

**Some Personal Observations of the Tenth Annual Texas Higher Education Research  
Executives Conference  
April 14<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup>, 2004  
South Padre Island, Texas**

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The theme of the Conference was

***“Creating Research Partnership and Coalition in Texas”.***

This was the 10<sup>th</sup> time research executives in Texas universities, under the auspices of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, gathered in a relaxed atmosphere to discuss some of the critical issues and challenges facing them and their institutions. At this conference, not only were there interesting presentations, it also provided an excellent platform for the research executives coming from all corners of the state a much needed opportunity to network and explore ways to create win-win collaborations.

The conference was both information-rich and relaxing. The “No-Tie Zone” requirement for the venue certainly ensured that there was a vacation mood in an otherwise highly professional atmosphere.

By any standard, this was a well-organized conference. The local host, **Bill Strong**, VP for Institutional Advancement of UT Brownsville and **Linda Domelsmith**, Director of Research Program of Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) should be commended for their behind-the-scene effort -- the cliché “the best organizers were those whose work goes unnoticed” was certainly present here.

Including the two organizing entities: THECB and The University of Texas at Brownsville, there were some 30 other research executives representing 19 public institutions:

1. Sam Houston State University
2. Stephen F. Austin University
3. Texas A&M University in College Station
4. Texas A&M University in Commerce
5. Texas A&M University in Kingsville
6. THECB
7. Texas State University at San Marcos
8. Texas Tech University
9. The University of Texas at Arlington
10. The University of Texas at Austin
11. The University of Texas at Dallas
12. The University of Texas at El Paso

13. The University of Texas of the Permian Basin
14. The University of Texas System
15. Texas Woman's University
16. University of North Texas
17. University of North Texas Health Sciences Center
18. University of Houston
19. University of Houston Clear Lake

This is roughly more than half of the Texas public universities, an excellent percentage.

I was extremely pleased to see that

**Dr. Hunt, Senior** Advisor to the Director of the National Science Foundation,

and

**Jerome K. Maultsby**, Associate Director of the Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization of the United States Army Medical Research and Material Command – Fort Detrick-

were invited by the organizers to give an overall picture of research challenges and opportunities for research universities in dealing with the NSF and US Army medical research. There is a lot of opportunities for collaborative research, according to Jerome.

I was especially pleased to have the opportunity to hear a special guest,

**Dr. Pablo Mulas del Pozo**, Director of Special Program  
Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico (UNAM)

talking about the impact of technology development impact on social and economic development of nation or nations! I hope that the content of this profound talk is available to more people in our business.

### **Some Observations:**

The venue of the conference, a resort hotel on South Padre Island called Bahia Mar Resort, was certainly superb. The beauty of this part of the island is, even by the standard of South Padre, breathtaking!

Having part of the conference at the resort, part of it on UTB campus and part at the International Technology, Education and Commerce Center (ITEC), approximately 30 miles away, could have been a logistical nightmare. Yet the local organizers handled with ease. I thought the philosophy that having the primary venue being a vacation spot, which could attract more participation, and the secondary venue on campus and ITEC, which allowed the participants to observe first hand a snap shot of the campus activities – especially its impressive Center for Gravitational Waves, a center which is now receiving

significant national attention -- were absolutely critical. Without the latter part, participants would not have any appreciation of what were UTB's aspirations in the coming decade!

I was very glad to have the opportunity to hear the talk by Dr. Dan Updegrave, CIO of UT Austin. I had heard of his name nearly a decade ago when he was the CIO of the University of Pennsylvania, the next-door-neighbor of my previous affiliation, Drexel University. More recently, he has worked closely with my colleague, UTD's CIO Bill Hargrove. Dan talked about current status of a statewide network initiative called "**Lonestar Education and Research Network**", or LEARN for short. I was especially impressed to discover what are some of the intractable challenges Texas in moving into the 21<sup>st</sup> century in advanced network. There was much discussion after Dan's talk about trying to bring the CIO's and VPR's of research universities into closer contact in the future. After all, the aims of both communities are the same: increase research activities. In this respect, since Paul Maxwell, VPR of UTEP, is already deeply involved with Dan, it would naturally make Paul a great point of contact for the VPR communities.

Finally, how could anyone complain about the fantastic Dolphin Watch Bay Tour? With clear water underneath the boat, dolphins leaping around us and the cool evening breeze blowing, it was a great two hours during which many of us had engaging discussions. For example, I had a most intriguing conversation with Dr. Ken Ashley of Texas A&M University-Commerce about the work he does in chemistry, and the strong collaboration he has with Los Alamos National Laboratory.

With increasing number of collaborations between technology and life sciences, it may be interesting in the future to have more participation from medical schools, such as UT Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas, UT Houston Health Sciences Center, M. D. Anderson Cancer Center and UT Medical Branch in Galveston.

I was a little disappointed that private research universities, such as Rice and SMU were not at the meeting. While this is a public university event, it may not be a bad idea if our colleagues in private universities could be there as well.

The theme of my presentation was about the opportunities of academia and industry collaborations. My presentation can be found in UTD's research website <http://www.utdallas.edu/research/>

Last but not least, a few comments about ITEC are called for. The site of ITEC, previously a shopping mall of about 600,000 square feet, is about a mile from the main campus. It is envisioned by the leadership of UTB to be:

- A technology training center
- A trade show and exhibition center
- An incubator
- Various offices such as the Mexican Consulate, Brownsville Economic Development Council, Small Business Administration

The University purchased this \$8 million dollar facility for \$3 million dollars. It would indeed be interesting for all universities in the state, if not the country, to see the path ITEC will take in the coming years.

I believe that the combination of the talks and personal interactions of the conference did fulfill the theme of the conference!