

THE BATTALION

Gates

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Each college will develop a five-year plan which includes quantifiable measures of progress, Gates said. For example, he said, Vision 2020 calls for 30 percent of the student body to be graduate students. Gates will require each college to determine how many more graduate students they must accommodate to make substantial progress towards the 30 percent goal over the next five years.

Higher faculty salaries and more endowed professorships will be key indicators for measuring faculty improvement, Gates said.

To make A&M more diverse, Gates said the University must attract more minority students. Last fall, former A&M President Dr. Ray M. Bowen proposed extending automatic admission to students in the top 20 percent from lower-income high schools with large minority populations. Critics said the Top 20 plan was a backdoor affirmative action program and in violation of the 1996 *Hopwood v. Texas* ruling. The University backed away from implementing the program this year, and Gates said he has not decided whether or not to pursue the Top 20 plan.

Gates said the University should consider adopting innovative minority recruitment programs that are already being implemented by some colleges, as well as provide additional scholarship money for minorities. The University of Texas, also operating under the constraints of *Hopwood*, has been more successful in attracting minority students, and A&M might be able to learn something from its rival, Gates said.

Setting A&M on the path to join the elite tier of public universities is a daunting challenge, but Gates' success or failure will likely depend on a factor beyond his control. As Bowen's eight-year term as president was winding down last spring, he reflected on the challenges facing the University and said the greatest

obstacle to achieving the ambitious Vision 2020 goals are the dwindling state funds.

Without a major infusion of resources, students will get socked with higher fees and tuition, and the quality of education at A&M will continue to erode, Bowen said.

A new enhancement fee, which added about \$900 annually to students' tuition bill, was implemented this year, and a similar fee hike may be necessary in four years unless the University's financial situation improves, Bowen said.

Rising tuition costs have not covered the loss of state funds A&M has experienced over the last 10 years, Gates said. With the state facing a multi-billion dollar budget deficit, the prospects for additional funding in the near future are not good.

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— Dr. Robert M. Gates
Texas A&M President

Gates said he plans to work with state legislators to devise a long-term agreement on how to tackle the financial woes plaguing Texas' flagship universities.

"It (declining state funding) is beginning to affect the quality of the institution," Gates said. "We've seen a steady decline in the number of tenured professors and an increase in the number of students. These are the realities we're dealing with."

One issue noticeably absent from Gates' action agenda is Bonfire.

"I'm waiting to see what students have to say as far as alternatives [to Bonfire]," Gates said.

In February, Bowen cancelled plans for a 2002 Bonfire, citing cost and liability issues. Gates said he has not made any decision about holding a Bonfire in 2003, but said the liability issue remains a huge obstacle.

Although his academic administrative experience is limited to his two years as interim dean of A&M's George Bush School of Government and Public Service, Gates is no stranger to running large public institutions. He said he learned in the CIA that managers must have an inclusive decision-making process.

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To assist him, Gates added a chief of staff to his executive team and named Rodney McClendon, an assistant provost, to the position. Because he is working in a new administrative environment, Gates said he wanted somebody in his office familiar with the nuts and bolts of running a university to advise him. McClendon will also be a facilitator who will help deans and top administrators work more closely with the president's office, Gates said.

Aware that chiefs of staff tend to monopolize power and limit access to their bosses, Gates said that would not be the case with McClendon.

"Everyone understands that his job is to open my door," Gates said.

Even as he busies himself with running one of the nation's largest universities, Gates admits to occasionally longing for his home in Seattle, to which he and Becky, his wife of 35 years, will return after leaving A&M.

In the midst of a blistering Texas summer where temperatures in the 90's are the norm, Gates recently called his son Brad to find out the day's high temperature in Seattle.

"Brad said, 'Why do you do this to yourself dad?' But I insisted he tell me. The high was 63 degrees," Gates said wistfully.

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