

David Slater is gaining on the deans

Harry Crowe and the deans may not like the moves but York's president is centralizing the administration for greater efficiency and influence on York

By ANDY MICHALSKI

Deans and presidents might get along when the money is flowing but when the tap starts to run dry, then tensions over who gets the last drop begin to mount until somebody has to give somewhere.

Since York president David Slater took office two years ago, he's been winning most of the battles. His bumbling image is still there but his shrewd decision-making is rapidly turning York into a tightly oiled machine with greater implied power coming from his office.

It's not that centralization is really a bad thing — it all depends on who's giving what input and who calls the last shot. In York's first 10 years, the deans gave most of that input although president Murray Ross certainly called every last shot for the board of governors. When a building was to go up, it went up because government money was there and serenely flowing. The baby boom had to stay in school or become unemployed in an overloaded economy. Deans had their way with just about any project that could be rationalized.

But the eternal spring is starting to run dry and the power plays over who gets what spoils is naturally more tense.

Conveniently as the battle shaped up, the dean's terms began to end. Osgoode's Gerald Le Dain stepped down. Arts dean John Saywell announced he was ready to step down if a successor could be found. Administrative studies dean James Gillies announced his resignation this month. And finally there was the abortive resignation of Atkinson's Harry Crowe.

Crowe said in an interview that he would resign two years early because he had completed everything he had set out to do in five years. And like every other dean, he was out to write that proverbial book on all the things "I know about," and of course, back to that first love of teaching.

"It seems I completely misjudged the climate. For whatever reason, the faculty and students do not wish at this moment to pick a new dean. I think it's in part due to the fact that so many deans are leaving. In part, there is also confusion in their minds between arrangements we have introduced here which would survive no matter who was dean and the personality of the dean and of those people closely associated with him."

Atkinson is afraid of getting somebody too cooperative with Slater and what he wants to do. And when there's other deans leaving, that simply compounds the fear — whether it's warranted or not.

In a coup-like gesture, Crowe withdrew his resignation. Officially, Crowe was anxious to leave, but there was student and faculty pressure for him to stay on and he accepted it — sort of like Abdel Nasser after a disastrous war.

"It seems we are now faced with a de facto assertion that a dean resigns to the faculty and students," said Crowe. "But I could have stuck with my resignation but the point was put with such great force by the faculty and the student body that just as a dean is chosen at Atkinson by the faculty and students... so one resigns to them."

Whether Crowe accepted the role of martyr for adult education is quite beyond the point. What he effectively and most shrewdly did do was to show everyone within York's administrative machine just how strong and how loyal his power base is.

Administrators don't like to talk about just why Crowe resigned. Slater's assistant on academic affairs Terry Olson is rather typical: "I don't know why he resigned or why he changed his mind. I'm as perplexed and surprised as anyone else."

He doesn't feel it had anything to do with the battle between the deans and the president because "they have an awful lot of input on the matter (distribution of money)."

But Crowe's resignation came at the same time that Crowe submitted his plan to the senate's structure committee for structuring and limiting the president's powers. Briefly, he called for a university council of five members from the board of governors with six faculty and four students from senate to handle York's entire operating budget.

It would control everything from putting up new buildings to hiring faculty. It would appoint the president and give the senate a veto over any decision he makes while the board would look after strictly money matters. In short, the president would be a figurehead, a spokesman and that's all.

How did Slater respond to this? In an interview last week, Slater said "Well, Harry Crowe has his ideas and I have mine."

It's understandable. For Slater to support anything like this would be a demand for his own political castration and understandably, he's not about to stand still for the idea.

After his candid response, Slater went on: "I haven't studied the Crowe model carefully enough. It's got some merits, it's got some good ideas, I just think we can do better than that. I think we have to do better than that." He later backtracked a little and said, "I'm not skeptical about structuring (the presidency). I think there are a number of things that need tackling."

He then explained what York needs is a new Act (which is coming), and a formalization of the president's responsibilities.

Although responsible for just about everything that happens at York, Slater has spread the input of decision-making to a considerable extent — whether through his own basic philosophy of government or through basic necessity. With limited resources for expansion, Ross' days of full-blooming expansion under the York plan are over. No president can now make unilateral decisions about where money is spent.

Slater said his basic approach to government is "participatory democracy" (that phrase sound familiar?) and involvement of the senate to a greater degree.

Harry Crowe said the handling of faculty budgets hasn't really changed since the days of Murray Ross. But Slater claims differently and points to three basic changes: each annual budget proposal has to come before the budget advisory committee (the deans and the president). "As this compares with a situation I inherited which was very largely a matter of the president dealing individually



President David Slater poses in front of a gladiator friend.

a dying university

with each budget officer (dean) and the budget officer (dean) not knowing what the position and claims were of others."

Secondly the budgets must be approved by the senate's academic planning committee and thirdly, it comes before its financial sub committees. Slater explained.

"The budget officer (dean) has to speak to what his objectives were with the money. What did he have? What did he realize? What new innovations was he able to start? Which ones did he terminate? What were the factors in his not being able to bring in the innovations he was expected to do? What is he asking for next year?"

In short, the deans have to be accountable, which Crowe admits is necessary. The question becomes: just how accountable do the deans have to be to the president and who's going to account for the president?

Crowe feels the buffers now around the administration are inadequate because professional administrators are taken over by the buffers and therefore, "you have to put them in a position where they can't sell you out."

Slater isn't exactly sitting still on the matter. Last year his high priority item was

getting a budget put together. This year it's making sure everybody supposedly gets the information they need and thinking about the long terms plans for York.

He feels the bureaucracy should serve those academics on their temporary stint as administrator and those senate committees trying to make decisions.

Despite complaints that he's centralizing too much, Slater's own administrative reorganization shows a decentralization of power from his own office into the hands of two new vice-presidents: academic affairs and university affairs. Despite the devolution of power, some professors fear that their input into decision making — now at a high level — will decrease when the vice-presidents take over.

Terry Olson disagrees and said the herculean academic vice-president job in just dealing with all the deans and research institutes means his input will be minimal.

A university affairs vice-president will handle the thorny question of the colleges and just how they fit into York's future.

The high priced college system — usually a hurdle in anyone's move toward centralization is bound to get pushed about sometime and that time is now. As Slater says with the tight money market, "I am extremely reluctant to put more money into the colleges until we know what role they are going to play."

Despite the shortage of money, it was Slater's idea to start pushing for a Student Union Building to centralize student services. The idea isn't really new, it's just that this is the first year it might really get off the ground. A SUB would cost the student \$10 in extra fees. It would be student-run. There's a possibility that even if they decide to vote it down in the upcoming referendum, York would then build a University Services Building — the same thing as a SUB but run by the administration. And they wouldn't need a referendum to slap on extra tuition fees.

The future looks good for more political fighting between the deans and the president until the vice-presidents take over. And then the question will become which side they are on. Most likely, he'll have to back efficiency and the natural centralization that it brings. Just how much power the president will have in the future depends on the opposition he'll get through the "participatory democracy" he ushered in.

ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZATION CHART

