

Interview With Provost

Reader Raps With Gross



By Joan H. Klein

C.C. Reader: In March, when the Board of Advisors dined with the Board of Trustees, faculty members said that the formation of Capitol's Board was possibly the most important event that had happened on this campus since it opened. I have read, "The Board of Advisors ... has taken extensive efforts on our behalf" and "our development plans are moving rapidly toward completion." What efforts? What plans? Can we discuss specifics?

Gross: The Board of Advisors was established to help give the campus greater prominence in the community and to help us develop particular projects.

It is made up of distinguished citizens of the Greater Harrisburg area -- judges, businessmen, the editor of Harrisburg's largest newspaper, and others. These people have never been involved with the campus before because nobody asked them. But they are here now and are more willing to help.

Whenever a problem comes up, I feel free to call any one of the Board members for advice. This gives us valuable outreach to the community. These people know what can and can't be done.

CCR: It's still not clear to me how they are going to help.

Gross: They have established five different action-oriented committees. One will be a finance committee that will help go out in the community to secure funds. Another is a physical plant committee which will make recommendations of beautification projects that should be implemented. There are also committees on academic affairs and community relations. Finally, there is an administrative committee which, among other things, has been working on a name for the campus.

CCR: Let's talk about the last first. What was the final resolution concerning the name change? I understand your preference was to change it.

Gross: I had thought that "Harrisburg Campus" might be interesting, but when I learned that there were so many mixed feelings about it, I felt it wasn't worth changing the name. Votes were taken by the faculty, students, and staff as well as by the Board of Advisors. The votes were so mixed that the decision was to keep the name The Pennsylvania State University, The Capitol Campus -- in short, Penn State-Capitol. The final discussion occurred at an open meeting of the Provost's Advisory Committee. There were no objections.

CCR: It's hard to keep up with all these committees. What is the Provost's Advisory Committee?

Gross: I have asked representative administrators, faculty, and students to advise me on particular problems on campus that may not be thoroughly discussed anywhere else. I wanted a forum in which students would feel free to register their opinions directly to me. The meetings have not been as well attended as I would have liked, but I think people attend such meetings only when there is an issue.

CCR: There seems to be a problem in getting students actively interested in campus activities.

Gross: It's hard to get people involved, I think, because this is, to a great extent, a commuter campus. If you don't have a fully residential campus, it's hard to create excitement about certain kinds of programs.

Another factor inhibiting social life is an imbalance between men and women on campus. Because of the engineering and business programs, the campus is heavily dominated by male students. If there were a greater balance between men and women, I think we would have larger attendance at social affairs.

CCR: It must be a sign of terminal middle age that I never noticed that imbalance. Getting back to Board of Advisor committees, what should we know about the physical plant committee?

Gross: Part of our general effort to raise funds from the private sector is to implement the beautification program. We're going into the community to secure funds for particular projects here on campus. We have tried to identify those elements most important to students, faculty, and administrators. The number one item seems to be Vendorville, and the number two item the sign in front of the campus.

Beyond that, we want to plant as many trees as we can afford -- we might get volunteers for this project. The beautification program has been started in the area of the dorms, paid for out of our on-going university budget.

We have had recommendations from consulting architects on remodeling Vendorville. It must go through certain campus committees before the remodeling is approved. When we determine the dollar figure, we hope that the proposal we have submitted to University Park will be approved. If so, we can remodel in a short period of time. If the university can't support it, we will try to raise the funds outside.

CCR: Are the niche for our Nittany lion in the entry hall and the colorful signs in the halls part of this program?

Gross: The directional signals in the halls were the idea of the faculty beautification committee headed by Mel Bleau. Credit for the new look in the lobby should be given to Joe Kemp who oversees the physical plant at the campus.

CCR: How about the academic development committee of the Board? What is its function?

Gross: This group has been looking at academic programs in relation to community needs. The citizens of this committee can offer fresh insights as academic programs are formulated.

If we are planning, for example, an allied health program or a mass media program, we would like that committee to look at draft documents and offer us advice. The key word in all relationships with the Board of Advisors is advisory. It **advises**; it does not dictate policy.

CCR: And the committee on community relations?

Gross: The community relations committee is interesting. That is chaired by Sondra Osler and one of the plans is to have an open house in the fall. We will invite as many leaders from the community as we can. At that point, if we have been successful in raising funds, we will make an announcement of the development plans that are under way.

CCR: What development plans?

Gross: We have plans for a three-year, fund-raising development program that includes a science and technology building, beautification projects, a scholarship program, and faculty fellowships or endowments.

CCR: Will you explain "faculty endowments"?

Gross: The endowment of a faculty fellowship is conventionally the donation of a hard sum of money in support of a faculty salary. The university draws on the interest of the endowment. For example, if a company gives \$35,000, we would draw interest on that donation and add the amount to the salary of a faculty member -- either in the form of secretarial help, travel, supplies, or other related expenses. The purpose is to draw to the campus the most attractive faculty possible.

CCR: I think that students will be curious about what these companies will expect in return. To put it bluntly, what's in it for them besides the tax advantage it permits?

Gross: There is a tax break. But, in addition, the company renders a community service. It also repays the campus for having trained so many of its employees. The university can conduct seminars and workshops of interest for the company employees and continue to conduct research that

might be valuable to the company. In general, the company gains high visibility by helping create a better university in the area where it does its business.

CCR: Do these funds also support the proposed scholarship program?

Gross: Possibly. But the scholarship program is really something separate, geared to a more modest scale. We hope to ask individuals to endow scholarships for particular students. An individual might give us \$5,000 over a period of time. We would draw upon the interest and apply it to a scholarship for a qualified student to make it easier for him to come to college. We are now about ready to move forward on these plans.

CCR: I think you have clarified the "efforts" and "plans" of the Board of Advisors. Thank you. Perhaps we can move on to other topics. I have talked with a number of faculty about the new division structure -- trying to find out why five divisions are better than nine. The only answer I can get is, "It is easier to administer a campus with five divisions..."

Gross: Don't say "only." Making administration easier is very important. It can improve the academic result. It also sharpens the focus of the entire campus a good deal.

When you look at the catalog now, you see nine different programs--some small, some large, some undergraduate, some graduate. Our program in business takes in 43 percent of our students and our engineering program handles 35 percent of the students. At the same time we have programs in urban and regional planning and mathematical sciences which take in far fewer students. There is an imbalance and a kind of confusion in the minds of people about the campus programs. These small programs can continue to exist--but within a larger structure.

With five divisions, there will be clarification of the administrative structure. The change will allow more work of an interdisciplinary nature to go on within those separate divisions. It would also improve our recruitment efforts.

Recommendations of the new division heads have been made to me. Faculty from each division have voted for the nominees. Now I will select from the recommendations. We hope to have these division leaders appointed by May 15.

CCR: May I toss out some one-liners for your reactions? Budget recycling.

Gross: Every unit in the university is in a budget-recycling mode. Our budget is being cut each year for five years and that is true of every unit in the

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