Opening Remarks
Happy New Year! Actually, the New Year celebration started for all of us in August with the beginning of the new academic year and – at least for me – when Lisette and I arrived in Tarleton. Although our arrival wasn’t marked by a countdown and ball drop, fireworks, confetti and noise-makers, we did feel a bit like we walked right into the middle of the Guy Lombardo Orchestra playing “Auld Lang Syne” because of the incredibly warm reception we received into the Tarleton family. For Lisette and me it was a Happy New Year, indeed.

I want to thank each of you for:

• Your enthusiasm for new ideas like the 4Es.
• Your energy to implement new approaches to things like commencement.
• Your patience and tolerance for my learning curve on things like the Color Song – which I now know is clearly NOT the finger song.
• And, of course, I want to thank you for your feedback and friendship.

I’ve learned much from you, including how to ride horse, the type of hat to wear after Labor Day and the nuances of such things as chicken fried steak, kolaches, and frito pie.

In response to my call to share ideas on each of the 4Es, you offered creative approaches to recruiting transfer students, identified ways to diversify the curriculum, and suggested new and meaningful service learning projects. Although I am only part way through my visits to the various departments and buildings, I have learned there are many special people at Tarleton doing extraordinary things. In short, I’ve learned much in my first few months and I am grateful to each of you for all you have done.

Today, we begin in earnest the process of putting the meat on the bones of some concepts that have been bandied about during the past semester. Our goals for today include:

1. To update you on several important activities and issues such as the status of the master plan, the diversity task force, and strategic enrollment management planning activities.

2. To give you an opportunity to provide advice to me on new opportunities and ideas for moving the university forward, and

3. To expand the 4Es from broad goals that set our course to more specific objections and actions that define how we are going to get there.

Over lunch Laurie Deviney from our state relations office is going to provide us with an update on the political climate in Austin. Everyone is expecting this to be one of the more interesting legislative sessions in recent history, and Laurie’s insight will provide us with some sense of what the art-of-the-possible may be over the next two years. She will be followed by Mr. Graham who has spent considerable time worrying over economic conditions, the impact of recent market activity on our endowment and other such nettlesome issues.
During your sessions on “advising the president” and implementing the 4Es, we want you to think creatively as you dream and plan for our future. But we also want you to do so within the context of the reality of the health of the nation’s and state’s economies.

Some may ask: why think about new ideas and programs if we are likely to have little money to do anything? My perspective is that tough times are the most important times for creative thinking. We need to assess whether old ways of doing business are still the best ways of doing business. We need to think about how we can work more effectively across departments. How can we be more efficient, more competitive and more attractive to prospective students. You’ve probably heard it said: “Don’t let so much reality into your life that there’s no room left for dreaming.” Well today, I ask that you do some realistic dreaming about where we should be going and what we should be doing.

To begin the process of updating, advising and strategizing, I’d like to ask Dr. Chilton to come forward. He and the staff at OPIER have worked very hard to make all the arrangements for today and we should all express our thanks to them.

Afternoon Keynote Speech

If there was one headline that came from my office during the first semester, I suppose it would be the “Cliff’s Notes version” of the Strategic Plan: The 4 Es. I repeated these four goals many times at many different events. Marketing gurus call this “cascading the message up and down the organization.” To me – and maybe to you -- it sometimes felt more like a torrent, a flood, a deluge. But I knew that repetition was necessary to ensure that everyone heard the message about where we are going.

As much as I feel that I’ve talked about it, I know there are still many people who may not have the 4 Es firmly committed to memory. This afternoon is the time for us to begin to define actions to implement the 4Es. If we don’t, we’ll be in danger of being what I’ve heard referenced as “all hat and no cowboy.” It is important to remember that the 4 Es are not just slogans or for show (like a pretty hat). They are signposts of progress in our shared commitment to the excellence of this university. Today I expect us to seize the momentum we have and accelerate the rate of change across the institution.

We are all accountable to these goals. To that end, I expect regular reporting from you and the vice presidents on measurements, actions and results that come from making the 4Es operational. I ask that you build these goals into the planning and budgeting processes of each of your colleges and departments. When all of our actions are combined, we will have a better picture of Tarleton’s success. And we will know where we need to invest.

I understand thinking about new ideas is not easy in this climate. NPR commentator and author Tom Bodett asked the question: “What is the difference between school and life?” His answer: “In school, you’re taught a lesson and then given a test. In life, you’re given a test that teaches you a
lesson.” We have been tested -- still are -- by an economy that threatens our aspirations. Jerry highlighted this at lunch. We are being tested by a competitive environment that is aggressive and unrelenting. Witness, for example, the growth of on-line programs and community colleges.

The economic downturn and increased competitiveness in higher education make the 4Es more important than ever. If we deliver on these goals, we will more than survive in these times. We will grow and prosper.

In this climate, collaboration is more important than ever. I encourage entrepreneurship (a 5th E) at Tarleton. Look for new linkages and new partnerships. Working across disciplines and organizational structures is not easy. Cross-functional teams and multi-disciplinary programs present their own challenges. Each unit has its own culture, jargon, and self-interest. We need to view these as assets and not barriers. The question is, “How do we gain synergy by working across units rather than within units?” Management guru Guy Kawasaki suggests that “partnerships can’t just happen at the top.” At every level, we need to look for common interests and complementary skill sets. Bottom-up ideas are very important, as is the freedom to implement them.

For these reasons, I’m asking all of you to:

- Create new synergies across departments.
- Turn barriers into platforms for progress.
- Welcome new ideas.

We must expand our horizons within the university community. Extend our reach beyond our organizational borders. Encourage one and all to contribute creative ideas. Excel in all we do.

While Tarleton is not a small institution, I have seen a culture of care and community that is an invaluable asset to us in meeting challenges and getting results. This place is small enough that we know one another and large enough to get substantial results. As I told prospective students, Tarleton is the true university of the American dream: big enough for them to chase their dreams yet small enough to be a warm, caring and friendly place.

Our collaborations should be win-win relationships, where the big winners are our students and the citizens of this state.

Let’s now talk about the next 4E iteration

When asked why we are doing something, I hope the answer is not because it is one of the 4 Es. Rather I hope that each of us -- that our colleagues and our students, our friends and supporters -- can articulate why we have landed on these four areas of focus. They are shorthand for:

- fulfilling our mission.
- doing the right thing.
- making Tarleton an even better institution.
- preparing our graduates to lead lives of purpose with distinction.

Today all of you are going to be engaged in thinking about what the Es mean to each division, department, and program. Some of you have already started using the language of our goals in focusing your activities. More important, you have had successes that advance us toward these goals:
• The opening of the new Advising Center this fall is a great example of encouraging student success.
• The PICOS program that is focused on first generation Hispanic students and is coordinated by Denise Martinez is helping us to meet all of our strategic goals.
• TIAER and CAE are great examples of Excelling in scholarship.
• And the Gordon Center, Langdon Center and Effective Schools Project Extend Our Reach to the citizens of Texas in powerful ways.

As I traveled across the campus, meeting people and getting familiar with programs, I have been able to put a face on the Es, which makes the story of Tarleton easier to tell. Now it is your turn to think about what we are doing – and what we are not – to advance our strategic goals. I need you to think about what objectives we should set and what actions we should take to make these goals a reality.

To help frame our discussion, Dr. Chilton will describe the process we will use and the products we would like you to develop with the remaining time we have available today.