

Interview with William Oliver  
2/13/08, 11 a.m.  
Kanawha Room

*Interview start time:* 11:02 a.m.

Roy Nutter: Explained Jan Boyles' role as recorder. Explained that information may be made public.

William Oliver: "I will share what I recall and remember. I'll be happy to answer your questions."

*Michael Lastinger: Basic question – You were a member of Heather Bresch's cohort. There were 20-30 students in the eMBA program, and you were divided into work groups, correct?*

WO: Yes.

*ML: Because of your involvement in Heather Bresch's work group, we decided to talk to you. You were assigned to work with Heather Bresch. What do you remember about working with her?*

WO: In group with [REDACTED]. There was another member who dropped out after a semester. Can't remember who that student was. Assigned to work together at the beginning of the first course in the program. Remember working with Heather Kirby throughout first year. In fact, worked one Saturday afternoon at her parents' home [Gov. Manchin] in Fairmont. Had house along the river. "Here I was working alongside this important West Virginian." Father was home at time, working on boat.

WO: Started program in August 1996. Oliver was still taking classes in Summer 1997 – taking classes in May/August. "After the August time frame, I don't recall ever seeing Ms. Kirby again. I do recall quite often other members of the class would ask, 'Has anybody seen Heather?' And no one had any idea, knowledge of what happened to her. None of the professors knew. I don't remember if [Paul] Speaker ever answered the question or not. Most of us assumed that she had dropped out." Oliver attended graduation. [Shows copy of graduation program]. "Her name was in the program. And we [other students] started asking, 'What's going on? How did she do this?'" Doesn't remember her attending graduation exercises.

*ML: Can we have a copy of the graduation program?*

WO: Yes. [Gives Jan copy of program]. "I don't remember seeing her walking across the stage. I don't remember her name being announced." Students were standing in line to graduate and talking about how Kirby's name was in the program. "We didn't quite understand it. From my recollection of 10 years ago, we did not know where she was." It

was not just [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] who talked about Bresch's whereabouts. "There were several students who did not habitually show up for class, and would show up for test time. This was a sore point with us." Many activities in eMBA were team-oriented experiences. Team was down to three people. Other teams lost people who only showed for test time. Made recommendations, class evaluations addressing the emphasis on group work. Stated that it was not a good system if those who did not attend were not penalized.

WO: "I really don't recall seeing Heather Kirby in August 1997. I don't recall seeing her at graduation. I understand her father says that she was there. For many of us who saw her name in the program, we were quite confused."

WO: "A lot of people have asked me, 'Why didn't we say anything about it?'" Reason: busy people, had families, jobs, travel – didn't have the time or energy to question what happened to other students.

WO: One student was admitted to the program without taking the admission test. (Pauses to recall the specific name of the exam). GMAT exam.

*ML: Do you know the student's name?*

WO: Attorney with [REDACTED]. I'd know it, if I saw it. (Looks at graduation program). [REDACTED]

WO: "What alarmed me over the course of the MBA is that it seemed like nobody knew where she [Bresch] was. The faculty had no idea." Not aware of whole story until received call from Post-Gazette reporter. Told that she had been named COO, and they uncovered this. "Frankly, as a WVU grad with a degree in engineering, I sincerely trust and hope this issue will be resolved to the credit of WVU."

*ML: "You received a degree from the College of Engineering. What do you think about the legitimacy of that degree?"*

WO: Earned degree in 1972. Tough courses.

*ML: "You earned another degree from WVU. Do you feel that you did substantial work that demanded rigor to earn this degree?"*

WO: "It's my belief that a lot of graduate programs are easier than undergrad, and technically not challenging to me as an engineer. This course [eMBA] is more inclined toward teamwork." Worked for GE. Lot of experience with team-related projects. In eMBA program – variety of individuals – real estate agents, pharmacy brokers, doctor who had retired. "Wide range of people." Enjoyed the program from a technical standpoint. Some homework was "quite tedious." Did not find MBA as challenging as other degree. But difficult to balance with family – late hours. Told wife that he was thinking about ending program after first year. "But deep within me, I realized that when

I had invested a year of my time, I resolved to finish the program. It was not fun from a family perspective.” Had Saturday classes, travel. “I resolved I was going to complete it, and I’m proud of what I’ve accomplished.”

*ML: Teaches in the humanities – languages. Finds that the real challenge is the investment of time.*

WO: Enjoyed the challenges. Son graduated from Johns Hopkins with engineering degree. Other son is attending Carnegie Mellon for an engineering degree. “We’re a family that appreciates challenges and has a strong work ethic.” Had good experiences in the program. “But the imperative issue is that the credibility of the University be enhanced. The University needs to stand firm that if you give a degree to a student, they have indeed met all the requirements.”

*RN: So you began in Fall 1996. And you say that she disappeared in Summer 1997?*

WO: Didn’t have class in June/July. Started back in August. “Don’t recall seeing her in classes for the fall semester.”

*RN: So you say she stopped attending one year into the 2.5 year program?*

WO: Yes.

WO: (Examines his grade reports). Could probably look at Kirby’s record and work backward and “see where the disappearance took place.”

*RN: Do you have a copy of your transcript?*

WO: No. Just copy of last grade report. Says that has 48/48 hours. Never had reason to ask for transcript.

ML: (Gives copy of Oliver’s transcript for him to review).

WO: “Yes, this transcript is exactly as I remember it.”

ML: (Explains notations on transcript).

WO: Transcript matches with Oliver’s final grade report.

*RN: “Are you certain that Bresch stopped attending in the Summer of 1997 rather than Summer of 1998?”*

WO: Certain. “We wouldn’t have made a big deal about it if she only had one semester. When we got to the last semester, no one inquired about her. So it was surprising to see her name in the program.”

RN: Were the lectures available on tape?

WO: "Not all of them." Couple of courses were computer simulations and not offered online.

RN: Could you guess what courses those were?

WO: ██████████ Could have been ██████████ with the most popular professor in the program – ██████████. Taught ██████████. "She was not in that course at all."

ML: This was in Fall 1998?

WO: Yes. Several courses were ██████████. Know that one of those ██████████ courses was Fall 1998.

ML: You're sure it was Fall 1998?

WO: "I'm sure she was not there. We didn't inquire because we had discussed her the previous year. She had disappeared the whole year before that. As I recall, no one offered that she was in California working on a trial."

ML: I'm going to try to jog your memory. (Asks Oliver about information class by class).

ML: ██████████ ██████████ – ██████████ 1997. Did you take that course?

WO: Yes.

ML: Do you remember who taught it?

WO: "That's one thing that I didn't go back and do. I didn't try to resurrect the names of the faculty." Could try to remember. Some professors were more personable.

ML: If I give you three names, could you pick it out? ██████████

WO: Schaupp. Taught that course as I recall. Not 100 percent sure about that.

ML: In the fall, there was another course – ██████████ ....

ML: For a minute – back to the ██████████ course, in ██████████ do you remember Heather Kirby in that class?

WO: "I don't recall her being in there." Schaupp had project where students were required to build a tower out of newspaper to support a can of Coke. "I don't recall Heather being on the team for that course."

*ML: But you remember the project?*

WO: "Oh, yes. We were wondering, 'Why are we doing this?' But I don't remember her participating."

*ML: Do you remember your other classmates?*

WO: Yes. [REDACTED] Added student from another team."

*ML: Do you remember who?*

WO: No, too long ago.

*ML: In Fall 1997, there was a course – [REDACTED]. You received a grade for that course, correct?*

WO: Yes.

*ML: Do you remember anything about that course?*

WO: Doesn't. Can't remember if [REDACTED] taught that course or not. Doesn't remember who taught that course.

*ML: Do you remember projects from that class?*

WO: Papers. A lot of individual papers. Had provided critique of team process after year one. Changed structure. In second year, more papers, reports, homework. More individual work than teamwork. Structure was odd. On Monday night, for example, would have three hours in [REDACTED]. On Wednesday, you'd have three hours of [REDACTED]. Then the next week, you'd move on to [REDACTED]. "It was tough to keep continuity." Not sure why program structured that way. Hard to shift from one subject to another.

*RN: In the Fall 1997 classes, were the lectures recorded?*

WO: No, but some of the homework was available online. Everyone had modem at time, thought. Not reliable. Some lecture notes were online.

*RN: Not describing much teamwork in the second year. Could someone turn in work and you wouldn't know about it?*

WO: Perhaps. Significant amount of independent study time required. Worked out finance problems. Would need to call/fax other classmates for help. Sent solutions back/forth. For some of the courses, "The exams were not all that easy." Had to be in class to pass those exams. "Even if you were in the class, you would not score 100." In

fall, had class two nights a week. Take more subjects in a semester than a traditional graduate program.

*RN: Lots of [redacted] hour courses.*

WO: Yes. A lot of jumping between subject areas. Lot of papers. Lot of individual work. Gave administrators critical evaluation after the first year.

*RN: There was no ability if you missed class to review the lecture?*

WO: "Don't know of anyone who did that." Classmates would often ask each other for notes. No one asked for [redacted] notes.

*RN: Was that true through the whole program – that you couldn't review lectures?*

WO: Could go back and review posted materials. But not the lecture itself. "Impossible to post interaction." Charleston cohort was live on remote video.

*RN: Is it possible that a Morgantown cohort student could go to Charleston and attend class there?*

WO: Only happened one time. Not the case in the 2.5 year program. Technology was not very good, a lot of the time the Charleston group had no video – only had audio.

*RN: The reliability of the link was poor?*

WO: "Yes. We were pushing the limits of the technology at the time."

WO: Lot of courses required teamwork. Computer simulation. A lot of professors didn't take attendance. "They wouldn't know if you were there or not. The professor doesn't have an idea that if you are missing a teammate or not."

*RN: Could you carry someone who wasn't there by placing their name on assignments? Did that happen?*

WO: With some students. Some people in the program didn't care if they learned the material or not. In subsequent years, several people from [redacted] workplace joined the eMBA program. One student came to him for advice about a teammate who was not equally sharing in the work. "I told her to sit tight and get through it."

ML: Goes through names of faculty for courses.

Capital Budgeting – Jay Coats

Business Law – Linda Sypolt

Economic Foundations – Cliff Hawley

Capital Structure – Paul Speaker

Management Leadership – Rob Moorman

Product Placement – Karen France

WO: “Those names ring a bell. But they were the type of faculty that didn’t stick out.” Did know Dr. Speaker. Came to workplace to recruit for eMBA. Schaupp taught interpersonal skills. Do you show that [REDACTED] taught classes in the first year?

ML: In Spring 1997, taught [REDACTED]

WO: “I remember Heather was in that course.” Had exercise on [REDACTED]. Computer simulation. Eager to finish project and take to professor for review. Another team finished after Kirby’s team. Graded other team’s project first. Kirby joked, “This is just like [REDACTED].”

ML: *Do you remember her in [REDACTED] course? [REDACTED]?*

WO: Don’t recall. Course did not have a lot of teamwork.

ML: *In spring, there was teamwork. In the fall, not as much. Does that explain why you don’t remember her in Fall 1997?*

WO: Perhaps. The first year, worked closely as a group. “We were excited to get going.” Went to her home in Fairmont. All cohort members sat pretty close together in the classroom. She usually sat in the back half of the classroom. Oliver liked to sit closer to the front. “You can try to prod my memory all you want, but I can tell you she was not there. She simply was not there. To be perfectly honest, we joked that she works for Mylan and Mylan bought all this equipment... We gave up asking about her.”

WO: (Refers to newspaper stories). “You would think that Speaker would have known about this situation. I wouldn’t see how this could happen outside of his approval and blessing.” Kirby’s answers in P-G puzzled him.

ML: *“What part puzzled you?”*

WO: “That she didn’t know that she did not have her degree.”

WO: “My perception of Heather Kirby was that she was hard-nosed, rigid and smart. She didn’t take anything. If you’d put her in a boxing ring with a pair of gloves, she’d go around with you. I was impressed that she was a go-getter. She struck me as someone who knew how to play the system... This whole thing could be put to bed [if Bresch came forward]. But it’s in line of what I think of her character.”

ML: *Have you had any contact with her?*

WO: “Not since she disappeared. Although we were in the same cohort, because of her personality and language, we wouldn’t be close friends.”

*ML: I teach in languages. What do you mean by language?*

WO: "Cursing, profanity." Relationship was strictly as a team member. Recommends that panel talk to other members of her group – [REDACTED], [REDACTED]

*RN: Anyone else we should talk to?*

WO: Would not hesitate to talk to [REDACTED] – came to every class. [REDACTED] – works for WVU, probably will not talk. [REDACTED] – attorney for [REDACTED]

Interview ending time: 12:10 p.m.