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Wagner, W. C. "Mike" Oral History Interview

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FACULTY EMERITI INTERVIEWS
UNIVERSITY OF THE PACIFIC ARCHIVES

Wagner, W.C. "Mike" (1962-1986)
Professor of Social Sciences, Raymond College; Professor of Economics

May 12, 2003

By George Blum

Transcribed by Alissa Magorian, University Archives

Subjects: Nature of Raymond College, success of Raymond graduates, Robert Burns, Samuel Meyer, Warren Bryan Martin (Raymond Provost), Raymond College demise, transfer to Department of Economics.

UOP ARCHIVES FACULTY EMERITI INTERVIEWS

WAGNER (W. C. MIKE), 1962-1987.

May 12, 2003

Tape 1

GEORGE: Interview with Mike Wagner on the 12th of May, 2003. Mike we have a series of questions here, relating to your work and life at UOP. First of all, what circumstances brought you to UOP? What in particular attracted you to UOP, and to position here?

MIKE: First of all, I came out here as a guest lecturer. Jack Mason, who took his Ph.D. under me, arranged for me to come out and give a series of three lectures, and I met some of the people here, like Jake Jacoby and John Tucker. Then I learned they were opening up Raymond College, and it was a General Education college. Of course, you know because you were on the faculty here, we were on the faculty together. And my interest was in General Education. I was invited to join the faculty here. And of course this was an experimental college in General Education, and it was exactly the kind of thing that I wanted to do. I did not have to come out for an interview because I already had these contacts. So at any rate it was Raymond College and my contact here that induced me to come.

GEO: Alright. And during what years did you serve at UOP? Were all of these in one department of our program?

MIKE: Oh well, of course, I came to Raymond when it opened which was... when was it? 1962. And I served there for about eight years, George, and as you will recall better than I do, there were problems in the Cluster Colleges and in this case particularly at Raymond. It was an awfully expensive college to operate because of the low faculty-student ratio, and further you really had to recruit a very special kind of student who was interested in getting a rigorous liberal arts degree in three years with no major or concentration. Now, subsequently we certainly found out from the contacts I have with the alumni that they had no problem because of this. They had tremendous careers, so in my view the college was tremendously successful in terms of producing students who went on and did interesting and significant things. I suppose I could mention one, I won't mention names here, but, one...

GEO: Well, names are alright, too...

MIKE: One is an executive of General Motors. Another is a dean of a business school...

GEO: Terry Mullins.

MIKE: Yes, Terry Mullins. And then there are several who have become faculty members and have in fact introduced and used their familiarity with the General Education program where they are. Now there's no point in going further with this, we'd be here forever, with this number of students. So at any rate, we of course, didn't have

the evidence at the time as to how successful a student could be, but the evidence is there now, from the early classes. But Dick Martin left and...

GEO: Dick Martin was the first provost...

MIKE: So we did not have the kind of sparkling leadership that could recruit the kind of students that we needed. There were a number of factors, all of which I don't want to go into, which caused the college to not have the kind of enrollment it ought to have had. I was not being used well at the time for what I could contribute to the university; there weren't enough students at Raymond, and I had abilities that weren't being tapped. I went over to Clifford Hand's who had become Academic Vice President, and said "Cliff, I am not being managed well here." And he said "I know, I use you as an example all the time." So we agreed to get me transferred to COP, in the Economics Department, and that was a very congenial transfer. Tapan Monroe was the Chairman of the Economics Department. And I moved into the Economics Department and then, of course, the curriculum I taught was totally altered, from that at Raymond, in that I taught Introductory Economics, History of Economic Thought, Political Economics, those kinds of courses. And that I did until I retired in '87 or something like that. I was just coming to the retirement age.

GEO: Alright, that indicates the span of your service.

MIKE: Right.

GEO: Now, let's go back to your early impressions again. What were your first impressions of UOP: physical appearance, faculty, students, administrators and staff of the campus, in other words, when you came here what was your overall reaction?

MIKE: Well first of all, the campus then was attractive, and I think it still is. Bob Burns was president of the University at that time. I thought he was really a great innovator president, with really some magnificent insight into education; so, Sam Meyer was the Academic Vice President of the time. He was a powerful Academic Vice President; I wish that he had stayed longer. Jack Mason was here, he had been a student of mine, as I said, and there was a certain closeness there. Though I must confess that being at Raymond College, as distinct from being at College of the Pacific, left me at a distance from COP. However my wife taught there, so I had contact there. Now there were some other parts to that question, George.

GEO: I think you have already commented about the administration, and some of the faculty. Students of course you encountered only once you started teaching here. So I think you have covered that pretty well. So let's move on to the next question, which you have already in part answered. Was there any particular person or persons here at UOP who was or were in part helpful in your initial orientation?

MIKE: Well, everybody whom I encountered was helpful in that they were a very congenial group of people. There was a very heavy focus, on a religious orientation, and

that tended to set my more scientific orientation at a kind of psychological odds, at least from my perspective. But the treatment that I got was fine, and there was no discouraging of what I had to say. There was total academic freedom here. As matter of fact, when there was a protest about rights of students at Berkeley, a couple of people came over from Berkeley to give a lecture, to a UOP audience. While we were sitting in our chairs, all of a sudden somebody was pushing between us, and it was Bob Burns, the University President. As he heard these radical comments about how people with ideas couldn't express them at Berkeley, he said, "I'm Bob Burns, President of University of the Pacific. Anytime you want academic freedom, come over here." And so that was the atmosphere here, and that was important to me, and I felt that we had a place here, with total academic freedom, where you were not bound by your discipline to stay tightly within your discipline, but could move out. My background, as you may remember, was not only in Economics, but in Anthropology, so I was free to move about philosophically, and analytically, and the like. As a matter of fact, we had a faculty member from Santa Cruz come over here, after Santa Cruz had just been operating a few years, and they were supposed to have great liberty. He sat in my Economics class in Raymond, and afterwards said "My god! We wouldn't dare to allow ourselves to spread our analysis as broadly as you are clearly free to do." And I thought, "Gee, for a college like that I'm amazed that people are so confined to not think beyond certain borders." At any rate, that's my early impression, and I haven't changed it since, even though Raymond College closed and I moved into the Economics Department of COP.

GEO: Now let's turn to programs and curricula. Some of the relevant points you have already made earlier, but let's see if we can concentrate on a few more general as well as specific aspects. What was your impression of the changes in the programs and curricula of UOP, from your initial introduction until the day you retired or left the institution?

MIKE: Well, you know I retired and didn't leave it. But the fact that the Cluster Colleges didn't work basically financially, caused of course the curriculum I was associated with to change dramatically. But from the perspective of at least some faculty in the Cluster Colleges, and you may have been one in the same position, you were limited in what you could teach. Even though you could teach it broadly and whatever you wanted in your classes, you couldn't go on to advanced levels, because it didn't have a whole department to build with. And so when I moved over to COP and the economics department, then I was able to build from introductory courses to advanced courses, and had other faculty members, of course who were economists, and you could then develop students who became economists. As a matter of fact, Julia Coons, majored in Economics and Japanese, and I don't know if I ever told you, she just went... skyrocketed in what she did. She went to Japan, and then came back to the State Department for a while, and she's been doing international banking, and has had a great career. And then Tom Tesluk, is another one who went international and majored in economics and has had a magnificent career and still carries with him the general orientation of College of the Pacific which itself was a liberal arts college. And the students, as it turned out, had that turn of mind, and not only were proud of it and liked it, but were successful with it.

GEO: What courses or programs did you help develop at UOP? What activities did you especially enjoy participating in?

MIKE: Well, I didn't get too involved in COP, other than the economics department, and so I taught a specially designed Introductory Economics course for General Education. I had nothing to do with the design of the curriculum as a whole, and I did participate in a combined political economy major, which was Political Science and Economics and that gave me a chance to look at economics as I like to look at it, from a broader philosophical and anthropological-sociological perspective.

GEO: However, earlier at Raymond you were of course instrumental in getting certain courses under way.

MIKE: Underway which I used later.

GEO: Which you used later at COP, but at least during your term at Raymond you did develop the Economics course.

MIKE: Yeah, oh yeah.

GEO: And you had certainly a dominating hand in developing the course on Introduction to the Modern World, sometimes known as Introduction to Mike Wagner.

MIKE: Did you want me to say anything about that?

GEO: Yes, because I think those were important contributions at the time.

MIKE: Well, there was of course, as you well know, the first course that was offered at Raymond, which was Introduction to the Modern World. You had a historical background, so you knew what it was set up to be, from the Renaissance on and something like that, but I lacked the historical insight, so I really thought they meant "the modern world." I proceeded in the course, as you well know, to look at the modern world in terms of... in fact, the first lecture I gave was on change, and I saw the dynamic technology changing the social structure, the economic structure, and, of course, the disruptive forces that alter the institutional structures and cause great conflict under the circumstances. So, yes I did indeed enjoy the Introduction to the Modern World and the structure of that course, and then we had the Non Western World...

GEO: Yes in a sequence called Readings in World Civilization...

MIKE: Well, you had more to do with that than I did....

GEO: That's why I specialized in the first part of it.

MIKE: So in a sense the two of us really played a role in the Introduction to the Modern World, World Civ. I, which was Readings in the Western World primarily, and then

World Civ. II, which covered the Non western world. We were able to teach the Non Western World course as a real seminar, where the students went out and dug into a particular culture in depth and some of them did really remarkable work...

GEO: Indeed.

MIKE: And so I felt I was being educated more than I was contributing...

GEO: We were contributing at the same time, I think, for ourselves.

MIKE: Right.

GEO: I think it was especially your economics course that was the major contribution to the Raymond curriculum, because that was the area in which you had most of your concentrated work.

MIKE: Yeah, yeah.

GEO: Did you find any particular programs and curricula at UOP that gave the institution a certain uniqueness in American higher education?

MIKE: Now in COP you mean, after I left Raymond?

GEO: No, overall in UOP.

MIKE: Well Raymond College, you know, made TIME magazine, and it got national recognition. It is regrettable again that somehow or other it couldn't be sustained. But I think that the Cluster College system gained its recognition and it is regrettable that it wasn't sustained. I'm thinking now of a little episode, when Bob Burns as President, was faced with the argument that the university was putting too many funds into the Cluster Colleges, Raymond in particular, which was the first, the earliest one, and there was complaining about the burning of money there. And he said, "Well, if you want to cut out a program, because of the money that's put into it and you don't get the returns, why look at our music..."

GEO: Conservatory.

MIKE: The Conservatory of Music. Because he said we spend much more money there than we do at Raymond. So Bob Burns was really committed to those Cluster Colleges and used his effort to raise funds and support them very much. Should I be going someplace else here?

GEO: I think you just touched on the importance of the Cluster Colleges as the one factor which gave national recognition at UOP.

MIKE: Yes, and it's regrettable that we somehow could not have sustained that because I'm certain we would have gained a growing recognition.

GEO: In fact, if I may add a foot note here... President DeRosa, just at the beginning of his presidency here, visited Harvard University. In some kind of gathering where one of the former Harvard presidents was at, he immediately asked DeRosa when he noticed where he was from, "What happened to the Cluster Colleges?"

MIKE: Oh yes.

GEO: That's what someone like President Bok, I forget his name, remembered about UOP.

MIKE: Yes, that doesn't surprise me at all. And in some ways, I think, that the Santa Cruz development of the University of California presented itself as being devoted to education and the Cluster College system. I was on an accreditation team that went there to make an evaluation of their programs, and they weren't any where near what we were doing. But, as a matter of fact, they were trying to outdo Berkeley in terms of research, and seriously neglecting the education of the vast student population. And that's why the faculty member who visited my class from Santa Cruz, I am sure was over here to investigate what we were doing in the Cluster Colleges. I presumed that he found something that he could take back there. But you know, universities are rather rigid institutions, and Pat, my wife when getting her Ph.D, was studying experimental colleges, and her conclusion was that experimental colleges always fail. She didn't discourage me from coming here, but she said well these are the findings, so... I don't know whether they can't be made to work, or whether they just don't have the dedication of resources that we have here at UOP.

GEO: Moving on to people, who were or are the individuals at UOP that you have most admired and why? You have already mentioned President Burns.

MIKE: Yes, yes, well, as I said, I thought Sam Meyer, who was Academic Vice President when we came, was a very competent person I regretted to see him go. Then Dick Martin, the provost at Raymond College; I had great respect for Dick. And he was caught in a real kind of bind, he believed strongly in liberal education, and academic freedom, and yet he saw the college as having a kind of religious orientation. I think I'm being fair to him, but he hired people like Hugh Wadman, Theo McDonald, people who were real thinkers in some science and scientific orientation. And he found himself in a bind where science, in fact, and the secular were coming in conflict with the more theological orientation, and he just, I'm sure, struggled with that as long as he was here. Then, of course, he left for other reasons, but so, I had great respect for Bob Burns, for the Academic Vice President, and for Dick Martin. Now then we had Clifford Hand, who came to Raymond, as you will recall...

GEO: From the English Department at UOP.

MIKE: Yes, yes, and he was a superb teacher from everything I could gather. And then when one of the colleges closed down, and he was made Academic Vice President of UOP, I think then he was too tied up with a number of things to get the Raymond type curriculum to develop in the College of the Pacific. In fact, there would have been some hostility to the idea, perhaps from the faculty of the colleges. At any rate I had great respect for Clifford Hand. Then I just want to go through three faculty members at COP that I felt made a difference in the University. One was Jack Mason, this person who was a student of mine at one time, and who was instrumental in bringing Pat and myself out here. Jack initiated, and was a leader in developing faculty government. Now he didn't do it by himself, he had to have a lot of other people to help him, but I had great respect for what he was doing. And that gave rise to Walter Payne, who took over as the faculty leader; he was a real fine scholar and fine teacher and at least held the faculty together in many ways. Then, I think, the really big important impact individual was Herb Reinelt. What Herb did was he broke through to the Board of Regents when he was selected.

GEO: When he became Chair of the Academic Council.

MIKE: Yes, Chair of the Academic Council and he had a meeting with the Board of Regents, and they asked, "Why are you faculty so discontent?" Have such malcontent, that kind of thing. And Herb said, "You got this thing backwards. What our concern is why do you, Board of Regents, why do you leave us with such incapable, incompetent presidents that you've been leaving us with?" Herb has a way of not aggravating people, and the Regents recognized he was serious and had something to say. And the consequence of that, I think, has been a major transformation in the way the Board of Regents has perceived and dealt with the University since then. And I think that probably President DeRosa has been hired more carefully, been scrutinized more carefully, and shows the very many different kinds of leadership, which I think, by and large, the faculty recognizes as being very qualified and competent leadership. My own personal view is I think that he is great and that he will make a great university out of us. I think that a great deal of emphasis is being placed on publish or perish, and so I'm not sure there would be a place for me in the university he would design, but you have to acknowledge that it is the kind of university that will really build up and grow stronger and get a greater and greater reputation.

GEO: Well, I think what probably can be added is that Herb became Chair of the Academic Council at a very critical time, when the Board of Regents was going through a phase of major transformation.

MIKE: Uh huh.

GEO: And it was in part also brought on by the critical review of the Western Association of Colleges and Universities

MIKE: Of course, yes.

GEO: Which put, in fact, at the time in the early 90's, the university on a very stern notice that it had to look at certain issues...

MIKE: Yes, ok, yes.

GEO: Intercollegiate athletics, football in particular, and especially its financial future.

MIKE: Yes, I, I...

GEO: So the Board of Regents was groping for answers, and I think in this case, another person from my perspective who deserves a great deal of credit, I certainly know that Herb credits him highly, is Bob Monagan.

MIKE: Bob Monagan. Yes, yes. I didn't want to mention Bob Monagan because I don't know the Board of Regents, and then I have not been that close to the University since I retired.

GEO: What I think I want to insert here is that Herb came at a very critical time, was able to present a perspective of faculty to a sounding board, the Board of Regents, which at that time was willing to hear...

MIKE: Yes, they were more open minded or more anxious... (Overlap).

GEO: Prior to that the attitude was generally well, you know they don't really quite know what they're doing anyway, so let us do it for them.

MIKE: A kind of a labor management relationship.

GEO: Right. Well, we may perhaps have occasion to come back to some of it. From your initial introduction to UOP to the time you retired, what changes did you see between students, faculty, and administration and staff? Can you comment on the sense of community that prevailed or was absent on the campus during your years here?

MIKE: Oh, my goodness. I'm not sure that I want to respond to that, but I'll make a try at it. I felt that, as I told you, that the relationship with the President and the Academic Vice President at the early time, was a very good pleasant relationship, but that COP was the center of the University then, at least on the Stockton campus, and Burns himself stated that one reason he wanted to get the Cluster Colleges going was that he wanted some way of shaking up COP, which was quite staid in its orientation. And then, of course, the new faculty that was coming into the university at the time were coming out of the 60s orientation; they kind of had a radical twist, which however didn't dominate the campus, but caused some shakeup in the way we were seeing issues. And then you know people like Gene Rice, who had been at Raymond, then moved to the Sociology Department, these were just good solid scholars in the sense of academic leadership, so there was a transformation from... I hate to use the term, but there were narrowly oriented people when we got here. After all they had just been associated, to survive, with

a Junior College and COP had to get to be a College of the Pacific in a university with a more, much more modern orientation. Now the transformation took place there's no doubt about it, and the new faculty that were being brought in contributed substantially to that. Which is not to suggest that some of the previous faculty were not really great faculty. Carl Wulfman, in physics, of course, was a magnificent scholar and faculty member. So I don't want to put everybody in the category that...

GEO: At the same time, Carl came to the university only one year prior to Raymond, in 1962.

MIKE: Oh is that right? Well, but I suppose institutions in general have got to be shaken up. It takes new personnel, or something from outside, a question of association and evaluation to make those kind of things happen that keeps an institution viable.

GEO: We already touched on some of these issues, but maybe even more specific comments can be made about some perhaps controversial issues. What is your personal opinion of the administration, past and present?

MIKE: Well, I expressed my affection and respect for Bob Burns' administration; I can't say that I knew the President and the Vice President that followed there well enough to have any strong opinions. I was on the committee that hired John Bevan as Academic Vice President. He came with a distinguished record and I thought he was a bust, and the university lost its dynamism then. As far as I could see it happened pretty well...

GEO: That was at the end of the 60s.

MIKE: At the end of the 60s, ok. So you go through the 70s and as far as I can see, nothing dramatic happened. And let's see, I retired in 87 and I didn't see anything unusually great happening. And I do think that we're having a renaissance right now. So I guess my opinion is that the administration in the interim period between Burns and the present administration was difficult. I can't point out anything that they did that was spectacular.

GEO: Except to phase out the Cluster Colleges.

MIKE: Oh, yes. To take their crown off.

GEO: Alright, what changes did you observe in the relationship between the faculty and the administration? Did the faculty become more united or fragmented during the time you were here?

MIKE: George, there I really have to say, I have no insightful observations to make. I think they were changing together. I do think that in the later phases of the Raymond program the faculty that were hired were coming with a view that students should have freedom. And if you will recall there was in the final phases of Raymond, a policy position that no student could be required to take any one particular course. That meant

that no student had to take any courses they didn't want, and that destroyed the curriculum. So I don't know whether or not others perceived it, but I perceived it, and I must say I blame the faculty not the administration on that account, and my conclusion has been...

GEO: Now this was specifically at Raymond College.

MIKE: Yes, and I don't know what was happening...

GEO: Did not pertain to COP.

MIKE: Yes, yes. But I pretty much drew a conclusion there that I'd rather fight with the administrators than with my fellow faculty members, because I think that the administrators had a different kind of sense of responsibility that the faculty members didn't perceive.

GEO: While we have comments about changes, any changes you may have noticed in the relations between the faculty and the Board of Regents?

MIKE: Not only do I have no observations there, but I won't even make any observations about the observations I don't have!

GEO: Well, how did controversies between the faculty, deans, and administration affect your department or program and its growth?

MIKE: My view has been that I never saw anyone, well, I don't have that much familiarity with people in other departments; but whatever we felt we wanted in the Economics Department there was no problem with the administration agreeing with it, so there was no conflict there at all. Though I don't want to speak for the Sociology Department, I had some contact with it through my wife Pat. I didn't feel that the administration ever did anything but support what they wanted to do, or whatever we wanted to do in the Economics Department. So if there were any failures of the kind that we're talking about right now, it would be that the departments weren't imaginative enough to come up with really innovative, constructive ideas. So there I would tend to look at ourselves and say I don't think that the faculty, we as a faculty, were imaginative enough. Though I think what was happening was that they wanted to do what all other departments do. So they go out and look at what other schools and universities are doing; and that's what we must do. Well, that's not exactly very creative, I'll say that. And I don't think you'll get an innovative university just sticking to that orientation.

GEO: How would you describe the campus during the turbulent times of the 1960s? What do you remember of the students and their activities during these years?

MIKE: Well, I, by the way, see that period and the students quite differently from the way my wife who was also on the campus at the same time saw them. I found the students inquisitive, curious, challenging, and it is true that they had a kind of a free-

wheeling orientation toward education. Nonetheless, they were brazenly willing to challenge what you had to say, and for me that makes teaching fun and successful, and I found those students at that time, very, very worth while teaching. With exceptions, but there are always the exceptions.

GEO: What issues were you involved in which stand out in your mind as important to the growth and development of UOP as a whole?

MIKE: Well, of course, being involved in Raymond College was important, and I wouldn't want to press very far on my role in College of the Pacific. It would only have been limited to the Economics Department. I don't think there's any doubt in my mind that I participated in a very meaningful way at Raymond college, and much less so at College of the Pacific. But then I never was a political person, so I never held any faculty positions that arose from being elected. So I didn't have any role in that.

GEO: Coming to UOP today, there is a feeling among the campus community today that UOP has entered into a period of change with a new planning of projects on the way. Would you agree with this assessment?

MIKE: With the new, what projects?

GEO: With the new planning and new projects under way. The one hears about now.

MIKE: Well, again I am not sure that I'm close enough to the present situation. If I am correct in how I interpret it, I think there is a pressure to be more like other distinguished universities, and that means the faculty should be a publishing faculty, and that would mean a de-emphasis on the importance of teaching. And you know, my focus has always been on being a successful teacher. I don't think there are many people in the world who are distinguished scholars and superlative teachers at the same time. There are some, but there are not that many available. And so they go and emphasize one direction or another. I'm afraid that the university has turned toward the distinguished scholar approach and thus has inadvertently turned away from the importance of the teaching approach. It will make, and I think I have heard this before, this turn will make the university more renowned, and we are apparently getting much more qualified students now than we ever did before. I think that is a factual statement that can be confirmed, so I'm caught in a bind. But then I have a particular philosophy of my own about education, that I wish some universities would pick up on. That is, that we have two categories of faculty: one teaching faculty, and another as research publishing faculty, and that the research publishing faculty have a reduced teaching load. Their role on the campus would be to give the results of their research, keep their department, who are primarily teachers, informed of what the front line of knowledge is, and then the teachers would have that information to keep abreast of the research going on. So in effect, scholarly research publishing faculty would teach the teaching faculty, and so you would have no statement then that the faculty are losing contact with the development of expanding knowledge.

GEO: What are you involved in currently at UOP that holds your greatest interest?

MIKE: I have been for a few years, trying to get COP to introduce the Raymond program, or Raymond curriculum in COP. What Raymond did in three years, COP could also do in three years, and then have another year for the major. When Bob Benedetti was the dean of COP, I was able to negotiate meetings with some of the Raymond alumni and some of the faculty at COP; you're familiar with this, of course. And what the prospects were of achieving the objective that I had in mind, I don't know. Then of course, the deanship at COP changed. The new dean Gary Miller seems to be also open to this kind of possibility, but I don't think either Benedetti or Miller feel that there is a high prospect or probability that the COP faculty will go for that kind of development of a given program. Dean Miller strikes me as an individual who is quite open to hearing ideas, but as far as developing them, he seems to think in such terms as "the spirit of Raymond" in COP. Well, that spirit will not exist if the main focus is to publish. But I don't know how they're going to clear that up.

GEO: I think this tape is going to run out pretty soon.

MIKE: Well, I don't think you're going to get much more out of me.

END OF TAPE