

THE UNIVERSITY *of* TENNESSEE CHATTANOOGA

Provost's Page

September 8, 2009

First of all, welcome to the beginning of what promises to be another record-breaking academic year for UTC. Also, I know you faculty veterans will join me in giving a special, warm welcome to all the new faculty members joining us this year. We congratulate you on your decision to come to UTC and hope that you have been able to get off to a great start already. Please let us know if there is anything we can do to make your transition to UTC as smooth as possible.

This is always an exciting time of year on any university campus as the youthful energy of several thousand students comes in direct contact with a dedicated faculty of experienced scholars. As I am writing this newsletter, we have shattered the 10,000 mark with over 10,500 students enrolled. This is more than a 7% increase over last year and adds up to a whopping 22% increase in the last five years. This record freshman class is also the best academically prepared group of freshman in UTC history with an average composite ACT of 22.7 (21.7 in 2004) and average high school GPA of 3.26. I want to particularly recognize and thank all the deans, department heads, and faculty who have responded in such a magnificent way to accommodate the record enrollment this fall. Although I have no data, anecdotally this fall's record freshman class has seemingly been provided much better advising and received improved class schedules over that of previous years. This is a tremendous accomplishment. Thanks to everyone who participated in this effort.

Obviously, the increased enrollment is a mixed blessing. Along with the challenge of serving more students while sustaining a high level of quality, we have opportunities for improved efficiencies and tuition revenue to offset recent reductions of state funding. Interestingly, the 7% tuition increase implemented this fall coupled with our 7% enrollment growth potentially generates new revenue approximately equal to what we were reduced in state support last year. Although the economic outlook remains turbulent, our costs continue to rise, and state funding levels will likely continue to decline, our aggressive attention to enrollment management and efficiency measures provides us with much greater local control for our own future.

It is particularly exciting to note that our freshman retention rate has jumped from 60% last fall to 67% this fall. This is the highest retention rate we've realized in the past five years. We also saw a significant improvement in our six-year graduation rate, which moved from 39% last year to 42% this year. Certainly we still have much work to do, but these data verify that we are on the right track and making great progress. The recent success is directly attributed to the entire campus community aggressively supporting some simple, but important initiatives. I want to especially thank Dr. Fran Bender, the staff in our new Center for Advisement and Student Success, the Department of English, Steven Hood and his Housing Staff, and the Retention Task

Force for their essential contributions to the overall effort. Congratulations to everyone who had a part in this success!

We undoubtedly have a full agenda of opportunities this year. 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 with any suggestions, questions, and/or concerns you may have regarding any university-related issues. Best wishes to all of you for another great year at UTC.

CURRENT INITIATIVES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Stimulus Fund Projects- Considerable effort has gone into maximizing our opportunities to receive and effectively utilize funds from the federal stimulus bill. UTC is scheduled to receive significant levels of one-time funds over the next two years. A list of proposed projects has been compiled with the assistance of faculty, staff, students, and administrators. This list will be reviewed and narrowed by the executive team with particular input from UPRAC and Dean's Council. If anyone has additional ideas to submit, please feel free to forward them through your department head and dean as soon as possible.
- Assistant Provost for Research and Engagement- As you know, Dr. Andy Novobilski left UTC this summer to accept a deanship at Arkansas State University. We plan to fill this position as soon as possible.
- Freshman Academic Success Tracking (FAST) Initiative- Professor Fran Bender continues to lead our efforts to improve our retention rate for first-time freshman. Last fall, the absences of freshmen enrolled in the English Department's composition and Western Humanities courses were tracked. This fall we are requesting faculty in all freshman courses to report student absences. If these students miss two classes, their instructors report these absences to a website which automatically sends their names to the Center for Advisement and Student Success and to Residence Life. For those students living on campus an RA tries to make a brief contact with the students to remind them of the importance of class attendance to their academic success. Those students living off-campus are contacted by the Advisement Office. These contacts are meant to serve as a mild wake-up call to students to get them back on track.
- International Programs- International Programs will soon have a new home and new administrative structure. We hope to implement fully the proposal developed last year by the strategic plan action committee regarding international programming. Stay tuned for more details later this semester.
- SACS Reaffirmation- Our compliance report for SACS reaffirmation is due a year from now. A great deal of effort will be focused this fall into finalizing our QEP plan. The SACS reaffirmation will culminate with the site team visit now scheduled for the first week in April of 2011.