

Interviewee: Richard Wright

Date: 4/6/1995

Location: Carey Hall

Interviewer: Gladius Lee

(GL) Richard can you please tell me what your birth date is?

(Richard Wright) 3.16.37.

(GL) Ok I'll proceed with the interview and ask you a few other questions. Number one, what is your educational background?

(RW) I have graduated from high school from the state of Indiana from the School For the Blind, I have an AB, an AM from Indiana University and I completed all the work for a doctorate but a dissertation at the Indiana University all degrees in sociology.

(GL) Ok number two, how did you decided to come to NMU?

(RW) I didn't decided to come to NMU, I my... my major professors were very concerned that this was of course a very different time than now that I would be able to function as a college professor with my vision. And they thought I would try and teach for a year or two and I filled out my data I put some interest in the upper Midwest. Notably Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, turned out Northern was looking for a replacement person and the person who was director of the Indiana university Darrel Holsman [Spelled Phonetically] from the doctor was a Northern graduate. And knew the department chairmen here who were looking and proceeded to see need and call me and then hire the chairmen here Gene --- called me and I gave them an interview and I was hired.

(GL) What was the university like in early 1960s when you arrived here?

(RW) We were about forty one hundred students, it was much smaller, the entire campus was centered around the area where the Cohodas building and the related area would be now. There were Kaye where Cohodas was and then Longyear off to the south and Pirece running to the Longyear, Pirece running east and west. And then the White building running north of Kaye Hall extending over to the old Olson Library building in a kind of curve, it came around almost where we are here in Carey Hall. The only other buildings was on campus at that time was the Field House and there was a University Center but it really wasn't consisted didn't have its extended wings that it has now. So all those, all the activity go over on at that old complex.

(GL) How has the campus, including the students, faculty and administrators different than past thirty plus years?

(RW) Well of course many more of everyone, much larger faculty with more departments and more specialties. We have more than twice as many students, we went through a period, we have a much larger administration although we went through a period under John Jamrich and the first part of James Appleberry where we had a much higher ratio of administrators. As far as students were concerned, I think that we probably have students that tend to be more in the middle if you think of the students as a bell shape distribution, I don't think we have as many of the opulent bright students that we used to see, but other hand we used to get some really callosity bad students and we also I think are less inclined to get that. With students sort have been pressed toward the middle.

(GL) mm... what were some of the classes that you have taught over the years?

(RW) Well I can laugh and say almost everything but I have taught introductory sociology, social problems, introduction to sociocultural anthropology under -- I might add. The sociology of education, social psychology, the sociology of human behavior, the study of population, social organization, environmental sociology, the study of community power. The current courses that I teach including the what have been two computer application courses what are now being combined into one four hour computer applications course and the course the is require for social work students that come in and need human service organizations that combine sort of elements of two traditional courses that I've taught normally the community and social organization. That's fairly complete list.

(GL) Who is involved or significant person in the department? Were there any memorable staff that you met on campus that you can recall over the years?

(RW) Well I think that within the department certainly one person that would stand out would have been Gene --- my first department head. He was an economist who had roots in social work and he had a very effecting relationship both with students and former students. He had a lot of ties with other colleges and universities and he was often able to get focused social work students get jobs while they headed into graduate school. I've personally seen him call the University of Michigan and when he got off the phone have a scholarship for a very promising student. He was very active have an active student organization and got the faculty involved not just the social workers but those of work who were sociologist and economist because we were all one department. Certainly --- and Albert Burns [Spelled Phonetically] who had been -- mentor and who had come here later who had been an academic administrator here and taught sociology when I was here, he had a PHD from Iowa and he taught the criminology courses here. He retired in 1966, those were good people, probably hard to think they stood out most. In terms of other parts of the university, one person that comes to mind was a person who taught in what was then business department, a man by the name of Kevin Sheer [Spelled Phonetically] who was an attorney. He taught law courses, he had written a book on an academic apparel that is the types of apparels that people wear when they go through graduations and different colleges and universities that have the design of their gowns and their hoods. Various paraphernalia which is

really an odd thing for a lawyer to have done but it was a very outspoken, a very funny kind of guy because all of the faculty used to gather with all of the secretarial staff for coffee down in the old Kaye Hall coffee shop. And then then we'd often used to eat lunch over in what used to be the faculty lounge in the University Center later had been the Charcoal Room. Everyone knew everyone else and so somebody like Kevin even though he was in another department he is somebody we had a lot interaction with. Staff I guess it would be I don't know if colorful is the right word, the staff would stand out in different ways. Certainly for many years as you walk Mary --- in English was one of the people who had a more powerful as far as a reputation as a sort of dominating the program over there. Anything that went on you dealt with Mary and it's so hard to say I mean I can think of other people but I am not sure I want to kind of departmentalize them.

(GL) Oh ok. Do you have any predictions for the future for the department?

(RW) Well I am pretty sure you are asking at a bad time because we don't know with all this economic situation we have as far as the budget whether we will be a department as such. Or whether they will have add us or combine us with somebody else but the sooner we survive as a unit, I think that the department will probably continue to increase at least in terms of quality. We have if you can a very effect program in social work, I think as we are able to hopefully hire new people in sociology because sociology and social work have come so interrelated so interdependent that it would be able to go beyond what we have already done. We already have a good scholarly record, but I think there are things that we can do that we are not doing already. One thing is we are starting to build more cooperative bridges with other programs for example sociology, social work, criminal justice are working together on some cooperative things. Some of our faculty are doing cooperative research, I think you'll see a lot more of that.

(GL) Mm ok. Well I can't think of anything else I wanted to ask, there has been quite a bit of a change hasn't though hasn't there over the years?

(RW) Oh immense change.

(GL) Not only physically in the surrounding facilities but with the different staff members and its students.

(RW) Yeah the biggest change came from -- the first few years I was here were, the first year of being the student enrollment was thirty one hundred and the second year was thirty-five or thirty six hundred. And yet by 1966 it was over seven thousand, so we doubled in about that time and what that meant was they brought a lot people in and there were a lot people who were here for just a year or two, a lot of temporary people. We taught some very very large classes, I taught intro classes of over three hundred back until one April was over four hundred which was a real zoo. We experimented we taught courses on video tape four others in social sciences prepared a series of thirty two tape presentations that were used through the late sixties in the old common learning program. The second thing was being better --- in the physical sciences as well or

natural sciences as well. But we did a lot of things just because we didn't have enough people really, we didn't have adequate faculty to acquire to catch up with the increase student enrollment. The place was in a real transition. I think that well we are much more of a university today I think one change that is not for the better is when I first came here everyone knew everyone and in some ways you were like a family. Certainly within the department more like a family than it ever was after that.

(GL) Mmhhh yeah -- --. Ok I guess that's all I have to ask so this is Glorious Lee concluding an interview with Richard Wright this is April 6th 1994, thank you

End of interview