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William Shelton Oral History Interview, 1998 April 3

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EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
HISTORY

INTERVIEW
WITH
WILLIAM SHELTON
Eighteenth President
Interview with President Shelton on a history of EMU and his Presidency, April 3, 1998.

LNS: So, what sort of Institution did you inherit?

WS: Well, I think I inherited an institution that had gone through a decade that very much was characterized by the leadership of the institution. And I think it had been an effective leadership. It had been a leadership that had a very specific structured format in which it wanted to view the University. So I think from that standpoint, it was an Institution that had an order and a structure that had been determined to be appropriate for the conditions and the times in which it was functioning.

LNS: Do you think it was an institution that was personality driven or systems driven?

WS: I think it was an institution that was driven not by personality but by a very formal beaurecratic process. Everything was defined in terms of, objectives, goals, tactics, those kinds of things. And it was not a free-flowing institution, which it probably shouldn't have been. But it was an institution that, whether it was the right direction or not, there was a very specific order of things that were going to take place or were going to try to take place. And were going to be interpreted in a very specific way.

LNS: Do you feel that locked you in in certain ways?

WS: No. I came in believing naively that there was a desire for this institution to go in a different way. However, admittedly I misinterpreted some of the underpinnings, which were driving that desire as it was imparted to me. But I heard from the Board during the interview process, a desire that this Institution become a more regional, national, external, outside Ypsilanti kind of place. I heard this. I read it in the position description. However, I later learned that that was, they were defining more a Presidential role than they were an institutional commitment.

LNS: Did you find when you came here that there was support for perpetuating, among the staff and the faculty, the directions we were going in?

WS: I don't know. I found some fear, maybe fear of the unknown and maybe fear of the known here.

LNS: The known being who the president was or the incoming president?

WS: No not necessarily related to the President, but the power structure. And that there was certainly some beliefs that this Presidency was structured in such a way for specific reasons. I think this would be hard to write delicately. Because, and again, I don't know.
LNS: Obviously there are a lot of expectations, there were lot of players, lot of people had ambitions, a President comes, a President leaves, people see an opportunity for themselves in that kind of a change. Porter was described as a president who saved the University. When you look back, do you think that would be a fair accolade to give him?

WS: I have the greatest respect for Dr. Porter. I think the reality is that the University survives, maybe it doesn't always flourish, but it survives in spite of the leadership. Thank goodness very few, if any of us can actually destroy this Institution. It's bigger. So I don't know if it's a matter of survival. It may have been a matter of there were some crisis that required some decisions. But no more than I believe that this Institution in the decade of the 90's could not have existed without Bill Shelton's kind of leadership. I don't think in any part. Admittedly, now maybe very early on in American Higher Education the personality of one person could decide whether that Institution because they needed to secure money from a church to make it, or whatever it might be. I think this Institution would have survived and did survive the turbulence of all the periods in its life when it had the down moments. And that's not to minimize the importance of leadership. But it is to acknowledge the inner strength of the Institution. It is stronger. How it would have looked and would it have changed perhaps under different leader. But I think the Institution has an inner strength that exceeds what the leadership can give.

LNS: One of the interesting things as I have researched the history of the Institution no President has had an easy time. Probably Charles McKinney had an easy time but he had a war and probably in the history of the University is one of its outstanding Presidents. It seems that this Institution has always been very political. Where you might have a bureaucratic, this has always been political bureaucratic vs. some school; I came from a conspiratorial bureaucratic. The school has never been able to escape that. From its earliest days, from day one it has always had a tremendous amount of influence buffeting about that. It's been a political, it hasn't responded to trends as much as it has to other pressures. Second interesting thing, I wonder if you know this Institution is like having a child where no matter what you do, you can make the child more or less of what he or she is. I'm not sure how different you can make the child. It seems that this Institution has been able to be stretched and pushed to go in different directions. Basically, if you could scrape away and let me account for inflation, in a sense if you could account for the differences in the era, this Institution has been on a path that is pretty hard to remold.

WS: I think it has. I would describe it as it has an elasticity. We try to drive it in another way but it will always come back. I mean we try to take the emphasis off of it so much, still 149 years later, we're still about Education, the preparation of education. So yes, we do try to take it in a different direction but it just kind of springs back. When that particular leader has made his or her imprint on the
Institution, that imprint may have changed just a bit but that Institution just comes right back to the basic.

LNS: Actually what I'm saying. There's a snap back. There's a cord to it. The way it was started was political, the land there was an investment. What about the Brickley administration are you familiar at all?

WS: Very little. I've had the chance to talk to Justice Brickley a time or two. I heard the stories of how the appointment came about and those kinds of things. But in a sense, what I came away with is that during those periods it was kind of a transition period and that no great positive change nor no great negative change actually took place in the Institution during that time. It was just kind of a drifting on and while there was some internal dissention related to it, I'm not sure it's anything that suggests to me. Again, I think it goes back to the leader in an Institution like this can only help it or harm it a very small amount. And so I don't view any particular leader of the modern era as drastically changing this Institution. There very well could've been back in the very early years a leader when it was a very small Institution that could arbitrarily say we're going to do this and it changed the Institution. What we've done in this nine years is it's going to be known for three or four things. Which we can talk about if you want. But, yes, we've done some facility differences, and yes, the logo has changed. But in terms of long term probably the facilities will be the single most definable. We would hope it was about learning and all those other things but the reality is during Dr Porter's era, I think he gave stability in a very structured format that carried him through some difficult economical times. He made decisions related to the cost of tuition. He made a series of decisions during his time and certainly ours was markedly different. I mean Dr. Porter was very, very clear in saying that he wanted tuition to be as low as possible. And I talked about this and he thought that it was imperative that this be an Institution that would keep its tuition as low as possible. I came in and while I respected his decision during his time, I believe we had to go the other way, we had to significantly go the other way because the lack of resources made it very difficult to do some other things. So I think each President in the time that they are in, has to make the decisions that he or she believes fits that time and the circumstances that they are in.

LNS: Other than the buildings, what other significant changes do you think occurred during your tenure as President or are occurring because you are still here?

WS: Very little. As far as really what I like to think inside, internally. I like to believe that we have changed our focus or are changing our focus a little bit to this learning dimension. And while I will preach it the entire time I'm here, if you really put me on the spot and say prove it's changed, I can't. I think certainly the fundraising has taken on a different dimension. I didn't say better; I said different dimension. I think that's one of the other changes, a foundation regardless of how it may currently work. I do believe the Institution needed a clearer area for increasing the support. I do believe that the Grants and Contracts, the fact that
basically in that particular case I just said I want to see a $10 million goal achieved in three years. It happened and there’s a particular case that it could’ve happened at another time. But this one happened because the President said to the head of ORD., I’m giving you a challenge. I want to see $10 Million in Grants and Contracts in three years and of course we got there much faster than that. So that’s all I did on that so you know. I think on those few kinds of pieces I certainly believe, and again it’s not a significant thing in a lot of ways, but I had a little more national connection. I was a little more known nationally in Higher Education than some of my predecessors. Because I’d been in Higher Education for most of my career. And by virtue of that, I believe Eastern's name became a bit more prominent in some of the national circles, whether it was ASCU or the NCAA or some of those others simply because I was already known and knew people. Consequently I could do a little bit in terms of making sure that our national recognition within the academy was a little higher; that we moved out of just the local community and we began to talk at a different level. And that's not to suggest that former Presidents couldn't do that. But I think the perspective of the former Presidents, and their experiences, and their backgrounds were not tied into the Higher Education community as much. So consequently they did not, maybe they did not have that built-in piece if they already knew a lot of these people and so consequently as it turned out we could get the Institution's name.

LNS: Looking back at your Presidency looking ahead, what would you change if you could've changed it? This is what, your ninth year?

WS: Yeah I'm finishing my ninth year. I've thought about that. Let see, what would I do differently? I think I might have worked harder at gaining a consensus or trying to gain a consensus and I'm not sure I could on some of my initiatives within the Institution. And not just having assumed that when you talked about learning that everybody would just automatically say "yeah that's a great goal." I think that I didn’t understand how important it was for me to have created some partnerships. I may have moved a bit too quickly and just assumed that this would be something that no one, no one could disagree with this direction for the Institution. I think I made some never-to-be-recorded decisions that made sure that the structure of this Institution was not abused or misused. And in a sense who knows, it may have been pulling this Institution a little bit out of the political, the local political arena may be my greatest contribution to this Institution. That came with a price and still comes with a price. Because I'm not tied to in that structure and I find it a bit fascinating now that when certain issues arise in the State political process that certain people don't even contact me about what my position, the institutions position is, but they still look for guidance elsewhere. And that tells me there is still a political system that no longer can have the impact on the Institution but is still trying to function it. And that doesn't mean that I don't think that we have a local responsibility. We do. However, I think that we had to say that this is a Regional in many parts in many ways a National and International Institution and we have to be mindful of our roles in those arenas as well as the local.
LNS: When you look back in your first days on campus and the Faculty were picketing. What were they picketing about?

WS: I asked them. I'd been here approximately a month. One day I hear there's going to be a march on Welch Hall or to Welch Hall. I go down there and they were carrying signs and the signs had something about hearing them or something like that some message I forget at the moment. I thought I would never forget that. I went out to the group that was out there and I asked, I said, what's the issue? Well, I was told the only purpose, the only purpose, was to just remind me, you know, of the importance of the Faculty. I was told that. However, there was just one basic flaw in what they shared with me. Why did they call the press? They had notified all the press that they were going to march on the President that day. And so I have to admit and I realized right then when they said, we're only here to say, you know, we want you to be mindful of the Faculty and etc., etc., etc. The question was never answered of why did you call the press? Perhaps it was to try to put pressure or to try to embarrass. So I always felt somewhat early on, because the one thing that this Faculty had that I really don't know to this day that they ever understood, they had a President who would've put his entire life on the line for the Faculty if we could have been partners. And somehow or another from the very start I felt that, not the Faculty in general, but the Union Leadership very candidly wanted to make sure that this President or perhaps no President was going to get that opportunity. They had one person in the Presidency, not saying that other Presidents went the same way, who was willing to take on all the political issues, that was willing to take on any kind of issue, if they had said we're part of a team. My greatest disappointment here is quite simple. I was never accepted as an educator and that is very distressing to me, that just because I'm not teaching a class that I'm assumed that I'm an administrator or that I'm not an educator. Most administrators are in this environment because they believe in education. And I think that it's something that's a sad commentary on American Higher Education that there's always this projection that if you're an administrator, you don't care about education. My god, that's why we're here. We care about education. And my greatest disappointment in is that I never felt that I was given the opportunity to be a part of the educators because we are one group of people.

LNS: Why would you feel the Faculty didn't want the President part of the educational? You seem as an educator.

WS: I'm not sure, you see I think that the union...

LNS: The union?

WS: I really sensed from the very start that because if there cannot be an adversarial role, I can only assume they felt that it would jeopardize the organization. Now that does not mean, I mean one of the greatest lessons I've learned here is working
within a Union environment even though I had been in many Institutions of higher education. And some had some Unions. I had never been in as formal a Union environment as we had here. And I have certainly learned that you can work within that environment. You can't work as quickly. You can't effect change nearly as quickly even though the Academy resists change anyway. You can't effect it nearly as quickly there, it costs the Institution much more money because of the formal processes and expenditures on legal council and all of those kinds of things so it's a more expensive kind of thing. But I am very comfortable working within this kind of environment now. But, I don't know if they've accepted other Presidents as educators. But I believe historically looking back at other Institutions I just thought that I would be different. That they would say yeah this guy is an educator. This guy lives and breathes education. He believes in education. No. Didn't happen.

LNS: Now you made two very important changes administratively when you came here. You moved personnel for Faculty under the Provost. That was probably one of the most significant symbols as well as changes in operating philosophy. What motivated that?

WS: Well I did believe that at that time we needed to separate those two functions to be an acknowledgement that I recognized the Faculty as the primary deliverers of the instructional program. And that I did see that there was some distinction in that part and I wanted to say there was some prestige. That I wanted them to understand that I saw that and that I was aware of their significant role. Everyone has an important role, don't misunderstand me. But I wanted to say to them, yes I know the Faculty are the prime deliverers of education on our campus. And I thought that that was a better way to do it. And so we did. I don't know that it made any difference at all other than a very brief, hey this is a good idea. Because I have understood no matter what you did yesterday, it's today that counts. And you can be for one day that you know, that's a great decision and the next day though, there's another issue and how you deal with that determines whether tomorrow they'll say that was horrible decision or that was a good decision. I felt that, thought that, was important at that time and while we've since gone back and done some consolidation, we did separate the academic personnel function from the non-instructional personnel function and we have maintained that, even though we put them all in Human Resources for some kind of scale.

LNS: The other structural change you made is you elevated the Provost into the same positional rank and scale to the Executive Vice President. Give a clear signal?

WS: Yeah, I think it was. I believe that in a single-campus Institution, not a system, a single campus Institution, the Provost must be the second in terms of the academic leadership. That position is critical and important. We had an unusual situation here in that we had an Executive Vice President and I had not been at an Institution that had an Executive Vice President within a single campus situation.
So consequently, there was some question as to who's is in command, if the President's not on campus, etc., etc. And we were not interested in destroying a structure but I did want to make it clear that I viewed the position of the Provost within the academy, as an extremely important leadership position that had to be recognized in terms of any decisions about the academic issues on campus.

LNS: Do you think the Faculty saw that at all?


LNS: So that was done for yesterday. What's good for today?

WS: Yeah.

LNS: The whole concept of the Learning Imperative, which is catching on nationally, here it is eight years later, seven years later and we see the League of Innovation coming out with the Learning Institution for the community colleges. Pick up Change magazine, there are people talking about Learning Institutions, you go to corporate America, Peter Senge and all of those people are writing about learning organizations. What happened at Eastern? Why would you say that the learning theme so intimidated the Faculty or was it the way it was introduced?

WS: Yeah, I think it was a combination. I think, when I look back on it, there were three or four issues.

WS: Number one, again maybe I had not really settled into the Presidency long enough to develop any level of trust. I do believe that I have a level of trust among Faculty and staff today. Even though they may not agree. But I believe, I mean most of them do, there's a level of trust that exists. So maybe that was too much at one time. Secondly, so by virtue of that, most anything that would've come out of my administration during that time. The word learning sounded so simple that people thought it was a rather trite thing. Even though you say now don't take for granted learning is the key, it's not. It's more the process of teaching and research and service that we just take for granted that learning is there. So I think it was one of those things that it was a wonderful little attack mechanism for those who...and I think the other thing is it did suggest that perhaps there was going to be a new assessment process at this Institution. And it created a little fear that maybe there was going to be a more specific performance-related assessment process. So one of the big rumors that came out was that it was going to be a mechanism to fire teachers. I heard that numerous times. That this was done so that there'd be a new way outside the contract to fire teachers. And of course, that was never intended. That was to go for a different role. It was viewed as a kind of crass marketing. That was one of the big things. It was kind of a commercialism, that we built into the Learning University Blueprint 150 that there was a commercialism and a marketing to it. Perhaps I had some staff members that in their enthusiasm for carrying out this new vision, that maybe they did not always
exercise that awareness of the sensitivity and along with me, I mean I'm part of that group, too. That there was just probably the assumption, that hey who can argue with this? Let's just get on with it. So maybe I didn't provide the leadership of members of my staff who would kind of carry it out to say we really have to be very sensitive. And I mean people need to move slowly if they're trying to be change agents within the academy because anything that's moved with much speed is assumed to have some kind of sinister purpose. So I think for a variety of reasons, I know I was not the choice of the Faculty and the Union as President so that number one, I knew I was coming in not their choice. So I think you put all those things together, it was early, I might've been here three or four years and had developed a little more people who knew me, etc., etc.. Perhaps it would've not been resisted as strongly. But then we did make changes by putting this President's Council, President's Commission on Learning, by putting in leadership roles a respected member of the faculty and a respected member of the non-instructional staff. That move was intended to take out, you know, that look that this was being pounded down from the top and saying this is what we're doing. So we did try and make some of those corrections so that there would be an opportunity for more people to buy in and there'd be less resistance to it. I think that the difference that I learned from that showed up in the Barriers to Learning. Because the Barriers to Learning did not create near the level of defensiveness and I think I knew several lessons. First of all, I listened for hours to members of the Faculty. As I said, this is what I'm thinking; help me make; what do I really mean by all of this. And certainly starting off with someone from the Faculty in that role and moving it with the flexibility that people didn't feel that this was some kind of sinister purpose in this plan. And so while there was a little resistance in certain areas as we moved to in the Barriers to Learning, all the things we faced there we didn't face here.

LNS: Some observers have said, though, that the reason the Faculty have resisted so openly was that they saw that it was really destructive, too controlling the way that they lived and worked. Had nothing to do with the academy, had nothing to do with learning, had nothing to do with many of the external reasons that they gave. It's not really whether it was introduced five years later when you were more comfortable and better or more trusted. Still basically it was perceived as affecting their working conditions. Control over not just their assessment but that the Faculty have it pretty good. That and people basically administratively had left them alone. Sort of an isolated to make their own decisions within the system and that this was just an attempt not to evaluate them, but whether it was good or bad for the Institution, it was bad for the Faculty.

WS: I think it challenged them to have to consider doing things a little differently and being willing to managing things perhaps a little differently. And being willing to stand some tests. So I think from that standpoint yes, it was going to create a little uneasiness. And I think we see it in the fact that on the assessment part how do we assess learning, passing grades aside. How do we assess learning? We let each department define how that would be. Capstones courses, portfolios, test on
some kind of graduate exam, or State Boards, or whatever. And it took over two years. It took two years. Now, you would assume that every department could have immediately defined what measure. If you're in a program that has a State Certification process there was a marvelous measure right there. This process took two years. And I don't think it took two years because it was that difficult to define what assessment there should be to learning, to the general learning. It was just that willingness to say yeah, we identified that as some kind of measure of learning. Because once you have only one measure or one primary measure of learning then you're getting into a situation what if the numbers don't show up right? And you said this is the measure of learning. So yeah, it had created an uneasiness because it was going to represent a little different order of things and no longer was there going to be, there was perceived that there was no longer to be this ability to explain away things in five or six or seven different ways, if we said this is the proper measure of learning for this particular department. That's why I think it took so long.

LNS: There was if you look back at five, six years ago; you look back at all of the Focuses and things of that nature. There was a lot of value at the Institution about assessment. We had a major assessment initiative, we had Faculty and people working on an Assessment Council or whatever taskforce. You don't hear anything more about it today. Has there ever been a product from that?

WS: Well, there has been. Yet, the one document that I haven't seen and I'm going to ask for it again, is I wanted us to put together exactly one publication that said exactly what each department defined as being the measurer. The assessment measure it was using. Now what did come out of it very positively and where again, this university played a leadership role as it did recently in this NCATE thing, that when the North Central, we happened to have really gotten just a little bit of a headstart on North Central's new piece that you must identify an assessment. There must be this part in the self-study, and accreditation. So, we were ahead of the curve and as you know North Central then used the way we did our assessment as a Model recommended to other Institutions in North Central. So we did play a role in a much bigger scene interestingly enough than maybe so much on campus, in that what we did at Eastern in addressing this assessment thing became a model that the North Central Association would recommend to other institutions to satisfy the requirement about there must be an assessment program on campus.

LNS: Do you feel we have an assessment program on campus?

WS: We have an assessment program. Do we have it where it should be? No. We have an assessment. We have pieces of an assessment program. We do have Capstone courses that are at least bringing those years of study together into some kind of experience. We have some portfolio things. We have, with the samples of the entering freshmen, we have some things about what progress they make
and that basic studies in those first two years. We have pieces in place. Do we have a comprehensive assessment program? No.

LNS: Is this something that your administration has energy to focus on?

WS: I'm not sure. If we put an end-goal because if you put a timeline and an end-goal I don't think it would be constructive. We have moved the Institution a ways. But I don't know that this is the kind of thing where you can put a specific time and say this is it. I think what we have to do, that must be done, and I will be asking the Provost for it, is I want the publication where every department has to publicly say this is our assessment measure. Because, then once it's there, once it's in a document and we say this how, this is what we are using, then it's very difficult not to seek and I don't want to do this teaching for the test concept. But to deny if you know that that's what you've said how we should be measured then in all probability you're going to do everything you can to make sure at least that measurement works. So I think where we have to go now, and there has been enough time, is to say I want the publication. Or we want the publication. This Institution needs the publication that says this is how we do the entering freshmen to sample what happens there. We're going to do all of them. And then this is what we do in every academic department. This is the measure that we use. To try to bring everything together to assess the learning that took place not individually, but the learning that took place within an Institution.

LNS: You have your early days here. You have a learning imperative, so to speak. You have the Learning University. You have reorganized the academic delivery system to consolidate the Provost leadership over the Faculty. You've elevated the Provost to the highest level within the institution under the Presidency to stand above his peers, in a sense. You've created an atmosphere for assessment to go on. And you have then come out with a concept called the Learning Edge. What's the Learning Edge mean and how does that fit into the definition of where we're going as a learning Institution?

WS: Well, I think this is another one of the challenges that Higher Education faces. The Learning Edge is a series of things that we have identified that put that little extra emphasis online, that does give that student a little more of a leg up in being successful in the learning process. But, I think as much as anything else, it is a marketing strategy that somehow says this is the distinction, this is the difference. This is the difference, and it is for these reasons why coming to Eastern provides a good educational experience. Every institution probably can point out to certain things and say this is why this is a better Institution for this, that or the other. But again, with the emphasis on learning, we need to explain to people that these are the things that we will do. Now those things may not be appropriate in certain student's lives. I mean I understand that. Certainly, we want to say that there is difference, this is what learning at Eastern can impact. And it may be in terms of some alumni that have been successful, it may be current students, it may be whomever. But it was again, that one thing if we've done nothing else for nine
years and we have, the word learning is very much a part of this Institution. And when I received that letter about a year or so after we introduced this from a faculty member who was complaining about parking, and going on and then uses as a part of his letter to justify that we need to do something about parking, that he used the phrase, since we are the "Learning University", now when that was used relating to a parking challenge by a Faculty member, I mean then, at least we got it within the culture of the Institution. The word, "learning" was in the culture and so candidly, everything we do in these special initiatives, we try to use the word "learning" in there. So if anything else, it becomes part of the culture, at least the language of the Institution.

LNS: There are some who feel that the Learning Edge is a requirement of the University to focus not its energies on the individual parts of the University, not in making it necessarily better for staff or Faculty or parking, etc. But the Learning Edge really means that all of our resources, all of our attention all of our focus is on the student. That the student is the element which unites us in this Institution, that takes its disparate parts and focuses them on one aspect. Would that be a fair characterization in your thinking?

WS: I certainly think these students probably are or do make up the largest learning constituency. I think the Learning Edge is a little, it's bigger than that. Because I think we contribute to scholarly knowledge, we contribute to some service dimensions in terms of learning. It's one of those situations as every other Friday at the orientation of new staff they come into my office and I explain to them why we interrupt their day. It's become a ritual; I've done that now for three or four years. They come in here and I explain to them exactly why I want them to see me. Because a lot of times people hear and read about the President. But they've never seen him or her and so you get this, you create this impression, so I want you to see who I am, I want you to see that I'm a person and I want to talk to you about this. So I want you to come to my office. I want you to see where, when I'm on campus, a lot of my time is spent. I want you to say that you've been in my office, that you can look and see pictures of my grandkids, you could see coffee mugs so you can say, yeah, I've seen his office. I know who he is; I know where he is. I want those two things. But then I go through and I ask each one of them, now, what is your job at Eastern? Well I'm on the Grounds Crew; I'm an Accountant in Financial Aid. Occasionally, there will be Faculty, but the Faculty really have a different orientation. Tells me, well that always happen on Friday, then I go into this. I said, it's Friday evening probably some of you will be out this weekend or maybe this evening. And you'll be with some people that you haven't talked to in a while. And they're gonna say, well, what are you doing now? And I said you only have one answer. And that is I'm a professional educator. You're not a Grounds Crew person at Eastern. You're not an Accountant at Eastern. You're a professional educator because there is only one reason that we exist and that is education. That's education of students, education of Faculty, staff. It's of learning. There's only one reason that we exist. So you may have come into this room believing that you were a computer programmer,
but you’re a professional educator. Because you’re contributing to a process that
gives people the greatest single hope they can have in this life in terms of a better
future, and that's an education. The Learning Edge certainly has a huge student
focus because that's the largest learning constituency within an Institution. But I
believe that Faculty and Staff do a variety of other things to benefit from the
learning edge. They benefit from the social things, the cultural things, the
educational programs. So there is a piece that it's a learning community, and the
learning edge is the difference that every person benefits who is a part of this
Institution. It just so happens that our largest single constituency of learners are
people we define as students. So I guess people could interpret it that this is only
something that is student focused but it's not. I think the Learning Edge is the
variety of other things that we do during the course of the year that impacts all of
us in some way.

LNS: Now to keep building on this concept of learning which is the theme that seems to
emerge when we use the last nine or ten years especially, is also you see the
growth of the FCIE, the restabilization of that. You see the creation of The
Learning Center. The evolution of something that was focused on one segment of
students, basically minority students. You see it broadened to say that gee, all of
our students have learning needs and to characterize only one group as having
them may in a sense be offensive to that group when it's endemic throughout the
whole population. These are two major initiatives. How do they fit into the
whole picture?

WS: I think that all of it fits in. There is the constant steel. Constant Steel, purpose in
the sense that you just talk about it over and over. You talk about it, everything
about learning, about learning, about learning. And as I say it has to be a variety
of experiences and they have to be in many ways labeled learning just as a maybe
perhaps not so subtle reminder that, we're talking about learning, were talking
about in it's broadest dimension. So all of these initiatives, whether we do things
in the Resident Halls, it creates a greater understanding of different cultures and
ethnicities or whether we do something in McKenny Union or whether we do
something in Pease Auditorium that causes us to learn to examine our values,
examine where we are. All of those things. Any of those things that occur
contribute to the learning process at the Institution, to the learning experience at
the Institution. Where we have not gone as far as I envisioned and if I could
change one thing about the learning piece and focus for these nine years, I’d
wanted every person on campus of students, not only students, too. But, I believe
that for us to be a “Learning” Institution we must have only one measure of
effectiveness and that be learning the difference. The significance in the quality,
the significance in what learn here. I use the term what students learn here, but
really what *people* learn here. We have not learned about learning to the level
that I would like. I mean we need to understand how people learn, why people
learn, when people learn. I mean, to really be a learning university we need to
understand the psychological implications of learning. Because once we know
how people learn and realize that they learn in a lot of different ways and a lot of
different learning styles, rates, whatever. But once we know that part then the education that's delivered, the instruction that's delivered, the experience that's delivered can be much more effective.

LNS: So that if we were a learning organization and that might be a legitimate agenda for us to explore.

WS: Oh, it would be.

LNS: But we haven't explored that.

WS: Well we've had the little pieces through FCIE, to the Teaching and Learning programs that have been offered like by Bob Kraft. I mean, we've done some of those things to improve the effectiveness of teaching to do all that. But in terms of people just sitting and talking about how people learn. Because if the student is blind, you may write the most eloquent notes in the world on a chalkboard, but that doesn't work. We need to understand how people learn. We need to be able in the classroom, in the Student Organizations and the Residence Halls, in Administrator meetings, to understand learning. Learning.

LNS: But have we provided rewards? Have we done anything to really change the culture in this?

WS: Well, you know, we've through the FCIE and a couple of other things, we've done some training, some kind of things like that; we've offered some incentives, even sabbaticals to focus some on the learning thing. We've offered some pilot project money on those kinds of things. So again, I think we have to look at it in that we will not transform a relatively large university into a community of people who understand learning. But I think we need to become more systematic. And again, I don't expect every person to understand the brain and be able to break it down. But I do believe the single best thing we could do right now to help us achieve that goal that's always out there about being a premier learning Institution, the single most important thing we could do right now is help the people who deliver instruction to understand the science and art of Learning. Not the science and art of Teaching. Because we will, once we understand how people learn, then we modify the process. But if we don't understand, but it's rote. I think we had an excellent example on how you can make a difference at the last Board Meeting. We had talked to a very supportive Board about the quality of the Faculty, about the educational level, the intellectual level and all of that. And they would nod and they would say yes and they would go on. But when we said to the Dean of the Graduate School, we'll have a reception and we just want to put out publications, just limited to books, just put them out, put them in one room. I don't have any doubt in my mind that we got a message across to our Board because I talked to too many of them who were in there that we had not gotten through another way. But they were visual and while they didn't read one of those books on that table, when they saw just the number and scope of the books,
without a question, I think that we understood something about learning. These
are people that have so many messages coming at them and you can say well, you
know we published X-Hundreds of books here in the last three years, or our
Faculty and staff and administration have. And that that sounded good here. But
when they saw a hundred and something books just lying on the table side by
side, they learned. And so we learned that they learned. I found that sending
them a videotape that may only last seven minutes is one of the most effective
tools because they're very busy people but there's something about videotape.
They can stick it into the machine and they may be doing something else and they
can get the message across. Well we need to know that about every student. We
need to know and be able to recognize different learning styles, rates and starting
points. We need to be able to recognize that. We need to be able to effectively
use technology in the learning experience. We have to know how people learn.
And we haven't gotten there as an Institution and perhaps, we're too big of an
Institution to ever expect a thousand instructors and a thousand support staff to
ever get there. But we really need to find pockets where we focus on learning.
Not learning history. Not learning English, not learning Science, but on learning.
How people learn, why they learn, when they learn. What are the amazing ways
that they learn?

LNS: Now do you see any energy left in our administration for this at this point?

WS: Well, obviously, it's something that still grates away at me. So that may be

LNS: Some unfinished business.

WS: Yeah, that may be the one thing that literally may be a special funded project to at
least see if there are, which I think there are, some members of the Faculty and
Staff who would, if this were made available would actually participate in it. So
we might not have a thousand people, but we might find fifty or seventy people
that really want to participate in a professional development process that they
could come away and have a mini-course in learning, not in teaching, but in
learning. Just to say, ok, how does the mind learn as simply as we could yet as
complex as it needs to be. So that people understand left brain and right brain. I
mean the reality is I think that gives us cues. Many years ago, one of the most
popular books, many years ago and you know it's kind of interesting that you
don't hear that much about it was that Body Language Book, you know? If you
cross your legs, boy you know what that means? Well, I was amazed how many
people read that book and if you did this, they just...ooh, you've just shut me out,
you've just closed me out. Oh, you don't want to talk to me. Or hmm, you're
really listening to what I'm saying. They accepted that. Now isn't that amazing
that because it was kind of a fad thing that Body Language, so many people read
that one book. I don't know if it's true or not. But a lot of people just bought in
and you had to be very careful in meetings for a while because people, if you
scratched your eyebrow, people read something into that other than the fact that
your eyebrow was itching. Well, but I do think we could pick up cues about learning if we are educated to understand what learning. You know, I mean there are some cues about the learning that goes on and we're not there. Yeah, so the long answer to that question was I think there's a little energy left to at least do that on a small scale here for a group of people that really want to understand that.

LNS: Now there's another commitment that seems to define the push for thinking about learning. I don't know if it's situational or it's philosophical or part of it grows out of the intentional vs. opportunistic, but, the creation of the whole reorganization, realignment of the whole external learning aspects of the Institution into an Associate VP for Extended Learning. What's the promise of that? And why was that done?

WS: Well, I think that was done for a couple of reasons. One is just facing the reality of the marketplace, and realizing that we no longer can sit and just say you come to us if you want to experience learning. And that, in fact, that may not be the most effective way to learn. We don't know that. There may be other ways. So we did need to move that. Because it's the marketplace driven situation on the one hand, but I think there's a part philosophical situation. And I've come a long ways in the fact that I now believe we need to have a physical presence somewhere else. An extension and a physical presence as well as the video and all the different other ways that we're doing this right now. So it fits into both pieces but if we do say that we are only going to be measured, or only want to be measured, in terms of the learning that takes place then we have to do those kinds of things and offer those kinds of learning experiences that do respond to the needs of the people that we are trying to serve out there. So while there's a part of me that tugs away and say that we should not, public education should be better stewards of the resources, and not duplicate programs and services that are offered by other Institutions, there is the other side, and that is the reality of that's the way the marketplace works today. There have to be choices available. People are shoppers today. There's just not one kind of automobile. And there just can't be one institutional choice. So we have to offer that variety too, because for whatever the reasons, it might be addressing a need that another program....

LNS: It's obviously that we've become a learning society and that the people, it's no longer just right out of high school going into college and then you don't have to go back for formal education again. There is a difference that external is non-degree, but it's learning for problem-solving reasons or for personal advancement or for leisure. It's probably less for that in formal settings. But these seem to be the requirements that people are asking universities to respond to. Do you see this as a growing future trend in education?

WS: Oh, I think so. I think that we live in a society where there has now become accepted that we have to really be learned, that we always have to be going with this. However, we still face some of the issues that we don't assess the success or assess what we do with learning outcomes particularly other than that people have
completed the course of study they received a degree. We still often use time if they put in certain time in education, and consequently they have learned. We still have that going on in our society. Some of the publications that use the, how to define the best Institutions of higher education. In fact several years ago I made a speech about this at another place. When it came down to it, a publication identified, one of the major newsmagazines identified, the best Colleges and Universities in America in that particular issue. And at that time when I read, well how was that decided? They said that it was decided on basically three things two of them I can remember very clearly, the third one, I think I can remember. But the first thing was; How rigorous was the admissions standards? In other words, so that the entering freshmen class basically, what academic credentials did they bring in? That was a measure of the “Best Colleges and Universities”. The second was the credentials of the Faculty. The credentials of the Faculty. And I'm trying to remember what the third one was, it slips me at this moment. But, not one piece of the decision as to which were the greatest Universities had anything to do with the learning, the value-added experience of learning!

LNS: It must have had to do with Athletics then.

WS: I don't remember, I'm trying to think what it was. But, what hit me was that, and of course at that particular time, it was, I think it was Harvard. Because their entering class had the highest academic standards, their Faculty was the most prestigious in terms of something, and I forget what the third thing was. But, I said I could do that. We could have an Institution that I would only take twelve students, or no, it was something about expenditures for something, expenditures was the third piece. I could only say we're only going to take twelve, fifteen, twenty, thirty students, number one. And I'm only going to have three Faculty members, but I'm going to pay them $5 million dollars a piece so they're going to be the greatest Faculty members in all the world. And then we're going to give them a hundred million dollars to run the school for those twelve years...so I said that's how artificial this is. Because it was a sad commentary that there was no way either that the magazine wanted to measure, or could measure, the learning experience. It was more about the process, the process of admissions, the process in terms of credentials, and the teaching part. More about process and not about what value-added experience. You see, I think the measure of the true learning experience relates to where that student was when he or she came in and where that student is when they go out. Because if that student, when they come in is already an ACT 35 extremely high boards, etc. And then in four and a half or five years later or four years later they get a Bachelor's Degree and they've got a 3.9 average. Don't misunderstand me. That's significant and I would say congratulations to that student and that Institution. But you take a young person with a 20 or a 19 or 18 ACT coming into an Institution and 5-1/2 years later they go out with a 3.1 or a 2.9. I would certainly say that Institution has done a wonderful job in terms of a learning experience and.
LNS: Even accounting for Grade placement?

WS: Even accounting for any of that. I mean the point is it really should be a value, the measure of a quality institution should be value added. Just having beautiful buildings is not enough. Just having good Faculty with great credentials is not enough. Just having a nice Athletic program and a beautiful campus is not enough. Just having adequate resources is not enough. There's only one measure; and that's what happens, what learning takes place when someone, whether it is Faculty or Staff comes into this Institution and goes out of it. Someone who works here for thirty years in some part of this Institution goes out of it, if they have not experienced a learning success, and their learning is not increased, then we failed. We may have paid them a salary to do a job. But we failed because this is an Institution where we're supposed to be learning.

LNS: Focusing on some other, just briefly, on some other concepts. Affirmative Action?

WS: The pendulum swings. I believe that we have a responsibility in Higher Education to sometimes do those things to correct, or at least to kind of set the course a bit straighter, that may appear to some to be, unfair. It may appear to some to be. But, I think that higher education has to be that Institution in our society which is one that should be writing the course, and writing the course sometimes means we do things which may be perceived as inequitable by those who want to say that they should always be. But it's that same way with learning. To assume that every learner is starting in the exact same position. And so the higher education as an Institution must be that part of society that takes the role in creating an environment where there is as close as possible, over a long period of time, created a starting point where everybody gets a start. And to do that, we've got to make some adjustments for what happened in the past. So I believe Affirmative Action, I believe Higher Education Institutions are the single, most important key in America to Affirmative Action.

LNS: Do you think our University is doing all that it should be doing or could be doing?

WS: No, I don't think it's doing all that it should or could. I think we're doing a lot and I'm proud of what we're doing. But no, I think that it's a goal that we have not reached or probably will ever reach to say that we are doing everything that we should do. We're still continuing to look at new ways to do more things. But no, we're not there.

LNS: Is the energy there to focus on this?

WS: I think as with anything, sometimes when something gets out of the spotlight, there is this kind of a relaxing or easing of the pressure to make things happen. And then, for whatever reason, something then brings it back into ones attention and there is a renewal, you know. I think we're in that period now where the
whole question of how Affirmative Action will be perceived, has once again  
brought us to the question of, What should we be doing more than what we're  
doing right now? We, like so many organizations, we have a tendency to every  
once in while take a deep breath and say, look at what we've done. And that's  
true, but we can't just say that's enough.

LNS: Do you see this as any further focus point in your administration?

WS: In terms of a major new thrust no. We still have some significant issues, I think  
in terms of creating opportunities for experiences that we're not doing. I certainly  
am aware, that the issue of gender equity within certain athletic programs is a  
focus in America right now. So I think we have some of those pieces but I don't  
see a huge new thrust for Affirmative Action

LNS: What about Athletics? How do you see Athletics at Eastern and where is it  
going? Or where are they going?

WS: Well, I accept the premise that Athletics is the most visual and often the most  
emotional part of your Institution. I understand that there is no way to expect that  
it will generate the sufficient revenues to pay for itself, an Institution such as  
Eastern. In fact, there are very few in America. I understand that typically  
Alumni remember the Athletic programs, especially those who played, as they  
ever were and expect to be that way again. All of that I believe is, and including  
Athletics, is an important part of an Institution. So much of an important part of  
an Institution it's such a visible and in so many ways can define the Institution  
literally. That Athletics, the way Athletics are funded at Eastern, should be the  
Model for America. And that is you fund it through the Universities budget you  
have a greater chance to control what goes on in there. So I think it's a part of it.  
We will continue with the upgrade in the facilities; in certain sports we will  
continue to achieve national recognition. We will continue to achieve  
recognition such as track, swimming, diving, basketball. It's one of those things  
that, if we get away with it, would cause a furor of unbelievable proportions in the  
Institution. But on the other side, the potential of what it can do to change  
dramatically any other piece of this Institution within the context, and this is not  
about Eastern, but within the context of American Higher Education today, the  
upside, I believe is very limited as to the impact it can make. It will not  
significantly change the size of this Institution if we're successful. It will not  
significantly change the amount of money that comes to this Institution if we're  
successful. Because we are positioned, in the Mid-American Conference, we're  
positioned as a regional Institution and very few of those have a National  
reputation other than North Carolina. If you notice, they don't refer to themselves  
as North Carolina, they say Carolina. Which I found was kind of interesting. So  
we are in ways a lot in a position and it's a position that we can't do drastically  
much about.
LNS: This sort of goes back to our beginning conversation that we can maybe be more of what we are, or less than what we are, but not universally different than we are. One thing that is certainly going to define your administration is the Huron Issue and we have to say something about that. Would you do it over again?

WS: Yep.

LNS: Same way?

WS: I think so. I mean the point is, there's not going to be any easy way to do this. And there was going to have to be some point for the outrage that would come from those and whether it's from our Institution, or Miami, or Stanford, or Marquette or St. John. There are going to be a group of people when you make a change and we're seeing that even at some Institutions where they're just redrawing the caricature you know people are just expressing outrage at that. There had to be a focal point. So there had to be a decision made. Now this Institution could have said that we're going to keep the name and drop the logo. And I would've had it much more comfortable in terms of the attacks on the Presidency. I've had a much more comfortable time as President of this Institution. I understand that. But it was not consistent with what we said in the Mission Statement. We said that we were not going to do anything other than celebrate differences and not encourage those kinds of things. So, yeah it just happened to be that it became my lot, that this would be in my time, and it just happened to be that I believed full well knowing, that it would be, it would've been a much more popular decision for me to have left it or to come down and to say keep the name or nothing. I knew that. I knew that then. But it was not, I believed, the right decision and all that I would ever want about my epitaph, here, in terms of my administration, of my years here, my only statement if I'm ever interviewed when I'm walking out of this office, my only thing is I would say this: I did the best I could. I did the best I could. And you know, I have no ego. I don't need a hundred page book when I leave office to say boy, look at the successes. It's really only one statement. I did the best I could. I made the best decisions I could. I made decisions that, as uncomfortable as they were, I made decisions that today I can live with myself. I don't believe I ever compromised the integrity or the values of this Institution. And some of them at personal cost, because I made a variety of decisions that I paid some prices for. But I did the best I could. Logo thing yeah. Because if we had not dealt with it, it would always be a lingering part of this institutions history. It's still a lingering part. There's still on the Web, now may not be, there's still these crusades continuing to go on both sides. So the issue has not gone away. Now it may not be at a point where it is quite as visible and high profile as it used to be. So that would be something that was not done here. If the Board of Regents had said thank you Mr. President, but we're not going to do it, I would've accepted that. Because as president it was my responsibility, once they asked me, to give them the best recommendation I could. I did.
LNS: For the record the vote of the Board was?

WS: We had one dissenting vote.

LNS: So we had seven people in favor and one dissenting vote.

WS: Yeah, with the dissenting vote was the person that told me to go make this recommendation. Not that recommendation but to do this and bring a recommendation to the Board. And a person who felt very strongly at one time about the issue in one direction, and on the day of the vote, for a variety of reasons voted against it. That's human beings.

LNS: What's your most favorite spot on campus?

WS: I love Pease Auditorium. I think Pease Auditorium is one of those places on campus that is very, very special to me, for a variety of reasons. Even with all of the challenges, that's where my first and perhaps, only Inauguration as a President took place. My family was here. And I still believed that I was going to do fantastic things as President.

LNS: What about student encounters?

WS: The what?

LNS: What about a student encounter? Are there any students who stand out in your mind?

WS: I remember one night about two or three o'clock in the morning hearing a noise and looking out in my backyard and here were some men from one of the fraternities planting a Christmas Tree in my backyard. I thought that that was kind of neat that they felt like, that they could just...in the night, come in and plant a little Christmas Tree and that tree is still there and it has grown greatly. So that was kind of nice. I had a lot of good student encounters. I think sometimes, you know, when you wonder, and sometimes in this job you just wonder, if you make, I don't have that sense of accomplishment on an individual life, because I deal more with the bigger picture. And I think helping a blind student at the bus stop to a classroom one day may have been one of the most beautiful things I've ever experienced because I knew at least at that time I had literally done something to help a person do something. So those kinds of things and sometimes students coming to the house to sing.

LNS: Faculty?

WS: I have an awful lot of you know we talked earlier about the Union. But I want to make it really clear that overall, I have really enjoyed the Faculty. There are a few. There are a few, you know, I remember one when I was very early in tenure
here, and we had a new Board member, Regent DeMattia. He'd come to campus, and I was giving him a tour of the campus. I had not been around too long and I didn't know a lot of people going through the Rec/IM. I'm going up the Rec. steps, and a Faculty member, who I didn't know who he was, was coming down, had been working out, this was like during the lunch hour, and he just ripped into me about some issue, I don’t know what it was, could've been parking I don't know. I mean, and here is a brand new Regent standing there, and I mean he didn’t introduce himself, and just ripped into me and obviously, didn't make a very good impression on the new Regent. I said I’m sorry, I don’t ever know ever know what that was or what the issue was about and I don't remember what the issue was. May have been a Union issue. I don't remember what it was. Well, I'm proud to say that I enjoy being around this individual today, and we can talk. So overall, the Faculty, I enjoy. I, as you probably know from my Fireside Chats, I love to just talk to faculty. Yesterday I was walking home, and Stewart Henry passes, and he waves. And I wave at him and all. And you know, this is a person I know but he turned around and came all the way back, and stood and talked to me about, he was taking a leave for a year. He was going somewhere else. See, that tells me even though there is that formal representation side, that fact that this Institution I love, and for the most part, I think they have respected my very much too. So you know, I have a lot of people on the Faculty that I have wonderful memories of.

LNS: Staff?

WS: Yeah, same way. I know that the Presidency, at least at this, in Higher Education, maybe not in the United States, but the Presidency is not a popularity contest. I had two or three, because when I became President, or was going to be President, because this was very much the direction, professionally direction, that I started twenty something years ago, so it's not as if it were, you know, I want to become President. But I read every book, and we even have some of the best writers about the University Presidency. But there were two or three things that somehow or another just, you know two or three little sayings that I've never forgotten. And one of them was I read some President did write basically that the Presidency is not a popularity contest. So you know you gotta understand that. I have accepted that that doesn't mean that I don't like to be popular, but I accepted that that was not going to be the case. So it's not popularity and then the other thing to remember, it's temporary position. And this was a temporary position. It's been a nine-year temporary position. How many years it'll be, I don't know. But it's a temporary position.

LNS: In that definition you know life is sort of a temporary position.

WS: Yeah. So you know I looked at this not in the terms as the only job in the world. But it's a temporary position. So you know, I'm in, the third one, I remember, if you need a promise try show business. I remember that was one of the other things that always stuck in my mind. I think the best thing that I brought to the
job, was an understanding that I would do the very best that I could, and that I would not take it personally. And until the last year or so, I've been able to do that. I've seen too many very capable, confident individuals leave the Presidency shattered. And primarily it's because they took it personally. So when I read the letters-to-the-Editor in the paper, I don't like them particularly sometimes, but somehow or another to this point, I've been able to say OK you know, that I don't take this personally, Presidents make decisions. The school makes decisions, some things I don't even make decisions about but the vote always has to be on the President. So I don't, I've done pretty good, even with the Union negotiations until the last one, admittedly. I've read their letters and I've seen this and well, OK well we're in negotiations that's the way life is. So I think that the reason why I'm one of the more Senior Presidents in this State, and now the second most senior President I guess in the Mid-American Conference then also, is that I've been able to keep it from becoming a personal thing has led me on.

LNS: Last question. What inspires you to keep on going?

WS: I still believe that what we do is the most noble thing in terms of making a difference in people's lives. I still believe education is. I was at a dinner last night, sitting at a table with two Doctors in the Detroit Area. Medical Doctors, and one of them was Chief-of-Staff of a hospital and the other one was a Surgeon you know. And I certainly recognize and value and respect, and yes, they're making the difference in the lives of some people. But an education will make a difference in hundreds of thousands of lives every day. I believe in what we do. That's what keeps me going right now. Admittedly, I don't have a financial need any more and you know I don't have an ego need. I still believe.