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St. Edward's University's big plans

Focus: Global workforce, raise \$70M+

Austin Business Journal - by [Sandra Zaragoza](#) ABJ Staff

St. Edward's University is ready to embark on an ambitious 2015 strategic plan, a five-year plan meant to further its goal of becoming a global university by adding foreign outposts, global classrooms and a cutting-edge library.

During the next five years, the university hopes to raise more than \$70 million in a capital campaign that is in its silent stages, grow from 5,300 students to about 6,000 students, and send graduates to the workplace with a global perspective and valued technology skills.

"Much of what we are doing in the five-year plan is relatively new to higher education," said St. Edward's President George Martin, referring to its goals to double the number of students participating in study-abroad programs, create new signature programs and globalize its classrooms by having students here sharing virtual classrooms with students in foreign cities. "In some ways, the five-year plan is more challenging."

While the five-year plan may be more academically challenging than the completed 2010 plan, it won't require as much construction as the prior 10-year plan that called for 11 new buildings and five renovations. Nevertheless, the new plan includes a few notable projects for the 120-acre campus.

The university is in the final months of fundraising for a \$22 million expansion of its existing science building, the John Brooks Williams Natural Sciences Center, Martin said. If all goes as planned, the science building's new wing will open in fall 2013. About \$16 million has been raised so far.

Additionally, St. Edward's is renovating an existing chapel for students. The expanded chapel will be a place for meditation and liturgical celebrations. The project is in the early planning stages, and the university hopes to complete it in 2012.

In 2013 or 2014, St. Edward's plans to give its library a technological upgrade and convert it into what will be called a learning commons.

"That's going to involve a great deal of technology, really transforming it into a 21st-century library, where students and faculty can connect to the rest of the world," Martin said.

The university is in the silent stages of a capital campaign to help fund its 2015 plan. Martin declined to specify the campaign's goal, but he said the university will likely raise more than \$70 million. The university completed its last capital campaign in 2007, raising a record-breaking \$70.3 million.

Ten-year plan goals met

The university believes it exceeded the goals set out in its recent 10-year plan.

John Bauer, chair of the St. Edward's board of trustees, said the university's success in growing enrollment and strengthening academics and faculty has elevated its profile.

"We set our sights on being among the best small universities in the country, and we are beginning to see some of that recognition from media and academic organizations," Bauer said.

During the last decade, the private Catholic university has grown to more than 5,300 students. U.S. News & World Report ranked it one of the top 25 master's-granting institutions in the western region and named it among the top five "Up-and-Coming Universities" in the region. Additionally, the **Princeton Review**, The **New York Times** and others have praised the university for everything from science, technology, engineering and mathematics education for Hispanics to its commitment to giving back to its community.

The university's global focus has become a recruiting tool for students and faculty.

"If you look at some of the research that has been done, a good majority of the students who plan to attend college already know that international study is important to their career. This is a way of responding to that particular need," Martin said.

St. Edward's wants parents, students and faculty to think of the university as being based in Austin and France, where a branch was established in partnership with Université Catholique de l'Ouest [the **Catholic University of the West**], Martin said.

"By the time we finish [the 2015] plan, it will be Austin and France and at least two to three other places, plus smaller programs that exist in other parts of the world."

Additionally, the university is planning to increase the number of globally connected classes it offers.

"They are going to be able to sit in a classroom in Austin, Texas, and in real time, through technology, will be able to take a class with students who may be in Japan," Martin said.

The goal is that by 2015 every student will have taken two to three such classes before graduating.

The international experience has helped some St Edward's students win Fulbright Scholarships in the last six years. In the 2009-10 school year, St. Edward's had four Fulbright scholars — an achievement for any school, especially one of its size, Martin said.

Tom Oliver, admissions director at **Southwestern University** in Georgetown, said many colleges have made international learning a priority. About 50 percent of Southwestern's 1,385 students participate in a study-abroad program.

Currently, about one-third of St. Edward's students study abroad, and those students are encouraged to also engage in international internships. The hope is that about two-thirds of students will study abroad within five years.

To make that happen, the university works hard to make sure programs are affordable, administrators said.

For example, students who study at its university branch in Angers, France, pay the same tuition, room and board that they would in Austin. The only additional cost is transportation.

"That's important to us. We want to make sure our students, regardless of socioeconomic status, have access to the highest quality education and all of the programs the university offers," Martin said.

Jeff Pilchick, director of guidance at **Westlake High School**, said that while Austin students seem to gravitate to the flagship **University of Texas at Austin**, he and the families he works with have noticed the changes on St. Edward's campus and consider it a viable option.

"They have raised the bar on academics, and their admissions has become more stringent than it was," Pilchick said. "The level of student and the applicant pool is getting better."

According to U.S. News & World Report, St. Edward's is seeing steadily increasing SAT scores, improved retention rates and improved academic quality of the student body.

Bauer said St. Edward's leadership is proud of what it has accomplished.

"St. Ed's has become a jewel in the Holy Cross system and here in Austin. You are going to see big things on an education front and both regional and national attention on the university," Bauer said.