

1. Regaining a Sense of Community

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Not long after I came to The University of Texas at Austin, I took the occasion of commencement to talk about the meaning of commitment. I told the graduating class that a sense of commitment requires a place, a community in which it can be expressed, and it is only through commitment to a community that we establish our own links to the past and to the future. Linking people to a place through a shared sense of commitment is what building a community is all about. This new master plan for the UT campus, the first in more than 60 years, is a thorough, probing, thoughtful and bold expression of renewed commitment to the future of this community.

During my years at UT, in a variety of ways, I and many others worked to build a greater sense of community across our campus and among all constituents of The University. Why? Because we live, it seems to me, in an age in which the pace, the progress, and many of the pressures of the modern world detract from the strength, cohesion, and life-sustaining quality of communities people once knew and cherished. We see, for example, in the technology of these times, the rise of so-called virtual communities and the steady erosion of real ones. Young people today worry more about how they are going to make a living tomorrow, and many are inclined toward a narrow individualism, with loosened bonds of social responsibility. In that light we must think seriously about how we can help to reestablish the sinews of community among our students, faculty, and staff. There are clear opportunities for us to build a sense of community as we grow, by creating an environment conducive to academic life in all respects.

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Universities are very special places where individual expression and the freshest efforts to unveil new truth can peacefully coexist with deeply regularized patterns of life, work and play bound by honored traditions and rituals. Efforts to regain a sense of community would be lost if one were to consider the people of a university as separate from the place. A university community is fundamentally about the interwoven character of a people and place, not one or the other, in an intricate social, cultural and institutional fabric. The finest university campuses in the world have always been places—model villages, to borrow Thomas Jefferson's notion—where communal cohesion and strength are derived as much from the physical plan as from any philosophy or values that may be espoused.

A campus, which serves as a village where people live and study for four or five years, where some people may work all their lives and where still others return regularly to participate in the life of the community, can be an important anchor point for personal identity. Places become part of our experience, part of who we are and how we define ourselves. We come to identify ourselves with the places we love, places where good times were had, where important lessons were learned, where we grew and matured, where the environment shaped us in memorable ways.



For virtually everyone in the UT community, past, present and future, the Forty Acres is one of those very special places on earth—at once memorable, magical, grand and deeply imbedded in the soul, as it has been for generation after generation.

The spirit of UT is very strong. One sees it in our freshmen classes just as clearly as at our 50-year reunions.

The quality of this institution is embodied in the quality of its campus, which can never be forgotten. People experience life on the UT campus as students, and their college days usually remain fresh in their minds for the rest of their lives. People who share the experience of living and working together in a remarkable place invariably share certain values: an aspiration to excel; faith in our peers, colleagues, teammates and neighbors; a passion for truth; high standards of integrity; and a sense of commitment to community.

Campus planning can add immeasurably to the sense of friendliness, comfort, sociability and community all of us feel at UT Austin. The University's original Forty Acres have long been considered the finest part of the campus, gaining their beauty, warmth and richness from the original master plans done by Cass Gilbert and Paul Cret just after the turn of the century. We are challenged

today to ensure that those exquisite qualities are embodied throughout the University in years ahead as the campus develops, through careful attention to the many elements that shape its physical environment: traffic patterns, parking, landscaping, the style of architecture, the kind of building materials used, the location of new buildings, their relationship to open space, the size of the residential student population and more.

This new master plan for The University of Texas at Austin is neither a blueprint nor a template that dictates the future; it simply provides a clear set of goals, a set of aesthetic considerations, a comprehensive, intelligent, reasoned, studied, open-ended plan in which the renewal of a commitment to community is the overarching theme. But neither is it a vague nor unspecific plan; it contains highly articulated goals and directions for the development of the campus. It provides a well-researched document that attempts to distill the best directions the University has taken in the past and tries to multiply, amplify and renew their effects in all future development. It is specific.

This master plan, including hundreds of drawings and planning documents as well as several volumes of text,

represents the work of hundreds of people—the finest, most creative, brilliant and constructive thinkers, planners, architects and members of our community we could bring together. This work reflects an enormous sense of pride in the University, pride in what this institution has always been, and what it might become as an even greater community. It reflects the profound sense of spirit we all share; it shows an energetic search for positive change without abandoning the ideals that got us here. It is about the goals and values that bring us together. Our hope is that this work will be lasting, that it will be used to inform future decisions and that it will serve future generations well.

Above all, the University today is a community striving to preserve its past, its heritage and its finest traditions and legacies, while building a bold, exciting and dynamic future. This master plan speaks eloquently of our history and tradition and seeks to build on the past, while providing carefully selected guideposts for the development of an even greater sense of community among the students, parents, alumni, faculty and staff of The University of Texas at Austin tomorrow.

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During 1994–96, working sessions among members of the design team and the UT community were held monthly in the Josey Room of the Flawn Academic Center to discuss a variety of campus planning issues.