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Mark L. Sheldon

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Mark Sheldon Oral History Interview
The Ames Library
August 2, 2012

Meg Miner: Good afternoon! My—

Mark Sheldon: Good afternoon.

Miner: Hi, my name is Meg Miner, and I'm the Archivist here at Illinois Wesleyan University, and today is August 2nd, 2012, and we are in the Ames library today with one of our alumni. I would like you to introduce yourself please and we'll go ahead and get started.

Sheldon: Okay, my name's Mark Sheldon. I'm a Wesleyan alum, class of 1970. And I've had, through my family and myself, an extremely long and rich affiliation with Illinois Wesleyan. I came here myself as a student in 1966. I was here for the...very... consequential years of the end of the sixties. I have a brother, Roger, who's class of '64, and I have a sister-in-law, Carol Thompson-Sheldon, who's class of '65, and interestingly my parents are both Wesleyan grads, Helen McNicol Sheldon is class of 1940, and my father, Chester Elton Sheldon, is class of '43. So I guess you could say our family's been associated with Wesleyan for—

Miner: [chuckles] that's a very long time.

Sheldon: —seventy some years. My parents met, and were married, here at Wesleyan. In fact, my father proposed to my mother in the alleyway by what is currently the Evelyn Chapel.

[Miner and Sheldon laugh]

Sheldon: So our family has, you know, tremendous history here in various ways. I've stayed in touch with Wesleyan over the years, over these forty [some] years since my own graduation, and particularly been involved with Alumni Association work and with recruitment of international students more recently and then served on the Board of Trustees for six years when Minor Myers was President. And that was due to the fact that I was the chairman of the Alumni Association for five years so I was a [Board] member. So, I'd love to focus particularly on my student era, perhaps that's the—

Miner: That'd be great.

Sheldon: —more interesting time where we can go whichever direction—

Miner: That's—

Sheldon: —you think is best.

Miner: —fine. No, I think that's all going to be good.

Sheldon: There are many themes to discuss about Wesleyan, so—

Miner: [chuckles] clearly!

Sheldon: —it's history in practice, shall we say.

Miner: Exactly. A rich legacy of your—

Sheldon: Yes.

Miner: —family's connection. Well why don't we start out with what it was like to be here as a student in the sixties. You want to tell us what your major was, what your official reason for being here was, and then the other things that you were—

Sheldon: Oh!

Miner: —Involved in, would be great.

Sheldon: Yes, I came here from Monticello, was my high school graduation, as I mentioned, in 1966. So it was right at the time of some very important cultural and political changes in our country and certainly in student life as well. I was a political science major, so I had interest in things political. I was also extremely active with United Methodist Church at that time, and given Wesleyan's stronger affiliation with the Methodist Church at that time, that was an important thing. In fact my freshman year at Wesleyan, I was the national president of the Methodist Youth fellowship (MYF).

Miner: Ah.

Sheldon: So I actually traveled the country extensively during that freshman year and was not really on campus so much as some other of my fellow students were. And then, I was very active at Wesleyan in things related to student governance, I was Student Senate president, and active in all the different major issues and concerns and debates of the campus during those times. And of course that was a sort of watershed point for student activities for the role of the university with the student body. In a sense, it was the end of *in loco parentis* of the university perceiving itself as the custodian of student care and of being the parent to the student. So, many, many things shifted during our four years here. And then of course, that was also the era of the civil rights movement, of the women's liberation movement, of black students becoming more empowered and more active on this campus. And certainly that was an era defined by the protests against the Vietnam War.

Miner: So, when you say—these are major cultural shifts, and—

Sheldon: Yes.

Miner: —they happened throughout the country and on college campuses, was perhaps more concentrated effects. We talk a lot—our students talk about these days about the “Wesleyan Bubble.” What sorts of things that penetrated the bubble in those times? You say that *in loco parentis* ended then but it didn't go away, peacefully I'm assuming—

Sheldon: Oh it went away—

Miner: —on its own.

Sheldon: —yes.

Miner: There was effect, there was cause and effect, can you talk about that?

Sheldon: Yes, there were many struggles and protests and changes that were asked for by the students. When I came here as a student of course, there was still women's hours, so women had to be in their dorms and locked up at 10:30 on weekdays, and by midnight on weekends. It was a time of required chapel, where you had to attend chapel each year a certain number of times. It was a time where there were very few representatives of students on university bodies, so that the whole question of student empowerment and student voice and the student role in the university's governance was really coming to the fore. And of course, many students here were active in things off campus, whether it was women's rights issues or African American rights issues or concerns about international issues. Of course, there were faculty who were very supportive, and I was very fortunate to be here when some of the great internationalist faculty at Wesleyan were active, and when there were starting to be fully-tenured women faculty who could be mentors and role models for women students. But generally, quite a conservative, quite an ingrown...quite an on-campus type of environment at the beginning, but then that all very dramatically and rapidly changed with the events, both in the country and then here in campus—

Miner: So—

Sheldon: —during those four years.

Miner: And so students started asking for the change.

Sheldon: Yes.

Miner: Started petitioning the administration—

Sheldon: Yes.

Miner: —for change.

Sheldon: And to the credit of the University, some of the changes had started earlier under President Bertholf. I was Student Senate president the last year of Bertholf's presidency—

Miner: Uh huh.

Sheldon: —and so then Bob Eckley came in as President during the latter part of my Student Senate presidency. And then my roommate, Roy Hankins, was president the first full year of Dr. Eckley's tenure. And Lloyd [Bertholf] had been very student-friendly and he was the one who implemented perhaps the most key decision related to student empowerment on this campus ever, and that was the decision to have the student activity fee be under the [full] control of the students.

Miner: Mm.

Sheldon: So in the late fifties and early sixties during his presidency, this was even when my brother was Student Senate president in '63, '64, the Student Senate started having some resources, and started to be able to make some decisions and have the financial resources to back them up. So whether it was speakers on campus or there was supporting other student

organizations, which is so common today, or whether it was advocating for the foundation of the radio station, which we did during my time, or funding in a very free and independent way the *Argus* or the *Wesleyana*, that really goes back to Lloyd Bertholf. So I myself cherish Lloyd Bertholf's presidency and he of course is a very dear friend of my father, he was a very important figure for Wesleyan in many ways. So I have tremendous respect for Lloyd's decisions in having confidence in the students to have their own voice, their own autonomy, and most importantly, their own financial resources.

Miner: And students stepped up.

Sheldon: They did.

Miner: They took those rules on and—

Sheldon: Yes, by the time I was president, of course, that was already a well established tradition. So we had a budgeting process, and we were able to use those resources to initiate new things, to support student activities and support the student role in the campus that was not so common previously—

Miner: Mm.

Sheldon: —so that led us to, as you said, [to] speak out, and advocate for change. The University to its credit also had a self-study process underway, when [Dr.] Eckley became president. Of course he wanted to have an assessment of where the University was headed. So there were the normal accreditations and some study procedures on—we started pushing very strongly for there to be many more students involved in all of that. So I served on a whole number of those kinds of bodies.

Miner: Wow.

Sheldon: And we pushed for the elimination of women's hours completely. We pushed for changes in student representation, and then we pushed for the whole ethos of student service into the community. That was something that was quite new in those days, which is of course very common nowadays.

Miner: Like what? What were the—

Sheldon: Well particularly for the African American students there were organizations here in town that did not have student participation so we wanted to bring onto campus people who were advocating these kinds of political, social, and cultural changes. So, whether it was speakers about women's issues or speakers about civil rights—

Miner: Mm.

Sheldon: —and of course Martin Luther King [Jr.] had been here once and then he came again. So, a lot of those initiatives came from students. The university was open and friendly although there were faculty and administrators who were of course quite hesitant and didn't feel the students had the level of maturity or responsibility to do these things. Of course, during that era, to be frank, most of the students were quite cheeky and, in some ways, quite arrogant, myself included—

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: —and of course we thought we could do these things quite well. So there was both positive response and then there was resistance. And then there was a good deal of tension, particularly when...political protests started to happen on campus. That happened both for black rights and for student participation, and then certainly there were protests against the war. During my era of course this was the time of the draft lottery. So, much of the protests focused around the fact that all the men on campus were facing being drafted and were facing accepting our government's kind invitation to go to Vietnam to fight. We had student deferment during our time, but once you graduated then you lost your student deferment unless you went to seminary or unless you failed your physical or unless you—

[Miner chuckles]

Sheldon: —pretended you were gay or—you know, there were all types of ways that people sought to get out of being drafted. But during that time, basically, my senior year, 1970, was the year when they used the draft lottery. So we all sat there in the lobby of Adams Hall and watched them pull out our birthdates out of the Ex-Lax capsules, out of the big tumbler.

Miner: They did that on campus!

Sheldon: Well it was on TV! [Note from Mark Sheldon September 26, 2012: It was done nationally, on one night.]

Miner: Oh, okay. Oh, okay.

Sheldon: So for the whole country, that is.

Miner: Sure, yeah, yeah.

Sheldon: The Selective Service System was engaging in the draft lottery.

Miner: Okay.

Sheldon: So if you got your birthdate pulled out, from one to 110, then you were likely to be drafted pretty quickly. If you got a higher number then your chances were that you would never be drafted. Of course, many of us, myself included, were involved in various kinds of draft resistance, and draft protests. I was engaged in a number of legal cases against the Selective Service System and different ways where you could object to the war and try to resist the war through the Selective Service System. We were arguing that there should be other ways to protest the war through the system, other than the traditional conscientious objection which is total objection to all war. So those on campus who were Mennonites, who were Quakers, who were from the traditional peace churches, could object and get a CO status and then not go. But many of us felt there were other reasons on which we wanted to object to this war, whether they were political reasons or historical reasons. Or, most importantly to us, they were selective reasons, meaning we objected to this particular war, but not to all war as such. My father's generation, many of those people, sought alternative service or sought to be CO's. But in our case there were many different and a wider array of reasons why people thought this particular policy in Indochina was a misdirected and an incorrect policy.

Miner: So you had the ability to join a suit, then? A lawsuit locally, or—

Sheldon: Yes, well many of us were involved in things on campus and then things off campus. Through my United Methodist church work, I was involved several summers in working in Washington, DC. I worked with Martin Luther King [Jr.]’s Poor People Campaign in DC in the summer of ’68, when, you know, when that was going on.

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: I worked one summer [with] a group called the National Committee for Negotiated Settlement Vietnam which was basically an anti-war group headed up by Dr. Clark Kerr, who was then president of the University of California system. So I was actually off campus quite a bit in summers working in these different political groups. One summer I worked for a gun control organization. It was the summer that Bobby Kennedy was killed. Then I attended the Democratic National Convention in 1968 when we all got, you know, pummeled by the police.

Miner: Now let me clarify. You attended? Or were you—

Sheldon: I attended—

Miner: —in the park?

Sheldon: Well I was inside [the Convention] first—

Miner: Okay.

Sheldon: —with this national committee group because we had been assigned to different delegations to lobby these delegates—

Miner: Okay.

Sheldon: —the Democratic National Convention delegates. So we had credentials and status inside the convention, as lobbyists. And so I was assigned the Pennsylvania and the Illinois delegations, and of course many of the delegates were strongly supportive of the war and did not want to meet with any of us. Quite a few delegates including the then senator Paul Douglas were quite open to approaches opposing the war. So we met with him, and with others trying to encourage them to support the [anti-war Senator] McCarthy peace plank at that time. Remember Senator [Eugene] McCarthy was running for president.

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: But he was not nominated. Hubert Humphrey won the nomination. So I was in Chicago in late summer of ’68, when all of that happened. And then of course after the peace plank was voted down, then many of us did go out onto the street because there were massive protests all around and of course the sad events of that [time] when there was the so-called “police riot”, where people were severely beaten and injured. Tear gassed in all of the streets of Chicago. So, I have some scars from that, yes.

Miner: Oh my.

Sheldon: I admit to that.

Miner: So many hats you were wearing.

Sheldon: Yeah. One hat was a police club.

[Miner and Sheldon laugh]

Miner: So glad you're here today.

Sheldon: Yeah. We survived all that, although many people were quite badly injured. I was able to dodge most of the suppression of the demonstrators that...

Miner: That was such a difficult year, in so many ways because so many things that seemed to be the fabric of our nation were being taken apart—

Sheldon: Yes.

Miner: —and so many good people were killed.

Sheldon: Yes.

Miner: How do you account for your...willingness to go on? Your ability to—

Sheldon: Well—

Miner: —stand back up and—

Sheldon: Yeah...

Miner: —take it forward?

Sheldon: I think, to be frank, many of us were very disenchanted after that convention. And we felt that working within the system was very difficult to do, so I frankly was disenchanted, depressed, sort of out of politics for a number of months after that convention. And it took me a long time to both process that experience, you know, to see the nature of repression in America, and how many of what I thought were reasonable requests or policies or reforms that people were arguing for, whether it was an area of civil rights or in the areas of women's rights or the area of gay and lesbian rights, were not so much on the agenda at that time and really came out much later. But certainly, to try to redirect the U.S. adventurism or the U.S. empire in Asia, to, you know, move that policy in a more healthy [direction]...it took a long time to get over those things, Meg. Many of us...felt that legislative process and lobbying and that type of participation then was not a very useful way to go and the other types of local or cultural changes had to be pursued. Or in my case, I went into international affairs and into Chinese studies as a result of that, because I felt really—the nature of U.S. policy abroad was where the area of interest should be, not so much domestic politics. Most of us who supported various peace-related candidates of course didn't have much luck in those days. Hubert Humphrey was supportive of the war, then Lyndon Johnson's vice president, and of course Johnson was pressed out of office by all the

protests in those times and decided not to run and he resigned that spring. Then of course Richard Nixon was elected. It was a disenchanting time for people—

[Miner chuckles]

Sheldon: —who were seeking various kinds of civil rights or antiwar approaches—you might call progressive change. Of course people got reengaged and then approached things in a different way and that had its spinoff here on campus. I think the most difficult time, the most down time for people here on campus, was in the spring of my senior year, when Kent State took place, when students were actually shot [and killed] on the street. And the students of Jackson State and then at Kent State were actually murdered by the National Guard. They were unarmed, civilian protestors, and they had damaged some property on those campuses, there's no doubt about that, but basically there was an order given by the National Guard to shoot the students on the campus, and there were then protests and teach-ins and student strikes here on Wesleyan's campus during that time too. That was the most tense and most discouraging time here on our campus, where students, who have been very close to faculty, had differences over the war, and they were not speaking to each other, and there were requests by students to lower the flag to half-mast and the university did not wish to do that. So students went to President Eckley's home late at night to request these things, and the Student Senate debated these issues and passed resolutions asking the U.S. government to withdraw from the war, to withdraw from Vietnam. And there were many students who supported the war and wanted to go off and fight in it, and there were quite a few other students, probably the majority, who were opposed to the war. And there were marches and other demonstrations on the campus to downtown Bloomington. The most tense time was the day after Kent State, when one of my dorm mates in Adams Hall put a sign up on the front of Memorial Center. And in those days the street came right down in front of the Memorial Center so you could turn and go through the quad area by driving. And he put this big white sheet up on the front of Memorial Center that said "National Guard four, Kent State nothing", you know, saying that the National Guard—

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: —had killed four students at Kent State, and, [without doubt,] the community was outraged by this. Anti-student [citizens] were putting letters in the Pantagraph all about how these terrible students are not grateful or not patriotic, accusing students of being communist. All of that was going on—

Miner: Right.

Sheldon: —all the divisiveness of that era was very evident here on campus. And that included then the famous instance of the fire in Presser Hall, which, initially, people thought was part of the political protests but turned out not to be anything related to political protests—where the stage and organ area of Presser Hall was destroyed by a very damaging fire.

Miner: I believe it was attributed to an electrical problem later at some point?

Sheldon: It was later attributed to some child, some kid, disgruntled kid in the neighborhood—

Miner: Oh.

Sheldon: —apparently was involved in this. But of course then those kinds of tense events that were demonstrations and fires and [...this] led to many of us in the student leadership being investigated by the FBI. There [was] plenty of evidence later on that we were being surveilled. So you know, these were...political struggles and political times that we hardly think of happening in Bloomington-Normal, but in fact they were very evident during that time. My roommate who was in... '68-'69, '69-'70, Student Senate president, Roy Hankins, was a perfect 4.0 [GPA] student. He got not a single B his whole time here. And yet his faculty members in his department would not speak to him, because he was so active in the antiwar activities on campus.

Miner: Interesting.

Sheldon: So when it came up to the graduation time, perhaps you've seen in the archive [pictures] the...woodblock print that was put on the back of people's robes[, on their hoods,] or put on the top of their mortar boards, there was a peace symbol with a dove and a fist through it, like this. One of my classmates, Lloyd Nash, was the man who did that. And this was a way for, you know, even at graduation for there to be protests. And of course many people did not want graduation "sullied" with these kinds of expressions of free speech. So the whole issue of what kind of free speech students could have, and what kind of political activity and political involvement or political activism students [should] have, I would argue, was basically redefined by that era here at Wesleyan. Now these are things we take for granted, that students can use the *Argus*, or can speak out or can be involved politically, can even run for office, can support candidates, can bring whoever they wish on campus even if the community objects.

Miner: —doesn't like them—

Sheldon: This type of intellectual freedom and academic—academic freedom is most appropriate on a campus. But in my era as a student then, there were conservative forces and elements that would not want students to do this. And I think the African American students on campus at that time felt that the most sharply. If you have a chance to interview some of the black students who were here in that time—because I remember so few of them first of all and then of course they were always in a—what was always perceived as being if not actually being a very hostile community toward minority students at that time—I think they felt...extremely threatened and endangered at times. In fact, I know they did.

Miner: Were they getting support on campus?

Sheldon: Oh they were. This was the time when, actually, the strategy and approach of black students was one more of separatism [, to have their own space, their own autonomy.] It was not so much of wanting to be integrated as wanting to be apart, because they were such a very small number of [black] students. So they wanted to have their own fraternity, sorority, their own club, their own black student association, their own way of, in a sense, crystallizing and focusing the black student expression. So if you speak to...many of the black student leaders of that time, there's very much this strong sort of wish to have "black is beautiful," to wear the afro, to where—Davis or pan-Africanism—that sort of whole approach to African American rights, which was of course very strong in the country through the Panthers, through H. Rap Brown, through many of the black leaders, through Malcolm [X], of that time, this had its reflection here amongst the black students at Wesleyan.

Miner: Do you recall—

Sheldon: So for example if you would interview Wenona Whitfield, she'd be a perfect person to interview, who then was later nominated to be a federal judge. She's a law professor [now!]

[Miner and Sheldon laugh]

Sheldon: She's just a fantastic person. She could really give you the flavor. Or perhaps you've already interviewed Paul Bushnell, who was... a very new faculty member my sophomore year. He was the adviser to Student Senate.

Miner: Oh my.

Sheldon: So he and I were very close, dear friends, because we went through the wars together about these issues. He's a terrific guy. And of course he has all the history of race relations and community and ethnic relations in Bloomington-Normal, perhaps more than anybody else.

Miner: Oh my. Yeah he was interviewed for the [Bloomington-Normal] Black History Project.

Sheldon: Yeah.

Miner: And we have a copy of that recording.

Sheldon: That would be excellent.

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: Paul was experienced, but new to Wesleyan. I think they put him in that role because other people maybe didn't want to deal with students at that time because students were—they were cantankerous. Students were outspoken and they were activists and that was the era. Those were the times. [Note from Mark Sheldon September 26, 2012: Great and exciting times.]

Miner: Were there things that could bring the university together? You said it was a time of very much tension and divisiveness.

Sheldon: Yes.

Miner: Are there things that rallied people or any of that stuff at all?

Sheldon: We were lucky in the student world, at least across all the different lines of the university. There were a lot of...different representatives of activism, even in quarters that you wouldn't think. There were athletes who were involved in these things. There were sorority and fraternity people who were involved in these things. Part of them were represented in the Senate. And generally speaking, the vast majority of the students were involved in some aspect of these social changes, whether it was being happy that they didn't have women's hours anymore or—

[Miner chuckles]

Sheldon: —being able to speak out in ways they couldn't speak out previously or the ones that were more active, way out in the community of course, they were very much engaged in these political issues of the day, mostly around the war, around the civil rights movement, and around the women's movement. Those were the three main thrusts. Some people were involved in other

issues like anti-apartheid work, corporate responsibility, what today we call divestment work, or looking at endowments and seeing if they're being socially responsible. That came on a bit later, in the eighties, after I had actually left Wesleyan and gone on to other things. And there were faculty of course who were very adept in reaching out to students and being public intellectual type of academics, which sadly I don't think we have so many of those kind of intellectuals today, in the recent decade or two. Academics are more careerists now. They're more interested in their publications and their career and their tenure and they're not so willing to sort of be out there and be public intellectuals in the way that, say, Emily Dale was or the way Paul was or many others were in that time. We also had in our era—perhaps you've seen this in the other interviews you've done—we had this wonderful...interdisciplinary humanities survey course, which [was] sort of a great book style—[University of] Chicago influenced style, team taught and across disciplinary lines, which dealt with the canon, you know, it dealt with the key literature. But, the issues in the key literature of course are issues that are always contemporary. About betrayal, about death, about governance, about whether the king is corrupt or not, or all these things, were very relevant to what was going on—

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: —with Richard Nixon's corruption and Watergate, and whether the American empire was legitimate to be doing what it was doing in Vietnam. And of course it was the time of My-Lai where American soldiers were committing atrocities. That was extremely evident in the debate in those days. So that course in particular, although many people had different academic experiences during those times, but that course in particular, which involved art history, religious studies, philosophy, literature, and had just a stellar team of faculty that were engaging and willing to be “big issue” people. Whether it was Joe Meyers, Doris Meyers, Jerry Stone, Jeff Storey, Rupert Kilgore. You name the faculty of that era, and there were an awful lot of extremely—well there are in every era—extremely talented faculty. But those in particular and then the fact that they were team teaching and doing something synergistically that they were extremely excited about doing, that really excited a lot of students, I think. [Note from Mark Sheldon September 26, 2012: It surely excited me and my own intellectual development.]

Miner: So student and faculty relationships were generally good?

Sheldon: Pretty good, yes.

Miner: And the faculty were supportive?

Sheldon: Yeah. Well, there were points of opposition, always, of course. Certain faculty resisted things that the Senate did. Certain faculty objected to initiatives that the students took. I'd give you a number of examples. Many of the faculty were for the war. And they would be willing to come to Senate to debate it, and we'd have good engagements. Max Pape was very much for the war. There were others the administration and faculty of course resisted some of the changes that students proposed in the social area, whether it was the women's hours issue or other things. And then many faculty were supportive of black students when they were scared to death of the war, resistant to greater ethnic participation, greater diversity. Wesleyan was an incredibly white...Republican place, [in those days.] And in many ways it still is. But not anywhere near like it was in those days. And so, black students were scary to a lot of people. And of course the black students used that to great advantage—

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: —to raise issues that needed to be raised, and to challenge the university, to be more inclusive, and to have a curriculum that was more helpful. Some of us were involved with the Judiciary Committee so there were cases of—that were brought up, both political and behavioral issues. There were very strong differences of opinion about how student disciplinary issues should be handled.

Miner: within the committee?

Sheldon: Yes within the committee.

Miner: Okay.

Sheldon: And in the broader debate.

Miner: Hm. So you were on Senate. And you were involved in WESN?

Sheldon: I was—well as Senate president you supervise all these things. So I was involved in choosing the *Argus* editor, choosing the *Wesleyana* editor, in that leadership group of the Senate. And then when I finished being Student Senate president, I was sort of the elder statesman because I was Student Senate president my sophomore and junior year.

Miner: Ah.

Sheldon: Then my roommate Roy [Hankins '70] was, the next year. And so then I was on the Judiciary Committee. I was on the All-University Study thing; I was on Adlai Stevenson lectureship. There were all these things going on. In those days, the degree of broad scale student engagement with Senate was a great deal more than it is these days.

Miner: That's quite a lot of work.

Sheldon: It was a lot of work. It was a lot of work. And we were paid. It was a job. So you were a full time student, but then you were given a stipend to be Student Senate president—[Note from Mark Sheldon September 26, 2012: I think it was \$500 for the year.]

Miner: I see.

Sheldon: —and you worked over the summer, and you had retreats of the leadership, and you chose the Commission chairman, and you chose the editors. That's when we initiated to start the radio station. So there were a lot of new initiatives that we put forward. But that was...probably the best learning experience of my Wesleyan time. I learned to be a manager. I learned to budget. I learned to do things political to get people to come along with you. And of course I was involved with other things outside of Wesleyan that way too, through the Methodist Church. I learned my politics in the Methodist Church more than anywhere else, I think.

Miner: Hm. What is your perception of students having fun on campus, and that type of—what would students do for fun?

Sheldon: There was a lot of the same things that go on now, even probably worse, some of these.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: There was wide scale use and abuse of alcohol. There were keggers out on the lake. There was crazy stuff going on at Homecoming, and then we had the...Greek games, where people would do obscene and gross things to each other, and this sort of hazing issue was very much evident in those days.

Miner: Do you want to talk about any of those things—

Sheldon: No!

Miner: —in greater detail, or just name them—

Sheldon: Well, there were unfortunate things—

Miner: Okay.

Sheldon: —that happened where people were drunk out of their minds or doing silly things or falling dead away in the snow or—

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: —sadly things that still happen [too often] today.

Miner: That's true.

Sheldon: Poor judgment by students often connected with alcohol. That was pretty evident in my era. I came from a Methodist tee-totaling family, so I didn't really get into booze too much. We all learned to drink, of course, but it was not the degree of abuse and the degree of binge drinking I think that we see now. That I think is extremely unfortunate, what we're seeing now. And there [are] many issues there related to how that's to be handled. Perhaps...discuss in a more contemporary interview, but—

Miner: Sure.

Sheldon: —in terms of my day—

Miner: Okay.

Sheldon: people were...socializing in fraternities and sororities. People were having dorm parties. There was the so called Grind every fall, Student Senate sponsored party. That was the day of beanies. We did do away from beanies too during my time. [Laughs]

Miner: Yes...

Sheldon: When I first came in you had to wear your beanie to all the—

Miner: Today's students thank you.

Sheldon: Yes. Many students thanked me.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: I'm sure it must've been—well, it was... a quaint tradition, but probably not one that would survive the eras of the sixties. Yeah!

[Miner and Sheldon laugh]

Miner: If ever there was a time where it was going to go. [Laughs]

Sheldon: Well, that was one of the times when a lot of things went. People just were sacrilegious. People were...uppity in a way. It was good. It was the mantra of the era. It was defy or "question authority."

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: So that was an extremely positive thing in many ways. I'm sure there's an historical revisionism going on, saying that everyone was a drugged-out hippie during those eras. [Laughs]

Miner: That seems to be the popular—

Sheldon: Yeah.

Miner: —assumption doesn't it? Yeah.

Sheldon: Yeah. But then if you look at the people who came through that era who were trained and who learned their activism and their service to the community during that time, and you even look now at people who are on Wesleyan's Board of Trustees, who are such important leaders of the university, many of them came from that time.

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: You have George Vinyard, you have Kathy Lewton, you have all the people we can mention, Phyllis Barker. You have so many of them, who are now key leaders of the university. Where did they learn to be active? Where did they learn to question? Where did they learn their leadership skills? Came through some of that time. Of course there are people who come from all decades that are good leaders, but there are quite a few from that time who've been extremely faithful, generous, and in crucial positions of leadership.

Miner: Now that's an interesting observation, given that there was so much tension and—

Sheldon: Yup.

Miner: —strife at the time, and—

Sheldon: Yes.

Miner: Some people would say it could easily go the other way, where you could just wipe your feet and walk away—

Sheldon: Yeah.

Miner: —without a second thought.

Sheldon: Well, there were people like that. I think there's, in the earlier generation, of my brother, there were people, alums who were talented and skilled people who were sort of ignored by the University—

Miner: Oh goodness.

Sheldon: —who didn't engage with the University, because the University didn't have the commitment during that era to alumni work. So you have a sort of lost generation of people who you have to then somehow recoup and re-cultivate and bring back in. Particularly if you're seeking support financially from—so that's one way the people get disengaged. In my era, people got pissed at the University, angry. And so some of them, sort of dropped out. So I don't have anything to do with this, because it's such a conservative and unhelpful and unresponsive place. So I have classmates like that where I tried to approach them. I say, “hey, I want you to come back to Homecoming, or I want you to please give a gift, or I want you to do that.” They'll say “ah, I don't want anything to do with that [place].”

Miner: Mm.

Sheldon: I didn't have a positive experience battling those people. There are some students like that, but the vast majority, at least, in my era, in my class in particular, which is sort of an infamous class—class of '70 is known as sort of this crazy, cantankerous, and activist group—their reaction was, we should engage more. You know, we should make our contribution, try to change it. Put your weight behind it, stay loyal, stay engaged, even if it drives you nuts sometimes, even if it doesn't work out like you hoped. I mean, that will always be the case.

Miner: Right.

Sheldon: It will never be the way it...should completely be. That's on toward perfection; as John Wesley would say, right? [Laughs]

Miner: Yeah, change never happens unless—

Sheldon: Right.

Miner: —it's demanded or you have to stay with it.

Sheldon: Right, right. You have to stay with it, and then, you should make your contribution to that. If others come along and can do better, then good for them.

Miner: Yeah. Did you get active then in the Alumni Association immediately after graduation or did you—

Sheldon: No, well I—

Miner: —go off to grad school and stay busy?

Sheldon: I'm sort of a funny case because I was in New York City and was still active with my class, and with things related to Wesleyan in my grad school time. But then, from the early eighties onward I was living in Asia for over thirty years.

Miner: Okay.

Sheldon: So I was very far away. Stayed involved by writing and emailing, and then later helped with raising funds in my class and would always try to come back for the key—there were five year reunions. But then I only got reengaged in a very significant, major way during Minor Myers' presidency, because the Alumni Association had been let go into a disarray period, and—

Miner: I didn't know that.

Sheldon: —and Minor really wanted to reenergize it and so he was looking for some people, both on the Board and certainly in the Alumni Association, [to] reenergize things and to move things on to a more activist level. So he recruited me to come back and be [Executive Board President]—I was moving back to New York about that time—to be head of the Alumni Association, and to sort of reconstitute and redesign, and Steve Seibring was very much involved in all of that, and then we reconstituted a new Executive Board. We sort of got things really going again, and that's really starting from about 2000.

Miner: So what are the things that you would've gotten going? What are the things that helped reenergize the association?

Sheldon: Well, I think there's still a lot to go. I'm not sure it's completely reenergized in the way it should be even now. Part of it is how much is the university then willing to...utilize some resources to develop an alumni program that's engaging and attractive to people. That's particularly difficult when you've let it go for a period of time, sort of like what we call the fundraising business. [Note from Mark Sheldon September 26, 2012: If you don't pay attention to alums, it's like "bananas rotting on the dock."]

Miner: Ha!

Sheldon: —if you don't do something with them then [they are] going to go away.

Miner: Huh.

Sheldon: If you don't cultivate even when they first graduate now out of Wesleyan, then it's hard to get them reengaged. So the Alumni Association started to try all of the different methods. You just have to try out everything you can, whether it's affinity groups, giving clubs, you know, things that they're trying now. We try to get the Minority Network more involved; we certainly try to get the Board to see that there should be more alums on the Board that came out of the normal nominating process. There were lots of issues there on the Board that came from the alumni side, particularly appointing more minority people and more women to the Board. And of course, we were fortunate that when we started pressing that, and it was tremendous resistance to that by the current in group of the Board—

Miner: Really!

Sheldon: —the Executive [Committee]—oh, tremendous resistance. Then we finally hit it just at the time when the accreditation came up, so this was about ten years ago, 2003, as you know it's coming up again now. That's the only time that you have when a self-perpetuating Board and Administration that is part of that self-perpetuating process of a private institution. That's the only time when they are accountable to somebody outside. The only time. So if you cannot leverage the accreditation process to make reform and change, then probably you can't get it done. Even then you probably can't get it done that much. So basically, we were fortunate that that accreditation process—the last time, this was 2003—said not once, not twice, not three times, not four times, not five times, not six times, but seven times!—

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: —it said in that report, that Wesleyan had issues related to diversity, representation, internationalization, all these issues of basically moving toward changing the nature and character of the institution on the different levels. And of course I have been a pest. A pest! I admit to—I was pushing these issues, and Miner wanted me to push these issues, and the minority network people of course wanted to push these— many women on the Board. They felt lonely. There were less than twenty percent women on the Board. Now there's just barely thirty percent, so we still have a long way to go, Meg.

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: In terms of really having the kind of representation that reflects the broader world and even reflects our alumni body.

Miner: Well you've anticipated my next question: what was your perception of the changes? Have there been—

Sheldon: There've been good changes! I think Wesleyan, for the most part, does respond to reasons, to types of requests or reforms. It takes time, and there are points of resistance, as there always are—were—traditional interests or feeling threatened or don't want to change. The whole process, of institutional change is like that. And just to give you an example, Minor Myers was a great visionary, a wonderful president, but Minor was not perfect. And you could make requests for reforms for Minor, and Minor would resist anything if he'd think you were going too fast or he'd think other people would object. So, we pressed him very much to have more African Americans on the Board. And from the alumni side I would actually suggest particular people, because we had the power to nominate a few. And Minor would say, oh no, we don't want to do that. And so, we had to go ahead and do it anyway!

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: Or Minor would get mad at you! And so you say, well sorry Minor, this is our part of the change process—

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: —and then you have your part there. And then you can control what you want. The same issue came up over the issue of accountability for minority hiring at a university. The United Methodist church has this thing called Project Equality, where they do an ...assessment. It's like an accreditation on minority representation!

Miner: Huh.

Sheldon: Of course Minor didn't want to have any part of that. He said, how dare those Methodists tell me what to do about minority hiring. They're not doing very well either, he darted back at them.

Miner: Really.

Sheldon: Yeah. And so we say, well Minor maybe it's a good thing if we have this sort of accounting of—this, a kind of audit.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: Oh no no, so then you have to go back and forth. Hope that people will be more open to that. But if you look around the University now, there's been good change on international faculty. We have a lot of faculty who come from other places now. It's a big change, it's good. We have many more international students. It's still nowhere near how many we should have in my humble opinion. It's not even four percent of the total student population.

Miner: That's amazing.

Sheldon: But then that's fifty or sixty or seventy students, which is a tremendously culturally enriching process. For somebody who comes from Strawn, or Cropsey, or Wellington, can plop down at Wesleyan and have a roommate from China!

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: That's tremendously positive, educationally!

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: So you have to look at it from the educational value. But then, look what the world is like.

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: It's not four percent from all these other people all over the place. Of course we're a regional university; we're serving the Illinois population, for the most part. I understand that, that's what our main mission is, okay. But, what would be wrong with ten percent international students. That would not even be two hundred of our total. Anyway, there you go.

Miner: Well what sorts of international studies? I'm thinking of the other side of this coin, about making it an educational experience—

Sheldon: Right.

Miner: —to have other cultures and be exposed to other ideas, so we bring students to campus and faculty and staff to campus now from other cultures—

Sheldon: Right.

Miner: —but we also send students—

Sheldon: Right.

Miner: —to study abroad. What was that sort of thing like in your time?

Sheldon: Well, this goes back to my experience during my student time and how incredibly inadequate the international dimensions of the curriculum were from my time. And the story I always tell, the fun story, was here we were, engaged in the Vietnam conflict, and in the whole country, there were so few people who understood Vietnamese culture or who could speak Vietnamese language. And so that whole debate about the internationalization of the curriculum of course came up during my student time, and it's been an ongoing concern and debate for how Wesleyan, as a supposedly national liberal arts university, designs its curriculum to address the broader world and the concerns that are raised there. So during my student time, here we were, being asked to go fight and kill Vietnamese, and, was there any single course on campus about Asia at all?

[Miner chuckles]

Sheldon: No! There was not a single course! The only course in my era was a peace or religion course about Buddhism and Hinduism that was taught by a man named James Whitehurst. He was a religious studies professor at that time, and he was also a magician, you may know that he was a very fun guy. But he was eccentric and he was professorial. And he would come into the faculty meetings—and of course I was in the faculty meetings because I was Student Senate President—and he would come in and he would bring his inflatable globe.

Miner: Ah!

Sheldon: And he'd put everything in his hand except North America and Europe. So that was all you could see, right? And he had all the rest of it in his fist. And then he'd hold it up and he'd start lecturing at the faculty, "This! This is the kind of education we're giving our students!"

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: He would sort of yell and scream at them. Of course, they all thought he was a quack. They thought, who was this guy who was bringing this globe into the faculty meeting? And I sat there as a young student, facing going to Vietnam to fight—

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: —and, [thinking,] this guy's got a pretty good point!

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: We don't know...jack about the rest of the world! We don't know hardly anything! Can I take Chinese? Can I take Vietnamese—no! And so that sort of sparked in me an interest which then led to my own academic career—

Miner: That's amazing.

Sheldon: —and my own stuff. And in a sense, I always thank Jim Whitehurst when I see him. I say you don't know what impact your little—

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: —your little rant—[your little stunt in the faculty meeting, had on my life.]

Miner: Did it change the faculty at all?

Sheldon: It started to. But of course, it took time.

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: And it then—when I was living in the eighties when I was living in Hong Kong, I'd always come back to Wesleyan and I'd always continue to ask Bob Eckley or I'd continue to ask later Miner, have you hired anybody who teaches Chinese history? Have you hired anybody who has an interest in Latin America? And step by step, sure enough, we had changes over those two or three decades where we now have the International Studies major, we now have many faculty who have international interests. We have many foreign born faculty who got their PhD's here, came here from India or China or—and then we have—even more slowly, but in a sense more importantly—we've had reform of the curriculum. So now there are many courses that have the international flag—

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: —I should call it now—

Miner: Global—

Sheldon: Right.

Miner: The global—

Sheldon: Yes.

Miner: Yes.

Sheldon: So there has been tremendous change! In my student days, there were no faculty except for Jimmy Whitehurst, who had interest at all, or any training, or any language ability, in Asia at all.

Miner: Interesting.

Sheldon: Now you have the Asian team, which is like, what, thirty people? Many of whom either come from Asia, and therefore they're native speakers of Asian languages, or you have people who did their research work in Asia, and have, like Tom Lutze, who speaks Chinese, and you have contacts, who did their dissertation research in Asia, who can mentor students because they've done it—who could advise them on study abroad. Meg, it's totally different.

Miner: It is!

Sheldon: So in that sense, I feel most optimistic and most...gratified about where Wesleyan is headed, given those changes. I'm still quite concerned about the diversity of the student population. I'm still fairly concerned about the degree of study abroad. I think if you compare Wesleyan in any frank assessment of our peer institutions now, we're still pretty far behind in the percentage of international students incoming. And we're still behind along the outgoing processes [for study abroad, too.] Because we haven't embraced the idea of exchange. Instead of sending to enclave programs or sending to—

Miner: Oh.

Sheldon: —school of international training or having our own program go to England, where we send our faculty to teach there, where it's like a Wesleyan course, but just happens to be located in London. That's one good model, that's a good place for many students to start. But that's not the—

Miner: —immersive.

Sheldon: —that's not the key paradigm of internationalization in higher education now. What it is now is mainstreaming, where we send our students to the University in England—and they are a local student there, and the local student from the University of England comes here, and mainstreams in our courses. More like the arrangement we had with the Moroccan university now. But you see we have that on such a small scale, that that's not really enriching our student population and our curricular development and our teaching environments and our living environments here, as much as it could. So what would it be like if we had fifty exchange agreements? And we had all these other things that have been going on continued. So then we'd have, you know, 200 international students on campus each term. And 200 of our students were out. And that's what places like Carleton have, that's what places like Kalamazoo have, that's what St. Olaf has.

Miner: What do you think it will take to change that?

Sheldon: I'm not optimistic, frankly. This one area where I'm not too optimistic, because that requires greater staffing. You have that many international students on campus, you're going to have to retrain your dorm people, you're going to have to have people handle visa procedures. So the offices that we have now would have to be...enhanced, and then you also have to have faculty who are more willing to deal with all the vagaries of that process. And most of our faculty here quite frankly are quite good, and quite enthusiastic, because they know that would enhance the educational environment, and it would also enhance the academic quality of Wesleyan. These students who come would actually be academically stronger than the domestic students. Okay. That's not often the perception. The perception is sometimes that—I've heard this even on our campus, some very, almost racist statements, that—oh those students from such and such country only come here because all their academic qualifications are fraudulent.

Miner: Oh dear.

Sheldon: You know, I've heard that—

Miner: Oh dear.

Sheldon: —from people here. And I just have to challenge them and say, well, look back at the record of the students we've had now from these countries, and you'll see that their GPA's are perfectly adequate if not higher than the domestic students. And they're doing it all in a second language.

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: So don't tell me they're not talented people.

Miner: That's—

Sheldon: Will there be some problems; will there be even some tragedies? Of course, but we have that with domestic students too. Why would we expect it to be different?

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: So that sort of critique of the internationalization process, I'm very impatient about that because I worked at a university in Hong Kong where I was in charge of that whole process. And we had 800 such students on our campus like that. And we had over fifty percent of our graduate students who were from the mainland—the actual cream of the cream of the cream. So to me, I'm not convinced by these obstacles and hesitations. But, to do it here, in Bloomington-Normal in a place like this that's out of the way for most international students, and to do it with the attitudes and personnel we currently have, that's not going to be that easy. I'm not saying that the university's not committed to it. I think Dick, and certainly Minor was, and many faculty—particularly the international faculty—are very committed to it. But then to actually...divert the resources, and to have the staffing, and to have the administrative apparatus to make it happen—that's a whole other thing.

Miner: Well it's support for the students—

Sheldon: Yes.

Miner: —and their academic world because—

Sheldon: Yes.

Miner: —there are language issues—

Sheldon: There are. There are cultural issues, there are pedagogical issues. There are psychosocial issues. That's major.

Miner: Yeah. That's—

Sheldon: Of course that's it for the domestic students that way. So if we're going to be an internationalized place, then of course you have to make some other investments as well.

Miner: There you go.

Sheldon: So.

Miner: So you are still teaching in China.

Sheldon: Yes, I'm affiliated with something called The Chinese University of Hong Kong, which is one of the major...comprehensive research universities in Hong Kong.

Miner: And what do you teach there?

Sheldon: I teach courses on Chinese studies, on Chinese foreign policy, on Chinese domestic politics. I'm a political scientist by training, but basically with a very heavy China focus.

Miner: And does that campus have an international...makeup? Does it—

Sheldon: Dramatically.

Miner: So students go—

Sheldon: Hong Kong is like New York City. It's a highly globalized place—

Miner: Okay.

Sheldon: —where everyone is very sold on the instrumental value of internationalization. I mean, Hong Kong could not survive without being international.

Miner: So it's got to be cultural shock for you to come back here and—

Sheldon: It is, sometimes. It's pleasant in many ways, and it's a bit homogeneous in some—

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: —ways.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: But it's my home base, it's where I came from, so I feel very comfortable. I never really lost touch with my Illinois—

Miner: Right—

Sheldon: —roots—

Miner: —right.

Sheldon: —so I was extremely fortunate on that basis. Extremely fortunate.

Miner: Hm. So when you come back now, and you see the way the campus is now, do you have any observations you'd like to share about any of the changes you've seen?

Sheldon: Well, I—

Miner: so you do come back so much.

Sheldon: As I mentioned I was on the Board for six months, so from basically Minor Myers' presidency onward I was really heavily involved with alumni affairs and with the governance issues and with the accreditation processing and all that. So I've sort of seen the developments of the last ten to fifteen years quite intimately. I would be here on campus two or three times a year. And of course I taught here one January term and—

Miner: Was that a travel course?

Sheldon: No, it was a Chinese politics—

Miner: Oh okay.

Sheldon: —course in what was January term in the old days. I about froze to death that winter because I was just coming from the tropics!

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: I was not used to Illinois winters. But, so, I think generally speaking, Wesleyan has improved dramatically both in student quality, in facilities, in the sort of overall mission, being well-defined, in terms of what the liberal arts education is to provide. I do worry about resourcing in terms of endowment per capita. If we look at the comparative matrix of how Wesleyan compares to its peer group, even regionally, let alone nationally, then we need an endowment probably twice the size. So I'm extremely supportive of Dick's efforts to do the capital campaign and do the endowment growth, and to do that in ways that can support quality teaching, fellowships for faculty, faculty development. I think we've—with the exception of the need for a really good new performing arts complex, I think we're about built out on the facilities. We're very fortunate and way ahead of our peers in terms of the quality of our facilities. So now the focus should very much more be on the software side, on the human resources side, in my view, meaning staying in the top four tiers of faculty salaries, and then providing all the other ancillary opportunities for students and faculty, so fellowships for faculty development, fellowships for summer research. So the gift that Eckley made recently I think is right on target. That's—I have many differences with Bob on different issues, but on that I really feel he made a beautiful and wonderful contribution. And so many more things like that including fellowships for international internships, fellowships for language study. The really top liberal arts colleges and Ivy League schools where I've had— you know, I worked for Yale for a long, long time—that's where they differentiate themselves—where they have fellowships for summer Chinese language for students so the student could be involved in Asian studies while on campus or spend the summer in Beijing or spend the summer in Italy or whatever and have that funded. So if we could go in that direction, where we're providing a richer array of the ancillary resources, that's really I think where we need to go. I of course would love to see much greater diversity, in terms of MALANA [Multiracial, African American, Latino, Asian, and Native American] students and in terms of international students. But if you talk to friends around campus you'll hear them say how I've been singing this song for thirty years so that's not anything new. They've heard about this for a long time.

Miner: And you help with recruiting—

Sheldon: Yes.

Miner: —in Hong Kong and through other contacts you have as well?

Sheldon: Yeah I was fortunate that I met very early on, a couple of the earliest of our Chinese students, and I knew them really well and we worked together to start a flow. So this was working with Paul Schley in admissions, but earlier on there was a student here named Guo Tengfei, Adam Guo, who graduated I believe in...[2010] or so. So, earlier on in the early part of the last decade, we were interviewing all the students who would come down to Hong Kong for their SAT, because in Asia you can't take the SAT in China. They're too worried about the...test security issues.

Miner: Really!

Sheldon: So all the students from China have to take a two or three day trip down to Hong Kong or fly to Singapore, whatever, to take the SAT.

Miner: Huh.

Sheldon: So many of the students that Wesleyan was looking at were from China or Hong Kong, were coming to Hong Kong, and I could meet them and interview them and check out their language ability. So I was very fortunate to find a couple of really, really top ones.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: That's always what you want to do.

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: You want to...start your line. You want to start your—seeding the well—

Miner: Yeah, that's right.

Sheldon: —with some really, really top students. So I ran into this guy named Ren Chao, you know—

Miner: Yes.

Sheldon: —and then of course he put us on to a lot of other people and he helped us in other ways, and he worked closely with the faculty and he's close friends with the whole orbit of Chinese and Vietnamese and—

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: —other students. So that's how you have to do it, to sort of prime the pump.

[Miner chuckles]

Sheldon: So that now I hope we can sustain this and keep at least thirty-five to forty students here, coming [each year!]

Miner: In perpetual motion.

Sheldon: Yeah, well then you get the younger sister if they have, and then you get the cousin, then the school knows that the people came here and had a positive experience—

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: —because we don't have the brand and name recognition.

Miner: Sure.

Sheldon: We're not a Harvard or Yale, so you have to do it in another way. You have to do it in a more personalistic, a more friendly way. So I think we're almost there with Vietnam. We're having a good flow from Vietnam. I've been discouraged that we haven't diversified more in the Asia region. We don't have students coming from Korea or from Philippines or Malaysia, from Taiwan. We've been pretty dominantly PRC and Vietnamese so far but that was a smattering of the Africans, and the Bulgarians, and others here and there. So I would just really like to see the next stage being a sort of more comprehensive recruitment plan. And a lot of other institutions have gone through this, and Paul's done great work. I really admire what he's done with extremely limited support and resources. So I'm optimistic on that score. But I think now's the time to go to the next—

Miner: Sure.

Sheldon: —level of planning, the next level of staffing, the next level of resources. And I think they're thinking about that. I'm encouraged about the recent trip that they took. There was a group of some of our senior faculty that have been over recently and—

Miner: Russia, wasn't it?

Sheldon: Well there were different trips of different kinds. The most recent one was the new Provost. He went with—

Miner: Yes, that's right.

Sheldon: —the head of the AsiaNetwork with Teddy Amoloza. And he met up with several other faculty who were there for other reasons. So now you need the enthusiasm for the top level.

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: Because he makes the decisions about the money.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: So I'm encouraged about [Provost] Jonathan Green.

Miner: Well what advice would you have to give students today about...I guess, any of this? What—to make this a more robust—

Sheldon: Yup.

Miner: —experience for them, or any thoughts you have for students today?

Sheldon: It goes back to my earlier experience of feeling that I was inadequately prepared. Both for graduate school, by Wesleyan, in this more internationalized environment, and certainly about the content of internationalization. In my area, whether it's Chinese studies in my case or Latin American or European studies or anything related to the broader social science field, which is so internationalized now. I think America, generally, and institutions like Wesleyan have what I refer to as the intellectual balance of payments deficit.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: We always complain about our trade deficit, and that we're buying more than we're selling. Well, that's true in ideas also.

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: That's true in foreign language skill, that's true in awareness of history, of even our own history—

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: —and our involvement in these countries. So the way I put it most bluntly is we have an intellectual balance of payments deficit.

Miner: Hm.

Sheldon: And how do you address that? Okay, you have to address it by language and culture learning, and by international experience.

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: And of an enduring and serious type. Not...academic tourism.

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: So my theme always to the students of Wesleyan is, it's your brain after all. Take it seriously.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: If you know you have an intellectual balance of payments deficit, and that relates to your future career and your future prospects and your future earning, and even your ability to work in these fields, has to be international now.

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: The way I most bluntly tell my students is to say, you're going to be working for the Chinese, okay? Because their capital is so great, they're going to go start buying all these

companies. So instead of working for Caterpillar—and if you are working for Caterpillar you're going to be working in China, without a doubt, because that's their biggest market, or GM, because Buick is the biggest in China, but more likely you're going to be working for a company that's owned by the Chinese. So your boss is going to be Chinese. It sounds crass to say it that way but that's being realistic.

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: Okay. We always used to say in my day, you choose the country you want to bet on for the future, and then you decide your career that way.

Miner: Interesting.

Sheldon: Were you betting on the future of China or were you betting on the future of Africa? Of the European Union? You could make your bets—

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: —and take your chance. But that means in depth foreign language learning. It means courses that are about the history. Particularly the history of the U.S. and the region you're focusing on. So that you know when you go there that you're not perceived as most Americans are, as being totally ahistorical. You complain about Iran but you don't know anything about the history of the American government overthrowing Iranian governments. You know nothing. You don't know who Mosaddeq even is. And the Iranians will look at you and just laugh. Like, who is this...unbelievably stupid American coming here? So that's part of it, and without a doubt, you have to go there and get what I call seat-of-the-pants experience.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: Okay, you can do that many ways. You can do study abroad, you can work, you can do internships, but it has to be, in my view, two full years, at minimum.

Miner: Oh really.

Sheldon: Okay, that means summer and a full academic year abroad, or a post BA, Fulbright grant. There's so many ways to do it! But you have to be able to be comfortable in that environment. So that you know if you are hired in that environment you can function. That's different than traveling with a Wesleyan group and having a nice time, and going out drinking with your buddies from the fraternity house and coming back and saying, aren't those foreigners quaint and strange.

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: That's totally different! What I'm talking about is, you actually love and miss elements of that new culture when you're done with the experience. When you come back to America, you have immediate empathy for people who are coming into our society and experiencing the difficult cultural sojourns and transitions that immigrants make. That's the kind of intellectual and emotional intelligence I'm talking about. And there's, sadly, very few Wesleyan students who get to that level. They're getting to other levels now more than they used to. Their language

abilities are somewhat better, their international experience is somewhat better. But to get to what we really call international competencies—

[Miner chuckles]

Sheldon: —that's the educational field where they talk about what these things are and what they mean. If you really develop in-depth intellectual competencies, whether it's cultural knowledge, language learning. That skill level expertise and a new cultural setting—

Miner: —takes you far.

Sheldon: —takes a while. And [for] Asia [it] takes longer. But that's what I would hope for, for Wesleyan students.

Miner: But it will take you far forward—

Sheldon: Yeah, it will take you far and it'll be an incredibly enriched and exciting life. And frankly, I know quite a few Wesleyan students now who are really pursuing it. Really chasing it, really running it down. So like Matt Hastings, who was [Ren] Chao's roommate, he's just worked for two years in China, teaching. And he's coming back and he has a degree of cultural knowledge, language learning, that's quite amazing. That's more like what the international students achieve by coming here.

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: Our students will never quite achieve that. Because we don't take our college, four years of courses, in another language. When I start seeing Wesleyan students doing that, then I'll really get excited.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: Some immigrant students could do that...like Spanish speaking students. Could decide, instead of coming to Wesleyan, to go to University of Madrid, or go to Argentina, and actually take a four year course or a master's degree in the target language, because they speak that language now. That's what we have in Asia with so many of the Chinese Americans.

Miner: Really.

Sheldon: Oh yeah, we have many, many students of Chinese [background] who come from California, who were immigrant students, or Vietnamese migrant students, who speak three or four or five languages already. They speak Cantonese at home, so they come to Hong Kong and say, oh, this is home free for me.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: They speak Cantonese. There's a big struggle in courses in writing characters, that's a big struggle for them.

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: But they're transiting across cultures and penetrating into the new environment in a mainstreaming fashion that you rarely, rarely see from Wesleyan students. You see it more, obviously, with these other institutions I mentioned in America. They have all these other ancillary resources. Because then you'd see all these people who graduate from Yale College or Amherst or Williams or Swarthmore, whatever it is. They actually have fluency in the language, as they graduate, total fluency. You have some students like that here at Wesleyan, like Jenny Ceisel, in Spanish. There are students I met here, could very easily go and then prove that they've already done it and moved into the new language and culture environment and totally function quite well. Of course, our PRC students will be able to go back now. They'll transit back in a way that's really quite a—

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: They'll have the Western...even, business, mindset. But they have the Chinese linguistic and cultural competencies. Those are the people who are going to get the new jobs.

Miner: I was going to say.

Sheldon: Yeah.

Miner: Get them and go.

Sheldon: Yeah.

Miner: Well, what other thoughts do you have to share with us? I've gone through our prepared questions, I think. Anything else you think we should talk about?

[Pause]

Sheldon: Nope, I think not, Meg. We've covered all those. It's good.

Miner: Well, it's very interesting. Thank you so much—

Sheldon: Well, my pleasure—

Miner: —for your time.

Sheldon: —my pleasure. I hope—

Miner: We know you're leaving soon—

Sheldon: Good luck with your project.

Miner: Thank you, and I—

Sheldon: I appreciate all the work you do here.

Miner: I want to wish you safe journey.

Sheldon: Thank you very much.

Miner: And a great semester.

Sheldon: I will be in touch.

Miner: We'll look forward to seeing you again. Thank you.