

Horowitz optimistic for 80s

University of Alberta President Myer Horowitz was interviewed last Tuesday in his University Hall office. Midway through his first year as President, Horowitz talks about the issues and problems facing the university, and what it looks like from the top.

by Keith Krause

GATEWAY: What do you see as the central issue facing universities in the 1980s?

HOROWITZ: Quality. The quality of what we do: the quality of our teaching, our research and of our students.

GATEWAY: What would you say would be the biggest problem in achieving these standards of excellence?

HOROWITZ: I think a major problem is financing, but I don't want to suggest this is the only problem a university or other educational institution faces. However, year after year when the increased allocations do not even cover the increases in the cost of living, problems naturally develop. It stands to reason that if we are to improve the quality of what we do so that we really merit referring to ourselves as an institution of excellence that we then must have the resources to achieve this.

GATEWAY: Are you suggesting tight finances will make it difficult to maintain standards in the future?

HOROWITZ: Well, universities have a financial problem right now. I hope these difficulties will receive the attention of governments and the public in general.

GATEWAY: How serious do you think the problem is now? I know some people are saying the problem has reached crisis proportions and what is your reaction to this?

HOROWITZ: Funding is a serious problem now. We have been compelled to reduce the number of permanent academic and non-academic positions and that is very serious. We're facing these difficulties right now and I have little idea what the government allocation will be next year. I hope we will be able to resurrect some of the deleted positions and I pray we won't have to eliminate even more.

GATEWAY: Are declining enrolments a problem here? In other words, since projections are for a declining and levelling off of enrolments in the next five years, will this cause a problem with funding in the future?

HOROWITZ: I hope not. I really don't think so. The enrolment decline will be very slight and for several years now the government allocation has not been related to the number of students. Our budget for 1978-79 received a percentage increase based on the previous year's budget, and the slight decline in students was not reflected. I hope that will not be a problem.

GATEWAY: Do you think then, that the structure of student contributions should change? For example, if tuition fees are a percentage of the budget and if funding is not tied to the number of students, will students not end up paying more?

HOROWITZ: I don't think so... I expect fees to represent roughly the same portion of the cost of education or of the university budget as they have in recent years. I don't think any minor change in enrolment patterns will affect this.

GATEWAY: Do you agree with the policy of making tuition fees a percentage of the total budget?

HOROWITZ: I think that would be far better than the very large adjustments that have taken place every several years. These are particularly hard on students.

Given an arrangement where there are student fees, I think it makes more sense to have modest adjustments on a regular basis, rather than dramatic ones every several years.

GATEWAY: Even if that means a small fee increase every year?

HOROWITZ: Yes

GATEWAY: Since the financial outlook for the university is not healthy, do you think the university will have to change its outlook and play a larger role in the community than it has in the past?

HOROWITZ: It is absolutely essential that all educational institutions be sensitive to the needs of the larger society of which they are a part. I think we are, and must continue to be. But we must not become an institution that is responsive to the needs, especially the vocational needs, of a society to such a degree that we no longer see ourselves as something more. Clearly, we are an institution involved in the preparation of professionals, but we are also an institution committed to general liberal education for large numbers of people. We must also take seriously the need to conduct the kind of basic research that may have much more to do with the solving of problems 50 or 100 years from now than the solving of the problems facing us today.



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GATEWAY: In other words, there doesn't have to be, as some parts of society say, "a job for every grad"?

HOROWITZ: Of course, there are going to be many people at the university who are going to be interested in work eventually, but who are here for the general education they can acquire.

On the other hand, I don't think we should pretend a university is involved only in general liberal education. This university has been involved from the beginning in the preparation of large numbers of professionals and we're going to continue to be involved in that way.

The challenge is to keep these different responsibilities in the balance.

GATEWAY: Does this imply the university suffers an image problem in the way society perceives its role and function?

HOROWITZ: This may be an obvious comment, but it needs to be emphasized. The world outside the university is not a homogeneous one and there is not one society out there viewing the university in a particular way. There are many different elements in a society and who one listens to depends, to some extent, on whether one is inside or outside the university and on what position one holds.

I am not as pessimistic as some with regard to the attitudes of people in society and I believe we enjoy a good

deal of support in some quarters. Clearly, we do not enjoy as much support as I think we deserve from some individuals and groups and consequently we must do everything we can to communicate effectively.

GATEWAY: Do you have any examples of what the university should be doing in the community relations area?

HOROWITZ: We are already involved in various ways of trying to tell our story, but we shouldn't hesitate to consider new approaches. I find there are important individuals outside the university who aren't aware of how we serve society. We not only prepare people for professions and educate large numbers of individuals; but our staff serves an important consulting role.

We must make better use of the media, and be willing to go out into the community and speak to all groups and individuals, not just those who support us. We must also be willing to bring individuals on to the campus who will benefit from observing what we do.

There is a danger here. The danger is that we may focus on the dramatic, that which can be illustrated easily. Some of the most important things we do can't be described easily and I think that is why it necessitates bringing people on campus to talk with us. From past experience I have seen that bringing together the staff and students most directly involved in research and people from the outside achieves some very

the case now, and I think many teachers and administrators at the secondary level agree. The Faculties of Education and Extension have worked with some groups in the past to provide continued training for teachers and the results have been highly successful. This is an example of the co-operation required to achieve results. If the schools have to accept some responsibility for the performance of graduates, then we have to accept some responsibility for the people we admit.

GATEWAY: What do you see your role as, both within the university and between the university and the community?

HOROWITZ: I'm not sure I've had the time to sit back and think about what I've been doing, and I know it deserves important reflection. Without trying to sound corny, I believe my major responsibility is to be helpful to other people so they can be effective in what they do. This includes, of course, students and staff, and my responsibility is to be aware of, and responsive to, the needs and interests of the various communities making up the university.

I must also invest as much time and energy as possible in explaining the aims and aspirations of the university to the government and other groups outside the university. I'm expected to provide leadership to the academic community generally and this I do not only by being involved in formal ways, but by spending time talking with individuals and groups within the university.

GATEWAY: Has the job been fulfilling and do you enjoy it?

HOROWITZ: I enjoy it enormously. Having been involved in administration for a number of years, there haven't been many surprises and I'm indebted to my predecessor, Dr. Gunning, in that regard. I certainly have no disappointments, but I find it necessary to spend some time as a teacher and researcher in a more conventional way. There are some who are content to be involved only in administration, but I miss the balance provided from working with students.

GATEWAY: As a concluding statement, what do you see as the outlook for this university in the next decade?

HOROWITZ: I think it is entirely legitimate for us to aspire to national and international recognition as a very high quality institution. I don't want to make unnecessary comparisons with other institutions but I do think we have important strengths on which to build.

I'm very hopeful we will receive the kind of support, not only from government, but from the community in general, which will enable us to be something more than just another college or university. We have the capability to do things at such a standard to justify our considering ourselves, and being considered by others, as one of the top two or three institutions in this country. That is my modest desire for my term. If we can be further along in four or five years than we are today, I will feel I've accomplished something.

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