

TITLE: Dr. James H. Seeney

JOB DESCRIPTION: Head of Department of Education

DATE INTERVIEWED: April 23, 1975

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How did you rate your other colleagues as teachers?

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with the graduates which we had here. I've always tried to maintain that. I came in under Dr. Scruggs and there were some outstanding scholars, and heads of departments with doctrines and they all insisted upon high standards. Ever since I have been with Lincoln, I think that we tried to carry on the tradition. We were a strong liberal arts college. At the time I came they made a study, in 1942, on the liberal arts college evaluates itself. It was about that time, too, that they were concerned about the simple standards. They had just gotten Lincoln University out of the political arena because the position of president was changed quite often and for political reasons every time.

Dr. Scrugg started some very fine things; the Midwest Journal, which presented the opportunity for the faculty to do some research and have it published. He really tried to set up standards. My main work while I was principal was tied up with teacher education and there were certain things in teacher education which were not right. For one thing Lincoln University had been a segregated school but not in harmony with the state requirements in terms of all courses and in terms of their concept of degrees. The B.S. in education was really not considered a very good degree and was given to the elementary people. It took some time to get that changed over to where people thought in the terms of B.S. in education, major in English, major in Social Studies. We developed some new principles in keeping the state department requirements and we were doing a big job in that area. We got into teachers education so that the student getting a job in a non-segregated situation would have the same qualifications as a person coming from one of the state colleges. That doesn't mean that we had inferior teachers, it simply means that we didn't have the same kind of experience, or the same kind of courses. So this was one of our main jobs in the 50s.

Lincoln University ran through some experiences in the latter 40s and 50s in which the state was trying to equalize the opportunities between



Lincoln University and the University of Missouri. As for the black students some of the outgrowth of the Gaines case included: the elevation of degrees; new departments which included areas that we didn't have before; and, we had a large number of degrees like the B.S. in agriculture, the B.S. in business administration and the B.S. in billing trades and so forth. We originally only had the A.B. and the D.S. degrees and the B.S. in education. And this meant that the degrees got out of harmony with each other. There was no comparison with the two, the B.S. in Agriculture, of course, didn't require the same courses that you might find in business administration.

During the 60s my work got into the area of reconcillation of degrees, and we reduced those degrees down to three. In the 70s, we are trying to maintain; at least, if we are going to progress, so that we don't get off too far out of line.

Lincoln is a good school. We have admitted students who were considered problem students. If a student doesn't make it, if he's just a C student, that's all ther is to it. We are not giving away grades. Lincoln is still operating as a good school, even though we try to have certain government programs, like those of other schools, in which we try to work with kids who were disadvantaged. I'm talking about upward bound, and the Talent Search, and some of these title free programs. We are also offering special couseling and tutoring, through which we try to bring these students up to some kind of standard. It's interesting to look at the students who came in on the original Upward Bound, who have now graduated and made it. Who, originally, if it hadn't been for Upward Bound wouldn't have made it. Whether or not this is an indication of a good school, I don't know, but I believe that it certainly has something to do with standards.

How did you relate to the students?

I've always tried to keep this office open. Any student can come in any time, and we work and, I think, its a philosophy for the Department of

Education to be open from 8:00 in the morning until 4:30 or 5:00 at night. We try to provide anything the student may need. On the last survey made the Department of Education was given the highest rating and that's because we're here for the students to come in any time and get help. Many times students will come here when they really should be going someplace else but our door is always open. I think that, maybe, this is one of the things that could be better at Lincoln. Every office should be open so there would be someplace for the students to go when they need help.

How did you relate to the administration?

I had no difficulties. There are times, of course, when you don't get all the money you would like, and you have to get advice. Sometimes you have to ask for much more money and more equipment but I have had no quarrel over the years. If you're persistent and are able to present a good case then you're likely to be heard which means you must have evidence, you must have it well written, and you must be able to back it up.

How large was the student body when you arrived at Lincoln?

It was a real small school. I'd say it had around 500 or 600 students in 1940. Right after the war it went up to about 900 with the veterans returning. During the 50s it weighted back and forth, because of the Korean War and the Supreme Court decision. I remember that summer after the Supreme Court decision, there weren't many students here at all. That summer we only had 150 or 200 students coming to summer school. In 1955, closing Lincoln was being considered for we didn't have much backing at all. From St. Louis and Kansas City, at that particular time, the black people had been fighting for integration, not for separately equal schools. In 1955, when the schools began to open up to blacks, we began to lose the athletics from Kansas City and St. Louis. This was a part of the black sociology at this time. At that time we didn't have any kind of gymnasium or any auditorium and then the bond issue came out. It was very skeptical as to whether Lincoln would get

anything from the bond issue since they were thinking about closing it. Many people in the legislature, who have been Lincoln's friends, thought of Lincoln as being a separate but equal institution.

Instead of being the school it was, the School of Journalism was reduced to a department. We didn't have much in vocational programs until Dr. Lang came. When Dr. Lang came here she decided to go for vocational home economics. Dr. Lang went to the state department and as a consequence of her efforts we got the vocational home economics to which we have some support. The Langgrane ideal didn't come in until we got the cooperative extension. We got that because Nixon decided the black schools in the South should have some money. Lincoln University got in on the tail end of that. We had been reduced to a state school.

Students from Helias and from the Catholic communities were the first to come here. The question as to whether or not the Junior College was to exist or not became an issue because the Catholics did not want to support it. The Junior College was closed.

That was the survival of Lincoln. Part of that is due to the religious tension that existed in Missouri over the trades which needed to support that. The Catholics couldn't see any reason why they should support the Junior College. As a result of that the state got mad, at that particular time, because Jefferson City had shipped the burden to the state. Nevertheless, it was the survival of Lincoln.

After the white people came to Lincoln the population began to approach the equal stage of the Black. Then we integrated the faculty. I know, that in 1967 the main fundamental question of the North Central was how well were we integrating. Since that time we've had a movement going on in which there are people who feel that maybe Lincoln is going to be lost, because the white people are taking over. It is true, however, that if it hadn't been for the white students we wouldn't have Lincoln now. We'd have



lost a long time ago. The black people were not supporting Lincoln and they still do not. The middle class black people from St. Louis and Kansas City still are not sending their kids up here. We also have problems with the dormitories. Some people would rather send their kids to Warrensburg to stay in the dormitories there because they feel the dormitories here have a bad reputation. Dormitories at Lincoln were open all night long and then we got that freedom movement. Boys were on the second and third floors and slipping in and out there. Girls could come in when they got ready. This hurt Lincoln with people who are strict with their kids. They preferred not to send them here but rather to a white school. As a result of this we have serious conflict.

Why aren't we getting some science and math students? Well, of course, there are some other problems in that. At Kansas City we have the Union and at St. Louis we have four Junior Colleges. There are also Western University, Washington University, and St. Louis University which have made special efforts to give the good Black students special inducements to go to those schools. For instance, they have a program at St. Louis and Washington Universities in which they take the real good 11th grade science students and the real good math students, and let them earn college credits. When they get through high school they are already set with some college credits. There are also some national programs and scholarships and we're not getting any of those kids. For a while they had the Pepsi scholarships. We're not getting those kids either and one of the reasons has to do with the bad reputation that is connected with our dormitories. The history of this thing, as I see it, is this struggle back and forth to maintain it.

Was the curriculum attuned to the needs of men and women equipped to begin their life's work or to enroll in the best institutions for graduate work?

Oh, yes. Our graduates are all over. If they can get in the

graduate schools with the grades that they made at Lincoln; then it doesn't matter whether they are white or black. We had a white girl who was an honor student here and went on to the University of Missouri medical school. She got a scholarship over there because her grades were so high here. She was a 4.0 student and is presently a doctor. And this is the way it is. David Scott was a graduate of Lincoln.

Was the library adequate?

The library has always been adequate. Any inadequacies occur at the higher levels. I believe there had been a movement to cut down on some of the materials in there. The library and the books were probably more adequate previously than they are at the present time.

Was there any academic interaction between Lincoln University and the University of Missouri before 1954?

We did have some situations exist before 1954 in which the professors at Lincoln and the University of Missouri got together. However, there wasn't much chance of getting together to see if the kids were getting the right kind of education or getting a good quality education particularly in areas not offered at Lincoln. I think this resulted in the firing of the University of Missouri teachers because they had collaborated with the Lincoln teachers.

Did you think that the science laboratories at Lincoln were adequate?

They're far more adequate now than they were then, but they were always adequate. They always had equipment. And like I said, I compare this with Western where I went to school. I was assistant in the chemistry lab at Western and they had less students here than at Western. As far as the equipment is concerned, I taught in the chemistry department a couple of summers and the desk was fully equipped with all possible equipment that was necessary to carry out experiments. I think it was expanded to present day requirements. I feel the labs are kept up. Physics is probably a little



because we had the problem of finding qualified people. We got students in every curriculum; much more than we do now. We do not now have many black students in science or math. We're not getting high caliber students in those areas. In those days we had some good students in those areas.

I'll tell you of one good example, Jessie Hill. I don't know how many people know about Jessie Hill. Jessie Hill, I taught history and mathamatics to Jessie. He is now president of three life insurance companies; among them is the Atlanta life insurance company. He has two insurance companies in New Orleans. It was in Ebony that the Atlanta Company has a 4 million dollar bank excess. Jessie was a student of mine and it's interesting that when I went to school in Michigan in 1947 we were in math together. Jessie didn't become a teacher but decided to go in to auxilary math. When he got through with his Masters he went on down there to the lab and he's become outstanding in that field.

Did you serve on committees?

I've always served on committees. I've been on every committee except the library committee. I've been on the Academic Routine Committee, the Personnel Committee, and Chairman of the Athletic Committee at one time. What committee did you like best?

When I first came here I was interested in athletics because I was coaching and that's probably the reason I got to be Chairman of the Athletic Committee. Unfortunately, when I was chairman we didn't win any football games that year. I still feel that was a good experience for me. But I liked the Academic Routine Committee. I liked the curriculum and that sort of thing. I liked the Graduate Counselor, and I like what I'm doing now.

Did you engage in community work?

Yes, not too much though. I had not been out in the community possibly in the same way some other people had. I've never been affiliated with the church. But other than that I never joined service clubs.

What was the attitude of the black community toward Lincoln?

They've always admired Lincoln. Always wanted their kids to go to school here. They've had many of them go through here and become, eventually, an outstanding individual. My own kids went through the lab school and on to Lincoln except my youngest one, he's finishing at Warrensburg but he started at Lincoln.

What was the attitude of the white community toward Lincoln?

I've been in meetings and uprisings of black students when they have complained about the library and the teachers. I've then heard many white students say, "you don't know how lucky you are to be going to Lincoln. If you were going to the University of Missouri you would be taught by the assistant graduates. And this library is a fine library. You don't know how lucky you are to have all the library facilities that you have." Sometimes the black student has come out and complained in all these situations while the white student has stood up for Lincoln. I know that in several strikes, and situations that occurred, white people took the side of Lincoln and said, "well, you don't know, how lucky you are. You see, all the state colleges have freshman classes in English and the freshman classes in general education are taught by graduate assistants." Lincoln has never done that. We've always hired and employed fully qualified teachers. For that reason our expenses are higher. We probably get a greater amount of money than they do, because they give the scholarships and don't have the same groups every year.

What was your attitude toward the white community?

I've always had a good attitude toward the white people, and probably my attitude is different from the fact that I was raised in a white community and that is another world. I was raised in an integrated set up. I've never gone to the South. As a matter of fact, I haven't been there yet. I was in Pine Bluff, Arkansas once with the Athletic Committee for a game. I was chairman of the Athletic Committee, when we took a team down to Nashville,

Tennessee. That was when I had a real good basketball team and we entered the national championship for high schools. That is as far South as I have been. I've been on a couple trips to Amoron, Texas and out toward California. To me it s perfectly natural to work with white people and to go to school with them. As far as black people I don't have any hangups in that particular respect.

This was an unusual situation when I came to Missouri, if you understand what I mean. I'm a firm believer in Sociology in this particular respect; that you always get what you expect in return. The reaction you get is always what you might expect. It never worried me about integration. Integration doesn't provide any insecure situations for me. I've always gotten what I wanted to eat, in a motel or where ever I go.

Do you belong to any professional societies?

I was a member of Kappa Ri Sigma. I was an honorary member of the science and math fraternity at Western. I'm not sure whether that's local or not. I've also belonged to honorary societies for science, math and education.

What was the attitude of the school toward your attending professional society meetings?

If a person has an opportunity to go to a professional meeting we should let him go. I've always taken that view point. I never question the person going to a professional meeting and I've never been questioned myself. All through the years the administration has been good to me. I remember times when there have been problems in other areas but never here in the Department of Education. If there was a teacher in the lab school who wanted to go to a meeting, they could go as far as I was concerned and I've always felt that.

In your opinion, what is the future of Lincoln University?

Lincoln University, in my opinion, has a very bright future. I think maybe that we have not accomplished all we might in



the area of multicultural relations. The primary function is to provide an education in which all the races and all the people can live and work together. We're talking about a situation in which we're training teachers that every student in the classroom is a human being and we're talking about human relations. Whether they are Indian, African, Mexican, Spanish, Italian, Polish, American or Chinese, they've all contributed. Originally, Lincoln University was an integrated institution. I think maybe we have to look at this thing as a total. If we preach races then we get tied up with racism. What is your background? What is your race? We can't make it as a segregated institution and we can't make it as a separated institution. We can make it as an institution that is interested in trying to bring this about, this multi-ethnic kind of education. And this is where the money from grants is for federal grants.

What have been your highlights during your connection with Lincoln University?"

I started as a supervisor teacher and as a coach in the lab school. I got a good deal of pleasure out of basketball teams, because I used to play St. Louis. I think probably one of my basketball highlights there was when I beat Sunter in Kansas City, who was the national champion. They came down here and thought they were going to run over us, but we beat them. Scholastic speaking, I think maybe in most scholarship cases, was pretty high, but I think maybe my promotions. I believe the latest one was the chairman and graduate councilor. I enjoyed that one. That was this year. I think when I was made Chairman of the Commission of Education in Sociology and I felt I could make some kind of contribution. You couldn't be any lower than I was when I started. I've been fortunate. I've had different kinds of problems than others. But I think maybe when I worked on the most central report. I worked real hard on that and was chairman on the committee. I had to write the report, establish the sources, and had to get the research done. There were a lot of faculty problems. Another

highlight was when we got credited that time, because I was in on it.

Was there academic cooperation between white and black students at Lincoln?

I think there was far more when it started than there is now. Originally, when they first started, black and white tried to get along. The white people were in everything. I think really now you can see some of this. Too much blackness, I mean at homecoming everything was black; very few whites. That wasn't true ten years ago. Ten years ago the white people were mixed. I think salvation lied in integration. It doesn't lie in constantly separation. You can't have a separate country. That's where the Indians made a mistake; having separate country. When they did they had to have separate laws. That's also the trouble in the Ghettos. The ghettos aren't able to tie in any place with the establishment. As a result they are not able to get jobs and move up. There is not enough upward ability in that kind of situation.

What was the attitudes of the black and white faculty members?

They worked together and still do to some extent. You still have two kinds of black faculty member. Personally I have an agreement with those white teachers and those black teachers who insist upon the standard. I do not believe personally in unlimited absentees. I fight with my class on that. Right now we're arguing. They employed 21 teachers from Lincoln in Kansas City last year. They took a large percentage of our teachers and so we expect them to be good. I try to insist upon the fact they don't want teachers with the braids and the long hair and the hats, jeans and bad dress. They want the teachers to be something that the students are going to look up to and to the school. So this is the problem we've got.

How did you rate the student leaders of the 50s, 60s and 70s?

Well, we've had somme good student leaders.

How did you rate the graduate school of Lincoln University?

Right now our graduate school rates well. We're doing just about the

same thing as the state colleges are doing, but we're not doing it as much. We've been unable because of the small amount of money that we get. We use to insist upon oral examination and written examination. I believe other schools have done away with this so we had research, different thesis'. In general I would say right now we stand about like Southeast Missouri State. Did you feel that there is a need for a law school at Lincoln?

Well, I personally dont. I know that there is a connection about more black lawyers. If they are going to have more black lawyers, they shouldn't put it at Lincoln because we don't have more than 2 or 3 students majoring in governments. I'm getting on some dangerous grounds here but there is one girl I know, Miss Thomas, whose quite able right here.

What about attracting students from areas in St. Louis and Kansas City?

Well, if you're going to be a law school that's what it's going to be which is what I'm saying. I don't know about the law school in Kansas City. They have one there, UMKC. So the only place is St. LOuis. If you put a law school up here all you are going to get are white graduates. If you try to increase the number of black graduates in law, you're not going to get it here, that's my point.