

On April 25, 2017, I was the invited speaker at the spring meeting of the UT Retired Faculty-Staff Association. Many of those in the audience had worked with me over the 47 years I have spent on the UT campus. As a topic I decided to reflect on some of the important events we have shared as colleagues on the faculty and staff.

Nine Days I Will Not Forget

1. A Monday in November 1979 – Opportunity knocks

Early in Peter Flawn's presidency there was a national focus on the core curriculum, led by Harvard. Our most recent review of basic education requirements had occurred in 1955 (the Graham Committee Report). In the University Council, chaired by President Flawn, a legal pad was circulated, and members were asked to sign the list if they were interested in working on this topic.

At the end of the meeting someone, Gideon Sjolberg from sociology, I believe, picked up the list and observed that those who signed would make a fine committee. That idea was quickly adopted. President Flawn asked Bill Lesso from engineering to convene the first meeting. However, Bill was out of the room, so Flawn turned to me and asked me to convene the group. That led to my becoming chairman. I used to kid Bill Lesso by telling him that if he had a stronger bladder, he would have been the one with the opportunities that followed. I shared the final draft of our committee's report with President Flawn in December, 1980, and our official report was submitted to the University Council in January, 1981.

2. A day in June 1981 – A quantum leap for athletics

President Flawn was pleased with our work on Basic Education Requirements, and this led to his appointing me in spring of 1981 to the Men's Athletic Council. One of the immediate tasks faced by the Council was to replace Bill Ellington, the athletic director who had rather abruptly decided to retire. Much of the leadership in the search was provided by L.

O. “Tom” Morgan, a chemistry professor who chaired the Council. The field was narrowed to three potential appointees:

T. Jones, a former Longhorn football player and a member of the staff,

Bill George, a former Longhorn basketball player and the AD at Angelo State (I believe), and

DeLoss Dodds, the AD at Kansas State.

The group of Council members who were able to participate in the interviews included Doc Neuhaus and Wally Scott, the Regents’ appointees to the Council; John Stuart, the Ex Students’ appointee; and faculty members Tom Morgan, Charles Alan Wright, Jim Ayres, and me. Another faculty member, Jack Breen from civil engineering, was out of the country, and the student member, David Monnich, did not take over his position until the fall 1981 semester began.

Doc Neuhaus (in his plane) flew up from the Valley, picked up Scott, Morgan, Wright, Ayres, and me, and took us to DFW where we were joined by Stuart. We were careful to access the AMFAC Hotel from a back entrance to avoid contact with the media. We first interviewed Bill George, then DeLoss. T Jones was interviewed later in the Stark Library on campus.

There was absolutely no doubt in my mind who was the best candidate. The world of college athletics was undergoing major change. It was apparent that Title IX was going to produce substantial revisions and restructuring, and the successful lawsuit by the University of Georgia and the University of Oklahoma against the NCAA’s monopoly on television revenues would change the entire landscape. From his interview it was clear to me that DeLoss would be a national leader in the new athletic world. While there was some resistance from those who wanted a Longhorn, I was deeply grateful to be on the prevailing side.

The real challenge was to convince DeLoss (and Mary Ann) to leave their home in Kansas and come to Austin.

The years I spent on the Council, working in the Southwest Conference, the Big 12 Conference, and the NCAA, made it clear to me that DeLoss was indeed the finest AD in the country.

3. A day in January 1989 – **A change of direction**

The annual meeting of the American Mathematical Society was held in Phoenix. During a break in the program, I went back to my room to check in with my office on campus, the Dean's Office in Natural Sciences (where I served as Associate dean). As we came to the close of the conversation, Darlette Powell mentioned that Ron Brown had announced he would step down as Vice President for Student Affairs at the end of the academic year. It probably did not take more than twenty seconds for me to think, "I could do that."

Not long after I returned to Austin, President Bill Cunningham invited me to lunch at The Headliners Club downtown. We knew each other pretty well, but we did not go to lunch together unless there was a compelling reason to do so. Bill told me he would like for me to be the next VP SA. We talked about the position in some detail, his interests and concerns, and the salary (it was a tough year, my move from associate dean to vice president would come with a 6% raise).

I told him I would think it over and give him my answer the next day. I called him on schedule and accepted his offer. No CV was submitted, no references were contacted. Bill had a committee advising him on the selection. I sometimes wondered what might have happened if the committee said, "Whatever you do, don't appoint a math nerd."

4. A day in April 1990 – **Face to face with hostility**

One of the rites of spring on our campus had, for many years, been a celebration called "Roundup." It was a weekend of alcohol consumption, parties, and a Friday afternoon parade. Needless to say, it was also a time of inappropriate behavior and frequently a source of distasteful conduct.

After the parade in 1990, a jalopy was parked on the street by the Delta Tau Delta fraternity house. Later someone painted the old car and wrote racial epithets all over it. These were photographed and published in the *Daily Texan*. There followed a week of protests and conflicts. With the tempers boiling over, President Cunningham decided he should make a public statement condemning the racial slurs and the hostility toward minority students. He stood at a podium on the West Mall steps, and I stood next to

him as he began to read his statement. The crowd surged forward so that the protestors were close enough to put their hands on his document and read it aloud. It was completely impossible for him to complete his presentation.

As years have passed, I have wondered what would have been the most effective way to deal with the situation. Today the campus atmosphere is much improved over what we all witnessed on that spring day in 1990.

5. A Friday in spring 1993 – **A new leader, a new direction**

On that afternoon it seemed most everyone had accepted the idea Mark Yudoff would be the next UT president. Then came the announcement from a meeting of the Board of Regents that Bob Berdahl, provost at the University of Illinois, had been appointed. This signaled a time of significant change in the lives of faculty, students, staff, and alumni. We soon would be conducting a major Capital Campaign, developing a campus master plan with the assistance of the Cesar Pelli architectural firm in New Haven, formulating our core purpose and core values, and recasting our commencement exercises to add beautiful music and spectacular fireworks.

The primary work on the core purpose and core values was done by the “Mars Team,” a group of five faculty: Betty Sue Flowers, John Trimble, Larry Speck, Bob Sullivan, and me, together with two influential alumni: Larry Temple and Roy Spence. President Berdahl explained that the group would be called the “Mars Team” in the sense that, if you were to send a group to establish the University of Texas on Mars, these would be the people to choose.

6. August 1993 – **Camp texas!**

Through the leadership of our student “Ambassadors,” Allison Shiff and Sean Petrie, and the Ex Students Association, primarily Doria Hanna, we planned and celebrated our first Camp texas, introducing new freshmen to the excitement and traditions of life on the Forty Acres. We rode a bus to the 7A Ranch in Kerrville where we enjoyed 24 hours of burnt orange fun.

The 7A Ranch was modeled after a cowboy town, complete with saloon, dance hall, candy shop, and cemetery. Groups of students shared

“bunkhouses.” I was fortunate to get a private room. Late that night some of the campers and counselors gathered among the “tombstones” and told ghost stories. Of the 50 students attending, I believe ten were counselors.

7. January 1995 – **The MLK Statue**

Prior to my appointment as VPSA, there had already been a movement to replace the statues of Confederate leaders on the South Mall. A student group, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Statue Foundation, had been formed to commission a statue of Martin Luther King, but my impression from Ron Brown was that the administration preferred a scholarship rather than a statue. Working with the students, we developed a proposal, including a model and a recommended location on the East Mall. I presented this to the Board of Regents at a meeting in Houston where we received approval in concept with the understanding that students would be responsible for raising the necessary funds.

Over a period of years, discussion of fundraising alternatives failed to lead to a satisfactory plan. In early 1995 a conversation with Bill Cunningham included his suggestion that we could hold a student referendum proposing a fee of \$1 per semester on each student for the purpose of creating and installing the statue. In a subsequent meeting with one of the student leaders, Tito Garcia, I proposed the \$1 fee approach, and Tito took this through the referendum process. The statue was unveiled in September 2000. It has been a huge success, and it has led to a statue of Cesar Chavez on the West Mall and one of Barbara Jordan in the Memorial Oaks north of the Texas Union.

8. March 4, 1997 – **Dealing with loss**

On March 4, 1997, my father, a retired chemistry professor at LSU, died of a heart attack at an LSU baseball game at age 87. In so many ways he had been and continues to be a role model and an inspiration for me. Later that day Bob Berdahl called me to express his sympathy. At the close of our conversation I noted that I had received several calls that day from reporters seeking comment on Bob’s possible departure from the University. He told me he had, in fact, accepted an offer from the University of California at

Berkeley to be their next Chancellor. Up to that point I had not been aware that he was considering a move.

Berdahl's successor was Peter Flawn who returned to the presidency to serve *ad interim* until Larry Faulkner was named president a year later. My 16 years as VPSA gave me the opportunity to work closely with five presidents:

Bill Cunningham
Bill Livingston (interim)
Bob Berdahl
Peter Flawn (interim)
Larry Faulkner.

They were a remarkable set of leaders who did great things for our University.

9. September 1997 – **FIGs**

During the late 1990s, each fall semester began with our office sponsoring a retention conference that brought together faculty and staff from across the campus to share ideas on ways we could improve the student experience in general and graduation rates in particular. Multiple goals included developing smaller class opportunities, improving advising, and creating learning communities.

At the conference in September of 1997, I stood up and committed our office to creating a program of FIGs (**F**reshman **I**nterest **G**roups) on campus. I was aware of such programs at the University of Missouri and the University of Oregon, and I was confident they could be successful on our campus, as well. It would require a cooperative effort of all of our offices and staff.

A FIG is a cluster of classes designed for a specific major and considered a package in the registration process. For example, a freshman biology major might want a biology class, a chemistry class, and an English class. The twenty students in the FIG would have the same three classes plus one or more classes of their own choosing. The FIG would also meet together once a week with an adviser in the associated major. This creates a small learning community that can help a new student adjust to life in a complex academic environment.

The following year was a time of focused effort, led by Ellen McDonald (Jockusch). As a result of her design, and the continued hard work by Cassandra Alvarado (Giguere) and other staff across the campus, FIGs became a key to student success. As we approach the twentieth year of the program I am particularly pleased with the impact it has had on our undergraduates in essentially all colleges.

Here are nine, there have been many more.

Jim Vick
May 1, 2017