

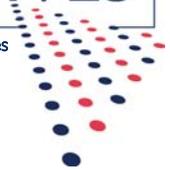
2007 SERIES: ENABLING CAMPUS GROWTH AND OPTIMIZATION

Transformational Leadership

A Case Study

**PRESIDENTIAL
PERSPECTIVES**

a higher education presidential essay series





TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP: A CASE STUDY

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Prince Machiavelli wrote that “the hardest thing to change is the order of things.” In 1987, a new administration at Louisiana Tech University made a conscious decision to do just that. The administration adopted a motto of QfQ (a Quest for Quality), and laid out a vision for the future. That vision stated that Louisiana Tech would be more interested in a prepared, quality student body than in the number of students on campus, and that the University would develop as more of a graduate and research university in the future. All of Louisiana public universities were open admission universities except for Louisiana State University (which had recently announced the beginning of admission standards).

At Louisiana Tech proposed (1) becoming a selective admission university with significantly increased graduation and retention rates, (2) developing advanced graduate programs at the masters and doctoral levels, and (3) developing world-class research activities in special niche areas.

This approach was rather bold since the University had lost almost all of its doctoral programs in 1977 following a Board of Regents review. In addition, the new administration inherited a bonded indebtedness of approximately 50 million dollars which was directly related to student fees. Selective admissions would certainly cause a decrease in enrollment and precipitate a financial difficulty. In addition, the state of Louisiana was experiencing financial troubles, and state budgets for higher education were being reduced.

Implementation of Selective Admissions

The administration began developing its first five-year strategic plan with broad-based participation. The president presented his plans for the academic elevation of the University in the quality of the student body, the quest for advanced doctoral programs, and the development of select, high-quality research programs. This agenda was presented to many groups, including the business community. The plan was accepted with reservations. An anticipated decline in enrollment was feared along with the consequent economic impact.

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For five years, the president and his administration developed plans for the new vision, adjusted to the state of Louisiana's financial realities, and continued to make the new direction inclusive of all stakeholders. A selective admission plan was presented to the Board of Supervisors in 1991 and was approved for implementation in 1992. Many individuals outside and inside of the Tech family viewed the plan as doomed, and predicted a rapid decline of the University. However, the University felt strongly that the best students seek admission to the best universities, and at Louisiana Tech only serious, dedicated students should be admitted.

The selective admission plan was to be implemented in four stages, with the first stage in 1992, and succeeding stages implemented as the University adjusted to the new conditions.

Impact of Selective Admissions

Following the implementation of admission standards in 1992, enrollment steadily decreased for four years. In 1996, the University had lost approximately 10 percent of its enrollment (1,000 students), and first-time freshman enrollment had dropped over 25 percent. Discontentment and unhappiness within and outside of the University were becoming manifest. The president and his immediate administrators held steadfast and strongly supported the University direction.

During this period, subtle, positive changes were taking place on campus. Faculty commented on the positive changes in the classroom—more students were a pleasure to teach and were eager to learn. The retention rate of freshmen increased. Reports of theft, crime, and incidents dropped over 50 percent. The ACT score of the freshman class steadily increased. Importantly, the written press, television news programs, and high school counselors were becoming impressed with the University's commitment. However, the absolute test of success would be the six-year graduation rate!

The financial impact was mitigated by careful management with significant reduction in personnel (not tenured faculty), increased tuition and special fees approved by the Board of Supervisors, and special fund drives by the Foundation. However, by 1996, the situation was becoming complicated by lack of funding and the discontent of some entities.

Selective Admissions Outcomes

After 1996, a positive change began in enrollment. Better students started coming to the University in increasing numbers. Freshmen class enrollment continuously increased from 1,360 in 1996 to 2,121 in 2003—a 56 percent increase. A special effort resulted in graduate student enrollment increasing from 1,431 students in 1996 to 2,227 students in 2003—a 56 percent increase. Overall, the enrollment increased from 9,313 students in 1996 to 11,975 students in 2003—a 29 percent increase.

The most important factor was a steep increase in graduation rates that eventually yielded an increase of more than 20 percentage points (from 35 percent to 55 percent), exceeding the national average and becoming, by far, the highest in the University of Louisiana System. State and national groups began recognizing the University's achievement. The Education Trust Foundation of Washington, D.C. spotlighted the University and used it nationally as an example of achieving increased graduation rates. Likewise, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) included the University in its national study of improved retention and graduation rates.

At this point, faculty were proud of their accomplishments, alumni were happy, and the administration felt justified in their long-term efforts and goals.

However, there was more to come.

Graduate Programs and Research Facilities

Simultaneous with admissions standards activity, the University proceeded with plans to add specific doctoral and master's programs. Following a Board of Regents review in 1977 by out-of-state consultants, the University had lost all of its Ph.D. programs in the Engineering and Sciences area except for a Ph.D. in Biomedical Engineering, the newest Ph.D. at Louisiana Tech. The Ph.D. in Biomedical Engineering was recognized by the peer review group as operating on a competitive level at the national and international levels. The Board of Regents awarded the program a commendation of excellence. Since the president had established the Biomedical Engineering Department in 1972 and developed the Ph.D. program, a decision was made to spearhead the drive toward a graduate and research university by using this Ph.D. as a keystone for future development. The primary focus of the program was mathematical simulation and animal experimentation at the micron level.

Working together, faculty and staff developed the idea of a research center in micromanufacturing that aligned with the expertise of Louisiana Tech's faculty. The president and his administration worked with alumni and Senator J. Bennett Johnston and his staff to get two earmarked federal appropriations through the Department of Energy for \$10,750,000 to construct and equip an Institute for Micromanufacturing in 1992. The new facility was dedicated in 1996 and became a first-rate research institute that led the University to today's expertise in nanotechnology and bionanotechnology.

With these activities, the University established an academic credibility, and today offers nine doctoral programs, including a Ph.D. in engineering, an interdisciplinary Ph.D. in the sciences (computational

analysis), and a combined Ph.D.-M.D. in conjunction with LSU Health Sciences Center in Shreveport. Other doctoral programs are in psychology, business, audiology, and education. Related master's level programs have been added.

The University enrollment goal of 20 percent graduate and 80 percent undergraduate has been achieved.

A recognition of achievement was given in December 2006 when the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) reclassified the University as a Doctoral Level II research university. The University's goal had been realized.

In 2005, the State of Louisiana mandated admission standards of varying degrees for all universities in the state, and Louisiana Tech increased its admission standards for the fourth time.

Transformational Leadership

Louisiana Tech University has made great progress over a span of years. The vision was never compromised despite some disappointments and setbacks. Key leadership elements included:

1. A clearly articulated vision with stakeholder ownership
2. Short- and long-term measurable outcomes
3. A fair decision-making process in setting priorities
4. An open and honest explanation process regarding controversial decisions
5. A competent administration that was loyal to the institution's vision
6. A strong supportive cast of key faculty, administrators, and alumni

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7. Strong support by the Board of Supervisors, particularly the system president
8. A firm stance on key, strategically-important decisions
9. Patience, understanding, and a willingness to listen to all points of view
10. A community of interdisciplinary scholars and a perpetuating culture of caring—the University family
11. Of great importance, toughness (develop a thick hide and believe in yourself)
12. The ability to express successes and future goals in charismatic terms often and repeatedly to select and broad audiences
13. Political acumen (know when to hold 'em and when to fold 'em)
14. A bit of luck!

Today and Tomorrow

Today, the University is looking forward to tomorrow. A new plan, Vision 20-20, has been developed to position the University for the year 2020. Acting on the Board of Supervisors' recommendation, the Legislature is deliberating the appropriation of funding at 100-percent of the formula level for the new classification (an additional \$12 million per year). At least \$100 million of new construction for the next three years is being approved. The Foundation assets have increased from \$1.5 million to \$65 million and are rapidly increasing. A new research park (\$25 million) is being funded to fully market the intellectual properties that are developing at a rapid rate by the faculty and staff.

Life is good, but the next major challenge is just around the corner.



Dr. Daniel D. Reneau currently serves as President of Louisiana Tech University and holds the Arthur T. Prescott Professorship in Biomedical Engineering. He holds a Bachelor's and Master's degree in Chemical Engineering from Louisiana Tech University and a Ph.D. in Chemical Engineering from Clemson University.

Dr. Reneau joined the Louisiana Tech faculty in Chemical Engineering in 1967 and established the Biomedical Engineering Department in 1972. He served as department head in Biomedical Engineering until 1980, when he assumed the position of Vice President for Academic Affairs at Louisiana Tech University. In 1987, he was selected as the 13th President of Louisiana Tech University.

Dr. Reneau has completed 40 years at Louisiana Tech University, 20 of those years as President.

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