

DU ORAL HISTORY 1984-2014

Interviewee: Virginia (Ginger) Maloney

Interviewer: James R. (Jim) Griesemer

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Transcriber: Terry L. Zdrale

Transcript

- Introduction [00:00](#) Series Introduction.
- Jim Griesemer: [00:20](#) Welcome to the University of Denver's oral history. The interviews in this series present a panorama of progress against steep odds, they're stories told by men and women who were personally involved in saving University in undertaking, an extraordinary process of renewal. We've divided our story into three parts. The first being DU's severe financial crisis of the 1980's really a perfect storm of financial adversity. Then in the early 1990's, the dramatic financial turnaround as DU pulled back from the brink, followed by a tide of renewal, a decade that saw new buildings, remarkable growth, academic innovation, all of which moved DU onto the national stage. To continue our story, I'm joined by Virginia Maloney, better known to everyone at DU as Ginger Maloney. She's the former Dean of DU's Morgridge College of Education and in that position played an important role in DU's remarkable renewal. She continues to be close to the University in her role as Dean Emerita of the Morgridge College of Education. Ginger Maloney, welcome to DU's oral history.
- Ginger Maloney: [01:33](#) Thank you, Jim.
- Jim Griesemer: [01:35](#) Let's begin to talk by looking at your background. Could you tell us a little bit about your professional experience, prior to coming to DU?
- Ginger Maloney: [01:45](#) Sure. You know, my background is not exactly a straight pathway to a deanship. But I think the theme that's run through at all has been I've been

either a participant in or lead a lot of organizational change. So, I started in the first class of women at Yale University, which was obviously a time of change at Yale. And, then started, I was recruited to start a childcare program afterschool for kids in Washington DC. It was one of the first in the country because women were just starting to really have careers and go back to work and need childcare for longer periods of time. I got interested in kids and all the issues that kids present and families were experiencing. So I decided to get a master's degree in early childhood special education after teaching preschool for several years and consulting with other teachers about how to include children with disabilities.

Ginger Maloney: [02:47](#)

I decided that I was, had a great interest in public policy and particularly as it affected children and families. So I went and got a PhD from George Washington University in public administration with a focus on education policy and organizational change. So with that background, I ended up working in a lot of not-for-profits, was kind of an activist and ended up working for a philanthropy here in Denver called the Sturm Family Foundation, a well-known name on this campus. And through them they had a strong interest in education reform, which was also my interest. I'd worked a lot in inner city Chicago before moving to Denver with families who were experiencing lots of risks including the immigrant status, non-English-speaking or poverty, and realized how different that world was. So I did that and ended up meeting Dan Richie and ended up as Dean of the Morgridge College of Education.

Jim Griesemer: [04:00](#)

Tell us more about what led you to the University of Denver.

Ginger Maloney: [04:03](#)

Sure. Well, I had interacted a lot with Dan Richie, who everyone knows is a remarkable leader and really a passionate advocate for education reform. So we had numerous conversations. We were

involved in some of the same groups, about the condition of schools in the Denver Metro area. What were some of the issues? And when Dan let me know that they were seeking a new Dean for the College of Ed he encouraged me to apply, despite the fact that I had a nontraditional background. I was really attracted by the mission of the University to be a great public University dedicated to the public good. And I thought that was, that was worth hitching my wagon to. I also had realized through my work in the community how important the preparation of school leaders was. We had people who were being prepared to manage buildings and manage schools, but they weren't being prepared to really be agents of change, to introduce reform, to improve instruction. And so I thought that the position of Dean would enable me to get involved in that important work.

Jim Griesemer: [05:22](#)

Well, your background in education, public administration and organizational change were almost the perfect credentials for those goals. But without prior experience in higher education, you were, as you just noted, something of a nontraditional Dean. That's a little more common these days, but it was less so when you assumed that position. What, what did you need to think about? What did, what were the challenges or obstacles that you saw facing yourself first as you went into that position?

Ginger Maloney: [06:00](#)

Sure. Well, I think it took a while for the faculty to trust the fact that I would understand their research interests and the importance of research as part of the College's work because I'd been an activist, not so much a researcher. But I did know that there was a substantial number of faculty members who were very interested in being engaged with the community and who recognized the change was needed. So that both helped me, but also created some challenges in winning over the faculty. I also had to learn what a Dean does, which wasn't always clear.

- Jim Griesemer: [06:47](#) Well, as the new Dean what did you see as the challenges and the opportunities that the College of Education was facing at that point?
- Ginger Maloney: [06:56](#) Yes. Well, the College had a number of very good programs, including a focus on educating gifted and talented kids. We had a very good counseling psych program. We had just taken on back a library and information science program, which was not accredited at that time, which was a very important accreditation to get. So there were a lot of challenges just looking at the academic programs to bring them into relevance for the schools of today, especially urban schools. So we needed to form some new partnerships to help us think differently.
- Jim Griesemer: [07:35](#) Tell me a little bit more about that if you would.
- Ginger Maloney: [07:37](#) Yeah. For example, because of my interest in school leaders, the Donnell Kay Foundation invested in us to help us develop a new program that was really quite different in how we were preparing school leaders. It was a residency-based program, meaning that students were in internships from the, from day one. And it was a challenge to design and develop this program in partnership because that's not the way the University usually does things. So, we were very fortunate to find an excellent partner in Denver public schools. The leadership of the University, DPS and the Donnell Kay Foundation all worked together to create a really state-of-the-art program that enabled us to teach in a much more integrated way to, we knew that learning occurs best and sticks best when people learn, apply, learn again, apply and, and have this iterative loop of learning, so that's really hard to do in the way universities are structured. So we were able to break some rules and get a program going that has made a really big difference in Denver public schools.
- Jim Griesemer: [09:12](#) Well, so there were some challenges facing the school when you came in. You mentioned partners.

What other ways did you approach those challenges in other, in what other ways?

Ginger Maloney: [09:26](#)

Well, we certainly also needed resources. The College simply didn't produce enough revenue to have much leftover to invest in new ventures. So it was clear to me that fundraising would be a fairly major part of my, my role. And so fundraising has to have something that you start with. You have to have a vision, an idea, a story to tell. So I understood that we needed to get a few new programs launched, but also that we needed to get the community engaged and caring about our College of Ed. So we started a series of conversations with leaders from the community, from the University, we talked to board members, we talked to faculty, we talked to students, and we asked the simple question, what makes a college education great? And then what would it take for Morgridge for at that point we weren't Morgridge, just the College of Ed, to be truly a great college of education. So, that energized people that got them excited about what we could be. And the message was loud and clear that we needed to be an engaged College of Education out in the community, making a difference for kids and families and the community agencies, libraries, counseling agencies that we were preparing professionals to go into.

Jim Griesemer: [11:02](#)

Well, this was in many ways at least a shift of the traditional paradigm of, of schools of education. I know that there were many elements to this. We've just covered it in a very brief way, but what were some of the, what were some of the outcomes? What, what were the results of these sort of multifaceted, layered efforts that you were making?

Ginger Maloney: [11:28](#)

Well, I think we as I said, made a difference in Denver public schools in terms of, many of the folks who were prepared in our program have become top leaders in DPS. And that really turned around schools. We now grade schools and so they're we can see, we can really measure those those changes. We also started the Buell early childhood

leadership program and there was, there were no other programs except maybe one in the country that worked to prepare people to be leaders in the field of early childhood, which has really exploded onto the scene from both a policy perspective, certainly under our current governor. But it has really expanded over the last 20 years and there were no people prepared to lead in that field. Both from a policy perspective but also from leading state agencies, leading community groups.

Ginger Maloney: [12:31](#)

So it gives me a great thrill to see how many of the people who went through the Buell Early Childhood Leadership program are sitting in state leadership roles now. So I think that gives us a strong sense of what kind of a difference we've made. Also our educational leadership program, which started, I knew enough about organizational change to know that sometimes you start with like a little protected innovation but then that innovation, if it's successful can have influence on the broader program or organization. And that is indeed what happened. So the Ritchie program is now kind of the model for almost all of our leadership development and it's now been recognized as one of the top 30 programs in the country by US News and World Report. So we feel really good about that. A lot of our Boettcher teachers are out there in the community continuing a great retention rate for very talented young teachers to stay in the field. So yeah, lots of, lots of,

Jim Griesemer: [13:49](#)

Lots of lots of academic innovation, lots of outreach to the community. In the midst of all that I know you also constructed a major new facility. Could you tell us about that?

Ginger Maloney: [14:05](#)

Yeah, well the fields that are covered by the College of Ed, which aren't just, you know, education as we know it, but higher education, library and information science, research and evaluation, all those programs are under the College of Ed. So we have quite a diverse group of faculty and stakeholders, but our, those fields have just

transformed over the last 20 to 30 years. And yet our facilities were still quite dated. It's, you know, the buildings we were in,

Jim Griesemer: [14:37](#)

That's a very kind description.

Ginger Maloney: [14:37](#)

They weren't exactly the shining lights of the campus. And we really weren't able to prepare people the way we wanted to with the kind of facilities where we could, for example, videotape counseling sessions so students could actually watch themselves and learn maybe where they needed to make some changes in their approach to clients. We needed a facility where we had high-end technology because it's hard to imagine, but back in 2001 when I became Dean the internet was really just starting to explode and was beginning to affect the way we taught significantly.

Ginger Maloney: [15:25](#)

So, we needed facilities that gave us the opportunity to take advantage of technology. Also, we, I wanted a facility that invited the community to come in and see learning in action. I wanted a transparent feeling. So when people walked in the building, they felt learning. And I remember taking a, the team of architects to a preschool, which was the first time the University architects had visited another preschool other than the Rick's center, because I wanted them to capture the feeling of a preschool classroom, the engagement, the flexibility, the, the joy in learning that you feel in a preschool education classroom. So we tried to capture that in the new building. We also wanted to make sure there were collaborative spaces because schools are encouraging collaborative learning and universities and so our students needed to experience that and have space for that. So a lot of the design incorporated, collaborative learning split spaces.

Jim Griesemer: [16:40](#)

Now you're not only build the College of Education building, which is very a major facility on our campus, but you were also engaged with the, what has become the Fisher Early Learning Center

hearkening back to perhaps your early exposure. Could you talk about that one a little bit?

Ginger Maloney: [16:57](#)

Sure. Well, the, the building had actually been built when I started, but the program was only one year old. And I had never been involved in actually running a preschool, which was part of the reason why I wanted to start the Buell Early Childhood Leadership program. It is challenging. And so we went through a couple of years of financially rocky times. Preschool education is not a viable business model. But luckily the University was very supportive and helped us through the rough times until we found a stable financial footing for the Fisher Early Learning Center. The center was designed to build, to meet both community needs for high quality childcare, to be a model demonstration site for educating our students and for potentially having placements for students in our program, but also to serve the childcare needs of the campus. That was perhaps too big a ticket to fill. And so we, we did our best, but it, it was a limited program. It is, however, accredited by the National Association of the Education of Young Children and is recognized nationally as a model for the inclusion of children with disabilities in a regular preschool setting.

Jim Griesemer: [18:28](#)

Well, I know from personal grandchild experience what a wonderful facility it is. The, the time that you were at the Morgridge College was a time of, of wonderful growth and the College continues to do very well. It really was an important part of, of the University of Denver's tide of renewal. I'd like to take a moment and move from the University of Denver specifically to talk about Colleges of Education and a little more general way. In recent years there's been some criticism of Colleges of Education generally across the country and questions like, why are Colleges of Education necessary? How do they add value? What do they provide? What are your thoughts on that?

Ginger Maloney: [19:21](#)

Yeah. Well, in my opinion, teaching is probably one of the most complex acts that any human being can perform. And that's because teaching requires someone to not only know information, but to apply it and to integrate learning about how children develop, how children and adults learn, how they learn specific content areas. You need to understand the subject you're teaching profoundly enough to have it make sense to someone else. You have to be able to take advantage of what we call teachable moments. Like when is someone receptive to learning? And you have to constantly keep in mind the ways that poverty, language differences, socioeconomic factors can play in young learners' lives. And what kinds of outcomes that can produce. All in the act day after day after day with groups of, of people, whatever age they are. To me, that requires someone who is not just able to teach, but who was themselves an inspired learner.

Ginger Maloney: [20:40](#)

Which, to me, universities are the place where that kind of inspiration can happen. An inspiration that comes from exposure to great minds, to people who think big thoughts to people who deeply understand their subject matter because they're researchers. So if you're preparing to be a teacher in the context of a University, you have exposure to all kinds of things that you wouldn't get if you were simply apprenticed, say to a school district it can work. But it's not where great teachers come from. Great teachers really come from people who have a broad perspective on the socioeconomic factors that affect education. And that comes from hanging out in a place where that kind of interdisciplinary work can occur. So I'm a strong advocate for, for keeping Colleges of Education alive and well so that we get the teachers our children deserve.

Jim Griesemer: [21:54](#)

Well, I happen to know that your, your purview on education covers the entire spectrum and including higher education and the same criticisms and even more that have been made of Colleges of Education have been made generally against universities and colleges across, across the country. Questions

related to the cost of course, the value, the social purpose. All these things are, are being questioned. So I guess the question, the larger question from my point of view is do you think universities are fulfilling this, what I consider to be an important social role to promote critical, critical thinking, thoughtful and civil dialogue and so on, prepare people for the world of work also. Do you think, what is your take on, on where universities are in that regard generally?

Ginger Maloney: [22:55](#)

Yeah. Well I think, I guess my answer would be yes and no. Yes, in the sense that I do think universities continue to try to promote open dialogue and bring people to campus who can stimulate conversations that go deeper than perhaps the news media or other vehicles. I remember back when I was starting as Dean, literally my first, the day of my first faculty meeting was 9/11. And that was a major time of trauma for everyone, including faculty and students at the College of Ed. One of the great things that I think Dan Richie did was he launched a series of conversations called bridges to America's future. You probably remember them. They were a terrific vehicle for bringing together folks from the University and outside speakers to look at issues in American society. New things were impacting us in waves and in truly engaged faculty, students, people from the community in deep conversation.

Ginger Maloney: [24:25](#)

Because each one of the lectures was followed by either you had readings or there were ways to sustain the learning. And I thought that was a terrific example of how colleges and universities can meet a need for critical dialogue. On the other hand I worry. I do think things are much more polarized now. That conversation is getting more difficult to hold even at universities because of the kind of like polarization of people's opinions, very strong opinions, which make it difficult to have conversations and learn from one another. I think universities are continuing to contribute though through some of the research. And I was excited to

learn, again, this is an outcome from the College Ed, that we've been able to start recently a center for rural health and education. And that program just received a multi-million dollar grant from the Colorado Health Foundation to do work out in rural Colorado to improve health and education outcomes for kids.

Ginger Maloney: [25:44](#)

So, that to me is a real contribution. One of our faculty members who came on as an endowed chair as part of the capital campaign, we were able to get a very generous gift from Jim Cox Kennedy to name two or I think it's three endowed chairs. Two of those endowed chairs have developed a curriculum for teaching math to young children. And that curriculum has now been adopted by the state of Tennessee as their preschool curriculum. Because the research shows that actually early learning of math is a better predictor of academic achievement than early literacy. So obviously you do both, but too many preschool teachers really don't know how to teach math. And what these two folks Doug Clemens and his wife Julie Sarama have done is really help preschools understand the importance of math.

Jim Griesemer: [26:50](#)

Their work is really remarkable and it reflects the kinds of research that's being done at the Morgridge College of Education and other schools of education around the country. As you alluded earlier there are major changes going on in higher education. I'd be interested in your view about the impact of those changes on the traditional academy that you and I grew up with. Traditions like faculty tenure, sabbatical leaves, the academic calendar, you know, originally based on the planting season. What, what is your view of, of the changes in terms of its of their likely impacts on these kinds of traditions in the academy?

Ginger Maloney: [27:42](#)

Well, I think there already are enormous changes particularly maybe in some schools that aren't traditional universities. I do know that when we were trying to do innovative programming at the

College of Ed that we ran into a lot of barriers including the academic year because when we were working with a community partner they needed us to work according to their calendar, which created lots of interesting issues for our registrar, financial aid office to try to get our students started earlier because that's when the school year started. So universities, and luckily I had the support of the provost and the chancellor who supported our needs to be innovative and helped move the administration to support those changes. So now programs like that are absolutely essential year-round programs. College of Ed has a large summer enrollment. And I think things like sabbaticals continue to be important. It's hard to afford them given the pressures on cost. Universities are supporting faculty to do research, it's an essential function and yet supporting that primarily through tuition, which is necessary if grants aren't available in someone's field is, is very costly. So I don't know what the solution will be, but I certainly hope that we don't lose the ability to blend research and teaching and have a faculty that is again, who are themselves inspired learners because I think that's what makes a great teacher.

Jim Griesemer: [29:45](#)

Well, I, I certainly share your view. I guess the question is how can we affirm the value of exposure to liberal arts? As the Dean of a business school our College was preparing people to take leadership roles in, in the business community. And yet we often advise parents to have their, their son or daughter take a liberal arts undergraduate degree and then blend in and take an MBA or a finance degree or whatever. So I certainly share your view, but how can we affirm that going forward in this world of, of great change? What are your, what are your thoughts?

Ginger Maloney: [30:28](#)

Well, I know how grateful I am for the fact that I had a liberal arts undergraduate education, which exposed me to things well beyond what my profession turned out to be. As an example, I took classes in architectural history and now that I'm

retired I have taken up that interest again and I actually taught a class for the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute on residential architecture in the U S. So in terms of it being a life enriching experience, I, I, there's nothing that can do what a liberal arts education can do. I think that people are still developing when they, we now know that brain development continues throughout life, but a major period of brain development is between 15 and 25 when lots of cognitive changes are taking place and to expose our students to a range of ways of thinking is essential so that they can then first of all, find the way that is best for them, but also when they enter a profession to have a broader view of the social context of their work, to understand the history of both their fields but also the culture of there'll be working in.

Ginger Maloney: [31:59](#)

So I know that from a financial point of view, it's hard to sell both parents and students today in liberal arts education. But it pays off in the long run in creating a richer, better, and I don't mean just financially, but, but in all ways, a human being who can handle the transitions that are coming in our culture more flexibly, can think differently and can make career changes, which appear to be the way of the future.

Jim Griesemer: [32:39](#)

I really appreciate your views on higher education generally and in your story your, your sharing the really remarkable journey of the Morgridge College under your leadership and since. I'd like to shift gears just once more and ask you to reflect on in a sort of a personal way. You dealt with many challenges and opportunities as the Dean of the College. As you, as you dealt with those things, what were your, what were the values that guided you? What was the sort of keel that allowed you to deal with these kinds of things and what did you think as you went along?

Ginger Maloney: [33:26](#)

Yeah, well, I think one core value was keeping children and families at the core of our work. That there are a lot of adult issues that come up when

you're dealing with organizational change. But to constantly remember why we were in business, which was to really improve outcomes for children, adults and families. I think it was important to respect all the stakeholders at the College. And we had many, many stakeholders because of the variety of programs that we offered. And in some cases the stakeholders weren't in agreement. But I always respected the importance of listening to all the viewpoints as to what we should do, what changes needed to be made. And always being respectful of the faculty in particular for the work that they had done preceding my tenure to create terrific programs for our students. I think I, you know, really believed in the importance of engagement with the community that we needed to bring people who could teach both practice, who had real experience out in the community and blend that with faculty who had a rich understanding from the research that they were doing from the study that they had done.

Ginger Maloney: [35:03](#)

And finding that balance, particularly to prepare professionals you needed to respect both types of folks who were going to contribute to the preparation of our students. So personal authenticity was important to me. Integrity being who I was and bringing that to my everyday interactions with people.

Jim Griesemer: [35:32](#)

Well, Ginger Maloney, thank you so much for contributing to our University of Denver oral history and sharing the insights that you bring drawn from the role that you played helping to really transform University of Denver. I hope that she'll join us in the future as we continue the story of the University of Denver's remarkable Renaissance. I'm Jim Griesemer. Thank you for watching.