

# President Paul Davenport's new age

In conjunction with Installation Week, *The Gateway* invited Paul Davenport, the new president of the University of Alberta, to its offices in the Students' Union Building. Managing editor Philip Preville interviewed Dr. Davenport on September 29, 1989, in the lobby of the Myer Horowitz Theatre.

**interview by  
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**On himself**

I grew up in New Jersey. Summit, New Jersey.

On my mother's side, they can trace their family back to a land grant from King George III, in the eighteenth century. In fact, the plantation house that was built on that property — it's a big, beautiful piece of property in the western part of Virginia — is still in the family. Lovely, old, *Gone With the Wind* kind of plantation house.

I went to Stanford University and got an economics degree. While I was there I studied for six months in France, where I met my wife. I went to U of T in 1969 to do a masters year; they offered me a very attractive fellowship. My wife and I thought we'd just go spend for one year in Toronto and then go back to the U.S., but we enjoyed Toronto so much that I stayed for a second year and a third year.

Finally, when it was time to look for an academic job, I got an offer from McGill. My wife is a French-English translator, so McGill was a perfect spot for us. So we went to Montreal, and I was in Montreal from 1973 to 1989. So the U of A is only my second job.

My favorite color is blue.

**On recycling and environmental initiatives**

Let me confess right away that I don't know everything we're currently doing in regards to recycling. I do know from my years at McGill that it is possible at some universities to have a recycling project break even if the price of paper is right. I think that there are interesting possibilities for environmental protection and recycling at the university.

There is the possibility of taking a strong initiative in this direction, but I would want to look at the costs. We're in a very tough situation budgetarily.

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**On student housing**

It's certainly a very critical issue, and we have a board committee studying that issue, and I don't want to anticipate the results that the board might come to.

It is an issue where we require very close coordination with the Department of Advanced Education. We have a severe problem in the physical deterioration of those buildings, and we're hopeful that we will get some government support to deal with that deterioration. Once we have the physical structures in a reasonable situation, we will then need to examine carefully the way we fund maintenance — and, ultimately, replacement — of those buildings through the rents that we charge.

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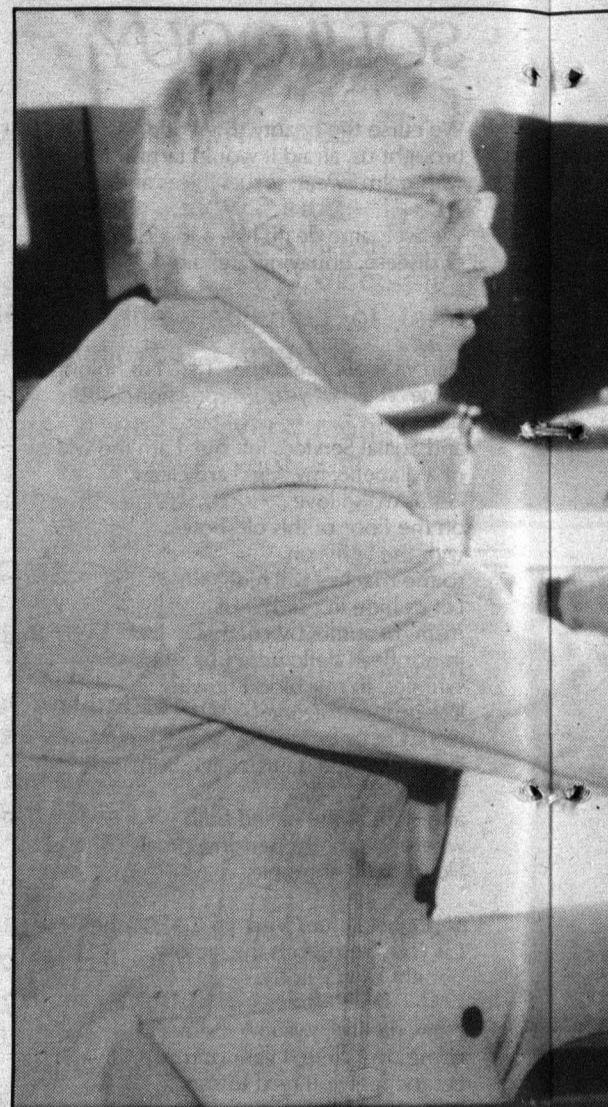
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**On enrolment**

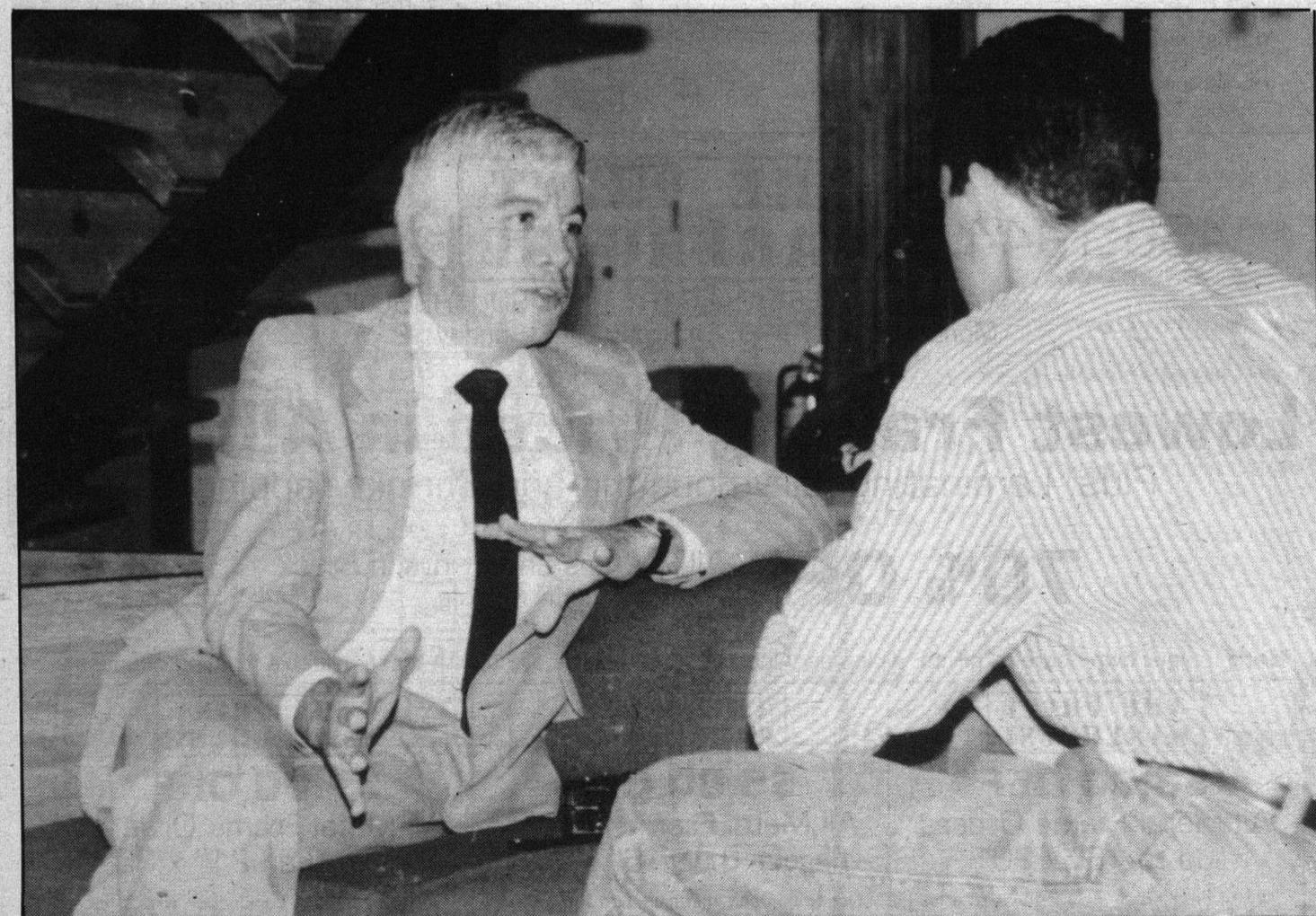
If I were to signal out two things in *The Next Decade and Beyond* (the U of A's long-term planning document) that I like, one is an emphasis on the quality of undergraduate education — a clear statement that when we think about accessibility, we've got to think about accessibility to a certain quality of undergraduate education. We should not concentrate simply on increasing our numbers.

The second issue that I like in there is the emphasis on graduate studies and research, and the assertion that the U of A has an important mission in graduate studies and research, and that we must protect that mission even in the face of severe budgetary problems.

The document proposed, over a ten-year period, to reduce our undergraduate numbers to something like 20,000 full- and part-time students, and increase our graduate numbers to around 5,000. This is an 80%-20% split, so it's an exaggeration to suggest that the plan will push us to a graduate school environment. Also, I think that the 80%-20% split is a possibility, but I wouldn't hold it up as a target. The student demand for graduate studies five and ten years hence is very uncertain.



U of A president Paul Davenport addresses a group of students.



President Davenport answers questions in the lobby of Myer Horowitz Theatre.

**On the university's finances**

A balanced budget is certainly an important goal for the university to have.

My hope is that, over a number of years, we will work our deficit down to zero. We will certainly do that as quickly as we can, consistent with maintaining the quality of our academic programs. There's a balancing act to do there.

If your question is "am I at ease with a five million dollar deficit in the university budget?", my answer is no, I am not. It troubles me considerably.

**Is a balanced budget achievable within your five-year term as president of the U of A?**

Yes.

This is not a personal goal; it's an institutional objective. This would have the wide, probably unanimous support of our Board of Governors and of my fellow vice-presidents. It's an objective the university would have had under any president.

We cannot, under our circumstances in Alberta, continually run deficits. The provincial government is spending \$1.15 for every dollar of revenue. This means that, in requesting more funds, the universities and colleges have a tough case to make.

That said, I think it's essential that we at the U of A do what we can to increase revenues from other sources, including from tuition fees and from private giving.

I can't give you specific terms as to what will and will not be cut. What I can say is that all of us involved in this exercise — the academic leadership out of the university, the Board of Governors — would want to be very careful to protect those areas of teaching and research where the university has a national and international reputation.

I think, however, that there