

Major step at UH

An upgraded rating for the University of Houston brings a Tier One goal closer.

THE University of Houston's continuing campaign to achieve Tier One status as a major teaching and research institution got a big boost this week when the prestigious Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching awarded its highest status to the school's flagship campus.

While it's just one of the hurdles UH must clear to achieve Tier One, which brings access to additional state dollars from a special fund, the Carnegie ranking is a milestone in UH's campaign to win national and local respect.

Gaining academic respect has been an issue for UH, founded in 1934 with a mission to educate the city's working-class youth. It became a state institution in 1963 and over the years has blossomed into a many-faceted higher education complex serving more than 37,000 students.

UH officials have their sights set on the top status now accorded to only three Texas schools (two public and one private): the University of Texas at Austin, Texas A&M University and Rice University. It's been Chancellor and President Renu Khator's top priority since she arrived three years ago from the University of South Florida.

Khator says that too many gifted graduating high school seniors here bypass UH for other destinations, making their hometown public university a last resort choice. "I think for a metroplex of this type, 6 million people, we've got to have an affordable public place where students can consider this to be their first choice," says the chancellor.

One nagging problem is the school's relatively low rate of graduation for full-time students over a six-year period. Although UH improved that figure by 10 percent in the last year to more than 45 percent, it is still significantly below the state average of 56.8 percent.

The U.S. News and World Report rankings, which currently peg UH as a Tier 2 national university, are heavily influenced by a school's graduation rates.

According to Khator, "Our expected rate is far higher than what our performance has been. That tells me that with everything else accounted for, there are certain things we have to do within the institution to serve our students right and get the undergraduate quality up."

One remedy, says the chancellor, will be upgrading admissions standards for freshmen in the coming few years. Another is expanding recruiting efforts and public campaigns to convince

school donors and the best and brightest students that UH is a worthy destination for their dollars and their education. A Houston Endowment grant of \$5 million is targeting graduate programs for improvement.

The Chronicle has been a committed

supporter of the efforts to boost UH into the elite sector of national higher education, and we applaud school officials' efforts to get us there. Houston's continued position as an international energy and technology capital depends upon the high quality research capabilities that another Tier One school would bring.

Texas lawmakers approved a dedicated fund with an annual distribution of \$24 million to help boost Texas public universities into Tier One. Of the seven candidates for those dollars, UH leads the field by qualifying in four of seven categories. However, allotment of those funds has yet to be determined, while all public universities face steep cuts in their annual state funding this year.

The Harris County state legislative delegation must make maximizing funding for UH, both from the Tier One fund and regular budget, a top priority. We've come too far toward achieving top status to slide back now.



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LEADERSHIP: University of Houston Chancellor and President Renu Khator wants students to consider their hometown university a first choice — not a last resort.