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INTERVIEW

McKernie pleased with new job

In May, 1984, University Theatre director Grant McKernie made a major career decision, one he had been struggling with for much of the past year: He accepted the position of speech department head for the University...a job which entails administrating not only speech, but the film, telecommunications and theater areas of study as well.

At the time McKernie, 41, had taught at the University for four years. During that period he directed several plays, and helped write the immensely popular musical fantasy "The Last Dragon" (a presentation which grossed more money for University Theatre than any other production in 15 years.)

McKernie says that he loves teaching and working with students, and calls it "the most important part of my professional life."

In turn, he anticipated his new job as administrator with trepidation. Now he's discovered his hesitation was unfounded.

While he says he looked forward to working closely with the speech department faculty and staff — he calls them "truly exceptional" — he was concerned that the new position would impose upon his time and efforts as the theater director and as a (highly regarded) professor.

In addition, he foresaw the administrative chore of having to cut programs in what he calls "a world of contracting resources."

Now, six months later, McKernie has moved his books and easy chair from a quiet, cozy office on the second floor of Villard Hall to an airy, more spacious room off the speech department office (The University can't give you more money so they give you a bigger office, he jests).

He's discovered that he enjoys the office, and, to his (somewhat mild) astonishment, the job that goes along with it.

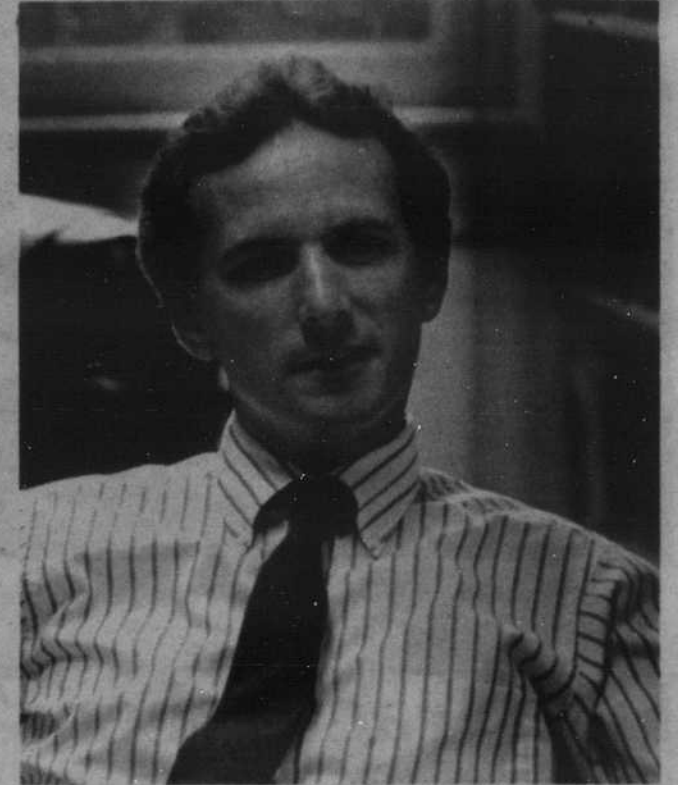
"The biggest surprise is that I really like it," McKernie says of his position. "I assumed it would be one headache after another."

Not so. While there are "always problems" McKernie says, there haven't been an excessive number of headaches. He credits the speech department staff for making his new job "a very special experience."

He continues to teach, but only halftime — one graduate and two undergraduate theater courses. McKernie remains as theater director and is currently writing a play with others in the department, in the collaborative style of "The Last Dragon."

McKernie says he's recently clarified the goals for his new job. Mainly he hopes to increase the amount of resources for the faculty, and to improve the faculty and equipment that's currently available.

He also hopes to make people on campus



Grant McKernie

aware of the status of the speech department. "I want to build an understanding in the University community that we (speech, theater and telecommunication and film) are one department. We are one and we have common goals. I want to communicate that sense of unity," he says.

"I think this is going to be a very exciting year for University Theatre," McKernie says. Coming from the theater realm of the department, McKernie has a special place in his work for it. "I really do believe that the theater area can benefit from my taking this position," he says, "because I will have the opportunity to seek out financial resources; something that I tend not to do as director of theater that automatically I will do as head of speech."

McKernie hopes that increased attendance at University Theatre productions and the consequential money gained, will enable the theater to update its equipment, and at the same time allow for the set and costume designers to more fully "explore ideas."

As with many department heads, money for his department and its several areas is obviously a weighty issue in McKernie's mind. "There are always continuing problems," he says, adding that there are usually never easy solutions available for many of them. "We're understaffed and underfunded," he says. "And now it's my problem. I'm very aware of it."

Kim Carlson

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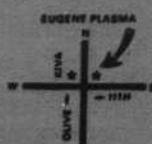
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