

Executive Summary: The University of Tulsa Reaccreditation Self-Study (2008)

Note: This executive summary was part of The University of Tulsa's self study report during the 2008 10-year reaccreditation review by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Universities. The University earned reaccreditation with a favorable evaluation, and North Central featured the university's report during its 2008 annual conference.

Doug Fishback wrote this executive summary; see more online at www.dougfishback.com.

Overview

The University of Tulsa (the University) submits this Self-Study Report to the Higher Learning Commission (the Commission) of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (the Association) in support of its request for continued accreditation. The University was first accredited as an institution of higher learning in 1929, with doctoral level accreditation established in 1962.

This report reflects the active involvement of the entire University community – including trustees, senior administrators, faculty, students and alumni.

Beyond its immediate value as an accreditation process document, this report will serve as an ongoing resource for University trustees and administrators. Just as our 1998 self study helped articulate a framework for the following decade of progress, our present review has yielded valuable insights that will inform our continued efforts.

Alongside our findings, we present two change requests: 1) We ask the Commission to lift its pre-approval stipulation on the University's introduction of new doctoral programs, and 2) We ask the Commission to concurrently approve our proposed doctoral program in Chemistry.

About The University of Tulsa

The University of Tulsa is an independent private university featuring bachelors, masters and doctoral programs; an active research enterprise; and lifelong learning through the Division of Continuing Education (serving adult learners) and the University School (serving pre-K through 8th grade). Programs are delivered through the Henry Kendall College of Arts and Sciences, the College of Engineering, the College of Business Administration, and the College of Law. Graduate programs operate under the auspices of the Graduate College, and research activities are administered by the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs.

Total 2007-08 enrollment is 4,165 students: 2,987 undergraduates, 638 graduate students, and 540 law students.

In broad terms, the University's history can be segmented into three periods, the first of which began in 1894 with its founding as a Presbyterian mission school in pre-statehood Indian Territory. The second period began in 1907, when a group of Tulsa business and civic leaders pooled their resources to acquire the college from the Church and relocate it from its original home in Muskogee. This move coincided with several historic developments: Oklahoma statehood, the advent of aviation, the introduction of Ford's Model T, and the first major discoveries that uncorked the state's Oil Boom. As a

matter of both design and necessity, the University grew quickly as an educational partner in Tulsa's commercial ascent, developing expertise in fields such as petroleum and mechanical engineering, law, and accounting.

The 1980s would set the stage for the University's third and present period of development. As Oklahoma's petroleum industry contracted, the aggressive entry of public institutions into the Tulsa market began to redefine the local education landscape. Recognizing new opportunities in these challenges, the University's trustees framed a vision for the institution's evolution from a local commuter college into a residential university with national reach.

The progress of the past decade has been guided by this vision and realized through focused action. Most recently, under the leadership of President Steadman Upham, the University has made notable progress in areas including National Merit Scholar enrollments, faculty endowments, campus expansion, and alumni chapter development. These efforts have been rooted in our Mission Statement and aligned around a set of strategic priorities, which we believe will:

- Advance TU as a highly competitive national university;
- Build our educational capacity through faculty endowments, scholarship endowments, and curricular enhancement;
- Develop an engaging residential campus environment with market-grade housing, resource-rich learning spaces, and commons areas;
- Extend our recruiting reach among the nation's most talented students and increase admission selectivity;
- Advance the University's research program, particularly along interdisciplinary lines in high-potential areas such as nanotechnology and energy; and
- Maintain fundraising success to advance these priorities.

About This Report

In responding to the Commission's accreditation criteria, we have tried to paint an accurate and complete picture of The University of Tulsa. While any such attempt must be imperfect, we hope to have demonstrated, within the structure of the Association's criteria, a number of essential points, with the following foremost among them.

1) Learning defines our mission.

The University of Tulsa Mission Statement, as refined per the Commission's 1998 guidance, delineates four bedrock values: excellence in scholarship, dedication to free inquiry, integrity of character, and commitment to humanity. It is no accident that knowledge and discovery stand alongside personal and social ethics in our statement; we approach education not merely as an individual achievement, but more broadly as a shared asset that draws from and returns to our collective welfare.

With scholarly excellence at the heart of our mission, The University of Tulsa offers 57 undergraduate majors and 46 graduate degree programs plus 2 LLM certificates (not counting joint degree programs – e.g., JD/MBA). These offerings are not static; within the past decade, we have introduced 7 undergraduate degree programs, 5 graduate degree programs (net of 2 deactivations), and 5 joint graduate degree programs. In addition, we continue to monitor and move to keep learning opportunities relevant. Our present effort to accentuate globalization in our curriculum (e.g., new language offerings, new international business faculty, and new emphasis on study abroad) is a good example

of our resolve to connect learning initiatives to emerging opportunities.

Reflecting our conviction that service is essential to a complete education, the University has supplemented its traditional service programs by formalizing community service as part of Freshman Orientation Week. About 600 students participated this year. In addition, we recently established the Freshman Leadership Institute, an elective organization helping students grow through community engagement.

In addition to recognizing learning as a multi-faceted process, we also cultivate it as a lifelong adventure. Visitors to The University of Tulsa campus will find pre-Kindergartners having their first school experiences, undergraduates and graduate students preparing for careers, seasoned workers returning for professional enrichment, and retirees pursuing new interests. As one of our recurring public radio service announcements reminds listeners, the University encourages lifelong learning through frequent public events, special guest lectures, and continuing education offerings. (One of our recent offerings was an eight-week introductory screenwriting course open to all.)

Our commitment to institutional learning is evident in our Quality Service program, a staff development initiative comprised of two multi-week courses. Quality Service I centers on *Raving Fans*, the best-selling customer service book by management authority Ken Blanchard, with Sheldon Bowles. Quality Service II engages staff in exploring the concept of community, taking as its core text Clifton Taubert's *Eight Habits of the Heart*, a highly accessible and thoughtful memoir of the author's upbringing as a member of the African-American community in a rural Mississippi town. The University recently adapted QSII course content as the basis for the Freshman Leadership Institute, mentioned above.

2) Our mission inhabits our organization.

As part of its 1998 review, the Commission issued guidance to clarify both the content of our Mission Statement and its role within the institution. We responded by convening a review committee with comprehensive representation. This committee refined the Mission Statement around the four values noted above: excellence in scholarship, dedication to free inquiry, integrity of character, and commitment to humanity. The Faculty Senate approved the statement, which was formally adopted by the Board of Trustees in October, 1999. The Commission's Focus Team visit in 2000 recognized our progress on this issue.

In the years since, our Mission Statement has been widely publicized in University documents, featured during new employee orientation, displayed prominently on our Web site (www.utulsa.edu), printed on the backs of many business cards, and displayed on the arena Jumbotron before each home basketball game. A recent internal awareness campaign built around the theme "I am TU" promoted each of the Mission Statement's four core values.

Evidence that we are defined by our learning-centered mission is widespread, but one anecdote serves particularly well as a distillation of our priorities. University of Tulsa Head Golf Coach Bill Brogden forfeited the 2005 Western Athletic Conference championship playoff against Southern Methodist University when extended play threatened our team's timely return for final exams. President Steadman Upham praised Brogden's decision in a campuswide memo, stating "I have never been more proud of a coach or team." Sports Illustrated columnist Rick Reilly also lauded the decision in an 800-word piece, which quoted Brogden saying, "We've got to remember why they're here: to get a degree."

3) Our mission aligns our planning and our execution.

Beyond embracing our Mission Statement as a matter of institutional identity, we have relied upon

it over the past decade as the basis for coordinated planning, action and self assessment.

Most recently, President Steadman Upham led a 2005-06 review that engaged faculty, administrators and trustees in a series of exploratory and planning sessions. Building on the Mission Statement and orienting to the “national residential university” strategies noted above, the review produced long-range guidance for the University’s academic development, student support, community engagement and continued campus growth. In turn, these priorities determined the line-item goals of our current Embrace the Future capital campaign. (We are currently in the quiet phase of our campaign, and have thus far secured more than \$200 million in commitments toward an overall goal of \$400 million.)

To be effective, organizational strategy and capital resources must be applied through appropriate governance channels. Here, too, the University has moved in accordance with its goals. For example, shortly after the Commission’s 1998 review visit, we welcomed a full-time Vice President for Institutional Advancement, who moved quickly to expand and organize our fundraising, stewardship, alumni relations and public relations units around both immediate and long-term needs. Elsewhere throughout the University, since the Commission’s last visit, we have created the position of Director of Assessment; have implemented two programs (MSAP and TULAP) to assess student skills relative to the Mission Statement; and have begun participation in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). In another important move, the University restructured its Information Services governance to facilitate a cohesive campuswide technology strategy; these changes included elevation of the Chief Information Officer position to the vice-presidential level.

Atop the foundation of organizational planning, capital capacity, and updated governance, The University of Tulsa continues to develop core scholarly assets – from faculty funding to curriculum. As noted elsewhere throughout our report, over the past decade, the University has:

- Endowed 34 new faculty positions;
- Endowed 160 new student scholarships;
- Introduced 7 undergraduate degree programs, 5 graduate degree programs (net of 2 deactivations), and 5 joint graduate degree programs;
- Emphasized globalization through new course offerings, faculty hires and promotion of study abroad;
- Doubled its externally sponsored research budget (currently about \$50 million); and
- Introduced six interdisciplinary institutes (Nanotechnology, Alternative Energy, Information Security, Bioinformatics & Computational Biology, Individual Differences, and Trauma, Abuse & Neglect).

While increasing our organizational and academic capacity to advance as a highly competitive residential university with national reach, the University has substantially expanded campus facilities. Since 1997, we have invested \$186 million in new construction and landscaping, producing a 34% increase in usable square footage that includes more than 500,000 square feet of new student housing. As a result, over the past decade, we have raised undergraduate on-campus residency from about 40% to an all-time high approaching 70%. It is a welcome confirmation that in its Best 366 Colleges guide (2008), The Princeton Review ranks The University of Tulsa 9th in the nation for quality of student life.

In alignment with our Mission value of “excellence in scholarship” and our strategic priorities of “national profile” and “admissions selectivity,” our Admissions organization has worked over the past decade to increase recruiting nationwide. In addition to expanding regional recruiting staff, we have targeted productive niches, most notably high school students in Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) programs. These efforts, along with increased scholarship support and rising national visibility, have produced clear progress in our Admission metrics:

- 51% of 2007-08 freshman applicants were accepted for admission, compared to 83% in 1997-98;
- The percentage of TU freshmen who graduated in the top ten percent of their high school classes has doubled from around 30% to 60%;
- The University of Tulsa has raised the percentage of first-time freshmen from outside Oklahoma from 38% to 56%
- The University of Tulsa ranks 12th in the nation for National Merit Scholars per capita (2007 entering class);
- In recent years, our freshman classes have contained 10% National Merit Finalists, and today 1 in 11 of all our undergraduates is in this elite group.

Conclusion

The University of Tulsa is pleased to present itself for your review as an organization that – compared to the University you visited 10 years ago – is more firmly rooted in a clear vision for educational excellence, more uniformly aligned around a set of strategic priorities, and more nationally visible as a sound option for highly talented students. We believe that our unity of purpose will be evident to you in the form of new faces, new facilities, and a significantly heightened capacity to set and achieve ambitious goals in line with our mission.

