

North Texas requires a 'tier one' university

Dallas-Fort Worth is largest metropolitan area in United States without one

EDWARD BAUM



Fully two-thirds to three-quarters of the best universities in the world are located in the United States."

So writes acclaimed economist and former Harvard dean Henry Rosovsky in his perceptive book, *The University: An Owner's Manual*.

Mr. Rosovsky thinks there are as many as 50 American universities of the highest world-level excellence, a number that corresponds with *U.S. News & World Report's* latest list of "tier one" national universities.

No 'tier one'

Dallas-Fort Worth is the largest metropolitan area in the United States without one of those "tier one" institutions.

America's leading institutions of higher education were the intellectual engines behind the scientific and technological progress and cultural growth of the 20th century. They will be even more instrumental in the 21st.

Dallas-Fort Worth must have a powerful "tier one" university. Its major institutions now fall into the second, third and fourth (out of four) tiers of academic excellence, according to *U.S. News & World Report's* publication "America's Best Colleges."

But how does Dallas-Fort Worth get a top university? It took several hundred years for a handful of Eastern colleges to grow into the Ivy League and at least 100 years for the leading state land grant institutions to grow into the large research and teaching powerhouses they are today. We don't have that kind of time. What can we do now?

We must fashion a new top-tier research university for Dallas-Fort Worth by reorganizing and re-energizing some of the area's existing public universities. We must put together a new institution that will have the vision, ambition and, yes, the political clout to raise both its standards and its funding to the level required to join the highest echelon of American universities.

Specifically, I propose that the University of Texas at Dallas, the University of Texas at Arlington and the University of Texas South-

western Medical Center at Dallas come together and become the University of Texas at Dallas-Fort Worth.

It makes sense: UTD, UTA and Southwestern all are components of the University of Texas System, so a great deal of operational commonality already exists. What needs to be seriously rethought is the collective mission of public higher education in the Dallas-Fort Worth region. The UT System is the natural institution to become the framework.

Businesses make acquisitions, merge and restructure all the time in response to both need and opportunity. The successful ones take advantage of new conditions and develop new ways of operating. Universities must do the same.

Right time

Assembling a leading research university in Dallas-Fort Worth isn't a new concept. But now seems the time to raise the idea more urgently, especially after *The Dallas Morning News's* publication of "The Global City" and Boeing's decision to choose Chicago as its new corporate headquarters. (Did Chicago's two "tier one" universities tip the scales? It certainly wasn't the city's weather.)

The University of Texas at Dallas-Fort Worth would contain several campuses but have a common course catalog and common administrative policies. It would serve today's mobile and time-pressured student much better, providing a palette of educational opportunity near home and work and taking advantage of intellectual resources throughout the metroplex.

The university would offer basic courses at all of its campuses and highly advanced and specialized courses at the campus best able to provide the highest standards in a particular discipline. By doing so, it would deliver both the breadth and the depth needed for an effective education. (Free shuttle buses would connect the various campuses.)

The current institutions —

UTD, UTA and Southwestern — have some programs, departments and schools at or within striking distance of leadership in their fields. They would be funded at the appropriate nationally competitive level and required to produce at that level. Such a strategy is known as creating "centers of excellence."

The public urban universities in Europe are their countries' elite institutions. Students live in the city, often work while going to school and are full participants in the city's cultural, economic and social life.

Urban centers

In the United States, many leading colleges and universities were removed from the dynamic urban centers, either physically or attitudinally. And although the public urban university certainly exists in the United States, most people would agree that a really successful academic model doesn't exist yet. Perhaps a UTDFW could create such a standard.

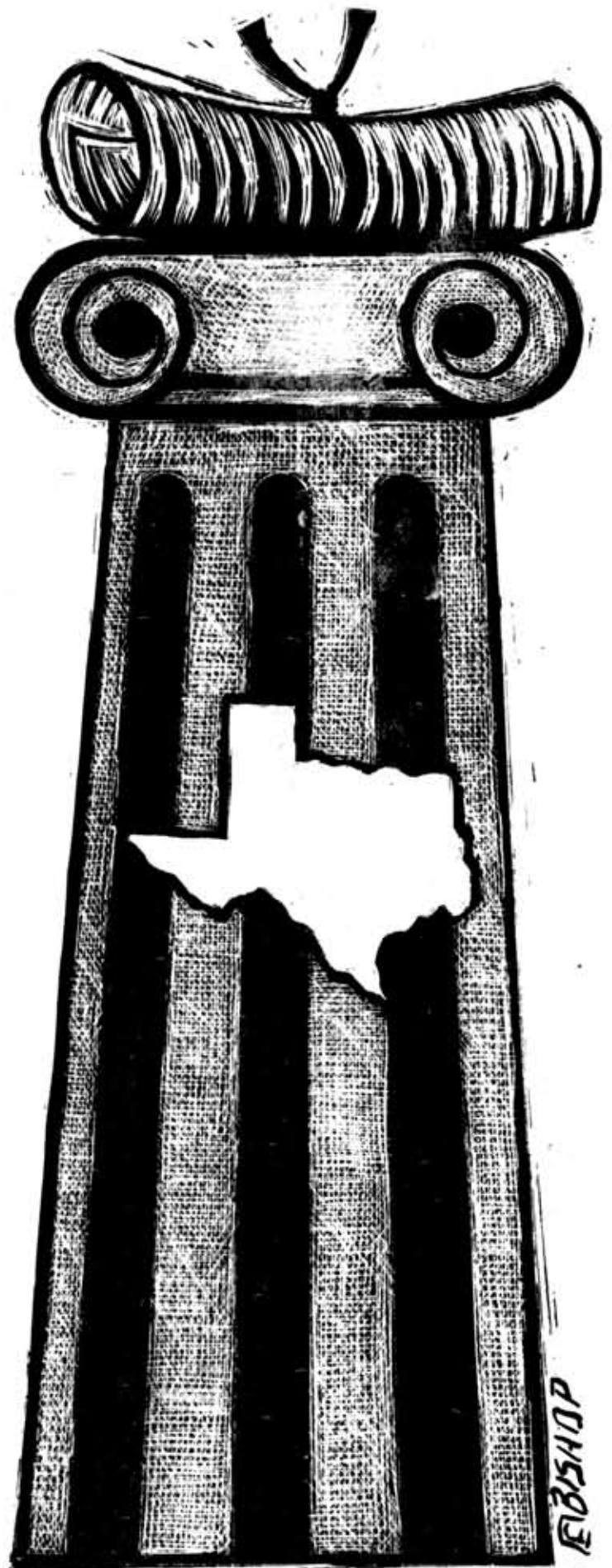
Why the name the University of Texas at Dallas-Fort Worth? Because it accurately describes the place where we live, work and learn — an integrated, interconnected region. And because Dallas-Fort Worth is familiar to the rest of the world. It carries an aura of energy, productivity and aspiration that also is quite appropriate to a top research university.

A UTDFW would have comprehensive campuses in northern Dallas County (now UTD) and in eastern Tarrant County (now UTA). Both are in rapidly growing suburban sectors, not immediately accessible from the traditional urban centers that, according to "The Global City" report, must be strengthened and developed beyond a 9-to-5 workplace.

Fair Park

Which brings me to a second proposal — create a comprehensive UTDFW campus at Fair Park.

Dallas' center city desperately needs a strong public educational institution for cultural, economic and social reasons. A Fair Park campus would place top education within minutes of the city's center and the cultural district. Easy freeway and public transit access already is in place for a Fair Park campus. Fair Park boasts a number of cultural facilities that could only benefit from a fine university among them. And perhaps most important, a Fair Park campus would be both literally and metaphorically a bridge from South



RANDY MACK BISHOP/Staff Illustrator

Dallas and East Dallas to downtown.

Would a Fair Park campus mean moving the State Fair? Not at all. I propose a one-month break in on-campus teaching during the fair. Students would use the time for independent study, travel and public service projects.

I recently read that improving the interchange between LBJ Freeway and Central Expressway

will cost a quarter-billion dollars. Considering that, I wonder how much improving the interchange among individuals and generations in our community — through top-quality higher education — is worth?

Edward M. Baum is an architect in Dallas and a professor of architecture at the University of Texas at Arlington.