

This transcript has been approved by the narrator as of 4/18/22.

SCHEDLER HONORS COLLEGE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Patricia Smith Oral History Interview Transcription

Narrator Name: Smith, Patricia

Interviewer Name: Ray, Brooklyn

Date of Interview: 03/15/2022

Location of Interview: Remote Interview - Zoom Recording

Acronyms:

UCA = University of Central Arkansas

TAG = Travel Abroad Grant

URGE = Undergraduate Research Grant for Education

ELF = Experiential Learning Funds

RA = Resident Assistant

Interview Summary

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Patricia Smith conducted by Brooklyn Ray on March 15, 2022. This interview is part of the Schedler Honors College Oral History Project.

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The following transcript has been reviewed, edited, and approved by the narrator.

Brooklyn Ray [00:00:04] This is Brooklyn Ray with the Schedler Honors College Oral History project. Today is March 15th, 2022, and I am interviewing Patricia Smith, who is at what looks like her office in Conway, Arkansas. We will be talking about her experience leading up to, during, and after her time in the Schedler Honors College. Please state your name and age for the recording.

Patricia Smith [00:00:33] My name is Patricia Smith, and I am forty two.

Brooklyn Ray [00:00:37] What year did you enter the Honors College?

Patricia Smith [00:00:39] I started as a student in 1997.

Brooklyn Ray [00:00:44] When did you graduate from the Honors College?

Patricia Smith [00:00:46] I graduated in 2001, May 2001.

Brooklyn Ray [00:00:50] Now we can go and get started with some questions. Where are you from?

Patricia Smith [00:00:56] I grew up in Barling, Arkansas, which is a small town right outside of Fort Smith and graduated from Northside High School in Fort Smith.

Brooklyn Ray [00:01:06] Oh, really, I didn't know that! That's where I went to high school.

Patricia Smith [00:01:11] Is that right? I think I did know that about you, actually. I think I remember that from when you were interviewing.

Brooklyn Ray [00:01:14] Oh, I never knew that. That's really cool! But I had no idea you were from Barling. I grew up in Lavaca, so that's like right there.

Patricia Smith [00:01:26] Right there, neighbors, yeah!

Brooklyn Ray [00:01:29] How did you learn about the Honors College?

Patricia Smith [00:01:33] I had applied to UCA [University of Central Arkansas,] my brother was a student at UCA. He was a couple of years older than I was and I went ahead and applied, but, it was because he was here, it was like the last of my choices, because I was ready to do something different. He was always three years older and always got to spaces before I was there and always leaving his mark, in a good way. But yeah, I was just determined I was going to do something else. And I guess I got a brochure in the mail from the Honors College and decided to apply and learn more and ended up coming and interviewing with Norb. Yeah, falling in love and coming to UCA.

Brooklyn Ray [00:02:14] What was the application and interview process like?

Patricia Smith [00:02:18] The application back then consisted of writing an essay about your interest in the Honors College, and so it was just kind of a small couple of paragraphs about what you're interested in. And submitting a writing sample, so something that had been turned in for one of your previous classes in high school, and then submitting transcript information, and general application.

Brooklyn Ray [00:02:46] How was moving to UCA different from your hometown?

Because, Barling, it's not very big, but it is right outside of Fort Smith, which is fairly big.

So, how was that moving to college?

Patricia Smith [00:03:01] Well, particularly like you said, Barling itself is not a really diverse community, although with its proximity to Fort Chaffee, there was a large Vietnamese population in Barling and in Northside. But Northside was a very racially and ethnically diverse high school campus. And in the late nineties, early 2000s, Conway, UCA, was really not as racially diverse as it is now. And so that was just kind of like, this is strange, it was just more white, honestly, a larger white student population. The size of Conway was kind of something in between Barling and Fort Smith. And so not too overwhelming with that transition. But it was always a, I thought, a welcoming town to that just really open and welcoming to the college students.

Brooklyn Ray [00:03:57] When you joined the honors college, did it feel like a big change from your life before? Did it feel like you were still at home or did it feel a lot different?

Patricia Smith [00:04:08] That's a good question. No, I think I felt those differences just in that it was residential and that I was living on campus and away from parents. My mother owned a daycare center, so as I was growing up, I was always around children and the age group here is all mostly like eighteen to twenty-two, with a few exceptions. It was different not just having little ones around because I would come home, finish my day after school in a setting with children still around. So doing homework with kids running around and that kind of thing. So that was a big difference, actually just having fewer kids. But also just kind of being in that intellectual environment all the time. We would have conversations in the classroom and then we'd go back to the residence hall and be able to

continue that conversation, and especially with the honors classes, adding that connection to what we were learning and being able to engage in that conversation with the folks who are going through the same type of transformations and the same type of knowledge acquisition with you and alongside you, I think was a very different experience. A positive experience, but different.

Brooklyn Ray [00:05:18] Why did you end up choosing the Honors College? Did you ever apply to any other places?

Patricia Smith [00:05:27] I did, and I was looking at out-of-state institutions primarily, and I think I had it narrowed down to a couple of in-state, a couple of out-of-state. But I don't know. I think for me, it was UCA felt like home, I think when I got here and particularly the Honors College, I think, is why I chose UCA. There were a lot of great scholarship opportunities at other institutions, but it was money, it was funding and that was great. But UCA Honors really offered a home and an environment to kind of transition into a community of support.

Brooklyn Ray [00:06:06] When you were going through the application and interview process, was Norb the one who interviewed you and everything?

Patricia Smith [00:06:17] Yes. And I suspect he interviewed a lot of the students back then. I sat down in Norb's office for a period as well as with another family group. We were up in 402, which is the presentation room on the fourth floor of McAlister Hall and sat and kind of did some orientation questions, went over the curriculum and what it was all about and his vision for it. You heard some of his own stories about his experiences with honor students, and just had general questions. I remember someone in the group asking, "Can

freshmen have cars on campus?” And me thinking, like, “Was that ever a question?” Like, is that a place? Are there places out there that don't let freshmen have cars? A lot of it was really just kind of visiting with Norb and him telling us what he expected of honor students, but also then what we would get out of the program in return.

Brooklyn Ray [00:07:14] I'm really curious, just for everybody we've been interviewing, what was it like being in the Honors College with Norb? I have on my sweatshirt, it's named after him. [shows Honors College sweatshirt] What was that like?

Patricia Smith [00:07:27] I'm thinking of Norb himself, Norb was the first person, I think it was either in my interview with him or one of my early meetings when he had a group of students in the office that he was telling a story about how a student had plagiarized something from a paper. And they had done so by copying it out of an encyclopedia, which was an entry in the encyclopedia Norb had written and I just thought, like it never occurred to me, people write what's in the encyclopedia. Obviously, they do, but there's people out here who were like, this is their work and it's published in encyclopedias. And probably encyclopedias aren't something that you still refer to as often as I did growing up. Even really as I went through college, that transition with technology was taking place. But just being in this room with this intellectual and having him say, “I want to invite you into this conversation to be a partner in learning.” It's like, this man is brilliant, right? And here he wants me to be a partner in this experience. I would say things that people didn't know about Norb, he got really nervous giving presentations, like when he would do large group lectures. He would pace the hallways for hours. As a student, I never would have expected that. He was a performer. He put on a show with every single lecture. Not afraid to show up in class, you know, I'm going to talk about Plato today, so here I am dressed in a toga, not afraid to really get up in your face and point to you and call on students. And he just

had the biggest, brightest personality and lit up a room, really engaged students in learning. And you just couldn't take your eyes off of him. He was a performer. And so it wasn't until I came to work in honors, and I would see him show him that kind of nervous. And I'm like, "Norb gets nervous?" Like he's a real person, too. I think it was, for me, getting to see both sides of him as someone who worked up here with Norb, but also had had him in the classroom. I was lucky to get to have both experiences.

Brooklyn Ray [00:09:39] That's really cool. When you were in the Honors College, was it just Norb and Rick at the time?

Patricia Smith [00:09:54] No, I was coming in as honors was really growing. And so I think the story I'd heard is that Norb and Rick had gone to a faculty opening convocation at the beginning of the year. The president usually hosts something and brings all the faculty. It's almost like a little pep talk about a year, but it's also about the academic goals of the institution. And President Thompson announced that he wanted to double the size of the Honors College within the next couple of years or something, and I was part of that group. I wonder myself, "would I have gotten in if it was as competitive as it is now or even had been?" So I came in with a very large cohort of students, probably 150 students that were in my cohort versus the seventy five who we admit. And yeah, I can't remember the question. [Laughter]

Brooklyn Ray [00:10:51] Oh, I was going to ask about who the faculty were and if there was like any—[crosstalk] I was asking if it was just Norb and Rick at the time or if there were more. And I was really just going to ask, was there any professor or faculty that you were specifically close with, or—[crosstalk]

Patricia Smith [00:11:11] So where I was going with that, was that we were also then kind of growing the faculty we were relying on. They needed more faculty to serve the students we had, but didn't yet have all of the faculty that we have now. And so Philip Melton was a faculty member who was here during that time. He was an alum of the honors college and had gone on to law school and came back and taught several legal classes. And I had some interest in the law, and so I definitely took several classes with him. I took a class on First Amendment and I think he was my Core I instructor, it was either Core I or II that I had him for. And then I had a grad assistant for a couple of classes. But yeah, Philip Melton is probably, as a faculty member, the one that I had worked with the most through my four years. I did have a class with Rick Scott as well. I took one of his Sex and Gender classes and still remember, like some of the things that I learned in that class and that one of the books we read and all of that. Philip Melton was probably the one I had the most classes with during that time.

Brooklyn Ray [00:12:21] Was there any specific course or reading or discussion that still sticks with you today or stands out to you today?

Patricia Smith [00:12:32] Well, I would say, as a woman in leadership in particular, probably a lot of what we discussed in the Sex and Gender class with Rick Scott. Rick's a sociologist, so a lot of it was through that sociological lens. And I was a sociology major at the time, too, and so I think that I connected with a lot of that. A lot of those discussions and I definitely think that class. And really, it was I had kind of taken for granted as a hetero- cis- woman, like what gender and sex meant to other people, and who didn't have a wealth of experience thinking about that. I think it was really eye-opening to just approach that topic and really learn more about the spectrum of gender.

Brooklyn Ray [00:13:15] You said you were a sociology major, did you continue to be a sociology major?

Patricia Smith [00:13:20] No, I did my undergraduate in sociology and had planned to go on to do a master's in social work. But I changed course in my senior year and went on to do a master's in college student personnel, which is essentially higher ed. Being trained to work as a practitioner in higher education and then went on to do a doctorate in Higher Education Administration.

Brooklyn Ray [00:13:44] What was your capstone project?

Patricia Smith [00:13:47] When I started my capstone project, it was definitely still through the kind of lens of someone who was going into social work. And in particular, as you might imagine, my mother having run a daycare center, I had seen at times what domestic violence effects it can have on children. So my capstone project was actually doing research on the effect of domestic violence on children in the home. And so I worked with faculty in the sociology department, including another one of our honors alums, Janet Wilson, who was my primary advisor. She was part of the first graduating class of honors. It was an interesting project and it's something I learned a lot from doing, but ended up not following as a career path.

Brooklyn Ray [00:14:36] Oh, that's really cool! So now I have some questions now that I think are more tailored to you since you're the dean now. Reflecting on your time in the honors college now as the current dean, is there anything that you wish you had known while you were a student in the Honors College? And do you have any advice for any current students?

Patricia Smith [00:15:01] Interesting. I remember moments when I was a student that I would see other students feel like the Honors College was trying to change them, and I saw students leave honors, and when the college was 150 students, the relationships with students weren't always what I hope we have now between students and faculty. Maybe we have more support now than we did for students. But I did see students who would get started in the curriculum and think, "The honors college, they're just trying to make me believe a certain way or they're just trying to maybe see things a certain way." But really, it was about challenging students to think for themselves. I wish I could go back and tell those students, "Here's what it's really about." And we started to have those discussions as we went through sophomore lectures, where we would talk about the philosophy of honors and what that looks like. I think one of the things that we do now is we're more transparent with students about that. I think that's good for them because I do think students at times in the past would feel like they were being confronted with new ideas, and it was uncomfortable, right? Intentionally so maybe, because that's how we stretch and how we grow. I do wish I could kind of go back and bring the students back in and say, "Look, there's really something that you're going to get out of—" Maybe your beliefs don't change at all. Maybe you come out stronger in your beliefs on the other end because you allowed yourself to ask those questions.

Brooklyn Ray [00:16:41] I guess this next question kind of goes along with what you're saying. What are some of your goals now for like— I don't know what I'm trying to say. What are your goals as the dean— What do you want for your students in the Honors College right now?

Patricia Smith [00:16:59] I want our students to feel supported and loved and to know that they're part of a community that respects and values them. I also want the students to be challenged. Challenged, but supported, and to question their own ideas so that they have a chance to build those arguments and come out stronger for doing so. But also have a kind of trained way of going through that process, because ideas are going to change, we're going to be confronted with new information, new technology, new advancements in ten, twenty years, in our students' lifetimes that we can't even begin to train them for today. There will be careers in ten years that we have never dreamed of, so I want our students to really have a process of learning, of being open to new ideas, that is going to serve them as the future comes at us all. I think that's a part of what I want for students. Then I think there's some evolution in our own curriculum that needs to happen. A lot of the traditions of Core one, two, three and four are all still very much here, but I think we need to examine what does that mean, what does that look like, and how do we make sure it fits the needs of our students and the students that are coming.

Brooklyn Ray [00:18:26] That kind of leads into the next one, too. Is there anything that you learned from Norb when he was dean of the Honors College or just any other faculty that you try to implement in the Honors College now?

Patricia Smith [00:18:42] That's a good question. One thing I think Norb was very intentional about, and sometimes we forget, is that the entire curriculum in the Honors College was really designed around the theory of moral development. It's really a process that every human goes through, but at different stages of their lives. He made some assumptions about kind of where we are when we come in at eighteen developmentally and then created a curriculum that kind of forces students to confront things and intentionally move them through these phases of moral development. I think we can

sometimes think about, oh, Core One is supposed to do this job and Core Two is supposed to do this job, and it's supposed to be search for self, search for community, and those are still very important thematically, but they also have a role to play in the development of the student as they progress through the curriculum. I think just kind of something that we need to do as a faculty is go back and just make sure we realign, make sure that that's still the right theory for us to be using. Does it still fit what we want for students? And then how do we help them kind of move through that in some kind of scaffolded, intentional way?

Brooklyn Ray [00:20:00] What kind of challenges have you faced trying to carry on that curriculum that Norb had, or the curriculum he had in mind when he formed the Honors College? Have there been any challenges or have there not been any?

Patricia Smith [00:20:18] I think it's a good question. I think the curriculum that Norb put in place has really stood the test of time. I can't imagine that there are very many programs out there that have as many traditions in the classroom that have lasted for 40 years, as much as what we have. And I think in part because he built something that was flexible and could be built upon as new ideas came. While we still have these theories of development that are our underpinnings, the class themselves, there's always going to be this question about, in terms of the search for self, the big questions that we're asking are always going to be there, but new thinkers have come in and added to that conversation, so there's room in that curriculum to expand that conversation. One of the challenges we have as a faculty is trying to decide which parts of the curriculum we don't let go of because we're tied to it, and which ones are emotional attachments for us, versus which ones are really necessary, sometimes that I think gets in our way. And then also, but how do we make room and make space for these other thinkers that also contribute to this

conversation, and so it's hard, because I feel we could like create an entire eight semester course or a series of courses on just looking at the search for self and all of the thinkers that now contribute to that conversation that have been added to that list in the last 40 years. But it still holds a small place in the curriculum and then we need to move on to other conversations, too, and so some of it is that. Probably there's no greater challenge to our progress on that than the pandemic, because it's made it difficult for us to just kind of connect with the ideas, and a lot of energy has been spent on supporting students and supporting one another, and a lot less energy in thinking about the future. Honestly, I think it was just hard for us to think "future". But we're getting back around to those conversations and wanting to make space for those conversations.

Brooklyn Ray [00:22:21] Why, how or what made you decide to pursue becoming the dean of the Honors College? You said that you had originally wanted to go to grad school for social work and everything, so it obviously wasn't in your mind as an undergraduate that you wanted to be the dean of the honors college at some point, so at what point in your life did you realize that's what you wanted to do?

Patricia Smith [00:22:50] Well, that's a good question, and I'm not sure of an exact moment. But I can kind of retrace how I got here. I started working in higher education. At one point I even thought, because I had been working in housing residence life and ran a residence hall, and they were talking about building a new honors hall. I was like, "Ooh, maybe one day I'll run that or something like, I'll be a hall director," and never really seeing that I would really be working with honor students to the extent that I am.

But honors, really having grown as large as it did and having needs in a greater number of students, was looking for someone to come in and do student services. I started in, I guess

the fall of 2005, and I created the mentor program and our ambassador program, introduced our peer coach program a little later, and created our inform and interview events, so I had an opportunity to kind of use my lens of training in higher education to meet the needs of this population in a way that was really tailored for the needs of honor students. So it really gave me a chance to be challenged and to learn and to be in a community where I really felt like I made a difference. Each stage of my career when I thought it might be time to move beyond honors to look for a new challenge, the stars aligned, I don't really know how else to say it, to open up new opportunities for me to grow.

From the role of Coordinator of Student Services, I moved into Director of Student Engagement and took on additional responsibilities. I had finished up my doctorate and was ready to kind of put that to use. I was looking into faculty roles and other administrative positions, and it just so happened Donna Bowman, who had been serving as associate dean at the time, decided to go back full time teaching as faculty, and that opened up an opportunity for me to move into a tenure track line as faculty because my position had always previously been full time professional staff. I moved into the faculty line and served as associate dean for several years. When Dean Rick Scott announced his retirement, we did a full national search to replace Rick Scott. At the time, I was about three years into an associate dean role and had no misconception that I was going to be dean of the Honors College, like I was ready just to bring on a new dean and it would be somebody I would learn from. I was looking forward to kind of the next stage of my career, having new challenges and new opportunity to bring someone into this community and then to learn from them. But we called it a failed search at the end of the day, we didn't find someone we thought was the right fit. And I became interim dean. And even then, I don't think I thought I was going to really be permanent dean of the Honors College, but I do

think I grew into the role during my three year job interview, right, [laughter] where I served as interim dean for three years.

I think I became the person that I thought honors needed. I had spent a lot of time thinking about like, “what did the new Dean need to be able to do? What did we need from our new leader?” And those are important questions we've been asking. So I'm glad we went through that search process because it really gave me a chance to reflect on that. And then when I found myself in that role, I knew what I needed to do. And so those were the things that I set out to start conversations on. It was some time, maybe in that first year that I thought, maybe we don't need to do a search. Or maybe if we do a search, I'll be able to apply because then I think I really had interest in maybe staying on in that role.

Brooklyn Ray [00:26:46] Yeah, that's cool! I didn't even know you were an honors alum until this project. So that's really cool, but I also think it's important that someone that graduated from the Honors College is in that position, honestly, just because of how special the curriculum is. So I did want to ask, do you think that the honors college is always going to stay with Norb's original philosophy? Or do you think it's going to have to kind of evolve more or be, I don't want to say like modernized, but do you ever think that it will be phased out at all or do you think it will continue to be the Schedler Honors College and with his original philosophy in mind?

Patricia Smith [00:27:37] I think that we will probably see changes in the curriculum. For example, the fast track is kind of– we didn't even really get a chance to think about a good name for what fast track was, we were faced with trying to find a way for students to complete their education in three years instead of four. And so there are some modifications I think that we are already starting to see, and I think we're needing to make

space for that in the curriculum just to make sure the students have those opportunities. But the underpinning philosophy, I think, is going to be there to stay. I think we might see changes in individual courses because they need to meet students where they are developmentally, but in terms of how we want to move students through that development, I think that will always be here. I think that will always be a part of our tradition.

Brooklyn Ray [00:28:28] The honors college has obviously changed since you have been there, but what do you think is the biggest change from when you were a student?

Patricia Smith [00:28:42] I think there are changes for the good. The inform and interview process is definitely one of them. The process that we had evolved to— at one point Norb, I think, was probably interviewing all of the students or at least a good number of them. But, as he retired and honors was growing and the faculty, we had a team of faculty who were now serving the students in the classroom. The faculty were getting to where they were doing interviews with students, and it seemed to me in my first year here that faculty were basically spending every minute they weren't in class interviewing students because they were doing individual interviews for every student. And it really wasn't a process of finding fit like what we now have. And so what we would see, though, is like the students would have spent about two hours or so on campus in this interview, maybe taking a tour, and when they left, they knew more about what Honors was, so they hadn't really tried it on. And so then students got to campus and they would say, "Oh, this is what this class is" and then maybe they weren't interested and they would opt out. And so we were really seeing like ten, fifteen percent of our students would be leaving in the first semester or within the year. And so the inform and interview process was really designed to give students a chance to see inside what we were doing with the thought that if they didn't like that, they wouldn't choose to come. And so that part of the population would really work itself out

before they got here so that we could really focus on students who wanted what we were offering, but then from the faculty perspective, selecting students that we thought really were prepared for what we were going to be doing as well. And I think that that's been a really big positive change because it was intentionally designed about finding fit for the program, but I think that's been a good thing. I also think that it moved from, if you think about if you're a faculty member, and I don't mean this to be negative against any of our alums that have come before, but if you're a faculty member having to do these interviews, basically every student you're interviewing is getting in, like that's really determined by their GPA and grades, and they were just kind of all, "oh, you meet our criteria." So it was kind of a sales pitch as much as it was an interview. And so then the students who came through that didn't really feel like they had to work for it, and sometimes I think when we feel like we had to work for something, we appreciate it that much more. So students who came before our inform and interview practice, I don't mean to say that they didn't appreciate honors, but it definitely led more to this culture of entitlement where they felt like they deserved something or that they had been given this opportunity and they were deserving of things, and certainly. But also, I think having to work for it is a little bit more of a culture of appreciation and we really were looking to make a cultural change. We wanted a culture of giving, a culture of service, and we wanted the honors community to feel like they wanted to give back. That was something we were really looking for, and so the process helped with that as well. And so I think in a good way, I think the culture of honors has changed as well.

Brooklyn Ray [00:31:58] Yeah, I remember when I applied and everything, it was a lot different from other honors colleges, but I never heard the kind of philosophy behind the I-squared day so that's really cool. So I kind of want to ask you a little bit more about when you were in the honors college, because I really liked hearing about your reflection now as

the dean, but I am kind of interested in when you were there. I did already kind of ask, was there any specific class or reading. But typically, when we go through the core classes, a lot of students have kind of like a, I don't want to say like a change of heart, but like a lot of things change, like the search for self, you find yourself. Did you kind of go through that change as a student, like where maybe you were challenging your values? And I interviewed someone else and they said that they really didn't change at all. Like, it was a good experience, but they didn't feel like they changed personally. So did you go through a change like that?

Patricia Smith [00:33:08] I think to some extent, I was raised in a household that was, for the most part, very accepting of others. And at least that was the teaching, even if it wasn't always 100 percent the practice, but I think for the most part, those around me that was the practice, being open and accepting of others. But I do think I was exposed to a lot more ideas, broader than what my own experience was. I think probably core one more than core two, core two at the time focused on contemporary issues. And it definitely included contemporary issues I had not thought a lot about. And so it allowed me to form new ideas about things in my society that I had not encountered. But Core One for me was probably the more introspective, really, allowing me to break down what it is I think, and helping me to build that back up. I don't think my values changed from that experience, but I do think that I came out more strongly prepared to defend my own values and to take action through those values, to not just look at like, here's a decision that has to be made you choose A or B, but like actually connecting those decisions to my own values.

Brooklyn Ray [00:34:34] So now that I'm thinking about it, I wanted to ask about where a lot of your honor discussions took place because now honors students live in Farris, and

there's the study rooms and the presentation rooms downstairs. So where did a lot of your honors type discussions take place?

Patricia Smith [00:34:57] Good question. So I had classes for the most part in McAllister Hall, so I definitely spent good memories up here on the third floor and in the forum. But a lot of those discussions, really, especially in the freshman year, like I was just talking about, were in Wingo Hall for me, and so that's the administration building now, but at the time was the freshman year residence hall for honors. And so it was co-ed. And so I spent a lot of time hanging out in the lobby just having really late night conversations about not just what we were learning, but I think maybe kind of applying that to life and thinking about the future. Probably Wingo Hall is where a lot of the most memorable conversations took place.

Brooklyn Ray [00:35:42] Where did you live after your freshman year? Were you always in Wingo?

Patricia Smith [00:35:47] I was in Wingo my freshman year. I was in Short Denney my sophomore year and then in my junior year, I was in Baridon Hall, so honors started having students in Baridon, and halfway through that year I became an RA and moved to Conway Hall, and so I was RA in Conway Hall. And then the next year I started as an RA in Hughes Hall, and halfway through that year, a little more than halfway through I actually took on a resident hall director job. I was a senior and about to go into grad school, but I took on a director job in Minton, which is no longer here. It was torn down shortly after I left. I lived there for two and a half years, so I guess I've lived in Wingo, Short/Denney, Baridon, Conway, Hughes. I lived in six different residence halls on this campus, five of which are still here and never did live in Farris or New Hall, but I did oversee the

community in my early days when honors completely filled all of New Hall and all of Farris. And just so I have this memory I'll share. I had just had my twins, so 14 years ago, and was in the hospital with them when I got this call that we had been putting the upperclassmen in Farris and the freshmen in New Hall. And I got a call from housing saying, "Hey, it's housing reapplication time, and the students are supposed to be picking their halls, but your freshmen in New Hall don't want to move to Farris, they want to stay in New Hall and have you put the freshmen in Farris." And so that was the year it swapped. The students that had just really fallen in love with the two person suites of New Hall wanted to stay as upperclassmen there. And now, Farris became the freshman hall. And then slowly, as we got smaller, we didn't have New Hall at all for a while, and now we have a little bit of that. There was a period of time that we called it the Honors Village, and we filled all of Farris and New Hall, and it was the Honors Village.

Brooklyn Ray [00:37:45] Oh yeah, I didn't know about that. That's cool. Besides being like an RA and everything, did you have any other jobs or internships?

Patricia Smith [00:37:55] So I did, not surprisingly, because I missed having kids around. I actually got an after hours job working at a daycare center in the afternoons, like after the school kids got out and came in, I would kind of keep the school kids at a daycare center. Other alums that you interview might know this, but there used to be these little snoopy shacks that were on the ends of campus and in the evenings they would go around and lock all of the gates to campus so that the only way you could get in was through one of these two gates, so I used to sit out there like a little guard in the Snoopy shack and students had to show their I.D. in order to get onto campus. So that was one position that I held for a while, and— [pause] I'm missing a job. Well, I did an internship at a women's shelter and particularly with the children of the women who had experienced domestic

violence, so I did that one summer and I did some volunteer work with a rape crisis hotline. Volunteers who would go would be with with women as they were having to get examinations after being sexually assaulted. So I did some work with that for a while. That's all I can think of during my college years, anyway.

Brooklyn Ray [00:39:14] Oh, cool, you sound very involved! [Laughter] So, what kind of other things were you involved in on campus?

Patricia Smith [00:39:27] I did some student organizations. I didn't ever do student government. I know I was a member of Sociology Department of Human Sociology, so I had done sociology club and was involved in that organization. I think RHA through housing, gosh, I know where there were other groups I met with because I remember some of the advisers to the groups, but I don't remember what the clubs were.

Brooklyn Ray [00:40:02] Okay! Sorry, I was going to ask you something right after that, but I kind of forgot what I was going to say. Oh, what kind of opportunities were you provided when you were in the honors college? Because I know URGE, ELF and TAG were still around. But were there any other opportunities you had or did you have an URGE, ELF, or TAG Grant? Did you do any of those things?

Patricia Smith [00:40:26] Yeah, I did get an URGE grant for the internship at the women's shelter. It was an unpaid internship, but they probably wouldn't have been able to afford to hire anyone had I not been able to come in with the funding. So that was a good opportunity. Probably one of my biggest regrets was not taking advantage of a travel abroad grant because now my list of places I have been as much shorter than it should be. But I also just missed that opportunity to travel with other students and faculty. So I do

wish I had done that. And I think that was just me being a scared student from a small town, never having seen the world or gone anywhere and wasn't really sure what was out there. But I do wish I had not missed that.

Brooklyn Ray [00:41:07] Well, obviously you made friends in the honors college, but did you make any or some of your lifelong friends, like people that you still talk to today?

Patricia Smith [00:41:18] So when I found out I was getting into honors, one of the other students in my high school, it wasn't someone I had really hung out with a lot, we hadn't really taken a lot of classes together in high school, but I knew and we had some similar acquaintances. But her name is Sarah, and she was at Northside High School with me. And so we both found out that we were getting into honors and we were like, "Oh, well, let's just room together because then at least we'll know of the person." Really beginning the summer before we came to college, we started hanging out some and getting to know each other and became really good friends. And so we lived together up until, I guess halfway through the junior year when we actually both took jobs as RA's, which was an influential role for me too, since it led me to a passion for working in higher ed. Sarah's definitely the first one that comes to mind, we have daughters that are the same age. Her daughter was born like three days after my girls, and so they're very close in age. And then her kids, both of them, went to my mom's daycare center. And so like, I got to see them kind of grow up when I would go up to visit my mom, I would see them there. So we've definitely stayed in touch. And then, yeah, so another suitemate my freshman year, Courtney, is someone that she like— so the two of us were in one room and we shared a bathroom with two others, Tasha and Courtney. And so I still stay in touch with Courtney some. And then just a lot of other folks that I still know and I'm friends with on Facebook, and we give each other life updates, but don't see each other as regularly.

Brooklyn Ray [00:42:57] So how did you guys kind of, I don't want to say communicate, but like now we have our GroupMe where a lot of our announcements and where people post events and all kinds of stuff like that. So how did your cohort kind of communicate and connect like that?

Patricia Smith [00:43:18] That's a good question. And as crazy as it sounds, because we had those old phones where you had to hit three buttons if you wanted to dial an 's' to text, I really think it was predominantly text messages and then in person, we'd get together and communicate because there weren't as many tools for communication, a lot of that came along later. And so it was really just phone calls, texts, and at least texting was a thing when I was in school. [Laughter] But it was a lot of phone calls and texting. And so Facebook came along a little later and honors college online, for some students. And then from Facebook to GroupMe, and some of the other tools we have now. And some of those people, I communicate now through other ways, but then it was not so much available.

Brooklyn Ray [00:44:11] So was the honors forum, like the online forum, was that when you were there? Like, I know that was around this time—

Patricia Smith [00:44:22] I think that had started the year before I came on as a staff member or the year I started as a staff member, so Honors College Online started around '04, '05 and so I had graduated from honors by then, but was coming back to work for honors a few years later.

Brooklyn Ray [00:44:42] Yeah, I was wondering. I had interviewed someone, now that I think about it, I think she graduated in 2006, and so she had mentioned the forum and I

wasn't sure when that kind of came about. So, what kind of other technology started coming around, I guess, during your time?

Patricia Smith [00:45:00] Through my staff time, Facebook has private groups and so we would have private groups for each cohort or an all Honors Facebook page. We have kind of dabbled in like Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, so Honors has accounts in all of those areas that we can push out information, but it's not really a way that we can facilitate communication between students. And so we can introduce students to one another, and then they can share their Insta pages, and then they can communicate with each other, but it's not a tool for really facilitating conversation. We can't post conversation starters, for example. And so GroupMe has really been like the tool we've relied on most for that and that we can bring students together and let them introduce themselves and if they choose to stay on that platform and communicate, great, but if they choose to just meet each other and then say, "OK, now we're going to have conversations over here," they can do that as well. But a lot of those are just not ways for starting conversations, so I'm hoping a new technology will come out, because I don't love GroupMe, but it seems to do the trick, at least for now, getting started.

Brooklyn Ray [00:46:10] So at the beginning, we had talked about, you're from Barling, and you went to Northside and Northside is very diverse. When I came to the Honors College and UCA, it feels kind of like Northside, I think it does. But you had said that when you first came to UCA, it really wasn't as diverse. So for the Honors College specifically, do you think the Honors College, I guess comparing it to then and now, do you think the Honors College has tried to embrace diversity more?

Patricia Smith [00:46:44] Yeah, I think so. I think in part, our inform and interview days that we have, not the days themselves, but that programmatic structure and the way that we changed our admission process from, “Oh, you have the ACT score we want” to broadening that and looking at more than ACT and then now not looking at ACT at all. So that was an evolution that came over a period of about fourteen, fifteen years, to saying, “Well, now we're going to place less value on ACT and to no value on ACT.” And in part because we came to rely on what it was we were learning about students through a process and then we said, we trust these things. So we moved to a more holistic admission process where we were learning a lot more about the students and then got to a point in which we trusted what we were learning and that those were good indicators of student success. And so the opening up of that and not relying on things like standardized test scores that are innately discriminatory, really, I think it didn't cause honors to become more diverse, but it allowed honors to become more diverse. And then I think what the other action we took right was then— minority students were always going to do well in our application process as long as they applied, but students of color were not necessarily applying because when I looked at honors, they didn't see people that looked like them there. And so then it was about having to change that conversation and making those students feel like they could be at home in this community and it was really a change in which it was about getting the word out about what we wanted the community to be and having that conversation with prospective students. And then I'm saying “I could see myself there.” And then there was a shift, so it was really a quick shift because once you had a cohort of students that were more racially diverse, well, then other racially diverse students can look at that group and say, “Oh, I see people who look like me there!” And so then it wasn't so much this conversation we had to really try to have as students just say, “Oh, yeah, OK, that's the type of environment it is and there are students like me and they value those students, so they will value me and I can fit in there.” So yeah, I think part of it,

what first had to happen was us to change the way we were having conversations about who our prospective students were, and there are plenty of minority students with high ACT scores, no doubt, but I don't think that we were really communicating the way we value students like we did value them. But I don't think we were communicating that as very well in the way we were selecting and recruiting.

Brooklyn Ray [00:49:36] I can see that in the new programs that have been created too, in like mentors and ambassadors. I'm a part of the ambassadors and so I can see that, everything you just said basically being put into that. Anyways, so, let me think. So did you go on like a freshman retreat when you were in the Honors College?

Patricia Smith [00:50:08] I did in '97, the retreat was at the Heifer project. And so we spent the night in Perryville at the Heifer Ranch. And I guess it was a full, like Friday through Sunday retreat. I think it was like the weekend after Labor Day, so it was a little later in the year then when we do retreats now. But yeah, so we had name game and all of that, just like some of those traditions like we still do now.

Brooklyn Ray [00:50:36] And what about your sophomore lecture topic? Do you remember anything about the sophomore lecture, the matriculation type process?

Patricia Smith [00:50:45] So I really have no idea how I landed on my sophomore matriculation like topic, my lecture topic. I remember the matriculation discussion as well. It was more of a large group discussion with Norb, but I remember that and I remember my lecture topic was on yawning. It was like the science behind yawning. I have no idea. Like, I think I had just read an article about it or something and got fascinated and decided to like, dig a little deeper and do a research project on it. Because as far as I know, it wasn't

anything I was studying in any of my classes, it wasn't anything connected to my major. Something had come out and sparked my interest, so I educated my peers on the science of yawning.

Brooklyn Ray [00:51:24] Oh, interesting. Can you tell me why we yawn?

Patricia Smith [00:51:28] I don't remember nearly as much as I should. [Laughter]

Brooklyn Ray [00:51:34] Well, besides like your thesis project, and then I guess the internship you did, did you do any other kind of research on campus?

Patricia Smith [00:51:49] I did. Yeah, so the sociology department did some additional research on secondary databases, so these would be like national surveys that collect a lot of data. And then you can go in and compare a few like say, "Oh, I want to look at these things and see how they relate to each other" and kind of see what story the data is telling. So I did some research, secondary data analysis in the sociology department. I did a minor in addition to honors, I had a minor in psychology. And so I know I worked on some research projects there as well. I don't remember a lot about what they were now, but I did a little bit with that.

Brooklyn Ray [00:52:36] I was interested, I thought about after you had mentioned you got the URGE grant, I just kind of wanted to know. I'm kind of going through like honor specific things, like the freshman retreat and sophomore matriculation are specific to honors. But what about the different challenge weeks that you had? Do you remember? Was there one that stuck out?

Patricia Smith [00:53:03] No. I actually have spent some time trying to remember what our themes were like. I can remember being in the physical spaces, but I don't remember who the speakers were or what we were talking about. And maybe that's just because some of those old memories have been painted over with the challenge weeks I've gone to in the last ten, fifteen years. But yeah, I have not been able to remember what any of the topics for those were. I do remember, high tables would be, has anyone mentioned, high tables yet.?

Brooklyn Ray [00:53:36] I want to say that I've heard that, but I don't know what that is.

Patricia Smith [00:53:40] Well, so you know how soapboxes boxes are like student led presentations? High tables would be faculty invited presentations and we would invite faculty from campus to come share their research interests or share a presentation. And there was a faculty member on campus that would do a presentation called the "Malice of inanimate objects." And so it was just kind of a hilarious presentation that really talked about how inanimate objects were getting us back. Like when your car, when you can't find your car keys, it's because they were hiding from you. And what it was was just this whole hilarious presentation. I do remember attending that one, I think, more than once, I think he did it every year, and I think I would always go because it was good for a laugh. And we used to read "No Exit," the play, I think in Core two, and the students would actually perform like a group of upperclassmen to get together and perform "No Exit." And so then if you wanted to, you could go and watch that play. And so that was an event that I remember then. Parent's Day was an event that honors hosted and I remember going to Parent's Day with my parents and my senior banquet and Norb giving the address at the banquet. I remember that. So some of those events I still have, like time and place

memories of that were uniquely mine. But challenge week, I have just not been able to remember what it was we were all gathered together to talk about.

Brooklyn Ray [00:55:08] Oh yeah, when you were talking about those things, it reminded me of the Parent's Day thing. There are a couple of students in honors now that are making a documentary, I think. And we watched it and they had footage of Norb, and I think Rick, they were performing that skit. I guess I was about to ask you, did you get to participate in my Parent's Day and that kind of thing?

Patricia Smith [00:55:39] Yes. And it was going to be the Friday before spring break that we would have Parent's Day, so parents would come up and do that. So I definitely attended it, probably a couple of those.

Brooklyn Ray [00:55:53] I remember when we watched the documentary, I thought that was really cool. I was kind of wondering why we don't we don't do that now, but I think it's just changed a lot.

Patricia Smith [00:56:08] I sent Leah a clip and asked her if she owned a toga and told her we needed to. [Laughter] And she said, "No, but I own a sewing machine!" [Laughter] So maybe she'll make us some togas.

Brooklyn Ray [00:56:22] So when you mentioned the high tables, one, I think that's a good idea, maybe we can try that again. I think it would be really fun, but what kind of student type— Because now they have the mentor events, the professors, pizza, pie, everything like that. Was there anything like that when you were in the Honors College?

Patricia Smith [00:56:43] So, the RA's would do some programing in the residence halls, but probably the ones that I can think of the most were things that were claimed by our honors council back then. And that included a big-little program. And so, not quite a mentor program in which the students really get training, but students being matched with someone that had similar interests and or major, maybe were from the same hometown or something like that, but they would try to match students with a big-little. And so I remember my big and my little. I can't remember my little's name, but I can remember her. But I remember Halloween parties in which we'd dress up in costume and hang out in the forum or the student center ballroom. I think it must have been a Valentine's dance, or some type of formal that we went to, I think that was my freshman year, that I'm remembering them hosting that. And then I don't know, I don't guess the last couple of years you would remember this, but we have now what's called LollapaLucy. So LollapaLucy was kind of a— Honors council would put on a benefit concert and it benefited Lucy's place. Well, prior to that, and I think it started when we were doing our retreat at the Heifer project and whatever project we were doing, Livestock was the concert, not Woodstock, but Livestock, and we'd always have T-shirts that have livestock like cows and pigs and livestock on the T-shirts, and it was a benefit concert. And so we used to have these benefit concerts that would benefit and raise money for the Heifer project. So that was something that we used to have as well. So concerts and parties and dances and a lot of that.

Brooklyn Ray [00:58:34] Okay, cool! I haven't heard about the LollapaLucy.

Patricia Smith [00:58:39] Yeah, I think because of COVID we haven't probably had it since 2018 or 2019.

Brooklyn Ray [00:58:42] Yeah, hopefully that'll start to get a little bit better. So I guess, do you just have any like stories or any like memories that stick out to you that you want to share?

Patricia Smith [00:58:59] Oh, my goodness. So many memories, both as a student and a faculty member and serving as administrator and working with students and housing.

[Pause] I don't guess I have a single one that I can think of, I should enter into record.

[Laughter]

Brooklyn Ray [00:59:31] Yeah, that's understandable. I know. Well, is there anything else that you want to talk about?

Patricia Smith [00:59:39] Not that I can think of. You've asked some good questions. It's been fun to go down memory lane and think of some of this, and I don't think I had really stopped and counted how many residence halls I have lived in until then, either. But I will say, I think honors as well, obviously, like where I landed as a career, honors has played a large role in where I am. But even in my path to having an interest in working with college students, the program that I was in the college and personnel program like, we studied the human development theory then, and it was really the first time I had studied this as a theory and it was the backbone of the curriculum, all along. And so I think had always really had seen behind the curtain, maybe I didn't really quite know, but I think I always knew there was a goal. It wasn't just like it was coming from a place of faith or trust. I think I really could feel and sense that there was some really intentional things happening and honors. And, I think that that probably caused me to be more open in the way that I saw and approached honors than maybe some of my classmates, too. But anyway, I'm glad I'm

here, and that honors played such a big part in my life, and now I'm getting to play a part in the lives of other students.

Brooklyn Ray [01:00:56] Well, I'm glad you're here, too. I loved every minute of my time in the Honors College and I think you played a big role in that too. I don't really have any more specific questions. We kind of went through them a little fast, but—[crosstalk]

Patricia Smith [01:01:11] That's because I talk at one point three speed. [Laughter]

Brooklyn Ray [01:01:13] So that's totally fine. Yeah. I don't have any more, like I guess I had written out questions specifically for you, and we have some questions, but we've really touched on everything that there is. I can't really think of anything else right now. I was really—[crosstalk]

Patricia Smith [01:01:36] You're welcome to reach back out if other things come up or you hear other things that you want more information on.

Brooklyn Ray [01:01:42] Yeah, I was just really interested just now that since you're the dean of the honors college or the place where you graduated from, so that was really just the biggest thing. But yeah, if you don't have anything else to share, like a story or a funny story or you have too many memories, which is fine—[crosstalk] [Laughter]

Patricia Smith [01:02:06] It's too hard to separate it all out! [Laughter]

Brooklyn Ray [01:02:07] Yeah. Well, we usually just ask at the end if there's anything else you want to share. And you did.

Patricia Smith [01:02:16] Remember in about 10 years, we're going to celebrate our 50th anniversary and we're going to need to fill in the gaps in our oral history, so we'll be having future students contact you! [Laughter]

Brooklyn Ray [01:02:26] Well, one day I'd love to do that, especially since I've been here since the pandemic started. It's also been really cool to do this project because I get to hear about— and even watching just that little documentary, they're not done with it, just seeing what—[crosstalk]

Patricia Smith [01:02:49] I've got me a new draft that I've got to watch, it's two hours long now, so it's just growing.

Brooklyn Ray [01:02:55] Yeah, I think I watched it when it was like an hour and a half. So yeah, just seeing how it's not that much different, but it kind of is because of COVID, but it's just it's been really cool. Yeah. So I guess that's it! [Laughter]

Patricia Smith [01:03:20] Well, thank you.

Brooklyn Ray [01:03:22] Thank you for your time. This concludes our interview.