

University of Texas at El Paso

Master Plan 2005

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Introduction

The University of Texas at El Paso is located in a 400-year-old community with roots to Native Americans, Spanish conquistadores, Mexican immigrants and American pioneers. Founded in 1914, the University has grown into a major research university whose students are predominantly Mexican-American. UTEP's stated mission is a dedication "to teaching and to the creation, interpretation, application, and dissemination of knowledge." In order to better serve an increasing enrollment of almost 20,000, the University is seeking to upgrade its physical campus. Balancing the quantity of new programmed space with pedestrian oriented quality open space is paramount in attracting the best and brightest students, faculty and staff. The scenic campus sits at the base of the Franklin Mountains and is characterized by a sometimes steep topography, an arroyo system, a natural Chihuahuan desert landscape and unique Bhutanese architecture overlooking the cities of El Paso and Juarez, Mexico. Building on the UTEP campus requires an understanding and respect for the history, setting and culture of this truly unique place.

As a follow-up to the 2002 Campus Master Plan, Ayers Saint Gross Architects and Planners were engaged in January 2005 to provide conceptual design solutions for three areas of campus:

1. A new entry sequence for the western boundary of campus along Sun Bowl Drive. Texas DOT is planning a new interchange from I-10 that provides opportunity for one or more clearly defined gateways. The western edge of campus is by far the most used entry to the UTEP campus and traffic along Sun Bowl at peak times is extremely heavy. New entries combined with an improved street network can more clearly and efficiently direct automobile traffic to parking and improve traffic flow. An appropriately monumental gateway would better signal arrival at this unique and significant campus.
2. A new pedestrian zone at the core of campus around Memorial Triangle. Closing portions of University Avenue and Hawthorne Street and eliminating parking lot SV-2 provides opportunity to create a new campus center. This new center would act as the symbolic and literal heart of the UTEP campus. Edged by the most public buildings on campus such as the union, Administration Building, Magoffin Auditorium and others; the open space would be well used for formal and informal campus gatherings. Pedestrian circulation will flow through the center of campus and vehicular circulation will be kept at the perimeter except for special occasions.
3. A potential new location for future research buildings. The University is dedicated to attracting more research dollars and therefore seeks to leverage underutilized land for this endeavor. Creating a small campus within the campus, separate from the core, will provide a unique identity for the research district that is at once part of the University yet distinctively self contained. Parking would be provided on site and would allow easy access to and from campus without negatively affecting traffic at the core.

Additionally, this Master Plan Update provides a two phase flexible framework for future growth campus wide. The process began by analyzing current campus conditions; identifying assets and liabilities. Phase One of the plan conceptually guides growth to about 2020. Phase Two provides a roadmap for building out the campus core. It also provides a framework for growth on the north campus that can be easily extended if the opportunity to acquire more contiguous property arises. Comprehensively planning the entire campus informs the design of the three initiatives above, creating a campus whole greater than the sum of its parts.

A good campus plan exhibits reciprocity between the built form and the University mission. This plan attempts to provide for an ever more efficient, functional, and beautiful campus while reflecting the desire to teach, serve and inspire.

This document illustrates the final conclusions based on campus visits and interaction with the UTEP Master Planning Committee. Full documentation of the process may be found on an accompanying PowerPoint presentation.

Overall Campus Plan

As the need for more facilities continues and limited land holdings constrain available building sites, land use will be partially reorganized out of necessity. Future growth on campus will be accommodated by developing underutilized parcels such as surface parking lots or by redeveloping sites with outdated buildings. The strategy of consolidating parking in perimeter decks has two primary benefits. First, by moving parking to the perimeter, the campus core will become more pedestrian friendly with fewer conflicts and more usable open space. Secondly, infill of new buildings creates greater density, which in turn creates more activity, more memorable spaces and streetscapes and hence a more dynamic, livable campus.

Sustainable growth through better utilization of existing parcels establishes a discernable pattern of building and open space. Building edges define spaces and paths. This definition results in an identifiable, connected and hierarchical open space network. Major paths such as Hawthorne, Wiggins and University all connect to the major open space at the campus core. Minor paths connect buildings and smaller open spaces. Likewise, greater density creates clear campus edges highlighted by memorable gateways that form a University image from outside of campus and aid in orientation within campus.

Plan Highlights:

- **2.1 million gross square feet** of new buildings at an average of three stories
- **5,600 new spaces** in eight parking decks
- Creation of a usable **open space at the campus heart**
- **Identifiable gateways** on the west side at Schuster Ave. and at University Ave., on the east side at University Ave. and at Robinson Ave., and on the south side at the intersection of Schuster and Hawthorne St.
- A **simplified street network** providing an internal campus loop
- **Improved streetscapes** throughout campus with a focus on shade for pedestrians
- **Potential Research and Mixed Use District** on North Campus

Phase 1

New buildings and four parking decks are inserted into Central Campus. The new buildings are located on surface lots or where outdated low density buildings exist. On North Campus, new buildings and two new parking decks are located on existing lots. Phase 1 will begin to create new campus edges on both North and Central Campus.

Phase 2

Longer term improvements replace the remaining outdated buildings and excess surface parking. New buildings will enhance the streetscapes along Wiggins, Hawthorne, Schuster and Mesa Street. In this phase Schuster Ave. is straightened and an overpass over I-10 is constructed to serve a new highway. A new gateway is formed at this location. Rim Rd. will be realigned to meet Sun Bowl Dr. thus creating a simplified loop around campus on the west side.

Diagrams showing future density, open space and street networks illustrate patterns of growth in Phases 1 and 2. The goals are clear and identifiable systems of ordering and circulation throughout the entire campus.

North Campus

- Build out on North Campus establishes a flexible framework on which to incrementally infill the area between Sun Bowl Dr. and Mesa St. If more parcels are acquired in this zone, replicating the pattern of growth will create a unified district.
- The interior of the block contains open spaces that are connected via a path extended from the Oregon St. right of way.
- Buildings would front both the streets on which they sit and the green space, thus providing public uses at ground level that stimulate outdoor activity.
- Access to the site is direct from Mesa St. or from Sun Bowl Dr. – traffic flow would largely avoid campus streets entirely.
- The North Campus would be an ideal site for future research uses. Pairing research functions along Sun Bowl with a mixed use environment along Mesa would create an active district, busy day and night.
- The potential exists for approximately 600,000 gross square feet of research space and 150,000 gross square feet of commercial/retail space supported by 1,600 parking spaces in three decks. Some surface parking would also be retained for short term trips.
- An alternative to research functions at this location is student housing. As Miner Village has successfully incorporated the courtyard concept into its site planning, the large quad-like space is easily envisioned as surrounded by residence halls. Mixed use could be a part of this scenario as well. The two buildings flanking the northeast entrance to the Don Haskins Center are ideal for retail/commercial as is the site north of Kern Dr.

Central Campus

- Build out on Central Campus will be almost entirely dedicated to academic and student life functions.
- Overall, the Central Campus is depicted as having the potential to add approximately 1.35 million gross square feet of new space with 4,000 new parking deck spaces.
- University Ave. is closed from the Union on the east to Wiggins and Hawthorne St. is closed from University to the Physical Sciences Building. These closures create a pedestrian zone at the campus core. Paved paths would still accommodate emergency vehicles, shuttles and autos on special occasions.
- Major new facilities are sited so as to provide dramatic gateways at Schuster and I-10, University and Sun Bowl, Schuster and Hawthorne and at the east end of University Dr.
- Other facilities front Hawthorne and Wiggins creating a more urban streetscape appropriate to the University setting.
- The area south and downhill from Rim Rd. provides an opportunity to expand the academic and student life uses in this zone. The potential relocation of the Health Sciences Complex to campus at the Schuster/I-10 gateway is a good fit. The building complex would be a self-contained unit connected to campus via an upper level bridge to Rim Rd. This building could house a 350,000 square foot program.
- A new Visitors' Center is ideally located in a new building adjacent to the first parking deck on Sun Bowl. This location would serve the majority of visitors entering the campus from I-10.
- A major Union addition creates an active edge along the newly formed open space at the campus core.
- A new pedestrian path connects the Chihuahuan Desert Garden with the Sun Bowl and will be a well used path in serving those parked in the lot A-1 deck.
- Smaller pedestrian paths connect between buildings and spaces creating a fine grain circulation network

West Campus Gateways

The current congestion along Sun Bowl Dr. at University Ave., the construction of a new 2,000 car parking deck on lot A-1 and the potential for a new interchange implemented by Texas DOT, warrant redesigning the busiest entry to campus. Currently there is one exit off of I-10 onto the UTEP campus. The proposed plan in Phase 1 indicates a frontage road parallel to the interstate which allows access to campus via the existing Sun Bowl and Schuster intersection. A second access point is created at the intersection of the frontage road and University Ave. extension. A traffic circle is proposed at the intersection of Sun Bowl and University providing free flow of traffic and a grand entry statement. A third connection to the frontage road allows exit from Sun Bowl north of the new parking deck onto northbound I-10. Phase 2 proposes straightening Schuster Ave. which will at that time pass over I-10 and connect to a new highway to the west. A new gateway and ceremonial drop off area is proposed in what is now parking lot A-13. Additionally, Rim Rd. and Sun Bowl are reconfigured to join at the Wiggins Rd. intersection.

Elements of the University Ave. gateway include:

- A specially paved traffic circle with a fountain or other feature in the center
- Entry pylons provide a threshold announcing entry to campus
- Building towers flanking University Dr. on the east side of the of the traffic circle
- Broad pedestrian crosswalks around the traffic circle
- A naturally landscaped buffer at the western edge of Sun Bowl

Elements of the Schuster Ave. gateway include:

- The proposed Health Sciences Complex, which provides a focal point for this gateway
- A specially paved ceremonial drop-off area with a fountain or other feature in the center
- A parking structure housed in the base of the Health Sciences Complex
- Schuster as a tree-lined boulevard
- A natural Chihuahuan desert landscape

Campus Core

The open space created at the campus core responds to the need for a campus center that can both functionally and symbolically act as the main gathering place for the University. Added green space will provide an area for passive recreation and socialization currently not found on campus. Acting as a campus hub, the open space will connect and unify a myriad of paths coming from all directions to the core. Closing University Ave. in this zone will ensure a safe environment for pedestrians.

A moderately steep slope defines the character of the existing Memorial Triangle. The change in elevation can be both an asset and a challenge in designing a new open space. The terrain provides fine views of campus from the upper level. A natural hillside can be advantageously used for outdoor seating. On the other hand, the constant slope makes holding outdoor gatherings difficult. Providing accessible paths allowing efficient movement through the space must also be considered. The existing parking lot and road network disrupts the continuity of the space between the Union and Geological Sciences.

Two major considerations are employed in the design of this new space. First is the concept of creating outdoor rooms. Since this is a relatively large space, establishing defined edges are necessary to give a feeling of enclosure. Organizing the total area into a series of outdoor rooms provides a variety of well-scaled usable spaces. The most prominent feature of the scheme is a large partially paved upper plaza. Capable of serving large or small gatherings for Union or theater functions, this space would also be the primary social gathering space on a typical day. A significant retaining wall would mitigate the change in elevation. Another prominent feature of this scheme is the evocation of a wash and natural topography. Pedestrian paths move through the space in an informal manner working with the topography. Other outdoor rooms include a small amphitheater area with stage west of the proposed Union addition, a gently sloping green space for informal play or gatherings east of Geological Sciences, a landscaped boulevard along the University Ave. right of way and a heavily landscaped arboretum space between Old Main and Psychology.

The other consideration is human comfort. Creating microclimates in these outdoor rooms will cool temperatures and promote more use of the spaces. Three elements help to create comfortable spaces in an overheated climate. Utilizing as much shade as possible will lower air temperatures. Several areas in the proposed scheme indicate shade structures including the large gathering space. Providing as tree canopy as possible is also important. Evapotranspiration through the use of small pools and fountains will also lower ambient temperatures. These elements additionally provide focal points for outdoor rooms. The third factor in providing human comfort is air movement. The scheme is designed to take advantage of summer winds from the southeast and winter winds from the north.

Improvements to Outdoor Spaces

- Defined Edges
- Hierarchy of Paths and Spaces
- Link open spaces into coherent network of “outdoor rooms”
- Framed Views
- Shade
- Balance large grassed areas with natural desert plantings
- Increase humidity in core where possible
- Wind breaks on the SE edges for summer winds
- Wind breaks on the west edges for winter winds
- Site shuttle stops to reduce pedestrian/vehicular conflict and congestion
- Remove roads from core, but paths will still handle emergency and shuttle traffic

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- Handicapped parking and bike storage embedded in overall design – not an after thought
- Make sure there is appropriate loading dock access to Student Union