

6-8-1971

Dr. James Nesmith Assumes Position of Assistant Provost

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Recommended Citation

"Dr. James Nesmith Assumes Position of Assistant Provost" (1971). *News Releases*. 3728.
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DAYTON, Ohio, June 8, 1971 ---- Dr. James Nesmith's "bag" for more than 15 years has been innovation in higher education. He'll bring that portfolio to the University of Dayton July 1 when he assumes the position of Assistant Provost at the Dayton, Ohio, university.

In assuming this academic post, Dr. Nesmith, who has been Assistant Dean of Faculty at Stephens College, Columbia, Missouri, for five years, will accept responsibility for the year-old Center for Interdisciplinary Studies. His task, in this respect, will be a formidable one.

While the University's academic curriculum has included educational innovation, approaches to modern education at UD have been largely the product of individual professors and departments. It will be Dr. Nesmith's task to coordinate these approaches, develop new ones, and incorporate them gracefully in the entire academic spectrum.

He comes well fortified for the task. In what he calls "uncategorizable ventures in higher education," Dr. Nesmith has been an advocate of innovation at the university level since the mid-1950s. As Director of Religious Life at Vanderbilt University, he mobilized half of the student population (1200) into a voluntary religious group which directed students into programs with community service agencies. There was no credit for the projects, but the effort proved to be one of the early steps in extensive education outside the classroom.

During this same period, he organized programs of volunteer study and inquiry into areas not covered by the curriculum. This was one of the early steps toward the Free University Movement. Some of his "free study" projects were in the areas of civil rights and ecumenism.

Following this tenure, Dr. Nesmith accepted the post of Dean of Students, American University, Cairo, Egypt. Here again he organized volunteer work and study projects outside the university walls---one of which included Mona Nasser, the wife of the late Egyptian President.

At Stephens College, Dr. Nesmith's educational innovation have been a part of that school's regular curriculum. Some of his year-long programs have had students studying rural poverty in Kentucky, training to teach in the inner city in Kansas

City, doing urban studies with the Denver Center of the University of Colorado, working with Pueblo Indians in Santa Fe and studying the Free School Movement in California. Some programs have been carried out in Europe.

Dr. Nesmith's academic background, therefore, fits an educational option which will become a part of the UD picture. Rev. Charles J. Lees, S.M., the University's Provost, in announcing the appointment, pointed emphatically to this form of education when he said:

"It is evident that the universal revolution the world is witnessing, no matter what aspect of life, has more profound implications in education than anywhere else. Because of this situation the University has been examining its structure, curriculum, student life and all other phases.

"It was during this examination that the University conceived the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies, administered by the Office of the Assistant Provost. A special search committee was appointed to make recommendations for a person to head that office. Dr. Nesmith has been appointed to that post. He realizes that his job will be an evolving one and that he, in fact, will make the job.

"With his knowledge, experience and interest, the University expects to undertake the new and exciting approaches to education as necessary in a world where rapid change has become a way of life."

Rev. Raymond A. Roesch, S.M., President, has endorsed the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies and appointment of Dr. Nesmith, whose background "will serve the University in its effort to develop programs which are meaningful to the young men and women entering college today and of profound importance in their future endeavors. We have been seeking the important elements of modern education and this is a first step. Our future and our priorities will depend on what educational options we can give the present generation."

Dr. Nesmith was born on October 11, 1926, in Cullman, Alabama. He has degrees from Birmingham-Southern College, Vanderbilt University and Yale University. His two degrees from Vanderbilt are a masters in sociology and a bachelor in theology.

He served in the United States Air Force, 1945-47, and in the past 25 years has traveled extensively in Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, and made one academic trip around the world. He has participated in seminars at the University of Michigan on university administrators and was the recipient of a Danforth Foundation grant in 1968 for the development of a Field Studies Program for Stephens College.

He is married to the former Edythe Engel, also of Cullman. The couple has two daughters, Mary Faith, 15 and Edythe Elizabeth, 11. He is the son of Major and the late Mrs. W. J. Nesmith.