Robert Nelsen was raised on a small Montana cattle ranch in the Madison Valley just outside of Yellowstone Park. Nelsen put himself through college by working as a janitor (4-8 every morning) and selling fish hooks and western clothing in the evenings. In 1989, Nelsen received his Ph.D. from the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago with a dissertation on the use of the grotesque in James Joyce's and Flannery O'Connor's short stories; his dissertation also included a collection of his own stories.

In 1990, Nelsen accepted a position in the School of Arts and Humanities at the University of Texas at Dallas (UTD). He directed the Creative Writing Program there and co-founded the academic journal *Common Knowledge*, while continuing to publish stories in notable journals.

Nelsen’s move into academic administration at UTD came as a surprise, even to himself. In 2005, just after he had won the Chancellor’s Council Award for Outstanding Teaching and had been re-elected to his fifth term as the Speaker of the Faculty, Nelsen was asked to move full-time into the Provost’s Office.

As Vice Provost, in addition to writing and implementing UTD’s strategic plan, Nelsen oversaw UTD’s reaccreditation efforts for SACS (the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools) and the accompanying Quality Enhancement Plan: Gateways to Excellence in Math and Science. Nelsen’s oversight responsibilities included the Center for US-Mexico Studies, the Office of International Education, the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, and the McDermott Library. He also supervised academic program reviews, post-tenure review, promotion and tenure, etc.

In 2008, Nelsen accepted a position as an Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. Many of his duties there were similar to his duties at UTD; however, he was also responsible for oversight of the Academic Affair’s budget preparation, the implementation of the University’s Business Incubator, and the Center for Academic Athletic Success and other NCAA related matters.

On October 12, 2009, the University of Texas Board of Regents named Nelsen the sole finalist for the Presidency of the University of Texas-Pan American, and he served as President of the University from January 1, 2010 through August 31, 2014 during which time the student body grew from 18,337 to 21,015. During Nelsen’s tenure, the University increased its six-year graduation rates by 9.8% and its annual freshman retention rate to 76.1%.

With a commitment to find ways for the University to help the region grow and prosper and to provide students with better facilities, Nelsen set a course for UT Pan American that will culminate in the creation of a new bicultural, bilingual, biliterate University. By act of the 83rd Texas Legislature, UT Pan American and UT Brownsville will cease to exist in 2015, giving rise to the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV).
complete with its own medical school. UTRGV is eligible to receive support from the state’s public endowment, the Permanent University Fund (PUF), and the new university has already garnered $348 million in PUF funding. Nelsen currently serves as a Special Advisor to the UT System as UTRGV is being initiated.