

Ken O'Brien 0:00

This is Ken O'Brien and this is the first interview with dr. john van de Wattering. The date is October 13 2000. Dr. Van De Wattering Good morning.

Dr. Van de Wattering 0:13

Nice to have you here.

Ken O'Brien 0:14

Thank you very much, john. Let's begin with your life before Brockport There had to have been a life before Brockport.

Dr. Van de Wattering 0:23

Yeah

Ken O'Brien 0:24

Would you talk a little bit about your scholarship, your intellectual interests before you went into academic administration

Dr. Van de Wattering 0:29

Well I think most of the time I had entered graduate school was the idea of my future, I intended to be the world's greatest historian and I was never never going deign to go into administration. The very thought of it was repugnant to me. my first full time, University of Montana after I'd been teaching for about three years. Was it I don't know If you're if you're Washington (?), and I was offered an opportunity to get involved in administration fairly early, and I refused it. So that was not my interest. I was a scholarship teacher, and I certainly intended to pursue a career that way. And I have all the classic faculties and prejudices against administration and administrators. So I love teaching. I really enjoyed it very, very much. But I got into campus politics very early. I don't know if that must be some characteristic of my personality, that leads me to do things like that. But

Ken O'Brien 1:42

what do you mean by campus politics, John?

Dr. Van de Wattering 1:44

Well, I became active in the Faculty Senate. I became president of the Faculty Senate. One of my earliest lessons in college administration came when I tried to eliminate some committees. People don't like to see committees eliminated they want to hang on to their committees. In any case, I also got involved in the ABT both locally and statewide because I had passionate feelings about positions. And then I became chairman of the history department by default really. I didn't want it. I wanted very much not to be the chair. But, you know, every time I tasted a little bit of administration I enjoyed it very much, and I moved directly from being the chair to being the President at Eastern Montana College which is now renamed the Montana State University of Billings. I was asked to serve on an interim basis as their advisor and commissioner of higher education. I suppose because I'd been involved in only those in statewide as well as local and there wasn't I really enjoyed it very much. So in fact, when when he called when the Commissioner called, and asked me to take the job. I said, I'll take it but let's have an understanding up front that it's a one year appointment and I have no interest in going past that one year. He said, don't do that. Hang in there and see if maybe you don't really have an interest in being a candidate for the permanent job. Well I didn't. (unintelligible). My scholarship I enjoyed research very much. Enjoyed the challenges the intellectual challenges of working with a body of material and trying to make make sense out of it and find bigger meaning behind it I found bigger meaning sometimes that was sheer nonsense I think

Ken O'Brien 4:05

we all have done that John.

Dr. Van de Wattering 4:10

Anyways then I became a candidate for a permanent job at Billings and was successful and spent five years there.

Ken O'Brien 4:23

American colonial history

Dr. Van de Wattering 4:27

Mhm.

Ken O'Brien 4:27

How did you get there?

Dr. Van de Wetering 4:28

Well, I got I got into history in more defensible (?) way than I got into American colonial history

Ken O'Brien 4:35

As much people don't usually get in America colonial history.

Dr. Van de Wetering 4:39

I I got into history I I really had aimed towards political sciences. But the questions I was concerned about were universal issues that every young person is interested in who gets involved in scholarship. I thought were answered better in the historical mode than they were through political science. So I moved into history Had I had better language skills. I would've sort of stayed in American history. I think I would've Probably went into ancient history. I loved ancient history. How I got into American colonial history largely because of my mentor, Max Sevell, who who became I suspect, you know, Max was a very fine and powerful personality and urged me to do it and he gave me wonderful support and guidance for me while I did it, and it proved to be kind of fun to be able to travel to the east coast and research (unintelligible).

Ken O'Brien 5:38

Speaking of traveling, you were a West Coast kid, you were born and raised

Dr. Van de Wetering 5:43

A West Coast kid, yep.

Ken O'Brien 5:45

your jobs were on the west coast. Now, that being true, what could have interested you in moving to Brockport New York.

Dr. Van de Wetering 5:57

Well, leaving Montana was difficult because Maxine was there and We always knew that she would hang on to her position would want to hang on to her position. But we talked it through when I became a candidate for positions. College presidencies, if you're serious about it can't really be viewed as a parochial market it's a national market. And so I became a candidate on a national basis. And that's how I found Brockport it's really that simple. You had a consultant here. what's his name Joe. Joe.

Ken O'Brien 6:38

I I had nothing to do with the search.

Dr. Van de Wetering 6:41

No this is not the search. You had a consultant come in (unintelligible) college he was from Wisconsin.

Ken O'Brien 6:49

Oh,

Dr. Van de Wetering 6:49

you'd remember him, very, very nice guy. Anyway, Joe, had also had been a consultant over in Montana. And so when this job became available Joe called and asked if I might be interested. And indeed I was and I said sure let's find out what it's like. You never really jump into something like that without, a lot of reservations, I backed out of more than one search reading local conditions (unintelligible).

Ken O'Brien 7:17

Sure, I could imagine that. That part of the search process. is you deciding if this is a good fit for you, your interests, your talents

Dr. Van de Wetering 7:25

(unintelligible). To go back a little further, I onced turned down a job in the history department of the University of Minnesota. And they were just furious with me could never understand why the hell I would do something that dumb it was such a better job than the University of Montana.

But it was the wrong time it wouldn't fit right for me that Maxine was just finishing up her degree she needed some real opportunity to focus on

Ken O'Brien 7:47

You needed a year (?).

Dr. Van de Wattering 7:49

No I don't. it was oh lord I could probably figure it out.

Ken O'Brien 7:54

The reason I ask is I had a friend at Northwestern who was one of my graduate school fellows, who finished his dissertation in 1969. Had it published in 1970. got a job at the University of Illinois, circled in 1969 and went to Minnesota.

Dr. Van de Wattering 8:11

Oh,

Ken O'Brien 8:11

in 1970. He was a colonial

Dr. Van de Wattering 8:14

it would be around that period.

Ken O'Brien 8:15

Well then, we always thought that appointment at Minnesota was a little bit strange to take away (?) the hiring year. They brought him in and I think he went from instructor at Illinois circle to tenured Associate Professor

Dr. Van de Wattering 8:30

Oh my god. What Nice job,

Ken O'Brien 8:32

because when they brought him in his book he had the book done and that's right,

Dr. Van de Wattering 8:38

is he still there

Ken O'Brien 8:39

No, he moved out to San Francisco to write the great American novel and is still living on the faultline.

Dr. Van de Wattering 8:44

One of those

Ken O'Brien 8:46

When you first saw the campus, what were your impressions of the campus?

Dr. Van de Wattering 8:57

Lee Parsons picked me up at the hotel. I had been assigned to it to as I had arrived (?) we drove out to Brockport along 31 and its some of these reactions are kind of strange. It seemed fairly well a fairly well developed community all the way from Rochester out to Brockport. But Remember I was coming from Montana. Where you het five miles out of town in Montana. You won't see a car for half an hour.

Ken O'Brien 9:31

I understand

Dr. Van de Wattering 9:32

so that many houses in a row I've come to learn that it's fairly rural. But it didn't seem that way to me, coming from Montana the campus, I thought was crazy because it was divided by the railroad tracks. I was a little I had known it was on the banks of the canal and I had a real

romantic notion about how that must appear you know what a beautiful opportunity to develop a park like setting the where the buildings facing the canal and. So I had

Ken O'Brien 10:13

So they had been wired in the Missouri flowing through

Dr. Van de Wetering 10:16

Yeah, I had romanticized that y'know what the whole thing must look like you may remember when I came the redevelopment of the village had taken place,

Ken O'Brien 10:26

right

Dr. Van de Wetering 10:26

And it was blown up real good they've done a lot with it since. So I was a little shocked and I remember I was coming in just to look and explore and coming, not any sense of obligation one way or another. So I didn't feel very passionate about any of these things. I was just looking I was housed in a motel, the only motel in town I think a successive One or two nights I remember calling Maxine and telling her what a miserable little motel I'm in assigned to

Ken O'Brien 11:10

we I don't think we do that anymore. We keep them in Rochester.

Dr. Van de Wetering 11:13

Oh, yeah, absolutely. The campus was not very attractive. It was much larger than the campus I had been on about twice the size of the campus I had been on I don't have much more to say about that I kind of liked the idea of moving east

Ken O'Brien 11:43

when you first came out you had been given some reams of paper. That's (Unintelligible).

Dr. Van de Wattering 11:50

Oh I Oh oh, yes, I certainly was

Ken O'Brien 11:52

And you had it

very well prepared search. They really gave me a lot of information so you had an idea of what you were going to find.

Well I read that the broken mug art and it impressed me much less than it impressed everybody (unintelligible) to me it looked like a challenge it the school that's had some trouble and of course I had Joe joe what did I call him Kaufman Joe Kaufman I said I talked to Joe and he told me a little about the trouble I guess he had been out here he had been selected I think to be at the campus before before Al's future was fully determined, as he participated in Al's decision I think so he was very candid I think about the problems he had seen and made a very thorough investigation. I gained probably a better insight into the place I was fine before I got here than most candidates did

me, I imagined I was that there would be a whole backdoor series of impressions very firmly based in the reality of our the campus in 81.

Dr. Van de Wattering 13:21

Now, he did have a lot of good things to say. The campus as I recall that made alotta difference to me. I had a lot of respect for him. (unintelligible) A few years ago, he finally retired

Ken O'Brien 13:36

when you interviewed, was there also a SUNY central interview?

Dr. Van de Wattering 13:41

Not the first time but I was here twice. I first came alone. And then I came back with Maxine when I was a finalist. And when of the that first search the interview was held at the Morgan Annie and we had lunch in Spencerport so nobody would see me. It was all very secret. Glenn sort of drove me around campus. Making sure nobody looked at me I guess. Was one of those

really crummy little state cars. But when I came when I came back a finalist and it was probably a very public return it was the last three people at that we were the last three were two different (?). And then I did go to Albany and was interviewed by Cliff (unintelligible) but the representative from the chancellor's office as always is the first interview and second interview

Ken O'Brien 14:59

Did you learn anything More about the campus in in Albany, find anything

Dr. Van de Wattering 15:03

Not a thing Not a thing I learned absolutely nothing from Cliff about the college. We had a very good exchange. I liked him very much. I was really very interested in learning about him. I knew far more and cared about him possibly at that point. And I like to him very much and of course I was very impressed (unintelligible) back then

Ken O'Brien 15:32

(unintelligible) ok to sum up to sum up for 1981. One way of doing it is that the campus is in deep trouble and you know it the broken mug article has already appeared. You've read it. Your consultant friend has given you all the inside dopes on the campus. The college is in the east, you're in the West, and it's covered by a constant cloud of dark stuff from November through April.

Dr. Van de Wattering 16:04

Don't forget that I came from Seattle.

Ken O'Brien 16:08

Haha. Okay,

Dr. Van de Wattering 16:10

Seattle more rain than Rochester. In fact when I was first here the first speech I gave to the Rochester Rotary Club. I told them I was the only person they'd ever meet. That came to Rochester because it had more sunshine than the place I'd grown up.

Ken O'Brien 16:26

So why'd you come John?

Dr. Van de Wetering 16:27

I wanted the job once Maxine and I decided we could handle commuting (unintelligible) Then coming East was no problem. I liked the idea of very much of being an hour away from Washington DC. I had spent five years with the president in my fantasies and now (unintelligible) to the Washington buildings (?).

Ken O'Brien 16:48

Sure,

Dr. Van de Wetering 16:49

and I went to Washington fairly often during that five year period. Here I could go down in the morning and be back in noon and New York City in the same day. I That's an enormous advantage. I love that. (unintelligible) It was exquisite in the northeast To come out

Ken O'Brien 17:08

Good place you're here.

Dr. Van de Wetering 17:14

So it was a challenge. It was a challenge and remember something else I wish I hadn't said it but this is very important I was coming out of a Montana system into the SUNY system. You thought you were poor and in trouble. I want to tell you next to Montana, you were rich. And all that changed and it succeeded in a year (?). But the relative wealth of the SUNY system as compared to what I had experienced in Montana was dramatic.

Ken O'Brien 17:46

Yeah, I I know California, on certain levels is funded very well and has been traditionally but on other levels even California has been pinching pennies for a long period of time. And for some reason, people in SUNY have never been able to look over the borders and really see what's happening in Massachusetts or in Pennsylvania and state colleges, public state colleges and draw appropriate comparisons.

Dr. Van de Wattering 18:15

Yeah, exactly. I used to try to do that in a general way. I was very careful while in public forums, not to draw comparisons that may Brockport look good. Brockport had hurt too much. That there was no way I could have said it to the faculty. You should see how (unintelligible).

Ken O'Brien 18:36

August 1981, you've arrived. The college is funded for a certain number of positions, more than the current the previous year's enrollment justified. And you now learn that the new freshmen class and transfer class is even smaller than anyone had ever told you. Is that correct?

Dr. Van de Wattering 18:52

Oh, yes.

Ken O'Brien 18:53

Oh, yes.

Dr. Van de Wattering 18:54

That was a crucial moment. I got here and second week, I was here I got a call from Harriet Spindler. Remember Harriet?

Ken O'Brien 19:04

Yeah,

Dr. Van de Wattering 19:04

she worked the Financial Officer as an assistant.

Ken O'Brien 19:07

Right.

Dr. Van de Wetering 19:07

Harriet said we think you oughtta come down. So he and bill Anslow introduced me to the realities of what was going to happen. I had In the course of interviews, I had learned that Brockport had been cushioned dramatically in it declines with the support of the system I met Harry and bill for the first time that day and they laid out the numbers in great detail to me as to what was going to happen and when I walked out of there, I knew for certain that we were having a retrenchment there was no question. I thought that we were going to have to make some very dramatic cuts. But only then was there No, no doubt anymore that we were in retrenchment

Ken O'Brien 20:00

I guess that's one of the questions I had. That's the first time you Really?

Dr. Van de Wetering 20:05

Yeah Then I really appreciated.

Ken O'Brien 20:06

You're briefed by central administration about the numbers.

Dr. Van de Wetering 20:09

Yeah. Yeah then I really had a. For Sure. Then I came home and started planning

Ken O'Brien 20:21

Now, when they laid out the numbers, did they lay out the numbers that they thought were gonna have to be cut the levels at which it would eventually?

Dr. Van de Wetering 20:30

well (unintelligible)

Ken O'Brien 20:34

I understand but your memory john

Dr. Van de Wattering 20:36

Yeah well the numbers they gave me were far fewer than the numbers I thought we needed to test as you may recall, I talked to the faculty when we found everything out that we were going to cut more deeply because we had to redistribute as well my plan was my intention was, to cut deeply not necessarily we would create a cooler line (?). Just as they'd be reassigned (unintelligible).

Ken O'Brien 21:03

Right

Dr. Van de Wattering 21:03

One of the problems was that Brockport had tacked people all over the place. People never really lost an administrative (unintelligible) at Brockport that got put somewhere. That was obvious very quickly and the need to be talking about the size and structure of the administration was overwhelming even before I (unintelligible). So, I'm wandering right now,

Ken O'Brien 21:34

No, go ahead

Dr. Van de Wattering 21:35

Direct, direct enough, but that's really why especially being the faculty I was going to be sure and cut the administration before I came to the faculty. Anyway,

Ken O'Brien 21:51

I going back over the paper trail. I realized that the time between the announcement of the administrative reorganization and then the the kind of the faculty was much shorter than I had remembered.

Dr. Van de Wattering 22:08

Oh it went fast

Ken O'Brien 22:09

Yeah, yeah.

Dr. Van de Wattering 22:14

(unintelligible) Was These clothes was different from them I said these clothes (unintelligible) (?).

Ken O'Brien 22:25

Right out of the gate.

Dr. Van de Wattering 22:26

Oh yeah within the first couple of weeks

Ken O'Brien 22:28

right you're here in August and September it's

Dr. Van de Wattering 22:31

An actual thing so but the context is that the money had gone ahead and dried up so that was a very unpleasant day very but the the other people Dick Cary (unintelligible) was back by contract at Brockport there was something and I'm sure that (unintelligible) I forget exactly what to they were saying off the campus. The assemblymen concluded she was only going to be able to get money (unintelligible) rank (unintelligible). Rank the economies (?).

Ken O'Brien 23:21

Oh, ah, oh, yes, he was defeated while I was away.

Dr. Van de Wattering 23:28

Is that right?

Ken O'Brien 23:29

Yeah, one of my and I was stunned. I couldn't believe it actually happened.

Dr. Van de Wattering 23:34

He started stirring up the pot a lot that Cary's contracts in the college and the fact that it was full of corruption. So I did what I had become comfortable doing in Montana. I thought my interest is very clear (?) doesn't understand what's going on here so I get the call he said well listen to Terrence and chop ahead and do it at 11:30.

Ken O'Brien 23:56

You should tell your ambassador to switch it.

Dr. Van de Wattering 23:58

Yes, that's right

Ken O'Brien 23:59

yes, yeah. I read it, it'll come.

Dr. Van de Wattering 24:04

He wouldn't talk to me.

Ken O'Brien 24:06

He refused to talk to you?

Dr. Van de Wattering 24:09

He refused to talk to me, first time in my life in an interview

Ken O'Brien 24:13

Call from the Brockport president.

Dr. Van de Wattering 24:15

Yeah really. Those first weeks were pretty hard. And I was trying to estimate also what changes in the administration I had to make in terms of people who were there

Ken O'Brien 24:37

without getting into personalities? What is it like to hit a campus from your experience your work and be surrounded by strangers, some of whom you have trust and in particular with a regard all of whom, you have to trust to some degree or another immediately.

Dr. Van de Wetering 24:57

That's an awfully good question. That's an awfully good question. It was Very, very difficult from because you're trying to sort out personalities and make evaluations every time you need something. So you can sit down and form (?) very very hard to do. But in terms of my own staff, you can do you can do those things fairly quickly. I made a couple of judgments of my vice presidents early on, I mean, had gone (?) all of them right away. In fact, I will be very candid with you And then maybe we should turn it off. And then we need to turn that off for us?

Ken O'Brien 25:37

It's fine with me one of your first steps within the committee on the allocation of resources? And Blue Ribbon group as I looked at it, and actually, I want to congratulate you on that. As I looked at that, in this last couple of weeks, it's a very distinguished group you were able to pull together in your first month. You really had the right name. What did you hope would really emerge from the process. And and in doing it the next question. There were six specific questions you asked of that group. And as I looked at them, they were very, very precise in what you seem to be asking for, you seem to be asking them to really make some evaluative judgments about what was most important, how to go about the process. That's not what came out of that committee.

Dr. Van de Wetering 26:33

No that's right they came up and (unintelligible) Really. I feel very, very good about the working committee.

Ken O'Brien 26:44

Okay.

Dr. Van de Wetering 26:44

I think the recommendations for a (unintelligible) were right on target, and I used it as a model around the country. To So public forums, dealing with problems in the transforming using that as a model of the way to approach. I think it worked very well here. Certainly the most painful I've ever experienced But We were so damn lucky to have a union at that time and I wish us that now

Ken O'Brien 27:17

Martin

Dr. Van de Wetering 27:17

Martin Martin was so easy to work with. And understood from the beginning that if there was a role of the Union to play, it would be a very positive role. So when we met with a group of faculty from a specific department and laid out the plan for that department and the main people who were going to leave, we left and then Dennis came in. And (unintelligible) set up important steps. The union always protested everyone who wanted retrenchments and they made them more of you refused to And particularly But we did our part in all of it

Ken O'Brien 28:06

I know I know. In retrospect would you do anything differently on this issue? I'm not asking. Okay, this is not names and departments

Dr. Van de Wetering 28:21

Oh sure

Ken O'Brien 28:22

but the process

Dr. Van de Wetering 28:24

Now as a process I don't know how I how we could have done it any better and I feel very good about the process I could (unintelligible) about the process It was a great bunch of people and I can who can say The report I think was generally well accepted by the campus but then the campus did something that I was very proud of them doing. The faculty senate faculty staff senate asked for a modification in the guidelines asking for greater attention being paid to quality and that would be accepted by everybody and would only be part of the evaluating process

Ken O'Brien 29:13

I for the record will say something personal going through the paper trail. It takes one's breath away to see the name Kenneth O'Brien not only on the 1976 list but also on the 1982 list in one of the earlier drafts and I am absolutely certain this played no role in the final decisions but I want to thank you for a career

Dr. Van de Wattering 29:48

yeah (unintelligible)

Ken O'Brien 29:51

yes they had to, I can imagine.

Dr. Van de Wattering 29:56

Each Position also had to be cleared through Albany for the final (unintelligible)

Ken O'Brien 30:04

And ultimately numbers aside, it had to come down to some qualitative judgments and some gut feelings that

Dr. Van de Wattering 30:09

absolutely no question about it we needed to roughly the (unintelligible) 50 positions we got 50 positions. We had designated a certain number of them for reallocation there were also plenty of reallocation positions in (unintelligible)

Ken O'Brien 30:27

Yeah I know.

Dr. Van de Wattering 30:32

And from then it was budget crunch after budget crunch after budget crunch

Ken O'Brien 30:37

that sort of gets us to question nine. And that is that not so much regrets in terms of process or would you do anything differently in terms of process, but in retrospect, do you think you should have cut deeper? I don't. But

Dr. Van de Wetering 30:53

no, I'll tell you. I don't either

Ken O'Brien 30:55

Okay.

Dr. Van de Wetering 30:56

No way one of the we formatively found devices for preserving positions that we didn't have available to us in the early 80s. What happened by delaying further cuts at that point was that the success of the successive years staged the reduction in a way that it wouldn't have been staged if we'd take them initially. I remember a couple of interesting things. We cut out a bunch of programs and that had an impact on the whole business had an impact on enrollment. enrollment had one of the biggest drops in the next year, it was inevitable if you own that it was going to go down further following retrenchment. There's a magic point breaking point where you really have lost it, it's gonna give you a real spiral down if you take too many out at once. And that's happened for the rest of the year (unintelligible) I think we keep going to go down a bad mistake.

Ken O'Brien 31:55

Okay. That that would have just exaggerated the downturn in enrollment?

Dr. Van de Wetering 32:01

Yeah.

Ken O'Brien 32:08

I think everybody on the campus at the time accepted the fact that cuts had to be made. I mean, we knew we had been living on borrowed time, if anybody ever picked their head up out of the sand, and thought about it in any kind of way.

Dr. Van de Wattering 32:24

So that was one of the things that maybe made it made it work frankly, that the campus really understood the need for it

Ken O'Brien 32:29

Yeah. As a citizen of the campus. I think that that experience was the single most important experience in the campus' recent history.

Dr. Van de Wattering 32:48

Yeah, when I was thinking about your coming down, I tried to think back to when in fact, there was no longer a great impact as a result of retrenchment. I would think that it came

Ken O'Brien 33:00

Probably is coming right now as you get large numbers of new people. And I think the litmus test on that was 1996 when something else was threatened Lynn stood up, and basically was slain with lots of arrows, and maybe it was 92. I forget which date but there was some years in the 90s. Lynn's in the Senate I. We went back and looked at the 82 report. And

Dr. Van de Wattering 33:26

Oh we just cut it off and talked about revising it.

Ken O'Brien 33:30

Yeah, but but there was a real need out there. There was a budget crunch that was coming down

Dr. Van de Wattering 33:35

I'd really have to go back and look

Ken O'Brien 33:36

yeah, I would too I'm not sure exactly which date it was, but but this was over 10 years after the retrenchment and the wound was still there. I mean, you know, that's when I realized how raw it was.

Dr. Van de Wetering 33:48

Oh, no question. The wound is deep? You should have seen my mail. Hate mail really vicious, nasty hate mail.

Ken O'Brien 33:58

Threatening you mean, really?

Dr. Van de Wetering 34:00

Awful stuff

Ken O'Brien 34:02

Did you have any sense that that that scar would be as long lasting as it was? I did.

Dr. Van de Wetering 34:09

I don't think I really no I certainly have a sense that it'd last that long, no. But I don't think I ever dealt with anybody on campus, including the interviewees for my successor. Without telling them that I thought This was a profound impact. They had a profound impact, and would still have an impact colored regularly what went on in the campus.

Ken O'Brien 34:39

Once you got through the retrenchment, took the hit on enrollment. Start 1982 83 you're trying to build things and then lo and behold, January, you're hittin' the 77 line. Now turns out to be illusory at the 77 line, but you're still hit us with an enormous budget cut.

Dr. Van de Wetering 35:05

Right. That's right. Yeah, that was devastating. Just devastating. We were trying to do a whole bunch of things to change our image and change our reputation. And we also if you look at it over the years, we also changed the nature of our commitment as an institution. We by 90, by the end of the 80s Brockport, was far more heavily a transfer school. Far more heavily into graduate education. And far more heavily in part time students almost three pieces with a story of Brockport's recovery with it.

Ken O'Brien 35:55

That desire that

Dr. Van de Wattering 35:57

I like Legos design,

Ken O'Brien 36:00

We'll follow up on that one in a bit.

Dr. Van de Wattering 36:06

But you know, when you talk about design, I think I've said this many times when I was president when you talk about design. Design is possible only when within the context of limited limited range of choices. When one comes onto a campus as the new President, one has to look at the various possibilities for that campus. And Find its nature, and then you have to decide what needs to happen for it. And what needs to happen is going to be very limited within the context of its past experiences.

Ken O'Brien 36:47

See you're a good, you really are a cultural historian. You understand That previous experience does constrain

Dr. Van de Wattering 36:55

Yeah no question.

Ken O'Brien 36:56

You can't just create anew

Dr. Van de Wattering 36:58

I interviewed for a job once at the University of Montana, the presidency of the University of Montana about 12 years ago and I was a finalist, turned out to be one of two at the end. I was not going to be in a position to take it frankly because it didn't pay enough. I had lost money on that kind of thing. It was a momentary look at living together with Maxine again would have been terrible for her financially and just would've been terrible for her professional career,

Ken O'Brien 37:33

but not at that point in her life.

Dr. Van de Wattering 37:35

But The real the real point is that, and of course I'd interviewed. One of the things that haunted me was the fact that I had dropped football in Millings (?) and the University of Montana is a big football school. And I kept trying to explain that of course, no one who came comes to Eastern Montana was supposed to drop football. It just couldn't be done. But the fact that I had Done that was such a stupid. But I couldn't recover from it

Ken O'Brien 37:58

But you had had such good luck with the football program in Brockport and didn't want.

Dr. Van de Wattering 38:10

Yeah,

Ken O'Brien 38:11

Keith moody was one of your first appointments.

Dr. Van de Wetering 38:13

That's right. That's right. Yeah, of course. I.

Ken O'Brien 38:21

That that's a whole other issue. That I think you and I should talk about, but

Dr. Van de Wetering 38:28

He's a nice guy (unintelligible).

Ken O'Brien 38:29

He's a really a terrific athlete. Nice man.

Dr. Van de Wetering 38:36

No coach didn't have a clue.

Ken O'Brien 38:38

Not at all

Dr. Van de Wetering 38:42

But you know, in a way I was looking for reputation because he had caught a lot of attention. Including in a short amount of time. Sure didn't win any football games.

Ken O'Brien 38:54

If he had had the ability to recruit and to be able to take those kids a little bit further than than we had been before. It would've been before.

Dr. Van de Wattering 39:08

It was a gamble. We lost

Ken O'Brien 39:12

No we won a little

Dr. Van de Wattering 37:49

We had some good PR.

Ken O'Brien 39:13

Do you remember your first Golden Eagle open? It was the first month you were on campus

Dr. Van de Wattering 37:49

Oh, I can't Oh yeah. Oh mighty do I ever Oh, Lord, it was horrifying just horrifying

Ken O'Brien 37:49

your face showed it I want you to know. I was in that audience and as soon as we started

Dr. Van de Wattering 37:49

Oh Yeah. I had forgotten

Ken O'Brien 37:49

I knew some of us sitting in the audience had short tenures at the college because I was a realist but I knew the shortest was up front. You were talking before about the about the constraints of history but but really in a way that's just a mission statement, that goes to a conception of who we are, who we could be. And one of the first assignments you had, other than that staff, reallocation and resource committee was to have the faculty senate redraft the mission statement. What did you hope would come out of that? I guess what I'm really asking is what how did you see the college at that moment in time?

Dr. Van de Wetering 37:49

Well, I knew we had to have a clearly drawn mission statement of some sort. And I'm sure we (unintelligible) got it. But we certainly needed it to come out of the faculty and I think eventually we did have something pretty useful. At least I used it pretty heavily in the popular faculty, the direction, but one of the problems with it, was it reflected the politics of previous 10 years
Five or

Ken O'Brien 37:49

No, I think 10, I think, yeah.

Dr. Van de Wetering 37:49

Because at every step, each faculty group was circling the wagons. There's no way to break that down. I think it would have been wrong of me to try to break that down we needed to (unintelligible) because I just wanted to keep talking about (unintelligible) mission statements with a clear definition about who we are and what we are and who we serve. I must not even have a copy of that old mission statement anymore.

Ken O'Brien 37:49

I can send you one.

Dr. Van de Wattering 37:49

Yeah. Do will you, I wanna see it.

Ken O'Brien 37:49

Okay.

Dr. Van de Wattering 37:49

And then as (unintelligible) revised in the 90s

Ken O'Brien 37:49

if I recall, the there were four parts, I think it was made as the four part piece, and the first part, talked about the integration of the liberal arts in the profession.

Dr. Van de Wattering 37:49

Right. And that was a that was a big issue when I hit the campus.

Ken O'Brien 37:49

Sure was. Yeah. And that was the the one that you kept giving back to us. The next part talked about quality undergraduates.

Dr. Van de Wattering 37:49

No there wasn't a part that dealt with quality. I think it was partly down the list, it was a paragraph thing on quality.

Ken O'Brien 37:49

Right. the liberal arts profession is this long, that we get shorter pieces and then there was something on quality upper division and graduate program I mean, it looked as if everything was being just thrown out. And as you said, reflecting the last 10 years, both the wars, the battles and the possible bridges to the future, but not really conceding very clearly or carefully what the college could have been.

Dr. Van de Wattering 37:49

No, it didn't hold in, in a precise way. What it did do however. It was. It gave me an opportunity to pull out of it those pieces that I saw, as, in my judgment, the direction we were moving and we were Talking about and I think I had frustrated

Dr. Van de Wattering 0:00

Well anyway, Short answer to your question is that I taught then and think now that a mission statement adds some precision and very valuable sort of sophistication (?) And it becomes the responsibility of the president to help them to (unintelligible) that mission statement.

Ken O'Brien 0:19

Sometime you and I could have a conversation about that too I believe. But because I have I'm much more suspicious of the value of that kind of document. I can see if you.

Dr. Van de Wattering 0:33

Yeah, I'd like to talk to you about it

Ken O'Brien 0:34

in a business world where you're really trying to hone.

Dr. Van de Wattering 0:39

I would take the view

Ken O'Brien 0:41

but some of us will try to be so much so many things to so many different. We've got so many constituencies that then get represented in the statement.

Dr. Van de Wattering 0:49

What I think a mission statement is important even if it isn't as clear as (unintelligible). as long as it's not as ten hours less (?), as much of a faculty, and community's, view of what that mission should be

Ken O'Brien 1:05

Yeah I always had difficulty with our mission planning. I think, frankly, most Long Range Planning is nonsense, a colossal waste of time I got too involved in because I really thought I had to and some of the planning pieces we were getting were pretty good. But planning out very far is impossible in a politically volatile environment (unintelligible). I think it was more impossible during your time than almost any other. And the reason I say that is that every time you tried to plan three years out the just three years out, which is not long range planning,

Dr. Van de Wattering 1:50

right

Ken O'Brien 1:50

the financial underpinnings of any such plan disappeared.

Dr. Van de Wattering 1:54

Exactly

Ken O'Brien 1:54

I think in the last five years. Oddly enough, there has been much stability in being able to project exactly what kind of support there would be from the state at various enrollment levels. And so in this environment, I think Long Range Planning might pay greater dividends.

Dr. Van de Wattering 2:15

Well, you got to do a funding formula now.

Ken O'Brien 2:17

Right

Dr. Van de Wattering 2:18

And I tell you the formula is apparently is being followed, in a general kind of way at least

Ken O'Brien 2:22

The State hasn't had any budgetary crises that would then have the state come back and say, more

Dr. Van de Wattering 2:30

Once you think about it most (unintelligible) the economic cycle the United States. We went through reductions, at times the whole country was being reduced I mean we used to I try to make that point (unintelligible) at least that we did have a lot of countrymen came in and reduction (unintelligible). They got pretty extreme you know.

Ken O'Brien 2:53

This is not. This is a non (unintelligible). Part of what I'm coming to see. Is that the College. The College's history is a reflection of not only internal dynamics, but very real external dynamics. And that's part of the tension back and forth.

Dr. Van de Wattering 3:10

No question, no question

Ken O'Brien 3:12

As I look at the 1970s there were two external pieces that really killed your dream that was being created. One was what happened to the city economy. And so the financial piece disappeared and the other was demographics. And and they had not been able to look 5, 6, 7 years down the road and see that between 1971 and 1976 there would be a very different pool available for

Dr. Van de Wattering 3:42

that's why we built our graduate student adult school

Ken O'Brien 3:48

I know,

Dr. Van de Wattering 3:49

well, but your point's absolutely on target the other piece that isn't coming through as we talk about all this well maybe it is related is the amount of time any president spends off campus doing other things

Ken O'Brien 4:02

It does come through. This is question 14, I'm getting there.

Dr. Van de Wattering 4:06

Ok.

Ken O'Brien 4:08

And maybe and maybe part of a mirroring (?) process is for me to get a much better idea of how you spent your time because as an academic, what I see is the on campus result and and the team that has been put in place as an administration. So, speaking of the administration, by the end of the second year, you have the admission structure, which had changed and you have the personnel in place. And these would be largely the people who would be serving the college for a number of years. John McCrae, not yet but about to be appointed. He comes very quickly in the third year Bob Marcus. Maurie Kleinen, Carolyn Rankin,

Dr. Van de Wattering 4:57

who will be replaced she didn't last long

Ken O'Brien 5:00

No I know

Dr. Van de Wattering 5:03

It's a terrible thing

Ken O'Brien 5:04

But how effective was the administrative team and how effective what its structure because it seems that its structure stayed a long time

Dr. Van de Wattering 5:14

the administrative (unintelligible) Maury didn't last much longer you know, Maurie was there when did Maurie retire? He's been retired for 15 years or something like that

Ken O'Brien 5:30

he

Dr. Van de Wattering 5:26

he stayed until retirement

Ken O'Brien 5:27

yeah, but he became VP I think in.

Dr. Van de Wattering 5:30

We had Bert first

Ken O'Brien 5:31

Right you had Bert first and then Bert went to help downstate and Maurie was acting and then he became vice president but

Dr. Van de Wattering 5:40

No because, Bert came back as a vice president after he'd (unintelligible) for downstate, (unintelligible) for six months at least according to the paper Bert came back and was here for quite a while

Ken O'Brien 5:56

okay.

Dr. Van de Wattering 5:58

Before he retirement Early retirement

Ken O'Brien 6:03

But that was I thought that was by '84

Dr. Van de Wattering 6:07

The early retirement

Ken O'Brien 6:08

Yeah, I can check it you know.

Dr. Van de Wattering 6:11

Maybe you're right. But I am Bert was around seems to me a long time maybe it was '84. (unintelligible) I'll ask Maurie tomorrow (unintelligible). Well, now to your question though was how effective was it as an administrative team?

Ken O'Brien 6:32

Yeah

Dr. Van de Wattering 6:37

Well I think it was ineffective I think

Ken O'Brien 6:43

that's a very presidential answer.

Dr. Van de Wattering 6:45

Yeah. I think the team that was most effective was Tuttle and (unintelligible) by the time I left, and that was a more effective group (unintelligible)

Ken O'Brien 6:58

okay.

Dr. Van de Wattering 7:05

(unintelligible) Barbara Never really rounded out the team for you like I did. Barb was strict and she worked hard. She worked very, very hard. But I think as a team we functioned better than only Barbara there was a lot of leftover difficulties Bob Marcus worked very nicely as part of team, no question and sort did McCrae. I mean They were both fairly new people

Ken O'Brien 7:47

Bert had been there a long time.

Dr. Van de Wattering 7:51

Yeah. Well Bert Yeah he had been there quite a while,

Ken O'Brien 7:53

yeah. Yeah. Okay, I just

Dr. Van de Wattering 7:59

it's a difficult question to answer.

Ken O'Brien 8:02

Probably a bad question. I'd probably a bad question I, I wasn't really looking for personalities. Is what struck me as I looked at the paper was how very different the focus administration was in terms of the various levels than it had been in the last years. With Dr. Brown, when I spoke to Al that is the way, he indicated that one of his regrets is that he had not handled the last couple of years better, that that there were problems that really needed to be addressed, that didn't get addressed, and part of it had to do with personnel, the personnel that was there. There seemed to be a very different feel, even by the second year after that streamlining of the administration, and that's all I was trying to get at

Dr. Van de Wattering 8:53

Okay well. We we certainly worked hard at working as a team and we'd have retreats and (unintelligible) internal warfare initially (unintelligible)

Ken O'Brien 9:14

I think the exact line he has on tape is that he learned that he'll never hire anyone again named Dick.

Dr. Van de Wattering 9:20

Is that right?

Ken O'Brien 9:20

Truly Then During your interview process, I recall you saying that you really wanted to be an external president to represent the college to external constituencies that vice presidents were supposed to have the on campus responsibilities that the operational responsibility of various areas and you needed to pick people you could trust that you saw yourself much more in terms of reaching out to new groups and to representing the college in a whole variety of ways. After the stability is reached, In the mid 80s, for enrollment, and it is by the numbers it is were you able to do that, was that where you spent your time

Dr. Van de Wattering 10:10

I think to some degree I did (unintelligible) one of the one of the things that I did very indirectly and was pretty much leave the village alone and concentrate my attention in Rochester that created some tension the leadership of the village from time to time. But I think it the (unintelligible) we needed to turn towards Rochester and I'd like to think that during our years

out there we did build a reputation in town in a really effective and solid way compared with everybody that didn't.

Ken O'Brien 11:02

That leads me to the next question, could you tell us a little more specifically about the ways in which you saw the campus how you saw the campus in terms of the relationship to the Greater Rochester area.

Dr. Van de Wetering 11:20

We did a little hard to pinpoint without a lot more thought. We did a lot of things were designed to related to the community. We had our annual banquet which we got a lot of good support from. We put more and more courses downtown. Until ultimately we (unintelligible) with the fact that it's important we had (unintelligible downtown we actually we worked like the devil to get the road extended that was our initiative we were Together in the effort to extend 90.

We actually subsidized Buffett (unintelligible) was his name (unintelligible) a student I got myself involved in for more board than a rational (unintelligible) and we tried to have a press civility but that oddly there's never any trick in getting the negative press incivility. We had enough of that in the course of a few years. We also tried to do a lot of positive trust building the (unintelligible) an important step Kennedy's red fund was an important step

which is now gone.

It is gone I was going to ask about that

Ken O'Brien 12:47

It is gone.

Dr. Van de Wetering 12:48

I thought it was probably going to go

Ken O'Brien 12:50

yep

Dr. Van de Wattering 12:50

Did you notice if there were any (unintelligible) students (unintelligible)

Ken O'Brien 12:54

I saw Kevin, I think a few weeks ago in Wegmans and we had a brief chat about it.

Dr. Van de Wattering 12:54

What's he doing?

Ken O'Brien 13:00

Ah, he landed on a seat, I'm not quite sure where. But he said he was doing very well.

Dr. Van de Wattering 13:06

Good

Ken O'Brien 13:07

And he was pleased. Yes, I thought so.

Dr. Van de Wattering 13:10

Why did they close it?

Ken O'Brien 13:13

I'm not quite sure, john, I think it has something to do with an evaluation of ELC operations and exactly what they should be concentrating resources on, and

Dr. Van de Wattering 13:22

They wouldn't support anything like it, the board

Ken O'Brien 13:25

probably not.

Dr. Van de Wattering 13:27

Well, the truth the long range plan for that park was such that they couldn't accomodate (unintelligible. I'm gonna get a cup of coffee a second if you don't mind

Ken O'Brien 13:30

Not a problem. There's an issue on the campus of what you might call the built environment, the buildings, the grounds the the receptivity to human occupants. What was the condition of the Campus when when you first found it and how did you go about changing it

Dr. Van de Wattering 13:45

it was a mess.

Ken O'Brien 13:47

Oh

Dr. Van de Wattering 13:47

It was a very very bad case embarrassingly bad really and one of the most traumatic memories is the condition of the corridor in the physical education building (unintelligible). But that was the only part that we fixed up we started out right away with a beautification plan for the campus to move very, very slowly but I tell you, I feel very good about the condition of campus when I left we were in good shape I think for the most part and getting better all the time. But

Ken O'Brien 14:02

Did You pay Gary enough,

Dr. Van de Wattering 14:49

Gary, oh Gary was a gem.

Ken O'Brien 14:51

was he not

Dr. Van de Wattering 14:52

just a gem. He was wonderful. WE also had times when we were getting some money out of Albany finally the first stage of getting money out of Albany after I got there was money for roofs we had clocked a flat roof for a long time But we were also very self-consciously we were working on beautifying the campus we got signage one of the very early moves we got decent signage and I think we did (unintelligible) it's a lengthy thing that had to get done a walk to improvement, all of those things and then the last few years I think we did get money for major renovations certainly the hartwell renovations was a real biggy

Ken O'Brien 15:44

Sure was

Dr. Van de Wattering 15:45

And that's a beauty and the science building must be coming online about right now

Ken O'Brien 15:50

Ah, I think it'll be coming on in at the end of the semester.

Dr. Van de Wattering 15:54

Anyway, we were making good strides as we could making campus quite attractive. and Last time I was up there I think it's getting better and better all the time I was really delighted to see it. I love the bridge.

Ken O'Brien 16:05

So do I.

Dr. Van de Wattering 16:05

(Unintelligible) I feel very personal about that because I selected the (unintelligible) and naturally with all the leftovers from other bridges that were possible through the construction fund was that really wonderful work would come in very supportive of everything we wanted They originally gave us a plan I'm just rambling now

Ken O'Brien 16:30

Go ahead

Dr. Van de Wattering 16:30

They originally gave us a plan to run a narrow open bridge that was you know, literally a narrow replacement of what it had been. We insisted that we really had to cover it and we moved the argument that it couldn't be that narrow and uncovered had to be narrow and covered the idea worked and we went with it except for the fact that it would be very high if it became narrow the bridge and then the design became (unintelligible)

Ken O'Brien 17:03

One of the one of the pieces I never knew until I started doing the research is that in your first year, you met with CFDA, a group of CFDA workers. And they raised the issue of the bridge and how unsafe it was during winter. And I was just chuckling to myself and said how long from that moment it took my friend Bruce to take a header and I had no idea how many other people ended up slipping on that, that thing.

Dr. Van de Wattering 17:32

It was a death trap

Ken O'Brien 17:33

It was a deathtrap it really was waiting for it to happen.

Dr. Van de Wattering 17:36

And knowing that it was going to (unintelligible) bridge to Tuttle

Ken O'Brien 17:41

Tuttle? Good for them

Dr. Van de Wattering 17:44

And to an outside corridor when they finally found the fact that Tuttle had a corridor cut out of it when it was originally built.

Ken O'Brien 17:53

That'll be nice. So you spent a lot of time, energy, effort And,

Dr. Van de Wattering 18:01

(Unintelligible)

Ken O'Brien 18:01

and it paid off.

Dr. Van de Wattering 18:03

I'd like to think so

Ken O'Brien 18:04

Yep. And you've still got a campus that's divided by a railroad.

Dr. Van de Wattering 18:08

Yeah. the train didn't come back around.

Ken O'Brien 18:10

That's true.

Dr. Van de Wattering 18:11

We did talk about we talked about several possibilities we talked one time about getting that would a buzz car do you know what a buzz car is. a single car that has an engine and it has controls at either end

Ken O'Brien 18:26

Okay, we're letting it in and out of Rochester

Dr. Van de Wattering 18:28

Yeah and that became feasible until they terminated the line (unintelligible) into Rochester. You know they had rigged out all that track and left a distance from our campus I had hoped (unintelligible) yeah turn it off

Ken O'Brien 18:50

Okay. In the years just before you arrived, the college underwent the process of revising its general education program and Using in some ways that actually the ultimate college program as a model were you satisfied with what emerged, when you got there and what would you have changed if you could have

Dr. Van de Wattering 19:11

well I was very happy with the general education requirement really and I got (unintelligible) with the faculty.

Ken O'Brien 19:19

I Heard the first part, which is why I'm asking the second.

Dr. Van de Wattering 19:25

I always thought when it came to Hartwell (?) the value of general education experience was (unintelligible) the place of the politics in higher education were a very conservative bunch of people,

Ken O'Brien 19:43

sure does.

Dr. Van de Wattering 19:44

But I still think they're fairly correct in that to have particularly for freshmen (unintelligible) an intellectual experience for the first time Now (unintelligible)

Ken O'Brien 20:03

Yep, they ran, ran the theme through the what was the DLE became the APS, the general education advisement seminar tried to give each of each year we would we identified a theme.

Dr. Van de Wattering 20:27

Actually you know The campus the faculty was doing some really fascinating experimenting that was very very good but of course there was the general education requirement. I thought it (unintelligible) should have been more focused, than (unintelligible) of that kind of intellectual experience and I did get a harp on that and suggested the faculty (unintelligible) I never argued it would ever happen without, you did have to plan it and (unintelligible) and I never did So,

Ken O'Brien 21:05

a lot about 1983 84 was we begin to get a discussion of what we can call mid tech. How did that fit into your vision of the college's curriculum? I ask that thinking that it did, actually. This is this is not meant as a toughy

Dr. Van de Wattering 21:27

no I know you know I thought it would begin slowly in steps everybody was talking about high tech high you know we're in a high tech community, we were not able to be a high tech institution (unintelligible) talk about becoming a high institution. So I grabbed at this (unintelligible) as a mesh between these appropriate (unintelligible)

Ken O'Brien 21:51

There's also seems to be a way of, again building a bridge between into the professions and more traditional with a lot (?)

Dr. Van de Wattering 22:02

Absolutely, and the first engineering

Ken O'Brien 22:02

I was reading some of your presentations to the faculty. I was reminded once again of how often you talked about your value of Liberal Arts.

Dr. Van de Wetering 22:33

Yes. Yes. I did that for tradition

Ken O'Brien 22:37

I know.

Dr. Van de Wetering 22:38

In fact I tried always in those speeches to include considerations about the heart of our endeavor. I tried also to try to provide some national context of where we were and what we were doing in those speeches that was part of my involvement I was very much involved in Washington (unintelligible) fund on education and (unintelligible)

Ken O'Brien 23:21

Did those involvements. Just to follow that up? In retrospective? Did those involvements give you a broader framework of understanding of what we were doing or capable of doing?

Dr. Van de Wetering 23:37

Without question? Yeah, Without question, I served on two commissions for APE for example, that kept me really up to date on what was going on to Washington at the national level with regard to higher education in fact we met representatives. in the education (unintelligible) Reagan administration And I said I was not a more than asked to (?) and from a slightly different perspective they were doing fewer kinds of things. Border Astir gave me an opportunity to not only help direct policy in a very minor way, but to find spots for Brockport in then those broad national policies and I think let me be very quick to find an example quickly, because I think that that did work to the advantage of the college in the years I was there

Ken O'Brien 24:33

I think anything he says the president alive and alert works to the advantage of the college. I'm quite curious about that, John. I mean, I'm that that came off, more glibly than I actually meant it. I think administration can be stultifying in terms of day to day sameness of problem after problem after problem with discrete solutions. Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. And

Dr. Van de Wetering 25:01

That's yeah that's what worried about teaching is I wanted to make sure I didn't let them just become a recital of the mechanics of our problems and the solutions to those problems.

Ken O'Brien 25:10

And anything that takes you beyond that anything that gets you to think, in broader terms about public higher education, about education itself, about learning, I think helps with you a lot. By the end of the 1980s, midtech, was no longer with us. It may have been in the curriculum, but it was no longer part of our lexicon. Would you talk a little bit about the way in which it has been replaced by an emphasis on what we might call multicultural curriculum, broadly defined multicultural issues, and your views on that very complicated set of pieces that grow out of the heritage of centuries of racism and sexism.

No no That's a good question. And I think a terribly important question because my last year in particular I did have some big issues with affirmative action in most cultural universities (?) in fact that's what I was doing in Washington the year I spent (unintelligible) by the by this time we had stabilized the enrollment we were in a relatively strong position with in SUNY you know in terms of our enrollment we had redirected it in a way we have already talked about but our success on affirmative action was pretty limited both in terms of the current faculty and staff it was representative in terms of the student body was sufficiently representative, we had enough minority students so that we could always have trouble and often did and I saw surely that part of the population should be a very crucial part of our mission out in Rochester most of our minority students came from Rochester area came from downstate but not many of them too far away for them. I believe fervently in the way in which that emphasis on multicultural curriculum came to take that last year international as well as multiracial multinational and I think we found the right to the right tune (?) in the last few years in terms of an Expansion of our own (unintelligible) involvement with an effort to what became what has become national now, globalizing our campus. I don't think we say globalizing I don't know where your Globalization is now

Shrinking

Dr. Van de Wattering 27:58

I think that was I'm afraid that it was inevitable so in any case. I saw a very commitment to making all that happen as much as possible our international business program helped that whole argument (unintelligible) because it fit into the cultural diversity argument. I believe in cultural diversity at the same time that I believe in affirmative action we didn't talk, we talked affirmative action for a couple years ago then we stopped that language. Didn't talk nearly (unintelligible) multicultural But affirmative action was pretty was a lot of it was all about and it became something to talk about more and more as we had problems on campus. If you go back and look at my speeches, I will bet that You can find a increased emphasis on multi-culturalism corresponding pretty closely with such things as the (unintelligible) campaign. Do you remember (unintelligible) campaign?

Ken O'Brien 29:13

Yeah I do

Dr. Van de Wattering 29:15

That was a bad bad piece (?)

Ken O'Brien 29:16

I'd like to read a chapter on it

Dr. Van de Wattering 29:18

Yeah it'd be a good chapter

Ken O'Brien 29:19

Yeah, I won't, but I'd like to.

Dr. Van de Wattering 29:21

Yeah Yeah, it'd be a good article for you.

Ken O'Brien 29:23

I think that was a disaster.

Dr. Van de Wattering 29:26

Oh there was no question it was a disaster.

Ken O'Brien 29:32

And I'm not blaming

Dr. Van de Wattering 29:33

No, that's. I don't take much blame for it.

Ken O'Brien 29:36

No I don't think you should. I don't think you should.

Dr. Van de Wattering 29:40

My dilemma in that case What you'd be interested in is My personal problems with that perhaps because they put me on (unintelligible) campus because out of that the black faculty and staff were around in certain ways and demanded to have a meeting with me it was Absolutely relentless they were tough I was also trying to defend the right of free speech and the right of (unintelligible) of the campus to make decisions about who came onto the campus without my interfering even though I editorialized it. So I was between a rock and a hard place I mean really, really awkward. You know meetings went on for long after the issue had settled periodically, the Black faculty came round again circle the wagons and come at me asking for more and more. I'd catch 'em to (unintelligible) Could be pretty lonely sessions. No that's enough, that's enough.

Ken O'Brien 30:55

There was talk on campus that seemed and your attributed as being the real source in the mid to late 80s, as desiring to wanting to turn the campus into something unique (unintelligible) an upper division, Graduate Center, almost forsaking all lower division students. Would you talk a little bit about that?

Dr. Van de Wattering 31:19

Sure. No, I never really wanted to do that.

Ken O'Brien 31:24

It's out there (unintelligible)

Dr. Van de Wattering 31:30

There were a number of them established around the country in the late 60s, early 70s. They have been dead and buried for a long time I don't think any of them are viable anymore. (unintelligible) was the last to go. I'm pretty sure that's gone now too but I did attempt to emphasize graduate education and upper division work because that spoke to a SUNY population that was not shrinking. And that Really sets the balance I was looking for the direction for Brockport and that's The direction Brockport moved and it worked So I, you know I think Brockport wound up right where I had hoped it in terms of distribution of undergraduate, graduate, transfers (unintelligible)

Ken O'Brien 32:24

and that's sort of the next question that we've already talked about and you've already answered in terms of the enrollment mix and how that has changed over the years. You notice that that what I'm trying to do today is lead you through to about the early 90s late 80s. That seemed to be a real good period. We became an enormous problem, and much of the first 5, 7, 8 years really was dedicated to solving those immediate problems and what happened in the aftermath. And then our Next conversation will take it up from there.

Dr. Van de Wattering 33:01

Good

Ken O'Brien 33:03

That

Dr. Van de Wattering 33:04

That's what (unintelligible) it will be the last seven or eight years

Ken O'Brien 33:09

Yeah, roughly half.

Dr. Van de Wattering 33:10

Yeah.

Ken O'Brien 33:11

And you you can break it any way you want and one one of the things I'd like to think I'd like you to think about is how you would break the administration how you would break that period of 16 years in terms. I think a story (unintelligible) important

Dr. Van de Wattering 33:26

It is you're right and I was thinking about that after you called me this week. And I'm not quite sure how I'd break it because those first years were by far the most dramatic the last years but we shouldn't talk about we'll talk about we'll talk about it later But those last years were so tied up with policy changes since the system (unintelligible) that and trying to keep Brockport placed right in that system-wide change. That it overrides really the individual campus machinations There are some things that we will talk about that we need to talk about and certainly we (unintelligible) the balance between faculty size and you know enrollment the whole question of workload we need to talk about the IFR formula that you exploited All of those things they really items for the 90s

Ken O'Brien 34:30

They don't appear today.

Dr. Van de Wattering 34:31

No

Ken O'Brien 34:37

But One thing I think that is (unintelligible) in both the 80s and 90s, but it was particularly there in the 1980s as I went back and looked again at your conversations with us and other materials and that's the access quality continuum

Dr. Van de Wetering 34:59

that was the issue that ran through all the years I was there

Ken O'Brien 35:03

1986. You told us I believe that the future belongs to institutions that stress quality. At the same time, one must be careful quality has too often been an ashtray of exclusion and translates in declaims of higher (unintelligible) standards achieved merely through higher income (unintelligible). And this is free flowing john

Dr. Van de Wetering 35:23

I don't remember the context of what was going on with the campus that led me to say that then as opposed to some other time, but I certainly believe it to believe it but I was probably building a case for balance in those two issues because it's different terribly (unintelligible) if SUNY just started to become more exclusive. You'd again cut out minority students and low income students and their (unintelligible) students. That's what, we talked about that So many times over the years. That's what so many

Ken O'Brien 35:58

many of the faculty thought that would be a good thing

Dr. Van de Wetering 35:59

That's what they wanted and that's what I kept trying to explain about Brockport. I didn't want that for Brockport even though I don't have a great many other (unintelligible) you may be moving more directly in that direction now than you did not only 'may' I'm sure you are moving more in that direction now than when I was there certainly I would not have supported any move that began to reduce our numbers of minority students We did a number of things that I think were very important the transition certainly was one of them Some of you put your hearts into that program year after year.

Ken O'Brien 36:43

I know

Dr. Van de Wetering 36:45

And it worked it really worked it was exciting to see that work you know that's the kind of thing that's In my mind, the link separating from the other SUNY schools from a Geneseo the easiest thing in the world to do I say this over and over again. But I believe it's so fervently the easiest thing to do is to teach a (unintelligible) you know you walk in and throw a topic out and sit back and enjoy the conversation. That's not true at Brockport teaching's hard work it's really hard work. because you're dealing with People who've never in their lives successfully coped with an intellectual issue you power through though demand that out of them then it can slide through a public school structure And never had that kind of intellectual challenge it's you guys down in the trenches are constantly dealing with a new group of students who are going to have that experience for the first time. That's terribly hard work but that's what Brockport is all about which is you know it's the right thing to be doing at the undergraduate level in my mind.

Ken O'Brien 37:57

My argument always even if the cost is the highest attrition rate.

Dr. Van de Wetering 38:02

Oh, sure. One of the things that angered me very much in those last years was the fact that we were getting trapped by arguments being made around the country as well as in SUNY, that attrition became a measure of quality, low attrition, high quality. Well, of course, you get a kid from an upper middle class family with a right nice school, and the attrition rate disappears in Zippo. But you bring in a great (?) bunch of kids who I will never forget interviewing a student in my office in my office one time was flunking out and she came in and she was in tears I said don't feel (unintelligible) go back go home. she I've been to Westchester Community College that she had Go home and spend a year or two at community college and then you'll be ready to come back to Brockport She then explained to me why I didn't understand but she was never going to be able to come back because her family was so dysfunctional and under such hard times economically that I would be putting her back into an environment that would make it impossible for her to have a college education. We solved her problem we got her placed with MCC when (unintelligible) only you can't do that ten thousand or eight thousand students if you have once in a while you run across somebody who needs help was wrong to think that Brockport should ever cut EST (unintelligible) out of the equation in my mind I feel strongly that that student can be a growing student what I used to argue all the time that we need to find a cut point between where a student will succeed and a student that will fail and where they where there's a chance to succeed we need to give him that chance (unintelligible) we'd begin to do all that with special ed students I think better than we had at first Barnes got better at it we'd begun to interview students and measure their capacity and ambition to succeed (unintelligible) before we put them into that program we had overenrollment in that program anyway I'm rambling now

Ken O'Brien 40:34

No, I think, I think not. I think that that one of the great ironies of this college and its history is that the two presidents who have led it through most of the modern period both have a real fire in the bellies For the same issues

Dr. Van de Wattering 41:02

Is that right that's interesting

Ken O'Brien 41:04

what has been forgotten about al Brown is he came directly from the Equal Opportunity Program. The OEO in Michigan to Brockport.

Dr. Van de Wattering 41:15

Oh, he did I didn't know that

Ken O'Brien 41:17

I know, he was the head of the OEO there.

Dr. Van de Wattering 41:19

Again, I didn't know that.

Ken O'Brien 41:21

So when al talked about building a public college, when he talked about the importance of the Rochester area, the New York area, about serving populations who had traditionally been denied and disfranchised, he used the same language and the same sensitivities that you held.

Dr. Van de Wattering 41:41

That's really interesting, yeah.

Ken O'Brien 41:43

It really is

Dr. Van de Wattering 41:43

Yeah it is, I think

Ken O'Brien 41:45

And it is one of the continuities that's gonna underlay at least part of the book. Because it's defines, to a large extent it defines what the college has been. Willing to serve how it has conceived of such service

Dr. Van de Wattering 42:03

Yeah. That's interestin, really interesting.

Ken O'Brien 42:08

Okay, we're dealing with a 1980's your greatest achievement

Dr. Van de Wattering 42:13

Well, my running for public office?

Ken O'Brien 42:14

No, no, no

Dr. Van de Wattering 42:15

I shouldn't've I have to tell you, I think that's a better question for you to answer (unintelligible) has said that the failures are best just by others,

Ken O'Brien 42:25

what are you most proud of? And you do have some pride.

Dr. Van de Wattering 42:30

Oh, sure, sure. what am I most proud of. Oh I You know, it's very hard to rank order those things about which one is proud. I'm certainly proud that we came through a the retrenchment successfully and ultimately turned around the enrollment decline. I suppose if there's any one thing that sticks out in the 80s that's it

Ken O'Brien 42:54

Okay.

Dr. Van de Wattering 42:56

And

Ken O'Brien 42:56

And what would you do over what would you like to have the opportunity to do again?

well, I'm not sure I wanna tell you

Dr. Van de Wattering 43:06

Oh Okay