

So much for the development of the physical facilities at the College. Well, let me add, as the need became apparent, we had developed one more residence hall to house 103 persons and financed that primarily, again, with government loan funds. That was the Nevin Hall on the south side, that is in the south group of residence buildings. We had then the physical facilities to accomplish all those early goals of facilities for a consolidated campus adequate to provide for 750 students in all its parts, including residence and dining facilities and with the capability, if need be, to accommodate within those instructional facilities as many as 1,000 students if that should become a desirable later objective.

Let me just stop to comment on that. At the present time I would doubt that the College will in the near future seek to increase the enrollment to 1,000 students. It seems probably a goal that would have limited academic advantages--limited fiscal advantages--indeed it might be counterproductive because it would mean that the same endowment which now serves 750 students might be required to serve a third more students, and it would mean a reduction in the per capita endowment and in the endowment support then for the education of individual students.

It may appear that the College's primary preoccupation during that time was with borrowing and building; but at the same time, efforts had been put in place to raise the academic strengths of the campus, both in the instructional program in the availability of a faculty and then, also, to hopefully become more selective in the admission of students; though the College was at the time these efforts began the most selective institution in the state of Kentucky, certainly. And that had gone along equally well.

One overriding dream of the dean of the College who was in place when I came here and continued to serve as dean for six and a half to seven years, Dr. Frank Heck, whom you know today as Matton Professor Emeritus of History. He had hoped that in his time the College might bring to its campus a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa. He himself was a member of Phi Beta Kappa, as were a number of other members of the faculty. This I found was an objective that he had hoped might be pushed in his time; it was one I certainly embraced enthusiastically, and though we didn't say much publicly about it, that was one measure that we felt would constitute an external measure of the quality of the institution. We measured various plans against the expectations of Phi Beta Kappa.

One of the things we did not pay much attention to was the fact that for some fifteen years prior to that time they had not placed a chapter on the campus of an institution of less than 1,000 students. We were prepared to challenge that fact, feeling that if we built adequate strength we would have as much reason to have a chapter as Haverford, let us say, which was a college of similar size and which had received a chapter far earlier in the history of the organization. An application can only be made one in three years under the rules of Phi Beta Kappa. And in 1958, I think it was, our faculty members of Phi Beta Kappa went forward with an application with the endorsement of the College because they felt that they would probably not take us under study at that time, but we at least ought to get our name in the pot. Much to our surprise they did take us under study in that triennium, and we were not surprised when the visitation committee did find some weaknesses.

The library, thought it was then, by the time they arrived here, fully in plan but had not been realized in fact. So we were among the limited number of institutions--normally they will have applications from 50 or 60 institutions and take 10 under study during the triennium. We were passed over at that time.

I made mental note of the fact, and I'm naming no names, that they had placed chapters at that time in one or two instances that I felt certain within ten years they would feel perhaps not as meritorious of a chapter as the Centre faculty was. As I say, that was simply a mental note and a mental assurance that I gave myself.

We were not able to be taken under study again for nine years, as I recall it. But we were taken under study in 1968, and Centre was awarded a chapter at that time; and the enrollment of the College was considerably less than 1,000--in the range of 750.

One year about that time we, by mistake, ran a little over 800 students because the percentage of students accepting invitations to admission ran higher than normal. But that was, I considered, an external measure of the quality of the program at the College.

Now they have since that time placed chapters in a few other institutions not much larger than Centre; in one case perhaps smaller. Centre was at that time one of probably the six smallest institutions in the country to have a chapter. Today we are among the fifteen smallest, of that I am sure. Not because they added that many, but some of the institutions that had a hundred students more than we did later dropped to a size somewhat smaller than Centre as enrollments began to fall.

That, as I say, was a source of real pleasure to me to see that come to pass. Dr. Heck retired from the deanship at that time, but he was chairman of the faculty committee that presented our application at the time. I've never gotten more pleasure than to see that come to pass in his time at Centre.

Meanwhile, we had seen the abilities of our students move up in terms of the average ~~ACT~~^{SAT} scores by nearly a hundred points, from a level of about 429 verbal score, as I recall it, in 1957 to a point ten years later where we were in the range of 530 as a median score on the verbal test. That was measured against national means. Measured against Southern means of the Southern institutions, we were running 150 points or more above the average of Southern colleges and universities that used the SAT. The great increase in the aptitude of the students led the faculty to realize that a careful restudy of the curriculum would be in order. How would one devise a curriculum to better serve those students. And that led to the major curriculum reform that was initiated in 1966 and put in place over three succeeding years, or really four years until the first class was admitted under the new curriculum, as we called it, graduated four years later. That was perhaps as thorough going a reformation as has ever taken place on a college campus since the University of Chicago reformed its college back in the late '30s, the early Hutchins years; or until St. John College simply wiped out its prior existence and took on Scott Buchanan's philosophy of spending a whole curriculum on a hundred great books.

The most important thing that the Centre faculty embraced in entering into this was a commitment that every course then authorized and advertised to our students was to be invalidated over the period of four years; that is to say that every course to be offered thereafter within the framework, the design, of the new curriculum had to be a course that would be newly defined by the appropriate department, later a committee of the faculty, and authorized through the curriculum committee and through the faculty. Looking at it another way, every group within the faculty, every disciplinary cluster, threw all their cards on the table; so no one was protecting any vested interests in that sense. Their willingness to do that made it possible for

us to undertake a reform that was very thorough going. The educational goals really were not changing; it was simply the mode and the methodology. But involved in it were all the changes now involved under just assumptions here.

Classes meet generally four days a week, and "wonderful Wednesday" is free for more extended study, research, or for whatever less worthy purposes people might give to them; that we would keep classes running pretty solidly from eight in the morning until four in the afternoon during those four days; we eliminated Saturday classes, too, in that process. It involved a change of the daily teaching schedule from the traditional seven 50-minute hours to the four blocks of 90 minutes of instruction with the assumption that classes would meet normally twice a week rather than three times a week under the old pattern. It involved for administrative purposes the abolition of departments, created the possibility of more broadly designed courses particularly for the freshman and sophomore years and for a little bit more experimentation with study in a more integrative mode.

We changed the grading system. We've now gone back, but we eliminated A, B, C, D grades. We had a "Pass", "Good", and "Superior" level of grading, three grades, and unfortunately put numbers on them because people couldn't agree on what the three adjectives should be; and this led people to begin to try to make those numbers work according to a digital system. It was not intended that way because the top grade was expected to be exceptional and to bear no proportional relationship at all to the others. This ultimately led the faculty to backtrack this and the problems of graduate schools trying to evaluate our transcripts and all. People were beginning to pull back from more daring and experimental modes, and we went back to an A, B, C, D system. That program was in planning in '64-'65, placed in effect in 1966, and was fully implemented over the next four-year period.

It was a time of harder work than I have ever known done by this or any other faculty, because it was an unbelievably taxing experience. It was exhilarating, but before the four years were up the faculty was, I would say, pretty much exhausted from the effort. I'm not sure whether the same faculty could ever be induced to do anything so daring again. But during the course of that time the College saw over the next five years or six years three students from this campus elected to Rhodes scholarships, which is out of all proportion to our size or expectation; and when one remembers that Centre students have to compete in the Great Lakes district which includes such populous states with such fine institutions as Michigan, Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin; that I thought was an even more remarkable evidence of the kind of intellectual strengths that were being demonstrated by Centre students at the time. Since that time we've had a gap; but in nearly every year, I think there have been only two years since that time when one of Kentucky's two nominees to the regional selection process has not been--one of the two has not been--a Centre student. I attribute the improvement in the external measure of the intellectual strength of Centre students to rest as much as anything else in the kind of vitality that was created growing out of that curricular reform. So that I consider to be one of the truly exciting parts of the years in our experience here.

Was there any resentment from KCW alumni about losing their campus when that changeover occurred in '62? Were there any problems on that score?

No major problems, though there were many people who felt a sense of great disappointment among the graduates, understandably, of the former Women's College. You see, until 1926 Kentucky College for Women was a free-standing institution; it merged into Centre in '26. Many alumni who had known it when it bore no organic relationship with the College, that was still the case in 1957; in other words,

anyone 52-55 years and up who were graduates of KCW were persons who thought of it as a completely independent institution. And certainly the physical separation was the thing that held (most of them) as being one of the unique situations in the relationship of men students and women students in Danville. I would say that the majority of the alumni, though they may have had some nostalgic regrets, accepted the idea, if not applauded it, from the beginning. Those who had greater reservations, I think, have all come to feel that--and in the light of history of development of higher education in America--considered that Centre probably made the move at the better time than institutions who moved toward coeducation later and under a greater sense of haste and perhaps not so soundly considered as were the arrangements here. I would not be able to point out, however, any focus of opposition. I do recall a wife of one Centre trustee (these persons not to be named) who claims, verified by her husband, that she didn't speak to him for two weeks after she learned that the trustees had voted to do this. He hadn't dared mention it to her earlier! But she and he remained loyal supporters of the College.

Do you think the merger of the two campuses was inevitable, or could the College have somehow maintained two separate campuses if it had wanted to do so?

It could have been done. It would have made it much more difficult to achieve the level of academic competence that exists by virtue of a wholly unified campus; I am convinced of that. Just the cost of maintaining two separate campuses just from the standpoint of maintenance of buildings and grounds was greater. As I look back on it, I would doubt that we could have raised \$100,000 more to have perpetuated that separation. It would have cost us more to have expanded both campuses, as we would have needed to do. I might just mention at this point that when I came to Centre I had a disposition to theorize about developing a relatively unique organization, one that would count on growth in numbers of students, that would operate the women's campus as a relatively self-contained campus, instruction and all for the first two years; and then would move into a completely coeducational experience. That would assume that there would be no additions to residence facilities or other physical facilities on the women's campus except as they might have been necessary to accommodate a stronger library to serve those first two years.

That seemed to me to combine the best of the arguments for the separate Women's College; that is, the opportunity to develop a greater sense of personal identity. When at age 18 or 19, not yet out of the teenage years, women seemed often to defer too much to men in situations where, as was the case here at the time, the men were in the dominance just in terms of numbers; but to provide coeducational experience and the greater strength, I think, of classroom experience which can grow out in the upper division classes, smaller classes, of having men and women together in the classroom.

That was the model that I had secretly in the back of my mind when I came to Centre. But when you begin to look at the inefficiencies of it, I just didn't see out there the resources that could make that a reasonable alternative to the full integration of the campus. I occasionally stop and ask myself what the College would be like if we had adopted that as a goal and pursued it. My general conclusion has to be that we would not be as competent an institution in almost any sense of the word as we have become. It was primarily an economic element, economic analysis, that would lead to that.

I'm just awfully glad we made the choice that we did. We were ahead of a move toward much greater integration in men's and women's education. I am reminded

occasionally that I would have thought myself crazy if I had projected a coeducational gym when we first began planning back in 1957-58 for the development of the College; but we have one now, and it seems to work very well indeed. I'm sure that the quality of the educational experience of the student at Centre has been enhanced by the full integration of the two separate campuses.

Centre has had a policy for some time of not providing athletic scholarships for students attending Centre, and I believe when you took office you agreed with or reaffirmed this position. I was wondering if there had been any discussion during your term as president, if alumni would come forward and urge the reexamination of that policy. What are your thoughts on that general question?

I found in general that Centre alumni, though with some nostalgic enthusiasm for the days back in the early '20s when the College's football team was as good as any in the country, that nearly all the alumni recognized that with the growth in size of the big state institutions and all that any effort to return to those days of glory, if indeed it was glory, would be a practical impossibility. I found that when we talked about strengthening the program here the one thing that I heard from alumni as much as anything else was, "Sure we've got to be small, and it doesn't make sense to put money into athletic scholarships. Let's make sure that our program is a good program that serves the needs of the students, and that it is carried on in the context of relating ourselves institutionally in this field with other institutions of comparable standards and comparable academic quality."

There are two things that are done to provide championship, nationally-recognized athletic programs: one is to pay the players in terms of the subsidies that go with it, that is athletic scholarships and the other is to give those best athletes special consideration if need be in admission to the institution. You have to do both of those things. Even if we were going to try to be the best small college football team in the country, we'd have to do both of those things. Neither one of them appealed to the sense of proper priorities for an institution whose primary goals were academic of anyone that was associated with the College at the time. There has really been no dispute during the course of my twenty-four years about the propriety of Centre's programs in this area.

On the board of trustees when I arrived here and for many years after was Norris Armstrong who was captain of the team that beat Harvard. He was one of the greatest advocates for the saner approach that College had embraced long since.

Could you discuss briefly the early recruitment and admission of black students into Centre College, the first black students?

Let me preface this by saying that the question of whether Centre should seek or encourage the admission of black students, not be open to them but whether to encourage them, was something of a matter of disagreement among different parts of the College constituency when I came here. It had become an emotional issue on both sides of the argument--people questioning to a degree the apparent good faith of the other side. I made it a point to say to the trustees when they and I were in conversation about my coming here that I thought the College... Well, that my own view of the matter was that any institution should be prepared to accept students without regard to race and should not let that be a cause of concern, indeed that the quality of the educational experience of the students would be enhanced by a greater diversity in the enrollments. Feeling that fully, I wanted them to understand that position and to know that I could not act comfortably under different understandings.

In the connection, however, I also expressed the view that an institution such as Centre should not allow its levels of expectation of its students to drop at all in order to achieve an integration of the student body. You've heard me say "levels of expectations" of the students and not "levels of readiness." I thought it was important to make some concessions where you had students, though with less adequate preparation, showing strengths that would lead you to believe that they, given the opportunity, could compensate for their shortcomings, and would have as reasonable prediction of success as any other student.

We anticipated all the federal laws and regulations about making clear-cut statements of policy in that respect. Indeed we took steps to try to encourage black students particularly, but also any student of minority persuasion. But in our part of the country there are not many Latin Americans and there are not many orientals, though there are a good component of blacks. I encouraged our admissions staff to visit what at that time were still the segregated by geography schools in the state. Louisville Central High School was the dominantly black institution where nearly all blacks attended; in Lexington the Dunbar High School was the school that enrolled the black students. (There was probably greater integration in the smaller communities than in the larger communities of this region at the time.) We began not only to visit those schools but to try to persuade the counselors that this was not simply an effort to be courteous but that our interest in their students was genuine. It became apparent, however that, given the degree of segregation that still remained in fact in the schools, the counselors or the leading educators in the black community had serious doubts whether Centre was a spot where their students might comfortably go, either in terms of academic readiness or perhaps social acceptance. So we went for four or five years without enrolling a single black after I came here.

The first black enrolled was an African, a young man who had come to America and was studying at Kentucky State University. He was from Ghana and had been educated in British developed preparatory schools there and didn't find the level of competition in the dominantly black school in America meeting the level of expectation that he had for it. He was encouraged by a minister of the First Presbyterian Church in Frankfort to visit Centre, look at Centre; and in due course he applied for admission and was accepted.

It was about two years later, I think, that we first enrolled American blacks as full-time students. That really was brought about by virtue of the fact we were able to gain funds from a New York-based foundation to offer what we called Opportunity Scholarships. They were by definition made available to students who came from families where there was no previous college tradition, and where the economic means would not allow them to enter Centre without substantial external financial help. We made it clear that this was not race specific, and this was demonstrated by the awards of those scholarships over the years that we had them in place. This was before the federal funding became significant and that pretty well eliminated the need for special opportunity scholarships.

We enrolled, I think, the first year we offered those scholarships, four black students. I think we awarded five of the so-called Noyes Opportunity Scholarships. My recollection is in that first year four went to black students and one to a white student, all judged by the same limiting criteria that I have discussed. From that time the College has continued to enroll a limited number of blacks; not as many as I would have liked to have seen, primarily because I think the black student has necessarily found it a bit lonely on the Centre campus in terms of the social patterns, as indeed would have been the case on any other campus of the country.

We don't find quite as many black students today. I can't speak for the past year's experience, or the experience just now in the Admissions Office, but we don't seem to find quite as many who are quite as venturesome in terms of being prepared to enter into a program that nearly all of these students conceived as being the greatest challenge they could accept in terms of academic difficulty while staying within the state of Kentucky.

I don't mean to suggest that all our black students have come from the state of Kentucky. We've had Noyes scholars coming from Jackson, Mississippi; Mobile, Alabama; Indianapolis, Indiana; and Denver, Colorado. All of those students looked on Centre as a place where they would get a substantial academic challenge, and they were prepared to forego the greater sociability of being on a larger campus or in a large urban community.

As you know, with black students at Centre today, the motivations are not as universally high as they were ten to fifteen years ago. In the dominant group now the motivation is as good but no better. But for a time there the motivation of the students who came to Centre among the blacks was just exceptional, and they tended to perform well above their projected abilities when you used a single scale for rating blacks and non-blacks. They have certainly gone on to perform well in various ways since leaving the College.

Tape 2, Side 2 (Part 4) Thomas A. Spragens Interview (continued)
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