

Thomson: Dr. Kaplan, what is it that you are here to do?

Dr. Kaplan: I'm finding out what I'm supposed to be doing. I'm visiting every faculty to get a feel for the research and scholarship that is going on. I'm spending time with my opposite numbers in other Albertan and Canadian universities, especially the U of C, to coordinate our initiatives.

One of the most important things is the unbalanced nature of research support. The statesmanlike creation of the medical research fund was the act of an enlightened government if ever there was one.

But medical research can't exist in the absence of fundamental science and engineering research. One initiative I've discussed with the University of Calgary is to attempt to make the government realise the need for a corresponding foundation for the physical and earth sciences, and one for the humanities and social sciences.

Thomson: It sounds as though you envision a fairly political job for yourself.

Dr. Kaplan: The job necessitates politics. We are a provincial institution. All Canadian universities are engaged in this exercise. It's very important that we be engaged in it, that there not be a gap between us and the government.

Thomson: How are you going to approach the problem?

Dr. Kaplan: Well, there's no sense tipping my hand! I shall be meeting with a number of government members and explaining the situation, attempting to sensitise them to the concerns of the university.

I could do a dance entering the room to get their attention!

I want to establish a constant dialogue. Research should be recognised as an activity vital to the future of the people of Alberta. The government has explicitly recognised this by setting up research funds in the areas of energy, agriculture, oil sands, medicine and biomed. I think they recognise that the future depends on research done now to attract high-technology and labor intensive industry that is required to maintain our standard of living when the oil runs out.

Thomson: That's great, but how are you going to convince them of the importance of humanities research?

Dr. Kaplan: It's evident even to a greenhorn like myself that prosperity from natural resources has led to a panoply of social problems. For example, when my wife and I went to Theatre 3 we were told we shouldn't walk back → and this in downtown Edmonton. Obviously there are enormous social problems requiring study and solution. This is a major role of social sciences.

As far as music and fine arts, the government is already convinced of the need for supporting quality in these areas.

What would you say about that kind of appeal?

"... prosperity from natural resources has led to a panoply of social problems... requiring study and solution."

Dr. Gordin Kaplan, the new university vice-president for research, talks to Alison Thomson about his role in pushing for more...



RESEARCH

Thomson: Probably that what you are saying is legitimate but you have to consider other claims on the government's finances. I'm sure that's the line they'd take.

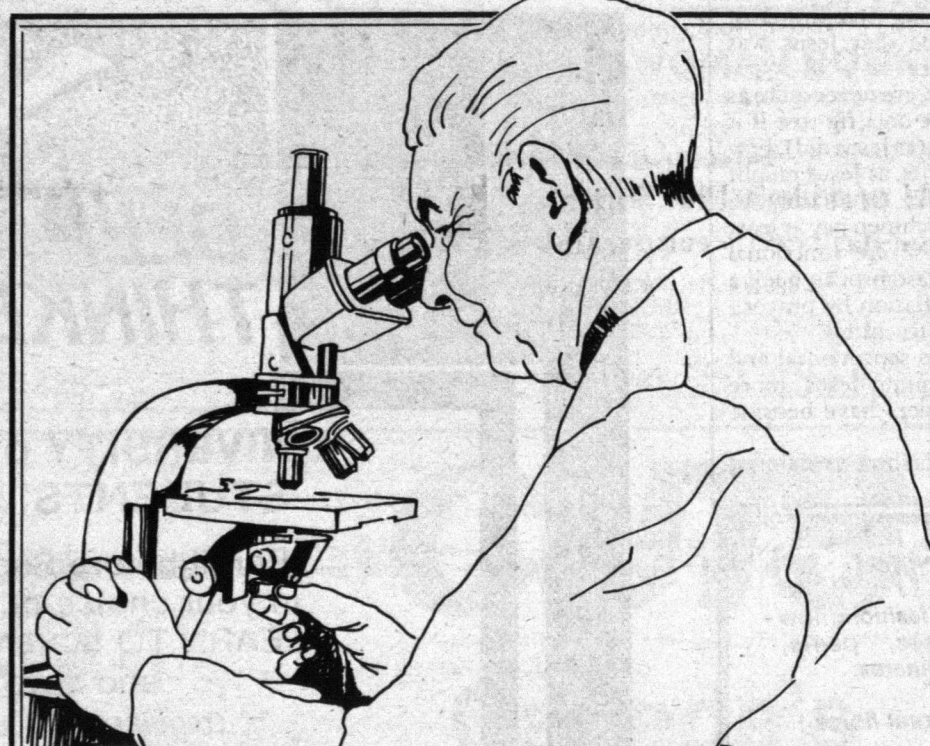
Dr. Kaplan: Yes, sure, they have to balance what we say against other claims. But the quality of the universities is a pretty good indication of the quality of the society. Think of the United States without the big universities. Think of California. Since the Second World War, the economy has been centred around microelectronics and microprocessors. It goes on in the Silicon Valley around the University of California at Berkeley and around Stanford. Think of Massachusetts, the other centre of high technology. All of it is within 50 miles of Harvard and MIT. The fundamental ideas in science, engineering and medicine are generated in the universities and they flow out to industry. What one has to encourage is a constant interchange between the universities and industry.

The university is the most precious natural resource of the province. That's the argument. It's impressive to have a look at industrial development in the United States. It's almost all associated with schools of science and engineering. The most important resources are those which will permit growth and development in the future. Of these, the universities are surely some of the most important.

For example, one of the big items of government expenditure, hospitals and public health, is vital. But it's dealing with present problems. The future of medicine is being determined now in the universities by the type of research going on in medicine and science. It's vital to look after health today but even more vital to look after the future.

Thomson: What else will you be doing?

Dr. Kaplan: I'd like to see the involvement of undergrads in research increase. It's part of the educational process. No student should get out of the university



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without a taste of independent scholarship. It's expensive, of course, as anything that's worthwhile is. It's one of the laws of thermodynamics — the second law. Energy is needed to reverse entropy here — energy in the form of dollars. What's needed before anything else is a commitment to scholarship and research. It's that commitment which determines quality.

Over the next few weeks, I'll be casing the joint to see just what is going on here.

Thomson: What is your own field?

Dr. Kaplan: Biochemistry. The interface between immunology and biochemistry actually. I'm working on what happens biochemically after lymphocyte receptors are activated. What happens biochemically to make the cell synthesize DNA and divide. We call ourselves lymphomaniacs.

Thomson: Will you have time to continue your research here?

Dr. Kaplan: I'll make time. I'll be in my lab every day. I have a technician and a post-doc and I'll have students. I propose to stay active in my field. Do you know why? Since one of my major roles is as a missionary for research I must be seen to be a practising member of the church. The other reason is I can't think of a more thrilling way of spending time.

Thomson: What is your background?

Dr. Kaplan: I've been a Canadian for a long time. I've been here 31 years. I'm working my way across the country — the next step is the North West Territories. As an undergrad I went to the City College of New York. It's an extraordinary institution — an urban college without the facilities that make this campus so agreeable. It's a free public college — there's intense competition to get in and to survive. Then I was in the US army during the war and then I went to Columbia for my PhD. Then I went to Dalhousie in 1950; I was there 16 years as a professor of physiology and biophysics. My field right from the start has been cell regulation. I went to the university of Ottawa in 1966 as a professor of molecular biology and was there 15 years before escaping to the West.

Thomson: Will you be teaching here?

Dr. Kaplan: I'll be teaching grad students but I won't have much time because of the travelling this job entails.

Thomson: How about public relations? It seems to me one of the political factors lacking for proper funding is a sense in the government that people in general value the universities and what they are doing?

Dr. Kaplan: I did a hell of a lot of that in Ottawa and Halifax. I don't know how much I'll be doing here. I did radio and TV — I had my own TV show in Halifax for two summers. In Ottawa I did a weekly radio science column every Monday morning — a sort of poor man's David Suzuki. In 1977 I was on Barbara Frum's As It Happens with Isaac Asimov. The public is fascinated by that sort of thing — absolutely fascinated.

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