

Barrett Oral History Project
Interview with Dean Mark Jacobs
18 November 2018, Barrett Tempe Campus
Interviewers: Julie Kaplan & Mira Khan
Transcribed by: Nathan DeJonge

KAPLAN: Hello, this is Julie Kaplan and Mira Khan interviewing Dean Mark Jacobs on November 18th, 2018 at 8:50 AM in Sage North in Barrett, the Honors College. This interview is a part of the Barrett Oral History Project. Our goal is to preserve a record of Barrett's history, in honor of our 30th anniversary. Thank you so much for taking the time to sit down with us and share your experience. Dean Jacobs, you started working at Barrett in 2003. What brought you to Barrett?

JACOBS: I was intrigued by the vision that President Crow had, of taking an honors college that was already very good, and making it even better in ways that would be related to some of the things that a good residential college of the sort, I had been employed at, formerly, Swarthmore College, can do with its students, so both of us were interested in doing the experiment to see which good ideas for bright undergraduate education would transfer, to a public honors college, and that was really attractive.

KAPLAN: Okay, and how has Barrett changed since when you first got here to now?

JACOBS: It's changed in almost every way you can imagine. It's gotten bigger in numbers of students, way bigger in square footage of facilities, way bigger in terms of coverage on all four campuses. Hopefully people would judge it also getting way better as a place for bright undergraduates to get their education, with much better advising, hundreds more honors courses available, compared to 2003. Scores more opportunities abroad and for travel within the United States. More theses being done, more thesis advisors weighing in and helping the honor students, a much larger faculty for Barrett itself, which had to grow as we grew in size because we wanted to keep the ratio of Human Event students to human event teachers the same as they had always been. So it's almost every way conceivable. It's changed.

KAPLAN: So what inspired The Human Event honor seminar?

JACOBS: Well, that was present when I came, so my knowledge of what inspired it is only stories I've been told by the founding Dean, Ted Humphrey. But quite clearly it was based on some of the Great Books courses that you have at places like St. John's College, Columbia University in New York City, University of Chicago. The idea that studying terrific thought of previous people can train students to think clearly and argue critically. That's the idea behind the Great Books courses. The Human Event was taken as a course starting with that premise, and then expanding it to all civilizations, not just Western Civ. And hiring faculty who were specialists at teaching specifically that course, so that as far as I know, is also relatively a new idea. Instead of having your professors teach their other courses, and then a section of a Great

Books course having a dedicated faculty solely for The Human Event. So therefore, one that gets to be better and better with practice at exactly that kind of seminar teaching was a new idea when it started, but it was in place when I came, and the only change we've made really is that all the faculty were Humanities PhDs when I came, and Peggy Nelson and I added slowly over the years, a lot of social science, PhDs and even some natural science PhDs, so that even if they were teaching the same piece like Plato's Republic, they'd be teaching it from different viewpoints, which we thought would be generally good for the students to have.

KAPLAN: And can you tell me about other honors courses that are offered?

JACOBS: Other honors courses? Well, as you know, there are honors courses offered all through the university, over 300 to 350 of them each semester that are self-standing honors courses in other departments, but just for honors students. And then there are thousands of honors contracts, each semester, and I don't know if the listeners to this history know what honors contracts are, but they're our way of making a non-honors course into an honors course. So, they depend on a contract between the professor and the student. Having the student go through some extra exercise, usually, hopefully involving a deeper understanding of the material and more interaction with the faculty member in the process to, to, change the three non-honors credits into honors credit. But if you count all of those, it's thousands and thousands of courses each semester.

KAPLAN: Awesome. So, Barrett has had a large focus in the last few years on global initiatives, can you talk to me about these and their significance?

JACOBS: Sure, one of the things we try to do each year is assess how the Honors College is doing and going back to our roots, so to speak, usually means starting the whole discussion by saying, "Are we giving students at Barrett the best education for bright undergraduates in the nation?" We decided to have that as our guiding mission to start meetings when we're trying to discuss what we really could do to make things even better. And although it's a little pompous to say best in the nation, it certainly sets our sights in the right direction. And two years ago, well, a year and a half ago, summer of 2017, we figured on our own, this was not part of a national movement or a grant that the university had obtained, it was just the people, the Deans of Barrett just thought that it was time for Barrett students to really grapple with global issues in a much more concerted way, not only by expanding the travel opportunities for Barrett students to go from Barrett out into the world, but bringing world leaders into Barrett, so, this coincided in discussions we were having with Craig and Barbara Barrett with a grant, a second grant or a donation they made to the Honors College of \$2,000,000 to sponsor, particularly the visitors that they know so well because their personal experience is at a global level politically and at a global level in the corporate world through Intel, so they have tons of contacts all over the world, in business and politics, and they thought it would be wise to support a program that brought those leaders in as well. So, we realized this was going to be a big enough program, so that we would want to have someone running it full time. So, we advertised a year and a half ago for a Director

of Global Initiatives, we hired Jason Briggs, and in his first year, all sorts of things happened. We doubled the number of trips abroad that are available and most of them are shorter than the ones before, so they're cheaper and therefore more available in the sense of economically to more students at Barrett, and he, through Barbara's and Craig's help, brought in Condoleezza Rice as a speaker, the former president of Latvia, the former, the first female Minister of Defense in the world, which was the Minister of Defense of Finland. And I brought Vice President, former Vice President Dan Quayle. We also had the person who was sort of, in essence, the city manager of the whole city of Hong Kong, Anson Chan, came in to speak at the law school and Barrett. So right away, the first year we had a bevy of terrific leaders, lots of them female leaders of the world, to come and interact with the Barrett students for various, for various, excuse me, amounts of time, the Vira Vike-Freiberga, the former president of Latvia, was here for six or seven weeks with her husband, and we had lots of events, including a puck drop, at the start of an ASU hockey game, because two of ASU's hockey players are from Latvia. So, it's been really terrific for the students to get exposed to global thinking, global issues that way, and also with the increased number of trips.

KAPLAN: Okay, what makes you excited to go to work every day?

JACOBS: I should probably say interviews, oral histories. I love oral histories! No, um, it's wonderful to be working. I mean, I would like, I've always wanted, you know, everybody has that moment when you're sitting on a sand cliff overlooking one of the oceans, having deep thoughts about what you should do in life, what, what is something that helps- that would help the world, the planet, the ecosystem, doesn't have to be humans, but lots of people think of it in terms of helping humans too. And I always felt that there were obvious answers like being an MD where you actually- or a nurse where you're actually literally helping people with wounds or diseases to stay alive or have a better life. But the other obvious answer is always education and education at any level. Elementary school through college. I settled on being a college teacher and I, I love interacting with bright students, particularly because I think they have a greater chance of becoming leaders in the country and the world, so it's easy to come to work every day when your whole job is making the education of bright students, better and better, and as trite as that sounds, that is what my job is and it's wonderful. And I'm, I'm surrounded by terrific people who have the same ideals and so. You're working with people that think the same way you do. It's great.

KAPLAN: What is the value of Barrett and how do you see it changing in the future?

JACOBS: The value of Barrett you mean, for instance, to the state or the university? Yeah, well, to the university, it's a terrific magnet for wonderful students, and other universities, after they saw what happened with ASU getting better and better students coming in because of Barrett, are copying us. They're realizing it's a very thing that that is definitely one of the things that's positive about it. From my point of view, I don't look at it as Barrett's just helping ASU be better because I see the relationship as a symbiosis, whereby good students come to work with great faculty in

great facilities that the university has built, but then they have the community that Barrett represents, and I really, firmly feel a terrific student is not going to come here just because there's a college built that that is sort of like a residential college or even a private one in the east or West. They come also to work with Nobel Prize winning faculty, members of the National Academy of Sciences and Engineering, all the things- and in terrific new facilities that have evolved today as you- because of mostly President Crow in the last 15 years. So it's- it's a symbiosis, but the fact that the Honors College is here is the same students would also not come if the Nobel Prize winners were here, but there was no good structure for them, no support, no advising at multiple levels. I think they'd opt to go as they did, from what I'm told in the 70s and 80s, to out of state colleges, that was where families that, I'm told, in Arizona, who really cared about education, sent their sons and daughters in the past. Barrett gives them an option to have a wonderful education right here in the state and that is terrific for the university, it's terrific for the state. I've had many MD's and professional people tell me when I'm in their offices, Barrett is the reason I and all of my colleagues are sending our children to- to universities in the state, in the state, instead of out of state at private places that cost more, because it's gotten so good that we recognize it's a terrific place for them to get an education. So, I think it's helped stymie a sort of brain drain from the state. It also stimulates brain gain in the sense that we're a 65-35% split in the student body between in state and out-of-state students. So we're now attracting a lot of very good out-of-state students, and there's a lot of sociological research that shows that a percent that's higher than you would expect of at any university has its alums come back and work in the geographic area of the university just because for those four years of their education, they got used to the area. So it really could easily be, probably is, also a brain gain mechanism for the whole state. And then, not to sound too megalomaniacal, but at the national and world level, we are being copied. This is the way public universities all over the country and, and now, starting to be, from other countries, are visiting us, because this is the way they see is the model they should use to take care of their most intellectually engaged students. They can't reproduce a Yale or a Princeton in the middle of their campus, or if they could, it would be much, much too expensive. And by following a model such as Barrett with a public-private partnership for building a campus and with some of the approaches we have with our intro, special course for freshman, thesis, undergraduate thesis and, and small sections throughout. They see that as a valuable way to educate their most academically oriented students. So I think in all those ways we've- it's- it's a good institution.

KAPLAN: So, to clarify Barrett is an example for universities all over the world for an ideal honors college?

JACOBS: Well, what we're seeing is- is absolute copying of Barrett all over this country, I mean, ten to twelve universities have built honors colleges after coming and touring Barrett and then building them using a lot of the ideas we've used here. So that's without a- without a doubt. And there have been people donating money to other universities that are their alma maters, saying as they donate the money, you need to do all of these things, and it's a list of things that

Barrett does, or I won't give you the money. So, there's no question it's happening in the nation, but we're starting to be visited by delegations from universities in China that are coming to see how we do this because they want to expand their honors programs in a way like Barrett. So, I do think it's- it's a model for universities around the world too.

KAPLAN: And how does it feel to be kind of one of the builders of this?

JACOBS: It feels great, but honestly, it's not great because people come and bow down to you and say you're so wonderful because you built Barrett. It's great because it's making the education for bright students at a good price available throughout the country and the world. You know, if- if our graduates, and this is true, go to the same graduate schools, professional schools as Ivy grads, but even if they're out of state, students at half the price, and if they're in state students at a third the price, we're- we're disrupting an industry in a very good way. I use that term the way industry uses it, when it talks about Hyundai starting to make cars that are 80 to 90%, the quality of a BMW, but half the price. So, we're- it feels good to have an effect that raises the level of education for intellectually engaged students all over the place, and one evidence of that is that both, Northern Arizona University, which switched from an honors program to an honors college and built a new honors college building that opened in the last year, and University of Arizona to the south, that had always had an honors college but not built and operated the way Barrett, is built and operates, is now building a whole new honors campus for its Honors College and changing the way it operates to have more of the services Barrett has. You could say, those are rivals, but the way I like to look at it is, the whole state and its level of honors education has been increased and it's because of Barrett. Even the Deans at those other places would agree.

KAPLAN: Can you tell me more about the Barrett undergraduate thesis?

JACOBS: Sure, it's that is not a new idea. Many, many universities, whether they're honors colleges or just other universities around the country, have- have an undergraduate thesis, but it's almost never required of every student, except at an honors college. So, Yale, Stanford, Harvard, you can, you can be one of the 20% of the students there who elect to do an undergraduate thesis, but 80% are not doing it and are just finishing up courses their senior year. Princeton does require a thesis of all of its undergrads. But even at Princeton, the overseers or directors of the theses are very often grad students and postdocs here, and I think at most other honors colleges, the ones I visited, the director of a thesis is always a faculty member, and every Barrett student must do one. So, that's background. What it is, of course is a sustained piece of research or scholarly work that the honor student does with a professor, side by side, here at ASU and defends in front of a group that includes, sometimes other faculty in the same area, but Barrett students also have the chance to bring in an outside expert from another university. Who- to whom they have to defend their thesis. So, they're- they're part of the committee and they get to ask questions too. So, the student, if that part is elective at Barrett, but the student can elect to stand up to, sort of, the nation's standards in that field if they wish to, by bringing in an expert

from outside ASU, if the expert is any more expert than the faculty at ASU, which isn't always the case of course.

KAPLAN: So as a dean, what opportunities to interact with Barrett students do you cherish the most?

JACOBS: Oh, I love family weekend. I love seeing the talent show on family weekend. I love homecoming because the alums come back to the tent when I got here, the former dean told me that- he said it's fall assembly. You better look closely because you may never see this class assembled again until graduation, and I found out when I looked into it that there weren't many opportunities to just see the students in a relaxed fashion. There weren't any, really, that- that had existed before. So, I started this monthly lunch with the dean or breakfast with the dean series, which I've done for 15 years. And although the number of students coming to it is only 12- 12 or 14 or so, it's a wonderful chance to have an hour to an hour and a half just talking to students over a meal about anything they want to talk about. They could make Barrett better. We've got lots of great suggestions that have come from those meals or that they just want to say is a good feature and we hope we keep it, but those have been wonderful times. And then I, I mean, I teach two courses a year, a course to first semester freshman on leadership with Dean of Students Kristen Herman, which is- it's wonderful to see students in their first semester at college. And then, I teach an upper-level course on the history and evolution of human food. Mostly the juniors and seniors. And we have, because it's about food, we have a dinner at my house at the end of that. That's wonderful to... That gives us a chance for a whole evening to get to know students better, but it's by the end of the course, so I know them already. And then we- we've arranged a culinary class at Vincent's on Camelback for about 15 students a year with the collaboration and support of Vincent and his wife Lavon. That teaches students culinary skills from a French chef's point of view, bechamel sauce, this, you know, pastry making and it- I don't go to all those, but I get to talk to the students who do, and we have a big dinner at the end of that. That's also very pleasant to take part in. So, I mean, any time I think that you're interacting with the students, it's a pleasure. That's what we're here for. I mean, if we're here to make education of them better, why wouldn't you want to be interacting with the students all the time? And now my daughter is a senior in high school and applying to college. So, what's happening now is I, even more than I ever did before, I see the- the students as- as if they were sons and daughters. And that's how the former vice dean and I have always felt. And the Dean of Students, Kristen, they all feel as if at many times we're- we're charting a course that would be good for our own kids if we had them at that age.

KAPLAN: What does the future of Barrett look like?

JACOBS: I think it's very good for some of the same reasons that I was talking about, as reasons were- were an intriguing model for the nation. I think we've had- we've had hundreds more applications every year, compared to the year before, for at least the last 12 years, and this is in the context of colleges all over the nation, if you read the one of the September issues of the

Chronicle of Higher Education, usually a headline on the first page for the last two years, it has been that freshman enrollment goals were not met by half of the 400 to 500 small colleges in the country. So, it's not necessarily, the case that everybody, every university, or honors college is doing well, but if we're having that and we're staying roughly the same size, we're getting to be, we have, you know, even more select students each year. I think the future should include the development of Barrett at the other three ASU campuses because it's not the same level of facility extent at least, and maybe well, the quality is terrific at the other places, brand new dining halls, brand new sports complexes and new res. halls. But I'd like to have the Barrett community be developed more at each of those, and I think it will. And then, I- I think the prognosis is very good for, for, for Barrett in particular we have we're taking part in Campaign 2020, we have many friends and donors who are giving us funds to keep supporting us as we expand programs. We could only do an expansion like the global initiatives because we had funds to do that with and the future looks good for continued funds to do continued good work.

KAPLAN: Can you talk to me a little bit about what the Barrett residential campus looks like?

JACOBS: Well, it's different on each campus. At Tempe, it's the most extensive and we have 1,700 beds in the campus we built, that opened in 2009, and those beds were designed to be for every year student from freshmen through senior. So, there are in some of the res halls along Rural Road, one door into a suite that has four private bedrooms, a living area, a kitchenette, and two bathrooms, all just for four students, and that's very attractive. It's just that now we did expand, although we're not expanding in size for the last three years, we were asked to expand by the president four or five years ago. And when we did, we had to use a lot of the rooms in this- this complex that we're sitting in for first year students, so they get terrific rooms if they get into some of these rooms, but we also were always wanting and planning to be a four- a potential four year residential community. We only asked the students to stay for two years, but many of them stay for their junior and senior year and so the president arranged to make it possible for us to take over Vista del Sol, this apartment complex across one of the streets that has 1800 more beds, and all of those beds are in full-fledged departments, so each- each apartment has a full kitchen. I was worried because part of my vision of building Barrett here, the one- the part that opened in '09, was to have all four years rubbing shoulders together in the dining hall, the way that that happens at Oxford, and Cambridge, and Harvard, and Yale in the house and college systems there, and I was worried if most of our upper classmen we're going to move across the street and they had full kitchens, that they wouldn't come to the dining hall. But luckily, enough of them don't feel like cooking or don't cook so that they still buy meal plans and we have a good mixture of the different ages in the dining hall.

KAPLAN: Okay. What do you think is one of the greatest achievements of Barrett as a whole?

JACOBS: Well, I think you know, we're the honors college of a state university. That's, that's the statement that has to start discussions about- about what Barrett does. So, we have an obligation to serve the people of the state. We're supported by state money from the legislature, even though

it's not as large a percentage of our budget as it used to be, we also are supported by fees the students pay and in that sense we're semi-private. In that sense. But, we're the- we're the honors college of the biggest university in the state. So, I think that we've made college education more available and attractive to students of the state is the best is the best thing we could have done. It should always be remembered when we're trying to make ourselves even better, that we're doing that for the engaged, academically engaged, students of the state.

KAPLAN: Okay, right. These are all of the prewritten questions that I have for you. Myra, do you have any questions you'd like to add?

KHAN: Yes, I do. Could you tell us a bit more about Campaign 2020 and specifically how Barrett-

JACOBS: Sorry, about what?

KHAN: was in that? Campaign 2020.

JACOBS: Yes, you mean more about Barrett's part of it, right? Well, Campaign 2020 asked each of the colleges to have some goals written up and, um, and disseminated in the form of campaign brochures, and Barrett has four goals for Campaign 2020, and they are further support of faculty through funding that lets them do work that makes their teaching better. There's all sorts of ways that can happen. But often it needs to be support- supported, visiting a particular library. That's very useful for some of the pieces that a faculty member might be using in The Human Event, for example. So, travel and study, but not so much for scholarly publication, but to make their teaching better. And that's one of the four goals we have. Another goal is student scholarship support, because a lot of the trips that we have expanded recently, as I was saying earlier, are nevertheless expensive. So even when a trip costs \$10,000, to go to Europe for six or seven weeks and you include everything, the airfare and the hotel, and we have scholarship money because we don't want these to be trips only for wealthy students. So, we have scholarship money to dispense, and we usually try to say, "let's leave something for the student, if they have a year advance warning that they want to go on the trip to raise some money themselves." So, we usually give a scholarship that's within one or two thousand of the cost of the trip. But even leaving only one or two thousand is not always allowing students who want to go on those trips to go. And furthermore, because we're giving, on a trip like that, 8000 out of the 10, we can only give a certain number of those scholarships before we run out of money. And so, we really need scholarship support from donors for travel and community service, which we also, we don't require, but we love to see our students do, but even community service requires them to get to the points where they're serving, and sometimes that can be a barrier. So, a second goal of, um, of the campaign for Barrett is student scholarship support. A third goal is the- the building and staffing of a student success center, which is coming along. I think it will be approved soon by the- the president and provost of- of ASU, but it hasn't technically been yet. The idea is to bring all of the pieces of Barrett support systems that help students to be successful outside the classroom: writing center, academic advising, advising for national scholarships, internship and

research placement, all those things, and now aided by a nice gift from the Tom Lewis Foundation, personal success coaching. Not just personal strength and measurement through indigo programs or things like that, but also career counseling at a much higher and more serious level for any student who needs it, because generally universities and also here and particularly in Barrett, we just felt, and so did Tom Lewis, that there wasn't enough of that. So, get all of that into one building and we, which we hope to build over in the middle of the Vista del Sol campus near the Gold Dome, that's a third goal of- of Barrett for the Campaign 2020, and the fourth goal was and is the global initiatives program, in other words, increasing the exposure of Barrett students to global issues, both by making it easier to travel out from Barrett, but also easier to bring leaders in.

KHAN: All right. Thank you.

JACOBS: Sure.

KHAN: Also, is there any particular faculty member on Barrett, currently or in the past who you feel just really embodies the spirit of the college?

JACOBS: You know, all the faculty, I know this sounds somewhat cheesy to say, all the faculty embody that spirit, and what I mean, I mean an example of that is that one of the faculty members suddenly had to be in the hospital for a couple of weeks for a procedure, just in the last month, and this has happened at least 15 times since I've been here for 15 years, there's been a need suddenly without- without any warning, to take over. There are courses where the students would just be sitting there and not have a teacher if it- if something wasn't done. And the other faculty, on their own, spontaneously and quickly so there's no dropped class, arrange a whole schedule so they teach The Human Event classes for that person while they're gone and there's no damage to the students. And that's in part, it's true, it's possible because the Human Event syllabus is similar in each of the 97 human event sections, but it's not the same. So very often, this requires the faculty member to read up really quickly on what that particular faculty member was about to teach. The next time their class met, they always do it, they always do it in a very high quality way, and the students never miss a beat. And I guess to me, the fact that they're not paid extra for that-. So, they're teaching all their courses too, they're not paid extra, they don't ask to be paid extra. They see it as part of being a faculty citizen of the college. Shows you- that makes it hard to say there's only one person who most embodies Barrett's principles. I think the faculty in general do embody Barrett's principles.

KAPLAN: Is- is there anything that we haven't brought up that you would like to mention?

JACOBS: I- I always want to mention the support President Crow has given us. If it weren't for his support, most of this would not have happened and it's been constant and very, very helpful through the whole 15 years. I also always want to mention Ted Humphrey, the founding dean because elements that make Barrett terrific, such as The Human Event, the idea of a residential community which already existed over in the city block between Gammage Auditorium and the

parking structure along Apache when I came and had 850 beds in it, all those things were there because of the planning of Ted Humphrey. So, I always try to mention Ted and Michael Crow, because without the foundation literally laid by Ted and the support of President Crow, this wouldn't have happened. But, because they both played those roles, we've really been able to build, I think, a wonderful institution for the students here and for the state, so.

KAPLAN: Well, thank you very much for your participation, Dean Jacobs, and if you have any questions about this interview or the 30th Anniversary Oral History Project, please contact Vice Dean Foote. Thank you.

JACOBS: Great. Thank you.