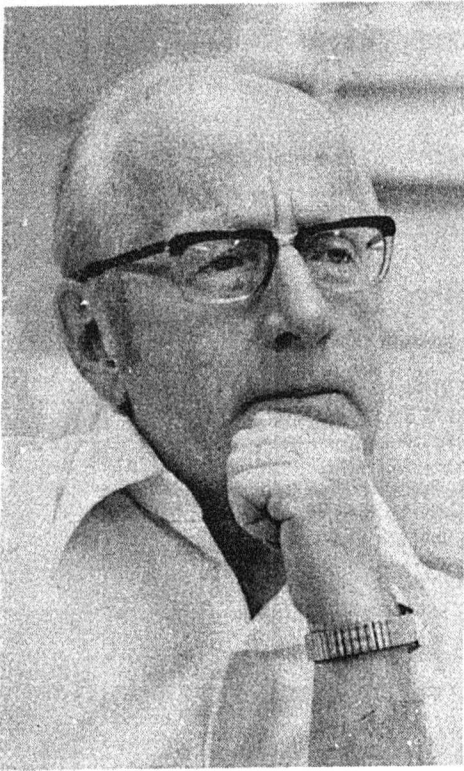


# The selling by the president



When the University of Alberta set out to replace President Max Wyman, who is retiring in 1974, it realized how crucial the next five-year term would be. After advertising across North America, the selection committee chose Dr. Harry Gunning, dean of Chemistry. During Dr. Gunning's tenure, the Chem department gained wide recognition and attracted scholars from around the world. Dr. Gunning's ability to secure funds and resources was a contributing factor. He now must sell the merits of higher education to the public which seems apathetic towards university needs.

Dr. Gunning is the eighth chief executive of the U of A, a massive, \$300 million corporation that has more than 7,400 employees and the third largest enrolment in Canada. Recently, Gateway reporter Vidya Thakur talked with Gunning. Here is the interview:

**Gateway:** Being named chairman of the department of chemistry, how will this new position change your life?

**Gunning:** To a very major extent. When my presidency begins next July, I will be giving up the chairmanship of the Chemistry Department but I will still remain a professor of chemistry and have students in my department. It'll change my life in a very marked degree in the sense that I've concentrated to a very major extent in the past on chemistry and related activities. Although, I've had a great deal to do with the general faculties council and many senior committees such as the academic development committee. It won't be such a radical change as it might have been for some people who had concentrated exclusively in their field.

**Gateway:** What about the creation of the department of advanced education as a threat to the autonomy of the University?

**Gunning:** Well, I think we can't say positively yet. It has got to operate longer before we really know if it's a threat to the autonomy of the university. We are watching this carefully.

**Gateway:** Could you go a little bit further. What effects might this have on the university?

**Gunning:** It's really difficult to say on an absolute sense. It would depend to a major extent on the attitude of the government toward the university. In the worst case, the university could be controlled in a sense that some of its programs and priorities might well be

determined to a major extent by the government. This is the major concern. My own feeling is it will depend upon how well the university can sell itself to the people of the province and put across the necessity of true intellectual autonomy at this institution.

**Gateway:** What do you see as being the main functions of the U of A?

**Gunning:** Well, its great intellectual resource. We probably have two major functions. The first major function is to give people the very best advanced education. Now, the very best advanced education requires the best staff and best facilities. This province needs very badly this kind of university because the university is mainly responsible for generating the highly creative people which are needed in a new society. Relatively speaking, Alberta in a new society. I just came back from Israel and this is a very good example of what can be done by a young country in 25 years. Now, they have emphasized education very strongly and this is one of the reasons they're doing so well, even under a great threat from other forces. Now, I think this province, in order to have its proper position in the federal-provincial scene, has got to have a high concentration of intellectual people, highly trained in various fields and it has to take full advantage of them.

**Gateway:** If we do go back to societal preparation within the University of Alberta, I remember talking to many people, especially farmers, who say the University of Alberta, and Calgary and Lethbridge, are taking too much money away from them. How well do you think the intellectuals at the university can relate to these people?

**Gunning:** I found quite the opposite. When you talk about farmers, for example, I have talked to many of them and the best farmers relate extremely well to the university because they need very highly trained people. Their future as a farmer depends upon their knowledge of business and agriculture, both of which are rapidly developing fields.

**Gateway:** Do you think the government will see that when we have a drop in enrolment each year?

**Gunning:** Did we have it this year? My understanding is that we're going up this year. But I don't think that's the important thing. I think that if people tie in funding of this university exclusively to the number of students, it is a mistake. There must be money for new programs even if enrolment remains absolutely constant, because knowledge is changing, we must keep doing new things.

**Gateway:** Going back to politics and government. Dr. Wyman said that the president must be skillful at dealing with politicians. Would you comment on this statement?

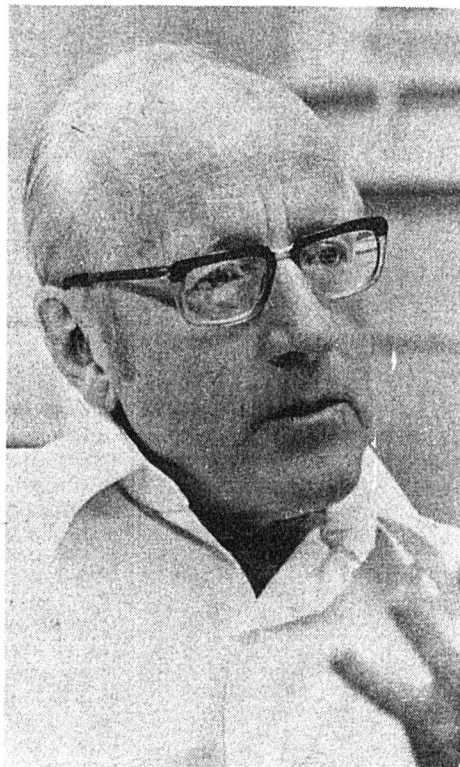
**Gunning:** I think the president must be a politically orientated individual who likes working with people, who likes to put the message of the university across. And in that sense, I agree with you.

**Gateway:** What would be some of the things you would do to try to make the government understand what the needs of the university are?

**Gunning:** That's a very complex question to answer. What has to be done is to become acquainted with the people in the department of advanced education to see what problems they have in funding. I will try to carry on and develop things that Dr. Wyman has done. Perhaps my personality will be a little different, my method of doing things different, but I think our objectives will

be similar. It's a complex situation to be specific about because you're dealing with new department. We have no experience with this type of thing before. We have been working through the Universities' Commission. This department is becoming crystalized and so there is a lot of work to be done on both sides to establish a meaningful relationship.

I think the government is trying to find out what we can do to manage our funds as effectively as possible. They're testing us to see if we've eliminated all the inefficiencies that we possibly can. From then on, we've got to argue on the basis of real needs. This is the kind of thing I've had to do at the university. I've had to deal with the federal government when getting money for research for the Chemistry department. So, it's a way of life for me.



**Gateway:** The fact that you were chairman of the chemistry department. Will this affect decisions you'll be making as president?

**Gunning:** Do you mean would I be making decisions that would favor the chemistry department? No, I don't think that would be a problem. I'm a broadly based individual. I graduated in honors English actually. So I have just as strong an interest in other departments.

**Gateway:** Some departments have a lack of professors. Yet, we're striving for academic excellence. What is your reaction to this?

**Gunning:** We have to build up as much justification in terms of services provided by this university and the effect of cutting back these services would have. The government must be sensitive to the fact that students are part of the people in this province and a very important part. If students have certain needs and we can't fulfill them, then we are not fulfilling our function. And if the government doesn't supply us with the necessary funds, they are not fulfilling their function with respect to the people of this province. As president, I will be extremely sensitive to students' needs. Don't forget, we are in a period of adjustment. Enrolment has levelled off temporarily - I believe it's going to rise again - what has happened is that we have had to overcommit our staff, on the basis of projected enrolment which turned out to be false. So this new adjustment had to be made.

## An interview with Harold Gunning president-elect

I don't find it difficult to relate to farmers and I don't think they find it difficult to relate to the university. If you take the farmer who is merely struggling along, he may not know what the university can offer in the way of resources. It's up to us to go out and talk to these people and point out the advantages of knowing what the university can do. I think this is a communications problem more than anything else and this is true of all walks of life.

One of the objectives I have, and this is not different from what Dr. Wyman has done so effectively, will be to tell as many people as possible what the university can do for them. And this is also true of the government. It is not fully utilizing the resources of the university. We have international authorities in many fields and the government is not fully aware of these people. It's not their fault. I'm just saying there is a communications problem.

**Gateway:** What changes have you seen at this university? And do you have other changes in mind?

**Gunning:** No radical changes. I would like to see us emphasize academic excellence. I feel that is absolutely vital. This university should be as good as we can make it. I feel that in this budgetary situation that there is a real danger that our academic standards could fall if we are not allowed to use very strong tenure evaluation procedures because of budgetary considerations.

Then, we may slip on the academic scale of things and that would be a mistake. The best way we can serve this province is to be the best university possible.

**Gateway:** But at the same time you've seen a cutback in government grants. So in that respect, I can't see you saying we can have academic excellence to that great an extent. Isn't that part of the government's fault?

**Gunning:** I don't think it's a question of it being the government's fault. I think what we have to put across to the government is the importance of providing us funds so that we can maintain academic excellence. And I don't think this is anybody's fault. The government has its own problems, right? It has many demands for the funds available. It is up to us to convince the government to place the university as one of the major priorities.

**Gateway:** So many people are coming out of university with BA or BSc degrees looking for jobs but can't find them...?

**Gunning:** The job market is improving markedly. In my field, there is really happening is that the business cycle and the academic-graduation cycle are totally out of phase. Our society can't possibly do without highly trained people. A business cycle can suddenly drop and the demand go down. On the other hand, it may take ten years to develop a good Phd program. So what your talking about is investments we're making in terms of students now.

When I took my Phd in Chemistry in 1942, there were absolutely no jobs whatsoever. And I think this is becoming much less common today. We have sort of a world-wide recession. Our universities had been geared up to produce students at a certain rate. There was a drop in demand and we've run into a temporary - it's been very temporary - oversupply situation. Now, demand is rising again. I can predict that in a few years in all these fields there is going to be a marked shortage.