

INTERVIEW OF BLAINE BROWNELL, 1994

BLAKE HAILEY: Today's date is February 28th, 1994. I'm Blake Hailey, and we're pleased to have with us Dr. Blaine Brownell, the Provost for University of North Texas with us today. We're making this videotape in the Biomed Communications Center of the Gibson D. Lewis library, at the University of North Texas Health Science Center in Fort Worth. Now, Dr. Brownell, after saying all of that, I'd like to turn over to you and ask you a couple questions. I'd like to start out with your -- maybe some of your prior background and experience in kind of leading up to your time at UNT.

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: Well, my degree is a Ph.D. in American history, specialization in urban history and my first teaching position was at Perdue University in Indiana, and then I spent 16 years at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and a number of academic and administrative positions. And then in 1990, I came to the University of -- of North Texas.

BLAKE HAILEY: What -- could you also describe a little bit of what a Provost for the University of North Texas -- what your duties are there?

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: It's -- the Provost is, for one of a better term, the number two person at the University who shares the council of vice presidents and acts for the President in his absence. The Provost has, in my case, also the title of vice-president for academic affairs. So reporting to me are all the academic units in the campus, including the library and all the support services.

BLAKE HAILEY: What were some of your goals when you came to -- to UNT in regards to that University as well as the thoughts on what was then TCOM?

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: Well, when I -- this is, of course, the first time I've ever been a Provost. And I have been both a graduate dean at one time and a -- and a dean of social behavioral sciences before. And a couple -- I had a couple of center directorships so I'd been -- I'd been obviously working my way toward vice presidency. When I came to North Texas, I was attracted by the area, by the opportunity that the University had because of its location, because of its broad array of programs, especially at the doctoral level. And I remember I was very impressed to visit what was then TCOM, and to see the facilities here in Fort Worth, and to see this very solid urban base that this institution had here in one of the two major cities in the metroplex.

BLAKE HAILEY: Did you have some ideas as what you wanted to see the Health Science Center, or TCOM at that time, do.

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: It's interesting because at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, while I was -- obviously, my academic appoint was in the history department, I had been dean of the graduate school. And in that capacity, I had responsibility for oversight over the graduate programs in the campus, most of which were in the bio medical sciences.

BLAKE HAILEY: Uh-huh.

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: And that was, of course -- contained a very large and successful allopathic medical school as well as an extremely successful clinical center and research center, with well over a hundred million dollars of peer review grant funding. And so I was very curious about TCOM and what it was, where it fit in the panoply of medical institutions, and I consulted with some of my colleagues in Birmingham about it, but I was -- I had been somewhat prepared before coming here to see the

potential for a major Health Science Center and all of its constituent units and the impact that it could make on the local community in the region.

BLAKE HAILEY: Did you feel that there was a need to help gain community support in Denton for TCOM to become a Health Science Center? And if so, what types of things did you try to work with?

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: I think the -- when I first came here of course, I was mainly concerned with trying to just get everything straight the way it was. But I anticipated eagerly working with the Health Science Center and this relationship came especially to fruition after Dr. Ivan Cohen became the vice president here at the medical school -- and -- and the dean. And it was around that time that we started -- in fact, in the interview process for his position, that I think a lot of the discussions that I #NAME? Science Center took place. The larger, broader, long-range potential for TCOM.

BLAKE HAILEY: So that was kind of one of your thoughts in searching for a candidate, was someone who wanted to help further this along, then, this Health Science Center idea.

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: That -- yes. And -- and also the correlative to that, which was the fostering of the relationship with the -- with the University.

BLAKE HAILEY: Were there any other events or things you can think of that helped drawing support for the Health Science Center as you worked through this process?

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: Well, we were already aware, and I was soon made aware when I got here, of the -- the research activity that was already going on, and also the training of graduate students that was already going on down here under the auspices of the degrees that the University of North Texas had actually conducted by the faculty here, many of whom had, of course, at one time been faculty at the University. So there was already the -- the curdle for the additional programs that would actually make this medical school into a -- into a Health Science Center and the future of those programs and how we would manage to -- to secure those programs here in Fort Worth, while really not losing program authority up in Denton was one of my first challenges. Because that required not only a lot of negotiations between Fort Worth and Denton, but also with the coordinating board in Austin.

BLAKE HAILEY: So the outcome, sounds like, was it successful, then, from that vantage point?

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: Well, now it looks like it should have been obvious to everybody from the beginning and that everybody just rolled merrily along but there were some fits and starts, and -- I think from the University's side, there was the notion that the Health Science Center had a nice ring to it, but it was not entirely -- we -- weren't entirely sure what this -- what this meant, or what the implications were, and what the opportunities for collaboration would be. In fact, I think beyond just the notion of what a Health Science Center is and the potential it has, we're still not entirely certain where this particular institution will go and how it will develop.

BLAKE HAILEY: So there's still some problems with growing as you go through and work through some of these changes between the two Universities, then, I guess there will be some trouble times here and there.

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: Well, challenges --

BLAKE HAILEY: Challenges.

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: -- we'll say, certainly not compared to anything truly serious. That's for sure.

BLAKE HAILEY: Why do you think it was necessary for the growth and success of TCOM to become this Health Science Center?

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: I think one of the things, frankly, was the -- the increasingly apparent fact that TCOM was one of the few freestanding medical professional schools in the state.

BLAKE HAILEY: Uh-huh.

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: And with the -- the designation by Texas A&M of its medical school as the Health Science Center, for no other reason, that left TCOM out by itself. It's also increasingly apparent that in order to -- especially from an educational perspective, to do what needs to be done nowadays just relying on one first professional degree is not -- is not sufficient. Even within a single University, to have a -- just a separate school of medicine, it's difficult not to have the various supporting programs in allied health and public health and et cetera. But to have a -- essentially a separate institution with its own President, with just only one first professional degree, was not -- was not adequate. And so it was almost essential that -- that it have the capacity to become more complex and to -- especially to serve this very large urban area.

BLAKE HAILEY: How do you see this Health Science Center being different from the other, I believe there are seven medical schools or health science centers in Texas. How do you see this one as #NAME? different from the rest of them.

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: It's -- of course, for one thing, it's an osteopathic medical school. And that carries many advantages, especially in terms of some of the new developments and community health and in public health and preventive medicine, and then in general practice. Many of the other medical centers, including the one that I came from, and obviously UT Southwestern is another example, have thrived on the bases of what you might called the "Old medicine" and boy, there was nothing better than that when times were good, with very significant grant activity, large gifts from individuals and corporations, major budgets, high visibility, clinical programs. But all of that now is -- is being called into significant question by the recent developments in health care reform and in terms of the infancies of how we're going to pay for that. So I think the biggest distinctions with this Health Science Center is that, number one, it's relatively new. It has a -- an excellent facility base. It's got an excellent location in the City of Fort Worth. It's positioned very well in the metroplex. And it should be on the cutting edge of a lot of the new developments in medical education and in health care generally.

BLAKE HAILEY: So I guess the health care reform and all that is a big -- a big concern of yours or of the Health Science Center. You really have to watch that, it sounds like, to see where the Health Science Center goes next.

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: It -- it's certainly a concern of everybody, even more down here than up in Denton, as you might imagine. Trying to make sure that the that the primary responsibility for #NAME? quality way with all the many changes that are -- that are taking place. In that regard, I think it's a real advantage that this particular Health Science Center does not have its own hospital, because that's going to be a serious burden in many other centers, particularly since the extra funding for medical education, it does not look like it's going to be forthcoming.

BLAKE HAILEY: So most of the medical schools have a -- I guess, a major hospital associated with them.

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: Many do. Not #NAME? ones.

BLAKE HAILEY: So it's possible that those that don't, or have some small relationship may do better through this upcoming situation?

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: Well, it's -- as -- hospitals have obviously get all their resources from the fees that they charge and other support which they receive, and is -- there's a tremendous break put on a lot of the reimbursement mechanisms in order to keep the health care cost down, the hospitals are going to get squeezed more than any other single entity.

BLAKE HAILEY: So, in a sense, we're in pretty good shape in that respect, too.

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: Yeah.

BLAKE HAILEY: Where do you -- why do you think this was the right time for the Health Science Center proposal to go through? Do you think there could have been a -- maybe later, earlier time? Why did you decide on this particular moment?

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: I think the dynamic really was that -- that -- that the time had come. It -- we would have been left as being the only medical school in Texas not part of a Health Science Center.

BLAKE HAILEY: Uh-huh.

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: And it was also clear that -- that in terms of the staged development that TCOM had reached, that it needed the authority to offer other degrees in association with the first professional degree in order to really expand and develop to meet the needs of the area. So it was not all together. Certain, given the approval processes we had to go through, given the legislative battle that we had to wage, that the time really would come. Although all of us agreed that it was inevitable. It was absolutely inevitable. But I think that it was really part of a natural process that -- that both institutions had reached a stage in their planning and their thinking where this was the next logical step. And I think Dr. Cullen's arrival here tended to confirm that, because his experience in other parts of the country convinced him completely that this was the #NAME? appropriate hospital affiliations for our medical students. Those are the two highest priority items that he had.

BLAKE HAILEY: How has the relationship been between TCOM and the UNT faculty over the years? It seems like -- it looks like it's been, you know, pretty good over the past few years. Has it always been doing well?

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: It's -- it's been an interesting marriage, and it is a marriage. I mean, we do bear the same name. I think in the very beginning the -- the University was of critical importance to TCOM. And, in fact, as you -- as you know, the first two years of -- of essentially training for the medical students was conducted up in Denton.

BLAKE HAILEY: Right.

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: And I think in a relatively short time, all that activity, of course, not only shifted here in Fort Worth, but given the construction of new facilities, given the migration of some of those North Texas faculty down to Fort Worth to become TCOM faculty, given the many other strides

that the medical school has made, that relationship changed very fundamentally. So I'm sure there were some people along the way who were used to having this #NAME? trying to help out. Then all of a sudden, the poor relative had grown and matured and -- and now is competing with them for research grants and for faculty employments. And so there was -- there was tension. And there were arguments over who was receiving at, you know, whether adequate funding was being received for doing this or doing that. But I think there was a -- that underlying all of that was a sense that the two relations -- the two institutions were joined by their -- there reporting the same border regions, by the reporting the same chancellor, and I think even more than that, to the sense of possibility of what the medical school could #NAME? solid, although you -- you have -- even on -- when a medical school is located on the same campus as a University, there are differences in culture between the professional culture and a -- and a -- say an academic culture, and between the kind of research activities that faculty conduct in a medical school or professional school environment as opposed to a general University environment. There's salary differentials, there are -- there's all kinds of things that can create some tension. But I don't think that any of -- any of those things between North Texas and TCOM are really unusual or -- or are out of the -- out of the ordinary. In fact, you could make the argument that under the circumstances, the relationships have been remarkably good.

BLAKE HAILEY: I think -- sound like, to me, then, that having a medical school in Fort Worth versus having on Denton campus is probably a better scenario for everyone all the way around -- except for you having to drive back and forth between the two?

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: Well, it's a -- I like to come to Fort Worth. I honestly do. So it's a -- a -- no. I think it -- it -- it enhances the capability of the -- of the total institution, if you want to look at it that way. It was kind of a mini system to have us located here in Fort Worth as well as in -- as in Denton. And of course, eventually, I think we have under process right now, we will have technology in -- better technology established so that we can communicate without having to drive up down the highway.

BLAKE HAILEY: That will be nice, I think. What other decisions or concerns that you have to make and think about when this proposal started to make UNT or TCOM the UNT Health Science Center, were some pretty tough choices that had to be made on your end?

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: No not really, except the -- the first step that would take place when -- after the Health Science Center was designated, the first programmatic step would be to secure independent separate Ph.D. programs at the Health Science Center. It was necessary to -- for it to become a Health Science Center because without that, there would be no place, frankly, to locate these Ph.D. programs, which are graduate programs and not professional programs. But once that structure was available, then the first step would be to locate those Ph.D. programs here. Now, those programs were North Texas programs.

BLAKE HAILEY: Uh-huh.

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: The students registered at North Texas, the formula funding for their courses they taught came to North Texas, and North Texas still had faculty members that participated in them. So, to find a way where those programs could, in effect, shift down here without eliminating UNT's ability to continue to pursue education in those areas was a -- was a challenge. And we had to go to the coordinating board and frankly just told them what our problem was to see what help they could -- they could give us in making this possible at a time when the duplication of programs was under great

scrutiny throughout the state, but I'm pleased to say that we were able to accomplish a transition that was -- that was smooth, there were some rough points, but, you know, essentially a smooth transition. And North Texas continues to offer graduate work in those areas. And now the Health Science Center has Ph.D. programs in its own right, which is absolutely appropriate given its stage of development.

BLAKE HAILEY: So you achieved all the goals you needed to, then, it sounds like.

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: Well, we got that worked out. That's true.

BLAKE HAILEY: Okay. How does the Health Science Center creation change the mission of UNT and TCOM in regards to education and research in that -- in that part of the mission statement?

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: One interesting thing is that North Texas now includes as part of its official mission, and as part of the goals and objectives that its developing it's collaboration with the Health Science Center. And I think a similar statement is included in the Health Science Center's mission in goals and objectives. All that shows is that in terms of impact, the expectation and necessity for collaboration between the two institutions now is greater than -- than it ever has been. That -- that change of name so that the University of North Texas exists with the -- with the Health Science Center as well as the Denton campus is more than just a cosmetic change. And so I think we -- we have mechanisms in place now at a higher level that are more serious for collaboration than we -- and mutual consultation than we've ever had before.

BLAKE HAILEY: So there's a lot of chance for interaction between the Health Science Center and various schools and departments at UNT now.

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: It's a -- I'm there is it's prospect for that, and we are exploring ways for that to -- to reach fruition, although a lot of that routine communication is really at an administrative level more than at a program level, although that's going to change.

BLAKE HAILEY: What are the next steps that you see for the future development in the Health Science Center? What would you like to see happen here?

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: Well, it's a -- I think what will happen in time, there's no question about it, is that there will be additional academic programs that the Health Science Center will have. Public health is the most obvious. The next step, potentially, programs in pharmacy, allied health, other health programs that will supplement and -- and support the medical degree are inevitable. So they will occur. The question is the timing. And the question is the extent to which the University can benefit from some of these programs and how the institutions will work together. But I think that even by the end of this decade we'll see the addition of some of these new programs. And as I said, probably public health will be the next -- the next one.

BLAKE HAILEY: What challenges lie ahead for the Health Science Center that you see that they need to overcome?

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: One of the biggest challenges that -- that is obviously well-known here, is that considering the -- the size of the urban area that -- that this Health Science Center serves, it is not very well funded. Certainly compared with the -- oh let's say, Texas Tech, is just an example, out in Lubbock. And so there needs to be over a period of -- this is not a very good time to get new funds, but there needs to be over a period of time, a systematic effort to increase the number of faculty to be

more suitable to the kind of urban base that the medical school and the Health Science Center will have to serve. So I think that will be a -- a constant effort. And -- but there will also be challenges that all health science centers will have to confront. And we've already alluded to some of those --

BLAKE HAILEY: Right.

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: -- the changes and the -- and -- associated with health care reform.

BLAKE HAILEY: What challenges -- shifting focus for a moment, what challenges lie ahead for your position and in the University of North Texas, the main campus itself, now?

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: Well, we've got -- we're also in a period of resource scarcity. And we're undergoing a -- a small decline in enrollment, but it results in what seems to be an enormous decline in funding, potentially enormous decline. And so we got to get our enrollment situation turned around. There are a lot of questions nowadays about the role of the sciences and education, particularly at the advanced level sciences with the end of the Cold War, the declining job prospects for graduates. So we'll be devoting a lot of thought to that. There are -- because we have committed ourselves to share information on programs, there's a lot of time will be taken up, continue to be taken up collaborations between the University and the Health Science Center. And I think the -- the main challenge right now is just to try to keep some sense of momentum going to develop the institution to make investments in things we need to invest in. At that same time, there will be no increase in resources, and in fact, could well be another decline in resources in the next biennium.

BLAKE HAILEY: What is the enrollment at the University of North Texas, currently.

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: It's about 26,300 as of last fall.

BLAKE HAILEY: So that's a large number of students there?

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: Large number of students. That's true.

BLAKE HAILEY: Now, I guess one of the big -- the big question I have for you is what lies ahead for you in the future and how -- do you see your role changing as Provost with these programs here at the Health Science Center and at UNT? How do you see the role changing for you and people after you?

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: I don't think the fundamental role of the Provost of the University. With change are each new program, with each new challenge, or with each new opportunity life seems to get more complicated, more demanding. But I don't think the nature of the position itself will -- will change. For me, personally, I'll either continue to be Provost, I'll be a University President someday, or I'll end up teaching a lot of undergraduate history courses. We'll have to wait and see how that turns out.

BLAKE HAILEY: Well, I guess you could be President of the University and teach some history courses, you'd probably like both worlds, wouldn't you?

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: Well, it's kind of hard to do both of those things at the same time.

BLAKE HAILEY: That's true. We've covered a lot of ground here this evening, Dr. Brownell, we've covered quite a bit of subjects. You have a lot of knowledge in the Health Science Center transformation. Is there anything that I -- in my layman's approach, have not touched on in this transformation?

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: I think as a historian, one thing that's always amazed me a little bit is that one assumes as you embark on a historical project, that there was a -- some fundamental underlying logic in everything that moves forward in a kind of straight, linear way. When you're actually get into it, you discover the impact that personalities have, the impact that serendipity had. And while there was nothing dramatic in this case, there were nevertheless, combinations of personality and opportunity that were kind of a chemistry that explained a lot of these things that maybe logic can't explain. And so whoever uses these tapes, and whoever reflects on the beginning of the Health Science Center, I think would do well to look -- sort of in the nooks and crannies for those explanations, as well as the facts that obviously was a good, solid body of #NAME? Center was inevitable. But I think the way it happened, and the way the -- the process occurred really had mostly to do with the circumstances people found themselves in, and the particular people. And who they were and how they interacted. I'm too close to it now, but whoever does the subject at one point will -- I think, have a good subject to do.

BLAKE HAILEY: Well, you definitely played a very large role in the transformation of the UNT Health Science Center as I can see here today, and appreciate you taking time out of your extremely busy schedule to -- to meet with us. And we really can't thank you enough. Are there any -- any other things you'd like to --

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: No. It's an important project, and I compliment you and your colleagues for undertaking it. And it's been a pleasure.

BLAKE HAILEY: Well, again, I appreciate it. I know your comments will be valuable in a few years when they start putting this together into a written form. And again, thanks so much for the time that you've given us today. And with that, I'll wrap up this interview. Thank you and have a nice day.

MISTER BLAINE BROWNELL: Thank you.