

LOCAL NEWS

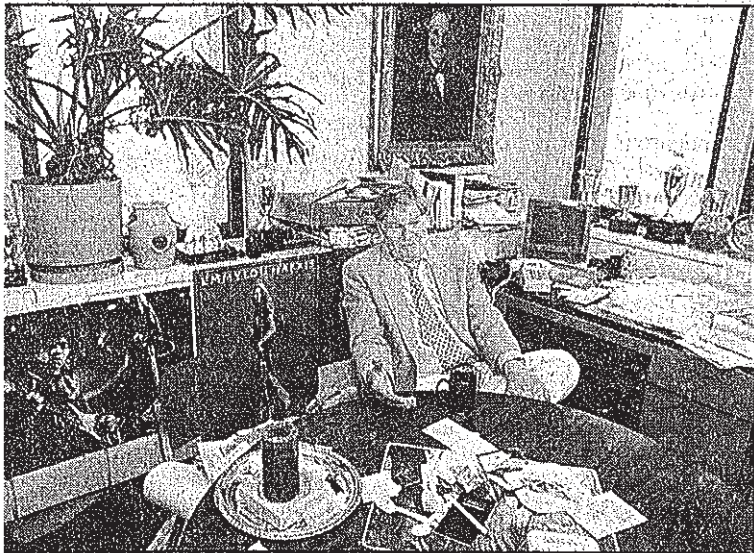
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DAVID PERRY/HERALD-LEADER

Among the novelties in J.W. Patterson's office is a portrait of former UK President James Kennedy Patterson. He also has posters of Emmylou Harris, Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson.

J.W. Patterson's role in success at UK is matter of little debate

BY DOTTIE BEAN

HERALD-LEADER EDUCATION WRITER

Meet J.W. Patterson. The J.W. stands for nothing.

"I have no name," said Patterson, the University of Kentucky's director of debate. "The way that came about was my parents disagreed over what to name me — one wanted Jason Wallace, and the other wanted Jackson William.

"So the doctor said, according to my mother, 'Why don't I just put the initials down, since we have a year to change it?'

"But they never got around to

"Oddly enough, I accepted UK's offer because it was the best offer I had that didn't require me to coach debate."

J.W. PATTERSON
UK director of debate

it."

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In 1960, when Patterson came to the University of Kentucky, he wasn't interested in working with college debate teams.

It was a time-consuming job requiring a lot of travel. And Pat-

erson was interested in research.

"Oddly enough, I accepted UK's offer because it was the best offer I had that didn't require me to coach debate," he said.

In spite of that, Patterson has spent much of his working life since 1971 as director of UK's debate program. It has flourished under his long tenure, building steadily on its national reputation.

The most recent team was ranked first in the country heading into the national tournament earlier this month, but it lost in the

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PATTERSON: Debate director puts UK on top

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quarterfinals.

UK debaters have won several national championships and have collected more than 100 first-place tournament trophies in 20 years.

And a driving force behind it all has been Patterson. He has spent countless hours on the road en route to tournaments, has organized UK's own tournaments and has run workshops for high school debaters.

His personal style, somewhat flamboyant and eccentric, inspires loyalty among friends and many former debaters — although some say it can be frustrating for those who work with him daily.

Once coach as well as director, Patterson's role now is more that of administrator, recruiter and publicist. Since 1984, the coaching duties have fallen to Assistant Director Roger Solt, described by one competitor as "one of the smartest people in the game today."

But it is Patterson's name and personality that many still associate with the debate program as an institution at UK.

Some describe him as outspoken and argumentative, others as gregarious and fun-loving.

His knowledge and wide-ranging tastes in music are well-known in debate circles. For long road trips, he makes tapes from a large collection of compact discs and has been known to play them loud.

One infamous tape contains 40 to 50 versions of "Amazing Grace."

Solt, who drives Patterson and the debate teams to tournaments, said the efforts are not always embraced by debaters, who complain that their director "inflicts a

bit more on them than they actually like, particularly when it comes to country music, which isn't too popular among students on the team."

"I must say," Patterson says ruefully, "some of my debaters have somewhat closed minds on music.

"I can appreciate a lot of things they like, but they can't appreciate a lot of things I like."

That doesn't keep top debaters away, though. Even among critics and rivals, Patterson gets respect for being able to attract top-notch debaters and students to UK.

"His strengths are in recruiting," said Harvard debate Coach Dallas Perkins. "The rest of the world is constantly amazed at how he gets such talented students to go to Kentucky."

Solt said he thinks Patterson's greatest skill has been as an institution builder,

"When he took over in 1971, Kentucky had had a strong program, but it was not nationally competitive.

"By the third year under his direction, Kentucky was in the semifinals (of the national debate tournament)," Solt said. "That shows how quickly he turned it around."

Some say his ability to wheedle internal and external support for the program and operate it on a shoestring travel budget borders on performing an administrative miracle.

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Patterson became well-acquainted with the administrative side of the university early in his career.

After about four years of teaching at UK, he was tapped by incoming UK President John Oswald to move into his office as an assistant and help organize the university's yearlong centennial celebration in 1965.

J.W. Patterson

Birthdate: May 9, 1928

Birthplace: Stillwell, Okla.

Current positions: UK director of debate, faculty adviser Student Government Association, professor of communications

Education: Worked toward combined degree at Northeast Oklahoma University and the University of Oklahoma, where he majored in speech and journalism; master's degree in speech, University of Michigan; doctorate, speech communications, University of Oklahoma

Quote: "The success we've had, I would attribute to the quality of the debaters... and to good assistants, particularly Roger Solt, I've been lucky in having good administrative support for program."

— HERALD-LEADER S

"He's interested in things young people are interested in subscribes to things like Spin and has a large music collection with hundreds of CDs, including rock and r groups."

T.A. MCKINNEY
former UK debater

He spent 3½ years as special assistant in the president's office.

He said he had no idea why he was picked for the centennial job.

"It was something I didn't seek and tried to turn down several times."

Patterson said Oswald found it appalling that UK was barely a year away from its centennial celebration and very little had been done toward planning it.

The celebration kicked off in 1965, complete with then-President Lyndon B. Johnson as speaker.

With the turmoil over Vietnam beginning to surface, Johnson was turning down a lot of invitations to speak on college campuses, but former Gov. Edward T. Breathitt persuaded him to come to the Kentucky celebration, Patterson said.

Patterson moved out of the president's office and back to the classroom in 1965. That same year, he also took on the duties of faculty

adviser to UK's Student Government Association, a position he holds, and in 1971 he accepted position of director of debate

The assignments left him as much time as he had to pursue the scholarly interests brought him to campus in that place, Patterson said.

But over the years, Patterson has found time to be co-author of debate textbook, *Contemporary Debate*, with Northwestern University Communications Dean David Davesky.

He still uses the text in teaching an undergraduate class on argumentation and debate.

He said he tries to instill appreciation for debate's logical processes in all his students.

But it's easier working with debaters, he said, because they already appreciate what he does for their critical thinking.

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From his cluttered office on the fourth floor of Patterson Tower, Patterson can see a campus landmark, the statue of James Kennedy Patterson, an early UK president.

A gilt-framed portrait of the same Patterson hangs on the wall — along with posters of Bob Dylan, Emmylou Harris, Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson, framed photographs of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, various plaques and a sign that reads, "Never trust a man who doesn't drink."

Was President Patterson perhaps an ancestor?

Patterson hedges. When he first arrived at UK, he was frequently asked, and he denied kinship.

But when he went home to the family farm near Stillwell, Okla., his father vehemently claimed kinship. "Since then I've said if my father says we are, that's fine with me."

Over the years, he has also built up a reputation for generosity and loyalty to his debaters and to the program.

"He would do anything for those debaters," said former debater Ouita Papka. "If you're having problems or need money to stay in school, he will find scholarship money or some way to help."

Papka said Patterson and Solt have also been known to bear many debate team expenses out of their own pockets.

Patterson also acts as academic shepherd, said former debater T.A. McKinney. "He knows what people are capable of and sees that they don't lose sight of getting good grades."

McKinney, now a law student at Columbia University's law school, said when Patterson recruited him as a UK debater, he promised that McKinney could move into a top-flight law school from

UK.

His first-semester grade-point average was about a 3.75, McKinney said.

"Dr. Patterson said, 'You need to bring that up a bit,'" he said. McKinney graduated with a 3.93.

McKinney said Patterson is able to adapt to young people. "He's interested in things young people are interested in. He subscribes to things like Spin and has a large music collection with hundreds of CDs, including rock and rap groups."

Patterson said he tries to stay up on today's musical genres and include what's currently popular in a library that ranges from classical Baroque to Hank Williams and George Jones.

"I like to hear new types of music. Not all the stuff that is new turns out to be good, but I like to at least give it a hearing."

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Patterson's class on argumentation and debate attracts a mixed group of students, ranging from pre-law students who need debating skills to those who are taking it to fulfill a university communications requirement.

This leads to a mixed range of interest in the class and mixed results, Patterson said.

During a 1-hour-and-15-minute class on the logical duties of the affirmative, several students briefly shut their eyes and appeared to doze off.

Failing to get a quick response from one student whom he asked to recount the four questions the affirmative side is expected to answer in a policy debate, Patterson told the class members to close their books.

Time for a pop quiz, Patterson said.

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