

# Oakland University Chronicles

## Loren Pope

Transcript of Oral History Interview

Interview date: March 20, 1998

Interviewer: Paul Tomboulian



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## **Oakland University Chronicles**

**LOREN BROOKS POPE**

Date of birth: July 13, 1910

### **EDUCATION**

B.A. DePauw University 1933

### **PRIOR TO OAKLAND UNIVERSITY**

Education Editor:  
*New York Times*

### **OAKLAND UNIVERSITY**

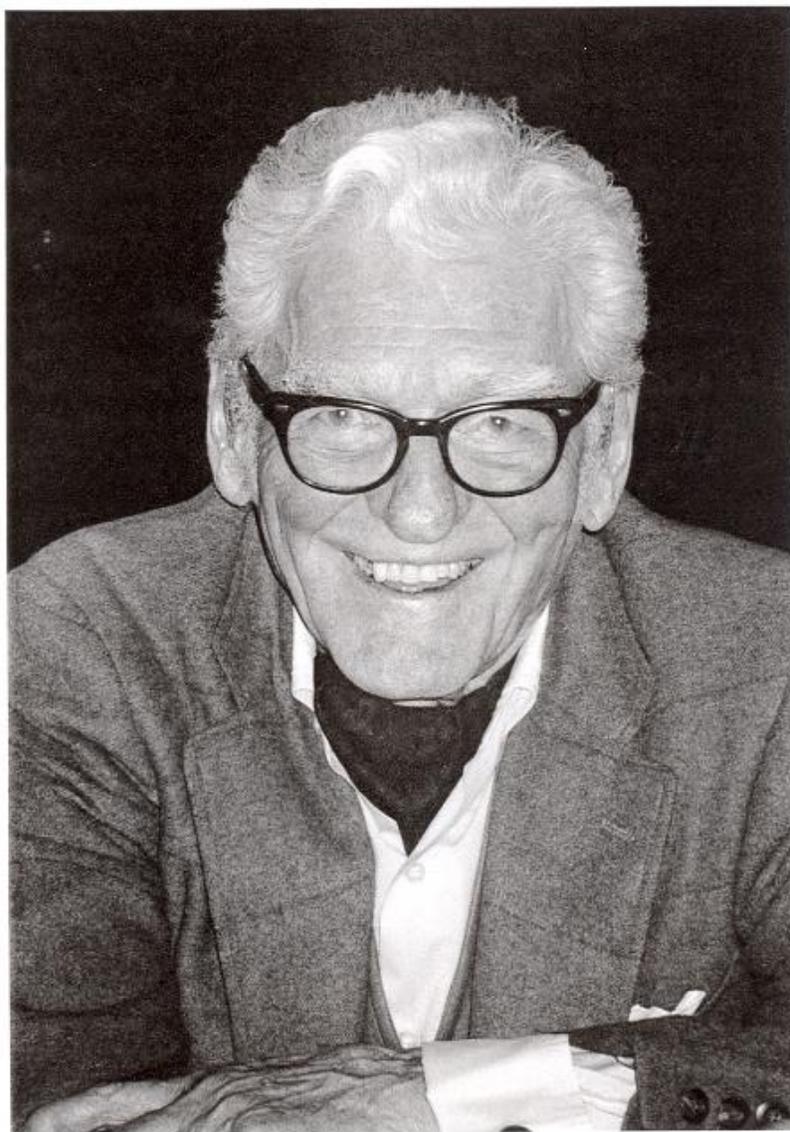
1959 • 1964 Assistant to Chancellor,  
Director of University Relations

Spring 1964 Resigned

### **SINCE LEAVING OAKLAND UNIVERSITY**

1965 • present Director:  
College Placement Bureau  
Washington, D.C.  
(Moved office to Alexandria, Virginia in 1994)

Author of three books on choosing colleges



**Photograph of Loren Pope**

March 20, 1989

Photographer: Alice Tomboulian



Loren Pope  
*Assistant to the Chancellor  
and Director of University  
Relations*

**Photograph of Loren Pope**

MSUO Yearbook 1963

**Oakland University Chronicles**  
**Interview with LOREN POPE**  
**March 20, 1998**

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: This is one of the interviews in the Oakland University Chronicles Project, supported in this second year by a special university allocation. Today is March 20, 1998 and we are speaking from the studios of the Washington Bureau in Washington, D.C. The goal of the project is to collect oral histories dealing with the beginning of Oakland University, the time prior to the graduation of the first class in 1963. Our focus is on the first years and the pioneers who started the new university. My name is Paul Tomboulia and I have been a professor of chemistry at Oakland University since 1959.

My guest today is Loren Pope, who joined the staff at MSUO in 1959 as Assistant to the Chancellor and Director of University Relations. Loren left Oakland University in 1964, and since 1965 he has been providing consumer research to help families make fruitful college decisions. His College Placement Bureau is located in Alexandria, Virginia. Loren has written three books on this subject, and here I have two of them.

Loren, welcome to the Oakland University Chronicles Project.

LOREN POPE: Thank you Paul.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: Loren, I assume Woody found you. How did Woody Varner find you?

LOREN POPE: Woody found me through Russell Thackrey, who represented the land grant colleges in Washington. He was basically a lobbyist and also a reporter. Woody [talked to] this man, who was a friend of mine and who also was a news source for me, because I was writing about education for the Gannett papers before I went to the *New York Times*. He told Woody about me, and then Woody got in touch with me. We had lunch and I thought this project sounded very exciting. That was the basis of it.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: So you left the *New York Times* as what, science editor?

LOREN POPE: I was education editor. I left the *New York Times*—maybe I left before I was pushed—but I left and went to MSUO.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: What was the MSUO story as you saw it?

LOREN POPE: Well, I thought it was very exciting. In fact I guess even before I had my lunch with Woody Varner, I'd gotten some information on it, and I had done a Sunday story for the *New York Times*, which attracted a lot of attention. I thought it was a very exciting concept, and something new in American higher education. And I'm sort of a zealot about American higher education. It's responsible for America's greatness, opening the doors to everybody: the second-class man, the third-class man, as well as the first-class man. I thought this idea was unique, and I know what unique means; it cannot be modified, it's not susceptible of modification. This was a college that would, in force, give blue-collar kids what I called an "Ivy League" education, the kind of an education that people in a democracy should have. As Thomas Jefferson said, "You cannot have a viable democracy and not have an educated public," and he meant educated, not vocationally trained.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: This was about the middle of 1959 or maybe after June?

LOREN POPE: I'm not at all clear on dates. I guess it was in 1959 sometime. (I don't know whether it could have been in 1958.) I went to MSUO sometime in 1959, when this was just a wonderful concept and it wasn't clouded by having students who were making it more difficult. So it was sometime in 1959 that I had lunch with Woody.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: The description you were given for the institution, or what you thought was to be the institution, did that come from the Meadow Brook Seminars or where?

LOREN POPE: I'd heard of the Meadow Brook Seminars, but if they put out a report I never read it. I just knew what I had been told about it, and what Woody was telling me. I guess I must have had some printed material. The

basis of my story in the *Times*, I assume, was probably part printed material that I had gotten, and I'm sure part interviews from people involved.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: What was it about specifically—the concept of MSUO that you found so exciting?

LOREN POPE: For one thing everybody would have to have a shared knowledge. You could not graduate a trained ignoramus. You had to have a two year sequence of Columbia's western civilization sequence. Everybody had to be literate in music theory and in art history. They had to take science, mathematics and philosophy. There was no ROTC, no intercollegiate athletics, and I guess a thing that's almost as important as anything else was that it wouldn't revolutionize teacher education, but it would set a new standard. The teachers that MSUO produced would be educated people, they would not be "teacher's college" graduates, which is the trouble with most public education.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: And your assignment, specifically?

LOREN POPE: Publicity, mainly.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: So Woody wanted publicity. You're not talking about recruiting materials?

LOREN POPE: No, this was to spread the gospel in newspapers, magazines, and so on.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: What was the effect from your perspective?

LOREN POPE: I think the effect was really pretty great. It was something that I thought was an exciting concept, and something that meant a lot to a democratic society. I guess my stories conveyed that, and I'm sure that some faculty came to MSUO simply because they read it. I know a lot of the students did. In fact, later on some students were giving me a hard time because they thought the concept might be going down the drain, and they were holding me responsible.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: So when you came, you were obviously very excited about this new possibility. There were some other non-educational aspects, like the athletics (or lack thereof).

LOREN POPE: Also no fraternities or sororities. I forgot about that. That was important too. This was a seminary, you might say, a seminary for a democracy. It was preparing people to live in a democratic society, and there was nothing else like it. I've already said it was unique.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: If you had to pick some other institutions today which are close to the ideal that MSUO might have been, what would those institutions be?

LOREN POPE: They would all be private institutions. They would be Marlboro College in Marlboro, Vermont; Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts; maybe Antioch in Yellow Springs, Ohio; St. John's College and the Great Books Program in Annapolis, Maryland and Santa Fe; and Reed College in Portland, Oregon. But then there are also a lot of good small colleges scattered through the country, that have really what I could call the same effect that I envisioned MSUO having on kids. But this was a public tax-supported enterprise, that was what distinguished it.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: It was a public college and there's no good model or example of that today.

LOREN POPE: No. I guess the closest thing would be New College in Florida, which started out as a private institution—and it's very much like Hampshire or Marlboro in that kids chart their own course—but it's a tax-supported institution and it's an elite institution. I use elite in the sense of intellectual elite.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: So your major assignment then was to do publicity, but you were also actively involved on campus activities.

LOREN POPE: I was "*tres engagé*." In fact I was probably too much *engagé*, and I wonder if Woody Varner knew what he was getting when he hired a newspaper man. But because I was interested in the whole concept and I thought it was so important and I wanted it to succeed, I had a lot of suggestions and I became... I don't know whether Woody set up this ["wild ideas"] committee to shut me up, or give me something to do, or whether it was my idea, or what—but anyway, it was a committee for which I think I chose the members. I chose people like Bill Hammerle, who I thought had ideas, and Norm Susskind, and Jerry Straka.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: Any administrators?

LOREN POPE: You know, I can't remember. One thing I wanted to do was to free up the educational process. I really wanted to do three things. I wanted to affect teacher education by making teachers take their practice teaching the second year instead of their senior year, so they'd have some idea whether they belonged in that profession. Then I wanted to free up the educational process and also put the teachers and the students on the same side of the fence, by having kids stand in examination for their B.A. degree and have outside examiners on the board. That would put the students and teachers on the same side of the fence. I wanted them to be able to take their certifying exam at the end of the first semester, the first year, or the second year, anytime they thought they could hack it. MSUO had a really tough curriculum and my thought was that you could hold a kid responsible for the core curriculum and then say, "Beyond that, impress us any way you want to."

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: This would be the exam?

LOREN POPE: Yes, this would be the exam. It might be like a Ph.D. orals or something. Bill Hammerle, a physicist who had gone to Cal Tech, said "Loren, it's poppycock, it won't work. Teenagers have a planning span of about 10 hours." So to prove his point the next semester he made a series of exams for his physics class, and told the kids that they could take any exam at any point. They could take the mid-term now, or the final now, and be shed of physics for the whole term. He never had anybody take an exam early and that proved his point, so we gave up that idea.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: In other words, self-pacing tends to slow down, rather than speed up.

LOREN POPE: Yes, right—you bet. There are very few kids who are self-starters, and Bill was right.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: So you felt involved in this sense of mission, in a prototype kind of activity.

LOREN POPE: Yes, I felt it was a prototype and if this place succeeded, other states might do it. Also remember this was just a few years after Sputnik, there was a college-going panic, and the GI Bill after the Korean war particularly had spurred college. College-going was then, I guess, up to 50% at that point in the country. Only about 2% of the people can get into the 30 most selective colleges in the country, and if other states provided tough, rigorous, you might call them intellectual boot camps like MSUO, it would be a wonderful thing for society.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: Then you not only did publicity, but you said you also did some recruiting out of state.

LOREN POPE: Oh yes, I visited a total of 67 high schools around the [Washington] D.C. area, which is a home area [for me], and around New York City, because I'd lived in northern New Jersey when I was at the *Times*. And I spoke to kids at just about all of those schools, and we had a fair number of kids from out of state. Of course I think that MSUO may have had more appeal on the East coast—where there was a great frenzy and fear and concern about getting into a college that would ensure a rich full life—than in Michigan, where there had been a long tradition of free, easily accessible public education. So I think the message of this new kind of college got more reaction in a lot of Eastern schools than it might have in Michigan. I know at least one kid said she came to MSUO because I was the only college recruiter she'd ever seen that wore a Madras jacket.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: You've had some continuing contact over the years with some of those students.

LOREN POPE: Yes. Some of those contacts have lasted for 20 years or more. In fact it was in the 1970's sometime—I don't remember what year—when I was living in Bethesda, Maryland, about six of the "original settlers" came one Saturday and they had lunch with us. There was Susan Sechler, who was from this area [Washington], Tony Hammer from Detroit, Wolfe Metzger—he was an Austrian, Susan Bierstein from Hershey, Pennsylvania, and I think there was one other, and they came and we had lunch. I remember Tony Hammer saying to my wife, "I bet this is quite an ego trip for Loren," and it wasn't an ego trip but it was very nice. A few years later another group of them... John Galloway's widow—John Galloway was an art professor—his widow had a party and there were about five of the original MSUO students there. But I haven't seen any of them for at least 10 years.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: But you clearly have strong recollections of them.

LOREN POPE: Oh, yes. Very tender recollections, yes, very loving recollections.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: But that was a sort of characteristic of that initial class.

LOREN POPE: Yes, there was a sense of community there and a sense of family and of belonging. I think feelings ran high but I never was aware of backbiting or viciousness. I remember I wrote about something that I thought was happening that was wrong, and George Matthews told me that so-and-so regarded that as a Philippic, that I was attacking him. Well, I hadn't meant to attack him, but I was stating my case.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: Undoubtedly there were times where you and Woody had a relationship which was clearly positive, at the beginning.

LOREN POPE: Yes, it was a very good, close, affectionate relationship. I admired him; I do admire him, I think he was the archetypal administrator. He was smart, sensitive, he picked up a nuance quicker than the nuancer could nuance it, and he did not micro-manage. He got somebody to do a job and he'd let them do it. For example, Alice was asking me this morning about conferences on publicity, and I told her that I can't recall Woody ever suggesting to me a story,

or “Do something on this.” He may have—I don’t know—but I knew where the stories were, and he expected me to know.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: And he trusted you.

LOREN POPE: I was certainly no exception. I think this was the way he operated, and we got a heck of a lot of publicity. The only person who objected was John Hannah, President of MSU.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: Tell us about that.

LOREN POPE: We were not only getting a lot of national publicity but we were getting a lot of state publicity. This was aimed at the legislature with the view of increasing our appropriations for each full-time-equivalent student. One of the points I was trying to make was how efficient this operation was, that our buildings didn’t stand idle 50 hours a week, that the chemistry labs and physics labs were being used on shifts, and what not. And Woody said he got a very irritated call from John Hannah who said they were doing the same thing up there. I guess this sort of thing happened more than once and Woody called me in one morning and said, “President Hannah wants you to submit all of your releases to them before you send them out.” I told him I wouldn’t do it. I didn’t know what Woody’s reaction was going to be, but that was my final say, and I never did.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: But he didn’t [push the issue].

LOREN POPE: No, Woody didn’t push it. There would have been no point of pushing it because Loren Pope wouldn’t have been there any longer.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: But he must have known that.

LOREN POPE: Oh, he knew that, yes.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: Maybe he was just testing [you].

LOREN POPE: No, I don't think he was testing. Woody had a responsibility to John Hannah, and he had to tell me, and I respect Woody for doing that. I think he was doing his job, and I expect that Woody expected me to say no. He certainly wasn't shocked.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: Okay. You talked a little bit about Woody's style as an administrator. Were there some other characteristics? How did he seem to operate on a day-by-day basis?

LOREN POPE: As I said, Woody was a very talented administrator, and sensitive to others. This thought just came into my head: I don't think he was good for the feminists, because Gertrude White, when she was chairman of the English department, her pay was lower than a lot of the other English department members. But that was because she was married and her husband was on the faculty at Wayne State.

Anyway, I liked Woody very much. I can't think of anybody else that I know, who would have had the leadership, and the executive and the political skills to carry that school through as Woody had done. But I think I felt that Woody was somebody who wanted to become president of Michigan State, and that he was a guy who could see an opportunity even before it had turned the corner. When John Dodge's widow offered her estate and two million dollars to start this new kind of school, Woody jumped at it. This is just my supposition: here was a chance to create his own identity, and his own success story. There were a lot of heirs apparent besides him at Michigan State.

Michigan State, too, was just on the road to getting equality—or so they thought—with the University of Michigan. Woody had gotten the name changed from Michigan Agricultural College to Michigan State University, and engendered the bitterness and hatred of Harlan Hatcher and other people of Ann Arbor.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: That must have been quite a coup.

LOREN POPE: Of course it was quite a coup, when you consider that the University of Michigan and their alumni were the power structure of the State of Michigan. That shows how adept and adroit a politician Woody was to get

that name changed, because Michigan Agriculture College was not a Johnny-come-lately—they were poor relations, they were hayseeds. To achieve that was really quite something. Anyway Woody, in John Hannah's eyes, was largely responsible for moving Michigan State uptown into the high rent district. I know that Woody had his eye on John Hannah's job. He said that President Hannah had called him in once after that successful thing, and said, "What do you want?" and Woody said, "I want your job."

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: You mean as a goal.

LOREN POPE: Yes, as a goal, right. Not right tomorrow, no. But I knew instinctively, from early on, that Woody's objectives and mine diverged.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: But they didn't seem to at first.

LOREN POPE: No, they didn't. Because I felt that if this thing was successful in a market sense, there would be no problem—if we became selective. Woody had said he wanted this to be a small college, and I thought that was great: never any graduate programs, just a pure undergraduate liberal arts college. If this were attractive enough so that we had people fighting to get in, that would be a success.

But if we had to go out, beat the bushes and take anybody who applied, then that was a different story, and that was about what happened. Then in the first [quarter] when [32% of] the first class had to take chemistry and [24% had to take calculus] and what not, [about 40% of the students] flunked at least one course. I guess you could say that was when the fix was in, whether we knew it or not. Then there were all kinds of meetings on what to do, and in one weird faculty meeting, Gertrude White, who's one of my favorite people, said, "Well, maybe we could sell them indulgences."

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: Loren, let's go back to that fall convocation when things were just getting started. It was September '59, late in the month. What was the spirit of those activities?

LOREN POPE: We were pioneers, we were really pioneers, and I thought that there was a real spirit of adventure there. The kids were interested, and I thought this was a wonderful faculty. The saying that some of the kids had started, was a thing: "I was a teenage faculty member for MSUO." And of course what they were thinking about was whiz kid Paul Tomboulian, who'd gotten his Ph.D. at the age of 21. Nobody could see how that could have happened—and anybody who knew anything about academia couldn't understand how the heck that could have happened. But anyway, that was the kind of faculty that we had. They were all whiz kids, and led by this 21-year-old [who was then 24]. I think there was a real spirit of adventure and I think the kids were working hard.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: You mentioned a convocation event.

LOREN POPE: Oh, yes. [Deletion of confusing reference.] We had canned music for the occasion; it was the [Triumphal] March from Aida. It was very stirring and I was all melted down inside and proud of this thing. Bob Hoopes, the dean, gave what I thought was a great convocation talk, about the purpose of this being not to make you a repository of knowledge, but to ask questions like "Who am I?" or "Why am I here?" and this sort of thing. In other words he was talking to me.

So it was a great adventure, and I think until the grades came in, the kids felt that they were being worked to death. I think the next year we went to Pittsburgh because they were on the year-round program. The kids heard that we were thinking about operating the school year-round and the cry was, "You'll burn out our brains!" But anyway, I thought there was a great spirit, and then when the first marks came in...

30% of that freshman class was taking chemistry. Now, this just doesn't happen at any institution in the world, and of course most of those kids didn't have any business taking chemistry, and they certainly hadn't been prepared for it in their little rural high schools in Michigan. An equally large percentage was taking things like calculus, physics, and economics, which are killers, and so it was no wonder that we had all this great attrition. We had an unsophisticated clientele—

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: And a faculty with high expectations.

LOREN POPE: Yes, the faculty with high expectations.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: Because they had read somebody's story about what was going to happen, maybe?

LOREN POPE: Sure, and of course—I don't know whether I ever said this to anybody or not—but in my own heart I knew that Paul Tomboulian at [24] years old was a pretty hard taskmaster, because he'd done it, and why couldn't anybody else do it?

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: Well, that's a little strong.

LOREN POPE: You're not guilty, right?

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: So the convocation was part of the sequence of social and academic activities which set the tone and kept the spirit of family?

LOREN POPE: Yes, and the way some of these kids' eyes were opened was really remarkable. I remember being in the library one day, and some kid who was undoubtedly the first one in his family to ever go to college said—he was taking art history under George Matthews' wife who was teaching art history—he came up to me and said, "Mr. Pope, we had to do a piece on the Frank Lloyd Wright house. There was a Loren Pope who had it." He said, "Are you the son of some famous Loren Pope?" [Note: Loren Pope had commissioned Wright to design a house in Falls Church, Virginia in 1939.]

A little later on, George Fritz had a mid-term banquet for the students. It was very fancy, and one of the things he had was butterfly shrimp—you know, with the tail still attached. The next day George was asking one of these kids how he liked the banquet. He said, "Oh, fine, Mr. Fritz. But I couldn't eat the feet on them little crabs." So that was the kind of student body we had, and to put them up against a curriculum like this, it was really—you couldn't make it mesh; it couldn't work. And I don't know what the solution would have been. But it was amazing—they hung in there, though.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: And the faculty hung in there.

LOREN POPE: Yes, the faculty did.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: But it wasn't anticipated, is that right? You don't recall Woody saying anything like, "Gee, I think this is going to be really bad," before it happened?

LOREN POPE: No, I don't think so. We used to joke a lot, before the school started, about this being "a wonderful institution—pretty soon we'll have to deal with students." But then we didn't know how true it was.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: Nothing in the Meadow Brook Seminars or any other materials you ever saw spoke about the question of who would come to a new institution?

LOREN POPE: Like this one, yes. The thing is that an institution like this had a lot more drawing power in the East, where there was a frenzy about getting into college, than it would in Michigan where everybody had access to free public education—and we did get quite a few students from the East. Of course they were the ones who survived most easily.

But there were also a lot of success stories, like George Corbin who was the first one to go to college in his family. The first [quarter] he got two Cs and two Ds, and he was on probation. But by the time he graduated he'd been on the dean's list three different semesters, and he now has a Ph.D. and has tenure at Lehman College of City of New York University in anthropology. It's success stories like this, that are what count.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: But at the time—

LOREN POPE: At the time when the first [quarter] grades came out, all I thought was, "Uh, oh." And there were faculty meetings about this, and that's when Gertrude White said we could sell them indulgences. I'm sure there were more faculty meetings. Then—I don't know whether it was the next year or the year

after that—there were proposals made to water things down, and I led an opposition to that.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: The grades came in that first [quarter] and they were as bad as some had feared they might be, in spite of lots of enthusiasm and hard work. You said the students were really working hard.

LOREN POPE: I did, but of course I was just sort of like a water bug. I may have talked to 20 or 30 out of the 500 kids there.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: But the vibes you got were that they were working hard, and that success was eluding them.

LOREN POPE: Yes, this was tough. But I also was sitting in on a meeting one night when there were a lot of parents there. One of the parents was asking, "What's the good of this liberal arts education, taking courses in philosophy and what not?" And some kid gave what I thought was a darn good answer. He said, "Well, a liberal education is what you have left after you've done your day's work."

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: The parents might have been confused by some of this [sophistication].

LOREN POPE: Oh, I think a lot of them were, yes. It just didn't lead to a job as a machinist, or a salesman, or an engineer—what's the point of it?

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: So maybe the students had to sell this to their parents.

LOREN POPE: Oh, I'm sure that a lot of them did.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: Did you have that experience in the East when you were recruiting?

LOREN POPE: No. The fact that there were tough standards, a core curriculum, a quality program, and I was calling it an Ivy League college... You mention the word "ivy" and you've got it sold.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: Some time in that period, the term "Harvard" came out. Do you recall how that happened?

LOREN POPE: Well, I'm sure it did [come out]: "the Harvard of the Midwest." Albion calls itself the "Harvard of the Midwest," and that's not quite as far as you can go, but Albion is certainly no "Harvard" of anything.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: Did you invent that term, do you think? Who invented that?

LOREN POPE: I don't know. It's a term that just wells up naturally. I wouldn't have used it, because I think of Harvard as something else. I think Harvard is great on the graduate level, but for undergraduates it's a gip joint.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: Would that term have sold students in the East?

LOREN POPE: I think it would have been putting on airs—a little presumptuous. Here's a brand new public institution, it doesn't even have one dormitory, no place to live, and you call yourself the "Harvard of the Midwest?" But you've got Ann Arbor there, which is a great institution. I think the message that appealed to kids and parents that I talked to was the whole concept, the thing that excited me.

But what excited people in Michigan was something entirely different. They didn't have to be excited; this was cheap public education. I mean accessible public education. If they couldn't get into Ann Arbor, which is tough for a lot of kids to get into, or Michigan State, and this [MSUO] was close to home, they could live at home. Was there any tuition at all?

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: Yes. A \$250 scholarship would pay [tuition] for the year. That was the size of a scholarship.

LOREN POPE: That's about as reasonable as you can get.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: That was tuition, \$250, and another \$250 would buy everything else. So you could do a college education for \$500 a year.

That Christmas after the first grades were in, and students' performance was not meeting expectations, either by the faculty or, I presume, by the administration, did Woody say anything about this? How did you play this in the publicity, because it must have been your assignment to characterize this?

LOREN POPE: You know, I should have a sharper or more vivid recollection of that, but I remember having one story that proved how tough it was. But whether that turned out to be a plus or a minus I don't know. And my gut feeling is that I must have had a subsequent story, saying that one reason was that too many kids who were taking chemistry had no business taking chemistry [or physics] or math, and of course that was perfectly true. That played a very large part in it.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: But there were some in the administration who probably were disappointed that the faculty were not allowing enough students to succeed.

LOREN POPE: That means that the administration wished that you wouldn't be so honest, right? If there was any of that feeling, I wasn't aware of it. But then in an administrative group meeting, one guy said, "You can always tell what's going to make Loren mad: some moral issue or something."

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: In these administrative group meetings, what was the flavor of the discussion?

LOREN POPE: Most of that's gone out of my mind. I remember there was a heck of a lot of concern about it. Of course there had to be a concern because you can't have an operation where almost half of your freshman class is getting an F in some [at least one] course.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: Woody's response to that was probably in several different directions, right? As I recall there was a sort of program to allow students to take courses over again as one option. And I know it became evident that we needed better admissions.

LOREN POPE: Yes, and that's probably one reason that I was going around the country, although I guess I was going around the country some the first year, too. I was doing that for about three years, I think—because, as I said, I had about 67 high schools that I visited, and I feel we got quite a few Eastern kids. I have no numbers, I have no idea how many. But for example, Wolfe Metzger, the Austrian boy, I think he came there because of what was written about MSUO. Wolfe was a very bright guy, and he later worked on the *Wall Street Journal* and I haven't seen him for some years.

One other thing, talking about the effect that MSUO had. In the middle seventies—I'm a ballet buff, I go to New York for the New York City Ballet season—and one night, it must have been 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning after my wife and I had been to the ballet and then been eating or something, I was walking across the street up on the Upper East Side about 83rd Street, and somebody said, "Mr. Pope?" I said, "Yes," and he said, "I just want to say how wonderful MSUO was and how much I admire you," or something like that. This looked to me like some guy 35-40 years old. So it was having some effect. Another night somebody said, "Senator Goldwater?" but it was 1964—that happened a lot.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: You didn't appreciate that?

LOREN POPE: No, being a Democrat.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: About the second year it became clear, as a result of student performance, that some things were happening that marked a division between the administrative direction that some of us, particularly you, thought we were going in, and the direction that seemed to be where Woody was going. There was a meeting in February, some called it the Saturday meeting of some type. Tell us your recollections about that.

LOREN POPE: This was a meeting, a faculty meeting, with everyone.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: It included everybody, then?

LOREN POPE: Everybody, yes. All administrators, faculty, even George Karas, who was [campus] engineer. This was a meeting to decide which direction the institution was going to take. It was—don't nail me to the wall on my choice of words—whether we were going to “water down” the courses, ease up on the required courses, ease up on the grading, become more vocational. Anyway it was not the dream or the concept that I had envisioned when I came there, and I was opposed to it.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: You used the term "fork in the road" this morning, a sort of a turning point.

LOREN POPE: Yes, it was a fork in the road. We had not been getting students in great numbers. This was a public, tax-supported institution and if you weren't getting students in great numbers, the legislators and the taxpayers might soon get tired of supporting this elite little precious thing that wasn't paying its way, and wasn't serving the community very well.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: Who was saying that?

LOREN POPE: This is what I'm saying the danger was, and that it was sure to happen if this place wasn't accepted, and if it didn't have marketability. So we had to find ways of being more marketable, being more attractive, and being a greater force in the community. We did all kinds of things. There was more recruiting going on, I may have made more trips to the East. I certainly visited a lot of high schools around Michigan, and I'm sure most of the other administrators did, and some of the faculty members did too.

But there was also a philosophical problem here that had to be solved. Are we going to go this way, or that way? Woody wanted to go this way. As I said earlier, Woody is a very pragmatic guy and he wanted this to succeed. I don't have very many pragmatic bones in my body, and I wanted the concept to succeed no matter how difficult it was.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: That was the conflict, between the pragmatism and the mission?

LOREN POPE: Yes, and when I left, the student newspaper said, "Idealist Leaves." Anyway that was it, and a lot of issues came up and I don't remember what a single one of them was.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: But you took a major part in that meeting.

LOREN POPE: I took a major part, and I sort of led the opposition and I defeated some of Woody's proposals, some of his central proposals. I don't know whether the outcome of that meeting was a victory for Woody, for me, or if it was a draw. But for the MSUO original concept, it was a disaster and from then on the route was clear. It was not going to be according to the Meadow Brook Seminars.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: It wasn't the dream you came with.

LOREN POPE: No, it wasn't the dream that I had come there to serve. I knew that pretty soon there would be intercollegiate athletics, maybe fraternities and sororities and so on. The teacher education thing would be watered down. I expect that that was one of my concerns, and I thought it was very important that we not become a teacher college.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: How did Woody react to your rebellion?

LOREN POPE: Well, my office was right across the hall from Woody's and about two days later he called me in. He said, "I waited two days before I called you in"—the implication being, "If I hadn't, I might have done violence or something."

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: But he was never violent. Was this as strong as he got?

LOREN POPE: No, he was never violent, no. But he would have fired me out of hand, yes. Why he didn't fire me then I don't know, unless he was afraid of

bad publicity, because you see in that Saturday meeting—which George Matthews called Black Saturday, I called it White Saturday or Bright Saturday or something—on a lot of those issues I had majorities taking my point of view, and Woody was in the minority. If he had fired me, there might have been sort of a minor explosion that would have busted up his dream of using this as a stepping stone to other jobs.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: So he might have been afraid of publicity that you might have then started. So again this was the pragmatic Woody Varner, who was choosing the lesser of several evils. But you stayed several years after that.

LOREN POPE: Yes, I did. There was one other time—I can't remember the occasion—but I do remember very vividly going in and saying that I'm quitting, my usefulness here is at an end, or something like that. That's all I remember, except that we had a long conversation and he induced me to stay. Why or what arguments he used, I can't tell you. But I shouldn't have stayed because my usefulness there was at an end, it was really at an end after that busy Saturday.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: I think you mentioned previously something about an administrative retreat.

LOREN POPE: Yes, and I don't remember when this was, but there was an administrative retreat at a resort in the woods that the Ford family owned [at Haven Hill], and it was very elaborate in a rustic way. For example, all the logs of the log cabins were held in place with copper wires, and the copper of course had gotten brown and melded in with the wood colors, and they had big rustic fireplaces inside—a very elegant rustic place. That was a two- or three-day retreat. There were people like Ken Roose and Don O'Dowd, who were the guys who would fix the flat tire. They didn't give a damn about the concept.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: Pragmatic administrators?

LOREN POPE: Yes, that was to try to answer: Where do we go from here? I was in that, but of course I knew darn well there was no reason for my being there. That's about the last event that I can remember which was an attempt to fix it up.

Of course, as I remember, the idea was "let's relax on things, and make it more like other institutions." I don't know whether they talked about intercollegiate athletics at that point or not. I don't know when you got a basketball team.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: You mentioned that this was a sort of desperation planning.

LOREN POPE: It was a desperation planning thing, but I don't remember what the heck came out of it.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: But the sense was that something had to change. So Woody's role in all this was to keep the operation going and make it a success?

LOREN POPE: Keep it going, yes.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: Loren, about this time when we were having these challenges between the curriculum and the student body, there was also at the same time talk of expanding the operation to year-round. You were part of a team that actually went somewhere to look at this option.

LOREN POPE: Yes. The University of Pittsburgh had gone on a year-round operation, I don't know whether it was a year or two years before. This may have been a time when this was one of those things that was endemic, in the air. The school districts on the elementary and secondary level were talking about year-round school to use the buildings year-round, be more efficient or whatever it was—the thing that we had made so much capital on, that we were using our laboratories 24 hours a day, the taxpayers' investment was being used to the maximum. Whether this was a factor in it or not I don't know, or whether it had something to do with the grades, or retention, or getting through earlier. It may have had something to do with shortening the four-year or the baccalaureate period. Anyway, we drove to Pittsburgh and spent a better part of the day talking to the dean there. I remember vividly one thing of caution he said. He said, "Do not give the faculty a choice, they'll beat it to death."

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: This group was who?

LOREN POPE: The group was administration: Woody, and there was Jim McKay, who I guess was chairman of the math department if there was a department at that time. There was Bob Swanson, the business manager, and me. I don't think there was anybody else because there were just four people in the car. Woody was driving. But what the conversation was on the return trip, I simply can't remember.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: But the message that I think came back was: Now is the time that we're going to start talking about this trimester or three semester system.

LOREN POPE: Yes, and the kids heard about it and they were in an uproar: "You'll burn out our brains!"

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: So there was only limited enthusiasm.

LOREN POPE: Yes. I don't think the faculty were very much in favor of it, because a lot of the faculty could be doing other things in the summer time, doing research, having other jobs or something, or vacation.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: So this idea sort of declined?

LOREN POPE: I think it just sort of fizzled out.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: Not a lot of Woody's capital went into it, do you think?

LOREN POPE: I can't answer that. I don't know.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: You didn't feel that he was strongly committed to this?

LOREN POPE: I don't have that recollection, no.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: But it was an idea that sort of went up as a test balloon?

LOREN POPE: It may have been just a trial balloon, and we may have gone to Pittsburgh just to see what their experience was.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: You'd also mentioned some other wild ideas (not too wild) about grading—a trial balloon about not having any grades.

LOREN POPE: Oh, yes, the evaluations. One kid who had come to MSUO on account of me, Tony Hammer, who lived in Birmingham, came into my office just beside himself with anger. "What are you trying to do, ruin me, take away all my evaluations, all my grades and everything?" He thought it was a terrible disaster. He wouldn't be able to get into graduate school or anything. I sat there with my mouth open. I couldn't imagine a kid not wanting to get rid of the grades. But anyway we didn't get rid of them. Tony was one of those who was my friend many years after.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: Well, Loren, as we think about your connections there, and the time you've had a chance to reflect on some of these things in retrospect, how do you see your experiences at Oakland? What was it for you?

LOREN POPE: There are a lot of things. It was a wonderful learning experience for me. I learned ultimately to work with people—although the fact that I didn't stay there doesn't attest to that—but I did learn to work with people. Being chairman of the "wild ideas" committee was a learning experience for me, because I thought some of my ideas were so obviously good that how could anybody not see their merits? I learned some of Woody's art of persuasion a little bit, and learned to subject things to open discussion and whatnot. It was good in that, since I've stayed in education advising. It was a powerful learning experience for me and I value the friendships of the faculty and administrators I made there.

The fact that it's not what was originally advertised, at this point in life is neither here nor there. Oakland University now is serving, I think, a vital public service function in that area of Michigan. It has its role, and a very important role, in the thing that makes America great. What makes America great is the open door to higher education. We educate the second-class man as well as the first-class man. Oakland gives kids who don't have money, even to

go away to Ann Arbor, or East Lansing, or Kalamazoo, or some place, a chance to get an education and a darn good one.

I'm sure the quality of the faculty is as good as when I was there, and I'm sure they couldn't get a better education anywhere else. As Thomas Jefferson said, "You cannot have a democracy without an educated public," and he meant educated, not vocationally trained. I think success stories like George Corbin's, who came there—two Cs and two Ds the first semester, he now has a Ph.D. in anthropology and tenure in a College of the City of New York University—it's things like that that make you feel anything like this is worth any amount of money the taxpayers spend on it.

PAUL TOMBOULIAN: Well Loren, it was a delight talking with you here in Washington, and let's hope there's more light in our lives than there is fog in the Capitol.

LOREN POPE: Thank you. My pleasure, Paul.

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**LOREN POPE**  
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