

An Interview with Dr. Robert Poorman
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Interviewer: Phil Pogue

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Pogue: My name is Phil Pogue. We're in the Presidential Library, Springfield, Illinois. It is May 8, 2013. We're on the oral history of the community college system and today we have with us Dr. Robert Poorman, who is going to be talking about the experiences that he has had at Lincoln Land Community College. So Dr. Poorman, we want to welcome you and could you give us some background about yourself.

Poorman: Yes, thank you. Usually we start with the high schools and I went to Germantown High School in Ohio, a small school with great teachers. We didn't think so at the time, but we found out later they were great. At a time when the Navy was trying to build up its officer corps, I applied and was chosen for the then V12 program which sent “bright young men” to major universities where they took naval courses along with standard college preparatory or engineering courses. Those schools that I went to then were Ohio Wesleyan and the University of Virginia. At that point, I was discharged. The war was over, they got their officers, but didn't need them all. Anyhow, I went back to Ohio and was graduated from “the” Ohio State University, as they say, with a Bachelors of Science in Education with English, math and psych backgrounds. Masters there also in counseling psych. Then my doctorate is from UCLA in Higher Education Administration, concentrating on community college and student services.

Work experience, if you are allowed to use slang in here, it is all over the ballpark. I've worked in six states, six foreign countries and a lot of informal stuff in between. Primary vehicle for my background after forty some years in junior high school, high school, community college, university and consulting, was the Fulbright Program. Those in higher education know that Senator Fulbright believed that if we shared professors or exchanged professors we might get to know each other better. I was happily afforded that opportunity four times: in Lithuania, in Ukraine, in People's Republic of China, and Tanzania. All of that brings me to a conclusion that I picked the right career. It was great fun.

Pogue: Now you indicated that you went to UCLA involving learning about community colleges. What were they teaching about that at that time?

Poorman: What had by then become rather standard topics, but primarily community colleges are **teaching** institutions, so they concentrated not upon research, although we had the research about the community colleges, but as a topic for further attention in our work in the field was teaching. We were taught then, and I think I followed this. My dissertation was about staffing, by the way, staffing in community colleges. And when we sought to staff our college, we did much of what UCLA taught us to do. A lot of it rubbed off. Find people who are knowledgeable, care about students, and are interested in serving their communities. Find people like that, you hire them, and we did. Much of that we were taught at UCLA. You say, well that's common sense, of course. Lot of it is supposed to be common sense. Those are the things that we had background on, the history of and makeup of community colleges over the years. Then for that part of my dissertation which was student services, we also had people from the psychology department, and they taught us how to care for people. Standard stuff—if you don't have that, you had better not be in this business. Anyhow, that is some of the background.

Pogue: How did you get from UCLA to Lincoln Land?

Poorman: By a circuitous route. UCLA provided me the opportunity to go to Hawaii to teach one summer, and to teach about community colleges, as a matter of fact. B. Lamar Johnson, whom I named before to you, an initial B. Lamar Johnson, major figure in the community college field. He was my major professor. He helped me to get a summer job at the University of Hawaii teaching about the community college. They were not terribly far along in their community college system, which they did have later. I went from UCLA to Hawaii to teach.

During that period I received the invitation from Charles Long, who was Chairman of the Board of Trustees at Lincoln Land, to make an application, which I did. I came home from Hawaii; my wife and five kids were still out there. I had to come home because of the timing of the contract. She came in to the airport at Los Angeles, and I said, "How would you like to

go to Illinois?” This, out of the blue. Met some great people here in the interviews with Charlie Long and the original board members, who turned out to be the most supportive people that I had ever known. So, that brought us from UCLA to Lincoln Land. There was a lot of other touring around, but that is just the part about UCLA to Lincoln Land.

Pogue: What years were you at Lincoln Land?

Poorman: I came there first in November 1967, and I retired in August 1988, so 21 years. Something of a different standard than usual, but I think that community college people last longer than the others do. (Laughter) Anyhow, 21 years.

Pogue: How did the Illinois Community College Act lead to Lincoln Land?

Poorman: The act followed the completion of a master plan that had been conducted, I believe, by the Board of Higher Education; it came then to pass that in 1965 the Community College Act was formed. It basically described a comprehensive public community college—comprehensive meaning transfer programs, occupational programs, student services, community services and adult education—concentrating on great teaching. Those things came to us from the Higher Education 1965 by way of a board which had been elected with the formation referendum. There was a referendum of the people back then in an eleven county district—very large in central Illinois—and at that time they formed a board of trustees, seven experienced members of boards of trustees. From that then they went about the business of hiring the president and that is how I came to be here.

Pogue: When you mentioned the original board for Lincoln Land, did Lincoln Land have any differences on board elections as compared to most of the other community colleges, as far as geographic territory?

Poorman: In the initial instance with 4000 square miles, some of our board members used to quip and say it was like running for the state of Rhode Island, or whatever you want to make as a comparison. It wasn't different then because elections to community college boards by in large were at large. They were not zones; the early board members ran from wherever they came from for the whole district. That was pretty standard stuff then, except that those seven board members, by their own design, before they ran chose each other from around the district. They said because it just made sense for us to do this in a big district. So we had a man from Litchfield, from Pleasant Plains, from Ashland, from, not Taylorville originally, from Auburn, and from Chatham area. Those men, six of them, had kind of gotten together before and decided they wanted to help get this thing going: Walter Adkins, Kennedy Kincaid, Charles Long, Richard Stone, Justin Taft, and Kenneth Malmberg, M.D. A seventh one, Eldon Greenwood, was the first additional member elected, not exactly running as a slate but I don't think anybody else ran in that very early

election. So happily, those originating board of trustee members decided that they ought to have some widespread representation. We were the “hole in the doughnut” district because Springfield was not then in the district. We started with all outside people. Happily all of those original people were experienced, interested, supportive people. You hear about board presidents’ troubles sometime, but not with this board. I had a superior original board.

Pogue: Did the original school districts in the eleven counties change during your lifetime?

Poorman: Yes, yes. First of all, Springfield joined. Remember I said they were not part of the district. That was not a matter of referendum; it was a matter of their 186 board deciding whether to annex to us or not. Happily, the president of the Springfield College in Illinois, the private junior college in this town, could have all kind of reasons to say, “Really, we’re not sure we need another one.” Not so. Sister Beata came to the 186 board meeting and offered her support. Great support from someone who could have said, “Well now, really, we’re here doing similar transfer materials, so perhaps we should think about this more.” She didn’t say that at all. She came supporting 186 becoming part of our district, so that’s one major one.

Originally, Hillsboro was not a part of the district. Litchfield and Hillsboro are closely allied cities which, I guess, are sometimes competitive with each other. I don’t know that that is true. Hillsboro had not joined originally, but then later did. That’s two.

Beyond on the west side, Jacksonville was not a part of the district to begin with. We had good relationships with the then superintendent. We were all cordial but they were not a part of the district, so when it became possible to amend the districts, I asked Jacksonville to consider joining and they did by their board’s annexation. Their board took the action to annex to our district. Same with Pittsfield. So that makes four more and eleven, so that’s the fifteen. I guess they are all in different counties. Anyhow, we wound up then eventually with fifteen counties represented and as we grew then, later, much later, the elections for community college districts, at least this one and I think others were possible, was to do it by zones. That for us—it seemed to me—that made great sense. What was done originally by great intention and goodwill and smart brought breadth of representation from a very large district. It might not always have happened that way, so whoever thought of the idea of having zones in such a large district, I think, made great sense. So from that point forward when there was a change in the number of years to be elected, used to be four and then became six, I think was at that same time that the zones were established. I don’t think we are the only one that has zones. It certainly makes sense in ours because it is such a large district, but there are other large ones around.

Pogue: What are the major challenges that you faced in serving such a large geographic area?

Poorman: Service. I used to say, if you are going to take their money, you had better do something for it. So the challenge was to find legitimate reasons to be where they were or help them to get where we were. We first started that by offering evening classes in the high schools in about thirty locations. We had presence in the district where people could see us. But we also needed to have, it seemed to me, some more than casual contact with them, so we got into the habit of going at least once a year to have our board meetings at the board meeting place of one of our high school districts. And so, the thing that solidified, it seemed to me, was that board members got to see board members and know that, by golly, we are worried about some of the same things. They felt ownership because, hey, these guys are doing the same thing we are at the board level.

That was also one of the things we did, trying to fit that need, that challenge, in a huge district. Go out to them, and we did that in a couple of ways. Make them welcome to come into campus, but eventually then, from that early start of evening classes in high schools, centers were formed where the offerings could be greater. That was probably one of my biggest errors: hesitations, in not going to the centers earlier. We were already out there doing classes in thirty places and people started talking, "Why can't we have a center out here? Why can't we have a center out there?" I hesitated because of money; I thought, well, I'm not sure we can do that. Others who came after me were wiser on that item and said, "You know, we've already got a good start out there. People want a wider range of courses. We couldn't do everything at every center, but we could do more than we could at the high schools." So, the centers then came later as an effort to meet the challenge of this large district.

Pogue: Did you have any difficulty because of the geographic nature for the farthest parts of your district, perhaps worrying about whether they'll go to another community college?

Poorman: Not really. We had the concern because Beardstown was fifty plus miles away. They are part of our district. Later, I guess Meredosia. In any event, when you are driving fifty miles, and twenty miles away is another community college, you say, "Well gee, wait a minute. Maybe, I'll just go to John Wood. Or maybe I'll just go to Belleville, or maybe I'll just go to Champaign or to Parkland." One of the things that mitigated against that, a thing called the chargeback, which allowed a student who wanted a program that we didn't have to go to a nearby community college and we paid the chargeback, we paid freight: that part of the total which the other district would have paid, we paid. It is called a chargeback, one of the important legislative actions to foster some of this cooperation that might not have been there. Now this is for programs that the other college didn't have. People out-

of-district other than chargebacks paid out-of-district tuition. So, many of them were willing to drive as far as fifty miles to come to Springfield, and we were happy about that.

Pogue: When you looked at the major events during your 21 years' term at Lincoln Land, what were those major events?

Poorman: Well of course, the formation election—which was before my time—was put together by some pretty far-seeing people. That is certainly an event that wasn't **during** my time but it was **important** to my time. I came to a ready-made district which had been formed by the original board members. That is a major event in the history of the college, though it was not in my time, just before my time.

Major event first off was creating a staffing system which would find the best teachers who cared about students and service to community, which I declared were our efforts. That's how we staffed, by the way; we sought people who met those. We decided to do it nationally. I know sometimes there are discussions about whether you ought to go local or ought to go national, because my notion was, in every significant staffing position, that we would try nationally. Now on occasion I would say, as I had on one important occasion, "You know, you are the person to beat local but you have to stand the test of national." And so we did national recruiting. Originally, I did it all because I was the only one here. I was joined by very experienced other community college vice presidents and especially, the academic vice president. He took a major load in going about the country, seeking people who seemed to fit what we had decided to be our mission. We saw eye to eye. Obviously we'd talked about what it was we were looking for; we could compare our ratings of people and they were pretty close.

Then we would bring those finalists, if they weren't local, to campus at our expense to be interviewed by whoever was on staff: administrators, faculty, students. We got to the point later where they also did a classroom presentation for people to have some kind of feel for what they would be like in a classroom, which is pretty important where you say, "Teaching is it; research is not." So we'd bring them to campus, then in house we would share our impressions and I would make a recommendation to the board. Long, long time ago I told people seriously, "I recommend; they employ. I don't employ." It's important in our setting of locally selected boards to have those board members not just see the end of the line, you know—yes or no, shall we hire this person or not—but for them to be involved if they wished to be even along the line. We did that sometimes with candidates having luncheon with a couple of our board members, to have them also feel before they saw the paperwork, the kind of people we were inviting to campus. So the end of that story is when board members would pass a motion for their employment.

Pogue: How did the building of the campus all develop?

Poorman: That's a major event, of course. You said you are getting to major events as I am. Building campus was twofold, temporary and permanent, then out in the district.

Temporary: When I arrived here, Illinois Central College in Peoria had embarked with one of our local contractors to build temporary buildings quickly and start at the earliest point to offer classes that you could bring together a good staff. So while from December to the next following September, I was going about the country, and locally too, finding the best possible teachers we could get. Happily, there were many who were fine choices.

But then the second most important thing was, where were we going to teach them? For the technical courses, we had to find places like the automotive center at Sixth and Laurel (I used to be able to say the name of the company¹ who had that automotive place). That's where we taught auto tech. We taught data processing at the old Plaid Stamp store, which nobody recognizes anymore, but it was a retail store, a Plaid Stamp store on south Sixth Street. So in the early days, the technical courses were on those two places. Then, well, we had to build our temporary campus for that first semester. So between the time I got here in December and the following September, we also had to have a campus built, temporary as it was, but none-the-less, a temporary campus. We talked to the folks at Illinois Central, hired the same people who had built theirs, and we built six temporary buildings on south Sixth Street. Had to have the land; we rented the land right next door to Heritage House from a local owner of the land, so we never did own that land. It was temporary and we had temporary buildings and the notion was that we would move those temporary buildings, if possible, to any place we were going with a permanent campus. That is what we did. The old temporary buildings were the first buildings we took out to the new campus for use. We did not take all six of them and we did a lot of things to them that hadn't been done on this campus.

So, get the teachers. I knew the kind of people I wanted because I had served at two great community colleges, Phoenix College in Arizona, and Bakersfield College in California. You could do a lot worse than have great staffs such as they had. Anyhow, get the staff, get the buildings.

Curriculum: I guess you would have to say, cut and paste and then review. I had come from some schools that were honest-to-goodness comprehensive public community colleges, the two I mentioned, so I had some sense the kind of things you ought to be doing, if in fact in the technical areas you have the local employment support of those programs.

¹ Brahler Automotive

Brought together then the faculty and one of the first things we did—remember, I’m bringing along all those materials from those other two schools—but one of our original faculty meetings was my introduction to them to management by objectives; that’s management stuff, but it does have applications to college curriculum. You want to say, what is it we’re trying to do with this thing, with the objectives? Let us now decide what the elements are that are important to this. I also have what two other colleges thought were important. Here now, department by department, some of them fairly new to teaching, some of them veterans, let’s look at this to see whether this is what we want to try to begin with, and then we will review it, we’ll revise it. That is how we came about the curriculum.

Now the liberal arts part of it: We said we were going to teach everything that you would find in a standard university setting in liberal arts. The only place that gave us any difficulty the first time around was Spanish. I couldn’t find a Spanish teacher and so I called Lincoln College in Lincoln, a private college, and said, can you give us any ideas. I guess they gave us tips where to look for Spanish teachers. So we did offer Spanish, I think by tapping one of our high school Spanish teachers. I don’t remember. But in any event, we did almost all of the first year liberal arts courses and a few of the technical programs, putting off one of the most important ones, nursing, until we could get a qualified nursing staff, which we did three years later.

Pogue: How involved were you in the selection of the current campus?

Poorman: Personally, I am sorry to always say this, but very much, I was not an outside president. I was a hands-on campus president. I did my work outside but the business of choosing and helping to form the permanent campus is pretty important stuff. So our selection of architects, **well**, first selection of site, and I did a lot of looking around at potential places. We had some help from university professor consultants from ISU about some of the kinds of things we ought to be alert to in picking spaces. I had an idea of what seemed to be a good prospect; as a matter of fact, where we finally went.

At that time Sangamon State University was just forming up, to the point of looking for a campus. Our board was invited to, and met with, the Board of Regents, it would have been called then, I think, for Sangamon State. We went to DeKalb at one of their meetings and talked with their board and our board in executive session—which you are allowed to do because it’s real estate—and came to some general agreement that being close to each other might be important to our further development and help both of us. So then we went about the business of acquiring the property by power of eminent domain, though we paid, I think, legitimate prices for our acreage. I think we paid \$2200 an acre for it, good farm land. Now people would say, “Why, you so-and-so’s. You stole that land.” No, back then \$2200 was a pretty good price of good black dirt. Anyhow, we got the campuses side by side, as it were, and then went about the business of hiring architects. We invited a

number of people to make presentations. The board selected a Chicago firm and we built, when we started out there in '72, then forward to completion.

Pogue: What were the major buildings that were constructed during your tenure at Lincoln Land?

Poorman: Six temporary buildings on South Sixth which served us well, got off the ground. The important thing was teaching. Our permanent campus while I was there included: a gymnasium, Cass Gym; two large basically liberal arts buildings, Menard Hall and Sangamon Hal. Called them by counties, which was a good way to get around the question of "Oh, how do we name these places?" Well, we had a lot of counties so we chose close by. Menard, Sangamon and Cass started temporary. Brought over from the old campus a couple of the temporaries and refurbished them on new concrete pads. Uh, let's see. That's all that were built during my time: Cass, Menard, Sangamon and the temporary buildings brought over for the refurbishing. Later on, not during my time, came a large central building. I want to say Memorial (chuckled). There were other things that we built, but not as buildings, such as things we did for energy.

Pogue: As far as sports, how did they begin at Lincoln Land?

Poorman: First coach we hired was an experienced high school coach from one of the Chicago suburbs. He became our first basketball coach. I think we offered basketball the first year, using the gymnasium of the old seminary out in the north end. It was called a seminary, way, way, way back; they had a gym. That is where we had our basketball to begin with until we had our own campus. So we offered only basketball, I believe, that first year. Then the second year, baseball, again by recruiting, in this case, people who had taught PE² that had coaching assignments with pay in addition to his PE. We didn't have full time coaches. As a matter of fact, I don't know whether we ever had full time coaches. They were either brought in just for the coaching stipend or PE teachers who also had a coaching assignment. So basketball to begin with, baseball and then early on, track and cross country. Going on up to, I am not sure, I think we started women's sports in about the third year, softball, volleyball; I am missing from there on. I think we had a total of 15 at one point, 15 both in women and men's and yes, we did go according to Title 9.³

Pogue: As far as enrollment from your time from '67 to '88, what transpired from that enrollment?

Poorman: Booming over the period of time. In the mud on South Sixth Street—in the temporary campus overlaid with pieces of plywood so people could walk

² Physical Education

³ Title 9 required schools to provide equal funding for male and female athletic programs. For further information, see the interesting and informative interview with Ellyn Bartges under *Sports* in this ALPL Oral History Program.

about—we registered 1401 students the first year. We were on quarters⁴ originally and we started in September, so some people report, I believe, to the State board that we started with 800. We had 800 when we had to report. We hadn't started classes yet, so the first time we had classes we had 1401. That was only on the temporary campus on South Sixth and the automotive place on Laurel and Sixth and the old Plaid Stamp Store.

From 1401, now that's headcount, I am told by people recently that with the permanent campus, six off campus centers and other places, perhaps still in the high schools, that the headcount of the whole year, counting those first semester and the new additional second semester, is in the order of 14,000. Now that's headcount, again. You will have to ask our current president or the enrollment person if that's true to say that was booming enrollment, indeed.

Pogue: Were you involved in any referendums while at Lincoln Land?

Poorman: The two, one was the building bond referendum just after I came. I didn't tell my wife, when I asked her if she wanted to come to Springfield, whether I had to pass a building referendum. (Laughter) But we did and got great support, great support including, I might add, senior citizens. People who said, "You know, we want to do this for our kids." Well, it turns out seniors decided with some urging in "no tuition" to join that group. I thought that was a good idea. The seniors helped us to build the place; it's reasonable for them to have free tuition and they did come. They didn't just do it for their kids. They said, "Well, you know, this might be a good idea and look, it doesn't cost us anything." So the seniors joined us. So that referendum though was successful in the whole district, but I called on the seniors because that is sometimes a question that people say "Well gee, how you going to get the seniors to take on a referendum?" Well, they did. That's the first one.

The second one was actually after I'd retired. We had the referendum for 15 cents on a \$100 worth of assessed valuation that was passed in the original formation election before I got here. It lasted us until 1988. Now, assessed valuation changed, of course, but we were able to maintain that maximum of 15 cents on \$100 of assessed valuation for 21 years. Then it became apparent that after all that time the college was going to have to have more money over time. The state did not meet its obligation of 50% of operating (cost), which I believe was in the master plan if not legislation, and it was just apparent after 21 years that 15 cents on \$100 was not going to do it. So we had a referendum just after I retired in 1988 and the board asked me if I would still take part in it. Well, that's "a name" they recognized and so I did. The new president and others here took care of the Springfield and close by areas, and my Community Services Vice President and I did the outlying areas. We said, well, those are our people out there; we are going to go ask

⁴ The quarter system divides the academic year into quarters instead of semesters.

them again. Happily, they did, like 56 to 44 or something like that. Anyhow, a good referendum.

Pogue: How did the Institute of International Education begin?

Poorman: Actually, that's a reference only related to Lincoln Land, that I know of, through my Fulbright awards. It's a Washington outfit. It's a very important one because the Institute of International Education is concerned with international education beyond the community colleges. But there was a national community college board there in Washington, too, and they know each other. In any event, we became primarily involved with them when I applied for personal Fulbright awards because they were also administrators of the Fulbright Association Program, so IIE. I may have been involved in sending some of the visitors, but that was probably true of IIE. But that was not the only one; the State Department sent a lot of our visitors and another agency sent a lot of our visitors. So the one that I think of primarily, maybe because I was personally involved in it, was that they also administered the Fulbright Program.

Pogue: What was the relationship between Lincoln Land Community College and the Capital Area Vocational Center?

Poorman: They were primarily involved with the vocational teaching and learning at the high school level. Their support, their very formation was created by several common school districts, K-12 districts, so they were primarily giving attention to students who would come from those underlying high schools. Instead of being at the high school all day, I think part of the day they would come to CAVC; thus most of them were high school students. So they would be involved at CAVC with essentially the early courses in vocational, technical education. Where the community college courses were, if you agree, a cut above that level of teaching and learning, more nearly the technical areas, so there was kind of an easy, unforced distinction. They were primarily concerned with high school students, although they had some seniors who would go over there for a course, maybe. We were concerned primarily with technical programs for those students who may not be much older but they were actually college students and adults who wanted to come for technical programs, like early-on data processing, early-on automotive technology, later on registered nursing and the like.

Pogue: Now, did that mean then that you were pulling classes from some of the places you talked about when the college first formed, to the technical school, or did those other places still exist?

Poorman: From the technical school?

Pogue: While you were talking about the automotive center and data...

Poorman: Yes, those were from originally when we had those three that I named; initially data processing and automotive would have been local because a lot of people had to travel, but as we had the high school programs, evening programs in the high schools, and particularly as we went out there with the centers, they picked up on a lot of the technical programs, too. I think particularly in one of them, nursing, although we didn't do nursing in the six centers. That would have been a great staffing difficulty. Staffing for nursing is one of the more difficult ones, but people who wanted nursing—and a lot of people did—would need to come to center campus, and they did.

Pogue: Because Lincoln Land is located with our state capital, was there any unique ties because of being right here in the state capital?

Poorman: Yes and no. If you said, “Was I spending all my time down on the rail?”—that's the Capitol building—no, I rarely did that. I'll tell you how most of our community college lobbying was done for community colleges in the State. But it wasn't so much a matter of legislation, obviously; when it was a matter that involved us personally, we would ask our representatives about legislation, but mostly it was for classroom instruction. Employees of the State wanted to improve their skills, get promotions; having college courses was one way to help to get there. Now, it was perhaps an inconvenience for state workers after a tough day to, at 5 o'clock, head out to seven miles away to the permanent campus. So we built a building on corner of Mason Street and Second Street, a new building that primarily served courses for state workers. Now anybody else could go there, but here it sits in sight of the State Capitol, so now we got the courses, now we have the teachers, now we got the convenience. So yes, I believe we served a vital function for the **State!**

Pogue: Were there any unique summer programs that you were involved in out of state?

Poorman: Yes, I will start with Utah. Our good archeology/anthropology teacher had been a forest service employee along the line of getting his degrees and also working for forest service. So he engaged conversation with a forest service in Utah where they would provide housing during a summer session for students and, of course, students would pay the tuition because they're going to get the instruction, get the credits, get the teacher. So they did actual archeological digs where the forest service wanted to have some additional useful information about a particular place where they didn't know what they had. An archeological professor teaching students who were interested about archeology by doing it, so that's one, that's Utah.

Model United Nations, we became—this sounds so braggadocio, but we were pretty good, so I have to say that—Model UN is a preparation for learning about other countries and their problems and development. This all comes very much down to teachers who had the skill, and a man who knew a great deal about Model United Nations. Eventually we actually wound up

having a course about Model United Nations, but the students who came together would go to a national meeting and represent a country, and various colleges and universities would address those problems and issues for that country in competition—one college and university with another—and their aim was to be named an outstanding delegation. We did it almost every year, and I might add, beat a number of big ten schools. (laughter) It was a matter of great, deep interest on the part of students in other countries in having a teacher who had that same passion, but one of the reasons they won frequently was that they went to those countries. Cuba, for example: I think we were one of the first outside groups that had come to Cuba. In any event, they would go to for a short term in summertime to study that country and its problems first hand. Can you imagine a sophomore in college saying, “Man, I get to go to a country and actually know about it before I get to talk about it.” And so we went to Cuba, we went to Jordan, a number of places over the years. That’s out of state, out of country. What else? London, we went to London with people in law enforcement. We went to Spain for foreign language teaching, well, teaching in Spanish. I can think of others, but not at this moment. But the point was, if there was a vital topic and a great teacher and students’ interest, it didn’t have to be in our district. We were not putting aside our deep interest in our own district, we were adding to it, and we did it.

Pogue: Were there major issues as students’ rights became more of an issue with the Viet Nam War civil rights?

Poorman: No. It has to be a qualified “no” by saying, “Were people interested in such things?” I had come from a good community college in California where I was Dean of Students, so to say I was sensitive to students’ concerns about students’ rights, indeed. But as it happens, during those times, I guess you could say we held the bird lightly. We had to create what sometimes students would have considered “stuff just to annoy us.” We didn’t have a lot of rules; we had expectations that they are going to behave themselves while they are on campus. They know that, but they didn’t press that. Were they concerned about Viet Nam? My goodness, yes! We were still starting when Viet Nam people were coming back. So I am not quite sure; maybe it was the absence of what students would have considered their rightful ways. We didn’t have a lot of them. We had great expectations that they behave. They did.

Pogue: Were there any other major legislations that impacted you as a community college president? You talked about Title 9, and that with the state legislature, the chargeback. Were there any others?

Poorman: Yes, in the matter of contractual services for faculty. When we started community colleges, to my knowledge, the boards were not required to engage in collective bargaining. There was then a piece of legislation which required, if the request was there, to contract with those who were union members into collective bargaining for arriving at salary and benefits. That was a major change.

Pogue: As far as strategic plans, were there major objectives in those plans during your tenure at Lincoln Land?

Poorman: Yes, and the shortest answer—because I talk too much—the shortest answer is a matrix which I devised for teaching about leadership in higher education. If you would look to a standard textbook in community colleges, that's Lincoln Land. We really, I believe, became not in the depth that some have exceeded us, but a model community college in terms of our interests anyway. We didn't always achieve everything, but our interest in being a comprehensive community college. Where were we going in that? I was talking about the breadth of our offerings.

Pogue: Well, as far as this strategic plans and the matrix, what were types of things in that matrix?

Poorman: Okay, well, I'll just quote from one here. I used the matrices overseas later in teaching about higher ed. management in foreign places in a course that I called Fundamentals of University Management and Leadership, not just colleges, not just universities, but higher ed. generally. I talked with my overseas students about the environment in which colleges and universities find themselves. There are very different environments from one place to another in our country. The ways local people looked upon us have changed through the years. In any event, the environment.

The structure of community colleges: most of them fall into a fairly common structure of academic, student services, adult education, community service; so the structure was one of the things I talked about.

The curriculum: in curriculum areas, the liberal arts programs are pretty much spoken for in the four year colleges and universities. The aim of a community college for transfer students is to make that transfer a successful one. If you are good at the community college, you can do well at the university. So in liberal arts the curriculum was set primarily by what students would be taking for two years hence. In the technical areas, you look for things that were apparent, such as the nursing program. More than three major users of nurses were clamoring to have somebody provide more RN's. If we kept our ears to the ground—and that is the answer to it—we would say then to meet that need we have to find out what it takes to do that. I know a little bit of that because I had been at places that had nursing programs. Anyhow, curriculum in technical areas depended largely to where people were employed in the district. I don't know that we did many things where we did here, technical programs for jobs that people almost always had to go that were not far away. Our major attention was potential employment in the district. So that's liberal arts side and technical side.

Student aid. There's great attention to the money side for students and helping them to take advantage of the federal and scholarship programs is a major function.

Research: that one, remember I said this is fundamentals of university management and leadership; it means college and university. The research element that I taught there was primarily aimed at the university folks. If you want to say, well was the research about community college? Oh, heavens yes, that's what I did my doctorate in. Research happens even in the community college out here because a number of those folks have Ph.D.'s where the emphasis was upon their discipline. They didn't just chuck that aside willy-nilly. Some of them said, you know, I would like to continue that; I'd like to write a paper and maybe write a book one day. So research is still a major item in the universities; it is not a major item in the community colleges, except for truth when people wanted to do it.

Leadership: Well, here's where the Kellogg Program,⁵ from which I graduated in the 1960s, said, you know, there must be the discrete set of knowledge about community colleges that if people know about before they went out there to try to run them, they might run them better. So the Kellogg Program. Kellogg Company supported programs in, I think, 52 universities aimed at providing leadership disciplined background; I mean studies about higher ed. and community colleges among them before you went out to do it.

Other people were already in leadership positions because they had moved forward, often times from the high school districts and were superior teachers there or great business people there and moved to the community colleges as they were developed. So the leadership came partly from a new community college. We looked to either the universities which had the Kellogg Programs or other colleges or high schools which had good people who were interested in moving up. We did national advertising for gaining that leadership. We continued to go out there and hunt them down, as it were, and then invite them to campus at our expense and find out some of those leaders. They needed to have some of the same attributes that I talked about for the rest of the places. They needed to know what they were doing – the college side. They needed to care about students, passionately and they needed to be willingly to go out in the communities and provide services where they wanted. We go to such people.

On the financial side, we combined state money, local tax money, and on occasions, some grant funding, but that originally was not a major part of it. We looked to the state for 50% of operating monies; I don't think we ever did get that. Maybe my state friends will point to a year when it did happen.

⁵ During WWII, the Kellogg company supported programs for the U.S. government when "bright young men" were needed as military officers. This successful approach was extended in scope over time, as Poorman describes. He attended programs at Ohio Wesleyan U. and the University of West Virginia.

Pension funding: it's common knowledge now, that the State never did meet that obligation, but I digress to say that our presidents' group of the 52 colleges then were together, that I think were called the Illinois Council of Community College Presidents. We tried to put together a legislative wish list each year. The first one always was full funding. I don't think it ever happened, but we approached it, and we approached the 50% end some years. If I am wrong, somebody will correct me. Local taxes, as I said earlier, were vital to it, but we had a large assessed valuation – no substitute for assessed valuation. By openly and often, I told my friends that. We were so pleased with the folks out in that large district who continued to support us. That was vital to the financing of the college. Later on we got into some specific grant programs, but that's over and above the primary sources in state and local. Federal programs came primarily through student aid. Once in a while there was a federal program designed to do a specific item, like energy programs, but the state and federal money for students and the local tax money – very important to keeping us going.

External: Well, with that part, I was at some lengths to say to our friends overseas when I was teaching these courses that you had to look outward. Uh, I'm not sure that all of the universities overseas in the times that I was there were always looking outward to do service. I don't mean that as a slur at all. I think there were aggregations of such powerfully trained academic disciplines that they concentrated primarily in teaching about those disciplines and researching about those disciplines in the universities. I think if you went there now you would find out that maybe they always did, but now they do a lot more outside than they did originally.

Remarks: I've already made my remarks at length.

Pogue: As we kind of close our interview today as part of our oral history, how did Lincoln Land change over the 21 years that you were here?

Poorman: First of all, they changed in facilities site. We completed a permanent site. We added six centers, which I have already said were more of the doing of others than myself, because we moved from going into the district high schools in the evenings for courses to actual centers in six places where we were able to offer a wider variety of courses. I am not sure you could always, in every one of those six centers, complete a full 64-credit program for full degree-earning because you would have to provide the whole span that we had on campus, but they did a lot more in those six centers at trying to make a wider offering. That's a major change. I can't say yes to that one; in fact, I probably avoided that one for a while because of money.

Major change in, I guess, in acceptability. I think this is probably a national function. Before I came here I had been involved in other community colleges, and the 21 years here were at the end of 45 years. Community colleges struggled, for the junior college as they were always called then,

early on before I got here, struggled with an image problem. “You know, well you only go to community college or junior college when you can’t go anyplace else, blah, blah, blah.” I think that’s changed nationally, not just at Lincoln Land, although I think we have contributed to it, to the idea that, you know, if you want technical programs you can get them close to home and get a job early on. If you want a baccalaureate degree and you want to go away to school, which is very common and understandable, but you can take two years at home and with good instruction, number two in the case at Lincoln Land. Number two among the 52 community colleges in the state in how well they gain transfer grades after they transfer.

Well, that ought to bring some greater attention and it did when people said, “Well, it’s not just Poorman talking about how good we are going to be.” We’ve got an independent study not conducted by the college that our students transferred to other two year universities, and among the 52 community colleges that sent such people, we ranked number two in the grades that they earned. Well, that served us pretty well in having people say, “Well, maybe we were wrong about, you know, saying only the ones who can’t go anyplace else go there. They got good instruction there.” So, the image thing changed, I think, yes, dramatically, not just in the 20 years I was here but at least the 45 years I spent in the business.

Pogue: As our last question, how do you see what challenges are going to be facing community colleges over the next decade?

Poorman: Well, there are going to be people who will say, as they have for many years, “Well, why don’t you become a real college?” (Chuckled) Meaning, why don’t you add the other two years? I have been and will always be one who says, “No guys, we have a particular comprehensive mission that if we are true to our mission it’s going to be different.” And those who say, “Why don’t you just add two years?” somehow don’t have the message. Will that still be an issue? I think so. People will say, “Well gee, let’s let them move on. Let’s not go where we could get great instruction.” Their kids want to go away. Now I understand that entirely; they want to go away, it’s time for change, you know, fly the coop, have the experience away from home. I understand that, but so some of them press to have the four year experiences. Well, I have six kids, who five of them came to my place and went on to transfer education. I understand that, but the question will still be there. It’s been around for fifty years. I think it’s been mitigated, but some people will continue to say, “Well, gee, why don’t you become a real college?” That’s an issue that the good community colleges will continue to address.

Money, money, money: If you ask any president of any university, college, liberal arts college, small town, big town, east, west, wherever, first thing they will say is money. Either that or they are really blessed. If states continue to be strapped for money, and ours is one example, and if the federal money were to lessen in student aid, then the problem would be that we would

have to tap into local district resources more fully. I think that would create a **real** problem, 'cause local districts not only support community colleges, they support high schools, they support all of the things that show on your tax bill; while we like to think we are the most important item on that tax bill, we know we're not. People look at that tax bill and say, "ah, well, we paid 46 cents to Lincoln Land" or we paid whatever. If a further heavy attention were to come to the local districts, I think the community colleges would have to wonder whether they could do all the things they do now. I think they could be forced into being less comprehensive than they are. That would be a shame.

Pogue: Well, Dr. Poorman, I want to thank you for giving us your time that you covered, for your days at UCLA, and then the work at Phoenix and Bakersfield, to being here at Lincoln Land and still teaching courses after that.

Poorman: It's been my pleasure and the only thing I do now is to assist one of the Washington agencies that helps pick Fulbrighters; they go to the old timers and ask them, "Will you read these applications and think they are good?" They are all good because they are all good. Anyhow, it's been great. Thank you very much.

(end of interview)