This is an interview with Professor Herman Eure. I guess I want to start out. Would you like to describe your family background and where you grew up?

Yes. I grew up in Eastern North Carolina in a little town called Corapeake. It's sort of sandwiched between Southern Virginia on the north side and on the south and east side, Elizabeth City. Small town. One of 10 kids to Grover and Sarah Eure and I'm the 7th of that 10.

What do you remember about … Was there an expectation that you would go to college?

My oldest sister, Ella, was one of the first children in that neighborhood, black and white, to go to school. She went to what was North Carolina College at the time and she was in music. My parents were poor people but with a middle class mentality. They always wanted us to do better than they had done. The communities, of course, were supportive. My aunts and uncles and grandparents, and grandmother, in particular, wanted us to go to school. She went to college and that set the stage for the rest of us. Of the 8 of us who survived to adulthood, 6 of us went to college. It was an expectation and it was either academic scholarships or academic and athletic scholarships. It was a combination of those kinds of things.

My father had a 7th grade education. My mother had a 5th grade education. They had no concept of what it meant to go to college, but they were very smart. My father was kind of a math genius. He could do problems for us that we couldn’t do. Math, he would simply have a knack for. [00:02:00] It's like math and physics, you have a knack for those 2 things and he had that. My mother, probably if she had gone it would have been horticulturist, could grow anything. Not just a green thumb, but green hands, basically. That concept then of wanting us to do better than they did set the stage, with Ella, for us to go into college.

How did you choose Maryland State?

In high school, I played basketball, football, and I was a track person. I was better at track than the other 2. My coach who was a graduate of North Carolina College had a friend at Maryland, and we were trying to decide where we’re going to go and I was the valedictorian of the class. I was going to get some money academically to go to school and then he
got in contact with a coach at Maryland, it was called Maryland State College at the time. It’s the University of Maryland Eastern Shore now, and talked about me coming there to be on the track team. I had won a Walter Cicero’s scholarship and a Sam Irwin scholarship, an academic scholarship to go to school combine those things with what was going to be an athletic scholarship so I chose to go there and because everybody was going to either Elizabeth City, A&T, or Shaw or Livingstone and I didn’t want to any of those places.

I was the outlier. I went to Maryland State at the time. I got there and then figured out that … The academic scholarship was fine. I got the money. An athletic scholarship during those days simply meant that you had a guaranteed work-study job. You had to work for the scholarship in a sense. After the first year, I decided that I wasn’t going to run. I just did the academic part. Obviously you’d lose a part, but I was going to work anyway. I was going to get that money anyway, so I simply worked without having to work twice [00:04:00] that is working a job and then running as well. I chose not to run.

Tanya: What was your major?

Herman: Biology. I had a major in biology and then I decided to take the teaching block because I really didn’t know what I was going to do, but I had no intentions of ever teaching. I just took it, kind of a safety route really.

Tanya: You were involved with student government?

Herman: Yes.

Tanya: Can you describe that and the Civil Rights Movement?

Herman: Yeah. When I was in high school, I was always involved with student government. I was a student government president as a senior. My parents were always very much involved in the local politics in the sense of trying to make sure that people got registered to vote, so it probably came from that, especially my father in that regard.

When I went to school, it’s like a natural thing to get involved in campus politics. I was class president for one of the years. I don’t remember if it was sophomore year or something like that and then I got involved in what was called the men’s senate and then the student government. In the men’s senate, I was with a group where the men made decisions about issues that were germane to men. There was a women’s group and that kind of thing, and then student government obviously looked at the anti-campus politics and it’s from a student perspective.

My junior year, I was the vice president of the … My senior, I was vice president of the student government. That was during the time when the Civil Rights things really were heating up. In my junior, King was
assassinated, and then we got involved with looking at the university and how the university was viewed from the standpoint of College Park because College Park was the overriding institution. All the other schools were surrogates of College Park. The black land grant schools were simply looked at primarily as second class citizens.

We got involved in protesting. We went to Maryland and then we went to College Park and protested these kinds of things. Because we were basically getting funding like a department at College Park would get funded rather than as a university would get funded. Dr. John [inaudible] who’s the president, had to go on fight everyday for us to get things.

We got involved in it because of what they … Then would come back and tell us what they were doing. They were teaching us how to fight for yourself. Then I organized during my senior year a march because the people in the town didn’t want us involved anything going on. When they got angry about something, they would rally around this whole auction block. You can imagine what that did to a bunch of young black people in the 1960s.

We organized marches, the march of the town and boycotted businesses. Really, it was silly on their part because when the college was in session, business was booming in the town because we were consumers. We stopped buying things then businesses suffered from it. We were smarter to know that and they finally had to do some things to change access and the way they’re looking at things because we were taking money out of their pockets.

It wasn’t an easy thing and it was frightening, but we knew we had to do it because a lot of the kids there were … I was from a rural area in the country, but many of those kids were from Philadelphia, D.C., Maryland, Baltimore, and this kind of thing. They had been in situations where the demonstrations hadn’t been so peaceful, but we had to try to keep … Because we knew we’re a smart group of people that were never more than probably 850 people at the school when I was there.

We didn’t have the numbers in terms of going out and fight. As a matter of fact we didn’t have any artillery to do it either. We have the power of the dollar. If we could keep them from getting our money, then they had to listen to what we did. That’s how I got involved in the Civil Rights and became the mantra for what we did in terms of making … It was the era where there was H. Rap Brown. There was Stokely Carmichael and all those folks were around. We were probably, in some sense just emulating what they were doing as young people, but directing it toward what was happening to us at Maryland State at that particular time. Great experience though.

Tanya: What do you think the most important thing you learned from that was?
Herman: How to be a leader. The one thing that they taught us at this little school … I think this is something that I took now that I think … I’m glad that we had access to predominant white schools, but one of the things that was lost was a cadre of people who taught young black people how to be leaders. When you got to predominantly white schools, the number of blacks were so small that you couldn’t get someone elected to a position of leadership. They taught us how to be leaders and they taught us how to do things the right way, but also to make certain that you had your ducks in order, so that nobody could come and say to you, “This is wrong.”

I remember when we were doing the march, the president wasn’t as good a student as I was. When he went to Dr. Williams to tell him what we were going to do, Dr. Williams said, “Well, you know, maybe you need to get your things ready in your classroom, Mr. Cayenne, before you start this kind of thing.” Well, the next time he went, I went instead of him because I was an honor student. He couldn’t say that to me and I was a little bit more radical than Cayenne was so it went well that way.

Tanya: How did you decide to be scientist?

Herman: When I was growing up, I was an outdoor … Well, if you’re in the country you’re an outdoor person anyway. I liked animals. I used to catch rabbits and all kinds of fragrant frogs, and these kinds of things. I had a teacher, Mr. Harrell, who was our biology teacher. He would always talk about not having enough black people in the sciences. I mean in those days, this was in 1960. I guess I went to high school in ’61 or ’62, something like that, and graduated in ’65, so that time span. I always did well in science. I went to school looking at, okay, either science or history because I liked history as well, but took both courses as a freshman at Maryland State. I did want them both because I figured that whichever one I did well in I would choose that one to be the pathway to take. Well, I damn made A’s in both of them so it didn’t solve anything.

I took a second course in both of them and my history teacher was a brilliant man, but was not a very effective teacher. I made another A in biology. I made a B something in that one and that sort of … I was science oriented anyway, I was probably going to go that way because there was also, in my sophomore year, James Abraham who was my mentor at that school, came back from Oklahoma. He had gone off to get his PhD and came back from Oklahoma, and he became the role model for me in terms of a mentor. I saw in him what I wanted to be. I knew that I didn’t want to go back to Corapeake to do what people there did.

My father used to tell us all the time, “The only way for a black man to get ahead is education.” I mean he would drill into us every … We would go out in the woods cutting wood for firewood and he would talk about that all the time. That resonated with me and I kept that going. That’s how I got started and I was good at it. You played to your strong suit, basically is what it amounts to.
Tanya: How did you choose [00:12:00] parasitology as a [crosstalk 00:12:01]?

Herman: Dr. Abraham was a parasitologist.

Tanya: Okay.

Herman: He was a parasitologist working on animal parasites, working on parasites of muskrats. He worked in Oklahoma. I did projects with him and we had classes with him. I got involved and really, really like what I was doing. Then as it turns out when I ... In my senior year while I was doing student teaching, I worked for the president’s secretary, Mrs. Steele. Mrs. Steele would always leave me messages to do this. She said, “Mister, you’re to do this. Do that.” One day, she left me a note and it said, “Ford Foundation Fellowship, doctoral fellowships for black students.” She said, “Fill this out.” It was to go to graduate school and I really hadn’t thought about graduate school. I didn’t thought about what you were going to do beyond those 4 years.

After a while, what the heck, I can't lose. I don’t have it now so there’s nothing to lose. I filled it out and the Ford Foundation who had just started this program where they were trying to increase the number of black faculty people with PhD’s. Now, a lot of blacks would go get a master's degree and then they would go on later on, but it would take them a long time to get it. Most of them got them in higher education. Well, I was going to go in biology. I then got chosen as semifinalist and had to go to New York to interview. My sister was in New York because my sister was singing with the Metropolitan Opera as one of the people on the company there. I stayed with her, so I got a chance to go to New York. I had never been in New York before.

Then when I went to interview, the person that interviewed me was a young white man from Morgan State College, our biggest rival. It was a young, white man who decided to teach at a predominantly black institution. [00:14:00] Right away, I knew there was something different about this. We had a great time interviewing and then I guess that March I was notified that I had won the fellowship. Five years of graduate school. Everything paid. It was simply a matter of choosing where to go.

I chose Penn State, Oklahoma, and Wake Forest. Penn State because I had a lot of family members in Pennsylvania. Oklahoma because Abraham had been at Oklahoma and Wake Forest because it was back in North Carolina, and I had looked at them play basketball when I was young growing and this kind of things.

Tanya: Out of those schools how did you choose Wake Forest?

Herman: My first couple of years at Maryland State, I worked as the equipment manager and trainer for the football team. Coach Gilliam knew the football coach at Wake Forest. I hadn’t heard from them. I had sent them things,
but I hadn’t heard anything from them. One day just talking to him and this was after I had finished working for him. I was a senior by the time so I was working with someone else. I told him what I was doing and he said, “Well, you know, I know this guy down there. Let me get in touch with him and find out you haven’t heard anything.” He got in touch with the football coach and the football coach apparently went to the grad school and then said, “This is friend of mine,” and with this whole process, and then I heard from them. Then they said that, well, the biology department apparently had looked at my record and said that, “We can accept you as a provisional student, but we don’t have any money for you.”

I don’t need any money. I told them that I didn’t need any money. I came but I still hadn’t heard after graduation. My younger brother, Dennis, and I drove to Wake Forest. We drove [00:16:00] to the town of Wake Forest, but we knew that wasn’t where it was because the [inaudible 00:16:01]. I met with Gerry Esch who was later to be my adviser and Ray Kuhn. They were the ones who would say, “Well, we can accept you as a provisional student because you had great scores … In terms of your record in school, but your GRA score is not where it should be.” You could have dropped my GRA scores on the floor and they wouldn’t even wiggle, this kind of thing.

I knew I could do as … Look, all I needed to do is get in the door. I knew that I could do it. They didn’t know me so he said, “Well, we don’t have any money to give you.” I said, “I don’t need any money.” He said, “What do you mean you don’t need any money?” I said, “Well, I have Ford Foundation fellowship. They will pay for everything.”

That made it, I guess, easier. Then, of course, I was a provisional student for the first semester and I was a Ford Foundation student from that point. I mean because all I needed to do was get in and do it, and I did well from that point on. Fairly, it wasn’t an option. There were too many people depending on me, my parents, the people at Maryland State, people in our community. If I fail, where was I going to go? I wasn’t about to go back home and tell somebody that I didn’t do what I needed to do to get to this next level. Then, of course, I became one of the student leaders in the graduate school when I came here. I knew what to do to be a leader because I had been taught how to be a leader.

As it turned out, Abraham was a parasitologist from Oklahoma. Esch is a parasitologist. He grew up in Kansas but went to school at Oklahoma, so 2 Oklahoma people, 2 parasitologists. That’s what solidified everything I was going to be doing. The rest is history. I became a …. Esch was a biochemical parasitologist working on biochemistry, but he was [00:18:00] switching to ecology. I liked ecology, but I didn’t like biochemistry, although I took the course of defining it. He was switching to the ecological animal parasitology. Joe Bork and another guy and I became …. Joe Bork and I became the first 2 ecological animal parasitology graduate students in a PhD program that Esch had. Parasitology was
changing in composite of that field, so we were the first 2 graduate students in that particular area for Esch, in a way.

Tanya: What else do you remember from that time period of being a graduate student at Wake Forest?

Herman: I was the only black graduate student on campus. There were a lot of people who would see me on campus and thought that I was an athlete because I was an athlete and they expected to see me … I was asked, “What sport do you play?” I would laugh and say, “None.” They didn’t know quite how to deal with that because here was somebody who looked physically fit, who was on campus, who was a black male, but who not an athlete, because typically what they saw was a black person … The first thing they would think would be they would be an athlete.

Then, of course, there were people who thought that I was just here of some kind of a giveaway and then I would say … My thing was, “What you think of me is not as important of what I think of me because I don’t really care what you think about me.” What I thought about me was more important than what they were saying to me. Then there would be people and I was in the building, people were coming to bring the machines. Some of these students would think … This even happened when I became a faculty member that I was the person coming in to fix the machines. I would just laugh at them and keep right on walking and sometimes wouldn’t even respond to them because that was their problem, not my problem.

There were some people who didn’t think [00:20:00] that I should be there, but, again, I had been trained by black folk at a predominantly black school to be confident in yourself and what you did. It was hurtful but it was like being Teflon. It didn’t stick. You don’t let it bother you. Now, by that, I don’t mean that it didn’t hurt, but I would never let them see that it bothered me. I might go home and do all kinds of stuff, but I wouldn’t let them see me be less than what I thought I should be. I was a graduate student and then I was a young faculty member, and I wasn’t going to be treated less than that by them.

My parents had taught us to be confident and so I didn’t have any problem expressing myself to them. Sometimes anger is the best way to get people to see that you’re not going to be taken advantage of.

Tanya: Do you think your area of research helped you at this point because you could focus on that?

Herman: An undergraduate was pretty much stuck having somebody else always in control. Once you are a graduate student, the education really is a lot on your own. You have to do a lot of it on your own. It’s like an internship or mentorship, or apprenticeship kind of situation. Once I got with the coursework, it was Esch and Joe, and me because Joe and I were … We
went to Savannah River to do our research. We were on our own down there. There were scientists down there, but none of them were parasitologists. We spent a lot of time together talking about the things that we needed to do as scientists.

That was in the hot bed of a racist place down. I mean if I thought North Carolina was bad at the time when we got to South Carolina and it was funny because Joe [00:22:00] was from Michigan. Young white man with long hair and then he had a young black man with a huge Afro and this kind of thing. You can imagine the 2 of us down there looking like 2 flies in a bowl of rice or something like that, because it was really, really so different than anybody else.

We got a lot of stuff because we were buddies. A lot of them had never seen a white guy and a black guy that close. We probably changed a lot of attitude because we were down there for 3 years together. That helped because I didn’t have … Because you could focus on the research and not have to worry about what people were saying because it couldn’t touch you. They had no impact on you.

Tanya: Can you talk a little bit more about the Savannah River site project and why it was important?

Herman: Well, I guess in ’54 or something like that when the Sputnik came up, whatever the year was. We found out that we were really, really behind the Russians. The US government started putting these nuclear facilities around, the Hanover. There was one in New Mexico somewhere and then they put one in … The address is Aiken, South Carolina because I saw the post office box, but it’s actually a little town called New Ellenton.

They took this little town called Ellenton. This 300-square acres of land, miles of area down there, they carved it all off. They took the town of Ellenton. They bought all the houses from the people and moved them off into a little town they call New Ellenton. That’s why I said New Ellenton earlier. Then they put in 5 nuclear production reactors and these are weapon grade plutonium making reactors. You have to have water to cool the reactive elements. They dammed up some of the creeks [00:24:00] and built these impoundments down there that really supplied the water. Some of these things were … It’s on the edge of the Savannah River so that’s how it got its name. The Savannah River Project is referring to the nuclear facility.

Then the other thing they did which is unusual, they put a heavy water plant there, which is kind of a trigger mechanism for it. Two units of a bomb were at this one particular plant. They probably wouldn’t do that now. You probably wouldn’t put 2 of the components at the same place. The smartest thing they did, there was a … Eugene Odum was an ecologist at the time at University of Georgia. The [inaudible 00:24:36] succession is his claim to fame kind of thing.
He and Frank Golley who was with Georgia as well, they put in at the same time an ecology lab to monitor the changes in the environment from this water, because when the water came out of these reactors, it was in an excess of 100 degrees centigrade. It was going to alter the plant and animal life down there, in these water impoundments.

Scientists were hired to come down there and biochemistry, physiology, ecology, all kinds of things to monitor what was going to happen to the environment down there. Then each of those scientists could take students and then they branched out and allowed students from other places to come down there as long as there was an onsite mentor. Esch worked with Whit Gibbons who was at Michigan when he was there. Whit was a graduate when he was there and then he got his PhD there and then Esch would go back to that area every summer to work.

We had a link there because we were then on the supervision of Gibbons while we were down there although he was not a parasitologist and he worked on turtles. I chose to work on fish and then Joe chose to work on turtles and we looked out how the Thermal Effluent influenced the parasite populations in those 2 populations of animals. It gave you a protected environment. The public couldn’t come on so you didn’t have to worry about your site being contaminated by anybody. We would catch fish or catch turtles and you didn’t have to worry about anything going wrong because you were essentially isolated from the outside world.

So this [inaudible 00:26:23] project was making bomb basically and we were looking at how the environment was going to affect it and what kind of long term things affects what’s going on. It was really smart to do it that way. They called them LTRs, long term research sort of environments this kind of thing, but it was a first one that was actually ever done.

Tanya: Can you talk about the process of becoming a faculty member at Wake Forest?

Herman: Yeah. It was kind of weird in a sense ... When I was writing in the spring of 1974 Esch called me and said that Wake Forest was interested in hiring me. My response was, “I’m not interested” not because it wasn’t a good school because they had trained me it’s because you go through this process and you’re looking toward the next stage which is a job doing something else somewhere else. I was in an interview process and I had been offered a couple of jobs and I had been sought after badly what was called the AEC at that point, it was the Atomic Energy Commission, that was the ... What I guess is ERDA now or something like that. They had given me money for example to go to conferences to talk about what I was doing and how the populations of parasites were being impacted by all this hot water and stuff like that. I had been offered a job at a Delphi university and then I started thinking about answers, you might want to just ... Not just dismiss it, think about it.
I said, “Okay” so then I came up to interview. [00:28:00] The interview went well but then I said to the department at the time, “Look, if I’m going to come here and I’ll always be Esch’s student and never become Herman Eure a faculty member then I’m not doing this, but if I can do that then I’ll try it.” I had confidence in this faculty because they had trained me. So then they offered me a job and then I accepted the job. As it turns out when I accepted the job Esch actually took a leave and took a job down at Savannah River. My first year here he was down there so I did the parasitology that he would have been doing. It gave me a chance to get on my feet without him being there.

I tell everybody, I came I was going to sit a couple of years, that was in 1974. I did what … I guess did 2 years 19 different times or something like that because I stayed for 39 years.

Tanya: What appealed to you so much about Wake Forest about staying there?

Herman: Well, first of all, I knew I could do the biology. That wasn’t an issue. I had always been involved in campus politics at Wake Forest with the students even when I was a graduate student because the African-American society was their group that was involved in trying to make certain that things were done right for black students. I was sort of a surrogate adviser for them in a sense because I had been through that although not a white school, I had been a leader and I know what kind of things to do and there were no black faculty at Wake Forest.

I figured, well, I know what the problems are. I know how to resolve some of these issues and I can serve as a role model, but then I had this real conflict between, okay, are you selling out the black schools? You went to school to get a PhD because there were not a lot of black people at schools. Well some of those schools were from the black schools. [00:30:00] My reasoning at the time was that well, black schools had black role models, white schools didn’t have any black role models. That became the reason for deciding to stay at Wake Forest and not to go … Although I looked at black schools even later on. I interviewed at different schools. I even interviewed once at Upstate at one point, but decided that the greatest impact that I could have was here because there were people here who were at that point of trying to make the change. Ed Wilson and Tom Mullen were very crucial to looking at it’s time for Wake Forest to do the kinds of things that we need to do. That’s how I basically decided to stay at Wake Forest.

Tanya: You eventually became the Chair of Biology. Can you describe the kinds of challenges that you had to meet?

Herman: I wasn’t the first minority person to become Chair but the first in a Science Department. Just the concept of people believing that a minority person could be the leader, the only black person in the department of whites and mostly male and so that … Dispelling the notion that you couldn’t do
it or that it was just given to you as a gift, well, if you know anything about Wake Forest and especially about the Biology Department they don’t agree for anybody to be Chair that they don’t think is capable of doing it. Their support in becoming Chair was good.

Then having to make certain that you were doing the right things, you have to do things that are best for the department even when sometimes it’s not what you particularly want to do, but if it’s best for the department and for the students that are in that department then that is what you do.

Those were the challenges of being in the department [00:32:00] and managing a group of people, all of whom were prima donnas within their own right but you have to sort of meld them into a unit that does the right thing for the college and for the students that you’re serving. Those are the biggest challenges and making sure the people knew that I could do it that it wasn’t something that was beyond my capabilities.

Tanya: You later went on to be the Associate Dean of Faculty Development and I know … I think that position was very important to you. Would you like to share what your role was?

Herman: Yeah, I was the … This happened really because of the dean at the time, Deborah Best. When she found out that I wasn’t going to seek a third term as Chair she didn’t want me out of the administrative, so she asked me what I work for [inaudible 00:32:47]. We sort of created this position. She and I created this position because she wanted someone there who could help mold and lead the younger faculty in becoming professionals. That’s how it came about.

My role was to mentor those people to find sources, a funding for those people to make sure that they could get what they needed to get, do the best job they could do and me to get the hell out of their way so they could do it. That was basically the same thing. I had done it in the department, so taking it to the next level was not a big issue. Getting things for young people … For faculty in general but particularly the young faculty to start their career and go off in a trajectory that was going to be beneficial to them later on was really, really worth … It made you feel good because you were preparing the next generation of academics and that was very important.

Tanya: You were also involved with what was then known as the Office of Minority Affairs. Would you like to describe that?

Herman: When I came to Wake Forest, as I said, there were … Dolly McPherson and I came together. We were the only 2 black people here. Then the next year [00:34:00] Laura Rouzan who was in Communications came. She was the first black woman who actually came anything other than English that’s where Dolly was. The kids were having a rough time with some faculty at the time who just thought that they could only make a C,
would make comments to them that were obviously ... I’m not so certain that the faculties saw them as racist because that’s what they had always done, but from the perspective of a black person they were racists and nobody ever challenged that.

Well, we were not in a situation where I was here, Dolly was here and Laura was here and we were not going to take that. We were meeting with students talking about what you had to do. There was no place for students to go when they had problems. In the fall of ‘77 I went to Provost Ed Wilson and talked about these issues that we needed to create and offer where these kids could go where it would be their place that they knew that it was there if they needed help. Now, all of them would not need help, but if they did, so then in the spring of ‘78 Dr. Skills and Dr. Wilson agreed to create this Office of Minority Affairs and then we went on and hired the first director who was Larry Palmer.

I was helped in that after getting it created by Laura Rouzan and by Dolly McPherson and Ross Griffith who also helped at a particular point. It provided an access point for kids to go when they needed assistance. We got a lot of grief from some faculty who say, “Well, we don’t have a … Why do you want to create this office for black kids? There’s not one for white kids.” I said, “Every office you have on this campus is a majority office so don’t give me that crap. I don’t want to see that.”

I think it’s been one of the most important things we’ve ever done as a university because it became the jumping up point then for LBTG, for women studies, all those American studies, all those things that came came about because that place came … It changed the way we looked at the faculty we were going to hire, the kinds of things we were going to teach. We had 3 courses about blacks at Wake Forest at the time, that’s all.

Larry Palmer and I and Dolly McPherson and Laura Rouzan helped to recreate and helped to stimulate people to look at different things in the curriculum that could deal with women, minorities, Hispanics, all this other kinds of things. It was the impetus for all these other things to go. If it had not been for that particular office, I think we’d be a long way from where we are right now. We still have ways to go but we would have been really, really behind the 8-ball at this point.

Tanya: I have to ask just being in a majority white school as a black faculty member, how did you deal with the frustrations and the situations that -

Herman: You speak out. You speak out. You have your integrity and what you think about what you can do and you have to say what … You have to do what you’re supposed to be doing. You have to make sure that you’re doing your job and doing the things that keep you as a faculty member but you can’t see something wrong and sit idly by and not say something because … I always tell people that if people are telling racist jokes and if
it’s a Polack joke or a Jewish joke in the absence of a black person there it becomes an in joke. If you sit there and let someone tell that joke and you don’t say something about it then you complicit in that process.

My thing was I’m not going to be that person. People say, “Well, aren’t you afraid you’re going to get fired?” My thing was, “Look, someone can always find a reason to get rid of you. If you compromise your integrity and they fire you you’ve lost twice.” My thing was, “I would rather be fired for standing up for what I believe in than to sit idly by and have somebody dictate to me what the situation is.”

Again, that comes from my parents. My father was really vocal in trying to get people out to vote regardless of … I was in a little town where the whites didn’t want blacks to vote because they knew that if blacks voted they could carry the election in that little hamlet. You have to be true to yourself and again, you can’t let what people think of you dictate how you respond.

Tanya: I want to ask about mentoring. I know you had some mentors on campus. Would you like to talk about them a little bit? Are there any students that you mentored that stick out in your mind?

Herman: Yeah, in the department Gerry Esch and Bob Sullivan who was a biology teacher who passed away several years ago and left his money to the Biology Department. There’s a Sullivan scholarship, it has his name on it from the money he left there and then Jim McDonald in the Biology Department who later passed as well.

In terms of the administration Ed Wilson and Tom Mullen were 2 people who at the time knew that Wake Forest needed to make the step to full inclusion. Without those 2 people we would be a lot further behind I guess than we would … Those are the people who had an impact on me. Gerry Esch taught me how to become a faculty member. Bob Sullivan did as well. I had the professional people on one side and the administrative thing on the other side. Those are the people that made me the person in terms of being able to handle administrative issues as well as become a good faculty person.

Tanya: Are there students that you mentored that you remember well?

Herman: Yeah, [00:40:00] Marc Dalton comes to mind. He’s a young man who’s a physician now. Nate French and his wife Camille, both of them. I didn’t teach … I taught Camille, but I didn’t teach Nate. Nate was afraid to come to Biology. He was a communications person. He was afraid to come over there. Pamela Johnson who’s another young woman, who’s a … I guess she’s back in Illinois. Those are some of the people who come to mind right away. Randolph Childress who’s a good friend and a student who I taught, Stan King another one, he was a 7 ft. basketball player who was a better student and student involvement person than athlete but did well at
Wake Forest. Guy Morgan who’s a young kid from Virginia Beach who I taught early on.

There are lots of other people but they come to mind right away. Tracy Connor who was a young woman who came to Wake Forest, she was the Tim Duncan of the women’s team during the same time that Tim Duncan was here and Tim Duncan. Tim was a quiet person so he was out of the house a number of times, but Tim was … I got to know Tim through Tracy and through Randolph Childress.

Tanya: Putting aside the Office of Minority Affairs, if you look back on your career at Wake Forest what are the 2 to 3 things that you think you’ve had the most impact on the university?

Herman: I think that changing the perception that both administration, faculty and majority students have about the capabilities of a minority person in the college ranks. Teaching students and being competent I think changed the way students saw black faculty members. They had not been taught by anybody who was black before. They had seen blacks but they had never seen them in these kinds of positions before. Also then becoming an administrative person who could look at university in total, who could look at situations that involved minority students but wasn’t necessarily a minority issue because you can jump on the bandwagon on every issue where there’s a black student involved or a female involved and it becomes a gender issue or a race issue when in fact it may not be.

When you look at those situations objectively and come to conclusion that sometimes may go against that person whom you may be in that group, I think people value your opinion and then the trust comes. Then it allows you to do a lot of things within that situation because people know that you’re making decisions based on the facts in front of you and not based on the emotion that’s involved.

Tanya: What do you think are the biggest challenges facing Wake Forest right now at this moment?

Herman: Keeping and increasing the diversity of students, not only in ethnicity, in gender, but in socioeconomics. I don’t want us to price ourselves out of the market that cater to those kinds of students that Wake Forest traditionally had served, some of those North Carolina students, some of those students from other places that could not come to Wake Forest unless there were monies available for them to come to Wake Forest.

I was reading an article the other day that the average … For some of the schools, the average tuition was $65,000. I couldn’t have gone to school for that and a lot of people can’t go to school. If we press ourselves out of the market, if we become that university that is so exclusive monetarily that we lose those people who bring the diversity and the difference to the schools then we would have lost.
Now Wake Forest has always been a place where we value different kinds of ideas, different kinds of people, religion, gender, sex, this kind of thing, and if we lose that then the Wake Forest that we have all known would no longer be there. We’re a collegiate university that caters to … That’s small enough to have the interrelationship between students and faculty that really is very important, yet we have the university mantra as well in terms of the resources that we have to provide students to do research, performance arts students and dramatic arts students, visual art students can put on performances that are world class and this kind of thing. The resources give us that, but if we lose the collegiate part of that mix, then we would no longer be the Wake Forest that those people in 1834 decided that we should have.

Those are biggest challenges, so the finances and that financial thing permeates a lot of things because it allows you to bring the diversity and keep the diversity and inclusion not just … The difference between segregation and integration is segregation was forced, integration is voluntary. When you get integration you then have to have inclusion of everyone because without that you simply still have people who are segregated into little pockets. Different simply means different, there’s no judgment attached to it.

As a biologist, I know that if you have a society, if you have a population that’s monoclonistic kind of situation then that population is subject to extinction because if you look at the gene pool if there’s no … if there’s nothing to allow for diversity to be fit in then if something comes that keys in on the major genotype in that population you’re going to lose everybody. So if you don’t have some diversity, some polymorphism as we would talk about in biology then you’re not really going to have a sustainable population and the same is true for this university.

Tanya: Are there other experiences that you would like to be sure we record?

Herman: Well, I’ve had a good … People say I a good run at Wake Forest and I think that what I would want students to see is that you come to Wake Forest, to a university, as I did that had a particular ethos that was primarily white male oriented but that you bring some experience into that situation like I brought those things from Maryland State College and you make those things a part of that whole tapestry so that the experience that you then get and make Wake Forest into then becomes like a soup. Soup isn’t just one something, you get beans and peas and cauliflower, all other kinds of things to put into it.

It’s like, I said, the tapestry. You woven all these threads to make something which is unique. If we lose that experience, if we become so … If our diversity becomes so little that we’ve become so homogenous that we’re bringing only the same kinds of people all the time then the experiences of college that I think I had as both a student and as a faculty member here will be forever lost.
I would make sure that we push to keep those experiences that students will have that then makes the Wake Forest that we love a better place. It may not be exactly [00:48:00] what you look [inaudible 00:48:03] but I think that it’s important that we keep the Wake Forest that people in 1950 had, in 1960 had, that in the 1900 had. Those experiences make us who we are.

The other thing I think is that we should remember that what you bring to the table is in large measure also indicative of what you will get from the table. If you don’t put something in, you’re not going to get anything out. Don’t be afraid to try different kinds of things. The most constant thing that you will experience as a person in this society is change. If you don’t embrace change then you’re doomed to fail because you can’t keep doing the same thing the same way and expect a different result. If you embrace the change then you would be willing to accept that things would be different sometimes.

Those are the things that I see. Again, back to … I want us to make sure that we have an experience at Wake Forest that makes us grow. If you come to Wake Forest and graduate and you’re the same person when you left as when you came in then you would have lost and we would have failed you.

Tanya: Thank you, Prof. Eure.

Herman: Thank you.