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Ron Collins Oral History Interview, 1998 August 12

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LNS: We're talking to Ron Collins our distinguished Provost, Vice President for Academic Affairs and it's August 12, 1998 and we're sitting in his office in Welch Hall and we're just chatting a little bit about affairs of the day and we're going to be looking a little bit about when you started at Eastern it was 19 what Ron?

RC: 1965 Larry when I came as Assistant Professor of Chemistry.

LNS: And then you rose through the ranks you were

RC: I became Department Head in the Summer of 1977. I became Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs in the Summer of 1980 and believe it or not, I recently passed my fifteenth anniversary as Provost and I became Provost in early August of 1983.

LNS: Wow.

RC: Not quite as long as you sir but

LNS: No but that's along time.

RC: Long period of time.

LNS: And you came here and the university was very different than it is today.

RC: Indeed. When I first came Larry approximately somewhere between fifty and sixty percent of the students in 1965 were still education majors of one form or another. So although the institution was evolving and going through a quick transition from the Normal School to Eastern Michigan College to Eastern Michigan University, the dominate theme was still education as I say slightly more than half of the students were still preparing to be teachers or to work in education in some form. We were just barely emerging also a graduate enterprise. We had a few graduate programs again in education predominantly. But that wasn't much of a presence. We were primarily an undergraduate school. Research to be honest almost a meaningless factor at that point. Promotions, tenure and so forth were based very, very much on ones teaching and ones service and interaction with students but the research component was very small. And of course we've changed so dramatically in all those ways. We've evolved in terms of breadth and depth and programming and in the graduate area most of all we've just come so far in those 33 years we have a different type of faculty today, we have a faculty you know not that all of them or many or them are internationally renowned scholars but they have much greater scholarly capability and accomplishment today so that dimension has emerged. The facilities, you could hardly recognize the university today and certainly what's right around the corner in terms of our facilities compared to what they were in '65. But again, my first year
here we were as I recall between 8,000 and 8,500 students. So of course, we were basically 1/3 of the size we are now. So you wouldn't expect to have the same facilities that we have now. Just again, the changes are so dramatic and I really have to say although most people will argue that change always carries with it more positives than negatives, you really have to look to find the negatives. The changes that have happened to EMU in my 33 years here have been overwhelmingly positive. You know some would argue first and foremost that we've lost some of that intimate, small institution feeling that we had then. Probably true but you know even at 8,000 you're not really a "small" institution and we were certainly beyond the point of intimacy then. I think there are various ways we've continued to retain attention of the individual. The slogan you've used over the years how we measure our success in terms of the impact we have on the life of the individual student. I think things like that still characterize our caring attitude and as I say the evolution has been very positive one.

LNS: When you think about the institution, you came close the beginning of the Sponberg administration. University had moved from being under a State Board to its own Board of Regents. Sponberg was the newly appointed president after a long term by Elliott. Who was relieved of his command by the Board and rehired by the university for a year until Sponberg came. As you look, you've seen Sponberg, you've seen Brickley, you've seen Porter and Shelton as presidents. You've seen, as you just said, the growth of the institution. What's at the core of Eastern? Even though we've changed in some ways a lot of people feel we haven't changed. We still talk about our cores, teacher education preparation or educational administration preparation or educator preparation, we still have this big shadow even though it's 16 percent of our student enrollment, we still have this big College of Education shadow over the institution have we become different in spite of what we've done?

RC: Well we've certainly become different but I think maybe to borrow a journalism perspective, I think the headliner the lead line though continues to be what we've been, what we are and I think what we'll continue to be in the area of the preparation of educators. That has been our historic strength, it is still the thing more than anything else for which we are known. I've always been proud of that and to kind of link it in a personal way that I feel says the whole message if you will. When I first became Provost 15 years ago, there was absolutely no doubt that the group that was most nervous about my selection and the group that was in many ways fearful of how I would you know carry out my tenure as Provost was the College of Education. Because candidly, Physical Scientists are often seen being at odds with educators who believe strongly in methodologies and concepts as opposed to content. But I'm proud of the fact that from Day One I recognized that was a great strength of Eastern Michigan
University and although I'm sure there are some in the College of Ed who would say I should have done more than I've done. I've always worked in the direction of maintaining that strength to the best of my ability. Because that's the core image of Eastern Michigan University.

LNS: But the strength of College of Ed has always been at least as I look at the History of the institution, the fact that there's been a strong College of Arts and Sciences behind it even before there was a College of Arts and Sciences that the process kinds of courses were always secondary to the content courses. Would you say that's a fair assessment?

RC: Oh I think that's still very much true. In my view though the process or methodology courses have become quite a bit more sophisticated. They have course draw on aspects of technology that were unknown then. I think they draw more on the true research about learning. So I think the sophistication has enhanced there. But you can't be a highly successful educator purely with methodology. You can't be a highly successful educator purely with content. So the blending of those two things is still so critical and I think the added strength that has happened in the College of Arts and Sciences has only worked hand in hand with the growth and evolution of the College of Ed.

LSN: So as we move from being a college of education you know a total college of education, we have the ready elements to become a college of arts and sciences because we have attracted so. As you look back, let's take faculty for a minute. They were unionized when you came here?

RC: No that's right.

LNS: Take me through the history of the union and why you saw, why did the union arise and what's been the up side and the down side of being unionized?

RC: Again coming in 1965 my first nine years here until 1974, it was in a non-union environment as far as the faculty was concerned. The union contract with the AAUP came into being in 1974. It's now been with us for 24 years. I think the reasons Larry as to why the faculty voted to unionize were very traditional, very standard reasons in the sense that union movement always gain their strength when there's a climate in which the employee grew rather it's faculty or machinist or what it may be. That employee group feels a couple of things. First of all, that their non-economic value, their non-economic involvement is not what it should be and secondly, I think there's almost inevitably an economic component. I think all those things were real in the early 70's in particular. See I mentioned coming here with an enrollment of somewhere over 8,000 in '65. By 1970, we were 20,000 students. That's the first time we passed
the 20,000 line so that growth was explosive. We were hiring you know significant numbers of faculty, 50 - 75 faculty a year were being hired in those years. It was just an unbelievably exciting yet in its own way the growth was almost out of control and then suddenly, we peaked starting in about 1970. And even begin a dissent that leads to the point at which you enter the picture in the mid 70's and your called upon early in your career to do some things about admissions and so forth. I any event, as we started to slide a bit in enrollment you know, the obvious things started to happen. The raises in the eyes of the faculty. Particularly so many of these young people who had come on Board during that explosive growth period. You know they felt that they should be getting more out of this. They felt in general that this institution was growing in numbers but not growing in ways of professional maturity that involved them they way they wanted. Thus leads to the vote to unionize and you know I'll say quite candidly, when the vote was taken, union vs. non-union and actually there were two union choices which is as I recall AAUP and MEA I think was the other and then "no union". I you may think I'm making this up but I do remember the figures when that election was taken there were 128 faculty who voted "no union", I was one of those 128.

LNS: How many faculty?

RC: Well you know at time there would have been basically the same number there are now, 7 - 800 faculty, something like that. So clearly there was a sentiment overall that we should be unionized.

LNS: Did any of it have anything to do with the way the administration was structured?

RC: Well yes definitely. It's not only a question of the economic factors and did the faculty have enough of a voice through its faculty council or whatever form it was in but there were some serious questions about the administration. It came at a time, Larry, as I think you know, when President Sponberg's tenure as president was nearing an end.

LNS: What do you think created that?

RC: Well I've always characterized Harold Sponberg to people and I'm not going to say I was a close friend. I knew President Sponberg at that time because he still interestingly had a style in which he got to know an amazing number of faculty. I've said many times if president Sponberg would just show up at things you'd have some seminar in the sciences or something you'd look around and Sponberg was coming in the room. He had kind of a presence a personality, he got to know people well. But the truth is I always thought Sponberg was a great leader during that growth period, '65 through '70. Ideal match. But the moment that things started
leveling off and going down, frankly, I don't think he was such a good president and

LNS: What are the reasons for that?

RC: Well his thinking was largely expansionist as to forward movement. He loved new programs. He loved new ideas. He loved moving further than we had been the year before. He just really struggled with turning any of those things around and I think he became uncomfortable in that role. I think it led to an erosion frankly of confidence in him as president. He really was a fine educator, great intellect and during the period of growth a great president. But it all started to unravel fairly quickly. That's happening at the same time faculty are talking about unionizing. Both are sort of coming to a peak very shortly before you arrived.

LNS: The economy is going south.

RC: That's right. And candidly, it was coming at a period that was to persist for the next five, six years where several times there were editorials appeared in newspapers and articles about maybe EMU should be closed. We were often in a grouping with Lake Superior and one or two others.

LNS: Plus a decline in the enrollment.

RC: That's right. Declining enrollment and an erroneous perception which you and I have already talked about that somehow our day had come and gone because at our core was this focus on education. And some people were so enamored with the explosive growth they wanted to believe that wasn't going to be important anymore so ergo, EMU wasn't important anymore but I'm very pleased to say that through the creative work of individuals like yourself who enter and through the admissions policies and other things that we do we start to turn that around and John Porter arrives.

LNS: Well before we get on Porter, let me just do a little more with the faculty union. The issues of the faculty become issues of security, governance was that an issue?

RC: Well I think governance is always an issue. Interestingly, twenty-four years later, today it's still an issue and there's always going to be a pursuit on the part of the faculty to get more clearly defined input structures involvement and a greater level of power in decision making. That was very true then, it's still true today.

LNS: Now the Board of Regents hired Sponberg, they're very supportive, ultimately, the Board turns against him. Is that sort of?
RC: You know it may sound surprising for someone who's been in a role like I have for as long as I have. At that point in my career, I have to admit, I just wasn't very sophisticated about reading, interpreting, understanding things like that. In 1974, '75, when Harold Sponberg does leave, I'm in my tenth year as a professor. I was frankly, head over heels in the work of the professor, the standard role. I was always very excited about being an educator a teacher a faculty member and I by the same token I was always aware, I knew what was going on, but as I said, I just didn't read things. Now or in the intervening years, I've come to understand much more clearly what was really going on and as you say, the Board kind of turned its back on Sponberg. Sponberg in turn, frankly what were rumored at least, to be some fairly serious personal problems and habits that were affecting his presidency and it just was no longer a workable situation.

LNS: So Sponberg resigns, gets sick, they think he has a heart attack and take him to the hospital. Bruce Nelson was Vice President for Academic Affairs during the first part. Any comments about Bruce's style of leadership?

RC: You know again I think Bruce, we're all products of our environment and where we started_. Bruce started as what we then called Vice President for Instruction at a much earlier time he started when we were a much different university. He grew with the times but he was always very much reflective of that former day, I think, when we were predominantly a teacher preparation institution. Bruce was always a hard working guy, personable guy. I still like Bruce to this day, but once again, I don't know that he was properly cast as the person who should have been leading academics during that period of time. He seemed to work well with Sponberg in those days again, I wasn't sophisticated enough to appreciate how important that is but clearly, the Chief Academic Officer and the president have to work well together and the two of them always seemed to do that.

LNS: Profit, Lou Profit was?

RC: I really didn't know Profit well. Gary Hawks enters the picture during that period of time.

LNS: Has a quick rise to the top.

RC: Oh yes, very much so. I mean even from a detached view of a faculty member then you could very quickly recognize that Hawks had sort of popped up high in the pecking order so to speak. And again, Gary was a very high in the pecking order, so to speak. And Gary again was a very personable individual. An individual who, the thing I always remember
about Gary Hawks from the first or second time I ever met the guy, he always called me by name. He seemed to have a genuine interest in knowing you, knowing about you. Still see and converse with Gary to this day. But clearly, he was playing a major role in the internal dynamics of what was going on. But interestingly, he doesn't become Acting President of course.

LNS: Never.

RC: Which in retrospect, one might ask that question, why he didn't. It is eventually Ralph Gilden who becomes

LNS: And why did Ralph Gilden with all and student affairs guy, Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid at that time. Admissions is one of the big problems. If you look through the Board minutes you see a chipping away at anything the president or vice presidents say, keep hammering, Tim Dyer joins the Board during that period and you could just see a hammering, a hammering, a hammering and always a question is there a need for more of this, why aren't you getting us and I don't know if this permeates the campus in terms of faculty situation but this is very apparent to me as I read the minutes. And all of a sudden, there's nothing about Sponberg being forced out, Sponberg leaves. I think it's pretty common knowledge that he had a alcoholic problem or alcohol problem or becoming an alcoholic and embarrasses the university in a couple of situations and there innuendo to that and a couple of other things. All of a sudden you see Gilden appearing and he doesn't make any sense.

RC: Well Larry, my own personal interpretation then and to this day remains the same. I think in that tumultuous period and the fall from power if you will of an individual whose kind of personal charisma hard driving style expansionist mentality, all those things, had kind of represented the very vibrancy of change and forward progress. I always felt that there must've been a strong desire to put in as Interim or Acting President someone who A) had a very longstanding connection to the institution.

LNS: So Ralph Gilden sure did.

RC: So Ralph an individual again who had devoted his life and would do that until he retired to Eastern Michigan a traditionalist in many, many ways. I think those were all characteristics, someone who is very well known on the campus, whether you liked him or disliked him, so to speak. Everybody knew who Ralph Gilden was. I think it was a nice safe comfortable caretaker type of appointment. One that might soothe the feelings that surrounded the departure of Harold Sponberg. Those were always the things that I looked at. And that's not to say that Ralph Gilden was a guy who had a lot of ideas and I'm not saying he could not have
contributed in more positive ways. But he fit the model of what was needed to calm the waters.

LNS: Do you think it was also he was highly controllable might have been an issue?

RC: Probably. Although again I have to say in fairness, I knew Gilden as a faculty member to someone who headed up admissions and you just not clear that you know how a person operates. I would guess though that for Ralph to get put into the position he would have both a great sense of indebtedness to the people who put him there. He never seemed to be an individual who stepped out totally by himself on things. So control most probably is a good word.

LNS: Now during this period the faculty unionize, we have the beginnings of the union. Who emerges as the leaders of the faculty union?

RC: Well quite interestingly the person who becomes president in the second year of the union and who is president of the union at the time of the only real strike that ever occurred at the start of the '77 - '78 year is none other than Judy Johnson, who is later to be Associate Provost after I'm Provost. Judy at that time was a professor of English and very quickly had risen to be a leader among the union people. She most of all I think was the individual who was really trying to move the union forward. There were others obviously,

LNS: Morris Laney?

RC: Yeah, Laney was another voice. I think in truth Judy influenced more people than Laney did overall.

LNS: As you read the history though, she may be more behind the scenes than the documents that I've looked at reveal. The issues, the union, the faculty vote, they become a union, the issues are still very strong in terms of economic, the faculty, there's a faculty, it's not a faculty council in those days, it's a faculty assembly.

RC: No I actually think the name was still faculty council. I think so. It was certainly a different configuration and composition. I tend to think that was the name that persists.

LNS: So we have a faculty council and what is it like in the early days? We're still in the Sponberg period here. Did they have any power, did the faculty union have any power?
RC: Well as far as the council, I think the council had relatively little power. It was more of a true dialogue body. It discussed issues, I characterized earlier that President Sponberg often just showed up at things. Believe it or not in those days, President Sponberg attended all the faculty council meetings. Today, I think that would be an unworkable situation for the president to be sitting there. But the council was largely a discussion body in the best of intellectual senses. The union of course, in its infancy was emergent and from the very beginning though we had some of the same difficulties in resolving those two sectors and to this day as you know Larry, there are people still troubled by our faculty council vs. the AAUP and who should be involved in what. My recollection is not that clear in terms of the first three to five years in exactly what were the central issues. But I don't know that it changes a whole lot.

LNS: But does the union change the campus at all? Do you remember things changing?

RC: Definitely and I can put it into very tangible terms. I mentioned earlier that I became Head of the Chemistry Department in Summer of 1977. In the brief time between 1974 and 1977, three years that the union was in existence, Clark Spike who was my Department Head in chemistry referenced on a very much continuing basis how his job was changing by the day so to speak and that virtually all the changes were things that were driven by the contract. Suddenly, there were formal requirements for a whole committee structure in every department.

LNS: All of which had to be invented.

RC: All of which had to be invented. And at that point in time, remember the union hasn't proven itself. So even though there were only 128 "no union" votes, I think there was a greater depth than that of individuals who were at best sort of skeptical about what the union would produce. So I would remember how Clark would call meetings and frankly, we would talk about well, we're obligated to have this committee or that committee and very early, you might want to think about this carefully, very early, the issue of instructional productivity really arises for the first time. You know I can honestly say the first six, eight years I was here, I don't know if I would have known what FYES divided by FTEF was, but suddenly that started to appear. The union forced a big committee that operated for more than a year reviewing productivity and faculty resources and Clark used to say to symbolize it to us, suddenly everything we do seems to be based much more on numbers than it used to be. Now that's one man's opinion and I'm getting a lot of my view through that not totally but a lot of it. But of course eventually in the summer of 1977 without any anticipation without any health reason Clark Strike announces that he's stepping down as department head. That of course is the opening into which I stepped and I
very soon began to appreciate what Clark said about the structures. So
the biggest immediate change is a dramatic increase in I guess what I
have to say honestly is the bureaucracy of how the academic segment of
the university is operated. Not that we didn't always have committees but
we had a lot more of them and maybe that bureaucracy forces the
administration as well to become more numbers oriented, more
quantitative because the way you often attempt to rebut arguments that
this or that isn't getting down is of course to pile on more data and say well
here we can prove this isn't the case. So the changes were very obvious
very early on.

LNS: Now you as a faculty member did your life change much?

RC: Mine, I honestly have to say Larry didn't in a direct way since I really
wasn't in tune with it at that stage of my life. I certainly was not a person
who sought out any role within the department in which I represented the
union. I didn't go to meetings of the union whenever they were held. And
it wasn't that I was trying to make some dramatic statement about my
beliefs, I just was involved in a lot of other things and that was not a
priority for me. The question I think you can never answer about unions
and I still say this today, as people would ask me what you are asking, it
may be in a more direct and specific way, well did you immediately get
bigger raises than you had gotten before? I think the answer to that
question is no. But in the climate that we were in then, one of uncertainty,
your leadership was emerging in terms of admissions and enrollment, you
can never answer the question would you have done even worse if there
were not a union? I think probably the union from the very beginning did a
reasonable job of looking after the economic welfare of its people. Were
there dramatic changes? Did we get 14% where we used to get 4%? No.
But I think unions tend to be very successful at that sort of thing.

LNS: Now are students during that period as you recall the campus, very
different than they are today?

RC: Well I think.

LNS: We're out of the sixties now, it's seventies early seventies.

RC: I think the students today are obviously different in so many ways. First
and foremost of course then was a very traditional age student body. I
mean, it was a student body of 18 - 22 year olds so to speak. If you had
an adult student in your class that was a real phenomenon. That's
changed totally.

LNS: And this is the undergraduate because the graduate program is just
starting to emerge.
RC: Undergraduate...graduate programs are just. The teaching types who were in graduate programs probably didn't change much because teachers had always been coming back for additional certification and that.

LNS: And the faculty's focus was still on teaching.

RC: Well it was still on teaching but the researchers scholarly direction certainly was emerging already in the late sixties and it became much more of a reality then with unionization because the contract defines very clearly; instructional effectiveness, research and scholarly activity and service. Those things have been there from the first contract. And it becomes a defined element of evaluation. Does that mean you immediately go to high production expectations? No, but you could no longer in truth get promoted without some role, some involvement in scholarly activity and research. So that changes. Going back to the students, I don't think there's any question Larry that we have in general seen over the years and I know some faculty would dispute this, I think we have seen a strengthening of the student body. I think we get better students in the 90's, better relatively than we did in the 70's. You remember when you came, maybe some of the accusations about if you were alive and breathing we would admit you maybe they were correct.

LNS: So the student body did deteriorate in the 70's.

RC: Yes. Yes it did.

LNS: It wasn't that the numbers increased alone. One of the things I found when I came here was contrary to anybody's knowledge, including my own during the interview process was until I was here, we were never using the total formula for admitting students. So all of the ACT scores because of the deep concerns over the shrinking enrollment, they stopped using those and therefore, students were being admitted on GPA's and if they came from an inferior school with inflated sense of achievement, if they came with B's and A's without any real rooting in reality of what a B or an A was worth. So these students came here and they were really remedial students. Some of them didn't even have college-focused courses because of the fact that they weren't using. So the big pressure in the university to retain this enrollment led to some abdication of responsibility in evaluating the. So we had a large group of students here who really did have some problems but during this period of time there's some student unrest during the Sponberg era. Students take over, it's not so much the war it seems to be related to racial concerns.
RC: Oh yeah, all of those elements were there as they were clearly present in society. And I was going to say too Larry, all of this was happening against a societal backdrop in terms of education, which just promoted endlessly the theme you had to go to college and that's fueling this rapid expansion of the regional university.

LNS: All of the baby boomers. There's so many more people.

RC: That's right. Population, the push to go to college, it all is coming together. And at one point it gets so easy to get more students but then we begin, the minute it starts getting a little tougher, then we begin to weaken a bit in how we're selecting and judging. And as you know, it doesn't take very long until there's a significant change. Did I as a faculty member see the precipitous or dramatic change? Interestingly, I don't know that I can say that I did. I doubt that you'll ever find many faculty if they're over the age of 40, who don't reminisce about how the students were better when I was younger and so forth. So I think that's kind of a common theme. Also in my field, Chemistry, there is a certain reality check that's involved there. We have never dealt with huge numbers of general education students. We tended also always have significant withdrawals and failures and so it wasn't quite so obvious but yes, many, many faculty seemed to be deeply concerned about the erosion and the quality of the students. But again, one Laurence Smith enters the picture in the mid-seventies and you know I'm not, I don't want to exaggerate your role, but clearly, you had to have a central leadership role in my view in getting us back on track. And then along comes the John Porter era and of course, John has a strong push in enrollment and with you working with him, I think we get those things straightened out.

LNS: My focus on the mid-seventies, I want to come back to that, but my focus was really sort of ironic, where we turn to it again. In your push right now for retention, in terms of that it was hard to attract people when we couldn't retain them. And the message out in the marketplace was so strongly against going to Eastern from those who didn't want to stay here wasn't that people were deterring people from coming here on some conspiratorial college you know high school guidance counselor level was basically anytime they talked to any of their friends who went to Eastern, they were leaving here in great numbers. So it wasn't that we, a lot of the enrollment problems wasn't coming just from not admitting enough students, it was from not keeping enough. We'll come back to that in just a second as we get into the Brickley era. So you're a faculty member, you rise through the ranks right? You become a full professor. You come here as an assistant professor. You're an associate five years later and a few more years later you're a professor. Something like that right?

RC: Something like that.
LNS: That's good. You feel good about it. You win a teaching award.

RC: Right. To this day if you ask me what is the most significant recognition that I've ever received in my career, I would with total honesty say it was being named as the first recipient of The EMU Distinguished Faculty Award for Teaching. And I don't mind saying, it hope it doesn't sound too egotistical, there have been a number of deserving winners since, but there's only one winner that was first. And I'm very pleased that the time, circumstance, chances whatever put me in a position to do that. But I really do cherish that to this day. It's a recognition by the institution to which I've dedicated my professional life that at least in the judgements of some people, you know, I was an exceptional teacher and that's what I strive to be.

LNS: So what made you an exceptional teacher? No time for modesty.

RC: I don't think that it's very allusive in a lot of ways. To this day, I'm still a very organized person as an administrator. I was an exceptionally organized faculty member quite simply. You'll say well what the hell difference does that make? It makes a lot of difference. I always had a leg up, I thought, in my ability to design, organize, plan the way a course was going to unfold. Stick to those sort of syllabi and schedules and I think I gave students first and foremost, a great sense of comfort about what they were going to encounter, how the course was going to go. I think there's on question, I've always displayed you know an intensity. I sense that I'm enjoying and having fun with what I'm doing. I think those things more than any exceptional knowledge of chemistry come into play. I'm a good, solid chemist. I was then, I still am or could be certainly. But that's not gonna separate you as a teacher. It's a lot of those other things I could motivate students and I could make them achieve at the level that they are really capable of achieving. Personality plays a role in it, but it is this more than anything in my mind, it is organization. Many educational experiences fail because and I don't mean you want to organize to the point that you say four weeks from today on Friday half way through the lecture, we're gonna be talking about this or that. But you've got to provide an organization that lets the student know clearly at all times where they are and the path.

LNS: You sort of predate this great debate that's going on know. I imagine also knowing where you work that part of your success was that you don't leave anything to be assumed so you start and you build and you build with great clarity at each step, which is probably good in chemistry, maybe not so good in analyzing a play or something but it's.
RC: I think that's exactly right and it's interesting that you would say that the way you do because way back when I was in elementary school was used to have as a penmanship exercise in those days, you had to do these spirals, it was somehow to get your penmanship working. But in my own mind, I characterized the teaching learning process that way. You've always got to be moving forward but you've got to constantly rolling back and reinforcing and building in sort of repetitive loops. Once again, I think the facts would be there to support it. I think my ability to go into a three credit hour course that met three times a week and to have a really strong coherent Monday, Wednesday, Friday message that kept building I think those things were very much an element of my success. I do want to say this though and it's just not the feeling that I've got to praise someone else. I had the incredible good fortune to be hired by and to work for a man, Clark Spike who if I can use the phrase, a throw back to another era, it's certainly true today but Clark as a department head, used to do something that's you know probably didn't happen all the time in those years and unfortunately today probably never happens because of time and other things. In my first couple of years, Clark used to routinely pop into my office and ask me how's it going in this class or that, how are you approaching this subject or that? And here was sort of a father figure to me, my boss, if you will, in those days, and we used to sit and talk and it promoted a great professional relationship and Clark would do things I don't know to do this day was he just saying he'd say things like boy that's really a neat way of doing that. You know I'll incorporate that into the next time I teach the course and he would tell me things about how you know I taught this for the last 15 years or something, I've always found that A, B or C works. So I had a great mentor, a great tutor, someone who believed in teaching, believed in its importance and I really think found in me a really pupil if you will in the evolution of Collins as a faculty member so he was immensely important to me.

LNS: It's nice to have those mentors. Any other mentors?

RC: The faculty member in those days with whom I was the closest in the chemistry department

Side 2

RC: Faculty member who's in the office next to mine in Strong where I started my career was Omer Rothins. Omer was to go on to become a Dean of the Graduate School in that era of the 70's. Omer was

LNS: Was he the first Dean of the Graduate School?

RC: He may have been the first person that truly had that title.
LNS: Earl Stutt was ahead of him, sort of

RC: Yeah that's right. I think with that title, I believe you're correct. Omer's first. In any event, Omer was sort of an elder statesman in chemistry. Offices side by side and our teaching patterns were very similar. I had great respect for Omer too. Omer's personality was totally different than mine. He never smiled. He never would have told a joke or said anything humorous in class. But he fundamentally was a damn good chemical educator who thought a lot about concepts and all that. Along with Clark Spike, Omer influenced a whole lot of what I did. There was to be one more person Larry, but it comes as my career moves forward. And that's John Moore who was here in Chemistry Department for almost 20 years. John and I eventually collaborate on a textbook. I'd like to say that book made us both millionaires, it didn't. But we collaborated on general chemistry textbook but John was another individual who loved to talk about teaching. So you know, I've had a tremendous amount of support in my life, tremendous sources of ideas and today what all that means more than anything else to this day. I do know what the life of a faculty member is like. I do know what it takes to be successful as a facilitator of learning, if you will. I still worry a bit about the trend in higher education that we get more and more administrators who didn't live that life. And you know, I think that unless you've been there, maybe you don't totally know what it's like. So I think that's been very helpful to me. Does that mean I'm too "pro faculty" today? I don't think so. But it does mean that I understand what a faculty member's life is like on a daily basis and it gets very helpful.

LNS: I think if you lose that, if you don't have any sense of that you really don't have the sense of the university.

RC: Absolutely.

LNS: Let's focus one more thing on, who are some of the stars among the faculty in the 60's. Any of them come to mind? There must've been some others. It's a hard question to answer

RC: Yeah it is but there are a few names and they're names that we would still recognize in more recent of modern times because I think outstanding teachers tend to remain outstanding teachers through much of their career. One of the most exciting people that I got to know early on in the business of teaching was an individual named Rinehart Whithkey in History. Sort of a crusty guy, if you will,

LNS: Even as a young guy?

RC: Oh yeah. He didn't really change much over the years. Dynamic guy for whom the students had exceptional praise in general. He excelled in the
large lecture classes, did things that really tended to captivate the interest of the students. I always liked just as I put it, wherever Whitkey was, something was happening. He was that sort of guy. He provoked, he cajoled, he led in his own way as an educator. He's one. He wasn't here when I arrived but he arrives very shortly after, Bill Fennel in the Biology Department, another exceptional educator that I admired through my