

## IS THERE LIFE AFTER DEANING?

By 'Josef Martin'

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When Elaine Gardiner invited Josef Martin to give this talk, he was quite delighted. But when we heard that it was for that part of your program that used to be Bernard O'Kelly's "Hotline", we began to worry – "Hotline" had been everyone's favorite, how could anything else adequately fill that slot?

But then I quickly cheered up again. If there's no "Hotline" now, then obviously things are not as good nowadays as they used to be in the good old days; and after all, that's every Dean's secret hope: that when he stops being Dean, that others will soon notice that things are going to the dogs.

Elaine suggested as a topic the often posed but never answered question, "Is there life after deaning?" But she also suggested that it be a light-hearted presentation.

As I started to think about it, I soon realized how very complex and multi-faceted the question is, depending as it does on how long one has been Dean, what one did before that, what one has been doing while Dean – and that made me realize just how well I've made the adjustment back to being a professor: clearly, I was not going to come up with any useful, straightforward answer.

Deans, of course, also don't come up with useful straightforward answers – but at least they could, if only they ever wanted to. (And dared to.)

If one *has* to give a direct, yes-or-no, answer to the question, "Is there life after deaning?", then of course the answer can only be "No"... just as it has to be "No" if you ask whether there's life after retirement, or life *after* anything at all: by saying "after", you're focusing on what's coming to an end. But if you ask, "Can one be happy as a professor after having been a Dean?", the answer of course is a most resounding "Yes".

Indeed, one can be much happier as a professor after having been Dean than after *not* having been Dean.

While Dean, I would often tell the faculty that a professor's life is the most desirable of all; and now I've seen that I was telling the truth – as usual – when I said that.

But as I indicated just before, it's important that you look forward to doing something: to writing something specific, teaching some specific courses, sitting in on some particular courses or doing some particular reading.

One not too specific and yet definite thing that all Deans can look forward to is the role of elder statesman. I don't mean offering unsought advice, or a lot of saying "I told you so" – though there'll be ample opportunity for that, and of course it can be fun once in a while – but I mean quietly making plain that you're ready to share your experience simply for whatever good it might do. I've found to my pleasure that I've been able to be of some use and even comfort to a number of colleagues, simply through giving them some insight into the ways in which things happen and what they mean – or rather, what they *don't* mean: for as you know, all academics are inherently paranoid, convinced that everything is somehow designed or intended to affect them individually, personally... and of course undesirably. I'm sure you've all heard of the two professors who run into one another, and the one asks, "Have you heard that they've just sighted the largest-ever iceberg in the middle of the Atlantic?" whereupon the other replies, "No, I hadn't heard; I suppose that means we'll get lower raises next year?"

You can enjoyably dramatize the elder-statesman role with the occasional knowing smile or expressive inclination of the head, to show that you're still privy to the high mysteries that remain hidden from the laity: but actually you soon lose the sense of being in touch with everything that's happening. However, "The more things change, the more they are the same", as the saying goes. Just as you can read no newspapers for months on end and still be able to reconstruct most of the stories after glancing at the headlines, so too you can – once having been there – reconstruct from very slender clues, what precisely is going on in administrative circles: – history repeating itself. For instance, I'm indebted to my successor for letting me know that the same distinguished professor who had told *me* how to hire a department head had favored *him*, ten years later, with precisely the same advice; but Herman didn't have to tell me the whole story, all he had to say was, "So-and-so came to see me..." and already I knew the rest.

As well as looking forward to doing some specific things after having being Dean, you can also look forward to *not* doing some specific things. I positively bask in the knowledge, for example, that I shall never

again have to sit in a meeting in which the Head of the Extension Service asserts that our Land-Grant University is not properly serving the State because our admission standards are too high.

As you join a Department, remember that people will always treat you better if they see that you're doing something for them than if they think you've taken something from them: so I'm very grateful for the fact that when I joined my present Departments it was made clear that my position was being *added* to the previously established ones, and that the operating budget was being augmented to take care of my future expenses for travel, telephone, and the like. It would make a lot of sense for Deans - and other administrators - to have clearly put in writing, when they're first appointed, the conditions under which they'll return to teaching; but you're rarely in the mood for that at the time, and it can still be done satisfactorily well before you actually resign. Beyond that, this group might consider issuing some guidelines for that sort of thing; to assume for Deans something of the role that the AAUP plays - or used to play - in defining principles that ought to govern the interaction between individuals and institutions.

What I've found I miss most is that I no longer have all the secretarial help that I could use; and that I'm at the mercy of someone else's budget for such things as chalk or writing paper. On the other hand, I now feel no responsibility whatsoever to see that the budget gets or remains balanced... in fact I see it as my duty to demand the purchase of anything that I can think of... and to get offended when that doesn't happen... and to ask whether "the university" apparently isn't interested at all in quality?

I wrote in my book that being a professor is in a few respects very poor preparation for becoming a Dean. The reverse also applies. I've had to revert, from being responsible for things to being un-responsible; and some people have even suggested that I've gone the whole hog by becoming in fact quite *ir*responsible. Deadlines don't bother me at all any more; if I don't meet them, it's clearly the fault of the secretaries for not typing the stuff in time, or of the Department for not having enough secretaries, or of "the administration" for asking for things at ridiculously short notice. In other words, whatever happens now it's *never my* fault - whereas when I was Dean, no matter what had happened, it was *always my* fault. It's no longer my job now to solve problems, rather it's part of my function to *create* problems...

If you think that sounds truly irresponsible, I have to tell you that I learned it while I was an administrator. One of our Vice-Presidents - admittedly not one of my favorites - used to keep saying, "There are no problems, only opportunities". So nowadays I'm just trying to create plenty of opportunities for him... (and maybe one day he'll actually *grasp* one).

So there can be a wonderful life after deaning. But I sincerely hope that most of you won't believe that. For now more than ever I'm clear about the need for dedicated people to accept the onus of academic administration; and now more than ever, I'm grateful to those who do so, leaving the rest of us free for other things: to think and to write, to teach... and to complain and criticize to our heart's content.

I felt truly honored to receive this invitation; there is no group that I respect more. Many, many thanks.