

Katie Schutze

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History of American Education

Dr. Newstreet

History of American Education: Interview with Dr. Alvis Transcript

- 1 Dr. Alvis: Yes, Miss Schutze, I understand the conditions and give my assent to them.
- 2 Katie Schutze: Um, you are, you are talking, you are referring to – just so they know in the
3 recording – I know what you're talking about, but you're referring to me. You're
4 referring to – giving me permission to conduct and record this interview and that
5 the final recording and transcription will be housed in the University of Dallas
6 Oral History Repository.
- 7 Dr. Alvis: Yes, I give my consent.
- 8 Katie Schutze: I will represent this information in writing. And would you like to use a
9 pseudonym to ensure anonymity?
- 10 Dr. Alvis: I'm sorry, I didn't hear.
- 11 Katie Schutze: I will represent – I will represent this recording in writing. I will write a summary
12 of it and I will make a transcription. Would you like to use a pseudonym to
13 remain anonymous
- 14 Dr. Alvis: No.
- 15 Katie Schutze: I have to ask all that for legal reasons. You don't seem like the type to be too
16 concerned about that.
- 17 Dr. Alvis: Um, no, I don't think so.
- 18 Katie Schutze: Alrighty.
- 19 Dr. Alvis: It depends on what I say, hahaha.
- 20 Katie Schutze: Yeah. Well you can, well, I can get your permission afterwards if you decide that
21 you would.
- 22 Dr. Alvis: Yeah, yeah.
- 23 Katie Schutze: OK, here we go. So, History of American Education interview questions... OK,
24 starting off, how long have you been teaching?
- 25 Dr. Alvis: Since 1965 when I was a senior. Undergraduate. Taught a course in the summer,

26 Katie Schutze: A course, in the summer.

27 Dr. Alvis: Lit Trad I.

28 Katie Schutze: Lit Trad II! You started at UD?

29 Dr. Alvis: Mm-hm.

30 Katie Schutze: Started at UD. Were you always a professor, or...well, I – I guess that question
31 answered itself, I was going to ask if you started with primary or secondary
32 education or if you were always a professor.

33 Dr. Alvis: I've never taught at the high school level, or elementary level, unless you're
34 counting visitations. Heh.

35 Katie Schutze: Hah. And I was also going to ask how long you've taught at UD, but obviously
36 that would be 53 years. Wow.

37 Dr. Alvis: Yes. But full time only, uh, full time, I think 49. 48 or 49?

38 Katie Schutze: Only 48 or 49 years.

39 Dr. Alvis: Mm-hm, yeah, merely.

40 Katie Schutze: When and why did you decide to become a professor?

41 Dr. Alvis: That's a good question. I can't remember that it was any sort of a "road to
42 Damascus –"

43 Katie Schutze: Haha.

44 Dr. Alvis: – decision. It seems that it just came and the natural course of things, uh, since I
45 enjoyed so much studying literature, that, uh, I suppose my thought was that the
46 only way I could continue studying literature was if I taught it. So I did.

47 Katie Schutze: The only way to keep studying literature was to teach it. Um, how would you
48 perceive the evolution of teacher student interaction?

49 Dr. Alvis: I have rarely thought of classes for individual sessions as interactions. I think,
50 well, I think of it as conversation and so my ideal would be to conduct every
51 class as a conversation and, and I would fill in only when the conversation
52 seemed to need some assistance. So I think that has continued to feed my ideal
53 throughout teaching career. Although it's impossible once the number of
54 students, impossible for me at least, once for the number of students, uh,
55 becomes greater than about 20, uh, because I can't, uh, you know, I can't
56 recognize, uh, faces in that large a multitude.

57 Katie Schutze: Okay, um...how would –

58 Dr. Alvis: So I lecture only when there seem to be a necessity for doing so.

59 Katie Schutze: So then, like what would you say the role of the advisor is in that case?

60 Dr. Alvis: Uh, the advisor is, uh, the role is to, uh, get to know the student well enough to
61 see how their character, uh, and their interests coordinate with the curriculum that
62 is offered at the University of Dallas and that is not as difficult as it would be at
63 other, uh, schools because of the large core curriculum. And, and in my case,
64 because of my conviction that that core curriculum is the best way to proceed, uh,
65 in educating, um, people who have matured, uh, beyond the age of 18.

66 Katie Schutze: How would you say liberal arts education has changed since you started
67 teaching? Or would you say it's changed very much at all?

68 Dr. Alvis: I'm going to make a distinction here between education as it proceeds at the
69 University of Dallas and education as it proceeds almost everywhere else. Um,
70 though education at the University of Dallas is, uh, in, in a central respect the
71 same as when I was, uh, an undergraduate and the changes have not affected the
72 essence of the education and the essence of the education is to begin with
73 students the process whereby one comes to understand, uh, nature and nature's
74 God. Now, uh, I, from what I know of other institutions – and I associate
75 constantly with academics from other institutions and they, they would tend to
76 confirm my judgment, which is that that is not the end of education, uh, as
77 conceived in most universities, uh, and has become somewhat less the case even
78 in a Catholic University. So, at – at the question what is the situation, of, uh,
79 education in this country generally speaking? Uh, I think, uh, it is, uh, in decline
80 and it is in decline because it is not, uh, because it is not, uh, continually
81 addressed – it does not continually address the question of what is the nature of
82 God, and of God's, uh, Creation and of God's Providence. And – and hints there
83 is no unifying center. So together the unifying center of education that would
84 give you a standard whereby you determine the entire curriculum, the, uh,
85 alternative conception is what makes for the best development of human intellect
86 and character. And that, eh, you would find that end of education espoused, at,
87 um, at places that would not endorse my emphasis upon uh, a divine being, uh,
88 but even so, that, uh, alternative conception of liberal education is freeing the
89 better part of the soul from the worst.

90 Katie Schutze: So –

91 Dr. Alvis: ...It is rare, it's rare outside, uh, this university and a handful of others, such as,
92 uh, St. John's Annapolis and St. John of Santa Fe and um, Thomas Moore, uh,
93 California, and some other places that, uh, the, um, University – Catholic
94 University of Wyoming. And, um...

95 Katie Schutze: I know that St. – that St. Thomas Aquinas has a very, has – is so proud of the
96 Catholic identity in California that apparently they have – they make students go
97 to Mass daily? Er, is that it? But, so would you say that that's another school that
98 is very proud of its liberal, that's very, unified in its liberal arts?

99 Dr. Alvis: Oh, yes. Definitely. Uh, Thomas Aquinas of California, yes. Thomas Aquinas of
100 California and, and the College of – of, uh, Thomas Moore, that, uh, in, in Fort
101 Worth. Where else? Uh, the program? Well, you would find that conception of
102 the end of higher education, not espoused by the entire institution, but alive and
103 well, in parts of, uh, large universities such as, uh, the – the, uh, program in the
104 Liberal Arts at, uh, y'know, at, uh, Baylor University in Waco.

105 Katie Schutze: That is interesting because I have a Protestant cousin who, despite going to a
106 Baptist school, she went to Baylor and is now looking into conversion to
107 Catholicism. So would you say that the liberal arts is a very Catholic idea in
108 general?

109 Dr. Alvis: I – I, that's my conviction and I'm not surprised to hear what you, uh, what you
110 say, since, since that conception of education would be, um, would be very close
111 to the aims of education as, uh, uh, as, uh, uh, Cardinal John Henry Newman, uh,
112 expresses them in his idea of the University – in his book, "Idea of a University."

113 Katie Schutze: Um, so you were saying that, um, more secular institutions when they dip into
114 the liberal arts, they at least try to go towards development of human end and
115 character, even if not in a religious context, but –

116 Dr. Alvis: Yes – the better, the better, uh, institutions do, and – and they are fairly few and
117 far between, but you will find a section, of – of many secular universities that,
118 uh, are devoted to a version of what I think is the – mm – proper end of higher
119 education.

120 Katie Schutze: So you would say they're on the right track, but what what they need is more
121 faith?

122 Dr. Alvis: I – not only more faith, but more, uh, of a reasoning in the tradition of the
123 classics of philosophy, and especially, well, especially Plato and Aristotle.

124 Katie Schutze: (unintelligible)

125 Dr. Alvis: So, uh, so, uh, yet another way of presenting a big idea I have in mind would be
126 represented by universities who think of themselves in terms of, uh, studies of great
127 books, and that would be – especially, the two St. Johns – the one in Annapolis,
128 Maryland, and the one in Santa Fe.

129 Katie Schutze: So a defining characteristic of liberal arts would be devotion to the great books.

130 Dr. Alvis: Yes. So that's the means to the, uh, to an education that seeks to understand the
131 nature of things and the nature of things by reverence to the, uh, Creator.

132 Katie Schutze: So overall, your definition of the liberal arts would be a curriculum that aims
133 towards looking into the nature of God, His Creation, His Providence, and the
134 development of the human end and character through the great books.

135 Dr. Alvis: That says it as I would prefer to say it myself.

136 Katie Schutze: How did I phrase that? I should just write that down. Um –

137 Dr. Alvis: Heh heh, ha ha ha.

138 Katie Schutze: Um, the definition of liberal arts would be a curriculum looking into the nature of
139 God, His Creation, and His Providence, as well as the development of human
140 character and man's "telos," um, through – through use of the great books. Okay.

141 Dr. Alvis: Yeah, through study of the great books.

142 Katie Schutze: How would you define a great book?

143 Dr. Alvis: Ah, a great book –

144 Katie Schutze: Haha.

145 Dr. Alvis: – is one that is, uh, continually pertinent because it is addressed to questions that
146 are inseparable from considering the nature of man, and the nature of the divine,
147 the nature of human beings in association, one with the other, and consideration
148 of human being as distributed between the two sexes.

149 Katie Schutze: And the nature of the human being as distributed –

150 Dr. Alvis: As manifesting itself in the two sexes.

151 Katie Schutze: – as manif-...being, as manifested, in the two sexes.

152 Dr. Alvis: Uh, manifested in the two sexes, uh, and consideration of human cultures, plural,
153 by reference to their capacity to educate human beings, in, uh, in the nature of
154 things by respect to their, with respect to their essence, and with respect to their
155 final cause, their purpose for being.

156 Katie Schutze: What would you say is, uh, I mean, you've given me your definition of the great
157 books, but what's the first great book that pops into your head when you say the
158 phrase?

159 Dr. Alvis: "The Iliad."

160 Katie Schutze: How would you say that it fits into these?

161 Dr. Alvis: Eh, because it makes you aware of constants of the human nature, but makes you
162 aware of it through a, through a language, and, ah, through, uh, the imagination
163 of an author who is sufficiently distant from us that we must, uh, learn a new, uh,
164 idiom. We must acquire a new idiom in order to converse with Homer.

165 Katie Schutze: So would you say that, like, separation by time also makes a book great? So,
166 would you say that if I were to write the great American novel right now, you
167 would need – I would need, like, at least a century before it could be truly
168 considered great?

169 Dr. Alvis: I think that's true, because, uh, the measure of a – a great book is usually
170 determined by its, uh, persistence among educated people. And it takes time to
171 see whether – it takes time to reveal whether that work deserves to be called
172 timeless or whether its appeal is restricted to a particular time, particular taste,
173 which are changeable. And whereas the great books are perennially, timelessly,
174 uh, available. Timelessly available.

175 Katie Schutze: Alright... So, going back to your educational career, um, UD students study a
176 variety of educational theorists and philosophers from Socrates to the modern
177 day. For example, I did a project on Montessori, um, in a previous education
178 class, and right now I'm doing one on Carol Dweck, the – who came up with the
179 growth mindset. Um –

180 Dr. Alvis: Mm.

181 Katie Schutze: – what psycho-...do you try to employ a psychology or theory in your teaching
182 and if so, uh, what do you try to, what do you try to do with it?

183 Dr. Alvis: Um, I don't employ any particular educational theory, uh, aside from of
184 generality, that I (unintelligible), uh, express, but I try to adapt as far as I can to
185 the present level of, uh, of learning of the students. And that means adapting
186 one's word choices, and to some extent, one's manner of argument.

187 Katie Schutze: So you think that differentiate – so you would say that differentiation, at least,
188 when facing – when talking with students face to face is very important?

189 Dr. Alvis: Oh yes, definitely. So, uh, educ-...as distinguished from knowing, education is a
190 matter of making the connection between teacher and student and in such a way
191 that it furthers understanding of the nature of things, but you must know the
192 character of the student you're teaching in order to speak to them in such a way
193 that they do progress beyond their present understanding, but by means that are
194 within their present abilities.

195 Katie Schutze: So, you must know the character of the students you're teaching so you can speak
196 to them in a way that... I'm...trying to think what the best way to translate what
197 you said because I feel like I got a little distracted typing the notes at the same
198 time.

199 Dr. Alvis: Speaking – yes – speaking in a way that, uh, that adapts the teacher's thought to
200 the present level of comprehension of the – of the student.

201 Katie Schutze: Do you think that in the process, the teacher has anything to learn from the
202 students as well?

203 Dr. Alvis: Yes, I was about to say that.

204 Katie Schutze: Haha.

205 Dr. Alvis: Yes, indeed. Uh, in that adaptation, the teacher relearns his function and that is
206 not to – that is not to say a certain word with which he is familiar, but to
207 understand the things themselves and the things themselves can be understood,
208 uh, by, uh, by various, uh, words, certainly by various languages, but also by
209 various – in various levels of sophisticated, uh, language. So, uh, in – in those
210 adaptations that are necessary for the teacher to make connection with the
211 student, the teacher also challenges himself to think through to the, uh, to the
212 essence of his subject and to be able to speak in a new – in a manner that may be
213 new to him, and yet express the same ideas he had hitherto expressed in familiar
214 language, and language familiar to him, but, uh, but not, mm, and, but probably
215 not to the student.

216 Katie Schutze: Alright. When you were still getting your qualifications to become a professor,
217 was there a specific educational philosophy involved in the learning process?
218 Like, what did they try to, what did they, what did they focus on when you were
219 becoming a pro – when you were going through the process to become a
220 professor, what did they say was the most important?

221 Dr. Alvis: Well, I, I believe they thought that the best manner of educating was a mature
222 conversation and conversation that would proceed by raising questions,
223 canvassing the various answers proposed to that question and distinguishing the
224 better from the worst and responding to the question. And that's a continuing
225 process requiring adjustment both on the part of the teacher as – as well as on the
226 part of the student. So, to put it simply, uh, progress is measured by, uh, advances
227 in the level of clarity and sharpness of the conversation. The conversation
228 sometimes, uh, conducted face to face but sometimes also conducted through the
229 writings of the student.

230 Katie Schutze: Um, I had something in mind as you were saying that, but I lost my train of
231 thought. Um, oh, right. So I guess you would say the Socratic seminar has gone
232 pretty far back in modern teaching. I mean, obviously, not even – not even
233 counting Socrates himself, but, like...

234 Dr. Alvis: Yeah, yeah, I would say that ideally a teacher would help to be able to proceed in
235 the Socratic manner, um, of – of about, of rigorous conversation and to the extent
236 that he can approach the manner of, uh, Socrates in conversation with his, uh,
237 interlocutors. The degree to which he approaches that is the degree to which he
238 will think he succeeds.

239 Katie Schutze: What prepared you most for becoming a professor? What do you appreciate
240 being taught the most in the process?

241 Dr. Alvis: I think what, um, what most encouraged me to become a teacher was, um, to
242 sustain the process of learning. So, when it became apparent to me that the, that
243 the great teachers were not necessarily in the classroom – though I've had great,
244 uh, experience of great teachers in the classroom – but in the teachers of those
245 teachers, and those tend to be the authors of the, of the great books and great
246 poems.

247 Katie Schutze: So you saw, so you saw your own teachers and you realized that the source of
248 their own information was from, like, the great authors and the philosophers and
249 such. And you saw, you saw that and you said, "I want to be able to communicate
250 those to others too?"

251 Dr. Alvis: Yes, that's, uh, exactly what I, uh, perceived in my classes. Uh, but I also
252 perceived the testimony of those teachers that indeed they are students of yet
253 greater minds whose thoughts are, um, established, published, uh, in the great
254 books – through the great books.

255 Katie Schutze: So you would say what prepared you most was a sort of humility to help you
256 realize that you're still a student?

257 Dr. Alvis: Yes, and – and by realizing that my best teachers knew that they were continuing
258 to be students.

259 Katie Schutze: OK. Have the English, have the UD English core and major undergone any major
260 changes?

261 Dr. Alvis: Ah, in comparing what I do now as a teacher to what I was called upon to do as
262 an undergraduate, I perceive no great differences in my field of teaching and
263 study – that is, in the teaching of, uh, literature, because this curriculum seems to
264 me to have been faithful, uh, to the idea that – that great works such as those of
265 Homer, uh, um, Virgil, uh, are to – to read them in translation. It is more
266 productive of wisdom than reading in English lesser works. So that's what
267 distinguishes – uh, that's what largely distinguishes, uh, the curriculum and the
268 literature, uh, at the University of Dallas. That conviction that you, uh, you, you,
269 uh, you attempt to absorb whatever – as much as you can absorb, uh, in
270 translation with the view eventually to reading in the original to the extent that's
271 possible.

272 Katie Schutze: So, I guess – this is a bit outside the field of English, but – so you would say that
273 an English teacher, it'd be best for them to learn as many other languages of the
274 great books as they can. Like, for example, I took Spanish, but, if I'm gonna be
275 an English teacher, are you saying that maybe I should look a bit more into Lat-
276 ...the Latin and Greek language myself?

277 Dr. Alvis: I would suspect that that's true. I'm mean – I would – I know that that's true, but
278 to a limited degree, I would say, uh, to the degree that you could learn one other
279 language, uh, thoroughly enough that you could compare words that were
280 approximately the same in the two languages, but appreciate –

281 Katie Schutze: So like "piu-..." so it's – oh, sorry.

282 Dr. Alvis: – the differences.

283 Katie Schutze: So it's like, "pius Aeneas" and "pious Aeneas" in "The Aeneid." I remember my
284 Lit Trad – my Lit Trad I teacher making a big deal out of that one.

285 Dr. Alvis: Exactly, exactly. When – when Virgil speaks of Aeneas as – as pious, he, uh –
286 uh, he has in mind an entire range of obligation that extend beyond our notion of
287 – of piety towards the divine. The way to include obviously includes that
288 understanding, but it also means piety towards the bonds that are established in
289 the family and the local community and friendships and, uh, and in civil society
290 as such.

291 Katie Schutze: So what makes that such a timeless book is the fact that even though we're
292 talking about a whole different pantheon here, the human or the human relations
293 and even to a degree, the divine relations, if you move them over enough to
294 Christianity, is part of what makes it so timeless?

295 Dr. Alvis: Yes, that's very well put. That is, if you think of piety as, in – in the larger sense
296 of dutifulness, then you grasped a – a subject that is, uh, central to, uh, Virgil.

297 Katie Schutze: Mm-hm. Um...most important...okay. What were some books or poets read in the
298 past that don't tend to be used anymore? Like, I know you're saying that the
299 curriculum as a whole hasn't changed much, but have the materials of the core
300 changed?

301 Dr. Alvis: Oh, that's a difficult question because I'm not right, uh, I'm not immediately
302 conversant with some courses that are in the curriculum, but which I haven't
303 taught such as, um, modern poetry, modern lyric poetry. Um, nor am I conversant
304 with what, um, with what Russian authors, uh, what Russian novels are now
305 treated, uh, as compared with the, with a emphasis upon Russian novels when I
306 was, uh, an undergraduate. But, uh, but I would say what has remained constant
307 and continuous, uh, is – is far more evident to me than – than alterations in the
308 curriculum and – and another, uh, constant seems to be the manner in which
309 literature is discussed, and that is seeking to understand the connection between
310 literary form and meaning and then bringing to bear critical assessments, uh,
311 upon whatever work is at hand, and that tends to predominate in all classes at the
312 University of Dallas, whereas my impression and what I derived from
313 conversation with other academics is that in – in, uh, in other settings, um,
314 historical considerations tend to predominate over those I just described.

315 Katie Schutze: So, my next question was going to be "why did UD stop using these materials?"
316 But since you say that the end-...that the endurance of so many materials instead
317 is more what sticks in your head. I guess maybe a better question to ask instead
318 would be, have you ever looked at materials to use in your own classes and then
319 decided not to use them? And what are, like, some examples of why you didn't
320 use them?

321 Dr. Alvis: Yeah. Uh, OK, can I be quite personal about this? Uh, when I came to the
322 University my under-...my notion of a great literary work was, uh, JD Salinger's
323 little novel, "Catcher in the Rye," and after about two, maybe three semesters of
324 study and the, uh, literature curriculum here, uh, I came to understand that I had
325 vastly overestimated that, uh, that novel, and so though that novel is frequently
326 taught, I think still it's frequently taught in university curricula –

327 Katie Schutze: And bel-...I believe in a lot of high schools too.

328 Dr. Alvis: Yes, and – and in high school, uh, it, it has never been, uh, prominent in, uh, in
329 the literature curriculum here. And that, and – and that seems to, or that does
330 confirm to my mind that whereas a novel, such as "The Great Gatsby" by
331 Fitzgerald, whereas that rises to the status of the timelessly pertinent, uh,
332 "Catcher in the Rye" does not. And that s...that seems to be the best, um, means
333 of as...that seems to be the means of assessment that is most helpful in
334 distinguishing the great works from, uh, works that our impression at a time, at a
335 particular time, but do not endure because they're not worthy to endure.

336 Katie Schutze: So the main – so the biggest criteria of what you personally like to use in your
337 own curricula is the timelessness of the material that you're looking at?

338 Dr. Alvis: Precisely, precisely.

339 Katie Schutze: OK, OK, that's good.

340 Dr. Alvis: And that – that requires some development of one's taste because one's taste, um,
341 largely determine what books one picks up, uh, but a good education will have
342 you selecting, uh, books quite different from those that you had originally picked
343 out.

344 Katie Schutze: I definitely know that feeling. I read Moby Dick in high school, didn't like it at
345 all. Read it again here. Not my favorite, but I – I could appreciate it more.

346 Dr. Alvis: I had the same experience. And on the other hand, uh, coming fr...in high
347 school, I not – not only doted upon the poetry of Walt Whitman, but thought that
348 he provided a, um, a program for one's way of life, and now I, uh, neither delight
349 in him nor think of him as a great moral teacher, or even as a decent moral
350 teacher.

351 Katie Schutze: Yeah, the poets were weird.

352 Dr. Alvis: Ah ha, yes.

353 Katie Schutze: Um, as one's taste changes...but academics can help with refinement of taste.
354 Have your own teaching methods changed over time? Like, you say that you're
355 very fond of the discussions in the Socratic seminar, but, like, can you think of a
356 big method that you started out with and whether you use it anymore or not, or
357 something that you're using now that you didn't start out with?

358 Dr. Alvis: Uh, I began with the thought that I must have planned out a complete lecture of
359 50 minutes or 80 minutes, whatever the class might be, and then it became
360 apparent to me that whatever you – one gains in clarity of thinking by a carefully
361 planned lecture, uh, is paid for by what is gained from a more, uh, a more relaxed
362 manner of teaching that is conversational rather than lecturing.

363 Katie Schutze: That is interesting because I was just seeing yesterday, in one of my classes, Dr.
364 Newstreet was showing us, like, statistics of student retention. Lecture was the
365 least, lecture was the least effective, with only about, students retaining about
366 five percent on average.

367 Dr. Alvis: I think I learned that the hard way, haha.

368 Katie Schutze: And another interesting thing was, and I think this could fall into the, I think this
369 could fall into the ring of discussion, but, um, the most effective way, with 90
370 percent retention, is teaching the material to others, which I think discussion
371 could fall into because –

372 Dr. Alvis: Yes.

373 Katie Schutze: – you're telling others why you think this.

374 Dr. Alvis: Yes, that's right. And because your thinking is alive when you're conversing
375 because you're continually adapting to what has just been said, whereas to the
376 extent that you have it pre-formulated and written down, you're not as actively
377 engaged in the thought process.

378 Katie Schutze: Make sure to take you before I graduate because I totally agree with that, heh.

379 Dr. Alvis: Yeah, yeah.

380 Katie Schutze: Um, okay... Does teaching now demand different skills than teaching in the past,
381 say 10 or more years? Like, I know I asked you how your methods developed,
382 but...

383 Dr. Alvis: Uh, I am thinking about that, uh, constantly, and I have, um, been concerned by
384 what seems to me to be a, um, a decline in the ability to attend to a complicated
385 argument. And that may be the effect of, um, uh, of our being immersed in, uh,
386 electronic media where one must have continual change of subject in order, uh,
387 to retain attentiveness. And that – that puts a, uh, that puts a limitation upon
388 extended, uh, consecutive conversation. So, uh, so I don't know what remedy
389 there, uh, there is for that other than trying to habituate young people who are,
390 uh, accustomed to changes in their perceptions occurring every 10 seconds to, uh,
391 to consecutive argument that may require half an hour to develop or longer or be
392 sustained over a course of a class meeting.

393 Katie Schutze: And it's very interesting because even as someone growing up in the digital age, I
394 totally know what you mean. As someone who – I can say I have a pretty short
395 attention span and I think technology is a good deal – has contributed a good deal
396 to that. But I also feel like discussion is probably the most effective way of
397 teaching that I have, that I've been a part of because I feel truly immersed and
398 you kind of get that ego boost when you say something that people, that people
399 agree with.

400 Dr. Alvis: Indeed, indeed. In the classroom, all of the physical and mental conditions that
401 are connected with the classroom tend to, um, tend to promote a lengthy,
402 consecutive conversation. And that's why the time in the classroom seemed
403 special and it seemed different from, uh, other, uh, venues in which information
404 is exchanged.

405 Katie Schutze: All right. And with that, is there anything else you'd like to add? We have about
406 another 20 minutes, so don't feel like you have to rush and, but also don't feel like
407 you have to extend it.

408 Dr. Alvis: OK. All right. Let me, let me think for a while then. All right. I probably haven't
409 dwelt as much as I should upon the interrelations between subjects and the way
410 those interrelations are promoted at the University of Dallas and that brings us
411 back again to the core curriculum because, uh, one realizes in studying the great
412 books that the authors of the great books are familiar with many of the other
413 great books that the student is, um, confronting and that's especially true of – of
414 such great books as the Bible, and the Platonic dialogues, Aristotle's treatises,
415 Cicero's, um, dialogues and treatises, as well as, uh, Shakespeare's plays, and the,
416 and the great novels of the French, British, American, Italian, Russian tradition.
417 And so, one – and so, when you're taking courses such as Understanding the
418 Bible, and at the same time courses in, uh, epic poetry, and at the same time
419 courses in philosophy that deal chiefly with Plato, Aristotle and maybe Cicero,
420 uh, and then, and then studying works of the plastic arts, uh, that were produced
421 in – in the eras, uh, of the, of the past, associated with the, with most of the great
422 books –

423 Katie Schutze: Of the what arts? I'm sorry.

424 Dr. Alvis: In eras of the past, past eras, historical eras, that, uh, produce, uh, works of – of,
425 um, of the plastic arts –

426 Katie Schutze: Plastic? Oh, OK!

427 Dr. Alvis: – painting and sculpture, architecture.

428 Katie Schutze: OK. So you mean like, OK. Visual art.

429 Dr. Alvis: Yeah, the visual arts. Um, then you become aware that not only are you presently
430 conducting a conversation between students and teacher in these classrooms, but
431 those students and teachers are becoming aware of a conversation among, uh,
432 among great thinkers living in different eras and producing their thought in
433 different historical eras. And yet, they're addressing, uh, the same questions. So
434 you will have a, you will have, uh, Plato, Socrates discussing with others, uh,
435 with whom he converses in a dialogue, uh, uh, conversing about the nature of the
436 human soul. And you will have, uh, and – and you may be studying in that same
437 semester, uh, the Bible and are then urged to consider the vision of the human
438 soul that is conveyed in the, uh, in the Hebrew, uh, Testament and in the
439 Testament of the, uh, of the Christians, uh, and then what you detect are
440 differences in response to perennial questions – and the perennial question I
441 chose just now is "What is the nature of the human soul?" And so, you are
442 recreating conversations among men, among minds, among minds that are
443 superior to one's own. And that is uh, a – a vital part of, uh, education – that is,
444 stretching your own mind to, uh, approach the conversation conducted across the
445 centuries by the great thinkers. And then they're in. And when you do that, uh,
446 then the differences between, say, a novel, uh, and a philosophical treatise, and
447 an, um, and a philosophical dialogue, uh, become less important than what is

448 common to them all – and that is giving a perspective upon, uh, questions that
449 human beings must continually confront in every, in every era because they –
450 they follow from the, from the nature of the human being that tends to transcend
451 cultural differences.

452 Katie Schutze: All right. Is that all you had to say? You have 10 minutes left if you have any
453 other ideas.

454 Dr. Alvis: Uh, I'll say that these, uh, perennial questions are especially pertinent when it
455 comes to the question of what . . . what perfects, what develops and perfects
456 human nature and in that respect, uh, liberal studies becomes very much a
457 conversation about the virtues, the di--...and the different orders of virtue, the
458 natural and the supernatural, and then the relation between the virtues, especially
459 the, uh, the Cardinal Virtues, courage and prudence and temperance and, uh, and
460 wisdom. And you would want to understand what's the status of these, uh, virtues
461 that seem to be inseparable from human nature and its refinement, and its, uh,
462 approach to completion. Uh, what's the, what – what are the different thoughts
463 upon the various virtues and upon their, uh, relation: which are more
464 authoritative, most authoritative, and for what – for what reasons? And then that
465 reminds you that the study of great books is very much a study of what
466 constitutes the good life: the life proper to a human being, the life, the mode of
467 life, consistent with the nature of the human being.

468 Katie Schutze: All right, so I think I'm gonna cut it – I'm going to cut it off there. Um, once
469 again, I'll represent this information in writing and would you like to remain
470 anonymous in case you've said anything that you – and I will send you a tran--...I
471 will send you the transcript and if there was any, and if there was anything that
472 you'd like to have cut out, you can tell me and I will cut it out before sending it
473 in.

474 Dr. Alvis: Excellent. That's – that's fine with me. And as of right now, I don't see anything
475 that I wouldn't, uh, repeat in other situations, however, uh, inelegant my phrasing
476 may have been. Right, right.

477 Katie Schutze: Mm-hm. Don't worry, I'm the same way.

478 Dr. Alvis: Heh heh.

479 Katie Schutze: Yeah, these notes I took of this were a mess, do not worry about that. Um, just
480 checking to see if there's anything else I need to tell you... Um, "permission must
481 also be granted if a picture is taken" – you're fine with having, you're fine with
482 having this all recorded on camera?

483 Dr. Alvis: Sure.

484 Katie Schutze: Um...let's see, do I have anything else to say? I don't think so. That is it. Thank
485 you very much for your time.

486 Dr. Alvis: Well, I'd be very gratified if my classes could go pretty much as this conversation
487 has gone. Ha ha ha!

488 Katie Schutze: Thank you! Yes. This was a very interesting conversation, I was...I had a lot
489 more fun doing this than I thought, so – not to say that I didn't expect to, but –
490 haha.

491 Dr. Alvis: Good, good!

492 Katie Schutze: So, I'll shut that down with this...

493 Dr. Alvis: I'm glad we had the opportunity!