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2 Dr. Newstreet

3 History of American Education

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5 Transcript of Oral interview with Dr. Spring

6 Samantha:

7 Okay. So, thank you so much for agreeing to meet with me today. I am Samantha Reveles and it
8 is currently 2, 2:09 [PM] on September 27th of 2019 I am with Dr. Spring in his office and
9 currently in Braniff. And I want to clarify that I'm going to record this interview and it will be
10 uploaded to the UD oral repository. Is that all right?

11 Dr. Spring :

12 Yes, that's fine.

13 Samantha:

14 Okay. So, to start us off, why did you decide to become a teacher or what led you to teaching?

15 Dr. Spring :

16 Great question. So, I was led to teaching because I come from a family of teachers. So yeah, my,
17 my parents are both teachers. Most of my siblings were teachers at least at one point. There are
18 10 kids in my family and six of us are all in education or have been in education. My
19 grandparents were teachers, and parents were teachers, so it's become kind of the family
20 business. I also had some phenomenal teachers, especially here at UD.

21 Samantha:

22 And so through graduate school that led you here to UD or what led you to UD?

23 Dr. Spring :

24 I had younger brother who was an undergraduate here. He was a sophomore at the time, and I
25 was looking at graduate schools. I was kind of floundering, not quite sure what exactly I wanted
26 to study. I had a few ideas in mind. I thought about doing comparative literature. I thought about
27 going to school for languages. I knew I wanted more school, but I didn't know what I wanted
28 exactly. But he told me about UD and about the curriculum and about his teachers here, and he
29 convinced me to come up and visit and sit in on a class with Dr. Davies who was teaching
30 Milton. I remember the energy in the room as students engaged in debate and I thought that if the
31 graduate program was anything like this, I'd love to be a part of it. Then I got here, and that
32 kind of conversation happened in all of the courses I took with a number of professors.

33 Samantha :

34 Wow. And so, when you, so when you came here for graduate school then, did you have the idea
35 to start the Seven Arts [seven arts of language] program or what did you start off teaching here at
36 UD first?

37 Dr. Spring:

38 Well, actually my first experience with the Seven Arts of Language was as a mentor with Dr.
39 Crider who created the program.

40 Samantha:

41 So it was Dr. Crider that created the program.

42 Dr. Spring :

43 That's right. That's right. Dr. Crider created it about 10 years ago. He created the program at the
44 request of the provost who said, look, we need to improve the kind of preparation students are
45 getting for the core. We have a lot of students who are coming in, who haven't had much access
46 to this kind of literature or these kinds of texts in their prior education. And they needed a way to

47 get into these. And so, he created the program based on his knowledge of Mortimer Adler and
48 his own studies in rhetoric in graduate school. Basically, what I was doing was I was observing
49 him as a teacher and review the material he was covering with students. I quickly fell in love
50 with the program and his teaching style and the students in the program. And, then when I
51 finished my PhD, he was moving on to become the Associate Dean of Constantin. His move
52 made it possible for me to take over the program.

53 Samantha:

54 And so the, the Seven Arts of Language started because of Dr. Crider. Because on the request of
55 the provost and now, now when Dr. Crider, moved to be the Associate Dean, you took over.

56 Dr. Spring :

57 That's right.

58 Samantha:

59 And so what has been your favorite? What has been the impact of the program for those who
60 have taken your course? Like what do you think has been the biggest impact on those who, who
61 have taken the course?

62 Dr. Spring :

63 I think a love of language has been one of the impacts on the students who have taken it. We
64 know that there are students who've now graduated from law school and medical school and jobs
65 in business and other fields. And many of those students really credit the kind of standard that
66 was set in the Seven Arts of Language in that first semester. Part of what we're trying to instill in
67 this study of these arts of languages are the intellectual habits that will carry them through the
68 rhythms of the intellectual life.

69 Samantha:

70 So would you say that the language is your favorite aspect of the program? Or, what is your
71 favorite aspect of the program and what's your least favorite aspect of it?

72 Dr. Spring :

73 I think I'd say that my favorite aspect, or kind of characteristic of the program, actually has to do
74 with the students and the gratitude they tend to show afterwards. It's an interesting program
75 because sometimes at the very beginning before students even have their first day of class in the
76 program, they know that they've been selected for the program and there's some confusion still
77 kind of in the air over why people have been selected to take the course. And so, students
78 sometimes come in a little bit confused and they need some explanation of what the course is and
79 what the purpose of the course is. And it usually takes a few weeks before students really
80 embrace the course. Unfortunately, the first few weeks is a struggle for many of these students.
81 They tend not to do well in the first month. So, I would say in some respects, my least favorite
82 part is the first, the first month of the course where you kind of have to struggle with students to
83 convince them that this is something that's good for them. But then what happens is that by the
84 end of the semester, and usually even before the end of the semester, students really have
85 embraced the course and the method of the course and the material in the course to the point that
86 when I look over my student evaluations, I tend to see the most gratitude in the student evals for
87 Seven Arts. Students might say nice things on student eval in lit trad courses or upper level
88 English courses, but I haven't seen the kind of gratitude elsewhere that students show for the
89 Seven Arts of Language course. Students really recognize by the end what they've been offered,
90 and they are excited about it.

91 Samantha :

92 So one of your favorite aspects is the gratitude that students show at the end of the year. And
93 your least favorite aspect is that first month of them like waking up of, “Oh my goodness, this is
94 real”.

95 Dr. Spring :

96 Right. And it's tough, I think, for a lot of these students. Because in many cases they've been at
97 schools that haven't asked much of them and they're coming in, and from the first day we're
98 asking a lot of them. And so, it's kind of shocking, right? That you think that you come into
99 college and you think you entered in this world of freedom, but then you're hit that first week
100 with a couple of different assignments that are going to be checked and you're going to be held
101 accountable for them. That's a little bit shocking and not, not what many students anticipate for
102 that opening of their college careers. so that pushback is understandable. But they come around.

103 Samantha:

104 They come around, and then what legacy do you think the program will have for future students
105 in 20 or 30 years?

106 Dr. Spring :

107 I think that as the program has more and more alumni who stay in touch with the university and
108 more and more alumni who can speak eloquently to the value of the course, I think it's going to
109 become difficult to get into the course. I currently have a number of juniors and seniors who
110 have requested to come into the course. And we've let them in because we've had space for them.
111 As word gets out among the alumni base, as the students who have been through the course and
112 can speak to how much it's helped them start to be a little more vocal, I think we're going to have
113 to start telling people no, they can't add it because we don't have enough resources to actually
114 provide it to everyone who wants it. Unless that is, we can find someone who would be willing

115 to endow a professor or two to teach in the program. This fall we have about 70 students in the
116 course and I think the first fall that it was offered, Dr. Crider had 15 to 20 students. So, we're
117 seeing fourfold increase in the number of students in the course. And as students learn more
118 about what the end product is, what happens to students who take it and how much they grow,
119 it's going to become a course that people are going to have to fight to get into.

120 Samantha:

121 Wow! That's amazing to see the growth of how when it began and now where it's at. And that
122 also leads into another question: is, how has this course enhanced your way of teaching? And
123 then what have you learned of it? Because I know you teach Lit Trad one and I don't know if you
124 teach it again this semester, but I think it's American or another upper level English class. How
125 has teaching Seven Arts of Language sort of enhanced your way of teaching?

126 Dr. Spring :

127 Yes. I've taught Lit trad one, Lit trad two, lit trad three, American literature and poetry by the
128 book. There is something unique about teaching Seven Arts and much of it has to do with the
129 material that is actually advanced. I think that's one of the things that people misunderstand
130 about the course until they've spent some time in it. So, I remember my first experience of the
131 course with Dr. Crider. I remember taking the course as a graduate student who already had a
132 master's degree in English. I just remember being blown away by how many things I thought I
133 knew that I didn't know. And so, what I'm trying to . . . is to communicate that to students. When
134 you hear the terms, grammar, logic, and rhetoric, you might anticipate that you already know
135 them, so you need to recognize that there are aspects of all of those arts that we don't know. So,
136 I'd like to enhance the sense of wonder over those things that we think we know, that we actually
137 don't know. I think what's been beneficial for me as an educator is that with this course you get a

138 wide variety of students from a range of backgrounds and with a range of interests. And there's
139 something about the course that encourages attention to the individuals in the course. And so, I'm
140 learning. I feel that I'm learning a lot about pedagogical techniques, about thinking about not just
141 what we learn, but how we learn it. I actually speak with Dr. Newstreet in education, and others
142 to improve how I try to teach this material. I'm striving to learn a lot pedagogically about hitting
143 the right tone in the classroom and trying new techniques in the classroom. One thing I'd like to
144 try at some point in this particular class, is a flipped classroom. At some point I'd like to have the
145 lectures recorded and to use the classroom time for actually doing the work and having more of
146 a workshop type atmosphere. There are all kinds of reasons I'm interested in that. But mostly
147 because I think more and more about the actual art of teaching in this course on the art of
148 language.

149 Samantha:

150 And so would you say, because obviously implied from, from what you just said, it has, it has
151 changed your view of certain ways of teaching. Yeah. Like instead of the standard way of just
152 reading the text and then having open discussion, you've now started incorporating more or what
153 has, or what has this course, or how does your, or how has your view of the, of the certain course
154 materials change because of the teaching of the course? Because if I remember correctly, there's,
155 the *Aeneid* right there. How would you say that's changed your view from like teaching lit trad
156 one and then the Seven Arts?

157 Dr. Spring :

158 I think what's been helpful there is that, we use the *Aeneid* as the test case for all of the advice
159 we're giving. So, we're saying you need to know grammar. But you also want to know that there
160 are rhetorical moves going on when people use simple sentences or complex sentences or

161 parallel structure And you need to recognize the unspoken allusions to logic that underscore the
162 arguments that characters provide. I think a simple answer to your question is that teaching The
163 *Aeneid* in Seven Arts has helped me to slow down and to attend to what it means to analyze a
164 text. It's one thing to tell students to analyze text. It's another thing to teach them the arts that will
165 help them analyze the text.

166 Samantha:

167 And, so then how has, looking back on everything like from when Dr. Crider started this course
168 and now that you've taken over, how has this course impacted the university do you think?

169 Because then as you mentioned you have seen results of students who have credited the course to
170 help them get into law school. And then thinking back, what would you say has been the impact
171 of this course on the university?

172 Dr. Spring :

173 Well, I think we have more students who are more confident in their education. I think we have
174 more students who are more confident in their grasp of language and more students who can
175 actually speak eloquently about how texts are working. It helps improve the quality of
176 conversation in future classes that students take because they are ready to make reference to a
177 particular dependent clause and actually use the term dependent clause. Or when a student can
178 make reference to a premise in a syllogism and actually know what they're talking about when
179 they say that. Or when a student can talk about a rhetorical appeal of some kind and actually
180 know what they're talking about. So all of these foundational studies in the arts of grammar,
181 logic and rhetoric are helping students in all of the conversations they're having, whether in a
182 philosophy class or lit trad class or history class or a politics class.

183 Samantha:

184 What advice would you give to current students who are taking the course right now?

185 Dr. Spring :

186 The same advice I give to all the students when we're four weeks in. Trust that the material is
187 valuable even before you see that it's valuable. Too many students recognize too late how
188 valuable this class is. They'll recognize that if they note early on how often their professors
189 across disciplines rely on the arts that we're teaching

190 Samantha:

191 Last question, is there anything else you want to add?

192 Dr. Spring :

193 To anybody out there who hasn't yet taken the course, please join us. Whether you're a
194 sophomore or junior or senior or you're a graduate student and you're interested in working with
195 the course, we'd love to have you. Or if you're someone who is interested in giving the university
196 money, please mark some of those funds for the Seven Arts of Language.

197 Samantha:

198 Thank you Dr. Spring.