



Paino: Students need to be involved as budget decisions loom

interview by Olivia Sandbothe and Chris Drew

Monitor: Do you want tell us a little about your background?

Dr. Paino: My background personally and professionally goes throughout the Midwest. I went to Indiana University school of Law and practiced law for three years before I went back to school to get my PhD. at Michigan State University in American Studies, and from there I joined the faculty at Winona State University in Minnesota in the history department. I served there first as a history professor but then later as the dean of the college of liberal arts before coming here to Truman two years ago as the provost.

Monitor: How do you like Kirksville?

Dr. Paino: I like it a lot. I have a family, two daughters, a 10 year old and a 12 year old, and a wife. It's been a very welcoming community for me and my family and we've been very happy with that. The girls have gelled right into the school system here and made some friends. Wynona, Minnesota is not dramatically different; it's about 28,000 people compared to 17,000 here. The school I worked at was about 8,300 students compared to about 5,800 students here, so everything is just a little smaller here. We're used to not having malls or tons of restaurants. We like the convenience of a small town. We like the character of small towns.

Monitor: What things should students be aware of that are changing or emerging as issues at the university level?

Dr. Paino: Most people are aware of the challenges for the budget standpoint; I don't know if people are aware of the enormity of the challenge. The cuts we are looking at for this coming year and the year after are monumental and could completely change the nature of what it is we do here. Essentially since the late 90s our state funding has held flat. We are getting the same money that the university was getting back in the 90s, and we all know about inflation and costs. We've essentially had to stop hiring faculty and staff for the last two years, and probably it will go for another year. People haven't had any raises for the last couple years and it will probably be a couple more years, quite honestly. Times are tough, and this is going to start affecting the quality of the education. Truman has set itself apart in many respects, and one of the ways is the contact between students and faculty, the ability for faculty to work closely with highly talented students. You aren't going to get that experience at most public universities. Our ability to serve the students in the way they have grown accustomed to is going to be seriously threatened. The gradual cutback of funding to public universities has been going on for a while, and that gradual decline really became a serious issue in the last 10 to 15 years. Initially what universities did to respond to that was to increase tuition, and then States started clamping down on what universities could do in terms of tu-

ition raises. So the burden shifted from the State to the students and now right onto the back of the universities and the employees of the universities. I think unfortunately over the course of the next two years students are going to notice that there are some things that we just cannot do. I as the president would like to hear from students saying what it is they can't do without.



troy paino will become truman state's 16th president in may.

Monitor: The humanities are often the most vulnerable to this kind of crunch—what are you doing specifically to preserve those departments?

Dr. Paino: I come from a humanities background, so I feel very strongly about the core of the humanities. If you were to look at the disciplines that have taken the biggest hits course of the last 20 or 30 years it's the humanities. That's largely because of what has happened in higher education in general, and because of the pressure that's continually placed on Truman to have a more vocational bent to higher education. Everyone essentially wants it to become a workforce development approach to higher education, and that's really concerning to me. I think it's shortsighted, and I'm sort of the voice out in the wilderness right now talking about the value and the importance of keeping a public liberal arts and science university intact and to continue to fund things like the humanities. We have a fairly large and strong classic and modern language department, for example. If you look around the country those programs that are taking the hit are things like French or German or Latin. We offer things here that went by the wayside at other universities a long time ago. We try to stay true to our mission. While I was in Jeff City I heard one lawmaker say "well, don't you think that having a liberal arts and sciences university is a luxury we can't afford anymore?" That's really troubling to me. I think Missouri made a very enlightened decision back in the 1980s to designate a school as its public liberal arts university. I hope that now, facing these economic challenges, they don't lose sight of that vision. We are looking at, best case scenario, 5.2%, worst case scenario, 8.2% cuts in our state appropriation for next year. Our state appropriation is around 43 million dollars. The year after we are looking at, best case scenario, a 12% cut and a worst case scenario of a 20% cut. Add those two years together and think about how much money is coming

out of our budget. At some point, not just in the humanities, we are going to have to start asking ourselves what is it we are willing to cut. I want to insure the quality of our academic programs, so if there comes a time when the cuts are so severe the question is do you continue to do across the board cuts where you diminish the quality of all our programs a little bit, a little bit, and a little bit, and die a death of a thousand cuts, or do you make some difficult decisions and say, okay, there are some programs that have to go away. It is a decision I don't want to make. I think all the programs we offer are important to our mission.

Monitor: Many people have called for the University to improve its environmental policies. Where do you think there is room for improvement on campus?

Dr. Paino: I've talked to students and faculty on campus who are very interested in us ramping up our efforts to make the campus more "green". One of the things that I would like to do is really think about developing a strategic plan for the campus in terms of how to make ourselves more environmentally sustainable. In terms of what we can do with the buildings, we don't right now have specific research on which building needs to come first, although I know that there are some concerns with the library. We need to make all of the buildings more energy efficient, and we also need to be more efficient in terms of our food supply, in terms of our fuel consumption, in terms of our energy consumption. All of these things I would like looked at.

Monitor: What can you tell us about the proposed changes involving a cafe in the library?

Dr. Paino: We're thinking about it in terms of a learning commons. What libraries are has really changed pretty dramatically over the last 10 to 15 years. The way people research and use libraries has changed a lot. We are rethinking the services we provide to students to create an environment that is more consistent with how students use the library. I know a lot of focus has been on the cafe but the real focus is how to turn that first floor into a learning commons that students might be able to use for multiple purposes and also stay there for extended hours. Having a first-class library is important if we are going to be the kind of institution that we are trying to be.

Monitor: As Truman's national profile rises, what do you want us to be best known for?

Dr. Paino: There are so many things. First and foremost is academic quality, that prospective students and their families recognize that if they want to pick an institution where they can get a world-class education that can compete with any institution in terms of the quality of their education, but do it at an affordable price, that Truman--particularly for the Midwest but I would want to say for the entire nation -- should be on their shortlist. I think it should also be known paring the next generation of leaders, and as an institution that has remained

true to its core mission and that hasn't been knocked off of its focus as a liberal arts and sciences institution. I think this is a time when people could be tempted to make short-term decisions that could have a lasting impact. I don't want us to lose sight.

Monitor: Do you have any plans for improving the relationship with the city of Kirksville?

Dr. Paino: Yeah, that's going to be a top priority for me. The phrase I've been using is that I would like to lower the drawbridge from the university into the community. The fortunes of Kirksville and Truman are intertwined, and I think it is in Truman's best interests to make sure Kirksville is successful economically and otherwise. I think you know as a prospective student that if you are coming to a town that has some life and some vigor, it is a little bit more welcoming. So, it is important to me from a recruiting standpoint, but it is also the community in which I live. I want Kirksville to be successful. Anything the university can do to partner and help attract new business to town-- I want to do that. I also want to encourage those types of businesses, especially downtown on the square, that will be student-friendly. We're not that far from downtown. I would like to have an almost seamless feel from campus down to the square so that you really get that feel that when you come to Kirksville that this is a college town. Of course as is always the challenge for a college town for about four months out of the year the students aren't around so businesses have to be able to survive year round, but I think it's really important to collaborate with the community.



Mary Bauer is crowned Miss North-east Counties Feb. 27th. Photo Credit: George Barlow.