

Interview with Charles Graham

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Central Minnesota Historical Oral History Collection

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Interview by David Overy

Overy ([00:00:03](#)):

Dr. Graham, could we begin by you giving us some biographical information? Something about your family and educational background and so forth.

Graham ([00:00:12](#)):

Well, I grew up in north central Illinois. My father was a schoolteacher, and I went to a high school in LaSalle, Illinois. And took one year of junior college there. It was a junior college attached to the high school. And then transferred to the University of Illinois, and did all the rest of my work through the PhD and Illinois. Finished in-- Well, I left Illinois in 1953. I finally got my degree in '55. Then, my first job was in Washington, D.C. I took a job with the, I took what was then called the Junior Management Assistant Exam. And took a job with the Navy Department as a management intern. And worked there in the Bureau of Ships for a year. Well, I went through the internship, which was perhaps, six or eight months. And then took a job in the Bureau of Ships and stayed there for another-- Well, actually less than a year. I was in Washington about a year and a half, and got an offer of a teaching job in what was then Wisconsin State College, River Falls. Went there and stayed there nine years, with a year and a half out to go back to Washington to work as a legislative assistant to Senator William Proxmire. And then, in 1963, went to Wisconsin State University, Whitewater as the first dean of the

School of Local Arts and Sciences. Was there for eight years, and then came to St. Cloud in 1971.

Overy ([00:02:14](#)):

What was the approximate size of St. Cloud State when you came here?

Graham ([00:02:19](#)):

I think it was about 11,000, 10 something, or 11,000. Which is where it actually stayed for most of the time it was here. We had one period of enrollment downturn in the early 1970s. And then after that, the enrollment came back. And we got to maybe 12 thousand. I don't remember the exact numbers.

Overy ([00:02:43](#)):

What was the appointment process like here? And by this, I mean, it was the first time you'd interviewed for a presidency, I think, wasn't it? Or was it--

Graham ([00:02:56](#)):

No, that's actually not true. In 1970, I had been interviewed and was appointed, as a matter of fact, to be president of Eastern New Mexico University. And but, that was at a time of great unrest among the Hispanics of northern New Mexico, and there was such an uproar over my appointment, and finally a court challenge. And the board, when it came time for me to move there the summer of 1970, the board was unable to give me a clear appointment. And so, I withdrew. This was all written up in the New Yorker Bank Scene one time. It's a very exciting chapter of my life that someday, I'll get around to writing about too. But it was tense.

Overy ([00:04:00](#)):

What was the appointment, the process like here then? Was it fairly congenial? Very smooth, [inaudible 00:04:05]?

Graham ([00:04:07](#)):

Well, it was as is the case now, it was essentially run out of the chancellor's office in St. Paul. The person in charge of it was David Sweet, who was then, the academic vice chancellor. And there was the committee here representing all the constituencies of the campus, faculty, administration, students, custodial staff, clerical people. I don't remember the exact size, but there must have been a dozen people on it. And it had, if I remember correctly, two interviews. One, at a hotel, at the Radisson Hotel near the airport in Bloomington and then, on campus, in where I met various groups.

Overy ([00:04:58](#)):

Was it a fairly grueling process?

Graham ([00:05:01](#)):

Well, I didn't think it was terribly hard. I had been through one or two of these. Not only the one I mentioned in New Mexico, but also I'd been through one for a vice presidency at the University of Nebraska, Omaha, actually the same year, the year before. So I'd done enough of them that I didn't think it was unusually demanding. As usual, people from St. Cloud were very nice.

Overy ([00:05:31](#)):

Minnesota nice.

Graham ([00:05:32](#)):

Minnesota nice, and after some of the other experiences I had, particularly in New Mexico, I found it to be quite enjoyable. I remember after I first interviewed, David Sweet called me and said, "Well, you did pretty well. But the group thought you seemed very--" "Well, I don't know very, but, "somewhat unsure of yourself. You didn't project yourself very well." He said, "If you have another interview, you'll have to try to project yourself." And so, I

Overy ([00:06:08](#)):

Did you, when you began to search for a position as a university president, did you feel that your background had pretty well prepared you for this job, this kind of job?

Graham ([00:06:08](#)):

Well--

Overy ([00:06:08](#)):

What trepidations did you have about--

Graham ([00:06:24](#)):

Well, you know, trepidations tend to grow with age. And I wasn't all that old. Well, I had had eight years of being a dean at Whitewater. And the department chair before that. And so, I thought I knew something about academic administration in these kinds of institutions. St. Cloud was about the same size institution as Whitewater. As we were saying a little earlier, I had certainly had some rough spots. But somehow, it hadn't disillusioned me about administration. So, I wasn't, I guess, unduly intimidated by it.

Overy ([00:07:08](#)):

In what ways are the duties of a president distinct, different, from those academic duties you've had before?

Graham ([00:07:23](#)):

Well, of course, they're much more comprehensive. They for one thing, involve external relations in a way that an academic dean doesn't have, or at least, not the dean of a liberal arts college. I suppose if you're the dean of a law school or dean of a business college, you would have more. But I didn't have a lot of external relationships as a liberal arts dean. And certainly, a president does. External in many ways, dealing with the community, dealing with the board,

dealing with state agencies, with alumni. So that was a major difference. And of course, it was much more comprehensive in terms of the academic spread. Instead of just the liberal arts, you're talking about a whole variety of other programs, teaching education and business administration. So, that was another factor. And then simply, the fact that you have a larger span of control with more people, or more people involved in the kind of decisions that you're making.

Overy ([00:08:34](#)):

When it comes to being a president, at least president assistant, are you given a pretty specific mission by the board?

Graham ([00:08:46](#)):

I thought at that time that really, the only mission that I was given was to-- The vision-- Let me back up. The vision which the then chancellor, Ted Mitau, had for this system at that time was to develop what was then being for the first time, called comprehensive institutions. That was a new term of art in higher education. And the idea of developing career-oriented programs, along with the liberal arts, spreading beyond the historic role of teacher education, was all still in the developmental stage. So, I felt that my charge was to embrace that vision of what these kinds of institutions could be.

Overy ([00:09:34](#)):

To make them more diverse.

Graham ([00:09:35](#)):

To make them more diverse. And of course, I also believed, and I don't know that this was necessarily a charge I had, that they were democratic institutions. That they were institutions available to what a later chancellor once called the ordinary, extraordinary people of Minnesota.

And that was a mission which I embraced fully, because I had been in these kinds of institutions before.

Overy ([00:09:59](#)):

Now, do you mean by that that there was a feeling that these institutions had been somewhat exclusive before?

Graham ([00:10:03](#)):

No, I don't mean that. I mean simply that that was clearly the mission that they had in this state, [inaudible 00:10:10].

Overy ([00:10:14](#)):

When you came here, what was your sense of the nature and quality of the relationship between your administration and faculty?

Graham ([00:10:28](#)):

Well, I remember one time, Harry Truman got up to give his State of the Union message, and he started out by saying, "The state of the union is good." And when I came to St. Cloud, my perception was that the state of the union was good. That the relationships in most directions were basically healthy. I had been in administration long enough to know that there's always a tension between administration and faculty. And I remember a piece of advice I got from Richard Dille, the president of Moorhead State. He told me at a meeting one time, he said, "Chuck, you're going to be a lot happier when you realize that the faculty really does need you." But I never really perceived it that way, and I thought that the relationships were certainly within the normal bounds of faculty administrative relationships.

Overy ([00:11:28](#)):

When you came, were your-- I don't know what word, your supportive administrators, your various vice presidents and so forth, were those positions pretty well established?

Graham ([00:11:41](#)):

They were. My predecessor, Bob Wick, to whom I give a great deal of credit for things being in great shape here when I came, had done the reorganization and created four vice presidencies in academic affairs and administrative affairs, and student affairs, and external affairs and university relations. So they were in place. And I did, I was faced with having to name of administrative vice president before I came because the person who had held that position had resigned, and I had to scurry around to find somebody. And the person I found was Brendan McDonald. And he served in that position for one year before he went on to become president of Kearney State Nebraska.

Overy ([00:12:25](#)):

And then, Tomlinson, was it?

Graham ([00:12:28](#)):

Well, Tomlinson was academic vice president.

Overy ([00:12:30](#)):

Oh, well then, yes, sure.

Graham ([00:12:31](#)):

Brendon McDonald's successor was Bill Radovich.

Overy ([00:12:38](#)):

So there was not exactly a, when a new president comes in, everybody hands in their resignation kind of thing.

Graham (00:12:44):

No, no there wasn't. Although actually, it turned out there was a fair amount of turnover fairly quickly. Within one year, I had had resignations from the vice president of student affairs. And I think maybe the next year for academic affairs. I don't remember exactly. So there was, within a relatively short time, we had three more vice presidents.

Overy (00:13:09):

Is it difficult for a president in an institution of 11 or 12 thousand, with X number of faculty, is it difficult to project your mission and your views through your sub administrators to the various groups? Is this a hard thing to do?

Graham (00:13:33):

Well, there was a great president of Harvard University one time who said that the university is but the shadow of a single man. And that was a view which I did not share. Probably because times were different, and shared governance was very much the mold in which I had grown up in higher education. And consequently, I was much more inclined to try to see if we could develop a cooperative direction for the institution. Or that the mission would grow out of the interests and the goals and desires of the various groups. Faculty, as well as administration. I would say, I don't know one of the questions that you have on here is what were my disappointments or failures. I think one of my failures was that I was so convinced of that view of things, that I found it difficult to get much of a good, long-range planning process going here. I had some goals. The major one was in the realm of academic quality. I felt this was an institution like so many of its type that had grown very, very rapidly during the 1960's. And it had formed new departments, and often new degrees, and new majors and minors and graduate programs all over the place. And that we needed in the '70's, a period of consolidation where we tried to make sure

that what we had gotten into was being well done. And so, that was really my goal. And we had a good opportunity to do it, because unlike the '50's and '60's, when it was so difficult to hire qualified faculty, the supply/demand situation had begun to shift. And we were able to hire, I think, a lot of good faculty people. I think also, we developed this process of what we called external review. What we brought in outside teams to meet with departments and talk about their programs and so on. And I guess if I had one thing that I think that we made some progress on during those years, that was in that direction. But I didn't find that difficult. I found, I had cooperation from administration. And even though we were going through the traumas of collective bargaining, that process was accepted and I think, had some benefit.

Overy ([00:16:06](#)):

So, you believe then, that perhaps you were a little bit too much consensus oriented? Is that what you were saying?

Graham ([00:16:12](#)):

I would say possibly that's true, yeah. I think that if I were to take a presidency today, which praise the Lord, I never will have to again, I would say, "Well, you know, you really do have to stake out some territory, maybe a little more vigorously than I did." I used to refer to what went on in those years, it sort of as the bubble up theory, or bubble up process of long-range planning. We sort of waited for the entrepreneurs and the faculty to come up with their ideas. And there were always lots of good ideas around. And then, filter those ideas. And I don't think that's all bad. I think out of that, we developed some very strong programs here. We got into some areas which we, from the top down, might never have identified.

Overy ([00:17:00](#)):

Like--

Graham ([00:17:01](#)):

Well, I think, for example, take what was done here in journalism. I don't [inaudible 00:17:08] a journalism department, but the kind of thrust that was given to it by the people in that department, I don't think it would have ever have been brought up by -- The same is true of some of the things that were going on in industry and business. And so, I think there were a lot of good things. But the entrepreneurs were sometimes difficult to control, but they were finding niches and identifying needs that were probably valid for the institution. So, I don't say that's a totally bad process. But I think that there might have been a little more direction, if we thought about it.

Overy ([00:17:48](#)):

Did, and if so, in what ways, did the collective bargaining process, did it affect the relationship between say, you and the college community?

Graham ([00:18:04](#)):

Well, it did in some ways. I liked to believe, and of course, I only have my point of view on this. But I like to believe that because of the basic goodwill that existed here when I came, and which I tried also to practice, that we never had a terribly hostile adversarial relationship. And yet, there's no question that that's what collective bargaining is all about is the institutionalization of an adversary relationship. And so, it certainly affected the way we did things in some respects.

Overy ([00:18:42](#)):

Did you sense at all a distancing between you and the faculty?

Graham ([00:18:49](#)):

Oh, I think so. I think so. It was, it's much more difficult. Now, I think both the faculty and I worked hard at trying to bridge that in some ways. And I remember thinking that well, all we can do ... And of course, it wasn't just-- Today we have collective bargaining, and today we don't

have it, and tomorrow we have it. It was this long, agonizing process of the faculty trying to figure out what it wanted to do once the legislation was passed and authorized it, and going through the elections and so on. And everybody feeling their way to figure out how this was going to work. So it was trying, and the only thing I could think to do was to just keep talking and make sure that the lines of communication were never shut down, and try not to develop a bunker mentality.

Overy ([00:19:43](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Graham ([00:19:44](#)):

And I think we did achieve that. One of the ways I tried to overcome that, and again, I had the cooperation of the faculty association, was that I met with every department. At least every other year, not about terms and conditions of employment or anything that the faculty association was particularly worried about, but simply to learn what the departments were doing. And this gave me an opportunity to meet with the faculty in small groups and to concentrate and discuss their academic efforts. So we tried various sorts of things. But it was trying, as always.

Overy ([00:20:29](#)):

I had one mutual friend whom we won't mention tell me that he would very seriously, at one time, he would very seriously question whether he would be an administrator in a collective bargaining situation. You never particularly felt that way about it.

Graham ([00:20:57](#)):

Well, I guess I can't say that I found it congenial. The question never arose. Would I have sought or taken a presidency in an institution that had collective bargaining after I had been through that experience here? I don't know the answer to that. The question just never arose.

Overy ([00:21:15](#)):

But you never thought it an insurmountable problem.

Graham ([00:21:19](#)):

No, I don't think it was insurmountable.

Overy ([00:21:23](#)):

So, you never believed that collective bargaining really interfered that much with the things you wanted to accomplish when you were here.

Graham ([00:21:31](#)):

I was concerned about some of the long-term effects, and I don't know the answers yet. On the one hand, there was a set of questions around whether or not collective bargaining would produce better results for the faculty in terms and conditions of employment, salaries and so on. Because I had been one who had worked very hard for better salaries for the faculty, and had kind of gone to the mat with the board and the legislature for better salaries, and thought we had made some progress. And I didn't know what the result was going to be, because that really wasn't my role anymore to do that. I was also concerned about whether or not the reward system was going to change in a way that would be discouraging to creative faculty people.

Overy ([00:22:32](#)):

Lock-step kind of salary progress.

Graham ([00:22:35](#)):

Yeah, right, right. And as I say, I don't think I really know the answer to that, because I wasn't here long enough after things really got in place to be able to--

Overy ([00:22:46](#)):

Let me ask you another question, this would be [inaudible 00:22:51] with the Whitewater experience. I remember at Whitewater when you and I were there, you were always very accessible as dean. And I sensed that when you were here, there was a remoteness. Is this a frustration to a president, or more particularly, to you?

Graham ([00:23:09](#)):

Well, it's size, primarily, I think. Initially, at least, I think it was size in that, you just, you are in the same places, and there isn't a time. You're off doing a whole bunch of other kind of things. It may have been compounded by collective bargaining. Because one does get the feeling that you are not sure exactly what kind of accessibility you can-- You're not in the position to be able to talk to a faculty member to the things that are most important to the faculty member. You can get yourself and the faculty member in a lot of trouble if you do.

Overy ([00:23:53](#)):

Sure.

Graham ([00:23:53](#)):

So, I suppose that may have had a somewhat [inaudible 00:23:58] effect on accessibility.

Overy ([00:24:00](#)):

Did you feel as president, and once again, thinking in terms of the United States President, that ... how would I put it? That you are in a sense, limited by your aides, by your subordinates, that in effect, they filter out things that might be coming to you from the fact. You know, you talk about the isolation of the President of the United States and this kind of thing.

Graham ([00:24:29](#)):

Right, well, I think in a modest degree, it's almost inevitable to some extent. Just again, it's a factor of size and time, of you have to rely on not only the efforts of your administrative people, but on their judgments. And so, I suppose that there is, that factor is there in some degree.

Overy ([00:24:29](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Graham ([00:24:59](#)):

Again, I describe some of the efforts that are made to try to make sure I was hearing various points of view. But I'm not sure that it was always successful.

Overy ([00:25:13](#)):

Being president here, you had then to develop a whole new set of relationships with the state board. Was this a difficult thing?

Graham ([00:25:21](#)):

Well, not particularly. Because in spite of what the rules and regulations say, the presidents of these institutions don't really report during the [inaudible 00:25:35]. They report to the chancellor.

Overy ([00:25:36](#)):

Chancellor.

Graham ([00:25:37](#)):

I mean, the language says they report to the board through the chancellor. And that is true to some extent. I don't mean to suggest that the chancellor is an absolute, the final and only supervisor. But for the most part, your relationships are with the chancellor. And I didn't find that terribly difficult personally. The problem, of course, was that there was always tension on this

campus, and I think it's inevitable on any campus between the campus and the university and chancellor's office. And so, as with so many administrative jobs, you're always a person in the middle. Whether you're a dean or a vice president or a president, that's part of the nature of the structure of our society. Certainly on the [inaudible 00:26:30].

Overy ([00:26:31](#)):

What was the relationship like between you and the chancellor? Is this pretty much, the chancellor says, "President Graham, you do this."? I mean, is there a negotiating or an interplay of ideas? Or is it pretty-- I think most times, students simply think the president is the highest officer in the world.

Graham ([00:26:51](#)):

Yeah, yeah. No, it's more than that. There is a collegial relationship. The presidents and the chancellor meet regularly in what I would say is a collegial setting. And I would say there's a lot of collective decision-making for the system. So it's not simply a matter of taking orders or seeking favor. But nonetheless, there's no question about who the board holds responsible for the system. And consequently, the chancellor has a lot to say about that.

Overy ([00:27:26](#)):

But you felt that you, if you had a disagreement or a problem, it was something that you could talk to with the chancellors.

Graham ([00:27:35](#)):

Oh yes, sure, sure. There's plenty of opportunity for that.

Overy ([00:27:41](#)):

One of the things, of course, that's been on the minds of a lot of people here in recent years has been the competition between the various campuses. Was there a lot of that when you were president here?

Graham ([00:27:56](#)):

There was always on this campus, a feeling of competition with Mankato. And I think that had to do with both of the fact that the institutions were roughly comparable size. But also, the fact that Mankato had made an effort to, in the '60s, to become, to withdraw from the system and to become a different kind of institution. I can remember when I came to Minnesota, people from Mankato were still wearing sweatshirts which said, University of Southern Minnesota on them. So, I think there was a lot of-- But this is not unique to this state. It was true in Wisconsin between River Falls and Eau Claire, between Whitewater and Oshkosh. It's not uncommon. And much of that was about size and diversity of program. Mankato get a new program, and that would raise anxieties here and so on. I personally was not that much interested in size, and so I didn't get terribly excited about it. As it turned out, when I left here, St. Cloud was bigger than Mankato. I think it changed again, and has now changed back, and may change again some time. But the rivalry over size never was a great concern to me, but I suppose it was to some people.

Overy ([00:29:21](#)):

What about competition over resources? That's been a big issue here on campus.

Graham ([00:29:25](#)):

There was some competition over resources. Or, there was-- And it had to do with fairly specific things. We had a system then of institutions getting special appropriations above and beyond the formula appropriations for special programs. And there was a fair amount of jealousy among the

campuses for who got what kind of special appropriations. And I don't know that we had any more or any less than anybody else, or our share or whatever. But quite often, that produced some anxiety. Another way in which there was anxiety over, or competition over resources was, the fact that Mankato had a larger graduate program. And since graduate resources were allocated at a different formula than undergraduate resources, that meant that their total allocation, or total budget, was larger than ours, even though their size wasn't much different. And that was irritating, I think, to a lot of people. So, there was some of those kinds of issues. I personally had a different kind of competition. And I don't know that anybody else felt it. I always felt that, the thing I was concerned about was academic quality. And therefore, I was always looking around to see which institutions were doing the most interesting things along that line. And I always thought our biggest competition was really Morehead rather than Mankato. But that's not the way the campus here generally saw it. Because I think that over the years, Mankato has developed some very high quality programs and a good quality academic program in general.

Overy ([00:31:06](#)):

How about, do you develop any kind of relationship with the other presidents?

Graham ([00:31:12](#)):

Yes, because you meet as a group. We were, we met at least once a month, and often, sometimes often, we went on retreats together. So there was a lot of relationships. And basically, very good relationships with the other presidents.

Overy ([00:31:26](#)):

Another aspect that you mentioned at the beginning of the interview, which was new to you, was that between the president of a university and the community. Was this something that was ready made for you to step into? Or did you have to develop this kind of relationship?

Graham ([00:31:46](#)):

It was basically in pretty good shape when I came. There had to apparently been some rough spots, maybe a half a dozen or 10 years earlier between the campus and the community. But by the time I came here, I didn't think that there were any very serious difficulties. There are always tensions between a community campus of this size in a community of this size. They range all the way from street management to zoning, to drinking and so on. But I didn't think there was anything here that was extraordinarily difficult. I had the help of a number of people in getting acquainted in the community, and I tried to encourage those relationships. And I would say the community was very open. I would say this, when I was here, St. Cloud was a very, very good place to be in charge of a university. Because while there were always people in the community who had reservations about the university, I think basically, the atmosphere was good.

Overy ([00:33:00](#)):

What kinds of things-- Well, let me put it this way, did you receive direct complaints from either individuals or groups?

Graham ([00:33:11](#)):

Oh, sure, occasionally. We had the administration set up so that there were channels for doing this, so that if the city government, for example, wanted to have a complaint or a problem about a street or a zoning issue or something, they would generally go to Bill Radovich. Or if it was some other kind of a political problem, a student problem, they would go to Dave Sprague and

through the student affairs. But yes, I would get telephone calls occasionally about what my students were doing. And what they had done. But I would say, it was modest. It was the community, it's a very tolerant community. I've been in communities that are a lot less tolerant, and you have too.

Overy ([00:33:56](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Graham ([00:33:57](#)):

About universities, so I never felt the town-gown relationships, while they had to be continually attended, and there were occasional problems, that basically, it was a good situation.

Overy ([00:34:11](#)):

What about--

Graham ([00:34:13](#)):

Partly -- excuse me. Partly because we weren't growing so fast during my years. We weren't testing those, we weren't creating problems for the university in terms of taking property or straining resources any more than had been. I think that had been part of the problem in the earlier years, and I think it may have become problems in later years. But in that particular decade, that was not a problem.

Overy ([00:34:40](#)):

I've heard from members of the community that the university has not had a very good relationship with the city council. That there are conflicting directions here. Did you have any sense of that when you were, there was a [inaudible 00:35:04] in the administration and the [inaudible 00:35:08] here?

Graham (00:35:11):

No, I really didn't. I think there were issues occasionally, and I'm sure there were members of the council occasionally who may not have been happy with the university. My relationships were mainly with the mayor's office, and I thought we had a very good relationship. Al Loehr was the mayor during many of those years, and there couldn't have been a more supportive mayor than Al Loehr as far as the university was concerned. So the most difficult issue we ever had to deal with, of course, was this 10th Street bridge issue, which was not an issue which arose between the city and the university. It was an issue that came from outside in part. And the city and the university was together on it, although ultimately the community got divided and the university got caught in that division to some degree. So, that was a somewhat difficult issue. But I don't think it was a basic town and gown issue.

Overy (00:36:14):

Did you feel that students had any kind of ready access to you when you were here?

Graham (00:36:23):

Well, I like to think that. And what every president says, "I have an open door." But it tends to be fairly meaningless in this size institution. There's not very many students who are going to get up the courage to go knock on the president's door and go through a secretary or two, and make an appointment or whatever. And although, I didn't always require that. But my channel, my way of working with the students was to go to them. And I had a system of meeting in the residence halls. I tried to visit every residence hall for a kind of an open forum session at least once each year and work with student government, of course, directly. And there were years when students were very forthcoming, very, would seek me out and we would work on a lot of different kinds of things. And there were other years when the students seemed to be off working on other kinds

of things. And I didn't have much direct relationship, but I came at a time when of course, there was the remnants of a lot of student unrest. And I spent a lot of time during the first two years meeting with groups of students who were unhappy, not so much about St. Cloud State, but unhappy about the world in general.

Overy ([00:37:40](#)):

And from the '60s and the protests of those years.

Graham ([00:37:42](#)):

Right, and so, but that tended to disappear after a while. The very first spring I was here, was the, I guess it was the anniversary of the bombing of [inaudible 00:37:58]. I can't remember. No, maybe it was the anniversary of Kent State.

Overy ([00:38:02](#)):

Kent State, yep, mm-hmm (affirmative).

Graham ([00:38:06](#)):

And there was a teach-in scheduled, and a rally scheduled for Lake George. And the students were going to gather out here in front of the flagpole. I guess, I think it was between here and Whitney, or else in front of Stewart Hall and don't know exactly where it was. And then, march. But the student government was already very much on top of this. They had already designated monitors. And I worked with those people, and they did come and they took the flag down. And having come from Whitewater where we'd had a flag issue or two, I was pretty nervous about that, I have to confess. And I'd forgotten, I think it must have been Bill Radovich or somebody who said, "Why don't you just wait till they leave, and then we'll put the flag back up and forget about it?" And that was the best advice I ever had, so that's what we did. And one of the great things that came out of that day was that, the mayor, Al Loehr, sent voter registrars down to the

rally on Lake George, and signed people up to vote. I thought, this is a different kind of community than I've worked in before. And I thought that was really great, and that was really the only terribly tense moment we had.

Overy ([00:39:31](#)):

I have a question here about the most difficult challenges or problems. Does any things really particularly stick in your mind?

Graham ([00:39:42](#)):

Well, we had that downturn in enrollment in 1973, '74, which resulted in a reduction of resources and resulted in having us to cut back some faculty positions and some layoffs, and that was very, very difficult. There are always resource problems. I mean, you never had as much money as you would like. And I was always particular concerned about the library, because unfortunately, it's a fact of life in university budgets that there's no single big pile of money around except the library when you get into financial trouble. We tried to protect library budgets, and I know that's been an issue in recent times until the legislature got involved. And then the other thing, I suppose, was the advent of collective bargaining and that whole process, which was probably the most single, most tension producing thing that we had during those years.

Overy ([00:40:36](#)):

Was--

Graham ([00:40:37](#)):

But they were great years. I don't want to miss the opportunity to say that I have really, I really felt I was extremely fortunate to have landed the job, and to have lived here for 10 really, very good years. It was sort of the central career experience of my life. And has been a source of great satisfaction to me.

Overy ([00:41:36](#)):

One of the questions here which, I asked Jim Pehler, and he was very-- I interviewed him about his legislative career. And he kind of evaded me a little bit, but I'm going to ask you. And this is the one about unforgettable situations or characters during your time here. Would you care to comment on that?

Graham ([00:41:59](#)):

Well, I'll tell you, I should have reflect-- I saw that question, and I should have reflected more on it. I've told you one, the case, the march. [inaudible 00:42:16] Another one that I think about is actually, before I started. My wife and I came up here for the interview. And it was March. It was snow all over the place, and we saw out in the student union. They were collecting money for some cause of Angela Davis. And I was very impressed by that, because having come from where I came from, the advent of a radical speaker on a campus just was a horrible experience. And here, everybody was taking this very much in stride. And I thought, that's a very healthy kind of place where this is not regarded as something to cause a revolution. And there didn't seem to be any community excitement about it. The community was quite excited about the fact that she spoke at St. Ben's, but they didn't seem to be very excited about the fact that she was speaking at St. Cloud State. So, I thought that was-- I really haven't had-- I'm not being evasive. I'm just being not very thoughtful, I guess, about coming up with unforgettable experiences. There certainly were high points. The fact that we were able to continue the physical development of the campus that was good.

Overy ([00:41:59](#)):

The mall.

Graham ([00:43:51](#)):

The mall we developed, I felt very good about the mall. Because this was just a stub of a street when I came. And the same as 3rd and so on. I felt very good about the fact that in that process, we were able to save the Lewis House, or the Atwood House, because that was slated to come down with all the other houses over there. And it seemed to me that would have been a mistake. And I was able to convince the legislative building commission to leave that house there. So, I thought that was good. But and then, we have a lot of memories of good people, wonderful people. But I think it would, Claude Del Zoppo is kind of an unforgettable character, too. Claude was a, I don't want to get him in trouble, even though he's gone. But Claude was very supportive in, he was very active in fact, in the association. And during those very difficult times, he was able to let me know mostly through Bill Radovich, what was going on, what people were thinking, where the problem spots were. And so I really thought that was one of the good things. It's one of the things I've never forgotten. I could probably, I would have to [inaudible 00:45:24].

Overy ([00:45:23](#)):

Sure, sure. Do you think the university changed much during your 10 years here? And if so, what changes do you perceive?

Graham ([00:45:35](#)):

I don't think that the changes were radical. We had no major reorganizations. We added some new majors and minors and programs, but it wasn't an explosive kind of growth. It was as I said, it was a period of consolidation, in fact, after a period of very rapid growth. We built a few buildings and did some campus development, but it wasn't explosive. So that I think that with the exception of things we talked about, the attempt to kind of shore up academic quality after rapid growth, and the advent of collective bargaining, I don't think we had any dramatic changes.

Overy ([00:46:21](#)):

Here's a question that maybe is a little bit off track, but I've often wondered about as a faculty member. And I guess it has to do with the procession of academic vice presidents who seemed to come around. And I guess it's the perception of myself and maybe numbers of faculty, that university presidents really aren't very much involved in academics. That this isn't their major concern. And thus, we worry about the procession of academic vice presidents whom we perceive really, as those as our major helpers or adversaries. Could you talk about that a little bit?

Graham ([00:47:05](#)):

Well, I think it's a very good point and a very good question. It is difficult for a president to be as involved in academic affairs as an academic dean. That was one of the things I did find when I was a dean of Whitewater, that's all I did was be concerned about academic affairs. And so, the president does get pulled away from that. I tried to make it be sure that academic quality continued to be the central mission of the institution. That seemed to me, that's what we were here for. And while it's nice to build buildings, and it's nice to grow numbers and all these things that, if the job you're doing academically is not up to par, then the point of the institution is lost. So, I tried to make that a major emphasis of my efforts. But there's no question in terms of the day to day on-going things, that a president gets pulled in too many other different directions. So, the academic vice president does become not only the major academic leader, but the lightning rod for all the tensions. And it seems to be, I've never seen a study on this. But it seems to me that those academic deanships from smaller colleges or vice presidencies are jobs that where there's an awful lot of turnover. And I think it probably is the most difficult job on the campus.

Overy ([00:48:41](#)):

Especially on a multiversity.

Graham ([00:48:41](#)):

Yeah, right, right. Yeah, I think it's very, very difficult. And this is something that I'm not-- I've seen happen a number of times. The faculty always has a very important role in naming the academic vice president. I don't think [inaudible 00:49:00] of faculty and the support of the faculty. And yet, I've seen time and time again people, academic deans or vice presidents who were chosen by the faculty get in trouble with the faculty very, very quickly. So, it's a tough, tough spot. It really is.

Overy ([00:49:34](#)):

Do you have any-- Do you see any negative things that happened, things that you wish had not happened?

Graham ([00:49:42](#)):

Well, there are always things, of course, that you wish hadn't happened. Things that didn't happen that you wished had happened. Certainly, there are some things. I think that the inability that we had to do certain things because of lack of resources was always a problem. It's a fact of life, and one shouldn't get as frustrated about it as I did. But there were always so many good things to do with money that you didn't have money to do. [inaudible 00:50:20] There were specific bad incidents, I suppose, but I don't know [inaudible 00:50:36]

Overy ([00:50:36](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Graham ([00:50:38](#)):

The overall negatives were very few, I think. The biggest issue was growth.

Overy ([00:50:51](#)):

Looking back at your 10 years here, what are you most proud of?

Graham ([00:50:58](#)):

Well, I think the fact that we did work hard, and it's the kind of thing that's not noticeable to the outside world. The fact that we worked very hard at trying to help departments shore up their academic program, the external review process. I supported every department or school that wanted to do an accreditation. It's not that I think that accrediting programs is necessarily a hallmark of quality, necessarily, but there are a few ways of which an institution like this, I thought, could say to the world that we've achieved a certain world of academic quality. So, while there are a lot of negative things to be said about accreditation, and a lot of battles over whether or not it's necessary or desirable, I support it all the way, because I thought, this is a way for St. Cloud State to be able to announce to the world that we have achieved a certain level of academic quality. While you can't get accreditation in history or political science or whatever, the fact that you can get it in chemistry and journalism and business and so on, I thought, was a way of calling attention to the fact that we were a university of some academic achievement and development. So, I think those are the things that I feel best about.

Overy ([00:52:23](#)):

Another question that comes to mind, concerns the reputation of the school. Do you think the reputation of the school changed in those 10 years? If so, in what areas?

Graham ([00:52:37](#)):

It would be, I believe that our academic reputation did grow. I think it grew perhaps, primarily because of the publicity that we got on our business program. The fact that we got accreditation by the ACSB, and suddenly, St. Cloud became the place to go for-- The only other accredited

program in the state outside the University of Minnesota. And so, I think that helped the academic reputation. And I think then, we also had the development, and I think this increased during those two years, the number of faculty who were getting noticed outside the campus. People who were publishing books, people who were giving speeches, people who were holding offices in academic organizations. I think that grew somewhat during those years. So I felt, and again, these are the highly developed measures. I felt that our reputation was growing as a university.

Overy ([00:53:47](#)):

Was it ever much of a concern to you, and I know it is the numbers of people today, and has been since I've been here, do you think it hurts St. Cloud State because it has, or if it has, the reputation of a party school? Did this seem to be pretty pervasive as you traveled around?

Graham ([00:54:07](#)):

Yeah, it's been true for-- Well, I guess, you probably know the history of this better than I do. I think it's traceable to a *Life Magazine* article back in the late '50's or early '60's or something like that. But it did hurt, I think. It has hurt St. Cloud. And unfortunately, there's been an event or two that's kind of confirmed that. But we tried to address that in some rather specific ways. First of all, of course, was by trying to herald the academic achievements of the institution. But we also did some other very specific things, like changing the class schedule. When I came here, the class schedule was set up so that nobody had any classes on Friday morning, so that everybody could party on Thursday night.

Overy ([00:54:56](#)):

I didn't know that.

Graham ([00:54:57](#)):

Yep, and we changed that so that there was not a recognition of party night. And you know, I don't know how much affect that had, but that was a conscious effort to do that.

Overy ([00:55:10](#)):

There were no classes on Friday morning, I'll be darned.

Graham ([00:55:14](#)):

Well, I've forgotten exactly how it worked, but it was set up in a way that it really encouraged students to think they could stay out late. I think it was Thursday night, party night.

Overy ([00:55:24](#)):

Yeah, Wednesday or Thursday night.

Graham ([00:55:25](#)):

Yeah, it was Wednesday night.

Overy ([00:55:27](#)):

I never did much of it, so--

Graham ([00:55:27](#)):

Yeah, maybe it was Wednesday night, and it was no Thursday morning classes.

Overy ([00:55:30](#)):

Something, yeah.

Graham ([00:55:33](#)):

And of course, with the four credit quarter credit schedule, Thursday morning, you know, you can do without. But we changed that so there were classes Thursday. We also, of course, tried to combat the reputation directly in some ways by some articles that were written in alumni publications and so on. But I wasn't naïve enough to think that the reputation entirely went away.

We didn't have any really untold-- Oh, another thing we tried to do was, we had some old company problems too. We tried very hard to get the bars downtown to stop their early morning openings on homecoming, and we did, finally. The last year or two I was there, we got them to back off. I don't remember specific hours, but to hold off opening so early on homecoming.

Overy ([00:56:25](#)):

How did you manage to do that?

Graham ([00:56:28](#)):

Well, it was a matter of just cajoling. And getting some people like the mayor and get it through the work of Terry Montgomery and some other people who were connected in town to work on it. And I guess it didn't last, because I guess [inaudible 00:56:49]. So it was something that I was aware of. But I soon, I had kids in college myself in those years at other colleges, and I soon concluded that St. Cloud wasn't any more of a party school than any other school. It's just that, it got hung with that someplace 30 years ago, and we've never been able to shake it entirely.

Overy ([00:57:09](#)):

One other area that I've been curious about is the place which athletics play in a school of this size. Was that a concern to you when you were president?

Graham ([00:57:25](#)):

Well, it was somewhat. I certainly supported the athletic program in a way that I thought was desirable. And one of the buildings, really the only major building that was built while I was here was the addition to Halenbeck Hall. But I guess I was-- I'm sure that people in the athletic departments didn't necessarily think I was the greatest athletic supporter they'd ever had, because there were some things that I didn't support. And all that came down to resources in many cases. I felt that while athletics was a healthy endeavor, and I certainly thought that the people who

were running athletics here were doing a good job, I felt it was always a balance of how much resources go into an activity that really affected a fairly small portion of the campus? Even in terms of spectators, let alone participants. It's really not a very big, it's not a [inaudible 00:58:34] always a few alumni who are very anxious to boost sports, I didn't find that the St. Cloud [inaudible 00:58:42] was necessarily all that enthusiastic about it.

Overy ([00:58:44](#)):

Nor that the community missed--

Graham ([00:58:45](#)):

There were some community pressures, but nobody really expected us to produce winning teams all the time. So, I just didn't think that in terms of priorities, that it was the top priority. While certainly, we did drop one sport that I always felt a little badly about. We dropped gymnastics, and there were a variety of reasons for that. It was because of the liability problems, as well as resource problems. It was kind of an unfortunate, but we did do that. The final thing I guess I'd say about that is, we did make the decision, I guess the last or second to last year I was here, [inaudible 00:59:31]. And I don't know to this day whether there was [inaudible 00:59:32].

Overy ([00:59:35](#)):

So fortunately, you weren't president of Notre Dame or something like that where the alumni pressure is just enormous [crosstalk 00:59:39].

Graham ([00:59:41](#)):

That's right, that's right. I remember speaking with Peter McGrath the last couple years he was [inaudible 00:59:44] at the University of Minnesota, and getting a sense of the incredible pressure that he was under with the athletic side, just really pressure.

Overy ([01:00:02](#)):

Did you have any sense at all when you were here that there was much alumni support for this institution?

Graham ([01:00:09](#)):

Oh, yes. I thought there was. The alumni support here, and I may be safe in generalizing a bit in saying alumni support for these kinds of institutions is not the same as it is for good old private liberal arts colleges. Partly that has to do with size, partly it has to do with tradition. But there is a connection among alumni of particularly the smaller liberal arts institutions. It's very, very strong. And when I went to Hamline, I learned a lot more about that. So that's not quite the same as here. But there certainly was alumni support, and I traveled a lot of places and talked to a lot of St. Cloud alumni. And I think in general there's-- It's a complicated question, because the attitudes of alumni of this kind of institution are somewhat different. In the first place, some of them came here because they felt they couldn't go someplace else, and that affects their view of the institution. Some of them have been in-- A lot of them have gone into teaching, and teaching, I don't know, I don't believe that teachers as a group are necessarily the most boosterish kind of people for anything. And so, there are a lot of factors that play on that. But yeah, there was pretty good alumni support. We started the development after a year, and while it was not major ... Incidentally, that's another thing we did too, during those years, that I think has brought some fruit. It was just getting started, but I think there was evidence, pretty good evidence that [inaudible 01:02:18].

Overy ([01:02:18](#)):

Well, just a couple more questions, Dr. Graham. You mentioned some time ago in the interview that the presidency here represented the, I don't want to use the word high point or something of

this kind. How do you think your 10 years here at St. Cloud State affected you personally and professionally? Do you think it had a pretty sound impact upon you?

Graham ([01:02:47](#)):

Well, it was a fantastic learning experience. I mean, every day, every year, I learned new things about life. I learned about academic administration, I learned about American higher education. You get a view of when you're president, you get a view of what's going on in home development, of higher education in the country. I learned a lot about community relations, a lot about state government that I didn't know before. And so, all those things were not only somewhat exciting, but intellectually interesting, too. So I think it has had a tremendous-- I taught a course the year after I left Hamline, I went back into Hamline and taught an introductory course in public administration in their graduate public administration program. And public administration was really never a specialty of mine. I'd taken some [inaudible 01:03:56], but I found that I was able to dredge up out of my experiences of being a state university president a lot of insights about the way public administrative, about the way state government works and the way politics work that I wouldn't have known otherwise. So in many ways, it was a learning experience. It was a personally satisfying experience. It was fulfilling from the sense that having had this experience, I felt that I would never feel my life was wasted because I'd had the chance to do this.

Overy ([01:04:36](#)):

Was there any particular area in the broad spectrum of things which a university president has to do that was most difficult for you? In other words, it was against your personality or the kinds of things that you feel [crosstalk 01:04:51]

Graham ([01:04:52](#)):

Well, I learned then and I've learned even more later, that fundraising is not really a great strength of mine. I enjoy the development of fundraising programs. And find that quite interesting. But in terms of soliciting funds, that is not a turn on for me. I don't think I'm particularly good at it. Obviously, any time you have to make a decision, this is the most difficult-- Anytime you have to make a decision that adversely affects the career of another person, I think that was the hardest.

Overy ([01:04:52](#)):

And you had to make decisions though.

Graham ([01:05:39](#)):

You did have to make decisions like that. Sometimes, they were-- Seldom were they decisions that I felt were life-crippling decisions, but certainly they were [inaudible 01:05:53].

Overy ([01:05:58](#)):

Any regrets about your time here?

Graham ([01:06:01](#)):

Well, in this area we've been talking about, I suppose you always wish you didn't have to make some of those decisions. But I've never felt a great sense of remorse or guilt or regret, or any kind of-- I just, it was sort of the defining experience of my career. I enjoyed [inaudible 01:06:31] St. Cloud. Still like St. Cloud very much, so it's altogether, a good memory for me.