

AcademiCast Transcript
Texas Tech University
June 6, 2012

Pierce: Welcome to “AcademiCast”—Texas Tech University’s biweekly podcast series from the Office of the Provost. I’m Rachel Pierce, and I’ll be covering the top academic stories on campus. Later in the program, Provost Bob Smith will spotlight student of integrated scholarship Keisha McKenzie.

First, the news...

It’s official! Texas Tech has been designated a national research university. The State Auditor’s Office delivered the good news, adding that Texas Tech is now eligible to receive a share of the state’s multimillion-dollar National Research University Fund.

The announcement also leverages Texas Tech in its bid to gain membership in the Association of American Universities, or AAU. Provost Bob Smith explains the significance of inclusion in the AAU and how designation as a national research university, or NRU, impacts Texas Tech in becoming a Tier One institution.

Smith: We wanted to help clarify some confusion we have observed relative to NRU versus Tier One status. They are really not the same thing. NRU status means meeting a minimum set of criteria that would be common among prominent research universities in the United States. The term “Tier One,” on the other hand, generally implies being among the very best U.S. and Canadian research universities; and arguably, the very best research universities are those that are members of the Association of American Universities, or AAU. The AAU has a membership of 61 public and private research universities that are all well recognized for excellence in higher education. Among the membership you will find public universities such as the Universities of California at Berkeley, Michigan, North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Texas at Austin. AAU private universities include Columbia, Duke, Harvard, Princeton and Yale. In all, AAU institutions represent 36 public and 25 private research universities of the highest caliber; Tier One institutions have the “feeling of greatness” in all that they do, particularly with respect to the quality and accomplishments of faculty members, students, and staff. Great research universities are also characterized by significant numbers of high-quality graduate programs, especially at the doctoral level, along with graduate student populations that are typically in excess of 25 percent of the total student populations. And, of course, notable research universities are at the forefront of research, scholarship, and creative work – whether that work involves musical compositions, plays, works of art, or great artistic performances. In general, the fruits of Tier One university research and creative endeavors change the way others view and think about our human experience and the natural world. Overall, Tier One campuses teem with intellectual activities and excitement. Academic pursuits are at the core of campus life—including that of students. Summarizing briefly then, our Texas Tech community may revel in the achievement of NRU status but we hope that all of our colleagues—faculty, students and staff—will see merit in our movement toward Tier One status.

Pierce: Provost Smith, along with President Guy Bailey and Senior Vice President for Research Taylor Eighmy, wrote about Texas Tech’s aim to become a nationally recognized research university in the spring edition of *All Things Texas Tech*. The article is titled “The Steps to Tier

One: Texas Tech's Promise and Prospects." A link to the article can be found on our website at academicast.ttu.edu.

In other news, the Office of the Vice President for Research is focusing on financial disclosure. Senior Vice President Eighmy formed the Investigator Financial Disclosure Committee to provide guidance in managing institutional conflicts of interest. The faculty-led committee also develops and monitors management plans when a potential conflict is identified. Accounting professor Ralph Viator heads up the committee as chairman.

The Rawls College of Business is amping up its emphasis on energy. The college announced that its energy commerce program is now an official area of study. The move intends to bring greater visibility to the broad energy commerce curriculum. Further, the college has committed to expanding the program with tenure-track faculty and a stronger emphasis on research.

Along with a commitment to academics, students of integrated scholarship pursue a course of lifelong study through their involvement in active learning. Modes of active learning include internships, service learning experiences, undergraduate and graduate research, and opportunities to study abroad. In this edition of "AcademiCast," Provost Bob Smith spotlights Keisha McKenzie, a recent graduate of the technical communication and rhetoric doctoral program.

Smith: Originally from the United Kingdom, Keisha McKenzie came to Lubbock to earn a master's degree in technical communication from Texas Tech. McKenzie's deep interests in communication, people, and society motivated her to continue her education through the doctoral level.

McKenzie: Well, I've always loved language. I've always loved people and learning about society, and so the three interests converge in technical communication because we study arguments, persuasion and how information is used in society.

Smith: Recognizing the broad influence of national systems of government, McKenzie focused her dissertation on communication within the UK's government.

McKenzie: My dissertation focuses on a British government document that was used to make the case for the war in Iraq in 2002, and so it's a description of Iraq's alluded weapons of mass description, and so I'm looking at this document as an example of executive branch communication and how the structure, the values and the personnel of government intersect and are revealed in the documents that the government produces.

Smith: To extend her education beyond the university environs, McKenzie interned with the House of Representatives in Washington, D.C.

McKenzie: I was placed with the House Judiciary Committee, and that's the committee that has a very, very broad remit. They deal with constitutional issues, immigration, crime, several other areas like commercial law. But it was a fascinating experience for me, as a British citizen, to see the working of government up close, and to see the way that the Separation of Powers Doctrine works itself out in everyday working life.

Smith: McKenzie's internship on Capitol Hill exposed her to a range of issues. Aside from her scholarly pursuits, McKenzie works on report writing, editing and grant applications as a staff member in the TTU Ethics Center. She also serves the Seventh Day Adventist Church, writing for denominational magazines and working with groups that support sexual minorities. In particular, she values the contributions she has made with the local chapter of P-F-L-A-G, or Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays.

McKenzie: They are very much concerned about providing support to parents and family members, and they are also very responsive to teachers and students here on campus. I think a lot of our social conflicts come when we don't really allow people to see one another. We hide behind talking points, or we hide behind political manifestos, and the human element in these discussions gets forgotten. So I really enjoy working with the PFLAG group because they are all about people.

Smith: McKenzie believes that seeking a broad range of learning opportunities is critical for students who aspire to having integrated scholar experiences.

McKenzie: I think that looking at the breadth of experience rather than just accumulating knowledge is part of what liberal arts education is supposed to give us. It's supposed to give us scope. It's supposed to give us access to humanities, sciences and applied arts. And so looking at opportunities to apply your specialty in some kind of community service project, whether that might be tutoring people who don't have access to the knowledge that you have, or want to get it but can't access it—education—formally, or it might be something completely different from your academic specialty.

Smith: In his 2009 "New Beginning" speech at Cairo University in Egypt, President Obama shared the following concluding thought with his audience: "All of us share this world for but a brief moment in time. The question is whether we spend that time focused on what pushes us apart, or whether we commit ourselves to an effort—a sustained effort—to find common ground, to focus on the future we seek for our children, and to respect the dignity of all human beings." Through her active learning as a graduate student, Dr. Keisha McKenzie has analyzed communication, connected with a number of people, and helped to enrich her community and society, for which we say: Bravo!

Thanks for listening! I'm Bob Smith.

Pierce: Thanks, Dr. Smith!

That concludes this edition of "AcademiCast." If you would like to learn more about students of integrated scholarship or the stories featured here, please visit our website at **academicast.ttu.edu**. Thanks for listening, and join us again in two more weeks for the latest academic news from Texas Tech University.