

## Interview with Don Sevener

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Interview 1, October 9, 2013

Interviewer: Phil Pogue

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Pogue: This is Phil Pogue. We're in the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. It's October 9, 2013. The project that we're talking about today is the history and the development of the Illinois Community College System. We have with us Don Sevener who's going to be giving us some information, gained through his own work with the higher education group that supervised the community college, as well as his own research on that particular topic. Don, I want to thank you very much for being a participant in our project. To begin with, could you give us some family and educational information about yourself?

Sevener: I grew up in Flint, Michigan. I went to the public schools for elementary and high school, went to the University of Michigan, where I graduated with a degree in English in 1969. Then [I] went to Michigan State University, where I graduated in 1973 with a master's degree in journalism.

After working in journalism in Battle Creek, Michigan, [I] came to Illinois late in 1978 to work for a group of newspapers based in Decatur. It was called the *Lindsay-Schaub Newspapers*. Soon after that, the organization was sold to another newspaper



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group, entitled Lee Enterprises, which was based in Davenport, Iowa, in the Quad Cities area. I worked with that newspaper group for five or six years as a statehouse reporter in a bureau that contained three reporters covering state government for five newspapers that were members of that Lee Enterprises group.

I've also been a reporter and editor at the *Illinois Times* newspaper. It's an alternative weekly newspaper in Springfield, Illinois. [I] did a lot of freelance writing and adjunct teaching, predominantly at community colleges and private institutions, before I, in 1997, joined the Illinois Board of Higher Education as its communications director and later retired in 2011, as a deputy director for external affairs.

Pogue: When you were at the statehouse, was the topic of community colleges ever on the radar?

Sevener: Yes, it was. During those years, which really spanned between about 1980 and about maybe 1995, with my direct attention to issues of education and higher education in Illinois, community colleges were certainly a part of the whole mix of higher education issues that came before the General Assembly and came before the Illinois Board of Higher Education.

My responsibilities as a reporter throughout those years was much more diverse than simply higher education, but I did pay some attention to it. As I recall, during that time many of the issues, of course, dealt with funding of higher education and the split of dollars between the universities and the community colleges. The community colleges, in my recollection, often felt that they were short-changed in the assessment or dispersal of state dollars, that the universities got more than their fair share.

But there also was a symbiosis between the two sectors. The Board of Higher Education attempted in many cases to bridge the gap between the community colleges and the public universities, even though there is and has been a separate board, the Illinois Community College Board, that more directly oversaw the operations and budgeting for the community colleges themselves. I think the Board of Higher Education attempted to take a more holistic view that concentrated, not just on the strengths of the community colleges themselves, but the way that the system could operate together as one system.

Those are my experiences during the early days of **my** attention to matters of higher education and the community colleges in particular.

Pogue: Were there any legislative leaders or key players for community colleges that you saw at that time, as a reporter?

Sevener: Well, none in particular comes to mind. But you have to keep in mind that every legislator has a community college in his or her district, so they all

attempt to satisfy their constituencies, and the community colleges often are a big part of that. Only, you know, maybe two or three dozen legislators have a real strong connection to public universities in Illinois, but everybody has a strong connection to their local community college and, by extension, the system as a whole.

I think the community colleges tend to see their local legislative delegation as very helpful advocates, not only for their own college—that's the main goal, both for the college administration and trustees—but also for the local legislators. But to the extent that there are statewide issues that affect each college, I think the community colleges look to their local delegation to advocate for their particular interests, as bills move through the General Assembly.

Pogue: You talked about doing some teaching yourself at community colleges. What did that entail?

Sevener: I taught for a number of years, taught the introductory and advanced composition courses for Lincoln Land Community College [Springfield, IL], on an adjunct basis. I also taught similar courses for MacMurray College [Jacksonville, IL], both on its campus and in a program that MacMurray offered at state penitentiaries, teaching writing; I also taught some journalism course work. I taught at the University of Illinois [U of I] at Springfield, [formerly] Sangamon State [University], before the changeover was made, where I taught media law and some interviewing and communications courses. So, it was a really broad sampling of public, private, and community college experience but always on an adjunct basis.

Pogue: Did you see differences in the community college students, compared to the other ones that you were teaching?

Sevener: That's a very good question, and the answer is yes. For the most part, I found that the community colleges had much greater diversity in its student enrollments and a greater commitment, generally speaking, among the students to their educational goals.

Part of the diversity that really speaks to, I guess, the underlying value of the community college in the whole scheme of education and higher education in Illinois. You would often have students right out of high school, freshmen; this was their first higher education experience. In many cases, they were not very settled in their educational or career goals. They, in some cases, really didn't necessarily want to be where they were. They were maybe looking to transfer to a university after establishing some educational credentials at the community college.

You would have many, many students who were adults. These were evening classes, for the most part, that I taught. You'd have a greater sampling

of adult students in the evening, but there was still a wide mix of students of all ages, backgrounds and aspirations. The adult students often were settled in their educational goals. They either had or were returning to college for degree completion or to upgrade some skills and credentials for advancement in their careers or were looking to begin a college career after their own children had been through college and left home, and they had time to look into and pursue their own educational aspirations. They were very committed. The adult students were very committed and very dedicated to the success of their educational experience.

I recall one semester that I taught at Lincoln Land Community College. The tenured faculty, the full-time faculty, on campus were considering going on strike, and it went right down to the wire as to whether that would occur or not. My class, as I recall, met one night a week, so we met just before the strike was to occur. I told students that, even though I didn't relish crossing a picket line, my authority and... my charge was to provide the education they were paying for and that the class would meet the next week, even if the school was on strike, if the administration had the school open. The students were expecting to be in class. They did not want to miss a class because the tenured faculty were on strike.

It turned out the strike did not occur, or maybe it occurred and was settled within a couple of days. At any rate, we didn't have to miss any classes nor did we have to worry about the effects of the strike. But the point was that these students were so dedicated that they wanted the class to meet, no matter what other things were going on, on campus. My teaching experience was that these students were much committed to their education than some of those that I ran into, both at the private and at the public institutions where I taught.

Pogue: Did you feel that, as an adjunct, that you were given enough information from Lincoln Land to do the job that you needed to do for that class?

Sevener: I did. I did. There were meetings of the regular departmental faculty, both before and during the semester, some professional development opportunities. And there were offices supplied to the adjunct faculty if they wanted to meet with students. And we met with the departmental chair to ensure that we were committed to and carrying out the educational goals of the department and doing so in a way that met with the requirements of the course. So, I felt that we had adequate preparation and information to conduct the classes.

Pogue: What led you to go on the Board of Higher Education?

Sevener: I had become acquainted with the executive director of the Board of Higher Education at the time—his name was Richard Wagner—during the years in which I served as a reporter in the Springfield state house, and we enjoyed a mutual respect. So when I had left the editorship of the *Illinois Times* newspaper and went to work on a part-time basis for *Illinois Issues*

magazine—which was published at the time by Sangamon State University—and did several adjunct teaching assignments, I was approached by Dick Wagner to see if I would be interested in doing some part-time work on a contractual basis for him and the Board of Higher Education in writing and communications efforts. I agreed. That was in 1995, 1996.

I think it was in ninety-seven or ninety-eight that Dick Wagner retired from the Board of Higher Education and was replaced by Dr. Keith Sanders, who wanted a full-time communications assistant. He offered me the position. I took it and then stayed there through a variety of executive directors and positions of responsibility at the board.

Pogue: What were your main duties?

Sevener: As communications director, I would work with the news media; I would handle the board's publications, work internally with various staff members and departments to attempt to produce prose that would be understandable to a general audience, not just to an academic audience. That was my primary responsibility initially.

Then, as the years went on and my role evolved, I was also responsible for legislative and external relations matters. I was the chief lobbyist, I guess you'd say, for the Board of Higher Education and its legislative agenda, but also dealt with many external constituencies, including other state agencies, the Office of the Governor, colleges and universities themselves, labor union representatives, and so on.

Pogue: During the time you were there, what were some of the major issues facing four-year institutions?

Sevener: Predominantly funding. Those were years in which it was late in the [Governor James] Edgar administration and through the [Governor George Ryan] administration, when State dollars were much more available to the colleges and universities. Governor Edgar, and then later Governor Ryan, were very willing to meet the requests of higher education institutions for increased funding.

The primary issue that related to funding for the universities was faculty salaries. They wanted to—particularly the University of Illinois, but this was an issue for all of them—to increase faculty salaries to be competitive with their peers **nationally** because all the public universities vied for qualified faculty throughout the nation. They wanted to make sure that salaries and compensation issues were not a barrier to luring some of the top faculty to their campuses. Those were, as I recall, some of the major issues for the four-year institutions.

I think funding equity among the community colleges was always an issue there. Then I think, beginning about then and certainly continuing even

on to today, a major challenge for the institutions was accountability. Even as legislators voted to increase budgets for colleges and universities, they were becoming increasingly vocal in wanting to ensure that the institutions were accountable for the expenditure of those funds.

There was a particular state senator, Rauschenberger, who was chair of the Appropriations Committee for a number of years. Steve Rauschenberger was his name.<sup>1</sup> Many of the institutional representatives and many of the state agency executives loathed to appear before Senator Rauschenberger's committee because they knew they were in store for some very hard questioning—in some cases difficult questions for them to answer—primarily related to their accountability in the expenditure of State dollars.

For example, Rauschenberger would often question the issue of tenure and why college professors should be tenured. He would question the workload of the faculty and challenge the institutions to explain why a professor might teach only two sections of a course in a given semester or four or six sections in a whole academic year.

Even though the institutions were very sure in their responses, very confident in being able to defend those practices, there was really a clash of cultures in those questions and answers because Rauschenberger represented a public that didn't understand and, really in the life of everyday commonplace folks of Illinois, found the university culture to be perplexing. The university culture couldn't understand why the legislative culture would question such things as tenure and the importance of research, as opposed to teaching. So, accountability was a major issue during those years, as well.

Pogue: Where did you feel community colleges placed in the educational spectrum at that time, between the universities, the K-12 [kindergarten through high school] system, and the community colleges? Were they an equal? Did they seem to be, maybe, the last one in on anything?

Sevener: Another good question. I think, in terms of legislative interest, they were often the last to the table, even though, as I mentioned earlier, every legislative district, every state senator or state representative, represents a community college. The thing is, they represent one, or in some cases their legislative districts will encompass the boundaries of two or three community college districts. But they primarily represent a single institution, and it's hard to represent, in the whole scheme of things, one institution, when there are thirty-nine community college districts.

The universities have their own constituency and have wielded a great deal of power, particularly the University of Illinois, obviously, and to some

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<sup>1</sup> Steve Rauschenberger served as a Republican member of the Illinois State Senate, representing the 33<sup>rd</sup> District, from 1993 to 2007.

lesser extent over the years, Southern Illinois University, often depending upon the leadership of the institutions.

In the K-12 system, you can say that every legislator represents a community college. They represent many, many local school districts, and K-12 education is always a high priority for legislators, at least when they're campaigning. Then, when it comes to divvying up State budgets, they are often right up there with other major recipients of State dollars, including healthcare and public safety.

So, I think the community colleges may have felt that they were kind of squeezed out of the debate in many cases because the universities had a lot of power on one side, and the K-12 system had, certainly, a lot of legislative commitment on the other side. I would also say...

Maybe this is a good point at which to examine a peculiar, in my mind, a peculiar characteristic of the community colleges that I observed when I was a part of the Board of High Education leadership and also during the research that I've undertaken for a book that will be published by the Illinois Community College Trustees Association. That is, the in-between nature of the Illinois Community College, sort of the long trail of stigma that that has left the community colleges with.

The community colleges were born out of the K-12 system, out of high schools. The first public community college was in Joliet and the creation of the Joliet Board of Education. Every community college or junior college that was created after that, up until the creation of the community college system as a system of higher education, all the junior colleges were creations of the high schools. That was a benefit, has been a benefit, because that connection is crucial.

In the early years, which dates back to 1902 and up through the forties and 1950s, the connections with the high schools was critical because so many students who graduated from high school wanted to continue their education, either to advance to a four-year institution for a baccalaureate degree or increasingly, in the 1920s and particularly in the thirties, with the Great Depression, attended a junior college as really the termination of their formal education, as they took courses after high school but short of the university, in order to advance their careers.

All of this is to say that it seems in my mind that the community colleges developed almost a schizophrenic identity. Was it part of the high school? Was it part of the higher education system? Was it watered-down high school? Was it "not ready to be college" in higher education? There was a schizophrenia and an identity that I think evolved from the junior college connection to the high school that created sort of a complex, both within the community colleges and, to some degree, from the universities.

In my research, the junior colleges were created and evolved, initially, as a springboard to a college degree from a four-year institution. That was the impetus for the creation for Joliet Junior College in 1902 and most of those that followed Joliet's path after that. However, as the colleges evolved, there were many people who worked within the colleges and outside of them, who saw a growing need for the colleges to become institutions that were not just a way-station for students on their way to the university, but rather institutions in and of themselves that provided the education that a student would need to get a well-paying job that required more than a high school diploma but required less than a university degree.

I think there has been this dichotomy for a long time, where the colleges, community colleges thought, We are part of higher education and ought to be respected as such. And the universities looked upon the community colleges as not quite higher education but rather more oriented toward vocational and career education that was not really a part of what the universities did.

Pogue: Did you have a counterpart that was working with the Illinois Community College Board, performing duties similar to yours?<sup>2</sup>

Sevener: There was at the Board of Higher Education, a staff person who was the chief connection, liaison, to the Community College Board, predominantly for the approval by the Board of Higher Education, approval of community college academic programs. All associate degree programs had to be approved, not just by the Illinois Community College Board, but by the Board of Higher Education as well.

Pogue: During your time at the Board of Higher Education, did you see any major challenges between the community colleges and the four-year institutions, particularly related to accepting credits from one to the other?

Sevener: That has been an enduring conflict between the two sectors. It's interesting; if you go back historically to Joliet Junior College and its development as a place where students could earn credits that would transfer to the University of Illinois, J. Stanley Brown, who was the first superintendent who created the Joliet Junior College, insisted that the curriculum be modeled after the University of Illinois curriculum for the freshman and sophomore years at the U of I, in order for students at Joliet Junior College...in order for his students to be able to transfer with full credits.

He would bring the registrar and faculty members from the University of Illinois, from the University of Chicago, from the University of Michigan

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<sup>2</sup> The Illinois Community College Board consists of eleven members, appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Senate for six-year terms. The Illinois Community College Board utilizes the advice and counsel of all constituent groups of the community college system in establishing policies necessary to implement state statutes. (<https://www.iccb.org/iccb/>)



to the Joliet campus to ensure that what was being done at Joliet Junior College was acceptable and that the credits that his students earned would transfer without any problem to the university.

As the role of the community college evolved and incorporated, increasing emphasis on coursework that was of a vocational nature, and not intended as transfer courses, the issue of articulation between the community college and the universities has become one of increasing dispute.

The Board of Higher Education and the Community College Board have attempted, with some degree of success, to bridge the gap between what the universities have demanded and what the community colleges feel they have been providing.

There's a program called the Illinois Articulation Initiative using community college faculty and university faculty to develop a roster of courses that would transfer from the community colleges to the universities, no questions asked. There is a general education initiative in which a coursework of some thirty-five or thirty-seven hours of general education coursework at the community college, if completed by a student, transfers completely to a university. And in many of the majors, the universities and community colleges have agreed on coursework that will transfer. But those issues of articulation of community college coursework to the university continue to be a divisive one between the two sectors, even though there has been a great deal of progress made.

Pogue: Did you have any turf conflicts between the two? You have the Junior College Act of 1965, which created a Community College Board and does the bulk of the duties concerning the community colleges; however, the Board of Higher Education does have programmatic responsibilities for the community colleges. Were there any conflicts between the two during your period of involvement?

Sevener: Prior to my joining the Board of Higher Education, there was an initiative by the board to phase out associate degree programs at the universities, this feeling that those were duplicative of what the community colleges provided, and, in fact, the community colleges are probably better at it. So, for the most part, perhaps entirely, universities phased that out of their curriculum. That's sort of an anti-mission creep. It was more definitive of the community college mission and what role the community college should play, and let the universities get out of that business.

On the other hand, one of the more divisive issues, with respect to mission-creep, came about half a dozen years ago when William Rainey Harper College sought to offer four-year baccalaureate degrees in selected

disciplines, in effect becoming a baccalaureate institution.<sup>3</sup> Public universities, fought that very diligently, very forcefully. The upshot was an agreement that Northern Illinois University [DeKalb, IL] and some private institutions would provide the coursework that would complete the baccalaureate portion of the degree in those selected fields. Homeland security, I think, was one of those fields and some health-related disciplines as well. That was seen, by the universities at least, as a major mission creep on the part of the community college system and the Board of [Higher] Education and the Community College Board as well were opposed to the sanction of Harper College offering four-year degrees.

Pogue: Before we leave this subject, did the issue of building construction at the universities, community colleges, play any divisive role? By that time, had community college building been pretty well established, or were you fighting over limited dollars for school construction?

Sevener: There's always a fight over limited dollars, and everybody has a long, long, long wish list of construction projects: new buildings, new facilities, upgraded classrooms and labs. Then [there's] a very significantly impressive list of deferred maintenance that every college campus and university campus has. So there's a lot of competition, and the dollars are very limited.

But I think there also is a recognition that everybody should get a piece of that pie. The Board of Higher Education has been quite forceful in its desire to create a list of capital projects that included both university projects, as well as community colleges, in recognition that you can't educate students if the facilities are inferior or out of date. I think that, even as people, institutions vie for those scarce dollars, there is not necessarily open warfare that wants to deny one sector at the expense of another.

Pogue: Reviewing the research that you've done on community colleges, Gerald Smith's name has popped up a number of times.<sup>4</sup> How did you come across him in any of your research?

Sevener: He wrote sort of an exhaustive study of the community college system, as it evolved from about the 1940s and fifties, up through about 1980 as I recall. He was intimately involved in the creation of the system that developed with the passage of the Junior College Act of 1965.<sup>5</sup> And he served as the

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<sup>3</sup> William Rainey Harper College is a comprehensive community college in Palatine, Illinois. It is named for William Rainey Harper, a pioneer in the junior college movement in the United States. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harper\\_College](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harper_College))

<sup>4</sup> Gerald Smith authored the research study, *Illinois Junior-Community College Development, 1946-1980* (<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED195296>)

<sup>5</sup> The Illinois Junior College Act of 1965, which included community colleges within higher education, rather than as part of the common schools, was the greatest stimulus for the development of public community colleges. It provided financial encouragement for the establishment of new community colleges and the separation of the older colleges from high schools. (<http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/312.html>)

executive director of the Community College Board. It was called the Junior College Board at the time, as I recall. So he was very intimately involved in setting up the system. He was one of the pioneers who assisted the development of the modern community college and the development of the system that brought those individual colleges together as a major and important part of the overall educational structure of Illinois.

Pogue: What about the Junior College Act of 1965 itself?

Sevener: It was pivotal. It was a recognition for the first time that the community college itself served a role, that it was not just an “in-between” institution that was sort of high school, sort of higher education, but a **valued** in-between institution that was neither a high school nor a university, and as such fulfilled a particular role, a special role, that neither the high school nor the university really could fulfill.

One scholar called the community college the land grant institution of the twentieth century. As such, it has fulfilled a societal need, certainly an economic need, and educational need, with a particular role and a focus that is absolutely essential to the well-being of the state’s economy and the career advancement, social advancement of Illinois citizens. That act was a recognition that there was this institution and there was this particular role that answered a very deep seated need that was otherwise not being fulfilled.

Pogue: Besides the Junior College Act, were there any other important dates for community college that were identified through your research?

Sevener: In the early development of the junior college and its evolution into the community college, there are certain milestones that are certainly important. In 1931, for example, the General Assembly sanctioned a formalized junior college in the city of Chicago, leaving out some existing junior colleges that had been developed, both before and after what was then Crane Community College of Chicago. Those institutions were formally recognized and legalized in 1937 with a separate act of the General Assembly. During the 1940s—I think forty-three, perhaps—the General Assembly gave further recognition to the junior colleges with the funding apparatus for them to levy taxes to support operations. Those were important milestones.

There were a number of studies that were undertaken, particularly in the 1940s, once the junior colleges had proved their value, particularly during the Depression era. The 1940s brought greater attention to the junior colleges as to what role they could play or should play in the educational system. Those were important ways of self-examination. There were state studies undertaken under legislative resolution. There were national studies undertaken at the behest of President [Harry S.] Truman and others. Those were very important milestones in the long evolution of the junior college into the community college.

Pogue: Did the community colleges have a supporter in any of the governors?

Sevener: I think Governor [Samuel H.] Shapiro,<sup>6</sup> Governor [Richard B.] Ogilvie,<sup>7</sup> in particular, were very junior college friendly. Governor Ogilvie, as I recall, was the governor who passed the Junior College Act and recognized that here was an institution that really needed a formal and legal recognition as a important segment of the state's educational fabric.

Pogue: Is there any other research from your preliminary work in the 1960s to 1980s that you think we should talk about today?

Sevener: I think maybe not at this point. I guess I'm not quite as conversant in those decades as I've been with the earlier times that I've had the opportunity to research in greater depth.

Pogue: In the early days prior to the Junior College Act, were all the parts of the state active, or were there just pockets?

Sevener: Pockets. That's a very good observation. The junior college development, from Joliet onward, really was a bubbling up from the grassroots, so that community after community thought there was a particular need for an educational entity that extended beyond the high school for their citizens and for their local economy to thrive, certainly in a changing—sometimes rapidly changing—environment.

The Depression brought about a recognition that people needed additional education if they were going to thrive economically. The end of World War II brought an avalanche of new students to the junior colleges and fostered the growth of the junior college movement in that time. But there was no top-down effort or initiative during those years, the 1940s, even the 1950s, that directly led to a systemization of the community college, under state authority or control or initiative.

There were calls for that. One of the studies in the mid-1940s, by the Commission to Study Higher Education Facilities in Illinois, recommended that there be a statewide system, that there be an oversight board to oversee the operations of universities and the colleges, but the colleges were still under that scheme to be associated with the K-12 system. So there was interest in setting up a statewide system, but that evolved slowly, somewhat steadily, through the 1950s until the culmination of the Junior College Act in 1965.

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<sup>6</sup> Samuel Harvey Shapiro was the 34th Governor of Illinois, serving from 1968 to 1969, taking office as governor when the previous governor, Otto Kerner, Jr. resigned to accept appointment to the federal appellate court. He was a member of the Democratic Party. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel\\_H.\\_Shapiro](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_H._Shapiro))

<sup>7</sup> Richard Buell Ogilvie, a Republican, was the 35th governor of Illinois and served from 1969 to 1973. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard\\_B.\\_Ogilvie](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_B._Ogilvie))

Prior to that, there were pockets... And even after the sixty-five act there were still some areas that had the...through the 1965 Act that had the impetus to create community colleges. But it wasn't until 1990 or so when the state finally had to step in and tell the last area without a community college, in the Bloomington/Normal area, that it had to have a community college, that every square foot of Illinois had to be covered with a community college. A state act had to be passed to convince the people to develop what is now Heartland Community College.

Pogue: The governance of Illinois's community college districts is basically a model where there is an elected board of trustees, except for the city of Chicago, which has mayoral appointees. In your research, were there any issues related to how the governance model developed? I know, in talking to some of the original trustees, it was quite common to have anywhere to forty to eighty people run in that first election, when the districts were being formed.

Sevener: This is really a key point in the evolution of the community college, in that they were always creatures of local initiation and control, stemming to the times when they did not have their separate board of trustees but were governed by the local board of education. There was this long tradition of local control, and there was no question that these were entities of local government. They were not State-created or State-controlled or State-operated institutions. There had been some suggestions that there ought to be State control of operations, but for the most part, those were resisted, and the community colleges developed as entities of local government.

The City of Chicago, for political reasons and perhaps some governmental reasons, is different than the rest of Illinois in many respects and is recognized as such in various State laws. The selection of trustees for the City College of Chicago is different than the selection of trustees in every other community college district in the state.

Pogue: You've talked about the curriculum before, but when you were working at the Board of Higher Education, were there any issues related to the ideas of dual credits, distance learning, and all the new technology, the potential of on-line, at the time?

Sevener: The issue of online education was just becoming more and more pronounced during my tenure with the Board of Higher Education. But the issue of dual credit is one that really began at the beginning.

Back in the early days of the junior college development, there were matters of accreditation, of accrediting agencies, looking at both high school and junior college curricula, and in many cases, finding that the courses being taught at the junior college to high school students were of a quality and caliber to qualify those as college credits. So, high school students who were able to take a chemistry course or a math course at the junior college were

able to forego having to repeat that class once they graduated from high school. This wasn't called dual credit at the time, but it was essentially the same concept. This has been sort of an ongoing debate within the higher education arena: What courses and what criteria and what requirements for dual credit coursework should be accepted by the universities? That's an ongoing debate.

Pogue: Those involved in community colleges today have mentioned such things as the pension cost shift, the overall pension problem, the new healthcare law, safety concerns, employee rules, unfunded waivers, tax caps, and unfunded mandates as current challenges. Were these challenges when you were there at the Board of Higher Education?

Sevener: Some of them were, and many of them were becoming more and more prevalent and prominent. This is a reflection of the fact that educational institutions, whether it's K-12 or whether it's the junior college, community college, or the university, are facing a whole different environment than they faced in prior decades and influenced by decisions made by the General Assembly or, in some cases, decisions not made, promises not kept, that influenced their operations, particularly in the area of funding.

State funding has not kept pace with the needs and with the effects of inflation. At a time when community colleges and universities have had to deal with greater expenses and costs related to all the issues that you raise, whether it's public safety and homeland security, whether it's granting veterans of the armed forces free tuition and fees, whether it's dealing with new mandates like the healthcare law or tax caps that restrict their access to local taxation, these are all matters of funding that restrict the ability, the opportunity, for the colleges to do the kind of job that they feel they need to do, with the resources that they need to have.

Pogue: To conclude our interview today, were there any surprises that you came across as you were doing your research?

Sevener: I don't know as I have been surprised so much as I have been enlightened about the role of individuals and leadership and vision in the development of the community college system. I'll just say one long-ago example. William Rainey Harper, who was the president of the University of Chicago and is often credited as the father of the junior college or community college, was a visionary.

He saw what others could not, that there was a distinction in the higher education hierarchy between coursework that prepared a student for university and coursework at the university that prepared that student for the professions. He saw that as a very important dichotomy and even organized initially the University of Chicago along the lines of what he called a "junior college" and then the "senior college." the junior college being for freshmen and

sophomores and preparatory to the rigors and demands of the upper division education at the university, which prepared students for further academic life or for the professions. He was a visionary.

But it also takes people of action. In that same area you had J. Stanley Brown, who was sort of an acolyte of the philosophy of William Rainey Harper. He was a man of action who put into place the philosophy of Rainey at the Joliet Township High School and created the first junior college in the state, in fact in the nation, the first public junior college in the nation. There was another person who you don't often hear about, who was sort of an amanuensis of J. Stanley Brown. His name was Chauncey Spicer, who was a chemistry and physics professor and chair of the Science Department at Joliet High School.

There's one sort of apocryphal story about Spicer. When a graduate of Joliet Junior College went on to the University of Illinois as a junior and was in a university chemistry course when the professor was explaining a concept on the blackboard, the Joliet Junior College graduate corrected him. The professor said, "Where are you from?" He said, "I'm from Joliet." And he said, "Oh, well then you're one of Chauncey Spicer's people. You must know what you're talking about." That was sort of the notion that Chauncey Spicer instilled in his students, that you have to be ready.

Spicer was a combination of the man of action... He, under the tutelage of Superintendent [J. Stanley] Brown, implemented the junior college courses and made sure that those junior college students were ready for the university-level coursework when they got there. He also was a person of great vision. His notion was that the junior college had to serve those students, but it really had to serve the needs of the community as well and that it was the responsibility of the junior college to respond to the community economic and social needs, if it was to really serve as a valuable entity for the betterment of the citizens of that community.

Years before the junior college really took on responsibility and the role of educating people for jobs, for careers, that were short of the university requirements, he saw that as an important role for the community college to serve. I really think that people like that—and there are scores of them, maybe even hundreds of them in the long evolution of the junior college in Illinois to the community college of today—people of vision and people of action, sometimes people with both attributes, really made this system what it is today.

Pogue: Don, I want to thank you for sharing your own experiences, teaching at Lincoln Land, your role with the Higher Ed board, and its relationship with the community college, and now starting your own research on the history of the colleges. I want to thank you for sharing that, and we look forward to maybe getting another little update on the current information.

Sevener: It's been my pleasure. Thank you.

(end of transcript)