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Bill Stewart Interview

William B. Stewart
University of Minnesota - Morris

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William Stewart: Okay, my correct spelling is W-i-l-l-i-a-m, B as in boy for initial and Stewart is S-t-e-w-a-r-t. And when did I serve? I started in 1973 in the winter quarter and I retired in 1998. I was the Director of the Minority Student Program.

Christopher Butle: Your background is actually architecture in urban planning. But when you came to UMM, you were director the Minority Student Program. How did you make the shift from architecture to Student Body work.

William Stewart: Well, my last assignment was in Washington, DC with the MICCO, which is Model Inner City Community Organization, which was a program developed by citizens working with citizens. They hired their own staff and did the planning for it to show an area. And so when I came back, I was thinking about working in the Housing and Urban Development. But the position opened up here at Morris and my wife was hired on a B appointment to replace Dean Headman [ph?] for two years since he had left. And they were looking for someone to develop and implement a program. I don't know if you need more detail. We can go back to that. But the first person that started the program was a faculty member in Biology and he was doing that part-time. Then he left and the first person was a Native American person who was only here six months. So they needed someone and I felt well, this is an opportunity. Say, why don't you try it? So, I said fine. However, I would like to be a director, not a coordinator. See, because in directing a program then you can initiate and plan your program and develop it relatively with the people that you're going to have to work with, rather than simply coordinate a program. It demands a lot more responsibility than that. And being as the program had no records, no office; I had to start from zero. So, how do you start a program from nothing and develop the mission statement and with no staff and yourself, no secretary and then implement that program? It's a challenge.

Christopher Butle: When you arrived in 1973, students of color made up 1% of the student body. What were your initial thoughts about that?

William Stewart: Well, my initial thoughts was that what I want to do is make this a viable program and in order to do that, and I set for my goals, to make it the best program in the university. So, in order to do that, you had to have a mission statement. Set up goals and objectives and work with those components in order to achieve the results. So, that's how I-- it was a challenge. And initially I felt well, why don't I get into

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education?

Christopher Butle: For the sake of the campus and UMM, why did you feel it was important to diversify the Student Body?

William Stewart: Well, at that time, the university was looking into diversity and minority students being a part of that diversity. And so I felt, in order for higher education as a whole, not only Twin City, not only here, but as a whole; they have to include that population that they had excluded for a number of years and therefore they had to develop a program to do that. See, the institution had already looked into that under Dr. Birdy [ph?]. What do we need to do to diversify our program? And at that time, I think all over the country, they were looking at bringing in diversity and how can you have a program in Liberal Arts or any other institution without including those people that had been denied entrance over a long period of time and were now suddenly appearing on the scene.

Christopher Butle: How does diversifying add to the Student Body health of the campus life?

William Stewart: Well, it brought in another perspective that the campus didn't have from ethnic racial minorities involving not only treatment and programming but also involved curriculum matters and role models and developing other kinds of programs for them to succeed. And there's a process that includes every student group that they are part of that group but it would have to be dealt with. Now, they cannot be treated the same as your white Student Body because their experiences are different. They need role models. They may need assistance in certain areas. They have to make adjustments to that system. So how do you bring that together in one program and then work with the two units, the major units; the academic unit, the student support services and then the administration to get that done. So, we patterned out staff after that. Academic Assistance coordinated an assistant consulate program and then the director at the head. And then you have your Student Body, your minority students who have different kinds of programs.

Christopher Butle: How did you come up with the idea to go to Chicago to recruit students?

William Stewart: Well, first of all, I felt-- and it's not only Chicago but I felt the whole

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country. But it just happened that Chicago was a talent search outfit that we used. I felt that we couldn't bring to a small campus as remote as this, enough student personnel to provide a viable body of students. Okay? And that would include Native American students, blacks, Asians, Hispanic. So, the first thing I looked toward was Washington, DC because I knew that. And surmised then that proved very difficult because we weren't able to provide the kind of financial incentives as well as the other stuff that gets in there. We didn't have what we call in-state tuition. So that provided a problem. Now, Chicago happened because they had a talent search program, which we had become acquainted with by-- Okay, I'll back up. We tried to get funding for the program. We only had directors' salary. So we applied to TRIO Program and TRIO Programs are talent search upper bound special service program. We wanted to apply as a special service program. We became acquainted because we went to their meetings; the Midwest Association of Equal Opportunity Planning. And we became associated with Chicago because of two reasons; Bob Vicander [ph?] and MAEOP.

Christopher Butle: What was the second name?

William Stewart: MAEOP; Midwest Association of Equal Opportunity Planning, which include Kansas City, Chicago, Michigan, all the others. It's a certain segment.

Christopher Butle: Explain to me what was Project C?

<Crew talk >

Christopher Butle: Tell me what Project C was.

William Stewart: Was summer education experience.

<Crew talk>

William Stewart: Project C was summer education experience initiated by Dr. Joe Lateral [ph?] to bring students into the university and work with them in groups to develop scientific research in various areas. Now, rather than take the best students, which all institutions normally take, Joe had the theory that we need to get the students who are not the best students and bring them here and put them in groups and have them do group projects. And then present these projects and bring their parents up in

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presentation. And this was developed in those students who were not the best. Okay. That was his idea. And this is how we got involved with Project C because we would bring in our minority and other students and then have them work in teams. They would develop a project and then present it not only to their parents but the university as a whole. And then they would be the less privileged students in terms of academic performance that would form the backlog for students in science. Now, and I'm gonna say this too, I think this was the beginning of our Gateway Program initiative and also I think it was a model for schools like Massachusetts Institution of Technology to develop these programs because they didn't have that.

Christopher Butle: What was Joe's role in Project C and your role?

William Stewart: All right. Joe's role was to be the administer of the program. Get faculty involved with it. Develop the projects and whatever it was they were gonna do. Do the experiments, complete it and then present it. The second role was to take these students into an industry that was doing scientific surveys and give them that experience. And that involved career planning and placement also because we went to places like Yunsty [ph?], which is a computer _____. We went to Pillsbury. We went to Cargill. We went to 3M. We went to a number of other places that had no students exposed their staff and what it means to get into science and research.

Christopher Butle: I understand Project C and later Project Gateway had a fact on retention.

William Stewart: Yes it did.

Christopher Butle: Explain to me why.

William Stewart: Well, those students that came to those programs, whether they stayed here or did not, had an opportunity to do experiments, develop the critical base of analysis and thinking, which would give them a prior experience so that they could come in with these other students and compete and not feel desecrated by the competition difference.

Christopher Butle: When Project C became Gateway, there was a little bit of controversy. Why?

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William Stewart: Yes. Well, because they--

Christopher Butle: Why was their controversy?

William Stewart: The institution itself, knew that it needed some kind of preliminary program for students but the faculty was not willing to do that unless it was credited and it involved faculty teaching in the three areas such as English, Math and computers I think. And therefore, we had to go through the faculty, establish the guidelines for setting up the five credit course in order to get it here because they didn't want the institution it seems as though, they were taking students that were not eligible for getting into UMM. And again, now these students may have some difficulties but they were admissible. So they weren't just students that were brought here in the Gateway program. And you have to look at the depth of that Gateway Program too. One, it was not only bringing students in, but they had to be advised, monitored to see how well they did relative to the other students in order to prove or see that there was a viability here. And it also included bringing in faculty who were working on their PhDs but had to come here and perhaps could teach and get that experience here. And also it was a much more extensive program than just simply bringing students here. And we monitored students as they went through and made comparisons to the other students; not only the white students but also the other minority students and see how they achieved.

Christopher Butle: What were the results? What did you fine?

William Stewart: Well, our results were-- I think it you look at the data, it's been very good. Now, we were funded by the Twin Cities. Okay? And we were supposed to do an evaluation at the end of five years in order to see if that was viable. Now, it wasn't along with other programs. Now it has been done but you'd have to look at the data, which _____ accumulate because we never went through the five year period of evaluation. But if you look at that, I think you'll find that that works out very well. And these students also, a number of these students may go on to the science area. Minorities as a whole have been limited in terms of the science program. And so you find this is a positive thing for the U.

Christopher Butle: What kind of programs or support did you feel was necessary for urban minority students to feel comfortable on the prairie of Minnesota?

William Stewart: Well, you have to work not only with institution, but the town as well. So, what you do is you present a realistic picture to those students what they're coming into. You don't tell them that they're going to come in an area like Minneapolis/St. Paul. That's not going to be. So, how do you develop-- once you admit them then what about financial aid? Then, what about orientation? What about the advising for academia? What kind of programs do you need there? How do you get them into student life? Student living quarters therefore, then move them through the system' how do you evaluate it and how do you get them into careers and then alumni associations? So it's a process but that process is the same process that's used for any other student. Okay? And so that's what we had to do. We had to look at each one of those ap-- You know, if they come to orientation, how is their orientation separate or different or apart of your Student Body. We had prior orientation of bringing their parents and their students and assured them, talk about our program; then they'd go the regular orientation. And then they would move on into the second phase. Now how do you advise them? Should you have-- we had an academic assistance coordinator. Initially, we found that there were come difficulties in working with faculty who had no experience with it. And so we said, "Okay, why don't we do the first year advising. Then move them into the regular faculty. Guide them through the mazes and then evaluate that process. And then what kind of counseling needs are there? If you have a student organization, how do they work? The Black Student Union, there's the Native American Student Association, The Hispanic Organization. What kind of functions do they perform? What kind of programs do they do and how do they fit into that? We developed Women of Color. We developed that. We set up a constitution for each one of those groups and then define their role and how do they apply for money? You know, to get the organization started, how do they work with other and how do they work with the other organizations. And then if you're gonna have a living situation, how do you work out that arrangement? We had student advisors here. Should they be a part of that student advisor staff? And then if you have student government, are they a part of the student government structure? You have to work that through. And then if they're gonna do program, what kind of programs do they do? How do you advise and guide them through how do they apply for money? Then we had our only minor-- we had our Cultural Heritage Week, which was a separate entity.

Christopher Butle: Another way to help students of color feel comfortable on campus was cultural programming.

William Stewart: Right.

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Christopher Butle: You were the one that started Cultural Heritage Week. Explain how you came up with that idea and why?

William Stewart: All right. We felt that the way the UN represented that for all the world. Now we said, "Okay, whatever's gonna happen on an international scene, will have some impact on what happens here." And therefore, we're gonna say you touched my world, I touch your world. Now, how we did that is we felt that Culture Heritage Week should not simply be an entertainment process. But it should bring in those prominent speakers for that particular year that would address the issues in higher education and those things that impact. It would not only be an entertainment but it would also be an educational, academic thing. So, we said okay. And when we started that, we used the four student organizations to bring in their programs. But then once a year, we would have Cultural Heritage Week, which would combine all of those things together and would address the particular thing that year that we had. And then in order to do that, we set up small groups within the community, which we had our students either do planning or games or _____ groups in the town here. And then once a year, we brought those programs in and we would invite everybody in that. So that was the reason why. And it proved-- I mean, we examined a lot of things.

Christopher Butle: It is still a very popular program.

William Stewart: And you know what happened? We only had a thousand dollars to start with and Student Activities gave it to us because they were into it so we started out with a thousand dollars and we had to develop a system. See? And we have that. What do you expect to achieve? How do you evaluate it? All that. We had that in a thing that's set up. You can get that.

Christopher Butle: "Transforming an institution requires constant change. As the institution itself changes, programs must be relevant." These are your words. Explain what that means in terms of students of color and campus life.

William Stewart: Okay. First of all, you have to have the same mission as the institution has but you have to adapt that mission according to those needs of those ethnic, racial, minority students. And their needs have to change relative to the changes that are incorporated and happening in the institution and the world around them. Curriculum wise, role model wise, institution wise; demands a different set of

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arrangement. We first came here, we didn't have mentorship with faculty. We had to develop that. Okay? So that they'd work with faculty, do research; do that kind of thing. And then when you talk about role models, who are they? If you don't have them here, who do you bring here to institute that? What do you do with your alumni group? Are they a part of your Alumni Association? Do they develop a network for their students? Do they develop an association with the campus that their programs are meaningful for them> This is all a part of that system. So, that's what the thing is. You transform institutions. You come into an institution first of all, it's all white. It has no experience, no association with these students. It has particular ideas about how these students should be brought to the institution, how they should work within that institution and how they should be guided through. So, when you come in, you're setting a separate set of criteria for getting these students in. You have to recruit them. You have to provide financial aid. If the financial aid is not appropriate, you won't get them. Okay? Then you have to develop an orientation process. Should it be special? Should it be the same? How do you involve them? So, all of that takes place. Now at the institution as far as faculty were concerned, they didn't have the experience. And if you don't have role models within the faculty, then how do students achieve? Your faculty represents the institutions commitment to ethnic/racial groups as well as the other. The students needs role models. They need incidence if they or happenings in which we represent them. If your culture-- if your programs, whether they're cultural or not, do not represent them, how do they feel a part of it? So, that's part of the transformation process. So, you have to transform, change the institution from what it initially was to make it conform to these new group of students that are coming in. And that not only includes informal but formal education as well. That's what I meant by that. And so what has happened, when we came here initially from what you see now, is very different. Okay, we started out with 25 students. They're only blacks and Native Americans. We had the highest percentage within the university, both the Twin Cities and here when we left. And now look at your Native America population. You have 130 Native American students here. There's a publication called Diversity in Higher Education. It used to be Black Educated. University of Minnesota and University of Minnesota Twin City; they look at the hundred institutions who have the highest number of minority. They're the two institutions in the whole country that have.

Christopher Butle: Thanks Bill for your time. We really appreciate it.

William Stewart: Thanks to also faculty and people that work with us. We didn't do that alone. And primarily I would say the Admissions Department and Dr. Joe Lateral who helped us there because we didn't have any resources because we applied for a TRIO Program and we didn't get that. And that's how we happened to get into Chicago.

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And understand something, the Twin Cities had Upward Bound Program. The Shelskys [ph?], the whole family got their PhDs and worked with that. We went to MAEOP and they only came sparingly. But we went to MAEOP and made a significant difference in MAEOP so that they came too. And that's how we got associated with ADS McKinley [ph?] and a number of other programs throughout the country. Louisiana, Texas and all these different things like that. But the recruitment was extremely important. Bob Vicander and I went together and recruited. We did not have anyone else do that. And that made a big difference because you had-- I mean, we went to the Twin Cities. We went to Chicago and others. And rather than have a counselor go who may not represent the situation. We had to go ourselves and therefore we could do two things. We could admit the students right there; provide the financial aid and everything else. And that helped.

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