

Rock Voices: The Oral History Project of SRU
Ben Shaevitz Interview
June 2, 2022
Bailey Library, Slippery Rock University, Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania
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JS: So, let's dive right in, Dr. Shaevitz.

BS: Alright, Dr. Silva [laughter].

JS: I'm Judy Silva (I guess I should say the date). Today is June 2, 2022 and we're at Bailey Library, Slippery Rock University. I'm happy to have Dr. Ben Shaevitz here today for the Rock Voices Oral History program.

BS: Thanks for having me.

JS: My pleasure. If we could start with some biographical information: full name, date of birth, where you're from, and your education.

BS: OK, Ben Alan Shaevitz, I was born in Columbus Ohio, August 23, 1960. And I grew up in Chillicothe, which was about an hour south of that. Graduated from Chillicothe High School in 1978 and I wanted to get away from home, so I went to Purdue University and got my bachelor's degree in Applied Physics. It took me five years because I had a little stumble. But anyway.

JS: How far away from home was that?

BS: It was seven hours. I only went home for Thanksgiving as far as I can remember during the semester. It was too far to go any other time.

JS: Wow.

BS: Then I got my PhD from Penn State. That's where I learned to love Pennsylvania; I got my degree in Experimental Physics there in 1989. And in that summer, I graduated, I got married, and I started this job. All in one summer . . .

JS: Wow.

BS: . . . when I was 29 years old. So, it was quite a big transition in life.

JS: And your affiliation with SRU?

BS: I am a professor, and my department is now Physics and Engineering. It used to be Physics once upon a time, and it was Physics and Chemistry, and now it's Physics and Engineering.

JS: Right, and you said the year you were hired was?

BS: 1989.

JS: And did you come in as an assistant [professor]?

BS: Assistant.

JS: Did you hold any other positions on campus as an employee?

BS: No. . . I had some release time for some grants and stuff, but nothing as an employee.

JS: Although you were department chair, but we'll get to that at some point.

BS: Department chair.

JS: OK, so, the next question is what SRU era were you here? But you were here at the university, and you didn't go through any of the transitions.

BS: But I was going to say, and I don't know why I remember this but . . . 1989 was the 100th year anniversary of Slippery Rock University, and there were a lot of events going on. And there was something, there was some kind of an academic series that was focused around our motto at the time. It was something like, "connect," something, "connected to the world." It was a three-line motto and I remember that Ted Kneupper was the spearhead behind this thing. So there was this--it wasn't exactly completely informational, it was a little bit of a, it was meant to maybe point out that this motto was not one size fits all, so it had a little bit of another side to it. But it was a sanctioned faculty thing, and I just remember that was really interesting getting exposed to something that was, you know, relatively philosophical, or kind of ethereal, in my first year here and that was--it probably had more impact on me than I realized at the time. To see that people were thinking outside the box, it wasn't just about what you were teaching, but there was something bigger going on. This model was representing the university and this whole thing was kind of a critique about whether this model was appropriate and stuff. So that was actually really, really, interesting.

JS: Yeah, Ted Kneupper.

BS: So, I remember that it definitely was in the university era, but there was that little milestone that I happened to be here for.

JS: OK, and so you mentioned this already, did the department you were hired into change while you were here? So, besides the name change, the evolution, you mentioned three different names, right? Did it change colleges? Did the college change? It has changed.

BS: It has recently.

JS: Arts and Sciences.

BS: For a long time it was under Arts and Sciences. I don't know how long Arts and Sciences has been gone, but whenever that changed into Health and all that stuff.

JS: Was it CHES [College of Health, Engineering and Science] the whole time you were here?

BS: No, it would've been CAS [College of Arts and Science] for the first at least . . . I don't know when CHES came around: it may have been the first half of my career. I don't know, you could probably figure that out. But . . .

JS: [Laughter] it was not traumatic, clearly.

BS: Yeah, but the changing of the department names went along with organizational changes. And so there is some trauma that goes along with that. It's not always bad, it's not always good, but it's something that's imposed from outside. So, if you're in a leadership position especially, you kind of have to deal with that.

JS: What about leadership in your department?

BS: So, I was chairperson I think for four terms, and I had--it might've been more than that, it might've been fourteen years--I had a falling out with Bill Williams at one point, and I resigned from chairperson.

JS: What role was he in at that point?

BS: He would've been provost. And Rizwan Mahmood took over as interim but I believe I resumed leadership after a little break, after a year or something, the next round. I'm a little bit fuzzy on these dates but I could probably find them on my vita. But it was a long time. I was department chair at least, between a third and a half of my career.

JS: Wow, yeah.

BS: So, it was a long time, and I think it was really good for me and for the department.

JS: Who was chair when you came?

BS: When I came, it probably was Jim Fearday. So there was one older professor that had been here a long time, and there were three that were kind of in the last third of their career, and then there was Rizwan Mahmood who was hired a couple years before me. So the department was pretty top heavy in really senior members. But before he was chairperson, I'm sure the other two were, but I don't know the history of it.

JS: So then him and then you.

BS: As far as I remember.

JS: Just curious.

BS: But it wouldn't have been, I don't think I did it for, until I got promoted at least to associate, it wasn't within the first five years.

JS: Yeah, I would hope. Good to be tenured before you're chair. OK, and were you always in Vincent [Science Hall]?

BS: Except during the renovation of Vincent, we were moved into West Gym. Into the place that used to be the fitness center. The basement of West Gym was the fitness center when I came here. And before that it was a locker room, so that became Physics. And it was actually real interesting, because they had to

spend some money to make that useable for us and deal with all of our equipment, and storage and stuff. So it was complicated and it wasn't great, great, but it wasn't terrible either; it could've been a lot worse.

JS: That wasn't that long ago that they re-did Vincent; in the last 10 years?

BS: Yeah, 10 or 12 years.

JS: [Pause]. So what were your first impressions of the university?

BS: Well, when I came for my interview, the department had a social function at one of their members' house. It was just a little hors d'oeuvres, it wasn't dinner; it was just a little meet and greet. And that was really amazing, because I'd been on a few interviews, and that's not the norm. So I don't know if they did that with everybody, or, I don't know, I don't know why. But that was a really good sign, and I was really, you know, really biased to staying in Pennsylvania after going to Penn State because I just fell in love with the place. I actually had three job offers, so I could've gone to other spots. And you know, you just kind of weigh the pros and the cons, and this place worked out. I don't know if the other places would've or would not have so, you don't ever have the chance to know what that other fork in the road was gonna do.

JS: Yeah.

BS: So that was my very, very first impression was that, "Wow, these people actually like each other." And then I remember in the fall, one of the things that was kind of an eye opener was I had a non-traditional female student in a class who was older than me. And so that was like, right off the bat it was kind of like, "Wow, this is a new world here," because I had never even contemplated the possibility. It's not a problem or anything, it just comes like wow, you know. She was smart; she was a great student. But it required me to kind of think a little bit, learn a little bit about appropriate roles and stuff, and just to kind of figure out this new landscape. Because if all of your class were traditional students, who were in their late teens or 20s it's a different--even though I was 29--it's a different dynamic. But she was like 40 and it's not, it wasn't intimidating or anything, it just was unexpected. So you kind of had to figure out how to navigate that space.

JS: Had you learned anything about pedagogy in your doctoral program?

BS: No, that word never--I never ever heard it until I came here.

JS: [Pause]. What changes have you witnessed at the university. and were they for the better or the worse?

BS: Oh my.

JS: [Laughter].

BS: That could be like a whole day. But I was thinking that, and I've made this [point] before in speeches I've given for APSCUF [Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties]: I think that in the 90s this place was really more run like a big family business. The System [State System of Higher Education] was not as intrusive, or it didn't seem as intrusive to us. Maybe it was as intrusive to the administrators, but we, but it was really, we didn't know, and it actually didn't seem like it was a burden. And there were actually a fair number of pretty high administrators that were local. A person named Bill Elliot who was in Finance a long time ago. There were administrators here that were, you know, raised in Western Pennsylvania.

So that--both of those things together kind of mold the dynamic of the organization. And so I don't necessarily want to say if it was good or bad, it was just different, it was a different model. So right now, clearly the System is the apex of the pyramid and we are one of the blocks in the structure, and that affects a lot of stuff on different time frames and in all kind of different ways. So, whether Slippery Rock was like a better or worse organization under that old model it's really hard to say, but that's the way it was. And so, I guess maybe the place was a little bit more responsive in terms of the timeframe to act because there wasn't so much bureaucracy.

Now, there are elements of this organization that are really, really, professional and polished. I mean I could start naming things like what Brian Danielson does, what Amanda Yale does, and what Connie [Laughner] used to do and now it's the folks in the Academic Support you know, our orientation program and Robert [Lagnese]; Patrick [Beswick] in Residence Life. I mean this place--Mimi [Campbell]--this place is a well-oiled machine in lots of ways, and you can see the results of that. So, our kind of statistical stature and our name recognition, and the word on the street is positively shaped by that stuff. I have a feeling that sometimes our sister schools don't have quite as polished pieces that are a part of the whole and that kind of gives us an advantage.

But, you know, there comes a price with that in that there's more structure, there's more bureaucracy, and the lines between things can sometimes be more distinct, or hike higher. So sometimes the organization is maybe not as responsive, and there's not as high of a connectivity because we've chosen to be more specialized or professional. So I don't know what the future is going to hold, but there's a lot of people who do really good jobs here.

JS: We're a lot bigger than when you were hired too, I wonder in terms of faculty

BS: At least a third bigger. There [were] probably 6,000 students when I came, so that's maybe 50% more.

JS: I wonder how many faculty?

BS: Yeah. So, I mean those are kind of two ends of the spectrum.

JS: Mm-hmm. OK. Let's talk about your campus activities, committees and such.

BS: Well so, I realized that it wasn't going to be very easy to continue my scholarship here because of specifically what I did and the infrastructure that was needed. So, kind of in my personal plan to advance through the ranks, I realized I was going to have to find a new kind of scholarship. And so, for me, I consciously tried to couple service and scholarship together as much as I could. So the reason why I got involved in a lot of these things that are kind of odd for a physicist like Writing Across the Curriculum and the Summer Arts Academy and stuff, I was open to make connections with professors in the humanities and so that helped inform my teaching and it helped my service too.

JS: OK, Writing Across the Curriculum, Summer [Arts] Academy

BS: Yeah, so I did a lot of service and probably for the--to make it to associate, I don't know if I had made it to the point that I was chairperson of any university committee; I don't think I was. I think I was on the University Curriculum Committee by that point, and I was also a legislative delegate for APSCUF, and a couple other things. So, I had kind of started that path. And that actually really helped me get promoted, that I was quite service heavy in my first five years because I didn't really have any great scholarship; I had one paper, but it wasn't very good. So [pause] I'm not being very linear here [laughter].

JS: No, no, I don't want to

BS: So, especially being involved in the Curriculum Committee, it provided you access to a lot of people, people from both directions. I don't exactly know how, but I got involved in this Writing Across the Curriculum initiative that was coming out of English. And I think even though that doesn't sound like service, I think that there's a connection between me being on the Curriculum Committee and having the ability to kind of see, and have the ability to interact with, these people that were outside of your area. Because there was nobody in the sciences that were interested in pedagogy other than maybe a couple people in the Math Department that always taught the Math for Elementary Ed[ucation]. There was very little back and forth with the professors in The School of Education.

So, once I started to learn about pedagogy it wasn't possible to get any kind of mentoring in house. And so, I ended up reaching out and made good connections with people like Neil Cosgrove, Rachela Permenter, and Allison McNeil, and Bob McIlvaine, and Bernie Freydborg, and I mean all kind of people in Spotts. And so that together being involved in the service and then those connections, it helped me advance in the service and I eventually became chair of the University Curriculum Committee. I don't remember how many years I did that, but that can make or break your reputation I think [laughter], to be blunt. And I think I did OK; I don't think I hurt myself in that, but it's definitely not something you can do for long because it's just so tedious.

JS: But your scholarship is about pedagogy, isn't it?

BS: Right.

JS: Yeah, the flipped classroom and all that.

BS: Right. And so, in some ways I'm really fortunate because I was able to integrate my scholarship into the teaching side of our domain; I didn't have to have a separate city that I was doing this experimental physics research in, that had no connection with anything else. For example, somehow, I got roped into helping write a grant to have a Writing Across the Curriculum newsletter system-wide, and I think I was the PI [principal investigator] for it twice, and the editor of this system-wide newsletter for Writing Across the Curriculum.

JS: I wonder if we have that in the Archives?

BS: Which is crazy to think back on it now, but you know, it was really good. Then somehow the connection with Wukich fermented, and we started working together, and I piggybacked off of him for a while. He helped me write my own grants, and get funding, and do stuff that was parallel to what he was doing.

JS: Him doing the Summer Academy?

BS: The Summer Arts Academy, and the things that we did during the school year that went along with that. It wasn't only in the summer.

JS: What went on during the school year?

BS: We had sites down in Pittsburgh that we did activities for, either after school or on the weekend. One was in Braddock, and one was in the West End.

So, it's kind of interesting, because I think it would've been much more challenging to make really effective connections with the humanities professors without ever having that experience in the Curriculum Committee. I think that was really, really important.

JS: That's cool!

BS: Yeah, I think that was really important. [Pause]. And then, other than that, I didn't really do a lot of university committees, other than one round on the Promotion Committee when Jerry was on it and Deb Whitfield

JS: Jerry Chmielewski?

BS: Yeah, I did that just for two years, and I really didn't enjoy that very much. I just found it so hard to try to really get the--use *just* the data and nothing else. It's so hard. It was so hard. And you were on it, or still are on it, and you know.

JS: Yeah. I believe you were also involved with APSCUF, besides being a delegate to Legislative Assembly.

BS: Yeah, I was vice president under Jace [Condavy] for either one or one and a half terms, I think it was right after Tom Daddesio? So I don't know, that would've been in the late 90s? And it was not very satisfying though, because it was the reign of Jace and it was not--we were not supposed to do any work. And that's OK. So I'm not sure if that actually contributed any to establishing a reputation in the faculty, because I don't think I ever really did anything.

JS: Did you go onto any other leadership roles in APSCUF?

BS: No, not at that time, because I was department chairperson.

JS: I mean later [laughter]. Fishing here.

BS: Yeah later. So our department was targeted by graduation statistics that were put out by the System in the 90s; a department in good standing was supposed to have twelve graduates per year. And it was just a number pulled out of a hat. We tried to fight it logically like scientists would, and we didn't make any progress. And then we just decided we'd rather just help ourselves, and so we really, really got involved with Saturday Showcase really heavily, and we started doing our own recruitment. So no, I didn't do anything with APSCUF at the state level then, because the department was basically all consuming.

JS: Right, but later, local APSCUF and state APSCUF. Do you want to talk about that a little bit?

BS: Sure.

JS: I know you were the president of the union; I happen to know that [laughter].

BS: You were the person who approached me, I think about being vice president.

JS: Yeah.

BS: I don't remember the circumstances exactly.

JS: We were in the parking lot in Swope [Music Building].

BS: And that was before Carolyn [Steglich] had decided to retire so that was . . . I don't know if I ran for a regular election. It's been a while.

JS: I don't remember the details either, but I know we needed a new president and I thought you'd be a good president.

BS: So you planted that seed, and I don't remember what my initial reaction was but it must've been positive in the end [laughter]. I was really [pause], I was a little bit shy at these parties for my retirement; I was going to share a little bit. But for me, for the last eight or ten years of my career without APSCUF I don't know if I would've been lost, but I would've had to find something to not be lost. Because it was the perfect thing for me at the perfect time.

JS: I'm so glad.

BS: I just don't know how I could've been so fortunate to be in the right place at the right time when that happened.

JS: And you were the perfect person, because you were president during the strike. So we'll talk about that now, or a little bit later, but that was fortuitous for SRU.

BS: Well, I think other people could've done the job just fine, but it's amazing to kind of think about how life goes like that. I had no, there was no premonition about getting involved in APSCUF again. I was completely out of the loop. I mean, the combination of working for the local and being here during the strike, and then finding a spot in the state to really contribute and getting to see the other side of the operation about how our union works in Harrisburg, is just an amazing, an amazing way to finish my career. During my sabbatical, which was the pandemic year, and even this last year, several people on EC [APSCUF Executive Committee] asked me, "Why don't you come to the meetings like all the past presidents have done?" And I said, "It's not because I don't want to and that I don't respect you, I just feel like this is just not my--you don't need my input anymore. There's a lot of smart people . . ."

JS: For local APSCUF.

BS: For local APSCUF, for around the table, and you guys, you need to steer the ship. It was the best for me too, because I really, really enjoyed this last year being a member of my department.

JS: Yeah, I can see that.

BS: I really enjoyed that a lot. And I'm sorry, I'm being a little bit circuitous here [laughs].

JS: No, no, no, it's good. I want to circle back though, because as president of SRU APSCUF you again attended Legislative Assembly, you're an automatic delegate, and that put you in a position to run for state level office. Do you want to talk about that?

BS: Yeah, so as chapter president you're automatically on one of the state level committees, it's called the Negotiation Committee. It's basically the chapter presidents, and it's a part of the approval process for things that involve the contracts. So there is a chairperson of that committee, so I ran for that a couple of times and didn't get it and finally got that. It's kind of ceremonial but it was just a little bit of a status thing.

But the committee of the chapter chairpersons is really an important part of the union. So, you feel a tremendous obligation to represent your campus really, really well in that forum. It's not that people don't, but it's just really important. Because it's this public thing and we're sharing, problem solving, helping, learning confidential information from the union president. There's all kind of stuff that happens.

JS: You *are* SRU in that group. That's all they know of SRU is you.

BS: Yeah. So, you really learn to kind of realize the gravity and the responsibility that goes along with the position when this stuff happens. And the strike was relatively early in my tenure [as chapter president], so I maybe didn't have quite as strong of a picture of the role of the chapter president in the whole organization. I kind of knew what the chapter president does for the chapter. So that was really enticing. And so I realized that I was interested in that, I told Ken [Mash] that I'd be interested in a more significant position if there was something I could do to help. So he suggested that I join State Meet and Discuss. And so I did that for about two years. So, besides being a learning experience it was, that was really an honor to be asked to do that because it was picked by the [state] union president. But also, I thought that it had the benefit that it was going to help us here, by just getting more experienced at this kind of negotiating . . .

JS: Absolutely.

BS: . . . that happens at the table. And that's not my forte, I'm not--unlike Kurt Schimmel, our colleague--I'm not a natural negotiator. That's not my comfortable space, so I also did it to help me try to be a better chapter president.

That led to realizing that there was an opening on the [state] Executive Committee, so that was kind of the next natural step, and so I did that for three or four years. Getting to go to Harrisburg and be a part of the committee and the team, but also like I said before, seeing our operation from the inside, for me, just built this incredible respect of APSCUF.

JS: Yeah.

BS: To see it that way, so.

JS: And your position in the Executive Committee was?

BS: Was at-large.

JS: At-large, right.

BS: Right, I was at-large.

JS: OK. So we went a little beyond campus there, but that's important to get because not everyone has those state level accomplishments. Any other accomplishments at the University?

BS: No, I mean, a couple grant awards that were competitive, but not like awards.

JS: What about North Hall?

BS: Yeah.

JS: Talk about that a bit.

BS: Well, so sometime if you're in Vincent, stop in the Physics office, and the bulletin board by my office, on the wall, there are some pictures on the wall of what our laboratories have looked like over the ages. And so in learning about pedagogy which on the surface you would think is mostly about the *stuff*, there is also the *space* comes into that. So I mean, learning about pedagogy opened my eyes up in many different ways because you have to start to become aware of psychology, of how the brain works, learning styles. So, I could solve differential equations like crazy when I came here, but I was a novice professor as a teacher. So I think the idea was that people are going to grow into the job, and I mean, my situation was not unusual at the time. Maybe now graduate [students] are getting a little bit more of an awareness of teaching in their department even if they're strictly research, but 35 years ago nobody in the physics department was a pedagogist. It just didn't happen.

So, you learn about all of that stuff and the spaces is one of it. So, we went through a series of, an evolutionary series of steps to change the teaching space that we used for our laboratories. That seemed to be an easier place to start because the rooms were smaller. Remodeling a lecture room is just more, it costs more money, so we didn't start there. So, we morphed over a couple steps to this idea where our laboratories are now set up with kind of office furniture style stuff that looks visually appealing, not laboratory furniture. And they're arranged in a way that promotes interaction in a group and amongst groups, and also, it's physically arranged in a place that the instructor can have good access to the students for interaction because of the way things were arranged.

JS: You did this in Vincent?

BS: In Vincent, right. So that was essentially the prelude. If you go into Vincent and see any of the physics labs, this is what they look like. And so, the SCALE-UP room in North Hall is not an original idea; we stole it. But it's that attention to the space scaled up to a size that's big enough to have a lecture, which for our classes at that time was 100.

JS: Huh.

BS: That was what the goal was. It was to reproduce an auditorium in this space. And we did, and that room, it really works.

JS: It doesn't look like 100 students in there when you're in the room and someone's talking.

BS: Nine times 12.

JS: It feels really intimate.

BS: Yeah, there is. [Pause]. So, the issue I think for the university is there's not really any kind of systematic way to help people amass the skills that they need to teach well in that class, because even an experienced person who's used to teaching in an auditorium lecture is going to struggle for a while in that room. Because it's different.

JS: In North Hall?

BS: In North Hall. Because you can't stand and deliver; it doesn't work. So if you can't stand and deliver, it means you probably need to change some of your teaching materials, and methods, and stuff. It doesn't happen quickly, right? So, I don't think they were worried about that upfront because we told them, "We're going to use the room," and they were real excited about the physicists being on the cutting edge of teaching, but that's something that would be good to ponder in the long sense. There's really hardly any professors in Vincent or ATS [Advanced Technology and Science Hall] who are really believers in

pedagogy. They're just not, because of how we hire and just the dynamics. So, people--you kind of need to have the tools. That room is a tool, but you need to have some smaller tools maybe before you use that room, or else it's an over kill.

JS: Is Physics the only thing that is taught in that classroom?

BS: Exercise Science uses it some, they really bought into it. I would imagine that they probably actually have some professional development in their department, because they're really together. We might do a little bit informally, but there's nothing on a larger scale.

JS: My sense is that classroom was sort of your doing, am I that correct?

BS: Basically.

JS: How did that happen?

BS: [Pause]. You know, I wasn't chairperson . . . it had to be Athula [Herat]'s running it up the flagpole. But honestly, I don't know. I don't remember if we had just a meeting with some dean, it could've been Jerry [Chmielewski], planted a seed and . . .

JS: Did everybody teach in there, or was it more like your thing?

BS: No. We used it as much as we were allotted at the time, but not everybody in the department was comfortable teaching in that room. So Athula will teach in there, Krishna [Mukherjee] will teach in there, Manuel [Valera] will teach in there, Sagar [Bhandari]'s not really in, Rizwan [Mahmood] would not have taught in there. We have enough people to use our time.

JS: Interesting, I'm glad to know about this. I mean I knew, I just associated that with you, but I didn't really know the background.

BS: Yeah, and you know some R1 schools, there are rooms like that, that go up to 300 or 500. I mean, they might have TAs and stuff and another level of technology and stuff.

JS: OK. What about some best and or worst teaching moments?

[Pause. Laughter].

BS: I mean I only can remember things over the last couple of years. So, last fall I was teaching Concepts of Science online and one student was an Elementary Education major would come by my office, we would have a standing appointment once or twice a week. She just wanted everything to be perfect. And it was just so awesome, she just did that the whole semester, and at the end of the semester she gave me a hug.

JS: [Laughter].

BS: I don't know if a student has ever given me a hug.

JS: [Laughter].

BS: It was unprovoked, it was . . . I almost cried. It was the most touching thing.

JS: Interesting for an online class that that's how this came up.

BS: Yeah, right. I mean, it was really fun interacting with this woman. I was, through helping her with the material I was able to plant all of these additional seeds about what we were doing, the way the curriculum was designed, and all the stuff. I said, "You know, you can do this in your third-grade class. You have to do it differently, but there's some stuff here that, you know, you can adapt to what you're going to do." So that was really fun.

JS: Yeah, that's like working on multiple levels there.

BS: You know, I wish I could tell you what the bad thing was, or the worst things were, because I'm sure there's lots. But maybe, you know, people are good at putting those things behind the curtain. I know that a frustration though, in the last half of my career that has been constant, is that it saddens me that students won't, don't take advantage of the resources that are available to the extent that I kind of wish they would. Whether that's office hours or whatever. I think that the college age population is different than when I started. Clearly, it's two generations have elapsed in the time that I've been here. That particular thing saddens me because I think it's a loss of opportunity that you can't ever get back. And maybe as a 61-year-old I realize that, and at 21 I didn't.

JS: Well yeah, like the student who came to office hours and she got so much more out of it for her discipline, for education, because she came to office hours. Others don't get anything.

BS: But you know I was once on the board of the Unitarian Church for a while and in charge of the spiritual services, and I've done Boy Scouts in my life and all these things, and I realized that you do stuff for the people that do it. You don't dwell on who doesn't take advantage of opportunities. But it's kind of a nagging thing in the background, you know, as far as my teaching part of my life goes. I just wish that students would take more advantage.

JS: Was that before COVID also?

BS: Yeah, in my eyes there's been a downward trend of engagement, or whatever you the proper word is to talk about this. But I have no scientific data that that's true.

JS: So, I'm trying to remember, when we went remote that spring semester whatever year that was, 2020 I guess.

BS: '20.

JS: And then it was the following academic year that you were on sabbatical, right?

BS: Right.

JS: So, you taught online the end of that semester and then you were on sabbatical that whole year we were . . .

BS: Online.

JS: And then you came back when we all came back, right? So, you just missed that one year.

BS: Yeah.

JS: Which I mean, not exactly the ideal time to go on sabbatical, in a way it was because you didn't have to teach online, maybe that was good. But you didn't get to do all the things you'd hoped to do on your sabbatical, did you?

BS: No, but that's OK. If I was not retiring now, I would clearly be interested in engaging in some really serious professional development on creating online communities. Because I think that the stuff has translation to face to face class too. So, I realized--I wasn't expected to be able to be a stellar online professor in March of 2020.

JS: Right, nobody was.

BS: It was just triage.

JS: Yeah.

BS: So, I didn't have this year where I could've probably advanced my skills some by having time on task. So, when I taught the online course in the fall, I was no more educated myself than I really was in the spring of 2020 and I pretty much used my old play, it was for a different course but . . .

JS: So, you taught online even though we were back face to face?

BS: Right, because we had one online section.

JS: Yeah, yeah.

BS: So, but if I was going to stay, that's something that I would do next. If I decide that I might want to make a little money doing some stuff online, then I might engage in some of this anyway.

JS: That's your thing too: pedagogy, so that could be . . .

BS: Yeah. But I've got to decide if I'm going to do it just to learn about it or because I want to have a use for it. I'm not really anxious to find another job, but I could imagine that it might be enticing to make some money sometime, teaching online.

JS: I thought you were going to go into the wood business.

BS: [Laughter] yeah.

JS: Firewood, there's a lot of money in that.

[Laughter].

JS: So, thinking back a little bit, who were the leaders when you came, and then maybe early in your career. Because we're trying to make these connections with old timers, people who were here before you. People before our time. So, who would the president have been when you came?

BS: [Dr. Robert] Aebersold.

JS: Aebersold.

BS: Aebersold would have been the president, and my dean was Charles Zuzak. When I read that question, he came to my mind immediately. In my eyes, he was an old school gentleman, gentleman dean. Felt like a very different kind of style from now. Kind of looking back on it, he seemed like he viewed part of his role as kind of the cheerleader to help pump up and to pump up the division so to speak. And I don't know if that happens anymore, whether the dean feels like there's any place to be a motivator, or a model, or a mentor, or if it's all about just got to get the business done.

JS: No, I think I see that in Liberal Arts.

BS: In Dan [Bauer]?

JS: Yep.

BS: So yeah, he was very different. And Jerry [Chmielewski], I think, was [Zuzak's] assistant dean for a long time, but they were like oil and water. So, I'm very fond of him. Duncan Sargent who was the Director of Admissions, he stands out in my mind as just an upstanding person. I'd already mentioned Amanda [Yale]. And Amanda was faculty, so she's made this transition into administrator side, and I think it's for the best of this institution.

JS: Yeah, what about Jerry? Jerry would've been, was he a department chair when you came?

BS: Jerry would've, I don't know if he would've been department chair, because he only came a year before me. He could have been, but . . .

JS: Yeah.

BS: Biology, I mean [pause] I should probably censor my comments [laughter]. The Biology Department has always been, I've always thought an outlier in terms in kind of understanding what our playbook is here, and Jerry is a part of that. For a lot of--the first third, first half of my career-- almost every one of their hires had post-doc experience and they wanted that on purpose. We would have never done that in Physics because it was completely contrary to what--we wanted our department to be was a teaching-focused department, with people that are competent researchers. But the research didn't have to . . . We already had one person whose research was stronger than their teaching. We didn't need--so that was Biology, and that's the way it was.

Neil Cosgrove and I had lots of interactions, and Rachela Permenter and some of these people are contemporaries and not that much older. Bill Lingren in the Math Department, he and I were good friends socially, we hiked together a lot. He was my next-door office mate for the pre-Vincent remodeling, so I knew him really well. Bill Morrison, a Biology professor, he was on that hallway. And Bob Hines. So, that was one thing that was really interesting, is old Vincent had these mixed hallways, we weren't organized by departments. And that was really healthy for the first part of my career. I don't know how things would have been different if we had suites like we do now, but I think it was good. I actually met Pat [Burkhart]--Pat got that office in that hallway, and I met him at the very first day he started working here.

JS: Nice.

BS: So that was really cool too, in that model of Vincent where there it was all mixed up, people weren't together.

JS: So, were you involved with the union? Bill Williams would have been union president, right? He seemed like he was for a long time, maybe somebody else was before him.

BS: Bill was before Jace. No, Bill Taylor was the president when I came, he was in Government I think. Then Kate Brennan from Music was next, and then it would've been Bill Williams, and then it would've been Jace. Bill [Williams] was president for a while, I don't remember how many years.

JS: Yeah, he was president when I came.

BS: I mean, I remember my vision of him like as a younger person, he's this powerful, powerful dude. He was the chair of the English Department and president of the union, this guy's powerful. It wasn't necessarily intimidating but it would catch your attention. This guy's really powerful.

JS: OK, at that time who were the old timers? Do you remember people who were like maybe at the end of the careers? Do you remember Hunter Davis?

BS: Yeah, I mean we never interacted. Yeah. So, Jeannie Hamilton. Of course, Wilma [Cavill]. The woman who we were just talking about at the APSCUF social, Bobby Braden, who was reported missing in Arizona a month ago, she was the chair the Phys Ed Department. We were on Master Swim Team together; she was a really good mentor. Patsy Ann Johnson and I started doing some work together, we didn't always mesh that well together in terms of our styles. She helped me a lot, and I maybe didn't help her as much as I could have . . . so anyway. But if you showed me a yearbook or something, I can look. There's lots of people who I would have familiarity with. Old timers.

JS: Any other people who were influenced you or were significant in your time here? [Pause]. It's OK, you've covered a lot.

BS: [Laughter], no, I mean that . . . that's kind of hard to answer. [Pause]. I've always had really good relationships with our department secretaries. There has been a lot of them over a 30-year career, and many of them I was their supervisor, and it doesn't have to be a perfect relationship when you're in that kind of thing. So that's, those people have been really, really, important in a career to make things . . . Cheryl Dolan and so on.

I don't know, I mean one person, and this sounds a little bit odd, Ed Bucha from the Foundation. He and I crossed paths a lot and he has always just been a really kind person to me. And Elliott Baker I was going to say, was another person that, you know, probably everybody loves Elliott because of him, and he could make you feel really special and important just because of [inaudible], so I have a really good relationship with him.

JS: Yeah, he's a super nice guy.

BS: His place, he's the person that you can't even measure what he brought to this place: the stability and the competence, and I mean, you couldn't try to hire somebody like that. I mean you could try, but it's just not going to happen.

JS: I agree. Nice. Yeah, it's not just fellow faculty, and it's not just administrators. OK, next question is: major events or activities while you were here. We did talk about the strike a little bit. Academic, cultural, building projects, weather events, national events, anything.

BS: [Pause]. Well, other than the strike there must have been something . . .

[Laughter].

BS: . . . really significant that happened in the last 30 years.

JS: That was pretty big though; the strike was pretty big.

BS: Yeah, it was pretty big.

JS: Every contract negotiation up until then . . . we would never play that trump card. We wouldn't go there.

BS: Yeah, it's like we're aiming the gun at each other but no one's going to pull the trigger, or there's no bullets in the magazine anyway.

JS: Yeah, and they knew that, they thought that. But this was different because we did, and you were a part of that.

BS: Well, the thing about the adjuncts was really egregious, I think that was . . . I think that was politically unwise of them. To think that that was going to be benign.

JS: It was a misstep, for sure.

BS: I don't know if that was the only misstep but that was one that ultimately . . . [Pause]. No, I was going to say, this is kind of silly, but one really odd thing when the PT [Physical Therapy] program was established, they were housed in these trailers out by the baseball stadium.

JS: I remember that.

BS: So that was pretty, that whole deal was pretty weird. Actually, the whole thing was kind of weird in the same way that adding some of these other medical-related programs lately has been weird because they don't seem like they fit, so that was the beginning of that. I was not in any kind of university leadership position to have anything to do with APSCUF. I might've been the department chairperson. But that was a pretty significant change in the landscape; adding the program in the first place, and then soon becoming the DPT [Doctorate of Physical Therapy] and they're being housed in these and like to see oh, it was kind of interesting. Not bad, not good, but wow we're trying to do something here. We're making a really big step.

JS: And think about how it changed the quad too when the PT building was built, and then ATS building wasn't here either. It was just Bailey, and Vincent, and Spotts, and Eisenberg.

BS: Yeah, it changed the *look* of the campus a lot too.

JS: And then Harrisville, because I happen to know you live out that way. All of that development out there that's changed SRU quite a bit. You're talking about other new programs, the health sciences.

BS: Yeah. Well that's what I would say. So, the strike is clearly like the number one significant thing, but this place has grown from 6,000 students to almost 10,000 in 30 years, so there's a lot of growth in the physical structure.

JS: The dormitories too. OK, what will you miss having just retired this past semester?

BS: What will I miss? [Laughter]. [Pause]. Well, I'm going to miss saying good morning to Athula, when I go in to the office [laughter], and Mary [Caylor], because I'm the first person there when they walk in. [Pause]. I can't; there's like a thousand things that I'm going to miss.

JS: Give me three.

BS: Three?

JS: Mm-hmm.

BS: I'm going to miss you.

JS: [Laughter].

BS: I'm going to miss, this is going to sound odd, so I'm going to miss the opportunity to make stuff better in my teaching and in the greater community. My teaching is a lot shorter timeframe because you just are in control. And in the greater community it takes a little bit longer, but hopefully being a part of APSCURF [Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Retired Faculties] I can still have a small role in that.

JS: That's two.

BS: That's two.

[Laughter]

BS: So, I do miss when the Faculty Club was the lunchroom for the faculty. I don't miss the dynamics that can evolve in a situation like that, because it's not always welcoming to everybody. But I don't think there's anything really that has kind of replaced that opportunity for just kind of casual interaction amongst faculty, and I think that that's unfortunate.

JS: Right. You have to be on a committee to meet other faculty outside of one's department. That was one way you didn't have to be, it was just, "Oh Wilma," and she'd invite you over. Yeah.

BS: So I think that is something that, we've gone backwards in that regards. I don't know if it's ever possible to invent another model where that can happen, but and maybe the pandemic has made it more obvious that there's something that's different and we're still, now we've got this other event that has provided a similar challenge, so now we've got to recover. You know?

JS: Yeah, and maybe we'll want to reclaim that, a way to do that again. Because even when they made that little space for us in Weisenfluh, nobody went there, it just wasn't the same.

BS: Yeah, it doesn't really work, for some reason. So, that's what I think.

JS: So those are three of the things you'll miss.

BS: Yeah.

JS: So, how about any words of wisdom. Things you might like for current or future Rock community members to know. [Pause]. What would you even tell your colleagues, you know, you have a lot of newer colleagues in your department now.

BS: I mean, for my colleagues, one of the things that I tell them is that you don't have to have the same master plan for your whole academic career. You know, clearly, we're supposed to focus on three areas [teaching, scholarship, and service], and so you can construct a pie chart out of the distribution of those three areas. But the size of the wedges don't have to be the same throughout your whole career. I would argue that it might even be good to intentionally change the distribution, like, every five years when you do your post-tenure review. Just because, because it's an opportunity and you don't know what's going to come from an opportunity until you go a little bit down the path.

JS: I like that.

BS: And for me, if I would have followed this advice, that would've meant that I would have to have gotten more serious about my research in terms of being able to present it and being more systematic about--not just use it to inform my daily practice, but I would have to have treated it more as a research, a study; to document it for eventual publication. Because after I became full professor I just decided that I didn't want to do that; that it was just a waste of time because I didn't need the cred, and it would take away from the time to actually make change. But I realize that the downside of that is that that insight is just local, and the community deserves to have access to insight, whether it's positive or negative. So, sharing is really an important part of the growth. So that's something that I think that I would've taken my advice and done that.

So, that's one thing. And then the other is, even on a kind of higher level is just to figure out the balance between work and life. Again, it's not, it doesn't have to be the same for your whole career, but you have to have a really good sense of what's appropriate in your stage of life in your career, which encompasses a lot of stuff. You've got to *think* about that, or else if you get out of balance, and if you get out of balance, you might make a misstep that's harmful to your family, or your work, or something.

JS: Yeah, it's hard.

BS: I don't know if I've always been good at that, I mean I've been divorced once, so I guess in some ways I'm probably not very good at this.

JS: It's hard. Look at young mothers now doing it. [Pause]. How would you like to be remembered?

BS: How would I like to be remembered?

JS: Mm-hmm.

BS: [Pause]. As a person who cared about Slippery Rock. I think that's enough, because there's a lot that you can plug into that.