

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Robert Podlasek

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Education is Key – Higher Education Oral History project

Interview # EH-A-L-2021-010

Dr. Robert (Bob) Podlasek, who taught Mechanical Engineering at Bradley University while also serving half time as Assistant Dean, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Education is Key – Higher Education* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Dates: Apr 15, 22 & May 4, 2021 Location: Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library,
Springfield, Illinois

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue, Director of Oral History, ALPL

Transcription by: Audio Transcription Center, Boston, MA

Edited by: Robert Podlasek and Mark DePue

Total Pages: 113 pgs. Total Time: 2:14 + 2:08 + 1:58 / 2.23 + 2.13 + 1.97 = 6.33 hrs.

Session 1: Early life, college education at the University of Illinois during 1960s-70s

Session 2: Ten year Working career and 36-year Academic career at Bradley U.

Session 3: Trends in higher education & impact of COVID-19 at Bradley University

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on September 28, 2021.

The interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

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Abstract

Robert Podlasek, *Education is Key-Higher Ed*, EH-A-L -2021-010

Biographical Information/Overview of Interview: Robert (Bob) Podlasek was born in Chicago, Illinois in August 1942 and spent the next several years growing up in the Bridgeport neighborhood on the city's south side. The family moved to the suburb of Willow Springs when Bob was twelve and began hitchhiking to learn about people. He attended Catholic schools and got a job as a golf caddie at age twelve, which led to him receiving a prestigious Evans Scholarship for caddies. He graduated from Joliet Catholic High School in 1960 and attended the University of Illinois, where he majored in mechanical engineering and economics simultaneously. He received his bachelor's degrees in 1966 (taking time off to travel throughout Europe and in the U.S.) and continued on with his education, earning a master's degree in 1968 and a Ph.D. in 1972.

Bob talked at length about life and culture at the University of Illinois during the 1960s and early 1972. Following his college years, he worked for Battelle in Columbus, Ohio, where he worked on midstream oil and gas projects. He moved to Springfield in 1975, where he worked at the Illinois Commerce Commission and for Northwest Alaska in Salt Lake City. In 1982 Dr. Podlasek began his University career, teaching engineering courses at Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois. He spent the next four decades at Bradley, splitting his time between his teaching duties and serving as the Assistant Dean for the Engineering College, which gave him the opportunity to interface with the rest of the academic departments and other universities. Bob discussed life at the University in the 1980s, comparing it with the academic world he had experienced during the 1960s and early 1970s. He then discussed the culture at Universities, in particular Bradley University, in contemporary American society. He addressed the decline in college readiness of incoming freshmen, the increasing financial challenges for both students and universities, and the impact of changing social trends in college campuses that have accelerated in recent years.

Subject Headings/Key Words: Bradley University; life at the University of Illinois in the mid to late 1960s; trends in academia, circa 2018-21; tenure track academic process; Bridgeport neighborhood of Chicago; Willow Springs, Illinois; Evans Scholar caddie scholarships; Kennedy Space Center; Walt Disney Company; midstream oil and gas projects;

Notes to the Reader: Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

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