

Susan Fiksdal
Interviewed by Nancy Taylor
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Final

BEGIN ZOOM 2

Taylor: Okay, so we're back after a delicious lunch, and we're going to move to your being dean, Dean of Part-time Studies.

Fiksdal: Part-time Studies.

Taylor: Evening and Weekend, whatever it was called.

Fiksdal: Later it became Evening and Weekend, but at the beginning it was called Part-time Studies. The slogan was "Part-time studies for full-time lives."

That was an interesting position to have in the deans. You were a dean at the time, and we had Jin Darney. You did hiring, Jin did curriculum, John Cushing did budget, and it was Masao Sugiyama, wasn't it, at the beginning? To do the first year.

Taylor: And then Brian Price?

Fiksdal: Well, I came back to do interim dean when Brian Price had some difficulty. And then, after a little while, Masao must have retired or stopped, and so we got Lee Little.

Taylor: And Bill Bruner.

Fiksdal: Bill Bruner was Dean of the Library. So it was a fabulous team. Very strong people in each position. Barbara Smith was the best Provost we ever had, for sure. Then we had Jane Jervis as President, thanks to you and your work. I would say that was the time to be in administration. It was great.

The thing about it for me was not knowing at all what I was getting into, because Part-time Studies was brand-new, the faculty had just voted it in, but I had no directives. No one knew what it would be like. There were two arguments. One was that it would become its own college, like a college within a college. The other one was, "We don't know, but it's not going to be that."

Taylor: Did you have a mission when you applied for that job, or did it just happen? There were four dean positions or something and you just ended up there?

Fiksdal: I applied for that position.

Taylor: Because the college had very little experience with part-time studies.

Fiksdal: Yeah, very little. Years before that, I had taught part-time students in a program called Foundation of Modern Society, I think. Both Thad Curtz and I decided to have our seminars in the evening. Each quarter, one seminar would be in the evening. We taught with Dave Hitchens, too. I think the first quarter, Thad taught his seminar in the evenings. They had to come to some other parts of the program—maybe just lectures—during the day, but the evening seminar allowed them to do that. Then I did it winter quarter and Dave must have done it spring.

So I knew something about part-time studies, but I was really interested in innovation, and I wanted to try something different, and I didn't want the other positions. So, I applied, and I really didn't know what I was getting into. I basically had to figure out what I would do and how. There were no precedents.

On Barbara's suggestion, I had a very good committee that met, I think, every two weeks, representatives from various departments. We had Andrea, who was Registrar; we had Edwin Bliss, who was a career counselor; we had someone from Admissions person; Jane Wood, who was my program secretary, and Kasia Pergia from Marketing.

It was a wonderful group, and we grew close as we tried to work things out—they had comments about curriculum, but I was really in charge of that curriculum because it needed to be a liberal arts curriculum. Basically, we did some hiring. The faculty were all going to be part-time adjuncts. And the idea that Barbara had was that Part-time Studies was going to be a cash cow, because you don't have to pay adjuncts very much money. You pay them less, and then they teach less also. They teach one quarter or two quarters or something like that, but four quarter-hours so it's all very cheap somehow.

I went around to the planning units to ask them what they wanted to see in our curriculum, and they were quite surprised by that. [chuckles] The arts people were most interested because they have studios, and someone had to teach or the studio wouldn't be used, so like printmaking and metalworking.

Taylor: So the issue was whether Part-time Studies would be in support of the full-time program, or whether Part-time Studies would be a college within a college?

Fiksdal: It had to be both, actually. The moment I started talking to people, I realized we had to have certain things. For example, the psychologists wanted us to have three courses always, because those are the three courses required of students before applying to a master's program in psychology. You don't really have to have the whole major, or they didn't at the time, I guess. This was 1996.

I talked to all kinds of groups and tried to figure out what needed to be there to support the curriculum. Then I hired to create a liberal arts college, so we needed someone in literature, history, economics, things like that.

The first year we only hired adjuncts, and they had no rights. I think we passed a rule in the faculty meeting that year that adjuncts were faculty and they could come and vote in faculty meetings. But, you know, they taught in the evening and on weekends, so during the day, they usually had another job because they certainly couldn't live on what we paid them to teach. Some taught half-time.

The second year, we decided that it would be good to anchor Part-time Studies. I think Barbara really had this idea. She suggested five permanent hires to anchor it. So, we worked out the areas that they would be in. I wanted art history to have something in the arts, and I talked to a lot of artists and they said, "That's the one thing we don't teach enough of."

Taylor: That was Ann Storey.

Fiksdal: That was Ann Storey. Then we wanted to have someone in the social sciences. We had politics and government, we had history, and, and then we had literature and math.

Taylor: They taught half-time programs but team-taught?

Fiksdal: Yeah. Those five people were hired as regular faculty members, but half-time. They created programs. They taught with each other and with adjuncts. Most of the other adjuncts were just hired to teach four quarter-hours, so it was always a boon if they were asked to teach in half-time programs. They'd get more money and have more to do. And it was more fun. It was more like Evergreen, so everyone was always trying to teach half-time.

Then the half-time folks came to me and said, "This is really hard. We work as much as full-time," and I believed that was true because the initial planning and preparation, and the work you do every week is the same for half-time or full-time. There were the same number of evaluations. It's just that they were not present as much and paid less. They said the other problem besides pay was that students wanted more. Some students could probably take 12 quarter-hours by extending their work in the program.

So we worked out a deal where if they had enough students who wanted 12 quarter-hours, they could be paid three-quarter time by teaching students in their programs to do 12 quarter hours of work. Or, they could teach another class if they really wanted. That's a lot of work, but some people opted to do that. Our half-time people were not assured of that extra class, but basically, we were able to give it to them the whole time I was there, and the faculty just loved that. They thought that our solution was innovative, and it was fair, I thought, in terms of workload, and they did, too.

That group we had was so good. I just really loved our faculty. A lot of them had been teaching for quite a long time at the college, but had not been acknowledged, so I had to decide on a policy for reviewing the faculty, for evaluating them. I went back to the early years, and I decided it would be every three years.

It was really a lot of work for me. I had to observe to their classes, which were on the weekends or in the evening. My work was hard on the deans' team because I was in charge of this new part of the college, and all of you had the rest of the college. The conversation in our long dean meetings—three hours a week—were always about the full-time faculty and the curriculum. I could never get a question in. I'd sometimes contribute, but no one really cared. Part-time Studies was new and it just wasn't in people's minds that we had this other thing going on. Those meetings were hard for me.

The only thing that saved me, I think, was Barbara. You remember, she taught us how to be deans by talking to her every week. I always had a lot to say because I had so many decisions to make all the time. I made them, and tried to defer as many as I could until I talked to her, but basically, I was a mini-Provost. I was hiring, I was firing—not firing but just not rehiring, trying to balance the curricular needs of students, and evaluating faculty, some of whom had not been evaluated for 14 years!!

Taylor: And you were doing a lot more of that because you had one-year appointments, and they weren't guaranteed another one. So even if they did teach another year, you had to rehire them.

Fiksdal: And if I needed someone new, I remember that Jin Darney had a bunch of files of people who had taught, maybe stepped in to help out—various kinds of people like that—but they hadn't really been evaluated, so we didn't really know if they were good. They just had some experience.

There was an awful lot to do. I remember one time, Barbara went on a Saturday to visit a program and kind of hung around, and one of the students told her that he only came on Saturdays. Whatever was offered, that would be his Evergreen education. She told me to pay attention to that. I said that just seemed impossible to me to schedule so someone—

Taylor: To make sure that there was a whole range of things on Saturday.

Fiksdal: Yeah, so I mentioned it to our planning faculty in Part-time Studies and they said, “No problem. We’ll start teaching more on Saturdays, and we’ll have maybe one night during the week, or two nights, and then part of a Saturday, and it will work out.” They were just amazing.

Taylor: You did have a planning group, because I remember when I was in the deanship for hiring, we hired specifically half-time people. I think one time, the hiring priority group decided that four positions or something would go to eight people.

Fiksdal: Yeah, exactly.

Taylor: That’s when we hired . . .

Fiksdal: It wasn’t the first people, was it?

Taylor: No, it was the second people.

Fiksdal: The first people were Helena Meyer Knapp, Sarah Ryan, Susan Preciso—

Taylor: No, Susan was the second. Susan was there, but she was in the second batch.

Fiksdal: Okay.

Taylor: But these people were hired from the outside. Kevin?

Fiksdal: Ann Storey?

Taylor: No, Ann was in the first batch. This is the next one. Kevin . . . what is his name? . . . who’s now Karen?

Fiksdal: I’ve forgotten her last name. And Doug Schuler, probably, who was in computer science.

Taylor: Yeah. But they were a group.

Fiksdal: Yes.

Taylor: Because the idea of the college—eventually, it dawned on them—we needed people that had some permanency and some loyalty to the college because they were guaranteed employment. They were half-time, but they were permanent.

Fiksdal: Yeah, we needed that permanence. They became the planning unit. It was a wonderful group of people.

Taylor: The only trouble was each year maybe they would add two or something, and there would be 10 people that wanted [a permanent position]. Like when Stephen Beck finally got it, and I don’t know if Marla Elliott ever did.

Fiksdal: She did, I think, at the very end.

Taylor: But it was cruel.

Fiksdal: And these people were all about to retire.

Taylor: It was very difficult.

Fiksdal: Joli Sandoz. I noticed that Joli is very active.

Taylor: And Steve Blakeslee. The part-time people became integrated into the whole college. They have been Chair of the Faculty, they have been active in a whole bunch of things.

Fiksdal: Yeah, over time things finally worked out and part-time faculty gained in stature. But it was really hard for a lot of people. At first, I would be walking out around 5:00 as my faculty would walk in. I recognized that that wasn't a good idea. I arranged my schedule so that I could observe classes and hang around, and sort of know what was going on. So many weekends. I put in a lot of hours.

Taylor: The curriculum got more representative. In the Part-time and Weekend Studies, you could get a full college education.

Fiksdal: You could even create a Pathway. The planning group created that. We sent out newspaper-like brochures. It looked like a newspaper because it arrived folded in residents' mailboxes. I would have to write a little column, "From the Dean." I was always trying to encourage people to think about coming. It really wasn't that hard. Once you get a few State workers, they know other State workers, and pretty soon—it was amazing how many State workers didn't have their bachelor's degree yet. Then we had these wonderful graduate programs, especially MPA—Master in Public Administration—so that was really useful.

Taylor: That was in the evening?

Fiksdal: Yeah, that was in the evening.

Taylor: There was always an issue about whether students that were full-time students should take Part-time Studies. There was nothing to prevent them from doing it, but that was always an issue. Because the idea of Part-time Studies was really originally to offer a service to part-time students.

Fiksdal: And older students was the idea, so they would be adults.

Taylor: So if full-time students took those places . . .

Fiksdal: We were worried about that, but in fact, it turned out that our full-time students didn't go to part-time studies. You could see that occasionally they would take a course. They would try to discuss

with their faculty how to not do some of the work, so that they could take a course such as language or math or art. That happened, but those courses are there to support the curriculum anyway.

We did lots of studies to show that students did not migrate. I think there was only one student that we talked about—I'm sure there must have been more, but honestly, no one took four courses because it was way too much work. It was crazy. Then, of course, it wasn't like the Evergreen experience. You'd never know when someone is going to have a test or a fieldtrip or something, and there you were. Most people realized that they had a bigger benefit by taking eight quarter-hours. Then others realized the economic benefit of taking 12, even when they were working, which is a heavy load, but economically, you paid less per credit if you did that. That actually did benefit the college as well, because they were only taking 12, not 16, so you need more students to make up the FTE.

Taylor: What percentage of the total FTE were in Part-time Studies when you were there?

Fiksdal: Oh, I have no idea.

Taylor: Was it a quarter of the students? Was it that many?

Fiksdal: I can't remember, to tell you the truth, how big it was. It started quite small. I was dean for five years, and then I felt like I'd done my work and I wanted to leave. I had signed up for a six-year term, I think two three-year terms. But I just thought, oh, well, I'll just tell Barbara. So I went and told her, and she didn't seem upset, so I thought, great, I'll just leave. And then it was like "Who's going to follow?" [laughing] But I talked to Russ Fox a lot, and he finally agreed to do it.

Taylor: The other part of your assignment, you were not only Dean of Part-time Studies, but you were Dean of International Studies, and that was a huge desk assignment.

Fiksdal: Yes, it turned out to be huge. I remember we had an early meeting in the fall when I had just become Dean. I guess we were talking about study abroad programs or something. Barbara, in her own mind, had this trip she was planning to go to Kobe and Miyazaki. She was going to check on things and maybe give some speeches. Just kind of reinforce our two exchange programs. The one in Miyazaki was with students, and the one in Kobe was with students and with faculty.

Several things started coming up, and she announced suddenly in the meeting—I guess by design, I don't know—"Susan, I think you should be our International Studies Dean." There must have been a question and I could answer it, because I had done so much work with study abroad, and I knew all the faculty who were doing work in that area. I thought, oh, this won't be hard.

Well, that job grew and grew and grew. Also later, either in that meeting or the next, Barbara announced this trip she wanted to take. She said, “I’m going to go to Miyazaki and Kobe, and because Susan has the International Studies Desk, she’s going to go with me.” And I thought, oh, well, this has perks. Then I was happy.

I had never been to Japan. I remember asking Barbara if Allen could come with me, because our kids by then must have been in college, or were able to stay with my parents. She agreed! It wouldn’t cost the college anything.

When we first met the President and administrators of Miyazaki University, I knew it must feel strange for them. Japan has such a traditional society, and they are meeting the Provost of a college and the dean of a college who are women, and then this man with them doesn’t seem to be anything. He’s shaking hands, and they kind of look at him, look at us, look back at him and I realized they don’t know what he’s doing here, and really, neither do I. He just happens to be present. So I said, “And this is my husband, the photographer.” They just thought that was hysterical. They loved it.

Allen dutifully took the camera and started taking pictures. He did it so perfectly—you know this very well because you went to Kobe, as I did later, but this was our first experience. I had read a little bit, and I knew that handing someone a present was important, so I told Allen to take the picture when we both had our hands on the package. He did that, and they were just like “He **is** the photographer!” [laughter]

They insisted in inviting him to all the banquets because, well, he’s a man, and he should be [there].” [laughing]

Taylor: You stayed in that place where we did later, where the two daughters—

Fiksdal: Yeah, I had taught the two daughters of this one family. Their father owned a nice hotel, and he insisted that we stay for free in his hotel. His hotel had some Western rooms and some tatami-mat rooms, and unfortunately, we had to go to the Western rooms. I really wanted to stay in the Japanese ones.

I can remember trying the green tea the first night and I couldn’t sleep because it was caffeinated. I didn’t realize. So I learned a lot. We would praise things too much, and then suddenly it would be ours. Barbara and I realized, just say thank you. [laughing] That’s all.

Taylor: At the time that you were given the International Studies Desk, we had the Japanese program. There were other people that had done some things, like your going to Mexico or something, but there was no organization. Did you set up to make an organization?

Fiksdal: No, there was an organization. I had started taking students abroad, as you say with the Mexico program. Then I taught a French culture group contract where basically we studied art, philosophy, history, and French language, and the French language was half of the credits. The idea was to prepare students for studying in France spring quarter.

Nancy Allen said she copied me, but we never sat down and talked. She just must have looked at a syllabus or talked to a student or something. So she and Alice Nelson did the same thing, and later, when we hired Marianne Bailey, that was just the best because then we could teach about the whole francophone world. We still had eight quarter-hours of language when I was teaching with her, before I became a dean. We lectured in French, provided outlines, and encouraged students to collaborate with each other to understand them!

Taylor: Did these international programs just happen? Was there ever any decision about which ones should develop and how they should happen?

Fiksdal: Oh, yeah. Lots of talk. Faculty interested in language programs would get together in what we called Culture and Language programs.

Taylor: Who was doing that?

Fiksdal: We were a sub group in a specialty area. That's where we talked about it.

Taylor: There was no deanly direction?

Fiksdal: No, deans never helped us think about it, but we, the faculty, did. I remember we hired Art Mulka, and he knew Latin and Greek. He was teaching something else entirely, I can't even tell you what it was. But I got talking to him because I realized he knew these languages and could probably teach them. He said he could, and I said, "Why not have a classical studies program?" So he did. There were people we hired that couldn't do something like that. They might know another language but they couldn't teach it, or they didn't know anything about the culture. Gordon Beck got involved in that.

Then we had Nancy Allen's program that turned into Alice Nelson's program. Setsuko Tsutsumi and others taught in the Japanese program.

Taylor: And Russian.

Fiksdal: And the Russian program. The Russian program never took students abroad, but they told people where they could go. Later on, there were summer programs, but students didn't have to know Russian to go on those.

Taylor: But the faculty just got together and said, "Okay, we're going to offer Spanish one year and we're going to offer French the next year"? It was just the faculty that did it?

Fiksdal: Yeah, we decided on every other year that we would do these serious language programs in — Japanese, French, Spanish—where we had expertise in the faculty. And when we didn't have enough faculty, it was a three year cycle. The Irish program which Sean Williams taught and the Chinese program taught by Rose Jang. You have to wait for a confluence of available faculty. I do remember Barbara Smith asking us to solve the problem of how to teach advanced programs or courses, but that just was impossible. We would work with small groups of students on contracts to do advanced work in language or literature.

Taylor: But now I notice—and it must have started with you, I don't know—if you're going to do a study abroad program, it is approved by the deans.

Fiksdal: Things changed because of all the budgetary implications. Not when I first started taking students abroad, but in the late '80s or '90s, the budget dean finally started not just paying for airfare, but also per diem. That started costing the college more.

I remember it was Don Bantz that I met with, and it really made me mad that he declared that study abroad programs would never cost more than 10 percent of the budget. I said, "I think it has more value than that. Ten percent? We should talk about what value each area has, and how much money they get."

Because for those of us in humanities, it's always very annoying when you start hearing more about what the science programs get. They get people, they get equipment, they get field trips. It costs the college a lot. Science matters, but humanities should get a large piece of the pie. Anyway, he said it was 10 percent, so they stuck to that for quite a while.

Taylor: But you didn't have any role in that decision.

Fiksdal: No.

Taylor: So what did International Studies Desk mean?

Fiksdal: We made agreements with lots of schools abroad to teach our students. When I became a dean, for example, Judy Gabriele, our adjunct faculty member in French found a school in France that

could contract with us. They wanted an agreement with the college that our students would go there and learn. We'd give them a certain amount of money, I can't quite remember the amount. So students in our French program started spending two weeks there at the very beginning of spring quarter. It wasn't in Paris, it was off in Brittany. The idea was that they would get used to being in France. They would have language instruction and live with French families.

So, we had these kinds of agreements. I would have to write these agreements and then check with our attorney general. These attorneys changed all the time, and they were really quite annoying to work with. I remember one time I got so mad that I visited the UW and talked to the people there that created these agreements. I found out what their AG had said; got several examples; brought them down and said, "If the UW can do this, then we can." So the agreement wasn't all legalese. We had to send these to other countries. They can't figure out what you're saying if it's legalese. I was able to write them much more informally. That process took time.

For a while, I was in charge of the students who came here on certain visas who were from other countries. That job luckily moved to Student Services, but for a while I did that, and then the faculty, too that we had on visas.

Then, against my objections, we passed a rule that there had to be at least 15 students that went abroad to approve travel. There were issues where they had 14 or they had 13, and yet, it was such a great thing. That was just really hard. Then, because I had the desk assignment, I had to talk to the faculty and students, and I didn't even support it. Well, I had to support it because it was my team's decision. I felt a strong allegiance to the team, but sometimes I thought our decisions were not good. That was very hard.

Taylor: Is it still operating that same way, that the deans approve? I think they do.

Fiksdal: I am pretty sure. I know David McAvity, even though he was Budget Dean, took over the International Studies Desk, or created it—because I think it lapsed or something—and he's really involved. He likes that kind of thing, and found more opportunities for students—one in Denmark, one in Korea, one somewhere else. So he's done a lot of good work in that area.

Anyway, being a dean was great. It was really nice to get away from teaching for a while. I thought, oh, this will be great. It'll be a 40-hour work week, not 80. Then on the evenings and weekends, I can do my research. And in five years, I think I wrote one paper. I went to two conferences, though. One time I didn't present. Remember, we had deans' budgets and so we could travel.

Taylor: But that was because you were a Dean of Part-time Studies, so you had all that evening work. I think you worked harder than the rest of us.

Fiksdal: Well, for sure, I racked up the hours. Remember, we had to write down our hours every week for Barbara. She insisted, because there were deans prior to us who apparently didn't work hard.

Taylor: After you left the deanery, you went back to teach, and then you decided to apply to go on exchange to Kobe, which I thought was wonderful because you had been so involved with everybody, but you hadn't been able to do it.

Fiksdal: Oh, yes. That's the other thing that I had done under that desk assignment. I welcomed each of the new exchange faculty we got from Japan. I met them at the airport, called relevant faculty to welcome them, and made sure their apartment was stocked with food, which I paid for.

Taylor: And you had to find the apartment, because I remember the apartment that they had was really inadequate.

Fiksdal: Yes, the Japanese faculty didn't like the one near our campus, but we didn't know. Finally, one of the professors said, "This really isn't a good apartment." And I looked at it with new eyes and realized it was a crummy apartment. I called the management and told them I was going to find another apartment (after getting the provost's approval). They said, "We'll remodel. We'll do anything you want." I said, "No, we're going to find one in West Olympia."

Taylor: It was that Ash apartment.

Fiksdal: Yeah, it was really close to the college, and if they didn't have a car, it was just really difficult. I found a place on the west side that was much better, where they were closer to the mall—they loved to go to malls and shop.

Every year, I would help buy or sell things that they needed, like cars and rice cookers. It took up a lot of my time. I always entertained them more than once so that they would feel welcome. I'd organize things for them. That desk assignment turned into a huge thing.

One of the attractions to teach in Japan was because I knew all the recent exchange faculty. When I filled out the application I felt odd because it was the application I had written as dean
[laughter]

Allen could only come for one month, but I was in Kobe, as you know, for four months. It was very business-oriented even then. As a linguist, I decided to call upon all the experience I had from

teaching Hype and Hucksters, and I taught The Discourse of Advertising. That was great fun. The students analyzed and created ads.

We even had a fieldtrip where the students went out and counted people carrying shopping bags, and from which stores. I explained that we were looking at portable advertising. I couldn't read the words on the bags. [laughing] But I said, "We're going to go and do this exercise, because everybody here seems to carry shopping bags, and they can't have all gone shopping that day" A student raised her hand and said, "I'm not sure people do that." Then she looked down and she had a shopping bag, and then she looked around and everyone had one.

We went to the busiest intersection and students had a number of variables to watch for such as age and gender. They figured out the middle-aged men were mostly businessmen with briefcases, but everyone else basically had shopping bags. Then they were able to see which stores were most popular, according to age. It seemed to fall out pretty much as they expected. That's what really convinced them that advertising seems to work. That was great fun.

That experience teaching in Japan was fabulous. We traveled to Miyazaki University. I knew Mr. Hirashi very well because he had come to the college many times, and I always talked to him even before I even thought about Japan, because he was visiting and he was interesting and funny. He loved to joke. His English was so good. So we went to see him, and saw faculty and administrators that I had met the previous time when I came with Barbara.

I knew a lot about Japanese culture, I had read so much, but I was reading even more. I loved my course. All the faculty that I had helped at Evergreen felt obliged to invite me somewhere, so that was quite wonderful. And the President was sure to come by a couple of times, I guess, not just once. Everyone said, "Oh, that's amazing." Then they invited me to a potluck, and I'll tell you, that was so cool.

Taylor: Did the wives come?

Fiksdal: Yes. They made the food.

Taylor: That's one of the things that Evergreen taught them.

Fiksdal: They learned, that's right. They learned about creating community, and they learned how fun that can be.

In the apartments where I lived, there were families that had also been on exchange. At one point, we had a cleanup around the apartment. They didn't really work very hard and announced that

work was done. I said, “But I’m not done.” They said, “We’ve worked hard enough.” [laughter] We went up to have lunch, and they have these big jars of pickles and olives. I said, “Where did you get this?” They said, “We go to Costco.” I said, “There’s a Costco?” So I got taken to Costco, which was kind of an adventure because you just see rows and rows of Atlantic salmon!!

Taylor: That’s new. Costco wasn’t there when I was there.

Fiksdal: Atlantic farmed salmon isn’t very nice, but there were rows and rows of Japanese things. It was fun to go there, actually. One of the families took us and then bought enchiladas, and then heated that up and we had enchiladas for dinner. [laughter] It was so fun! They were probably the most westernized as they had also lived in California for a year.

Fiksdal: The deaning was very good, but I did get kind of tired of it after a while. Basically, we were so busy, and we were in meetings all the time, I didn’t even know where we were in the quarter. Like suddenly, “No one’s here. Where are the faculty? Oh, it’s a break.” We were on such different schedules, and we were so busy. I really wanted to get back to teaching.

Taylor: But you were glad you did it?

Fiksdal: I was very happy I did it.

Taylor: How many years did you teach after you finished deaning?

Fiksdal: A long time. Six more years.

Taylor: That’s when you went back and taught with newer people.

Fiksdal: I did, but then I also applied for a Fulbright. I decided I needed to get away. I had done that when I went to the University of Michigan to get a degree in linguistics—that was three years—and then I did take one or two quarters off. That was nice. I guess I had a sabbatical. That was very nice.

You get really tired and burned out, so I was looking at Fulbrights, and I found one in Hong Kong. I told Allen and he said, “Hong Kong. Sounds great!” So I applied for it. It was an unusual one where you join a team of five other faculty. The government had decided to move all public universities in Hong Kong from a three-year college curriculum—which is the British way—to a four-year experience, which was the American way, and add two years of general education. General education was a very new concept for them.

A billionaire business man, Po Chung, had helped convince the government that this move would create students who were innovative and collaborative. He also paid for four years of American faculty teams

to work in Hong Kong. He said, “Anyone he hired with a spark of intelligence came from somewhere in the West. These people were not only intelligent, but they were creative.” Mostly, it was Americans.

Taylor: Was this a private university?

Fiksdal: No, we were placed in public universities, and then we were asked by private ones to come and help, and we did that, too.

Taylor: Who’s the “we”?

Fiksdal: The six of us that got the Fulbrights. We were placed at these different universities.

Taylor: These are six people that you didn’t know.

Fiksdal: Oh, no. They came from all over the states. Our group, we know each other well. Not all of us can get together all at the same time, it seems, but we do get together still. We like each other. It was a wonderful way to make friends and to be in another culture. Like Japan, you arrive and you can’t read anything. You can read street signs. Those are in English. But basically, it’s a Chinese culture. Hong Kong is very crowded. There’s a lot going on. You can’t even see everything that’s going on.

Taylor: You were there for a full year?

Fiksdal: Yeah, we were there for ten months, and then I went back because the English Department gave me a research fellowship. I went first in 2010-2011, and then I went back in the fall of 2013. Going back was just—people said, “Hi. Have you been here all this time?” I said, “No, actually a whole year went by since I saw you.”

Taylor: This second time you went back by yourself?

Fiksdal: This second time I went back by myself. Allen had retired.

Taylor: I mean without the team of six.

Fiksdal: There was not the team of six. I was the only one that was asked to go back. Allen came with me because he was retired, so we had four months there. I told them, “I have to get back to Evergreen,” because I was going to still teach, so I had to get everything done. [There was more pressure on me than anything else. They were fine with that. I stayed for exams and grading.

Taylor: What were you teaching?

Fiksdal: For that class and the other one I taught for them, it was Introduction to Sociolinguistics, which is my field.

Taylor: And you were teaching it in English, of course.

Fiksdal: In English, with an unfamiliar book. But the second time, I improved the class.

Taylor: Was their English good?

Fiksdal: Their English is quite good, not perfect. For the fellowship I researched how students disagreed with each other. I found huge differences from the ways that students at Evergreen disagreed in seminars. Because Hong Kong students are second-language learners. They only learn a few ways to disagree, whereas when I looked at data I had from my seminar work, there were lots of ways to disagree.

I also participated in a conference and gave a talk on my research. It was a rare opportunity. When I first arrived in Hong Kong, I worked in the Office of General Education. That's what we were all supposed to be doing. So I had this desk and I had my own office, which turned out to be a very big deal. I didn't realize that it was such a big deal. They had asked me, "What should we call you? Professor Susan Fiksdal or Dr. Susan Fiksdal?" I said, "Professor." It sounded better to me, and I was a professor, I figured, if I had been at another university. That turned out to be a lucky decision because it turns out that a doctor is lower in status than a professor, so suddenly, I had my professional status doubled. [laughing] That was fortuitous.

When I taught, I had a second office over in the English Department, so that was, I guess, cool, but I couldn't decorate it or anything. That was just too much for me.

Taylor: Did they provide housing?

Fiksdal: Oh, yeah. I had a beautiful, huge apartment, because it was out in the sticks. There's a part of China that was conceded to the British when they had Hong Kong, and I lived on that peninsula. So I was, I don't know, it's not even halfway, maybe a quarter of the way to China where our apartment was. I should look at a map. It might be halfway. But anyway, it's called Sha Tin there.

Taylor: But you really didn't know anything about Hong Kong when you went.

Fiksdal: Oh, no. I read a lot right before I left, because every time I go somewhere, I read papers on language and power. I knew that there was English and there was Chinese, and I knew there were at least two dialects there, if not more. I knew some things, but I had to really study up. It was nothing but amazing. Hong Kong has a huge bureaucracy in the universities, in the government, probably all institutions because it had been a British colony. It was just after I was dean, excuse me, I have to backtrack, remember that just after I left the deanery, Russ Fox was dean, and a business woman and some administrators came from Wuham University in China. Their goal was to partner with Evergreen so

their students would learn English. WE needed to send a group to Wuhan. Russ couldn't go because his mother was ill, so I had to go. Again, I thought, oh, my gosh, I'm so lucky. I got to go to China with our then-Provost, Enrique Riveros- Schäfer.

Taylor: You did that, because eventually, I went on that exchange.

Fiksdal: Oh, you did?

Taylor: You met "the woman"?

Fiksdal: Yes, of course. There was a brash businesswoman who was very clear about she wanted. No hedging around. She was part of the delegation that came to Evergreen. It was hard to understand their partnership with her. When we visited Wuhan, we had some talks and then they organized a tour of their southernmost province in China, which was an open economic development area. That meant you could build anything without any restrictions. It's very close to Vietnam. Beautiful weather. They were building horrible-looking places that people could stay in, resorts with crazy themes like teepees. It was really sort of a frightening experience to go there and see how they were kind of plundering the land. They wanted to build a university there in one year and have lots of Evergreen faculty staff it along with their faculty.

I insisted that Rose Jang accompany us because I knew that her English and her Chinese were perfect. They had a translator that was from Olympia that accompanied us, but I didn't want a translator I didn't know. I didn't know whose side he was on, and this would be, I knew, a hard-driving bargain. If there's only one thing I have learned about the Chinese, it's that they bargain. No one is a match for the Chinese.

Taylor: That's absolutely true.

Fiksdal: I called all kinds of universities with connections to China. I even talked to Yale Law School because they had a branch there. I always said, "I'm a dean at the Evergreen State College." I was not saying that I used to be a dean. [laughing] I had to give myself some title. At Yale, my contact said, "Don't agree to anything. They don't believe in contracts. They don't understand contract law, and they will break every agreement. All you have to do is look at some car companies." I said, "I don't have a lot of time to do this research. Could you just summarize it?" [laughing] But he did, and he basically said, "Your best answer is 'no' and just be very, very, very, very careful."

They wined and dined us. They took us on this tour. They said they were going to build another Evergreen in this gorgeous area, and everyone would want to come. I said, “But your faculty?” “We’ll just assign them to come.” I said, “They don’t get to decide?” “No.”

Wuhan was one of the top 10 universities, and it was nothing like Evergreen. I just couldn’t understand their interest, or if they could even understand our teaching approach.

Taylor: Did you go to Wuhan?

Fiksdal: We went to the university in Wuhan.

Taylor: Because there are three universities there.

Fiksdal: We didn’t see all three, we just saw one. It was just huge. The President was 40 years old. There were generations lost during Mao’s time and the Cultural Revolution. We did meet the resident scholar, who looked like you would expect a Chinese scholar to look. He had a really long beard that kind of curled at the end. He was ancient, and he was sitting calmly in a huge beautiful office. [laughing] I couldn’t really speak Chinese, which was embarrassing, so I just kind of did a little bow—a vague bow—because I thought they used a bow, but who knows? It was just hard to know what was polite at that moment.

So, they had a few intellectuals who were still alive, and they were apparently in each of these universities. But everyone else was so young. I finally asked the president, “Is there anyone over 40 here?” He said, “Basically, no.”

Taylor: So you were with Enrique and you were with Rose?

Fiksdal: Yes. It was wonderful to be with Rose. She knew everything. Her parents were part of Chiang Kai-Shek’s work group that escaped China. They moved to Taiwan thinking at any moment, they were going back. So they raised Rose with a traditional Chinese education, which emphasized perfect Mandarin, memorization of great poems, and rigor.

She stood before an ancient monument in Wuhan. I can’t remember what it was—and there was the beginning of a poem, and she recited the poem, and then she kept going, and they all looked at her and said, “We don’t know that.” They weren’t trained like she was trained. She was invaluable. She knew so much about Chinese culture. It was only her second time back in China. She had only gone to a famous women’s conference.

Taylor: Now she’s gone back many times.

Fiksdal: Many times. That really opened up the Chinese world to her. That was wonderful. So, that was my experience. I knew something about Chinese culture, let's just say that. You could argue that being a dean was one of the best things I ever did.

I remember that you came up to me one day and you said, "So, you used to be focused towards the West, and now you're looking at the East." I thought, well, that was perceptive. I didn't understand it myself. [laughter]

I remember in Hong Kong, one of the things they say in their literature of tourism is that Hong Kong is "The gateway to Asia," and we really took advantage of that. Allen and I went to China several times, different places. We went to Myanmar. We went to Vietnam and Cambodia.

Taylor: You were in Hong Kong for 10 months.

Fiksdal: Yes and when we went back to Honk Kong, we visited Taiwan. We saw a lot of Asia, and that really influenced me.

I should mention that I made a little time on my Fulbright to write. One day, I just announced I was staying home. That day I worked on creating two chapters of a book on seminars.

Taylor: That was when you were in Hong Kong?

Fiksdal: I took the time to do it then.

Taylor: Because I thought you did that book before then.

Fiksdal: No. I had written lots of other stuff, but this was better. This was a different direction. I wrote two chapters, and then I sent them off, one to Jossey-Bass, a publishing house that publishes "how to" books for faculty. The other one was Routledge, which is really a big name. But I sent it to them because I had things to say about my teaching in Hong Kong.

Routledge got back to me really fast, and they were very interested. I had these two chapters, so they shopped them around, which means they send them to faculty readers. Then your editor sends you their comments. The comments were very favorable, so Routledge said, "We'll publish it." I said, "I have to write it first." They said, "Fine."

Taylor: I thought you published that book way before I retired, but you were in Hong Kong after I retired, so that's recent.

Fiksdal: It is recent. When I finally retired in 2013, I basically sat down and wrote the book. I just had been waiting for time, and suddenly, I had all the time in the world until I was 98 or something. I just sat down and it took me four months. I wrote the whole book.

Taylor: When was it published?

Fiksdal: It's called *A Guide to Teaching Effective Seminars: Conversation, Identity, and Power*. It was published in 2014.

Taylor: So you did seminars on seminarizing many times.

Fiksdal: Many times.

Taylor: But the book actually comes out in 2014.

Fiksdal: Even though it's called *A Guide to Teaching Effective Seminars*, it's actually a guide to conversation. It tells you how conversation works. At the end of every chapter, I have tips on seminars, and I have lots of quotes from actual seminars in the text. It's my clever way of teaching linguistics. Teaching art of conversation. [laughing]

Taylor: Has Evergreen used this in faculty development in any way?

Fiksdal: Once. It's really sad. I wrote it for Evergreen faculty. I really wanted this to be useful, and only once did someone notice. I had led summer institutes on Seminars for a long time. Therese Saliba managed to get enough money to give this book to all the faculty who signed up. Not everyone came and not everyone read it. A whole bunch of adjuncts came because they just, I don't know.

Taylor: They knew you.

Fiksdal: They decided they liked me and they knew me, yeah. But they don't really have seminars in four quarter-hour courses, so I was wondering why they were there, but it's good for them to know more about seminars.

Susan Preciso and Sarah Ryan sat really close to me, and had underlined and written all over their texts, and were ready for a seminar. They were ready to seminar on the text, which I wanted to do, but no one else was. Other people hadn't really read much of it. There were other full-time faculty, and they were wonderful, but they came with particular issues they wanted to discuss. It was like any seminar, you've got some participants that are just brilliant and ready, and the rest are kind of floating around. [laughing] But that was the only time that Therese was able to buy the books. They could have gotten really good deals from this publisher.

Taylor: They should have done. It reminds me of when Don Finkel died, and he was such a presence in the college. His teaching philosophy had made such an imprint on people, so he had published his book, *Teaching with Your Mouth Shut* not too long before. That's when I was dean and you were dean, too. We were doing Summer Institutes, but we did one in honor of Don. Peter Elbow came and did a little

talk. I think there were about 100 people that came. They all got the book, and we worked through the book, and they all created a Finkel workshop. It was, I thought, really significant. It was a way to honor Don, but it was a way to get his teaching into the minds of a lot of Evergreen people. That's what should happen with us.

Fiksdal: I agree. I think it should happen, but it hasn't. We don't share enough. People were saying, "I learned so much about you at the meeting where they nominate people for emeritus status." That's when you hear what everyone has done. You don't hear half of it, really, because it's only if you've taught with someone that you learn how they teach, and you learn teaching approaches that are so useful and helpful. Often they come from someone else, or your colleague attributes them to someone else. So you realize, okay, so these people know how to do this, these people know how to do that.

I know we had an integrated workshop with Heather Heying that she had learned from Paul Przybylowicz, because we were teaching biological systems of communication, which are not language, and human systems that are so different. In order to connect those, once a week we would ask a question—I think we usually had two questions—and put students to work. Then we did our own work together, like usually a business meeting and things like that. Then occasionally, listen to them, and then they would talk about what the groups all decided. That was very good, I thought, as an integrative method.

I tried all kinds of different things that I heard about in teaching, but there's so much more. I didn't go to the Finkel workshop, but I had worked with him alone one time and I learned to do his type of workshops. I talked about him in my book, too; I talked about his approach.

Taylor: There have been some efforts over time to share things. Truthfully, we're better than major universities where people are really isolated.

Fiksdal: Yeah, that's really bad.

Taylor: They don't have any idea what their colleagues do, except to maybe read their book once it gets published. But I remember Leo Daugherty wrote a monograph on teaching writing at Evergreen. He talked to a whole bunch of people that teach writing, and he wrote this little thing, which described maybe 30 ways people teach writing.

Fiksdal: It was so helpful.

Taylor: It was very helpful. So that was one case, but there hasn't been as much sharing as there should be.

Fiksdal: And now is when we really need it, as more and more people are retiring. Because the sort of usual practices are going to be forgotten and people aren't going to realize what they are.

I don't know whether seminars are so great actually anymore either. I've been talking to faculty. There are students who really are triggered by any number of things. A mention of the word "rape" in class can set them off. There are so many more issues now.

Taylor: Are you saying that you're doubting . . .

Fiksdal: . . . the way we used to do seminar.

Taylor: As a means of study?

Fiksdal: I'm not so sure that good, collaborative learning is happening in seminars, unless a lot of measures are taken to help students. Remember, I was talking to you, we both knew about Jose Gomez's First Amendment approach to seminar. That's not working these days at all. Students are much more aware of their own triggers. We've got to stop because we need a break.