Oakland University Chronicles

Interview with

Sheldon Appleton

Transcript of Oral History Interview

Interview date: January 8, 1997

Interviewer: Harvey Burdick

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Contents

Preface

About the Oakland University Chronicles

Editing of the Transcripts

Introduction to Interview

Biographical Sketch of Sheldon Appleton

Photograph Taken January 8, 1997

Photograph from MSUO Yearbook 1963

Biographical Sketch of Interviewer

Transcript of Oral History Interview

Transcript of the Interview: 29 Pages

Index of Topics in the Transcript

Preface

About the Oakland University Chronicles

The Oakland University Chronicles is a set of oral histories dealing with the beginnings of Oakland University, mainly focusing on the years prior to the graduation of the first class. The purpose of the Chronicles is to provide insight into those early times, and record the perspectives and personalities of some of the pioneering individuals who built the foundations of the institution. Special emphasis is placed upon information not readily available from written records.

Starting in 1996, a number of oral history interviews of early faculty, staff, and alumni were recorded as videotapes and transcripts, one of which is in this volume. The videotapes and transcripts are available for scholarly studies, research on institutional history, or outreach purposes of Oakland University; other uses are not permitted.

Bound copies of the transcripts are available from the circulation desk of the Kresge Library at Oakland University. Circulating copies of the videotapes are available from the university's Instructional Technology Center, where many of the interviews were recorded. Archival copies and supporting documents are located in the archives of the Kresge Library.

Editing of the Transcripts

Each transcript was prepared initially by a court reporter based upon the reporter's records and/or the audiotape of the interview. The transcripts were edited by the Project Coordinator, but only as necessary to clarify the meaning, consistent with understanding the intent of the interviewee. Thus, the transcripts differ in some places from the spoken narratives.

The editing followed accepted practice for oral histories, and included:

- correcting factual content, usually indicated by square brackets [ ]
- adding clarifying words or phrases, also shown in square brackets
- correcting usage or unintended errors in speech; may be in brackets
- eliminating unnecessary repetitions, interjections, or false starts
- breaking up lengthy dialogue into shorter sentences or paragraphs

Each interviewee has approved the edited transcript, and has granted Oakland University the rights to the videotape and transcript of the interview, with the proviso that these will be used only for research, scholarly studies, or outreach purposes of Oakland University.

Alice Tomboulian, Project Coordinator
Paul Tomboulian, Project Director

Oakland University Chronicles

SHELDON LEE APPLETON

Date of birth: September 17, 1933

EDUCATION

B.A.	New York University	1954
M.A.	New York University	1955
Ph.D.	University of Minnesota	1961

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

9-1-60	Assistant Professor of Foreign Studies
8-1-61	Assistant Professor of Political Science
7-1-64	Associate Professor with Tenure
7-1-69	Professor of Political Science
8-69 • 8-70	Visiting Professor of Political Science University of Hawaii (Hanea)
8-1-79	Professor of Political Science and Associate Dean for Advising, College of Arts and Sciences
7-1-87	Professor of Political Science and Acting Associate Provost for Undergraduate Studies
7-1-88	Professor of Political Science and Associate Provost for Undergraduate Studies

Photograph of Sheldon Appleton

January 8, 1997

Photographer: Rick Smith
Oakland University Communications and Marketing

Photograph of Sheldon Appleton

MSUO Yearbook 1963

Sheldon Appleton
Assistant Professor of Political Science

Oakland University Chronicles

HARVEY BURDICK, Interviewer

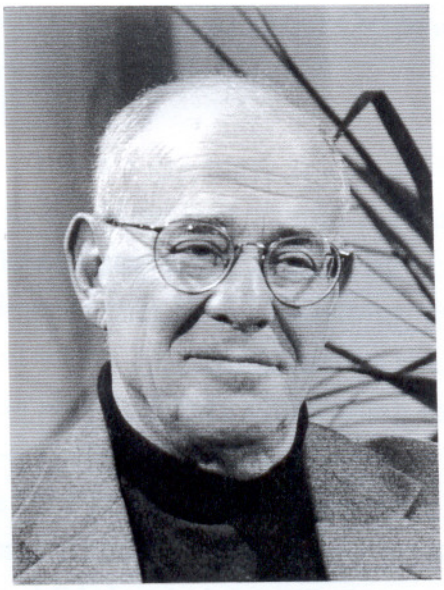
Date of birth: February 18, 1926

EDUCATION

B.A.	Syracuse University	1949
Ph.D.	University of Minnesota	1955

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

8-15-62	Associate Professor of Psychology
8-15-64	Associate Professor of Psychology with Tenure
7-1-64	Acting Chair, Department of Psychology
7-1-66	Professor of Psychology Chair, Department of Psychology
7-1-69	Professor of Psychology
2-15-96	Phased Retirement



Oakland University Chronicles
Interview with SHELDON APPLETON
January 8, 1997

HARVEY BURDICK: The interview today is one in a series of interviews of the Oakland University Chronicles Project supported by the Oakland University Foundation. Today is January the 8th, 1997, and we are in Varner Hall on the campus of Oakland University. The goal of the project is to collect oral histories dealing with the beginnings of Oakland University. At present, we are focusing on the first four years, that period before the first graduation.

My name is Harvey Burdick and I am a professor of psychology, and I have been at Oakland since 1962. That's a long time, but not as long as Sheldon Appleton, who's been at Oakland since 1960. Professor Appleton, who has served in various capacities at the university, and
who presently teaches in the political science department, has graciously accepted our invitation to be interviewed for this project. Welcome Shelly, and thank you for coming.

SHELDON APPLETON: Thank you.

HARVEY BURDICK: I wonder if I can get your memories and remembrances of the early years by asking how you first heard about Oakland or MSUO, and how you ended up coming here.

SHELDON APPLETON: Well, I was a graduate student at the University of Minnesota and I subscribed to the *New York Times*, the Sunday *Times*. Some time in spring or summer of 1959, I saw some articles by Loren Pope, who was the education editor at the *Times* at that time, describing this wonderful new campus. I read the articles and saw a number of things that seemed attractive to me. The most important to me was that they were going to require classes on probably Russia and China—on other civilizations.

Now, I had been in the US Foreign Service and I'd left because they were sending me to Spanish language training. I'd come in on Spanish and while I was there, I studied Chinese and I'd decided that China was going to be critical. We'd gotten into World War II in Asia, we were fighting at that time—when I was at NYU—we were fighting the Korean war with China. I knew China was

going to be important. There were no courses at New York University—with 40,000 students—zero courses dealing with China or Asia when I was an undergraduate.

I continued to be a graduate student there in China studies. I had done an undergraduate honors thesis on American diplomacy in the 20th Century and it seemed clear to me that China was critical. There was a graduate course offered finally on 20th century China and I enrolled for that. Professor Chester Tan came in by ship, I guess, from Asia, to teach that course and there were two people enrolled; the other one was an American of Japanese ancestry. When we went to the library to look for books on China, there was very little written by Americans, just a few books by missionaries [and their children].

So I said, "China is the crucial thing, and here's a university that's going to require everybody to study this." I thought that was great. [The article] said that [prospective] teachers were going to take the same courses everyone else had taken and I liked that, too, having taken some "ed" courses which seemed, to me, not up to the standard of the liberal arts. And some other things were attractive; no fraternities, no required sports.

HARVEY BURDICK: This was all in that article.

SHELDON APPLETON: This was all in that article and a bunch of other things. Oakland was going to produce abrasive people and so forth. I wrote a letter to the name in the article, Durward B. Varner (in whose hall we sit), and said, "Hey, this is great stuff! I'm delighted to see that a university is going to require students to take courses in another culture."

HARVEY BURDICK: So you were just sending a letter to congratulate him?

SHELDON APPLETON: Absolutely. I hadn't taken my prelims [preliminary examinations] yet. I was still taking courses, I wasn't looking for a job.

Woody sent a letter back saying, "Come to our campus, you sound like a good young man, come to our campus." I spoke to my mentors and advisors at Minnesota and they said, "Don't do it, you don't want to go there. We'll get you a good place when the right time comes."

But Woody said, "Look, I'm going to pay the expense, it's not going to cost you anything. No obligation—come on out." So I came out. Before I went out I said, "Well, what if he offers me a job, what do I do then?" My advisors gave me a whole list, you know: "If he means it, ask him to buy these materials for the library. And ask him for this, and ask him for that and ask him for the other thing." I said, "Okay."

I went there and they spent all day with me. I was met at the airport. I was really scared—it was Tom Varner, Woody's son, and Loren Pope, Jr. They introduced themselves as Varner and Pope and I thought to myself, "Oh boy, I'm really in for it. These guys are so young." They looked like teens to me and they played heavy metal rock or something all the way. I figured, "How soon can I get out of here? I'm so sorry I did this." But finally I met George Matthews and Loren Pope and Woody Varner. Bob Hoopes spent all day with me driving me around the area. There were no classes yet.

This was the summer of '59, and Woody said, "You know, I like you, what would it take to get you here?" I said, "Well, I'm not really ready, I haven't taken my prelims." He says, "That's okay." I was in the middle of a two-year Ford grant, so I said, "I can't come." He said, "That's okay, you can come after a year. What is it that you want?" So, I started spilling out all these things, confident—as they were—that he would say, "Wait a minute." And he said, "Okay."

HARVEY BURDICK: He just said, "Okay?"

SHELDON APPLETON: He said, "Okay." And then he said, "Well, then it's settled." I said, "But wait, wait, I need to talk to my wife!" And Woody said, "You know, you asked me for a whole bunch of stuff that's really out of the ordinary, and I didn't blanch and I didn't negotiate, I said yes. It seems to me that you're obliged, on your side, you're obliged to say yes." I took a deep breath, and Bob Hoopes said, "I think you'd better let the man talk to his wife."

HARVEY BURDICK: He's a tough negotiator, Varner.

SHELDON APPLETON: Really tough, yes. So Woody said, "Okay, but you need to call me back, you've got to promise to call me back collect in 48 hours."

And so, that was the way we left it. My mentors were astounded. I remember one of them running up and down the halls yelling out the offer that I'd had. They still didn't want me to go. They thought they'd find me a Big Ten place, but I decided to go. And that was it.

HARVEY BURDICK: That was in the summer of '59, and you were impressed by the fact that they were going to be teaching these Asian studies and that was your area of specialty?

SHELDON APPLETON: I figured that in the normal course of events, I would go to some university where I would be teaching umpteen sections of "Intro. to Poli. Sci." or "Intro. to American Politics." If I was a really good boy, they'd let me teach one term on China, which I'd been killing myself on—the Chinese [language] and all of that—and which I thought desperately everybody should know and hear. If I went here, Woody wrote it into my contract (would you believe) that in perpetuity I always would teach only what I wanted.

HARVEY BURDICK: You just came into the Garden of Eden, academic Eden.

SHELDON APPLETON: I realized, in a few years, that that was a totally useless commitment once we got into departments.

HARVEY BURDICK: Then you were constrained by—

SHELDON APPLETON: By colleagues. But the point was that I could be teaching my specialty with a missionary impulse, and not so much of other things.

HARVEY BURDICK: Well, if I remember your vita, you were appointed as an assistant professor of foreign studies. It wasn't in political science.

SHELDON APPLETON: That's right. And think of the assistant professor part, too: I didn't have a degree, I didn't even have my prelims.

HARVEY BURDICK: That's true. In those days, instructors [positions] were more normal.

SHELDON APPLETON: That's what I was asked to ask for.

HARVEY BURDICK: We've talked a little bit [earlier], and I remember your mentioning something about a conference that was somehow held at Oakland University. I wonder if you'd tell us about that?

SHELDON APPLETON: Oakland was going to be the first institution in this country that was going to require a student to study a non-European civilization. I don't know how it happened, but some time in that '59-'60 academic year, a conference was held here sponsored by the Asia Foundation, I believe, and it brought outstanding scholars from various parts of Asia to Oakland, to discuss what you would do. I mean, really, nobody else had ever had students in a required course.

HARVEY BURDICK: [They discussed] what would you do in these courses?

SHELDON APPLETON: Yes, what should you offer, how should you organize it? Should you have, you know, two days on Afghanistan and two days on each of the other countries, or should you specialize in one or the other? How would you handle it, and how would you approach it? It was very stimulating.

HARVEY BURDICK: But also, fairly surprising that it would be held here.

SHELDON APPLETON: It was held here for the purpose of helping establish that program. It wasn't a national conference, although the people were top level people in their fields, from Chicago and MIT and places like that.

HARVEY BURDICK: So Oakland was, you would say, unique in that sense?

SHELDON APPLETON: Absolutely, and it was for many years. A little bit later, we were ranked near the very top of undergraduate institutions for China programs by the Department of Education, under the National Defense

Education Act. We got major grants to develop a library and partial funding for positions and so forth. That was when Charlie Hucker was here.

HARVEY BURDICK: What about Charlie? Now, Charlie Hucker had a fairly big name in that area, didn't he?

SHELDON APPLETON: Absolutely.

HARVEY BURDICK: Why the devil did he come to Oakland? This is a small school that didn't even have a first graduating class.

SHELDON APPLETON: This is a good question. My first recollection of it is at some social event—it may have been a square dance—that Woody called me aside (because as you know, the whole faculty attended these events with the whole administration). Woody called me aside and said, "Who are the ten best people in your field?" I said, "Why do you need to know?" and he said, "Because I'm going to hire one of them." I said, "Well, I can make you up a list of the best people in my field, but you're not going to bring any of them here." He said, "You do the listing, I'll do the hiring."

He asked three major professional associations—I forget which ones they were—also for listings of the top ten. One name was on all four lists, and that was Charlie Hucker at the University of Arizona, who was a University of Chicago graduate and had quite a reputation in the field.

That's all I know personally. But I remember Charlie telling me that he got a call, sitting out there in Arizona one day, from some guy—he thought it was quite bizarre—named Varner, from someplace in Michigan. He said he wanted to talk to him about maybe coming to this university. Charlie's reaction was, "Thank you very much, I'm very happy where I am, but I appreciate your interest. 'Bye." Woody's response was, "You don't know anything about us. I'd like you to come at my expense, we'll show you the town, we'll show you the situation—no obligation." And Charlie said, "Well, it was hard to say 'no' to that," so he came. He asked for all kinds of things. He had a major reputation, and Woody made all those commitments to him, and Charlie came.

HARVEY BURDICK: So Charlie figured, "I'll make these demands, he'll never meet it, and I'll just have a free trip to Michigan."

SHELDON APPLETON: Well, obviously there's some interest when you take the trip, just if only curiosity: "Who is this masked man, who is this guy?"

But you know, we're sitting in Varner Hall, which was built as a recital hall, and you remember the Meadow Brook Festival: I mean, we had outstanding musicians here of international renown. How could that have happened?

HARVEY BURDICK: That's true. Woody sought all sorts of people and gave them what I would call the old magazine pitch: "The first issue is free and then you make your own decision, right? Come out and look us over."

SHELDON APPLETON: Woody was a great motivator.

HARVEY BURDICK: Yes. Besides the Asian studies, there were other aspects of Oakland, I think, that were attractive as well.

SHELDON APPLETON: Well, I mentioned them: the integration of education students into the same courses as the liberal arts students.

HARVEY BURDICK: Expand a little bit on that. You're saying, as I understand it, that people who were going to go out to the high schools and so on, were not simply being taught their specialties in the school of education.

SHELDON APPLETON: Yes, and they still aren't. At Oakland University, then and now, if you want to teach history, you take history with history professors, not with ed professors who specialize in history, and the same in any other field. I think that's great.

HARVEY BURDICK: I think you mentioned to me that you had some experience with taking some of those courses designed just for education?

SHELDON APPLETON: But they were at a much lower level. I was at school at New York University, which was one of the top-rated education schools in the country at that time. I aced the courses without going to class or reading the books—so you tell me! There are not many students here that can do that.

HARVEY BURDICK: In other words, the standards here were going to be much higher for the people going through teacher preparation.

SHELDON APPLETON: Yes. There's a huge difference between somebody whose whole background is in teacher education and history, and somebody whose background is in history who's teaching aspirant teachers—a big difference.

HARVEY BURDICK: So the image of Oakland, when you were coming, was no frills, and commitment. What are the kinds of things that stick out, in your head? You mentioned something about abrasiveness.

SHELDON APPLETON: Well, that was a famous quote that Bob Hoopes made, that we were going to produce individuals with rough edges and so forth.

HARVEY BURDICK: Well, weren't we going to polish them off or something?

SHELDON APPLETON: Oh, no, no; supposedly not. It was an invitation to be a little unconventional, and that was good. I saw that as good.

HARVEY BURDICK: So, it was the Asian studies, the commitment to non-Western affairs that was unique. It was also somehow no frills, no athletics, no intercollegiate athletics.

SHELDON APPLETON: Right; no "rah-rah."

HARVEY BURDICK: And because of those things you said, "I could come here rather than going to a Big Ten school."

SHELDON APPLETON: I wouldn't have been attracted to Michigan State, for example. One of my mentors, Herb McClosky, said, "Would you go to Michigan State?" I said, "Probably not." He said, "Well, Michigan State's probably a lot better than Michigan State University Oakland." And to me the very bigness, all the hullabaloo about football and basketball, and all the fraternity atmosphere, that was not a turn-on for me.

HARVEY BURDICK: So, it seems that a small school committed to liberal arts, plus all the Asian studies, became an attractive school, even though it was unheard of: right?

SHELDON APPLETON: Well, the Asian studies was the big attraction, because it meant every day I'd be teaching the things that I wanted, mostly, instead of fitting them in occasionally.

HARVEY BURDICK: So, after having been appointed and doing your various researches and scholarly activities for that '59-'60 year, then you came the fall of '60? What was it like? What was campus life when you first came here?

SHELDON APPLETON: I think of David Riesman's phrase from his book, *Academic Values and Mass Education*, that it is was "redolent of a Marine boot camp." The students didn't have any seniors and juniors there to set the pace, to tell them how to get around, things to reassure them that you could survive without killing yourself. The faculty were very young, they were the norm-setters. So it was really a very earnest environment.

I can remember having classes, but it wasn't a "ten to eleven" class—if you went a little longer, you went a little longer. People didn't start shuffling at two minutes to the hour. I can remember once when I must have had a lunch appointment or a committee or something like that, and I had an eleven to twelve class (or whatever it was), and they were in a hot argument. I said, "Stay here, if you wish, I'm going to lunch." After lunch, whatever time it was—1:00 or so—I passed the room and the guys were still going at it. But now, if that happened, you'd have a heart attack, wouldn't you?

HARVEY BURDICK: I don't know about a heart attack, but it would be very surprising. It had to have been very gratifying, then, for you to come back, as an example of the kind of commitment the students had?

SHELDON APPLETON: They were scared stiff.

HARVEY BURDICK: Oh no, come on, Shelly, they were more than scared—there was some commitment. What were the students like? You just gave an example: they would stay after class, they wouldn't shuffle. What was your sense? Here you were, a young person yourself, and sophomores were the "seniors" at that time, right?

SHELDON APPLETON: There was a lot of interaction between students and faculty. We went to the same parties. I really knew what was going on, how they were feeling, and there wasn't that much difference in ages. In 1960, when I taught my first class here, I was 26. So the students were 19. We really lived in the same world at that time. I just noticed seven or eight years later that "These are not my folks anymore, they're living in their world and I'm living in a different world, with different music and watching different television programs and so forth."

HARVEY BURDICK: That's a very interesting characterization—that it was a community that was helped along between faculty and students because they came from the same generation.

SHELDON APPLETON: Pretty nearly. We played baseball together.

HARVEY BURDICK: Did you actually go out and play baseball?

SHELDON APPLETON: Oh yes. We had faculty-student games all the time. Even Charlie Hucker played.

HARVEY BURDICK: Even Charlie got into the scene, playing? So, even though they didn't have intercollegiate athletics and sororities and fraternities, they did this other stuff after class.

SHELDON APPLETON: Yes, and as you know, there was a lot of interaction among faculty of different departments. I mean, who else was there? We started out with about two dozen faculty—that's smaller than some departments here now—and we all interacted. We were many of us on the same floor.

You were, as I was, part of a group that used to meet in the science building [Hannah Hall] for lunch in room 350—not by appointment, but we just strolled in there. There was a stove and a fridge in there. There were Herman Lewis and his wife, Helen, the biologists who were doing the stuff with the fruit flies—but you shouldn't talk to Helen about it because she was very sensitive, they were squashing the flies. And John Maher and Nat Simons, who were economists, and Norm Roseman, who was an educational philosopher and raconteur in almost any field. And others would be there—some went some days, some other days. We'd just have a great interdisciplinary discussion.

HARVEY BURDICK: And people drifted in with their bag lunches or what have you? What was the theme of a lot of those discussions?

SHELDON APPLETON: Anything. I don't remember. Some of them were totally trivial and others probably were of great academic depth.

HARVEY BURDICK: I was wondering if Oakland University or MSUO was one of the significant topics that they spent time on.

SHELDON APPLETON: I think we talked about teaching, shared our impressions of the students. It was what you talk about at lunch: whatever comes to mind. And then Norman, as you may remember, would argue with you about anything. So a lot of our time was spent taking whatever side Norman didn't take or vice versa.

HARVEY BURDICK: So the faculty, because it was small, and because they were living in close proximity in their offices, were interactive with one another during the day. Was there also after-hours getting together?

SHELDON APPLETON: Oh sure, and it usually was inclusive. That is, for the first couple of years if you invited somebody, you invited everybody, because everybody wasn't a lot of people—unless it was a very personal thing with two or three couples. Inviting everyone was like inviting your department now, and everyone meant the administrators, too. I mean, when was the last time you square danced with [President] Gary Russi?

HARVEY BURDICK: Can you talk about the relationship of the faculty and administrators? Was it a sense of one family, or something like that?

SHELDON APPLETON: Yes, I definitely think it was.

HARVEY BURDICK: There wasn't a sense of "We're faculty, you're administrators," or anything like that?

SHELDON APPLETON: I think, to a great extent, as long as Woody was here, that was the case. Strangely enough, because Woody did not have a Ph.D., and he was not an academic. And when one of our inside people—when Don O'Dowd became president, that was when some of the antagonism began. But that's also a matter of size.

HARVEY BURDICK: But that is much later, right?

SHELDON APPLETON: Yes, about ten years later.

HARVEY BURDICK: But those first four years, if you were to sort of give a global impression of it, in this regard, what stands out in your memory?

SHELDON APPLETON: Well, I've told you, there was a lot of interaction. Woody would give you a call and take you out—McDonald's was one of his favorite places—he would take you out to lunch at McDonald's. Or when a speaker on China was at the Economics Club, Woody would call me up and say, "Hey, are you free for lunch? I'll drive you down to hear so-and-so at the Economics Club." And then you'd have a conversation in the car going up and going back.

HARVEY BURDICK: Woody was very involved in the daily activities of the faculty and what they were doing.

SHELDON APPLETON: He didn't interfere but he was a constant presence. He would talk to the maintenance people at any hour; he'd come early, and they all knew him. I once asked students in my class, not the first couple of years either, how many of them had shaken Woody's hand and most of the class put their hand up. It was still retail—speaking as a political scientist—it was retail politics. It was New Hampshire primary politics. It wasn't national, you know, like an address from the podium.

HARVEY BURDICK: He was a hand-shaker and he knew everybody's name, didn't he?

SHELDON APPLETON: He knew their name, he knew their spouse's name, he knew their children's names, and knew if they had a back problem. So he'd meet these maintenance people, he'd have some coffee with them and he'd say, "Mary how is your back?" And they were thrilled, absolutely thrilled.

HARVEY BURDICK: Well, I would be, and to feel that he is that interested in those activities.

So, he was very supportive of freedom on the part of the faculty, but he was also very interpersonal: is what you're saying?

SHELDON APPLETON: Yes, I think it was retail politics. I think Woody was a great politician. I think he could have been governor if he'd wanted to, or U.S. senator.

HARVEY BURDICK: So, you think Woody's presence sort of helped that sense of family and community. Certainly I remember, coming a little later, at the tail end of all that, I certainly had the feeling of community and his knowledge of everybody.

I'd like to talk about the students a little bit more, because here was a school that was creating something new, at least it was attempting to do something new. There was the set of Meadow Brook Seminars, and you had

the Asian conference to say: "How should we design the programs and the curriculum?" Who were the students that were coming into this beautiful new world?

SHELDON APPLETON: They were mostly local Rochester students, and that's not what Rochester students are now. Rochester was a real small town; it was quite a shock for folks like us to go into that small town. The students weren't especially bright.

HARVEY BURDICK: You'd say they were normal average students?

SHELDON APPLETON: Yes. Actually, they had about the same relative ACT scores that they have now. The myth that we were going to have—or once upon a time in Camelot that we had—these Ivy League caliber students but they've deteriorated is nonsense. 'Tain't so. There was a great clash and many, many students fell by the wayside. Most of them, a substantial majority of them, did not graduate. They were crushed. I remember—I'm not sure if I've got it accurately—but one year we gave failing grades to something like 17 high school valedictorians from small high schools. Woody was aghast and he called the faculty together and said something to the effect that, "Hey, guys, we just can't keep on doing this."

HARVEY BURDICK: There seemed to be some problem of discrepancy between some image of what Oakland ought to be and what it was supposed to present to students, and then the students who confronted that rich meal and then got sick (if you'll allow that image). Was it was a very rich presentation to the students?

SHELDON APPLETON: Well, you had young faculty out of top graduate schools. They had no idea what a weak or average high school student from a small town brought to the table, so to speak, to continue the metaphor. And the expectations were extremely high.

HARVEY BURDICK: Well, okay, it was a problem. But there was an idea. You came, attracted by the idea that this was a different kind of school that was going to create that interesting new curriculum for average students?

SHELDON APPLETON: For average students. I hear it said all the time that we were supposed to be the Harvard of the Midwest, and I think that's nonsense. In the first place, I remember from the beginning, coming here and looking at 2,000 acres and a state university, and knowing we were not going to be allowed to be a small school. And if we had five or ten thousand students, let alone what we have now, where were we going to find five thousand Ivy League caliber students to come to Oakland University when they could go to Harvard, or at least to the U. of M.? So I knew it wasn't going to be that way. My understanding, from day one, and I found it a major attraction, was that this was an attempt to give a high-quality education to typical American students.

HARVEY BURDICK: So, what do you think of that?

SHELDON APPLETON: I think that's a good idea, although we were too harsh at the beginning. We needed some leavening from senior faculty who had been around. I think we've done that, to a great extent. For you and for me and most of my colleagues, one of the greatest satisfactions, one of the greatest sources of pride, has been to see our students—first-generation-in-college students—go out there and achieve a great deal. And to at least be able to think, to persuade yourself, that you may have had something to do with that: that they might not have been able to do it without the kind of opportunity they got at Oakland. Whereas, the Ivy League students probably could do it very well without you.

HARVEY BURDICK: Well, now, you make me feel a little better, that maybe what Oakland was trying to do contributed to some of the outcomes that occurred for some of the students that went through the process. Do you recall any students who you think might have benefited by that experience?

SHELDON APPLETON: Lots and lots.

HARVEY BURDICK: Any names come to mind?

SHELDON APPLETON: Well, one that I think of is Betty Sherman, now Youngblood, who is a university president. She came from a standard kind of

background. She didn't have a great vocabulary, she didn't do outstanding work in classes. She was a B student and so forth, but she was never satisfied with that. I remember I used to call her "Tiger." I called her Tiger because she'd just keep asking, "What do I have to do, to be better than that? 3.4 isn't good enough, I've got to do better than this." She just worked and worked and worked her butt off to improve. It's great to find out that somebody like that is now a university president. I think she just came back and contributed a scholarship, or something like that, and that's terrific. That's the kind of person that you admire.

HARVEY BURDICK: We had a few of those. Go ahead—I know you have a trap of a memory. I think you mentioned a few other people.

SHELDON APPLETON: Mary Beth Tierney—I just was up in my office looking over a Christmas card that arrived over the break—Mary Beth has finished her doctorate. She's a young woman from Brighton, from a single-parent family. She just finished her doctorate at Cornell, she worked with Ken Harmon in our chemistry department. She's in nutrition. There's another person who's achieved a great deal. There's just tons of them.

HARVEY BURDICK: I know that you served in various capacities. You were dean for advising, and you were associate provost for undergraduate studies. You were very critical in doing a self-study, and part of that was picking up the kinds of students we've produced who went on to advanced degrees.

SHELDON APPLETON: Yes, in researching that, one of the things I did was call the National Research Council, which keeps tabs on people who've earned doctorates and the institutions they came from. I remember calling up the National Research Council, and asking if they could give me information on how many students from Oakland had earned doctorates. I remembered that Dave Beardslee, your colleague in psychology and institutional research, had done a little study many years earlier called "Oakland University, Mother of Ph.D.s."

So I called the National Research Council and asked. The woman on the phone said, "I'm really sorry, but we only keep records or files for schools that have more than..." I think she said "more than 300," or something like that.

"And I'm sure that Oakland University, which I'm sorry I haven't heard of, isn't one of those, but I'll check for you anyway." I said, "Well, I'd appreciate it if you would check that." I got a call back a few hours later, very apologetic, saying, "I'm sorry, I should never have said that. Actually, Oakland is one of the schools that's done that."

Then I went back and looked at the enrollments. I looked at the average number of years it takes to get a Ph.D. I did a count of the enrollments that we had had in those years—who'd started ten years before or graduated six, seven, or eight years before—and percentage-wise, we did fabulously. We did much better than any of the regional institutions in Michigan. I think we were in line with Michigan State and Wayne, not up to U. of M., but given the kinds of people that came in.... Oakland University's students, probably even until now, and certainly then, had the second highest percentage of first-generation-in-college students among four-year universities in the state, second to Ferris.

HARVEY BURDICK: So, our students were truly not only average, but even in their family background there were no college-trained people, they were the first generation college people?

SHELDON APPLETON: And of course, more so then. The whole country has moved and changed, but our relative position hasn't changed a lot.

HARVEY BURDICK: Well, that says something.

Shelly, I would like to go back to the time when you started to teach. I wonder if you could describe how you were preparing for the classes, what kinds of books you thought were appropriate, the exams, and where you taught your classes. You always taught them in classrooms?

SHELDON APPLETON: No, I used to have classes, a lot of times, in the cafeteria. Students would sit around three or four tables and I'd hop from table to table, pick up some coffee and we really could have chats. It was very nice, and I was very unhappy when I was forced to leave the cafeteria and go to a conventional classroom.

HARVEY BURDICK: In other words, in that setting things had a different quality, different ambiance?

SHELDON APPLETON: It was much more informal, there was much more chance to deal with students one-on-one. I still do this kind of thing, except that I have to do it in a classroom.

HARVEY BURDICK: And somehow, the cafeteria allowed you to feel a little bit more informal? The kids would get up and get a coffee and things like that?

SHELDON APPLETON: Sure. It was almost like lunch, you know.

HARVEY BURDICK: Is that comparable to the summertime when everybody went out and sat on the grass?

SHELDON APPLETON: Yes; those were kind of nice, too.

But you asked about books. I used only the best books, the same ones I had in graduate school.

HARVEY BURDICK: That was interesting. You thought that these undergraduates could handle those books?

SHELDON APPLETON: I never thought of it at all. I thought I'd give them the best books—of course they should be able to read them. And I remember a gracious woman named Margaret Redfield, who is the wife of the famous anthropologist, who came on campus. Some foundation or other was sending her in to consult on these things, and she saw my book list and she was appalled. She said, "How are the students handling this?" I said "Well, they're dropping out, but you know, these are good books." And she said, "Well, it's not really what you should use." But I didn't pay any attention to that.

Then I mentioned to you that Charlie Hucker came, and Charlie was a major China hand. When he started teaching the course, I saw he was using *The Good Earth* and other stuff like that, that would really reach the students. I thought, "If Charlie can do that, maybe I can do that, too." So I started using that kind of thing. Finally.

HARVEY BURDICK: That reminded me of your comment earlier, that we didn't have the elders around to soften things. We just had these young, bushy-haired people running in with their graduate student books, if you like.

SHELDON APPLETON: Yes, with no idea of what a student is like. Even now, when I have my best undergraduates help me with classes, they're appalled at how the weaker students are unprepared. As a graduate student, it never occurred to me how bad an average student was. I thought they were like I was, as an undergraduate.

HARVEY BURDICK: You know, Shelly, that brings up a point. We've been talking about the average student and it seems to give the impression that these students are not extraordinary academically inclined. But it's also that they weren't, perhaps, prepared.

SHELDON APPLETON: Absolutely. Even now, students aren't really ready, always, for college. That's because a lot of them didn't—and still don't—have parents who went to college, so they aren't prepared for what happens here.

HARVEY BURDICK: Then they came, and in those days, just that rich diet (as we go back to that metaphor) was given and they couldn't handle it?

SHELDON APPLETON: They had no support services. There was no skills center, there was no real advising center. We have a whole panoply of support services now, many of them brought in originally to help minority students. We've got lower level courses now. As you'll remember, when we started out, everybody had to start math at calculus. There were no remedial courses. So that was very different, and there weren't even juniors or seniors to say, "You can get around Appleton this way," or you can do this or that or the other thing. That must have been really tough for them.

HARVEY BURDICK: It was. They had nobody to tell them the ropes; they were making up the ropes as they were going along. And then they met these young recent graduate students, like yourself, giving them only the best books to read.

SHELDON APPLETON: Right. We did them a "favor."

HARVEY BURDICK: You were saying the books that you were having your students read were the kind of books you were familiar with in graduate school. You thought they were great books and you were giving these to undergraduates. In hindsight, it was crazy; right?

SHELDON APPLETON: This is true. I mentioned that after Charlie Hucker came and started using *The Good Earth,* then I did.

HARVEY BURDICK: Were you a little vaguely sad that you had to pull back and reach out for the students, and they weren't coming up to the level that you were excited about?

SHELDON APPLETON: No, I don't think so.

HARVEY BURDICK: I think I was a little, that's why I asked.

SHELDON APPLETON: Charlie was doing this and he was an established person. He was getting so much better responses that I realized I didn't have to be macho anymore.

HARVEY BURDICK: You needed a role model.

SHELDON APPLETON: Yes, exactly, and that's what wasn't here.

HARVEY BURDICK: At the time, it was small. I think you mentioned there were a couple dozen or thirty faculty people, so everybody knew one another. And that's certainly going to effect governance. Can you remember how this place was being run? Who made decisions in those days?

SHELDON APPLETON: The academic decisions were made mostly by the university Senate, the academic Senate. Everyone was a member—every faculty member, and administrators were members.

HARVEY BURDICK: So, the few administrators and the whole faculty?

SHELDON APPLETON: Yes, and I believe that the Senate recommendations were followed in every instance, except the famous one of basketball. Woody instituted basketball, despite the opposition of the Senate, and that led one of our colleagues, Dave Burner, to threaten to leave and actually leave.

HARVEY BURDICK: Was that sort of a marker, do you think: the realization that, perhaps, all the power didn't reside in the Senate?

SHELDON APPLETON: I think we were very upset about it, yes. We thought that was the way it was supposed to be.

And I think, at one point, Woody dissolved the Senate and called together a "rump Senate." I don't remember whether this had to do with a nine-semester proposal that was made. The students would have to take nine semesters of work so we could fit everything in. The administrative group was just utterly appalled. They figured we wouldn't have any students. Who was going to take nine semesters at Oakland when you can get through U. of M. in eight?

HARVEY BURDICK: But you'd be better educated here?

SHELDON APPLETON: Yes, right, and if you stayed fifteen semesters, you'd be better educated, still!

HARVEY BURDICK: There was that tendency to say they need this other course, and they need this other information, to be properly educated. Was that it?

SHELDON APPLETON: There still is that, you know, nationally, with this call for the classical canon, and people are appalled because someone hasn't taken a course in you-name-it. But if you take all the you-name-it courses that every educated citizen should really absolutely have, you're going to be there 20 years, very well educated. The 73-year-old graduate would be the norm.

HARVEY BURDICK: One of the questions I have is, do any people stand out for you, who seemed to affect the direction that the university was taking?

SHELDON APPLETON: I think we had a lot of major contributors right from the beginning. Bill Hammerle, certainly, I think, was a very important person; Woody Varner, obviously; Don O'Dowd; Gertrude White; Mel Cherno. You could go on and on. In the early days, you will remember Ken Roose, who was our associate dean.

In the sciences, Cliff Harding came here. Now, my understanding is Cliff had a life grant from Columbia University, and Woody persuaded him to come here and leave that. You don't do that for nothing. Any more than Loren Pope left the education editorship of the *New York Times* to take a job at a non-existent (at that time) university. So, a lot of enthusiasm was generated.

HARVEY BURDICK: Well, there was the excitement that this was not just going to be a local school, and they would have kind of a national reputation of doing stuff that might be a model for other schools.

SHELDON APPLETON: That's right. To give an elite education to ordinary students. I think that's what David Riesman had in mind. He was, remember, involved with Donald O'Dowd and Dave Beardslee, and was consulted on a number of occasions in the early days of the university, and wrote on it.

HARVEY BURDICK: Do you recall, what did he say that you agreed with and disagreed with?

SHELDON APPLETON: Well, I don't know that I disagreed with a lot that he said. He felt, as he outlines in his book, that the ethos of American education and the ethos of American society was such that it was very hard to do what we were proposing to do. And I think that, in time, he's proved to be right: that the change has been more in us than in our students. We have had to modify, we have become much more like all the other schools in our kind of situation, the regional state universities. We still have some distinctions, we still do some things a little differently—and, I'd like to think, a little better. But the difference is not as big as it was, and his idea was that it really couldn't be, and I think that's true.

HARVEY BURDICK: In other words, the idea was a good one that just couldn't be put into a kind of permanent operation. Maybe for a short period of time it worked?

SHELDON APPLETON: For a short period of time, it worked for the survivors. I mean, it made them or broke them.

HARVEY BURDICK: It was a sort of sword with two edges. It helped those people who were willing to go with it and struggle and strive?

SHELDON APPLETON: Not just willing: who had the wherewithal, the resources to do it. For some others it must have been just a heart-breaker. Imagine kids who were high school valedictorians, coming and flunking out.

HARVEY BURDICK: I knew you were instrumental in developing Charter College, an inner college at the university, and I know this goes a little after the first graduation. When was that?

SHELDON APPLETON: It opened in 1965, so it was established in '64-'65. The first graduation would have been in '63, so it was really right after that.

HARVEY BURDICK: So, a couple of years after that. Can I ask you what motivated you to take the trouble to develop that inner college?

SHELDON APPLETON: The idea was that we could give interdisciplinary courses that could be unconventional, that might not be introductions to disciplines, and we'd have a lot of freedom. We'd have the ability to have this interplay of faculty from different disciplines that we didn't have before, and to create kind of a living-learning environment.

HARVEY BURDICK: Okay, but wasn't part of early Oakland also an attempt to break across departmental lines?

SHELDON APPLETON: Yes, it was.

HARVEY BURDICK: So that it had that feature that you were trying to, perhaps, recapture a little bit?

SHELDON APPLETON: Yes, that's what I said, to have interdisciplinary contacts and courses. It's very difficult to do that now.

HARVEY BURDICK: To pick up on that point, my own recollection is that there were just three areas here, wasn't it?

SHELDON APPLETON: No, there were six, actually. We had basically one for each of the faculty members that was involved.

HARVEY BURDICK: Do you recall those areas by any chance?

SHELDON APPLETON: I don't remember for sure. One was literature, and one was maybe philosophy or the humanities, and one was social science, and one was natural science, and one was international studies, or Asian studies or whatever.

HARVEY BURDICK: So, when you had something like social sciences with which you and I are familiar, we wouldn't distinguish you in political science and myself in psychology; we'd be part of social sciences.

SHELDON APPLETON: Not only that, but I could cheat and teach a course that was as much psychology or sociology or economics.

HARVEY BURDICK: Right—you could do it, I wouldn't.

SHELDON APPLETON: Janet Holmgren McKay, who's now president of Mills College, was in the first Charter College class. And the course I know I taught to them was "The United States and China in the 20th Century." Talk about difficult books! I never tried it again because it was so hard. But I had a terrific class of students and we weren't giving formal grades, you know. We did write-ups on the students, we didn't give grades.

HARVEY BURDICK: At the end of the semester you simply gave—

SHELDON APPLETON: Satisfactory or unsatisfactory.

HARVEY BURDICK: And wrote a paragraph on a student?

SHELDON APPLETON: Yes. We wrote stuff about them, and it's caused trouble ever since, when students tried to transfer—that's this whole transitional problem. Still, occasionally, I get a call from somebody who's 45 and trying to go back to school, and here's a paragraph. What was it about, or even the name of the course, and where do we put this?

HARVEY BURDICK: Yes, they don't have those slots at other schools. But certainly, if one was going to do the job well, you weren't going to summarize a person with one letter, right? You were going to deal with them as a human being.

SHELDON APPLETON: It was different: we didn't want the grade motivation. You remember, later, they talked about free universities and stuff of that sort, but there was enough motivation here. These students worked—although they were randomly chosen—they worked as hard as the others. I remember teaching an ungraded Charter College class in the same subject as a graded university class in the same term, and mixing the exams at the end without names on them and they did about the same. But these were students who knew each other, they lived together in the same dormitory, so there were social norms. And that's where the Charter College went bad, too, because when the '60's came and you had the all the student movements, they just took over and made it a very difficult place to live.

HARVEY BURDICK: We were sort of going along our way and we got hit by something dropped on our head, called the '60's.

SHELDON APPLETON: Some people look back and say how wonderful it was, and I don't think it was wonderful at all.

HARVEY BURDICK: It certainly was affecting what was happening at the university.

SHELDON APPLETON: Absolutely.

HARVEY BURDICK: Well, that was a major force in bringing about changes. What other kinds of changes have occurred—obviously, many changes—and what has been left that you think is still precious, still of value, from the early days?

SHELDON APPLETON: We still deal with a lot of first-generation-in-college students. In many ways we deal with them better now because they do have support services, which they didn't have; it isn't just make or break. Many of them do stay for more than four years, although they are only taking that same number of credits. I think many students have an opportunity that they wouldn't have if Oakland University weren't here.

HARVEY BURDICK: But one could say that about Central [Michigan University], something like that. Do you think we still make a special contribution that's different from the other regional colleges?

SHELDON APPLETON: Yes, I think we do. For one thing, we have a more productive faculty, as we documented in our last self-study, and we do have more first-generation-in-college students. They're commuters in most cases, so they wouldn't be going to those other regionals. And they'd probably be going to a less academically-oriented school with less emphasis on liberal arts and things of that sort.

HARVEY BURDICK: Let me ask this, now that we're coming to the end. There was an idea, it was very attractive. You came, I think, with that image you had and you were going to carry it through. And now you're saying, along with Riesman and others, that it couldn't work. Could you fill that in: Why couldn't it have worked?

SHELDON APPLETON: Because you've got a society out there which has norms; because the university has to compete with other schools; because our students don't spend most of their lives at the university—a lot of them are part-time, and even the full-time ones live at home. What are you going to do, flunk a whole class? No longer are the norms set by the faculty. You've got a huge student body of twelve or thirteen thousand students; they set their own norms.

And then the society has changed; it's much less word-oriented, it's much more image-oriented. We all know the kind of social change that's taken place. The effort levels that they are making are not the same. Students who didn't used to work in high school all work now. They come from homes where often there's a single parent or two working parents, and they don't come in with the same things that they came in with before, attitudinally as well as academically.

HARVEY BURDICK: I was reading the early descriptions of Oakland and it was going to have a great emphasis on the liberal arts, regardless of your particular specialty, whether you were going to be in engineering or business or what have you. We were talking earlier about our ability to do that, to pour over these students the demand that they be liberally educated—because, I think you said, they could always get a job.

SHELDON APPLETON: At that time, yes. Now there are many more liberal arts majors, proportionately, at private colleges than there are at public universities. I think this is for the same reason, that they have to worry less about their jobs. They have the kind of family that can afford to send them to private colleges.

HARVEY BURDICK: So now, you get Oakland and the students are really concerned about "what's going to get me a job" and somehow, the liberal arts twist isn't as charming as it once was.

SHELDON APPLETON: That's true, but I think we still give them more liberal arts than some other schools. We still are requiring—a number of other schools do, too—we are still requiring non-Western civilization for everybody. We still

are integrated with teachers, and we have an outstanding teaching program. There are outstanding schools in the region, and many of the teachers from those schools come here to do master's work. I think we've contributed enormously to the cadre of teachers in the tri-county area and beyond. We're giving them a better education than they would have gotten if they'd taken psychology for teachers, and political science for teachers, and so forth.

HARVEY BURDICK: So, there are remnants of those early days that are still of considerable value?

SHELDON APPLETON: I think so.

HARVEY BURDICK: Well then, let me finally ask you: At this remove, how do you feel about your choice now, about coming to Oakland when you were that young graduate student?

SHELDON APPLETON: I feel very good about it. I think that I've enjoyed my life here and my family has. I think this area is a better place to live than it's generally thought of. I've had the satisfaction of seeing a lot of my students get out into the community and do very good and wonderful things; many of them are working at Oakland University. One of them is the acting provost, for example.

HARVEY BURDICK: Bill Connellan—we can call him by his name.

SHELDON APPLETON: And many others. We mentioned Joan Stinson [Clair], who's gone on to be a vice president at Wayne. That's very satisfying; it makes you feel that you've been involved in something that may be worthwhile. I got to teach what I wanted, and I had the opportunity to work in administration for a while and teach at the same time. I think that's great.

HARVEY BURDICK: Well, you've operated in various capacities.

My question is about coming to Oakland, because it was a slightly different school and something special, where you could have gone to Dartmouth, possibly, or another school?

SHELDON APPLETON: Yes, I had inquiries from those schools. A mentor of mine at NYU became a dean at Dartmouth and was interested in my coming there. I thought that those students didn't need me. They needed a reading list and our students needed more than that.

HARVEY BURDICK: And we gave them, sometimes, too much?

SHELDON APPLETON: Some of them.

HARVEY BURDICK: And to finish up, would you say that the efforts that Oakland made to create some of the things that, perhaps, it doesn't do any more—that whole notion of offering to the average student a high-standard, fine education—was part of the contributing factors to these students?

SHELDON APPLETON: To the ones who made it through, yes.

HARVEY BURDICK: And to the others—

SHELDON APPLETON: I have mixed feelings about it.

HARVEY BURDICK: So again, there were benefits, but then there were problems. And so, we have concluded. Shelly, I want to thank you so much for coming and graciously accepting our invitation.

SHELDON APPLETON: Thank you for inviting me, it's been fun—both the interview and the last 37 years.

Oakland University Chronicles
SHELDON APPLETON
Index: Transcript of Interview

Administration:
- Role of university Senate 20-21

Asian studies:
- Required at MSUO 1-2
- Opportunity to teach on China 4
- AsiaFoundation conference 5
- High-ranking program at OU 5-6

Athletics:
- Basketball issue 21

Atmosphere on campus:
- Earnest environment 9
- Student commitment 9
- Faculty-student interactions 10
- Sense of community fostered by Varner 12-13

Charter College:
- Purpose 23
- Structure 24
- No formal grades 24-25

Course design:
- Books used in courses 18

Curriculum:
- Non-Western civilizations 1-2
- Regular majors for education students 7-8
- Nine-semester proposal 21
- Modified by social change 22-23, 26-27
- Continuing strengths of Oakland's curriculum 27-28

Faculty:
- Faculty-administration social events 6, 12
- Informal interactions at lunch 11
- Not familiar with weak students 14, 19
- Major contributors 22

First contact with MSUO 1-2

Growth of MSUO/Oakland:
- Expected Oakland to grow 15

Hoopes, Robert 3, 8

Hucker, Charles 6-7, 18, 20

Image of MSUO 1-2, 8, 15

Media coverage:
Articles in *New York Times* 1-2
Michigan State University:
Comparison to MSUO 9

Philosophy of education:
High-quality education for typical students 15, 22, 29
Phrases:
"You're obliged to say yes" 3
"You do the listing, I'll do the hiring" 6
"Redolent of a Marine bootcamp" 9
"Retail politics" 13
"High-quality education for typical American students" 15
Pope, Loren 1

Reasons for coming..... 4, 7, 8-9, 28-29
Recruiting of faculty:
Hiring Charles Hucker 6-7
Reflections on career at MSUO/Oakland 28-29
Riesman, David 9, 22

Students:
Commitment to classes.....9
Average quality, poor preparation 14, 19, 23
Value of opportunity at Oakland 15, 26
Examples of successful graduates.....15-16, 24, 28
Numbers of graduates earning Ph.D.s 16-17
Support services brought in 19

Teaching experiences:
Class staying for discussion.....9
Satisfaction in seeing early students achieve 15, 28
Informal classes in cafeteria 17-18
Charles Hucker as role model 18, 20
Tierney, Mary Beth 16

Varner, Durward B. "Woody":
Campus visit and job offer.....2-4
Accepting Appleton's requests 3
Method of hiring Charles Hucker.....6-7
Interactions with campus community 12-13

Youngblood, Betty Sherman 15-16