

UTD has top-tier aspirations

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Let's play a game of triangulation. If we name two points, **Texas Instruments Inc.** and the **University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign**, what would be the third?

Answer: The **University of Texas at Dallas**, led by its president, Dr. **David Daniel**.

Did you read the article in *The Dallas Morning News'* Business section Saturday about two engineering students at the University of Illinois and their professor who use a sensor with TI chips to "read" electrical signals that the brain uses to command the larynx to speak?

That's cutting-edge research.

Dr. Daniel was dean of Illinois' engineering school until July 2005, when he was recruited to perform the same lofty mission at UTD, which was founded by TI executives.

In an interview this week, he reiterated his mantra that the school's mission is to become one of the great research institutions of America.

There are three indispensable ingredients for that ascent: faculty, funding and location.

The faculty is at around 400, "and we want to upscale to 600 in about a decade," Dr. Daniel said.

As for funding, the school raised \$43 million for research during the 2005-06 academic year, his first year in the post. Dr. Daniel says that UTD expects to reach the \$100 million-a-year level – the sum needed to become a top-tier school, according to the **Washington Advisory Group** – in about 10 years.

The engineering schools of only two public universities in Texas have reached that level, Dr. Daniel said: the **University of Texas at Austin** and **Texas A&M University**.

"Federal grants provide about 80 percent of the total, with corporations, foundations and individuals worldwide providing the rest."

Dr. Daniel says his school is fortunate because UTD is in one of the biggest high-tech centers of the world, "unlike the University of Illinois, which sits in the center of a huge cornfield."

And although UTD is rather small, he said, "we don't yet have the critical mass. We have electrical engineering and computer science and are in the process with **UT Southwestern Medical Center** and **UT-Arlington** of starting a biomedical program and also a materials engineer and science program."

"And we will be filling in the gaps soon with chemical and mechanical engineering.

"We are young and growing and taking advantage of nanotechnology."

He said the school is in the process of recruiting four researchers.

Helping this program is the \$30 million Texas Nanoelectronics Research Superiority Initiative, a public-private partnership to bring world-class nanoelectronics researchers to UT System institutions.

It involves participation and funding from the governor's office, the **UT System**, Texas Instruments and other sources.

UTD will get much larger, Dr. Daniel said, but he sees advantages to being small.

"We can be more appealing to entrepreneurial innovators and not be hindered by size like some dinosaur institutions."

Can he get UTD to the top tier in 10 years? The bet here is yes.