

Interview with Robert L. Hardesty

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Begin Tape 1, Side 1

Michael P. Hellrung: This is an interview with President Hardesty by Mike Hellrung. Good afternoon, Mr. Hardesty.

Robert L. Hardesty: How are you?

Hellrung: Just fine. We'll start off with question number one. That is, what is the General Studies Program, and how will it increase the quality of education at Southwest Texas?

Hardesty: The General Studies Program is both a curriculum and a delivery system. We have revised our core curriculum, our general studies program, our academic foundation programs to make sure that every student who graduates from Southwest Texas does receive the broad education of a, what we would consider, an educated person. To make sure that that program is there, in existence, and available. The College of General Studies is the delivery system of the General Studies Program. It's to make sure that nobody falls between the academic cracks, that everybody who goes to school here and that graduates will have had the required number of hours of the courses in this General Studies Program. We feel that higher education had a tendency, and still in many instances has a tendency, to become too specialized, and we think that's necessary. But we also think that everybody who goes to a university needs a good solid liberal arts education as well. We need to teach people who need to teach people, to learn, to learn to learn, teach people to think, as well as to train them. And so the General Studies Program, as I say, is both the curriculum and the delivery system for that philosophy.

Hellrung: Recently we've been experiencing a shortage of funds for universities as well as statewide, and will the shortage of funds adversely affect the General Studies Program?

Hardesty: No, I don't see that that will have an adverse effect at all on the General Studies Program. The General Studies Program is in place, and it's on schedule. And while the shortage of funds will have an adverse impact on some areas of the university, I don't expect it to have an adverse impact on the General Studies Program.

Hellrung: Would you consider Southwest Texas being currently in a crisis situation with respect to funding for other academic programs?

Hardesty: No, we're in a period of retrenchment. We're in a difficult period. Higher education generally, indeed the whole state of Texas, is in a difficult period financially [and] economically. But I wouldn't consider it a crisis situation. We're going to have to slow down some of our programs. We're going to have to cut back. We're going to have to delay some other things. But a crisis situation, I would say no. I think that's a little strong.

Hellrung: What alternative sources of funding have been found to supplement the recent cuts imposed by the state legislature?

Hardesty: Well, if you can't get state funds, the alternative is either federal funds, which are very scarce these days too, or private funds. This is not something new. Our effort to raise private funds has not just come about because of the scarcity of state funds. We've been attempting to raise private funds all along very successfully for a school of our size admission. But we should need to redouble our efforts. There are some areas that, even in good times, the formula system just doesn't fund. Our testing program is a good example of that. So we have to raise outside money to help support our testing program.

Hellrung: What is the formula that you mentioned, the formula system?

Hardesty: Well, the way the state allocates appropriated money is through a formula based on enrollments of the [students] and the generation of semester credit hours at each institution. And they have worked out a series of formulas to decide how much money an institution gets for the number of semester credit hours it generates in a particular area. Some areas, some disciplines generate more money than others. Lab sciences generate more money than a history course, for example. Graduate hours generate more money than undergraduate hours. So, it's a complex formula. But it's the way that the state appropriates money on a specific basis rather than just deciding arbitrarily which institution ought to get how much.

Hellrung: How have the budget cuts of Texas House Bill 1 affected the attainment of your "Nine Goals for the Nineties" as described in your September 26, 1985 speech to the faculty?

Hardesty: Well, I guess the principal impact of the budget cuts has been on our effort and our goal to reduce the student-faculty ratio. We have one of the highest student-faculty ratios in public education, in higher education in the state of Texas. Much too high, as far as we're concerned. And we felt that the quality of instruction demands that we lower that student-faculty ratio, and that's been one of our goals. Now, however, we're not, we have not been getting the kind of appropriation that our growth in the student body would call for under the formula funding. And so, we're just sort of marking time and really not doing anything to greatly reduce the student-faculty ratio. So that's been a disappointment and a frustration and will continue to be until we start getting some additional state funds.

Hellrung: Have the restriction of funds caused the advance registration process to be less successful than hoped for?

Hardesty: No, I don't think it has affected the advance registration. There have been some glitches in the advance registration program, as there always are going to be when you're trying out a complex new system. But basically we're quite satisfied with the advance registration program. It's on schedule. It is working. We found some problem areas that I guess we're going to have to correct. You'll always have mid-course corrections in this. But it's on schedule, and we're pleased with it. And we think when it's all said and done that the students will be pleased with it too.

Hellrung: Do you find yourself spending increasing amounts of time and effort keeping your programs on schedule?

Hardesty: No, I don't think [an] increasing amount of time. You always have to keep riding hard on the programs to make sure that there's no slippage, or no more slippage than you can possibly avoid. But I don't find I'm spending any more time on it than I ever have.

Hellrung: When do you see relief in the student-to-faculty, and similarly the square foot per student, ratios on campus?

Hardesty: Well, we have been making great progress in so far as construction of new facilities on campus. And as a result, we've been making progress in increasing the square footage of E and G [education and grounds] space per student. Now, that seems to be on hold until the end of the next legislative session beginning in January. Hopefully, the legislature will be able to work out some sort of an appropriation process and a revenue process [so] that we'll get back on the track in our appropriations, which will allow the coordinating board to lift its freeze on new construction and we can start building new buildings again. And if that happens, and we go back to our normal formula funding, then I think with the kind of growth that we've experienced, and continue to experience at Southwest Texas, that we'll start receiving the funds that we need to hire additional faculty [and] start reducing the student-faculty workload. It may be, hopefully, within eight or nine months to a year when we start seeing some progress. But I wouldn't want to predict the state's economic conditions could worsen instead of getting better. Then we're in for a long period of retrenchment.

Hellrung: That's pretty much the last question I had written down; however, is there anything else you would like to add as far as any of the questions [asked]?

Hardesty: No, you focused your questions mostly on the current economic crisis in Texas and how it's affected Southwest Texas. And there's no doubt that we've had to cut back and retrench and freeze hiring and go on a four-day—forty hour work week in the summer, close down when we can to save energy and so forth. It's been a tough, troublesome period. Several things I think ought to be said to bring that into perspective. The first is that higher education in Texas has had ten, twelve, thirteen, fourteen good years: years of solid growth, years of increasing appropriations from the legislature, support from the state government that we can be proud of. And so, lean times followed some really good times. And we ought not to be too concerned

about them, if we can get back on track anytime soon. The other thing is that the morale at Southwest Texas on the part of the staff, the faculty, and the student body is extremely high, it has always been high. This is an upbeat, can-do campus. The people have shouldered the hardships that we've been called upon to make and done it without any undo complaints or bitterness. And I think after a year and a half of some severe cutbacks that morale continues to be high. As long as it does, then we'll survive the bad times, come through it, and be ready to go on again.

Hellrung: Well, thank you very much. That pretty much concludes our interview, and I thank you for your time.

Hardesty: It's a pleasure, Mike.

End of interview