

Podcast 36 – Changes In Education

Narrator & Editor Richard Gay: Welcome to 30 Brave Minutes, a podcast of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. In 30 Brave Minutes we'll give you something interesting to think about. Joining Jeff Frederick, the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences is Charles Jenkins, Ralph Steeds, and Sara Oswald. Get ready for 30 Brave Minutes.

FREDERICK: In the past four decades the practice and face of higher education has changed. For much of the 1970s men vastly outnumbered women in the ranks of college students. In some years as much as 58% to 42%. The ratios were even more acutely different when it came to STEM or science fields. Today over 2 million more women than men are enrolled and by 2026 the ratio may tilt to as much as 58% female. Some universities are launching studies and developing programs to recruit more male students and are pondering pathways to create viable male education role models for male underclassmen. In part this is a reflection of the current environment which documents that men are less likely to enroll, more likely to drop out, and less likely to graduate. But this is far from the only change in higher education. Back in the day, universities printed multi-page course schedules and distributed carbon copy forms, so students could wait in physical lines in order to register for their classes. Even when computers came punch cards, mainframes and other museum-quality blasts from the past were the daily grind for students who simply wanted to get in a class. Professors received paper copies of rolls and duplicated course materials, sometimes known as dittos, and as likely to feature blue ink as black. The professoriate produced syllabi with Risograph machines, making the absent-minded professor someone likely to be wearing a series of ink stained splotches across their fashion-forward ensemble. They posted grades by student name outside their office or outside the classroom where they often delivered instruction with lectures and chalkboards, not PowerPoint or by directing students to go to the electronic textbook app. Majors like Decision Sciences, Geo-environmental Sciences, Gender Studies, or Birth to Kindergarten Education either didn't yet exist or were still on the drawing board. While some would call for a return to the basics of higher education experiences grounded in trivium or some other classical notion, many other developments are unquestionably better. Affirmative action provided opportunities to assist groups of

students who had been historically marginalized in the admissions or acceptance process. Diversity became a core value of higher education as an appreciation for other cultures replaced an early 20th century preference for racial, class, religious, or even gender exclusivity. Adult learners now populate many universities, providing opportunities previously reserved for students in a specific age demographic. The digital world provides an avalanche of scholarship and research materials helping students gather resources at the stroke of a key rather than finger flipping through a massive piece of furniture called a card catalog. And here in Southeastern North Carolina, the changes are equally palpable. UNC Pembroke is now replete with buildings that three or four decades ago were not even thought of. A school of two or three thousand students is now well over 7,000 and climbing. Faculty and students alike walk from building to building carrying laptop computers, tablets, and phones all while chugging down iced coffees. Three or four decades earlier faculty in their own offices didn't always have their own telephones. Our topic for today are the changes in higher education and the changes right here at UNC Pembroke. Joining me today are Charles Jenkins, Professor of Education and former Provost and Chancellor, Ralph Steeds, retired Art Professor and renowned printmaker, and Sara Oswald from the Department of English, Theatre, and Foreign Languages, who knows everything about college yearbooks you could ever want to know. Welcome everybody.

All: Thank you. Hi. Glad to be here.

Frederick: So what year did y'all start at the University? What were your recollections of campus life and the classes you taught? Tell us about what it was like when you started.

Jenkins: Well I came in January 1971 and of course the name of the University at that time was Pembroke State University. Just three years earlier it was named Pembroke State College. And so there were monumental changes taking place in North Carolina in higher education. In fact I came and 71, but in 72 is when UNC, now called UNCP joined the UNC system. That was a major change for UNCP and all the other institutions of higher education that came under the old State Board of Higher Education for all 16 public universities to be under one system called the University of North Carolina. So we were seeing a lot of changes at that point in

time. I would say specifically about UNCP at that time, although it didn't possess that name, the size of the campus, of course, was much different as you've already indicated to some extent. I do not have the figures in front of me, but I think, actually, in the early seventies, that we were like 1500 to 1600 students and did not have master's degree programs, but we were working on our enrollment and got enrollment by mid 70s up to about 2000. And, of course, it continued to grow and, of course, the advent of master's degree programs made a big difference, too, in the clientele that we had on campus and the students that we served. I would say the big thing that stood out in my mind when I first came, I came from a larger university as an undergraduate and master's student, a much larger university, and it was very impersonal, and when I came to campus I couldn't help but reflect that I thought higher education was supposed to be impersonal. And it was so great to be on a campus where it was very personal, that students got a lot of individual attention, class sizes were not all that great, but individual attention, I think, has been a hallmark of UNCP from the very beginning to the present day and I think it's one of the things that sets us apart. Now, of course, through the years, the big change has been technology and we'll talk, perhaps, more about that as we move along.

Frederick: There is something nice about working and going to school in a place where everybody knows your name.

Jenkins: It makes big difference.

Steeds: I came here in 1975 and I think enrollment was about 1600.

Jenkins: That would be about right.

Steeds: A lot of the buildings that we had (then) now aren't here. The Art Department was in the top of Moore Hall. We were on the top floor and home economics and music were on the bottom floors. We moved the Art Department twice, and had major Innovations, and now I think it's probably one of the better art departments in the state, because of the fact that the improvement in equipment and funding. I think what really, in my opinion, helped the university the most is when we did the name change. I know the community were pro and con for it, and Adolf Dial, then, (who) was chair of the Indian Studies Department, finally

advocated for the name change, and it happened. And after that happened in the enrollment really started to build up. There was a time in the art department when it was almost empty. It was scary. We thought we were going to lose our jobs, but after that happened everything went right back up.

Frederick: Sara, when did you get here?

Oswald: I got here in fall of 1987 and I think there were something like 2300 or 2400 students on campus at that time. It was still very small. I think one of the slogans at that time was "PSU, where learning gets personal" and it was still small enough that you did feel that you knew everybody on campus. And that's one of the things one of the changes that I'm not really in love with over the years is now I don't feel like I know everybody on campus. It's like what is now Facilities used to be Physical Plant and I knew everybody in Physical Plant, and I could pick up the phone - by the time I got here faculty did have phones in their offices. We didn't have computers yet, but we had phones, and I could just pick up the phone and call somebody, if I needed something fixed, and they would come and fix it for me. And so, you know, it was very intimate and very personal and when I got here what is now the dial building was Classroom Building North, and that was at that time, the northernmost building on the campus.

Frederick: And now it's in the middle of campus.

Oswald: And now it's in the middle of campus. Everything beyond Classroom Building North was trees. So now there are buildings, but I kind of miss some of the trees and the thing that I found about this place and that still is true to the most part, is it was very welcoming. And coming to North Carolina, for me, was a real culture shock because I came from northern New Jersey, the New York area, and the style and the pace of everything was much slower here. I still walk much faster than you know, I have to pass people as I'm walking.

Frederick: Well, you are a force of nature. (Everyone laughs)

Oswald: And I learned in the first couple of years that I had to tone myself down a little bit. My first student evaluations said that I was a really good teacher, but I was too abrupt and so I realized that I had to reflect more of myself as a human

being and not just an expert on my subjects, which would not have been appreciated in the City University of New York, which was the institution I had taught in most recently before I got here. They didn't want all of the, you know, making nice and if anybody had ever called me Miss Sara in either New York or New Jersey, you know... So there were a lot of cultural things I had to adjust to and basically I found that I really like the slower pace of things here.

Frederick: It grows on you, doesn't it?

Oswald: Yeah, it does.

Frederick: Let's talk about some of those transitions. Think about the difference between when you were a student in college and when you came to UNCP to teach. Some of you had stops between there, but what was the biggest transition from being a student back in the day, to moving to being a charge of all those students?

Steeds: Well when I came here, like Sara said, the community was so small I knew everyone, and I enjoyed things like the Faculty Forum. It was just for faculty. And we had cookouts with our students, hamburger and hot dogs and then we'd fix the big Thanksgiving dinner and the class size was different and I think, when I first came here, I had a lot more Native American students than I had when I retired. The difference between the University of Oklahoma and here was vast and I don't think I'm still used to being called Mr. Ralph, but I later realized there were so many Oxendines and Locklears that if you were introduced as Mr. Locklear or Mr. Chavis people might not know who you were. That's where that tradition probably came from. But I think the first computer I ever worked on was in Vietnam and it was punch cards and the computer was probably as big as this building. So that was a major thing. About two years before I retired we started getting computers. Yeah, and I was a Luddite and still am, but I can work them now, but as he knows I have to call him once in a while.

Frederick: Charles, you were probably in the middle of the action in making sure all faculty got a computer.

Jenkins: Absolutely. In fact, that was a monumental development for every faculty member. It's one thing to get a computer for a department or for the IT Center, but to get one for each individual faculty member, just like the telephone. I wouldn't downplay the importance of getting a telephone. It made a statement and getting your own personal computer made also a statement. A couple of changes which have already been mentioned, but I want to just follow up on them, because I think they are worthy of emphasizing and they really stand out at UNCP: is the personal attention. I really don't see that. I have visited a lot of campuses, but I believe we stand out in that category of personal attention for students. And then secondly, the way faculty members go out of their way to help students. You can call that personal attention or not, but I wanted to emphasize and I really do believe faculty members go out of their way to work with them, if the student will do their part. I think that's a big, big difference for UNCP.

Frederick: So, let me just follow up on that a minute. When you guys pushed out the initiative for everybody to get their own office computer, did you have a bunch of people saying, "We're not going to need these," "why are we doing that," "you're spending money, we don't need."

Oswald: I remember vividly because I used to be in the office next to a person I will not name who was then the advisor for the Pine Needle, our student newspaper, because Mass Comm and English used to be in one big department. And so his office was next to mine. We had a computer lab. We were one of the first departments on campus to get a computer lab, thanks to Pat Valenti who was on our faculty. She got a grant and we got 20 computers, old IBM PCs with the Dual floppy disks, because we saw the importance of using that for teaching writing and so we had access to computers probably before a lot of other departments on campus because we could just go into the student computer lab and get them. When each of us got a computer in our office the guy in the office next to me never even turned it on and what would drive me crazy is he had an old manual typewriter and I would hear the clickety-clack of his typewriter through the wall. And I wanted to bang on the wall and say "This is 1990...whatever it is. You should not be advising a student publication and using a typewriter." In fact, when I took over the yearbook in 1988 or 89, there was a typewriter on the desk in the yearbook office and that was the first thing that I said. "This goes. We are not

using typewriters any more. We're using computers." There was some resistance and there were three or four other people in our department that had computers in their offices that were never used. But, you know, most of us really embraced it, I think.

Steeds: Thank the powers to be that there's spell check and grammar check, and you can delete and move back and forth. Remember all the whiteout we had to use? And I remember mimeographs and getting that stuff all over me.

Oswald: We had it a ditto machine and I saw it as purple, not blue. And so a lot of our handouts and things were, but the thing about that is there was a myth that you could get high on breathing ditto fluid. And so the students would sometimes pick up and sniff the papers if they came right out of...

Frederick: You mean there was actual research going on as they looked at their worksheets and syllabi? (Everyone laughs)

Steeds: Did they have purple noses?

Oswald: No.

Jenkins: Let me go back to another point, Jeff, that you've already mentioned, and that's the diversity matter. I think that's very important to emphasize that makes UNCP a special place. Last time I checked we were considered the most diverse university in the South. I don't know whether that's true, but we're either number one or number two, and of course diversity meaning African-American students, Native American students, white students, Hispanic students, Asian and other categories. And I really think that makes a big difference for our campus and when people come to our campus, they recognize that. And our students get along so well and our faculty get along so well, in the major scheme of things that certainly something that stands out. As I mentioned the personal attention, but also the diversity being so important. And I think it's the real world that people are going to be living in and so it's part of their education to be exposed and to be involved in that kind of environment.

Frederick: Well, and it makes for a richer learning environment, whether you're teaching someone to make art or to write a proper essay or to be a good high school principal, you need that diverse experience. You leave here you have gone to school or worked with everybody that you possibly encounter wherever else you go from here.

Steeds: I think that's one of the important things about university life that might be going by the way with distance learning, which I think is important, but I think people have to consider what they want out of university life. And that's meeting people from all over the world, seeing all kinds of different opinions that you get with diversity which you won't get by sitting in your home on your computer learning. It's important but it's different.

Oswald: I think we also have the percentage of people from just the local area has gotten smaller over the years and I remember one of my first freshman composition classes. There were eight students in one section who all had gone to Purnell Swett High School together, and they sat together at least for the first half of the semester. It was really hard to kind of reinforce the idea that we're not in high school anymore and we have people from other parts of the world, but we did have a Vietnamese student in that section and we had a woman who was in her late 40s or early 50s who was coming back to school and gradually they kind of broke out of the, you know, we're still at Purnell Swett and I don't think that that would have happened as effectively if there hadn't been a more diverse group of students in the classroom for them. I think yes, Charles and Ralph were both right. That's a really important thing.

Frederick: You're listening to 30 Brave minutes to broadcast service of the College of Arts and Sciences at UNC Pembroke. I'm Jeff Frederick and our panel includes Ralph Steeds, Sarah Oswald, and Charles Jenkins. Richard Gay is our podcast engineer. How many of y'all carried around a pen, paper, and ink gradebooks?

Oswald: All of us.

Frederick: Did you get to the point in time where you started keeping those records in the computer? And how hard was that?

Steeds: I was gone before that happened to me.

Oswald: I started but I always have a pen and ink grade book as a backup because there were times when... There was one semester where all my grades were in Blackboard and Blackboard crashed and it took weeks for them to get everything back again. And so that reminded me that you know, you need to have some kind of backup. It was a transition and every time we're. Like when we change from Blackboard to Canvas, it's a different way of doing things and but I always keep a paper backup of my grades just in case.

Jenkins: Likewise for me because even today, after being retired for one year, people call me for recommendations for jobs. And I can pull my paper roll book that I wouldn't have access to otherwise, and I can tell how well a person did in every assignment. You know, how well do they speak? How well do they write? How well do they perform on tests? What about their attendance in the class? That kind of thing. And so it really helps me to be able to go back and look and find those individuals and see how well they did and that that happens almost every week. Somebody will call me about a recommendation for principalship, even superintendencies. So having something other than, oh, he was a great person. You look on there and know you made a C in English or whatever. Of course, I would have access only to the classes that I would teach, but I find that very beneficial. So having it on the computer is important but having a backup, as Sarah said, is very important, too.

Steeds: I always kept paper files for everything. I wanted some kind of record that I had safe in my file cabinet besides on the computer.

Robin Cummings: This is Chancellor Robin Cummings and I want to thank you for listening to 30 Brave Minutes. Our faculty and students provide expertise, energy, and passion, driving our region forward. Our commitment to Southeastern North Carolina has never been stronger through our teaching, our research, and our community outreach. I want to encourage you to consider making a tax-deductible contribution to the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. With your help, we will continue our impact for generations to come. You can donate online at uncp.edu/give. Thanks again for listening. Now back to more 30 Brave Minutes.

Frederick: Charles, in all of your various roles here, you had to sometimes step in and resolve, maybe some conflicts or some disputes between, maybe some more experienced faculty members who weren't excited about some of the transitions and some brand new faculty members who you were recruiting to come to work here and trying to empower to use all this stuff. How did you in all your different roles bridge those divides between people who had one way of thinking and people who had another?

Jenkins: I'm a firm believer in face-to-face contact in those kind of situations. And so I would have the people in my office or I would go to their office and I would take two approaches. I'll get them together as a group, being two people or three people or whatever and then also I would get together with them separately and it's amazing when you get together with them separately how they will react as compared to having an audience or other persons in the room. So I would try to resolve the problem that way and then, after I collected my information, had all the facts, and heard their viewpoints, then I would try to get them back together again and hopefully leave with some degree of understanding and mutual ground, sort of a common ground that means that they could work together. So I think in Academic Affairs, that's a natural almost every day, not necessarily major problems, but some disagreements across the entire campus, because you want, as Ralph said, you want different viewpoints and different kinds of things. You don't want everybody thinking just alike. So that's the approach that I always took

Frederick: And Ralph, what changed for you in terms of how you taught printmaking from the first class you ever had at UNCP to one of your last? What changed in terms of the technique? What changed in terms of the ways in which you inspired students to pursue their own art?

Steeds: Well, first and foremost is probably the ability to get contemporary equipment and supplies. The money increased as enrollment does, and we will get new presses and things. I've gone to a lot of workshops where I kept up on my field. I studied at Tamarin workshops, which is probably the premier litho facility in the world and was able to bring that information back into class. I think if a professor is really well grounded in their field that they can bring that and I had a tendency to teach the way I was taught and I had good teachers.

Frederick: Sara, the first year book that you produced here at UNCP or it wasn't even UNCP.

Oswald: It wasn't UNCP. It was PSU.

Frederick: What's different about the process, the equipment, the machinery?

Oswald: Absolutely everything. The thing is it's been about four or five generations of technology I've been through in the 30 yearbooks that I have produced. And so, actually, until recently I used to go every year to a national conference of high school journalism students that's held at Columbia University in New York. And one of the presentations that I gave several years ago was "Here's the way we used to do it and here's how we do it now." The high school students were blown away by the fact that even though the text was submitted on floppy disks, we had to draw all of the layouts and draw boxes and put labels on physical pictures and put Crop Marks on them and everything had to be bundled up and put in envelopes and physically mailed in and that was the way we did it for several years and then gradually more and more things became digital. So last year's yearbook was done entirely online and all we have to do is go onto the site and make sure that everything is there virtually. Hardly anything is physical now and we just push send and it gets submitted to the printing plant. Obviously there are a lot of good things about that. I kind of miss though, print photography that was on paper. I could teach students things about photography and light and so forth, working in the darkroom and working with physical prints that I can't anymore teach as effectively when they're just looking at images on a screen. It doesn't make any sense anymore to use dark room because of the time and everything but there are things that get lost as well as gained.

Steeds: We used to have a dark room, but it just became obsolete with digital photography.

Frederick: So in the midst of a lot of positive trends about convenience and efficiency, there are a few things that you miss by moving from some of the old ways.

Oswald: Yeah. So some students really are hands-on learners and if they have physical objects to manipulate and work with they will learn and retain that better than just by looking at a computer screen.

Frederick: Talk about some of the positive trends that you see in higher education in general. What would make it easier to be a student today? What would make it easier to be a faculty member today than back when you started?

Jenkins: Let me emphasize one that was there when I started as a faculty member and as a student, but a greater emphasis on the cost of higher education. I think that's one of the most important trends. There's a recognition now across the country and in North Carolina that we must be concerned about the cost of our education and we must do something about it. I think that is taking place and of course, a good example of that, a great example for UNCP is NC Promise that we have now. So I think that is a very positive thing because there was no financial aid, of course, when I was going to school as a student and there were very few scholarships, but the costs were not that bad. But costs have risen so much through the years that is hard to believe that students develop some of the debt that they have. Doing something about that is a great trend, I think.

Steeds: I don't think I could have gone to University if things were as expensive as they are now. At the University of Oklahoma, I only required one grant and it was just for one semester of tuition. I was on the GI bill, but there was a catch 22. You had to be enrolled to get the GI bill, but you had to get the GI Bill to pay your tuition. So I had to take a loan, but I think the cost of going to university now really puts a lot of people out of the realm.

Frederick: Sara, what about you?

Oswald: Well, I'm thinking in terms of some of the things that are easier now or improved in the field of English and Literature. The expansion of the cannon to include not just the kinds of texts that were taught when I was an undergraduate. It was all white men, you know, virtually, and now I think students are much more engaged if there is a much more diverse range of texts by people who are from their cultures or their ancestry. Things that they can relate to. So that's one positive thing. Another positive thing is just the use of technology in teaching writing.

When I was an undergraduate I had to write all my papers on a typewriter and if I made a few mistakes there was white out, if I made many mistakes, I would have to type everything over and one of the things we really emphasize in the teaching of writing is the importance of revision, and it is so much easier to revise now than it was. Not that students will always do it as often as they should, but, you know, so that's another positive thing.

Steeds: Sara, do you remember 5 carbon copies?

Oswald: Yes.

Frederick: What I remember about typing a paper, I think, in high school or so, that was so hard is if you had to add a footnote. How do I? Where's the superscript? Where's the tiny thing? And I was like "aaaaahhh."

Oswald: By the time you got to the bottom the paper would start to slide. A lot of my footnotes were like crooked. (Everyone laughs)

Frederick: Well let's wind down here a little bit. Tell us a favorite story about academic life that people might not necessarily know that was a part of who you are and what you contributed at UNC Pembroke.

Sara: Well, I actually have two, but they'll be brief. One is more general. I, for several summers, participated in a summer bridge program here, where we brought in students who hadn't quite met the criteria to come to UNCP, but if they successfully completed the program they would be admitted. For the first year I was a classroom teacher and after that I managed the writing lab with help from a lot of really good UNCP students who worked as peer tutors. And so one of the things that can really, really got me for four or five successive years was seeing some of those students walk across the stage and get their diploma and I really felt like I was a major part of that. One other thing is years ago in a general ed literature course that I taught I had a student who sat in the back, said nothing in class. But I would assign writings periodically every two or three classes and I would get these things from her and she had such wonderful insights. And so I told her to come to my office. This is even before email and I said you do nothing in class, but you're writing this. I said you need to be an English major. You know,

she was a criminal justice major and she was not doing well in her criminal justice classes. She said my parents insist that I have to major in something practical. I really want to be an English major, but they won't let me. And so I kind of worked on her for the rest of the semester and then she took another course with a colleague and by two semesters later, we convinced her that she needed to be an English major. She graduated. She went to Western Carolina. She got her master's degree in English and she is still working in the field. And so, you know, maybe that wouldn't have happened if I hadn't begun that intervention with her.

Steeds: I think some of the fun things we did. We took students on field trips and we used to go Franklin, North Carolina and mine precious stones. Paul Van Zandt taught a jewelry class then and we would bring them back and we would cut the stones to make jewelry out of them. And then there were museum visits. We would go to D.C. and also we used to combine with the music department and take field trips to the Kennedy Center. Things like that I really enjoyed and I think the students learned a lot from it.

Frederick: And I think, you know, from my perspective as dean, that's one of the things that we still value. How do you create a transformative student experience where you ask somebody "What did you get to do in college that you'll never forget?" and some of them might have said, "Well, I got to take this trip" or "I got to do this internship" or "I got to present this research." Those are still time-tested values for us today. Charles?

Jenkins: What stands out in my mind is the opportunity to help students and help faculty members when they had a real problem. There's a couple examples that I would give. For the last 15 years. I've been teaching Master's students who want to become school administrators. I had a student who was within two courses of graduating and I got word that he decided he was going to drop out of the program. He was guidance counselor at one of the schools in Robeson County. I got word he was going to drop out of the program and he had a lot of potential. So I decided I would give him a call. The first obstacle I ran into, I had his phone number at home and his school but he was on vacation. This was summertime in the mountains of North Carolina. So I had to do a little detective work to get his cell phone. Back then people weren't so willing to give you the cell phone, so I got his cell phone

number and I gave him a call and he was shocked that somebody would call him when he's on his vacation. He was shocked in a good way that someone would reach out to him and talk to him. We must have talked 30 minutes and by the end of the 30 minutes, he promised me he would come back and at least finish the program. I assured him he didn't need it necessarily to be a school administrator, but he needed to finish his master's degree. So today, since then, he's been an assistant principal, the principal of a large high school for like five years and now he's assistant superintendent at one of the school systems in Southeastern North Carolina. Another student, the same way. I got word that he was going to drop out of the program. An outstanding student, too, so I called him. He had a different kind of problem and we talked about that and he had had some conflict with some folks. So we talked through that and got him to come back and since then he's been a principle of three large high schools, two in North Carolina, and one in Georgia. And today he superintendent of schools in Vermont.

Frederick: Wow.

Jenkins: And so those are the kinds of things that you feel real good about.

Frederick: No matter what decade you're in a classroom or at a university, it is the personal stories of the connection you have directly with your peers, with your colleagues, with your students that make a life in higher ed a really rich life. What a treat to hear from Charles and Ralph and Sara today. Join us next time for 30 Brave Minutes.

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Good job everybody.