

# Go Big and Go Home:

Major Gifts, Public Flagships, and the Parlance of Prestige

Zachary Taylor

The University of Texas at Austin



# Mulva Family Donates \$60 Million to Business and Engineering Schools

Jan. 24, 2014

[Email](#) [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [LinkedIn](#) [Google+](#) [More](#)

AUSTIN, Texas The Mulva Family Foundation has made a \$60 million multiyear pledge to The University of Texas at Austin to support the [McCombs School of Business](#) and the [Cockrell School of Engineering](#), once again demonstrating a deep commitment to the university's future and to a continued vision of excellence in teaching and research.

The Houston-based foundation's donation is one of the largest cash pledges made during the course of the [Campaign for Texas](#) and provides additional momentum to the campaign as it approaches its conclusion later this year. With this pledge, the campaign is now poised to exceed \$2.7 billion in donations, well on its way to the university's \$3 billion goal.

The Mulvas have a long history of supporting the university and stand among UT's greatest supporters in its 131-year history and among Texas' top proponents of education. The Mulvas' deep commitment to the university and to these projects led them to this pledge. Payments during the early years will support the Engineering Education and Research Center (EERC) construction, with subsequent payments going toward the McCombs project after it has been fully approved. This will allow the projects to move forward quickly and enable the university to rely on yearly support to sustain them.



# \$20 Million Wong Gift Launches Leading-Edge Eye Institute at Dell Medical School

Oct. 6, 2016

[Email](#) [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [LinkedIn](#) [Google+](#) [More](#)



# \$20 Million Patton Gift to Boost Liberal Arts Faculty, Graduate Program, Student Experience

Sept. 28, 2016

[Email](#) [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [LinkedIn](#) [Google+](#) [More](#)

AUSTIN, Texas — A \$20 million gift from Fort Worth oil and gas investor Bobby Patton Jr. and his wife, Sherri, will support faculty and graduate student endowments in the College of Liberal Arts at The University of Texas at Austin.

The gift will also support experiential learning opportunities for undergraduates as well as excellence funds to support priority programs in the college.

Yes!



No!



# Expansion of Institutional Advancement

- 1821: Williams College, first alumni association in North America (Society of Alumni of Williams College, 2005)
- 1823: Brown University, first alumni fund (Mitchell & Brown University Library, 1993)
- 1897: University of Michigan establishes first official public university “Alumni Association.”
  - (Regents of the University of Michigan, 2016)
    - U of Michigan currently has largest public institution endowment in America at \$9.7 billion
  - (University of Michigan, 2016)
- 1936: fewer than 50% of IHEs had alumni funds (Kelly, 1998)
- 1970s: merely 25% of all IHEs had development units (Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1990)
- Today: institutional advancement universal, less so among community colleges



# The Necessity of Institutional Advancement

- Since Great Recession of 2008:
  - ALL states have cut higher education funding, except MT, ND, and WY.
    - (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2016)
- NSF and Pell Money down.
- Weakened regulations of for-profits.
- Fewer international students.
- Emphasis on career education.
- Rise in corporate partnerships (dozens at McCombs; pay for student access)
  - (Farish, 2016)
- What does this mean?

## State-by-State Fact Sheets: Higher Education Cuts Jeopardize Students' and States' Economic Future

UPDATED AUGUST 18, 2016

SHARE



Public colleges and universities have experienced major cuts in state funding since the Great Recession hit – something state lawmakers should consider as they grapple with difficult budget decisions in coming months.

These fact sheets show that funding cuts have often been accompanied by tuition hikes and cuts in campus staff and programs that may reduce the quality of education for students.

## The Specific Threats Now Facing Higher Education

By Donald J. Farish | NOVEMBER 15, 2016

**T**hree questions: What does Donald J. Trump's election portend for higher education? How should we respond to ill-conceived, threatening, or dangerous initiatives from Washington? Is higher education somehow complicit in President-elect Trump's victory?

He did not focus on higher education during the presidential campaign, beyond an occasional bombshell, but with the Republicans retaining control of both houses of Congress, many of their initiatives will now receive support from the new president.

# Altizer (1992) and Rooney (2009)



- Most extant research=
  - Donor recruitment (Doan & Morris, 1988; Grant, 2001; Schervish, 2005)
  - Soliciting major gifts (Fredricks, 2006; Hall, 2003; Matheny, 1999)
  - Major giving to private institutions (Clotfelter, 2003; Lindahl & Winship, 1994; Vaupel, 2014)
- **Altizer (1992):** public institutions (n=12), major gifts
  - Institutions prefer “major gift” if over \$25,000
  - Major gifts as cash or convertible securities
  - Alumni give greatest percentage of major gifts
  - 28% from corporations, 20% from foundations
- **Rooney (2009):** costs of fundraising at one Midwestern public
  - Public institution fundraising > private institution fundraising

# Research Questions

- Because public funding, national funding, and other forms of traditional revenue are down for public institutions...

- What is a “major gift” for publics?
- Who gives “major gifts” to publics?
- When do they give?
- How much do they give?
- What do they fund?



# Methodology and Sample

- Quantitative content analysis (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico 2016)
- Grounded coding (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2013)
- Text of “major gift” announcement, body and title
  - “opportunistic disclosure” (Saorin, Osma, & Jones, 2012)
- Public flagships (n=50 x 3 announcements = 150)
  - All 50 “flagships” published at least three “million dollar gifts” announcements from 2000-2016 (other types did not)
  - Public flagships are well resourced, prestigious institutions with large alumni bases and fundraising units (U.S. News, Forbes).
  - Culturally reproduces social capital and earning power for graduates who become donors (Bourdieu, 1990).
  - Understudied relationship/perception of public institutions and local taxpayers, on-going contentious partnership.





## Results: “Opportunistic Disclosure” (n=150)

Donor name in headline:	49%
Gift amount in headline:	89%
Purpose of gift in headline:	61%
Most frequently used words in headline:	“million” (127 occurrences) “gift” (105) “receives” (22) “school” (16) “college” (15) “center” (13) “foundation” (13) “new” (13) “program” (11)
Most frequently collocated pairs in headline:	“million” and “gift” (88) “receives” and “million” (20) “receives” and “gift” (18)

## Results: Timing is Everything (n=150)

Mean date of publication:	July 15, 2014
Median month of publication:	August (9)
Mode month of publication:	October (25)
Least frequent month of publication:	January (5)
Median day of publication:	16 <sup>th</sup> (3)
Mode day of publication:	1 <sup>st</sup> (9)
Least frequent day of publication:	8 <sup>th</sup> , 21 <sup>st</sup> , 30 <sup>th</sup> (1)
Median year of publication:	2015 (28)
Mode year of publication:	2016 (50)
Least frequent year of publication:	2000, 2005, 2008 (1)

## Results: Go Big and Go Home (n=150)

Mean gift amount:	11.59 (millions)
Median gift amount:	3.7
Mode gift amount:	1 (represents 37 major gifts, 25%)
Mean gift amount from individual:	10.05
Alumni:	12.05
Non-alumni:	3.53
Estate/planned gift:	8.27
Alumni:	7.35
Non-alumni:	8.88
Part of institutional fund drive/project:	4.14
Alumni:	4.04
Non-alumni:	4.24
Mean gift amount from corporation/business:	2.23
Part of institutional fund drive/project:	2.53
Mean anonymous gift amount:	3.6

# Results: Students, Students, Students (n=150)

Most frequent purpose of gift:

student scholarships (37% of all gifts)  
academic programs (27%)  
professorships/chairs (19%)  
capital projects (15%)  
research centers/institutes (13%)  
athletics (12%)  
libraries (1%)

Most frequent purpose of gift from individual:

Alumni:

Estate/planned gift:

As part of an institutional fund drive/project:

Non-alumni:

Estate/planned gift:

As part of an institutional fund drive/project:

student scholarships (22%)  
student scholarships (19%)  
student scholarships (8%)  
capital projects (6%)  
academic programs (15%)  
professorships/chairs (3%)  
academic programs (7%)

Purpose of gift from corporation:

As part of an institutional fund drive/project:

academic programs (7%)  
capital proj., student scholarships (3%)

## Results: Devil in the Details (n=150)

Average frequency of statement in body text:

Mentioning gift amount:	1.38 (occurrences per press release)
Mentioning donor/corporation name:	12.41
Alumni name:	14.52
Non-alumni name:	12.03
Corporation/business name:	7.91
Mentioning intra-institution recipient:	6.58
Mentioning gift purpose:	5.69

Most frequently used words in body text:

“gift” (695 occurrences)  
“university” (641)  
“students” (502)  
“million” (477)  
“school” (405)

Most frequently collocated pairs in body text:

“million” and “gift” (97 collocations)  
“gift” and “university” (56 collocations)  
“our” and “students” (41 collocations)

# Findings, Discussion, and Future Research

- Public flagships...
  - Prefer “million” to “major” = millions are sexy
  - Receive million dollar gifts from alumni more than any other source (Altizer, 1992)
  - Prioritize dollar amount of gift before donor, purpose, or intra-institutional recipient
  - Practice “opportunistic disclosure” – in sync with the academic calendar
  - Realize a wealth of funding for student scholarships and academic programs
  - Tend to announce major gifts in ways that emphasize people (the donor(s) and students)
  - Promote the message “our alumni support our students”
  - Receive 63% of million gifts for initiatives “unrelated” to college affordability
- **Future research**: analysis/criticism of expenditure of endowments coupled with donor-mandated spending of philanthropic dollars, how institutions of all types fundraise and how they announce/communicate fundraising with public.