

DEANS
in conversation

Nan Crouter

Two of Penn State's longest-standing academic leaders, **Nan Crouter** and **Susan Welch**, stepped down June 30 after a combined 38 years as deans—Crouter in Health and Human Development and Welch in Liberal Arts. We invited them to talk about their careers, the changes they've seen at Penn State, and what lies ahead.

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NAN CROUTER

SUSAN WELCH

SUSAN WELCH, a political scientist, has been dean of the College of the Liberal Arts for more than a quarter-century. **NAN CROUTER**, who studies the interface of work and family life, spent her career at Penn State, starting as an assistant professor in 1981 and becoming dean of the College of Health and Human Development in 2007. They are two of Penn State's longest-serving deans, and both are about to step down from their administrative roles. We sat down with them in Welch's office one afternoon in April and asked them to reflect on their colleges' strengths, their toughest moments as deans, and what they plan to do next.

PENN STATER: YOU BOTH TAUGHT FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS BEFORE BECOMING DEANS. WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO ACADEMIA IN THE FIRST PLACE?

NAN CROUTER: When I was in college, I went through a period where I was undecided about what I was going to do. In fact, I double majored in psychology and English, partly just to postpone the inevitable. Then I worked for a while in a research institute, and I liked research, and that made me want to get a Ph.D. Then I met the person who I wanted to study with, so that part seemed pretty straightforward compared to what it was like in college.

SUSAN WELCH: It was kind of the same thing for me when I started college. I wanted to be a math teacher, so I was in math education until I was a senior—and then I decided I didn't want to teach high school. But could I be a great mathematician? I didn't think I could. I loved history, so I switched to history. But then I was told that women shouldn't go into history.

PS: REALLY? WERE YOU GIVEN A REASON?

SW: You must have heard this story, Nan. My undergraduate history adviser told me, "There's no room in history for women," and it really *was* a male-dominated field at the time. And back then I wasn't the way I am now. So I said, "OK," and I went into political science.

PS: WHICH WAS CONSIDERED MORE OPEN TO WOMEN?

SW: Well, yes, in a certain way. But when I enrolled in graduate school, they wouldn't give assistantships to

women, because they figured that we were just going to—

NC: —get married, and it was going to be a waste of their investment.

PS: INCREDIBLE. WAS THAT IN THE 1960S?

SW: Yes, I started graduate school in 1965. But things changed within a couple of years, because by the time I was in my later stages of the graduate program, I had assistantships.

NC: Wow. Well, when I went into a human development and family studies graduate program at Cornell—where most of the full professors were men—I actually went in with a graduate fellowship for a year, and then I wrote a National Science Foundation fellowship and got it. So they actually never had to fund me, and I think partly because of that autonomy, and because my own work went in a fairly different direction, my adviser—who was also a mentor—was very supportive.

SW: So, you were maybe 10 years behind me?

NC: I started graduate school in the fall of 1977.

SW: Yes, so things had changed a bit. When I started graduate school, there was only one woman professor in the whole history department, and one in political science.

PS: WHY DID YOU WANT TO BECOME DEANS?

NC: Actually, I was one of the ones who never planned to have an administrative career, and when that's the case, you kind of have to learn it by doing it, because one minute you're not a dean, and the next minute you *are* a dean. So you just have to ask lots of questions and



Susan Welch was named dean of the College of the Liberal Arts in 1991, coming to Penn State from the University of Nebraska, where she was professor of political science. As dean she worked to create such centers such as the Rock Ethics Institute, the Richards Civil War Era Center, and the McCourtney Institute for Democracy. She also established the Paterno Fellows Program and the Career Enrichment Network, both aimed at helping undergraduates. Her research focuses on American politics, and she recently was named one of the most cited political scientists of her generation. She's the author of six books and two textbooks—including an American government textbook now in its 14th edition.

hopefully be surrounded by really good staff who can steer you clear of huge goofs.

SW: I decided when I was at the University of Nebraska that I wanted to do it, and I couldn't succeed there, because the chancellor at the time was very up-front that he didn't see women in leadership positions as being the right thing. So I applied elsewhere, and eventually I came here. And I'm not embarrassed to say I applied for the job, though these days, you can't be too obvious about it, I guess.

PS: IS IT GETTING HARDER FOR UNIVERSITIES TO FIND PEOPLE WILLING TO BE DEANS?

SW: It is kind of unseemly to want to be a dean if you're a faculty member—your colleagues do look askance at you. I also think faculty whom you want to be deans have good lives as senior professors. They have research, they have their research funding, and they love working with their graduate and undergradu-

ate students. Being a dean is a big career change that some people don't want to make.

NC: I do think Susan's right that it is hard to convince successful faculty who've been good at all parts of their job to take the additional step to become a dean, which is likely going to affect how much research and graduate mentoring they can do. You can still do some. Susan's been amazing at doing a lot. But you probably can't maintain the momentum you had before.

SW: No way.

NC: And for a lot of people, it's also timing. People are sometimes reluctant to do it until their kids are at a certain stage, for example. And then I think it is a challenging job, and you don't have much sense of the satisfactions of it until you're in it.

PS: WHAT ARE SOME OF THE GREATEST REWARDS YOU'VE EXPERIENCED AS DEANS?

NC: It is really very satisfying to hire young, smart



Ann C. "Nan" Crouter was named Raymond E. and Erin Stuart Schultz Dean of the College of Health and Human Development in 2007. Before that, she spent 26 years on the faculty in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies. She's a past recipient of the university's Faculty Scholar Medal for Excellence in the Social and Behavioral Sciences. As dean, she led the renovation and construction of the new Health and Human Development Building and Biobehavioral Health Building, and has worked to make it easy for researchers to cross disciplinary and departmental lines to work together. She's a past board member and chair of the Christian Children's Fund.

people and then see them do well. And when somebody gets a grant—particularly when a junior faculty member gets their first grant, and they may have had to revise and resubmit it, and you know there's a real struggle behind the success—that is huge. I always feel great when we're recruiting faculty, and you know that they have offers from these other places, and you're trying to do what you can to attract them, but they have to make the leap of faith and decide that Penn State is the place. It's very rewarding when someone decides they want to come here.

SW: I love it when people get Evan Pugh professorships and other big-name fellowships, medals, and national awards. It's also great to see our students getting awards, like Fulbrights—we take pride in their recognition.

PS: OF COURSE, YOU MUST HAVE ALSO FACED SOME CHALLENGES IN YOUR YEARS AS DEANS. WHAT WERE SOME OF YOUR TOUGHEST MOMENTS?

NC: Both Susan and I have had to work with department heads, Faculty Senate directors, and faculty during times of uncertainty. One example is the year we didn't know whether there would be any state appropriation, and it was month after month of just ambiguity. I felt a need to keep everybody moving in a positive direction, while there wasn't much I could really tell them.

SW: Another situation sort of like that was after the Sandusky crisis, when our alums were so devastated, and many of our faculty felt, "Oh, no one is ever going to accept my papers again, or give me a grant, because I'm from Penn State." Keeping people's spirits up was a challenge. And then there was the time when my house was firebombed.

NC: When was that?

SW: A couple years after I came here. We were going through all these changes in the college, closing some departments, merging others. There was a lot of unhappiness; I got a lot of protest letters. Fortunately, we were gone when the firebombing happened, but somebody lit firebombs at each of our doors.

NC: Was there a lot of damage?

SW: Mostly on the outside. There was smoke damage on the inside. But the state fire marshals who investigated said, "You know, if you'd been here..."

NC: I haven't had anything quite that terrible happen to me, fortunately.

SW: But on an emotional level, I'd say the Sandusky thing was the worst. And the aftermath has lasted so long.

NC: But you know, what I try to tell alumni now about

that is, "I'm so proud of what the academic response was." Susan's college, my college, together with Medicine, Education and Nursing—and I'm probably leaving somebody out—we worked with the Social Science Research Institute and the provost's office, and we did this strategic cluster hire. We realized we had not enough expertise in child maltreatment, that we shouldn't come out of this horrible situation without having dealt with it as an academic unit. And we brought in some wonderful people.

SW: I'm glad you mentioned that. The university brought in a dozen new faculty who are fabulous.

NC: They're called the Child Maltreatment Solutions Network. They aren't a center, they aren't an institute—by design—but they work very well together, and in the short time they've been here, they've got some amazing grants, including a big grant from the National Institutes of Health to establish the Center for Healthy Children. They've also developed a minor: You can be in any field at Penn State as an undergraduate and take a minor called Child Maltreatment and Advocacy Studies. They have 100-some students now.

PS: THAT HIGHLIGHTS WHAT WE OFTEN HEAR ABOUT PENN STATE AND INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION AND PROGRAMS.

NC: Yes, a group of faculty and deans had the idea, and the Social Science Research Institute had the infrastructure, the processes, and the protocols to know how to do a good cluster hire. That's how the idea took off, and it went really well.

SW: It is something new since I've gotten here, though not necessarily since you became dean, Nan, but our institutes, our drive toward interdisciplinarity—we're really good at that at Penn State. I think we're good at breaking down walls between colleges and in different areas, and I think that's helped our social scientists work across departments and colleges, and be more of a visible entity. Working between the social sciences and the life sciences has also become a pretty big deal.

PS: IS THERE MUCH COLLABORATION AMONG DEANS?

SW: Well, yes—our deans' group is close, and we often seek advice from each other. I think the spirit of collaboration was always here, but the institutions that made it easy weren't. What do you think, Nan?

NC: I think that collaboration is really evident with the deans. Maybe it was always there, and I had to learn it, but Susan and I collaborate in all kinds of different ways, because ultimately, those kinds of projects are going to benefit her faculty and my faculty, and that's

true with other deans as well. And I don't know if you went back to when Susan first started, whether that spirit of collaboration among the deans would have been there. I feel like it's even grown since I became dean. But again, maybe I've just gotten more comfortable or more able to do it, and so I'm noticing it. Leaders like Eva Pell [former vice president for research] and Neil Sharkey [current vice president for research] were incredibly helpful with getting that spirit started. And I think when you're trying to recruit faculty, they really notice the collaborative possibilities. That's often what makes them want to come.

PS: HOW HAVE YOU BOTH COLLABORATED?

NC: Sometimes it's very concrete, where we talk about something very specific. And then there have been other times where it's like "I need help with X," and it's a short-term piece of advice that I might ask Susan for. If I'm hiring someone, for instance, and they have a spouse who needs a job, I might ask her if she has anything, and similarly, if she's faced with that situation, she might ask me if I have anything. The important thing is that we have a foundation here that's been built from people having worked together, and because of that, it's not hard to reach out and ask for help.

PS: SINCE YOU FIRST BEGAN YOUR TENURE AS DEANS, HOW HAS THE JOB CHANGED?

NC: You know, with only 11 years as dean, it's harder for me to judge what about the job has changed, versus what about me has changed, because the two things have changed at the same time. Susan can give you the broadest historical sweep.

SW: In my view, I think the biggest change has been over the past five years especially, and it's happened because of increased regulation, which is intruding more on academic life.

PS: WHAT KIND OF REGULATION—GOVERNMENTAL, INSTITUTIONAL?

SW: Every kind. There's more regulation from funding agencies, from the state. And then, you know, compounding that, we have various new systems that have caused policy issues to arise. So that's the biggest change I've noticed.

PS: HOW HAS PENN STATE ITSELF CHANGED DURING YOUR YEARS HERE?

NC: You know, when you're here, change is so gradual that you don't notice it as much until you look at old photographs. For example, the HUB has morphed in all kinds of ways since I've been here. But I don't walk by

the HUB and ever think about that, because I've morphed as it's morphed. And I remember when they put in the Millennium Science Complex, or when you could no longer drive through campus on Shortlidge. I used to come in that way to get to work, and I can't tell you how many months it was that I would drive down Shortlidge, and I'd get that far and then think "Darn, I did it again," on automatic pilot, first thing in the morning. I have finally learned, but there are so many things about campus that have changed.

PS: IS THERE ANY PLACE ON CAMPUS THAT STANDS OUT IN YOUR MIND?

NC: I have enormous pride in our two new buildings. There have been a few times when I've been walking across campus and I've noticed, either the Biobehavioral Health Building or the Health and Human Development building might be lit up in a certain way, and I just stop and I realize, that is a beautiful building.

SW: Yes, those are beautiful buildings and they've really enhanced central campus.

PS: HOW ABOUT YOU, SUSAN: ANY FAVORITE MOMENT, A HIGHLIGHT FROM YOUR YEARS AS DEAN?

SW: Well, learning that we were going to be able to build new buildings—those have been great moments. We had a huge renovation over in Burrowes, that was important. And when we got the National Research Council rankings in 2010—that was really a huge moment.

NC: Absolutely. Not all departments within colleges are ranked by the NRC—we had a few that were in there, but you really had quite a huge validation, Susan.

PS: WHAT DO THE NRC RANKINGS MEAN?

NC: It's a huge undertaking based on many different variables, the quality of programs, research, faculty, etc.

SW: There was a ranking done shortly after I came here and we didn't do very well then. We did badly, in fact, so that [2010] ranking was a great moment for us.

PS: AND OF COURSE, PENN STATE HAS CHANGED CONSIDERABLY SINCE YOU FIRST GOT HERE, SUSAN.

SW: Yes, and getting away from the physical changes, a big change in our college—and I bet in yours, too, Nan—has been our alumni development program, which when I came was pretty minimalistic, and now it's pretty big. In fact, as soon as we started to have alumni development boards, it was a huge change in how we connected with alumni and how we conducted our development business, and it really helped us

enhance our success amazingly.

NC: I thought you were going to talk about your pioneering work on the World Campus, Susan.

PS: PENN STATE'S WORLD CAMPUS IS HIGHLY REGARDED AND WAY UP THERE IN THE RANKINGS.

NC: Yes, that's all new, and Susan has been just a superstar in that area.

SW: Well not me personally, but yeah, our college was really one of the pioneers, because I was kind of skeptical of online at first. But now we have multiple majors online. And overall, Penn State is a much better place compared to when I first got here. It's much more of a national and international university and I think many parts of the university have really elevated themselves.

PS: WOULD YOU BOTH SAY THAT'S THE CASE FOR YOUR RESPECTIVE COLLEGES?

NC: I definitely think my college has more respect in the university than it did in 2007 when I started as dean. Actually, I think the whole field of the social and behavioral sciences has more respect at the university than it had 10 or 20 years ago. This is a heavily science and engineering place, and it probably always will be. But I think there's more recognition, even from people in science and engineering, that it would be productive to do some things with those people over there in social and behavioral science. And that has been really positive to watch happen.

PS: WHAT'S THE MOST POPULAR MAJOR IN EACH OF YOUR COLLEGES NOW?

NC: Right now, our biggest major is biobehavioral health. We have about 800 or 900 undergraduate students enrolled.

SW: Really? More than human development and family studies?

NC: HDFS is one of the smallest undergraduate majors right now. When you lay out the 160 majors at Penn State, all of our undergraduate majors are in the top quartile for size, so we don't have any real small ones. But BBH is probably in the top five at the university in terms of popularity. I think it reflects this generation's interest in health and wellness, in careers that might involve health care, which is one of the big sectors that's growing.

SW: For us, it's probably economics. We have about 1,300 students.

PS: IS ECONOMICS SEEN AS ONE OF THOSE LIBERAL ARTS MAJORS THAT LEADS TO BETTER

JOB PROSPECTS? WE OFTEN HEAR HOW IT'S HARD FOR LIBERAL ARTS STUDENTS TO FIND JOBS.

SW: Yes, hardly a week goes by without the *New York Times* or the *Wall Street Journal* writing about liberal arts undergraduate majors and how they are valuable in careers, but it's more difficult to get a start if you're in a field that doesn't have an obvious professional link. On the other hand, our labor studies or human resources students are in a more applied field, so they can go right out and get a job.

NC: I think it depends how they use their liberal arts education. I think a lot of our degrees are useful in so many different settings: The students don't necessarily go on to become humanities professors; they might become bankers—but really articulate bankers who write well and think well.

PS: SUSAN, NAN SAID EARLIER THAT YOU'RE ONE OF THOSE RARE DEANS WHO'S BEEN ABLE TO CONTINUE YOUR RESEARCH OVER THE YEARS AND PUBLISH WIDELY. YOU'LL REMAIN IN THE COLLEGE AS RESEARCH FACULTY. WHAT WILL YOU BE WORKING ON?

SW: I'm keeping up my interest in women and politics, and I'm doing work on the Holocaust, which is newer.

PS: AND NAN, YOU'RE RETIRING AND LEAVING STATE COLLEGE. WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

NC: We're going to spend more time at my mother's ranch in Wyoming. Our daughter and her family live in Boulder, Colo., and we're going to spend more time there, too. I don't have a huge roadmap for exactly what I'm going to do in retirement.

SW: And she has a new grandchild. He's the absolute cutest.

NC: That's spoken by Susan Welch, and not by the doting grandmother.

PS: WILL YOU STILL BE CONNECTED TO PENN STATE IN ANY WAY?

NC: For me, it's not just stepping down from the deanship, but retiring from the faculty where I've spent my entire career. So it's a huge transition, because most of my friends are here. You know, your friends get intertwined with your work life. But I'm just planning to be based in the Rockies and then come back and visit, and I'm hoping I can stay connected to Penn State. And I want to be helpful where I can be, without being a pain in the neck. If there are ways I can help the next dean, I want to do that so that they get off to the best possible start. ♥