

SCOTT VAUGHN

August 5, 2003

Jeff Charnley,
interviewer

Charnley: Today is August 5, the year 2003. We're in East Lansing, Michigan. I'm Professor Jeff Charnley, interviewing Scott Vaughn for the MSU [Michigan State University] Oral History Project for the sesquicentennial of the institution to be commemorated in the year 2005.

Mr. Vaughn is the Assistant Director of the Honors College at Michigan State, and as you can see, Mr. Vaughn, we have a tape recorder for this interview today. Do you give us permission to tape?

Vaughn: I certainly do.

Charnley: Okay. I'd like to start with just some initial personal background questions, professional questions, also. Where were you born and raised, and when were you born?

Vaughn: I was born September 22, 1942, in St. Louis, Missouri. I lived in St. Louis until the age of eight, when my family moved to a small town south of St. Louis; Potosi, Missouri. I lived there until I went to the University of Missouri at Columbia in 1960. I was there for six years, and I earned a bachelor's degree in secondary education, social studies education, and an M.Ed. in history of education. I taught two years, subsequently, in the public schools of Hazelwood, Missouri, which is north St. Louis County, and I then came in 1968 to Michigan State University

to pursue a Ph.D. in the philosophy of education, which I did earn here after I started my job at the Honors College.

Charnley: Who was it that attracted you to Michigan State?

Vaughn: George Ferree [phonetic], with whom I had studied a bit for my master's degree at Missouri, and for whom I had served as an undergraduate and graduate assistant there.

Charnley: So he recruited you?

Vaughn: He recruited me and we had a really fine program here at the time, so I was happy that he did.

Charnley: What attracted you to your dissertation topic?

Vaughn: I had actually decided on my dissertation topic before I came up here, because I had become really fascinated with the work of [Ludwig Josef Johann] Wittgenstein and I had been steeped, so far as you can be steeped at that point, in the [John] Deweyan tradition, so I knew I wanted to do something that would compare Dewey and Wittgenstein about some fundamental issues in education.

Charnley: Where did you end up doing most of your research?

Vaughn: Here.

Charnley: Was it right here?

Vaughn: Yes. Had to do an interlibrary loan for a number of things, but our library has a really fine Wittgenstein collection. They have all the original works and everything also in translation, and they have the full shot, a very good Wittgenstein source.

Charnley: You mentioned you were working at the Honors College. How was it that you came to that job?

Vaughn: In 1969, Frank Blackington [phonetic], who was one of the faculty members in history and philosophy of education, was selected as the director of the Honors College. In '70, he was building a staff and sent out the word, and I interviewed with both him and the rest of the staff, and I was selected there.

At the time the Honors College was rostered for a director and associate director and something like four or five assistant directors. The assistant directors were really sort of super graduate assistantships and were all really academic advisors rather than assistant directors, but that was the title at the time, and I started work there in 1970, the summer of 1970.

Charnley: There was a lot going on on campus at that time, certainly.

Vaughn: There were lots of things going on on campus at that time, yes.

Charnley: What do you remember about maybe some of your first impressions of the university? Had you come to the campus before you actually—

Vaughn: I came in '68. I had visited twice before that around Easter time, and one of those—which year would it have been? Probably Easter of '69. Probably it was. It could have been '70. It was the year of the big blizzard, and when I got here at Easter, there was a snow pile on top of the area that used to be the tennis courts, over by the Spartan Stadium, that must have been eighty-feet tall and covered the entire area. And I thought at the time, “Hmm. I wonder.”
[Laughter]

Charnley: Wanted to go back to Missouri.

Vaughn: Exactly.

Charnley: Quite a pile.

Vaughn: Like everyone else, when I first came here in the spring when I came for the actual job, I was absolutely blown away by the campus, how beautiful the campus was. And I knew that we had some good people here in the field I wanted to work, but I didn't know that I was going to be so lucky as to be here during the time that Steven Tullman [phonetic] was a faculty member. Steve and his wife came here every fall term for four or five years, and they had

appointments then at other institutions the rest of the year, and I met them as a consequence of building a doctoral committee.

I met Ronald Souter [phonetic] from the philosophy department, who was a member of my doctoral committee, and Ron is a close friend as well as an intellectual mentor, shall we say, as is George Ferree, the person I came here to study with.

Charnley: Yes, that intellectual genealogy is interesting.

Vaughn: Yes.

Charnley: Or how we get to where we are sometimes.

Vaughn: That really is. I've always felt very lucky, because the years that I was at Missouri, they had a very young history department, and although my degree was social studies education, I was a history teacher. That's all I ever taught. And they had a very young faculty, some of whom were already becoming distinguished, but who became very distinguished in later years—Harold Woodman [phonetic] and Lester Kirkendall [phonetic] and a number of other people who were really top-flight historians.

Charnley: How would you describe the Honors College when you first arrived, in terms of mission or just a general description?

Vaughn: I didn't really know much about it until I went over to interview, and then I had to kind of bone up on it. I knew that I had been in an honors program at the University of Missouri as an undergraduate student, until I declared a major in education. At Missouri, unlike here at MSU, secondary majors were majors in the College of Education, as well as elementary majors, and so when I declared my major and became a student in the College of Education, I was no longer eligible for their honor's program because it was an arts and sciences program only.

So one of the first things I learned about the program here is that it was not an arts and sciences program only; it was a university-wide program, and that struck me from my own experience as a very positive factor. It took me awhile, of course, as it would anyone, to get my feet wet and to learn all the ropes. Never learn all the ropes. [Laughter]

But I was really impressed with the program from the very beginning. The faculty, the staff who were associated with the program, were really dedicated and hard-working people. They were committed to the idea of a university-wide honors program that really brought students together from all over the campus, and which provided them with a great deal of flexibility in planning their program.

I think the people who started this program in the fifties were smart beyond what they probably even anticipated themselves. I think they probably adopted the model they did, in part, because they viewed it as being a cheap one, but in so doing, they came up with probably the key factor in the honors program here at MSU; that's really the flexibility.

Charnley: Who were some of those founders that you saw?

Vaughn: I never met most of the founders. '56 is when the program was started. I have met—I can't remember the name of the guy who started it, but the man who got it all rolling was by, I believe, the director of the then- University College. I can't remember the name at the moment, but it went through faculty governance after some studies and was approved in '56, and the first class was actually in '57. Stanley Azerta [phonetic] was the first director and was director for many years. I have met Stanley, and he's just like the other people who were there when I joined the staff. He was very enthusiastic about what he was doing. I believe he was a professor of humanities, but I'm not certain.

About the same time that the Honors College was established, we had an applicant, a successful candidate in the Rhodes scholarship program, by the name of John Wilson, who was a member of the university football team and an Academic All-American. John went on to get a doctorate in English and came back to Michigan State and was professor of English and the second director of the Honors College and the first assistant provost for undergraduate education at MSU. He was the author of the CRUE report; not the CUE Report, but the CRUE Report. I can't even remember what the acronym stands for.

Charnley: Yes. Only David Scott would remember that acronym. [Laughs] Committee to Review Undergraduate Education, wasn't it?

Vaughn: Yes, right. And the one that David Scott knew was Committee on Undergraduate Education, because the CRUE Report was issued in the late sixties, or maybe in 1970, about the time I started at the Honors College.

So, at that time we have Frank Blackington, who was director; Dorothy Orotta [phonetic], who was a lipid biochemist from food science, I think, was the associate director; and we had a range of people, all of whom, except for me, have gone on to other things. I liked what I did so much that I never really searched for a position after I finished my Ph.D. I just stayed with what I was doing.

Charnley: What were your main duties when you first—

Vaughn: When I first started, they were mainly advising students. and I had some liaison responsibilities with some departments, but that was not much in those days. The provost at the time I believe was Jake Neville [phonetic]—not positive, but I think he was—and I gather that when Blackington was selected as director, he was advised to maintain a low profile, and we certainly did maintain a low profile in certain ways during those years. There was not a lot of contact with other units and so on, although in Frank's period as director, he really broke the barrier on Rhodes scholar selections. We had three very quick ones. Don't remember the exact years, but probably—Alan Planck [phonetic] was the first. Alan was an English major and is now practicing law in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Roy Pea [phonetic], who was a philosophy major, and who is now director of the Stanford Research Institute's—all of their educational programs. When he came back from England, he took a position at the Bank Street College of Education in Manhattan. Actually, it was kind of funny, because he left the States to go to Oxford, where he got a D-fill [phonetic] with Jerome Bruener, who was there as a visiting professor. [Laughter]

Then he came back and he went to work at the Bank Street College of Education in Manhattan, and then he became a faculty member at Northwestern [University], where he founded an entire program based on some complicated learning resources issues, and then became the dean, and then went to Stanford Research International. He's a leading thinker in the development of computer programs for instruction of young children.

Charnley: Oh, and very early.

Vaughn: And very, very early. He attributes that to the kind of education he was able to do here at MSU, where he did a lot of work in psychology and philosophy and linguistics, and that area that used to be called artificial intelligence until—it's now, I think, called cognitive science. He spoke at an Arts and Letters commencement a few years ago and said he was able to have an undergraduate major at Michigan State in cognitive science when no one knew such a thing existed.

Charnley: That's interesting.

Vaughn: And of course, Paul Hunt, our own Paul Hunt, was a winner there, and another young man, and then it kind of ballooned. I think we've had thirteen since 1970.

Charnley: So the driving force really was Professor Blackington and his directorship?

Vaughn: Well, he left in '74, I think it was. I don't remember who the third director was. He was only there for a year, I think, in between Wilson. Wilson and his successor and Blackington all left to be college presidents in different kinds of places, but college presidents, nonetheless.

Charnley: An interesting springboard.

Vaughn: Yes, it looked that way for a while. So when Blackington left, we had three acting directors for a third, a third, and a third. Here's where I'm having trouble with names. One was Dorothy Orota, who had left the Honors College to become assistant provost for undergraduate education. She was the "commencement czar" and all of those things, in those years when we were still having commencements outdoors in the stadium and had to be prepared to rush indoors somewhere else in case of rain. And then—I'm not coming up with their names.

Charnley: Was this was before Professor Lamers [phonetic], or Don Lamers was later?

Vaughn: Don Lamers is later. This is the interim between Blackington and Jim Pickering, who came from English. The two people I can describe; one was a historian, a diplomatic historian, who had been dean in the College of Arts and Letters for a while.

Charnley: Paul Varg [phonetic] was that?

Vaughn: Paul Varg. Thank you. Paul Varg.

Charnley: He was on my committee.

Vaughn: Okay.

Charnley: I was his last graduate student.

Vaughn: The other was the first dean and the longest-serving dean of Lyman Briggs College, which was a college at that point.

Charnley: We can check.

Vaughn: Yes. And they came in and they would be there half-time, half a day, and do something else half the day, and they kind of took turns. We just had to kind of wing it on the staff at that point. We just had to do what we could do, and we did pretty well. We came into the new directorship with Jim Pickering from English, who was really a disciple of John Wilson, and Wilson left MSU to become a president of a girls' college somewhere. I forget which one. And then later was the provost at—is it Virginia Tech that's in Blacksburg, Virginia?

Charnley: Yes.

Vaughn: And then became president of Washington & Lee University, from which he retired. His brother, Patrick Wilson, was at least a one-, maybe two-term member of the MSU Board of

Trustees. They're from up in northern Michigan somewhere. I don't think UP [Upper Peninsula], but maybe.

Charnley: Who was the president when you arrived at the university? Was that the in-between transition when Walter Adams came, or who was there?

Vaughn: I'm not certain, but I believe the first year I was at the Honors, certainly when I came here, but maybe even my first year at the Honors College, John [A.] Hannah was president, and then there was the transition period, and then Cliff [Clifton R.] Wharton was president. I believe while Blackington was still there, because Wharton used to come over and meet with honors students in our lounge and stuff like this.

Charnley: Was he supportive of the honors program?

Vaughn: Oh, yes, and the ADS [Alumni Distinguished Scholars] program. He would meet with the ADS students for dinner once a month and things like this, so he was very active with high-achieving students. I have no idea how open he was to others, but he certainly was open to—

Charnley: But you saw the Alumni Distinguished Scholars that he met with, he was very open with, supportive?

Vaughn: Yes. Exactly. And after that interim year with acting directors, Jim Pickering became director of the Honors College. As I said, he was a faculty member in the English department

and a disciple of John Wilson's. I think they had been on the faculty at the same time in the English department, but I'm not certain of that now. Jim worked very hard to change the image of the Honors College, or to give it an image, I guess, because we had really been low-key, except for the award winners and things of that nature.

Charnley: Was the program expanding in those years?

Vaughn: The program really expanded. My first job at the Honors College was to organize an orientation procedure for freshman students in the Honors College, because that was the first year we had freshman students in the Honors College. Prior to that, they had always been students who came in and applied for membership on the basis of their MSU record.

In '69, the governance system approved a three-year trial of admitting entering high school students directly into the program, and they spelled out the criteria which should be used for that, and they authorized a three-year trial period, which there would be some comparative research and some experimental groups admitted as well. So we had never participated in academic orientation programs before, and that was my first job, to set up the procedures for that. So we brought in our first class of entering freshman students in 1970. That bumped the numbers a lot.

Incidentally, under Wilson and others, especially under Wilson, there had been a great effort to recruit especially out-of-state students, but recruit high-ability students. Gordon Sabine, in the Office of Admissions and Scholarships, and John Wilson worked very closely together. I see in our early internal records lots of form letters that went out from the Honors College and so on. So there this was this really close effort at recruiting students, such that in 1970—I

remember looking this up one time in the SAT manual—the average SAT score of out-of-state students who were enrolled at MSU in the fall of 1970 was 1300. That's what was required to become a member of the Honors College. There were other things that were required as well, but they had really been successful in recruiting out-of-state students.

MSU was a really good buy in those days educationally, and they used the Honors program as a marketing tool and were very successful at it. When we started admitting freshman, we used the criteria that were laid down by Academic Council, and the numbers began to climb rather steadily because we were bringing in students. Students were still becoming members by applying after their first year.

There was some significant grade inflation in the early 1970s, in large part because of the Vietnam War. To give a person a grade that would flunk them out in 1970 was to hand him a ticket to Vietnam, and a lot of faculty knew that, I think, and a lot of faculty behaved according to their own lights in that respect. But there was grade inflation, so we were admitting more. We'd got up to around 2,800 or so during the Blackington regime, and that steadied off, and then began to slowly decline over the years, and it declined until our current director came in.

Charnley: What's the level now of the Honors College?

Vaughn: About 2,300, 2,400.

Charnley: Have the criteria changed much over the years?

Vaughn: They've been relatively constant.

Charnley: You mentioned the effort of Gordon Sabine and others to attract out-of-state students. Has that push continued, or has MSU backed off some of that out-of-state recruiting?

Vaughn: Well, I think that for a long period of time, the Office of Admission and Scholarship backed off of it, because it was expensive and it was largely ineffective, because while in the late sixties and early seventies we were a really good value in higher education, as we began to raise tuition, our board, in its democratic fashion, would say, “Let’s sock it to the out-of-staters.” They would raise tuition.

So the gap between in- and out-of-state grew substantially, and then even if you give the same percentage increase, it continues to widen, so we really began to price ourselves out of the market for many out-of-state students, in the eighties especially, and into the nineties. I think we hit a peak freshman class size, must have been—well, it was in the seventies. I don’t remember exactly which year it was, ’76 or ’78, we had 400 and some-odd freshman students in our freshman class, which was really big. We had been running around 300, then went to, I think it was 480 in one year, just a bump, and that was the end of the bubble at that point, if not burst, at least began to leak a little.

At one point, the Honors College population was 60 percent out-of-state and 40 percent in-state. It’s nowhere near that now, although it’s a little better now than it was five years ago.

Charnley: In those early years when you were here, what was the main pitch to attract students to the Honors College? What was the argument that you gave? You did freshman orientation at that time?

Vaughn: Those were people who were already accepted membership.

Charnley: What did you see as the biggest advantage of the Honors College here at MSU?

Vaughn: We have always emphasized, above all else, two components—the flexibility that students have in building their academic program, and in the old days, that meant they didn't have to complete the University College humanities sequence or the social science sequence or the natural science sequence; they could take alternative work for that. We also emphasized the enhanced access to small honors courses, and all of the old university college departments offered honors sequences. Humanities had a full yearlong sequence, social science, natural science, and ADL, for that matter. So our members had an option of taking alternative work or these smaller, more interactive honors sections, of course. So we always put the emphasis there.

It didn't hurt to tell people that they had a priority in enrollment, that they were more likely to get the classes they wanted. Some students were really attracted to the enhanced and earlier access to graduate-level courses and to research activities. So we emphasized all of those, but the real emphasis was always on flexibility and access to smaller, more in-depth and more interactive coursework.

Charnley: So there was also, within their own curriculum, they could design or modify it to some degree to their own personal interest?

Vaughn: With the approval of a departmental honors advisor. We have departmental honors advisors in all the areas, and that's probably the area in which today things aren't done as effectively as they were back then. We know, for example, of a student who completed his bachelor's degree in chemistry here in the early seventies and had a lot of graduate work in chemistry. The chemistry departmental honors advisor had said, "This would be better than that; this would be better than that," and when he completed his bachelor's degree and was admitted to the Ph.D. program at MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology], he met with his doctoral committee the first time, they went over his transcript, they said, "Okay, here's the two courses you need to take and write your dissertation." So that's all he had to do for a Ph.D.

Charnley: Wow. That was good advice, I'll say.

Vaughn: Yes. And I don't think that that happens as frequently today as it did then. We had one student who came here, whose name I don't remember. I remember the incident at orientation programs, but I didn't know him well. He came here from somewhere in Oklahoma, I think, and his very first year he was taking graduate courses in mathematics. He didn't complete a degree here. He left and went on to—

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

Charnley: When the tape ended, we were talking about one student who was a mathematician, who didn't complete his degree, but yet—

Vaughn: Went on for a Ph.D. I remember the instance, because at orientation programs—this was back in the days when we used course cards and punch cards.

Charnley: Yes, I remember.

Vaughn: This guy came to orientation and saw the math advisors and saw us. We had this program worked out that had Math 481, Math 437, Math 833, Math 897. And they didn't have class cards for graduate little courses in freshman orientation, so they gave him cards with 400 other courses that matched the other side of the math. People just went [imitates]. So this guy went on.

We also had a thread throughout the earlier years, not so much recently, of the Honors College involvement, along with testing and the Office of Admissions, to take care special needs of young students. I remember once at a national conference I was asked to describe our program for attracting and serving young students, and I said, "Our program doesn't do that. It attempts to avoid them, but when they get there, we try to take really good care of them." We never went out to recruit young students, so we've had a series of them throughout the years.

Charnley: Now, by young, you're talking about under seventeen, in terms of age?

Vaughn: I'm talking about younger than that. One of those students, for example, completed first grade and they bumped him to high school. So he was about eleven when admitted to MSU and, of course, wouldn't let him live in the residence hall, so his family moved to the East Lansing area. They were not going to admit him, but he was a graduate of a Michigan high

school. So Chuck Curry [phonetic], who was then with the Office of Admissions, and Gwen Durrell [phonetic] and I convened our little “kiddies committee” to figure out what we were going to do. We did this every time this happened. And there were maybe, oh, six or eight of them—maybe not quite that many—over the years, but Gwen would hire them to work in the testing office where she could keep an eye on them, and Chuck would work with us in setting all of this up, and I would be the academic advisor, the point academic advisor for the students. I remember this one student calling me one morning. It was the day of enrollment, and he called me at home at six o’clock in the morning with questions about courses he was going to sign up for later that morning. So it turns out that he really didn’t have to sleep much. He was one of those people—you know, two or three hours of sleep a night, that was it. So we were fairly well known for that for quite a number of years, but we haven’t had one recently.

What else have we been involved in? We’ve been involved in a lot of things, I guess, but other than the honors programming and the academic advising, Jim Pickering’s major emphasis when he was director was to expand relations with units, and try to get every department to have a departmental honors program in addition to the Honors College program overall. I think part of the reason for that was that there were three departmental honors programs on campus that pre-dated the founding of the Honors College—chemistry and English and mathematics. Jim had a fondness for the departmental programs, and so he wanted every department to have a departmental program with a brochure, and that brochure could then be used in recruiting. It could be used in his AP and R [phonetic] and all this. And so we spent a lot of time working with committees from various departments, planning for departmental honors programs, and there are quite a number that were really established and built up.

Then Jim made a run for the deanship in the College of Arts and Letters when Al Hollingsworth [phonetic] was selected, and not long after that, Jim left and went to the University of Houston as their dean of humanities, I think, and later became provost and acting president for a while.

Charnley: How did the faculty of the university generally respond to these department-level programs? Were they supportive, or did you have to build that base?

Vaughn: You really had to build it in a lot of instances. In areas like political science, on the other hand, no, there was a very key person in the department, who worked religiously to build that program, because it struck her as something that really ought to be done. Ellen Miskavitch [phonetic], who you pretty much see on the *NewsHour* [with Jim Lehrer] now and then. I forget where she is now, but she's a political scientist with a specialization in—well, it was in the Soviet Union, the politics of the Soviet Union. Her husband was in one of the language departments; taught Russian. When you found a department, like someone in a department like Ellen, that she just was full of energy and did all the work, you see. But we all had a lot of liaison responsibilities at that time.

That's about the time that Jim hired Chetra Smith [phonetic] as associate director. We had been really without an associate director for some time. Actually, since Dorothy Orola left during Blackington's administration, there was not really an associate director on line. I think that Mary Thompson [phonetic] had that title for a while. Sister Mary, was a—I forget what order—nun, was in charge of doing all the research associated with the evaluation of the freshmen program, entering as freshmen.

But that's about the time Chetra came in. She had just finished up an administrative internship in the provost's office with Dorothy Orotu, and when she had completed that, Jim managed to re-slate us for an associate director. And that's about the same time he changed all of the assistant director titles, except mine, to staff advisor. So I got a promotion, but not a change in title.

Charnley: Not a change in title and not an increase in pay. That's okay. [Laughter]

Vaughn: So he wanted us to be much more out in the trenches with the other departments in building departmental honors programs, and that was really one of his main objectives.

Charnley: Now, was this in the late seventies, early eighties that this happened?

Vaughn: Jim must have left late seventies. He must have left about '80 or '81, something like that, and we then had a year and a half with Chetra as acting director, and it's at that point that Don Lamers [phonetic] was hired, and Don had a very long tenure at the Honors College, until '98, I believe. So he was director for quite a long time. So they did a complete review of the program at Don's retirement, and went through a search, a national search, in fact, for a director.

Charnley: And who followed Professor Lamers?

Vaughn: Ron Fisher is the current director.

Charnley: Was there an increased emphasis on international programs at any time during the time that you were there?

Vaughn: Yes. Once the president announced there was an institutional objective to achieve a certain—we redoubled our efforts. We put a lot of emphasis on intensive advising. For example, students come in and see one of us, excepting the times that we know are going to be extremely busy, they start out with a one-hour appointment, not a fifteen-, ten-, twenty-minute appointment. It's a one-hour appointment, and we've always put a lot of emphasis on talking with them about a range of considerations, including internships and study abroad and those sorts of things.

We've always tried to make it a total advising situation, and telling them at the same time that they have to see other people, too, if they want to get the best kind of advice. If you're a physics major, you've got to go see that physics advisor, too. But intensive advising has been one of the hallmarks of the Honors College.

I don't know when it was, a number of years ago, the National—NSSE Yearbook or something; it's some educational organization—did a whole volume, one of the yearly volumes was on programs for the gifted. The guy who wrote the higher education chapter, something Gold—I can't remember his last name just offhand—had chosen three institutions to be representative of what he considered to be the best institutions representative of three different models for honors programs. He had his models ranged basically in terms on flexibility.

At one end was the University of Washington, where there was an absolutely cut-and-dried core curriculum that constituted the honors program, and if a student wanted to do that, he does that, okay. But at the other end was good old MSU, which placed a great deal of emphasis

on real flexibility, widespread flexibility. And then the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the middle, which he viewed as having a combination of the best of those two models.

But we were identified as the best in the country of the flexibility model, and when you look at that kind of closely, you see that with the flexibility comes a great deal of emphasis you have to put on academic advising, because intensive advising, in that context, produces great academic programs. If you don't have intensive advising and good advising, you don't produce good academic programs, okay? And we've really put that emphasis. We've always had a wide-ranging core of honors advisors and faculty who teach honors courses and so on, who work with our students very closely.

It also requires a kind of student that's different than those that bloom in those other programs. They've got to be inquisitive and they've got to want to take charge of their own education more than other students do. And I think probably over the years, including today, a significant subset of our students don't really take advantage of the flexibility. They meet the program requirements, but they do it according to somebody's model of what they ought to be doing. They're not terribly interested in thinking up different things to do, as [Roy] Roy Pea was, when he said, "I majored in cognitive science when nobody knew it existed." And this changes. Generations of students are very different from other generations of students.

Charnley: The students in the late sixties and early seventies, to what degree were they politically involved? You mentioned the Vietnam War. Were any of them leaders in, let's say, the war protest movement? Did you discover that? What were some of the effects or relationships between those top students and, let's say, the anti-war movement?

Vaughn: Well, our students have always been involved in student government and other activities, more not less than the average student. The exception would probably be varsity athletic, although I don't know that it's even the case there, because it wouldn't take very many Honors College students, given our size, to be varsity athletes to exceed that of the student population as a whole.

Charnley: And you mentioned you did have some athletes who were, again, top students, too.

Vaughn: Oh, yes. We do every year. In fact, one of our Rhodes scholars was a member of a world-class relay team—Molly Brennan [phonetic]. Among our Rhodes winners, she's really been the only real athlete we've had—quote, unquote—"real athlete." Although Roy Pea used to commute, when he went home on weekends to the Detroit area, he did so by bicycle.

So, yes, those were disturbing years. I was still a student, of course, and I was working full-time, but I was taking graduate seminars, evening seminars in philosophy and in philosophy of education. I was taking some other courses in philosophy, because I didn't have an extensive background in philosophy before I came here, so I did quite a number of undergraduate courses just as, more or less, catch-up.

The campus, our students were probably over-represented in SDS [Students for a Democratic Society], for example. The woman who was our second-in-command at the library for many years, Beth Shapiro, was an Honors College member and an SDS founder. There are lots of examples like that.

Charnley: Randy Scott.

Vaughn: Didn't know him. The African American guy who was in [James] Madison [College]—I can't come up with him, but lots of them.

As part of this new freshman program in '70-'71, and '71-'72, we did a freshmen seminar, which we would bring in people to speak, and then we had broken down into a large number of small discussion sections, some of which were taught by Honors College staff, some by other faculty, some by students, and we brought in a lot lefties. Phil Johnson, who was one of the other assistant directors, was a sociologist, and Phil was connected, shall we say, in the movements. I did my own share of marching on Grand River Avenue and so on, and I know our students were frequently to be found there as well.

Yes, we had all kinds. I remember vividly a young man, not especially political, Mordecai Abramowitz [phonetic]. Mort was from Detroit, and he had attended a very competitive high school, and was a go-getter and a really competitive spirit, was a physics major. After his first year, he decided that he wanted to be in Justin Morrill College rather than be a physics major. The first time he came into see me, after he had made that change, say, halfway through the fall semester, he looked haggard; he looked tired. I said, "Mort, what's the matter with you?"

He says, "I always knew when to stop before. You know, you had a four-point, you could stop. I don't know when to stop." [Laughter]

Well, a lot of students at Justin Morrill who were in the Honors College. We had a separate application procedures for them, the ones who came in by application. So we had an arrangement over there. They provided us with the permission of the students, with their written

evaluations, and they made recommendations themselves. So we had a good working relationship with all of the residential programs.

Charnley: Were you teaching at all during that time?

Vaughn: Yes, I taught. Before I started at the Honors College, I was the teaching assistant in the undergraduate required course in educational foundations, and then after I moved over to the Honors College, I taught a number of special topics courses in that, one for people who were preparing for certification as teachers of the gifted, so I did an ed foundations course for them, and I did another one that was—I can't remember the name of that program now. There was a special program in the College of Education and I taught at one for them. And then I taught at 801A, the introductory philosophy of education course in a lot of places, by extension and on campus, and I taught a Plato-Dewey seminar a couple of times. George Ferree and I used to teach some special topics grad seminars together.

Yes, I kept up pretty much, and then it got too busy, and I didn't after, say, early eighties. But when they started these new freshmen seminars, I've been teaching on those. So I didn't last year, but I did the first two years or so, and this year I'm doing one. I'm going to have the kids look at the vision of education that's incorporated into Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward [2000-1887]*. I'll have some fun with that. This is not for Honors College students; this is just a freshmen seminar.

Charnley: What is it over the years that you've liked most about teaching?

Vaughn: Well, I've always liked student contact, and I really consider academic advising a form of teaching, quite honestly. But what I've liked most about teaching is that it kept me more engaged in my primary subject than I am otherwise.

I remember one time I was teaching in 801A, and there was an African American guy in the class who was in a special program in mathematics, and this was going to be a program for improving mathematics instruction. It was a master's program, and after three or four sessions, he set up an appointment with the office. He said, "I want to sit down and go over some things with you because you don't seem like you're hard-nosed, but I know you are hard-nosed." [Laughter] He says, "I really want to know more about your expectations," he said.

And I remember that. I have always remembered that, because the people in ed used to give me these things every semester—"Fill these out," you know, and they would ask, "What characteristic learning activities are your students going to be involved in?" And I would answer, "Reading, writing, and discussing materials." [Laughter]

Charnley: The tough things.

Vaughn: So, in student contact discussion especially, you get to know people in that context much more than otherwise. I mean, I've taught everything. When I was at Missouri, I taught courses at Central Methodist College, and I taught in our correspondence division. I've taught on campus, teaching assistant on campus, but I've always liked teaching. I just taught high school for two years, high school American history, but it was a fine, good two years.

Charnley: In your career, you've seen change obviously in students over the years. How would you characterize that change in the MSU students?

Vaughn: Well, I think there's the waning and the waxing of political orientation and seriousness about why they're here, and that's very difficult to disentangle which is which sometimes. Because I know a generation of students, kids who were here in the eighties, probably early '82 to '86, these kids were very serious about their educations, and they appeared to be, at least socially, rather conservative. But I've never met a cohort of students that was more committed to doing good with their education than these.

This was a group of people who include a guy who—I'll never forget it—at AOP [Academic Orientation Program]. He came into AOP and he sat down across the table from me and he says, "I want you to know before we start talking, I want you to know, right off the bat that I'm not an engineer and I don't want to be an engineer."

And I said, "Well, then why do you have your declared major in chemical engineering?"

And he said, "Because I want to work for the Environmental Protection Agency and I don't think that the EPA bureaucrats know enough about engineering and science. And so if I'm going to work for them, I'm going to know what I'm talking about, okay?"

I said, "Fine. Let's work on it."

So he stuck with me sort of almost primary advisor for the full four years, and I'm still in touch with him. I still keep in touch with him. The first task with Tom was to get him to apply for a Truman Scholarship, and we managed to convince him to do it. He kept saying, "It's not for engineers. It's for Madison students, stuff like this."

"Give it a shot."

And it was a tough row to hoe, but he actually won a Truman Scholarship, and he went to [University of California] Berkeley when he finished his degree here, and did a joint program in public policy and engineering. He stopped off in East Lansing for a visit on his way back through to Washington, D.C., where he had taken a job with the Environmental Protection Agency. He was in charge of a superfund, a big job for a first job. He was in charge of the superfund program that was to dig up underground gas tanks from abandoned gas stations and stuff like that, and restore those, and he was with the EPA for a number of years. He finally went back to school and got a Ph.D. in environmental engineering. He's in, I think, UCAL [University of California] Davis. I think it's Davis. But we stay in touch by e-mail now and then. But he really characterized that group.

They were serious, they were socially conservative in lots of ways, but they were really out to do something. They were not these "me first" kinds. We've had "me-first" kinds, of course, but I think that less of that than has been claimed. I really do. I think our students at MSU, at least the ones I've known in the Honors College, have, by and large, been really serious people.

I said our first modern Rhodes scholar, who practices law in Fort Wayne [Indiana], is also a labor organizer. He also did pro bono work, representing a small town in Indiana where Waste Management Inc. was dumping hazardous materials, and he won.

That's what our people are doing. They're all over the place. They're in medicine, they're in law, they're profs, they're doing engineering kinds of jobs and all sorts of thing, and they're, I think, by and large, good citizens and thoughtful citizens. I'd like to think they're all lefties, but they're not, but the ones that aren't are, for the most part, sensible. I can name a few well-known exceptions, but I won't.

Charnley: In looking at some of the alumni of the Honors College, you've mentioned a couple contacts that you've had. Is there any way you can characterize their reaction when they come back, either in conversations that they've had with you, in terms of what the Honors College has meant to them and their experience?

Vaughn: They had a reunion of the ADS'ers last year. A number of them showed up and it was like old home week. The people who communicate with us—one of the things that Ron Fisher has done is reorganize the staff rather thoroughly. We now have an assistant director, who's Bess German. All of her work is related to alumni relations and recruiting. So the way we got around the backing off of serious recruiting efforts for out-of-state students on the part of the Office of Admissions and Scholarships was to take on a substantial part of that ourselves. Bess has one assistant, and they spend lots of—

[Begin Tape 2, Side A]

Charnley: This is tape two of the Scott Vaughn interview.

When the last tape ended, we were talking about the reorganization of Ron Fisher and Beth German.

Vaughn: There are times at which one of our people, Bess or Sarah [], attend a college fair in some big city, and we're the only MSU representative there. So, since Ron made that addition to the staff and reorientation to it, in the nineties, late eighties and nineties, the size of our freshman

class had slipped through the 300 level down to the 200 level, and at least through one year, below 200 students.

Our freshman classes now are running in the 450s. Our total membership got below 1,000, and it's now over 2,000, and this is largely—not largely—it's entirely due to the fact that we have a very different focus on the staff. In the older days, we were all necessarily, the way things were organized, generalists.

So I remember some years ago, ten years ago or so, I think it was still when we had G_____, and before we had the worldwide web, finding a site that advertised higher education opportunities for gifted students, and we weren't on it. And so I sent them an e-mail message asking why. And they said, 'Because you chose not to be on it.' And, of course, the reason we chose not to be on it, it would cost fifty bucks or something to be on it. So it may have been [unclear], I'm sure.

But I got it to them. I said, "Send me the information." So we started putting an ad in this publication. It was actually a publication. They had it online, but it was a glossy that they sent out to students who had been successful in the various area talent searches that are conducted all around the country. Duke [University] does one in the South, Johns Hopkins [University], Northwestern [University] and so on. It has contact information and so on, and we weren't on it. So we drew it up. We put it up. We sent it in to them. We got from them each year a list of students who had responded to it, and we sorted them out. This was all stuff that admissions was unwilling or unable to do, given their gigantic task in a place this size.

Really what we've done is move from what was going on in the sixties, and now we're much closer to one another than the things that happened in the middle, because there was this very active Honors College involvement in recruiting high-ability students, especially out-of-

state students, but not entirely. So Ron's refocus of the staff has really brought that about, and some other changes, but we were beginning to build back up when Don left. We went through some very tough demographic times. The 200 wasn't just because we weren't recruiting efficiently.

MSU was the first public institution to participate in the National Merit Scholarship program. And in the 1960s into the early seventies, people who had been named semifinalists in that competition, the first public university they heard from, no matter where they were in the country, was Michigan State University. What happened in the seventies and into the early eighties is that every institution in the country—college, university, whatever—bought tapes from the National Merit Corporation and sent out stuff to people. So my daughter, who started college in 1989 or '90, something like that, we had three grocery sacks full of stuff that she received in the course of trying to get her to apply.

So the competition came in where there was no real competition before, and at the same time, we had begun to reduce the investment we were making in out-of-state recruiting and high-ability recruiting, because it was becoming tougher, which meant that each catch costs a little more than it used to cost. So you cut that back. So we ended up at one point having our national search, so called, was greater Michigan, and that's all it was.

So we've gone back to a national search, and Sarah and/or Bess go to California, they go to Florida, they go to New York, they go to Chicago, they go all over the country, D.C., to college fairs. The demographics are better now, but the demographics, combined with the more effective and efficient, better recruiting practices, have brought us back to about the same level we were in terms of members in 1973 or '74. And really from the late seventies all the way

through, it was a steady decline. I think the lowest we hit, as I say, was 198 in a freshman class, in a total membership of 905, something like that.

Charnley: Do you think some of the budget problems that President [M. Cecil] Mackey experienced was part of that mix, or other things?

Vaughn: One thing about it, I think it's true in higher education that everybody's typically in the same boat, at least in public institutions. When we're having budget problems, so are other people. I think the problem wasn't so much that we had budget problems. I think the problem, as I said before, came in that we increased the difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition so much over those years that now it wasn't cost-effective for people in Indiana and Ohio and Illinois to consider MSU as opposed to their own—

Charnley: Purdue [University] or—

Vaughn: Right. Exactly. In the old days, we were such a good buy, that in the late sixties and early seventies, our competition for honors students wasn't the student's home state public university; they were the Ivys [Ivy League] and the other privates. We had a lot of students who had applied here and to us, there and to us, there and to us, and we did pretty well there because we were such a phenomenally good value. I mean, it's like being able to buy the finest vintage wine for a \$1.99 a bottle, you see.

Not very many years ago, one of the special issues that *U.S. News and World Report*, I think, does, on values and the best buys in higher education, they did a special thing on honors

programs, and we were one of the features and we were identified as the best buy. It was called “How to Get an Ivy League Education at a Public Institution.” And we were identified as the best buy there, but I don’t know that that was for out-of-state as opposed to in-state. They may have just been considering in-state residency.

Students got—still do get a phenomenally good education here. I think we have a great undergraduate program to begin with. I’ve always told my friends in the National Collegiate Honors Council, you can’t have a great honors program in a second-rate institution. You’ve got to have a first-rate institution. You can’t make an institution a better institution with an honors program. You’ve got to have a good institution to get a good honors program, and then you get a synergy that really works and it feeds on itself.

We had that for a lot of years, and I think we’re getting back to having it again, because students are more active now, they’re more involved. There’s a critical mass of students out there. They’re far more involved in terms of co- and after-curricular activities as honor students than they ever have been in the past. So it’s really a matter of—

Charnley: It sounds like you’re optimistic.

Vaughn: Oh, yes, I’m very optimistic. I mean, we’ve got a lot of difficulties facing us in terms of budget and all of that. In fact, one of the reasons—we shouldn’t print this, but one of the reasons I decided to retire next year is that I’m expensive in terms of the staff. I’m one of two assistant directors. Ron will be able to do some restructuring. Not that I don’t want to retire; I do want to retire. [Laughs]

But I think to retire now, because I want the unit to continue to have that kind of ability to adjust and not be strapped for nickels and dimes, you know. It's really bad when you're strapped for nickels and dimes. You can't send out a good glossy brochure to recruit students, because you can't afford to print it. And recruiting high-ability students is really an expensive operation. I don't know what it costs us, but I remember reading somewhere a couple years ago, I think it was Princeton [University] or someplace like that, said it was over \$15,000 is what it cost to recruit a student, each and every student, successfully.

Charnley: Wow.

Vaughn: It had to be less than that, but it was in the thousands.

Charnley: When you left Missouri and came here, did you anticipate you'd be here basically your entire career?

Vaughn: No, definitely not. I thought I was going to come into Michigan State, complete my Ph.D. in four years, maybe five, and then I was going to get a position teaching philosophy of education at a public institution probably, hopefully a land-grant public institution, because I am a land-grant college freak. University of Missouri is public and land grant, and there are relatively few places in the country that have the distinction of being that, public land grant, and research. Missouri and Michigan State are two of—I think there are only eight or nine in the country that are land grant and among the elite of research institutions.

Charnley: That's interesting.

Vaughn: And when I got here, I really liked it. I don't like the area that much, because where I grew up, on one side of Main Street the curbs are this tall [gestures] and the other side of Main Street the curbs that tall [gestures]. I had to move from there before I knew that there were basements that were not walk-out basements. And here a hill is hard to find, and if you see a rock bigger than your fist, you know somebody brought it in. [Laughter]

I'm used to mountains. I grew up in the foothills of the Ozarks. I yearn for those now and then, but in every other respect I love MSU. I think it's a great place. I think the people of Michigan are blessed to have one of the finest undergraduate institutions in the country and one of the best graduate institutions down the road as well. But they don't do undergraduate education the way we do at MSU, by golly. They really don't.

Charnley: You mentioned the land-grant philosophy, which leads me to my last question, and that is, in looking back at your career, in terms of Michigan State, is there anything that you deem to be most important?

Vaughn: Well, I think probably, apart from falling into this job in the first place, when Jim Pickering was willing to, in effect, give me a promotion and give me more responsibilities and give me a more active role, not just as an academic advisor, but as a real assistant director, that I think probably was the most important thing that sealed my fate in a way, because I then began to look at this as a real career. I say career. I've often told folks I haven't had a career; I've had a calling. [Laughs] It's more like the ministry than it is a career.

Charnley: Many teachers use that. Good teachers use that.

Vaughn: Yes. Right.

Charnley: They see the connection. Addressing freshman, you're probably an evangelist at AOP.

Vaughn: Yes.

Charnley: I'd like to thank you on behalf of the Oral History Project, and I appreciate your insight and the time that we spent. Thank you.

Vaughn: You're quite welcome. It was a pleasure.

[End of interview]

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