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## The Last Word: Reflections of a Retiring College President

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## Reflections of a Retiring College President

Last June, in his Boyden Hall office, the Bridgewater Review editors asked Dr. Adrian Rondileau to reflect on his 24 years as president of Bridgewater State College. Here are some of his remarks.

*Q: What do you consider your major accomplishment as president?*

A. I believe very deeply that a college must strive to be a community where we have common causes, common goals, common purposes, which transcend whatever differences we might have. In Massachusetts, Bridgewater has a reputation for a strong sense of college community. Now that doesn't mean that everyone here thinks alike. There has to be a play of different ideas and different perspectives to create a dynamic community, and certainly we have that here. But it's very possible for people in organizations and that includes colleges, to be so much at odds among themselves and so embittered that much time and energy are wasted and not much is accomplished.

In sum, I feel that the growth of a strong sense of college community is the keystone achievement which has greatly facilitated other critical goals, --highly competent faculty, administration and staff, strong academic and support programs and concomitant justified pride among students, faculty, staff and alumni.

*Q: What is the most challenging or difficult experience that you have had to deal with in your capacity as president?*

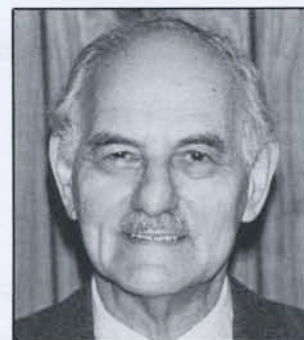
A. A most difficult one, and what I considered the single best test of the soundness of the college community philosophy, happened during the period of about 6 or 7 years, roughly from 1967 to 1973, when resentment and discouragement about the Vietnam War were at their height. Virtually every campus in America was experiencing a variety of very difficult problems. Here at Bridgewater, we had a student strike over the issue of non-reappointment of a faculty member who was very popular with some students. I had to resolve the matter. Given the circumstances, it seemed to

me that we might abide by the best judgment of two of the three segments of the community, that is, students, faculty and administration.

The students were quite taken with the charisma of this teacher; and would surely vote to retain him. The administrators' vote not to reappoint him was also highly probable. The faculty were divided, and their vote was highly uncertain but finally most of them were convinced that the decision not to reappoint was in the best interests of the institution. So he was dismissed. I was told later by a knowledgeable friend that I had either done the dumbest thing he had ever known any administrator to do, or the wisest. He wasn't sure which. Sometimes no one can be sure. That's inherent in the job; a college president must make basic decisions and stand by them.

*Q: What do you find most rewarding, the part of the job you like best?*

A. Among the most rewarding times are the special occasions. Of course, Commencement is a rewarding occasion, as are Honors Day and Alumni Day. I also think it's always encouraging to realize that although progress is sometimes a little slow, we know that we can be proud of a great tradition and a strong forward momentum. We have a beautiful campus and excellent academic programs. The College is fulfilling its mission, even more than it was able to do in the early years. In the last decade, we have developed several important new professional career programs, retaining of course our several traditionally outstanding teacher education programs, and we have a panoply of arts and sciences. Most students who want a good undergraduate program will find something that is suitable to them at Bridgewater. Now you really couldn't quite have said that 25 years ago. Of course, historically some graduates have come out of Bridgewater even when it was a single purpose institution and have gone into all sorts of fields: business, law, medicine, among others. But now students can prepare for teaching or business as well as a number of other professions and they can get all their preparation here. I



Dr. Adrian Rondileau

think it's a great tribute to the conscientiousness of the faculty and of everyone else at the College that we've evolved so successfully from a small single purpose institution to a large complex multi-purpose institution.

I also find it rewarding, to cite an academic example, that we've just been through a very rigorous and thoughtful review of the General Education Requirements. A very careful effort has been made to determine what kinds of courses really ought to be considered as a basis for a sound liberal arts education. It's one of the finest intellectual efforts in that area that I've seen any college faculty undertake. Ordinarily the battle for turf militates against real consideration of the needs of students. Everyone argues that his or her own subject is the most important. But this review transcended the battle for turf and was imaginative and idealistic as well as practical and realistic. I thought it was a great job.

*Q: Can you tell us any thoughts on how you would like to be remembered as Bridgewater's president?*

A. I have three hopes. First, I would hope to be remembered as a person who had some understanding of what this College has always stood for, its educational, cultural and economic mission to the students, the region and the country. Secondly, I would hope to be remembered as a person who tried to work cooperatively with colleagues and with students to fulfill the College's potential so that together we might attain our mutual goals. Finally, as Bridgewater's academic reputation continues to grow nationally and internationally -- as it surely will -- over the next decades, I hope to be remembered as a person who helped to lay some of the essential building blocks for that deserved splendid reputation.