

Interview with Dr. William Brueske
Interviewers: Brittany Doss and William Wade
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Brittany Doss: All right. So we're just going to ask you some questions basically about what was going on during school and things like that. We have broken it up into years that you have worked here. I guess you've been working here since ...

Dr. Brueske: Nineteen Sixty-Six.

Brittany Doss: And you're still working here?

Dr. Brueske: No I'm retired now. I retired officially in nineteen ninety-eight, and then I was on a five year early retirement program. And I completed that a year ago December. So I've been off one year now. I may be teaching this fall, but it will be one course.

Brittany Doss: So alright, our first question is: What did the effects of the wars going on in the sixties? You know like Vietnam and coming out of the Cold War and everything.

Dr. Brueske: Well, I would say that Humboldt was surprisingly unaffected by most of that. The only thing that may be possible and I was not convinced of it at the time, but retrospectively I may have been wrong, is that we probably had some students who were here by preference in college rather than being in Vietnam who had student deferments.

Brittany Doss: What is a deferment?

Dr. Brueske: Well, in those days of course we had the draft.

Brittany Doss: So they were getting drafted while they were in school?

Dr. Brueske: If they had a student deferment they could complete their college education before they were eligible for the draft. And since the draft usually cut off at the age of twenty-six, that still meant that most students that had been through college would have still been young enough to be drafted. But I was told by a few people their feeling—that

is, other faculty—that a lot of the students were here because they were trying to avoid the draft. But I don't really think that was necessarily true. I really don't know, but maybe I from a philosophical point denied that that might have been true at the time because I was relatively young myself. I had been deferred myself in the early part of the war, when I was finishing graduate school, and then when I came here I had a change in my selective service class simply because I was a professor, because the policy was that they felt that they needed teachers at the universities. So I wasn't affected much by it.

Brittany Doss: Were other teachers? Was it possible for teachers to be drafted?

Dr. Brueske: I don't know of a single one that was. There weren't actually as many PhD-level teachers as were needed in those days. We had sort of a shortage of people to staff universities. It was much easier to get a job in those days too as a result, independent of the war. So I think that Humboldt maybe being isolated in a rural area, except for possible students who got drafted occasionally, was probably less affected than most campuses were. I mean there was very little in the way of protests that I saw going on during the sixties. It was nothing like, for example, at Kent State or something like that back east. I think that probably much of the same feeling about the war was present among the students and the faculty, but this was a pretty ...

Brittany Doss: Quiet place?

Dr. Brueske: ...quiet place, and in fact that's been true in general. You even see today much less you might say unrest than you would see in big city campuses or campuses farther east. Humboldt just is behind the Redwood Curtain in many ways, and it was less accessible thirty years ago than it is today. And the enrollment at the time I came here was only half what it is today.

Brittany Doss: All right, you said that there were half as many students. Was the school as small or as big...?

Dr. Brueske: You mean physically?

Brittany Doss: Yeah. Were there any new buildings that were being made or anything like that at the time?

Dr. Brueske: The first new building that I can recall was probably the Arts and Theatre and Arts Complex, the Music Complex. The area that it occupies today was occupied by some tennis courts when I first came here, and that was a pretty good sized building. I think that was probably the first one that I can recall that was put up. This building did not exist when I first came here.

Brittany Doss: This science building that we're in?

Dr. Brueske: That's right. They had it on the drawing board so to speak, and construction began after a couple years I guess that I was here. And we moved into this particular building, Science B, in the fall of Nineteen Sixty-nine. And that was probably the next big building project on campus. And the library also at the time I came here was only half the size that it is now.

Brittany Doss: Was it shorter?

Dr. Brueske: No, it was the same height I think but they put a big addition and remodeling project onto that building after a few years after I came here. So it must have been in the early...the late sixties or early seventies. It was somewhere in there. I don't remember the exact dates. And quite a few of the other buildings that you see on campus now were built during the seventies, like the Natural Resources and Sciences building

and probably some others that I can't think of at the moment. Most of the student residences, likewise, were not constructed when I came here.

Brittany Doss: Which ones (dorms) were (here) in the sixties?

Dr. Brueske: I don't think there was much of anything constructed back in the dormitory area in those days.

Brittany Doss: Like nothing at all, or was there like one..?

Dr. Brueske: I think that the big main building where they have the food services and so forth ...

Brittany Doss: The one that looks like the jail?

Dr. Brueske: ... that may have been in place, I'm not sure. I never got over to that side of campus very much.

Brittany Doss: My next question is what was the campus life like during the sixties?

What were the students doing? Because I know there were "Lumberjack Days," but I don't know if they were back then?

Dr. Brueske: Yes they were.

Brittany Doss: What were the big things that were going on around campus?

Dr. Brueske: Well that's a little hard for me to answer. I was pretty busy as a young faculty member teaching in the sciences and I didn't have much time to be involved.

Brittany Doss: Did they have anything like we do now where at noon there would be music? I don't know ... Did a lot of people congregate?

Dr. Brueske: I don't think so. For one thing the Student Union Building, the what do you call it now, the University Center, didn't exist. There was a Book Store but it was a much smaller building and it is part of the present building, which was expanded around

it, but the quad area didn't exist. And there may have been something going on at noon and so forth in those days, but nothing like today.

Brittany Doss: If there was, would be in front of the library? Where were the people meeting?

Dr. Brueske: I honestly don't know, and even that is half way across campus. My life existed pretty much in what is now the old Science A. That was the Science Building on Campus.

Brittany Doss: The only one?

Dr. Brueske: The only one. And Science C used to be the physical plant courtyard and just before I came here apparently that had been occupied by the biology department. But it had not been remodeled as you see it today.

Brittany Doss: Who was the President of the school during the sixties?

Dr. Brueske: Cornelius Siemens.

Brittany Doss: I guess we'll go on to the seventies. When did they make his building?¹

Dr. Brueske: Well, the building was here.

Brittany Doss: They made it while he was actually here?

Dr. Brueske: No, no. I think they named it after he had retired. The building was here and I don't know what it was called. At that time I think it housed classrooms, I think, for the business department and some other departments, but the building existed, but it wasn't called Siemens Hall at that time.

Brittany Doss: Oh, I see, see I thought they built it for the guy.

Dr. Brueske: No, it was named later as far as I recall.

¹ A reference to what is now called Siemens Hall.

Brittany Doss: That makes a little bit more sense. Wow, my next question isn't really good because it's what kind of events were taking place on campus in the seventies? Was there any more protesting or anything or more activity with the students in the seventies, because my idea of the seventies is young activists being out here in Humboldt and what not?

Dr. Brueske: I think if there was anything it was probably related to the environment and I can't recall exactly when that became most prominent, probably in the eighties, when we had the tree sitters and that sort of thing, but there has always been a concern with environmental things, but I don't recall very much in the way of protests per se, people marching around with signs and placards. I don't remember that. Of course it may have gone on while I was busy teaching classes (laughter).

Brittany Doss: What changes were being made during the seventies? Changes to the school? Changes to the way ...eventually we became the CSU system?

Dr. Brueske: Well, when I first came here it was called Humboldt State College. Then there was this organizational change at the State level that created the California State University, and most of the campuses became then California State University San Francisco or California State University Stanislaus. A few of them, I think San Francisco was one of them, were able to use a name like San Francisco State University. And Humboldt was able to use Humboldt State University. There were quite a few that had to retain the CSU sort of designation and then followed by the location. And initially I think it was California State Colleges and then it became California State University.

Brittany Doss: And was that in the seventies?

Dr. Brueske: That was in, I think, the seventies, and I believe it was largely the efforts of Dr. Siemens that allowed us to have our name in the form that it is today instead of it just being CSU Humboldt, we were Humboldt State University.

Brittany Doss: And it does make a little bit of difference.

Dr. Brueske: He was a very strong President in many ways.

Brittany Doss: Were there a lot of budget problems, because we are going through the budget crisis right now? What was it like in the seventies? Was there a lot more money flowing?

Dr. Brueske: Yes. I think so. That is visible in the buildings you see on campus today.

Brittany Doss: Because a lot of buildings were being made in the seventies?

Dr. Brueske: That's right. There was a lot more money. If this building here were being built today it would be a lot more cheaply built in some ways, for example: just the furniture you see in this room, laboratory furniture is high quality stuff, it's really expensive. They probably would have found a more economical type to put in.

Brittany Doss: Cheaper?

Dr. Brueske: If they were building it today, there is a big difference in terms of funding between the seventies and today.

Brittany Doss: Do you think that made a lot of difference on what was being taught in the school? Was there a lot more classes being offered do you think?

Dr. Brueske: One thing I do know is that we were able and willing to offer courses with much smaller enrollment.

Brittany Doss: In your department?

Dr. Brueske: In my department. I am sure that is true elsewhere on campus. For example, there was one course I taught when we had a medical technology program. The course is called histology, the study of animal tissues, and the med techs had to have it as part of their curriculum. One year I remember, on the quarter system, we taught it two quarters out of three instead of offering it just once a year and I think I only had about a half dozen students in my section and the other Professor who taught it the other quarter had about the same number. We didn't have very many students at all. But we couldn't possibly do that today. We don't have the funds to have such small classes. And when I first came here the course in my specialty which I taught in nineteen sixty-six had an enrollment of only seven. It was a brand new course, at least in terms of my offering it, and I only had seven students. Probably today a lower-division ... well, it was upper-division ... a junior level course with only seven students could not be offered, I suspect, or at least it would be difficult to get it approved because we don't have the funds.

Brittany Doss: Yeah, you have to have a certain amount of people for there to even be a class.

Dr. Brueske: That's right, and we had a lot of other examples of small courses being taught or multiple sections being taught that we would probably not be able to offer today. It's simply a matter of dollars.

Brittany Doss: Yeah, well it must have been nice.

Dr. Brueske: It was in that sense a golden age, compared to today.

Brittany Doss: I'm going to go on to the eighties, another thing also, and this could apply to the other decades: what changes in the students did you notice? Not just within the

eighties but also just being there since sixty-six and finally in the eighties. Was there anything noticeable?

Dr. Brueske: Not a great deal. I mean differences in detail, but the overall effect I would say is the same because coming here in the middle sixties I saw a certain amount of the hippie influence in terms of dress and lifestyle, but whatever the trend may be of a particular year, whether it's 1966 or 2004, it is true that the young people follow what is the dress and lifestyle code of their group for the day and so in that sense, I don't see that there is really much difference. Young people are young people no matter what century you're in I think and I wouldn't say that I felt that the group was any different in the sixties, seventies, eighties, or nineties.

Brittany Doss: So they get more, like, loud mouthy

Dr. Brueske: No I don't think so.

Brittany Doss: Because I've been told by grandparents and what "Back in my day kids didn't talk like that?"

Dr. Brueske: Grandparents and parents always talk that way, but I would say that my relationships with the students and the way they would deal with me has changed very little in all the years that I've been here. I would say I see a little more change if I compare my years at Humboldt with my years as a student and a graduate student at the University of Minnesota. There I think the students were more conservative and quiet and respectful and so forth.

Brittany Doss: Was that because you were a student?

Dr. Brueske: No. I think that there are two things involved there. One is that I think in those days Minnesota was a more conservative area and secondly, and this is California

of course that I came to, and secondly, I think that there was a sea-change in student attitudes and behavior in the sixties and that has carried on in many ways ever since in the ensuing forty years. But I don't really perceive any great difference in the students in the years I've been here. The changes have been gradual, if anything, so I haven't noticed them.

Brittany Doss: When people started dyeing their hair green and what not, did that shock you?

Dr. Brueske: No, no.

Brittany Doss: You were here during the early nineties; there were a lot of weird stuff.

Dr. Brueske: The green hair stage is relatively new but I don't perceive that as a fundamental difference. My son went through some of those stages too and it just seemed like he was doing what his friends were doing.

Brittany Doss: My next question would be about your teaching techniques and comparison of all the years that you have been teaching. Do you notice that your techniques have changed, or did you change not because you had too but you just did?

Dr. Brueske: I think I changed, but that is probably more a measure of my own maturation than anything. When I came here I was right out of graduate school and in general I think graduate students when they're teaching associates and teaching assistants are rather strict and very, very serious and a lot of that carries over into a young faculty member's first few years and after a while and sufficient experience and interaction with classes and students to realize that I don't necessarily have to be that rigid and in a way have to become more flexible, so I think I became more flexible and somewhat more relaxed in my way of dealing with both the students and the subject matter.

Brittany Doss: Do you think that had to do with just being comfortable with the school instead of the changing times?

Dr. Brueske: I think that's probably a lot of it. I don't think it's the changing times. I think you can probably see this in most faculty members. When they come here right out of graduate school or out of a postdoctoral fellowship they are very deadly serious about it and sometimes very strict and inflexible. It depends on the individual but I think there was more formality to the profession you might say—I'm speaking of my profession as a professor—there was more formality when I first came here than there is now.

Brittany Doss: Like Mr. and Mrs. and what not?

Dr. Brueske: That and also we dressed more formally. I mean I wore a white shirt and a tie and most of my colleagues did initially then gradually in the seventies, particularly, I think things got more casual and you see professors in blue jeans.

Brittany Doss: Well, I think that is a good change.

Dr. Brueske: Yeah, I think in general it's a good change.

Brittany Doss: That would make me uncomfortable having teachers in a tie...

Dr. Brueske: You know I made a conscious change somewhere in probably the late seventies or middle eighties of becoming less formal to see whether that affected the way the students interacted with me, and so I started wearing sport shirts and no longer wore a white shirt and a tie, and even that simple change seemed to make a difference.

Brittany Doss: Really! How so? In what way?

Dr. Brueske: In the way they related to me. I think that when I was dressed more formally they felt there was a greater distance between them and me.

Brittany Doss: Standoffish.

Dr. Brueske: That's right. So just the simple business of getting rid of the tie and wearing a sport shirt instead of a white shirt seems to have actually made a difference.

Brittany Doss: Were there any other buildings that you remember being put up or any buildings being taken down? Were you around when they put in the football field or has that been around since...?

Dr. Brueske: You mean Redwood Bowl?

Brittany Doss: Yeah.

Dr. Brueske: I think in one form or another that's been here for many years.

Brittany Doss: I'll bet it's gotten bigger.

Dr. Brueske: It's gotten bigger and they put in that rubberized running track. I remember that was a big deal because it was pretty expensive.

Brittany Doss: About what time was that put in?

Dr. Brueske: Probably in the seventies, I would guess.

Brittany Doss: Wow, the golden seventies!

Dr. Brueske: Well that's when there was money. Oh, the new athletic building that was put up—that was a major building project. Well, at least the west gym, maybe the east gym existed before, but I think again that was one of these buildings which was partly an old building but with an addition and a lot of remodeling of the old part. The field house existed when I came here. The President had a house right on campus.

Brittany Doss: Really?

Dr. Brueske: Right next to the old Science A. There is a little sort of park-like area with some carved wooden statues in that area. That area right in there used to be the President's house.

Brittany Doss: Which President?

Dr. Brueske: Siemens.

Brittany Doss: Wow, he really took it seriously.

Dr. Brueske: Well, he lived right on campus, but you know that house must have been there for a long time previous because a number of professors use to live what we'd now regard right on campus. But they were off campus at the time. For example, Fred Telonicher, who the marine lab is named after, lived on campus. And the Telonicher house, which is near the library, was where he lived. And the campus was apparently at that time, he came in that late thirties apparently, was limited to Founders Hall, Nelson Hall, Gist Hall, and Jenkins Hall, which is the Industrial Arts building, which is still there. And there may have been the corporation yard building probably was built post-war, as was Science A, but the campus was not much more than that apparently. There may have been a few more buildings I don't know about, but those were the major buildings at the time, so there was a group of faculty houses over near the Library that were all faculty dwellings. Off-campus, basically.

Brittany Doss: Because I've wondered that, actually, seeing those houses ...

Dr. Brueske: That's where they came from. Yeah, Balabanis House—Balabanis was vice-president for many years apparently, and as I said Telonicher House and there's a couple others I don't know the names of.

Brittany Doss: O.k. My next question is what changes in your department were made throughout the years you've been teaching?

Dr. Brueske: Not a great deal really. There were a lot of new faculty added the first few years I was here. Just like the student body doubled within the first few years I was here,

so did the faculty, and so very soon we had at least a couple of dozen faculty in this department. It's always been a big department and still is. We had a lot of retirements in the last few years. Within the last decade or less we've had a lot of people my age leave the department, but we've been replacing them. So it's still a large department. As I say, it probably doubled in size within a few years after I first came here in 1966.

Brittany Doss: That's interesting that it actually doubled. Could you see the difference when you were walking around?

Dr. Brueske: Well, a lot more students, a lot more colleagues. And of course physically the department got bigger too, because we added this building, and then later on, I guess it was in the early eighties, I'm not sure exactly when, we added Science D, and that building sort of has an interesting history. It cost, if I remember right, more than this Science B cost, but it's a much more cheaply built building. It's steel framed construction and then the outside walls are just glass and stucco, but even the steel construction was sort of minimal. The engineers discovered after a while that it was not earthquake safe, because it did not have diagonal bracing built into it. And so it was actually closed for a while while they added more steel to it and made it earthquake-safe, and also put in the carpeting which is on the second floor—what is technically the first floor, but the upper floor—to make it quieter because it was built so cheaply that all it had was a thin cement floor on the upper level, so it was very noisy especially for people down below in the basement. So as I say, they closed the building to make it earthquake safe and to improve it a little bit. Another thing that is interesting about it is that it was supposed to be environmental experiment in the sense that it was energy independent. It was supposed to be a solar building. Originally there was supposed to be automatic

controls that would control the air flow, so, when the sun shined, the building would absorb heat and that would shut down some of the input of heat into the building and when it got colder then the sun would be allowed in and so forth and the air circulation could change. Well, if I understand correctly—I may be wrong here, but if I understand correctly—the automatic controls were largely abandoned because of the expense, so there were just manual controls on windows that could be opened and closed, and the whole thing really did not function as a solar building. So eventually they put in heating for the winter time when it got cold, because it got cold when the sun wasn't shining. It got too hot when the sun was shining, so they have an air conditioner, which is back in the green house—a great big one, you can see it there today—that would take care of the really hot days.

Brittany Doss: So it was kind of pointless?

Dr. Brueske: So it was sort of pointless. It was a good concept, but I think because they lacked funds to do it right, it ended up being ...

Brittany Doss: Was that in the eighties?

Dr. Brueske: That was probably in the eighties, yeah. We had I think probably less money then than we did in the seventies, I'm not sure, but the building proved to not be a very good engineering demonstration the way it had been intended to.

Brittany Doss: I'm basically out of questions, so if there is anything else you would like to tell us about Humboldt that we haven't thought of? Anything interesting? Are there any haunted buildings or anything?

Dr. Brueske: No, there aren't any haunted buildings, and I don't know of any scandals or dastardly crimes that have been ... nothing like that. If there have, I'm not aware of it.

One point I might make is apparently the campus paper, *The Lumberjack*, is a particularly good one for the size of the campus. It has received I think national awards if I'm not mistaken. It's considered a good campus paper and if I compare it with the campus paper at the University of Minnesota, *The Minnesota Daily*, I would say it is just about as good as that paper was. And there they had a whole Journalism building to train students in journalism and the paper was produced there. So I think that Humboldt does quite well. I think that Humboldt for its size is a fairly outstanding university and I think a lot of the people who came here in the sixties and seventies were aware of that. And that's why they came here—they wanted to come to a small place.