



New Leader in Residence

Lessons from boyhood shape Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin's leadership approach.
Story by Mark Barna * Photos by Nicholas Benner

R. Bowen Loftin owns more than 400 bow ties, including a black-and-gold one he wore to the Dec. 5, 2013, announcement ceremony of his being named the 22nd chief executive officer of the University of Missouri. His first day as chancellor was Feb. 1, 2014.

For decades, his favoring a bow tie over a long tie made him visually distinct among his colleagues. But that's just surface stuff. What really distinguished him was his personality and accomplishments. Growing up dirt poor in Texas, Loftin found his passion in math and science, received scholarships, became a tenured physics professor at age 33, did pioneering research that included classified NASA projects, and became president of Texas A&M at College Station. Through it all, he never forgot the lessons of his upbringing.

Loftin, 64, has the ability to relate effortlessly to people of different ages and backgrounds, colleagues say. His father, Richard Loftin, had the same quality. "He could connect with anyone in a very short time," Loftin says. "He could find some common element with someone he just met and use that element to build a relationship."

His people skills and mantra of putting students first were on full display Dec. 5. That evening, Loftin attended the basketball game between Missouri and West Virginia at Mizzou Arena. Rather than remain in a suite with MU administrators, Loftin visited the bleachers to mingle with students. "I would guess that I shook hands with about 50 students and spoke to about a dozen," he says.

"I never lose track that [universities are] for the students," Loftin says. "We exist for our students."

Teacher and Researcher

Richard Bowen Loftin was born June 29, 1949, in Hearne and grew up in Navasota, both pinprick farm communities in eastern Texas. "I grew up riding horses and chasing cows," he says. His father, who only had a sixth-grade education, worked 10-hour days for the Texas Department of Transportation. His mother, Dorothy, was a homemaker. Both parents wanted their only child to be the first Loftin to go to college.

As a teenager, Loftin was a reader and a farm-

hand who had a vague notion of becoming a college professor. He excelled at Navasota High School and found a mentor in math teacher Milton Schaefer. Given the socioeconomic status of the family, tuition for Loftin's education would have been out of reach if not for scholarships. Loftin got two from Texas A&M, 20 miles north of Navasota. The experience led to his career-long championing of university scholarship offerings.

Graduating in three years, Loftin earned his physics degree from A&M in 1970. He received his master's in 1973 and doctorate in 1975 from Rice University in Houston. By fall 1977, Loftin was an assistant professor at the University of Houston-Downtown. He loved teaching. "I really enjoyed the fact that you could see a light bulb come on, and a student would make [an intellectual] leap," he says.

Not long into his academic career at Houston, a policy made it mandatory for male professors in the physics department to wear ties. Loftin exploited a loophole in the official language. As his colleagues donned long ties, Loftin wore a bow tie. "Faculty are independent people," he says, explaining his rebellion. "They resent people telling them what to do." In time, Loftin discovered advantages to dressing differently (bow ties had been out of fashion since the 1950s). "People remembered who I was. They connected my name to my appearance," he says. "It was the beginning of my personal branding."

Loftin flourished at Houston, receiving tenure in 1982 and engaging in cutting-edge research. He pioneered, for example, educational learning systems that use virtual reality technology in instruction. He directed the NASA/University of Houston Virtual Environments Research Institute and was chair of the computer science department. In the 1990s, Chris Dede was an education and information technology professor at George Mason University who collaborated with Loftin on research projects. "Bowen was a fabulous collaborator," Dede says. "He was the physicist who brought that expertise to the [education] field."

The professor also earned teaching awards. "He was not a pomp-and-circumstance type of person," says Dede, now a professor of learning technologies at Harvard University. "He was a terrific resource for my and his graduate students.

A social media dynamo, Loftin personally manages his Twitter and Facebook accounts, and is delving into Instagram. At A&M, he had more than 30,000 Twitter followers, many of them students. His MU handle is @bowtieger.



† Karin and Bowen Loftin settle into The Residence on Francis Quadrangle. This photo was taken in the east sunroom on the first floor Jan. 29, 2014.

He believes what matters is people. He treats people the same, from the graduate student to the Nobel laureate.”

Administrator and Leader

By the late 1990s, Loftin was juggling a host of teaching, research and administrative duties, including fundraising. At one point, he made a decision to take on more administrative tasks; he could help more students by managing and leading, he reasoned. As chair of Houston’s computer science department, he managed faculty and staff and had an annual department budget of \$2.3 million. As director of the Virtual Environments Research Institute, he managed 35 graduate students and staff and had an annual research budget of \$2.5 million.

In 2000, he joined Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Va., where along with teaching he directed the Virginia Modeling, Analysis and Simulation Center. He managed 60 research staff, 50 graduate research assistants and had a yearly budget of \$8.5 million.

Then his alma mater called. In May 2005, Loftin became the chief executive officer of Texas A&M’s branch campus in Galveston. He managed 1,600 students and 400 faculty and staff with a fiscal budget of \$45 million. He brought stable funding and increased research to Galveston, says Mike McKinney, chancellor of the Texas A&M University System from 2006 to 2011.

But a storm was brewing — literally. On Sept. 13, 2008, Hurricane Ike struck Galveston with 110 mph winds and a 22-foot storm surge. More than 80 people died on Texas’ Gulf Coast. Days before Ike’s landfall, Texas authorities prepared for the storm. But Loftin’s preparation began years earlier. Back in 2005, he and then-A&M President Robert Gates formulated a hurricane evacuation plan for the Galveston campus. Loftin evacuated the campus community to A&M’s College Station campus 145 miles north. Logistically, it was like moving a town, McKinney says. Students resumed classes at College Station and lost only nine class days. All of the students graduated on time. “It was 24/7 to get it done,” Loftin says.

After the waters receded and the skies cleared, Loftin led reconstruction and worked with the state and federal governments on disaster relief. The experience brought the College Station and Galveston faculty and administrators closer, sparking a collaboration that continues today, McKinney says. “[Loftin] was a tremendous leader and so humble during this time,” he says. “He does a whole bunch of things and gives others the credit.”

His leadership at Galveston led to his being named interim A&M president June 15, 2009.

Eight months later, Loftin became president of A&M, with its \$1.3 billion budget and fall 2012 enrollment of 50,627 students. A&M, like Missouri, is a public land-grant research university and a member of the Association of American Universities (AAU) and the Southeastern Conference. Both universities similar challenges: managing a general operating budget in the face of state funding cuts for higher education, developing more successful fundraising strategies, increasing economic development through faculty innovation, attracting high-caliber faculty, moving up from the bottom quartile of AAU ranking, balancing growing enrollment with quality education, more effectively marketing university accomplishments, and increasing research donations.

One example of Loftin’s immersion in these issues was his budget balancing strategies. In 2011, Texas cut higher education allocation by 14 percent, and the A&M System board chose not to raise tuition to help make up the deficit. From fiscal 2011 to fiscal 2013, A&M lost about \$60 million of its general operating budget, records show. Loftin put together a task force of staff, faculty and students to examine how best to reallocate money. One strategy was giving senior faculty the option of retiring early, and 105 did so, saving A&M \$32 million in payroll over the two-year period. The winnowing meant a larger workload for some faculty and loss of many stellar researchers and instructors, but no tenured faculty were laid off, Loftin says. The university also increased fundraising and made cuts recommended by the task force. Budgets got balanced.

As for fundraising, A&M kicked off its latest campaign Jan. 1, 2012. Between Sept. 1, 2012, and Aug. 31, 2013, A&M raised \$740 million, a record for the university. Of that amount, \$205 million was in estate gifts, the largest in the history of the Texas A&M Foundation, records show. Loftin now is involved in the One Mizzou fundraising campaign, scheduled to go public in 2015–16. It has a goal of more than \$1 billion.

“The key to fundraising, as in most endeavors, is relationships,” Loftin said in a late December 2013 interview. “I have already begun developing relationships with MU alumni and friends.”

From A&M to MU

Last summer, Loftin announced his resignation as A&M president. He wanted to return to teaching and research, or so he thought. On Oct. 1, Bowen and wife Karin, an associate biosafety officer in A&M’s Office of Research Compliance and Biosafety, bought a home in Bryan, Texas. The closing chapters of Loftin’s academic career appeared

to have a firm outline.

But days later he was contacted by Storbeck/Pimentel & Associates, an executive search firm hired by the University of Missouri System to help find the successor to Brady J. Deaton, who after nine years was stepping down as chancellor Nov. 15, 2013. Over the next few weeks, Loftin interviewed by Skype with MU's 18-member Chancellor Search Committee and spoke in person with UM System President Tim Wolfe, BS BA '80, and, finally, members of the Board of Curators.

"He was forthright, thoughtful and smart," says Dean Mills, dean of the School of Journalism and co-chair with Ann Covington, JD '77, of the search committee. "Best of all, he seemed to like Mizzou as much as we liked him. And, of course, it didn't hurt that he wore a black-and-gold bow tie for his video interview."

Loftin says there aren't too many schools he would consider at this stage of his career. But MU "fit all the pieces," he says. He saw an opportunity to affect the lives of thousands of students as a top executive rather than as an A&M professor teaching a few dozen students in a lab. Loftin expects to hold the position at least five years.

The choice of Loftin was greeted enthusiastically by the MU community. Faculty Council Chair Craig Roberts pointed to Loftin's years as a research professor and six years as a member of Houston's Faculty Senate, including two years as its president. Loftin understands faculty and their interest in shared governance, Roberts says. He "will make an effort to include faculty in major decisions."

Tracey Mershon, BJ '85, of Lee's Summit, Mo., volunteer president of the Mizzou Alumni Association, is impressed by Loftin's academic experience and affable nature, which "will resonate with alumni," she predicts. "I believe Dr. Loftin will successfully build on the momentum established by Deaton and take Mizzou to new heights."

Loftin planned to spend much of his first few months building relationships with faculty, staff, alumni and students. A social media dynamo, he personally manages his Twitter and Facebook accounts, and is delving into Instagram. At A&M, he had more than 30,000 Twitter followers, many of them students. His MU handle is @bowtieger.

As for changes he might make, Loftin said in December it was premature to suggest possibilities. "I've got a lot to learn beforehand and want to work from good data," he says. "Change is good, but it must be done carefully." Even so, being an outsider, rather than rising through the MU ranks to chancellor, has advantages. "It's very difficult to be objective when you've been somewhere a long time," he says. "I will see [at MU]

UNIVERSITIES BY THE NUMBERS



Opened	1876	1839
Fiscal 2014 budget	*\$1.6 billion	**\$2.1 billion
AAU member	2001	1908
SEC member	2012	2012
Student enrollment, fall 2012	50,627	34,704
Research expenditures, fiscal 2012, reported to National Science Foundation	*\$782 million	\$239.8 million
Gift income, fiscal 2013	\$254.6 million	\$103.9 million

Sources: TAMU Division of Marketing and Communications; TAMU Finance; MU Budget and Research offices; Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System; and Council for Aid to Education Voluntary Support of Education. *Includes Galveston branch campus and Texas A&M University Health Science Center. **Includes MU Health Care.

what others haven't seen."

As was Anne Deaton, Karin Loftin will be involved at MU. "I see my role as supporting Bowen's goal to promote MU in academics, sports and in the community," says Karin, who holds a doctorate in biomedical sciences from the University of Texas Health Center at Houston's Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences. Her personal goals involve promoting cultural exchange internationally and supporting the historic preservation of The Residence on Francis Quadrangle, where the Loftins live. One of her hobbies is equestrian dressage, or "learning how to dance with a horse," she says.

Asked to describe her husband, she says, "He appears to have endless energy, is a quick study on any topic and has the ability to socialize with everyone." He is so driven that sometimes he "doesn't know when to quit and take a rest, although he does try to keep Sunday relatively free from work."

Looking Forward

During the Dec. 5 announcement ceremony, Loftin spoke of his parents, whom he considers role models. Throughout life, he has tried to live by their values. He explained how they mirror MU's core ideals of respect, responsibility, discovery and excellence.

"You have a lot to be proud of at Mizzou," he told the hundreds gathered in Reynolds Alumni Center's Great Room. "It gives me great comfort that I match you and you match me. Karin and I look forward to merging here as your family." **M**

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