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Gerald Alter, Professor Emeritus, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology

Gerald Alter

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WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY
Retiree Association Oral History Project

Interview date: 8/25/2022

Interviewer: *Kathy Morris (KM), Associate VP for Student Affairs, Retired*

Interviewee: *Gerald Alter (GA) Professor Emeritus, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology*

TRANSCRIPT

Kathy Morris: Welcome to everyone who will be checking into this video at some point along the way. My name is Kathy Morris, I'm the former Associate Vice-President for Student Affairs at Wright State, and I'm chair of the historical preservation committee for the Wright State Retirees Association. Today is Thursday, August 25, 2022, and I'm interviewing Dr. Gerry Alter, Professor Emeritus, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology. Gerry, I'm very happy to be able to do this today, as this is the first interview in over a year due to COVID and all the restrictions that were placed on our ability to do the interviews, so I'm looking forward to this, and we're going to have about 45 minutes to have a chat about your experiences at Wright State, and I think we're about ready to get started. So, this is how I kind of like to break the ice, so to speak. Let's start first with where you came from, and how you got to Wright State University, and we can include your educational background. So, you can go back as far as you like, which is good, because it's nice to know everyone's...the genesis of all of this.

Gerald Alter: Well I was born and raised in Alaska, general Alaska, my parents were from Indiana transferred to Alaska as a result of World War II my father was in the public health service and he had a...at the end of the war he took a job with the department of health and welfare of territory of Alaska. While he was in the service his job was to...being a civil engineer

his job was to...make sure water supply and sewage was okay for the military installations in Alaska. Upon joining the department of health and welfare the job was similar but for all of Alaska. We stayed in Juneau, my parents stayed in Juneau until they died.

KM: That's a long time.

GA: Yes, they were long term residents, I guess until about around 2000.

KM: That's remarkable.

GA: So, I got my early education and my bringing up I guess, in Juneau. It was scattered with a great appreciation for the outdoors, a unique ability to have interacted with I think truly inspirational geography, actually.

KM: How much of your year was really cold weather? Just to get context.

GA: Well, Juneau is in the most southern part of Alaska, it is kind of pasted, southeast Alaska looks like it was pasted on Canada. The first snow would occur probably not that much different than here, October maybe, maybe September on an unusual time. The lakes would freeze probably by- reliably freeze by Thanksgiving and it would thaw by late February or March. We had a lot of snow but it did not usually stay around for a long time so we had periods where it warmed up above freezing and the snow melted away. Which distinguishes it greatly from the part of Alaska that is Anchorage and further north, so, for example we could see the ground during the winter, periodically. It also never really got too cold that you couldn't go out, so we had opportunities to play in the snow.

KM: Must've been a beautiful country to live there.

GA: I still go back every chance I get.

KM: Do you have any family that's still there?

GA: My brother still lives in Juneau and we try to visit them on a regular, if not... well, I don't know, say every two years, something like that, we try to see each other.

KM: That's nice I think a lot of people that live in this part of the country, the contiguous states, have Alaska on a bucket list so you probably get a lot of inquiries from people saying where should I go, but that's great.

GA: I think Alaska is a great place, or at least my part of Alaska. Coastal Alaska I think is a great place, it's not that deep freeze-y.

KM: Right, it sounds like something my in-laws might experience up in the northern part of Michigan in some ways.

GA: Probably, probably. As a matter of fact, when you get out into the Aleutian chain Alaska has the Gulf of Alaska, the stuff that is really on the Gulf of Alaska is not frigid, and the stuff on the Aleutian chain is probably less frigid, because it's surrounded by water and the Pacific current is running pretty well through the Gulf of Alaska and out into the Aleutian chain.

KM: So, your education there, you obviously grew up there, you experienced all your primary and secondary schooling there, did you go to college there?

GA: No...no I went to college actually in Michigan I went college at Albion College, which is a small liberal arts college in Michigan.

KM: How did you land there of all places you could go?

GA: We were friendly with a young couple, an architect and his wife who is a teacher, and the young teacher graduated from Albion College and that's basically my link to Albion College. It turns out that there was no college that was in the region really, so my choices began pretty much with going to Fairbanks, which was where the University of Alaska was and the only part of the University of Alaska at that time, which is very close to the Arctic Circle, and really does represent a difference in where you are. Or you go to Washington, which is the next closest place, and as it turns out that Albion was really not that much further than Washington really, and I was strongly influenced by those people. After I graduated from Albion I went to Washington State University, where I joined a biophysics and biochemistry program.

KM: Did you know really early in your education that that's how you were going to lean?

GA: No, at the time I was in college I was thinking I'm going to be an MD. One of the things I was thinking how nice it was to have been in Alaska and I thought, well, you know I could do this in Alaska in the same town I grew

up in, actually. So, I was pretty focused on that and even went so far to apply to medical schools and even got into a medical program.

KM: Was your undergraduate in biology?

GA: My undergraduate was in chemistry.

KM: Chemistry? Okay.

GA: At the time in which I said, 'okay, that's what I'm doing', I seriously thought about what a doc does for a living. It's kind of a decision I had made very early that I would be a MD. Then I thought, well, how good would I be at- and this sounds pretty selfish I guess- how good would I be at looking at people who are at varying degrees sick, spending my time basically fighting to get people back to normal. At that time, I had found I liked chemistry a lot, and chemistry seemed like a pretty exciting area and in the end, I figured I had a temperament that was more suited to chemistry. So, I thought, well, maybe what I want to do is biochemistry, because I was thinking about a lot of biological things as well. So, after those I looked for... I didn't really address the idea of really what would I be doing day to day as a doctor until that looked like what I was going to do.

KM: I think that takes a lot of personal strength to dig deep inside to know what you think your own strengths are and where you think is going to be the best fit, because a lot of people choose, as we know, areas that they think is the perfect area to be in, only to find it isn't a good fit for them.

GA: I don't regret that that was the decision that I made. So, I joined the chemistry and biophysics program, I think it was, at Washington State University. I worked on protein biochemistry to get my degree with a fair emphasis on physical methodologies.

KM: Did you go right into a PhD program?

GA: Yes.

KM: So, it was a combined masters PhD?

GA: That's right. It turned out I never got a masters, just got a PhD.

KM: Is that typical in the sciences?

GA: At that time, I think it was. It certainly is the typical way to go now. I think it has never been so typical in non-science areas. By going directly into a PhD program there is a process called advancement candidacy in which at the end of two years you take basically an exam or series of exams over the book knowledge that you have had. If you don't pass that exam, you can get a master's degree if you like. If you do pass, you don't need to get a master's degree. So, I got my biochemistry degree and it was working on a group of proteins called metalloproteins and doing some physical chemistry with a particular protein, a lectin binding protein called Concanavalin A. It's not the most... well, if it isn't familiar to you that's not unusual.

KM: It doesn't surprise you. [*Laughing*] You're talking to a person who didn't come out of a science area. I was in the liberal arts area but my husband would be able to have a conversation with you.

GA: So, after I got through with my PhD I did a post doc. I did a postdoc at Harvard in Bert Vallee's laboratory. Turns out Bert Vallee was a well-known biochemist, a physical biochemist, that worked on metalloproteins. So, I was really pleased to be accepted into that laboratory. There I worked with metalloproteins, lactate dehydrogenase and a couple of those. Lactate dehydrogenase is the major root by which alcohol is detoxified in meds.

KM: Okay, I can understand that.

GA: It involves some intriguing questions about what the role of the metal was in the process and also involved some interesting physical methods for studying. After that I looked around...

KM: And what year was that, Jerry?

GA: That would have been in- let's see...probably around '76 or '77.

KM: Okay.

GA: I began looking around at prices, I decided at that time that I would like to work at a university.

KM: And what made you think in those terms, versus going to work strictly in a lab to do research?

GA: The main distinction between a university and a non-university laboratory- and a non-governmental laboratory, too, I would've been happy

to consider working in a governmental laboratory- it was the amount of freedom you had in choosing what you wanted to work on.

KM: Okay.

GA: I thought it would be nice to be able to choose the projects, and there are caveats with that. That means your choice better be good.

KM: Yes, something that the institution is going to value, and something-

GA: Or that'll be valued by the people that fund the research. Which the broadest audience is probably for the non-governmental, non-private university settings. Where ultimately the support comes from either the institution, or commensurate with accepting an academic research position is accepting that you need to look for funding, you know, it's a constant battle to get grants to do research, and everyone is happiest if that process goes well.

KM: So, I'm really intrigued as to how Wright State became...well, obviously it became the top of the list, because you came here. But what was it that...

GA: The department of biochemistry was brand new. Its initial chairman was actually Ira Fritz, who was a member of the department of biology. Very soon they hired an external chairman, the chairman was Bob Weisman. Now, the med school was just in I think the first or second year of new students, of students entering the med school. All of this is to say that this was a brand new operation for this university.

KM: And how exciting that is.

GA: Yes, and the chances of being useful in that process, useful in shaping kind of how things worked out, was very intriguing. I interviewed at several places. Weisman was a critical part of the process and the state of the university in terms of committing itself to getting a med school going and the associated research component going. So, it was a chance to make a difference at a fundamental level, and it also was a faith in the institution being committed to having this enterprise and this area of research to go on.

KM: It's a little bit like a leap of faith.

GA: Yeah. Yeah.

KM: The excitement about coming to an institution that's fairly new, and I came a few years after you did, but one of the things that interested me as a staff member was the fact that there were a lot of things that weren't really firm and in place, and coming here meant I could have a part in helping create that, so I get that. I think others I talked to, other faculty that I've interviewed, too, had similar feelings about it being new and exciting.

GA: Yeah. It's important that new is not enough, because there are lots of new places where you kind of wonder, is this for real? Is it going to last? You take a chance going with something new, but I thought it was worth it. I had faith in the university being committed, and a large, large part of it had to do with the fact that there was a medical school here and they pretty much had to be looking at putting in resources into having the medical school go, and the associated research components.

KM: So, let's talk a little about your perspective on the campus itself. When you arrived in Dayton Ohio, obviously you had lived up in Michigan for a while in Albion, so not too far of a jump, and you had been living on the east coast for a while. When you came to this town what was your impression? And then what was your impression when you came onto this campus?

GA: Well, the campus was fresh, you know? There was a slight apprehension I would say in the fact that there was not really much of on-campus students, and the graduate students similarly were not on campus. Now, it turned out they lived close in apartments, but I had never been to a place that didn't have dormitories.

KM: We would've had one at that time, and that would've been Hamilton Hall.

GA: That's right, and I believe that was primarily for handicapped students at the time, wasn't it?

KM: It was for a very small population of students who would've had a need to be really close by, and wouldn't have had access otherwise. So, yeah.

GA: Yeah, so in terms of the town, we wound up...well, we lived in an apartment when we came.

KM: Just you and your wife?

GA: Just my wife and I, that's right. We lived...well, I have to give a lot of kudos to my wife here. She was taking a much bigger risk than I was, I think. She was from the east coast and worked at Harvard for a while, and Dayton was a lot different than that.

KM: Oh yes, [*laughs*] I'm sure it was.

GA: Then we were living... actually it was relatively close to where the air force museum was, so it's not like we were in a place where there was much going on in terms of living. It's a testament to her fortitude that I think that we did well here. We lived in Fairborn, we bought a house in Fairborn when I got tenure.

KM: And that was what year?

GA: Well it was 6 years after...I guess it was '80 or '81, probably. I don't remember exactly what year it was. But we got a... no, we bought a house before I got tenure. We bought a house in Fairborn, a small house in Fairborn, which was primarily because it was close to Wright State.

KM: I have to acknowledge the convenience of Fairborn and then I guess Beavercreek. Because really if you didn't live in one of those two communities, your drive onto campus was cumbersome. We didn't really have much of a highway system that connected you to the place.

GA: What is it, I think 675 quit at...

KM: It quit north of Fairfield Road.

GA: Yeah, that's right.

KM: So, really, if you were coming from-

GA: -south of Dayton-

KM: -it was not going to be an easy drive. So, sure, I understand that choice.

GA: I guess we lived in that apartment only a year or so, maybe two, then we bought a little house in Fairborn. For me it was fine, for my wife it was actually being kind of alone, and it took a while for her to find a couple of good friends. But she did, and we started a family, and I guess that was

about '80 when we started a family. Then after I got tenure, we looked for a house, and it turned out that we liked Oakwood, so we moved to Oakwood and we were there for- well, until two years ago, I guess, maybe three years ago.

KM: So, you downsized after you retired?

GA: That's right. I actually moved about a mile and a half away to Kettering, close to the Frazee Pavilion.

KM: Mm hm, perfect.

GA: It's nice. I've got to say, personally, it's been a great run.

KM: So, when you came to Wright State, Bob Kegerreis would've been president.

GA: I never met Bob Kegerreis, I think. My thought is he may well have been, I can't remember exactly.

KM: He would've been president in the late 70's when you arrived. I came in '83 and he was still president. And who was the dean at the time you were here, when you first came?

GA: Oh... I think the dean was...

KM: It's okay if it escapes you.

GA: John Rossmiller, I think. At least the one I interacted with. Now, my head was pretty far down when I came, and I didn't look much beyond my department.

KM: I would imagine in a new role, new place, new program there is just a lot of focus on here's your window; this is what you're doing. Were you teaching classes at that point, too?

GA: Yes, I began teaching the year I arrived.

KM: Were those graduation students or undergrads?

GA: There was a combination. I began teaching in the medical school right away, and I began teaching to master's students in science and mathematics.

Turns out biochemistry was a matrix department at that time answering to both the medical school and to science and mathematics. There was no PhD program at the time I arrived, although there was work on getting a PhD program going. Among the people who were involved in that- and I know that I'm doing a disservice not knowing who was involved, I know that John Rossman was involved in the process. I think with the year that I arrived, the PhD program was approved, and I think we began taking PhD students a year or two after that. That would've been in the biosciences PhD program, and that program encompassed the basic science departments from the medical school, which were at that time biochemistry, physiology, anatomy, and pharmacology, although I'm not sure if that was considered a basic science program or part of the medical school or not, but it was part of the BMS program.

KM: How many students were they submitting into the medical school each year?

GA: Each year, I think they began with around sixty to seventy students and then as the years [went by], they increased the enrollment during most of the time that I was conscious of it, you know? They were around one hundred.

KM: And in the PhD program that had just been approved how many students were they admitting to that?

GA: Well, the initial class for the PhD program I think was about a half dozen students. I think it wound up being about that. Now, the average time it takes for a PhD student to go through is 5 years, so the number of students grew at a relatively steady pace. I'm not really sure what the class sizes were.

KM: So as a fairly young PhD yourself, what was the dynamic like? You're teaching students in the medical school, and you are less than two handfuls the number age wise older than them, what was that like?

GA: Well, to begin with the teaching that was done was purely classroom teaching at the time. It was a case in which we were clearly the professors and they were clearly the students, and that was probably because we were the ones standing in the pit and they were sitting down. Most of my interactions with medical students actually were in that "us and them" kind of paradigm. The department when it was responsible for biochemistry and

the first-year curriculum of the medical students and that took most of two quarters or probably all of two quarters. We had a team of teachers involved in teaching the medical students and it probably involved either four or maybe five people in total.

KM: People who were part of the matrix units...

GA: All part of biochemistry. It was a new experience because it was the first time I'd ever talked to anyone in an amphitheater...

KM: That's probably a little off-putting at least initially. There you are facing a huge crowd of people. You weren't taught to do that, you had to adapt to adapt to that.

GA: That's right, you had to adapt to that. But it turns out that it was easy... the real trick was to make it less us and them, that is to be able to interact with people individually even though they were sitting... it was still very much of a lecture environment.

KM: Not like a lab environment where your interacting with a small group.

GA: That's right, that's right. Questions would come up and that was a chance for one on one, as exams were reviewed specific people would have specific questions and that was a chance. If the students had the time, I felt like and I still feel like the medical students are exceedingly programmed in their first year and they don't have much time to talk about things that they don't...they really have a very selected part of biochemistry that they need to know and our job was to get it to them in a very prescribed amount of time.

KM: Kind of like drinking out of a firehouse, I would imagine.

GA: It is and so what we did... I have to credit Dr. Weisman for insisting on this approach. The notes, we produced the notes, and we gave them to the students, and the notes were enough that if they read them they would get through. They were a very detailed set of notes. That meant your preparation had to be good.

KM: That would have been an awful amount of work on your end.

GA: It made it, in a way... the notes were there, we taught from the notes, that is we didn't read the notes to them but we followed the notes. It gave us a chance to be more flexible in how we approach the material, because one approach was already written down and it had the facts they needed to know.

KM: Lucky them that you did that.

GA: I think as a whole the medical school had had a history, at least this medical school, has had a history in making sure the medical students got the material in more than one way. So, in the end I feel like the notes kind of substituted for a book, and of course people could still get a book, but the notes really were what we wanted the kids to know. The lectures were basically supposed to follow the notes but allowed for variability on how to present things. It was a labor-intensive process but I think it was an effective process.

KM: It sounds like it helped address a variety of learning styles, too, because while some students, particularly bright students, can look at the material, read it, and maybe internalize and grasp it very quickly, there are others who don't. So, your approach was giving them the interaction in class but also providing them with all the critical content they needed to know and not just a bunch of other stuff.

GA: That's exactly right, and it turns out I think that methodology has a lot to be said for it because you're settled on what the factual content is, the conceptual content you may want to work... you have more flexibility in how you do that. Simply, that was mostly the case with the medical school teaching, while it was less the case with the graduate school teaching, which was always the notes were never paragraphs.

KM: Gotcha. That would have been a very interesting dynamic, those two very unique populations of students. Those that are drinking out of a firehouse and know in 3 to 4 years they will be moving to the next phase, and a small handful of PhD students who may have very unique areas of research they want to do.

GA: Yes, we asked more from the graduate students than we did from the medical school students, in as much as there are more conceptual things that you really want the graduate students to know than probably the medical students. That's not to say that there aren't concepts that the medical

students know, but there are concepts of concepts that they may not need to know so much. Also, what we are interested in the graduate school was developing a method of scholarship, a method of thinking about problems.

KM: So, your pedagogy, and I hope I am getting this concept correctly, the process of teaching, you had to have two different ways of approaching students you were working with. In addition to the teaching, and I think about faculty and the three legs of the stool- teaching, research, and service. You were very interested in research and as you were saying earlier, one of your choices in coming to Wright State was picking a place that had opportunities for the kind of things that really interested you, so can you talk a little bit about the challenges for better or for worse with research.

GA: Well, let me... okay, when I came, biochemistry was in Biological Sciences [Building], phase one. There was a phase two, and there was a bridge in between, and all the medical school departments had their offices in the- I should say all the basic sciences medical school departments, at least in theory, had their offices in the bridge region. When I came, I got an office in a kind of a corner of the hall next to Dan Organisciak's lab.

KM: These are names that are coming back to me. I knew all these names, I don't necessarily know all these people but their names I've heard of.

GA: I did not have a lab to begin with so I started writing a proposal, and I got a lab relatively soon after that, and that lab was in phase two of biological sciences. I got a graduate student, a master's student, about a half year after I was here, which probably means I got her in the summer.

KM: Is that relatively quick for someone who is fairly new and young?

GA: No, it wasn't relatively quick for the department. I think all of us, more or less- I should tell you, when I came to the department there were four or five faculty members in the department: there was Bob Weisman, who was the new chair; Ira Fritz, Emil Kmetec, Prem Batra, and there were two further people that left soon after that. There was four people, and there were plans at that time for hiring an addition. Bob had four places that he wanted to fill, and the people that filled those places were: myself, Parke Flick, Larry Prochaska, and who... Larry, Dan, and Mike Leffak. And Dan Organisciak was the last person Ira Fritz hired. There were four of us that we said were "the big four", and it's wonderful that the four of us stuck around

and finished our careers here. I began with an office, no lab, then I and Mike Leffak shared a lab for a while, for actually quite a long time, maybe a year or two, then we all had labs. About that time, we all began getting graduate students, the first student that I got was a master's student. After I had had the master's student for not very long, only a couple of months, I attracted a PHD student.

KM: All to do the kind of research that was tied to your interests in your PhD.

GA: That's right. The processes had always been, you know, that you write grants to see if you can get money for the research that you would like to do, and that is a difficult task.

KM: I can only imagine. On top of teaching, on top of everything else you're doing.

GA: In all fairness, our teaching roles were less than a non-research department, but we did have medical school teaching responsibilities and graduate school teaching responsibilities. While I was getting in the door here, the BMS program was opening up, and Bob Gardier was the first director of the BMS program. There were people in biological sciences that had strong track records for research, one in particular is Larry Arlian, and another is George Kantor, who were- at least Larry, I don't recall George was involved directly or not in it- were involved in writing up the BMS program and getting the accreditation, getting the okay to get it going. It was opening up then as we were coming in. We got some of the first BMS students, and it was a wonderful experience, really.

KM: This is ground floor things. This is the foundational piece of what becomes a university's legacy, and that's pretty exciting.

GA: It is, it is. So, we had the benefit of strong support from two colleges, that is the medical school and science and mathematics, and the people were kind. They did what they could. They didn't have the deepest pockets, honestly, but they were supportive of our efforts.

KM: Let me ask you about- kind of jumping ahead here- the university is in its seventh decade now, if you think about it. There are a lot of changes that

are happening at the university. I've been retired for six years next month, and you have been for nine, almost.

GA: Doesn't seem that way.

KM: I know, I don't know where the time goes, you just blink and its gone. What are your thoughts on the direction of the programs you were very involved in and had significant responsibility for? What's your sense of where it is now and where it is going?

GA: Well, one of the things that I really cherished having had the opportunity to do was to be the director of the biomedical sciences PhD program. I became director of that program, I think it was in 2000. I would like to spend time talking about that, if I can. The BMS program was a program that was designed, I think, to meet the somewhat unique needs of biomedical interests in this university, instead of being a collection of departmental PhD programs, it was a program that spanned two colleges, that is math and science and the medical school, and serviced basic science departments in the medical school, as well as certainly biological sciences in the college. As a matter of fact, during the program as the program developed, we had many students in the program from many departments in science and mathematics.

KM: Can I ask were there any students out of engineering?

GA: Yes. Few, very few, but we had a couple. There is, as you probably know, there is a biomedical engineering [program], and the interests were fundamentally different in that department. They were more in equipment, and we were more in mechanisms and how it worked.

KM: Important distinctions, important distinctions.

GA: But we had the program and we had a lot of faculty in the program, and the program still has a lot of faculty because we span departments. We had a wide range of interests in the program, so it became necessary to represent those interests by the program. So, the program actually had several different tracks, and that has varied through the years, according to what the strength of faculty are in a particular area. The idea is to match talented students with researchers, and all the researchers have to have graduate students to flourish. Its important to keep that in mind.

KM: So, given what has been happening at the institution in recent years, can you say that those programs have the graduate students? Do you know?

GA: Well, one of the things I wanted to mention here is that when I became director of the biomedical sciences PhD program, which was in 2000, we had faculty numbers that numbered around 100. Not all of them were active, or active in all parts, but if they interfaced with the program they could be members of the program.

KM: They could be called upon if needed for a specific focus.

GA: But if we were to look at who were the people that got the students, it came down to a much smaller number. When I was director, we wound up having somewhere around 60 or 70 PhD students. That covers several departments, and it covers actually 3 colleges at this time, because we also had students that were in engineering that were in the department. It became a challenge of the program to have opportunities for faculty members that were involved in some way in the biomedical enterprise to participate in the program and to have access to students in the program. So, we had a large number of faculty, we had a relatively large number of students, you know, 60-70 students is a good number of students. Right at the moment, there are 35 students in the BMS program. Right at the moment, there are less than a 3rd of the support slots for students in the program. That is an issue of concern.

KM: Right, and when you've had the kind of role in building a program, it's kind of difficult to see the departure in what had been the norm.

GA: Yes, it is. That's exactly right. There's no question the university is going through a stress test.

KM: That's a good way to characterize it, I'd say.

GA: But it is also important that the university remembers its job is not just to teach students. Its job is to increase knowledge, and are we doing our job if we are not increasing knowledge, and how do we increase knowledge. Research is one way in which for sure we do it, and I think that's my bottom line here.

KM: Okay, so what's your take on the restructuring of the college to include other areas that were not originally part of the College of Science and Mathematics?

GA: I probably do not know enough about the restructuring right now to be...

KM: To weigh in?

GA: But I would like to point out that the PhD program evolved, and should continue to evolve as the nature of the faculty evolve. Like, there are several areas of concentration in the PhD program. They are not there by accident, nor are they written in stone. As the faculty interests change, the focus of these areas of concentration should morph a bit with the faculty so that the program can serve the faculty better.

KM: So, as in so many other areas, as things evolve and times change, so will certain programs and several areas of interest.

GA: That's right, but it's not like we are no longer interested in research, or that our interest in training PhD students has waned. It certainly hasn't waned, and the program should serve those interests even as the faculty serve the program.

KM: That's a really great way of putting it, and it sounds fairly optimistic to me, as opposed to sounding pessimistic, negative, or disappointed. I don't think anyone likes to see an institution shrink.

GA: Yes.

KM: But at the same time, there probably is a place where the university has a sweet spot, and maybe it hasn't quite found that yet, for programs as well as services.

GA: Yes, I would hope that's the case. I do know that there are faculty at Wright State- even though I've been gone for a long time really, I'm surprised at how long it's been- but there are people that are very interested in generating new knowledge. There are departments that are very dedicated to publishing, disseminating results, new results, new things that have been found in health sciences and health allied sciences. The university needs to

make sure those people stay. You know, to make it attractive for those people to stay.

KM: That's a really good message and just like these other interviews we've conducted, I like to think that the people that are currently part of the university's structure/leadership take an interest in listening to some of the stories from people who were here early on, before you and I, in some of those really formative years where we saw not only a growth in the student body but in the campus infrastructure and in the development of new programs, and those are things I think we can all be proud of. I reflect back on my experience and think I had a great ride here, and so I'm grateful for that, and grateful for those that I had a chance to interact with, and it sounds like you feel optimistically as well.

GA: Yes, and I want that to be possible for the people that are here yet.

KM: Me too, me too.

GA: So, there is, if I can I would like to...

KM: Yes, I was just about to ask if there was anything you would like to add to the narrative for the good of the archives and the good of the history.

GA: Well, there are a couple of things that I've been associated with, general things that I've been associated with. Probably relatively early in my career, I was associated with the laboratory animal care and use committee.

KM: Those of us who worked on campus always heard about it, but it always sounded very mysterious.

GA: I served on the committee, and I served as the chairman of the committee for a while and it turned out that it was an interesting time, at least I hope it wasn't as interesting after it, but it makes for an interesting story, I think. Let's see, the laboratory care and use committee was... well, I wound up being asked if I would be chairman of that committee, and I was trying to find the date, and I seem to have not put it in here. But I think it was in the early 80's, early to mid-80's. It seems like it was an interesting time because PETA had been targeting that committee, and as a result of their surveillance the public health service, which is the organization that basically grants licenses for having an animal care and use program, came to

investigate Wright State. Ultimately, they found some deficiencies there, and that was in part because PETA had become aware of issues that they thought were important issues to be raised, and actually had managed to... there were people in the program that helped.

KM: Infiltrated? Is that an appropriate term?

GA: I would say, you know, if you want to take sides, they “infiltrated”. Anyway, they had some things that were pretty sensational, I would say.

KM: I think I remember this.

GA: And as a result, the animal care and use at Wright State went under close examination. A veterinarian actually left, and I don’t know if it was... well, in some relation to the complaints. The program, the care and use committee, had been thought not to be as diligent as they should have been. It turned out probably not for animal care and use, so much as for records. So, with that preamble, Bob Weisman, dean of science and mathematics at the time asked if I would be chairman of the committee, and I being relatively green agreed.

KM: Did You know what you were in for?

GA: I’m not saying things were not improved but the laboratory animal care and use program is responsible ultimately for everything that happens in the facility so ultimately it is responsible for the things that are deficient as well as for the things that work well.

KM: How long did your oversight take?

GA: A couple of years. I was aided by a new veterinarian that was brought in, [*Stills?*] The thing that was probably the most unnerving was the committee’s deliberation, which involved- basically there is as protocol that has to be written for animals to be used, and it has to be compliant with the public health service requirements and generally good science, and the committee is the one that approves the protocols and then they have some inspection responsibilities as well. The meeting of that committees as most universities are, they’re not open to the public. Well, at that particular time, it was decided that they should be open to the public.

KM: Did you have media attracted to this, too?

GA: Not for long, not for long. I think there was someone that came, to one or two, and they decided it was a pretty boring meeting, and left. There was a PETA person that basically came to all the meetings. There was an interesting case that came shortly after that, a case in which a private individual wanted to use the laboratory facilities at Wright State, applied to use the facilities at Wright State, and the procedure that you do to use the facilities is that you generate a proposal and a protocol for holding animals, it gets approved, you know, it goes to the committee and ultimately, if approved and if the appropriate arrangements are made, the laboratory care facility accepts the animals and the process goes on. Well, it turned out the protocol was not approved by the committee, and that upset the person that presented the protocol and threatened to sue the university. The university, you know, the people on the committee, were threatened with a suit individually. So, the committee looked to the university for some sort of indemnification, and much to our dismay there was no indemnification offered, which was a low point in my time at Wright State. In the end, the process was... there was no lawsuit that happened. The ruling of the university committee stood and things went on from there. The laboratory care and animal use facility did pretty well, I think, after that. But it was an eye-opening experience for yours truly, and what was most eye opening was the lack of the central administration's willingness to indemnify the actions of the committee. I do not know, but I hope that the central administration has been a little more forthcoming to their commitment to the oversight committees. I have a feeling that this committee is not the only one that may have felt like they were orphans, but there may have been others as well. Now, having said that, that was actually one of the more stressful times I had at the university, but it worked out well. In the end, it worked out.

KM: It's good to know that in the end you could walk away from that and say the outcome was the appropriate outcome.

GA: I suppose another point I would like to touch on is that the work that I did when I was doing research at Wright State involved a computational component as well as a bench research component, and Wright State was still not really certain, I think, where it should be in terms of supporting computational research.

KM: Would that involve other departments engaged, like statistics or people in the mathematic side of the college?

GA: It was more a different college.

KM: A different college? Alright.

GA: The interests that I had reflected the interests to varying extents from other people, [and] the effort began to get people from another college involved in the BMS program, that college being computer science and engineering. I'm happy to say that that college is involved in the BMS program and that the presence in the program has actually helped out people such as myself that had computational issues that could be aided by people who knew more about computing than I did and that had equipment that was appropriate for it.

KM: Its really nice to know when your part of what really is a large, complicated organization that there are people who were willing to walk across the isle to be helpful. I would say that from my perspective from the administrative side, as compared to yours in a faculty side, its very easy to be siloed in a university, its very easy to feel isolated or to feel that there isn't a willingness for collaboration to happen, but more often than not I did find that there was.

GA: The BMS program is a great vehicle for that, because faculty are not bound to have to be part of this administrative unit to participate.

KM: There's a welcoming feeling for other disciplines to be participants.

GA: That's correct. I felt like during my time here I served on some computing users committees at the university level, because-

KM: You could speak to it having had that experience.

GA: Those in my time have been very useful. I certainly hope that they remain that way. There is a gap in terms of computation between what you can do on a laptop computer or a workstation computer and the size of computer and the specialized computer you need to run an organization. There has always been a challenge about what to do in that gap. Now, if you're in computer science, that's not so much a problem because part of

your institution is appropriate equipment. If you are in biomedical sciences it can be a challenge, because the kind of computation you need is, it's definitely not desktop computation and its maybe not ideal for using the big computing resource of the university.

KM: If I'm not mistaken, the new college combines science, math and engineering.

GA: I'm not sure.

KM: I think it does, which in many ways would make sense.

GA: This would speak to that very well.

KM: I'm pretty sure that it does.

GA: Very well, very well. Let's see, the last thing I wanted to touch on for a moment...

KM: Well, from what I'm gathering, among your greatest satisfying experiences was the development of the PhD program and directing it, and your greatest disappointment was part of the experience dealing with the laboratory animals and that committee.

GA: I think the thing that was disappointing was not the operation of the committee it was the support that was given from the...

KM: From the institution. I think most times when people identify disappointment, it has to do with support, and it can be interpreted in a variety of ways, but I can understand what you're saying. One has to wonder why some people would choose to want to be in leadership of an institution like a university, because its so complicated; its complex. Every college is unique; every administrative area is unique; every academic and non-academic area is; support services; and when people don't feel they're heard or understood it can be very disheartening, is probably the best way I can describe it.

GA: Yeah. Yes, there's no question it's a big institution, and we all have to, for it to flourish, everyone has to flourish.

KM: And everyone has to at least be given a sense that they're valued while they're there.

GA: That's true. Maybe that's the basic thing. They have to feel like they're productive.

KM: I know for me one of the things I always felt grateful about was the fact that I had an opportunity to interact with- either by way of committee or assignment- people across the academic areas and the non-academic areas, and support areas, and particularly just with the students. That part is still ongoing, still in touch with so many students. Do you interact with former students do you stay in touch with them?

GA: I do with a few.

KM: It's great to have those connections.

GA: An interesting thing, my wife and I are planning to go to Egypt in a couple months, and there are some students from the BMS program that are there.

KM: That sounds really exciting. I think I'm in touch with probably eight former graduate assistants who worked in my office or my areas of responsibility. So, I've known them from in some cases from their undergraduate through their graduate experience, and into their personal lives and marriages and children and job changes, and I feel really fortunate to have that kind of interaction. So, I count myself among the lucky for having been here.

GA: Yes. You know, I have no idea, really- nobody I think could have an idea how they would've worked out at another institution. But I'm happy to have been at this institution. My desire is that the institution here always gets better and better.

KM: I'm right there with you on that one.

GA: I'm sure most people that are involved here at Wright State will feel pretty much the same way.

KM: I would agree. I would agree, and I thank you for making the time to do this today. When Chris comes back he'll probably explain this but they have people who actually will transcribe this in written form and it will also be posted in visual form.

-End of Video Interview-