



OAKLAND AND ME

A Look Back at My Decanal Years

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Retrospectives are always fun since you have the chance to look back and color your memory however you see fit. So, when I was asked to write a retrospective of my years as dean of Oakland's business school, how could I pass up such an opportunity?

Actually, this should be easy, since I recently re-created lots of this as part of the oral history project for Oakland's 50th anniversary.

The fact is, however, that there is no need to be a revisionist. Remember the line from *The Manchurian Candidate* that was permanently installed into the memory of Frank Sinatra: "Raymond Shaw is the kindest, bravest, warmest, most wonderful human being I've ever known in my life"? Well, I've repeated a corollary of this line several times, and unlike Mr. Sinatra, I really mean it: "My years as dean, from 1979 to 1991, were the most professionally rewarding of my entire academic career." Let's see why.

In 1979, a search was undertaken for the replacement of original dean of Oakland's (then named) School of Economics and Management. I had just come off an unpleasant experience at the University of Detroit, where after a 15-year tenure, I found it desirable to take a leave no pay. I happily landed a visiting professorship at The University of Michigan-Dearborn where I had many friends on the faculty.

However, as luck would have it, in May or so, I was casually reading the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and saw an ad for Oakland's business school deanship. It looked like the right thing to explore at that stage of my academic career and I applied. It turned out that Oakland's assistant dean (John Tower) lived less than a mile from my home. So, even though I was a late applicant, we were able to expedite things.

I remember the interview process vividly. I chose not to stay at Meadow Brook Hall, but did have a dinner there with the search committee. It was the last day of Stouffer's catering contract, and if I had to base my decision on the quality of that meal, this piece would never have been written! Also, the very day I interviewed with President Donald O'Dowd was the day he announced that he was joining the SUNY system. So, I'd be going to a university which would soon be commencing a search for a new president. The uncertainty was not appealing, but at least there was stability in the provost's office.

Alas, I was not the first choice. Since the faculty were concerned about the lack of the business school's visibility in the business community, in their wisdom they recommended someone with virtually no academic experience but who was a prominent business person in Detroit. It turned out that this person "had some issues," so they turned to me as their second choice. However, by that time I had already committed to a full teaching schedule at Dearborn.

I remember asking the provost, Fred Obear, if we could delay the appointment until January. He was emphatic in insisting that I begin no later than September 1st. I told him he had to call his counterpart at Dearborn, Gene Arden, to get me off the hook. The best they could do was to relieve me of all classes except one at 8:00 a.m. three days a week. So, after I was appointed, I began teaching at Dearborn those three days and then pedaling to Oakland (a 45 minute drive) immediately after class. Not fun!

My first deans' meeting was a real "Welcome to Oakland!" It was around Labor Day, and Labor Day every three years at Oakland means it's the last throes of bargaining for the Faculty

Agreement. So, the major agenda item of the meeting was to lay out our strategies in the event of a strike. Boy, I do not remember anyone telling me about this during the interview process. Happily, they settled *just* before classes were to begin. I soon discovered that every third Labor Day meant either a last minute settlement or a strike (there *was* one bargaining when neither of these held!).

During my interview, Pres. O'Dowd informed me that he was in process of putting together a Board of Visitors for the school. I must confess I didn't have a clue what a Board of Visitors was. I discovered it's just an east coast term for a business advisory council. Nonetheless, O'Dowd drew on the Meadow Brooks to collect a "who's who in Detroit-area business." The chair was F. James McDonald, soon to become president of General Motors, and included the CEOs of KMart, First Federal, and Comerica, the president of Ford Motor Company and several other distinguished businessmen and professionals.

Although many concerns were articulated by the faculty during the interview process, I did not appreciate the enormity of so many things, including:

- The lack of advising support. The school had no professional advisors: the faculty were not involved in the process, and only one person was doing the advising for nearly 2,000 undergraduates and over 200 MBA students.
- The inability to recruit appropriately credentialed faculty. The school was funded by the provost for new positions at only \$20,000. This was at least \$10,000 below current market requirements for faculty in key functional areas.
- The severe salary compression present for most key faculty in the school.
- The lack of full-time faculty to support the tremendous student demand for the school's courses.
- The total lack of infrastructure to implement the necessary steps for professional accreditation (a mandate delivered by the faculty).

Happily, the dean of the Engineering School came to my rescue since many of the above were shared problems. He proposed that we go to the provost as a team to get a common resolution of those problems. His solution worked, and we were able to get a significant infusion of salary dollars to address the compression issue and an agreement to fund new positions at market rates.

That really began an unprecedented run of financial support for the school. George Matthews, the acting president, funded an advisor's position, and we hired Katie Kazarian (nee Clark) to straighten out the advising mess and implement a rigorous set of systems. Her work gave the school much needed administrative credibility within the university.

Upon Katie's hiring, we immediately began enforcing the major standing requirement which was in the catalog and the prerequisites for our courses. This caused some resentment on campus, but once everyone understood what we were doing, and why, that became a non-issue. However, the problem our students had with the calculus course, which was required for major standing, was a real issue. The math department was teaching a traditional calculus course which had very little meaning for business students. So, after many, many meetings with the math department faculty we were finally able to find an appropriate textbook and come to a common understanding that the focus of the course should be on business and statistical applications of calculus.

I immediately began working with our faculty to identify those areas where we needed additional personnel and to train them in recruiting techniques for the functional areas. The school, which had a rich tradition of strength in both economics and organization behavior, was really quite naïve about the other key areas of business administration.

We also decided to revamp the MBA curriculum, which meant going through the Graduate Council. This was my first real introduction to Oakland's faculty politics. After surviving a few bumps in the road, the revision was approved.

On top of putting in long days as dean, I did not want to

forego the classroom experience. So, in my second year, I also taught an MBA finance course. This proved to be not such a hot idea. The demands for my time, including many evening functions, were so great that I ceased teaching in the evening after only one semester.

The next major hurdle was to address our needs for professional accreditation by the AACSB (American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business). John Tower and I attended innumerable workshops and conferences to learn as much as we could. We always went together and compared notes afterwards to be sure we each heard (and interpreted) the material similarly.

After several reasonably successful recruiting years, we applied for accreditation. We really did not appreciate how exhaustive a process it is. Just the preparation of the self-study was overwhelming. We had our visit, and at the end of it the team informed us that we were nowhere near ready. We were, of course, disappointed, but realistically knew we were approaching this first application as a learning process. The team's report was very helpful in laying out exactly what we needed to do. To avoid a "no" decision, we withdrew our application.

By this time, Keith Kleckner had moved into the provost's office and Joe Champagne was our president. Both of these gentlemen understood how important accreditation was to both the school and the university. A sure way to get recognition in the business community is to join the elite group of accredited schools, which at that time in Michigan included only U-M (Ann Arbor), Michigan State and University of Detroit (whose accreditation was very iffy). The support that we received from Messrs. Champagne and Kleckner was extraordinary, and after a few years we re-applied.

About this time my first five-year term as dean was coming to an end. The faculty felt very strongly about using a process not unlike a faculty member coming up for promotion. I did not believe that was appropriate since a review for an administrator should have a different focus than one for a faculty

member. I met with the key faculty drivers and we worked out a compromise. They circulated a rather detailed questionnaire to all faculty and staff regarding my performance. I found the responses very helpful in planning my next five years.

We also realized in the accreditation process that we were not helped by having the school named the “School of Economics and Management.” It gave a false impression of our mission. So, we decided to change the name. After examining several alternatives, we settled on a rather pedestrian “School of Business Administration.” I remember the Board of Trustees meeting when they were to approve the new name. A trustee asked why we rejected “School of Business.” With as deadpan an expression as I could mount, I responded that given Oakland’s penchant for using acronyms (SECS, SHES, SON, CAS, etc.), we did not think it was a good idea to be called the School of Business. The new name was approved, post haste!

We were very excited during the second accreditation visit since we were sure all of our ducks were in a row. We had the audacity to schedule a celebratory dinner with the team on their last evening with us. However, that afternoon the team chair suggested to me that I cancel the dinner since they were not going to recommend accreditation. We were devastated. When their written report came, I remember my dismay. The issues they raised in the report were almost all outside of the scope of the accreditation standards. I immediately called Provost Kleckner and we went on one of our infamous walks. (We had established a tradition that whenever something went really bad for either one of us, rather than mope privately, we’d call each other and take an extended walk around campus, crying on each other’s shoulders.)

I quickly convened our Board of Visitors and met with several colleague deans who had accreditation experience to discuss strategy. As a result of these meetings and several sessions with our department chairs, we crafted a carefully written and well documented response to the report. Champagne and

Kleckner also accompanied me for a personal visit with the full AACSB accreditation committee in St. Louis.

The annual AACSB meeting was in Dallas. The procedure was to leave an envelope in your mailbox with the final decision. It's much like applying for college: if you get a slim response, it's probably a rejection; if it's chubby it probably includes additional paperwork to be filled out which is a good sign. I remember periodically checking my mailbox and finally seeing a chubby envelope! I immediately called Pres. Champagne, Provost Kleckner, and the SBA office with the good news.

With the granting of our accreditation, a major milestone for our school had been reached—an internationally accepted accrediting body had recognized the overall quality of our business school. Overnight, we joined the elite group of business schools within Michigan who were AACSB accredited. Our students began receiving interviews from major employers in the Midwest based on the fact that we were AACSB accredited. Things had really fallen into place, and the school was functioning at a considerably higher level. We had an outstanding group of faculty, highly qualified undergraduate and graduate students, a dedicated staff and respect on campus.

With the end of my second five-year term approaching, I began thinking about what else I could do for the school. As soon as we firmed up accreditation, I began teaching one undergraduate class each winter (fall was too busy with faculty reviews). I even also managed to keep up, on a limited basis, with my scholarly work, eking out a few publications. When I met with Mr. Kleckner for my second review, I warned him that the probability of my finishing a third term was very small, indeed. And, within a year of that review I informed him and the faculty that I had decided to step down and move to the faculty on a full-time basis. I believed the school had reached a plateau where it was appropriate to have someone new take the school to an even higher level.

So, in January 1991, after nearly 12 years as dean, I returned to the faculty, and my first love—the classroom. I had no desire to pursue a deanship at another institution. Little

did I know that my return would be short: a stint as acting vice president for academic affairs was in the wings. But, that's another article.

Looking back, one always has certain feelings about things one did or did not do, and things Oakland did or did not do. Here's my list:

Things I'm Glad I Did:

1. Obviously steering the school to AACSB accreditation tops the list.
2. Maintained outstanding relations with the AAUP. I recall going to Michigan business school deans' meetings and listening to colleague deans moan about how much time they spend in arbitrations, etc. During my 11+ years, we had only one arbitration—a case I know the AAUP would have preferred not to take. Little did I know that these good relations would “cost” me in future years¹.
3. Assembled a first class faculty, replete with superb scholars and individuals who were truly concerned about our students. For the life of me, I could never understand why some folks choose a career in higher education while they dislike students (and there are plenty out there in this category).
4. Instilled a sense of high quality in our programs. I insisted on as high a set of admission standards as we could possibly implement at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. For several years, our MBA entering students' profiles were second only to Ann Arbor's.
5. Had a truly open door policy with the faculty. I always thought of myself as a faculty person. My lunches were generally with faculty colleagues and I had a small informal group of faculty advisors who felt free to tell me

¹ Ironically, in 2000 I was asked to be, and served as, chief negotiator for the AAUP (faculty) bargaining team.

I was full of baloney (and who frequently did) and on whose counsel I knew I could always rely.

6. Established a true friendship with Ted Yntema. Ted was a former vice president of finance at Ford Motor Co. who latched onto Oakland when he retired. He held a PhD in economics from the University of Chicago and was one of the brightest persons I have ever met. Because of our friendship, he became a very generous supporter of the school and helped us build our gift fund to a very substantial amount.
7. Established a good rapport with faculty and fellow deans from the other schools and the college. This was especially true while Brian Copenhaver (former CAS dean) was here. The two of us had a relationship that was unusual for arts and sciences and business school deans.
8. Married my wife, Carol. She was incredibly supportive during my years as dean—suffering through many dinners and events where she had very little in common with the other guests. But, she was a super “first lady,” and I was damn lucky to have her at my side.

Things I am Sorry I Did Not Do:

1. Get the faculty involved in undergraduate advising. I could never understand the general resistance to this. They say you should pick your battles and this was one I finally chose not to fight.
2. Learn to play golf. To this day, I am sorry that I did not play, thereby losing several opportunities to schmooze and network with folks I should have. This was especially acute given the availability of the Katke-Cousins course right on campus.
3. Say “no” when asked to be on the University’s bargaining team in 1985 for the Faculty Agreement. I was turned off by both the process and the outcome (there was a several-day strike). However, there were

lessons learned which I applied when chairing the *faculty* team several years later. Oh, what a wicked web we weave, etc.

Things I'm Sorry the University Didn't Do:

1. Nothing—and I really mean it! The support I received from the university while dean was exactly what the school needed and was very much appreciated.
2. Well now, on second thought—I wish the university had been more aggressive with tuition during the very lean years of the early eighties. We had very high demand for our services and could have easily charged a higher tuition and then had the benefit of that being in our base for future years. I remember Mr. Copenhagen and I had a private meeting with Pres. Champagne to plead for this (to no avail).

After my one-year (1992–93) stint as acting academic vice president, I returned to the faculty for the remainder of my academic career. I retired in August, 2002, after nearly 40 years in higher education. And my summary opinion of my years as dean: “My years as dean, from 1979 to 1991, were the most professionally rewarding of my entire academic career.”