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Jain, Ravi Oral History Interview

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FACULTY EMERITI INTERVIEWS
UNIVERSITY OF THE PACIFIC ARCHIVES



Ravi Jain (2000-2013)
Dean of School of Engineering and Computer Sciences

July 10, 2018

By Ashland O. Brown

Transcription by Savannah Dughi, University of the Pacific,
Department of Special Collections, Library

Subjects: Changes and growth of academic programs, experience with accreditation, changes of students, staff, faculty, and administration over time, and teaching and learning infrastructure.

UOP ARCHIVES FACULTY EMERITI INTERVIEWS

Brown: My name is Ashland Brown. I'm the interviewer for Ravi Jain the former dean and professor in the School of Engineering and Computer Science. Today's date is July 10, 2018 and the interview is being conducted in the Atherton Library (William Holt Memorial Library). I will continue by asking Ravi some questions. We'll proceed for probably an hour, and I'll start now.

Ravi what years did you serve at the University and what were your titles?

Jain: I came to the University June 2000 and I retired June 2013; I was dean at the school of engineering and Computer Science.

Brown: Okay. Ravi why did you come to Pacific? Describe the process for you to get here.

Jain: I was nominated to the dean's position; I had lived in Sacramento in my earlier years, so I was somewhat familiar with the area and thought this was a good opportunity for me to explore.

Brown: When you first came here what were your impressions on Stockton and the city?

Jain: I really did not know much of the community, but I had generally a positive impression of the area.

Brown: Ravi, please describe the physical appearance of Stockton and Pacific. What did you think of the campus when you first saw it?

Jain: The campus looked rather charming. Very impressive, at that time they had some [Quonset] huts near the river, they were somewhat unusual. Fortunately, they've replaced them since then and that was a good thing.

Brown: Yeah those [Quonset] huts have been here for a while. Now you've been here awhile as dean and professor, can you describe some of the major changes in the curriculum that you lived through here?

Jain: The major changes Ash in the school are related to streamlining undergraduate and the co-op programs and developing a distinctive graduate program.

Brown: Is there any course or innovative program that you were particularly involved in creating while you were here?

Jain: Ash, there were a number of things. First of all, many of the innovations were made by the faculty and my goal was primarily to help the faculty. We did create a distinctive graduate program. And we also streamlined some of the undergraduate curriculum so the students could graduate on a timely basis.

Brown: We will be turned for a few minutes to your administrative experiences. In your administrative capacity who did you report to and who reported to you?

Jain: Ash, I reported, like any other dean, to the provost. In the School we had department chairs, assistant/associate deans, program directors, and dean's office staff that reported to me.

Brown: Who was the Provost when you came, Ravi?

Jain: Phil Gilbertson was the Provost.

Brown: How would you describe your administrative philosophy and style?

Jain: Ash, my administrative philosophy has been to build on the contribution of my predecessors. And then to provide order purpose and integration of effort of talented faculty and staff that we had in the School.

Brown: Can we move a little beyond the school of engineering and computer science and how did you develop the relationship between the school of engineering and computer science and the university schools at the campus during your tenure?

Jain: Ash we tried to be very collaborative. We had a special program where we taught several courses which only non-engineering and computer science students could take for credit and this was a fairly large undertaking. We introduced large numbers of students to our computer technology, computing and coding. And this was a major contribution the school made to the university community. We have had a fairly good relationship with other schools both in the academic area and also we had a few collaborative research programs with the business school and COP.

Brown: As the Dean what kinds of things did you do to make yourself accessible to students the faculty and the people in other schools? How did you try to make sure people could get to you with their comments or suggestions?

Jain: You know, faculty is the key to the success of any academic enterprise. My staff had instructions that if any faculty member who wanted to see me, and if I was tied up much of the day, I will stay as late as needed, so they could see me the same day. I met with the students as requested and also with student professional organization leaders and the staff periodically.

Brown: As you were an administrator what were the activities that you thought were the most and least productive? What are the things you thought worked and what are the things you said well it didn't work as well as we had planned?

Jain: You know, most of the activities were related to trying to listen to the interests and the aspirations of the faculty, staff, students and friends of the school. And they all were very productive. In any job the least productive or least enjoyable activities are some contentious personnel issues.

Brown: When you were making decisions and working with people on projects how did you find the University governance system? The other offices you had to work with the faculty senate all the faculty committees that were out there was it easy to navigate when you were doing things or were there problems? What were the challenges?

Jain: You know Ash, the University governance is supposed to be shared governance with faculty. Thoughtful administrators look at their position in a way that I would describe as *primus inter pares*; first among equals, and they should always keep in mind that most of the heavy lifting and the real work is done by the faculty and staff. I found the governance committees at the university level and the school level to be productive and I had a reasonably good relationship and understanding of what they were trying to do.

Brown: Let's move on to a different topic. Who were the individuals during your time at Pacific both administrator and faculty members you found to be the most memorable and why?

Jain: You know it's hard to look at any one individual. I had a reasonably good working relationship with most of the faculty and the university administration. I found immediate staff at the school to be a blessing for me because they worked very hard and I had a reasonably positive relationship with the provost and the president.

Brown: Were there any administrators or faculty members that stood out in your mind from your tenure?

Jain: Not really I just had a fairly positive relationship with most of the administrative people and faculty. It is difficult to single out any one person.

Brown: What were your most positive and negative experiences with your accreditation bodies such as ABET and WASC during your tenure here?

Jain: When I came in here in June 2000, we had an ABET review scheduled that fall and it was a bit of a challenge because we had some deficiencies in terms of the teaching and learning infrastructure, especially teaching labs. We were able to get through all of that and all our programs were fully accredited by ABET. I had considerable experiences with ABET but I was not involved much with WASC that was done mostly at the university level and my role primarily was supportive in nature.

Brown: Ravi during your time here do you think students have shifted or changed good bad indifferent?

Jain: Yes, there was some change. We created a distinctive graduate program and there was more emphasis on discovery, research, and scholarly activities. So there was excitement on the part of graduate students naturally but also undergraduate students because they could see what is possible. And they also, as a result, aspired to undertake graduate studies. Even in their undergraduate work they were looking at some exploration and discovery and innovative ideas. So, there was a positive uptake in terms of the students' interests; many students pursued graduate studies because they were exposed to some of the graduate courses, graduate faculty, and some of their research programs.

Brown: Do you feel that the graduate program carried its own weight at that time?

Jain: To start the graduate program Ash, we really had to struggle. We started the program, but we did not have the necessary faculty resources; so many faculty members had to take on the extra burden until the university could be sure the program is going to be successful and sustainable and provided the needed resources. Evidently, there was a graduate program that was started before I came here, and it was later discontinued. We were able to create a graduate program that was not only sustainable but also helped markedly increase undergraduate student enrollment and the student quality. It also helped generate considerable external research support for the School. Yes, the graduate program more than carried its own weight.

Brown: What about the faculty over your time here Ravi has the faculty changed? Have you seen in changes in the school of engineering faculty versus when you first came here in 2000?

Jain: We recruited a large number of new faculty partly due to attrition, partly due to graduate program and partly due to the increased enrollment. The school had excellent faculty, but we were able to bring

in some additional faculty that were very collaborative, had exceptional academic credentials and research and some industry experience as well.

Brown: Let me ask you another question about the faculty. Did you see any changes in the faculty in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, during your tenure?

Jain: We attracted a large number of women faculty. When I came here, I don't know the exact number, but I would say there was only two or three women faculty members. As we hired new faculty members, we were able to attract many women and minority faculty as well. I don't have the exact numbers but from what I recall there was a marked change in the make-up of the faculty in terms of diversity and gender.

Brown: What about the administrators you worked for and those you supervised during your tenure? Did you see any changes in their operational characteristics and skills during your tenure?

Jain: Ash, you know the people when I came here were really highly skilled people admin assistants and business managers. We had a very small change in these positions; as the administrative assistant retired, we had a new one. And even though the student population almost doubled during my tenure the number of people working in my office stayed the same. So, I would say the people that were there before I came, they stayed as long as they wanted to and like I said one person retired and the other person, the business manager, stayed during my tenure. At the University level there, were many changes; I did all I could to be supportive and adapt to the new demonstrative leaders.

Brown: Now moving to the staff that you hired in your department and the campus. Did you see any shift and changes in the operation characteristics of the staff?

Jain: No we made some changes how we managed the budget. We made some changes how the staff interacted with the faculty and we had some staff available to the department chairs, so the end result was that they were able to function more efficiently as the number of students grew and as the external research funding grew markedly. The business manager had to handle things differently and some of the staff activities were handled at the department level for reasons I explained earlier.

Brown: Now let's move one to the regents, alumni, university donors. The people who are not in the institution now but were in your support groups do you think there were changes in the nature of the alumni organizations, regents, and the donors during your tenure?

Jain: Let's look at these things one at a time. There was an industry advisory board which was established by the previous dean but during that two-year period they were not active. So, I created what I called the Deans Council, building on the previous deans' industrial advisory board concept. My interaction with the regents was only through the university administration. I made several presentations at the Regents meetings related to the teaching and learning infrastructure, like the Chambers Technology Center, the graduate program etc. as requested by the University Administration. I had a very positive relationship with the Regents; they were always most thoughtful and engaged. The School engaged the alumni leaders in many our academic programs like the senior design projects, Dean's Council, and the coop program etc.

Brown: How did you feel toward the donors that were available at that time Ravi?

Jain: You know each school is assigned a development officer. We had a very large attrition in the development officer position and that was a problem. I would say we were reasonably successful. In one year that I have record of, the School raised more money than the combined total of three schools. Most people at the University level think the business school raises a lot of money. We had raised more money than the combined total of the business school, the College of the Pacific (which is the largest school on the Stockton campus) and the conservatory. We were not as successful as pharmacy or the dental school. But if you look at per capita fund raising, based upon the alumni pool we had, we did quite well. I would give it a B- grade because engineering school should be able to do more fundraising from the alumni because many of our graduates are successful, so we did okay but not as well as I had hoped.

Brown: Curious you went to the Middle East. Tell us a little about your fundraising in the Middle East.

Jain: In the Middle East, we have some very successful alumni and again we were moderately successful; four of the alumni made very large donations. But that also takes a bit more effort than we were able to devote; we did not do a good job of laying a strong foundation for fundraising. This foundation, for example, relates to having students come from there to attend the school and taking good care of them. We did okay but not as well as we should have and so it was a mixed blessing. It was a good experience. We had a development officer, he went with me the first time, the second time was another development officer, the third time yet another one. There was, what I would call, a lack of continuity of effort; as several of the alumni pointed out that you can't move forward unless you have a continuity of effort in fund raising. The alumni were all disappointed that we did not have the personnel that would stay with the School and this was not just our school this was a constant problem in the way these development officers were assigned, and they were managed by the central administration. Most deans felt that perhaps the development officer positions should have been organized differently. The Middle East efforts were quite time consuming and so again I'll give it a B grade, not as well as we should have done.

Brown: I hope that's improving. If you had to look out there and you talk about programs and what particularly involved as a teacher and you felt successful, but looking out even more broadly about the university programs that you may have something to do with as well as those in the school of engineering and computer science what do you think over the last ten and fifteen years has been our most successful programs here at the university and where do you think we haven't really made it?

Jain: Ash looking at other schools on the Stockton campus, pharmacy school has been very successful. They have a unique model and they have done well. Other schools have struggled, some of them have done well others have not. And comparing that with the school of engineering and computer science, I think we have created several things that made a big difference. One was creating a distinctive graduate program, as I mentioned earlier, streamlining the undergraduate and the coop programs and building an excellent teaching and learning infrastructure.

Brown: You mentioned a co-op what streamlining did you do during your tenure here in the co-op Ravi.

Jain: Yes, the co-op program, from the perspectives of many faculty members and the alumni, was very rigid. Students had to take about fifty-two units of co-op. We allowed students to take a semester and a summer of cop (about 32 units); they could take fifty-two if they wanted to. The end result was the

students could reasonably finish their degrees in four to four and a half years instead of five and a half years. And that immediately had a positive impact on enrollment and student quality.

Brown: So, removing that burdensome and streamlining it improved the operation and the enrollment numbers during your tenure?

Jain: Yes, it really did. When I left as Dean the enrollment had steadily increased and it had nearly doubled to seven hundred and eighty-five. One should check these numbers to be sure since I do not have all the data with me.

Brown: Excellent. Now Ravi over your years as tenure there has been various crisis here at the university which we've overcome some and some we are still fighting. What would you say has been our major crisis that we're still dealing with over time? And how we overcome them.

Jain: Ash for us the crisis was teaching and learning infrastructure. Before the Chambers Technology Center, we did not have classrooms where we could even conduct proper classes for thirty students or more. We did not have updated laboratories. Existing laboratories have to be continually updated and that required considerable investment: a major challenge. During my tenure we increased enrollment in the school markedly by at least three hundred plus students. And in nominal terms that is eight to nine million dollars in extra revenue. And, of course, some of that money was invested in the School by the University; my recollection is that the University investment in the School was rather modest compared to the considerable additional resources generated by the School. The biggest challenge for a private university, like Pacific, relates to resources. Where do the resources come from? Most of the resources we get are from student tuition as I understand. Most of the University problems, we see now, in my judgement, can be traced to this issue, among others I presume.

Brown: Good point. Now let's move on to the evolution of the school. Do you think the academic quality of the university has changed over your tenure and has academic quality gone up gone down gone sideways or gone where?

Jain: See Ash, the academic quality is a function of several things: faculty quality, teaching and learning infrastructure, student quality and the support the faculty gets from the University. In the school of engineering and computer science we were able to improve all of these things markedly.

Brown: Excellent. Let's move to a different venue. The community of Stockton you've been aware both at your advisory board and you are working with donors about the relationship between Stockton and the local communities and the university. What do you think the university has done for Stockton? Do you think it has been a good thing for Stockton and what are they those things you feel the university has contributed to the city of Stockton?

Jain: It was my impression that there are many programs historically the university has been involved in, for example, community involvement program. President De Rosa and Provost Gilbertson were quite active in the community. President Eibeck took this to a higher level; she created programs called Beyond the Gates and the school of education created programs, working with the school districts, to improve the quality of education from K through twelve levels. In our school, we had a MESA program that was quite active in the community as well.

Brown: Do you feel that the MESA program and your school of engineering was a very big player in the city?

Jain: It was not particular the city but in the region.

Brown: In the region.

Jain: The MESA program, in my judgement, brought good group of students, fifteen to twenty, each year and some of them would not have come to Pacific if it were not for the MESA program. This helped student diversity considerably.

Brown: And these were other sources that helped bring those students here?

Jain: Yes. Bridge programs, expanding your horizons, math counts, and faculty visits to community colleges and high schools.

Brown: Excellent. Excellent Ravi. If you look back on your time here at Pacific you probably have some expectations when you came here. Has Pacific met those expectations in your mind during your tenure here?

Jain: I really did not have any specific expectations. I was very interested in improving the quality of education for our students and providing a very vibrant and meaningful environment for the faculty. Recognizing, not having a graduate program was holding us back so it was a challenge creating the graduate program for a number of reasons. Since the university is primarily tuition driven and most engineering graduate students don't pay much tuition and then the faculty teaching loads have to be adjusted as well. So, all those things were a challenge and there was a history at the School that the graduate programs once started are not successful.

Brown: Good. Ok. Ravi before I ask this anything else to say. Let's start with a supposition if you were asked to be chairman of the board of regents for this university and the regents suggest that you draft an agenda for them to pursue. What would you put as the top three items that this university should pursue and from your experience should be pursued? And again the entire university in its teaching mission in its research missions and not just in engineering. What is the number one?

Jain: I will not be asked to be a regent because I am not very rich; this appears to be the crucial requirement for most, if not all, of the people asked to be regents at Pacific.

Brown: But your very smart.

Jain: The university rarely asks people to be on the board of regents unless they see something which is very unusual. And when the university announces the new board member, they are all looking at their monetary worth so there's no danger of their asking me. Now this is not true incidentally of other universities. I would say we have a very dedicated and excellent members of the board of regents. In my judgement, the regents are providing proper support and guidance for the university. I would focus on some critical success factors. For Pacific, they would relate to enrollment, financial sustainability, university ranking and reputation, student success and faculty morale.

Brown: Do you feel that our donor program can be improved?

Jain: Yes, I would say the donor program for the school of engineering and computer science can be improved.

Brown: What would be the number two item that would probably be just as well. That regents would....

Jain: I think, if you really believe that the faculty are the key the success of any an academic enterprise, we really have to mean it. This means some of the crucial decisions at the school level and at the university level will require us to engage the faculty in a positive way.

Brown: In your thirteen years as dean and professor how many cutbacks did you have to go through, probably?

Jain: Ash I did not have to go through any cutbacks. There probably were cut backs at other Schools which I really do not know for sure. I have a way of managing such challenges, if the come, without adversely affecting faculty morale.

Brown: So, you insulate the faculty from the cut backs?

Jain: I have always insulated the faculty from the cutbacks. And this is something I plan far ahead of time and make sure that we use our resources wisely. One time our operating budget was reduced due to some reason, but we managed it without making any cut backs to the departments, faculty, and other school commitments. Often it is not clear to the faculty why do the cutbacks come? Most faculty members feel that they are working as hard as ever and doing all they can to support the University and the students. Clearly, there are many complicated issues that make such university level cut backs necessary and controversial. Arguably, University administration and the Deans should focus on critical success factors (e.g. enrollment, student support and quality, student success, faculty morale etc.,) and focus on shared conversance by developing shared values and a sense of community. And then if there are some challenges, including budget cut backs, faculty members ae more likely to accept them.

Brown: Sure. Absolutely.

Jain: I focused on increasing the enrollment and not overextend ourselves in terms of staff and resources so that we always had some cushion and some reserves if needed.

Brown: Reserves.

Jain: Reserves, in case your enrollment doesn't go as well as we thought. And what is not clear to others is that when we started the graduate program we started teaching courses, but we did not have any extra faculty, so the question is how do you manage that? This meant the faculty took on the extra burden before the resources came so we could hire needed faculty. I myself taught a graduate course with over thirty students and advised several students for their master's level dissertation as well.

Brown: I think that's very timely Ravi, because the University is faced with and administrative cutback right now.

Jain: I hear about it, but I make no comments one way or another.....

Brown: no.

Brown: Well in wrapping up Ravi is there anything else that we haven't covered, questions, that you think you'd like to add to the oral history?

Jain: Ash, there are two things I would like to add as a part of this oral history document that might be helpful to others in the future, they relate to the difficult transition to the University I had and the exceptional support I received from the faculty and others.

Regarding transition to Pacific and the community, I noticed that all the new deans received certain level of support for their transition to the community. To the best of my knowledge, Pacific paid for the new dean's spouse travel to the campus; arrangements were made to give the spouse a tour of Stockton and the nearby community, some real estate agents were introduced to the new dean so he/she could readily get settled,; and many formal and informal receptions were held to introduce the new dean to the internal and external community. **None of this was done for me or my spouse.** We stayed in a hotel for over 30 days, then rented an apartment and, finally, bought a lot and built a home in the Brookside Golf community, all of this took over 18 months. The transition support provided to other deans was never extended to me. **All of this had a chilling effect on me.**

Regarding substantive support provided to me, throughout my tenure of thirteen years, by the faculty, staff, the students, alumni and friends of the School, was truly exceptional; though scarcely deserved. All of this contributed for the School to be very successful with a very high level of faculty morale when I left the School.

Brown: I understand Ravi. I mean, let me turn this off....

End of Transcription