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Dr. William D. Sawyer interview (2) conducted on October 8, 1984 about the Boonshoft School of Medicine at Wright State University

William D. Sawyer

James St. Peter

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James St. Peter: My name is James St. Peter and this is a second in a series of interviews with Dr. William D. Sawyer, Dean of the Wright State University School of Medicine. The date is October 8th, 1984. The time is 2:30pm and we’re in room 113C in the Medical Sciences Building at Wright State University. Dean Sawyer in our last interview you talked about your experiences in Thailand developing a Microbiology department. What university specifically were you at?

William P. Sawyer: I was at a university called Mahidol. You’ll never believe it when I spell it, that’s M-A-H-I-D-O-L. But in Thai it’s pronounced Ma-hi-don University. It was named after the present King’s father; it’s the family name of the king and I was at an institution called the Faculty of Science of Mahidol University and that was affiliated with Ramathibodi Faculty of Medicine as the pre-clinical portion of the Medical School at Ramathibodi.

JS: Was the university that you helped develop there based on primarily the American model?

WS: It was started; it was put together really as a consortium of a variety kinds of activities. Thailand for many years has had a distinguished university called Chulalongkorn University. He was the little boy in “The King and I,” Chula. And they had a medical school and then the King’s father upon earning his PhD, as I recall in Public Health, or his D.PH I guess from Harvard returned to Thailand and was very active in the development of public health and medical education and they had a cooperative program with the Rockefeller Foundation in the 30s to build another medical school called the Siriraj Medical School and Hospital. That served as the basis of Mahidol University and eventually a Dental School was added, a Public Health School, a Faculty of Tropical Medicine, medical technology, etcetera. The Faculty of Science for Science and Pre-Clinical Training, then a graduate program was added for the country; a Pharmacy School, and I’ve got these out of order and then the decision by the Rockefeller to engage again and a cooperative program in Thailand and it was put into the Faculty of Science and then when all of this was in place and the King finally said “Yes, this is something I would be proud of;” the name Mahidol University was conferred on the entire complex of graduate/undergraduate/medical and other disciplines.
JS: So…

WS: It was basically American in its organizational structure.

JS: Did you include basically tried and true methods of organizing based on American models here in the United States or did you use any concepts from other models, the British model? Japanese model?

WS: Well the undergraduate medical education program was on the British model. It was a six year program directly out of the equivalent of high school. So it was a two year pre-med, two years pre-clinic and two years clinical/medical education. Our graduate model was very heavily American in its orientation and I think our approach to undergrad or to graduate education as well as undergraduate education research development was very much patterned after really the sum of my…microbiology after the sum of my experiences. It would be probably only more to bury wood and Bill Sawyer’s evolution than it would be to any other single structural element. I think it’s fair.

JS: Is it also fair to say a lot of development American medical schools follows that type of development pattern on to developers experience with a mentor type figure?

WS: I wouldn’t try to generalize on the mentor figure but I think everything that we are and how we approach things is really the sum product or the sum total of all of our experiences to date. So I think when one individual or a small group of individuals takes on a development chore, you really are going to get some sort of summity process of all of their experiences, so fundamentally I agree. Whether one has one mentor or takes a piece from here and a piece from there and a piece from the other place will depend very much I think on the…how profound an influence given individuals have had…as…on that group of people during the development.

JS: So there is no basic one model that’s used by many different people who develop many different aspects of the medical school philosophy?

WS: I don’t think so. I think it’s…they tend to be a product of their past experiences.

JS: When you moved to the United States again in 1979, how dramatic of a change was that to you?

WS: 1973 not ‘79 but that’s okay.

JS: Okay…Ball State University.

WS: Really it was not a dramatic change. The Rockefeller Foundation has an operating or had at that time is an operating principle that they did not want their staff serving overseas to become professional ex-patriots. They wanted them to maintain a contact with US or World Science, US and World Culture. We traveled back and forth extensively; I remained actively involved in US scientific organizations. And we had in
Bangkok, an enormous sample of distinguished visitors. For example, about the second place in the world that Dr. David Baltimore, now a Nobel Laureate; ever spoke on his work on reverse transcriptase which led to his Nobel prize, was in my department at Bangkok. David and his wife were good friends from US days and he was coming back from the meeting in Germany and he was making a trip through South Asia and back to the US, they spent time with us in Bangkok and I believe it was the second talk he ever gave on that. We had a lot of exchange with people coming through Europe or through Thailand I’m sorry. So I think we stayed pretty well associated with what was going on in the US. I had looked at a number of relatively major positions in microbiology even while I was in Thailand, so perhaps the biggest change was missing the student unrest of the late 60, late 60s early 70s. I came back when that had calmed down but a lot of changes had occurred in universities between ‘67 when I left which was pre the first student protest riots at Columbia came back in ‘73 and they were sort of over. We were in a wind down phase of that overt protest period and I think that was probably the biggest change I observed was that…the interaction with students.

**JS:** When you went to Ball State University what was your first stop?

**WS:** Now Ball State let me correct that it’s in a curriculum. The time that I was in the faculty at Ball State, Indiana University School of Medicine had undergraduate programs that a number of sites around the state of Indiana, one of those was at Ball State and they had a problem in which one year they had no one to teach a major part of their microbiology course and I simply commuted between Indianapolis and Muncie two and a half days a week and did their teaching. So my appointment at Ball State was purely a compensation for doing my job for Indiana University.

**JS:** Why did you choose Indiana University to come back to from Thailand?

**WS:** Well, variety of reasons I suspect. I had looked at…been offered the chairmanship of Microbiology at the university in the East, had been offered a senior position at a big ten, another big ten university, looked at Indiana, I liked the people, I liked what they were trying to do and it seemed clear to me that Indiana University School of Medicine was on the verge of becoming one of the country’s truly outstanding medical schools for the 70s and 80s. They were not a school with a tremendous reputation of fifty years of Duke or Harvard or Hopkins, but they were a school that probably along with North Carolina- Chapel Hill’s Medical School was moving into the late 70s and the 80s as leading institutions.

**JS:** How can you determine that an institution is going to become a leading institution in another decade or two?

**WS:** I think you talk to the leadership and to the people who are gonna make that…who aspire to make that happen. Are they indeed marshaling their resources? Have they made a commitment recruit outstanding people who could give them the leadership assistance that could make it go? Are they organized towards quality? Are they willing to set high standards of achievement and expect people to achieve them? I think I’m repeating
myself. Have they got the resources marshaled to allow them to do this? But overall it’s a forward looking spirit of the administration. It’s not we’re great because we say we’re great, it’s were gonna do whatever is necessary and make whatever commitments we have to make for this institution to be great. And I thought some of the leadership and opportunity there was outstanding.

**JS:** Why did you feel it was there at Indiana and not at a prestigious university in the East or on the West coast or another Big Ten school?

**WS:** I wouldn’t by any means say I didn’t think the potential wasn’t there or elsewhere but Indiana had moved over about a ten or twelve year period from an almost voluntary faculty exclusively institution with a dependence on their Bloomington campus for basic sciences to an enormously forward looking, aggressive group leadership, they put in full-time program. In the mid-60s it was going forward, they had a chairman of medicine who was first class, a chairman of pediatrics, chairman of surgery; they gone out and whenever they had a vacancy they got top notch people to fill it. And they had a sense that the old traditions were what was needed in the 70s and 80s but there were new ways of doing things. I can’t go much further than that. I just thought the people were forward looking. I have to say I didn’t spend an awful lot of time looking at them or them with me. I visited the campus for one day and from that one meeting came the offer of the position in the mail, the Bangkok and I accepted it. So I think we had obviously a certain rapport with each other that was very good. I knew a lot about it…one of the people at Indiana had been in Bangkok with our program, he was…had been involved in the Physiology program and I knew a number of other people at Indiana from one system or another and so that was about the way it was done.

**JS:** You were going as chairman of the Microbiology and Immunology departments. Were they two separate departments?

**WS:** No it was one department.

**JS:** What was…that was obviously you’re second big leadership change of a department, going from one department to the next. Did you adjust your style of leadership when you left?

**WS:** Sure. I think that one…in Bangkok it had been a position of having virtually nothing there and having a building. In Indianapolis the situation was such that the chairman who retired had been the founding chairman of the department in the medical school at Indianapolis had recruited the faculty. It was a department that had not kept pace either with the medical school or the science. There were relatively few grants; their productivity of scholarly work was depleted, the people were not I think completely up to date with modern science. In anticipation of my predecessor’s retirement, the university had or the school of medicine had not filled some positions, so the leadership style had to change to be one of growth while recognizing that there was an existing group there to be dealt with. Some of whom had promise but had not achieved their promise, others of whom probably had gone past their prime and maybe one or two of whom had some had...
very little promise. So the style had to be one working in an existing system, changing it, reorienting the department through a process of working together, bringing it up to date and developing it, causing it to grow, developing approaches to get more space, more support, all of those sorts of things. Plus developing a whole new set of relations with both the other basic scientists, the other chairman, and the clinical scientists of the medical school.

**JS:** Was a different pace of change development different than what you experienced in Thailand? Were you able to do things as quickly? As decisively?

**WS:** Did some things as quickly or quicker and some things took a lot longer.

**JS:** What are some of the things that you could change relatively rapidly?

**WS:** Well I think we were able to work with the administration and get those kinds of support in terms of positions of space that we could renovate. The axe that an administration could give a new chairman to say this is somebody good and we’re supporting him that was done very quickly. One didn’t have to learn new cultural problems or new cultural interactions that I hadn’t learned in Thailand the Thai way. Although I guess it’s a joke we could always say there’s the Hoosier way but really it…one was dealing in one’s own culture with one’s own cultural values. Those are the things that went very quickly I think. Some of the hard ones were people who had acquired a bad reputation in the department with the school of medicine for reasons that may or may not have been correct, who were perceived as being non-productive…had a responsibility to try and help them undo that to get back on track and become productive, effective members of the department in teaching, research, and service. And then to bring in new people into this mix of established senior people who maybe weren’t being productive without having the new people get caught up in the lethargy in the system.

**JS:** Do you feel your style as an administration was changed any?

**WS:** Oh sure. One style, I’m going to be repetitive, I think again the product of all the experiences that one has had and so there are pieces that evolved in Bangkok, there are pieces that evolved in Indianapolis, there a pieces now that have evolved in Dayton, together with things one learn by talking to other administrators, seeing how other programs are run. One very big help is I was very much involved after I came back to this country with the Association of Medical School Microbiology Chairmen; it’s a place for chairmen to talk to each other and played a leadership role in that very quickly. I remained active in the American Society for Microbiology and been able to keep up with that field as well as a number of other scientific and professional organizations. So that too is another source. Now for example, I am quite active in the Council of Deans of the Association of Medical Schools and that’s a way to get input. So I think you change because you’re a product of all your experiences.

**JS:** Let me ask you this. What was your toughest decision as an administrator in Thailand…or as the chairman of the…the acting head of the Microbiology department?
WS: Oh there were personnel issues. I cannot honestly come up and say this one decision to do x was the toughest. It’s how to come to grips with people who are not doing the job you expected them to do is the hardest issue broadly I think.

JS: How do you tend to handle those kinds of issues?

WS: Badly like everybody I suspect. I try to find things they can do and do reasonably well. And to orient their current activities into a way in which they will receive positive feedback and feel useful. And to the extent that individual is willing to work at that and cooperate with it, give them chances, try to identify as I say what they can do reasonably well and feel good about it and then take advantage of those talents by reshuffling their assignments. It’s really to look at everybody and say they got some talents, they’d do a good job if could, maybe they are not in the right niche, let’s see if we can find a niche and help them to see that niche as important to them, important to the institution and if they can reach it indeed support them and let them function with dignity and grace in a niche in which they can make a real contribution.

JS: And if they can’t?

WS: To the extent possible if we made every effort and they are unable and willing I think they have to bear the consequences of being on the short end of getting resources and so forth if after a real effort if they are not tenured faculty, I think when you come up to tenure time tenure does not occur, promotion doesn’t occur, pay raises don’t occur except in relation to their ability to contribute. I’m not sure that we in academics deal with those problems terribly well, we tend to almost put them under the rug and hope they’ll go away in a nice, easy, comfortable way and they don’t really. I’m firmly committed to counseling people on their performance. As unpleasant as it may be to say “I don’t think you’re functioning well, here’s why I don’t and here’s the things you can do.” And I think what has that obligation and we try to do it and help them to see other ways. But ultimately it’s a two-way street, the individual being the one having to deal with it, got to be responsible in the system.

JS: How do you deal with an individual in the department who has tenure but yet has passed the term I believe you used, passed their prime? You bring somebody else and just ease them out or…?

WS: Again I would try to find a niche for them. For example, at Indiana I had multiple courses to teach at eight or no about six different levels and some of those people were very effective in becoming involved at a different level of course. We gave somebody an awful lot of course responsibility, their research program was not thriving so they took on more course responsibility. We’re well recognized and rewarded for doing a good job at that. Then three editors whose research program was taking off from having to do quite as much teaching so that the research could thrive. We’re applauded as an integrated affair for the department and that people can contribute in many ways, not everybody’s going to do everything. I guess that’s as well as I could describe it.
JS: Did you find yourself being intellectually and mentally taxed more as an administrator in a department at a major American university than you had been in Thailand?

WS: No. We, I worked awfully hard both at my own research, my own scholarship as well as getting the department on track and while I was in Bangkok. And I could not see any intellectual fallout going there or any intellectual pickup coming back. If you’ll allow me a brief brag again, a recent study was conducted by the people at New Science Citation Index and they took a period and sampled all papers from third world countries during as I recall a five year period while I was in Bangkok and then they done a subsequent sample over roughly five years as to how many times those third world generated papers were cited in the world scientific literature. And three of the top fifteen in the world were my papers and five of the top fifteen in the world came from our program in Bangkok. So we were not in a little backwoods operation, we were publishing actively, leading work in the field, and helping my Thai colleagues do it, so no I would not say there was a major change.

JS: You came from Bangkok situation in a university where you were pretty high up on the pecking order.

WS: Mm-hmm.

JS: How did it feel coming down to Indiana University becoming, I hate to use the term but just another department chair?

WS: I don’t think I ever felt I was just another department chair at Indiana. I intended to be the best department chairman in Indiana and to be the best faculty member at Indiana and that’s true whether I was at Hopkins or Washington, here, the Army or Bangkok. And oh I suppose you can’t, you don’t win your argument everyday but I say that one very quickly if you do a good job you can acquire a reputation for whatever kind of things you have and then make an image whether you’re in Bangkok, Boston, or Bangalore. You’re going to be accorded a hearing in related…in relation to the quantity or the quality of what you do. So I didn’t, I can’t really say I felt low on the pecking order or high. We had a change in Dean’s at Indiana really during the first year I was there and when Steve Beering became Dean at the end of that first year, Steve and I had one relation or another, developed a very good rapport and so I never really felt left out or put down.

JS: Was there a flagship department at Indiana University in the School of Medicine?

WS: Among the, all the departments in the School of Medicine, yes.

JS: How do you feel with…was there a similar flagship department in Thailand?

WS: In the basic sciences, yeah. There were two- biochemistry and microbiology.
JS: How did you feel coming from one flagship department to an area that clearly wasn’t a flagship department?

WS: Oh the microbiology department didn’t exist when I went to Bangkok. So it became a flagship because the enterprise of everybody that was involved in making it that. And I simply had no question in my mind that the goal of our program in Indianapolis was to become the flagship basic science department. And we were gonna collectively not just me but everybody do whatever was necessary to have that happen and I think it…I suppose…became one of the two or three outstanding departments probably along with pharmacology or biochemistry….it was good and so I didn’t let, never entered my mind…we we’re just gonna be good, get out and get on with it.

JS: In the very hard pressed world of being a department chairman in a busy school, did you feel you were a good advocate for your department in obtaining the resources and materiel you need to not only function as a department but to make that into a flagship department?

WS: We did pretty well. So I don’t know whether I was a good advocate or the people behind me provided evidence that any advocate could have used to accomplish…it must have been reasonable.

JS: How long were you at Indiana?

WS: Seven and a half years.

JS: And you came directly from Indiana to here?

WS: Yes.

JS: On your….


JS: Tell me about Oxford.

WS: Great place. It’s my second or third home. I love it. If I could pick any place to live that would be in the running.

JS: You were the visiting professor in the Microbiology unit in the department of Biochemistry, what does a visiting professor do besides visit?

WS: At Oxford what I did was to go into the Microbiology unit and set up and begin to do research again fulltime. I washed my own glassware some of it, I made my own media and got very much engaged in the research enterprise that was going on at Oxford and a couple of problems and had no teaching responsibility although I began to work with one
of Professor Mandelstam’s post-doctoral fellows and occasionally had a chance to interact with a number of the undergraduates in Dr. Mandelstam’s program.

**JS:** What was his program?

**WS:** He was...he has...one of the world’s leading experts on the process of spore formation in bacteria the molecular biology and genetics and spore formation. So I was a visiting scientist as it were in the unit and also I was a visiting fellow at Wadham College which is one of the undergraduate colleges at Oxford, going back in two months and just can’t wait.

**JS:** You didn’t do any teaching there at Oxford?

**WS:** No not formal.

**JS:** What was...did you have mixed teaching responsibilities to teach in Indianapolis?

**WS:** Yes.

**JS:** What percentage of your day was divided into teaching versus administration?

**WS:** Well at IU the ...our department taught its major courses for medical students in the first quarter of the first year of medical school and we were occupied very heavily during that quarter. We had...a typical load would be eight or so lectures a week, three hour conference plus seven hours of laboratory time each week during an eleven week quarter. So we taught very intently for eleven weeks. I did all of the bacteriology and bacterial diseases and some miscellaneous things in the course. I carried the lightest teaching load in the department. So during that quarter I was very heavily engaged in teaching and trying to keep things running smoothly. I fortunately had a very good crew in my laboratory that kept the lab program going without my hour by hour attention which I couldn’t do. That slacked off when that course ended and I didn’t do nearly so much teaching in the rest of the year, an occasional lecture in a graduate course or into some other program- spent more time in research and various kinds of committees and administrative matters. So it would be hard to sort it out by day. I carried a full years teaching load in one quarter in essence.

**JS:** What kind of committees did you serve on in Indianapolis?

**WS:** All basically but those two which I advise anybody to avoid that’s Parking and Admissions. Virtually every aspect of the School of Medicine, the Executive Committee of the School of Medicine, the Curriculum...Education Curriculum Committee of the school, Student Promotion; chaired several sub-committees of those various committees, also the...was on the Promotion and Tenure Committee each year in the School of Medicine. I was on the University Faculty Council for four years I think; I’d have to go back and look it up and chaired their sub-committee on University Structure and Governance for two years. I was on the University Promotion and Tenure Committee...
essentially every year, some search and screen committees, the usual kinds of things that’s pretty much a repertoire of whatever committees that existed in the school.

**JS:** The executive committee in the School of Medicine, does that function similar to the one Wright State has?

**WS:** I would think it’s not very different…originally it did not include all the basic science chairmen but…and Steve Beering time was expanded to include that and became a large committee that tended to be more of an information and endorsing mechanism for communication with ad-hoc committees or task forces or various committees or sub-committees of the institutional organization becoming the unknown side of the day by day work and an awful lot of interactive governance. It was easy to pick up and talk to the chairman of medicine about some problem or the head of OB-GYN or surgery or someone.

**JS:** How would you fit your administrative style under that of the Dean of the School of Medicine at the time?

**WS:** I’m very much then and now oriented I guess to what I would call middle management style. I believe that the departmental structure or program structure was very important and that is an essential part of the leadership and if you’ve got strong and active chairmen you’ll have strong and active programs in the school and that they’ve got…they must be expected to exhibit leadership and develop programs. I suppose it would be fair to say that I didn’t always agree with the Dean but we got along very well because we understood each other’s willingness to disagree on an issue but ninety-five plus percent of the time we were both looking at a similar goal down the way and all we were doing was saying I wouldn’t have done it that way; that doesn’t mean that you have to be disagreeable in order to disagree on an issue. I think I was a pretty good…pretty good player in the school and Steve and I remain very good friends.

**JS:** Do you consider yourself a team player in your management style?

**WS:** Sure. Very much so. I think if you can’t be in any organizational structure you’re going to end up either messing up the organization or causing it to be…causing a major disjunction between your entity and the rest of the organization. And when you reach that point where disagreement over substance and I really do think it ought to be more over substance and style. We get unhappy over style we need to talk about substance and when issues of substance become major differences between a member of an organization and the rest of the organization, I think ultimately one has to separate oneself from it. I think style things tend to be what we talk about most of the time. And most disputes tend to be style disputes, I don’t like the way x does this, that’s very different and x and I don’t agree how to do it in this case we’re going to that way, I made my case and the decision went the other way now I’ve got to get in and support it. I’m very much a believer that if one is hurt that doesn’t carry the day in an organization one has the responsibility to support the ultimate organizational decision; I guess it’s called being a good soldier in the management vernacular or else one has to recognize a responsibility to openly step out if
you will. I don’t believe you can or should be functional if you’re back-dooring and trying to shoot down your organization because….

JS: [question asked is unclear]

WS: Absolutely. They get it from me and I expect it back. I’m always disappointed if I don’t get it let’s put it that way.

JS: You were at Indiana University for six years and on your seventh year you spent it at Oxford…

WS: About half of it.

JS: When did you first find out about the opening or hear for the Deanship at Wright State University?

WS: It was basically in November of 7…October/November of ’79. I had over the previous year or so looked at a number of Deanships had turned down one very…the Deanship of one very large, well-financed…one big school, let’s put it that way. And had…was still looking at two or three others but had made up my mind I wasn’t going to take any of those…was getting ready to go to Oxford that fall or that winter on a sabbatical and Steve Beering who was the Dean at Indiana said “Well there is a school that is looking for a Dean and you may not have ever heard of it, I’m sure you wouldn’t think of it spontaneously and I know you’d never apply to it but I’d like you to take a look at it.” Steve at that time was the chairman of the Liaison Committee on Medical Education so he knew about medical schools and he said “This is a place it’s been…it’s a new school, it’s been well put together, it’s got a good basis to go on and grow on. The Dean over there has done a good job, he’s going to become the [unknown], it’s an orderly transition and I wouldn’t ordinarily mention you to a new school or a new school to you but” he said “I think this one is different and I’d like you to take a look at it.” And I said “Okay Steve. Fine. Thank you.” We went on our way. I met John Beljan briefly Steve just introduced us and Chicago or Washington at the double A…at the Association of American Medical Colleges. Here after AAMC if that’s alright. The AAMC meeting and we said hello and John wasn’t there to talk about that and I was getting ready to leave the next week to go to Oxford and that whole scenario so I did send in my CV and the information and went on to England. So that’s really how it…really how I came became involved and I have to be honest all I knew about Wright State before that is we had a PhD student in our department in Indiana who decided to go to medical school and lived in this area and was recruited very heavily by Wright State for either the first or the second class, was also admitted to Cincinnati and I told her to go to Cincinnati rather than this new, unknown medical school. Confession is good for the soul. That’s how much I knew about Wright State up till that point. So Steve Beering was really instrumental in my even interacting here.

JS: Why did you turn down the Deanship of a major university?
WS: Well let me tell you at the time I had all sorts of reasons and I had all sorts of reasons for all the ones I wasn’t interested in. And while we were in England, not having the same responsibilities and so forth, Jean Ann and I had a lot of time to walk and talk and just sit and think and had a great, great experience, I began to think about all of this and we got to talking and it became obvious to me that all the reasons that I had given for turning down these other institutions were valid but probably were window dressing rather than the actual fundamental reason and I came to realize I think correctly that I had enjoyed very much the development work I done in Bangkok, I was very proud of what I’d there and what was still going on there. I’d enjoy very much the challenge really of doing a development job in Indianapolis which is what is was and was very proud of the program we had there. And what I was probably doing was looking at some established relationships or institutions where I perceived the need for them to make some changes and to get on a kind of modern course like Indiana was doing and get on with things instead of living in the recent or remote past and what I was really doing was saying they weren’t prepared to do that for whatever reasons either in terms of their resources, in terms of preventing attitudes, many of them hadn’t even recognized that they weren’t moving into the next decade of the 80s and that it was that sense of development in making a difference that I missed. I would…had worked like the very Dickens to make a millimeter or so difference and I think that was why…finding reasons why I wouldn’t go. The reasons were more manufactured than they were overt expressions of an interaction that was not probably the basic problem.

JS: When you applied to Wright State University and sent in an application, what’s the normal procedure for that for a position like the Dean?

WS: I can’t really tell you what the normal is. Steve Beering had suggested to John that he contact me; John wrote and asked would you be interested and I have always followed the policy again back to Barry Wood, Barry told me one day we were going someplace in the car and he said well Bill my view has…I ask him…had gotten this letter was I interested in a job and I wasn’t sure what…how did he feel about it. And he said well unless you’re absolutely sure and under no circumstances you’d go, never insult anybody by refusing to look or listen about a position that they think you might be qualified and good for. So when John wrote to me as I do regularly and I tell other people the same thing that Barry told me, I routinely…unless there really something there’s I no way would do…respond, send them a CV, list of references, and then the process is typically a search and screen process, you may never hear, you may make the short list, and go through all of that and I’m not hung up on not being asked. I think that if someone wants you to apply, thinks highly enough of you to put your name in, I think you ought to let them look and I think that most of these are not based on competence, they are events related to particular mixes of people of needs of talents. And you may have someone in one of these job searches who is superb at x but you really need somebody who is superb at y and you find somebody’s who got stronger credentials at y than x does and they end up getting the job but it doesn’t mean x isn’t a good person. So you try to match skills with needs and you’re not always going to get so lucky.
JS: When you send in your CV what…who does a department chairman of a prominent university list as a reference? It’s a common term for people who are in the normal world but who does a professional man list for references?

WS: What I’ve always done…all I can tell you is how I do it. I try to provide the name of a reference or a source of reference of the major phases of my career. So without going back and getting out the file, when I provided references to Wright State, I’m sure Steve Beering who was Dean at Indiana, I’m sure a senior professor in the department at Indiana was on the reference list, I’m reasonably sure someone who had been involved in the leadership of the program at the Rockefeller Foundation was on the list…at the point I wouldn’t have been able to put someone at Oxford. Somebody I had worked with at Hopkins was on the list and somebody I had worked with at Walter Reed was on the list I would guess. And I tried to give them people who for…had close knowledge of performance in the various phases of career. Right now if you were to ask to see my reference list it would include the President of the University, Steve Beering, again back to Indiana, a professor at Indiana, I’d probably drop out the Rockefeller because most of those people have become very distant from my direct contact…one…two principle source of references are dead. I would include the major scientific organizations I’m active in, Joel Mandelstam at Oxford where I worked, somebody who’s in the National Academy of Medicine or Institute of Medicine who I worked with professionally. I try to give them some choices of a very broad spectrum of what I’d done.

JS: When you sent the response letter back to Wright State, did you expect to hear back from them?

WS: Yeah. I did.

JS: Why?

WS: In that…John and Steve and I talked in Chicago or at the AAMC in Washington I keep saying Chicago in Washington that year it seemed to be a reasonably clear that I was going to hear some more from John from the conversations that he and Steve and from Steve that they had but there was nothing earth shattering about that. If I hadn’t I wouldn’t have…the world would have gone right on.

JS: Did answer a number of other responses for positions?

WS: I think right then at that point we had ended up breaking off discussions with everything that was active so there was…and I cut that off because I was going to England on Sabbatical, had a commitment to go back to Indiana for a year afterwards and I said “Hey I’m not going to get in the middle of this while I’m getting ready to spend my…the rest of this year in Oxford…I’m going to go do that and that’s going to be my primary goal.” So the only thing I really had going at that time of only discussion…well I didn’t have any cause I just sent John the CV.
**JS:** When you were in Oxford what plans did you make for your future? Were you thinking that far ahead?

**WS:** This may sound funny. I’ve never planned ahead any of the things that I’ve ended up doing. If you go back over this rather long tale you’ll find that almost everything was evolution out of something that happened or some contact or some connection. So I suppose when I was at Oxford my mindset was such that someday I might become a Dean. I didn’t have to I had already had the chance to…there was no drive that I couldn’t stay at Indiana and be a good chairman of Microbiology for the rest of whatever be a nominal career. I didn’t feel compelled to move and we just were enjoying a very productive period in science, enjoying that wonderful university. I had the best of all worlds there. I interacted with the leadership of [unknown] science all day every day and at lunch had an interaction with a college system, in the evening we lived comfortably and could travel around the [unknown] and the science I did there was as good a piece of work I’ve ever done in my life and it was just great. So no it wasn’t a period of intense career thinking although I obviously thought about why I rejected a number of opportunities. I didn’t…it wasn’t done in a sense of what’s next; I don’t think we spent a lot of time talking about what next.

**JS:** There’s an axiom in the business world that you should never spend more than seven years in one place. Do you feel that applies in the world of academic medicine?

**WS:** No I wouldn’t say that. My career is ended up that. My chronic joke is I can’t keep a job. If it hadn’t been for Indiana…I got tired of people saying where did you go on your last sabbatical and I had to tell them I never stayed any place long enough to get one. But…so Indiana resolved that…I don’t think that’s valid I think different people, different circumstances…no I don’t…my career has been one of a series of moves because each time it seems like the right thing to do but we didn’t set out to move every seven years. Don’t tell my wife I got to move again in three years.

**JS:** How did your wife react to all of the shifts in your career, jumping overseas and back again?

**WS:** Oh we had a…we’ve had a great time.

**JS:** She must be a remarkably patient woman.

**WS:** To put up with me you have to be patient whether we moved or not. She’s first rate and she gets involved and does things wherever she goes and we’ve had a good time.

**JS:** Well thank you very much for this second interview. It’s….we’re ready to move into our next one into the big, wide world of Wright State University and I’d like to cover in our…your next interview your interview process and your first period of time here at Wright State as Dean.

**WS:** Great.
JS: Thank you.