

## University of Washington Tacoma Oral History: Founding Stories

**Narrator:** David Morris  
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**Charles Williams 0:00**

**This is Charles Williams, and I'm interviewing David Morris for the UW Tacoma founding faculty oral histories, and the date is September 20, 2018. So David, maybe you could briefly tell us a little bit about your background before you came to UW Tacoma.**

**David Morris 0:18**

Well, I had a kind of interdisciplinary academic background. I had ... I went to graduate school in English and I got a master's degree. But, then I wanted to do something in the environmental field because I had been introduced to this poet named Robinson Jeffers when I was a senior in college as an English major. I'd never heard of him up until I took a class in contemporary poetry, and he just happened to be assigned, and he—if people are familiar with him, which they're probably not—he was an environmental visionary back in the 1920s way before anybody else. It made me want to do something along those lines. So I was at [University of North Carolina] Chapel Hill for a master's degree in English, but I went into city planning there. They had a good city planning school. And they didn't really have much in the way of environmental stuff because this was the early '70s, and the landmark environmental legislation wasn't even passed yet.

But I got a master's in Regional Planning, it was actually called. And for my internship, I came out to the Northwest. I got an internship in Bellevue, Washington, in '72, between my two years of planning school. That was with something called the Washington State Land Planning Commission, which was to draw up state land planning laws for the state of Washington. And it had members from the legislature and also from the public. It was a very interesting project. I did a research paper on a big, proposed shopping center in Bellevue—between Bellevue and Redmond, which was just out in the sticks at that time. This is way before Microsoft existed. I met the planning director of Whatcom County during that summer.

When I got my degree in planning, I called him and he just happened to have a job opening. So I went and worked in Whatcom County for three years as a planner. But I got a little frustrated with the politics of the situation and began to be interested in the underlying cultural issues of regional planning and urban development. Whatcom County was a fascinating place for that

because it had an international border, and federal land, and Indian reservation, college, steel mill—or a paper mill, excuse me. So I went back to grad school in English. I thought I could do a kind of American Studies program.

**Charles Williams 3:33**  
**That was at UW Seattle?**

David Morris 3:35

It was at UW Seattle. And I finished that, wrote my dissertation on Robinson Jeffers and environmental literature generally, which was a completely unknown field at that time. This was at least 10 years before there was anything called ecocriticism, and I worked as an instructor at UW. I actually got a job as the sole TA for the honors program with Donna Kerr, who ended up being the first dean of the branch campuses, but who was not around when they started—she was the dean during the hiring process. But when we got here in the fall, she was gone and no one knew why and no one explained anything, which was interesting, but it was sort of in line with the interdisciplinary nature of the Tacoma campus at the beginning. It sort of fit my background. I got a job at UCLA as an adjunct in UCLA writing programs, after being an instructor and working in the interdisciplinary writing program on the Seattle campus, which was brand new. I worked in that for three years, five years, I can't remember. Then went to UCLA where I did similar things. And then I finally got a tenure track job as an assistant professor of English at Butler University in Indianapolis. I taught there for two years and at the middle of the second year there, I heard about the branch campuses opening up. And I also heard that Donna Kerr was the dean. And I thought, "Aha. My ... woman that I worked for as a TA, was the dean—that, maybe I'll get an interview." So I applied. And it also sounded fascinating, because the description of the campus sounded perfect for someone who was interested in both literature and in environmental studies. Whereas at Butler, I was in an English department, you know, a much more traditional setting. So I applied, and came out, and interviewed in an extremely unusual and odd interviewing process, and was offered the job at Tacoma and took it.

**Charles Williams 3:35**  
**So was the position you applied for defined in ways that fit with your areas of research, or was it broader than that?**

David Morris 6:25

Well, that's a good question. There were no specialties, as people probably know, that there were only 12 people hired for each campus and a chair. My position I believe was described as the literature position. American literature, specifically, because there are only two majors at the time—United States Studies and International Studies. These were defined, as I recall, by the documents that we inherited from the search committee of faculty members on the Seattle campus. So there were generally, I think, an idea that there should be someone in political science, someone in history. We ended up, I think, having three historians—but that's because our chair was a historian—but they were in radically different fields. Mike Allen was a sort of an American frontier, colonial historian. Bill Richardson was history of Russia and Eastern Europe.

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And Mike Honey was African American history. And then we had a film person, Claudia [Gorbman], we had an economist, Anthony D'Costa, but they were interdisciplinary themselves.

Almost everyone hired was kind of an oddball, in that they sort of straddled the field. Sam Parker was in anthropology, but also kind of art history, and also Indian cultural studies. So everybody was interdisciplinary in their interests. So it was fascinating because you put 12 interdisciplinary people together with this interdisciplinary program, and you had something that was quite unique, I think. I never—in discussions with colleagues around the country—never heard of anything like it actually ... certainly at the time. And the fact that it was a branch of the University of Washington, but it was so tiny. Usually branches when they started, they had their own campus already. Or they had departments, or they had at least, you know, say, 100 faculty. University of North Carolina campus, I was familiar with, the University of Michigan Dearborn, which was a major campus in its own right. But I never heard of anything like this. Plus, with the Tacoma campus and Bothell having such radically different structures than the Seattle campus. And they barely knew we existed at the time, we were just a blip on their radar. I'm sure most of the faculty there didn't even—maybe they read about in the newspaper or something. That's probably what they knew about it. Although the people, the faculty members there, who were on the search committee, were interested in it and were interested in developing. You could tell by the kinds of materials that they gave to us—you could tell that they were interested in exploring all the radical structural ideas that they couldn't do in their own departments. The UW Seattle at that time being a fairly traditionally organized campus.

**Charles Williams 10:03**

**Could you elaborate a little bit on the interview process—search process?**

David Morris 10:07

I certainly can. It was extremely unusual. They brought in, I believe 12 candidates at a time. And as I recall they brought in—which is really strange—they brought in two candidates per area. So they brought in for my position two literature people. And they kind of observed us, it was like we were animals in a, you know, a science experiment. I mean, I don't mean to be that negative there. You know, it was fun in a way. But they would have us have discussions, and you'd be in this roundtable discussion with these other 11 people, I guess, including the person who you were competing with for the job. So I remember thinking, "I really don't want to come off as a, you know, competitive, you know, uncooperative person with regard to this other guy. But I also want to beat him out for the job." So I thought, "This is really odd." And then they were just watching us have this discussion, and we were having a discussion among ourselves. And then the presentations were also very unusual in that we were put in a room with one way mirrors, and the search committee members were behind these mirrors. There was maybe one or two of them sitting out in the audience. And there were one or two students that they had somehow shanghaied into participating in this process to be the audience for your talk.

**Charles Williams 11:54**

**And where did this take place?**

David Morris 11:55

On the Seattle campus. I remember I was extremely lucky in that I had two students as an audience for my talk, and they were actually good. So I actually could engage in a discussion as I would with a regular class and they responded. They asked intelligent questions. So I felt my presentation went really well. But I know that some of the people, I think maybe Sam Parker, had no students. So they had to pretend that they were giving a lecture to a class. So it was just a very unusual situation. I remember thinking that, "Well, I thought it went well, but who knows?" And I got the job and so I was very pleased. But it was ... you know, the interview process was unusual, the campus was—everything about it was unusual.

**Charles Williams 13:01**

**So what was it like then collaborating with the rest of the faculty in terms of defining where this was all going to go? And I think as you already described a little bit, there was a kind of a commonality of a certain type of person who is interested in this campus. So was there a strong sort of shared project that it felt like was emerging when you got together to start figuring out what would happen next?**

David Morris 13:25

Yes, well, I think there was a feeling of people were happy to have gotten the jobs. They were by and large happy to be at a place where they could feel a lot of freedom. We also had, though, these documents that were given to us by the search committee from the Seattle campus that were quite elaborate and sort of confined us in a way. So we had to figure out how to negotiate doing what we were supposed to be doing. They told us when we were hired—they brought us in, and we stayed at the big hotel in Tacoma, and I think we had a two-day workshop. And it was, I can't remember, it was during the summer sometime.

**Charles Williams 13:32**

**I know at one point there was a retreat in maybe April of 1990.**

David Morris 14:23

Yeah, I think that was what it was at the hotel. We were to come up with the curriculum. And we had to, I can't remember whether they told us before we got there what one of the things we'd have to do was, but it was to come up with an eight-course cycle of classes that you would teach over a two-year period, so that you did not repeat any classes. And you know, usually when professors start at a place, they give them a certain number of classes and they let them repeat them. We didn't get to do that at all. And we had to come up with them out of whole cloth. So they had to be different enough that they were distinct classes. But they had to be general enough so that we could teach them but if we were replaced at some time, someone else could step in and teach them too. So I came up with some very general classifications like selected American writers, themes in American literature. I had one class I remember that was specific to me, it was the American Environment: Literature, Culture, and Social Policy. And that was sort of my class, and I figured, "Well, someone else could deal with that." And then there was

Shake—not Shakespeare ... I think it was something like Fundamentals of Writing, or something like that. And I can't even recall what the other ones were, but there had to be eight and everyone had to come up with eight. Some people came up with, you know, ones that they—like Mike Kalton who had turned down a job at the University of Southern California, where he would have taught, I think it was a four-course load, to grad classes and to undergrads in his very specialized field. And he turned that down to come to Tacoma so he could do what he wanted to do. And he came up with classes like God: East and West, the Zen and Taoism that he wanted to teach always, and other people had things like that also that they could do. Anthony, who was in development studies and always been—felt confined by an economics curriculum, got to do lots of things. So it was very, you know, liberating in that sense.

But it was also, since I'd been teaching mostly writing, it was daunting for me to suddenly teach courses that were real content-based. And I had taught a lot of classes that were linked writing classes with other base classes in different disciplines. So for me, it was a challenge to have these classes that were all stuff that I generated, that were literature-based. But we also had—I mean I don't know whether other people have talked about this—one of the requirements that the committee on the Seattle campus handed us was for a very rigorous writing component to all the classes and a rigorous oral presentation component. So we felt that we had to spend a lot of time during the quarter doing some kind of oral presentation that we had to grade. So Mike Allen and I, who taught one of the core classes for the United States Studies core ... we only had about, maybe we had like 20 students that first year. We had them give oral presentations. We videotaped them. We looked at the videotapes. We gave them written feedback on their presentations. It took a long time to do this, like the last two weeks of the quarter. And we realized, "We can't do that, we'll never cover any other stuff." So it became more ... we had them give just a talk, I think. Then it became, well, we would just grade them on their class participation. But it was funny, and somewhere we have the videotapes of these students giving their ... and they were long—they were half hour presentations, I think. It was interesting and they had to evolve in that way. And we were supposed to—there was a very elaborate writing requirement. I can't remember exactly what it was. But we, you know, that was easier to do. But it was this sort of combination of feeling constrained by these requirements handed down by the committee. And I'll put this metaphor in there because I've used it several times. They were like the Titans in mythology, who created the gods, and then the Titans disappeared, and the gods were left to do it. And then the gods created the world and the people had to deal with that. We were like the people. And these things would hang on, and I don't know how much of them are left, probably their traces left, you know, Foucault would find traces of, you know, these old rules that are still in place one way or another in the curriculum, or in the practices of the present day campus. And I'm sure present day faculty have no clue, "Why are we doing that this way?" you know. So the portfolio, which I was just informed, has finally been eliminated. We had this elaborate portfolio requirement, students were supposed to gather their papers, then present day faculty were to ... who weren't in the classes that had assigned the papers, were to read all the papers, provide feedback to the students. They then were to provide some written, you know, response to that.

That was just a completely, very forward looking and advanced pedagogical tool at the time, which is why the Titans on the Seattle campus wanted to impose it on the branch campuses, but it took forever. And since all of us were in search committees or promotion committees every year, not to mention government committees of all kinds, both on the Tacoma campus and in Seattle, we didn't really have time to do that. And the portfolio, it became—it got whittled down year after year also. Until now I understand that, finally, it's become an option for the different majors I guess.

**Charles Williams 21:23**

**Right, there's some general sense of—some way of assessing ...**

David Morris 21:26

Assess, yes.

**Charles Williams 21:27**

**... how the student's career has worked out. And not necessarily in the form of a portfolio.**

David Morris 21:34

Yeah, yeah. So that was one of those ... one of those things. Yeah, it was, but you got to teach. Since we also were not in each other's fields. There was great latitude granted to anybody for anything they wanted to teach. So if it sounded remotely plausible, everyone would say "sounds good." Plus, most of the classes sounded very interesting. And I think from the start students were very positive about their experience in the classes because they were small and the teachers were dedicated. There were no burnouts because everyone was starting fresh. So you could pretty much do whatever you wanted to do.

**Charles Williams 22:24**

**So how much dialogue was there between faculty about the way all those things should fit together? I know, for instance, there was team teaching, but what else, which I'd like to hear some more about, but how else did you sort of try to collectively define a shared sense of it?**

David Morris 22:38

That's a good question. I think there was a general political orientation among the faculty, with maybe one exception to begin with. And there were ... so there was a kind of progressive, I guess what we come to be called progressive orientation. There was some slight pushback from, you know, some members, but I think there was a sort of a progressive viewpoint. But there was also a general agreement on interdisciplinarity being a good thing. And people, all the faculty members, having wrestled with those issues, versus traditional departments in one way or another, as graduate students or in their previous jobs. So there was a lot of agreement on that. And then there was, I think, everyone was pretty student oriented. So there were no people said, "Oh, I just want to do my research and, you know, teaching is a burden." No one talked like

that, and you couldn't talk like that. And in the evaluations at the end of the year, student evaluations were taken seriously and really looked at. And everyone knew who—you know, enrollments were so small you knew who ... everyone was a good teacher. I don't think there were any bad teachers because the vetting process had looked at teaching all so seriously. So there was an agreement on that. So we were all pretty student oriented, while at the same time people did serious research. And I think no one had trouble getting tenure through the Seattle campus those early years.

The team teaching—there was a lot of team teaching. It was difficult because it ... from a student number standpoint, you didn't get as much credit for team teaching. But I always found it very enjoyable. I team taught with Mike Allen, and with Sam Parker, who were quite different in their orientations. But both really good teachers and really fun to teach with. And I felt those classes were great. I enjoyed listening to them when they, you know, did their lecturing and felt I learned a lot and I felt it was good for the students to hear two different viewpoints in the same class.

**Charles Williams 24:59**

**What would be an example of the subject matter?**

David Morris 25:35

Well, Mike and I always did the United States studies core class. I forget what the exact title of it—Making of America, and so we covered ... it was entirely up to us. But he covered—he's a historian. He covered history, I covered literature, we tried to do it sort of semi-chronologically, but also thematically. We meshed, you know, well in some ways and other ways students probably wondered, "Well, what do these things have to do with each other? Other than they're about, you know, the United States in some way." We traded off grading papers, we'd grade half of them then, you know, give a grade without telling the other guy what we had given and then compare and see how we did. Usually we were surprisingly close. That happened both with Sam and with Mike that we tended to ... and that was actually very reassuring and interesting to note that. While the grading process could seem sort of arbitrary, especially in the humanities, when you actually had two people, even from different disciplines, grading papers, you found that you rarely were more than a half grade different. Then sometimes it'd be a big difference. But most of the time, not 90 percent of the time, I'd say we were in a half grade of each other. You know, B, B minus, or, you know, we had decimals and be like "three, four?" and he'd say, "Oh I had it as a three, five." "Okay, well, let's go with the three, five," you know. So same thing with Sam. And with Sam, we taught—when we developed this graduate program, which was later later on. Not at the beginning, it must have been about 10 years in I'd say.

Sam and I taught this class called Values in Action. It was one of the core classes for the Interdisciplinary Graduate Program, which at the—originally was called the Foundations of Public Action, I think. And it actually had a good idea behind it, which was to get students to figure out the sort of philosophical and cultural underpinnings of public policy. And we chose students who had a public policy orientation. And we taught this class on values in action where

we, I thought, used really interesting material to try to get students aware of the value systems out of which policy was created. And Sam being an expert in Indian culture and Hindu temple construction was his sort of smallest specialty, but he was very broad ranging. And mine being in American literature and environmental studies, I think we brought a really interesting mix of backgrounds.

And so that class was a delight to teach. He and I did one class that was not a core class either in the graduate program or with Mike Allen, the United States, that is core course. And that was a course called something like Asian Philosophy and Early American Literature. And we put it through as a special request. And we had about, I think we had 15 or 16 students. Which was hard to do because that's small for two people doing it. But there is a connection between early American literature—Emerson, Thoreau, that generation because that was the first generation that had access to translations of Asian—great books or philosophy, classics, whatever you want to call it. And they were very influenced by it. Walden has maybe 100 references to Asian sources. Same with Emerson. So we read some early American stuff, and then we read the original stuff that they had read, that Sam knew about. That was really a fun class to teach. And I wish we could have done it again. For some ... I don't know what the conditions were that they couldn't afford to do it, I think, after that. But that was a great experience and I think students should have appreciated that.

**Charles Williams 30:25**

**That sounds amazing to me. So how would you describe the students in the early years of the campus—or the university before it even came to the main campus?**

David Morris 30:35

I was extremely pleased with the level of students I had taught at UW Seattle. I had taught at UCLA and I taught at Butler. I felt the ... admittedly, I'd mostly taught freshmen, sophomore level at those places. I had a couple of classes at UCLA that were sort of upper level, mid-level literature classes I taught as a substitute for someone who went on sabbatical. But otherwise it was mostly freshmen. And at Butler I had, I think two-thirds of my load was freshmen. In Seattle, I think it was all freshmen that I taught for five or seven years, whatever it was. So we had all upperclassmen. Their average age, I think, was 32—that sticks in my mind, when we started. I think about 70 percent of them were women.

And for a literature teacher, they were great because they had life experiences to bring to literature. And some of them could really write. Maybe they self selected for taking literature classes, you know, ones who really like to read and have some sense of style. But I was ... I thought, "Oh, this is great." And they were serious. They were paying for it themselves so they were interested, they showed up. They ... liked to talk, it was not a problem getting discussions going at all. So I was quite pleased with the students. And the one thing that surprised me is, I thought, "Well, older students won't be worried about grades because they're past all that," you know. Instead, they were hyper concerned with grades, because many of them had gone to college earlier, dropped out, had kids, got a job, whatever. So they came back—now they were



serious, and they wanted grades. And so they would be very concerned with that, which was a little disconcerting, but you learn to kind of deal with that. I thought the writing, I mean, a lot of my fellow faculty members complained about writing skills, I think more as time went on. But I felt by and large, the students who sign up for my classes could write pretty well with a few exceptions. And at that time we didn't have the problem that has developed later of people coming from foreign countries who are smart but have rudimentary knowledge of English and writing skill. There were people who could write. The other thing that was fun was a lot of people had worked in jobs where they had to write certain kinds of things. And suddenly they were in a literature class and they got to write things that to them were more fun and read things that to them are more fun. Especially the nurse—I put in a plug for the nursing students, they started, I think we had a nursing program starting the third year of the campus. And the nursing students that took my classes were always excellent. And they were grateful to be reading stuff outside of their field and they were always smart, hardworking, and good writers. So they were fun.

**Charles Williams 34:26**

**What was it like to move to the new campus once the full campus opened?**

David Morris 34:33

That's an interesting question for me because I had my first sabbatical, I believe, the first year that the campus opened. So I wasn't here. So when I came and started teaching here, it had already been up and running for a year. So everyone else was kind of you know, familiar with it. To me it was new. It didn't seem that much different. It was nice. But I kind of like the Perkins building because it was cozy. And I always got a kick out of the fact that one floor was classroom, one floor was offices, one floor was the library, and one was the administration. And that was the whole school. Plus it was in this building—we were on the top four floors. So the first four floors were some kind of sketchy businesses that didn't seem to really do much. It had a nice ... kind of film noir quality to it, you know, and the new campus that was sort of gone. Although I'll say that I'm so glad that they picked the downtown location. It was a great decision which I'm sure everyone sees now is the case. And the campus architecturally fab—one of the best campuses, most interesting physical campuses that I've ever known. So it was great. The offices were great. They were in—I would say they were better than 80 or 90 percent of the offices on the Seattle campus. I was afraid that Seattle faculty members would come down and see them and go, "What the hell?" you know, because offices in the history department up on the Seattle campus were these little, you know, rabbit holes. I had a view of Mount Rainier, I was on the fourth floor the first year. That was great.

**Charles Williams 36:43**

**Then as someone with a background, somewhat, in planning, it must have an interesting from that angle as well, just to see the the location of the campus and its reuse of the warehouses and ...**

David Morris 36:53

Absolutely, I thought, "If they don't pick this downtown location, it'll be just huge a mistake. It would be an anchor for this area." Then they did such a great job of rehabbing the old buildings, and the architects sort of maintaining this industrial feel. Building that trestle—not trestle, but that walkway across the what were the tracks at the time—having that kind of awning that looked like an old depot awning along the tracks. It was great. It was just fabulous. And it has completely panned out. I'm just thrilled to see the redevelopment of the Thea Foss—the condo buildings that have gone in there, people are living here. I remember thinking—the hilltop one day will be a, you know, it's gonna be gentrified because it's got this view, it's close to town, close to the freeway. So yeah, from the city plan—it was a great spot, it was really. Plus it was just fun to come in. It was a cool place to work, you know, from visual standpoint. Yeah.

Charles Williams 38:16

**So going back for a second to the ... partially to the student experience, but also more, I guess, a broader question. Over time, the campus has become increasingly diverse in terms—at least in some respects in relation to the student body. Also, the university now puts forth as recognizing diversity as one of its core values. So looking back at the early years, do you recall conversations about those kinds of questions of inclusion, equity as part of the campuses?**

David Morris 38:48

Yeah, definitely. Right from the beginning, there was always a discussion on our first hires of hiring more women and hiring diverse faculty, people of color. It was always a topic of concern. And we were always looking for people who knew people that might be able to encourage candidates to apply. From a student standpoint, that was more an administrative, I guess, task—was to diversify the student body because we didn't even—we were not in charge of screening students. That was the admissions department. Looking back on it's sort of interesting that we might have had a representative on the committee, but that was ... they set the criteria. I think that might have been set even at the Seattle campus. But it was always an issue every search I was ever on was, there'd be a discussion, "How can we find a more diverse applicant pool and look over the applicants trying to figure out a way of meeting that challenge?" But then also there was I-200, I think it was called, passed pretty early in the history of the campus, which prohibited explicit use of race, and I don't know if it ... gender or whatever, in the hiring process. So there was ways of talking just about diversity without specifically focusing on that. But it was always an issue. Obviously more a concern to some, or more vocal among some faculty members than others, but just a general agreement that ... our first faculty of 13 people, there were 12 men and three women. There were no African American faculty. There was one Native American faculty member. There were no Asian American faculty. So it was, you know, that's what it was. Yeah, so I'd say from the beginning, there was always a focus on that, and in any curriculum also a focus on ... in United States studies, I think the original documents even mentioned, focusing on subcultures and including them as part of the United States studies curriculum. And then international studies of its nature was, you know, diverse in that, in that sense.

**Charles Williams 42:11**

**So, perhaps shifting gears a little bit, what was the faculty's relationship with administration?**

David Morris 42:23

It was pretty personal because there were 12 of us and our chair, and the dean. The dean, at the beginning, was dean of both the Bothell and the Tacoma campuses. I was—happened to be one of the first two representatives to the committee that was the governance committee that met in Seattle, and it was made up of members of both Bothell and Tacoma. Mike Allen and I were the first two members of that committee. So we met with the dean up there. And we talked about things like what tenure qualification should be for the branch campuses as compared with the Seattle campus. We talked about enrollments, library issues and so forth.

At that time, the tenure process was very much still a Seattle thing when we didn't know much about it, because we would vote on tenure among ourselves. And at that time, there were only I think, eight or nine senior members. Then our chair would write a separate letter, I think. Then it went to the dean of the branch campuses. But then it went to the provost office, and we had no clue what, you know, how they would look at things. Eventually that changed because the Bothell and Tacoma campuses got their own deans. I forget what year that was, but I was involved. I was a member of several committees that met up in Seattle. And I forget what the names of the ones were ... but I do remember one year, I was on a committee. I was on it for two years, it was the tri-campus, something or other. This was after the campuses split into two, it had members from Tacoma and Bothell on it, but Seattle members. The big issue was enrollment, because the legislature—it somehow passed a bill that penalised the campuses. If they didn't meet enrollment numbers, they would have to pay back large sums of money. And we couldn't control our enrollment in a way—it depended on the economy, it depended on starting new programs and people didn't know about them. And I remember my role was to try to persuade the Seattle people, you know—please don't punish us if we happen to meet our enrollment goals. And that committee met every two weeks at 7:30 in the morning, in Seattle. It met for an hour and a half.

That was sort of my role without looking like I was, you know, representing a, you know, beggars consortium or something. I think, you know, I did a pretty good job. But then ironically, the year I left that committee, enrollments soared at the branches for no reason that anyone knew exactly why, and it became a moot, sort of a moot point. But we discussed other things in those meetings. By and large, the Seattle campuses—the people, at least who served on those committees, were supportive and wanted to hear what we had to say. I still think at that time we were under the radar that as long as we didn't impinge on the budget or the operations of the Seattle campus, they didn't much care one way or the other. What would happen if we took some, you know, overflow people? That was fine with them. If we made them look good in the sense of diversifying and providing access, that was fine. But most of them did not know much about the campuses.

The issue on our campus, that I always used to vocally talk about, was people would complain about Seattle in some way, and I would wonder why are they complaining about it. We get to use the library. We get sabbaticals. We get the prestige when we go to conferences, of saying we're from the University of Washington, you know, Tacoma or Bothell, which I could see just at academic conferences made a difference. And I would always—the example I would always use I'd say, "Let's imagine you were at Tacoma State University and you went to a conference. How do you think your colleagues would look at you, being from Tacoma State as being from University of Washington Tacoma? So why are we complaining? Why aren't we sort of just nurturing this relationship?" And what have we really suffered by being ... they never turned down any of our tenure applications. Much later, I think, maybe a couple of people had some postponements or something. But especially in the first years, we got to use the University of Washington library. We had no books hardly at all, in our own library. Not only did we get to use that library, but you put in a request for a book, and they sent it to you the next day. No one had that privilege on the Seattle campus, unless they were an endowed chair with, you know, their own TA, who they could send to the library. We had it. We also had, as I said before, much better physical offices than they had. We really didn't, in my view, have much cause for complaint about that. Now, I know the professional programs it was a different situation, like nursing education, because they were tied in much more closely with the departments. We were left alone partly because we were interdis—first we were liberal studies, and then we were interdisciplinary arts and sciences. So we did not have a counterpart on the other campus—on the Seattle campus. So there was no department there that was threatened saying, "Well are they taking resources away from us?" We weren't. And that probably was a big difference here. We had an English department that maybe was diverting sources from the English department there, history department, then there might have been a different issue. And I know the structural arrangements were much different at the Washington State branch campuses,—which I don't know if people talked about, but they got created at the same time. And there they had traditional departments and they were directly tied to the departments of WSU. Faculty members even sometimes moved between the two campuses. And their tenure was totally based on the department at Pullman and their budgets were tied, I think also, much more tightly. So that was a different thing here. We weren't connected to any department. At least interdisciplinary arts and sciences wasn't on Seattle.

**Charles Williams 50:06**

**So in some ways kind of benign neglect?**

David Morris 50:08

Absolutely benign neglect. Yes. I'm sure that it would have, you know that it wouldn't have been so benign. I just heard through the grapevine that when the business school at Tacoma got its 15-million-dollar gift, which was more than any gift that had ever been given by far to the business school in Seattle, that there was a lot of grumbling about, you know, how in the world did that happen? And how could Seattle get its hands on some of that money because who was Tacoma? But then, shortly after that, Seattle Business School got its own larger gift, I guess,

and made that point not so important. But you could see how, sure, if you were a faculty member in a prestigious Seattle department and your Tacoma counterpart gets this huge amount of resources that you don't get you would wonder what was going on.

**Charles Williams 51:10**

**What was it like as the UW Tacoma campus itself increasingly developed an administrative structure? I mean, for instance, Vicky Carwein was the first chancellor, I guess at the campus?**

David Morris 51:21

Yes. It's, you know, it didn't affect, just speaking personally, it didn't affect my teaching at all, or my relationship with students. So it wasn't that big a deal. I still served on some campus committees. Remember, we had one Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, and I won't name names, but he was a fairly crusty sort of fellow—had very bad interpersonal skills. He was a smart guy and an earnest guy. And I think he, you know, he tried to do a really good job but he was almost comically inept at dealing with people—chewed me out in one meeting where I thought I was trying to help him a little bit, didn't brook much dissent. But he's also the guy who was responsible for me getting the single biggest raise I ever got. Because he single handedly raised all the associate professors one year from who are compressed, and I came back to the campus and got this letter showing, I'd gotten something, I got 16 percent raise. Went, "Wow, how'd that happen?" And then I heard that he had no authority to do that whatsoever, but it was too late. They couldn't, you know, ask for their money back. So—and I kind of liked him in this, you know, this odd way. But he was, you know, he left—he got sort of forced out, I guess.

And the campus was, you know ... it kind of ran, I guess like places do. I heard you know various grumblings about, I think it was, any administrator came here from someplace else it was an impossible situation because it was such a unique place. Particularly IAS that I'm sure they looked at and said, "Well what is this about? How did this happen?" The relationship to the Seattle campus was never defined. The campuses as I understand it, their history was that Washington state ranked only above Mississippi in access for upper level public university, so universities at the junior and senior level. Had a good community college system, but then there was nothing but WSU, UW, Eastern, Western, and Central. And three of those campuses reached in the mountains where students west of the mountains could not go for the most part. One was in Bellingham, which was pretty distant from the population centers. There was UW, which was competitive. So there were all these students that were left with no place to go, either transferring or having coming from community colleges.

WSU stepped into that vacuum. And then Gerberding, Bill Gerberding, the president of UW at the time, as I heard it, you know, through back channels or whatever, said, "Whoa, WSU, you know, we don't want them in the Puget Sound area." So he agreed to have a Bothell and a Tacoma campus, but he was never excited about it. No faculty and the Seattle campus were excited about having this. And then the structure, as I said, at WSU, those were outposts. So it really was to Pullman's favor to have them. Whereas in Seattle, they had these little tiny things

that were, you know, of sort of no importance to the main campus. And then we had ... that first year, I think Gerberding had a dinner for faculty from the branch campuses at his house in Seattle. And, I guess got the distinct impression that he was, you know, lukewarm at best. Was sort of going through the motions, chatting with us a little bit with, but more his attitude was—"I have to do this and who are these people?" And you know, "As long as they don't bother me, that'll be fine," you know.

So that's how the administration in Seattle looked at us. And so any chancellor coming here—and they weren't called chancellors—they were deans first ... they were just deans. And then they had a weird thing where they were deans, but they weren't really members of the College of Deans in Seattle. And they were under the provost, even though they were running a campus. So there were constant discussions every single year about what the structure of the administration of the branches should be in relation to the Seattle campus. It still is not settled, I don't think, in a way that you know, that was never a problem at say, the University of California campuses. They were separate campuses, they had an overall structure, there was a president of the system, but there were chancellors of the campus with very specific things and the tenure was on that—specific to that campus. Same with University of Michigan or University of North Carolina, which I'm somewhat familiar with. So this was an anomalous system, which remains an anomalous system. So whatever problems the administrator have, cut them some slack because it was crazy from—maybe I shouldn't say crazy. It was unusual and innovative, but also, in some ways ill defined.

**Charles Williams 57:22**

**How about in terms of the relationship between UW Tacoma and the wider community?**

**David Morris 57:31**

I don't know too much about that. I guess I could say that I maybe could have done more in that regard. There were some faculty members that were really active in that, Mike Honey being one. I think Mike Allen also was active in the community. I know that—I think Anthony and Claudia started a film program locally, which was really a great thing because it brought art films to a community that there was no venue for that. And I think, you know, our students are mainly drawn from the South Sound area. I used to be a little disturbed because people were talking about we need to do something more, you know, Tacoma specific, and I thought, but really we're representing the South Sound; we're not a city of Tacoma school. And so what about the outlying communities as well? They're as much a part of our area. There was talk about faculty living in the, you know, area, because several people lived in Seattle—I did, for one. There were some people living on Vashon, which was a problem because sometimes in the middle of faculty meetings, they'd say, "I gotta go!" and three or four of them would get up and, you know, take off and catch the last ferry or whatever ferry, you know. But I always thought that Bill Richardson—I shouldn't mention Bill ... but I think he used to say ... he lived outside of Tacoma, but he would sometimes talk about, "Well, people should maybe live closer." And I thought, if you're here, and you never complain about, you know, the constraints of the job, then where you live is no one's business but your own. And so that issue went sort of away. But I imagine it's, to

some degree, faculty who live in the area—live in the area where you draw your students from. It probably has some advantages in some ways. Although at most universities, you know, the faculty come from all over the world. So I'm not sure that it's really a viable issue. I thought we could do, you know, we never had a theater program. So I think it would have been nice if we'd had a theater department that could have put on plays that local people could have come to.

**Charles Williams 1:00:29**

**Yeah, more recently there have been tentative—**

David Morris 1:00:32

Yeah, that's what I've heard. And same with speakers. You know, probably we could have had a more active speaker program that would be of interest to the community. I'm not sure how much a university is, you know, what its relationship with its immediate community should be or whether its job in some way is to expose members of that immediate community to a wider world.

**Charles Williams 1:01:05**

**Right. You mentioned some other levels of impact, right, which maybe connects to how the university at this point in time also discusses itself as urban serving, but that had this kind of revitalizing role in downtown, although at the same time maybe raises interesting questions like the gentrification you pointed to.**

David Morris 1:01:23

Yeah, I mean, I'll say this. It's interesting about the issues of gentrification ... because I lived in an area in Seattle that's similar. I lived in Belltown the whole time I taught at UW which was an area very much like Pacific Avenue when I first moved there. And it now is utterly transformed the way this area is, and if they had displaced some memorable either, you know, community of people or architectural landmarks that would be one thing. But Belltown itself was a completely derelict area. Pacific area wasn't even ... the warehouses here weren't even used. It wasn't even like we displaced businesses. They were from what I heard like 20 percent used. The Hilltop wasn't really immediately impacted, although I understand now there's been quite a few changes in it. The Thea Foss Waterway was a derelict, polluted mess. So it's not like there was any sort of cultural or architectural entity that was replaced. So I see it as the same with Belltown. I don't see it as a loss. I see it only as a positive thing and as a way of revitalizing Tacoma's downtown core. I see it as a really great benefit. If it had moved out to the TCC campus I don't think you'd have any of the stuff here that you have.

**Charles Williams 1:03:08**

**So then it would still have an impact in terms of access, especially as it's grown and the number of students that are able to enroll but not the same impact as ...**

## University of Washington Tacoma Oral History: Founding Stories

David Morris 1:03:15

Yeah, no, it's definitely great in terms of Washington was just way behind. And it's on historical—I don't know how it came to pass, maybe from when it was a more rural state that three of the five four-year universities—now Evergreen was also west of the mountains, it's true, but it was a much more specialized school—three of the five campuses are east of the mountains, where I think 15 to 20 percent of the population was. You would never design a university system that way starting out, you know. Four of the five campuses would have been west of the mountains, and one of them would have been in Tacoma. It's the second biggest city in the state, I think.

**Charles Williams 1:03:43**

**You know, maybe basically the same size of Spokane.**

David Morris 1:04:04

Yeah, yeah, right.

**Charles Williams 1:04:08**

**So thinking about your career now that you're retired and looking back, what would you say was the most rewarding thing about being a professor at UW Tacoma?**

David Morris 1:04:18

Oh I think it was ... well, first of all, I'd say I'm grateful, you know, to have gotten a tenure track job as—I think my numbers right—when I retired, I believe that for my position, my replacement, there were 530 applications. Which gives you a notion of what the tenure track line is in English, but it was great. It was ... I feel really lucky to have gotten a position. I had a tenure line position at Butler. That was not a bad job, but I think that this job was more stimulating. I certainly got more experience doing, for better or for worse, searching and being in administrative committees. Students here were, by and large, really interesting. I never felt—can I get a glass of water?

So, yeah, I was lucky to get this job and very few people get to have the freedom of, you know, curricular development that we had where you could pretty much teach what you wanted to teach. The students were, I felt, responsive and interesting. I never really had a complaint. I had very few, maybe one or two classes that were kind of, you know, overall somewhat negative experiences, but most of them I felt at the end of the quarter, that was really fun. And you know, I'd do that again. It was fun having older students after having taught a lot of freshmen. I know it's different now. But that was interesting. Sometimes it was tough because in literature classes, and we had no majors as such, you kind of have to invent the wheel. You couldn't ever teach a class, or almost never, where you could count on a certain level of background information. But that was, you know, counterbalanced by students' enthusiasm and bringing life experiences to their readings. So that was good. And then just walking around the campus today, I realized that, physically, it really helps to be, at least for me, I guess I'm somewhat sensitive to architectural stuff from a planning background or whatever, it just makes you feel good to be



here. Whenever I had people visit me from out of town, colleagues or whatever, I'd like to show them around the campus. And it just was an interesting physical place to be. The library is incredible. The repurposing of the reading room, which I'm sure very few people use now, but it's great, in an old powerhouse. If you had seen that place before, it was redone, just as a metaphor for transformation. It's astonishing. It was a polluted, you know, burnt-out mess. And now it's one of the most interesting reading rooms you can find anywhere in the country, I'm sure. So ... then colleagues were, you know—it was a stimulating set of colleagues, there were no burnt out cases. There were no people adhering to, you know, traditional sort of "you got to do it this way" sorts of views, no one pulling rank. There was perhaps more uniformity of political opinion than is desirable in some senses, but it was never, you know, oppressive. So it was very—I think about, you know, my fellow students in graduate school in English and the careers that they've had or didn't have—lucky.

**Charles Williams 1:09:01**

**Has the campus as a whole, do you think stayed true to what maybe the founding faculty, and you in particular, also hoped it would turn out to be?**

David Morris 1:09:12

You know, it's hard to know, since I've been retired since 2012. I've talked to some people, you know, who are still here, still teaching. It sounds like the, you know, interdisciplinary, innovative element is still present. That the departments, as they exist, are not traditional in the sense they were when, say, I was an undergraduate, certainly. Although I know that departments themselves have evolved.

**Charles Williams 1:09:44**

**Right, well, at this point, still, they are divisions so they still aren't fully functioning as departments but have sort of stepped in that direction. And we may well departmentalize moving forward, just as a, partly, as an issue of scale.**

David Morris 1:09:57

My last couple of years—maybe three years ... when I was teaching, I was involved with PPE. I thought that was really fun. And I think it was at that time was philosophy, political science, and economics. I thought it was great they have those people together. They seem to have a good esprit de corps. I know the environmental sciences—which I had some dealings with when I was here, having served on the search committee to hire the first two. They had a great esprit de corps as far as I knew, and I thought the students in there had great experiences. You know, how much of that is continued? It's hard for me to say. I hope it has. I know it's harder as you get bigger to ... and as the pressures which I think have vastly increased to be vocationally oriented like are your students getting jobs, where are they getting jobs? It would be hard to, you know, unless you can show there was a direct correlation between the way you're structured and students getting jobs. It's hard to justify an innovative structure. I'm sure students themselves want to say, "Well, how can I get a degree that will lead to this job, you know, without any obstacles?"

But, so as far as I know, it's still you know, quite unconventional. But it's, there's no way you're ever going to have a situation with 12 faculty members, with a student body of 80 some students and stay that way, you know. It got bigger, but even after six or seven years, it was maybe 20 faculty members and 300 or 400 students, at least in IAS with this, you know, library system that you could access and with the prestige of the University of Washington. With no TAs you know, it was all taught by full time faculty members, a few adjuncts—just very few. You're not, that's never going to be repeated. It just isn't going to happen. So, you know, good luck to the ... I see that the campuses now are ranked on the US news rankings that I've seen them. That's, you know, "Oh wow, they're recognized as you know, places." I realized now it's been 28 years since they started, so they're not new campuses anymore. So they probably have their own structures. Plus IAS, the relation—you know, we started in liberal studies IAS was the only program. Then there were tiny nursing and education programs. So it really wasn't until 10 years later, that they were programs that sort of rivaled IAS in any way. So I'm sure now the campuses much ... the Institute of Technology, that Milgard School of Business, those are major entities in themselves. So I don't know what the, you know the relationship is there.

**Charles Williams 1:13:21**

**Thanks very much David. It was really a pleasure to talk with you about your experience.**

David Morris 1:13:26

Well, thank you for having an interest in the early days of the campus. I'm sure that I'm not the only founder that is appreciative of that.