

DU ORAL HISTORY 1984-2014

Interviewee: William (Bill) Zaranka

Interviewer: James R. Griesemer

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Transcriber: Terry L. Zdrale

- Jim Griesemer: [00:21](#) Welcome to the University of Denver's oral history. Our series begins in the mid 1980's, when DU was on the brink of bankruptcy and continues to 2014 with the University then a regional academic leader poised for national prominence. 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 undertaking an extraordinary process of renewal. Their narratives are true renaissance tale.
- Jim Griesemer: [01:00](#) To continue our story, I'm joined by William Zaranka, who served as provost of the University from 1989 to 2001. Prior to joining the DU faculty, he was an assistant professor at the University of Pennsylvania. Bill came to DU in 1978 as a professor and director of DU's creative writing program. He became dean of the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences in 1984 and held that position until being selected as provost of the University in 1989, a position he held for 12 years. In addition to his administrative roles, he's an accomplished academic. He's the author of several books, including two volumes of original poetry. Bill Zaranka, welcome to DU's oral history.
- Bill Zaranka: [01:46](#) Thank you very much.
- Jim Griesemer: [01:48](#) My first question I guess is, is what led you to DU in the first place? How did you get here?
- Bill Zaranka: [01:54](#) Jim I actually go back even further than 1978 because I came here as a graduate student for the PhD back in 1969. And the DU was in a very unusual position because it had one of only two creative writing programs in the country that

offered a PhD. , and , the other one was Iowa and DU's PhD was more attractive to me because it was much more academically oriented and I've always valued that part of it. And so what you did was you had to do all the academic requirements that anybody had to do a and um and then you were given the opportunity to write a creative thesis of poetry or fiction or a novel.

Jim Griesemer: [02:56](#) And, and then you're now at this after a couple of jobs here at the University of Pennsylvania. Right? Associate professor. Then how did you come back to you as a professor? What happened?

Bill Zaranka: [03:07](#) Yeah, the, I was there for three years and came back because the University, the English department, the creative or creative writing program needed a director for the program. So I was, I was determined to apply because I love Colorado and Denver and the University of Denver and to my great surprise, I got the job.

Jim Griesemer: [03:36](#) Now I know from personal experience that you were a thoughtful and effective provost at DU during a challenging time and it's a tough job, but I'm sure some of the viewers are asking, how does a poet become a top administrator at the University of Denver? I guess indeed, why would a poet become University administrator, what happened that, that led you into administration from the creative writing program?

Bill Zaranka: [04:02](#) Yeah. That's a, that's a hard one to try to explain because as a writer, a poet, all I wanted in my youth was immortality. I was very ambitious for that. And all I needed it I felt in life was a isolation and enormous blocks of time to write poetry. And of course, becoming an administrator - solitude, forget about solitude and your time is never your own. So that was pretty ironic, but I think maybe I had to wait until Dan came in order to get my reason for becoming that because Dan came in and he was known as the cowboy chancellor. And so of course Jim, I became forgive me, his poet laureate.

- New Speaker: [04:57](#) We're going to let that pass.
- Bill Zaranka: [04:59](#) I don't blame you.
- Jim Griesemer: [05:01](#) Now Bill, you came, you became, if I've got this correct, you became dean of arts, humanities and social sciences, one of, if not the largest college in the University the same year that Dwight Smith became chancellor of the University and we know that that was becoming, that was a very difficult time. Lots of lots of things had to happen just to keep the University afloat. Could you talk about some of the steps that were taken in some of the impacts on Deans like yourself during that period?
- Bill Zaranka: [05:38](#) Sure. That was a very difficult time. I had no idea how, how bad a time it was until I actually got involved, but it involves such things as, and I'm sure Dwight Smith could talk about this in much more depth than I could, but the things that I knew about were the terrible financial difficulties the region was undergoing, you know, the kind of the collapse I think of shale and the real estate market. And so on
- Jim Griesemer: [06:07](#) A general a recession in the oil patch of which Colorado was a big part.
- Bill Zaranka: [06:11](#) Yes. Yeah. That was part of it. Locally at the University, enrollments were down significantly. And as I look back at the 1990-91 accreditation document, they talk about the University as having run small deficits, half a million, some are relatively small compared to what was to come, small for several years in the late seventies. And then in the eighties million dollars. And I remember the \$8 million, I think it was we were facing in about 85. I think so. It was a, it was a terrible time, a very difficult time. And, and as, as a, a response to it, the trustees I know approached Dwight and said, look, you got, I think they gave him six months to come up with a plan to do something about a very dangerous situation for the University. And he did. And basically I was involved in that. I got an invitation to serve on a

committee. One of the committees, I think there are four of them. One of them was the blue sky committee and, anyway, that led to something that we called the reconfiguration. I know you know it,

New Speaker: [07:58](#)

Right. But I think it's worth explaining if you would.

Bill Zaranka: [07:58](#)

Yeah. The feeling was that we needed a kind of jump start in terms of an academic program, something that would enable us to recruit more effectively and increase enrollments. And I think the, the, the idea was that we would adopt a model that was just gaining currency, the Ernest Boyer model which had to do with a much more emphasis on undergraduate programming and academic programming, but have a different kind. And it was, felt that a Dwight presented a plan where the University would do away with its college of Arts and sciences. Replace it with so called for faculties, which were arts and humanities, which I got initially, social sciences that was Al Mendelson, natural sciences - that was Gareth Eaton and then mathematical and computer sciences that was Herb Greenberg. And, this, this was the reconfiguration. The idea was we would be able to recruit more effectively if we had an undergraduate program, a, a core that was attractive. Some people disagreed, but that was the idea. And, so after all the meetings and the consultants and all kinds of people and after all those meetings and came back and the plan was presented to the University, the plan for the reconfiguration. And, and how was the reaction to that? Hey, let me take a deep breath.

Bill Zaranka: [09:31](#)

There was consternation because although, excuse me, although there were the, the, various committees, it was felt that the faculty had not been consulted in the way it should. And basically that was the beginning of the one thing that, that stymied us and presented impediments, which were concerns about the governance process, a crucial process in academia. And although many of the things in the reconfiguration, including the core, were very popular, they had even been

recommended by faculty committees before all of this, although they were very popular, what the faculty focused on and could not get past and felt that they must react and they did react negatively to what was the process by which the reconfiguration was they felt imposed?

Jim Griesemer: [10:36](#)

Do you think a Bill that, the environment, that financial pressures and the other difficulties that must have somehow come into the mix, I would think.

Bill Zaranka: [10:49](#)

Oh, yes. It certainly did. You're absolutely right. It was the financial pressure that created the need to do it now immediately to get something there. I mean, we're facing an \$8,000,000 deficit in those days. And it was enormous. If I might step back a second. Herb Greenberg, who was a dean of a mathematical and computer sciences, the deanlet, we were called deanlets and that was not a term of endearment. I got to tell you, Anyway, I remember one day, Jim, we, we all gathered, Dwight was chairing the meeting. And the vice chancellors were there and the deans, the deanlets were all there, and the associate deans and the various staff members, the budget geniuses were there and everybody, everybody was there in a big room feeling desperate. And at one point Dwight asked for ideas and Herb who could never resist himself, bless him, stood up, said that Mr Chancellor, he says, I, I'd like to suggest that we were talking about salary increases of about a half percent that was going to go over big. He said, I'd like to make a suggestion that we take the money for the salary increases, whatever it was, half a million, 250,000 and we go down to 7-11 and we buy lottery tickets. Whew, silence a deadly silence in the room. And then a little smattering of laughter. But that's how kind of desperate was because we were looking at a terminations, I think up to 90 faculty. I think we're finally got buyouts

Jim Griesemer: [12:40](#)

on a base that was much smaller than today's University.

- Bill Zaranka: [12:44](#) Yeah, absolutely. Much smaller. Staff were let go. There were program terminations. A library school was terminated. The idea was to terminate theater, there was a, there was termination of the physical therapy program, I think that was the name of it and, and others. And so none of this was popular and it didn't help at all because there was the governance issue as well. So it was a very, very difficult time. People, there were people negotiating a Herb at one time called a death by a thousand cuts and that was that governance issue, Jim, that kind of haunted us, I believe for 20, 30 years after that.
- Jim Griesemer: [13:34](#) Wow. Well Bill, those are major organizational changes that were going on to try and cope with this problem. And, on the academic side, what, what kinds of things were going on? It sounds like there was curricular change the University's kind of struggle of philosophically, how do we come at this and could you talk a little bit about that?
- Bill Zaranka: [14:00](#) Yeah. The, on the academic side, I guess the, the main thing that we were dealing with then and through that decade and I suppose before even the eighties, probably the seventies as well. Well for sure the seventies as well had to do with a vision for the University and what was beginning to be, I think Jim, a, a philosophical shift in how we looked at it, how we looked at ourselves. There'd always been a kind of conflict between teaching and research at one point when, when Roy Wood, who is the first provost in the provost model a, gave a kind of inauguration speech. He talked about the University as aspiring to be a teaching University where research really matters, you know, and that's kind of, we were on sort of on the fence there. There were those two things.
- Bill Zaranka: [15:09](#) And then there were other unresolved things that the accreditation folks would bring up, such as the balance between traditional programming of the theoretical academic side and the nontraditional, which is University college and the women's college and more applied kinds of things. The balance of

the undergraduate, one third of the University, the graduate and professional one-third and the nontraditional applied programs. There was kind of an uneasy balance there. And you could see in what Dwight was trying to install, which was the core and the trustees were completely behind. You could see the shift to a more student oriented place and what you might say is that it was no longer going to be just publish or perish, but, but that was never resolved at the time. That was the, those were the beginnings. And the core actually took off Jim. It was a difficult thing to get installed because the faculty was, was not, they were recalcitrant. They didn't like it. The governance issue,

Jim Griesemer: [16:25](#)

Describe the core curriculum a little bit Bill, it was developed there.

Bill Zaranka: [16:28](#)

Each of the areas of the four faculties was charged with producing, creating a, organizing a core curriculum for its area and for its students and in our area, which by the way, we got an NEH grant for a half a million dollars at that time was wonderful. Ours, we had three courses and they were to be interdisciplinary to the extent that was possible. So we had one course called the making of the modern mind, which included religious studies, philosophy, history, art, faculty from all those things. All, excuse me, all those places, and we had another one well we had a, several others had one on power or we had one on civilizations compared and so on. So we did get a core and that core was very difficult to get started. But we did have departments who were, for instance, the history department, loved the idea. They wanted to increase their numbers and they did it. And when people saw that some faculty, we're going to do it, well my department's not going to get left out. So reluctantly people got on board, you know, and, and I, I was very pleased to find that partly due to that NEH grant, but partly we had some great people Will Bradley and others working on it. So many people, that, the core program got a national recognition.

- Jim Griesemer: [18:37](#) I was going to say that was innovative at the time. And, and, again, it sounds like the underlying strategy was to strengthen the undergraduate dimension and the student experience. And that, of course we'd be very much in keeping with. Yeah, with that, with, with, with all this going on and all this turmoil, what were there, were there concerns about re-accreditation or other things? I mean, that's the lifeblood of a college or University. How did that interact?
- Bill Zaranka: [18:43](#) Accreditation to me is kind of central to both my time with Dwight Smith working for Dwight and then for Chancellor Richie as well. We had accreditations in 85-86, 90-91 and then 2000 as you as you remember. And then in the, the accreditation of 85-86 was a sorry, experience because there was so much turmoil. We were in such trouble, you know, with financial trouble and there were so many things that, that were keeping us from achieving any kind of vision or plan that we might've, we might've brought up. Anyway, we were only accredited there for five years, which as you know, Jim, if you're only there, going to be accredited for five years, you got to start your next accreditation process the day after the one that...
- Jim Griesemer: [19:46](#) That's right.
- Bill Zaranka: [19:46](#) Anyway, in 1990-91, there was another one. And that was much, that was a much better report. I think everybody felt good. But the problem was at the time, Jim, that Allan Schmitzer who was the vice chancellor for academic affairs at the time before the provost model, Alan would invite the deans. He'd say, I'd like to have some ideas of where you want to go in the future. And so strategic planning. Okay. Ready to go. You know, I can't tell you how many, kind of smallish strategic plans for arts and humanities. I can't tell you. Maybe two or three. But they were there, but you couldn't go anywhere with them because there was no, there were no resources. Yeah, yeah.

Jim Griesemer: [20:41](#)

The so you, you were very much a part of helping and having to deal with these really difficult problems. And very challenging times. And then, in 1989 into the picture came Dan Ritchie, who was a DU board member who was asked by his colleagues to become chancellor of the University. And not very long after Dan became the chancellor. He asked you to become the provost of the University. Perhaps you could tell us that story. How did, how did you happen to become provost when all you want to do was write poetry?

Bill Zaranka: [21:28](#)

You know, I'm not sure how it happened. There were, there was an interim provost, Jack Jones, and then Dan opened up a search. It was an internal search and I had not applied for it. I can tell you the truth. At the time I thought maybe I hadn't quite left my poetry baggage behind because I probably did too many things. Such as in meetings... give money, me. Take friendship, who so... And I would say, quote things that the deans would look, I felt, boy, I have really ruined my credibility. Although we did Herb and I and Gareth, we did write some, some limericks I think that we're a pretty good. Anyway, I just didn't think that there was any chance there. And however, was approached by people on the search committee to apply. I did and Dan chose me.

Jim Griesemer: [22:26](#)

And, you and I came into our respective roles. I was CFO, you were the chief operating officer about the same time. I know that, that, there was so much that happened from that point forward under your leadership to characterize it. We were, we were just beginning to come out of the, the terrible times that you were describing, but over the next 10 years or 12 years while you were provost, the University just went through a period of renewal that is very hard to describe. And a lot of that was your leadership. Can you, can you talk about a, in whatever order you want, but talk about some of the major things that that happened during your, during that part of your tenures as provost?

Bill Zaranka: [23:21](#)

Yeah, I think the,, the thing that I learned about at that time which became central, was a Dan's, Dan's feeling about quality. And his desire to import into an academic setting, the principles of Deming's principles I guess in total quality management, that was extraordinary. And, he wanted to use those methods in pursuit of academic quality at the University, but not just academic quality. It turns out it was quality in every area that might not be defined as academics. Athletics for instance, if you're going to be, if you're going to be a great University, you are going to have the greatest athletic department. If you're going to be a great University, you will have the best, the best programs, the best faculty. And so on. It was a pretty extraordinary thing. And he even tried to import that. He brought people in to speak to faculty and Jim, you know, very well how faculty reacted to that kind of thing.

Bill Zaranka: [24:44](#)

They did not like some of the terminology. But it was always ironic to me because although the terminology was different, there was so much about total quality management that seemed to me to be already built in to the University that I knew and among the people always, you know, instructors, professors in their research and their teaching, were attempting to get better and better. I mean there were. And, and the horizontal notion of total quality management, the inclusiveness, that's something that you, that's governance, you know, and, and there were many things that, that the chancellor wanted to, put into place, that had to, that had academic ramifications. Assessment, for instance in accreditation was becoming a requirement and of course assessment and measurement and total quality management. I mean, the chancellor wanted, that's the first thing he wanted. How do we measure how we're doing, you know? And, so, some of the governance issues, I think a got, were solved by welcoming faculty, staff, community and didn't, just, not the University, not just the ivory tower of the University. The community, trustees, individuals who had some

interest in programmatic initiatives, I mean, it was pretty extraordinary. This horizontal leveling and inclusivity that brought in everybody, talk about governance. That's got to be a kind ideal if you can keep it up.

Jim Griesemer: [26:36](#) Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. And another thing that came in from the business side was, was the whole notion of strategic planning, but that was a very different situation from what you were describing earlier because it was University wide. Can you talk about, about that process,

Bill Zaranka: [26:57](#) About the, about the strategic strategic planning? Well, the first real strategic plan as you know, we collaborated. Yes we did. And it, it was a pretty ambitious plan, that, that kind of lived and survived through most of the nineties and surfaced as pretty much the same mission and goals in the year 1999-2000 when we went through, went through it again and I can't remember Jim, if part of that, part of that strategic planning and those missions and goals included some of the financial things that you proposed and we put into place. I guess we'll look at that a little later.

Jim Griesemer: [27:54](#) Yeah, we talk about that more and more, more depth, but your, your recollection of, of the process is really right. And I was impressed by the fact that the faculty who were participating at that point really did want to participate. I mean, they began to see at least in my view, sort of the light at the end of the tunnel and they said, you know, this, this place is starting to really move.

Bill Zaranka: [28:21](#) Yes.

Jim Griesemer: [28:22](#) And your, your principal responsibility and focus in the area that you did so much was on the academic side of course.

Bill Zaranka: [28:30](#) Right.

Jim Griesemer: [28:30](#) And could you talk about some of the things that happened within the academic dimension of the

University and the student life dimension of the University? During your tenure as provost?

- Bill Zaranka: [28:41](#) Sure. I think that if I had to use a couple of umbrella terms, one would be the way I always characterized what chancellor Richie wanted to be doing and actually had been, had begun with Dwight and his embrace of Ernest Boyer and Charles Kerr, I'm forgetting her first name, but, and which I would, I would characterize as the demo democratization, democratization of higher education.
- Jim Griesemer: [29:17](#) Explain that a little bit.
- Bill Zaranka: [29:18](#) That I think that idea is that we're, as a University, we're not going to pin everything on publish or perish anymore. We are not going to rely on the reputational model of education where you try to bring students in by having enormous, luminaries who, you know, who decorate your masthead but who students never see and never have anything to do with, you know. Rather, what Dan wanted to see was a much more democratic process which was to bring students, and we had good students. They applied and they were getting better and better. Whereas, the Ivy's their reputational model, they had the very best students. And Dan said, no, we've got, we've got wonderful students, we're going to bring them in and if they're not quite at that level now by God, they are going to be at that level when we're done with them.
- Bill Zaranka: [30:37](#) And so that was, I mean, that was just wonderful. The, the implications were what you and I as administrators then had to, had to figure out, how, how, how to deal with. Because those implications, if you are going to make your University more student centered, if you are going to support those students, if you are going to basically say you come to the University of Denver, you will graduate at a higher level the, at the level that you know, the, the so-called reputational model schools. I mean, if you're going to do that, then you've got to have a

faculty that is willing or that believes, first of all, that it's not only going to be rewarded because of publication, right? It can be rewarded and will be rewarded for the variety of different things you do in scholarship. And the old reputational model, it was a scholarship of discovery, research, the lab or whatever it is elsewhere and but research, the scholarship of discovery.

- Bill Zaranka: [31:49](#) See we had books that now could help us and we actually sent these books around to faculty and asked them to read it. And basically we're asking them to read about a different model for higher education. Yes, the scholarship of discovery research. Absolutely we want it. We must have it. But also, we, we want to encourage in our students more students centered University, the scholarship of application, the scholarship of integration, in other words, applied scholarship, integration, scholarship that that stands astride a variety of departments or professional school. So that sort of thing. And finally the scholarship of teaching. So he broadened Ernest Boyer broadened the definition of scholarship and faculty knowing that that scholarship of teaching and application and integration was going to be valued just as much as the scholarship scholarship of discovery.
- Jim Griesemer: [33:02](#) And it's almost impossible to overstate the impact of that you're going from one model that had existed, the Germanic model that had existed from the late 19th century into a very different model with different rewards and different objectives
- Bill Zaranka: [33:21](#) and no longer are we going to try to be The Harvard of the West. No longer is just going to be peaks of excellence, right? We will do some very, very different. And that's the, that's the democratization.
- Jim Griesemer: [33:34](#) And the student centered notion really was compatible with the things that Dwight Smith had introduced with the core. So DU was really reshaping itself.

- Bill Zaranka: [33:47](#) Yes.
- Jim Griesemer: [33:48](#) Outside the traditional model. It's, it's, yeah, it's remarkable. And it, it is what in many ways defines and distinguishes the University today,
- Bill Zaranka: [33:58](#) I think. I think so, Jim, from what I see now I'm retired, but as I, as I look on, I see that it's, it's alive and it's well. And the corollary to that was that democratic notion. Dan was profoundly democratic in that way. I think it was just a wonderful. Was what you could call the marriage of academic life and student life.
- Jim Griesemer: [34:25](#) And, and no one understands that. I think better than you. Could you talk about that? What, what, how did that manifest itself, that marriage of academic and student life?
- Bill Zaranka: [34:36](#) Yeah. I think first of all, by a commitment to that idea that if a student was going to come in, we would support that student by providing a, you know, a much improved and expanded student life office, Office of Student Affairs to help students to provide tutoring, to provide everything. And, and the idea was, hey, learning just doesn't just take place in the classroom. Why should not learning at a University take place everywhere? And so you saw programs now being offered in the dormitories and Sheila Wright, you will remember was, was the dean of undergraduate studies at that time and, and Dan was, we must make this student experience at the University memorable and a great experience in every way. And, and Sheila was most responsible for getting that done. And there were times, you know, when the chancellor would, would suddenly visit in the middle of the night, a dormitory on a Friday night or a Saturday night. Oh my gosh, what he would see and oh my gosh, what Sheila would hear and how we had to make things better. Anyway, that you know, lectures in the living and learning communities, all of those things were attempts to make student life outside of the academic classroom just as educational or as

educationally relevant as possible, as much as in the classroom.

- Jim Griesemer: [36:37](#) There are several that I recall, but one was the partners in scholarship, which I was very taken with had nothing to do with it at all. But you did. Could you describe that? And, and what it was and did?
- Bill Zaranka: [36:54](#) I guess of all programs at the University. If I have to say, if I had to say, well that's the one that is like a microcosm of everything we want to do. That would be partners in scholarship where a, and you had to have faculty buy in to this as well, where a faculty member or faculty members in different departments would partner with students who had written research proposals, and submitted them and the faculty member would read it and would agree to not to be a mentor to a student, but literally to be a partner in this study. I mean, it's pretty amazing stuff and you know, when you think about what's involved there, you have to have a faculty that's willing to do that, that believes that, gee, if I do this, I'm not writing my novel or I'm not writing my article and therefore in a publish or perish environment, that person is doomed. You know, they have to know that that's valued by the administration. And as you know, we put so much emphasis on that and the merit salary process was linked to that kind of thing. We had to, we had to put up.
- Jim Griesemer: [38:19](#) So, so we had students who actually put together research proposals, partnered with the faculty and then they might. That might result in a publication. Right?
- Bill Zaranka: [38:31](#) Absolutely. Yeah.
- Jim Griesemer: [38:33](#) That's remarkable. The other thing that that evolved on, again with, with a your and Dan's leadership was the international study abroad activities for which DU is now known as one of the top universities in the country. Could you talk about that a little bit, Bill?

- Bill Zaranka: [38:52](#) Sure. Uh, that's. Yeah, and it is stunning where DU is, at one time, what first or second in the country in numbers of undergraduates or proportion of undergraduates studying abroad, just a remarkable thing. That whole globalization effort was early on and there wasn't much of it during the years from 84-89 that I spent with Dwight because we were so beleaguered, you know, by other things. Dwight just did a yeoman's job just amazing job at that time. But it really came into its own. Dan, you know, as usual was putting all of his energies into so many different things, but this was truly a thing that he wanted and he wanted every student to have it, immersion would be the ideal, but any study abroad would be welcome and would be good for our students. And so we, we didn't reach the levels Jim that were reached after I left during the beginning of 2000, one, two, three, four, and up to 2010 when the Cherrington scholars came in and they, there was a lot more in the way of resources put into that. But we started, we started the office of internationalization. Ved Nanda worked so hard on that. And who could you be a better person? Could you have in charge of that for a University than a world renowned, you know, a prof like a Ved and you know, a number of different things came out of it. The beginnings of this, of the study abroad program. But also, the, the program with the University of Bologna and others, in China and elsewhere. It was the beginning of the great thing that happened.
- Jim Griesemer: [41:03](#) Yeah. During your tenure, this whole notion of sort of lifelong learning began to come to light and, and DU, had a, a high school for a while, had and has an early learning, a top notch early learning program. How did that come about and how did that evolve?
- Bill Zaranka: [41:26](#) I love that it was a kind of a cradle to grave experience because yeah, the Fisher Early Learning Center, that was the early, the Ricks Center, you know, was the kindergarten up through, what was it, 10th grade I guess, or, and

then, we had the University high school. Then of course he went to undergraduate then graduate, maybe then post graduate, then professional, and then I think there are programs like Viva that came. So it really was. Oh, and there was a charter school too which, I mean it was extraordinary. So it was cradle to grave. Now the high school did not survive, but it was quite successful when it was there.

Jim Griesemer: [42:18](#)

And the others not only survived, they're thriving, they're thriving. And it's really remarkable the, there was so much else going on under your, under your years as provost creating of new centers and institutes. Anything jump out at you on that.

Bill Zaranka: [42:37](#)

Yeah, I still remember Jim, and you will remember very well. You were right smack dab in the middle of it. Dan wanted to have a vision and a road map for the new millennium, you know, if we got past Y2K, for the new millennium and as you remember, we put out a request, a call among faculty staff and I think it may have even extended to some students, maybe not, faculty and staff anyway, for proposals. What do we want to do in the new millennium with what we manage to do in the capital campaign, given the funding, what would you do? Where should this University be going? So for the first time we were able now in a big way to deal with some of those programs. Some of those problems that early on the accreditors said that we didn't have a vision going forward.

Bill Zaranka: [43:45](#)

What was it? So we put out the call for proposals and astonishingly, maybe 200, I think 220 proposals came back and said, my gosh, what are we going to, Oh, be careful what you wish for, what are we going to do now? So the next step, I still remember actually it was kind of an embarrassment of riches. We had transportation folks across the University in the business school, in geography and GIS in the arts and humanities, social sciences, the law school, everywhere. And so what happened was each had a proposal and they all had maybe just a little bit in common, a little

venn diagrams. You can see how they. So what we did was, as you remember, we brought those people together and said, look, we can't fund all of these, but do we have the balance? Do we have the resources, faculty, resources and expertise to make a proposal that all of you to which all of you could subscribe?

Bill Zaranka: [44:57](#)

And that's what came out of it. And the centers and institutes, boy, we got a number of very good ones. The one I'm still a little bit involved with is the Intermodal Transportation Institute. Now the Denver Transportation Institute, the Center for Conflict Resolution was another. Those were the two that managed to spawn academic programs. But then, as you know, there was the institute, Carl Williams, the Institute for Ethics and values, The Center for Teaching and Learning. And there were several others as well and lecture, centers for, well maybe not centers for lectures, but you know, whole bunch of things came out of that

Jim Griesemer: [45:50](#)

Yeah, it was, it was really a, it was almost like a blooming field of new ideas. It's hard to hard to describe sort of the excitement. With all the programmatic activities, the centers, the students centered activities, all these were enormously important in shaping University, but they also cost a lot of money. And you, although your area was, was the, the academic, you were very much aware of the fiscal issues and the implications of these. You and I worked together on a lot of those financial issues. Could you talk about the financial implications of those times? We've come out of this really terrible financial period now, the University starting to bloom but there were still, we had to have good financial controls or none of that could have happened and you were very involved in that

Bill Zaranka: [46:54](#)

because the centers were one thing, but there are also other programs. They were the living learning communities and everything involved with where would they live. And so there were lots of budget implications. And, and to tell you the truth, I given the experience I had as dean and early on as

provost, I really didn't have any good idea about how we could do that. The capital campaign was a little bit later, but early on in the nineties you introduced me to the idea of gain, well, the idea of the contribution margin, or, or responsibility center management, the contribution margin. And finally the most brilliant of them all I think was gainshare. And what that did for the University. And you could explain it much better than I can, but I guess if you're interviewing me, I'll try it in my halting, halting kind of way.

Bill Zaranka: [48:02](#) It was wonderful because it was the introduction of incentive into the academic environment and I'm not sure, Jim, I don't think that there are a lot of universities that do that kind of thing.

Jim Griesemer: [48:20](#) There were almost none then and it has become increasingly popular over the years, but what at the time there were one or two perhaps in the country.

Bill Zaranka: [48:31](#) Yeah. And it was wonderful because in the older times when Alan Smitzer was vice chancellor for academic affairs, all of the resources such as they were, would be on his table and he would have to allocate. And that's the way I think most universities operate or operated. We had a visit from a couple of universities. They came to see what we were doing with that and they were flabbergasted. They, they, it was almost like incomprehensible. How do you get from that centralized to basically responsibility center management and giving the faculty, the deans the incentive. I mean, this is a brilliant thing that now they, once they can get past the idea that, you know, money is not necessarily evil all the time. Once they get past that idea. I'm just being facetious. I'm sorry. To, to be able to share in the, in the resources that are made available because you got 30 new students in the law school or 100 maybe in the business school or in the University College. Even, maybe more than that, to get a department to work at recruiting students for its majors and so on, and then having a share in those

proceeds. Well, first of all, for the faculty member in him or herself and the department a windfall, a way to get the folks out into libraries and conferences, to help fund their research, do all these wonderful things and so it became very popular very soon. Not to mention the thing that, you know best how the University, by adopting this and being able to take those millions and tens of millions of dollars in shared revenue and have it there enabled us to raise our credit rating. I don't know exactly where it raised, but to become solvent and better than solvent. Much better, much better. Yeah. Yeah.

Jim Griesemer: [50:56](#) Yeah. And it's interesting to me the, at the intersection of the academic goals, student centered experience, and the financial management, played a big role, I think in the University moving forward.

Bill Zaranka: [51:13](#) Absolutely.

Jim Griesemer: [51:14](#) You were a huge part of that. I guess finally Bill, during, I mean, you, you had a unique span going from, as an administrator, going from really the depths, the really literally the brink of bankruptcy to this flowering of the University. What I've called a renaissance and I really mean that. As you, as you dealt with both very tough problems and then also trying to capture opportunities. What, what were the values, what were the sort of ethical dimensions that, that affected you personally from a values perspective? What did you think about as you were creating all these entities and programs?

Bill Zaranka: [52:00](#) Yeah, there's a, there was the programmatic side of ethics and values that I guess nobody really embraced more than the Daniels College with the Bill Daniels money. And the emphasis that there was to be on ethics and values. So there were those programmatic things that we, the incorporation into the academic programming. But when you look at everything that we did, there were things that you did, that one at the University that, that reflected the ethics of the place, the values of the

place, things that, you know, governance for one thing would, you know, would be one, you involve more people, you don't dictate things by fiat, from above. There's, that's a, that's a, that's a value judgment and that is something that you do, you know, and I think all the things that we did try to do in terms of make things more equitable to pursue diversity and sustainability, to try in every way we could to equalize or make more equitable salary, opportunities for, for women, things that we did, putting in place an ombudsman for those who had no one to speak for them, you know. And, so there were a lot of those things, both the programmatic and then how do you live a good life? How do you teach people possibly just try to live it. And if your example shows, that's a wonderful thing. Yeah.

Jim Griesemer: [53:52](#)

Bill Zaranka, thank you so much for contributing to our DU oral history and sharing the insights drawn from the key role you played in, in not only helping, helping to save the University, but to truly transform it. 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.