

In-Sync with Palmer Hopkins:

An Interview
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This is an excerpt from a September 29, 2005 interview with **Dr. H. Palmer Hopkins**, the first president and a founder of the group that became the Delaware-District of Columbia-Maryland Association of Financial Aid Administrators (Tri-State). Dr. Palmer was the first Financial Aid Director at the University of Maryland, College Park from 1960 until 1976. In attendance at the interview/meeting were:

- Dr. H. Palmer Hopkins
- Naomi Hopkins (wife of Dr. Hopkins)
- Dr. Herm Davis, third Tri-State president, a founder, and first Financial Aid Director at Montgomery College
- Jacqueline Daughtry-Miller, Tri-State Historian and Senior Vice President, Independence Federal Savings Bank

The interview went something like this:

Q. How did the organization get started?

A. The breath of this organization came about in the mid-1960s. The Financial Aid Directors in the region got in touch with me and used my financial aid forms. This led to regular meetings. The next thing you know we gradually grew, expanded, and a year or two later, we started the District of Columbia-Maryland Association of student Financial Aid Administrators. (Delaware joined a few years later in 1971.) The idea was soon copied and other student financial aid associations began.

Q. How did you become the Director of Financial Aid at the University of Maryland, College Park?

A. In 1960, when we first started the Financial Aid Office, we just had scholarships and some grants, but they were never organized together. I was hired to put the office together. The name was just Student Aid Department then. My wife, Naomi, was a financial aid officer working in my office at the time. She stayed for about three years, but she left to make more money. Helen Thompson was the secretary who “ran the office.” I was director from 1960 until 1976.

Q. Tell me about the first Financial Aid Office at University of Maryland?

A. The University of Maryland Financial Aid Office had only four (4) employees; which included one staff for loans and one staff for grants. We set up the college work-study programs.

Herm Davis, the first Financial Aid Director at Montgomery College, interjected that he had to share his filing cabinet with the Admissions Office at Montgomery College, and it was always a battle. Those were the days!

Dr. Palmer Hopkins said that the Financial Aid Office was the best run office at the University of Maryland. In 1965, there were about 10,000 students. The University grew very fast because the state and federal governments were intent on helping students. There seemed to be a new program developed every year. That’s what caused the University of Maryland student population and financial aid programs to grow.

There was student unrest during the sixties. Students were unhappy about Viet Nam, the death of Martin Luther King and there was much racial unrest. Even during the riots, the financial aid office was untouched because the students knew where their money was coming from. The students were turning over trash cans, breaking windows. The National Guard was on the campus with tear gas, and students tried to burn down the main administration building. At that time, colleges were full of students who enrolled to keep from entering the military. College enrollment swelled and students were raising hell, not necessarily there just for education.

Q. Who were the Financial Aid Directors at the time?

A. Most Student Financial Aid Directors were males. Very few women were in financial aid leadership positions. The requisite that a Financial Aid Director have a Masters degree in Counseling kept women out of these positions. The Financial Aid Director was a very powerful position. Dr. Palmer Hopkins got along very well with the movers and shakers on campus. He always had tickets to the sports activities, and Lefty Driesell was a regular in his office. *(Driesell, now 74, was basketball coach at the University of Maryland for 17 years. At 68, Driesell was Georgia State head coach and had over 40 years in the NCAA Division I.)*

Q. What are your most noteworthy contributions?

A. I signed every letter. I talked to the students and to their parents. I represented Tri-State at national meetings and with the counselors. I gave Tri-State a national presence. Most importantly, I grew the job, particularly, because I was willing to take the job. It had to be done!

What I remember most is that I never had enough staff. In the end in 1976, I had 35 staff; 20 were full time; the remaining staff was students. Later, the Governor of Maryland called and asked me if I would take the job as Chairman of the Board of the Maryland Higher Education Loan Corporation. I recommended Jim Leamer as its first Executive Director. The rest is history!

I'm 92 years old and happy with my accomplishments and although, I don't get around like I used to, I still smile when I think of my Financial Aid experiences and colleagues.