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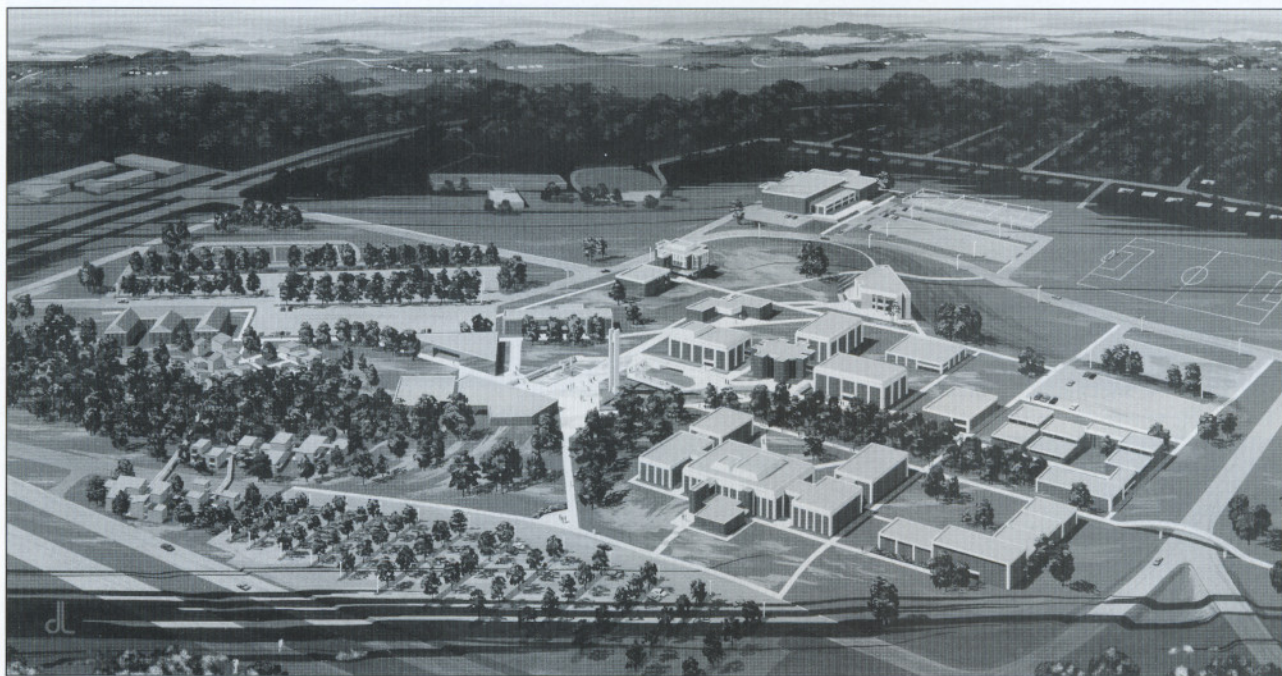
UAH

MAGAZINE

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IN HUNTSVILLE



*What will UAH be
in 2020 A.D.?*



This rendering, prepared in 1975, shows the planner's view of UAH in 2000 — and the futility of predicting the future.

What will UAH be by the year 2020 A.D.?

By Cheri Shipper

It is the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year; 70 years since the University of Alabama opened extension classes in Huntsville, and 50 since UAH became an autonomous university.

Aboard a space station, students in Engineering 304 raise a convivial sealed plastic pouch of Tang to toast their Alma Mater.

Back at the Huntsville campus, scholars from around the world ponder issues for the 21st Century: "An Ethical Policy for Mapping Mars." "Hamlet vs. Hamsters in Literature." "Is There a Place for Books in Today's Functional Library?"

Crazy?
Maybe.

Certainly no crazier than the leadership in Huntsville that suggested buying a little farm outside the city limits in the late 1950s. Denounced for their lunatic thinking, they earmarked the land for education.

Today, the farm has produced a bumper crop of classrooms.

But how can ...
... should ...

... will UAH continue to grow?
What will the future hold for UAH in 10 years? 20? At its 50th Anniversary?
"You can't tell where you're going

if you don't know where you've been."

Huntsville attorney Patrick Richardson modestly describes himself as "the first of many chairmen of the University of Alabama in Huntsville Center Advisory Committee." He has been with UAH since long before there was such an institution.

"My interest in having a university in Huntsville goes back to 1946, when I was a student at (the University of Alabama) in Tuscaloosa."

Two things stirred Richardson's imagination. He read a U.S. Chamber of Commerce report correlating education and material progress ("It showed figures like per capita income, bank deposits, the number of telephones, and magazine subscriptions.") and the University of Alabama's Extension Division opened a branch in Gadsden.

Richardson contacted Dr. J.R. Morton, then director of adult education in the Extension Division, asking about the possibility of an extension center in Huntsville.

"Morton was skeptical," Richardson recalls.

Richardson went back to his hometown, a "nice little community of about 12,000," to practice law

But he was convinced there should

be a university center in Huntsville. He rounded up support around the town square: Huntsville Times Editor Reese Amos. A cub reporter named Pat McCauley. Leaders in the business community.

The local group conducted a survey, getting people to sign up if they would be interested in taking classes at the proposed extension center.

"We opened our first classes in January 1950. It was pure coincidence that Wernher von Braun would arrive in August of that same year. Had the university center not been here, who knows what might have happened?"

He remembers von Braun's dramatic address before the joint session of the Alabama Legislature in 1961. Shortly afterward, a bill establishing the Research Institute was co-sponsored by every member of both chambers of the Legislature.

Meanwhile, the young lawyer-turned-advocate signed on as one of the first five teachers at the fledgling extension center. Later, he would serve as the first president of the UAH Foundation. He is now a foundation trustee.

Richardson sees continued growth for UAH.

"The university operation will grow, and with it enrollment," he predicts. "I'm very much in agreement with (UAH president, Dr. Louis) Padulo's expressed view that this university should attract students from around the world, that it cease to be a day school."

Thirty years from now?

"Great universities are recognized as being great because they do attract students from a wide spectrum," he says. "I believe this will continue at UAH — and expand."

If Richardson attempts to bypass much of the credit for UAH past and future, ("There were many people who were involved. My friend Macon Weaver was interested from the beginning, back when we were in law school."), his long-time friend and fellow historian, Dr. Frances Roberts, won't put up with such foolishness.

Like Richardson, Roberts was a member of the original extension center faculty.

"I was teaching history at Huntsville

High School, and they asked me if I would teach western civilization in the evening extension classes," she says. "I was there when it opened that January night in 1950 in the old West Huntsville High School (later S.R. Butler High School and now Stone Middle School). I taught high school during the day, and university extension classes at night."

Her first students were adults, mostly veterans, taking courses to supplement their high school educations. There were no degree programs available. They came to class because they wanted to learn.

"I really had not planned on a college career at all," she confides. "But I kept seeing some of my students taking classes, and I realized at the time that what was to become UAH was the only opportunity that some of them would have to attend college."

Roberts taught history at UAH for 30 years, until she retired in 1980. Her love for UAH has never waned. She pleads for a "broad-based, fully-developed university."

"We need to raise the public sights to the needs of the total university," she says. Balance is the key. "We define English as English, history as history, mathematics as mathematics, and physics as physics. These and other disciplines stand on their own, but they also contribute to a common core."

Asked to gaze into his crystal ball, UAH President Louis Padulo briefly pondered major advances that lay in store for UAH 30 years hence.

"The elevators in Roberts Hall will run smoothly," he said, pensively. "Solar-powered cycles will replace cars, which will ease the parking problem outside the University Center."

"And the new wonder algae we will perfect in the duck pond will provide valuable nutrition to the faculty and staff, as well as increasing our resistance to herbicides."

"One of the smartest things we will have done by then, when we realize we can't kill or hurt it, will be to recognize that algae's potential value to mankind. Scientists from the Johnson Research Center and the College of Science will isolate the parts of the algae that resist damage from chemicals and poisons,

"It was pure coincidence that Wernher von Braun would arrive in ... that same year."

— Patrick Richardson

“Electronic classrooms in space will form the basis of a university in space.”

—Dr. Harold Wilson

and will develop an extract to protect humans from pollution and carcinogenic food additives.

“And the University Center will provide free algae salads to students on the meal plan, and to faculty and staff, to partially compensate for the state continuing to provide lower than average salaries.”

From his office in the College of Science, Dean Harold Wilson suggests another consideration for the future:

Where will students go to class?

Not necessarily in a classroom in Huntsville, he says. “As we continue to explore outer space, a ‘university in space’ approach to education will need to be formalized.

“Initially, space dwellers will take advantage of electronic communications for education and training in a dedicated facility associated with space station or some other space-based outpost,” Dr. Wilson says. “Eventually, electronic classrooms in space will form the basis of a university in space.”

For all students, “the classroom of the future will not necessarily be a defined block of space.

“Satellite, cable, and closed-circuit methods of receiving instruction will be available in the home and the work place, as well as at institutions of higher learning.”

“Thirty years from now, with telecommunications technology, we’ll be offering courses from anybody in the world: the Harvards, the Oxfords, the Soviets ...”

It is a heady idea, but Dr. Thomas Tenbrunsel, UAH vice president for advancement, says its time has come.

“We’re in the Information Age,” he explains. “We’re already going to the next stage. In 30 years we’ll be approaching what Teilhard de Chardin describes as that ‘sense of common intellect.’ We’ll be on the cutting edge.”

Twenty-first century students can continue to “interface with biological faculty,” he says, “because chips will be stored. Students can interact with computers. Books won’t exist as we know them, but the automobile may still be the main mode of transportation on campus.

“And the Huntsville campus will continue to be the main place in terms of a University of Alabama education. Things will continue to happen here,” he predicts.

“We will be focusing on some very significant humanities-science interfacing,” Tenbrunsel suggests. He likes that kind of emphasis. “It’s like plugging into something accessible to people. It’s super.”

For a traditionalist like Dr. Elmer Anderson, interim provost and vice president for academic affairs, there will always be a blackboard.

“No matter how sophisticated we become, there will always be a blackboard and a piece of chalk,” he says. “And books. Libraries are here to stay.”

Anderson believes that by 2020, lectures will be on videotape. Does that mean faculty will have to cultivate star quality? “It’ll be tougher on the lazy ones,” he admits.

Perhaps, he says, lectures will be in tape libraries. UAH will “still want people to come to class, but they can use the tapes afterward.”

Anderson also predicts:

— Huge collections of videotaped experiments. “There will still be some lab equipment around, but maybe we’ll use the videos and come in and take practical tests.”

— An extended university, but “still a yearning for campus life. Students are still going to want basic activities, like sports and clubs and dances and fraternities and sororities.”

— And a continued role for professors: “They’ll always be there.”

UAH’s future, says Associate Provost and Vice President for Research Ken Harwell, is tied to things happening today, things at the university and in the surrounding community

“I feel university enrollment will more than double,” he said. “Our graduate enrollment will continue to be the major growth area, because Huntsville will be THE place in computer technology, and aerospace technology in the Southeast.

“Graduate students from all over the country and the world will be coming here.”

Harwell predicts:

— UAH will be recognized as the top optics center in the world;

— Optical computers will probably be developed at UAH. Researchers here will begin to apply breakthroughs in superconductivity;

— Because NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center is here, "we'll be developing the propulsion systems that will launch a permanent base on the moon, and a manned mission to Mars.";

— UAH will be a major center for environmental study. "We'll solve the ozone depletion problem at UAH. We'll be able to put together a detailed global model of the Earth and apply much of what we learn from space.";

— With the launch of the Hubble Space Telescope, "we'll be looking back in time to the existence of the solar system. We'll be studying whether the universe is still expanding from the 'big bang.'"

"We want to become a more regional university, nationally recognized for excellence in our programs," Harwell said. "Our primary growth has been in science and engineering. As we become nationally recognized, we expect growth in the humanities, the creative side of the human experience, in history and art and music, for example."

For Dr. Jeanne Fisher, vice president for student affairs, the future looks "a little spacey."

Fisher came to UAH in 1980, "back in the Dark Ages," she laughs. "Right now I'm working with groups like the Society of Physics Students, and Students for the Exploration and Development of Space."

Self-described as "non-technical," Fisher is learning.

"These students are serious. They're interested in applying for grants. They're talking about building an unmanned lunar orbiter, and reserving space for their experiments on the '91 and '92 (space shuttle) Getaway Specials.

Back at her desk, Fisher beams herself ahead 30 years: "We'll be giving classes in the space station, of course. Some will be beamed back to Earth.

"Non-traditional students will be living in residence halls, but they'll

own and operate them themselves. It may be a co-op type of situation."

Will 21st century students fight University Drive traffic?

Fisher thinks not. "I visualize a whole electronic system of transportation. Condo to tube, shuttling back and forth.

"Faculty will be doing research in space," says Fisher, who expects to have her own space suit. "We'll have computer chips, probably no textbooks. You can watch out for sonnets and soliloquies in space, and laser shows from space back to Earth.

"I'll be the little old lady in the space suit, watching it all and having a great time."

Students have a special stake in the future UAH.

For graduate student Sarah Walker, who came from Iuka, Miss., to study for a master's degree in history, it is the goal of a "well-balanced university, one that will continue to fulfill the many needs of the community, and answer the challenges of a growing metropolitan city."

Senior marketing major Ardis Morton came from New Orleans to study at UAH because she wanted to attend "a small type school." As UAH grows, she expects it to attract "more students from outside the Huntsville area."

She also hopes more students get involved in campus activities. "After all, we're still a baby school here compared to UAB and UAT."

Sorority life has been a good experience for Carol Ann Vaughn of Monrovia, Ala., who has been at UAH for two years. She is president of the UAH Lancers, and a member of the UAH choir. Vaughn says extracurricular participation adds an important dimension to her education.

"I've had a wonderful time here," she said. And in 30 years, she predicts, "with more students and the campus spread out, when people think of Huntsville, they'll automatically think of UAH."

Vaughn will definitely be thinking about the university.

Thirty years from now, she wants to be on the faculty

"I'll be the little old lady in the space suit, watching it all and having a great time."

—Dr. Jeanne Fisher
