

Daniel Gerlowski Interview

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SPEAKERS

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Interviewee: Daniel Gerlowski

Courtney Trang

This is Courtney Trang. And it is May 4th, 2023, at 9am or 9:15. I'm with Professor Daniel Gerlowski via the online zoom platform. We're going to begin our oral history interview for the University of Baltimore stories, the 100th Anniversary Oral History Project. The purpose of this project is to celebrate the university's centennial by preserving the memory of those influenced by the University of Baltimore over the years. We will be creating a digital archive and exhibit and making these recordings available online.

Daniel Gerlowski

Please call me Dan.

Courtney Trang

Yes, absolutely. And again, it's nice to meet you. Um, let's talk about, you know, where you were born, where you went to school and just kind of start from there.

Daniel Gerlowski

I was born in a suburb of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1960. I grew up in a small town called Carnegie, Pennsylvania, which is between Pittsburgh and the airport.

Daniel Gerlowski

It was a great life. We were poor. All my friends were poor. It gave me something to learn from and move forward with. I did the normal things in high school. I went to college, I graduated from the University of Pittsburgh, and I returned there for a PhD. And my PhD is from Pitt in 1986.

Courtney Trang

What was your major?

Daniel Gerlowski

I have a PhD in economics. Yes. I love economics. I'd loved it from day one. And at the time, it looked better than a law career to me. I was accepted, actually, to every law school I applied to. And I applied to some top ones. The decision to go into academics was the right choice for me.

Courtney Trang

Yeah, for sure. Did you come straight to UB, or did you go anywhere else?

Daniel Gerlowski

I came to UB, and I've been here since about 1986. I'm sorry, my PhD was earned in 1986. I think I said another year, but it's been a great place I haven't done one job at UB, I've done many jobs. I have done early in my career a sort of a regional economic studies piece. I was an associate dean. I was interim dean for a year. I was Associate Dean for many years following that. And I have just looked at it like this month I'm doing this, next month I'm doing that. Now I tend to favor service activities that I'm interested in.

Courtney Trang

Okay.

Daniel Gerlowski

You'll see me on curriculum things and here and there. On the personal side I've had, I was married with two kids. And early on. Unfortunately, that marriage didn't last. I married a second time in 2006. And unfortunately, my wife passed. Now I live in Ellicott City with my wife. She's a keeper if she watches this ever. She's a keeper. And we have a great life together. We're blessed with enough money. We're blessed most importantly with our health.

Courtney Trang

That's important.

Daniel Gerlowski

We try to be active. We get outside and do things like going to the gym. Because you know, the more you do that, the less health problems you have.

Courtney Trang

Very true. Very true.

Daniel Gerlowski

That's what that's what I do. That's who I am. I've written two textbooks early on. There's a textbook published by then Prentice Hall, which is now Pearson. We did a European version of that textbook. And surprise one day in the mail, unsolicited, came four copies of that textbook translated into Slovakian. I had no idea until we got them in the mail. But there. That was fascinating to me. A month after the copyright expired, boom, there it is. Wow. So that was fun. I've had a lot of success in research activities. Nowhere near some of my colleagues. But you know, you have to do research to stay current. And I figure I've got 15 years left. Good lord willing and the creek don't rise, right?

Courtney Trang

So, how have you seen the university change over the years since from the 80s to now?

Daniel Gerlowski

We used to joke that the university wasn't really a university. It was a real estate company. Because the president at the time, Mebane Turner was very real estate oriented. We, I think we began from one building, which is now the academic center. At one point, it was a car dealership. And another little-known fact about that building is it used to have a swimming pool in the ground or in the basement level, that was where they put the Jacob France Institute. And now I imagine its public safety is in there now. But things changed, new buildings come up.

The Merrick school building was the Thumell Business Center was built, and it was state of the art. And you know what, it still basically is now we're in the shadow of law school building, which has a lot of technology, a lot of neat features, architecturally, it's marvelous. Maybe someday they'll let others teach in that building just for the heck of it. And it offers the best view on campus, right? You want to see them, you want to see the university go up to the top floor over there and look around. So we have different students now we went from a, we flirted with the idea of full time students over the course of our history, right? Now, when numbers were big, we had a lot of them. Our core was probably always the working adults. And you know, you had people back in the day. Sounds so old now. But you had people working all day.

Coming here for class at 530. Staying for a second class at 815. Going home and getting up and going to work again. Are you surprised that students like online learning? I mean, there's no good alternative for many of them. I think we do online learning very well here in the Merrick school. So, it's funny, a lot of schools struggled when COVID hit and they shut down. We were ready. I spent a lot of time talking to colleagues and public affairs and arts and sciences. Well, how do you do that? You know, step one, turn the camera on step two, be ready, you know? Do the best you can, you'll figure it out. And then the students were very forgiving, as well. We were all in the same boat. That was nice.

Courtney Trang

Yes, that was nice. When we went to you know, we went from an upper division university to a four-year institution, you know, how did your classes change? How did you...

Daniel Gerlowski

I tend to look at things with an irony to them. Freshmen were coming and they were preparing for the freshmen and adding courses and adding support staff and doing this and doing that. And in the business school, the question came up who's going to teach these freshmen and the answer came up, Gerlowski. And I asked why, and they said because on your resume, you said that you were a Scoutmaster. And I was a Scoutmaster for 10 years. And they said if you can deal with Boy Scouts, you can deal with freshmen. So, you take what you do, you adjust it and you learn from them and they learn from you. You hope.

Courtney Trang

Yeah, for sure.

Daniel Gerlowski

Now freshmen is freshman and sophomore is a smaller part of what we do.

Courtney Trang

Yeah. It's kind of not the new thing anymore.

Daniel Gerlowski

Not the new thing anymore. No. We're looking for the next new things and when you know what it is, tell us, please

Courtney Trang

Have you come across any students that stuck out of your mind over the years?

Daniel Gerlowski

Yes. And you're going to ask me their names, and I'm going to say, I don't know.

Courtney Trang

That's- the stories are good.

Daniel Gerlowski

There was one student that I met him on the way to the commencement exercise. And he pulled me aside and he thanked me for whatever I had taught him. He wasn't a special student. He wasn't demanding by any means, but he thanked me for treating him like everybody else. And he told me a story of a time when he and his father were together. And his father asked him, how many windows does his building have? And the kid counted the windows, and the father smacked him and said, no, that's wrong.

Because there's a backside and two sides of that building, you only counted the windows in front. And he said, Gerlowski, you made me think in a much better way than my father, that there's another side of that building. And I take that as a huge win. We had so many students standing out, it's really hard to identify them. Yes. Now the ones that stand out tend to be the ones that are technically inclined. Students who are good with numbers, good with Excel, know a little bit of Python, can make graphs and tell the story behind them. Those are the ones that stick out. And the good news is, there's plenty of them. And that's what the world needs now. And I think we're doing our best to produce them.

Courtney Trang

Absolutely. How about colleagues over the years, memories with colleagues, things that stand out?

Daniel Gerlowski

I'm one of the rare people here, in that all my memories of colleagues are good. You work with people, let's face it, a lot of the faculty have been here 20 years, 15 years. You gravitate towards certain ones, and they gravitate towards you either because you pester them enough that they become your friend or

whatever they figure they're helping you you're helping them. There's a lot of really smart people here on the faculty side, the student's side, the administrative side.

Everybody's got pluses and minuses. We have a lot of pluses. I have great friends here from long ago. I'm friends with Professor Korb. Friends with some relatively new arrivals here. From the management department, there's a couple that we know by name, Bill Carter and Amir Pezeshkan, friends of mine, coworkers, but I consider them friends. And I know, I hope they consider me a friend as well. But there's a lot of relationships, a lot of deep relationships, we're a collegial place. Most of the time. We have outliers, right. But, of course, most of the time we're in a collegial place.

Courtney Trang

Any standout memories, anything?

Daniel Gerlowski

There's a lot of good memories, a lot of interesting things that's happened. As a young faculty, I witnessed us getting our first AACSB accreditation. That was phenomenal because even as a young faculty, you could understand the requirements were pretty daunting. You can think of deans coming and goings, you can think of presidents coming and going. I'm of the belief that the administrators come and go and the faculty stays.

And if you take that view of things, it explains quite a lot. Meb Turner, the first president, was an incredibly insightful man. He is full of funny stories. Bob Bogomolny came and Bob Bogomolny had a vision. He acted on his vision. Bogomolny has since gone away. I wish him well in his endeavors. And we have Kurt Schmoke here now. Kurt Schmoke is a wonderful human being. He listens to everybody. When he came here, I think he was here a year or two he invited me to a Boy Scout banquet. And I asked him why he invited me and he goes well, you know we have these tickets and you're in scouting and I said he said so am I said yes sir.

But I don't think you've ever crawled out of a tent into the mud. Have you and he goes no, not for like 30 years and I said I have. He said you'll fit right in at that banquet, dinner, whatever it was for. A woman approached him, an older woman who was- she got half of her name out. And Kurt remembered her full name. Remembered when he was the mayor of Baltimore, that he did something to get the streetlights turned on her Street. He remembered it. She remembered it. And it was just so joyous to see. Our president is a wonderful man. He's going to lead us kicking and screaming right into the next whatever's next for this institution. And we wish him well.

Courtney Trang

How about achievements of yours over the years? So, things that you're proud of at the university?

Daniel Gerlowski

There's a Nobel Laureate. His name is Ronald Coase. Coasean economics. And I actually shook Ronald Coase' hand at a conference, not on campus, but in a meeting in Chicago. And he knew I had written a textbook with a fellow who's no longer here, his name was Zoltan Acs. And we were at an Educators Conference something in Chicago at the AEA meeting. Ronald Coase has read our book.

And he took the time to learn about the University of Baltimore. And he said, that sounds like a fascinating place. And he said, If I live long enough, maybe I can come and join you there. And I said, we had an office ready for him. Yes. But he never came. But we don't need Ronald Coase. We have Phil Korb and, we have Jerry Yu and we have Hoang Nguyen, we'll compete just fine. Thank you.

Courtney Trang

Nice. Have you, throughout your career, published scholarly articles? Did the University of Baltimore help you in your authoring journey?

Daniel Gerlowski

I have published some really nice articles over the time. Early on, I was very interested in where do foreign firms locate their activities and assets in the US? And we got lucky with that question, because it was an important question at the time. And that led to many publications. We've done other research on locational issues. That's probably what I'm mostly cited for. I took a brief time and spent time learning about smoking policy. And because I was interested in it. I'm sitting here in this job, and I had two kids that were teenagers, you don't want them to smoke.

And it's sort of on your mind. So, we published some articles on the role of taxation and cigarettes, which I think are pretty impactful. Lately, I've gotten into small business issues. And I've worked with a colleague here named Ting Zhang. And we've been doing some papers, right now we're trying to package one up that has to do with the levels and incidents of anxiety and depression arising during COVID. So again, I have the luxury of finding interesting topics and interesting datasets. It's the payoff for being a full professor, I think.

Courtney Trang

Yeah, yeah. It's interesting.

Daniel Gerlowski

I'll send you a copy. Yes.

Courtney Trang

Yes, please do. I'm actually very interested. Um, you've seen a lot of changes in the way the teaching gets done, and in the way that the institution organizes itself. What observations would you like to share about those changes as UB moves forward?

Daniel Gerlowski

There's no shortage of observations ever is there?

Courtney Trang

No.

Daniel Gerlowski

I think that online education is tough to do well. I think people have a vision that you just go there, you do this, you log off, and you're done. If you can figure out how to do it that way. I'd love to know. Would

you share it, please? You know, we began with chalkboards. Here. When we went to the whiteboard, we went to PowerPoint. We went online. And now we're mixing all of the above. Except the chalkboards, it's all whiteboards now. It's very interesting, it's very useful. I had a wonderful experience when I taught at the Jessup Correctional Institute. Here I am, an older guy, relatively speaking, ah, volunteering, but being- well, I was paid to go, but. I ended up getting most of the money back, don't record that.

You're in prison, you're teaching guys in prison. And guess what I found when I got there, I found the PowerPoint display screen. And I found a bunch of white magic markers. So, it was a step back. But it made me understand, you know, those students at that time did not have the internet. So, you couldn't tell them to go find some data? Go read this. You had to bring it in. So, it was back in the past, but it really made me think about what they really need to learn? And what can you give them to help them learn? You're not going to turn a group of people in the Correctional Institute into entrepreneurs overnight. You're not going to turn them into social workers overnight.

So, you got a piece of it. And part of the trick that I learned is how do you fit your piece and all the other ones? That's what I went for. And it was the best teaching experience I've ever had. Now, I didn't sleep two days before I went in. I get that up in the open. It was rough. Because what do you know, but you know, people that went there and taught and they're telling you, everything's fine. And I didn't believe them, no. And they're telling well, you get stuck in there overnight, you know, if the big alarm goes off, and they have to shut down, it never happened to me. I would probably get a really good night's sleep. If I was stuck in there. You feel safe.

Courtney Trang

That's a good point. I've got a four-year-old and a two-year-old, I can imagine. That'll be a nice night's sleep actually.

Daniel Gerlowski

Yeah, it's coming. But you know, our faculty. We have research experts. We have some really smart people, really talented people, but everybody has that. Here, in the Merrick School. Most of those people get involved in other things. They're willing to talk about curriculum, they're willing to talk about how this happens. How that happens, how can we make it. Now, they don't always agree. But they're willing to talk. Right? And they, we have some stellar researchers who bring themselves you know, and then they're humble. So, I'm not a stellar researcher. But they figure well, maybe Dan knows something. Because maybe I asked them, what do they know? And I think that's the relationships here that make things go.

I think we have the people. We're changing the programs more and more frequently. I would love to be in our undergraduate BSPA, BS program. You're picking up Python, you're picking up data analytic skills, you're applying them in different disciplines. Where were you back in 1979 when I was in college, right? I had the Fortran on the punch of the Fortran language on punch cards. That's what I had. It's hard to connect with that, you know?

Courtney Trang

Absolutely. I mean, the amount of things that are at people's fingertips now even, I mean, I grew up in the 90s. And even from then to now is like, you know, going from Dewey Decimal System in the library, or anything at home.

Daniel Gerlowski

But Courtney, I have to tell you something I got to put on my professor hat. Those things are just tools. You know, they can change your life, they change this, they can change that. You can ignore them. But their tools at the end of the day, it's there. That's what, that's what I try to keep in mind, I don't know how my cell phone works on every feature. That's what sons and stepsons are for. I can figure out the TV remote, you know, I can figure this out in Excel. I can knock your socks off, right. But it's a tool.

Courtney Trang

It's a tool. You're right. And that's what I- I mean, my own personal experience that you be with my professors in the criminal justice department. I feel like UB, just in general, all of the professor's here are, they're teaching what they're experts at. Like we have people who have been in the field. And you know, they've come to UB and they're like doing what they're teaching. And that's just fantastic. I think that's one of the things that makes up very. It just sets us apart.

Daniel Gerlowski

It surely does.

Courtney Trang

Um, actually, I think we've kind of gone a lot over it.

Daniel Gerlowski

Now you hit a big theme right on the head that's percolating through a lot of faculty and a lot of administrators here. And I'll use old language. The old language is that a college, a university experiences by definition, lots of general knowledge, lots of general education, language, abstract mathematics. And in about 1985, people looked at business schools with disdain. You're not really part of the club. And, boy, you're a vocational school. You're no good. You don't belong in the university. You're a second-tier citizen. I'm proud to say after 20 years, that's starting to change, you know?

Courtney Trang

Yeah, absolutely.

Daniel Gerlowski

And it's what the market wants. It's not what the market wants to know what the market needs. And we give it to students in the Merrick School.

Courtney Trang

Absolutely. And especially as we come up to our centennial, we're just kind of moving right into everything that's happening.

Daniel Gerlowski

Give us I think, give us the next 100 years.

Courtney Trang

Yeah, exactly.

Daniel Gerlowski

Yes, give it to us. We'll take it. So, is that good?

Courtney Trang

Yeah, I was going to just ask you, is there anything else that you would like to say about your career as you look back?

Daniel Gerlowski

I loved every minute of it. The students, the colleagues.