

## **Bryan Sims**

**Former Assistant and Associate Director of Environmental Health and Safety, former Physical Plant Associate Director, and former Director of Institutional Construction; current Executive Director of the Division for Enterprise Development, UT Arlington**

*Interview conducted by  
Sarah Rose and Trevor Engel  
in 2015 in Arlington, Texas*

*Transcription by  
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Disability Studies Minor  
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### **Biography**

After owning and eventually selling an environmental firm in the Metroplex and serving as an environmental consultant for the University of Texas at Arlington, Charles "Bryan" Sims joined the University's Facilities Division in 1996 as Assistant Director of Environmental Health and Safety. He eventually became Associate Director of that office.

In 2003, Sims became the Associate Director of the University's Physical Plant, where he worked under Director Jeff Johnson, a longtime advocate of improving the campus's physical accessibility. In both this position and as Director of Institutional Construction (2007-2013), Sims took a leading role in addressing persistent accessibility issues, choosing how to prioritize and fund accessibility improvements, and ensuring that both new construction and renovations complied with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and the Texas Accessibility Standards. He worked closely with Johnson, Carpenter Shop Supervisor Billy Bates, Office for Students with Disabilities Director Penny Acrey (previously Associate Director), UT Arlington's architects, and Vice President for Administration and Campus Operations John D. Hall.

In 2013, Sims became the Executive Director of the Division for Enterprise Development, where he oversees continuing education, especially workforce development and lifelong learning programs. In this position, he is once again drawing on his background in environmental work.

### **Topics discussed**

- Sim's career at UT Arlington and growing awareness of accessibility issues

- Accessibility challenges posed by UT Arlington’s physical plant
  - Prioritizing fully functional buildings versus fully compliant buildings
  - Carpentry Shop Supervisor Billy Bates’ role in improving accessibility at UT Arlington
  - State and federal requirements regarding accessibility
  - Jim Hayes’s impact on how Facilities approached improving accessibility
  - UTA’s funding and culture regarding accessibility
  - Why did UTA become a pioneer in disability accessibility in Texas?
  - Process of requesting state funding for improving accessibility
  - ADA transition plans for Facilities; recordkeeping in Facilities
  - UTA’s impact on accessibility at other schools
  - Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act of 2008 and expanding definitions of disability
  - Origins of the walls in front of some buildings’ ramps at UT Arlington
  - Accessibility challenges posed by ramps and parking lots
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**Rose**

This is Sarah Rose.

**Engel**

Trevor Engel.

**Rose**

Interviewing Bryan Sims on August 12, 2015 for the Texas Disability History Project.

**Sims**

Wonderful. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of it.

**Rose**

<topic>Sim’s career at UT Arlington and growing awareness of accessibility issues</topic>  
Thank you! When did you arrive at UTA?

**Sims**

I’ve been here nineteen years, I came in August 1996. Actually, as I was thinking about visiting with you today, you caught me at the perfect time in my life and career for this because I’ve had some changes over the last couple years with my job duties associated with the university and it’s allowed me to have a different perspective on my career here and what I had hoped to accomplish. I’ve been thinking a lot about my career lately at the university. You hit me with the perfect time!

I came in August 1996 as an Assistant Director in the Environmental Health and Safety office. I spent seven years in the Environmental Health and Safety office as an Assistant and Associate Director, in which I managed in overseeing the environmental and health programs for the campus.... [Given] my background in that area, I was able to help develop many of the

environmental programs that exist today. I'm very proud of those days in environmental health safety.

I then moved after a seven-year tenure to Facilities for ten years. I spent ten years in Facilities, the first four as an associate director responsible for maintenance activities across the campus. That's where I really came into my first real contact with accessibility issues on our campus, mainly seeing those come into play as we were performing maintenance activities and identifying accessibility problems that we had.

The remaining six years involved at Facilities, I took a more active role as a director of construction. I was responsible for overseeing institutional construction activities on the campus during that six-year period of time. I was responsible for managing and oversight of our architects and architectural program, which of course, obviously, took me directly into the accessibility world, the ADA, and Texas Disability Act. I was very much involved in day to day decisions on accessibility issues and responsible for managing those corrections and/or improvements. That was my life there.

Then in the last two years I have come over to the Division of Enterprise Development to manage adult education programs through Continuing Education. We do a ton of training for heavy equipment operators for TXDOT: Texas Department of Transportation. We do thousands of students a year in adult education, from everything from healthcare to public works type related training courses. I've been able to take some of that—my construction environmental background—and apply it to adult education management. That's my history at UT Arlington.

**Rose**

Where did you come from before that?

**Sims**

Prior to that I had owned an environmental firm in the Metroplex and I was very young, and very fortunate to have sold that firm. I sold a firm to a much larger environmental firm in Dallas, and UT Arlington was a client of mine. I had worked for five years previous to 1991 with the university in that capacity as an environmental consultant. That was actually a very good segue into my career at the university, having worked with them on a vendor side for a long period of time. It's been a great... UT Arlington has been a fantastic home for me, I spent nineteen years here, I consider it my career, obviously. I hope to spend the remainder of my career here. This adult education portion is that third and, I think, last track of my career. I've been able to span multiple departments with multiple responsibilities.

**Rose**

That's impressive!

**Sims**

It's been fun! I've known a lot of people and I've seen multiple presidents and administrations come and go through campus which has been very very insightful and interesting. They've all brought a different value to our campus. When I came here Dr. Witt had just come on board. He had a great tenure here and moved on to even larger duties at the University of Alabama. Since then, he's moved up, and he's in their system administration, if not running the entire system of administration. He was the initial individual that I came in contact with as far as the senior administration position on our campus. Then we had an interim president, Dr. Sorber—

Charles Sorber—for a short period of time, and then President [James D.] Spaniolo came, and then Dr. [Vistasp] Karbhari. I've been able to see multiple senior-level administrator presidents come in and see how that impacts and changes how we address issues on our campus. That's been interesting and fun. They've all done a great job.

**Rose**

<topic>Accessibility challenges posed by UT Arlington's physical plant</topic>  
You went into environmental health and safety initially, but what was the accessibility issue like? You said you remember it before you got into facilities and construction?

**Sims**

I remember the campus being challenging from an accessibility standpoint. The things that come to mind the most is being able to get in and out of facilities. We have a lot of older buildings on the campus—we have a history.... There's a group of very old buildings: Ransom Hall, Preston Hall, those original parts of the Carlisle College, the military school. Those buildings, inherently, had virtually no accessibility. They were very difficult to access. At that time, accessibility wasn't even given a consideration.

Then we got a group of buildings that come in around the '50s and '60s. That's a core amount—most of our buildings on the campus were constructed during that timeframe. When I left facilities I think there was roughly 110 buildings on campus. The vast majority of those buildings were built in that '50s, '60s, '70s timeframe. During that timeframe, although accessibility issues had been identified, they were not addressed during original construction of those buildings.

Science Hall—built in the '50s.... Science Hall is a building that although has some ramps in the area, but for the most parts, [it's] very difficult and access and maneuver around if you're a wheelchair, or if you're blind, whatever the case may be. If you've got an impairment that limits your mobility, it's a difficult building to move around in. You would go from Science Hall to maybe University Hall, something like that, that's built a little later, the Fine Arts Building, you'll see a little more accessibility—areas where it's easier to be mobile.

**Rose**

Davis Hall was cited as the first building built after the Texas Architectural Barriers Act [was passed] in 1969. Although, apparently, University Hall—[the Department of] History fits because it [History] was one of two choices [of majors] whose buildings were accessible. Jim Hayes—and Sam, I don't know about Sam Provence, who got the first ramps built, about thirty of them by 1970—[well,] Jim Hayes had a choice between accounting or history. John Dycus, who was here for many years—*Shorthorn* advisor—he also majored in history a little earlier because it was accessible [actually, Dycus majored in accounting, in which he had no interest]. All the classes were in University Hall. This was really before there were laws—things were moving fairly slowly.

**Sims**

<topic>Prioritizing fully functional buildings versus fully compliant buildings</topic>  
That's what typically happens with rules and laws that are intended to do good for our society, but at the same time they're harder to enforce because [of] the economic impact of them. In this case the economic impact of making a building completely compliant, that's a huge term that I used to struggle with a lot...having a fully compliant facility versus having a functional facility that meets the intent of the rule. That's what I had to juggle, and I think every individual in my previous position that has come before me or after me has to juggle that issue. There's only a certain amount of funds you have available to address issues. Do you

address them by the letter of the law that might cost this much money and benefit hopefully all people, or do you address them to make them functional and it costs this much money and does the same thing [and] benefits the vast majority of the people?

That's difficult, and where it really becomes difficult is when you're faced with...here's a great example for me. If I've got a slope, and I've gotten this: if I had a pre-existing slope issue on an accessible route into a building. That slope was one degree off—it's not technically compliant by the letter of the law. By the letter of the rule with noncompliance, is it functional? Absolutely yes, 99.9% of folks in a wheelchair will be happy to take that ramp and never know that one percent exists. Do I take those dollars that may be significant dollars to replace that ramp to fix that one percent, or do I take those dollars and address this ramp over here or this restroom over here which is completely nonfunctional? It's so noncompliant it's nonfunctional.

Functionality versus letter of the law is a huge issue that a person in that position, making those decisions, has to make. We've had to do that, and Jeff will tell you this even more so than me, because he faced it for numerous years. He came before me in '94, he worked in Facilities and Housing pretty much the entire time. His experience with this is even greater than mine. When I took on the responsibility of accessibility issues on our campus as far as facilities were concerned, keep in mind there was a clear delineation between students' and visitors' needs versus Facilities and what we did.

Penny Acrey, who's a good friend of mine [Associate Director (2004-2009) and Director (2010-present) of the Office for Students with Disabilities]... Penny [is] an individual that was just an absolute advocate of the need of the person, I love that about her because she would come to me, and she'd say "Okay Brian, I don't care about whether it meets the code, I just need them to be able to do this." I love that about her because we had a similar thought process—I don't care either: "I've only got X amount of dollars Penny, how can I help you? How can I help the people coming to you the best?" She would say, "Okay, do this for me, do this for me." We would do those kind of things to help. If it was a personal need of an individual that had a particular challenge, Penny was that advocate. If it was the person that needed to go execute the fix, then that was me. That's how our relationship played itself out.

#### **Rose**

<topic>Carpenter Shop Supervisor Billy Bates' role in improving accessibility at UT Arlington</topic>

She talked a little bit about that and also [about] working with the Billy Bates, fixing drawer pulls, moving desks for someone who was tall in a power chair.

#### **Sims**

I met Billy Bates when I came on board Facilities as an Associate Director. He was our Carpenter Shop Supervisor. He was one of the folks that I was responsible for, he directly reported to me. Billy had a heart for this, you gotta have passion, you gotta use good common business sense to make your decisions, but you also have to be compassionate. You have to have passion for doing the right thing. Billy was one of those people that had one of the best passion for doing the right thing of any of our supervisors.

When I called Billy up and said, "Billy, we've got this issue over at this building, somebody couldn't get in," he loaded up the truck and every guy he had available, and they took straight off, left everything they were supposed to be doing, and built a ramp. He may have spent two days building a wooden ramp to get a new person into a new facility that we had never had to get in that facility before. It would be a completely noncompliant entrance, and we just get a single student, and that's enough. There's a singular need to get that individual in that building.

I almost had to hold the reins back on Billy from a management standpoint, versus giving an incentive, because he was there all the time. Billy's a great man, a great person. He very much cared about not just the issue. As far as the code was concerned, I don't think he cared about the code at all—that was my job to care about the code. He cared about whether the person could get in the building or not. I think he did for all the right reasons.

<topic>Sim's and UT Arlington's approach to improving accessibility</topic>

If it was chairs, Penny or the person before Penny, Diane Hengst [Director of the Office for Students with Disabilities prior to Penny Acrey; departed UT Arlington for UT San Antonio in 2010], she would call up and basically say, "I've got a very special situation with a student coming into this class this semester." We would sit down and say, "Okay, where does this student need to go?" We would get a roadmap whether they're going to be in that building, that building, or that building. They live over here, they go to the grocery store here, and they do this and that, and then we would try to ensure that we built that pathway for that individual. Within the limited funds that we had as a state institution, and obviously we had to be careful with state dollars, but at the same time that student... When we built those pathways we built it in matter, not just to take care of that student, but we knew there would be another one. There would be another person that needs this path later. We were trying to be as permanent as possible in those directions.

I call them "corrections," and I shouldn't because a lot of the times a facility institution will get a bad rap... I inherited old buildings, it didn't make me a bad person because I had a bunch of buildings that didn't have ramps on, it would've made me a bad person if I didn't care. I did care. The dollars that came in, we planned appropriately to update those buildings. They weren't buildings with problems, they were just buildings that were built for another time and another thought process.

**Rose**

What's the process of recognizing and addressing accessibility issues more long-term? Not just a particular student, or particular semester, but the university's approach to doing it?

**Sims**

The plan? We had a three-phase approach. We had three different areas where we ran into accessibility issues. The first one was new construction. In new construction, everyone tends to think, "Well it's new, it's gonna be compliant." It's not easy to build a new building period. It's really not easy to build it and ensure that it meets the letter of the law of compliance with ADA and TAS [Texas Accessibility Standards]. Making sure that we kept accessibility in mind as we constructed new facilities and inspected it appropriately to ensure the construction was built per the code—that was a part of what we did. The last thing you want to do is have this great program to go correct and/or update existing buildings and then forget about the new ones you built and be building the same problem again. We had to make sure we had new construction addressed, and that was a certain amount of our time.

**Rose**

<topic>State and federal requirements regarding accessibility</topic>

Are the Regents still involved in moderating some of that? That is, in the '70s, the Coordinating Board and the Regents had a form that people had to submit to say here's our plan for addressing accessibility.

**Sims**

I don't know if there was a form. There's tons of forms that go to the Regents for new buildings, all of them state that the building will be built per code, all codes, accessibility, ADA, TAS, included in that. Now it's a part of doing business. It's not, "Oh my gosh we gotta do

this!" like sustainability or making a green building. It's all a part of doing business now. Even when I was in that responsible role, we would always make sure that we said "Yes we are going to follow NFPA 101 fire code, we're going to follow building code, we're going to follow ADA/TAS" [ADA/Texas Accessibility Standards]. For the most part we always did. With TAS though, there's a unique aspect to it, there's an inspection process by a registered accessibility specialist called RAS [Registered Accessibility Specialist]. A RAS has to inspect every new building and check that box saying that that building was constructed as per TAS and the ADA. We always had the architects and the RASs involved. It was a process, it was time-consuming, but we got there. The more challenging and the bigger planning that we had to do was associated with two other areas, renovation.

Renovation...the ADA does not state necessarily that you have to go in as a building owner and immediately correct all noncompliant issues, but if you touch that facility in a renovation, if you renovate that building to certain level, I think it's \$50,000.... If you do \$50,000 worth of noncosmetic renovation, in other words [if] you move walls, it triggers compliance in that specific area. Everything you construct in that new construction has to be compliant. That in itself is pretty easy to do. The problem that you're really faced with is it also triggers accessibility from the parking lot to that area and from that area to the restroom that services it. If the restroom's included within the renovated area, it's easy. You're building a new restroom, you make it compliant. If the restroom's outside of the renovated area, and many times it is. It's down the hall or somewhere else, those restrooms have to be accessible. They have to meet the accessibility standards. Now what we were challenged with is we have all these renovations occurring, and we did tons of renovations and I know they still do today.

As we did those renovations, we had to ensure that we were compliant from parking lot, into building. The struggles we faced were the parking lot itself, the accessible route from the parking to the building, the entrance into the building and then to the space. That was always a problematic area that we were faced with with addressing. Then you've got the restroom that may be a hallway down that would have to be brought up to date. Restrooms and plumbing are very expensive. One of the managerial issues I was faced with, I would turn in a construction renovation budget that had to address all these things and my budget would skyrocket. The administration would say "We're only renovating ten rooms, it should be \$100,000." My budget would be \$200,000. They would say "Where's the other \$100,000?" Well, did you forget about that parking lot that's not compliant? Those restrooms down there that are not compliant? I was constantly having to fight that battle for funding, and it wasn't a fight, it was a justification because they're state dollars. It's something that a person in that position has to do. They have to realize that ADA and TAS, especially TAS, trigger things you have to do when you touch a building. Renovation was huge.

That last area that we were faced with is, "What are the known problem areas?" That's where you get the history of people, that's where the Billy Bateses and the Penny Acreys and those people come in very valuable because they know "What are the struggles of our population on our campus?" Whether it be our students, our faculty, our staff, or whether it be the visitors. What are the areas that every time we hold a graduation ceremony some amount of people can't get there easily because there is a barrier in the way, whatever that barrier may be.

We put together a list of those things: where are those barriers at? That list, it seemed unsurmountable for a period of time, it was huge. You go around and just look anywhere and you'd see a barrier. We had this list, and when I first looked at that I thought, "I'll [have] retired ten times before this is done!" You just got to chew a little bit of it at a time, you bite it off and say, "Okay, what's the most important parts to hit?" People like Penny would be very helpful for that because we'd go to Penny and say "Penny, where are you having problems? What do you see?" because that's where the rubber meets the road. That's where people come in to say, "Hey, I can't get here!" We don't know that until it's reported to us.

**Rose**

<topic>Jim Hayes's impact on how Facilities approached improving accessibility</topic>

Who was involved in making that list? It seems like you overlapped a little with Jim Hayes before he died.

**Sims**

Jim was a fantastic man. The thing about Jim is just his attitude that he brought about. He obviously was.... To be in a wheelchair as an extremely mobile person.... He got around very well, and he made it look easy, and it's not obviously. He brought this positive attitude towards it, and he was able to bring this reality of functionality to me. I can never speak for him, but I don't think it was the one percent slope off that he was worried about. It was, "Is there a ramp there at all? Is there a means for us to even get remotely close, from point A to point B?" Being able to have someone like that that thought, "Hey, it's not about 'Is it easy?' It's about 'Is it doable? Can you get there from here?'"

It instilled certain priorities in us. That's a priority because there is no ramp at all! It's ten steps of stairs to get from point A to point B, that's obviously not very navigable. You can't get there very easy. He would help us with those kind of priorities. Then you just had people, our maintenance staff. Our maintenance staff were huge because they're there every day, they live it, they breathe it. That's their job. They open a door every day, if that door doesn't open easily to a person that can walk up there and have all of the normal human abilities to grab the door swing it open, if it doesn't open easy for them, I guarantee you it doesn't open easy for a person in a chair or person with a cane in their hand. It's obviously identifying those kind of those areas, we got a lot from them too. We get a work order and turn it into the system: "Hey, this is a trip hazard, it's an accessibility issue, it's a this, that, some type of safety hazard."

**Rose**

<topic>UTA's funding and culture regarding accessibility</topic>

It's a culture in the whole department it sounds like? Of addressing accessibility?

**Sims**

I think so. One of the fortunate things we have here as a state institution.... I'll say this, I feel like every state institution if they're not they should be, we have the ability to come in and do the right thing every day and not really be questioned because it's an expectation of our society as public servants that we're doing the right thing. It's easy for me in my position, or anyone within the organization to come in and say "Hey, I think there should be a ramp there! We can't get people from point A to point B." If you do that in private industry, you get a lot more of "Well is that economically feasible? Does that meet our business model of what we're trying to achieve this year?" The bottom dollar here counts a lot more when you get in that area. I'm not saying that we're not careful in how we spend money, but we get to come in as public servants of state dollars and be able to say "Hey, we think the right thing is this. Let's find a plan to fix it." It creates a culture by the very existence being a public servant.

**Rose**

<topic>Why did UTA become a pioneer in disability accessibility in Texas?</topic>

That's interesting. One thing we've been wondering—we've been looking at the '70s and '80s, the early period—we know from oral histories like Penny Acree's oral history, other schools had the same environments of state law, Regents, Coordinating Board, [but] they were not accessible. Why was UTA different? Obviously, a big part of it was Jim Hayes, Sam Provence, [Wayne] Duke, the Handicapped Students Association, but it's an interesting question of why was UTA so far ahead? Why did things line up here? Nedderman also, seems to have been important too.



## Sims

I also think that it takes administrators in decision-making roles who want to do the right thing and are not necessarily focused on what their career looks like and are focused on being a servant within that career.

The person that is in my mind, my mentor, the person that I think has taken us farther than anyone from that standpoint is John Hall. John Hall, he's responsible for all the people that we've been talking about except for Penny Acrey, she's on the other side. Jeff Johnson, myself, Billy Bates, facilities has reported to John Hall for a very long time. John reported through I think originally, Dudley Wetsel. John had come up through Housing, then he came through Facilities, but he's a senior leadership role, he is a vice president on campus. He's still here today. John was the guy that never said "No" to us when we had that issue. I could not have been effective in my role if I went up to Davis Hall, third floor, and asked for money and was told no. He expected me to do my job and to make sure when I brought something to him, whether it be a request for ADA money or TAS accessibility money, that I had really looked at the issue, I really studied it, I put the best number I could to it, and that I prioritized it in the manner that I should. That was all my job. His job was to be supportive of the need. He always supported me. I cannot think of a single time in all my years of tenure under him, which was all seventeen prior to here, that he ever told me "No."

## Rose

That's what Duke said about Nedderman in a way too. They had to prioritize, but he never said no.

## Sims

He never said "No." That's huge, that's support from the top down. When you have that support up here, it's very easy for folks that are working down here at this level of actually rubber meets the road do everything down here, the real people doing it, which would be a Billy Bates-type individual, and his staff, and the folks he had. It's really easy for them to go out with that culture and mindset because it comes from the top.

## Rose

<topic>Process of requesting state funding for improving accessibility</topic>

We actually wanted to ask about the political dynamics of processes. I don't know if you have anything else on campus, but also dealing with the system, or Regents of the state?

## Sims

One of the responsibilities I had each year was to submit a request for state funding. There was above and beyond our budget for the facilities. We had numerous different means of doing that. For a while, PUF funding was available—Public Utility Funds—library funding was available, library equipment, we had rehabilitation.... Those funds were issued every legislative period. Every two years, we could submit for funds with what we thought were issues on the campus. The areas that almost always I submitted for were fire and life safety issues to bring up fire alarms for our sprinkler systems in our buildings, and [for] ADA TAS [Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and Texas Accessibility Standards compliance]. It was my job to bring forward these, and these were submissions for big big money: at half a million dollars, a million dollars, \$300,000, at 1.5 million. We would submit these requests for monies to address ADA/TAS issues across the campus. It was my job to prepare those documents to go

to the state. We were almost always awarded some money in those areas. There was very few times that I can ever remember that fire and life safety and ADA/TAS were not funded, even in the most difficult years of funding. We weren't asking for a new swimming pool at the gym, we were asking to correct a ramp issue, restroom issues—all of these things that people did not have good accessible use of the facilities.

**Rose**

Do you happen to know if other schools had the same success?

**Sims**

I don't know what the success rate of other schools are. I would think that they would've been similar. It's all about you gotta ask. If you don't ask, you don't get. We always asked, and we were pretty successful in getting those funds. I might ask for \$750,000 and get \$500,000, but I got \$500,000 for two years to deal with stuff! What that money went to most of the time was to these areas we had identified. These upgrades, and upgrades are probably the best term for them. It's not the old building's fault that it's not compliant, it's an old building! It just needed an upgrade. Funding from the state, my perspective, it was easy. I had to make a good point, I had to say, "It's this building, it's these issues, and I've done my homework, I've gotten cost estimates put together." I've did my job to ensure that I know what we're asking for. It's the right amount of money. Once I did that, we got money.

I can say this about UTA, and I don't know if other institutions are like this and not, our efforts, any time that we were unable to come up with something, it was never because there was not enough funding or desire to find funding for. We always had funding, and we always had folks supporting that funding. Really, what we ran into is that we just ran out of time to get it all done. You got multitudes of, literally, hundreds of thousands of items across the campus that were not compliant. From a rail here...our biggest challenge was priorities. Prioritize the issue. If a handrail is supposed to be 42 and 44 inches high, and it's 44 and a half, 45, do I really spend \$100,000 to remove and replace a bunch of handrails? No I don't. I go in there and take care of some toilets that aren't even remotely close you can't even get into it, if you're in a wheelchair. That's what we did. That's the mindset that we tried to take to.

**Rose**

That makes a lot of sense.

**Sims**

That's what Jeff is going to tell you too, and I love that you're going to talk to Jeff. He's a very very close friend of mine. His perspective is ten times that of mine when it comes to those issues. He's probably going to be more colorful with you about it than I am, which is fine. He's like "I'm going to replace that dag-gum handrail. I really need to do real work that counted!" He's done probably more as far as just actually, directly being supervising over these issues. In the twenty years I've been here, he's done more than anyone including Billy Bates or anyone else. He's been that responsible for correcting stuff because he cares.

**Rose**

That's amazing. What about other allies that you have on campus?

**Sims**

Allies? Jeff is one. There's a gentleman you should speak with, his name is Curt Kuhlmann.

**Rose**

Curt with a K or C?

**Sims**

Curt with a C, and Kuhlmann with a K. It's K-U-H-L-M-A-N-N. I hired Curt, and he's an architect. I brought him in specifically for this issue and others, but predominantly to help me understand and address and prioritize and write corrections or improvements for ADA/TAS issues. As far as actual TAS and ADA is concerned, he was my subject matter expert. If I need to know the exact height, size, width, whatever of a specific area I would go to him. He's an architect, and he thinks like one, and he's extremely valuable for that ability. I would say, "What's the letter of the law say, Curt?" He'd tell me, and I'd say, "Okay now, what makes sense, Curt?"

He and I would strategize about what makes the best sense, and he's told me many times "Why don't I have your job? All I gotta do is tell you the code, you gotta make [the] business decision." He was right, I had to make the business decision, but I could never have made that business decision without that knowledge of what the intent of the code was. He would be able to say, "Okay, Bryan, here's what it says, and my best guess as an architect is here's what I think I'm supposed to do with the intent of that." I could say, "My best guess as a business administrator, this is what I'm gonna do." We would argue about, not argue about, but we would discuss that. He was my resource when it came to ADA/TAS, and you should talk to him because he's the keeper of the stuff. When I left, all the files, all the budgets, ADA/TAS, anything related to planning or buildings or tasks to do, he had it. I left the files with him and said, "It's yours, buddy."

**Rose**

<topic>ADA transition plans for Facilities; recordkeeping in Facilities</topic>

That's interesting, because Special Collections has very little from Facilities and Construction in terms of things that were transferred. One of the things we've wondered about, Penny Acrey has said she's never seen a copy of the ADA transition plan, although presumably UTA had one. Then, we wondered about the '70s, '80s, and even right after the 1969 law. Any thoughts on reports that would've been required?

**Sims**

I can't speak prior to me being there, obviously, so I don't know about the '70s and '80s. When I had responsibility for those reports, and yes they do exist, there are reports, there's stuff in writing, because I developed much of it. It's not a narrative guideline to: "Here's how we're going to get from point A to point B." What it is more of a group of documents that are probably five boxes of stuff that says, "Okay, here's on this date, at this time, this period of time. Here's the list of thirty buildings that have problems. Here's the list of things we think we've identified, here's the priority we're going to be putting them in. Here's the budgets that we've developed for that. Here's the plan to get there." It's more of that. There's no magic bullet locked away that you can pull it and say, "Oh my gosh, there's the ADA magic book!" That doesn't exist, but there are a ton of documents that do. A lot of those include floor plans. They include inherent issues associated with the university.

After we had the situation with 9/11, we found, as an institution, too, that a lot of documents started getting locked down out of the sake of security, homeland security. We, as a facility were not able to release documents for a period of time because there was this issue of: "Do you, as an institution, release floor plans of all your tunnel systems?" No, you really don't want to do that because there's a certain tiny amount of people out there that want to do bad things. Do you release floor plans that show your roof access points? No, you don't want a person with bad intent to know how to get on a roof of a building. These documents had all that in it, so it would be almost impossible to black out the documents of the stuff you didn't want. There was a period of time which Facilities, even as a public entity...we still held back from [the actual people in the] building, [the] floor plans...[we held them] very close to Facilities. Even if a class or one of the colleges wanted...let's say they were doing a project and they needed that information, we would require the chair, go to the Dean, and the Dean submitted to Facilities so we could release it for that specific use. We had some level of control.

**Rose**

What's the situation now?

**Sims**

I don't know, I've been out two years. I would say that it's probably relaxed, but I don't know. I do know there's a process to go through to get documents released. I think it would start with John Hall, most likely, and then it would go through Bill Poole. Bill Poole is the Assistant Vice President over Facilities. Bill Poole would have to send it down and get them released. If you wanted a copy of whatever Curt had...Curt is a follow-the-book guy so he would probably tell you, "Hey, you gotta go through the procedure to get it." I don't know, he might say "I left a copy in here."

**Rose**

It's also about getting the university archivist—Betty Shankle, who is new—and Brenda McClurkin [head of Special Collections] involved. What Betty said is that there's a record retention schedule that they distribute, but then that Facilities and other departments have their own records things. A lot of stuff doesn't get turned over.

**Sims**

We all do, if I open that file drawer of this doctor, she's probably got something in there that we don't have anywhere else.

**Rose**

It's something to explore—what would be of historical relevance but not a security issue?

**Sims**

There's plenty there, and there's other issues too, as an institution, that you have to think about. We are a transparent university, and we are more transparent than I think many are, but even that being said, you still have to protect your institution from folks that would want to think ill of it or do ill of it. There is a balance between security and being transparent. I've always tried to lean towards being as transparent as I can possibly be and as trustworthy as I

could possibly be of humankind, but at the same time, if I know there's a risk there, I'm certainly not going to go stick my hand in the lion's mouth.

**Rose**

<topic>UTA's impact on accessibility at other schools</topic>

Thinking beyond UTA, did people from other schools consult with you? Wayne Duke said there's definitely a lot of consultation... We are hoping to get Jim Hayes's actual papers which his sister probably has in a storage locker. We know that UTA is described as being fifteen to twenty years ahead of other schools before the ADA was passed. Did other facility officers come and talk to you? Was there any kind of outreach that may have happened?

**Sims**

I do know this, I do know there was a conversation with my colleagues and peers at directors' meetings and things like that nature about our accessibility issues. We all faced the same thing. You don't manage that much square footage—when I left I think it was 110 buildings and right at six million square feet—you don't manage that much without facing the same problems. We talked about it, but I don't recall, specifically, a time where we shared necessarily more than conversation.

**Rose**

We don't know how it would've gone, it may have all been from Jim Hayes or Wayne Duke because it's...at least before ADA, and I think from what I've.... It certainly occurred at private schools. My husband teaches at TCU [Texas Christian University]. UTA is far more accessible than a lot of other schools. A lot of schools that were actually, that have a lot of buildings from the same period. Things lined up at UTA.

**Sims**

What it I contribute to...thinking about it a little bit, I think you're right. I think we probably have been a little bit ahead of the curve when it comes to addressing issues, building accessibility issues. When I think about why, I keep going back to there was just good people involved. A Wayne Duke or a John Hall or Dudley Wetsel passing that over to myself or Jeff Johnson, or me passing that to Curt Kuhlmann, Billy Bates, all those people. Then you've got this major figure like Jim Hayes that sat in the middle of it. Jim had no responsibilities with facilities necessarily, or minimal, but he had such this huge personality about.... It wasn't that he was trying to be outgoing or egotistical—he wasn't any of those things. When you visited with him, you knew you were visiting with a real person that was really compassionate and was able to articulate that compassion in a manner that got things done. People wanted to help him. It wasn't because he was in a chair, they wanted to help him because he wanted to help others. That's incredibly important that there was this group of people.

I remember when Jeff and I argued about a thousand things in our career, but we never argued about spending a penny on an ADA TAS issue. It was because that's a common ground, we both have the same interest there. It was a culture that had been developed within facilities. We just had a lot of good people that were able to make good decisions. We were in the right environment, I think we probably were ahead of the curve.

I visited a lot of campuses, and if you're in Facilities, you go and you look at facilities. If you're a cook, you look at food. If you're Facilities, you look at the door. You go and say, "I've seen that a hundred times. I'm glad I don't have to do that, I dealt with that last year." You just go through and you see that and I did see bigger issues at other campuses than I've seen here.

**Rose**

Something that I talk about in class early on in disability history, "Okay think about SMU [Southern Methodist University], think about TCU. What's on the buildings?" TCU's board has been adding columns and stairs to a lot of buildings, whereas the MAC was built with no stairs.

**Sims**

Yep, pretty flat.

**Rose**

They just say, "Oh, that's really interesting." If you think about the legacy of the campus, it is visibly different.

**Sims**

Absolutely. That's a huge thing too, do you want your buildings to be functional, or do you want them to express something? Express themselves in some manner? Architecturally, we had been changing, and that was a part of bringing in architects and talking about the programs of new buildings, talking about the legacy we want that building to give, leave or be.

Often times those conversations were not that it had to look a certain way, but had to function a certain way. If we thought about functionality, then inherently within that you're always going to address accessibility. You can't function unless it's easy to access it, use it and use the parts and pieces of the building. ADA and TAS issues just got incorporated into it. Again, I think it's a culture.

**Rose**

One of the things that we found was really striking was that mid-'80s there were people coming from Kansas and Indiana to go to school at UTA because it was accessible. Partly was because the Arlington Handicapped Association, now Helping Restore Ability, had set up independent living programs and attendants, but also it was just so accessible. We don't know how they were getting word of that.

**Sims**

That's interesting. I have never heard of it. I didn't know that we had that kind of impact outside of our institution, that we had folks that were coming here for that specific issue. It makes me feel good because it means that we did good, and we brought people here. That's interesting.

**Rose**

This may be the '80s, there are some debates with Student Congress mediated where the Handicapped Students Association wanted to get rid of all stairs and Jim Hayes came and said "Well, actually, the blind people might need those stairs to navigate." I was curious, was there ever any student pressure on facilities?

## Sims

No. We had student resolutions that would come down, and they would have an effect on decisions we made. Some cases we would add something here or there. I don't recall there ever being a student resolution that come down that negatively or dramatically positively impacted. Most of the ideas that came out of the student groups were good ideas, were they feasible to do? No, in some cases, yes in some cases. We did the ones that were. Specifically, no, I don't remember there being any negative impacts at all.

One of the biggest issues that we're faced with is there's a lot of real good ideas in our society, but it doesn't mean they're real good ideas are for every place and every person in every situation. Weeding out the ones that are good for us, UT Arlington, and our environment, and our situation we're in—that's what was important for us. It may be a great idea in Kansas City at this particular institution, because it's well-suited for them—the idea. You bring it to here and it's just because of our dynamics for whatever it could be, the way we think, our culture, or it could be our building situations. We would get a lot of good stuff, and sometimes we had to say, "You know, if we were just a little differently could do that," and we could.

## Rose

<topic>Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act of 2008 and expanding definitions of disability</topic>

That's interesting. ADA Amendments Act in 2008, did that change anything? Because it really expands the definition of disability, and part of what I'm wondering, we talked about physical ability, blind students, but there's also things like chemical issues, bringing your environmental health and safety background, have things changed in terms of how things got approached and what disabilities were included?

## Sims

I think it does. I'm probably not the best person to speak to that because I don't know the true impact of that to the campus, but I can say this. It changes how we operate our facilities and our business units. What happens is, as a great example, if you've gotta have—for the hearing-impaired, you can come into the Planetarium now and there's hearing-impaired equipment there for folks to be able to enjoy that particular presentation. That's not a Facilities issues as much as it is just an added experience to that student. It can be a hearing-impaired individual, it could be how we operate...our laboratories are a good example. What we do to enhance the experience of the student? That's what it boils down to. Can we enhance the experience of the student? To do that, what aids do we need to be able to do that? I think what the rule changing did was allow us to think are we enhancing or providing the appropriate amount of experience to the student?

If it's a safety issue, and safety issues, in environmental health and safety was big because if you're an able-bodied person it's hard enough to deal with a hazard because there's a hazard there you have to take precautions not to harm yourself and others. If you have an impairment, now it's tenfold more difficult to deal with a hazard because of your impairment. In other words, if it takes two hands to do this and you have one, now it's a whole new way to operate but you still want that person with one hand to have the experience. You gotta put in a process or procedure, an additional aid to help with that happened.

## Rose

<topic>Origins of the walls in front of some buildings' ramps at UT Arlington</topic>  
Okay. One final question I had. Penny has noticed that a lot of the ramps had walls at various points, like outside University Hall that makes it hard to spot, and she argued that this is

making the ramps less visible. I was just curious if you remembered why and if it was just for the UH [University Hall] ones?

**Sims**

Why?

**Rose**

And Pickard? It's really hard to spot.

**Sims**

When you said that I wanted to immediately say, "You need to ask Jeff Johnson that, because he decided to do it." The walls up on ramps.... I cannot think of a good reason why there were walls on ramps other than if you do have handrail/guardrail systems, there are certain things that you have to be concerned about. If you've got a person with a cane, they're going up a ramp, they gotta know where that edge is, so you've got to have something there. I think it's a four inches that that's gotta turn up with some type of wall system, so it's a tap area for the cane.

There's things that come into play that aesthetics and meeting the interpretation and needs of the code sometimes conflict. Those walls.... I remember Jeff did a lot of ramps, he and I both did ramps. He'd do some of these special projects and he would go do a ramp, I would make fun of his, I'd do a ramp, and he'd make fun of mine. When you said that I'm thinking, "They're probably all Jeff's, make fun of him." Jeff would be the person best to address that. Ask him, just say that Bryan said, "All the ramps that look goofy are yours, Jeff. They're all compliant."

**Rose**

Any questions you think we should've asked but didn't? Or anything you want to add at this point?

**Sims**

No, I can't think of anything. Let me look at my notes real quick.

<topic>Accessibility challenges posed by ramps and parking lots</topic>

I would like to say this: we talked a lot about ramps, ramps are important, parking lots and restrooms. Parking lots and restrooms are very difficult, difficult things. Parking lots—just the slope issues that you're faced with.... This idea you made a comment a minute ago there was a group that said there should be no stairs, my first thought to that, and I'll try to be positive...my first thought was "That's ridiculous." There should be all of these wonderful accoutrements to our buildings, they should be there, and stairs are one of them. Stairs are functional and very useful for 90 percent of our population, but that does not mean there should not be a ramp there too, obviously, for the other ten percent. So a hundred percent of our society can enjoy that wonderful thing we built inside that building.

There's all of these issues about parking lots, parking lots are set at different elevations than buildings. Here at UT Arlington we were pretty lucky because we're flat. This campus is fairly flat. You go to Texas State, Texas State is one of these...I cannot imagine being in the facility's role trying to address ADA/TAS issues at Texas State.



**Rose**

Penny's mentioned UNT and Sam Houston—both places she's tried to go, and it was impossible for her.

**Sims**

You just can't, it's because a university was built in a bunch of hills. Inherently, now you've got an issue with geography that you didn't have these other facilities. It might be great to put something up in Kansas where it's flat, go try and put it at Texas State, it makes no sense. You'll spend twenty times the amount of money to build this little thing.

Parking lots were always a challenge, and Jeff is the very best person to talk about parking lots because it was his baby. He was responsible for parking lots from day one that I can remember. He was born the parking lot man. He knows all things parking lots.

Restrooms, in my opinion, I would spend more money and time on a restroom because there is nothing more, in my opinion, degrading than for a person to not be able to properly use a facility.

**Rose**

There's actually a conference at Berkeley this past spring about restroom access. Gender, disability, a few different things and that it's exactly that idea.

**Sims**

It's a place where you expect to go take a personal break in your life. If that personal break is not a good experience.... We all appreciate a good clean restroom. I don't care if you're on the road traveling, when you go in the bathroom you appreciate it if it's accessible, there's paper, and it's clean...or now air, we use a lot of air. Whatever, there's stuff to be able to enjoy that particular moment. We spent a lot of money on restrooms. I think that it was one that I was more apt to spend money on than I was a ramp that was one or one and a half percent out of compliance. Other than those, I think those are my things I had.

**Rose**

Well, thank you! This has been really helpful!

**Sims**

Thank you. Ask Jeff about Billy. I haven't seen Billy in a number of years. I've looked for a number and a means to get in touch with him and I don't have it. He would sit down and tell you tons of stuff and history that predates Jeff and I. He was here before both of us.

**Rose**

Pre-ADA?

**Sims**

Yeah, he goes back a ways, and has a good perspective about it.