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### Interview with Jon Wagner, 1998

Columbia College Chicago

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## Jon Wagner

*It's December the 18th, 1998, and this is an interview with Jon Wagner, the former instructor of Social Sciences and Program Developer at Columbia College, from 1968 to 1971.*

**And I'd like you to start with telling us what were the circumstances that brought you to Columbia?**

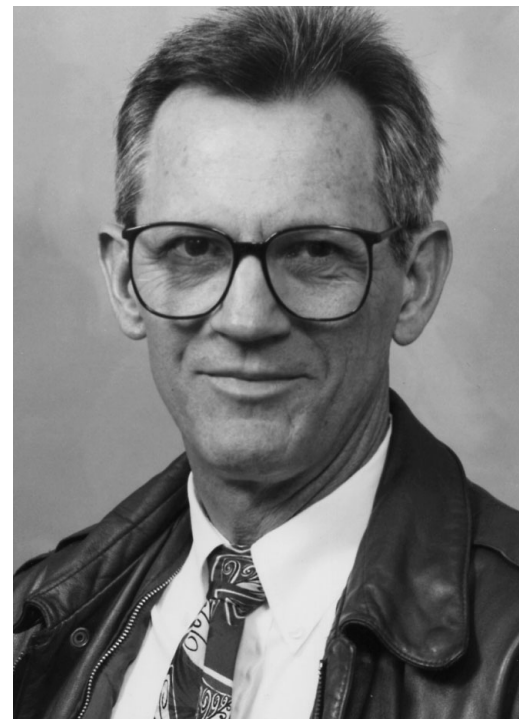
Well, I was teaching at a school on the West Side of Chicago called CAM Academy. This was an experimental, alternative school for high school dropouts, located on West Madison. And one of the other instructors there was Paul Pekin, who was a writing instructor at the same time at Columbia College. So I'd heard about Columbia College from Paul Pekin. And during the second year—I think that was the only person I'd heard about it from at that time, but during the second year I was teaching at CAM Academy, we had a big political catastrophe, which involved firing the principal of the school, and several of us protested, and we were fired as well. And that was an important point, because part of that—through Paul Pekin, I guess I'd met Mike Alexandroff, Paul had recommended me for teaching something at the College, and I was teaching a course on social problems. So I think that was beginning Fall, 1968. But then when I got fired in January, I had a lot more free time, and Mike had asked me to do some additional things at the College, and so I did. And that meant teaching more courses, but it also meant trying to do some work in support of the student culture. There were several things we did along those lines, I can go into those, but that was the initial

connection, was between Mike and Paul Pekin.

**Why do you think Paul maybe recommended you, and Mike was attracted to your work, or, you know—this is really at the beginning of Columbia's kind of shift to its current mission.**

Well, you know, Columbia was very small then, and you would just—I mean, I found this out after I got there, but somebody would say, "Oh, listen, we need somebody to teach a course. We only have three courses on social problems, who can we get, do you know anybody anywhere?" And, you know, there were just a couple dozen faculty, and the sort of word would circulate around, so I think that Paul may have known that Mike—you know, Mike may have said, "If you people know anybody to identify to teach a course like this," and Paul thought maybe I could do it. Something along those lines. And then I went and met with Mike, and so we seemed to hit it off pretty well. I was a graduate student in sociology at the University of Chicago at the time, and I had done a full year's worth of work there, and then I had sort of taken a leave. Either taken a leave or walked away, to work at this school on the West Side. And I had a relatively well-developed critique of traditional social science research. As these critiques can be very well-developed when you're young and in graduate school (*laughs*), and you can imagine the world being very different than it is. So I think that was one of the things that Mike responded to, was that I was—I had some research skills, I was not resistant to theory, I had a great love of liberal arts

education, but I also thought that undergraduates should not be prepared to be graduate students, but they should get a liberal arts education, and that most of what got taught in sociology and anthropology and the other social sciences was basically just a—it was like vocational training for the academic professions, rather than really using the social sciences to teach people about the world. Now, that's something I still believe, and I said it then, and I think Mike responded to that, you know, quite a bit, because it fit his notion of what the social sciences should be. So I think that was part of the attraction there, for him. And for me, I hadn't taught at the college level before, it was really my first college teaching opportunity. And I had just heard, I guess from Paul, and then maybe from some other people who had taught there. There was another teacher we had at CAM Academy named Floyd Hightower, and both Paul and Floyd were involved with the Story Workshop method that



John Schultz had been developing. And Floyd also taught at Cook County Jail. And I thought Floyd was terrific, and so both Paul and Floyd told me about Columbia, and they said, "Oh, come on down, teach a class there, you'll really like it." And so I did. And the first class I taught there was... an intense and very rewarding experience for me, and I think for many of the students. So I sort of stayed with it.

**Why don't you elaborate on that, what the course was and why it was so rewarding?**

Well, it was a course called Social Problems—I think it was called Social Problems, and at that time, I think most of the courses that students got there in the social sciences were sort of... um, I'm not sure how intellectually stimulating they were. I think they were courses that engaged them perhaps politically and personally. But, for example, in this course, one of the things that I did was we spent the first half of the course trying to figure out what people thought a social problem was. And the students seemed to get really engaged in that, because they walked in with the notion that we know what the social problems are, and so on. And I did a bunch of things in class, these were the '60s (*laughs*). We had the first class session; I didn't identify myself, I sat in the room with other students, and we sort of kept it like that for the first 15 minutes of class, and I got up from my seat, went up to the front, and asked them "So, what's different now, now that you know that I'm a teacher?" So there was a—some of the things I did involved this kind of simulation, small group work. And we also had these outside proj-

ects, where everybody was supposed to identify a social problem, make a proposal for working on it, and do something with it. And they really took to that. They—you know, we had a whole sort of proposal fest, then, halfway through the term, and everybody was lobbying each other to work on their project. There was one group that wanted to work on air pollution, there was another group that wanted to work on getting additional donors for the eye bank, there was one person that wanted to work on zoos, and... so I think that was another thing, this notion of linking both the social science readings with some in-class simulation activities, small group stuff, and also then this political action outside of class. And they did these things. So we had a air pollution rescue squad, that went around and did sort of guerilla theater, and we had people doing a drive to get more donors for the eye bank, this and that.

**So how would you—excuse me, I have this cough, at, of course, eight o'clock in the morning—** That's quite all right. And understandable. One thing about this course—and I mean, just in terms of other documents—this particular class was written up—the following six months after the class was over, or the next year, or whatever, one of the things that Mike did was he thought this class seemed to capture something about what he wanted to have go on at Columbia, and so they did a book about this course.

**Hmm.**

The first class. And it's called "The Story of One Class." And I can remember Gene DeKovic, who was on the Board of Directors, Board of Trustees, but he was also a teacher at the College at the time, and he had—I remember, we were using

these—we were very excited about the notion of a self-correcting Selectric typewriter, and they were typing this thing on these sort of mimeograph masters, and then running it off. And through that class, there were also then, through the students in the class, that's where I really made connection with other faculty at Columbia. Because one of the students was named Dan Liss, and Dan wrote this, oh, I don't know, 60 page thing about—this memoir about the Chicago Convention for my class, but he was also working on it in his Story Workshop class. And so I connected with John Schultz in part by talking about Dan Liss.

**Huh. Maybe expand on what you remember, or how you would describe the students at that time. And I'm just kind of curious, were there any similarities at any level between the students at Columbia and those that you taught at the CAM Academy?**

Not much. At least, not right initially. These students were really diverse in terms of their age and disposition, why they were there. You know, this first class, I mean, Dan Liss was sort of a... I don't know what he was doing. Not quite a street person, but close to it. But then there was, you know, a couple people from—one guy from Gary, Indiana, who was a social worker, and you know, there were some people that were sort of in between whatever they were doing, there were other people that were working, you know, 40 hour, 50 hour weeks at regular jobs, there were people who were just going to college. But it was really a mix. I mean, the ages in the class... I think Dan may have been in his late teens, and there were other people in there that were 40 years old.

**Mm-hmm.**

So, it was—the students that I was working with on the West Side were—it was entirely black, the school. And they were all kids right around from that neighborhood. And, I mean, in the sense of it being a sort of second chance place for some of these people, maybe that was a similarity. But I felt it was a bit of a different kettle of fish, you know, very much. I mean, and not just because they were older, although, you know, I may not have been very astute about that at the time.

**How would you describe the mission of Columbia, you know, while you were there?**  
Yeah.

**Or if it was developing, in what way was it developing?**

Well, see, here's this thing, there was—the other thing that happened, very early, and I don't know the dates on this, but it's probably worth trying to pin them down—it may have actually been that same Fall, and it may have been within the first couple weeks of my even teaching the course there. But Mike had organized this retreat up along the North Shore, I forget the name of the place, but Lou, I think, may know something about it.

**Mm-hmm. Several people have mentioned this.**

Yeah, now, this retreat was quite a deal. I mean, I was just sort of stumbling into it, because I really didn't know beans about the College. It was very new to me. And Mike said he wanted to have this retreat, and he wanted me to come, and I said OK, and there was a certain amount of, sort of, glamour and... pizzazz about the whole

thing, because he sent a limo around to pick us all up and drive us up there, at least those of us that lived far away. So I get into this limo, and I was one of the first people picked up, and then as these other people got into the limo, you know, each one was quite a character, you know, in their own right.

*(Laughs)*

It was just getting to the—it was at the Moraine Hotel, that was the Moraine Hotel, up in...

**OK.**

And I can't remember—I think the second person that may have been picked up was Staughton Lynd, and I didn't know Staughton, I just knew of him, from all his movement work at the time. He was a very visible figure in the movement. And then, because he was bringing people from the South Side, and then we stopped and we got Bill Russo and Harry Bouras, and I'm trying to think who else was in this car... So I'm sitting in the car, and Harry Bouras is making all sorts of smart comments that I'm finding very entertaining, and Bill Russo is sitting there with a little portable typewriter trying to finish off a review of some musical, and they're talking about, you know, Bill had just seen Hair in New York, and how this was a whole new era for musical theater, and Harry was—you know, it was stimulating, it was exciting, it was really neat stuff. And that was just this one car, you know, that was bringing the other people from, sort of, the four corners of Cook and DeKalb County. And among other people at this retreat, Staughton Lynd was sort of—I don't think he was actually teaching there at the time. But he may have—Mike may have been recruiting him to teach something. Or he

may have been teaching a course, I'm not sure. But there was also this guy, I think, Norman Birnbaum, from [Staten] Island Community College, and this other person whose name escapes me at the moment, who had—he was either just going to or coming from being dean of the extension program at UCLA. And I think we were there for, like, three days. And those discussions, I think, were really critical to forming this philosophy. Because there was, at the time, still—there was a whole, sort of, technical, vocational orientation to many of the programs at Columbia. Or at least many of the classes.

**Mm-hmm.**

But then you also had people like Harry and Bill Russo and John Schultz, who, you know, while they—it's not like they weren't professionals, but they had a much broader sense of what their metier was. And then you had this notion of some political engagement, and the people that were at the hotel were—really represented all three of those strands. But if you looked at the faculty of Columbia, you probably had—it was probably the technical strands that dominated. So this was sort of a moving the center of gravity, as I remember it, and as I think Mike described it, from just preparing people to be good workers to preparing them to be liberally educated and politically engaged. Which is not that that was the first time that Mike had worked on that issue, it's just, in retrospect, I think this meeting ended up being sort of a watershed. I mean, there might have been a dozen meetings before that, as well, and not much came of it. But we did leave there and try to some things differently.



**Like what?**

Well, one of the questions that came up was also just what Columbia was going to be called. Because, I mean, one of the fascinating things about the College for me is how its name has changed in response to different conceptions of what the, sort of, critical media are. So, you know, it was founded as Columbia College of Oratory (*laughs*), and then it became Columbia College of Radio Broadcasting, so when oratory was the medium, that was it. And then at some point, I think it was Columbia College of Radio and Television, or something. Well, what we had proposed, and I think it stuck after that meeting, was Columbia College of Public Arts.

**Hmm.**

And one of the intriguing things—see, because of the other people that were there, Norman Birnbaum from [Staten] Island Community College, I mean, this was straight-up adult education, second-chance education, but he had a strong—and literacy education, he had a strong commitment to all that, and to opening up access to people, sort of an open enrollment kind of posture. But, it wasn't open enrollment just to help people develop better job skills, because he had a very strong liberal arts commitment himself in that domain. And then on the other end, you had this guy from UCLA, or who was going to UCLA—I think his name was Kaplan. Maybe he was at Stony Brook, and he just—he went to Stony Brook from UCLA, or something. He must have been coming from UCLA, because I remember him talking about these extraordinary programs they put on in public education for, you know, with noted philosophers giving a series of 10 lectures to audiences of

4,000 people and... So there was this whole thing about democratizing higher education, and the different forms that that might take, that, you know, I think—I'm not saying it created a greater openness at Columbia, but it certainly fueled it, in the sense of both "Let's get a broader range of students here, let's do some aggressive recruiting, let's put together programs that will attract minorities and the underprivileged, let's prepare our students for a life of public education, I mean in the broad sense, let's do things that really educate the public." So it was really a sort of opening up to the public and the community kind of discussion. And the political conventions of that were really interesting, because at one point in the meeting, there was some sort of conflict or tension, people saying "Well, what are we going to do? Are we going to talk about being politically engaged, or are we going to talk about preparing people to be effective in the public arts?" Because they're not really the same, you know, we can have good musicians, but they can also be very reactionary, and so on. And, as I remember it, Staughton Lynd and I argued that, in fact, political engagement could be seen as a form of public arts, that that's in part what we mean when we say that the substance of the politics is in the struggle and not necessarily the victory, that it's disposition that we want to—so anyway, there's this whole thing about thinking of it as public arts. And Mike talked about it as a college of public arts, I talked about it that way, other people talked about it that way afterwards. One of the things that that led to was a program that I had a lot to do with developing. I hesitate to say I developed it, because... well, anyway, I'll just tell you what it was.

(*Laughs*)

We had this idea that—of not just offering the social science classes, and having students take those, and then also take their arts classes, but trying to set up something that would link these together. And Mike was on the [out], so he was always looking for people that, you know, cut across these boundaries. And Lou was one person of that sort, and as I remember it, we were trying to find an instructor for something, and I recommended Lou to Mike, and they met, and Mike thought this was a good match, and signed him up that way.

**Now, how did you know Lou?**

Well, I knew Lou because—this is an oddball thing, but when I was teaching at this school on the West Side, I was asked to come and give a talk about that school in the School of Education at Northwestern University. So I gave this talk to this large lecture class, at the invitation of the professor, and Lou happened to be a graduate student who was a TA for that course. And so I had just a glimpse of him, but he sort of got a good look at me, at least standing up in front of this class and doing my schtick about the school on the West Side and so on. And then sometime after that, he called me, I think, to come and talk at a smaller class that he was teaching. And then he was also teaching an adult class up in Highland Park, and I went and gave a lecture to the adult class, too, and really enjoyed my discussions with him. And that's sort of how we got connected. And those connections probably were happening about the time I was teaching at Columbia, and I think it was probably the following year, then, where we were looking

for somebody for a class and I suggested Lou, and, you know, we went and got him. And he was interested, and so then that was the beginning of that. But he was a person then, also, who had this notion of trying to link what you do in social sciences with your personal life and political life and so on. And there was another person, Joel Lipman, that Mike had found. Mike had me meet this guy, in his sort of characteristic way, "There's this guy you've really gotta meet, he's gonna be here on Thursday, come, we're gonna go have lunch." And so Joel was a lawyer who had gotten interested in poetry and was writing poetry, and didn't want to be a lawyer and wanted to be a poet. So Mike thought that Joel and I could work something out as a program, and so what we did was this thing called Social Action Research. And in this program, students signed up for two things: It was like a matrix, you signed up for one from Group A and one from Group B. And Group A was a set of social research classes, and Group B was a set of... actually, Group A was a set of media classes, one of which was Social Research, and Group B was a set of policy seminars. So a student might sign up for a policy seminar on public housing, or a policy seminar on contemporary issues of education, or a policy seminar on the public press. And then they would also be in a sort of media laboratory section, in photography, in journalism, in motion pictures, or whatever. And the ones that were not in a media laboratory per se were in this course, this Social Research lab that Joel and I taught. And the whole notion here was that we were gonna create these teams, in these policy seminars, of students that would do these

Action Research projects. So in the policy seminar on public housing, you would have a few students who were in the photography lab, and another couple that were in the motion picture lab, and somebody else who was in the advertising lab, and somebody who was in the creative writing lab. And they would work together on public housing issues, but they would also bring together all their skills from these media labs, and do some work of value to the community. And it was one of these ideas that, I think, sounded—Mike thought this was a great idea, we—well, we thought it was a good enough idea to try it. But logistically, it was an absolute nightmare.

*(Laughs)*

And I think the students—I don't think the students necessarily had a bad experience, but we ended up with 60 students in the social research lab, and sometimes, you know, three or five or at most eight or nine in some of these other media labs. And that's the kind of scheduling thing that just made the College crazy, you know. So we only did that once or twice, but we had some great people doing the policy seminars, people who, you know, we pulled out of the city. So that was one kind of thing that came out of this Moraine Hotel retreat, was this notion of just—and there were lots of other efforts to make closer connections between the visual and performing arts, social research, and sort of engaged politics.

Since you left Columbia, has your personal philosophy or vision of education changed, or, you know, has Columbia shaped how you approached or what you did after leaving, or influenced it?

Yeah... well, let's see, two or three questions there. Has it changed? Well, I'm sure it's changed. But I'm not sure that this thing of how you use social sciences to help people develop more informed, engaged, political and civic trajectory into their lives, I'm not sure that's changed. I think that's been pretty much a constant. And as I look at the things after Columbia, several of which have sort of an oddball character to them, I mean, it wasn't the last time I did those kinds of things at all.

*(Laughs)*

In fact, I'm sitting here designing my course for next quarter, and one of my whole issues of how I'm going to have—this is a large undergraduate course at UC Davis, it's a liberal arts course, most of the students that take it take it as seniors, they're from all these different departments across campus, because it gives them general education credit, and I'm trying to figure out how, in this course, I can have them do this work that really has a payoff out of the schools, with some of the projects they do. So, I mean, there are some pretty strong parallels, and that's 30 years later.

**Yeah.**

Now, there is a way in which Columbia also, though, has sort of an existence proof. I refer to Columbia frequently—oh, there was also this great poster, if you're doing a history of the school, you gotta get a copy of the poster if you haven't seen it yet. You know, because there was all this sort of media stuff in the school, you know, you got some neat things being done. And so there was a Columbia College sort of recruitment poster designed in around...

oh, I don't know, the late '60s, early '70s, which shows this multi-story city building—it may have even been the building we were in, over near Lake Shore Drive—with all these weird characters. It's like an R. Crumb advertisement for the College, these people sort of falling out of the windows and a multi-colored thing. I don't know, I may have one still, someplace. I had a couple of them, I put them up, and I advise students for, you know, however long it's been since I left Columbia, that they don't have to live with—and they shouldn't live with the assumption that the liberal arts, vocational preparation, and engaged politics are three incommensurate activities. That they can really put these things together. And I've referred students to Columbia, you know, ever since. I'll say, "Well, you know, there's a college in Chicago, and you can get a liberal arts education there, but instead of it being organized around sociology, psychology, English literature and this and that, it might be organized around photography and motion pictures and writing and so on." And so, in that sense, you know, I think it's—you know what it's like? There are these high schools in New York City, there used to be. Technical high schools, but they weren't dead-end technical high schools. Well, Brooklyn Tech is a good example now. But they were technical schools (noise interference) that you got at a regular high school, but you got it through the vehicle of a technical training. Lane Tech in Chicago used to be like that. So Columbia appeared to me a little bit like that as a college, you know. I mean, here you could get extraordinary technical training that you couldn't get at a normal college or university. They just

don't do it.

**Mm-hmm.**

Most research universities, you know, if you want the technical training, what we have is, you know, people who do what they call a sort of reverse transfer. You graduate from Berkeley and then you take some courses at a local community college to catch your—well, you know, Columbia had it, you know, as a package. You could also have these wonderful courses—Harry Bouras, after the—another outgrowth of this Moraine Hotel thing, he taught a course on... I think Art and Science, or something like that. I taught a course on Machines, Games, and Technology, or something. There were some of these courses where people tried to bring it together in the whole course, or they also tried to bring it together with a pair of courses. I'm not sure we tried much more along the lines of this Social Action Research thing, where you had this elaborate program. But those ideas of bringing these together in class for students was always somewhere on the agenda.

**You talked about the retreat, and I think that's an excellent—you know, the story getting the limousine, too, we have too little of that—but what were some of the other—you know, that was obviously very important in your memory when you came to the school. Was there any other important events that occurred here during your tenure that, you know, stick out like that?**  
Yes. (*Laughs*)

**OK. Give me your list.**

Ah, well, see, there's one other sort of big watershed thing. I mean, you probably know, at least from having heard people talk about it, that Mike would just find these

people that he thought were neat people, and just bring them to the College to teach. And when the student demonstrations broke out around Cambodia, the College was in a tizzy. Mike was in a tizzy, the students... That was another very interesting, defining moment for the College.

**Was that '70?**

Yeah, I think it was 1970.

**Yeah, and I—and Laos was like '71, I might be mixing them up, but—OK.**

You know, there was the Kent State shootings, the Jackson State shootings, and in addition, which really engaged people at Columbia, although it wasn't—at least some people at Columbia, although it had a different, it played differently around the country—the Chicago police had shot and murdered Fred Hampton and Mark Clark, and that one was pretty close to home for some of us. And so what happened, anyway... there were all these things going on, and there was this national distress over Kent State, which was precipitating all sorts of strikes and shutdowns all over the place. And Mike thought that Columbia (*laughs*) needed to stand up and be counted by going on strike. So he, as I understand it, was more than sympathetic to the students going on strike. However, faculty members weren't so inclined, and, you know, in some cases, it was somebody saying "Will you go on strike?" when they shot Fred Hampton and Mark Clark, you know, or "What about this?" or "What about that?" and so on. In other cases, it was people saying "Look, Columbia's a commuter college. We go on strike, there isn't anything here. These other places, you go on strike and these people are in meetings and hanging out in



the dorms and so on, but classes are the only things we have. We shouldn't have any strike, we should just have people talk about these things in class." And then there were other people saying "I already spent (audio goes out) militarism? What am I supposed to do now? It's the first time these issues have crossed the threshold into my classroom." So Mike was disappointed and called a faculty meeting that Bert Gall was given the unwelcome task of chairing. And this was a meeting that was held off-campus. It was held up no North Clark Street someplace. I think there was a new theater that the College was developing there.

**So do you have anything about this meeting, or just that there was a meeting in your notes? Just, um, that we ended the last side—that the meeting was help off-campus and that Bert Gall was given the unwelcome task of chairing.**

Right. Well, it was in a theater space, or a dance space that the College was acquiring, I think, up off of Clark Street or something like that. And so there were—oh, I don't know, maybe 50, 40 or 50 faculty members, maybe a few more, a few less. And Mike had come in and gave us sort of a pep talk at the beginning, and said he'd called us together because these are—the Kent State matters, and the Jackson State matters, and the bombing of Cambodia is real serious stuff, and he felt that we needed to develop some sort of response, and he wasn't sure what it would be, but we needed to do something. And then he left. And Bert was given the task of sort of facilitating the discussion, which was sort of the task from hell. Um, and there were all these different

positions that people had... I mean, there were some people there, a few people, who felt that we should either go out on strike or support the student strike, if there was going to be a student strike, I don't think it was entirely clear that there was going to be one. But then there were other people who said, "Well, you know, that works fine at a residential college, but this is a commuter college, and so if you go out on strike here, what happens? People just stay home, not that they do anything else." So then there was also a proposal not that there be any sort of strike, but that there be some sort of teach-ins, that we try to do something collectively with all the students. But then there was another position, which was "Well, some of us are trying to address all these issues in our classes all the time, and we're gonna completely disrupt the whole structure of what we've been preparing, so that we do this teach-in." So you had all those different things, you know, and that's probably just a sample, there were probably other angles that people were taking. And then there were process questions about, you know, "I think this is completely inappropriate, you know, for Mike to call this meeting," and somebody saying "Well, no, it's appropriate, but what we need to do is make it our own meeting," and so on. And in the middle of all this, Arnold Weinstein got up and went over—because I think this was a space where he was doing some work, theater work, and he had some materials there—he went over and he got this huge, black binder out, one of those sort of, like, four-inch thick binders, and he opens it up, and he starts reading this letter. And he just says, "I just would like to read you this letter." And, um, he started reading, and it was a

letter, as I remember it, which I think he had written, it may have been that somebody else had written, in rejecting a Ford Foundation grant, I believe it was, for doing some kind of work or research. And, um, it was one of these things where it was—at first, I think people thought he was just gonna read a phrase or two, or maybe a paragraph, but... it was a long letter. I mean, I think it was a 10 page letter or something, single-spaced letter, and he sort of started at the beginning and was gonna walk us all the way through this. And so people sat there, and Bert was up at the front of the room and sort of, you know, wringing his hands, and some of the rest of us were getting pretty restless, and people would say, "OK, Arnold, OK Arnold, that's enough, we've heard enough, let's have somebody else speak," and other people would say, "No, no, go on, Arnold, go on, Arnold, I want to hear more of this," so it was just sort of... slightly chaotic. And at some point Arnold either was asked to stop or put it down, and people started testifying as to this being, sort of, exactly what was required, attending to these kinds of issues, and three people got up in a row, one of them was John Schultz, one of them was Harry Bouras, and I can't think of who the other one was, but anyway, they got up, and they each referred to Arnold's letter as a, you know, sort of a really eloquent statement, and it's exactly what we needed to do, and then they gave absolutely contrary readings of the letter, and absolutely contrary recommendations about what we should do next.

**Was Weinstein's letter, was it a letter he had written, or a**



**letter—**

I think it was a letter he had written.

**Yeah, OK.**

Yeah, and it was sort of like the things you've heard about recently with the NEA, you know, where people were—

**Right.**

And so part of the whole tenor of the letter was, sort of, the integrity of the, you know, the person's work, and being compromised by the institution, and sort of not wanting to live with that kind of compromise, and not willing to take the money for it, or whatever. And so it was a kinda ambiguous thing, because, you know, if it was directed just towards Mike or the College from the faculty it meant one thing. If it was directed towards, you know, the United States government by the faculty, it meant something else, you know. If it was directed towards the students, it meant something else. So, you know, it was a—but it was a statement all about, you know, integrity, and about how individuals have to maintain their integrity, even at the expense of their own careers and resources from the government and foundations and so on. So to me, that was sort of—I mean, it was an epiphany, this was one of many sort of things. But it was sort of a characteristic pattern of how Columbia seemed to work, which was you had these people agreeing about these very general principles that did sound pretty good.

**Mm-hmm.**

And then what they meant by those principles was rarely examined in great detail, and when it was, it turned out they frequently disagreed. But if you examined it

in more detail, I think probably it would have fallen apart. And if you didn't affirm those general principles, it also would have fallen apart. So it was this sort of balance between, you know, everybody sort of affirming human rights and progressive forms of education and integrity and, you know, sort of respecting students and saying all those things, and then, of course, differing in how everybody interpreted those, in terms of their individual work. So that seemed like... a key to how Columbia functioned.

**Yeah. Very illustrative.**

It came up in graduation, also, I don't know—this was, I'm not sure if this was the same year, in fact, it was an interesting re-connection with Lou, because Lou had taught there and then he went away, I think to Stony Brook or whatever, and he taught a course or two there, and then he came back, he was hired back, and the first thing he did, being hired back, was he went to graduation. Because that's when he got back in town, and so they were doing graduation, and I met him, after not having seen him for a couple years, in line for graduation. And so there we are putting on our robes, and sort of talking with each other, you know, "How've you been?" and this and that, and this was, you know, a time when there were a lot of... well, this was the—all the political issues that had come up in that meeting, as well. It was later in the same year. And a number of the students in the graduation wore, I think, flowers, I think they had these little yellow daisies that they put in their graduation robes. Lots of them, lots of students did this. And they did this in sympathy for the students at Kent State, Jackson State, and so on. It was a political gesture. But it really cut across an

extraordinary array of majors. I mean, it wasn't like it was just the photo students doing it, and it was sort of straight students and unstraight students doing it, and then Mike gave a talk about, you know, the, sort of the soul of the nation being invested in the young of the nation and sort of championing at least some of the political sensibilities of the young people. And as I remember it, the featured speaker, who was given an honorary doctorate, was David Halberstam.

**Mmm.**

And he was... you know, being lauded, also, in part for his willingness to take on—it was either David Halberstam or Frank Reynolds, but in both cases, they were given an honorary doctorate, and they were being championed for their willingness to challenge authority of one sort or another. So, that was, you know, another one of these sort of things, where you had all these people from—with very—if you worked things out with them in great detail, they probably disagreed, and yet they would all sort of salute or... somehow, to some sort of progressive sensibilities.

**You also mentioned Dagmar Schultz.**

Yeah. Now, this was—I think I mentioned this as what I found a really difficult chapter in my own involvement with Columbia, and that was where we—Mike was—they didn't used to have a social science department, they just had some social science, social problems courses. Robin Lester taught some of those. Did you talk to him at all, by the way?

**I haven't yet, but his name has come up many times, and I'm**

**going to ask Louis what he thinks.**

Yeah, he'd be a neat guy to talk to. But Robin had been teaching some history courses there, and then when I taught some of these social problems courses—anyway, at some point, as the College grew a little bit, and started embracing more fully the full array of departments, as a liberal arts institution, there was this notion of having at least coordinators for the social science or social studies component. And by that time, we probably had four or five—well, we might have had, actually, a half dozen people, or more, teaching courses in the social sciences. And they were—Robin and I, I think, were the first two to have semi-permanent positions, but there were a couple of other people that did as well. And Dagmar Schultz was one of these. And this was—and Lou was another one, although he came a little later. And it wasn't like a real whole-scale, full-time position, but it was like, you know, you taught 60 percent time or something like that, and you—it was a 60 percent time position, and you taught several courses, and did other things, rather than just came and were paid on the basis of teaching an individual course.

**Mm-hmm.**

So Robin and I and Dagmar, and there may have been another person or two along those lines, were in that category, and Robin and I were coordinating this. And we were, um, somehow responsible for deciding whether or not her appointment should be renewed. And I remember agonizing over it in a number of different directions, and not feeling good about how it was resolved. And I know we ended up recommending to Mike that it not

be renewed, and there was some... serious concerns about her teaching, but there were also students who were very pleased with her teaching. And so... it was just sort of a very messy kind of thing. But it also, I think, illustrates the way in which, you know, Columbia was sort of moving from being a... sort of a family-run business to more of a, you know, a somewhat bureaucratic institution, and we were in between there, um, and we hadn't hired Dagmar in the first place, and we didn't even have those positions when she was hired, Mike would just hire people and tell you later "Oh, I got this great person to do this and that." But then, it was getting a little too complex for him to make all the—to manage it, and so then this notion of having chairs and department chairs and so on was—I mean, they'd already had that in Photography and some of these other areas, but I was there when the social sciences sort of went from being just people that Mike hired to teach courses to having enough people and some more semi-permanent positions, so it was more of a department. And it was a real difficult transition.

**And, um, you also mentioned Gene DeKovic.**

Yeah, now I mentioned him as a good person to talk to, because—

**OK, and I did talk to him.**  
Oh, you did?

**Yeah.**  
Oh, good. Good. Was that useful?

**Yes.**  
OK, well, good.

**Very interesting.**  
I mean, he just had more than—maybe anybody else at the time, he cut across several of these very different sort of domains or purposes that Columbia seemed to

be trying to serve. Because, you know, he was a Board member, he was technically an expert in his own field, he was, you know, apparently a very talented typesetter, book designer, and so on, and he was president, when I was there, I think of the Society for Typographical Artists. But, you know, a relatively conservative, straightforward guy, who was still open to new ideas and, you know, had an open mind. But he had that whole technical training kind of background, and then he was a member of the Board, and he also taught some classes. So that's why I was pointing to him, because—not everybody went across all those lines.

**Right.**

A lot of people there were in just the technical domain, or they were in just the, you know, more administrative domain, the way Bert was, I think, when I was there. You know, or they had some of these political sensibilities. But I thought Gene was somebody who sort of cut across a little bit.

**Right, right.**

You know, I thought of one other example, I don't know if I mentioned this to you last time we talked, about the College going from being a sort of family-run—it was like a mom and pop college, you know, to being a more stable and organized institution. Have you come across any references to Columbia's first Dean's List?

**No.**

Well, within this whole sort of progressive orientation, um, and the notion of affirming students and democratic principle and this and that, the faculty had not been eager to single out a few students—I mean, they always had

some sort of valedictorian, but they were not trying to emphasize distinctions between the students. I mean, the whole idea was to try and build a sense of community and one day, a couple of us were walking by the administrative office, in the old building out by Lake Shore, and here was a Dean's List posted. And it had all these students listed on the Dean's List. And it was sort of like "Oh, gosh, Columbia's got a Dean's List, I didn't know it had a Dean's List, how did these people get to be on the Dean's List? Were we asked to recommend good students?" And there was this whole buzz among faculty. Well, it turned out what had happened is the College, the grade and record keeping got a little too much for the few staff that they had there, so they jobbed it out. And they hired some firm that was doing this for all sorts of different places. So the firm did it, and they automatically calculated a Dean's List as part of what they did, 'cause that's what they did for other institutions.

**Based simply on grade point average?**

Just by grade point average. So they sent it all back, and they gave all the grades back and everything, and then they also have this other form which says, "Dean's List" on it, and so the people that were secretaries there put it up on the wall. *(Laughs)* So that's—I mean, just as this in-between stuff, I'm sure now they're much more deliberate about how they do these things.

**That's great. And, finally, and I don't know, you know, if you want to make mention of this, but you talked about the connection with other—**

Oh, the other institutions. Right, yeah. Actually, I think that's a real interesting and useful thing to pursue, because, um, there were, you know—some people talked about it almost like it's a—C. Wright Mills has this term of "interlocking directorate" when he was talking about the military industrial combine, or complex.

**Uh-huh.**

And in Chicago, it was more like the counter-cultural interlocking directorate. And it included—you know, Columbia was very well-situated in that, because it was connected into the local theater, and in some sense the local theater in opposition to the mainstream theater, I mean the Lyric Opera and the big theaters, but the Clark Street theaters and the Story Theater, Paul Sills' work, and all that. And there were a number of connections with Columbia and the Museum of Contemporary Art, and some with the Art Institute. Maybe more with the Museum of Contemporary Art than the Art Institute. But it was also true, then, for the colleges and universities. So that there were people teaching at Northwestern who came and taught at Columbia. Because they could teach something at Columbia that they weren't really set up to teach at Northwestern.

**Right.**

And among the people that did that, one very esteemed sociologist, Howard Becker, who is now at the University of Washington. But when he taught at Columbia, he taught courses on documentary and photography. And there were people that came as graduate students; um, I think the first time Lou taught at Columbia, he was a graduate student at Northwestern. When I taught at Columbia, and

when Robin Lester taught at Columbia, we were graduate students at Chicago. And there was also migration from Illinois Institute of Technology, because they had a really strong photography program there. You know, it's sort of a—I'm not sure there's much of this connection left, but it was sort of the Bauhaus of the United States.

**Mm-hmm.**

And there were some really senior, extremely able and extraordinary teachers there, who then taught a whole generation of photographers, who populated the Columbia Photography Department, you know, for a while. Brian Katz, and Charlie Traub. I'm not sure if Jim Newberry was at IIT or not, he might have been. So it was something- you know, it wasn't just another institution. I think the people at the mainstream institutions who were interested in the arts and are interested in sort of an alternative way of linking professional work and liberal arts work were tied in to Columbia in some of the same ways that professionals, uh, working in the media or government or whatever else were also tied in to Columbia.

**That's a good point. And I think that's a good point that we can just wrap up the interview on.**

**Um, unless there's anything else that, you know, you had come up with at least one illustration of somebody that you'd forgotten, or...**

Nothing comes to mind.

**OK. The Dean's List is good.**

***(Laughs)* I'll stop the tape.**