

C.C. Reader interviews the Provost

Capitolizing on our future

The following interview was conducted on Thurs., Jan 17 and was edited for clarity by Lyda Baker, interviewer and Provost/Dean Dr. Theodore L. Gross.

The interview concerns Dr. Gross' future plans for expansion of Capitol Campus.

C.C. Reader It is obvious that the Capitol Campus is in need of change. After all, change is an integral part of education.

Why do you believe that the expansion of Capitol Campus into a "university presence" is a needed change?

Gross For one thing, the campus is already a university. It has graduate programs in place already. So it is not as though one is creating a university presence, it already exists. It is a question of making the community aware of the fact and of strengthening the programs.

There is no university in South Central Pennsylvania. There are universities in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and at State College. In the Greater Harrisburg Area and, by extension, South Central Pennsylvania, there are many colleges, but no single university.

It seems unfortunate that in a state capital one does not have a university. In other state capitals in the country - Austin, Texas; Sacramento, California or Albany, New York - there are significant universities. And the need for a university here, I think, is self-evident.

C.C. Reader As indicated in the working draft of "The Pennsylvania State University, The Capitol Campus: Status 1980 - Prospectus 1990," almost every aspect of the campus requires improvement.

Listed in the draft, for instance, is that improvements are needed in student scholarships, cultural programming, research and teaching facilities, psychology laboratories, engineering labs and classrooms and, also needed is the modernization of the library and what was titled "The Next Step," a Science Center.

Which of these needs will be fulfilled first? That is, what is the order of priority?

Gross Several things will happen at the same time. But in terms of buildings, the building we are trying to establish first is the Science and Technology Building.

Students in engineering technology desperately need to have laboratories for their work.

In addition, we are thinking of moving ahead in the area of allied health, which

there is a great need for in this area.

The university has already made a request of the state legislature for a 2.4 million dollar appropriation so that it is not as though we are all alone in that effort.

The university is supporting us. We also hope to go out into the community to seek additional monies from corporations and industries for that building.

Many industries in the area hire our graduates, so it would be to their advantage to let their future employees have a decent facility.

At the same time, we are going to mount a scholarship program throughout Pennsylvania. We hope to attract the best prepared and most talented students from two year institutions.

"We are trying to propose a plan that will work-- not a wish list..."

And then, at the same time, we are going to be looking for monies to establish endowed chairs - what are called Faculty Fellows.

Probably the first thing we will do will be to try to find funds to develop certain beautification projects. There will be immediate physical change to make Capitol look more like a campus. One of our first projects is the sign in front of the campus; then Vendorville; then the lobby ...

C.C. Reader How did you come to the decision that the Science and Technology Building is more important than, say, a theater for the performing arts or the expansion and modernization of the library?

Gross We began by asking Dr. Nancy Tischler to be editor of an academic master plan. Dr. Tischler, together with the program heads and the administrative staff, met at a day long retreat last Spring to review the first draft of the master plan.

In the last few months she, together with Mark Dorfman and several other people, has been refining that academic master plan, sharing new drafts with the program heads and the entire faculty in terms of setting priorities and in terms of writing the various sections. The development of the "Status - Prospectus" document stems from that project.

We are trying to propose a plan that will work - not a wish list, but something that will work. The two buildings we have proposed, are first, the Science and Technology Building and a Conference Center, or a Continuing Education Center.

Now, we had in mind the establishment of an arts building - a humanities building. But, we were advised by people in the community that that probably will not attract funds as readily as a Continuing Education Center that will serve the needs of the community in a more complete way and include in it facilities for the humanities.

What we decided to do was to establish the Continuing Education Center and in the Center have an auditorium that could be used for the arts and humanities. We could have dance performances, concerts, lectures. And in that Conference Center also, we hope to build an extensive library.

If you have ever traveled to Berks Campus, you will see a beautiful multi-purpose building that is similar to the one we have in mind. There, you have different units. You have a student unit, cafeteria, a theater and a library. That's the sort of facility we have in mind.

It would be primarily a building devoted to continuing education, conferences, seminars, workshops and also available to the arts and containing a library that will serve the entire campus. That building, we will not see funds for until about 1984 - 85.

"There are gaps as a university.

We are trying to flesh this out..."

C.C. Reader Are there also plans to incorporate HACC and the Hershey Medical Center into the "university presence?"

Gross No. Not at all. HACC is a separate unit, and we do not intend to become - we do not need to become - involved in freshman and sophomore study. There is no need to. HACC provides that very well.

What we need to do is to articulate as closely as possible with HACC at the same time as we work closely with Berks Campus and York Campus, so that people in the general area have a sense that they have a four year education available to them.

We are not a full university, in the sense that we have selected courses of study. For example, we do not have a

program in science. You really can't have a university without a program or course of study in science.

This is one of the reasons we are moving in that direction. Our resources are limited. This campus should have a program in science that matches the programs in humanities and social science.

There are gaps as a university. We are trying to flesh this out so that we have a more comprehensive kind of university. But Capitol Campus is very small - and that is one of its strengths. There are only 2500 students, and there really should be, in my view, no more than 3,000.

It is very difficult to form a full university on that small a basis, but you can establish a first-rate group of programs that provide university study.

"It is not going to be a futile mistake..."

We are trying to develop a plan that meets the need of the student population. We have to synchronize the physical development of the campus with the developing enrollment. As I have suggested, we are contemplating stabilizing the enrollment at something like 3,000 students over the next ten years.

C.C. Reader How do you account for a proposed increase in student enrollment, considering the fact that there is decreased enrollment in colleges across the nation, and that educational fees in Pennsylvania are steadily increasing?

That is, how do you plan to safeguard the costly expansion of the campus from being a futile mistake? Where will the students come from?

Gross It is not going to be a futile mistake if we move step by step - cautiously.

We need the Science and Technology Building and the Conference Center right now! Even if there were not to be an additional student or an additional faculty member, those facilities would be desperately needed for our present student body - even with a decrease in students.

But, I contemplate a slight rise in student enrollment because, if you introduce new programs, you're going to attract students. Secondly, there should be an increase in part-time students.

As you know, there is a decline in students between the ages of 18 and 22, but there is not a decline in the population of people in their

30s, 40s, 50s and 60s. And that is the population that tends to be one large segment of our student body.

Then the Harrisburg area will be less affected in population than any other area in the state. For one thing, you have the stability of the state capital. Even if there is a recession, or difficulty in the economy, the state capital employment tends to remain stable.

In addition, with the inflation, people might not want to send their children away to college. School is too expensive. But I can see them sending their students to a school that is in the area. In a kind of perverse way, I think we will benefit from difficult economic times.

C.C. Reader Now the inevitable question. Since you have become Provost/Dean of Capitol Campus, there has been talk of changing the name of the campus. Are you going to change the name?

Gross That name change has been in the works now for at least five years. The faculty have wanted the name to be changed, so I am simply carrying out what I consider to be a mandate of the faculty.

There is a possibility that it could be happening very soon. The university administration has discussed the matter with me and what we at Capitol are doing is taking a vote of the faculty and hopefully, a vote of the student body too. These votes will be recommendations that I will take most seriously.

The choices will be either remaining the same - that is, Capitol Campus - or becoming The Harrisburg Campus of the Pennsylvania State University, which, in its shortened form will be Penn State/Harrisburg. There are arguments for both choices.

The arguments for Capitol Campus seem to be that first of all, we have been here for 13 years and people know us. We have established a reputation. Furthermore, Capitol Campus seems to embrace a larger area.

On the other hand, Penn State/Harrisburg has advantages, too. If someone asks you where you go to school, you say Penn State/Harrisburg, and Penn State - with its great prestige - becomes a constant feature. If you say Capitol Campus, people sometimes wonder if it is a part of Penn State or not. Penn State/Harrisburg in that sense, will be strong for the students, as well as the faculty.

It is a question of making a decision between the two. I'd rather not make that decision. That decision must be made by the faculty, the students, the clerical staff, the administration - the entire community of Capitol Campus.