Whittle Senior Project

Whit Lee

A Proposal:
University of Tennessee Welcome Center

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University of Tennessee Welcome Center Project

As high school juniors and seniors begin the process of deciding upon a university at which to continue their educations, many factors contribute to the final decision such as prestige, cost, reputation, tradition, and academic programs. When it comes to these factors, the University of Tennessee is placed in the same class as Georgia, Clemson, South Carolina, Kentucky, and other area state schools – not quite competing with the likes of Vanderbilt, Duke, and Virginia but well above Memphis, ETSU, and NC State. More than ever, schools are having to market themselves to these consumers much like businesses do every day. Decisions must be made by both student and administrator alike that will affect who attends and who wants to attend. What makes a student choose one university over another? Some will argue academic reputation is the most important factor while others will say a tradition of excellence is paramount. On this point I will not disagree. Yet, after a student has placed the University of Tennessee on his/her list of possible schools and comes to our campus for a visit, what will that student think? The campus visit may be the single most important decision factor for any student. By visiting the campus, the student has already shown an interest in attending the institution. It is in this part of the process that the university must make a dynamic impression upon its target market – high school juniors and seniors.

Unfortunately, if first impression has anything to do with it, Tennessee is lagging far behind her sister schools. Within the past three years, many universities (including the ones mentioned above) have constructed welcome centers – facilities dedicated to receiving and informing visitors and guests of the university. These centers provide a central place for potential students to identify with the institution and to get a feel for the type of community the college offers.

My senior project was to collect information needed to present a plan to the Board of Trustees and possible alumni donors for a welcome center to be constructed on the campus. I formed a committee made up of undergraduate and graduate students from UT to investigate other campuses similar to ours. We considered such factors as student enrollment, proximity to metropolitan areas, public versus private institutions, etc. With the help of my committee, we formulated a questionnaire for phone interviews with college administrators at the campuses we identified as being somewhat similar to UT. This survey included information such as how the welcome centers are funded, how much construction costs were, how many personnel occupied the building, size of the facility, number and types of rooms, hours of operation, annual number of guests, location of parking facilities, and other important facts.

Armed with this information, a list of 30 universities was narrowed down to nine. These nine institutions all possessed welcome centers with unique characteristics that I believed could prove beneficial to UT. The next step is to visit these centers to collect more detailed information and video footage of the facilities. A professional-quality video will be created to highlight features of these buildings I want to see in UT's facility. In addition, architectural sketches will be rendered for the actual building at UT along with a rough cost analysis of the structure.

Two factors that will limit the success of the project will be finding a place on campus to locate the welcome center and finding the appropriations for such a facility in this time of financial cutbacks.

Nevertheless, our sister schools are building and staffing these facilities. It is necessary for UT to look at our need for one of these centers as well. Competition is getting tougher every day in the world of higher education. Every resource counts in this race to attract the best students. And our first impression is fast becoming our Achilles' tendon.

Development of Thesis

My senior project began as a simple, personal belief that as Whittle Scholars, we are encouraged, and perhaps more appropriately, expected to become beneficial members of the university community. I feel that those chosen each year should feel an obligation to honor the investment the University of Tennessee and Chris Whittle have made in them. In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, they should "try to leave the world a bit better...." Because of this personal belief of mine, I felt that my senior project should in some way make an attempt to better the university that has given me such a colorful, exciting environment in which to learn more about the world around me, the people who live in it, and the person that I have become in these past four years.

I felt challenged to create and present a senior research project that represents a culmination of my education and experiences at UT. Instead of taking the traditional route of a research paper, I wanted to tackle some more immediate, practical issue -- one that could benefit my colleagues here at UT. I wanted to use this opportunity to give back to an institution that has been so instrumental in my development, a place that has served as my home for the past four years, a place I truly love and will hold close to me always.

Last August, serving as the president of the Vol Corps Student Ambassadors, I began to formulate a list of goals for the coming year for the organization. As I was searching for a new focus for our tour program, I began to think back about my experiences with visitors and prospective students at UT. For the past four years, I had

served on Vol Corps and had given campus tours to hundreds of high school junior and seniors. As an Orientation Leader in the summer of 1995, I introduced the college experience to more than 7,000 freshmen and parents. As a member of the Student Alumni Associates for three years, I was central to reforming the impressions of our former students as I went out from campus as a representative at alumni events. And I began to realize that a major part of my UT career was spent influencing and reinforcing the first impressions of our campus to its visitors, guests, and students, both past and future.

And from these personal experiences, I have come to know that many identify their first encounters with a difficulty in arriving at UT and knowing where to begin viewing the university. In our complex campus with its amorphous borders and entries, it's difficult to manage the first impression. In truth, our first impression depends on a large part to which side street one takes from the Strip to get here.

Likewise, given the complexity of the University of Tennessee system, it is tough for prospective and sometimes even current students to find a repository of campus information. It is not that we do not have many offices that effectively provide it, but it would be easier to have a central location -- to develop the concept of one stop shopping for our students and visitors.

As you can see, I realized this opportunity was more than just a line on a list of goals for Vol Corps. This was a chance to offer a plan that could have an impacting and

far-reaching effect for the university. This was the chance for me to try to repay UT for the wonderful experiences it has given to me these past four years. And this became the thesis for my senior project -- to identify, analyze, and propose a new method in managing our first impressions in an attempt to improve upon the already tremendous experience that is the University of Tennessee.

Research

Now that I had a topic for my senior project, it was time to begin the research. I wanted to know what other schools did to welcome their prospective students, to identify the national trends, and to get a better understanding of how others manage their first impressions. More than 55 colleges and universities from across the nation were included in the first round of an exhaustive survey (Appendix 1-2). From California to New Hampshire and Minnesota to Arizona, programs to welcome visitors were analyzed and evaluated. From this enormous pool, various demographic variables were selected to narrow the study to institutions similar to UT (Appendix 3). The enrollment, the location, the surrounding cities, and the cost of tuition were a few of the deciding factors, but one of the most important variables used was whether a school dedicated a physical space to receiving its guests. Out of the original 55, 30 had such a facility -- generically called a visitors or welcome center. And this concept of the welcome center has become the main plank in my proposal.

What is a welcome center? Well, welcome centers serve as the university's front

door. It presents a dignified, practical, yet exciting gateway to a college. Yet, a concept such as this cannot be properly described as well as it can be shown. Ergo, I visited four campuses, Clemson University, University of South Carolina, University of Kentucky, and University of Georgia - Athens, and shot footage of their welcome centers (Videotape 1). Over the course of five days, I traveled across the Southeastern United States and interviewed the staff and administration at these colleges to better understand how their welcome centers benefited the universities. For the next two weeks, I taught myself how to cut, edit, mix, and organize an informative video. Using two VCR's and a miniature soundboard, I integrated audio and video onto a videocassette. I had to enlist the aid of a local radio station to effectively mix the music and voice-overs, but the rest of the work was completed a room of my house.

After visiting these other campuses, I began to meet with administrators at UT. From the discussions I had with them, I inferred that many people would agree we have a need to establish a way to mould the impressions of our visitors. With the research gathered from universities across the nation, my research was complete. Now was the time to formulate a model of a welcome center program that could prove beneficial to UT. Our university will have different needs and functions to be fulfilled by its welcome center. The next step was to identify those needs and develop a program and physical structure that could effectively and efficiently address them.

Welcome Center Program

The main goal of the welcome center program is to manage the first impressions of our university's visitors. From this central idea, many other goals can be established, for we should not limit this building to just the simple function of receiving prospective students. At the University of Tennessee, our welcome center can do much more than that.

Through the research gathered from the those 30 universities, I have taken what I believe are the most successful programs at those schools and have integrated them into a plan for UT that is an effective use of form following function.

The welcome center will have four main functions: one-stop shopping, a statement of UT's commitment to technology, The "front door" to UT, mulit-purpose university building. One of the main functions of the UT welcome center would be its ability to fulfill the goal of one stop shopping for visitors and students. Inside this structure, all the current booklets, catalogues, brochures, pamphlets, and flyers from all the programs and colleges on campus could be housed. When a student, either prospective or current, wants more information, the staff of the center could quickly and easily find the requested material.

In our current situation, if a student requests information about the College of Engineering, the UT Band, and the Honors Program, the admissions office would send the student's name and address to the offices of all three programs, and they, in turn would separately mail information to the student. This process would be streamlined if handled through the welcome center. Departmental secretaries who once had to assemble

these packets and mail them would be unburdened from this task with more time to do their clerical duties, and mailing costs would be greatly reduced by combining the information into one shipment. Also, one stop shopping would be more convenient for the student as well, allowing them to receive all the information at once -- perhaps even before they leave campus.

The welcome center could also function as a statement of UT's commitment to providing its students in the classroom with the most forward thinking, technologically advanced visualization system in the world. In the theater will be the GVR-120E Briefing Center. This 60-seat room provides a group virtual reality experience and will be the classroom of the 21st Century. The equipment (GVR-120E) is a fully integrated display system capable of multi-channel imaging. On its 10 foot by 30 foot screen, this visual immersive machine can display television programs, PowerPoint presentations, web browsers, videotaped footage, movies, filmstrips, computer generated images -- virtually anything that can be placed on a television or computer screen. The system can show three separate screens or one screen with the same image across the entire 300 square foot area. In addition, with its state of the art technology, the GVR-120E can show 3-dimensional images with the aid of polarized glasses. The applications of this theater are very diverse. This theater could be used as the most forward thinking, technologically advanced classroom in the world.

Currently, only one other university on the globe uses this type of technology -- the University of Lapland in Scandinavia. With this system, professors can instruct and

instill knowledge like never before. History students can walk the street of Ancient Rome. Biology students can witness a chemical reaction on the atomic level. Geology students can study rock formations and oil deposits hundreds of feet underground. Engineering students can see their designs brought to life right in front of them. Its uses are limitless.

Using this technology also sends a very strong message to the many firms and corporations that recruit at UT. It shows them we are committed to providing out students with the highest level of technology available from the second they step onto campus.

Technology drives today's business, and as UT looks to forge more corporate partnerships, this system could be the platform from which we launch a new initiative to bring more corporate partners to our campus, providing our graduates with an edge when entering the highly competitive workplace.

Our theater is not the only powerful tool we will employ in the world of virtual reality. In our main lobby area will be a Viewstation 36. This station uses the same kind of technology, but on a smaller scale -- a 3' by 10' screen. It is not capable of 3 dimensional images, but it can be used as an interactive workstation where anyone can access a virtual map of campus, select any building with the click of a mouse, and retrieve all kinds of information about programs and classes housed in that building. Yet, before any more discussion as to the interior of the structure, the proposed location and the design of the structure are also important factors to bring into the discourse.

The welcome center will serve as the front door of UT to hundreds of thousands of visitors each year. Logically, a front door should be easy to find and aesthetically pleasing. For these reasons, the appearance and location of the building are crucial to its function. Though four sites were considered, for the sake of time, I will only discuss the primary site – the corner of Circle Park Drive and Volunteer Boulevard. The selection of this location is based on four factors.

First, based on the UT Master Plan, two main gateways are to be built for the Knoxville campus. One will be located at 16th Street and Volunteer Boulevard, and the other will be located at Lake Loudon and Neyland drives. Controversy still swells over which should be the primary gateway for the university, and for this reason, the welcome center should be positioned to be easily accessible from both portals. With the proper signage, the circle park location would be easy to find from either direction.

Another important factor to consider when locating the welcome center and one with which every student at UT can relate, is parking. Most centers at schools of similar size have between 20 to 26 spaces for both visitors and staff. Visitor parking, now located in the University Center garage, could be relocated to what will be the remnants of the commuter lot on the corner of Volunteer and Lake Loudon. The Master Plan calls for the eventual removal of this lot in favor of "a building to accommodate future unprogrammed needs" (Master Plan 3-36). The welcome center will not greatly affect this site, nor the proposed addition to MuClung Museum. There are no appropriations set aside for the future unprogrammed building for the next 15 years. Until its construction,

parking could be located to the west of the welcome center. Entry to the lot would be from Lake Loudon and, with the removal of the median, from a turning lane to be constructed on Volunteer Boulevard.

The center, though in reality a multi-purpose building serving many publics, will be primarily focused on receiving prospective students. For this reason, it should be located in close proximity to the Admissions office, Financial aid, Records, Housing, and other important administrative functions centered in Circle Park. The answers to many questions high school students ask often lead them to these offices for further aid, and having the center located within a short walking distance makes the campus seem more friendly and connected. In addition, the building needs to be located near Admissions for ease in facilitating the campus tours. When tours leave from the Circle Park area it is easier for admissions counselors to be on hand to answer any specific questions and to address any complex needs.

The fourth factor to consider when placing the center is campus beauty. Its design must allow the structure to blend into its surroundings while at the same time catch your eye and command your attention. In addition, with our limited campus size, we must ensure a proper utilization of space. In order to propose a more professional building plan and site plan, I enlisted the aid of a former graduate of the UT College of Architecture, John Davis, R.A. Davis is the principle partner of Davis Stokes Chilton Collaborative, P.C., located in Nashville, Tennessee.

Working closely with his firm, a 10,000 square foot welcome center has been

designed. It is a one-story structure with a 2,500 square foot entrance area and lobby. It has a 60-person theater with the above mentioned virtual reality capabilities. Along one wing, public restrooms, three offices, a kitchen, an 18-person conference room, and a reception hall run parallel to a glass wall looking out over a 2,000 square foot patio area located between the theater and the opposite wing. This patio can be used for receptions, parties, informal meetings, and other student and administrative activities. The office space is intended for a director, an assistant director, a graduate assistant, and a secretary's area in front of these offices. The kitchen will be equipped to serve light meals and drinks for up to 100 people. The materials used in the construction will mimic those used in McClung Tower and the Humanities Complex and the other building inside Circle Park.

Budgeting

The capital outlay and operating budgets have been estimated using various resources from the administration of the university to outside experts. The building itself is anticipated to cost approx. $1.2 million. The GVR-120E and the other virtual reality table along with the rest of the information infrastructure will run $350,000. The cost to furnish the building will run $75,000. This will bring the capital outlay budget to approximately $1.6 million dollars (Appendix 5). This equates to $160 per square foot. In architectural terms, this will be a very palatial building. By comparison, most

classroom buildings cost between $65-80 per square foot.

The main expenses of the operational budget are salaries and maintenance. Based on the advice of the Office of Admissions, one director, one secretary, and five undergraduate work-study students will staff the center. The additional office space is included to accommodate for anticipated future growth. Their salaries are roughly estimated at $71,950 per anum. The upkeep and upgrading of our technology and virtual reality machines will cost $20,000 each year on the average. The maintenance of the center, such as routine cleanings and minor repairs, is estimated using the Tennessee Higher Education Commission formula of $2.40 per square foot -- which will be $24,000. The lobby displays will cost an estimated $100,000 and will be rotated on the average every three to four years. This places the annual cost at approximately $28,000. Other office supplies will most likely be absorbed by the office of Admissions and will not be recorded separately. This brings our estimated annual operating budget to $143,950 (Appendix 6).

Administration

The welcome center would be most effectively run under the Vice Chancellor of Student and Administrative Affairs. The director of the center should report directly to the Vice Chancellor. The welcome center will fulfill an integral, highly visible function on campus. Because of its crucial role, it should have autonomy from any type of administrative office like Admissions, Alumni/Development, or parking Services.

Closing Argument

The welcome center represents an important next step in the development of our university's image to our visitors, guests, prospective students, and alumni. This paper highlights only the functions that my limited experience can identify. From faculty retirement parties and student retreats to community meetings, campus tours, and alumni receptions of football Saturdays – from virtual reality course work and Governor School luncheons to recruiting top notch administrators and faculty to our campus -–this center is a multi-purpose tool when wielded by knowledgeable hands. This single building can fulfill a plethora of roles and purposes I could not outline today. And many more functions await to be discovered. In truth, this building's role in our university is limited only by our imagination.

Appendix

Research

- University of Oklahoma, Norman
- North Carolina State University
- University of Florida
- Rhodes College
- University of Memphis
- Arizona State University
- University of Arizona
- University of Colorado, Boulder
- James Madison University
- Bowling Green State University
- University of Minnesota
- University of Michigan
- University of Virginia
- University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
- Rutgers University
- Cornell University
- University of Wisconsin
- University of Maryland, College Park
- Duke University
- University of Miami, Ohio
- University of Arkansas
- Georgia Technological University
- West Point Military Academy
- University of Kentucky
- University of California, Berkeley

Research

- University of South Carolina
- Baylor University
- Clemson University
- Texas A&M
- Florida State University
- Tulane University
- University of New Mexico
- David Lipscomb University
- University of Kansas
- University of Missouri
- Mississippi State University
- Virginia Technological University
- Middle Tennessee State University
- University of Alabama
- University of Mississippi
- University of Texas, College Station
- Emory University
- Indiana University
- Colorado State University
- University of Georgia
- Vanderbilt University
- Ohio State University
- University of Texas at Austin
- Penn State University
- Boston University



Visitor Center Questionnaire

Name of School: Univ. South Carolina

Demographics

Location:(State) SC (City) Columbia

Surrounding Population:

School Population: 26,000 On Campus: Off Campus:

State Funded: (Yes / No) 10,000 (grad)

Other Source of Income:

Land Locked: (Yes / No)

Urban campus

Facility

Age of Facility: 1994

Location on Campus: Perimeter Center Elsewhere

Type of Structure: Free Standing Installed in an existing building

converted Hotel

Square Feet of Space:

Number of Levels: 15

Number of Meeting Rooms:

Projected Life of Facility:

Cost of Building(Installation):

Special Features: Rooms Displays Hall of Distinction Several Multi-Media displays Touch Screen

May(is) the building we used for purposes other than a Visitors Facility(i.e, receptions, meeting rooms)? (Yes / No)

Hours of operation: M-S
M-F
8:00-5.00
S
9.30-2.00

Personnel

Number of Full-time Staff persons: 2

Number of Student Workers: 1 grad, 20-30 Student Assistants.

Other Staff Associated with facility: Volunteer 2 hours a week
2- student employees

What are Full-time Staff required to do?

What are Student Workers required to do?

Do guests have access to admissions counselors in facility?

Guest information

Are Reservations Required for campus tours: (Describe)

off admissions gives tour
- coordinate parking & campus maps

Number of Annual Guests: 37,000

Where is parking in relation to facility: Parking is next to building

How are guests transported from facility to other locations on campus:

(walk) shuttle bus other

Are Refreshments or Lunch provided for guests? (Yes / No)

Comments: 1-800-922-9755

- used to be hotel
- 15 floors
- admissions 2 blocks away

Budgeting

Operating Expenses

Salaries:	Director, Secretary	**$ 70,000**
	5 UG Work Studies	**1,950**
Technology		**20,000**
Lobby Displays		**28,000**
Maintenance	(2.40/sq. ft.)	**+ 24,000**
Total		**$ 143,950**

Budgeting

Capital Outlay

Building Costs	**$ 1,200,000**
Technology	**350,000**
Furnishings	**+ 75,000**
Total	**$ 1,625,000**

Powerpoint Presentation



University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Welcome Center Proposal

by Whit Lee

Personal Background

- Whittle Scholar in Marketing and Public Relations
- Vol Corps -- past president and four year member
- Orientation Leader 1995
- Student Alumni Associates -- three year member

First Encounters with UT

- How do I get to campus?
- Where can I get info?



Senior Project

- Purpose:
  - To identify, analyze, and propose a new method in managing our first impressions in order to improve upon the experience our visitors have of our university.

Research

More than 55 Colleges and Universities

Research

- University of Oklahoma, Norman
- North Carolina State University
- University of Florida
- Rhodes College
- University of Memphis
- Arizona State University
- University of Arizona
- University of Colorado, Boulder
- James Madison University
- Bowling Green State University
- University of Minnesota
- University of Michigan
- University of Virginia
- University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
- Rutgers University
- Cornell University
- University of Wisconsin
- University of Maryland, College Park
- Duke University
- University of Miami, Ohio
- University of Arkansas
- Georgia Technological University
- West Point Military Academy
- University of Kentucky
- University of California, Berkeley

Research

- University of South Carolina
- Baylor University
- Clemson University
- Texas A&M
- Florida State University
- Tulane University
- University of New Mexico
- David Lipscomb University
- University of Kansas
- University of Missouri
- Mississippi State University
- Virginia Technological University
- Middle Tennessee State University
- University of Alabama
- University of Mississippi
- University of Texas, College Station
- Emory University
- Indiana University
- Colorado State University
- University of Georgia
- Vanderbilt University
- Ohio State University
- University of Texas at Austin
- Penn State University
- Boston University

Research

- **Enrollment**
- **Location**
- **Cost of tuition**
- **Size of surrounding cities**
- **Dedicated Physical Space**



What is a Welcome Center?



Research

- Clemson University
- University of South Carolina
- University of Kentucky
- University of Georgia

Tour of the South

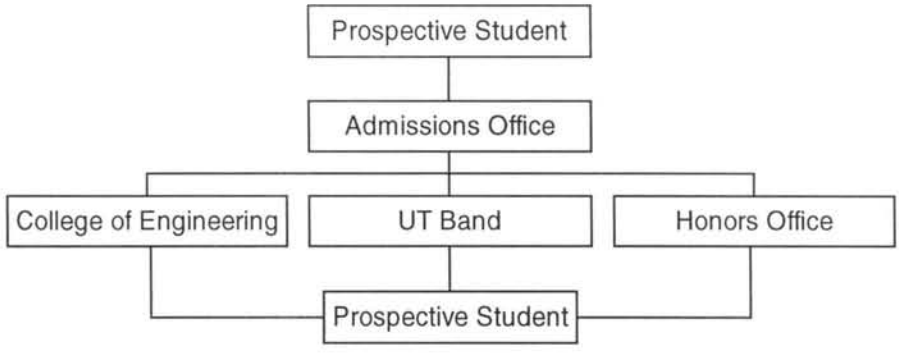
Steps Taken

- Brick Entrances
  - The Hill
  - Volunteer Boulevard West
- Welcome Center…?

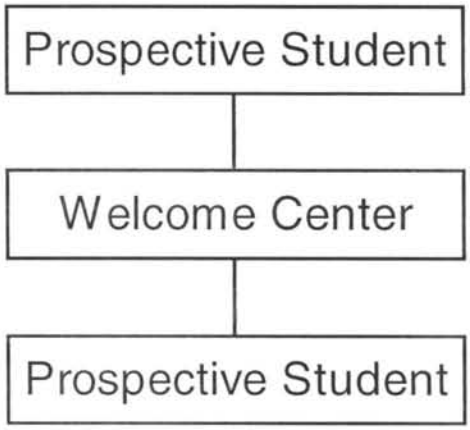
Functions of the UT Welcome Center

- One-Stop Shopping

Current Situation

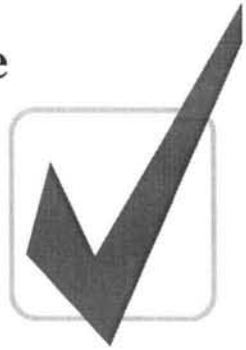


Proposed Situation



Advantages

- **Reduction in work load**
- **Lowered postage expense**
- **More convenient for prospective students**



Functions of the UT Welcome Center

- One-Stop Shopping
- Classroom of the Future
  - Group Virtual Reality

CNN Future Watch

Aired June 9, 1998

Functions of the UT Welcome Center

- One-Stop Shopping
- Classroom of the Future
  - Group Virtual Reality
- Front Door of the University
  - Appearance
  - Location

Factors in Location Decision

- Gateway Access
- Parking Availability
- Near Administrative Facilities
- Beautification/Proper Utilization of Area

Consulting Architect

John W. Davis, R.A.

Bachelor of Architecture -- 1974

Davis · Stokes · Chilton
Collaborative, P.C.

Budgeting

Capital Outlay

Building Costs	**$ 1,200,000**
Technology	**350,000**
Furnishings	**+ 75,000**
Total	**$ 1,625,000**

Budgeting

Operating Expenses

Salaries:	Director, Secretary	**$ 70,000**
	5 UG Work Studies	**1,950**
Technology		**20,000**
Lobby Displays		**28,000**
Maintenance	(2.40/sq. ft.)	**+ 16,800**
Total		**$ 136,750**

University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Welcome Center Proposal

Concluding Remarks
& Questions