Q. This is Raimund Goerler and the date is April 10, 2012, and I have the good fortune of interviewing David Frantz for the Oral History Project of the University Archives. Thank you very much, David, for agreeing to do this. We have a list of topics; feel free to add and deviate as the occasion wants. Let’s begin at the very beginning and talk about your early academic years. Who influenced you to pursue an academic career.

A. I’m delighted to be able to do this and I’m delighted to think about and reflect about some of these things. Actually, I grew up in an academic family. My father was a teacher in boarding school so I grew up in that academic world, and had decided I would very much not be in that world when I went to college. At one point my dad was head of an international school in Rome, in Italy, and so from 5th, 6th and 7th grade I was in this international school in Rome. So when I went to college, I really thought I was going to go into foreign service, something like that. And second semester of my freshman year in college I was not taking any English, and I was taking Economics and Political Science and discovered by what I was not taking and what I was taking, that what I really missed was English. And it was what I had always done best in but I had never imagined going into academia. I had grown up in that world, even at that secondary level, and I had been very fortunate my freshman year at Princeton [University], one of the things at Princeton that spoils you is that the graduate program is very small. So everybody teaches undergraduates, and there are no professional schools, of course. And the person I had [when I] was taking a Shakespeare course – it was one lecture and two discussion sessions a
week – and the person I had for the discussion sessions was a full professor, this really great professor. I didn’t know it at the time, but he was, as it turned out, was very famous. He was Robert Frost’s official biographer; Lawrance Thompson was his name. He was just the most inspiring teacher, and I was very, very fortunate to develop a friendship with him that freshman year. And so that second semester when I had no English, I went to him and said, “Oh, I want to be an English major.” Of course, I thought then that I probably wanted to be a writer, too. I think all of us who go into English at some point think we could also be writers. And he was so wonderful, just sat me down and said, “Well, the first thing to do is to get a really good background, so you take this Chaucer course from so and so. You take this Spenser course from so and so …” And one of the things that happened in the course of that was, I discovered in working in earlier literature, especially Renaissance literature, that it fit so many interests that I had developed as a kid living in Italy. And I was taking Italian. It just all kind of came together for me. Then the other person I worked with at Princeton, Tom Roche, has remained a life-long friend and advisor. So I was really fortunate to discover early on as an undergraduate what I wanted to do and to get the kind of training as an undergraduate that was fabulous. So I went for graduate school, you go to wherever they give you the most money, and for me that was the University of Michigan. I spent a year there getting my Master’s. I hated it. I said, “My God, if this is what the Midwest is, I don’t ever want to be back here again.” It was really me; it wasn’t the institution. I realized at that point I really was ready to be in a city and then I went to the University of Pennsylvania, got my Ph.D., and my job offers came down – this was in the Golden Era now. There were lots of jobs and there was lots of support, so you could go through quickly. I went through graduate school in four years, which was not atypical, even in Humanities in those days, because there was (1) support and (2) there were jobs at the other end.
So there was an incentive to get out. And my job choices ended up coming down to Williams College and Ohio State. Now, these are the two ends of the spectrum, I would say. [Williams - ] small, liberal arts, still all-male, in the middle of nowhere in Massachusetts, or Ohio State – big state University, in the Midwest. Everyone advised me, “Take the Ohio State job.” Because they all said there is so much mobility these days. It’s easier to move from a big place than a small place. You’ll get your own courses right away. At Williams there were already two people in the Renaissance [department], senior people, and with a small faculty of 11 or whatever I would have waited to get my own courses. Plus, I thought, I was single at the time and I thought, I had been four years at an all-male boarding school and four years at Princeton, [then] all male, an all-male college, I’ve had enough of this. So I came to Ohio State and have been here for my entire career. When I came here, Al Kuhn was chair of the English Department. John Gabel was vice chair. John Gabel picked me up at the airport. John Gabel remained one of my closest, dearest friends and mentors for all my time here, and Al Kuhn was also a great friend, great mentor. Having lost both of them here the last year has made me very aware of how fortunate I was and the people I had when I first came here. That’s how I ended up at Ohio State.

Q. The fact that you came from very selective institutions to an open-admission institution, was that a bit of a shock for you?

A. That was a shock and I tell people many times, my last job, which we’ll talk about at some point, as Secretary of the Board of Trustees, I’ve had this conversation with [former Board of Trustees Chairman] Les Wexner, I said, “If someone had asked me in that job interview what was a land-grant institution, forget open admissions, did I have any conception of what that was?” I would have had no conception, I had no idea what that was. I knew about open admissions because it was made clear to one, one knew that freshman English was regarded as
the kind of course that would separate people out. Now, I started teaching in the fall of ’68 when everything had changed, though, too, because we were so privileged when we came in from a teaching point of view, if I hadn’t volunteered to teach freshman composition a couple of times in my time, I would never have had to teach it. Whereas, the group, the generation before me, if you’ve ever interviewed [English Prof.] Julian Markels, we taught five courses over three quarters. Those guys taught nine courses over three quarters, and six of those sections – even though they were three-hour courses – six of them would be composition. And all I can think of is, think of the grading, forget the class time. How many papers did you have to grade? We were very, very privileged. So I have to say that, from the get go, I always had a fair number of very, very fine students. But you did notice the bottom of the class was pretty weak. I think the other thing I was even more aware of was, certainly one of the great changes over time was, it was not an institution much invested in undergraduates. The value system was oh, you wanted to get graduate courses and teach your own graduate courses and so forth. And that was not the world I had come from. More than the going from private to public, it was more the value system, of valuing undergraduate education, and it certainly is true in the early years, I think I used to think I would be better suited at a small liberal arts school because that’s the value system that I have. And then over time I came to realize that’s value added I can bring. And it made for much more of a positive experience for me, because you had to fight for that back in those days, big time.

Q. My understanding with the value system, my understanding is that back then it was sort of frowned on, professors who did the teaching.

A. If not frowned on, I actually think, and that probably was true in many departments, and it was clear even back then, scholarship was what mattered. That’s how you were going to get promoted. To me that’s why you had to teach the courses you did, it’s why you got support for
research. Not the way they do now. I mean, it’s unbelievable now. But still pretty good by our standards. But the notion was how many PhD.s you produce, was going to be more significant. For me, actually I was able to get involved with honors courses and honors students right away and that became a big focus of mine. But I was always way more interested in undergraduates. The other thing was, I think when I first came, Agriculture had changed. I mean, everyone was aware that the real power on campus was Ag. The story is no doubt apocryphal, that Roy Kottman was the dean back then. And that Kottman had been asked once if he was going to run for governor and he said, “No, he wouldn’t step down to that office.” Now that may be apocryphal.

Q. Actually there is a story that’s in the Archives and it was quoted in one of the newspapers that we have here, where there was speculation that Kottman would succeed Fawcett as president but the person who commented on that in the papers said that he didn’t think Kottman would step down in power.

A. And that’s a good reflection, isn’t it, of the place of agriculture. Now one of the things I found out early on, though, I have to say, and this ultimately became an attraction for being at a place like Ohio State, the college that did the best job with undergraduates was Agriculture. Coming out of the whole 4-H thing, boy, they were really great at advising undergraduates and so forth. I have to say the English Department, in my entire history with the English Department, really did value good teaching, though. We had a lot of people who won the distinguished teaching award and I have to say that in salary raises and so forth, it really was a significant factor. So I think the English Department was probably, I’m not going to say unique, but valued it.
Q. You mentioned you taught honors students. As I recall, honors then was very college-centered as opposed to being a University-wide program.

A. In fact, it was really department-centered. I knew people from history from the earliest time on, and they were clearly a department, kind of like political science. Still is, I would say, to give you some biases, they could care less. They used to care less about undergraduates. They didn’t care about honors programs. They didn’t care about promoting people, getting their students to do honors theses. Whereas in English, we really did, from the get go, and we developed the most highly articulated honors program. We offered honors courses at the 100 level, the 200 level, the 300 level, and 500 level, from the get go. Now, I think one reason English could get away with that, I wouldn’t have known any of this until I went into administration, but because our classes, especially writing classes, tended to be relatively small anyway – let’s say 24 used to be the limit in freshman comp – so if I’m doing an honors seminar, let’s say, or an honors version of Shakespeare at the 200 level, I’m going to teach 20 students instead of 45. That’s not financially that big of a difference, whereas in history, if I’m going to lecture close to 300, there’s a huge difference there. I think the finances drove some of this but I was always really proud of our honors program. From the get-go really terrific students in that. And one of the things I loved is, I am still in touch with a number of students, even from those earliest years. And when you start teaching the children of people you taught before, then you know it’s time ... And I’ve done a fair amount of that now.

Q. Okay, okay. Well it sounds like you thoroughly enjoyed your teaching experience here. Of course, you also arrived in 1968, at a time of great turmoil, particularly amongst the students, but also among the faculty.
A. Yes. So we were joking about this the other night. I mean talking with Al Kuhn’s sons, who were much younger then, so it was kind of like, “How much were you guys aware of what was going on in the department?” I tell people, “Everyone would be fired. All the faculty from back in those days would be fired by what went on in terms of the social life of the department back then, because the socializing by the faculty and students together, and when I came it was a very social department. I mean there was not a night on the weekends, at least one night, that I would be invited out to dinner at someone’s house or a cocktail party. Everyone had cocktail parties back then, which divided quickly into the drinkers and the smokers. But a lot of these involved students as well. And the stuff that went on; it was a crazy period. It wasn’t just crazy. It was a crazy time in our country. Now the protesting part of it, I had been at Penn, on the east coast it was much more radical, it seemed. When I first came out here, it seemed to me Columbus is a pretty conservative town. The University seemed to me quite conservative. But this interaction with the students and the craziness of the department, really ratcheted up in that time. [English Prof.] Chris Zacher and I talk about this all the time because we came the same year, you know. It’s when everything changed in English studies. There was a canon after all. When I came into the English Department, there was a required senior seminar and tutorial, a course in which you had six students only, and there was a reading list. And you got them through that reading list. And at the end there was an exam. And if you didn’t pass that comprehensive exam as an undergraduate, you didn’t get your degree. That is old school, right? Now, it also assumes you can say, “Here’s the canon that you better agree on.” Well, you know, within two years that disappears. No one would agree on what the reading list ought to be. There was a very famous department meeting – this will give you some sense of how radical things had gotten – in which the English Department had a retreat, had a big debate, and voted on whether
we were going to require writing in English courses. And one of the people leading the argument against it, and he would freely admit this, was Julian Markels. Julian’s one of the great old lefties, and I say that in the most positive way. Julian, I’ll never forget, got up and said, “And if my students want to build a box to explain the rate of [Alexander Pope’s] The Rape of the Lock,” and Joan Weber, who was then his wife, said, “And if they want to do a painting to explain “Paradise Lost”, that’s fine by me.” Julian later became chair of the English Department and one of the things he did was issue an edict about how many words would be required in writing in every courses. But we actually had that debate. Now we affirmed that we were going to require writing but it gives you some sense of how radical a time it was. And then in spring of ’70, however, when they had the riots on campus, I actually was on leave that quarter. Because I had taught the previous summer, so you didn’t get paid for summer teaching, but you could earn a quarter off and I was given a quarter of research time, so I had earned a quarter off. So I was gone winter, spring, and then I didn’t reach that next summer. So you could put together a nice block of nine months of research time. So I had just gotten married, and my wife and I were living in Italy. We were living in Rome, pick up the paper and read about riots at Ohio State. I’m like, “This can’t be! This is nuts.” And then of course right after that was Kent State. When we came back that next year, of course, there was still a lot of unrest. And then there were pluses and minuses to student behavior then. It had made them question everything. There was a way in which that was really good. There were days, however, when kids would be in a classroom and just stoned out of their minds. It was just a completely different period. And then one’s experience of Columbus, when you’re married and you’re raising a family, suddenly it becomes a great place to live, just from the point of view of raising a family. And then the city really
started to change. I mean, the University started to change and the city started to change in, I think, really positive ways.

Q. You mentioned the socializing that went on with the students and the faculty. Was this at faculty member’s houses?
A. Yes. Or students’ apartments. Students invited faculty; faculty invited students. I mean it was pretty free flowing.

Q. Okay. As an aside, I kid Chris Zacher periodically, whom I used to lecture with in the OSU History class: In the 1920’s, the University suffered an investigation mandated by the State, of course, into alcoholism and communism and faculty basically subverting student mores. And the only one that they found with some questionable behavior, was in the English Department.
A. Well, of course. We’re infamous for it. Well, when you interview Chris Zacher, you can ask him about a very famous party at his apartment. He and his first wife, Judy, there was a very amazing party at their apartment once that is still kind of legendary. One thing you have to know is that English, from the time I got here, had already built up a very fine reputation in folklore: [for example, English Prof.] Fran Utley. It was interesting, the first people, I think, to legitimize folklore in some ways, in the English Department, were medievalists. But then, of course, it soon became the larger discipline. But with Dan Barnes, who also came the same year as Chris and I did, and Pat Muller, we have great collectors of the mythology of the department and the folklore of the department. You know, you talk to younger people now, I think, the younger people in the department probably socialize with one another. I’m so far removed from the department, I really don’t know much, but I think the world pretty much changed, too, in that regard. I mean, people stopped having cocktail parties. That part of it. Life became different, I think, because both couples in marriages would be working and so forth. Patterns just changed.
Q. You and I have been with the University a long time and we can see those changes in the Faculty Club. When I got here, the Faculty Club, I can remember the Faculty Club, second floor, being actually busy.

A. Absolutely. That’s a great example. Most of us, even junior professors, when we came, even before we had ever been tenured, joined the Faculty Club. And the English Department had a table upstairs. I have some wonderful pictures from the group gathered there. [English Department Chair] John Gabel, [English Prof. Edward P.J.] Ed Corbett, I mean, and then later that table, when it moved downstairs, to John Gabel’s dismay it got referred to as the Gabel Table. But the English Department, we always welcomed other people and John Gabel got Ed Corbett to buy a larger, more oval-like table, because the kind of rule of it was, let’s have one conversation. We don’t want side conversations. Let’s try and have one conversation and include everyone, so whatever you wanted to talk about, you’d get in with and then get out. So we got Corbett to buy, to actually buy the table. He was making good money on his little English handbook and grammar thing. There’s actually a little plaque on the table down there. Then the History Department, as they tell it, got table envy, and they got one, which they claimed was one inch bigger than ours. But that was a great, just a great place to go. And you know from the early days, there used to be what was called the bachelor table upstairs, and Ed Jennings, when he was president, and that was open to anyone who had no other place to sit. And Jennings used to come over there regularly and just sit and eat so that he could mix with faculty.

Q. Woody Hayes was renowned to do the same thing.

A. Exactly, exactly.

Q. I’m curious, you reference a change in culture in the early ’70s. I’m guessing less socialization in the English Department.
A. Probably by the late ’70s is when it started to turn more, I think.

Q. The economy turned, and the professorate was challenged in terms of mobility and environment. And students themselves seemed to be far more focused on getting their degree, not necessarily getting an education.

A. I think that’s right, it was get a job. You know, I’m here and I’ve got to get a job. That was a huge, that’s why I say, the late ’60s and early ’70s, while there was a downside, there was an upside, which was the questioning of everything. Because students at a certain point then became, I think for a period anyway, less questioning. It was more, “What do I have to do to get through this?” It was a different period.

Q. You have had a significant administrative career as well as a career as a researcher and teacher. And that administrative career, according to our records anyway, began when you were vice chair of English from 1980 to 1988. What propelled you in that direction and what were the responsibilities?

A. At first I was vice chair for undergraduate studies, and for me that was the perfect fit because it was what I cared about so much, the undergraduate curriculum, the undergraduate students, and it gave me a chance to really try to develop some things. You know it’s interesting, we didn’t have, we taught a lot of students. I’m sure we taught the most students. Probably English and Math have always taught the most students on campus, just because of the requirements. But in terms of the major, we didn’t have a lot of majors then, because education was still in the process of doing undergraduate degrees. So if you wanted to be a high school teacher in English, you didn’t major in English. You took English courses but you majored in English Education. So we were always scrambling for majors and I had this great scheme of, by God, we were really going to order the curriculum so that someone would know every spring
quarter, this course will be taken and every … I was going to regularize everything. It was a great theory; it never worked because, of course, even with as large a faculty as we had – which wasn’t all that large, given the number of students we had – people are always on leave and so forth. So you were always adjusting. But it gave me a great start at working with people and trying to effect change in the curriculum, and we really worked in English on advising our own majors, so we had a critical writing course, and the students you taught in that class became your advisees. I thought it was a great system. I mean, it had its problems, but I thought that worked really well. So I did that for a while and the nice irony was, Julian Markels became chair, and he and I were probably at pretty different ends of the spectrum politically. We became such close friends, dear friends. One of my other duties in the undergraduate program was regional campuses. So we would go to the regional campuses, Julian and I. And these were days, by the way, here’s another big change: Everyone smoked. I smoked a pipe. Julian smoked cigars and we’d get in his car to drive, you couldn’t see out the windows. I mean, it was hilarious. But he was wonderful to work for. Then, because of some political problems in the department, I became vice chair for rhetoric and composition. We always had a director of freshman composition but because the program had grown and become so important and Ed Corbett had retired and we were having some political personnel battles with the people in composition, I took over as vice chair for rhetoric and composition, even though I knew nothing about the fields. If I look back, one of my jobs was to be with the chair and the director of freshman composition every time they met, to serve as referee. If I look back on what I subsequently ended up doing, working both in the dean’s office and then as secretary of the board, it was probably very good training.

Q. You mentioned you were the referee. What were the conflicts? Personalities issues?
A. Yes, it really was personality in a huge way. Personality, though, that exacerbated what were fundamentally curricular and educational policy matters and follow-through and supervision. That was an interesting time. I’m trying to think if at that same time, you made me go back and kind of refresh my memory about when was the first time I served on the Athletic Council and that started at that time, too. I did two different terms on the Athletic Council, ten years apart. And in ’86 was the first time I went onto the Athletic Council. So I was doing that as well. All along I had done some University service and that one started at that same time in there.

Q. Actually you mentioned the Athletic Council, it sort of skips ahead, but why don’t we address it now? One of the things that a former Athletic Director told me was that he felt there was much more University control over Athletics in earlier times than now, which I found hard to believe. He mentioned, specifically, the Athletic Council was much more engaged in the past. This might have been ten years ago.

A. He actually would be entirely accurate. This is probably more detail than you want to have but some of it is actually structural. The Big Ten was an athletics representatives conference. That is, the faculty representative to the Big Ten was appointed by the President but took instruction as well from the Athletic Council. The faculty Rep was not a member of the Athletic Council. Sat with Athletic Council, but the Athletic Council itself was this other entity. Now up until the time Penn State joined the Big Ten the faculty representatives were, in theory anyway, the controlling body of the Big Ten. The athletic directors met, the presidents met, but this was the group that voted on things. And NCAA regulations were voted on by an institution, which would be instructed. Now the institution could decide who got the vote. It could be the president or it could be delegated to the faculty rep but they took their instruction from the Athletic Council. So when we used to meet at a bowl game, we would meet with Ed Jennings
and say, “Okay, here are the issues. How do we think Ohio State ought to vote?” These would be lengthy discussions. There was a quarterback at Illinois named [Dave] Wilson, I want to say. There was a huge case, sued the Big Ten. The Big Ten lost the case. The presidents got up in arms and said, “The commissioner of the Big Ten is too powerful. We’ve got to take control of this. It’s our money after all that’s now at stake.” And the presidents started to control the Big Ten. The presidents then took control of the NCAA. So no legislation comes to a group to be looked at like that anymore. So the fact is, there’s way less power than there used to be with an Athletic Council. So Ed Jennings and I joked about this a lot. Then Penn State was invited to join the Big Ten and we voted on it after the fact. So when I gave the report to the University Senate, as chair of Athletic Council, I said, “Look, let’s face it. We don’t control things anymore. We don’t control the budget. The Athletic Director brings in the budget and we approve it. But we don’t have any real control or say over it.” There are only two arenas in which Athletic Council had any power left. Ticket allocation, which is fairly important, right? And academic oversight. And I think those are still the only two things left. There’s no question that more and more power shifted away to central administration. So it’s ironic as faculty power grew in other areas, and this area I would have to say they are far more advisory than we were in the past. I don’t know if you want me to keep talking a little more about athletics now since we’re on it. It’s one of the most complicated pieces of a large public institution. If I step all the way back on my first time on Athletic Council, when Rick Bay was Athletic Director – he had been at Michigan and he wanted to bring the Michigan model here and cut a whole bunch of sports. Ed Jennings’ reaction to that was, “There’s never been a program review of athletics. The way we were doing them were departments. Let’s have a program review.” And I think [Geography Prof.] Howard Gauthier, I believe, chaired that committee. And basically what we did, what that committee did,
was affirm a broad-based program, that we were going to sustain a broad-based program. We have, by far, more varsity sports than any other Division 1 public institution.

Q. Yes, 36 now, I believe.

A. Only the Ivy League schools, which are totally subsidized in what they do in athletics and aren’t big time in that regard, have bigger programs. That affirmation I always thought was a great thing, because it said we’re not going to get rid of these, we’re not going to get rid of synchronized swimming. And then along came Title IX, too, which complicated things. So how do you start to balance that out? Rick Bay, though, did see something very clearly. He saw that we had outdated facilities, and he was smart enough to know that athletics would never rise high enough up on the wish list to get appropriations from the state for what it wanted to do. That somehow athletics would have to figure out how to do it on its own, and that’s really what [Athletics Director] Andy Geiger did when he came. And Andy was really great at it. We are like every other big-time program now – a victim of our facilities. So whatever you might believe we ought to do, because you’ve got debt service on that stadium, you’ve got debt service on the Schottenstein arena, I don’t want the money coming out of the center to pay for that. I want athletics to be able to sustain itself and pay for that. We are of course one of, I don’t know, maybe five programs in the country that actually makes money on athletics. But there’s a price you pay for that. And so when I was on Athletic Council the first time, I made this talk, though to the [University] Senate, and said, “We’ve kind of lost that. Be aware and don’t ever give up control of the academic side.” Ed Jennings said to me afterwards, “You were pretty easy on me on that.” No one asked me any questions. I finished the talk and I get no questions. I was shocked because I thought, I’m putting up this red flag. I had written to all the chairs of all the other Big Ten institutions: “We’re losing control.”
Q. Of course, those meetings took place on Saturdays. That may have been another …

A. So ten years later I’m back on Athletic Council again. So in the first term, sorry to go back to there, we fired a football coach, Earl Bruce. And I’ll never forget this because we then said, “Well, we have to have a meeting with the President.” Because we weren’t consulted – we, the Athletic Council – before he was fired. Julian Markels was actually chair of Athletic Council that year. I was on it but I wasn’t chair. And Julian, he did it in the most wonderful way, he said, “President Jennings, I feel I must begin this by saying that I feel the need to scold you for not consulting.” And Ed, rumble, rumble, he said, “I realize you have a board, but you realize I have a board, too.” Say no more. The next time around, we were having problems on the academic side. John Cooper was the coach. When I finished my stint the second time around on Athletic Council, we were in the throes of that difficulty and we created a position of Academic Liaison with Athletics and I did that for two years. So I worked hand and glove with Andy Geiger those two years. I mean, Andy and I met every Friday from the fall through most of winter, we would meet every Friday and go over the transcript of every kid we were recruiting for every sport at Ohio State. And we would then get word back to the coaches, “Hey, you probably shouldn’t recruit this kid anymore.” Andy had a great value system, which was, look, in certain sports you know you’re going to have to take kids who may be marginal students to be really successful. You can’t kid yourself about that. They better be real difference makers then as athletes, and they better be okay citizens. What was happening was, we had kids who were both, let’s say, marginal football players and crooks. Not a good combination. Andy also had a great value system in terms of evaluating coaches, I think. I don’t know if you know this, but he and Eleanor had adopted two boys. For their age their kids were relatively young and Andy would always say, and the final question I asked about a coach was, would I want my child to play for this coach?
That’s a pretty good measure and that’s a pretty solid measure. And we ended up having to fire John Cooper. John, I’m sure there are multiple versions of this, but to me he never got the message. I’m sure if he had beaten Michigan more in football – I don’t want to be naïve, I’m sure that would have made his position stronger than it was. But that isn’t why he was fired. He was fired because the behaviors of the guys didn’t change. And we would send back word to him: “Don’t recruit this kid,” and he continued to recruit them. And it was, like, does he not believe that Andy Geiger is his boss? To this day, I see John around. John is a perfectly nice guy, by the way. I mean, I have no problems with him as a person, just a fine guy. But I think he never really believed that that piece really mattered. I think he thought if he could just win enough, that would be enough. With some people in Buckeye Nation, that would be. But I think not with the University. So we got sidetracked there, sorry.

Q. You provided more on the athletics than I realized you had knowledge of. I appreciate that, thank you. Let’s step back, if we can, to an event less dramatic than firing coaches. Before I forget, in the ’80s you were involved in redesigning the curriculum requirements. You mentioned earlier that you had, as Vice Chair for Undergraduate Studies in English, was this about the same time that that happened?

A. I think this was a little later because by the time we finished doing that I had moved into the Dean’s office where I was responsible for undergraduate affairs for the college. So I got to be in, as a faculty member, shaping these, and then I had to implement them in my administrative way. That special committee, to review undergraduate curriculum, we always just referred to it as the Reagan Committee, Jerry Reagan was the Chair of it. That was a great experience. Ed Jennings formed that committee, said we haven’t looked at this in a long time, let’s look at it. And we had representation from every college that had undergraduate programs. So it was a
great across-the-university committee, and we decided the best way to go at it would be to begin
with a philosophical statement defining the educated person. So let’s forget requirements, let’s
put all that aside. What are the qualities, skill sets and so forth that we think someone who
finishes an undergraduate career ought to have? There were three of us who basically wrote that
statement. It was Jerry Reagan and a guy named Nate Fechheimer. I don’t know if you knew
Nate. He was from Ag.
Q. He was in Dairy Science.
A. Not dairy, but he did chickens or something in Ag. But he really was a scientist. He was a
geneticist or something. In fact, Nate, if you had seen him, he was a bow tie guy. Super-smart
guy. Very wonderfully informed. So the three of us do the first draft of this. Part of what I
remember is this: They both smoked like crazy, cigarettes. I probably still smoked a pipe. And
we’d sit in this room writing and then re-writing, and then we’d bring it back to the full
committee for approval. But that experience, for me it was different, because working in a group
like that is not what most of us in English do. We’re solitary scholars. We go off alone. So
especially doing group writing was different, but they were fabulous to work with. That was one
of the great experiences really of my time. So we had the philosophical statement and then would
say, “Okay, not courses but what areas then would we want students to have to have exposure to,
to fulfill these?” And then another committee was formed to flesh out what those requirements
would be. And I was on that committee. That was an Arts and Sciences committee that was
charged with doing that. That was the Babcock Committee; Charles Babcock chaired that one.
Then as soon as that was over, I’d go into the Dean’s Office, and now the Associate Deans in
charge of undergraduate stuff will be responsible for implementing this. So I actually got to be a
part of that whole process all the way through. And you know, the minute you get the courses,
then it’s just political. Forget all the statements we’ve made over here. Now we’re down to trading horses, right? Well, you get this requirement, then we have to have this. We over here in Engineering really don’t think we need any foreign language, thank you very much. All that horse trading started, and there was an oversight committee, a central oversight committee, then, that had to approve the curriculum for each college. Because we never had a University-wide curriculum that applied uniformly to every college.

Q. Yes, it makes me wonder what major curriculum review would be like. In the current system, where we have incentive-based budgeting, so much of the money remains within the colleges rather than being centrally distributed.

A. So imagine, how much worse it would have been, because even back then, though we didn’t have that system, still you knew that, you know, if you had enrollments you had a calling card of some kind.

Q. Sure, if you had enrollments, well, somebody’s got to teach those enrollments; that meant faculty. That meant graduate students.

A. Exactly. So even then people knew in some sense what those stakes were. And then we all have our biases, right? So for example, I always thought the notion of having a contemporary world requirement was like one of the dumbest things I’d ever heard of. They live in a contemporary world. Why do we have to study that? Why not make them take the classical, the world of classical antiquity? That would be more [logical], or Shakespeare? And I really wasn’t sure about having a statistics requirement. Now I have to say, the minute I started doing administrative work in the college office, if I had had a good statistics course I’ll tell you, that would be incredibly useful. I really discovered that, that one of the strangest committees I ever chaired was equity within the athletic department with respect to gender and ethnicity. And I
chaired it, and I believe I was the only white male on the committee. And it was what the agenda of that committee was, and by God, manipulating statistics was the way one was going to get to the answers. What was fascinating about that, though, I don’t know how much equity we brought to the whole salary system, but one thing we did discover was, there was great inequity with respect to locker rooms, support, who got the practice fields, and so forth. And so we were able to actually make some real changes on that front. So the curricular change for me was a great experience. I would say overall the curriculum that we ended up with is, we developed a curriculum to take the place of advising. Everyone would admit that what we do worst at Ohio State is advising the general undergraduate population. So if you know advising is not going to be very good, not because the people don’t care, but they’ve got each person in what used to be University College back in the day, would have 350 or 400 students to advise, right? Now, if you construct a curriculum that says you have to take one from A and one from B and two from here, and fill this, in a sense it is a way of advising.

Q. Okay, because there are some clear-cut requirements.

A. There are clear-cut requirements. So I’ve always, this is maybe a cynical view, but it always seemed to me that that’s a part of what we were about. Now my view of what the honors program was meant to do, I think, was to say, keep those in mind, but you ought to have way more liberty to do whatever the hell you want within some pretty broad parameters. That was always a different kind of tension.

Q. Okay, okay. It’s interesting you said that about University College because we did interview several people after University College folded and one of the rationales for having University College was that the colleges themselves did a mixed job in advising students.
A. I would say that’s still true. So do departments. My own department, I am very sad to say, I told you we had this course 398 critical writing, the faculty member who taught you that course became your advisor. They’ve now done away with that and they’ve now hired professional advisors in English. Now I have to say, to me that’s criminal. And some faculty members have said, “Well, our undergraduate curriculum just in English is so complicated, we can’t do a good job with it.” And I’m like, “So you’ve constructed a major so complicated you can’t understand it but you expect students to?” To me, it’s nuts. But I think the bigger point is, we were missing this opportunity to connect students with faculty in a way that I think really matters. Sitting and talking about, “Well, what course do you think I ought to take?” Now, people will say, “Well, I can’t answer that. I don’t know anything about any departments outside my own department,” and that’s a problem.

Q. University College used to employ so many graduate students.

A. Yes, and their job is to steer the student through the safest path.

Q. We’re leading up to a momentous occasion, which is when in 1988 OSU adopted a policy of selective or competitive admissions. In the John Gabel history, as I remember it, of the Ed Jennings administration, he described the meeting as one which the faculty cheering the advent of selective admission. What did you think about it?

A. Interestingly, it was never an issue that was hotly debated among faculty, at least in the circles where I was. We were all for selective admissions. No one felt, I shouldn’t say no one, I just never heard anyone articulate the notion of, we are doing away with some fundamental principle on which the land-grant [university] was founded. Because one would go back and say, “Well, a valid high school diploma from the State of Ohio meant something back when that was formulated.” It came not to mean the same thing. I think if I had been, again I guess it’s hard for
me to separate current arguments from the past, but after all it was selective admissions only for autumn quarter.

Q. And it’s never applied to the regional campuses.

A. And it’s never applied to the regional campuses, which we have held on to as our way of having it both ways. And, in fact, it’s worked out pretty well, I think. The next step later on, when we applied it to all quarters at the Columbus campus, you could notice a difference in the classroom. The bottom part really fell away and I think in a pretty significant way. All the while I was doing administrative work I always taught at least one course a year. The only time I never taught was that year I was Acting Dean. The quality and quantity of the students got better and better and better. On my side of campus anyway, it was never much of a controversial issue.

Q. Curiously, when the University began, to get into Ohio State in 1873, there was an admission test.

A. Oh, is that right? I didn’t know that.

Q. And what happened is, in fact, the Trustees were very defensive about that admissions test. Joseph Sullivant writes in defense that it would be a waste of taxpayer money to admit students who are going to fail, and that’s the same rationale that we would use today.

A. Right. Well, and it’s not as if there aren’t other options in the State. My God, the state has so many public institutions. On our side, it wasn’t terribly controversial, I think. Very welcome.

Q. And of course, other [OSU] presidents, even before [Edward] Jennings, [Harold] Enarson had tried to make admissions somewhat more restrictive.

A. So Ed was pretty smart, I think. We paid a little price for it. This is my interpretation, okay? Ed could probably tell you the truth, but then here’s my interpretation of this was, the deal he struck was, let us have selective admissions and we will keep tuition down, because I don’t
want a double whammy of saying, “We’re going to selective admissions, so we’re going to limit who can come here, and we’re going to really jack tuition.” We have never been the most expensive option in the state. We have never even been close. That’s absurd in the face of it. We are by far the premier institution in this state, by now by pretty big factors. And then I think we’re still only fourth or fifth.

Q. Still a bargain.

A. We are really a bargain and I think that all goes back to, we paid a price for that because there were a couple of years in there where we could have used some more money coming from tuition. But I’ve always thought that was the deal he made.

Q. Okay. Certainly selective admissions have had a transformative effect on the culture of the campus, the quality particularly of teaching and research, especially undergraduate research.

A. Exactly.

Q. It was not there before.

A. Right. And all you have to do, I do believe architecture had something to do with it. The best architectural job done on this campus was the renovation of Thompson Library. Another committee I got to be on was the design review board. That one was also just a terrifically educational, for me, opportunity I had. And you walk into Thompson and it is packed with students all the time. Part of it is the attractiveness of the building, the environment, one wants to be there. Just a great environment. It’s also that you’ve got far more serious students.

Q. And somewhat controversially, we have more places for students to be because it went from 800 to 1,800 and there are some faculty, particularly in the History Department, who don’t forgive for creating more space for students at the expense of the print collections.

A. Right.
Q. Anyway, we all have different perspectives. I want to turn, if I might, to your College of Humanities experience. You became an Associate Dean in 1988. What were your duties back then?

A. So when I started, my portfolio was undergraduate education.

Q. Okay.

A. Then I have to think of sequencing. I think Marvin Zahniser was Associate Dean for research and faculty. Marvin retired, then I took that position within the office. And I think that’s when Martha Garland came to work. Martha and Chris came in and had other pieces of what I had done, Martha having particularly the undergraduate side. So I was doing faculty and research. So I had different positions within the college. What was interesting was, [G. Michael] Mike Riley wasn’t teaching when he was Dean but he was teaching in that, really, he ran both his office meetings and his executive committee and the chairs of all the departments, but especially how when he met with the Associate Deans and the fiscal officer, which we met weekly, were really seminars I think, as I look back on it. Many deans are on their way to being provosts who are on their way to being presidents. Their number is legion, right?

Q. Our version of the ________ in Orem.

A. Exactly. We are the cradle of presidents. We once totaled them up and boy, we’ve produced a lot of people who went on to become college presidents. I mean, after all, once you’ve been provost here, you’ve seen about everything you can see and then on the scale, it really does prepare you to be a college president. Well, Mike Riley never wanted to be anything except dean. He loved being dean. I think he was a great dean. We talked about some of the controversy, perhaps. And those seminars, those meetings were seminars and discussions. And then he always empowered you as an associate dean. You were given a budget. You deal with
those issues. You can come to me anytime but it’s yours to run. This opportunity or that
opportunity came up, he would send others of us to conferences and always with the statement,
“Now when you’re a dean, you’ll want to do X and you’ll want to do Y.” He was a great teacher
in that regard. Well, you were talking about the budgeting system. So other colleges would
complain that the College of Humanities got any research money from the Office of Research –
why should Humanities get any money? It doesn’t bring in any money. Our grants and so forth
cost money, for crying out loud. Aside from the Linguistics Department, they actually, you
know, got grants from NFS and so forth. Riley always said, “I’ll tell you what. You give me the
money I generate from my teaching and I won’t take any research money. But I figure that my
budget is somewhere between,” and now I’m going to make this up, “between eight and ten
million dollars shy of what I ought to be getting.” So he intentionally ran a deficit every year. He
just said, “I’m going to do it right, I’ll run a deficit because, by God, this is what we ought to be
doing, and then if they come after me I’ll say, ‘Okay, which courses don’t you want me to teach?
Which sections of freshman English shall I cut? Alright, well we can do things like closing the
writing center which is not course-specific, we can do that.’ ” And what Jennings would do every
year is bail them out. They never moved money over as annual rate.

Q. They just wiped out the deficit.

A. They just wiped it out. Now, I’ll have to think about who the players were. So Ed would
tell the story: Myles Brand, I think, was Provost at one point, comes in and complains bitterly
about this. And Ed says to him, “Well, let me ask you this: is it a better college than it was?”
“Well, yes.” Ed said, “Well, I guess we’ve got to let them do it then. We’ve got to cover it.”

Q. We also had a provost, Diether Haenicke.
A. Yes, but he had left by then. There’s nothing worse than having your own guy get up there, right? I mean, that’s a whole other story. Diether would be a whole other interview actually. Wow. There was a man who executed his office in order to get to the next office. So nothing was principled. Interestingly, he was a very smart guy, by the way. Diether did better and better the higher he went and became more principled, because he wasn’t looking [for the next position]. Ultimately as a college president he was pretty successful, because he finally got there and he didn’t have to worry about it. He ranted and raved – I was on the search committee that brought Mike Riley to Ohio State – and [Diether] ranted at us because there were no women candidates in the final pool. And I’m thinking, “Okay, you were dean here for how long? And tell me how many associate female deans you had?” Zero, none, he did nothing to promote women when he was dean. And I just found that so objectionable, whereas I’ll never forget the day Riley put up the names of all the female full professors. [He said:] “Here are the associate professors. How do we get these moved up there? What do we have to do? This is a big thing that we have to address. You’ve got a problem and let’s deal with it.” So anyway, Mike runs a deficit every year. It gets covered, and Fred Hutchinson becomes provost.

Q. From Agriculture.

A. Right. This is all going to work fine. They got on fine. And Fred leaves to become President of the University of Maine. And the chief rival of the College of Humanities, which would be the Dean of Social Sciences, Joan Huber, becomes Provost. That’s when Mike got fired. And it was over the budget stuff.

Q. And oddly enough, just a few years thereafter, under Ed Ray [as] Provost, the budgeting system is changed so that Humanities would have gotten everything that Riley was asking for.
A. And did. Yes, exactly. The irony of it all, as it turns out – under the system they finally put in, he was right about what the shortfall was. I’ve always thought that that kind of proved the point.

Q. It’s remarkable that there was such tolerance, if you will, for the deficit. It’s my understanding that with deans in recent administrations, no deficit is allowed.

A. Exactly. No, no, no, it just wouldn’t happen now. Not under this system, either, though too, where presumably you’re getting what you should be getting to support things. So then that’s when I became Acting Dean that year after Mike got … essentially he didn’t get reappointed. He was coming to the end of the term. Back then we didn’t call them Interim. I got to be Acting Dean in the toughest budget cut that we ever had. So it was a great time.

Q. In the first years of the Gee administration?

A. Now, I have to think, I guess yes.

Q. Kind of restructuring as well.

A. And Dick Sisson was Provost.

Q. Yes.

A. And so I spent most of the year working on budget cuts and programmatic cuts. And then they hired Kermit Hall as Dean and I went back to the English Department for a while. That’s when I had gotten them kind of the next time around involved with Athletics. About two years after that was when I came back from my second round on Athletic Council, and we were having to do NCAA certification and I was involved in that. Two different times I was on that. So it actually all kind of worked out fine for me in that regard. I was a candidate to be, the search was actually set up to find a female dean. There were five finalists, three of whom were female,
Kermit Hall and me. But when they came to campus for the interviews, the female candidates did not shine apparently.

Q. Oh, okay. Kermit Hall didn’t stay that long as dean either. As soon as he got here, I think he was considered to be upwardly mobile.

A. Yes, that was his m.o. [method of operation] but in retrospect, there was a period there when I pursued some other deanships and actually got offered some other deanships to leave. So I had this opportunity, and it was right when one of the buyouts came. So I thought, “I can take the buyout, do early retirement, I could start double dipping early.” But Gordon actually back then gave me some advice which was, “Make sure you are going to someplace, not running from someplace.” And when I looked at that whole set of circumstances, a lot of it involving family. My kids were grown at that time and already off at college, it would have been a huge adjustment for my wife because she had her circle of friends here and so forth. Well, it’s a lot harder to move to another place when you don’t have kids in school. Your circle is going to be, the circle you moved into, one of the things I found out very quickly when I didn’t get the dean’s job permanently was, how many people pay attention to you just because of office as opposed to person. It’s always a very useful thing to have a very clear knowledge of. I mean, I have to say when I went back to the department, I probably had some of the best teaching experiences I’ve ever had. Just fabulous students. And again, I ran the honors program when I went back to English, so I was really happy. I was having a great run with that.

Q. Is there anything you want to say more about incentive-based budgeting? We talked about the origins.

A. I don’t think so. Since I actually haven’t had to deal with it myself in any administrative sense, there are pluses and minuses to it. You already pointed to the major minuses. They’ve
always been in competition within the institution. It’s one of the tough things about Ohio State. It’s why I think the move to having a College of Arts and Sciences has been a very good thing. I’ll have more to say about that from a different perspective. But the downside of it is, it gets people to look at curriculum and want to do certain things for the wrong reasons, which are, how can I generate more income? How can I get a bigger piece of the pie?

Q. I think it caused a disaster for the College of Education, which just before had given up its undergraduate dollars if you will, at the very same time, very shortly before the University went to incentive-based budgeting when those undergraduates were actual dollars to the department.

A. Which is why now they’re trying to move back into it. Now one could ask the question of whether that is a good or a bad thing. Is it better to have English teachers taking upper-division English courses as opposed to the 200 level courses which is all that they required of them when they were running the program? So to me it’s not clear cut. It needs to be flexible is all I can say. You’re always going to have units that are really important that you want to have that aren’t going to have heavy enrollment. And are you going to sustain them? We used to go through this within the college all the time. Linguistics, you know, was the Rolls Royce operation in the college. They didn’t have big classes, didn’t have all that many students. But, they were great scholars. They did what they did really well. You want to support and sustain that.

Q. Yes, from the Libraries’ perspective, it’s made a little more, it has made the Libraries, instead of, basically we are a support to the colleges which means that anytime there’s a shift of budget to the libraries, it’s at the expenses of the colleges. So that creates some awkwardness.

A. Sure.
Q. Okay. Do you want to talk about your steering committee service? That struck me as one of the more pivotal roles in the senate.

A. Steering committee is incredibly important. I try to explain that to faculty all the time and to my own department. You always want to have someone on there if you can have it, because you never know when the single most important thing is going to happen, which is suddenly a president leaves and you’re going to do a presidential search, and steering is going to be where they’re going to go to get their faculty members first and foremost, or to get advice about faculty members who should serve on a search committee. So I start with that one. That sounds crass but I’ve got to tell you, having been involved in three presidential searches now, two as a committee member and one as the person helping to run it. It’s so critical. What faculty you have on that matters. And then, because it’s the committee on committees, essentially or was, does very, it’s very important. And I do think presidents, and we’ve had some, I think, very successful presidencies here, partly because they do work with faculty. So that’s the key committee.

Q. Okay. You’ve been very active with the University Senate. Can you comment on looking back on the Senate, its effectiveness, especially from the beginning? It’s been said that Ed Jennings basically revived the University Senate. Enarson wasn’t very compatible with it, let’s put it that way.

A. You know, boy, and again it’s very hard for me to measure whether this was just my own perspective, but when I first was a Senator and then on steering and so forth, I looked around and these were among, I thought, the most influential, powerful, important people in the University. And people did their service and went off. We didn’t have what I would call professionals – people who just stayed on and loved being on the committees and doing it. And you had people willing to do, Jesus, serving on, like, rules [committee]; I would have shot myself if I would have
been on that committee. But you had really good people who were willing to do that work. I thought the Senate was a pretty robust body. What started to happen, though, and I think still does, is Academic Affairs kept issuing guidelines, not policy. Stuff that never got voted on and never went to the Senate to be voted on. These were just guidelines but you better follow the guidelines. If you didn’t follow these guidelines, you would get screwed over. I think that’s one thing that happened. The other thing that happened, people used to complain about this, to go all the way back to the curricular stuff, a special committee would be appointed. Now they would always try to have a fair number of senate members on it but in order to continue the business of the Council of Academic Affairs, they wouldn’t hand it off to them to do; they would appoint a special committee to deal with it. There would be resentment of that. We’re the people charged with doing it, so sometimes there’s tension on that front and a suspicion that Administration then is trying to control everything by doing that. There is a lot of suspicion of the Administration, which they lump altogether – faculty. I certainly saw it when I went back to the department and you start sitting through department meetings again or, really, through tenure promotion meetings, I would have to say. When you’ve been the one making the decision, you had an advisory committee, but finally you were the one that wrote the letter to the Provost that said, and one thing I was really proud of was, every recommendation I made to the Provost in terms of tenure and promotion was followed. I had no rejections. I felt really good about that. But when you listen to faculty sometimes go on, you realize that they are so clueless in terms of the reality of some situations. I’m sure that administrators from time to time convey that attitude and you can end up with lots of tension. My sense overall though is, the Senate has worked really effectively with the Administration on a lot of issues over a pretty long period of time.
Q. One of the concerns that I want to ask about with the Senate is that we all value the concept of participatory governments, but one of the issues that I believe has arisen is, do we actually reward people who give up their time to be effective in the Senate?

A. Yes, one, and two, we have too many repeats of the same people rotating through. We have not done a very effective job of saying everyone should do a turn. That it’s part of the duty. And when you get the same people rotating through, then they lose credibility with their colleagues and the reward part … see, what should the nature of reward be for service? We know in a research institution that ought to count. It should count the least, of the three legs on which tenure and promotion [are based] and so forth. Research and teaching have to be the two most prominent. And in a big university you can sustain having some people who do no service if they’re really great in the other. But you can’t have all of that. And therefore you have to find some way to reward the people who are doing this. But you want it to be some of the same people. That’s the big challenge, right? How do you get the eminent researcher to say, “I’m going to give my time for a three-year period to go and sit in meetings?” I don’t think we’ve ever solved that dilemma.

Q. I’ve mentored people in the Libraries faculty system and I’ve told people, “If you want to be a full professor, if I have any say at it, I better see some service on the appointment of promotion and tenure today because that’s just part of being a citizen.”

A. That’s right. To me, I think that’s right. See, I guess I, we know what the rewards for doing all the first-rate scholarship are. For these others, we have to find, I think the University has worked hard at trying to find recognition and so forth, for these other duties. But we haven’t succeeded in getting the notion through that really it’s everybody’s duty to rotate through.
Q. You were quite active, certainly from your record at University Senate. This wasn’t an issue in the English Department?

A. No, I mean I had Chairs who recognized the value of having the voice of the department, going back to, John Gabel would say, “There should always be an English professor on the steering committee.” Again, for the presidential search kind of thing, because you want to make sure you get someone whose values at the top are ones that you value. I think I was fortunate in that way actually.

Q. Okay. This really brings us to the next topic. You served on some high-level [search] committees: two Presidents, and some would say, the football coach is even more important.

A. Well, I will tell you the difference in those searches is, while you have to be relatively secretive in doing a presidential search, it’s nothing compared to how you have to do a football coach. I mean, trying to maintain … there are far more people who care about the football coach across the state and the press. So there’s no question about that. I love to sit and listen to people talk about what that search was and so forth and so on, who actually don’t know. I mean, it’s hilarious. You can tell from what I said about John Cooper and so forth. I don’t listen to talk radio and especially don’t listen to sports talk radio but I was driving somewhere I think to do one of the interviews one day. These guys are going at it. “Who picked this committee? Who are these people? An English professor and a woman?” Susan Hartmann was on it. “And a Women Studies [professor]. They know a lot about football.” It was hilarious because of course, I don’t know anything about football. No more than the average person. Now basketball I actually think I know a lot, so it’s way more dangerous. When we got into the interviews, it’s not my job to find out, can this guy coach football? Andy Geiger had a consultant. We had Archie Griffin on the committee. We have all these other people who are experts in that. I wanted to find out,
what’s the value system? What have you done with players off the field? What’s the academic reputation? I suppose it’s also true when you’re looking at presidents, you’re looking for strengths that the previous person didn’t have. For better or worse, that’s the tendency. And we wanted someone who could really control the program, whose graduation rate … Tressel’s graduation rate at Youngstown State was way above the graduation rate of the rest of the student population. Now that has to do with something about the institution, but still there aren’t many coaches who can come in and say that. So that’s what I was looking for. What is the person, in terms of commitment to the academic side of the house and the behavior side of the house?

Q. When you were on the committee to select Tressel, what was the relationship between … was there a relationship between that search committee and Athletic Council?

A. So I have to stop and think. At that point I wasn’t on Athletic Council, so probably, and Susan was the faculty rep to athletics and probably whoever was chair of Athletic Council was on that committee too. So no, no, they had representation on that.

Q. The reason I ask is, it’s a mystery to me. I’m thrilled, I think I’m thrilled that we got Urban Meyer but in looking at the names of the people who were on the search committee, I didn’t see …

A. It was done in a completely different way. Completely different way.

Q. So that was an anomaly?

A. Yes, it really was.

Q. Okay.

A. Yes. So presidential searches, the first one I was on was the one that eventually where we hired [William] “Brit” Kirwan.

Q. Okay.
A. And that was my first real extensive interaction with Trustees.

Q. Okay.

A. Now I can’t even remember who was chair of the board at that moment. But the people I worked with on that committee were Alex Shumate, Tami Longenberger, a terrific group of people.

Q. In the deliberations of the search committee, is there an actual vote taken or is it based on consensus?

A. Here’s what’s interesting about how those committees were set up. And both that one and the next one, they followed the exact same model, which was, I think, don’t trust me on numbers, okay, but I’m going to say there were nine Board of Trustees voting members of the board at the time. So there could be only four board members on the committee, because if you had five, that constituted a quorum of the board; therefore you could be subject to all the open-records laws. Four trustees, five faculty. They always had more faculty than board members on the search committee. What was made very clear or became clear, but I think made clear from the outset, and their was head of the Alumni Association. There were other members of the committee but your job is to come up with a recommendation that you agree on that will be taken to the board.

Q. To the Board of Trustees, okay. In that respect it’s somewhat similar to what happens in many departments and colleges. There’s a search committee that makes a recommendation and it’s the head, the dean or the chair who makes the final decision to accept or reject the recommendation of the search committee.

A. Right. So that process, and there’s always the use of the consultant as well, which is an interesting piece of how it works. That also had some deans on it. Let’s see, Kermit Hall was on
that committee, and Bernadine Healy was on that committee. It was wonderful watching the two
of them, both who were people [who had] considerable sense of their own importance, right?
Q. Yes, I had a close friend of mine refer to Dr. Healy as the queen bee.
A. Yes. Well, this would only conjure memories of Queen Ann [Reynolds], of course, when
she was Provost way back. She was Provost before …
Q. Yes, I think she was appointed by Enarson.
A. After Al Kuhn left.
Q. Yes, near the end of Enarson’s administration.
A. Yes, W. Ann Reynolds.
Q. Yes.
A. So anyway, I was always amused by that interplay but Alex Shumate is one of the great,
he’s been back on the board. That’s when I first got to know Alex. I have worked with him
closely. He is just such a fabulous board member and so good at getting people to work together.
I think maybe George Skestos might have been chair of the board at the time. Don’t trust me on
that. I’m hazy on that.
Q. That’s a matter of the record anyway.
A. But I mean, getting Brit Kirwan, I thought, was a real coup. Again, Gordon in his first
time around was a terrific, I thought he was the right person to follow Ed Jennings because he
was a great external person. He really could work the state. He was terrific at the externals. I
think if there was one group by the time Gordon left that was less than happy with him, it would
be the faculty because the faculty figured out when Ed Jennings left as President, faculty salaries
were second or third in every category in the Big Ten. By the time Gordon left we were near the
bottom. But administrative salaries had gone way up. I had been in Administration. And Brit was

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such a faculty person. Again, you try to look at the balancing of how things had gone. I think Brit, it’s the same thing as [Provost] Fred Hutchinson, the one place that he would have left here for was Maine, which is where he was from. And I think the only thing that got Brit to leave was going back to Maryland. I think the spouse and grandchildren was a factor, too. So much sooner than we expected we had another presidential search. So we used the same model: four trustees, five faculty, and even some of the same faculty on that committee. And I think the growing sense of the place of research in medicine and knowing that you wanted a president who really understood medicine, because you had a very aggressive dean who was, now how frank I’m going to be about Fred Sanfilippo will be a major issue for me. I mean, Fred was doing what he was brought in to do. Change things up even more, bring in some high-powered people. They gave him the wherewithal to do it. Plenty of money was spent. So there was a sense of, we want a president who understands that game really well. That was a huge factor in Karen Holbrook’s becoming President.

Q. Interesting. Were there any concerns about the fact that she had never been a president before?

A. Yes, I think some of this is retrospect. I couldn’t put in time for you where people would say, you can’t learn on the job at Ohio State. You have to have already been a president, or you have to be internal. That is, you have to already know Ohio State. But you can’t have both be unknowns. Now that’s probably an after-the-fact kind of analysis, but I think it’s pretty clear when she didn’t get reappointed, that by God, the next time around we are going to have a sitting president. That was almost a foregone conclusion. Or maybe, if there had been some internal candidate who was a superstar that you saw, this [person] is presidential, which has never happened at Ohio State, at least not in recent memory.
Q. Her appointment would have been the first time since 1956, that we appointed a President who had not been a president at another institution.

A. Right. And I think, by the way, one might say the same thing when we came to hire another football coach. It’s not a place where you get on-the-job training. You have to prove that you’ve already done it. But some of that’s retrospect. Yes, there was huge concern about that. No question. And I think maybe she was also hampered by the fact that soon after she was appointed president, that fall was when I was made secretary of the board. Now, she obviously had a say in that. It has to be someone the president can work with and feel comfortable with. One bit of advice I think she didn’t get was, every other president, the minute he became president, brought in a group of former presidents and advisors to say, what should I do? Now these were people who already knew what the hell they wanted to do and how to do it. She never did that. And I think no one ever pushed her to do it, though. I think it’s unfortunate.

Q. Yes, yes, but the academic plan had already been, was one of the major accomplishments.

A. No question.

Q. And there had been a significant budgetary commitment to renovate the Thompson Library, again out of the Kirwan administration. She was inheriting some significant legacies.

A. In that search, I’m not violating any confidence when I say this. We made it very clear to every candidate, we have an academic plan. We think it’s a good academic plan. We expect the new president to execute this plan. We know there’ll be tweaks. We know there’ll be things that some president, a new person will want to put on it, but we don’t have to start over again, is our own assessment. That was very clear to each candidate. That was a very strong position that the committee held and shared. All the candidates knew that coming in. And it is true, but that
doesn’t speak to, though, how you execute the office, okay? And until you’ve been there and done that, it’s hard. Really hard.

Q. Let me put this on pause. David, welcome back. This is a continuation of the interview we began a couple of weeks ago. … Where we had left our discussion, or rather your discussion, I should say, was leading up to your appointment as secretary of the Board of Trustees. Now as I understand from our previous meeting, you were a natural for the post, given your service on search committees, your leadership in University Senate. Is that a fair statement?

A. I don’t know if I’d use the term natural; I think I had what it turned out was that, because of the experiences I had had, I had been exposed to members of the board because of the search committees that I had served on. Presidential search committees, which always involved at least, actually had a maximum four trustees, and then five faculty and then other members of the committee. I can’t remember actually if we had talked about this but it had to do with the fact that if you had more than four trustees, then it became a quorum. So there were always four trustees. And I think it was the case that two former presidents had indicated to the board that they, who had been consulted about desirable qualities in a president and so forth, that one of the things that the board might look to do, since they knew they were having to replace the secretary of the board in any case, would be to have a faculty member serve in that position. So I think actually some of the advice came from former presidents. So I was fortunate in having been in a position that I have been in and served on some of the committees that I had served on, I was known to some of the board members. And I was known to those presidents who I think suggested to the board, “Hey, this would be a faculty member who could serve in this position.” And it would give a faculty voice where there hadn’t been one. I think it’s fair to say, if you don’t know what the secretary of the Board of Trustees is or does, which I had very little
conception of, why would you give up the freedom you have as a full professor, which is the best life that there is, to take on a job where you’re essentially at the beck and call of other people? And the hook was that this would be an opportunity to have a faculty voice where there had never been one. And that really was for me the attraction of doing the job, because I really couldn’t imagine the kind of life one might have to lead serving as secretary. Because you organize the work of the board, but you also serve as the interface between the Board and the president. That’s a very big part of the job.

Q. Okay.

A. And I just wasn’t sure that that was something that I could really see myself doing. I was aware that part of the job also involved the kind of care and feeding of the Trustees, if you will, one of the things that was very fortunate was that there was a veteran staff in the board office and when I talked about this with several board members, they made it very clear, “Look, we’ve got a great system of the people who take care of tickets to events.” Or running the bowl operation is always run out of the board office. And that’s a huge endeavor. You’ve got a crew that does that. They know how to do it and basically we don’t want you messing with any of that. So that was that and I knew those people by virtue of having been on bowl trips, because of my service with the Athletic Council. So I had a lot of confidence in the people in the office. I knew I wasn’t being asked to come in and reorganize an office and make changes. So, several senior members of the board approached me about doing the job, invited me to do the job. There was no search. There’s no formal process. And I think I started in November 2002 or something.

Q. I’m trying to remember your predecessor. Was that Bob Duncan?

A. No, [OSU General Counsel Robert] “Bob” Duncan had been secretary of the board. Bill Napier was my immediate predecessor. So one of the great advantages I had as secretary was, I
had as a board member Bob Duncan, who had served in the position as secretary of the Board when he was also general counsel. Which is probably the most common model that you see out there with public institutions. Generally, very often, you will see that the general counsel also serves as secretary of the board. And there are a lot of good reasons for that, actually. It’s the other dominant model. It is actually the dominant model. So I was very fortunate. I mean, Bob was one of the people in the group that talked with me. And that was extremely helpful. They, the board, appoint the secretary. You serve at the pleasure of the board, but their conception of the job was that I would also sit on any advisory groups, the most important groups of the president. So they wanted also to get the president’s buy-in, “Would you be comfortable with this person as secretary of the Board?” Because the oddity is that you serve, say on the President’s Council and whatever other groups there are within university governance, mostly central governance, but you’re the one person there who doesn’t answer to the president. So having that relationship, making sure that there is an element of trust is very important. Now, Karen Holbrook had just come in as President. I had known her a little bit from the search committee process, but she obviously agreed to it and then that began my term as secretary of the board.

Q. You mentioned the board was involved in the bowl events. I assume you worked with the board and the president in setting agendas for meetings. What other kinds of duties did you have?

A. When I started, I think the board was still meeting nine times a year. That’s a lot of meetings. I think that that kind of schedule invites micro-management. Let me just say that from the start. So no sooner are you done with a meeting then you are starting to work on the agenda for the next meeting. And you would generally work on that with the officers of the board, that
is, the president and the vice president. The board operated in different ways under different presidents. Remember that when I started the job, each board member became chair in his or her ninth year. So everyone got a chance to be chair of the board. For better or worse. I think if you look at that as a system, really, I think it’s not a very good system because you can never really do long-range planning in that kind of mode. And each chair will have something that he or she most wants to get done, and then that becomes the chief issue for a certain period on the board. It’s just not conducive to strategic planning, long-term planning. And it’s probably very difficult for a president. After all, the relationship between the president and the chair of the board, if you look at most boards, is probably the most important relationship there. And here the president would have to have a different chair each year. Very, very, I think, difficult situation. On the other hand, it did do away with any politicking on the board itself—who is going to be chair and so forth. There was none of that. Each person knew he or she would get to be chair.

But then each chair operated in a slightly different way. Some of them wanted weekly meetings with me to review things, to review the agenda coming up, to review the big issues, to try and do some planning. They would want the president to be in some of those meetings but not always. The fact of the matter was, you had to change with each chair and each chair had a different interest. I think I managed to convince them that we ought to have fewer meetings, so we got to eight meetings, and by the time the board had expanded, that changed, which we can talk about a little bit. We were down to five meetings a year, which to me was … now, two things happened with the expansion of the board, which happened six or seven years ago now. The board was expanded from nine voting members to fifteen voting members. At that point, and I think it was at that point, for the very first time we did the board, it had a committee, it developed a committee on trusteeship right at that point. And we did an analysis of each of the
board members and said, “Here’s what we have on the board. Here’s the expertise they have. Here’s the board profile. Here are the areas of interest of where the University is going. We need some people with expertise in these areas.” And we kind of submitted that to the Governor’s office and said, “When you’re making appointments it would be very helpful if you would look at this.” When Governor Taft – then, the law had changed so that, it got expanded from nine to fifteen voting members, also you could be reappointed after you had been off, I think, four years. Don’t trust me entirely on that. So some people were clearly going to be reappointed. And I don’t think that it’s any secret that Les Wexner was the one who got the law changed and got reappointed. What was very interesting was, Bob Duncan was chair that year when this happened – of the board. And Governor [Robert] Taft met with Bob Duncan and me, reviewed that profile, we talked about it: “Look, we’ve got this huge medical center. We’ve got a lot at risk there. We have no one on the board with expertise in that area. Please find us someone.” Some names were proffered as well but you have to be very careful about that, because you don’t want to be telling the Governor whom he ought to be appointing. But we would try and come up with some names of people that we knew of that we felt could contribute in a significant way.

I have to say that from that point on, the appointments to the board, whether by Taft or [Ted] Strickland or [John] Kasich, had been very responsive to the University’s needs assessment. So if you look at the last appointment, Jeff Wadsworth, for example, the head of Battelle, that was a very important connection for Ohio State. Here’s someone with a Ph.D. in engineering and what are we investing in? We’re investing in engineering and big science and medicine. So we were very fortunate in the appointments we had, and we also expanded the board by adding what we call mass charter or national trustees. They now have two of them where the board is empowered to have three. They are elected by the board themselves. These
are people who are not residents of the State of Ohio. So they can’t vote at the full board level but they can vote at the committee level. And with the expanded board, the committees became far more important. The real work gets done now in the committees, I would say. That’s been a pretty big change. Even though the full board votes on everything, and no final decision can be made in the committee, nonetheless, the committee vote is the vote that really carries the day. So I think from where I sat, the expansion of the board was a huge plus.

Q. The national committee members – given the fact that the Governor appoints the Board of Trustee members, what is the legal status, if you will, of the national trustees?

A. It just means they are not empowered to vote at the full board level.

Q. Okay, sort of senior advisors.

A. But we went further and said you can vote in the committees. And you can be in every executive session, which we have also always allowed our student members to do. And that’s not true across the state. The first national trustee, the interesting piece of it was, [G. Gilbert] “Gil” Cloyd, who was one of the people appointed in the expansion of the board. You know, he was a Senior VP at Proctor and Gamble and just an absolutely terrific board member, who then became chair of the board. When he retired at P&G, he moved to Texas. He then got appointed as the first charter trustee. So that was a real anomaly. You won’t see that kind of pattern probably again. The other thing that happened with the expansion of the board, is we then also brought in a consultant, Dick Chait, who is the big guru on trustee governance. And he was the perfect person for us. Dick’s background was all in big public institutions but at the time he started with us was a professor at Harvard in their graduate program in education. But if you look at the publications he is always the big guru of governance, and he worked with our board and made it so much easier for me because we had to reform everything. We had to change the way we
basically did all our business. And the first thing he did with the expanded board was, we went on a retreat and we developed a Statement of Expectations. Here’s how you will operate as a board member, and that really became a model that got used by other institutions in the State and other places across the country. It actually was really very successful. And we changed orientation for new board members. Board members would come on, their initial orientation would be to the University. Now we’ve got this a little backwards. The first orientation ought to be with the board, what it is to be a board member, and what the expectations are. And then we’ll move to trying to educate you about the University. But that is a multi-year process. You know how complicated this place is? And we’ve had board members like Ron Ratner, we’ll take him as an example. Terrific board member. He chairs, I don’t even remember what we call it now, the physical facilities. It was an ad-hoc committee when he was chairing it. Now that’s his business up in Cleveland [Forest City Enterprises Inc.]. They’re a big national company. Ron had no connection to Ohio State. Hadn’t gone to Ohio State. He had never step foot on this campus until he was appointed. But he had a skill set that we knew was very important. There’s a case of someone we were delighted to have appointed to the board. And now you can’t find a bigger fan of Ohio State than Ron Ratner, a fan in the right sense of the word, of the University.

Q. What you’re telling me is more than a bit of a revelation because you have this sense of almost a stereotype of the board. These are appointees of the governor with necessarily a huge interest in the University, but this seems to be a cataclysmic shift within the board.

A. Yes, I think the view we all had on the faculty was, well these were the cronies of the governor. And it didn’t matter, Republican or Democrat, they all seemed to be the same. And they were more or less political appointments. And it is the case that it is the most sought-after appointment in the State of Ohio, and that is still true. Brian Hicks is on the board who might
have been kind of one of the last of what we would call political appointments. Brian wanted
desperately to be appointed to be a Trustee, and he had been chief of staff for Taft, and that was
kind of his reward. Brian had been president of Undergraduate Student Government when he
was a student here, knows and loves the University. He wanted the appointment because he cares
and loves the University. But he used to run the appointment process for the governor, when he
worked for the governor, to the boards. And he would say, “You know, the day in which we
make one person happy we make a whole lot of people very unhappy,” because there’s so many
people who want the appointment.

Q. It’s not so obvious to me why people would want to be on the Board of Trustees.

A. So, it’s interesting, too. We all think, “It’ll because they want the great football tickets.”
Most of these are people who already own their own boxes. They aren’t people who need that in
order to get any benefits. The prestige attached to being on the Board of Trustees is enormous. I
mean, I think we in Columbus underestimate that. Underestimate how prestigious it is. Take the
example of Gil Cloyd. Let me just give him as an example. He was not someone, anyone who …
we had come up with his name because we were [saying] look, you have to look at multiple
things. Geographic distribution, the governor always has to worry about that. Here was a guy
who was an OSU alum, had his degree in Vet Med, but went to work for Proctor and Gamble,
had huge international experience. He ran their research abroad for some time. He lived in Japan.
Was very big on R&D. So since we’re moving so much into research, it’s such a great fit. I
mean, there’s a case of a person who was identified, no one had any idea what his politics, if any,
were. I’m sure actually most board members to this day couldn’t tell you what his politics were.
So here’s someone who had never, ever tried to get appointed, who got approached, though, and
said, “If you were to be appointed, would you …?” Well, think of this, if someone who had
started at a regional campus, became this huge success, and gets the opportunity to serve his institution in this way. I mean, I think, let me take the other great example, I guess. Les Wexner has plenty to fill his life. Spending his time and energy and thought and obviously money on Ohio State, he doesn’t need to do that. He has plenty world-wide to occupy him in other ways. But he loves this institution.

Q. That makes another question. Even though you cut back the number of meetings per year, there must be a lot of work for the members of the board of trustees just to prepare adequately for the meetings.

A. Huge amount. And the amount of time between meetings is enormous. And a lot of that falls – two things happen for the secretaries. You end up serving or attending lots of meetings on campus if the Provost is meeting, president’s meetings. To me the biggest shock was, I’ll bet half my time was spent in meetings dealing with the medical center. That alone just took enormous amounts of time. Then, you are also meeting with chairs of the committees and you have to sustain the relationship with each individual board member. And it’s also your job to make sure that the president is sustaining his or her relationship with each board member. Now, it varies from board member to board member. Chairs of committees, I mean you’re going to spend, especially there were some committees, which I was the liaison with. For example, the committee on trusteeship, the committee that ran governance. I was the point person on that, whereas [with] medical affairs, [Senior Vice President for Health Sciences Steven] “Steve” Gabbe would be the point person on that. Fiscal affairs, it would be [Senior Vice President of Business and Finance William] “Bill” Shkurti, and then [subsequent Senior Vice President of Business and Finance] Geoff Chatas. So academic affairs was [Provost] Joe Alluto. But you have to make sure all of those connections are working and that everyone is on the same page. It’s
really the orchestration of that. I have to say, when it came to what they call the care and feeding, or the concierge duties if you will, we’re going to some conference, we’re taking some Trustees, we are going to the big governance conference or whatever, I never had to deal with that. My staff dealt with all of that. The bowl stuff I did get involved in. Some of the ceremonial things I got involved in. But I really had a terrific staff to arrange that. And then, of course, they did all the recording of minutes, all of that, development of agendas.

Q. As I remember it’s a relatively small staff, too.

A. It is, and of course as it grew, we grew by one person in my time there. But just terrific. And then my other duty was at commencement. Now this was one of my best jobs. As part of [being] secretary you have to go to every commencement, and you hood the honorary degree recipients. I always had the best seat at commencement. I’m between the first honorary degree recipient and the speaker. I mean, I probably had more time with Bill Clinton when he was here giving his commencement address than anyone else in the University. I’ve had great conversations with people at those and you know, at the dinner beforehand, the night before. So parts of the job in that sense are wonderful. Some of the ceremonial parts were enjoyable. The toughest part is, you don’t work just for the chair of the board, though. Each board member has a vote. Each board member is equal. Therefore, you have to make sure you are giving time to each board member even though the chair is always going to take the lion’s share of your time. And your relationship with each one will be different depending on your personal relations. Tami Longaberger was someone I already had a friendship with. We were very close. I worked very closely with her, and she had one very important agenda item that she was determined to get done in her time, which was the passage of dependent benefits. That was huge. Before my time it
was ready to come to a vote at the board, and they tabled it at the last minute. This was before my time as secretary.

Q. This concerns the benefit package for gays and lesbians?

A. If you look at how it ended up being worded, it didn’t even say domestic partners. It was phrased as, I can’t come up with the right phrase, but it had to do with dependents. So it could be an older relative living with you, but if you were the responsible person, but it had to do with domestic partners. We just did it in a broader fashion.

Q. Okay.

A. And she pulled it off, too. That was a huge accomplishment. No one now even thinks about it but boy, at the time it was done that was huge.

Q. It had been controversial in the past.

A. And it had been very controversial in the past.

Q. You said a moment ago that it was important for you as secretary to maintain or cultivate a relationship with each of the board members. How did you go about doing that? You knew Tami Longaberger from past service.

A. Yes, and I knew Bob Duncan the same way. I knew the ones who had been on the search committee, I knew Jim Patterson who was chair when I first started. Dimon McFerson the same, and Alex Shumate. And Alex probably the person I had done more with and then he was reappointed to the board. So he became one of the most critical figures on the board. And Alex is one of the great statesmen. He is a consummate team player and he is maybe the best at getting people to play together. He is just so terrific at what he does. You try and find where you have common cause with people. Some are more interested in one aspect than another. It might be the medical center – Alan Brass, that was his bailiwick. That’s what he was really interested in. Make
sure they are connected to the right people on that front. You try to develop personal relationships and you have to know the interactions and dynamics of the people on the board. The board is dominated by people from central Ohio, so you have to know the ins and outs of those relationships. Over time you learn which spouses get along and so forth. You’ve got those dynamics, so you’re at a dinner and so forth. I will say this, at my time on the board, in contrast to what I hear played out in previous eras, political differences never came to the fore. You recognize that from the time the board expanded. I really had a mixed board of people who had been appointed by both Republicans and Democrats. The really fascinating piece of that was, that never came up at all in my time as secretary. It had come up right before, in the period right before I became secretary, and it came up over a tuition raise at one point I know. And I know that because it’s in the [Kirwan administration] history. Jo Ann Davidson, I think Brit Kirwan thought he had the board behind him to do a raise, and then at the last minute they switched on him and did the governor’s thing.

Q. Yes, that’s in the history of the Kirwan years because I remember Kirwan was quite disappointed that he did not have the board, because apparently it wasn’t such a big issue, at least as the history reads, with the governor, and Kirwan cites that one of the reasons for leaving.

A. Right, and I think that that probably was the last instance in which that kind of dynamic played out.

Q. Okay.

A. It never came up again in my time. I think that’s one of the things that made the job far less complicated. When it had tensions over that kind of a thing, it could have been really... Again, I go back to the Statement of Expectations. Look at that document, it says, “We are here to serve The Ohio State University.” Other things we leave at the door of this room. We would
revisit that document every year. Alex, as chair of the committee on trusteeship, would have the board review that. That was the first document we gave to new appointees. Then the board would revisit that every year and say, “Let’s make sure we are operating on these principles.”

Q. Historically, there has been tension between University executives and the Board of Trustees over the issue over what is the role of the board of trustees in regard to general management versus micro management.

A. So this is where having Dick Chait around was really helpful as a consultant. And I give the board a lot of credit. At the end of each meeting, of the ones he would attend, they would say, “Okay, now tell us how we are doing? How did we do?” And he would sit there and say to them, “Did you guys realize you spent half an hour talking about X? And that’s not what you should be focusing on. You should be up here. You guys got down here, right?” “Oh yes, okay.” Now only an outsider, I think, can do that. If I had said that to them, I don’t think it would have been received in the same way. It is a huge challenge, though, because the implications of what I had said earlier, “Okay, we need someone with expertise in medicine.” So you get someone with expertise in medicine. Well, that person is going to have opinions about how you want to be doing it. So when you have people with expertise, you are in some sense inviting them in, and the tendency to micro manage, especially if you live in central Ohio, is enormous. They are confronted everyday by someone who says, “Do you know they’re doing x or y over there?” And on the one hand you want them to be able to say, “Look, that’s not what I’m supposed to be concerned with.” But no one wants to give that response, right? So there is this temptation to give into micro management. And there’s no question that when you have high-powered businessmen who run their own businesses, men and women, who run their own businesses, they have very strong ideas about how you ought to be running your business. So there is always
tension there. I would never say that there isn’t that kind of a tension. It’s harnessing that, using it, sometimes you have to push back and say, “I think you’re really overstepping the bounds here.” That, in a sense, was part of my job or my job to get another board member to tell another board member, you know one of the ways you work that is to say, “Hey, could you say something to so and so?” You work with it in different ways, again, depending on the people. But that tension is always going to be there, especially on the fiscal side. We’re seeing it right now, aren’t we? How do we monetize the University? Well, some board members have very strong views on that and push pretty hard.

Q. I think we’ve touched on it a little bit but there’s probably more to say, but what makes an effective member of the board? Certainly, the sensitivity to micro managing versus a general management perspective, but what other things? Obviously, doing your homework.

A. Yes, and that’s huge. The amount of material they get for each meeting is beyond belief, really, in some ways. Collegiality is incredibly important. But in a larger sense, let’s say you have someone on the board who has expertise in medicine. Let’s take that as an example. But you have only one board member who has that expertise. How much do you defer to that singular expertise? You know, there’s a danger there after all. So each board member has to develop, there’s a trust factor involved. And part of that trust then comes when they work in close concert with the administration and the people within the institution who have expertise in that area. I come back to this notion, the one area that the board would tend not to interfere in actually, at all, would be the academic side of the house, because they recognize that’s not where they have expertise. If you look at the single biggest weakness of this board in terms of expertise, it’s that there’s no one on the board who is an expert in higher education, which I have pointed out to them many a time, which they would concur with by the way. I mean, they understand
this. And such a person, I think, has virtually no chance of being appointed by the governor. He might appoint one of your charter national trustees. If you look at private boards, they will have, they almost all will have some former president or current president or someone who has an expertise in higher ed. They at least tend to stay out, in some sense, out of that arena. They’ll look at things like, you know, what can we streamline on the academic side. They couldn’t believe how long it took us to get from 191 hours down to 180. How can it take you so long to do that? That drove them absolutely wild. But then if you think, look how quickly we did the change to semesters, made the decision to go to that. So being collegial, understanding both powers and limits, Wexner who is a very driven, very extremely visionary, very smart fellow, had that. I gave a talk [about it] to an OSURA [OSU Retirees Association] group last week.

Q. I missed that unfortunately.

A. Well, what I did at the end of it was, I read a quotation from the last meeting I attended – I served on it last June – where there had been controversy about, not controversy about the firing of the football coach or the resignation of the football coach, but the fallout from it. And one of the board members had opined that the University had a lot of soul searching to do and so forth. And Wexner took issue with that at the end of the meeting and had this great statement about it. He said, “The business of running a University, this is a tough business. This is a tough job. It’s really hard work. But it’s hard work that matters. It matters for the sons and daughters of Ohio.” It was a beautiful statement that he wrote. I sit next to him at the meetings. He wrote that out there, at that time. Because normally what he does at the end of the meeting, he would go around and have each board member say something at the end. He leaned over to me and said, “I’m not going to do that at this meeting. I have something to say.” And he wrote it out right there. It was a beautiful statement about, “Look, yes, we’re the economic engine of Ohio and we
need to be. But we’re the intellectual engine of Ohio. We’re the artistic engine of Ohio. Whether it’s English or Engineering, whatever it is, food safety, we matter enormously. But it’s hard work. And it’s valuable work.” It was a beautiful statement and it captured for me, I guess this circles all the way back to why do you want to be on the board? Because you think you can help them help the University make a difference? Because you know the University matters in some fundamental way? It was very powerful and very moving and watching him do it on the spot, I have to say, it was mighty impressive.

Q. You had said a few minutes ago that one of the things, one of the important duties you had was to connect – interface, to use another word – between the president and the Board of Trustees. Now presidents have their own strengths, each of them has their own strengths and weaknesses. You had the responsibility of working with two presidents, namely President Holbrook and President Gee. Would you comment on their styles in working with the board and anything else you care to add?

A. Karen Holbrook was one of the hardest working and smartest and to me and to many others, just also a very nice person. A person with strong values, really good values, great work ethic, but she did not enjoy the public part of the job. I think that was apparent. That’s a huge difficulty at a place like Ohio State because this presidency is a very public presidency. And I don’t think she really enjoyed working with board members; there’s no other way to put it, I think. I think for Karen personal politicking just wasn’t an area of comfort for her, whereas Gordon, how many different places [had he done that?]. He was a pro at dealing with boards, for better or for worse. He had had his difficulties, obviously. The Brown [University] situation. I think actually he learned a lot from that – that his tenure at Brown, as he would be the first to tell you, was not successful. His tenure at Vanderbilt was very successful because he learned the
lessons at Brown, I think. It obviously clearly stood in a very good stead when he came back to Ohio State. Gordon is, and this isn’t just with board members, Gordon is the master of personal relationships. Gordon would write me a note after every board meeting, “Great job,” and so forth and so on and finally I went to him and I said, “Gordon, look, I appreciate it. I’m right across the hall from you. You do not need to take your time writing me a note. It’s lovely that you do it, but...” He is phenomenal and natural at it, he loves it, and I never, ever had to go to Gordon and say, “I think you better touch base with so and so.”

Q. He also has a phenomenal talent or gift for remembering people’s names.

A. Exactly. And details about them. So you had very different styles there that end up being, whether you think it ought to be or not, end up being very important in the functioning of governance.

Q. As I remember, Board of Trustees members only get their expenses paid. They don’t get a salary.

A. Right.

Q. Or a stipend, if you will, for being on the board.

A. No, and frankly most of my time on the board there was virtually no asking for expenses [to be paid]. Of course, if you’re traveling on a trip or whatever, that’s [reimbursed], driving from somewhere.

Q. Okay, so it’s that personal connection.

A. The other thing is, when we re-did, now it didn’t work out this way or it hasn’t very often, but when they re-did the president’s house, Gordon said, “I need to have it set up so that out-of-town board members can stay at my house if they want to when they’re here.” Now it ended up very few of them did that. Most of them stay at the Blackwell when they’re coming
from out of town. But still that notion, the mentality of, I want to keep them close, I want to have as much contact with them as I can. Just a different mode. One of the challenges we also had was keeping former board members engaged and having them be useful as well. I think that’s a continuing issue. Some of them, Bob Duncan for example, have continued to be very helpful on a number of things. We would always have a Christmas dinner where we always invited the former trustees and spouses back, which was always actually very well attended. I think that’s something they really appreciated.

Q. One of the courageous acts, whether it was wise or not remains to be seen, of Karen Holbrook was addressing the fan behavior.

A. Absolutely.

Q. Can you tell me how that played amongst the board because the alumni and students, many of them never forgave her.

A. So there’s a great case of her value system. It was courageous and it was more than courageous. It has proven in the long run to be absolutely the right thing to have done. And I give Karen a lot of credit for that, because she really stuck to her guns on that. And there were some, although I will say, it was a very small group on the board, who I think probably wish that she hadn’t taken that strong a stance. As they understood a stance had to be taken but they probably would have appreciated a more modified approach. But that was a very small group. I think Bill Hall was Vice President for Student Affairs at that time, and he was really terrific too, in executing that change, you know. Getting the students to change their behaviors, and really the more problematic, I think, behaviors were from alums and any other group. It’s not just an Ohio State phenomenon obviously and we had some difficulties. When we played Texas here, there was some very bad behavior. When we went to Texas last year, it was amazing. They went out
of their way to treat us well. We had never been treated so well at an away event. It started to pay off, the whole notion that hey, we’ve got a problem here. We have to address this problem. I think she was courageous, and I think it was the right thing to do. I don’t think there’s been any argument about that. And most of the board really did support her. There were some criticisms of it but it was pretty muted within the board.

Q. Eventually, President Holbrook and the board parted company and her contract was not renewed. Do you have any thoughts about what appeared to be a parting of the ways?

A. I think if you look at what Karen was brought in to do – and I think we actually talked about this a little bit before. We had an academic plan. It was very clear in the search that we were looking for a president who would embrace that and extend that and modify it. There’s no question that Karen during her time as President really extended the research side. That’s I think what people expected and wanted and she certainly succeeded in that, and I think that was an enormous accomplishment. There were other pieces, especially on the medical side, that increasingly got problematic. That were certainly not her doing. I mean, you know, senior vice president, Fred Sanfilippo had his own interesting issues. I do think there were parts of the job that she never was entirely comfortable with, and I think to thrive as president of Ohio State, you really have to love the public connections. She was essentially a very private person. Very articulate and again, as I said, very hard working, but I think you have to, you know, love that piece of that job – the public part of that – and I think to be truly successful and to have moved to the fulfilling of the missions the institution had, I think, it was kind of a sense that maybe the fit wasn’t entirely all that it could be and should be.

Q. The board increased in the number of members, and I was somewhat astonished at the increase in the size in number.
A. Yes, they didn’t raise my pay proportionately.

Q. You had to coordinate all these other people and, of course, I as an outsider always assumed that board members came in with sizable egos, which may not have been in the case. But basically how did you manage to go to the largest board?

A. I think as I’ve indicated earlier, I really think it does because it does because I think the opportunity to change the entire population of the board, to really empower committees, and to get more fire power on the board, when you think of how complex the University is, how many areas where one wants advice, from where I sat, it was a great move.

Q. Now we’ve had students as members of the board, non-voting members of the board – they’re still non-voting, correct?

A. Correct, but again, when we had the charter trustees, we said you’ll have a vote at the committee level, and with student members, we’ve said you’ll have a vote at the committee level. And we’ve always included them in the executive session as well.

Q. How effective are the student members? Because you would think being a student, they would have the extra demands.

A. It’s not just the extra demands on their time. They are the most invaluable people who are their… I don’t want to say constituency, because we always wanted to be clear to them, you’re not here to represent a certain constituency. You’re not a board member [for a certain constituency]. You may chair Ag Affairs and that may be your major interest but they have to see you in a larger way. But they are on campus all the time, and I think of any group it must be the hardest for them to maintain confidentiality. This is the biggest thing to worry about is maintaining confidentiality and that is exceptionally important. It goes back to that issue of trusteeship. To my knowledge, during my time, no student ever violated confidentiality, which I
think is really remarkable. What they bring to the board, and I’ve always told them, this is the most powerful thing you have is your voice after all. So they have to be articulate and be able to speak up in a group of very powerful people. And that’s hard for even some board members to do. I think we’ve been very fortunate in the, well if you think, not to go into any detail, but the graduate and professional member of the board right now, Brandon Mitchell, was an undergraduate at Ohio State. He was a football player at Ohio State. I think he played about two years of pro football. Brandon actually came in as an undergraduate when I was still academic liaison with athletics, so I’ve known him since his freshman year. He actually graduated in three years and his last two years, he did a total of five years, but he had a master’s [degree] when he left and went into pro football, and then came back and went to law school. Now you’re in the midst of a controversy with the football coach in athletics, and you have on the board one of your student members, someone who knows that world from the inside and has an enormous amount of [insight]. Think of the value of having someone like that. As an example, again, you’re dealing with lots of issues related to the medical center. Looking at the switch to semesters, you had the notion of, we’re going to require all sophomores to live on campus, you start to have those kinds of discussions; clearly, undergraduates bring a lot to the table.

Q. I’ve got a question about faculty representation. You answered part of it already when you talked favorably about the faculty member as secretary, which is unusual in higher education. When the students were elected, when it changed to enable students to serve on the Board of Trustees, there was some significant concern that if you’re going to let students on the Board of Trustees, why not faculty? Do you sense that [concern] is still is there?

A. Oh, I’m sure it’s there with some faculty. And by the way, it’s typical of faculty also and you don’t ever hear them say, “And what about staff?” though do you? They don’t even let staff
on the University Senate. So I always would put that out there as well, because there are way more staff than there are faculty.

Q. Yes, I actually interviewed somebody years ago about the origins of University Senate and that actually was considered – the staff – but the overwhelming number of faculty, the people who came up with the structure of University Senate, felt that staff were too vulnerable and would amount to little more than surrogates for the University administration.

A. Interesting. And they do serve on some committees, obviously. Anyway, I think that, one of the ways that I try to both formally and informally to connect trustees is with faculty. And there were some trustees who were very interested in doing this. So I would set up a series of just informal lunches, no agenda. Now, I would always make sure to have at least one of the faculty members who would be invited to lunch be someone who was on the Senate. But I just tried to pick people from across the institution and just set up informal get-togethers so that they could just get a faculty voice. And so that the board could get some sense of, what are faculty like? Because when they would ask me, “Well, what do the faculty think?” I think I’ve mentioned this to you, I would say, “I’m from the English department. You can’t even get two people in English to agree on anything, so when you ask me what do faculty think, it’s a crazy notion.” We do have faculty who serve – now I have to stop and think if they’ve continued this or not – on the academic affairs and student life committees on the board. I believe it is the case, that there is a faculty member who serves on that. So again, what we tried to do is introduce the voice in the appropriate place.

Q. In the committee structure.

A. So in addition to the informal that I tried to promote, we did make that move.
Q. Okay. Well, David, that brings us to the end of the interview. I appreciate what you said and your willingness to participate and I personally feel much more enlightened about many aspects of the University, especially the role of the Board of Trustees and the dynamics thereof.

A. Well, Rai, thanks, it was a great opportunity for me to do this. I’ve been very privileged in my time at Ohio State. I think about that a lot and most appreciative of the opportunity to talk about it.

Q. Thank you.