

DAVID WEST: THE FACULTY'S ADVOCATE

By Carol Baskin

DAVID WEST made his first big money when he was seven years old. The young entrepreneur collected newspapers and magazines until he had enough to sell the whole works for \$3.65 — equal to an entire year's allowance. "That was a big day in my life," he says. Even 39 years ago, West was goal-oriented.

Today, West is chairman of the Faculty Council, a professor of finance and chairman of his department. For both chairmanships, it's his second time around. "All my life, I've wound up fighting someone else's battles," he quips. West has fought a big battle of his own, against polio. It hit when he was 16. He negotiates life from a battery-operated wheelchair. West's students describe their professor as witty, practical and relaxed. Many of them, particularly the undergraduates, aren't aware of West's Faculty Council role, or that he's reputed to be one of the most powerful and politically astute figures on Campus.

West flippantly dismisses the suggestion. "I can call or cancel a meeting. That's the absolute extent of my power," he claims.

OK, then, influence. He'll concede to that. West was first elected chairman of the Council, which represents Mizzou's more than 2,000 faculty members, in the spring of 1978, the same time Dr. Barbara Uehling was named to succeed retiring Chancellor Herbert Schooling. West and Uehling quickly struck up a mutually supportive relationship bonded by their aggressive plans, his for the faculty, hers for the institution as a whole. "He certainly seems to have her ear," says Rick Elam, interim director of the School of Accountancy.

IN THE LAST 18 MONTHS, Uehling has reorganized the administration she inherited and has replaced most top positions with new blood. She sought opinions from West and asked the Faculty Council to suggest names for search committees. No small part of the Council's time has been spent grappling with

problems that require administrative cooperation or support, such as tenure revisions and staff benefit improvements.

WEST MEETS OFTEN WITH UEHLING and Dr. Shaila Aery, the chancellor's special assistant. "David is such an advocate of the faculty," says Aery. "He gives us a clear, representative view of what the faculty thinks on issues. Even if you diametrically oppose him on a point, you can deal with him because of his integrity."

One of the biggest challenges West sees ahead is the need for "faculty renewal." Academicians use the term to describe methods that professors can use to avoid burning out early, now that traditional alternatives are being sealed off. "We can't escape to another job because there are fewer open, can't submerge in new research because less grant money is available, and can't be enthused by new faculty because fewer are being hired," he says.

SOME FACULTY AT MIZZOU "are facing the emotional stress experienced with any kind of entrapment," says West. "They become frustrated, less productive, bored, withdrawn. Not a pleasant state to contemplate." Burned out professors don't make good teachers, either.

Some possible solutions, says West, include mid-career retraining, internships or fellowships in private business or industry, and early retirement.

But currently, regulations at Mizzou prevent a professor from enrolling in a doctoral program, even outside his own area. Financial penalties are significant for faculty who retire early. And part-time faculty get no staff benefits.

West got interested in faculty renewal after an older professor told him he resigned because he didn't know many older faculty at Missouri who were happy. West sought another term as Council chairman because he wanted to work on faculty renewal.



WEST MEETS WITH AERY



"Right now it's only a hope, an idea, a kernel," he says. His second term is up this spring. Whether or not he's kept on for another year as chairman, there's little doubt that he'll continue working in that arena.

Concentration of effort is West's pattern. "I may be slow but I'm real persistent," he jokes. He tends to limit his mental energy to just a few subjects, though he may seek several outlets for each of them. From 1970 to 1977, for example, his attention was on the financial problems of the public utilities. He churned out a batch of research articles and did consulting on the subject. Since he became Council chairman, West has virtually forsaken writing, except on faculty renewal and morale.

West says the most effective way an organization can gain strength is to assume more authority than it was given to begin with, and then to act responsibly in exercising that authority.

The Council has generated more publicity than in some recent years, largely because of West's willingness to talk with reporters. By the Council's own rules, the chairman was its only spokesman. The group's meetings have been closed to the press for several years, though it recently voted that any Council member could talk with the press about Council matters.

"As a faculty member, I'd like to have the press present, but as chairman, I'm not sure. It would change the way the Council functions," West opines. "More decisions would be made by the executive committee in private. I like the idea of 30 people

debating, trying to get their views across. Sometimes I've changed my mind after listening to what is said at our meeting table. The give-and-take, the degree of argument and discussion would be mitigated if the press attended."

Descriptions of West's leadership style are remarkable in their consistency. His friends say he is aggressive, foresighted, dynamic, democratic, political. He uses his power wisely, he takes definite stands, he holds people — including those on committees — accountable. But not everyone is a friend. People either like or dislike West very much. Not much middle ground.

"ONCE HE MAKES A DECISION, he hangs on like a bulldog," says accountancy's Elam. "He has the knack of getting committees to move. He asks a lot of people."

Council member Richard Hofst, an electrical engineer, says West doesn't let the meetings drag. "Twenty or more of us may be clamoring to talk. He wants all viewpoints expressed, but he doesn't let it drag."

Marilyn Maddux, another Council member, says West has put much energy into developing a good relationship between faculty and new administration. "He's succeeded," she says.

All this is not to say West hasn't succeeded as a teacher, too. He's been on the faculty since 1966. His students, mostly seniors and graduate level, welcome the practicality of West's classroom presentations. He teaches security analysis and investments. "He's willing to go over and over something until we understand it," says Julie Bruton, a senior from Dallas, Texas. "He speaks our language. It (the finance curriculum) was all such book stuff until his course." Kansas City junior Chris Prestigiacomo remembers a guest lecture by West last spring on options. "We gave him a standing ovation. After so much theory, here was something we could really sink our teeth into."

WEST INVOLVES his security analysis class in the option market by giving them a list of companies to study and then asking them to select one to purchase options from. Each student can invest no less than \$2.50, and no more than \$10. This semester Coca-Cola won the vote. "Almost everybody went for \$10," confides Bruton, who is treasurer. The choice was made just before the possibility of a U.S. boycott of the 1980 summer Olympic games came up. With

Coke a major advertising sponsor, "We may not do too well," Bruton laments. The options expire in May.

West doesn't like to think he's where he is today because he's handicapped. "But I understand some people's frustrations a little better. I'm a little more tolerant of some kinds of limitations, and maybe a little less tolerant of people who don't try." But he admits he didn't try to make much of himself as a youth. "I got reasonably good grades, though I didn't study much. I was independent, almost wild. I probably would have been a businessman, but never much of a scholar." All that changed when he got polio.

"WHEN I LAY THERE in that hospital bed, taking inventory, about all I had left was a brain. I knew I was going to spend the rest of my years in a wheelchair. I figured if I wanted to get out of the back room of my parents' house, I'd better make use of that brain." A's have been his standard since.

OPPORTUNITIES for the handicapped — well-educated or not — were a lot more limited in the '50s and '60s than they are today. Friends carried his wheelchair up and down stairs through high school and college. The honor graduate wasn't employable with his bachelor's degree, so he went after a masters. That got him an interview, but no job. West, ultimately a Phi Beta Kappa with a PhD, landed his first teaching job in Tennessee. "I'm forever grateful to that college president, but I don't think he would have hired me if he could have found someone else.

"When I left my last two teaching jobs, they interviewed candidates in wheelchairs to take my place," says West. "That's one of the best bits of flattery I could receive. To me, it meant that I didn't mess it up for somebody else.

"A lot of people helped me get through school and the early years of my career. You can't really repay those people. You can only balance the scales by helping someone else." □

STUDENTS AND TEACHING REMAIN IMPORTANT TO COUNCIL CHAIRMAN

