

JOHN MOUNT
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
AT THE OSU ARCHIVES
MAY 13, 2002

- Q. This is May 13, 2002, and I'm Raimund Goerler and I'm interviewing John Mount about University College and the regional campuses. This is the third of a set of interviews on that subject. Dean Mount, University College served as a portal of entry for the entire University. Can you focus on how and what methods were used to assure good relations with the deans of the respective colleges, to make certain that these undergraduates were in fact well prepared for the rigors of the other colleges once they had decided on their majors.
- A. Of course, as University College developed over a period of years, moving from the concern that students coming to the University, I should say the larger numbers, in the magnitude of the enrollment and the advising they were getting in individual colleges, that led to developing a University College, dividing the College of Arts and Sciences into five colleges. And again, the emphasis upon preparing students to become graduates in some baccalaureate program met clearly the need for working with all of the colleges and the deans and the assistant or associate deans, particularly responsible for undergraduate education. First you start with meeting with the students themselves with a council of deans. And they would meet with them. There was a council on instruction in the office of the provost. And as we developed what was called in those days the curricular academic program. For example, you had an academic program for those going into agriculture or going into engineering or going into one of the liberal arts

colleges with a major in geology or psychology, depending upon the student's area of interest. But many students then, as today, would come and say, "I'm not sure. I'm undecided." And so we developed a program for them to explore and during that you needed to have a more definitive statement of expectations. And we looked to the respective college deans and their staff to develop the expectations for students to eventually leave University College and enroll in one of the programs in the college. With that developed the early experience program for education. So in University College, persons who aspired to be teachers would become involved in early experience and it would help them to determine whether it was really the field or whether the students who were exploring, for them to find out whether it was a field. So there was regular conferences with the deans and helping them to see that University College was to their colleges the same as the graduate school at the end of the spectrum, has persons responsible for graduate education by college and by department. And the expectations set forth. So it was a matter of communication and strong communications. We developed programs where students would be recognized. We created a program called Desuma Award, for students who made the Dean's list, that's a 3.5 or better, and we would have a gathering at Mershon or an auditorium large enough so that you could recognize those students who made such achievement and introduce them to their respective future dean and have the dean welcome them and greet them. In terms of as we moved along in the whole area of development of education, with the minority students in the Office of Academic Affairs. Again, working with Neil Watson, an Associate Dean for Developmental Education, helping

students who came to us in the area of needing remedial work. And again working with colleges and respective staff to prepare students to make the gradual move.

Q. Were some deans more cooperative than others or was it uniform cooperation across the line?

A. I did not sense anything but cooperation as a matter of developing an understanding. Get new deans who came into the setting here not understanding University College at Ohio State. And that's where we met one on one. And we were very receptive, helping University College to listen to the deans and having them feel such responsibility. And again, in my role as Vice President for Regional Campus, all students, no matter what campus, would be enrolled in University College. And the responsibility for teaching courses on regional campuses meant another reason for meeting with deans and department chairmen. And so it went hand in hand in terms of again, the objective is preparing students to be successful at this University. And you move from a culture say of saying to students, as it's been quoted down through the years, at the time students would enter freshman week or orientation, someone would stand before them and say, "Now look to your right and look to your left and one year from now only one of you will be here." Moving from that culture to saying to them, "We expect each one of you who enrolls in this University to eventually graduate." And it was shifting from actually finding ways to reduce enrollment, to finding ways to have enrollment continue and retention became a specific issue and concern.

Q. Dean Mount, I'd like you to step back and look at your career as Dean of University College and Vice President for Regional Campuses, and see if you can assess five or so most important accomplishments of your administration.

A. That question of course is always difficult to respond to and avoid self grandizement And I'd rather let the record speak in terms of documents or others that made observations and evaluations and it comes to mind people listed up, as I say, in the beginning of student life, the orientation. And there's been many commendatory articles written and pride expressed by the president and others who are present at the University, that we developed an orientation program that was a model for universities really across the country, involving orientation into the curricular opportunities. That's getting students scheduled. That was not new, but to bring parents. We went to having very few students accompanying students to having five and six thousand parents come to the campus for a two day orientation in the summer. And so students, along with their parents, learn about the expectations of the University. So that is listed as one of the accomplishments that I feel some pride in.

Q. If I could interrupt you, where do the parents stay?

A. Parents stayed in the residence halls along with everyone else. Of course, parents from the Columbus area would go home and return. But we had parents who were members of the faculty who experienced living in the residence hall for the first time. So that in itself was an experience. One of the facts of life of this institution, we had two very large dormitories called the Lincoln Tower and the Morrill Tower, 23 stories, and there was some negative reputation about those residence

halls. Large mass all in one building. And as we moved to having parents and students get a real feel as we corrected some of those problems, reducing the number in half. And actually having them live there and see that it was probably more safe there in terms of fire than any dormitory. The consequence of that concern is because we did have a fire in one of the dorms, one of the high rise dorms. And it received some negative publicity. And so having parents experience the real life was a positive thing. We of course kept records, if students and parents would come to orientation in the summer and if they didn't return in the fall, we would say, "Why didn't they return? What's wrong?" So I guess again, we let the record speak, and we would be able to project that 90% of those who came would be back in the fall and only health or some uncontrollable reason would be given for their not returning. So we moved from the orientation to the challenge of getting well qualified faculty appointed by the respective departments of this University to teach on the regional campuses. And that is I think one of the accomplishments, as the record will show today. That students who started on a regional campus would be just as well and even sometimes better prepared to change from a regional campus to the Columbus campus in their chosen curricular program and be successful. And move on then into a graduate or professional school. And that is an accomplishment that I feel some pride in. Getting the community involved in understanding what's expected for baccalaureate education was very important. And so we had community support, financial aid, scholarships, so that we could really say that any student who had the motivation and the willingness to meet the challenges of a baccalaureate

program could afford it. No one would be denied opportunity because of financial need. Another area of pride is that we developed the involvement of students in determining programs for students. Actually, one of the first colleges to have a student council in the 70's. And to have a student council on each of the regional campuses. And have them meet together to have them identify programs that would meet their needs and their interests. And again having administrators and faculty meeting with them. Another area of course, as the records show, upon my retirement was the increase in the number of the most able students. The development of the National Merit Scholar enrollment and we've spoken to that before I think in our interview here. Actually despite our opening the doors to urge more minority students to come to the University, the test scores, the ACT, the SAT scores went up during the period of the Enarson presidency here and continues to go up. And that gives me a feeling of pride that the pattern set at that time continues and they are continuing to rise as we go from test scores down in the low 20's, even a little below 20, to now up to 25, 26. I give credit to the planning and the programming that went on to bring that about. Raising dollars for scholars is another one of the areas of some pride and joy. As we developed dollars for the students based upon academic achievement, we worked at having the challenge of not becoming elitist, as some would object to, to having an egalitarian program. Opportunities for all at the same time. So we would develop programs for the underdeveloped. Unprepared academically to programs for honors students. And we had programs for students who had special interest in music, for example. Encouraging them to move into the expanded mens glee club,

for example. It used to be 40 men in the mens glee club. Under the leadership, we hoped our support, Professor Jim Gallagher came in and there would be 100 in the glee club. In the area of athletics, we would select academic advisors who were especially prepared to advise students who were studying under the NCAA rules, National Association of Collegiate Athletics. So that they were meeting the requirements in terms of the number of credits and the University moved from a position where if a student, an athlete, would fail a course, would be ineligible for the next quarter, to a point hour. And enough courses to move toward graduation, all of those being policies and rules handed down that needed to be administered. And so we worked at doing that in cooperation with the Department of Athletics, the coaches.

Q. Point of clarification. The athletic academic advisors – were they part of athletics or part of the UVC?

A. They were part of UVC, working with again, that's been a developmental process. I can remember in the early days UVC, Woody Hayes brought in the first "academic coach." His name was Jim Jones. And he later became Director of Athletics. But he was the first "academic coach" and we would work with persons in that role to have academic advisors. There was great cooperation between the Department of Athletics and the University College as it was, cooperation between a dean of law or a dean of medicine. Again, I say a dean and delegated staff members. In medicine, for example, there was an Assistant Associate Dean by the name of Huts Williams. He was very helpful in the area of allied medical profession. There was a person by the name of Katharine Shane was directing it.

And she of course moved on to become Vice President of the University. But we prided ourselves in working with those people responsible in the long run to have graduates who were qualified to go out in the world and represent this University.

Q. Anything else we want to add in the area of accomplishments?

A. I just want to conclude I guess to say that any accomplishment that might be credited to my leadership should be shared with a very competent staff that I've spoken to earlier I believe in our oral history here. But without a doubt, leadership, staff as we developed programs that, what I would say, is holistic, the total student, helping them to relate to alumni. For example, we created a program where we, the University College, with academic advisement, could refer students to specific alumni in the area, so that they could talk with a banker or a lawyer or a teacher or a librarian. And that meant to work very closely with the alumni. I also take pride in developing volunteer leadership for all of our campuses. And becoming very involved with the Alumni Advisory Council. And moving in that circle representing the regional campuses and University College to become chair of the Alumni Advisory Council. And then that leads to what we have today. We have actually boards of trustees on each of the regional campuses and that all started with advisory councils on each of the campuses. And as we grow in stature, as we grow in numbers, we grow in quality and understanding of continually rising expectations. And hopefully that leads Ohio State to be worthy of being one of the top universities in this countries, with programs on all of our campuses.

Q. Let's turn for a moment to the disappointments and incompletes that are part of every administration.

A. Disappointments coming after I was Dean of the University College were basically a matter of moving forward as rapidly as we had set expectations. We still had a problem of developmental education, students not continuing their education at the level we wanted. In other words, we looked at retention. And then the dichotomy of having an open door, at the same time working toward selective admission, that was a slow progress. And the answer to that was developing more institutions of higher learning in the State of Ohio to take the responsibility for those students who were not prepared. And the K-12 preparation of students was a disappointment to me and continues to be that. I'm so very grateful and feel a great amount of satisfaction, it's difficult for me to identify some major disappointments in that period of 1970 to 1983, when I was Dean of University College and Vice President for Regional Campuses. Basically we went through the problem of not having enough finances to achieve everything we wanted. Finding the resources so that faculty on regional campuses could do research. And to grow in their promotion and tenure track. I wish we might have moved more rapidly on that, but yet given the circumstances, I feel a sense of pride that we've come as far as we have and did at that time.

Q. You mentioned that library resources were a particular challenge on each of the campuses.

A. Exactly. And just as laboratory resources and that was the environment in which faculty and students learned. The library specifically, as we were teaching in

University College a survey course, use of the libraries, we needed more staff and some disappointment that we almost had burn-out with some library staff as we tried to accomplish that very important lesson with the time available and some 200 sections of freshmen orientation to be taught during an academic year. Another area of disappointment I guess and yet achievement as we talk about staff, the expectation on the part of many and aspirations were to have more full-time advisors. But to bring in a full-time advisor meant replacing some graduate students. And this is a graduate institution. And so we were providing the financial resources for graduate students, while at the same time we wanted to have more full-time, well-prepared counselors. And that's one of the paradoxical situations that one finds in higher education.

- Q. We've been focusing on this campus but of course every campus learns from other institutions as well. And can you give for the interview a sense of the national context of University Colleges. Were there other institutions that you sought to emulate? What was the national context?
- A. At the time of University College, creation as we've spoken earlier, was a time of the institution of higher learning across the country trying to meet the tidal wave of students who were knocking at the door. And there was a junior college development and the community college development. And of course, in the State of Ohio, we had the regional campus or then called branches. And let us take this midwest for example. Indiana, Penn State, Michigan, and Michigan State specifically, were all developing programs off campus in different ways. But coming together sharing experiences. We met regularly with my counterparts

from other universities. South Carolina, North Carolina, universities in the west, sharing experiences. And today, as I understand it, there are about 140 institutions of higher learning that are part of an organization under the University College framework. Many of them are directing most of their attention, if not all, to the multitude of undecided students. And they would move into a general baccalaureate curriculum, so that the degree granting colleges of that institution would then set standards, as they would vary, and then the most able students would go directly into the college of their choice if they had the credentials. And then the thing that many institutions are wrestling with today, as I just learned that's happening on this University, those students who go directly into a college as we've developed in the last few years, and they become not acceptable to continue in a degree program. What happens to them? And institutions across the country, state universities like ours, are wrestling with that problem. And so that's an area of major concern.

Q. What you describe is a concept that OSU rejected when University College was formerly the general college alternative.

A. That's right. They came here and then within that University College concept we could help direct them. For example, very able students would move into a curriculum like engineering, but would decide that I really want to move out into the role of business or education. And when you change from engineering following a narrow curriculum as it was, and still is to a large extent, in the large field there's counseling to be held. Our College of Business at this University has increased the expectations for students entering greatly from the time University

College was created back in the late 60's. And the standards for admission to the College of Business and the expectation for a student graduating academically is just the same as engineering. You shift from in the College of Education, for example, having had that early experience in University College that helped find students who were qualified for education, now that has moved so that students now must earn a baccalaureate degree and then they go into a graduate program in education to get their teaching certificate. All of that is a developmental process that University College was a part of the progress, the process, and working with staff of other institutions, solving problems together. Each university in a state has circumstances of that state which are different. Ohio is much different than North Carolina, for example, or South Carolina or Penn State. Penn State has some 20 commonwealth campuses under Penn State University. So when you start comparing universities, we need to be mindful of the mission of each university. In the Big Ten, we have what's called institutional cooperation and they meet together. Provosts meet together and share experiences, and faculty, and researchers.

Q. It sounds like what you're saying is that programs are different, is it fair to say that the portal of entry concept is probably more ambitious than at other institutions.

A. It definitely was in the beginning. And I think continued to be. And much of higher education at any institution I guess, one would say, depends upon the economic factors. In Ohio, as we shift from program budgeting to having the budget at a specific college gets at this University depend upon the enrollment

and the courses taught by that college. And so the motivation of a dean and administrative staff is to get all the students that they can into their courses, while at the same time they're moving toward having an increase in the quality of the students and the opportunities for students. You find that the financial circumstances will change the motivation of administrators, or academic units.

Q. Dean Mount, you've led me to a question that needs asking and answering. Specifically, at University College, after more than 20 years, is no more. And this happened after your watch so to speak. You were on the scene and can you give me a sense of the factors and the dynamics of closing University College?

A. Well that of course is difficult for me to answer and perhaps not appropriate for me to make too many observations, in that I was not involved in the decision. I consulted in it and after not twenty, but thirty years from the early 60's to 2002. That's more than 30 years that it operated. But my observation is, that as we got new administrators at the college level coming from campuses where there was not a "portal of entry," and a thrust for academic achievements at all levels, deans wanting to get "National Merit" students immediately in their colleges and having them take the courses offered that would bring revenue to the colleges, all of those factors I suspect were there. Central administration at the University, particularly at the provost level, assessing the talents of people in the University and the organization structure of the University. I have the observation that change enabled the administration, particularly at the level of provost, to change the roles of some people by changing titles and perhaps continue to do some of the same things but under a different structure, that gives different lines of

authority. I see that. I see that there's developing this winter quarter some changes that were there in University College, that they'd come up short on. Specifically, there is a concern right now for what happens to those students who come into the area of arts and sciences, where the undecided students go, what happens to them when they're not acceptable to the degree granting colleges? And the need for counsel for them seems to be void right now. We may have a time when the tension will go down rather than up. We'll see what develops there.

Q. This is currently under study by a task force for President Jennings to head, as I understand it.

A. That's right. The problems that were to create University College are now developing as we go to a program of direct admission in the colleges.

Q. For the record too, you mentioned about dollars. Is it fair to say that as the University changed its budgeting structure to one much more based on enrollment in the individual colleges and departments, that they would have a larger share of state subsidies, that that concept made it much more economically desirable for the deans to have as many undergraduates as they could.

A. Exactly, exactly. As many undergraduates as they could, but they will say quickly, as many of the top most able and the best undergraduates as they can. And that's the challenge that this University has when the finances available are limited. And I think another reflection as I look at it, the number of international students enrolled in our graduate school, and I don't have the records in front of me, but the percentage of international students in graduate school is coming perhaps close to half of them. And so when you have international students,

advising as graduate students at the freshman and sophomore level, where 90% of them are almost from the State of Ohio, it really presents another challenge of an institution.

Q. You have seen and predicted a decline in the quality of advising within the colleges, which was the source of the original problem, which led to the creation of University College. We need to improve the advising, counseling.

A. Yes. One of the areas of concern, which President Croman lifts up regularly, is a matter of diversity. And again, the challenge will be how we deal with the diverse student body and how we continue to personalize an institution, so that students won't feel that they are a number. And so as they go in the college office to seek advise, they take a number and wait on whoever is available or will they have, as we did in University College, every student had an academic advisor from the day they arrived on campus until they move into a degree granting college.

Q. You mentioned in an earlier conversation that some of the colleges are going or experimenting with web advising, rather than face-to-face.

A. I think that's part of a developmental task that we have, as we market our institution to say that you can make a large university small, through personal attention by colleges and departments and it's difficult to make a small institution large because of the advantage of a critical mass. We'll see how we cope with that, with the technology of today and the tomorrows.

Q. Anything else that you would like to add about the decision for closing University College?

A. Only like I, like many, will be looking at how the University develops its undergraduate, what they call, what is the title of it, the undergraduate experience, and the very dedicated people working at this. Many of them were in University College and I wish for them the very best and I'm sure that there's every commitment to improve upon what we've had in the past. And the record will speak for itself.

Q. We have reached the end of our question list and I appreciate your willingness to cooperate and your contribution to this program. If the transcript shows that there are areas that you would like to develop further, we are certainly willing to add to this interview.

A. Well thank you. And I would conclude also by saying, as we go down the road of life and thinking about the history of institution, I would encourage anybody who is curious about the role of University College during the past 35 or so years, to come to the archives. I'm very impressed with the records that you have here, taken from our files, many of the reports of the investigative committees, to go in greater depth than my memory, having been retired from University College for now, what 17 years ago. But I have looked through the records here that you have in the archives and they're very complete I think, in terms of the story of University College during that period.

Q. Well thank you again.