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McMaster, Robert Oral History Interview

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McMaster, Robert
Chief Investment Officer,
Associate Vice President for Business & Finance
1966 - 1990

November 27, 2012

By Larry Brehm

Transcription by Mark Linden, University of the Pacific, Department of Special Collections, Library

Subjects: Years of service at Pacific; Administration and colleagues; major accomplishments and changes; summary.
UOP ARCHIVES FACULTY EMERITI INTERVIEWS

Robert McMaster – Business and Finance.

Date: November 27, 2012

LARRY BREHM: Chief Investment Officer, Associate Vice President for Business and Finance at the University of the Pacific, and I’m here today, November 27th 2012, with Robert McMaster, who came to the University in 1966. Bob, what year did you leave?

ROBERT MCMASTER: 1990, I believe.

BREHM: 1990. So, almost 25 years of service, correct?

MCMASTER: Yep.

BREHM: Why don’t you give us your background, what job titles and positions you had at Pacific, your knowledge of Pacific before coming here, and anything else you can add.

MCMASTER: Well, I’m a graduate of Pacific, in 1954. I graduated and went into Public Accounting. How I happened to be at Pacific, I was an independent auditor for Pacific and from, well I don’t know when I started auditing, but I was there for a couple of – three years as independent auditor, outside auditor, and I became familiar with Pacific and their Business and Finance operations, and so they asked me to join Pacific. I did, I was very happy here.

BREHM: What positions did you hold at Pacific?

MCMASTER: I started as Bursar, then eventually, I became Director of Finance and when I retired, I was Acting Financial Vice President.

BREHM: I remember I started in 1970 as Bursar when you became Director of Finance. This was when Lloyd Stuckey, who was controller left.

MCMASTER: Right

BREHM: Just to confirm, looking back, I believe when you retired, the title was Interim Financial Vice President. Then Financial Vice President, Robert Winterberg had retired and I believe you were Interim Financial Vice President for about 9 to 12 months.

MCMASTER: Right

BREHM: At the time of your appointment as Interim Financial Vice President, Bill Atchley was President. Bob, we worked together almost 20 years. What especially attracted you to Pacific? During your tenure
and as a student, how did Pacific progress plus some of the changes you saw, academically and financially?

MCMASTER: Well, as a student, it was a small, liberal arts college called, the College of the Pacific and it was church related, Methodist Church, and I don’t know, the Board of Regents were, either connected with the church or were very strong church members. And, well as a background, the bishop of the church was on the Board and had a very close tie with all the church memberships. It was a small liberal arts college at that time, and then, the cluster colleges came along: Raymond, Callison, Covell College, and its, going back to the Methodist relationship, why, it was-those were endowed by, what I think were strong church members. Elbert Covell and the Raymond Family, were very generous, and Callison, San Francisco endowed-helped found the Callison College, so it was a small liberal arts college and as I recall, when I first came to Pacific, entered Pacific, why, it was a small liberal arts college and as I recall, at that time, Stockton College, which is now Delta College. The first two years of students at Pacific attended Stockton College, and then about that time, they split the relationship and College of Pacific became a full 4 year school. Dr. Burns and Bob Winterberg were very involved in the transfer of the academic programs. Dr. Burns had this great, what I call vision, of establishing a four year college with professional schools and-he would be very pleased with the way that things are now at Pacific. I think Pacific now was his dream at that time.

BREHM: Become more comprehensive, instead of relying on a liberal arts program?

MCMASTER: Right-

BREHM: -Having a combination of professional schools, was this important?

MCMASTER: -Yes, a combination of schools and-which has worked very well I think.

BREHM: So when you came to Pacific in 1966, the Dental School had merged with Pacific about a couple years before, and so that gave us a presence in San Francisco, and I think in ’66, the McGeorge School of Law had just merged with Pacific, so presence in Sacramento was established. Besides a Stockton campus, this was a major change in expansion of the University With the position of Bursar, were you primarily involved with the Stockton Campus operations, or all three campuses?

MCMASTER: Well, probably, at that time, why, you wore about four or five hats. I recall, reporting through my office at that time was health center, and food service, and housing, and personnel, and-you just-we were a very small compact operation, and the transfer of administrative duties went fairly well. It was Bob Winterberg, what do I want to say? Very, knowledgeable, and he took over the transfer of administrative duties, and I think it went fairly well.

BREHM: With the reorganization in 1970, when you became Director of Finance, I think you started to work with the Board of Regents committees, is that correct?

MCMASTER: That’s right, yes.

BREHM: How was that relationship?
MCMASTER: It was very good. The Board was involved—not very involved, but some of the Board members were, I don’t want to say day-to-day, but they came in and went over the operations of the University. I’m thinking specifically of Ted Baun. He was very active in what was going on on-campus. He would drop in probably at least once or twice a month and ask you “How are things going?”

BREHM: Ted was the chair of Board of Regents?

MCMASTER: That’s right, Ted was, yes.

BREHM: You served during the tenure of three Presidents?

MCMASTER: Yes, Robert Burns, Stan McCaffrey, and Bill Atchley

BREHM: How would you describe their administrative styles? Impressions?

MCMASTER: Oh, Dr. Burns was, let me say, he was a dreamer. He wanted—he was looking into the Future. Stan McCaffrey came in and he was more of, what do I want to say? Say, “governed-by-committee” and he had weekly meetings with his staff, his vice presidents, and?

BREHM: So McCaffrey used more of a cabinet style or form-

MCMASTER: Cabinet style, yes. Bill Atchley was more of a hands-on guy. He, what do I want to say, help me (chuckles)

BREHM: Would you describe him more in charge even though – there were vice presidents, deans, and directors, but he let everyone know who was in charge.

MCMASTER: That’s right.

BREHM: As I remember, he let you know who was the boss.

MCMASTER: He let you know when—His was the only way. He would listen, maybe once in a while, but that would—and then from then on he would do it his way.

BREHM: In 1966, the cluster colleges had developed and were operational, but you were also involved with the decision to close the cluster colleges, is that correct?

MCMASTER: That’s right.

BREHM: That was a major change in the Liberal Arts Program.

MCMASTER: And there was a transfer of faculty between the clusters and the College of the Pacific and faculty coming out of those cluster colleges were very good, great faculty, and I think some of them are still at Pacific, aren’t they?

BREHM: Well, either they are or they’ve retired. They have a close relationship with Pacific, and I know that there is always alumni meetings. I know the Raymond faculty are very involved.
MCMASTER: I should have known. Raymond was a three year program, and plenty of students came out of there.

BREHM: I remember that too. So, how did the Dental and Law school combinations work with Pacific?

MCMASTER: Well, it worked fairly well. The Dental School, at the beginning, was always-felt that they were stand alone and their funding was coming from, internal and it took many years before they finally realized they were part of the University. Law school was a fairly smooth transition. Dean Schaber up there was- I got the impression that he felt that he was, they were part of the university from the start, and it went very well.

BREHM: Yes, he was in charge? I know there was an independent or working agreement with the Law School that ended in 1992 or 1993.

MCMASTER: I don’t know about that.

BREHM: Yes. There was a, apparently, I think, with the merger, McGeorge would be all part of the University but they were to keep their surplus. If you want to call it a surplus: anything that was left over at the end of the year, it was intended to expand their plant and facilities.

MCMASTER: Right. Which they did, and as you know, the Law School put add new buildings up there...

BREHM: Develop the campus was the objective.

MCMASTER: The same with the Dental School. They put up a new Dental School, and it was very advantageous to them because their physical facilities prior to the merger were terrible. I don’t know if anybody recalls what the facilities at 14th Street and Mission Streets. Very old and inadequate.

BREHM: Right, 14th and Mission.

MCMASTER: Yeah, right. The buildings were terrible, and they weren’t up to the academic standards that we were accustomed to now. They put up the new dental school and it, when in time, there were it was negotiations between, what? Cal?

BREHM: Pacific Medical Center?

MCMASTER: Pacific Medical Center. Right. And there was a big program in health sciences, and but it didn’t work out.

BREHM: But it was ambitious to have programs in SF. We are trying to establish programs now.

MCMASTER: The combination of the School of Pharmacy and the Health programs on the Stockton Campus probably came out of those ideas.

BREHM: Now, when you came to work for the University, School of Pharmacy was still in Weber Hall.

MCMASTER: That’s right.
BREHM: And then they got a new building and they moved across the river, so they were the first school on the north campus.

MCMASTER: First school to go across there. The only thing we had across there at that time was the Health Center, and then the School of Pharmacy went over there and, well, as you can see now, what’s over there now.

BREHM: Yeah, the campus has expanded since 1966, there’s no question about that.

MCMASTER: And at that time, why the Stockton State Hospital, the Stockton hospital farm was out there.

BREHM: Where Delta College is now?

MCMASTER: That’s right. Delta College moved out there, and Pacific acquired much of what is called South Campus now.

BREHM: That was a major expansion and acquisition of the University.

MCMASTER: Yes, it was.

BREHM: And that provided us with relatively old buildings, that we eventually renovated and added several new buildings on the 40 acres. Thus the South Campus was merged into the main Campus. What would you describe during your tenure other successes whether it was controversial or problems that may have occurred?

MCMASTER: Well, there were problems, but successes I would think, expanding...when I first went there, very small student housing on campus. There was South Hall, I think. They called it SouthWest Hall, North Hall, and the University got federal funds to construct Grace Covell Hall and the Cluster College complex with housing there. Spanos Center that was federally funded as I- no that was-

BREHM: No, I believe Spanos Center was a combination of private donations and borrowings.

MCMASTER: Yes, gifts and borrowings - state CEFA Bonds, that’s what I meant. It was a major expansion at that time as far as student housing goes, and the sports facilities.

BREHM: How would you describe the financial condition of the University and its challenge?

MCMASTER: Well, that was very-we worked from day to day, I think. The Bank of Stockton was our savior I think during our time, because they were generous with operational loans, and as I recall, I would, when the tuition money had come in the fall and spring, I would pay them all off, and I would have to go down and borrow until the next semester came in.

BREHM: So, in a sense, no financial reserves, if there were any reserves, they were somewhat nonexistent, so day to day operations were tight and you constantly had to borrow for operations.
MCMASTER: Yes and a very small endowment. At the time the Faculty were underpaid and there was unrest and they felt that they should have their salary increased, which I agreed with, but we just couldn’t do it.

BREHM: As I recall, during that time too, enrollment was always a challenge, and we had some peaks and valleys, and I think twice during your that tenure, we didn’t have annual salary raises.

MCMASTER: That’s right, that’s correct. We had reductions, staff, and the faculty I think felt that we were spending too much on administration and we had to justify every position we had, so it was tough.

BREHM: But we managed.

MCMASTER: We managed (laughs).

BREHM: Now you mentioned CEFA. That was California Education Facilities Act, and I believe the University was one of the first borrowers under that program. Is that correct?

MCMASTER: That’s correct, right.

BREHM: We used CEFA bond proceeds to expand the campuses, the South Campus as well as the Main Campus facilities and renovations during that time. We also used bond proceeds at the Dental School to acquire a housing complex in San Francisco, plus to add residential housing at the law school.

MCMASTER: Right.

BREHM: How would you describe the major administrators that you worked with? Academic Vice Presidents, Provost, now. How would you describe, and the relationships with them and the Deans during that time?

MCMASTER: Well, when I first came here, why, we had—we didn’t have a Provost. The department chairs were very strong. I remember Emerson Cobb in Chemistry, and Mark Jantzen in Education, and those people pretty well ran their own programs and which they did a good job. Trying to recall....

BREHM: Well, let’s see: I know of the Academic Vice Presidents. I think John?

MCMASTER: John Bevan

BREHM: Cliff Hand, and

MCMASTER: Who else?

BREHM: Oscar Jarvis.

MCMASTER: Oscar Jarvis, that’s right. Very good guys.

BREHM: What was your working relation with them? Budgets, etc.?
MCMASTER: Very good, very good. I think they realized the situation they were in, and they did their best to run their programs and on a very limited budget. At that time, the budgets were pretty well prepared, and the business end—the administrative end of it—they had very little input except the faculty—getting their faculty positions in order and...I’m just trying to recall...and then Cliff Hand, he was an outstanding Vice President and he pretty well, at that time, became involved in the budget process, and as I recall, Lee Fennel and who else?-were appointed as their assistant, who worked very closely with them and preparing their budgets.

BREHM: Yeah, I know Lee was also the Registrar and handled enrollment projections and academic finances. Well, finances were always a challenge.

MCMASTER: Well, at that time they were (chuckles).

BREHM: Well, even though finances were a major challenge from your standpoint, especially with- being a financial administrator, what else?]

MCMASTER: We always had turmoil with the School of Dentistry about... they, naturally, were very popular at that time, and with a budget surplus. It was always a challenge for them to transfer over funds to help run the Stockton Campus.

BREHM: So, the so-called “administrative fee” or “indirect cost fee” is controversial now again, let’s say it’s always a controversy. As you look back...I know we have now, IPC, which is a budget policy committee that...I think President McCaffrey, like you said, he did things by committee, but didn’t he have some kind of budget policy committee.

MCMASTER: Well, at that time, I was—there’s always discussions from the students and the faculty about where’s the money going, and he’d have open meetings. And after the budget was set, I mean, he had challenges to the budget, and he’d have to explain and— I don’t know if it was very effective, but it was sharing.

BREHM: Also during you tenure, the, as I remember, what we call now “computer operations” or “information technology”, or whatever you want to call it, became a major expense component at Pacific, (MCMASTER CHUCKLES), and if I remember, didn’t that operation report to you, at one time?

MCMASTER: Yes, at one time. Yes, Yes.

BREHM: And what changes were involved as the University moved into the computer age?

MCMASTER: It was turmoil.

BREHM: In what way?

MCMASTER: Well, as...when I was first there, we had what we called punch cards system. That was when the-business operation was at the lower floor of? It was called the administration building at the time.
BREHM: Knoles Hall?

MCMASTER: Knoles Hall. Ok, we had the bottom floor south end of Knoles Hall-everything was in there. We had big discussions with staff about the flow of information and it was turmoil. Then we went to computers, and that worked out very well, and we got rid of all the punch cards but still there was turmoil as space needed for operations. Operations were growing faster than we had space. The computers were moved to the then Quonset Huts and as operations expanded to the basement of the Health Center.

BREHM: The basement of the Health Center?

MCMASTER: For a while, yeah, and...

BREHM: Eventually the data center was relocated to what we would have called at the time, the Bookstore and End Zone where now we have the new Technology Center for the School of Engineering and Human Resources offices. So, how would you describe your working relationship with students?

MCMASTER: The students during the 1960’s could be considered highly activity. They were challenging, which is good, and-what do I want to say? They were very involved with aspects of student life.

BREHM: Were they concerned with how their tuition dollar was spent?

MCMASTER: I think so. They were always complaining about “tuition is too high, tuition is too high”. And, actually, as administrators, we were trying to get the last dollar out of them (CHUCKLES) and there was always turmoil there. And, they were involved with social issues, and Dr. Burns instituted the-what is it now? The….my memory is leaving me...

BREHM: It’s ok.

MCMASTER: Community Involvement.

BREHM: Oh, the Community Involvement Program.

MCMASTER: Yes, the Community Involvement Program. And that was very successful, and sort of calmed the turmoil for a while.

BREHM: Now, would you consider that turmoil on campus, or would you consider that form of an outreach with involving the community and bringing the community into Pacific?

MCMASTER: Well, not the community so much. As the...well, yes I would think the community, because , as I remember...

BREHM: As the program evolved, was it supposed to be? Stockton-based, or San Joaquin-based students?

MCMASTER: That’s right, that’s right. And...I’m just trying to think how that came about...I think the University was getting pressure from the outside community-principally in the church community, and
naturally, the-quot-e”South Stockton people” saying that we were an elitist institution, we should become more...more local-based, I guess is what I want to say.

BREHM: Would you consider Pacific involved with the local community? Or, separate from the community?

MCMASTER: Probably separate from the community.

BREHM: Did Pacific reach out enough to the community?

MCMASTER: No, I don’t think we outreached ourself very much. We, our only outreach probably was through our faculty, because at that time, we had many faculty members that were, what they considered, as being assigned by the church to teach. When we split the ties with the Church, why we had many faculty members that were receiving what we called housing allowances, and that upset many of them that we could no longer do that when we split our relationship with the church. At that time, as I recall, why, the federal funds-the feds were saying that if you were church-related, why, you could no longer receive federal funds, so naturally, Pacific had to split their ties with the Church. And, that was a big-what do I want to say? A big change for Pacific at the time. The split wasn’t...as far as the Board of Regents go, we were still...many members of the Board of Regents were still strong church members, and I can...and they kept up their support to the University, and I think, I’m just thinking, that the people involved...we had the Ballentynes, and others up north state, and the Raymonds, and they were very generous as far as their donations to the school.

BREHM: How would you describe during this tenure, the rise and fall, in our athletic program; football and basketball. How did that contribute to the student life, and also campus life?

MCMASTER: Well, at that time, football was always turmoil, and the faculty felt we were putting too much money into football, and we had to justify the programs based on finance, and we had to cost out the football program, and it was just, I don’t know, it wasn’t good. I think probably some of the Board members felt that we should retain the football program, and then the outside people wanted to retain the football program, and the faculty felt that it was distracting from the academic programs, so it was tough.

BREHM: One of the major keys, it’s always been, talked about the University as the philanthropy to the University; there’s a lot of interest-it came from certain individuals. How would you describe the, let’s say, the challenge and the constant need for resources, other than tuition?

MCMASTER: Well at that time, why most of our donors wouldn’t give money, they’d give land, and then you’d have to find buyers for the land and manage the land until you could find buyers, so it was-what do I want to say? - A challenge, to sell land and get the money from the land, and so we were very involved in real estate at that time too.

BREHM: As far as donations go, how did it benefit the institution? Were those gifts more for growth? Or were they for current needs?
MCMASTER: Well, probably for specific programs rather than unrestricted gifts. Most of the gifts were for a specific purpose.

BREHM: Did it contribute to the growth and expansion of the institution?

MCMASTER: Oh yes. All of the cluster colleges over there were- I don’t want to say endowed, but given for the purpose of establishing the school.

BREHM: For the school? No I meant for, maybe, for buildings, but not necessarily an endowment to keep those programs going.

MCMASTER: Right. I don’t think any of them were endowed programs really.

BREHM: So we received gifts for establishing the programs but not to help pay for ongoing expenses and continuation of those programs. How would you describe, over the 25 years, some of the best and worst situations with the University? Was there progress?

MCMASTER: Oh yes, yes.

BREHM: So you were always faced with financial challenges?

MCMASTER: Probably! Finances were always a problem.

BREHM: Did you see some good academic programs develop, during those years, and strengthen?

MCMASTER: Oh yes, sure. I’m just thinking about Pharmacy, for instance. And the Law and Dental Schools. School of Education was expanded, and the School of Engineering was expanded, so...

BREHM: Anything that you can-in describing the presidents you worked with? You said that Burns was a visionary?

MCMASTER: That’s right.

BREHM: I’m thinking you said McCaffrey was more by committee?

MCMASTER: Committee, that’s right.

BREHM: Atchley was more-

MCMASTER: Hands on.

BREHM: -hands on, direct.

MCCSTER: That’s right. His way was the only way.

BREHM: Anything else that you would say-now the longer tenure you have, was more under McCaffrey I presume? Is that correct?

MCMASTER: Ah, yes. Yes.
BREHM: So, so there you had to-with the committees and involving the campus- I know that’s really more how everything was communicated to the community, through the committee process, and having-trying to get everybody involved in the operation, or the-having a say in the operation. Now that changed with Atchley, I guess.

MCMASTER: I think so, that’s right. He was-well, Atchley was Atchley. His way was the only way.

BREHM: That’s how you remembered him.

MCMASTER: That’s how I remembered him.

BREHM: No changes. Is there something you would like to reflect or say about the 20 year tenure that you had?

MCMASTER: Well, I enjoyed every minute of it, and...Burns would be very happy, and to see what has happened, because this-I think the school now is-was his vision, when he was president. Stan McCaffrey was-he had his problems with the faculty, and...

BREHM: Was that the acceptance or...?

MCMASTER: Oh, I don’t know. As I recall, why, at one time, the faculty gave him a vote of no confidence, for instance. He had his problems, and he was-well, he was ok. I mean, he had his problems and he took care of them.

BREHM: During your tenure, there was only one financial vice president – Robert Winterberg. How would you describe your relationship with him, and how he met the financial challenges?

MCMASTER: Well, Bob is a good administrator. He gave you a job to do and told you to do it, and that was it. Come to him if you had a problem; that was about it....

BREHM: He kind of let you run your operations?

MCMASTER: He assumed that you knew what you were doing, and left you alone.

BREHM: Anything else you’d like to reflect during on the 25 years?

MCMASTER: Well, I’m very pleased with what the University has achieved. I look back at-my goodness, what changes have happened...all the professional schools and the strength of the academic programs.

BREHM: You feel that the University has gained recognition?

MCMASTER: I think so. I think so, yes.

BREHM: It has taken a long time, hasn’t it?

MCMASTER: Well, you know, even at that time, why, I was fortunate enough to serve on the accreditation committees with Western Association Schools and Colleges, and I visited many of these small, at that time, church-related schools, and I’d come back to Pacific and think, my goodness, what do
we have here? We have something great, you know, and I’d look back at these small schools, and their academic programs were what I call substandard at that time, but Pacific was alright at that time. It was a good school.

BREHM: I know some of my impressions were... it seemed like Pacific was a kept secret.

MCMASTER: Yes, right.

BREHM: It had everything here.

MCMASTER: We used to, at that time, we could call up a business officer in some other schools and ask what their tuitions are and what your tuitions are going to be next year, and they’d tell you. I don’t think you can do that now.

BREHM: No, some things have changed.

MCMASTER: And Pacific with the Dental School-you could call up any Dental School in the State and ask them well, what do you think your tuition is going to be next year, and they would tell you, “well we went to the board, and this is what we’re recommended”, so we could pretty well tell you what everybody else was doing, and I don’t think that’s happening now..

BREHM: So, as a former employee and an alumnus, and 20 years out of the-not working here, you are very pleased with the stature of the University?

MCMASTER: I am, I am.

BREHM: Good.