Feb. 27, 2008

In this month’s Update, I want to address two issues: 1) the status of the university’s budget and 2) upcoming construction projects. Currently, it still does not appear that we will suffer a budget cut this fiscal year. Keep in mind though, there is always the possibility the Texas economy could decline and we would have to react with a slight budget cut. However, we have positioned ourselves as a university so that, if a small budget cut is mandated, we would be able to handle it without negatively impacting current personnel. It is too early in the State’s legislative session to determine what the appropriate budgets of the next two fiscal years will look like. We do know, on the other hand, there are some factors that will have a positive impact on enrollment that will help our budget. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 that was recently passed by Congress and signed into law by the President provides an increase of $500 to the maximum Pell Grant award over two years. The maximum award in 2009 will be $5350, increasing to $5550 in 2010. Additionally, the new bill provides for a larger tax credit that covers up to $2,500 (it’s currently $1,800) of the cost of college tuition and other related expenses, such as books and supplies, for the first four years of college. Lastly, the new GI Bill will go into effect August 1, 2009. The new GI Bill that was passed under the previous administration provides increased educational benefits for GI’s and will be available to all members of the military who have served on active duty since Sept. 11, 2001, including activated reservists and National Guard. Over the next several months we will be initiating several construction projects of which I want to make you aware. The first project – the construction of new signage for WTAMU’s entrance - will commence shortly. The new signage will be constructed at the corner of 23rd Street and Russell Long Blvd. I believe it will be a better reflection of whom we are as an institution than what currently exists at that corner, and it will symbolize better the pride with which we regard our institution. The new entrance signage is shown below.
New Campus Entrance Signage  A second project that will start over the Spring Break will be the renovation of the parking lot behind Guenther, Conner and Buff Halls, Buffalo Courts, Killgore Research Center, and the Cornette Library. This project will comprise three components. One, the current lot will be re-graded so that rain waters flow to the northeast, rather than into the HELC which is located in the basement of the Cornette Library. Two, in the area behind Guenther, Conner, and Buff Hall we are going to create a residential quad (green space of approximately 100 feet by 200 feet). This space will be available to students for recreation and relaxation. Three, the remainder of the lot will be resurfaced and available for parking. A sketch of the renovated lot follows.
Guenther Hall Parking Lot  Admittedly, this project will reduce the amount of parking in this area, but that is the reason we opened up the lot that was previously reserved for the marching band. An additional parking lot will be located where the old Fine Arts building is currently located. Upon completion of the Classroom Center renovation, the old Fine Arts building will be demolished. The decision has not been made yet as to whether that will be a surface parking lot or a parking garage. If a surface parking lot is constructed, it will front 23rd Street and stretch from Stafford to the Box, providing some 280 parking spaces. A parking garage would provide considerably more spaces, but would be considerably more expensive.
Later in the year, Hudspeth Hall will be demolished to make room for a new underclassman residence hall. Also, this summer we will see initial work on the new Recreational Sports complex on the north side of Russell Long Boulevard and commencement of the renovation of the old Palo Duro Hospital as a research center. During the year, if we can secure the funding, we will commence renovation of the old Ag/Nursing building for an expansion of our engineering program. Just this month the newly renovated art gallery in Mary Moody Northen opened. It is a fabulous exhibit space for the creative work of our faculty and students. In August 2009 we will open our newly renovated Classroom Center, offering a fully integrated Student Success Center, 44 smart classrooms and two ITV classrooms. Additionally, in the fall we will open a fantastic new recital hall in the Sybil B. Harrington Fine Arts Complex. This next year we will commence major renovation projects in the ANS Building and Mary Moody Northen Hall. All of these projects will help WT position itself better for its second century as a great institution of higher education.