Former MIT President Charles M. Vest Dies at 72

AP

CAMBRIDGE, MA (AP) — Former Massachusetts Institute of Technology president Charles M. Vest, who began its initiative to offer free courses online and oversaw expansions in its research fields, has died at age 72.

He died of pancreatic cancer at his home in Washington, DC, on December 12, 2013, MIT announced.

Vest led MIT from 1990 to 2004. During his tenure, MIT expanded its research in cognitive science, genomic medicine, biological engineering and nanotechnology.

Vest asked a faculty committee in 1999 to explore how the Internet could broaden MIT's mission. The result was its non-degree OpenCourseWare project, which by 2007 offered more than 1,800 courses to learners worldwide. The online learners now may earn certificates for coursework.

Other universities began exploring similar programs, and last year MIT announced a partnership with Harvard University, called edX.

MIT President L. Rafael Reif said Vest "set an exceptional standard of intellectual clarity, moral courage and generosity of spirit."

"And there was no better example of his vision and values than the creation of MIT OpenCourseWare — the simple, elegant, unprecedented idea that MIT should make all of its course materials available online to anyone in the world, free," Reif said in a statement.

Vest also transformed the campus with new buildings and grew its endowment from

$1.4 billion to $5.1 billion, MIT said.

Vest was president of the National Academy of Engineering from 2007 until this year. He was a frequent government adviser, including heading a committee to redesign the International Space Station during President Bill Clinton's administration. He served on a commission appointed by President George W. Bush that concluded in 2004 U.S. intelligence agencies had been wrong in reporting the presence of weapons of mass destruction before the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Vest was born in Morgantown, WV, and earned a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from West Virginia University. He earned advanced degrees at the University of Michigan, where he taught and was vice president of academic affairs from 1989 until becoming president of MIT.

Vest is survived by his wife, two children and four grandchildren.

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