

THE PRESIDENT SPEAKS: Interview with President Alistair McCrone

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The idea for the following interview was hatched late last spring when President McCrone issued a campus-wide letter inviting faculty members to visit with him on a one-to-one basis. While the latter open invitation is still operable, the interview which follows seemed appropriate for allowing a wider audience to hear what the President has to say on a variety of topics affecting this University. Many questions were submitted to the Editor from a cross-section of campus faculty and staff for purposes of conducting this interview. Either directly or indirectly, a composite of nearly all of the questions submitted are reflected in the specific questions asked the President by the Editor at a taping session on October 16, 1980. The tapes of the interview were transcribed and, with a minimum of editing, reflect the President's current thoughts on a number of issues on the minds of many at HSU.

Professor Tanner: How do you respond to the assertion that the *Forum* is merely an organ to further the interests of the Administration, rather than truly an open "forum" for discussion of vital and controversial issues?

President McCrone: In my view the *Forum* is in every respect a journal of *faculty* opinion, for the purposes of discussing issues of academic significance and interest to the University. The *Forum* is totally in the hands of its editors and the editorial board, who are all members of the University faculty.

Tanner:

Much is made at HSU of faculty consultation. Yet increasingly one hears faculty complaints that, among other entities, the University Curriculum Committee and the Academic Senate do not represent the views nor consult with the general faculty. Can you comment on this situation?

McCrone:

These complaints are reminiscent of complaints we hear about elected representation at the local, statewide, and national levels. My view is that if members of the faculty are dissatisfied with the performance of their elected representatives they should express that dissatisfaction directly to these representatives. Then, if satisfaction is not secured, the complainants can elect other representatives whose actions will meet with approval. If dissatisfaction were extreme and widespread, there is no reason why mechanisms of recall could not be invoked. Another alternative is for the complainants to run for representative office themselves at the first available opportunity.

T: What do you anticipate as the most important benefit and/or drawback which may result from adoption of collective bargaining at HSU?

M: I am troubled by the fact that collective bargaining as envisaged via the enabling legislation would lead to comparatively more centralization of authority in distant localities such as Sacramento, Lon Beach, and wherever union headquarters might turn out to be. Any erosion of our local autonomy erodes the academic freedom that goes with it.

In more general perspective, I believe that trade-unionism would demean the professional stature of the professoriat and the academy.

T: What direct channels of communication do you maintain with the general faculty which enable you to keep conversant with the process of instruction?

M: Every year I attend a number of department faculty meetings on campus, where I hear discussions about the instructional program and issues related to it. I attend Academic Senate meetings as often as possible. I read the minutes of the Curriculum Committee, which gives me the same information that every other member of the faculty gets about instruction throughout the University. Also, the Academic Vice President keeps me constantly informed regarding instructional activities and discussions with Deans, Department Chairs, and faculty occurring under his delegated jurisdiction. During my annual review of recommendations for promotion and tenure, I have unique opportunity to study extensive documents regarding the instructional efforts of the faculty. On many other unscheduled occasions throughout the year, I talk to individual faculty members about instructional as well as other academic matters. Furthermore, I teach a class each year and occasionally invite fellow faculty members to visit some class meetings to comment upon the manner, mode, and substance of my teaching.

T: I know it must have kept you running fast to teach a course each year, since you had so many other activities to engage in. You taught Geology - did you have a good experience doing it?

M: Oh, yes, it is like a tonic for me to get back into the classroom. You have to remember that I

M: spent twenty years as a professional geologist, both teaching and as a practitioner in the field, before I stopped teaching to do full-time administrative work. I still feel that for me the choice of geology as my professional discipline was the best choice. If I had it to do over again, I would still choose geology as my professional field. So I feel that I have a lot to offer the students in the way of geological perspective and experience, and they in turn can help me to understand the challenges and satisfactions of teaching at Humboldt. By teaching every year I am able to share in the experiences of my faculty colleagues and consequently serve the academic enterprise with a better sense of current reality than is possible just from an administrative office.

T: In your opinion, to what extent do faculty publications affect faculty promotions?

M: During my time at Humboldt State University, I know of no faculty member who has been denied promotion by virtue of being a publishing scholar. Seriously, though, while our policies certainly call for us to give credit for published scholarship in considerations for promotions, the record shows that promotions have also been justified on the basis of other kinds of productive professional activity.

T: Although the answer to this question seems obvious, what relationship do you perceive between scholarship and teaching?

M: I agree that the answer to this question is rather obvious. While the one does not guarantee the other, good scholarship is virtually essential to good teaching. To put it another way, the experience and knowledge gained by a professor who is engaged in the most advanced thinking and discovery of his or her discipline contributes enormously to the vitality, substance, and authority of the professor's teaching. Inversely, the questions and problems encountered by a professor, in communicating the essence of the discipline to the student, cause constant reexamination of the fundamental truths and facts of the discipline, and help to focus and sharpen the thrust and vigor of the professor's scholarly inquiries and critical thinking about the subject. As a corollary to the undeniable communion between scholarship and teaching, I believe that student involvement wherever possible in the scholarly projects of the professor adds immeasurably to

the educational experience. Thus, the relationship between professor and student becomes more than a teacher-pupil relationship - it becomes a communion of minds in a common learning experience.

T: Do you have any specific recommendations on how to improve the promotion and retention process at HSU?

M: Yes, the promotion and tenure process could be substantially streamlined by eliminating at least one step of committee review, as suggested recently by the University Faculty Personnel Committee. Also, if colleagues commonly visited one another's classes either by invitation or by voluntary courtesy, for purposes of regular collegial help and support, there would be no need for the *ad hoc* classroom visits which tend to occur just before the promotion-review process, to provide a basis for testimony regarding teaching performance.

T: What assurances do we have at HSU that a reasonable balance will be maintained between our science-professional-training and liberal arts programs?

M: This is substantially in the hands of the faculty. If the faculty determine that such a balance shall be maintained, they can see to it that the curriculum required of all students in structured in such a way as to ensure such a balance. Conversely, if the faculty do not commit themselves to maintaining such a balance, there is no amount of administrative action that will secure it.

T: Do you see any contradiction between the effort to preserve the liberal arts nature of HSU and the use of AMALAF, which places a premium on FTE, as a model for faculty retention?

M: No, but if there are any such contradictions, we should get to the business of solving them. The question asserts that the AMALAF mechanism places a premium on full time equivalent students, which, after all, is the factor upon which University funding is unavoidably based. It would be much wiser to recognize the fact that, while FTE is seriously considered, the formula really takes substantial account of model and level of instruction, as well as other factors. It is curious that the question also seems to suggest that the model exists for the purpose of faculty *retention!* It is much more accurate

M: and constructive to view it simply as a means of generally guiding faculty allocations. In short, the AMALAF mechanism is intended as an instrument to assist the decision-making processes which must proceed on the basis of academic principle and philosophy. The record shows that when the model fails to come up with guidelines that accommodate to overriding academic principle, faculty allocation decisions are then made on the basis of other factors. Thus, for academic reasons, course offerings and hence faculty positions have been protected through the use of *administrative* positions, even where the AMALAF formula indicated that student enrollment was below minimum guidelines. More specifically, no faculty member at this University has been laid off because of faculty allocations suggested by AMALAF. Allocation decisions have been made to protect the academic integrity of our University and thence the professional security of our faculty on grounds loftier than AMALAF. Don't forget the recently adopted long-range planning document which outlines priorities that clearly transcend AMALAF.

T: How do you respond to the assertion the HSU's General Education program is more of a conglomeration of courses imposed by the pressures of competing departments than one designed to meet certain philosophical objectives as to what an educated person should be?

M: I believe that this assertion inaccurately characterizes the nature of Humboldt's general education program. Compared with those of other respectable institutions, our general education program has a sounder rationale and more orderly facilitative structure. A careful reading of our general education policy will verify this, and put to rest any mistaken notions about conglomerations.

T: Can you offer some ideas on what you perceive as the ideal General Education for undergraduates?

M: Without getting into sequences of courses, mechanisms, or philosophies of instructional delivery, I can simply name for you the kinds of subjects that I believe essential to a strong "ideal" general education program. I offer them to you in no particular order of priority:

Philosophy - with strong components of moral philosophy, natural philosophy, and logic;

English - with strong components from the literature of many other academic disciplines as well as very rigorous and demanding writing requirements;

Science - physical and biological with a history of science component, and a laboratory experience;

Mathematics - certainly through algebra, geometry, and trigonometry, and ideally

with some differential and integral calculus as well;

History of Ideas;

Political Economy;

Foreign Language - at least one, and ideally another from a different family of languages;

The role of **computers** in modern society;

Basic legal and business practices;

World History - with strong western civilization and American history components, as well as some elements of anthropology;

Creative Arts - embracing overviews of art, music, theatre, and architecture, and their associated technologies; and,

Finally, I would want to offer a broad perception of **industrial technologies** and the procurement, development, and use of **natural resources**.

Perhaps there are other subjects that I should add, but these are all that I can think of at the moment. In the end, the way such subjects are taught and to what objective they are aimed, are crucial to the success of any General Education program.

Perhaps I should conclude by saying that by the omission of any subject here I am not implying that it is unimportant to the University as a whole - because I believe that the academic fare of other departments should flow very freely and naturally from the substance of the general education program.

M: sity as a whole - because I believe that the academic fare of other departments should flow very freely and naturally from the substance of the general education program. General education should not be viewed as a separate educational activity. It should be regarded as a fundamental part of the learning continuum that is the essence of the University.

T: In your opinion, what effect will the increased enrollment of older, part-time students have upon HSU?

M: The presence of older students brings much valuable life experience and seriousness of purpose into the academy, which enriches the learning environment for all students and for the faculty as well.

To accommodate larger numbers of older students many of whom may be fully employed during the day, the University might have to schedule comparatively more classes in the evening.

T: Are there any plans afoot to develop stronger alumni support at HSU? What benefits might we derive from such efforts?

M: Yes, there are, and we are presently enjoying our most active and successful year in developing alumni relations at the University. The benefits of a strong alumni program are many. By virtue of their maturity and on-campus experience, the alumni are well equipped to act as ambassadors for the University in portraying to others the value and quality of our academic programs. Alumni can be very effective as recruiters of students for whom a Humboldt educational experience would be ideal. Alumni can be very substantial contributors of funds to the University for projects that the state will not support. For example, we need their help in securing funds for scholarships, seed money for faculty projects, and for faculty and student travel and development. Similarly, even if the alumni are not in a position to provide fiscal support for the University, they are often well placed in their communities to assist the University in contacting potential friends and benefactors. Likewise, the alumni have tremendous capacity to carry the message of Humboldt's strengths and qualities to legislators throughout the state upon whom we depend for continued interest and funding. Incidentally, the Alumni Association has just concluded its most successful participation

M: in Homecoming activities in recent years. I regard the alumni as a vital part of the University, inseparable from everything that the University is, does or could be.

T: Is there demonstrable evidence that the HSU Affirmative Action Office is making progress toward achieving its goals?

M: Yes. Our records show that since Fall 1975 the proportion of female faculty has increased from 16 percent to more than 19 percent; the total number of women in the entire University work force has increased from 34 percent to nearly 40 percent; and the number of ethnic staff has increased from 6.7 percent to 9 percent.

Although statistics for Fall 1980 are not yet complete, there has been significant progress in hiring of the handicapped, and 58 percent of the faculty hired for Fall 1980 are women.

T: What goals should we set for the University to meet the challenges of the 1980s?

M: Long- and short-range goals that immediately come to mind are:

Keep politics out of our academy;

eliminate any lingering sex or ethnic discrimination from our University hiring practices;

continue upgrading the quality and rigor of our academic offerings, and increase academic performance standards for our students;

increase private support for the University;

increase purchasing power for the faculty by way of improved salary scales;

increase faculty development opportunities;

increase the proportion of minority students in the student body;

foster increased faculty research and scholarly productivity;

increase computer-based instruction opportunities at the University;

M: endeavor to secure single offices for all faculty;

build several new academic buildings (science, creative arts, natural resources);

increase necessary instructional equipment and support material;

increase on-campus fiscal flexibility and discretionary authority in all aspects of University operations. That is, encourage more decentralization of state and CSUC system functions, placing greater responsibility and discretionary authority in the hands of the campus faculties and administrations;

improve, increase, and coordinate University Relations and Development activity;

substantially increase library resources;

build a strong and active alumni association with a self-supporting alumni relations director. Involve the alumni in student recruiting and fund raising;

greatly increase staff and faculty awareness of the nature and potential of the University;

secure freedom from the requirement to accept certain community college courses for credit for our degrees, and certification of completion of General Education, without such courses or certification being acceptable to the HSU faculty;

build an off-campus study and conference center;

attract comparatively more middle aged and senior citizen students to the University, and enhance lifelong-learning opportunities.

work more closely with local high schools and elementary schools to enhance the quality of the entire educational spectrum in Humboldt and Del Norte counties;

develop the faculty *Forum* into a truly outstanding scholarly publication;

M: develop increasingly harmonious relationships between the University and the surrounding community;

secure more funds to support faculty travel, and student travel to professional meetings in company with faculty

build student housing sufficient to allow every student to reside at least one year on campus; and

secure more scholarships and student financial aids.

In summary, develop the ambience and academic quality of the University to singularly strong and distinctive levels.

T: Thank you, President McCrone. I am certain that readers of the *Forum* will be very interested in your views on these matters.