

Interview with Dr. Richard ‘Dick’ Wagner

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Interviewer: Phil Pogue

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Pogue: This is Phil Pogue. We’re in the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield. It is November 13, 2013. Our topic is the history and the development of the Illinois Community College System. We have with us today Dick Wagner, who’s going to be talking about his experience with that development. We want to thank you for being present, taking part in our project here at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. At this time Dick, could you give us some background about yourself?

Wagner: Yes, thank you Phil. I grew up in Chenoa, Illinois, McLean County, attended public schools there, graduated in 1956. My father was a crane operator in a stone quarry. My mother was a housewife and involved in service occupations in Chenoa. Neither of them had completed high school. My mother was the oldest girl in a family of eleven and the fourth child. She was fifteen when her mother died, so she had additional responsibilities as a teenager. My dad grew up on a farm, and his help was needed in farming.



Dr. Richard “Dick” Wagner

Neither were able to complete high school, but they felt very strongly about education. There was, without any question, my sister Marilyn, two years older, and I were going to go to college.

I went to Bradley University in Peoria and earned my bachelor's degree there. [I] met my wife, Judy, who grew up in Knox County, Illinois, Knoxville. I went to the University of Pittsburgh and earned a master's in public administration at the Graduate School of Public International Affairs in 1961. [I] earned my Ph.D. in administration and public policy from the University of Pittsburgh in 1967.

While in Pittsburgh, I worked on the administrative staff at the University of Pittsburgh. Our two oldest children, Judd and our daughter Whitney, were born there. In '66 we went to the University of Maryland. I was on the administrative staff at the University of Maryland, '66 to '69, and while in Maryland, our twin boys Peter and John were born.

As both Judy and I were from Illinois, our parents were here, our families were here. We wanted to get back to the Midwest. We wanted to get back to Illinois—the values of the Midwest—to raise our family. When I was given the opportunity to join the staff of the Illinois Board of Higher Education in 1969, we were elated, and we came back to Illinois that spring.

Prior to joining the staff of the Illinois Board of Higher Education in July of that year, I had a tremendous educational experience working for six weeks in the Bureau of the Budget, under John McCarter, and in six weeks in the Illinois Senate on the staff of Senator Russell Arington.

You'll recall the spring of '69 was a very dynamic year in Illinois politics. Governor Richard Ogilvie proposed the income tax, which was in fact enacted that spring. I had the opportunity, as a very junior staff member, to be involved in the development of the budget, while working in the Bureau of the Budget, and in the disposition of the budget, while working with the members of the Illinois State Senate. [It was a] very educational experience for me and enriched my life significantly.

I then joined the staff of the Illinois Board of Higher Education in 1969. I was deputy director for Fiscal Affairs for some years, then I was deputy executive director of the staff. In 1980, I was appointed executive director of the Illinois Board of Higher Education, where I served for the next eighteen years, until I retired in 1998.

Since then, I've enjoyed our family, our eleven grandchildren—designated driver for our grandkids to and from school and other activities—and enjoy my time with colleagues that I worked with here in Springfield.

Pogue: What attracted you to work in a position with higher education?

Wagner: While I was a student at Bradley, I got involved in administrative work and worked with the president of Bradley, Harold Rhodes, at that time. I was very attracted to the work of higher education. Then, when I went to Pittsburgh at the Graduate School of Public International Affairs, my interest became more in terms of government. So I merged the two, higher education and government, and that led me to work with the Illinois Board of Higher Education, very, very satisfying career.

Pogue: When you came to the Board of Higher Education, had you had much involvement with community colleges or junior colleges, as they may be called?

Wagner: At that point, no. The history of the Illinois community college, of course, is very deeply associated with the history of the Illinois Board of Higher Education. In 1961, the Illinois General Assembly passed legislation. Governor Kerner signed the legislation to create the Illinois Board of Higher Education. It's [a] very interesting, rich history, and I would refer people to an oral history that is in the Sangamon State University—now the University of Illinois [U of I]—Oral History Library, the oral history of Richard Browne.

Richard Browne was deeply involved in State government in the '50s and headed up staff, a couple of higher education commissions appointed by Governor [William] Stratton—commissions that made recommendations for the creation of the Illinois Board of Higher Education—which was enacted into law in 1961. So I would encourage people to go to that oral history to get a richness of the history of the creation of the Board of Higher Education.

Basically, there was the mindset [shared by] part of the members of the General Assembly that there had to be a better way of making higher education educational policy than the traditional log rolling legislative process that had been used, a process dominated by the University of Illinois and its patron, Everett Peters, and by Southern Illinois University [SIU] and its patron, Paul Powell. There was the sense that there had to be a better way to make policy. Particularly as the demographics as the state were changing dramatically and enrollments were going to increase dramatically in the '60s, there was a thought that we need a new process. We needed a new agency to take leadership in developing master plans and the development of higher education systems.

That led to the creation of the Board of Higher Education. Governor [Otto] Kerner made excellent choices in selecting Ben Heineman as the first chairman of the Board of Higher Education. Richard Browne was the executive director, and they developed a very professional staff, headed up by Lyman Glenny, who was brought in from California to head up the professional staff of the Illinois Board of Higher Education. The board's responsibilities were master planning, policy development, budget

development, budget allocations, program approvals, and data information/data management.

It was master planning policy development to which the board first turned its attention. In developing Master Plan phase one, they recommended the development of the community college system to deal with the significant enrollment increase that the state was going to face, as well as in other studies. They recommended the establishment of two senior institutions, which became Sangamon State University and Governors State University. They recommended an expansion of the Illinois Student Assistance Commission and the need-based student financial aid programs of the Illinois Student Assistance Commission to enable students also to choose private colleges and universities to help address this enrollment expansion in the 1960s. So, it was from the Board of Higher Education planning process that the community college system was developed.

Now I should note, there was a great deal of dynamics in that process. The University of Illinois and SIU were much more interested in establishing regional campuses than enabling a new system of colleges to be established. It was the sense of Governor Kerner and the General Assembly that the community college system should be established, and it was from that that legislation was passed.

Now this all transpired before I got to Illinois, so I was not involved in that, but I am aware of that history, which is critical, I think, for the development of higher education in Illinois. Again, Governor Kerner appointed Frank Four to be chairman of the Community College Board, an excellent appointment, which has served the community college system well.

The community college board was established, and the process of forming districts was begun. I was not deeply involved in that. In many respects, it was a bottoms up process, as I can understand it. It was not a top down; the State did not draw boundaries for districts, but districts emerged from leadership at the local level.

A number of the districts that were formed emerged out of junior colleges that were already in existence. In Joliet, for example, I think, over in the Quad Cities area, those community college districts emerged from junior colleges that already existed that were part of the public school system. They became freestanding institutions. Over the next decade, districts were formed throughout the state, until there was only one major area of the state that was not in a district, the area Route 66 from Lincoln to Bloomington, up to Pontiac.

Then legislation was enacted, basically mandating that all areas of the state be involved. That was a process that required legislative action. It was an initiative that the Board of Higher Education supported, but the full credit

should go to the Community College Board and its staff and its then executive director, David Pearce, who took that strong leadership to accomplish that.

Pogue: When you arrived in 1969, had this idea of the regional process that the University of Illinois and Southern Illinois University had been promoting dissipated by that time?

Wagner: It had dissipated by that time. Basically, they put those proposals on the table in the mid-'60s. They were not supported by the Board of Higher Education, nor by the governor and General Assembly, so they were not pursued.

Basically, the U of I wanted to make the Navy Pier campus a strong educational institution, and it became such. It became the University of Illinois at Chicago. The Southern Illinois University wanted the Edwardsville area, East St. Louis, Edwardsville, Alton area, to have a campus, and the Edwardsville campus of Southern Illinois University was established. But that only took a part in a couple of geographical areas.

The U of I had proposals for other communities that, I'm told, were not accepted, because basically the mindset is Hey, we're going to develop this community college system that's going to be governed at the local level, freestanding institutions, supported by a local tax revenue, a tuition revenue and State grants; we will not go with the regional campuses as other states did, Indiana, Ohio. Their public institutions developed regional campuses to deal with the expanding enrollment of the '60s, whereas Illinois, under the leadership of the Board of Higher Education, created the community college system with freestanding community colleges that were locally governed and basically driven by local leadership.

Pogue: You indicated your involvement before Illinois was in Pennsylvania and Maryland. Were they in the process of looking at anything like this?

Wagner: Well, I was on the staff of universities, and my responsibilities were not related to these kinds of issues, and we had four young children, so I can't really say (laughs) what Pennsylvania and Maryland were doing. Although, I will say, that Illinois was truly out front in the development of the community college system.

California, its master plan recommended community colleges, they were in the process of being developed. But Illinois was really one of the first states that began to implement a comprehensive community college system in the '60s.

Pogue: You came into the Board of Higher Education four years after the Junior College Act of '65. What did you learn about that act when you came as part of a staff of the board?

Wagner: Well, we learned that this was a major initiative to deal with educational capacity in the state. The board was deeply involved in dealing with other capacity issues, if you'd like. For example, it was involved in a major study on health education, which led to the creation of the SIU School of Medicine and led to the expansion of nursing programs and allied health programs. The board would look to community colleges to address some of these educational needs, for example, in the allied health fields and the nursing fields, as it undertook its studies.

Basically, the development of the community college system, at that point, then was the responsibility of the Community College Board. The Board of Higher Education, it carried forward its involvement in terms of budget development and program approvals and data management relative to community colleges.

Community colleges, of course, were one of the systems of Illinois higher education that evolved in the '60s. The other systems were, of course, the University of Illinois, the Southern Illinois University system, the Board of Governors, which was the governing board for Chicago State [University], Governors State [University], Eastern Illinois University, and Western Illinois University and the Board of Regents, which was the governing board for Northern Illinois University, Illinois State University, and Sangamon State University. So, in essence, the board was responsible for coordinating the systems that were governing boards in Illinois higher education. At the same time, it was fostering the development of these really independent, autonomous, stand-alone institutions throughout the state, both public and private. So, our involvement was dealing with, as I said, the various planning initiatives.

One of the areas that we did become involved in in the mid-'70s, dealing with the community colleges, was in the area of finance. We established a blue-ribbon committee on community college finance in the mid-'70s because we were facing a horrendous disparity of resource allocations to community colleges. The Chicago city colleges, under the leadership of Oscar Shabut, had taken over the adult education functions in Chicago and brought horrendous numbers of students into the system.

At that time, the state reimbursement rate was one rate for all instruction of categories, and those programs were relatively inexpensive. But they brought tremendous numbers of enrollments, which generated tremendous resources for Chicago City College, at the expense of everyone else. So, one of the major activities we undertook was a blue-ribbon study committee on community college finance. We approached these studies by involving general citizens, people from the community college system, governing board members, presidents, and others to try to achieve consensus as to a fair policy to move forward that would benefit all community colleges in the state.

Some of the key players at that time were a board member by the name of Ray Brune that I want to talk about a little later, Hugh Hammerslag, who was then chairman of the Community College Board, Bill Brondor, who's a member of the Board of Higher Education, and Oscar Shabut, who was the chancellor of the Chicago city colleges, Jim Spencer, who was chancellor then of Illinois Eastern Colleges.

Another important person was a person I believe you already interviewed, a state senator at that time by the name of Terry Bruce; he's now the Chancellor of Illinois Eastern Community Colleges. He was a longtime player in community college policy development in the state. But that's an example of the Board of Higher Education using its policy development responsibilities to put together a study committee to try to deal with a very specific challenge facing higher education. The community college finance study committee was a case in point.

Pogue: The time you're talking about, in the late '60s, the early '70s, seems to be an exciting time for education. You've got the growth and doubling of the community colleges from about maybe eighteen existing ones to more than thirty-some that are moving through and developing buildings and programs and staffing issues. You've got your university expansion at the same time. How did all of that play in with State budgets and the role of State government and allocating resources between all of these groups that are now adding to the pot of education?

Wagner: Well, it was a dynamic period of time, and there was a lot of tension in the system, shall we say, because there were aspirations on the part of institutions and systems for resources, and the resources were limited, obviously. But one of the responsibilities of the Board of Higher Education, as I said, was budget development, to put together a coordinated budget for higher education. That included not only the public universities, community colleges, but it included also the private colleges and universities, because Illinois created a number of grant programs to provide support for private higher education.; it included student financial aid.

Illinois has a long tradition of providing strong support for need-based student financial aid and, in essence, the student financial aid system was yet another system, if you will, that the Board of Higher Education worked closely with in developing budget allocations. The system of systems that was created with the Board of Higher Education, as a coordinating board, and the community college board and all the community colleges, U of I with its campus in Champaign and its campus in Chicago and its medical colleges, SIU with its campus in Carbondale and its campus in Edwardsville and its new School of Medicine and dental medicine, the Board of Governors with the five institutions I referenced, the Board of Regents with the three institutions I referenced, the private colleges and universities.

The system that was designed, in essence, was not unlike what our founding fathers designed for our national government. It's a system of checks and balances. It's a system that had dynamic tension built into it and had mechanisms for conflict resolution to deal with the tension that was in the system because all these institutions had very justifiable requests and aspirations, and someone had to say "no." The governor and General Assembly basically looked to the Board of Higher Education to coordinate the development of the system, to steer the development of the system, and to make some tough decisions relative to budgets and programs.

I think it worked well for a whole host of reasons. One, it worked well because of outstanding appointments made by the governors to the boards. Governors Kerner, [Richard] Ogilvie, [Dan] Walker, [James] Thompson, [James] Edgar—the governors I worked with—all made strong public service appointments to the boards. And these boards developed very competent professional staffs to aide them and these staffs, I'd like to think, worked very hard on process and very hard on building trust.

If you have you have process and trust, you can solve a lot of problems. The board leadership—I mentioned Ray Brune earlier—Ray Brune, was the founding chairman of the Blackhawk Community College Board. He was an executive with John Deere; he was the founding chairman of that (Blackhawk) board. Governor Ogilvie then appointed him to be chair of the community college board, where he served for a number of years. Governor Thompson then appointed him to be a member of the Board of Higher Education, where he served for eighteen years. Here was a distinguished public servant who had experience at a local board, a statewide board, then the Board of Higher Education.

He brought tremendous leadership in his service to the state. He had a passion for the non-traditional student, which was a student that the community colleges served greatly. Also, on his tenure on the Board of Higher Education, he would constantly challenge us to look at the non-traditional student. So, I think the key to making all this work was the system design, as well as the leadership of board members and the professional staff that were developed. People on the community college board staff...I mentioned David Pearce earlier, Ivan Lach, Virginia McMillan, Sarah Hawker, just superb professionals, graduate degrees, deeply committed to public service.

The Board of Higher Education people worked on community college issues, Bill Kelly, Bernie Warren, Paul Lingenfelter, Catherine Kelly, the same thing. All of them had earned doctorates. All of them had years of service in public education, deeply committed to developing good public policy. And I think that all aided in the development of working through some really tough challenges, fiscally and programmatically, but enabling the state to develop a really premier system of higher education.

Pogue: Did you find that the Junior College Act, which originally was passed in '65, provided a good road map for the formation of the community colleges? How did it get rewritten?

Wagner: Well, I can't say anything other than yes it did, although I can't talk to the specifics of it. It enabled the community college system to develop in a way that I think was appropriate, from sort of from the bottom up, with local leadership, up to the point where there was a little road block in along Route 66, based on Farm Bureau's strong concern about the heavy reliance on property tax to form a community college. I'll give Senator John Maitland, who carried the water for the Farm Bureau, much credit for becoming a statesman and allowing David Pearce and his colleagues to enact legislation mandating that all that area in the state create the Heartland Community College District, which is just a magnificent community college district today.

That's part of the dynamics of the decision process. That's part of the beauty of how this system of higher education in Illinois grew, in terms of the sort of the dynamic tension in the system at times, the checks and balances. People were focused; they wanted to develop a strong system of higher education, and they did in my judgement.

Pogue: You talked about the challenges of the financing with the adult education count and the imbalance then between Chicago and the rest of the state. Were there any other issues that hit the Board of Higher Education because of the differences between Chicago and the rest of the state of Illinois?

Wagner: Well, not as dramatically as that one did. And most of those issues, I'm sure, were addressed at the community college board level. Basically, once that finance issue was addressed, we moved on beyond sort of capacity building issues that dominated the '600s and the and into the '80s. We moved more to public policy issues, issues like affordability in higher education, undergraduate education, transfer and articulation.

When you have a system as we have, where students can enter community colleges, public universities, private colleges and universities, and there's a lot of swirl within the system and a lot of student movement within the system, transfer and articulation issues become very, very important. The Board of Higher Education, working with all the systems, again, would take leadership on undergraduate education. Remedial education's always been a big topic relative to the adequate preparation of students coming out of high school for college level work and remedial education. Those were the types of issues that we would try to address through policy study committees in the '80s and the '90s, work force preparation, big issues relative to how can we aid and facilitate the development of educated manpower to deal with workforce issues, not only at the community colleges but at the university level, too.

Then, [there's] always the question of the wise use of public resources. We undertook an initiative in the 1990s called PQP, Priorities, Quality, Productivity of higher education, which was a major initiative to deal with the cost effectiveness of higher education and the wise use of resources, working on the premise of less with more, recognizing the most important resources we had are not the incremental resources we get each year, the 3 or 4 or 5 percent—in good years—as we did in the '60s, '70s, '80s, and '90s, but the base budget of the institutions and how can we effectively use those resources to advance the mission of the institution?

So, we undertook a major initiative, priorities, quality, productivity, and the community colleges were deeply involved in it, as were the public universities and as were the private colleges and universities. This was an example of how the steering mission of the Board of Higher Education evolved from one dealing with capacity issues, where the community colleges basically were created to help address the areas of program enrichment and program achievement. That was an important development, I think, in higher education in the '80s and '90s.

Pogue: Taking a look at the program development that you talked about, the community colleges became the forerunners for the associate degree and the training for such nursing and other technical areas. Was there any challenge to the Board of Higher Education, because some of these had been in the domain of the four-year institutions?

Wagner: Well, I know. In fact, the Board of Higher Education encouraged the development and deeply involved the community colleges in the development of these kinds of programs through our planning initiatives. There was always competition in the systems, the nature of the beast. (laughs) You have institutions who have aspirations and want to play important leadership roles, so there was always sort of this dynamic tension I talked about.

But again, there was fairly clear understanding, programmatically, of what programs at what level of instruction the various sectors would provide. You take the allied health professions, including nursing; there is an important role for the community colleges. Yeah, there might be some noise, but that goes with the territory. (laughs) And part of the role of the Board of Higher Education was to build a process to try to enhance the trust among the sectors so that they could work cooperatively and move forward the delivery of educational opportunities for Illinois citizens.

Pogue: Could you explain a little bit about the working relationship between the Community College Board and the Board of Higher Education when you were in your role as executive director?

Wagner: Well, they were primarily responsible for the development of the community college system in the sense of they dealt with the creation of new districts and

the program approvals. The statute required that our board approve new units of instruction, which we did. The working relationship was generally, again, very positive because of the quality of people they had on their staff and their commitment to high quality work.

We worked closely together in trying to build a strong system of higher education in the state and to address the policy issues that were out there. The affordability of higher education, a major issue that all sectors have to deal with in some way, all sectors had to deal with that issue. Undergraduate education issues, transfer articulation, remedial education, you would find community colleges working with four-year institutions on remedial education issues, and on lower division instruction issues. Often this was done, as it quite appropriately should be, at the campus level.

For example, Parkland Community College, over at Champaign-Urbana, and the University of Illinois would work out relationships where lower division math courses would not be given for students at the University of Illinois, [but] would be given on the Parkland campus, and you had joint programs developed in that respect. Much of this was done at the local level. We at the Board of Higher Education would try to help facilitate regional cooperation, provided funds to establish regional consortia to enable campuses in an area to work together to provide services to reduce duplication to better serve the public. It was interesting.

Last week I saw there was a conference up at Governors State, sponsored by the South Suburban Regional Education Commission, which was one of the commissions we established twenty years ago, which is still functioning to facilitate cooperation among Governors State and four private colleges, five community colleges, two proprietary institutions to say, Hey, how can we better serve the citizens of this area? That was another way that we tried to build processes to develop cooperation among the sectors.

Pogue: What seemed to be the biggest conflicts between the Board of Higher Education and perhaps the community college board? Were there any?

Wagner: I know there were conflicts. I think in the mid-‘60s...I’m sorry, in the mid-‘90s, the community college sector wanted more, basically to be seen as a stand-alone system, not necessarily part of the higher education community. They aggressively moved legislation to basically take themselves out from underneath the Board of Higher Education. That legislation passed easily in the General Assembly.

The community colleges obviously are—as Tip O’Neill said, “All politics are local,”—they’re local institutions, and they’re very, very, good in terms of serving their local communities. They have very good, positive relationships with the members of the General Assembly, and that legislation passed easily in the General Assembly. But Governor Edgar vetoed it,

basically saying, “Hey, look, you are part of the higher education system; it served you well. The Board of Higher Education created you. Come on; let’s continue on and move forward.” That was one example and probably the most significant example. It was driven by some presidents who felt very strongly about the issue.

But all-in-all, I’d say, over the history of the community colleges—established in 1965 and will be celebrating their, what...fiftieth, fortieth, fiftieth anniversary this year next year—the working relationships have been very good. I think—and let me talk a little bit about this—I think what we tried hard to do is to say, Hey, we’ve designed a system in Illinois to serve the citizens of Illinois, and the key questions are performance. How well are we performing? How well is the system of higher education servicing the citizens of Illinois?

Fortunately, the National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education, in 1998, was established to assess the performance, state performance, in higher education. They produced, over a ten-year period, documents every two years, *Measuring Up*.¹ It evaluated how well a state is providing services to its citizens in the areas of preparation, participation, affordability, completion, and benefits. Let’s not talk about institutions; let’s talk about public policy and service to students and citizens, and let’s talk about preparation, participation, affordability, completion, and benefits.

What they did, they developed a series of matrices in each of these areas and graded states’ performances. They gave a grade in each of those areas, and Illinois—Illinois was ranked in the year 2000, based on 1998 data—Illinois was ranked first among all states in those categories, followed by Connecticut, New Jersey, Maryland, and Massachusetts. Illinois was ranked first in *Measuring Up* in those categories.

Illinois earned an A in preparation, an “A” in participation, an “A” in affordability, a “C+” in completion, and “B-“ in benefits. That ranked Illinois first among the states. I am sorry to say that the last report, issued in 2008, based on data from year 2006, Illinois had a “B” in preparation, down from an “A”; they had a “C” in participation, down from an “A”; they had a “F” in affordability, down from an “A”. The good news was completion increased from a “C+” to a “B+”, and benefits remained at a “B”. So, I think that the system,—the systems that were created—the community colleges that were created, the universities, the private colleges and universities, the student financial aid system, basically served Illinois well in those years. There’s been some deterioration in the past decade, but I’m hopeful...I’m confident that,

¹ *Measuring Up* is a report that evaluates the progress of the nation and all 50 states in providing Americans with education and training beyond high school through the bachelor’s degree. (<https://www.crpe.org/publications/measuring-educational-improvement-and-opportunity-50-cities>)

through important leadership appointments, the state and the institutions can regain the stature that they had achieved back in the year 2000.

Pogue: As I was going around to some of the community colleges, such as the College of Lake County, I saw buildings that were designed so students would be able to attend there to finish their third and fourth years. Was that activity going on when you were—

Wagner: That was an initiative of the Board of Higher Education during my tenure. Basically, we were looking for ways to provide degree completion opportunities for community college systems. The Lake County initiative was such an effort. It was begun in the mid-'90s. The building was constructed after I retired, but I like to think that we put the planning process in place. And it's a point of policy development, recognizing the need for degree completion opportunities. It was sort of modeled after a center over in the quad-cities area, Quad-Cities Graduate Studies Center.

Rather than build a new, free-standing institution, let's bring together a series of institutions who had programs they want to offer off-campus. I think there may be thirteen to fifteen institutions up there now, public and private, that are all for degree completion programs, as a way of providing the completion of educational opportunities for students.

Pogue: How difficult was it for the articulation agreements to get finalized?

Wagner: It's an unending process. Faculty believe this is their domain, and faculty are, with all due respect, slow to cooperate and articulate. We worked hard on this; we worked hard on this for many years.

Now, the good news is that there's some data from the National Student Clearinghouse that all this swirl in Illinois higher education (laughs) has led to some pretty impressive completion rates. In fact, the one area of Measuring Up where Illinois in previous performance was in completion. I give a lot of credit to the transfer and articulation initiatives and agreements that had been developed, but it's tough. It's a tough business, and people have worked long and hard on those issues. I'd like to think we took some leadership, but that's an area where faculty really get deeply involved in working out the agreements, and there's a lot of turf protection among faculty members.

Pogue: When I interviewed some of the community college folks, I sometimes say that they have to be very nimble. They can't be like a big luxury liner, because they have to make some quick adjustments for workforce training and the needs to create new programs, due to job training requirements that develop. As far as course offerings and all that the community colleges need to approve, what was the role of the Board of Higher Education during that time period?

Wagner: Well again, the way the system's designed, those were divisions made at the local community college system. I like your description, they had to be nimble. I think that's been a strength of this community college system and the system that's in place, in that it's locally controlled, and it's locally driven. In those cases where you have a strong board and a strong president and strong professional staff, you see it.

We saw it in PQP. PQP was a process that basically the chairman of the Board of Higher Education, then Art Quern, used it as a bully pulpit. But if change was going to be made, it had to be made at the local level. It had to be made by the individual community college or the individual university. And the performance varies dramatically across the state.

We had a couple of university presidents that fought us tooth and toe nail, fought us every step of the way, and really didn't accomplish all that much. But, we had other university presidents that said, Hey, we can use this process. We can eliminate some programs; we can restructure some programs; we can strengthen our institution. The same thing [happened], in terms of the community colleges. Again, the system was designed so that many of these programmatic decisions are made at the local level, as they should be. Where there's been strong leadership, there's been very effective education offered.

Pogue: You talked about the private schools. When we talked about Carl Sandburg, Knox, and Monmouth Colleges, you were very supportive of Carl Sandburg, which had a very difficult time itself getting started, because of referendum defeats. How did the community colleges view of the four-year private schools during the time you were at the Board of Higher Education?

Wagner: Well, it varied from school to school, I'm sure. But we worked hard on public/private cooperation. We had a public/private leadership group, composed of presidents from all sectors, and we would sit down and talk long and hard about these issues. It varied from state to state. I mean that John Wood [Community College] and Quincy [College] worked very well for a while; then there were some problems. Greenville, you were talking earlier on, worked very well, and then there were some problems. It varied from area to area of the state.

What we tried to do was to facilitate cooperation and tried to deal with policy issues that cut across sectors, so that everyone had a stake in the issue resolution. In some areas, like I talked about the South Suburban [Regional Education Commission], that consortium is still functioning. I'd like to think that the record that Illinois has achieved, in terms of graduation rates and program completion rates, is testimony to the fact that, Hey, this can be done. It's a big system; it's a complex system. There's what? Forty-nine community college campuses, thirty-nine districts, is that right?

Pogue: It's right about that level.

Wagner: About that level. There are eleven public university campuses, 125 degree granting private college and university campuses, and then the proprietary institutions and a number of degree granting institutions. So there's a lot of players in the game. It's a system that promotes choice. It says to students, Hey, you got all kind of opportunities out here; you can go to any kind of institution you want to go to, in a sense.

The fact that there's this tremendous amount of swirl among institutions on the part of students and to achieve the graduation rates and degree completion rates that we have, I think it's a testimony to the leadership and the people working in the systems. Can it be better? Of course, and people are working on it to make it better. But it's a system that's worked well. It's served the citizens of Illinois well, in my judgement.

Pogue: You talked about the conflict, during Governor Edgar's tenure, that came from the community colleges wanting to be more independent. Are there any other big issues that were kind of conflicts with the Board of Higher Education in the community college system?

Wagner: Not many that I recall. The universities had the same desire...Part of the reason the community colleges pursued the course they did was that the governor had a task force that proposed the breaking up of the Board of Regents and the Board of Governors and giving the public universities and those systems—Northern, Illinois State, Sangamon State, Eastern, Western, Chicago State, Governors State, Northeastern Illinois—their own separate governing boards. That legislation was enacted into law.

The presidents of those institutions said, Hey, we don't have to deal with these governing boards anymore; we have our own governing board. I think the community colleges said, Hey, if we get our independence, we don't have to deal with the Board of Higher Education anymore. The governor vetoed that legislation, and it was not pursued.

The structure is important, but it's not the major issue, I don't think. The leadership is the major issue. Fortunately, Illinois has been well served at the state level and at the institutional level, at governing board levels, with strong leadership. That's served the state and institutions well and the citizens well.

Pogue: Were you involved at all in the formation of the East St. Louis Consortium, or is this strictly community college?

Wagner: There've been two or three consortiums down there. (laughs) I was involved in one. But I think the most recent one was after my tenure. That's been a real challenge, that district. We tried to do a couple of different things. It was a real challenge. I think SIU Edwardsville is playing a much more major role now, if I recall correctly. There have been some changes made since I retired

in 1998, and I haven't really kept up with them...been chasing grandkids. But that East St. Louis, that was one of the challenges.

Pogue: You talked about being involved from '69 to the period of what, 1998?

Wagner: Yes.

Pogue: How was the view of the Board of Higher Education towards the community college? Did it evolve? Because in some of the interviews, we heard the early terms "Plywood Tech," "Upper-Grade Vocational Center." On the other hand, we heard about the "Miracle of Main Street" with the community college and its role in the community, the "People's College," the "Citizen's College." Did the community college movement gradually develop its own prestige because it was a birth from the high school, and it was kind of unknown when it was formed through the Junior College Act?

Wagner: Well, I think that...Gosh, I always looked at it as a major player in higher education, post-secondary education. Now it is true I talked about the fact that it developed from the bottom up. There is no question about it, that many of the people came out of secondary education. So I'm not surprised that you're hearing some of those comments in your interviews with people at the local level. It just speaks probably to the...

It was not a system that was imposed from on top and said, You're all going to be the same. It had baccalaureate transfer programs; it had occupational programs; it moved into adult education over the years, because adult education had been a big part of secondary education, and there were adult education districts throughout the state. That was sort of a dynamic process in and of itself that the Community College Board took strong leadership on and tried a couple of times to fold in all of those centers into community colleges but were unsuccessful in getting legislation passed. They finally did after I retired, although when Ted Sanders was state superintendent in the late '80s, we made an effort to accomplish that.

I'm sure, at the local level, there are a lot of different perspectives, depending on who you talk to. Again, I think, probably over time, these differences and how the individual districts came about were sort of addressed. Trustees were involved in the [School] Trustees Association, presidents were involved in the presidents' association. They all sort of got together at the Community College Board. Then they would be involved in the Board of Higher Education planning activities, dealing with various policy issues. I think, over time, there was maybe more of a homogenization. At the same time, there was a distinctiveness of the districts, I think. And that's one of the strengths of the community college system.

Pogue: When you think back to your tenure at higher education, what are you most proud of?

Wagner: Well, I'm proud of the performances, the performance record that we achieved. I'm proud of the diversity of institutions. I'm proud of the fact that our state provides significant educational opportunity. I'm proud that there's a great choice among institutions. But I'm most proud of the performance that we achieved.

I had four kids in college at one time, and affordability was really a big issue for me. (laughs) I'm proud that we earned an "A" in affordability and led the nation in affordability, back in 1998. I think that's... Probably the system was student focused. And I'm proud that we were able to work together and provide a high quality education at post-secondary level for the citizens of Illinois.

Pogue: As for the master plans that you talked about, how important were those for the development of the community college system?

Wagner: Well, they're critically important because Master Plan phase one created the community college system. If it'd been left to the University of Illinois and SIU, there would not be a community college system. Well, if it'd been left to the University of Illinois and SIU, there wouldn't have been a Board of Higher Education either, because they, in essence, were the big players and controlling the agenda in higher education; the regional public universities were just sort of an afterthought.

That's where I said that Governor Stratton and members of the General Assembly said, Hey, there's got to be a better way to do this. Richard Browne and his work with the commissions that I referenced, took strong leadership and recommended the creation of the Board of Higher Education, and it all flowed from that. So, the master planning process was critically important to the community college system.

The planning process and the blue-ribbon commission that I referenced on finance, it was important in keeping the system together and to solving within the system major policy issues. Those processes were critically important to the community college, to the development of the community colleges.

Pogue: As we kind of conclude our interview today, let me ask, since you've retired, what challenges do you see community colleges facing, and what might be the ones that are going to be the newest challenges during the next decade?

Wagner: Well, I really have to take a walk on that, because I haven't thought that much about higher education policies since I retired. (laughs) I think performance is critically important, as I've said, and I think affordability is a major issue for higher education. I'd like to see the community colleges. In many respects, they're the most affordable system now, and they're playing... They're addressing that issue, but I think that they need to deal with that. Program

completion is critically important; the remedial education issues are critically important. The issues, in many respects, haven't changed. We just need to continue leadership and commitment to deal with issues. I'm hopeful that will be the case.

Pogue: Well, I want to thank you for giving us an in-depth look at your experiences with the community colleges through the Board of Higher Education. Is there any other area that we haven't covered that you'd like to pass on?

Wagner: Well, let me conclude by saying this; in the history of the United States there have been three major higher education initiatives. The first was the Morrill Act, which President Lincoln signed in 1862, which established the Land-Grant Universities, including the University of Illinois.

The second major initiative was the G. I. Bill, passed at the conclusion of World War II, which provided tremendous financial investment in our veterans and made a tremendous difference in the development of the United States. The third major initiative is the establishment of community colleges. And Illinois, in my judgement, has the premier system of community colleges in the nation. And I was proud to play a small role in the development of that—but that is the third major initiative, higher education in the United States.

Pogue: Well, Dr. Wagner, I want to thank you very much for sharing your input on that exciting period from the 1960s up through the 1990s.

Wagner: Thank you.

(end of interview)