Joan Erdman

Today is March 15, 2001, and this is an interview with Joan Erdman, Professor of Anthropology and the Humanities.

All right. Joan, when did you come to Columbia, and what were the circumstances that brought you here?

I came in 1986. I should say that when I came, I had decided that I was going to be here five years and then I'd go on to the next thing. And here it is some 14 years later or 15 years later, and I'm still here. So I like it. I came after—I originally moved to Chicago in 1973, to go to graduate at University of Chicago. And I was an older student. There were 11 years after my BA degree, cause I said I never wanted to go back to school. But then I decided, the only way I could afford to do what I wanted to do was to legitimize myself and get a PhD. So I had a fellowship, Danforth Graduate Fellowship, for women, and it was four years. So I said, four years, and I'll be done. So at the end of seven years, I finished. But in the meantime, I became something called the South Asia Outreach Coordinator at University of Chicago, which was a perfect job for me. I mediated between the expertise in the University in South Asian Studies and the wider public. And I ran teachers workshops and film festivals and presented Asian art and took 17 Chicago teachers on a seven-week Fulbright sponsored tour of India, and it was really quite fun. And I stayed in that position after I finished my PhD, which was in 1980 until 1986. My younger daughter was at the Lab School. It was financially very smart for me to stay at the University of Chicago. And although I taught courses at University of Illinois, Chicago Circle and in the extension, I didn't look for a full-time teaching job. But then it was time. So I did a nationwide search, and one day I went into the Anthropology Offices of the university, to go through the file for jobs and one of the jobs there was something called a Social Science Generalist at Columbia College, Chicago. So I said, "where is that? It must be New York." And looked at it and behold it was in downtown Chicago. I'd been in Chicago for, what, 12, 13 years, and I didn't know about Columbia. Then I remember, I vaguely heard things about it from some poets who taught here. So I said, "well, before I look into this, I'd better go look into the place and see if it's a place I even want to be." So I took myself downtown and I found the Department of Liberal Education. And I found actually the chair, who was Les VanMarter, and he sat me down for one of his usual two or three-hour talks. And I was actually pretty impressed with the place. He had a PhD from University of Chicago, too. That was nice. In philosophy. I thought that it was pretty intriguing. It was definitely challenging, and it was something unlike I had ever done before. So I applied. There were a couple interesting things about the way that this happened. I applied. I was short listed. Then I decided, that if the department was going to interview me, they knew all about me. They had my CV. They had my essays. They had my writings. They had everything. And I didn't know anything about them. And unlike many academic departments, where you can go look at the names of the people who are in them, go see what they've written and read what they've written, this was not that kind of department. It was not a publish or perish department. So I called up the administrator who was Paula Weiner and said, "look, I'd really like to see the CVs of everyone in the department." And she said, "oh, well, no one's ever asked for that before. I'll have to ask Mr. VanMarter." So she did, and he said, "yes," and I came down and I read everybody's CVs. And I discovered some really interesting things. Number one, I discovered that Glenn was interested in the West Side and about his West Side project.

Glenn Graham.

Glenn Graham. I discovered that Louis Silverstein and I were born on exactly the same day, in the same year. I discovered that Bill Hyashi who was in Social Thought at University of Chicago, was very interested in Indian religion and in a particular guru. I mean I discov-

ered a lot of interesting things. That made the interview process for me much more fun because I could ask them about these things that interested me, and they, I think it was more fun for them, they talked about it. Anyhow, I got the job.

I want to just back up a little bit though, because I know what were your other options at the time and what leaned you in favor of taking, if you could be specific about the things that intrigued you about teaching at Columbia and the opportunity to teach here?

Well, I don't think it was the opportunity. It was the challenge.

Okay.

First of all, other places. I ended up, although there were a number of jobs, I ended up looking at only two seriously. Because I was older than the usual fresh PhD, I was easily subordinated to every person in a department without stating my point of view and didn't think that I could probably succeed as the sort of junior member of a department. I was going to be older than some of those who were senior to me. So it just didn't figure that it would work. I couldn't do an entry level anthro position. So there were really two that interested me given what I work on. I work on cultural policy and performing arts in India. So the two jobs that interested me, were the Performance Studies Department at the Tisch School of the Arts at NYU, in New York. And I went there and did an interview there. And Columbia College. Columbia interested me because it was a kind of a carrying on of my outreach work except that now, what I had were all these students who were interested in the media and film and radio and television and theater and journalism and that I'm a South Asia specialist as an anthropologist and that I could actually carry on a commitment that I had made when I went to graduate school which was to teach Americans about South Asia. But here I could do it by this snowball method, that is I would teach the people who would then go out and use the materials in various ways. And so Columbia seemed to me a really appropriate place for me to do that. Having spent some time in New York, when I went to interview there, I visited five different friends, five different apartments in New York and each person had a dreadful apartment story, just dreadful. There was the woman who was living in an apartment building next to Carnegie Hall, and she was in a two-bedroom apartment. And the man next door was in a one-bedroom apartment, and he wanted her apartment. And the entire time, I was interviewing her for some research I was doing, and the entire time I was interviewing her, he was pounding on the wall because he was trying to drive her out of her apartment. Excuse me. This was not the way I wanted to live. And so I sort of actually took that as a sign. And so Columbia seemed to me the really appropriate place. I liked the atmosphere.

I liked at that time, Liberal Education Department was in the Wabash Building, and if you'd go down the halls, all the students would be sitting there and they'd pull back their legs and let you through. And there was a kind of an informality and atmosphere of informality and just friendliness, that seemed to me to make Columbia a pretty interesting place. I liked my potential colleagues in the department. They were not all anthropologists. They were in history and humanities and subjects. They were in different parts of the social sciences. And as Social Science Coordinator then I would be responsible for anthropology, sociology, psychology, economics and political science faculty members, and I liked that, too. The other thing I liked, is I liked coming in as Coordinator. It meant that I could use the many connections in networking I had in the city, to find people who were doing what they would teach to teach courses in those areas. And indeed, that was great fun. So it just seemed a very appropriate place for me. And then I mean it was nice. I didn't have to move. I was expecting to move, but here I was.

Did the chair, was the chair surprised that someone with a fresh PhD was coming in to want the coordinator, or did Les seem open to that?

I didn't have a very fresh PhD. Remember, I got my PhD in 1980.

Oh, okay. Yeah.

And I had a lot of teaching. And so this was 1986, so by then I had quite a lot of experience. I had also run outreach programs and been involved with teaching teachers for a long time. I actually had a great deal of experience.

Columbia has, I've learned through this oral history project, a long history going back to the sixties, but a pretty strong history with the University of Chicago. And they seem like such different institutions. Can you offer any insight why there would be a connection or why a lot of people that were educated at the University of Chicago ended up here or would be attracted to an arts and communications, open admission college?

I think there's two parts to it. One is the sort of recent history. And in

the recent history, University of Chicago offers very few opportunities for its graduate students to get teaching experience. And so we attract, and I made every effort to continue that and I think it's going to continue beyond me as Coordinator, we attract a lot of University of Chicago students who want teaching experience. And they know that they can plan their own courses, that they have leeway and flexibility that they might not get in community colleges or other places. We're well located, the same reason as it's true for the students. And so I think that in recent history, we've been very attractive to University of Chicago people. Then there's the sort of bigger ideological reason, and that has to do with it seems to me what the University of Chicago is really like. University of Chicago really is a community of scholars. I mean my undergraduate work was at Harvard, and I remember coming to University of Chicago to look at it. I actually thought I was coming to the wilds of the Midwest. I had never been to Chicago before. I had never lived here, and I was living in a small town in New Hampshire, where my husband was teaching at Dartmouth. And so when I came here, and I remember walking across the campus of the University of Chicago with Lloyd Rudolph who was a professor there, and he had also, I had known him from Harvard. He had taught me at Harvard. And he said, you know, he said I didn't really understand it till I got here, but this really is a community of scholars. And University of Chicago has long attracted people who wanted to do their particular work in their particular way, and I think Columbia attracts similar people. That it isn't so much the arts, media, and communications although those are the particular people who we tend to get from University of Chicago, the people who are in English but in film studies or in, I don't know who you've talked with, but who have an interest in arts, media, and communications for some reason. I mean I'm an anthropologist, and my work is on performing arts. But I think that one of the ideals that people leave University of Chicago with, of course, you know, many of them are dashed at graduate school. We know that. But one of the ideals they live with and breathe with, is that they are going out to teach people not to carry a kind of elitism forward but rather to really seriously teach what they're really seriously interested in, to people in whose interest it is to learn about that. And Columbia offers that opportunity.

Now, I'm glad you were able to comment on that cause it gives really insight and a connection between the two that on the surface you might not actually—

Well, I've thought about it because going back and forth, and I do, I have an appointment at University of Chicago, too. I'm a research associate in the Committee on Southern Asian Studies at the University of Chicago. And that's an affiliating appointment. And it's not a paid appointment. It's an honorary appointment, but it gives me full library privileges at the university which is very important to me because as a South Asia Scholar, I need access to a really fine South Asia library, and University of Chicago is one of a limited number in the country. So I go back and forth. And I remember for a long time, some of my friends at University of Chicago would say to me, they'd say, "oh, you're wearing all black. Is that because you're with artists now?" I mean their perception was that somehow one had gone to this artsy place called Columbia and was being transformed by it and bringing that back to these Midwestern ivied halls, which are sort of different anyhow. But I think that there is a very distinct atmosphere at both places. And yet, I think that the free for all that academia can be in the sense that it welcomes new ideas, that it flexes to accommodate them, that it opens doors for people who are risk takers is in common in both institutions.

How has Columbia influenced you if not in your fashion?

Oh, I'm sure it's influenced me in my lack of fashion.

But has Columbia changed you at all do you think or?

Oh, I think any institution that one spends time at has influences. Columbia has changed me in a lot of ways, and it continues to change me. I don't think it's an ending proposition because when you teach, you know, year by year the students seem to change, too, and that's a reflection of the way that one changes oneself and also the different trends in the schools and different groups from which the students are drawn. So I think, yes, it's—here are some of the ways. One, I think that my position at Columbia has led me to think about general education, general studies in social sciences in a rather new and exciting way and to think about what are the essential things that we're trying to—that makes us feel that it's essential that students take social sciences as part of their degree. So it's led me to think a lot about that. And that's influenced

my own professional work as well. I think that Columbia is, in some ways for me an ethnographic experience. I'm an anthropologist so everything is. But I have certainly learned a lot by observing and paying attention to the hugely and deliciously diverse group of people, faculty, staff and students who come to Columbia. So I've learned a lot more about the city. When I took this group of Chicago teachers to India in 1978, I think it was, they were appalled at how little I knew about Chicago. They really were. I mean they were teachers in the schools in Chicago. And I said, "okay, I'll teach you about India and you teach me about Chicago." And in a way, that was the beginning of my learning because at University of Chicago, you put your head down and you go to the library. And you don't explore the city usually. So I've learned a lot about the city. I've also learned a lot about human nature because since we are a non-selective or open admissions college, people come here for a lot more different reasons than I think they go to some kinds selective schools. So as a person who studies human behavior, this is a really interesting place. I've also learned a lot more about a lot of different things, and that's from having colleagues who are in all the different fields that Columbia offers. I teach a course called Visual Anthropology. That course was created by me, number one, because I thought it was a good course for this place and because I'm interested in it. But secondly because I kept finding colleagues who were doing visual anthropology although they didn't call it that in photo, in film, in art, in videography, Television Department. And I said, "wow, wouldn't it be terrific to show the students how people in these departments in which they're majoring are actually doing visual anthropology."

And did you explain visual anthropology or what you mean by visual anthropology.

Visual anthropology is, well, I've just been communicating with one of our new instructors. And I thought he summed it up very nicely. He said, "it's three things. First of all, visual anthropology is about representation. How do we represent something to someone else?" And so I use four media in this course. I mean probably one could think of more, but four is sufficient. Film, photographs, paintings and drawings, and museum exhibits, and these are all ways of representing something to someone else. And that something in anthropology is humans and human behavior. That's what we focused on. So that's the first thing, and it may be part of the second thing, which is that visual anthropology may be about representations through material culture and the way that material culture symbolizes values and ideas about a culture. And then, visual anthropology is also about symbol systems. It's about the ways in which through art, through the creation of things we represent what we think they are.

Okay.

So it's all woven.

So that's the system part of how—

That's what visual anthropology is about.

Okay.

How do you go about studying it? Well, you examine a significant number of visual representations in film, in photograph. For instance, Peter LeGrand comes in every year from our Photo Department and talks about a piece of his work which is in a former gold mining town in Colorado, Victor, Colorado, which has turned into a ghost town and which he's been photographing for many years with infrared film, which makes a very beautiful ghostly representation. And so when we talked about this, and I asked him to come in, he said, "well, you know, what do you want me to say about the way it used to be?" And I said, well, could you get any photos when it was booming. And he did. He got some. They were mostly of the miners all lined up, the miners. And this is an opportunity for students to think about how he presents and represents this ghost town visually. I mean, I know a ghost town is sort of an inversion of the idea of human behavior, but it is, in fact, a question of human behavior. Or Carla Fuller, who is from Film, has been coming in. And she is a person who wrote, now she's a Northwestern person not a University of Chicago person, she wrote a dissertation called Hollywood Ghost Oriental, Caucasians and Hollywood Films of, I think it's like, the Thirties to Sixties. I'm not sure exactly of the dates. Anyhow, she comes in with a lot of clips showing the ways in which Asian often undifferentiated are stereotyped and even caricatured in films where the intention is not to be racist or discriminatory but to somehow represent. And this is a very eye opening moment, when you realize the extent to which Hollywood has purposely created a kind of formalized and standardized distortion of Asians.

I think of Charlie Chan immediately.

That's exactly right. She starts with Charlie Chan. You're right on. But

there are a lot of people in this college who actually do visual anthropology because of the media in which they work. So this is a way of bringing it all together. And frankly, this is something I could do at Columbia that I don't know any other place in the country where I could do this. So it's very exciting.

That is the repeated theme that people say, I'm not sure I would have an opportunity to do whatever it is that they are interested in or have happened upon or developed, that they're not sure they could do it anywhere else but here, that they fit here, that they're supposed to be here.

Well, I'm not quite that—I'm delighted to be here, but, and I certainly can do the things I want and I've certainly stayed because that's the case.

Uh-huh. That has kept you.

And it certainly is what I say to people who are considering coming here. I mean, I think it's a great opportunity for those who would use the opportunity. And it's always interesting for us to interview potential new faculty members to size up whether or not that's the case that they would like to be in a place which does the kind of thing that we do. And that's important. I mean we have had some faculty who wanted a more standard academic department and they have moved on to that, and that's a good thing.

And speaking to what Columbia does, maybe this is a good time for you to describe what you feel of the college is and what its role is in higher education.

Okay. So there's sort of a series of things. So for one and from one point of view, Columbia is an opportunity for students from anywhere to take up an education that is not available to them hardly anywhere else, an education which allows them to take risks, that encourages it, an education which puts them into hands on experiential opportunities right from the beginning, an education which is their choice. And so that's certainly one of the missions of the college that has to do with ultimate vision. I think another mission of this college, is to encourage people who want to use their own voice in their careers and professions to find ways to do it. And that's not a small thing because much of what is taught in academia, and my three rather profound experiences have been at Harvard and Dartmouth and University of Chicago, is what other people think you should know. And I think that's least true by the way, at University of Chicago, which is another pairing here. You do the few things you're required and then you can go out and explore. Well, I think that's true here, too. You do what's required, but you can go exploring. And sometimes I feel sad, that some students are already so used to not being able to do what they want to do that it takes them a long time to figure out that they can do that. And you have to encourage them to go ahead. Who are you and what do you want? What interests you? And you follow up on that. Now, I will admit that I have always been stubborn in this way. So Columbia's a good match for me. When I was an undergraduate, my grandparents were all from Russia. Actually, it turns out some were from the Ukraine, but we didn't distinguish at that point. Anyhow, but since they were refugees, no one talked, no one spoke Russian, no one would talk about Russia, no one would talk about anything Russian. So when I got to college, I said, "aha, here's my chance." So I took Russian History with Richard Pipes and Russian National Character with Alan Finkley, Russian Literature with this wonderful man who had a peg leg and you could hear him coming up the stairs like this. I don't know how you're going to transcribe that. Setchkaroff was his name. I'll spell it for you. I'll be kind. S-e-t-c-h-k-a-r-o-f-f. Anyhow, and so I went after that, and I think that students—that's part of Columbia's mission is to give students a chance to find their voice and to really go after it. So that's another thing. A third thing is that it seems to me that Columbia, I mean I'm sure that everybody has quoted to you the key, wonderful phrase of our mission statement which is to teach students to offer the culture of their time. But, you know, it's really good. That's really, really good. I want students to know enough so that they can, in fact, do that. And so another thing that Columbia has as a mission is to help students understand how much they need to know in order to be effective in doing that. And sometimes, for students who don't have a history of higher education in their family or who simply aren't yet serious about their own lives in a certain way, convincing them that there really is a lot to learn and that knowledge is power, is tough. But I think Columbia goes about doing that. And it's an interesting combination of accepting the students halfway and also helping them see that knowledge is power. That's why I like teaching Freshmen Seminar, which I've been doing for some years. Cause you get them right at the cusp when they're

translating themselves from high school students to college students, and you get a chance to help them think about how to form themselves as college students and what they can get out of the experience. I think that Columbia's mission is also to be a place in Chicago, not in New York and not in Los Angeles, but in the Midwest which offers students pathways out. Now, out may be figurative. It may not mean leaving this area. But Columbia offers students some chance of really transforming themselves from very often people who don't think big or who think big in such idealistic terms, that the connection between how you get there and where you want to end up is not makeable into people who are actually on a path to do that. So those are some of the things that I think are Columbia's mission.

Maybe we can talk about the student because obviously, that's the focus that you see as the center to the mission is what Columbia can do for students. Have students changed since you've been here? How have they changed? Has it become harder for Columbia to fulfill that mission? Big question.

Big question. Has it become harder? No, it's always hard. Big challenge. I like challenges. I came here and the challenge has never stopped. Have students changed? Yeah. You know, it's really hard to judge if students are changing by the fact that one has, you know, four classes of 25 students each semester. That's a very small representation of a whole body of students. By the time I came here, students were already not only at Columbia but at colleges across the country very interested in how they would earn money from their college education. So I don't think that that's changed nor do I think it's particularly different at Columbia. We statistically are getting more students directly from high school. We used to have more older students, more mature students, and that is perhaps somewhat of a change. But I don't know that it really, I don't know how much it affects the teaching. I think that you have a whole—it's very hard for me to generalize about students. I mean there are a lot of different students here. They need to be addressed as individuals because that's the only way that you encourage anyone to find their own voice.

So it's still a diverse student population?

It was diverse when I came, and it still is diverse. It's perhaps a little differently diverse. There are more Latino students. There are more international students. There are more students. So and all of those things are different.

I'd like to talk a little bit about the faculty and your role in working on bringing tenure to Columbia and that process, and if you could speak to why is that important to fill and in bringing that to Columbia and your work in that?

All right. Unlike many commitments one makes in life, my commitment to the faculty and to faculty rights, faculty fairness and faculty status comes from personal experience. The personal experience was an evaluation of me, which I felt was completely unfair. Now, this is not the time or place for the particulars of that, but it was unfairly done. The Chair's behavior, in this event was inexcusable and the dean not much better. And I felt like I was not being treated as a professional, as a colleague, and certainly as a faculty ought to be treated. This happened, just ironically, at the point when I was going on my previous sabbatical. I'm on sabbatical now. And two months of my sabbatical was taken up fighting this. And I made some significant headway and at the end of it, the end of the fight, I wasn't—I'm not someone who sues the college. I'd rather fix the college because if I sue it, I might get something out of it personally, but if I fix it, then everybody benefits. So at the end of that, I called up the Executive Vice President and said, "I'd like to have lunch and talk about this." And we went to lunch and as we went out the door, we turned towards Printer's Row, so I knew it was okay. We turned towards a lesser place or I might have been worried. And we had lunch and talked about everything, and at the end, I said, "you know, I'm just not inclined to pursue this anymore. I'm tired of this, and I want to work on my own work. That's what sabbatical's for." So I asked if it would affect—I knew that the people would expect me to be interested in money so I said "will it affect my salary?" I said, "would it affect my standing at the college and would it affect any recommendations I might have on record?" And he said "no." So I said "fine," and that was the end of it. But I did agree, that with the support—

That was the end what, evaluation affect those things, right?

It wasn't a poor evaluation.

Right.

It wasn't a poor evaluation, I have to tell you.

I don't want to put you in an awkward—

I'm going to tell you exactly what it was. It was an unfair evaluation.

Okay. Unfair.

It was an anonymous letter received by the dean which was transmitted to the chair without my knowledge, and which the chair used in the evaluation without ever discussing it with me. That's called unfair, and it's completely inappropriate behavior. Okay? So that's gone now. It's gone from my files. Now, it's on tape. Okay. Well, but I, you know, there are lessons learned from these things. And you can turn around and keep a grudge forever, or you can turn around and do something useful with it. I always think it's more interesting to do something useful with it. So that meant in the spring when I was asked if I would run for vice president of the CCFO, I said yes. Here was a chance to enter the leadership group which looked out for faculty's interests, and that made sense to me. So I ran and as usual on an unopposed slate, so I was elected. And Caroline Latta was elected president of CCFO. And then at the end of August or beginning of September, it was suddenly announced that Caroline was going to be the acting academic dean. So since I was the vice president, I should now be—

President.

—President of CCFO. So I came back after this misadventure in evaluation, as the President of the Columbia College Faculty Organization, and the same chair sat down with me and said, "I want you to know if there's anything we can do for you to help you in this position, we'd be happy to help you." So I said, "yes, there were a few things." I needed Xeroxing and some lunches and anyhow, I named some things, and they took care of it. As President of CCFO, one of the mandates the faculty had been concerned with and was interested in the new officers following up, as was the issue of rank for faculty members. We had had a presidentially appointed committee under Mike Alexandroff, that looked into rank for faculty. And that committee, which was composed of faculty chairs and administrators, had come up with recommendations for a system of rank but had clearly stated that there would be no tenure associated with it. And I immediately saw on that plate that rank without tenure was a foolish, foolish way for the faculty to go.

Was there an explanation as to why Columbia was not embracing tenure, stated or unstated?

Well, you have to go back in order to understand that. That has to do with sort of the way we grew. I mean, Mike Alexandroff appointed most faculty members himself personally on the spot. He first appointed chairs, and chairs had discretionary powers to appoint faculty members. And they also had discretionary powers to fire them on the spot if they so desired. And so we came from a history where faculty members had very little rights in the terms of being employees of the college. But then we grew, and we grew into a college that had faculty members who come from other colleges and who had different understandings of what their rights should be and who didn't feel, many of them, that they needed to kowtow and lick the boots of chairs in order to get along here. And there were chairs who felt that way, too. And eventually, and I think Louis, I don't know if Louis is on tape talking about this, Louis Silverstein, but at one point with pressure from the faculty, it was determined that there would be two statuses for faculty, probationary, which was three years and non-probationary, if you were kept after those three years. When I came in '86, probationary was three years. Two years later it was raised to five years. And so you were either called probationary or non-probationary.

Defining you by what you are not, not by what you are.

Yes, very elegant terms for faculty. So I mean one of the things that I did first, when I became President of CCFO was I said, "look, I don't even know the history of this organization. It's not a union. It's a faculty organization. How long has it been in existence and what is it's history?" So I went around and talked. I mean it's a good ethnographic study. I went around and talked to all the people who were here at the beginning and about why it had started and how it had happened. And I got the history. And then I realized, that I'd have to run the CCFO out of my office which was already rather crowded. It's worse now, but it was crowded then. And so I decided that we needed to have an office space, that legitimizing the CCFO required an office. So I created a slogan, and the slogan was "we're ten years old; it's time we had a room of our own." And it worked. Took a few meetings. I worked with other wonderful officers. Let me say that Brian Katz, who had been once President of CCFO was very useful in the history, from Photo was the vice president. And Diane Erpenbach,

was the treasurer from management. And Paulette Whitfield from management was the secretary. And we worked as a group. We met every two weeks. We really worked hard. So we decided that the first thing we needed to do was that many faculty members really didn't know much about rank, tenure or the issues of faculty salary and that these were the three issues on the table. So as a group, we researched these issues and we held two forums, rank, tenure and salary. And each one of the officers researched one area. I sort of directed and delegated. And we invited the president and we invited the Chair of the Chairs, and we had two forums on this to inform the faculty of our findings. We then constituted, this was just at the end of my term by that time.

Can I ask a date?

Oh, we're in the nineties so this is probably '93, '94.

Okay.

At the end of my term as president, which was two years, I took the step of appointing a committee which I gave a name which I thought was really going to be effective. I called it—and what we'd officially sort of had working before was called the Rank Committee. And I felt that was a very smelly term, and that it really was not good for the faculty to have a rank committee, that it sent the wrong message. So I created a committee, that I called the Committee on Faculty Status. And this committee, of course, by its very name gave us status immediately, and that was the goal. And this committee which was a wonderful group of people, I must say, elected Peter LeGrande from photography as its chair, and I was ex officio, and we set to work on developing a faculty division on rank, tenure and salaries. Now, I had figured out by that time that rank without tenure made no sense at all. So we had to find a way, and Peter and I were pretty much in agreement, and other people in the committee, although there were some people who thought that rank was the only issue they wanted to deal with. So we put the three before the committee and we were able to convince the committee, which was appointed by CCFO, not by the president, but contained two chairs in addition to faculty members and the dean who rarely came to meetings. So we put the three on the table and agreed to take up tenure first. That was a big moment. Now, I have to go back a little bit first, because there was another piece of this puzzle that had to be in place before we could do this. In order to establish CCFO as the voice of the faculty, there had been a gnawing problem in the past that we had to overcome, and that was that CCFO membership consisted only of those who paid their dues. By its own by-laws, only faculty members who paid the dues of CCFO, $10.00 a year, were members. So whenever in some committee meeting we brought up the CCFO or the voice of the faculty, an administrator who I will not name would always say to us, well, but you only have 60 percent. How can you say you speak for the whole faculty? So we were essentially devoiced. So the first thing, and this happened even before I was president. I was part of the By-Laws Committee. Probably why I was invited to run for vice president. As part of the By-Laws Committee, we revised the by-laws to say that all full-time faculty members were automatically members of CCFO and were encouraged to pay their dues. So now, the CCFO spoke for the whole faculty. The only way a faculty member would not be a member of CCFO would be if they wrote a letter specifically asking to be relieved of their membership. No one has ever done that so far.

No.

Yeah, so far that I know of. So I don't know. So we started meeting with the president and told him what we were after. And to our great delight, we discovered that President John Duff, was very much in favor of bringing tenure to the college, and that was really important to us. He assigned his assistant, Roger Shiness, to help us research tenure systems at other colleges across the country, and we did a huge amount of research. And with that research and with all the advice that we could take and with a hardworking faculty committee in two years, we created a document which was the faculty's proposal for tenure at Columbia College. We didn't write it in legal language. We didn't want to although we certainly were legally sound in what we wrote. We knew that it would probably be rewritten in legalese. I mean with a lawyer as the Chair of the Board of Trustees you could probably imagine that. But we sent this forward to the president. We also sent it to the faculty, and there was a vote by the faculty at a retreat on this document, and it was approved by something like 87 or 90 percent of the faculty. So we had a very big mandate. When President Duff took it to the Board of Trustees, he expected them to embrace it, and they didn't. They were very negative. And we were, of course, buck-

ing the trend in academia which was to challenge tenure at that point. But somehow Columbia almost always does that.

It's consistent.

Yeah, well, it was right in line with our usual way of doing things. So John Duff was not to be defeated. He set out to educate the Board of Trustees on why tenure was good for Columbia and good for its status and good for the faculty and good for the students and good for everyone. And he brought in two speakers, one from Harvard, one from University of Illinois at Urbana to talk. And when we got wind that these figures were coming in, we asked them to come and speak with the CCFO Committee first. And so we had meetings with them even before they got to the trustees so they had clearly our perspective in mind, which was—they were quite amenable. They wanted to hear from the faculty on this. I mean if the faculty doesn't support tenure, then why push it? Anyhow, the long and short of it is, May 31st of 1997 I believe, the Board of Trustees voted unanimously to approve the tenure document which has been rewritten by a Committee of the Board of Trustees for Columbia College, and that was it. Since then, it doesn't stop there. I mean no good deed goes unpenalized, as it were. Since then, operationalizing it has been a real challenge. One of the new innovative things that was included in it was an all college tenure committee. There had never been any all college committee. And actually, each department and each chair had been the ultimate voice in determining whether any faculty member would stay or leave. And that All College Tenure Committee was a highly contested part of it, but we were adamant about it. We felt that you were tenured in the college, not in your department, and that there had to be an all college tenure committee. And so Peter LeGrand was Chair and I was Recorder of the first All College Tenure Committee, and the first thing we had to do, and it took us a year, was to get each department to write criteria for tenure. And it was a very tough struggle. And we had everything from flippant denial really to highly excessive documents filled with lots of examples. But for the most part, I must say most of the departments wrote very reasonable documents. And then we had to do a certain amount of standardizing so it's absolutely fair across the college. So tenure is now based on two things. It's based on the handbook description of what is, the handbook description plus the tenure document is one thing, and then on departmental criteria for tenure. And then we had to get the departments to write criteria for five-year review of tenured faculty. And that again, was another struggle. And in any case, it took us a year to operationalize it and so we're now in our third year of tenure. Now, a very important part of that document was that everybody who was non-probationary was grand fathered in as tenured. One of the biggest problems of the original rank proposal had been that everybody was reduced to the rank of instructor and had to apply for any other rank, and that seemed grossly unfair. So by the tenure document, everyone who was non-probationary as of May 31, 1997, was tenured and put on the list for appropriate five-year review. In order not to have everybody come up for five-year review in the same year, which would be a disaster and too many, five-year review was determined from the year in which they became non-probationary. So that scattered it, so that you had a reasonable number each year. We have 27, 30 every year. So the process and the procedures were new and there were many complaints from the chairs about what they were expected to do and how they didn't know what to do when. And the dean had not had experience with a tenure system before, and so the dean and Peter and I and the ACT and sometimes Bert Gall, who was the provost at that time.

What's the ACT?

All College Tenure Committee. Worked very hard to develop procedures, and Peter and I then spent the following spring, that's the second year spring writing a booklet called Guidelines for Promotion in a Tenured College which has become the basis of procedures. Because the tenure document, although it states the criteria and the legal obligations of the faculty and the college, does not talk about how you operationalize so the procedures is a separate thing. So we're still working on it. And it's a system in process, but I do think that it's accomplished several things already. And certainly John Duff recognized those things for which I can only admire him. And he would go around the country talking about how he brought tenure to Columbia College, and I think he had every right to be proud. It's accomplished something for the faculty. It means that each faculty member's evaluation is based on their own competence and their own presentation along with other kinds of evaluations and that they are not put in the position of being personally responsible to a Chair in a kind of feudalistic

system for their continued teaching appointment at Columbia. It provides a kind of security. But it also provides a kind of accountability in the five-year reviews. And it seems to me that it's a part of the college growing up. And I shouldn't say this, but I was and still am very concerned to have a thinking, conscious, aware faculty in this college, that if you think about the administration and the faculty and the students and the chairs as a kind of a special group, the faculty voice is critical in the success of this college. We know it from student evaluations. When the students evaluate, they always say the faculty's terrific. The staff gives them some troubles, but they think that the faculty is wonderful. And the faculty is really important. But each of us gets so busy with what we do professionally, that it's also hard to devote time to supporting the faculty's role in administering and caring about procedures and the way things happen in the college. And so I'm a very big supporter of the faculty. I have argued now for several years that we should have a Dean of the Faculty. We're in a process of thinking about restructuring. Some of the plans have a Dean of the Faculty. Some don't. I now think that with the part-time faculty having unionized and many, many, many issues connected with that are on the table all the time, that a Dean of the Faculty would handle both the ten-year and five-year review and the union issues and the issues of faculty development and faculty awards and all of those things is a very reasonable position for this college to institute and *(inaudible)*.

How related are some of these issues to the growth of the college? I mean I think that it seems that, you know, that transformation from the mom and pop, you know, a lot of people said let's have a college, you know, in attitude of the sixties and today where we're fast approaching 10,000 students or *(inaudible)*—
$100 million. $100 million is one of the ways of measuring, yes.

So I mean do you see that, too, as keeping up with, you know, keeping Columbia viable and keeping up with the changes that—
Well, I think you have to face realities that scale matters if that's what you're saying. Scale matters. And that there are certain expectations that come with the continued, if I can, institutionalization of an institution. And that's what we're attending to. And I think if you don't attend to them, you certainly can get yourself into a lot of trouble, and I do think that's what earlier incarnations of Columbia College ran into. If you look at the history of Columbia College, it's been fits and starts. So if you want the institution to be strong, if you want it to be able to address both changing times and contexts and changes in size, you have to think about what it means. I mean I remember at the retreat this last fall, we were in the CCFO, the Columbia College Faculty Organization meeting and we were discussing a question of restructuring, and there was a big discussion. And there were some points of view that said, "well, the administration is very smart and if they've decided to do it this way, it must be right." And that just makes my blood boil. I mean, you know, the administration had made a decision to put forward a plan, without ever consulting any faculty members and that seemed to me really, really, really problematic. And then there were other people who said, we should not let this go ahead once we have a voice in it. We need to have a committee and so forth and so on." So eventually, it was decided that we would have a committee and we have, in fact, created a faculty structure proposal which has gone to the dean and to the president who was very welcoming of it. But I left that meeting and I met a colleague of mine outside, Howard Sandroff, who said, "Joan, you see, there were people asking questions about the structuring cause I was involved in it." And he said, "Joan," he said "now, I know how I know you're a leader," and I said, "what do you mean?" He said, "you always know when the next meeting is." And I thought, "that was pretty good, Howard. You really got it." Yes, you have to think ahead. You have to think of not so much as an objective, whatever you're aiming for, but where are you going. You know, it's like driving. You better think about what's ahead of you. And I think that institutions have to do that, too. And I think that strategic plans and, you know, five-year plans and all that are very nice and important, but it's just as important to be involved in this process that has a momentum in it and to be able to think, both in terms of what your objective is and where you are in the process and to bring them together so that they have some greater energy of being both a goal and an outcome of where you've been. And that's what Columbia has to do. And I certainly think that tenure and by the way, the unionization of the

part-time faculty, are those kinds of outgrowths. They reflect changing contexts but also changes within the college. And I think that we need to go further. The difficulty is that when your administration is left to make those decisions by itself without input from faculty and from those students who are wise enough to understand this, not all of them could turn their minds to this, but certainly from faculty and chairs, that the institution then becomes detached from its moorings. And I worry about that all the time. There are signs that could happen here. That's why I'm currently serving on the—I agreed to run for—even though it's my sabbatical and serve on the provost and Vice President Academic Affairs Search Committee, which I'm on because I think that's a very important position in the college. And it's a position, that was created in some haste in an effort, it appears of John Duff to remove what he's thought as excessive responsibilities from Bert Gall. And then that was Vice President for Academic Affairs, and he put someone in without any search, any faculty input, anything, someone who had once been dean, Sam Floyd, and was put into this position and had not succeeded as dean, I would say. And then suddenly make him provos,t as well. And so we want to make sure that we get someone in that position who will understand this kind of way of both using the momentum that's going on and aiming for important goals for the college.

Is it important that that person come from within or without or?
This is a national, wide open search.

National.
And I can't talk about candidates, but I would expect there'd be candidates both from the college, yeah.

I want to before this ends go back to something that you mentioned earlier, and can I use general education and liberal education somewhat interchangeably?
Sure.

I want you to define what do you think general ed or liberal education is because you referred earlier to the goals that you thought a lot about this.
Okay. You know, one of the parts of the mission statement is that the students will achieve their voices as it were, whatever the language is in a context of enlightened liberal education. And I have to say this is one of the other reasons—I should have said that, you know, this appeals to University of Chicago people. That's sort of one of our motifs. I think that for Columbia students what general studies, and liberal education is this department so I think about that also, can do is provide them with a couple of things. Number one with knowledge, knowledge of the world, its history, the way people behave, the way different kinds of peoples behave. If you raised to consciousness ideas which they have held mainly as prejudices and biases and let them examine them and think about what they really value and why and how, and so I think that there is a kind of true enlightenment that comes out of general education and general studies and should come. That's one. And that has to do with knowledge but also something beyond knowledge, the ability to think. Then there's a second part of it. I think that many students in arts and media don't recognize the extent, to which different methodologies can provide them with ways of accessing materials relevant to what they're doing. And yet when they get into social science courses and history courses and humanities courses, they're exposed to not just methods and methodologies, but ways of thinking about how you learn something which are good for life. And I think that that's a critical part of their liberal education. I mean I think that really liberates them from saying how I find out about this is I turn on my computer and I punch, you know, global and go to it. Because there's a lot of ways to find out things and a lot of ways to establish how you know what you know. And they need to think about that. Then there's a third part, and that is that there's a huge responsibility that goes with using your voice to quote off the culture of our times and that responsibility means that we must not only in the majors where certainly some of this does come but very much in the liberal education courses and certainly in this department in history, humanities and social science helps students understand what that responsibility is and what a big one it is. Not to censor themselves but to recognize that that responsibility is a responsibility, God knows, to the human race. It's a very big responsibility, and it has to be handled with a certain amount of care and thoughtfulness. So I think those are the sort of three major areas that are very much a part of liberal education, enlightenment and knowledge, methods and methodologies, and responsibility.