

Richard Skaggs

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Interview with Richard Skaggs

**Interviewed by Professor Clarke A. Chambers
University of Minnesota**

Interviewed on September 15, 1994

Richard Skaggs - RS
Clarke A. Chambers - CAC

CAC: This is Clarke Chambers. This morning, which is September 15, 1994, a moist, humid Thursday morning in late summer, I'm interviewing Richard Skaggs. He has been associated with the Department of Geography for a good number of years . . . I think since 1967. He came to play a role in many college and university affairs.

Dick, as I've said with everyone else, it's kind of fun to start with an intellectual or academic autobiography, even in high school. It's interesting how many people, when I say how did you happen to . . . it was one teacher somewhere along the line. It isn't invariable but often it's that. Tell us something about yourself.

RS: I'm a native of Minnesota, even though much of my education took place in southern California. My family and I moved to southern California in 1950 and I attended junior high school and high school in Long Beach, California. It was a time when California was growing very, very rapidly. One of the characteristics of my high school was that it was huge. My graduating class had over 1200 people in it.

CAC: [laughter] Mine had seventy-two.

RS: [laughter] It was just before several new high schools had been opened. That had an effect on my academic development. It was a huge place. You found your own small niche of friends that you went around with and you very rapidly got a handle on what courses in that high school would prepare you for reasonable success in college and which would not. It turned out that I decided to attend a junior college in California right after high school rather than go into UCLA, which is where I intended to go immediately, for reasons of not quite knowing what I wanted to do and also reasons of cost.

CAC: Yes.

RS: Even though amazingly, the all-tuition fees at the University of California-Los Angeles in 1961, when I finally graduated, was a grand total of \$90 per semester or \$180 per year.

CAC: I think California clung to that principle longer than most other state universities.

RS: I think it did, too. It's only very recently actually and quite reluctantly that the University of California system has followed what most other institutions had to do much earlier and raise tuition and fee structures tremendously. At Long Beach City College, I learned two things. One was that I probably would not be successful at what I thought would be my first career choice which was foreign service with the largest reason being that try as I might, I couldn't get the pronunciation of the French language suitably well to be successful. [laughter]

CAC: [laughter]

RS: At that time, it was a requirement for the foreign service that you be able to do French very well.

CAC: Let me interrupt. You would be amused at the number of people who thought of the foreign service in early college. It's a first career choice of all kinds of folks.

RS: That's very interesting. I hadn't realized that. I had, at Long Beach City College, a professor from Germany, Alfred Stout, who was a geographer. He was clearly one of the outstanding faculty members on that campus. I took all of his courses, as well as courses in English and Anthropology from very good faculty members. This [unclear] of course, particularly by Dr. Stone, led me to choose geography as a major at UCLA; although, it was sort of a foregone conclusion that I would go to the University California-Los Angeles because that's one of the major reasons my father decided to leave farming and go to California . . .

CAC: Oh, he was a farmer?

RS: Yes . . . so that his sons could go to the University of California-Los Angeles

CAC: Heavens.

RS: That was the way it was going to be. [laughter]

CAC: How did he make his living in southern California?

RS: He came essentially without a job but with skills in welding. He had welded Liberty ships during the Second World War and eventually went into construction work, which was booming

in the 1950s in southern California, and then got out of that to go the government naval shipyard as a welder from which he will retire, eventually. He's, in fact, still living in southern California.

CAC: We talk a lot about migration and the education of the children and one thinks of the eastern European migration of 1880-1910; but, it rarely is ever mentioned otherwise. To go from here to Los Angeles chiefly for that . . . that's an interesting commitment of parents to education. You were one of how many children?

RS: Two. I have a younger brother. [sigh] Dad was very certain that both of us would go to college, number one, and that at least one of us would go to UCLA.

CAC: Bravo.

RS: He'd developed a love affair with that school, that still continues to the present time, when he was out in southern California during the war. With Dr. Stone giving me introductions to faculty members in the geography department in UCLA, I was able to move in there very nicely. It was an interesting undergraduate program, a very traditional geography program, with accommodation of physical and human geography, lots of regional studies, particularly of Latin America, as you might expect at UCLA. One of the aspects that happened in that department was visiting professors. In my senior year, they invited, and he finally accepted, Carl Sauer, the distinguished geographer from Berkeley. He came a spent a semester at UCLA.

CAC: He must have been, by then, retired?

RS: He was retired and did a few visiting positions. Mr. Sauer never really appreciated the department at UCLA. He said, "It simply got bigger and bigger." [laughter] He was willing to undertake directed readings with an undergraduate—me.

CAC: Oh, my!

RS: So, I had the opportunity to sit with him for about two hours a week . . .

CAC: [gasp]

RS: . . . for a whole semester and . . .

CAC: He was one of the few giants in geography, at that time, in the country.

RS: That's right . . . do the readings he suggested and discuss geography with him. It was a tremendous . . .

CAC: Gosh!

RS: . . . not so much a learning experience as an inspiration to continue on beyond the bachelor's degree. It was sort of an automatic decision for me after that experience to go on to graduate school. I left UCLA and went to the University of Kansas [KU] intending to be in agricultural geography. I got to the University of Kansas and ran into a faculty member by the name of David Simonet. The story is very amusing; but, I won't go on about it.

CAC: A little joke now and again is all right, go ahead.

RS: [laughter] One of the things that was characteristic at the department at KU, at that time, was that all new graduate students had an entering diagnostic oral examination to find out what they had learned in the past.

CAC: Oh, good.

RS: One of the things, however, is that they didn't tell you about it before you arrived; so, you showed up in the department and the next day or so, you came to meet with two or three groups of faculty. They just talked with you and asked you questions about your background. It turned out that my background in climatology was not very strong. As a matter of fact, it was the only grade of *C* that I received as an undergraduate.

CAC: But you had been exposed to it?

RS: I'd been exposed to it but not to the level that satisfied Dave; so, he insisted that I do his course.

CAC: I'm going to interrupt a minute. Was James Malin still at Kansas, at that time?

RS: He was still there; but, I did not do any work with him.

CAC: He was kind of agricultural history, and geography, and climatology.

RS: That's right. He was retired but still around campus and I didn't have the opportunity to interact with him. The closest I came was with his good friend, Walter Cole Morgan, who was head of the department at KU at that time and an agricultural geographer who interacted closely with Malin.

CAC: He probably would have been a very cranky person to work with, in any case.

RS: That was my impression from Walter, that he was not the easiest person in the world to get along with and to work with. I did not take the opportunity to even try.

CAC: I was a graduate student a bit earlier and I was ordered to read Malin by an agricultural historian at Berkeley . . . warned but made to read it.

RS: I see.

CAC: I was just bowled over by it. It was a kind of history that I didn't know anything about.

RS: Walter had his students read Malin a great deal and I did read him some. It was at a time when, as a result of working with Dave in this climatology course, I was changing my whole idea about what my graduate work would be about. I'd arrived at KU with a quarter-time assistantship and was fortunate enough to make it a half-time; but, I needed something for the next summer. There was an aeronautical engineer by the name of Fred Bates who was very interested in severe local storms, particularly tornados.

CAC: Good place to do it.

RS: Oh, absolutely. Somehow I got referred to him and got a summer job with him. Eventually, this worked into a master's thesis under jointly with Fred and with Dave Simonet and then a doctoral dissertation that was basically with Fred Bates.

CAC: This is all pre-computer climatology?

RS: This is very interesting. My master's thesis was a statistical study and I did the statistics for it on an old rotary Marchand calculator. Then, my doctoral dissertation was also a statistical study; but, I didn't do it on the mechanical machine. I did it on a very early IBM [International Business Machines] computer that I had to program myself and do all kinds of strange and wonderful incantations to make it work.

CAC: You had to introduce yourself to computers at the very beginning when they were coming into the academy . . . barely?

RS: That's right.

CAC: This is approximately what date?

RS: I started using the computer fairly heavily in about 1965. At Lawrence, it wasn't coming in quite as fast as at some other places.

CAC: As we say, you were ahead of the curve.

RS: It was a great advantage to me all the rest of my career to not be afraid of the machinery and to have gotten in at a point where you had to get your hands dirty. You couldn't just take a software package off the shelf and plug in mindlessly what was going on.. [laughter]

CAC: This would be varied in its impact and certainly climatology and demography, for example, must have been two subfields, at least, that did it. In History, we were a long time without it.

RS: At KU, at that time, we had the advantage of Duane Noss as a member of the faculty. Duane had been a graduate student at the University of Iowa. One of the centers of the—quote—quantitative revolution—unquote—in geography was at the University of Iowa with Harold McCarty and Duane was one of his students. Then, Duane brought that way of looking at geography to the University of Kansas. Eventually, naturally, after Duane left to Clark University, it became very common among faculty and graduate students at the University of Kansas, even though it was resisted pretty strongly by some people at the beginning.

CAC: I'm sure. Looking back upon it, do you know how fortunate you were to have been at Kansas? It seems to me you're describing a cluster of persons who really made you do this.

RS: Oh, absolutely.

CAC: Which might not have been true in some other departments you might have gone to?

RS: That's correct. I believe I was extremely fortunate to have gone to the University of Kansas.

CAC: You didn't choose it for that purpose?

RS: No, I chose it for its strength in agricultural geography—Walter Cole Morgan, Dave Simonet who was primarily in soils as well as geography—and the fact that it was a place that was willing to pay me to come and do some graduate work. [laughter] I think it's always a combination of these reasons that get you into a particular situation.

CAC: Sure.

RS: Then, you have to take advantage of the opportunities that are offered in that situation. Sometimes, it's a matter of design; but, most of the time, it's a matter of seeing the opportunity almost on the spur of the moment and deciding it's worth doing this and taking advantage. Sometimes, I worry about some graduate students as they come into the academy now with a very detailed game plan and a very detailed track that they're going to follow. I notice some of them missing or not taking advantage of an opportunity that has presented itself. I think that's very unfortunate.

CAC: You got your degree in . . . ?

RS: I officially got my degree in 1967 in June. There was only one graduation time and I wasn't quite finished with my dissertation when I came to the University of Minnesota.

CAC: I see. You came here in the fall of 1966?

RS: I started with the winter quarter of the 1966-1967 academic year.

CAC: How come you came to Minnesota?

RS: [laughter] I hadn't really planned to take a position during the 1966-1967 academic year. I thought perhaps the next year would be a good time; but, in the late spring and summer of 1966, I started getting kind of antsy about remaining at the University of Kansas. My colleague here—and there—Dwight Brown and I went to the annual meeting of the Association of American Geographers that summer and I presented a paper there. Dwight had already come up to the University of Minnesota and had agreed to join the faculty in the winter quarter of 1967. At the annual meeting, I got to talking with some of the faculty members here: John Webb and Fred Lukermann, for example. It turned out that they had more than one position open; so, all of a sudden I was in the job pool, not only at the University of Minnesota but at a couple of other places. Those were pretty heady days for folks.

CAC: Oh, the mid to late 1960s, just lots of . . .

RS: An incredible number of opportunities. I interviewed here in Minneapolis. I interviewed at the University of Colorado and at the University of Illinois and was fortunate enough to have offers from all three. I decided to come to the University of Minnesota.

CAC: You were expected to be a general geographer plus climatology or what was your assignment?

RS: My assignment, very generally, was to be in physical geography, especially climatology.

CAC: Physical geography also encompasses rivers and . . .

RS: Land form studies, the spacial pattern of soils, biogeography . . . those kinds of things.

CAC: All right.

RS: My specialization was very strongly in climatology. The combination of myself and Dwight, the two of us, pretty much covered the waterfront. At that time, Ward Barrett was the only one in the department who was doing very much in physical geography at all.

CAC: Am I wrong in thinking of Brown as essentially an historical geographer?

RS: That was Ralph Brown. This is Dwight Brown.

CAC: Oh, I'm sorry. I'm corrected.

RS: Dwight was a colleague of mine at the University of Kansas and we moved up here together. It was very clear from the beginning that even though you might be hired in as a physical geographer or an historical geographer, what happened to you after that was up to you.

CAC: I see.

RS: There was no constraint. If you decided to change the kinds of things that you wanted to teach, the kinds of things that you were doing research in, this was not only acceptable but it was actually encouraged in the department.

CAC: Do you think that that cultural climate was strong in geography relative to other departments, unique to geography, or is this a Minnesota phenomenon?

RS: I think it was stronger in geography than lots of other departments that I knew of at that time. We had a very interesting way of going about putting the teaching schedule together, for example. On the one hand, everybody knew what they were—quote—expected to do—unquote. On the other hand, it was a matter of everybody writing that down and nobody telling you what to do. It was and I hope still is—as a matter of fact, I'm sure it still is—a matter of this interaction between personal responsibility for the corporate good and the ability in any one particular instance to say, "No, I can't do that this time." Somehow, we'd get through to accommodate the individual requirements of individual colleagues at a particular point in time.

CAC: You found that true throughout your time here since 1967?

RS: Yes, and quite different from other departments that have quite different traditions. I'm not so foolish as to say that the way in which we did it in geography is the way everybody should do it. Some units wouldn't and couldn't work that way and it wouldn't be good for them.

CAC: How do you credit this phenomenon? It was established well by the time you got here?

RS: Oh, yes, it was very well-established. It was probably something that evolved out of the reconstruction of the department after the Second World War with the death of Ralph Brown, unexpectedly, and bringing Jan Broeck in to head the department and then hiring John Weaver, and John Borchert especially, and attracting to the department some graduate students who did very well and stayed on awhile . . . people like Fred Lukermann and John Webb, and hiring in talented young people such as Phil Porter, and Joe Schwartzberg, and Ward Barrett . . .

CAC: They were on hand when you got here?

RS: Yes . . . and especially the evolution of John Borchert's interests. He came from the University of Wisconsin after having been a forecaster in the Second World War, and emphasizing at the University of Wisconsin a climatology with Glen Tory Wartha and Reed

Bryson. By the middle of the 1950s, John had taken stock of what was going on in the environment he was in, which was the Twin Cities, a very vibrant, and growing, and interesting place to study, and he gradually worked into, through a series of research projects, the urban land use, urban planning, an American cities type of teaching and research upon which his illustrious career and reputation is really built. Given that kind of evolution of his interests, it was fairly natural that the rest of the department would have the same kinds of opportunities to take advantage of these things that come along.

CAC: Let me say something from the outside and it may or may not be—just a hypothesis, very unformed—that you came into a department that was of very high quality but relatively small?

RS: That's correct.

CAC: There was no way that you could cover every course that had to be covered and get geography?

RS: That's right, and we didn't try.

CAC: So, it may be that that very fact gave you more flexibility than if you had been a large department of not such great distinction?

RS: I think that's right and if everybody had had their niche that they wanted to protect. Nobody had a niche that they wanted to protect.

CAC: That's remarkable.

RS: People worked in and out of courses cooperatively . . . very nicely. I had an opportunity when I first came, the first two quarters, to teach courses jointly with Russ Adams. That was very helpful to me in forming my own sort of place in the department and the kinds of things I would do cooperatively with other colleagues.

CAC: Jan Broeck was probably head at that time?

RS: No, Jan had stepped down as head.

CAC: Just before you came but he was still on the staff?

RS: He was still on the staff and still very active. When Jan stepped down, we established the notion of a rotating chair.

CAC: Can you say something about that because Jan was probably the last, throughout the Arts College, of chairpersons who were really heads of the department and kind of at eternal tenure?

RS: I really don't know all that much about it.

CAC: Okay.

RS: I think that there was something of a palace coup that occurred, that John Borchert, and Fred, and John Webb convinced Jan that it was best if he stepped down as essentially head of the department and that the department reorganize . . . I guess the jargon today would be re-engineer itself as a unit in which it was, and still is, essentially assumed that each colleague can take a turn and should take a turn at administering the department for the benefit of the people who work in the department.

CAC: That change happened just before you came?

RS: Just before I came.

CAC: But, the gossip would suggest that what kind of forces were operating in that direction . . . apart from personality?

RS: I think it was a reaction to the European style of a single professor and head and sort of confined niches for faculty members in the department. It may be—I don't know this—that as John Borchert moved out of climatology and more into planning and urban geography, this was not completely appreciated by Jan and others, but particularly by Jan, because it sort of disrupted the patterns of teaching in the department and that in order to sort of complete this evolution of John's career, he had to get to an administrative system that was a rotating head and much freer.

CAC: How was the rotating chair selected?

RS: The first few years I was here, it was sort of a matter of natural . . .

CAC: Natural selection. [laughter]

RS: [laughter] . . . succession of whose turn came next.

CAC: So, it was by consensus?

RS: A great deal . . .

CAC: A certain deference to seniority?

RS: Deference to seniority and deference to whose turn it was. From, the middle 1970s on, it's been more a situation of an advisory vote of the faculty. Everybody's name is on the ballot and everybody is eligible, so to speak. Then, you send the results of the vote to the dean and the dean makes the selection.

CAC: Do have any idea what date that was, approximately?

RS: I think in the late 1970s, we got to that particular point.

CAC: That late?

RS: Yes. Before that it was more of a consensus kind of operation. This corresponds pretty closely to essentially a doubling or more of the department.

CAC: Ah! Say something about that.

RS: When Dwight and I arrived, I suppose we brought the department up to about nine faculty members. There had been about six before that and with the addition of Dwight, myself, and John Rice, you're up by a substantial fraction right there. Now, I suppose, we have twenty faculty members all together; so, it's three times the size of the department in the late 1960s.

CAC: That growth came over what span of years?

RS: Primarily during the early 1970s.

CAC: Those were, after all, times also of beginning retrenchment.

RS: We were in the fortunate position in the first huge retrenchment in, what was it, Clarke, 1970-1971 or 1971-1972 . . . ?

CAC: The first one was 1971. I think the big one is 1973.

RS: . . . where we had the difficulties with the Medical School and those kinds of things and converting soft money positions in the Medical School . . . and the hard positions.

CAC: Which reduced the funds available for other appointments elsewhere?

RS: Right. We came out of that actually with a new appointment, which was very unusual but at a high cost to the department because we traded in almost all of our TA [teaching assistant] [unclear] for that. We went from the late 1960s having budgeted TAs of somewhere around twelve FTEs [Full-Time Equivalents] to three.

CAC: How did you finance the other graduate students?

RS: We came to a decision that we would do it by consciously using leave monies, and sabbatical monies, and other sources of income to support graduate students.

CAC: So-called soft money?

RS: So-called soft money.

CAC: But that would mean that you had to trust that your department was good enough to have quite a few on leave every year. [laughter]

RS: That's right. That's exactly right. It was a decision that we made, that we could generate enough soft money every year to maintain ourself. It sometimes was a struggle. In my first year as chair, the worst fears that I had every February and early March was signing all of those letters committing money that I didn't have and wondering what would happen if anyone ever found out what was going on. [laughter]

CAC: Right.

RS: Then, of course, this was happening in lots of other departments.

CAC: Was there much money in the form of research grants coming into Geography, at that time, in the late 1960s through the 1970s?

RS: Yes.

CAC: From what sources . . . chiefly?

RS: Chiefly, they were local foundation sources not national foundations.

CAC: Ohhh.

RS: Until the middle 1970s, at the time of the retrenchment in 1973, Dwight Brown, and John Borchert, and myself were fortunate to get a fairly large grant through NASA [(National Aeronautics and Space Administration)] to do remote sensing. That helped the department over that period of time when state money was fairly scarce. Also, John Adams had come back to the department, at that point, and John . . .

CAC: You say, he had come back . . . where was he?

RS: He had graduated in 1965, I guess, and went to Penn State University.

CAC: Oh, I see, came back in that sense. All right.

RS: He progressed, I think, to associate professor and then we hired him back in about the middle 1970s. John Adams and John Borchert were able to be key players in a large NSF [National Science Foundation] funded project called the Metropolitan Atlas Project, which produced a series of atlases of the metropolitan areas of the United States at that time and a series of books, vignettes, about metropolitan areas that were very successful. That brought in

a lot of funds. It was also about that time that John Borchert had his Lake Shore Development Project that was funded by the state, fondly referred in the late 1960s and early 1970s as the LSD Project.

CAC: [laughter]

RS: It was headquartered, when I first arrived, in the Clay School, which is where the library is now. A lot of graduate students had worked with this Lake Shore Development Project, which essentially was mapping what was happening on the shorelines of all of the lakes in the state of Minnesota and putting them into an electronic database that became one of the very first geographic information systems in the country and, eventually, became the Minnesota Land Management Information System, which is still, probably, one of the very best state-based geographic information systems for planning and development work in any state in the Union.

CAC: It's a transferable methodology?

RS: It is a transferable methodology and it is the kind of thing that followed John Borchert's ideas about how this ought to work; that is, you develop the ideas in the academy and you get them worked out; but, as soon as they're ready to be hived off to a more proper place for continued work, you do so. It was transferred to the state . . . I can't remember for sure but about 1973 or 1974.

CAC: It would be students from Geography and allied departments who would then be hired to do this kind of work?

RS: That's exactly right. They were from Landscape Architecture, Forestry, Soils . . . a wide range of places around the university. Those kinds of contacts were very helpful in some of the fine contacts between departments in these units.

CAC: When you speak of local foundations, they would have been attracted to those kinds of . . . What kinds of foundations?

RS: Dayton Hudson funded some things. Pillsbury funded a few things. Not a foundation . . . but a lot of state money came in to some of these projects. Eventually, after the Lake Shore Development Project was over, the applied research aspect that that represented became a bit more built into the structure of the university through the establishment of the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs [CURA].

CAC: Ah, yes, in which two geographers, Lukermann and Borchert played a major role.

RS: The notion there was to establish a unit that could bring in resources from the state to do applied work in the urban area and the regional area of the type that the Lake Shore study had represented.

CAC: The Lake Shore study preceded . . . ?

RS: That's correct.

CAC: It was a model that could be used with CURA or with state government or other places?

RS: That's right. Then, state funding got somewhat better in the late 1970s and we had another spurt of faculty coming in.

CAC: Wow! [laughter] That's an interesting story because it bears upon a theme that I find is little known even by persons familiar with the history of the university at more than a casual level and that is the outreach that the university makes. We think of Extension and then when CURA comes along, we talk about CURA; but, you're talking about another variety of outreach to the community that must have touched not only state officials and planners but individual real estate developers, right?

RS: That's right. John Borchert, particularly, had very strong contacts in the real estate world and development world in the city. There were Midwest Planning and other planning outfits in the city that heavily used the expertise on the faculty and among graduate students. A number of graduate students, during that time period, would go out on contracts to a planning agency or an engineering firm to do a particular project that this kind of expertise could be used in.

CAC: Is there any conflict of values in that, which is to say, as a lay person, I can see that there are developers who would destroy the lake shores. It's a conservation ethic against the development ethic and was that present or how did it express itself—or maybe it wasn't there?

RS: I didn't see any evidence that there was very much conflict or difficulty on the part of these graduate students interacting with the private sector. Most of them had very clear values and they simply didn't . . .

CAC: But development runs against the conservation ethic or it may.

RS: It may.

CAC: Let me put it another way. From my point of view, it frequently does.

RS: [laughter] Yes. However, this Lake Shore Development Project and subsequent projects provided for the first time, the information base that you needed to draw up the regulations that would at least reduce the impact of that kind of development. That is the way in which people approached the project and the work they were doing outside of the project in the private sector . . . as developing the database that could be used for conservationally sound planning and zoning of these very critical areas. So, it becomes a situation where you are helping to solve problems that started to develop, had developed, very much earlier. With the increasing pressure on the

lake shore in places like Minnesota, if you were successful with this kind of project, you could, in some sense, minimize the damage that would occur with increasing pressure.

CAC: You may know where I'm coming from on this. My son, the erstwhile geographer, has the last four or five years, but particularly the last two years, been fighting to preserve the Kinnickinnic Valley from development.

RS: Yes.

CAC: There the conflict of values is very clear.

RS: I think at that time, the conflict of values was less on the surface. We were moving from a situation, in my view, in which you had no information, and no data . . .

CAC: Yes, I understand.

RS: . . . and no laws to a situation where you had information on the basis of which you could do some zoning and then some regulation. I think we've moved beyond that or away from it—I'm not sure it's beyond—to the situation where we accept this notion of having the information, of having the regulations, of having the zoning laws. Now, it's more of a question of whether this is the right way in which to use a particular piece of land without regard to whether it's going to meet the letter of the law, in other words, into the value realm. I think there has been this progress.

CAC: And members of your department run this theme out down to the present and . . .

RS: Oh, yes.

CAC: . . . have had played major roles in this evolution?

RS: I think among our current graduate students, there's a very strong interest in this view of the environment as an ethical question, as a philosophical question. It's probably more prevalent among our graduate students today than it is among our faculty—but, that's not uncommon either. It probably, over time, will result in a change in the character of the faculty where these issues are more ingrained in the faculty and better matched with the interests of the graduate students. Right now, they're having to do a lot of it on their own.

CAC: If I read the university correctly, the last ten years, plus or minus, several persons in Landscape Architecture have been the chief assertive persons in this regard rather than Geography?

RS: Than geographers . . . I think that's true.

CAC: Let's stick with the Geography Department. This is very engaging. It's the kind of stuff that histories very rarely attend to. This is our business! How do ideas develop, and how does a curriculum change, and how does a faculty grow? Those are really important. Say something about . . . with expanded faculty, what that meant in the opening up of new fields and subfields in Geography—if, indeed, it did. Maybe, the tradition of being a generalist runs strong in Geography?

RS: I think it does run strong. We have, since the middle to late 1970s, gone back and forth between, on the one hand, hiring new faculty for very specific purposes and issues in the department to do particular jobs in research and teaching and the notion that what this Department of Geography does can best be served by getting the best intellect and the best instructor that we can and hang what the speciality is. We've gone back and forth, in part, because resources have become less available in the university and the university has taken the position, we can't support everything, therefore, we're going to choose a few things that we're going to support and this has got [unclear].

CAC: [unclear] strategy of focus.

RS: Right. That gets translated into specific job descriptions at the unit level; although, I don't think it necessarily has to. One could decide to do it differently. I much, personally, prefer the notion that you have a broad search and bring in the person . . .

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Tape 1, Side 2]

CAC: This is a very engaging conversation. Again, from the outside, although I've been around a long time, we think of certain departments as very strong: Chemical Engineering, Psychology, Economics, Geography, and some others, by rating and so forth. Geography, I'm saying from the mid 1960s when you came until the mid 1980s, was a pretty powering program when you think of the individuals who were here . . . Yi Fu Tuan, for example, and Borchert . . . you know the names better than I. Part of the accounting for that, I'm guessing, is the strategy of hiring a best person regardless of fields. Is that true? I don't want to put words in your . . .

RS: I think it is true. It was particularly successful with certain individuals. Yi Fu Tuan, for example was . . .

CAC: How on earth did we ever find him? I mean, you didn't want a philosopher of space?

RS: That's right. It was a matter of people having known Yi Fu at Berkeley where he was a graduate student, at New Mexico where he taught for awhile, and eventually, at the University of Toronto, and getting acquainted with him, listening to him, hearing what he said at meetings, reading things . . .

CAC: He came in at the top?

RS: He came in as professor . . . and, then, giving him his freedom when he got here.

CAC: How long was he here?

RS: Ten, or better, years, which is probably the longest time Yi Fu had spent anywhere; although, he'll probably match that at Madison by the time he retires.

CAC: That's leading to my next question. Why would a great department let him go?

RS: I don't think we let him go. I think it was a combination of things, one of which is that Yi Fu had kind of a wanderlust. He moved around a lot. The offer from Madison was very, very good, including the opportunity to have a name chair, something that, at that time, was virtually impossible at the University of Minnesota. This was before the campaign had gotten to the point where you could have endowed chairs. Yi Fu had and one or two other members of the faculty had some personality clashes. I think it was very much a combination of things. Probably the saddest thing I ever had to do was, finally, as chair of the department, acknowledge that there was no way we were going to get him back. We tried. Fred and I made a couple of trips down to Madison to try and get him to come back. It just wasn't in the cards.

CAC: During the ten years he was here, he helped contribute to that quality that . . . ?

RS: Oh, a tremendous part of that quality was the stature of Yi Fu, the stature of John Borchert, the stature of Fred, the stature of John Fraser Hart, Phil Porter. All of these folks have national and international repute that led to a ranking of the department that was very high relative to some measures of quality that might be thought to be more common, that is, the number of books, for example.

CAC: Yes, yes. Is that measure of quality upheld the last ten, fifteen years?

RS: There was a period right after Yi Fu left and just before he left where, on average, the quality of the department was declining. I think, however, the emergence of Eric Sheppard, as a very distinguished member of our faculty, the hiring of Helga Leitner, the hiring of Bob McMaster in geographic information systems recently, and most recently the hiring of Kathy Klink, a very young physical geographer with tremendous potential that we're . . .

CAC: Building capital again?

RS: . . . building capital again after having a period in which the capital declined. As you know, sometime in the next few months, there will be another ranking coming out from the National Academy of Science and the National Research Council. I don't know where we're going to end up.

CAC: I think it's very helpful to understand the basic missions of the university. Is there somehow, for lay persons, five, ten, twenty years down the line, that you can say something about the intellectual development of all these fields of geography in your experience, that is, from the mid 1960s to the mid 1990s? Is that too big a question? I don't know how to break it down.

RS: [laughter] There have been some threads and some good parts and not so good parts to the development of the field. One development that has personally been very satisfying is a reemergence of physical geography in the discipline from a situation when I was a graduate student where it was a very, very small fraction of the discipline . . .

CAC: And kind of old-fashioned in tradition?

RS: Yes, very old-fashioned and traditional physical geography . . . to where it is now, it is very, very dynamic with some of the very brightest of the graduate students going into physical geography with strong relationships with environmental science . . .

CAC: Good!

RS: . . . and concern with the environment and also a strong quantitative bent to the kinds of work that is done in physical geography that allows people in physical geography to converse easily with other disciplines . . . in atmospheric sciences, for example or in geology. That is one thread. Another thread has been the development in the last ten or twelve years of geographic information systems and geographic analysis techniques. I think that these techniques properly used will be very advantageous to the discipline in the next ten to fifteen years. John Borchert, a graduate of the department and Ron Abler who is now executive director of the Association of American Geographers and was at the National Science Foundation at the time that the foundation decided to support the development of geographic information systems . . . these individuals were very important in sort of the theoretical and academic development of geographic information systems and will be in the future.

CAC: The kind of aesthetic or philosophical bent that Yi Fu had . . . is that a major trend in geography?

RS: Oh, I think so. I think it is a major trend. Humanistic geography, which Yi Fu essentially reinvented at least, if not invented, is alive and well.

CAC: Do we have that represented on our faculty?

RS: Unfortunately not . . . to the degree that I would see. There are some. Roger Miller is of that type; but, he's probably the closest to the kinds of things that Yi Fu did along with Fred, who is retired now. No, we lost that particular aspect of the field.

CAC: Your own field of climatology changed over this twenty-five year period?

RS: Oh, yes, from, quite frankly, I think in the 1960s, a kind of nadir, almost a backwater in some ways, to a real growth industry.

CAC: Oh, I see . . . nadir. I thought you were going to say Ralph Nader.

RS: [laughter] No, to a real growth industry the last ten or twelve years, largely having to do with concern with the environment issues of energy use and global warming.

CAC: These are issues that you've had to turn to in your own research?

RS: Absolutely. I certainly have. When we came to hire someone in physical geography, Kathy Klink, the kind of person we were looking for, was someone who could do this large scale numerical modeling and was interested in applying those techniques to questions that had to do with how humans have interacted and will interact with the environment and, particularly, the surface of the earth.

CAC: Will we ever solve the mystery of the global warming?

RS: Probably not because we'll try to insist that there's a single cause, and I don't believe there's a single cause; so, in that sense, no, we'll never solve . . .

CAC: Climatologists have the best of the argument at the moment?

RS: Yes, they probably do; but, I don't think that it's all that compelling.

CAC: I see. Some of my personal interests intrude upon . . . I beg the forgiveness of posterity for intruding in that fashion.

RS: [laughter]

CAC: Dick, you did all kinds of other things, too. You chaired the department with a split. Really, you had nine years . . .

RS: A total of nine years, right. I've probably been chairman of the department for a longer period of time than anyone since Darrell Hall Davis, who sort of established the department.

CAC: [laughter] But, your terms, like Grover Cleveland, were split.

RS: Right. [laughter]

CAC: I know from my personal experience, but now I'm looking at your CV [Curriculum Vitae] here as well, that you were very active and very effective in Cross-Disciplinary Studies. This is the mid 1970s,, isn't it?

RS: Yes.

CAC: Say something about that as a strategy for curriculum development, where it came from, and why it faded.

RS: I think Cross-Disciplinary Studies grew out of the need to retrench and reallocate.

CAC: Ahhh.

RS: Cuts were being made in the mid 1970s, as you well know, that were very deep. To cushion somewhat the blow, there were reallocation schemes and one of these was the establishment of Cross-Disciplinary Studies essentially through the College of Liberal Arts [CLA].

CAC: I'm going to interrupt. Do you mean then that a primary motive of this was budget driven rather than pedagogically driven . . . a bit of each, I'm sure, but . . . ?

RS: I think a bit of both; but, I'm probably inclined to say that I'm not sure it would have developed without a push.

CAC: Okay.

RS: If it hadn't been, in some sense, a near catastrophe coming along that got people thinking in a somewhat different way and got people to think outside of the usual or normal mode of operation, Cross-Disciplinary Studies might not have developed. Now, it happened that this came along at the same time there was great interest in environmental studies and other multidisciplinary approaches.

CAC: I'm reminding listeners that this is the early to mid 1970s.

RS: Yes, and the first incarnation of the environmental revolution in the last twenty years.

CAC: That's right, we had the first Earth Day in 1971, I think.

RS: Right. It was a natural for this Cross-Disciplinary Studies. You could take things like in Geography, in the Institute of Technology [IT], in Horticulture and put them together into a different pedagogical arrangement that was an attempt to provide within this large university a confined cohort of students that would somehow get to know one another and take classes together.

CAC: In order to take classes together? It was kind of a packaging of these courses?

RS: That's correct. The plan was to develop a more coherent program for the students, a more, what is today referred to as a better community of students. This is the first and very early attempt at developing community at the University of Minnesota—it's amazing how these come back in over, and over, and over again—and to provide a stronger advising system where you had peer advisers, professional advisers, and faculty advisers all working with the same group of students with common courses over the first two years . . . very similar in some respects to experiments that are being put forward, even as we speak, to develop a residential college for the first time on an experimental basis on the campus this fall with a cohort of about 100 students.

CAC: You speak specifically of the environmental. There were other clusters of courses?

RS: There were.

CAC: I remember there was one on what we thought was going to be the American Way of Life and then it turned into American Ways, which tied together a different cluster of courses.

RS: That's right.

CAC: You became involved at a higher level or were you just administering that kind of environmental, forestry . . . ? We tied Composition into it?

RS: Yes. The particular cluster that I worked with as a faculty member was the environmental theme. It involved Geology, Geography, Horticulture, Composition, and Classics. We had a course on Greek and Roman comedy that George Rochefort taught.

CAC: How did that fit into this cluster?

RS: George was and is a very resourceful man . . . first of all, an extraordinarily gifted lecturer. He was able to take this course on Greek and Roman comedy and integrate it in ways that I still don't quite understand into this package of highly environmentally oriented issues. But, it wasn't that everything had to address directly the theme.

CAC: Part of it was having students know each other in the same sets of courses?

RS: And to get them to understand that, even though they had a strong interest in the environment, there were other things very interesting to learn about. That you don't want to be too confining.

CAC: They were Friday afternoon lectures or symposia?

RS: We had weekly get togethers with the students in symposia. We had a commons room where students could study and visit. We had the adviser in that commons room so that students could interact easily with both professional advisers and graduate student advisers as well as faculty advisers.

CAC: It sounds to me that that's expensive. It isn't saving money; but, it's costing money.

RS: Oh, it is costing money.

CAC: Then, how on earth could you . . . ? It had to be justified in retrenchment strategy.

RS: It was justified on the basis that it would improve the educational experience of students and that if we were going to do retrenchment, we wouldn't just retrench what we had to give to the state but go a little bit deeper and use those funds to revitalize the university at the same time.

CAC: How long did that last, Dick?

RS: [sigh] My recollection is that Cross-Disciplinary Studies and many other activities came out of the so-called Educational Development Program and that, initially, was on the order of 3 percent of the university budget, which is not an insignificant amount of money even in the 1970s.

CAC: Yes.

RS: These funds were available at the all-campus level, at the collegiate level, and at the departmental level. I don't think it ever got quite fully funded. I don't think the departmental level was ever funded.

CAC: This was launched entirely within the Arts College; although, we chose some of our courses from other . . . ?

RS: No, the Educational Development Program was campus-wide; indeed, I think it was university-wide.

CAC: I mean Cross-Disciplinary Studies had its home in CLA?

RS: That's right. It was a proposal of CLA.

CAC: But, they drew upon and rewarded IT, Agriculture . . . ?

RS: All of the campus, right.

CAC: How long did it last?

RS: About six years or thereabouts.

CAC: What's your judgment—you were so close to it—of its success in achieving the goals that you outlined so accurately a moment ago?

RS: It was not as successful as we planned it to be and, indeed, hoped it to be. It was difficult to recruit cohorts of students that would be quite so interested in exactly the same cluster of courses; so, eventually, we got to the point where you didn't have to take every course. You had to take a part of them. That number started to get smaller, and smaller, and smaller and, eventually, it faded away. I think faded is essentially the way to talk about it. At the same time, it did cost money. It was predicated on the idea that you would pay for the classes, that is, the time of the professors. You would pay for the adviser and our graduate student adviser to the program. You would pay for space, in some sense, college room. It was very expensive. As you got into some other budget cuts, it was a fairly easy target.

CAC: It was soft.

RS: It was very soft.

CAC: Do you have any sense, measured in intellectual or learning terms, whether it was successful or is there any way to evaluate that?

RS: I don't think there's any way to evaluate it other than idiosyncratically.

CAC: And what is your sense?

RS: I know of a number of students that were intellectually stimulated by that experience and went on to very successful undergraduate and graduate programs; but, I know only individuals.

CAC: But now you say that as an idea, in the work you're doing in Morrill Hall now on a part-time basis, this is coming up again as a possible way to create community among the students.

RS: Right, in the form of a residential college. I think it's a bit more realistic. It is more predicated on living together in a dorm and having those kinds of interactions with a relatively modest amount of course overlap. It isn't built so much upon a program theme as it is built upon the idea of experiencing a collegiate education together. It has, in the experimental phase, students from IT and the College of Liberal Arts in it; but, you don't have to be in Environmental Engineering or Environmental Science or something like that. That probably is a change that will help it to possibly be more successful.

CAC: Do you have a sense, by the same subjective terms, whether there was an increase or not in collegiality among participating faculty?

RS: During the time that things were going on, yes, there was . . . between individuals. Also from my personal point of view, it gave me an opportunity to learn an awful lot about what happens on the St. Paul campus in detail and increased my interaction over there; so, from my personal point of view, yes, it did. Of the five faculty members that were very heavily involved, three are gone. Only two of us are really left. One is gone by retirement and two others left the university.

CAC: Let me try something on you. It's my sense—it may be wrong; all of our views are partial . . . that is, incomplete—that Wally Russell, as dean, was one of the . . . and he left very soon before we even got it underway?

RS: Right.

CAC: And Roger Page really became the staff person, right?

RS: That's correct.

CAC: It seems to me that Roger was deeply dedicated to this . . .

RS: Yes.

CAC: . . . and that without his perseverance, it wouldn't have lasted as long as it did?

RS: I think you're right, Clarke. [laughter] The difficulty came down that we had a very hard time recruiting the right students into the program out beyond about the first year or so. We didn't do it very well.

CAC: Fair enough.

RS: I think we're doing it a lot better in this residential college. These students go through a very extensive interview. They're offered an opportunity to be part of an experiment. I don't think we were, in some sense, as well educated about what we have to do to recruit the right students. It was pretty much catch-as-catch-can . . . whoever showed up. That was a big mistake.

CAC: One final question on that project. Persons attracted to it, not students but faculty, were persons like yourself. What attracted you to that? It distracts you from other things that you must have been doing. It took time from teaching and research, etcetera. Why would you do that?

RS: It probably is a combination of motivations that's not very different from most other things that you do of that type within the academy. It's an exciting idea; I want to be involved with it. It's something I don't know very much about; therefore, I want to learn about it. It potentially has a very big impact on my unit and what I do; therefore, I better know about it. It is the notion that somebody's going to do this job and it ought to be done right; I am better able to do it than a lot of other people that might do it. It's a whole bunch of things. It is not a lot of altruism.

CAC: But, it's that kind of person that you found reflected in others who were participating?

RS: That's right, that kind of mixed motivations.

CAC: Those motives mix themselves in a relatively small proportion of the total faculty [unclear]?

RS: I think that's true and it shows up all over the place with a relatively small number of people being involved in a wide-range of activities.

CAC: Professor Skaggs, you show up on all kinds of . . . [laughter]

RS: [laughter]

CAC: I'm going to name some things here. You know what your university service has been but to start with, the All-University Council on Environmental Quality. That's a natural for you. Tell me about that.

RS: That was very early on in my career here, one of the first committees with which I was associated. It was an attempt to see whether we could put together, in response to the rise of environmentalism in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a campus-wide program. We decided it was not a good idea, that the tradition of the University of Minnesota, having very independent colleges that did their own thing, was the way it was going to continue; so, it eventually died out—at least we talked about it.

CAC: Space Science Center.

RS: That came about as a result of a NASA contract that Dwight, and John Borchert, and I had through the university to use remotely sensed satellite data from LANSAP, primarily, to interpret land cover, land use, and environmental problems in Minnesota. It was housed over in the Space Science Center and I got involved that way with the Space Science Center.

CAC: That was another Cross-Disciplinary thing by it's very nature?

RS: Absolutely.

CAC: What was the strength? How long did that persist?

RS: We went about five years on that project.

CAC: It was essentially a research project?

RS: It was.

CAC: Did it have a teaching spinoff?

RS: We did establish a Remote Sensing course and taught it during that time period; but, it's not one that's continued in the department.

CAC: Intercollegiate Athletics . . . now, that's a jump.

RS: [laughter] I don't know whether I should admit it but I'm pretty much of a sports junkie.

CAC: I see. Did you play anything yourself?

RS: Only in high school, not in collegiate play. I've always attended the University of Minnesota sporting events.

CAC: Any favored sport?

RS: Oh, yes, basketball is by far my favorite. Football, I like a lot. I think intercollegiate athletics are a necessary part of an institution, such as we have here, for traditional reasons if no other. Somehow, I decided maybe I should learn how it works and so I did for a little while.

CAC: So, it was intellectual curiosity?

RS: Very much so, very much so; but, it lead to some very interesting things including an opportunity to help Nils [Hasselmo] select our current athletic director, Mac [McKinley] Boston.

CAC: Ahhh.

RS: I learned a lot.

CAC: That leads, I guess, to a series of questions that I had difficulty framing. Some committees from college, or university, or the senate are of general policy, which is in the domain or the territory that we have as professors . . . Senate Committee on Educational Policy. There are others that one is a representative to in an established agency with its own governance . . . the Senate Committee on Libraries, for example. A Committee on Intercollegiate Athletics, it seems to me, would be of that nature, that there is a self-interested provenance out there and

the faculty are a minor representation. I found the same thing in the Senate Library Committee, for example. It's not good or bad; I'm just talking about a systemic situation.

RS: Right.

CAC: Speak to that issue of a systemic agency, which I see to be very powerful, Intercollegiate Athletics, on the one hand, and faculty that kind of dabble in it.

RS: That was one of the things that was very interesting to me, that the faculty's interest in the intercollegiate athletics business—you can't refer to it as anything else but a business today—is fundamentally, from my point of view, twofold. One . . . that the student athletes be exactly that, students as well as athletes. Therefore, the faculty have responsibility there for attempting to provide oversight for the academic progress of student athletes and to attempt to make sure that these individuals aren't used in the sense of athletes and not be students at the same time. I said that very badly.

CAC: It's possible for a program to exploit its athletes and not worry about its scholarship?

RS: That's right, exactly. I think that's one fundamental issue.

CAC: You found that to be true . . . or at least one issue?

RS: It's an issue that constantly needs to be looked at and monitored by faculty, in my opinion. The other thing is that a great deal of the publicity about this institution comes from the athletic department and about the athletic department. To the extent that that publicity is positive, the institution advances and to the extent that it's negative, the institution is hurt. I think that the faculty have not only a responsibility to the institution, they have a personal responsibility to themselves to attempt to provide oversight, to try to make sure, to the extent possible, this publicity is positive, that the activities that go on there reflect well upon the institution. But, the faculty, as you pointed out, are part-time and the people you interact with are full-time.

CAC: We all hear, all the time, the assumption being made that a winning team, particularly in the major sports, football, basketball, essentially, play, if not a chief role, a pretty important role in the climate in the legislature when they come to receiving a budget. You know this assumption is said as a common sense of the matter all the time. Do you think that's, from your experience on this committee and otherwise, a truism?

RS: I don't know if whether it's true.

CAC: Has it ever been tested?

RS: Not that I'm aware of; although, there is . . .

CAC: It has a kind of superficial plausibility. [laughter]

RS: It has a superficial plausibility and there are some instances where, apparently, it was a strategy—not here—that was used to enhance the institution. I'm convinced that that was the case at the University of Wisconsin-Madison . . . and Donna Shalala. She very purposefully decided to revitalize the football program and did so . . . not exactly what you would expect from Donna.

CAC: With the help of the university?

RS: In her opinion, yes, because the athletic program is not going to be self-sufficient. It's not going to pay for itself without a healthy football program. So, I think there are instances where it has been done. I don't think we've ever done that here, in my experience.

CAC: Was the issue of women's athletics part of the agenda when you were on the committee?

RS: Yes.

CAC: Say something about that.

RS: There are tremendous tensions involved and tremendous tensions, primarily, between a situation in which you have two athletic departments, one of which is self-financing and the other of which is not self-financing and feelings about the degree to which Men's Intercollegiate Athletics should support, needs to support, Women's Intercollegiate Athletics, what the role of athletics is, whether there's a difference between the so-called revenue sports and the non-revenue sports . . . tremendous tensions there that haven't been solved and I'm not sure how they do get solved.

CAC: You saw these dynamics at work?

RS: Oh, yes. For a shorter period of time than . . . I have to admit this . . . I quit when I became a half-time administrator because, in part, I had to for senate rules.

CAC: Were you active in this when Mr. Hasselmo was vice-president for Administration?

RS: No. This is quite recent.

CAC: Okay. He had that as a portfolio at that time. The Council on Liberal Education leads logically to your present interest; so, I'm going to reserve that just for a moment. I see two other things that jump out at me. I know there's the College Assembly and summer session. I think they are, if you'll forgive me, more routine . . . important, not unimportant, but more routine. You served the Committee on Computer Facilities and also the Supercomputer Institute. There's a great deal of mystery surrounding those with the public generally and, therefore, to historians five, ten years from now. How do you entangle that story?

RS: I'm afraid that I don't have anything to say about the Supercomputer. It was a very peripheral role that I played in helping on a couple of searches basically. I didn't get into the nitty-gritty; so, I can't tell you very much there.

CAC: Fair enough. All right, your connection with the Supercomputer was relatively peripheral; I will be interviewing persons there. Help me, however, because you were early into computers and it may be that to be on the Computer Facilities Committee was perhaps more central? Can you say something in general first about how computers came to the university? [laughter] They had to but the process of adapting . . . it just changed so much.

RS: Right. When I came to the University of Minnesota, I think the university was, at least in the Social Sciences and the College of Liberal Arts, fairly well along. The university had main frame computers, as all universities did then, that were highly subsidized, I think, by local computer manufacturers . . . UNIVAC, Sperry, and then later CDC [Control Data Corporation].

CAC: Because you'd have to use the tie-in of their company to make it compatible?

RS: But, they were also very interested in the university having their state-of-the-art computers for purposes of publicity, and support of the local educational institute, and the fact that a lot of them had come out of Institute of Technology, and many of their engineers came from our Institute of Technology. The main frames were here. They were very powerful, much more powerful than I'd been used to at the University of Kansas, and very importantly, the College of Liberal Arts—I think it was Fred Lukermann who established it; but, I'm not certain—had established the Social Science Research Facility Center, which started out as a group of consultants with the purpose of helping faculty members and graduate students in the Social Sciences get access to computing facilities, and use the computing facilities of the university effectively in their research and studies and education, and consult on, what was the big bugaboo at that time, programming and the use of programs. That facility, I think, speeded up, in the Social Sciences particularly, the introduction and use of state-of-the-art computing right along the way. We never really fell behind.

CAC: You're talking now, if Mr. Lukermann was a chief mover . . .

RS: Back in the middle 1960s.

CAC: Okay. Long before he was dean?

RS: Long before he was dean. He was associate dean when I came.

CAC: That's right, he was a dean in that sense.

RS: He had just become an associate vice-president with Gerry Shepherd, if I remember correctly.

CAC: Ahhh, of course.

RS: One of the things that he pushed was this Social Science Research Facility Center. The remarkable thing about that has been that it has kept up with the times. It had its own local computer that we could do a lot of things on to begin with. Then, as the main frame became more powerful at the University of Minnesota, the local computing facilities went away and they provided easy access to the main frames. As main frame computing died out and you get diversified computing . . .

CAC: By approximately when?

RS: This would have been in the late 1970s, early 1980s . . . the introduction of the personal computer and the evolution of the personal computer, first, into offices and, now, into networks of personal computers, and work stations, and so forth. They've continually kept up-to-date and we're responsible for the network on the West Bank and in the Social Sciences, particularly.

CAC: What is the tie-in into the library computer system, if any?

RS: That tie-in really didn't occur until you got strong networking capabilities on campus so you could go from . . .

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

[Tape 2, Side 1]

CAC: We're talking really about an enormous issue, development, of introducing a new technology which has to be in payroll, in registration, in research, in teaching, in the library; and it has to happen quickly and then when the technology changes, a large institution has to be nimble to change its technology. How on earth is that done? It seems to me that's just an overwhelming problem.

RS: I think it is, too. I'm not sure we've done it, campus-wide, very well. I think it's been decentralized on this campus, just like most everything else has been decentralized. With the recent development of a university-wide backbone network, and then people tying into it, and the emergence of a technology that can put everybody onto that network from their desk with essentially telephone wires, we're getting into the era where more centralized development and planning is going on.

CAC: Where does the initiative come from when its decentralized? How can you finance it? How can you encourage it? How did the university pull this off? We're a large, enormous institution. How was that done?

RS: I can only speak about the Social Science Research [Facility Center]. It was very largely a number of incremental steps where proposals were written to the college, to the university, for equipment funds to implement a particular advance in technology that was taking place.

CAC: Interruption on my part . . . that requires new funding of a substantial size in the long run?

RS: Right.

CAC: So, one has to make budgetary decisions. Is it new monies or is it monies taken from somewhere else?

RS: Sometimes, it was new. Sometimes, it was part of the retrenchment, if I recall correctly. One of the failings that we have had at the university is that we have been fairly generous with one time allocations to purchase equipment. We have not provided for the maintenance of that and the perpetuation of what we've developed. It's often been a series of steps where you get new equipment, and you spin it out to the point where a new technology comes along, and then you get new equipment again. In the interim, you've had a real battle to maintain what it is you put in initially. I don't think that in computing it's any different from the way in which day-to-day maintenance on this campus has been handled over all.

CAC: But, it's far more expensive.

RS: I'm not sure that it is; but, the principle is the same. We haven't funded very well the day-to-day maintenance of the infrastructure. We're in very, very bad shape right now.

CAC: With computers as well as with other things?

RS: With computing, yes; although, we've put more money into that recently and it's much better. Building maintenance, for example . . . it's awful.

CAC: We all see it all the time, except that's a decremental process and you see it eat away slowly.

RS: The notion that I saw in the newspaper today that one of the two bridges across Washington Avenue has got to be closed, the one with the steps to the east side, because it's simply unsafe anymore and the one on the west side . . . its handicapped access is going to have be reduced in width so that you don't get too many people on it at one time.

CAC: So, it takes many forms.

RS: It takes many, many forms.

CAC: Now that you're in Morrill Hall—I don't know how many portfolios—you listen, you see things, you hear conversations.

RS: I try. [laughter]

CAC: The process of making the university in the 1970s and 1980s accessible to persons with various kinds of disabilities was an enormous expense?

RS: Yes.

CAC: It took an investment and still there are places you can't [unclear]?

RS: That's right.

CAC: Then, you have this new technology of computers, including supercomputers, for heavens sakes. That's an enormously expensive investment and it would seem to me such an expense and such a high level of technical sophistication that it's difficult for a university to carry it out with equity and I don't mean in any abstract sense of justice but in some places the university must be more receptive by the nature of their discipline?

RS: Yes, I think that's true.

CAC: Where that question leads, I don't know. I'm such an ignoramus with this. I'm trying to get you to help out posterity . . . how this adaptation of a new technology came and how it took place. You've commented on some of that.

RS: I think it came from a wide range of sources. In the earlier days, it was activities by the major computer manufacturers like CDC and UNIVAC that put the technology into the institution at very low cost. With the development of the personal computer, both of the major manufacturing streams, the Apple stream and the IBM stream, were very active on campus providing at minimal cost the equipment for use primarily in educational development.

CAC: Did you buy into both streams?

RS: The institution did. The institution made the decision that it would not go with one stream of technology over the other.

CAC: But, there must be twelve streams . . . not really?

RS: Not really. I think there are now three: the Apple stream, the IBM type stream, and the UNIX, so-called risk computer stream.

CAC: We've emphasized the first two?

RS: We've emphasized the first two; although, the third is coming on very strong now and there are attempts to bring them back together. Whether they'll be successful or not, I don't know.

CAC: Is there full compatibility between the first two streams?

RS: Actually, they're quite incompatible and that's one of the problems . . . the Apple and the IBM.

CAC: So, some units have gone one way and some the other?

RS: And in some units, half the faculty is one and half the faculty is the other.

CAC: The library's units?

RS: The library has maintained main frames, for the most part, and terminals.

CAC: That's a third system?

RS: Yes. In some ways, it's difficult and in other ways, it's not. Myself, for example, I use, at home, an IBM type machine. At Morrill Hall, I use an Apple type machine. I've also used the main frames and UNIXs.

CAC: But, you're more versatile than most faculty. I'm not asking you to be modest or proud. It's just an empirical observation.

RS: Perhaps, I am.

CAC: Most faculty cannot manage all three.

RS: Actually, it's fairly easy to do if you have to do it. I just found I had to do it. It's not that I want to.

CAC: Maybe that's it . . . a lot of people don't have to.

RS: That's true.

CAC: I'm suggesting that there's a real differential application of the process of adapting to a new technology within the university.

RS: I think there probably is, right. I happen to like technology and it probably makes it very much easier for me to do it than other people that aren't particularly interested in it.

CAC: You see, Dick, I'm trying to anticipate something. I couldn't write a part of a chapter on this; but, if someone were to do a history of the university, 1951-2001, that process of adaptation would have to be pretty central. I'm suggesting that there aren't a large number of historians who could do it off the top of their head, as we can do any number of other topics.

RS: That's very interesting. A place that might be able to get involved in that is the [Charles] Babbage Institute in the Institute of Technology.

CAC: So, I should interview those folks?

RS: I think maybe I would. It's an historical archive of essentially computing machinery. They have some interest, I believe, in the way in which computing machinery on campus has developed.

CAC: That's a good idea.

RS: They would be good folks for you to talk to.

CAC: Thank you. I was going to say we'd turn to a happier subject . . .

RS: [laughter]

CAC: . . . but it's not really a happier subject. It's just one that I feel more comfortable with. [laughter] On and off, you have had an expressed interest in Cross-Disciplinary Studies and the Council on Liberal Education, and so forth . . . education in its larger sense, particularly undergraduate instruction, in this instance. I gather that in your present part-time commitment in Central Administration that that is a chief . . .

RS: Right.

CAC: Take us back as far as you wish in your career chronologically with that level of interest, at college or university level, and then see where it takes us.

RS: Okay. As a result of the Cross-Disciplinary Studies activities in the 1970s, I got associated with the earlier Council on Liberal Education that Jim Wertz in Physics headed up for such a long time.

CAC: Oh, my.

RS: That former Council on Liberal Education had established the basic liberal education requirements for the campus back in the middle and late 1960s. It is from that generalized set of university liberal education requirements that all of the individual campus and collegiate liberal education requirements had devolved. It involved writing and four broad areas of knowledge in

the sciences, the social sciences, and the arts and humanities, and artistic expression. That former Council on Liberal Education was abolished in an attempt to streamline educational policy decision making. Their activities went to the Senate Committee on Educational Policy and I think fell through the cracks. [laughter] Nobody really looked after liberal education on a campus- or a university-wide basis.

CAC: Particularly after Don Smith left?

RS: After Don Smith left, right and after Jim Werntz left.

CAC: These were the two persons in Morrill Hall who really paid attention to this?

RS: Right. More and more colleges took into their own hands what the liberal education requirements would be within the guidelines of these broad university policies and you know better than anyone else, Clarke, how that happened in the College of Liberal Arts.

CAC: Is this college, right. I'm going to interview myself later on.

RS: Great! [laughter] This particular approach to liberal education had some side effects that eventually became, I think, overwhelming. One of them had to do, I believe, with a divergence of liberal education requirements between colleges, primarily as colleges became more specific about what students would do to satisfy particular requirements and which were, in my opinion, simply downloading parts of the major into the liberal education requirements. I don't think it happened in the College of Liberal Arts; but, in other places, it happened real big time.

CAC: That's an interesting concept. Is that yours or is that the council's that you sat on who saw this downloading?

RS: I think people began to see this from the point of view of students having an extraordinarily difficult time transferring between colleges on the campus because the liberal education requirements didn't match. What you thought you'd satisfied for your liberal education requirement in the social sciences in one college . . . it turned out you hadn't when you transferred to a new college. This caused some political fallout as people complained to legislators and so on.

CAC: I see. Who complains to legislators about something like this?

RS: Students do.

CAC: Do they really?

RS: Absolutely . . . they absolutely do.

CAC: Give me some anecdotes or more on that.

RS: I think the clearest evidence of it is something allied with liberal education, which is the so-called Minnesota Transfer Curricula. This is an agreement among the four public systems in the state of Minnesota to establish a set of ten competencies which, if certified by the sending institution, will satisfy the lower division liberal education requirements at any other institution. That was largely the response to political pressure in the legislature that had to do with the difficulty of transfer between the state university system and the university system, between community colleges and the state universities on the one hand but different from the University of Minnesota on the other hand and even between campuses of the University of Minnesota . . . that there were certain things at Morris that didn't count in liberal arts at the Twin Cities campus and vice versa. This is not just isolated to Minnesota.

CAC: [unclear]

RS: It's quite broad. It got to the point where the legislature was saying, "Either you fix it or we'll fix it for you." The state of Florida, for example, insisted that every college and university had the same numbering system for courses so that they are transferrable.

CAC: I understand. What dates are we talking about now?

RS: We're talking now about the last five to eight years or so.

CAC: All right..

RS: One of the impetuses for a reexamination of liberal education came from this transfer issue. Another came from the apparent complexity of our requirements when you look at Agriculture having one set, and IT having another, and CLA having another. From the outside, it looks very complex. Shortly, after Nils returned as president, and shortly after Len [Leonard] Kuhl was appointed senior vice-president and provost . . . he and Warren Ibele, in consultation with Nils, I'm sure, appointed the task force on liberal education that your colleague and mine, John Howe—who was associate dean for Social Sciences I think when I was chair . . .

CAC: [unclear] just in time.

RS: [laughter] . . . of the department the first time and a great guy to work with—chaired to look into the liberal education requirements, not individual colleges but on a Twin Cities campus basis. They came up with some extremely revolutionary ideas for the Twin Cities campus at least and lots of them haven't even started to be implemented yet. The ones that have been started to be implemented have to do with the traditional liberal education requirements of breadth and of composition. The task force that John chaired recommended, among the many things they recommended, a reduction in the number of courses that satisfy requirements in the diversified core. They established a so-called diversified core that is sort of the traditional

breadth requirement of the sciences, the social sciences, arts and humanities, and mathematics. They also instituted a requirement in so-called designated themes of liberal education, having to do with issues that are of substantial societal import today and are likely to be in the near future, at least in international perspective, cultural diversity, environment, citizenship and public ethics. They also argued that the writing skills of our undergraduate students were in adequate and recommended a major change in the way in which writing instruction is done in primarily the institution of writing across the curriculum as the responsibility of the faculty at large and not of a small cohort of graduate students in the so-called Composition program or Rhetoric. That was sort of the curricular side to it; but, they also recommended that these requirements apply to all undergraduate students on the Twin Cities campus without regard to what college they're in, and that the same set of courses satisfy those requirements for all students, and that the implementation and the future development of the liberal education requirements be vested in a reestablished Council on Liberal Education. So, John's task force, I think, did its job magnificently.

CAC: Were you on that task force?

RS: I was not on the task force. They consulted very widely and there was lots of debate about it. In May 1991, the Twin Cities Assembly approved the report and the Central Administration accepted that report that summer. The council was established in the fall of 1991. Somehow, it got past them in May that they had to reestablish the council; so, it was October before it got done. The authority was vested in the provost, which by this time was [Ettore] Infante, who had delegated it to the new vice-president for Art, Sciences, and Engineering, Anne Hopkins. She decided to hire an associate vice-president for Academic Affairs within Art, Sciences, and Engineering to chair the council and take administrative responsibility.

CAC: That's where you come in?

RS: There was a search done for that and Anne selected me to do it. We established the council in February of 1992. A task force laid out the broad ideas but the details weren't there.

CAC: Sure. [unclear], oh boy.

RS: So, we sat between February and May and wrote the first draft of the policies.

CAC: This, you did on released time . . . part released time?

RS: Yes.

CAC: So many committees are pro bono.

RS: That was my main task as 50 percent time . . . associate vice-president.

CAC: That's what you're still engaged in now?

RS: That's what we're still engaged in.

CAC: How long a process do you anticipate?

RS: We decided right away that it had to go in in two phases: the core and the themes in a first stage and writing skills in a second stage with the core and the themes. We wrote the policies. We wrote the criteria for courses to satisfy the requirements, sent out a call for proposals in January of 1993, had one deadline in May of 1993 and another in November of 1993. We got the response of about 600 course proposals, which we read and approved about 400 of them; and we had by the middle of December of 1993, what seemed to me, a large enough number of opportunities for students so we could put the curriculum in place. So, we did and it has gone into effect for new high school students, NAS [New Advance Students], with the fall of 1994. It will go into effect for all students, transfer students being the other large contingent, in the fall of 1996. Now, we're in the business sitting down and working on a very difficult task, which is to implement the writing skills.

CAC: The pluralism and citizenship come later?

RS: They are in place. The designated themes of . . .

CAC: But, the citizenship also includes . . . that's somehow to certify actual service in the community?

RS: It is not exclusively community service based.

CAC: Okay.

RS: We have a number of courses that satisfy that requirement that include community service; but, it is not exclusively that. It may be strictly classroom and classroom discussion.

CAC: A related group that you were with here is a task force on improving public understanding of verbal learning. It obviously fits in with your other interests; but, what was that?

RS: That was a group that, I think, President [Charles S.] Anderson at Augsburg [College] was instrumental in putting together in the middle and late 1970s.

CAC: Oh, my, that's what it was. I was with that, too, and I'd forgotten it.

RS: You remember, Clarke.

CAC: Wow!

RS: President [Peter] Magrath asked me if I would represent the university in part on the steering committee of that; so, I did for awhile. My service on it was interrupted by an opportunity to go to the National Center for Atmospheric Research on sabbatical as a senior post-doc[torate].

CAC: But, it fell apart?

RS: It fell apart. It's very interesting. It did a small grants program for a year and to get some successful projects back, I think, and, then, essentially fell apart. One of the things it did do was collect a large number of endorsements from high level executives of companies around the state about the value of liberal education.

CAC: And some workshops and some publications.

RS: Yes . . . but eventually it did fall apart.

CAC: I'm going to shift again. We're getting, both of us, a little bit exhausted.

RS: Yes.

CAC: Let me try you on something really big.

RS: Okay. [laughter]

CAC: One of the themes that I picked up, that I was kind of covertly, implicitly aware of, that so many persons have talked about, not entirely in agreement but as a controversial thing, is the sense that what happened in many parts of the academy, in the late 1950s and down through the 1980s and into our present era, is increasing specialization of every discipline and some have seen in that process a fragmentation and, therefore, the source of a loss of a sense of collegiality.

RS: I guess I'd go even further, Clarke. I guess it's also one of the reasons why it's necessary to reform undergraduate education and especially liberal education.

CAC: Comment on the phenomenon itself and then maybe it spins back into your engagement in liberal undergraduate . . .

RS: I think there has been an increased specialization and my own view is that undergraduate students, over this period of time, have come to have more and more narrow programs. The place I got my best evidence from was reviewing graduate school applications . . .

CAC: Ah!

RS: . . . from not only here but almost everywhere.

CAC: I think the University of Minnesota is part of a national . . . sure, this is not us.

RS: Right. It became more and more clear to me that undergraduates were more and more concentrating their studies in one, or two, or three disciplines without much broad exposure to the various fields of knowledge. That's one of the reasons why I think that both nationally and at the University of Minnesota this reform of undergraduate education to reestablish liberal education is so important . . . to make it broadly applicable to undergraduate students and to, in some sense, wrest away from the individual disciplines some of the time of the students for them to spend in a broadening experience.

CAC: You put your answer appropriately in terms of undergraduate instruction. Many—not all—whom I've interviewed so far have said that what it did was fragment colleges and departments. For example, I was told—I'm going to follow all of these up—that in the late 1950s, beginning graduate students in Chemistry were given a required seminar in Chemistry. [laughter] Ten years, there were eight of them. There's a similar report from the College of Education that specialization became so intense—now I'm talking about the faculty and, therefore, the structure of what they teach and what students get—that the faculty themselves don't have a sense of being engaged in a common enterprise.

RS: I think that's true and true in my department. We have so-called pro-seminars the graduate students have to take. We don't have one of them. We don't have two of them. We don't have three of them. We have seven of them and they can choose among them. They are, in my opinion, very fragmented. I don't think we need more than one or two of them.

CAC: Would it be possible to offer a course in Geography?

RS: I believe it would be. I'm not, however, in the majority.

CAC: Does it mean in Geography or other places—you talk with people in this Liberal Education Council from all over the university—that it has become increasing difficult then for faculty to talk to each other about matters that are vital to our entire enterprise?

RS: I think on average yes; however, there is an extraordinarily large number of folks who do see the commonality and the necessity of disciplines communicating with one another. Fortunately, all of the people on the council are that way.

CAC: But, they are self-selected. That's why they are there.

RS: They, in some sense, are self-selected; in some sense, they're not.

CAC: They have reputations and, therefore, they get appointed.

RS: That's correct. They are self-selected in that sense, absolutely. The most interesting things on the council have to do with these very intense but very collegial and very forward looking debates about what students should be exposed to, what students should try and learn . . .

CAC: How about what faculty should be exposed to?

RS: . . . and how we can encourage faculty members to participate fully in this kind of liberal education for students.

CAC: For students and not for themselves? I'm baiting you a bit.

RS: I think the underlying assumption is that if they're willing and able to do it for students, they have to do it for themselves first. I firmly believe that.

CAC: I hear, not from everyone but in different nuances, that the phenomenon we're kind of agreed about, whatever the solution may be, has led to a loss of collegiality in this sense that there is a sense of the loss of a common enterprise, the University of Minnesota, and one's place in it; and that this, in turn—now, I'm advancing the observation one step further—has been a source of lowered morale, if one can measure that, among the faculty in many places in this large institution, that lacking a sense of the common enterprise, it's not only budgetary retrenchment that has been a source of loss of moral but this factor. Do you have any response to that?

RS: Hmm. Whether it's responsible for a loss of morale or not, I'm not certain; but, I do think that there has been over time a tendency for faculty members to specialize their lives at the academy in terms of concentrating on the research, or concentrating on graduate teaching, or concentrating on freshman teaching, and so on. That's very difficult for me because I very strongly believe that a university faculty member has to engage in all of these activities, and that the broad contribution of individual faculty members is what contributes to a common enterprise and a common goal for the institution, and that it's very difficult for a person who spends 90 percent of his or her time in research to really appreciate what goes on at a 1000-level, 300 student course, and conversely, that a person who does not engage in very substantial research has a difficult time understanding the value and importance of what goes on in a cutting-edge research project at this institution.

CAC: It does come to be increasingly difficult to maintain that balance?

RS: It has come to be very, very difficult to do. What I'm not certain about is why. [laughter] At the current time, my hypothesis is that the time that seems to be taken away from research for lots of faculty members and the time that seems to be taken away from instruction by lots of faculty members is the origin of or the demand for that time is coming for administration and paper work and when we talk, all too frequently, about research sort of interfering with teaching or teaching interfering with research, that we're wrong. Both have suffered from what I consider

to be an enormous increase in administrative cost, not monetary cost exclusively but time cost at this institution.

CAC: I've heard that theme, too.

RS: Some of it may be necessary but some of it, I think, has gone too far. When I came to the University of Minnesota, you had only four years of probationary service rather than six. The first indication that I had that I would be promoted to associate professor and given tenure is when I got the letter from the dean in the spring saying that I had it. [laughter] I didn't know that it happened.

CAC: [laughter]

RS: I never submitted anything. Today, when I help Vice-President Hopkins look at dossiers, they are four, five inches thick. Now, I don't believe that what happened in 1970, whenever it was, was right; but, I don't believe what we do today is right either.

CAC: That second pile of four or fives inches measures and weighs disproportionately publish/research?

RS: Yes, it does; although, you will also find in many of them a ream of written student evaluations two inches thick—but, has anybody ever read them? Has anybody ever looked at them carefully? Other than the person about whom they refer, probably not; but, they're there and somebody spent an enormous amount of time collecting them and collating them. [sigh]

CAC: You bet. I hate to end on this note, comrade.

RS: [laughter]

CAC: Do you have any ultimate thoughts that you would like to share with posterity about your experience here the last twenty-seven years?

RS: I have a real tough time, Clarke . . .

CAC: Okay. We had a lot of big thinking earlier.

RS: I've never been tempted to leave the University of Minnesota.

CAC: That's an important thing to say.

RS: I've never been tempted.

CAC: That must have some kind of a grounding.

RS: It's grounded in the whole milieu from individual colleagues in the department to the progressive state in which I'm privileged to live. It's all of those things.

CAC: The surround of community makes a real difference to you?

RS: When I first got here, John Webb told me that when "Easy" [E.W.] Ziebarth had a retention case, he always told them, "Living in Minnesota is worth at least \$4,000."

CAC: [laughter]

RS: I believe it.

CAC: Schools, Guthrie [Theater], music.

RS: The symphony . . . major league in every way! I think it's true. My greatest fear is that we will forget that, what I think is a fact.

CAC: It's remarkable the degree of interlacing of that community that we speak of just now and the faculty. It's not only as consumers but the outreach of the university to that larger cultural . . . schools, galleries, symphonies, music, opera, everything, is just extraordinary.

RS: Yes. I guess that's the one thing that I hope in the future will not occur is that we somehow lose sight of what we have and that we start not to value what we have and recognize the value of what we have.

CAC: That's a good note to end on.

[End of Tape 2, Side 1]

[End of the Interview]

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