President John L. Hennessy announced an ambitious university-wide program Tuesday to seek solutions to the century's most pressing global challenges, enhance the education of future leaders and strengthen its academic endeavors. "The Stanford Challenge," a five-year, $4.3 billion fundraising campaign, received the unanimous endorsement of the Board of Trustees Tuesday.

"The scope and complexity of social and scientific challenges has grown immensely in recent decades," Hennessy said. "Universities are uniquely positioned to address these complexities. And I believe Stanford is uniquely prepared among universities—by its breadth of scholarship, entrepreneurial heritage and pioneering faculty—to provide research and real-world approaches to address many of these issues. This campaign will not only provide the resources to do so, I believe it will galvanize the Stanford community to meet the commitment made by Jane and Leland Stanford 'to promote the public welfare by exercising an influence on behalf of humanity and civilization.'"

Hennessy said early gifts to the campaign total almost $2.19 billion. "We are fortunate to have loyal alumni and friends who share this vision about the role of Stanford in helping address some of these critical issues," Hennessy said.

The Stanford Challenge seeks:

- $1.4 billion for multidisciplinary initiatives. Among them are three transformative initiatives designed to make groundbreaking advances in human health, environmental sustainability and international peace and security.
- $1.175 billion for initiatives to improve K-12 education, strengthen Stanford's undergraduate programs, reinvent and enhance graduate programs and engage all students in the arts and the creative process through exhibitions, performances and research.
- $1.725 billion in core support and annual giving to sustain Stanford's breadth of excellence in teaching and research.

Key to these research and teaching initiatives is a multidisciplinary approach that draws on excellence across all seven of Stanford's schools and throughout its many centers and institutes. The campaign enables Stanford to increase its research collaborations and to extend them throughout campus, bringing together experts from across the university to focus on specific problems, university officials say.

"The Stanford Challenge is the most forward and outward-looking campaign in the university's history," said Burt McMurtry, chairman of the Board of Trustees. "Today Stanford launches an effort that will focus the university's whole range of expertise in new ways on the most important issues of our time."

The role of universities in addressing the world's most pressing challenges has become increasingly important as the issues facing scientists and scholars have grown more complex and global, university officials say. At the same time, budget limitations and market realities have caused government and industry research efforts to diminish, leaving universities to fill the gap.
In recent years, Stanford has launched three major multidisciplinary research initiatives that have laid the groundwork for the campaign's goals. The Initiative on Human Health speeds the conversion of significant medical discoveries from the lab to the clinic. The Initiative on the Environment and Sustainability brings together scholars and researchers to address the challenges in providing the resources humans need to live while protecting the environment. The International Initiative addresses complex problems concerning peace and security, governance at all levels and human well-being.

The initiatives were chosen after several years of research and discussion among the faculty and university leadership. This process began in October 2000, when Provost John Etchemendy convened a task force to assess the university's needs. The task force identified strong faculty interest in intensifying the university's multidisciplinary efforts in the biosciences, the environment and international affairs. In the years since then, the trustees, faculty and staff have refined the university's plans for the initiatives by identifying those areas where Stanford has the greatest existing strengths, and which therefore hold the greatest potential for breakthroughs.

The second component of the campaign focuses on preparing students to become a generation of leaders in a world transformed by global realities. The university is increasing its commitment to improving K-12 education, focusing on new efforts in the arts and liberal education, innovating in graduate education—based on recommendations of the Commission on Graduate Education—and further enhancing undergraduate education. The Stanford Challenge also seeks to increase undergraduate and graduate financial aid, including extension of need-based scholarships to international undergraduate students and loan repayment assistance for graduate students who go on to work in the public interest.

The third component supports continued investment in exceptional students and faculty; its goal is to ensure that financial resources and facilities are consistent with the Stanfords' desire to create a "university of high degree" and to "qualify students for personal success and direct usefulness in life."

"A core strength of Stanford is its ability to function as one university and not just a collection of separate schools and institutes," said Isaac Stein, the campaign's convening co-chair, who was re-elected to the Board of Trustees during its recent meeting. "This integrated excellence is what allows The Stanford Challenge to ensure Stanford University's important role in the 21st-century world."