



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

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Guest Editorial by President Jon Whitmore

What does new Phi Beta Kappa status mean for Texas Tech students, faculty, university?

Texas Tech University joined the ranks of an elite group of universities on Oct. 28, 2006, when The Phi Beta Kappa Society voted to establish a Phi Beta Kappa chapter at Texas Tech.



Texas Tech University
President Jon Whitmore

For more than two decades, our Phi Beta Kappa faculty and staff have worked toward the goal of sheltering a Phi Beta Kappa chapter. This historic vote confirms our reputation among other colleges and universities and establishes a major and permanent honor for Texas Tech University.

Phi Beta Kappa was founded at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, on Dec. 5, 1776. Chapters were formed soon thereafter at Harvard and Yale, and the society has operated continuously ever since. Phi Beta Kappa is thus the oldest academic honorary in the United States and one of the most prestigious in the world.

Only about 10 percent of institutions of higher learning have Phi Beta Kappa chapters, and only about 10 percent of the graduates in the liberal arts and sciences at these distinguished universities are selected for lifetime Phi Beta Kappa membership.

Begun during the American Revolution, Phi Beta Kappa embraces the principles of freedom of inquiry and liberty of thought and expression.

These two concepts, which are symbolized on the society's distinctive and widely-recognized gold key, promote the foundations of personal freedom, scientific inquiry, liberty of conscience, and creative endeavor.

The Greek letters Phi Beta Kappa represent the initials of the society's Greek motto which can be translated as "Love of learning is the guide of life."

Phi Beta Kappans are found in all walks of life. Seventeen U.S. presidents were keyholders, including George Herbert Walker Bush and William Jefferson Clinton. Six of the current nine Supreme Court justices are keyholders, as are Amazon.com founder Jeff Bezos, space shuttle commander Eileen Collins, cultural critic Henry Louis Gates, Jr., physicist Brian Greene, film director Francis Ford Coppola, authors Michael Crichton and Gloria Steinem, and a host of other individuals.

Led by Mary Jane Hurst, Professor of English and Faculty Assistant to the President, the Phi Beta Kappa faculty and staff in 2003 once again began the process of applying to establish a chapter at Texas Tech.

A site team of Phi Beta Kappa officials, headed by a dean at Yale University, visited Texas Tech for several days in 2005 to examine the campus facilities and to meet with students, faculty and administrators.

After three years of scrutiny with multiple layers of evaluation by The Phi Beta Kappa Society, delegates at the October Triennial Council voted, by overwhelming majority, final approval for a chapter at Texas Tech.



Texas Tech University joined the ranks of an elite group of universities in October when The Phi Beta Kappa Society voted to establish a Phi Beta Kappa chapter here.

This was not the first time that Phi Beta Kappa faculty and staff had pursued the long-held dream of establishing a Phi Beta Kappa chapter at Texas Tech. Previous preliminary applications had been filed in 1982, 1985, 1997, and 2000, never advancing beyond the initial stage of review. Significant university improvements occurred during that time, in part due to the findings that resulted from the application process.

Meanwhile, area Phi Beta Kappans developed what is now a chartered alumni association for West Texas and Eastern New Mexico, a region in which several hundred members of Phi Beta Kappa reside, and the support of those alumni association members has been invaluable to the Texas Tech effort.

Why has Texas Tech achieved success with Phi Beta Kappa in its most recent application? The answer lies in the quality of our academic programs.

With just under 1,000 students in what Phi Beta Kappa has called our "thoroughly impressive" Honors College, Texas Tech today is characterized by increasingly well-prepared cohorts of students, rising retention and graduation rates, a library recognized by the Association of Research Libraries as one of the best in the country, and visible and tangible excellence in both teaching and research.

Determined leadership by Professor Hurst, an individual uniquely willing and able to coordinate the complex application effort, has also been essential to demonstrate to The Phi Beta Kappa Society the excellence of our academic programs.

What does this new Phi Beta Kappa status mean?

- It means that prospective students may be assured they can obtain at Texas Tech University an education in the liberal arts and sciences of the quality found only at the top 10 percent or so of institutions in the United States.
- It means that prospective faculty may be assured of affiliation with an institution whose commitment to excellence is proven and established.
- It means that every degree granted at Texas Tech University is enhanced in value.
- It means permanent association with the very best in American education.