

The most powerful student leader at the UM system isn't MSA president or RHA house speaker. It's

TROY NASH

STUDENT CURATOR

story by suzanne struglinski
photo by mike buckley

Nash.

Troy Nash.

Though he's not Sean Connery, doesn't own a suitcase full of high-tech gizmos and gadgets and doesn't make saving the world a top priority, Troy Nash makes his mission seem anything but impossible. Nash's mission is to voice the opinion of 55,000 college students to the UM system Board of Curators, while serving as Student Representative to the board.

This two-year, rotating appointment gives one student a seat at the Board of Curators meetings.

"It gives me an opportunity to represent people who are in the same situation as myself," said Nash, a 27 year-old University of Missouri-Kansas City law student. "I'm a full-time student, too."

As the Board of Curators decides the university system's future, Nash's voice reminds them of the people they will directly affect.

Although Nash does not get to vote, his opinion can influence the curators, who get to look at issues from a student perspective.

"It's a very important position," said Bob Fritchey, student government president at University of Missouri-St. Louis. "[He's] in a position to see and hear more of what goes on than any other student. [The position] is much more than people give him credit for and he does a fantastic job."

During the Board of Curator meetings Nash listens attentively and acts in a highly professional manner. His voice tells the Curators what the students think and gives them ideas.

But once the tie comes off and a cold soda is in his hand, Nash's voice tells the story of a very down-to-earth guy with a strong sense of humor.

Walking down Ninth Street after a curators meeting Oct. 24, he talks to a student walking nearby. He's never met her before, but like any good special agent, he knows her name, her major, where she's from and how her day went in less than five minutes.

Nash's voice continues to charm when he walks into Music Cafe. Nash immediately starts chatting with a student studying at the bar. The student happens to be in law school too, and he gets a bit of advice from Nash before receiving his change.

Nash's outgoing personality led him to the position in the first place.

Many of his classmates and colleagues encouraged him to apply for the position last year. But Nash admits he didn't know what he was getting himself into.

"I didn't know anything," he said. "You really can't know anything until you're actually involved with what you do on a

day-to-day or month-to-month basis. It's hard to know."

Before being assigned to what might have appeared an impossible mission, Nash went through a long application process.

"I was interviewed by the student government presidents of all four campuses and they did a series of background checks," Nash said, pausing with a smile. "Obviously they didn't find anything."

After many applicants for student representative were reviewed, the final three selections were forwarded to Governor Mel Carnahan.

Carnahan called Nash to tell him he was the final selection.

"The competition was keen, but I was confident," Nash said, eyeing the chess pieces on the table.

Finding anything negative among Nash's resumé was probably the real impossible mission.

After his high school graduation, Nash worked three jobs and attended community college before deciding to join the Air Force.

He spent four years in the service while attending Wesley College in Dover, Del. There, Nash earned his bachelor of economics degree and was vice president of the Economics Society.

He continued his success in the Air Force. There, he received an "Airman of the Month" award as the youngest member of the Base Advisory Council.

"I had a wonderful time in the Air Force," Nash said. "Everybody should be exposed to that at one time in their life."

But despite Nash's success and impressive list of accomplishments, he remains modest.

"I'm by no stretch of imagination a genius," Nash said. "It's just from good old hard work."

For Nash, "good old hard work" also includes studying for a master's degree in economics.

While holding the position, Nash is required by law to attend all Board of Curator meetings. He does not get paid for the position or reimbursed for his travel expenses.

"It's nice for students to have a direct

avenue [and] a way to be represented at the board meetings," said MSA President Elizabeth Barton. "Despite his status as a graduate student] he is still very concerned with undergraduate students' needs."

"Of course we wish he had the ability to vote, but any opportunity we have to say anything makes it easier because he is here."

Nash said he understands the needs of undergraduates well because two of his brothers are students at UMKC. His sister, along with his wife Sherrie, also are completing their master's degrees at the school.

Challenge is nothing new to the Nash family. When Nash's voice tells of his family and their academic careers, pride shines through his eyes. Nash grew up with his four brothers and one sister in inner-city Kansas City. There he was raised by his mother on welfare in a single-parent home.

But Nash said his sometimes shaky past has never held him back from completing his goals and missions.

"Where you start has nothing to do with where you end up," he said, now playing with the chess pieces on the table. "I can say I'm truly blessed."

Now, Nash's mother is returning to school, in part because of Nash's involvement with the Program for Adult Continuing Education at UMKC. After completing her GED at 55 years old, Nash's mother will be enrolled at UMKC in January.

"You can always better your best," Nash said. "She is thrilled to death."

Despite his demanding schedule and huge amounts of responsibility, Nash meets his mission by finding time to listen to student's opinions.

"We have a good relationship with Troy," said Karl Schmitt, vice-president of Internal Affairs of the University of Missouri-Rolla Student Council. "If we want anything done we know we can go through him."

At the curators meetings, Nash continues to maintain the open lines of communication by paying attention to issues that could affect students in ways Curators might not have envisioned.

And he has a strategic plan for doing so.

"First and foremost [I

consider] whether or not the issue under discussion affects the students," Nash said. "Every issue affects the students in some way, but there are some that affect them more directly than the rest."

His plan seems to be working.

"When he speaks, people know he has something to say," said Curator Paul Combs. "They know what he is going to say is well thought out and represents the students interests."

Nash understands the curators are committed to improving the UM System, but still tries to examine the methods they use. Nash is concerned with the fact that many new degree programs currently in discussion might be offered only at MU, the flagship university of the UM system.

"You have to keep in mind we have two urban campuses, one specialized campus and a traditional campus," Nash said. "You have to balance between them all."

Despite the fact he cannot vote, Nash said he has an influence on the curators' decisions.

"There's a difference between having power and having influence and how well you use it. I think [Nash] does it very well," Fritchey said.

Nash said he feels the Board accepts his statements and is responsive to his comments. In fact, Nash said Interim Chancellor Richard Wallace and he have become good friends.

The curators said Nash is a good addition to board.

"Troy does a good job of balancing between trying to speak to the board on every issue and knowing when to talk and when not to," Combs said. "Troy's very good about getting his point across and not trying to get on every little issue. He gets a great deal of respect."

UMSL will be selecting the next student representative in the Fall of 1997.

When his term ends, Nash will focus on earning his Ph.D. and his voice might be heard in the classroom or courtroom. He plans on practicing law or teaching.

And his mission might even go abroad. Overseas travel is high on his list of priorities as well.

For now he is pleased with his assignment. His favorite aspects of the mission include the interaction with other students and visiting the different campuses throughout the state.

"You get to meet many interesting people," Nash said. "I enjoy what I am doing because it gives me an opportunity to serve my fellow students."

"As far as I am concerned, there is no higher honor a person could have."



Student Curator Troy Nash attends a curators meeting in early October.