

John Duff

OK, it is May seventh, 1998 and this is the interview with Doctor John Duff, President at Columbia College.

Doctor Duff, would you tell us what the circumstances were that brought you to Columbia? In the late '80s, around 1989, 1990, I was finishing my term as Commissioner of Chicago Public Library. Finishing it in the sense that the reason I had come to Chicago was to be involved in the building of the new central library, which became the Harold Washington Library Center. And it had always been my intention to go back into academic work after the library project was finished. And about that time, Mike Alexandroff, who I knew from the committee of the various cultural groups in Chicago that met from time to time, asked me if I'd be interested in coming to Columbia and I said I certainly would consider it. And both my wife and I were interested in staying in Chicago, and an opportunity to come to Columbia would mean that we wouldn't have to relocate again. So when the job was advertised I applied and I went through the process of interviewing and was elected and came over here in June of '92.

When you, what were your impressions of Columbia, you know, as being a resident of Chicago before you came? And perhaps you could tell us maybe how that changed once you got here.

Well, when I was a resident of Chicago I knew about Columbia. Again, through the Grant Park Cultural Group, to which the library belonged as well as Columbia College. And my prede-

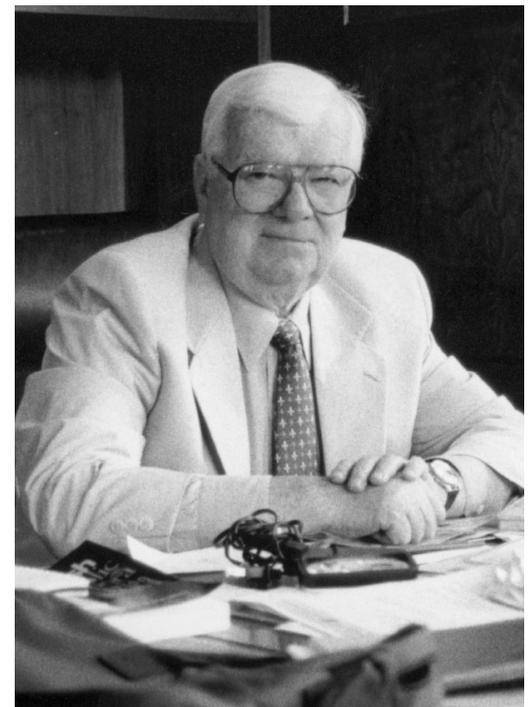
cessor Mike Alexandroff was the chairman of the Grant Park Cultural Group and I knew that the College was involved in the bridging of performing arts and communications. And we had even had a meeting with Ed Morris, who was Chair of Television at the time, about the Television Department using the new television studios that were in the Harold Washington Library. So I knew quite a bit about what the College did. And then during the interview period I read the last accreditation report, a self-study that told me quite a bit about the College. Finally, during the interview process, I learned a great deal about Columbia, its strength and its problems from the process, from the members of the Search Committee, the faculty, the administration people, and the trustees who were on the committee. All these elements helped tell me something about the College.

And now, and then once you got here, were there things that surprised you that you hadn't known or adjustments you had to make in your impression of the school?

I had been asked by the committee to concentrate on a couple of matters. One was a dormitory. They wanted to get a dormitory because they wanted to attract students from other areas while keeping their main mission in Chicago. And they wanted me to get Columbia better known because they wanted the story of the College to be told. When I came here I felt that it was quite true that the College hadn't really been as well known in Chicago or other places as it should be and so that was one of our goals. And it clearly was, it needed to get

some kind of a residence facility because we were losing many good students for not having those. The other impression that I had was that the—and this has continued—the students were very satisfied with their work here. You know, I've been in many institutions and there is less student complaining about the quality of instruction and the quality of the education they're getting than at Columbia College. And of course I noticed right away a problem that we haven't completely solved yet: that it was a crowded place. There's more space needed at Columbia. I've been used to places where there's an abundance of space and a large campus. Here we have thousands of students and only two buildings.

When the dormitory, which has been put into place, but what were some of your plans for— what have you done to bring Columbia to the greater Chicago community, but beyond that as well?



What we've done is we've put out periodic reports, President's reports, on Columbia; reports of the Board of Trustees. But also we've put out a great deal literature. We have done more with alumni, worked with meetings in Los Angeles, where there's a large Columbia coterie in the film industry; in Atlanta where we have large numbers of people in television at TNT and CNN; in New York, in other areas. We expanded the network of our admissions to southern California and now New England, as well as our neighboring states, for attracting students. And I try to make Columbia a presence at events as much as possible and get involved with statewide activities. For example, I'm in the middle now of a two-year term as chairman of the Federation of Independent Colleges of Illinois. That's fifty-seven of the independent colleges of the state including University of Chicago, Northwestern, Loyola, DePaul, Bradley, are members. And as chair I do a lot of work, I get around to many campuses. I stayed and begin to know what—they begin to know what Columbia is all about because we talk about it. And I had the opportunity to meet with George Ryan, who spoke to the Federation in Springfield, and we were talking in length about Columbia and some of the things we do. So it really is taking advantage of whatever opportunity there is and promoting the good things that are happening at the College and getting involved in other things. For example, one of the newest ventures is the Asian Cultural Center. That had its kick-off last week which was put together by Nancy Tom, one of our new trustees. I think that's the first such center of a college in the United States, and I think it's gonna bring us more attention as well.

What do you think, or in your own words, how would you describe the mission of Columbia College in relation to the arts community, to Chicago, the larger society?

Well, I believe Columbia is a very important part of the arts community in Chicago. We are involved in every aspect of dance, theater, music, journalism, television, film, radio/sound. There are people from Columbia, Columbia graduates, throughout all those areas in Chicago. You know, I like to say that in the recent semester, for example, that we had fifteen or sixteen active Chicago directors; that is, people who have plays running in Chicago teaching in the Theater Department. In the recent semester we had six Pulitzer Prize winners teaching in journalism. Now, they're adjunct professors and these are folks who work for Chicago Tribune or the Chicago Sun-Times or the Chicago Magazine. But they teach here and they're very active in the community. And that means that Columbia is known in the newsrooms of the major publications. It's known in the theater areas wherever you go, etc. And it's the job of all of us to keep telling that story and promoting it. And of course, as we expand from one building in 1979 to about eight or nine locations now, we're getting to be better known.

And, but do you think in your tenure here, Columbia, has it influenced your own ideas of what education is or changed it? Has it influenced it in any way?

Oh yes, I think so very definitely, Erin. I had always believed that college was important for people. In fact, I had, I have said that when people say, "Some of the students you bring in drop out before they finish more than a couple years."

And I said, "Well, even if they finish a semester it's a valuable thing that they've had a college experience of some kind. If they come back to it later at least they know what college is about, it gives them some information and knowledge about it." And I also became much more supportive of efforts to bring students who need help the help that they do need. We're spending quite a bit of money now on helping students who are not well prepared. Because it's hard to compete here at Columbia unless you are well prepared, because of the peculiar appeal of our programs. For example, we get first rate students from the Parker School, from St. Ignatius, from the New Trier High School. This year we admitted twenty-two students from New Trier, which is considered one of the top high schools in the United States. And that was the most New Trier graduates of any college in the United States. And so you get these students who are really top-notch but you also have students who have real problems, who are reading below the eighth grade level. So we have to do developmental work with them. But I think the mix works well because the students who come here really know what they want to do. In that way it's different from the traditional large university where you have many people who go in and say, "I don't know what I want to major in. I want to see what it is, see what it's like to be in psychology or history or business or art, etc." But usually, when you come to Columbia College you know from an early time that you wanted to do radio or television or you wanted to be in theater or film or you wanted to be a journalist. There aren't that many undecided people who come here. So they come here with a feeling that they want to get the kind of education

that Columbia provides and are therefore halfway home; they're accepting of what we do here. It's what they expected, for the most part. As I said earlier, there seems to be a great deal of student satisfaction at this College, more than I've experienced in almost forty years in this business.

I want to return to that issue of, you know, you talked about retention and that has been a challenge to Columbia, and you're talking about exposing children or young adults to the college experience. When you put money resources into this remedial or bringing students up to a college level reading ability, is that a larger issue that should be handled before they come to Columbia? Do you know what I'm saying?

Oh, of course. There was, today in USA Today, there was a couple of columns about the new system in Texas where they have to deal with the opposition to affirmative action after they passed these laws against affirmative action. The state of Texas adopted a provision that ten percent, the top ten percent of a graduating class, was entitled to admission at the University of Texas wherever they were. And this means that they would get in regardless of what their SAT or ACT tests are. And some people are opposed to that, in saying the students should be able to score well on those standardized tests and the reason they have them is because the high schools haven't done the job, etc., etc. And there's some truth in that but I don't think just because the high schools haven't done the job as well as they might have had in various parts of the country, that those people who have finished high school and want to go to college should be denied

that. Because we can help them; I believe they have reading ability. The various programs that we run here: the Freshman Seminar, a program run by the English Department and the Math Department, the Outside Program by the Sylvan Company, have all been successful to some extent. They have been retaining students and having them, getting them to continue and do work here. So, and I believe that is, that's very important because, well, I've often said this to people, "The day that most students drop out of college is the first day and the week is the first week and the month is September of their freshman year and the semester is their Fall semester of freshman year and the year is their freshman year." So if you get through your freshman year, your chances of finishing college are increased proportionately and so on through the second year. And so it's getting people and keeping them in the College. And we're doing more of that every year. And I, I'm one of the people who believe it's an important thing to do. As I said earlier, "If we can get people to have a year's college or two years' college, it still is a significant achievement." I'm not particularly worried that they don't graduate within four years. Many of the students at Columbia don't, partly because many of them go off and become interns for a while and then come back and finish their degree and so on. I could cite you a list of distinguished people from Winston Churchill to John F. Kennedy who didn't finish college in four years, it took a longer time to do it. I don't think there's anything magic about it. In fact, before the 1960s, it was the norm that it took longer than four years. I mean, the real expansion of American higher education began after the Second World War with the GI Bill that brought back

all those veterans that went to college. And they took five, six, seven years to get through college because many of them were married and supporting a family and so forth. It was only in the '60s and in the '70s that the norm was, became, in my opinion, almost an obsession with getting through in four years, took hold. I think students, and I know several I advised where they had opportunities; they could go and study in Europe for a year and they said, "This might hold me back getting my degree here." And I said, "So what? A year spent in Spain or Austria or whatever is worth an education in itself. You know, that's going to be a great value to you and go ahead and do it, you know?" And so, I think that that emphasis is too heavy.

On the traditional or what has become the traditional.

Yeah, I mean, it's fine to get through in four years, most students will still do it. But there shouldn't be any stigma attached to people that take longer to do it.

I was just thinking too that open admissions today means something quite different when, with the remedial work that Columbia has to do, than, it sounds like, when Columbia first came to its own where it was accepting a lot of adult or older college students maybe that hadn't worked out in another institution and come here. But today really the reality is, as you say, that there are these kids that, you know, want to come to college and many of whom aren't, don't have the skills.

Well, in the '60s Columbia began, under Mike Alexandroff, to take its shape in its modern way. And Mike instituted the ideas that made

Columbia what it is today. One, the concentration on the fine performing arts and communications and the inclusion of other courses which would let people get degrees in liberal arts. Secondly, open admissions, which meant that anybody could come to Columbia who had a high school diploma or an equivalency. And the third idea was usually use of practitioners who would teach. When that happened Columbia changed from having many adults to having traditional aged students. Our students are now traditionally coming to us at eighteen and stay through their early twenties here. So it's a very traditional student body now and the processes work well. Who can deny that it has? When Mike started this there were, in the early '60s, less than two hundred students at Columbia. And this Fall we have over nine thousand students. So it has worked well and I think we've done well by a whole generation of students.

Can Columbia get too big, do you think? Is there, do you personally see a limit or can it fulfill its traditional mission with unlimited growth or...

This is a question that has been asked by many people. The people on the Board of Trustees have asked it outside, evaluators have asked it, people internally ask it, and it's a good idea to question your objectives from time to time. I personally believe that because the system has worked well there isn't any reason to change it right now. The people who argue strongly for limiting enrollment do it primarily because of the argument of space. We continually have to get more space and equipment. But if you limit it, if you end open admis-

sions, you're going to limit enrollment. People say what they favor is open enrollment, not open admissions. The distinction they make is that we'll set a target, let's say ten thousand students. And if you need two thousand more or twenty-three hundred more for an entry class, as soon as twenty-three hundred people are accepted they, you know, that they, then no more people are accepted or they're put on the waiting list...

It's first come, first serve?

First come, first serve. But, the problem with that is that every year Columbia, which is on, as you know, a traditional semester; in other words, unlike colleges that begin right at Labor Day or even the end of August, we don't start until the end of September, we enroll seven hundred to eight hundred students in September. These are students who make up their mind late, who have gone to other colleges and don't like it, who have graduated from high school and gotten a job in the fast food business, say, making five or six dollars an hour thinking when they were in high school that was all the money in the world and then they find their friends going to colleges. It's not the best thing, and they've decided to come to college. We would be excluding a large number of students just because they had not made the last choice. They don't think for a minute that it isn't difficult to do. Since I became President, which is six years ago, we have acquired seven more venues for our operation. We've got the radio/sound building now over on La Salle and Huron, we've got the new film/sound studio on Fourteenth and Wabash, we've acquired the Sherwood School of Music building, we opened the, we've got four

floors in the East Congress building, we've got a place for continuing ed across the street, we've got the place for the Paper Center on Wabash, and we've got the dormitory. And that's just in the six years that I've been President, about seven places have been filled. So it's a lot of work. We spend a great deal of time looking at property, looking at enrollment, and so on. But it's worth doing it, we still are doing it. And this year we were apprehensive that we might, it might end because we did have to, because of a number of factors, raise the tuition the most that it's been raised in years and years. And there are a number of reasons for that. First, all the work that we have been doing, just as I've just elaborated, the fact that over the next three summers we're going to spend four million dollars replacing the elevators in the three main buildings, starting this summer in this building, and we have to do that. And then we face replacing, in the few years to come, the boilers in the three main buildings. So it's a continual cost-horse and we're still tuition driven. Although I'm proud of the fact that when I became President we were over ninety-two percent tuition driven; we're getting down to around eighty-eight percent. So we're making progress in that direction. We're not there yet by a long shot.

What's your goal in that sector?

Oh, my goal is to get it down more and more. I want to get certain figures down like the dependency on tuition, which we've made progress. When I came in we had a default, student loan default rate of over twenty percent; we're now under ten. We hired a firm to do that. And that, by the way, brings no money into the College, but it's

a risk, because if you get over twenty-five percent fault rate then you can lose your federal funding. So now we're in a safe position because we've worked hard to do that. And I remember the Secretary of Education, Riley, told me we're one of the two colleges in the country that spends zone money to go out, to go after student loans. Because, as I said, it doesn't come to the College. The colleges collect the money for the federal government. So those are goals, to get those down. The other goal is to increase the endowment of the College. And one reason we become less dependent on tuition is we have other sources. When I became President the endowment was about nine million, it's about forty million now. A lot of that came from effective administration, we could put more in the endowment and we've taken great advantage of the rising bull market over the last six years, we've been lucky that way.

And what about relationships to Chicago? Are you building, you know, corporate or...

Yeah, well, one of the things we've done is to build a Board of Trustees. I mean, the Board of Trustees of any institution is extremely important for the survival of the school and for support to the school. When I became President, there were about twenty trustees, even though there were forty-five, at the time, authorized. Now we increased the number authorized to fifty and currently we have forty-four trustees. So we've recruited, some have left from the original twenty, some who, that I myself recruited have served three or four or five or six years have left. So we recruited about three dozen people over the last six years for the board from all walks of life and all parts of the country. It's a national

Board now with people coming from New York and Boston and Florida and Ohio and Los Angeles, Arizona. We're trying to make it national, even more national, and trying to get people in who can support the College and help it.

With, I mean obviously, as you said, it's a very diverse Board, but what direction did you go with the Board that perhaps hadn't been gone before, in addition to making it more national? Well, we're getting more support from the Board. We're getting hundreds of thousands of dollars more than the Board gave before because it's a larger Board and we're getting some substantial gifts from members of the Board. One Board member and her husband gave over a million dollars to the College, which was a substantial gift. That's what you have to do in a modern situation. And we're about to embark on a capital campaign, which the Board will be involved in, to raise the endowment and also to raise money for construction or acquisition of property.

Is it, I mean, it must be very difficult with the school being centered at least, in the Loop or, you know, at the south end of the Loop, but the cost of facilities. Are you looking to other locations or are we pretty much looking at expanding here?

No, we're committed to the South Loop. I just chaired a meeting in Springfield, in my position as the head of the Federation, about expansion into Lake County. There is a large institution, in fact the discussion was whether it be a public institution in Lake County; either a couple of smaller places like Barat and Lake Forest, etc. But that population is growing there and so somebody asked me if

Columbia is thinking about a campus up there. The problem is that we are so dependent upon equipment and facilities. We've got to have, for Radio/Sound, we've got to have a radio station; for Film we've gotta have sound studios. We just built the second one and now it's been in operation less than a year and they're already talking about needs for a third sound studio. We have to do that for Television, Art, and Photography. So you can't go out to the suburbs and replicate these at great cost. We have to be here. Secondly, the locus of culture has always been the cities. The glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome, was the old saying, was the cities. You know, that was, that's the important thing. You can't really run a top-notch Film Department in the suburbs or in the rural areas. You gotta be in the city. And the same with Dance and all because you have to have an audience for it. And we do so much here in all these disciplines, especially this time of year; there are film festivals, or theater, there's music, there's dance. Every night there's something going on at Columbia College or it spawns from Columbia College. The city is vital and we're so well established in the South Loop now, we won't be going anywhere further from here. The problem is the South Loop is getting to be a hot place for everybody and that drives the cost up for us, of real estate. And it makes us...

Very hot.

Yeah, very hot, that's right.

You've talked about, you've touched on some of the things that you think Columbia has to face for the future and you've talked about a lot of the things that you want to retain about Columbia. Has there been anything that you've brought that

maybe you didn't plan on but that you found that needed to be changed or adjusted or a new direction, perhaps, in addition to say the Board of Trustees and the relation to the alumni? Anything else?

Well, we did, yes, Erin. We had to do some things with the academic structures in the College. The College, as I said earlier, thirty years ago was very small. And it ran with a very small operation. And it still, we're very lightly administered for colleges. A university that I was at that was quite a bit smaller than this had seven Vice Presidents and eleven Deans, you know, we're nothing like that here. But we had to have more people do some of these things. We have expanded in many areas. When you've got, when you have nine thousand students you have to have a lot more people in Financial Aid, you have to have a lot more people in Admissions, you have to have a lot more people in Payroll, all of these things, in Maintenance, etc. So we've developed structures and reporting systems. One thing I've learned in being a President several places is that you've got to be able to delegate; put good people in and trust that they'll do it because you can't do everything yourself. In my experience, as a college President, the people who haven't succeeded are the people who try to do everything themselves. As I was saying, we established the College Council, which was a faculty dominated group, as majority to deal with the academic issues of the College and make recommendations to the President and through the President to the Board of Trustees. And we have become more professional, we established a tenure system for the first time, which I think was essential for the College.

We have formalized lots of things at the College. Now, I don't mean to say that the whole, everything depends upon structure, but you have to have some structure when you have nine thousand students. You can't deal out with everything on an ad hoc basis. So that was one thing that I concentrated on doing. We've rearranged responsibilities and reporting mechanisms, etc. We're not finished on that. We're in the midst of our self-studies for the North Central Accreditation. We're looking at every area of the College in doing that. And we'll probably get some recommendations from NCA when they do their visit and read our self-study and see what's happening in the College. On the whole, though, the system is strong because I believe the ideas that Mike Alexandroff had of bringing in strong leadership in the departments of people who were very good in their fields on the outside. Like bringing in Morris, who was a station manager in television at a couple of Chicago stations, in to run Television. Just one example, there are many others, was a good idea. And the, traditionally, the chairs have been very important here and have functioned of sort of being small deans in their own area. I mean, in an area like Film where there are sixteen hundred majors, I mean, there has to be help there, because that's bigger than the College was in 1979, just the Film Department. So you have to develop structures for that and we have done that. That's a thing that I've concentrated on. There was no Office of Planning at Columbia before I came here. And now we have a Planning Office, and that's essential because you have to look into the future: where you're going to be, what you intend to do. We've done space studies now on where we're

going to be. We hired the outside firm of Lobel-Schlausmen to do this complete analysis of our campus, how to, with the idea of improving campus identity and giving us an idea of where we stand as far as the present facilities we have and what we're going to need in the future and so on. And the Planning Office has worked very closely with that. That's going to play an ever larger role at the College.

Well, it seems that the growth, that Columbia was trying to catch up to the growth and that that was probably the pressing issue that you found when you came here because the, what I've been hearing about the early days that it really, people wore many hats and kind of dealt with things as they came up.

Yeah, there was an ad hoc atmosphere, dealing with problems as they came along. and on the whole, they did it successfully because the College grew during that time. And as far as acquiring property, they saw the opportunities and took them, you know? And that's still a great deal of what we do. But eventually I think we're going to have to do some of our own construction. We have an open lot there on Tenth Street by the Getz Theater, Eleventh Street I should say, that we'll probably do some construction on someday. I'd like to get the Dance Center down in the Loop from up on Sheridan Road. That would be a prime objective as well. So we've got those kind of things too but it just, the fact is that we're so big we can't operate as we did in the past. So we're gonna be, lots of changes will be taking place in the next decade.

Do you worry that Columbia might lose its image as, perhaps, an

alternative place of higher education and become mainstream or indistinguishable, not indistinguishable, but less distinguishable from other institutions, or how do you see that?

Well, that's an interesting question. I think, first of all, my experience with colleges like Columbia, and I had a College of Music at Lowell, is that the students who go there are different. You know, the people who are interested in their subject are interested from an early age. When I was President of the University of Massachusetts at Lowell we had a big engineering operation, all of this was electrical, chemical. These were all the people who, from an early age, you know, carried around slide-rules and those things that the engineers use. They wanted to be an engineer. The people who come to Columbia want to be in their particular discipline. And I don't think that will change because I notice it at other places that that kind of feeling would be. But, if you mean alternative in the sense that it was used in the '60s, you know, a different kind of education, etcetera? Well, that has changed. We have to make sure, as we alluded to earlier, that we have people who are able to do the work here. So that's why we're a lot more into remedial work or developmental work, if you will. We have to, as I said earlier, add more structure than before. We can't make so many decisions on the basis of intuition or, as I might say, "We have to plan a lot better," because of the size of the College. But I've always, I think that the particular ambiance of a college that deals with the fine arts and communications, like we do, is going to remain.

I was sitting at dinner up at Rhapsody and, you know, we were talking to, the tables are close together, and I mentioned that I had taught at Columbia. And the gentleman looked at his wife, and they were elderly, and said, "You know, so and so [their daughter] should have gone there." And, you know, I asked him to explain that and he said, you know, "She went to a very traditional college and never really fit in and never really liked it. And we thought Columbia was a strange place and we should have let her, you know, that's where she wanted to go." And I just wonder, I guess that's what I'm asking, if that might be maintained, is that this could be a haven for kids that might not fit in elsewhere but, as you say, you know, aspire to higher education.

Well, I think you're right. I had, I knew a fellow who was a graduate of Wheaton College, which is an Evangelical college and very conservative. And he was very proud of there and the lifestyle which they had at Wheaton. And it is a marvelous college. And he sent his son there and he told me that his son didn't like it at all, he was failing classes, etc. And he said that one day, "Why are you doing so poorly?" And he said, "Well, I really want a different kind of college." He says, "Where do you want to go?" He said, "I want to go to Columbia." He said, at that time, and this is ten years ago, twelve years ago, he said he couldn't imagine anything more different from Wheaton and Columbia. And he said that Columbia really worked out well for him. He just blossomed here, was outstanding. So it's what you want to do, you know? And I think that college has been like that for students and will

continue to be. But, as I said before, I, in four years, have never seen a college where there's been less student complaints about things. We get complaints from time to time but not a great deal. I mean, most of the alumni, when I go out to southern California or Atlanta, they're very, very satisfied with their work at Columbia, and I think it prepared them very well for the jobs that they're doing.

You talked about Mike Alexandroff's ability to identify talent and leadership. And that also is a recurring theme, where some of the department heads or longtime faculty talk about that he, they felt he completely took a chance on them and, you know, took a lot of risks but had this talent. Could you speak to that and maybe his influence on the transition of him leaving and you coming on, what he gave to you or how he influenced you...

Well, that's a very interesting question. And it goes to the thing about why changes have taken place because of the growth of the College. Mike could identify, through people he knew in his cultural areas in Chicago, the individuals who he thought would fit in at Columbia, would do a good job. I'll use one example, Fred Fine. Fred was an early entrepreneur in the music business and concert business and he used to go around the country with these rock bands or whatever; setting up engagements for them. And as Fred told me, Mike said to him one day, and he'd known him for a long time, "Don't you think it's getting to be a little bit ridiculous, a man of your age," this was when he, Fred's in his eighties now, when he was in his sixties running around the

country with teenagers, he says, "You ought to come and run a program at Columbia." So that's how the arts and entertainment, Arts Management Program began at Columbia, and it's been one of the most successful ones. And then the reputation was so good Harold Washington named Fred Fine the first Commissioner of Cultural Affairs for the city of Chicago in '83-'84. And he left Columbia to do that job for five or six years, this is when I first knew Fred, when I was Commissioner of the Library. And he's still here as a consultant for us; he's still carrying on. So Mike could identify those people and bring them in. And he brought in that kind of leadership for Art, for Music, for Marketing, for Theater, some of those people are, many of those people like Bill Russo and Sheldon Patinkin and John Mulvany are still here, and that those departments have been very successful. However, when you get into the size that we have and you get into departments that are as large as Film or Art and Photography, and you go to replace a chairman, I no longer can say, "Aaron, you're going to be chair of the Film Department, even though you're not, you haven't made any films, it's just that I think..." You can't do that anymore, you have to have faculty participation. We have to have searches now, that's part of the structure. They didn't do that in the old days. And you could do that when Columbia was a few hundred or six hundred students. That was the system that worked well, and it worked well because Mike knew what he was doing and he had the connections and he could spot talent. A long time ago when the eighteenth century philosophers were talking about government, some like John Locke

and others who made the U.S. Constitution, the Founding Fathers, opted for a democratic republic. But others said the best type of government was sort of an enlightened despotism. When you had a person that really was just and intelligent, etc., and really, you know, make all the decisions. And I think it was a lot like that with Mike and he was very, a very good person. He was very liberal and just and far-seeing and sympathetic and knew what he was doing. And he picked the right people. It's just that you can't do that any more. You can't, I mean, I am a different type of person. I'm a traditional academic in many ways whose career has been at large universities, although they've always been urban so I've always had that city influence. But, my strengths are, as I say, being able to delegate things and get some structures in place. So, that's why we had to make the change.

I think too that something that comes up, a lot of people that you've mentioned have been here a long time and, you know, what will happen when they leave? But the conflict between the artist and the administrator, that the administration of departments has grown so that these people that have been identified as artist in their field, that's a tough transition, or to give more and more time to the administration of the departments, and doings like that, you know, with the growth.

It surely is. It has not been an American academia characteristic for artists, you know, people who are in the arts or even the communications, to be administrators. Almost all the people forget who become presidents at colleges or universities in America come from the social sciences. They're histori-

ans, political scientists, etc. Because they feel that there's a lot of politics in being a college administrator. You've got to be able to deal with people. You know, very few scientists are in it, for that matter, because scientists look for the same result. If you mix two compounds in chemistry, you're gonna get the same result every day. But two people may be fine one day and be at each other's throats the next. So you've got to know how to deal with that. And historians also know that things are very rarely black and white. There's an awful lot of gray.

Never.

Yeah, exactly. And there's no, very few cases that are that open and shut that you can decide. There's always extenuating circumstances. So, and then to many people, they're not, there are a couple chairs here who continually say, "Oh, I hate meetings. Why do we have to have all these meetings? I've got to do..." And they name their discipline. I'm not going to name individuals but they are marvelous chairpersons in their own disciplines, but they often don't care about the work that goes on in committees, etc., which is essential for a big operation, as I've emphasized. But I have to say on the whole, given that this is a college that emphasizes the arts and communications, the chairs have been effective, very effective.

Have you been struck at, and again, you talked about that the students' dissatisfaction compared to where other places you've been at has been fairly low. And I'm sure that there's always a, faculty and staff administration there's issues or problems that come up. But have you been struck by how loyal the

employees, whether it be faculty, staff or administration, are to, I think, maybe at one time it was that Mike and Columbia maybe were one in the same, but they continued to be extremely protective and loyal to the institution.

Have you found that?

Well, I think, Erin, that they are. There's no doubt of that. On the other hand, the reason I was emphasizing the students, I find, I have found that kind of factor true in other places I've been. There are, every institution I've been in, which was a large Catholic university, Seton Hall in New Jersey, the University of Massachusetts at Lowell, large public university, here I was Chancellor; places that I've taught. There were always people there that had been there thirty or forty years. A good example is, was my brother, who came to Seton Hall a year after I did in the English department. And he just retired after thirty-six years staying in the English department. And he wasn't unusual. I had, I have a number of friends there, they came when I did, and have just retired; they spent thirty or forty years. That is kind of characteristic in academia. People like the academic life, you know, the students come and go, the faculty remains, you know, that's one of the principles of higher education. The difference here is, is again, I come back to student satisfaction. That is really very high here. I, the number of complaints that I get, I could name on one hand, you know. And this is often because of, they like what's happening to them even though the job expectations aren't always good. Just this weekend somebody was saying to me, "You know, when you're at a college like Columbia, don't you have a lot of problems with students that decide to major in theater, to be actors and

actresses, don't they, you know, and they know they're not gonna get jobs?" Well, I know that from my experience at Columbia and also personally. My two oldest daughters were both theater majors, got A.B.s and Masters degrees in theater. And one of them is a related field and one of them did acting and now she's raising a family. But, I had said to them all along that at any given time, ninety percent of all actors in the United States are unemployed. And that's why I was...

Worse than Ph.D.s

Much worse than Ph.D.s, Erin. I was upset with the government program, was talked about a couple years ago, the [Spree] where an emphasis was going to be, colleges were gonna have to demonstrate that the careers that they were training people for were there. Well, you can't say to a student, "Look, there's only going to be jobs for ten percent of you so we're going to cut our class from a hundred people to ten." Because those ten might not get the jobs either, you know, it's very competitive. If you want to be an actress, and you're determined to be it, you're going to do it. You know, and you gotta have the chance to try it, you know, to prove it. And I have to tell you, it happened to me again last week and the people I'm with, I said, "This has happened to me at least a dozen times in Chicago." We were in a restaurant and the waitress brought the bill and I signed the check. And she said, "I thought that you were the President of Columbia College. I graduated there two years ago." And I said, "Oh yeah?" And she said, "Yeah, I was in theater. It was a wonderful place, I just love Columbia." Now here, this woman was working as a waitress like so many actors and actresses are, you

know? But she was very happy with what happened to her at Columbia. She felt she had a marvelous education and she had no regrets about it. In fact, that's a good idea about education itself. I think a college degree should be considered, in this country, an end in itself. I mean, sure, it's an opportunity to get a better job, and sure, the statistics are there that people who have one year of college earn more than a person with a high school diploma and people with two years more, and A.B.s more, and MAs more, etc. all the way up the line, even Ph.D.s earn more than anybody else. But it shouldn't be just narrowly professional. Having a college experience is a great thing in itself. I mean, it gives you a better outlook on life, it makes you able to understand life better, to enjoy life better, etc. And that's always been the basis of a liberal arts education, which we provide here; along with a professional education we provide a liberal arts education. So, and I think most students realize that. We periodically survey graduates on this and we ask them questions like that. We get very few responses where they said they were disappointed, that they majored in a certain discipline and they had to get a job and they had to be in something else. Very few people feel that way.

Finally, Dr. Duff, anything else that, you know, that maybe we haven't touched on that you'd like to tell us about that, you know, your hopes for Columbia or experiences you've had here that give a certain kind of meaning or can be illustrative of, you know, what Columbia symbolizes or what its mission is?

Well, I don't know if I can, we've talked about so many aspects of life

at Columbia College. I think that the mission, which was laid down by Mike Alexandroff, of providing an education in the fine and performing arts and communications, I mean, using practitioners, open admissions, has worked well and I think it should continue. It's under discussion. Now there are elements throughout the College and the Board and outside who think we should reconsider it. I personally believe it's worked well and will continue to work well. I do believe that we'll probably, eventually hit a point where we won't be able to expand or we'll sort of fall off. I actually believe that with the tuition increase we had this year that we'd see a decline, but it looks like we're going to have a big or bigger class than ever with freshmen coming in. I mean, the reputation of the College is growing and I think as the amount of leisure time increases in this country people have more time and they are interested more in arts and in entertainment and in the media, that the interest in institutions like Columbia will continue to grow. So, I'm optimistic about the future. I've always been an optimistic person but I think this College has got a very rosy future ahead of it.

OK, thank you very much.