

**CAN A
BIG CAMPUS
BE
A CARING
CAMPUS
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**AN
INTERVIEW
WITH
BARBARA UEHLING**



No one argues the point that we're big. Mizzou's 23,000 students, 1,500 faculty, 4,500 employees, 14 separate schools and colleges, and \$170 million operating budget are facts impossible to refute. But there is some concern—and our admissions' people hear this often—that the University of Missouri-Columbia is too large to be really effective, too large for the good of the individual students.

Obviously, I wouldn't agree. In fact, I have not heard as many complaints about bigness in Missouri as I have in some other states and other schools. One of the greatest benefits to the student is the variety that we offer. This is vital in our graduate programs. For example we simply could not have a strong program in nutrition without strong Schools of Home Economics, Veterinary Medicine, Medicine, Nursing, and a quality College of Agriculture. But our comprehensiveness and diversity are important to undergraduates, too. Entering freshmen rarely are dedicated to a particular field. I think many times it is wise that they are not. I talked not long ago to a waiter in a Columbia restaurant. This student had come here to study engineering; then he decided maybe he was interested in things a little more artistic. Our interdisciplinary nature enabled him to work out a joint major that simply would not have been possible in a smaller, less comprehensive institution.

A larger institution often has a larger selection of very high quality faculty. I'm not suggesting that a smaller institution can't have good faculty, because many of them do, but we have a great number of highly qualified faculty. Students, even in their early years, are exposed to excellent teachers at Missouri. In fact, our very size and reputation tend to draw topflight faculty.

What about outside the classroom?

A university is also a living place. It is a place where young people learn about other people, where they confront new ideas and alternative values, where they begin to solidify their own self-concept. Too often, we limit our viewpoint about what happens in education to the classroom when, in fact, much education is going on outside the classroom. And if students are going to live in a very big world, why not come to a large campus where they can learn to deal with all kinds of people and all kinds of ideas?

Another thing that pleases me about the Columbia Campus is the number of events that are taking place every week. In October, a Mizzou student could hear a superb violinist, Itzhak Perlman, country singer Kenny Rogers, and the rock group, Atlanta a Rhythm Section. Who else has a truly fine Museum of Art and Archaeology, Broadway shows — and the Mizzou Tigers?

A lot of critics will concede the opportunities available on a large campus. But they're worried about the individual student's becoming just a number who receives little individual attention. What about the large classes?

Some of the data I have seen on class size suggest this: Probably the class size least effective is the size often considered typical, 40 to 45 students. The classes in which students derived the greatest benefit were the very small classes, and we have a good many of these, and the very large classes. The latter is true, perhaps, because we often put our teachers who are very good performers in our large classes. Mack Jones teaches Shakespeare in an unair-conditioned room on Friday afternoons to 450 students who choose that course because Mack Jones makes Shakespeare live.

Every teacher is not a Mack Jones, of course. When a teaching assistant becomes involved in an undergraduate's education, is that student getting quality education?

One of the things I'm really pleased with on this campus is the seriousness with which many of the departments are taking the TA program. For example, our Romance language department has a program for training teaching assistants that is just superb. They make sure their TAs are very well supervised, that the exams they prepare are reviewed by senior faculty members. Senior faculty members go into the classrooms and evaluate the TAs. In short, there is a real teaching interchange between the senior faculty and the TAs. The math department holds weekly or bi-weekly meetings with its TAs to discuss any problems, suggest how to cover portions of the book, and review test objectives. Once each semester a senior faculty sits in on a TA's class to mark his or her progress. The English department has a similar program and, in addition, conducts a two or three-day pre-school workshop. The English department's "Manual for Teaching Assis-

tants" has been requested by other large universities. Generally the student evaluations of teaching assistants have been favorable. So, again, just having senior faculty members is not in itself a criterion.

When I was visiting with the students in the Rollins dormitory group, there was some concern about some international-student TAs not being proficient enough in English. Although some of this might be the students' inability to listen to dialects, we may have a problem, and we need to be aware of it. We may need to give more research assistantships to international graduate students rather than teaching assistantships.

National statistics indicate that the attrition rate for entering students is about 50 percent. Some persons seem to feel that at least a part of Mizzou's attrition is due to poor advising.

I am concerned about the advising system. I have not been on any campus where I thought the advising was all that it should be. I'm talking with the deans now about that very concern, because I want us to do a better job. We need to reward faculty for good advising just as for good teaching and good research. We need to make advising an important part of their evaluation.

Incidentally, in our last allocation of unrestricted gift money, we allotted more than \$1,800 for a workshop for 80 academic advisors and \$7,800 for the Teaching Assistant Award program.

But back to attrition: I think one of the most important factors in determining whether or not students stay in school is their ability to determine what they want to do. Also, many who leave are "stopping out" for a time, then returning later.

How does the University help the undecided make a good choice?

Our Career Planning and Placement Center has made real progress. It provides career information, workshops, testing, individual counseling and other special programs. Testing includes interest and personality tests. The center has a wide variety of career information. One of its programs involves alumni, ASK — Alumni Sharing Knowledge. These graduates talk to students interested in their specific field. And as important as the Campus offering these counseling services is the fact that our students increasingly are taking advantage of them.



Chancellor Uehling calls on a questioner during a visit with residents of the Rollins group.

How do you measure the quality of an institution? How can you tell whether we're effective?

I ask myself that almost every day. One way is to take a look at the things that are happening right now: the reputation of the faculty, the number of times they are sought as outside consultants, their participation in national and international projects, the outstanding projects going on right here. And after being here for 15 months, I am more and more impressed with the quality of this Campus.

Another criteria is the alumni. Where are they after 15 years? And I don't mean only what kinds of jobs do they have, although ours are doing very well, but how happy are they? How many have needed therapy? How many vote? What's the incidence of alcoholism? There are measurements for those kinds of information.

But, most of all — and I sincerely mean this — a quality university must be a place where students are significantly changed by their participation in the enterprise, in ways that we value as a society and in ways that will make them better persons. They must learn not to be passive in responding to life as it confronts them, nor merely to cope with it. They must become people who can go out and energetically engage the future. We believe our students are developing the self-confidence and the skills to do that. We like what we are doing, and we are proud of it. □