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Anne B. Shearer Interview, University Division, Wright State University

Alyce Earl Jenkins

Wright State University - Main Campus

Ann B. Shearer

Wright State University - Main Campus

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Profiles of African-Americans That Helped Shape Wright State University

Interview with Anne B. Shearer

Date of Interview: 1992

Interviewer: Alyce Earl Jenkins, College of Education and Human Services

Interviewee: Ann B. Shearer, University Division

[Note: Video and audio begin perceptibly going out of sync after 4:00]

Alyce Earl Jenkins: Thank you for joining me as I continue talking with African-Americans here at Wright State University about their roles and contributions in making Wright State what it is today. Today I have with me Dr. Anne Bartholomew Shearer, who is Associate Director of the University Division and Director of Developmental Education. I'm so pleased that you're able to join me with this video history of blacks at Wright State University.

Anne B. Shearer: Alyce it's a pleasure to be here. It really is; I've looked forward to this for a long time.

AJ: Good. Let's start out by telling the audience a little about yourself. Where are you from and where did you go to school? Your college and graduate studies, where did you do that?

AS: Well I'm from Memphis, Tennessee, and I did my undergraduate degree at Howard University, my Master's degree at Atlanta University, and my doctorate at Ohio University.

AJ: Oh, so you have a varied experience there. You tried out different universities as you continued your educational—

AS: Well I didn't say that I also started out at the University of Dubuque—

AJ: Oh, okay!

AS: In Dubuque, Iowa—

AJ: Oh my!

AS: —as a freshman and sophomore.

AJ: How did you get to Dubuque, Iowa?

AS: Oh that's a long story, we won't go into that right now.

AJ: Okay. Tell me a little bit about how you got to Wright State University. How did you learn about Wright State?

AS: Well, I was in Athens and I have a brother who lives here, and I visited with him and heard about the new university, relatively new university, that was just getting off the ground, and I knew that in a couple of years I was going to be job hunting. I was working on my doctorate in college counseling and student personnel work. And there was also the new university—well at least community college—that was being built that was to become Sinclair. And so I had two possibilities when I started job hunting of working either at Sinclair or Wright State and I interviewed at both, and I chose Wright State because I liked the opportunities that a four-year institution I thought provided me for my future. I interviewed with the Counseling Center and with the Dean of Students Office, and so my first job here was as Assistant Dean of Students.

AJ: Oh really? I didn't know that; I didn't know that. Now going back to Athens just before you came here, I've often heard that you knew Dr. Kegerreis there. Was he on the faculty at Ohio University?

AS: Yes he was, in the School of Business.

AJ: So did you and he come here about the same time?

AS: Just about, yes.

AJ: I see, I see. So how long were you Assistant Dean for Student Services?

AS: For a year, and the Dean of Students left and they did not fill that position again. I moved from there to the University Division and was appointed Assistant Dean of the University Division. In those days the University Division had a dean, was run by a dean, and it was created in about 1971. And so I remained there through the tenure of the first dean, who was Dr. Craig Willis. And when Craig Willis left, the deanship—
[break in the video] —oriented and whether that unit should report to a vice president for student affairs or a vice president for academic affairs. And after much discussion it was decided that we were an academic component of the university, a support service that was more academic than student service. The developmental component provided the coursework for students who were entering the university who were not really well-prepared for what they were about to face. And so with that component and the

academic component of advising which was really getting students ready for coursework, we were declared to be an academic unit.

AJ: I see.

AS: And that's why we've stayed and reported to an academic vice president. We reported to a provost at one time, and when that position was changed to an academic vice president, then we remained reporting to that unit.

AJ: Now, the University Division services first and second-year students only?

AS: Yes, our goal is to really serve first-year and entering students, to provide with them with a kind of academic support to enable them to make good career choices, to make good academic classroom and class decisions. The Division has really grown from what it once did which was only academic advising to include testing—we provide now the—
[break in the video] —testing that takes place, graduate level as well as undergraduate, the PPST which you're familiar with, the GRE we do. Our office, a component of it, handles all of those things.

AJ: How long have you been doing the graduate testing? I thought that was over in the Graduate School.

AS: No, we handle that as well. Under Dr. Collie, Bill Collie—

AJ: Okay

AS: —who was a previous director, university testing was moved to the University Division.

AJ: I see.

AS: And there are academic advisors who are responsible for the various testing responsibilities. Each of them monitors and administers, I guess I should say, a certain number of those tests.

AJ: Okay. Now in the role of serving as academic advisor especially for first-year students, do the advisors in the University Division have contact with the academic advisors at the upper-level in the various colleges?

AS: Yes, yes. There is a liaison between the University Division—each one of the advisors has a liaison responsibility with a college and with departments within the college. And there used to be, and I think there still is, although it does not function as frequently as it used to, there used to be an organization of all advisors, both University Division and college and school-wide. And that was again to make sure that each unit was aware of what the other unit was doing, to make sure that the Division served the

colleges, which is really one of the goals: besides serving students we make sure that the advice which we provide and the support which we provide is in keeping with the needs and goals of the colleges and the curriculum of the colleges.

AJ: Now about how many students do you have contact with in an academic year?

AS: In the Division?

AJ: In the Division.

AS: We have almost five thousand students.

AJ: That's what I thought.

AS: And that is far more than the freshman class, which we were really created to serve. We right now retain students until they are ready for transfer into the college of their major. So we have students who have earned as many as ninety hours plus. In fact, that has resulted in a ninety-hour rule now, which says that students must be ready to move into a college of their choice and to make a career decision. Or, if they remain in the Division, they must be declared undecided. And so it's really an attempt to get students to make a good decision, to make some decision, by the time they've been here to the equivalent of ninety hours and that's a lot of quarters.

AJ: That is. Now I understand that in September we had an enrollment of 16,907, and so with your five thousand you have almost a third of the university enrollment—

AS: That's true.

AJ: —in the University Division.

AS: That is true. We have added to the Division: in addition to just advising and testing there's also the adult and transfer office, which has become a component. We also offer [core] courses now, a lot more than just the developmental courses which I'm responsible for. We have the freshman seminar which our advisors teach and which we, at least two years ago I think, reached out to the other university community and had volunteers come in who wanted to be involved with freshmen and who taught a section of the freshman seminar. And that's a course designed to help freshmen get oriented to the university.

AJ: As you were talking I was thinking about a couple of programs I've heard you talk about over the years. I don't know whether they're part of the University Division academic advising or the developmental education. The program is the TRIO Program?

AS: Well TRIO—I am also responsible for a special called—used to be called special services—more frequently we have begun to call it under a new title of Student Support

Services. It is a component of TRIO. The TRIO Programs are Upward Bound, which serves high school students in the summer and is a college-based program. We do not have a regular Upward Bound, but we do have a new one which we will talk about, I'm sure.

AJ: Yes.

AS: There's also the Talent Search component of TRIO, which is composed mostly of counselors who help students get into college, to find and get matched with a college that is of most benefit to them with their career desires. And then our component, which is Student Support Services, is college-based and serves a college population. It's designed for students who are academically underprepared in some way; it also serves the learning-disabled. And we are an extension of what use to be the Handicap Student Services Office, which is now the Office of Disability Services. We are one grant but two components. I provide the academic support and Steve Simon, who was the coordinator of the handicap component does all of the things that facilitate making this an accessible place for those who have physical disabilities.

AJ: I see. Now these programs, the Student Support Services and the Learning Disabilities Program and the other programs that you have with Steve Simon, requires that you write proposals. It seems that ever since I've known you you've always had a proposal deadline. Do you have any idea over the years about how many dollars you've brought into the university through grants from the Department of Education and other sources?

AS: Well our annual grant Student Support Services is way in excess of \$150,000. Most recently I have written a proposal which was funded that provides an Upward Bound Program which is specifically for mathematics and science. It's a new regional center that was funded last year at \$174,000. And since you mentioned deadlines, there was one on Friday, and a proposal went out to the Department of Education, for a three-year funding of this Upward Bound math/science regional center with a bottom-line figure of about \$220,000. I've also had a grant until last year with the Board of Regents which was for the support of developmental education. That grant over the years has been from \$70,000, depending on what they were doing with those line-items, funds have gone down to \$20,000. Then last year that whole line was taken out of the budget for developmental ed across the state.

AJ: So you said that you have an annual grant of \$150,000, and that's a continuing grant, you have to write a proposal each year to—

AS: Every three years, right.

AJ: Every three years. So about how many times have you written that proposal?

AS: Well, that proposal was funded originally in 1977.

AJ: Okay.

AS: I wrote it the first time in 1971, but it was not—well, we didn't even get to send it out of the university at that time. And I continued to write it and other facsimiles of that proposal over the years between about 1971 and 1977, and in 1977 the Department did fund our Student Support Services or Special Services Program. And we've been operational ever since.

AJ: Since 1977.

AS: Yes. Served hundreds of students and graduated dozens, hundreds probably, over the years as well.

AJ: So you're looking at \$600,000 to \$700,000 just in that program that you've brought in. And then you add the others, the most recent one for \$200,000-and-some for the Upward Bound, and then the ones from the Board of Regents, then, Anne, you have been responsible for writing grant applications for close to \$1,000,000. It always...

AS: Thank you! I'd like to think so.

AJ: It's always so interesting that you take that so lightly and over in Academic unit, we tally the number of grants and how much money we bring in because we are evaluated by that. And you seem to take that so lightly, but a lot of a lot of kids—a lot of students, rather—and a lot of faculty have been the benefit of those grants that you've brought into the university.

AS: Well, the grants have not only provided salaries for faculty both in the summer and during the academic year, but my primary interest is in serving students, and nothing makes me feel better than to see a student in the halls of the university or on the street who can say something to me like—oh well in fact on the parking lot. The other day I had a lady say to me, "I bet you don't remember who I am." Face was vaguely familiar, and she said, "Don't you remember me? I was the lady who started crying in the middle of placement testing, and I wanted to get up and walk out because I remembered so little math that I just decided college was not for me. And you took me aside and you encouraged me, and I want you to know I'm making straight A's now."

AJ: That's great!

AS: And so it's things like that and students who are graduating who came into the university, you know, looking like they were very what we've called "high-risk" who are now at the other end of the continuum. In fact, one of my students said to me today, "I just came back to thank you for all that you've done for me and all the support you've

been to me over the last four years.” And I remember that student coming in, transferring from another college, having a learning disability, and having tried to make it on his own and not wanting to use Support Services, and I finally convinced him that that was the only way to go for him. And not only was he successful, but he came back to work as a tutor in our psychology program within the Special Services Program and became a psych major—

AJ: Very good.

AS: —and he’s leaving here this year. I’m very happy that he stuck it out.

AJ: Very good. You’ve brought up another area that I was going to talk to you about, and that is personal involvement you’ve had with students. I know that you have personally helped them with clothing and housing and food and other kinds of things. It seems like you always have gone that extra step to help people. Do you have any students that stand out in your mind, not necessarily students that you’ve helped but just...students who’ve graduated from Wright State who are doing well?

AS: Oh, I think back to the first year or so that I was here and I’m reminded of people like Linda Gillespie, who was probably an up-and-coming senior when I arrived—she might not want me to say that, “when I arrived”—but that was one of my first memories was of the protests that were going on at the time under the then President Golding and the involvement of Linda Gillespie and Carolyn Wright...a number of other students.

AJ: [Marcellus].

AS: Kenny [Marcellus], Chester Russ, there were a lot of students involved in trying to make a difference in Wright State in those early days.

AJ: It’s interesting that you mention that. I was just looking at this article here in today’s *Guardian* and it’s a letter from a student saying that they wish that they had more workshops—that we had workshops that would address racial issues here on campus, help black students learn how to deal with racism, and help other people learn how to become more tolerant and more aware of various kinds of issues regarding racism. So it seems, though, that even though it’s twenty-one years later, some of the same issues that Linda and some of the others were addressing before—

AS: Right.

AJ: —they’re addressing now. Listen, I want to go back to a couple of things. As you were growing up in Memphis and then you later came here, who was your role model in Memphis and who was your mentor here, and at Wright State once you got here?

AS: Well, I can always say Alyce Jenkins, who came shortly after I arrived...When I was growing up—

AJ: A year after you did, I think.

AS: A year after I arrived. There weren't that many other black faculty or staff members, you know, in those days...None in many departments and a few in some. And you are one of my idols and one of my models—

AJ: Well thank you!

AS: —and one mentors, and I have always looked up to you, Alyce, and your responsibility within the College of Education. When I was growing up, there were many. Personal friends of my parents, people who were in the public in those days. In fact when I was in graduate school, I almost had the opportunity to march with Martin Luther King in Memphis, and unfortunately that weekend it snowed and I did not have an opportunity to participate in the march. I returned to Athens that weekend only to hear the sad news a couple of weekends later about his death. But his wife was also one of my idols. I admire her tremendously.

AJ: You have a lot of important people from Memphis: Benjamin Hooks is from down there, so yeah.

AS: Yes, right. And one of the other persons who has really been an influential person in my life is the young woman who is the Executive Director of the NAACP in Memphis. And she has stuck with it and fought Memphis and racism in Memphis for a very, very long time, and I have seen Memphis grow as a result of her continued involvement. And I've always known that if you persevered you could accomplish some things.

AJ: Okay. You mentioned—we talked a little bit about the students, and I interviewed someone earlier, and we were talking about— [audio cuts out] —and how it came about, and we touched upon the organization for black faculty and staff and how that organization came into being. Tell me about your role with the Bolinga Center, organizing/founding the Bolinga Center and then later on the organizational black faculty and staff.

AS: Well I was on the planning committee for getting the Bolinga Center off paper and into a reality. I was on the search committee for the first director, who was Yvonne Chappelle. I helped the students with the planning. The groundwork had already laid when I arrived but—

AJ: Now when you say you worked with the students, and I recall the 1960s as being the student unrest years, and I was at a local university involved with a lot of things. And you say you were helping them with the planning and so forth, were you doing that

subversively or were you out front on that because during that time, a lot of times, students and faculty had to not let the left hand know what the right hand was doing as they were trying to make changes occur within the university. What was it like here?

AS: Well, it was not subversive.

AJ: Good.

AS: The University, the President had agreed that the creation of a place like Bolinga Center was appropriate and the money was going to be provided to create that center. What it was going to turn out to be was not quite certain—they were not quite certain. So we tried to put together an organization that would serve the many needs black students had on this campus at that time and that could evolve into what it has become today so that it'd continue to serve the needs of black students. The director, who was Yvonne Chappelle, came in with a lot of ideas about how to make that center a viable place for black students. We planned the...well looked at the responsibilities that we wanted a director to have and went out about searching to find that person. We planned the activities that the center would project and went about trying to make those a reality as well. I remember in fact, I still have in my office a portrait of me at the opening ceremony of Bolinga Center back in January of 1971.

AJ: Oh, that was a nice time.

AS: Yes. Oh, at that time I was sporting a big afro.

AJ: Looking like Wright State's Angela Davis.

AS: That's right. And I guess I felt a little like Wright State's Angela Davis because shortly after I arrived all the black faculty and staff and students became embroiled in a situation with the president and some of the other administrators around the failure to...I guess upgrade the job of one of the black staff members who was here in the Office of Financial Aid. I was not sure that after about two months of being here whether I was going to continue to be employed. But we felt very strongly about what we were asking and the support that we were providing to that person. And we won in the end, although the person chose to leave the university. I think it made a difference in the way black students and black staff were treated after that point.

AJ: I remember that occasion, and I remember thinking that Yvonne had maybe jumped out of the...what is it? The frying pan and into the fire?

AS: The frying pan and into the fire.

AJ: Because she and I had worked together at Wilberforce University as I mentioned with the student unrest and a lot of things that were going on there. And so she accepted the job at Wright State and it was like a continuation just different players.

AS: Right.

AJ: So those were some very, very interesting times.

AS: They were—you know, the year that I graduated there was so much unrest that I did not get a chance to march; well there was no graduation. In fact, Ohio University had been closed and I remember speaking of doing things surreptitiously. I continued to meet with my academic advisor to try to finish my dissertation that summer because he said, “Once you leave, it’s awfully hard to come back.” And so we used to meet in the parking lot or the Catholic Church in the city of Athens to go over statistics and the other kinds of things that were necessary to bring that dissertation to fruition and to closure. And, when I came to Wright State, you’re right: it was almost another extension of what had gone on in Athens.

AJ: Now during that time that you were working on behalf of this staff person and working with the students on behalf of establishing Bolinga Center, is that when the Organization for Black Faculty and Students—

AS: and Staff.

AJ: —and Staff came into being or was it after that?

AS: Shortly after that.

AJ: Okay.

AS: Yes, we had a staff member at the time who had come from the University of Cincinnati where there was a—

AJ: Who was that?

AS: Um...you would ask me and I would not be able to call his name right away but I’ll think of it. And he came here saying he worked in the Office of Research, I think, and Development. And he came here saying, you know, “Why aren’t the few blacks that work here...why don’t they meet together? Why isn’t there more togetherness? And I guess each of us had so many responsibilities at the time that we just had not thought about coming together as a group. A part of that coming-togetherness was a result, again, of the situation that the staff member was facing in regard to her promotion or her lack thereof. And we decided that we would, and so the Organization for Black Faculty and Staff started out as a social group. We used to get together and go out to dinner or out to, if you’ll allow me to say, happy hours or whatever there were on weekends every

now and then. And then we began to think about the need to become a more formal organization. So we established a constitution very much modeled after the one at the University of Cincinnati and elected officers and began to meet as a group at least once or twice a month. And we asked for permission to do that on university time, with in mind that this was a very important organization for the university. We wanted to not be just a reactionary group but to try to help plan and think about the future of the university with regard to recruiting not only black students but faculty and staff. And so we began to assume those kinds of support roles asking to be involved in any searches, asking to be used in any way the university could use us in the recruiting activities that we knew the university would be facing as they attempted to reach out to bring in students and staff.

[Break in the video] I think this is an important point. It was originated as the Organization “of” Black Faculty and Staff—

AJ: Yes.

AS: —which implied that it was made up of blacks only. Eventually there came to be white faculty members and staff members who were interested in what we were interested in and they asked, you know, “Can we join you?” And of course we said yes. And so it became necessary to look at what the title of the organization really meant, what it implied, and so it was agreed that it needed to be changed to say that it was “for” rather than “of.”

AJ: Yes.

AS: So that anyone who wanted to join was free to do so.

AJ: And we have some white members who’ve been in the organization for a long period of time.

AS: A number of years, yes.

AJ: A number of years. Even before—

AS: And continue to pay membership even though we’ve become that formal now.

AJ: Yes.

AS: Once upon a time, we did not, but because we wanted to be supportive in a lot of different ways which call for finances, we needed to support activities that were going on in the university, it was decided we’d pay a small fee. It used to be \$5, now it’s \$10.

AJ: Now it’s \$10.

AS: The cost of living has gone up in everything.

AJ: Now you served as president of the organization, didn't you?

AS: I think twice.

AJ: Twice. Yes, okay.

AS: And I think I've served in one other capacity, probably secretary.

AJ: Secretary?

AS: Yes, in fact I have all of the minutes—

AJ: You should—

AS: —from those years still in my file.

AJ: Yeah, you should organize that, that's history, you know. It has to be placed over in the Archives with all of the rest of the information

AS: That's true.

AJ: Anne, I know that you're also busy out in the community. Tell me about some of the civic things that you do and professional things that you do outside of Wright State.

AS: Well I'm very active in my church and have been. I'm a member of Freedom Hill Bible Baptist Church. And for a number of years—

AJ: I think all of us know that, when Women's Day comes around.

AS: Yes! For a number of years, I chaired the Women's Day activities of the church, and a number of years ago we joined forces with the men and called it Men and Women's Day, so that that celebration is on the same day. And I also chaired one of the fundraising activities of that week of celebration, the Freedom Lunch, which I've invited you to several times. And that's a lot of fun. I enjoyed it; it's my contribution. I am not active in my sorority, even though I was in all the other cities in which I'd lived, but I save that activity for the church. And we celebrated the fourteenth annual Freedom Luncheon just two Saturdays ago.

AJ: Very good. Now I remember you used to work with Planned Parenthood.

AS: I work with Planned Parenthood, I've been on the board of the Dayton Free Clinic. I was on that board a number of years, and the Free Clinic was finally dissolved a couple of years ago. I'm active in my alumni club: the Howard University Alumni Club. I have

served as president of the organization and I now chair the program committee. I've done a number of other things—

AJ: Yeah, well rounded.

AS: —that try to keep me active. Also, I am a mother, and I have tried to keep up with two growing teenage boys, who are now both college age, so I'm just getting to a point where I can call some time my own.

AJ: Hopefully.

AS: Hopefully, yes.

AJ: Listen, in summary, if you had a choice to do things differently here at Wright State—if you think back on what you did the past twenty years that you've been here—if you could do something differently, are there things that you would do differently? How do you feel about that?

AS: ...I don't know Alyce. I have enjoyed what I have done up until this point.

AJ: I've always thought of you being in the classroom a little bit more. So if you were to do it differently...

AS: Well, one of the things I did not talk about when we were talking about the Division was two classes that now are part of the offerings of the University Division which originated as a part of— [audio cuts out] —responsible for. I used to have on the staff of the University Division's developmental component an academic advisor who worked in both capacities. She served as a special person with our student support services participants and she also was an advisor for the students. She created a course for those students that was designed to help them make good career choices. Many of the students coming into our program either had no goals and majors in mind, and so they kind of floundered around, or they had unrealistic goals, you know they wanted medicine and they had never taken chemistry in high school. And so [Anne Haine] was a person that started to work with small groups of students on career advising. We were finally able to get the curriculum committee to see the benefit in creating a course out of her idea and her work with students. And so a career development course was created. And just those students, for a while, were allowed to enroll. Then Dr. [Collie] saw the benefit of expanding that so that any student who did not have a career choice made could enroll in that course. That is now a very active course offered every quarter and taught by several of the staff in the University Division who have career as their avocation, career activities. So that's a very popular course.

The study skill course was brought to the university in 1979 by a young man who served as my assistant in developmental ed, Bob Steinbach, and Bob taught the college study

strategies course to probably a couple of hundred students a year. And we started to get more demands for that course as well. There now are approximately nine sections offered in the fall with enrollments ranging from ninety-five to thirty-five from, you know, largest to the smallest possible. And there are three of us who teach the course, and we offer it in workshops. I've done a number of them this year off-campus. We offer it every quarter, and I passed a young lady the other day, when you ask me what makes me feel good about what I've done, she was walking up the sidewalk toward Allyn Hall flipping 3x5 cards. And I said, "Hot dog! That makes me know somebody's listening."

AJ: So then you—

AS: So it's those kinds of things that make me feel good about what I have done, and I'm not sure that I would do things any differently. I've been told I do too much, it's why I always look like I'm going in a thousand different directions, but that keeps me happy, and I think I've made some inroads and I've left some things behind that I'll be proud to have left behind when I leave here.

AJ: That's very good. So you feel good about what you've done—

AS: Yes.

AJ: —and it's especially rewarding to see students who have profited from—

AS: Surely.

AJ: —what you've done, your contributions. And thanks so much for joining us, and I look forward to talking with you again.

AS: It's been a pleasure, Alyce. Thank you so much for conceiving of this idea, and for inviting each of us, and especially for inviting me.

AJ: You're welcome.

AS: Bye bye.

AJ: Bye.