

**Oral History Interview of
Gary Elbow**

**Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson
May 9, 2013
Lubbock, Texas**

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Transcript Overview:

This oral history interview features geography and honors college professor Dr. Gary Elbow. Dr. Elbow discusses politics in university culture and the challenges at Texas Tech University over the years. Dr. Elbow addresses changes in faculty policies, administrative changes, and changes within the field of higher education more broadly.

Length of Interview: 01:39:04

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Andy Wilkinson (AW):

This the last day of March 2017 in the afternoon, Andy Wilkinson with Dr. Gary Elbow, and we're doing part two of our interview series, and we're in your office and looking out at the wind blowing the trees around. When we finished up last time, we didn't completely finish up, there was some things that we didn't get around to and one of the first notes I have here was that we wanted to talk about university politics.

Gary Elbow (GE):

Oh. (Laughter)

AW:

Yeah, and I have a second note, how you've been active without getting a bad reputation as a rabble rouser, is that only partly right? Your reputation?

GE:

I think it's only partly right, but let me—

AW:

Well and—

GE:

I've been careful about how I raised my rabble, let's put it that way.

AW:

Well and I wanted to also preface this, the start of this, by saying this is not a tell-all after the thing. I'm more interested in the bigger issues of how universities work in the kind of archane and odd way that they work. Some of that's historic and some of it may be very functional when you think about scholarship.

GE:

Oh I think it is.

AW:

Yeah, so that's what I'm really more interested in than I am you know about ex-president or provost was good or there was this problem or that kind of thing.

GE:

Yeah, well, and anything I told you about that would be heavily loaded with value judgements anyway so.

AW:

Well, but I value your valued judgements so (laughter). I'm going to scoot this a little closer to you.

GE:

Let me start out by telling you how I got involved in rabble rousing. Did you ever know Jack Collins?

AW:

No, what department?

GE:

He was a historian here, British historian as I recall, and Jack was a really interesting guy; he's retired and living in Wisconsin now, and he's been retired for I guess close to twenty years now probably. But I got to know him fairly early on when I came here, I don't remember exactly how that happened probably because we were—well no, we weren't even in Holden Hall at that time, I don't know. Anyway, I ran into him one day walking across campus and it would've been about nineteen, probably seventy-nine something like that seventy-eight, seventy-nine or seventy-seven, somewhere in the late seventies anyway, and he said, "Have you ever thought about running for faculty—" It was faculty council at that time, I don't know if you knew anything about—

AW:

No, I think of it as faculty senate.

GE:

Yeah, well when Grover Murray came here he created something called faculty council, and that was an advisory body, and in those days when the faculty met, they met as a whole and Grover presided. So we didn't have a president, we didn't have a committee chair, we didn't have anything like that, so Grover kind of ran the show and so the faculty council, or the advisory council, was this body of probably fifteen faculty members who were elected and were advisory, in quotes, to the president, and there was no formal—we didn't have a constitution, we didn't have any bylaws, we just met and discussed issues that the president sent to us, or if faculty wanted something brought up with the president, it came up through the faculty council or the executive council, and so I said, "Well yeah I guess I'll run for it." And I got elected, and that was the year that Grover quit and so Cecil Mackey was hired and Cecil Mackey came in and he said, "The president chairs the faculty meeting? That doesn't make any sense." (Laughter) And so he went to the Board of Regents and he asked to create a faculty senate and the board, not being really very plugged in in terms of what a faculty senate meant said, "Oh sure that sounds fine." And so the faculty advisory council sat down and drafted up a constitution and by-laws for

a faculty senate, and the man who was the chair of the faculty council at that time, it was approved about halfway through an academic year, and so he became the first president of the faculty senate, and then Margaret Wilson became number two and I became number three and—

AW:

Without having to run or?

GE:

Well no, by that time we were elected but the senate—

AW:

Well what I mean is for the officers, you wound up filling in for this new thing.

GE:

Yeah, and it was an elected position, but the election was done by the senators, the senators elected their president so it wasn't a you know—

AW:

Faculty wide.

GE:

Yeah, the senators are elected by college, and then there are a certain number of at large that are elected faculty wide, but the officers are elected from within the senate. So anyhow, that happened to be the year that Mackey took off and went to Michigan State.

AW:

So he was here two years.

GE:

Two years, yeah.

AW:

I know I don't have much—of course I had just moved back to Lubbock, and I wasn't active at Texas Tech but.

GE:

Yeah, oh no, he didn't last long at all and Larry Graves became the interim president, and so anyway the Board of Regents picked the committees they had. That was the first time they instituted this two tier committee kind of thing where they had the—I don't remember what they call them now, but one of them was the selection committee and the other one was the advisory

committee or something like that, screening committee and advisory committee. And so on the advisory committee, they appointed, I can't remember her name now, it'll come to me in a minute. But anyway, they appointed a woman from the college of business who was the vice president of the senate while I was the president. Wendell Aycock was the secretary and I argued that it was inappropriate for the board of regents to decide who the faculty senate representative on that committee should be, and so we raised a little cane about it, and Wendell and I went and talked to one of the regents, and I can't even remember who it was now, I was going to say Peevyhouse, but it wasn't, it was a guy from Abilene. I don't remember his name, nice guy. And so anyway, he said, "Well yeah I see what you're saying." So I got appointed to the screening committee, and that was— Louise Luchsinger was the woman who was put on the other committee, and so anyway that was my first adventure in rabble rousing a little bit on a small scale. But that was how I kind of got started in campus politics. and then I don't know, it just—

AW:

Just for a minute back on that the way you related it sounds fairly, not business as usual, but not necessarily fraught with angst. Was there more to it at the time then?

GE:

Well, you know, yeah there was a little more to it because I think the, you know, the faculty senate was new it was in its third year, and we wanted to be recognized as the voice of the faculty. I mean, you know, that was the idea that the faculty senate was to represent the faculty, and if we were going to represent the faculty then we should have been asked who we wanted to represent us on those committees, and you know we didn't have anything really against Louise Luchsinger, she was a very nice lady, smart, good professor I think. But the problem was that the board was picking our representative, and of course the board thought well we just decide who we want, and so anyway it was also a little bit of well you know let's show them how things ought to work kind of stuff. So I wouldn't say it was angst but it was a teaching opportunity for—

AW:

An education, yeah. Well how, at the time, how did the provost role figure in because one would think that the provost is in a sense a representative of the faculty also, at least as I think of the provost role today. What was it like in '78 or '79?

GE:

Well that was when Charles Hardwick was provost. Back at that time I hardly knew what a provost did, and I don't know, I mean, I knew Hardwick I'd probably been introduced to him but I certainly didn't have any kind of a relationship with him, and he didn't come to the faculty senate meetings you know. I mean the provost or the senior vice provost always now show up at the faculty senate meetings and oftentimes both of them. But Rob Stewart hardly ever misses a

meeting and Lawrence always came and Mike Galyean shows up as his schedule permits, but usually he's there, and so that's a relationship that's developed over time, but it hadn't developed at that point, so the provost really didn't have a lot to do with us or we didn't have a lot to do with the provost you know, and I can't remember as president of the senate that I ever met with the provost.

AW:
Really?

GE:
Yeah. So you know it was a very young and kind of inexperienced and—

AW:
What did the provost do in those years? What was the role? I mean—

GE:
Well he was actually he was the vice president for academic affairs; we didn't have a provost per say.

AW:
Ah yeah so the office hadn't actually been created in the sense that we think of it.

GE:
Yeah and the provost position came up probably—let's see Don Haragan was the provost, and it must've been after Cavazos left and we made that switch from—and that would've been Lawless, so it was probably in that transition that we switched from vice president to—because John Darling was the vice president for academic affairs under Cavazos, and then I guess, trying to think because Darling was fired. It's an interesting story.

AW:
There's a lot of stuff going on in the Cavazos years, I know.

GE:
Oh yeah that's—we'll spend more time on that but Darling went off to, he was a piece of work, but anyway you don't—but anyway he went off to be interviewed at Mississippi State for their president job, I think it was, and we were in the middle of the tenure crisis at that point, and they ask him about it, and he kind of laid it at the feet of Cavazos, and the Starkville newspaper picked it up, and somebody got it to Cavazos, and by the time Darling got back his office was empty and he was back over in the college of business. But he recovered very well; he went on to be the president of Pittsburg State College in Kansas. But anyway, that was when Cavazos left I

think that's when the transition took place, I'd have to go back and look at old catalogues to be sure of that, but I think then. I think there was—Graves had resigned as Dean of Arts and Sciences, and I'm trying to remember if Bill Conroy then became Dean, I think he did, and then he took a job at New Mexico State as their provost, and Don Haragan moved into the provost position and that was—but Conroy and Haragan were both really important in terms of negotiating the tenure policy that—Cavazos came out of a med school background. He was the Dean of the School of Medicine at Tufts University in Massachusetts, and he came back here, and I think he was used to the structure of a medical school which is much more top down, you know, and so he ran things very much like that, and we used to talk about, well he was the foreman and we were the ranch hands you know. But anyway, the Board of Regents and then this was at the time when Jayford Bussey [?] was on the board and Don Workman was on the board and they were both really anti-tenure people. They just really didn't believe in the idea of tenure and so—

AW:

Yeah I've interviewed Bussey, he's an interesting character.

GE:

Yeah, I have never met him, but I've heard multiple stories about him.

AW:

Yeah, and I say that not as a—

GE:

Yeah, no, I didn't get a negative—

AW:

Yeah, when he was at, one time at TI, it was dumped on him to have to fire somewhere a third to forty percent of their people worldwide, and he was telling me about having to have bulletproof glass installed in his home because people would drive by and shoot at the house.

GE:

Well, yeah, you know, TI went through some tough times, and so they closed to plant here, so yeah I understand. They weren't keeping up with technological innovations well enough, you know, and they got scooped.

AW:

And they'd overextended themselves financially, and Bussey was an engineer who became an administrator and it was interesting to hear him talk about it but his take on being at the

University was all about we got to get somebody who can do the job and I—was he part of the pressure on Cavazos to, that finally resulted in Cavazos leaving? I seem to get that sense maybe.

GE:

Well, he may have been I don't know, but if he did, I mean he and Workman and probably a couple of other members of the board were unhappy about the tenure policy we had, and that goes clear back to—did we talk last time about the hiring of Grover Murray and what had to be done to get him here?

AW:

We talked a little bit about it, and I've interviewed Sally a good bit. I never did get to interview Grover, but one of the things, and this would be worth talking about now besides tenure, is that it strikes me that Grover was the first president we had that really moved us from a college into a university.

GE:

That's absolutely right. I mean this was a cow college until he got here, and the board wanted him very badly and the deal was we were on AAUP probation because of—

AW:

Because of the lack of tenure policy?

GE:

Well, there wasn't the lack of the tenure policy. It was the fact that three people had been summarily fired, this had to do with Lyndon Johnson's election, and one of them was the chair of the history department, I can't remember now. I'll give you an article that I wrote years ago, and a lot of that stuff is in there. But anyway, the bottom line was that Grover said if he was going to come here that issue with those men had to be resolved because they had filed suit, and that was all pending and so they had to be, you know, their issues had to be satisfied and we had to have a tenure policy because we hadn't had one up until then, and the reason that they were able to get AAUP to back them was that they had been here for you know like fifteen to twenty years, so they were de facto tenured if not de jure tenured. So anyway, what they did, and this was I think suggest, number one how badly they wanted Grover and number two, how naïve they were about tenure policies was that they allowed to us to adopt virtually lock, stock, and barrel the AAUP tenure policy. It's in that red book over there if you ever want to look at it, I can send it to you, but anyway, that was our operating tenure policy then, up until Cavazos got here. And the board wasn't comfortable with it.

AW:

With the policy?

GE:

Yeah, with the policy. And I'm not—

AW:

I doubt they'd read the fine print.

GE:

Yeah and I'm not sure that Cavazos was really happy with it, and so they wanted to have a tenure policy that gave them more flexibility in getting rid of people. I mean that was the whole thing, it was all right you know, if somebody's not doing the job as we see it, you know, we want to be able to pack them up and send them on the road. So John Darling drafted up a policy—well, it's more complicated than that. The University, the administration put together a committee and Conroy became the chair of that committee, and by the way, if you ever get to Las Cruces he's somebody you ought to talk to about Texas Tech.

AW:

Yeah, I do, actually get there—say his first name again.

GE:

Bill, William, William B. Conroy, and he became president at New Mexico State. I don't have his address but you could track him down.

AW:

Yeah I'm sure Galyean probably knows since he's a New Mexico State guy.

GE:

Yeah, I'll bet Galyean does. Well, and Heragan knows him, he and Haragan were big buddies.

AW:

Okay great. So Darling has make suggestions?

GE:

Yeah, and well, don't put that down because it's not quite how it happened, the sequences is this: Conroy chaired a committee and the committee drafted some changes to the policy and those were voted on by the faculty, and everybody was reasonably happy with it and it went up to the Board of Regents for a vote, and they were all ready to vote on it, and one of the regents, and I can't remember who it was asked—do you remember Marilyn Phelan? She was the university attorney and then she ended up in the law school.

AW:

Yeah, I never I knew her.

GE:

But she was the university counsel at the time, and this regent asked her what she thought of it and she said, "Well, I can't defend that policy." And so it went down, so you know, I don't think they even voted on it; they just pulled it off the table and—

AW:

So you were left with what you already had, the AAUP?

GE:

Yeah, but it was clear that you know, that changes were wanted, and so at that point then Darling stepped in, and he drafted a policy and that was roundly hated by the faculty, they really didn't like it at all, and so Cavazos decided to go ahead and railroad it through anyway, and at that point the faculty senate organized a vote of no confidence, and the vote of no confidence about eighty percent of the faculty voted, and about eighty percent of the voting faculty voted no confidence in Cavazos, so you can get some sense for, you know, the—

AW:

The engineering people that I talked to take credit for the no confidence movement. Is that purely correct or—?

GE:

Well, I think it was broader than engineering, I think it was across the board, and I mean people like Henry Shine got up and gave an impassioned argument against the new policy, and you know Henry was not the sort of person who would get into a brawl like that if he didn't feel very strongly about it, you know, and he is a very highly principled sort of guy and extremely articulate, so when he gets up and condemns something you know it's been condemned. But anyway, yeah, so that essentially kind of put us in limbo, and I'm trying to remember exactly how it all came up, but we ended up going back to the boards again and doing another policy and in the meantime, Regan was president, and he appointed Cavazos to be secretary of education and that gave Cavazos a graceful out to leave, and that was when—I can't remember who the interim, oh was it—it may have been Bess Haley who became interim president at that point she was—

AW:

I think I remember that.

GE:

Yeah, so anyway whoever it was, it all got resolved and then Lawless came in and took over the permanent Presidency, he was here for seven years, and things were relatively calm at the time, but I was heavily involved in all of that stuff, and Jack Collins, and Edna Gott, and Wendell Aycock and I got together, we were all active in AAUP, and we created a sort of a newsletter which we called Cage's Corner and, Cage came from Collins, Adcock, Gott and Elbow.

AW:

C-a-g-e and not a Y?

GE:

No, it's C-a-g-e, and then apostrophe S, Cage's Corner, I shouldn't have said Cagey's, Cage's, and I think there are copies of that over in the Southwest Collection you can probably find it.

AW:

Yeah, probably so.

GE:

And Wendell's son was in high school at the time, his son Daniel, and he was an artist, and so he became our cartoonist, and we had lots of fun with that, and I don't know, it probably went on for close to two years before things finally got resolved. But anyway, that's sort of the short version of how I got involved in rabble rousing, (laughter) and then the other thing I have to tell you about that is, I don't know how much longer it was, it was probably five or six years or maybe a few more when—oh come on, I can't remember names anymore.

AW:

Me neither. You're not alone let me just tell you.

GE:

Yeah. Oh come on the biologist who's always raising rabble around here, Lewis Held.

AW:

Lewis Held, yeah.

GE:

Yeah, and so Lewis one day came up to me and he said, "You know, you're my role model." (Laughter) I like Lewis all right, and I think he's very, very useful in what he does, and he's right on top of stuff, so I should've been flattered I guess, but I was a little bit astonished at the time.

AW:

Yeah well you don't think of yourself as that much of an extremist to have the extremist say, "You're my role model." That will make you think about it (laughter).

GE:

Yeah. But anyway, that's—you know by the time Cavazos left and everything simmered down, and I don't think I was raising much rabble after that.

AW:

What about Lawless was it that made things calm down a little bit because from the outside, I always thought, Well this would be a guy that would maybe but theads with faculty but not so?

GE:

Nope. Well, you know if you ask me what happened during the Lawless seven years that he was president, I'd have trouble coming up with anything, you know, it was just—

AW:

So he kept the ship on its course?

GE:

Calm waters, yeah, and there weren't any big crises, and not much happened, so he kept the lid on, you know, and I think the faculty, you know, we in essence, we won the battle, and I think the idea was, Okay, we got what we wanted. Now let's go back and do our job, you know, do what we're hired for and not that we weren't during the problem, but you know.

AW:

Sure.

GE:

But it was a distraction, so I think you know it was probably a mutual coming to, you know informally coming to an agreement that yeah we'll just, you know, leave us alone we'll leave you alone kind of thing. And Lawless is pretty cool, he's—

AW:

Well, he had a lot of management experience for one thing.

GE:

Yes, he did coming in out of Southwest, yeah.

AW:

Yeah, and I guess the reason I thought well that was bound to be a conflict is because he was a manager not a scholar in the sense that you think of.

GE:

Well no, he wasn't a scholar and maybe that was an advantage at the time you know that—but no, I think he did exactly what the Board of Regents wanted him to do which was to calm things down and get the ship back steered in the direction that they wanted it to go. But I don't get the sense that either he or Cavazos really had a vision for where they thought the university ought to go, you know, I mean it was just kind of, Well here we are.

AW:

And here's one style and here's another style, but not the vision, whereas Grover obviously—

GE:

Yeah, Grover came in at the ideal time. I mean you know, if you look at, we had Mahon was the chair of the House Appropriations Committee; we had Lyndon Johnson and who was the other—Yarborough I guess, we're the two senators, and we had Preston Smith as governor and we had, who was the guy who was the attorney general? There was somebody from Lubbock who was the attorney general.

AW:

Not John Connally.

GE:

Nope.

AW:

I was thinking of what's his name at Sharpstown, but he was from down south.

GE:

Yeah, no, no this was earlier. You know we're talking fifty—well no not fifty we're talking, Grover came in '66 I think.

AW:

Yeah, I was going to say it was 1966.

GE:

Yeah. Anyway, we had very strong representation. There was a lot of money. You know the state was—

AW:

And I would suggest that another factor that was a plus—although it may sound odd to say this—but a plus for moving things forward was the May 11, 1970 tornado because I know it changed the dynamic in the city a great deal, and I think that Lubbock became more of a modern city afterwards. They had leadership like Jim Bertram at Parks that changed things, and I, you know, even as a fairly young person at the time thought that there was a difference in the attitude toward the university and vice versa because of some of the changes that happened in the city.

GE:

Yeah, I think you could make that argument I think, certainly. I was hired about two weeks before the tornado. (laughter) My mother called me from Oregon and said, “You’re still going out there?” But yeah, you know, all of the rebuilding, the rehabilitation, the creation of the civic center and all of that stuff came out of that.

AW:

And I think just a whole different attitude about what Lubbock ought to be because I was in city government, I mean I was very lowly in city government, I was just a policeman, but I got to see that. Well since, have we had a period of quite as much—?

GE:

Turmoil?

AW:

Well turmoil, but I was trying to think of a more of where the edges were so obvious as when that no confidence vote came?

GE:

No, I don’t think so that—you know there was a history of very conservative, you know, I daresay reactionary, board members.

AW:

Well, I mean not two years before there had been the [inaudible] attempt you know that Graves documented pretty well in the Lubbock history about the community leaders trying to get rid of all those pinko professors.

GE:

Yeah, yeah, well and I think Evitts Haley was heavily involved in that, and he was on the board at the time and you know so yeah there were people like that who would—you know it was McCarthy stuff, and so yeah, I think that there had been tension between faculty and administration you know going back, well actually back into the thirties.

AW:

Yeah, in the thirties is what I was thinking is the—

GE:

Yeah, and so what happened after the Cavazos incident I think was that the board became more sophisticated about what a real university was, and I think the faculty also became, maybe this isn't the right word, but I'll use it more professionalized in the sense of figuring out how to work with the administration, so you had mutual goals instead of kind of a hostile relationship you have a more, let's work together kind of thing. And certainly the administrations that have come along, the provosts that have come along you know and I would say starting with Haragan and Burns, they have almost all come up through the faculty at Tech. The outsiders, Smith, and I think he's about the only one.

AW:

Only one that I can think of.

GE:

Yeah so—

AW:

And he was one of many outsiders during that administration.

GE:

Yeah, but it's been pretty much people who understand the faculty and who have a vision for the mission of the university and where they want to take it, and that includes presidents as well and it includes the board, you know, the board is clearly supportive of these kinds of goals, and it's grown over time you know I think it's gone from, Well you know we want to be coequal with Houston and some of these other you know the—

AW:

The second tier.

GE:

The second level, yeah, and now it's, okay we want to be the third AAU institution and you know.

AW:

Which is some of the angst we're having right now because there's still a lot of people in politics in Texas that don't want a number three.

GE:

Yeah.

AW:

And you know I think our vet school and that is a—

GE:

That's part of—well yeah and it's of course the vet school runs right up the back of A&M, and you know they definitely don't want that competition. I think if we were trying to create something other than a vet school, they'd probably have their backs up a little less.

AW:

Yeah but they'd still have their backs up.

GE:

Well yeah, they're protecting their turf. I don't think Austin cares so much, Austin is number one and you know we don't—

AW:

Although they seem to, at least in these battles, have sort of non-entities, maybe that's because they chose to be, but they also seem to be, to me just as an outsider, more closely in tune with their town which puts them out of tune with the state.

GE:

Yeah I think that's true and I think it's also, "Well let's let the cow colleges duke it out."

AW:

Yeah, right and we'll step in when it's all over with. Well, let me ask you about something that I see coming from a very different background you know in management and government, local government, and then management and business and now being here and not being a tenured person and not being a formal part of that, but still affected by it and having to deal with you know what is priority, who gets the money, who doesn't, you know all those kinds of things. It seems that there is a different kind of—I don't want to use the word tension, but a different sort of schism between an administration and an institution of higher learning particularly that has a lot of research versus in a private industry or an industry firm where you still have the distinction between who's done the work and who hasn't. We saw that some in police work, you know if you hadn't come up through the ranks no one gave you any respect and the more and varied experience you had, the more respect you got, and it was easier to lead the people you know that you had to supervise. But there seems to be a different quality, I'm not sure I've got a good way to phrase it, but I suppose it's because we don't have, despite what we would like to think, we

don't have in education a really clear measurement of our success. We put things together, I mean we think of—although I think there's some real measurements for instance, how many of your people go on to do good things you know.

GE:

Yeah.

AW:

And how many of them get jobs when they leave the university, you know what kinds of things do you contribute in the research, but still those are sort of high points, and there's a whole lot of rest of the students that how do you, you and I talked about this last time, about how do you even really know what you've taught a student for ten or fifteen years, they don't know, you know, until then. So I don't know I'm really interested in your point of view in this because I've watched you as an outsider, I mean, me as an outsider, watched you when you were in the provost office and I think the first time I really had any contact with you, other than at music events, was when I was looking to find a home for my course, and the only people that would take to me on campus were the geographers and later the people at honors college. You know the people that I thought would want to do this, the history people, the English people, you know they weren't interested in that sort of thing. So I've had a chance to watch you in these different environments, and it seems to me like you are able to navigate those different waters pretty well. Is that because you're a good fish or because—? (Laughter)

GE:

Well, you know, I've done pretty well here at Tech. I've got no complaints about my career and I'm at the end of it so. But it's all instinctive, you know, I mean I don't—I never took a management course in my life. I hate business, but—

AW:

Well, they're not necessarily good at it let me tell you. I was in the business world for ten years, and there's a lot more success in business that's attributable to fortune than there is to being clever.

GE:

Yeah, well, that doesn't surprise me too much, but I don't know, I guess I see myself as generally speaking, thinking before I—you know where they say looking before I leap you know, thinking things over a little bit before I jump into the middle of it. Although that's not always the case, every once in a while I lose my temper but most of the time I don't and that helps a lot you know if you sit back. But back to the more general case. I think if you look at, why does somebody become a university professor in the first place? And I think there are a

couple of answers to that, and one is that we tend to be very interested in our discipline and we want to contribute in some way to advancing that discipline and—

AW:

Does that strictly mean research or does it also mean teaching as well as mentoring?

GE:

Well, I think mentoring you know and teaching, however you want to call it, is an important part of it, but I'm thinking in particular, you know, you can do teaching at the high school level or at the grade school level you know, and you can get into teaching positions that aren't necessarily in formal education, so I think that for a lot of faculty the ability to be able to do research, and that research is especially in a research university, it's an expectation, you know, you're supposed to do that, part of what you're hired for. And so faculty tend to be very interested in their own individual thing, you know, so I don't collaborate, and this is not necessarily a good thing, but it's true, you know in my department and here none of us really collaborate on our research. Now I have collaborated with people elsewhere on research, but it's a loose thing, and most of what I've written is sole authored and you know, so if you're in places like engineering or some of the sciences, you know collaboration is the name of the game, so that's a much different kind of things.

AW:

Is that having to do with the nature of the work or is it just a cultural issue in those different disciplines?

GE:

No, I think it's a nature of the work. (Background noise) I think that a lot of the, especially the humanities, kind of tend to lend themselves to the lone wolf kind of thing, less so in the social sciences. But geography—when I came up through geography, there wasn't a lot of co-authoring, now there is, there's a lot more. If you look at our flagship journal, almost everything now is co-authored and sometimes with five or six people, so it's a different mode of operating now. But anyway, the point of what I'm trying to get at is that they, the way university faculty operate is pretty much being independent you know, and they don't want to be bugged they want to do their thing, and as long as they're left alone to do their thing, and nobody gets in their way, then they're generally going to be fairly happy. And I think that a lot of other kinds of professions don't operate quite the same way, you know, and certainly if you're in industry then the tendency is of course that everybody has a specifically assigned role, you do your job, and if you do it well enough, and opportunities occur, you get to move up, but it's always in the same kind of context. I worked plywood mills when I was in high school and summers when I was in college, and it was all right, you know, I could learn how to grade veneer and then I'd get a job as a veneer grater which was a better job than the person who hauls it off the belt you know, and

then if I'd stayed with it long enough I probably would've become a foreman and you know all this kind of stuff. So you can work your way up, but you're still in that very structured kind of situation and college professors don't like structure very much, so I think that gets at some of it anyway.

AW:

What is a motivation to leave this "Let me do my own thing and leave me alone" What is the motivation to say, "Okay I'll be department chair," or "I want to be a dean," or I want to be—you know, that seems to be sort of a can the leverage change its spots?

GE:

Well, and you know, I lusted after an administrative position for years and I wanted to be department chair of the geography department, and I knew I could do a better job than the guy who was chairing our department at the time, and then of course the department got merged into economics, and so anyway, when I finally got the job over in the provost— well I became an associate dean over here first, and then I went over to the provost office, but then I decided maybe I didn't like administration as much as I thought I would, (laughter) and so it didn't break my heart at all when I left the provost's office, and I did that, you know, I've always been kind of proud that I did it on my own terms. You know I mean I walked in and said, "I'm retiring as of this date, and this is what I want." And you know, I was asking for a perfectly reasonable sort of thing, and they said fine, go with God you know. So anyway, yeah I think you know there's a little bit of ambition and of course it's higher salary, so that's one of the ways. If you come in at a certain salary, you're kind of locked into that for the rest of your career unless you move, go to another place, and so you start out, and when I came here—I'll give you an example of what I'm talking about, I started at Tech in 1970 at \$10,000, a year and that was a perfectly adequate salary at the time, but I found out that the guy who had been hired the year before me got ten five, (laughter) and I never caught up with him you know, and I was doing a whole lot more than he was. But it's just, you know, and even that difference was—

AW:

Was far enough that it was not surmountable.

GE:

Yeah.

AW:

Yeah. But you know this is the kind of job that's like music you can't, you better get your satisfaction with the kind of work you do because you really have no control over the financial side. One of the things you just mentioned about how people are happy if they're left alone to do their work and one of the things you and I have talked about in pursuit of our idea of sharing

more about creative process across the university for the benefit of all, it always come down to an invocation at least that we need to breakdown silos which I you know—of course we don't like people who grab turf or whatever, but there is something said about sticking in your silo and doing a really good job. I mean we can't, if we're completely out of it how do we move forward?

GE:

Well I think, you know, it's not as hard to break out of the silos as you may think and one of the—you know they give you an example, when Dorothy Chansky was named Director of the Humanities Center. One of her first ideas was the create an integrated humanities class, and I'm really in favor of that kind of thing. I tried to get the scientists to create an integrated science class for the core, which would've been perfect you know you get physicists to talk about what physicists do; you get chemists to talk about what chemists do; you know you go right on through the sciences, and I could never get any interest on the part of the science people at all. You know in terms of the courses, they're really locked in. Now in terms of their research, they'll cross over you know so you got, chemistry has now created things in biochemistry, and the physicists are crossing over in some cases, and you know, so on the research end they understand how it works, but on the teaching end, they just can't do it, and I think part of it is that they're so hung up on the structure, and I understand this because I've taught physical geography as a science. And you say to yourself, "All right, these kids have to understand how geographers classify climates; these kids have to understand the principles of adiabatic temperature change and these kids have to understand la-di-da-da-da, and well by golly my semester's full," you know, so no I don't have time to bring a botanist in to talk about plant geography. I don't have time to go get somebody to come in and talk about soil chemistry, I don't have time to bring somebody in and talk about atmospheric dynamics you know and so on. So I think that a problem lies in that idea that there are certain principles from every discipline that the scientists are kind of conditioned to think have to be there but when you start talking about humanities, and you know, all right what are the vital principles that you have to talk about in a literature course? I mean you know are there things that every student ought to understand? Well there are some things about interpretation that every student ought to understand, but it's not as rigid as it is in the sciences, and to a certain extent in some of the social sciences, and so I think you can reach across and bring people in and what Dorothy did was to say, "All right we're going to look at general kinds of things. We want this humanities class to—"

Unknown:

I'm sorry. Do you remember Brian Horton?

GE:

Oh I sure do. Bryan!

Brian Horton (BH):

Hi, how are you?

GE:

I'm pretty good, how're you?

Brian:

Good to see you. How have you been?

GE:

I've been fine. Bryan, this is Andy Wilkinson who—Bryan was a student here and a real cracker jack debater (laughter) and a geography major.

AW:

Oh cool.

GE:

So he went off and did Teach for America and what're you up to now?

BH:

I'm a PhD candidate at Brown in the department of anthropology, so using my geography training (laughter).

GE:

Wow fantastic.

BH:

So I was on campus, so I set up a meeting with Sarah and she was like, "Oh Dr. Elbow's upstairs."

GE:

Well, I'm really glad you stopped by.

BH:

Yeah, it's good seeing you. How are things?

GE:

Oh things are going pretty well. I'm being interviewed here.

BH:

Oh.

AW:

And this is all part of it.

BH:

Oh cool, what is it for?

GE:

Well, he can explain better than I. I think it's just so I can talk.

(Laughter)

AW:

We have—at the Southwest Collection, the archive, one of the things we like a lot are what we call oral history interviews which is mainly a conversation that we record but the idea is that 200 years from now somebody will be able to hear people in their own voice, their own words, talking about something. Whatever that may be.

BH:

Oh okay.

AW:

Last night I got to spend a delightful time with Sarah's dad who has had this really interesting life path as diverse as range management and wildlife, being ordained as a minister, PhD program in archaeology, working for multi-national chemical and seed companies, and now they're running a vineyard, just a logical progression (laughter). But you know getting someone to talk about that kind of path you know, you could never understand that by looking at it reduced to paper you know so.

BH:

Right. Which is unfortunately the way that most things work.

AW:

Yeah, exactly so that's what we're doing.

BH:

Okay cool, cool, that's awesome.

AW:
Yeah.

BH:
Don't want to interrupt just—

GE:
No, hey I'm delighted that you came by. It's really good to see you.

BH:
Yeah it's good to see you too. Good luck with the interview.

GE:
Well thank you. Good luck with your PhD, What kind of research are you doing?

BH:
Thank you, so ethnographic so I work in India. I'm actually writing up now, so I was in Bombay for about two years doing fieldwork, so now I'm back in the states finishing—starting to write the dissertation.

GE:
You learn Hindi and all that?

BH:
So I knew Hindi before I went, but it got way better (laughter). It got much better yeah so just doing that—

AW:
So how did you—you said, "Well, I knew Hindi before I went." How does that happen?

BH:
So my family is indo-Caribbean and Afro-Caribbean, and so I grew up sort of like introduced to lots of things, and so Hindi was sort of around, and then it got much better. It's actually strange because in the Caribbean they actually speak Bhojpuri which is like in the Hindi sort of spectrum, but it's like it's almost like what like Spain Spanish and like Mexican Spanish so.

AW:
Yeah I have a friend, a musician, Bob Livingston who travels often to India he really likes it and his son is living over there learning the venna, and—

BH:

He's learning the veena, wow, that's really cool.

AW:

Yeah and so he looks down on sitar players.

BH:

(Laughter) Yeah, the veena is considered more indigenous to India than the sitar is because—

AW:

Yeah and more difficult.

BH:

Yeah, it's harder, much harder.

AW:

Yeah but Bob, I was just visiting with him last weekend, but he absolutely adores India.

BH:

Yeah, it's a fun place to do fieldwork.

AW:

Yeah, cool.

BH:

So great, well take care.

GE:

Well, thank you for coming in.

BH:

No problem it was really good seeing you. All right, have fun.

AW:

All right, nice to meet you. Well that was fun. Say his name again.

GE:

Horton, Brian Horton.

AW:

Brian, B-r-i-a-n?

GE:

I think it's with a Y.

AW:

B-r-y-a-n.

GE:

Yeah, and his mother was from Guyana, you know Guyana, so that's the Indian connection.

AW:

Guyana, yeah.

GE:

And his father was an officer in the Air Force.

AW:

Cool. Well, you know back to the silo, the research, another great example I've seen of that, an illustration, let me say not an example, that makes it sounds like you're saying we should do this, but that wonderful program in wind science that started with three professors from—they talked like they were from three different planets, but they were all in the engineering school but different kinds of engineering. They go out the day after May 12 of the tornado and they begin to collaborate on the first mitigation, but it's grown into this whole program. Yet one of the things that I found in doing interviews is that while they are terrific at collaborative research you still can't matriculate with a higher degree in that program, you still have to get your degree in one of the other collaborators, and there's a friction in the credits and what do we have to do to—

GE:

Oh yeah and you know there is a—there are different wind programs, and I think you're probably talking about the one where they were looking at the structures primarily in civil engineering and looking at building structures that will stand up under high wind.

AW:

Although that morphed into, once they brought in the meteorologists—

GE:

Yeah but now that's something different because there are two wind, two of those, and one of them is the one that—oh come on what's his name? The atmospheric scientist is running—

AW:

Oh Katherine

GE:

No Katherine is in poli-sci, and she doesn't have anything to do with them. No, there's—

AW:

Well there's a National Wind Institute, and they have their office over—

GE:

Yeah, they're in the old journalism building, yeah.

AW:

Right and that's the direct descendent of what Mehta, Minor and McDonald started, but now their mitigation has kind of been swamped by energy.

GE:

Well yeah, and then there's wind energy program that's Andy Swift, and he's kind of a pariah over in energy because he's got this other program but they're offering a PhD.

AW:

Yeah, but he's also in the National Wind Institute, Andy Swift is, so yeah, and it's further complicated by people in particularly wind energy. They all have advanced degrees but most of them came to these programs from industry and not from another—

GE:

Yeah, not through academia.

AW:

So yeah, there's a real—and it's anybody you talk to over there that's still a, “How are we going to solve this?” kind of thing. So back to Dorothy, she created this way to address this issue.

GE:

Yeah and the way she went about it was to say, Okay what we want out of this integrated humanities course is, number one, for students to understand what it is that distinguishes the humanities, you know, what's different from—you know because people confuse humanities and

arts all the times, confuse humanities and social science, so what is it that makes the humanities different, and then we want them to understand what are the tools the humans used. So we want them to be able to write clearly and definitively, and we want them to be able to identify problems in the humanities and think about how humanists go about dealing with those problems, answering those questions, and all this kind of stuff which can run across all of the disciplines, so it's not, "Okay this week we're going to study history; next week we're going to study literature; next week we're going to study something else." It's all kind of melded together in the lectures and are supposed to exemplify different approaches to you know—and I do one that I call "What do gringos eating babies and Michael Rockefeller have in common?" And you know the answer?

AW:

I dare not even guess.

GE:

Well, I got accused of eating babies in Guatemala at one point in time and had to change my research area because people don't want to talk to you when they think you're to eat their babies, and Michael Rockefeller of course was cannibalized in New Guinea in 1965, I think something like that. So I talk about cannibalism in New Guinea, and I talk about you know how people in Guatemala sort of began to think that I was doing something you know that I wasn't supposed to be doing and how it fits into a cultural context where we talk about ritual cannibalism. And then we talk about cultural relativism and how do you, you know, if you're dealing with people who are willing to think that you're trying to catch their kids and eat them, then how do you deal with that, you know, how do you treat that culture and try to reason with it, and then okay what did the Dutch do in New Guinea in the case of Michael Rockefeller, and it turns out you know there was a big mystery. Nobody would ever tell his family what they thought had happened. Nobody would admit that yeah the local people had killed him and eaten parts of his body, and that didn't come out until years and years later, and part of the problem was that the colonial administrators didn't want to go in and deal with the culture. You know this is their belief system, and sure over time we're probably going to change it because they can't go on doing this you know, but we're not going to march in with the troops, I mean that was what started it. Apparently they'd sent some of the colonial police in, and they'd shot up a village, and the culture of the place, if you do that, then you have to take vengeance on the people who've done you wrong, and so you know they could see this just degenerating into some kind of a mini war, and so they didn't really want to address it, but if they had admitted to Nelson Rockefeller and his wife that this is what actually happened, then they would've had to deal with the situation. So anyway, then the question comes down, all right if somebody is cannibalizing somebody else in the honest belief that if I eat somebody's heart, let's say, and that gives me courage, the courage that they had when they fought me and I was lucky enough to kill him, then you know, how do you deal with that culture? Do you tell them that that's an evil thing that they shouldn't do or do you take it as

something that's embedded in their culture and then you work with it and maybe over time you can change it, but you don't just march in. You know and then the anthropologist approach, and I contrast this side—the philosophers will say you can't have cultural relativism because if you do that means that nothing is evil, you know, and if it's done within a culture, it's got to be okay, therefore you know there are no universal norms of good and evil. The anthropologist says, I don't care, what I'm doing is I'm going in and I'm studying these people, and I'm trying to study them from the most neutral perspective, culturally neutral perspective, I can, and I can't have a value about whether cannibalism is good or bad, as far as these people are concerned, it's good you know, it has value to them so.

AW:

Yeah. So in a program, which and I admire Dorothy's program a lot, I wouldn't call myself a humanist, but I think that's probably more likely than not because one of the things I like about the humanities is that it has about as few of boundaries as do geographers in terms of what you can study and the way to integrate things into that. But how does one advance in this current world the idea of having that sort of degree?

GE:

Well, the argument is, and I heard somebody just today talking about the importance of liberal arts, and this is a guy who came in and did the noon, Friday afternoon lunch talk for the honors college, and I'm trying to remember, his name is Dick—anyway, he came here in the fifties or sixties, I guess it was sixties, and started at Tech and he washed out after three years with a 1.3 GPA, and he went to work for SPAG or the predecessor to SPAG, and he eventually wound up in Austin working in state government, and he worked his way up to the point where he had a very responsible position, but he never finished his degree, and so he turned sixty-five and he retired and came back here, and they told him in the registrar's office that yes he could finish his degree in thirty-six hours, he had to come up here and he had to take the courses here at Tech. He had to enroll on campus, and he had to have straight A's, and he did it. You know, came back and did it in a year, and so he was talking with the kids about this experience and about his experience—they were actually more interested in what he was doing with state government because he worked with the state environment agency for ten years and he was involved with nuclear site down in Andrews County and—

AW:

The dump? Yeah.

GE:

Yeah. So anyway, he wanted to talk to them more about liberal arts and his idea of liberal arts was that you need to know something about history in order to understand how history works and how the, you know and how—so we don't repeat bad history and so maybe we can repeat

good history. But what struck me was that most of what's done to sell a liberal arts degree now doesn't have anything to do with a specific discipline you know, or he was a history major so he's pushing history, an English major is going to push English or whatever. But what they're doing with liberal arts to sell it to parents and students is to say, "Okay you're majoring in engineering but when you go out into your job, if all you can do is engineering, then you're probably going to stay at a relatively low level, but if you can communicate what're you doing to people higher up and out beyond the walls of your factory, and if you can work with people and if you can do the other kinds of things that a liberal arts education is supposed to prepare you for, communicating orally and critical thinking and all of this kind of stuff, then you will most likely move up, and the people who don't have those schools are not," and so that's the pitch in a world where most people are coming to college because they want to be prepared for a career, and they're assuming, and they're assuming correctly, that if you don't have a college education and preferably some technical skill that you can apply, you're not going to earn very much money, you know, and all the information that we get from the census and the economic reports supports that argument. So how do you convince people that they should get into some of the soft skilled stuff? And that answer is, okay technical skills may get you a job, but it's the soft skills that will differentiate you from the regular people and allow you to move up.

AW:

Yeah, and my bias is that those soft skills, the humanities stuff, what they do is enable you to be a more creative thinker.

GE:

Well, that's part of it. Sure.

AW:

In your own discipline. Not that it's going to turn you into a historian or a writer, but—

GE:

No, and you know yeah, that's exactly—it's a different way of saying the same thing, you know, yeah sure. So it is, it's those critical thinking you know, how do I craft an argument, how do I read something and see what's going on and you know critique some of the ideas that are coming out of it, or do I just read it and say, Oh yeah you know.

AW:

Yeah, and how do you apply apply—and I guess, I don't think of myself as iconoclast, but I do think of myself as cruising a different neighborhood all the time seeing, what's the use to me? Had a delightful talk with Lawrence Schovanec the other day about Cantor sets and mathematics because they make sense to me in terms of how we just talk about story and narration, you know, the infinite number of stories, but within each story is an infinite number of narrations and

what's the difference? Well, you describe a difference, but now what's the relationship of these things. And here without you having to sit down and puzzle over it yourself, there are people in mathematics who've already done that for you and so you can adapt that you know and you don't have to become a mathematician to be able to use it. Well, I would like to come back and talk—as soon as we have a little more direction with our provost—about the creative process, I'd like to come back and talk to you about that, and about specifically because of the things we've talked about just now but also about your career in geography of looking at the notion of moving sideways as opposed to up or down in not just creative thinking but also in collaboration or moving across the moats, the boundaries, the silos, and so forth. But this afternoon would you talk just a little bit about what you see as developments in this particular university?

GE:

You mean where we're going in the future?

AW:

Yeah.

GE:

Oh yeah. I'd love to.

AW:

Good, and we won't hold you to it (laughter).

GE:

It's fine. No, but one of the things, you know, I'm in my forty-sixth, seventh year I guess forty-seventh year at Tech and—

AW:

Wow. Is anybody on campus in that range?

GE:

Yeah, when I went to get my forty-five year period—come on who's the bassoonist in the English department? Mike—

AW:

In English?

GE:

In music, Mike—

AW:

Yeah, I was thinking of the oboe teacher.

GE:

No, that's a woman, that's Anderson.

AW:

No. Yeah, okay bassoon—my mind just went blank, his wife is a painter, Meek.

GE:

Yeah, it's Richard, I said Mike, yeah, it's Richard Meek, yeah. Well, he got his fifty year pin when I got my forty-five, and he's still around so I'm going to have to kill him off (laughter).

AW:

So you get the top pin.

GE:

No, but anyway, you know, we talked a little bit earlier about the fact that you know Grover had a vision for the university, and he had a lot of help you know in creating the med school, the law school, expanding the campus. A lot of buildings came in during his period.

AW:

The Ranching Heritage Center.

GE:

Yeah. And I think he worked hard to get, you know, engineering going and other areas as well. So it was a really exciting time to be here, and the university was, you know there was a sense of we're on the go, and then Grover left and it kind of fell apart and we went through a period of maybe thirty years during which not a whole lot happened, and then we brought Schmidly in, and I think probably bringing Montford in as chancellor also you know, creating the system, which in some ways was a big mistake and other ways I guess maybe wasn't.

AW:

What ways was it a mistake?

GE:

Well, when we spun off the medical school, we would be an AAU institution right now if we had the med school.

AW:

As a part of Texas Tech as opposed to its own?

GE:

Yeah, and so we would be way ahead of Houston and competing much closer to Texas and A&M because a med school is a—you know they bring in big bucks, you know their research, medical research budget is—

AW:

So we in a sense cannibalized ourselves.

GE:

That's right, and we did it for political reasons.

AW:

Really?

GE:

Oh it was defensive, yeah. The board was worried that A&M was going to suck us up.

AW:

Really?

GE:

Yeah, I think, or—

AW:

But if we were a system they couldn't do that?

GE:

That's right. But if we were a freestanding campus, see, and by that time Texas and Texas A&M had picked off all of the state colleges that weren't part of the Texas State system, you know, and they got West Texas A&M. See if we wanted to create a system that was—

AW:

We should've—

GE:

Yeah, we should have got them, you know and—

AW:

Sul Ross.

GE:

Yeah, yeah. So anyway, that was I think, you know, Montford had a vision for the University, and I think the board had a vision for it, and that was that we were going to have to grow and we were going to have to compete and we were going to have to become a major national force.

AW:

Yeah and raise major money too.

GE:

Yeah, well yeah that's part of it, sure. So the chancellor's job essentially was fundraising, Montford did it, and Hance was a master at it, and I assume Duncan is doing the same thing.

AW:

I don't know yet, but you know it takes a while for that happen. I do know that I was not in the University when John was chancellor but I was in various community things, and you couldn't go to a potential donor in town whose pockets hadn't already been picked clean (laughter) by John Montford. He was terrific at it.

GE:

Yeah, that's essentially what they're hired for, you know, and so anyway that vision for the university is what's driving us, and that's what over the past fifteen years or so you know since the system was created, that's how it's changed, and we are, you know, we're growing in a variety of ways. We've got the medical school in El Paso, now they're not quite independent yet because they haven't been approved by SACSCOC, but they will be, and we'll probably suck up a couple more institutions before it's over with, you know, I'm not sure where we're going to find them because there are not many left around to be grabbed, but I'll bet we do.

AW:

Well, I mean San Angelo was in a system but didn't like it, and Sul Ross doesn't like their system I hear that, so I mean there are those—

GE:

Yeah, Sul Ross is a little bit of a problem because it's so small and it's got—

AW:

Yeah it would be a money pit.

GE:

It's got lots of problems.

AW:

Yeah, it would be a money pit.

GE:

Yeah, West Texas would make more sense, but I think they're pretty happy with A&M, and A&M isn't going to be glad to give them to us you know.

AW:

Right.

GE:

Especially not if we created a vet school up there. But yeah, we'll find some places before it's over with or create our own as we did in El Paso. But anyway, you know, that's my answer to your question that yeah we have a mission, and the mission is to become number three in the state of Texas and to gain a national reputation.

AW:

I have heard this, under Schovanec the first time mentioned at that level though of we've grown a lot and we need to make sure the rest of the growth that comes now is responsible growth or that's my wording, but not just we've got to be fifty thousand, which kind of Kent Hance—

GE:

Oh no, no, no I don't think—I think we've just about maxed out on growth, and you know that was Hance's thing, forty by twenty, and we're confronting the problems, and we're not at forty yet, you know, we're thirty-six, and we don't have space we're—you know got students coming out our ears.

AW:

And if we create the space, and then we have a legislature that puts a cap on tuition or any one of a number of things, you can be pretty quickly overbuilt too.

GE:

That's right and they're fixing to do that I think. So yeah, it's, you know, you can overdo it, and so I think we've kind of—you don't hear much about forty by twenty now, and so I think we're going to hold off for a little while on that. But no, it's not enrollment driven, it's driven by the kinds of programs you offer, whether they have national stature, how much money you're

bringing in, what kind of research you're doing, how many graduates and a little bit on things like completion.

AW:

Retention rates.

GE:

Yeah, and—

AW:

And also the variety of graduate degree programs, right?

GE:

And see we've got some holdovers that keep us from developing as much as we should. For example, our foreign languages, we've got a Department of Foreign Language, and the schools that we emulate would have a Department of German, a Department of Spanish, a Department of—or it might be Spanish and Portuguese—and a Department of French and so on you know, and we're way, way not doing that. We've got a department of soc-anthro and social work, those should all be independent. Social work should probably be its own school. We've got a department of geosciences with atmospheric science, geology, and geography, and those should all be independent you know. So we've got all these kind of departments that are—

AW:

To do that though you have to have students in each one of those departments that merits the size.

GE:

That's right.

AW:

Because you have to have a faculty to deal with that, and space.

GE:

Yeah. But you know that's the schools that we seek to emulate, have that kind of organization and structure.

AW:

Yeah and we have the hodgepodge groups.

GE:

Yeah, I mean we do fine in the technical areas, but when it comes to the softer areas, you know social sciences, we're quite weak in social science. Psychology is okay and apparently political science which used to be just a dump is coming along. I understand they're moving up in the rankings. But none of the other social sciences; our economics department is a joke.

AW:

And that's sad because although it is a dismal science, it's certainly an important—when I graduated in '72 my degree was in sociology, you know, I wasn't knowledgeable enough about structure to know whether we had a Department of Sociology but I—

GE:

Well, yeah it was—

AW:

Sociology and anthropology.

GE:

Yeah it was—no, it was, anthropology was separate at that time.

AW:

Oh it was?

GE:

It was a separate department. Most of these mergers came during Jane Weiner's period.

AW:

And was that necessitated because of smaller numbers?

GE:

Well, it was mainly budget.

AW:

Yeah, that's what I mean yeah in the classes. How does our vision fit in with what you see as a national, if there is a national vision, about universities? I mean when I look at the popular press, they're dealing MOOCs and—or MOOCS is it? The giant classes and the whole notion of doing your entire program on online and then talking to a human being and all that sort of thing.

GE:

Well I think that wave is kind of starting to pass. MOOCs have turned out to be big problems.

AW:

Yeah I don't know how anybody teaches online. I think how convenient that would be for me, but I don't get it (laughter).

GE:

Yeah, well the completion rate for those big ones is just on the floor, you know, I mean it's like ten percent you know if you're good you can get—and so the colleges that thought they were going to make big bucks on these things haven't been able to figure out really how to make that happen and online teaching, that's here to stay, and I think it's going to increase. But there are a lot of problems with online teaching in terms of how do you maintain high quality? How do you keep the students? You know, if they're—it's like home schooling, and it has a pretty big differential in terms of results; some people do very well at it. If you're highly motivated you know you can—

AW:

Yeah if you're highly motivated you can get on Wikipedia and learn an awful lot on your own but—

GE:

That's right.

AW:

The thing I—of course, I don't know how we do this even in person, is the integrity of the education. How do you know who's doing it, how do you—and that's even difficult in face to face but online.

GE:

Yeah, I don't know the details, but the people who do this kind of stuff argue that they've got ways of figuring out that the right person is taking the test and all that kind of stuff, and you just sort of have to accept it and say okay.

AW:

I have been a part of—I just did a guest lecture in Nevada in the winter that was a remote where you—you know there's a camera on you and then you have the screen where you saw the different campuses, and I actually found that to be pretty, better than I thought.

GE:

Yeah, that's a little different deal because you know you're—

AW:

Right, it's a remote versus online.

GE:

Yeah. Yeah, it's called simultaneous instruction, and yeah we do some of that.

AW:

Yes, my cousin teaches writing, she lives in Spicewood and goes over to Marble Falls and teaches and has students all around the central Texas area. But in the same thing, they all show up at the same time and interact.

GE:

Yeah, I served as the deans rep on a dissertation defense over in English a couple of years ago, and the woman who completing degree was married to a truck driver and he had a PhD and he had given up on college teaching because he'd make more money driving a truck, and so she was riding with him and she was teaching online courses, and she'd grade the stuff, and you know on the road, didn't make any difference as long you've got a wireless connection, you're in business.

AW:

Yeah, stop at the McDonald's get a cup of coffee and connect with your—

GE:

Yeah.

AW:

Well, it's a brave new world.

GE:

Yeah it is. But yeah, I think that online instruction works for some things. It doesn't work as well for other things. I don't know how you teach a lab science online. I don't know how you teach anything that requires a lot of hands on kind of—

AW:

Yeah. You know, people have suggested that—I teach songwriting and have for fifteen years in the School of Music that that would be suitable, but I really think not. I can be a critic online you know, but you have to be a kind critic when you're trying to help someone develop something

that they have a passion for, and it's almost impossible to do that with email responses or digital responses.

GE:

Yeah, it becomes very impersonal.

AW:

And it's very easy also for people who aren't very, very cognizant of the system to appear to be even more impersonal than they are really you know. Hence the reason we have emoticons because I can say something to you like, "I hate that shirt," and I'm smiling and what I'm really saying is I love that shirt, but you can't do that online, it's just not—

GE:

Yeah, not possible.

AW:

All right, well once again, you've worn me out, this is all—there's so much thinking that goes on here (laughter). Maybe have you paid any attention, it's probably a fad, but I was reading a nice little essay on the idea of slow teaching, you know, they borrowed the nomenclature from slow food, you know. But what they were talking about was smaller, which is happening in a lot of things. Sarah Timmons' dad last night was talking about he got out of being an ordained—not being ordained—but pastoring a church because he had experienced the difficulty in his own work but had found an intellectual support for the fact that when you get over at least in that line of work over ten people, you can no longer do your job, and I thought you know sometimes we kind of dance around that, but we really—that's the case in our work, how do you mentor students when you have thirty of them or three hundred of them? You know.

GE:

Well, yeah, I mean I've taught large classes for years, and you know I kind of enjoyed it in a way because you can be a showman, but in terms of what the students learn, you know, you're disconnected from them, and—

AW:

And you don't have enough hours in the week to have office hours for three hundred students.

GE:

No, no.

AW:

So they're not going to be able to come.

GE:

Yeah, and well normally what happens is you've got a corpus of trained TAs who run interference for you, so they're the ones who engage the students directly. You know you walk in a play God for an hour and walk out (laughter). So yeah, I don't know the answer. Well I do know the answer to that, and talking about the liberal arts and what the liberal arts are supposed to do for you, monster sections of liberal arts classes don't do that, you know, we're not teaching people to think critically, we're not teaching them how to write, communicate orally or any of the stuff that you know is supposed to be there. What we're doing is teaching them a minimal amount of content and saying, all right you've now learned geography go forth you know.

AW:

Yeah for one I don't think of a real significantly any difference between a monster class and online or you know it's—the student has to be the one driving that education, not the mentor.

GE:

Yeah.

AW:

All right, well I'm going to call it quits for today if that's all right.

GE:

Oh yeah.

AW:

And I would like, I really would like for us to talk about creative process but I'm hoping—I'm going to meet with Provost Galyean I think next week, and we'll talk a little bit about the nuts and bolts.

GE:

Well, let me know, you know, when you're ready.

AW:

Well, I'll be ready pretty quickly after that because I had—we'd built our group up sort of topsy and turvy because we started out, and the provost said, "Let's just do two or three people and talk about this." Well the next thing I know the interim provost said, "Well how about adding." And so sure enough once that started we then had about fifteen people which was not manageable in the sense of really getting information across. So I'd like to go back to kind of our smaller group which was Aliza wong and Dom Casadonte and Genevieve Durham, and I would like to have you in that too because I think, you know, we're all talking, we say cross silo as if it's become something everybody understands, and I'm not really sure that's safe. We need to be I think a

little more specific and have better language for it, and you have a lot more experience, not only at Texas Tech, but in a discipline that has survived by working sideways.

GE:

Yeah.

AW:

Yeah, so I think it would be a real asset if you don't mind.

GE:

No, I don't mind at all, I'd like to do it.

AW:

Good. All right, well thanks again this has been very pleasant.

GE:

You're welcome and I've enjoyed it too.

AW:

Thanks.

GE:

Okay Andy.

End of Recording

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