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## **UA's Shelton weathers stormy second year UA hoops, med school woes among challenges**

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Robert N. Shelton's second year as president of the University of Arizona opened on a tragic note when he received notice that freshman Mia Henderson, a star student from Tuba City High School, had been stabbed to death in Graham-Greenlee Residence Hall.

"It was a singular event and a tragedy that was indescribable," Shelton said during a recent interview.

The challenges continued when UA head basketball coach Lute Olson announced he was taking a leave of absence and a faculty committee reported that tensions within the College of Medicine threatened its very survival.

Shelton is a glass-half-full man, though, and while he acknowledges last year's challenges, he points to launching a new financial aid program, hiring a provost and the success of the Phoenix Mars Lander mission as highlights of his second year in office.

As leader of the second-largest public employer in the state, with more than 14,000 on the faculty and staff, Shelton knows his third year also will be daunting. Cuts in UA's \$1.6 billion budget are certain, he said, after the Legislature approved a budget Thursday to erase a state deficit.

But the 59-year-old physicist, who took over the reins at UA in July 2006, isn't fazed by hard decisions or hard times. He remains committed to the primary goal he set for himself after taking office: moving UA to the top of the food chain of major research universities.

UA will do that, he says, by making sure the best faculty want to come here and stay, and by providing financial opportunities for the best students.

Both require money. With state funding on the downturn, Shelton has delivered the bad news to deans and department heads that the money to retain faculty and draw top students will come from internal surgery, at least in the short term.

"These are not simple discussions and it won't happen instantaneously. . . . People don't react well to sharp edges. You need to do things gently and smoothly," Shelton said. "But if we can, over a year or two years, phase out a program and shift the resources to other activities, while sticking with our institutional priorities of serving the people in Arizona, we need to do that. We should focus on quality over quantity."

In the fable of the tortoise and the hare, Shelton would probably be the tortoise - and that's just fine by him.

"I think a successful president is somebody who has shown he or she can work on a really hard problem over time and, if not solve it, at least make significant progress," Shelton said.

"You have to keep trying. We asked for a big increase in faculty salaries and didn't get it, and considering the state of the budget this year, we won't get what we asked for for next year. But we're going to ask again because it is that important."

One result of his persistence is Arizona Assurance, a program that guarantees faculty mentorship and four years of tuition and room and board for academically qualified students from families with an annual income of up to \$42,400.

"He's a hero to me on account of Arizona Assurance," said John Nametz, UA financial aid director. "He mentioned it in his inaugural address. A year later he mentioned it in his State of the University address. And now, it's on the ground. That's how he works. He follows up and he's good for his word."

This fall, the program will benefit about 600 students and will be funded by moving some money UA has for merit aid into the need-based Arizona Assurance program. But Shelton is seeking private funding and believes he will have "some major gifts to announce in a few months."

Those who have worked closely with Shelton during his second year in office - even those who might be considered critics - admire his determination.

"He doesn't need constant affirmation of what he's doing," said UA Faculty Chair Wanda Howell. "He's a planner and a plodder and he knows he's going to get it done."

Shelton's focus was broken twice this year by controversy, by the athletic department in the fall and by the College of Medicine, including its expansion into Phoenix, in the spring.

"The College of Medicine in Phoenix is a tremendous opportunity, but complicated," Shelton conceded. "It's hard to grow a College of Medicine under the best of circumstances and we aren't in the best of financial circumstances. And getting through a basketball season when your iconic head coach is out for personal reasons - that rebounds to the entire university."

In November, Olson announced a temporary leave of absence, which in December became seasonlong. He refused to talk to the media, leaving Shelton on the hot seat when questions of special treatment arose.

In April, simmering tensions in the College of Medicine became public when a faculty committee report revealed many of UA's medical faculty were upset over governance, lack of academic freedom and the convoluted relationship among the College of Medicine, University Medical Center and University Physicians Healthcare, the practice plan for the college's faculty.

"It's a wild, a crazy structure and one that requires a lot of extra work for the leaders of the units," Shelton said. "It simply doesn't work."

Within three weeks of that report, Shelton held a meeting with College of Medicine Dean Keith Joiner that nearly 200 faculty attended.

"The meeting was very important, and coming out of it, I set up a number of one-on-one meetings with the leaders of the three units," Shelton said. "What we're doing is trying to take some time to make the right decisions."

One of those decisions will be to hire a vice president of medical affairs who will coordinate the three units, Shelton said.

Fred DuVal, a member of the Arizona Board of Regents, said Shelton has had a much more difficult task than former UA presidents "by virtue of the College of Medicine expansion."

DuVal said expanding the college to Phoenix has been "complicated" and that Shelton has provided a "calming influence."

"It's important that all the instruments play together up there," DuVal said, "but he's head of the band."

Lynn Nadel, a regents professor of psychology and cognitive science, said Shelton is "much, much better than his predecessor in including other people on campus in substantive discussions about what needs to happen before it happens" but that he doesn't communicate well enough with the wider campus.

"The problems the university faces right now are not of his doing," Nadel said. "But . . . the communication between the administration and the people in the trenches - the secretary, the groundskeeper, the assistant professor - has not been as good as it could have been."

Faculty head Howell agreed.

"On a one-to-one basis, Robert never fails to respond, so it is clear to those who've had one-to-one communication that he's very responsive," she said. "Having said that, I've told him he doesn't communicate often enough internally. . . . What's wrong with once a month having a campuswide, all-employee president's message? That's not too much to ask of somebody who's considered to be the leader of such a complex organization."

Student body President Tommy Bruce said Shelton "is probably the best president students could have asked for."

Bruce spent many hours last fall negotiating with Shelton on the tuition increase the president believed was necessary. That resulted in Shelton promising more student advising in exchange for higher tuition, and support for a tuition task force.

"He's ridiculously accessible. And while the honeymoon by definition is over, it is still a joy to have him as president," Bruce said. "He has a vision of what the university should be and vision to get there, and it is focused on students."

### **Who is Robert Shelton?**

UA president: 19th

Age: 59

Base salary: \$420,000

Other compensation: \$130,000

Born: Phoenix; moved to Spokane, Wash., after his freshman year at Cortez High School.

Education: Bachelor's degree in physics, Stanford; master's and doctorate in physics from University of California-San Diego.

Languages: Shelton said he can "get by in German," have dinner conversations in French and knows key phrases in Chinese and Japanese.

Career highlights:

- \* Guest scientist at Kernforschungsanlage in Germany, summer 1981
- \* Visiting professor, Université de Genève, Switzerland, 1983-84
- \* Vice provost for research, University of California Office of the President, 1996-2001
- \* Executive vice chancellor and provost, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, 2001-06

Married: 38 years to Adrian, 58, a self-employed research compliance consultant

Children: Christian, 32; Cameron, 30; Stephanie, 25.

Little-known fact: A baseball devotee, Shelton sported a handlebar mustache ala Rollie Fingers when he was in graduate school. He is a Red Sox fan.

### **University of Arizona, by the numbers\***

\$1.6 billion: budget

36,805: enrollment

14,466: employees

347: academic programs

3,254: courses offered

27,131: computers on campus

5,533,482: volumes in the seven campus libraries

\*Source UA Factbook, based on 2006-07 figures

**Caption:** Desert View High School freshmen Miguel Lopez (left), and Ryan Zanin, both 14, walk with University of Arizona President Robert N. Shelton Thursday morning on the UA Mall. The freshmen were hoping to meet Shelton and did just that.

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