

Chancellor speaks in Brazil

Ruth Rieken

Chancellor Arnold B. Grobman was enjoying balmy, short-sleeve temperatures in Brazil over the winter break while the city he left behind lay buried in snow.

The chancellor delivered a series of lectures on science curriculums at the University of Campinas, a rising young state institution on Brazil's eastern coast and about 75 miles west of Sao Paulo.

The opportunity for his well-timed trip south arose through similar work which his wife has been performing in recent years at the University of Sao Paulo.

"My wife is invited down to lecture occasionally on evaluation and designing proper tests (in biology), and when she learned that there was such an interest in Campinas, she suggested my name," Grobman said.

A biology major himself, the chancellor's expertise in the administrative end of the field stems from his earlier work with high school science studies.

"Years ago, before I came here to UMSL, I was in charge of a curriculum study in biology," he related.

"You've probably used some of our textbooks when you took biology in high school—the BSCS series. So I've had a lot of experience with curriculum development and design, and these people in Brazil wanted me to come down and talk about science programs."

The University of Campinas has been in existence about as long as UMSL, about ten years, but here ends any further similarity between the two campuses. "Their faculty is twice as large as UMSL's and they have half as many students," Grobman explained, "so it has a much better student-to-faculty ratio than we have."

"It's also organized differently; it's organized along the European style. Instead of having a college of arts and sciences, as we do, which is the core of the university, they have nothing like that," Grobman said. "They have an institute of mathematics, an institute of physics, one of history, biology—about a dozen of those. Then they have separate faculties of engineering, medicine, education, and so on."

"So, a student getting out of high school has to immediately select which one of these he wants to major in. And you don't apply to the university itself—you must apply to one of these institutes. Each has its own building, and the campus is arranged in a circle, with these various schools along the outside and a nice library in the middle. It's very nice."

Grobman emphasized the pressure under which the Brazilian high school student must decide his career. "You have to make up your mind while you're still in school. And furthermore, high school ends at the eleventh grade instead of the twelfth, so the students are much younger. They have to make that determination at a very early age."

As to changing one's major, he added that "it's almost impossible to go in some directions. For instance, engineering is very popular in Brazil, with its expanding economy, and so many people want to get into engineering. If you're already in engineering and decide to get into physics, that's fine. But if

not be good for Thailand or Brazil or France, because the educational systems are different, the plant and animal life is different, and the social problems are also different. An African student, for instance, may need to know about malaria, but not in this country—it's wiped out.

"So, we said, we'll be glad to let you use our materials if you get a group of educators together and adapt them for local needs. Okay, they said. Well, from that little beginning, a large number of adaptation teams arose and these books have now been modified for about forty countries. Brazil is one of them."

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you want to go from physics to engineering, you can't do it."

Such technical fields are highly stressed now in schools because Brazil, a nation rich in natural resources, is climbing upward along the economic scale as a future industrial giant. Grobman said that, "the country is larger than all of Europe, and it has about 110 million people. The southern parts of Brazil are highly industrialized, and since it used to be underdeveloped, it had to import everything—cars, for example."

"Now they make their own cars; they make Volkswagens. The whole place is just full of Volkswagens—even the police cars and army vehicles," Grobman said.

"Brazil has tremendous resources in its interior, in everything but oil. So when the oil prices started going up, it hurt their economy very badly."

But research in the field of energy and elsewhere has become a major concern of the country's higher educational systems, especially at Campinas, as its research programs indicate. "I have rarely seen a better-equipped university," Grobman said. "They are also doing research in lasers, for example, and they have marvelous equipment, an excellent computing center, and it's really a gem of a place."

Much has been done in recent years to upgrade the standard of education in Brazil, and yet, much remains to be done. The chancellor's personal contribution towards this effort started with the science textbook series which he helped to design some years ago.

"These books became very successful, and people from other countries wanted to translate and use them. We said no, that the biology books that are good for the United States may

Grobman has personally examined the progress his books are making in foreign countries, and has, in the process, managed to travel the world several times. One would inevitably encounter many language barriers on such occasions, and Grobman related one humorous incident which occurred while he was in a Brazilian drugstore.

"The hotel we stayed at didn't supply soap, so I went down to a drugstore to get some soap. I hadn't brought my Portuguese phrasebook along, but; I thought, most of these Portuguese words are really English words with an 'a' on the end.

"So I told the clerk I wanted some 'soapa'. Well, she called the other clerks over and they had a big conference about 'soapa'. Apparently, 'soapa' means 'soup', and of course, they didn't sell soup in the drugstore. So I finally had to make hand motions to show her what I wanted," Grobman explained, as he rubbed his hands together, "and she finally understood."

Seeing a common bond of understanding established between peoples and nations, regardless of language barriers, can indeed become a rich learning experience. Grobman observed, for example, that Brazil is almost devoid of racial discrimination.

"The country has a tremendous mixture of racial types. There were no signs of discrimination that were overt to me, anyway. It wasn't unusual to see a black girl and a white boy walking together on the street," Grobman said. "you don't just see two blacks and two whites; they're all mixed. You see all shades of people—from the darkest black to the whitest white."



WONDER WHAT THEY'RE UP TO? Little Rivermen fan observes the action at a recent basketball game. [Current Photo]

UMSL's acting troupe open to creative new talent

Paul Marshall

Joining the University Players is as easy as showing up.

That is, at least according to Jim Fay, an associate professor of speech and technical director for the theatre here. "Just show up and you can help," said Fay. Fay, who is directing the Players' latest offering, "The Night of the Burning Pestle," explained, "There are tryouts before work begins on any production and the roles are open to anyone in the UMSL community."

"There are usually anywhere from six to 35 roles available. There is no hard core of performers, or those who are in every production. We always are looking for new talent," he said.

There are also jobs that students can perform off-stage. Prop and costume designers, artists and painters, and handy people in general are always welcomed. The University Players is a volunteer organization where a mechanical talent is as useful as acting ability.

The Players give the student a chance to acquire a new and creative social outlet. "Considering the drawbacks of a commuter campus," said Fay, "the theater helps students develop a social life. It's a closely knit group but it is very easy to be accepted, just show an interest and you're in."

Those individuals who may be a bit skeptical about performing in front of a university audience can "get their feet

wet" in front of a lesser audience from time to time.

Last December, as a community service, the Players put on a Christmas show for all of the elementary schools in the Normandy School district.

The Players have always been well-received, both on and off campus. "Response from the students and faculty here has been good," said Fay. "Many people realize that theatre can play an important role in education, for those in the production itself and for those in the audience as well." UMSL currently offers five courses in acting and theatre production.

Funding for the Players come from student activity fees and production admission receipts. When asked about the financial aspect of the Players, Fay replied, "Theatre, by its very nature, requires a lot of space, equipment, and money. True, we would like to have a new fine arts center, but I would have to say I'm pleased with the cooperation that exists between the Players and the administration and student committees."

For those of us who are content to view the productions, rather than act in them, "The Night of the Burning Pestle" will be performed on Feb. 24 through 27 at 8 p.m. in 105 Benton Hall. "Pestle" is a Jacobean comedy, a satirical look at plays and actors," said Fay. "It was first performed in 1608 and was a failure. However, it was revived in 1630 and has been a success ever since."



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