



Paul Risser Oral History Interviews, March 25, 2014

Title

“Continuing to Build at OSU and Reflections From Afar”

Date

March 25, 2014

Location

One Partners Place, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

Summary

In interview 2, Risser share his memories of changes in the OSU Colleges of Business and Engineering, the construction of the Kelley Engineering Center, upgrades in the campus technical infrastructure, and developing the environmental sciences at OSU. He likewise provides his perspective on the creation of an OSU branch campus in Bend, Oregon, the expansion of the Valley Library, the formation of the University Honors College, and the move to OSU of the Linus Pauling Institute. Other topics discussed include visits to OSU by major speakers including Hillary Clinton and Desmond Tutu; the reaction on campus to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001; working with the OSU Alumni Association; Risser's own scientific research; OSU's commencement traditions; leaving OSU for Oklahoma; thoughts on the current direction of OSU and advice to OSU students.

Interviewee

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Transcript

Janice Dilg: So today is March 25th, 2014. This is Janice Dilg, with the Oregon State University Oral History Project. I'm back with Paul Risser today, for our second session. And yesterday we were talking about the renovation of Weatherford Hall, and how that was being used. But I think there were also additional innovations that went on in the business college as a whole, and perhaps we could start there today?

Paul Risser: Yes. Well the business college, I think, is clearly an important part of any university, and it's a particularly important part of a Land Grant university. And so we did pay a fair amount of attention to the business college. And again, we had some donors who were supportive, and have been supportive, actually, since I've been at Oregon State. And so the business college really has grown, I think, not only in terms of its stature, but its intellectual outlook. And our emphasis, really, was to make sure that our business programs connected with the community in a realistic kind of way.

And so, our courses tend to be maybe more practical than in some places, that they really do focus on the business of business, and the faculty—really, we went through an accreditation process while I was there, and the faculty, I think, really—not accepted—I think they were enthusiastic for a kind of a reorientation, in a way, of a business college which was very perceptive to the needs of the business community, and tried to be responsive to it.

And interestingly, we don't always think about engineering and business together, although we mentioned it in Weatherford Hall, and putting that together. And there are a number of programs at Oregon State which are quite innovative, and they bring together business and engineering. I say "we." I guess that's a throwback to many years ago, and probably reflects my pride and pleasure at Oregon State. But we, that is, Oregon State, has a program that brings together both business and engineering to work with local companies, and to do internships. And it's not just a common internship program. Companies that support the interns essentially get kind of first shot at the graduates, because they have worked for the companies. So the student knows the company, the company knows the student. And many of those students then take a job, either a business job or engineering job, after those internships.

And so I think the power of what we did in business really was making a very firm connection between the business needs of the business community at that time, which continued to change, of course, and the curriculum, and the fact that the faculty spent great effort to make sure that what students learned in the classroom was entirely germane to what they needed once they were in the workforce. And I think that connection between workforce needs, and the curriculum in the business college, was really, in some ways, kind of again, a little bit ahead of the game, in terms of thinking about how, like, a structured curriculum.

Now, what I just said has become much more common across the country, but remember, that was ten or fifteen years ago, and so I think the faculty really liked, and were enthusiastic about that kind of forward-looking prospect.

JD: Mm-hm. And Business 1 was the title of one area of the business college that I came across during my research. Is that part of what you're talking about, or is that—?

PR: Yes, it is part of that. So, like in so many cases, giving a program a name, an identity, is important. So yes, the Business 1 is part of that.

JD: Mm-hm. And you talked about the curriculum, and my guess is that there have been some pretty significant changes in what a business curriculum would be, as companies have become much more global, is much more common?

PR: Yes, that's absolutely right. And I think we can take some pride in this, because I think curricula in business colleges have become much more, as you say, global, just because markets are global. Financial systems are global; investments are global. And so the globalization, if you will, of business programs has certainly grown since then, until now. The other, I would say, sort of large change is the focus on entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurial kinds of—I guess I'd say business structures, that is, creating new businesses, and so that many universities now have innovation programs [0:05:00], or entrepreneurial programs, or they have incubators, or what they call aggregators, in which small companies get started.

And in fact, here at the University of Oklahoma, we're in a building which actually has, essentially, a business incubator innovation center in it, and so—and it's also connected with the business college. So business colleges now have recognized that it isn't always just growing an existing business. It is, in fact, creating a new business. And so the creation of new businesses, the sort of transformation of intellectual property from research into a business venture, commercialization, is now a huge part of business colleges.

JD: Mm-hm. So you've mentioned engineering a couple of times, and sort of the link between business and engineering, but I know that particular college was another place where there were some significant changes that happened during your tenure at OSU.

PR: Yes. Yes, that's true. The engineering college—I have a couple, I guess, stories about engineering, which maybe will reflect what happened there. I think engineering was always a very strong program at Oregon State. It was kind of a statewide program, so it reflected, in some ways, the Land Grant mission, but it also had strong links in the Portland high-tech community, for example. And in fact, we talked previously about the Board of Advisers, and a couple of members of the Board of Advisers were from the high-tech community in the Portland-Beaverton area. So it always had that connection as well, and so we actually hired a new dean, the dean of engineering, who actually was from the high-tech community. And he brought sort of a fresh view, kind of an external view.

And I think, in the same way that the business college responded to a national review, engineering also responded to a dean who'd been in the business community, and in the technical area, and was an engineer. So I guess I'd make two sort of interesting points, one of which is that the College of Engineering became more outward-focused in its activities and programs. I'd mentioned this internship program, which was really quite unique. We also created a kind of a technology center to connect with the business community, which really, in some ways, was kind of a forerunner of entrepreneurial programs now, but a matter of making a sort of engineering technology available to the business community, in accessible kind of ways. And so I think that kind of transition story is one reflection of the changes that occurred in engineering, and it was led by a dean who, I thought, was very, very good.

The other story was a failure. We didn't have many failures, but we actually had a failure, and in some ways it was a predictable failure, and I knew the chance of success was small, but somehow it seemed like the changes of really pulling it off might be worth it. And so as I said, when I looked at the engineering program, it looked quite strong. When I looked at the engineering program at Portland State University, their program also had some strengths, but they weren't in the same strengths as Oregon State's engineering program. And so it dawned on me, you know, if we could somehow connect engineering in a metropolitan area, like Portland, with the statewide strengths of Oregon State, we would really have a very unique engineering program. And so there must be a way we can combine our engineering colleges. So I said, "Stop right there, and leave my naïveté at that point."

So anyway, we had lots of discussions with the idea of this, and in fact, the dean of engineering at Portland State was actually quite enthusiastic about it. And I would say that at least a significant portion of the faculty at Portland State were enthusiastic. And maybe "enthusiastic" is an overstatement—at least willing to pursue. And I would say that a number of the faculty at Oregon State were also willing to pursue. But in the end, I think there was too much paranoia on the part of the Portland State President to let this happen, and the state board, frankly, didn't have the energy for something which would be sort of groundbreaking like this, and realizing there would be lots of political repercussions. And so in the end, we didn't do that, which I've always regretted, because I thought the opportunity was there to do something unique.

And now, if you look across the country, there are lots of programs that combine institutions and programs, and institutions, and so once again, we were probably a decade or two ahead. And yet, when I look back on my experience at Oregon State, and there are not many opportunities that we missed—but to me, that still was an opportunity that we missed. And some of it now is in place [0:09:59], in terms of inter-institutional institutes and things like that, and so I suppose in some ways, we may have been a precursor to the programs that are now sort of collaborative and cooperative, in the higher education system in Oregon. But I saw it as a time that we could have leaped ahead, and that would have been fun to do.

JD: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

PR: In any event, the engineering program was quite success. As you know, we have a new building—had at least, from the time I was there, a new building, which is a remarkable building—again, supported by a very special donor, who actually made his gift, and told me that if I ever shared who it was, he'd take the gift back. He wanted to be anonymous. It didn't work out that way, and everybody appreciated it, but it sort of reflects the kind of person he was. He wanted to give for the purpose of the gift, not for his own purpose. I think that's—again, some donors want lots of attention, and others don't. And so the idea that you can write a recipe for giving is simply wrong, because everyone is individualistic.

JD: Mm-hm. You talked a little yesterday about the importance of space, for a variety of needs on a university campus. Talk a little bit more about what the Kelley Engineering Center provides for students there.

PR: Yes, well, in some ways it embodies the kind of learning experience that I've talked about, as sort of a student-centered application learning experience. So the building, as you know, is architecturally designed to sort of bring different disciplines together; has this sort of open atrium kind of perspective that encourages collaboration. And so I think space is important. And you're right; I do focus on space these days. I think it's really important, and it was important then, too.

I think it could have been sort of a standard building of laboratories, and offices, and classrooms, but it's more than that. It's really a building that brings both people and disciplines within engineering, both out and together, and to me—you know, that's home; that's a professional home for faculty, students and staff, and so what the building embodies, in terms of its architecture and its presence, and its atmosphere, not only reflects what the college does, but also enhances what the college does. And so to me, space really is important. We tried to put the cultural centers in. Space is important for the cultural centers. And it's important for Weatherford Hall to bring together disciplines, as well. And so I think—it sounds like I'm focusing on buildings, rather than programs, but I think the two are intertwined, maybe more than we ever realized, so.

JD: Mm-hm, mm-hm. And when you were talking about the technology center, and its role in doing that outward approach to putting real-life experiences, and businesses, and engineering together with students, can you elaborate a little on kind of how that process works, and maybe how that developed under your tenure?

PR: Yes, and so again, I never want to take too much credit for these things. I think it was rather a matter of sort of prompting thoughts, and faculty and students sort of took over and did what needed to be done. And I realize as I'm talking here, it sounds like we thought of everything first, [laughs] and I don't mean to imply that, but we did actually have some thoughts that are now sort of coming into fruition. And so I appreciate the chance to talk about it, because I hadn't actually thought about it in this kind of way. And this technology center is an example of this.

So there is, in today's world, what's sometimes called a "lean launch" method of starting a new business. And so the traditional way is: you have this idea, you have this new device, you have the new service, so you write a business plan, you take it out, you take it to an investor. The investor look at the business plans, says, "Okay, I'll invest in it," and you go out and try and sell your product, or your service, or your gadget. The "lean launch" is different. It's the reverse of that, in a way. It says, "Okay, get your device—not that it's finished yet, but at least you can convey what it is—or your service, and then go talk to lots of customers before you actually finish it." And so the term "lean launch" means you don't finish it before you go out and launch it. It's really quite lean when you try and launch it. And then, as you talk to customers, then you refine that product so it really works much better, and furthermore, you know you have a market; you're not guessing you have a market. [0:14:57]

Well, in some ways, the technology center we did in engineering many years ago was kind of that way. The idea was not for us to write a paper, or create something in engineering, and then try and go insert it into a business, but rather to be able to listen to businesses, to know what they really needed and wanted—what problem we were trying to solve for them, or what pain we wanted to go away for them. And so in some ways, it was kind of the precursor to the "lean launch," which is so popular now, in the sense that it really focused on not just outreach of engineering, but engineering reaching out and listening to the consumer community. And I think that model was just right. And so, as I say, I'm not taking credit for it, I'm just saying the openness with which we tried to listen to our constituents and customers, I think, served us well in that, and other areas, as well.

JD: Mm-hm. And as you're talking, I'm thinking about just the significant changes in technology in the last 20 years, and how you, or your team, or the colleges, were thinking about where technology might be going, in putting together these plans and developing their curricula. Who's thinking about that on a college campus?

PR: Yes, you know, that's a very good question, because I would say—I'll just use 15 years, in the time period I was there, was the seven years before 10 years, so in that range. Compared to where we are today, in terms of thinking about and using technology in the learning environment, what we were doing 15 years ago was actually pretty primitive. But I think even then, we began to understand that technology was going to—was going to continue to grow at a galloping pace, and that it was not only that students needed to understand that evolving technology in their own areas or disciplines, but that that technology was going to play a big role in the educational environment itself. And it's the latter which has now happened.

And so now there are what are called "active learning" classrooms, which are really based on technology and facilitational learning, learning enhanced technology, and these systems have gotten very, very good, in terms of being responsive, understanding learning processes. They are student-centered, and they actually have the students engage in the process. And so the best classes today don't have faculty lecturing in front. They have students actively engaged in processes, and they use videos and all kinds of techniques for getting the content, so the content comes up electronically or technologically now. This is kind of exaggeration, but in a simple sense, content is so plentiful these days, you can get that in lots of different resources and lots of different places, and you can get the content from the best faculty in the country.

But the learning is when you actually apply it, and in fact that's the power of the learning environment today, and those are best done, always, enhanced by technology—connecting to the Internet, and all kinds of learning modules, and so forth. So I think to answer your question, we understood that at some level when I was at Oregon State. We were beginning to understand it. It's moved on much farther now since then, and Oregon State has continued to stay in the forefront of that. But I think, again, we sort of tilled the field in a way, that the university, Oregon State, was really quite receptive to those learning technologies. And so I think the success Oregon State has today probably had its roots, if I can continue my agricultural metaphor here, in some of the discussions and some of the things we tried to do 15 years ago.

JD: Mm-hm, mm-hm. Are there any other thoughts you have about engineering before I launch in another direction?

PR: I guess I would say one more thing, kind of in a summary way, that there are lots of strong units at Oregon State, and I think we watched engineering really move forward, and it's important in a university to have units that do move forward, and the whole campus can watch and take some pride in that. And I think, again, we had good dean leadership there. The connections with the technology community, the business community, were strong and were overt, so people could see them. [0:20:01] And so I think engineering—and to some degree, business as a partner—played a role in sort of moving the university forward.

And I say that in the context of realizing that Oregon State has extraordinary environmental science. The Forestry Department is one of the best in the country, and the environmental sciences were always ranked high, and so Oregon State was always known for agriculture and environmental science. And now to have the sort of business and technology/engineering area also grow—you know, it gives people a sort of sense of comfort, to know that there's a broad range of success at their institution. And I think we tried to cultivate that, as well. So I think business and engineering played that role, which one might not have thought about strategically, but I think strategically—well, it was strategic, and I think it was important that we have a sort of second strong fulcrum point at the university.

JD: Mm-hm. Well, you completely anticipated the next area I was going to move to, which was ecology and environmental sciences—clearly, subjects near and dear to your own interests and research, and practice. And it seemed like there was kind of a renewed emphasis on those areas during your tenure.

PR: Well, there may have been. It is my own technical area, and even though I haven't actually done bench or field work for many years, I've certainly stayed involved in the field in lots of ways, and I think it's important. This was kind of a tangent, I guess, but I think it's important, frankly, for presidents to have credibility in their own field. Now, there are good presidents who are just good presidents because they're good managers and leaders, who don't have credibility in their field, so I'm not saying it's a prerequisite, but I think at least for most of us. You know, if I'm trying to move somebody along, or move a department along, or a program along, if I've never done it myself, and I've never played

that role, there's a certain hollowness to it. But, you know, if I've taught the classes, and done the research, and done the publications, and done the community activities, then there's a credibility level which I think is really important.

You know, I think the growth of the environmental science—again, part of this is being smart, and anticipating, seeing where things are going, and sort of getting there first, and part of it is taking advantage when things come along. And in some ways, in the environmental area, it was a matter of taking advantage, and being alert enough to take advantage of things that came along. It was a time when we began to first do kind of big science—that is, programs that brought together lots of different scientists to focus either on a specific problem, or on a specific area, or a specific topic.

And so there's a program which is funded by the National Science Foundation called the Long-Term Ecological Research Program, the LTER program, and Oregon State has been a leader in that, literally, from the beginning. And that program went through some changes, and became more regionally-oriented. So what do I mean by that? I mean that the initial parts of that program focused on a particular, in that case, experimental forest, but it changed to realize that it needed to have an influence on the whole region, and connect more constituencies. Well, think about what I just said. That conforms exactly with the kind of things that Oregon State can do really well, because of its Land Grant mission, and so we took advantage of that. That is, there's a big national program, which took a more regional approach, and we were right there, being a leader in that part of it.

Another example is that at that time—and it goes back to our technology discussion of earlier, and that is, environmental science began to recognize that large data sets, taken from sensors either over large areas, and/or small time steps that measure processes very rapidly—these large data sets were incredibly important in trying to answer questions. And so before that, the environmental sciences tended to work on individual sites, or individual researchers that work on the individual problems. But this whole idea of what we now call "big data" really is the idea of creating programs where lots of scientists work together and create lots of data, and then we manage the data as an integrated data set that lots of scientists, or applications, can come from that integrated database.

And so, again, there was a program in oceanography which looked up and down the coast, and again, we could see that that was a real opportunity to go into a next phase in environmental science [0:25:03], and became quite involved with that. The oceanography program has always been very strong, both at sea and in coastal areas, and so, again, large data sets came from that as well. So I think those two opportunities out there—the idea of working together in large teams, and the idea of creating large databases, which we now call "big data," were opportunities, and we did see those. We had people who were adept, and who were agile, and who could respond to those.

And so again, I don't think it was a case of my leading anything. It was a case of our, together, figuring out those opportunities and taking advantage of them. But it did elevate our science, and today Oregon State is simply one of the best environmental science institutions in the country.

JD: And there was also a graduate degree program added.

PR: There may be, but frankly, I don't remember that.

JD: Oh, okay. Sure.

PR: I'm sure that's probably right.

JD: Sure. So we've been focusing on the Corvallis campus and all its many aspects, but at some point the idea came to you and/or a team of people about serving the population in another part of the state, particularly central Oregon. Talk through the process of how OSU ended up developing a campus in Bend.

PR: Oh, yes, that was a really interesting process. And again, it reflects a couple of things that I've said repetitively here. As I describe it to you, you'll see that it was a team effort, and frankly, everything we did at Oregon State was a team effort. But it was also sort of seeing the opportunities, possibilities, and preparing for them. And in some ways, the whole process of establishing a campus in Bend was—I guess one would say a huge victory for Oregon State. On the other hand, I was never quite sure it was done exactly the right way. I mean, yes, there are competing institutions, and we'll always have competing institutions. On the other hand, we're all trying to help the state of Oregon. And so to the degree that that process—it encouraged sort of a state-level view was, in my opinion, a bit unfortunate.

Having said that, frankly, I thought we did a terrific job. So what was the situation? The situation was, we could see that central Oregon was growing rapidly. It's a very attractive part of the state. Well, much of Oregon is attractive, but certainly central Oregon is attractive. It had a community, a business community, including the press, who really wanted more higher education in central Oregon, and could see it, and they were articulate about what they needed, and why—and why it was important. So that's sort of point one.

And so, again, with our statewide Land Grant mission, we were sort of all over the state, and so we had, I think, a pretty good perception of that, and we could also see that something was going to happen in Bend, and so we needed to position ourselves.

And so we actually leased a building, which was a bank building, coming into Bend, and it became the OSU facility in Bend. And this was long before anybody thought about competition of our putting up a division and college in central Oregon. But we decided if there was something going to happen there, having a foothold there, and a place, and the visibility in the program was really important. And so we did that. We leased a building and put staff over there, and it wasn't a big staff, but [unclear] staff with programs over there in central Oregon. We also worked fairly closely with the community college, which was a very good community college, and we sort of prided ourselves at Oregon State at being able to work with the community colleges around the state.

And then the state board decided, "Well, yes, sure enough, we need some sort of campus in Bend." And they decided that they would do a competition and allow institutions to write proposals and to compete. And let's say, I'm not sure that was the right way to go about it, but anyway, that's what happened. And of course, by this time, we'd been fairly clever. We had good relationships with the press and the business community in the central Oregon area. We'd actually put members of that state on some of our advisory committees. We now had a facility in Bend. We constantly touted our Land Grant mission as being statewide. [0:30:00] And so we had done all of the positioning, I think, actions in the right kind of way, and then the state board put out this request for a proposals.

And in some ways, that was kind of interesting, and so I would say our competitor did a good proposal, hired a proposal writer, did all the right things, normal things, but we decided to do it a little differently. And I remember there was a big conference room in the administration building, and so we—gosh, we probably had 20 people or more around the table one morning, and said, "Okay, we're going to write a proposal for this"—we always referred to it as the Bend campus, although it really was central Oregon—"for the Bend campus. How should we do it? We can hire a consultant to write it for us. We can assign one or two of us to do it, or we can do it as a group."

Well, people were sort of intrigued by the idea of doing it as a group, and so that's how we wrote our proposal. We had 20 people writing the proposal. And I have been involved in lots of proposals, both before and after, and I have to say that proposal is one of the best proposals I've ever seen. It brought together student affairs; it brought together sort of the kind of learning technologies we've talked about. It anticipated some of the business, I would say, the business of distance education, and thinking about it, it built on our Land Grant, external view of the world. It was quite responsive. We actually paid some real attention to what the community really needed, in terms of courses, so we knew what the community thought it needed, and combined it with what we thought we could bring.

And it wasn't just a book. You know, it had pages at different sizes and colors, and so forth. It was quite a spectacular proposal, and it was actually put together by a team, which is more difficult, because you have to reconcile lots of points of view, and you have to actually do the mechanics of putting it together, and I think it required a five-year budget, or something. Even budgeting for that complex a deal over a five-year period is not a simple task.

Anyway, we put the proposal together, which I thought was really quite spectacular, and people took great pride in it on the Oregon State campus, and I wouldn't be telling the story so happily if it came out differently, but Oregon State was selected to put the campus in Central Oregon. The board, of course, was under enormous pressure, and so there were some caveats about including the University of Oregon in some of those programs, but it was clear that that campus leadership was at Oregon State, and it now is in what's in central Oregon.

So I think there are a couple of lessons there, that again, are consistent, one of which is we could see this coming, and we did the preparation steps in the right kind of way. And then secondly, I think the team effort—you know, it shows when you can say, "This proposal has 20 authors on it, and it reflects the breadth of the college, and Oregon State's committed

to make Central Oregon a success." That's different from, "Here's a proposal." So I think it reflected that anticipation of opportunities and the team effort that we used pretty effectively.

And so sometimes when I think about what I want to do in my next life, it's go lead the campus at Bend, Oregon. Again, I just think there are so many opportunities there. It's growing, and I think it'll continue to grow. So it's an interesting story; some lessons to be learned, I think.

JD: And how did having another separate campus change your job as president?

PR: Well, that's a good question, and maybe not as much as one would think. So why do I say that? I say that because I tried to be out around the state a lot, just because I thought that was important, and so I did spend lots of time out around the state, which frankly, made my schedule a little challenging, but I thought it was the right thing to do. And so by the time we put a campus there, I had been there many, many times. And then I think, again, I don't think it changed, to answer your question straightforwardly. I don't think it changed a lot, yes, and I wouldn't say, you know, this was all completely smooth.

There were some people on the Corvallis campus who wondered if, since we didn't have enough resources on the Corvallis campus, why we needed to have another campus—perfectly reasonable question. And the idea of sort of looking 10 years, 15 years down the road to say that this is a whole 'nother opportunity for us, and furthermore, we know politics well enough to know that the central Oregon legislators will look after their part of the state [0:35:00], and so it really won't be sort of taking resources from Corvallis and putting it there; it'd be growing another set. But that's the abstract, and that's not happened yet, and so it took some time to sort of talk through that.

Again, I thought the sort of team effort, again, you know—if we'd had one person write it, or if I had written the proposal and sent it off, we wouldn't have had the campus-wide support that we did from the team effort. So I think the sort of lessons here are the team effort worked for lots of reasons, including the continuing relationship between the campuses. And I wouldn't want to say that there weren't, you know, some sort of hiccups along the way, because certainly there were. I had mentioned rather fondly Roy Arnold, in our previous part of the conversation. Well, Roy was a wonderful—I mean, he drove back and forth to make some of these things happen! And here's Roy—driving over the mountains in the wintertime can be a real challenge, as all of us know, and bless his heart, Roy did all those things. And so I think there were—I mean, and Roy was sort of a role model for all of us, and so the fact that Roy would work hard at this, the fact that we had a team effort to do this, the fact that we had support in Oregon for what we were doing—and we did; we had really good support from that community. All those things sort of mitigated what otherwise might have been challenges.

So, yes, it was another set of challenges. Yes, it wasn't always entirely smooth. But people worked at it as a team. They could see the opportunity. And I think they were sort of, given our other successes, willing to give it a try. So it was an interesting process. And I think it reflected, frankly, incredibly well on Oregon State. I just think we did things in a classy kind of way.

JD: Mm-hm. And of course, the beginning and ending of a university presidency is never just sort of clean-cut, and beginning and end. Just like you started that project and it was launched, but still in its early years when—

PR: Absolutely.

JD: —when you came to Oklahoma. You, then, of course, on the other end, inherited some projects that were in process, and I wanted to just touch briefly on those. One of them was the Valley Library.

PR: Right. The library project—I mean, you're absolutely right, and actually, I think presidents are pretty careful about this, that they don't take credit for things that started before they got there, and they don't take credit for things that continued successfully after they left. And so I hope I'm clear about that, because I want to be absolutely clear about that. And the library project, and its funding and design, was well along when I got there, and so I didn't want it to be a case where I sort of waltz in and took credit for this wonderful thing that was happening, and I think we did it just right. I think the people who were generous, again, donors who made that happen, and lots of people worked at it.

The library staff went through—I mean, you had to sort of be there to realize what the library looked like during all this renovation. You sort of went to the library through a construction zone, and it was noisy, dusty, dirty. It was hard to even

see what was coming out at the other end of the project. And so people had to be really patient and tolerant about this process, and there were a whole host of small things. This whole idea of the pavers in the front of the library, and people had their names on those—again, libraries, gosh, for the last 20 years, libraries have been kind of in upheaval, retaining their wonderful, traditional, book-bound history, versus, "No, we don't need libraries anymore; we just need our Internet."

And so libraries have been in this sort of transition for the last two decades, and the library there was, as well. But I think the planning had been done well. I think the building, obviously, is a beautiful building in the center of campus, and reflects so well on the university. But it was a case—I remember sitting, actually, on the dedication day of this, and thinking, you know, "In some ways, I shouldn't even be sitting here," because all the planning and groundwork happened before I got there, and I just happened to show up at a time that we completed the project.

And so I guess I'd like to say one more time: I want to celebrate that success. It was a huge, great success; continues to be important to Oregon State, but the ideas, the groundwork, the fund-raising, the planning—all that happened before I got there, and my only role, frankly, was to make sure that when we finished the project, that it was finished in a way that reflected the dreams of those who started it, and reflected the generosity of those who made it happen. [0:40:02] That was my role, and that was my focus. And I hope that's where I got, in terms of where we were, because we've all enjoyed the fruits of all those labors.

JD: Mm-hm. And another one was the honors college.

PR: Yes, the honors college. I've always thought honors colleges are important. And I suppose, in a way—I went to a small liberal arts college, which, academically was a very good college, and I think that sort of richness of very good students, who learn from each other, and have a sort of sense of identity, of really aspiring to do very well—that's an important ingredient of all kinds of universities, whether it's a huge university or a small liberal arts college. And so the honors college was important to me at Oregon State, and it was a good college, but it also seemed to me it could be expanded and grown, grown not only in terms of its programs, and number of students that it accommodate, but frankly, in its ambition and aspirations—and really, to be kind of an intellectual leadership entity on campus.

And so we did look at the honors college, and made some changes in it, and expanded it, and put some more resources in it. And it grew, as you know, in terms of the number of students who could participate in the honors college. And I think in some ways, it's a very explicit example of investing in a program on a university. On the other hand, it's also a kind of a symbol or a signal, which is: we want to give the best students the best intellectual challenge we can give them, and furthermore, we're willing to put resources into that experience for them—and that says, thirdly: and therefore, Oregon State cares about really high-quality students and their performance. And so I think it's that sort of mental model that led us to spend time and attention, resources, in the honors college, and the honors college responded really very, very positive to that. And frankly, I don't know what's happened in the intervening 10 years, but I think it was set on exactly the right trajectory, so I would be astounded if it wasn't successful today.

JD: Mm-hm. And the third project I wanted to get your comments on was the Linus Pauling Institute.

PR: Oh, yes, the Linus Pauling Institute. I thought that was great fun! My own area's biology, which is in some ways pretty close to chemistry, and so the Linus Pauling was sort of interesting to me in a kind of an intellectual-research sense. But Linus Pauling as an individual was pretty interesting as a person. He had all these ideas, some of which were chemistry ideas, and some of which were political ideas and social ideas. And then he had some sort of—what shall we say? Idiosyncratic ways about going through life. And then we had all this collection of his there, in the library.

And so I had sort of two reactions to it. One, I thought it was great fun, and so we used the Linus Pauling for various kinds of things, you know, frankly, in connection with alumni. Alumni like that kind of a story, so it was a good connection with our alumni. It was also a good connection with the philanthropic community, who liked to see the sort of famousness of their institution. But it also, I think, was kind of inspiring to us, and this a less of a kind of overt, conspicuous reaction, but it was a kind of feeling—well, you know, if Linus Pauling could do this, what else can we do? And so as you may know, we created the Linus Pauling Institute, which has been very successful, had very good leaders, which is not the same chemistry that Linus Pauling did, but it was the idea of using chemistry, particularly in health-related kinds of issues, and understanding health-related kind of issues.

And so I think the Linus Pauling had sort of two roles in my mind, and this is probably too regimented, but one was this sort of fun part of his being part of Oregon State, and connecting with past students, and students who are there now, and the stories we could tell, and about his materials which were there, and—I mean, it's almost kind of a sacredness in the library to the Linus Pauling collection. [0:44:58] But then there was also sort of the implication of, okay, if Linus Pauling can do this, we can do some neat things, too. Well, it became kind of a sub rosa, subterranean impetus to try some new things, of which, I suppose the Linus Pauling Institute, because we call it the Linus Pauling Institute, is the most conspicuous.

But it really was a spur to sort of move us along in some ways, and I think people see the first one; they don't see the second one. They don't have to see the second one. But I think the Linus Pauling Institute is an example. It sort of drove us to think at a little higher level that we might not have been able to, had we not had a Linus Pauling in that history [unclear]. So that's probably a more complicated answer than you expected, but I think it played a role in where we were going.

JD: Great. A campus has a lot of self-generated interest, and programs, and perhaps well-known people in a particular field, but of course you're part of a larger community, and often there are interesting, distinguished visitors to a campus that bring a different type of learning experience. And I thought we might talk about two distinguished visitors that came to OSU, the first being former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. She wasn't Secretary of State when she came to your campus, but—

PR: Right. No, she did come. That was great fun. You know, I have kind of—I guess my view's too analytical, in the sense that I tend to look at things analytically, and say, "Okay, so Hillary Clinton's coming. How can we position this to position Oregon State better? How can we use this internally for us, to think differently and better?" And that doesn't apply just to her. It's just whenever we had outside people who came—I know that's too analytical, but that's sort of the way I thought about it. And it turned out Hillary was a wonderful guest. She was gracious, she was accommodating, she was friendly.

I didn't actually spend a lot of time with her—I spent a little bit of time. Actually, Les, my wife, spent more time with Hillary, and that was, I thought, entirely appropriate. There were a whole group of women leaders and organizations who spent time with Hillary, and I hope that we always treat women the same, but I never know if we really do, and that was a case, really, to give the women on campus a chance to interact with Hillary, which they did. And so, to me, the fact that Hillary would come to Oregon State was important, because it sort of said that's important about Oregon State. I guess the fact that the current president's wife, his brother is a basketball coach at Oregon State, is maybe the same thing; I don't know, but anyway.

So Hillary came, and I think we—you can't imagine the security that comes along with that. Unfortunately, it's necessary, and we all understood it, and I think we were very accommodating, and she was very accommodating, but the logistics are really quite incredible. I thought she did a wonderful job. She conveyed herself well. I thought the campus conveyed itself well, in the sense it was interested and mature about this, and took advantage of it.

And I think it was a nice signal for us to send as a campus, and so we welcomed these kind of visitors, and Hillary was, just because of where she was in the sort of political scheme of things, was such a visible and a really wonderful visitor. So I don't think it was an earth-shaking event, but it was just the sort of continuing momentum of, "Okay, Oregon State is on this trajectory; it's going up and up, and Hillary Clinton will come to our campus." And all these things sort of go together, to sort of reinforce the momentum and trajectory of the college.

JD: Mm-hm. And probably another very high-profile visitor was Desmond Tutu.

PR: Yes, you know, [laughs] I thoroughly enjoyed his visit. You hear about these people who seem larger than life, and certainly Desmond Tutu is one of those who is larger than life. And I honestly had some experience in South Africa, which was kind of interesting. I was asked to go be a consultant, to what was analogous to their NSF program, about a research program and facility, and the question of whether to close it or leave it open or not, and so it was a funny agency. [0:49:57] South Africa said, "Well, why don't you bring an outside consultant in, and we'll see what that consultant has to say?" And so the program asked me to come be that consultant. But that was still when apartheid was in place, and I

was really pretty uncomfortable, because even though I was [unclear] opposed to that, the fact that I would go would—implicitly, at least, if not explicitly—imply support.

And so I actually talked to some people about it, and this was not my idea, but it was the right idea. And that idea was: I said, "Okay, I will come, because I think I can be helpful with science. I will not, however, be in any group setting in which there's a separation." And so that caused a scramble, but they basically said, "Okay. That's fair enough; we'll accommodate that," and so I was there, like, five or six days, and every group was a mixed group.

So I had that sort of background with South Africa, but I've said on occasions, one of the great benefits of being a college president is you get to spend time with all the guests to campus, and that was clearly one of those cases. And whenever we'd have CEOs come, or authors come, or poets come, I always got to spend some time with them, and I think I'm obviously honored by that, in a way, but to me it was one of the real benefits of always getting to spend time with campus visitors.

And that was certainly true with him. You know, when you talked with him, you could just see that was a very special being, and his sort of depth. I'm sure all of us overacted to this. We just think everything he says is going to be wonderfully wise. Sure enough, it is. Well, to me it was wonderfully wise. I just thought he was so thoughtful, and he had this sort of empathy about him, that you could see why he was such a leader. So I guess I'd say two things. One, it was wonderful having him on campus. It adds to the richness of campus, and adds to the sort of—again, the trajectory of success of the campus, but in a very selfish kind of way, these visitors—of which there are few like Desmond Tutu—but these visitors were a really special sort of gift that I had some time with him, and I felt really honored and appreciative of that opportunity.

JD: And you just now used the word, "it brings a richness to campus," and that alone could be enough, but what do you think some of the other benefits are for the students and the faculty, by having outside guests of a variety of—you had a great list of poets, and CEOs, and political leaders?

PR: Right. That's a very interesting question to me, because this is going to be an unbecoming answer. So why do I say that? I've had the chance to do these kinds of things on lots of campuses, and I've always wondered, frankly, whether I really made a difference or not. So that's one point. The second point is, on the other hand, when you talk to students, they frequently refer to conversations they have had with, or things they have heard campus visitors say. And what that says to me is that in some ways, I haven't judged this right—that, in fact, having that richness of outside voices is more important to students than I realized.

So having said that, then I think the constant encouragement of outside visitors, I'll say, without trying to define it more closely than that, and having them available to students and faculty, but especially students, is a more valuable part of an institution, or a college, a university, than I had realized. And it took me a while to understand that. Once I did, it didn't really change all that much, but it made me more appreciative of both the campus visitors, and making sure that we had innovative ways that they'd interact with students. So you know, frankly, sitting in a circle with 15 or 20 students and an outside visitor is a powerful opportunity for those 15 or 20 students.

The question is, are there other things that we can do to make that visitor more accessible to more kinds of people in different kinds of settings? And so we did spend some time thinking about that, and sometimes, frankly, a well-known speaker in front of a large group can be quite influential. Otherwise, they wouldn't be in their position, right?

And so I'd say the only thing that really came out of that, at far as I was concerned [0:54:58], was a greater appreciation about how important this richness is for our students, and therefore the need to make sure that we were as thoughtful as we could be about connecting students with outside visitors. And I think Oregon is sort of one side of the country, a very rich part of the country, no doubt, but on the other hand, it's a long way from the East Coast. And I think making sure that we have, really, that sort of cosmopolitan, nationwide perspective is really important, and so that's why we encourage it.

JD: Mm-hm.

PR: Does that make sense?

JD: Mm-hm. So I picked two notable visitors. Were there others that come to your mind, as you're thinking about this topic, that you noticed that particular engagement with students, or that you thought made a particular mark?

PR: Yes, and instead of trying to just do names, let me do the categories.

JD: Sure.

PR: It was pretty interesting to me. Well, I'll use one name. What was interesting to me was, yes, the Hillary Clintons and the Desmond Tutus attract all the press, for all the wonderful reasons that we've said, and they're wonderful additions to the richness of the Oregon State campus and its [unclear]. The sort of second-level people, in some ways, were just as influential. So there was a person whose name was Jim Johnson, who worked for—I shouldn't have started this sentence. I think it's Intel; might have been Microsoft. Don't tell him. Any event, we spent lots of time on campus, and he would work with faculty, and he would talk to deans, he would talk to students, and his job was sort of outreach job, anyway, but he was a very smart guy; very smart, knew the technologies well. I was always interested in how often his name would come up in conversations.

And so what that told me was that the Desmond Tutus of the world are important, and we need to have them on campus. On the other hand, we don't have to have only Desmond Tutus. If we have people who are really smart in their area, who are good thinkers, who are good communicators, who have good empathy for their audiences, who can be helpful, and can understand what you're trying to accomplish is what they're trying to accomplish, they can really have an influence. So I think universities need to always recognize that yes, they need they marquee speakers, but the sort of constant influx of other people who've been successful, and just by their success, and by their caring, and by their being able to really share ideas and be helpful—those are important, too.

And so I think if I were to write the recipe for a college president, I think ensuring that you have a range of speakers is really as important as making sure you have a few of these really well known speakers.

JD: Mm-hm. And you mentioned categories of speakers who come, and you're talking about kind of the Jim Johnsons and/or—how do you kind of get a mix that are going to connect with—we've been talking about lots of different colleges, and different disciplines.

PR: Right, so I should have finished. No, I'm glad you asked that question again, to clarify. So I really think that this richness comes from speakers in sort of all categories. So there are the Hilary Clintons, and I'll put the Jim Johnsons sort—they may be the CEO, or they may not be the CEO, but they're very successful. Their credentials are beyond reproach, and they do all the right things. They care about the campus; they care about the students, and they come work at it. But then there is the researcher who has done really wonderful things in a very narrow kind of area, and that researcher, her or she comes to campus, gives a seminar, and then works in a department with faculty in that same area. That's also incredibly important.

So I think that, as I said before, that if I'm writing the workbook for the college president, that making sure that we have all these classifications of outside richness that come to campus, and that we always orchestrate them in a way—and I don't use that, "orchestration," in a pejorative kind of way, but we'll orchestrate them in a kind of way that not only do they help enrich the campus, but we also make sure that the setting in which they interact with the campus is most effective, and gives the constituents a chance to participate.

So, it might be a researcher in my own field, for example. [1:00:01] We might have somebody who had come from Oak Ridge National Laboratory, who's very good in ecological data analysis. Okay, if we just had that person come and talk to ecologists, that's not as much benefit as if we have them also talk to the computer science, who worry about "big data" sets. And so I think when I talk about being sure we orchestrate visits, we don't want to get vulcanized into just departmental kind of things, when in fact the expert can have a broader impact.

JD: Mm-hm, mm-hm. And while we're talking about outside influences, sometimes there's just large national and international events that affect everyone. And I was thinking about a couple that occurred during your tenure at OSU, and just picked a couple—Y2K, and of course, 9/11, not exactly on the same scale—and even just sometimes natural disasters, like there was a lot of flooding that happened in 1996.

PR: Right. You know, I have to say the Y2K—I don't remember much about Y2K. [Laughs] You know, there was so much buildup to the Y2K. The world was sort of going to come to an end. Sunspots are now—but I don't, frankly, recall it had much impact on, frankly, any of us. So I don't think Y2K was much an impact.

9/11 was a huge impact. I had mentioned earlier, just by coincidence, that morning was the same morning that we had our Board of Visitors. I think it was maybe the second meeting of the board. And you sort of saw the quality of that board at that time. I think we had maybe 11 members at that time. All 11 would have stayed, if we had said, "Well, we want to continue." But it was sort of a group decision among all of us that that wasn't where we needed to be today, and so everybody arrived at that conclusion, both by themselves and as a group, and it sort of reflected, I think, the quality of the persons we had.

I'm going to be, I guess, sort of a little personal here, right? I think one of the challenges of a presidency is, in fact, at these times. I had mentioned earlier—I think the hardest times I've had was when we lost students. It's just, I think, really difficult. And so 9/11, although we didn't lose students, I bet half the people on campus had some connection to someone in that tragedy. And so then the question is, "Okay, where's leadership at that moment?" And I guess you don't want to overreact, in a way. People have to arrive at their own sort of sensitivity and sensibility about those kind of situations.

On the other hand, you can't appear callous, partly because I'm not very callous. I couldn't do that. So it's always difficult to know, and whenever some kind of tragedy happens on a campus—you can see that whenever—in a shooting, if you listen carefully, presidents struggle with this, because it's not clear what to do, and how much attention to do to it. And 9/11 was really difficult for all the obvious reasons, and also we wanted to make sure that we behaved in the right kind of way, and I think we did. And there were a number of—I used the word "services;" I'm not sure that's quite the right word—"celebrations of life," services to people who were lost. I think there was a sort of common understanding across campus that now is way too early to react negatively against who may have perpetrated it, because we didn't know enough for that, and I think that actually the campus was kind of mature on that, which was good.

But it's difficult. And if there's an obvious sort of guidebook, I don't know what it is right now. I think it's really understanding your campus, understanding the outside world enough to know, to put it in the right perspective. Because even though we talk about the wonderful students we have, and the maturity they have, most of them are kids, and they haven't faced experiences like this, and so what guidance can you provide to them? How can you bring them together so they support each other? [1:05:00] How can you demonstrate that the institution cares? And so as I say, looking back on that, I think we did the right things, but it's hard to know, in the end, what is right. And so, yes, that was clearly—in a sort of a national, international sense, that was by far, the biggest challenge in terms of outside events.

And yes, there were other things, like flooding, which was pretty common over the years we were there. And actually, universities normally—and I think we did, too—respond really kind of well to that, in terms of reaching out to communities, and offering places for people to stay if they need to, providing food if they want to, and having students go out and clean up spots, or rebuild, things like that. And that's a learning experience, and it's a chance for students to really make a difference, and feel like they've made a difference, and to sort of set a course, frankly, for other opportunities in life for them to reach out to others and be helpful.

So I think in the latter case, it's a matter of being sympathetic, understanding, and then trying to be helpful, and inculcating those behaviors in the ways that the institution behaves to be helpful, but also individuals and students, particularly, can take advantage of those opportunities.

JD: Mm-hm. Well, and I would think that, even though they're very different events, and motivations behind the events—between something like 9/11 and flooding—that there's also that constituency that's not on campus, which are the parents, and how that plays into decisions that are made, certainly concern for students—as you said, they're kids; they're far away, perhaps, from their parents.

PR: Right. Yes, I think that's a really good point. Not all students, frankly, have parents who care the same kind of ways. They all have parents have some level, but they might—

JD: Sure.

PR: —not have parents in their current households. So I think that's an important point to remember, that not all the students on your campus come from a very standard family, and so I think always being cognizant that the origin might be different is an important point. Secondly, again, making sure that students feel like they're supported on campus, but they're not supported in such a way that pulls them away from their families and their parents. That's a balance that one has to have. And then the third part of that balance is to be able to assure parents that, in fact, their student or students is in the right situation, being treated in the right kind of way, being supported in the right kind of way.

And so it is really, I think, as I see it, anyway—again, I'm probably being too analytical, but I see those as the sort of three sort of fulcrum points, realizing that not all families are the same; yes, in fact, you have to pay attention the students and their relationship to their family; but also make sure the families feel like you're treating the students in the right kind of way, and they're having the right kind of experiences. So that's the way I think about that issue, and I think it's a really important one.

You know, we all laugh about helicopter parents these days, who sort of helicopter in, and go to the student advisor with the student. Yeah, in some ways, you know, frankly, I'd rather deal with helicopter parents than parents who don't care, who don't exhibit the sort of care that they should. But all that's part of it. And so institutions of higher education recognize they have a whole suite of these relationships, and our job is to make sure that we give every student the best possible experience, including the relationship with the family.

JD: Mm-hm. And so presuming everything goes well, at some point students become alumni, and you certainly want to keep them involved in the institution, or they desire to be involved with an institution that's been a significant part of their adult development. Talk a little about your relationship with alumni association, and what you think the role of alumni at a university is, or should be.

PR: Right. Okay, so, the alumni dimension—I'm not sure that's the right word, but I'll use that word—is really interesting to me, and incredibly important. And it was important to me before I went to Oregon State, and I think in a way became even more important. And part of this is unfair, because it's my putting on you, the alumnus, alumnae, what I think you should do [1:10:00], and to me, too many alumni organizations' activities are way too benign. They're fun. So we have these alumni picnics at Oregon State, and we'd go around and have a picnic with alumni, so we would go all over the state, and have the picnic. And I remember saying to Les, "I can do one more alumni picnic."

Well, it wasn't that I disliked the picnic. It was fun, and all alumni organizations need to have picnics. On the other hand, there's so much more richness in that connection between—potential richness, in that connection between alumni and the university than picnics. And so the idea that we somehow relegate alumni relations to alumni picnics was, frankly, abhorrent to me, just because I could see that the connections could be so much richer, so much more meaningful. And when you spend four years, or in many cases, more than four years, at an institution, you spend that time, that energy—which is really a crucial time in a life—that money, then you should have a really close connection with that organization. And if we only have picnics to celebrate that, it's wrong.

And so I think one of—and I would say I wasn't particularly successful at this—one of my sort of goals was to deeply enrich the way in which alumni interacted with Oregon State. I wouldn't say we didn't make progress. We did make some progress, but to me, there—and it's not just Oregon State. I think many universities are pretty superficial in terms of their alumni relations programs. And yet involving alumni in lots of different ways, it involves—it's sort of like recruiting students. You know, every department has to pay attention to its alumni. Every program has to pay attention to its alumni. The administration needs to pay attention to alumni. Individual faculty members can be helpful.

So I think if I could write the script, it would take alumni relations out of a single office, the alumni relations office—and this is always the case—and essentially put it in the university, and make the responsibility a university-wide responsibility. And I think that the potential for alumni knowing about what's happening on the campus, participating, even coming, giving lectures, participating in the activities, being—if I go to a meeting in Boston, I should go see two, three alumni when I'm there—it's just incorporating the alumni into the things we do, I think are important. To me, we should think about students being students not for four years, but for 40 years. Okay, 36 of those years are as alumni, and so the idea is to continually include them in our institution.

Frankly, here at this institution, that's part of our theme right now, is to make sure that we enrich those connections, and so to me, they're important to Oregon State. In some ways, it was easier at Oregon State, because we had all these facilities in all the counties, and we were out and around the state all the time. So I think we had pretty good relationships with our alumni community, but there was still a segment out there that I thought it could be really more—more into it, in a professional kind of way.

On the other hand, I have to admit, not many universities do that, and so maybe it's harder than I think. But I do think it's a goal that we all should have as institutional leaders, is to enrich that relationship. The alumni will benefit from it, the university will benefit from it, our current students will benefit from it; they'll become alumni in the future, as well.

JD: Mm-hm. So I wanted to also have you talk a bit about your science work. It's clearly been an ongoing and significant part of your life and your career. If you would start by perhaps talking a bit about the role of scientific research in your early years, your development of your career, really.

PR: Sure. Yes. Yes, the research, the science part, has always been important to me. I started here at this university, at the University of Oklahoma, as an assistant professor. [1:15:04] I hate to admit it, but it was back in 1967 I started here. [Laughs] That was a long time ago. And I had been at Wisconsin, where I did my graduate degree. But I grew up in Oklahoma, so I was essentially coming home, and so when I was at Wisconsin, of course, there were not many large grasslands, but I grew up in northern Oklahoma on a farm, so the grasslands were of interest to me, and so it seemed important as I started my career that I should focus on some set of key questions, science questions, and since I liked environmental science, the sort of ecology and environmental management, I decided, well, I would work on grasslands. Actually, the university had a history of students, graduate students, and faculty working on grasslands here.

And so I wrote a large proposal to NSF, which was essentially comparing different grasslands in Oklahoma. Oklahoma has such wonderful rainfall, from about 15 inches of rainfall in the panhandle, to 30 or 50 or so in the southeast, and so it was a gradient across, and so I was going to compare grasslands, in terms of how energy flowed through the grasslands, and nutrients move through them. And I wrote a proposal to NSF, and NSF was wrong, of course—declined my proposal. But they said, "You should contact this person in Colorado State, who's essentially doing what you want to do, but he's doing it on a reasonable scale."

So I contacted this person, who's actually passed away now, but he was a very lively, energetic guy, a fellow named George Van Dyke. And he said, "Well, that sounds interesting. I don't have anybody in your part of Oregon in my program. Why don't you come to a meeting," which was three weeks from then. So I went. And basically that program set 10 research sites around the western half of the country, and they basically said, "Okay, Paul, you have the [unclear]." Well, here's a guy just out of graduate student—now, these other people are leaders, had been doing this for 30 years. But I said, "Okay, fine."

And the idea was to get researchers in your region to participate on these sites. Well, of course, I was hopelessly naïve, and so I didn't know many people, but I called up people at Kansas, and Texas, and various places, and well, sure, they'd do insects. Well, I'd do birds. They all agreed to do it, and so we met, and I came in with my plan. So I had all these people from all different institutions doing my site, which was actually up in northern Oklahoma, in Osage County, which is a beautiful grassland, which is still there. In fact, it's a national grassland now.

Well, what I didn't, of course, realize is that all these guys who'd been running these sites for a long period of time just got their local people to do it, and so here I'd constructed this [laughs] network of scientists from other institutions. They had their own little team already in place. So I had all these logistics of managing contracts between institutions, because I didn't know any better. But it turned out that that became sort of the hallmark of my science, that we did a lot of things on grasslands, in fact, wrote a book in 1981 on the tall grass prairie, called *The True Prairie Ecosystem*. And it did some first things, in kind of looking at whole system-level variables. We also did some modeling, mathematical modeling, which was, at that time, really quite new.

The other funny part of the story is that I also—my second year—became the assistant director of the Oklahoma Biological Station, which is down on Lake Texoma. And I said, "I don't have time to do much of this," and they said, "Okay, if you'll just write proposals for us, that'll be fine." So I said, "Okay, I'll do that." So I wrote proposals the second

summer [laughs], and I don't say this in any sort of braggartly way, but I wrote five proposals to NSF and got all five of them. Well, that's sort of unheard of.

The one that was interesting was I wrote kind of a systems analysis, that we would bring in post-docs from around the country to study this arm of the lake. And we got that. And so here I had these 40 post-docs in this isolated little station, down in southern Oklahoma, which gets incredibly hot in the summertime, trying to manage all these programs. And it turned out it was successful. What I didn't know was that these poor guys were homesick, so they would go in on the telephone line for our computer and call their families at night. So at the end of the summer, I had this huge telephone bill I didn't know about.

But I learned an administrative lesson right there. The vice president of research here at this university—I was, like, \$6,000 over. [1:20:02] At that time, \$6,000 was a huge number! And he called me in one day. He said, "We made a terrible accounting error. You actually have \$6,000 more in your account than we thought you did." Well, he obviously had covered it. And so over the years, when young assistant professors get in trouble, do something wrong, I've thought about that \$6,000. But anyway, that was sort of the science, and as you can see, the science has always been kind of a team effort for me.

And it sort of morphed into what we then called "landscape ecology," and that's the idea of looking at whole landscapes. And, again, when I was in Illinois, at the Illinois Natural History Survey, we had a conference on landscape ecology, and brought in 20 people from around the country, a couple of international persons, and wrote what really was—it's now referred to as kind of the seminal paper of landscape ecology in the U.S. And again, that was bringing a group of people together, and thinking in a little different scale.

And so I think in some ways, my science has reflected my view about how organizations operate, and as I've sort of moved through the professorial ranks, and in had administrative responsibilities, I've continued with the science, although it's moved more toward advisory committees, and chairing commissions, and organizations, and things like that. But actually, I still am a reviewer for papers occasionally, and I also still do things with the National Academy of Science, in terms of reports. And I think that sort of grounding in science has been important for me, the way I think about challenges and issues.

I think the sort of group effort that's always been part of my science, which has sometimes gotten me in trouble, and made it more complicated, but has really served me well, to think about the team approach to things, so that's kind of instinctive. And I have to say that I think in today's world, either we as scientists have not done a very good job conveying science as it is, and why it's important, or the world hasn't listened. It's probably a little bit of both. But now, the sort of mismatch we have in today's world, in which how science works, and what it can tell us, and what it can't tell us—it is so maligned in the current press, that we actually jeopardize our country and our world, in terms of solving problems, because we don't understand science. And so I still harbor a desire to make sure that we can expand the understanding of science, and the contribution it not only has made—which have been incredible, obviously—but continue to make, if people would just stop and understand how the scientific process works, and what one can get a result from science.

JD: And I'm sure that played a great role in how you viewed the importance of research at OSU, both at the institution and its role in the broader community, as well.

PR: Yes, that's right. So I've used the Land Grant mission repeatedly here, and part of that, because both in terms of the extension service and the research it does, that's really where our successes come these days. Yes, we do new softwares, and yes, we do new technologies, but most of those are based on science—I'll say science and engineering. People sometimes want to make that separation, where engineering is more the application. So if you look at much of our progress, it comes from science and engineering.

And so to me, at Oregon, especially in terms of the university, Oregon State University has sort of ability to do science, to attack issues all the way from how do we manage populations of ocean fisheries, to how do we make the grape industry successful, to how do we grow 200 crops in the Willamette Valley? You know, that's a science. And so to me, the success that we can provide not only for an entity like a state, but to the livelihood of the people who live in that state—much of that is based on science, and much of that comes from university scientists, students, faculty, staff.

But even more than that, I want to make sure when the students leave an Oregon State University, they understand science enough, and once they graduate and become citizens, then they bring that understanding. [1:25:04] And that's what I talked about a second ago, that right now we don't have a deep, thorough understanding of science. And so the importance of science is not only doing the science, and the products of science, but understanding science in a way that when students leave Oregon State, they become part, frankly, of the literate, scientific literate citizenry that we need so much today in the world.

JD: Mm-hm, mm-hm. Well, and this is a bit of a tangent here, but as you talk about students leaving Oregon State, there was one area that we haven't touched on yet, which was you made a rather large shift in how commencement occurred at Oregon State.

PR: Yes, they moved it to the stadium. Commencements, you know—commencements are for whom? Well, they're for the students, yes, but they're really for the families. I mean, families, as we know, take great pride in graduates. In many cases, frankly, they sacrificed immensely for that success. And so it seemed to me that—and if we did it in the field house, we had to sort of limit families to four tickets or something. And although, yes, it never rained in the field house, but on the other hand, it really was limiting in terms of who could participate.

So it seemed to me that—two things about commencement at Oregon State—three things: one of which is if we did it in the stadium, then anybody could come. That was really important to me. Secondly, we didn't really have commencement speakers. I mean, I would make some remarks, but instead of that, we used the time to have every student walk across the stage, and I would shake every hand. I mean, hundreds of students! And to me, maybe because my commencement speaker, although I remember who he was, I don't remember a thing he said. To me, it's more important to give that person even those few seconds to walk across the stage, and be recognized as an individual was so important, and was more important than having one more commencement speaker.

And the third one is, Oregon State—I had never understood this; I don't understand it today. But we gave every single student his or her own diploma. So every other university I've ever known, you get your diploma case, and you take your little receipt and either they mail your diploma to you, or you pick it up. Not at Oregon State. You walk off the stage with your own diploma. So think about what I've said. Anybody in your family can come, you walk across the stage by yourself to be congratulated, and you get your own diploma. To me, that's the way commencement ought to be. Now, it isn't always exactly right. Occasionally, you'll see them passing their diplomas back as they walk back. We might get off one a few years later. But, I mean, it's just amazing.

And to me, commencements were really quite wonderful, and on the campus, we sort of march through the campus. Actually the march has to go through a train track, so we have to time it with the train, and the lines tend to stretch out. It's all televised at the state level, so the timing has to be just right. So it was an enormous amount of orchestration, every bit of it worth it. To me, commencements at Oregon State, we did that right. And each one of the years I was there, we had a terrible rainstorm! [Laughs] Everybody got soaking wet, and so I'm not sure that my argument would have been quite as prevailing at that particular moment, but in general, I think the way we changed the commencement was the right thing to do, so.

JD: [Laughs] When we talked before this interview, you talked about campus goodwill that you felt was there when you left your position as the president. Talk a little about what that means.

PR: Yes. Well, it means a lot. To me, Oregon State is a totally unique place. And so how can I say that, when there are universities all over the country? And frankly, I've had the good fortune to be at several. So I come with a database, [laughs] at least having been at some other institutions. And to me, Oregon State has this sort of fundamental goodwill about it.

Part of it is, as I've talked about before, the sort of willingness to work as teams [1:29:59], and to solve problems, and to say, "We're in this together. How do we fix this, or how do we solve it?" And along with that comes the sort of attitude that, "Well, we can solve it; we can figure it out." And I think that "We can figure this out" is an important part of it. But I think the sort of personality of the campus was one of goodwill. I felt upon arriving that, "Okay, well, here's the new guy. We'll give him a chance, and we'll be helpful." And I think in many institutions it stops at the first one: "Well, here's the

new guy." And sometimes it stops with, "Well, we'll give him a chance." It doesn't always go to the third step, "and we'll be helpful." And at Oregon State, it was the case, "and we'll be helpful."

So I think this spirit of goodwill was there, and I think when we left, the same feeling. In our business, one wonders about how long you should be a president at a single institution. I think seven years is just right, actually. I think less than that's probably too short in many cases, and much after that probably is too long. And so I think that the time was right for us, although we loved Oregon, and loved Oregon State. This was sort of home for us, and closer to our family, and so that was the deciding factor. It was the factor, actually.

But I always felt like Oregon State was—as you said, had sort of a goodwill. I think part of it was due to my wife, Les, who is a wonderful partner for me in a professional sense, but I think as a person, comes across as caring a great deal about Oregon State, and the people of Oregon State. And I think that in some ways, the fact that we were sort of active and around all the time, and enjoyed doing lots of things with alumni, with the community, and with the campus, might have been helpful to that. I mean, there were no secrets when we were around all the time.

And I think that sort of comfort helps with that, as well, but I was always grateful for Oregon State and its welcoming attitude, its supportive attitude, and its sort of goodwill. And I don't think you find that in lots of places. And as I say, I've been a number of places. This is a wonderful university. In a sense, it's my home university, but it doesn't have quite the Oregon State sort of goodwill about it that Oregon State has. So congratulations to Oregon State.

JD: [Laughs] So it sounds like, as we've talked for these two days, that you keep up on what's going on a bit at Oregon State. Any thoughts about kind of where it is now, and the direction that it's going in the near future?

PR: Well, that's a good question. I wouldn't want to exaggerate. I don't keep up all that well, but I keep up some, just because I'm interested.

JD: Sure.

PR: You don't devote seven years of your life to something that intensively and then forget it. So I want it to be successful, and I think it's doing, actually, incredibly well. Makes me proud, and I have to admit that I'm not above sending things about Oregon State to my friends, here or elsewhere. [Laughs] Whenever I see something, and Oregon State's done something, why, I put it on my electronic folder, and use it when I can. And I think Oregon State has done really well. Well, one of the consequences, actually, of the work there that we ended up doing, especially—I think I'd mentioned that we had overrun the budget one year, and one of the consequences was that Oregon State actually said, "Okay, there must be better ways to go about how we organize ourselves on campus."

And so they've—and this happened mostly after I left, that they put together a structure, which actually combines administrative responsibilities, so that every department isn't all by itself anymore. They share resources. That's a wonderful model; more universities should use it. So there's a case where I think they've really stepped out and done some really good things. I think they've hired some good people in leadership roles, and the research program continues to do very, very well; continues to grow. So in some ways, the size of the research program at Oregon State is bigger than you would expect, based on the institution. That's a reflection on the quality of the researchers, so I think that's a huge success.

I'd also mentioned, I think earlier, that online program has grown a lot [1:34:59], and if you look at online programs around the country right now, there are a dozen or so which are sort of the top, in terms of being well-organized, orchestrated—again, not separated into little blocks. Oregon State is a campus-wide process, and it's quite well-organized. I think Ray has done a wonderful job. I think he's primarily a really good leader—has been a good leader, and provided really good leadership. The fact that the enrollment continues to grow and grow and grow says to me, "By golly, that's continued to be a great success." So I have all the admiration for where Oregon State is right now, and I think it's doing good things; it's having good successes, and nobody could be happier.

JD: [Laughs] And what about advice for current OSU students?

PR: Well, I think for one, they should appreciate the wonderful place where they are. Not everyone gets to go to an Oregon State, an institution that cares as much about its students as Oregon State does, and has the resources—and they do, now. I mean, Oregon State has many more resources now than we did 15 years ago, just because of the state situation.

I wouldn't want, therefore, you to take that for me to say: and therefore the state adequately supports higher education. I don't reach that conclusion. I just say that I think Oregon State has, by lots of means, accumulated resources to make a really good learning experience for students.

And so in some ways, what I'd say is: appreciate what you have at Oregon State. It's a fun place. You know, as we used to say, it's small enough we can move rapidly and do things, but it's big enough to make a difference when we do. And I think that's true of Oregon State, and no matter where they go, their degree will be recognized as being from a good institution. But other than that, I think that there are students—and they're not students limited to Oregon State; they're college students today—I think that taking enough time to think harder about the issues is really important.

I'm sort of waxing off into my own philosophy here for a minute, but I think that college students are at a stage—and I actually looked one day at this—I thought, "Well, maybe this university." We have more older students than many universities, so I looked at the proportion of traditional-aged college students at major universities, of which Oregon State was one. Michigan and the University of Oklahoma were the others. And it turns out they're all about the same. I mean, most of the students on these campuses are traditional-age students, and so I'm not dismissing the adult students any sort of way, I'm just saying most students are typical-age college students on major research universities. I think sometimes they focus too much on either getting a grade in this class, or trying to get this degree taken care of, and don't try and take enough time to try and synthesize thoughts.

And so I think one of the roles that students have, and we have—when I say "we," leadership has—is they need to think harder and in a more synthetic way about the biggest issues, the most vexing issues, in the world today, and we, as leaders, make sure the institutions encourage that kind of deeper, broader thinking. And the reason I say that is my uneasiness these days about how poorly—and it's partly driven by the dichotomies in the press these days—but how poorly we actually assimilate complicated issues as a citizenry. We sort of leap on instant answers, or we leap on phrases, or we leap on the last thing the talking head has said on TV, and we don't think hard enough about: everything's not black and white, and there are grays, and grays, in many cases, are the answer.

On the other hand, simply to say we're going to compromise because compromise is necessary, is the wrong question. The question is: what's the right answer? And you can't get to the right answer without thinking really hard about it. And so I guess if I could encourage students, as well as colleges, I think the missing, the gap here we have is providing an environment for, and encourage our students to, think more synthetically and deeply about these complicated issues, and not leap to simple answers. And I know what I've just laid out there is an enormous challenge, and it's almost against human nature, and yet to me, our higher education system is probably the only segment of our society that can do that, and it's so important that we should do that. [1:39:59]

JD: So you have very carefully answered questions that I have had, and I want to end with giving you an opportunity, if there's subjects you wanted to bring up that I haven't addressed, or any final thoughts you have, to give you that opportunity.

PR: Oh, my goodness. Well, I think we've covered lots of topics. I think they've been good topics, and I hope they've sort of conveyed, in a way, thoughts and ideas from seven years, which I think were, I hope, important to the life of Oregon State, and certainly the important points in the seven years that I had the honor and pleasure of serving there. No, I think we've covered the topics, at least I don't think of obvious ones that we might add to the list, which is a compliment to you.

JD: [Laughs] Well, thank you for taking the time and sharing your thoughts.

PR: Sure. [1:40:59]