

Chapter 10

The Felder Years 1973-1995

With the departure of Dr. Hubert M. Dawson as college president, the school faced new challenges. Trustees looked for a new leader who could bring stability and reasoned leadership. They found that new leader just up the road in Waco, a person already known to and well-regarded by college administrators – Dr. Marvin Ray Felder.

Dr. Felder was no stranger to Temple Junior College. As dean of instruction at McLennan Community College in Waco, he was a valuable partner in establishing cooperative programs between the two campuses. He also was vice president of the Texas Association of Junior College Instructional Administration and the Texas Junior College Teachers Association, where Dr. Dawson had served as president.

A former teacher of history and government, a career in administration interested Dr. Felder. He had earned a master's degree from The University of Texas at Austin and began pursuing a

higher degree. Before joining McLennan Community College, he had been a faculty member and administrator at Wharton County Junior College, which was located in his hometown, and an administrative intern at El Centro College in Dallas. Dr. Felder earned his doctorate through The University of Texas' Community College Leadership Program, the nation's oldest graduate program with a focus on preparing key community college leaders.



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When the position in Temple opened up, Dr. Felder expressed interest in it. "I knew and appreciated community colleges," he said in a 2019 interview. "I liked the small size of the college, and I liked the community."

Temple voters were always reluctant to increase taxes. We always had a problem with funding. Other schools have funding districts, which expand taxable base and, thus, income. But Temple College was limited first by its boundaries.

– Dr. Marvin Felder, Temple College president

The college's first dormitory, which opened in fall 1973, enabled 120 students to live on campus. (1974 Templar)

Most of all, he realized that the college's trustees would be supportive. "The board of trustees was all male and white, but all were successful business people," Dr. Felder said. "Their management style was that they had the big picture, and they expected the school administration to do its job. They didn't bother in everyday management or small issues. They allowed the staff to do its job."

Dr. Felder's appointment was significant. As the college's eighth president, he was the first top administrator to join the college with college teaching and administrative experience and without having served at Temple High or in Temple public schools. He brought to the job a clear vision of community college curriculum that extended far beyond the freshman and sophomore core academic courses.

In making the announcement of his appointment, Dr. Felder told a Waco newspaper that the college was "one of the outstanding junior colleges in Texas, and with the community's help and support, even greater goals can be reached in the future."

TURNING OUT THE LIGHTS

Just as Dr. Felder planned to assume his duties on July 1, 1973, international crises directly affected his early tenure. No sooner had he settled into his office than he was confronted with issues that began more than 7,000 miles away – an Arab states oil embargo, petroleum shortages and an energy crisis in the U.S. Ironically, Texas

with its rich petroleum history also was slammed by restrictions.

By October 1973, Arab members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) placed an embargo on the U.S. in response to its support of Israel and the Yom Kippur War. The result was an oil shortage across the United States and a crash course for Americans on the limits of their government's power. The effect rippled all the way to Central Texas. Texas Governor Dolph Briscoe, taking his cues from federal guidelines, ordered strict fuel-reduction measures.

Automobile drivers were limited to 10 gallons per car, while gas prices soared. This deeply affected commuting students, especially those driving in from outside of Temple. Electricity prices doubled and tripled in some areas.

College administrators were required to submit monthly energy consumption reports to the governor's office – including natural gas, electricity and gasoline as well as air and car travel. Employing his finely honed administrative skills, Dr. Felder took quick action to address the energy issues. He immediately instituted energy-saving measures. Thermostats were turned to 78 degrees in the daytime – even in the sweltering summer months. All lights were turned off in empty rooms. Outdoor and display lighting was turned off at midnight. Business and school trips were curtailed;

meetings were "conducted" through letter-writing and phone calls. In classrooms with ample windows, some professors opted to turn off overhead lights.

Since half the student body commuted to school and the remainder lived on or near campus, classes were rearranged. For example, a course consisting of three hour-long classes per week was reduced to two 90-minute classes or one three-hour class weekly. Schedules were truncated to four weekdays to eliminate classes on Fridays and weekends. The college began offering classes in Cameron and Taylor in 1974. This reorganization greatly reduced energy consumption and students' additional commuting to campus. Although they worked longer days, they enjoyed the three-day weekends. Many of these changes remained in effect long after the oil embargo ended.

In Dr. Felder's first semester, the college was entering its 48th year. The campus had grown to 103 acres and an enrollment of 1,282 with more than 200 in non-credit courses. The college streamlined its oversight with a complete administrative reorganization. Academic courses were divided into seven divisions. The technical-vocational classes were divided into 13 program areas. All offerings expanded – academic, technical-vocational, and continuing education – resulting in increases in faculty from 84 to 100.



Percy Francis was hired as the college's first chief financial officer in 1973 and held the position for two decades. (1974 Templar)

DELEGATING FINANCIAL OVERSIGHT

Dr. Felder's predecessor, Dr. Hubert M. Dawson, held the dual role of president and financial manager. Although Dr. Felder recognized that the college had a strong, stable financial footing, he quickly realized the necessity for splitting financial oversight from the president's job. Among his first hires was Percy Francis (1928-2016) as the first chief financial officer, a position he would have for the next two decades. Besides his financial acumen, he had experience in academia. Mr. Francis was in the group of 14 men who founded Lubbock Christian College in 1957. The school began as a two-year private school and later evolved into Lubbock Christian University.

The growth in classes and student body intensified the need for better collaboration between faculty and administrators. By the mid-1970s, Dr. Felder called on faculty, staff and students to remain flexible and

BRINGING TWO SIDES TOGETHER

When the college officially acquired an additional 73 acres of the former McCloskey Army Hospital property in late 1967, it was a welcome addition to the campus. But while the acreage gave the college room to expand, it also created safety issues. The new land was located adjacent to the VA Medical Center on the other side of South First Street – a busy road that was also known as State Highway 36. Crossing the street would be hazardous for students no matter the time of day.

In 1970, voters approved a \$1.5 million bond issue for additional buildings, including several that were to be located on the new land. The City of Temple, in cooperation with the Texas Department of Transportation (then called the Texas Highway Department), began extensive upgrades and paving of the highway alongside the campus.

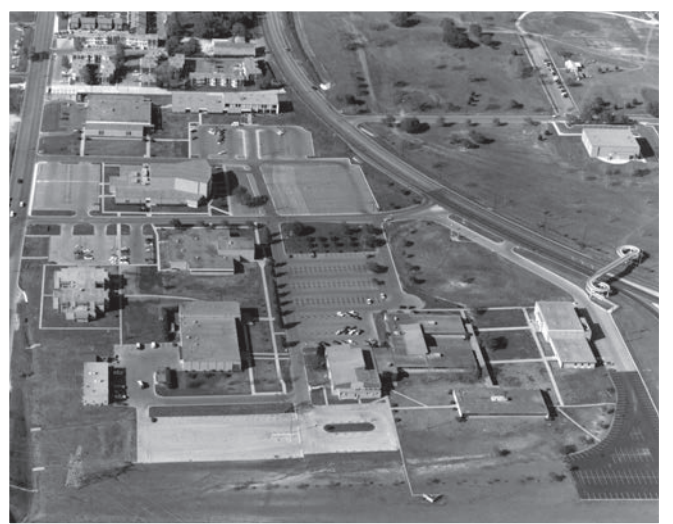
That same year, negotiations began in earnest to construct an overpass near the rear of the Hubert M. Dawson Library. The structure had to be accessible for pedestrians in wheelchairs and high enough so that trucks could pass under. The total cost of the project was \$773,000.

The result was a distinctive concrete and steel spiral spanning South First Street and rising above the asphalt highway like a giant airborne curlicue. The good news was

that the project was eligible for inclusion in the newly instituted Traffic Operations Program to Increase Capacity and Safety, a cooperative state-federal effort.

Completed in 1973, the pedestrian walkway also provided inspiration for hundreds of art and photography students who studied its lines and shadows. The 1975-1976 *Templar* yearbook made special note of the newly completed overpass by commenting that engineering students "marvel at the First Street crosswalk, and the first period Health-Physical Education students curse it."

Of all the additions to the campus in its early years, none was as revered (and sometimes dreaded) as the South First Street pedestrian overpass.



Completed in 1973, the pedestrian overpass (lower right) helped students get safely over South First Street to newly constructed facilities on the east campus. (Courtesy of Rose Anne Brasher Special Collections, Temple College Libraries)



Demand for vocational-technical programs such as auto mechanics increased dramatically in the 1970s. (1974 *Templar*)



Students moved into the still-unfinished dormitory in fall 1973 (1974 *Templar*)

patient during these building projects and transitioning years. He also smoothed lines of communication between administrators and those working directly with students. In 1974, Dr. Felder organized the Faculty Council, which was open to full-time and adjunct instructors as well as librarians and counselors. The Office of Student Services was expanded with the hiring of

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The College Information Office was created in the 1976-77 school year.

Dr. Walter H. Paul and additional staff who coordinated counseling, housing, financial aid, student publications and improving classroom performance.

Expanding on the need for open communication, the college also created a new position in the 1976-77 school year, College Information, with Susan Metcalf Howe as its first director. Previously, public information duties were the responsibility of the journalism professor in addition to teaching and advising student publications. "Creation of the Public Information Office as a separate administration function was the direct result of the college's growth and changing needs," the *Templar* yearbook reported. The office also maintained a speakers' bureau and promotional materials.

College trustees also created faculty professional growth and development grants to encourage professors to achieve higher degrees and to help fund their research projects. The first grant went in 1977 to math instructor Billy Wayne Vannatta (1941-1992). Mr. Vannatta attended the college before he earned bachelor's and master's degrees from The University of Texas at Austin. He was recognized for his love of teaching and ability to encourage students in mathematics. "Most people don't like math, but I do!" Mr. Vannatta said. "Numbers make sense, equations are logical, and I get how to put things together. I love that women are being recognized in the field of math and are being encouraged to make a career of it."

TROUBLE WITH BOND ISSUES

Internal reorganization and development of new programs accelerated, while enrollment grew to 4,816 by the time Dr. Felder retired. Despite his keen administrative skills as enrollment grew, building projects grew at a slower pace than during Dr. Dawson's years. Building projects completed during Dr. Felder's tenure included construction of the college's first residence hall (1973), a maintenance building, a combination administration and technical-vocational building (1978), and a nursing education building (1982). The 1957 gym was renovated into additional classrooms and offices, and a pedestrian overpass connected the west and east campuses.

Despite these advancements, voters were reluctant to approve bond issues to fund more aggressive building programs. They rejected an increased maintenance tax for the college in 1974 and in 1980 defeated a \$2.7 million bond issue that would have funded purchase of a nearly vacant mall on Interstate Highway 35 and two miles from the campus for a vocational-technical center. This was considered an urgent need because vocational-technical areas grew 25 percent while the academic increased only 1 percent.

Some relief came through the Temple College Foundation, established in 1982 to raise money for the college and strengthen scholarship programs. However, the financial crunch loomed larger. Due to cuts in state funding and declining numbers of students,



A combination administration and technical-vocational building opened in 1978. (Courtesy of Rose Anne Brasher Special Collections, Temple College Libraries)

the board of trustees voted in December 1985 to reduce the faculty and staff by 10 percent for the 1986-1987 school year. This was the first time in the school's history that the board voted to reduce the number of faculty and staff.

Enrollment reflected that financial hit. By fall 1985, enrollment was predicted to be down 3.5 percent, but in reality, it fell 7 percent. Nevertheless, "the staff did well with what we had," Dr. Felder said, even though it meant cutting programs like the baseball program and the journalism department with the school newspaper and the yearbook. "People were upset," Dr. Felder added.

The college developed a retrenchment policy to deal with declining student numbers and reduced staff. The decline soon reversed, however, and enrollment grew to record highs. Enrollment began an uptick two years later with a 25 percent increase by fall 1987. A stock market crash that October resulted in a two-year-long deep recession that pushed many to return to school to upgrade

their job skills. The college also established developmental courses to help students pass skills assessment tests so that they could enroll in higher-level courses.

Since its creation in 1925, the college's service area matched the Temple Independent School District's taxation boundaries. In 1986, however, voters in the college district and the City of Temple redefined the college district as coterminous with the Temple Independent School District or the City of Temple, giving college trustees authority to expand the district as either area grew. In the mid-1970s, adjoining independent school districts rejected invitations to join the college district, which allowed residents to attend the college for in-district tuition, but would have meant property owners would pay college taxes.

In 1995, after 22 years as president, Dr. Felder announced his retirement. During those decades, other college offers had come his way, but he remained in Temple and at the college. "I have had other job offers. I would

go there, look around, but I decided to stay here. Although those jobs offered more money, it was also a different lifestyle and different challenges. I returned to Temple, happy to have stayed here all these years. I liked the town and its people. The college was a good place."

When he assumed the president's post, the college was basically an academic "feeder" to four-year universities – geared to offer freshman and sophomore academic core courses. However, he recognized the need for vocational-technical programs to meet the needs of local industries – automotive, heating/air conditioning and healthcare. Dr. Felder reorganized the college's administration to meet the needs of each decade – energy crises, failed bond issues, expanded programs, widely swinging enrollment numbers and financial retrenchments. He maintained a reassuring presence with level-headed administrative skill while delegating authority to others skilled in their areas of expertise.

"I have always felt fortunate to have been associated with the college," he told the college trustees. "I have always felt peculiarly fortunate to have this job – to work with people who have achieved so much with limited direction and oversight. I couldn't imagine a job without having that many creative and intelligent people on board. It's been a real joy."