

In Memoriam: Dr. John H. Keiser (1937-2016)

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John Keiser, president of Southwest Missouri State University (now Missouri State University) from 1993 to 2005, asserted that “the characteristics of an educated person are clear, measurable and recognizable. An educated person is someone who is literate in the broadest sense, has an appreciation for the beauties and complexities of citizenship in his or her community and the world, the skills and motivation to continue to learn after leaving the university, and can solve problems through the mastery and use of one or more academic disciplines.”

This definition ultimately developed into the public affairs mission of the University; however, in 1993, it was not entirely clear what Keiser meant by public affairs. Nevertheless, he was confident the concept could be articulated into a clear, compelling description that incorporated the idea that higher education should foster civic leadership. He argued, “Our society needs more than workplace competence or critical thinking skills from higher education. It needs the recovery of core values that sustain social order, create responsible public leadership, and promote community in the midst of diversity.”

In 1994, the Missouri Coordinating Board for Higher Education responded favorably to the request for a statewide public affairs mission. The board found merit in Keiser’s assertion that “public affairs is about taking values seriously.... It involves cultivating civic virtues, strengthening bonds that unite people and provoking reflection about and commitment to the collective sources of our individual rights.... When the public affairs theme is successfully implemented into the life experience of students it should produce ‘individuals of character more sensitive to the needs of the community, more competent in their ability to contribute to society, and more civil in their habits of thought, speech and action.’”

Since Keiser’s retirement, the University has clarified and broadened the conversation about public affairs, which is now understood in terms of ethical leadership, cultural competence, and community engagement. The *eJournal of Public Affairs*, reflecting these ideas, is part of John Keiser’s legacy.

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