



Alan Acock Oral History Interview, March 2, 2017

Title

“A Leading Scholar of Quantitative Analysis and Family Dynamics Alike”

Date

March 2, 2017

Location

Valley Library, Oregon State University.

Summary

In the interview, Acock describes his upbringing and the changes in family fortunes that both impacted his life while a teenager and also helped to inform his empathy and world-view later on during his scholarly career. He likewise traces his early infatuation with public service and public policy, and recounts his undergraduate years in Political Science at Eastern Washington State College, a time period during which he married and became a father. He then recounts his enrollment in graduate studies at Washington State University, the transition that he made from Political Science to Sociology, and the progression of his interests in both sociological theory and quantitative analysis while a doctoral candidate.

From there, Acock recounts the series of academic appointments that he held prior to coming to Oregon State in 1990. In so doing, he touches upon his years at USC, noting his disinclination towards Los Angeles and the work that he conducted on primary groups during this time. He then recalls his two years at the University of Oklahoma, commenting on the departmental turmoil that helped to drive him away. He likewise reflects on four years spent at Virginia Tech, where he chaired the department's graduate program. Lastly, he shares his memories of six additional years at Louisiana State University, a time period during which he published two very influential papers related to marriage and divorce.

The remainder of the session is devoted to Acock's career at Oregon State University. In thinking back on that period of his career, Acock comments on his experiences and achievements while chair of the newly created Human Development and Family Sciences department; his work on three books - *The Sourcebook of Marriage and Family Theory Research*, *Family Diversity and Well-Being* and *A Gentle Introduction to Stata* - as well as an influential paper, "Working with Missing Values; and his association with the National Council on Family Relations as well as the Positive Action Program. Throughout this discussion, Acock alludes to his strengths as a quantitative analyst and communicator of statistical concepts. Acock likewise shares his perspective on strengthening family dynamics; reflects on his evolution as a teacher; and discusses the Hallie Ford Center as a place of work. The interview concludes with thoughts on change within HDFS and Acock's sense of OSU as it looks toward its 150th birthday.

Interviewee

Alan Acock

Interviewer

Chris Petersen

Website

<http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oh150/acock/>

Transcript

Chris Petersen: Ok, today is March 2nd 2017 and we are in the Valley Library with Dr. Alan Acock, who's a Distinguished Professor of Human Development and Family Science here at OSU. And we will talk to him a great deal about his academic career, but I'd like to begin by building a biographical sketch of your life, and I'll ask where you were born?

Alan Acock: I was born in Trenton, New Jersey and immediately moved across the river to Norristown, Pennsylvania where I spent my early years.

CP: But you did not grow up there, is that correct?

AA: Well, my father was an engineer and he moved around quite a bit until they got to Spokane, Washington and we fell in love with the Northwest. He certainly did; I did. But we moved to Rome, New York and then Newark, Ohio near Columbus, and then to Spokane.

CP: What type of engineer?

AA: He was an electrical engineer. He had a very interesting achievement which was horrible, and it plagued his life basically. He was one of the key people involved in getting copper wire replaced by some aluminum wiring in houses, where it's a tremendous fire hazard because the copper screws and the aluminum wire separated from each other, caused shorts, and burned down the houses. But he developed all the technology for doing it, bringing the aluminum in, not aware that the average electrician was used to working with copper – and it's so much more pliable than aluminum wiring – wasn't making the connections as tight as he could have, or as correctly, using the right technology. It was really disappointing, obviously. But he was an electrical engineer for a long time.

CP: How old were you when you went to Spokane?

AA: I was twelve.

CP: What do you remember about Spokane as a community growing up?

AA: Well I lived in the valley, in a little town called Veradale. And it was a really small town. Spokane is kind of this city, small city like Eugene, about the same size as Eugene. Spokane was a series of little tiny towns but it's now one town. But at that time, there were little tiny towns and I liked the little tiny town life.

CP: So it was a rural upbringing then?

AA: Pretty rural, yeah. You could look at them, our backyard, and see mountains and fields and so on.

CP: What were you interested in as a boy?

AA: I always wanted to be President of the United States. So my goal as a boy was to become President of the United States. I realized that I can never remember anybody's name, and when I listened to the Presidents having to know thousands of people, I eventually realized while I was in college that I wouldn't likely be President. Although, given some more recent history, maybe I have a chance. So I haven't completely given up on that, although pretty much.

CP: Did this manifest as an interest in public policy as a boy? I mean, was that pretty early for you?

AA: Yeah, I was always interested in that. My father was incredibly successful most of his life. When he was a baby, at six months, his parents, my grandparents, moved to Mexico. And he was raised in Mexico until the age of twelve and spoke Spanish. [laughs] And then at the age of twelve they came back to the United States and he started public school at a tremendous disadvantage, not being able to speak English. And he graduated from high school four years later, and from Virginia Tech – I think he was twenty – and then he did his graduate work at MIT. And then he was a very successful engineer and when we were in Spokane we loved it; the whole family loved it.

But they were closing down his projects and they wanted him to move him to New York City, and he decided he wouldn't do that. So he bought a store for my mother and a store for himself and proved that the best electrical engineers are sometimes the worst possible business people. And in a matter of a couple years he went bankrupt, and my mother died, and my grandmothers died, and he went through tremendous tragedy. And I saw my family go from an upper middle class, country club membership type of family, to one that lived in the basement. And I saw how society wasn't responding to people who had great need. And I think the contrasts between what I had when I was younger and what I had in high school made that really a profound experience for me and really engrained in me the desire to make the world better. And if I had been President, the world would be better, I promise.

[0:05:10]

CP: So this all happened during your high school years? This dramatic change?

AA: The dramatic change began in middle school and then high school, yeah.

CP: Wow.

AA: And it was pretty traumatic. During high school I worked before school and I worked after school. And I knew I had my math classes, I knew I had them first period; in high school I missed a lot of them because I had to change irrigation pipe early in the morning. And it wouldn't work and it would leak and you would have to re-do it, and you couldn't not do that. So I missed a lot of math courses. But I survived. Good thing it was math because I was good at math. [laughs]

CP: Well, was school something that came fairly easily to you? I mean, a lot of disadvantages here but...

AA: It came too easily. All the way through, until I got into sociology, I pretty much floated. I studied hard when I was in political science in college, but I remember I never had notes when I went into a final exam. I just didn't bother to keep notes and I could guess what they were going to ask somehow. And that's when I knew. I didn't get tremendously high grades; like, I got enough grades to go to graduate school. And I certainly wasn't a stellar student. If it had been a little harder for me I probably would have worked on the school part harder.

CP: So in high school, was college always in your sights?

AA: That was a part of what was so interesting about my political views. I went to a middle class high school where virtually everyone went to college. And even though when I went to college I had zero dollars, I had a scholarship, and I had about ten dollars when I arrived on campus. It never crossed my mind that I wouldn't go to college, because that's what everybody did. And when you contrast that to the situation where people in the same economic disadvantage that I was in at the time, but they go to a high school where nobody goes on to college, I think I wouldn't have. So I think that our public school system being economically segregated as it is, not just racially segregated, but economically class segregated, puts people with little resources at a triple disadvantage where the best and brightest don't even think about going to college because none of their peers do. But truly it never crossed our minds that I wouldn't go. The fact that I had absolutely no money never crossed my mind that somehow this wouldn't be taken care of. We had a dean who I met because I told him I had no money, and he found some loans for me after school starting. And I would get little tiny scholarships; he would find little scholarships that nobody else had that wouldn't be enough to recruit somebody, but he would add that on to what I had.

CP: And this was at Eastern Washington State College?

AA: Yes.

CP: So these conversations were happening after you enrolled?

AA: Yes. And I got a very good education there. My classes were tiny, and I had mostly young faculty who were proving themselves. And the small classes and young faculty are trying to proving themselves produce good students. They gave me enormous attention and support. As an undergraduate I got to be a research assistant. And the books we read in the small classes in Political Science were all the books that I read when I first went to graduate school – I was in Political

Science and virtually nothing was new to me. All the books we had in the graduate program, I had as an undergraduate. But apart from the political science and a little bit of economics, I just floated [laughs] truth be told.

CP: Was that a double major?

AA: It was a – no. It was a major in Political Science, I had a minor in Economics.

CP: And you're still driven by this interest of someday being a public figure?

AA: No, I pretty much gave it up. You don't want to say you won't ever do it. I see people that are my age in politics who have an energy level who I couldn't dream of having. They work and work and work and people make fun of them and ridicule them, and I have great admiration for that; I just don't myself have that ability. I need to go to bed [laughs] at night and if I don't get a good night's sleep I'm not good that next day. I don't want to get up at four o' clock in the morning every day just to get on a flight to go somewhere. So I don't think I have that ability.

Well, I think everybody has to do – it took me a long time to do it – but everybody has to find a niche. And if they can find a niche where they really fit, they can make their own contribution to a better society. But I think many people would never find that niche, but I think I did even though it took me a long time to do.

[0:10:40]

CP: I'm interested in a couple of things. You said you were a research assistant as an undergraduate, can you tell me a bit about that?

AA: Oh, well I worked on a variety of projects. These little surveys, I worked on a literature review – the instruction of Latin American Studies in US colleges, which is very little, [laughs] at that time at least. It's still very little but it was almost non – very, very, very limited. And that was kind of an interesting study. Just a variety of things. I got interested in doing surveys and survey research. I had an opportunity to be the intern for the mayor of Spokane, Washington one summer, and that was an enlightening experience for me. I won't go into what he – he had different politics than I did, but that was very enlightening to me and how that affected the people of Spokane at that time. The strength of my feelings, we have to do something, but I don't have the ability you need to be a politician. But I do have the ability you need to be a scholar, and make my contribution that way.

CP: So during this time period is when you started to think about an academic career?

AA: Yeah. And when I graduated – I got married as a sophomore, which my wife and I say it's the dumbest thing both of us ever did, and were still married over fifty years later. But we had a child, and with a child and a family like that, I had no money. So when I graduated, I got a job. I worked for Prentice-Hall as a publisher representative to universities. And what that involved was going around every day of the week, seeing faculty in different departments, and finding out I was on the wrong side of the desk. It took me a few months to realize that, but I realized I would much prefer being on their side of the desk than mine. And as a salesperson, I was probably finally below average. So being slightly below average was not my niche, and I thought maybe my niche would be moving to the other side of the desk.

So I went to graduate school. Not having any money, I went to Washington State University, which was very close and had a brand new Ph.D. program in Political Science. When I got there, I realized one of the things that goes with a brand new program is that they don't have a lot of established scholars to guide you. So I was disappointed with that program.

I went to the University of Michigan one summer while I was in Political Science to a special new program for political scientists that were learning quantitative methods. And it was a very intensive program, and I did very well. It was at that point I decided I would either have to move to Michigan –which would, with my family, I didn't see how we could ever afford it – or figure out some way of getting a more intensive program.

And at that time, Washington State University had a shockingly good Sociology department. They controlled the university. The dean of the graduate school, the sociologists, the Provost I think was a sociologist. They had the *American Sociological Review* there, which is a major journal for sociology. The president of the American Sociological Association was there. It was just really probably the strongest department, at least in social sciences, in Washington

State. And I realized that Political Science was limiting me because I wanted to study more than just politics. And the ideas of political science are expanded when you go into sociology. So if you look at any group, whether it's a family, whether it's a work group, whatever it is, the principles are the same. So I became interested in studying small groups and studying families a little bit – I'm stopping – but I got into families more later on.

But it was a very good switch and I had very good mentorship. I developed my quantitative skills, which at that time, sociology had very few people who were really very good at quantitative methods. You could probably name them on hand at that time. So that really set me on finding my niche, because even though I never had a great deal of math, it always came very easily to me. And I learned statistics very quickly, and data analysis very quickly. And so I quickly became the local star for data analysis, and that was able to get me opportunities ever since.

[0:16:01]

CP: That's interesting. So this attraction to quantitative methods, which has been a big part of your career–

AA: There was nothing before that.

CP: –but it emerged out of this natural skillset that you had?

AA: Just undeveloped. Totally undeveloped. And one thing I really liked, I came to sociology without any undergraduate background. And so I didn't have the content that most people focus on in sociology. And in my graduate program, all my courses, virtually all my courses, were either theory or data analysis – statistics, data analysis. And it really influenced my career in positive and negative ways. When you're a faculty member, I think the most effective way is to pick one particular topic and you can quickly become an expert on that one topic and develop a national reputation by putting out ten studies that are decent on that topic. But when you're really a theorist and a quantitative analyst, which is a very unusual combination, you want to study everything. [laughs] So if you look at my CV, you see what seems like total chaos, because I work on a variety of different topics. Not all of them do I use the same theoretical perspective; I use my quantitative skills.

CP: Was there a point of view that you were drawn to? A sociological point of view?

AA: I got in a lot of trouble for that, but initially my primary view was as a social exchange theorist. But the more you read about any of these theories and the geniuses that developed these theories, you realize that they all have their place. And so the richness of symbolic interaction was far greater than the richness of social exchange theory. Conflict theory dealt with many issues that I've experienced in my lifetime already. Structural functionalism, which a lot of people make fun of for being very conservative, actually is very useful. But because I was eclectic in my theory, people who were purists on any one particular theory were offended. So sometimes I irritated people because I would be talking to a symbolic interactionist and say "you should use social exchange theory too" or "you should use structural..." Telling a symbolic interactionist they should use a functional perspective really irritates. And so I irritated a lot of people.

CP: Was there a dominant model at Washington State? Or was there a mix of folks?

AA: No, there was a mix of folks but they were strong – at least, what I was exposed to was primarily theory or methods.

CP: What was your research as a doctoral candidate?

AA: [laughs] Well, the subset area I picked, because it's really not a specific topic, was social psychology from the sociological perspective. And I looked at the attitude-behavior relationship and I was going to the early people that talked about the attitude-behavior relationship being influenced by your peers. And this goes back to when I was in high school: everyone went to college so I did. I think a lot of time, if your attitude and your peers share that attitude, then your attitude predicts your behavior perfectly. If your attitude and your peers are different, then your attitude doesn't really predict your behavior at all. And so that was my thesis and I was able to publish it in the *American Sociological Review*, which is the number one journal. They had a 95% rejection rate at that time, so I was quite delighted by that and that article, occasionally, I see it cited – in the last few years, it's still cited. That was in 1970, so it's still cited today, thirty-four years later.

[0:20:06]

CP: Tell me about navigating family life during this time period.

AA: It's impossible. My wife really did so much more of what I should have shared, because once I became passionate in my commitment to studying hard, that's what I did. So I went to school in the morning, I had lunch on campus, I had lentil soup and an ice cream cone – thirty-five cents for the soup and twenty-five cents for the ice cream cone – and I would come home at about 5:30, I would see my family, eat dinner, and go back to school. I'd come home about 10:30, and go into bed and everybody would be asleep. And she put up with that; it's pretty hard on the family. That, combined with the fact that we married at the age of twenty, made the early part of our marriage very difficult for both of us. And I don't know how we survived it, but we did. And she still likes me most of the time and I like her all the time.

CP: Glad to hear that. Sounds like you had a pretty successful Ph.D. experience and then, from there, you went to a very different place from Pullman, Washington.

AA: I did.

CP: Los Angeles, and then USC. Talk about that transition.

AA: I was a country bumpkin. My wife is a country bumpkin. She grew up in rural Washington state on the Canadian border in a town called Oroville, which was very small. And when we got to Los Angeles, I remember the first time we went to a grocery store we came home and went back to bed; just the stress of driving exhausted us. We were just – it's hard to say this with a Ph.D. in sociology and some of the things that, you know, I think I'm pretty smart, but I certainly wasn't in some ways. We rented a house from a guy who didn't own it. The owners of the house were in Japan for a couple of years and he decided to rent their house. And that's, like, stupid. We got called by the bank saying "what are you doing living in this house?" And my wife takes the call and she explained that I was a professor at USC and we were nice people and we're paying rent. And they believed her; it sounded so ridiculous.

It was a terrible adjustment. At the time EPA wasn't very powerful. Environmental protection – I don't even know if EPA existed then, but environmental protection rules were very limited, and the smog was atrocious. I would be really feel physically ill when I got to school. I had a seventeen-mile commute by car and twenty-one-mile commute if I went by bicycle, and it took the same amount of time either way. It was just gridlock, disgustingly smoggy, we were sick all the time from the smog. My wife worked in a respiratory disease hospital for a while. And whenever there was a smog alert, their census would skyrocket. They would have beds in the hall. It was awful. We didn't do well.

We lived in Altadena which is on the side of a mountain, and we had an elevation of 1,500 feet. We were close to being out, we were within two blocks of the end of houses. At 1,500 feet, when the smog was its worst, it would be below that. So the inversion layer would be maybe 600 feet. We could see Catalina Island like seventy miles away, and nothing in between. We couldn't see Pasadena, we couldn't see LA, we couldn't see anything. But we could see all the way out across the ocean to Catalina Island.

So I hated LA, and that's a big part of why I left. I loved USC. It's a wonderful school, and it was a wonderful department. And I saw the value – there is a value to large city universities, because everybody is a long distance call from everybody else. So the political in-fighting that you get in a small college town doesn't exist, because you come there, you do your work, and you leave. And it was organized in, basically, fiefdoms. So research teams would coalesce and work on a particular project and these fiefdoms would kind of shift around and people would change around, but they didn't fight each other. And we would have one faculty meeting a term and half the people wouldn't bother to come. We had a very famous scholar there who I didn't meet until he had been there for two years, and he came into a faculty meeting twenty minutes late and he looked at his watch and said "oh my gosh, I didn't realize the time, I have to leave." That was the only time I saw him.

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But within your group, there's a great deal of support. I worked with a fellow named Vern Bengston who was an eminent scholar and still is, and he was a great mentor for me. It was so important in developing my career, having that support. So the university was very good, but Los Angeles was just insufferable. Now I have to say, two of my children now live

in the Los Angeles area. One is in Claremont, and I used to go out to Claremont on the motorcycle to get it serviced. And I would wear one of these masks that when you're spraying in the fields you have these like kind of gas masks with carbon filters. And you have goggles on and you couldn't see anything out there. And I just got back from visiting him in the mountains behind his house in Claremont – beautiful. And the smog is greatly improved. And it shows the EPA, sometimes people say regulations are bad, I hate a lot of regulations, but the regulations we've done on smog have been wonderful.

CP: Yeah, a timely statement I think.

AA: Yeah. I mean, really, it's amazing the difference how it was to how it is now. Both my kids are happy living in Los Angeles.

CP: So tell me a bit about your research at USC. It sounds like one focus was on gerontology issues.

AA: Not really. I had an appointment at a gerontology center because they built the largest gerontology center at the time, which was a huge three story building just for gerontology, and they wanted to make sure they filled the space so nobody else would try to claim space. So in addition to my office in Sociology, they gave me a suite of three offices over there. And so I did some research there; I did a little bit of gerontology. Vern Bengston was a gerontologist. But that really wasn't my focus. The focus on my research there, apart from a few statistical articles, was using the three generation study that was started in 1970 and expands to four generations and went on into the early 2000s. And I did an article there, I did several articles there, but one of them in particular didn't get published until I was already at another school. But it won a Reuben Hill Award as the outstanding contribution to family theory at the time – an annual award – which was very nice. And that really got me interested in working with families. In my undergraduate training, I had never taken a course in family. My graduate training, had never taken a course in family. But that really is what I've been studying ever since, subsequently.

CP: You published your first book during this time.

AA: On the primary group. And this is the idea, the bridge between political science and sociology. Primary groups are everywhere, and the problems you have with primary groups – before this, you [referring to CP] were in a staff meeting – they're a primary group, they can be dreadful or they can be wonderful. But families are a primary group, the primary group, everywhere, and then they're the most important thing in how we're socialized and how we develop. I think the individual is very important, but I think that the peers and members of their primary group – coming back to why I went to college when I had no money – the peers and the groups therein are so important. So that book was trying to be a very introductory book that tried to explain how these primary groups were everywhere and the same processes worked on all of them and how some of them ended up being conflict-ridden and some wound up being very constructive.

[0:29:51]

CP: Well, you were at SC for seven years and then you decided to make a change.

AA: Yeah, well part of it, as I said: "oof, smog." But when I came up for a tenure I had the unanimous support of my department, which was wonderful. And they really liked me, I'm absolutely sure, and I liked them. But we had a historian as a dean who had just become dean that fall, so brand new to the job; I think I was his first tenure case as a dean. And he wouldn't pass my papers on because he said I hadn't published a single authored book. And at that time, sociologists wrote articles, very few books. Historians write books, and a single authored book was his standard for tenure. The department appealed the process and, a very unusual result, they overrode him. So the paperwork went ahead, and I got tenure.

But my feelings were hurt, and I hated smog, and I hated the commute, and I hated never seeing my family. So the University of Oklahoma was the first school that offered me a job, it was at a very small town, so I snapped it up and we moved to Oklahoma. Probably the worst decision I've made. I've made others that are very bad, but that's probably the worst decision. The University of Southern California, I think they felt bad about all this, and so they extended my tenure even though I left and at the end of one year at Oklahoma things seemed to be going very well and they called me up and said "are you coming back? We want you back." And I said "no." I decided to stay at Oklahoma.

That next year, the department collapsed. And this is a small town, it could be very good or very bad, and when it's very bad, it's very bad. It was so bad that they divided into two departments, with half the faculty on one, half were in the other. There were two secretaries at the time – not administrative assistants, in those days they were secretaries – and they had to use different mimeograph machines because they couldn't talk to each other. And they had to have different office space. And it was just a situation where I just couldn't function.

At Virginia Tech – every year I had offers; many years, I've had offers to move. There's a lot of universities that recruit people who have moderate success. And Virginia Tech is where my father went to college for his undergraduate work. It's a beautiful campus, it's a small town – very small town, smaller town than Corvallis – and it's a good university. So I took that opportunity to go to Virginia Tech and it was a great improvement compared to Oklahoma. But I don't want to condemn Oklahoma because after I left the departments somehow got back together and that's ancient history, and I'm sure nobody who was involved at that time is even there. I'm not criticizing them, but it was a place where I couldn't develop my career at that time.

CP: I have a question about a project you worked on during that time period though. It was on perceptions of the legal profession and it included interviews with prisoners.

AA: [laughs] Well, that's my methodology. At that time I had no interest in that topic, but a lawyer approached me who had no ability to do any kind of data analysis – surveys, research, interviews, anything. He was strictly a lawyer, but he wanted to talk about that. So we got together and I agreed to work with him on that. And after that I got interested in incarceration, and particularly in re-entry, and if there's one topic I'd like to study now it would be re-entry of people who had been incarcerated. Unfortunately the person I wanted to do it with suddenly died. He was in Romania, he was sixty-eight years old, and he had a heart attack and died. And we were working on that just beginning. But hopefully I'll do something on that. I think that really is important. And that is the primary group. When they release a prisoner and he has to re-enter society, the only thing that predicts that he won't recidivate is if he's picked up by a family member. That's the only thing. All the stuff they want to do in the prisons, that's good, but the family's involvement – and we can talk about that maybe later – is what determines if he has a chance of returning to society in a positive way.

[0:34:50]

CP: So you went to Virginia Tech, and the note that I have here in terms of research is some investigations on the Red Cross?

AA: Yes. I worked on that a couple of years, and that's the first time I did an evaluation. The Red Cross is very serious about doing evaluations of their programs when they develop a new curriculum. They do a type of formative evaluation where you evaluate it while they're developing it and use the results of your initial results to modify the program. So it was a very interesting process as a methodologist; I approached that as a methodologist. That was my role, I mean.

CP: You were doing some administrative work at Virginia Tech as well?

AA: Yeah, I mean I was director of the graduate program, which is administrative but not too administrative. It's a very important job, you're actively recruiting students, you're actively solving problems students have that are there like the problems I had when I was a student, so I could relate to that. It's a very rewarding job in many ways because – we had a student here at Oregon State that I voted against admitting her because I didn't think she was good enough, and she's now teaching at a major university and has a tremendously successful career. And I'm just so proud I was wrong. And in the graduate director role, you get to really foster not just your own students that you're working with on your research, but everybody's students. You get to see them develop, and it's just wonderful to see the growth that some students are able to have if you just help a little bit.

CP: Well that was four years at Virginia Tech, and then another change to LSU.

AA: Double my salary. [laughs]

CP: It was as simple as that?

AA: It wasn't as simple as that, but they doubled my salary. That's the first time I became a full professor. I was really excited about what was happening at that department, and they had hired four assistant professors, all of whom were just great, about two years before I went there. And you could see they were going to be great, and these would be people – at this point I was more of a mentor than a full professor – that was the opportunity I could see to really support people and collaborate with them. By collaborating with them, it was a wonderful opportunity. I loved Baton Rouge, Louisiana. I loved Mardi Gras. I hated, hated the politics in Louisiana as much as I hated the smog of LA.

But that was a case where it was a very supportive department, and everybody encouraged everybody. And the department chair at that time was a role model for me, and he would not tolerate people criticizing one another. So if somebody came and criticized somebody, which is something that happens when you're department chair, he would just, "No. No." Just crush it. "If you don't like this person, fine. I don't want to hear about it." Everything there was positive. It was a great place to work. I did some things I was very proud of there, and I would've stayed there a long time. Leaving Louisiana was probably the hardest decision I had.

CP: Am I correct that a focus for you during this time period was rural sociology?

AA: Not really.

CP: I'm 0 for 2. [laughs]

AA: Yeah, you're 0 for 2. Appointments – in order to double my salary, they had to figure out a way to do that, and so they paid me a twelve-month contract even though I was a regular nine-month faculty member. And so during the summer I had to do something rural, and I did a few rural strategies. I never really got involved in that in a major way.

CP: A couple of highly cited papers during this time period though, one being a theory of marriage timing.

AA: Yeah, I had a couple there, yeah.

[0:39:29]

CP: And the other, the impact of divorce on children. Can you tell me a bit about those two?

AA: Yeah, I'd rather talk about the impact of divorce on children.

CP: Ok.

AA: I've never been divorced, I've been married over fifty years, but so many people are divorced. And the women who are left after the divorce go through such struggle. Economically, oftentimes, they're kind of abandoned with the children, they're responsible for the children, they want the children. I say they're abandoned, but they want the children. But the stress and strain: there's a reduction in income, they move. And I can relate back from when I was a kid and I saw what happened. We went from being upper middle class to lower middle class. That's basically what happens in many – not all cases, but in many cases that's what happens in a divorce.

And people say the children suffer in a divorce, but the people doing that research have done just terrible research. What the major, major study that supports that position was based on people who came to a psychiatrist after a divorce to get counselling. Well, if you go to a psychiatrist after a divorce to get counselling, presumably you're having trouble. But if you want to know how much the children suffer, they have to overcome a lot. But you want to compare what their alternative situation would have been, and being in a conflict-ridden family where they're fighting constantly and hating each other, that's what you have to compare being in a divorce family if you want to know what the effects of a divorce are.

But when you get a divorce, the resources you have, the mother has, are very important. And one of the things we showed is education. So for the mother who has more education, the children suffer far less and in many ways may be much better off than when they were in the conflict-ridden family. So the major thing we showed, it wasn't divorce as such, but it was what went along with a divorce. So if you move from a middle class home to a new school and a new school in a ghetto, your child suffers. You suffer a great loss. But if she has an education where she can make an adequate income to support

the children, everything is going to be a lot better than it probably would have been if she had stayed married. So what we were trying to do is just show that the thing we can do is work on education. We can't make people who are unhappy happy, but we can provide educational opportunities. So after a divorce, a woman who's twenty-five years old, has two kids and gets divorced, we can make sure we have friends available to help her finish college if she gave up college before these sorts of things. Programs that work on maximizing the education attainment of divorced mothers, that's the most important thing we can do for the children.

CP: Well in 1990 we finally get to OSU. How did this come about? A difficult decision?

AA: It was a terribly difficult decision. I blame it on Mt. Hood and I blame it on the airport in Baton Rouge being in the middle of the oil refineries. So when you drove to the airport in Baton Rouge, it smells, it's hot, it's humid, and your nose is inhaling all the chemicals. We got on the plane, and as we're coming in to Portland we look out and we see Mt. Hood. The plane flies right alongside Mt. Hood and God it's beautiful. My wife grew up in Washington, I grew up in Washington as a teenager. This is home.

And we decided to come, but it was a loss. So, at LSU I was a director of a NSF-supported program that had money to give to junior faculty across all the social sciences to help them write grants and to work with them to get grants. And people in Psychology get grants, and people in Social Work get grants, Sociology. And I really liked doing that, that was really something I hated to leave. But I wanted to come home. So coming to Oregon State, small town, beautiful town, decent university, research university. And so we came.

[0:44:31]

CP: What was your initial impression of OSU? This was a difficult time in this state for higher ed when you arrived.

AA: I don't know how much I should go into that. The main recruitment here was the provost. The provost at that time – whose subsequent career had some problems – but the provost at that time had his tenure in our department, in HDFS, in Human Development and Family Studies. That's where his tenure was; he team-taught a course. He wanted that to be the best program it could be. He wanted to be at least one of the top three or four programs in the country. "It's a new department, this is what we want you to do." That got to my idea of developing things.

And when I got here, I was here for about a month and Proposition 5 happened. Oregonians were asked do you want your property tax cut in half? Yes or no? And they understandably said yes. And the university bled for about ten years. The provost left almost immediately. He was gone the next year. And that department really – it was in a College of Home Economics, and it really didn't belong there. The dean of the College of Home Economics was a traditional home economist. And I don't want to criticize home economists, but the quality of the research, the level of the research, the sophistication of the research was extremely low by those standards as opposed to, say, Sociology or Psychology or Economics. And she saw HDFS as traitorous. We were traitors because we wanted to be somewhere else. She didn't see us in a positive way and she withdrew all resources she could withdraw from us. It was a terrible relationship we had. Horrible.

During that period, when I first got here, we had 140 undergraduate majors, and when I left we had 1,000 undergraduate majors and we had absolutely no more resources with 1,000 majors than we had with 140. We had become one of the largest departments on campus and we just had a handful of faculty. And so it was very, very frustrating. But my colleagues were just wonderful. Some of them had good backgrounds, and some of them had home economics background, but most of them really bought into my argument that we have to do research, we have to publish. And we don't just do papers in meetings, but we do articles in major journals. And when we write an article in a major journal, it's not in a journal you've never heard of. We look at how often your research is cited, not just how many articles you publish, but are people using your research? And I think they bought into that. And some of them pushed me on that. And I was amazed at what we were able to accomplish. And I say "we," it was the faculty, we did that collectively. So that part was rewarding, and we were able to keep that program going and develop and become better. Not as good as we would have liked to be certainly, but we became better in spite of that hostile environment.

CP: So scholarly rigor was probably agenda item #1 coming into this position?

AA: Absolutely, yeah.

CP: I have to imagine it was an unusual time for you. I mean, this is the first time you're not in a Sociology department and you are the head of a brand new department that is facing significant headwinds in a college that's trying to figure out its identity.

AA: Right. And one thing I tried to stay away from was Sociology, because I wanted to make it clear that I was identifying with this new department because I was [laughs], I was the chairman of this department. And so I pretty much stayed away. I've been a little bit involved, I did an article with Becky Warner in Sociology. I was on a couple of Sociology review committees and so on. But I really focused on developing that department as opposed to sociology. I still consider myself a sociologist.

CP: It sounds like it was a struggle the whole time?

AA: It was. Day and night.

CP: Were there any milestones along the way that stand out when you reflect back on the administrative piece?

AA: I mean, the administrative peace, a milestone was going from 140 to 1,000 students and increasing the productivity probably ten-fold by the faculty. There were faculty that were producing major grants, national awards, great success. That was very important administratively.

[0:49:58]

CP: And you maintained your productivity as a scholar during this time period; a lot of times people move into a position like yours and they sort of have to sacrifice something.

AA: They do, I understand, I understand. [laughs] And again, that was sort of like the graduate school days, it was hard on my family. So I had nights and weekends and I did my research mostly at nights and weekends. So I did more in terms of books rather than articles, because books you can kind of do piecemeal: work on it a little bit, forget about it, work on it a little bit. Where articles, you have to submerge yourself completely into it. But a book, if you have it organized, you can do one piece at a time. The major publication I had while I was there – I guess it was while I was there – in that role was *The Sourcebook of Marriage and Family Theory Research*.

CP: I have a book called *Family Diversity and Well-Being*.

AA: Well, that was in the '90s. That was a very successful book, and that grew out of a series of articles – David Demo, who is the person who replaced me at Virginia Tech, and I collaborated on a series of articles, and then we decided we really had done enough that we needed a book. And I talked briefly about that one article but there were a series of them, and the book kind of was this point about what leads to success after a divorce, for the children and for the mother. And our basic conclusion was giving every opportunity for more education you can to the mother.

CP: So that was an outgrowth of the divorce paper then.

AA: Yeah, absolutely.

CP: You did some work on inter-generational caregiving and mother-daughter relationships during this time period as well.

AA: Yeah. Yeah, I don't know what to say about that.

CP: Ok. [laughs]

AA: My focus, if you look at a lot of my research, is having to do with a family's influence on the individual and inter-generational influence – parents on children, children on parents, you talk about gerontology, it's grandparents – in the context of generation's relationships to one another.

CP: The sourcebook came about in 2005?

AA: Right.

CP: Can you talk about that, *The Sourcebook of Marriage and Family Theory*?

AA: That was a really big deal for me, and I collaborated on that with four or five co-editors. I worked with Vern Bengston who was the first – I mentioned when I first started at USC. The National Council on Family Relations, every ten to fifteen years, publishes a big sourcebook. They change the names once in a while, but it's a big sourcebook. There was one in the early '90s, and there was that one in 2005, and now they're trying to start to do another one which will come out in probably another three years. We had over 150 contributors and that was the only book I've ever been editor on. And getting these people to complete their manuscripts, to be told that they have to change their manuscripts, that it's not good enough, that they need to look at some other research on this topic, it was a tremendously time-consuming task. But it was very valuable, and it's a very valuable book. And one of the things we did, the royalties for that project went to the National Council, so we didn't get any personal benefit that way. But certainly when you do that, your name is visible, and you're cited many, many times.

CP: Stepping back a couple of years, 2002 seems like it was an important year. There were a couple of things that happened that year. First of all, the College of Home Economics merged with the College of Health and Human Performance. And you also stepped down as chair of HDFS that year. Can you provide some institutional memory from that time?

AA: That was wonderful. The department didn't belong where it was and Human Development and Family Studies really studies health in terms of mental health, mental well-being, psychological well-being; all these are aspects of health. The National Institute of Health supports research on psychological well-being and mental health, mental well-being. And so this is what we do. And so we really fit. We're not a public health program, but the research we do is totally consistent with what public health programs do. So it was wonderful.

The dean that I had so much trouble with, the new provost announced she was leaving, and she not only left as dean, but she left the university immediately when this person became provost. We went through a – any transition is hard, some faculty find it harder than others. I saw it as an opportunity to do what I wanted to do and to make my greatest contribution in terms of research. And so I really decided I could vet somebody else to administrate. At that point we had people who were fully qualified to do it, absolutely. And I could just stop doing that completely. I loved it. And so I could focus completely on my research. So my productivity after that has been huge compared to what it was while I was in that administrative pool, and I'm really proud of that, what I've done.

[0:56:11]

CP: So the same year as the sourcebook, you also published a book and a paper I want to ask you about. They're both statistics-related, I think, the book being *A Gentle Introduction to Stata*. Can you talk about that?

AA: Yeah, that supports my family. [laughs]

CP: It's been very successful.

AA: Yeah. OSU has terrible salaries. Always have, always will probably. We're not different than other schools in Oregon, but Oregon doesn't provide the level of support some other places do. And that more than made up the difference.

Stata is this statistical software package for doing data analysis, and it was developed after the personal computer became available to people, to researchers. Before that, the software was just horribly complicated because it had to deal with mainframes where hundreds of people shared one computer and you had to share space on the computer and all that. But Stata has a rigid structure to all their commands, and if you know one command in Stata you can learn any other command in terms of the programming part in a matter of minutes. So I just fell in love with this package during the 1990s and decided to write this introductory book. And my niche in terms of statistics is – I'm not a pure statistician, there are 100,000 people probably who are better statisticians in the world than I'll ever be, but I have a very good ability to translate what they do so people who are not mathematicians and not statisticians can understand it.

At the time that Stata was written most of the development, early development, of Stata was by econometricians. And econometricians are pretty good at math and very good at statistics, and they're not very good at explaining it to anybody. So the books that were available and the material that was available on learning Stata was relatively inaccessible to a beginning graduate student in social sciences. And that's my specialty, is translation. So I was able to write a book and use real data, because I think people can relate to real data. We used national surveys that are in the public domain, and used real examples where they could actually be interested in finding result, and the book has been the most popular book by Stata Press every year since 2005. This now is the fifth edition, and I have to think of what to do for the sixth edition, but it's been really very, very successful.

CP: So the demand is still there.

AA: Acknowledging that you're not a great statistician but you're a great translator of what great statisticians have developed is a wonderful skill. It's my niche in statistics. So I'm good at that. I've been set on a couple of doctoral committees in statistics as an outside person and I have a hard time following what the graduate students are doing, but once I follow something, I can explain it to other people.

[0:59:43]

CP: A paper from that same year: "Working with Missing Values."

AA: Yeah, that's my most-cited article. And it sounds kind of strange to somebody who isn't involved in social science research of a quantitative nature, but data is missing on so much, everywhere. When we do a national survey, we have people who refuse to participate. They're very different than the people who agree to participate. When they do participate and we ask questions, they may decide "I don't want to tell you that." So they refuse to answer specific questions. If you don't answer specific questions how do I know? Do I want to throw you out for everything?

And up to this point, up until about that time period, what researchers were doing was called list-wise deletion. So if you had fifty variables you're looking at in your analysis, if you didn't have full data from a person on any one of those variables, you threw that person out. And what would happen is you might have a huge survey with 10,000 people in it and you see an article where they have 900 observations. What happened? You lost 9,001 people out of 10,000. And what does this mean? Why do I have any confidence in what you're doing? I don't.

And the progress in statistics – that's where Stata has been so successful because it adapts to that so quickly – but the progress through what econometricians have done, psychometricians, statisticians, and then computers, the capabilities of computers have just grown tremendously. And what we can do now with missing data is wonderful; not perfect, but wonderful compared to what we could do before.

So in that article I showed how much better that new technology is, and I showed people – because that's what I do – I showed people "here's an example of how you can do it right. You don't have to depend on somebody else doing it, you can do it and you should do it and here's how you do it." And that article has been cited in every field I can think of. It's been in medical journals, in social work journals, education journals, psychology, sociology, political science, economics – it's cited everywhere. It's got, like, 1,000 people have cited it in their own research. And again, nothing I said in that article was revolutionary new statistics that I developed. It's my ability to make it clear to people who are not particularly good at statistics or data analysis. I'm very proud of that.

CP: Looking through your vita, there's heavy involvement with the National Council on Family Relations. I believe you referenced that in respect to the sourcebook. Do you want to talk about that a little bit?

AA: Yeah, this is an interesting organization I've been involved with for a long time, and they basically are a major organization for studying families. I was on the chair of the first committee that picked fellows for the organization. They gave me an award for my teaching that they give every two years; they give out an award to what they say is the outstanding educator. I received an award from them for my research for the outstanding research article in here. I've gone to most of their programs, I've organized programs for them. Been very involved.

CP: What is the Positive Action Program?

AA: This is a program developed by the wife of Brian Flay. Brian Flay is in our Department of Public Health, our School of Public Health. And meeting him, when we merged into this new school and he was hired after that, that was just tremendous for me. He was an endowed chair at the University of Chicago, Illinois, and he's generated over a hundred million dollars in research grants in his career. And he's probably the brightest – I hate to say that because there is a lot of bright people I've known – but he's probably the brightest I can admit that I've ever had the chance to collaborate with. And I feel – I don't want to insult some very bright people – I work with him as a methodologist doing evaluations.

And what fascinated me about him, he pushed me, because he wants to do the best. So I learned more because I had to give him the best method. And so that oftentimes was things that I didn't know when I started. So I learned a huge amount of new methods of data analysis while consulting with him, and so it was just wonderful.

And that's where what we do at HDFS fits with Public Health, and working with him was just an example of that for me personally. And we did a considerable number of articles, and some of them have been successful, and it was the first time I dealt with truly big data. I dealt with what I thought was big data, but one study we worked on. He had every school in Hawaii. That's big. [laughs] He followed kids in Chicago from disadvantaged schools with a large minority population for eight years, panel data, following the same kids over eight years. Working with eight years of data, longitudinal data, thousands of kids, multiple schools. It was really challenging for me and forced me to be my best in terms of a methodologist. So it was really, really wonderful.

[1:06:21]

CP: And what were you trying to evaluate with this data?

AA: This Positive Action Program, for the most part, is a program designed to help kids. It works, I think, for any kid. We were interested in showing that it worked for kids that are disadvantaged. But so much of the life of a kid that's disadvantaged is not positive, and so much of what happens in school is not positive. So basically, you emphasize the positive. So when the kid does something good, you observe it, you comment on it, you say "that's good." If they do something bad, you wait a little bit, but you don't just attack them. And they have curriculum for every week of every year for the whole – from first grade to graduating from high school – they talk about a different type of thing that's positive. So, like, words and positive words. They have just a whole bunch of activities that they generate that emphasize positive youth development.

They try to involve families, they try to get the families involved with the school program. Kids in disadvantaged schools in particular, the mothers oftentimes can't get to the school. They have to work and the school wants to have the function start at a time that the mother would have to work. She can't take off work if you work at a job where you're told "if you don't show up, you don't show up the next day either." So programs that try to get the parents involved, they try to get the school district involved, they try to get the community involved. So all they do is design ways of maximizing the positive experience of kids. And that's good. [laughs] But it's hard to prove that that is effective, and so that's what we worked on.

CP: I think we've alluded to this at various points over the course of the interview, but I'd be interested to know your perspective as a social scientist on what characteristics contribute to a successful family or stable family the most?

AA: Boy, [laughs] there's so many. But I mean, one of my favorite studies, not that I did, somebody else did it but it was a wonderful study; they watched people who were preparing to get married and they simply counted the number of positive comments you made in a twenty minute session and the number of negative comments you made in that same twenty minute session. The more positive comments – you bring in a couple that was engaged and you give them a topic, "talk about how you feel about Bolivia," I don't care what the topic is, right? And they talk about it and he says "that's a good idea, I like your idea." Positive right? "That's stupid." Negative. Some things are harder to code than others, but that predicts overwhelmingly whether they'll be divorced within the first five years. And I know sometimes when you're mad at somebody, and anybody who's married is going to be mad at their spouse, and it's hard to remember. But more positive, more success. More negative, less success. And I think there's an awful lot to that.

So I guess if there's one thing, that would be to go out of your way to say something nice to your spouse, even if you have a hard time coming up with something nice. But always say something nice to your spouse. Do I do that all the time? I'm glad my wife's not here, because you never do what you know you should do. But that's what you should do.

[1:10:40]

CP: Tell me about teaching; we haven't talked about teaching. You've mentioned that you've received awards for your teaching, I'm interested in knowing if it was something that came fairly naturally to you from the get-go and how you evolved over time as a teacher.

AA: When I was in high school I was in debate and I was pretty successful in the debates. And so I could stand up and talk, and I did extemporaneous speeches, so I could stand up and talk about anything; they give you a topic and you have to pretend like you knew something about it. So that background, I think, was very helpful. I could relate to a lot of students because of my own experiences. And I think I can have empathy for problems they have; what's difficult for them to understand and what's not. But I'm good at it, I think. I'm better at working with graduate students than I am with undergraduate students. I'm better in small classrooms than I am in large classrooms. And some people are the opposite. Some people, we have one person in our department who can teach – if she offered a class on any topic in any room, that room would be filled, immediately. That wouldn't happen with me. So in terms of student evaluations, I did pretty good for the undergraduates, I did very good for the graduates. So many times, teaching statistics is an advantage because everybody has such low expectations of how you're going to do. So if you can be a nice guy and make them understand something and make them sort of feel like they are achieving something they couldn't do before, then you must be wonderful, because they assume you'd be terrible. So that helps. [laughs]

CP: I have a question about a building, and I don't know that we've talked about this building at all in this project, and that's the Hallie Ford Center. It's a relatively new building; I know you've had an affiliation with it.

AA: I'm on one research grant on it currently, but I had a very minor role and I'm really not involved in it.

CP: Right, but what purpose does the center serve on the campus? It seems to me a fairly unique space relative to other buildings.

AA: [laughs] I was not involved in the design of it and I don't have an office in there. If I were designing a building for what the purposes are, I think it would look pretty different than that building. There's some parts of the building that are great, but it seems like an awful lot of the space is not designed to be as utilized as it might be. There's a beautiful staircase that's like twenty feet wide which, for a building with very few people in it, I don't know. I never knew what the purpose was. One side of the staircase appears to have chairs on it, boards that go across it. And I just don't understand the building.

But it's beautiful. It's beautiful. Some of the people in there, I'm sure, are very happy. You can do good research anywhere, and they can do good research in there. But I think in the same building they could've had more people, had better research space if they hadn't – when people donate money to build buildings that's wonderful, I don't want to criticize that. But I saw that at USC: they would donate money because they want something named after them. And I'm not saying that would happen here, but at USC the offices were just thrown in. They designed the outside of the building and it looked very nice, beautiful. They had to put offices in it so they just put them in. But one office would have like three windows and the next office would have no windows and then the next office would have one-and-a-half windows because that half window they shared with another office. But that would be the only office they had. And it wasn't like it was laid out for the people who was working there, it was laid out to look like a monument to the person who donated the money.

Now the woman who donated that money, did that and died. And it's going to be put to very good use, and the research we're doing there is very important research. So I'm not saying she wasted her money or anything else. But I have a brother who's an architect, an architectural engineer, he's designed many buildings on the Ohio State University campus, one of which was a 990 million dollar building; almost a billion dollar building. He's a very successful architect. And I'm not an architect but I have some of his genes, and I would not design a building like that. But it's a nice building; beautiful.

[1:16:11]

CP: A question about Corvallis: you've been here for a while, I'm interested in knowing what the town has come to mean for you and also your observations on how it's changed, perhaps, as a social scientist and resident?

AA: I love Corvallis. I loved it more a while back. I'm a bicyclist, I can ride any place in Corvallis in probably 5 minutes. I can get there before you can get there in a car. Not always literally, but I can get there before you can get there in a car. It's just a real nice town. It's a small town.

I worry about all the in-filling making it more city-like. And I call it in-filling when we tear down a house and put up three condos and a lot. It certainly increases the density of it and keeps it small and that's probably good because we can get out of it quickly, but I don't know what's going to happen. I think its losing some of the – on the other hand the downtown part and keeping it downtown is nice. This is wonderful. And so many towns have just, like 9th Street, ridiculous. But our downtown section of Corvallis, it's just a wonderful little place to go and eat meals and shop in little stores and walk around the riverfront. It's just lovely. And most places don't have that anymore. And I don't like the sprawling suburbs, so if the in-filling is an alternative to indefinite sprawling, maybe we pay a little price to have this instead of that endless sprawl.

CP: You referenced bicycles, do I understand there's an interest in electric bicycles?

AA: I'm getting old, yes. I did a number of Cycle Oregons and I used to ride 3 or 4 thousand miles a year. I still try to do that; I can't keep up with the younger people. And bicycling is a social event for me, so I don't go out by myself very often just to do a ride. I like to ride with other people and talk about things. I still have to pedal, it doesn't do anything about pedaling, but when I come to a hill, I can just click that on and I can get up that hill and I can keep up with people. And with this electric assist, I think I'll be able to continue indefinitely, until I die, riding a bicycle.

In some European towns, electric bikes are taking over. I think Denmark, half of the bikes sold in Denmark last year were electric assist. People can do it with varying degrees of physical fitness. You still get as much exercise as you want because you have five levels of assistance. You can pick none. [laughs] And I think it's great. I think there's going to be a great future for electric assist bicycles.

Another thing we did, my wife and I just bought a RV. I spent much of my life feeling sorry for people who didn't camp in little tiny tents, sleeping on the cold ground. And now at my age of seventy-two, sleeping in a bed in my RV seems like a real attractive option. But I did get one with a diesel engine; it gets like fifteen to twenty miles per gallon, which is not as gross as some of them that get six. But I'm still adjusting to the image of a RV'er.

[1:20:09]

CP: When did you retire?

AA: I don't know. I think 70 probably; a couple of years ago. I kind of gradually retired. Like I said, I'm still on one grant and I have my graduate student coming in later this month. So I'm still engaged. I think once you bite into it, you have it for life.

CP: A couple of concluding questions for you. The first is if you could give your perspective on changes that you've observed in HDFFS and now what is the College of Public Health and Human Performance. There's been quite a bit of change over the course of your career here.

AA: Yeah, it's very good. HDFFS has done very well for the graduate program. When I got here, the graduate program was very weak and now it's very strong. We're placing students at major universities. We have two at Purdue now for example, which is a good university. One that just returned to OSU was, for the past several years, at Yale as a research faculty member. So a number of students have done – one at University of Pittsburg. Good schools, doing well, doing very active research. And so it's prospered.

The affiliation with Public Health has helped in many ways. Where it hurts is the identity can get lost in recruiting graduate students, because many of the graduate students, HDFFS is all over the place in campuses, and many of their graduate students are not looking at Public Health to find us. But once they find us and find out what we do, they like us.

The faculty we've hired recently since the merger have been tremendous. The people that have replaced me are proof to me that I'm replaceable. Really good hires. So I really see a great future in that.

The other side of that is the undergraduate program, which I feel horrible about what we've done in terms of – I think when I was chair we had 1,000 up to 1,200 students. And we don't have enough faculty committed to undergraduate education to do that. So, I mean, the last course I taught was an undergraduate research methods course and I had 150 students. A research methods course should have twenty or fewer. This was an upper division course, not a freshman course. And an upper division course with 150 students, you can't – I mentioned this at the beginning, when I went to Eastern Washington we had little tiny classes where you had ten people in a classroom and you're doing research projects. The faculty member knows what research project you're doing and he can help you or she can help you, work with you on it. But when you have 150, I don't think you can do that. We have some gifted teachers, but we need – at some places, HDFS departments have twice as many faculty and half as many students.

So Oregon State really underfunds the undergraduate component of our curriculum. And as a result we have – students like it, but what are they getting? I mean, I don't know. They're happy. The faculty do good on student evaluations. Maybe they wouldn't be as happy if they had 12 people in their class and had to work twice as hard, but they would learn more, I think. So I feel very good about our graduate program, and I feel we really have to invest more to do justice to the undergraduate students.

CP: And that leads into the final question, is if you could give us your sense of OSU as it looks towards its 150th birthday.

AA: It's come a long way since I've got here. The leadership we have with our current president is very positive. I remember, I won't name names, but one of our former presidents during my time here discouraged people who had frequent flier miles from using them to upgrade because he didn't want to see any faculty members in first class. Even though it didn't cost anything, right? Because they would think the university was squandering money. I don't know what the current policy is on that. But I think we want the best, we want to be good, we want to be recognized as a research university. First class.

The undergraduates at OSU are good. We don't have as steep of admission standards as we might have, but then I think – when I went to college I wasn't a great high school student, and I think sometimes people who aren't great high school students become great engineers or sociologists or whatever. So I think that's ok. So I think overall I'm very positive about what's happening at Oregon State.

I do not think we should grow much. I think we're about as big as we need to be. There's a large amount of utility you gain as you grow that's considerable, but I think it currently tops out at around 25,000. So there's not much that we don't have enough students here to have. And when I look at Arizona State at 50,000, students I don't see what they're getting. Ohio State has 50,000 students, I don't know what they're getting beyond what we could get them with 25,000. I think they get lost in these huge factories.

CP: Well Alan, I want to thank you for this; this has been very enlightening and a nice contribution to our project. And I wish you the best as you continue to glide into retirement. [laughs]

AA: Yeah, alright.

CP: Thanks.

[1:26:49]