

Jeff Johnson

Director of in-house construction of facilities at UTA

*Interview conducted by
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in 2015 in Arlington, Texas
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Disability Studies Minor
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Biography

Johnson joined the University of Texas faculty in 1994. His initial job was as an assistant director in housing. At that time Johnson was in charge of maintenance in dorms and apartments in University center. Two years later he became the director of facilities management and started working toward making the campus as accessible as it is today. Johnson worked closely with Jim Hayes and the office for students with disabilities with providing accommodations throughout the campus, as well as with individual students.

Topics discussed

- Background and UTA accessibility
 - UTA disability culture
 - Broadening disability and accommodations
 - Jobs throughout his career
 - Jim Hayes' funeral
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Johnson

I got here '94. Jim Hayes and I used to work very very close together and he was really the front runner of all this in the beginning.

Rose

Let me just give the date and who's here. This is Sarah Rose.

Engel

Trevor Engel.

Rose

<topic>Background and UTA accessibility</topic>

Interviewing Jeff Johnson on August 12, 2015 for the Texas Disability History Collection.

Johnson

I got here '94. Let me tell you why I got here.

I interviewed for the job, it was actually for housing. They were looking for someone to take over the maintenance, all the repairs for all the housing, apartments, and dorms, all the auxiliary operations. I interviewed for the job and they made an offer, I turned it down because of the money. It was almost half of what I was making where I was at. I was really intrigued with the job, it was just I couldn't force myself to walk away to cut my salary by fifty percent. A year later I get a call from Will Parker in housing, he said, "Jeff, we want to talk with you again. We still haven't found anybody we really like besides you." He said, "We can't match the salary but we can get closer." I met with him and the president at the time, Wayne Duke who was the vice president of student affairs.

Rose

We talked with him last week.

Johnson

Yeah, he's a super guy, a lot of history. He was a big mover in a lot of this stuff too. Anyway, I took the job. When I got here the housing and operations, it was in pretty sad shape. There were all sorts of issues. That's just about the time they started all of this in '94, is when they did the first ADA act, there was a lot of retrofitting going on. It was really pretty crappy work, really crappy work. They were meeting the intent of the law in my opinion, but it was just so poorly done. It was so obvious.

Rose

This is the existing housing?

Johnson

I'm talking about all of the campus. They were making accessibility issues, but it just looked bad. We started rethinking some of the things we did. Jim and I worked really well together because a lot of his wheelchair basketball players would come through our housing. Jim, his attitude was "We don't need to

be treated like a major handicap." A lot of times his guys would come in and they wouldn't want anything done. They wouldn't stay in the ADA apartment. They didn't consider themselves handicapped, or disabled. They just didn't need it.

I would meet with anybody that came through housing that had special needs. I have never, even when I was running hotels and hospitals, I was never one to put somebody in an ADA room or ADA bedroom. I always tried to, "What are the accommodations do you need?" Go that way. Over in Lipscomb we had a girl one time in a wheelchair that the only problem she really was with her hands and she couldn't slide the card to get the gate open. Everything else she was fine with. We got her a remote control. She just pushed the button, the gate opened. That's all that she wanted. I've never been, I don't like to categorize people. Even though she was in a wheelchair, she had all these issues, she didn't want to be treated like she had all these issues. She had one particular problem she had a problem with and we addressed it. That's been my philosophy the last twenty years. Over the years we've addressed a lot of issues. Classroom issues, a lot of the classrooms originally on campus were not accessible. Then I moved over to facilities.

Rose

You started in housing?

Johnson

I started in housing and two years later they asked me to come over to facilities. I transferred over to facilities.

Rose

Okay, and what were you doing in facilities?

Johnson

I was the director of facilities management

Rose

Then?

Johnson

Then we started working on classroom stuff. We started out tearing out the raised floors. That's just what they did in the old days, the teacher was always on this platform, well somebody who was in a wheelchair couldn't get on the platform. We started tearing out platforms and doing stuff like that, and then the few places where we had situations where we could not--like 108 University Hall for example. We put a lift in. Since then we've come back and tore out and put a ramp in. Back then, the lift was the easiest and most economical way to go. Our first goal is to make every room we could accessible, all the classrooms. That was sitting in the front and/or the back. The code only says you have to have ADA accessibility in the room, but my philosophy was that the student wants to sit in the front row, he or she

ought to be able to get to the front row. We started addressing those types of issues. We've been very aggressive on getting funding over the years. I can get you a list for the last several years if you want that, how much we've gotten. We get special funding all the time.

Rose

That'd be great, and it's sources.

Johnson

It's also a list of all the projects over the years we've done. I just couldn't get it together this quick.

Rose

That'd be fantastic.

Johnson

This last year we got \$250,000 from **River funding** which is money that comes from the UT system every year. We typically get 250 or 300 thousand dollars for ADA corrections or modifications. A couple of times we've gotten a million. We've been very aggressive on restroom renovations, making all our restrooms ADA accessible. We will continue to do that.

Rose

We've heard that you're "the parking lot guy."

Johnson

We also do the parking lots. We also make sure all the parking lots are accessible. I just recently did a survey of ADA parking on campus, and even though we meet the—I'm never one to just meet, but with our new veterans program, people coming back and all, we just always have more ADA students than any other campus in the area, even in the state. We've just always been known as the friendly disability campus. I think a lot of it goes back to Jim Hayes. I've always thought that we need to have more than what we're supposed to have because we have more than the average person. We just recently did a survey on ADA parking, we've added some additional spaces. We do that about every two years, making sure we have enough accessible parking as closely as possible. Sometimes we just get as close we can is the best we can do. Over the years we have worked extremely close with Penny's office, even before Penny's office existed. We were just as close with Jim Hayes. It used to be just Jim Hayes and that was it.

Rose

At some point he had a secretary, right?

Johnson

After many years he had a secretary.

Rose

Do you happen to know her name?

Johnson

No I don't, but she's got a lot of knowledge.

Rose

I've seen her mentioned, but I don't know her name.

Johnson

I can probably find out who that was, but it's just been so many years. She was a huge contact for us too, we'd call if we had a problem, we'd meet. Jim was real big "Let's sit down, talk about the problem, come up with a solution." That was really the easiest thing, that made it so much easier. Now we've these forms for you to fill out, and I call it unnecessary stuff. I guess I shouldn't on the recording, but I'm just saying it was so much easier when Jim was here because he'd just say "Okay, we're gonna meet 1:30 with this student, see what the problems are." We'd solve them.

Penny and I work very closely. We do all the ADA accessible seating in classrooms every semester, we get a list. "Okay this is where the students are going, this is what they need." We do that every semester and we also if there's any special needs that come up. There's been situations where a student would park over here in F10, be in a wheelchair or walker and he or she would have a problem getting over here to class with their stuff, I'd actually have to have one of my carpenters meet him or her there. At 8 o'clock he would meet them in the parking lot help that person to the classroom and then help her back to their vehicle. We're always very accommodating. Then there was another student that had a class over at Social Work, but she couldn't make it from Life Science to Social Work in the allotted time. We'd pick her up and take her. We'd go beyond what needed to be done. It's very important to me that the students be successful.

Rose

<topic>UTA disability culture</topic>

What do you attribute with this culture? You mentioned that UTA is known, and we've seen evidence from other oral histories, I don't know if you talked to Penny about her college experiences, but her ones in the 70s and 80s, where she tried to go to other schools? It's just clear that UTA was way ahead.

Johnson

Oh yeah, I was here for all that. I contribute that to Jim Hayes. Our wheelchair basketball team has really been a huge asset to the university. I probably shouldn't say this either, but out of all of our athletes,

athletic programs, they've been the most successful. Poor thing, he never gets a budget, they're not official, they never had any money.

Rose

You saw Doug Garner went to the White House?

Johnson

Oh yeah, they've been to the White House several times. Jim's been, the teams been several times. I used to travel some with the team when I was younger and I had more time. We would go with the team and help them.

Rose

What kind of helping?

Johnson

When they went to the tournaments and all, just help with the tournaments.

Rose

Help run them?

Johnson

Yeah, another person that would be really good to interview would be Elsa Corral in the president's office.

Rose

Her names come up.

Johnson

She's been really involved with the wheelchair basketball team. She started in housing with me and she was really close to those guys.

Rose

That's really good to know. When you were on campus had you had any experience with accessibility, people with disabilities? How did you get accustomed to the culture here?

Johnson

I started working in hospitality when I was in high school, so I had some experience there and the people that I work for also had nursing homes. We had a retail mall with 180 stores. I've always been around people that had disabilities. I've always wanted to make people's life...I everyone to be mobile. I just grew up around it. I've always tried to do what we can. I've been accused sometimes of going too far, but it's just like Jim's guys or Garner's guys, not only are they successful in what they do here at this campus, they're successful when they get out of here. They've all done well. To me that speaks volumes on the program. I know that when Jim was in charge they had study time, and they were there. If you weren't there, you caught hell. If somebody was having a problem in a course, Jim would find somebody to help them if he couldn't do it himself. There were no excuses. Jim's attitude, "You're not going to use your disability at any point to get through life around me.", and he just didn't believe it. I just think that Jim's been our biggest asset in all those years when he was here before he passed away.

Rose

When you got to campus the refitting was not that great, but was there already a culture in place?

Johnson

It's kind of hard to explain back then. Facilities had a totally different mindset. It was just "to maintain." I came in in housing and made all these changes, redid all these apartments, painted a new roof, new air-conditioning's, new countertops. They looked brand-new. That's why I was asked to go to facilities, they didn't have that concept, that mindset for facilities. When we did the retrofits, there might be a bathroom with yellow tile, they didn't care. They just used white to patch it. Nobody paid any attention to detail. A lot of the things that they did could've been done so much better than what they did.

We did what we were supposed to do. The law says "This is what you gotta do," but the same thing could've been done to make it easier. I guess I don't know how to explain it. I think somebody in a wheelchair, it ought to be flawless, from point A to point B. They shouldn't have to wait for somebody to hold the door open for them, they shouldn't have to wait in the hallway till everyone gets out of the restroom so they can go in. It should be flawless just like you and I walking into a restroom or classroom.

Rose

It's interesting because Bryan mentioned that it was really the culture by the time he got there, to exceed things, it's an interesting transition you're talking about.

Johnson

It was a hard transition for me because I had 250 guys that didn't back me up. We got there, it took a long time. We just wouldn't back down. I had some people that were really supportive, Billy Bates for example in our carpenter shop.

Rose

Do you have his contact information? Bryan tried but couldn't.

Johnson

I can get it. I've got it somewhere. Billy was one hundred percent behind me. He was really a shaker and mover on a lot of the stuff. He knew what I wanted, he knew what I expected. He was an important part of all that, a lot of his administration too. The administration was really supportive of me, and like I said we've gotten millions of dollars over the years for ADA issues.

Rose

When you started the president was?

Johnson

It was [Ryan] Amacher for a little while, just for very brief period of time.

Rose

And Witt came.

Johnson

And Witt came, he was very supportive, and very student oriented also. That's when we really got the bulk of our big big money under the Witt administration, and under Dan Williams. I got everything I asked for. Everything I ever asked for I got. Jim Spaniolo, Jim was supported, but the money didn't flow like it did under the Witt administration. It's whatever we needed.

Rose

From what I've heard and I need to double check this, but Witt help set up the Alabama wheelchair basketball team once he went there? Is there sense that he was just interested in disability?

Johnson

I think he was interested and he just understood it. He was really proud of our team here. Not only did they exceed on the court, they all exceeded in classes. They all graduated with honors in the top of their classes.

Rose

That's right after they won all those national championships.

Johnson

Right. Dr. Witt was at UT system for twenty-seven years, he was in charge of the college of business. He had a business background. He was also very much into taking care of the students, and he was also very much into our image. He had a strong administration, he brought Dan Williams with him, who was also well known in the UT system.

Rose

What was his position?

Johnson

He was the vice president of finance.

Rose

He would replace Wetsel?

Johnson

Yes, he came in after Wetsel. After the Witt administration...Dan Williams, Dr. Witt and John Hall controlled all the money. When Jim [Spaniolo] came in he said "I'm going to give this college X number of dollars to spend, and this college X number of dollars to spend." That's when our funding sort of got diluted. We still get money, don't get me wrong, it's just not like it was back then in the Witt administration. We've done well. Every year we've ask for money and we've gotten some.

We have a lot of bathrooms on campus, we've been trying to renovate them and get them all up to today's standards, which is all ADA. It just takes a lot of money. We go through 250-300,000 dollars a year. I can knock out ten or twelve bathrooms, there's hundreds on campus. Right now we're doing the ones in Trimble Hall second floor for this summer project. Last year we did the ones on the first floor.

I don't know if I'm answering the questions how you want, it's hard to stop and think back. I wish I had a list of all the projects we did and how much we spent. When I get that I can then go through with you. It'd be a whole lot easier to go through here. We've just done so much over the years it's hard for me to stop and think...

Rose

<topic>Broadening disability and accommodations</topic>

We can talk some of the other questions. What about people you characterize as allies in addition to folks you've mentioned?

Johnson

I think for the most part we've always had good support on campus. Administrations always been very supportive of students with disabilities. The students with disabilities program probably grew the most under Dr. Witt, with Jim and his secretary. Penny's probably got eight or nine people with her now, maybe more than that. I think it's needed, when you talk about students with disabilities a lot of people think somebody in a wheelchair. It's so much more than just wheelchair, it can be learning differences, it

can be hearing issues, it's just so many issues. It's not just somebody in a wheelchair. You've got to take that into consideration also. It can be as simple as someone with a back problem that has to have a special chair.

Rose

That's actually one thing I wanted to ask you, how the range has changed over time and some of the other examples.

Johnson

The range when I first got here, it was basically if you were in a wheelchair you were disabled. If you were blind you were disabled. If you couldn't hear, that was a disability. It added a lot to it now, all the learning differences. It is a disability when you're trying to learn. It may not be a physical disability but it is a learning disability and I guess that's where I've seen the most change since I've been here. Years ago it was folks who had a physical disability, now the range is so much greater, you've got mental health issues, autism, all the different stuff.

Rose

What did you have to do in terms of facilities, classroom services, things like lighting and other setups to accommodate that?

Johnson

There've been times where we've gone in and we've customized the classroom just for one semester.

Rose

What kind of things?

Johnson

Lighting, soundproofing. Over at the main stage theater for years, if you were in a wheelchair you couldn't get on the stage unless you went out the door and came in through the back door of the stage. We finally got a lift now. One semester we'd go there every day and put the student on the stage. I did that for an entire semester, when she got there we'd would put her on the stage, and we did every day, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. When they did a play, and she was in a play, we were right there. Put her on the stage and take her down. We just always have tried to do whatever we had to do to make it work.

Rose

What about the process of addressing accessibility? Longer-term things, Bryan walked us through some of that, but also individual students?

Johnson

Let's talk about the campus in general first before we talk about individual students. We tried to focus on what I call the "high-traffic areas" first. For example, this building I would consider high-traffic, number one just because the office for students with disabilities is in here. Believe it or not when I got here it was the basement of University Center. You had to go up and down the elevator to get to the office for students with disabilities. At the time Jim was never downstairs, he was always over at the PE building. He kept his office over at the PE building. Then this is where all the freshman class rooms are, so everybody comes to this building at some point in their college career. This is what I consider a "high profile building", where everything should be accessible. The only thing in this building that's really not what I call "code" is the ramp out here.

Rose

Penny brought up that ramp and the wall actually. We're supposed to ask you about the wall.

Johnson

We talked about it for years, and at some point it needs to be done. Everything in the front is accessible, the ramp is accessible, it's just not the right slope. There's really no way to fix the ramp. We've looked at it several times. You've only got so many different, it's one inch for every foot. There's nothing we can do. We are talking about when we put the new science building over here in the F10 parking lot, we're going to redo this mall area and put utilities right here. I'm going to tear all this up because I've been wanting to do something out here for a long time, it's not very attractive and it's not level. There's a lot of issues. There may be a chance that we can do something to this ramp at that time. That's the other thing I never understood, for years the UT system, and all the designs whether it's this building, you can tell from this building how far back it goes, this building, the business building Pickard Hall, they had the damn ramps. They're all behind brick walls.

Rose

This is what she wanted to know! She wanted to know why!

Johnson

It's just the way they designed it back then, my attitude is they are invisible! A lot of places we've taken the walls down, or we've lowered the walls. If you walk around this campus, fine arts, is the same way. If you didn't know that ramp was there, you would never find it. We addressed it with signage, but back then it was all "We want to hide this."

Rose

You said that was the UT system?

Johnson

That was just the way they designed buildings back in the 70s and 80s.

Rose

So it wasn't a campus architect?

Johnson

It wasn't an architect. I imagine how it started, they did one building that way, and probably this one because it's one of the older ones like that. We want a wall where the ramp is. I don't really know the history on that. Two I've taken down, the one at the library, and we took one off of the **ERB** when we renovated that building a couple years ago. You can still see the ramp but you have railings and all. That was just the culture back then when you built a building. You hide the ramp.

Rose

The thing about the campus process?

Johnson

The campus process, anytime we do a major renovation in buildings we try to address ADA outstanding issues. The older buildings is more of a challenge than the newer buildings because there's more issues in the older buildings. We also have the way the codes and all the different codes. For example, I can go in and I can really do a lot of work, I gut bathrooms. Bryan has done a few where he really didn't gut them, he just modified them. I don't believe in that. I gut them to the sheet rock and start totally over. If you want a new bathroom, that's what you gotta do. New **petitions**, and new fixtures does not constitute a new bathroom. We'll take out a urinal, or we'll take out a commode, then we're on the line of "Okay, building code says I need X number of fixtures for the number of people in the building," but there's really no way to do it right with ADA. You can't get a five foot ADA stall in and in existing building unless you take out one of the urinals. It just doesn't work. Even if the students have to wait a minute, either they have a stall ADA accessible and wait for someone in a wheelchair. Years ago it was okay if your wheelchair didn't fit in the stall, as long as you could use the hand rail and all that to could get in the stall you are okay. That's crazy. That was one of the earlier codes that was acceptable in '94. It's no longer acceptable.

Rose

Is that Texas or federal?

Johnson

I think it's federal. You have to take the wheelchair into the stall with you now, but it should've always been that way. We constantly look at ways to address the restrooms. For example, the trouble in Hammond Hall. That building was built in the early 70s, probably '69. The general population were men. It's just the way it was. You got them men's over here, ten urinals, fourteen commodes, and then on the women's side you got four commodes. What I did over there, I flip-floped them. It was confusing to people at first because everyone was walking in the women's, people weren't paying attention to

signage. What we did, we put three urinals in the men's and left the four commodes which is fine for men. Then we took the urinals and commodes that were on the men's sides and we put ten for the women. We look at those types of things also. That's ADA on the restrooms.

The classrooms, for the most part, the classrooms are fairly compliant. Some are our tiered classrooms, like in business, if the students in a wheelchair, they're forced to sit in the back of the class. There's really nothing they can do about it, I looked at it and I've tried, there's just nothing I can do about it.

Rose

There's a couple in the basement here. If the instructor has a mobility impairment, it's impossible.

Johnson

Like in a bunch of rooms downstairs, I cut the doors in. I put ADA accessible so they could come in from either direction. Where we could do that we've done that, but not every building is that way. You're right, there's two rooms in the basement of this building. If somebody was in a wheelchair they have to move the class to the instructor. We got a couple others but not many left.

Rose

Bryan said there's a list of problem.... Is that how you also dealt with addressing these long-standing issues?

Johnson

We keep an ongoing list, the areas we know we have problems. We try and work down the list, we add stuff to list all the time, and things get moved around too. The list is very fluid. There's ramps that have been on the list for years. I can spend \$200,000 to fix this, wrap it around and all this, but my philosophy has always been the whole front of this building is accessible, just that this one door that's not.... I'd rather take the \$200,000 and address twenty other problems rather than just that ramp. That's the way we operate on this list. Where's the money best spent? If I can address twenty bathrooms versus this ramp, that's why the ramps have never been done.

Rose

What about individual students? It was brought up with Penny and Bryan Sims that there is a lot of work and you mentioned about addressing specific issues semester by semester.

Johnson

Like I said I have a team every semester, we get a list for all the special needs, seating wise. Whether it be a special chair because of the back, they have to be close to the classroom because of a sight problem, they can't be in a room that's got bright lights, or some problem with their eyes, hearing issues come up, they can't hear well, they can't see the board. It's just a variety of different stuff.

Rose

We've heard Billy Bates was really involved in some of that.

Johnson

He was. At that time we had a cabinet shop, and a lot of time he would custom-built for a student. If someone had to have a special desk that was a certain height and all, back then you couldn't just look in a catalog and buy stuff that had adjustable legs. It's come a long way now, but back then you couldn't. A lot of the times we'd build something. Whether it's a disability or not, professors, "Well, I need a podium this tall instead of this tall." We did a lot of that kind of stuff.

Rose

What about the processes **that went on** the campus but also UT system or Regents at the state. Did you wind up dealing with any of that?

Johnson

Some of the funding requests we had to justify what we were doing and why we were doing it. Back when I was the director there were a couple times I had to go to Austin for questions. Sometimes they'd ask questions, but for the most part anything ADA related they've been very generous with me. I think the UT system overall, over the years understands how important it is. I think they also see that we're the forerunner.

Over the years we've had them all come out, UT Dallas has been over, Texas has been over. A lot of people have been over the course of the years to look around. Something as simple as our signage. I'll walk around with Penny for example, I try and get people involved and a lot of the times I'll get a group of students in wheelchairs to walk around campus. Where do we have a problem? That kind of stuff. It really helps because you and I, we walk all over campus all the time and we don't really see this stuff. You get two or three in a wheelchair or someone on crutches, somebody that's on a scooter, you'd be surprised how much stuff you can find, even now.

We spend probably at least \$100,000 a year on concrete repairs and if it shifts or something. A lot of students that have disabilities, including myself...I dragged my right foot, especially when I get tired. If I'm on campus at seven or eight o'clock at night, I can find those trip hazards in a hurry. 400 acres here, we're never going to solve it all, but we really do try. We really try. ADA ramps, we're working on a lot of those, the codes just recently changed on those, we're trying to upgrade as many of the ADA ramp cuts. It's ongoing, it's constantly ongoing.

Rose

UTA, you think really has a reputation that you see and other schools are consulting?

Johnson

I definitely think so.

Rose

Are they consulting with you do you know?

Johnson

They consult with different ones, they toured with me, they toured with Bryan, Penny's had them out here. I had one group come out on a charter bus, Stephen F Austin. They came out because we had just done our signage and they wanted to come out and look at our signage. Some of the stuff we've done in classrooms. The signage is really important to me, most people don't pay attention to it, the little signs with the wheelchair and the arrows, fifty or sixty of them on campus, but people don't really see them unless you are looking for them.

It was real important to me when we did them, half a million dollar signage update a few years ago when, we gotta make sure we address these ADA directional signs because all of our ramps are hide. We gotta do a really really good job so people know where to go. Even on the library right here where these damn steps are, horrible design. Before I retire I guarantee you that thing is going to be tore out and we're going to put a ramp, a legal ramp there if it's a last thing I do. The only reason I haven't been able to make one at this point is because they've been talking about a bell tower and all the stuff out there.

I think this new president, he could care less about a bell tower, that was a big deal for Jim [Spaniolo]. For ten years we heard about this bell tower. Dr. Karbhari is not really worried about this bell tower, he's more concerned with research. I'm hoping to tear those steps out, and I may be able to do it with this project because like I said we're going to tie into the water line right here at this sidewalk. I may use that opportunity to do it then. Even the ramp coming up those little steps, we tore the wall down, the wall used to be tall like up here, I tore all the way down to here, but you still don't know it's there unless you're looking for it. We still have some areas like that we need to do, like over Davis Hall... I don't know how long you been here...

Rose

I've been here since 2008.

Johnson

I don't know if you remember in Davis Hall, the little ramp, the ADA ramp. You come into the front doors of Davis Hall and you turn real sharp and there was a concrete ramp poured right on top of the terrazzo and then there were four steps over here. You have a four foot ramp, and then eight foot of terrazzo and then you go up four steps. It was horrible. Finally we tore that out and we poured the whole thing into a ramp and put handrails and all that. That's what I want to do here. Now that we talk about it, I think I'm really going to push to make this library thing happen with this project out here. People trip all the time on the steps, even normal people.

Rose

The bricks broke.

Johnson

The bricks break, and people don't even pay attention. They talk on their cell phones, they talk to their friends. We paint it yellow all the time, I hate it, because it looks like hell, but you don't have a choice. You gotta keep the yellow. It just needs to go.

Rose

This is a little before your time but we found a student congress resolution, and a petition of like 360 signatures, probably just before 1990 saying improving mobility and building priorities. The resolution was saying "stop building stairs because they're exclusionary" and I think there was one about the library stairs too. The library stairs were still blocking access and then the MAC, now which doesn't have any, and it's just designed to be much more accessible.

Johnson

We did the MAC on purpose, it's a perfect example. It was a horrible design originally. That's why there are no steps in the MAC at all, because of that issue. If were in a wheelchair you literally had to go around the building, didn't have a choice. There was no other option, you just go around the building. I don't think we really do that anymore, we still have steps in some locations. I even looked out front here, we had to put a new water line down through there two, three years ago...We looked if there was any way we could expand it out so we could do a ramp and do away with the stairs at the two main entrances. There was no way we could make it work, we just didn't have enough room. The fire department wouldn't allow it.

Rose

Hayes was saying that blind people might need those steps to navigate, balancing, competing priorities. The resolution got tabled.

Johnson

He brings up a good point. We average ten or twelve blind students a year, and we work very closely with Penny on that too, on construction. We meet with them, we let people know, and we train people. We had one lady a couple years ago, I won't ever forget this, they were doing a bunch of work out on Cooper. They had the fencing up. She and her seeing eye dog got confused and they got on the wrong side of the fencing and they were out in the middle of Cooper. Luckily somebody in a UTA truck was right there and we stopped traffic, but it was just dangerous. It's really important when you change a blind student's typical path of direction, you've got to retrain them. We work closely with Penny, very closely on that. We really try hard not to block any pathways off.

Rose

It's something that when you talk with facilities people at other schools, that kind of really intense awareness?

Johnson

I don't think they pay much attention to it. We were all very close to Jim Hayes, and the wheelchair basketball team, whatever they wanted they got. Even now they'll call and say they need this, they'll drop everything and go. My guys have always been, they know that the disability deal is a priority to me, whether it's a basketball team, the women's tennis team, or just a normal student. They know and nobody complains. They kind of bond with them, after you walk somebody to class for a semester. A couple times they'll call and say "They're not here." We'll go to the house make sure they're okay! That's how involved they get. I think that's one reason our reputation is so strong. Our campus is, it's pretty ADA friendly. We've got some improvements we need to do in the restrooms. But as far as the pathways and the parking, I have to say I'm pretty proud of where we're at.

Let me do this for you, and help y'all put some meat to this thing. I've ask the Accounting department to get the last eight years of ADA funding. We do by year so I can tell you how much we spent, and what we've done.

Rose

I don't want to put them through anything, but if they could go back further that'd be great.

Johnson

I'm not sure how far we can go back, but I started a project list by year about eight years ago for this particular reason.

Rose

<topic>Jobs throughout his career</topic>

Your positions, you've been in facilities since '96, what have your positions then?

Johnson

I went over in '96 as assistant director, and then I moved up to the director.

Rose

Director of?

Johnson

Facilities, of the whole thing. I was assistant director for two years underneath John Hall. They hired somebody because I didn't want the position, because I'm a doer. I'm not one to sit behind a desk. I'm out there doing. They hired a guy, the guy was a nut, they ended up firing him. That's when Dr. Witt said "You are taking the position. We're not asking you." So that's when I became director.

About 2008, Jim Spaniolo, he was big on VPs, so he was putting all these VPs in positions and I didn't want to be a VP. That's a bad thing to be a college university. They come and go too fast. I've been here too long and work too hard. They're the first ones to go during administration change.

Rose

Like Wayne Duke?

Johnson

Yeah, and he had been here since '72 or '73. Everybody knows that's the way it goes. They hired the new VP which I found him, interviewed him, and hired him. Then we decided, and he decided we need more directors, it's too much for one person. So now there's three of us.

My role is building maintenance and repairs, in-house construction, all the ADA stuff, parking lots to roofs, grounds, plumbing, electrical, paint, and classroom renovations. Then we have Bryan's position he was in, on new construction. When I say new construction I'm talking about new buildings, or when we did a master remodel on this building, he was over that. When I say in-house projects, my in-house projects run around hundred thousand or under. I do bathrooms because I can do them so much more economical. I can do back there for about 20,000 dollars. We do a lot of bathrooms. My goal is before I retire to have them all done. That's my goal.

Rose

That's great. In housing what was your?...

Johnson

I was assistant director of housing in University center. I was over all the housing maintenance, repairs, and construction in University center.

Rose

One thing that stood out, a little bit before your time, people actually came here from other states to attend because there were attendant services available from what is now Helping Restore Ability founded by Sam Provence also John Dycus. In the dorms, are there dorm rooms with lifts or accommodations for attendants?

Johnson

I haven't dealt directly with housing in eight or nine years, but when I was over housing we did make accommodations if there were attendants. I know there was two or three in Brazos at one time, a couple in Lipscomb. A lot of times we had parents, moms would come in every morning and make sure the student was up and dressed. Sometimes they were live in, sometimes they weren't. We also had the two brothers, the twins in wheelchairs, they been here since I've been here. They were students when I got here, now they've graduated, they both have masters degrees, and they both work here. I can't even remember their names now.

Rose

What are their positions?

Johnson

Different positions on campus. They have motorized carts, you'll see them all over Arlington and all over campus. They were young, we were all young at one point, but I can remember they lived in University Village. Their mother would come every morning. They knew to call us if they needed anything. We had a situation, we had a lift in one room, a pulley system to where they could pull themselves in and out of bed, we've done that a couple times in dorms. There's been a couple apartments we really retrofitted.

Rose

Universities have dealt with those issues very differently. Illinois was the first to really serve with students with disabilities, didn't really allow people if they needed attendants till very late. Whereas Berkeley that was kind of the whole point in the 60s. People who were in iron lungs at night or needed attendants, that they could go to college.

Johnson

I've be here twenty-one years in August and I can't recall not one time that we didn't meet the student's needs, whatever they asked for, whatever they needed, we've accommodated them.

Rose

I know we're going to do a follow-up when we have this list, we'll talk through it. For now, is there anything else you think we missed or need to emphasize?

Johnson

Wheelchair tennis team, that was huge deal for us. I was excited when we got that. I will say over the years the wheelchair basketball team has gotten more and more funding. It's still nothing like athletics. My dad was a football coach so I know how it works. I was a guy that was in theater and all the other stuff. We didn't get crap, everything went to football. It's the same thing, I guess everywhere. I just never understood why. That's why I've always bend over backwards for the wheelchair basketball team, whatever they need, we made sure they had. I never understood why athletics got anything they needed, but the guys up there actually giving us national reputation, year after year, they're struggling.

Rose

They're not in official team.

Johnson

They have to do fundraising and stuff, it just wasn't right in my opinion.

Rose

Other people you think we should talk to? Besides Elsa Corral? Bryan suggested Curt Kuhlmann and John Hall.

Johnson

I would definitely talk to John, Curt has only been here three or four years. He's kind of our ADA person, but John has been here thirty some years and he actually started in housing. He moved all the way through the ranks to where he is now. John has been one of the major driving forces in our funding.

Rose

He was also here before the ADA?

Johnson

He was. He was here before the ADA. He's really been, you can ask anybody on campus. John Hall is well-liked on campus. He would be a good one to talk to. I think if you didn't talk to him, you would regret it. He'd give you a lot of history, a lot more than I can. He can tell you how much we spent off the top of his head. He can talk to you about....

We've had a couple situations where we had a mother last year filed a federal complaint against us at the Department of Justice about Texas Hall. They came out and met with us, they toured the building and they looked at all of our stuff and how we do, and they cleared us with everything. The only thing he recommended to do was maybe a couple more signs. Other than that, we've been fortunate. Even he commented that "This campus is so far ahead of so many campuses I've been on." Even he and his report commented on that, he really couldn't find anything wrong.

Even though we had situations in Texas Hall, for example, the concession stand wasn't accessible for certain things. We always set up a contemporary concession stand that is accessible for events. That's beyond making accommodations. The second floor, the balcony wasn't accessible. The building was so old. We did put an elevator in years ago for Jim's group because we used to host the wheelchair basketball teams and they had to go across the street to the showers and all. I said "This is crazy" so I went to Jim and we went to John and said "We need an elevator here." We got the money to put an elevator in. When we host these national tournaments, you had to go across the street to the showers, it was crazy! But that's the way they did it for years.

Rose

Apparently we still don't have locker rooms that are accessible in CPC.

Johnson

<topic>Jim Hayes' funeral</topic>

Oh yeah, all that's been addressed since then. I will get those numbers together for you and we'll get back together.

[Break in recording]

The reason they hired him [Jim Hayes], he was a football coach, he was a quarterback and all that, but the reason they really hired him... the superintendent said at his funeral the reason we hired this guy wasn't because of his football abilities, he could teach college algebra, and organic chemistry. Where you gonna you find a coach that knows those two things? That's where we were weak. I can say we're having a minor in this, a lot of the school districts don't have the money to hire a full-time person to do that. It's almost mandated now you have to, or you get yourself in trouble. I wish education would think a little different about it.

[Break in recording]

Rose

You're talking about Jim Hayes? His funeral?

Johnson

When Jim passed away one of the things he told his sister was that he wanted to have his funeral in the gym. We talked about doing it in Texas Hall, somewhere larger, the MAC, but he wanted it in that gym because that's where he had his team, that's where his office was, that's just what he wanted, so that's what we did. People thought we were crazy, the first funeral we ever had in a gym on campus in all these years. That's all we did. It was standing room only. Probably eighty-five percent of his team players came back for that funeral over the years.

Rose

That's a lot of people.

Johnson

He had a lot of people from the community and the university, but I was amazed. He had a lot of kids over the years, he had a huge turnout.

Rose

We've seen others even, it's not just athletes. Late 70s, 400 people, 80s, 250 disabled students and now it's about 1000. Penny Acrey has done great.

Johnson

Right, we just upgraded the training center downstairs to meet the needs of the growth. The veterans program for example, it's had a huge impact on our enrollment, which is good, it stresses the system so we just have to stay on top of it, and we do. Penny and her group does a really good job.

