

AN *interview* WITH

# President Robert Klitgaard

**O**n July 1, Robert Klitgaard succeeded President Steadman Upham and Interim President William L. Everhart as CGU's 13th president. He came to Claremont from the Pardee RAND Graduate School in Santa Monica, where since 1997 he was the dean and Ford Distinguished Professor of International Development and Security.

Klitgaard has enjoyed an illustrious academic career. The author of eight books and scores of articles, he has been a professor of economics at Yale's School of Management and an associate professor at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, where he also served half time as special assistant to Harvard president Derek Bok. He has also been on the faculties of the University of Karachi (Pakistan), the University of Natal (South Africa), the World Economic Forum (Switzerland), and the World Bank Institute. Growing up in California, Klitgaard studied at Harvard University, earning a bachelor's degree in philosophy and master's and Ph.D. degrees in public policy.

What makes Bob Klitgaard's career unique is that beyond academia he has worked on development programs in more than 30 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. One of his specialties is government reform. *The Christian Science Monitor* called him "the world's leading expert on corruption." His book, *Tropical Gangsters*, was named one of *The New York Times* "books of the century."

When *The Flame's* news editor, Bryan Schneider, recently had a chat with President Klitgaard, it was this unusual international focus that prompted the first questions.

**The Flame:** You have worked in dozens of countries all over the world. What compelled you, early on, to live such a global life?

**Klitgaard:** After my first year of graduate school, I was lucky enough to be a summer intern in Peru's National Planning Institute. The government was trying to create a rational plan to help the poor, but the country was virtually bereft of useful analysis. What a contrast to America, where you could find hundreds of studies on education or labor markets or whatever the issue. In Peru, there were almost none. So, I began to think the value of new research in poor countries like Peru is much greater than it is in developed countries like the United States.

The other part is personal, having a chance to work with individuals from diverse backgrounds and cultures in one-on-one situations.

**The Flame:** It is interesting that your first job out of Harvard graduate school, when most might have chosen a nice tenure-track job in America, was a faculty position at the University of Karachi (Pakistan).

**Klitgaard:** When I returned to America from Peru to work on my dissertation, I was getting comfortable settling into the U.S. However, in the back of my mind, there was this lesson I learned in Peru—that good ideas go further there than they do here. So I thought, before I settle down and get too comfortable, maybe I should try to go someplace where it's really poor, like Bangladesh or Africa.

I started checking around, and found there was a job opening in India. I went down to look at this job, but it was too bureaucratic for me. While I was there, they told me about an opening in Karachi. I ended up getting the job and spending two years in a new organization called the Applied Economics Research Center in Karachi. It was fabulous. We worked on local and regional problems of poverty, really nuts and bolts things like: What was wrong with the shrimp industry? How could you get property taxes to work better? How could you improve fertilizer distribution in rural areas? We did a study on the economics of hawkers and peddlers, which involved all-night field trips to the city wholesale market with my students. It was a great experience to see how analysis could be useful to help poor people. Since I thought of myself as a person with an interest in all of humanity, it was natural for me to dedicate my research to people in third world countries.

**The Flame:** What got you interested in corruption and international development?

**Klitgaard:** When I was in Pakistan, many people talked to me about problems like corruption and lack of meritocracy. At that time, there was little in the academic literature on corruption that was anything but exculpatory. Academics would say, "Well, corruption is just a free market where you don't allow a free market price." It's a form of log rolling when there isn't a democratic legislature. So, corruption is the grease of the wheels of



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## PERSONAL PROFILE :

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### **MOST LIFE-CHANGING PLACE TO VISIT:**

“Bali. A place where over half of people’s money and time are devoted to religious observance. Just being there helps to remystify life.”

### **FAVORITE FOOD:**

“So many things, but how about chili?”

### **FAVORITE INSTRUMENT:**

“Electric guitar, but in my case please remember with sympathy Oscar Wilde’s dictum, ‘If a thing’s worth doing, it’s worth doing badly.’ ”

### **SPORTS/HOBBIES:**

Surfing (“at least, in the past”), beach volleyball and motorcycling.

### **PROUDEST ACCOMPLISHMENT:**

“Happily married husband and devoted father.” Bob’s wife Elaine is a mathematician and mother of Genevève (18), Tamryn (17), Kai (11), and Kristen (7).

commerce and the glue of politics. People in Pakistan were telling me something different, “Corruption is appalling; it is holding us back.”

The students I had at the University of Karachi were as good as the students I would later have at Harvard. Yet, they felt they couldn’t get ahead through their own efforts. They felt that meritocracy just wasn’t there. They felt that the corruption affected their careers and was distorting the path of the economy away from productivity. When I returned to America to be an associate professor at Harvard, I started reading the literature on corruption, and I realized that it was very incomplete. That is what started my work in this area.

**The Flame:** What country has had the biggest impact on you?

**Klitgaard:** Each experience has had an impact. Last year I was in Southern Sudan, the most impoverished place I’ve seen. Southern Sudan is as big as Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi combined, but in two weeks of travel, I saw no paved roads and no electricity. This is a place where, after 21 years of war, three percent of the women can read; where only 20 percent of the children go to primary school; where diseases of every kind, the usual suspects in Africa plus many others, are rife. The public health disaster of the world right now is in Southern Sudan. With all of that, still I found the most remarkable idealism among the leadership and potential leadership. After so much war and so much poverty, it’s as if all they’re left with is their idealism.

**The Flame:** Are there specific instances, some specific eye-opening experiences that you can recount that changed the way you do things?

**Klitgaard:** The summer that I was an intern in Peru, my job was to help evaluate about 200 foreign aid projects. They wanted to figure out which projects worked and which ones did not, under which donors and in what sectors.

“Bob is the most intellectually attuned individual I’ve known in my entire life. He is a great leader who is able to lead without taking credit. Wherever you go, he is the brightest person in the room, but he’ll never let you know that. He is good at developing self-confidence in the people around him. He challenges your mind. His desire to better the world distinguishes him from everyone else. He is a man whose intellect combines rationality with emotion—a rare gift.”

*Pedro Jose Greer Jr., M.D.  
Assistant Dean for Homeless Education  
University of Miami Medical School  
Trustee, RAND Corporation*



So, I thought fine, I can do that—I’d been studying economics and statistics, hadn’t I? We had three months, \$17,000, and two other young researchers to do this. No problem.

I got the files for each project and asked, “Where is the benefit-cost ratio?” It wasn’t there, anywhere. I backed up and asked people about the country’s social welfare function. Their answer: “What’s that?” So, after a couple of weeks of frustration, I wrote a bitter letter to one of my professors at Harvard, Frederick Mosteller. I said in effect, “You’ve been teaching me all of these economics and statistics, but I don’t see any use for it at all down here. There

are no benefit-cost studies, there’s no social welfare function, and they don’t have a definition of ‘success.’ I can’t do a regression analysis.” He wrote me back saying, “How I feel for you in your misery. People can never agree in general terms on what is success and what is failure. They cannot do it. However, people can agree on examples of outrageous success and outrageous failure. Go interview the ministers and the supporters, find a few examples of each, study them, share them, and watch what happens.”

So we went off and studied successful fishery projects, and unsuccessful road projects, and so forth. At the end of the summer, we had a meeting of the government ministers and the supporters and presented these little vignettes of studies, stories of success and failure, and then led a discussion where the ministers and supporters started talking about why that kind of project worked and this one didn’t. They had a two-hour discussion. They couldn’t stop talking to each other, stimulated by these examples. They got more out of this in process, partnership, and trust, than any regression study could have ever done. That was an epiphany for me. We don’t need size-up-and-solve social science, telling people in places we don’t really understand what to do. Rather, we need to create ways to enable them to think more creatively by bringing in examples from other places to stimulate their discussions, sharing analytical frameworks to help guide their thinking, and then engaging them in a dialogue—that can lead to wonderful things. Professor Mosteller was right.

**The Flame:** What are some of the larger truths you have learned in your travels and experiences?

**Klitgaard:** That’s a difficult question. I am amazed by human perseverance. I think the thing learned most from the disadvantaged is their amazing ability to persevere. Things that would leave me flattened out and fractured, despairing, you see them come back again and

again. I realize what fiber people have compared to the soft life that I have. It's always an inspiration for me to travel to these places. I come back and try to be better, try to do better, to complain less, to be more grateful.

I am also impressed by the ability of people to change their lives. It is interesting that as economists and policy people, and social psychologists, we think of these big processes moving along in predictable ways with GDP growing and education rising, land use degrading, whatever the positive and negative trends are. And yet, in the midst of that is the power of renovation. We see people making big changes in their lives. It might be because of love. It might be because of religion. But, something happens to some people that spurs them to make a fundamental change, and I think we ignore that.

**The Flame:** Are there impacts you have seen in your consultations around the world with governments and development agencies that have made a difference in people's lives on the ground?

**Klitgaard:** Sometimes I've been lucky enough to be part of that mysterious process of individual renovation and inspiration. I was an advisor to Mozambique in 1996 and '97. I believe many people today would think that Mozambique is a remarkable success story. I hitched into a situation where they were eager for ideas. We had a session headed by the prime minister with the 37 top government officials doing just what I described earlier in Peru. They gave half of a day. I brought in cases to examine. They divided up into

two groups and went off and analyzed. They came back and shared their answers and debated them, and then after a tea break, we started talking about Mozambique. They came up with sensational ideas, which they went ahead and put into action. They cleaned up the customs bureau, knocked out a hospital mafia that was extorting money from patients, and eliminated a lot of the corruption in educational testing. Each of these actions reflected small progress, but combined it was a tipping point. People began to see progress, and meanwhile the country was pursuing sensible democratic policies and sensible economic policies. As a result, Mozambique has been growing at seven-eight percent a year. I'm not trying to posit cause and effect there, but it was heartening for me to be involved and see good things happening afterwards.

**The Flame:** Do you consider yourself transdisciplinary?

**Klitgaard:** I've been called worse.

There are some uncanny match-ups between my interests and this university's, and that's one of them. Within each discipline, many of the most interesting advances in recent years have been because of trespassing across disciplinary boundaries. I can think of many examples in economics, such as behavioral economics for example, and many in sociobiology; you can go on and on.

At CGU, there is a tremendous concern for making a difference in the world. It's not just about training academics; we want to try to have an impact. And we know that problems in the world are not con-

finied to specific disciplines. They're all transdisciplinary. If we're going to make a difference in addressing problems, we can work together in teams that respect the disciplines and understand what it means to trespass. That's very attractive to me.

**The Flame:** In the early 1980s, you were special assistant to President Derek Bok at Harvard. What did you learn from that experience that you can use now as a university president?

**Klitgaard:** Derek Bok is an amazing guy. I learned many things from him. One is that the president's responsibility to raise funds is best done by pulling together and advancing great ideas. He was relentlessly trying to extract from Harvard its best ideas and its highest aspirations to present to people in ways that would not only mobilize their resources, but their energies too.

Another thing I learned from him was the way he interacted with the deans. Each year he would write long letters to the deans going through their strategies and asking specific questions like: What are you doing about such and such? Then, he would follow progress on those issues throughout the year and come back with another round of letters the next year. His intellectual engagement at the leadership level with the deans respected them and what they knew, respected their authority, but also demanded accountability from them, and provided inspiration to them.

He also had an open-door policy, which is something I follow as well. If there's a problem, and people want to talk to you about it you should be ready to see them.

"Robert Klitgaard is a remarkable man because he combines an extraordinary sense of vision and desire to help others. He has helped African nations with his advice, bringing out their strengths and weaknesses in his books. You are very lucky to have him as a president, he will do an extraordinary job."

*James Q. Wilson, Professor Emeritus of Management, UCLA  
Former Shattuck Professor of Government, Harvard University*





## Elaine Klitgaard

**S**ettling her family into their new home in the CGU president's house, Elaine Klitgaard took a few moments to reflect on the journey that has taken her half a world away from the rural South African town of Harrismith, where she grew up.

The Drakensberg region where the small town of Harrismith is located is an environmental and cultural treasure of South Africa. It is a designated World Heritage Site, known for the beauty of its mountainous parkland, teeming with wildebeests, zebras, antelopes, baboons and rhinos, and encompasses the archeological treasures of more than 35,000 bushman rock art images.

It is that connection to nature and the good and strong feelings of a small community that Elaine Klitgaard recalls with fondness about her early life in South Africa, "Everyone knew one another. We

*"It's hard to keep up with Bob. He reads insanely fast and makes copious notes on everything."*

became very self-reliant, walking to school and to sports. I was 16 the first time I saw a TV. I still love going out into the game reserves. We stay in huts or simple bungalows and go out looking for game. We walk out on trails and just savor being part of the wildlife and nature."

She created an eclectic and creative life when she left Harrismith in pursuit of a degree in mathematics and computer science from the University of Orange Free State in South Africa. She modeled, and was a finalist in the Miss South Africa pageant. She also worked in a computing firm installing computerized financial systems. After obtaining her B.S. degree, she returned to Harrismith and farm life. Recognizing the

**The Flame:** What have been some of your highs and lows professionally?

**Klitgaard:** It was painful to leave RAND. I'd been a part of a process there that's been very successful, mobilizing passion and energy on important problems—that's been a great pleasure.

Writing has had its highs and lows. Some people think that a couple of my books have made a difference to the problems I studied. My work on corruption had an impact in raising consciousness about the problem and it presented an approach that people found practical and useful.

**The Flame:** How do you think your background has prepared you for the presidency of CGU?

**Klitgaard:** As I said, this is a place that is interested in making a difference in the world through research and education that transcends disciplines. That looks a lot like what I've been doing. I do not pretend to master every field, but I have a wide range of interests. I hope people will find me an energetic listener who'll

learn what they're doing, and then an enthusiastic proponent of what they value most.

I am concerned about the problems of diversity, and the opportunities for diversity. It's something that has been a passion of mine for many years. I was the co-chair of the diversity committee at RAND, and a couple of my books are about the question of ethnic inequalities and how to think about them. I think there is tremendous potential for this university to make even more contributions here.

Finally, the graduate-only aspect of CGU is something that fits into my background. I have been a professor mostly of graduate students. I was the head of the graduate program in economics at the University of Natal. At Yale I taught graduate students. At Harvard I taught graduate students. At RAND I only taught doctoral students. I am familiar with the tribulations and the opportunities that graduate students face. These are people that are now mature, eager, and intellectually

powerful, their brains well muscled, and they need a different kind of relationship with their faculty and with their president than they did as undergraduates. I am really looking forward to working with the students and helping them. I hope that five years from now, if you ask the students "So, was this guy a student's president?" I hope they say, "Yes, this guy likes us. He interacts with us. He helps us."

**The Flame:** Do you see other parallels between CGU and RAND?

**Klitgaard:** Yes, I do. RAND is legendary for thinking outside the box. It is highly regarded academically and yet its purpose is making a difference in the world. Somehow RAND has been blessed with an interdisciplinary spirit that you do not see at Harvard or Yale.

The spirit here at CGU is interdisciplinary. Here, too, there is a focus on the real world. I think Claremont, the whole word Claremont, has a certain mystique to it, just like RAND has a certain mystique. The Claremont name

challenges of her country, including Apartheid, Elaine Klitgaard put her talents to work by creating a school that gave the mostly rural and tribal students in her community the skills they would need to become successful with the unfolding opportunities of urban life in a changing South Africa.

Opportunity and challenge brought Elaine Klitgaard to the University of Natal in South Africa, where she served as a statistical and computer support professional. Responding to a request from a visiting professor of economics, she met someone who would, once again, change her life – Bob Klitgaard. “He had some kind of math co-processor problem and I helped him out of it. That’s how we met.”

In 1993, Elaine Klitgaard found herself balancing her roles as a wife, a mother to Genevève, Tamryn and Kai, a statistics teacher and a consultant for social science researchers. Even juggling all her roles, she enjoyed staying involved in research through her teaching and consulting. “It

*“He likes to take one of the children with him on many of his trips—usually the older kids. He’s taken them to China, the Philippines, Venezuela. I think it’s been good for them to see him in action, and see the difference one person can make.”*

was great because I felt like I had a ‘short-cut’ to stay connected to interesting research.”

A major move and a family addition further enriched her life in 1997. The Klitgaards moved to Calabasas, California, where Bob became the dean of the Pardee RAND Graduate School in Santa Monica, and also the Ford Distinguished Professor of International Development and Security. That same year, a fourth child joined the Klitgaard family with the birth of Kristen. Although she loves her life in California, she still misses South Africa. “I miss people, mainly. I miss my family and the friends I have there.”

Elaine Klitgaard has devoted herself to her four children and her husband, while staying

active in schools and community. Now, as President Klitgaard begins to plan for the future of CGU, Elaine Klitgaard reflects on the changes in her life and her new role at CGU. She is quick to underscore her excitement about the move to Claremont. She can see those close community bonds she cherished in South Africa, as well as the excellence in scholarship that she and Bob have always exemplified. “I think Claremont has a small town sense of community, and yet it has a broad mind and spirit. I would like CGU to feel like a large family in which individual abilities are encouraged, celebrated and given every opportunity to become the best they can be.”

represents high quality, high engagement and dedication. There is a sort of intimacy to the place.

**The Flame:** Placing CGU in the context of higher education in America, where do you see CGU’s place in the big picture?

**Klitgaard:** Some years ago, BMW developed a motorcycle called the R80GS. Today it’s even bigger and called the R1200GS. This bike was a strange bird, an 800 cc dirt bike that could carry suitcases, go on the highway, and also go fast. When BMW announced the bike, they were asked what kind of bike it was—“Is it a touring bike, a dirt bike, cruiser, what?” BMW replied, “It’s a hybrid, something completely unique. You can’t compare it to anything else.” People didn’t know how to think about the R80GS, but you know last year *Motorcyclist* magazine named the R1200GS its Motorcycle of the Year. This weird beast was their most desired bike, even though it doesn’t fit any standard category.

I think CGU can be the R1200GS of higher education. It is a unique place.

**“Asked how to characterize Bob, I’d call him adventurous. He not only thinks of things that might be worth doing, he does them. He trusts his judgment, and his judgment proves trustworthy. He goes places intellectually—choosing elites, controlling corruption—and he goes places physically—Equatorial Guinea, where people are tortured for fighting corruption. He’s the only person I know who would take a surfboard when attending conferences in Indonesia and the Philippines. At Claremont Graduate University he’ll be exciting to watch.”**

*Thomas C. Schelling  
Professor Emeritus of Political Economy,  
Harvard University  
Distinguished University Professor Emeritus,  
University of Maryland*

This is the only research extensive graduate-only university. We don’t have undergraduates or a medical school or law school, but we have uniqueness because of that. We also have that friendly interdisciplinary climate here that is so beneficial to students and professors alike.

**The Flame:** What other challenges do you see?

**Klitgaard:** The part-time nature of many of our students—this is an interesting challenge for us in terms of our desire for a community of scholars and learners. You lose some community feeling if you’ve got students driving in after work.

How might we harness the emerging technologies of the Internet to create virtual communities? How can we add to what we do face-to-face? Not replace it—add to it, and make this Claremont mystique even more possible in a world of part-time, 21st century, life-long learning. That’s a great challenge. We need to be pioneers in intimate graduate education in the current world the way we were in 1925.