Interview with Shirley M. Clark

Interviewed by Ann Pflaum, Assistant Dean University College, University of Minnesota

Interviewed on March 22, 2000

Shirley Clark - SC
Ann Pflaum - AP

AP: Shirley, these interviews are taped and recorded as part of the Sesquicentennial. The University is 150 years old next February, so the University is having a full year of ceremonies and events, and one part of this is this book that we're working on. It's based on interviews that were carried out by Clark Chambers. Then Clark's health began to fail, so Stan Lehmberg and I have been asked to carry forward. We do interviews with students and faculty, and then from the interviews we are constructing a history, which is to cover the years 1945-2000; in other words, the last fifty of the 150 years, and a sequel to the James Gray history.

AP: This is Shirley Clark. What I would like to ask you is to describe how you came to the University and a bit about your faculty experience. Then I will follow it up with some other questions.

SC: I came to the University of Minnesota in the fall of 1968 with my husband, John P. Clark, now deceased. Jack, as he was always called, and I were faculty members at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana throughout the 1960s in sociology. We had gone on a sabbatical—it was actually Jack's sabbatical. I was one year shy of eligibility, but I and our three children under four years of age went with Jack to spend the year in Tokyo, Japan, in 1966-67, and had a marvelous year in every respect. But we decided during that year that we would leave the University of Illinois after our return for the obligatory year, mainly because the University of Illinois still had at that point a very strong anti-nepotism policy which it used to discriminate against women. Although I was sought after as a faculty member and I was appointed on a series of annual appointments, it was a very contrived and uncomfortable arrangement, and our assessment was that it was going to be very difficult to me in that situation to have a promising career trajectory which I sought and had been prepared for. There were lots of jobs available; the market was very active, so we assumed we wouldn't have difficulty finding other jobs. In fact, we were able to secure jobs at the University of Minnesota pretty easily the year we returned to University of Illinois. I recall when I went to the University of Minnesota to be interviewed for a job that combined both education and sociology with a focus on the sociology of education, I asked some questions about nepotism issues and so forth, and it quite mystified the people who were interviewing me because Minnesota already had a number of couples, many of them well known, on the faculty, some in the same departments, some in different departments. They assured me there would be no difficulty in that respect as far as they could see. So we were very excited, then, to move to the University of Minnesota. We did that at the very end of the 1960s, and were there for the next twenty-two years until we left the university in order for me to accept

the position which I hold here, and have held since the fall of 1990, which is Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs for the Oregon University System. So that's it in a nutshell, Ann.

AP: Remind me . . . I want to clarify the Oregon University System. Is that the counterpart of the University of Minnesota System, or the State University System? What is that?

SC: It's a little different from both. It encompasses both in a sense. It includes all of the public four-year institutions in Oregon. Because we are a very sparsely populated state, that means seven universities, and also the affiliated Oregon Health Sciences University. So our system, which is one of the oldest systems in the country dating—depending on how you want to count it—from approximately 1930. It encompasses the University of Oregon, Oregon State University, Portland State University, the regional universities that are Eastern {Oregon University], Southern [Oregon University], and Western [Oregon University], and the Oregon Institute of Technology, as well as the affiliated Oregon Health Sciences University. That is the entirety of public higher education beyond the community colleges in Oregon.

AP: It sounds like a huge job.

SC: It's a marvelous job, and a very daunting set of challenges, but it is a very inclusive job. In some ways that makes it easier than would be the situation in Minnesota or another state that had more than one tier of institutions in public higher education.

AP: You must have come in the summer or the fall. Was it about 1969 that you came?

SC: In the summer of 1968, I don't even remember at what point in the summer, but we were there in advance of the opening of the fall term because our children at that point, our oldest—a daughter—was ready to enter first grade, and another—a son—was ready to enter kindergarten, and the youngest was just two years old, so he was not even a candidate for nursery school at that point.

AP: What was your take as a faculty member on the various demonstrations in Minnesota—the occupation that led in 1969 to the creation of African American Studies or perhaps the strike in 1970, or the tear gas on campus in 1972. As a faculty member, did that have an effect at all on you?

SC: It had only a rather peripheral effect on me. I have recollections of those incidents. I also had a recollection of things happening somewhat later on the University of Minnesota campus that had happened, for example, on the University of Illinois campus. I don't know whether my assessment of that sequence is a correct one or not, but for example, at the University of Illinois there were protests earlier and somewhat more active—even violent—kinds of protests. I do remember walking across campus one day after there had been some kind of skirmish when there was the whiff of tear gas in the air and the campus was almost eerily quiet at that point. But my sense was that the focus on the end portion of the war in southeast Asia was not an event that had engulfed the entire campus, but more that it was deeply affecting some parts of the campus more so than others. My sense was that arriving more toward the end than earlier. I do recall some of the events around the establishment of ethnic studies departments because in a way my

involvement, which was somewhat accidental, was a factor that pulled me into my first central administrative position. That was, I was invited to serve on an AAUP committee that was chaired by the late professor Hal Chase from political science, of course a very well known constitutional law scholar and also well known for his patriotism and his involvement, as he once told me, in all the great wars, as a reserve and then as an active marine general. The committee was attempting to understand better what the issues were and to try to sort out those issues toward determining how the university might better respond to concerns of people who felt very left out of the campus, the curriculum, the power structure and the rest. As it turned out, about a year later—about 1973—when President Moos was being moved out of the university by the regents and there was a series of resignations by Vice President Shepherd and a couple of his key staff, Hal was invited to serve for a year as acting Vice President for Academic Affairs, and told by President Moos that he should pick the people he wanted to work with him. Invitations came to Al Link, then, who was at that time the Dean of Agriculture, and to me—I was certainly a nobody on campus. I was an associate professor of education and sociology, and I guess I was probably best known for having been visibly involved in the organization of a really diverse group of women who were looking hard at gender equity issues on campus in what now, as I look back on it, was a very lady-like revolt of sorts. My activism had been in that area as far as other things that were also going on on campus in the very late '60s and the early '70s.

AP: We have a fair amount of copy and have done some interviews on the founding of women's studies and the women's center, the Shyamala Rajender case, the Committee on University Women's Progress.

SC: Yes, I was president of that group and in fact, I was the person on behalf of the women who wrote and signed the formal complaint to the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare concerning gender equity issues. They were employment issues, I would say, of women faculty and staff at the university. It was a great irony, I thought, that there were complaints, of course, all over the country as a leveraging device to try to get universities to respond, and I think the University of Minnesota did begin to respond. But by the time an investigation team came to the university several years later, I was already in a central administrative position, and we had done a salary equity study—a kind of quick and dirty type study and we were able to put several hundred thousand dollars against the salaries of quite a number of women. Given the times, that would have gone much further than what one might imagine now. We were really moving in that respect by the time the investigators came. So I was on a very different side of things by the time they came, and in a position to be able to do some good, to encourage others to take some action and actually to do some good and make some changes. The Council for University Women's Progress was not viable for more than just a few years because, as you know, organizations like that in effect require an enemy for the organization to maintain itself, Once the university began a process of making positive responses, there was just much less need for the group to come together and to strategize and scheme. So the group eventually came apart. But it was a marvelous experience for a lot of us who date some very strong friendships to that particular era.

AP: Do you have any thoughts on the relative strengths . . . You were in academic affairs . . . you became , was it Assistant Vice . . .

SC: I was Assistant Vice President. There was one assistant vice president, one associate vice president, and a vice president. And that was it in Academic Affairs. And a very small staff of other people, but it was a very simplified bureaucratic structure.

AP: This is approximately the fall of 1973?

SC: Yes.

AP: Peter Magrath came in . . .

SC: He came about a year later.

AP: Exactly. He took office in September of '74, if my dates are correct. Then, did you stay on when Peter came in?

SC: Yes I did. I had not intended to. I hadn't intended to stay on for more than a year. I had intended to go back to my faculty position, which I enjoyed very much, and my colleagues and my students. There was always some reason why I was needed and encouraged to stay longer. One of those reasons was in that rather wholesale transition that went on, when President Moos left and there was a hiatus of about perhaps up to a year . . . I think there was an interim presidency, though. E.W. Ziebarth came in to do presidential duties over the summer, I recall.

AP: That's exactly right.

SC: Then Peter Magrath came and was, of course, very new to the whole University of Minnesota scene. Al Link became the acting vice president because Hal decided that, although he'd had a very good time in many respects during the year and enjoyed the work of the academic vice president, it was really not his cup of tea and he didn't wish to stay longer. So that left Al Link and myself more or less keeping the store open. Then there was a search process established that resulted in the selection of Henry Koffler, who was at Purdue University, who came I believe a year after that. He probably came for what was Peter's second year.

AP: Which would have been the fall of '75 probably.

SC: Yes, and then Henry prevailed upon Al and upon me to stay in place because he needed us, as another newcomer to the university. So I stayed for four more years. It was altogether about six and a half years before I went back to my faculty post in 1980, I think it was. By that point, Henry had gone. He had gone onto the University of Massachusetts, and of course after that he went on to the University of Arizona where he was president.

AP: One of the things that's interesting as we sort of sorted through the records about Peter Magrath's presidency, is that it's one of the most—and I don't mean this in a negative sense—but that the institution seemed to be very preoccupied with long-range planning and with administrative issues. It seems to have been an inward-looking period rather than an outward-looking period, I think largely fueled by the very serious economic problems in the sense that the

post-war boom had ended. Nineteen eighty-two was the height of the post-war enrollments. Does that mesh with anything you remember?

SC: Yes, it does. I think that it was probably Al Linck, and I would just encourage you, Ann, if he's not on your list, I know that Al and Van, of course, have retired from Colorado State where they had gone, and they live in Mahtomedi, I think.

AP: I have talked to Al a couple of times, and I have to double check one of the things we want to make sure of, that we have a fully recorded interview because he helps us on things like sorting out the evolutions of the titles in the College of Agriculture, which are mysterious even to the people there right now. He's a wonderful resource.

SC: He really led the planning effort at the university level, and it seemed to me that it had been a long time since the university had been engaged in anything like that at that level, and the way in which there was a kind of mobilization of the institution in order to be able to do it. My recollection again is that planning, in a serious sense of the term, was long overdue. I think that was not a characteristic of the Moos administration, and of course I came in toward the end of that and have only the knowledge of what I've read of the earlier eras. But I would say, because I'm a scholar of the study of higher education, that we are much more interested in planning now than we were in past decades. Later in the '70s and '80s and of course in the '90s there is much more attention to planning than I believe there was earlier. Also, and you know this, Ann, because you're a planner also, that the nature of planning changed, somewhat away from the kind of big and unwieldy long-range and master plans to shorter term, more opportunistic, more environmentally sensitive, strategic plans. Even established planning as an ongoing process, that is, putting a focus on the process rather than simply as on a set of outcomes.

Al really provided the leadership that enabled serious planning to go forward again in the university, because I think there was something in the sense that the university had been afloat—if not adrift, at least afloat—on the sea of federal money, which was quickly drying up in the early 1970s. A lot of activities that had been easily funded by federal money were no longer supportable because the federal sources were drying up. That meant we had to take a harder look at what we were doing and where we were leveraged out on soft money. It was also the beginning of quite a litigious era in faculty personnel, if you recall. That kept us very focused on issues we had with the tenure system, and the need to shore up the tenure system from being quite administratively determined as far as the implementation process was concerned to a set of procedures and policies that had to be more carefully attended to by faculty members themselves, by department chairs, by deans, vice presidents and others, because there were increasing numbers of faculty who were taking their cases to court. So that's also an inwardness that looks to how well is the organization functioning with respect to all of its parts, or does it have some seriously dysfunctional areas? In the 1970s how the tenure system was working was one of those areas in transition and had quite a few problems in terms of how well it was functioning.

AP: When you say "how it was functioning," can you remember any of the specifics? Was it the selection of who was getting tenure, or was it the funding of positions? What about it was . . .

SC: It was not so much the "who was getting hired" because, if anything, there was for the most part in most units a rigorous process. That process, though, was changing to be much more sensitive to affirmative action than it had been in the previous decade. So that was something that was relatively new in terms of integrating procedure that would ensure that there was attention to affirmative action. That was a change indeed in the hiring process. It was more in terms of a faculty rights kind of situation. Were faculty being advised of the criteria against which they would be evaluated? What would be the documentation and evidence that would be used? Could the individual have access to their personnel records, letters of assessment about them, and so forth? When department committees took up tenure questions, were they doing it right? Were they not permitting improper conditions and information to be entered into the process? Did they know how to do this in such a way that it was fair to the individual and also could be defended if an individual challenged the process? Were department chairs counseling with faculty members regarding the process and mentoring them and really bringing them along in the process? Did they have a basic command of the process so that they wouldn't in any way thwart the way the process was supposed to work? We found that it needed a lot of attention.

With a great deal of help of some outstanding faculty members like Professor Charles Mclaughlin in political science, who chaired the faculty committee on tenure and the senate committee on tenure. At any rate, I recall him being the chief architect of what later became known as the Koffler Memoranda, which were detailed policy and procedural documents for doing it right, in terms of guiding faculty through the probationary process and through tenure considerations and so forth. There were soft money issues, too, Ann, particularly the beginnings of what would become today's issues in the medical school, and in medical schools everywhere, for that matter, were very eminent in the 1970s because of such a large proportion of the staff who were on soft money of some kind or another, whether it was patient fees, federal grants, or whatever it was. Concerns about de facto tenure were very much a characteristic of the 1970s. There was often discussion with attorneys about the extent to which we had created a large veritable army of annual appointees who were doing regular faculty work, and yet we had not included them within the provisions of tenure, and what to do about that.

AP: They were the temporary appointments, right?

SC: Yes, they were T appointments . . . [end of side 1; beginning of side 2] . . .in which they appeared to have very clear rights and prerogatives related to their employment status.

AP: Did you get involved in the Ragender case at all?

SC: Yes, I did. Most of that occurred while I was at Morrill Hall, and because I was responsible for the administration of the tenure system, as it were, I did become involved in that situation. Actually, I was involved in it in two ways. My earliest involvement was with the women's group. I believe while the women's group was still viable, we had filed a Friend of the Court brief relative to Shyamala Rajender. We were not sure of all the particulars in the case, but we were very sure that there were too few women hired in many departments in the university, and that was the basis of our concern rather than anything specific with her case because most of us didn't have an in-depth knowledge of her case. But I was involved and, in fact, very often went to court as a university witness to explain procedure and to defend procedure sometimes, as women and

other grieved parties. It wasn't all sex discrimination that took people to court, of course, in the 1970s.

AP: Did you happen to be in court the day that Lillian Williams was asked, "Mrs. Williams, has the university done all that it can?"

SC: I don't recall that, so I guess I'll probably say I don't think so.

AP: The legend is, and I'm sure there are transcripts, that she was asked and she said, "No, I do not believe we have." There is a very interesting and quite a recent book on American litigation. One of the chapters is on the Rajender case.

SC: Oh, really? I haven't seen that. I'd love a reference for that.

AP: Very interesting; very thoughtful. The end line of this, as it takes it through the case is something to the effect . . . "It's very indicative of the state of American higher education that a progressive institution like Minnesota would have had a case like this."

SC: I think it was because Minnesota was a progressive institution it would have a case. I've thought a lot about the years during which the women's group was active and what we were able to do, the exercise of free speech that we were able to have, and so forth. Frankly, we could do that at Minnesota without fear of retribution. I think would not be said of many other places, but Minnesota had a much more open atmosphere and it had this ethos of inclusion and egalitarianism, which meant that when people weren't behaving in that way, it was very distressing to me and the university community. Because Minnesota's traditions of consultation and activism are so strong, it seems to me it is a situation where people would want to do something about injustice.

AP: I also want to ask you about the College of Education and your sense of its mission, and how you would describe it perhaps to someone who said, "What was the College of Education in Minnesota like?" I know generally the answer to the question, but I'm interested in how you would have described it.

SC: I certainly regarded it as my faculty home for all of those years that I was there. I did serve also as department chair over a four-year period, I believe. I recall that I served a little over a year as acting provost and academic vice president at the very end of the 1980s in yet another university crisis after Ken Keller resigned and there were other resignations. I left my role as department chair to do that, and when I returned I was chair for yet one more year before moving to Oregon, or the better part of a year, I guess. Maybe it wasn't even an entire year. I had both an administrative, but of course, a long-term faculty experience in the College of Education. I have a high and very affectionate regard for the College of Education. I think that's for many reasons. One was of course that when I came to the College of Education from the University of Illinois, I found the college to be a very welcoming place for a new faculty member. I had a very small number of immediate colleagues, but I had superior colleagues in Bob Beck, who became a regents professor of philosophy of education—a prince of a person in every respect; Ayers Bagley, also in the area of philosophy and history of education; and Mary Corcoran, who was in

educational psychology, but also in the higher education program, and from the very beginning there were some common interests. There were many other colleagues along the way later on, in particular Darrell Lewis, with whom I did a fair amount of publishing, and Jim Hearn, who is chair of the department I was chair of ten years ago. There is some continuity there, and so forth. But the college was a place where you could get to know people across program or departmental lines by making even the most modest of efforts. It was a place not only devoted to teaching, but very much to research and scholarly work, and encouraged the community participation and involvement as well. So I found the college a very good place to be because I was very interested in application of my sociological background to educational and social issues and problems. So I was with the right group of people one might say, to be able to work on those kinds of issues and problems.

AP: Usually at this point in the interview I ask people is there anything that I have not asked you that you'd like to comment on?

SC: Let me think about this. Maybe simply to say because I do have such a deep and abiding regard for the University of Minnesota, I found it in my lived experience there to be a place that offered so much to me as a developing faculty member, so much opportunity to participate in the issues of the department, the college, the university at large. I was very interested in being a participant. Not everyone would be, but I was, and I found it very easy to find opportunity to participate in the larger life of the university. Not every place has a place that's beyond the subcultural aspects of the discipline groups, but I think Minnesota does have that. I appreciated that very, very much. It certainly made my career a different one than might have been the case had I not gone to the University of Minnesota. I value the consultative traditions very, very much, and have tried to honor those in my administrative work because I feel those are the contemporary strengths as well of modern organizations. Those kinds of characteristics are quite enduring and timeless features of a truly great university.

AP: Do you have any comments or recollections on students, whether they were strong or weak, eager?

SC: My experience with students was that there were all kinds—all those categories that you mentioned, and then some. One early impression that I had was that the students were almost categorically different from the students at the University of Illinois whom I'd become acquainted with during the 1960s. The Minnesota students were not the in-your-face kinds of students. They really had to be encouraged and thought out, reassured that you had time to spend with them on their issues. There was a certain shyness of Minnesota students. One might relate that to the regional culture in the upper Midwest, probably, and then maybe some other cultural elements. I recall how differently both I experienced that at first, and my husband did as well. We would often remark on that to each other. But in my teaching experience, I had many undergraduate students. Largely, those students were in courses where they were studying social foundations of education. They were somewhere in their pre-service teacher preparation, and some of them far more interested in becoming teachers than others I felt were marking time. I had many graduate students at both the masters and the doctoral level who have gone on to all kinds of jobs—administrative, policy research, academic jobs, and those who continue to do the hard work for which I admire them very much in the leadership of the public schools of the

nation. I think I learned from students as well. I learned of the importance not only of being reflective about knowledge, but being prepared to act on the basis of the best information you have, because of course that's what professionals and school people have to do all the time. I felt I had a very good experience with students. I had many experiences with foreign students. That's always very enriching. One can only hope there is true reciprocity there, and the students are deriving as much as the faculty member may be from that. I was really heartened a couple of months ago when I first got e-mail and then a telephone call from a man whom we'd helped find a place at the university when he wanted to come from the People's Republic of China. That would have been in the very late 1980s. We knew that he was essentially trying to escape from a bleak future in a very remote northwest corner of China. He was one of a number of such students who made their way through our department at that point. He subsequently moved to, I think, agricultural engineering, and succeeded in a masters program and then went to the University of California Davis, and did a Ph.D. program, from which he has just graduated. His call to me was followed by a call sometime later from a large biotech firm in the Bay Area that was very interested in hiring him and had not done so. I thought, what an odyssey for this student, and what satisfaction one gets from playing some minor role in helping a student like that to take true advantage of American public higher education, and then become a part of our society and our economy in the sense of what this man is prepared to do. Anybody would have such anecdotes to relate to you about their experience with foreign students. There, as here, where I do some occasional gratis teaching for the University of Oregon, I meet many wonderful foreign students. It's very interesting and very grounding to see the world through the eyes of an undergraduate student rather than the administrative colleagues with whom I spend most of my time.

AP: Could I get your address? I'll need to get a permission for this to be transcribed and put in the archives—a Human Subjects Permission.

SC: Certainly. My mailing address is the Oregon University System, Office of the Chancellor, P. O. Box 3175, Eugene, OR 97403.

AP: What is your secretary's name, so if I needed to follow anything up I wouldn't have to bother you?

SC: That's all right. Her name is Helen Stampe. Her phone number is almost the same as mine. It's 541-346-5721.

[end of interview – you may want to delete the rest]

AP: Perfect. That's terrific. I really appreciate your time, and we will keep in touch. I found something else I thought you might like, and I'll Xerox it. It's a picture of Mary Corcoran as a very young woman.

SC: I would be interested in that.

AP: Interestingly enough, she has her hair parted in the center, which is kind of a different look. She must have been, I'm guessing from the picture, in her late twenties. It's Bureau of Institutional Research, and is a wonderful picture. She was elegant looking.

SC: I talked to her a couple of weeks ago. She was getting ready to go on a cruise, a kind of educational cruise, not a Carnival-type cruise, mind you.

AP: I wouldn't expect her on a Carnival-type cruise.

SC: She still has a sponge for a mind—always interested in learning and learning the details of things.

AP: This has been a pleasure to talk with you, and we'll keep in touch. Thank you for participating.

SC: You're welcome. I hope this project is fun for you, Ann.

AP: It's tremendously fun . . . everybody's best stories and you hear things that you wouldn't know and discover little things. It's just a complete pleasure. It's going to be a wonderful year. We've got a fabulous set of things that are going to happen. We're going to do Aaron Copeland's "Opera on the Farm" at five different farms to start the sesquicentennial year. Then there is going to be of course a big State Fair exhibit, and homecoming will have a sesquicentennial theme. The president is planning some conferences on the role of the research university. In February, which is Charter Week, we will have an academic ceremony on the campus and a sort of charter reenactment at the Capital. There will be a kind of finale next June. So it's a whole year of celebration. The president is very interested in historic preservation, so we've got markers now on the campus explaining the significance of things, and a web page with links to the histories of each of the colleges. It's really, as they say, a big whoop-dee-do.

SC: It sounds very exciting and something for everyone to participate in as well.

AP: Exactly. It will be for all kinds of people. Well, thank you so much for your time, and good luck.

SC: Thanks again, Ann.