

Dr. Donald Fletcher (Dean A&S) June 24, 1970

Allen - Just to start out on this - we're talking with Dr. Fletcher, Dean of the Arts and Science College. Well, let's just get started out with the question here - Why did you come to the University of Bridgeport?

Fletcher - I think that's an extremely difficult question. We are basically westerners - we felt that the opportunity to live in the east would be interesting. We found it an interesting move, but being a professional we found also shifting from public higher education to private higher education would be a challenge - and the thing that intrigued me about private higher education was the fact that I have been a critic of private higher education for years and I wanted to put my money where my mouth was. I felt that the function of private higher education in this country was to provide the leadership through bold and innovated programs for public higher education - and I have been concerned about those prestigious private higher educational institutions in this country, such as Yale, Harvard, Princeton and others, who have become so tradition bound that they can no longer innovate - and the relatively young, relatively liberal and an institution unincumbered by tradition such as the University of Bridgeport might be the place which one could put into practice notions about improving the quality of our education - without the strictures of public legislative hazards and road blocks. This sounds very good, but what one finds is that public higher education is probably one of the most inefficient public institutions existing....

Allen - In what way?

Fletcher - Because of the enormous waste of resources. There is no body that is responsible for overseeing expenditures in public higher education as there is higher in private education. It is bureaucracy in its most inflated kind.

Allen - You mean there's more bureaucracy in public education than there is at the University of Bridgeport?

Fletcher - By far, by far. Public higher education attempts to reach out, but in doing so it also operates under the Peter Principle. It tends to recognize and,

Fletcher - (Continued) - indeed, encourage incompetence. I think not so much out of any sincere disrespect for academic standards, but more out of personal and humanistic concerns for ones talent. Public higher education also tends to put individuals into molds, pigeon holes. There is very little one could do to recognize either good teaching or scholarship within public higher education. Public higher education is so large that the institutions are governed by rather rigid policies. We, at the University of Bridgeport, are at the point in the development of the institution where we have reached a position where we're of sufficient size that policies are necessary; yet one is very reluctant about establishing a policy in view of the limitations that it places upon individual freedoms and individual consideration. One of the, the typical example of this is, the desire on the part of the faculty to institute some kind of .... find .....sick leave policy. I was presented as a freshmen Dean with...two the first series sick leave situations in the history of the college.

In one case, we had an individual who had loyally served the university for nearly a quarter of century. Service had been above and beyond the call of duty. On the other hand, we had a young man who had served the university for less than fourteen months, found himself completely incapacitated. Then there was no policy. These two cases were dealt with individually upon recommendation of the first party and justice was done. In the case of the man who had served the university for nearly 25 years - there was never any question about whether he would receive compensation, whether he made his classes or not - and his colleagues picked up the burden. In the other case, as to what would be fair in terms of university commitment to him, had to be determined. It was in this very individualistic sort of way, we arrived at what I considered to be a very fair and realistic determination of that particular situation. Now if we move to a policy of sick leave credits for the faculty, the chances are that neither one of these individual

Fletcher (Continued) - would have fared as well as they did under a situation where there was no problems. I think that this is an example of a very practical and non-academic situation, but it represents the conflict that I think private higher education is faced with. When I recruit faculty, one of the points that I use as a strong recruiting factor, is the fact that we don't have policy. That we still are small enough to be able to treat each person as an individual - that and <sup>^</sup> one can negotiate with whatever officer of the institution is involved - a situation that is most desirable for that individual's particular wants. For instance, if a young faculty comes to the University of Bridgeport, it is possible to negotiate with the university a loan that will allow him to establish his residence in this area - at very desirable interest rates, based upon a <sup>note</sup> payable under almost any reasonable set of conditions, depending upon the kind of recommendations the individual had. Now I know of no other university in the country that allows this. Very often, I think, our faculty and their concern about the level - in their concern about protecting their prerogatives, ~~tend to forget that these advantages exist in a university of this time.~~

Allen - ...Well, tell me, did you, after trying out your ideas about private education versus public education, what are your conclusions after a year?

Fletcher - Well, it's very obvious. Private higher education in this country is strapped for funds - and private higher education simply will not exist in the form that exists now at the University of Bridgeport, without substantial <sup>or</sup> State <sup>^</sup> Federal aid. I say this, simply because the University of Bridgeport is a unique institution in that it has operated for some 40 years on a tuition base, but that it has been able to do this simply because it has had a devoted faculty willing to make certain sacrifices.

Allen - How well we know that.

Fletcher - That era is long passed. The university, I think, has kept faith in attempting to reward those loyal faculty members that have given good service to this institution - and in many cases, to the disadvantage of the total

Fletcher (Continued) - university. But, that kind of loyalty is something that you have to respect. But, I'm convinced that the public is going to recognize the fact that more and more <sup>people</sup> are going to demand more and more of universities. The universities' role will change - that the concept of universal post secondary education will become more and more of an established public notion that as the public becomes more and more free of the strictures placed upon it by the efforts to provide a living wage the university is going to play more and more of the role in providing leisure time activities. And the real problem is how to protect the integrity and the quality of programs within the university, which are a result of thousands of years of evolution with the kind of social and recreational pressures that are being placed on the university.

Allen - You mentioned one of the reasons that you came, to try out private education, was the freedom to innovate. Did you find that here?

Fletcher - Well, I think that the University of Bridgeport.....well, let me back up...

I think I misread the size of the University of Bridgeport. I misread the historical context of the University of Bridgeport. I think in a different time, and under different leadership, the University of Bridgeport could have accommodated the kinds of innovative programs I was espousing without any difficulty. The size problem is extremely important. As the university grows, in order to be innovative, it has to provide greater and greater autonomy to its individual parts. And there was a reluctance on the part of the central administration to provide that kind of autonomy. There was a move on in an operating philosophical principal towards greater autonomy. But that was only a philosophical principle. When it came down to an operational mechanism, which is basically financial, that was a totally different story - and therein lies the problem. Historically the University of Bridgeport was...is now in a plateau in which it has to make some very fundamental decisions. It has to decide what its mission is and what are its goals - both in terms of long and short range goals. Then it has all

Fletcher (Continued) - kinds of alternatives opened. Anyone, of which I think, would be a benefit to this particular.....area, but it needs a leader. It needs a leader of the quality, of the stamina, of the energy level of the intelligence of Henry Littlefield - 15 years.....10 years ago. It needs a leader of 20 years ago for the quality of the visionary Jim Halsey. Both of these men serving well their particular role in the historical development of the institution. But there is time now for an infusion of new blood, new leadership, and new vigor towards some clearly articulated goals. So that the faculty have an idea of identification with a movement so that the students feel associated with the university that is moving forward. The feeling one gets on the university campus today is that we are stagnant - not moving, and what little movement exists, is on the part of the students. That leadership has got to come from the President. It's not going to come from the President.

Allen - Let's assume for a moment that you were President.

Fletcher - Don't.....

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Allen - What policies, what programs would you advocate to the University of Bridgeport?

Fletcher - Well, I think one has to look at the University of Bridgeport in terms of its ecological situation . It has to determine what its unique role was going to be in this highly industrial/ commercial environment. It must immediately stop any drift. It must pull together its faculty and its administration and come to some common understanding as to where we want to go - and what role we want to play. Now the longer we delay that decision, the harder it gets - simply because you've got to deal with more and more diverse opinions as the faculty grows. And we continue to grow by attrition, and by the fact that more and more pressure from higher education....The kind of plan that I have outlined for the college, in terms of putting together a loosely organized master plan for the next five to ten years, in which there is meaningful consultation with the total faculty, in which there are clearly explicated guidelines, in which people simply don't sit around and complain about working conditions, the administration, salaries...

Fletcher (Continued) - where you're talking about programs or you're talking about what are the social, political, economic, esthetic as well as the environmental needs of this region - 30 yrs. from now, 10 yrs. from now, 20 yrs. from now and putting together the best minds in worrying about the future. After all, that's our business - and trying to set down in reasonable and understandable language what the hell our goals are. Are we going to end up with a Sociology Department five times larger than History? Or are the Social Sciences going to gobble up the Natural Sciences? Do we really need a first class Physics Department in a university such as the University of Bridgeport? I think we do. I think we need quality programs in all of these. But I think we've got to order our priorities now in terms where we are - the kinds of students we attract - and the kind of faculty we have - and you know those decisions can't be made unilateral President or a Vice President. They may have made a few years ago and they brought us to this position. I mean, they were made unilaterally. But now it seems to me that has to be a question of joint government. The faculty, the administration, the students, to some extent, have to determine what kind of a place it will be. But, regardless of the direction the university takes, I think to be manned in traditional, academic standards in favor of an existentialist type of educational experience. I just don't think it's going to work. I think for us to bury 50,000 years of human heritage for the kicks one gets from <sup>a</sup> hallucinogenic drug is....well, it's pretty ridiculous.

Allen - Yeah. Well tell me, you've given a beautiful recruiting talk to me right now. Why did you resign?

Fletcher - I found myself in a position which I could not effectively communicate with my immediate supervisor....and man whose tragic death a few weeks ago shocked the entire community. A man whom I had a great deal of respect for intellectually as a human being and as a scholar, but it was one of those very unique situations that one encounters occasionally in his life which two

Fletcher (Continued) - individuals simply can never get together on the same frequency.....and we found ourselves adversaries, and ourselves; simply not communicating, feeling very uncomfortable within 10 feet of one another, and in my opinion, I felt that it would be in the best interest of the college considering the administrating, political and economic situation at that time to bow out. Because my own operational principles do not allow me to force an individual to make a choice - and that choice would have had to be between my immediate supervisor and myself. I will say this, I was open and honest in my relationship with him and it just simply was a situation that came and one that was beyond control . There were contributing factors to that conflict which I don't really want to discuss, but....are the direct result of petty ambitionism on the part of other members of the faculty. It was just an unfortunate situation.

GO TO SIDE #2

Allen - I find in your discussion of the reasons to why you came and the reasons why you left, perhaps a question in regards to the innovativeness and the innovative possibilities of the University of Bridgeport. Did you find that that was an unfulfilled promise?

Fletcher - No, I don't think so. I don't think there were any promises made and I wouldn't...I certainly wouldn't want anyone to feel that my decision was based upon any kind of renegeing on the part of the central administration in regard to commitments that might not have been made. The....

Allen - I'm not referring to commitments, I'm referring to the promise which you thought of innovativeness in private education.

Fletcher - Well, I think that the problem that I found was basically a personal problem. Yet a problem, or situation that I've brought myself in conflict with. I don't mean to sound arrogant, but I suppose I had had enough self confidence in myself never to be concerned about my own self interest in

Fletcher (Continued) - making a decision that I felt was in the best interest of a much broader group or section of the times. I've always felt that if I live my life in an ethical fashion, and if I put out 150% effort, that I really didn't have any concern about what I was going to do tomorrow or next year. It's never been a question of insecurity on my part. What I have found as I grow older and more experienced is that most of my colleagues have these insecurities, and they have carefully planned their lives toward certain goals and when influences, external influences, tend to change the direction of the course of events, I often find myself as that influence and very frequently a threat to the ambitions of an individual or ? .

Allen - You mean there's politics in the Deans Council?

Fletcher - Oh....of course.

Allen - What type of politics?

Fletcher - Well of course, I think ...to say that we are completely free of self interest is simply not true. I operated in the Deans Council in terms of self interest for the College of Arts and Sciences as does the Dean in the College of Business Administration. But I think all of us tend to try and take the universities point of view - whats good for you and what is good for the university. One of the things that has encouraged the rebond the University of Bridgeport are my colleagues - among Deans....although I think very often take a narrow point of view are willing to conceive that <sup>a</sup> first class History Department or a first class Physics Department are absolutely essential in a first class university..... and this recognizes the need for professional programs, but it also, I think, recognizes the sensitivity to classical educational principles which I think all of us are

Fletcher (Continued) - committed ....and from my point of view here, at the University of Bridgeport, I have found that on a operational level my colleagues in the Deans Council are sensitive, intelligent, reasonable and personable individuals. In fact, one of my most sincere regrets is the fact that I will leave a circle of very, very close friends. My colleagues among the Deans at the University of Bridgeport are people that you don't have to tolerate..... they are simply good people, and they're talented - and I think one of the real strengths in the University of Bridgeport is the strength of its Dean Council.

Allen - Well is there really a role for the Deans Council in the university given a strong administration leadership?

Fletcher - Well, I think that the day to day educational policies at the institution should be the perquisite of the Deans Council. A decision that the Deans Council makes, of course, is going to be after meaningful consultation with the Chairman, faculty, various colleges and such. You simply don't administrator by Fiat today. The direction, the philosophy, the style of the university is going to be set by the President. The most important feature, it seems, to be of a President of a university is to set the tone. He establishes that style of operation; he sets the example for the entire faculty - for Vice President - for people - and on down the line. I perhaps have a very naive concept of academic administration, but briefly its that you administer by example. You do, indeed, set the tone or the style. If you expect your faculty to publish, you publish. If you expect your faculty to be good teachers, you excel in the classroom. If you expect your faculty, and your Chairman, to make reasonable, logical decisions, you make reasonable nonarbitrary decisions. It seems so simple and yet it isn't quite as simple.

Allen - Over the years many faculty have seen something of a struggle for power, perhaps, or a contest for power between the faculty Senate and Deans Council. How do you see this?

Fletcher - Well, you've used an incorrect term. There is no such thing as a Faculty Senate.

Allen - I find I've got to explain that....

Fletcher - There's a University Senate.

Allen - OK - I'm talking about the olden days. There's a University Senate. OK.

Fletcher - The.....in reality with all of the wasted time and the rhetoric that goes in the University Senate at the University of Bridgeport in considering the conservative philosophy of the upper echelon of the administration. The University of Bridgeport has one of the most democratic, and one of the most representative Senates of any other university in the country.

Allen - I can take some pride in that.

Fletcher - Most people don't realize that.

Allen - I know that...I know that.

Fletcher - To have as many students on the University Senate, as we have, and to be able to accomplish as much as is accomplished at the University Senate is to me something the university should be very proud of.

Allen - As you know, that I fought for a long time when we first formed what was than the Faculty Senate - to have students on it. Did you realize that?

Fletcher - Well I think it is very important that if you're going to have students, you've got to go beyond tokens.

Allen - Yes, yes.

Fletcher - If you don't do that, than you simply don't have students.

Allen - Yes, well, we didn't have students simply because it came down to the point that....if you wanted a Faculty Senate, then there are not going to be any students. So we took the Senate...the Faculty Senate. I think over the years (and it's been in operation for quite a few years) it's undertaken and accomplished number of very important developments. Its undergone quite a bit of change now. But, this still doesn't answer the question of the student power.

Fletcher - Well, I don't think there's really any ? . The seat of power at the university is with the President and let's make no mistake about that. He has the responsibility and he has to be given the authority. One of the things that has been very encouraging to me here at the university is that no one has really brought up to question to whether or not any action taken in the Deans Council or the University Senate represents university policy or whether or not this is a recommendation of the university policy to the President. Everyone seems to understand that the President has ultimate authority and the responsibility - and that I think is very, very....

Allen - You may recall from the, now the University Senate constitution, there's a a codicil attached to it on the position of the Deans Council. Do you recall that?

Fletcher - I haven't read the Senate constitution very carefully, but I have never viewed the Deans Council as a policy making decision. It is a body which makes recommendations to the President concerning the operation of the colleges that make up the university. We can take action in terms of certain operational principles and doing so, can commiserate, can share common experiences, and to provide a broad base for communication on university affairs, but in no case has the Deans Councils, in my experience, ever made decisions that represented university policy. It has concerned itself primarily with the day to day operation of the university - operating within the broad policy framework established by the University Senate. It has, it seems to me, the responsibility of protecting the integrity (the academic integrity) at the university. That's its principal function

Allen - Well, it's fine to hear that because some of us at one time had the impression the Deans Council was a sort of policy making body.....now, this goes back quite a ways. In part to offset the Faculty Senate when it was first organized...

Fletcher - I make no mistake about the fact that the Deans Council has an enormous amount of power. It has power in the sense that academic policy is generally

Fletcher (Continued) - very loosely written, and it can interpret that policy pretty much as it sees fit. And it does so. When the Deans Council has the recommending power to the academic Vice President which.....and really if you look at the Deans Council, what it represents is a Council in which the academic Vice President obtains opinion. It's a form whereby he can make certain decisions <sup>in</sup> regard to the academic operation of the institution. He listens very carefully - if he doesn't, he's a fool. But, when such a body is making recommendations with regard to the frequency with which the university catalog is published, recommendations with regard to academic calendars, recommendations with regard to interpretation of academic standards, recommendations with regard to the broadest kind of priorities for the development of the university, it obviously has a great deal of power - and it should have. But from the standpoint of establishing the academic policies of an institution, when you consider that the Deans are all represented in the University Senate, when you consider that the University Senate simply makes recommendations,

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I think the Deans have as much power as they need or are entitled to.

Allen - It wasn't always this way. You referred to the academic Vice President and there are a number of other Vice Presidents. Some faculty have occasionally complained that we are top heavy administratively.

Fletcher - Simply not true. In fact, if you look at the University of Bridgeport in this contractual era, we have by far a real paucity of administrative overhead in this university. There are some real inequities in work load in the university, and especially at the Deans level. If one compares the work load with the Dean of the college of Arts and Sciences, College of Education as compared to the College of Nursing the comparison is odious. Very often the university, having grown so much lately, just simply doesn't recognize that when they want a reaction out of the college, the Dean of College of Engineering calls three departmental Chairman and they in turn call 10 faculty members (maximum

Fletcher (Continued) - each) and he has the total consensus of that college - whereas in the College of Arts and Sciences we're dealing with 12 departments, 125 full time faculty, 4 associated departments, 20 budgetary directors and roughly 4,500 full time students. It just doesn't make sense. What is needed it seems to me, is to avoid applying labels to people and making them visible to the faculty as the Vice Presidents now are. We need some help in the academic Vice President's office now. We need some real help in the area of institutional research. A decision was recently made virtually to eliminate that office for a period, significant period of time - and in my opinion, considering the quality of the academic Deans that are now on board would have been a better decision to eliminate the academic Vice President's job and continue the Vice President for Research and Development, because I consider that area far more critical than academic guidance - simply because I think we have a number of highly qualified and deeply committed academic Deans . But I was not part of this decision so I really can't say.

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Allen - Well, what do you see as a future of the University of Bridgeport in the next ten years?

Fletcher - A lot depends on the leadership and it also depends on the kind of role the Trustees are going to play. As I have stated in open meeting with the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees as well as the Central Administration and the academic Deans of this institution, the kinds of alternatives that people had in the planning area are presenting us with are totally unacceptable. One of these alternatives has become the Parson's College of the East. Based upon the economic proclivities that exist at any given time. How many beds are empty in the dormitories. The other alternative is to strive towards intellectual academic elitism compete with well established private, prestigious institutions so characteristic of the East. I don't think the University of Bridgeport can afford to take either one of these positions. What it can afford

Fletcher (Continued) - to do, it seems to me, is what its been doing for the last 27 damn years - and what it hasn't been able to recognize is the fact that its playing, and has played, and will probably continue to play a very unique role in the educational process of the use of this country - and that is to provide an educational experience to a segment of our society generally referred to as white, middleclass Americans. And if you look at the kind of students we attract at this university, they are basically from upper-middle class homes with very rigid social values and the kind of thing that we can hope to provide these students with, is a greater flexibility in their outlook toward all things that they're going to do. We, indeed, are concerned with middle-Americans - and always have been and yet we don't sell that aspect of our program, and we do it very well.

Allen - Oh, I agree with you because I made this observation many times. Speaking of middle-Americans, I believe this spring with our organization for black students, which gave some headaches along the way, but at the time of the bombing of the church, the black students were put in position of having to react essentially as white middle class students. Do you agree with that?

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Fletcher - Well I have only hearsay information about that incident - and I wouldn't want to be quoted on what I might offer. My source of information I think is reputable and reliable. I think it's true that black students at the University of Bridgeport are probably more concerned about avoiding any kind of middle class syndrome that might be visible than they are revolutionary tactics. Those black students that I deal with through various commissions and advisory groups are quite reasonable, logical and unemotional. I get the impression that they are embarrassed by their middle class attitudes and behavior and one often sees these overt and rather obvious attempts to divorce oneself from these characteristics. I don't really see that black students at the University of Bridgeport are going to be any real problem, but on the other hand, I think the University of Bridgeport should make it clear that

Fletcher (Continued) - it is not a public institution, that it does have a certain mission, and it does have clearly articulated goals. One of the dangers that I see emerging on the horizon is that we like the protection of a private institutional facade, but we are tending to operate <sup>the</sup> institution more as a public - which we can't afford to do. We cannot be all things to all people. That's true, the university is surrounded by ghetto. Now whether or not the university can afford to do anything about that, is something I think that should be decided very quickly. I don't think that the responsibility of providing immediate practical solutions to social problems in Bridgeport - even though they infringe on the very borders of the university, is necessarily our primary function. It seems to me that our function is to train those individuals, provide young people with the experiences and the knowledge to become active in the community when they leave the university environment.

Allen - Well, this then is basic to the role the university, public, private, or what have you. That the university is a training ground - rather than an activist problem solver. The same thing would be true in the area of national condition .

Fletcher - Well, I don't think this will be a real problem. We have found ourselves with this dichotomy in higher education, but I think it's our own fault. I think if the kind of experience that students were exposed to on university campus, was an exciting venture for them, that is, if the faculty were really capable of motivating the an intelligent knowledgeable way, I don't think we would have this problem. Like students are bored with the kind of experience they are getting on the university campus, and it turns them toward action programs - whether they're right or wrong. They want to do something. And I will say this, in all candor, in your own department are individuals with whom I simply could not study because they are about as stimulating as that drape over there - and I could understand the kind of frustrations that students have. Now I'm not singling out the History Department, because every department

Fletcher (Continued) - has these individuals . And a few years ago students were expected to suffer under this as part of their normal educational process, and perhaps it was good - I don't know. But I think we have matured and moved far enough down that road so that the University of Bridgeport can in recruiting faculty and retaining faculty, look for really stimulating intellectuals that are capable keeping classroom interests. If we don't, we're done for...

End of Tape

Where is the other tape?

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