

Reflections of Patrick F. Taylor

Being accepted to study petroleum engineering by LSU was for me, as Wellington said of Waterloo, “a very close run thing.” As a high school senior in Houston who was determined to be an oilman, I had surveyed petroleum engineering schools across the country. The people that I was talking to consistently ranked LSU among the best and, I was told LSU was “cheap.”

Arriving on campus in September of 1955, I had many disadvantages and one big advantage. The disadvantages were several. Having been on my own for well over a year, I had a mere \$55 in my pocket; I had not applied and I was two days late for a three day registration. Was it a close run thing? Absolutely. Had not one individual that day in the old Armory Field House over heard me say that I had graduated on scholarship from the Kinkaid School in Houston, I would almost certainly have been turned away.

As it was, I only managed to enter because LSU did not charge tuition (and, in my case, overlooked out of state tuition)

and accepted a “deferred payment note” in lieu of the student fee and room and board. In my life, as they say, “The rest is history.” I finished my degree requirements in 3 years and began an extremely rewarding career.

My debt to LSU and the people of Louisiana stayed with me. In the early 1980’s I had the honor to serve on the LSU Board of Supervisors which allowed me to push successfully for adoption of the 17 credit advanced core curriculum for admittance. That was especially meaningful to me since my own academic success at LSU was directly attributed to my having completed that same curriculum at Kinkaid.

It was not until 1988 that I was faced with the realization that our University was priced beyond the means of the majority of our families. That realization and my firm conviction that academic preparedness was absolutely essential to any individual’s success in college led to the passage of Louisiana’s Taylor Plan in 1989. It was a simple piece of legislation that provided for state-paid tuition and fees for low

and moderate income kids only if, however, they first completed the core curriculum with a solid passing grade and made a median score on an admissions test.

As governor Huey Long, a great benefactor of LSU, said to the kids of Louisiana, "Graduate from high school, bring your toothbrush, and we will take you in." As one of those poor kids that had been taken in, I wanted to renew that promise but to add, "First you must take the right courses and make the grades so that you can graduate when you get here." That message has been confirmed and has impacted the kids and LSU.

Our original bill has been recognized nationally and has led to similar legislation in thirteen other states. More states will follow. But, Louisiana has maintained its role of leadership. After constantly expanding the bill, we were able, in 1997, to remove all income limits and to roll in extra benefits for honors students, resulting in the present programs, "TOPS."

From the very beginning, however a significant fact has been apparent, LSU far more than any other university, has been the choice of Taylor Plan kids. Dr. James Wharton, chancellor at the inception and my good friend, has monitored and recorded the progress and the improvement in the quality of our freshmen applicants. Our dream of access and admissions standards has worked and LSU has responded.

Last year, under the leadership of Dr. William Jenkins and our faculty heads, LSU increased its admissions standards to include a 2.5 GPA and an ACT score a point higher than "TOPS" for all freshmen applicants beginning next fall. The national significance of this action cannot be overestimated. Last fall, 80% of entering freshmen met the "TOPS" admissions standards and are free of tuition and fees. Next fall, the entire freshmen class, the last of this millennium, will be

free of the burden of tuition and fees. They will be the first since 1958 not required to pay tuition but there is a big difference. They, each and every one, will be qualified to succeed in university level studies.

As engineers we know, of course, that the standards, significant as they are in Louisiana and this nation, are not adequate for those seeking degrees in science and engineering, so we in engineering must set our goals higher. Our society and economy face a growing and serious shortage of engineers and scientists. Fortunately, we are also seeing that early exposure to the advanced math and science courses in the core curriculum are leading more young people to choose more rigorous degree courses. Dr. Ted Bourgoyne, our Dean of Engineering, is well aware of the need for higher standards for admittance to the College of Engineering and we can be confident of his leadership.

I must admit that this all has a very personal meaning to me. My dream of the past decades has been that LSU, our LSU, could once again be tuition free so that the disadvantage of my youth would once again be no obstacle. But I have had another dream, and that has been that every student would enter LSU having properly prepared for success.

I know that, in a few years, Louisiana State University will be unique in the entire nation. Ours will be the only major public university in the land to be tuition free. Ours will be the only student body that, in its entirety, will have earned its admittance through individual effort, desire and merit. Not only will we attract the best and the brightest, but the opportunity and the challenge that we offer will create far more of those best and brightest. Our example will cause our peer institutions around the country to follow suit just as other states continue to

follow Louisiana's tuition assistance program. Let us not forget, however, that history will record that LSU was first.

By appointing me to the Engineering Hall of Distinction you have extended to me both high honor and more than a small measure of indulgence. Please understand, however, if I accept this honor not for my own achievements, material or otherwise. Please let me choose to accept on behalf of the coming achievements of all those kids like me that are once again guaranteed the same shelter and enrichment that LSU gave to me.