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## Interview with Dr. Susan Atherley - Alumnus; Adjunct Professor

Susan Atherley  
*Nova Southeastern University*

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SA= Dr. Susan Atherly

Nova Southeastern University

History of Presidents

Dr. Susan Atherly

JP= Dr. Julian Pleasants

SA= Dr. Susan Atherly

JP: This is Julian Pleasants. It is the 24<sup>th</sup> of October, 2011, and I'm speaking Dr. Susan Atherly and we're at Nova Southeastern University. You originally started school at Florida Southern?

SA: Yes.

JP: And got your degree, a Bachelor of Science, from Florida Southern, then you went to Barry University for a Master's of Science in Counseling.

SA: Mm-hm.

JP: How did you get from Barry to Nova Southeastern, and why did you choose Nova Southeastern?

SA: How'd I get from Barry to come back to Nova?

JP: Yeah.

SA: Let's see. I wanted to... After I got my counseling degree and became a guidance counselor, I did that for a number of years, probably six or seven years. I heard that there was a program... I was living up in Palm Beach County, and I heard there was a program through Nova where you could go and get your specialist degree. And you needed to do that in order to become an assistant principal. And actually, in that day, they held the classes at a high school or a middle school. So I had heard about it and wanted to get involved in that and get my degree, my specialist degree, so that I could become an assistant principal.

JP: So your job was ultimately not so much counseling as administration?

SA: Right.

JP: And tell me, at this point, exactly what the requirements were for a specialist degree in 1990? And what is the difference between a specialist degree and an Ed.D?

SA: Okay. The difference between a specialist and Ed.D is the specialist is like a step towards it, but you really can't count it. It's kind of like you should've -

in hindsight, I would've gone straight for the Ed.D, but I never thought I would get my doctorate, so I though, specialist, it's a year program..

JP: It's between the masters and the Ed.D? Okay.

SA: Yes. And it was a year or year-and-a-half program versus, of course, a doctorate was several years, so it seemed like the way to go and it was all that I needed in order to become an assistant principal. So I thought, "Okay, let me do that."

JP: I see. So, in essence, you just take part of the coursework that would be necessary for your terminal degree?

SA: Yes, part of the coursework and you don't do the dissertation or anything like that.

JP: So at the time you were taking your specialist degree in 1990, you were working where?

SA: In 1990, I was working at Suncoast High School, in Palm Beach County.

JP: Okay. And you were a counselor?

SA: I was a guidance counselor.

JP: All right. Explain to me how the process went for this degree. You would go on weekends?

SA: It was basically a weekend, Saturday classes.

JP: And how many would be in your cluster?

SA: We didn't always stay together, so the classes would be 20 to 30 in size. Some of them would be smaller, might be ten, but overall I can remember sitting in certain classes that everybody had to take, like research and certain things like that. There would be 20 or 25 students in those classes.

JP: And who taught the classes?

SA: Mostly they were folks who were doing the job. They were other administrators working in Palm Beach County.

JP: So they were not all Nova faculty?

SA: No. They were Nova adjuncts.

JP: Nova adjuncts?

SA: Right, they were Nova adjuncts, which meant that they had a full-time job elsewhere and then teaching the courses. I can remember one of the people who taught me my school law class was a principal in Palm Beach County.

JP: But he had his Ed.D degree or not?

SA: At that time, yes, he did. Now, not everybody did. At that time, not everybody had their doctorate. He did. He was Dr. Norm Shearin. But my friend, who now teaches at Nova with me, up at the [Gardens], Linda Carter, she only had her master's degree, but later went back and got her doctorate degree because she knew that they were going to then require to get the doctorates to keep teaching.

JP: Did that bother you at all these people were "adjuncts" as opposed to Nova faculty?

SA: No, it didn't bother me, mostly because I was just looking to get my degree and it was closer to home and I didn't have to come down here, quite honestly. And they were folks doing the walk. They were walking the walk, which is something that I pride myself on even now, teaching for Nova. I'm a principal doing the walk and I'm teaching school law and about being a principal.

JP: So this is hands-on experience?

SA: Very much hands-on.

JP: So when you'd do, say, administration, somebody who was currently a principal would sit down and discuss with you the problems, solutions -

SA: Right, that would tell their stories.

JP: - concepts, new ideas? What kind of reading material did you have?

SA: Textbooks for the most part that the university would put in their syllabus for us to use, the school law textbook I think has been the same forever.

JP: And that, of course, is becoming more and more important every year. [laughter]

SA: Yes, very important. That is the important one, as we always say to everybody.

JP: People will sue because school starts too early.

SA: Right, exactly.

JP: It must be sometimes -

SA: Well, that's why you can tell so many stories. Like when I compare when I took the class compared to when now I'm teaching it, it's hugely different, even just the copyright law, which was just: Here's the copyright law. Don't make a copy. But now, with all the technology and

everything else, it's just so much more. And we live in a litigious society where people just want to sue you for everything.

JP: When you look back on your specialist degree, how did that help you in your job?

SA: Well, at the time – now that I go back – we were in a situation in Palm Beach County where they weren't really hiring a lot of assistant principals because of the salaries that had existed and there just wasn't a lot of raises or anything. And so in terms of my wanting to move up to become an assistant principal, it took me a couple of years because there just were not openings. Now, as far as doing my job, it helped me, I think, knowing better leadership skills and having those leadership skills and understanding the law.

I was stepping out of the role as a guidance counselor to kind of a quasi administrator with my principal, who had me actually doing more assistant principal things than guidance counseling things. And so what I learned I was able to then apply to what I was doing on a daily basis – understanding the budget, understanding the law.



JP: So the value of this kind of education is more pragmatic than intellectual. Is that fair to say?

SA: I think so because you really get to – at least where we were – again, I wasn't on this campus, so I'm not sure if there were full-time folks doing the walk or not, but with the satellite programs they had, the adjuncts were people actually doing the work in the county.

JP: And so you attended classes where?

SA: Oh gosh, I attended classes starting at Conniston Middle School.

JP: Did you ever come to this campus?

SA: For my specialist, no – for my doctorate, yes, but not for my specialist.

JP: But you never went on the campus at all during your specialist training?

SA: Never.

JP: Did you talk to any of the faculty members on the campus? Did you have...

SA: On this campus?

JP: Yeah. Did you have a mentor at all?

SA: No. Everything was run through the satellite program where we had it at Conniston Middle School. There would be a couple people working the desk. There was somebody there from the university that would help you, tell you, "Here's your program you're taking. Sign up." They only offered one program at the time. It was Ed. specialist in Ed. leadership, when we did it at Conniston. That was the only reason that anybody was going to that building.

JP: Well, yeah, in the beginning the programs here were educational leadership. That was what they started with.

SA: Right.

JP: And the whole idea was exactly what you did. They started this in the 1970s with the idea that a lot of people who were working as you were, who want to be principals, superintendents, had no time to do it. So we can make arrangements where they would have these clusters and they would come to Boston or wherever it was or Orlando.

SA: Right.

JP: How did you – there are some people who look at that education as perhaps not as rigorous as if you were on campus, attending class all the time.

SA: Mm-hm, that's true. We would hear that conversation. "Oh, you're going to Nova?" But it met our needs. For those of us that didn't need to be traveling down here or couldn't come down here, it met our needs to be able to get the goal that we wanted to. And the goal for what I wanted to do was important to me.

JP: What did you think of Nova before you came? What did you know about Nova?

SA: Very little, really actually probably nothing. A flyer probably came across my desk that said, "Nova Southeastern University. Go to classes at Conniston. Get your Ed. Leadership degree." And I thought, oh... Someone had told me I would make a good administrator, so I thought, "Well, I'll get that degree next. I'll try that one. Really, it was not hard to get into, quite honestly, because you didn't have to take all the GREs and all the entrance exams. I think we took some little exam at the time. Maybe that was for the doctorate. I don't really recall. But you basically just signed up and paid and went to your classes.

JP: Now, did your school help you with the cost?

SA: No, my school did not.

JP: I know they don't anymore.

SA: I never had any help from any of the schools or any of the counties.

JP: But some did, right?

SA: Yes, some did, but I did not.

JP: What was the cost, do you remember?

SA: I was going to say back then it was maybe \$400 or \$500 a class or a credit. It might've cost me maybe \$10,000, I'm thinking. It wasn't really that expensive. And the classes were set up to where you went for the eight weeks, which was also something that people like me liked. You didn't go 16 weeks for the semester; you went eight weeks and you could fit in two classes if you only went mornings. And if you were a little crazy, like I did, you could do morning and afternoon and really double up, and so it was kind of a fast-paced, let's get through this program, get what you need so you can move on.

JP: Did you do night at all?

SA: Not for that degree, no. I did night at Barry, but not here.

JP: Okay. The degree was one three-hour course would take eight weeks.

SA: Eight weeks.

JP: And that was, in essence, all-day Saturday?

SA: Half-day Saturday.

JP: Half-day Saturday?

SA: You could get the three credits in.

JP: And then any Friday?

SA: No, I didn't do Friday. When I did the specialist, it was just Saturdays.

JP: Okay, so it was four-hour Saturday, something like that?

SA: Four hours in the morning, four hours in the afternoon, if you so choose. You could go down, take a class, break for lunch, and take another class. So you could actually fit them in.

JP: Okay. That's a long time to be in class, eight hours.

SA: Mm-hm, it was.

JP: But the alternative is that you wouldn't be able to do it otherwise, right?

SA: Right.

JP: This is very difficult if you're a full-time teacher and then spending your weekends doing this. It's a tough gig, isn't it?

SA: Yes. And I actually – if you look at my résumé, I actually had a private practice going, too, at the same time. I was a mental health counselor, so I would work until three, go do my practice three or four days a week, from three to seven, and then go to school on Saturdays.

JP: That'll keep you busy.

SA: Very busy.

JP: Did you feel like you benefitted from the degree, the specialist degree, in both academic terms and in terms of proficiency in your profession?

SA: That's a great question because at the time when I did it, yes, I really did. I felt like I had great classes, they were interesting. I got through them, made A's. And once this district opened up the door to become

an administrator, I had my degree to be able to go into what we called the Preparing New Principals Program. I was able to go through that program, which is what the state and district makes you do for a year. And then I could become an administrator. So without the degree, I would've never been able to get into the Preparing New Principals Program to move forward. I had to have that degree. That was critical.

JP: That's a state program?

SA: Yes.

JP: And who runs that?

SA: Well, ever district runs it. The state says you have to have a Preparing New Principals Program, and every district sets up their own program. But you had to have your degree prior to going into that program.

JP: So what they do is, in essence, teach you how to be a principal?

SA: Right. And you also had to have a job as an assistant principal to go in. In other words, I couldn't just be a guidance counselor.

JP: You had to have some experience?

SA: I had to have some experience as assistant principal to go into that. I actually had to do it for a year. You had to be an assistant principal for one year prior to going into that program.

JP: And what about recertification? How often do you have to do that, or did you have to do that?

SA: I think it used to be every five years. Now they give me a certificate for ten years.

JP: Every ten years?

SA: Yeah, every ten years right now.

JP: And for recertification you had to take some education graduate courses?

SA: You could, or you could do a lot of workshops and things, meetings that the district did. Mine were all done through the district.

JP: So the district would have a workshop on –

SA: Bullying.

JP: Accounting?

SA: Accounting, bullying – anything that an assistant principal would go to, you'd sign up for it and you'd get X



number of points for it. The state says you can have X number of in-service points and it can be a -

JP: That's what it's called, in-service points, and then you -

SA: In-service points, yes.

JP: The time you took your specialist that would've taken care of that recertification?

SA: Exactly, yes.

JP: And so when and why did you decide to go on for the Ed.D?

SA: I was still a guidance counselor at the time I went on with the Ed.D. I hadn't stepped into that role of being an assistant principal yet, but I had become friends with one of the teachers who had taught me when I was going through my specialist. She had said to me, "If you ever want to teach," because I always thought I would want to teach for university, "If you ever want to do this," because I thought it looked like fun, "you need to get your doctorate."

Now, interesting enough, at that time, I was still a guidance counselor and had my specialist degree and decided

to go for my doctorate. I had not become an assistant principal yet.

JP: So this is around, what, 1990?

SA: 1997 or 1998.

JP: Okay.

SA: And again, there was a rule that you were supposed to be an administrator, assistant principal or principal, to go into this doctoral program, because you were supposed to have those years of experience. Well, I had not.

JP: So it's still educational leadership?

SA: Yeah, still educational leadership. But I did not have the experience because I had not been named an assistant principal yet. I always recall this because I had to get special permission from my area superintendant to sign off because Nova said, "Well, if you get the area superintendant or somebody big to sign off to say you can go, when you have administrative experience, even though you don't have the title, then we'll let you in the program."

JP: Okay.

SA: So I got the area superintendant to sign off on that. I had to list everything that I had done administratively, present it, and they accepted me into the doctoral program. But one of the reasons I wanted to do that was because I felt it was important if I ever wanted to teach, and I knew that Nova was moving from just having your master's degree to teach to having your doctorate to teach, and that was something I wanted to do. It was one of my goals. So that was really the driving force.

JP: And explain the difference between the specialist coursework and the Ed.D coursework?

SA: Oh, huge. The specialist, as I said, was eight weeks, kind of mini classes on fast forward. The doctoral was 16 weeks, all day, for the credit. We came down here for the coursework and sometimes we met at a hotel as well. But we had to then travel. They didn't have the cluster sites for doctorates back then, like we have now in Palm Beach County. We didn't have that, so we had to come down here and go to a number of places. They flew in all the experts from all over the country to come in and teach. It was very extensive.

JP: But it was still the cluster concept, right?

SA: Still the cluster concept, yes. There was like 20 of us in this one particular cluster that started. And at the time I think maybe 10 or 12 of us finished. So it was a cluster.

JP: And how would you evaluate the faculty who came in? Were they nationally known?

SA: Yes, nationally known.

JP: These were not adjuncts?

SA: No, these were not adjuncts. They were nationally known. When Haller came in for research, we all learned so much from him, and he was a national expert on research. So they flew in national experts for the most part to teach us. Now, there might've been one or two Nova experts, but for the most part they flew in and it was done on the weekends, all day Saturday, from eight until five or six at night. It was a long day.

JP: And this is for, what, 16 weeks?

SA: Sixteen weeks.

JP: And did you have a summer program as well?

SA: The summer program was where we had to attend a summer institute, more or less. We had to go for two

weeks. Some of my colleagues went the first year. Two out of the three years, if you were doing it in three years, you had to attend two out of three of these institute seminars in the summer. Some of my colleagues at the time went to Sweden. I opted not to go that year because they actually took them I think it was to Sweden and they had a seminar there.

JP: That's a nice option. [laughter]

SA: Yeah. It was expensive, too, so I think that's why I opted out. I said, "Okay, I think I'll wait." Because I knew the next couple years they were going to do right here in Fort Lauderdale. So they did it right here, in Fort Lauderdale.

JP: And they did. They held the summit. If they weren't here, they could be in Phoenix or anywhere.

SA: They could be anywhere. Yeah, they had a number of different places. I just chose the ones that were closer to home.

JP: Okay. And so if they had it in Phoenix, you were on your own nickel to get out there?

SA: That's right.

JP: And you had to pay for your hotel and all of that?

SA: Everything, yeah. So there was a cost to it.

JP: So the cost was not the cost of the tuition. It was the cost of the trip itself?

SA: You had to pay for the trip itself and actually sign up for a class, and that was the class that you were paying for, so you were paying for it, yes, but you also had to pay for the trip.

JP: And what would the tuition be the Ed.D program? Now, this is nine years later along the way.

SA: Mine was like \$30,000 total.

JP: That's a lot.

SA: Yeah, it was a lot.

JP: And it took you three years?

SA: I did mine in just under three.

JP: Okay.

SA: Just under three.

JP: Do you feel like that was worth both of the effort and the cost?

SA: Yes, 100% worth the effort.

JP: And the cost?

SA: And the cost.

JP: And otherwise you could never have done it?

SA: No.

JP: I mean, otherwise you would have to get a leave of teaching and go to Harvard or Columbia or Florida or somewhere and be an in-resident student for two or three years, whatever it took.

SA: Whatever it took. Because actually my first doctorate I was working on was in psychology at Miami Institute of Psychology. And I did everything but my dissertation, and when it was time to do it – this was all prior to this – when it was time to do that, they said, “Oh, yeah, now you have to take a year or two off and go to some internship in some jail or some hospital somewhere for \$6,000 a year and give up everything you have.” And I thought, “I can’t give up my job. I can’t give up my private practice. I can’t leave my family. I can’t do

that." So I said, "Okay, switch gears. What else can you do?" And then there was Nova again meeting the needs of someone like myself that needed to stay -

JP: This is really a significant niche of people. Not everybody wants to be a school administrator.

[laughter]

SA: No.

JP: And you know why. [laughter]

SA: Yes.

JP: It takes a lot of patience and other qualities to handle the situation today. It seems to me, from what little I know, that with all the cutbacks the schools are not offering any help for people who want to go back for extra courses or extra degrees.

SA: No, they haven't. Several years ago, maybe five years ago, Nova University, I know in Palm Beach County, had an arrangement with the district to where if you were going to get your ESOL or your ESE or those special need areas, they would either pay for half or pay for it.

JP: Yeah. And that's gone?

SA: And that's gone for Palm Beach County.



JP: Well, I think it's probably true most places. So if that's the case, why would anybody do it? If you're not going to get help to pay for it, you're not going to probably get a job these days – they're not hiring a lot of principals and superintendents, just the opposite – there's not much incentive at this point to do that, is there?

SA: I think it has to be a personal incentive that you want to do that, or that you want to teach one day in a university, or – I can speak directly to Palm Beach County – the salaries for being a teacher to going to be an assistant principal, when I did it, they were flat. You basically went from here to here and you got a five percent raise and that was it. But since then in Palm Beach County, if you're a teacher right now making \$35,000 or \$40,000, the starting salary for an assistant principal, which you need this degree and the program to go through, starts at \$62,000.

JP: Wow.

SA: So a lot of people are getting the incentive saying: You know what? I can't live on this \$35,000 a year as a teacher. I want to be an assistant principal. I may not ever be a principal, but I want to be an assistant principal, because it's another \$20,000 in my pocket. Now,

it might cost me that much to get the degree I'm getting, but in the long run, if I can make that for the next 15 years -

JP: If you can teach 20 years -

SA: I'm done making my money back. But without this degree and without going through the program, you can't even think about going there.

JP: So your incentive was financial, but it seems the way you're telling me it's a personal fulfillment?

SA: Mine was more personal. Mine was more I just like going to school and learning as much as I can. I'm just one of those people. Mine was more the drive to want to be able to teach because I loved teaching and I thought, if I could teach like my friend was doing, who taught me research through Nova when she had her master's degree - she was kind of like a mentor - then I could teach like she was doing.

JP: And you're currently at the Dreyfoos School?

SA: Dreyfoos School of the Arts.

JP: And where is that?

SA: That's in West Palm Beach.

JP: West Palm, okay. And what's the function of that school of the arts? Is that different from a regular high school?

SA: Yes. It's a very premiere high school. In order for students to go there, they have to fill out applications and they have to audition, and so they have to be very talented in either their music or visual arts or digital arts or what have you. And so we get the best of the best from all of Palm Beach County that wants to come to this arts school.

JP: Okay. So you would do music, painting –

SA: Dance.

JP: – dance, everything?

SA: Yes.

JP: And what is the base curriculum?

SA: The same as Palm Beach County. They still have to take all the classes that they have to take to graduate and we still offer advanced placement classes and things of that nature, but these kids get to come to school and for two hours a day, three hours a day, do what they love.

JP: Is that after class?

SA: It's during the school day. It's part of class. So when you walk around – any time I go into a dance class watch these kids ballet and toe and jazz, or you go into another one where they're singing or strings or violin. Their talent draws them there.

JP: This is "Glee"?

SA: This is "Glee." We just applied for "Glee." We're on there. Go vote for us. [laughter] This is "Glee," exactly.

JP: Now do you reconcile the divergent concepts here? Most kids go through school, they get a degree, and they can be in the dramatics club after school and that sort of thing. Here, there's a stronger focus. And I imagine the faculty is trained to teach – like at Julliard they teach piano.

SA: Yes.

JP: It's not just a regular teacher who is after class trying to organize a dramatics club.

SA: No, no. Then these kids, they stay after school. They have their own tutors, for lack of a better word. They have people that come in. They study. These kids go all night, until six or seven o'clock at night.

JP: So these would be highly motivated kids?

SA: Highly motivated kids who have a talent.

JP: Do they have to have a talent? Do you have a standard for admission?

SA: They have to have a talent or they don't get in. They have to apply for one of the nine areas.

JP: Like Julliard, but you have to come and audition and –

SA: And it is very similar to that. We had three kids go to Julliard last year. It's very much like that. The teachers there, the academic teachers – because you have your arts teachers and your academic teachers – integrate the arts within their classes. They have to be a little bit open to that because it's an art school, but you want smart artists. The folks that teach the art, some of them have gone to Julliard, they've been on Broadway shows. We have what's called Artists in Residence, where they're talented human beings from all over and they come in and work with the kids and the teachers.

JP: So they like to come to Palm Beach in the wintertime? [laughter]

SA: Yes, exactly. They like to come to Palm Beach in the wintertime. We call them Artists in Residence.

JP: Well, now, is there a correlation between these kids and jobs? Do they end up in the chorus line or...?

SA: Probably about 75% of our kids end up going to college to be a doctor, dentist, lawyer, businessman, things of that nature.

JP: In other words, they're artistically talented, but they still focus on a professional outside of the arts?

SA: Right. Maybe 20% of them actually go to Julliard or want to study – because they recognize and realize how hard it is to make a living. But those that are passionate about it are going to continue to do it.

JP: And do you like the concept of integrating? In North Carolina, there is a state school of the arts. I don't know if you are familiar with it. In the past, I had a good friend who was with the New York Philharmonic. She was very talented, but she got a lousy education.

[laughter]

SA: No, our kids get a good education. Again, a little history there – that school opened in 1990...I think we opened Suncoast in '89, when they went to the big

building. We had two schools in the area; we had Suncoast and School of the Arts. Parents would say to us in the community – these were the two best schools in the entire district and you had to try to get in by application – they could come from anywhere in the district – the only two schools that existed in Palm Beach County like that. And 10 or 15 years ago, they would say, “What school do we go to?” Well, if you want academics, you went to Suncoast. If you wanted arts, you went to Dreyfoos. Dreyfoos didn’t like that, necessarily, so they then became very academic and attracted a lot of the academics.

JP: Yeah, that’s true nowadays.

SA: So now we have academics and arts.

JP: And this is still officially a public school, right?

SA: It’s a public school, but you must apply, audition and be selected.

JP: Do you have to pay extra because it’s arts?

SA: No, no extra.

JP: And you like the idea of having the arts and the academic curriculum interrelated, that they can use facets of both in trying to get across concepts?

SA: Yes.

JP: Let me go back to your Ed.D. In an Ed.D, you do not have to write a dissertation. Is that right?

SA: We had to write a dissertation. We didn't have to defend it. It might not have been called a dissertation, but it was close to it. What were they called? I'm trying to remember. I thought it was a dissertation. Yeah, we had to write it; we just didn't defend it, necessarily. We were given a -

JP: The difference, as I understand it, was it was more of a practical paper as opposed to a research paper?

SA: Yes.

JP: So a dissertation is usually two or three years of research and that sort of thing?

SA: Right.

JP: And what you were doing - one of the people I talked to about that said that he had a program dealing with delinquent kids and that he had worked up some



proposal for adult supervision or something. I don't remember the details. That was what he did for his Ed.D.

SA: Right.

JP: So that's the kind of thing?

SA: Right. I don't remember the exact name they called it.

JP: What did you do?

SA: Mine changed because I was at Suncoast when I initially started the program and I was working with the low-performing kids there. When I went to become assistant principal, I ended up going to an elementary school where there were very high socioeconomic kids, just the perfect school, and there were no problems there. So they told me I needed to change. Since I was no longer at the other school, I couldn't continue with my research for that and I had to start over...a year and a half into it. Okay.

So I started over. We ended up working on - it was more or less an ethnographic research paper or how this school stayed so effective, because it was such an effective school. So I did a lot of ethnographic-type research.

JP: So what you're demonstrating is why it works?

SA: Yes. What was it about that school? What symptoms, what characteristics? What did people say about that school about why it was such a premiere school? And it was a premiere elementary school. It was just lovely.

JP: So you would find a combination of the quality of the teaching and the facilities, the ability of the students, all of that, because you didn't have any -

SA: I couldn't find anything wrong with it, other than it was overcrowded.

JP: Well, they're all overcrowded.

SA: That one was a 1,300 elementary school. President Clinton came to that school, as a matter of fact, to talk about reading, because it was one of the most overcrowded schools in the county. But it was overcrowded with wonderful children, parents and teachers.

JP: If you were in - let's just say parts of Palm Beach County - it was pretty grim out there.

SA: Very grim.

JP: I have spent some time out there.

SA: This was a pocket, very white, affluent, very high parental involvement. I walked in there and I kept saying to my person, my mentor, "I can't find a problem to work on." And so through long discussion, "Why don't we look at what makes this school what it is?" So that's what I ended up doing.

JP: If you go out with some of the sugar workers and...it's difficult – and some of the Seminoles. I would find it very difficult to work in one of those schools because the dropout rate is obviously very high.

SA: Terrible, very much.

JP: Have you worked with these low-income kids since that first experience? You're obviously not with them now.

SA: No. I only worked with the lower-income kids, as a pocket of kids, when I was at the alternative school and at Suncoast.

JP: Okay. Did your Ed.D degree, when you took all that, were you prepared as you become a principal or superintendant or whatever – do you feel like you got the necessary information you needed to deal with problems like how you deal with low-income kids, how you deal with dropouts, how you deal with bullies?

SA: Gosh, a lot of that's just a learning experience, as you know. I think we had a great foundation of philosophy and the research and the practicality and how to solve a problem that you saw in your school. If you saw something you needed to change, how did you get the research to back it up? How did you make the program stick? How did you evaluate it? How did you reevaluate it, assess it and all that? I think that was all there, right there in place. And you need that as a principal. But I think some of the things that we honestly do, like bullying you learn as you go on, because we really didn't have bullying that we talked about back then.

JP: So you had the right tools?

SA: Had the tools.

JP: So if you had a problem with bullying, you would know where to go, what kind of literature to look at, that sort of thing?

SA: What was good research, what was not good research, what was qualified – yes, absolutely, very strong in that.

JP: But in any kind of situation in the educational realm, a lot of it is flat-out experience, particularly being a principal. You learn by doing.

SA: It is. You learn by doing. And I think my guidance counseling and my mental health has helped me deal with people.

JP: That would make a huge difference as a principal, wouldn't it?

SA: Yes. It makes a huge difference.

JP: Your psychological background, all of that.

SA: I think it helps.

JP: Oh, it would have to. I'm not sure you exactly planned it that way, but you ended up - [laughter]

SA: No plan there!

JP: But you ended up with the right background, didn't you?

SA: Right.

JP: And so what's your future?

SA: Oh, I don't know.

JP: You mentioned you wanted to teach at university. Is that still possible?

SA: Yes. I would love to be a full-time university professor. When I'm done being a principal, I think that's what I would like to do.

JP: Do you want to do that? Well, you're in a pretty good position now. That's a very desirable job you have, and so you don't want to just toss that out.

SA: And I just got that school in August because I was at Spanish River for four years in Boca, which is another great high school, but not – this is the prestigious one. Yeah, so I love doing that. And again, I continue to teach at Nova. I'm still an adjunct for Nova.

JP: Tell me that. What do you teach for Nova?

SA: Oh gosh, I teach a number of things for Nova. I've been teaching with Nova ever since I got my doctorate degree. I actually started teaching with them right before I got my doctorate, because I hadn't gotten it yet; I was in class. And it's interesting because – and I think this is important about Nova, the relationships you build. Because I had built so many relationships in this cohort that I was in getting my doctorate, someone had said to me,

"Hey, I need a class taught up at Palm Beach County. Would you like to teach a class?" I said, "Sure, I'd love to teach. What class do you want me to teach?" "School law." "Okay, here we go." So I started teaching. School law was the first class I taught back in 1998, '99. Back down to that school where I took the classes, in Conniston, with my friend who was my mentor.

JP: But now the roles are reversed.

SA: Here we are together. She already got her doctorate. I was working on mine. One thing led to another. So anyway, to answer your question, I starting teaching school law for the most part and then, through other relationships that I had built and gotten to know people, I was asked to teach a class for the SkyLight Program.

JP: What is that?

SA: That's a Master's of Teaching and Learning. It's another program that they offer here through Fischler in Ed. leadership. You get a Master's in Teaching and Learning. It doesn't lend you to be an assistant principal. It's like, "I don't really want that, but I want to get my master's degree and learn more about being a

teacher and how I can be a better teacher.” And so I started teaching some classes for them. I’ve taught research classes for Nova.

Through this other relationship that I had with this gal – Nova was expanding. They have a BrainSMART Program. Nova was bringing in different programs to attract different people who wanted to do different things. So I started teaching little BrainSMART classes, which was my psychology and chemistry and biology background.

JP: But BrainSMART means better students? Is that what it means essentially?

SA: No, BrainSMART is a program that Donna Wilson and Marcus Conyers created about how to use your brain. How can teachers use students’ brains and understand the brain to have more effective teaching and learning taking place? So you become aware of what a child’s left and right sides of the brain do and all that stuff.

JP: Oh, I see.

SA: It has a lot of application to it. So I started teaching some of those classes. Now, those classes, it was at the time that we went online. So Nova was now taking a pendulum shift here because my law classes were live and



then my SkyLight and my BrainSMART classes were all online. They were never live classes. Oh, my gosh, here we go with the computer. Now we're doing that shift. Nova, I think, was one of the first to kind of jump in on that one. There are a lot of pros and cons in conversations, I'm sure.

JP: Let's go through that because there are people that see advantages both ways. What are the disadvantages of online teaching?

SA: For me, as the teacher and I think for the students, they don't get the stories. It's very difficult to let them have the conversations that we're having, the dialogue.

JP: Sort of that rapport between teacher and student?

SA: Right, yeah. And if you're talking about something with the live class, which I still teach up in [Gardens], and now they satellite me out to five different places: Tampa, Gainesville, here, Orlando or whatever. Those students watch me.

JP: So you are in West Palm?

SA: I'm in West Palm.

JP: Do they have the center where they have all this technology and you just plug in, as it were?

SA: Yes.

JP: And your students are... How many, 10 or 15?

SA: Oh, it's varied. I've had classes as big as 20. Now they're probably 10 or 15.

JP: If you're online, 20 would be harder.

SA: Yes. I've had as much as 28 in an online class.

JP: I would think 15 would be sort of the upper limit.

SA: Yeah, 18 now is where they kind of max them out, 21. But 15 to 18 are very nice.

JP: Because if you're online – and you would meet them Thursday night at seven?

SA: Right.

JP: Everybody logs in, right? And how do you go from there? Obviously, in that time period, an hour and a half probably, you want to contact or ask a question or get some response from everybody, right?

SA: Right, you hope. Well, it's interesting. Again, in time, when we first started, everybody typed the answers. I would be there typing. "So tell me what you learned from Chapter One about contracts and school law." And you didn't know who was on the other end of the computer, which was one of the issues. And they would just type. "Okay, who can give an example?" You kind of just go with it, trying to keep the conversation taking place, but it's all being typed.

JP: That's hard.

SA: Oh, it's exhausting. So that's where I think they miss it, because if you're having the conversation, somebody can raise their hand and say, "Well, wait a minute. I want to tell you about an experience."

JP: This is not the ultimate video classroom then.

SA: No. This was the very beginning when everything was —

JP: This is not Skype and all of that?

SA: No.

JP: But you have that now?

SA: Now we have – well, yes, we're getting there. Now we have what's called Illuminate, to where they can talk. I talk and they can actually hear me, so I can actually lecture or tell them what the assignments are and go on it like I would in a live class, and they can ask questions.

JP: Yeah. And I was talking to somebody today who teaches one of those classes here, and he was saying that the way they've set it up is that he can see them raise their hand and they can see him. He knows what everybody is doing.

SA: Right. Raising their hand is a little button they push. It's like a little sign that comes up and says, "I have a question." Maybe it's George over here. You can say, "Okay, George, what's your question?" And so you're interacting, which is much easier than back in the day when I'm typing and saying, "Talk to me. Tell me something."

JP: Well, this is like video conferencing. He can see them.

SA: Yeah. We're getting there, to video conferencing.

JP: Of course, that's here. They've upgraded stuff.

SA: We're not there yet online.

JP: The other sites don't have that yet?

SA: No, we don't have that.

JP: Well, if you had to do it by computers, I would think that would be a huge disadvantage.

SA: There is a disadvantage.

JP: It takes too much time.

SA: It takes a lot of time and you have to make sure that you're consistently checking your emails, as the instructor, because students -

JP: Because they can pose questions all day.

SA: All day long and expect and answer.

JP: Immediately, yeah.

SA: "It's two o'clock. Where are you?" "I'm working. I've got a full-time job. I'm sorry. You can't wait until the day before the assignment is due to ask your five million questions." [laughs]

JP: "Did you get my email 30 minutes ago?"

SA: "Sorry!" Then of course you have all the technical issues that go on, but we've come a long way.

JP: In what I still call the person-to-person educational system, you can have the interaction of ideas, expression, touch people, you can relate to people. And in some cases with this typing, they don't even know who you are. They can't see you or anything.

SA: Right. You don't know.

JP: Yeah. And you lose some of that interaction when you don't know who you're talking to. I'm talking to Mary, but I don't know who Mary is, what she looks like or whether she's interested or just looking at...texting with one hand and doing class with the other.

SA: Exactly. You don't know.

JP: So if you see that they get to the level where it's all Skype - all virtual classroom - that would be significantly better?

SA: All of it?

JP: Yeah.

SA: Getting rid of all the live classes? Is that what you're saying?

JP: That's a question I'm asking. I don't know whether they're going in that direction or not. They're certainly getting more classes here online than they've ever had before. That I know.

SA: And it makes sense because just like I chose to go to a satellite program in a school where I sat on Saturdays, why not – if I'm teaching all week and have kids at home, let me be at home and do my work at one o'clock in the morning if that's when I want to do my assignments. With the price of gas, why would I get up and drive to a class? Why not just do it online? Now, I will tell you – because I have students in my live law class I teach tomorrow night and they will tell me, "We want the live classes. We want the interaction."

JP: And how big would that class be?

SA: Tomorrow night is six students.

JP: Six?

SA: There are only six.

JP: Okay.

SA: But my law classes online are bigger because more people are opting to do them online.

JP: So is that a trend that would bother you?

SA: No. I think that's what we're seeing across the country.

JP: That's true. That may or may not be..

SA: I know.

JP: For those of us that spent our careers in the academic world in the traditional mode of teaching -

SA: I like live teaching, as I always tell my students, but I understand that online classes meet the needs of individuals that couldn't get their degree if they weren't doing that.

JP: That's how Nova started. They started this in 1971-72 with these clusters. Nobody else was doing anything.

SA: No.

JP: The target was, again, educational leadership. They were targeting people, superintendents and principals that wanted to change, get better educated, get more degrees, all of that which they couldn't do. That still seems to me to be the basic function of the educational leadership program, because I don't know if anybody comes



here and stays on campus for three years to get an Ed.D. They may. I don't think many people do, do they?

SA: No. And actually, they didn't even have the online classes when I got mine. But then, as soon as we were done, here comes the cluster in Palm Beach County. You no longer have to drive to Fort Lauderdale. Here comes the cluster where you can do classes online, fast forward, do it in half the time and, boom, you have your doctorate. So they continually change things. I think what Nova does is they continue to change to meet the needs of what the students need in order to get where they want to be.

JP: Yeah. And so as the world becomes more technologically inclined and all these kids have these iPads and everything, the way to educate is going to be online.

SA: And as you probably know, in public schools, especially in Florida, we have a lot of students taking virtual classes. The governor just passed a law where every incoming ninth grader has to take at least one online class to get out of high school.

JP: Governor Scott did that, did he?

SA: Yes. [laughter] So now you have students that have to take an online class. So what do I take, online English, online Spanish – online what? So we're forcing kids to do online work.

JP: And you know why.

SA: Why?

JP: Cheaper.

SA: Well, yeah. They can do it at home.

JP: If I thought it were the learning component, I would feel better about it. That's what bothers me a little bit. I see a lot of... For instance, I was at the University of Florida. We've turned to adjuncts. Now, I know for a fact that some of the adjuncts were better teachers than some of the full professors, but that's not the purpose of adjuncts. The purpose of adjuncts is because they're cheaper. As more and more people in the history department become adjuncts, they don't have to pay retirement. They have medical, but they don't have to pay the kinds of money you would have to pay to a full-time employee. And the object is not teaching, per se, although obviously they want to hire good adjuncts. The motivating factor is less money.

SA: Less money.

JP: Which always bothers me in education, I always think that education needs more money – within reason, of course – rather than less money.

SA: As a matter of fact, we were told a couple years ago that as adjuncts that the university was going to force, ask or whatever, every full-time person to take on an extra class without being paid as part of their job, which would then impact us adjuncts, because now not only are we cheaper but they don't need us as much. And they're getting you, the full-time person, to teach a class because obviously you want to keep your job.

JP: And that's for free.

SA: And that's for free.

JP: And you don't have, depending on where you are – because there's no tenure here, so if you were tenured at the University of Florida, you might say, "I'm not going to do it." But here, you'd better do it because it's a three-year contract or whatever. They won't renew you if you don't do the extra work. It's not that that's bad because the person who's teaching the course is a qualified person, a faculty member, but it's just cheaper for the university

to use them. And I frankly think, having been at that level and teaching six hours, I always thought we should've taught at least nine hours. I think the people who are full professors, who've been there and done their research, written books, know better, they teach less. [laughs] I would be teaching more.

SA: See, I don't want to write the books and I don't want to do the research. I want to teach. [laughs]

JP: Well, but a lot of my colleagues don't want to teach. They want to research, but that's not the only function of the university. It seems to me the people who are researching and doing good work and writing books –

SA: Should be talking about it.

JP: Should be in the classroom. They have the experience. Whereas, when you get a first-year adjunct that's not published and has not done research, they have a limited approach to, in our case, the study of history. And the problem that everybody faces, of course, is the cuts go on and on. I'm sure you've had to deal with them. Have you had specific cuts? Are you given a percentage you have to cut?

SA: At the school district?

JP: Yeah.

SA: Are you talking about the school district now?

JP: Yeah. Is it just less money or what?

SA: At the school level, our district has really protected the schools. We did lose a few people, like hall monitors and things like that, but overall they have left the schools untouched.

JP: Because it's Palm Beach County.

SA: It's Palm Beach County and the board doesn't want to touch the schools. Now, step into the area office and in the big administration office they did major cuts so that they didn't have to cut at the school level.

JP: So they would cut people who were in curriculum and things like that?

SA: Yes. They cut it to bare bones to where there's nobody up there, practically. And they displaced them out or they lost their jobs or what have you.

JP: So you didn't have any specific cuts in your school? Did you lose any teachers?

SA: No. I didn't lose any.

JP: This would not be the case in some of the smaller counties in, say, Lower Florida.

SA: I know, right.

JP: They would have lost teaching positions at every level.

SA: That's true. And I think that's because — I was being satellited out throughout the state and I'd have these conversations when we would talk in my classes, and they would say, "Oh, my gosh, we let 300 teachers go." "We let 400 teachers go." We had to hire 300 or 400 teachers a few weeks ago, and I think it's because of the way in which the superintendant at the time, he was very good at handling that. I think he just did a good job with it.

JP: And so the people who are taking your courses now — let's say your law course — where would they be from and what would they be doing? Would they be teachers, principals, what?

SA: For the most part, I would say 90-something-percent of them are teachers.

JP: Aspiring to be principals?

SA: Aspiring to be assistant principals or principals. Occasionally you get a few that are working at the Parks & Recreation, but they think they might want to get into this. Those are where you kind of wonder, "Well, why are you here?" But they're there. It's a little bit hard sometimes for them to do the coursework because they can't go to a principal or assistant principal or school and do a project that they need to do. But for the most part, they all come from schools and they want to be an administrator.

JP: When you were doing your Ed.D, how much time did you actually spend on campus during those three years?

SA: Well, I came down every Saturday for coursework, but as far as coming on campus, like using the library or the facilities, probably not that much time, honestly, because we were in the transition during those years of going to computers, and so you were able to go on the computer and do your research and look up your articles or your research. So occasionally I would come down, spend time in the library, spend a few days down here, trying to get my hands on books and journals to take back home.

JP: So in essence, you're an alumnus to this university, but what kind of ties do you have to the university? Are you a proud Shark?

SA: I've very proud of Nova, I really am, and I don't say that just for this. I'm very proud of Nova. I always tell the students when I'm teaching them, especially the live students, "I think Nova has reached out to many of us." I think the fact that they have – at least in Palm Beach County. Those of us that are principals or assistant superintendents or whatever they are, they're teaching. So the students that come through Palm Beach County get to know – again, back to building those relationships. They get to see them and meet these folks. We, many times as teachers, want to go in there and say, "I think I'm going to hire you one day as an assistant principal. I would never hire you because you've been late to my class every time. And if you're going to be late to my class every time, I don't want you." So we have hired a great deal. What Nova has done by having us teaching it is it has helped those students to get jobs.

JP: I was sort of trying to get at when you think of the alumni of Nova University, a lot of them have never been on the campus. It's not like going four years at FSU



or Gainesville, where you're there all the time, where you're going to football games, you have social interactions, you're in student government or whatever.

SA: No, we didn't have that.

JP: So you're an older person, as most are, and your relationship with Nova is essentially professional.

SA: Yes.

JP: If you come here on Saturday, you don't see anybody walking around campus.

SA: I don't know anybody.

JP: Is that a problem? I've noticed that one of the issues for Nova, as they try to raise money, is it's not like you graduated Princeton. [laughs] So they would like to get alumni more involved in the university and that sort of thing, but they've had a hard time because of the nature of the fact that many of them are out of Nova, foreign countries or whatever, and/or very few have been undergraduates, so very few would've been here for any length of time. So that's an issue that they're always going to be struggling with.

SA: Probably. I was just up at Tallahassee this weekend with a friend. We went to school there, so football, and we were in the football stadium watching the game. You could see the whole... We didn't have that. We didn't have anything to really draw us here. Now, in our clusters we grew together.

JP: Of course.

SA: Again, back to those relationships.

JP: But that's very limited.

SA: That's very limited.

JP: Is there a way to change that? One of the things that I had thought about is maybe if you had some two days of papers and presentations and have all the clusters come – not necessarily required, but voluntarily – give papers and have seminars and whatever, it sort of would broaden your relationship. It wouldn't be just one cluster; it would be people from other clusters.

SA: I think so. They did that with that SkyLight Program I was telling you about. They didn't do a lot of it, but a couple of times a year the clusters from all over South Florida would get together and they would put up presentations and we would walk around and see their work.

I would go down to Miami for this. They did it in the Miami Center. I think that kind of built some camaraderie and they made them feel like all the clusters got together, so I think that's a good idea.

JP: Does the alumni association stay in contact with you?

SA: Yes. I continue to get mailings that say, "Come get your doctorate with us." [laughter] I already got it! "Get your doctorate in something else." No, I don't want another one. I'm done! [laughter]

JP: Obviously, they don't have a good record.

SA: Well, they want you to get a doctorate in another area. You've done one. Come do another one.

JP: Is that what it's about really?

SA: I don't know, but I do get the flyers.

JP: You're just on a list?

SA: Yeah, I'm on a list.

JP: But do they come and say, "We're proud to have you as an alumnus. We want to invite you back to..." whatever homecoming would be?

SA: No, not really.

JP: Or ask you for money or anything?

SA: I think they always ask for money in one of those flyers.

JP: I've talked to all the presidents of the university and that's sort of been a failure that they have not. They don't even have a good list of the alumni. We were trying to find people that went to school here.

SA: Couldn't find them?

JP: Couldn't find them. I can understand why they didn't do it as the school as developing. They didn't have any money to pay for people. But now, as they grow bigger and they have a relationship with particularly law school and medical school, all these people, they're going to go out and make a pretty good living.

SA: For sure.

JP: You might want to make sure that they are at least aware of what's going on in the university. There's no alumni magazine.

SA: No.

JP: Which I find incredible.

SA: Basically, I'm still on the list, but like I said, its like, "Come get your doctor in pharmacology." Or, "Come get your doctorate in something else."

JP: Yeah. In that sense, I suppose they do a good job, but that's not directly related to your relationship with Nova.

SA: No.

JP: I've noticed that at the University of North Carolina they have this really slick alumni magazine that comes out quarterly. It's about 150 pages and color photographs and advertising. It's big. It is a big-time... And they have comings and goings of all the graduates and all of that stuff.

SA: Right. And you feel like you have a connection. I would imagine people that went there would feel they have a connection so they want to do this or they want to do that.

JP: Exactly.

SA: But I think those of us that did it satellited out or elsewhere, we're proud of what we did and we love Nova, but we don't feel a true connection probably.

JP: Right. That's a good way to put it, yeah. And that's not going to change. Or is it?

SA: I don't know. For them?

JP: Yeah, because it's getting more and more online.

SA: I don't know how you're going to pull that together.

JP: That's what I mean. That's the downside, to me, for the online education, that you don't have a relation with the university. You don't have a relationship with a mentor.

SA: But even when you have the cluster, like the clusters that move through the program together online – when we got the clusters, we were at least live people talking to each other, building those relationships and friendships, etc. But now you have it online. I don't know what they do with each other. Yeah, it's like, "I'm in this cluster. Isn't it great that I know your names and recognize you?"

JP: "I believe you're from Providence, Rhode Island."

SA: And I might be with a few of my buddies because we're getting it from Savannah, Georgia, or somewhere else,

or Texas. Okay, I've got a friend that I'm doing the program with, but that's all I have.

JP: Yeah. And that's not enough. And that's not related to the university, anyway.

SA: No.

JP: That's an interpersonal relationship as opposed to a relationship with the university.

SA: Yes.

JP: Are there any interesting stories you can tell me about going to class, or the time somebody fell asleep and fell out of the chair, or somebody tried to set the building on fire, or there was a hurricane? I'm just looking for anecdotal stories about how the classes worked – good things, bad things, funny incidents.

SA: I don't recall anything really funny happening. I don't really recall anything bad happening when I was a student. Teaching, we've had all those hurricanes and those were challenging times. The university was very supportive of those because students obviously were without electricity and food and –

JP: So Andrew?

SA: Andrew and Charlie, Francis, Ivan and Jean, then Wilma, those five about put us all under. As a teacher at the time, we had to really help take care of those students. We were without electricity, some of us, for two or three weeks. You just had to be very adjustable and help them through as best as you could.

JP: And the university was accommodating and flexible?

SA: Accommodating and flexible and very helpful and supportive.

JP: If they haven't figured out how to do it now...

SA: Yeah.

JP: There will be more.

SA: Right. And it wasn't like they said, "Hey, teachers, you didn't teach for three weeks, so we're not going to pay you."

JP: Yeah.

SA: "Just help us get through this time. Help our students feel that they can get through this and we'll all be there together." That is what we did with all of those hurricanes.



JP: And that does bring people together. It's an unfortunate set of circumstances, but nonetheless it does create some sense of community because everybody –

SA: And I would have students in my life classes that had lost everything in their garage, and all their work for their portfolio was gone. "What do I do?" And we'd just try to help them construct as much as we could and say, "Well, this is what we have. We're going to get you through it."

JP: Well, that's a sinking feeling, isn't it?

SA: Oh, yeah, you lose it all.

JP: It's hard to imagine starting over.

SA: Yeah. So now I always tell them, "Keep your work on computers, back-up drives, hard ones – put them in plastic bins – keep everything everywhere because you can lose it."

JP: I have even decided that I have a memory stick in the house and one in the car in case the house burns down.

SA: That's right, because you don't know, or you'll lose it.

JP: That's probably a little crazy. On the other hand, there's no way I could replicate that work - couldn't do it, wouldn't do it, wouldn't even think about it. Anything else you'd like to talk about that we haven't covered?

SA: No, I think you've hit it fairly well.

JP: Okay.

SA: I really enjoyed it.

JP: Well, thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate it.

[End]