

# THE UNIVERSITY of TENNESSEE CHATTANOOGA

## Provost's Page

*December 3, 2009*

At the end of this semester and looking forward to the new year, I would like to address briefly UTC's ultimate impact on our state and region and its recognized brand identity within the higher education marketplace. Despite UTC's challenges, most of us at UTC generally identify UTC as a high quality university serving a growing population of talented students. We now recognize that we have successfully transitioned to a traditional residential campus over the past ten years with over 30% of our students living on campus. We also know that compared to a decade ago we are enjoying a greater market share of college age students from across the entire state of Tennessee who select UTC as their first choice.

However, as we enjoy this positive energy, we continue to struggle a bit with what we should ultimately be as a progressive university within a rapidly changing higher education landscape. What should our brand identity be and how do we effectively capture that brand in the minds of our public constituencies? Certainly our strategic plan, "Critical Partnerships-A Pathway to Excellence," is our basic blueprint for success as a community engaged institution, and we continue to make great progress with the implementation of this plan. However, I believe the next and most crucial step for us is to lay claim to our potential by becoming known within our state as the premier undergraduate campus with the very best honors' experience opportunities as well as strength in selected and differentiated graduate programs. Of course, these goals must always be balanced against our mission to provide access to higher education for Tennesseans with varied backgrounds and interests. These are not mutually exclusive, and I believe it very possible to have both high expectations and reasonable access.

Truthfully, we are not very far from achieving our brand recognition, but we do have some issues to address along the way. The following goals are among those that I feel are most important for us at the present time:

- Improve first year retention to above 80%
- Improve six-year graduation rates to above 60%
- Improve success rates in developmental math and college algebra to above 75%
- Improve advising, particularly for first year students
- Integrate critical thinking within our undergraduate curricular experience via our QEP
- Establish an Honors College with a goal of enrolling 10% of UTC undergraduates
- Provide at least one educational enhancement experience for every undergraduate (i.e., faculty-guided research, study abroad, service-learning, internship, etc.)
- Strengthen global learning opportunities for more students within the context of their majors
- Grow graduate enrollments to approximately 20% of total enrollment and continue to differentiate and improve the quality of our graduate programs

I will try to say much more about all of these as we move forward. However, I would like to use the remainder of this newsletter to focus on the success rates in math and our plans regarding a student math lab. Math has become the major gateway for most students to complete successfully a college degree and ultimately be prepared to negotiate our increasingly technological global economy. Students, teachers, and employers across the country have justifiably been worrying about and dealing with students' poor math skills. ACT data indicate that only one-third of Tennessee high school graduates are ready to tackle an entry college algebra class.

A recent article in *The Chattanooga Times Free Press* brought this issue of national significance into a local context. The article appropriately pointed out the opportunity for changing the model of how we teach lower level math to improve student learning. The details of exactly how this model will be manifested here at UTC in the general form of a math computer learning laboratory remain to be developed by our faculty. However, based on the experience on other university campuses, the idea of a math computer learning lab represents an exciting opportunity to help a large number of math-phobic students overcome their fears and succeed in significantly higher numbers. I am delighted that our UTC Math Department is leading this initiative and looks forward to the anticipated success of this model to help students.

Unfortunately, the recent newspaper article painted with a broad brush the current situation of math education at UTC and may have left an inaccurate view of the UTC math department as a whole. Like many departments at UTC, the math department performs at a high level with limited resources. They bear the brunt of large enrollments in lower-level courses, and as a group have stepped up to teach overloads repeatedly. The department boasts a conscientious, hard working, and talented faculty. The fact that we plan significant additional investments in the department regarding both the math computer lab and a newly approved master's program speaks volumes of both the University's commitment to mathematics as well as its confidence in the department faculty to negotiate successfully these major initiatives.

For those of you unfamiliar with the math laboratory concept, allow me to explain briefly. The concept of an active learning environment for math was born about ten years ago in the math department at Virginia Tech. At that time, Virginia Tech converted a vacant department store into their "Math Emporium" equipped with 500 Apple Macintosh computers. The Math Emporium completely replaced traditional math lectures and provided 24/7 student access with on-site instructional support from faculty and graduate students.

Despite some initial criticisms, the effort has proven to be a tremendous success by any metric used. In fact, the effort is the most highly recognized initiative named by the National Center for Academic Transformation <http://www.thencat.org/> and has been replicated with some modifications at a large number of institutions around the country, including LSU, University of Alabama, Mississippi State, Ole Miss, Oklahoma State, University of Idaho, UNC-Chapel Hill, and others. Without exception, the results have been incredibly positive with success rates (at least a grade of C) typically jumping from below 50% to above 75% of students enrolled in algebra and pre-calculus. This success is highly documented and a proven model for improved student learning outcomes in mathematics at multiple high quality institutions. This teaching/learning math concept was born and nurtured from within the mathematics community, and student response has been universally extremely positive.

Currently, we plan to implement fully a modified "emporium" model here at UTC, hopefully by fall 2010. The details of exactly how much traditional math lecture will be used in

our model are yet to be determined by the math department. A name for the new facility is also undecided at present despite the reference to the “Math Mall” in the recent *Times Free Press* article. Regardless, I am excited by this opportunity and wish to applaud the math department’s continued commitment to our students. I look forward to the opportunity to work with them to explore aggressively alternative approaches that hold potential for helping our students be more successful.

In closing, I encourage all of us to recommit ourselves to helping all of our students succeed with their academic and career goals regardless of their varied levels of preparation. Talented, hard working students usually do well anywhere they go, regardless of the faculty. However, the more at-risk students challenge us. The chance to mentor and help weaker students achieve something they never felt possible offers us the real opportunity to make a substantial, lasting difference in their lives and the broader communities we serve.

Below are announcements and a briefly annotated list of current initiatives. As always, please feel free to contact me directly at [phil-oldham@utc.edu](mailto:phil-oldham@utc.edu) with any suggestions, questions, and/or concerns you may have regarding any university-related issues. I want to thank all of you for another great semester and offer my best wishes for a Happy Holiday and productive New Year.

#### CURRENT INITIATIVES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Center for Advisement and Student Success (CASS) - Currently with five full-time professional advisors, each of whom has been assigned 200 freshmen for advising this academic year, the Center has been extremely busy. Taking on tutoring previously provided by Adult Services, the Center is quickly becoming a place where students seek academic assistance. So far this semester, over 2,200 separate appointments, walk-in visits, and/or tutoring sessions have occurred in the Center.
- International Programs – International Programs will soon have a new home in the former AΔΠ sorority house and new administrative structure. Although many of the details are still being developed, the basic approach was proposed last year by the strategic plan action committee regarding international programming.
- SACS Reaffirmation - Both the Compliance Certification and Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) Committees are continuing their work on a weekly basis. You will be hearing from the QEP Committee next semester as the Committee continues to seek your input regarding the general theme of critical thinking.
- Brown Bag Lunch with the Provost- If you would like to join me for lunch (Dutch-treat) to discuss anything on your mind, I plan to be in the UC Foundation room at noon on the second Wednesday of each month (Jan. 13, Feb. 10, March 10, April 14). Please join me if you can.
- Faculty Dining Room- Beginning in January, it has been arranged to make the Cherokee room in the UC available for faculty members to bring their own lunch in and enjoy eating together Monday thru Friday from 11:15 to 2:00. Thanks to Dr. Campa and the faculty senate for this great idea.