

Donald Spring
Narrator

Charles Brunette
Interviewer

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- CB: 00:00:13 I wonder if you could give a brief description of your educational background before you came to UMM.
- DS: 00:00:21 So my educational background is relatively clear-cut. I did my undergraduate work at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. And I went on immediately back to my bachelor's degree for my master's degree in English at Marquette University.
- 00:00:42 Following that, I taught for four years at Marquette University, and then decided to go on for my PhD work at the University of Minnesota, which had offered me a part-time instructorship. I came to the University of Minnesota in 1955 then. And I was an instructor, a part-time instructor at the university for four years while I was pursuing my doctoral work.
- 00:01:06 And at the end of that time, I was granted a Danforth Teaching Fellowship for work on my thesis in 1959-60. During that year, I learned of the vacancy at the University of Minnesota Morris, or I should say, more properly, I learned that the University of Minnesota Morris was coming into existence, and that a position in English—as a matter of fact, it was an acting chairmanship of the Department of English was open.
- 00:01:45 I came out, was interviewed for the position, and accepted it. I've been here ever since. I became in the third year, at the end of the third year of the University of Minnesota Morris, when we switched to division structure, I became the Chairman of the Division of Humanities, and I have remained that to the present time.

- CB: 00:02:12 Did your previous educational background, in any way, the sizes or the types of colleges you came from influencing your decision to want to come to a small forming college?
- DS: 00:02:30 I think without being a background in a small college atmosphere, it was nevertheless of the kind of training that would encourage me to do that. I went through a rather traditional secondary school training. For example, the secondary school I attended expected all students in the academic program to take full four years of Latin, and then went on to Marquette University, which at that time was a relatively small institution.
- 00:03:08 I think the enrollment was just over 4,000 in all of its colleges, the College of Liberal Arts being approximately, I think, around 2,000, perhaps 3,000 students. It, too, had a curriculum, which was largely traditional, appealing ultimately to the Greco-Roman civilization and as a foundation of civilization. And there was strong humanistic requirements as well as a penchant for the traditional classical education.
- 00:03:48 You might say then that all the way through my secondary and baccalaureate degree training, I was being prepared for small liberal arts teaching. I think the fact that I chose English as an area in which to obtain my advanced degree was also a factor. One becomes an English teacher in part because he believes that that people are best taught in liberal arts environments and in liberal arts sized courses.
- 00:04:22 I think all of those things pointed me in the direction of a small liberal arts college. I think there were factors that didn't however. I was born in what I thought was a small town. It was Racine, Wisconsin. There were only 90,000 people in it. And when people asked me where I was from, I said from a small town in between Milwaukee and Chicago, thinking that no one would know the existence of the town with only 90,000 people.
- 00:04:51 I grew up in Milwaukee, began my career in Milwaukee. My wife is from Chicago, Illinois. I taught at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. I guess I wasn't quite prepared for the small town environment in which a liberal arts college is frequently placed. And I think if I had any difficulty in orienting myself in a small liberal arts setting, it was more because of the small rural town environment around it rather than the college itself.

- CB: 00:05:38 When you came to UMM and applied for the job, what kinds of things did Dean Briggs ask you in the interview or tell you in the interview to try to encourage you to come? What kinds of things do you remember him saying?
- DS: 00:05:57 I don't remember specifics, of course. Because I think we talked so much together in the next five years that it's difficult to remember which conversation began where. But I think that I—I noticed about consistency in the way in which the college was presented to me. And I think there was a consistency in the way in which, having joined the faculty, we pursued the aims of the college throughout all of its early history.
- 00:06:31 I would say that without remembering specific details, that Briggs said really in effect two things to me. He said, "This is an interesting, exciting, new adventure, building a college and having a say in which way it goes." And then having impressed me with that, he was quick to indicate that it was also a very risky venture since we were trying to establish college where none had been before in an area of declining population, remote from the central university and from the kind of cultural environment that a metropolitan area will offer. And the big question was, would people come to it?
- 00:07:29 So he simultaneously dangled the attractions of a new, exciting college adventure, and then warned me that the risks in pursuing it were great.
- CB: 00:07:50 What kind of role did Briggs indicate in that first interview as you planned in developing them? What kinds of courses did he suggest you probably would be teaching? And did he give you a suggestion at that time of where you might be going in college?
- DS: 00:08:08 Well, I think he did because, in a sense, he made me the Acting Chairman of the English Department. Incidentally, there was never any other department but the English Department, since during that first year and second year, we decided not to go to our departmental organization but divisional organization.
- 00:08:29 But the fact that he made me the Acting Chairman of the English Department was some indication that he wanted me to accept some leadership in not only English, but probably in the Humanities area from the beginning. Briggs himself,

as you know, was an agronomist. And the background of the physical campus of the University of Minnesota Morris was agronomy, West Central Experiment Station.

00:08:56 And I think, therefore, that he wanted people, whose areas were in the Humanities, distant from his own, who could give leadership to programs that were not as well-known and understood by him. I was under no misapprehension at all about what I would teach. And the opening year was nothing but a series, a very small series of freshman level courses. And I was teaching freshman English.

00:09:28 I did find out before I joined the faculty that he had on the recommendation of the Minneapolis Campus put into effect the twofold freshman English program that I had been teaching in on the Minneapolis Campus, that is, he had a standard course, English 1, 2, 3 and an advanced placement course, English A, B, C for those who qualified. I was familiar with the course. I was expected to teach the course as it was intended to be taught. I had four years' experience in teaching it. And therefore, I knew very well what my immediate task was.

00:10:09 He gave me to understand also that he wanted me to build that curriculum in English because he was sure it would be one of the cornerstones of the campus and that he looked to me for direction in the development of that English curriculum.

CB: 00:10:28 You say basically that the classes you taught the first year and then the next couple years were pretty much freshmen or intro courses or—

DS: 00:10:36 No. The courses that were taught for the next few years were always heavily slanted toward the freshmen class because our freshman class was always twice the size of any other class until about the sixth or seventh year of our existence. No, I didn't do that. What happened though, is that's all that was taught in English the first year. There was nothing but freshman English taught.

00:11:05 In the second year or during the first year, Briggs said to me, "All right. We've been given the go ahead to create a sophomore year. I want you to introduce those courses in English that are appropriate lower-division courses and that will eventually prepare the student as prerequisites for a major in English." In other words, he said, "What I really

want you to do is I want you to start preparing the major in English and then back up and put those courses in that are prerequisite sophomore experiences."

00:11:42 Well, that wasn't difficult for me either because, you see, I had done the same thing at both Marquette and the University of Minnesota. I had taught the yearlong introduction to English courses. At that time, it consisted of, on the Minneapolis Campus, three-quarter courses, English 21, 22, and 23 in the history of the development of English Literature. And that was the sophomore program that I put into existence. And that's the courses I taught in the second year.

00:12:16 During the second year, he asked me among other things, and I probably should answer that question separately, my interest had by then been extended at his instigation, far beyond English. I had become, during the first year, the Chairman of the Curriculum Committee. And I kept that position for five years. And therefore, I had responsibilities in all areas.

00:12:43 But nevertheless, in the second year, I put into existence a two-year program in English that would lead to a major. And we did that in every area that we intended to introduce majors in. I believe there were 13 majors at that time. We introduced 13 programs in the second year, had them approved by the Minneapolis Campus, well, the Morris Campus Planning Committee, which was a Minneapolis Campus Committee at that time, and ultimately, by the legislature.

00:13:21 So in the first year, we planned the second year. And in the second year, we planned the junior and senior year, on the one hand, as a biennial request, and on the other hand, as a set of majors in basic Liberal Arts Disciplines. I probably even should go beyond that and tell you that I think for the first four years I was here, I never taught the same course twice.

CB: 00:13:52 Is there an end?

DS: 00:13:53 Yes. Each year, we were adding new courses to the curriculum and, very frequently, it became my responsibility to introduce at least some of those new courses. So it was a busy time, not only in organizing and

getting the college underway, but also in preparing a wide range of courses here for teaching.

- CB: 00:14:16 Would you say that the types of courses you selected for English reflected your desire to build a strong liberal arts college?
- DS: 00:14:23 They reflected my desire to build a strong liberal arts college. And by, of course, the second and third year, we had other English faculty on campus. They reflected, in sense, their concerted decision to build that kind of college. I have to be honest, too, and tell you that they also reflected the particular interest and proficiencies that we had.
- 00:14:46 It's true, no matter how much you suggest that a college is a college is a college, that a college is frequently a kind of college that fits the talents and interests to the people who make it out. If you have a history department with a person from the far east on it, you're going to have a strong far-eastern segment in history. If you lack somebody in the far east, you're going to lack those courses. And I think this is not—and one doesn't have to apologize for this.
- 00:15:23 I think that if liberal education was concerned only with the dissemination of knowledge of information, then we'd all have to give up. It has something to do with the training of minds. And sometimes, you can train a person's mind by teaching him a great deal about 18th Century English Literature. And sometimes, you can train his mind by teaching him a great deal about 20th Century American Literature.
- 00:15:50 And in no case, can you ever hope to teach him everything about all centuries in all kinds of literature. You got to assume that you must train his mind and make him ready to operate as an expert in the discipline. And then he will fill in the knowledge gaps on his own.
- CB: 00:16:09 What were some of the major problems involved when developing the curriculum in those first couple of years? What kinds of things did—I suppose we could say as a general role in terms of working toward that goal of building a strong rewards, what were some of the major problems you ran into at Morris?
- DS: 00:16:26 One of the problems that we ran into, of course, is that in a growing institution, you must always anticipate what

faculty you're going to hire before you've actually hired them. In other words, you must plan your program before the faculty is on hand that will teach it.

00:16:44 And as a result, some of us were very uncomfortable with the roles that we were playing in curriculum development. We were making decisions about advanced level work in disciplines, where we felt we were not sufficiently expert to make those decisions. As a result, I suspect that our curriculum was one of the most carefully developed curriculums ever to be devised.

00:17:11 Because we recognized our limitations, we sought help every place that we could look for authoritative help. One of the things that we benefited from was the fact that there had been recently, in post-World War II, there had been recently mammoth studies in many disciplines, sort of, investigating the very premise of the teaching in those disciplines.

00:17:36 I call your attention what Sputnik meant to Science and Mathematics. There had been major studies performed about what was a sound curriculum in Physics, in Chemistry, in Mathematics. And we were able to profit from those studies.

00:17:55 Secondly, as a result of the postwar boom in college enrollments, most liberal arts colleges themselves, the big ones that had been established for years, like Amherst and Carleton, for example, in our own state, had undergone scrutiny of their own disciplines. They tried to bring themselves as it were into the 20th Century with the war being a kind of a turning point that allowed them to make new decisions and with burgeoning enrollments that gave them the resources to carry out their decisions.

00:18:34 As a result, they had produced, many of them had produced studies of inestimable value for us. And we studied catalogs and self-studies produced by such liberal arts colleges before making any steps on our own. In other words, we found our own weaknesses filled in by the careful, current contemporary studies that were being performed nationally and in liberal arts colleges in our own area. We were guided in large part by such advice. I think that was the major difficulty in establishing the liberal arts college. I think there were others as well.

- 00:19:19 I think the second problem was, again, in a growth situation, we had to try to create as many courses as possible in order to give liberal education the kind of breath that it needed. We couldn't be serious about educating students unless we had courses in the major areas identified as liberal disciplines.
- 00:19:44 But on the other hand, our resources were limited by a legislature that was watching us very closely to see if we would grow rapidly enough to warrant the resources that they were giving us. I must say that both the Minneapolis Campus and the state legislature treated us very well, both in human resources, in supplies, expenses, and equipment, and then ultimately, in buildings.
- 00:20:12 But there were always anxious moments. We were never sure until the last minute that we were going to get it. And as a result, we lived sometimes with the urgency of a toothache. We never knew relaxing moments. We were constantly at work and developments might come as late as 12:00 or 1:00 in the morning. And we had to be prepared for them by 9:00 the next morning.
- 00:20:41 As a result, it was a hectic time and an exciting time. And because most of it went well, it was a fulfilling time as well.
- CB: 00:20:57 Kind of, critically evaluating your teaching experience that first year or maybe move it up the first four years, what kind of job you think you did as first time yourself?
- DS: 00:21:11 My own estimate is, and of course, one does have feedback from students even before questionnaires became popular, especially in the liberal arts college, you knew. In fact, we had a joke going in the first two years on campus that said that we had the best feedback mechanism ever devised for a liberal arts college.
- 00:21:33 When we moved in here, we inherited a group of ancient chairs that hadn't been in use, classroom chairs, it hadn't been used for about 20 years or more, and were really quite old when they were taken out of use. These were put in the classrooms, and our students sat on them. Sometimes, they had armchairs and, sometimes, they didn't. But I'll tell you this, you knew when you didn't have the attention of the class because the noise of squeaking chairs told you immediately.

00:22:05 I think when we moved to the Chrome and Formica brand, we lost something. We lost a feedback system that was of inestimable help, not just in long-term planning but in knowing whether the next sentence was making sense or not or the last sentence was making sense.

00:22:24 I think in my own mind, I did some of my best teaching, but I think that may be one of the ways that a person romanticizes the past. I think I did some of my best teaching because the promise that Briggs had held out for an exciting new experience with a way so in how it developed as a matter of fact proved to be true.

00:22:49 In many cases, I was teaching courses that I had devised myself. In many cases, I was establishing goals and objectives of my own, and therefore, choosing the means, commensurate to achieve those goals and objectives. I think something else entered as well at this point.

00:23:11 Both Marquette and the Minneapolis Campus were really large campuses in retrospect. I see that now. And as a result, although I always worked closely with students in the sense that my classes were never exceptionally large, sophomore survey courses, for example, frequently did get over at 80 or 90. But nevertheless, they were not exceptionally large.

00:23:39 It wasn't until I got to Morris that I had really some sense of community with students. It wasn't just that I had them in class, it's that I saw them on campus in a number of capacities day in and day out and worked with them. They were also the students who sat on committees that I sat on. They were people who were producing the newspaper that I was reading. I met them downtown and in Edson Hall. They were the people I talked to when we had the speakers out or musical performers.

00:24:15 As a result, I think I came to understand the idea of the community of scholars that embraced not only the faculty that I was familiar with but the students whom I was both teaching and living with in close communal relationships.

CB: 00:24:35 I was wondering, do you expand on this community and students that you had mentioned? Could you define a little bit closer to kinds of things you noticed about them?

- DS: 00:24:45 You mean about the students themselves or about the change in relationships from what it would be at some larger college? I'm not sure what point you're making. And maybe I should answer both of these.
- CB: 00:24:57 That might be an interesting way of getting in. Yeah.
- DS: 00:25:00 The students were different. There's no doubt about that. But on the other hand, human nature doesn't vary that much. And as a result, I don't wish to suggest that they were a different species. I think in the first years, for example, they were quite different from what they are now.
- 00:25:18 When the college was started out here, some people came immediately who had been out of high school for some time and simply could not afford to attend a college further distant from their home. As a result, we did not have the typical 18-year-old freshman class. There were people in there with a good deal of experience and sophistication. And some of it came in areas totally unknown to me. Some of them, for example, were successful farmers already.
- 00:25:54 And as a result, the class was quite different from what it was. Most of them, unlike classes I had taught before, came either from farms or from very small towns, 3,000, 4,000, 5,000 population towns, scattered around the state. I found that different. Where I had taught before, just the opposite balance was true.
- 00:26:20 Sixty to seventy-five percent of my students were urban students, born and raised in the city, sophisticated in city ways, had attended concerts, lectures, were up on both social and political developments, were keenly aware of what was going on in the world at large.
- 00:26:43 That wasn't true, the classes that I taught in the first couple of years at Morris. They tended to be more provincial. The word may sound like a pejorative, and if it is, why it's still accurate and I would stick by it. They tended to be more provincial. They had not been to concerts and lectures. They were not very concerned with the political or social scene. They were really out of it. They didn't know what the major developments in the late '50s and '60s were in big cities.
- 00:27:15 As a result, it was a different atmosphere. One had to, as it were, create his own frame of reference. You couldn't make

a reference to a major diplomatic figure and expect the reference to be known. You had to explain all your references as it were. And I think that was a chore. And there were disadvantages to that. We wish they were more experienced in the contemporary issues, social, political, cultural issues.

00:27:47 On the other hand, if they were less sophisticated, then I would've liked them. They were also less pseudo sophisticated. And as a result, I experienced one of the really delightful moments in my total career of having to work with people who desperately wanted to be educated and who were willing to try any method that you, the teacher, would hold out to them as a way of pulling themselves up by their bootstraps.

00:28:21 As I explained to a colleague of mine on the Minneapolis Campus toward the end of that first year, I said, "It's just uncanny. Something you teach on Monday will show up on a paper on Friday." The students are eminently open to suggestion and willing to try things. They've also got a kind of native caninness, cleverness. And they know when they're being had, and they can sense a phony a mile away. And if your suggestions aren't practical, if they won't work, because they try them, they know.

00:28:59 And as a result, it was both an exciting moment and a demanding moment for me. You couldn't be careless about comments you made any longer. The way you threw away lines that you try in a big city class, you couldn't do that anymore because people took you in earnest. And you had to make sure that what she said made sense and wasn't just some kind of a remark that you intended to be really facetious.

00:29:28 I think they were different. I think they did not remain the same. Within the first eight years that I was here, the nature of small town life must have changed drastically in Minnesota, because by the end of eight years, the students we were getting in as freshmen from small towns and from rural areas were as well-informed politically, socially, and culturally as most of the students from the urban areas. So a change has taken place in them as well as a change in me.

00:30:07 I, of course, live on variation of that kind. And I guess if I didn't believe in the value of a liberal education, I wouldn't know how to adapt to such changes. And I guess I've not

only adapted. But I've been excited by the process of adaptation.

CB: 00:30:26 Would you say the process of this change of the students that they're becoming in less earnest or that you described was so vividly present in that first year? They became more aware of things going on, but then they also, at the same time, begin to be more similar to the main campus type student or—

DS: 00:30:47 I think perhaps in certain respects, that might be true. But by and large, I'd say the people who elect to come here are those who believe so strongly in the value of close personal interrelationships as a part of their undergraduate career that they chose this place because they didn't think they could get it elsewhere. In other words, we have people here, the people that I work with. And mind you now, I don't see the full range of students that we once got because we have gotten larger.

00:31:24 But the people that I work with in advanced English courses and really in conversations as division chairman that I have with students who come in here with one kind of problem or another, they seem to be people who are already convinced that smallness is good, that a liberal arts education is valuable, and that they have something to contribute to the process of their education as well as something to be gained simply by listening to others.

00:31:57 They seem to be people who have some sense of self-direction. As a result, I would say that they have not lost that sense of wanting to learn and being open to learning. No, they have not. I think that like a lot of people, not just young people, but like a lot of people who are caught up in national indeed, even in international causes, such as college students have been ever since the counterculture movement of the late '60s, early '70s, they have sometimes been satisfied with slogans and cliches rather than with developing their own convictions.

00:32:47 But I believe that faculty members, including myself, are as liable to errors of that sort as anyone. And I think that maybe in part, what I would say is that because the emotional pressures were so great during the late '60s and early '70s, sometimes, some people, faculty, administrators, and students were not as open to learning experiences as they might have been.

- 00:33:25 I think this is one of the things that I've noticed in the last two years that we are returning to. We're returning to a greater sense of equanimity in ourselves and a more relaxed, critical attitude toward not only what we're learning in this liberal arts college but in what we know is happening in the world at large.
- 00:33:59 I think we're developing a more scholarly attitude than we are returning to, a more scholarly attitude than the one that we had during the early '70s. That's criticism, as you see, as much against faculty as it is against students. I wouldn't insist on that.
- CB: 00:34:28 Okay. That first year, I think we can safely say that there was what we call a staff shortage, which a lot of people had to do a lot of different kinds of jobs.
- DS: 00:34:44 Yes. In two respects. Some people had to teach in areas that they really weren't terribly well prepared in. And in a second respect, in addition to teaching, you had to do a lot of other things, like be on two or three committees and be available for any kind of an ad hoc group that had become in existence to handle an emergency. The hours were long, and the pace was hectic.
- CB: 00:35:16 Some of the major curriculum committees in that were the people selected. Was there a strong influence by Briggs who got selected on committees, and was he almost the last say of where he wanted to see you to fall?
- DS: 00:35:35 I think in the first couple of years of this committee, Briggs pretty well acted the way the president of a private liberal arts college would've act. This is not meant to be a pejorative. He acted the role of the of the benevolent tyrant. He was the patriarch. He was the paterfamilias. He ran the show. He appointed members of the committee and committee chairman. And he turned to the people he wanted to turn to for advice and for help.
- 00:36:11 I think that one of the processes of growing up that we had as a campus was eventually to turn that around. And as you can imagine, moving from one system to another, moving to a one man, one vote arrangement that is so characteristic of the University of Minnesota as a whole was not always a painless process.

- 00:36:35 The kind of leadership, I think, that Briggs provided was absolutely essential. If he hadn't done the job he did, it would never have gotten done. But he did call the shots. And I suspect that it had to be that way, as I indicated. He decided who was on committees. And in the first year, he formed the curriculum committee of a group of people in various areas, like Science, Social Science, and Humanities. And he gave them the power to sift through the suggestions of all the other faculty and to come up with an organized curricular program.
- 00:37:18 That's when he made me Curriculum Committee Chairman. And I served in that function for the first five years. And he wanted me to. There was no doubt about it. He wanted me to give direction and to make decisions that would move this campus in a way that he felt was congenial to him and a way that I appreciated, approved, and backed.
- CB: 00:37:46 Would you say in the whole, you had a pretty good association with them or no?
- DS: 00:37:50 Yes. And students will tell you the same thing. I think one of the really different things about this place was that the chief administrative officer and officers eventually were and are always accessible. It isn't that I always agreed with him, far from it. But when I disagreed, I was always able to disagree within 30 minutes. I could tell him what I thought, and I could either be persuaded by what he had to say or I could persuade him. As a result, I'd say our relationships were excellent.
- CB: 00:38:39 How early do you think in the first year the question of building these strong liberal arts college came up? Was that almost a goal that was formed with the college itself?
- DS: 00:38:50 Yes. I don't think any of the faculty in a sense can take credit for initiating that goal. I think it was one of the reasons each one of them came. I think a lot of them can take credit in the way in which they pushed forward our efforts toward that goal. But as a matter of fact, it was there on paper and in the mouths of everyone he talked to.
- 00:39:17 The central administration on the Minneapolis Campus, the Morris Campus, Planning Committee, which was at that time, Minneapolis Campus Committee. I should point that out. Briggs was the member from the Morris Campus. And Briggs himself all said the same thing, this campus has to

become a strong Liberal Arts Campus in the tradition of the University of Minnesota as a whole.

- 00:39:48 In addition, it ought to provide, as strong liberal arts campuses always do, adequate pre-professional training for students who wish to move from this campus to professional schools on the Minneapolis Campus and elsewhere. There was never any doubt. What I've just told you was here when I walked on campus, it was hatched independent of the brains of the faculty who were chosen.
- CB: 00:40:15 Did most of the faculty feel that it must be a strong liberal arts college simply because that's the only way it could survive? Or are there other?—
- DS: 00:40:27 I think three things come into being, since they were hired on that premise, they had some contractual obligations. Secondly, they made the decision to come. Jobs were not hard to come by in most days, incidentally. They made the decision to come because that was the goal that was held out to them.
- 00:40:49 But I think in addition to that, as the place, as they got experience with the place, they realized that if it was to find a place in the sun, if it was to become a permanent Liberal Arts College of the University of Minnesota in this area of declining population, it had to get the image of a strong Liberal Arts College or it would falter and die.
- 00:41:19 So I think that for the first four to six years of our existence, almost everything we did was simultaneously directed at improving this as a good traditional liberal arts college and of making sure that that image was widespread in the State of Minnesota, from which we knew we had to draw our students.
- CB: 00:41:46 You had mentioned earlier that the curriculum committees made a strong effort to emulate curriculum programs of the CLA and other research studies done. Was there other ways that moved toward strong rewards college, for example, in your teaching methods? Are there approaches teachers took to students?
- DS: 00:42:11 Yes. Let me answer that question. But first of all, I think we tended to imitate CLA only in perhaps the first two years of our existence. CLA even at that time had 16,000 to 18,000 students. And as a result, it was very difficult to

model our curriculum on any undergraduate program of that size.

- 00:42:34 And as a result, we tended to use as our models smaller prestigious private liberal arts colleges. To go back to the question that you asked, was there any other way? I think one of the ways that by the third year, I was very much involved in was in hiring faculty.
- 00:43:01 We knew that if you didn't continue to hand pick carefully the kind of people who were teaching at this college, if you rested only on the printed evidence of credentials, you might get people who on paper were successful academics but who would forward the liberal arts ideal very little.
- 00:43:28 As a result, the process of searching for, sifting through, and selecting the faculty became one of the, I think, best ways by which we tried to forward our aim of producing a strong liberal arts college. And we had to be fairly broadminded about that. We had to find people with strong minds, which might differ from our own.
- 00:43:56 And I think we succeeded. We had articulate people. We had people who were committed and who were unafraid of stating their commitments. I think that was the next thing. I think another thing began all the way back in the first year and was continuing effort, even now, when we were hired, whether it was Briggs that did the hiring or eventually one of the division chairman, every faculty member that I know of on this campus has always been told the same thing. If you are not a successful teacher, you will not be happy here, and we will not be happy with you.
- 00:44:44 People never came here with the idea that they could be anything other than successful teachers. And I must say that has been one of the overriding concerns in the evaluation of faculty for all of the 16 years that I've been here and, sometimes, very painfully so.
- 00:45:04 It's become apparent that we've hired people sometimes directly out of graduate school who would be best placed in large institutions, teaching at the graduate level because they could not relate either to the undergraduate mind or to the undergraduate curriculum.
- 00:45:23 And as a result, decisions had to be made not to keep such people. Sometimes, the decisions were all too plain to the

people themselves, and they left. At other times, that apparent unsatisfying performance had to be drawn to their attention. And it was a painful experience.

00:45:47 I think there has always been an insistence that faculty members stay in close contact with their classes. And I think that the size of the class has frequently made that possible. And where it hasn't, I think we've tried to change the curriculum so that it could be possible.

00:46:11 From about, I'd say, the fifth or sixth year on, after we had reached what I would call respectability and the image of respectability, when people knew what we were and how good we were, I think at that point, people began to concentrate as academics did elsewhere, began to concentrate upon the effectiveness of the learning process. And much innovation in teaching methods was introduced then and continues to be introduced.

00:46:48 I think our first six years were exciting in one way. Our next 10 years have been exciting in a different way. And I think throughout both stages, we've been growing, and we did the appropriate things at the appropriate times. I think that's one of the reasons why our campus has maintained a sense that students and faculty alike on our campus maintain a sense of confidence in the system and confidence in the procedures. They feel as though when change is necessary, we have the mechanism for introducing it and pursuing—

CB: 00:47:41 In talking about building that strong curriculum, do you think it's possible the first couple of years that UMM almost, in a way, over succeeded, became too strong?

DS: 00:47:56 Well, we were told that by people who were in a position to know. And therefore, I have a suspicion that let you say is probably true. Maybe it's another question of our bark being worse than our bite, however. And I think that would be my final judgment in the matter.

00:48:14 Because we were so earnest about becoming respectable, I think we were extremely stringent in the demands that we made upon our students. And the stringency showed up not only in the evaluation of students but in the demands that we put upon them, that is in what we expected them to do in our classes in the way of performance, such as papers as well as examinations.

- 00:48:49 As a result, we got the reputation of being a very thoroughgoing liberal arts institution. And students who were good students but hadn't really developed the scholarly approach in high school as many students have not done, students in that position with good mind but without the scholarly approach, sometimes, floundered in their first year or two here and went away dissatisfied from the place.
- 00:49:24 Or at least, let's put it this way. When they went back and talked to their high school counselors, they said that they had been subjected to a really rigorous training. And the counselors became wary of sending people here who were not already demonstrably good minds and demonstrably good scholars.
- 00:49:47 At one point, it was said that nearly everybody on campus was either the valedictorian of his graduating class or the salutatorian. We tended to have two people from about 500 different high schools, and both of them were the honor students at that high school. This was both good and bad, as you can imagine, because you can't pass judgment about high school students in that manner.
- 00:50:16 I, in my career of teaching, I've seen students come alive as juniors and seniors and in their baccalaureate program. I've seen them learn to become scholars as freshmen and sophomores. And their interest must be preserved, and quarter must be granted as it were to allow them to develop into the kinds of scholarly minds that you want them to be.
- 00:50:45 Now, the people who told us that we were overdoing it were, of course, the people who were out recruiting for students who were going to high school nights, college nights and the like, and parents from the area. And it was coming back here. UMM is too demanding. Unless you already have a degree, it's unlikely that you can pass the freshman courses. That's one of the extreme rumors that we got.
- 00:51:18 I think some of that was true. And I think it was true not only because we were earnest about what we were doing, but most of us were young faculty members, newly out of graduate school, suffering from what has subsequently have been called the graduate school syndrome. That is because we were operating on a certain level in English Literature or European History or Chemistry.

- 00:51:45 We expected our students to be operating on the same level, perhaps not in the first week, but certainly by the mid quarter of their freshman year. And I think this is one of the errors that beginning teachers frequently make. They try to make students over into undergraduate students. They try to make undergraduate students into a big hurry. And I think that's one of the things we had to learn. And I think we did learn that lesson.
- 00:52:16 I think, however, that, as I said, I think our bark was worse than our bite because I think most of us learned from the close contact which we had with students, a great deal about student minds. We were not in any doubt. We weren't talking to a sea of faces. These people were in our offices talking over the class discussions within an hour or two of the time that we had them.
- 00:52:45 And as a result, we had incredibly good feedback from such students. And I think those of us who suffered from the graduate school syndrome learned the lesson in a hurry. And I think in most cases, students were treated fairly, but then always a great deal was demanded of them.
- 00:53:04 I'm not so sure since the counterculture movement began of the early '70s that that has always been the case either on this campus or elsewhere. I think both from principled commitments and also from simply a relaxation of standards, the demands upon the students today are not as great as they were upon students from 1960 to 1967 or '68.
- CB: 00:53:37 If I was to be going to school here from, let's say, my years here with a span from, let's say, '62 to '65, would have I noticed a conscious change among the faculty of trying to become less stringent?
- DS: 00:53:55 I think you would have. I think you would've noticed a change in the dress of the faculty. I think you would've noticed a change in the way in which they conducted their classes. I think you would have noticed the difference in the way in which they talked to the intellectual enterprise.
- 00:54:14 And if you don't believe me, you should talk to some of our alumni. We have some of them who are on the faculty as a matter of fact, Roy Gross, and some who are married to people who live in town and some who work in offices on this campus, for example, one young lady who works in the records office.

- 00:54:41 They all say the same thing, that demands are not as great upon the students today as they were upon them. I think they're not always right in this. I think the nature of the demands might be different. I think students are given more freedom. But more self-direction is demanded of them today. So that I'm unwilling to make a black and white comparison of the two ages.
- 00:55:10 But I tell you this, you would notice a tremendous difference. Good students today are probably getting as good an education as they would've gotten then. But I think the way in which they pursue it is a little different, in some cases, quite a bit different. And I'm not at all sure that the added responsibility of self-direction hasn't had a salutary effect on today's students.
- 00:55:41 I think they are less passive about their part in the intellectual enterprise. And I think as a result, when they leave here, they probably are better equipped to take the initiative than maybe they were back then. I think society is similar. I think back then, students stepped out of a baccalaureate degree into a training program. Industry, business, or government really took them from college and trained them to the task.
- 00:56:15 Nowadays, I think students are expected to shift more for themselves. And I think they're expected to have more self-direction than they had then.
- CB: 00:56:27 Well, that's an interesting point that I hadn't really thought of. Do you think the students of those early years, their goals of coming out of the baccalaureate education is much different than it is now?
- DS: 00:56:40 Well, oddly enough, I think there's been a three-stage. Remember now, I'm making generalizations that I'm sure would not stand up to a particular inspection of particular cases. But by and large, I'd say, in the early years of the existence of this campus, most of our students were vocationally oriented.
- 00:57:02 They came from small towns. And their only idea of a higher education was attached to a professional, a doctor, a lawyer, a teacher, an engineer in their own town. That's the way they thought of an education, as a professional, vocationally oriented education. And they came here with that in mind.

- 00:57:25 I'd say one of the great fun developments was to watch such people broaden their perspective to realize that not every educated person fell into one of those professional slots, but that's the way they came to us. And they were earnest about making that vocational goal. I think in the mid years, especially during the countercultural movement, the vocational applicability of their education was a relatively remote goal.
- 00:57:58 I think they were just earnestly probing the meaning of life, the value of society, and indeed, the value and justification of their own education. I think they were turning everything upside down. And they really didn't have the kind of commitment. If they weren't opting out, I think the phrase at that time was capping out, they were at least calling into question those traditional goals.
- 00:58:27 I think in the last three years, there's been a marked change back toward the vocationally oriented student, earnestly pursuing a job at the end of four years. And I suspect that's a reflection of the economic situation in which we find ourselves. And the fact that, emotionally, we are probably exhausted as a nation from calling everything into question for a period of nearly five critical, crucial, cruel years.
- CB: 00:59:05 The last question I have deals with faculty politics. Do we have enough time to get into it?
- DS: 00:59:11 Surely. I'm sure we do.
- CB: 00:59:13 Okay. When, what, and were, as you remember, some of the first things that faculty start to get involved in? I think it is an interesting lead into this. You could relate what you had told me before this interview started that Briggs was the coordinator of most outside politics.
- DS: 00:59:34 Yes. I guess the point that I was making is that in answering that question, I'd probably give you a disappointing answer. Because I think in the first few years we were in existence, most of our politicking was directed outwards from the campus. It was not interneccine.
- 00:59:53 We were so militantly out to influence the opinions and the judgment of the central administration of this university, the legislature of this state, the people of this town, the parents of our potential students, and the academic world at large. We were so devoted to the task of influencing those

people and gaining their good opinion that our politicking was almost all external.

- 01:00:28 And I think that was good. And it was inevitable, given the situation which we found ourselves. I don't wish to say that there wasn't some internal strife. I think it tended to be largely personal, that is personal conflicts. If Briggs was the patriarch, the leader, he also demanded a certain kind of loyalty to that leadership. He expected the people to fall in line or to declare where they were and, eventually, to find their way into line or to change the line.
- 01:01:07 If they didn't, he was ruffled. He could become upset with people. And people could be upset with him because many of them had come with the kind of desire for greater freedom than probably he wanted at that time. I think academic life encourages that kind of freedom because it rests on a premise of academic freedom and latitude.
- 01:01:36 I think people therefore on a personal basis had some difficulties accommodating to that stage of our development and to Briggs' leadership, which demanded loyalty. I think there were issues at stake that people divided over. One of the first issues I recall was that people in the area were afraid that we wouldn't make it as a liberal arts college.
- 01:02:08 And therefore, that we ought to have some vocational courses and interests, like a two-year AA program such as they have at Duluth or such as our community junior colleges offer at the present time. They think we ought to do that. We ought not to be so elitist as to look down upon an effort of that sort.
- 01:02:36 I guess the difficulty we had was that some people felt we should do it. And other people felt that we ought not to do it not because for elitist principles but simply because if we stopped trying to do well, the one thing we were trying to do and diverted our energies elsewhere, we were afraid we'd falter in that main purpose.
- 01:02:59 And I think there was politicking about that. I think some people on campus felt that there ought to be a little bit more attention perhaps paid to popular desire for two-year, more or less, vocational programs. But the main swing of the campus was not behind that.

- 01:03:25 The first non-personal political conflict that I recall coming into existence was a conflict in which I was involved as the Chairman of the Curriculum Committee. And it was a part in a sense of this vocational question. We had been expected to provide not only liberal arts training but pre-professional training because liberal arts training contained the pre-professional training.
- 01:03:57 In addition to that, it was felt pretty much from the start that we ought to offer students the ability or the courses necessary to become accredited to teach Liberal Arts Disciplines in high schools. But this was something that I looked upon as something that could be added to the liberal arts program and demanded of students in addition to their graduation requirements.
- 01:04:23 You know, back the third year of our existence, however, the question of a major in elementary education came up. An elementary education is not a liberal discipline. It's a professional area specialization. And I think this is one of our first major ideological splits on campus. And I was on one side the side in favor of preserving the liberal arts ideal. And the majority came down on the other side in favor of including elementary ed, and it was included.
- 01:05:01 I think that was, kind of, a point where real questions of ideology from then on were raised and also questions of pedagogy and methodology, ways of attaining goals, then I think multiplied in the future. And I think more or less political lines developed, which I might add have always been more or less fluid. You can't point to a person and say and characterize him with a certain word that he fits there.
- 01:05:41 On one issue, he might take one stand because that's where his convictions lead in. And on another issue, he might find himself in quite different company. I don't think the political lines are hard even now on this campus.
- CB: 01:05:58 In this issue of trying to get elementary ed on the campus, as you remember, what were probably the main arguments that they had, that they wanted elementary education?
- DS: 01:06:08 The main arguments that they had, and they were good ones, were that other liberal arts colleges included elementary ed within their majors, and secondly, that it would provide a curriculum for a significant segment of students who wanted the college education in Western

Minnesota. I think those were their two good arguments, and they used them very well.

- CB: 01:06:38 Okay. Well, one more question on that issue, where did Briggs stand on that? Did he—
- DS: 01:06:46 He was firmly in favor of elementary.
- CB: 01:06:48 Elementary.
- DS: 01:06:48 Yeah. He and I were at loggerheads over that.
- CB: 01:06:53 The last politicking type topic I have here is the decision with I think in the second year to not go for a departmental division but rather a more divisional organization.
- DS: 01:07:08 I'm glad you brought that up. I would've neglected that completely. As a matter of fact, that probably had a great deal to do with campus politics. At the time we were in that situation, academic administration was being subjected to variations that were unknown previously.
- 01:07:33 On the west coast, for example, many of the schools that were coming into existence were starting from scratch as we did. And those colleges, instead of developing along traditional departmental lines, tried to create larger academic administrative units that would not complicate the bureaucracy. They organized according to divisional lines. And the divisions most frequently fell out to be as they did here, Humanities, including the Fine Arts, the Social Sciences, Science and Math, and Education.
- 01:08:13 There were some modifications, mind you, but those tended to be the way academic division developed. And they were structures that had some justification in the nature of the discipline and some justification simply in academic administrative experiencing, how to get things done.
- 01:08:34 Our aim here on this campus was very simply stated. In some disciplines, we had only 1, 2, 3 faculty. Rather than create an entire department with a chairman with no members or a chairman with one member, we decided to organize divisionally to minimize the bureaucracy, to minimize the ways in which we imposed administrative responsibilities upon faculty.
- 01:09:05 In other words, to state it as clearly as I can, we wanted the faculty to stay involved in teaching and research and as few

of them as possible to get involved in administrative bureaucracy.

- CB: 01:09:20 Was it an argument at that time that a divisional structure we have now would centralize how we're making decisions on this campus too much? It would not—
- DS: 01:09:33 It wasn't an argument. And since I was a part of that divisional administrative structure from the beginning, I'm probably not the most reliable man to ask. I didn't hear that argument, but I'd be strongly surprised if it didn't exist among people who were afraid of such a centralized structure. Yes. I would imagine that would be precisely the argument that people would raise, who feared that this would centralize things too much.
- 01:10:01 That way, the Dean of the Provost, as eventually he came to be called, could control the entire campus because all he had to touch were four-division chairman rather than 18-departmental chairman, all of whom might be going in different directions. I think that's an argument.
- 01:10:19 I don't know how strongly it's felt. And I probably wouldn't know because as division chairman, that would seem to be, at least in a part of some of my faculty members, to be a kind of a subject that they wouldn't broach. They ought not to. I'm not that firmly committed myself through the structure.
- CB: 01:10:40 Well, I think that is well conclusive—
- DS: 01:10:42 Will that do the job? Good.
- CB: 01:10:43 Thank you.