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Interview with Doreen Bartoni, 2004

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D o r e e n B a r t o n i

—2004 and this is an interview with Doreen Bartoni, Dean of the School of Media Arts at Columbia College, Chicago. So if you could tell us how you came to Columbia, where you were and what the circumstances were that brought you here?

Okay. I was finishing my graduate studies at Northwestern and with a group of my colleagues at Northwestern, we went to Louisville, Kentucky to the Popular Culture Conference. I was presenting a paper on Atlantic City by Louis Mall.

And I gave the paper and then there was a contingent of people who had gone to Northwestern and Judd Chesler was one of those people. And we started talking and we hit it off. He took my name and my information. He presented to the chair of the film department at the time, Tony Loeb. And shortly thereafter I was called in to join the part-time faculty.

And had you known Judd before?
No.

Okay. What did you know, if anything, of Columbia College at that point?

Not much, not much. I'll tell you what I knew about it and it's a wonderful little story. I had seen a film by Lisa Gotlieb, who was a student at the time at Columbia. And she did the film *Murder in the Mist* and I saw it at Chicago Filmmakers and I noticed she had thanked Columbia College. So that is as much as I knew about it. Just recently we were able to hire Lisa to be part of our faculty in the film

department. So in a way it was just full circle. So I know they had a film program, but I really wasn't that aware of it.

And what when you came, and you came as an artist in residence?

I initially came as a part-time faculty. Then I was moved into artist in residence. And then I went into the full time faculty status.

Okay. And what, when you came as a part-time instructor—
Yes.

—what were your first impressions if you can remember?

Sure, I do remember. I had been teaching at Northwestern as a graduate student and I also had taught some classes as an instructor and I loved the students at Northwestern. My original learning experience in terms of filmmaking was at the Community Film Workshop, which was here in Chicago. And that was a program that was designed to teach the un-represented filmmaking, so women, and minorities. So in a way I learned the practical aspects of filmmaking at Community Film Workshop in a manner that wasn't that unfamiliar when I came to Columbia.

So I went to Northwestern. It's a different type of student who is going to Northwestern. And I came back to Columbia. When I came to Columbia, actually I was also teaching at Northwestern and I would take LakeShore Drive back and forth from the Evanston campus. And I remember at the time The Doobie Brothers song "Taking it to the Streets" was very popular and that's the song I

associated with Columbia. It felt very much urban. It felt gritty. It felt like things were happening in contrast to Northwestern, which is a fine institution, but the school, Annie Mae Swift, was kind of removed in the middle of this Ivy League type campus. So there was a real contrast.

And I felt very much at home at Columbia. I do remember a time the film department was in the 600 building and it was on the eighth floor and at the time I could walk up the stairs with ease. But I remember taking those stairs saying oh, I'm home and it truly was, you know, it just resonated with me, so.

And what were those early students like in the film department?

They were, when I think about it, I had, my first class that I taught in terms of film production, I had Mara Feori in there. I had a number of really good filmmakers.



Mara Feori is now as accomplished cinematographer. In fact, he was just featured on an Eastman-Kodak film. He was a colleague of Janus Kaminski. Janus was around then.

There was a real sense of students who wanted to make films and you just could feel their passion. The department was at a respectable size so you knew where people were at. You knew all the students who were really interested in doing films were hanging out around the film cage. It was a real exciting time. And then there were students who, for whatever reason, decided to come to Columbia and I would say at the time it was a much more diverse group, range of students.

And I should say—
That that was in '84.

Okay.
Well I was part-time I think was '84-'85, mid-eighties. Okay, I think we can be safe with that.

Great.
So there were students that you had no idea why they even thought about college. But those were some of the students who had the best stories. So I would say the degree from the student who was really at risk to the degree to the students who, you know, could have been at American Film Institute, and a lot of them ended up going to American Film Institute, was pretty wide. But there was a real give and take. And I think in the classrooms, students learned from each other.

And one thing I would like you to address is, you know, that reputation that something still lingers of Columbia, kind of the tech schools and have the nuts and bolts. And I saw on your (*Inaudible*), I'm jumping ahead a bit, but

when you were describing acting co-chair, of emphasizing the craft skills, what is your take on that shifting the emphasis or enlarging the emphasis from the technical to the creative, you know.

Please expand on that.

Sure. The film department has always taught craft skills but they've never taught it in a vacuum. So you had people like Chap Freeman. You had people like Michael Rabiger. You had people like Keith Cunningham, Tony Loeb, who were well read, who really saw a film as an art form and would discuss film and context of its relationship to society. That was just part of it.

It became more systemized as we grew larger. I came on. Judd was very, very involved in critical studies. I came on to teach some of the history, film history courses. And over the years I ended up being the first coordinator of our Production I classes, which were back then Tech I classes. And at that point we made sure that there was more of an integration, a formal integration.

So I guess the difference is, I remember Chap used to actually go into all the Tech I classes and give what we now call modules, but a module on film aesthetics and film as an art form. And then we were able to create the aesthetics for film video course, which I believe Judd originated. But we created that so that it was really addressing the film student as a future filmmaker with an understanding of aesthetics, the cultural society implications of the art form, what it means in terms of representation.

So I would say that, you know, and I can only speak from the film department, from that period. There was always an interest in integrating. And our critical studies courses, I think have always been equal or even stronger than some of the courses I've seen at other graduate film programs. So there was always a constant dialogue between form and technique.

It's interesting that you said that one of the things that, when you were brought on, that you taught the history of film courses. What gap did that fill and what were some of the, why is it important for your students to have that background?

Film history or film aesthetics?

Yeah.

I don't know how you can create without knowing what came before you. And so students ended up enjoying that course tremendously because they, and because I have made films, I consider myself a filmmaker. I taught it from that perspective. It wasn't from the textbook. I mean there was obviously a textbook, but it was from the experience saying, you know, here, your interested is in creating, you know, this dark lighting. You have these edgy things to say. Here's German expressionism. Now see what they were doing and why they were doing it and at what period of history was this happening?

And especially when you have, you know, like the French New Wave who constantly borrowed. Those filmmakers constantly borrowed on film history as references. And again, the French New Wave filmmakers who were originally critics, like Truffaut and Godard, they originally wrote about film. They didn't make film. So that was kind of the catch.

And at the time, when I was teaching that course in the mid eighties, the French New Wave was still current in their minds and Gidare was still making films. So they could see that the study of film wasn't something that was, you know, an ivory tower approach. That it could actually inform their own filmmaking. So that's how we taught it. We taught it with the emphasis of if you want to make films you should know what came before, this can inform your style. And you could, you know, really use the medium to its fullest advantage.

And that coming at it, providing kind of that context for the students or demonstrating on how they could benefit from it. Right.

Was there any resistance to that or is that something?

No, no, students, no, no. In fact, George Tillman was a student of mine in History of Cinema and also in an image design class. And, you know, he, I see him constant, you know, not constantly but even to this day he will tell me how much he appreciated the film history class. And so no, I think the students who really were there to make films used every class and took all the information as a sponge because they knew how important it would be for them to go forward in their own process.

Okay. In '86 to '87 you were the artist in residence?

Yes.

And then—

Do you want to hear the story about that?

Yeah, yes, I do.

Okay, because this probably says more about the institution at the time. It should be noted that when I was there, even as a part-timer, I was one of the few women there. They had a woman who was a well-known, experimental filmmaker, Barbara Hammer, who was an artist in resident while I was a part-timer. She was only there a year.

Unbeknownst to me she had resigned like the day I was going to meet with the chair of the department at the time, Tony Low. And I was at a point in my life where I was teaching a lot of part-time classes, I mean basically a full load. And I thought it would be good that I, well basically I needed to get insurance.

A basic human need.

A basic human need, to see if there was any possibility of how I could work out anything. I wasn't really expecting anything. But it's just saying hey, I'm teaching all of these courses. Is there anything you can do for me or should I be finding a full-time position somewhere else?

And Tony, it was just like oh, perfect. We'll make you an artist in resident. And that's how it happened. And I remember getting my contract and realizing the tremendous difference in take home pay from being a part-timer to being an artist in resident. But I just thought it was, I think it was indicative of that timeframe because things could happen like that.

And I then was an artist in resident. I was again, the only woman on the faculty for a few years. Not until Mehrnaz came on was there a

second woman faculty member. So I'd say, I don't know when Mrnoz came on but I want to say early 90's, late 80's, I don't know. It's a significant period.

Can you talk a bit more about that from the perspective of the film department but perhaps also kind of on a college as a whole, what have been the obstacles or the opportunities for women at Columbia?

Again I'll speak locally here. I never found it to be a hardship. The faculty in the film department has always been supportive of women and alternative approaches, gays. I mean it's a very supportive faculty. And I think at the time really the reason there weren't more women on the faculty, it was a medium that was primarily male dominated. And I don't know if anyone thought of doing anything proactively.

Certainly I was well received and accepted and encouraged and both Chap and Michael Rabiger and Chap Freeman played an integral part in my development as a teacher. So I remember feeling that Columbia wasn't that exceptional. I guess from Northwestern there was only one or two women on the faculty then at the time. So I think it was pretty standard.

I think that's interesting though that in this case Columbia really was reflective of the times throughout history in regards to women.

Yes.

And in other ways it was way ahead of its time.

Right, right.

So it's one chapter that—

But then, you know, remember when I was hired full time my interview was with Lya Rosenblum and she was a dean. I think in the individual fields that were like film, I don't, I'm not sure about television. But it just was how do we get more women involved, so?

Right. Okay. And so you're an artist in resident?

Yes.

From '86 to '87?

Yes.

And then you become full time in '87?

Yes.

As a professor of film?

Well that's when we had the probationary and non-probationary.

You had probationary?

Yes.

Maybe we can talk about that?

Yes.

What made you or did you decide that this is where you want to be and, you know, how did that progress? Was that a commitment on your part for, you know,—

No. Did I, did I, I don't even know how I, I think one day Tony pulled me aside and said I'm putting you on the faculty. That's what it was like back then. It was like, what they did, if I remember this correctly, the artist in residents was really almost like a trial period.

It was like the, dare I say it was like the minor league. It had that quality of, you know, try out and see how you can do. And if you did well there was almost this notion that the next step would be going onto full-time faculty. There was no search back then.

No committees?

No committee, no. Now I have to, you know, judging from what was happening in the film department, it seemed to work well cause it was an opportunity to see how people taught, how they handled departmental responsibilities, what their commitment to the college was. So I don't know how that happened.

So on my part, my commitment, I can tell you I was committed to the college the first semester I started teaching as a part-timer. It just seemed very organic to me. And then everything just kind of flowed from there. So there wasn't any conscious decision on my part to go forward. It was an honor. I was happy to be approved to go onto the next level. But I don't remember not, that one I didn't knock at the door. I think it was they knocked on my door.

Okay. So you are full-time faculty and then in the early 90's you become co-chair of the department.

Um-hum.

Who were you co-chair with?

Chap Freeman.

Chap Freeman?

Um-hum.

And again—

How did that happen?

How did that happen?

Well there was a sudden shift in leadership, a very sudden shift in leadership in the department and it was a crisis situation. And the faculty in the film department gathered together. We were very concerned about our graduate students. The administration at the time realized they needed to do something quickly and they

appointed Chap as the acting chair. Chap didn't really want to do it on his own. So he asked for another person to help him out.

What was interesting at that time is I really think, I can't compare it to other departments, but my sense was we were the first department that actually empowered themselves as faculty. And so the faculty actually voted for the second person. Actually voted and approved Chap and they voted me in. And again, it was not anything I asked for. At the time I remember, and this is, you know, the filmmaker in me. But at the time I remembered this when they told me I was elected, I saw these calendars, you know, like a little montage just floating away and I'm going there goes my life.

Your creative life at least.

That's right. But it was an incredible time. It was probably the most amazing time I've experienced at Columbia.

Because (inaudible).

Sure, I'll tell you why. Because it was this opportunity for the faculty to really come together in a way that we hadn't before. I think it was almost as if a cloud lifted and we were just dedicated to creating an environment that would really serve our students well. So I remember that it was, in many ways, it was such an incredible and rewarding situation to kind of coordinate these efforts with the faculty.

We would just spend Fridays together looking at a graduate curriculum. We'd spend all Friday, you know, I mean 9:00 to 3:00 or 10:00 to 5:00. There's never a question of faculty wanting to participate. It was 100% participation. It was people that were quiet in previous meetings and in the previous

administration were contributing, you know, from their heart, from their minds.

And I just felt it was in a certain way the best of times. It was also very hard because we were having to catch up. Chap and I, I remember we would work light nights. In fact one night we were locked into the 600 building because we were working so late. And it was like *(inaudible)* films, you know, where you're stuck and—

Where did you sleep?

Well we were able to get a security guard. But I had someone picking me up and we're like, you know, signaling each other from the glass. But I think that epitomized that year for sure. I mean it was a two and a half years, it seemed like three years where we were doing it. You know we worked really hard as a department. We came together in way that I don't know if we would have had that opportunity to do it.

It sounds like, and correct me if I'm wrong, but in the absence of a very strong personality who was the leader or the head and that's gone, that you were overseeing more of a collaboration. Where I think a lot of people today see the chair position again maybe being administrative. So did you see, was there a shift from faculty to administration at that point in your mind or did you see yourself still as primarily a faculty member and a part of this collaboration to, I don't know, redesign re-organize? I felt part of the collaboration, but I also recognize the administrative aspects of the position. And there were times when Chap and I had to make hard decisions and we made them. So there was that quality of having to step up to the plate and really fulfill our duties.

I actually come from an administrative background. Before in my, you know, I was an accounts payable manager at Northwestern. I've supervised people from the time I was 20, 21. So that was, that's never been an issue. But I think my approach to administration has always been the notion of consensus building and having people agree and dialoguing. But, you know, at the end of the day the people who are in those positions have to make the decisions that come with that.

So when you, just to *(inaudible)*, you were a co-chair, assistant chair?

Yeah.

You know had, and with the growth of the college, has the administrative side or aspect of your work increased at this stage in the film department with that shifting or changing?

Where are we? Now are we—

Well still in the 90's.

In the 90's.

Before you become actually dean. Okay. So here's what happened. So Chap and I are acting co-chairs for two and a half years. We thought it was going to be for a half a year. We didn't know it was going to go on. We were one of those departments that had a long, long search for a chair. And then right after us, we finally said that was enough. Then right after us Judd and Dan took over as acting chairs for a year.

Okay. Is that Dan Dinello?

Yeah, yeah.

Okay.

And Judd Chesler.

And because then you become assistant chair?

Then Michael Rabiger becomes the chair.

Oh, you were assistant chair?

And then I was very happy to, oh no, in between. I knew that was missing. Ira Abrams, they had brought in Ira Abrams to be the chair of the film department. But after Dan Dinello and Judd, they hired Ira Abrams.

Was that person from outside the college?

Yes.

Okay.

I'm not sure how long he was chair. I want to say two years maybe. And then Michael became the chair. And then I became assistant chair under Michael and that was great. I was overseeing the graduate program.

Okay. That was your main responsibility as assistant chair?

Um-hum.

Maybe you could talk a bit about the graduate program and maybe how that changed or how it developed while you've been here?

Yes, yes, yes. The graduate program, the film department was either the first or one of the first departments to offer a graduate program. And at the time I think they were pretty much letting anyone in who had an interest in filmmaking. There wasn't a real strict admissions policy. And I would say in my tenure at the film department it went from kind of this all encompassing let's see what we bring in to becoming much more structured, a much more defined curriculum.

I think that the work that we all did as a group right during that

transitional period was helpful. We really streamlined it. We really looked at the student outcomes. We realized a number of our students weren't completing their films. So we tried to work on creating steps along the way that would encourage full production of their thesis film.

And it became, it's now a very highly selective program. It's first choice among many of our applicants. During my period I did something that's anathetical to Columbia. I, you know, with Michael's support, we capped the enrollment. So we went from having 24 graduate students to 12 because at that time we were experiencing this exponential growth in our undergraduate enrollment and the faculty were teaching on both ends. And the graduate students required more attention because they have this thesis film at that end of their education with us.

So we reduced it so we didn't have to have two sections of a graduate Production I or two sections of a graduate Production II. So we just had one section. And we made it more lock step. So that students had to take all their classes together the first year. The other shift was they had to take the classes in the daytime, primarily in the daytime.

So we moved from this large group of students to a smaller, more select group of students. I think we have really increased the quality of our education. Our thesis films now are award winners. There was one film that just recently won an international documentary award. There's Sheree (*inaudible*), I don't know, I can't spell her last name. She just won a Studs terkel Award. So we're getting students who are finishing

their films, getting them into vestibules and really are doing quite well.

So clearly you're pleased with that policy but, so that capping enrollment is at the graduate level?

At the graduate level because remember the graduate school is not open admissions.

Right.

So there's a select process to begin with.

Okay. And was there any reaction to that or resistance to it from outside the department?

You mean from the administration?

Yeah.

I think no. I think they were okay with it. We really, if you look at the enrollment numbers, the film department is growing so rapidly that I think they let us have that, so.

Could you talk a little bit about the critical studies and your position as coordinator? I don't know if that's something that a lot of people know about.

Okay. The critical studies is a concentration within our film program. It oversees the history and aesthetics of film and video, which are required as far as our core. When I was overseeing it I, with the help of faculty, redesigned aesthetics so it again would address more directly the issues that a student filmmaker would address. I had students give little, they had to prepare clips they had to present in front of the classroom.

There was much more movement away from the lecture to student. So it was more interactive. And those two classes were our foundation classes for the rest of our criti-

cal studies. And what we did is we've always had an interest in exploring national cinema and authorship, certain directors, looking at decades, looking at films of the 70's or films of the 60's or films of the 80's. Again, bring those in, looking at those films and like of what was going on historically, socially and culturally.

And then we are committed to showing films that are alternatives. So we would have courses, one semester it would be gays in film or women in film or male images in films. And what we did is created rotating classes. So students could take, you know, a genre class and take one semester film lore and next semester the western or whatever.

And I have always been real pleased at the department's emphasis on critical studies. Even though, you know, if you looked you wouldn't find that many students who were majoring in that as a concentration, I mean obviously they're majoring in film. The fact that we offer those courses and they always have healthy enrollments I think stresses the need for that integration, that dialogue with the critical aspect and the filmmaking. And again, all of the courses were taught from when you're making a film.

Right.

That's kind of the opening sentence for those courses, you, as a filmmaker, need to know this. Or if someone decided that they wanted to really write critical reviews or go onto graduate school, they would be informed by the film production that they had to take in the core. So I remember when I was a graduate student, one of my professors just bemoaning a critical essay writ-

ten by someone who was critiquing an aspect of filmmaking. And it was real clear to the reader that this person didn't know what they were talking about in terms of the film-making, what the capacity of the camera was. So I think the notion that critical studies and filmmaking are integrated is just vital to a filmmaker or to a critic.

Okay. And I know it seems like I'm running through these.
No, that's okay.

You know each chapter is important. Then you become acting dean. Could you speak to, and you're never supposed to do this in an oral history interview, you're only supposed to ask one question at a time. But I'd like you to think about, you know, the reorganization, the changing role of the deans, you know, the position of deans at the college from your perspective and, you know, how you felt kind of leaving your department, you know, was that bittersweet? But then still not really leaving it but expanding certainly your role and who you were responsible to and for.
Well I always like to talk about this as a funny thing happened on the way to my summer vacation. I had no idea that I was even being considered. I literally was on my summer vacation. My family was up visiting with me and I received a phone call from, there was a voicemail from Dr. Carter.

And I was very surprised because I had never received a phone call from Dr. Carter at my home before. So he asked me and I asked him for the weekend to think about it. I had a similar experience of the calendars flying by, the months flying up. But I agreed. I called him back that Monday. He

called me on a Friday and I called him back that Monday.

I will say this, it had a very similar quality to when I, I think my approach was very much the same as when I took over co-leadership of the film department. Again, it was sudden. But it was this notion, what intrigued me about it was the idea of bringing people together. And I have to say I was so lucky to get to work with the department chairs and the faculty within our school because people seem to come together real quickly. And again, it took me a while. It was almost, I mean in a way they were out of the gate before I was because I very much, and I really appreciate the depth of all of our disciplines in terms of the curriculum.

I probably should interrupt for someone listening. Maybe you should, at this point, define what the School of Media Arts is?
What they include?

And what it includes here at Columbia.

Okay. So at Columbia the School of Media Arts has eight areas. It's audio arts and acoustics, it's academic computing, it's interactive multi-media, it's journalism, it's film, it's radio, it's television and it's marketing communications.

That's a big family.

It's a big family. Yes, we have big Thanksgiving dinners, a lot of tables. It is and I think presently it's the largest school in terms of majors. The film department, as most people know, is extensively one of the largest in America if not the world. So it's (*inaudible*) with 1,800, 1,900 majors and I think we have close to 5,000 within the School of Media Arts.

Interestingly, I've had experience in virtually all those areas, either educationally or professionally. So I was, you know, surprised that I was being considered. But as I stepped into it I was like okay, I'm not that unfamiliar with the big family, all the members of the big family. So the department heads, we all just meshed really well.

And I think part of it, when I took time to reflect on it I think part of it is that when you look at all those disciplines they're all collaborative in nature. And we're all team members. So what's been really exciting is to see departments working beyond their department within the school and also thinking across the college. And there's wonderful, wonderful partnerships that have developed already. But I think I'm jumping ahead. You had asked me, you had like three prompts.

Well and the reorganization and the role of the dean.

Okay. So we have the School of Media Arts, we have the School of Fine and Performing Arts, we have the School of Liberal Arts and the graduate school had already been in existence. We, as the deans, we were all acting deans that first year. And it was, I think we worked really well together as a team, the four of us. And within the school there's a lot of sharing, a lot of good dialogue. And the role of the dean I think is to be the guiding administrator.

I think if you look at the way the college has been structured, in many respects the chairs over the years have been given and are expected to do a lot of the responsibilities that in a more common hierarchy would fall to the deans. So there's been a real interesting

dialogue on how, you know, we can maintain what the chairs do. And do well and then relieve them of some of the administrative oversight that could more readily be handled on a school-wide basis then within the department because I think we have really good chairs. And I see the deans as helping the chairs to, you know, to have their departments work as efficiently and as effectively as they can for their students.

I mean there's a real kind of generational change because certainly when you were talking about the chairs, too, in the old days or in the golden years as some call that, they had a lot more power as well and responsibility. And these kind of, some people describe them as (*inaudible*). And with that shift with kind of the new generation of chairs, if I can say that, is that expectation, was there tension over that or is that expectation of having to collaborate or work within a larger structure—

I can only speak for the School of Media Arts and I've never experienced any tension that way. In fact, you know, within our school, I always use us as this model approach. One department, about two or three years ago, DVD authoring was, you know, exciting as a new approach to technology and naturally the three departments that it most affect thought of offering a course.

Now I can't own this at all because I think just the notion of the school structure, the fact that we had it in existence, gave kind of permission for faculty to think beyond their departments. So it just so happened that the three departments, the key three people happened to be talking about it and they said why should we offer

three courses? Why don't we offer one and we'll open it up to our three departments. So what you had was a DVD class that was designed by, I think Jeanine Mellinger was the one of the originators of the idea.

In what department?
And she was in TV.

TV, okay.
So the class, if I'm not mistaken, was held in the television department, taught by a film faculty and opened up to the interactive multimedia. And what was just great was that you had an IM student, a TV student and a film student side by side working together. So that to me is really exciting.

That's when you say what's the dean's role or what's the school's role? That's where you're bringing people together. It's beyond departments. You're serving the students well. You're working that maximum efficiently. And subsequent to that, now we have the TV department and the film department talking about shared post-production classes. We have marketing, film and television talking about creating a concentration in TV commercials.

There's a real desire among the School of Media Arts' chairs and faculty to have a common School of Media Arts class. That's the exciting aspect of this. I mean there's a real cross-fertilization going on and appreciation of what everyone else is doing and supporting that and building on that and thinking more globally. And, you know, also thinking of what are our connections with fine and performing arts and what's the connection with liberal arts and sciences.

I have two departments that, you know, are wanting to work hand in hand and coming up with either concentration or major with liberal arts and education. So I think because there's this constant communication on the deans, we're all working together, we're dialoguing and then the faculty are dialoguing, I think there's this new realm of possibilities of what we could do, not only as a school but across the college as a whole.

Yeah, because that's different, to give an example of the whole issue around video when that first came between the two departments of television and film—
Yeah.

That it sounds like, the example you gave, how it worked as more collaborative instead of whose territory it was.

Whose territory, yes, yes. And I think it's a much healthier environment that way.

And would you say that that's what you think really, you know, is in the future of Columbia, more of that kind of sharing and collaboration?

I hope so. I hope so. I mean I think it can only benefit students, faculty, staff, all the way up the line. I see the benefits far outweighing any negatives and it's very hard to find any negative to that approach. Now I will offer one negative. I started this out by saying I really do respect the discipline, you know, the depth of disciplines that we teach.

So I would hate for us to be a mass media department. I'm looking for the bridges for the departments. I am not looking for one merged group and I think that's a big

distinction. And I don't think anyone does. But, you know, there's very few places that you can get the film training, the courses in journalism, a whole department devoted to just teaching radio and I think that should be preserved. I really do. I think that's what our strength is and I would hate for us to abandon that.

But I do think there's areas you can go oh wait, maybe this junior radio student can take a class with a film student. I would love, for instance, one of my ideas is to have a documentary class where you had radio students, television students, film students and have them, I mean who else? I don't know. But give them a topic and just see how they all approach it and to dialogue about the differences of the medium and what they had to face and address with their subjects.

Yeah. That sounds very exciting.
Yeah.

I know Mehrnaz has talked to me about to work with oral history. Right, oral history. I know she's worked with, you know, creative non-fiction.

Yeah.
I mean this to me is just exciting to find connections where there might not have been or wouldn't have been supported, you know, institutionally supported in a way I think it is now.

Or possible.
Yes, yes, yes.

There are several other things I'd like to at least touch on before our time is up.
Sure.

I knew we'd run out of time. How important or could you give your perspective on the significance of getting rid of the non-probationary, probationary and putting a tenure system in place?

Oh, I think we're still learning about the tenure system. So it's hard for me to discuss this. I think the tenure process will ultimately ensure that we have a really good faculty in front of our students. Saying that, I think we also had good faculty in the probationary, non-probationary. But I just think the whole tenure system allows us to attract more interesting candidates to come to Columbia.

It has been a shift and I like the change, the recent changes in the tenure committee structure. I think it was a little bit cumbersome. I mean Columbia has a history of having no policies and then initially adopting the most archaic policy. So I'd like to answer that question in about five years.

I'm telling Louis we need that. He's like oh, I don't know if we could have a re-visit. I was going to mention the self study, but instead maybe you could mention a couple things that you think for the college have been really important to the college since you have been here.

Well I think the school structure has been a major step forward. I think our current program reviews are really a constructive approach to the self study cause it's ongoing and each department will go through a program review every five years and hopefully they will be honest and self-critical and an incredible learning experience for everyone involved. But, you know, I guess from my history in the film department, to constantly look at the curriculum, to constantly re-visit it, can only be a healthy thing.

So those are a couple things that I think are key shifts that we've made. I'm trying to think of other major developments.

I have to get to this. What has being at Columbia, how has it influenced your work and do you get the time to do your own work, your own creative work, you know, as much as you used to?

It's a constant reminder. I had more time to work on my creative endeavors when I was faculty. Administration, you never quite have that autonomy of your time. You could at least carve out some hours. But I have to say still I'm working on a screenplays and I plan to continue to writing and hopefully, I'm thinking about working on a text.

And has your experience as faculty and all the other positions and experience you've had here, has that influenced your work and what you're interested in or have you maintained your interests as a filmmaker, has that been consistent?

It's been consistent. I've been probably more influenced by my interest in Buddhism, in Dharma Arts. So that's been more of a constant in terms of my creativity.

And I was wondering, we were talking about opportunities for women at Columbia and you were talking about being one of the only or the few female faculty members. What is, and I don't know this. What is the breakdown of your students in the film department?

Oh, in the film department. I don't know right now.

But I mean is it evenly, no
No.

Mostly men?

I would estimate that it's probably more men than women but I don't know. I don't know. I think the grad schools are always interesting. They are more of an even divide, yes. But I can't tell you. I would have to look at that.

Cause I'm just wondering if that will shift to teaching with who's obviously at school.

Well, you know, we have made, having that as my own direct experience, we have made some major shifts. We now have a woman, full-time, in audio arts and acoustics. We have a Hispanic in audio arts and acoustics. The television department has always been well represented. The film department, there's a number of women. There's, you know, again, it's—

So that has changed considerably since you became dean?

Oh, yes, oh, yeah, oh, yes, yeah. You know I get to play the old grandmother sometimes going well in my day I was the only one.

And the other thing I wanted to come back to because you were talking about your training outside of Northwestern is, you know, the un-represented, the stories that aren't told or haven't been told.

Yes, yes.

And is that something too that you carried with in the film department?

Oh, yes.

And part of the telling of stories?

Right. I've always been so touched by our mission statement and giving voice to those who might not have had voice. I mean that's part of the reason why I felt like I was coming home because it just

expressed my own personal history so articulately. So my films have always been in that vein and my approach to teaching, it's informed me, it's informed in my teaching, in my administration, my creative work.

And do you think that Columbia, if you could comment a little bit more on it's mission? Are we closer to fulfilling that mission, you know, today then we were when you came or has it shifted or changed?

Well I think institutionally we've always remained committed to that mission. I think the big change from when I first came on board, there was more opportunities for students to come to our school because of federal and state grants that have been diminishing rapidly. So I think, you know, we certainly are doing our best to offer scholarships and to bring those students in.

It does seem that we're getting students to, because we're the first choice in so many respects, we're getting more students who could be at Northwestern, could be at University of Illinois. So, you know, in some respects I think we're doing a better job for the students who are at risk because we're providing good educational footing for them with the Bridge program and courses that allow them to get up to speed and we didn't have that before. And that was needed. So I would say that we've lost some of the students we would have gotten maybe 20 years because they can't afford us for one reason or another. But when we do get them we do a better job of ensuring and promoting their opportunities to succeed.

Okay. Well I will end this by asking you, you know, what do you think the future holds for Columbia and what should our priorities be?

Are you sure you didn't want to start with that? Well I think we should always keep true to our missions. That's the number one priority. I think keeping true to our mission just emphasizes the whole student centered approach. I think each department, throughout all of our college, whatever school, should work to really give the best education we can to our students and to be there for our students because that's what we're here for.

Great. Well I want to thank you a lot. I took extra time but I thought it was well worth it.