U.S. - Mexico Border and International Programs

Lucinda Vargas, Chair

Joe Alcantar, Jr., Lillian Esparza Hinojos, Felix S. Fernandez, Maly Fong, Michael M. Miles, Henry Quintana, Jr., Gabriela Quirarte, Andres Sandoval, Arthur Wiener

UTEP Liaisons
Jon Amastae, Kirsten F. Nigro, Richard L. Sprinkle

UTEP’s binational location on the U.S.-Mexico border and its historical link to the Kingdom of Bhutan place the University’s academic programs, research and service efforts in an international context. This committee was charged with exploring opportunities to develop international partnerships that take advantage of UTEP’s unique geographic location. It provided recommendations on areas including: cooperative academic and research collaborations, Mexican student enrollment, study abroad programs, and other international program opportunities.
Introduction

UTEP’s border location and its historical link to the Kingdom of Bhutan place its academic programs, research, and service efforts in an international context. The committee explored opportunities to further international relations and determine the anticipated needs of the U.S.-Mexico border region in the next decade. Recommendations are provided in areas including academic and research collaborations, community outreach, Mexican student enrollment, and other international programs.

UTEP is committed to providing quality higher education to a diverse student population. It has taken advantage of its close proximity to Mexico to enhance programs that capitalize on its border location by building strong interdisciplinary programs and research collaborations among faculty, institutions of higher education, and industry, especially in northern Mexico. Given its unique relationship with Ciudad Juárez and the rest of Mexico, themselves gateways not only to the rest of Latin America but to Europe and Asia as well, UTEP is ideally situated to become a renowned locus for international studies and research. Within this framework, the following is the committee’s vision for UTEP’s stature by its centennial year of 2014:

• The University of Texas at El Paso will be a premier institution for international studies, programs, and research with emphasis on Mexico, on U.S.-Mexico themes, and on international borders.

To fulfill this vision, we anticipate that in the next decade UTEP will need to consolidate and continue to build upon existing programs, while at the same time creating new opportunities for innovative, synergistic initiatives.

Background: Existing Programs

The foundation for turning this vision into reality is strong, as UTEP has developed extensive activities in U.S.-Mexico and other international arenas. These span all areas of the University, including academic disciplines, outreach, service, and student activities. As of Fall 2004, UTEP enrolled 1,854 students of Mexican nationality, a number that constitutes approximately 10 percent of our student body and approximately 13.9 percent of all Mexican students in the U.S., the largest concentration of Mexican students in any U.S. university. It should also be recognized that there is a significant but uncounted number of U.S. citizen students born to Mexican parents and raised in Mexico who are a part of the UTEP community. These students are another link between Mexico and UTEP. Many pursue careers in the U.S. with unique insight into the international environment.

At the undergraduate and graduate levels, UTEP offers academic programs focused on Mexico, U.S.-Mexican interactions, and other international areas. Important recent additions include the Ph.D. in History emphasizing the Borderlands, the interdisciplinary M.A. in Latin American and Border Studies, the Ph.D. in Environmental Science, the Ph.D. in International Business, the Ph.D. in Composition and Rhetoric with cross-cultural emphasis, and the M.F.A. in Bilingual Creative Writing. UTEP is actively pursuing closer integration of its programs with the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez and...
other regional universities through the program Building Higher Education on the U.S.-Mexico Border.

Research and teaching on Mexico, U.S.-Mexico themes, and international topics are organized through several specialized campus units—e.g., the Center for InterAmerican and Border Studies (CIBS), the Center for Law and Border Studies, the Center for Environmental Resource Management (CERM), the TransBoundary Water Institute, the Office of International Programs, and the Center for Research on Hispanic Health Disparities—and through most academic departments. The University currently has 27 convenios with Mexican and other international universities and agencies, including governments.

These activities, while impressive in their range and depth, are the result primarily of individual initiatives and are relatively uncoordinated and not well known regionally or nationally. There has been an insufficient formalized effort to coordinate, to publicize, to seek opportunities for integrative actions, or to plan strategically in this area. Thus, we regard the present situation not as an end point but rather as a base to build on to fulfill the vision articulated by our committee, a vision that will maximize UTEP’s strategic advantages in its border location, its binational reach, its bicultural composition, and its majority Hispanic student population.

Recommendations

The committee offers the following recommendations for making the University of Texas at El Paso a premier institution for international studies, programs, and research with emphasis on Mexico, on U.S.-Mexico themes, and on international borders:

I. Coordinating Entity

- There must be a clear institutional commitment to the creation and continuance of a coordinating entity that spans all colleges and all existing and new centers.
- This entity should have the structural capacity to advocate for, initiate, nurture, guide, and actively promote all international activities, whether in existing administrative units or in areas new to the institution.
- This entity should have as its charge the facilitation of strategic planning within existing and new programmatic endeavors and of cross-disciplinary program development.
- This entity will incorporate community input through an advisory board comprised of international community leaders and students.

II. Existing International Initiatives

- Existing convenios should be inventoried and evaluated for their efficacy in creating excellence in international initiatives and, if need be, discontinued.
- Existing international programs and initiatives should also be inventoried and evaluated for their efficacy in creating excellence and, if need be, reconsidered and reconfigured.
- The University must commit to supporting and publicizing existing international initiatives.
- The undergraduate and graduate curricula must be internationalized across disciplines.
- Study abroad must become a major University priority.

This would be accomplished by:

- Increasing funding
- Creating a diverse menu of study programs
- Incorporating study abroad into major requirements whenever possible
- Developing clear agreements between institutions/ departments regarding transfer credits to enable and encourage study abroad
- Fostering the study of second and third languages in K-12 education, to better prepare students for study abroad
- The number of UTEP students studying abroad should represent 10 percent of the University’s student population by 2014. (Currently it is approximately half of one percent [.005], even under the most generous definition of “study abroad.”)
- While the implementation of traditional models of study abroad needs to be expanded, UTEP should also develop new models based on relationships with nearby Mexican and other international institutions, so that increased numbers of students and faculty may participate and other collaborative activities can be developed.
- As UTEP moves toward Research I status, and in order for the international dimension to make a greater mark across all disciplines in the University, research expenditures on Mexican, U.S.-Mexico, and international studies must be at least tripled over the next decade.

III. Foreign Student Enrollment

- Building on its established base, UTEP must actively recruit students from abroad in order to make this campus a truly international community.
- Primary to this effort must be raising Mexican graduate student enrollment by at least 50 percent of the current enrollment through active on-site recruitment and new convenios.
- Formalized collaborative teaching and research between UTEP and foreign (especially Mexican) institutions of higher education should become a major recruitment tool for building graduate student enrollment in fields related to
Mexico, the border, and international studies.
- UTEP must commit to the strategic development of cross-disciplinary Ph.D. programs in these fields, to recruit top students and faculty from both the U.S. and internationally.
- UTEP should pursue both state- and externally-funded mechanisms to provide competitive TA/RA support as a strategy to recruit foreign students.

IV. New Synergies
- The development of programs and activities that integrate Mexican and Mexican-American students should be reinforced. This will provide a truly international experience that both enhances student achievement and leads to cross-border understanding and community development.
- Traditional academic “silos” must be actively broken down to facilitate research and curricular synergies across disciplines and University units.
- These synergies should include, but not be limited to, the following areas, which are listed in no particular order of importance:
  - Engineering
  - Biomedical research
  - Science
  - International business and cross-border trade
  - Demographics
  - The environment
  - Technological and legal aspects of security
  - Technologies of and for the future
  - Translation studies
  - Cultural and linguistic competencies
  - Cultural and artistic programs
- Departments not presently engaged in international research and teaching should be encouraged to collaborate with departments that are.
- UTEP should encourage and support synergies between the Consulates and cultural agencies on both sides of the border.

V. Executive Education
- In order to extend UTEP’s Mexico and international impact, the committee recommends programs to involve the entire range of bi-national actors in the community with campus international activities.
- UTEP should become a model for executive education by creating an Institute of International Executive Education. The Institute would, among other things, provide short-term courses and seminars designed specifically for the needs of executives and other leaders on both sides of the border. These courses should include, but not be limited to, comparative cultures of management and business; comparative civics; and comparative linguistic and cultural competencies in the professions (health, law enforcement, business, the media, etc.)
- This program should serve executives and leaders from throughout the U.S. through web-based courses or intensive seminars at UTEP.
- Executive education programs should be developed and marketed as important revenue generators for the University, especially given the large presence of Fortune 500 firms in the area.

VI. Outreach
- Outreach efforts should be fully integrated into the mission of all UTEP programs related to Mexico, the border, and international studies.
- Included in outreach activities should be the local community, schools, arts agencies, and businesses.
- Joint activities between UTEP/EI Paso and Ciudad Juárez should be established as a way of furthering bi-national synergies.

The U.S.-Mexico Border and International Programs Committee of the University of Texas at El Paso’s Centennial Commission believes that by 2014 UTEP will be a premier institution for international studies, programs, and research with emphasis on Mexico, on U.S.-Mexico themes, and on international borders. This will be accomplished by the creation of the coordinating entity, which will have as its charge the implementation of the stated recommendations.

Lucinda Vargas examined existing and future international initiatives.