

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Youngstown State University

Personal Experience

O H 1894

PETER KASVINSKY

Interviewed

by

Jerry Bakanowsky

on

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B This is an interview with Dr Peter Kasvinsky for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Youngstown State University, by Jerry Bakanowsky, on November 18, 1997

Dr Kasvinsky, what did you do prior to your current position here at YSU?

K I was Assistant Vice President at Bloomsburg University in the state system of higher education in Pennsylvania. I was in charge of the graduate studies area at Bloomsburg for four years

B Did you have any educational training for this position?

K Nothing specific I have a Ph D in Biochemistry, and a Bachelor of Science degree in a combination major of Biology and Chemistry I took post-doctoral work before I got a teaching position My first teaching position was at Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia, in the medical school, where I was located for ten years before I went to Bloomsburg

B Could you describe your position at YSU?

K I am Graduate Dean here The Graduate Dean's position at YSU encompasses more than just the graduate school. Continuing Education reports to me, and we now have a grants office, which also reports as Grants and Sponsored Programs My office deals with graduate programming at both the master's and doctoral level The office is primarily an admissions and recruiting office for that function We deal with the quality of programming issues related to graduate degrees offered at YSU And we also supervise the educational outreach programs that operate through University Outreach and Continuing Education The Metropolitan College comes through that office as well In the research and faculty development area, Grants and Sponsored Programs and the graduate school work together in order to generate more external funding for faculty research and scholarship.

B Could you just describe a typical day at YSU?

K No (laughter) There is no such thing as a typical day at YSU Every day is a different kind of a situation Actually, that is one of the reasons I like my job in Graduates Studies so much The kinds of problems we run into, the kinds of things that we deal with are different from day to day It is said, in the Grants and Sponsored Programs area, that it is impossible to really anticipate all the different ways that you can run into problems, either with getting grants or with executing them, or dealing with faculty and trying to bring in external funds to the institution And I think that statement is probably correct All kinds of different things occur in the job Generally speaking, we deal with issues that relate to recruiting of students We go off campus, we do graduate recruiting fairs and

things of that sort. And while we recruit each quarter to bring students in, our big recruiting time for students is in the fall, so we do get off campus and out and about around the region, between Pennsylvania and Ohio, in the fall especially, to do some of these kinds of things.

B To just add onto that question there, what activities and programs do you anticipate the graduate program will become involved with to make it more visible to the community?

K Well, when I came here -- and this actually deals with some of the other things that you have indicated you are interested in -- the graduate school did not recruit. There were very, very minimal things in place that really dealt with making the area and the region aware of what kinds of graduate programming was available at YSU. There was no major brochure for the graduate school indicating what all the programs were. There were very few individual program brochures available. Some departments had moved a little bit faster than others and tried to develop recruiting materials on their own. But there were really very few in place.

One of the first things we did was to try and begin to make the institution more visible -- at least to plant our flag on the mountain top, so to speak -- and get out and let people know that we had a graduate school and a number of very good graduate programs available. Right now we visit about eight to ten campuses regionally. We go as far away as Ohio State and Penn State. We get up into Erie in Pennsylvania, and on some occasions we get into the northern panhandle of West Virginia. So we try and cover the regional area. Most of those fairs are cooperative. There are a number of different schools that come to each fair. So, we roughly hit maybe 150 different colleges and universities by going to ten locations on an annual basis.

The other recruiting that we are going to be doing is on-campus, since most of our students come from our own university. I have become aware of a lot of students right here in Youngstown and at YSU do not know about our graduate programs. I have talked to a number of graduate students recently who, as undergraduates, really did not know what opportunities were available to them. As a result, we have decided to increase some of our recruiting on the campus. We are going to be doing graduate school recruiting days once a quarter. We did one last year in the Spring or the Winter quarter. But we are going to do them every quarter from now on, in Kilcawley in order to make information available to students. We are also going to be doing a letter-writing campaign to people in their senior year, indicating what programs we have available, with a response card that can be sent back to us to tell us what kinds of programs they are interested in. Generally speaking, those are the kinds of things that we are going to be involved with, in terms of visibility issues.

The faculty are really the key to good graduate recruiting, and I think that one of the approaches that has to occur at YSU is to make the community more aware of what kinds of scholarship and research opportunities exist with faculty,

and to try and get more of that information out into the media. I think, generally speaking, we have not had good representation in that area. A lot of people know what kinds of things that are going on at Youngstown, but very little of what actually is going on in specific programs and by specific faculty. So we are going to be trying to do more of that, as well, in the coming years.

B: What was it that attracted you to come to YSU?

K: At the time, I really felt it was time for a change. The school that I came from was about a 7,000 student campus. The graduate programs were much smaller than they are here. The number of students at the graduate level was smaller than it is here. And YSU had new leadership come in around and about that time, and I really felt that with new leadership on campus -- a new president and provost, and mostly new deans at that time -- that there was going to be a lot of growth and development at YSU. I think that has occurred. I really think that did come to pass. That was really the "driver" that brought me here.

B: I understand that you were involved in the PACER (Presidential Academic Center for Excellence in Research) Project.

K: Right. PACER is an initiative that we started in the graduate school and the Sponsored Programs office. It is an acronym for, I cannot remember [laughter].

B: That is okay.

K: I am running a blank. It is Centers for Excellence in Research, those are the last three. Oh yes, it is Presidential Academic Center for Excellence in Research. The program really was designed in concert with the University Research Council and the Academic Research Committee of the senate, to try and get away from funding with minimal internal resources very small individual faculty research projects. While those are very effective at moving things forward on the campus, the group felt that our faculty may be able to become more competitive nationally in seeking external funding, and be able to develop stronger reputations nationally in research and scholarship, by getting together, working in groups, working collaboratively in areas from which a number of faculty would benefit, rather than having individuals trying to work as individuals in this kind of competitive environment that we exist in.

Actually, one of the reasons that I felt that this would be a good approach was, when I was at the medical school in West Virginia, it was a new medical school. It was started in, I guess, the late 1970's under the VA Med School Act that established five med schools at VA hospitals. And at our med school, what we found in the basic sciences was that we had small departments. Many of our departments here at YSU are small. The departments hired people in different ways. Some departments hired people according to their teaching discipline. One department in particular hired people according to their research discipline.

and made sure that everyone in that department could work collaboratively, in terms of their research productivity. And that was in the pharmacology department. Everybody was hired to work for cardiovascular pharmacology. Even though one person might be an endocrinologist in pharmacology or another person might be a chemical person, related to drug development or things of that sort. The driver in the department was the central role of cardiovascular pharmacology.

What basically occurred in that system was that because of the collaborations that could occur, the faculty were probably four times as productive, in terms of research and in terms of getting grants, than those departments where they hired one of each kind, according to teaching. They obviously made sure the teaching was covered. They made great attempts to ensure the people that were hired were good teachers. But they paid a lot of attention to the research collaborations that would occur in the department after those new faculty came on board. And that was really important in terms of generating an active research agenda that went across individual interests and was fully a departmental agenda.

That sort of led to this idea of PACER. Faculty who could collaborate and cooperate with each other can be more productive, they can work together and, rather than writing one paper every two years, faculty can get two papers every year by a broader collaboration that would be possible in this kind of a program. We decided at URC and ARC that the funds that we had available to us that were now being spent on individual projects would be used differently. We would take a portion of those funds and combine the money from our research assistants fund, our research challenge money that we get from the state of Ohio, and our URC funds that we fund individual grants and fund two or three centers. So PACER combined some of these funds together in order to give a group of faculty the flexibility to operate as they felt necessary in order to get a particular scholarly area developed with their own research developing within that kind of umbrella approach.

What we did was we set up a competition on campus. I think we had seven applications from various areas on the campus. We had external evaluation. I asked graduate deans to come in from a number of state institutions around Ohio. There were four people on the review panel and we selected three areas for possible funding. In essence, we were able to fund all three. Originally, I did not think we would be able to, but we did come up with the money to fund all three. So we have three different centers that have been tapped for funding. They were extremely competitive. The comments from the external reviewers were outstanding. One of the ones funded was from the physics department and received fantastic comments. One of the reviewing deans basically said he would give his eye tooth for faculty like we had in that department because they were really very good and had some wonderful ideas, in terms of the projects they could undertake.

We did, basically, three areas: physics and chemistry combined and did a Center for Photon Studies, where they are looking at lasers and things of that

sort, and various kinds of reactions, where photonic reactions are involved. We have the Mahoning Valley Environmental Research Center that is a collaboration between, I think, Chemistry, Biology, Civil and Environmental Engineering, and Geology. Geography might be involved in that, too, I do not recall if it was or not. And then we have the Center for Historic Preservation, which is primarily History, but there are other faculty from other social science areas involved in that, as well. All three of those projects were wonderfully proposed and have really begun a very good approach to what they said they were going to do. The centers are funded for three years and they are receiving a total of about \$250,000 in internal funds over those three years with another \$250,000 in in-kind support from the college deans. The Centers are expected to go external for funding and to write grants and to try to bring money in so that they can become as self-supporting as possible. The intention is that, at the end of three years we will not continue funding those centers for the future, but they will be self-supported.

At that time, we will then do another competition and do three different centers to go to different departments and try and generate the same kind of developmental approach to research and scholarship development in other departments that we have initiated in these three areas. Some of the Centers are, of course, interdepartmental. And I think that is really important. It is important to distribute the resources around the campus, but it is also important to let faculty know that there is continuing opportunity if they did not get funded in the first competition -- because we had seven in the competition, so four were not funded -- we still have the opportunity, maybe they can come back and develop their programs and projects a little bit more and come back for future funding. I would like to keep this program up for at least nine or ten years so that we can reach the point where we at least have ten to twelve centers of excellence in terms of research and scholarship on the campus. And that is really the goal here, to develop some areas of excellence that have more than just a YSU reputation, but a reputation both regionally and beyond regionally as well, that are competitive on a national basis. That was a long answer. [laughter]

B: Could you describe your role within that project? Did you have any specific duty?

K: My office, essentially, set up the request for proposals. We devised the guidelines for the proposals, what was expected from the applicants in terms of what they needed to present to us that they were going to do. We worked with the URC and the ARC to develop the criteria for evaluation, and some of those criteria included the issue of demonstrating at least a capability of being able to bring in money on their own in the future, involvement of undergraduates in research, involvement of graduate students in research, demonstrating it was inter-disciplinary, demonstrating that it was not just a conglomeration of faculty coming together with individual projects, but a program of research where there was some kind of thread that ran through all the individual participants, that

would tie it together and make it a center, as opposed to some kind of a hodge podge where you just throw a whole bunch of people together that are working individual projects but using a single source of funding. Really, to prove that it is a collaborative approach to research. And then once we organized the external reviewers, they came to campus and we held an all day meeting on campus to review the proposals and make the decisions on funding. The various fund sources are in my budget, ultimately, so we had to work out a system where by we would be able to fund each of these for three year periods, and we worked that out as well.

As it turns out, we are trying to give them as much independence as possible so that each center has a director who is head of that center who has budget authority for the center. We set up budgets for those people to operate on. And then each year there will be an annual report that comes back to my office, indicating issues of accountability -- what they have done, what they have accomplished, what their future proposals are for the next year -- and that will go back to the University Research Council for evaluation, sort of as an oversight body on the campus. If it looks like they are not doing what they said they would do, we have the ability to close it down and move the money someplace else and maybe do another center instead. Issues of accountability are fairly important when we are investing that kind of money. We want to see a "bang for the buck," so to speak. We really want them to be successful. That is basically where our office has been involved. It is oversight.

B. A project that large obviously has obstacles in reaching its goals. What do you think is the most significant obstacle of this project?

K. I think everybody was kind of interested in doing this. I do not really see that we had a lot of obstacles because of the interest and because faculty really wanted to try a new mechanism for funding that would really have some significant investment in particular areas. I think that eliminated a lot of the problems we might have had. I think we do not have a lot of resources on this campus for research development or scholarship development. We have got a fair amount, but not like at Ohio State or at Ohio University or places like that, that have a lot of research funding for this kind of program.

I think really what happened, in this instance, was that faculty understood that when you have a pot of money available and you have three times as many applicants as you normally fund, it is much better to take a dollar and give a person a dollar and maybe have him or her get something substantial with that investment, than it is to take that dollar and chop it up thirty different ways and give everybody three cents. And I think, in the final analysis, that was the driver in PACER, that people understood from the outset that there would be sufficient funds invested so that collaborative interdisciplinary projects might be able to become much more fruitful and produce a lot more by this approach than it would by simply giving a small grant to an individual faculty member who is out there scrambling to try and do a very small project. A large investment would

bring fruit more quickly and maybe more fruit more quickly I think that really helped us a lot

I really do not see that we had a lot of problems in getting the whole program off base and moving forward. And it really has established an approach, I think, that can be broadened in other kinds of areas The provost was recently indicating that he would like to do the same kind of thing for some of the public service kinds of projects that he is interested in because, really, faculty development involves not just scholarship and research, but teaching and public service as well You can do the same kinds of approaches for teaching development projects or dealing with the methodology of teaching or things like that Or, in some of the public service areas, you can do similar kinds of approaches where you have invested your resources to try and deal with a specific area of public service, rather than piece mealing yourself, spreading yourself too thin. So I think PACER is an approach that could be used in a lot of different areas on the campus

B As a whole, how do you feel YSU has changed since your arrival?

K I think it is a lot more active than it was when I arrived We established an office of Grants and Sponsored Programs in this area that reports to me That office was established three years ago, and we got a Director of Grants and Sponsored Programs two years ago. Our grants applications have, in essence, increased by one hundred to one hundred fifty percent over that period of time So where we might have been submitting thirty to forty grants, we are submitting eighty grants a year now. That is a big increase That means that there are eighty people out there working, rather than thirty or forty. And a grant submission is not something that is easy to do It is a big project Some grant submissions are thirty and forty pages or more It is a scholarly project in itself to research an area, understand the discipline involved in that area and the current research, and to put it all down on paper, tell people what you are interested in doing, why it is important, why it ought to be funded, why it is important to humanity or whatever, and get somebody convinced that they ought to put some money behind it That is a big problem It is a major investment of time To get twice as many people on the campus involved in that kind of exercise is an accomplishment in itself So I think those kinds of things are tremendous changes

In terms of motivational issues, the fact that the promotion and tenure guidelines for faculty have changed over the last couple of years has really changed what the drivers are How the faculty look at themselves, how they think of themselves professionally really affects what YSU is currently and what it will become I think it really changes the interest of faculty a great deal And I think the rising importance of scholarship and public service has really had a big impact on the campus

B To go off of what you were saying YSU will become, how do you think YSU will



change in the next ten years?

K I have no idea [laughter] I am a little bit worried right now, actually, because of the issues with K through 12 funding. The citizenry of Ohio do not support higher education the way they ought. In fact, they do not support education in general the way they ought to. And when you get into a situation as we are in right now, where the legislature is under mandate from the judicial side to change K through 12 funding because the way it has been done is basically unconstitutional, I think you can understand that the competitive pressures on state budget are going to or could cause major problems for higher education. There are not many places to get resources in the budget and higher education is one of the only ones available. My fear is that the legislature will not bite the bullet and they will not be able to convince the citizens of the state that we need to invest more in education in general, and that higher ed could be very, very seriously damaged in the next few years if they do not come to grips with this problem. That in itself is going to have a lot of effects on what YSU might become or might not become.

I think we have begun to move forward in a lot of different ways, and I think we will continue to do that as best we can. But, obviously, if the legislature turns around and takes a big bite out of higher ed's overall budget, it is going to affect what we can do and it is going to be negative. I hope they do not and I hope they understand that they really need to do things with the tax structure in this state, to support K through 12 in a stronger way. But you cannot have an educational system that stops at the twelfth grade. In today's environment, technology and the importance of education beyond twelfth grade should be apparent. I do not think that people always understand its importance. I think the students obviously do or they would not be here. I think this kind of discussion needs to be carried back to families and back to the community so they really understand these issues better than they currently do.

B What major obstacles do you anticipate for the graduate program?

K Right now, probably, our biggest obstacle is that we are caught in demographic trends in the state. We are still seeing -- at least in this area of Ohio -- some decreases in the student population. And, as usual, when the economy is good, nobody goes to graduate school. They would rather work and make money. That affects how many students come into the graduate school. That affects our budget as well, which also affects what kinds of things we can do as a university. I think the biggest obstacles right now are to maintain enrollment and to improve enrollment. I think our recruiting programs will do a lot to combat the demographics and we deal it with as best we can. But there is something to be said for the statement that you cannot change the demographic numbers. The basic numbers of students available to go into undergraduate or graduate education are decreasing. You are stuck with that. Those are probably the biggest obstacles we have right now.

I think in many ways some of the good things that can come out of graduate education are that our program faculty are becoming more aware of the fact that there are other needs in the community besides the areas of study that we currently have. As you are probably aware, we just started the Masters of Science in Nursing degree, and the Masters in Health and Human Services this past fall. Those were the first new graduate degrees at the Master's level in 24 years at YSU. That is a statement in itself. That tells you what I have to deal with [laughter]

And I think there are other areas we would be interested in moving in to. We are working on a cooperative Master's in Public Health with NEOUCOM and the other four state institutions in northeast Ohio. We are looking at the possibility of a Master's in Social Work, in collaboration with Cleveland State and Akron. They already have a degree, and when that degree originally went up, they had indicated that, in the event that we are interested and when we became accredited at the undergraduate level in social work, they said that they would be interested in expanding to include us in that program.

I would also like to see a Master's in Computer Science. I think that program is absolutely a must at a comprehensive Master's institution in this day of technological advances. Not to have that program is really shortchanging your community by not having those kinds of opportunities available. Right now we can do a computer science track under the math program, but it tends to be more traditionally math oriented. So I think we really need the other degree. There is interest in the art department in a degree in art, related to the Butler Museum and the technological advances that will be available to the art field - visual presentation of the arts and museum studies and things of that sort. So that is another area we are looking at. There are a number of different areas we are looking at for expansion. But there are a lot of different things, I think, that we can do if we have the time and the money. [laughter]

B What significant event or events, other than the PACER project, stand out during your stay at YSU?

K In terms of the graduate school, I think the single biggest accomplishment, other than PACER, is the creation of the grants office. There was no Office of Sponsored Programs and Grants at YSU. Some time back, there was a single individual in the administrative area that dealt with grants, but that individual did not deal with the issue of grants development. And to really make the institution grow in this area requires an investment of time and energy into the grants development process. Normally, when you think about grants, you think about a pre-award side and a post-award side, the dividing line being when you get the grant from the agency. And the pre-award did not really occur here before we started that office up. When I first came, I started doing a little bit of that kind of development on my own. But you cannot do that, graduate dean and everything else on top of it. So we really needed to establish a more formal approach to grants development, which we did do.

And that has resulted in a very significant increase in activity, as I said already, amongst the faculty, both in the numbers of submission and the awards we have got. In the academic area, I think we got about \$1.4 million last year. And this year we will top \$2 million just in the academic area and \$3 million overall. So I think that speaks for itself, in terms of major accomplishments and importance to the institution. There really are not that many ways to bring money into the institution, other than tuition, subsidy from the state, gifts through development and grants. So grants is the fourth area that needs to be developed as much as we can.

B The final question, sir. Could you describe what you typically enjoy doing when you are not working at the office at YSU?

K We work a lot at the office at YSU. [laughter] There is not much time for anything else. I have a family. I have got little kids in my family. My son is 14, my daughter is nine, so I spend a lot of time with them, doing things with them. I dote on my kids. I also do gardening and things of that sort. We have a new house, which really did not have much in the way of landscaping or plantings or anything like that, so I have been involved in a lot of that stuff at home. And, also, being a new house, there is always decorating to do and things like that. So, I have been involved in a lot of those kinds of things. And I enjoy doing those things.

B On behalf of the Oral History Department, I would like to thank you for participating in this interview.

K Thank you.

End of Interview