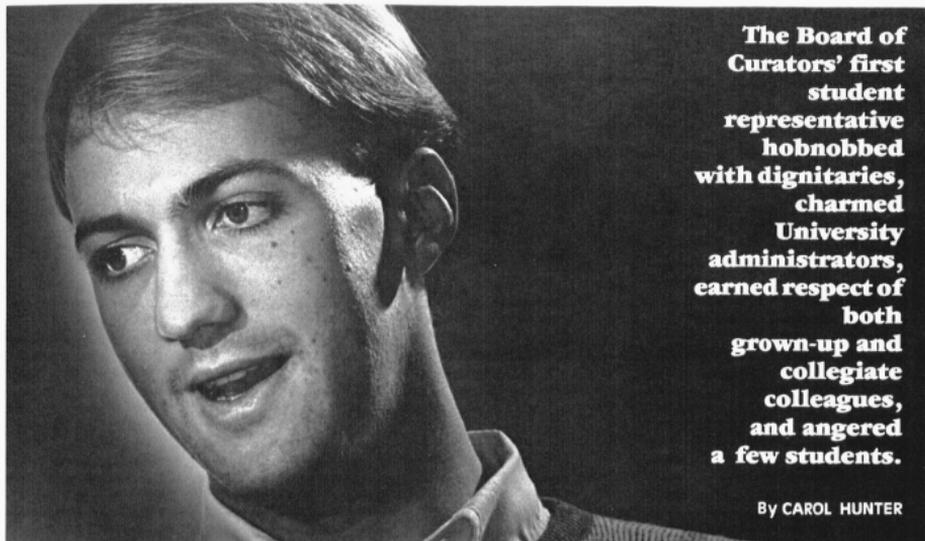


THE FIRST STUDENT CURATOR



The Board of Curators' first student representative hobnobbed with dignitaries, charmed University administrators, earned respect of both grown-up and collegiate colleagues, and angered a few students.

By CAROL HUNTER

WITH THE FINESSE of a seasoned politician, 21-year-old Jay Felton tells an anecdote about leaving his Beta Theta Pi fraternity house before dawn to address honor students in Kansas City. "I'm on the bottom of the totem pole," he laughs, referring to his non-voting position on the Board of Curators. "I give the breakfast speeches."

He makes his point with equal polish, rapping the table to accentuate key concepts: "I'll do whatever it takes to promote the University of Missouri and work with students—the University is Missouri's greatest asset, both for today and tomorrow. It's been an honor and privilege to be part of it."

Since becoming the first student representative to the curators in October 1984, Felton's privileges have included dining with Jehan el-Sadat, Anwar Sadat's widow who lectured in Jesse Auditorium, and jogging alongside University President C. Peter Magrath in a race co-sponsored by the St. Louis Alumni Association chapter to raise scholarship funds.

Despite hobnobbing with dignitaries, the student curator professes no elevated status. "I'm just a student like everybody else, but when I take on a public responsibility, I take on a public trust," says Felton, whose role was created by state legislation to place a student representative on the governing boards of Missouri's four-year, public colleges.

Earning respect of curators was of prime concern. "I didn't go in there and jump up on my soapbox. I don't think I would have accomplished much if I did." Felton chose to blend with the group. "Curators get used to you after awhile. I stayed with them when I attended out-of-town meetings and attended all of the curators' informal lunches and dinners during meetings."

Before Felton was appointed by former Gov. Christopher "Kit" Bond, Curator Jeanne V. Epple, BS HE '49, of Columbia said she was ambivalent about having a student representative on the board. A year later she says, "I feel we've been very fortunate to have someone with Jay's maturity and attitude. He's given a great deal of time and has been effective."

Magrath also compliments the student representative's efforts. "I've enjoyed working with Jay Felton. He's a very bright person who took his assignment seriously and served students with the highest degree of professionalism and integrity."

Though polite, Felton says he hasn't hesitated to differ with his elders, even Magrath. "I'm not going to hold back. I say what I feel and what students feel. I've disagreed with President Magrath, but it's back and forth. Let's talk about it." He wants

to hear what students feel."

Outgoing board President Doug Russell, BS BA '77, of Lebanon, Mo., says Felton's contribution was constructive. "Not that we always agreed, but he participated in a way that added to the discussion and added to making the board more aware of student opinions on issues."

Discussion was Felton's forte. "I've probably been more of a talker compared with the board members. There's one of me and nine of them. I can't be silent on an issue that faces students."

In Felton's view, every issue is a student issue. For example, "Faculty are the University's most important resource as a whole. Students are the most important ingredient. So faculty salaries are a student issue—we need to increase faculty salaries because we don't rank very high in that area with Big Eight/Big Ten institutions."

Though he soft-pedals his individual influence on the board—"Even if I were allowed to vote, there hasn't been a vote I could have swung"—Felton takes pride in his work on a student-fee-policy task force. "Tuition has doubled since 1979. No more. From now on fees won't increase by more than the Higher Education Price Index on inflation, and fees will be set one year in advance so you can plan your budget."

APPLAUSE GREETS student representative Jay Felton at his first Board of Curators meeting in Memorial Union in October 1984.



Felton has financed his education by working summers and vacations as a law clerk, and with his father, Frank, BS Agr '62, on the family farm near Maryville, Mo. His mother, Lynn, BS Ed '63, is a homemaker.

Though pleased about the new fee policy, Felton says he didn't bring a roster of goals to the board. "The only promise I made was to work hard and establish the credibility of the position. I think I've done that."

Curator Russell gives Felton high marks. "He did an excellent job in trying to fulfill a difficult task, which was to represent a diverse student body of undergraduate, graduate and professional students located on four campuses."

From his perspective, Felton says, "There's no way to speak for 50,000 students. There's not one animal called student opinion. If I disagree with a student view I still will take it to the board, as well as saying how I feel personally."

Three of the four student-body presidents credit Felton with representing each campus equally. "From the diversity of students, even on this Campus alone, I know how hard it is to represent your constituency," says Hope Craig of UMC. "I think Jay

did the best he could."

Craig's counterpart on the Kansas City campus, Michael Temporal, also praises Felton's performance. "I found him to be very helpful in communicating student needs."

Says Scott Lucas, UMR student-body president, "It's been his responsibility to see how well students could be represented from his centralized location. He did a pretty good job. I know Jay didn't make everybody happy, but I don't know that that's necessarily a deficiency."

Only one student-body president, Greg Barnes of UMSL, takes exception to Felton's record. "He's done a lot to establish the credibility of the position with curators, but he hasn't done much to establish credibility with students, especially ours. He shies away from major battles on issues that students propose. He takes the easy way out by agreeing with the curators."

In his first curators' meeting, Felton's stance on University investments in U.S. firms operating in racially segregated South Africa irked UMSL student leaders who called for full divestment.

"I was dropped in a mine field and told to plot my way out," Felton says of the

meeting. "I think I did the best I could" by supporting a plan to discourage the University from future investment in firms that were not signatories to the Sullivan Principles, a set of equal-employment guidelines. "You can't turn a deaf ear to people who have money in the retirement program," which the University funds through investment income.

"I had to take the heat for my opinions," says Felton, who traveled to St. Louis to meet with his critics. "There was a communication problem, which was my fault. I learned you have to be very methodical in making sure students understand what you say. I had said some students didn't favor the University's policy; I should have said students from the University of Missouri-St. Louis are against this policy."

With other student-body presidents, Lucas of UMR served with Felton on a task force that recently examined the University's investment policy. The group recommended divestment of current holdings in firms not adhering to the Sullivan Principles. "Jay's style was inquisitive," Lucas says. "Other people were trying to push their own position, but Jay used the task force as a way to become informed on the issue and people's feelings."

Dr. Hugh Stephenson, professor of sur-

WELCOMING FELTON are, from left, former curator Charles E. Kruse, UMKC Chancellor George Russell and UMC Chancellor Barbara Uehling.



Trent Bushner/Columbia Missourian

gery and faculty adviser to Felton's fraternity, says the student curator's strong points include a wide perspective. "He doesn't view the University of Missouri solely from the student's point of view. He certainly represents students' opinions, but he has a broad view of the University and its goals, needs, accomplishments, good points and weak points without a pedestrian approach limited to one campus or one school."

Indeed, Felton expounds upon the need to raise taxes to improve the state's entire system of higher education. "We in higher education are the basis for building the state's future," says the fifth-generation Missourian. "The University of Missouri is the cornerstone."

Of his own education, the political science major says, "I'm a very satisfied consumer." Board meetings are the only time he misses class. "I read in *Forbes* that the thing most correlative to grades is class attendance." During his tenure as student curator, Felton has earned nothing but A's, boosting his grade-point average to 3.886 on a 4.0 scale.

He regularly takes courses in Mizzou's Honors College. "I try to take upper-level classes outside of my major to understand

things." He also attends summer school at Northwest Missouri State University.

"The key is not to get a good grade point," he says of his studies. "The key to college is learning how to learn."

Still, Felton's impressive grades have placed him on five honor rolls. He also holds junior membership in Phi Beta Kappa, and has been initiated into Mortar Board National Scholastic Honor Society, QEBH, Sigma Rho Sigma honor society and Phi Kappa Phi national honor society. His numerous scholarships include the Arts and Science Honors Undergraduate Research Fellowship; his topic is student representation and proliferation in the United States.

"You have to have a combination of activities," he says. "I have a good social life—you have to have an understanding girlfriend."

His resume lists participation in intramural sports and membership in 15 Campus groups and committees, including four years on the Alumni Association Student Board.

In the community Felton has been a volunteer for charity fund raisers and a counselor for Boys State. The Eagle Scout is a junior deacon at his hometown church, First Christian, where he's also recreation leader for Bible school.

After graduating with honors in May,

Felton plans to attend law school and perhaps pursue a career in international law, the foreign service, or as a diplomat or an attorney.

Felton's term as student curator officially expired Jan. 1, but he will continue to serve until Gov. John Ashcroft appoints a successor from UMR. Future student representatives will serve two-year terms with the position rotating among campuses.

For his successor, Felton advises, "Work hard academically and on the board, and work to be a complete person. Take time to have fun. You won't be a good student representative if you lose touch with students. Realize that you are representing 50,000 students, and that there is not just one student opinion."

The next student curator also should travel to other campuses more frequently than he did, Felton says. He hopes that student governments can pay expenses of his successor, since most board meetings are in Columbia.

In the future, Felton says he might like to be a full-fledged curator, but "I'll work for education whenever I can, whether I'm on this board or not. I love education." □