

Interview with Paul Speaker
1/18/08, 2:30 p.m.
Kanawha Room, Mountainlair

Interview start time: 2:21 p.m.

Roy Nutter: Explained Jan Boyles' role as recorder.

RN: Describe overview of service in the West Virginia University College of Business and Economics.

Paul Speaker: Director of grad programs 1993-1998. Stepped down from director of grad programs, returned to faculty. Offered position, terms were rejected at Stewart Hall. Bob Maust served as interim dean. In 1994, Syd Stearns came as dean. In 1994-1995, put together eMBA program. Fall 1995 was first class.

PS: Took over eMBA program, ran it. Hardesty's first year was Heather's class. Started program with 900 student credit hours (weekend incarnation). Within year, had more than 4,000 student credit hours. [Lee] Deringer came as dean. In March 2001, COB was losing money. eMBA program was way "to make money. It basically runs the rest of the college [financially]." Continued as faculty member. Deringer resigns effective August 2001. Jay Coats appointed interim dean. Steve Sears named to position in August 2005.

PS: In September 2006, Speaker asked by Sears to resign. Has "no relationship with the dean." Described as "very sour." Submitted copies of resignation letter to panel. Did not fill Speaker's vacancy. Hired Cy Logar to act in duties. Increased Logar's salary because of extra duties. Last summer, filled vacancy. Not sure transfer date.

PS: Wants to share recent chronology. "I'm going to tell what I know, and avoid what I think."

PS: On/about Oct. 11, 2007, received phone call and e-mail from Jen Fisher.

RN: What was Jen Fisher's position?

PS: One week before [Garrison's] inauguration. Jen/Craig Walker made phone calls to friends of mine – trying to track me down. Speaker was in class when received phone calls. Also received calls from Jess Mancini and Maria Yester.

PS: On/about the next day, Walker called. Reiterated comments shared with Fisher.

PS: On/about Oct. 12, called Steve Taylor at Admissions and Records. Taylor "went over the details" of Bresch's record with Speaker. Went through transcript. "Were positive it was not an error of Admissions and Records." Knew of problem areas within the COB. "In no way did Fisher, Walker or Taylor ask for an answer [about Bresch's record]."

PS: On/about Oct. 12, had conversation with Jerry Blakely in stairwell of COB. Blakely asked where to find Bresch's records. Papers were to be kept in the graduate records storage room. Never sat down to talk with Blakely. There were electronic files that had grades, plans of study, workbooks. When Speaker resigned from post, left single piece of paper on his desk detailing how to find elements in office, calendar of events for program.

PS: Later on/about Oct. 12, Blakely said he couldn't find records for Bresch. Speaker told Blakely to perform a Windows keyword search for Kirby. In 1999, when Speaker was not in the position, COB wanted to trim back electronic records, clear space on server. Put all electronic files on four zip disks, which were to be kept in storage room. Also bunch of floppy disks. Believes may have been thrown away somewhere between January 1999 to March 2001.

PS: On/about Oct. 14 (a Sunday), Speaker put notes together about Bresch. Sent e-mail message to Bresch. Called her. Agreed to keep records private until "she gave the OK to let the records go."

PS: On/about Oct. 15, put together an amended version of his notes for Walker. Went to Walker's office. Called other COB officials to come to Walker's office. Present in meeting: Walker, Alex Macia, Jerry Lang, Steve Sears, Cy Logar, Blakely and Bill Case arrived late.

PS: Possibility of grade problems. Problem with calendar. eMBA calendar not same as University calendar. Billing also issue. Students were dropped when they had not paid. Problem – company often making payments for students. Mylan was not paying for degrees directly. Rather, reimbursing employees.

PS: Believed that had [REDACTED] of credit that had been completed. Gone through grade changes on blue cards. [REDACTED] class.

PS: At meeting on Oct. 15, Sears was asked to make a decision. Macia to Sears: "not told which way to make a decision, but they needed a decision."

PS: Previously, had lunch with Heather [Bresch]. Also with Leah Summers, who had graduated year before. Coworker at Mylan.

Michael Lastinger: Do you know when this meeting occurred?

PS: Don't know. Doesn't have calendars that go back that far. Probably 1998.

PS: Discussion of lunch meeting – "how do we get Heather to finish." Created two plans of study. Outlined her last semester – remaining [REDACTED] credit hours.

1. At time, two cohorts were in the fifth semester. In the spring semester (1999), Bresch would follow [REDACTED] track and could have finished in spring.
2. Complete degree with [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] to finish these courses. Work with instructors to see how could use her case in [REDACTED]. Students encouraged to confer with instructors.

PS: Example of other student – [REDACTED]. Had accident and used work on his legal settlement for class. Also created a new business. “Fairly common” to have experiential, independent studies. With the trial ending, would figure out how to use experiences toward credit. Put copies of plans in file.

ML: Where is the file now?

PS: “I don’t have it. I believe it was shredded last summer.”

PS: In meeting on Oct. 15, it was clear that Bresch did not finish classes in December 1998. No record of her registering.

PS: Part time MBA program had high level of attrition. Weekend programs had 35 percent graduation rate. Retention was only in high 60s. In March 2001, requested list of all students in program who did not finish. Called all students on the list. Did not call Bresch. Heather was on list of graduates.

PS: At end of Oct. 15 meeting, Speaker’s only direct comment to the suggestion that she had earned a degree in 1998 was, “That is the one thing that we know did not happen.”

ML: Asks for Speaker to repeat his last statement. Repeats statement for the record.

PS: Sears makes decision, based on information, that Bresch had finished the degree in 1998.

PS: “Sears has not sought my advice or counsel.” Only been in dean’s office once since Sears assumed role. Only visit to dean’s office was “the day I was fired.” Only contact with Sears was at meeting.

PS: From Jan. 1, 1999 to June 30, 2001, served as Director of MBA programs.

PS: On multiple dates, Speaker has been contacted by the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. Contacted University’s general counsel.

PS: Received anonymous e-mail. Passed along e-mail to panel. Warns of PG stories to be published. Encourages Speaker to come forward and save his career.

PS: Forwarded anonymous note to Macia.

RN: Asks Speaker to print out properties page of e-mail from GroupWise.

PS: Received from hotmail address. Address: "A Friend" mountaineerphd@hotmail.com.

RN: Asks Speaker to send properties page through campus mail to Nutter.

PS: First contact about media was within hour of inauguration ceremony. Speaker was in Florida. Alum called Speaker's office. Had been contacted by Post-Gazette for list of students in Bresch's cohort – alumni list.

PS: Ceremony is not a graduation; it's a convocation. "It's a ceremony where we say thanks for participating in the program." Typically held two to three days after last class ends. Individuals who are expected to graduate in the cohort are asked to participate.

PS: "I guess she was there at graduation, but I'm not sure." Keynote address delivered by Jeff Jones – CFO at hospital. Thinks can find pictures of ceremony. For each ceremony, COB hired photographer to take pictures. Placed photos in packet that went to all grads.

RN: It's "meaningless if she was there or not."

PS: Post-Gazette tracked down three other students who did not finish.

PS: Found alumni list. Passed to Macia. List maintained by Speaker, updated manually. Information pulled from alumni files. Note next to Bresch's name – notes 1999 graduate. Made last entry into spreadsheet in 2004.

PS: Two cohorts in 1998. Charleston/Morgantown.
Parkersburg/Morgantown/Shepherdstown.

PS: Examples pulled from list. [REDACTED] – student listed as graduate, but did not finish. Transferred to D.C. area for job.

PS: Received another call on Dec. 11 from Post-Gazette. Speaker contacted Macia. Contacted/met with Macia about what reporters said. Agreed "will not talk about records, grades or conversation [with Bresch]." Will talk about process and procedures.

PS: Received another call [from P-G] yesterday. Sent Macia note. Strict interpretation of FERPA. Speaker confirmed his attendance at Oct. 15 meeting to Post Gazette. Denied attendance at other meetings. Was pressed on Mike Garrison's involvement in matter. Said that there was no involvement.

PS: On Tuesday of this week, received request from Liz Vittulo to see if Speaker could assist in finding records for Kirby [Bresch]. Received request through letter in mailbox. Received call from Bonnie Anderson. First request Speaker had received for direct assistance.

PS: Was very careful about what touched in grad program's office. Liz pulled records off STAR/Banner. Bonnie looked through graduate programs files. Ran search that told Blakely to run on Oct. 12. Searched for "Kirby." Liz pulled out names of other example cases – of those "outside normal cohort."

Examples:

[REDACTED]
Entered law school

Last 12 hours were covered by law school credit

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] took new job

Joined Wheeling cohort

[REDACTED]
Took job as hospital administrator

Asked to create three letters

1. Ensure potential employers status on degree

2. Number of completed hours

3. Letter of recommendation

Worked with faculty to complete independent study credit

[REDACTED]
Worked for gas company as engineer

Received promotion to Northern panhandle

Includes two Mylan employees

RN: Asked Speaker to indicate Mylan employees on his notes.

PS: "What was there [in the records] was what I told them would be there."

PS: Hopes that panel has legal counsel.

ML: Assures Speaker that panel has representation.

PS: Had spreadsheets that were updated each semester with grades. First in Lotus 1-2-3. Then upgraded to Excel. For Spring 1997, an "I" was still on the books for business research. For other summer sessions, there were grades in the records, but these were not the courses put on her transcript. Found by Bonnie Anderson.

RN: If we ask for this spreadsheet, what specifically should we ask for?

PS: Ask for CM98 eMBA folder with grades for each semester – Excel file. For the final semester, there's a blank line – didn't take classes.

RN: When was this file found?

PS: Tuesday morning.

PS: On Jan. 16, received note from Sears. Not accused of any wrongdoing. Said there were "innocent mistakes; bad decisions." Logar or Blakely were involved in shredding the files in the summer. Both were told by Sears to take charge of finding electronic records. In the first round, they did not find anything. In the second round, "now they are there."

PS: Recommends that panel request for files today. Every Friday, COB backs up server. Uses backup tapes. "If they are taped over tonight, the information might be lost."

RN: When, specifically, are the tapes backed up?

PS: Changed at midnight.

PS: Details contents of submission to panel.

ML: Did you work with grad council or faculty senate [to get program approved]?

PS: Worked with Bob Stitzel. Admissions/Records fought on course names. Detailed contents of submission to panel.

PS: Worries that image of WVU may be hurt. Especially COB and its forensic accounting program.

PS: "If these are false records, it's hard to tell what damage that this could potentially do."

PS: Documents were shredded. Floppies were thrown out. Search conducted in October that was to be "exhaustive" yielded nothing.

PS: "If laws were broken, [panel] should put into the hands of somebody outside [the University]." Would subject himself to a polygraph.

RN: What happened to the four zip disks?

PS: When cleared out of storage room, put into file. Were there when Speaker left in September 2006. Placed in shoebox size box.

RN: Were they labeled?

PS: Yes. Found one zip disk, but believe it's blank.

RN: What happened to the backups?

PS: Every Friday, everything is backed up. Jess Mancini and Carol Henry work with this.

RN and ML debate whether to ask COB for Friday backup tapes.

RN: If don't ask dean, is there a danger of evidence being destroyed?

PS: Maybe if anyone has intention of getting rid of the record.

RN: Any reason to speculate that someone would do that?

PS: "I'm not going to do that – speculate." Recommends panel ask dean. Thinks "Steve Sears merely made a bad decision." Grade mods were used to create a record after the fact. Courses don't match up [between spreadsheet and Admissions/Records transcript].

PS: Completed search this week that told Blakely to complete months before. Did not uncover everything [in fall 2007] that should have been there.

ML: Refers to [REDACTED] course.

PS: At graduate level, Speaker is instructor of record on all independent study courses.

ML: Who sponsored the independent studies?

PS: "Almost everyone."

PS: "She did not take a single course in Fall 1998."

ML: Shows PS BUE 4. Speaker remarks he has never seen the document. Notes footnotes that suggest courses grades were based on "a recollection of a meeting between Heather, Leah and Speaker. Do you accept that?"

PS: No.

RN: "I take it you haven't seen this document."

PS: "I have not."

RN: Explains BUE 4.

PS: Had conversation with Taylor. Asked what else people took at the time.

RN: What you saw on the screen with Bonnie Anderson was different than what's on her transcript?

PS: Yes. Grade mods were submitted in Oct. 2007.

Interview ending time: 3:34 p.m.