

Spanier Q & A

Will you always work in higher education?

"I hope it will be possible for me to have a very long tenure there (at Penn State). I don't aspire to do anything other than that job."

"Given that I'm 46 years old now, I don't think it's likely that I'll be in a position like that for 20 years. By the year 2015, I would probably be breaking some sort of a record if I was still in that same position. But I really don't aspire to do anything outside of higher education."

Will Graham Spanier ever run for office?

"My interests have broadened. One thing that happens to you as chancellor is, because you spend so much time with people in business and government, you learn more about what they do."

"By learning more what they do, it doesn't seem as remote or scary to be in that line of work that's different from something you've done."

"But my whole life's been higher education. I feel like this is where I belong. I don't ever expect to run for public office."

What do people not know about Graham Spanier?

"How much I will miss the job. There's a danger in only having been here four years, of people coming to the conclusion that I really didn't become rooted here, and I was passing through."

"Nothing could be further from the truth. I feel very deeply rooted, and leaving will be very hard."

Is Penn State the only job you would leave UNL for?

"If this combination of things hadn't occurred when it did with the University of Washington and Penn State, yes I would still be the chancellor. The presidency at Penn State is probably the only thing I would have left this university for."

"Here is the one opportunity that I felt I seriously needed to consider, and it happened. I get approached all the time about these things, and I answer with a form letter."

How would you grade yourself on affirmative action efforts?

"You can't do that because the pipeline is much longer. I think we get an 'A' for laying the groundwork for long range improvement. But the course isn't over yet. An 'A' is the midterm grade. A final grade can't be given for a few more years."

How did you improve human development?

"The climate of the university is different. I think we've done away largely with the we and they attitude that used to be more common here. The students were against the faculty. The administration were against someone else."

How successful has empowering employees been?

"In the past, deans, directors, vice chancellors, would ask for money. We've done away with that entirely. In the last three years, would you like to guess how many times a dean or director has come into my office asking for money? Zero. They don't come and ask me for favors during the year."

—Jeff Zeleny



Chancellor Graham Spanier is a showman with many hats. He hosts a monthly radio show, "To the Best of My Knowledge," on Lincoln radio. He came to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln 3 1/2 years ago. AT RIGHT: During an NU Board of Regents meeting Saturday, Spanier becomes involved in a discussion on research. Spanier will become the president of Pennsylvania State University in September.

Spanier makes administration spontaneous

Spanier

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Spanier is a showman with many hats.

Magician. Racquetball player. Father.

Those interests always have been hobbies, but perhaps a key ingredient to his success in the academic world.

"About half of the chancellor's job is what I would describe as external relations," he says. "For me, this part of the job is pretty easy."

This university chancellor doesn't sit in closed meetings all day. He defies many stereotypes of a man in charge of a multi-million dollar budget.

No power breakfasts.

Instead, he insists on a daily family breakfast with his wife, Sandra, and two children, Brian and Hadley.

No golf.

He thinks of it as a waste of time. Instead, he exercises by playing racquetball.

No secret advisers.

Instead, he seeks input from people directly involved. Spanier made this clear during his installation speech on April 27, 1992.

"Shortly after I arrived I was asked if I wanted to have a Chancellor's Advisory Committee. My reply was that I found there already was one in place here. It has 1.6 million members."

Since then, Spanier continues to consult Nebraskans from across the state. Whether on his radio show, "To the Best of My Knowledge," speaking to rural high school students or lunching with a western Nebraska Rotary Club, Spanier has been accessible.

"I try to stay in touch with constituents of all different levels," he says during an interview in his second-floor Administration Building office. "I know the custodi-

ans in this building as well as I know the directors."

This common man approach brought abrupt change to an administration of a different generation, many Spanier aides say.

Spanier is the first chancellor to attend nearly every academic senate meeting. He is a mentor to a residence hall floor of honor students. He regularly plays racquetball with an employee from the purchasing department, a Navy ROTC administrator and students.

"When you're out there in the locker room with your shorts on, any distinctions of status and hierarchy are gone," he says.

Michael Mulnix, executive director of university relations, says Spanier's youth and vitality are refreshing. Spanier is a "new breed

of a guy," whose visionary and witty sense are good for the administration, Mulnix says.

"It made the second floor a little more fun," he says, "and a lot more spontaneous."

Spanier demonstrated this the day before he officially became chancellor.

A gorilla walked into an Oct. 31, 1991, meeting in the chancellor's office. As the animal passed out candy, it got stares from vice chancellors and department directors. Stan Liberty, then interim vice chancellor for academic affairs, asked the gorilla to leave the room.

Little did Liberty know, the gorilla soon would be his boss. Spanier laughs as the 3 1/2-year-old story is recounted.

"I would like to point out that it was Halloween, so there was a context for it," he says. "But, yeah, that's sort of how I am. I like to have fun and operate the administration with a pretty high level of informality."

And there has been a show every Oct. 31 since.

Every "Halloween I put on one of

my things and walk around campus and have a couple hours of fun. That's just the way I am," Spanier says. "I think some people thought, 'this is different, but we like it.'"

"Put simply, I see the 1990s as the era when this university rededicates itself to the people it serves: our students, staff, faculty, alumni, citizens of Nebraska and those we seek to reach beyond our borders..."
—Spanier's Installation Address

Spanier's goal to make the university more user-friendly is well under way. NRoll, the automated enrollment system, eliminated the dreaded drop/add process. Electronic mail allowed immediate communication across campus.

"We've practically done away with standing in lines," Spanier says. Spanier receives dozens of e-mail messages every day from students, faculty, staff and colleagues. And he responds to them.

When Spanier came to UNL, the campus was not technologically ready. Buildings needed to be rewired. Computer equipment needed to be purchased.

George Tuck, the 1991 Academic Senate president, said members of the faculty were thrilled that a chancellor would allocate funds to improve communication.

"He was really interested in technology," Tuck says. "He was much more interested in having people talk about problems."

The new communication system allowed Spanier to be in more places at one time. Because of this, he has been one of the most visible chancellors at the University of Nebraska.

Communication has been a part of Spanier's life since he was a boy working on a Chicago radio station. Spanier uses this knack when

working with the local media.

If the media attention is positive, Spanier is happy. When stories turn negative, however, he gets upset and often clams up.

But when the television lights come up, this is a chancellor who doesn't need coaching, says Mulnix, his chief public relations aide.

"He has been in the news more than any other figure in the state," Mulnix says. "He's very, very comfortable with that."

Some say he's too comfortable with the spotlight.

Regent Robert Allen of Hastings has consistently been critical of Spanier's zest for the public eye. It is a distraction that takes away from his duties as chancellor, Allen says.

Allen disagrees with Spanier on nearly every issue. The regent's continual negative comments usually aren't answered by Spanier, who says it isn't proper to play out those types of discussions in the press.

Instead, Spanier says he uses his family sociology experience and his training as a marriage and family therapist to diagnose the attacks.

"When people criticize me, my first reaction is not to get mad, it's to understand their perspective and to figure out why they are behaving that way," Spanier says. "I almost always end up understanding it, accepting them, forgiving them. I just don't hold grudges, I never have."

While Spanier downplays the attacks, those close to the chancellor say criticisms from Allen and others are one of his biggest frustrations.

"That's been the most disturbing to him personally," Mulnix says. "It gave a lot of people a different view — a wrong view — of Graham."

Despite Spanier's popularity, he has not been immune to controversy. His 1993 proposal to replace a parking lot with grass didn't sit well