

MRS. PRESIDENT

UI's President talks to OnCampus about binge drinking and the generations
by Erin Gallo, photography by Myriam Fallon



Dr. Mason talks to OnCampus about the difference in generations. "There was less of an interest in alcohol and more of an interest in drugs back then," she said.

DR. SALLY MASON, the UI's new president, is no stranger to alcohol. Her father, a Czechoslovakian immigrant, kept a steady stock of wine on the family dinner table. As a result, drinking in excess never was an American tradition that she found particularly alluring. That is why Dr. Mason now talks candidly about a thing she simply cannot understand about Generation Y:

"What's with the binge drinking?" she asks.

Yet she's certainly familiar with houses of spirits. Talking of her early childhood Dr. Mason remembers that she was often baby-sat by her father at the local Veterans of Foreign Wars bar where he worked once a week.

So maybe it was because of her early exposure to alcohol that Dr. Mason never ventured into over-indulgence. Or – perhaps – was it a generational thing?

"There was less of an interest in alcohol and more of an interest in drugs back then," she says. She assumes – and she may be right – that college students today are more enticed by the former.

Dr. Mason comes to the U of I from Purdue University, where she was Provost to 40,000

students, so one could say she is familiar with college students of today. But how will she become familiar with those at Iowa?

Her predecessor, David Skorton, was more of an approachable person than he was a traditional, distant, academic president. To interact with students, he hosted a weekly jazz and blues hour on KRUI, held a barbecue for 4,000 freshmen at his house in 2005, and created a Facebook account on which he had thousands of friends. His popularity is a hard act to follow, but Dr. Mason hopes to become an accessible figure:

"We're working on Facebook," she said.

Dr. Mason comes from a humble background. Her family could not afford her college tuition, so, to make the end's meet, she worked a full-time job

Q&A

Nickname: SusieQ (my mom's nickname)

1st thing I did this morning was: feed the cats

I am currently reading: *Sullivan's Island* by Dorothea Benton Frank

Currently listening to: Steely Dan

In college my favorite musician was: Eric Clapton

If I were an undergrad, I would be found at: the student union

The 1st bar I visited in Iowa City was: Graze

Pet Peeve: cell phones

In Heaven there is are no cell phones

"FAC" stands for: FACULTY

The last thing I will do tonight will be: watch The Daily Show/Colbert Report

during her undergraduate years as a secretary for an architectural firm. Not only did she graduate, but she was the first in her family to get a bachelor's degree, much less, the Master's and Ph.D. she subsequently received – all in biology. In a speech on June 21, Dr. Mason said her parents would be both "proud" and "amazed" at where she is now.

"I've taken it to an extreme," she said of becoming President of a Big Ten school.

"I've over-achieved for the whole family."

An over-achiever, Dr. Mason makes \$450,000 a year – \$100,000 more than Skorton did before his departure – and is the second female president at the University of Iowa in 152 years. But despite her fancy new home, university-paid car and steep salary figure, she has not forgotten about the days when she was a full-time student with full-time job, all of which made her undergraduate years unforgettable.

"Most people my age will tell you the four, five, six years of college were the best years of your life," she said. She proposes that her positive university experience in the sixties could be why she has never left college:

"I can't think of any place more stimulating to be



... Where else can you work where the clientele never ages?" she said.

In Iowa City, Dr. Mason has encountered a different learning curve regarding the culture, which she describes as "cosmopolitan". Unlike West Lafayette, Indiana, Iowa City has multi-ethnic restaurants and square blocks with fabulous gastronomic options, such as Devotay, Motley Cow, Pagliai's and Takanami, all of which she had eaten at within her first three weeks after her arrival. Those eateries make the town appear to be a larger community than it is. Nonetheless, Dr. Mason recognizes that Iowa City is, as her husband, Dr. Ken Mason, describes it, "a great town to be a college student in."

A great college town is not comprised merely of bars, however. Dr. Mason applauds the variety of arts and art venues at Iowa. But she wonders why students don't take advantage of entertainment around town on a regular basis – such as Hancher and the Englert Theater:

"There's so much entertainment in this town," she says emphatically. "Don't kids like to see movies?" she asks.

With time, Dr. Mason will be familiar with the Big-Ass Turkey Leg vendor on Melrose, the marching band that visits the bars on Fridays before football games and the early birds that bring the beer bongs to Olive Court. And while she disapproves of

the binge drinking culture, she also understands her role as president is not to change traditions, but rather to embrace them.

And to her, college kids in Iowa City don't lose any credibility as intelligent and capable students merely because of their excessive alcohol intake:

"The nice thing about students in the Midwest

is they don't know how good they are," she said. "If you go to an Ivy League – to a school that has really stringent admission requirements – those kids all know how good they are. You guys are just as good – you just don't know it."



Display of items in Dr. Mason's new office in Jessup Hall