



**AN INTERVIEW WITH  
JOYCE STEWARD**

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Edited by Susan H. McLeod



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*For an introduction to Joyce Steward, the legendary founder of the University of Wisconsin Writing Center, see the blog post by Brad Hughes at <http://writing.wisc.edu/blog/?p=2462> or <http://wac.colostate.edu/books/thomas-steward/blog/blog.htm>.*

*The following oral history interview with her was conducted by Brad Hughes in July of 2002, two years before her death.*

## BEGINNING OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1.

**Hughes:** . . . 2002 and I'm interviewing Joyce Steward, Professor Emerita from the English Department at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, and we're in Ellensburg, Washington where Joyce now lives, and I'm Brad Hughes, the current Director of the Writing Center at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. We're doing this interview to explore the history of Professor Steward's career and to learn more about the beginning and the development of the Writing Laboratory at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I wanted to start, Joyce, by reflecting some on your career as a whole before we talk in more detail. I wondered what you might think are some of the highlights or important themes or proudest accomplishments in your long and wonderful career?

**Steward:** Well, it's wonderful to me, too, as I look back, Brad. Sometimes I wonder how it all happened, how things happened that I still wonder how they

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1 Editor's Note: As with all oral interviews, this one contained a number of fillers (like "uh") and some repetition. I have silently edited these out of the transcript to make the text more readable. Pauses or gaps in the tape are indicated by ellipsis marks. In a few cases, Steward misspeaks; in places where this might cause confusion, corrections are provided in brackets. To minimize footnotes, I also used brackets to fill in needed information and to correct transcription errors. I should like to thank the personnel at the University of Wisconsin Libraries for their help in properly identifying various people mentioned in the interview and the University of Wisconsin Archives for giving permission to post a digitized version of the tapes to accompany the transcript.

happened. A lot of it was accidental. I think sometimes that is the case that we look back and find that something would never have happened unless it was an accidental event, and that's sort of true with me. I don't know that . . . I didn't plan a career very well because, well, for one thing I was married for ten years and busy with that, but when I got out of college I really didn't plan to teach or do anything except get married. Everybody seemed to be doing that at that time; the people my age did, anyhow. That turned out unhappily after a while, and we decided to make some changes in life, and I had a little boy to raise, and teaching looked like the best way to raise a child by myself and get along and have hours that he had and vacations that he had. In a way I made a very accidental choice. I was living in Des Moines at the time, and I didn't have a teacher's license. I got it the expensive way because I had a straight English degree when I graduated from Grinnell College, which is an excellent school even yet, and Grinnell gave me lots of background. Although I'll tell you a little if you want to know about what the earlier things were, but I went down the street and enrolled at Drake University, and it turned out to be a very happy choice, too, because I got my education, or some of my education preparation that way for getting a teacher's license because I hadn't planned to get one. So, as I say, things were accidental a lot of the time. That was in 1949, and, as I look back, that's a long, long time, but it was a good experience, too. My parents, who did a lot of helping at the time—my little boy stayed with them while I was busy getting a degree down there, or getting . . . well I did get a degree there finally because I went on to get a Master's there—but the choice of where I went and how I did it was just accidental, but a fortunate accident; the whole thing was a fortunate accident; there are very good accidents at times. It worked beautifully. I know my mother said at the time that the time I'd been happiest in my life, as she remembered it, was when I was in schools, and that was always the case because I *was* always happy in school. We lived in a little town, and the school was a nice little town school, and they gave me a lot, but I wasn't going to be a teacher; that was for sure. I think maybe it was natural; in fact, I know it was. In fact, I have a poem that starts with, "Pieces of our grandmothers are in all of us," and in the course of the poem I tell it's not only things like breast cancer that can be in the genes, but the teaching can because both my grandmothers taught country schools. I still have one of the old school bells that one of them must have rung to bring the children in from the playground, and that's kind of a nice memento. Long ago destiny may have been there. I don't know. In fact, I loved teaching once I got into it, and I had a good time. I taught for a couple of years in a little Iowa school, a little town in Iowa's school, which was Radcliff, Iowa. I still hear from some of my students who were in my first classes, and that's a happy thing, too. In fact, one of them said he turned out to be an English teacher and taught in

Indianapolis because I'd made him into one, and that was a nice thing to do. I was only there a couple of years, and then I had a half-sister, an older half-sister, who lived in Madison, and I'd been up there a lot to Madison from Iowa. She thought I should apply at the schools in Madison, and I did and was hired. So I went to West High, and they wanted something rather specific that year. They wanted the development of a new course, and they had another teacher and I who were to do it together, and then the other teacher became pregnant and had to go off the teaching rolls—they didn't let people teach so long then—I had to do it alone. It was a course in World Lit, and they were beginning to be popular, again an accident, but they were beginning to be popular at that time because it was after the War, and they were trying to get children interested in world literature, and there were World Lit textbooks coming out. I had a very good one to use, but the other teacher wasn't a help because she departed, and I had to do it alone, but it was rather fun. So I had to do some things that I never expected to do, and they turned out favorably, so I guess that's just one of those happy accidents again.

**Hughes:** Can I take you . . .

**Steward:** Madison wasn't entirely an accident, because I went there with a plan.

**Hughes:** Good. Well, I want to ask about that in a minute. Can I take you back just briefly to some childhood things you mentioned? Your grandmothers both having been schoolteachers, what was the town that you grew up in?

**Steward:** A little town named Paton, P-a-t-o-n.

**Hughes:** Uh huh.

**Steward:** It was named for one of the people who owned a lot of land around there originally. They still have a good little library because he gave a little endowment to start one, but I certainly wasn't going to be a teacher when I was a little girl, nor was I going to go to school and do some of the things I did. If I had an ambition as a child, I was going to be an actress. I thought I'd be Katherine Cornell, and I don't know whether anybody remembers her, but I had seen her one time. My parents had taken me as a child to see her in *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*, and I still remember that very vividly because it was the first great play. She was marvelous. I saw her later in a couple of other things, but she was with Basil Rathbone in that, and they're great old names. I went off the first couple of years to college because I was very young, and my father thought I needed protection, I guess. I went off to Stephens College, which then was a two-year college in Missouri and a girl's school. I thought to . . . as I look back I think I had a couple years of inspiration, and then Grinnell became a couple of years of perspiration. So the inspiration and the perspiration, which I think both are still necessary qualities for education. I think that that's something we need

to give kids in the classroom, not only in high school, but in college because it seems to me that it needs to be something that makes them want to learn. They need the richness that I got at Stephens and hard work that I got at Grinnell because as I made up the things to be an English major, I really worked awfully hard. Well I did both places, but that was all right, but at Stephens I changed my mind rather quickly, I think, from desiring to be an actress, although I worked in the drama things, but I think I changed my mind there. I really came out of that school sort of wanting to do a lot of writing. I had an awfully good writing teacher, wonderful writing teacher. She since has written children's books—well, she's dead now—but she has written children's books that had awards and went into that after she was our teacher at Stephens. She was most inspiring and, I think, taught writing very well. In fact, two or three people there did. I had another good course there. I didn't have a lot of creative writing, anything like that, at Grinnell, but I had the scholarly things there. They were serious and taught me how to make footnotes and a lot of other things. Certainly how to delve into scholarship at the time.

**Hughes:** You mentioned that teacher at Stephens who went on to write children's books—what was her name?

**Steward:** Her name was Jean Bailey. One time when my little boy was in the fifth or sixth grade, he came home with a book—she used history a lot in the books—he came home with a book and said “Oh, this is an awfully good book I got from the librarian.” It was called *Oklahoma Bill*, and *Oklahoma Bill* was a story of the opening of the territory and the way the people rushed in when the . . . well, the story of the opening of the territory, and she had used that to write an historical child's novel. It was a good book, and she had an award on it. I don't remember just what award, but she did have. It's still a good book. Later I wrote her a letter to thank her, as I have had many letters from students over the years to thank me, and I wrote her, and she sent me a copy, an autographed copy, of that book; I still have it. It was good because she, I think, encouraged the creative side as well as the business side, and we need both. I know we need both, and we needed both in the Writing Lab. We needed to inspire students to want to do better, and we needed to give them the feeling that they could do better and then certainly get them down to work.

**Hughes:** Is there anything else that you think was formative for your career and your life from early years? Are there family members, or experiences, or favorite books, or things that you think are really important?

**Steward:** Well, I was married during the war years, and it was . . . my husband wasn't in the service; he did some things that were . . . so he wasn't required to go, but, on the other hand, I think during that time, I had some experiences that made me want to do more writing. I did a little substitute teaching without a

teacher's license, and that was good, too. I also managed a hometown newspaper while men who published it usually went off to the Navy, and I did some other things; I wrote some things. In fact, I think my first paid job was reporting the scores of basketball games while I was in high school. We had an awfully good basketball team that went to the state tournament for a couple of years, and I thought the *Des Moines Register* needed the scores more quickly, so I used to go down to the central office, which was old-fashioned and closed at ten o'clock, and the old woman who ran it, Beulah, was always very helpful. She let me in, and I could call the paper along about ten thirty and give them basketball scores. So sometimes I say that's where my writing started although it was just a telephone call. It was fun, just fun.

**Hughes:** You mentioned a few minutes ago, Joyce, one of your poems. Do you remember, did you write poetry when you were in high school or before that?

**Steward:** No, not in high school much. I didn't do . . . I had a teacher in high school who said I could be a writer, but I didn't think much about it. I didn't try to be. I had other plans then, but she was a good teacher, and I think maybe knew more than I did about what I could do and what I couldn't, and . . . it was . . . but I didn't have definite plans then. I had some good teachers, accidentally again, I suppose, because in small towns sometimes you didn't get very good teachers, but I did have, and I took Latin as well as English, and I read a lot. I read and read and read, in fact, because the librarian was good. I ran into a poem by Rita Dove later about her childhood experiences, wanting to take the whole world in small bites because she went to the library and couldn't bring out all the world—all the books—and I think that was a little bit true with me. I'd get a book or two out of the library and walk down the street reading them on the way home.

So I was always a reader. I think from the . . . I knew how to read when I went to school, actually. My mother helped me learn how to read, and I'd always been a reader. I still am. Oh, I don't have enough eyesight left, like Keats lamented that he didn't have enough eyesight—enough time—left to write all his poetry. As he didn't. I used to say, and I still say, I don't have enough years of eyesight left to read all the books I want to.

**Hughes:** Do you remember any of your favorite books from that period of your life?

**Steward:** From childhood?

**Hughes:** From childhood or high school?

**Steward:** Oh, I suppose there were children's books, like *Anne of Green Gables* and all those and a lot of others. I didn't read a lot of children's books. My mother used to think I was reading things that I shouldn't, but I don't think that

hurts. If a kid reads things he shouldn't, let him read them. At least he's reading. I don't know. I don't remember a lot of the actual books I read. There were some that I probably could dig up, but they weren't very memorable, I guess. I'm sure some of them weren't very good books, but I read from one end of the library to the other as much as I could and loved it.

**Hughes:** Would you tell me a little bit about your parents? You've mentioned them a bit.

**Steward:** Well, my mother taught school for a little while, not very long. My mother was . . . loved music and she was pretty much . . . she sang beautifully, she sang at all sorts of things, she and other people. My father, though, had gone to college. He was the son of a Quaker preacher, and he and his brothers were all sent off to William Penn College.

So he was sure . . . and although that little town didn't send everybody to college; I mean everybody didn't leave and go off to college; there were people who did, and some of them nice people who did [become] good teachers later. They usually went to school preparing to teach although my father hadn't done that, but he was a businessman in a small town. I was brought up with the notion that I would not stay there, that I would go off to school somewhere and did that. So I think that's one of the things that, perhaps . . . my cousins had gone to college, or were going, and some of the students in small towns like that, of course, don't go to college at all.

**Hughes:** Mmm-hmm.

**Steward:** They stay there and get married and settle down and raise a family.

**Hughes:** You've been talking about something I was really interested in also, Joyce—the expectation that you would go to college and have a career or move away from that town.

You're saying that it, to me, sounds like that was always an expectation from your parents and from you.

**Steward:** Well, I guess so. My parents wanted me to do whatever made me happy.

**Hughes:** Uh huh.

**Steward:** I don't think that . . . they weren't the pushy kind of parents, but I was always a student. I suppose there was one other thing that made me a reader and made me delve into the book business, or the writing business, and that was that I had scarlet fever when I was little and nearly died. I had rheumatic heart, and I couldn't do a lot of things that I liked to do. I couldn't be an athlete; that was for sure. I couldn't play basketball, which all the other girls in high school did. Long before there was [professional] basketball, Iowa and Texas always played basketball. Those two states had girls' basketball very early, and I remember one time being taken to a heart specialist when I was little because I



had this rheumatic heart, had rheumatic fever after scarlet fever, and the doctor told me to be a pen pusher and nothing else. I guess I became what he told me, but it was a little bit of an accident, and I'm not at all sure that happy accidents are to be regretted.

**Hughes:** I want to ask about a different side, not reading and writing so much, but when I think about your accomplishments in your career, I think of you not only as a stellar teacher, but also as a very important educational leader, someone who developed and led new, important programs in high schools and at the University of Wisconsin. If you think back on your early years are there experiences you had that you think helped prepare you to be and helped you succeed as a leader, as an innovator?

**Steward:** Well, I don't know, Brad, whether that's the case or not. I had to go to work eventually, as I said, get a teacher's license and go to work, and it was a good thing, as I said, a happy accident. I don't know that there were other things that made me do what I did.

**Hughes:** I wanted to ask some more about your undergraduate and graduate school experiences. What were some activities that you participated in or other things outside of course work that were important to you?

**Steward:** Well, as I said I went to Stephens partly because I thought it was a school, and it is still a school, that dealt a lot with the performing arts, and I did some work in that there at the college. But I knew that I wanted to write when I got into some of the classes. I wrote a lot of poetry while I was at Stephens, wrote some in that year when I had Jean Bailey, and then the teacher I had in the sophomore year was good too, very good teacher, and he encouraged the creative writing, and I worked on a little magazine we had and the paper we had, *The Stephens Standard*, both of them, and I worked in the . . . very journalistic things, and then when I went to Grinnell, I worked on the magazine there, and had things published in both of them. Stephens had some sort of link with a kind of group that gave some awards for writing, and I got an award for the poetry the second year. It was all encouraging, I guess, so that you stayed at it. The poetry, of course, hasn't been my mainstay in life. You don't live on poetry, but I love poetry, and I think, as I get old, I spend more and more time reading poetry and going back and reading lots of things that I used to, but I still have a folder full of old things that I wrote during college years, and that means quite a bit to me. I'm going to . . . I'll pitch them out some day, but some of them are still fairly good, and it's been a life-long interest. So . . . and I think we develop those interests young; in fact, I know we do, and then they're there to enrich. When we get older, we can fall back on them sometimes, and that helps, but it's good. For instance, this year I've been enamored of Billy Collins, who's quite a different kind of poet, but he's very, very good if you like his titles for the idea and then

go through and enjoy the poem. But I like them all, anybody practically.

**Hughes:** My wife went to undergraduate school at the college in the City University of New York, where Collins was on faculty, and she was so pleased to see the recognition that he's gotten for his poetry. Given your later work with writing labs, I'm interested, do you remember when you were an undergraduate student having conferences or individual meetings with your professors . . .

**Steward:** Yes.

**Hughes:** . . . about course papers?

**Steward:** Yes, and both schools were small, and we had constant conferences, always. In fact, I had a World Lit course at Stephens that second year that was taught by a woman who taught it almost by conference. She gave a little lecture, and then we had to keep a notebook and have a conference with her on the notebook, and that was something I learned, again, at Wisconsin perhaps more strongly, because of the grading on the folders in some of the classes, the composition classes, and I did that in 309 later; we graded on the folder, on the total output, rather than one piece of writing. We didn't make an . . . the early pieces of writing in a folder weren't held against the student if he improved. We graded on improvement, really, and I think that's very important. Why grade the kid down because he flunks the first test? If he comes up and does better by the last one, and he doesn't need to fail it, but if he did, that grade ought to not, I think, should not be there eventually in his conference. At Stephens we did a lot of . . . our grading system was quite different. We had Honors, Satisfactory, and Unsatisfactory and not the A-B-C sort of grading system, and it worked. I remember, however, when I got to Grinnell, I had a very fine teacher in a Bible Literature class who was well known at the time—Edward Steiner—and he was quite a famous man, and he asked me if I thought that experiment in the college was sincere. I was a little shocked. I thought it wasn't entirely experimental, although some of it was. At that particular time they were experimenting with a lot of things. The president had been influenced by Dewey, and I think they were influenced to make some changes, not only in curriculum, but methods. We ran there, for instance, on the honor system, and I saw it work a time or two, one time especially, and actually I think it worked very well. The teachers didn't stay around when you took a test, if you took that kind of test, but, for the most part, we were graded and sat down and talked over our folder of work and knew what kinds of things were expected, and it was interesting. It wasn't quite the same grading system; that's why I say it was inspiration-perspiration, but I learned to do the scholarly work later at [Grinnell], and I've needed both. We all do.

**Hughes:** Do you have any memories from those individual conferences in a professor's office, about your work, about your writing? Did you enjoy going

to them and remember how you felt about receiving that sort of individual attention?

**Steward:** Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes. We enjoyed it tremendously. It was good, friendly, and helpful. They pointed out things, and you learned from the conferences. I learned to take notes, certainly, copious ones, too copious at times, by the teacher looking over the notebook and making suggestions. One suggestion I always liked was that when I read a book and had it in my journal, which I kept in that World Lit class—a thorough journal of the reading—the note taking, the teacher suggested that I jot down a few notes from the writers, and I still do that. I keep them all over the place, and it's not a very good habit if you want to eliminate the clutter, but it's a good habit if you want to find a note later on that comes back and is handy.

**Hughes:** Would you tell me a little bit about your choice of a university for graduate work and memories from that?

**Steward:** Well, that again, you know, as I said a little earlier, was a kind of happy accident because I had to start where I lived. I didn't have a chance to go somewhere else. When I got to Wisconsin, having—I had a Master's at Drake—and came out with it, and we had some good requirements. We had a requirement, for instance, of quite a good test—a testing system—that was in operation then, I don't know whether it is now or not, and we had to write a Master's thesis. All schools don't require, I think, the Master's—to write a Master's thesis; there would be some things along the way. I had a good American Lit teacher there because I had to take a literature course or two on the side to keep me happy with the education courses that I had required. I'm not great on education courses, even yet. I don't know whether they're the right thing or not sometimes, but I know that the other courses are, so I took an American Lit course there, and it introduced me to some people that I hadn't read thoroughly enough. The main one was Nathaniel Hawthorne.

**Hughes:** Mmm hmm.

**Steward:** And I have read Nathaniel Hawthorne in the old Riverside Edition. I haven't got the new edition, I'm sorry to say, but I got started on Hawthorne, and I wrote a Master's thesis that when I got to Wisconsin and took a course with Harry Haden Clark,<sup>2</sup> which I did a seminar after school when professors quite often gave a seminar so teachers could come. I took a seminar with Harry Haden Clark, and I asked him if he would look at my thesis, and he did, and he said he'd accept it for a dissertation.

**Hughes:** Wow.

**Steward:** And he would have, I guess. I wrote a thesis at that time on

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<sup>2</sup> Harry Hayden Clark was a University of Wisconsin English Department faculty member specializing in American literature and literary criticism.

Hawthorne's use of the child character, and that is a subject that has interested me ever since.

## END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1. BEGINNING OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2.

**Hughes:** . . . the courses that you took with him once you moved to Madison. I want to go back to something you said a minute ago, Joyce, about you're not being sure about the value of education courses. Tell me more about why you say that.

**Steward:** Well, I'm not sure sometimes about the value of education courses because I think some of them are too easy and too theoretical, and they don't give you the practical things on the side, sometimes, that you need. I think that one nice thing about some courses I took—I went in summer school. By getting . . . of course, that isn't the economical way to get the teacher's certificate; it's better to do it when you're an undergraduate and not have to spend that money twice. I didn't have any trouble with them, that's for sure, but I did run into one very good one at Drake, and that was a course with a professor who advocated a great deal of activities, a great deal of activity and activities, many activities in the classroom. He was a very good teacher who later wrote a book called *The Activity Classroom*. He did a lot of group work, encouraged group work. He knew how to break a class into groups—he was an expert at that—and get some good purposeful work out of them, and I used that a great deal in high school. Not as much as I would like although I did use it a great deal. One thing I certainly learned from him was that, not to put people in formal roles. I remember the first year I taught in the little town school, Radcliff School, which was . . . and I was there only two years, but it was a good experience, and I remember that I encountered a classroom when I went in where the seats were nailed together so the janitor could slide the whole row at a time, and he could sweep more easily that way. He didn't like it that I wanted the nails taken apart so I could put the chairs in circles and groups, but I did that from the first because of this teacher who had had a good methods course that was very practical. He became a kind of mentor, and I did some editing on a textbook he wrote on activity classrooms. Incidentally, he had had John Dewey as a teacher at Columbia, and there were ideas from Dewey and other people that I think are still valid and maybe people should listen a little more today. In education, we so often reinvent the wheel. We go back and try to do the same old things that were tried before, and they haven't always worked. One thing I think in elementary schools and high school, I think children should read things aloud more than they do. I remember when I was little, we had to read in front of the classroom. We had to stand up and read things and do it well, and it was worthwhile. I've asked a person or two if

they ever use that anymore, and very seldom do they ask students to read aloud in front of the class. I think it makes the students more aware of the words, and how they read, and the thought, and a lot of other things. It may embarrass a few, but they can do it in a small group, and it wouldn't embarrass them. I think that that's valuable. I know it was for me.

**Hughes:** I like what you said a minute ago about reinventing the wheel in education, and we also, I was thinking, when you talked earlier about that kind of grading on improvement of a whole semester or whole class or term's worth of papers and how a writer and a student develops. That's been introduced in the eighties and the nineties as if it was something new—portfolio grading or deferred grading is the term that I most frequently see used for it in the past couple of decades. I worry that lots of teachers are ahistorical; they don't know that many of these techniques, for example, have deeper roots than they think they do, and they weren't invented yesterday, so I'm very happy to hear that kind of history.

**Steward:** I think that's very true. I know that, well I think, and not only in writing, but in other subjects, that very often the averaging in the six grades from the tests is silly. After all of her teaching in math class, and the student has learned it by the end of the semester and can do it perfectly by that time, or near perfectly, why should he be penalized because he didn't know it when he came to the class? That's true with a writer, but I think it's also true with other subjects. What you want him there to do is to learn. The student is supposed to learn what you're teaching him. Why give him a bad grade and average the six together because he didn't know when he came in? I think that's rather a foolish thing to do.

**Hughes:** I hear that is a very important part of your educational philosophy, and I can certainly see the very strong connection between that and what a writing lab does in giving students flexible means to learn more about writing when they need to and not thinking they need to know everything before they walk through the door.

**Steward:** Right, right. I think that's one reason that the Writing Lab has succeeded, and has gone on succeeding every year since I've been there, because the student feels that he's making progress. He isn't penalized because he didn't know what to do when he came. I think we need to spread that word to other teachers. That's a premise that's definitely behind a good writing lab—the growth. That's what he's in a class for, as well as what he's in the writing lab to do.

**Hughes:** I want to take you back to, for a minute, to get a name. The professor who taught you about an activity classroom and group work, what was his name?

**Steward:** His name was Larry Flaum. He had a little book out at that time

called *Activity Classroom*.

**Hughes:** How do you spell his last name?

**Steward:** F-l-a-u-m.

**Hughes:** OK.

**Steward:** I think it's long out of print, and I don't know what's happened to him. I have no idea, in fact. I had another funny experience with that thesis that you might enjoy. We had an oral exam over the thesis where they sort of rushed the gun and did some things that people do later. Since I never got to all the later, but I had lots of experience, one of the people in the committee said to me, what school of psychology do you think Hawthorne belonged to? I was a little nonplussed for a minute, and then I said, "Well I think the same one Shakespeare belonged to," and that was about all I could think of. There was a great deal of psychological influence by the time of Hawthorne, and then a lot after that, but I couldn't think of anything else to say, and they enjoyed it, at least, and I still am glad I said what I did, didn't try to say that he'd read certain things because I didn't know what all Hawthorne had read at that time. I know a little more about him now. I got that from Mr. Clark later.

**Hughes:** In your graduate studies, did you do some teaching as part of that?

**Steward:** Teaching?

**Hughes:** Or tutoring, or any kind of employment in the university?

**Steward:** Well I, you know, I'm one of those strange people who did what I did without a Ph.D., and I don't know that, well, I'm awfully sorry that I couldn't finish one. I had some good experiences along the way and some great teachers. I had great teachers at Wisconsin—I had some great teachers at Grinnell—who encouraged me. At the time when I finished Grinnell, they were sure that I would go on to graduate school, but then I didn't right away, and I suppose Paul Spencer Wood, who was my stellar English teacher at Grinnell, was a little put out that I didn't. On the other hand, when I went to Wisconsin and could take all sorts of courses on Saturday and in the evenings, once in a while, I started a lot of work, and I did a lot of work even without finishing everything. Harry Haden Clark was, of course, marvelous. Then I had a wonderful year, probably the best year of my life, and I don't know why I say that except that it fed my mind all the time, I guess. I had a wonderful year in '61-'62. I applied and got a John Hay Fellowship,<sup>3</sup> and I had a year at Yale, and I took all the things I wanted to take. I had . . . we could audit . . . we could take two courses for credit—we didn't have to, but we could take two courses for credit. I took a course with Norman Holmes Pearson, who is the big Hawthorne man in the country, perfectly marvelous. Then I took a course in Dostoevsky with René Wellek. It

3 John Hay Fellowships were awarded to public high school teachers and administrators, providing summer institutes to promote education in the arts and humanities.

was Dostoevsky in English, not reading him in Russian. For him, too, I wrote a paper on Dostoevsky's use of the child character, which he liked at that time, '61-'62. It seems a long time ago, but it was rewarding. Those credits I could transfer back. If I'd had enough money, I suppose I would have quit for a year somewhere there and taken off and just done the residency, but I couldn't, and fortunately the people on the faculty all knew me by that time, and that's one reason, another happy accident, I wound up at Wisconsin.

**Hughes:** You mentioned that if you'd been able to take a year off and not have to work you might have done your residency for a Ph.D. Do you imagine if conditions had been different in your life, you might have become a professor of American Literature? Do you think that was attractive to you at the time?

**Steward:** I suppose. I don't know. I like what I've done, though. I haven't really . . . I don't know. I like all kinds of literature, and I guess the American intrigues me a little more than the others, but I don't know that I would have. I couldn't make any better choices than happened, actually, so that's one of the things I'm glad for.

**Hughes:** OK. I want to talk some about your teaching career at West High and at LaFollett High School in Madison. You mentioned earlier that you were hired at West and, an unusual circumstance, were supposed to co-teach a World Literature course that was new and you ended up developing and teaching that. Would you tell me about the other kinds of courses that you taught at West and what your role was there?

**Steward:** Well, I taught junior and senior English at West. I think one year I had taught a class of sophomores. We taught four classes, each of us, and I taught my regular four classes, of course, and they were always good, good choices I mean. Primarily I had seniors, and I still . . . I'm very happy that I did. I suppose, in a way, it wasn't just accident that I wound up at the University. I was taking classes there—all I could—you couldn't do too many and still teach a full load. I also had had many of the West High people's children in classes. I'd had Roger Clark, who was Harry Haden Clark's son, I'd had the Eccles<sup>4</sup> children . . . a couple of them, good students naturally, Ann and Margaret Eccles, and I had had . . . the man who was the director of practice teachers, and I'd had many practice teachers in my classes, was John Searles,<sup>5</sup> and I had Pat Searles in class. I had the Cassidy<sup>6</sup> children in class, and I'd admired and cared about Fred Cassidy

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4 Mark Eccles was a University of Wisconsin English Department faculty member who specialized in Renaissance literature, especially Shakespeare.

5 John Searles was Professor of English and Curriculum Instruction at the University of Wisconsin.

6 Frederic Cassidy was Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin and the chief editor of *The Dictionary of American Regional English*.

tremendously, and Mrs. Cassidy, too. I had many professors' children, not only from the English Department, but from others. So they kind of knew me, I would say, in another way. Their children had carried home stories, I suppose. I had the Haugen<sup>7</sup> children. He was the head of Scandinavian studies, fine man. Those two girls I had had in class. Then I gradually, well, I got my John Hay Fellowship, partly on the recommendation, I'm sure, of some university teachers and I am sure that helped my teaching. We had already started before that our AP classes, and I was the . . . our AP classes were a little more, I think, exclusive than AP classes are now. I think that . . . I don't know what's happened entirely in the AP, but I went to a conference down at Northwestern on the beginnings of the Advanced Placement program. It was very good, the conference was. It was being experimented with, and there were many things going on then, and one year I worked with Mrs. Thomas<sup>8</sup> at the University, and I'd like to mention her a little later because she was a great mentor, very fine woman. She was like me; she had drifted into university teaching because of happy accidents. They were lucky to have her, and I was lucky to know her, and that was a real plus; it was an enrichment. I suspect that she knew about when she was going to retire, and they knew they needed somebody to replace her later . . . we'll come to more of that, I'm sure. At West, I had good opportunity to work with many people and get acquainted with them in a different way. That made a good situation. The students were good, wonderful students at that time. Exceptional, I would say, in many ways because there was such a concentration of university people's children. I can't begin to mention all of them; I'd like to, but I could make a list someday, I guess.

**Hughes:** And this was through the 1950s and into the mid-sixties?

**Steward:** I came to West in 1951, in the Fall of '51, and I was there; then it was ten years later, '61-'62 that I had my John Hay Fellowship. I came back to West after that for a year; then they were opening LaFollett, and I went out to LaFollett as the department chairman, setting up a new department, and that was a little different kind of work, but it paid me a little more, and I had a boy in college at that time, and that was important. I loved that, too. Opening the new school was fun, and I had some chances there to do some different things for a couple of years, and then from there I went to the University. I stayed at LaFollett only three years, then the university experience after that.

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7 Einer J. Haugen was Chair of Scandinavian Language and Literature at the University of Wisconsin.

8 Ednah Shepard Thomas was an English Department faculty member who directed the Freshman English Program at the University of Wisconsin, first with Edgar Lacy and then with William Lenehan, from the period just after World War II until her retirement in 1971. Her memoir is on this site.



**Hughes:** Did you have colleagues who were important mentors for you at West?

**Steward:** Oh, yes. I think West had a good faculty. Mary Mackenhern who was the Department Chairman was good. The principal was good; at least I liked him very much.

**Hughes:** Who was that?

**Steward:** That was Ralph Kristofferson, Kristy we called him. We had a lot of people who were good teachers, very good teachers. I couldn't begin to name all of them. They were people who had been connected with the University in one way or another. Many of them had gone to school there, and others were in graduate school doing the same thing I was. There were many that were good people, good to know. They were inspiring, too, and they gave you a chance. I think, oh, for instance, in World Lit. I remember that Mr. Kristofferson always came in and sang the national hymn of Norway for the kids when we got to the Norwegian section. We had things like that that were . . . and that was . . . there, too, I had my chairs in a circle. It was at Radcliff, the first little town where they were nailed together, but . . . I still hear from a number of my students. I'm very glad I do, and I've seen some of them every now and then. So, it . . . but it was a great experience, and it was a good school, a quality high school I'd say at the time.

**Hughes:** I've always heard good things since I've lived in Madison about the West High School English Department. It's always enjoyed a very strong reputation, and I think it still does.

**Steward:** Well, you've probably . . . a lot of them were graduates of the University. I always heard that—and I don't know, I just heard that out over the state—that the course that everybody looked at when they wanted to hire new people who were University trained was 309, Mrs. Thomas' course. She taught that course; I think she exclusively taught it. It was a course in writing for prospective teachers, and, of course, we had a lot of the practice teachers, and they knew us that way, too. There were good people there. I think the schools had changed somewhat; I don't know how much, but certainly there are some changes. There are some changes in the city of Madison so that people don't live in the same places. Well, after all, after we first started LaFollett, it was the first high school they'd opened for a long time, and then Memorial came after that, and it made a difference in where people went to school. For instance, just a week or so ago I had a call from an old student of mine at LaFollett; well, he had written a letter. I hear from him regularly, and he went to the University while I was there, too, a student who is now the publicity man at the National Crafts Museum in New York City, and he often came back to Madison and came to see me when I still lived there, but I had a letter from him, and he told me about

David Benjamin, who just has a book out. Well, David Benjamin was not one of my students. He was a little bit . . . his senior year at LaFollett was a year behind my departure, I guess, but I called his old teacher and asked her—she lives down in the Chicago area now—asked her if she remembered him, and oh yes, she went into all sorts of elation. He’s just written a book called *The Life and Times of the Last Kid Picked*, and I think it sounds clever, and I’ve got the library here getting it for me on call, and they’ll probably buy one when they see it. Anyhow, we all prided ourselves on helping students getting ahead. I think at that time . . . I don’t know whether people feel that way now, but I had good colleagues, very good colleagues.

**Hughes:** Were you chairman of the English Department at West?

**Steward:** No, I was not the chairman at West. Mary Mackenhern was, and she didn’t leave West until after I did. No, I was not chairman . . .

**Hughes:** But you were recruited at LaFollett to . . .

**Steward:** Yes, I was the chairman at LaFollett and setting up the new department, and that was a little different, but it was a challenge. I liked the challenge, and I liked the changes.

**Hughes:** When you were at LaFollett as the chairman of that new department, that’s a very important leadership experience. What did you learn from doing that or what do you remember as being the challenges of starting a new department?

**Steward:** Well, we had a lot of teachers who . . . we had a, I want to say we . . . any school like that gets teachers from other schools who apply to go there, and they did. But again, it was a happy experience because I got one very good teacher. My friend, she’s still a friend, Marian McKinney—she’s the one who had David Benjamin in school because she went down to the Chicago area later—and she succeeded me as the Department Chairman there, and others, many of them. One young girl who came over from the University of Iowa was hired . . . by then we had a kind of pool downtown that hired the teachers, and you didn’t get as much choice as the chairman because when I went to West, I was interviewed at West, as well as in the downtown offices. They knew who it was that was coming into the Department, and they picked you because they liked your background and so forth. I suppose that day is long gone. It was in other cities at that time because that’s the reason at the time when I was looking for a job that I applied at a couple of other places when I came to Madison. Now, I came to Madison; it was my first choice, but the teachers are hired in a pool down in the main office and then put out in the schools, and I’m sure they are in Madison now. They were beginning to do that when I was at LaFollett. So, the department chairman or the principal didn’t have as much say, but that wasn’t

true when I went to West. They picked the teacher they wanted. They had a say, too, in the application process, and I'm glad that that was the way it worked at that time. You knew where you were going to teach, in other words. I think as a teacher that was very important to me, that I knew which school I was going to go to. For instance, I could live near it, and it was easier, but that wasn't the only reason. I think it's good to meet the principal and people before you go there rather than just be hired in the pool and then sent out. Our teachers at LaFollett, some of them, were sent to us and we had some ups and downs, but it was interesting. It was a challenge. Some of them came over from some of the middle schools, or junior highs, and they had a new challenge. It was good, however.

**Hughes:** Good. Do you remember in your teaching at West and LaFollett whether you used to hold individual conferences or meetings with many of your students about their papers and progress?

**Steward:** Well, somewhat, somewhat. We . . . I think we did more individual . . . we didn't do the kinds of things you could do at a university because you had too many students, but I think you get to know them individually. I think I did, at least, and I'm sure some other teachers did. We had some awfully good students, and it's been fun to know a little about the careers of some of them later, and a few are nationally known, quite a few, in fact, and it's been interesting to follow them. I know they had many good teachers there, and teachers did give more time to the students. I had a boy one time at West who just hung around after school. He'd hang around so long that I finally said to him one day, I said, "Jack, doesn't your mother think you should get home by now?" and he said, "Oh, she doesn't care; she thinks I'm with you." So, it was good, and I think we did more of that kind of thing because we could in that time. I don't know that people do now or whether they can. There are some things that are impossible.

**Hughes:** Did you . . .

**Steward:** We . . .

**Hughes:** Go ahead.

**Steward:** We didn't have anything like a writing lab. They had a writing lab at West after we started our Writing Lab at the University, and I don't know how it's still going or what's happening there, but when Marian Knable was the chairman at West, after Mary retired and Gretchen Schoff—who was a wonderful teacher—came to the University, and I had gone to the University, and Marian came in once; she wanted some of her teachers to come to my 309 class, and they did. I taught it once in the evening, or late afternoon and evening, so we could accommodate some of them. Only once I taught it that way; it was a little hard to do. Marian came, and she had had 309 as a young teacher, knew how important it was to her, and she came along with them that time, and really I started her little book *The Store* in that class as some of the writing. I was very

fond of Marian, well, I'm fond of everybody, but it went very well. Actually, then she started a writing lab at West, and I hope it's still going, I don't know for sure. I know that the staff when I was there would have been sympathetic to one if we could have done it. Don't know how we could have, though, at that time.

**Hughes:** OK, great. I want to move from West and LaFollett just as you did to the University now and ask you about the beginning of that experience, but I think we're near the end of this side of the tape, so let me stop it and put a fresh tape in, and we can start with that.

## END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2. BEGINNING OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1.

**Hughes:** . . . to ask about your recruitment to the University. What year was that and how did the University approach you and how did, who were the key figures in that and how did you become interested in the possibility of continuing your career at the University?

**Steward:** Well, I went to the University . . . I was three years at LaFollett after that 1962 date and along in 1965, I guess it was, I'd have to do a little figuring here, I went to them in the fall of—yeah, that's right—anyhow, they called me, I don't remember who called me, I guess it was Walter Rideout.<sup>9</sup>

**Hughes:** He was the department chairman at the time?

**Steward:** He was the department chairman, and Ed Lacy,<sup>10</sup> of course, was assistant chairman all those years, and Bill Lenehan,<sup>11</sup> and Ednah Thomas was in on it. There were a group of them who called. Well, I think that they called; anyway, Walter did, and asked if I'd come down and talk with them about some things. He didn't tell me what it was particularly, and I've told this story over and over, but it's kind of interesting. It was interesting to me; I tell you it was a surprise. Anyhow, I went down whenever they made the appointment one afternoon late after school. They said they wanted to offer me a year at the University as an instructor, visiting instructor. Then if it turned out to be good, they would continue it, and I don't know that I really had a complete knowledge of what they would do, but I wanted to try it. It would just . . . visiting lecturer I guess they called me that first year. I didn't know, I thought I was just taking a

9 Walter B. Rideout was an English Department faculty member who specialized in American Literature and was an authority on Sherwood Anderson.

10 Edgar W. Lacy was in charge of the Freshman English program at the University of Wisconsin, along with Ednah Thomas, from just after World War II until 1968. He also served as Associate Chair of the department. Lacy and Thomas wrote a composition textbook together, *Guide for Good Writing* (1951).

11 William Lenehan was an English Department faculty member who specialized in American Literature; he took over administering the Freshman English program in 1968, after Ed Lacy, working as Lacy did in tandem with Ednah Thomas.

year off from the schools and probably going back, so I'd be a visiting lecturer. I had taught a summer school for them. I had taught with Ednah Thomas and a man who is no longer there from Linguistics. We had a NDEA Institute,<sup>12</sup> and they all knew me, of course, that way, and I had worked quite a lot with Dr. Pooley, Bob Pooley,<sup>13</sup> who was in English Education and ILS [Integrated Liberal Studies] too. Pooley was well known over the country, and I had got very well acquainted with him through the National Council of Teachers of English. I was very active in National Council, had been during my high school years, had done speaking for them and had written things in the Council magazines and that sort of thing. In fact, I did a lot of reviewing for John Searles, who was at the University; I mentioned him before, I guess. He was the man who supervised the practice teachers. I had done a lot of work with them. We had had a lot of articulation there, a lot of back and forth sort of things, and they were very much interested in getting somebody in from the high school who could help train TA's, and I thought that would be very interesting. They knew my work in the schools and that it would be interesting to do. Well, I got a leave of absence and went to them as a visiting lecturer that one year. Then, of course, well, along about in January they offered me tenure because I couldn't have gone without tenure. I had tenure in the schools, in Madison schools; in fact, I took about a five-six hundred-dollar cut in salary to go. That didn't bother me because it was important. So they gave me an associate professorship the second year. They found me satisfactory, and I found them satisfactory, and it was quite an experience. It was good in every way. I taught a 309 class, and it was big at the time, and that was the class that Ednah taught, and, Bob Pooley knew a lot about it because he, I think he had set that class up originally. I'm not very sure of that, but I think so. I think that he had. And he was well known; he was president of National Council for a long time and had worked in . . . . He knew quite a lot about me, actually. But they all did because we'd had meetings, articulation meetings, where we talked about the transition from high school to college, and they were interested in what was happening out over the state, and I knew quite a bit about what was happening there because of Wisconsin Council and the work with the NDEA Institutes. NDEA Institute—Bob Pooley, for instance, headed the work on Big English in Wisconsin,<sup>14</sup> material for the NDEA Institutes, and,

12 National Defense Education Act of 1958, aimed at strengthening U.S. education, especially in technology and science.

13 Robert C. Pooley was a specialist in the English language and the first to administer the Freshman English program at the University of Wisconsin during the time of exploding enrollment after World War II. He left that position in 1948 to head the newly-created Program of Integrated Liberal Studies; Edgar Lacy and Ednah Thomas then took over the writing program.

14 Here she is probably referring to the Wisconsin English Language Arts Curriculum Program, a federally funded project that was a continuation of a program first started by the

there'd been a couple of those, and I had gone two or three times, actually. When he couldn't go, I had gone to present that, the booklet and the use of it—how we worked together—to other schools, and I had gone, for instance, out to North Dakota one time to talk to their people one time when Bob Pooley couldn't go; he had, he was tied up. And he couldn't do all the work he had set out to do anyhow. But, anyway, I went to the University to try it. I was experimenting, and they were, too. And, fortunately, it was a good experiment.

**Hughes:** I try to imagine what it must have been like to have that meeting in 1965 to talk about this possibility, and you were so successful in the Madison schools and were department chairman at LaFollett. It seems to me that involves quite a bit of risk to make that kind of change . . .

**Steward:** Well, it was a risk; it was a risk, but by then my son was out of college, and I thought it was worth taking. I had done . . . it was a risk for me; it was a risk for them. I don't know; probably it was a—and I don't say this at all to praise myself—it may have been a bit more of a risk for me than it was for them at the time because I had done considerable writing, and they knew that, and they . . . I had, for instance, published one textbook with Harcourt Brace that I worked on, and the *Success in Writing* books had come out that year; about that year, the first of them did. Marian McKinney, who was my successor of the department chairman at LaFollett, and I—I mentioned her before—and I did a series of textbooks called *Success in Writing* with Addison Wesley, and they were used for quite a while. And they knew that I, that I was capable of doing that kind of thing. I'd done enough writing for the *English Journal* that they knew it, and so, of course, one thing that the University always looks for is a bit of scholarly writing, or a bit of writing, of some kind, and they knew that I was at least productive in that way, and so, and I think that it was . . . but, of course, when you change jobs, it takes time, and you can't write as much either.

**Hughes:** Mmm hmm.

**Steward:** So, I don't know who was running a bigger risk.

**Hughes:** I think you were, especially when, given that you said it was a visiting position at first, and you were so well established in your career at that point. What were you uncertain about when you thought about making that shift?

**Steward:** What was I uncertain about? Oh, I didn't really know what I was getting into, I guess. I don't know that I was, I can't really pinpoint anything that I was uncertain about. I was . . . the superintendent they had then—and he didn't stay too long—he was the one who was a little bit unwilling, at first, to give me a leave of absence; then he, he did anyhow. First he wanted me to sign a paper that I'd come back, and I didn't want to do that, and I didn't do it anyhow.

Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English in 1959.

It, I wasn't at all uncertain about getting a good job if I had to.

**Hughes:** When I think about what you accomplished at the University, all the great teaching you did there, the teachers you trained, the programs you developed, the influence you have had, I see that as a wonderful career move for you. In retrospect, Joyce, how glad are you that you made the switch from these schools to the University?

**Steward:** Oh, I'm completely glad. No, looking back; I'm very glad. It was, they were good to me, and I hope I was good to them. It was a pleasant, during the sixties, late sixties, when we had all our trouble, things were a bit riotous down there for a while, but even then I didn't, I never regretted it. No, I didn't regret the move. And I loved 309; I liked the class. I think Mrs. Thomas had liked the class. They knew that she was getting to the age where she could retire and would, and it was, it was just good. I inherited a very good class there, but I liked teaching it. Every now and then I had some older women, an older woman or two that would come to one or two of those later who were thinking that they would come back and get a teacher's license or, not necessarily that, but get a little more preparation so that they could go out and teach, and they were good. But the young women in that class were . . . it was a very good class to teach, and that was my steady one. I didn't just do that at the University because there were other things that came up, but that was the, that was the chief thing that I was working for.

**Hughes:** Mmm hmm.

**Steward:** And I had done this, as I say, the Summer Institute, NDEA Institute, with Mrs. Thomas, and oh, I ought to be able to think of that young linguist's name; I can't right now. He's a friend of Charles Scott,<sup>15</sup> and I will know his name pretty soon, but they were fine to work with. We had good teachers in—we had teachers from all over the country that year. And I had, that was a good experience. And I don't know, Helen White<sup>16</sup> was still there, and she came to talk for us once, and I, I had got acquainted with a lot of people like Helen and others that I had never worked with because they were retired about that time. I had gotten acquainted with them though, and it was a real privilege. No, I was happy. I'm not one bit sorry that I changed.

I have my West High friends, my LaFollett friends—some of them have died; a good many have; university friends have—but I'm old, and they . . . but

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15 Charles Scott was a University of Wisconsin English Department faculty member who specialized in English as a second language.

16 Helen C. White was a University of Wisconsin English Department faculty member who specialized in 17th Century English literature, particularly the metaphysical poets, and among other firsts, the first woman Full Professor in Letters and Sciences. The English Department is now located in a building named after her.

I have friends from those years. I hear from a lot of them, actually, and they're good friends, close friends.

**Hughes:** You have mentioned Ednah Thomas several times. Would you tell me some about her?

**Steward:** Oh, Mrs. Thomas. I knew her first as Mrs. Thomas, and then she was Ednah. We became very close friends. Mrs. Thomas had had similar experience to mine. She brought up her children alone, pretty much, and she was like me, she was somebody who was hired at the University in a job that she could do: help train TA's, and work in Freshman English, which is what I went for, and same kind of job. They needed more people in it by that time, and Ednah was great at it, and she taught 309. That was the only class she usually taught, and, but she was a mentor, in every way. She retired in 1970 before we moved to Helen White Hall. She had got to the age where she was 70; she didn't retire until she was 70. And she retired then. She said she wasn't going to move her office down the hill, and she didn't, but we saw each other until she got sick and died. And I miss her yet. Every now and then, I run across something that's in Ednah's handwriting, and I remember all the good times we had together. It was a very rewarding friendship, and it was, but it was a very rewarding work relationship while I was there, while she was still there. The fact that she didn't move down to Helen White Hall was logical, of course, but she . . . I think she felt good about turning over a great deal of the work she'd done to me, and I know she did, and, so it was a happy time, happy relationship. I don't know what else I can tell you about her right now except that, oh, she came out when I retired, later, she came out to Bainbridge to visit me, and we had a great time, and she was a lovely woman.

**Hughes:** I know; I've had the privilege to know her some, once I came to Madison and feel very lucky to have known her, and she still volunteered in the Writing Lab every Tuesday morning for the first few years that I was there. What are some of the ways that she influenced your training of teaching assistants or thinking about the teaching of writing?

**Steward:** Well, Ednah had influenced me in ways before I came to the University because she had been the one from the University who was often in on these conferences if we had some committee that set up ways to make a transition more easily and, especially, the transition of writing. And, of course, she worked with TA's, and, and I suppose that she influenced many people through her little book, which was sold for years and years, *Evaluating Student Themes*.<sup>17</sup> I don't know whether it's still in production or not. Someone told me that it was, had sold more than anything that the University Press had ever put out. It's a little book on evaluating themes, and it's, she had taught many people

17 The booklet is available on this site.



how to handle papers. And one of the things that was always in Ednah's mind was, "find the good in it first. Find the good in the paper first." And that was something that I think I impressed the people who came to me in 309 and the future TA's about doing. To start a student out with just checking his commas and his type and that sort of thing, as I've seen many teachers do. I had a boy from the University that I coached a little bit last year on a paper. He had the influe . . . he had to interview four older people, and I was one of one of the older people he chose to interview. And I was in the care center then and not now, but, but I was, and he—I was one of the people he interviewed, and he came out with a marvelous conclusion in the paper. The teacher who read it—he came back and showed me the paper—she had written on the bottom of the paper, "nice sharing," but that was her only comment. And he had a marvelous conclusion. And I said, "Didn't she say anything about your conclusion?" And he said, "No, she didn't." And I said, "Well, she missed the boat." She really did. She missed the point of the paper. I don't think she read it, honestly. And she was teaching gerontology, but I don't think that the woman read the paper. And I felt bad about that for him because it was a good conclusion about the fact that all four of us that he interviewed missed our freedom, which is very true when you get into old age; you miss your freedom, your freedom to do things, freedom to drive a car, and run around, do the things you want to. But Ednah had a way of evaluating themes and using the folders; that was set up long before I came there, and they had done that, had tried to do that in freshman English, tried to help the TA's do that, and it's important that we send our TA's, I think, out with that philosophy about using the papers, conferring with students. She held many conferences, and it was, it was an important, important lesson although I knew it, and I'd read her book. I had her book before I came to the University, so it wasn't new to me when I came to the University, but then working with her in the NDEA Institute, where we were working with teachers from all over the country actually, and that was a great privilege, and she still carried that philosophy always.

**Hughes:** You've talked about 309. I want to ask you a little about the beginning of English 250, a course on women writers that you proposed, initiated, and fought for. Tell me some about that. Where did the idea come from? What was the process like of proposing and beginning to teach that course?

**Steward:** [Laughs.] Well, that's kind of a long story. That's kind of a long story indeed. I think I want to go back to, sometime, to 309, a minute.

**Hughes:** OK.

**Steward:** I won't do it right now, maybe, but and although it's, it might be worth doing right now.

**Hughes:** Go ahead if you want to.

**Steward:** What's that?

**Hughes:** Go ahead.

**Steward:** Go ahead? May I go back to 309?

**Hughes:** Sure.

**Steward:** One thing we did in 309, always, and I did it maybe more because by the time I got there, I could use the overhead more than Ednah could, and we didn't have the advantage of sharing on the computer, but we did a lot of, and she did a lot of dittoing papers and passing them around to the students. You picked the paper to, from the class, and you shared the class papers and got them all to say what they would do with this paper and that sort of thing. And we let their students know that their work would be used in the classroom as a way to teach, not picking out a bad one, necessarily, to hold up to ridicule at all—that's the wrong thing to do—but to hold up a paper that, that they could help improve, and then the criticism is welcome, and it's used. And I think that's very important.

**Hughes:** Joyce, I'd like to turn now to talking about the freshman writing course at Madison. I've always had a lot of interest in that history because Wisconsin was so unusual in dropping that requirement in the late 1960s.<sup>18</sup> Before I ask about the process by which that requirement was dropped and your feelings about that, would you tell us what that course consisted of?

**Steward:** The old Freshman English 101?

**Hughes:** Yes.

**Steward:** Well, I didn't work too long in it, of course, a few years, and it was interesting. We had TA's in it. And we worked to help train them. We had a little workshop in the fall for the new ones, and that was where we tried to give them the philosophy about using their folders and the papers as we did and not just grading each paper and calling it final and I think it was . . . I worked with Ednah on that.

**Hughes:** [inaudible]

**Steward:** Well, in the old 101, the staff worked with the teaching assistants, and gave them a little preliminary workshop in the fall and were there to consult as they needed to during the year. They could come to us. We also visited classes, which I expect was a little strain for the new ones, although I thought it was rather fun. It was sort of like working with a practice teacher. And we had some requirements. We had a textbook as a rule, a writing textbook of some kind. They changed every once in a while, so there was no single one to which we were addicted, and the teaching assistant had control of the classroom pretty well, himself or herself, and we visited, I think only once or twice, sometimes twice, but if a teaching assistant wanted some help with what she or he should do, they

18 The English Department voted to drop the requirement in the Spring of 1970.

could come to us. We were there to be helpful, we hoped, not to be critical, and to give a little guidance. Once in a while there was a student we had to move or something of that sort. I had to move one out of my class. I'd taught English 101 the first year I was on the campus, and my 309 and the 101 were the things I taught, and that 101 course gave way to the new 101, which was a course that they had to test into. It wasn't the kind of regular, massive freshman English course that we had, but it was a little remedial sort of English course. And then, in, that happened, that change occurred in the late '60s, a gradual sort of change, and it was a hard one to make because I think at that time it was hard to convince other people that we weren't going to teach everybody the same writing skills quickly in 101. It was 101 and 102; they took both semesters. Well, for the most part, they began in the late '60s to think that it wasn't working very well. And I suppose that was one reason I was asked to come on staff because I knew the high school situation perhaps better than some other people did. And I was in touch with high schools all over the state because of my National Council work and Wisconsin Council work and the work with Dr. Pooley and Project English.<sup>19</sup> And they needed somebody like that, or thought they did; I hope I was needed. I think so, but on the other hand they really were quite sure that the freshman course didn't work well because students were bored. A lot of students who were pretty good and who had some of the writing skills didn't want to do it all, and a few of them tested out at the beginning, but only a few, and the ones who went into the course still weren't responding very well, and they were better trained then. They had more writing skills; they really were coming with better test scores than they had for a few years, and, in the late '60s, I think that was true. I think the high schools were preparing them more thoroughly than they had. And, because they were better prepared, the course was dull for them and didn't fit their needs. And I would have to give the credit primarily to . . . and it certainly was their idea; they had that idea, I think, even before I came on staff; I think they'd probably discussed it. Mr. Lenehan and Mrs. Thomas and Mr. Lacy had the idea of doing away with the class and offering tutorial help of some kind. The Writing Lab became the instrument through which the student could be given some more tutorial help. And English 207 then took up some of the slack because they encouraged the 207 course, which was the basic Humanities course that all the students took. Is that still true today, pretty well?

**Hughes:** It is; it's got several different numbers now with different themes, but it's still the large introductory literature course that all the students . . .

**Steward:** Yes, well, the students did the, were more enthusiastic about the large industrial . . . initiative, the initial 207 course. Pardon me; I'm misspeaking

<sup>19</sup> Project English was a federally funded program that provided summer institutes for teachers.

myself. They were much more enthusiastic about that; it was more interesting. And 207, as it was designed then, was to contain quite a heavy writing component. And I think that was the idea of the group, too. So I wouldn't say that the original ideas was anything. I was in on some of the meetings, but certainly that wasn't my idea because I didn't know. I did know that students', the attitude in 101 wasn't very good.

**Hughes:** Was that your experience when you taught it?

**Steward:** Yes, I think so although I can't say that they were completely restless, but, in general over the campus, I think the attitude to 101 was not warm. And so that 101 became a small section, a small group, several sections of remedial English, and then they said that we would start a writing center, a writing lab, and we, I had an office the first year I was there, up in Bascom Hall between a young man who was a TA that we had employed to give some guidance, some help on grammar, that sort of thing, writing help, to journalism students, and that had been working. He was there for that specific reason, and the only students that I think he saw were journalism students who were referred to him, and we visited quite a little. And Mr. Lenehan had the next office. Bill was, of course, he was a man of ideas and willing to try new things, and he could convince people of it. In fact, I think that when he had come on staff a few years before, I think he just got his associate professorship that year that I came on; I think he came down and told me that one day, and he was pleased with it, but I know Mrs. Thomas had at that time told me that she thought they had somebody who could take over where it needed to be, the freshman composition course, and he was the man.

And he was very capable, of course, and full of ideas. "Well," he said, "why not start this writing tutorial program of some kind?" So the lab wasn't entirely my idea; it was working together with him that we begin to shape something, and what we decided to do at that point was to give some modules or small classes that first year, for people who needed help, and they would come voluntarily, and that was what went on in Bascom Hall the year before the Writing Lab.

**Hughes:** Good. Can I take you back just for a minute? I'm very eager to hear the beginning of the lab, but I also want to ask a little bit more about the freshman composition requirement for 101 and 102. I've heard many histories of this since I've been in the department. I have heard, for example, the opinion that the department stopped teaching it, not for the reasons you just mentioned, but because the course had become politicized, and that teaching assistants were, at that time, the political climate on the campus in the late 1960s.

## END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 2. BEGINNING OF SIDE 2, TAPE 2.

**Steward:** . . . and voiced around, among the other people, was that students were coming a little better prepared, and they were not taking hold in the 101 class . . . resented the year's work, or semester's work, they had put into it, and that it would be better to give them an initial literature course and do more writing there than in the old freshman comp course.

**Hughes:** Mmm hmm.

**Steward:** And I think it was true; I think that was absolutely true at the time. And the TA's were restless in 101. I can say that because that year when we had the visit was about the time of the strike. I, I can't date that strike exactly.<sup>20</sup> The, the chancellor had recognized the teaching assistants' union, and we had a TA strike, in, but that was the year, the next year. It was after we were in Helen White, I know that, I know the Writing Lab was in Helen White the year that the TA's had the strike because, and I can say that with, well, rather happily really, because I had a few TA's; we weren't big as we became, but the TA's who worked in the lab, a good many of them, came in spite of the strike. They didn't all go to their classes, to teach the class; we were still teaching 101 at that point; it wasn't gone yet, and we had moved down to Helen White Hall, and there were still a good many 101 classes, and we were doing some of the same things, but I know that the TA's . . . I had one TA, and I said to her, "Now, why are you here?" I was working late and hard and stayed because we were starting to get more students gradually, and she said, "Well, Mrs. Steward, we felt a little sorry; we knew you'd be up her working, and we thought we'd, a couple of us wanted to come." And I always felt good about that because I know they came, and we tried to find out which ones were seeing their classes, and I felt a little bit like a spy, but it was—we did try to do that. But we weren't yet in the great period, the period of the great unrest. That was the next year.

**Hughes:** OK.

**Steward:** And I know that that happened the next year.

**Hughes:** Do, do you recall what other departments, faculty in other departments, thought about the English Department's change in that first-year writing requirement?

**Steward:** Well, I think some of them . . . I think there were mixed feelings, probably; some of them were afraid we were abdicating a job of teaching freshman writing, probably, although I didn't at that point—after all, I was pretty new—and I don't think I heard a lot from other departments. After all, my second year on campus, and I was working away at what they gave me to do, and I don't suppose I was in contact with a lot of people from other departments. I became

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20 The TA strike was in 1970.

more so later as the Writing Center grew and as they took an interest in it.

**Hughes:** Mmm hmm.

**Steward:** But I think some of them probably resented the . . . and thought, as I say, it was abdicating.

**Hughes:** Mmm hmm. The reason . . . I've heard some faculty say that. I've heard even Lee Hansen,<sup>21</sup> who's a great supporter of writing instruction, as you know, on the campus, describe it as the English Department's "unilateral decision" to stop teaching composition.

**Steward:** Well, I think it was, to an extent. I think they were having, they may have been, and I didn't know it if it was the truth, they may have been having more teaching assistant trouble even then than I knew, and, after all, I wasn't then in—I wouldn't say I was yet in an administrative post; I was in the training post; I was helping supervise TA's, and I certainly helped in the Fall when we had a few days of preparation for it.

**Hughes:** Mmm hmm.

**Steward:** And I don't think, however, that . . . I was probably not in on all the decisions.

**Hughes:** Mmm hmm.

**Steward:** Mr. Lacy and Mr. Lenehan and Mrs. Thomas, probably, and the chairman at that time probably did a good deal of talking that I didn't hear. And, but I think that by and large it, it was workable.

**Hughes:** Mmm hmm. That's what I wondered, is what, how you felt about that change—at the time and in retrospect.

**Steward:** I didn't, I didn't really worry much about it.

**Hughes:** Yeah, what was happening . . .

**Steward:** Maybe I was overlooking something I should have been looking for; I don't know, but they had said that we'll start a place where the students can come for help, and we'll start that, and they can be writing more in 207, and we'll start this way of helping them. And, "Oh, Joyce will do it," you know, sort of thing. And Joyce was—I began to explore, and there weren't many writing centers. I didn't find—I wanted to go visit some, or they suggested I go visit some, and Mrs. Thomas and I went. I drove us down to DeKalb, and we went down there and looked at a little writing center in a community college. And then I went over to [The University of] Iowa—Lou Kelly had one in Iowa—and I went over there and spent a day with her. And that one was very interesting, but it was an adjunct, definitely. People came to it from freshman comp. When they were having trouble with the freshman composition course, they were referred to the writing laboratory that she ran. And then they had to write back and tell the referring instructor that, what happened and what they did so that

21 Lee Hansen is now Professor Emeritus of Economics at the University of Wisconsin.

there was a definite—they controlled the body at that time—now, they perhaps don't at all a little later; I don't know; I never visited again—but at that time they controlled the people who used it. It was a controlled thing.

**Hughes:** Lou Kelly was the keynote speaker at the Midwest Writing Centers Association Conference this past September in Iowa City . . .

**Steward:** That recently?

**Hughes:** That recently, and then I visited their program and learned more about it, and it's what I describe as an enrollment writing lab,

**Steward:** It was that when I was there.

**Hughes:** A student essentially enrolls and works every week or twice a week for the entire semester, and it's very closely connected with the first-year writing course and the way that was set up.

**Steward:** Well, that was true when I was there; no one came to that writing center except those who were referred to it, and there was communication between the class instructor and then, I wonder if it—and I hadn't thought much about this—it was a way, I suppose, to pick up the students that we left in the old 101.

**Hughes:** Mmm hmm.

**Steward:** We had a certain number of sections, and Jean Brinkman, for instance, taught that for quite a while, a certain number of sections, and she had some TA's in some other sections. There were some 101 classes left although we abandoned the big 101; we had—and I don't like to use the word “abandoned,” but that's all right; we'll just say abandoned—the effort to teach them all in that course. We kept a certain number. I don't know how many were running, maybe four or five sections, at least, and maybe a few more; I don't know now how many. I think I did know at one time, but I don't any more.

**Hughes:** Uh huh. There were a number of committees that studied the question of reinstating composition requirements throughout the 1970s, and I've looked at some of those reports and some of those recommendations, and there were various recommendations that such a requirement be reinstated or a broad-based universal requirement. Do you have an opinion about why none of those succeeded in the 1970s?

**Steward:** You mean there were committees that were talking about reinstating it?

**Hughes:** Yes.

**Steward:** In the English Department or other departments?

**Hughes:** Well, it was college wide committees or campus wide committees. For example, there was the campus undergraduate committee headed by Bassam Shakhashiri<sup>22</sup> in the chemistry department that issued a report in 1976 or '77

22 Bassam Shakhashiri is Professor of Chemistry at the University of Wisconsin and holder of

about remedial education and Lee Hansen was on that committee, and one of the many recommendations was that there be more rigorous standards or requirements for admission in terms of composition skills and that there be more universal writing instruction. And then the chancellor, Ed Young<sup>23</sup> at the time, had a committee that Bill Lenehan was on and Lee Hansen and Herb Wang<sup>24</sup> and some others that Lee Hansen was recalling, and they gave a report to the chancellor recommending that more wide-spread composition requirements be reinstated, and it's Lee's memory that the chancellor did nothing in response to that.

**Steward:** Well, now some of that I don't think I even knew. [Laughs.]

**Hughes:** Uh huh. That's interesting in itself.

**Steward:** If it was . . . and Lee Hansen is a very good friend of mine, and I think a person that . . . and at that time—and I knew him at that time—he was certainly . . . he is certainly a man who wants better standards throughout the University. And he's guarding standards in more ways than one, and I admire—I agree with him to a certain extent that there should be wider requirements,

**Hughes:** Uh huh.

**Steward:** More rigid requirements for some, maybe even for entrance, and I think entrance is part of his philosophy, too.

**Hughes:** Uh huh.

**Steward:** So, if it's entrance, then, the better writing when they come in would be true. Right now, I don't know what's been settled on that, but I've heard two or three comments and commentators on the television lately who've been talking about the SAT's and wanting a writing component in the SAT's.

**Hughes:** Yes, there's apparently going to be one.

**Steward:** Mmm hmm. And if they got a writing component in the SAT's, it would sift out a lot of students, certainly.

**Hughes:** Yes.

**Steward:** Of course, I have always felt that those big tests that run through machines, and this as a teacher, I feel that that kind of testing is a very good way for the test companies to make big money, and I notice that the SAT people defended the lack of a writing assignment in every discussion that I heard. And I heard the university professors, on the other hand—and Lee wasn't among these at all—but there were university professors from several schools that I've heard make the statement that they wanted this writing component. One of

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the William T. Evjue Distinguished Chair.

23 H. Edwin Young, Professor of Economics, served in various leadership positions at the University of Wisconsin for more than 40 years. He was Chancellor during the tumultuous Viet Nam protests on campus.

24 Herbert F. Wang is Professor of Geomechanics at the University of Wisconsin.



them one night on the news, the Lehrer program I think, said that he didn't think it was at all too much to expect that an incoming freshman should write three or four coherent paragraphs on a subject of his interest. And I don't either. But if the high schools aren't going to teach them to write three or four coherent paragraphs, I don't know what we can do. I think at that time my students were going—from West or LaFollett either one—had been going to the University and testing out of 101.

**Hughes:** Well, and that . . . 101 got smaller and smaller during the years that I was at Madison, and then in the mid-nineties, as you know, the University reinstated a universal one-semester freshman writing course though they provided options for students to place out of that from the University of Wisconsin English Placement Test or with a T[ransfer] credit. When that requirement first began in the fall of 1996, about 75% of entering freshmen had to take that.

**Steward:** That didn't come through the carry over into other courses?

**Hughes:** I think it's now recording so if you want to talk about that, the second tier of the new requirement is that students, 100% of undergraduates have to take, usually in their sophomore or junior year, a course that has a strong communications emphasis, often within a particular discipline, so it's a biology course with a strong writing and public speaking component. Or it's English 201, an intermediate composition course, so that's what the requirement is currently.

**Steward:** Well, by the time a student gets to 201, if he takes the intermediate composition course, he sometimes is a little more focused; he knows a little more what he wants to do, and he knows a little more about what it means to be in a big university like Wisconsin, for one thing. And I think perhaps that that's one reason that he gets more out of it. But the big freshman composition class as it was taught—well, I would defend their decision although I would say that it was not my decision, but I think that they made a good decision. They were still giving, after all, the big remedial, an arm that was remedial. And we know very well that some students who had freshman composition didn't need it or want it.

**Hughes:** Uh huh.

**Steward:** And it was a restless course, I would say, as it had been. Now whether it could be changed into something serious, I don't know. And I know how the University of Iowa has handled it because of that referral to the Writing Lab was done through the course, and that's a different system entirely, and that's a little as if they were taking up the slack that we were taking up with our continuing 101. And we did continue that for the student who needed it.

**Hughes:** As we turn now to talk about the early history of the writing lab, you . . . let me just recap some of the things you said before about that, that you

think even before you were hired by the English Department, there were some people in the department who had this possible idea of some individualized instruction, Bill Lenehan perhaps, Ednah Thomas, perhaps.

**Steward:** Well, I don't know whether they had the idea of a writing lab, certainly not the kind of thing that you're running today, Brad, and if the . . . but I do approve of it. After all, the student who comes, and who came then, first, to the writing lab usually wanted help. He wasn't sitting there indifferent through the class period, and he—without, with help for him or her—and he, that student, and was the . . . maybe the student didn't always get it. We couldn't always claim 100%, but then who can?

**Hughes:** That's right.

**Steward:** You can't claim 100% if you give a math course or a chemistry course or anything else. They don't all learn it.

**Hughes:** I'm interested in predecessor programs on the Madison campus before the Writing Lab itself began. You mentioned that there was a TA hired to help journalism students, an English department TA.

**Steward:** Yes.

**Hughes:** Was there other writing tutoring going on on the Madison campus that you know of, besides that?

**Steward:** Not that I know of. Not that I know of. I didn't know it then, and, of course, I hadn't been there but a couple of years.

**Hughes:** Sure.

**Steward:** But I don't think there were other writing tutorials of any kind going on.

**Hughes:** So where did your ideas for what this would look like and how it would work come from?

**Steward:** Well, again, may I use those words, "happy accident?" Because it was the time when something like that was needed, and I did what was asked of me. I had a good time going out . . . I did see another writing center, however, in, I think it was in Burlington or Muscatine, Iowa, when I went out to see Lou Kelly. I was interested in hers because those students she saw progressed then in that course whereas they hadn't before, and there's not any reason, it seemed to me, why the student wouldn't progress in other classes where he was asked to write better with a little tutorial help as she was giving them in the 101 course.

**Hughes:** Mmm hmm.

**Steward:** And in this one I saw in the other school—there had been a write up about that writing lab in some magazine, maybe in *College English* or *Four C's*; I don't know now, and it was, I was stopped there. It was two labs I went to see by myself.

**Hughes:** Do you remember what year that was?

**Steward:** Yes, it was about 1969. Probably in the spring of '69.

**Hughes:** OK, and did the Writing Lab at Madison open in the fall of '69?

**Steward:** The fall of '69 we opened with the module and a little tutorial help. Very little. That . . . I have a little notice that was our first one we sent out to faculty, and I'll give that to you, and you may keep it. It's a little notice that was typed up, I suppose, in our office and copied off; we certainly didn't have a really good copy center, even, and we promised that we would open about 4:00 in the afternoon and offer some module classes, modular ones, on essay writing and that sort of thing, and it would be little group instruction for which there would be no credit.

**Hughes:** Mmm hmm.

**Steward:** But we would also be there, and I think some of the time we stayed until about eight in the evening. The idea, then, was that more students could come late in the afternoon for a non-credit class, and they came. I expect some of them were referred, but some of them came, and they worked. And we knew that the next year we were going down to Helen White [Hall] and we promised in this notice that we would have a tutorial center there.

**Hughes:** Mmm hmm.

**Steward:** And I don't think it was . . . I didn't create something . . . Well, I didn't do it exclusively, that's for sure, but I had a lot of help with the idea, and I think at the time I remember that Bill or somebody said, "Well, Joyce can do this, Joyce can do this." And it wasn't because they were shoving anything off on me, but because they thought the students needed some of the help that they had needed in high school and had never got. And if they hadn't had it, why, this was the time to get it to them. And I think it worked. And then I know that there was a dean of students; I think his name was Blair Matthews—

**Hughes:** Yep, he was still an associate dean of students . . .

**Steward:** Was he?

**Hughes:** . . . until he retired about five years ago, and I worked with him on a number of occasions.

**Steward:** Well, he wanted me to come a time or two, and I did that summer and talked to the students he had in; he had groups of students. Sometimes they were with parents, and they asked some questions, and I went, oh, two or three times maybe to some group of students that he had corralled and who were there to come in as freshmen. And they tried to explain to them that they weren't going to have the usual composition help, but they would have some through the writing center if they wanted to come. And so it was left open to them that they could come on their own or they could be referred, that if the teacher suggested that they weren't writing in their classes, that they could be referred to this facility, whatever it was going to be. And we didn't know exactly what kind

of rooms . . . we had one room in Helen White [Hall] the first year.

**Hughes:** How about back in Bascom the original year; it was on the third floor?

**Steward:** It was up on the third floor.

**Hughes:** What was the office like; can you describe it?

**Steward:** It didn't have an office. I had an office down the hall, by that time. The very first year I was there Bill and I and this young man who tutored the journalism students and Karl Kroeber<sup>25</sup> at that time was up there—we had offices up on the top floor, which was the fourth floor. Kind of nice; we could walk out onto the roof up there and look at the sunset if we wanted to or the sun over the lake, but they were little offices; we didn't have enough space—that was for sure. The second year I was down on the third floor near this classroom that was down the hall. And I went and taught some of them myself and we'd maybe find some of the other teachers who were there. I don't know all of the teachers who taught that first year.

**Hughes:** Mmm hmm.

**Steward:** But we had different ones, and they seemed to have a good time with it. We had, I suppose, the roots of the . . . Well, I think we called some of them "Essay Test Writing" or something like that, and we tried to help the student get able to write this three or four, whatever it was, coherent paragraph [Laughs.] on his own. And the ones that perhaps the SAT would like to test him on before he comes to school. And that's . . . it grew. I used to say that it was Topsy, you know the story in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Topsy says she —just grew.

**Hughes:** [Laughs.]

**Steward:** I think it just grew; it caught on. And it took a while. Not every student felt that he had help. I, we sent out student questionnaires—not the first year; we didn't have that kind of record keeping, but when we had better record keeping, we sent out questionnaires—to find out what the attitude was, and we always got a few back who didn't like what they had. They either didn't get along with somebody, or they didn't feel they got the help they wanted. I always had a little suspicion on one or two—they didn't have to sign them—that perhaps they wanted to lean a little more heavily on the TA than they could, that they wanted to get the paper written for them, and I suppose that was true sometimes. But also we got, proportionately, we would get ten times as many accolades as we did criticisms. And I would guess that that is still the way the lab works, that if you send out a questionnaire, you get more accolades than you do the criticisms.

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25 Karl Kroeber was a faculty member in the Wisconsin English Department who specialized in the English Romanticism and American Indian Literature. In 1970 he left to join the English Department at Columbia University.

**Hughes:** That sounds right. Was there a formal proposal, a written proposal of some kind to create the Writing Center?

**Steward:** Not that I remember. I don't think anybody . . . we didn't vote one through the . . . they may have voted through the department to change the freshman requirement; I don't know that. You see, I was there that year, that first year, as a visiting instructor, and so I didn't go to anything that voted, probably. By the second year I did. And if they changed it in '68-'69, before the '69 fall came in with the module, then I wouldn't have been in the voting meeting. And I heard about it afterwards.

**Hughes:** I think one of the things you were so successful with as the Writing Lab grew was building a strong relationship with the college administration in South Hall. Were there early conversations with associate deans or with the dean at the time about the creation of the Writing Laboratory, do you remember?

**Steward:** That I don't know. That I simply . . . I wouldn't have been in on those early conversations.

**Hughes:** OK.

**Steward:** It, to me, it was a kind of assigned duty, and—the first one—then that happy accident. And for many people, it was a happy accident, not just for myself, but for others.

**Hughes:** Yes.

**Steward:** And I think that, I think it was a surprise to . . . it was never a surprise to me because I watched the students getting help. I don't think I was ever surprised that more came because one would say, "I told my friend," and we would hear that. But we didn't have complete records on the attendance and on that sort of thing until about 1972-73.

And one reason we didn't have complete records then is that we didn't have faculty assistants, and I know there were proposals by the time I got to asking for faculty assistants and that sort of thing because that chiefly came out of the fact that, the need for faculty assistants, out of better record keeping. And the TA's probably couldn't work more than a few hours a week. I don't know how many hours a TA works now a week.

**Hughes:** It's fairly similar to what it was initially from what I've read in your ADE article<sup>26</sup> about staffing and hours. I think you said in there that the standard was about nine hours a week . . .

**Steward:** Something like that.

**Hughes:** . . . of teaching or tutoring in the Writing Lab, and today it's more typically six, sometimes nine. The six combines well in terms of an overall TA appointment with a writing course, which is a 40% appointment.

26 "To Like to Have Written: Learning the Laboratory Way." *ADE Bulletin*, vol. 46, Sep. 1975, pp. 32-41.

**Steward:** Sure, if they're teaching a 201 or something?

**Hughes:** 201 or 100 . . .

**Steward:** If they're teaching something else, then they can combine it with that. Well, I think nine would be the extreme top any time. And if a TA had other duties and didn't have just writing lab duties, certainly he wouldn't work that much. But, because they couldn't be there all the time, they could do the tutoring all the time they were there, but they couldn't be there to keep records. We needed people at the desk when the student approached, and we began to keep detailed records. And I have said in speeches that I gave to other schools about writing labs and in visits I made to other schools where they were considering starting one or to people who came to see ours—we'd show them the way we kept records. And I'm sure you've got, probably, a little better way now because you could have with the machinery that is there. But . . .

**Hughes:** We still keep largely the same information; we simply are able to do it in a database on a computer, but we used pink and yellow sheets until 1992 and then developed a database that tracks much the same information.

**Steward:** Well, it's that information that you need, and I began to know that we needed it and needed it consistently. I had only, the whole time I was having the Writing Lab, I had only one experience where an instructor came to us and saying we had done too much. Only once, and I expect you've had a few of them in as many as you see.

**Hughes:** This is a question I wanted to ask, especially initially, were there faculty misperceptions about what the Writing Lab was and what it could do?

**Steward:** Not very long.

**Hughes:** O.K. Because it's a common story on many campuses that when writing labs are created, there are some faculty who assume that all the writing lab does is to clean up students' papers and deliver unobjectionable edited prose to them, and they're unhappy if a student has gone to the writing lab and that isn't the result, or they're suspicious that somehow this assistance with a paper in progress inevitably leads to cheating or plagiarism in some way, so I'm really interested in hearing what the early conversations were like about that.

**Steward:** [Laughs.] Well, I don't think, because we trained the TA's and talked to them a long time before they went to work in the fall—we were very careful to say that it must be a learning experience, and the student must come back again—and I don't think there was much of the feeling on the campus that we cleaned up prose. And I suspect that maybe some of the criticisms we got—I've still got a few of those tables, those reaction sheets—and the kind of thing would be the student who wanted a little more; he wanted his prose cleaned up so he didn't want to answer for it, and I'm sure that was the case. As I started to say, I had only one case when the instructor roared in and said so-and-so's been

here, and you've really written her paper for her and that sort of thing. And I can remember that distinctly, and I was very glad it was a professor in the English Department, and the only time I knew it to happen. And I said, "Well, let's look at our records." And that was when we [tape runs out].

## END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 2. BEGINNING OF TAPE 3, SIDE 1.

**Hughes:** You said before that you can't recall all the names of the teaching assistants that you had, but approximately how many were on staff in the fall of 1969 when you opened the door? Were there two or three . . .

**Steward:** There were TA's only; we didn't have any teaching assistants [*sic*].<sup>27</sup>

**Hughes:** How many TA's did you have?

**Steward:** Maybe half . . . Well, I did . . . and I don't think they came every day. I don't remember that, and I didn't keep records. That would have been entirely up to me, and I was teaching a full load.

**Hughes:** Were you teaching some of those mods or tutoring in the Writing Center?

**Steward:** Oh, yes, well I did a little; I did a few, not a lot, and they weren't doing any of them with the idea that it was connecting with a single discipline. I think almost that first year; in fact, I think it was—I know it was—while we were up in, still in Bascom Hall, I went to some classes. I went to a geography class at their request. I went over there a time or two and talked about essay tests, and I went to some other classes at the teachers' request. They would call and say, "Could somebody come over and give us some help?" Or, "Could Mrs. Steward come over and give us some help with the general talk about writing?" And we'd go and talk about things. I did most of that myself. I don't know that at that time I had anybody who would have felt confident in that, and I don't know that it did a lot of good, but I remember distinctly going to geography and some others, perhaps, that I would remember. But it wasn't numerous visits. It wasn't numerous visits. It wasn't a case of numerous visits. I'm getting my own grammar turned around there a little bit, but you can forgive it, perhaps.

**Hughes:** Do you remember the first weeks of students walking through the door in that room in Bascom and how they found their way there?

**Steward:** I don't remember that. I know that I would go up and sit in sometimes, and I know I went up and talked to the TA's about how many they had, and sometimes we'd have quite a few students. I expect, I don't know just how many; we don't know how many came that year because we had no certificates and no names, and that need for certificates and names is very great, indeed, and

<sup>27</sup> Steward probably means they didn't have any academic staff when they opened; academic staff were hired later.

from where they come. You should have that, too, and why. I used to say this to teachers, and they said, “Well, you know, the students don’t always like to give that information.” And I said, “Well you have to have it for protection for them and you.” And you’ve got to have a record. You don’t have to put down anything bad if you don’t want to, but just have a record of who was here and when.

**Hughes:** When the Writing Lab started, I know you said that for you it was an assignment that you were given. Do you know—was there an initial budget for it? Was there new money provided by the college to fund those TA positions?

**Steward:** I expect that they were funded out of the same allowance that teaching assistants had been paid before. I suspect that.

**Hughes:** The department just allocated some of that . . .

**Steward:** Uh huh. Said allocate some of that to the Writing Lab. I think so, as far as I know. I didn’t ask for more money for anything at that point, and I don’t think I had to.

People, I began to hear a few other places that were trying to do more tutorial writing help in a year or two after that. I remember one of the quarrels, if you can call it a quarrel; it didn’t make any difference to me. It didn’t then. We called it a writing lab from the first, and I think you’re calling it a writing center. And that’s perfectly all right.

It may sound better; it may not. And I think as soon as other people began to hear about it, they became writing centers. I know that one woman from a school, I can remember who she was, she was very critical of us because we called it a writing lab, but she did center; that was a better name for a teaching facility; lab wasn’t the sort of thing, and it didn’t make any difference to me. I didn’t care which it was called from the first, and, but I know that now when I go over to Mason Clinic, I go over to the medical clinic, and it’s a [inaudible]—she thought it sounded too medical. And when there’s many medical facilities called centers today, they’re called labs. [Laughs.]

**Hughes:** I had wondered about the choice of name. Do you recall making that choice? Was it made for you?

**Steward:** No, I don’t think we even recall that. I don’t recall making any . . . I don’t know. I wish I did. I could try to answer you better.

**Hughes:** I think I heard you talk in the past about, or I’ve read things that you’ve published about why you thought the name laboratory was actually a good name. Do you remember this?

**Steward:** Well, I may have said that, but I don’t remember if I did or where it was.

**Hughes:** I can tell you what I remember. It, maybe I’m making this up or its apocryphal, so you tell me whether this is true, that the name lab fit what happened . . . [inaudible].



**Steward:** Well, I may have said it was an experiment, and certainly it was.

**Hughes:** . . . an analogy with the role that a lab plays in a science course. Students will hear a lecture and read a textbook, but then they go in the afternoon to an extended period of time to with the guidance of a laboratory teaching assistant, and actually try out doing the science with the guidance, so that's what I've heard some people say was the reason for that choice of writing lab.

**Steward:** I may have written that or said it either one; [Laughs.] I may have done both, and I don't see anything wrong with it. I know almost immediately some people began to fuss with the word, and it doesn't bother me, but center doesn't bother me either because . . . .

**Hughes:** In my view, in some of the things that have been published in the '80s and the '90s about these names, they've made much ado about nothing. It's what a program does—it's the substance of it and not what that word happens to connote for some people that really matters, and it's actually a mistaken history that occurred. People who are critical of the name lab say, "Oh, any program with a name lab has a bad pedagogy." And that's so mistaken; it's actually historical. Older programs, like Purdue's, like Wisconsin's have tended to have that name, and it's the pedagogy, the staff [inaudible] the quality of the instruction [inaudible].

**Steward:** That's right. That's very true, and I think there's many medical facilities today called centers.

**Hughes:** Did the pedagogy conjure up much of an image that very first year . . . ?

**Steward:** No, it didn't seem to me that it made any difference. The work we did there made a difference. But the name didn't. It just designated work either way you do it. But that was after my first year.

**Hughes:** Do you have any memories, special memories of the very first year or two of the Writing Lab that we haven't had a chance to talk about yet? A story or something that's memorable?

**Steward:** Well that one of the man coming down from [inaudible] English, maybe. But that was when we had records; that was after about 1973. I was almost immediately, however, well, we had visitors almost, quite soon. And, I know, well, some of the visitors were from high schools, some were from other schools. Fairly soon Mary Croft,<sup>28</sup> who was my collaborator on my little book about writing labs, writing centers, we did together, after she became . . . she heard me talk about it at the Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English. And she came down. And we had other visitors; we had campus visitors. We had,

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28 Mary Croft founded the Tutoring-Learning Center at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, which is now named after her; with Steward she co-authored *The Writing Laboratory: Organization, Management, and Methods* (1982)

after we were in Helen White Hall; I don't remember that we ever had visitors up in Bascom. I don't think we did. We probably didn't invite any. And we were much more a facility to help students with, in the modules there although we did a little tutoring, but it grew out of the modules, sort of. And I don't think that we did as much tutoring as we could have at that point; I think it was the second year that we began to. I think in that notice that we sent out that it says something about, that we said something about that we would be moving to Bascom the next year and that was, and that we would have the facilities for it. And we did. There we had tables, and we had chairs, and we had other things that we didn't have the room in Bascom Hall; it was small and it accommodated a group better than it would have. Many students requested things of that sort.

**Hughes:** How was the Bascom room furnished? Do you remember . . .

**Steward:** That room?

Hughes. What did it look like? I know you said it was small

**Steward:** Well, it was on the North side, I know that, and it was just a classroom type room.

**Hughes:** Was it used as a classroom during the day and then became the Writing Lab at 4:00 or did . . .

**Steward:** No, I don't know that we had a class in it during the day. I think it was, but at least we had it all afternoon, and we began to stay open a little longer because of requests, and people, as I said, with the incoming students, sometimes parents and students were both worried about the writing that they would have to do. I think they were worried about the writing they were going to do for 101, too. They came because they knew they weren't experts and that they would have a little trouble. And, but, it worked, and almost magically. I don't know—I can't say it was due to any one thing. I think it was due to the fact that we were giving help and that people needed it and wanted it, and usually they came seeking it, and we tried to give them back what they wanted. And what they needed. Both. And I'm sure that was true of the classes I went to. They wanted somebody to come and talk about some specific kind of writing, usually the essay test. And that was the, after all, high school teachers don't give enough essay tests. They don't want to read them, and, well, some do, but they can't read them, enough of them. If you have high school students, three or four classes a day and thirty to thirty five students in a class, you can't read a lot of essay tests. Some teachers don't know what to expect on one anyhow.

**Hughes:** So students got to college and faced a lot of essay tests and needed help.

**Steward:** And they get to college and here's the essay test. And I can sympathize with the students more than anybody else. I think I always have. I gave a lot of essay tests in my English classes; I always have. And, of course, with

AP classes I particularly did, teaching high school, because I knew they were going to face that on the placement test.

**Hughes:** Um-hmm.

**Steward:** And one time I had a girl who wanted to, to go somewhere out East to a school. I met her professor later at something I was at; we talked about it and he said she was . . . passed her essay, her section of the placement. He said I always thought she would analyze a poem; he couldn't even tell, and that's good, but that advanced placement test at that time had a big section of essay tests; I've got some old samples. They were asked even to analyze a poem they'd never seen—a poem that they chose rather deliberately as one that they were pretty sure the student wouldn't have seen. It wasn't Wordsworth or Keats. And they were asked to write quite a few answers about that poem and then to write about it in an essay at the time. And if a student could do that, they could go to college and feel secure, but they felt insecure. Students still do with writing. Probably always will. [Laughs.]

**Hughes:** Let me ask one more question about staffing, and then we'll take a break. You talked about those initial TA's and how many you recall there were. Do you recall where you got them? How you found those particular TA's? And, actually, it was Allen Einerson who had been a one-time TA in Madison Writing Lab who now directs a wonderful writing lab at the University of Wisconsin at Whitewater who wanted me to ask you about that—where you got your first TA's.

**Steward:** The first ones I got because they were assigned. I think they may have asked for it. I don't know. I didn't screen them. I didn't have that opportunity, and I don't think that . . . I don't know how soon I did. In fact, I think, by and large, it was a TA request, not my request because most of the time I didn't know that TA well enough to have screened them, and Allen Einerson was a marvelous TA; he's done a good job, and I'm awfully glad he has it—it's still going down there . . .

**Hughes:** He not only directs a wonderful writing lab; he directs a whole tutorial program on academic subjects.

**Steward:** Good. Well, that's, that's a spin-off, too.

**Hughes:** That's right.

**Steward:** Because when we began to do modules, we began to work with more subjects, and other courses. That's a spin-off, partly of the Writing Lab, and it's a spin-off partly of going out to talk in those other classes. If we went, for instance, and talked in another class and did a good job of it and convinced them that we had a module that would help over there for the student, they'd send students, and the students would come because we told them they were classes themselves. And some of us did that. There were a few of us that did

that—not very many. It was mostly that I did, and that Abbie McCann did when she was there. She went to classes—quite a few—but most of the time we didn’t ask other people. They were busy in the lab. And I didn’t screen the lab assistants. Do you now?

**Hughes:** The TA’s who want to teach in the Writing Lab? I have them come and do a short interview,

**Steward:** Do you? Well, that’s a good idea.

**Hughes:** I let them know that if they’re interested in teaching in the Writing Lab, I expect them to have certain teaching experience, to have a successful teaching record within the department, and I look at the observation reports from their classes and the students’ evaluations, and then I ask them to come and meet with me for fifteen or twenty minutes.

When we resume this later, I wanted to ask you to talk about what you see as important traits in a writing lab teacher.

**Steward:** Well, I think there are definitely some important traits. I never did have the opportunity to screen them in that way, and I don’t know whether I would have had time to anyhow; after all, some of the time I was teaching two classes.

**Hughes:** That’s a lot. I just wanted to ask this last one about the staffing. Did you as the Writing Lab developed and grew ever consider other possible staff for the Writing Lab besides the academic staff that you ended up hiring that I’d like to talk about later, but did you ever consider faculty as tutors, for example, or undergraduates as tutors, the way many programs have?

**Steward:** We, I saw laboratories off and on when I visited where they had successfully used undergraduate tutors and some where the other faculty came in quite often. Not to teach usually, but maybe just to look. And I could, many places didn’t have the advantage of TA’s we did, didn’t have that number. And they could use student tutors and train them, and the director could do that, but the ones I saw that could do that were in smaller schools, not in as big a school as Wisconsin, and it takes (and I’m sure you know this very well) that it takes more training, and takes more training time, and we didn’t try to start it in the lab while I was there because I didn’t have the training time to do it. And I had no training time allotted that way. I did have a training time for the TA’s, but not to work with undergraduates. And I think it’s perfectly all right when you can do it and when you have the training time to do it.

**Hughes:** O.K. Why don’t we pause now and take a break?

**Hughes:** One of the most distinctive features to us of the Madison Writing Lab is that in addition to the TA’s who do the teaching or tutoring there, and in addition to the director, there’s a really substantial strong, stable group of academic staff who teach in and help administer and bring continuity to the lab.

These are people who are in these as career positions, and I've come to believe that that's a very important part of the Madison Writing Lab's success and its growth, and I've had many writing center people from other campuses ask about the development of the staff. Could you tell me whether you, at first, were able to hire some academic staff?

[Tape becomes garbled at this point; the following are audible fragments.]

**Steward:** After all, a TA worked 6-9 hours a week [indistinguishable] time. One didn't work as many hours as another did. In fact, [indistinguishable] to a student where they felt like they had assessed the need and assigned the TA to the right person, and the TAs appreciated them, too . . . I would like to say, however, that I think at the University of Wisconsin that we have been very fortunate that TA [indistinguishable] academic [indistinguishable] because at many schools almost all the tutors are trained undergraduates. They're more peer group people, and know that they're didn't work as many hours as another did. In fact, [indistinguishable] not to devalue what you've done; I think it's very good, but you've done a lot of [indistinguishable].

**Hughes:** When you first recognized the need to hire some academic staff, was it difficult to get the funding for that?

**Steward:** I think that we had very little trouble. You know, I have to say that I had an awful lot of good will. I had, let's call it the blessing of the chairman who had come in, and we had very little trouble. And then we had a good friend in Dean Cronon<sup>29</sup> who recognized rather early, he recognized the work the lab was doing and knew that students were pleased overall with us and I think that, that it was [indistinguishable] because of the situation [indistinguishable]. And I can't say that we ever had big turndowns on budget. We really didn't. Now a person might if you bridged too far, but they knew that we needed that academic staff. I was there hour after hour; they knew that, too. And I didn't mind being there long hours; I still was, but it couldn't go on quite the way it was, and the record keeping and the assignment of the TAs—not that they assigned certain ones to everybody, but they could look around and say, "Well, you could see Mr. So-and-so in a little while." And that helped a great deal for the people who were there in the academic staff. And it was important to have them. They weren't highly paid to begin with. I think they may have gotten more later. I don't know about that. You know, I've never delved into it. That was an arrangement that the offices could make, the chairman and the assistant chairman, and I never had to, and I happened to know the women who, well, knew one of them at least, and when we added the help for the graduates, the department knew that we needed that, and I think they thought that overall it gave a good image, and they

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29 E. David Cronon was an historian and Dean of Wisconsin's College of Letters and Sciences from 1974-1988.

were pleased with it. I think that was the case.

**Hughes:** When you hired the initial academic staff in 1973, how many positions were there?

**Steward:** There were two, two. And I hired two people that I'd had in class, and they both were people who didn't want to work the long hours; they had family. Well, one of them did, and the other one didn't want to work the long hours that would be required for public school teaching, but they were good teachers in that I knew how they worked. They'd been very good in class, and those two divided it up, and there were a few hours that might not have been completely covered. I was there some, too. And, but they were there and doing their job, on the desk.

**Hughes:** And these two initial positions—were they full time, both of them?

**Steward:** No, not full time. I can't remember that TA's, they . . . it wasn't long, though, until we had enough academic staff to have someone there on the desk all the time, at least. And that made a difference. I do think, though, that having TA's who were far along in their work, and I had a chance in the summer that last week before school; they met, and we trained a little, and they met the academic staff, and they all worked well together, and I think by that time it was necessary, and I think that that was part of the development, one thing that kept us steady. The department knew that.

**Hughes:** But to recap what their responsibilities were actually: they sat the desk, scheduled appointments, matched students with particular TA's, solved problems that would come up and respond. Did they, and they did the record keeping for the lab?

**Steward:** Well, they did some of it. The TA who helped the student wrote comments about what they did, what was done in the session, but at least the TA staff, the staff people could see that it was back in the file, and it was a critical record.

**Hughes:** Did they also teach or tutor?

**Steward:** They did a little, but not, not unless they found a need to; they weren't, they weren't given regular assignments in the teaching. We soon, though, began to use them in the mods, and that was a kind of branching out, and when they could do the modules, I tried to help them do the right thing. Juneey Good wasn't there long; we had other people, and she moved off to Arizona or somewhere with her husband, who was a graduate student too, and then after a year or two we had other people, but some of them were very capable of handling mods, and some were not. As you know, we had Mary Fern, who was very capable, and I gave her the original, the assignment to the nursing school. And she and I talked a great deal about helping the nurses because they wanted help. We had one little nurse—I don't know what year she was in—come in one

time almost in tears, and she said, "I didn't know when I took nursing that I'd ever have to write." And they were having to write very set things, and Mary was a very big help to the tutors, and she liked to do that. It was something that appealed to her, and then she did it well because of liking it so well.

**Hughes:** So there were those two initial adjunct staff positions and then what were the next ones . . . ?

**Steward:** We got the graduate tutors. They were definitely part time. They were part time; most of them were part time, and I don't know; it wasn't hit and miss at all. But we had to have somebody who could help the graduate students and who could make the adjustment to the different academic fields. We didn't have the different disciplines with those graduate students, and they had pretty special needs, and we really couldn't help them in the regular lab. So those positions, and I don't know; I think you've increased hours with those people, but we didn't have them full time.

**Hughes:** Do you remember about when that was that you were able to hire those additional academic staff to work with graduate students in those positions?

**Steward:** Well, we had them not long after I got the other academic staff.

**Hughes:** OK. So near '74 . . .

**Steward:** It wasn't long after that, but I don't know the exact year, now. I may have that in some of my records.

**Hughes:** Were Mary Burkhold and Joyce Sexton the original people in those positions?

**Steward:** Yes, they were the initial ones. And Mary Burkhold has stayed all along; Joyce Sexton had become an editor by then.

**Hughes:** No, Joyce is still there.

**Steward:** Oh, is she still there? For a while she was doing some editing on a scientific magazine.

**Hughes:** That was Mary.

**Steward:** Well, they both have.

**Hughes:** Maybe they both have.

**Steward:** They both have.

**Hughes:** Uh huh.

**Steward:** Because, and Joyce was very busy, too. She has a book out since then, a little one on Shakespeare, Shakespeare's Women [*The Slandered Woman in Shakespeare*], a very fine little book. I have a copy of it.

**Hughes:** Uh huh.

**Steward:** So they've been, they've been mainstay. I didn't know Joyce was still there. You must greet them for me; I like them both so much.

**Hughes:** O.K. You mentioned the success you had in getting the funding

for these new academic staff positions. That leads to a question I wanted to ask about the dean's support. You mentioned Dean David Cronon and his interest in the lab and his support. Joe Wiesenfarth<sup>30</sup> wanted me to ask you—he's a former chair of the English Department—given what was going on across the campus of the college in the 1970s and given how large the College of Letters and Sciences is, how did you manage to get the dean to take an interest in the Writing Lab and to support its growth?

**Steward:** Well, that's a good question. Maybe it's happy accident again. But it wasn't—Joe knew Dean Cronon. I think, in fact, sometimes when we wanted more TA's and did things, they'd say, "Well, let's ask Joyce. Maybe she can talk to the dean." I didn't talk to him directly very often; I didn't need to. I knew Dean Cronon, and he was the big benefactor of the lab in every way. I knew him in . . . after Ednah died I took over the office of secretary of Phi Beta Kappa, and some member of the Phi Beta Kappa organization has to be the secretary. And being secretary involved doing quite a lot of work again. I had some secretarial help with it, but it was a lot of work. And I met and knew Dean Cronon best, maybe, through some of that work because he was a very active member, and some other people were, too. But I also belonged to the Madison Literary Society, and I got to know him there, and I think he trusted [me]. . . .

### END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 1. BEGINNING OF TAPE 3, SIDE 2.

**Hughes:** You want . . .

**Steward:** Well, I think he'd [the chancellor of the university] been there a couple of times; I know his wife came a time or two. And, just to see things. Actually, one day I was startled by, greatly, when I looked up, and here was Chancellor Young walking into the Writing Lab.

**Hughes:** Wow

**Steward:** But I'd had Jill Young in high school, his daughter, and he knew me and he walked in and he said, "Well, I have to come over and see what kind of work you are doing over here." And here he was. He didn't stay long, but these people . . . I don't know how they heard about us. I didn't write pleas for money. If it was, the request was made for additional help or anything, it was done through the department chairman, though he didn't stay long, and I think presented to them in that way, and they were very good to us. In fact, they gave us our first tutor when other people couldn't get it. And that was a fortunate thing too. I may have told you that before.

**Hughes:** Uh huh. We've not talked about that.

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30 Joseph Wiesenfarth is now Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Wisconsin.



**Steward:** We've not talked about that? Well, we got a computer because of the Journalism Department, actually, to help the journalist students with their editing problems, their techniques of refining prose. That had been, always, a good relationship. The relationship between the journalism department and the Writing Lab started, of course, with that young man who was, or whatever young man was a tutor up in Bascom Hall when—I did tell you about that—that we had this relationship. And then one of my good TA's, Marjorie Smelstor, worked with them a great deal, and Marjorie and I wrote a little article for the *Journalism Educator* about the work between the two, our work and the journalism department. And they were pleased with that and it . . . In fact, I'm not so sure but what they arranged or they asked us to do that or what happened, but it received a little publicity, and (in their circles), and the journalism department needed more help with the refining of their prose. So we got this, we got a computer that went into the main frame, and that was before the day when we all have them, and Joyce Sexton, one of the graduate tutors, wrote the raw material for it, and a man over in the computer bank, or whatever it was called then, the main, wherever the main frame was, came over and worked with us a little and told us what we should use. He was very much interested in how we were working. People just got interested. Luckily, they just found us and got interested. And so we were, I don't know, I didn't push it very hard, but it went where it should go.

**Hughes:** Do you remember about when the lab got that computer that was connected to the main frame? Was it later seventies, would you guess?

**Steward:** Well, it was several years before I left.

**Hughes:** You left in '82, so . . .

**Steward:** Yes, I don't know. It would have been in the seventies, somewhere, but Joyce Sexton might be, if she's still teaching graduate students, she might be able to tell you when it happened.

**Hughes:** I'll ask her.

**Steward:** I don't think I can tell you. I should have kept some of those dates, but I didn't, and to keep it . . . I tell you, I was too busy, Brad, to keep all those things, [laughter] to write it all down, and it takes time to write those things down.

**Hughes:** You mentioned Chancellor Young. I know that the Writing Lab was based in English in the College of Letters and Science and that the proper source of funding for the lab was always the College—two TA's, academic staff, and faculty budgets. How much, how many relationships did you have with Bascom or central campus administrators? How much contact with them about the lab?

**Steward:** Well, I didn't have a lot of times. We did, when we started to

help so many nursing students and many pharmacy students—the pharmacy mods for, they requested that we help them with the writing. I think that was about the time—that was early on. I think about that time they were beginning to write a lot of these information things you get with your medicine when you go to the pharmacy, and they wanted good clear writing, and they were practicing that. In fact, I know it was early in the lab history, and it may have even been in the first three or four years—I think it probably was. But we worked with pharmacy students, had pharmacy modules for them, and they, those departments, because they were in health sciences or not at all in our budget, did give us some money a few times and were asked to give some. I don't know, that went through the administrative offices, and I don't think I needed to bother with it, and maybe they felt that I was better off not to. If we just got down the hall there, and [the English Department] improved our needs and our work, that was the main thing, and then they handled the budget. I made a request or two; one of them got immediately granted, and the other one I don't think did, but that was perfectly all right. And I'm not sure whether that was through the lab or [English] 250 [Women in Literature], however, and I can tell you that in a little bit.

**Hughes:** Do you think the home for the Writing Lab of the Madison campus made sense within the English Department than in the College of Letters and Sciences? As opposed to a campus-wide program . . .

**Steward:** Oh yes, I think so, and that was one speech I gave when the ADE met in Madison. I came back to give a speech that they requested about that. Why—they asked if I would talk on why I thought that the Writing Lab was at home and was properly based in the English Department. And I had fun with that talk. I worked hard on it, getting it ready. That was a year after I was, a year after maybe, you came, wasn't it?

**Hughes:** Yeah, we were on that panel together . . . [inaudible]

**Steward:** Together, we were on the panel together—that's right. I've got that date—those dates, then, I have on the manuscript over there, and that one I can give you. And it's, that was, it was a good thing, and I feel it is at home there. I know our [indistinguishable], and, of course, a lot of them are campus wide and are funded some other way, but I would have to say that any lab in any school is going to have to be funded where you can get the money, and sometimes it's fortunate. Because we started in the English Department, I think we took roots there and grew and flowered there, to carry out my metaphor, and I think it's flowering still, and I'm happy.

**Hughes:** When I think of the priorities for an English Department in a research university like the University of Wisconsin, I think that it must have been difficult to get the department to support the Writing Lab, or many

people assume that it would be. Would you talk a bit about to what extent the department and its faculty as a whole were interested in this venture and supportive of it, or was it a smaller core group of faculty within the department that was?

**Steward:** Well, it wasn't difficult, really, for me. I went to one school as a visitor—it will remain nameless—where they were trying to start one, trying to start a lab, and they weren't having any success, and it was an interesting little trip. I saw the university, talked about it. And they were hoping—they didn't have TA's; they didn't have the corps of TA's that we could tap, as we could with the big graduate school—but they were hoping that it would be a way to employ some faculty wives. And that was what they were looking at as a potential staff. And I don't know whether they got it done or whether they didn't, but I was a little doubtful whether that was the way to go or not. Now we were lucky in, we're a different situation because we have that big pool of TA's. And, after all, it's to the advantage of the whole university to have the TA's employed.

They come there as graduate students, and they need to fund them, too. But, as I say, we got some money from Pharmacy and from Nursing School a time or two. You know, I paid very little attention to money. I did my work and didn't worry about it. And I don't know but what it came partly because we did our work and didn't worry about it.

**Hughes:** [Laughs.] That's a good point. Of the faculty in the English Department, were there some who were especially interested in the lab and were involved with it in some way in addition to you?

**Steward:** Well, there were a lot of them who came down to see what was going on. I can remember that that often happened. They'd drop in to see what was going on. And, of course, their TA's could tell them. The TA's worked with 207, and they worked with—there were TA's in that course—and they knew their own TA's, and if the TA's worked part time in the Writing Laboratory, I think that would carry over, and, for the most part, though, once in a while somebody would just drop by and see what was going on. And there were a good many faculty who did that over the years, and it was just a friendly gesture, and sometimes, I suppose, a little curiosity, but mostly a friendly gesture. I didn't feel unfriendliness on their part.

**Hughes:** That's one thing I wondered. I hear from writing center people on many campuses that occasionally they'd have some fairly vocal opponents who simply don't believe in writing labs' pedagogy or don't think that's an appropriate use of resources, and they can be fairly active in their opposition to our commitment to a writing lab. I wonder if you ever faced any of those kinds of challenges or opposition?

**Steward:** No, I don't think we ever did. But, of course, we were fortunate.

I can see that that could happen in many schools. They couldn't get one off the ground and started sometimes, and I don't know, but if you want your students to improve, and you want to fund their improvement, why, I think it's been a good thing for the University of Wisconsin. There's no doubt of that. And I'm happy that it has been because I didn't want to walk away and feel that there wasn't something good that was going on.

**Hughes:** This next question takes us back a little bit to something we talked about before the end of the required composition course. Do you think, Joyce, that the lab would have been created if the freshman writing requirement had not been dropped?

**Steward:** That's a hard question, and I don't know. I do know that because of the link with 207, they did more writing, perhaps, that—more students took 207; they took it for their humanities credit, and that was one blessing in that course. They had a full-time faculty person who was a good lecturer most of the time, liked the course, pretty much from the start, I think, and they had a TA in this little section which they broke up into some, and that would perhaps have called for a smaller lab connected with it. Whether or not it would have reached the size it has and reached the campus-wide spread that it has I don't know, and that would be hard to say. However, because other departments got interested in this, I suspect that we would. After all, people ask me and then ask others—and ask me to send others—to speak to them. Abbie, for instance, went down quite a while to the engineering school, and I went to Econ to work with their TA's on how to correct papers several times. We did some work with their, the papers they did in their initial courses. And sometimes, and this is appropriate to something that you mentioned further back in our tape, I talked to them a little bit about making a clearer assignment.

I think many teachers get the papers they deserve because they haven't made a good assignment. And that's something that you really can work quite a lot on with teachers over the school. But, I don't know, I think, and we worked with Pharmacy early, as I said. They asked us sometimes if we had room enough, partly, I suppose, because we started with the modules. And they knew we did, and it was open.

**Hughes:** So it sounds like you think that perhaps the lab might not have started at the same time if that freshman writing requirement had not been dropped, but the English [Department] would have started one to support the writing in the literature courses, the intro lit courses, and then as other departments became aware of what the lab could do for students and faculty, the support would have been there.

**Steward:** I don't know whether we can make that kind of generalization about it. Certainly, the dropping of the freshman English course required

something that was an offer—to say that this is something to smooth it over. And I was handy, and it was, “Joyce can do that.” [Laughs.] And I loved doing it, so why not? Does that make sense to you?

**Hughes:** It does make sense to me. You said you loved doing it, which makes me want to ask about writing lab pedagogy or conferencing techniques. In the 1991 alumni association magazine article, you were interviewed by the reporter and talked some about the beginning of the Lab, and one of the things you said there, and I’ve seen this in your ADE publication about the development of the Writing Lab at Madison, you said that the lab from the beginning was determined not to be a token, “We never just corrected sentences. We asked, for example, what’s this paper all about? What are you trying to do?” Tell me some about what you trained TA’s to make their priorities in responding to student papers, and what were important pedagogical principles for this individualized instruction?

**Steward:** Well, I think there’s, I believe very strongly in the principles of paper correction that Ednah Thomas taught me. And some other people taught it to me, too, but Ednah reinforced it all on the line, and she had taught that to teachers for years, and I was part of the . . . but I was one of her great disciples. And certainly I think that when you start with a paper, you look at the content, you ask about the purpose, you want to know what the student’s writing, what, what his requirement is, what was the assignment if it is on an assignment, and some of those things that are important, and I think they are just sound pedagogy for any class in the . . . for perspective teachers and pretty much it’s the same things I taught people in 309 and sometimes developed them a little further and carried on. And it’s a refinement of those same things, and that’s what we tried to teach the TA’s when we did our initial meetings and in workshops, and we tried that with, to watch and see that they did that. We weren’t just a paper-correcting machine. We weren’t a spell check, in other words. And, not that I believe in spell check; have you seen that little poem about the spell check?<sup>31</sup>

**Hughes:** Yes, I have.

**Steward:** And all those funny things. Well, today we’re getting a great deal of the use of things like that, and on TV I see—on these little headings that run on the bottom of the television—I’ll see a wrong word time after time, and it’s because they run it through a spell check, and nobody has read it. And that is distressing to me. I don’t want something of that sort coming out. If our children are not reading, and they’re just looking at television, how are they going to learn? And I think that’s true. But I don’t know. It’s a, it was, from the first it was, it was succeeding. It was helping students. Not always, but enough.

**Hughes:** Let’s focus on larger issues first, on purpose, audience, assignment,

31 Available at <https://www.thoughtco.com/spell-checker-poem-by-mark-eckman-1692348>.

**Steward:** Organization . . .

**Hughes:** Organization, some before focusing on sentence level concerns or word issues is a perfect description of the priorities that composition in the past 30 years has made central, and it sounds like you were advocating all the things then when the lab opened in 1969 that are absolutely standard contemporary writing center practice. And there's, I think, an easy misconception in a lot of writing center/writing lab literature that earlier programs were drill and skill and sentence level mechanics focused and that they didn't follow this model that . . .

**Steward:** Well, it was because they didn't have either directors or teachers who were ever given that refinement to stress that sort of thing in the teaching. And, because that wasn't true when I was a student in college with my teachers. They didn't look at the commas first. And they looked at the content of the paper and how it did what the purpose was intended for. And they helped me. So I suppose I had always had that sort of training to an extent. And I'm very thankful that I did.

**Hughes:** Well, that also suggests that these constraints [constructs?] are a mistake sometimes in suggesting that the enlightened recent past is the only time that there was an emphasis on larger rhetorical issues or larger writing issues first, and that's simply not true.

**Steward:** Well, I think I said when we started to talk—I hope maybe it was on the tape—that too often we thought we re-invented the wheel, and we do, and I think that's true with other disciplines, too, sometimes, perhaps, but with scientific disciplines you may not have that kind of trouble because—I don't know because I'm not a scientist, but—they have so many new things that they've found that are so wonderful perhaps they [inaudible] But it's certainly, with writing, good writing is still good writing—clear, organized, purposeful, that is what people need, and they need to do it in order to communicate clearly. I know that when we started the intersession courses that that was what we were trying to teach these pre-law students, that that was exactly the point of it. And I still think that good writing hasn't, hasn't changed that much. It has changed in style, yes, and there are a lot of things allowed that weren't allowed years ago because they were perhaps too picky, but I don't know, but with our journalism mods, though, with our journalism students sometimes and sometimes maybe with the pharmacy students we needed to stress the mechanics a little more, and that was what we did with that computer program. We taught the mechanics that way and then worked on the other things individually. And that, certainly the computer for you today must pick up a lot of the mechanical stuff that you don't have time to pick up otherwise.

**Hughes:** Ah, but the grammar checking and style checking have some of the same limitations that spell checking does, and parsing natural language is very

difficult.

**Steward:** I'm sure of that, and the student still has to be, well, I think students have to be good readers to be good writers. And, of course, everyone wouldn't agree with me on that [indistinguishable]. I'm hoping that the generation of our children and our grandchildren and great-grandchildren won't be poor readers because I think they need to read.

**Hughes:** So from the very start—is this accurate to say, Joyce—the Writing Lab was not there to edit papers for students, not there to proofread for students

**Steward:** Absolutely accurate. It's . . . we tried to stress that, not that we ignored the need to edit. We asked the student and sometimes gave him materials to help him edit, and he could sit down and study some of those out for himself for a while. We had a lot of materials, and I think one thing that you suggested was did the Writing Lab need a library? And we accumulated a lot of material and added more and added some special direction sheets like Gregg's book on essay tests—that sort of thing, which certainly we, we made materials to fit the cases, and those could be used for different purposes. But students can, they look up a lot of those things for themselves. And they sometimes sat in the lab and did it.

**Hughes:** Here's another question about writing lab pedagogy. Janet Fishbain, who's a long time academic staff instructor in the writing center, wanted me to tell you this story and ask you this question: "In my first year of working at the Writing Lab I was concerned about whether I'd helped the student too much. I talked to Joyce Steward about it, and she looked over her glasses at me and asked, 'Well, did the student need it?' [Steward laughs.] And when I replied in the affirmative, [she] said, 'Well, then you did just fine.'" To me, this is Janet speaking, this says that we can help students at whatever level they are, with whatever their problems are, and in any way that works to help them become successful. First, is that what you meant?

**Steward:** Of course, of course. Exactly. We do have to help with every part of the theme if that's what they need and that's what they want. And, but we don't just sit down and edit it for them. If we're going to teach them how to edit it themselves, we can go over, we can, it's a little like holding his hand and showing him the keys of the piano when you start to be a, to take a piano lesson. You've got to learn that, you have to learn the keyboard somewhere. And I don't think that, and Janet's a wise teacher; she was for me, and she probably is for you. I'm sure she is. And it's good that she was sensitive enough to know that she wanted to ask that question, and I hope I gave her a common-sense answer.

**Hughes:** Did you worry, ever, that some TA's would help students too much?

**Steward:** Yes. Yes. One has to worry about that. But I think with the training

that we did for TA's and the talking we did, and every now and then we pulled things together again and talked about them, and I hope they felt free to come to me as Janet did and to the faculty assistants, if that was necessary, and that they felt free to talk to each other sometimes. I'm sure that now and then a lowly TA who was far too busy couldn't do what the student [needed], and I told you a little about the criticisms that we got, the few; we didn't get a lot of criticism from students, but most of them, I still think, were from students who wanted the TA to do more writing of his paper. He would say, or she would, that, "I didn't get enough help. I went thinking I would get more help." And when they begin to feel that way, it's probably because they wanted something that the TA felt she or he couldn't do. I don't know that for sure because we, these were written evaluations we had that were not signed, and we wouldn't want them signed, and that was about one of the chief complaints.

**Hughes:** Did your views of writing lab pedagogy change over time, during the years that you were over the lab?

**Steward:** No, I don't think so. Has it changed since you've been there much?

**Hughes:** No, I think the core principles are about the same. One of the big debates in the writing center tutor training literature in the past twenty years is about directiveness. How directive should a tutor be in explaining to a student how to revise a paper versus how much should a tutor try to lead or guide the student to those insights for themselves and then to coach or guide them through that process without being too directive about it.

**Steward:** Well, I suppose if you can guide them a ways through the process and then say, "Now come on and show me that you can do it the next two or three paragraphs, that that doesn't hurt too much." But we can't be supposed to do it for them in the future, and certainly we can show them how to revise; that's perfectly natural, but, and show them on one paragraph and then say, "Look at the next one and see if you can pick it up." I think that's a good pedagogical principle.

**Hughes:** So do I.

**Steward:** [Laughs.] We agree.

**Hughes:** O.K.

**Steward:** Yes.

**Hughes:** I want to wrap this up. We're near the end of the tape, and we've done lots today. Just, is there anything else that's on your mind right now that's related to writing lab pedagogy, for example, that we didn't touch on? We've talked about a lot, but is there anything else about pedagogy that . . .

**Steward:** Oh, I don't know. It seems to me that you've hit most of it with your questions. If, I don't know, I think that our TA's usually were friendly and warm and listening, and we had to listen as well as direct. I think that that



was true then, and I hope it's true now. I'm sure it is—that you feel the lab is a friendly place, not something that puts you off. And again I, sometimes, would like to go behind the papers I've seen and say to the teacher, “What the heck did you mean by this assignment? I can't figure out what's wanted here.” And that's an art in itself. As you know, I did some writing in textbooks, and I think maybe that helped me refine my assignments although I had an editor or two who said that, “Joyce, one thing we like about your books is that your assignments are clear, and students would know what they are to do.” I don't know whether they would always have said that or not, but in my classes, I suspect that, unless I were playing a joke—and I've had joke assignments, a few times; I did one in English 250 and you want to ask me about English 250 sometime, you said—but I had an assignment there that was a great deal of fun that I could do only once. Anything that's tricky you can do only once.

Do we have time for me to tell you quickly a story?

**Hughes:** Yes. I think this tape's about to end, but we'll put another one in here; let me stop this tape. I'll put a new one in, and we'll be ready for that story. That's a great cliff hanger for people that will hang on and wait for the next side.

#### END OF TAPE 3. BEGINNING OF TAPE 4.

**Hughes:** . . . gave a presentation about writing labs at the Association of Departments of English Conference in Madison in 1985, that you told visiting English department chairs that you always told people from other campuses that when they were in Madison they were in Frank Lloyd Wright country. [Steward laughs.] And that one of Wright's key architectural principles applies to writing labs. And that is that a good writing lab, like a good house, fits the landscape in which it's placed. Ah, that its structure is organic, that there's no one right model for a writing lab, so on different campuses . . . What led you to believe and insist on that?

**Steward:** Well, I think it's true. Maybe it's an innovation or was then, and a very, and you try things and they sometimes fail, but I don't know, it, that business of “You're in Frank Lloyd Wright country” to start it, a speech, was a kind of relationship that I wanted to establish, that after all, he was somebody who tried new ideas and gave the country new ideas and that that was, that was healthy, very healthy. It's . . . we have to do that in, we've done it very well in a lot of the sciences. Very, it goes on constantly in medical science or I wouldn't be 85 years old. And we know that, but it still, it's part of a, I guess, well, after all, it, they probably, while they were there, went out and saw the Unitarian Church and some other buildings by Wright. But now you have the wonderful buildings down town, which they voted down for a few years, but you have those things,

and they go out to Taliesen or something, and it's just a way to say, I guess, that don't be afraid of a new idea. There're going to be good ones and then there are some that aren't, and that was true with Wright, I'm sure. But I wasn't necessarily trying to compare anything or say any, have anything like that sort of impact. It, the writing lab is a business of teaching; it's a pedagogy, not art, and it's a different sort of thing, but I hope that it wasn't, and wouldn't be, well, insulting to somebody like Frank Lloyd Wright said they were in his country where the ideas were new sometimes. And I think that's what I meant. I remember that ADE; the first speech I gave that attracted ADE was one that I gave at CCCC's, I guess, or National Council—I don't know which; I'd have to look back at that—and I haven't kept very good journals. I should have kept better ones, with some more dates in them, and I didn't. I think I was too busy.

**Hughes:** One of the big developments in the 1980s with writing labs, as it became more widespread, is that there began to be professional associations specifically for writing labs, and there began to be publications specifically for them. Do you remember the beginning of the *Writing Lab Newsletter*?

**Steward:** Well, there is no one model, and different schools can finance them in different ways. The schools differ; after all, when I told you the other day that I got my inspiration at Stephens and my perspiration, my learning to work hard at some other things at Grinnell, I thought that two kinds of education were very valuable to me, and I still think that the models, while they learn from one that you study or go to or have the director come and talk to you about it, and they can learn from examples. They have to adapt any writing lab to the school itself. For instance, I told you that the Mary Croft innovation, which it was up there, when they started a writing lab up at Stevens Point, it was, at first it was just a writing center, but then it incorporated the reading center with it, as I understand. And now it is a learning center, where they work at reading and writing, and there're instructors of both kinds. Well, after all, that's what you do in architecture, too. And it just made a good analogy.

**Hughes:** Good. Do you remember the beginning of the *Writing Lab Newsletter* that Muriel Harris at Purdue edits?

**Steward:** I don't think, I don't remember about the beginning. I did get it a time or two, a few times, but it was quite new when I left, and I don't remember a lot of it. Yes, that was a good thing. It was fine that we could have a newsletter, and know about each other. It's encouraging if nothing else. Very encouraging to know that other people are trying to do the same kinds of things or that they're varying it a little bit. And that's encouraging.

**Hughes:** Good. And then the *Writing Center Journal* began in 1980. Were you aware of that?

**Steward:** It is 1980. I don't know that I was. I don't think I ever saw it before

I retired. I don't know. I was very active in 4 C's, and at that time was director of the Committee on Composition—Commission on Composition—and that was a lot of work. I hesitated when I took that job, but they were having a little trouble, and they wanted me, I guess, and I tried to get along with everybody, and I think I was so busy with that I couldn't handle another outlet [Hughes laughs.] or another input, either one. It was both, because journals are both. They are an outlet for the people who want to write for them, certainly, and they are a way to get information around the country, and they are all good. They all have their place.

**Hughes:** You mentioned that National Council committee. Were there important issues that came before that committee when you were on it?

**Steward:** Well, I don't know. I can't remember all of them, really. There were, there were ideas, and they had people in it who, well, Gary Tate<sup>32</sup> preceded me, and he was excellent, of course. I don't know now, and I was in that spot a little bit after retiring—I had a year or so to wind it down, and it was discussion of different kinds. I don't think there were issues, particularly.

**Hughes:** OK. And as you retired, Joyce, what were your expectations for the future of the Writing Lab at Madison? Do you remember?

**Steward:** Well, I expected it to go on. I didn't think it would die, at all. It was too well established, I hope. And I think was too well established. And I hoped it would go on. I thought that it would go on with the woman who first succeeded me, and then she wasn't, she didn't get to stay in the department, and I think it was probably, well, I don't know that she wanted to at that point, but there were things that, and then the next year they had a kind of interim director who they knew was not going to stay at the campus more than that. But he evidently kept it alive and going, and then they got you, Brad, and they were very fortunate, indeed. I went out; Joe Wiesenfarth was chairman, and I went out and spent a day or two talking with Brad about the expectations I'd had for the Writing Lab, and he was very receptive and it was . . . he took hold of it and made it an even bigger and better venture than I was able to. And it's gone on all these years, and it's still helping students. That's the big thing. And it certainly has been growing, and I don't know whether I thought it would grow this much. I think it's almost beyond our dreams, and I'm very happy for it, happy that it's done what it has.

**Hughes:** Thank you. I wanted to ask a little bit more about one of your major book publications, *The Writing Laboratory*, which was published in 1982. You've mentioned that a couple of times. You co-authored that with Mary Croft from UW, Stevens Point. Would you tell me about where the idea came from

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32 Gary Tate was Professor of English at Texas Christian University and a pioneer in the development of Rhetoric and Composition as a scholarly field. He held a number of leadership roles in NCTE and CCCC.

for that book?

**Steward:** Well, I think it was time for a book. And you know, Muriel had one out about the same time. And so she must have thought, other people were thinking it was time for a book. And all Mary and I did, really, was to put down our philosophy and our, and then our methods of taking hold of it, our management. For instance, one of the things we stressed was keeping good records, and we called it “methods, management, and materials” because we tried to cover the three. And we tried to say what materials were useful in the lab, what we hoped to do was spread the word with that little book, and we thought at first that National Council would publish it. You give a book to National Council; they don’t give you anything for it. But that was all right with us. We didn’t, we weren’t either one looking to make money out of that book. I’d made a little money with earlier ones and that was sometimes a blessing and sometimes too much work, but, on the other hand, this was something we did because we wanted to spread the word, as I said.

And then National Council couldn’t do it and wouldn’t right then; they didn’t think there were enough people interested in writing labs. That’s a bit of a laugh as we go on, and I don’t know whether they’ve been sorry that they didn’t. But I’d been working with Scott-Foresman on other things, and they published it, I think mostly gave it away to people who were starting labs or where labs were, and they published Muriel’s, too. And they did that out of the kindness of their heart, I’m sure, and we appreciated it very much because we thought that, when it got out, it looked good to both Mary and me, and we were happy with it.

**Hughes:** All right. I know it’s been very influential and helped a lot of writing labs.

**Steward:** I hope so, and I don’t want it to restrict them; they should branch out from it. I think they do.

**Hughes:** OK. I wonder how you ever found the time to write these books. You talked about writing on the weekends, and I wonder, did you ever have a sabbatical while you were on the [indistinguishable].

**Steward:** I had one semester after I was at the University campus. I had a leave of absence one semester, and I spent that semester finishing a book that I had started, but I did a lot of work at home. And it got to be kind of, I hope not routine, but it . . . my schedules . . . Really I can’t explain how I did all my work. I can’t, I look back and I don’t know how I did it. I even look back at papers, such as I kept about the Writing Lab and wonder—and Brad knows this because he’s seen the papers—and wonder how I got it all done because it seems to me that I was talking, probably too much, or writing, or teaching, and there were times, as I say, partly because I was a woman alone, I couldn’t, I didn’t have other

demands on me, and, at that time, when I . . . . The first book I got involved with, well, not the very first; the first was a little book, an edition for Riverside, a high school edition of *House of Seven Gables* by Hawthorne. And they had, Houghton-Mifflin had done that. And then I got involved with one of the series of the big literature books for Harcourt Brace, and that book was a wonderful help to me because I got a little money out of it. And they were very good to work with, and through them I had met this young man who went to Addison-Wesley. And I had at that time, with another person, a little book of literary criticism for high school people, and that was—Addison-Wesley published it, but then I went on to do a series called *Success in Writing* with them. I did some other things, though, that weren't the same kind of publications. I kept doing articles for the *English Journal*, and now and then did some reviews for the *Wisconsin Academy Journal* and other things of that kind. I enjoyed working with the *Wisconsin Academy Journal*. I should be taking that magazine still, and I'm not. But various outlets like that where somebody asked me to review something. I did some reviews for *English Journal* that John Searles asked me to do, from the university.

**Hughes:** I'm interested, Joyce, in how important you think it is that a writing teacher write. Is that important?

**Steward:** I think it's important that a writing teacher has written. That thing that we got one time on the campus from Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings<sup>33</sup> who was there to talk, and somebody asked her if she liked to write, and she said she was glad to have written. And I used to tell that and say to the TA's, "Try to make the student glad that he's written." It's something that I think is valuable—to have written or to do what he can or she can, and both really, but I don't know that I think it's necessary that they publish a lot of stuff.

Some of the things that I published were not particularly—well, some things worked real well, and some things don't in that kind of business, and I suppose I'm just as pleased with little things that I did as I am a textbook. The textbooks couldn't be all of what a person wrote. Mary Fern and I did a big survey once with English teachers in Wisconsin, and that was part of a continuing response of high schools, which I always enjoyed very much. I enjoyed the continuing invitations to speak at a high school—went out to a lot of them. And I think that that is important, too. But certainly Mary Fern and I did together a nice little survey for the National Council—of high schools, professors, what they wanted high school students to have read before they came to the university. We got a big kick out of it because they sent this very good list, and this is a little bit amusing, too. And *Huck Finn* was the first one, and the *Bible* was the second.

<sup>33</sup> Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings was an American novelist; her best-known book is *The Yearling* (1938).

And we always laughed because we said we could hear Mark Twain laughing that he had, that he was first choice, and the *Bible* took second place. We weren't being irreligious at all, but it was sort of funny, and some of the teachers laughed when the list came out for use in the high school.

**Hughes:** One of your textbooks that I admire a great deal is the one you did on writing in the social sciences.<sup>34</sup> Would you tell me a little bit about that?

**Steward:** Well, that I finished—we finished it—I really finished it because Mary was occupied in something else by that time, but Marjorie Smelstor, a former TA in the Writing Lab and other things, too, the one at the University of Texas in San Antonio, where I had gone and done a workshop or two in the summer—that was summer school experience, and, it was in the summer, anyway. And that worked pretty well. She and I did that together for materials in it. She was great; she could get some sample papers and things, and did. And that book, I finished that after I retired; I didn't do it before I retired. A lot of it was done after I retired.

**Hughes:** That kind of focus on writing within a particular academic division or area is of very popular area of interest now in the 1990s and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But, as far as I know, there was very little in the way of textbooks or advice to writers about writing in particular fields like that. Where did your interest in writing in the social sciences come from?

**Steward:** Well, it came a little bit out of that intersession course that was in a way—intersession courses in the English Department and others were started just a year or so before I retired, and I don't know, have they gone on, Brad, are there any intersession courses now?

**Hughes:** Not of that type. There are others offered across the university and some literature ones in the English Department, but not that type.

**Steward:** Well, that—we offered that one because there was a need for it, and it was full, and I had a TA to help a little because we went over a lot of papers rather fast, and that was, I think that that idea for writing in the social sciences came out of that, or either from, it might have come from an editor because Scott-Foresman published that, too. And the textbook companies have all merged and gone together. I hope that by saying that I did some textbooks, some of them made some money and some didn't. And the first ones helped me put my boy through college and that sort of thing and were good, but were good for me, too, but I didn't do it just for that. They were fun. They were interesting, and, but there were others people have done out of the department, too. And they weren't the only thing. And they weren't the only thing I did or wanted to do.

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34 Joyce Steward and Marjorie Smelstor, *Writing in the Social Sciences* (1984). After finishing her degree at Wisconsin, Smelstor was hired by U.T. San Antonio.

**Hughes:** I know you've continued to write in your retirement. Tell me just a little bit about when you retired and how you decided to retire that year.

**Steward:** Well, I retired in '82 when I was 65 years old, and I think I was ready to retire.

My family was out in Seattle, and I—my son, my son and his wife and grandson—and I had spent a couple of summers, part of them, just a few weeks each year, and liked the area, and I had built a little house over in Bainbridge Island, where a lot of my English Department friends came to see me. The Rideouts came and the Fields<sup>35</sup> came, and other people came, and I've always had fun knowing that some of those people could come.

But anyhow it was a pleasant place to live, and I was there for a good many years, and I've continued just well, some writing has continued because I spin it off my other interests. I did an article on women who retired alone; that was the first one. It was done for a magazine in Seattle, a Seattle publication, and it was interesting to do. I went around and got some interviews for that, and it was fun to put together because there is a special, well, there's a special concern. There're women who do retire by themselves, and you have to have got yourself a little bit secure, and I felt secure by that time, and ran into some other things. Anyhow, most of it's been for fun. The things I've done have been for fun. I worked with the Commission on Humanities out here on a talk, on the way quilts are used in literature. And that was an outgrowth of my 250, definitely, and because I'd read, I'd started to gather things there, enough to be conscious of it. I didn't have any particular purpose. And then I've gathered together a little book of my poems that I'd done over some years.<sup>36</sup> I still have a drawer full, but they're not like the wonderful woman who left us her drawers full, but I'll leave them there, destroy those I expect, but on the other hand, it's been just pleasure, and as I retired I thought maybe I'd travel a little more. I took a couple of trips, but I'm not a great traveler, and then I haven't been well enough to travel alone, and a lot of the time I couldn't, so I've not done enough of that, but anyhow it been a good retirement, and I'm happy with it, I guess.

**Hughes:** OK. Tell me a little bit about your book called *The Leisure Pen*.

**Steward:** *The Leisure Pen* [Keepsake Publications, 1988] Mary Croft and I did together, again, after we both had done the little bit of, although I'd done some speaking and she'd done some teaching. I'd done some short courses for elderly people who wanted to write their family memories. I think it started partly because Mary had an interest in the senior center that she worked with in

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35 It is not clear to whom this refers; according to the Wisconsin Archives, there was a Professor of Community Programs named Frederic Field during this time period, but no one in the English Department by the name of Field or Fields.

36 *Lamps with Prisms*. Red Apple Publishing, 1999.

Stevens Point, and we both thought it was time that we put our own memories together, and neither of us has finished, as far as I know, and we probably never will, but we were encouraging other people to do that. We have short things at least, have done them, and *The Leisure Pen* we did as a little publication for elderly people. And it's been fairly successful, and we've had fun with it although it's now out of print, and it's scattered over the country. Mary and I had a vacation at the same summer, well, we were both retired. We went down and sat in Florida for a couple of weeks and mapped it out and then came home and each did the things we could and gathered the things we could and put together *The Leisure Pen* and did what . . . it was well received.

**Hughes:** Good. I know that, before your retirement you received two very distinguished teaching awards. In 1978 you won the University's distinguished teaching award, and I know you also won a teaching award from Phi Beta Kappa. How did it feel to receive those awards?

**Steward:** Oh, it was wonderful, of course. You feel nice to be honored, but it's . . . many other people deserve honors, too. I don't, I'm not necessarily the kind who's, who dwells on those things. I am thankful. It's nice to be known and recognized for your work, but that's really . . . your work when it's recognized, it's a little reward, a pat on the back, as we should give students in the writing lab the pat on the back, figuratively, at least. And let them know that they're achieving and doing well at whatever they can do and help them get better.

**Hughes:** I appreciate your modesty about that, and it's so characteristic of you, but I wanted to read just a little bit from Bill Lenehan, the chairman of the department at the time,

**Steward:** Oh, my.

**Hughes:** His tribute to you in May 1978.

**Steward:** Are you sure you want to do that?

**Hughes:** Just a short part. "How does one get to be asked to be a distinguished teacher with this kind of national reputation? In Professor Steward's case, knowing one's discipline thoroughly, being an effective administrator, having apparently endless reserves of energy all helped, but I'm convinced that the real secret is the commitment to help the individual who needs help, whether that individual be the scared freshman facing her assigned paper or the newly appointed director of Harvard's Writing Laboratory coming here to find out what he should do. A scene may illustrate this. I walked by the Writing Laboratory one night about nine o'clock. Professor Steward is still there. She had dropped by to make sure the staff members got out on time at 8:30, and after they left, this boy came by with questions about the organization of a paper due tomorrow. She reported, 'I had to look at the paper. He needed help.' Joyce Steward's distinction as a teacher is that she responds to all of us who need help." What a wonderful tribute!



**Steward:** How good of Bill! It was a wonderful association. If, maybe Brad will let me, for just a minute, say another word of appreciation. I think, Bill Lenehan was always wonderful to work with, and I feel very sad about his early death. And all the others were, too. I think that one reason anybody can do good work is that they have wonderful colleagues. I had wonderful colleagues in the English Department, and I had wonderful colleagues in high school when I taught there, and I had wonderful principles who valued things, and I had wonderful students. I can't say enough about the—you know, we learn from our student, too—and the wonderful students both in the high schools and in the university, wonderful friends out through the teaching community because of the fact that I was in the various organizations. If I named them all, it would take all afternoon. Certainly, beginning, well, all of them. Ednah Thomas was a wonderful mentor to get me started out and a wonderful friend, and Bill and Angelina [Lenehan], Charles Scott, all of them. The whole department was good to me, and I could have been regarded as a kind of interloper, and I never felt that for a minute. I was always welcomed, and they were good, and we were friends. And they were great people to work with, and I'm glad that Brad has some of those same great people to work with because there couldn't be a better reward than having good people to work with. So, and good students to come.

**Hughes:** Great. The very last thing I wanted to ask—those are wonderful closing remarks so I hesitate to add anything more—but I just wanted to ask, you worked as secretary for Phi Beta Kappa for many years, and you've told me about two of the distinguished inductees that Phi Beta Kappa—and since they've been so important to University of Wisconsin history and to Wisconsin history in one case, would you tell us about those?

**Steward:** Well, Ednah had been the secretary before me. And then I willed it to Carol Tarr, who was a wonderful advisor for majors in our department. And it's . . . you have to have a faculty secretary representative. We all had the privilege, when we were the secretary of being sent off to some of the national meetings. And that was very rewarding. [Coughs or loses voice momentarily; tape turns off].

**Hughes:** You were saying that you traveled to some national conferences about Phi Beta Kappa?

**Steward:** Well, that's a, I'm not parading that any more, didn't ever really. . . .

## **END OF TAPE 4, SIDE 1. BEGINNING OF TAPE 4, SIDE 2.**

**Steward:** When the son of our dean, Bill Cronon, who was one of our speakers the year he was elected, and the other that I remember as a, when he was elected, a little. I don't remember him as individually as much as I do, and

he was the speaker at the dinner this year, I guess, the meeting. And he was when he was in high school, or college too, I'm moving him back a bit, and he was a Wisconsin senator, Mr. [Rus] Feingold. And so that's the kind of people you got to see sometimes. I think Carol Tarr did an excellent job of that, and I don't know who's handling it now. Somebody is, I hope.

**Hughes:** Good. Any last comments beyond the ones you already made that you want to make?

**Steward:** Along with the saying that I had wonderful colleagues, sometimes we had some awfully good secretaries. And when I first retired and was trying to get that little book finished or anything else, I used to miss the secretaries. We had June Stone, for instance, for years, who was down in Mr. Lacy's office, and she handled an awful lot of department business. And many others—I could name them, but there isn't time to do that, as there isn't time to name all my colleagues, but if they listen to any part of this tape, I hope they know that I appreciated them very much. And just, it was fun.

**Hughes:** I hope you know how much I appreciate your giving this time to reflect on your career and your life, and it's been a real joy for me to be able to interview you for this, Joyce. Thank you very much.

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## PUBLICATION INFORMATION

Hughes, Bradley T. "An Interview with Joyce Steward." Edited by Susan H. McLeod. The WAC Clearinghouse, 2017. <https://wac.colostate.edu/thomas-steward/interview.pdf>.

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