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Oral History Interview with Janet McNew

The Ames Library, September 26, 2014

Meg Miner: Good afternoon. My name is Meg Miner, and today is September 26th, 2014. I'm the archivist of the university and I'm here to do an oral history today in the Ames Library with Dr. McNew. Would you like to introduce yourself and tell us how you're affiliated?

Janet McNew: Sure. I'm Janet McNew and I came to Illinois Wesleyan in 1993 as Provost and Dean of the Faculty. I became acting President in 2003 and was acting President for 17 or 18 months, depending on how you count it during the illness and then after the death of President Minor Myers. I left in 2006 to become Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at the University of Tampa in Tampa, Florida.

Miner: Big change.

McNew: That was a very big change and not just climate-wise, either.

Miner: Oh my goodness. Well, maybe we'll just start at the beginning about where you were before you were at Illinois Wesleyan and how you got here.

McNew: I was at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota, central Minnesota, where I had been—where I went for my first faculty job. So I'd been there for 14 years and had risen through the ranks of faculty in the English department and become chair of the English department, and eventually just before I came, Professor of English. And just before I came, I did an administrative fellowship at the University of Virginia—in the President's office at the University of Virginia because I was thinking at that time having risen through the ranks, being chair of the department, and become a professor about whether I would make a shift into administration, to academic administration. And that was my chance. As I said with President John Casteen at the University of Virginia to kind of test out some of those interests. So that was kind of my—the transition into this-this job and-and coming here.

Miner: So you were in that—in the University of Virginia when you were interviewing here?

McNew: No, I had just completed that fellowship and I was back at St. John's University on, again on faculty doing various things there.

Miner: So you were looking for career progression.

McNew: Yes, so I was looking—well and really a shift from being a full-time faculty member sometimes with part-time administrative responsibilities such as being chair of a rather large department. But I was thinking, do I really want to do this? Do I want to do this thing about being an administrator? So this was my first big job as an administrator.

Miner: So you had two culture shifts then.

McNew: I did, I did. And-and St. John's in Minnesota was actually an all-male institution then and is now. And it was coordinate with the College of St. Benedict and I was chair of the joint department, for instance, between St. John's and the College of St. Benedict. And everything that the institution did, you

had two deans, two vice presidents, two presidents. It was a very complex institution. And I was thinking about your question about culture shifts and things like that. And one of the—I remember one of the biggest was realizing as Provost and Dean of Faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University, I was it, in terms of upper academic administration at the time, and I was second to the president, and if we wanted to do things, we could get them done very quickly because if I could say yes in terms of budgetary priorities, I could say yes. And we could do them. That was—that was breathtaking for quite a while when I first came here in terms of understanding most things.

Miner: So you were hired as Provost—

McNew: Mhm.

Miner: —and into Professor of English as well here. Is that right?

McNew: Yes.

Miner: So the-the roles between governance and teaching and everything else it's involved in a smaller institution. Could you talk a little bit about those experiences?

McNew: I'm not sure I understand your question. I didn't-I did begin to teach each year one course each year. But I didn't actually—except for the other course a year, I really wasn't doing faculty work in that sense. I really was fully involved with the work of being Provost – the Dean and Provost. I think that the difference between here and for instance the University of Tampa, a larger institution, is that I was Provost and Dean. And that was always a question that the faculty bounced around. Do we need a separate Dean of the Faculty and Provost, because the Provost was aimed toward, and perhaps that's what you mean, Provost was aimed toward working with my fellow Vice Presidents and President on university priorities and overall financial, particularly operating budget issues and that sort of thing. And Dean of the Faculty was aimed at faculty and working with the faculty on developing promotion to tenure processes which we didn't have any settled ones when I came, so working on getting those settled, building committees and curriculum and hiring faculty and-and that sort of thing. So those were thought to be two sides and they are in fact two sides of the position, and you're kind of poised between those administrative issues, the vice presidents, and the large institutional issues, and faculty “will” and interests and issues, and if anybody can discover what the faculty will is, which is often another division and issue that you have to mediate. So that was a constant conversation and it was a conversation when I left by the faculty. But in an institution the size of Illinois Wesleyan it's not, and with the relatively simplicity of it, it's not unusual to have a chief academic officer—which is the title for that—have that sort of dual role.

Miner: Thank you, that's a better explanation of that—[Chuckles]—than I was articulating. So that is a fine line to thread in and out of those communities, right, so that the more corporate side of the institution and the more curricular side of the institution. You want to talk a little bit about your observations and experiences in those communities, so working with vice presidents and the Board, and then working with the faculty, and some of the observations doing the changes you saw, perhaps?

McNew: Well I think—I know one of the questions that we discussed before we started this interview that I thought about, and gave some thought to, is what drew me to Illinois Wesleyan. Why here? And I think that—and this is relevant to your question because there were really two sides to it. One of them was

President Minor Myers, because he was president for when I came I believe it was his fourth year. And he really was stirring the place up. He really had ambitions and energy and interests. He really was a transformative president for Illinois Wesleyan in many ways, and that was exciting to think, okay, you can work with someone like that. On the other side, faculty had things that they really wanted to do, I mean, kind of in response to this transformative president. But there was a large gap, because he was president and he was really—he was a visionary, but he was no manager. So he wasn't going to work on the detail of how to build the financial—the place in the operating budget to hire new faculty or how you build promotion and tenure system that you need, or how do you change the curriculum, how you create a new general education program. He really wasn't going to be doing that. And they had, as I say, this big hunk of things. It was called the 7-to-6 movement or proposal, which had to do with shifting from a 7-courseload to a 6-courseload but it really was all tied in with changing the general education program and kind of changing the emphasis of the faculty, really, changing January Term to a May Term, we finally decided. So it was—there were those great draws, because of the amount there was to do, and apparently the will to do it but without the patient steps through working with the faculty on committees and I'd been working with the administration, other vice presidents, particularly the Vice President for Business and Finance. One of the things that I did when I came here, or began to when I came here—was to meet weekly with the Vice President for Business and Finance, with Ken Browning—who was Vice President for Business and Finance—for two to three hours on Wednesday mornings, every Wednesday morning—and began to bring Roger Schnaitter the Associate Provost—the only other central academic officer at the time—along, partly because—and we really worked on-cobbled through all of the operating budget issues that there were. I mean, that's in effect jointly we were kind of a Chief Operating Officer as well and that's probably the biggest kind of pull in the Provost direction that I did. On the one hand, you could think, as a faculty member or someone looking at that, well she's—the Provost—is over there pulled by the Vice President for Business and Finance into financial realities and thinking about and dealing with those things and we really need her advocating for the faculty. And I was advocating for the faculty. And the other thing is, how good is it to have your Provost sitting at that table doing that, rather than having it done somewhere that there's not an academic officer with significant power? And that's what I mean about the power of that position. So you had asked about major changes to be made and there were major changes, so I'm not sure how you might want to—

Miner: Well it sounds like this was a particular moment in Illinois Wesleyan's development, then because we had a president who was taking the university in a different direction and needed the assistance of detail people who understood both the curricular side, but then were also able to work with the very incremental, management types of things of a corporate organization.

McNew: Exactly, exactly. Exactly true.

Miner: So when you came onto our campus and came from a different environment, the roles that you were doing, and the environment that you were in were completely different. Was there anything else that you wanted to add about that shift from—?

McNew: Let's see, I think those were probably some of the main things. I mean, I just—I think the shift or what Minor was—was really pushing and who he was, had to do with—some people would say that he wanted us to be Williams College but in Illinois, and-and in-in a sense that was true. I mean, he was a great advocate for the liberal arts. Not just core, but the liberal arts heart and soul, the liberal arts is

everything, as far as he was concerned. And he was—he wanted Illinois Wesleyan to be one of the—I mean he would just say, we are one of the top 50 liberal arts institutions, liberal arts colleges in America and that's who we are and it was, sort of, then we just want to be there already; we want to be there. And we're not Wesleyan by the way because Wesleyan is in Connecticut. We're Illinois Wesleyan. And he went over and over it, and at one time there was even had a kind of little stirring around about whether we should change the name because there was a certain clumsiness to Illinois Wesleyan and this whole issue of, who are we? And what are we? And it was interesting to me that he didn't, finally, get on the side of doing something because it's the sort of thing that you would think—he had a really kind of magical thinking side to him and it was the kind of thing you might think would appeal to him. But because it would be disastrously hard to do as various institutions have demonstrated in many, many ways, and Illinois Wesleyan was an old and venerable institution, when he became president, so it wasn't like it hadn't been around for a while. And as I said so he didn't, and that's when he became attached to the *Illinois* Wesleyan brand and name.

Miner: [Laughs] That's a great story. So with these big ideas brought a new change in direction. What do you think the ability of an institution that is old and venerable to meet those kinds of changes, what do you make of that and how that played out in that time?

McNew: Well really, and not because-not because of me, because of the situation—the situation and the way that we all fit together, I think it's very hard not to think of 1993 to 2003 as a great age of flourishing for Illinois Wesleyan. It's just a massive boom forward in any number of ways. I thought of a few of them here that I could—that I'll mention that—it seems nostalgic—at first I was thinking, maybe, it's Illinois Wesleyan's Golden Age, and that's always kind of illusory and also sort of egotistical. I mean there are wonderful things that happened at Illinois Wesleyan during Bob Eckley's—there are many ways that Bob Eckley was a great president and exactly the president Illinois Wesleyan needed. And there are—there were issues with President Myers just as there were issues with President Eckley in a variety of ways. But he—it—we still—until we got a settled Provost/Dean who was going to stick around and who had enough power and—to move things forward on behalf of the faculty and bring together those sides of things in 1993, even though Minor was president, until I got here. And then after Minor was gone circumstances were changed. We couldn't—things couldn't happen or didn't happen. Many things that needed to happen didn't happen and then after 2003, it's not like the bottom fell out or anything, it's just that the emphasis—things changed. That period was over, whatever that period is, and as I said, I think of it now as sort of a great flourishing. Just to give a few examples on the Physical Plant, just on the side of the place itself—I mean we're sitting of course in Ames Library in the biggest physical transformation. This building was a result of two substantial master planning processes that I worked on with Ken Browning. The two of us did those master planning processes. This—the location of this library was very controversial and—

Miner: In what way?

McNew: It was thought to be outside the quad, the periphery, and nobody had thought about putting a library here. I mean I think the thought was we put it where the library was, where the Sheean Library was. [microphone shift] Is that okay?

Miner: Yeah.

McNew: And-and this was going to be, I think in general or just vaguely, it was thought to be some sort of residence—some of the residence halls are now, in that direction.

Miner: The Gates.

McNew: Yes.

Miner: The Gates of Wesleyan is what they're calling them.

McNew: Oh, the Gates down there? Well the Gates weren't there of course either.

Miner: Right.

McNew: I mean that Gate is related to this building, making a new front, or another front to Illinois Wesleyan. So it was—and I think a faculty member—Bob Bray—wrote just a scathing—when this was announced—a scathing attack on putting it on the periphery and nobody would ever come here, and it was just the wrong way to go. But there were so many—I mean prior to when I came, the first big physical transformation was going on in the building for the Center for Natural Sciences—I mean it wasn't being built yet, it was a great hole in the ground and we knew that it was going there and so that was the first giant building project and then working through that was work for a few years, and then it was the Shirk Center. We didn't have any of that inside of our campus and that was just very major—and on the academic side, we then had the old science building which was called Sherff at that time which then became the Center for Liberal Arts. That was a very interesting project in terms of building faculty offices and classrooms and beginning a sort of new era for those. And it just—renovations—to install the Mellon Center, changed things in the Nursing building and renovations in the Memorial—the Student Center Memorial, but then the Hansen Center was also at pretty much the same time as the library. So when I came, the bookstore for the university—the university bookstore was in this little basement of a room over in the Student Center and it was kind of shocking for someone coming on campus—I mean you asked about cultural issues—because it was like a kind of a drugstore or something. It just didn't have any feel, any collegiate feel to it or any feel that had to do with books and so it was clear that was one of the things that Minor wanted somewhere more prominent—and we all did, the faculty did, like the library it needed to be out there. But that was an issue too having it over there and a library over here. So those were major physical transformations. But on the faculty there were—there was—we did come up with a plan to move from a 7-to-6 course load, and in my very first fall, there were people who thought that—actually most of the rest of the administration thought that this was going to be the downfall of Illinois Wesleyan University because we were going to—we were changing the mandatory January Term to an optional May Term. The students really did not want that. And I was responsible for answering angry—going to student forums and telling them it was going to be fine. This was going to be—this was going to be terrific.

Miner: What were the—what was the discussion around? Why were they—?

McNew: Well, they really thought that it was the end of Short Term. They thought the Short Term was just going to fall off the map. And I was saying, no, we're going to have more Study Abroad opportunities. I want to build the Study Abroad area. And we did with those and also with the London Program and Spain Program, which we don't have anymore. Other kinds of things like that, but it was—it was thought to be the faculty diminishing their role as teacher and become—wanting to become researchers or not attend to students as much. And that just wasn't true. And as I said, the fear was that we

wouldn't really put attention-enough attention to Short Term to keep it and of course it became popular right away, and remains a very important part. And so we needed to work to make May Term a more distinctive part—Short Term more distinctive, rather than for January Term, they would often take semester-long courses and say, well we're just going to teach it in three weeks in January Term. And that's—so it had kind of run its course in intellectual and curricular ways when I came but that's not the way it felt to the students and some administrators, too. I remember Jim Routi was very, very, very worried. He was a guy, it was like he was selling Coke. He was selling Coke and everybody loved Coke. Now we're going to give them New Coke.

[Miner laughs]

McNew: And it was going to fail. You know the way that those did, too. The General Education Program, the number of courses required for general education program were reduced, but Gateway Colloquium was created and all the general education program created to be a more coherent general education program instead of a cafeteria menu. That was huge and took a lot of faculty energy and dissension, and you finally get—it was amazing when we finally voted the whole thing in. And we did it, kind of in some pieces—it was unanimous on the faculty. And it was illusory in some ways because then I had the issue through the 90s—bit by bit by bit—of getting people to teach Gateway Colloquium, of focusing them on that. But well, primarily they were staffing issues because, you know, when the faculty goes out and hires, their minds turn to their disciplines, and people that were going off to interdisciplinary things, which the interdisciplinarity, generally, was growing. Most of the interdisciplinary programs we had were created at that time.

Miner: Do you think that's something we need to—what was happening in this whole environment of moving 7-to-6, then moving to Gen Ed, and then the really interconnectedness of some of the formerly departmental areas, do you think that was unique to what was happening here or is it something that's happening—?

McNew: I think that the reason we could do it here is that we had the carrot of 7-to-6 and we had a way to motivate—I had a motive—the faculty had a motive for doing all this work, this curricular work, and in other places you don't. And yes, all these issues have come up in other places. But that's what I mean by opportunity, when I came. But if you don't have—if faculty doesn't have that motive, then you've got—I mean, people do wonderful things all over the country. But there are also a lot of stalled and killed general education projects, you know, revision to general education, or creation of general education, or other things. It's very hard to get faculty to do it, and the University of Tampa which has many other strengths, but it was—it's just—it really has a pathetic general education program that just keeps almost falling off the table because A, it's bigger, and it's—they're a different institution but it's just, the faculty don't have any motive for doing it. And as I said, as the 90s went on, the issues with how I as Provost was saying, well you can have this—this faculty position, and there was a faculty process to determine priorities for those, we set that up. But you can have this faculty position but you have to give back this many Gateway Colloquia. We have to have from your department these things, got to have a trade. And those things get—department chairs, they get harder and harder to make work. The nature of the beast. I mean it really is and to answer your question, I think it's—it's kind of inevitable general education programs aren't eternal. You create them, and they run a certain kind of course, and you really have to get ways to keep the faculty interested and motivated to work on it more. I was incredibly lucky. I was lucky because all

my motivation was growth and expansion, and the enrollment of the institution rose by 3- or 400 students in 1993 to 2003 period. And so that was—that was very fortunate. I was a very fortunate Provost.

Miner: Perfect storm of opportunities.

McNew: Yes.

[Miner laughs]

McNew: Actually, that's a good way to put it. I'm trying to think if there was anything else I wanted to add. May Term was so important. So in the creation of the Associate Dean at that time at Mona Gardner's founding role in that and just her role. Roger Schnaitter as Associate Provost tended to work with me most on the budget issues and on Physical Plant issues, which he was still doing, continued to do even after he sort of retired.

Miner: He did.

McNew: So those were—I mean he was my kind of lieutenant for that, and Mona Gardner in terms of the faculty, the faculty curricular or faculty development issues, which was the role, was just absolutely essential. She—when I say we did these things after I came...Roger was doing this set of things on the ground and Mona was doing this other set of things and they were very important—she was so trusted by the faculty which she should have been. And had already begun, was part of the beginning of certain kinds of movements when I came, and a lot of them had to do with her leadership on the faculty. It was great to have the faculty—have the associate dean be closely associated with the faculty, speaking of the dean of faculty. Yeah, I was just looking. [referring to notes for interview] We added more than twenty tenured to the new faculty in the '93 to 2003 period. And we—one of the things that Minor really, really very much desperately wanted and knew that I had worked on at St. John's when I had gotten there was to get a Phi Beta Kappa chapter. And I had been Phi Beta Kappa and so had Mona been Phi Beta Kappa. And we worked on that application and process and as you know you can't get a Phi Beta Kappa chapter unless you do have a certain amount of emphasis on—enough emphasis on the liberal arts by their definitions in liberal arts discipline. And unless you have a high enough quality in which you have there, and emphasis on things like the library and those kinds of things. The library, when North Central, as it was then, accreditation team had come just before I came in '92, I believe they came and I came in '93. Maybe they came even in '93, anyway, they had just been here. Among the weaknesses they noted was the library. Well, when they came back in 2003 that had changed.

Miner: Things were different.

McNew: Things were different. So we really knew what to focus on.

Miner: What do you think of the emphasis on having Phi Beta Kappa be affiliated for Illinois Wesleyan then. How that worked out with the reputation of the institution or-or—and maybe just not in that one particular case of that organization but generally those kinds of external...not accreditations but affiliations.

McNew: Right, right. Well let me just say that I—it was very important to both Mona and me that we were also Phi Kappa Phi members, and the fact that Phi Beta—that students graduating from Business,

for instance, couldn't be Phi Beta Kappa—couldn't get Phi Beta Kappa. There was only the liberal arts disciplines—so defined liberal arts disciplines, or students with enough of that in terms of a minor or something else. That every student at the university couldn't win that highest academic honor meant that we were concerned not to slight those students or to slight those parts of the university. So I think that it—to answer your question, I think, which is more an external question—I think it gave Illinois Wesleyan internally a sense that it was moving in the right national circles, in other words. But I think it, externally, also sort of marked Illinois Wesleyan again in terms of quality and the company it keeps in good and important ways. And a number of the—we did a number of grants—I always thought it was important, important external work that I did as Provost didn't have to do with grants or development. Illinois Wesleyan the Provost truly doesn't have that role. But the important external work I did was with external organizations like the American Association of Colleges and Universities—the most important umbrella organization, Washington organization, for institutions like Illinois Wesleyan. And we had been a member for a long time but really hadn't done much with that membership and I sort of really activated us and went and took faculty and other administrators—academic administrators every year to the national convention. And was on the dean's group there, became part of the Board of the dean's group there and did papers and ran institutes for deans at those national meetings, and things like that along with other members of the Board and did case studies. I did a case study on the library, as a matter of fact.

Miner: Oh!

McNew: Those things I think are important in terms of getting Illinois Wesleyan people's eyes—this is the company that we keep, and this place is—I think that's part of my role. And then—that was part of my role. Part of my role was also bringing these ideas back—the national currents back to the faculty and saying, we need to do a faculty roles and rewards project and I'll get money for that, I mean and so in grants—money terms, I did, get national grant money for that and for other—several other projects that we did. But so as the faculty does it, this doesn't just become the entire world.

Miner: Right.

McNew: This is what's going on at Illinois Wesleyan. Well it's not just what's going on at Illinois Wesleyan. It's what's going on nationally. And here, let me help define the issues in terms of the national context as well as the Illinois Wesleyan context.

Miner: We often tell our students setting goals with talk about the bubble. The Wesleyan bubble. So this emphasis on professional development at both faculty curricular levels and faculty and administrative levels is something that's beneficial to develop.

McNew: Yes it is, because it is very easy for faculty to get in a bubble to—I mean they—they are connected to their disciplines. And that often will, for those people that are very active in their disciplinary organizations, they'll come across these things too but oftentimes it's just through scholarship. And if it's just through scholarship and they're not really looking at the overall issues in their disciplines—or for their disciplines. There's a myopia. I don't even think it's bad. I mean, I think some of the best faculty members I know are people who work on their scholarship and teach their students and they're not really engaged with the kind of—call them political issues or corporate issues, or the kinds of things as you were phrasing them. And that is perfectly fine. It really is perfectly fine, as long as they don't get...as long as they're not impediments to things that—I don't want to call them impediments—to

changes that need to happen. As long as it doesn't making them too conservative, in the sense of doing things that need to be done.

Miner: But it's interesting for your particular position and then the other people that you involved to have that external view and to bring that back so that all of the parts of the institution are working and contributing to each other and bringing it to the dialogue, too.

McNew: Exactly right.

Miner: Interesting.

McNew: I've only taken you up to 2003 by the way.

Miner: Well, take me away. Where would you like to go from there?

McNew: Well, I-I think I-I noticed that a question that we didn't discuss earlier, by the way, and I'll just touch on that and tell you that briefly. Which was, "what's your favorite memory." I don't know about favorite, but I think of 2001—of course for the country, September 2001 was such a shock, landmark, and watershed. And for us at the University of Tampa, that was certainly true. But in October 2001 of course we had the dedication of this Ames Library, and that was...it was such a dramatic moment. And it did really feel to me like that was actually the beginning, I think, of my deepening sense of changes and challenges that were—that were facing us, that were facing the country in some ways but that had particular resonance for us. And of course President Myers was there, and it was in a sense kind of the apotheosis of his vision, of what he wanted for Illinois Wesleyan, was so happy with that. I was delighted to give that dedicatory speech and thank you for your appreciation of that.

Miner: It was a wonderful...

McNew: And I was always touched by Sue Stroyan's having that done up in calligraphy in the library. But when I say it was the beginning of my sense of kind of a deepening and darkening of—not the kind of challenges that you get where you're trying to staff Gateway Colloquium but the kind of challenges that you get when you have had these terrible things happen to the country as a whole. And then not long after that, of course, with President Myers. But already even in the decisions to build this library, to go ahead with building this library, there were people who had misgivings about that in terms of the amount of bond debt that we were getting into with the building. And actually I was one of them. That was a great dilemma for me as a Provost at that time, kind of where to be and how to stand in relation to that because I, having worked—since I worked so closely with Ken Browning—I understood the operating and financial issues with taking on more bond debt, because even though this is the Ames Library, it was a deferred gift, much of it, almost all of it, was deferred. And so, and the Trustees had been saying we shouldn't have any more bond debt. And the faculty were saying, should we be doing this much building, what should we be doing—maybe we should turn our attention in another way. On the other hand the faculty, of course, wanted—we all knew the Sheean Library was inadequate, was completely inadequate. And my heart yearned for this library. And it was very much, as was everything else, was Minor's baby in some ways. And you see in the Pembroke windows and the reading room and many places his touch. But he also did—really had nothing, had very little to do with the planning for the library building and the building up of it. I ended up of course wholeheartedly on the side of saying, well, whatever it takes. But I knew it took a lot, that we needed it as an institution, and we did need it. But it pushed us, it pushed us

hard financially, and not just this, but added to the other things that we had. And then we had—as many people did, but we in particular had—some significant endowment losses following with market issues, following 2001. And as we got into the latter part of 2002, Minor who was never sick, who was never—who was just the spirit-fire spirit of enthusiasm for Illinois Wesleyan, was not himself. He was getting—something was going on. It was unclear what it was. And then of course there was the terrible news in 2003 of his diagnosis of lung cancer in February. And it was actually—he came back from Mayo with his diagnosis—and we learned about it just a few days before the accreditation team for what was then the Higher Learning Commission—was coming to campus. Minor was really never—was so sick and for other reasons, he wasn't really able to communicate through any of that time. So my attention, as I say, in some ways began to shift in 2001 because of the greater burden of financial issues that I felt even with just dealing with the operating budget and those kinds of things. But as I became acting President because of Minor's illness and the loss, his loss. I mean, we learned of this in February and he was dead in July, by the end of July, and without really communicating to the campus, either, with his being able to communicate with the campus. So I, as I became acting President, really my job was so clear to me because it had to with really getting—beginning to get a grip on these financial issues and we did that in several different ways. Ken Browning retired, for instance. As I, as acting president, hired Dan [Klatzbach]—hired a new Vice President of Business and Finance. Jim Routi retired. And just as Minor—one of the last things he did was to appoint, uh—I can't remember his name, he's no longer Dean of Admissions, but anyway he, so those things were changing. It sort of fell to me to manage that transition because Jim Routi was still Dean of Admissions when I became acting President and—Jerry Pope was who it was. Then to sort of work with the new Vice President—work with Ken Browning on tying some things up for the new Vice President for Business and Finance. So we were working with kind of major new Admissions strategy things because there were new and different issues in Admissions. That last year, Jim Routi's last year was a record in a number of ways—in Admissions ways. There was a yield—something called a *yield rate*. And we had the highest yield rate we had in quite a while. It was marvelous in that way. Clearly he was leaving and things were changing. And as I said the financial issues were things that really had to be dealt with—Dick Whitlock the Vice President for Development or Institutional Advancement retired—was retiring too, and I mean I dealt with him on that. So there were all those things—that it was epochal. And there was also the other major part of it was communication, too. And the Commemoration was so important that we had in August, when everybody came back together after Minor had died, dealing with that loss, for me, trying to help think, with the community, how to do that. But I also did a lot of traveling to alumni events all over the country and talking to them to reassure people, essentially to say that this is Illinois Wesleyan. We are what we have become and we'll continue to—there's more becoming to continue. We'll continue to do that and grow and change but there will also be continuity, there is continuity. So that communication was very important, too, in that time but it was—I knew I was crafting a transition, and that—when we got a new president, I would hand these things off to that new president and kind of show him the way and then I would be gone—then it would be time for me to go. That was—it was a very, very, very hard time, you know, for all of us. I feel, of course, delighted to reflect back on that great, flourishing time. But I also feel pretty satisfied to think about that—the transitional role that I played, too.

Miner: I would hope so. I hadn't realized all the number of leadership changes that were happening here at the same time. So you had a self-study—or, excuse me, a reaccreditation. There was also strategic planning.

McNew: Yes. Well I appointed, yeah, we started the strategic planning process.

Miner: And all of those other department head, administrative level types of changes occurring simultaneously. I'm trying to wrap my head around how you managed that type of thing. What do you...

McNew: We actually completely rewrote the university mission statement at that time as part of that strategic planning process to focus on—but you were going to ask me a question.

Miner: Well no, no, it's okay. Yeah.

McNew: I was just thinking about what you were saying about that.

Miner: Yeah, right, which—which in essence—I don't want to say codified but captured, I think, some of the, perhaps, the-the changes that Minor had been doing—or had been working towards in that statement. And shifting the university into a direction with environmental sustainability and diversity and some of the other things which had certainly been happening. But then bringing them together in that document and that vision.

McNew: And Minor was—I mean, he was—he was kind of in a cheerleader way for diversity but he wasn't as interested in diversity as he was in academic quality, what he thought of as academic quality. And they're not—they aren't—they don't fight with each other but they are different in terms of their focus. So it was, I think besides codifying some of the things that had been part of the Minor Myers transformation of Illinois Wesleyan, it also took some new directions with things like diversity and environmental—and sustainability—and things like that.

Miner: To get them actually moving, right?

McNew: To get them actually moving and to make them, you know, foci, as opposed to some of what we were going to do. I know it bothered me, and lots of other folks, that we were becoming steadily less economically diverse and also less diverse through the 90s—racially and culturally diverse through the 90s—partly because of the kind of almost single-minded focus on ACT scores and a certain kind and definition of academic quality that had to do with things that were in U.S. News & World Report rankings. So I think to say, this is important, these things are important to us, and will be foci for what we do was, not a bright turn, but a shift for the institution.

Miner: And who are the people who filled them, the new roles, while you were active president...I don't think all of them—I don't think any of them maybe except for Jerry Pope were affiliated with Illinois Wesleyan. Is that true? So there's—so I'm just—

McNew: Yes, that's true—

Miner: —thinking of the different perspectives that would come in, in that timeframe, too.

McNew: That's right. And we didn't—I actually left it to the new President to hire the Vice President for Development, because that officer needs to be wedded to the president, so the president needed to do that—and actually he took a while to do that. And so there, to go back to the question, Ben Rhodes was acting and headed things up for a while. But your question earlier, you were just thinking about—

Miner: —transitions—

McNew: —Dan, yeah.

Miner: —and how the traditions of Illinois Wesleyan have changed. And so curricular, faculty focus, development of infrastructure, which certainly had growth spurts in this time period, and shape of the university and your role then in communicating all of this to the larger Illinois Wesleyan community in this time of transition. Can you reflect on thought processes at the time for you personally in this role and what your...what direction you were thinking of that time, or how you were handling all of this?

McNew: Well as I said I knew it was a transition. And so I needed to be deferential to not hiring that new vice president even though I was—actually I had a—I had someone I knew, who was in the development world that I met at the University of Virginia [Editor's note: confirmed after interview that this was Thomas Jennings] come and do an assessment of our Development Office, our development processes, and that's where—so that's what I did there, and then worked with Dick Whitlock in terms of his retirement and making that transition there. But I knew that I needed to leave certain things open-ended. I had the Jennings Report to hand off to the new president. But—so my thought processes had to do with what I could do that—that wouldn't sort of, end run, a new President. So I'm pleased with your sense that for instance the mission statement changes were—they didn't come out of the blue. They didn't just—I didn't make them up out of the blue and say, these are my new directions, or these are—this is my mission, because it'd be presumptuous for me to do some of those things. So I wasn't a new President, in that regard. I was an acting President and so I focused on—and many of the things that I focused on with the Trustees and then had to—and brought, some of the things that were then brought to the Faculty, were hard things. And I knew they were, they were not popular things. With the Trustees there were issues and—when I say I worked on, as Provost from '93 to 2003 on all these financial issues, what I really mean are operating budget issues which are different from the overall university financial issues, having to do with bond issues and endowment and those kinds of development issues. And so when I became acting President I was taking a step into another area and there were issues in that area that I kind of knew about as Provost but really didn't know as clearly in terms of how we were—of our endowment—and how that was going. We actually hired some endowment advisors when I was acting President, for instance, that just to change our endowment—some of our endowment policies and things like that that needed changing. And we—so I, with the faculty, I had to bring up issues with health insurance, and particularly, retiree health insurance. And nobody liked it. It was like, why are you doing these things? Well, we have to. You need to know it. You need to know this is not going away. This is here and this is not going away and here are some thoughts. I had begun to work with the Emeriti folks at that time to think about, I knew this was one of those national issues, I knew this needed to happen. I knew. So there were things I knew I was trying to bring in. But my thought processes had to do with confronting what needed to be confronted. But at the same time I hoped in a reassuring way because that was important to that transition.

Miner: What would you—is it possible for you to think of your favorite memory of Illinois Wesleyan or categorize that or...?

McNew: Oh gosh, a favorite memory. Well I think I was kind of positing that moment, even though it was somber, it was also—there also still was the joyousness of the dedication of this building at one time. There are just so many. I know I was just rereading my commemoration for President Myers to get myself

ready to think about this. And I—maybe because, obviously because he’s not with us anymore, now, there are—a lot of them are—attached to him. As difficult as he could be in terms of just rushing in and telling you to do something, one of the things that I had to realize was when he would rush in and tell me to do things, and I would—first I would be nearly panicked, I would think how am I going to get that—he’d rush in and tell me things like, “We can’t get rid of any more books from the library. There can be no weeding out or whatever that is they do, nothing, because all books are—all books are important and we’re keeping them all.” So I’d listen to him and “I’ve taken away the withdrawn stamp”—you’ve probably heard about this—“taken away the withdrawn stamp” he would be standing there and I’d think, what am I going to do? I know we have to do this. I realized little by little that he would then go away and he would kind of forget about whatever it was. And so we could do something that would assuage him but it wouldn’t necessarily be that thing. So I kind of—I got some things settled down. But I still—when I think about him I think, and I told myself this when I left and went to the University of Tampa, that you need—you really did need to embody—he embodied that kind of joyous enthusiasm and love of learning that was just so important for an institute, not to get to be a grim place even when you have to face difficult things, is so important to hang on to those feelings. And—and in the Commemoration I believe I mentioned, this time that he rushed in to say, get up, get up, come with me, come with me. And he ran me out to see the bee tree, the tree where there was a—outside-the Catalpa tree outside the School of Nursing—College of Nursing—School of Nursing, excuse me, where there was a swarm of bees that had dropped down from the tree and I remember him standing there and he’s telling me about all the trees, and it was a lovely day, and he was sort of strolling around, he just—he just loved being a college president and he loved and he thought of campuses as little Edens and cultivating those gardens in any number of ways was so, so much what he did, who he was and so I—that’s a happy memory of—it sort of embodies that kind of pleasure and joyous...

Miner: That’s a wonderful memory. How did Illinois Wesleyan change you?

McNew: Oh gosh. Well I think—I was—I became Provost—I mean I became—some people, fewer here actually, than at the University of Tampa because I was, I had deans—I wasn’t Provost and Dean, I was Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs. But people would call me Provost, not Janet, not Dr. McNew, whatever, but Provost. And I, in becoming Provost sort of became—I thought all the time my energies had to do with the community, building this community. I love the phrase, *community of scholars*. And I remember when I got my PhD, whoever was doing the ceremonies said from the University of Virginia, said, “Welcome to the community of scholars.” And so I really—the notion of cultivating this particular a community of scholars really became a passion for me and a lot of energy went into that. And so I think it changed me in terms of—in those terms—in terms of my focus and I carried that in a different way to a very different institution, to the University of Tampa and...

Miner: Are there other things that you would like to add?

McNew: No, I think we kind of one way or another covered plenty of stuff. Yeah, so I don’t think so. I think we’ve done it.

Miner: Well thank you so much for taking the time. I really appreciate it.

McNew: You’re very welcome. You’re very welcome. And you make it easy to do. So thank you—and comfortable.