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Interview with Bill Hayashi, 1998

Columbia College Chicago

Bill Hayashi

OK, today is May the twelfth, 1998 and this is the interview with Bill Hayashi, faculty member of the Department of Liberal Education and the Coordinator of the Senior Seminar.

Can you tell us when you came to Columbia and what were the circumstances that brought you here?

I came to Columbia in 1982, and I began teaching part-time. I was teaching then at Central YMCA Community College in a program called Quest for Identity, which involved both doing group therapy and also teaching inner-city college students speech, writing, and reading. And I worked with the same twenty-five students, another instructor and I; we were the only teachers that they had for a whole semester. So it was very intense. It was like doing a lot of in-depth kind of like character development and esteem building as well as teaching these basic skills. And I was feeling like I really wanted to teach some things. At that time I really had a passion for my own life, like at that time I was reading Carlos Castaneda. And I just heard that Columbia was a place where you could teach kind of like far-out things. And so I actually came and I went to speak to Lya Rosenblum who was at that time the Dean, and registration had already begun. But I mentioned to her that I really was interested in teaching Castaneda and that, through a fluke, which was that my major professor from the University of Chicago was related to one of her relatives, she was kind of excited because I guess she respected this person. Anyway, what she said was, "Well, you know, why don't you write something up and if the course goes you can teach it."

So that was my beginning. It was really like the third day of registration and it was just kind of proposed and like it filled up really fast, and so that was my first opportunity to teach here and it was quite an extraordinary class. I mean, I was completely blown away because there were the people who are, you know, apprenticed to sorcerers, and people have offered me peyote buttons, and it was just like a completely different world than I had, you know, certainly than Central YMCA. And then the whole irony of it was that this happened in the Spring semester. In the summer I was invited to teach a course at the University of Chicago at my department, which was Social Thought, on Castaneda because that's what I said I wanted to teach. And it was such a totally different—I mean, it was like they wanted you to have a logical sort of criteria and just like, my resources, I mean, so what research I had done; it was just like, just an utterly different experience. And I realized I really wanted to teach at Columbia because there are people who work, very genuine, sort of passionately concerned about what they were learning. But, you know, I mean, really, I mean, people were really angry because I wouldn't take peyote buttons with them, you know. And they really wanted me to have lived the material in some way. And I felt really drawn to that because that's really kind of the way I learned which is to really kind of live the experience that I'm reading about and just seeing, is this a life philosophy or, you know, I mean, and through that reading, trying and then differentiating you go, "OK."

That's how I kind of evolved my own life philosophy. So I love the fact that it seemed at Columbia I could explore that kind of teaching. So then, sometime later, it occurred to me that it would be really fun, because I continued teaching this Castaneda course, and then I taught a course on narcissism, that's pathology and literature because then I got really interested in narcissism. And again, Lya was interested, and again that course was very popular. And again, I did a very experiential—are you primarily a grandiose and idealizing narcissist, what are your main soothing mechanisms, I mean, you know, I mean, very again a kind of experiential course. And again, I was very excited, like, "My God, this is a very different kind of teaching." And I could kind of like pursue what really interested me, just see what happens.

Anyway, it occurred to me that it would be great to teach here full-time because I was getting a little burned out with the intensity of the other teaching. And I met Louis Silverstein, who then was chair of this department, Liberal Education, and he was very interested that I might want to teach here. And I guess through a fluke, where Mike Alexandroff got into a taxicab with the president then of Roosevelt University, and at that time I hadn't gotten tenure at Roosevelt because I was completing a second degree in social thought. Anyway, Ross Weil told Mike that he was furious that the college was letting me go because I was the best teacher they had and Mike, apparently, had stored that information in his head. So then when Louis approached him with this, I mean it was like, I'm trying this because it feels to me like synchronicity is part of my whole, whole, like, why I'm here. I mean including being able to offer a course after registration had started; it wasn't even in the bulletin, you know? I mean, there was no, there were just these individual pieces of paper, you know, sort of posters: Anyone interested in Castaneda, new course being offered. So it felt like, in many ways, this is where I was meant to be. So that's the story about how I got here. And then through Mike and also me meeting, at that time, the full-time Liberal Education faculty, you know, they invited me to become full-time here. It was a very, I mean, it was much smaller then. I mean, you didn't have to do national searches and all that. I mean it was just, I mean that was how, at one point I got a full-time position. I mean, of course it was always like—who put something, was something available too. And I guess a full-time position had opened up. But it was a very different way of like, you know, recruiting faculty in those days.

It's interesting because that's a reoccurring theme about different circumstances: Mike recognizing the talent or seeing something different, and maybe we can talk about that later. But again, has Columbia been able to maintain that or has it, you know, been forced..

Yes, yes. Are you asking that or...

Yeah, I mean, when you felt like you fit in but you fit into a place that you obviously thought was...

Very exciting, very in that, I kind of, I mean, encouraged individual vision and passion, you know. I mean, it just wasn't Mike, it was also Lya, you know, who took the risk, really, of hiring me for a course that had, you know, wasn't in the bulletin. And again, that shows how Columbia has really changed because at this point, no way Jose could we offer a course, you know, now we have to prepare the schedules, you know, a semester ahead of time. And once that schedule is printed no way are you going to have a course. So again this was an old Columbia. I do think that in some ways, you know, it comes down to kind of administrative system, bureaucratic system that has, as Columbia's grown, it's been much, much harder to have this kind of spontaneity simply, you know, in order to ensure some kind of fairness for hiring and all that sort of stuff. I mean, I think it's a little sad given my story and who knows, if I had gone through a job interview, who knows if I would've gotten a job, you know what I'm saying? That I might not have even been invited for the—you know, but it was much more, you really had this feeling: This is what the universe wanted. This was this meeting of this person and this institution and let's just go with it. I mean, and to some extent, I think just because of the size and equity, you know, you just, you don't have that same sense in terms of at least hiring, you know? And I regret it but I also, you know, understand the reasons behind it. And I do think that, say in Liberal Education, when we do our hiring we, you know, we do look for that kind of passion and that kind of like, what uniquely does this person have to offer Columbia College. Not simply are they the best scholar in Shakespearean studies. I mean, it's like, do they have something that will really add to, you know, what Columbia College is about. And do they really feel like they want to be here and have a passion for teaching here.

So you, as an individual and those like minded, even though you've got the bureaucratic standards that you have to comply with, but you're still trying to maintain what someone saw in you.

That's right, that it's really about the individual. Not only their areas of specialty, what they publish, etc. It's really important to us, will they really like serve the needs of Columbia College students. That's ultimately, for me, what I love about this place. You know, it's the students.

I mean, you mentioned the old Columbia and I think this is interesting because many of the interviews talk about it or, you know, have some term for that. And the more I interview, the more I feel

that it was a place that someone made up, not that it was perfect, I mean people had plenty of pros and cons, but that its uniqueness perhaps, that it's very hard to imagine the way things worked, how it came together, and how it went for so long. Can you describe it any further about that old Columbia?

Well, I mean, I think what was special about it is that really, people were seeing more in terms of kind of like their unique sort of individual gifts. I mean like, you know, people were hired who didn't have Ph.D.s, I mean like, people like Harry Bouras, like Bob Edmonds. People who were, who didn't have the like the legitimate credentials as such but somehow, something about them as teachers and as individuals that was unique. And I think now, I mean, you know, it's tough because, you know, when you read hundreds and hundreds of vitas applying for a full-time job, I mean you're like, "Where did they get their degree?" A lot of the things that sort of went for whether or not you were hired were kind of almost, you know, intangible. You had to kind of feel the spirit of the person, you know. And it's very hard to kind of recognize that because we've had some experiences where we thought, "Oh, this person is great" and they'd come in for an interview and it was just horrible, just total duds. You know, so it's so hard to know what a person is from paper and what they are and I think we keep looking for this special kind of Columbia spark or, I don't know how to talk about it but, so I think just the fact that the size has made it more of a necessity to become more bureaucratic and where it really is bureaucracy. I mean even things like, you know, I mean, heading under pros and cons but I'm just speaking about life, my enthusiasm like, you know, at one point it felt like I was really interested in meditation and relating to psychology and creativity. And so for a number of years I taught a course called Meditation: Focusing Your Creativity. And it was, I mean again, once I started teaching here I also started tuning in to kind of like what the students were really interested in also. And it was kind of through that kind of conversation between myself and the students that these new courses could be born, really. And all I had to do was, you know, was go to Louis, who was then chair, and say, "You know, I'm interested in this course. I think the students would like it." And it happened. Now you have to think about curriculum, papers, you have to, you know, I mean, go through these criteria. And again, I can see why that has to be, but something of what we can only call it, it will come up again, was lost, you know what I'm saying? And it had to do with, again, kind of like honoring individual vision. And as you have taught for a while, also in conjunction with kind of where the Columbia students were, what they really had passion about, you know, what might really be an interest to them and supporting them in whatever their fields are. It was just a lot smaller too, you know? I mean, at graduation you would know a lot of the students when they went up there. Now, you know, thirty or forty will walk across the stage and I won't know who they are, and then there's one, and I teach here full-time so I have much more exposure to a lot more students. But really, in the earlier graduations I'd know a lot of the kids who would walk across the stage, you know? So it really felt a lot more like a, I mean, community, family, etc., etc. And again, size and bureaucracy and there were trade-offs, you know, but...

You said that before and now that one constantly tries to maintain, you know, how can this person serve the needs of the students? And you said that that's the most important thing, the students. Could you describe, in your own words, what you feel the mission of Columbia is and how that ties in with that philosophy of you saying the students have?

I mean, I like very much the statement, in the mission statement, that Columbia College students will eventually author the culture of their times. You know, and it's a bit presumptuous. But I do think that people working in the arts and media have much more of a role directly in shaping the culture of their times. For me though, the question is is what culture are they going to author? And that's where I think the role of the general education departments are very important because I think through the general education courses that they take—and you know, humanities, history, social science, science, etc.—they start to contemplate more kind of humanistic values, you know? And that that's really the function of the general studies courses, which is to ground the creativity in self-reflection and reflection on sort of value priorities, you know, are you creating culture that basically supports utter self-indulgence and, you know, narcissistic pleasure? So I think that that's really an important part of what I see the mission of Columbia being, which is to encourage artists and media students, but also provide them with certain self-reflective and contemplative kind

of skills. It's also kind of really also savvy about political, historical issues too so that they'll have a context out of which to place their creations and hopefully some reflective values that they embody in it, sort of guiding your creation of the culture, you know. So that is to me like a really important part of the mission of Columbia, which is to offer these kids who, in some ways, will have an impact on creating the culture of their times, providing them a set of tools so that the culture that they'll be helping to create is one that we can really honor and respect.

And that's really what's behind my becoming Coordinator of the Senior Seminar Program. It's called Voice, Values and Vision and in the course we really emphasize a lot, articulating what your core values are, knowing what it means to have your own voice, and also, within the classroom, creating a sense of safe community where people can really feel free to really tell their stories and from those stories draw forth what their core values are. And then it culminates in a final project which is the students' vision of a future good life. And that is defined very loosely. They can express a personal dream that they've had. They can talk about what values have emerged in the process of the course that they see are really the core values. How would they celebrate those values? What is most vital in their lives for them now as they go into their future that they want to kind of offer to the world? And these projects take the form of whatever art or media or discipline that the students want to use to express them. Like we had someone write a great management plan for her good life. So it's not simply the artists and the media students who are encouraged to use the media of their major but whatever your background is, that you can find some form of expressing it that would also kind of tap into a particular skills and interest in that field. But this really becomes quite a powerful statement. We tell the students that five or ten years from now when they go back and look at their projects, hopefully, you know, this will remind them of what their vision was when they were still young and idealistic at Columbia College and, you know, have they gone too far off from that?

Do they recognize it?

Do they recognize it? Exactly. And, you know, for me Senior Seminar is kind of a last effort to kind of encourage this kind of self-reflection sort of, what are my priorities? What do I really want to offer my culture? You know, as a citizen, as an artist, you know, etc. So that's really what draws me to this program.

What need or void do you see that filling. I mean, what, how did the concept come about?

Well, see, I think that in many, there aren't really that many Senior Seminars across the country but...

Is it something all seniors have to take?

Eventually at Columbia all students, all seniors will have to take it. And in most of the Senior Seminars in other colleges and also in the other kind of senior courses in this college, much of the focus is placed on career. And, you know, writing your resume and how to manage work and how to get a job. And I think all that is valuable at one moment, but I'm much more concerned in kind of the students kind of reflecting on the whole range of what, what is the good life for them? And we frequently encourage them to consider issues such as: Well, if I have to move to Boise, Idaho in order to get that foot in the doorway to a radio announcing job, I mean, is that going to be fine? Is community being with friends who really share my values? I mean, is the most important thing for me making a lot of money or will it be being able to create a really expressive work? We had a situation where a woman who's quite gifted in management was interviewed for Marriott Hotels. And her interview, a woman said, "Well, are you willing to give up your personal life for three years in order to do this?' And she kind of gulped and she said, "Yes." And then later, a week later, her fiancÈ broke their engagement because he said he couldn't live with somebody who was such a workaholic. And she brought that to the class and right away this discussion kind of ensued about how many of you really want families and have you thought about that there might be a tension between following your career dream and having a family. But what happens to a seminar I think is that people really begin to reflect on what really do they hold dear? They tell their own stories around a different, whole set of things, you know, their best and their worst job. I mean they do some community service so they have the experience of what it means to sort of live for something higher than just their ambitions. They write a midterm paper about what they believe. They bring in a treasured object and write the history of how that object came to have meaning for them. So we're really teaching them sort of skills of self-reflection so they can really begin kind of looking at their own experience and pulling from that what they do. They have values. They might not have named and articulated, but

they do have values. And it's very exciting to them to discover in this process that, "My God. It really doesn't matter to me whether or not I have friends." And then when this job offer comes where it's not only that they know anybody but is there a real possibility that they could form friends with these people, you know?

They start to really, really, I think, become self-reflective individuals and I also think citizens because we emphasize a lot, you know, why does community service matter? Why does it matter to become, to vote, to be a concerned citizen, you know? And so again, most Senior Seminars emphasize simply the career dimension. In our program, which is really offering the students an opportunity to first of all really learn the skill of self-reflection and then begin just working with how to want to really map their lives, what are the things that they really feel like will be really important for them? And will accepting that great paying job make it impossible to live out some of these other values that they have? And it's just a, a process of just, you know, the unexamined life is not worth living, you know? Socrates. And it's just, giving them the opportunity to know what it means to have an examined life. So that's what I think is the purpose of this program. And I think too many of them, I mean people in general, this immediate need, I've got to get a job, is paramount, you know? And it's not just about getting a job, it's really kind of like, what would really make them happy in the long run. And the other thing that's good is we have seniors come back to talk about various experiences after. And a lot of times, they haven't found the perfect job but, you know, they're still playing in their band and then they're working, you know, this, and they start to realize...

So you don't just bring back the ones...

Oh no, there aren't that many, and a lot of people find their dream job and they decide to quit. So many of them, I mean, that's the major question in terms of work. How can I have a passionate heart and also make a living, I mean, how do I balance that still? And we try and find students who are sort of doing that juggling act. I've also, you know, just like, one student talked about the increasing value for being flexible. Because she really finds even out a year and a half she's already had three jobs and each one becomes more meaningful and closer to her dream job, but she had to be flexible about being open to accepting something that at first she wasn't sure, you know, why would she do that? It's not her, you know, it's not in her specific major, stuff like that. So it's great to have these students come back to really offer the students some kind of real sense of what it's like to not have the world of Columbia. How do you navigate that? And what is it? Increasingly, you know, all the students say, "You need a community, you need some people to support you, and you need to be clear about what you won't do." You know, it's a little vague what you will do, but you have to really know what you won't do. And you need to really find to be able to take risks.

Do you think that Senior Seminar, one of the reasons, is that it's in reaction to the growth of the College? I mean that as the College becomes—that bureaucracy becomes more imposing on it, I'm just wondering that, you know, it sounds like your value is keeping the students at the center. Does that become increasingly harder and there's more bureaucracy and so there's the Senior Seminar?

Well, you know, I hadn't thought about it. But I do think, you know, without it I would see students kind of not really stopping, before they graduate, to reflect on what they received from their college experience and what it is that they really hope to create for themselves in the future. Because so much really is getting that job, you know? I mean, "God, it's going to turn out just the way my parents said. I'm not going to get a job in my field." So the natural focus is this and, you know, all that seems to matter is the film courses that they had or, they don't realize that, you know, their general studies courses also have some place in terms of creating their future. So I do think that without the Seminar that kind of self-reflection, which I think is the key to have a liberal education, I think that would not necessarily happen.

It sounds to me, and I'd like you to counter this, that it also seems that when you say that there aren't a whole lot of Senior Seminars nationwide and the ones that do exist are really this preparation for this job search, career development, that is this our attempt at trying to create some uniqueness at Columbia?

Well, yes, I do. See, I think Columbia, in being Columbia, is really different from most institutions. I mean, it really is a school for arts/media students. And it really does attract students who in some sense are more of an individual, have their own dream, want to follow their own paths. And, you

know, it was interesting when we did a focus group of what seniors wanted the Senior Seminar to be about. The main thing they wanted was how to not sell out. They're very conscious that that's a major issue they're going to face, how to not sell out, and it speaks to our students. In other words, they're not, for the most part, mainstream. And so this question of not selling out is very crucial to them because they felt pressure all along, even to make the choice to come to Columbia, to not kind of go to more traditional schools where at least they would be on a tracked career or at least graduate school. So being that Columbia, in itself, is a school that attracts this kind of student, which is in some sense preparing them for a lifestyle that's more, in some sense, risky, creative, and more on an individual... So I really do want to support that lifestyle just as the students are about to make these major decisions: how am I going to live? Where am I going to live? Who am I going to live with? And, you know, that hasn't come across at these other colleges because that kind of question is not that much addressed by these other. I mean like, well, you want a job or are you going to go to graduate school? I mean, they'll prepare you for those but it doesn't involve this kind of alternative career or big risk kind of finding, being unique and special, following your dream, really. So it's just, it's supporting, at the very end, what set Columbia apart from a lot of other institutions right from the very beginning. Does that make sense, what I am saying?

Yeah, yeah. And has your, again, thinking back now based upon your experience here, how did you come to that? Has your personal philosophy of education or views of education changed since you've been at Columbia?

Yes, and radically. I mean, it sort of shocks me when I realize I wrote my dissertation on Troilus and Cressida of Shakespeare and that I was really a Renaissance scholar. I mean, you know, and now I'm teaching courses like Empowering Diversity or, you know, Philosophy of Love and it's just...

And your degree, you're from U of C?

I'm from University of Chicago and initially my Ph.D. was to be from the English department. And I did everything except my dissertation and then I decided that that was too limiting, and so I went back and I continued another Ph.D. program in something called Social Thought, which involves combining humanities, social sciences, and history. And I worked with some wonderful people, you know, Victor Turn, and my dissertation directors were Sal Daldo and David Green, who's the classicist. And so, but you know, I mean, I liked them because for one thing, it was interdisciplinary, you know. But it was also a kind of, it was quite an elitist group. I mean, in terms of high culture and all that kind of thing, you know what I mean? And I have tremendous respect for the kind of scholarship and passion that these people brought to it but, you know, I could not see myself teaching a Shakespearean course. In other words, Columbia has gotten me much more into like living life, you know what I mean? It's like, we keep using this phrase "Thou is an action" in Senior Seminar. And it's like I've gotta study things that will really effect the quality of my life, not just as a scholar but as a human being. That's why teaching Castaneda mattered to me so much. Of course, the narcissist course or the meditation course I taught were things that I know are needed to come to terms with the issues involved, and deciding, what I wanted internalized affected how I live my life and how meaningful and how happy I felt. And I think through—this is, fortunately my courses are very popular. And I really think the reason they are is because this is what the students want. They really want to find personal happiness and meaning.

And they, you know, one thing I like about Columbia students is, I mean, they don't bullshit. I mean, they'll do what they're supposed to do but they'll let you know that they're not really excited about it, you know? On the other hand, if they find something they really love they'll be totally there. So I think, you know, it's a nice match. In other words, what matters most for me is the question: How can I live meaningfully and fully and happily? And I think really that's what are students are really, they come here because they have a dream that they believe and they don't just kind of follow the track, you know, they don't follow bureaucracy in terms of this. And so I think they've really affected my continuing to believe that this kind of teaching, which directs really the quality of one's soul life, you know, is what they really love. And I've been able to do that here. Now, you know, I could see teaching sort of—well, I did, I would teach Hamlet in Humanities but it would not be the Hamlet that I would've taught at, you know, even that I did teach at the University of Iowa, you know. It's Hamlet as, you know, so he procrastinates, so now you procrastinate, do you think it's

related to any kind of feeling about sort of like what's meaningful in life? You know? There's a way that I would teach these works in a very different way which was really, what is kind of the real life questions that these authors are addressing that you grapple with, and do you agree with the answers they come up with? How would you—but again, it keeps going back to: How do I want to live my life?

And how would you have taught it at the University of Iowa?
Oh, I would have taught it the way I did teach it, well: what are the major things of this play, what are the key image patterns, how is Shakespeare different than Beaumont and Fletcher, is he dealing with the same thing? It would always be within a nice construct of that particular subject matter. It would never be: how does the subject matter influence you and the way you're living right now? That's why actually, after I got my Ph.D., I went back to the Chicago Counseling Center and got a degree in psychology because again, it was this kind of thing where, you know, what really mattered to me was kind of, how people live, you know? And, you know, I think for many people to do sort of the right scholarship and that kind of teaching is very meaningful and students respond to it. But I also think there's really a place for the kind of teaching that I do, which is really kind of like a constant confrontation with what do you believe and what will make you happy. And that's why both a psychological and meditational kind of interests have kind of had an impact, you know, in terms of like: How, in this moment, do I affect my state?

So when you went back, you said, to get the psychology degree...
Yes, that's right.

Was that after you started here?
That was when I was still teaching at Central Y in this Quest for Identity Program. Partly because I was doing group work and I had to figure out how to do it.

I was just trying to see what Columbia's influence has been in, you know, your direction not only in the classroom but outside of the classroom, or were you headed in that direction and this was your outlet?
Yes, it's more like that, I think I was headed in that direction. But I think what was great about Columbia was that I had both the administrative and students' support to really pursue that kind of teaching.

And I'm going to make a wild guess here, but I would imagine that at U of C it would be stereotypical that the professors and faculty weren't necessarily interested in what the students were feeling or anything but...
Well, well, what it is was that the students that went to U of C were much more concerned about image patterns, themes, and sort of the relevance of Beaumont and Fletcher to Shakespeare than to...

They're feeding off what's expected of them...
Exactly, exactly. I mean, you know, you will hear people who bitch and groan about, "Oh God. I mean, what does this stuff have to do with my life?" But hey, I mean, you got offered the job at sort of Northwestern, you went. I mean, you know what I'm saying? It's like so, so, I think that in most colleges, certainly graduate schools, the question of like "Will this material really deepen my sense of who I am and the way I want to be as a human being," I don't think that's addressed directly, you know?

And the getting out of information, or giving it to people, as opposed to what you're describing as a real interchange.
Well, you see, that I think is really crucial which is that—and it's been really interesting. Even in terms of Senior Seminar it's getting a challenge to find faculty who want to do this kind of teaching. Because you can always hide behind... In terms of even finding teachers for Senior Seminar, you know, a lot of faculty are comfortable when they teach content. They can always say, "Well, what do you think Friedrich Nietzsche would say about that or what does Aristotle say about that?" But when you're really teaching a course where you're using the philosophy or the literature in a way of like raising questions that the students then have to grapple with in terms of their own experience, you can't fall back on your content being a kind of buffer between you and them, and you have to become very intimate with the students. And you have to confront the fact that sometimes you're judgmental, that you don't like what they're saying. So in many ways, I mean, I find that with what we get to teach or most effective are people who are quite comfortable with who they are, who enjoy kind of listening as well as teaching, who really, I mean in many ways the model of Socrates as the midwife who really doesn't pull information in but somehow finds a way for people to give birth to themselves is really the kind of teaching that has to happen at Senior Seminar. And it's not always

easy to find those people who are comfortable and have the real skills, the human communication skills, to really provide an atmosphere in which this kind of exploration can happen. Not just kind of like a talk show kind of stuff, but also a way to teach skills of self-reflection so that they really have to look at what's behind that and what's the core value underlying that. And then setting up a context in which people can talk about different perspectives respectfully and honestly, so that at least people consider that there are other options that maybe other people would see as more valid here to them than these others. So it's not simply, we're not simply encouraging students to kind of vent, but then also kind of like reflect on this, what are they really saying, I mean, is that really what they believe? If that is so, I mean, why do all these other students really question whether or not you are being honest? For me, the question that always comes up is like: How do you keep this from being just moral relativism where anything anybody says is OK? And the way that I respond to that is that I always ask the other students what they think. And we've created a community, ideally, in which people feel comfortable speaking their voices and teaching ways of disagreeing that are respectful. And because there's this difference of opinion, it doesn't ever come out to be like one totally right answer. And again, I don't think we're in the position to teach the totally right answer but to create a kind of a way, a kind of reflecting, taking in, considering, that I think is really crucial to the kind of like the examining life, you know?

And I would imagine that you feel this is relative to all disciplines, I mean, this community included. And then my next question leads into, the next question about challenges facing Columbia in a specific department, how can you do that or help teachers to do that when you have so many part-timers in such a flux?

I think it's very hard with so many part-time people. And I think more of the school funds should be really put into faculty development and teacher training. There's some stipends for attending these teacher development things or teaching and learning committee events. But I think it would be great for there to be more sort of consistent workshops on, you know, like, you know, just experiential teaching or just things that would really offer...

A lot of us came to Columbia just because they needed people to teach, you know, whatever it was: literature, social studies, psychology. And I don't think there's any orientation saying, "This is a different place or we'd like to achieve a different place or an open..."

Yes, right, right. Yeah, I think there really has to be more attention placed on, you know, teacher training, teaching at Columbia kind of, and also just workshops, just kind of concrete and pedagogical techniques to use, you know? And that faculty be paid to do these workshops, you know? I mean, they're already so underpaid. So I think really, I mean, the school has to really stand behind this kind of support for innovative and Columbia student oriented teaching.

Because there isn't...

No, there isn't anything.

...anything and seven people in a department of, I don't know, seventy-five, I mean that has to be frustrating to some kind continuity. And I know, I'm not talking about status in the classroom but even those kinds of goals that you were...

No, that's really right, yeah, right, right.

So, you know, even say that as a historian is teaching it as history, you might want to pay more attention to history films, even something as simple as that.

Exactly, or show film in your class or anything.

So I'm kind of getting off the track of it but I was interested, and it's obviously a challenge that Columbia's gonna be facing. Any other challenges, you've talked about growth, you've talked about, you know, the problems associated with bureaucracy, but if you could look back at some of the challenges Columbia has come from or challenges you see on the horizon that, you know, that we haven't mentioned already.

See, one of the challenges, I think, would be just the decision: At what point are they going to stop making Columbia bigger? I mean, I just think that's a real issue. You know, it's great to constantly increase our enrollment by ten percent each year but I think at some point it just has to be, "That's enough." You know? Let's really, you know, stop growing and really consolidate what we have. Another thing that I really feel concerned about is how to provide more opportunity to the students to really form a sense of community

here at Columbia. I mean, it really shocked me really, when we were doing this study of the focus groups for Senior Seminar. One of the main things that kept coming up about what students were really worried about is they were afraid that they'd lose their sense of community. Particularly in terms of a community that would foster kind of their doing intellectual and creative exploration, self-exploration. And it struck me as ironic because, you know, where do you have this community? We don't have any clubs, we don't have any place to meet and yet this is all they have, you know? I mean the classroom, the, you know, and it just showed me how hungry the kids are for some sense of community. So I compare it to, you know, you know, I went to schools that have campuses where you join organizations where, you know, a dorm even, but to them this is the community that they do have and they value it so much and they're terrified that when they leave Columbia their community will be gone. And so, you know, I'm thinking, "Well, if there's this much effect with just so little, imagine the impact if you really have, you know, a student activities board that would really like find out what the students are really kind of interested in in terms of like films or music or whatnot, and then sort of offer those and organizations around those that support those. I just think that, particularly living in the city at a commuter school, and again, it's not going to be easy because kids are doing so many different things, but I think you could really find activities and groups that would attract some of the students, you know? And as it keeps getting bigger, you know, there's gotta be some sense of their being connected with other people. It was very touching to me, actually, that in two of the sections of Senior Seminar, when it came time for graduation, the students decided that we were going to sit next to each other because that was the community that they had formed at Columbia. And even though, you know, I mean...

Is that a semester course?
It's a semester, that's right.

And how long, just so we have this down, how long has it been going on?
It's been going on for three semesters. It began in the Spring of '97, right, right, right. You know...

I interrupted you. You were talking about how they decided to sit together at graduation.
Yes, it was just very touching to me how, you now, that they didn't sit with the Film students, they didn't sit with, you know, I mean with... And they really wanted to sit with each other and they did even if it was screwing up the alphabetical order, because to them it really mattered. They wanted to leave with some sense that they had somebody to share this experience. And to me that, you know, that really speaks a lot to the need for community of a young person living in Chicago, but also to something that Columbia should think more about. I mean, especially as it gets bigger and in a certain sense more bureaucratic, where are the students going to—I actually attended a conference on student values earlier this spring in Tallahassee, Florida, and I actually gave a paper on the Senior Seminar there. But one of the things that really struck me is that all these studies have said that the single strongest factor influencing students' values is pure values, pure community. And so often what makes a real difference in terms of what they believe and what they live is affected by their life in the dorms and what their peers think is really cool, etc., like the whole influence of fraternities on the values. It's really, you know, really across the board the main factor that really seems consistent in steady influence is peer group influence. And they don't have much opportunity for that here, you know what I'm saying, for good or for bad, you know? But I just think we're not aware of just how important peer community is in terms of affecting the lifestyle and values of our students.

I think, and partly in response to what you're saying, it's your interview, but I think to a certain extent that Columbia students that I've known not through teaching here but have come here through parents, friends, that many of them are so happy to find a place where they're not seen as weird. So I agree with what you're saying that there seems to be so little but, like you said, they're still grateful for what they have; maybe as the former outcasts that here's a place where...
That's right. But you see, this is also where the pressure really builds when they're seniors. Because the weirdos have taken a risk to come here and now they have to go back into—because people are always asking them, including parents, "Well, what are you going to do? How will you make a living? Who's gonna pay your health insurance?" And like all of a sudden they're confronted with the fact that all of a sudden now they have to go back again and

deal with the world in which they're weirdos, you know? How do they make that transition, you know? What are the options, the real options that they can take?

So in a way you're saying too that this seminar might be, it has to be unique and different there because of the population that we're serving.
Absolutely, it has to serve our students' needs.

Right, and that comes right back to your first statement about serving the needs of our school.
That's right, that's right. Yeah, in fact in terms of Senior Seminar, in my class just last week they started talking about the work, you know, what can I do about the work? But then the real question came up it's like, what were the pressures that you had to live with to even come here? And what, you know, what, your friends, you know, like this one kid who was so great, he talked about going back to the school in Ohio. A number of students have flunked out of other schools and they come here. And part of the reason that they flunk out is that they just didn't get along with those values. So this one kid went back to one of those schools and like he was starting to freak out a little bit because, you know, all his friends had fifty-thousand dollar jobs lined up. And he said he knew, before he went that they were going to ask him, "What are you going to be doing, Ryan?" And he said, what his answer was, "I'm graduating from an arts media college without a major and I'm glad." He said that. And I just saw from that, even with choice to come here, these kids are taking the risk and they're going against the mainstream. And they really need support right at those times when, now they're being hit in the face with, "God, why didn't you do what I told you to, kid? I told you you'd never be making a buck. I told you you should sort of just be responsible and do what you're supposed to do." And it's like, you know, it's why it's so freaky for them to leave because all of a sudden they have to deal again with like, "Oh my God, maybe mom and dad were right. Maybe I made a big mistake. How am I going to hold on to my dream? I mean, is there some way I can hold on to my dream and still make a living?" Almost all of them have to compromise their dream in some way. How do you do that? So it's really, I mean again, the more we talk I'm really analyzing that Senior Seminar has to be quite different than what, although it's also interesting, this whole question of values is just, you know, character education is just kind of hitting the country, at least at kind of elementary high school and level and so it's starting to now filter into the colleges and the character, this whole question of...

Yeah, not to say that this exact course wouldn't be valuable.
That's right, that's right. But I think there's a kind of a unique twist of like what characters filter through, also the role of being an artist and a media creator, you know, so that yes. But I do think this whole thing of character education or value education, is really, it's gonna really enter into the mainstream now of higher education practice. In fact, someone from Julliard was actually talking to me about their program of values and the artist that they're starting at Julliard because they're really concerned about this issue that, you know, as fledgling artists that they have no sense of like what they're offering to their culture, you know? So yes, I think what we're doing in Senior Seminar is something that is going to become quite salient across the country in colleges. But it's always going to have a unique twist to it because of the nature of our school.

Well, it's nice to see, maybe, Columbia at the forefront of something again. It seems like it was at the forefront and then people talked about, "It's leaning towards mainstream and standards." But there seems to always still be that push.
Yes, yes. And I think that's really, in some ways, part of the value of this project. I mean, there was something that the old Columbia represented that I think is important to kind of keep in consciousness; kind of find a way of integrating that into whatever changes do occur of necessity. You know, and I think it's very valuable to be aware of what the spirit of Columbia College is all about and how to, you know, how to keep that alive in some way given the needs for, you know, expansion, bureaucracy, and standardization, and all that stuff.

You're obviously very proud of Senior Seminar; other memories that you're particularly proud of, events or...
I guess, I guess this is a story that I like to share because it's just, it's so typical of kind of like what I value about teaching here and how the students respond. And I've taught this course, Philosophy of Love, for many, many years.

What is it?
Philosophy of Love, right. I was in the elevator and I had one of the books for the course in my hand.

And this student who I have never met before says, “Hey, are you that Hayashi guy that teaches Philosophy of Love?’ And I said, “Yeah, I teach Philosophy of Love.” And he said, “Well, I hear it’s a great course. I hear you’ll never fall in love again, but I hear it’s a great course.” And that just really tickled me, you know, because I just realized that, you know, they’re authentic, you know? I mean, they want to know about love so that it affects their lives, you know? And it’s a great course, you’ll never fall in love again, but it’s a great course. And, you know, that made me reflect that I am coming down a little bit hard on the narcissism stuff. Maybe I should really like tone it down a little bit and, you know, kind of that it’s not simply romantic, you know, idealizing narcissism, it’s all I’ve kind of offered; sort of my approach somewhat, you know what I’m saying? But it’s just like, but it just tickled me, that incident, because it just spoke to why I love teaching here and why I’ll always teach the way that I teach. I mean, you know, in a course on love they should really discover what’s keeping them from loving. And is the way they’re loving in a romantic way just bound to fail because of unexpected, you know, unrealistic expectations and is it just a fantasy combined with lust? And these kids want that, they’re very no bullshit, you know? Really, when they can be themselves, they know how to put on the mask and play the game but really, they’re here because they have a vision. They’re here because their heart and their spirits want something and they really want that in all aspects of their lives.

I think that’s it, right at the tail end.

Good.