



## **Prop 4: Texas Needs More Tier One Universities**

*By John Colyandro and Tom Aldred*

Proposition 4 on the November constitutional election ballot would create the National Research University Fund and the Research University Development Fund – out of money that is already in the state’s higher education account – for the purpose of bringing some of the state’s “emerging research universities” up to the standard of tier one institutions.

Tier one research universities typically prioritize research, award a significant number of doctoral degrees annually, and receive substantial amounts of state and federal research funding. These institutions conduct groundbreaking research across many fields, often with commercial applications.

Despite the strength of its flagship universities, Texas currently lags behind other states when it comes to top-quality higher education institutions that can serve the needs of the nation’s fastest-growing state. In fact, Texas has only three tier one nationally-recognized universities: the University of Texas at Austin, Texas A&M University, and Rice University in Houston.

By comparison, California has nine tier one universities and New York has seven. Most strikingly, Virginia has three tier one universities, yet that state has less than one third the population of Texas. This places Texas at a significant educational disadvantage compared to other states and forces students out of the state, resulting in comparatively lower levels of federal research funding, and inferior educational opportunities in the state’s largest cities.

For instance, Texas experiences a net loss of 6,000 highly qualified students per year to doctoral-granting universities in other states. As a result, although Texas has 8 percent of the U.S. population our state only receives 5 percent of federal research and development funding and 5 percent of the nation’s venture capital investment.

According to testimony taken by committees in the Texas House and Senate, the lack of top-tier universities impacts Texas’ largest cities. For instance, Dallas Fort-Worth is the fourth-largest metro area in the nation but has no tier one university. As a result, the Metroplex ranks 22<sup>nd</sup> in research expenditures and 11<sup>th</sup> in number of college degrees awarded, awarding less than half the average of the 10 largest cities.

This is why Prop 4 is important for Texas' future: a state the size of Texas needs to have a higher education system that creates the kind of opportunities that make staying home attractive, and also one that attracts exceptional students from other states and nations.

California is the benchmark: Schools like CIT, Stanford, UC-Berkeley, UCLA and USC helped fuel the explosion of technological developments that underpin the economic growth driven by Silicon Valley. Only by keeping and attracting some of the nation's brightest talents did California manage to place itself at the center of these advancements.

Now it is Texas' turn. Already the strongest economy in the nation, Texas can develop a first-class higher education infrastructure that will underpin economic growth and cultural development for decades to come. When the Legislature proposed this policy shift, it proposed a system in which higher education institutions will be able to compete for the available funding based on the progress they make towards achieving prominence as nationally-recognized institutions.

With the help of the Higher Education Coordinating Board, legislators challenged Texas Tech University, the University of Texas at Arlington, the University of Texas at Dallas, the University of Texas at El Paso, the University of Texas at San Antonio, the University of Houston, and the University of North Texas to raise themselves to tier one standard and will provide funding incentives to those institutions as they make progress toward that goal.

Critics contend that Texas' colleges should focus almost exclusively on teaching, rather than research, yet this ignores the truth that while universities fulfill a basic service by providing a tertiary-level education to students, it is their research and development that advances our economy by spurring innovation. For example, as a result of its research efforts, UT Austin has been awarded more than 400 patents. Similarly, Texas A&M University is consistently ranked among the nation's top 20 research institutions and, since 2007, the university has allowed the commercialization of intellectual property to be a criteria on which tenure can be awarded to its professors.

Research at UT, A&M and Rice University, Texas' other tier one institution, has made Texas a national leader in research fields as diverse as nanotechnology, energy research, nuclear power, medicine, transportation, and astronomy. Passage of Prop 4 will expand Texas' research efforts, create enhanced educational opportunities for Texans, and will strengthen our vibrant and innovative economy.

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