

ATTT . . . What's it all about?

Bob Smith*

“What we don't understand we explain to each other.”

—J. Robert Oppenheimer (1904-1967)

American Theoretical Physicist, Director, Institute
for Advanced Studies, Princeton University and
the Manhattan Project

Understanding the world of higher education is clearly not as difficult as deciphering quantum mechanics, but insight into the former may nevertheless seem dauntingly elusive at times. Enter *All Things Texas Tech* (*ATTT*) where higher education—its history, planning efforts, policy, and developments are considered—all in the context of Texas Tech University (TTU) and the communities it serves.

Our higher education world is awash with information and interpretive commentary—some of it coming through blogs, e-mails, text messages, and twitter—but often marked by contributions that are not as carefully or thoughtfully developed as our constituents deserve. To fill the void, President Bailey and I have conceived of *ATTT*, which offers a vehicle for reasoned and well-developed essays and articles—along with multimedia contributions—all with the intent of illuminating the higher education and Texas Tech worlds we live in and serve.

ATTT will be produced twice a year, at least for the first year or two. I will serve as editor and issues will have contributions by President Bailey and other TTU administrators. But, we also hope that faculty members, students, and staff professionals will find *ATTT* as an attractive outlet for “explaining” all we do among our colleagues and friends. For example, Valerie Paton, in her role as Director of TTU Strategic Planning has already gotten involved with *ATTT* as is evident through the relevant article in this first issue. Clearly, many other individuals—from advising professionals—to faculty governance leaders—to academic community members spearheading new initiatives and projects should consider *ATTT* as a way of communicating aspirations, goals, and developments.

Beyond information sharing, thoughtfully developed pieces on the challenges faced by higher education in general and TTU in particular may be aired through *ATTT*. In short, *ATTT* should help to illuminate all that we do at our emerging national research university. More specifically, *ATTT* contributions will include:

- Videos or excerpts thereof of presentations by University community members or distinguished guests (*e.g.*, honorary degree recipients)

- Articles on important university policies and procedures or revisions thereof (*e.g.*, policies governing the use of human subjects in research) and related efforts (*e.g.*, regional and programmatic accreditations, responsibility centered budgeting and management)

- Discussions of the legal and ethical bases of University policies and procedures (*e.g.*, conflict of interest and conflict of commitment policies) and special initiatives (*e.g.*, TTU's Quality Enhancement Committee and its studies on ethics in operating procedures, curricula, and student life)

- Profiles of outstanding faculty, students and staff, highlighting especially the concept of integrated scholarship (*i.e.*, the creative blending of the teaching, research and service elements of the University's mission)

- Essays to promote understanding of the roles and responsibilities of key universities leaders (*e.g.*, department chairs, ombuds professionals, faculty, student and staff governance officers)

- Narratives offering new perspectives on opportunities for study, research, scholarly and creative expression (*e.g.*, study-abroad and other internationally based collaborations)

- Reports and background articles on university planning

The above list is purely illustrative. Indeed, we anticipate that creative colleagues across the TTU landscape will find novel ways of helping us all understand better our complex enterprise.

So, please think about *ATTT* and how we may all benefit from your thoughtfully crafted views, analyses, and interpretive assessments to make our lives at TTU richer and more effective—all in the service of our many constituents.

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“From here it’s possible . . .”. Assisting TTU’s Ascent During the Second Decade of the 21st Century

Bob Smith*

“Every thing that is done on these West Texas Plains ought to be on a big scale. It is a country that lends itself to bigness. It is a country that does not harmonize with things little and mean. Let us make the work of our college fit with the scope of our college. Let our thoughts be big thoughts and broad thoughts. Let our thinking be in worldwide terms”

—Paul Whitfield Horn (1870-1932)

American Educator, First President of Texas
Technological College (now Texas Tech
University)

In 1974 I joined the University of Texas at Austin College of Pharmacy as a young tenured associate professor and assistant director of a new research institute (Drug Dynamics Institute) begun by a newly appointed visionary and energetic dean—James Doluisio. At the time, the UT Austin pharmacy program was the largest in the country—but hardly the best. Many years later, however, pharmacy educators across the country would reflect on the halcyon twenty-five record of progress of the College across its professional and graduate degree and research programs, and academic outreach under Dean Doluisio’s leadership. While I assisted in some of these efforts, as faculty member and eventually Director of the Drug Dynamics Institute during 1977-1985, most of the credit for the College’s advancement goes to the faculty, students, and staff who not only developed a common understanding around Dean Doluisio’s vision, but also understood that size, growth and development can be realized so long as the *sine quo non* of **quality** is sustained.

Fast-forward to 2009 and an opportunity to assist the growth and development of Texas Tech University (TTU) during the next decade. This time, however, conditions are different from the earlier experience at UT Austin. TTU has a great reputation for high quality undergraduate education and graduate and professional education in several areas. However, to meet its potential for service to Texas and the world, TTU needs to grow enrollments and develop further its research prowess and productivity. And, the advancement with quality as an overriding principle

is as relevant today as it was in another Texas university more than three decades ago. But, you might ask: How can it be done? Some ideas on this topic and how the Provost Office can play a role in TTU's ascent are provided below with one big caveat: Little can be accomplished without a common understanding of a vision, careful planning, and the broad-based dedication of faculty, students, and staff. So, let's proceed down this path a bit farther.

Planning—including strategic planning—is sometimes maligned as an effort leading to yet another report or document to accumulate dust while sitting on office and library shelves. However, in my previous post as provost at the University of Arkansas, I had an opportunity to contribute to a nationally acclaimed and productive university planning effort, dubbed the 2010 Commission. The effort, in effect during 2000-2008, led—in large measure—to what a regional (university-wide) accreditation team (from the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools) termed a “transformation of the University.” Remembering what Woodrow Wilson said when he was President of Princeton University—that changing a university was akin to moving a cemetery—you might well ask: How was such a positive impact possible? Here are some of the critical elements that made the 2010 Commission's work effectual:

- Having a clear vision
- Crafting a realistic mission
- Recognizing that a university—even a national research university—can not be all things to all people, that it is necessary for practically all universities to selectively focus particularly when it comes to research and outreach efforts
- Dovetailing university planning with college and other unit planning efforts
- Having a set of overarching goals or strategic priorities that drive more specific goals and objectives at unit-levels
- Tying goals and objectives to budgeting processes and outcomes

TTU and Strategic Planning

As Texas Tech has proceeded with its strategic planning efforts—led by Chancellor Hance and President Bailey—I have asked myself: Can we find parallels among the successful planning efforts at other national research universities, including those that I have been most familiar with at the University of Arkansas during its eight year experience with the 2010 Commission? I think we can. Let's see how.

In March 2009, the TTU Board of Regents (BOR) had a full-day strategic planning retreat. During this set of meetings, President Bailey presented to the Board a summary of TTU's emerging strategic plan. The plan contains a vision of TTU becoming Texas's next national public research university—a research university that will be associated with the best in the nation and one that can claim flagship status among the three or four other flagship institutions (*e.g.*, UT Austin, Texas A&M University) in different parts of our expansive state. Before continuing, it is wise to consider a bit further the implications of such a claim.

First, which institutions compete among the great public research universities in the United States? Curiously, the great public research universities are all located in the nation's major athletic conferences. Thus, we find eminent public research universities—fifty-five in all—collectively in the Big 12 (*e.g.*, Iowa State University and University of Nebraska, besides TTU and the two other public Texas institutions we know so well), the Big 10 (*e.g.*, Indiana University, University of Michigan), the Pacific Athletic Conference or PAC 10 (*e.g.*, University of California-Berkeley, University of Washington), the Big East (*e.g.*, University of Connecticut, West Virginia University), the Atlantic Coast Conference or ACC (*e.g.*, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Virginia Tech), and the Southeastern Conference or SEC (*e.g.*, Auburn University, University of Georgia, and the University of Arkansas). While some academics may find it unseemly to compare research universities through their athletic conferences, the truth is that great athletics and great academics seem to reside in the same institutions nationally. So, the take home message of the above-noted association of athletics and academics can be: Just as we want to compete on the athletic fields with the great public research universities, we also wish to compete academically, including the quality and size of our teaching/learning, research, and outreach programs. Although in the case of academics, there are no problems—and indeed it is desirable—for TTU to collaborate with other prominent public research universities on various projects across the teaching-research-service spectrum of activities. So, relative to our peers, we might ask, how does Texas Tech stack up among the best or what some might say the most competitive national research universities? In other words, what are the markers of great national or public research universities? At the risk of seeming pedantic, let me offer a set of characteristics of such universities (with parenthetical comments):

- Great undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs (don't dare, for example, tell a University of Michigan alumnus or alumna that he

or she did not receive a high quality undergraduate experience on the Ann Arbor campus)

- Great research and scholarship, recognized through faculty membership in the National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering, or National Institute of Medicine, faculty and student recipients of national awards for outstanding research, scholarly and creative contributions, significant research funding, particularly from nationally competitive programs (such as those of the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Institutes of Health, and the National Science Foundation), and development of great libraries and museums

- Extraordinary outreach programs, often providing direct economic (*e.g.*, research and technology transfer including the formation of university spin-out companies), cultural, and social benefits (particularly through the arts, humanities, and social sciences) to states, the nation and world communities

Beyond the above-noted qualitative features, what quantitative characteristics are prevalent among great public research universities? Here are some key factors to think about:

- Highly ranked undergraduate and graduate (*e.g.*, National Research Council doctoral program rankings) and professional (*e.g.*, *U.S. News and World Report*) programs

- Proportionately higher percentages of graduate and professional students (*i.e.*, generally in the range of 20-30%) among total student bodies

- Significant numbers of nationally and internationally recognized faculty (*e.g.*, national academy status and prestigious awards such as those associated with the Fulbright Fellowship and other such programs)

- Sizable research funding, expressed as yearly expenditures usually exceeding \$100 million per year but in the many noteworthy institutions approaching one-half to one billion dollars per year

- Large endowments (*i.e.*, one billion dollars or more) and percentages of alumni contributing each year (*i.e.*, approaching twenty percent or more)

So, when we think about TTU making claims to be among the ranks of some of the best national or public research universities, where might we fall short? At the same time, how do we respond to the need for Texas to educate a greater percentage of its population, including traditionally underrepresented populations? With these purposes in mind, President Bailey recently articulated the following TTU Strategic Priorities (parenthetical detail) at the BOR meeting noted earlier:

1. ***Increase Enrollment and Promote Student Success:*** *improve higher education participation and supply a well-equipped, educated workforce for the state of Texas (grow to 40,000 students by 2020, with a heavy emphasis on increasing the number of transfer and graduate students and insuring a diverse population of students; concentrating not only on the size of the freshman class but also on retention through nationally recognized six-year graduation rates at or exceeding the average of our peers).*
2. ***Strengthen Academic Quality and Reputation:*** *attract and retain the best faculty, staff and students (address student-faculty ratios to insure quality of all offerings; stress diversity in the hiring of all faculty and staff).*
3. ***Expand and Enhance Research:*** *better the lives of all Americans, while improving the state's economy and global competitiveness (build infrastructure and direct internal resources to leverage extramural funding; pay particular attention to the needs of researchers and scholars in areas such as the arts and humanities where external support is meager; increase yearly research expenditures from \$58 million [FY08] to at least \$100 million).*
4. ***Further Outreach and Service:*** *improve our communities and enrich their quality of life (all with global awareness and emphasis on enhancing international opportunities for faculty, students, and staff).*
5. ***Increase and Maximize Resources:*** *ensure affordability for students and accountability to the State of Texas (seek new sources of public and private support, including donations and endowment funds for faculty positions, student scholarships/fellowships, and programmatic support).*

Thinking once again of the immortal words often associated with President Horn, "From here it's possible," it is incumbent on this new provost and his colleagues from vice provosts to deans to faculty and staff members and students to consider how TTU's Strategic Priorities may be addressed to meet the overarching goals of the University. But, let's think a bit more about this proposition in the context of a newly appointed provost and senior vice president.

The Promise of a New Position

In recent years, I have reminded recently appointed professionals how important it is to reflect on the *double entendre* in the word "promise" as it pertains to new employment opportunities. On the one hand, we perceive the "promise" a position may hold for meaningful leadership in a firm,

institution, or organization being served. The second meaning pertains to the promises we make to the people we serve. This latter meaning provides the entrée for describing anticipated roles and hopes for the firm, institution, or organization that you are beginning to serve.

At TTU, and other national research universities for that matter, a provost should serve the academic community by: 1) encouraging and supporting faculty, student, staff, and program development; 2) guiding and evaluating accomplishments; 3) advocating and representing the University to its constituents—within and outside of our institution—in collaboration with the President. My promise to the TTU community is that I will honor these commitments to the best of my ability while insuring the values of quality, trust, and integrity—in all that I do.

As we go forward, it will be important to emphasize that a provost can do little without the collaboration and cooperation of all who are served. Thus, a communication strategy and follow-through will be necessary to serve immediate and on-going goals. Accordingly, I have planned the following:

- Visits to TTU's colleges and schools (all thirteen of them) along with other critical units that report to the Provost Office (*e.g.*, TTU Libraries, the TTU Museum, and the TTU Press)
- Follow-up visits to departments within colleges and schools and other units that serve the institution's academic mission (*e.g.*, Office of Institutional Research and Information Management, Office of International Affairs, Teaching, Learning, and Technology Center)
- Regular contact with faculty, students, and staff
- Creation of *All Things Texas Tech*, the web-based multi-media journal, which is serving as a vehicle for this article
- Presentations and regular discussions with TTU shared governance officers (*e.g.*, Faculty Senate), along with the development of all-campus forums to engage our community in issues of broad academic interest

Allow me to elaborate a bit more on the proposed efforts.

Following e-mail messages and other preliminary contacts, several deans and directors have already made appointments for me to visit their colleges, schools, and other units. I hope these leaders will craft forums to help us develop common understanding of the vision, mission, and academic strengths of their units. How the deans and directors develop these forums is their choice but I would like to come away with an understanding of the potential, aspirations and capabilities of the leadership of each college, school, or related academic unit. I will also want to learn how the units have engaged in strategic planning and if so, where their plans

may be—either in development or implementation. I will also be interested in units' recent accomplishments—including notable achievements by faculty, students, and staff.

My initial visits to colleges and schools will be followed by a series of visits to individual departments and other units where I hope to learn in greater detail, the strengths of people and programs. The college, school, department, and other unit visits will take many months to complete because of the sheer number of units represented. But, I will seek the advice of deans and directors in the prioritization of the visits.

I am also working on mechanisms for regular interactions with faculty, students, and staff—including meetings of the Provost Council, the Academic Deans, the Faculty and Staff Senates, and individual faculty members. For example, I have already pledged to meet regularly with Faculty Senate Leadership. I have also been exploring ways in which the monthly Provost Council meetings may be enriched through presentations by faculty, staff, and student leaders serving the various segments (*e.g.*, the Student Affairs Division) of the University's overall mission. Additionally, with the appointment of a new Vice President for Research, it will be useful for the two of us to arrange one-on-one visits with teacher-scholars and researchers across a spectrum of TTU's disciplines and interdisciplinary departments, centers, and programs. When I was Vice Provost for Research at Washington State University (1987-1997), I organized and participated in such meetings with a newly appointed provost (Thomas George; now Chancellor at the University of Missouri-St. Louis) and we were able to visit with dozens of faculty members during a five-year period.

Emerson espoused "straight talking and plain dealing." It's been the *modus operandi* for my academic administrative life and one that I plan to continue at Texas Tech. The above-noted visits, one-on-one communications, and *All Things Texas Tech* represent a communications strategy that is now well underway. The strategy represents the "how," "where," and "when" of communication. Its effectiveness will depend on how well we are able to engage TTU faculty, students, and staff, and make modifications to the strategy based on ideas, comments, suggestions and recommendations of members of our national research university community.

You might now ask: How about the "what" of communication and follow-up action? In other words, what initiatives will be most important for the provost to encourage and support, as a part of his new position and its promise?

Certain initiatives may certainly evolve as a result of my visits to academic and other units and individuals in the TTU community, but my visits will be guided—in large measure—by a set of questions, such as the following:

- How may we work together to meet the five strategic priorities set forth in our developing strategic plan that includes TTU's emergence as a prominent national research university?
- Regarding our national research university status:
 - What University-wide research and scholarly initiatives will best serve our students along with the intellectual, cultural, and economic needs of Texas and world?
 - How may we best leverage our resources to enhance the success of faculty and student-initiated research and creative efforts?
 - What strategies might we invoke to reach our goal of substantially increasing extramural research support during the next several years?
- How do we grow in student size while insuring the quality of our students, and their instruction and learning as they contribute to the development of TTU?

Certainly, there are many other questions to ask. But, I propose that the above are representative of the queries that should be asked—and answered—if we are to see TTU become the national research and flagship university needed by Texas and the world. I also look forward—in the weeks and months ahead—to hearing the TTU community's best thoughts on advancing our strategic priorities—to achieve our vision of a national research university that serves—with the passion and dedication of President Horn—Texas and the world.

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