



## **Oral History Interview of Douglas R. Snow**

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### **Interview Summary**

Dr. Douglas R. Snow, Professor Emeritus of the Institute of Public Services at Suffolk University, reflects on his personal and professional life before, during, and after his career at Suffolk University. Dr. Snow also talks about his role as a faculty member and chair of the Public Administration department, the growth of the various programs and degrees offered, as well as, the colleagues that inspired him during his career. Dr. Snow concludes with a reflection on what he hopes students gain from the MPA programs, their potential impact in the public sphere, and the future direction of Suffolk's program.

### **Subject Headings**

**Snow, Douglas R.**

**Suffolk University – Business School**

**Suffolk University — History**

**Interview Transcript begins on next page**

**ALEX ARBAIZA:** All right, so today is October 25th, 2022. It is now 1:55 pm, I'm recording this in the Suffolk University recording studio located in Sargent Hall. My name is Alex Arbaiza, and I'm here with my classmate Selvin Backert. We're both students from professors Patricia Reeve's course, *History 239, Getting Started with Oral History*. We both have the pleasure to interview Dr. Douglas Snow, professor emeritus of the Institute of Public Service. Before the recording, all parties involved signed a consent form for this interview to be [made] public through the Suffolk University Oral History Project in Suffolk, which would be housed in Suffolk's Moakley Archive. With us here today is Jonathan Wardle, our recording operator, and our lovely professor, Patricia Reeve.

Dr. Snow, during this interview, we're going to ask questions about different aspects of your professional career. It'll include your time before, during, and after Suffolk.

**DOUGLAS SNOW:** Okay.

**ARBAIZA:** So, the first question that we have for you today goes way before Suffolk. We were already kind of interested in this, which is how was your experience as an undergrad at Idaho State, and why did you decide to attend there?

01:18

**SNOW:** I grew up in Buhl, Idaho, a very small town with 3000 people, and Pocatello was the big city where Idaho State is, about two hours' drive from where I lived, and I had a half tuition scholarship to go. Half tuition was \$80. You guys will—even if you convert that to today's dollars—you've got to multiply that by maybe almost eight. That's still not very much money. So, your cause is just if you're complaining about tuition increases over the past few years. It's actually driven by the state legislatures who have had to finance the Medicaid programs. Medicaid, typically, not that I'm against Medicaid, I'm all for it, but it grows faster. Medicaid grows faster than revenue. So, anything in anybody's budget that grows faster than their income is going to crowd other things out, and so higher ed tuition is the safety valve.

**ARBAIZA:** Hm, wow, I had no idea about that. I mean, you already kind of got into it, especially with kind of your research, but did you originally start with public service and public management when you went into higher education, or did you start somewhere else and then move into that?

**SNOW:** I was very much interested in history and political science. Both were very interesting to me, also economics. Economics has always been a major part of how I think about the world of politics. In fact, public administration, as I understand it, is a very unhappy marriage between political science and economics.

**ARBAIZA:** So, was there a specific program that you could go into for public administration when you were in school or was it just looking more into business?

03:09

**SNOW:** Not as an undergraduate, no. As an undergraduate I majored in American studies, which gave me the political science and the American literature and the economics to kind of build a foundation.

**ARBAIZA:** Okay, so you built a foundation school first and then kind of just went into the field and still have it specific—

**SNOW:** Yeah, well, it was a circuit circuitous route, but basically, yeah.

**ARBAIZA:** Yeah, so it seemed like you kind of got into the next question. When did you decide to take a graduate degree in business and why?

**SNOW:** I don't have a graduate degree in business. After my undergraduate degree, I earned a master's degree in public administration at Brigham Young University. And this was quite a few years after my undergraduate degree that I went back and did that. Then I went to work for the Utah State Legislature when I finished it, and that's really when my public service career started.

So, I was in my early 30s when I finally did that. I was an analyst for the Joint Appropriations Committee for the Utah State Legislature. My job was nonpartisan. I basically worked for Republicans because they ran the place, but I was not a partisan employee, but professional. We did revenue estimates. Anything related to school finance, I was involved in. Anything with capital planning, I was involved in.

04:44

**ARBAIZA:** So, I must have missed it, but when did you decide to get a PhD from—

**SNOW:** Oh, it's really hard to work for a state legislature and not want to explain your experience. I mean, I really needed to explain what I'd really been through. And I also found that I really loved the analytical work, whether it be revenues or the impact of a law, or the finances of a school district, or an individual's pocketbooks. I mean, I really began to really love that. And so, really, the graduate degree helped me really explain the politics of what I had just been through.

**ARBAIZA:** Going from—so you get your master's, you get your PhD, it sounds like you were really invested in your work and what you're doing, explaining it. How do you get from there and leading that into teaching and becoming a professor?

**SNOW:** Well, I think that in these particular times, even going back 25 years when I got here, we are very split along partisan lines in our country. And we think in terms of good and evil. But I knew a state senator, he was an accounting professor at Brigham Young University. His name was LeRay McAllister, probably the finest man I've ever known, and I've not known anyone that I've disagreed with more on most things. But he entered the legislature, just curious and not ideological, but I mean, his gut reaction, his default position was a conservative view.

But he was befriended by the director of the State Department of Health and Social Services, and who happened also to be an accountant, which helped. They just got to know each other. And LeRay became an expert on healthcare and social services in the state of Utah. He became the most important advocate of funding for social services in the state, and really did a job, which was a real lesson to me, knowing that a partisan divide can be crossed and that you really can educate political figures. I think that's a little harder now, especially at the national level. Dispositions have hardened, but I do think it's possible, and I do think it happens.

**ARBAIZA:** So, kind of going off of that, kind of living that lesson and wanting to go to teaching, what made you specifically want to come to Suffolk and come to Boston? Because I mean, you were working in a very different part of the country, so why come all the way out to here to the East Coast, and specifically to Suffolk University?

07:40

**SNOW:** Really, frankly, I grew up in the Mormon church. I served a Mormon mission in southwestern France. My wife was a Mormon. But we were in the process of leaving that church when we lived in Utah, and so we were both in graduate school at the time. We decided that this was an opportune time to just leave the state, and so we wanted out. And so, my wife had an opportunity in Illinois with the Weyerhaeuser paper company and we moved Illinois, and I went to work as an administrator at Northern Illinois University. I worked for the vice president for finance and planning there. So that got us out of Utah, a place with which I have a love-hate relationship because my ancestors went there in covered wagons. But it was a new life for us in Illinois.

**ARBAIZA:** In your career of academia, was Suffolk—so you said that you were as an administrator for Illinois beforehand. After that, did you go straight to Suffolk University or was there a stop before Suffolk?

**SNOW:** Well, while I worked for Northern Illinois University, I entered a PhD program at that university, so I earned my PhD there. I finally, for the last couple of years of it, I left the university and just worked on my doctorate. My wife's career was doing great. We had one, our youngest child, really couldn't make it in daycare. So, I was a full-time stay-at-home dad for our four sons, the youngest who was at home, and I wrote my dissertation.

**ARBAIZA:** Wow, impressive. That's a big job, I know.

**SNOW:** I was elected to a school board while I was a stay-at-home dad, which actually happened before we left Illinois. And I had the most interesting experience. I was elected when I ran, but we lived in the congressional district where Ronald Reagan was born and raised. This was not a place where letting the gender roles slip was an easy thing.

**ARBAIZA:** Yeah, so let's focus a little bit on your first couple years here at Suffolk University. What do you remember about your time here, the first few years at Suffolk? And on top of that, was there anyone that helped you become part of the campus community?

**SNOW:** One of the first people I met, whom, if you haven't interviewed, you really should,

but she's still working full-time, and that's Sandy Matava. Sandy is the director of the Moakley Institute for Public Service. Have you guys interviewed her already or, any of you?

10:48

**PATRICIA REEVE:** Later this month.

**SNOW:** Yeah, well, you'll really get a kick out of that. She was, anyway, probably the best person for getting me acclimated to Boston, to Massachusetts politics and to our particular program, the Master of Public Administration Program. That was fall of 1997. Also, Clarence Cooper, and he was an old-time human resources director working in government, worked for the Commonwealth, and I believe he worked for the city, too. So really, these were practitioner academics that I got to know really the best right off the bat, and really learned what Massachusetts is really like because it was a foreign country to me.

**ARBAIZA:** You've already kind of touched on it, but being here in Massachusetts, being here in Boston, how did Suffolk being so close to local politics—whether that's City Hall or being right next to the State House—how did that help with teaching within the public administration program and with your own teaching and your own work? The program is wonderful because at BYU, most students were pre-service. They'd never worked in the field, as I had not. But at Suffolk, it's the other way around. Almost all of the MPA program students are, in fact, working in the field, and it's the full range. Many of them are social workers, others are non-profit leaders. Many of them work in local government, state government, a few in the federal government, not as many. Most of them are in their late 20s to early 30s, and most of them are already working in the field, which makes the classroom just really, really interesting. You know, a few years ago, I had the president of the Boston Police Department Patrolman's Union in class.

**ARBAIZA:** Wow.

**SNOW:** And that was, you know, so I mean, that makes the program a real jewel because of what can happen in the classroom.

**ARBAIZA:** Do you think it could have possibly made it a little more difficult having people already well established within their fields within the program as well because they already know a lot from their fields? Do you think it makes it any more difficult in terms of being able to teach or do you think it just adds more and more, just having those backgrounds?

**SNOW:** In most cases, it adds a great deal to the conversation. A few people don't really think they have anything new to learn. I mean, that's the human condition though in any organization. There are a few people, you can't tell them anything and they can't learn anything. But by and large, it's a huge advantage to have people give examples of what's going on in class or who raise objections to what you're teaching and say it's not like that, and so it really leads to some very interesting conversations. I love that the most.

**ARBAIZA:** So, you did talk a little bit about what motivated you to be a part of the MPA program.

I do want to see you kind of talk about how you took part in an interdisciplinary team of people to help kind of curate and develop the global MPA program. I just was wondering why did you want to be a part of that Global MPA program and what motivated you for that?

14:21

**SNOW:** Well, I wasn't sure what my academic life would be like when I got here. My primary area of expertise is the budget process, politics of the budget process, federal, state, local, and government finance. And so that was really what I was interested in. The interest in what the students do and that interdisciplinary nature of it came a little later as I got to know the students. When you're a new assistant professor, you need to publish, first and foremost. And you don't really, you know, you'd like to be acclimated, you'd like to get to know the students better, but if you don't publish, you won't be here. You know, you just flat won't be here. And so that's what you really have to just get your head down and do that. And so really my relationship with the students didn't really build in that sense until I became a department chair in 2003. I'd been here six years, I was tenured, and I could do that then. And I would still, I would advise anybody, a new assistant professor to get your head down and get tenure because I've seen too many just not, you know, they're not here because they didn't get that part done. I loved that part, but being department chair was the best. That was the best because I really could do the things that you're talking about. I could cross boundaries, I could work with other departments. We created a new degree while I was a department chair. It was fantastic.

16:00

**ARBAIZA:** And you talked about crossing over to different departments, we know that the Madrid and Dakar campuses opened up while you were here. We just kind of wondered if that had any effect on what you taught, if that opened up more opportunities for your program, especially because I know, eventually, once you became department chair, those would both be going on. As a department chair, I just wondered, like, if that opened up any opportunities or if they just had little effect on what you were doing?

**SNOW:** Surprisingly little effect directly. There was an indirect effect, though, a very indirect effect because the business school, at the same time, was becoming global in nature. The business school was really rather Podunk in 1997. It was relatively small, in my opinion, not real well led, although there were really plenty of nice people, and its programming was pretty narrow. It was called the School of Management in fact, at the time when I came it was the Sawyer School of Management, not the School of Business. But I was asked to be chair by Bill O'Neill, who had just become dean of the business school, maybe two years, maybe three when I became chair of the department, he asked me to do it. Bill really made the business school what it was, and he's the one who changed the name. We were all mad at him because he did it unilaterally. Bill didn't ask anybody about changing the name of the school. Just one day we all woke up and we were no longer the School of Management, we were the School of Business. But it changed everything, how we thought. It took a while, but Bill was, I would say, persistent. [He] would say, "Look, you know, everything is global. There's nothing purely local." Everything affects the global community, and that began to change pedagogy too.

**ARBAIZA:** I know you talked about all these big changes that Bill O'Neill put in place.

Were there any that directly, that ended up really directly affecting you instead of just kind of like this attitude and look at the business school? Was there anything that he did that he may not have talked about or whatnot and

18:25

**SNOW:** A really cool thing happened when I became chair. I went to Bill's office, and Bill was a very interesting guy, but he would just sit down and you would start talking about something absurd like why do so few rivers in North America not run north? You would sit there, you'd think, "Where are we going with this, Bill?" And, really, all this was about was to let me know that he had time for me. We could just chat about something completely unimportant and that he had time just for me, but that was extraordinary. That really was. And then after we talked for a while, he said, "So what are you going to do as chair?" Really, I kind of thought I was going to hear from him what I was going to do as chair, and get some marching orders, besides keeping the place running and not breaking anything. But he said, "Well, what are you going to do?" And I said, "Well, we do have a Master of Health Administration program in addition to the Master of Public Administration, and that degree, the core curricula of both degrees was pretty much the same. And I said, "Look, Bill, I think the MHA could be a much better degree if we were to make it distinct from the MPA and give it a different, a separate core curriculum." I said, "But that needs to be led by somebody. We need somebody who really knows healthcare, who's worked in healthcare so we can really differentiate these two degrees." And he said, "Okay," and he authorized the position right there.

**ARBAIZA:** Wow.

**SNOW:** And so, we went out and we hired a woman, Lauren Williams, who was vice president of nursing at South Shore Hospital. She had just finished a PhD program, not really interested in academics, but very interested in healthcare. And she came and she led the development of that MHA. We had three or four members of the faculty, plus Lauren, [they] completely retooled the Master of Health Administration, made it a very different degree from the MPA, and we were off to the races. I'm glad I was part of that, but the credit really goes to Bill because he cleared everything. I mean, anybody who's been a department chair knows, to get a new position authorized is brutal. I mean, it's just really a lengthy, difficult process. All I had to do was say, "Well, we really need somebody to lead this," and he said, "Okay." That's just exactly, that's the way he was, that's the way he led the business school. But the MHA really broadened our department, and it had a significant influence on how we thought. Although once we were looking at organizations that are involved in public service and in a public purpose, not so much government, it helped us broaden ourselves in the nonprofit community because most healthcare in Eastern Massachusetts, at least at the institutional level, is, in fact, nonprofit. And so, it was, to me, it also connected us to the other business school departments in interesting ways. And so, I watched the business school become a much more cohesive place, less Balkanized by department. And at the same time, Bill was saying, "Look, I mean, healthcare is so international." I mean microbes, as we know so well now, don't respect boundaries or borders. And you know, I learned from those colleagues that the US had completely demolished its public health capacity beginning in the '80s, maybe even before that when we thought we had defeated every microbe that there was.

**22:38**

**ARBAIZA:** Well, so from that question, it seemed like the MHA was a pretty big contribution during your tenure as chairman. Are there any other contributions that you think was the biggest during your tenure as a chairman?

**SNOW:** Besides mistakes, of which I made quite a few, I think that, overall, we became more aligned with other MPA programs across the United States. We were a bit of a backwater here in Boston. Massachusetts, typically in the area of public administration, has been thought of as a backwater, that is, other parts of the country, Midwest and South especially, just thought of us as purely political old-boy networks, patronage oriented, and [there's] a lot of truth in that. And politics here is still heavily patronage oriented, more so than any place I've ever noticed wherever I've lived, and I've lived in Idaho, Utah, Illinois, and Pennsylvania. And coming here, I thought, "Wow, this is really a very, very narrow-minded place, especially among political figures," and still is. I mean, if you get elected to a democratic seat in the House, you know, you're going to be there for as long as you want unless you do something really terrible. I forgot where I was going with that. It was—well, I know what it was, is we began to really become more outward oriented toward the profession. More of us went to national conferences and presented papers at those conferences, and we began to publish more, and we began to publish in better journals. I think that started then and I don't think it's something I did by myself. Part of it was the hiring practice, just the people that we brought in in the hiring. Bill O'Neill's leadership, Bill never had religion when it came to publishing, but he knew we had to do it. As long as he knew we had to do it, he pushed it. And it did—it grew our reputation and it connected us to a discipline with which we had not been real well connected.

**ARBAIZA:** I know earlier you talked about mistakes and obviously mistakes you made, especially in a long career. Were there any specific challenges you can think of that were really hard during your time as chair that you kind of had to overcome, or maybe that you were even unable to push through during your time?

**SNOW:** Oh, it was the interpersonal learning. I mean, faculty are a pain because they are mostly equals. I mean, you're not their boss, first thing, you're chair, you are not telling people what to do. The only real power you have is the course schedule, and there's the annual review, but it's very collegial. I mean, I'm doing an annual review for someone who may be my chair in two years. It's very hard to lead the faculty, difficult. Where was I going? What was the question again that I'm answering?

**ARBAIZA:** Any challenges, just what your biggest challenge was.

**SNOW:** Well, that was it, you know. That's where most of my mistakes were in trying to lead in too direct a manner, especially in my first two years, and trying to get things done, and forgetting that you have to convince people, not tell them. And that'd be my advice to anybody in a new leadership position. It doesn't really matter how much authority you have, people have to be willing to—they have to be willing to want to do what you ask them to do, and so you build a relationship. An example, one of my colleagues came into my office one day and he started to go through the spiel, and I knew exactly where this was going. I knew exactly what he wanted, and I cut him short and just started to say what it was as I understood it. And he stopped and he started



over again, the whole thing. I thought—and this happened one more time, much to my embarrassment. He went through the spiel again and I cut him short, and that's when I realized, he knows I know what he wants and he knows he's going to get it. He just wants to know if I will listen to him. And you think I would've learned that from Bill O'Neill, but I didn't. I appreciated it from him, but learning to practice it was much more difficult. And academics are particularly hard on each other, anyway. We can be a real mean bunch, but I did learn that you're not going to tell anybody what to do. It's all about convincing and building the relationships and building cohesion, but it took me a good two years to get there.

27:56

**ARBAIZA:** Gotcha, so you mentioned Bill O'Neill a bit. Were there any other faculty members or administrators that, I guess, shaped how you were as a chairman?

**SNOW:** Sandy Matava was the biggest influence, the most painful, biggest influence because she is a very adamant, strong personality who knows what she wants. But while I was chair, she built the Moakley Institute for Public Service, first by getting a contract with the Boston Public Health Commission, looking at the use of Ryan White AIDS funds. She had a contract to evaluate all Ryan White AIDS programming handled by the City of Boston. It was a big deal. It was a huge deal for our department to have a contract of that size. But she's a strong personality too. She knows, and knew, exactly how she wanted that managed. But I think I learned a great deal from her, and I think that it was one of the most fraught relationships I've ever had, and I knew that on the day she left, I would probably cry. But, actually, I retired first. She's still here, and she's much older than me. I'm a kid. But I learned a great deal from her. And some years after that we became pretty good allies, and we really still are, and got a lot of things done. So, I bring that all up because I think our—as I begin to understand democracy in my work in public administration, that it is something that is felt. Democracy is an emotional appeal. Public policy is rational. It's economics, it's political possibilities, but democracy is something we feel that's in our hearts. I learned that when it comes to managing people too it is something we feel. If you try to make this a rational process or try and base it on authority, you're not going to do well.

30:21

**ARBAIZA:** Kind of going off of that, I know you kind of spoke about your own opinions when it came to democracy and public policy. What did you hope that your students would get out of the program, of the MPA program when they were finished? Because I know you also mentioned a lot of them were in the field already, so when they came in, what were you hoping they would leave with? Obviously, besides the degree, but—

**SNOW:** One of my favorite writers in the field, she writes an area of budgeting, but she wrote an article on public service ethics, the first ethical principle for the American Society for Public Administration, which was founded in the '30s by the early theorists. The first item is to serve the public interest. And Carol Lewis, at the University of Connecticut, wrote an article about what that actually means, that particular ethic. And it's something that I have students—an article that I have students read, every time I teach our capstone course, the last course in the program, we read that article. But Lewis says that the first thing we consider in making public decisions is democracy. That is, is this what the people want? But we don't stop there. There's a hierarchy,

and we go to the next most important thing. That is, these things get progressively more important, and that's mutuality, our obligations to one another, which is different from what the people want because what the people want may well violate the obligations that we have to one another, the mutual feelings that we have for each other. So, we consider democratic values, what the people want, we think about our obligations to one another, and then we ask, "Well, can we sustain this?" It's a terrible thing to introduce new programming, new policies that you can't continue. It's a terrible thing to tease people about what we're going to do and not be able to sustain it. And so, sustainability is third in the hierarchy. And fourth really is my favorite, it's what will our children think? What will our legacy be? What will they think about us once we've made a decision? That's the thing I want students to remember, to remember democratic values are obligations to one another, the obligation to sustain policy over time, and to really think about the long-term impact of the things that we are doing. I'm a finance person. The most important liabilities on a local government financial sheet are not there. They're not listed. One of them is environmental. Local governments are some of the most important polluters in the United States, worse than many corporations, primarily because of sewer systems. Sewer systems alone make local governments among the biggest culprits in EPA's gun sites. So that's one. You know, we haven't thought about what our children will think about us. It's a huge liability that we're leaving to them, these environmental liabilities, the things that we have not cleaned up that are right there in our backyard within our stewardship. We could talk about nuclear war too, but that's a really big thing. And another is deferred maintenance, which also isn't measured on any government balance sheet. There's no liability for maintenance that has not been performed, and it's a huge number, probably enormous, that no one has really carefully measured. And every year in the budget process, when there isn't enough money, the thing that goes is maintenance of our capital resources ongoing. And, you know, preaching to the choir because we all saw what happened to the MBTA over the summer, and if you want a lesson in deferred maintenance, I mean, there it is. Davis Square, sometime, look up at the station if you're ever on that line. Look up at the roof and look at the exposed rebar, which is truly frightening because you're not supposed to see that, you know? So that's what I want them to think long term. The hardest thing to get public officials to think about is beyond the next election, think well beyond the next generation. What are we going to do for them? What are we going to leave them?

35:20

**ARBAIZA:** So, you mentioned a lot about, I guess, the importance of people or other administrators to think about their legacy. I was just curious, what do you think your legacy will be, or what you leave behind for the future generations?

**SNOW:** Really, let's keep this small. I had just hoped that when I left the department, it was a little better off than it was when I got there. And that we built some norms about how we do things, but I think if you're wanting to be remembered, that's a fool's errand. You know, we have short memories as humans. We forget very quickly. Once you're a little older and you think back 30 years and you think, who was that guy I worked with when I lived in Illinois? And you can't remember. So, I think it's a human arrogance that we think that people will remember us or we want them to remember our names, but, they just can't, they can't, and they can't really understand. All they can really do is maybe learn to examine their own lives and recognize that the feelings they have and the experiences they're having are very similar as to what other those

have gone before have had. So, do I think about a legacy? No, that can only lead to disappointment when in 10 years you realize they've changed everything, which they will. They will, and it's their right and privilege, that shared governance. That's what people do.

37:26

**ARBAIZA:** Obviously, you've been teaching for a while, especially when it comes to today's public management students is there anything, skills you think are necessary for them today that may not have been necessary back when you first started teaching? What skills do you think are necessary for public management?

**SNOW:** The one we're all talking about, and it is most important, is race relations. And especially what we mean by that and what the issues are. I think about how do you teach institutional racism, and even critical race theory, which is actually really very, very simple. You just think about Hurricane Katrina, and you look at an administrator who follows the letter of the law when he really has, or she really has, discretion to do something immediately that will make things better. And institutional racism manifests when managers decide to follow the letter of the law. It's not when they bend the law or break the law. It's when they follow the letter and refuse to use their discretion, which they inherently have, and they come down hard. The same thing happens with bail, setting bail following the letter of the law instead of the flexibility that you know you really have.

And so, to me, it's understanding what that means is the hardest thing in the world to teach because administrators are taught to follow the law. Administrative law is a really very important concept. I mean, rulemaking and following rules and policies and procedures is important. But, there are very few places where administrators don't have the power to bend the rules and exercise discretion, from a simple thing like getting a warning ticket at a traffic stop instead of a citation, or the decision of a school teacher to send a kid to the office or not.

I was a school board member in Illinois, and we expelled a student in the eighth grade because she wielded a razor blade at a fellow student. When that happens, you don't have a choice, but the middle school principal was there. And so, I exercised my right as a board member to ask what her, I said, "Well, what's her rap sheet like? What are the other things she's done? This can't be the only thing." And he said, "Oh, no, no," and he went back to the first thing and it was third grade, and she didn't stand for the Pledge of Allegiance, which you don't have to do. You don't have to stand and say the Pledge of Allegiance. You can sit quietly. You just have to not be disruptive, which goes without saying in any circumstance in that classroom. But the teacher sent her to the office, she was a young Hispanic woman, she was a minority, and the principal threw the book at her, and that was her first [offense]. And I've often wondered ever since, if that teacher had just let her sit quietly and let it go, if maybe that expulsion never would've happened. We have discretion, and when we can use it well, then I think we can make things better.

But to me, that incident was the classic long-term result of institutional racism. We're all talking about it, but I'm not sure we have the right vocabulary to understand that we've always had the power. It's about how do we approach people? Are we willing to use discretion? Are we willing to think at a human level? Or are we just, you know, are we just so stupid that we can't do

anything but follow the precise rules. But there's nothing more important than that because without the confidence of the public, then democracy fails.

41:40

**ARBAIZA:** So next question, just looking forward to the future, where do you think the MPA program will go in the future?

**SNOW:** Public administration has become much more complicated. The problems are more difficult and made so by our failure as a people to make hard decisions that should have been made years ago. It has been made more complicated because of that. And of course, there are challenges to democracy itself, which I don't think I need to reiterate for you guys. We're living it. But it's going to be a harder job, part of it is because we need to clean up and do the things that we should have done 50 years ago, and kept doing that we didn't do.

**ARBAIZA:** Kind of going and looking towards the future, some of your more recent work, you did a lot of research with the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of budgeting and whatnot. What effect did you hope your research would have when it came to the work you were doing? Did you hope it would have a certain effect or were you just kind of just doing your own research within the field and just kind of doing that?

43:16

**SNOW:** The research I did on that is part of a larger stream of my research. I've written, I think four, maybe five papers on the financial condition of the Commonwealth, and the financial condition of governments, their ability to sustain themselves over time, to make good budget decisions has been a key research theme of mine. And even before the pandemic, my colleague Brendan Burke and I wrote a paper on budgeting in Massachusetts and the challenges that we face with our basic revenue structure and the politics of the budget process. And so COVID just exposes everything weak, everything weak is just laid bare for you. And all at once, thinking about, oh my gosh, a whole sector of the economy could disappear, the restaurant business. A huge number of them went under, and many of them changed, but they're still not, you know, they're not what they were. Our lives changed in a remarkable way.

Weirdly, Commonwealth revenue actually increased because we are a relatively affluent state. In fact, in terms of wealth, we are the third wealthiest state in the Union, and so the stock market did really well, a lot of big companies did well, healthcare companies did well. So, in some ways, we made out like bandits. In other ways, those who were not part of the modern knowledge economy really got hammered. You know, their families got hammered. They were by far and away the worst off because they couldn't just work at home. They couldn't just go to a Zoom meeting, they couldn't work at all, you know? And then they had to figure out how to manage their kids at home. So, it was a very, very hard lesson, but weirdly, the impact on the state's finances was, to a large extent, positive. I really don't want to sit here and process that. It really shouldn't be, it's strange, but that is what happened. That year of the lockdown, the state had windfall revenue, which I think, yet, a lot of people didn't do well at all. I think it really,

really exposed the two economies, which wasn't in the paper that I wrote with my colleague at UMass Lowell, but it's the lesson that stuck with me.

And really, the stupid, stupid stuff we did with healthcare. In the late '90s, a *New York Times* author wrote a book about our dismantling of our public health infrastructure. You know, when my mom was a girl in the late '30s, early '40s, smallpox and polio both ravaged her tiny town in Idaho. One of my aunts, same aunt, had smallpox one year and polio the next, and both times the family was quarantined. And here's how they were quarantined. The public health officer came to their home and hammered a wooden sign onto their front door that said "Quarantined" in red letters, and they weren't allowed out. Their friends and neighbors brought them food. They didn't go anywhere. That's the power of the state when that happens. And, you know, contact tracing, all of that was very robust because people got sick in those days. And it was a fairly regular event. Polio had been scourge for many years. I think we became arrogant. Yet in my lifetime, I remember 1958, I was in first grade and it was time for a polio vaccine, and my mom said, "You're going to get a shot today. Just line up and get your shot." And, we all just lined up in the hallway at Washington School, little tears running down our cheeks, and we marched down the hallway, and a few years later, the polio vaccine wasn't a shot anymore. It was just, you know, a drink, a little, looked like a communion cup, and you would drink that, but then it was a shot, and my mom was so grateful for that, and I couldn't possibly understand. I was only six years old, but it was one of the happier days of her life that I could get that vaccine. And yet, think how we responded in this latest [crisis], we simply didn't understand, we were so spoiled. I think that, and again, that's part of taking the long view, the understanding that what's happened in the past, it can happen again. It can definitely happen again. And that you don't let that stuff go, that our job is to think about what's possible, to learn from the past and think long term. The public interest is our daily concern, not just today's public interest, but tomorrow's.

49:05

**ARBAIZA:** So, you mentioned a lot about how COVID-19 has shown the weakness in a lot of sectors of the government or in Massachusetts, and also how the public management career, it seems like it would be harder and harder for the future students. Do you have any tips for them?

**SNOW:** Any what?

**ARBAIZA:** Any tips?

**SNOW:** Any tips?

**ARBAIZA:** Or insights?

**SNOW:** Yeah, well, one saying, it's preaching, I realize, says your job is to teach elected officials their jobs, and they can't know you're doing that. I met an alum at a meeting several years ago, I guess now, and I asked him what he was doing, and he said, "Well, I'm an educator now." I said, "Really?" He says, "Yeah, I'm the chief financial officer for the school district." And so, I immediately thought, "Well, you're not an educator." He says, "I teach the school committee their job."

**ARBAIZA:** Wow.

**SNOW:** That's how he felt, and I absolutely agree with him. We have an obligation to teach them what they're supposed to do. They don't know, they're laypeople. They get elected. They need help. You don't want to try to run the place for them or tell them what to do, you can't tell them what to do, but you can teach them and work with them, especially when they're brand new. I was elected to a school board in Illinois, I think I mentioned that, but the first thing that happened to me is the chief financial officer gave me a call and asked to meet with me, and we met one-on-one and he took me through all the district's finances so I would know what was going on. He basically taught me my job, and that is what we do. You know, you watch a town manager working with a select board, and they are very carefully teaching the members of the select board their job without making it particularly obvious.

51:34

**ARBAIZA:** Just kind of going back to Suffolk, what was your relationship—I know you already talked about Bill O'Neill—but what was your relationship with leadership like, here at Suffolk, whether it was either head of the business school or even going all the way up to the president? How has that affected your time here at Suffolk, especially, throughout your career?

**SNOW:** It was my privilege to be a member of the inaugural faculty senate in, I think, 2013, 2012, 2013. We got a faculty senate and we elected senators from each of the three schools, and I was one member of that first senate. That was really a great experience because I met people in the law school that I didn't know, I met people in arts and sciences that I didn't know. It was a difficult experience. It was the first time I really had any interaction with the provost or the president, but that experience taught me a great deal about the university as a whole, whereas before, I really had stayed in my own little world in the business school. I'm really glad I had that experience. Then, just before the pandemic, we were in the process of creating a school of public affairs and global engagement. That was the working title of a new school that would have included the political science department in arts and sciences, and the MPA program in the business school. We would've been a new school. I think that, you know, according to the president, the pandemic killed it. I think it was doomed from the beginning, but it was, nevertheless, provided an opportunity to understand what faculty life and academic life was like in another school altogether. And the College of Arts & Sciences has really a very different set of traditions, a different governance structure, different rules for promotion and tenure. It is a different world, and faculty in arts and sciences have a different experience from faculty in the business school. I'm not saying better, but it is a different experience.

53:47

**ARBAIZA:** The school you were talking about earlier that you said it got killed by the pandemic, you said it was doomed to begin with. I just want to know why'd you think it was doomed, and if the pandemic wasn't the reason why it got killed? I just wanted you to express your opinions on that a little bit more if you felt comfortable.

**SNOW:** Yeah, I think that the—well, I'm not going to dance around it. I think the president didn't want to do it but felt pressured to do it, and she had an excuse not to do it.

**ARBAIZA:** Gotcha.

**SNOW:** In the pandemic. And I'm willing to admit that might have been a wise decision.

**ARBAIZA:** Do you think it would've negatively affected both your program and poli sci if the president had gone through with it completely?

54:38

**SNOW:** Yeah, it could have because I think the university simply did not have the resource base, even pre-pandemic, to really do what needed to be done. I mean, hiring a dean alone is a big deal. I mean, you're looking at, it's not just a dean, but an office of the dean and that's not cheap. Those, we're getting into some pretty high salaries and an infrastructure. I think that was, for a school that would have been fairly small, it would not have been very cost effective. That's my finance person's hat. On the ground as a faculty member, teaching in public administration for a separate school was always my dream.

**ARBAIZA:** Do you think it would be possible, within Suffolk's future, maybe not within the next two to five years, but even way farther down the road, decades, how do you think, with the way you see the university going, do you think it would be possible that we could end up creating a new school like this and kind of reaching that goal or dream?

**SNOW:** I'll never say never, but Suffolk swims—we are a small fish in a big pond. I mean, my program competes with a lot of really big schools that happen to be major schools of public administration in their own right. So, it is very tough to be a small fish in a big pond and to get noticed. By the way, our rankings have gone up steadily though. You know, we are well into the top third tier of public administration programs in rankings, so we've done okay. But it's, you know, we live in the shadow of Harvard and MIT and Brandeis, and UMass Amherst. I mean, they all have fantastic [programs], and Northeastern. They all have great public administration programs, so a lot of places students can go.

**ARBAIZA:** I think researchers would kind of be remiss if I don't ask this question. We were just wondering, like, how did Suffolk change throughout your career?

**SNOW:** In 2012, 2013, maybe 2011, Suffolk had a lot of issues, especially in the press, with our board. The board was rather incestuous. There were some cozy financial relationships between at least one board member and the administration. It looked worse perhaps than it really was, but it wasn't appropriate, and we were under pressure from the Attorney General to change. And in terms of administrative procedures, and the quality of people—let me backtrack off of that, we had good people, but we didn't necessarily have seasoned people who knew how it should be done. And that public pressure, when it came about, forced some huge changes. And so, it was right around the time the faculty senate was created that Suffolk was going through this process of growing up and having to really have a truly professional administration. I think it was a very painful thing for this university, very painful. Most of the old-time administrators left about that time or soon after. I used to really like the chief financial officer. I still do, but we have a modern, excellent chief financial officer. So, I think Suffolk grew up, but it hasn't been that long ago.

**ARBAIZA:** What's your current opinion of the current president and the direction she's taking Suffolk in?

**SNOW:** I think I'll defer that one. I'm not sure I have a good answer. Let me just stick with, that Marisa was really important in reinforcing that more qualified, more professional administrative structure, and I think she does get credit for that.

59:21

**BACKERT:** Kind of going back to public administration, I was actually curious, I know you've talked about us being kind of a smaller fish in a big pond, especially with these much bigger schools and much older institutions. Do you think they're—well, one, during your time here, was there more collaboration between us and other schools around the area, especially when it came to public administration or was it very much everyone kind of sticking to their own corners, trying to get students to come to their program specifically? Or was there more, a lot more collaboration between the universities?

**SNOW:** A law professor by the name of Al Roberts, who had a PhD in public administration and a law degree, worked in the law school about, I guess, about a decade ago. I'm trying to think when Al was here. Did you know Al? Al was very good at convening people, just convening groups, and that's how he put it, that our job here is to convene the players in various policy issues. I was invited over once with a colleague to sit with the new leaders of a new state Department of Transportation. A law passed about 10 years ago made the Department of Transportation an independent agency, much more free of the governor's oversight. Not completely free, but much more free. And Al convened the people in the new Department of Transportation, as well as other academics, and then he kept doing it. He kept just convening people to talk, and that's really what we did. But gradually, Suffolk became one of those places where people gathered to talk about important things. Around the same time, Sandy Matava started the Moakley Breakfast series. So, in the morning, once or twice a year, there's a breakfast and then a public policy discussion with a major leader in the Commonwealth. And so, when Suffolk began to convene major decision makers in the area of public policy, we began to grow up. That's really an important change, and it's really not that old, but really, that was it. Sandy Matava, my colleague Sandy, when you talk to her, I mean, she was a very important person in that, but Al Roberts was maybe the one who really did it in a big way. Unfortunately for us, he's at UMass Amherst now directing an MPA program.

01:02:03

**ARBAIZA:** When you talk about people convening and coming here to Suffolk, and obviously, as the program has grown and whatnot, I don't want to make us sound like the little brother to a lot of the other universities trying to prove ourselves, but do you think there's a future of Suffolk kind of being able to place ourselves up there with all these other big universities? Not to say that we're lesser, but just being a younger program and institution, do you think there's a future in that kind of growth with the way we're growing right now?

**SNOW:** Yeah, I think we're just about there, really. I mean, through the Moakley Breakfast series and through all the other efforts of the other schools to really convene the public. This is



something that Marisa gets credit for. She's really wanted to be a person to make Suffolk known, being the go-to place for public policy. Well, we're not the go-to place, that's still the Kennedy School, that's still Brandeis, you know? But we're allowed to play. We're part of it, we're not out of it, we're not excluded. We are definitely part of it. In the Massachusetts chapter of the American Society for Public Administration, Suffolk has been the leader in convening members of that organization, which is the oldest organization for public administration in the country. So, no, I think that there is a future for Suffolk, but let's not kid ourselves. We would need a Harvard-type endowment to really be in that league, and this is quite all right. It's really, it's quite all right. In many ways, we don't really bump into each other because our program and what we do here has always been much more local, and Harvard has always tried to be more international. We just approach different segments of the market, if you will, and there's plenty of room for us.

01:04:12

**ARBAIZA:** Do you think us being more local and folksy, and more local, and not as international as Harvard, do you think that attracts more people who are looking to specifically go into local politics, and whether it's just state level or city level?

**SNOW:** There are a lot of people in the state legislature who are our graduates. If you look at state government and who's a Suffolk graduate, it's pretty astounding. We have a lot of people in important positions in state government, a lot of town managers that are out there, you know, leading communities, professional town managers. I'm really quite proud of that. But we have made our mark more locally than we have globally or internationally, but it's what we do best, and frankly, to me, local government is where it's at.

**ARBAIZA:** Is there anything else that you'd like to mention that we haven't touched on with our questions or with our research? Is there anything else about your time at Suffolk or just in general that you'd kind of like to put on the record while you're here?

**SNOW:** It is extraordinary to have the experience of seeing someone that you taught 20 years ago become an important leader in the field and make a difference in communities. Just to see them out there making a difference, it makes everything worthwhile. It is the most wonderful feeling. And, I think anybody would tell you that it is, and it's not because any one of us can say, "I did that," but it's just what happens to that person. You know, to remember what they were like when they came into the program, and there they are, standing before a city council or a select board or making a speech on the legislative floor, and you think, "My God, we made a difference."

**ARBAIZA:** Yeah, that's really powerful, honestly.

**SNOW:** It is, it really is, and so it makes you think about those grandchildren.