

# Five years of changes: retiring president Harry Gunning

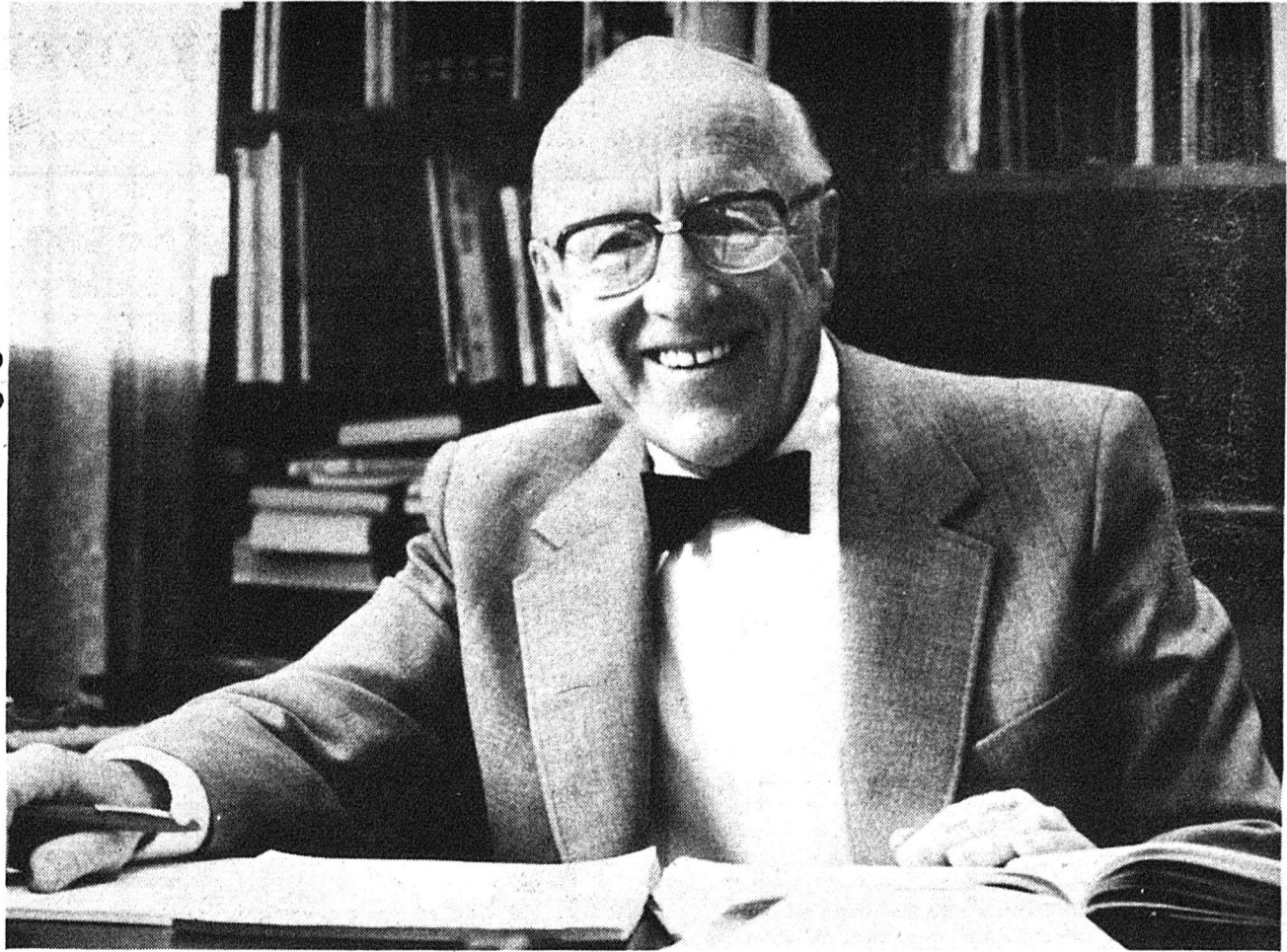


Photo Jim Connell

Dr. Harry Gunning, eighth president of the University of Alberta, will be resigning his post effective July 1 of this year.

It was a difficult time for the university five years ago when Gunning took office. Faced with dwindling enrolments and cutbacks, he saw the need to strengthen the tenuous relations between the university and the general community in order to ensure the university a role in a changing world.

Moreover, Gunning's shrewd sense of political know-how made him the ideal person for the job. When he joined the university as professor and chairman of the department of chemistry in 1957, the department had only six graduate students, no doctorate program and its research grants amounted to only \$15,000 a year.

But within ten years he had garnered over \$600,000 in research grants yearly, established a Ph.D. program and increased the academic staff from 18 to 34. The department is

now considered to be one of the best on the continent.

Born in 1916, Gunning graduated from the University of Toronto with a BA Honours in Chemistry and English in 1939. He then completed an MA and PhD in physical chemistry in 1940 and 1942 respectively. He was a post-doctoral fellow at Harvard University and worked for the National Research Council of Canada, the University of Rochester and the Illinois Institute of Technology before coming to the U of A.

Gunning was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 1964 and appointed a Killam Memorial Professor in 1968. In addition he has received numerous honorary medals and degrees.

After his term as president draws to a close, Gunning plans to return to the department of chemistry and continue in his capacities as scientific advisor and consultant for the government and numerous businesses.

**GATEWAY:** *What was your main goal as President?*

**GUNNING:** My primary objective was to take the university to the people and show them how important it is for the development of this province. I have tried to encourage the university to go out and become an integral part of the community in a wide number of ways. For example we provide services for the government and the people of Alberta in many areas of research.

**GATEWAY:** *How successful do you feel you have been in achieving this objective?*

**GUNNING:** We have been increasingly successful. However, there are many things left to look at. We certainly haven't got across the importance of the role of the university. It's easy for the government to support the material side of things, but it's not so easy for them to support the intellectual side — there's no pay-off for them there.

Nevertheless we must do things in a certain sequence. We have to show the government and the people of Alberta that the university can help achieve the things they need. Once the confidence is established it is easier to push for other things which are not so easy to justify on a palpable basis.

**GATEWAY:** *Do you believe there has been a change in the role of the university in our society?*

**GUNNING:** Yes, I believe there has been a period of disillusionment. In the 1960s people had false expectations of what the university could do. Now as society sees the need for educated and creative people it is possible for the university to be more fully integrated with society.

**GATEWAY:** *During your term as president did you encounter any areas which you wish you could have dealt with more fully?*

**GUNNING:** There are many areas. A job like this ends up giving you a gnawing feeling of your own inadequacy. It's a bottomless thing. Certainly we haven't put enough time into the whole field of communication. I feel the university should be taking a leadership role in this field and should show people how they can truly communicate. What we really need here is an institute for the study of communication which would cover all the way from the psycholinguistic problems of people trying to put across ideas to each other, to actually training people in how properly to express themselves.

**GATEWAY:** *Do you feel that government funding of the university is adequate?*

**GUNNING:** From our standpoint we obviously don't think the government is treating us adequately. Our inflationary pressures are not being compensated

for. We have tried to get this across and I feel we are becoming increasingly successful. The Minister of Advanced Education (Bert Hohol) has been very sympathetic and has tried very hard to assist with our problems. Maybe students don't see this very well because it takes such a long time to put across. The university must develop some extremely convincing arguments to justify government spending.

**GATEWAY:** *Do you foresee any change in government funding policies?*

**GUNNING:** I predict that in the near future there will be a special kind of funding coming to the university. The difficulty will be that I don't think the funds will be allocated on a global basis (one lump sum for the use of the whole university). More and more the government is going to fund certain areas for which it has a particular need. We will have to ensure that other areas which we believe to be important are also funded by an internal redistribution of resources.

**GATEWAY:** *Isn't this a potentially dangerous situation?*

**GUNNING:** Yes, it's quite dangerous. But it's a situation we'll probably have to learn to live with. However, we should fight very strongly internally for what we believe in. We are educated people and it is our responsibility to try and ensure that the quality of education does not decline. I think we can handle this problem.

**GATEWAY:** *You were a participant in the protest against tuition increases and cutbacks last spring. How did you feel when the Board of Governors recommended that you not take part in the actual march to the legislature?*

**GUNNING:** Well, first of all, I thought the students did a very fine job representing what they thought were the needs of the university. I feel it is a right of people to represent their needs in a legitimate and peaceful way and I was right behind the students. However, the Board of Governors thought it was not very dignified for the president to be out walking along the streets. I understood how they felt yet I also felt I had to support the students.

**GATEWAY:** *Do you believe the answer to funding problems lies in maximizing the internal operating efficiency of the university?*

**GUNNING:** We've already done an

awful lot of that. Moreover I believe the university is as efficient an organization as any I have seen. I think we run a better, more cost-effective organization than any I have ever been associated with.

We are stimulating the human mind. We are not an auto factory which can quantify its production. We are doing a very complex job and because we are under constant public scrutiny we budget very carefully.

**GATEWAY:** *What was your reaction to the recently released Grantham Report?*

**GUNNING:** I don't agree with all its recommendations. However, the committee tried to do a very thorough job. It will probably be instrumental in determining the student costs of education, although some of its recommendations will probably not be implemented.

**GATEWAY:** *In an interview at the beginning of your term you reported that you foresaw no "radical changes" during your term as president. Have you seen any radical changes and if so what were they?*

**GUNNING:** I don't think there has been a radical change but there certainly are differences. I think there is a definite change in the student body. I've been very impressed with students over the last few years. They represent a very real strength at our university. The students I know are very deeply concerned with issues at the university and at the same time are working very hard towards a career.

**GATEWAY:** *What do you see as the main responsibility facing the new president?*

**GUNNING:** The new president will have to keep on improving relations between the university and the government and people of Alberta.

Incidentally I'm certain that the new president will do an excellent job in representing the university. I'm just delighted that Meyer Horowitz has been selected for the position.

**GATEWAY:** *How would you sum up your experiences as president?*

**GUNNING:** It's been a great honor for me to be president of this university. Although it's been an extremely demanding job and very hard work, it has been a period of great fulfillment. My association with the student body at this university has certainly been satisfying.

## Interview with Harry Gunning by Portia Priegert