

# CONVERSING WITH KERREY

by Mark Grueter

At 5 p.m. on a Wednesday I call Bob Kerrey for a thirty-minute interview.

"Hello," he answers.

"Senator Kerrey?" I am not positive who it is.

"President," he corrects me.

"Oh, President. President of the United States?" I joke, but it falls flat.

The subject is the Graduate Faculty, the New School and education in general. Kerrey's secretary has instructed us to send him - in advance via email - our questions, so Andrew Gold and I hurriedly put together ten of them. Kerrey is reviewing the questions when I reach him. He skips right down to the final question - a throwaway that has nothing to do with the topic of the interview. "I see you're supporting Wesley Clark." It is true. Really, both of would us prefer to talk presidential politics but the theme of Canon this fall is education and that is what I am paid to write about.

I introduce myself. He is not aware of it, but the former senator from Nebraska and I go way back. I met him in the snow-soaked New Hampshire winter of 1991-2 when he was campaigning for the Democratic nomination to become President. I was only 14 at the time but was nevertheless attuned to the process, as I was an unusual kid. "The good old days," Kerrey reflects, quite rightly I imagine, for no particular reason.

Now, there are many austere critics of Kerrey - I regret to say that such people do exist - in the New School universe. I do not intend to disappoint

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this righteous crowd, but I should say straight off that I have no desire at the moment to discuss Kerrey's left credentials, nor the allegations against him from Vietnam. This conversation is about education, not the moral superiority of the student body.

Here we go. According to Kerrey, the most pressing issues facing the GF are finding a new

dean, increasing the school's endowment, and rebuilding the gutted and decayed anthropology department. Certainly, all these things are related. The new dean needs to be able to generate funds but he/she also needs to be able to fit into the unique cultures of the GF and the New School. And Kerrey says that the anthropology department at the GF should benefit from the fact that the New School just hired a famous anthropologist, whose name I cannot decipher, to be its provost.

Kerrey concedes that when he first became president three years ago he was not interested in providing support for the GF. But all that has changed. He now understands and appreciates the value of the GF and is working hard to support us. Also, I find it interesting as he admits to me that when New School officials first approached him about becoming their president, he had never even heard of the place.

He believes all the New School schools have common goals and that we should all be working together like one big, happy family. We talk about how surplus revenue, which the Parsons School of Design generates, essentially keeps the GF afloat. Kerrey explains that this is okay because the GF can return the favor by assisting Parsons in non-monetary ways.

