



by Kevin Gillese

Photo by Norm Selleck

The president of a university must play many roles in his official capacity and pursue many objectives during his term of office. His tenure as president will reflect not only the man, as an individual, but the experience and philosophy of the man's life. The issues which he chooses to emphasize may alter the direction and ultimate destiny of the institution which he is heading.

Eighth president of the University of Alberta, Dr. H.E. Gunning, was placed in his position one year ago. The issues which he has chosen to emphasize during his first year of office reflect his personal development as a man and his own particular philosophy. Because of the weighted importance this emphasis carries in relation to the development of this university, Gateway here attempts to examine the man, as a particular individual, and some of the opinions he holds at the present moment.

Harry Gunning was born in Toronto in 1916 and developed the two passions of his life at an early age, discovering chemistry at the age of eight and poetry at the age of ten. In pursuit of these two endeavours, he graduated from the University of Toronto in 1939 with a Bachelor of Arts degree and twinned majors in Honours Chemistry and Honours English.

Although offered separate fellowships in both fields following receipt of his undergraduate degree, Gunning chose to pursue his Master's and Doctorate degrees in the field of physical chemistry, obtaining the

degrees from the same university in 1940 and 1942 respectively.

During his time at the U of T, Dr. Gunning was involved in a number of activities, all of which exposed him to an enormous number of unusual situations. His participation in amateur theatre, for example, exposed him to impromptu acting situations with such people as Wayne and Schuster and, as he says, "Yes, they were pretty funny back in those days, too." It was also at this time that his liking for folk literature and negro jazz music began to develop.

But, of course, his academic development continued. He worked as a post-doctoral fellow at Harvard in 1942-43, and for the rest of the war years worked with the National Research Council in Ottawa until 1946.

From Ottawa Dr. Gunning ventured south to the University of Rochester, where he taught and engaged in research for two years. To complement his academic life during his time there, he ran a local radio broadcast and called it "Jazz Is Our Music."

He taught at the Illinois Institute of Technology from 1948 until 1957, when he joined the University of Alberta as chairman of the chemistry department. Dr. Gunning explains that "at the time which I arrived, there were only six staff members involved with teaching in the department and no research was being conducted."

From these modest beginnings, Dr. Gunning took the department to a position of pre-eminence amongst similar departments in North America today. The change is evident both in light of the advanced research work currently being undertaken by the department,

Dr. Harry Gunning one year la

and the change in physical size, with 48 present staff members and a massive increase in the number of students registered in chemistry courses.

Although Dr. Gunning was selected President last year, he still works actively in chemical research and publishes an average of ten papers per year, having already authored or co-authored over one hundred fifty such papers. He has also worked for the last 25 years as a consultant in the chemical industry.

In recognition of his contributions, he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 1964 and appointed Killam Memorial Professor by the U of A in 1968. Other awards conferred upon him include honorary degrees from the University of Guelph and Queen's University, a Province of Alberta Achievement Award, and the Chemical Institute of Canada medal.

His life reflects a philosophy of dedication - not simply to one area of concern but to a wide range of such areas. It appears that his belief in 'broad scope' has been one of the philosophies emphasized in the university structure in the past year, and thus we posed this question to Dr. Gunning:

GATEWAY: Dr. Gunning, in your acceptance speech made in the fall of 1974, you stated that "Perhaps the University of Alberta can not be all things to all people but it can certainly be more things to more people." Have your feelings concerning this changed in any way, and do you see improvements in the structure which you were faced with last year?

GUNNING: In the first place, it is important that we maintain good relations with the provincial government if we are to fulfill this objective. While there have been misunderstandings in the past, it is my belief that we have made a marked improvement in this area.

Secondly, I feel that we are presently engaging in a lot more programs which will be of a lot more benefit to the Alberta population as a whole. Two of the more prominent of these programs which we have implemented are the Institute of Public Administration and the various programs run for Senior Citizens.

The university, you see, is interested in caring about everyone...that is, we want to be useful to everyone and not just to our own graduates.

This sort of meaningfulness was discussed in my last Convocation Address (November 15) when I began to discuss the various programs currently under research at this university. A good example which comes to mind is our research into the re-vegetation of bitumens. This is very necessary if we are to preserve the ecology of the area of the Athabasca Tar Sands.

Once the Syncrude plant begins large-scale operations, 100,000 tons of sand will be released *each day!* This will be formed into dikes and used to enclose the tailings water, in order to provide an area for the wastes to be precipitated out, after which the water can be released. Now, these dikes could develop into a desert if something is not done to revegetate them. We are working on that problem in conjunction with the department of Environment, and it is obviously one with enormous ramifications for the Albertan citizen.

This is, of course, only one way in which we are attempting to make the university more things to more people. But it serves as a good illustration. I think I can say with confidence that the University, during my tenure, has instituted a large number of such programs.

GATEWAY: In light of your first statements about government, has there been, or do you anticipate, a good deal of trouble over the provincial government's proposed Adult Education Act?

GUNNING: Although some people are becoming very excited by this whole affair, I don't feel that this is a move on the part of government to decrease our academic standards. I do not agree with the proposal, however, because I do believe that it will remove from the autonomy of this institution and I firmly believe that universities should be free to pursue their own destinies.

I think that the government is attempting to develop a 'system' for post-secondary education, but I don't think it will work. This type of thing might be considered a "socially desirable objective," but historically this type of system has not been able to be applied to universities and succeed.

You see, under the terms of the system, something may be implemented which is politically appealing in the short run, yet socially damaging in the long run. For instance, the short term objectives might dictate that only applied research be done in a certain field, such as has already happened in much of cancer research. But until basic research has provided the questions to be asked in applied research, one works on a 'hit-and-miss' system.

So when the politicians ask for 'expedient applied research,' to the scientist they may be talking nonsense-nonsense which can be very wasteful and costly.

GATEWAY: Do you feel that the academic standards of the staff on this campus are good? Do you perceive any problems which may be encountered in trying to raise them?

GUNNING: I believe that academically we have a very, very good university here. And it's getting better. Of course we have about 1600 staff members and these range from truly outstanding to tolerable. But the fact that we have been able to retain outstanding people, however, augurs well for this university.

And yet, we are experiencing a problem in maintaining these standards. Human rights legislation and the general attitude of 'protecting the underdog' has seriously inhibited us in dealing with people who should *not* be at this university. What we need now, I think, is an Institutional Bill of Rights, so that we can maintain equality.

I am all for equal opportunity, but I think that you can misuse anything. Something which is idealistically introduced, if not controlled, can do as much harm as good. It can be used, in this case, to protect the mediocre. I do not believe that mediocrity is desirable at this, or any, university.

GATEWAY: Do you agree with the government's recommendation that the university should restrict enrollment to 24,000 students?