

**Richard Alexander**  
**Interviewed by Susan Fiksdal**  
**The Evergreen State College oral history project**  
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**FINAL**

**Begin Part 1 of 2 of Richard Alexander on 1-28-17**

**Alexander:** It seems to me that I recall, during our last interview—the first interview, that I had mentioned that the deans and the faculty and most people involved imagined that the vast majority of the students, who were enrolling for the first year, were going to be first-year freshmen.

**Fiksdal:** But they weren't.

**Alexander:** They were not. And it was really quite remarkable how very many students, who were not only not incoming freshmen, but were well over 30, some of them over 40.

**Fiksdal:** Wow.

**Alexander:** And everybody had been planning the curriculum on the assumption that all the programs would be on the model of Tutorials at San Jose, that is to say 100 students, five faculty, five seminar groupings lasting all year long. Well, this just simply had no relevance to most of these older students, especially the ones who had already had the first year or the first two years of college someplace.

So those of us who stayed in good touch with the Registrar's office were well aware of this. They kept trying to warn people. And most particularly—this is a very bad memory lapse here because I know this woman very, very well.

**Fiksdal:** Nancy Taylor?

**Alexander:** Yes, Nancy Taylor. She didn't work for the Registrar at that time. I've forgotten exactly what her job was.

**Fiksdal:** She might not have had a job title. That's the way I heard it from her. She was just sort of asked to come and help out.

**Alexander:** She said that was the way?

**Fiksdal:** Well, for that first year.

**Alexander:** That was the way. Okay, we won't worry about the other little wrinkles that are involved in that. At any rate, Nancy did her damndest to persuade people. And strangely enough, the one that refused most strenuously to listen to her warnings was Cadwallader. And it's now clear to me that Cadwallader was in a terrible bind in that first year. He was the one who had suggested that there be

some, what came to be called, coordinated studies programs—it didn't have that name at the time—only to discover, to his dismay, that this was going to be taken up as a model for everything in the curriculum. And it was most held onto by those people who had never done it.

So people like myself and Richard Brian, who had come up from San Jose, and, well, strangely enough, the Provost at that time—but, of course, he rather scrupulously kept hands off the academic planning, as much as he could.

**Fiksdal:** Dave Barry?

**Alexander:** Dave Barry. He knew all about it because he'd been down there. And his connections with Mervyn through the Tutorials program down there had been a major reason why he was asked to become the Provost.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, I see. Had he been teaching in that program?

**Alexander:** No, he'd never taught in it. He was an administrator. But he was sufficiently close to it, and aware of what was going on there, but he recognized a whole bunch of things about those programs that most other people just simply didn't cotton to it at all.

And one of those things was how absolutely essential the particular mix of faculty in such a program was. You couldn't put one of them together just by getting five people at random and throwing them into a room and saying, "Here, teach this."

**Fiksdal:** Bad idea.

**Alexander:** But people didn't realize that at all.

**Fiksdal:** Wasn't that the situation when you first arrived at San Jose?

**Alexander:** Oh, yes, it was.

**Fiksdal:** Because they had everything in place, and then you came. So you experienced that.

**Alexander:** And they had it in place, but it hadn't been put together by the five people who were going to teach it.

**Fiksdal:** So you knew about that.

**Alexander:** Oh, god, in spades. [laughing] I tell you, it was a disaster. And Richard Brian knew all of that sort of thing, too. And then there were people who had worked in a similar program at Old Westbury, and who came over from Old Westbury in large numbers. And then there were people who had gone from San Jose State to Old Westbury—for instance, Bob Sluss, and so on. So there were people who knew. There were people with experience. But we weren't listened to. No one wanted to listen to anything that we had to say on the subject.

**Fiksdal:** Why do you think that was? Was it because you were forming something brand new?

**Alexander:** Yes, and people were very nervous about the whole thing. It was a function of something that is typical of any of these large programs. They become a college in and of themselves. Nothing else exists, and this has all kinds of repercussions. So people are myopically focused on that program—their program, their particular problems that come up, which often turn out to be personality conflict problems.

Overwhelmingly, personality conflict problems, and the attempt to avoid such problems, that absorbs an inordinate of time in these large programs. And relatively little time is spent trying to—in the early stages, before there are any students around, when you’re planning it and putting it together—[see] how everything fits, and where it is supposed to be leading; and what are the major questions we’re asking in this; and what kind of answers are we looking for; and what, therefore, should we ask the students to do?

There was a tendency to simply accept the model, but the model, as understood by people who had never done it. Amongst the folks that—Richard Jones was a major figure in the bad side of this, in my view. And he was busy writing his little book, which is still circulating, I should think.

**Fiksdal:** I think so, yeah.

**Alexander:** And has had an enormous influence, even though it is largely not his own experience that he’s describing. [laughing]

**Fiksdal:** Oh, he doesn’t attribute the stories to people? I’ve never read it; I really have to do it.

**Alexander:** Well, I think it’s a great disappointment. It just doesn’t really describe what goes on in such programs. It’s highly idealistic, in the worst sense.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, I see.

**Alexander:** There’s an idea of coordinated studies programs, which he’s pushing. But at any rate, with all of this mess, with people trying to figure it out, I think Mervyn felt that the best thing he could do was just hang on, and make sure there was one program that really was the model that he tried. And I think I have to step back and say that what Mervyn had wanted—when he came up to the fatal meeting, and they were all supposed to propose what they wanted to do; and nobody had the foggiest idea, he was the only one who had any idea—and what he wanted was to guarantee that there would be at least one program like the Tutorials in Arts & Sciences.

**Fiksdal:** That he would teach, or it didn’t matter? It was just one that really was the same?

**Alexander:** Well, he was going to teach it, and he did.

**Fiksdal:** Not right away, though, right? Oh, yeah, he rotated out of the deanship fairly quickly.

**Alexander:** Yes. And he worked with Richard Jones in that first program. At any rate, he thought that the model, as it was practiced at San Jose, was the model that should exist; that is to say, this coordinated studies program would be an honors program. Not everybody would take one of these things, and they would all be students who were satisfying their general requirements, but nevertheless were going to go back into the regular curriculum, and would therefore have to take courses . . .

**Fiksdal:** . . . to achieve their major.

**Alexander:** . . . to put together the requirements for the major that they were going to have. Now, you see how this just—

**Fiksdal:** So it would be just one year.

**Alexander:** Oh, no.

**Fiksdal:** It could be two years?

**Alexander:** Always the idea was that it would be two years long.

**Fiksdal:** Okay, I think I didn't remember that.

**Alexander:** Right. That pretty much disappeared within the first year. It became very clear that this was too much of a burden to put on students; that by the time they'd gotten through a year of this, they'd had it.

**Fiksdal:** I see. Let me just ask, was that the experience at San Jose State?

**Alexander:** No, the experience at San Jose State was that the student would enroll—if he or she qualified—it was an honors program. It really was an honors program. And it was strictly voluntary amongst those students who qualified for it. Of course, not anything like all the ones that could have taken it did attempt to take it. But once they signed up, it was for two years.

And sometimes, the second year would have a completely different faculty. Sometimes it would have the same one, same faculty, depending on how well they got along with each other, and how well it worked. And that's not a given. Just because it starts that way doesn't mean it's going to continue that way.

At any rate, the second year was always felt that it should have certain peculiar qualities. The key to understanding what Mervyn really wanted is to look up the old accounts of the . . . oh, boy, see, my brain's going out . . .

**Fiksdal:** Of the Meiklejohn . . . ?

**Alexander:** Yeah, okay, you got it. Meiklejohn, right. And the accounts of those things are really wonderful. Very inspiring. But they required a quite peculiar set of talents and aptitudes on the part of

the faculty to work in those things, and a commitment that's unbelievable as far as most people are concerned. At any rate, he thought he would have to fight to get one such program.

**Fiksdal:** Right.

**Alexander:** And suddenly found everything was going to be that. Well, nobody had any idea what that meant, including Mervyn. He had no idea. So I think he believed the best thing that he could do would be to just commit himself to this Meiklejohn idea, in this year, and let everything else work its way out as well as it could, and see what happened; and try to preserve that as a shining example that would continue. Because there was always a chance that, well, this will turn out to be cockamamie nonsense, and nobody will ever continue doing this. People just had no idea what they were getting in for, or what they were going to do about it. And it was very difficult to plan these programs when you had no idea what was likely to take place. And you wind up with a commitment to the seminar as the primary mode of instruction, which makes perfect sense if you had the Meiklejohn idea in mind. It makes somewhat less sense if you have anything else in mind.

At any rate, everybody was busy planning these freshmen-sophomore programs for this student body that people believed, with no evidence, was characteristic of the folks who had signed up. Well, we had all kinds of people who'd signed up because it was the only show in town. And if, for whatever reason, they couldn't leave—there was no other four-year institution in Southwest Washington. This was it.

At any rate, when this became clear, I was still committed to trying to put together a Japan program for that first year, which turned out to be more and more and more difficult, especially because the young woman that I had wanted very much to hire—not Carri Cable; nobody knew who she was—but a woman named Kathleen O'Connor, who later became a major administrator at the University of Washington. But she ran into trouble with one of the deans, namely, Cadwallader. But it didn't matter how much Al Wiedemann and I argued that this young woman was exactly what was needed for the Japan program; that she had exactly the right talents and exactly the right experiences. It didn't matter. They weren't going to hire her. It was one of those rare things where the deans just dug in their heels, or at least one of them.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah. Charlie did tell me that if one said no, the other two respected that choice.

**Alexander:** That's right.

**Fiksdal:** So, for better or for worse, that's what happened with even your hiring. Everyone's hiring.

**Alexander:** Right. But I didn't know that was going to happen . . .

**Fiksdal:** No, of course not.

**Alexander:** . . . until relatively late.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, I see.

**Alexander:** Well, okay, so all of a sudden it becomes obvious that I'm not going to get my faculty hire. And she was absolutely essential, as Carri Cable was absolutely essential. There was just no way to run that program without her particular group of talents.

So, all of a sudden, I'm sitting there with nothing to do the next year. So I immediately began trying to get more and more information about, who are these students that are having trouble finding programs to sign up for? And what do they want to do, and why do they want to do it?

Remember, we're still, in some ways, in the process of hiring a group of faculty. But these new faculty that we were hiring weren't going to show up to do any work until the middle of the summer. So Richard Brian found himself in a similar spot that he hadn't found a home someplace that needed or wanted a mathematician. And so I said, "Okay, Richard. This is our baby. Let's figure this out. What are we going to do?"

And we decided pretty quickly that there was a large cohort of students in this group who wanted to do something in counseling, social work, psychiatric stuff, or at least were interested in that. So we said, "Okay, that's what the subject should be."

We called the program Human Behavior. But I was very leery of discussing in detail what the content of the program should be without having the faculty who were going to work with it. Well, we were stuck with the model of five.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, everyone had to be five?

**Alexander:** Yeah, that was the ideal. And so an awful lot of those first programs were five faculty. And some of them were really disastrous, too. And strangely enough, the one that was the biggest disaster was considered by a number of people who had run it to be a shining example of the way things should be.

**Fiksdal:** But not according to the students.

**Alexander:** Oh, the students loved it, because the students had no idea what this—let's not talk about that program. Okay. It became notorious after a while, mainly because of the evaluations that came out of it. They were just insane. And some people, this was just exactly the lake they wanted to swim in—for instance, Willi Unsoeld. He could sit in his chair knitting and holding forth, while people sat on the floor around him and listened to their heart's content. And that's what many of the students wanted, too, to get close to a guru. This was the '60s, after all.

**Fiksdal:** That's right.

**Alexander:** Let's not talk about that. Let's just stick with . . .

**Fiksdal:** . . . your and Richard's program.

**Alexander:** Right. Well, there was one other one. I think there were still further ones that were designed, but Russ Fox and Carolyn Dobbs—and I've forgotten who the other person was—designed a program that was aimed at community development. And this is the program from which the *Cooper Point Journal* was developed. It was wonderfully successful. I think Carolyn is dead now, isn't she?

**Fiksdal:** She did die, but Russ is around.

**Alexander:** What you need to do is get lots of detail of just how they put that together, because it was enormously successful. As far as I'm concerned, that's one of the great programs that showed what could be done with this odd model for advanced students, and to produce an advanced program that really was advanced.

Well, we put together a group of faculty, and it was the oddest group that you can imagine. We knew that we were five odd ducks. It was Llyn Patterson [changed her name to Llyn DeDanaan] and Steve Herman and [Ted Gerstle] and Richard and me. And there was very little in common. Very, very little.

I decided early that there wasn't any way that I had the expertise to pull rank and design the damn thing myself. And Richard was along for the ride, Richard Brian, which meant that he was extremely valuable, because he was the "joker", shall we say. I don't mean that he cracked lots of jokes, but he could take over all kinds of different responsibilities because he didn't have any particular...

**Fiksdal:** No agenda.

**Alexander:** He had no agenda of his own. At any rate, I immediately proposed that neither Richard nor I should be the coordinator, and that it should be chosen from the new people. And they chose Llyn, which was the shrewdest damn thing that they ever did. I mean, she was marvelous. She just took to that particular role perfectly.

Never had any problems. We knew that what we had to do was design something for the students, and we had certain knowledge of what they wanted. So we very quickly came to the conclusion that the last part of the last quarter of the program should be individual projects and internships—internships, if possible. If there was a good reason why this particular student shouldn't do an internship, okay, that's fine, we'll work something out. We just stayed infinitely flexible and open to what the students needed, as it developed.

We had very little idea going into the fall quarter what the winter quarter would be. We knew what we were aiming at towards the end, in the spring; and we knew we had to prepare for that by

making contact with all these institutions—making a list of the institutions; making sure that we’d interviewed each student very carefully to be sure that we would have internship opportunities that would really be what they wanted. In some cases, this would be their junior year. And this was a big deal for them. In fact, for them, this was what it was all about. They were preparing to do their internships.

But we just improvised and improvised and improvised and improvised. And one of the first things we all agreed was we were going to throw over the ideal model. If it turned out that the standard book seminar wasn’t what was necessary, we would do something different. We didn’t know exactly what that would be, but we would improvise and devise something quite different. And we did that, and so did the Fox-Dobbs team. They just improvised over and over and over again. Of course, there wasn’t much contact across programs. There never has been. There never has been. Each little program is a universe to itself.

Okay. So what I really want to talk about are some of the really wonderful things that we improvised and did. This was a different model of the seminar is the first thing. We decided that not all the students were going to be interested—we knew that we had to, given the student pool and what they wanted to do—that they had to have something about psychological development. Amongst the people in the group, there were different notions of just what that should be. I think Steve Herman had the least clear idea, and LLyn, because of her background as an anthropologist, she had some notions, but they weren’t exactly psychologists.

**Fiksdal:** No.

**Alexander:** Richard had no idea at all. He would just do what we suggested to be done. I had gotten very deeply impressed by Erik Erikson’s young man, Luther, some years previous. At any rate, [Gurstel] knew lots of folks, but we realized very quickly that if we tried to settle on one psychologist, this was not going to—either it would take up the entire program, because we’d switch from psychologist to psychologist to psychologist, and that’s all that would be there. Or, it would become narrowly Freudian or some crazy thing like that, which none of us had any . . .

**Fiksdal:** You didn’t have the expertise for that in the program.

**Alexander:** Well, we did. Gurstel. Gurstel could have done that, but he wasn’t a Freudian, and he had no—you would just go on. So I came up with the idea, all right, instead of having the seminars focus on a particular psychologist, let’s focus the seminar on a psychological problem of some sort—the importance of early childhood, let’s say—and have a seminar on that. And then each student chooses a psychologist that that student is particularly interested in, for whatever reason, and then goes out and



examines what this psychologist has to say about early childhood development, and what the psychologist had to say about other people's theories of early childhood development. And then we have them write this up, and the arguments amongst the psychologists become the basis of the seminar.

Well, it worked like a charm. They just dove in, the students did. This was just what they wanted, a kind of broad argument and discussion and so forth. And coming out of that, we quickly realized that many of the students would need—it would be a huge drain on librarian resources.

So I said, "Okay, let's have them share the resources," and we went to the Library. Evergreen, at that point, had all this space. There were all these unused rooms. We got the Library to donate a room to us, not just as having student carrels, but a room in which all the books that all the students would need could be stored. And the students could go there and study and work together at all hours.

**Fiksdal:** That's nice.

**Alexander:** And so, guess what? That's exactly what happened. The room was crowded all the time, people arguing with each other about the subject. It was just a massive success. And we said, okay, they have to have something more than just someone yakking, so let's have each students write up a position paper on this to give to the rest of the members of the seminar, and that will be what starts the initial discussion. And so we were able to teach them writing . . .

**Fiksdal:** How many students per seminar would have a position paper? It couldn't have been all of them.

**Alexander:** Yes, it was.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, it was? Each week they would write a position paper?

**Alexander:** Right. Well, there was more than one meeting a week.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, true.

**Alexander:** There were lots of meetings.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, so how many seminars did you have?

**Alexander:** I think, ordinarily speaking, we would meet three times a week. But we could improvise. If it was clear that we needed more time than that, we would have additional seminars. People could do it.

**Fiksdal:** That's great.

**Alexander:** And we also designed lectures to go along with the topic, and the nature of the [quarrels] that we were going to develop, and so on. It was wild. And pretty soon, my ideal of a seminar is that the faculty member in charge of it, supposedly, I would do all my work in advance. And then, when it

came time for the seminar, then that was the student's responsibility to take over, and I shouldn't say a damn thing unless it was absolutely necessary.

**Fiksdal:** So there was no real facilitation going on?

**Alexander:** Oh, there was tons of it.

**Fiksdal:** So the students did it themselves.

**Alexander:** Yes. There was lots of facilitating, but in the terms of getting prepared for it, delivering a lecture on such-and-such topic.

**Fiksdal:** That's all part of it, yeah.

**Alexander:** Yeah.

**Fiksdal:** So you weren't all looking just at psychology that year?

**Alexander:** No, there were all sorts of other things. We looked at anthropology we looked at those—it made Steve Herman grit his teeth; he hates genetics. Absolutely detests. Can't stand it, never does it. But he had to do some.

**Fiksdal:** He had to contribute.

**Alexander:** He had to do some, because there wasn't any way that you could do a human development without some notion of what the genetics were going to be.

**Fiksdal:** What about Richard and math?

**Alexander:** That was difficult. He improvised, mostly. But he was a very good facilitator for the discussions.

**Fiksdal:** Interesting.

**Alexander:** Because he didn't have anything at stake. He had no position he was trying to lead people into. So it was just fine, and so on. Towards the . . . let's see . . . I had some other things.

A particular one, this was a real success for me. I had stumbled across a book written by a psychologist and a philosopher. The title of the book is *Ego and Instinct*. And the philosopher is well known. I quickly realized that the topic of this book *Ego and Instinct* was just right on target for our program. Well, we got around to the third quarter, and we had some problems with all these people are out doing their internships, and doing this project and that project and so forth. And the program was on the edge of just disappearing, turning into five little clusters. There, I was right. William Barrett. [Daniel] Yankelovich is a well-known—he ran a company that did psychological surveys.

**Fiksdal:** Polling or . . . ?

**Alexander:** Yeah, that sort of thing.

**Fiksdal:** Well, it's still out there.

**Alexander:** Right. And it's a very fine book, by the way. It's a very fine book. Especially if you're an Erikson fan.

**Fiksdal:** Well, yeah. It's hard not to be an Erikson fan.

**Alexander:** Well, people find it fairly easy if they are not attuned to it.

**Fiksdal:** Well, that's true.

**Alexander:** Their argument is that Freud made some really terrible mistakes in drafting his theory; and that Erikson, though he tries desperately to be a loyal Freudian, finds himself necessarily correcting those mistakes, following the lead of Ann Freud, who was his real teacher.

At any rate, it's a fine book. It's one of these books that keeps bringing up subjects, from philosophy and elsewhere, that reward—indefinitely reward—exploration. So I decided that we had a group of students who basically had time on their hands here in Olympia, and were looking for something to do. So I just organized an *Ego and Instinct* seminar. And in this case, I assigned students to explore this paragraph of this chapter. "And you take this next paragraph. And you take this paragraph."

But at any rate, it became so intense that people would pass by in the hall outside the room we were using, and they would stop, and look in the window. [laughter] "What the hell is going on in there?" It wasn't that we were shouting or making a lot of noise. In fact, just the opposite. It was really intense, quiet, deep discussion. But it was as if a dynamo were going off, an intellectual dynamo going off.

And after a while, the students understood that this was their show, and they were to be running this seminar, not me. What I did was explain a little bit ahead of time what Barrett and Yankelovich were trying to get at in this chapter, and why such and such paragraphs were important, and said, "Okay, you do this. Write up a paper." Again, we commandeered the little room. People went and studied together and argued about this before the seminar. [chuckles] It was just wild. All kinds of good things happened.

**Fiksdal:** The rest of the program, students did not read that text?

**Alexander:** No. There wasn't any way that they could. We had a whole bunch of people who were interning at Western State Hospital and over at Eastern State Hospital.

**Fiksdal:** So this was spring quarter?

**Alexander:** Spring quarter, right.

**Fiksdal:** That sounds great.

**Alexander:** Yeah. And the same thing happened with all the rest of the people. Steve decided, okay, here's a cohort of students who really want to get more deeply into the biology, especially the bird behavior.

**Fiksdal:** He got them interested in birds? Of course he did. [laughing]

**Alexander:** Of course he did! And that was a big thing in the '60s.

**Fiksdal:** Oh?

**Alexander:** Oh, yes. Everybody was so excited about [Konrad Zacharias] Lorenz's revision of the notion of instinct, and his explanation of how it operated amongst birds; and the question of whether human beings had similar instincts; and if so, how did they operate? How would you know what they were? This kind of thing. That was a major part of our program discussion. It's all over *Ego and Instinct*, of course.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, of course. So as faculty, you didn't all know—because normally other colleagues don't come into your seminar, so you're off on your own in the spring, in a sense.

**Alexander:** Well, we were, but that was required by the fact that we were going to have everybody doing individual projects or internships or so on.

**Fiksdal:** Sure.

**Alexander:** And then we would go off—because we had to go visit these guys . . .

**Fiksdal:** Of course.

**Alexander:** . . . and find out how they were doing, and what problems there were, and arrange [that] whoever was supervising their internship was going to supply something for an evaluation.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, so we've kept that. So the whole notion of doing internships, did you develop that in your program? Did someone come in and talk to you about it?

**Alexander:** No, no, no. We did it.

**Fiksdal:** You did it. Because that's, of course, still the way we do it. Except now, students have to find the internship, it's not faculty. Well, sometimes, of course, faculty finds them. And so they go off, and we ask the field supervisor to write something. So that's the same. That's interesting you developed it then, that very first year.

**Alexander:** Well, we had to.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, you had to. Well, you say you had to, but it still took imagination. [laughing]

**Alexander:** Well, yes.

**Fiksdal:** And grit.

**Alexander:** Yes, and a particular grit. You can't believe what kind of crap we got from the deans.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, the deans didn't want you to do this?

**Alexander:** No. We were not doing the kind of thing that supposedly coordinated studies were going to do.

**Fiksdal:** Because you're supposed to stare at books.

**Alexander:** Yeah. And we didn't.

**Fiksdal:** So you didn't clear it with the deans? Or you just told them, and you did what you wanted?

**Alexander:** We did. We told them "We're going to do this." Actually, they didn't ask. They asked after the fact, "What did you do?" And then sometimes they would get very upset. "What? You were doing this?" [laughter]

But that was an enormously successful program because, as carefully as we could do it, it was designed for the specific needs of specific students . . .

**Fiksdal:** . . . that you knew were coming.

**Alexander:** . . . that we knew were coming. And after a while, we knew who they were.

**Fiksdal:** Okay. It sounds fabulous. I want to ask about evaluations. Did you have some discussions in the planning years about how you would write evaluations of students?

**Alexander:** I don't recall.

**Fiksdal:** So do you think that you might have made it up in each program?

**Alexander:** I think it was left for people to invent. I do not recall there being any deep discussion of evaluations in this first human development program.

**Fiksdal:** Okay.

**Alexander:** We had too much material.

**Fiksdal:** Well, certainly.

**Alexander:** We just had tons of things to discuss.

**Fiksdal:** Did you write at the end of fall quarter, at the end of winter?

**Alexander:** Yes, yes, of course we did.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah. And then do you remember, did you also put suggested course equivalencies on those first-year evaluations?

**Alexander:** I don't remember that. I think that appeared a couple of years later, at the urgent request of the Registrar's office, because they were constantly being besieged by registrars elsewhere for some kind of course equivalency. And indeed, when you think about it, of course they need a course equivalency. This ought not to be a problem. I never have understood why this is a problem.

**Fiksdal:** Well, I think sometimes, in my own experience, it hasn't been a real problem—I've always done it, and willingly, but sometimes it's hard to name what you're doing.

**Alexander:** Oh, yes. Now, that's another matter.

**Fiksdal:** You name it. You might even look at other course catalogs just to—but it wouldn't fit, because at Evergreen, we're doing things in a much different way, quite often.

**Alexander:** That's right.

**Fiksdal:** Combining things in such a way that's it's a little hard to, I don't know, to come up with something . . .

**Alexander:** That's right.

**Fiksdal:** . . . in a particular discipline.

**Alexander:** However, that gives you some way—material—for your evaluations of the student. In other words, the narrative evaluation makes it its job to describe what these things were, in a language that the person at the other end is going to be able to understand.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah. Did you use these narrative evaluations at San Jose State?

**Alexander:** Yes.

**Fiksdal:** Ah, so that's where they come from?

**Alexander:** I think they actually come from Charlie McCann.

**Fiksdal:** Oh. Not that he did them, but it was his idea. Is that correct?

**Alexander:** Yeah. He didn't want to have grades.

**Fiksdal:** Yes, that's right.

**Alexander:** No grades. No requirements. No this, that and the other. He was always vague about what he wanted, but extremely specific what he didn't want.

We didn't have—the question of self-evaluation that never arose in those early programs that I had anything to do with. But, oh my God, did it arise in other programs.

**Fiksdal:** You're talking about student self-evaluation?

**Alexander:** Student self-evaluation.

**Fiksdal:** Because sometimes people might critique the program?

**Alexander:** No. Nobody was worried about that. If somebody did it, that would be just fine. The worst example I can think of—the worst examples—were always from one program. One student [pounds on table] put his hand down and traced out his hand.

**Fiksdal:** And that was a self-evaluation?

**Alexander:** That was his self-evaluation.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, my gosh! I see. So there's no way of knowing if the student learned something.

**Alexander:** Right.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah. I think—was it you?—someone read through evaluations in the early years. Right?

**Alexander:** Yeah.

**Fiksdal:** I remember I believe that Charlie Teske asked you to think about that.

**Alexander:** Yes, I did.

**Fiksdal:** And you did it. What a lot of work. And so you came—

**Alexander:** Well, when you've [pounds on table] got something like that. And one young woman wrote down that—this was for a whole year's work—that she had learned to urinate out of doors easily. [pounds on table]. End of evaluation.

**Fiksdal:** And this goes into their transcript.

**Alexander:** Right.

**Fiksdal:** But nonetheless, they don't care; it's just going to go in there.

**Alexander:** No, the students often did care, after the fact, when all of a sudden, they realize this is going to be sent to a registrar; this is going to be sent to a school I'm trying to get into. [chuckles] This is going to be sent to this person where I'm applying for a job. But it continued to be a problem about which there was no official, or even semi-official, advice or policy.

Now, I understand that something that I wrote up for my friends in the Registrar's office—rather late in the history of Evergreen, I wrote up a rather detailed description of why it is important to have the self-evaluation, and how would you go about writing one? And I think that's still available.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, I think so, too. It just doesn't have your name on it, I don't think.

**Alexander:** That may be, but I'm the one who wrote that.

**Fiksdal:** That's great. That's good to know.

**Alexander:** Right. And I'm a believer in the self-evaluation. And I try, in that piece, to argue that this is the most important part of it for anybody who will take it seriously. And this is the place at which you, the student, get your chance to explain to the potential reader of this what really happened.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, the personal discoveries. It's just amazing what some people can do.

**Alexander:** Yeah. Well, I point out that the only person who knows how the entire experience adds up in the student.

**Fiksdal:** And especially if you're studying human development; you can study intellectual development as well in these.

**Alexander:** Right, but let's not worry about what the student is studying. It's the same thing if they're studying physics. The only one who knows—who really knows—what the student learned over the entire experience, and how it all adds up, and how it changed and so forth, is the student. They're the only ones who know. And if that story is to be told, they're the ones who have to tell it.

**Fiksdal:** Let's pause.

**End Part 1 of 2 of Richard Alexander on 1-28-17**

**Begin Part 2 of 2 of Richard Alexander on 1-28-17**

**Fiksdal:** Okay, we're ready to go. So, Richard, you were going to tell me about your Japan program. What got you interested in doing it, and how did it finally come together?

**Alexander:** What got me interested in doing it goes back to when I was in early high school, and Japanese films started appearing in the art house, art movie theaters in the United States for the first time ever. And it coincided with a bursting forth of enormous filmmaking talent in Japan.

The director I became intoxicated with in those early days was Kenji Mizoguchi. His film *Ugetsu* appeared in the United States, and I remember seeing it, and I saw it and saw it and saw it and saw it and saw it. It was . . . it was intensely dramatic in a way that seemed to me to be beyond anything I'd ever seen before. And it was, at the same time, exquisitely beautiful. I was so happy to see, in a review of the new—who's the director of *Raging Bull*?

**Fiksdal:** I don't know.

**Alexander:** You're not a movie buff.

**Fiksdal:** No, I'm not a movie buff. Well, I like some movies, but I don't know that one.

**Alexander:** *Raging Bull*?

**Fiksdal:** I don't think I've seen it.

**Alexander:** It's brilliant. It is truly a marvelous film.

**Fiksdal:** Martin Scorsese.

**Alexander:** Scorsese. Okay, Scorsese has just released his long-awaited Japanese film based on a very fine novel called *Silence*. And there is a review of it by Ian Buruma in, I believe, the *New York Review of Books*.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, I've been reading about it.

**Alexander:** And Buruma links up—he talks about there is an earlier Japanese version of the same novel, and he makes comparisons of them. One of the big differences is that the Japanese director had this cinematographer [who] was the same man who had filmed the great Mizoguchi films. And their beauty is beyond belief. It's just staggering. If you've never seen *Ugetsu* . . .



**Fiksdal:** Yeah, I'm not sure. I've seen other Japanese movies, but I'm not sure that I have, so I'll do that.

**Alexander:** Yeah, okay. Here. Get out your thing. The title of the film is *Ugetsu*, U-G-E-T-S-U. See if you can get a clip from it.

**Fiksdal:** It came up right away.

**Alexander:** Oh-h-h that is such a gorgeous scene. Oh!

**Fiksdal:** 1953.

**Alexander:** Kenji Mizoguchi, yes. Well, just take a look.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, the images are so—oh, here. Look, they show a lot.

**Alexander:** Yes. Well, it's gorgeous film. And very, very moving, the conclusion. The only Japanese film that has a conclusion more powerful than *Ugetsu* is another Mizoguchi film called *Sancho the Bailiff*, which I personally think is a better film than *Ugetsu* is. Although, I mean, God, how can you choose? These are absolutely masterful, and any number of other Mizoguchi films are almost to the level of those two.

**Fiksdal:** But this, you began to recognize so young.

**Alexander:** Yes. Well, I was a movie fan. My father distributed films, so he used to bring them home, and I would project them for the family to watch. So I was watching films carefully and closely at a very early age. But these films, and several others of the same sort, just blew me away, and I became intensely interested in things Japanese.

I also benefited from having been born and raised in Atlanta, for two reasons. First of all, the Second World War, which was very vivid in my imagination during that time—I was quite young—but in the South of the United States, and I think along the East Coast altogether, the war against Germany seemed very personal, whereas the war against Japan, I mean, the Japanese were not the evil, rotten sonsofbitches that the Germans were.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah. Maybe it was less understood, their culture.

**Alexander:** Oh, yes, it was utterly un-understood. So I didn't develop any great prejudices against the Japanese, whereas I have anti-German prejudices very deep.

**Fiksdal:** Still?

**Alexander:** Still. You bet. But not about Japan. I have immense curiosity about everything Japanese. So this sort of developed and grew, and it just kept growing. Japanese culture dominates my notion of Asian life. I'm largely uninterested in the Chinese, and have found that, on the whole, people who are interested in Japan don't care about China, and people who are interested in China don't care about Japan. [laughing]

**Fiksdal:** I think that seems still true, at the college, anyway.

**Alexander:** Yeah, I think that's very true. But there are similarities—they go very deep—between the American South and Japanese culture. It's not that they're related in any way, but they share certain qualities. And discovering these time after time after time is quite—

**Fiksdal:** Could you give me an example?

**Alexander:** Both of them are highly militaristic.

**Fiksdal:** That's true.

**Alexander:** And they also place a great deal of emphasis on codes of politeness and decorum that go hand in hand with the most unbelievably raucous, lowdown, dirty life standards. And the two are absolutely essential. You can't have only one; you have to have both.

So as soon as I cottoned onto the fact that no Japanese agreement can take place between businesses unless there is, first, a highly formal meeting at which tea is exchanged, and all kinds of gifts. But that's not sufficient. You then have to leave—go someplace else—get drunk. [laughing]

**Fiksdal:** That's true.

**Alexander:** And at that point, the true heart has been revealed, and you have the agreement. But you can't get the agreement just by getting drunk with somebody.

**Fiksdal:** So I didn't know that was a Southern custom.

**Alexander:** Oh, yes, it's very Southern. There also is a tendency for there to be a male culture and a female culture. That's true of the American South, and it bleeds over into—well, there are two strains of American Southerner: the Virginia gentleman, which is Virginia, North and South Carolina; and then there's the Appalachian Scots-Irish tradition. You get that mimicked in Japan, too, most easily seen in the difference between Samurai culture and farmer culture, farmer and fisherman culture.

**Fiksdal:** So you had done this work, and thinking about Japan.

**Alexander:** Yeah.

**Fiksdal:** In what year did you end up being able to offer that program?

**Alexander:** Well, the second year.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, already the second year.

**Alexander:** The second year, yeah, because I managed—Carri Cable showed up, and she was able to do the things—see, one of the absolute requirements, in my mind, for this program is that after the first year, a selected group—how they got selected is another matter; lots of different ways—but a smaller group of students would go to Japan, someplace in Japan—in this case, Carri had all of her contacts in Shimane Prefecture. As far as I'm concerned, that was one of the perfect places to go. There were a

whole bunch of others that would be just as good, but anyplace but Tokyo, Nagoya or Kyoto, Kobe. Wouldn't want that. Get people away from that urban core and immerse them in the old Japan. That's basically what you do when you go to Shimane.

**Fiksdal:** I bet. [laughter]

**Alexander:** And she had all those. [Kathleen O'Connor] would have taken them someplace else. But she also had lots and lots of contacts, and that's just exactly what she was ready to do is to take the students off and arrange for internships and arrange for—

**Fiksdal:** Was that the spring quarter of that program, or the year after?

**Alexander:** No, it was the second year.

**Fiksdal:** That's what I thought you were saying. Okay. So they would stay the entire year.

**Alexander:** Right, you bet. And for most of the students—and the only reason I say “most” is because I can't actually vouch for all of them. I don't know the details about all of those students, but I think that year in Shimane had enormous impact on those people's lives. Not as spectacular, let's say, as David Keller becoming the Shinto priest, and winding up practicing the Shinto priesthood down in Iwasaki.

**Fiksdal:** I didn't know that.

**Alexander:** Oh, you didn't?

**Fiksdal:** So that was one of your students?

**Alexander:** That's one of our students. He was never—he was Carri's student, not mine, really. Very brilliant young man, but it's through David Keller contact that the connection with Iwasaki developed.

**Fiksdal:** So were you thinking of making these connections as you were teaching the program? Was that one of the goals?

**Alexander:** What connections?

**Fiksdal:** Well, we have a connection now. We have an agreement with Miyazaki University.

**Alexander:** See, I don't know anything about that.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, it's for student exchanges only.

**Alexander:** Okay.

**Fiksdal:** So you didn't develop that?

**Alexander:** I think it would have been in process of being developed about the time that I retired.

**Fiksdal:** I see. And then the Kobe exchange was also not your . . .?

**Alexander:** Oh, no. That happens when we're starting to think about doing the program a second time. But Carri's not going to be around, and we don't have the faculty exactly, so it has to be put together

again. It seemed to me that it was important for me to set up something. And Kobe's relationship is within—well, it's really prefecture and state connection.

**Fiksdal:** Right.

**Alexander:** And also, to a certain degree, a Kobe-Seattle . . .

**Fiksdal:** So because Seattle already had that sister city arrangement.

**Alexander:** Yes, right. And so the good offices of Dan Evans . . .

**Fiksdal:** . . . and the consul from Japan in Seattle has always been involved.

**Alexander:** Right.

**Fiksdal:** So did you bring one of those faculty members over to help teach your program?

**Alexander:** No.

**Fiksdal:** Okay, so that must have come after.

**Alexander:** That comes after I go over there.

**Fiksdal:** Okay. You do get the credit for both of those in everyone's minds. [laughing]

**Alexander:** Yeah, well . . . and [Mitsuharu] Mitsui was my closest friend on the Kobe Shodai campus.

And, in fact, he and his wife lived in the other half of the duplex in which I lived in Tarumi. But it would have been nice to have Mitsui teaching in a Japan program in this country. But that—there are a whole bunch of reasons why that didn't happen, and, in fact, most of them I haven't thought about in years and years and years. I can't say anything sensible.

**Fiksdal:** That's okay. So you did the Japan program twice?

**Alexander:** Yes.

**Fiksdal:** But the first time was the only time that it lasted two years?

**Alexander:** Right.

**Fiksdal:** Okay. That's a very good story.

**Alexander:** Well, I'm not sure that it's much of a story.

**Fiksdal:** Well, yes, it is, because wasn't it—to me it is, because I believe very much in teaching language and culture programs, and it seems to me that that was the first one.

**Alexander:** Yes, it was.

**Fiksdal:** And that's big. You made that opening.

**Alexander:** Yes.

**Fiksdal:** And it's interesting because you don't speak Japanese, you didn't study in Japan . . .

**Alexander:** Well, I tried.

**Fiksdal:** I remember that you went to study.

**Alexander:** Yes, I went up into Madame [Niwa]’s infamous—

**Fiksdal:** And you had that very story of how you learned—didn’t you learn feminine Japanese?

**Alexander:** Yes, she taught—

**Fiksdal:** She didn’t bother to teach you the—

**Alexander:** She taught everybody female Japanese. And not only did she teach it that way, but she carefully made sure that nobody would enlighten us of the fact. So in the textbook we used, there was not mention one of the difference between male Japanese and female Japanese.

**Fiksdal:** And it’s so fundamental.

**Alexander:** Yes, absolutely fundamental. But that’s the University of Washington, and they had their own problems with Madame [Niwa]. In fact, they had decided—the Japanese Department had decided—that it was just going to give her that . . .

**Fiksdal:** . . . last course.

**Alexander:** No, it was the intensive course.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, I see.

**Alexander:** They were going to let her do that, and they just didn’t interfere with it and just let it go. You’d think that everybody must have known.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah.

**Alexander:** But, in fact, they kept hands off. So during the whole time that I was studying up there, even though I knew personally one of the members of the department . . .

**Fiksdal:** . . . even that person didn’t tell you.

**Alexander:** No.

**Fiksdal:** Well, there’s certain things that, yeah, you can’t do.

**Alexander:** Yes.

**Fiksdal:** I’ve understood that. Because when I became a dean, we had a Japanese language teacher who really wasn’t doing the job in the way that I would want.

**Alexander:** Who was this?

**Fiksdal:** Oh, his name escapes me, quite frankly. But he was just strictly by the book, and going over the grammar, and there wasn’t conversation, and he didn’t use Japanese very much in the class. The students just didn’t learn very much. And he was just also extremely boring [laughing] in his approach.

And I happened to mention it one time to Setsuko, and I said, “It would be really good if you would help me find someone much better. I’ve observed him, and I’ve written some things he should do, and I’ve gone back and he hasn’t changed at all. We need a different teacher.”

And she said, “Well, it’s probably best to wait until he retires.”

And I said, “What? No! We need a good person here so we can get students to the second level”—because they kept dropping out, and we’re teaching first-year Japanese. But she didn’t go into any detail—I’ve never met a Japanese who did—but she just said, “It’s really better if we wait.”

**Alexander:** Yes.

**Fiksdal:** And so we waited, and then we got a much better person to teach. So that taught me a lot about Japanese culture also.

**Alexander:** Well, Setsuko had her problems as well.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, well, I imagine. I think it was tough for both of our—well, anyway, that’s a different topic. I want to focus on you.

**Alexander:** Well, as far as I’m concerned, the second Japanese program foundered almost immediately because not knowing any better, and having no alternatives, I went ahead and hired Setsuko on the recommendation—

**Fiksdal:** Oh, you hired Setsuko?

**Alexander:** Yes. And then discovered that it was impossible to work with her.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, no. I didn’t realize that.

**Alexander:** Right. And we had totally different concepts of what should be taught, and how it should be taught. And her way of dealing with this was passive-aggressive in the extreme.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah? Oh, I see.

**Alexander:** So it rather quickly turned into two programs that were connected with each other in only the most tenuous sort of way. And I ran mine, and it was of necessity a program in which the language could play virtually no role. And so I did my usual seminar method, and . . .

**Fiksdal:** Do you remember what it was in that program?

**Alexander:** Well, we happened to have inherited from the University of Washington an enormous cache of articles and pamphlets on Japanese subjects in English. I’m sure that it still exists there. But this meant that we had this resource in the Library that was quite remarkable. So I said, “Okay, we’re going to use this.”

And I happened to get a group of students who were mostly not terribly interested in the language. They either already had it reasonably well, or they were completely indifferent. That wasn’t the reason they wanted to be there. But they were interested in business and history and political matters and cultural matters, and so I did my usual thing of making the seminars not be about a book or

a text or something, but about a topic; and then asking people to explore individually some aspect of this topic, and to write up papers that would be given to the group and so forth.

**Fiksdal:** That's very interesting.

**Alexander:** In other words, a true graduate school seminar style, which I find works very well. You don't have to be a graduate student to do that.

**Fiksdal:** No.

**Alexander:** All you have to do is to have somebody set it up, and then let the students go at it. They tend to really like doing the research. [chuckles]

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, that's interesting.

**Alexander:** Yeah. So we had these just crackerjack explorations of all sorts of topics. And I would try to pick the most controversial types of approaches, that aspect of a situation that was the most controversial. For instance, I remember spending a great deal of time about the differences between the old zaibatsu and the new zaibatsu.

**Fiksdal:** What is zaibatsu?

**Alexander:** These were the large corporations, like the Mitsui Corporation, Mitsubishi. The old zaibatsu had gotten started during the Meiji Restoration, and during the 1920s. The new zaibatsu gets started in Manchuria and Korea by the air force and the army, whose big project was to create this Japanese empire out there.

The old zaibatsu didn't want anything to do with it. They were absolutely opposed. They had tended to be, amongst other things, more attuned to the navy, and to matters of Europe. They were all pro-British and pro-French; somewhat less pro-German after the German army—the army had their contacts with the German army. This gets all very complicated.

But at any rate, the air force and the army had to get a hold of some smaller corporations that could be developed, and they designed a whole bunch of new zaibatsu, which then become Nissan and the automobile industry.

**Fiksdal:** With their origins in military uses.

**Alexander:** Right. It's just amazing, because the American army—MacArthur's occupation—they were deeply suspicious of the old zaibatsu and didn't want to help them at all. But they latched onto these new companies out there, and installed them as the head of the Japanese industry after the Second World War.

**Fiksdal:** That's interesting.

**Alexander:** Yeah. So I got people talking about all of this sort of thing.

**Fiksdal:** That's fascinating. Very interesting. And, I think, helpful, because I'm always doing institutes about how to teach effective seminars, and I didn't know this method.

But here's why it's especially interesting to me now. Because all the research I'm doing about useful and effective pedagogy for the wide array of broad, diverse students, has to do with making sure—being intentional about everything you're teaching. So you had already thought that. What do we really need to do? Do we need to have a seminar? Yes. But does it have to be based on a book or two books or whatever?

**Alexander:** No, it most definitely does not.

**Fiksdal:** Can it have this other approach? Yeah.

**Alexander:** In fact, if you're going to center in on a book, and the book is really meaty—it's got a lot to it—my notion is that the best thing to do is to devote several weeks to this book, not just one day.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah. No, I think often it is one, yeah.

**Alexander:** Yeah, the idea that you can't get anywhere.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah.

**Alexander:** Whereas you can do quite nicely over a longer period of time, and students will get an enormous amount out of it. But my whole notion is that the best kind of seminar is where each student member of the seminar has a job to do, and it's a peculiar job, they are the only ones doing that job, and their doing it well is essential for the operation of the seminar.

Let me give you a beautiful example of how this worked in another program, totally at the end of my career. Dave Hitchens and I did a program that we called South, and it quickly occurred to me that there wasn't one South, there were dozens of them, and they were very different. And not only that, but when you started examining in detail, there wasn't one South Carolina, there are at least four different ones. And then you've got all these different class levels and so on and so forth. And you've got blacks versus whites.

At any rate, I suggested to Dave—and he, with some reluctance, agreed to it, but it worked perfectly—I said, "Let's have each student have responsibility for a state. And then we'll organize the seminars, not on a state, but on a particular topic, generally historic."

For instance, the nature of slavery, and what was it in this state? By the way, the slavery systems were quite radically different from state to state. And the slaves had come from different parts of Africa. And that made a difference. It made a big difference. And in some, slavery would be confined to a certain section of a state, and be virtually unknown in any other section of the state.

**Fiksdal:** Maybe like Tennessee maybe?



**Alexander:** Tennessee's a very good example—a very good example—where the slavery, you've got basically three regions. You've got the eastern Appalachian region—very few slaves, very few indeed; then you've got the middle section, which is centered on Nashville and Chattanooga; and then you've got the western section, centered on Memphis. Just utterly different, those different sections, and so slavery was totally different in each one. The slavery in the western part is an extension of the Louisiana-Mississippi-Mississippi Delta, going north. Whereas in the part around Nashville, it's totally different with agriculture.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, and the type of agriculture would matter, of course. Yeah, that's a good point. So that's why you could have more than one student doing one state.

**Alexander:** Well, sometimes there were. But actually, there were easily 20 different states in the Confederacy. It depends on how widely you want to spread it. Do you want to include Maryland, for instance? What about West Virginia? How about Kentucky? What about Missouri? [laughing] But at any rate, we just did this, and each student became deeply immersed in the intricacies of each one of these states. And then when it came time to discuss the topic, she would be in charge. For instance, the civil rights movement. How did this break out? And why North Carolina?

**Fiksdal:** So this is a true sharing of information.

**Alexander:** Oh, yeah.

**Fiksdal:** And then comparing, and trying to make broader conclusions.

**Alexander:** Right.

**Fiksdal:** I'm just struck also by the fact that you were working with Dave Hitchens, and you were both planning year faculty.

**Alexander:** Yeah.

**Fiksdal:** And a number of years had gone by, so you'd tried various ways of teaching coordinated studies.

**Alexander:** Yeah.

**Fiksdal:** So did you feel like you had both come to some of the same conclusions about coordinated studies, or do you feel like, no, it was pretty still individual . . . I don't know quite how to phrase this.

**Alexander:** I don't think, you know, Dave and I didn't have much disagreements. We recognized how different we were in personality and approach [recording stopped].

**End Part 2 of 2 of Richard Alexander on 1-28-17**