

C E L E B R A T I N G
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THE TRUMAN VISION

Twenty years ago on January 1, 1986, the mission of Truman State University, then Northeast Missouri State University, was changed dramatically when House Bill 196 became effective. This legislation had been approved by the General Assembly the previous legislative session and was signed by then Governor John Ashcroft on June 20, 1985, on the Truman campus. House Bill 196 changed the University mission from that of a regional, comprehensive university to Missouri's only public liberal arts and sciences university. At that time the idea of an affordable, public liberal arts and sciences university was very innovative, and there were almost no models in any state across the nation. Even today, the number of recognized public liberal arts and sciences universities is small, numbering barely more than 20 across the nation.

The mission change was the result of a broad-based examination of Missouri's system of public higher education by the Coordinating Board for Higher Education (CBHE). At that time the system was emerging from a period of expansive, inflationary growth in the 1970s followed by several very lean funding years as a result of a national recession in the early 1980s. Furthermore, Missouri's economic recovery was projected to lag the national recovery significantly while full-time, traditional age student enrollment was expected to plummet. It was the judgment of the Coordinating Board and its Commissioner of Higher Education, Dr. Shaila R. Aery, that too many very similar institutions were serving an overlapping population while the state lacked the resources to fund adequately the plans and infrastructure developed by the public institutions. Their solution was to encourage the institutions to sharpen their programmatic focus, differentiate the clientele served, and encourage financial access to quality programs rather than broad geographic access to undistinguished programs.

The result of a yearlong series of studies by the CBHE staff was a report issued by the Commissioner of Higher Education titled "Strengthening the Investment in Missouri Public Higher Education" that was released in September 1984. The report contained a number of recommendations related to program reviews and changes at institutions, but one of the most significant proposals - and the only one to be enacted into statute - was a mission change for Northeast Missouri State University from a comprehensive regional institution to a public liberal arts and sciences university with a statewide service area. The recommendations also outlined how the University's Board of Governors should be selected. In addition, the new Board was to look at admission requirements, closure of two-year programs, and other program decisions needed to make the institution fit better with its new liberal arts mission.

Northeast Missouri State University was chosen to fulfill this role for several reasons. The student profile was the best among the public insti-

tutions outside the four-campus University of Missouri system. At the same time, the University had not allowed its programmatic offerings to expand as much as those of other institutions - resulting in an institutional focus as a smaller, more selective university. Most importantly, perhaps, the University enjoyed a growing recognition among other institutions across the country for its value-added instructional philosophy and sophisticated testing and survey system. Overall, Northeast was the best-positioned institution in the public sector to undertake the role of a selective, public liberal arts university.

To make the goals of the study a reality, Aery drafted initial legislation proposing and detailing the mission change for Northeast Missouri State University. This legislation was then endorsed by the Coordinating Board for Higher Education and prefiled by Representative Winnie Weber, Chairperson of the House Committee on Higher Education. Aery and Weber provided extremely strong and intelligent support for the bill. In their lobbying to support the changes, they cited important benefits Northeast offered to students, including its smaller to moderate size and small-town location. Another key figure in the legislative process, Representative Harry Hill, presented other benefits the enactment of the bill would have for education in Missouri. He asserted that with its new mission, Northeast Missouri State University would help keep talented students in Missouri by preparing them for graduate and professional studies and by offering a less distracting, personalized environment in which students could attend a quality school of higher education.

On the Senate side, long-time 18th District State Senator Norman Merrell was a strong supporter of the initiative and shepherded the bill through that Chamber. Once House Bill 196 was signed into being by Governor Ashcroft in June of 1985, Northeast Missouri State University began the task of drafting a five-year planning document to guide the University in implementing the new mission set to take effect as of Jan. 1, 1986.

After receiving its new legislatively mandated mission, the first major changes in the University took place in the review and evaluation of the curriculum and all academic programs and courses. Each element of the University's academic offerings was analyzed as to how well it fit into the goals of the new mission statement. The result of this year-long review was the proposed elimination and/or redesign of all of the University's program offerings. The number of undergraduate programs offered was reduced from 140 to just 49, and the graduate programs were cut to only nine from the previous 38 offered. All of these remaining majors were restructured to better fit within the University's new mission. This evaluation also ushered in the Masters of Arts in Education degree program. In addition, a core general education course requirement that constituted half a student's required course work and defined the unique mission

and emphasis of the University was adopted. Other issues analyzed and addressed by the University in response to its new mission included admission requirements and tuition and fees. Detailed plans were set forth to guide the University in furthering the selective nature of its admission policies and keeping the cost of its quality education affordable for a wide range of students. The plan developed by Northeast, under the leadership of President Charles McClain, was submitted to the Coordinating Board for its review and was approved in early 1987. The plan was unique in Missouri higher education for its reliance on quantitative measures of success of measurable institutional goals.

As the University worked diligently to carry out its new mission, its reputation for excellence and academic achievement continued to grow. The University's unique, innovative approach to assessment brought nationwide attention to the school, and the reputation of its students for educational excellence quickly spread throughout the country.

The implementation of the mission development plan produced by Northeast was evaluated by a national panel of liberal arts experts jointly appointed by Northeast and the staff of the Coordinating Board following an initial five-year implementation period. On Oct. 14, 1993, the Coordinating Board for Higher Education formally approved the report prepared by this panel which recognized that Northeast had achieved its goals set forth in the *Five-Year Planning Document*. "In all critical components - the content and academic rigor of the curriculum, the quality and disciplinary distribution of the faculty, and the characteristics and academic abilities of incoming students - Northeast met or exceeded [its] goals."

After receiving this confirmation from the CBHE, discussion began on-campus regarding the issue of whether the University's current name satisfactorily reflected its new statewide mission. The Board of Governors authorized the establishment of a special commission to investigate the question. The commission determined that it was in the University's best interests to adopt a new name in recognition of the statewide mission and to reduce confusion outside the state with other institutions with similar names. Among the many new names suggested by the University's various constituent groups, the one variant that had the most support were those honoring Missouri's only favorite son to become President of the United States, Harry S Truman. Several months later, after reviewing all the information it had gathered on the name change issue, the Board of Governors voted on Jan. 30, 1995, to move forward with seeking legislative approval for an official name change to Truman State University.

"Based upon a very thoughtful and prolonged discussion of which name would be more appropriate, we finally decided to leave the word "state" in the name," then Board President Thomas R. Shrout, Jr. said. "State carries several connotations with it, such as it says we are affordable, we are egalitarian to a certain degree in terms of the wealth of the people who come here, and it reminds everyone that the state of Missouri is the primary funding source."

"The name Truman State University is highly appropriate because it represents a native Missourian with national prominence which is what our university is about," then Board Vice President Mary Rhodes Russell said. "It is a Missouri university, owned by the people of this state, that has achieved national prominence."

Once the Board of Governors had approved the new name, an effort was launched in 1995, under the leadership of President Jack Magruder, to persuade the General Assembly to authorize a new name for Northeast Missouri State University. The effort was not without controversy, however, owing to previous unsuccessful efforts by other public institutions to use a name change to begin a mission change process as well as a lingering concern on the part of some that the "Northeast" name should be maintained. Nevertheless, there was generally broad support in the General Assembly to recognize the achievements of the University in the attainment of its new mission as well as to honor the memory of one of Missouri's greatest historical figures. Ultimately, the name change legislation passed on one of the last days of the session.

On June 15, 1995, University administrators, Board members, legislators, CBHE representatives, alumni and friends gathered in Governor Mel Carnahan's office in Jefferson City, Mo., for the signing of the legislation officially changing the name of Northeast Missouri State University to Truman State University, effective July 1, 1996. "Ten years ago this month, Northeast's mission was changed to that of Missouri's statewide public liberal arts and sciences university," Carnahan said. "Since that time, the University's success has exceeded all expectations - bringing great credit to the school and to the state of Missouri. On the 10th anniversary of this historic event and the 50th anniversary of the presidency of Harry S Truman, I am honored to sign legislation that will give one of the nation's best public universities a name that complements its statewide mission."

The new name was launched on July 1, 1996, after a year of intensive work by the University staff to ensure that the University's "brand" as a quality institution was not lost in the transition. Governor Carnahan came to the campus to be part of the festivities and the Student Union Building Georgian Room was filled to nearly overflowing with friends and supporters. The day concluded with fireworks and ice cream under Kirksville's south water tower, which proudly bears the name Truman State University.

As we reflect upon the two anniversaries Truman is celebrating, it is clear that the University has come a long way in the past 20 years. Building on a solid foundation, Truman has become one of Missouri's strongest academic institutions, and it has garnered a national reputation for educating outstanding students. As Truman State University prepares for its bright future we do so with great respect for its past.