THE UNIVERSITY of TULSA

Tulsa's University: A Platform for Talent, Innovation, and Economic Growth

How The University of Tulsa Can Serve as a Problem-Solving Engine for the Region

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Executive Summary

Tulsa's future economic competitiveness depends on the city's ability to cultivate a thriving business community. Cities that thrive in the future will be the ones that generate talent, create new technologies, attract outside investment, and continually reinvent themselves through innovation. To achieve these goals, Tulsa needs an anchor university that can integrate talent development, applied research, commercialization, and industry problem-solving.

The University of Tulsa is *Tulsa's* university. In 1907, the Tulsa Commercial Club, a group of local business leaders, offered Henry Kendall College $100,000, 20 acres, and utility and streetcar service to relocate to become the city's university. Today, UTulsa possesses nationally relevant capabilities in energy, cybersecurity, advanced materials, finance, health, and autonomous systems. These capabilities already produce talent, research, and industry partnerships in sectors important to Tulsa's future. Our community's next era of economic development does not require building a new institution from scratch. It requires investing, deliberately and at scale, in the one it already has.

To drive Tulsa's economic competitiveness, UTulsa intends to be the region's problem-solving engine. This means establishing a repeatable model through which a regional business can bring an important challenge to UTulsa and receive a coordinated response that draws on the full capabilities of the institution. UTulsa commits to operating at the speed of business, rather than the sluggish pace of a typical university. In return, UTulsa asks industry to:

1. *Never presume the university is uninterested*. If it matters to Tulsa, it matters to UTulsa.
2. *Give UTulsa the right of first refusal.* Bring the university your hard problems before taking them elsewhere. If UTulsa is not the right fit, we'll say so and help identify who is.

Today, the city's future and the university's future are inseparable. They always have been. Tulsa invested in this university once, and it changed the course of this city. Invest in The University of Tulsa one more time to create a future Tulsa that is one of the best mid-sized cities in the country and has all the necessary ingredients for a thriving business community.

Tulsa's Inflection Point

Tulsa – the university and the city – is at a critical *inflection point*.

For generations, Tulsa has competed on affordability, location, and quality of life. These advantages are real, and they should not be taken for granted. In Tulsa, a family can still afford to buy a home, commute to their job in fifteen minutes, and still have an evening left over to spend with their children. However, the rules that govern which regions thrive are changing at the speed of technology. Increasingly, the cities that win are not simply the ones that are most affordable; they are the ones that generate talent, create new technologies, attract outside investment, and continually reinvent themselves through innovation.[1]

Tulsa's long-term ability to attract, retain, and grow companies depends on its ability to build on historic strengths and convert them into a new economic future based on a robust talent

[1] Mark Muro at the Brookings Institution argues that the U.S.'s "advanced industries," i.e., those defined by high R&D intensity and STEM employment, generate a disproportionate share of GDP growth and creation of high-paying jobs.

pipeline and continuous innovation. To achieve this goal requires an institution capable of producing talent, generating new knowledge and technology, and shaping the city's intellectual and cultural life; in short, an "anchor institution." In most communities, this is the critical role research universities play.[2]

Mid-sized cities across the country are tackling similar challenges to Tulsa. In many of these communities, such as New Orleans, Dayton, and Waco, the economic reinvention is being driven by private universities that anchor the regional economy. These communities demonstrate that it is not the governance model of the university that matters. Instead, it is whether the institution is willing to embrace its responsibility to its city and move at the speed of business when it matters the most. **Table 1** provides an overview of how three private universities are driving the economic resurgence of their communities.

Table 1. Private Universities Anchoring Mid-Sized Cities

University	Model	Lesson for Tulsa
Tulane University (New Orleans, LA)	• After Hurricane Katrina, Tulane anchored New Orleans' recovery by leading the city's innovation strategy. • Launched the Tulane Innovation Institute (TUII), a one-stop shop for economic development at the university and a mechanism to support New Orleans' economy through innovation. • TUII supports faculty, students, and entrepreneurs across the community.	A private university can become a city's innovation front door, aligning research, commercialization, industry, and talent development around regional priorities.
University of Dayton (Dayton, OH)	• UDayton launched the University of Dayton Research Institute (UDRI) to support Dayton's manufacturing, aerospace, and defense economy. • UDRI is organized around industry and government demand, with a focus on delivering "innovative, practical science and engineering solutions." • UDRI is a unified interface to university capabilities, streamlining corporate engagement.	A private university can deliver significant economic value without a medical school if it tightly aligns its applied research to federal and industrial demand.
Baylor University (Waco, TX)	• Baylor has made regional economic development an explicit institutional priority and has been a central driver of Waco's economic reinvention after its manufacturing lines closed. • Baylor Research and Innovation Collaborative (BRIC) is a one-stop shop for industry. • BRIC offers equipment and infrastructure that enables Baylor faculty and industry to collaborate on R&D.	A private university can become a civic institution that positions itself as a key economic development partner whose fortune is inseparable from the fortune of its city.

UTulsa is uniquely positioned to play the role of anchor institution here in Tulsa in a way that the public universities are not. As Tulane, UD, and Baylor demonstrate, none of these institutions assumed critical roles in their cities because they were public, and none of them failed to support their communities because they were private. They did it because they made a deep commitment to their community. In turn, their communities chose to build with them. UTulsa has made and will continue to make that commitment to Tulsa. In fact, much of the important work that goes into building strong talent pipelines and discovering new technologies is already underway at 11th and Harvard.

[2] The Center for Strategic & International Studies calls universities one of the U.S.'s "most enduring sources of competitive advantage and a key pillar of the nation's innovation system."

Tulsa Chose This University

The University of Tulsa has two origin stories that are essential to understanding who the university is as an institution and its deep commitment to the city of Tulsa.

The first begins in 1882 in Muskogee, Indian Territory, with a small boarding school for Indian girls. Before Oklahoma was a state and Tulsa was the "Oil Capital of the World," the institution that would become UTulsa began with a simple and radical idea: education belonged to everyone – even Native women in the Muscogee (Creek) Nation. While many complexities exist around the boarding schools at that moment and place, at its core and with good faith, that school was about access and the transformative power of education. In 1894, that school became Henry Kendall College and produced the first four-year degrees in what is now Oklahoma.

The second story is uniquely Tulsan. When oil started to flow, Tulsa became one of the most important places in the American economy. Money and people flowed in, and Tulsa was growing faster than it could build. The leaders at the time understood something essential: oil could make a city rich, but it couldn't make a city great. A great city needed great minds, culture and the arts, and the engineers and lawyers and teachers and leaders a city needs to thrive. Tulsa needed its own university.

In 1907, the Tulsa Commercial Club, the forerunner to today's Tulsa Regional Chamber of Commerce, visited Henry Kendall College and offered a relocation package: $100,000, 20 acres, and a guarantee of streetcar and utility service. These business leaders offered the land, infrastructure, and transportation that would make sure the university was successful and served the needs of Tulsa and its businesses. The college said yes. In the same year that Oklahoma became a state, it opened its doors to 35 students. In 1920, that college became The University of Tulsa.

"The University of Tulsa is not a university that happens to be located in Tulsa. **Tulsa chose this university.** Tulsa recruited this university. Tulsa invested in this university, on purpose, because its leaders believed that the future of the city depended on it."
– UTulsa President Stacy Leeds

UTulsa is *Tulsa's* University

Anchor institutions do three things for the communities they serve: they produce talent, they create new knowledge, and they shape the future of their city culturally, intellectually, and economically. UTulsa is already doing all three in the industries Tulsa is betting on.

Domain	UTulsa Strength	Why It Matters
Energy	• Tulsa's status as energy capital has been deeply interconnected with UTulsa. • Decades of industry partnerships with Chevron, ExxonMobil, ConocoPhillips, and other leading global energy companies. • Top-ranked petroleum engineering program with extensive expertise in subsurface systems.	Decades of applied research through industry consortia have addressed practical engineering challenges, creating direct connections between academic discovery and commercial application.
Finance	• UTulsa has supplied the financial leaders, analysts, accountants, and entrepreneurs that support Tulsa's position as a financial services center. • Hands-on learning via the $9 million Student Investment Fund (one of the largest in the nation) position UTulsa students for financial leadership.	Companies choose to grow in places where they can hire exceptional talent with hands-on experience, and UTulsa serves as a direct pipeline of talent for Tulsa's leading employers.

Health	• UTulsa has one of the largest nursing programs in the region, ensuring our major hospitals have the staff they need to serve every Tulsan. • Faculty are exploring emerging technologies to match cancer drugs to patients, develop shock-resistant body armor, and develop new treatment techniques in speech-language pathology.	The future of healthcare depends on data, technology, AI, cybersecurity, and advanced diagnostics, areas where UTulsa's strengths increasingly intersect.
Cybersecurity	• UTulsa is one of the nation's leading producers of cybersecurity talent. • With the largest Cyber Corps program in the country, the university is helping supply talent critical to economic competitiveness and national security.	In the 21st century, cybersecurity is critical infrastructure and UTulsa's strengths align with the needs of the energy, healthcare, aerospace, manufacturing, and financial sectors.
Aerospace	• UTulsa researchers are working at the intersection of autonomy, connectivity, and cybersecurity, developing the technologies needed to drive the next generation of aviation, logistics, defense, and infrastructure protection. • The Oklahoma Cyber Innovation Institute (OCII) is playing a critical role in certifying drone aircraft, keeping our skies safe from nefarious actors.	These emerging technologies are the kind of areas where UTulsa expertise can differentiate Tulsa from peer cities and create new industries.

Commitment to Excellence and Access, Together

Recent rankings from the U.S. News and World Report demonstrate the power of a UTulsa education, ranking the university as one of the nation's top 75 private universities. They also ranked UTulsa the best value for higher education in Oklahoma, outperforming the state's public institutions on return on investment. UTulsa's best value ranking was driven by how strongly positioned the university's graduates are for the workforce, with alumni receiving starting salaries 10% higher than the University of Oklahoma and 27% higher than Oklahoma State University.

> "Everyone knows that Oklahoma desperately needs more engineers, more finance people and more tech and deep tech talent. Let's invest directly in those programs rather than trying to create something new from scratch."
> *– UTulsa President Stacy Leeds*

There is a common assumption that there must be a trade-off between the type of excellent education UTulsa provides and accessibility, that only public universities can provide an affordable education. However, UTulsa has flipped this paradigm on its head. In August 2026, the university announced that it is taking undergraduate tuition and mandatory fees from $54,000 to $25,000. The new tuition rate will be locked in for four years to incentivize on-time graduation and to give families a transparent financial target that they can plan for. This tuition rate makes UTulsa the most affordable private research university in America's Heartland and demonstrates a deep commitment to providing excellence and access at the same time. This decision was made for many reasons, first and foremost among them to be a talent attractor for Tulsa and to retain more of Tulsa's high school graduates.

Many assume that this change means UTulsa is lowering the quality of its degree programs. However, excellence and access already co-exist at the university. UTulsa enrolls more National Merit Scholars than any other university in the country. At the same time, a significant portion of UTulsa's student population are eligible for Pell Grants. These two groups aren't separate; they sit next to each other in class and often are even the same person. At UTulsa, excellence and access are not a tradeoff, they are one and the same. While the price is changing, the quality, small class

sizes, robust research, and career opportunities that distinguish UTulsa as a premier private research university continue.

UTulsa has ambitious goals for the future: for the university, its role in our community, and for the Tulsa region. President Stacy Leeds has announced her goal of 10,000 students enrolled at the university in the next ten years. Each new student enrolled at The University of Tulsa is a potential employee at a Tulsa-based company, an entrepreneur, a neighbor, a civic leader. To achieve this goal, UTulsa wants to work directly with industry to build the programs that they need to be successful in their businesses. This means growing the programs that already feed Tulsa companies, and creating new ones built around the talent needed five and ten years from now. If your company needs more analysts, more engineers, more cyber professionals, more nurses, or a credential that doesn't exist yet, UTulsa wants to design a program to help fill that gap.

The fastest path to a university-anchored innovation economy is to build on the anchor you already have. UTulsa has the infrastructure, a demonstrated track record of academic excellence, and a clear vision of the university's role in our city's economy. What is needed now is to *scale it*.

Tulsa's Future: UTulsa as a Problem-Solving Engine

At the core of UTulsa's approach to supporting Tulsa's economic competitiveness is its position as a "problem-solving engine" for the region. The university is committed to establishing a repeatable model through which a regional business can bring an important challenge to UTulsa and receive a coordinated response that draws on the full capabilities of the institution, from faculty expertise to student talent to specialized research equipment. UTulsa as a problem-solving engine would serve as shared innovation infrastructure for the region and provide businesses with a dependable way to convert their most important challenges into research projects, tested solutions, skilled talent, new technologies, growth opportunities, and Tulsa jobs.

To industry, UTulsa's role as problem-solving engine will look like:

- A single, visible point of entry for businesses and community partners looking to access the university's expertise, talent, and assets.
- Focus on challenges that are important to regional partners and aligned with areas in which the university can build distinctive capabilities, such as energy and critical infrastructure.
- Multiple pathways for solving a company's problem, with a focus on identifying the fastest and most effective form of engagement capable of producing value.
- Interdisciplinary teams organized to solve a partner's actual challenge, not university academic departments.
- A repeatable partner experience, from intake to discovery to solution design to translation.

To be the region's problem-solving engine means that UTulsa provides businesses and community partners with a clear, responsive, and repeatable way to access the university's talent, research, facilities, and convening power. UTulsa will organize interdisciplinary teams around consequential regional challenges; translate those challenges into research, education, technology, and venture opportunities; and remain engaged until the work produces practical value. Success will be measured not by the number of meetings held, but by problems solved, people developed, technologies deployed, companies strengthened, and jobs created in Tulsa.

How can UTulsa partner with industry?

- Degree programs and talent pathways, from certificates to undergraduate to Ph.D.
- Experiential learning opportunities, including capstones, COOP, and internships.
- Research, testing, and innovation projects to solve technical problems.
- Technology commercialization and entrepreneurship, including IP licensing.
- Facilities access, including specialized equipment for research and testing.
- Strategic partnerships, including place-based economic development.

A Reciprocal Compact with Regional Partners

Innovation is a team sport. Being the region's problem-solving engine will require strong partnerships between UTulsa and our industry partners. To grow our university and our city, UTulsa asks:

- *Ask One: Never presume we are uninterested.* Too often, a company has a research problem, a workforce need, a new venture, a building, or a partnership idea, but they assume the university would not be interested in it. The call is never made; the partnership never moves forward. Beginning today, make the call. If it matters to Tulsa, it matters to UTulsa. Engage us and build with us.
- *Ask Two: Give us the right of first refusal.* When you have a hard problem, a new opportunity, a talent need, or an idea that needs a research partner, come to UTulsa first. If the university is not the right fit, we'll tell you quickly and honestly.

In return, UTulsa commits to:

- Operating at the speed of business.
- Organizing the assets and resources of the university around the partner's challenge, not our internal structure.
- Measuring projects by the value they create, not merely by the activity they generate.

Conclusion: Invest in UTulsa One More Time

The cities that thrive in the next generation will not be the ones that simply attract opportunity or rely only on historic strengths to navigate a complicated future. They will be the ones that create opportunities through new talent and new technologies coming together to drive innovation. Tulsa's ability to create accessible, high-paying jobs depends on its capacity to help existing businesses innovate, convert promising discoveries into market opportunities, build new companies, and connect local talent to the resulting careers.

In 1907, Tulsa's businesses invested in The University of Tulsa because they knew that a great city needed a great university. The return on this investment was generations of engineers who built Tulsa into the "Oil Capital of the World," more than a century of industry partnerships with the largest companies in the world, and a national reputation

> "I'd like you to imagine the students who will walk onto [UTulsa's] campus in 2057. Many of them will be the first in their families to go to college. Some will build companies that don't exist yet, in industries that don't have names yet. And most of them, I hope, will choose to build their lives right here. They'll never know most of our names. But they'll live in the city we decided to build."
> *– UTulsa President Stacy Leeds*

in the technologies that are critical to our future. Now, as the city again faces a critical inflection point, the best thing for Tulsa's future is to invest one more time in The University of Tulsa.

UTulsa's ambitions are bigger than preserving what exists today. The university wants to grow to demonstrate that a nationally ranked private research university can be affordable and accessible to a broader range of students. It wants to grow to 10,000 students in ten years, bringing more talent, neighbors, and civic leaders to our community. And UTulsa wants to be the problem-solving engine that solves the region's toughest challenges. The future of The University of Tulsa and the future of Tulsa are inseparable. They always have been. Tulsa invested in this university once, and it changed the course of this city. Let's build together again.

What It Means to Invest in Tulsa's University

- **For Industry:** bring us consequential problems, sponsor applied research and student projects, co-design academic programs and credentials, and hire interns and graduations.
- **For Philanthropy:** fund student access and transfer pathways, support research faculty and laboratories, and create translational research programs.
- **For Civic Leaders:** include UTulsa in business recruitment and expansion, incorporate university strengths into regional cluster strategies, refer company needs to the university, and position UTulsa as a regional innovation asset.