

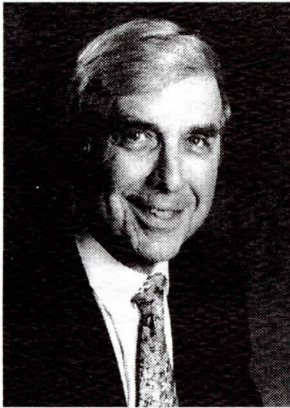


Oakland University News Information Update

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An Interview With Interim President John De Carlo



OU NEWS: "Woody" Varner, Don O'Dowd, George Matthews, Joe Champagne - now John De Carlo. What were some of your thoughts when the board named you as the fifth person to lead the university?

DE CARLO: In all honesty, I was shocked and surprised by the honor. A great many thoughts went through my mind regarding the problems facing the institution and what issues should be immediately addressed. We are in a very difficult period because of the financial constraints placed upon us by virtue of the problems facing the State of Michigan. I do not underestimate the severity of the fiscal problem because it will impact on our every action. One of the critical responsibilities of the president is to attempt to obtain sufficient resources so that the university can function effectively and carry out its objectives. Given the fiscal problems of the state, we know that we are also going to have to exercise some constraint in our actions. That leads to another part of the president's responsibility and that is to seek the input of the university community to determine what is the most equitable allocation of those resources available to the institution.

Has the board given you any specific guidelines on issues you must address during your tenure? If so, what are they?

I have not been provided with any specific guidelines since my appointment was so recent. The chairman and other members of the board have indicated that they view the interim presidency as one that will be active and engage in decision making. We intend to continue the operations of the institution and to make those decisions that need to be made. We shall make those judgements that are necessary to carry out the mission and role of the university. We are not going to defer action or postpone decisions.

Have you had time to formulate any specific plans for the university as we enter a very difficult year for the state and for higher education?

It would be presumptive for me to suggest that I have formulated specific plans for the university. It must be remembered that I was thrust into this position just a few weeks ago. The decision was a total surprise. So consequently, what I am attempting to do is consult with the various constituencies on campus to obtain some input on the issues and concerns that need to be addressed. I have met with the deans and we are in the process of establishing a regular meeting schedule. I have met with some of the faculty and I shall meet with many more faculty members. I have been meeting with the vice presidents in cabinet meetings and we have had extensive budget discussions. I also wish to meet with students to hear their concerns and obtain their input. I intend to engage in a *consultative* form of presidency. All of my decisions and judgements will be made on how a particular action will enhance the educational opportunities of our students and how the decision or judgement will impact on the educational and research mission of the institution.

Each issue, even the paving of a parking lot or road, will be evaluated or based on how that decision will enhance our educational program and support our instructional and research mission. We should inquire if the dollars under consideration should be spent in another way to enhance our academic programs. Everything is going to be focused on our primary mission - to serve the student.

Will you consider filling administrative openings in the cabinet or at the director's level if they occur, either on a full-time or interim basis?

Yes. I intend to address those issues. We shall not postpone necessary personnel actions. I have given thought to the interim positions and to some current and potential vacancies. I shall be making recommendations to the board to resolve some of these issues. I believe that in fairness to all parties we should not delay. We should meet our responsibilities to the institution and to these individuals and make a decision. In further response to your inquiry, I am speaking about issues to both the academic and administrative areas.

You have been active meeting with many groups on campus. How would you characterize your leadership style?

My style will be consultative. As a lawyer, I have been educated to obtain all of the facts and to engage in research and consultation before reaching a decision. I would like our judgements, or leadership, if you will, to be on an informed basis.

I have met with the deans on an *ad-hoc* informal basis and at a second scheduled meeting. I have requested that we meet on a regular basis in order to have their input on academic and other issues. I intend to establish meetings not only with the deans but with the cabinet. I do intend to consult with faculty and will be making an effort to obtain their direct input. As I indicated earlier, I intend to have input from students. That may be a little difficult this summer, but I do not intend to wait until classes start. We are already contacting some of the students who will be back in the fall in order to talk to them about mutual concerns and problems. Quite frankly, my calendar has been very full!

In your opinion, what are the university's strengths and problem areas?

The university has a great many strengths. It is well respected in Lansing and throughout the state and nationally. It has an outstanding faculty and a good institutional reputation. I think we have to build upon current strengths. Our problem areas in many instances relate to the level of available resources. I think if Oakland looks at itself objectively, it is in a better position than many of the other state institutions. All of the state universities have financial problems and some are greater than ours. Western Michigan University has announced it will make a two percent cut in its budget this year and a three percent cut next year. I am merely suggesting we do the same. I am merely demonstrating that our problem is not unique.

The state not only has a deficit problem, but it also has a cash flow problem that will

impact us. The state has determined that for the last quarter of the fiscal year (July, August and September), the state universities and community colleges will not receive their monthly allocation because of the cash flow problem. The state is promising to pay that money sometime after October 1 and before June 30, 1992. We will lose some revenue because we will not have these funds to invest. I believe we can weather that problem, but it is just another issue we must face.

What are the universities major tasks and challenges in the months ahead and, if you could sketch out a long-term blueprint for the success of the university, how would it read?

I would reiterate that the major task will be to preserve the quality of the institution given the fiscal constraints this institution will encounter in the next several years. We receive approximately 60 percent of our funding from the state. All projections indicate that the state, for the next three years, will not be able to infuse substantial additional funds into higher education. It is going to be difficult to make any major changes or adjustments unless it can find other resources or reallocate existing resources in an orderly, humane and compassionate way. I would like to see the implementation of actions in a variety of areas, particularly in the academic area - to buttress and support the positions that we have espoused with respect to our educational and research mission.

How will you handle your current responsibilities of interim president, as well as your responsibilities of vice president of governmental affairs and general counsel and secretary to the board of trustees?

We are currently trying to resolve those issues. These responsibilities are taking an inordinate amount of time and I do not wish to bore anyone with my problem. I am blessed with a good staff and we have begun to delegate tasks in the legal and board areas. The Lansing responsibilities are also very critical and I am developing a plan to resolve this. I have been representing the university in Lansing since 1970. I am blessed with many friends and contacts in Lansing and I believe my position as interim president will assist that relationship. I will need some support on the day-to-day operations and committee meetings in Lansing. I am struggling with some sort of resolution for those assignments. The legislators and executive office have been wonderful and

very supportive of me in view of my appointment as interim president. I believe there is a vital need for a presence in Lansing.

What are your views on the budget situation and future tuition rates for Oakland?

We recently had two intensive meetings with the cabinet to discuss the budget. We have to make a decision this summer. Unfortunately, there are several variables we do not have answers to at this point. We do not know what the exact appropriation from Lansing will be. The governor has proposed a four percent increase and the house and senate have different recommendations - one of which could be as high as 4.7 percent. I don't know if we can rely on any of those projections at this point. There is still a state deficit and there may be a need for further state cuts. We are going to have to make a decision on tuition this summer. I want to be as fair as possible with students. It is conceivable that we may not have a recommendation on tuition until August. That is late, I realize, but it has been done on that schedule before. All of the state universities will be recommending a tuition increase.

I also have to have additional internal budget discussions. If I knew how much we were getting from Lansing and if I had information on all expenditure areas, we could decide on a budget and tuition. At this juncture there are many unknown factors. We could operate on a continuation budget but it is not my preference because it doesn't permit staff to plan and to allocate resources in an orderly fashion.

Is there a closing message or charge you would share with the university community?

I would like to call upon the entire university community to have patience and to provide us with an opportunity to review the issues facing the institution. We shall share with the university community our intentions and what we believe are the critical concerns and problems. If we "reason together," as one of our former presidents stated, and resist jumping to conclusions, we will resolve our problems in an objective and humane fashion. There is no question that on occasion there will be divergent views on certain issues. This is a healthy condition. I would only ask that we attempt to understand the other party's position and then make a judgement based not on personal interest, but on the interest of our students and the academic and research missions of the institution. I can say without reservation that the actions I will take will always be based on what I objectively believe is in the interest of this institution.