

Malden C. Nesheim

From the pages of the
Cornell Chronicle

Cornell Chronicle v24n26 April 1, 1993 p5

Chief operating officer balances his hectic life and the university's budget

Cornell Chronicle v25n3 June 30, 1994

Provost Malden Nesheim will step down in a year

Cornell Chronicle 26(31) April 27, 1995

Cooperation called hallmark of Nesheim's tenure

Cornell Chronicle v26 n31 p4 April 27, 1995

Nutritionist-administrator-nutritionist, Nesheim career path traced

Chief operating officer balances his hectic life and the university's budget

By Sam Segal

When President Frank H.T. Rhodes took a brief sabbatic leave last spring and, again, when he was recovering from surgery in the fall, Malden C. Nesheim became the chief presidential understudy without a hint of stage fright.

The move was easy, because Provost Nesheim — as Cornell's chief academic officer, chief operating officer and chief budget officer — already knew the part thoroughly.

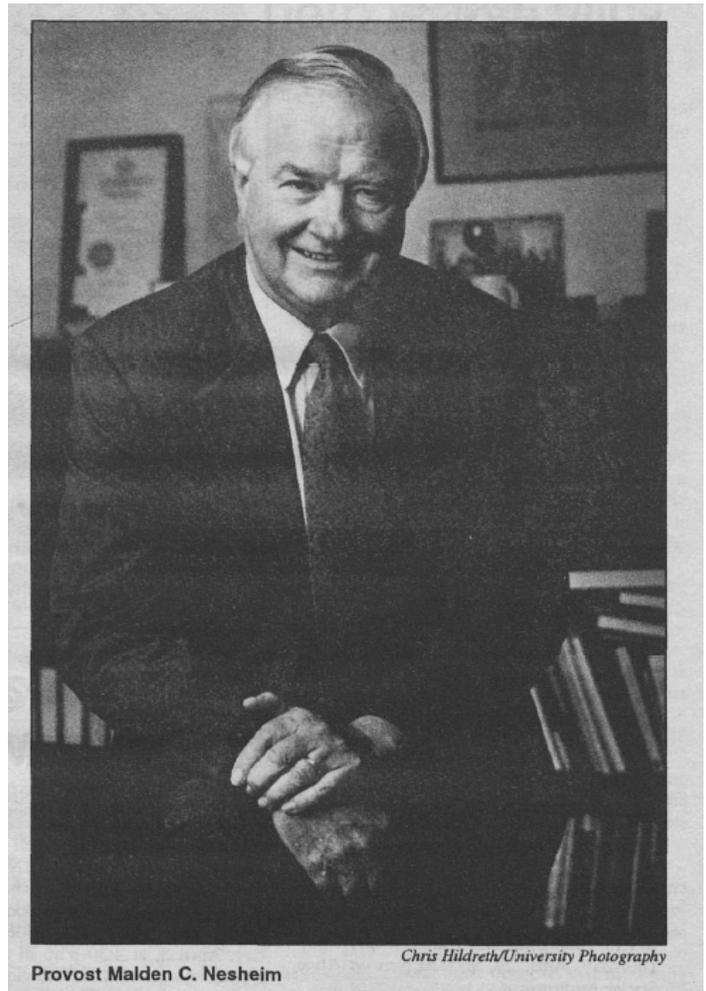
The provost's ceremonial, fund-raising and external duties don't approach those of the president; nor does the buck stop as often at his desk. But when it comes to knowing everything about the university's budget, colleges, departments, centers, students, faculty, staff and problems of every weight and kind, the provost can't be topped.

Reporting directly to him are 12 deans, four vice presidents, the Academic Personnel Office, Admissions and Financial Aid, the Africana Studies and Research Center, the Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies, the Cornell Institute for Social and Economic Research, the Division of Biological Sciences, the University Library and Minority Educational Affairs — not to mention some two dozen major units that report to his subordinates.

Recruiting faculty

In addition, the provost plays a part in recruiting individual faculty members and in trying to dissuade some bent on leaving; in reviewing every faculty tenure and promotion recommendation; in searching for senior administrators; and in the setting of annual budgets for individual divisions. Because of his budget responsibilities, he must be intimately involved in issues that impinge on the budget — such as tuition, financial aid, graduate student stipends, salary increases and reimbursement of indirect research costs.

The job takes broad shoulders, and Nesheim, at six feet, 220 pounds, happens to have the frame of a farm boy —



Provost Malden C. Nesheim
Chris Hildreth/University Photography

with good reason. Until he went off to the University of Illinois in 1949 to study agricultural science, Nesheim spent his life on a 170-acre, family owned farm in Northern Illinois — in a location he describes as “near Rochelle.”

Before he took the five-mile bus ride to his school, he and seven siblings had chores; in his case, milking three or four cows and feeding a small menagerie of sheep, pigs and other contributors to self-sufficiency. And, though Nesheim was a summer-league baseball pitcher, after-school chores precluded his playing on school teams.

During the depression, he recalls, “we lived comfortably enough,” but it was a “semi-cashless economy,” another preparation for his job as provost.

“My mother bought sugar and flour in 100-pound sacks and made her own bread.”

She also canned fruits and vegetables — froze them after electricity arrived in 1938 — and, with Nesheim’s father, canned beef and made sausage.

Beverly Maynard, Nesheim’s executive assistant, says he handles his myriad responsibilities with the profound calmness that American legend ascribes to farmers.

Stands firm

“It takes a lot to ruffle his feathers,” Maynard says. “In fact, I’ve never heard his voice raised no matter what the pressures. He stands firm once he’s decided something; but, until he has decided, he’s flexible and always willing to listen.” Though his mind and time are well organized, his desk isn’t always so. Sometimes Maynard has to guide him through the papers on and around it.

He has a lot to keep track of. While Nesheim tries not to bring work home and usually has official obligations only two or three nights a week, his average day runs from 7:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., crammed with meetings that often take place in his large office, beside the president’s, on Day Hall’s third floor.

In a recent two-week period, his calendar included separate meetings with seven deans (sometimes including Rhodes as well), three vice presidents, six heads of programs and centers, his 34-member council of deans and administrators, and his academic deans’ group. There was a breakfast with department chairs, a dinner in Washington for which the return flight left at midnight, a meeting in New York preceded by a 6:25 a.m. flight from Ithaca and followed by a business dinner back on campus, an employees’ Benefair dinner, and several meetings with inquisitive students and aggrieved faculty members.

These did not include high-level group meetings that he joined as a participant — the president’s executive staff, a smaller senior-administration group, a planning session for an upcoming Board of Trustees’ meeting, and regular meetings of the Strategic Planning Advisory Board, which is seeking to establish Cornell’s long-term goals and priorities. He also sits on the Quality Council, which is concerned not with what the university decides to do but with improving how well its departments do it.

Becoming provost

When Nesheim is asked what it is, besides the rigors of farm life, that prepares a one-time student of animal nutrition to be the chief operating officer of a great and complex university, he turns the question around:

“A person becomes a provost by first becoming an academic, by knowing what makes a university tick — teaching, advising, functioning in an academic discipline, understanding faculty and student perceptions and aspirations.”

That, he says, is better preparation for managing Cornell’s total budget of more than a billion dollars than the financial study that a comparable corporate leader would likely have on his or her resume.

He says his own progress as a nutritionist captured university life in microcosm. As an undergraduate, Nesheim helped with the graduate research of an older brother — who later became a vice president at Quaker Oats — and knew early that he wanted to do graduate work himself. He took a one-year master’s degree in animal nutrition, also at Illinois, spent two years as an officer in the Air Force, got his Ph.D. in nutrition at Cornell from 1956 to 1959, then began as an assistant professor doing research in basic biochemistry and physiology of nutrition associated with feeding farm animals.

During three research leaves at Cambridge University — in 1965, 1972-73 and 1983-84 — he became interested in parasitic infections, so that when Nesheim became the first director of Cornell’s Division of Nutritional Sciences in 1974, his focus was already shifting from animal to human nutrition.

The new division was formed from the Graduate School of Nutrition and the Department of Human Nutrition and Food. Over 13 years, Nesheim developed the division — with its cross-college faculty, graduate and undergraduate programs, expanding operations in Savage and Martha Van Rensselaer Halls, and major infusions of government research funds — into one of the world’s leading centers for nutritional research, teaching and extension. He also met and married his wife, Diva Sanjur, who is a professor of nutritional sciences here.

Prominent nutritionist

During his directorship and as vice president for planning and budgeting (1987-89) and provost, Nesheim has remained a nutritionist of national prominence. From 1986 to 1992, for instance, he was national director for a Pew Charitable Trust program that dispensed \$5.9 million to help other institutions strengthen nutrition programs; and in 1989-90, he chaired the Dietary Guidelines Committee that revised the federal government's national guidelines and helped revise the Recommended Dietary Allowances.

He also has lectured in Canada, Puerto Rico, Panama, England, Indonesia, Malaysia and China, as well as around the United States.

It is in Panama, his wife's native country, at a home on the Pacific Ocean 60 miles from Panama City, that Nesheim is best able to think about things other than Cornell. It's true that, on his last visit, he read a book of Professor Walter Lafeber's — on Central America — but he likes to mix history with a range of best sellers; and, with no phone at hand, he may read six or eight books in his hammock, among the mango and papaya trees, overlooking the Pacific.

Back home, his escapes are less dramatic — entertaining his grandchildren, fishing, puttering around the house and playing golf once a week when Ithaca weather and his schedule permit.

Some of his pleasures, like his discipline, seem to reach back to the Illinois farm. He loves flowers and brings daffodils to his office regularly in the spring. And he makes jam — apple, cherry, strawberry and raspberry — with fruit that he and his wife pick locally.

Almost four years into his provostship, he seems to be balancing his life as well as the budget. He says it's possible because he likes people, loves the extraordinary range of people and disciplines at Cornell, and has talented deans and administrators to “run the day-to-day life of the colleges and departments.”

Provost Malden Nesheim will step down in a year

By Sam Segal

Malden C. Nesheim, who has been at Cornell since he began graduate study 38 years ago, has announced that he will retire as provost a year from now but will continue as a professor of nutritional sciences.

Last week, at a regular meeting of the Board of Trustees' Executive Committee, President Frank H.T. Rhodes informed the trustees of Nesheim's intentions. Nesheim's retirement from the provostship will intentionally coincide with Rhodes', which the president announced in March.

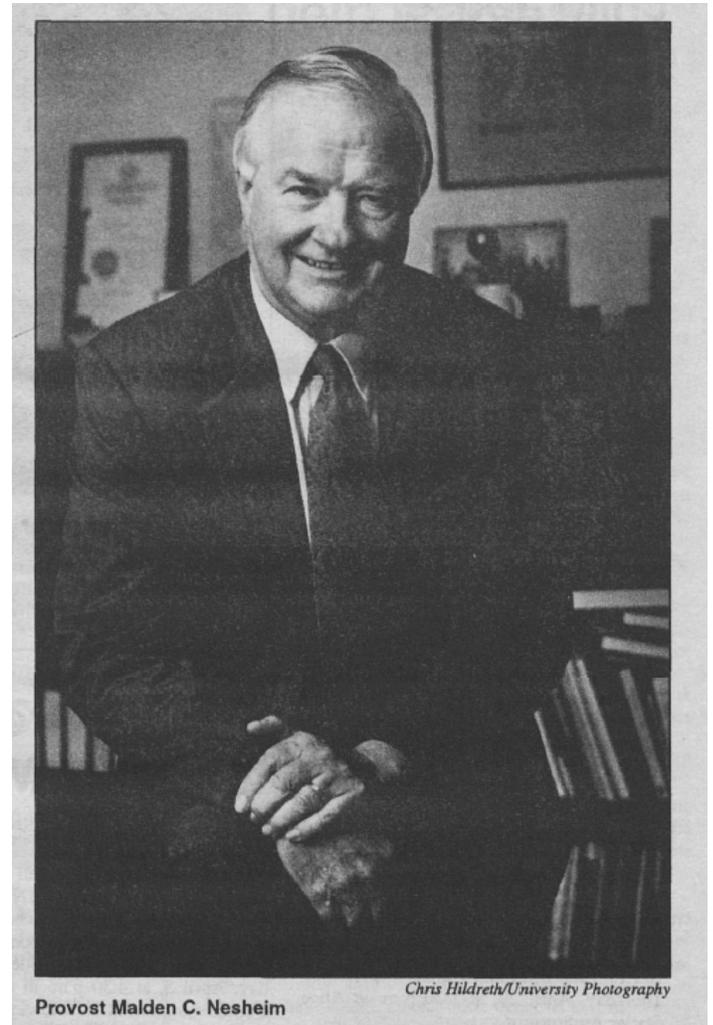
"While I had initially planned to limit my service as provost to five years, I'm pleased to serve a little longer at Frank Rhodes' request," said Nesheim, adding "But it is appropriate for me to step down when he does, so that the new president will have a major role in selecting my successor."

Rhodes concurred that Nesheim's decision was appropriate but said Cornell would miss his leadership.

"Mal Nesheim has been a superb provost," Rhodes said. "He has been deliberate but thorough, solicitous but decisive, respectful and supportive of every area of our academic life but also focused on the exigencies of managing a large institution. He has played a critical role in keeping Cornell financially stable and academically strong during a time of serious financial constraint. And he has done it with grace, intelligence and good humor. He leaves the entire university in his debt."

The provost is the university's chief operating officer. Under the president, he has responsibility both for the budget and for all academic programs—except those of the Medical College—with 12 deans and four vice presidents reporting directly to him and more than two dozen major units reporting to his subordinates.

He has helped the statutory colleges successfully sustain a series of recession-driven state budget cuts, which will be reversed with more ample funding next year. He has also worked, with Rhodes, to persuade faculty and staff that the entire university has entered a



period of financial constraint, during which efficiency must be everyone's concern and academic innovations must generally be funded through substitution rather than addition of programs.

To support financial stability in the years ahead, Nesheim has formed a high-level group that looks at the budget with a five year perspective.

Nesheim, 62, grew up on an Illinois farm, studied animal nutrition at the University of Illinois and got his Ph. D. from Cornell in 1959, when he became an assistant professor. During three research leaves at Cambridge University, he became interested in parasitic infections, so that when he became the first director of Cornell's

Division of Nutritional Sciences in 1974, his focus had already shifted from animal to human nutrition.

Nesheim has said that the only preparation for the complex management job of provost is immersion in university life.

A person becomes a provost by first becoming an academic, by knowing what makes a university tick – teaching advising, in an academic discipline, understanding faculty and student perceptions and aspirations.”

For two years before becoming provost, Nesheim also served in the new position of vice president for planning and budgeting. Nesheim has been president of the American Institute of Nutrition, chair of the National Institutes of the Food and Nutrition Board of the Institute of Medicine, where he was part of a subcommittee that prepared the 1989 edition of the U.S. Dietary Guidelines, the government’s official advice covering recommended dietary allowances.

Fact File Office of the Provost

Reporting directly to Provost Maiden C. Nesheim are:

- ✓ 12 deans (Agriculture and Life Sciences; Architecture, Art and Planning; Arts and Sciences; Continuing Education and Summer Sessions; Engineering; Graduate School; Hotel Administration; Human Ecology; Industrial and Labor Relations; Johnson Graduate School of Management; Law; and Veterinary Medicine)
- ✓ 4 vice presidents (planning; academic programs and campus affairs; information technologies; and research and advanced studies)
- ✓ Other campus units, including the Academic Personnel Office, Admissions and Financial Aid, the Africana Studies and Research Center, the Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies, the Cornell Institute for Social and Economic Research, the Division of Biological Sciences, the University Library and Minority Educational Affairs, and some two dozen major units that report to his subordinates.

Cooperation called hallmark of Nesheim's tenure

By Roger Segelken



When Malden C. Nesheim became provost in 1989, he knew what Cornell needed to get a dozen deans, four vice presidents and the heads of a host of divisions, centers, offices, libraries programs and other units talking and working together for the university's common good.

As Nesheim prepares to step down from the provost's post June 30, other administrators agree that he has succeeded in his unification mission. So does he. In fact he takes considerable satisfaction, although with characteristic modesty, in a seemingly impossible job well done.

It shouldn't be surprising that Nesheim "has the colleges pulling together, eliminating duplication and working more closely than at any time in the past," said David L. Call, dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, who also is retiring this year. After all,

Nesheim used the same kind of Leadership 21 years ago, Call noted, when he brought together faculty members of two units in a controversial merger to form the Division of Nutritional Sciences.

Under Nesheim's directorship, that division grew and matured to become widely regarded as the premier research, teaching and public service program for human nutrition in the country.

This time the stakes were bigger and the factions more entrenched. Resolving issues about what's called "accessory instruction," the complex system in which individual colleges are reimbursed when their classes attract students who are enrolled in other colleges of the university, won the deans' admiration. So have Nesheim's efforts to bring sense to the number of different colleges, schools and departments in which certain subjects, such as economics or statistics, are taught.



Robert Barker/University Photography
Cornell President Frank H.T. Rhodes presents Provost Nesheim with an award commemorating his long service to the university at a banquet in his honor April 19.

“Mal has us consulting together, trying to use faculty resources in concert with one another, to keep educational principles in the driver’s seat of the university,” said Don M. Randel, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. Citing an “improved quality of Conversation among the deans,” Randel credited Nesheim’s personal energy and perseverance” and his willingness to address the difficult problems.”

More enlightened, university wide policies on admissions, faculty recruiting, athletics and budgeting come to mind when David B. Lipsky, dean of the School of Industrial and Labor Relations, reviews Nesheim’s six years as provost. Lipsky also pointed to an internal taskforce, convened by the provost with deans of several colleges, to coordinate activities that potentially can enhance economic development in the state.

“Mal brought a depth of knowledge of the institution, an understanding of the different disciplines, of their concerns and capabilities,” the ILR dean said. “For the first time, the undergraduate deans are meeting, sharing information and progressing on a number of issues,” Lipsky said, noting Nesheim’s understanding of the unique problems and needs of the statutory schools.”

Nesheim’s affiliation with the university, and with the statutory colleges in particular, date to 1956 when he began his Ph.D. studies in nutrition, biochemistry and physiology. Growing upon a farm in the Midwest, he had pursued degrees in agricultural science (B.S., 1953) and animal nutrition (M.S., 1954) at the University of Illinois at Urbana, and joined Cornell’s Ag College faculty, upon graduation in 1959, as an assistant professor of animal nutrition. He first specialized in nutritional biochemistry in the Poultry Science Department, but changed the focus of his award-winning research to hu-

man nutrition and to the interaction of parasitic infection and nutritional status following research leaves at Cambridge University in the mid-’60s, ’70s and ’80s.

Influential national leadership roles came as president of the American Institute of Nutrition, chair of the National Nutrition Consortium and membership of review panels and study sections of the National Institutes of Health and U.S. Department of Agriculture. For the Institute of Medicine’s Food and Nutrition Board, Nesheim served on the committee that wrote the 10th edition of Recommended Dietary Allowances. He also chaired the panel that wrote the 1990 edition of “Dietary Guidelines for Americans,” the government’s official advice on dietary practices.

Nesheim’s considerable contributions to nutritional sciences were acknowledged at an April 19 symposium in his honor, and at a banquet that followed. Symposium speakers from as far as the University of Glasgow presented updates in the fields in which Nesheim made his mark: nutritional science on the international, national, state and academic levels. Dr. Cutberto Garza, the current director of Nutritional Sciences, led the tributes, followed by Milton Scott, professor emeritus of poultry science; Olav Oftedal, research nutritionist at Smithsonian Institution’s National Zoological Park; and Dean Call.

Then it was the Board of Trustees’ turn. At an April 20 testimonial dinner in New York City, Board Chairman Stephen H. Weiss and President Frank H.T. Rhodes cited the retiring provost “for his leadership of the university, first as vice president for planning and budgeting and, for the last six years, as provost, a post in which his fairness, strength, judgment and foresight have earned the respect and gratitude of the whole Cornell community.” Looking back on his tenure as the university’s chief academic and fiscal officer, Nesheim takes satisfaction in having guided Cornell through what he calls a major period of financial adjustment,” starting with an earlier round of state- and federal-funding cutbacks. A lot of effort had to be put into policies and practices to keep Cornell on a strong financial footing,” he said.

Affirmative-action efforts, particularly in faculty recruiting of underrepresented minorities and women, were one of his greatest concerns, and notable progress has been made, Nesheim said, “although we can never completely do what many would like to see done.”

Renovations and new construction are giving the university up-to-date classroom facilities, the provost said, “although we still have a lot to do.” He points to the Noyes Lodge Language Learning Center, which was converted from a shop and lunchroom on the shore of Beebe Lake, and to the Big Red Barn, rebuilt into a graduate-student center from a 120-year-old carriage house.

We now have a strong set of relationships among our deans, in which they are committed to closer collaboration across college lines,” Nesheim said. We have been able to clean up a number of administrative issues that had been unresolved,” he added.

“As provost, I’ve had the opportunity of dealing with the whole institution,” Nesheim said. “I’ve had the privilege of becoming acquainted with a very large number of the faculty and staff who are responsible for all the wonderful things that go on here.

His successor, Nesheim said, must share the vision of how the next Cornell president, Hunter R. Rawlings, wants to organize administration of the institution. “Increasingly, the provost will have to help the president make decisions on academic priorities that have to be set. The provost will have to make choices on programs - how large an institution we can be, which programs we can support and which we cannot.

“It is important for the provost to identify and support the leadership that comes from the college deans,” he said. “The outstanding set of deans is one of Cornell’s strengths. It gives me satisfaction to have their leadership in place, supporting the academic purposes of the institution.”

The provost cited “the great privilege of working with Frank Rhodes,” saying, “Clearly, he deserves all the honors he has received. He is an excellent president to work with and for.”

The pace in the Provost’s Office, in the third-floor Day Hall suite adjoining the president’s, won’t slow at all until both have completed their duties, Nesheim said, and he hasn’t had much chance to think about what comes next. Dean Call thinks the retiring provost should take time to work on his golf swing. Nesheim expects to return his research focus to nutrition and health issues. And he will be working with public health nutrition programs in Central America and Mexico. And once

again, national service in the United States is beckoning.

“I hope to have slightly more control of my time,” he said, “and I hope to do some writing. There’s some research that still needs to be written up.”

Captions: Adriana Rovers/University Photography

Provost Malden Nesheim in his office in Day Hall April 10.

Robert Barker/University Photography

Cornell President Frank H.T. Rhodes presents Provost Nesheim with an award commemorating his long service to the university at a banquet in his honor April 19.

Nutritionist-administrator-nutritionist, Nesheim career path traced

By Roger Segelken

Longtime colleagues of Malden C. Nesheim took the occasion of his retirement as provost to recall his accomplishments as a research scientist, educator and administrator.

Speaking at an April 19 symposium, David W. T. Crompton, professor in the University of Glasgow's Institute of Biomedical and Life Sciences, cited poultry research by Nesheim as early as 1955. Nesheim was the first to demonstrate the importance of dietary selenium in chickens' growth. It was not until 1979 that the human need for selenium was recognized, Crompton observed.



Crompton

Research during visits by Nesheim to Cambridge University showed how heat damage affects digestibility of protein. Then the researcher turned to a topic that was to have the greatest worldwide impact, Crompton said, referring to the effect of internal parasites, such as helminth worms, on human nutrition and health. First with preschool children in Kenya and subsequently in Panama and Burma, Nesheim showed that worm-free children grow better and "pioneered the approach for using primary schools for delivery of antihelminthic drugs," Crompton said.

Jean-Pierre Habicht, professor of nutritional epidemiology, and Andre Bensadoun, professor of biochemistry and nutritional sciences, spoke of Nesheim's efforts in building the faculty of the Division of Nutritional Sciences and extending its reach around the world. What Habicht called "enlightened risktaking" resulted in bold initiatives in international nutrition in which Cornell led the way, the epidemiologist said, pointing to programs such as the Chinese diet-disease study.

"Mal created a nurturing environment in Savage Hall," Bensadoun said of the then director's concern for students and faculty members who benefited from ex-

panded laboratory space, better research equipment, financial support and freedom of inquiry. "We were free to do research in any subject that interested us, but Mal expected excellence," the biochemist said.

No one called them "paradigm shifts" then, professor of Nutritional Sciences Christine Olson said, but one occurred in the field soon after Nesheim took over the newly formed division in 1974. Some—but not all – nutritional scientists in the late-1970s were beginning to acknowledge that what we eat influences the diseases we suffer, Olson said. At Cornell, Nesheim was viewed as relatively neutral in the diet-disease debate. She recalled, and in his national service he was known for his "level-headed consensus-building among the nutritional community. He was actively involved in bringing nutrition to the people."

Nesheim had a chance to respond to the accolades.

Nutrition, he said, "has been a wonderful field, even with its quirks and controversies. We are always looking for scientific credibility—" But progress in nutritional science is always of relevant interest to the general public, Nesheim said. "Nutrition is the one thing in our lives we can have a hold of and do something about."

And building a world-renowned department wasn't so hard in what Nesheim called the golden age of nutrition at Cornell. "When I took over," he said, "there were eight vacant faculty positions."