INTERVIEW with HAZARD ADAMS

May 30, 1974

McCULLOCH: Hazard, I'd like to know what attracted you about coming to Irvine.

ADAMS: That's a long time ago. Well, of course, mainly I think it was the opportunity to start clean and recruit a department from the ground up, and I remember my first conversation on this matter was with Ivan Hinderaker in an airport in Chicago, where I indicated to him the desire to create a department that had a creative writing program and also some connection with comparative literature, either in or outside the department. I think I was opting for an outside situation at that time, which is, of course, what we tried for a while, if you recall.

McCULLOCH: I do recall.

ADAMS: That was the first thing that, I think, struck me as exciting, and then the next step was for me to come out here and be interviewed, and the conditions of the operation seemed to me terribly exciting. It was going to be a young faculty, and it seemed as if there'd be a lot of opportunity to try out things. It was also the fact that it was the University of California, which made for greater possibility than there would be in a lot of other systems, because it is a lot easier to attract good people to the institution. I think those were the main things.

McCULLOCH: Well, now, passing to the program itself, can you give any of your impressions of the early meetings we had? We all met together, and we set up the program that came out in the purple book. And I'd like you to comment particularly on the breadth requirements, because in a recent article you wrote for the Humanities Review you indicated that really we don't have a set philosophy, we never did work out a set philosophy of general education; we just had a compromise.
ADAMS: Yes, I think that's true. I still hold with what I said there. That isn't to say that there weren't a lot of people who had positions, but those positions tended to get submerged in the politics of the situation. I'd be interested to see what Sam McCulloch says when he's interviewed about this.

McCULLOCH: I think when I've finished the interviews, I'm going to have someone do me. I agreed with you, and I felt we didn't go about setting up a philosophy, and that's why you and I talked about a humanities course--at least we'd get something going. And then you did University Studies, which was an enormously successful and fine program which tried to build some kind of general education.

ADAMS: Yes. Well, I feel that there were some advantages to us in developing a rather freewheeling operation where different units were given their head, and I think also that we had to pay the price for that. And one of the prices we paid was that, when you put all the chieftains together in a room, the tendency was for each of these people, so intent on developing a strong program in his own area, to rather neglect the total picture. I was never happy with the 6-3-3, though I went along with it at the time--I think I probably voted for it. But it did not strike me as a good general-education requirement nor a liberal-education requirement; it seemed to me it was just a dividing up of the students so that everyone would have a crack at them.

McCULLOCH: That's true. It wasn't a systematic set of requirements.

ADAMS: Yes. But at the time it may have been all right. I also might say that I felt that the temper of things in the room, when we used to meet, tended to be somewhat antihumanistic--I don't think deliberately--but the majority of the people who sat in that room were of an attitude toward education that was really quite foreign to my previous experience and actually a little bit shocking to me at the time.
McCULLOCH: Well, we had just yourself, Arthur Marder, Abe Melden, and myself, only four.

ADAMS: That's right. We were the only humanists around. Clay Garrison was here, and he was representing the arts, and of course he, at the time, was intent on pressing the production side of things, and he was having enough trouble sustaining that view in the face of the University's traditions. Much of his thought was taken up with that, but when you looked at the other people, you had people who were very much interested in mathematical models, in the social sciences, in computers, and so on. I remember one Dean walking through the Library and saying (at least, this was the story) that he didn't see any reason why we had to have a Library, since there weren't going to be any books in education after a certain point.

McCULLOCH: I know who you mean. John Smith, whom I've interviewed, remembers it, too.

ADAMS: Yes, and then I also remember another Chairman describing the institution as a kind of supermarket, which is not my idea of education, and another person being rather surprised that the people in humanities did research, which surprised me a little bit. It seemed to me that there was a kind of floating barbarism at the beginning that we managed to put down, and I think we put it down to some extent because some of the pure scientists joined us.

McCULLOCH: Particularly biological scientists.

ADAMS: Yes. And if that hadn't happened, at some critical point if we hadn't had a lot of humanistically oriented biological scientists, I don't know where Irvine would have ended up.

McCULLOCH: I share that perspective, too. Well, moving on now to your own program, Hazard, it was my position as Dean to let the Chairmen have as free a hand as possible and develop programs in which they were particularly
interested. I recruited them because of a particular position that they held. I knew of your work in literary criticism, and I wanted to see that developed. When you recruited, do you feel that the administrative regulations were helpful or reasonable? I know that in several cases we got turned down, but were they really obstructive, do you think?

ADAMS: No, I don't think so. The major issue that I had to deal with, with respect to the review process, was in the area of creative writing, and the fact that the School of Fine Arts was pressing in the direction of performance was an aid there.

McCULLOCH: Yes, that's true.

ADAMS: Yes. We had a little trouble with that. There was some skepticism about it here and there, but, as I recall, we got it through without too much difficulty. Beyond that, I would say that the review process may have saved me from making a couple of bad appointments—not bad appointments, but at least not very strong appointments—and I would come down pretty strongly in favor of it, even though it's a nuisance and cumbersome and slow, and everyone is always complaining about it. At the same time, I don't really feel that any of those regulations prevented excellence.

McCULLOCH: In that case, the next question: How should these be changed? Really, you feel that they're on the whole satisfactory.

Incidentally, I did Jack Holland a couple of weeks ago, and he, number one, wished to be remembered to you particularly, but, number two, he feels very strongly that the system we have in the University makes good appointments.

ADAMS: Yes. I'd say the system runs excellently as long as the University salary scale is competitive with the top institutions in the country; I think it would deteriorate pretty rapidly, if that weren't the case. One sees a little bit of pressure on it right now.
McCULLOCH: Well, turning to our Academic Senate, our own UCI Senate, how do you think we did in setting that up? What's your opinion?

ADAMS: Well, I think that, if one thinks of a Senate as working through its committees principally, then one judges it by the behavior of its major committees, and with respect to that it seems to me the Senate has done pretty well, and the only real change that we've had to make is the splitting of the Committee on Educational Policy into two committees, and that was just a matter of workload. I would say that, over the years, the Committee on Educational Policy has been the weakest link in the Senate. Part of that is caused by the fact that the different schools developed such strength and such independence, and no one has ever wanted to cooperate with that committee. I think the time has come that there's going to be, sooner or later, probably a kind of crisis over this in which either the campus is going to reaffirm the independence and even strength of the independence of the schools, or there's going to be some grounds for concern for a general-education approach or a liberal-education approach which will give that committee more power. Beyond that, it seems to me the Senate has been a fairly effective body to its committees.

The Senate meeting together is almost impossible. It's almost impossible for that body to do anything intelligent, I think. But, again, I'm not sure that's the crucial question. We've all been through Senate meetings here that we wished hadn't happened. We've been through some Senate meetings in which nothing happened, and then others where there weren't quorums, and so forth, but that's not the real issue with the Senate, I think.

McCULLOCH: I think you're right, Hazard. Reflecting on your own work, now, as Chairman (I'm only really thinking of the first two or three years here), in what areas do you think you had the greatest success at UCI?
ADAMS: Oh, I think that recruiting faculty is probably the most important thing a Chairman does, finally.

McCULLOCH: Yes, I agree.

ADAMS: And I think the recruitment in English was pretty successful, and I look at the department now and I'm pretty proud of it.

McCULLOCH: Yes, you have good reason to be. I think it's just great.

ADAMS: I would say that two other things are important. One, the department really did change from a rather traditional curriculum to a much more flexible sort of curriculum than most departments have, and that flexibility has very nearly been maintained, so it must be doing a reasonably good job. I tried to set it up in the beginning so that it could respond to change, and I think it responds to change fairly well.

Second, I think the introduction of a good, strong program in the Master of Fine Arts degree in writing is a good thing. It was a new departure in the University of California, and we have had tremendous success with a lot of our graduates in that program.

McCULLOCH: Yes, I know you have.

ADAMS: A number of them have published novels, books of poems, and got prizes and so forth. I believe that's been a good thing for the department, and it's also been a good thing for the campus and has given a lot of life to the School of Humanities.

McCULLOCH: I quite agree. I think both in your program and in your recruiting you were very successful.

ADAMS: I could tell you about failures. I feel that it is only very recently that we've managed to break through and really exploit the possibilities of comparative literature. Though we worked at it for a while, it seems that that's a very difficult thing to get moving, but we still have the camel's head under the tent, I guess.
McCulloch: Yes, I know how hard you and I worked on that problem. Would you like to comment a little on University Studies, which I feel was a real success and would have continued if we had not had budget problems?

Adams: Well, I think the fact that University Studies has virtually disappeared, at least in the form in which it was conceived, is a sign of its success, because you look at what University Studies did and the conditions that obtained at the time we began and now look at the curricula of different schools, you'll see it had a considerable influence on the kinds of courses offered.

McCulloch: Yes. I put my own course that I taught in University Studies into the regular curriculum.

Adams: Yes, and so did I, and a lot of people did that. Fred Reines's course in rainbows and things is a fixture in Physical Sciences now, for example. So I think that the fact that it's dwindled is a sign in some ways of the fact that the campus absorbed the good parts of it in the regular programs, which was the intention at the beginning. We never got it on a sound financial basis. The complications to that simply seemed to be overwhelming, and every time we'd get to the point where the administration would say, "Gee, we'll support it," the faculty began to have doubts about whether that support really ought to be sent in that direction; in other words, it happened at just the wrong time. But I see University Studies continuing, perhaps in a different form, though I don't know what form that'll be. I think it was a good program for its time. I don't think that what it then did is what is now needed any longer.

McCulloch: I'm interested in what you say, Hazard. Going on to the question about the uniqueness, what problems are unique to Irvine because it's new or because it's a particular campus? What observations do you have on the fact that we—
ADAMS: The present situation?

McCULLOCH: Well, no. I was thinking of really the first two or three years.

ADAMS: Well, I may not be the best person to comment on this because we're all so absorbed in getting to a certain efficiency of operation, to a certain level, finding the fundamental courses and getting them taught and putting our innovations into practice and so forth. It just seemed to me we were all so absorbed in that, that there wasn't very much time to worry about the fact that we were new or even to theorize very much about it. I've actually theorized to myself about education a great deal more in the last four years than I did in the first four, strangely enough.

McCULLOCH: That's interesting. Would you like to comment a little?

ADAMS: Well, I think the reason for that was that I had set certain goals when I came, and you had set certain goals, and we were working at those, and those absorbed us. And then there came a time when those were reasonably well established, and then we sat back and began to look—or at least I did—started to look at what was here and what wasn't here, and that was the time that I began to concern myself more with the problem, the campuswide issues that I see. And one of those strikes me still as being the whole question of what Irvine conceives education to be.

I frankly don't believe that education ought to be defined by students; I think education has to be defined by people who are professionals in disciplines. The great danger of that is the kind of specialization that so many such people have found themselves either trapped in or committed to and so forth. It still seems to me that people who have experienced the full range of higher education are the ones who have to make those decisions about it.

McCULLOCH: Well, I think that's very true. Well, would you like to
jump down a little to this question of a liberal arts college as against the schools? Do you like the way we have it organized now, or do you think we ought to think of changing?

ADAMS: I voted at that critical vote for the abolition of the deanship of the College of Arts, Letters, and Sciences. I was ambivalent about it at the time, but I felt that at that stage of our development we'd gone too far to turn and that, in fact, we ought to continue to move as we were. And I'm still ambivalent about it because, as Vice Chancellor, I think I'm now in a position where I'm going to have to create some kind of an office to handle things that a Dean of the College normally would handle, because the pressure of so many different units reporting in to a Vice Chancellor who has a large number of other duties sweeps the whole question of campuswide educational policy under the table. So my ambivalence has to do with my perception from this level that something is missing. I'm not sure that the concept of the College of Arts, Letters, and Sciences is one that one would want to return to, though. Not for Irvine, perhaps.

McCULLOCH: Do you think a Dean of Special Studies or Dean of Undergraduate Programs--

ADAMS: Possibly so. But, surely, there ought to be some centralized place where educational policy in the broader sense is really being thought about. One of the things I notice about administrative positions in institutions, in spite of the fact that people are constantly saying that we're overadministered, is that no one really has any time to think, that one is running as fast as he can to stay pretty much in the same place, and innovation, thought, is left to a faculty which also is very much occupied with things. And if anything is missing in the higher levels of administration in universities, it seems to me to be a philosophical approach to questions of education, of intellectual development, and we just don't have that.
McCULLOCH: You know, Hazard, that we did think about that at the beginning, and we created a kind of position--or we suggested to Dan the position that John Goodlad would take, who would look at the whole problem of educational programs, and we tried to interest John in coming, but he didn't respond. But I think, had someone of John Goodlad's abilities and caliber come and just thought about what we were trying to do and how we were going to run our programs, it would have been just the thing at the time.

ADAMS: Yes, I think that's true. Some people were a little wary about this because they didn't want anyone interfering with what they were doing.

McCULLOCH: Right.

ADAMS: Nevertheless, the situation now is a little different from that. I don't think you'll ever have, at the Irvine campus, a Czar of the sort that John Goodlad might potentially have been. But what you do need is someone who can bring people from different units together in a room and work out connections, relationships; that's what we're missing. It's very hard for two Deans to sit down and negotiate an interschool program, because there's too much to be lost. His role just isn't right for that. What's needed is someone who can mediate; we need a kind of Henry Kissinger of academic life somehow.

McCULLOCH: That's the sort of thing I like to do, but the reason that it's very difficult to do it is you have no particular power unless you have a budget.

ADAMS: That's correct.

McCULLOCH: And the Deans have the budget.

ADAMS: And any movement in that direction would mean that the Vice Chancellor would have to vest authority and budgetary authority in such a person. I appreciate that.
McCULLOCH: Yes.

ADAMS: That's where policy is made, at the budgetary levels.

McCULLOCH: If you were to do it all over again, Hazard, what would you do differently?

ADAMS: Oh, I never think of that! A bad thing to think about! I don't really want to answer that question, Sam, because I've always tried to avoid raising that question. It seems a pointless question, and it usually ends up your being unhappy and upset about something.

McCULLOCH: Well, it isn't intended that way. A number of people have commented on one or two things that they wish had gone another way or that they would have done a different way.

ADAMS: Oh, yes, there are things, I think, that I would have not done. I suspect, though, that I look back upon that kind of question from a more cautious perspective than I had then, and caution may not be the best perspective. Hindsight is not really very good, I think, because Lord knows what you'd have done instead—it might have been worse. I'm not unhappy with the way things have gone. I think that, if I had to do it again, I would have fought more for an integrated program between the arts and the humanities, and I think I would have insisted more on the role of the humanities in the education of other people on the campus. I would have wanted that better defined than it is presently. But, again, if one had done that, one would have had a different kind of situation to deal with, and in some ways it would have been a less attractive situation to deal with, and we might not have as good a faculty as we have.

McCULLOCH: That's well answered.

ADAMS: So I don't really know.

McCULLOCH: Yes. Well, just one last question. Are there any experiences in the early years that we have missed or that have come back to you while we've been talking that you would like to comment on?
ADAMS: Well, I hadn't really thought about that question very much.
McCULLOCH: Well, it's just a catchall.
ADAMS: Well, I would say that it's not a matter of specific experiences; one has all kinds of stories that one can tell.
McCULLOCH: That's right.
ADAMS: But I think the major experience here for me was my connection with a tremendous number of interesting people—young people, by and large. As I recall, in my own department the oldest person was in his forties. I don't think there was anybody in his fifties, was there? In English?
McCULLOCH: No, not in English.
ADAMS: And very rarely in the rest of the school at the outset. I was thinking mainly about the connections that I made with people in other fields. In a large institution, that's very difficult, and I know that my social life previous to coming to Irvine was pretty well restricted to people in my own field or reasonably close field. Here, for the first time, in my academic career in higher education, I came into contact with scientists, social scientists, people who were working in things like ICS and so forth, and that was extremely exciting, and it was marvelous to meet these people and get to know them and to work with them. I think that was one of the great experiences of being here at the beginning, even though there was a lot of disagreement, too, at the same time, and, as I said earlier in the interview, there were some points of view that I didn't really care for very much.

At the same time, I think it made it necessary for us all to think about our own positions more, and, in spite of the disagreements, one could never claim at Irvine that one was dealing with unintelligent people. The level of competence and imagination was very high at the outset; I think it still is.
McCULLOCH: I think this is true. And I was interested when I taped Jim March, which was over a year ago, that he felt the exchanges were so fruitful, and he felt that maybe we might have listened more to some of the older people. I know that I feel that those we recruited sometimes didn't share the vision we had and tended to want to mold the institution after their own graduate schools. Even though we told them what we wanted—

ADAMS: That's a natural tendency. I had the same experience in my department. That's inevitable. Part of that is just the way everything changes. One of the things I've tried to guard against in my own career since then is trying to impose too much of my own will upon my own department, because as the founding Chairman I still have a great deal of authority over there. It's not official authority, but it's a kind of authority you gain by having been in that position. And one of the things I try to guard against is preserving things simply because we started that way. And, indeed, that's something you do struggle with in your own mind sometimes.

McCULLOCH: Somebody said that every catalogue should self-destruct every five years, five years.

ADAMS: I think that's an old Jeffersonian principle, isn't it?

McCULLOCH: I don't know—I hadn't thought that far back. But in History, as you know, we changed the whole curriculum last year, and I think it was very good for us. It's good for us to keep thinking about changing when we think it's necessary.

ADAMS: Well, one of the other things that we did try to do in English is to have a curriculum which was flexible in certain kinds of ways and was able to change. I think we succeeded in that fairly well. At the same time, it may have hardened a little more than it should have.

McCULLOCH: Well, that's a problem for a Dean. It's hard to move a
person, once he's got started and a course belongs to a professor, which I
know many times you said and I said should not be. The course should belong
to the department, and other people should teach it, but people get into
these ruts. I think Irvine, more than a lot of others, has tended to remain
fairly flexible. What I miss, Hazard, is what you say, that there isn't
this overall thinking and planning, and the Senate has not worked out to be a
forum where we can discuss it.

ADAMS: No.

McCULLOCH: It should have been; it should have been.

ADAMS: Yes, but I don't think that it can be. It seems to me you get
as much variety of attitude and approach as you have in a typical university
faculty in these days, and the idea of the town meeting is just not a good
one.

McCULLOCH: No, I wasn't thinking of that, but I was thinking, are our
committees working better? And you were saying quite correctly that the
Committee on Educational Policy, which is the key committee along with
Budget, has never really worked.

ADAMS: No.

McCULLOCH: And maybe because the faculty didn't want it to work, and
the Deans, too.

ADAMS: And I think we've still got that problem, because Ed Policy can
bring something to the floor of the Senate and almost inevitably it will be
defeated.

McCULLOCH: That's right.

ADAMS: And I think we're going to see this again. They've spent a
whole year working on the breadth requirement, and they've come up with
something, and I suspect that it won't pass. We'll be right back where we
were.
McCULLOCH: That's exactly right.
ADAMS: That's just a guess.
McCULLOCH: Yes, I know.
ADAMS: But that's been the behavior of the Senate over time, and, if there should be any change in the Senate, it ought to be in the direction of making it possible to make educational policy and make it stick. After all, that committee has worked a whole year, and it is a representative elected committee. People ought to listen to it a little more, but the tendency is, when the report comes in to the Senate, for people to get up and make long speeches which imply that this committee hasn't thought about anything at all, you know, for the whole year and that they should start at the beginning again and work out all the problems, which just can't be done.
McCULLOCH: That's right.
ADAMS: I don't know how Senates get around that, but I think, unless we can find some way, we probably won't get very far there. And then, of course, what happens is that the administration starts to manipulate budgets in order to get its way. It fills a void. I would say the administration here has never wanted to do that.
McCULLOCH: I think you're right.
ADAMS: The Chancellor has certainly never taken that position, and I don't think any Vice Chancellor has, but occasionally one is tempted to step in where the Senate simply doesn't act.
McCULLOCH: You're absolutely right. Well, any other thoughts you have? Anything on your program? I, of course, was particularly pleased with your program, the various spokes of criticism, of comparative literature, and of creative writing. I thought it was very exciting, and I think we've got an exciting faculty, and the students we turn out, I think, are good students. And I feel, as you say, that there was a flexibility to make certain changes, yet we've gone a long way in nine years.
ADAMS: Oh, I think so. We've gone a very great distance very quickly, much more quickly than I expected us to, frankly.

McCULLOCH: Well, I think we all worked maybe too hard, but we worked at it. We simply worked sixteen hours a day—I know I did. I think to try to start a BA, MA, and PhD is damned near impossible, really.

ADAMS: Yes, I'm very proud of our graduate programs in English. I think that on the campus our department has had probably one of the largest graduate programs. It may be the largest—for all I know, it probably is—and it has turned out good students.

McCULLOCH: Yes. I notice Dora Polk got a very good teaching award the other day.

ADAMS: A lot of good students turned out in the three different programs.

McCULLOCH: Well, Hazard, I appreciate this talk, and, if you have any further thoughts, just drop me a line. I'll turn the machine off now.