

Bill Baker

Previous Graduate Dean and Vice President of UTA

*Interview conducted by
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in 2016 in Keller, Texas
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Biography

Bill WA Baker was born in San Antonio and grew up in a small South Texas town called Freer. He went to college at Texas A&I [which is now Texas A&M Kingsville] where he got his bachelor's and master's degree in chemistry. Throughout Baker's career, he worked as a Dean and Provost at Syracuse, UTA, UT Tyler, and UT San Antonio. Baker helped develop a number of graduate doctoral programs at UTA while he was there.

Topics discussed

- Background and previous jobs
- UTA
- Jim Hayes
- Coordinating Board and Regents
- Funding and UTA accessibility
-

Rose

This is Sarah Rose.

Engel

And Trevor Engel.

Rose

<topic>Background and previous jobs</topic>

Interviewing WA Baker, Bill Baker, in Keller at his house on August 26, 2016.

Let's start with where you were born, a little bit about your family.

Baker

I was born in San Antonio. I grew up in a very small town in South Texas called Freer. I'm one of five children, my father was small-town grocer. The first year I went to school in San Antonio, but I think we moved to Freer, I went actually into the third grade for some reason, even though I had only been to school one year. Anyway, I finished all my public school in Freer. I went to Texas A&I or what is now Texas A&M Kingsville where I got my bachelor's degree.

Rose

Texas A&I? What did the "I" stand for?

Baker

Arts and industries. I got a degree in chemistry, I went to UT Austin and got my PhD. I met my wife in Alice, which is a small town, also close to Freer. That's actually where my family moved after I got out of high school. She and I got married in 1954.

Rose

Her name?

Baker

Her name is Cynthia, was Cynthia Henderson. She was actually born in deep South Texas, Mission, which is down there by the Mexican border. I went to Austin, got a PhD.

Rose

What drew you to chemistry? What kind of research did you wind up doing?

Baker

I was an inorganic chemist. Really my research was on the borderline between inorganic and physical chemistry. I basically did research into transition metal compounds, iron, cobalt, nickel, that sort of thing.

I went to Syracuse, I was there eleven and a half years and went from there to UT Arlington where I stayed for about twenty-five.

Rose

You came to UT Arlington under Frank Harrison?

Baker

Yes, Frank was the president when I went. I actually went in February of '71 as the Dean of the graduate school. UTA was just beginning to develop graduate programs, actually they had some masters programs for a number of years, but they were just beginning to develop doctoral programs. What I was told when I was hired was that my job was to develop a broad range doctoral programs. I was actually only graduate Dean for effectively really about a year. Because after I had been there about a year I was asked to be the interim director of what was the Institute of urban studies, which I knew nothing about. Technically for those two years I was both the graduate Dean and the director. Being the director took more time than the graduate Dean. About the end of that year, Frank left UTA to go to the Health Science Center in San Antonio as the president. Wendell Nedderman became the interim president, so he asked me to be the interim vice president for academic affairs which I was for...I really don't know how long, a year maybe. I'm not sure. Then he was named president and I was named vice president.

My wife and I had two children, a son Kent and a daughter Cheryl. They both live in the area, in fact Cheryl lives here in Keller and Kent lives in Grapevine. One grandchild, a grandson, in fact that's why we live in Keller is because after I left UTA in '95, I went to UT Tyler and spent six years there as the Provost. I retired in 2001, and we had a nice house on the golf course and I had visions of playing golf and working in my yard. Before I knew it we were looking at houses in Keller because my grandson moved here. I guess I should say my daughter and son-in-law and grandson moved here, so we moved to Keller in 2001 and have lived here ever since.

Rose

There's an article on the dedication of the Baker chemistry and physics building that you were also UT San Antonio?

Baker

Yeah, in 2004 I got a call from the Provost at UT San Antonio wondering what I was doing and I said, "Not much, I get up in the morning, have breakfast, a cup of coffee, and read the paper. Then figure out what I'm gonna do the rest of the day." Anyway, he said they were having some difficulties in their college of sciences and he asked me to come down and be the Dean for a year. After thinking about it it seemed like it would be an interesting thing to do, and I frankly was a little bit bored doing nothing.

I did, I went down in August 2004, stayed there a year. They wanted me to stay another year but I just wouldn't do it, because my wife had stayed here all the time that I was there and I was driving back and forth about every third weekend and I just didn't want to do that. We set up an arrangement where I would continue to be the Dean but I would do it from here, so they set me up with a computer and everything. Basically I would get up in the morning, read the paper, turn on my computer and start being a Dean. That went on about six months after that, and then they found a full-time Dean. That ended that. I was down there a year, and I guess technically I was an employee for a year and a half, maybe a

little bit longer than that because after the new Dean came in, I was appointed a special advisor to the Provost or some fancy title. I would still go down there about once every three weeks and spend a couple of days. Help them with some of their budgeting things and things like that.

Rose

While were on San Antonio and Tyler, we'll get those now and then go back to UTA. What kind of stuff were you working on when you were Dean and with UT San Antonio?

Baker

Circumstances were in a way quite different and in a way pretty similar. When I went to Tyler, Tyler was at that time a very small school, it's still fairly small, but at that time it was I'm not sure, 3000 students maybe? It was an upper-level institution. They were going to add an engineering program. Obviously like all universities it had ambitions to grow, it had ambitions to add the freshman, sophomore classes which actually happened about three years after I was there. There was a bill passed through the legislature to do that. I was hired partly because they were going to be developing engineering and I had some experience with engineering because of UTA, plus I had a lot of experience as the chief academic officer. It was not a very well developed institution, a small place, very much dominated from the top down, presidentially. I really don't know exactly what they expected of me, but the goal I set for myself was to help them develop a place where chairs and deans were chairs and deans and did the things that I was used to chairs and deans doing.

Rose

They hadn't done that kind of stuff before?

Baker

Not really. They had a, I'm not sure what his title was, vice president for academic affairs, Provost, or whatever it was. It was still very much run out of the president's office, which may very well have been appropriate for a school that size, but with the addition of the engineering program, the addition of freshman and sophomore classes, it grew. When I left there enrollment had grown to about 5000 students, I think right now they're up to about 8000. It's continued to grow.

San Antonio was a little different in that it was a much larger institution. In fact at the time it was probably larger than UTA. They had a lot of difficulties in the college of sciences, they had gone through a couple of deans pretty quickly, a lot of turnover in department chairs. I think what they were really looking for was somebody to give a little stability and leadership to it. That was an interesting challenge because it was different than Tyler because it was a different institution, 28-29,000 students. College of sciences had six or seven departments, I don't remember. Fairly typical college of science. They just had an emergency situation, and I was an emergency fill-in.

Rose

That's cool. Going back to UTA, what drew you back to Texas from Syracuse, other than the weather?

Baker

When you're moving from Syracuse to Texas you can't ever say "other than the weather." I wouldn't say the weather wasn't particularly the important part, I was getting tired of the cold weather and the snow. I'm not sure how familiar you are with Syracuse, but they get a lot of snow.

Rose

My dad's from much further north.

Baker

I liked Syracuse a lot. It was a very good place for me to go as a new faculty member because it had a tradition of a lot of the older private universities, a lot of faculty autonomy, a lot of freedom. Candidly, I became very disappointed with the place because I went there in '59, and beginning in the middle '60s with the Vietnam issues, there was a lot of activism on campus. A lot of student protests, and I did not like the way the University dealt with them.

Rose

Which was?

Baker

I'm a fairly conservative person, as some would say, I'm a very conservative person. They simply tolerated behavior on the part of students that I did not think should be tolerated. I guess in a way I could understand the administration's positions, I did not understand the faculty's positions because you hear a lot now about how free speech is being eroded on campuses, it was eroded in the late '60s. If you weren't antiwar, then nobody wanted to hear from you. I just felt the faculty... I could tell you a number of stories, but basically that was it. I just was not comfortable there anymore. The weather was a problem, my daughter tended to have some skin problems, and the cold, dry winters were very hard on her skin.

It just seemed like a good time to leave. I didn't necessarily assume I would come back to Texas, I looked at several other positions, Missouri, Colorado, Louisiana. Bottom line was I was really attracted to UTA, I don't quite know why except that it was part of the UT system, which I had kind of grown up in in a way, and I liked the idea of being a graduate Dean. It's hard for me to go back and think of exactly how I wound up at UTA, but I did.

Rose

<topic>UTA</topic>

What was it like when you first came?

Baker

Very different than what I was used to. Student enrollment was what, ten, eleven, 12,000? I don't even know, it was a fairly sizable institution. If you know the history of UTA, it had been a junior college for a

long time, became a four-year school, especially when it had switched from the A&M to the UT system. That had happened I guess a couple of years before I came. That was when Frank Harrison came up to be president.

Compared to what I was used to, it was an undeveloped institution, and I don't use that term pejoratively at all, it just had not been through... Syracuse was not a Harvard, Yale, or Cardell, but they have been around for a long time. In fact not very many people know this, but the second PhD in chemistry ever given in this country was given at Syracuse. I think was about twenty years before they gave another one, but the fact is they had a program for a long time. It was a fairly well developed graduate institution. It was moving from private to state. They're a different system, some good, some bad. The people here were just great, I couldn't have asked for a better group of people to work with. That's why I was here so long.

Rose

Who in particular?

Baker

Wendell Nedderman. When I came, he was the academic vice president when I came as graduate Dean. I worked closely with him for twenty something odd years. He was great to work with. He was a true gentleman, a person who if given a choice would speak well of someone, not poorly. The main thing was, he let me alone, he let me do my thing, which I liked. Actually, the same time he was named president, Dudley Wetsel came in as the vice president for business affairs. Dudley and I worked very closely together. In fact, not only were we good work colleagues, we were close personal friends. We played golf together and did a lot of things.

Wendell, Dudley, and I worked together for twenty something odd years. It was a good group. We knew and respected each other, respected each other's role in things, didn't always agree, but that's all right. We disagreed, but were never disagreeable about it. You don't always find that. The thing about both of them that I really appreciated, is I could trust them implicitly. If either one of them told me something, I could rely on it, I could act on it, I didn't have to worry about it changing the next day, and that was a rare thing. In fact, I haven't talked to Wendell about this in a long time, but my guess is if you asked him, he would say very much the same thing. There was an unusual level of trust among us.

Rose

That's really interesting. One of the things that Trevor and I've tried to grapple with in terms of history is why did UTA do things that no other schools in Texas, and very few schools in the country were doing in terms of serving disabled students well ahead of legal requirements. It keeps coming back to the people, a particular group of people and how people worked together. I've spoken with Dr. nedderman, Kent Gardner, Wayne Duke, quite a few other people.

Baker

Oh yeah, I've mentioned two people. There are a lot of others. I was accepted when I moved here, and I really appreciated that. People like John Hudson who was the librarian when I came, we were never really close personal friends, but it was very comfortable working with John. Again, the trust level.

Rose

Was he the librarian in the 1960s also, do you happen to know?

Baker

In the 1960s? He was the librarian when I went there in '71, I don't know when he was named.

Rose

We've been told that the librarian in the 1960s hired quite a number of people with physical disabilities. I think it's him.

Baker

Could be.

Rose

I wasn't sure who it was, but basically remembered someone of short stature, someone with a facial abnormality, and others that were kind of striking, even in the '60s.

Baker

I don't know what else you want to know about UTA.

Rose

What were the students like when you came? You said you dealt with them?

Baker

Almost all commuter, of course. When I came, maybe 800 students living on campus in very old dorms, old even then! They were largely commuter, many working students, again in a way different kind of students than I was used to Syracuse. There were almost no part-time students at Syracuse, they almost all lived in dormitories, fraternity or sorority houses there. Some of them probably worked, but they worked very much part-time, but they were largely full-time students. That was different back then. Like the people at the university, the staff and faculty, I don't want to say they were blue collared, because some people would take that as an insult and I don't mean it that way at all, but they were very much a working kind of people, the students worked.

Candidly, they were not as well-prepared as the students that I was used to Syracuse, but they certainly made up for it by the way they worked. Unfortunately, coming in as graduate Dean and eventually going into the vice president's role, I didn't have as much contact with students as a lot of people. I did teach, I taught on average a course a year. I would usually teach around the legislative session, and I frequently

taught the freshman course. Again, unfortunately, those classes are very large so you don't get to know a whole lot of the students. Unfortunately, a lot of the students that I had contact with were around problems, so that tends to skew a little bit of the relationship.

Rose

How did you approach developing UTA academically?

Baker

Again, I'm pretty much a traditionalist. I'm a great believer in the combination of teaching and research. I think to be a good teacher you need to have an active mind and you need to do research. On the other hand, to be a good researcher, you also need to have a certain touch with reality, with what's going on around you. My approach was a very traditional, academic approach, try to hire good people who are going to be that combination of bringing research and service to the university. I'm a very strong believer in departments, even though the history of higher education, they've gone in and out of favorability. There've been times people said that department shouldn't exist, that it sets up walls and boundaries. I don't believe that, I believe in departments, I believe they're a central part of developing the university, and that's where the faculty particularly plays a role is at the departmental level where the influence, which is effective only if you give the department's influence. The idea is to hire good people, developing, try to build around departments, or programs sometimes, but mostly departments. That's not an innovative thing, that's a very traditional thing. That's the way, in my understanding, universities have developed for a couple of hundred years.

Rose

What kind of programs are you particularly proud of having developed in twenty some odd years?

Baker

Like I said, I was told by Frank Harrison that my job as the new graduate Dean, and the first full-time graduate Dean was to develop doctoral programs. I'm proud of the fact that when I came to UTA there was one doctoral program, and when I left in '95 there were twenty-three or twenty-four, something like that. The fact is, in that period from '71 to '95, it was not easy to develop doctoral programs in Texas. It was you on the part of a lot of people, a lot of the legislator, particularly on the coordinating board, that there may be only two or three doctoral places, Austin, A&M, maybe Tech, Houston. There was a feeling that doctoral programs were expensive, which they are, and the state couldn't afford to put the money in. There was a constant political battle, political both at the legislative level and at the state coordinating level to getting them. Quite frankly, we played all kinds of games to get them. There were times when interdisciplinary doctoral programs, the coordinating board thought, "Hey, that's good, you combine people!" We played that game. There were times when cooperation between institutions was favored, so we played that game.

We developed working with UT Dallas in humanities for example, that was a combination of interdisciplinary and interinstitutional. They didn't like specific programs, they liked broad-based programs. We developed a program in administration, which had a business component, a social work component, and a public component, which eventually became three separate doctoral degrees. I guess I'm proud of that, I hate to say it, but there was a lot of maneuvering and political things going on. The man who was the Commissioner of higher education through much of that time, very able, cable person

named Kent Ashworth. I had to fight him tooth and nail for every program we got. They just didn't want to approve anything. I guess the fact that we were able to eventually get them, and get so really without a whole lot of negative fallout from anybody. I'm proud of the doctoral programs we developed.

When I left, I really can't say much about it since I've left, because I just don't know the people that well, but I was proud of the academic organization that had been developed. I think we had a strong group of Dean's, a strong group of chairs, I think they all did their jobs, and did them well. Obviously some didn't work out, that always happens when you hire people, but for the most part I think we had a good group of people. We didn't have a whole lot of turnover, that's not all good, but we didn't lose a lot of people because they were unhappy in their positions, they may have found a better position. There are always those, and you certainly don't blame people for going somewhere where they can better themselves, for the most part I think if you talk to some of the people who were the deans at that time, we had a very well-functioning Dean's Council. Obviously, some competition among them, there always are, but for the most part I think it was a good group. I'm proud that that was developed.

Rose

That's quite a lot there. It sounds like you actually dealt with the coordinating board in the legislator?

Baker

The legislative process, yeah. I was our main contact with the coordinating board, mainly because we worked right and develop these programs, so I had a lot of contact with them. The legislator I didn't have that much contact with, I occasionally we'd have every two years a budget hearing before the legislator and I would go down for that. Sometimes there would be a particular issue, before though there would be a committee, but I did not personally deal directly with the legislator very much at all.

Rose

What about the Regents?

Baker

Nor with the Regents. During the time that I was at UTA, the Regents had a pretty much a "hands off" attitude toward the academic side of things. They were much more controlling of the budgetary aspect, but for the most part I would occasionally attend Regents meetings if we had something on the agenda that there might be questions about. Generally, the Regents at that time didn't deal a whole lot in academic affairs, they left that to the Chancellor's office into the presidents of the various institutions.

Rose

<topic>Jim Hayes</topic>

Do you remember Jim Hayes? Can you talk about how you met him?

Baker

I don't know how I first met him, I don't remember when it was. My first real memory of Jim Hayes was when he, I don't remember whether he came to one of Wendell's staff meetings...but as I recall he said

he wanted to take some of us on the tour of the campus, you may have heard about this... I knew who Jim was, and I guess what his agenda was, he wanted to show us the physical barriers that existed on campus for people with handicaps. What I didn't know is he wanted us to take this tour in a wheelchair, which he did. I don't remember, I know Wendell, Dudley, and I, maybe Wayne Duke, I'm not sure.

Rose

There's a prior one with just Wayne Duke, he was the only person who showed up. It was a much smaller imitation, and about a year later there was the big group.

Baker

All I know is, I remember getting in a wheelchair, going through University Hall, maybe to the library, I don't remember where else. It was an eye-opener, it was a very good thing to do.

Rose

How so?

Baker

Well, because you saw things from a different perspective than what you would see walking around. I remember particularly going into University Hall on the first floor and Jim saying "Well, okay go into the restroom." Well if I were walking, I'd go to the restroom. Going in a wheelchair was a totally different experience. It made you much more aware of the difficulties particularly people wheelchair face that way. My memory, and I could be wrong about this, but it seems to me that that's what really began the modification to the physical facilities, that was kind of the first step along the way. I'm sure Jim came to budget hearings, I don't have any specific memory of those hearings, but occasionally I would deal with Jim when there would be an issue may be in a science lab or something like that.

Rose

We want to come back to that.

Baker

He would come in and lay out a problem, we'd figure out how to deal with it, or I would serve as an intermediary between him and the department chair, sometimes maybe just a faculty member who was not being terribly accommodating. Again, I remember a lot of those interactions.

Rose

Someone who just finished the disability studies minor, she came back to do it, and now is going to go on to grad school. In the early '90s she worked with Jim Hayes and the Department of chemistry on developing a... Let me back up, she was working in the stock room for the Department of chemistry and figuring out and wound up working basically as a facilitator of how to make laboratories accessible.

JeanMarie Ford, I think, now JeanMarie Bryant. We interviewed her for this collection, partly because she started going to conferences of stock room attendants, and wrote a manual. She's trying to figure out how to get it off a very old disk. Basically it spread internationally, that was the first manual for how to apply the ADA in chemistry laboratories.

Baker

I didn't know that.

Rose

Yeah, it's really interesting. We'll have to send you her oral history, it's quite short. It's really interesting on thinking about, Bunsen burner's, hoods, and all sorts of things. UTA was really at the forefront. I didn't know if you remembered anything about some of those discussions?

Baker

Not specifically. I have more general impressions of Jim than I do have specific recollections. Jim was a good person, an easy person to work with. He obviously had a calling, and he was very dedicated and persistent, but never unreasonable. When the whole effort moved a little bit from physical aspects to the learning aspects...sometime, I'm not sure what year it was, we got into the "reasonable accommodation" issue for learning. The question was "Well is the faculty member making a reasonable accommodation to someone who has this or that?" I probably directly dealt with Jim a little more on those kinds of issues than I did the physical facility issues, that would've been more Dudley Wetsel's area.

Rose

We haven't actually heard anything about those kinds of issues. Any discussions over the reasonable accommodations for learning disabilities. Anything you could remember would be interesting!

Baker

All I know is, sometimes it's not easy to convince the faculty member that someone needs a little bit of extra time to do the test, and whether extra time is a reasonable accommodation. My memory is that when that first became an issue, Jim dealt with those, but fairly shortly thereafter there was an appointed someone specifically to deal with that. The first one I remember is Sharon Cordell who did that. I dealt with her a lot more afterwards than Jim. Jim kind of started the area, but I use that as an example to say he was such an easy to person to work with because he was always reasonable. I won't say he wasn't demanding because he was demanding, that's how he got a lot done, but he was reasonable in his demands. He was always pleasant to deal with.

Rose

What about Sam Provence? He was more involved in community organizing, he was very good friends with Jim Hayes. He John Dycus and Joseph Rowe in 1968 founded the Handicapped Students Association. He had red hair.

Baker

Sam, that's a name that I remember, but I honestly don't remember the individual. John I do, I remember him quite well. In fact I saw John at Dudley Wetzel's funeral, he was there.

Rose

We spoke with him and Dorothy Estes last week. The second part in a two-part interview with them.

Baker

John did a tremendous job with the Shorthorn and the Shorthorn staff. He made Dorothy look good, not that Dorothy wasn't good, but John really did good work.

Rose

They seemed like very good partners, very close.

Baker

I haven't seen Dorothy in a long time. In fact I guess the last time I saw her was at her husband's funeral. It seems like going to funerals is what I do a lot nowadays.

Rose

She's still living in her house in Arlington.

Baker

I had heard that, somebody had told me that not long ago.

Rose

Did you ever end up going to some of the wheelchair basketball games in the '70s and '80s?

Baker

Yes, but I don't remember. I didn't normally go to any of our basketball games, I wasn't a fan of basketball period. In fact, the team would frequently be playing and I would be sitting up in my office there in Davis Hall. They were playing right across, but I didn't go.

Rose

No worries.

Baker

I think I probably saw the wheelchair team play once or twice maybe, that's all.

Rose

I was wondering because that's, seeing the FreeWheeler's play was something a lot of people have mentioned that really changed their impression of people who use wheelchairs. It was very rough, and much rougher than they were expecting, much more dynamic.

Baker

Jim Hayes had already changed my perspective of people in wheelchairs, I didn't need to see the basketball team. Really, just the way he handled himself, the way he didn't let that keep them down. That can change your impression of people. I think in a way the team is a good example of Jim, it wasn't just that we had a team, he wanted the team to be the very best, which is kind of typical of him.

Rose

<topic>Coordinating Board and Regents</topic>

Since you dealt with the coordinating board a lot, maybe you can help us untangle this question we're working on. Texas passed its own architectural barriers act in 1969, after the federal one in 1968. The law went into effect in 1970, Sam Provence, John Dycus, and Joseph Rowe were the first three activists at UTA. They asked for concrete ramps to be put in to replace these wooden ramps that were donated by Alpha Phi Omega. UTA agreed, we had a Dallas Morning News article from 1970 saying, "putting in thirty ramps around campus." They were really early curb cuts basically, very steep.

We've been through many of the minutes of the Regents, not the entire period. A lot of times they would respond to legislation, there's nothing for a couple of years in the Regents papers about this new architectural barriers act. Basically, the rule was that new or renovated construction had to be made accessible. The actual federal law that started really changing the landscape of colleges wasn't put into effect until 1977. It's the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

What's been interesting to us is that we found the letter that we showed you, saying that Provence and Hayes asked to go to the Regents, and then what we found in the papers was LeMaistre the Chancellor, he wrote back and said "I'm not unwilling to make this happen, but what will UTA do?" We can pause this and show you if you want. Hayes and Provence started putting together a proposal working with Wayne Duke, and probably Christopher Kirkpatrick who is a lower-level of Dean of students who we haven't been able to track yet.

By '75 the coordinating board starts saying that the new facilities have to be accessible. There's this gap of "How does it happen?" Trevor thought that perhaps Hayes, Provence, Nedderman, Duke are really in a sense, educating the coordinating board Dean and Regents. It doesn't seem to be happening from Austin, it's more that UTA was doing stuff, and Gardner, Nedderman, and others say that they were talking a lot to Regents, other schools, the coordinating board about what UTA was doing. I know that's a lot of information, but we're wondering how this all happens because UTA is way at the forefront and well ahead of any legal requirements.

Baker

I don't know. The coordinating board, for example, is like all bureaucracies, it doesn't necessarily move all that rapidly. In the early '70s it was playing a different role than it began to play later on. It was more the role of policemen standing there with a hand up saying, "No, no, no." I think probably, and I couldn't even begin to tell you a year, but maybe in the middle '70s or a little bit later when Kent Ashworth became commissioner, it began to be more, a term I don't particularly like, but proactive in a lot of ways, in saying, "Look, you all need to do this."

The timeframe I would be very fuzzy on, but it was clear that through the '70s the board changed a lot. For one thing, even though it was a bureaucracy even then, staffing at the coordinating board was very much smaller. They had a physical facilities division, but there wasn't a whole lot of construction going on in the state, so they didn't play all that much of a role until, again I'm not sure of the date, but a little bit later.

Rose

That's interesting. We saw some of the Regents minutes, they start responding very quickly to new legislation. Like it's passed earlier this year, they respond. The stuff? They just ignore. The first evidence that we found is 1975 of the coordinating board saying, "Here's a form, you need the construction plan certified."

Baker

Like a lot of those issues, it depends on the individual. Hypothetically, the federal government passes a law, someone at the Regent at a junior level, assistant level, at the coordinating board level, or at the legislator becomes aware of that and they're interested, something happens. If not, it just floats along until either a problem arises... Let's face it, a lot of things, that's the way it happens. A lot of the safety issues in my area of chemistry, people ignore them for years, and then you have a fire or an accident, you get to teaching and something happens.

Rose

Let's pause this.

[Recording breaks]

Rose

When we showed Wayne Duke the LeMaistre letter, he said, "Yep, that's typical administrative letter."

Baker

Well, quite frankly that was typical of the Chancellor at that time.

Rose

Can you tell us a little bit about him? He was a doctor right?

Baker

Yes. I don't know exactly what I could tell you that would be helpful. He was not, in my opinion, a strong administrator. At that time, when he was the Chancellor, there was a member of the Board of Regents named Frank Erwin who was an extremely strong individual, and pretty much dominated things. I'm reluctant to say...

[Recording breaks]

Rose

Basically, he was willing to let UTA go off and experiment with this, but not with resources?

Baker

I would say not just experiment, I think it was probably an idea that he instinctively was quite attracted to. We thought it was a good idea.

Rose

He was a doctor too, right?

Baker

Yes.

Rose

By the way, our transcriptionist had asked us, he's listed as "Charles LeMaistre," but "Mickey?"

Baker

Mickey is what everybody called him, I had no idea where the Mickey came from.

Rose

She had quite a while googling trying to make sure they were the same person.

Baker

They are the same person. After he was Chancellor, he became the president of the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston. He was there for quite a while actually.

Rose

Do you know how he spelled Mickey? Was it M-I-C-K-E-Y? Because it shows up in a number of oral histories.

Baker

I think so. His name was Charles A.

Rose

We were certain that we'd heard Mickey.

Baker

I have no idea where the Mickey came from, or why he was called Mickey.

Rose

<topic>Funding and UTA accessibility</topic>

Basically, what happens, you saw, is that Hayes, with Duke's and Nedderman's support, applies for a \$40,000 grant from the Texas Rehabilitation Commission, student Congress chipped in a little bit of money, and Nedderman put in about \$40,000 and started modifying the campus after the handicap administrators tour. I can't remember who else, a number of people have said that was just a central event for them.

Baker

Certainly, my impression was from that time was when things begin to happen. Rapidly? Probably not. It certainly was pilotable in that it changed awareness and attitudes.

Rose

I think actually things happened pretty quickly at UTA compared to other universities.

Baker

I think it probably did.

Rose

Berkeley was serving students with disabilities, and student activism started about the same time at UTA as with Berkeley in terms of actual organizations. We talked with Kent Gardner about dorms, modifying the dorms to make them accessible. There was an attendant program quite quickly as well.

Baker

Again, my memory, and I didn't remember the memo that you showed me, I didn't remember writing that... But in those days, that was always the issue for UTA. We did not have a lot of free, flexible money. First of all, the funding system was very much different being than it is now for example where the University has a much larger pool, of basically unrestricted funds which you can move around. We didn't have that, we lived on our state appropriation. The state appropriation was largely earmarked for various things, I suspect that was behind my memo. There's a limited way, not just because of the amount of money, but because of restrictions that existed on it. Building funds were much harder to come by, you may of heard this from someone else, but back in those days, we were part of an old tax system that funded our buildings.

Rose

Can you explain that more? We haven't actually heard it at all.

Baker

We had no access to the permanent University fund, which is where a lot of construction money now comes from. Even the UT system didn't have the ability to help us out there, we got whatever the tax system said we got for buildings.

Rose

That was a state tax system?

Baker

Yeah, it was later we were constitutional, gosh, I don't know, '78, '79, I don't know the exact year. That was when the permanent University fund was opened up to all components, up until then it was only UT Austin that used that money. We didn't have any, and we got a distribution every ten years, what would happen is they would give you, I think it was 85% up front. One time you got 85% of whatever this money was, then later on you would get another 15%. People think, "Well the university has got a lot of money, surely you can find X..." You can't always find X. Not only do you have to worry about, "Okay, if we put it into X, then we can't do Y. What's the priority?" Which is always a legitimate issue to raise, sometimes there are simply legal restrictions where you can't do it.

Particularly for example, the biggest chunk of money that we got was designated for faculty salaries, you could not use that for anything else. You couldn't use it for administrative salaries, staff salaries, or anything, it had to go to faculty. That all changed over time, but particularly through the '70s, not only was there real shortage of money, but we were in a real straitjacket as to how that money could be used. In fact, talking with you, I guess in a way that makes even prouder of what UTA was able to accomplish given the restrictions we had. That might very well have been responsible for the slow response to a lot of other institutions.

Rose

I found an article from UT El Paso in '77 or '78, basically saying "look, classes aren't accessible to us." We found a couple of other articles. Then UT Austin has a handbook for students with disabilities in about '72. Wayne Duke and Hayes were creating one in '73. Other than that it seems like things really don't happen. If the tax was ruled unconstitutional and construction money began to flow a different way, that would explain it.

Baker

It presented a real problem for the state. I think it was actually '78 that it was ruled unconstitutional, but I could be wrong about that. The problem was, "Okay, we can't do that anymore, how are we going to float construction at the state institutions?" Again, other than Austin and A&M. Actually, oddly enough, UT El Paso also participated in that fund. That was because UT El Paso started as a branch of UT Austin. I don't know all the history.

Legislature went through a lot of "How are we gonna do it? Where are we going to get the money? We can't collect this tax anymore." The admiral Davis, it was a statewide property tax basically. For whatever reason was ruled unconstitutional.

Rose

What system did they go to and then when did construction money start to flow?

Baker

My memory is that two things happened. One is that the state had actually appropriated general revenue money into a pot of money to distribute. It also allowed the components of the UT system and the A&M system to access the permanent University fund for construction only, not for operating money, but for construction only. Again, I don't remember the exact balance between those two, but there certainly was a fund set up by the state. I don't know how long we got money from that, but obviously when we first began to participate in the permanent University fund, not only did we, but so did UT San Antonio, UT Dallas, UT El Paso, everybody. There wasn't a lot of money. Later the state went to other systems of funding, tuition revenue bonds, and so on. Money in the last few years have been a lot more available for construction then it was at that period.

Rose

Again, we don't have the bulk of the records yet from Jim Hayes, but there's apparently a file cabinet and more that should have everything, apparently he was a packrat. We haven't been able to get a lot of information on facilities, and the financing of all this between that grant of \$40,000 and then the 1990s...we've interviewed Jeff Johnson, and Bryan Sims, some of the people in facilities who were very involved in making sure buildings were built accessibly and renovating. You're right, it's clear UTA was really going above and beyond in a period of really tight funds.

Baker

They were, they were very tight. The one saving grace for UTA was that it was a growing in student enrollment. Although we did not really benefit from tuition money, we benefited in the sense that by having more students, each biennium there were more, so the budget was continually going up. In a sense that produced uncommitted money. There were still restrictions on how you could use it, but you hadn't already hired people so you didn't have to pay their salaries. You can always trade-off between salary increases versus new personnel because you had more money. At that time in the state, if you went down in enrollment you were really in trouble because then you got less money than you had the previous biennium, and that's a problem. When you've got more money, it creates its own problems, but it also solves a lot of problems. We had that advantage. That did not apply to things like we're talking about here. You didn't necessarily have more construction money.

Rose

As far as we know, that grant paid for things like lowering water fountains, changing doors, adding some ramps, and in particular Pahl and Brazos Hall were renovated.

Baker

Yeah, they were the two original door buildings on campus.

Rose

Those were renovated, and Kent Gardner's talked a lot about that.

Baker

He would know more about that than I would.

Rose

Then it kept going throughout the '70s and just doing piece by piece to make more and more buildings accessible. I think that grant also helped pay for Jim Hayes' salary initially.

One other question we have since we weren't able to interview Dudley Wetsel, we're going to interview the head of the carpentry shop who worked very closely with Jim Hayes, Billy Bates next week. You were very close with Mr. Wetsel, right?

Baker

Yes.

Rose

If you could tell us about them, and how you think he might've been involved or how he might've approached this.

Baker

Dudley was very good at what he did. As the chief fiscal officer he had to manage the resources and he did a very good job. I'd already mentioned, he was a person of his word, he could be trusted and he was very good about finding a way to free up money for a particular purpose. Legally, always, I mean I don't need to say that, but I do mean, you always have a certain flexibility about how you do funds. He was very good at that. But he was also a very prudent manager of funds, so it wasn't as if you could go in and say "Hey Dudley, let's do this. Go find the money for it!" He wasn't gonna do that, it was something that he felt was important and he could do it, something he was committed to, or something that he might've been told by someone that "We have to do this." I don't know a direct memory, I could certainly imagine that if Dudley became committed to this cause, which I suspect he was, that he did everything he could to find the resources to support it. That's just the kind of person he was.

Rose

He would've been trying to free up money, and then Everett Strahan would've actually been overseeing modifications?

Baker

Yes. I don't know exactly what Everett's relationship with Dudley was, I know they worked closely together. I don't really know how that went, but I can imagine a couple of scenarios. Dudley telling Everett, "Hey, look, we really need to do this, go do it. We'll find the money and take care of it." Or maybe Everett coming in and saying "Hey, we really need to take care of a ramp here, a door here, or whatever it is. Can you find the money?" And Dudley saying, "Yes." It could've gone either way. Dudley was a good man, a good friend, and very good at his job.

Rose

Anything else you think we should've asked?

Baker

Not really. If I wanted you to ask a question...

Rose

Thank you!

Baker

You're welcome!