



Student President Dave Thomas Talks About The Communications Gap

The Columbia campus of the University of Missouri seemed far away from Columbia University this past year, certainly as far as student unrest and disturbances were concerned. We do have our problems, of course. And the articulate leader of the Missouri Students Association, Dave Thomas—who is required to wear dark glasses as a result of a baseball injury—talks about some of them in an exclusive interview with the Alumnus.

Dave, what kind of an alumnus do you think today's student will make for the alumni association later?

I'm not sure, but I don't believe he's going to be a particularly active one. Part of this is due to more off-campus students who are not too closely involved with campus activities. And, in general, I don't believe the average student is as interested in the University as he once was. He is more interested in himself individually. When he gets out of school and in his own profession, I don't think he is going to be concerned about coming back to the campus. And it's not just our students; this is what any campus or college is going to have to face.

If this is true, if students aren't interested, then how do you explain the riot at Columbia University or the sit-ins at various other universities?

A lot of it, I think, is that the students are trying to express their rights as individuals. They are more concerned about this than the university. Take Columbia University, for example; they were willing to go in the buildings when there was a possibility of destroying a part of their campus. They were more interested in themselves individually than they were in the University as a whole, perhaps.

Why was the MU campus relatively quiet this past year?

This is debatable. One of the things that everyone goes back to is the Midwest conservatism that we have in this area. But as a whole, I think the students here are recognized fairly well by the administration. We were supposed to have had some students from Berkeley come in last fall and try to get something organized. The story came to me that they gave up after about two weeks and said there wasn't much hope of trying to get students here to do anything drastic. They seemed to be pretty well satisfied. Of course, we know that students here were dissatisfied to some extent with the administration and some of its policies, but not

enough to go marching. How long this will continue, I don't know.

We seem to have a relatively small hippie population, don't we?

Yes, I have heard friends from back East or from the West Coast say they were really surprised at the dress of students on our campus. They were just amazed. Everyone looked nice compared to their colleges. Harvard is one I think of in particular.

Why do you think this is?

Well, a lot of things. Going back to the statement we made earlier, Midwest conservatism. But there's something else I like to think, and it's that here at the University of Missouri we still have a good set of moral values. This could be debated by some I guess, but I would say morals are better here than in some of the other colleges and universities.

Do you think there's a relationship between our small hippie population and the low incidence of campus turmoil?

Yes, I definitely do.

There was one incident last spring that I think we ought to talk about, the one in which a student was shot and wounded by a Columbia policeman.

Our incidents last spring were far from anything like they had at Columbia University. At the time, I was in the hospital; so all I can go by is the information that was given to me. But I was right in the middle of it even though I was in the hospital, you might say, because the boy that was shot also was taken there. It started out, if I'm correct, Wednesday night with a panty raid, which is nothing unusual for a college campus, especially during final week in the spring. And it was the first one that we had had. I talked with Dean Matthews (the dean of students) before the incident Thursday night and he said he was just hoping the weather would stay cool and that the rain would

continue because as long as it did, he was pretty sure there would not be any trouble. But the weather didn't cooperate, so you could have expected something to happen on Thursday night. There wasn't any organized group as such, but small groups of 10 or 12 here, 10 or 12 there, just roaming around. They weren't even approaching any residence halls or sorority houses. The police were called, and one boy lifted the officer's cap and began running. Shots were fired. At the time the officer didn't even know that the boy had been hit, except that he did fall, but he got up and started running. The Boone County Hospital called the Columbia Police and reported it, so all the Columbia officers and the University security police were called together and this is how they first found out about it. I think it was poor judgment on the part of the officer who fired the shots. However, I will admit the student also was in the wrong to have taken the hat. He will be brought before the University's disciplinary officials this fall. The officer was suspended, I think for three days, and then readmitted to the force. Well, I am not the judge on this; however from the students' viewpoint, it can look kind of bad in one sense. Any time students are in the wrong, it looks as if police can open fire, and the officer doesn't really have to answer for it. I don't think this is normal, or proper, police practice.

How should a panty raid be controlled?

I've never taken part in one, so I don't know exactly what goes on. It seems to me that one of the best ways to control these boys is to keep the residence halls' lights off and the girls away from the windows, not urging the boys on. You are always going to have something like this during final week. You've got tension that builds up and the students are going to let it off. Panty raids are just not the riots that Columbia University and some of the other colleges had. They are just all together different. I am not saying whether they're right or wrong, but I don't think they are anything to be broken up with gun fire.

Have you seen President Weaver's recent strong statement on "interference with (the Uni-

versity's) normal and regular activities"? (Editor's note: Text of the Weaver statement appears on page 36.)

Yes, and it upset me, to be right honest. Not that I thought there was anything wrong with what he said nor the way it was said, but I don't understand the timing. I have been in close contact with the president of the UMKC student body and he reacted through the *Kansas City Star* with two statements. To some extent, I go along with him. I think that Dr. Weaver's statement needs to be defined more. It is definitely vague. I think that this is one thing that the students are going to want in black and white, to know what they can and cannot do. I think perhaps President Weaver is looking at it in a different light. His main purpose may have been to make a statement to the people of the state, and not to the students.

Let's say that some people came in and took over Jesse Hall and the employees couldn't get to work or, worse, the employees were here and couldn't get out.

I think if we had something like this, then, perhaps, President Weaver's statement is good. But the thing of it is, our students haven't done anything resembling that here and have never indicated they might. I'll definitely agree that people taking over buildings should be removed. They have no right in there. It isn't a student right to be able to take over Jesse Hall, but this isn't what our students are wanting. That implication is what I didn't like about the statement.

What do you think some of the problems are between students and the administration and/or faculty?

The key one right now is that there's no communication. This is what I hope that my administration will be able to do, improve the lines of communications. What I have been trying to do is work with the Chancellor and, hopefully, the President and then going a step further to the Board of Curators. At the present time there is no communication at all between

the students and the Board of Curators.

Last spring after I was elected, I had regularly scheduled meetings twice a month with the Chancellor and, then, if it was needed, I could have had them more often. I want to be able to go to him and tell him what is going on in student government, what is being talked about, so that he doesn't have to get the *Maneater* or the *Columbia Missourian* to read what the students are doing or see what they are saying. This is something that we haven't had before. I'm hoping to be able to have this same type of thing with President Weaver, to be able to meet with him perhaps once a month or once every two months. I also feel that the 40,000 students on our four campuses have a right to at least be heard before the Board of Curators.

How can this be done?

By being able to have some student representation from time to time, preferably the student body president from each campus. But if not, one of the four should be able to present ideas to the Board of Curators. Now, I'm not saying we should sit in on the meetings at all times but at least we should be heard, and this is something that we haven't been able to do. My predecessor was refused admittance to a Curators' meeting last February which was taking up student disciplinary procedures.

What is the proper role of a student at a large University? What I am getting at is that on many campuses students are asking for representation on decision-making groups. Do you see a role for students at Missouri in helping shape academic programs or in helping choose a new dean, chancellor or president, this type of thing?

No I don't. A lot of students here at the University of Missouri, as well as at a lot of other universities, think that within the four years that they are on campus they're going to remake the whole University. Now I look at it somewhat like a dog chasing a car. What would the dog do to the car if it caught it? What would the students do if they got all of what they wanted in the four years? When they graduate they leave the University. Many stu-

dents don't stop to realize that there have been people here before them and there are going to be people here after them.

Now, maybe students could be contacted for



some brain-storm sessions or to make recommendations. But they shouldn't have a decision-making role on administrative matters.

However, I do feel students have the right to express their opinions, including as I was saying earlier, to the Board of Curators. Getting more specific, we have proposed a \$10 student activity fee increase — \$1 for a new divisional student government, \$4 for the present MSA structure, and \$5 for capital improvements, such as intramural playing fields. It got through the MSA Senate twice; it has gone through Mr. Dickeson's office; Dean Matthews' office; Dean Callis's office; the chancellor approved it; and as far as we knew it would be coming up before the Curators. We had been told, hopefully, the May meeting, and definitely in the June meeting, that it would be put on the agenda. Yet it has never been brought up, and we don't know why.

I think, to sum it up, the students' right is to be respected as individuals, collectively and individually. This applies not only to the Curators, the administration and faculty, but to the student government, as well. This is what I hope to be able to do, to open up the channels of communication so all of these elements can meet each other as individuals, as people. □