

LEARN BY DOING THE RIGHT THING

BY SCOTT ROARK

BEING A COLLEGE PRESIDENT sometimes feels like you're being nibbled to death by goldfish.

That's one thing the president of the University of North Texas has learned in the position she has held for nearly a year.

"Change can be threatening to people, and they nibble at you," **Gretchen Bataille** (ENGL '66, EDU '67) says with a laugh. "On the plus side, you can make a difference. You can make changes. What you do in this position has a positive influence on countless individuals."

Bataille has learned many lessons outside the classroom over the years. One of her favorites is "take advantage of every opportunity," something she learned during her years at Cal Poly.

"I knew what I wanted to be in my senior year, when I helped a professor teach her class," Bataille said. "The 'learn by doing philosophy' applies to all disciplines. It was a great prelude to a teaching career."

Not surprisingly however, it was the challenging experiences that defined her character and perspective.

"In every speech, I talk about leadership and ethics – the need for an ethical framework for what you're doing," she said. "Do the right thing, even if it causes you grief at the time. I learned that while chairing the Iowa Civil Rights Commission."

Bataille served on the commission during the late 1970s when many students received basketball scholarships, nearly all of them male. The reason? Girl basketball programs in Iowa played "half-court" six-person games – not the standard,



full-court five-person games that boys played. Bataille and the commission decided that girls needed to start playing full-court in order to be competitive.

After a firestorm of controversy, the state's governor did not reappoint Bataille to the commission. But her position for equality was validated years later, when she was thanked by an assistant coach at Washington State University – a young woman from Iowa who went to college on a basketball scholarship. "Although unpopular at the time, our actions made her future possible," said Bataille.

Bataille has made the most of her opportunities – her professional accomplishments are almost too numerous to mention. She served as chief academic officer for the 16-campus UNC system and as interim chancellor for the system's North Carolina School of the Arts.

She helped create the American Indian Institute at Arizona State University and has written numerous books and articles on Native American literature. An accomplished public speaker, she recently gave a keynote address at Bogazici University in Istanbul, Turkey.

"Gretchen's contributions to higher education bring honor to both of the colleges where she earned her degrees – the College of Education and the College of Liberal Arts," said COE Dean Bonnie Konopak. "Her willingness to take risks for what she believes and her love of learning both formally and informally is a great model for our students." □