HONORS CONVOCATION SPEAKER SERIES

Dr. Roy Rom

“Yesterday and Today at the University of Arkansas”

Remarks upon the occasion of the first Honors Convocation 1995
DR. ROY C. ROM

Dr. Roy C. Rom is University Professor Emeritus. He retired in 1989 after 32 years on the University of Arkansas faculty in the Department of Horticulture.

Dr. Rom's research has been primarily in apple and peach genetics and culture. He conducted long-term peach and apple rootstock trials to identify those best adapted to Arkansas conditions. He did extensive research on rootstocks, training systems, orchard planting density and other management practices to help Arkansas producers adapt new systems to enhance orchard efficiency.

Dr. Rom has also worked closely with Dr. James N. Moore in a fruit breeding program to develop improved varieties of peaches and apples.

Dr. Rom is a fellow of the American Society of Horticultural Science and a former president of the American Pomological Society.

He operates the Rom Family Apple Orchard on the outskirts of Fayetteville and remains much in demand as a speaker to groups ranging from horticultural scientists and fruit farmers to elementary school students.
YESTERDAY AND TODAY
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS

by Dr. Roy Rom
University Professor Emeritus
Department of Horticulture

Remarks upon the occasion
of the first
Honors Convocation

Friday, April 21, 1995
Arkansas Union Theater

Dale Bumpers College
of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences
INTRODUCTION

In 1856 a Madison county farmer moved his family to Fayetteville because city life offered greater opportunities for religious expression, formal education and social development. William McIlroy purchased 160 acres of land north of the city square and settled into farming by cultivating 65 acres and rather poorly managing a four-acre orchard.

The Morrill Act of 1862 established the Land Grant Colleges. Arkansas got into the act in 1868 when the state general assembly authorized the establishment of an agricultural and mechanical arts college. The location of this college was open to competitive bidding, and the bid was won by the city of Fayetteville in November 1871.

Fayetteville’s city fathers decided that the proper site for the college was the McIlroy farm. The following is a quote from Reynolds and Thomas’ History of the University of Arkansas:

“The location of the University of Arkansas proved a severe strain on his, Mr. McIlroy’s, local patriotism as against an attachment for his old home. When the board selected a site which involved the sacrifice of his hearth and home, he at first demurred.”

The Arkansas Industrial University opened for business in January 1872. There were eight students, three faculty and no administrators. Early on, a section of the new university was known as the Department of Agriculture and Horticulture. The institution took the official
name of University of Arkansas in 1899. I am proud to have been a part of this great school for 30% of its existence.

When Libby Wheeler, College Mentor, asked me for a title for this presentation, I submitted the following: “Reminiscences and Reflections of an Aging University Professor Following Some 19 Odd Years and 18 Even Years of Service in the Department of Horticulture and Forestry at the University of Arkansas.” Libby said the title was too long. I then suggested “c:/Rom/195895.” We settled for “Yesterday and Today at the University of Arkansas.”

A University is a social enterprise and entity. Its goal is to foster learning and promote culture in a structured environment, a campus. Typically a university has an academic base or core called a curriculum, students, faculty, buildings, and ancillary features such as clubs, bands, athletics and services. Universities, as is the University of Arkansas, are by nature dynamic.

Since my arrival on this scene in October 1958, and this date will serve as a reference for my musing about “yesterdays” as against today, I have lived through and noted a revolution of change. You students here today might reference 1958 as the time most of your parents were getting started in elementary schools.

I use the words revolution or change rather than evolution, which implies random and non-directional change in the true Darwinian sense. I specifically use change in the context of growth and progress. Growth is easily defined as an irreversible change in size. The University of Arkansas has certainly grown since 1958. Progress is more difficult to define as judgment of progress is in the eye of the beholder. Progress results from answering, through action, the faults and failures of the status quo. In my view the University of Arkansas has progressed since 1958.

Permit me to make observations about the University of Arkansas through a look at progress and change.
Physical change has occurred on this campus. What you see now is not what I saw on the day I arrived here. In 1959 a sign across from the stadium parking lot read “future home of Alpha Gamma Rho.” Roberta Fulbright Hall was under construction and stood alone north of the new Animal Science Building. Brough Commons, a men’s dormitory, was also being built. Pomfret Hall came a few years later. The stone building at the northeast corner of Lindell and Douglas Street was the 4-H girls dormitory and a good source of baby sitters for my four children.

For years after 1958 I taught a 7:30 a.m. class in an old, drafty, cockroach-ridden, wooden building with a greenhouse attached. Today I stand in this union theater on the very site of that structure, razed to make room for the modern Student Union. Now the Student Union is said to be outdated and under-used. A massive building and renovation will start soon.

The current Union’s mission statement is to provide unique and diverse services, programs, conveniences and amenities to students, faculty and staff. Teaching or academics does not appear to be included.

Faculty and students in the College of Agriculture used to play softball in department challenge games in the open field behind Gray Hall, which was torn down to build the Mullins Library. The dusty old playing field is now the beautiful mall between the Student Union and the Library.

The Mullins Library was completed in 1968. During the two years of its construction, the campus was rocked and buffeted with sound as the foundation hole was blasted and gouged out. We are now (1995) at full circle with similar noises and digging as an addition to the library is being constructed. The old Hill Hall was removed one weekend in 1994 to make room for this addition.

Prior to the Mullins Library, books were found primarily in college libraries. The Agricultural Library was housed in the Agriculture Building. It had a few stacks and a large reading room, now divided into various offices. The main library prior to 1968 was in Vol Walker Hall. Students were not allowed access to the stacks. The faculty,
however, were permitted to descend the narrow iron stairs into the bowels where books were shelved. For the first time in about 28 years I descended into the stacks at Vol Walker a few days ago to view some of the 90%+ holdings and collections of the University Museum now stored there.

In past days, the museum was on the top floor of Old Main. Now it is located in the old gym where on occasion I played badminton with a colleague during lunch break.

Most students have found it necessary to conduct some business in Silas Hunt Hall. This student service facility opened in 1993. The facility was essentially a remodeling of the University swimming pool, built in the 1960s. Prior to construction of the swimming pool, the site was occupied by the Dairy Building where on occasion I could buy milk and dairy products.

The physical face of the campus has changed much and grown considerably. Phase I of the Plant Science Building was completed in 1977. When Phase II will arrive has been a matter of speculation and a shuffling of priorities for the past 20 years. In the mid 1980s came the HPER Building, and now nearing completion are the new gems in the crown of our college: The Poultry Science Building and the Alternate Pest Control Research Building.

Back in the 1950s and 1960s, Old Main was the administrative center of the University. Dormant for much of the 1980s, it was remodeled in its interior and opened for teaching in 1991. Meanwhile the massive Administration Building was placed on a grassy knoll, a site occupied for many years by a small, one-room, log cabin school.

Aesthetically the campus grounds have never looked better. Within the past two years, when it was officially proclaimed an arboretum, the campus became the University’s largest classroom.

**STUDENTS**

Students still come to the University as wide-eyed 18-year-olds, but they, too, have changed over time in lifestyle and attitude. Actually, today as many as 25% of the students are older, non-traditional students and foreign students. A novelty on campus 30 years ago,
non-traditional students are now a common and integral part of the student population, especially at the graduate-school level.

Binge drinking as a freshman rite of passage and escape from parental suppression or hassle exists now at the same level as it did then. The specter of drugs was not an issue 30 years ago; it emerged in the mid 1960s, and poor performance in class was not blamed on “Prozac” use, as is often claimed today.

Sexual orientation or expression operated on either side of an individual’s moral basis. During yesterdays it was moderated by fear of pregnancy; today it is moderated by fear of AIDS.

The 1959 the University of Arkansas catalogue contained one sentence on student discipline: “Students are expected to obey the laws of the land, the University and good society.” The 1994-95 catalogue had extensive listings concerning academic honesty, sexual harassment, alcohol policies and miscellaneous rights and rules.

The 1872 Bulletin Catalogue contained a list of guidelines that are still appropriate.

“If our students are to become valued and noble citizens, they need to learn self government and to conform their conduct to the laws of their country and to the usage of good society. Students must not expect to be governed, but to govern themselves. It is no part of the duty of the faculty to act the part of policemen or spies upon the conduct of students.

“Those who do not care to try need not come, for they will not be permitted to remain. The widest personal freedom will be accorded to everyone to do all that is good and right, and the fullest opportunity and the most abundant material possible will be furnished for this doing. But whatever is unmanly and lowers one’s self respect will not be tolerated.

“Loitering in the streets and the contracting of debts and the spending of money foolishly, the use of profane, indecent or ungentlemanly language, all forms of dissipation, the spending of time in any company whose information
does not lead to a higher and fuller life, are some of the things which must be avoided by students.

“Absolute promptness in attendance and in performance of all duties will be required.”

Does any student at the University of Arkansas today come close to obeying these mandates?

Over time and on an average, I have sensed a change in the student’s attitude to learning. Absent is the excitement of learning and the thirst to comprehend. Today’s students are economically goal oriented. The most frustrating question a student has asked me, and more than one has in recent years, is “What do I need to know to get an ‘A’?” The next question usually is, “What can I do for extra credit or points?”

Yes, there is grade inflation now, and I strongly suspect that some of this is due to requirements to maintain grade point averages to retain scholarship financing. In the past, scholarship help was rare. Now more than ever, students juggle class choices, opt for a “WP” [withdraw with a passing grade] to retain a suitable grade point average and place less emphasis on retaining knowledge.

Students arrive from high school expecting high grades and minimal assignments. A recent Calvin and Hobbes cartoon strip sums up this attitude. In the first panel, Calvin, sitting at a desk, says “This bad grade is lowering my self-esteem.” The teacher admonishes Calvin with this statement. “Then you should work harder so you don’t get bad grades.” In the final panel, an enraged Calvin replies, “Your denial of my victimhood is lowering my self-esteem.”

Back in the 1950s and 1960s, girls wore skirts and blouses to class. At that time Physical Education (PE) was required, and when the class necessitated wearing shorts, a long raincoat was required to cover up. Some time in the 1960s blue jeans entered the apparel scene, first for the boys, then later for girls and eventually for the faculty, particularly in Arts and Sciences. Whereas boys’ t-shirts formerly carried such identification as “Rogers High School Athletic Department,” this soon gave way, in the late 1970s, to tie dye markings and eventually to the works of stencil art and political statements common on the campus to-day. T-shirts now take on the role of
advertising as students become human billboards. Often the art or message is gross enough that I coin the term “Human Bilge Boards.”

Much of today’s student attire is a residual from the campy look of the 1960s flower children. Seed caps for boys entered the scene in the 1970s, and more recently it became cool to wear them backwards. Now they are common in the classroom and the restaurant scene. They are sort of high schoolish and always gross. And 30 years ago no man would be caught dead wearing neck or ear jewelry, not to mention shoulder-length hair.

Books under the arm or in a brief case vanished some 20 years ago when the on-one-shoulder backpack style hit the college campus.

Students always abhor walking. This fact was addressed in the late 1970s when the Associated Student Government President proposed a campus transit system. One was tried. It consisted of a flat-bed wagon pulled by a tractor. This lasted about one week, but it was a precursor to the current campus transit system. Parking and walking still remains a problem despite the success of this new system.

Athletics are a part of University life. I have participated in intercollegiate athletics as a student (Wisconsin) and as a coach (Yale) and had students in my classes who were athletes (University of Arkansas). I love college-level sports.

I saw my first Razorback football game in October 1958. It was coach Frank Broyles’ first home victory, Arkansas 13, SMU 6. I have not missed a home Razorback football game for 36 years. Back then the marching band had 100 members; this past fall there were 280 students in the band. Games were formerly played on bermudagrass, which turned to a soft beige color after a killing frost. Then the change was made to the astroturf rug with its glossy green sheen all season. Style has come full circle as natural grass is now being re-installed in Razorback Stadium. Since the heady football days of the 1960s, the stadium has been enlarged with the addition of lights (used once), an upper deck and sky boxes.

The sport of basketball has seen changes. In the 1950s and 1960s, the players wore short shorts, the socks were high, the scores were low, there were no three-point shots or slam dunks, and tickets were available on a walk-up basis. In 1994-95 the shorts are long, the socks are short, the scores are high, and the crowd is kept in a frenzy by a 100-
member pep band, cheerleaders and anorexic pom-pon girls. Trash talking among players replaced joshing as standard court demeanor.

Formerly, students who were athletes played sports. This has changed to athletes who are reluctant students; they are coddled in their academic work to retain eligibility in order to preserve a winning record and the coach’s job.

Big-time college sports have changed from amateur games to a quasi-professional status, dollar-driven, media-manipulated, corporate-sponsored, mass-entertainment format. Unfortunately, the University of Arkansas has fallen prey to the times. Scholarship has lost its academic meaning. A “keeping up with the Joneses” in the SEC regarding building facilities, recruitment and coaching staffs has become the order of the day.

The flickering bright spot is the emerging women’s sports program, which I fear may ultimately follow the men’s trend.

My love for college sports is now diminishing because the sport has been taken out of the competition.

**CAMPUS LIFE**

Back in 1958, hula hoops were seen on campus and Fred Waring, Roger Williams and Chuck Berry gave concerts. There was no in-state tuition charge, but registration was $100, up $25 from the previous year (nothing new or different from 1995 except for amount). This fee included athletic fees, a student union fee, concerts, lectures and, for agriculture students, a subscription to *The Agriculturist*. Campus housing was $530-720/year. Contrast this to the 1994 registration of $1,932 and $3,478 for housing. But then the student wage was $0.60/hour or less.

While education costs relative to student earning power were more favorable 30 years ago, campus life is definitely easier and more convenient today. This is due to student services, which abound. Now the greatest growth on campus is not found in academic offerings but in student services.

During yesterdays, students toughed it out or dropped out. Now there are improved advising, writing centers, counseling centers (such as Counseling and Psychological Services), remedial classes, tutoring
availability, career services, computer resources, a student health center and many union programs. Most students now have in their rooms refrigerators, personal phones, CD players, television, VCR's and even computers, amenities unknown 35 years ago when only a few students had a radio and the communal phone was down the hall. Two years of R.O.T.C. is no longer required of all male students, and P.E. is no longer mandatory for all females.

Best of all, registration for classes has improved. In 1959, 5,500 students registered for the spring semester. Students went from advisor’s offices to the dean’s offices, then to the Old Gym, where lines were long and course offerings were short. At least one full day was required for registration, and there was no preregistration period. The 1959 Razorback year book said this about registration: “It was easy, as disorganized Freshman were absent (spring registration) yet characterized by having remarkable duplicity, unnecessary paper work and lack of logic.” Safari registration, with all its glitches, is a vast improvement. The program quickly handles 15,000-plus students, requiring less of their time.

Today I see campus life as having less civility and sense of belonging than in the past. While student diversity has increased remarkably since the 1950s, this has led to group isolation rather than flux. Campus prejudice exists now as then. I recall a huge homecoming decoration from about 1960. Its theme was “Arkansas, the Land of Discriminating People.” I have a photograph of it. Now, prejudicial actions, while less overt than in the past, are nevertheless present and often in a more subtle and insidious form. In a recent Chronicle of Higher Education article, the author’s point was that when we fail to take personal responsibility, we accept regulations, hence the rules of affirmative action and harassment policy and the facade of political correctness. Our growth in personal responsibility in this area is lacking, particularly in the teaching aspect of this University.

**FACULTY**

There has been a change in faculty over time, a change not only in numbers but in attitudes. As always, there are those who are dedicated to teaching and others who see it as a necessary chore, as adjunct to their research. Formerly the faculty-student relationship was more
formal, more respectful, more professional, less intimate or, to use a modern term, “less user friendly.” For the most part, the faculty of today emerged from the crucible of national unrest, which occurred during the late 1960s; they are from the “ME” generation. They are dedicated to their professions, more narrowly trained, more interactive with students and lower in their expectation of student respect. Being less formal, today’s faculty are more likely to mimic students in terms of dress. Coats, collar shirts and ties are less common in the classroom than previously. Students have commented to me about (some) faculty’s sloppy appearance and, particularly, their use of bad language.

Course syllabi were uncommon, in fact rare, 30 years ago. Now they are virtually a requirement and issued by the faculty in great detail. Instructor and course evaluations were a rarity and seldom utilized, but the student “grapevine” passed the word around concerning who and what was good and who and what should be avoided. Now faculty and course improvement is recognized, fostered and, hopefully, rewarded. A teaching academy on campus provides opportunities and incentives for faculty improvement. As always, faculty characters and legends about them exist.

A profound change has come about in terms of faculty accouterments. Thirty-some years ago office phones were rare, there were no copy machines, and mechanical calculators were used. Today’s faculty has access to computer terminals, answering machines, faxes, E-Mail and a high-speed copier just a few steps from his or her office.

**OUR COLLEGE**

Enrollment in the college of Agriculture and Home Economics was about 500 in 1958; 60% were males. In 1995 the gender split is about even, and the student total is about 800. In the early 1970s the first significant shift of women into the previously male-dominated area of agriculture courses occurred.

*The Agriculturist*, two issues per semester, was published for many years by college students. It vanished in the 1960s. *Arkansas Farm Research*, which began in 1951, was replaced by *Arkansas Land and Life* in the spring of 1995. This publication is for the public and serves as a public relations vehicle for our college. *The Graduate* newsletter
communicates with the alumni, and the new Deans Notes keep the faculty informed of broad issues.

Departmental clubs have always made up an important part of the educational recreational aspect of student life in the college, and they still do so.

Although the image of being the “Cow College” has diminished along with the entire university’s image of being a party school, much needs to be done to enhance the public’s perception or vision of our academic and research worth to the state and nation.

Recognition of scholarship and teaching, as done at this convocation, is a definite progress plus for our college. Another positive step is the soon-to-be-organized University of Arkansas Agriculture Alumni Chapter.

AGRI DAY

I do not know how long “Agri Day” has been a distinctive feature of the college. I do know that it is not what it used to be. The spring of 1959 was my first Agri Day experience. I had a meeting on campus that Saturday morning in April. When I arrived at the noon barbecue at Agriculture Park, I was accosted by a zealot student who cut my necktie in half using a long pair of scissors. This was a shock and a blow to an unknowing assistant professor who was just emerging from the poverty of graduate school. Wearing a tie was an Agri Day no-no, and cutting it in half was a tradition. That same afternoon I took my four children to the student rodeo at the fairgrounds, and in the evening my wife and I attended the banquet where the Agri Day Queen and her court were presented. Agri Day was also a show-and-tell day on campus; cattle were tethered to trees, tractors were parked on senior walk, and exhibits open to the public were well attended in the Agriculture and Home Economics Buildings. Since those days, Agri Day has shrunk in its activities and become internalized.
CONCLUSION

In the past 35 years, the University and the college have grown. An unfortunate consequence of this growth and increased specialization is separation and isolation among colleges, departments and individuals. I see faculty too much involved in doing their own thing, concerned with promotion, tenure and, yes, accountability. This has resulted in a loss of a sense of “Community” in this college and throughout this University. The faculty has lost its collective social ability.

What is needed, in my estimation, in our college is a series of forums, seminars, round tables and discussion groups where issues of education and agriculture on a broad, if not global, scale are discussed. More intra- and inter-departmental interaction is needed to retain our college’s vitality and to spread our progressive reactive image to the general public. A faculty that does not lead will soon find itself being led.

Over time our college and the University of Arkansas have experienced change, some of which translates to growth, some to progress.

To the students assembled here, those receiving academic recognition, I can say that someday your name will be etched on senior walk; that will never change, but your life and the life of this great educational institution will have changed because you were here.