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Paula Trafton

Western Kentucky University

Charles Anderson

Western Kentucky University

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Western Kentucky University
UA1B University Wide Committees / Events
Series 2/1 Anniversaries Western Kentucky University
Item 5 Charles Anderson Interview

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Biographical/Historical Note:

Records regarding anniversaries celebrated by the university includes founders day, 75th and centennial celebrations.

Description: Interview conducted by Paula Trafton with Charles Anderson, retired Vice President for Information Technology.

Dates: July 15, 2005

Formats: 1 audiotape, 1 wav file, 1 mp3 file

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Oral History Recording List

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09/11/2013

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| Tape 1 | 1 | 00:00:09 | <p><i>PT: Today is Friday July 15, 2005. This is Paula Trafton, instructor in the History Department at Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, Kentucky. Today I will be interviewing Charles M. Anderson retired Vice President for Information Technology at Western as part of an oral history project for Western's centennial celebration in 2006. This project focuses on those persons who have a special knowledge of the growth and changes Western Kentucky has experienced since the 1930s. Charles and I are sitting in the Seminar Room on the second floor of Cherry Hall on the campus of Western Kentucky University.</i></p> |
| Tape 1 | 1 | 00:00:58 | <p><i>PT: Good morning Chuck.</i></p> <p><i>CA: Good morning.</i></p> <p><i>PT: It's a pleasure to be here.</i></p> <p><i>CA: Good to be with you Paula.</i></p> <p><i>PT: Thank you. We are doing our oral history project and we'll just start right off with where you were born?</i></p> <p><i>CA: I was actually born in Albany, Kentucky. I grew up in Cumberland County.</i></p> <p><i>PT: And stayed there pretty much in your younger years?</i></p> <p><i>CA: Well, yes, went to, actually went to my first eight grades in a two-room school house Vincent Elementary. My mother taught the first four grades. She was my teacher for the first four grades. And not an experience I would recommend to anyone, but she was a wonderful teacher. And then graduated from high school Cumberland County High School in 1960.</i></p> |
| Tape 1 | 1 | 00:01:44 | <p><i>PT: And, so came straight to college?</i></p> <p><i>CA: Came straight to Western, yes. A quick little story I was admitted at UK going to engineering and to do an engineering degree and all of my friends were coming to Western and I was admitted into a National Science Foundation summer fellowship program here in physics. So I came over here in combination of getting familiar with the campus and my friends coming here came to Western and that obviously changed my life because I spent most of the rest of my adult life here.</i></p> <p><i>PT: That's a great story. What was it about Western that attracted you?</i></p> <p><i>CA: Well I think it was the familiarity and the fact that I knew people here. I didn't know anyone at the University of Kentucky. I had not had any orientation, you know, today it's a big deal to have students come in and do summer orientations and acclimate them to the campus. Didn't have any of that and as it turns out I had a great experience here, had a wonderful career. Love Western. And don't regret that in the least.</i></p> |
| Tape 1 | 1 | 00:02:51 | <p><i>PT: Well this then says something for the programs that Western does hold during the summer. That's what attracted you.</i></p> <p><i>CA: Indeed, indeed. That's why I came.</i></p> |
| Tape 1 | 1 | 00:03:01 | <p><i>PT: So it's well worth it to Western. So what did you major in when you came to Western?</i></p> <p><i>CA: Started out as a pre-engineering major, the idea was to transfer to the University of Kentucky after two years. Then after a while I switched to physics. Then being a little lazy in my study habits decided I didn't want to tackle advanced math. I went through calculus and stopped there. So I did a general it's called the physical sciences area concentration and I got the teaching certificate. I'll admit that I did that to avoid German. Then ended up doing German as a language twice, once for the masters and once for the Ph.D., so, but that background physics, chemistry and math has served me very well over the years.</i></p> |
| Tape 1 | 1 | 00:03:55 | <p><i>PT: So then you got your masters here?</i></p> <p><i>CA: I left from here I actually had gotten into commercial radio. I actually dropped out of college for a year. In my senior year I quit college.</i></p> <p><i>PT: To the chagrin of your parents, right?</i></p> <p><i>CA: Absolutely. Got married, started a radio career. Figured out very quickly that I needed to finish that education and came back to Western. Decided I wanted a masters' degree in communications and so I looked for places I could do that without having an undergraduate in</i></p> |

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| | | | communications and University of North Carolina Chapel Hill was that place. And I guess based on my GRE scores they admitted me and I went to Chapel Hill and did a masters' degree there. And I'm sitting in Chapel Hill one night and the telephone rings and it's Raymond Cravens. And Raymond Cravens as you know was Vice President for Academic Affairs at Western, the first and long-time Vice President of Academic Affairs. And he was calling me to recruit me to come to Western in a faculty position, something that had never occurred to me. Not in the remotest possibility. So I came up for an interview and accepted the position. So I came here in February of 1967 as an instructor of English which is where, what they then called mass media was located. |
| Tape 1 | 1 | 00:05:35 | <p>PT: Wow. Did you go through an interview process then or it just came . . . ?</p> <p>CA: I did, went through an interview process. I think as much as anything their interest in me was generated by a fellow by the name of Al Temple who was the manager of WKCT here and a major figure in broadcasting in the state of Kentucky. And the story is, the story goes they asked Al if knew of anyone and Al said, "Well, you need to hire Charles Anderson." So they called me and I retired from here in 1999.</p> |
| Tape 1 | 1 | 00:06:11 | <p>PT: Okay. You got your Ph.D. then?</p> <p>CA: Left Western after three years. Had a fellowship at Indiana University and did the Ph.D. at Indiana in instructional technology which is a subfield in education. I did the Ph.D. so I had to do the German. Didn't have to do German, could have done another language. I particularly like German because of its structure. I found it easier to learn. And came back once again for the third time to Western and this time I stayed.</p> |
| Tape 1 | 1 | 00:06:45 | <p>PT: And so, what's your title then?</p> <p>CA: I was, I was staff assistant to, in the office of Dr. Henry Hardin, Dean of Academic Services and Earl Wassom who was the assistant dean, and worked in that position for a year. Then the person who was director of the radio and television program, his name was Fred Haas left and I was promoted to the director of media services which was a combination of radio, television and what had been called audiovisual services. And so in 1972 at age 29 I became a director and served in that position for several years. And from that basis we started building radio and television facilities and distance learning facilities. And I spent I don't know how many years, '72 through '91 doing all of that.</p> |
| Tape 1 | 1 | 00:07:48 | <p>PT: So we didn't have media. What was it that you actually did?</p> <p>CA: Well my colleagues and I expanded television production center which had been established in 1969 and I was a part of that although I wasn't in charge of it and I came back to that from Indiana. We expanded television production into first a student radio station. A station that actually used the electrical wiring in the residence halls in 1975, and it was a very successful laboratory for students. And then in 1980 WKYU-FM, in 1985 I believe the FM station in Somerset. I believe it was '87 we established Henderson. 1989 we established a station in Elizabethtown and the television station WKYU-TV at the same time. And somewhere in there we built a cable television system and we built a distance learning network which is, all of which is still active today.</p> |
| Tape 1 | 1 | 00:09:05 | <p>PT: Lots of changes.</p> <p>CA: Lots of changes. Lots of challenges. And I guess that's why I stayed at Western. There was always something new to do and I think one of the special things about Western as an institution, and I believe that continues today, is that Western is an environment where a person who has an entrepreneurial spirit and the drive and the interest is permitted to develop facilities and programs that will be beneficial to Western and often without much resources. It took a good deal of creativity and stretching of the penny. I think penny is a relevant term in those days to do all of that. But Western has been a great incubator an environment where people were given some freedom to develop programs. And I could look around the institution and cite other examples. I think Gifted Studies comes to mind. I think that's an excellent example of a national caliber program. So those were some of the things that we did through the years. It's very satisfying to sit here today and see those still prospering and growing.</p> |
| Tape 1 | 1 | 00:10:35 | <p>PT: Tell me a little bit about distance learning. Was there any particular person of that was the brain child?</p> <p>CA: Well, it's hard to identify any one person. A lot of us worked together to do all of that. I think there were some people who were key players in all of this who should be mentioned. When I talk about that environment that encourages innovation and Western has been a very conservative institution over the years, we all know that, but within that conservatism, people like Paul Cook, people like Don Zacharias, Tom Meredith, Henry Hardin who was my dean and a mentor and a great supporter. Those people were quick to recognize the potential of innovations and support them. And in the public radio area I was fortunate to hire David Wilkinson who came from a major commercial radio background, a very high quality commercial radio background in Hartford, Connecticut. And he and I partnered and for many years in working in the development of FM, WKYU-FM the public radio network we call it</p> |

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| | | | <p>today. But it's a lot of different people. We decided to push the initiative and I guess in all modesty in terms of all of us Henry Hardin and all of us who worked in technology the initiative for distance learning didn't come from the academic side. It came from the technology side. The philosophy, in all candor, was build it and they will come. We saw what was happening on the national level. I came back from Indiana knowing what other people were doing. And so we began to encourage that development using our own budget resources to develop that and it caught on. The faculty saw the potential and I think if you were going to give anyone the credit for its development at Western, the credit, a lot of the credit if not most should go to the faculty members who saw that potential and who tolerated the early crudeness of the technology and got involved and discovered that it works, that the instruction is of high quality and it's valid and it serves a real need as it still does today mostly for students who otherwise might not come to the campus and might not have that program. I think one of the most dramatic illustrations of that came when we opened a new classroom at the Owensboro Extended Campus Center. We'd had a classroom there for some time, I believe this was the second one and there was a young woman there who was a single mother who had just finished her elementary education degree and was becoming a teacher. And she said and I think she represents many, many others, without distance learning she wouldn't have been able to achieve that. So that, you know, was the motivation. And the motivation of a typical, well, maybe not typical, but a person in technology, we all love our capabilities and our technology and so it's a combination of factors.</p> |
| Tape 1 | 1 | 00:14:10 | <p>PT: Jack Thacker I know in the history department is very supportive of distance learning.</p> <p>CA: Absolutely and I think Jack was a major factor in giving us credibility because when Jack Thacker and the history department at Western Kentucky University, and we all know the caliber of this history department, utilized and endorsed this technology, I think it made a real difference in terms of other people being willing to use it. And now the last time I saw any figures in talking with some of my colleagues the enrollment was well over a thousand just in interactive television. That's not counting all the enrollment that's been developed in the use of web-based instruction. And I think it's, I'm not sure about all this, I believe the interactive television facility is a key component in the engineering degrees and in the cooperative engineering programs with University of Kentucky and perhaps the University of Louisville. So it's an old technology now. We started all of this I guess in the early '80s. I really can't remember the day we offered the very first class, but I do remember the class. Larry Miller who was professor of communication agreed to take on the very first class. We had a microwave link to Owensboro one way. They could see him. He couldn't see them. We installed a conference telephone system so they could talk back to him and he taught I think about seven graduate students in a course in communication research methodology. And the class at Owensboro scored higher on his exam than the class here. So that was the beginning really of distance learning at Western.</p> |
| Tape 1 | 1 | 00:16:04 | <p>PT: So do you think it's still going to continue?</p> <p>CA: Oh I don't have any doubt. In addition to my experience here, I spent four years in the University of Alabama system as a vice chancellor and that is actually the first vice chancellor for information technology and there was a distance learning component in my office and we transformed it. It's still growing and, as this one is. Technology has transitioned from dedicated lines to the internet in terms of the connectivity and is going from classroom based to desktop based but it's still there and growing. Yes.</p> |
| Tape 1 | 1 | 00:16:48 | <p>PT: So those are you feel it's one of your major contributions to Western?</p> <p>CA: Well, I think it would be somewhat self-serving to say they're my contributions but it was my responsibility to provide the leadership on the technology side for most of that. One of the things I learned very early is to hire good people. That the most important thing an administrator does is hiring. And we always had some very talented engineers and people in television production and throughout the, and as I think most everyone knows in the FM station from day one 'til today WKYU-FM and its satellite stations represent among the best in public radio. I think it's, at least for me it came from two or three sources in terms of working hard to achieve quality. I think it's part of the Western culture and I think the Western culture encourages it. The University of North Carolina Chapel Hill gave me a whole different perspective. And I was fortunate early on in television to have a friend who had worked here. His name is Terry Donahue and he's still working in Hollywood in free-lance video production which is what everyone is out there, free-lance. He was here for a year and a half as a faculty member, staff member actually and through the years he got me involved in network level productions so I would go to California or to Mobile, Alabama or wherever and be a part of major network television productions in not a major role, usually technical director or other role, but I, you know, brought that back here in terms of my experiences as did some other folks, so.</p> |
| Tape 1 | 1 | 00:18:52 | <p>PT: Now when did you become Vice President for Information Technology?</p> <p>CA: That was in 1996 I believe. I actually took on the responsibility in 1991. We had a major planning effort here led by Jim Flynn and I think I've told him this. He did one of the best jobs in facilitating a planning group I've ever witnessed in my entire career. It was called Western XXI and it actually was somewhat controversial. The outcome, one of the outcomes of Western XXI strategic planning process was the recommendation that all of the let's say</p> |

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| | | | <p>fragmented technology programs be merged into one information technology division. And that plan was adopted by the Board of Regents and a position was created as assistant vice president for technology and telecommunications I think it was called then in 1991. And I applied for that position and was asked to take that role. And we brought together administrative computing, academic computing, the telephone telecommunications area, the area for which I had responsibility radio, television and media services and we put them into one unit. And I believe that worked out quite well. We affected a lot of savings and some synergies and in 1996 the position was elevated to Vice President.</p> |
| Tape 1 | 1 | 00:20:34 | <p>PT: And you were in that position for how long?</p> <p>CA: Three years. And I reached thirty-two and a half years in the Kentucky Teachers Retirement System. Most people who might listen to this tape or look at a transcript of this tape will recognize that's kind of the breakeven point. Actually I discovered I was beyond the breakeven point when my first retirement check was higher than my last check on the payroll and at that point was considering very seriously putting all of my time and energy into business activities mainly commercial radio. At that point I owned a commercial radio station here in Bowling Green, had some other activities I wanted to pursue, but then Tom Meredith called from Alabama and actually Tom had been talking to me some time before my retirement at Western and said he was establishing a new position in the University of Alabama system as Vice Chancellor for Technology and wanted me to be an applicant for that position. So I did, ended up in that position and spent four great years in Alabama.</p> |
| Tape 1 | 1 | 00:21:51 | <p>PT: Then came back following that.</p> <p>CA: Well it was time to retire I thought at age 60 and I also thought it was time to pursue those business ventures and consulting activities and I've been doing that for a year and a half and enjoy it very much and hope that it's going to be as successful as it looks like it will be.</p> |
| Tape 1 | 1 | 00:22:13 | <p>PT: What was the best part of your job?</p> <p>CA: Oh, that's a hard question to answer. I loved my job at Western almost every single day. It's not to say that there weren't times where there were issues to deal with but I just, I always loved what I did. I do today. It's been a blessing for me to have always been doing something I really enjoyed doing and I hope most people find that. For me, it's a person who was aimed into science because Sputnik, who apparently had some ability in that direction. I came to Western and I did not apply myself after the first couple of years because I did not have a passion for physics or chemistry although Gordon Wilson Jr. almost turned me into a chemistry major. One of the best teachers I ever had by the way. And I just lucked into working in broadcast radio, developed a passion for it and fortunately came back to Western and went on to graduate school and developed those credentials and did it in a higher education environment. I don't think there's a simple answer to that question. I think a big part of it is the kind of people you work with. It is such a very positive environment to have a career, the colleagues, the students and to know every morning when you get up to go to work that you are a part of something that is important, that is making a difference. So that's kind of my round about answer to that question.</p> |
| Tape 1 | 1 | 00:24:05 | <p>PT: Okay.</p> <p>CA: I think one of the things I would add to our general conversation about Western is Western has been fortunate to have presidents who were ideally suited at any given time to the need of the institution and I think today in Gary Ransdell we have a president who is perfectly suited in terms of his experiences and abilities to take Western to the next level and to be an entrepreneur and a risk taker and to do what we all see around us. As I look back over my career at Western I was always blessed with having presidents that provided great leadership both on a personal and a professional level. Who encouraged me and those people that worked with me to do the very best we could and continue to achieve and strive. So for me one of the best parts of this position and this career at Western was having the good fortune to work with all of those people from Kelly Thompson, I actually worked either directly with or indirectly with seven presidents, from Kelly Thompson through Gary Ransdell and had a great working relationship with all of them.</p> |
| Tape 1 | 1 | 00:25:27 | <p>PT: Wow. Talk about those presidents just for a little bit and talk about their expertise. What did they add? Can you give an example other than Gary Ransdell?</p> <p>CA: Well I could talk about each one of them, but I won't take that time. Let me just pick a couple. Don Zacharias came to the institution and convinced us that we could aspire to be an institution of higher academic quality and that we could be innovative and he was. He had a particular interest I'll have to admit in communications. His doctorate was in communications and so that relationship was particularly important to us, I think to the entire institution. I think he took us to a higher level in terms of the state's awareness of this institution. I think Western has always been one of the state's best kept secrets. I think you can trace back the quality of the academic program here all the way back to the origins. I believe that. I had some of those teachers as an undergraduate so I know that academic quality was always here, but Don Zacharias developed that level of awareness.</p> <p>I think Tom Meredith continued that. Tom Meredith had a tremendous public relations ability</p> |

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| | | | <p>and an ability to deal with the public and to spread our message. And he also, most people don't realize, really founded the development program at Western despite some faculty opposition. Because there really wasn't the vision then that those investments would pay off the way they have. So, he started, he hired the first director of development and started building the staff and they did a lot of the research which was here as a foundation when President Ransdell came and of course he took it and just ran with it and has done a marvelous job with it.</p> <p>I think Kern Alexander with whom I did not have a very close personal working relationship was a risk taker and left us with some significant advances in my field particularly. He endorsed and embraced the idea of building a television station which we did on credit. We actually borrowed the money. We leased purchased a full powered television station to be paid back with the grant money that that station would earn. Now that's a half million dollar risk. Kern Alexander, Paul Cook, Harry Lergen endorsed that and somewhat risky venture. The same thing is true of the radio station in Henderson which had been a partnership between Murray and Western. And anyone who knows anything about the radio broadcasting business knows you can't, you can't share a radio station. This is not a good analogy, but it's kind of like sharing a toothbrush. So as he established the Glasgow campus he was coming back from that announcement and I happened to be in the lobby of the administration building. And I greeted him and congratulated him and mentioned that to him and it took him ten seconds to say, "No, we're going to build that station in Henderson. You go ahead and do it." So we did.</p> |
| Tape 1 | 1 | 00:29:25 | <p>PT: So the president who takes risk is someone that the university needs?</p> <p>CA: It think the university needs a lot of different characteristics in a president and maybe different characteristics at different times. I think if you look at the progression of presidents leading up to Gary Ransdell, we were moving forward and becoming more innovative and more risk taking. And I credit Gary Ransdell with breaking through and taking that to the level that it needed to go to for Western to really bloom. For Western to really realize its' potential.</p> |
| Tape 1 | 1 | 00:30:06 | <p>PT: How about our relationship with the Bowling Green community? The radio station is growing.</p> <p>CA: Well that's from my perspective that's always been an excellent relationship. The community immediately embraced WKYU-FM and providing financial support and all kinds of support. Reinforcing to the Board of Regents and to the administration how important it was to the community. So that's always been an excellent working relationship.</p> <p>And another relationship that would not be obvious to anyone outside of the broadcasting area is the importance of the working relationship with the local radio stations and particularly the television stations. And I think that's been particularly important to my area. Clyde Payne who was the manager for many years of WBKO-TV, and I developed a very good professional relationship and friendship. And had Clyde Payne not been willing to let us rent at a very modest rate space on his tower to build WKYU-TV it would not exist today. And I think that's a perfect example of university industry relationship that would not happen a lot of places. And he realized that it was crucial to us because we were at a point where getting the money to build our own tower, getting the land and just the timing and the resources would have made it virtually impossible to build WKYU-TV which has become quite a strong establishment for the institution and for the community. So that would be one excellent example from my perspective of that relationship.</p> |
| Tape 1 | 1 | 00:31:55 | <p>PT: How about within the state? How do you think Western fares amongst the universities in the state?</p> <p>CA: Well you're getting above my pay grade here. I mean those are kind of presidential kinds of questions, but from my perspective we've always been a force. We've always been able to in radio and television and in technology and in information technology be a force right there with the University of Kentucky and the University of Louisville . . .</p> <p>[end of side 1 at 32:28]</p> |
| Tape 1 | 2 | 00:33:00 | <p>PT: We were talking about Western in the state.</p> <p>CA: Well there's always that dynamic and again, I'm not the expert on this. You folks in the history department have a better perspective, but there's always been that dynamic of Western kind of staying in its place and I've been one of those people among many at Western who've always not accepted that, who've always thought that we had more to contribute and more to achieve. And I think we get right back to all the way from Kelly Thompson to today, every, throughout all those presidencies and all of that time all or part of Western has been growing and achieving more. And I think it's clear that we have become the preeminent comprehensive institution in the state and that we have many programs that are the very best in the state and region and some that are among the very best in the nation. That I think is a tribute to a lot of things. I think it's a tribute to this culture at Western that goes back to leadership. I think, I'm over simplifying things, but I think you can usually find in any achievement, leadership or failure, leadership.</p> |

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| Tape 1 | 2 | 00:34:25 | <p>PT: Okay. Compare Western today to Western of yesterday.</p> <p>CA: Well, I can put that to you in some very graphic terms. I came to Western as a freshman in 1960 and walked into Cherry Hall to register in the lobby first floor of Cherry Hall. Crowded, you could hardly move, no elbow room to get from table to table to pick up your computer cards and go through the process of registering. And when you were registered all of my classes were in Cherry Hall one floor or the other, every single class. I had classes in the basement. I had physics lab, I think, chemistry lab in the basement. I had physics on the first and second floors. I had math on I think, the first floor, English on the first floor. History has always been on the second floor, I guess, hasn't it? And the other thing I remember vividly is as we grew either that first or second year the class changes between 8, 9 and 9 and 10 o'clock would be such a crowd that the stairwell on one end of Cherry Hall would be down and on the other end of Cherry Hall it would be up, one way stairwells, because otherwise the people couldn't get from one class to another. We did actually have a couple of other buildings. I think in my second year, my sophomore year I obviously had some classes in science and the Thompson Science Complex was opened about my sophomore year I believe. And then the old Ogden Hall which is now torn down was biology and I had sociology there. But it was 30 some hundred students as I recall in 1960, a few buildings and a lot of good faculty growing. We saw a lot of new faculty members come and go during those three to four years. So the contrast in size and enrollment, in sophistication is stark. It's amazing, had I not been here to live through that it would be even more astounding. When you talk to people who come back here after twenty or thirty years and see this campus and see the kind of programs we have on this campus and read about them they're astounded. Having said that, I believe the core quality has always been here. I'm sure it's been here in history. I know from personal experience it was here in physics and chemistry and math and I think that tradition lives on today, and lives on in some extent in Western's own graduates. You know, Western went through a period of time when most of us were Western graduates. When you, the new faculty convocation would be held and everyone would stand up and you had the freshly minted Ph.D.'s in various fields the great majority of us or half of us at least would be Western and then we, it was out of favor for a while. But I think if you look through the years you'll find a real healthy blend now of people who have that Western heritage, who have an undergraduate degree or a graduate degree from Western and who have kind of an emotional attachment to the place and then folks who come in here from elsewhere with excellent academic credentials.</p> |
| Tape 1 | 2 | 00:38:05 | <p>PT: The physical appearance of the campus, how has that changed since you were a student here?</p> <p>CA: I can answer that in two ways. I think Western's always been a beautiful campus and I'm one who never saw it reach the level of disrepair that some people thought it did, having said that, it has obviously transformed in the last few years in terms of all the renovation. We had gone too long without renovation and building buildings and I think, I'm not sure I understand why that was part of that I think was physical conservatism and part of that may have been political.</p> <p>But you know, the campus physically is transforming and I think in a lot of other ways. I just think we're in a growth period. I'm personally not surprised that Western had the capability to have 18,000 enrollment, much of that through distance learning. And personally I think Barbara Burch has done a marvelous job as provost in many ways, but specifically in encouraging non-traditional programs and supporting those. If you look at the 18,000 and I don't really have the facts, I'm guessing somewhat, but I believe if you look at the 3 to 4,000 population growth or enrollment growth two-thirds of that would be in distance learning and Glasgow campus and the community college. And I credit the president and the provost and others who have been involved in those things and I would also remind people that Tom Meredith was the person who decided it was time that we had a real community college. Tom Meredith was the person who took the initiative to really take distance learning to the next level and assert leadership at the state-wide level. And so I think you can see seeds of much of this in previous leadership and previous times, but that's not to take one thing away from the dramatic growth and the improvements that I've watched in the last six years. Now I was a part of that for two years. And I knew, it didn't take me long to figure out that Gary Ransdell was a risk taker and an innovator and its, you know, he's been very, very effective.</p> |
| Tape 1 | 2 | 00:40:33 | <p>PT: Did you stay in a dorm when you were here?</p> <p>CA: When I came to Western there wasn't enough room to get into dorms. I actually enrolled in late summer in Western. I didn't make the decision to come to Western until July or early August so we had to room in rooming houses. I actually lived with some of my friends from Cumberland County on Thirteenth Street, in the attic of a house on Thirteenth Street. Well, yes, it was the attic. I moved into a dorm the second year. I lived in East Hall and later West Hall and Central Hall.</p> |
| Tape 1 | 2 | 00:41:11 | <p>PT: Where did you eat?</p> <p>CA: We ate, we ate off campus a lot. We ate in Downing, no we didn't have Downing Center there. We ate in Garrett. We'd eat lunch in Garrett. Later in West Hall we had a facility in the basement of West Hall. And we'd go off campus a fair amount. There was a College Street Inn down at, I don't know why we went that far or why they were so successful, but you could</p> |

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| | | | <p>go to the College Street Inn which is down around Third or Fourth Street any time of the day and it would be crowded with Western students. At 10:00 at night it would be crowded with Western students. There was a place on Thirteenth Street called the Duck In Café. So we ate a little bit of everywhere and I'll have to say that I'm very envious of the students today because the quality of food service and the choices they have. We didn't have those then.</p> |
| Tape 1 | 2 | 00:42:12 | <p>PT: What did you do for fun?</p> <p>CA: Mostly go to ballgames and that kind of thing. There weren't a lot of recreational activities as I recall. I mean you didn't have the student, we had Garrett Center, but it wasn't the kind of student center you have today. And I'll also admit that for a while I was one of those suit-casars who went home every weekend so.</p> |
| Tape 1 | 2 | 00:42:43 | <p>PT: Okay, lots of basketball and football games . . .</p> <p>CA: Everybody went to the basketball games. One of my most vivid memories is going to a basketball game in what some people call the Red Barn. It's not actually the Red Barn, it's what is now the library, Margie Helm Library and the place would be packed. We'd get there and as freshman maybe we didn't have priority or maybe we were just late but we'd get there and we'd sit in the balcony with our feet dangling over. Places where the fire marshals probably didn't want people to sit, but the place would be packed. Ed Diddle would be wiping his face with that red towel and waving that red towel and marching up and down the sidelines and it was just a great atmosphere. The student body was very much involved in athletics in those days. It was the thing to do. With that enrollment we would pack the stadium for football and we would pack the basketball arena if you want to call it an arena.</p> |
| Tape 1 | 2 | 00:43:45 | <p>PT: Well, when you go back to the library again, does it feel really odd to walk in there knowing . . . ?</p> <p>CA: Well I guess the fact, it would if I'd been away all this time, but as I say to people I've spent my whole adult life at Western Kentucky University with the exception of four years in Alabama and three years away to graduate school. So I saw the transformation but oh I can, you know, it conjures when you walk in there and see that jump circle it conjures up memories it does indeed. We've done a good job here of repurposing buildings over the years. There may be a few of these that don't deserve repurposing but most of them have been repurposed very well.</p> |
| Tape 1 | 2 | 00:44:26 | <p>PT: As you walk down the Hill what buildings were down the Hill? You spent most of your time up here in Cherry Hall.</p> <p>CA: I guess Grise Hall during my undergraduate days, I believe Grise Hall was built although I never had any classes there. But the Music Building, our residence halls West Hall when I first came it was East and South and North and then West was built about my sophomore year and then they built a couple of the high rises. But I think the last academic building going at the south of the campus for a while was the Music Building which is no longer there and Grise Hall. And then everything else was built since then. I can remember watching Diddle Arena under construction. You know, looking out the West Hall dormitory room window and seeing the crane at work over on Diddle Arena.</p> |
| Tape 1 | 2 | 00:45:20 | <p>PT: How about the football field? When was that built, do you know?</p> <p>CA: You know, I don't recall when L.T. Smith Stadium was built. It must've been about the same time as Diddle Arena.</p> |
| Tape 1 | 2 | 00:45:33 | <p>PT: But now there's a parking structure on, in the parking lot of Diddle Arena, right? So that's a big change.</p> <p>CA: That's a big change. Well, everything's a big change. And I'm particularly proud of a building called Mass Media and Technology Hall. When I arrived in Wetherby in 1991 and was asked to take on the responsibility of academic and administrative computing and all of those areas I went up to the top floor in Wetherby and saw the physical facility of computing and couldn't believe it. It had been housed for many, many years in the area with simple makeshift walls, did not have adequate power protection, did not have emergency power, did not have any kind of fire suppression system and very little security. So we began to talk about a technology building. There'd actually been that concept developed several years earlier. Paul Cook was instrumental in floating that concept and encouraging that concept and we failed. We put together a 40 million dollar building in partnership with Engineering and it was too much to be funded. So we resurrected an idea in the form of an instructional technology building that would be a place to put all the computing. That would be a place to have state of the art showcase student computer lab. A place for distance learning and other kinds of mediated instruction and to be laboratory environment for faculty members and others to come in and use the very latest technology, and the idea was for it to be a national showplace. And that idea was endorsed by Jim Ramsey who provided great leadership and support for all of these programs as well and Tom Meredith and was headed to be funded. It was expanded to include Journalism and then Journalism and Broadcasting merged which I think was an excellent idea. And I credit Dean Lee with that taking the leadership to get that</p> |

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| | | | <p>done and the departments themselves. And so it all coalesced into Mass Media and Technology Hall. I really believe that it is the nicest building on Western's campus since Van Meter, particularly proud of the atrium for some very personal reasons. We modeled the technology hall part, the information technology part after a building at Arizona State University and one at El Paso at UTEP and they had large atriums in them so we convinced the architect that we should have an atrium. And then I think the addition was the architect's idea and with the president's endorsement and support of it and raising the money for the area outside of Technology Hall leading up to Guthrie Tower, I think that's just been a marvelous addition to the campus. I think it's one of the most beautiful areas on the campus. I happened to be here for the Fourth of July celebration and to sit there and listen to that music in that wonderful environment and look across at that site was very gratifying to see what Western has achieved there.</p> |
| Tape 1 | 2 | 00:49:32 | <p>PT: Did Western change you as an administrator?</p> <p>CA: I think Western let me grow as an administrator. I think most people who have been administrators here have been influenced by the culture, by the absolute commitment to the student. I believe that that's something, I'm sure that that's true of all institutions, but I still today believe it's a special attribute of Western Kentucky University. That whoever is in any role here is always interested in the student. Their door is always open and there's always an emphasis on the student. I credit Western with letting me mature as an administrator. I became a director at age 29 and I was allowed to I'm sure make some mistakes and grow. And I feel very fortunate to have ended up in the position and with the responsibilities I did here. As I like to say this is a very steep hill in many ways. Any time you decide to stay at one institution for your entire career, you know, the odds are against your advancement and I feel very grateful to have the opportunities that I had here. So Western changed me. Western gave me great opportunities and gave me a wonderful career.</p> |
| Tape 1 | 2 | 00:51:03 | <p>PT: What do you think, what challenges do you think Western faces today?</p> <p>CA: Well I think Western is facing the biggest challenge very well and that is decreasing state support. All institutions of higher education have experienced this. What I found in Alabama was they had experienced it earlier than we. In Alabama there's virtually no state support for buildings, yet they are building all kinds of buildings. Any given board of trustees' meetings, meeting for the University of Alabama system there'd be 100 or 150 million dollars' worth of construction. You know, Western is fortunate to still have some state support for buildings but increasingly external support and unfortunately tuition which I think is something that had to be done is required in order to, for Western to maintain and improve the quality of life here not only in instruction in the classroom but all the related activities. External funding is the critical factor and you know, that's why, I think the Board's selection of Gary Ransdell with his particular background was timely and visionary. But I think funding is probably the biggest challenge for higher education. State governments are faced with increased demands from the medical responsibilities and prisons and all these other areas and unfortunately they tend to look at higher ed. as a place they can cut funding. And they think higher ed. can do without some of its funding or find its own way which is very shortsighted. I'm sure there are others, but I would think funding would be the major challenge.</p> |
| Tape 1 | 2 | 00:52:57 | <p>PT: Where do you think Western is heading in the next 100 years? We're celebrating in 2006 the centennial.</p> <p>CA: Well I didn't bring my crystal ball and I've never been a person that looks that far ahead. I've always looked somewhere between five and ten years ahead. But I think Western is on a course to continue to improve. I don't know that it will grow that much more, although I think we'll see eventually 20,000 enrollment here in the composite Western, Glasgow, Owensboro, the distance learning everything. I think you'll see continued improvements on the campus. I think even in the short term, ten years, we'll look at this campus and not recognize it. I think there will be buildings that were built and I'm getting out of my field of expertise, this kind of an opinion, but I think we all, all the institutions built very marginal buildings in the '50s and '60s. Marginal in terms of their aesthetics, but also marginal in terms of the mechanical infrastructure, so I think you will see buildings replaced and the campus continue to be transformed. But I think the thing that will be equally dramatic will be the growth in the academic programs. I think Western will be offering doctorates in several fields and we're not talking 100 years, we're talking ten years. And another thing I'd like to mention, something that I've said directly to the people involved the engineering program is one of the major breakthroughs at Western. All of these buildings, it's tremendous and I'm very, very pleased and gratified to see that for Western, but the engineering program becoming a professional double [?] program in all of those fields was one of the singular achievements for Western Kentucky University in the last 100 years, because that puts us in a competitive position with a lot of other institutions and that lets us serve the economic development of our region. I think we'll see the same thing happen, I wouldn't be surprised to see a doctorate in history, a doctorate in biology, education will probably be first. And those are the kinds of things that I'm sure that Gary Ransdell and Barbara Burch are thinking about right now.</p> |
| Tape 1 | 2 | 00:55:28 | <p>PT: What is your fondest memory of Western? This is the last question. Can you think of any single one?</p> <p>CA: That is a very, very tough question. That is akin to what is your favorite book of all time,</p> |

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| | | | <i>your favorite movie of all time?</i> |
| | | | <i>PT: Did you meet your wife here?</i> |
| | | | <i>CA: No, no. We met, she's from Cumberland County. We met there.</i> |
| | | | <i>Fondest memory at Western . . .</i> |
| | | | <i>PT: A particular professor maybe.</i> |
| | | | <i>CA: I'd have to give you a lot. I would just have to give you a lot. I'll give you the fondest memory of Western. The day I retired. Folks put on a very nice reception. A lot of people came, very surprising. I didn't want that. I didn't, I wanted to be one of those people who left by the back door on his last day. It was extremely gratifying to leave this institution after thirty-two years with the kind of experiences that I had here and the kind of feeling I have toward my colleagues and the institution. And I still have those feelings today. That's it.</i> |
| | | | <i>PT: That's it. How can we ask any more, or say any more after that? Thank you so much for this . . .</i> |
| | | | <i>CA: Thank you. I've thoroughly enjoyed it.</i> |
| | | | <i>PT: . . . researchers will appreciate this.</i> |