There are many elements that come together to create the campus climate of a university. Some of the most influential are relatively easy to identify. First and foremost, it is the people. Students, faculty, staff and visitors all contribute towards creating the climate of the university at the very same time that they are experiencing it. Secondly, the physical facilities, their condition and the landscape in which they are set play a major role in how the climate of a campus is perceived.

Less obvious, but of major importance, are other factors such as: the ready availability of important information; ease of access to programs and services; the presence of a customer service orientation and culture; the quality of the faculty and staff; and the availability of opportunities to participate in activities to learn and develop oneself outside the classroom setting. Arguably there are other important factors that affect the campus climate of the University of Texas at El Paso. The task force, however, chose to focus upon and assess those factors that influence campus climate the most.

**Process:**
The Task Force was organized into four subcommittees to assess the current campus climate:

I. Student Activities and Services  
II. Physical Facilities and Infrastructure  
III. Human Resource Development  
IV. Intellectual Climate and Shared Governance

Each subcommittee used a methodology that allowed it to take a snapshot of the current campus climate at UTEP. Methodologies used ranged from surveys to focus groups to informal feedback from department heads and vice presidents. While strengths were identified, the primary focus was to identify areas in need of improvement.

**FINDINGS**

Both strengths and areas needing improvement were identified by the Task Force. The goal was to assure that over the course of the coming decade UTEP will build upon what it does well and make improvements where they are needed. By doing so, the university will be able to meet the needs of its current students and best position itself to meet the needs of future students as it prepares for the second century of its existence.

Some of the subcommittees of the Task Force utilized focus groups made up of the various constituencies of the university to gather information. The comments received from the participants made it clear that UTEP is currently doing many things right.
Specific university strengths repeatedly mentioned by participants included:

- The small campus feel of the university despite its large size and rapid growth.
- The opportunity for students to closely interact with faculty and staff on a regular basis and not feel like a number.
- Small class sizes.
- An environment that is very user- and people-friendly.
- The beauty of the campus and the way it is carefully maintained.
- The sense of pride held by members of the university community. That pride has been further strengthened by recent athletics success.
- A diverse student body and a diverse faculty and staff that it capitalizes upon and celebrates.
- The desire to maintain and carry forward the sense of a warm, close, and friendly environment.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

I. Student Activities and Services

Enhance Advising and Student Advocacy

Students reported that they relish the interaction they have with UTEP Faculty and Staff both in and out of the classroom. They place a high value on the advice and advising they have received during the course of those interactions. Continuous improvement and program enhancement, however, is necessary in order to serve UTEP’s growing student population and expanding curricular portfolio.

A consistent training program for academic advisors is needed to ensure the accuracy and reliability of information given to students. Some students also voiced the view that a centralized office or student ombudsman is needed to provide thorough and consistent advocacy for students. Some additional recommendations included:

- Provide better access to advising resources and staff.
- Print and distribute accurate/current degree plans.
- Improve access to and the quality of the academic advisors.

Improve and Expand Communication With Students and Advertise Current Programs

The students stated that they recognize the effort the university puts into advertising the many programs, events and services it offers. At the same time they also reported that they would like to see the university strike out in new directions to increase the information provided to students and other constituents. Increased emphasis needs to be placed on informing students. They need to know about and take advantage of the important programs, events and services offered. Discovering new and improved methods of communicating with students is recommended.

- Go beyond email.
- Stress importance of getting involved.
- Provide better and earlier notification about important programs (e.g. orientation, etc.).
Strengthen Customer Service

As a growing and dynamic University, UTEP will continue to experience greater complexity in service and program offerings. It is imperative that the staff and faculty of the University work to maintain a “small campus” atmosphere on a campus with a student population approaching 20,000 students. Students should never be “just a number.” They deserve and expect high levels of staff expertise, outstanding customer service, and streamlined processes that minimize their involvement with university bureaucracy. Information between departments should be consistent, accurate and readily available. A comprehensive customer service program that permeates all areas of the university should be instituted to increase staff awareness and decrease student and constituent frustration. Recommendations received included:

- Consolidate services to improve customer service and quality of staff efforts.
- “We’re here for you and here to help you” should be an attitude that permeates the campus.
- Continue efforts aimed at enhancing collaboration between University departments.
- Continuous customer service training should be emphasized throughout campus.
- Policies should be clear and well publicized.

Expansion of Services and Programs

The committee heard a clear request for new and expanded services and programs. It recognizes that determining which programs and services should be implemented or strengthened is challenging because of the variety of suggestions received from the diverse group of individuals interviewed. Furthermore, the students requested that the increases in services and programs be accomplished without raising the fees they pay. Addressing some of their suggestions will require financial support. Their requests included:

- More standardized office hours for all departments.
- Better office coverage during lunch time.
- Offer more programs after 2:00 pm.
- Academic Services also need to be available in the evenings.
- More food services and dining options need to be available in the evenings.
- Expand hours of operation, especially for the Library and the Computer Labs.
- Provide more parking closer to campus for students.

Different Populations

Students and staff place a high value on diversity at UTEP. They appreciate the value of providing programs on diversity so that they can learn, grow, and become more culturally competent. Building upon our strength as a campus that values and promotes diversity, UTEP should capitalize on its unique border location. The creation of a diversity department was suggested. It would focus on developing new and innovative diversity programs and services to help students better understand the culture and diversity issues affecting El Paso and society in general.

Student Housing Expansion

Students and staff expressed strong support for increasing student housing on campus. They further stated that to be successful, the additional housing must be affordable. They also recommended that family housing be made available. The benefits to the UTEP community they
cited included an increase in student life and activity on campus, and increased usage of campus programs and services.

**Enhanced Academic Program Offerings**

Students at UTEP value their education and would like to see a wider variety of pre-professional and graduate programs offered at the university. The current classes and graduate degree programs offered were not seen as sufficient to meet the growing demands of the university. They suggested that the university:

- Create more career oriented academic programs that students are interested in, such as pre-veterinary, architecture, hotel/motel industry, and forensics.
- Provide more diversity in graduate programs. The growth to 13 doctoral programs is good but there is still a need for more graduate degree and certificate programs.
- Offer greater availability of selections and classes to choose from each semester.

**Gathering Places/Common Areas**

Several of the sub-committees heard the clear desire expressed by the campus community for more places on campus where people would want to naturally congregate. The campus is already beautiful with its architecture, grounds, close proximity of buildings and wonderful weather. It is a perfect setting for a string of well designed gathering areas that would be located across campus. Those gathering places would be attractive to all members of the university community and would invite students to spend more time on campus and more time with each other. In addition to outdoor gathering areas, indoor areas also are needed in campus buildings. They would encourage students to gather to study or socialize.

**Create a Pedestrian Walkway in the Center of Campus**

Strong support was voiced for the immediate closing of the core of campus to vehicles and the creation of a pedestrian mall. The result would be a much better campus environment. It would improve pedestrian traffic flow, provide a “homey” feel to the campus, and students would feel more welcome.

**Miner Metro**

The UTEP shuttle service has been a great success. During the first year of operation the Miner Metro shuttles carried as many as 1,800 passengers per day. In the second year the shuttles have carried as many as 2,400 passengers per day. The demand for more shuttles and more shuttle routes is clear.

**II. Physical Facilities and Infrastructure**

The Task Force reviewed the Campus Master Plan and generally agrees that the document adequately addresses the concerns and issues raised by students, faculty and staff. It includes visionary space planning that anticipates and accommodates: growth in academic and research capabilities; integration of academic, research and administrative functions; creation of a pedestrian-friendly campus; creation of gathering spaces in and around buildings; and general improvement of the campus environment and quality of life for students, faculty, staff and visitors.
Community Neighborhood
To maintain its current quality and be made even more effective, the next update of the university’s Campus Master Plan should account for the growing interaction between the university and the neighboring community. The university should use the concept of “community neighborhood” in all future updates. Doing so will focus attention on issues that are unique to servicing the needs of the community yet are interrelated with student needs. For example, elderly members of the community need convenient, accessible parking. The University offers a great variety of programs for the community. They include cultural and performing arts events, conferences and lectures, alumni functions, dinner theater productions and others. Planners should be sensitive to accommodating the needs of a diverse population of visitors from the El Paso and Juarez communities.

Parking Improvements
The lack of readily accessible parking is frequently identified as a primary issue by students, faculty and staff. Parking improvements would improve the everyday quality of life. The need on campus is for more “convenient” parking, closer to classrooms and offices. Parking garages appear to be a good solution. They could not only help with the parking situation but they also could be mixed-use spaces. They could include meeting facilities, food venues, additional classrooms and other services. The committee recommends that before any additional campus facilities are constructed, emphasis should be placed on alleviating current parking deficiencies. Future updates of the university’s Campus Master Plan should ensure that construction plans for major structures incorporate provisions for the construction of sufficient parking spaces and address the projected demand for parking as part of the project cost. Planners also should consider combining the construction of parking garages as integral parts of new structures in order to provide convenient and readily accessible parking for the staff and faculty who work in the new buildings.

Planners also should identify other viable parking solutions such as: leasing off-campus parking spaces with a shuttle service back to campus, modifying existing parking lots to include metered and timed spaces, and expanded use of the on-campus shuttle service.

III. Human Resource Development
The Human Resource Development subcommittee reviewed issues that will affect and shape UTEP’s human capital as the university moves toward its Centennial. Vice Presidents and Deans were invited by the subcommittee to give input on the challenges and opportunities facing UTEP’s workforce over the next ten years. Additionally, members of the subcommittee met with the Faculty Senate and Staff Council to get the input of these two key groups. A questionnaire was supplied to Faculty Senate and Staff Council members as well as to the Facilities Services Department. The subcommittee reviewed and discussed the information provided by constituents and makes the following recommendations.

Campus-wide Climate Study
The climate issues pertaining to human resources cover a broad range of topics. In order to fully understand and study the issues with more refinement, the subcommittee recommends that the
University consider administering a formal campus-wide climate survey of staff and faculty. While the subcommittee was able to identify some key areas of focus, a wide-reaching study of the university’s climate would expand on many other human resources-related issues, including mentoring/coaching, communication, respect, trust, diversity values, management development, compensation planning, benefits, performance management, and workforce growth projections. Such a climate study would enable the University to adequately prepare for the next phase in UTEP’s development.

Performance, Development and Workforce Planning
During the next 10 years the expected growth in UTEP’s student population along with the University’s goal to achieve Tier I research status will require new staffing strategies. As the Washington Advisory Group noted, a significant increase in faculty will be necessary. At the staff level, while increased hiring also may be necessary, training and development will play an even more critical role. Our staff—from managers and administrators to secretarial and support personnel—will need to acquire new skills and have the ability to function in a number of roles. Outstanding leadership among administrators and staff at all levels will be required. The availability of advancement opportunities and career paths will impact employee retention and provide continuity in the workplace. Additionally, identifying career progression and providing training and development tools will result in greater opportunities to hold employees accountable for performance expectations. Options to expand or explore include:

- Providing staff with clear advancement opportunities through career ladders, job families, and succession planning.
- Evaluating the University’s training and development opportunities in on and off campus courses, developing training paths or curricula tailored to specific job classifications, and mentoring and coaching.
- Exploring pay-for-performance or incentive-based compensation programs.
- Anticipating and planning for growth in staffing or reorganization of current staffing by developing new job descriptions to fit the changing needs of the institution.

Benefits & Work-Life Balance
The structure and types of benefits offered to UTEP employees will continue to be an important recruitment and retention tool. As employee accountability and expectations increase, assisting employees with balancing demands at work and demands at home will become important for the University to become more competitive and research-oriented. Issues in the area of benefits and work-life balance that were of interest and may need further attention include:

- Employee Tuition Assistance Program: extension of this benefit to include employees’ immediate family members, and expanding evening and weekend course offerings to accommodate staff schedules.
- Dual career couple considerations including opportunities for spousal/partner employment at UTEP, and a central clearinghouse with resources for hiring managers to assist candidates with off-campus job opportunities for a spouse or partner.
- Child/elder care arrangements, particularly emergency or after-hours care arrangements.
- General retirement planning assistance/additional communication about current UTEP retirement plan options.
• Work schedule and leave issues including telecommuting arrangements, faculty sabbaticals/career advancement leave, flexible work schedules, and parental or family or sick leave enhancements.

IV. Intellectual Climate and Shared Governance

The cornerstone of the University is its intellectual climate. The subcommittee defined the intellectual climate as those characteristics of the university environment that act to promote or interfere with the development and discussion of scientific, philosophic, and artistic ideas. A positive intellectual climate is one in which faculty, students, staff, and community members collaborate, exchange ideas, create new ideas, and learn from each other in non-threatening, open, and accepting intellectual encounters. It stimulates excitement for rational and intelligent thought, invites individuals to take intellectual risks, and rewards such contributions. It encompasses the traditional aspects of university teaching and learning (instruction, coursework, etc.) and the creation of new knowledge through research and creative activities, including the visual and performing arts. It promotes an atmosphere that nourishes collaboration, exchange of ideas, intellectual interchange and growth among faculty, staff, students and the community. The Intellectual Climate Subcommittee studied the campus intellectual climate and shared governance climate with campus-wide on-line surveys. Anonymous responses were obtained from 117 faculty members, 193 staff, and 462 students. They represented reasonably well the characteristics of the overall population at UTEP in regards to race and ethnicity, gender, years of experience, rank, and experience with shared governance. The analysis of these surveys forms the basis of this report and recommendations.

**Overall Intellectual and Shared Governance Climate Survey Results**

![Bar Chart](image)

**Intellectual Climate**

The responses of faculty, staff & students to questions that explored perceptions of the intellectual environment at UTEP indicated that the intellectual environment was rated as neither particularly positive or negative. This suggests that the university needs to improve in providing a stimulating intellectual environment for its students, staff, and faculty. The comments from all
groups indicated a strong desire for more and better outside speakers, debates and cultural events.

**Recommendations**

- The University should explore the possibility of dedicating one prime-time hour per week as an intellectual hour during which no other activities are scheduled, for example, Wednesdays 12:00 – 1:00.
  - The first Wednesday of the month could be dedicated to university-wide events, such as renowned and/or controversial speakers or performers.
  - The second to events within each college of general appeal to the entire college community.
  - The third to departmental events, such as colloquia, debates, or forums.
  - The fourth Wednesday of the month could then be used for campus wide activities such as festivals, parades, pep-rallies etc.
- Separate budgets should be reallocated within the university, colleges, and departments for intellectual events that can be used to pay the expenses and honoraria for distinguished outside speakers. These budgets need to be of sufficient magnitude to allow for stimulating and significant events and should not be the first funds cut when a budgetary shortfall occurs.
- Greater participation by the UTEP community in the development of various programs that focus on improving the on-campus intellectual climate should be encouraged. A variety of incentives could be used to promote participation in program planning and implementation. Students could get extra credit, staff could earn time off, and the faculty could include their participation as a more meaningful service entry on their annual review.
- The University should explore the possibility of coordinating intellectual program offerings with other institutions such as El Paso Community College and New Mexico State University as a way of sharing resources and costs for outside speakers or performers.
- Efforts should be made to bring scholarly conferences to the campus that are free of cost to the university community. The new Hilton Hotel should be used as a selling point for this purpose.
- The University should take greater advantage of the intellectual and cultural resources of Mexico in general and the Juárez universities in particular. This is important given UTEP’s focus on border region as areas of academic interest and cooperation.
- In order to facilitate the creation and implementation of programs and policies recommended, we suggest that a new, permanent “Intellectual Climate Committee” be created composed of staff, students, administrators and faculty. This committee would report directly to the President or possibly to the Senate. The Intellectual Climate Committee would be responsible for coordinating, planning and implementing programs focused on the improvement of the intellectual climate at UTEP. Members of the committee would have a minimum two-year term so that the impetus and oversight for creative programs is not lost in the transition of members.
Shared Governance
Shared governance was defined as the ability of individuals to affect change, engage in decision making, empowerment, and the communication of pending decisions at various levels of the institution. Faculty, staff and students responded to questions that explored their perceptions of shared governance at the departmental, college and university level. The responses from all three groups indicated that the overall shared governance climate was slightly below neutral. There were, however, large differences in the perceptions of shared governance at the departmental, college and university levels. In general, faculty and staff indicated that they were modestly positive toward the shared governance environment in their departments, moderately below neutral in regard to their college, and well below neutral in regard to the shared governance climate of the university. The written comments regarding the shared governance climate were varied but indicate that there needs to be substantial improvement in faculty, staff, and student involvement in the governance of the colleges and particularly the University. The Faculty Senate, Student Government Association, Staff Council, and Employee Advisory Council have historically been the vehicles for faculty, staff, and student involvement in the institution’s governance. The results suggest that these organizations have not been adequately providing shared governance involvement, further suggesting that substantial improvements are needed in their structures, their involvement in discussions of major university issues, and their involvement in the decision making process.

Recommendations
- The University and the Colleges need to expand the roles of faculty, staff, and students in the decision making process. Their inclusion should extend to active participation and shared responsibility for major decisions.
- The University should consider the development of a University Senate which includes the President, Provost, Vice Presidents, and Deans, faculty, staff, and students as a forum for vigorous discussion and interchange on all topics of importance to the University.
- The University should consider providing a broad role of the University Senate to include substantial input on decisions regarding strategic planning, research direction, budgetary allocations, space development and allocation, athletics, and the library.

In the interim, while the University Senate is being discussed and developed, liaison members of the Faculty Senate, Staff Council, and the Student Government Association should be appointed or elected to the organizational body to insure coordination of organizational activities.

V. Conclusions & Next Steps

The University of Texas at El Paso is a dynamic community dedicated to providing students with access to the highest quality education. Students are much more likely to commit to and complete their education in a climate that is intellectually challenging but which also provides a strong sense of belonging and support. To that end, the recommendations of this report are offered with the understanding that to achieve that climate for our students, the university must continue to strengthen and develop the physical, social and intellectual environment for all members of the university community.
The comments of focus group members and individuals interviewed reflected a strong sense of pride in the university and a great deal of satisfaction with it as it is today. The committee took note of the strength with which the participants expressed their positive perceptions. It has included and highlighted that response because it is important to acknowledge the sense of pride and appreciation held by the students, faculty, and staff of the university. In addition to stating their high degree of satisfaction, participants in the focus groups also were eager to share constructive criticism and point out areas for improvement. Both strengths and areas for improvement are detailed in this report. As UTEP moves towards the future it is important to carry the positives forward and build upon them. It is also important to directly address the areas identified for improvement.