



## Kevin Stoller Oral History Interview, September 28, 2015

### Title

“The University Honors College - Then and Now”

### Date

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### Location

Valley Library, Oregon State University.

### Summary

In the interview, Stoller discusses his upbringing and the path that he took to enrolling at OSU, as well as his academic progression and social experience while an undergraduate. He then shares his memories of being a student in the first cohort of the University Honors College (UHC). In particular, he notes his involvement as a co-founder of the UHC's earliest newsletter and reflects on the broader atmosphere that pervaded the UHC during its infancy. He likewise recalls his work as a staff member with *The Daily Barometer*, comments on campus culture at OSU in the shadow of Ballot Measure 5, reflects on his connections with specific faculty in the OSU History department, and describes the atmosphere in the stands for Beaver fans of the mid-1990s.

From there, the session turns its attention to Stoller's experiences as a graduate student. He details the means by which he came to study for a master's degree in the history of science at OSU, and provides a synopsis of the thesis that he wrote on psychologist William James. He likewise discusses his decision to pursue a Ph.D. at Harvard University and the life circumstances that prompted him to leave the program before finishing.

The final third of the interview is devoted to Stoller's return to Corvallis and his years of employment with the UHC. In this, he shares his thoughts on the ways in which the UHC and OSU changed during his absence; his sense of the current and future direction of the UHC; the forward evolution of his work for the Honors College; and the impact that the Learning Innovation Center promises to have on UHC operations. The session concludes with notes on family and extracurricular activities, and Stoller's appreciation of the sense of community at OSU.

### Interviewee

Kevin Stoller

### Interviewer

Mike Dicianna

### Website

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

## Transcript

**Mike Dicianna:** OK, today is Monday, September 28, 2015, and we have the pleasure to capture the story of a member of the last class of the twentieth century – 1999 – Kevin Stoller. We're in the Valley Library here on the OSU campus; my name is Mike Dicianna, I'm an oral historian for the OSU Sesquicentennial Oral History Project.

One of the things we always like to do is start with a short biographical sketch of our Beavers – things like when and where you were born; stories of early childhood; what did your parents do? That type of thing.

**Kevin Stoller:** OK, so I was born in 1976 on Luke Air Force Base, in Arizona. My dad, at the time, was in the Air Force Band; so he was in the Air Force, technically, but he played in the band. So he wasn't exactly flying planes or anything like that. But, still, he was a music major and it was kind of the height of a band player; not exactly a lot of career options for a person playing in a band. But he loved it.

So we lived there for a very brief time and moved in '77 or '78 to New Hampshire, outside of Portsmouth; it was at a different Air Force base. And we were there until 1980, at which point he left – not particularly remunerative to play in the Air Force Band. So he got a job at IBM out here in Oregon, where he had never been before. The only memory I have from pre-Oregon times is coming up to, in some apartment, I remember riding one of those little cars with wheels and pushing it up to the very top of the staircase and looking down and thinking, "I got this. I can do this." And then [makes speeding noise]. I've been told that it's true; I went crashing down the stairs. [laughs] I fortunately didn't injure myself too badly.

And then we moved out here, and I have vague recollections of Mount St. Helens. It was right around the time that Mount St. Helens erupted, and ash coming down in Tualatin and Tigard, which is where we lived. So we were there until about the fifth grade, I was in Tigard, then we moved to West Linn. And I spent the rest of my young life there, going to West Linn High School. I graduated in '94, came to OSU starting in '94. It was not necessarily my first choice place to go, but my parents gave me the option of coming here and leaving with no debt, or going to the school I wanted to and leaving with \$60,000 of debt.

**MD:** Yeah, even back then.

**KS:** Right. And I made the choice that they were strongly encouraging me to make. So I came here and I originally had planned to be an engineer of some sort. I kind of was interested in aerospace engineering, vaguely, astrophysics or something like that. And I was also interested in history and English and wanted to try and maintain that diversity of interests as long as I could. So, first year, I was an engineering physics major, taking a kind of well-rounded group of classes. The second year I was here was when the Honors College started, and I applied for that and joined the Honors College that year. At some point, I dropped the engineering. I think I took statics, which is like the first engineering class, and found it so boring that I couldn't imagine continuing in that.

**MD:** Yeah, you have to have that mathematical mind-

**KS:** Well see, that's the thing, is that sort of was a recurring theme or has become a recurring theme. So I took statics, didn't like it, too boring. Became a physics major, did very well in that, but then got to quantum physics and was put off by how I would do the homework and I would get it all right, but I had no idea – I didn't feel like I understood. Like, "I know how to use these formulas and I can put them in the computer, but I'm just not quite feeling like I grasp it enough." I didn't like that disconnect between what I felt like was my understanding and the outcome.

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So after that, I went even to a more primary level and became a math major. And I got a degree in math. And through all this time I was also taking history classes and I declared as a history major too. So I got a math degree and a history degree when I graduated.

**MD:** Well let's back up just a touch here. One of the things that I always try to ask – every generation that I interview, they all have that significant memory, whether it be Pearl Harbor or the assassination of JFK. But your generation: items like the fall of the Berlin Wall or the Challenger disaster. Are these significant memories that have stuck with you?

**KS:** Yeah, I think that the memory that most – and I think this is fairly common for people of my age – they remember being in there, it was in the fourth grade, I guess. Gathering together to watch the space shuttle go up, because it had the teacher on it, in the middle of the day. And it blowing up, of course. And that memory sticks out a lot more than the really other more significant geopolitical change that came after. Because you remember – it's hard for a kid who is sixteen or fifteen, I guess thirteen, to really process in some ways. Because we hadn't lived through, in any real way, the Cold War. That wasn't a major part of our existence, even though the early '80s were a fairly significant time.

**MD:** Yeah, there's always that key memory that sticks in people's – that they can define where they were.

**KS:** Yeah, and I remember being in class. But in some ways, I feel like – and maybe this hasn't been the case with many people, I suppose – but 9/11 almost displaces everything. I remember that so vividly. Exactly where I was and what happened and all of that, that it almost has replaced or overshadows those other significant recollections.

**MD:** Yeah, every generation. Now, let's go ahead and key in a little more about your studies here at Oregon State when you came here. Coming as a young freshman, what were your initial impressions of the campus and what were your living arrangements when you first got here?

**KS:** So I lived in Callahan Hall. And my roommate was somebody that I'd gone to high school with. I ended up making some very good friendships on my floor. In fact those became, for the most part, the most persistent friendships throughout my whole time here, with some notable exceptions. And I was a really – I combined a lot of social awkwardness with a very high self-regard and arrogance. So I would say that started things off both by feeling - in part because I hadn't wanted to come here - I sort of had some residual bitterness, almost, about that. So I felt maybe – this doesn't reflect well on me – but I felt, perhaps, a little bit better than here. That's a horrible thing to say. But at the same time, I had some trouble – not a ton of trouble, I did make good friends – but I didn't really feel, to some degree, like I integrated that quickly.

**MD:** What was your first choice? Where were you hoping to go?

**KS:** So my first choice was Rice University in Houston. And it's very hard to capture what it was about that place that appealed to me so much. They had a very good – I was interested, even at the time, in history, and I was interested in astrophysics. And Rice, you know, it had a very strong – it's a great university really – and it had very strong programs in those areas, and a lot of opportunities. It was very exotic - I mean, I probably would have hated living in Houston - but I'd never been anywhere like that. It would have felt very, I don't know – I just had it set in my mind, that's where I wanted to go.

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**MD:** Well you were involved with the University Honors College from almost its inception-

**KS:** From its inception.

**MD:** -as the Honors College. I mean the Honors Program goes back into the late 1950s, but never as a degree granting... So, were you recruited? What got you to the Honors College?

**KS:** Yeah, I can't really remember. There must have been some outreach. I can't remember how I learned that the Honors College existed. I do remember that we had to apply, and that they opened it, I think, only to people who were either in their first year or, of course, in-coming students. I may be misremembering that. Yeah, I'm probably misremembering that, because there were some people who graduated pretty quickly.

Yeah, I remember applying and being very interested in it. It appealed to this sense of – to this smugness that I had at the time. I liked the idea of the Honors College and this kind of, this intellectual community. You know, I was young and had this romantic sense of, like, a community of people who are discussing all these topics and reading and, just, the ideal of

a community of young intellectuals. And I thought, "that's what this maybe will be." This will be a place where I can find what, maybe to some degree, I felt I was missing in my first year.

So yeah, I applied, got in, started there the next year in its very first year, and was very involved early on in the community. Extremely involved, I'd say. I was probably one of the most involved people in the first year. Me and that roommate from high school - and Chris [Petersen] was on the staff too, I think - founded the first Honors College newsletter. And it will say a lot about my disposition that I insisted that it be called *The Ecclesia*, which is a Greek word that's, like, marketplace of ideas, or something like that. Do you know? It's been a long time since I've thought of it.

**MD:** I've seen the word, yeah.

**KS:** I was taking classical history at the time, so I had this notion that that would be a really cool name. And we, just a small group of us, managed to create what looks now like pathetically small little newsletters for the first year. I remember it feeling like a lot of work at the time. And I was involved in the - it was a big part of my life, being in the office and the lounge. And some people say - I don't think it's true - that I may have had something to do with the name of it. I don't think that's right; I don't remember that. It's called the SLUG - Students Learning Underground. And it was in the basement of Strand Hall.

**MD:** Oh yeah, I've heard of that.

**KS:** Yeah. I'm pretty sure it wasn't me, but somebody told me it was me and I was like, "that's a good story. Maybe I should say it was me."

**MD:** Well now, in the early days, when they were just putting together the program, it was literally kind of a fly by the seat of the pants operation.

**KS:** It was a gum and tape operation, really. But that was a lot of the charm, you know? It was in this one little corner of Strand. The dean, Joe Hendricks, I mean, he was right there. You'd go in - and that's a big part of his personality and it was through his whole time as dean, I understand. He wanted to be as accessible to the students, and his office was there when you walked in. And you could see him and he would come out or you could go in. It just felt like a really intimate community. There were only 300 and some students in it, so it was small. And you did feel like you knew a lot of the people.

I guess I had been in - so before the Honors College started, there was Chemistry. You may know, that is where even the Honors Program had started, in this honors chemistry track that goes back to the '50s, and had persisted even after the program closed down in the early '90s. Honors Chemistry maintained as like an introductory class with a special recitation. So you would take the group class, but there was a lab and recitation called "Honors Chemistry." And I had taken that, and all of us, I think, for the most part, were in the Honors College. So it felt like we were sort of the founding - the small group at the very start of that.

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And it continued to be a pretty significant part of my life. The lounge, and I went on the trip to Ashland twice. And I have some other good friends in that group that - I ended up meeting the person that I married later. So it was a big part of my life.

As time went on, my world became a little broader and it became maybe less of the centerpiece of what I was doing over time. And in the end, I didn't get the honors degree.

**MD:** Oh really?

**KS:** Yep... disappoint you... [laughs]

**MD:** Because the thesis component actually goes back into the '60s, but then it was codified in the Honors College. What would have been your thesis?

**KS:** So my thesis that I had begun, in a very preliminary and somewhat desultory way, was on the Harlem Renaissance. I was going to work with Jeff Sklansky – don't know if you remember him. But yeah, it came at a time – the time that I would have theoretically been working on writing that came at kind of a time...how should I say this. I had a belated time of sowing my oats, as it were. So by the end of my - I was a five-year student - and by that fifth year, my attentions began to wander a bit from academic things. [laughs] I started running with a fast crowd. I was in the *Barometer*-

**MD:** Yeah, you were part of the *Barometer* staff. Was that just your senior year?

**KS:** No, it was before that. I don't think I was, necessarily, my senior year anymore. But yeah, I got involved somehow, not sure how. I wrote some editorials. I eventually, fairly quickly, became the forum editor and also wrote some movie reviews. Never any news, as far as I can recall. But yeah, as the forum editor, I wrote editorials; some relatively snarky ones.

**MD:** The culture of the *Barometer* has come up in numerous of our interviews and it's interesting to find out what the culture of the campus newspaper is at any given point in our history. You were here during kind of a down time in OSU's history, after Measure 5 – all the huge cuts that were experienced, and then also low enrollment. Did that reflect in your; did you see that? How did that become part of campus culture, that you saw?

**KS:** I don't think that I recall that as feeling like a really overt and obvious influence on specific elements. I know that the Journalism degree had gone away, but I wasn't necessarily making the correlation. Everybody knew it was a bad funding environment, but we didn't have, of course, a basis for comparison. Measure 5 had passed before we came to OSU and so, for all we knew, it had always felt that way.

And some of this – so, looking ahead a little bit, it's amazing, I was gone for a while and came back in 2010. The university was so different when I came back from what I remembered it. Of course there are a lot of components, but Ed Ray really changed this university. When I was here, it felt very small and kind of provincial and young, you know? It didn't feel – to think of it as a university that you would compare to Washington or Berkeley, it felt like very much a young step-brother to other Pac-10 schools. And, of course, our football team was horrible. It was the beginning or the tail end, whichever you want to see it, of the strong basketball years – we were after the really good teams but before the really terrible teams. And it just felt kind of like a little school and a school with small ambitions, to some degree too. So it was a surprise to come back later and see a school that had a much grander view of its role in the state and its potential in general.

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So getting back to your question, I guess, what I would associate, if anything, is just that pervasive feeling of it being kind of a low-potential – I don't know how to say it, you know. Good faculty, but the facilities were pretty terrible. And it just didn't feel like a major research university. It was, perhaps, in certain areas, but you had to kind of-

**MD:** You had to find those areas.

**KS:** Yeah. And to be honest – and this will show that I'm still kind of an elitist – the students weren't that great. I mean, it didn't feel like a top-tier university with the quality of its students. There were good students, very good students. But overall, it was easy for those students to stand out, I would say.

**MD:** And the ones in the Honors College were a step above. So when you were here, especially in the History department, did you have a mentor or any favorite professors?

**KS:** Yeah, and that's an area where it relates to a kind of caveat or asterisk I put on the "small" or "not first rate." Because at the same time, I was also here at a kind of a point where something like History, which I would not have thought OSU had a good History - I mean, it's not what it's known for, certainly. But it had some really great historians there; so many young historians. And it benefitted probably - it's an attractive place to live - it benefitted from the horrible job market at the time, I think, in that they were able to bring in people - and they have since then, maybe even to a larger degree - people who were impressive. Like Jeff Sklansky, and John Katz was relatively new here. They brought in, through the Horning Endowment, Bob and Mary Jo Nye. And they came with some significant prestige and a lot of influence and

a vision, really, for the community that was extremely attractive. So it felt like I'd discovered this secret kind of world almost, that was really great.

So your question, mentors – the first person that kind of drew me in to history here was probably Gary Ferngren. I took all of his classes and he's a very good lecturer, a very good teacher. And I literally, I think, took everything he taught in my first two years probably. After that, of course, I got to know Jeff pretty well. I took a lot of American history classes from him. Got to know Ben [Mutschler]; he came a little later. But probably my foremost, by the end, was Bob Nye. So I took all of his classes too, and he became a really significant influence.

**MD:** Yeah, now his main area was human sexuality-

**KS:** -and gender

**MD:** -which is something that hasn't been really replaced in the department

**KS:** No.

**MD:** And did you take any classes from his wife, Mary Jo?

**KS:** Yeah, I did. I don't remember the timeline exactly. I did take classes from her but... So when I was approaching graduation - this was another disincentive, perhaps, to finishing the honors thesis - I didn't really know what I was going to do. I was kind of in this – the wastrel years. And Bob, who I was close with, pulled me into his office and was like, "so what are you going to do?" I'm like, "I don't know, I have no plans." And he was like, "well, here, I have a proposal for you." And this was like April or something; pretty late in the year. He said, "why don't you come here, get a master's in the history of science? We'll fund you. And then after that, if you get the master's, it'll be a great stepping stone to go and get your Ph.D. somewhere else. It would be hard to get into a good Ph.D. program just coming out of OSU. It doesn't have that kind of pull at the top programs." And I was like, "ok, yeah." I didn't have anything else to do. It was a good offer. And so yeah, I ended up staying here and getting a history of science master's. And then, of course, take all the classes.

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**MD:** How about Bill Robbins?

**KS:** Never took a class from him. It's interesting how you can just not – the department is big enough that you don't intersect with a lot of people. So I never took a class from him or Bill Husband. I didn't take any classes from John Katz or Steve Hackel.

**MD:** Kopperman?

**KS:** One class from him but it was just, like, historiography. So there were a lot of people-

**MD:** It is a big department. I'm the same way with Gary Ferngren, it was just a, I couldn't fit him in type thing.

**KS:** Right.

**MD:** But the History department, that is one kind of shining beacon – a sleeper really.

**KS:** Yes. And I took a lot of classes in English. I probably – I loved English in high school and really enjoyed reading and writing. I thought I'd come here and that was gonna probably be my – I liked history but I always thought I might get two degrees in very different things, and I thought it would be English. I took a lot of English classes; there were some good faculty there. But it couldn't compare at the time with the quality – I'm probably not supposed to say negative things about. [laughs] Yeah, it just wasn't the same. It had a lot of pretty old faculty members who were very traditional and conservative. And the ones who weren't stood out and didn't necessarily fit in. I became quite close with some of them, and you could tell that it was not always the easiest community for them to be in. Of course, now English has become pretty incredible and has made a series of amazing young hires that has totally transformed that department.

**MD:** That's one of the things we want to talk about a little later is then versus now. I always like to ask people – you definitely had a campus life story. What was going to the football games and the basketball games during this low period like? Was there still school spirit, even though?

**KS:** Yeah, there was. But I think OSU has a very – and it still has – a kind of unique investment in athletics. Today it feels like the teams have a little bit more higher expectations, but there still, compared to a lot of other schools, there just isn't the same kind of intensity. I mean, you go to a basketball game – and I know they haven't been very good – but it's practically empty. The student sections at most sports that aren't football are pathetic. And you kind of imagine, or I would think, at most other universities there would be, it would be a more central part of campus life.

When I was here, like I said, there was still kind of the residual – we were in the halo of OSU as a basketball school. So that was a more prominent part of campus life. And I remember going to – I love basketball – and going to some of those games, not all of them. And there was Brent Barry and the Benjamin brothers. And they would still occasionally beat really good teams and they were very athletic. And the football was just terrible. I don't remember going to, honestly, any football games until the end of my time here when they started to turn around. They were horrible; they were atrocious. But then they brought in Riley, I think, he was the coach in the late-'90s. And Jonathan Smith and Ken Simonton. And they started to – they were a fun team that would win games.

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**MD:** Right, their first appearance at the Hula Bowl-

**KS:** Right. And out of the blue they started to become a better team. I remember being - I have no idea what year it was, but Oregon was also becoming a good team at that time and they had Akili Smith, a great quarterback who was, I think, drafted very high. And this – a classic, an amazing game here, between Oregon and Oregon State. Oregon was the better team, but OSU winning that game in, like, quadruple overtime or something like that. The fans, thinking the game was over at one point and rushing the field, only for it not to be over and everybody had to clear off the field. It was crazy. That was fun.

And then, I think, at the very end of my time, when I was in graduate school, was the – it doesn't feel real in the recollection and for good reasons – is when Riley left, Dennis Erickson was here, and they became, like, for that one or two years, one of the best teams in the country. Which is weird.

**MD:** You spoke about staying on for a master's degree, I understand that your thesis was about an early American psychologist named Williams James. How about an elevator pitch on that thesis?

**KS:** [sighs] It's a long time ago now. It was a very long thesis. It was ok, but for some reason I can barely remember now what it was about. [laughs] It's about William James. It was about the influence of currents in European psychology on James. It's starting to vaguely come back to me. It was trying to critique or add another dimension to the view that James was kind of *sui generis*, like emerged out of a purely American set of influences, and was not really engaged in any kind of a trans-Atlantic or a more international scientific enterprise. So I was trying to connect his work – particularly the principles of psychology – to currents in European philosophy and psychology.

**MD:** So you, after obtaining your master's here in 2002, moved on to the other side of the United States, to Harvard. And got into their master's program.

**KS:** I was in their Ph.D. program.

**MD:** Yeah, full Ph.D. So what prompted this move?

**KS:** It was always part of the long-term plan - as I was saying, that Bob had developed for me - that I would get my master's here, and then I would move on to somewhere which would be more like an elite program that would present a more, probably, realistic career path in that job climate. I mean really, fair or not, in order to be a candidate for the best jobs in the country, you need to have gotten your degree from one of the best programs in the country. So I applied to many of them – Harvard, and University of Chicago, and UCLA, and Wisconsin, somewhere else, I can't remember – and I visited all of them and ended up deciding on Harvard. And part of it was, because it was Harvard. [laughs] Other

programs – I think about it frequently, actually – many of the other places had...oh, Johns Hopkins, that was the fifth one. They had things about them that were appealing, and some of them made me superior financial offers, but there was just something about – I was seduced a bit by the idea of Harvard and the feel of it. You know, an Oregon kid; as already established, an elitist with a bit of a chip on his shoulder. So going to Harvard felt like-

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**MD:** -you've made it.

**KS:** Yeah, a big prize.

**MD:** Now in the doctoral program there, you're ABD. Still history of science area? A continuation of your original thesis?

**KS:** Well, yes and no. So I was in the History of Science program there. Unlike at some schools, it's quite separate and distinct from the History program. There's some, of course, paths that cross; students who meet across the track. But they're separate and there are a lot of people in History of Science who had minimal involvement with the History department; they're coming at things from different backgrounds and perspectives – science, architects, visual media, sociology. That's all kind of an aside.

I was still planning, and did work in, the history of psychiatry, and the history of medicine and psychology. And the dissertation that I was going to work on, planned to work on, was about personality testing and its applications in the early and mid-twentieth century U.S. The development of these tests and then viewing them as kind of technology of both medicine and also, in other ways, a kind of technology of management and classification, and a way of ordering the world.

**MD:** Now I noticed that, while you're over in Massachusetts, that you were also involved with MIT in some other areas and job-type things.

**KS:** Yeah, so that's – Boston's very expensive, you may have heard. So I was not making a ton of money as a graduate student. My wife – we got married the first year we were out there – she got a job at MIT in their Admissions department the first year, and then she started graduate school at Boston College the next year. She was also, of course, not making a lot of money. We were, by Boston standards, extremely poor. When you're paying \$1,700 a month in rent, it's hard to not be poor. [laughs] So to kind of get by and make a little more money, she was working part time in another part of MIT, in their resource development area. And I ended up being involved in that. So basically their equivalent of the Foundation. And it was not particularly interesting work or anything, but I became involved there in kind of a part time way, through her. And then when I left graduate school, I was working there full time for a year, before we came back out here.

**MD:** Well, let's talk about returning home. You came back to the OSU Honors program here in 2010, clear back across the United States. What prompted this move? Did they headhunt you or did you actively go after this position?

**KS:** No. Yeah, so when I left graduate school in 2009, for a variety of reasons – and one of those was, we were getting old; we'd been in graduate school forever, and we wanted to have a family, we were ready to move on to a more settled existence. And we decided that would be very hard with both of us being graduate students and trying to pursue academic careers. We had seen friends of ours, faculty members here, when we were here before; faculty members who had to spend as much as a year apart, maybe spread across the whole country, as they both tried to pursue careers. And we didn't want to do that; we just decided that that was not an option.

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So I left. That was only one reason. But we had a kid, and once we had our son we really decided that we couldn't stay in Boston because we didn't have enough money. We were doing much better since I was working, but we didn't have a very strong social network, it was hard to get around. It was just not the best environment for having a kid and raising a kid. So we wanted to come back here, which is where our families were. And I was looking for jobs out here and applied for this job. And it was as the executive assistant for student and alumni engagement. And really, I was applying to almost anything to try and come back out here. So it was serendipitous, I guess, that this job appeared. I remember interviewing on the phone; that's always fun, dealing with people you cannot see. And then the dean at the time, Dan Arp, was going to

a conference or something in New Hampshire, so I drove up – I skipped out on work, told them that I was sick – drove up to the Portsmouth airport. And basically, we talked briefly and he offered me the job. So then we moved back out here.

**MD:** Come full circle. So one of the things that I really wanted to come up with was the whole idea that the Honors College, from the inception, when you were here as a student, compare that to fifteen years of development. Where are they now as opposed to what you experienced as kind of a guinea pig with the first batch of students?

**KS:** Yeah, so it was weird to come back, in part because it was in the same place, the same location, as it had been previously. And I came back at the point, really, where it was starting, it had just begun to grow. So really, between '99 and 2010, the total number of students in the Honors College didn't change that much. So it felt like a very similar-sized community when I came back, to begin with. And it was all in the same places; the couches may have been the same, I don't know – they looked like they were the same. But the university, as I said before, it felt different. It was bigger, much bigger, and there were building projects. And it didn't feel like a university that was stuck in a rut, which it had felt like previously.

And then, the first year I was here, the mandate for the dean at the time – as I mentioned, Dan Arp – was to grow the college. And we did a number of things, or my colleagues did a number of things to make that happen. So it's doubled in size in the five years that I've been here, and changed dramatically, which feels almost like a microcosm of the university as a whole. We've moved from Strand – were there for three years that I was here, I was there for three years. Then maybe my second year or so, there was this project for the Learning Innovation Center – it was just the Classrooms Building at the time – and the provost said, "why don't you guys move in there?" And we got to design it from scratch, and we have moved in there now. And, I mean, it's pretty palatial by Oregon State standards.

**MD:** Yeah, and you're in the top floor, the penthouse.

**KS:** Yep. We're up at the top. Our dean has probably the nicest office on campus. Our students have the nicest student space on campus, almost certainly. It's a long way from Strand and a long way from the little homespun community – the gum and tape, as I was saying earlier, operation of the early days. It feels – it's bigger, has a larger campus footprint, more ambition for development and fundraising and all of that.

**MD:** I understand that the Honors College here at OSU is one of the few degree-granting honors colleges in the nation. Is that a big distinction? Is that a big deal for us as an honors college?

[0:45:06]

**KS:** It's hard to know how many degree-granting honors colleges or programs there are in the country. So, in some ways, I think it's significant, but we play up other distinctions more because they're easier to articulate with certainty. So it's a selling point, but I don't think we make it a primary point of distinction.

**MD:** Now where does the Honors College, in your view, fit into the new mission and goals of Oregon State University with the fundraising that just got through raising over a billion dollars, changing the outlook and changing the university as a whole. Is the Honors College moving with that development and change?

**KS:** So, yes and no. Yes in so far as it has become a central part of the university's attempt to transform itself into a more prestigious institution which will draw in and attract students – kind of a vague concept – but students with more impressive credentials. So getting high achieving students here has become a more central part of the university's mission and, of course, the Honors College is a big part of that. So yes, that desire from the upper reaches of the university administration to have a robust Honors College, they've shown that's important. And it's indicated by moving us to this great new space.

On the other hand, the Honors College had virtually – and high achieving students in general – no place in the campaign. Scholarships, like Presidential Scholarships, scholarships for the honors students – very, very small, if any, movement in the campaign. The campaign was primarily about big projects and faculty positions. So scholarships got little attention. And, I'll try and be a little political about this, but the Foundation doesn't really view scholarships as being a good sell. And high achieving students as an easy pitch to OSU donors.

And part of the reason for that is because there is a tension - or many would perceive a tension - between OSU's Land Grant mission, its accessibility, the "people's university," and something as elitist, or apparently elitist, as an honors college. So every donor, we hear every time, every donor you talk to, big-time donor, was a C student. And they don't care about the Honors College. You know, "I was a C student and look what I did. I want to try and support the people like me who came from Hermiston, or something, and were not superstars academically, but just needed some chance and a stepping stone to a bigger world." And, you know, I think they're right to some degree. A lot of the people who graduate from OSU were this kind of - they weren't bad students maybe - but they weren't the kind of students they associate with and who are, maybe, in the Honors College. And those students, the students we have, are somewhat unfairly viewed as already having all of the advantages that they need. So why do we have to give more to students who already have a leg up on other kids who might be coming here?

[0:49:56]

**MD:** Now your position at present is the director of external relations and operations. So you're basically chief cook and bottle washer under the dean? What are your duties? What is your bailiwick?

**KS:** OK, so I'm not really - the Honors College hierarchy, because we're small, we have ten, eleven, twelve, I don't know, we have a pretty small number of full-time employees. There's the dean and her kind of hierarchical system - there's the dean and then the associate dean is kind of on the side, is probably her second. But everybody else is the same; all the other professional faculty. So I'm one of three directors, and then we have three advisors. And there's no hierarchy amongst us. So I'm not like the second in command or anything. [laughs]

But what I do is - so my job is two almost unrelated components. There was this reorganization a couple of years ago where the kind of administrative functions were split into these three groups, based in part on what we had been doing previously - because we were all already employees of the Honors College, the people who filled these three new positions - and what our perceived strengths were. For me, when I was in this kind of weird executive assistant for alumni and student relations, I was already in a kind of weird hybrid position where I was partly filling the role of, to a small degree, of like an office manager type. I was involved in kind of operational issues in the office and facilities things and all of that as kind of the dean's appointed person.

Also then, on the other hand, I was pretty highly involved in development, which became a much more significant priority with the new dean. So we had grown and Toni Doolen, the dean who replaced Dan when he was plucked into the dean of Ag Sciences role, her mandate was, "ok, you've got all of these students, now you've got to get money to support them." So, as a part of that, she created these three positions to both kind of allow her to shift a larger percentage of her time out of operational issues and have more direct support for development. So I, operationally - this is really tedious [laughs] - deal with facilities things and financial stuff and all the under the hood things. And then the other significant part of my job is supporting development. So I'm in development meetings, and help plan strategy and events, and I write a lot; I'm kind of the primary writer for the college.

**MD:** And so this big move to the new facility has been...?

**KS:** Yeah, it's been a significant - so I've been involved in the planning of that, of our space, from the very beginning. And I have, for the last few years, been the primary representative, was the primary representative, on the overall building committee - me and the dean, but she was gone a lot. So, yeah, I've seen it all the way through.

**MD:** And that must give you a sense of pride, settling into your new desk at the beautiful new facility.

**KS:** Yeah, it's great to see that come to fruition, partly because we spent all this time in Strand, and then a year in the wilderness that is Weniger. And to have seen it, kind of elaborate through all these different stages of planning, and to reach the point where all these things we've talked about and designed are actually a reality. I have to say, in some ways the sense of reaching an end point is mitigated because the building is not quite done. We're still missing a lot of furniture and sorting things out.

**MD:** Well you just moved in; you've got boxes to unpack. Now there are dedicated classrooms for the Honors College along with that?

[0:54:55]

**KS:** Yeah, so we have four classrooms – two large classrooms, by our standards, which are twenty-six seats. And then two smaller seminar-style rooms, which are fourteen, sixteen seats.

**MD:** Which is a step up from the digs in Strand when you and Chris were there.

**KS:** Yeah, we had one classroom back in the day. And that had been increased; we managed to find space for three rooms by the time we left Strand and were in Weniger. It's a necessary step up really, considering how many more students there are.

**MD:** Well, your comparison between then and now is significant. Coming full circle as a student coming back to the program, you have a unique perspective on the Honors College, and you must have a feeling that where we are now is light years – is where you, when you were in college, is where you wanted it to go.

**KS:** Yeah, I'm maybe a bit more ambivalent about it, to be honest. Yes, it's where it probably should be for the university. But you lose things as you get more students and you become a more, kind of, professionalized, integrated, university-branded part of the culture. There's something charming about putting on a show, which is what it was in the past. Figuring things out as you go. The students were super-involved in the community and you had this freedom to try things out, and those days are gone to some degree.

**MD:** Well, one of the things we always like to do with our alums is kind of catch up with them – learn about your family and children. We've talked about your wife a little bit; where is she at this point? Is she in academia?

**KS:** Yeah, so she completed her Ph.D. program at Boston College in history, rather heroically, because she finished from here with a small child. And she is now teaching as an instructor, primarily here, in the History department. And she also has a kind of fixed-term position, is I guess what they call it, helping them with standardizing and assessing their Ecampus programs, in anticipation of an Ecampus degree. So that's what she's doing.

We have the son, Gus, who was born in Boston, and lived there for three months before coming out here. And we have a second, a two-year old, Theodore. So Gus just started kindergarten and Theo keeps us on our toes. They both do.

**MD:** Other than having young children, what do you do for enjoyment? Do you have any special interests, hobbies, that type of thing?

**KS:** Yeah. To be honest, there isn't a lot of extra time to do anything else. We have the little kids and that takes up a lot of free time. And then both of us end up working a lot in the evenings. We have a lot of things to do. But if I had free time, theoretically, what would I do? I still like to read. I used to, and would enjoy again, playing the piano. I like to ride bikes and enjoy the community and hike - kind of low-impact outdoor activities.

**MD:** You guys settled here in Corvallis?

**KS:** That's where we live, yeah.

**MD:** So are you close to campus?

**KS:** Yeah, we still rent. We're saddled with still fairly crippling student loans, and our positions have only recently become more settled. We live on Van Buren just north of 35th, so we're very close to campus. It's a great little street; nice little neighborhood. It's very nice. Corvallis is a very nice place – it's a long way from Boston.

[1:00:05]

**MD:** Yeah, this is more home than Boston.

**KS:** Yeah, and it's a great place for kids. And we have more roots here, certainly, in the short period of time – or developed them – than we did in our eight years in Boston.

**MD:** Her family's from here too?

**KS:** Yeah, she grew up in southern Oregon, in a town called Glendale.

**MD:** Oh, yeah, small town.

**KS:** Very small town, yes. A mill town.

**MD:** Yes, very much so. I've been there many times. Now is there anything that we really haven't touched on that you want to talk about in this life story, this history?

**KS:** No, I don't think so.

**MD:** Because one of the things I always like to do is to give my Beavers a chance to impart some words of wisdom to the Beaver Nation that's going to be viewing this. This is, after all, a permanent part of the history of this organization and this institution. Any final thoughts?

**KS:** I think, as final thoughts, I think Oregon State, the university is, for whatever reason, taken for granted to some degree - or even overlooked - by the people who live in the state. And it isn't fair, really, or right. I'm not sure where that perception came, when it's clearly the best university in the state and has the most potential to have a real global footprint. And not just in the fields that it's most known for, but in a wide variety of disciplines. And part of that is just the relatively - having been in many places - the unique nature of the campus culture and its integration with the Corvallis community, which is special. Just thinking about the difference between my experience as a master's student and undergraduate here in History, and my experience in Harvard, it highlighted how unique and special this place was.

Some of that had to do with the people, certainly the personalities here - Paul Farber, and Bob and Mary Jo - but there was such a supportive and curious community, you know? Regular meetings exploring topics that weren't necessarily in your interests, but just an openness to ideas and to really being collaborative and supportive in a way that is not that common. People tend to be, elsewhere, much more focused on their own little corner of the world, sometimes even at the expense of supporting their peers, because they know they might be in competition with them to a certain degree. So I think it combines a lot of academic and intellectual possibility with a fairly uniquely supportive community that crosses a lot of boundaries between faculty and undergraduates and graduate students in different fields.

**MD:** Well Kevin, this has been a pleasure. On behalf of the Sesquicentennial Oral History Project, we thank you for your participation. And you are now a permanent fixture in the oral history collection celebrating our 150 years. Thank you.

**KS:** Thank you.

[1:04:03]