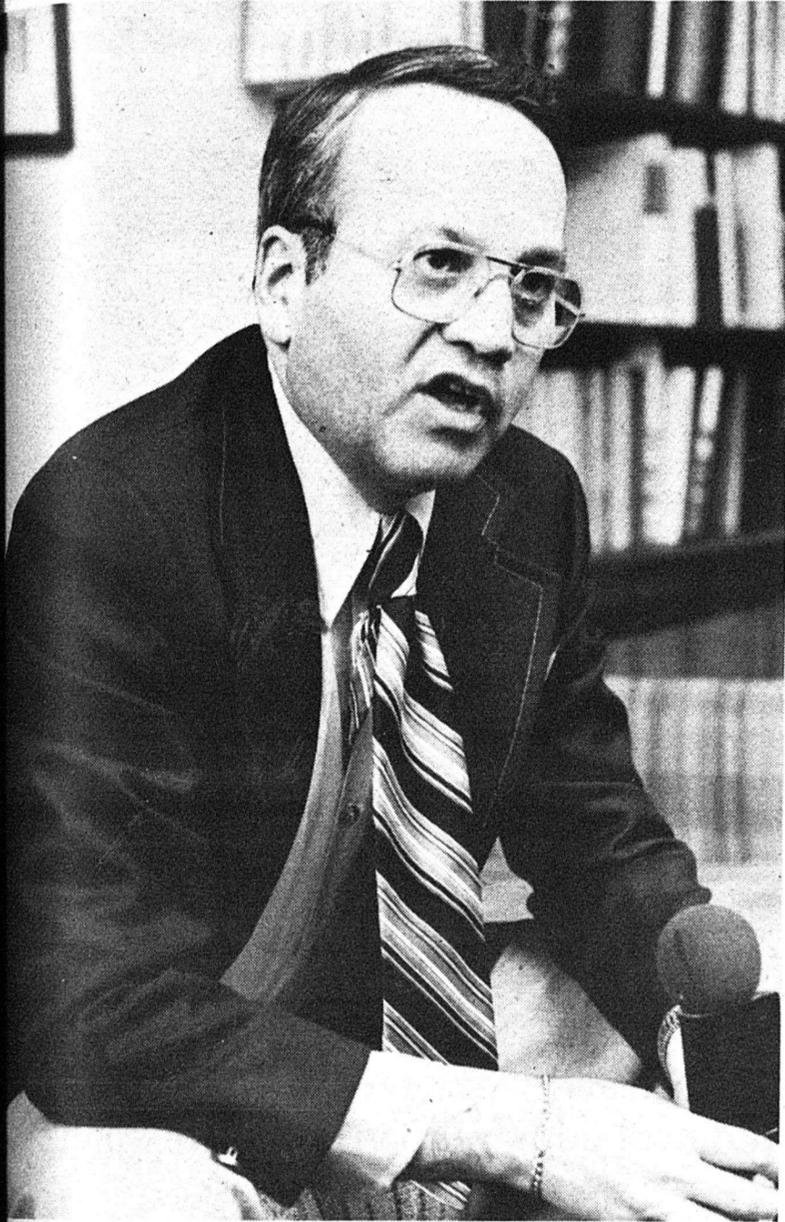


"Priority decision can't be avoided"

Horowitz concerned about funding



Interview with Myer Horowitz
Tom Barrett

Gateway: In your view, what is the role of the university president?

Horowitz: To be as helpful as he possibly can to create the kind of environment within the university that enables people to work well together; to be as productive as he possibly can with regard to teaching and learning and research and services. And then to develop as good relationships as possible with outside agencies of all kinds, government, professional bodies, labor, etc.

Gateway: Former U of A president Max Wyman once said that the president must be skillful at dealing with politicians. Do you consider this an important component of your job?

Horowitz: Yes, but not the most important. There are other people at the university who will be dealing with politicians even more directly than I. As chairman of the board, other members of the board, selected layman. Certainly one of the responsibilities of the president is to relate to members of the legislature generally, and certainly to a number of cabinet ministers. But he has to be effective in dealing with other people as well.

Gateway: You have expressed disappointment in the past about government funding of this university. How serious a problem do you believe this to be and

how do you intend to respond to it as president?

Horowitz: It's a very serious problem. We have had to keep unfilled 40 academic positions for the present budget year and we have reduced the number of permanent non-academic positions by 100. That's very very serious. We have to make a real effort to come at the matter in a fresh way. Perhaps we have invested too much energy in trying to describe the very general problem without being too specific with regard to a number of particular difficulties.

I think we have to try awfully hard to convince the government and people generally that the U of A has a special mandate, a special set of responsibilities, and that in no way minimizes the importance of the other universities in this province and the other post-secondary institutions.

We are the oldest university. We're the largest. We're involved in research in just about every area conceivable. We feel a responsibility for providing a service to the community at large and to professional groups.

I think an institution that has that kind of mandate requires a special kind of funding, and a formula that makes sense for post-secondary institutions generally, clearly doesn't make sense for this university.

Gateway: It appears that the present government funding policy will con-

tinue for some time. How close is the U of A to the adoption of an internal priorities system for determining where budget cuts will be made?

Horowitz: We're very close to developing a mechanism. We're not all that close to the decisions which need to be arrived at through this mechanism and I think we all have to be very very patient because if it's worth doing then it has to be done with care.

We will accomplish very little if all that we end up doing is to make people more nervous, more unsteady and less secure. I'm very pleased with what General Faculties Council (GFC) did last Monday and I'm hopeful that before too long and on the basis of the kind of reviews (of priorities) that GFC endorsed last week we'll conduct more extensive, more systematic reviews, which will have an external component as well.

Then we'll have more data than we have now to make difficult decisions. You see, I think a policy that is often forgotten within the university and outside is that we don't have the luxury of avoiding difficult priority decisions. We made difficult priority decisions last year. The issue is whether we're going to make those difficult decisions based on my set of prejudices or yours, or whether they're going to be based on better data than we've had available. The point to the exercise now is to accumulate the best data that we possibly can so that these decisions can appear to be fair and reasonable.

Gateway: Do you believe that the university has suffered in the eyes of the public in recent years?

Horowitz: That's one kind of message that we're getting. I don't think that it should have. I suspect it has. I really don't think there is as much appreciation as there should be of the extent to which the university is responsible for some of the most important developments we have experienced and enjoyed in recent years.

I think we have to be charitable. I'm not sure the layman should be faulted for not being able to make a connection between the very basic research that's being done on immunology, for example, at this university and the extent to which that basic research today will pay off thirty years from now, just as the basic research of thirty years ago is paying off today.

We have to be more effective than we have been in telling our story.

Gateway: In a recent editorial, William Thorsell of the Edmonton Journal suggested that Arts degrees at this university have been seriously devalued by the abandonment of most mandatory requirements. Do you agree?

Horowitz: You probably know that liberal education programs in many places in North America are being reviewed. Harvard is just one of many, many institutions.

I think programs at any level, whether, it's primary schools or universities, and in any educational setting, should be under review constantly. But I sure hope that we don't over-romanticize a program of another period and attempt to solve all of our present problems by reintroducing a program for the twenties or thirties.

Gateway: What do you think of the university system in certain European countries? In Germany for example, university entrance is restricted to an academic elite, but standards are higher and there are no tuition fees. Would you like to see our universities moving in that direction?

Horowitz: No.



Horowitz:
University not just for academic elite.

Gateway: Do you think that such a system has any merits?

Horowitz: I think that, to use Clark Kerr's term, former president of the University of California, the multiversity can accommodate any different types of students and certainly the individual who is admitted into a typical German university must find a very happy place at a university such as the University of Alberta. I would be very disappointed if we moved too much in the direction of making the institution so selective that we end up meeting the needs of relatively small numbers of people.

When I say that, I'm not suggesting that our doors should be so wide open that any individual who is breathing and has survived grade 12 should be accommodated in this institution.

I don't believe that. I think constantly have to look at the entrance requirements, and I'm pleased that the appropriate General Faculties Council committee is doing that just this year.

Gateway: Do you have some suggestions about how student aid or loan programs could be improved?

Horowitz: I think with regard to the student aid programs the pattern in most of the provinces is a more desirable one than what we have here. As I understand it, at the present time, when a student applies for a loan under certain conditions some of that loan is remitted. But that happens after a student is into the program. In most provinces, part of what the student receives is declared as a grant from the outset. I think that would be an improvement.

We can't have it both ways. We can't expect our students who are almost all over 18, to behave as adults, to think as adults, and then for the state to turn around with regard to student aid and treat the individual as a minor.

The financial status of a student's family should not be considered. That's another change which I think is necessary.

Former U of A Presidents

1908-28	Dr. H.M. Tory	1951-59	Dr. Andrew Stewart
1928-36	Dr. R.C. Wallace	1959-69	Dr. Walter H. Johns
1936-41	Dr. W.A.R. Kerr	1969-74	Dr. Max Wyman
1942-51	Dr. Robert Newton	1974-79	Dr. Harry E. Gunning