

DU ORAL HISTORY 1984-2014**Interviewee: Richard (Rick) Caldwell****Interviewer: James (Jim) R. Griesemer**

Recorded: August 22, 2019

Place: Denver, CO

Transcriber: Terry L. Zdrale

Transcript

- Intro: [00:00](#) Series introduction
- Jim Griesemer: [00:20](#) Welcome to the University of Denver's oral history. The interviews in this series present a panorama of progress against steep odds stories told by men and women who were personally involved in saving the University and an undertaking, an extraordinary process of renewal. We've divided our story into three parts. The, first DU's fiscal crisis of the 1980's, a perfect storm of financial adversity. Then in the early 1990's, the dramatic financial turnaround as DU pulled back from the brink, followed by a tide of renewal, a decade that saw new buildings, remarkable growth, academic innovation, and moved DU onto the national stage. To continue our story, I'm joined by Richard Caldwell, director of the Institute for Public Policy Studies at the University of Denver. Rick Caldwell has a long and distinguished record of service at DU joining the University in 1984. In the mid 1980's, he and other key individuals played significant roles as DU struggled with an existential financial crisis as we've described at several points in this oral history. But as we'll see, his contributions at the University go well beyond those dark days to include a key role in DU's renewal. Rick Caldwell, welcome to DU's oral history.
- Rick Caldwell: [01:45](#) Thank you Jim. What a pleasure.
- Jim Griesemer: [01:47](#) Rick, how did you, how did you become associated with the University in the first place? How'd that happen?
- Rick Caldwell: [01:52](#) Well, my history at the University goes back a long ways, back to law school and to the sociology department where I took a master's degree along with my law degree at the College of law. At a time back in DU's history when a very well-known individual by the name of Robert Yegge was dean of the law school. And this was a very exciting forward thinking time where Dean Yegge really stood for the proposition that a law and society had to be blended. That law couldn't exist in isolation without thinking about the broader social context. And in that respect, there were a number of wonderful individuals that were involved at DU at the time, most of whom came from the east

coast, notably Princeton. People like Professor Bill Beaney, for example, professor Gresham Sykes, Professor Wilbert Moore, and they all believed in that essential vision. So that was my, that was my start at the University.

Jim Griesemer: [03:15](#) And then what brought you to the University in, in, in the role of a, of an instructor or professor in that role?

Rick Caldwell: [03:21](#) Well, there were a couple of things. One of the things that happened while I was in school, and I don't think that this would really occur in the same way today, but for whatever reason, some of those individuals involved seemed to think that I would make a good instructor. And so while I was still in graduate school, I actually had an appointment in the sociology department as a lecturer and taught all kinds of different courses including statistics, methodology, social problems. I mean, this was of course, a very active and very vibrant time in society and on campus of course. And eventually like everyone else, most everyone else had graduated and went on to do some legal work with what was then the National Center for State Courts here in Denver. And did a lot of work related to grants and research and court systems and so forth and so on.

Rick Caldwell: [04:35](#) But I had a lot of contacts still, of course, at DU. And pretty soon after I came back to Denver after stints in Washington, DC and California I got calls from a couple of friends that said, well, you were reasonably effective as a teacher at one point. Perhaps you'd like to do a little bit of teaching on the side. And so what ended up being the case is that started with one class, it was an American government class. Interestingly enough, actually in the political science department where we also had good relations that expanded to two classes. And pretty soon I realized that I was actually doing two jobs, not necessarily a bad thing. But as, as events unfolded over the course really of, of a year or so I, I got a call from the then dean of what was the College of Arts and Sciences whose name was Ken Purcell. And he said, well, you seem to have been reasonably effective as a teacher. We know you're busy with the national center and so forth, but are you interested at all in the possibility that the University of Denver would start a modern public policy program?

Jim Griesemer: [06:10](#) Now you were very much involved in creating that, we'll get to that, but shortly after you arrived here and of course DU is now going through the dark days financially. And we've, we've interviewed former Chancellor Dwight Smith. Yes. Who, who led the University through the early stages of, of the financial crisis. But here you are sort of new on campus, newly engaged and you were, you were asked to play a significant role in

helping to manage that crisis. Could you talk about how that happened? (Sure.) And what you were involved in?

- Rick Caldwell: [06:56](#) Well, it's, it's again, which I think is, is kind of a, a wonderful hallmark of what has been my career at the University, but it's, it's serendipity. So we had our undergraduate public policy program and we had invented a new curriculum and so forth. And this was focused entirely at that time on undergraduates. But after a couple of years, it the same things that you just alluded to in terms of leadership at the University, the fiscal health of the University, reputation of the University, the ability of the University to retain its students after spending incredible time and effort to recruit them first year to begin with. And I began to feel a lot of misgivings about my own future at the University, not because anything overt had happened, but simply because to be truthful, I didn't have a lot of confidence in where the University was headed. Still early enough in my career to start to think about the possibility that maybe there were some alternatives that I should explore.
- Jim Griesemer: [08:15](#) And you weren't the only faculty member having those thoughts.
- Rick Caldwell: [08:18](#) No. That's true. True. And in the course of my return to campus and, and starting to get active and working with different groups. I mean, at one point I was on the Rhodes Scholarship interview committee, they quickly assigned another major national scholarship to the public policy program, which was the Truman Foundation scholarship and so forth. And I had gotten in the course of really just a couple of meetings, the opportunity to get to know Dwight Smith just a little bit. I had not known him before. I certainly was not a chemistry student by any, any matter of means. And so I thought, well, I have these misgivings. I will make an appointment. I'll go to see Dwight who had just been appointed as vice chancellor for what was then called academic affairs.
- Jim Griesemer: [09:21](#) And that would be the position we call provost today.
- Rick Caldwell: [09:23](#) Basically. Yes. And he had not been in that position very long, maybe just a few months. It was certainly one that people were looking at in the sense that this appointment signaled a lot of renewed credibility in the administration because Dwight as a scientist and as really the, the founding chairman of what had become a, a small but very active, highly involved in research chemistry department, that Dwight brought credibility to that, to that job. So I made an appointment and went to see Dwight and I said, well, you know, I'm really thinking that this will be my last year DU. I have a lot of regrets. And again, Dwight knew just a little bit about my background as a graduate student at DU and

so forth and so on. And so Dwight looked at me and said, well obviously you can make your own decision, but you might want to wait literally until tomorrow. And so I said, well, Dwight, of course. And the next day the board made the decision to replace the then chancellor with Dwight on a permanent basis. And this was not an interim appointment. It shocked the campus. It made a lot of news of course. Sure. DU replaced its chancellor. And all of a sudden, someone that I barely knew but highly respected was now the chancellor. Okay, now what?

Jim Griesemer: [11:22](#)

And so I was just going ask, (of course). So where did that, where did that lead?

Rick Caldwell: [11:27](#)

Well, where that led and Dwight had definite ideas and those ideas were based on his understanding of what academic life ought to be all about, which fundamentally boiled down to a tremendous respect for intellect and students. And a great respect for research, empirical knowledge essentially science. And Dwight realized from the very, very first that he needed some sort of advisory group to start to meet with him. And discuss the condition of the University, but not in an abstract way with a view to what Dwight felt, and certainly the board of trustees at the time knew, had to be immediate action. So this was not a contemplative exercise. And, hence Dwight formed what, what came to be known, at least informally as the Blue Sky committee.

Jim Griesemer: [12:45](#)

And what was, what was the purpose of that and you were on that committee?

Rick Caldwell: [12:48](#)

Well, that was what was interesting because almost immediately after Dwight became chancellor and he asked various individuals beginning with former chancellor Chester Alter who was very much considered an august authority and a wonderful person with a great, great love of DU, also a chemist, a scientist and others that Dwight knew and trusted. And we can probably talk about those names at a certain point, but the idea was to have a no holds barred, confidential view into the real condition of the University. And that included fiscal matters. First and foremost it also very quickly came to include deep discussion as to what kinds of academic programs the University really should be offering. Were there things that we could be thinking about in a very immediate way that would signal to the broader communities signal to students nationwide who might be interested in coming to Denver? That we had given our curriculum, a very thorough going over that we understood the challenges, we understood the kinds of things that would be appealing, particularly from the standpoint of a private university.

- Jim Griesemer: [14:34](#) Now, you all were functioning kind of as a kitchen cabinet. It sounds, I think that's fair to me. We don't have time to go into great detail, but I am interested in who, who were the other members? This was a pretty exclusive club. Who was the other members who were serving with you on this?
- Rick Caldwell: [14:54](#) Well it was a, it was a small group and I was very surprised actually initially to be invited to that group. One of the things that's probably worth mentioning is that no one on the group was necessarily a professional strategist or, or consultant. I mean, we all came from different, different backgrounds. I certainly didn't have any particular training in how to do a University strategic plan, for example, which of course we ended up doing. But the group included a professor, Gareth Eaton from the chemistry department. Professor Herb Greenberg, who was an outstanding mathematician, had been chair of mathematics at DU had come to DU some years before. And that same wave of people that moved to Denver from the east coast. He had actually been with IBM for a number of years. Professor Howe Mendelson, who had been with DU for a while, but really was one of the founders of modern media theory and media relations, but a brilliant renaissance individual.
- Rick Caldwell: [16:11](#) An individual that Dwight had brought to campus very, very soon after he became a chancellor was Roger Campbell, who at the time, the title was director of admissions as I recall. And that certainly was something that we needed advice on. And Roger who was an absolutely unique individual was recruited from Northwestern. And he came and ensconced himself in the lower level of the Mary rebuilding it at one point. And so he was, he was part of that that committee. So those were the people that were on it in addition to myself. And what Dwight felt was necessary is that we have regular meetings. And we did meet, in fact at least once a week, sometimes more. The meetings were a 100%, well for the most part, 100% at the then Phipps mansion, which DU owned and was operating as a conference center. And we met upstairs in what was, had been one of the large bedrooms and usually started around 6:30, seven o'clock. And those meetings often went on for a number of hours. And there was no subject off the boards as long as it pertained to DU and not necessarily fixed agenda, but certainly at various points various things were focused on at the meetings
- Jim Griesemer: [18:02](#) Now. Was Chancellor Smith a member of that group?
- Rick Caldwell: [18:05](#) Yes, absolutely. Well, he presided over, (yeah). Over the group. Sure.

- Jim Griesemer: [18:09](#) and, so what, Rick, what kinds of things came out of this process? What were some of the outcomes?
- Rick Caldwell: [18:17](#) Well, I think there, there were, there were kind of two. One was how effective is our teaching in the sense of a curriculum that shows and demonstrates that we have a deep commitment to our undergraduate students. I mean, that was a critical, critical variable. So one of the things that was discussed and we did a lot of research on this relatively informal, but we made a lot of calls. People knew what was going on in a lot of different universities, was the idea of a kind of undergraduate college. And that there would be multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary courses that would form the foundation of freshman and sophomore years. So the idea was that senior professors, not graduate assistants, not people at the beginning of their careers, but people that had a reputation and were dedicated to students would become involved in that teaching. Um enterprise. So that was one of the, the things that we certainly focused on.
- Rick Caldwell: [19:43](#) The second thing was fiscal. And, one of the things that I will always remember is that Chancellor Smith felt with this group that there should be, to use the, the more modern term total transparency. In other words, where was DU in fiscal space? Let's, let's look at the books, let's look at what the prospects are over the near term and then then going forward. And, this is an area that, that I think couple of us had a little bit of expertise in at a couple of points in time. We did rather informally involve a little bit of outside advising and, and consulting. And of course there were other University, senior administration officials that were that were there to provide the basic information, but not necessarily the strategy.
- Jim Griesemer: [20:53](#) So you looked, you looked at the curriculum. (Yes.) Particularly, the, the, the general curriculum, and looked at some financial issues. Did you look at, structural questions, organizational questions, those kinds of things?
- Rick Caldwell: [21:13](#) Absolutely. Because what had existed at DU and as I mentioned a few minutes ago back to the time when I first came back to DU, we had a very, very traditional college of Arts and Sciences, which included virtually all the departments that one traditionally associates with the University from math to philosophy, to psychology, to English literature. All of it was all part of the College of Arts and Sciences. And so one of the things that we advised the chancellor to do and in fact he did do and was very eager to do it, was to subdivide that college of Arts and sciences up into different divisions. And so arts and humanities became a division. There was a, a division that involved math and computer science that that sort of thing. So

the idea was quite frankly, to, to break up what had been fairly concentrated power in the hands of one powerful entity, start to decentralize at the same time, think about what these different entities could do on a more flexible basis, what kinds of new courses they could start to offer, given a, a degree of, of decentralization. So structurally that was important.

- Jim Griesemer: [22:56](#) So the committee clearly played a major role in this whole process of, trying to in effect hold a university together. And, and it's interesting to me that you all were focusing on not just financial issues, but on academic quality, on innovation and those things. Nonetheless, the financial issues were compelling. (Yes.) And during that period, we know that the University was forced to retire or lay off some 20% of its faculty and staff. It's just for anyone who's been through that, it's just remarkable to, to put it mildly.
- Jim Griesemer: [23:46](#) You were involved in a particular thing, which was dealing with tenured faculty (Indeed.) Talk about that a little bit.
- Rick Caldwell: [23:53](#) Well, there were, there were a couple of things that before I get to my personal involvement in that there were also some schools, some programs that were not attracting students that the chancellor felt frankly we couldn't operate effectively any longer that included things like nursing, theater department at the time, Library Science,
- Jim Griesemer: [24:26](#) My Gracious.
- Rick Caldwell: [24:27](#) These all had alumni, all had constituencies. And so there certainly was some program outright cancellation where we simply announced, well, this is our last year for nursing, or we're not going to have theater majors, that kind of thing. And that was, that was important, but not going to take us as far as we had to go to control expenditures. And as you say, and you're exactly right, the tricky part of this enterprise was thinking creatively in the midst of a crisis.
- Rick Caldwell: [25:08](#) Because the crisis has to be dealt with, but at the same time, a simply cutting, cutting and cutting does not get you where you need to go. So, one of the things that Chancellor Smith was very lucky to have at the time was a board of trustees that realized that we were in a crisis, that the reputation of the University was at stake. And indeed we had to deal with the issue of too many tenured faculty. And essentially the board of trustees created a fund, a buyout fund an incentive fund,
- Jim Griesemer: [25:54](#) because you couldn't just fire.

- Rick Caldwell: [25:58](#) you can't fire tenured faculty, because tenure is a defined, it's not a terribly technical definition, but it's a lifetime unilateral employment contract. So the tenured faculty member can, can leave and, and you know, open a hot dog stand, but the University can't fire the tenured faculty member except for cause, one of those causes is financial exigency. But that becomes an extraordinarily technical enterprise and exigency can exist on a unit level, but it becomes such an extraordinarily complex issue. And of course from a, can we say public relations standpoint, this is not something that you want broadly known because you, you lose confidence.
- Jim Griesemer: [26:49](#) So you, you needed, the University needed, to deal with faculty members one by one tenured members.
- Rick Caldwell: [26:55](#) That's correct.
- Jim Griesemer: [26:56](#) And you drew the short straw on that. And.
- Rick Caldwell: [27:00](#) well, once it was clear that the board was going to back Chancellor Smith with the funding that they felt was necessary to effectuate this over the course of approximately an academic year. And by then of course, you know, used to dealing with Chancellor Smith and, and kind of understood his, his thought process. And he said, well do you know anything about how to negotiate with faculty and negotiate tenure contract repurchase agreements? Cause that's what we're going to have to have. We're going to have to have these drafted and they're going to have to be individuated. And I said, well, Chancellor Smith, I, this is something that none of us have any experience with. And he said, well you are the only one on the blue sky committee that has any semblance of a legal background. So I'm going to assign you the task once we announce this program of conducting these negotiations.
- Rick Caldwell: [28:11](#) And of course you have to open that door to everyone in a similar position. So that would basically be all tenured faculty at the University. And there's a lot of risk. One of the risks of course is that the people you most want to keep are going to see this as a wonderful opportunity to change positions. You may or may not succeed in being terribly selective in who steps forward. You certainly can't discriminate on any basis or any classification, age. For example, that would be, that would be one. And really once you're tenured, it can't have anything to do with whatever job performance you have logged in since post-tenure cause that can't be part of it.
- Jim Griesemer: [29:05](#) So you negotiated a number of these.

- Rick Caldwell: [29:07](#) There were, there were close to 70 or so that we negotiated and the basic formula, which we varied a little bit depending on circumstances and there was some degree of individuation but basically was a guaranteed additional year of salary and benefits if indeed the individual relinquished their, their tenure contract relinquished tenure.
- Jim Griesemer: [29:39](#) It's for those who haven't been involved in this it's hard to imagine the complexity of this, but I want to move on. (Sure.) As you look back on this, what, what are your personal three or four takeaways from that really difficult period of 1984 to 1990 as you think about it?
- Rick Caldwell: [30:06](#) Well, the first thing, and if I, if I can, I'll just tell very, very brief story about the human dimension of all of this because I realized even though you know, the time relatively young, inexperienced probably didn't know better, but after, you know, a couple, three months of pretty much daily meetings with one or two faculty members and they were scheduled out considerably in advance, it started to take something of a toll and uh it's not something one wants to do as a regular habit as you, as you suggested. So my dad at the time was very much alive and dad, like so many dads and my generation had been a naval officer in World War II for example, and then had been heavily involved in the department store business, retail business, all of that as a manager. But, you know, he was retired and living in the house I grew up in.
- Rick Caldwell: [31:12](#) and so I went up to see him as I did frequently, and he lived up in Hilltop. And I said, well dad, I'm getting, you know, kind of kind of frankly a little depressed about this. And he said, well, a man of relatively few words, like a lot of men in that generation were. He said, well, what do you think your job is? And I said, I'm not sure. I know my job is to conclude these negotiations successfully and and shield the University as best we can from liability. He said, well, he said, well that's great. Those are great outcomes. But he said, you only have one job. And I said, well, what does that, he said, well, your job is to ensure that the University of Denver survives, have a nice day. And that was the end of the conversation. So that was lesson number one. Lesson number two absolutely has to do with, and it's not a term that academics like to use, but the product, what are we offering?
- Rick Caldwell: [32:18](#) What is the nature of it? What is the value of it? Now these days we're hearing a lot about costs and benefits and is a degree worth it and so forth and so on. But this, this is a, I think a deeper lesson that a university has to stand for something. The degree has to stand for something. It has to have a deep meaning to the students while they're there. And it is after all something that one carries with one the entire rest of their life and connects the

University powerfully to not only other alumni but to the whole community. So that, that becomes a second lesson, the third lesson, and it is one that has to be continuously discussed, thought about in sophisticated ways, not necessarily totally public ways, but that is the fiscal dimension. In other words what are we spending? Why are we spending money on certain kinds of things? What long-term expenses are we incurring down the road five years, 10 years down the road? It's wonderful to be able to say, well, we're doing this, we're doing that. We built this, we built that. So that's, that's a kind of third lesson and it's not a popular one. Most people don't want to talk about that. They want to talk about their grand vision or many faculty then and now like to talk about their ideas for a better world or frankly their ideas for significant research, all of that wonderful. But it has to be funded. Right. And so I would say those are the three major, major lessons that looking back now, which has been a considerable number of years looking back. I have remembered.

Jim Griesemer: [34:30](#)

That's really terrific and, and so important, but I, your contributions, as important as they were during that very tough period. Go well, go well beyond that. And, and indeed, while you're doing all these other difficult things, you're, you're involved with founding the University of Denver's public policy program. Could you tell us about, about that dimension? (Sure.) And what was going on?

Rick Caldwell: [35:00](#)

Well, the first thing that one thinks about in terms of public policy and I, I really, frankly, to this hour have never been able to precisely define what public policy is. To some people it's social analysis to other people, it's multidisciplinary, to other people, it's a particular aspect of a particular discipline that is recognized by the academy, such as economics, political science, that kind of thing. To some people it's political agenda, but the, the idea is a powerful one because you are basically saying to students, we are going to give you a very broad and powerful view of how society works and we're going to provide you with enough understanding of the mechanisms within that society, political mechanisms for example, or how to do a valuable research on the state of some aspect of, of society that's going to enable you to go out and be a decision maker and advisor to people, not just in the public sector by any matter of means, corporate sector, nonprofit sector.

Rick Caldwell: [36:25](#)

So, one of the things that we did from the beginning and it, it happened in a very fortuitous way was then governor Dick Lamm was ending his third term as governor. And he served 12 years as governor and was succeeded by Governor Roy Romer, who had been an advisor in Governor Lamm's cabinet. And the assumption was, and this was very fortuitous, I think, for the

University, the assumption was that of course, Governor Lamm would go to the University of Colorado. This just seemed natural. Everyone he had a lot of contacts at the University, of course, had been governor and he was invited in the year after he left office to which was in the 86, 87 time-frame. And he was invited to go and he did in fact go for a one year residency, very broad based residency at Dartmouth College. So in the course of that everyone in there had been a number of newspaper articles, sort of speculating, will, will Governor Lamm go to the University of Colorado at Denver? They have a public affairs school and all of that.

Rick Caldwell: [37:53](#)

And so one day, into the chancellor's office came this marvelous alum by the name of Leo Block and Leo had been an active alum. He was essentially towards the, the tail end of his entrepreneurial career. He had to, he had been in San Antonio, Texas where had a big liquor distribution business and, and actually family in Denver. And he walked into the chancellor's office basically and said, you know, I love the University. Everything I've been able to do is a product of the University. And, pulled a check out of his pocket that made all the difference in the world at the time. Still a very significant sum of money. And it was a check for \$1 million. And he said, use this how you think it should be used to enhance the public's understanding of society and so forth. And he had a couple of ideas, which we actually actively pursued for a time. And that is that there be a multiple use from this money, a series of basically rotating appointments.

Rick Caldwell: [39:25](#)

So an individual might have it for a quarter, they might have it for a full year, but he was very interested in Governor Lamm coming to the University. And he said, well, you should use this. The proceeds initially of what was an endowment to help fund Governor Lamm coming to the University. So we were then in a position to make an offer to the governor. And he immediately accepted because he realized there were areas that he was interested in speaking, writing various kinds of things that, you know, while he probably understood more about the public sector than any other single person in Colorado, he had gotten his start at the University of Denver and was actually a professor at the law school even before, and actually during, the time he was in the state legislature.

Jim Griesemer: [40:22](#)

Now when Governor Lamm joined the University, (yes.) you were directing the public policy program and undergraduate effort at that point. But you and Governor Lamm collaborated in a, in a remarkable way and, and really re-envisioned the entire process. How did that change (sure) and what was your vision in that, in that regard?

- Rick Caldwell: [40:52](#) Well to step back just a bit, once Governor Lamm accepted that he was going to come to the University, he actually didn't ask any questions about what that was supposed to consist of. And in fact, the board made a very unusual appointment and they're probably not likely to do too many of these, no University is, but he was appointed University professor, which meant essentially that he was not, first of all, he had lifetime tenure. Second, that he was not assigned to any one department whatsoever. He had a portfolio he could teach and do what he wanted. So again, conversation involved a couple of people, certainly Chancellor Smith and, and he said, well thanks to Leo Block and the support of the board, we now have Governor Lamm. What are we going to do with Governor Lamm to maximize the value of his appointment? And it was not a terribly difficult thought process to realize, well, we have a functioning public policy program. We will rethink that just a little bit and it will have an academic dimension, but it will also have a research and writing dimension that we'll call the center for contemporary issues essentially. All right. Later to become the Institute for Public Policy Studies, we found a couple of name changes.
- Jim Griesemer: [42:26](#) Were you, you also changed the, the degrees that were offered? (Yes.) And talk about that a little bit.
- Rick Caldwell: [42:33](#) Well, for a very long period of time we had focused entirely on the undergraduate degree and we were giving the BA in public policy and a requirement was, and still is, that a student have completed a second double major, in other words, economics and public policy, political science. And we, we had some humanities students, we've always had some science students, premed students, those, that sorts of thing. But as we, as we progressed it became more and more essential that we think about offering a graduate degree and the modern public policy movement. And you know, people will probably disagree with my time frame here, but it's, when you really think back on it, maybe it's 20 or 25 years old in terms of gaining real power. The Kennedy School at Harvard was certainly a harbinger of schools to come. This was the time when the University of Chicago, for example, was consolidating what had then been an advisory council into what became the Harris School and a contemporary of Governor Lamm's, Terry Sanford of North Carolina had been very instrumental in founding a, what became it is the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University.
- Rick Caldwell: [44:11](#) So we thought, well, we at least have to begin to start to think about a graduate degree. And indeed we did some preliminary thinking, did some preliminary outlining, what would a curriculum look like? Was there really a market for this et Cetera, et cetera? And there was considerable enthusiasm, but

the implementation side, in spite of the fact that we certainly had undergraduate students, we didn't have a lot of resources at the time to think about an ambitious graduate program. But nevertheless, eventually through a few permutations and seeking some advice externally we established the master's program in public policy, which began and had its first course which was a course called American systems. And we'd made the decision that that course would be those courses, the main courses would be in the evening, early evening, basically five to eight to attract students that, that were developing careers, had internships, so forth and so on. So the night of September 10th, 2001 was our first graduate course.

Jim Griesemer: [45:34](#)

And very interesting point in time,

Rick Caldwell: [45:37](#)

yes, it was in the sense that I came home and talked to my wife Taffy, who of course wanted to know, well, how did it go? And we had 20 or 25 students in that first class of, of MPP students and it's two year degree was envisioned and his two year degree. And I said, well, you know, it went great. I mean, we've got all these new students attracted to public policy and so forth. So on, we're off to a good start. And as I think everyone remembers around 6:00 AM the following morning we got a phone call and the phone call was from a friend said, well, are you watching television? And well we don't normally watch television at 6:00 AM turned it on. And of course, nothing in public policy or in our society frankly, has been the same sense. That in an odd way was a real impetus though to further develop and deepen our commitment to offering graduate studies in public policy.

Jim Griesemer: [46:39](#)

And that program has progressed very well. I want to shift the focus a little bit. Of course, the, your institute not only produced students with undergraduate and graduate degrees, but you also hosted a number of individuals who had been very much involved in public policy roles in Colorado and, and, beyond, and who brought different perspectives very useful ones to the whole public policy discussion. Who are some of the folks who,

Rick Caldwell: [47:17](#)

Well, one of the, one of the interesting individuals who had also of course been a very successful and, and very popular political figure in Colorado was Senator Hank Brown. And Senator Brown had been in the House for a number of terms, served a term in the Senate. Not unlike what one hears today, but this was back in the late 1990's. Senator Brown really became a bit disillusioned with Washington after more than, than 20 years and accepted from the University of Denver and from our center, a very similar offer. One of the ideas was that Senator Brown, being a Republican, Governor Lamm being a Democrat, would both be University professors. They would be co-equal, co-

directors along with, with myself. So we had three co-directors and so Senator Brown joined the University and stayed at the University for a bit of time a couple of years.

- Rick Caldwell: [48:28](#) And his most active phase also had generated a significant endowment, which was a wonderful thing because he certainly had supporters here in Colorado. But Senator Brown was always interested in managing a university. And in particular he became very interested in what was then not a terribly positive direction in his hometown of Greeley, which was the University of Northern Colorado. And so, Senator Brown became president of the University of Northern Colorado after that went on to the University of Colorado, Daniel's Funds, so forth and so on. But he was a very important, I would say at this point, kind of transitional figure for DU because his name along with Governor Lamm's attracted quite a lot of notoriety.
- Jim Griesemer: [49:33](#) And were there other folks who then spent some time?
- Rick Caldwell: [49:35](#) There were, and for example, a two term Republican Governor Bill Owens was supported by several trustees who thought that he should have a relationship with the University. And that relationship turned out to be what at the time we basically, it wasn't an academic appointment, but it was a senior fellow kind of arrangement. So and he would periodically come in do a bit of teaching lecturing, particularly on fiscal matters where he was really quite outstanding. For a number of years, he was actually the first African American speaker of the Colorado House of Representatives. We had Peter Graf who was a very notable figure at the time because of his, his father's long time notoriety as a, as an activist and civil rights person here in Denver. And Peter was and is an outstanding individual. So a Chancellor Ritchie at the time supported the idea of establishing a, a center for African American public policy, essentially.
- Jim Griesemer: [51:03](#) Well, the Center for contemporary issues and the Public Policy Center at the University has really been a great point of pride and visibility at the University of Denver and really very much a part of this great renewal we've talked about. Finally I'd like to ask, as you dealt, as you created the program as you dealt with its transformation its growth. You faced a number of challenges, identified a number of opportunities, but beneath that all, what were the values that guided you as you thought about this? What was important to you in, in creating literally from scratch, a program from an ethical, moral student perspective?
- Rick Caldwell: [51:52](#) Sure. Well, that's, that's probably the hardest question you've asked. And it requires a little bit of a thought and I will approach it by way of kind of a comparison. And one of the things that

everybody knows about certainly our public policy students understand how to do an excel spreadsheet. My point in mentioning that is that there is a way of looking at public policy that is rather mechanistic and it involves plugging in numbers, making projections, and certainly the idea of doing a sophisticated cost benefit analysis of any problem that confronts a policy-maker or a decision-leader at any level is extremely significant. So I'm not discounting that at all, but the questions that really emerge and I think, again, what, what are we learning? What have we learned? What needs to be the underpinning of the policy enterprise? Are the values that the program stands for? In other words, what is the actual foundation? It's not just simply a question of achieving greater fiscal clarity, spending less money when we reconstruct the, the, the Great Hall of Denver International Airport. Those are important questions and they are significant public policy questions. But our society in the post, just confine ourselves for a moment in the post-World War II era, we have had such intense discussions and many of which have been very, very successful ultimately, about what we stand for as a society.

Rick Caldwell:

[53:59](#)

And at the forefront of that of course is civil rights, the environmental movement. We're, we're all, I don't know if celebration is the right word, but we're at a kind of 50 year watermark period of looking at the Vietnam period. We're, we're looking at we're, we're beyond 50 years beyond the great society under Lyndon Johnson. And it seems to me that what you have to think about is what these public policies are achieving, what kind of life people are having. And can have, what kinds of opportunities have either been opened or are not opening as they should in terms of virtually everyone in the United States. And so that means that one of the things, several of the things we have to focus on, I feel very strongly about personally is that public policy ultimately has a base in the United States constitution.

Rick Caldwell:

[55:15](#)

It has a basis in law. Understanding, for example, due process and equal protection under the, the 14th amendment, that is essential. Second, there is a tendency for the public sector to be extremely re-distributive. And it of course has captured a very high proportion of our national income. Today, federal government alone redistributes 25% of our national income, state, federal and local government, it's close to 40 to 43%. And I think that it is very legitimate to say, to ask, well, what are we getting for that money? How effective are those programs? Can we really look with a careful eye at what we have achieved via these mechanisms of public policy? So that leads me to maybe the second major, major point, which is, and every artist, every novelist, anyone remotely familiar with the American experience

gets into a mode where at some point they question the American ethos of buy and sell, materialism, the marketplace, all of that. And certainly that's a fascinating discussion. It's a discussion we should have.

- Rick Caldwell: [56:44](#) However, there is a driving factor in addition to the constitution in addition to the pursuit of liberty, the driving factor, it seems to me that has to be the underpinning of any successful policy venture or policy curriculum has to do with economic vitality, economic growth. The degree to which we are enfranchising people to be successful. And we're facing, we have faced for several years, I think we're going to see this well on, into the virtually infinite future. But the idea of the value of a person's work, the value of labor, the future of work, these are tremendous public policy questions. We have tried to answer them via the welfare system for example, or job retraining, those kinds of things. And you have to look at the report card and be honest with students because it's not our job in, in higher education to solve every problem in society. But we do need to inform our students and be honest with them and say, many well-intentioned efforts have at best been partial successes. There's a long way to go and as issues change and shift, you, the public policy student have to be able to adapt your thinking in a sophisticated way to really proposing, defining problems and proposing lines of solution that policy makers and decision leaders can actually adopt.
- Jim Griesemer: [58:28](#) What a, what a great summation. Well, Rick Caldwell, thank you so much for joining us in this DU oral history project and sharing your insights on the role you played and public policy has played in the University of Denver.
- Jim Griesemer: [58:47](#) I hope you'll join us in the future as we continue the story of the University of Denver's remarkable renaissance. I'm Jim Griesemer. Thank you for watching.