A Decade and a Billion Dollars
Put New York U. in First Rank

By WILLIAM H. HONAN

Ten years ago, New York University was what college-bound students from New York regarded as a safety school, fourth or fifth on their application lists. If you didn’t get into Cornell or Brandeis or Brown University, you could always commute to N.Y.U.

But the administration, doing some long-range planning, decided that being the safety school was not good enough. So in 1984, it began a brash campaign aimed at moving the school into the nation’s top tier of universities. And according to academics around the country who have looked on with envy, the strategy worked.

In what was a remarkable fund drive at the time, the university set out to raise $1 billion. But unlike most institutions, which plow such sums into their endowments and then live off the interest, N.Y.U. spent nearly all of it to rebuild the university.

It lured scholars from Princeton and Harvard and Stanford and Chicago. It created a top neural science center. It opened a new performing arts school, an institute of mathematics, an Italian studies center.

It raised the average Scholastic Assessment Test score of entering students from about 1100 five years ago to over 1200, making it one of the more selective schools in the country. It built new dormitories to attract students nationwide: 10 years ago, 18 percent were from outside New York City; today, 73 percent are. And it has increasingly become the first choice of students who apply.

“They have simply made enormous progress in the last decade,” said Harold T. Shapiro, the president of Princeton University, who served as chairman of the evaluating team for N.Y.U.’s reaccreditation last year. “In several areas, they’re every bit as good as the best.”

Joel Conarroe, president of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, which evaluates faculty at colleges nationwide for its prestigious fellowships, said, “N.Y.U. has recently become a great university, and if it continues to develop at this pace, it may well gain admittance early in the next century to that small, charmed circle of exceptionally distinguished institutions.”

The story of how the university came to inspire wealthy benefactors to help upgrade it into what is now very nearly the Greenwich Village equivalent of Columbia uptown, commanding tuition, fees and room and board of $26,800 and attracting students...
Laurence A. Tisch, left, the head of CBS, and L. Jay Oliva, the president of New York University, greeting Abraham and Nan Ellis at a fund-raiser last Wednesday at the university’s Bobst Library. The university has raised more than $1 billion in the last decade.

...
middle. We were in a position where we had to grow or die."


Mr. Tisch and his fellow trustees, many of whom had attended N.Y.U. as night-school students and could not afford an Ivy League education, were proud of their humble beginnings and pleased to show off their accomplishments. "By elevating N.Y.U.," Mr. Tisch, a 1942 graduate, said with a chuckle, "we made our degrees worth more."

But they also had a larger vision. Many of the trustees—men like William R. Salomon, honorary chairman of Salomon Brothers Inc.; Walter V. Shipley, chairman of Chemical Bank, and Lewis T. Preston, former chairman of the J. P. Morgan Company—were financiers with large stakes in the city. They understood the financial plight of New York well and were eager to do something about it.

"Although our main purpose was to help N.Y.U.," said Mr. Tisch, "we are citizens of New York. N.Y.U. is a real anchor for this city. If you include the medical center, it's one of the largest employers in town. We wanted to help both the university and the city."

Raising the Money

Major Gifts Up the Ante

The university’s chief fund-raiser, Naomi B. Levine, took a pragmatic look at the membership of the board and saw dollars.

"I knew, for example, that Mr. Tisch and Leonard Stern, the owner of the Hartz Group, would soon make major gifts," Mrs. Levine said. "We also had on the board George Heyman of Lehman Brothers, who is one of the best fund-raisers in the city, and philanthropists like Lew Rudin of Rudin Management; Alan Greenberg, the chairman of Bear, Stearns, and Morris Bergreen of the Skirball Foundation."

"You look at a group of trustees of that quality," Mrs. Levine said, "and you say to yourself no university has a better group and none has a more effective chairman than Larry Tisch."

The fund-raisers capitalized on the facts that Mr. Tisch almost never turned down a proposed meeting with a potential contributor and that as New Yorkers, they were never more than a cab ride away from the headquarters of most major foundations.

"The best way to raise money is not by having the best brochures, charts, fund-raising thermometers and so forth," said Mr. Oliva, "but to keep constantly on the road. Shoe leather!"

Despite such enthusiasm, the billion-dollar goal often seemed daunting. "We had to raise $2 million a week for 500 weeks," said President Oliva.

In 1988, the Tisch family made a $30 million donation. The same year, Leonard Stern contributed $30 million, and fund raising topped $90 million that year, for a total of $366 million. In 1989, contributions soared to $123 million, a record. The annual total slid down with the general economy over the next few years, but never fell below $100 million.

In 1991 came an odd bequest, the $25 million legacy of the actress Paulette Goddard. After all, she was a high school dropout from Great Neck, L.I., not an alumna, and lived most of her life in Hollywood and Switzerland. But behind the scenes were her dentist, Dr. Maurice Sacklaj, another N.Y.U. board member, and N.Y.U.'s president. Mr. Brademas, who speaks warmly of the "good chemistry" he had with Ms. Goddard.

Last year, N.Y.U. raised $116.5 million, and with that, the $1 billion mark was reached without even counting what may be the largest single gift ever given to an American

CASE STUDY

How N.Y.U.'s Investments Paid Off

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<th>APPLICANTS</th>
<th>S.A.T. SCORES</th>
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<td>The number of applicants each year for undergraduate programs.</td>
<td>Average combined S.A.T. score of undergraduates</td>
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<tr>
<td>15,000</td>
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<td>10,000</td>
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<td>5,000</td>
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<td>*Projected.</td>
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Source: New York University

The New York Times
university—the late Sir Harold Acton's estate in Florence, La Pietra, valued at between $300 million and $500 million. N.Y.U. officials are not counting it yet because Sir Harold's will is still in probate.

Last week, the university celebrated reaching its goal with a black-tie affair at the Bobst Library on Washington Square. But of course, there were a few disappointments along the way.

"Our corporate contributions were not as strong as they should be," Mrs. Levine said. "The only overseas country that's been helpful has been Japan. We should have done much better in Germany and Italy," she said, given the Italian Studies Department and the Deutches Haus on Washington Mews, a center for the study of German culture.

As Mr. Oliva sees it, there can be no letup. "When you raise this kind of money, you also raise the level of your expectations," he said. "That means continuing to raise $100 million a year. It's like what John Wooden said when he was coach of the U.C.L.A. basketball team. He said, 'A team doesn't stay the same. It either gets better or it gets worse.' I intend to get better."

**Spending It All**

**Fat Wallet Buys Dorms and Deans**

If fund raising was often a struggle, spending was a cinch. The largest share of the billion raised—about $600 million—was used to complete the expansion and renovation of the Washington Square campus.

Among the 22 buildings erected, bought or renovated were the $35 million Tisch School of the Arts, which opened in 1985, and the Department of Chemistry, which underwent a $15 million renovation between 1987 and 1989.

Equally important for an urban university like N.Y.U. were the 11 dormitories built or renovated. These included the $14 million Goddard Hall at 79 Washington Square East and the $49 million Carlyle Court complex on Union Square that was bought and renovated between 1987 and 1989.

Some students who came to live in these quarters were attracted by generous offers of financial aid, totaling $109 million. Others were lured by the new sense of urgency and growth.

The infusion of money also made possible the energetic, decade-long recruitment of a stellar faculty to fill 88 new chairs. The hunt and capture was supervised by Duncan Rice, a Scotsman who was himself recruited in 1985 from Hamilton College, in upstate Clinton, by President Oliva. He is now vice chancellor.

N.Y.U. had the advantage of flexibility. Unlike many public colleges and universities where salaries are tied to rank, there was nothing to stop Mr. Rice and his colleagues from luring an associate professor, for instance, with a higher salary than that received by a full professor in the same department. Not all the new hires have been welcomed with
open arms. Andrew Ross, who was
drawn from Princeton in 1993 to
head N.Y.U.’s American Studies
Program, has faced criticism for his
focus on such matters as gay and
lesbian studies.

Mr. Rice, as dean of the faculty
of arts and science, began to think
systematically about recruitment,
he said, soon after his arrival in
1985. That year, he learned that
Anthony Movshon, a leading
N.Y.U. specialist in neuroscience,
was about to accept an offer from
the Massachusetts Institute of
Technology.

“It made me wonder about what
we could do to persuade him to stay,
and, if we succeeded, how we might
use Movshon to attract other out-
standing people in his field,” Mr. Rice
said. “I knew that neuroscience was
one of the most rapidly expanding
fields in the biomedical sciences —
people were talking about this being
the Decade of the Brain — and it
seemed like an opportunity to cre-
ate a center of strength.”

Eventually, Mr. Rice persuaded
Professor Movshon to stay by creat-
ing the Center for Neural Science,
which gave him the unusual oppor-
tunity to hire 10 professors and
develop what is now an internation-
ally known center for the experi-
mental and theoretical study of the
human brain.

Other professors were lured by
the promise of rejuvenating a trou-
bled department. By the early
1990’s, N.Y.U.’s department of poli-
tical science had become a victim of
internal strife, its staff pared as 6 of
27 faculty members quit. But the res-
ignations meant that a new chair-
man would have the opportunity to
reshape a department.

Russell Hardin, a leading expert
on the role of morality in politics,
was lured from the University of
Chicago for the job. In the last year
and a half, he has hired two faculty
members from Stanford, one from
Harvard, one from Princeton and
one from the University of Chicago.

In another instance, a university
asset proved to be the lure. John
Freccero, a leading Dante scholar,
gave up a post at Stanford three
years ago to move to N.Y.U. because
of its Casa Italiana. The landmark
brownstone on West 12th Street
between Fifth and Sixth Avenues is
where the seven faculty members
have their offices and conduct
classes.

“Everybody acknowledges the
importance of Italian culture in the
Renaissance and so forth,” said
Professor Freccero, “but very few
universities have a commitment to it
to match N.Y.U.’s.”

It also helped that Professor
Freccero was baptized at Our Lady
of Pompeii Roman Catholic Church
on Carmine Street, and had warm
memories of growing up in
Greenwich Village. “New York City,”
he said, “was a big attraction for
me.”

As it is for so many others, says
George E. Rupp, president of
Columbia University. He says the
City deserves some of the credit. “I
am delighted with N.Y.U.’s
progress,” he said. “It reflects the
resurgence of interest in New York
City that we are all seeing, as more
and more of the best students and
faculty come here.”

Said David Levitsky, 18, a film
major at N.Y.U. from East
Northport, L.I., “Many of my friends went to col-
leges with lawns and trees, but for
me this is where it’s happening.”