

RESEARCH AND MSU:

REMARKS DELIVERED TO THE 1986 SCHOLARS LUNCHEON

Faculty responsibilities, like Gaul, can be divided into three parts -- teaching, research, and last but not least, public service. The second -- research -- concerns us here. Last year George Dickinson presented a delightful, lighthearted anecdotal account of his escapades as researcher. My talk is somber, triggered by several untoward events of the past year. Some of what I say may be offensive, causing auditors to think of a non-geographical type of gall. But my modus operandi is to air concerns if an opportunity arises, trusting that a thoughtful discussion of the issues raised may be helpful; believing that allowing unhealthy conditions to fester is deleterious to the health of the university.

I am concerned that George Dickinson, like others with strong research interests before him, found an environment at MSU that led him to seek other pastures. I am concerned that the edited Coal book mentioned in last month's Kentucky Coal Journal is by Forrest Cameron, another recent departee. As a member of MSU's faculty since 1968, I am painfully aware of the general low esteem in which real research has been held at MSU. If a class did not make, you received a 3 hour reduction of load for research even if you could not distinguish between a footnote, a lovenote, a sour note. Some faculty members would read a textbook for the preparation of tomorrow's lecture and label it research. Others claimed that MSU's heavy teaching loads made

research impossible. And others still argued virtuously that as a former teachers college, we should not soil our hands with research. Gene Gressley of Wyoming once answered the research defiling teaching with the maxim: "The lack of research does not necessarily demonstrate good teaching."

Though it is generally acknowledged that the "big guns" of a college are those who have achieved a reputation through a corpus of published works, the reward system even among MSU's research community is skewed in another direction. In the past if you worked up a paper to be delivered at the 6th Annual Honolulu Conference on the relationship between the tse-tsefly and the left winged-scarlet long eared wasp, you may have won a trip to Hawaii. On the other hand, if you wrote a path-breaking article for publication, the expenses were your own. The budget for delivering papers has varied wildly over time -- one year niggardly, another handed out with the abandon of the proverbial drunken sailor.

Some years back a seat of the pants study revealed that of the ten highest paid professors, only one could by any stretch of imagination be called a researcher. The others were FARTS (fired, failed, or more often referred to as Former Administrators Returned to Teaching). In the past year, thanks to our FART-regent, who blocked President Reinhard's proposal to treat ex-administrators in a professional manner, the number of FARTs pulling down outrageous, outlandish salaries has increased markedly. From that Board of Regents meeting forward, a new

phenomenon has been seen. Poorly attended Riggle Room gatherings now were thick with an almost unbroken horseshoe of FARTS, looking like a magnified view of ring around the collar. The FARTS by a show of force are determined that their letters of marque be honored. With the growth in size and aggressiveness of the FART cohort and the further skewing of salaries away from equity -- a variety of reactions, varying from anger, frustration, sheer resignation to a lowering of faculty morale even further, has resulted. A fear that MSU will again become GOBU (Good Old Boy University) is strongly felt. The forced departure of Herb. F. Reinhard and statements that have been made respecting interim and permanent presidents feed that concern. The fact that a committee to investigate salary inequities headed by a FART chairman found three areas of concern, none of which relate to inflated FART salaries is hardly reassuring. The deep division on the Reinhard contract and the raw anger over the bloated salaries of FARTS, whom claim to be so loyal to MSU that they bleed gold & blue, -- who in reality bleed MSU dry of greenbacks, has led to a lesser degree of collegiality than I have ever seen before. The FART-regent's action may force remaining non-fart faculty to either follow the lead of NKU toward AAUP or AFT representation or to change what has in the past been mere bluster to action -- to file an equal pay for equal work law suit.

We all admit that FARTS vary in competence (as do non-FARTS) from quality people to coffee coolers. But the question at issue

is the relationship of FARTS as a cohort, to research. One obviously bottom line lesson is that research is not rewarded at MSU. As a general maxim, that truth has been known for years. But the excesses of the FART regent this past year have been so gross that even those who have their proverbial probiscous in a book or hands on the keyboard of a wordprocessor are aware of the basic injustice of his perfidious performance.

In years of 2 and 3% raises the tendency is to award salary increments across the board. Workers and drones receive equal percentage increases. And of course FARTS with larger salary bases receive larger dollar increases than non-FARTS.

This year of instability -- the shakiness of MSU's future coupled with the perverse distribution of salaries -- will lead willy-nilly to another outmigration, perhaps even more damaging than that of the past year -- An out-migration of researchers whose sustained efforts over the decades would have greatly strengthened the reputation of MSU. The low regard for research at MSU does not reflect the national trend and thus some will leave for campuses where they will be appreciated, where their efforts will be rewarded.

The FART fiasco is only part of the problem of MSU research. When MSU hires a Ph.D., part of the newcomer's value is that she or he has gone through the rigors of a doctoral dissertation. Not to encourage a continuation of their writing/research dimension is poor management. If one drops out of academic research, it is difficult to return to it. The stereotype is of

the professor that got his degree in 1936. None of his lectures incorporates material written less than fifty years ago. Research leads to growth; lack of research frequently to stagnation. The conversation of the researcher tends to be shop talk; the prattle of the coffee cooler to home repairs/hair-dressers or what have you.

Researchers spend hundreds of hours of their own time and thousands of dollars of their hard earned money investigating topics of value to MSU. Yet the attitude expressed by the Faculty Research Grant form fails to recognize the self-sacrifice of those who apply for aid. The concept, that anything produced from the sweat of the brow or thought process of the brain which is sponsored in whole or in part by the university is to be repaid if the results are profitable, is simply sick. The prototype for such a statement came in the aftermath of Gatorade. In the case where a university backs a single project with more money than MSU spends on research in a decade, obviously there should be a quid pro quo. But on a non-equipment based project with a funding level of less than \$4,000, the demand is not only unrealistic but also encourages research that has no commercial possibilities. Last fall I spent days working up a proposal for the "Civil War in Kentucky." In the end I did not submit the proposal as past wounds were opened. In the past I did turn over photographs and other items as required. They were not taken care of -- photographs curled, they were not adequately filed so that when I received a desperate call regarding a specific

courthouse photograph, I could not fill the request. I would have been able to, had the material remained in my hands. The relationship between the researcher and the library has presented more than its share of problems. Though other regional universities have set up university archives, aggressively collected manuscript and printed materials, systematically worked in the field of oral history -- MSU has been laggard. For me this has been a particularly frustrating thing to view. Years back, before I began working on a soon to be published pictorial history of Eastern Kentucky, I saw photographs including the interior of Bishop's drugstore dating back to 1954. Due principally to a lack of a retention schedule and a university archives, the material was trashed, evidently, when photographic services moved from Howell-McDowell to Allie Young. The result is that in the soon to be published volume which includes a picture of Adron Doran and Bob Martin with the hog rifle, the credit line is EKU, not MSU. Since a University Archivist by taking non-current permanent records from active office areas and destroying ephemeral materials saves monies nearly equal to their salary -- through decreases in requests for filing cabinets and space, it is difficult to understand why MSU still lacks such an individual. In addition embarrassing errors caused by the destruction of records that by law must be kept permanently are kept to a minimum. If in the future someone attempts to write a history of MSU, the documentary record will be poor when compared to EKU, our chief competitor.

When the Julian Carroll Tower was blueprinted, a special collections room was labelled the Carl D. Perkins room. The papers of the late 7th district Congressmen are at Eastern; and Richmond is not in his district. I saw it coming. Historians at EKV and their University Archivist were actively working 20th Century Kentucky history. They started a Carl D. Perkins oral history project. They had credibility. We had our ears pinned back.

I wish this was the end of horror stories relating to the library, but it is not. Years ago an Appalachian collection located, I believe it was in New Jersey, was up for sale as a unit. MSU would not so much as look at it, though Eastern Kentucky, our region, is in Central Appalachia. Then, in the late 1970s with the creation of the Appalachian Development Center and the desire to create an Appalachian Collection as large as our Kentucky Collection, purchases were made with little attention given to cost or quality.

The way one develops a viable collection at MSU is for a professor to use his allotment year after year in a focused field. In a decade or two that collection may become significant. Mennonite materials are due to Rob Tinsley; early Kentucky newspapers due to yours truly; anti-slavery to Victor B. Howard. The role of the research-oriented professor in strengthening the library extends further than merely ordering. The gifts of Edmund Hicks are the basis of our World War II collection. I dare say that the gifts by Ed Hicks, Victor

Howard, and myself to the library have footed up in each case to five figures, yet the attitude of the library has, at times, been antagonistic and downright destructive. One year among other gift volumes, were more than a dozen Baedeker's -- those brilliant European guidebooks that are chocked full of detail, they are considered classics, and have been advertised recently in the \$25-35 range. They were thrown out. The last time I gave at the library (and there were quite a few years in the interim where gifts were given to appreciative institutions), a long run of Missouri historical magazines vanished. My experience is hardly unique. When Victor Howard offered to donate his unique Civil rights collection which contained hundreds of one of a kind items -- a collection that at least one East Coast institution lusted after, MSU did not want it. Now it is housed at U.K. With the Fisk and Oberlin Collections he had earlier acquired for the University, and the subsequent publication in microform format of the great Shomberg Collection of New York, MSU could have had arguably the greatest Black History Collection in the South. MSU blew it. What is wrong with the library. Hopefully, such attitudes are a thing of the past. Speaking from personal experience, severe permanent damage has been done. I intend to donate a significant collection to a Kentucky College this year, but it is a college, the library of which, has a collector's instinct, a library that has both the facilities and curatorial staff to take care of it. With limited funding I can not for the life of me understand the peculiar way the MSU library has of

treating research faculty bearing gifts. Unlike the stereotypical coffee cooling FART, the researcher is year in and year out a buyer of books and recipient of review copies. No other group of such size offers such a potential of needed free volumes for the financially strapped library.

I could go on and on in terms of the frustrations of an MSU researcher:

- (1) Inordinate delays of inhouse publications due to turnover of personnel and the very lowest of priorities -- read no firm date ever promised, I am still waiting for a publication turned in in 1984.
- (2) The lack of a research center to which one could turn for statistical help.
- (3) The difficulty of competing at the national level when sustained funding is not granted to faculty with established records of solid scholarly achievement.

I am concerned that increasingly those faculty who are doing research at MSU are doing it in isolation. This is understandable with the coming of the home computer, the utter inadequacy of some faculty offices both in size and temperature control, and the unsettling climate on campus, where concerns and rumors force out research. It is understandable that some researchers feel alienated after seeing the soaring salaries of non-productive fat cat FARTS, compared to their own; when they see that only one/one thousandth of the budget is earmarked for research -- one of the three primary objectives of the university. It is understandable

that faculty members will increasingly move in the direction of research that may benefit their career and mobility, instead of what may benefit MSU.

In the time remaining I am going to suggest a number of ways in which we might be able to achieve the quality and quantity of research that I believe we are capable of, given adequate attention and funding. First of all we need, in the words of A-Team's Hannibal Smith, "a plan." At present research is a most individualistic type of thing. At one time a plan was in place, but it backfired due to a fatal flaw. Many of us ancients remember the Communist sounding five year plan. One was asked about one's goals for the next five years and what resources would be required to fill them. The instrument proved a two-edged sword as there was evidently zero funding. The process became about as creative as a Confuscian eight-legged essay. The Faculty/Staff Development Plan was implemented in 1977-78 and the last record I have of such an instrument is for 1982-83. The original form declared that departmental efforts will follow the same format as individual plan. I wrote in my last form under comments: "This form is a real downer. Having filled one out time and again it merely sits in a dark file cabinet without any results. This is hardly reassuring." Any administrator worth his or her salt would have realized the possibilities of relating the goals of individual scholars to larger groups and to resources. I guess we did not have any -- at least then.

The term synergy is a sort of an academic the whole is greater than the sum of its parts thesis -- ideas bouncing off the group and the excitement of the discoveries of colleagues giving the whole group increased energy. When I was working on my M.A.T., I washed dishes Wednesdays for working dinners of the biophysics department. In those surroundings there were weekly briefings on progress regarding DNA and RNA. The environment was helpful.

Years ago I participated in a Cliometrics AAAS-NFS seminar led by economist Bob Gallman. He told of how Purdue hired three historians. Intentionally Purdue sought historians with a consuming interest in quantified history; though the historians were to cover different periods and topics in the classroom. The result was the creation of a new history that swept the nation. Purdue historians had found a niche and made the most of it.

A third synergistic scenario would bring together individuals in different disciplines with similar topical interests. There is a hint that Morris Norfleet had something like that in mind as a thrust of the Appalachian Development Center. I happened to have been thrown in with the head of the Great Plains History Center during the Summer of 1978 and with the ADC in its infancy, I asked if he had any advice for us. His comment was terse "you must build up credibility first, before you ask for money." Of course, ADC received substantial funding first. Perhaps it is because it did not have to lift itself by its bootstraps, focus itself, find its niche, make its mark, that

President Reinhard is doing to the ADC what President Nixon did to the Office of Economic Opportunity -- scatter its functions. I would certainly hope that if something substantial is done to bring the level of research at MSU up to speed, it be done thoughtfully and that major funding follows credibility. Talk's cheap, production counts. Though I am not a member of that group, I would imagine that the nearest thing to an in-place synergistic group is the computer users group.

Since the WMKY of old did indeed use the wealth of knowledge of MSU's faculty as "experts," perhaps that practice could be expanded. There is a tendency for some to divorce research and expertise from MSU as a whole. This was best or rather most blatantly expressed by an administrator years ago who told a distinguished researcher, "you have proven you can do research. Now why don't you do something useful. Recruit." The lunacy of such a statement is obvious. To a considerable extent, parents make decisions as to where (or if), kids go to college. The quality contact made by faculty to adult-oriented interest groups or through the mass media via faculty as experts on current topics exudes an image of an intelligent, progressive faculty and that in turn projects an image of MSU that is positive. Sports has an S.I.D. I have suggested (in jest) that academics should have theirs too -- we could call them A.I.D.S. and sure get plenty of attention. The working faculty, in the research sense, as opposed to coffee coolers -- should be able to anticipate with near certainty a sabbatical at the end of seven years. Those who are unproductive deserve far less consideration.

I have been severe in my comments. I have been caustic. But I do believe that with new presidents and a possibility to do something financially for research for MSU, the time to speak up is now. I doubt that there will be consensus about my distinguished researcher speech save one exception. I believe there will be consensus that I have spoken up. Thank you for hearing me out.

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5 May 1986