

**INTERVIEW WITH
FREDERICK BROWN, CHAIRMAN
CAROL BLUM, PROFESSOR
DEPARTMENT OF FRENCH AND ITALIAN**

December 5, 1988

Dr. Hartzell: An interview with Professors Blum and Chairman Brown of the Department of French and Italian, December 5, 1988.

Dr. Brown: Oyster Bay or that there are people who have talked a lot about Oyster Bay and the total period, that period which was the period 1962-63.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, now, let me run through some of these questions. I want to make sure this is going. And then after that we can be as unstructured as necessary. Name, department, rank, position, you first.

Dr. Blum: Okay, Carol Blum, French and Italian, Professor of French.

Dr. Hartzell: And you?

Dr. Brown: Frederick Brown, Department of French and Italian, also Professor of French

Dr. Hartzell: Two, what year did you come to Stony Brook?

Dr. Blum: 1962.

Dr. Hartzell: You came in 1962, same year I did.

Dr. Blum: Do you remember me?

Dr. Hartzell: Yes, I do remember.

Dr. Blum: Do you. We had an interview that first day, I think.

Dr. Hartzell: Is that right.

Dr. Blum: Yeah.

Dr. Hartzell: Next question.

Dr. Blum: When did you come?

Dr. Brown: I came in 1965.

Dr. Hartzell: You came in 1965.

Dr. Brown: Yes.

Dr. Hartzell: Now, you don't have to answer this, how old were you at the time?

Dr. Brown: It's depressing.

Dr. Blum: Oh, god, I think I was 28.

Dr. Hartzell: 28.

Dr. Brown: And I was 31.

Dr. Hartzell: And you were 31. Three, from what institution and position did you come.

Dr. Blum: I was an instructor at Columbia.

Dr. Brown: Actually, the position I had immediately before this was as program officer for a foundation called the African American Institute. I had left academia for one year. Before that I had taught at Harpur College.

Dr. Hartzell: Harpur, they call it Binghamton. The Afro American, where was that located?

Dr. Brown: In New York City.

Dr. Hartzell: Who was primarily responsible for your coming to Stony Brook.

Dr. Blum: Seymour Flaxman.

Dr. Hartzell: Seymour Flaxman, he was chairman of the Department of

Dr. Blum: Foreign Languages and Literature.

Dr. Hartzell: And who was

Dr. Brown: The same, Seymour Flaxman.

Dr. Hartzell: Seymour Flaxman, all right. Five, who interviewed you for the position here?

Dr. Blum: I think it was just Seymour.

Dr. Brown: I recall that I met Lynette Brugmans and Ivan Tasch, those are the only two I can think of. Of course, it was the summer. I was hired under rather peculiar circumstances because somebody had dropped dead in the middle of the summer, and they needed someone at the last minute.

Dr. Hartzell: I see.

Dr. Blum: And actually, you yourself interviewed me.

Dr. Hartzell: I did, I see. All right, now, why did you come, what factors were most important in our decision?

Dr. Blum: Well, at that time I needed a job.

Dr. Hartzell: Yes, that occurs to all of us.

Dr. Blum: Yes, and I wanted to be close to New York, so I took the job that was closest to New York that was available. At that time jobs were just starting to get hard to find in French, and it circled outward from New York. You could still find jobs anywhere else in the country, except New York.

Dr. Hartzell: Is that right. Well, now, why was that?

Dr. Blum: Well, I think that there had been a real lack of trained Ph. D.'s during that education boom of the early '60's, and there had been really jobs for just about anybody with a Ph. D. Then little by little the market started to close down, and New York City being one of the most desirable places, it

closed down first. So there were jobs ringed around New York, but there was nothing right in New York.

Dr. Hartzell: I see, and what about you?

Dr. Brown: Pretty much the same. I left the academic world thinking that perhaps I might prefer foundation work, and I was quickly disabused, and decided to get to teach again. But I encountered the same problem. There was nothing in New York, and I would have preferred to teach in New York, but there were no positions available. By that time it was 1965 and even more difficult to find positions, so I applied to various places including Stony Brook. And at the very last moment, for reasons I explained, I heard from Seymour Flaxman.

Dr. Hartzell: What was your understanding of

Dr. Brown: Excuse me, I should add that another reason I wanted to get into academics because I realized that in foundation work I didn't have time to write. That was a very important reason for me. I had a contract to write a book, and I wanted to do that.

Dr. Hartzell: What was your understanding of the purposes behind the creation of Stony Brook, what did you know about Stony Brook?

Dr. Blum: I found out there was a job opening, made an appointment, rented a car and was hired all on the same day, so I really didn't know what I was getting into very well, except through one person who is no longer here, who is now the president of Bennington -- Elizabeth Coleman -- who was an instructor in the English Department at that point, and who had been at Oyster Bay, so she sort of filled me in very quickly about what the whole enterprise had been about as she saw it. And my impression was of a very, if not the wild west, because it was east, it was a very experimental, sort of the opposite of a traditional institution with a curriculum that has been settled, everything seemed to be up in the air, which was very stimulating and exciting and also a little bit disconcerting, that was my first impression.

Dr. Hartzell: Quite different from Columbia.

Dr. Blum: Totally different.

Dr. Hartzell: But you came to this campus, you were never in Oyster Bay.

Dr. Blum: I was never in Oyster Bay.

Dr. Brown: What did I know about Stony Brook? I remember or seem to remember that when I was still at Harpur College, I had heard sort of little noises about Stony Brook. First of all, I seem to remember that it was already designated as a University Center, was it not?

Dr. Hartzell: Oh, yes.

Dr. Brown: That conferred a certain prestige on it which, and I'm not sure that Binghamton was yet designated a University Center. When I went it was still Harpur College. At any rate, the only other thing I can say I had heard about Stony Brook was that it was said to primarily a scientific school. And that there was an attempt being made to build up the non-scientific curricula divisions, but as I said, I was told it had begun I seem to recall as an engineering school and that, but this is the rumor, these are the rumors, and that it was strong in science and not very strong in anything else yet.

Dr. Hartzell: I see, all right, what were your impressions of Stony Brook when you first came, the campus, the people, the leadership, the spirit?

Dr. Blum: It was a rainstorm and it looked like a huge construction site. I sort of wandered to one construction gang to another asking if anybody knew where the humanities building was, and when I finally found it, tried to get a cup of coffee, was told that only the construction gang had coffee, and they were just putting new windows in the humanities building that day.

Dr. Hartzell: This was in September of 1962.

Dr. Blum: Yes, September. And Classes had already started, so it all seemed very alien, kind of overwhelming.

Dr. Hartzell: Why didn't you turn around and go back to New York?

Dr. Blum: I needed a job. Morris Peckham, who was chairman of the department at Columbia that time, I remember saying to me this is going to be the school of the future, and if you can get in on the ground floor with this institution, you will have a wonderful future. And I remember thinking how silly and I would stay a year or two at the most, so that was 26 years ago.

Dr. Brown: The question is, what were my initial impressions?

Dr. Hartzell: Yes, when you first came, the campus, the people, the leadership, the spirit.

Dr. Brown: Of course, it was difficult the first day to get any idea of the leadership. And it was the summer, as I said, I came in August, and of course it was mostly deserted, and it struck me as being very provincial, it was small and provincial. I had come from first Yale, and then for three years I taught at the University of Texas, and these are physically large and established, and it was extremely primitive, it seemed really quite primitive and small still, so that was a strong initial, I don't remember too much else actually. Obviously impressions began to gather in September when the semester began. Also, bear in mind the fact that when I came, the very man who hired me was about to leave as chairman, and the new chairman had not quite arrived yet, so it seemed a little bit chaotic.

Dr. Hartzell: Who was the new chairman?

Dr. Brown: The new chairman was Oscar Haac, who was coming up from Emory, hadn't arrived yet. And not only was Flaxman stepping down, but the entire department of foreign languages and literature was being restructured. It was no longer one department, it was being divided into romance languages and Germanic and Slavic, so I didn't know quite what to expect.

Dr. Blum: I remember the first day in class asking, the book that we were reading was a play, and asking students in French what play they had seen recently, and getting absolutely zero, and asking them what plays they had ever seen, finally had you ever been to New York, and I couldn't believe I was asking this question of young people 50 miles or 60 miles from the city and out of a class of 30, 2 or 3 raised their hand who had ever been to New York. I really thought where am I.

Dr. Brown: Yeah, I should add also that I was interviewed I'm quite sure, yes, I was, by Stanley Ross, and I think that that meant a lot to me. I had an extremely good impression of him.

Dr. Hartzell: In what way?

Dr. Brown: He seemed to be intelligent and forceful, alert, and I liked him very much. Also of course, I didn't turn around either because I needed a job, but Ross made a good impression.

Dr. Hartzell: I selected him as dean because I came originally as acting chief administrative officer and dean of arts and sciences, both hats, and it didn't take me long to realize that

Dr. Brown: You couldn't wear two hats.

Dr. Hartzell: I couldn't wear two hats. I needed somebody.

Dr. Blum: He was a good choice.

Dr. Hartzell: Good, I'm glad you feel that way. All right, now, what events, what persons, what experiences stand out in your mind? I think Lynette Brugmans was here, wasn't she?

Dr. Blum: No, she came after I did.

Dr. Hartzell: She came after you did, I see, all right. Well, tell what you can about the life of the department.

Dr. Brown: Are we into the unstructured part of the interview yet?

Dr. Hartzell: I think we could say, yes, this is question nine, and you can be as unstructured as you like.

Dr. Blum: Well, I think I was probably rather cranky, and I had, I guess, unrealistically high expectations of what the department should be and what the students education should be, and I was very much oriented to Columbia humanities sequence type of foundation, educational foundation, so I became pretty quickly involved in efforts to set up something similar for our students. And many people in our department were very much opposed to really any requirements and felt that that was sort

of passé element in higher education and that Stony Brook represented the education of the future, not the past, and that we should have sort of infinite flexibility, so there was already a kind of polarization.

Dr. Hartzell: Who were some of these people that

Dr. Brown: What's going to become of these interviews, who's going to hear them?

Dr. Hartzell: They are going into the archives, and the only person that is likely to see them is the person who will probably later on be writing a history of the institution.

Dr. Brown: I see.

Dr. Hartzell: So that there won't be any searching out of choice bits.

Dr. Brown: Okay.

Dr. Blum: Well, what can I say?

Dr. Hartzell: So, you did have a difference of point of view.

Dr. Blum: Yes, we definitely did.

Dr. Brown: Are you talking about the entire sixties now or the just the first years?

Dr. Blum: I don't know, I just remember several years of struggles over curriculum.

Dr. Brown: Was I here?

Dr. Blum: Yes, going into the time when you were first here. For example, Norman Laidlaw made me chairman of a committee that was to draw up a humanities sequence precisely, and on the committee there were Konrad Bieber, Oscar Haac, and several other people whose names I've forgotten. First of all it was silly to put a young assistant professor on a committee as chairman of a committee with full professors, and I didn't have the political savvy to know when to shut up, I think basically. And I very much felt that these young people needed education in the largest possible sense; that was the best gift I thought we had to give them. The other people felt just the opposite, that was the dead hand of the past and that should be destroyed. So, we had in essence some honorable disagreements, because they were really about

Dr. Hartzell: Where did Konrad

Dr. Blum: Konrad was very much opposed to any kind of uniformity or requirements. He was a libertarian in the most extreme

Dr. Hartzell: Where did he come from, do you know?

Dr. Brown: Connecticut College.

Dr. Hartzell: He came from Connecticut College.

Dr. Brown: He had been chairman of the French department at Connecticut College for Women in New London.

Dr. Blum: And before that I guess Yale and he's from Berlin originally, wasn't he?

Dr. Hartzell: I see. A German but teaching French.

Dr. Brown: I didn't know too much about him, but he was in France during the war -- German-Jewish.

Dr. Blum: We had a number of Germans teaching French.

Dr. Brown: Oscar Haac, Austrian; Eleonore Zimmermann is Swiss.

Dr. Blum: She was born there.

Dr. Brown: Yeah, that's certainly my memory too. I think it can fairly be said that Carol and I have been allies from the beginning representing what we've considered to be certain prerequisites for an undergraduate education, and we found ourselves I would say by and large rather isolated at Stony Brook, increasingly isolated during the sixties.

Dr. Hartzell: I'm surprised that Lynette wasn't in your camp, so to speak.

Dr. Brown: Well, I would say at that point one gets into matters of personality. I mean it's not, as you know, departmental affairs and not purely intellectual or ideological, all sort of personal collisions, clashes, disaffections enter into this, and often people will espouse issues which they have come to believe out of dislike for people who and so on. But certainly the department did split, both ideologically and personally

Dr. Blum: Also remember during those years the was enormous. From the time I came until Fred came, when we were just the department of romance language, we were hiring people right and left. I know Seymour Flaxman hired people over the phone, things were so loose.

Dr. Hartzell: Was this without interviewing?

Dr. Blum: Well, that was the legend at any rate, that they, the numbers were getting greater and the need was acute so there were just mobs of people who came in and out of that department before it finally kind of shut down and stayed for a decade or so without any change.

Dr. Brown: It's hard to say, my feeling looking back is that perhaps Carol's and mine expectations were too great, perhaps we thought we wanted to do too much with students, expected too much of them. On the other hand I still think that the opposite camp simply tended to take and finally became deprecatory view of undergraduates at Stony Brook, that they're not up to studying certain things. And then what entered this was the whole ethos of the sixties, with the abolition requirements, this was the *ancien regime*, we were going to do away with all of that, we were going to study what was immediately relevant and so on and so forth. And again, we who both were used to the ideal of the classical education in some way, at least some sense of the historical tradition, had a very hard time getting our

way in anything, certainly in the small minority, very small minority. And I was very disappointed finally. I felt that Stony Brook lost years in some ways because of that ideological uproar.

Dr. Hartzell: This was in the sixties.

Dr. Brown: Very definitely, sixties didn't end until 1970, it really continued, continued a long time here, I think a long time after it had ceased to be the case in other universities which had regained somewhat more conservative spirit, Harvard leading the way. But Stony Brook I think in many ways has always lagged in that way. Certain things tend to become entrenched here, that was one of the things became entrenched I think, a certain kind of radical spirit. And I don't think, while I'm speaking freely, I don't think the administration during that period was a very strong one. I don't think that it was strong enough, and they certainly were in very good company, it was happening in universities throughout the country. I don't think that they really examined the issues closely enough and opposed the radical elements forcefully enough. I'm talking about, first of all, I think one problem has been in that regard is that we've had scientific presidents who feel themselves on treacherous ground when they enter the humanities. They don't feel they know exactly what people are talking about. They are afraid to take stands, and I think that Toll was no exception to that. On the other hand, I think one of his I imagine principal advisors, Sidney Gelber, was not a strong force in the administration. I liked him personally but I don't think

Dr. Blum: I wouldn't agree with you that he wasn't strong. I think he was, his agenda was very much the agenda of the white sixties surprisingly enough coming from where he came from.

Dr. Hartzell: Yes, well, he came from Columbia at the time, from Contemporary Civilization.

Dr. Brown: Well, I disagree with you, I don't think it was a question of strength, I think it was a question of weakness, because my profound sense is that Gelber succumbed. I don't think these were his values, but I think that he was rather overwhelmed by very vehement, noisy, youngish assistant and some associate professors. I don't think he stood deeply for what he probably believed. And that was my view. I found him very disappointing. I became somewhat disaffected during that period. I didn't really participate, I was opposed to just so many things that were going on. You know, the scrapping of language prerequisites, the scrapping of almost everything else. I mean, these students were ignorant enough as it was, and this was a sort of consecration of their ignorance as I saw it. And I think we are still paying for it to this day.

Dr. Hartzell: Do you agree with that?

Dr. Blum: Well, I guess it's, I mean you're bringing back memories of so many efforts and struggles. What am I trying to say? There was also, as a teacher in those early years, I felt that my job

was in some way to force the students to take in as much, assimilate as much and grow as much as possible. The model was almost a sort of disciplinary model, somewhere along the line of campus student evaluations, and that was interesting, because I particularly, in these courses that were modeled on the Columbia model, I was treated without much affection by the students, and I was very, very hurt by that. And it was years later that I would get feedback from students saying, when I took that course of yours, I hated it, and I hated those quizzes and I thought you were awful, and now ten years later I can say that was the best course I ever had. But that kind of lag effect, I think, was wiped out by the student evaluations from which I learned, as we all did, how to get good student evaluations when that became an important element, and that was part of the radicalism too. And it is obviously two-headed sword, the teacher who pays no attention to the students' reactions is not doing the job, the teacher who only pays attention is also to be questioned in that way. But that was I think another watershed, and that must have been in the middle sixties. And then after that I found it impossible to give a course as rigorous as I would have given before.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, you were also at the mercy of the kind of students that the high schools were turning out, and also the lack of a fundamental or first-rate cultural background in many of the families, because you're dealing with first generation college and you had several strikes against you in that sense.

Dr. Brown: From a somewhat different point of view, I mean speaking of the atmosphere of Stony Brook in those years, in the sixties and how it's changed, I have always been a commuter. During the first five to eight years as I taught at Stony Brook, I was in numerous company, and I am no longer; and that says a lot about what has happened to Stony Brook.

Dr. Hartzell: You were in what kind of company?

Dr. Brown: I was in numerous company in the early years, there were many people on the faculty who lived in New York and commuted. That has changed for various reasons. The University has grown much larger, New York has become unaffordable, completely unaffordable, that wasn't the case in the sixties at all. There was a campaign to discourage, perhaps you recall that, to discourage people from living in New York; numerous candidates were asked actually whether they intended to, where they intended to live. And you know I'm not, I decided to do this for all kinds of personal and quite necessary reasons to continue to live in New York, but what we say about that as far it affects the personality of Stony Brook; it has acquired more of, in some ways, more of a personality than it had originally, it jelled to a great extent with faculty members to a great majority living here. I think that's the case. I'm wondering to what extent it has also lost a little something. There was really a chaotic

atmosphere I think all over the place, coming in, disappearing. In some ways it probably profited from the intellectual resources in New York, of people living in New York, and that it found itself in a very difficult position. And I think that probably one of the sort of congenital difficulties of Stony Brook, the fact that it is as close as it is to New York but in a certain sense really quite far away. I mean it's been hard I think to achieve an identity, this sort of middle distance from the great city, maybe I'm quite wrong, because after all Rutgers is no further away and Princeton and so on, perhaps it has something to do with being on an island and the only direction to go is really New York.

Dr. Hartzell: There are two ferries.

Dr. Brown: You know what I mean.

Dr. Blum: Well, yes, I think there was always that tension. I remember stories the first year I was here, the person who preceded you as CEO having talked about helicopters that would go from New York to the campus, and perhaps you remember when Governor Rockefeller came for the, I guess the opening ceremony for one of the new buildings on the campus, and he talked about the bullet train that was going to be from Manhattan out here, it would be twenty minutes or something like that, so that the notion of being attached quickly and rapidly to the city I think was always part of the fantasy of Stony Brook. And I think that's part of what put Stony Brook on the map, because many interesting, excellent people could come out and teach who would not go to Albany for example.

Dr. Hartzell: I think Alfred Kazin is an example of that, but it worked both ways.

Dr. Brown: That's right, it certainly did, and I'm not rationalizing, in certain important ways because I live in New York, I've not been able to devote myself to the University as much as I would if I lived here, not served on committees as much as I would have that foremost, I certainly see students, but it's a matter of committee work, that's quite true.

Dr. Blum: On the other hand, you've made

Dr. Brown: On the other hand, I've made quite a in writing, it's true I spend a lot of time writing. I also have to say, Dr. Hartzell, that I think that, I have various thoughts, one thought was a memory which I don't want to forget; I remember very distinctly Rockefeller's visit. And the thing I remember most distinctly about it was his pointing to the campus in a sweeping gesture and referring to this beautiful campus whereupon the entire audience began to laugh, because we were up to our ankles in mud still.

Dr. Hartzell: When did that, must have been 1965 or 1966?

Dr. Brown: Well, it was within a year or two of my coming, must have been, I don't think it was 1965, maybe it was 1965, certainly the middle sixties.

Dr. Hartzell: Do you remember what building?

Dr. Brown: I have a suspicion it was the Earth and Space Science, that's where it was held, right in front over there.

Dr. Blum: A jungle at that point.

Dr. Brown: Returning to the question of identity, I didn't in those years and I still don't, I have a feeling that, and part of this is really a matter of architecture, I think, that Stony Brook has a center, and certainly new faculty always wonder about this, always worry about it and express concern, there isn't a place in this campus, a lounge, a faculty something or other where people can simply drop in and have a cup of coffee or tea, you know, in fact it's a very serious error not to have taken this into consideration from the first. I feel that architecture is a crucial thing in construction of the University and I think we really missed out. California colleges are beautifully designed and one quickly achieved a sense of coherence and personality that Stony Brook hasn't. It still to this day, and eating places are not all that pleasant.

Dr. Hartzell: Have you been over to the

Dr. Brown: To the Chemistry Building. I've been over, it's okay. I'm also simply talking of a sort of club, a lounge, a tea room. I mean there's such a place

Dr. Blum: A faculty club.

Dr. Brown: In every university I've taught in

Dr. Blum: It's an important place.

Dr. Brown: It's an important place.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, I guess it was not on John Toll's agenda.

Dr. Blum: No, it sure wasn't. This was a funny place. I remember I had friend who taught Russian here, Barry Rubin, he's been gone for a number of years. He and I used to play tennis, so we play tennis and the next week we go to play tennis and the tennis court would be torn up and they'd be building a building and then we'd start looking for where they'd put the tennis court. They must have moved the tennis court three times. And I was always thinking \$2,000 per court, times six courts, times three times. But there was that feeling of improvising a new plan every

Dr. Brown: Yes, exactly, of improvisation, such a strong feeling of improvisation. And in fact our own French Department offices have been, well we've been here for quite a long period now, but during those years, we were moving all the time, from one year to the next I didn't know what floor I was going to be on.

Dr. Hartzell: Let me ask you this question: the sciences have individual buildings, chemistry and physics and math, the social sciences are together in one large building and biological sciences are together in another large building, the humanities are scattered all over the campus, would it make sense, would the humanities people be happy if there was an attempt made to erect a large humanities building which would bring together not only English and literature but the languages and philosophy and possibly history if the social sciences building becomes too small.

Dr. Brown: It is interesting.

Dr. Hartzell: And put it fairly close to the library, there is probably only one good place still left. When I came, I was amazed that they put the chemistry and the biology buildings closest to the library and so close that with chemistry there wouldn't much possibility for expansion of the library, that was already done when I came and humanities off quite a ways.

Dr. Blum: Well, when Robert Neville was Dean, I was chairman of the committee of foreign language development, all the languages, and we had subcommittees and one of them on long-term space, and we were given to understand that there would be a humanities tower, and we worked out a plan for languages within that context, very lovely plan with a state-of-the-art language laboratory and computer laboratory and the languages all sort of clustering around that, but then that's been three years now and I haven't heard anything more about that. Yes, I think it would be a very positive sign

Dr. Hartzell: And with a cafeteria in the middle.

Dr. Blum: Absolutely, you would have to have, a little tea patisserie and a little Italian place to give a little, also so students have a place to meet and have some feeling of conviviality.

Dr. Brown: Yeah, as long as it's a place where people really want to go and eat, I think it's one of the unfortunate things about Stony Brook, and I never understood quite why it's been so difficult to create a cafeteria where people would really like, for one thing where the food is reasonably good and I don't think it is at any of the places I've eaten at. You don't find this at other universities. The City University Graduate Center has a marvelous cafeteria; also it's a place, I think that yes it would be a good idea to have all these disciplines together in a single place. At the same time

Dr. Hartzell: Architecture has the tendency to separate on this campus, but it could also bring together, if you're going to keep the building close to the library, it's got to go up because there isn't that much space, and it should be kept close to the library.

Dr. Blum: In some ways it's very wonderful to be in the library itself, that I've enjoyed.

Dr. Hartzell: But the library itself is going to grow. They've got Purchasing in there and a good deal of the academic administration on the east side.

Dr. Blum: I think Purchasing doesn't have to be logically in the library.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, originally they were going to add to the administration building. How the garage got put where they were going to put the administration building I don't know. Those things happen.

Dr. Brown: Where would the site be for such a building?

Dr. Hartzell: I think it would be the other end of this horseshoe where you have the fine arts building and then the theater and main stage and the library and it's open now.

Dr. Blum: That plaza?

Dr. Hartzell: I'm not thinking immediately of the plaza, but just beyond where it's sunken, a building going up without getting actually getting into the main sweep of the open mall, so to speak. I think that's about the only place it could go.

Dr. Brown: You know, Dr. Hartzell, we've been talking about faculty, but there is also the students to talk about, and I think what apply to faculty could also be said of students, this is a complaint I started hearing way back when, and I guess students, the very young students the less inclined they are to speak conversationally to me, but it's still the same, the same problem exists for them, where do they congregate? There are no really very agreeable places. They don't seem to speak about the individual colleges, and of course there are a lot of people commuting, where, I mean there's something called the commuter study lounge downstairs, it's not really, I mean it's a shabby place, that is another problem having to do with architecture really in a way. Students were not, students have, one of the real paradoxes of Stony Brook is that the student has difficulty finding private place and social space, places to congregate with others, and places to be really alone. They have to resort to the stacks virtually to be, to find a quiet, I find it to be entirely negative.

Dr. Hartzell: What has been the criticism of the student union that you've heard? It was supposedly built for an institution of around 3,000.

Dr. Brown: Exactly. I don't the student's actual view of the union, and I see it as a place that began deteriorating almost as soon as it was constructed. I find the rooms really almost esthetically repellent. The furniture is not pleasant, there aren't really any agreeable places. And also the central hall almost immediately began to look like a kind of Moroccan souk with everybody hanging his wares out.

Dr. Blum: I have to say I have the feeling in recent years there's been more of an effort to attend to their needs. Paradoxically it doesn't seem to work.

Dr. Brown: You know, I don't think that the students having spoken to me about these things, I think it may be one of the reasons why undergraduate enrollment has dropped so dramatically in recent

years. True, there are many factors responsible for that, but there really isn't, I think the reputation has spread that Stony Brook is not a very real place in which to live for an undergraduate.

Dr. Hartzell: What can be done about it?

Dr. Brown: Well, that's a very good question, I don't really know.

Dr. Hartzell: I think one of the reasons that we have had difficulty keeping up the quality of the students is that students very often want to go away from home.

Dr. Brown: Well, that's true, but that was the case twenty years ago when we didn't have an enrollment problem. I think that there has been some deterioration, part of it obviously is financial, the money to, we don't have the money to take care of things. It just looks pretty dirty.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, we're educating other people's children and some of them aren't housebroken.

Dr. Blum: That's true.

Dr. Brown: Absolutely true.

Dr. Hartzell: and it's a difficult job for an institution to correct that.

Dr. Blum: I think they've done a lot like putting a cafeteria in humanities building, obviously very nice place for the young people, and then in Harriman college. I think there have been efforts to put flowers on the campus, because we really were living in a construction site for so many years, and maybe it just had to be that way.

Dr. Hartzell: I was an associate professor at Albany and there they took over a golf course and built the entire campus while they were keeping school in the old buildings down near the center of town. They didn't have to run the college on a construction site.

Dr. Blum: That's interesting.

Dr. Hartzell: They were crowded, but they didn't have to run the college on a construction site.

Dr. Brown: I feel compelled to say at least one positive thing about Stony Brook and that is to go to the library which has considerable financial difficulty and would like to do more than it can, but I really think certainly in our field, and I'm sure it's true in many others, it has become an extremely good research library, thanks in some part to absolutely first-rate people like Vasco.

Dr. Blum: I remember getting an offer from a school about twenty miles closer to New York and thinking about their pitiful little library and this library and that was Marymount; that was what kept me here, this library, especially the eighteenth century collection, it's fabulous.

Dr. Hartzell: And also the departments do have a hand in building up the library.

Dr. Brown: That's right, we were especially lucky in eighteenth century studies, I'm not sure when it was it was, was it in the 70's when we acquired an entire library.

Dr. Blum: There were two collections valued at more than \$75,000 each that were bought just out of hand in the early 60's and they were eighteenth century French books.

Dr. Brown: Including a first edition of Diderot's Encyclopedia and just sort of transported here for what would now seem a derisory sum of \$75,000. It was a staggering coup.

Dr. Hartzell: Was Roscoe Rouse head of the library then?

Dr. Blum: I don't remember.

Dr. Brown: Reuben Weltsch I think.

Dr. Hartzell: When did you get the green light on graduate work, how soon?

Dr. Brown: Well, it's been a kind of checkered history; I can't remember what year. I know that we already had an M. A., we were offering an M. A. before 1970.

Dr. Blum: But I don't remember when we got it.

Dr. Brown: I don't either, it was probably the late 60's.

Dr. Hartzell: How did you go about applying for it?

Dr. Brown: I don't know, I really had very little to do with that.

Dr. Hartzell: Was it Oscar?

Dr. Brown: It was Oscar Haac. I was an associate in the early years, and in the early 70's the new chairman, Mark Whitney, asked me to direct graduate studies and draft a proposal for a Ph. D. program, which I did, and nothing ever, then austerity set in at that time but we had already gotten the Ph. D. program, and it's taken all these years for us to draft another one. We have one that is now in Albany being considered.

Dr. Blum: We have a D. A. program, which is the Doctor of Teaching Arts, and many of our students have gone on and gotten that degree because they couldn't get a Ph. D. and they are offered many advantages, although not all, so we have had in effect a terminal degree.

Dr. Hartzell: I see, now would German and Slavic also have that kind of a degree?

Dr. Blum: Yes, that D. A. is for all languages; it's been run for many years by Joe Tursi, who will be retiring this year so someone will have to step in and take that very important position. He was chairman for nine years until a few years ago and now he's Director of the D. A. program and really has been the most successful proponent of Italian language and literature education in America.

Dr. Brown: He's one of the big names in foreign language teaching here in the States, and did a great deal to build up the Italian wing of the department. It's now an important program, it wasn't for many years.

Dr. Hartzell: Now, is his office here in the library?

Dr. Blum: Yes, it's located in Comp Lit. You must ask him about Joe Tursi day being declared in Suffolk County; he's very modest, he wouldn't tell you about that.

Dr. Hartzell: All right, time to go. Have we talked, did you have any connections with Albany, did you have any responsibilities in the statewide faculty or did you know any individuals in the central office?

Dr. Blum: Well, I was on the committee for resources allocation and budget for two years. I went to Albany with the president and Homer Neal and Carl Hanes for the budget hearing, and was with them when the DOB came down here for budget. That was an illuminating in a sad way because in Albany we had this immense budget prepared, and we had one morning and the realization that all -- how many campuses are there altogether?

Dr. Hartzell: About 63.

Dr. Blum: Okay, so each one had half a day and this little group of budget examiners was listening to these 62 other presentations, Jack Marburger had a time to get Stony Brook's name into their heads. I thought this was an extremely difficult way to run a university, very, very hard to do budgeting in a sensible way having to sell it to these people in three hours. It's terrible. I hope that the flexibility improves that.

Dr. Hartzell: All right. Anything else.

Dr. Brown: Well, look, we could go on for hours and get into anecdotal material but I think I'd just as well skip that.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, why don't you leave Stony Brook, go somewhere else?

Dr. Brown: Well, for myself I'm in middle middle age and I'm really anchored in my present life; I'm established and don't really want to uproot myself and go somewhere else. I also find the department more congenial now than I have in its entire history. I like most of my colleagues and I find it an extremely pleasant place to be. I wish that certain things as you know from my critical discourse were different, there was more money available for all sorts of things and that the students were better. Unfortunately, they seem to be getting worse because admissions standards have been lowered. But on the whole I'm not unhappy, that's why I'm not leaving.

Dr. Blum: I'm happy too but I just might leave, you never know.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, thanks very much.

[end of interview]