

9-5-1991

Hawkins, Robert - Oral History Interview

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

Follow this and additional works at: <http://spark.siu.edu/siueohi>

Recommended Citation

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, "Hawkins, Robert - Oral History Interview" (1991). *SIUE Oral History Interviews*. 25.
<http://spark.siu.edu/siueohi/25>

This Oral History is brought to you for free and open access by the University Archives and Special Collections at SPARK. It has been accepted for inclusion in SIUE Oral History Interviews by an authorized administrator of SPARK. For more information, please contact gpark@siue.edu.

LOUISA H. BOWEN UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES & SPECIAL
COLLECTIONS

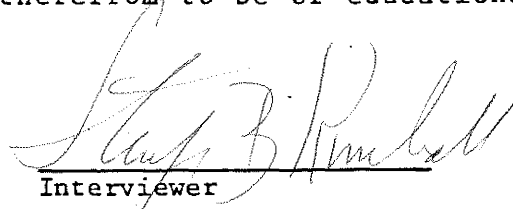
LOVEJOY LIBRARY

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY EDWARDSVILLE

ORAL HISTORY

The undersigned interviewer and interviewee irrevocably consent to the recording and preservation by any means of an oral history interview and further irrevocable consent to the transcribing, typing, editing and publication of the interview by the Board of Trustees of Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, hereinafter called "University", or its agents, employees, officers, or representatives.

It is further understood that the interview or a form or forms of the interview may be retained and maintained by the University in the Research Collections Department of Lovejoy Library for use by students, faculty, staff and other scholars for so long as the University believes the interview or products derived therefrom, to be of educational, scholarly or historical value.

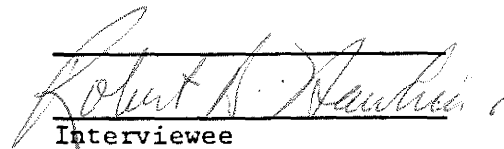

Interviewer

SA 4 E

Address:

Date:

8/5/91


Interviewee

Address:

Date:

8-5-81

Date of Accession: _____

SIUE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Summers 1990-91

Robert Hawkins Interview, Sept. 5, 1991

Interviewed by Stanley B. Kimball

Filename: HAWKINS. 905

Q: Robert Hawkins, Professor of Communications, thanks for coming by and being willing to go on the record and share your memories and reflections about pioneering this place.

A: My pleasure, Stan.

Q: Bob, why did you come to SIU in the first place?

A: Well I think it can be put most accurately this way. I did not really see a future at the Chicago Junior College where I was teaching in 1955-56. I had always wanted to teach at the university level and the opportunity opened up when SIU's Alton Residence Center got underway in 1957-58. I came in 1959 and started teaching.

Q: How did you learn of this opening?

A: It was a teacher placement service plus some word of mouth information.

Q: Are you from the midwest?

A: Yes. Born and raised in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Q: You were teaching in Chicago for about four years.

A: Right.

Q: Speech?

A: Speech. I also supervised the debate program.

Q: And then you came here. You retired in '87 which would be about 28, 29 years.

A: Right.

Q: Why did you stay here so long?

A: Well for a number of reasons. I guess the most significant reason is that I saw at SIU an opportunity to do everything I had ever wanted to do at the university level: teach a variety of courses in Speech Communication, do research, and carry out community service projects. Everything fell into place early on. So that's the reason I stayed from '59 to '87 simply because I liked it.

Q: I have heard this many times, Bob. The opportunities here that we were building and we just didn't inherit something set in concrete and people could experiment and try out. So that seems to have kept a lot of people here and made their professional life so meaningful.

What do you consider, looking back twenty some odd years, as your most significant contributions to this area, to the university, to your discipline?

A: I think the most significant contributions came in the last 8 to 10 years. In 1977 I became affiliated with the Gerontology Program at SIU and had began to do some work with Tony Traxler th eprogram director. We worked together on a project which led finally to the development of a proposal for a grant to start a gerontology training program . The grant was awarded and training got underway. Later on that led to the development of special courses in communication and aging in the Dept. of Speech Communication. Those are the two major contributions.

Q: Now specifically you were a professor of speech in the Department of Speech Communication and then you became very heavily involved with gerontology. How do the two go together?

A: I think the two go together because as people age, they continue to communicate. They continue to relate with themselves and among themselves and with people of younger generations. So problems in communication are always there. The aging process also has an effect on your ability to communicate. Aging can do funny things to your memory. Also it can sometimes result in your moving more slowly. When you move more slowly its more difficult to gesture meaningfully. Arthritis comes into the picture when you use your

arms and your legs to move around and not just in formal platform speaking, but in everyday interpersonal communicating, what we're doing right now.

A: I want to make another point about my part in initiating a special commission on communication and aging in the Speech Communication Association of America. I guess you could say I was a pioneer in this field.

A friend of mine in Oregon joined me in developing a national conference on communication and aging and indeed it came to pass in 1981. It took a long time to develop the idea and to sell it to the people who were in positions of leadership in the speech communication discipline. We finally did and as a result the Association approved the establishment of a commission on Communication and Aging.

Q: I also see this hand-in-glove situation here on this campus where the gerontology program has been in affect, a laboratory for you to work on these ideas and theories. So obviously gerontology and communication went together perfectly.

A: It was a nice fit.

Q: What was the second one, develop that a little more please.

A: I began what turned into a debate and forensic program. Also I began to offer courses in debate and forensics in the classroom. Then this moved into the whole area of intercollegiate debating throughout the midwest. The debate program is now a thriving activity on this campus.

The other thing I count as a contribution is the beginning of a "talk-in" in the University Center's Goshen Lounge.

Q: In the University Center.

A: With the giant toothpicks hanging from the ceiling.

Q: Exactly, right. The Plum Bob.

A: This was back in the 60s when there was a little bit of unpleasantness on U.S. campuses--relating to whether we were getting a fair shake in the area of civil rights and what we were doing in Vietnam and all of that. And students and faculty, students especially in the classrooms, were agitated and this was a wonderful opportunity for students in my discipline to practice the discipline of speech communication. I wanted students to look at issues, argue them out in public, face to face. This proved to be the ideal laboratory on the campus. I think the term we used was "Campus Speak-in," wasn't it?

Q: Talk-in or something.

A: Right. We played around with different ideas. It was, to my knowledge, the first time there was a place where students and faculty members could pick up the microphone, move around, and ask questions. There was real excitement in those days. I don't know whether you remember?

Q: Yes, very well.

A: Hundreds of students 2, 3, 4 hundred students gathered in the lounge sitting, walking around thoroughly engaged with one another with their probing questions and spirited answers.

Q: Hanging from the balcony.

A: Yes. And talking about issues that really mattered. Talking about the government's role in defense spending. The work that was being done by the CIA and why the government was in many cases lying to us. Those were issues that people wanted to talk about.

The idea for this came up in my persuasion class. We were talking about real world opportunities for persuasion. And one of my better students and I were in a conversation about what are we doing in the classroom. I said, let's regard this as an opportunity to move out of the classroom and continue the engagements among ourselves and with other students. Let this not, however, become just a kind of verbal blood bath, a kind of exchange that ends up with people calling each other names, but an opportunity to practice debating and persuading in public with procedures based on *Robert's Rules of Order*. We had kind of an agenda to follow and students who took

turns as moderators. It was a great opportunity for them to face not just the people in their sterile classroom, but actually hundreds of other students.

And you know on one occasion there was a small up rising. I forget the name of the sociology professor who took the students,, marched them off the campus down to the post office to rip off a picture of president Nixon. That incident happened in spite of the responsible debating that we were carrying on on the campus.

This fellow, and I can't think of his name, acted unilaterally.

Q: They went to the post office all right,, but they also tried to trash the the draft office which was there. His name was Laud Humphrey.

A: That's right.

Q: Now a related question we have touched on it somewhat but I always ask it, it sometimes brings other dimensions out. And that is from contributions to satisfactions, is there anything to add along those lines of great satisfaction?

A: Oh yeah. I've all ready mentioned the fact that the biggest satisfaction was the chance to do everything I have ever wanted to do I had, what's the idiom of the day, I had it all. I really did. When I look back on it. I had the opportunity to do anything I wanted to do.

There was another great satisfaction and that was the close mingling among faculty members on the campus, especially on the Alton campus. To a great extent on the East St. Louis campus as well.

Faculty were able to mix because of the fact that in one building it was the geography people upstairs, calculus and the math people in the basement and speech and history downstairs. And we couldn't help but sit down and have a cup of coffee and interact. Today of course people gather in the cafeteria, but that's the only time really that they have time to interact.

Q: And relatively few ever show up on a regular basis.

A: Yes. That's right. So that was a great satisfaction. Another great satisfaction I had was the opportunity to work with Catherine Dunham in East St. Louis in 1967. Hyman Frankel in the Sociology Department--where he began his Experiment in Higher Education. Do you remember Hy?

Q: Very well.

A: I keep forgetting how long you've been here yourself.

Q: Robert, I came in August of 1959, same as you.

A: Well, in 1967 Hy Frankel was developing an Experiment in Higher Education and he was pulling people in from history and math. And Hy's idea was to develop a program for disadvantaged young people, mainly blacks in the East St. Louis area. The idea was to prep them

for work on this campus. To prepare them for matriculation in the regular General Studies programs and then in the major disciplines that they went into.

Catherine Dunham had a dance program. I was teaching, not dance, I was teaching Speech Communication and one of the courses I was teaching something called Oral Interpretation. You take prose and poetry and memorize it and then develop skills and techniques in interpreting it. Using voice training. You have to study the poem or the essay whatever it is and then you get a thorough understanding of it and present it. Catherine Dunham was looking for a script, was looking for something in the field of black poetry and it just so happened that I had a collection, a dramatization, a prepared script on poetry done by Langston Hughes. And the name of the show was *A Dream Deferred*. I think that was maybe the name of a specific piece that he had written.

Catherine Dunham had students in her dance class some of whom were in my class in oral interpretation and had the opportunity in putting on this show in the summer of 1967. That was a hot summer. It was an ugly summer. There were riots and rumors of riots and I think that one of the reasons that the riots did not get completely out of hand was that there was, I'm tooting my own horn, I would like to think that that program had something to do with keeping in check of the riots in East St. Louis in that ugly summer of 1967. So that's another satisfaction.

Q: I remember Catherine and Hy, other people have reported on this and the great work that we did down there. The Head Start program and all kinds of things.

What else, in what other way did you work with what we sometimes call the educationally deprived?

A: Not so much, not directly. I worked with students in Speech Communication who had to carry out speech practicum. Speech Practicum was one of the courses, one of the requirements for their graduation. They had, the students had to go out and develop workshops and develop contacts with a variety of populations. And so in that way, I saw the opportunity there for the students to work on projects, with these populations and use that as a basis for their practicum assignments.

Q: Were these students with speech problems or was this just everybody in the class?

A: Everybody in the class.

Q: I see.

A: Yeah.

Q: Now we have speech therapy.

A: Right.

Q: In education?

A: Well no, Speech Pathology and Audiology are really in the School of Fine Arts and Communications. Many people argue that they should not be, but they are.

Q: Let's look at some of your greatest frustrations over the years here.

A: I suppose the greatest frustration was not being able to maintain the close contact with people from other disciplines. I missed that. In the early part of the 80s we became more and more fragmented, more and more specialized, more and more expert in our areas in developing our own particular expertise and the idea of promoting collegiality was an over worked term. Opportunities to develop collegiality evaporated and that was a frustration.

I think another frustration was the fact that we were developing new programs and it took time for the state legislature to act favorably and I knew this is not my own experience, but this is an example of the frustration I was aware of. People in the Mass Communication department for years have been trying to get authorization to develop a radio/television station. They have the radio station but I think there's still a request for a television studio, television programming. Carbondale has television programming as does WIU, but we don't. That is an ongoing frustration.

I jumped over to Mass Communication, let me get back to my own area, Speech Communication. We have had the ongoing frustrations of not being able to get enough money to hire enough graduate students

to teach our basic level courses but that's a frustration we have all faced or are facing and probably will. The people who come after us will continue to face it.

Q: If those are your worst frustrations, why you very well did have it all.

A: Yes. I thoroughly enjoyed.

Q: Some of your best memories that you may not have mentioned so far.

A: I think the proximity, We have not talked about this at all. This is part of the whole experience. Proximity to St. Louis, the cultural center. Powell Hall and the Municipal Opera offer wonderful things. Some of them are pretty jazzy and pander to the public but it's all culture and there are some really good things. Leonard Slatkin can not be put down as a second rate leader in the field.

There theres is Webster College and the Loretto Hilton Theatre and , of course, St. Louis is the birthplace of the famous playwright, T. S. Elliot.

Q: How about some of your worst memories?

A: Well, the weather. I hear what sounds like air conditioning going on right now.

Q: And you also hear my computer.

A: Do you remember when we did not have A/C in all of the classrooms or when it would break down. God that was awful. I think another memory that is pretty negative is the fact that on one occasion I was the consummate perepatetic instructor for that particular quarter anyway. All over the place.

Q: That was after 65 I take it.

A: It was after 65. Do you remember the classes that were taught in the Edwardsville High School. There were some classes there. Because we did not have adequate classroom place on the campus so they had to.

Q: Well Bob, I don't know whether it will make you feel better or worse but you are a first I think at least nobody else has told me that same worst memory. Anything else along those lines?

A: This comes closer to a humorous situation. It's not really a worst memory, just kind of a funny thing. On the Alton campus, this was years ago, professors were required to sign a loyalty oath, remember that issue?

Q: Yes.

A: And then the House on Un-American Activities committee hearings. And this came after McCarthy, Joe McCarthy's brouhaha in the Senate. On the Alton campus, there were students in my classroom who were really excited about this; can't we go out onto the campus lawn

and put up a little soap box and we'll see what kind of an opportunity there is for students to sound off. I said O.K. that sounds like an o.k. project. So we did that. But then the assistant director of Student Affairs saw me and saw some of my students and we were going out onto the lawn and he said, where are you going. Your moving out of the classroom? I told what we were going to do and he said we had to have on file for a request for an out of classroom off campus sort of a project but this is just a spontaneous sort of a thing, I said. And it just struck me as a humorous sort of thing. You have to legislate or control spontaneity on the campus.

Q: I presume that was Howard Davis.

A: No, No. Bill Banahan. Do you remember him?

Q: Yes, a little.

A: I don't know what became of him. I don't think he lasted. As a matter of fact Howard Davis saved me. I think he saw the wisdom of what the students were trying to do. So he allowed us to do it. It did not become regular thing. So Bill Banahan really had no cause for worry. I like Bill. It was just that it struck me as a funny situation more than anything else.

Q: Yes.

A: Another bit of humor, do you remember, boy we are going down memory lane, Phil Vogel.

Q: Earth Science?

A: In earth science and Mel Kazek? A number of them were on their way to Carbondale to attend meetings. Do you know what I'm going to say.

Q: Maybe.

A: And they lost their way. Geographers! They made the wrong turn and they never lived that down.

Q: The version I got from somebody a little closer to it was. Bill Baker or Phil Vogel or somebody kept saying, well we've seen that, look at that church it's just like the one we saw the last time.

A: I think that there were a lot of fun things that happened on the campus tricycle - tric contest during Mayfest. Those were light kinds of experiences. I'm trying to think of some other. Remember when the roof of the Peck building leaked. I was walking along the hallway coming in out of the rain. I had just come in out of the rain and I was getting wet. I still had my raincoat on. I was shaking myself off and shaking out my umbrella. I popped the umbrella and held the umbrella up as I walked down the corridor. I think Joe Munshar or someone said, what's the that for. I said, its still raining. And I think Joe mentioned that in one of his classes and they got a chuckle out of that.

Q: It would be cheaper to hire the roofers, make them Ph.D.'s and let them do nothing but repair; a great idea except they wouldn't work for that little money.

A: Yeah.

Q: And the other great idea we had was well, let's just bring biology over and let them set up an arboretum and let the rain come in and water their plants.

All right on best, worst, and humorous, anything else that comes to mind.

A: Workshops for senior citizen service providers; this was a good experience. I developed student projects. Directed some of the students projects where students could go into the nursing homes and talk to the older folks and get and encourage them to open up and they would come up to the campus and sit in on the classes. mmunication process and how aging can effect your moral. It had an effect on moral. Aging did. And the older adults were quite willing to talk about this openly.

They talked about how it, you get up in the morning and you don't have that old drive anymore and yet you know you have to get to work, you have to do things. Younger people who had been reading journal accounts and doing papers on communicating and aging and some of the problems of aging and making comments on how terrible it would be To grow old. And these were folks who were old and taking it rather lightly. That was a tremendous eye opener for me and for my students.

Q: Is there something you might like to record that would most assuredly never end up in an official history?

A: Yes, I have mentioned it and I made a note of that. I one time spent the evening in the Faculty Club in a sleeping bag. Not only I but my kids took them down to grassy lake one weekend and we came back and it was too late. I forget what the I guess my wife had been gone. I did not have a key for the house and so we had to find a place to stay that night. She was out of town and I didn't have the key to the house. I forget exactly how that happened. So we just returned from the camping trip and went into the faculty club and luckily there was someone at the faculty club and we watched the T.V. and then we just stretched out the sleeping bags for the night. That emphasizes the kind of a family feeling. Take care of the faculty members.

Q: Have you related the university to the community?

A: Depends, I guess, on how you define community. If you want to define community as the world, beyond Edwardsville, beyond Illinois, beyond the United States, there were certainly some relationships. I had the opportunity in 1982 to take a year off and taught for the university of Maryland and I've shared this with you and that was a chance to use what I had taught and use what I had learn, and use the courses and the notes for the overseas program, European Division. So I personally was able to relate to the rest of the world. Last fall I taught for SIU Carbondale in Japan and that was really an interesting experience. They have in a little town of Nakajo a

college campus. It's one of their overseas off campuses. Off campus programs over there. Nakajo is a little town on the coast of the Sea of Japan. Business men in Nakajo and some educational leaders developed the idea of an American university an opportunity for Japanese students to take American university courses in Japan to prepare them for matriculation in the States. Somehow the idea got out and in some way the Carbondale faculty members picked it up. I don't know exactly how it came to pass. But Carbondale educational leaders and Japanese business interests got together and now there are possible plans for the development of similiar projects in Austria and Spain. Incidentally this is another frustration. Do you remember the days of Delyte Morris? Certainly you do.

Q: Yes.

A: I'm looking right now at a man who has, I know you've been overseas and you've done work in Eastern Europe and you've perhaps taken students over there. And the whole idea of opening up the rest of the world my goodness with the tearing down of Berlin Wall. Well, I don't need to expand on this point because you can see where I'm going all ready. But we need to develop SIU through the world communities.

Q: SIU Abroad.

A: Right!

Q: We have been very weak in that.

A: I know and can not ever forget the disappointment I felt when we had opportunities; three faculty members went to Switzerland and they wanted to develop a campus over there, an SIU campus. It was turned down by the president. And then Webster college seized that opportunity and they developed Webster College in Switzerland and Webster College branch campus in the Netherlands and maybe in northern Italy. It's good to develop programs that will help Illinois. This part of Illinois has been somewhat depressed for a number of years. That is certainly the reason why we should be the best of our kind to develop opportunities for our students and Illinois southwestern Illinois businesses, but aren't we big enough to look abroad at that same time?

Q: I took 24 students to Vienna in 1962.

A: 1962?

Q: There never was a follow up.

A: Oh for heaven's sake.

Q: The program kind of laid down and died. This gives me a marvelous opportunity to move into what contributions has the university made to the area and have we met our challenge.

A: I think we're beginning. We have shown some signs, some important signs that we are meeting that challenge. Everytime I go to the dentist now, or the doctor. They knew my children in high school and here they are operating in the hospitals and in the dental clinics and so on.

They are SIU business men, SIU sales people, business leaders. You see that in the alumni magazines that come out. I've seen it in my own contacts with professional people and that's kind of a warm feeling.

Q: My dentist teaches at SIU.

A: Mine too. And I have another student who has been the co author of more than one book in the field of public speaking. She's doing a really good job at Lewis and Clark now.

Q: Well, that must be one of your great satisfactions.

A: Yes.

Q: The success of your students.

A: That's what it is really all about isn't it? To use an overworked phrase. But here it is 1991, we're inching our way toward 1992 and my lord the time goes fast though. Think back to 1959.

Q: It's unfair Bob the less you have the faster it goes.

A: I know it. 68 years old, I'll be this coming October.

Q: I'll be 65 in November.

A: There are just too many things left on the agenda.

Q: Well, there's one thing in working with young people; it helps keep you young. It's a very real fringe benefit.

If I could interview just arbitrarily two more people, who might you suggest?

A: Well, you may have already touched bases with Patrick Riddleberger, Anthony Traxler, Jack Ades, Reagan Carpenter, Bill Slatterly. Those are names that come to me. John Richardson, Lyman Holden.

Q: These are all good suggestions.

A: Oh, Herb Rosenthal.

Q: I did interview Herb.

A: He's done so many interesting things. Taiwan. Are these necessarily people who retired?

Q: No, I just like to ask people, it's a set question I ask everybody I'm just trying to do a difficult job fairly well. Well Bob as we look over the last approximately an hour. Is there anything you would like to add to anything we have discussed or would you like to add anything about something we haven't discussed.

A: Well, I guess one of the things I want to add is summed up in a phrase: the human situation may be hopeless, but it's not serious.

Q: Very good.

A: I look at the human situation, the problems that we have on the campus, in the state of Illinois, throughout the world and I know we're going to stumble along like the British Empire, but we will muddle through somehow.

You realize sure there are big important problems that we have today: homelessness, unemployment, we should not blink. We should not ignore these problems. One way or another though I think we'll be able to deal with them. That's about the extent of my thought for today.

Q: Well, Professor Bob Hawkins, long time friend, co pioneer of Alton in particular, I remember we went to parties and picnics and all kinds of things together. Thanks for being willing to come by and record this for posterity and well on that rather high note well formally turn the tape off.

Index

A

Ades, Jack, 21

Alton, 1, passim

B

Banahan, Bill, 14

C

CIA, 6

Civil Rights, 5

D

Davis, Howard, 14

Debating, 2, 5

Dunham, Catherine, 8, 9

E

Experiment in Higher Ed., 8

F

Faculty Club , 17

Frankel, Hyman, 8

G

General Studies, 9

Gerontology Program, 3, passim

H

Head Start Program, 9

Hughes, Langston, 9

Humphrey, Laud, 7

J

Japan, 18

K

Kazek, Mel, 15

L

Leaky roofs, 15

M

McCarthy, Joe, 13

Morris, Delyte, 18

Munshar, Joe, 15

N

Nixon, 7

O

Overseas Courses, 17

R

Radio/TV, 11

Richardson, John, 21

Riddleberger, Patrick, 21

Riots, 9

Rosenthal, Herb, 21

S

SIUE Abroad, 18

Slatterly, Bill, 21

Speech and Communication, 1,

passim

Speech Pathology and Audiology,

11

Speech Practicum, 10

St. Louis, 12

Students, 20

T

Talk-ins, 5

Traxler, Tony, 3, 21

V

Vienna, 19

Vietnam, 5

Vogel, Phil, 15