

## **Chancellor Emeritus Kerrigan builds bridges to developing universities**

**by Sheryl Hanson - Friday, September 12, 2008**

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/1242/chancellor-emeritus-kerrigan-builds-bridges-to-developing-universities/>

Retirement from his position as chancellor at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh has not slowed John E. Kerrigan's involvement in educational issues.

Since retiring eight years ago, Kerrigan (1990-2000) has remained involved in promoting two of his favorite causes — higher education and international relations. Best of all, he has found a way to combine the two interests.

As an internationally recognized expert in public administration, Kerrigan serves as an academic consultant to universities, educational associations and government agencies. He has a special interest in developing countries, including those in the Middle East.

"I never get tired of traveling because I so enjoy learning about other countries," Kerrigan said. "There is so much to be gained from visiting them."

So far, Kerrigan has visited more than 30 countries, many of them multiple times. His first international assignment was in 1964, when he worked with the Ford Foundation on a project in Amman, Jordan. He served as a specialist for the National Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs before war broke out there in 1967. He and his wife, Pat, then moved their family to Beirut, Lebanon, where Kerrigan finished his three-year assignment.

"That was my first taste of international work. It was a great honor and privilege to have that opportunity to learn about another culture," he said.

Kerrigan has worked tirelessly over the years to connect U.S. universities with those in other countries. He begins by having two universities — one from each country — sign a memorandum of understanding. The agreement specifies collaborative goals, such as sending faculty to teach and conduct research.

"What we are trying to do is assist another university by giving them the opportunity to come to the U.S.," he said.

Kerrigan has served as a consultant to more than a dozen universities. Most recently, he has spent much time working with Sultan Qaboos University and the University of Nizwa, both in the Sultanate of Oman. The two universities have signed memorandums of understanding with UW Oshkosh as a result of Kerrigan's leadership.

He began his relationship with the University of Nizwa during its infancy in 2003 and even proposed its beginning structure.

“We were hoping to have 400 students enroll in each of the first three years,” he said. “But we were pleasantly surprised to have around 1,100 enroll each year, and today there are more than 5,500 students.”

Kerrigan facilitates exchanges with faculty from other countries to help the international universities he works with. On two recent trips to Oman, two colleagues from UW Oshkosh — Stephanie Stewart of the College of Nursing and Tom Grogan of the Chancellor’s Office — were part of the visitation teams.

“It is rare that I travel without someone accompanying me,” he said.

UW Oshkosh enjoys a strong nursing program connection with Chennai and New Delhi, India. Kerrigan takes pride in having helped begin that relationship while he was chancellor.

“It is most certainly a win-win situation. UW Oshkosh has been a great help to those universities, and they have enabled our nursing students to gain valuable experience in return,” he said.

Kerrigan also has called upon faculty from other UW schools, such as UW-Platteville and the UW-Madison, depending on the need of the university. The visiting professors give advice on everything from engineering education to office management.

“There is always something to be learned,” Kerrigan said. “From their perspectives, these universities are being very wise not to walk alone. They have chosen some outstanding U.S. universities to partner with.”

In 2004, Kerrigan’s alma mater, Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa, needed an interim president. He gladly returned to higher education leadership and served for a two-year terms until his successor was hired.

“I had always been at large, public universities, so I enjoyed learning how things operate at a small, private college.”

Since Kerrigan’s first higher-education experience was as a student at Loras, he felt that his career went full circle. “My office was located right next to the janitor’s closet that I worked from when I was a first year student.”

During his tenure as UW Oshkosh chancellor, Kerrigan was credited with building scholarships, campus technology and research opportunities for students and faculty. The 1990s were a time of rapid change and transformation for the university.

He also gained respect throughout the region for his commitment to community — a reputation he enjoys to this day. Kerrigan is very actively involved in a variety of community projects.

Still an Oshkosh resident, Kerrigan maintains an office on campus in Gruenhagen Conference Center. While he keeps regular hours that belie his retirement status, he is hard to find, due to his extensive travels and commitments to community efforts.

In addition to his significant international work, he still is involved in various leadership and board commitments. He served as Rotary District 6270 governor from 1999 to 2000. He also works with the National Collegiate Athletic Association, where he helps first-year chancellors learn about intercollegiate

athletics and the NCAA.

Kerrigan serves on the board of the Midwest Higher Education Compact. This is one of his favorite assignments because the group of 12 states works to find ways to improve student access to higher education, increase efficiencies and reduce operating costs.

Outside of the higher education arena, Kerrigan has been active in such organizations as the Wisconsin Historical Society, Circus World Museum and, closer to home, Chamco — the Oshkosh Industrial Development Organization, the Oshkosh YMCA, the Oshkosh Symphony and the Oshkosh Area United Way.

Although these commitments are important to him, Kerrigan's most significant passion is education, and his No. 1 mission is to bring higher education to countries outside the U.S.

"I am convinced that education, without a doubt, is the very best way to understand another culture and allow them to learn about ours," he said.

Whether on campus or out of the country, Kerrigan is easily recognized by the red hair and twinkle in his eye that reflect his Irish heritage. Reportedly, he still plays racquetball and is wont to defeat opponents in friendly play at the downtown Oshkosh YMCA.

### **A closer look**

**Name:** John E. Kerrigan

**Service:** UW Oshkosh Chancellor, 1990-2000

**Where he lives today:** Oshkosh, Wis.

**Current affiliation:** Higher education consultant and ambassador for UW Oshkosh

### **University accomplishments:**

- Significantly grew endowed professorships with the Endowment for Excellence, begun in 1993 with private contributions.
- Strengthened scholarships and student research opportunities, including the \$1,000 Chancellor's Academic and Leadership Scholarships, which were first offered to entering freshman in 1992. The John E. Kerrigan Fund, established upon his retirement in 2000, extends scholarship opportunities to second-year students with strong academic and leadership abilities.
- Led the University to invest in emerging technologies.
- Engaged the community by working with area businesses to provide solutions to local industrial and commercial problems, including establishing the Center for Community Partnerships in 1997.

- Hosted a program on Titan TV to facilitate an open dialogue about higher education issues with faculty and academic staff.
- Began the Honorary Doctorate program in 1992 to recognize individuals who embodied the ideals of the University by making significant civic, business and scholarly contributions.
- Grew the University's international initiatives by instituting faculty exchanges with other countries.
- Led all professional colleges to accreditation, a first for UW Oshkosh.
- During his tenure, three faculty members and one department were recognized for excellence by the Board of Regents, a record unmatched in the UW System.

Contact John Kerrigan at (920) 424-3130 or [kerrigan@uwosh.edu](mailto:kerrigan@uwosh.edu).

This is the second in a two-part series featuring former University of Wisconsin Oshkosh chancellors. The first provided an update on Chancellor Emeritus Edward Penson (1978-1989).

**Related story:**

- [Chancellor Emeritus Penson still champions higher ed](#)