

Interview with Robert Goodrich      March 19, 2007

**Georgeann Jukuri:** Okay, will you please state your name birth date and position here at northern?

**Robert Goodrich:** Robert Goodrich, Associate professor of History, director of the honors program, born on June 20 1965.

**GJ:** Okay, thank you. I have some questions about the merger between the departments here at northern. When did you first hear about the merger?

**RG:** I heard about them pretty much as soon as they happened, which was, my goodness, 2002 sometime into 2003. It was just an official announcement that came down that departments were going to be merged. Before the official merger was announced though, there was a series of meetings where when we realized that this was going to happen, the departments started to communicate with each other to figure out, one, whether we wanted it, two, if we did want it, what did we think would work best, and three, if we didn't want it, how best to articulate those concerns, so it was actually kind of trickled down in a series of statements by the administration, all coming from the top down. First the idea that something was going to happen, and then finally what was going to happen. And so that stretches out kind of over half a year or so.

**GJ:** What did you think when you first heard about it? Were you opposed to it or?

**RG:** When I first heard about the idea of merging departments, I was ambivalent. I wanted to get details. There's nothing wrong with departments working together or being merged. It's quite common, depending on the size of the university. For example, (unable to decipher) history department, we have always had a close working relationship with the philosophy, although we are not the department of history and philosophy, we have always only had a single department head working for both of those departments. Or computer science and math, for example, have always been a merged department. They never really merged because they have never existed separately. Computer science came out of math in the 1970's. Where there are synergies, we were overlapped, I say great. Where there are not, where you have distinct enough disciplines where the practices and the cultures inside of the departments are different, then I would oppose it. So initially when I heard about it, well let me hear more about it, because I know where it can work, and also where it can't work.

**GJ:** How did your colleagues feel? Did you know anything about that?

**RG:** Start, about trying to figure it out. Within my department, we initially said well, okay, what does this mean? We already have a relationship with



philosophy, so that can continue. We said well, maybe there are other departments we might want to look at. Would we work well as a department of history with political science? Or maybe we thought about modern languages, or actually humanities. Since we are a department that is defined as humanities primarily, there's also a social science contingent. We said, well obviously we'll go with someone from Humanities, lets try to figure out what our options are and if we want to pursue them. Most of us at the start were open to it, provided that the decision that was made had faculty input, and that our concerns were taken into it. So initially, we were like, not ideal, it's more work for us to try to figure out how to do this, very limited cost savings. So we started to think about what options would work, but as the process started to unfold we realized overwhelmingly, we were not being listened to, and that this decision was being made upstairs in Cohodas, and that our input was meaningless because we presented a series of options, all of which would have saved the same amount or more money, and when they were ignored, I believe we had a meeting with dean Terry Seatov, we presented 6 other options, all of which we thought would save the same or more money, cause that was the argument, that it was about saving money, and all of those were ignored, and we had to scratch our heads and say why? It became clear that it had nothing to do with size. Some small departments, much smaller than (unable to decipher) modern languages, for example, which has a full time faculty of about 5, remained unmerged. And yet our department, which now has 9 or 10 including the head, was merged with three other departments. Some departments that were bigger than us were merged with just one, some that were bigger were left alone, some that were smaller were unmerged. It made no rhyme or reason to us. There was no sense to the decision-making. So we all felt that this was a decision that was ignoring faculty input, it is being talked down, as far as we could tell, it was being assigned arbitrarily. And that's when the opposition started. Initially, most of us were cautious about it, but by the end, when the final decision came most of us were adamantly opposed to it, and we remained so for the fight that took about two and a half years.

**GJ:** What kind of problems were there between the departments when the merger was in place.

**RG:** Most of the problems were not between the departments. History was merged with political science, economics, and philosophy. We have a very good relationship with our colleagues in those departments, work very closely. As I said, we have always sort of been administratively linked to philosophy. These are our colleagues. There was no sense of rivalry between us. It was just, what is now going to happen to resources? You're going to have one department head for 4 departments. That department head is a representative and the link between these departments and the administration. Lets say the department head was a historian, as it was at the time. The interim department head of the merged departments was Russ Magnaghi. A good man, and ethical man. But when he is sitting there, what department is he going to know better? Is he going



to understand the needs of economics or history better? And when he's sitting there in the deans department heads meetings and he's making arguments, who's he going to argue better for? Either he goes with where his skills are, which would be, I understand history better and I would advocate them stronger, or he tries to bend over backwards to balance those, which you can't really do. Different departments have very different needs and trying to say well because I'm a historian I won't advocate history very much, I need to advocate economics. That was our biggest concern, that we were going to lose advocacy and a clear sense of articulation of specific departmental needs to the administration, because all resources at the university flow from the top down, and if you don't have access to the deans or to the higher executives, you don't have access to those resources. And that comes into play primarily when we get new hires, replacement hires, or enhancement positions. That was probably the biggest concern. But also, we were just left scratching our heads. Why were these four merged? Particularly for my department. Why are we put in with economics and history? Yes, you can find and overlap, you can find and overlap in history with everything, because there is a history of everything. But why something that is clearly in the social sciences with a field that is clearly in the humanities? It seemed to even defy the logic of the college of arts and science and liberal studies, which separated these different departments out into different fields. Humanities are division two, social sciences are division four. Why then create a single department? It seemed irrational even on that level. And we saw that there were conflicts in the working cultures and professional expectations. So another concern that arose was well, will we have economists making decisions about historians? Either for new hires or for tenure promotion? And we saw that none of these were adequately answered by the administration. So those two things, one the serious concerns that arose about how this would work in practice, and the lack of enfranchisement in the decision-making, meant that there was no reason why we felt we should have supported or trusted this decision.

**GJ:** Okay, how did the end of the merger finally come about?

**RG:** Two and a half years of constant and increasing pressure on the administration to reconsider their decision. We started, I was part of a kickoff to opposing it with a petition drive to the affected departments, and a very strongly worded statemtn about the mission, at least asking for a reconsideration that included meaningful faculty input. We got about, from the merged departments 50-60 signatures. It was a strongly worded statement, this was right off the bat. So we felt of the 7 or so departments that were being merged, that wasn't a bad kickoff. Over the years though, it started to fall into another hand committee O which was a committee of AAUP, of our union, that had been created right around the same time as the merger of the departments, discontentment with the contract that we received, in combination with discontent over a general sense of a lack of shared governments on campus. And committee O, which I was elected chair, took this issue on as one of our chief issues. That this was going to be the point around which we would raise awareness in the faculty and try to



protest the decision-making that was going on. So we held a series of meetings, that were gaining in popularity, that is, greater attendance, more resentment, and also, after two years of seeing how this arrangement did not work. And the administrations refusal to talk to us, and the administrations refusal to say, if it was a money issue, were there other alternatives that we had proposed, led the overwhelming majority, almost to a person of the people in the merged departments to begin to take an active stance, so that it would have been a year and a half ago, that there was a meeting that involved the dean and the provost, came into a meeting with all of the merged departments in the course of one day. By the end, the provost and the dean weren't even allowed to speak. There was clear recognition by every single faculty member present at those meetings that it was unacceptable, that it would not be tolerated, and that the cost for maintaining this sort of imposed administrative restructuring would be too high. It was frittering away faculty strength, our energy, we've only got so many hours in a week. And if we are organizing against this for 10 hours during the week, we don't have time to do other service. Also, there was an increasing skepticism about why should I put in service for the university in another field, for example, more advising, doing the AAA scholarship, these sort of activities that are highly dependant upon faculty volunteerism. With a low morale, it was like why should I do that? And the university doesn't work without the professors. The professors were getting to the point where they were saying well, lets just start slowing down the university, because they are not listening to us. And people started to realize this model was one that was based more upon the community college model, where it is very common, in order to save money, that you have a single sort of merged department around the social studies, sciences or the natural sciences, they said we're not a community college, so why adopt this model? And the argument started to come out. But I think the turning point was very clearly, those last 7 meetings, back in the fall of 2005, where the provost and the dean of the college came in, and the anger was direct, and the frustration and the unwillingness to concede to any of the excuses given by the administration, and when the administration said cite us specific evidence where you think, one, you have the right to do this, and two, where you think this is saving money that you think can't be saved elsewhere. And they couldn't produce any documents. And they were doing this in a room of trained scholars and I think that completely shattered their credibility, when they could produce no written documents that said that either they had support from the union to do this, which they had claimed or that any of the other proposals could have saved as much if not more money.

**GJ:** Do you think there have been any long-lasting effects from the merger?

**RG:** Yeah. There is a much greater degree of mobilization amongst the faculty. Some people call it anti-administration, I wouldn't call it that. I think instead there is a larger support for faculty involvement in shared government. Is it a distrust of the administration? Sometimes. But there is a clear recognition that the faculty defends the academic quality of the university, that's our primary task, and the



administration defends the business interests of the university, and that's our primary task. And sometimes they work harmoniously, but sometimes they're in conflict, and when they are in conflict, the faculty should expect the administration to act on the business side of things, and thus we have to defend the academic side of things. I'd like to say we're all in the same boat. We are on some things, but we're certainly pulling on different oars, so sometimes we have to pull a little harder to correct the course that the ship is going on. And I think that awareness has been heightened. For example, I saw out of the last contract negotiations, which occurred in the summer 2006, where there was a great deal of concern on the administration's point of view about the activism of the faculty, and would we disrupt classes? Were we talking about strikes or work slow-downs? What was this committee O going to do? The first two meetings actually had that question raised by the administration, so they were very worried about the agitation amongst the faculty. And I think rightly so. Because we were planning to do things if the administration wouldn't listen to us yet again. And I know that through the AAUP, we have been fighting to increase shared governance and to make sure that the question of academic integrity is being defended just as actively as the number crunching decisions coming out of cohodas and hedgecock. So yeah, that is a shift. That is a shift. It disillusioned some people about the administration to do it, but the ability, even though it took two and a half years to reverse that decision, when we were told flat out by the provost, and it even said this in the North wind, that well, they'll forget about it soon enough. Poor choice of words on the provost's part perhaps, but that only showed that if you stick with it, you can influence the outcome. And I think that a lot of people were empowered by it, just as many people were disillusioned by the lack of involvement in decision making.

**GJ:** Do you have any last comments to make about it?

**RG:** Uhm, well, based on my experience, the key thing to learn is not really about mergers, it is about shared governance. That probably some sort of merger system could have worked if they had actually involved the faculty in a meaningful way in the decision-making process and listened to our alternatives. Then I think they would have had goodwill and we could have found a situation in which the university could have saved the money that they needed to save and the faculty could have made arrangements. But you need some parameters that make it fair, as fair as possible. Departments are very different, they are complex. Some have graduate programs, some do not. Some are large some are small. Some rely heavily on adjunct faculty, some do not. I know they are apples and oranges but the faculty could have made some decisions, I think, based upon their interests that would have also had financial benefits. So it was that lack of inclusion that led to all the problems. And then the administrations unwillingness to even reconsider the issue for two years. That sort of intransitive, just bad management. So I think strong faculty input, combined with administrative willingness to listen to that input, to value it on an equal level with

whatever the executives are saying. That's the lesson that I drew out of it, and I hope the administration and the faculty drew out of it.

**GJ:** Okay, thank you.

*Robert Goodrich: Career Development, Lecturer and Associate Professor of History and Director of the History program, 1981 to 1986-87, 1991*

**Q1:** Okay, What is the Junior Faculty?

**A1:** What do you mean? Usually we'd say a group of people who would be somebody who would be coming very early. Starting out usually when you're starting in the lower positions or adjunct or whatever. Some track. They usually think of it as assistant professors. Although in theory you could come in an any way, they would have you as an associate or even a full, although that's not the way you're hired. So it's really for the lower faculty, by definition. The way I think I got into it was I was with East I thought was the senior faculty, interdisciplinary College, and I was at the end of the line in the fall of 1971, when that started up there. I was a very young faculty and assistant professor at BNU and I was that time, I was very fortunate to be invited into a group and my wife and I went to the house and I had some other people that group.

**Q2:** This Title is considered part of the Junior Faculty Group?

**A2:** It's really anybody. Anybody who would be considered it. The term itself is not formal term. It's really just a general term that you'd use when a high ranking. So you're who would be the assistant professor usually you're considered Junior Faculty. And then the group itself, we started out the first year in 1971, calling everybody who had been hired that year. There were about 100 people. And then when a committee was formed there was more included and the faculty group was bringing funds. So we started to work out really anybody who had come or would be on the list. And then every year when that would be the list of the people who were hired that year or new professors - so that's what the group was for and we got together in that the year we actually passed the name of a faculty is the old Faculty Interdisciplinary College. And it really was that simply run along the old faculty and we would have a group. After we had a group that was well-organized and we started to bring in funds really for the good of the university and Michigan, we were part of a larger interdisciplinary program, and it was a helping program when you would have with your senior position, and that's what the list of people that follow the bringing the name to the old Faculty Interdisciplinary College.

**Q3:** Okay, What do you do as part of this group?