is a particularly difficult problem at urban institutions since their facilities, faculty, and staff must accommodate a larger number of students taking a lower number of credit hours. Interim UH President Glenn Goerke liked to say that when a full-time student at UH started his or her day, four students woke up. Urban institutions, as Peggy Gordon Elliott notes, were lean and mean before that phrase ever came to be the rallying cry of corporate America.

State funding for higher education is based on semester credit hours, so an enrollment decline could have been expected to cause a severe loss of revenue. Fortunately, UH was insulated from serious damage by generous grants of state hold-harmless funds, but it was experiencing a drain on resources from its athletics program. A break-up of the Southwest Conference left UH in a new conference likely to reduce television revenue and crowd appeal. In 1996, UH was castigated by a legislative subcommittee for amassing the largest athletics deficit in the state.

Tension and other events resulted in turnover at top levels of administration. UH had three presidents in five years. In mid-1995, the system chancellor and presidents at UH and UH-Victoria resigned. Regents brought in administrators, including the authors of this chapter as chancellor (William P. Hobby) and deputy chancellor (Saralee Tiede) for two-year terms.

Strengths and Shortcomings

Strengths and shortcomings can be opposite sides of the same coin. That is often true in urban university systems. One of the great strengths of the UH system is location, location, location. This was apparent even in 1927, when a questionnaire answered by 218 students showed that most of the respondents attended because of its convenient location. Seventy students said they could work in the day and attend classes at night.

Location gives the universities a large pool of potential students, an attractive climate for faculty, eminent professionals willing to serve as adjunct professors, and great opportunity to interact with the community.

But it can also be a drawback in attracting traditional students whose parents worry about crime, safety, and the many distractions of city life. Only about one-third of UH students come from outside Harris County.

The mission and future of the University of Houston System is closely linked to the city. The Houston culture and economy have shaped curricula just as the universities have contributed to the city's strength. Particularly strong programs, like the Health Law and Policy Institute, optometry, and pharmacy are related to the presence of the Texas Medical Center. The excellence of programs in creative writing, drama, music, and visual arts depend on the city's vibrant arts community, just as the colleges of law and architecture owe much to the city's professional communities. The Space Vacuum Epitaxy Center and the Partnership for Space Exploration would not exist without the Johnson Space Center, nor would UH-Downtown's innovative urban teaching program exist in a different setting.

Some faculty have been concerned that UH would be co-opted and corrupted by its relationship with the city's business and industry. The 1938 drive to raise private contributions for the new campus was the first evidence of the strong financial support Houstonians would give their university, but it also resulted in an unfortunate legacy--the sense that UH leaders were most concerned with producing a trained work force and educated managers for industry, with vocational courses rather than traditional curricula (Nicholson, 105).

There is considerable evidence that the symbiosis is limited. Houston is the energy capital of the world, the exporter of oilfield technology to the Middle East, the North Slope, and the North Sea, but UH is not particularly strong in geology or petroleum technology. Even though Houston's port leads the nation in tonnage and gives the city an international flavor, UH has not so far focused on international trade as part of its offerings.

Another strength of the universities is diversity. In the four universities combined, the student population is diverse, with 25,000 white, 5,950 African-American, 7,656 Hispanic, 5,900 Asian-American, and 2,680 international students in 1996 (UH, Ethnicity 20). When the Hopwood v. State of Texas decision, which proscribed the use of race or ethnicity in university admissions policies at the University of Texas at Austin Law School, left the University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M; University scrambling for ways to attract minority students, UH gained minority enrollment, based at least partly on its record as a welcoming, hospitable institution in a city proud of its diversity.

UH Regents, state leaders, and most national experts in education view increasing the educational achievement of African-American and Hispanic citizens as a critical challenge facing higher education. Yet diversity can hinder university recruiting efforts. It was an irony at UH that it was neither as black as many white residents thought, nor as white as many African-Americans believed. During the decade from 1976 to 1986, UH tracked other urban universities in losing ground, with its percentage of black students declining from 11.3 to 7.4 (Kinnick and Ricks, 27).

Another strength-shortcoming conundrum exists in the differing attitudes toward the universities' mission and future. Frank Newman, president of the Education Commission of the States, has said that urban institutions "are not yet sure of themselves. Their traditions are not so formed that they are barnacled, so that they have a great opportunity to chart a course that serves American society" (Elliott, 35). It was a common question when the UH System Vision Commission deliberated to ask which universities were to serve as models, when in fact UHS had a great opportunity to become the model itself.

It is not unusual for faculty at urban institutions to feel they are undervalued, (Elliott, 88). And UH's background as a junior college, as "Cougar High," was vexatious to faculty who saw their future connected to a prestigious research institution. Some remembered that the first effort to win state support for the University of Houston was won at the cost of a ban on state support of graduate courses. Others were concerned that some vestiges of the past, like the College of Technology, still remain.

The Transition

The task of the interregnum was to do as much as possible to solve the critical problems of declining enrollment and resources. The greater challenge was to change the culture from one of pessimism to optimism, from distrust to confidence, and from exclusion to inclusion. A number of initiatives were begun between 1995 and 1997. The most important were expanding into Fort Bend County, restructuring the system of governance, creating a unified marketing effort, finding a shared vision, and increasing state funding for higher education.

The University of Houston System at Fort Bend

The UHS campus in Fort Bend county, southwest of Houston, is located in one of the fastest-growing counties in the nation and is a prime site for corporate locations. UH-Victoria had held classes there for several years, but the business and civic leadership wanted their own university. The state's only avenue for expansion at this time is through multi-institution teaching centers, through which several universities offer degree programs. At the first annual system leadership meeting we held in August 1995 (also the first to include faculty leaders), we decided to create a multiuniversity teaching center comprised of the four UHS universities, Wharton Junior College, and Houston Community College.

At that point only one multi-institution teaching center (in Dallas) had been approved in Texas. The University Center in north Harris County was still in planning stages and proceeding slowly. Through the Herculean efforts of staff and faculty, the UHS at Fort Bend teaching center was approved by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board in January 1996. Classes started that summer, and by fall 1997, enrollment had nearly doubled, reaching 930. In 1997, the legislature transferred 256 acres from the Texas Department of Transportation to UHS as a permanent home for the center. A substantial beginning has been made in raising money to start construction.

The initiative was important strategically because it sent a message to other university systems who looked yearningly at Houston as a rich area for expansion. It was also a positive move to halt enrollment decline. Perhaps most heartening was the cooperation it produced among provosts, admission officers, registrars, and faculty as they tried to create a student-friendly environment from the different admission policies, course structures, fees, and calendars at the four universities. In 1997, 20 percent of the courses were fully articulated, offering students the promise of a degree from one of the four UHS universities.

The speed with which the Fort Bend center was created obscures the immense difficulty of the task. There was no consensus that this was an appropriate direction for UHS. The old concern about misdirecting resources was alive and well. That it worked was due to superb leadership at all four universities as well as the tireless work and exceptional consensus building skills of Ed Hugetz, Fort Bend director.

Restructuring the System

By 1995, Regents were convinced that only a dramatic step would resolve conflict over governance. The system administration had become a flashpoint, blamed by a vocal faction at UH for maintaining a costly bureaucracy that made inappropriate demands on the universities. Generally, the smaller universities supported the status quo.

The Regents asked for an organizational review to identify administrative functions and where these functions were best performed. Three task forces, on academic affairs, administration and finance, and external affairs, had 60 days to present options. Each task force included regents, faculty, and administrators. The results were encouraging, not so much because they represented consensus on the best structure, but because they revealed a number of ways to improve operations.

For example, the task force on administration and finance determined that information resources and facilities planning needed review and improvement, regardless of structure. The external affairs task force identified several needs: consistent communication of a shared vision, rapid responsiveness to constituents, cost effectiveness, clear lines of communication and a constituent-centered approach.

On April 1, 1996, Regents decided to combine the offices of chancellor and UH president, effective when the search for a new leader was concluded. The new structure would not be in place for at least a year. For the transition period, we decided to increase faculty participation in the system operating structure. That structure consisted of councils of provosts, chief financial officers and external affairs officers, a Chancellors' Executive Council, and the University Faculties Executive Council. We added a faculty advisory committee to each council; faculty advisors met with that council once each month. The external affairs council also included alumni, student, and community advisors. The result was a better decision-making process.

A Combined Marketing Initiative

There are many ways to address enrollment declines, and marketing is always high on that list. Like most universities blessed with steady expansion, UH institutions had a philosophy best described as "open the doors and they will come." The problem was that they had stopped coming. Alumni skilled in marketing and public relations provided valuable advice. First, understand the problem, they counseled. They recommended that we discover, through market research, what barriers and perceptions impeded our efforts. They told us not to advertise for more students if the admissions staff was not answering their phones in a helpful, courteous way.

We commissioned a stakeholder survey in 1996. The objectives were to establish baseline measures of stakeholder satisfaction, to identify strengths and areas needing improvement, to increase enrollment and retention, and to generate additional support of the universities. More than 5,700 students, alumni, faculty, prospective students, parents, and community leaders responded. Generally, stakeholders agreed that:

1. The most important finding of the survey was that external stakeholders, community leaders, parents, employers, and alumni are more positive about the universities than internal communities such as faculty and staff. Overall, internal and external satisfaction was highest at UH-Clear Lake and UH-Victoria.
2. All four universities offer first-class education, have outstanding faculty, respect diversity, and contribute to the communities.
3. The universities need a clear mission and direction and links to the community.
4. Universities need more funded research, more nationally recognized programs, more alumni association membership, and more faculty and staff interaction with students and alumni.

However, a significant number of faculty were dissatisfied with pay, opportunity for input, internal communications, and the system administration.

The survey created guidelines for marketing and a clearer sense of problems that needed resolution. Meanwhile, all four universities pursued aggressive marketing programs, dedicating staff and resources to advertising and student recruitment. At UH, considerable effort went into creating a more user-friendly environment through such innovations as longer business hours for the financial aid office, graduate school counseling for juniors and seniors, retention programs for at-risk students, and contracts for community college students.

The University of Houston System Vision Commission

A two-year term is a short time in which to accomplish change and is too short to achieve many goals. It seemed best to attempt to construct a roadmap to guide us to those goals. We decided to appoint a Vision Commission comprised of national leaders in education, business, government, and culture. That 19 people of their stature were willing to devote such time and effort to this endeavor is a credit to the strength of this university system and the interest in crafting new directions for urban institutions.

The commission was successful because of these visionary people, but also because of the leadership of Dr. Kenneth L. Lay, whose understanding of vision has created one of the world's leading energy companies, Enron Corp. Dr. Lay, is a UH alumnus, a former regent, and one of Houston's business leaders. The next challenge was creating interaction with campus communities. That plan was developed by Dr. Peter C. Bishop, who chairs the UH-Clear Lake Studies of the Future program and skillfully served as facilitator for the Vision Commission. Each university community selected a team of campus leaders to work with the Vision Commission.

The commission meetings produced the most exciting, energetic discussion of the future of higher education we have been privileged to observe. Among the ideas that were expressed:

"It is powerful to be a major city. It is a powerful environment, and what raises the power is the preparation of students through urban life," Dr. Arturo Madrid, distinguished professor at Trinity University.

"Is the UH System going to define itself or let others define it? You can't imagine Houston without words like urban, international, Latin America, petrochemical, energy . . . these are the unique strengths to build on," Dr. C. Peter Magrath, president of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges.

"To be unique in profoundly different ways means freeing ourselves from the enormous grip of the past, and remember we're not the only ones. Your colleagues are deeply in the grip of that old model," Dr. Frank Newman, president of the Education Commission of the States.

"I do not believe we should condition our vision on the prior assent of the so-called stakeholder groups. It seems to me, particularly in educational institutions, that this is often prescription for paralysis," Dr. Chester E. Finn Jr., Fellow at the Hudson Institute.

"There is a growing disconnect on campuses between the internal priorities of people engaged in universities versus the external demands from students, employers and the community," Dr. Aims C. McGuinness, Jr., senior associate of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems.

"We seem preoccupied with housekeeping, maintaining endlessly, arranging and rearranging, defining and redefining, in hopes that we will uncover the right organizational structure, the right strategies, the right mission statement. But solutions built on ever changing circumstances will be just that--ever changing," Professor Angela Patton, former president, UH Faculty Senate.

"Our strengths lie in our ability to retain the learning lab quality of the university, the gathering place quality, the community of learning," Dr. Linda Gratch, former president, UH-Downtown Faculty Senate.

"The first person who says 'Harvard on the Bayou' is out of here," Dr. Frank Newman.

The product of this invigorating debate was this statement: The University of Houston System will become the preeminent metropolitan university system of the twenty-first century.

As we had hoped, the vision statement provided a roadmap to future greatness, but its real importance transcended that. It stimulated the sense of opportunity so obvious at these universities. It created a mechanism for future cooperation and guidelines for progress.

Back to Basics

In 1995, UHS was not alone in watching its financial support diminish. Texas legislators followed the national trend in reducing support for state-funded institutions and shifting more of the burden to students and their parents. In 1995, chancellors of the Texas major university systems decided to create a unified, statewide effort to reverse the trend.

The consensus was that previous efforts had failed because they were self-serving and fragmented. The proposal for the 1997 legislative session was to look objectively at the needs of the state and the way that higher education could address those needs, given adequate resources. Staff task forces were created and started work in fall 1995. The resulting "Back to Basics" proposal owes much to a report, "Texas Challenged," done by Dr. Steve Murdock, Director of the Texas A&M; University Department of Rural Sociology. The key findings were:

1. Texas' population is growing fastest among groups (African-Americans and Hispanics) in which educational attainment has been relatively low.
2. Texas lags the nation in production of college and university graduates.
3. Texas per capita income is below the national average.
4. If current trends continue, Texas' average household income will decline by \$3,000 in constant dollars by 2030.
5. Support for public higher education in Texas has declined by 24 percent since 1985.

The proposal asked the legislature for \$926 million to increase full-time faculty, to improve recruitment and retention efforts, to increase financial aid, to improve research and workforce preparation, and to produce more health professionals. The return on the investment was to be a 22 percent increase in the number of bachelor's degrees per year at the end of the phased-in program.

The Coalition for Higher Education included public and private universities, community colleges, and medical schools. We were fortunate that our efforts coincided with the efforts of Senator Bill Ratliff, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, to change funding formulas for public universities. The legislature increased appropriations to higher education by \$593 million, reversing a 12-year decline in general revenue appropriations. We did not achieve everything we had hoped, but ours was a multiyear effort.

The Future

When Philip G. Hoffman was inaugurated as president of the University of Houston on April 27, 1962, he said, "The University of Houston is not a great university. We believe, however, that it is a good university which has very much within its total situation the basic ingredients of greatness" (Nicholson, 417).

In 1997, the University of Houston System was once more on the march. The search for a new chancellor-president was successful. Dr. Arthur K. Smith, who had an impressive record of achievement at SUNY-Binghamton, the University of South Carolina, and the University of Utah, took office on April 1. His term promises to be rich in accomplishments.

For urban universities, and for UHS in particular, the future is bright. These universities are ideally positioned to address two of the most critical needs facing our society: the education of minority students and the demand for lifelong learning.

Texas and other states face dramatic demographic change. By 2030, Hispanics and African-Americans will be about 55 percent of Texas' population. The number of Anglo youths ages 5 to 17 will decline as the number of Hispanic youngsters increases rapidly. Historically in Texas and the nation, Hispanics and African-Americans have lagged behind Anglos in receiving bachelor's degrees, yet the part of the job

market growing fastest requires a college education. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see how grim our economic future will be if higher education cannot address this problem.

In Texas, our ability to do this was severely limited by the decision in *Hopwood v. State of Texas*, a Fifth Circuit ruling which found affirmative action programs in higher education to be unconstitutional. Interpreted by Attorney General Dan Morales to apply to "all internal institutional policies, including admissions, financial aid, scholarships, fellowships, recruitment and retention, among others" (Office of the Attorney General, 24), this decision adversely affected minority enrollment at several Texas institutions.

The University of Houston and its siblings in the UH System continue to educate a disproportionate share of African-Americans, Hispanics, and Asian-Americans. About 42.5 percent of the UH student body is minority, including Asian-Americans (UH Office of Planning & Policy Analysis, Ethnicity). The population of UH-Downtown, where the student body had been about equally divided among Anglo, Hispanic, and African-American students, is tilting somewhat more toward Hispanic.

Location is one reason for the excellent record of these urban universities in providing access to historically undereducated populations. Houston is a diverse city--about 25 percent African-American, 30 percent Hispanic, and 5 percent Asian--and proud of it. In 1997, Houston voters upheld by a comfortable margin the city's affirmative action policy. Another reason is reasonable cost. Tuition at Texas public universities is among the lowest in the nation, and classes are scheduled so students can work while earning a degree. Less easy to quantify is the welcoming atmosphere, but it is definitely a factor.

The second important demand is for lifelong learning. When he spoke to the UHS Vision Commission, James Kollaer, president of the Greater Houston Partnership, said: "In 2015, my 12-year-old son will be 32, with an advanced degree. He will be in the second of his five careers (four of which have not yet been created), and he will be heading back to the third retraining of the 13 times he will be retrained for new tasks he faces on the job" (University of Houston System, *Beyond the Horizon*, 14).

Another study by Washington State University's Social and Economic Sciences Research Center shows that "college-educated Americans are keeping their edge in the workplace by making continued learning a high priority." Don A. Dillman, lead researcher on the survey, said that it has good news and bad news for higher education: "On the one hand, American colleges and universities have many more customers for educational services than is typically realized. On the other hand higher education institutions will have to change the way they do business if they are to service students. If higher education does not adapt to serve older working students, firms in the private sector will meet those needs."

The message from that study is that adults know they will need training and retraining on a continuing basis to meet the needs of a fast-changing workplace. The education they need must be affordable and convenient. The UH universities are ideally situated to meet this need. They have been meeting it for years, with convenient urban locations, graduate programs like the Executive Master's in Business Administration, continuing education, and distance education.

UH pioneered televised education with a public television station established in 1950, and UH still offers more televised courses than any other Texas institution, with 10 full degree programs available on Channel 8. Most of these are traditional taped lectures broadcast at night for students to record and replay. At UH-Clear Lake, the Center for Instructional Technology teaches faculty and students how to use distance education more creatively. UHS at Fort Bend has become a laboratory for distance education with four classrooms outfitted for interactive television and a number of courses offered through that medium. One course in organizational behavior combines interactive TV, the Internet, videotapes, CD-ROMs, and face-to-face instruction. Two Fort Bend courses are offered entirely on the Internet.

More ambitious is the effort to create a "Gulf Coast Knowledge Utility," which would link universities, community colleges, public schools, and hospitals in a distance learning network. That effort was sparked

by creation of the state Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund, conceived as a \$1.5 billion account financed by contributions from telephone and wireless telecommunications providers. Planning is underway to seek a grant for a collaborative application, but that effort is slowed by the different needs of the participants, according to UHS at Fort Bend Director Ed Hugetz.

"Those of us at the universities talk about instructional applications in math, reading and writing--in algebra, for example--it's the dropout killer and everyone agrees that we desperately need computer instruction," Hugetz said. "But the community colleges want to focus on workforce development courses, like web page design and technical support, and the public schools need equipment before they can do anything. We think collaboration will be very valuable, but we haven't yet agreed what our effort should be."

The need for urban institutions like UH and its sister universities is greater than ever, but significant challenges are ahead. In Texas, as in other states, the method of financing public universities does not recognize the unique needs of these institutions. With more part-time students, the demands for libraries, parking, counseling, and financial aid are higher. The situation is particularly painful at UH-Downtown, which operates with fewer dollars per student than most other state universities in Texas because its course offerings have been limited to low-funded undergraduate programs and because the state has recently cut back on reimbursement for remedial courses.

Enrollment at UHS has turned the corner with two successive years of increase systemwide. It is too soon to declare victory, but it is clear that a focused effort at better admission practices and higher retention can be successful. At UH, where the problem was most acute, increases occurred in the number of entering freshmen. Dr. Eduardo Apodaca, associate vice-president for enrollment, credits 26 measures including transfer agreements with community colleges, satellite outreach offices, field admissions, a summer program for high school teachers, a four-year graduation agreement, and expedited financial aid. Equally important and perhaps more cost-effective is the effort to retain students already enrolled. In fall 1996, 80.6 percent of all UH students who were enrolled in the spring semester returned. In fall 1997 the percentage was 83.3. The challenge facing UH will be maintaining the balance among white and minority students, as well as increasing the number of adequately prepared minority students. See Table 9.2, A B, C and D.

Table 9.2a : A Profile of the University Houston's Entering Freshman Class Fall 1997

Fall 1997	Headcount	Percentage	GPA	Class Rank	SAT
White, Other	1001	35.4%	3.2	69.0%	1116
African-American	544	3.1	72.0%	969	
Hispanic	659	23.3%	3.2	73.7%	1003
Asian	613	21.7%	3.2	72.6%	1047
Native American	13	0.5%	3.2	64.4%	1104
Total	2830	100.0%	3.2	71.4%	1047

Table 9.2B: A Profile of the University of Houston's Entering Freshmen Class: Fall 1996

Fall 1996	Headcount	Percentage	GPA	Class Rank	SAT
White, Other	909	38.1%	3.1	70.4%	1129
African American	456	19.1%	3.0	72.6%	985
Hispanic	494	20.7%	3.2	78.6%	1013
Asian	505	21.2%	3.2	74.7%	1075
Native American	21	0.9%	3.3	80.7%	1086
Total	2385	100.0%	3.1	73.6%	1066

Table 9.2C: A Profile of the University of Houston's Entering Freshman Class: Fall 1995

Fall 1995	Headcount	Percentage	GPA	Class Rank	SAT
White, Other	880	40.6%	3.0	72.6%	1124
African American	344	15.9%	2.9	73.4%	996
Hispanic	458	21.1%	3.1	78.3%	984
Asian	475	21.9%	3.2	76.6%	1066
Native American	11	0.5%	2.5	65.6%	1061
Total	2168	100.0%	3.0	74.8%	1068

Table 9.2D: A Profile of the University of Houston's Entering Freshman Class: Fall 1994

Fall 1994	Headcount	Percentage	GPA	Class Rank	SAT
White, Other	890	43.5%	3.0	72.0%	1122
African American	259	12.7%	2.9	73.8%	952
Hispanic	369	18.0%	3.0	77.7%	993

Retention rates need improvement. As at other urban universities with large numbers of part-time students, UH and UH-Downtown have low graduation rates. A Coordinating Board study showed that only 37.4 percent of first-time entering freshmen in fall 1989 had earned a degree from UH six years later (although another 12.4 percent were still enrolled). At UH-Downtown, it was only 7.3 percent. Many of these students cannot carry a full course load and must take longer than the six years the state counts as a performance measure for baccalaureate degrees. However, there are also excellent programs, like the Scholars Community and Urban Experience, that help at-risk students stay in school. These programs are privately financed and limited by funds available.

UH, the flagship university, must continue its march toward excellence, as defined by traditional means: nationally ranked degree programs, award-winning faculty, National Merit scholars and other distinguished students, and more sponsored research leading to Carnegie Research I status. The means are there to accomplish this. The university added considerably to its endowment and to the number of endowed chairs in its recent \$358 million fund drive. Aggressive recruiting is necessary to fill these chairs with the scholars who will attract research dollars and enhance the university's reputation.

Some encouraging events have already occurred. Thanks largely to the creative fundraising efforts of former Regent Chair Wilhemina "Beth" Morian, a granddaughter of UH benefactor Hugh Roy Cullen, the new Moores School of Music building has a ceiling painted by Frank Stella, a landmark in contemporary art. Entry into a new athletic conference produced a winning football season and a bowl game for the Cougars in 1996. The new governance system holds many challenges, but the prospects are good for less conflict and more cooperation.

The future for urban universities is bright with potential. The UH System has an ambitious vision of becoming the "preeminent metropolitan university system of the twenty-first century." That will require blazing a new path rather than seeking an institutional model to pursue.

One of the members of the Vision Commission, Aims C. McGuinness Jr., believes that this system will be judged by how it advances the capacity of modern society to address the educational, social, cultural, and economic problems of great metropolitan areas. "Because of vaguely defined missions, outdated policies and uncertain leadership, many systems are drifting in directions that contrast sharply with those toward which the UH System must move," McGuinness said (University of Houston System, *Beyond the Horizon* 24-25). A number of systems are characterized by:

1. Dominance of the traditional research university as the only respectable model for quality and prestige.
2. Closed governance processes and leadership styles that exclude key external stakeholders, such as employers and civic leaders, from decision-making.
3. An inwardly defined agenda determined by the priorities of constituent units and their faculties.
4. A "hunker-down" mentality that values competition and confrontation rather than collaboration and cooperation with other universities and education providers.
5. Low tolerance in faculty reward systems and system resource allocation for the priorities of teaching, application, and public service.

The Vision Commission saw a different system, one that achieves the highest prestige and respect because of its interconnectedness with one of the world's great metropolitan areas, and that serves as the highway through which the Houston community gains access to the latest advances in knowledge. It is that future we would hope for the four UH universities, each of them contributing in unique and important ways. It is a very bright future.

About the Authors:

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