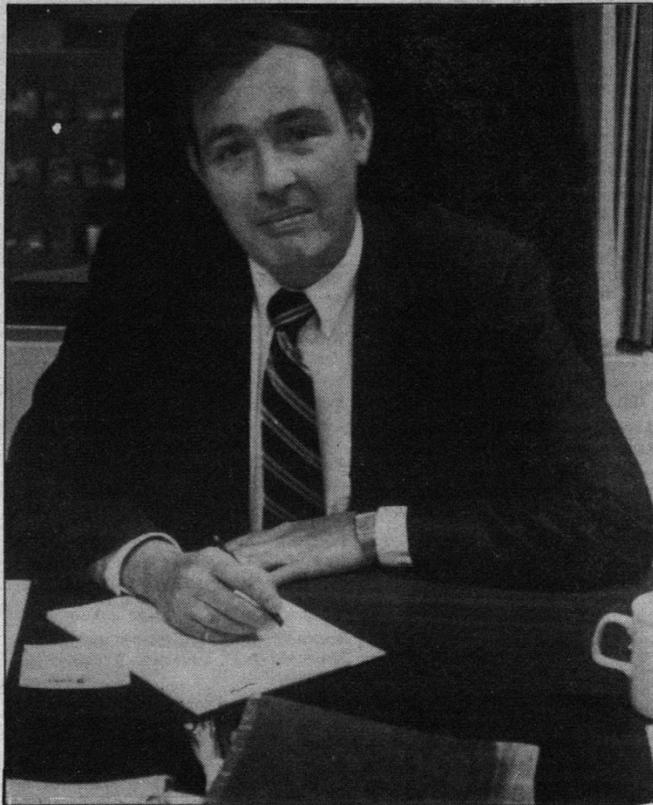


Incoming VP Academic speaks on education in 80's

Gateway reporter Denise Workun recently approached the incoming VP Academic for the University, Peter Meekison. Presently Deputy Minister of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs, Meekison will succeed Dr. George Baldwin to the second most influential position in the University administration on June 1.



Incoming VP Academic Peter Meekison in his downtown office.

What changes do you plan to implement at the University?

I don't have any specific changes in mind at this point. I think it's wise to start the position and find out what changes are needed and take it from there. The University has embarked on a planning program so we can't start making changes until we get the results of these studies.

What is your opinion regarding present cutbacks in provincial funding at a time when university enrollement is increasing?

I don't know what the level of fiscal funding at the University will be for the coming year. Other universities in Canada are facing the same problem at a time when governments are having to look at their overall economic situation. One has to try to advance the case of the University to government and other funding agencies to try and maximize expenditure. Whether that will be successful I don't know.

Do you see any solutions to the current declining standards of education?

The question is whether they are in fact declining. I'm not so sure they are. I sympathize with students, for example, having to learn in large classes, but I'm not sure these conditions lead to a deteriorating education. The function of large classes has to be looked at in terms of scarce resources.

Do you feel quotas should or will be placed on all faculties to remedy the high enrollment problems?

I think that what has to be done is that the optimal size of the University has to be determined at some point, given our space and how we want to utilize that space. If the faculties of Arts, Science and Education have no limits, we face the problem of declining standards.

Do you see cutbacks in the administrative bureaucracy as a solution to inadequate funding?

I'm not in a position to comment on the growth in the administration. It depends on what the administration is expected to do. Besides, taking resources from the administration doesn't necessarily solve other problems.

Do you think more efficient use of available funds rather than demands for greater funding is a viable solution to the University's financial problems?

In times of fiscal restraint, the easiest solution is to get more money, but this may camouflage ineffective use of resources within the University. If the University doesn't get any more money we'll have to look at how our resources are being allocated. There is no magic solution.

Do you feel access to secondary education is being restricted by continually increasing fees?

There are funds available in terms of financial assistance through loan funds. With enrollment up, one would think that students are able to find a way to go to University with an increase in tuition, even in a time of recession.

I feel that an important part of any university program is that adequate funds are made available to students in need.

Have you any ideas on how the tenure system can be reformed?

I think tenure is important with respect to academic freedom. Quite often tenure comes under attack during times of fiscal restraint. Although the question of bad teaching is something that must be addressed, I don't see how the tenure system relates to stagnation.

Have you any ideas on how the University of Alberta can attract high quality professors with its limited budget?

I think the University has been able to attract very high quality professors in the past. The University must ensure that its high academic standards in research and teaching be continually enunciated.

Are you prepared to increase funding to the various departments, such as the political science department, which are desperately short of teaching staff?

I can't comment on that because I'm not sure what the situation will be. I'm not sure the V.P. Academic should say where money should be allocated within the faculties. They have to make these decisions.

Do you feel the recently introduced diploma exams are a good idea? Will they increase the standards of education?

In terms of standardization across the province the exams are a good idea.

What are your views on the U of A's decision to accept either the exam or the teacher awarded mark for its entrance requirements?

The University's accepting the either or for the first year is merely the reinstatement of policy that was in place eleven years ago.

Do you think foreign student enrollment should be further restricted to decrease overcrowding?

The purpose of the University is the generation and transmission of knowledge and knowledge is international. Foreign students are a healthy and necessary ingredient of any university. When a total enrollment cap in the University is determined a reasonable mix has to be established. Foreign students go back home as good ambassadors.

What direction do you feel education at the University should take? Should it move toward a more technical orientation or should it place stronger emphasis on the arts and humanities?

The University has got to realize that there is a technological revolution going on in the world. If our graduates in engineering and computers are going to compete, we've got to be able to match or better this new technology. At the same time this technological revolution creates strains within society and clearly the arts, humanities and social sciences have a very critical role to play. The arts are very much a part of our society and we can't just worship on the altar of technology at the expense of the other aspects of our civilization which make us in fact civil. The international component of the University is also very important if we're going to compete internationally.

The University GFC executive recently adopted a motion which will effectively eliminate the establishment of new programs. What do you think of this?

I'm not aware of that particular motion, but I think that clearly you've got to continue to have new programs. The question is where does the money come from for new programs. As knowledge expands, you've got to look at new ways of developing.

Do you plan to continue with Dr. Baldwin's strategic planning process? Do you think it will be effective?

Yes, I think it is a necessary process. I think the planning process is critical provided that people are involved.

After your involvement with the Government of Alberta, do you feel you will be able to represent the needs of students when dealing with provincial officials?

Oh yes, no problem.

Are you considering applying for Dr. Horowitz's job when it comes up for review in 1989?

I didn't know that Dr. Horowitz was retiring in 1989. That's so far down the road I couldn't comment. I'm just excited about my job starting July 1st.

CABARETS

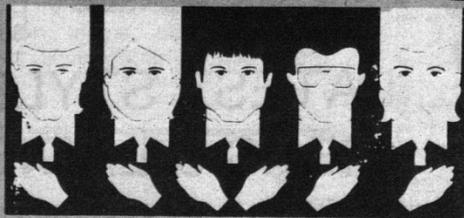
Tickets are available from the SUB Box Office (2nd Floor SUB) and various club members. NOTE: These events are open only to U of A students, staff, and guests.

DINWOODIE
2nd Floor SUB

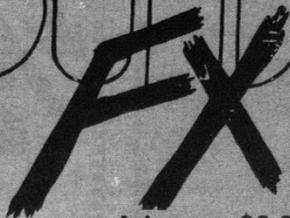
Proof of age required.

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