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Oral History Interview with Janice Bellace: Conceptualising SMU

Janice BELLACE

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Singapore Management University

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Conceptualising SMU: The People and Ideas behind the SMU Story

Interviewee: Janice Bellace

Interviewer: Patricia Meyer

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Pat Meyer: When was Wharton first contacted by a contingent from Singapore?

Janice Bellace: I believe it was about late 1996 or early 1997. What I was told at the time was that Singapore had embarked on a strategic plan, one aspect of which was to make Singapore the education hub of South East Asia and that that meant that Singapore both would want to attract foreigners into Singapore to avail themselves of higher education services and also that internally they wanted to increase the percentage of the cohort going to university themselves. Partly because the economy in Singapore had changed so much that it sold as a service economy, it really wanted to increase the percentage of young people going to university. So it was both that was happening and that the Wharton school had been contacted because Singapore was interested in bringing in an outside institution to run a business school of its own.

Pat Meyer: Who did you meet from Singapore? And when was that?

Janice Bellace: I first came in the summer of 1997 and I came because we had been approached and we should seriously consider this invitation. And I was going to be in Asia, going up to Hong Kong and the dean of the Wharton School said to me, "Why don't you go down to Singapore first and meet people?" And so I came down here and in my very first visit in about three days I saw so much, I now laugh about how much I saw.

Pat Meyer: And what was the idea for that institution at that point?

Janice Bellace: The Wharton School has a very large undergraduate programme and an MBA programme and a doctoral programme and we're part of a large university. So when visiting us obviously, they became more aware of what we do and that led to an invitation to formally collaborate on the establishment of an undergraduate business school. And in January of 1998, an agreement was signed and I was present for this so two people came over to sign the agreement which was a Memorandum of Understanding that the Wharton School would assist in the formation of an undergraduate business school. So that was signed in Philadelphia and I was there.

Pat Meyer: And why was Wharton interested?

Janice Bellace: Oh we just, at the point I think, we were interested in expanding our international engagement and Singapore was interesting to us, partly because it was in South East Asia and secondly because it is English-speaking, it's a huge plus. Also, one of our very prominent alumni John Huntsman Junior, the Huntsman family is quite prominent, but John Junior had been the US Ambassador to Singapore around 1990, 1991 and he had always maintained very good contacts with people. So he was one person who brought

this and said, "You really should consider this". He's now the US; right now he's the US Ambassador to China, John Junior. So we said, "Of course, we'll explore." So, that was one reason.

The second reason was we had wanted - when I say engagement, we did not want to run another campus somewhere but we did want a place where we could have faculty do research and learn much more about the economy and culture, about parts of Asia and so Singapore seemed a natural.

Pat Meyer: When you talked about signing the agreement for the research centre?

Janice Bellace: What happened in March is I was contacted about my ability to serve as a special advisor to the Chairman of the board on certain terms and I emailed back that I would be pleased to do that but that I was stepping down as deputy dean. This was to Ho Kwon Ping. I wrote back and said, "You would have no idea I'm stepping down as deputy dean and I'm having scholarly leave for next year, what's owed me."

Pat Meyer: This was independent?

Janice Bellace: Independent. So I said perhaps, so I would be happy to do what you were asking and I have the time to do it but you might want the person who's the deputy dean of the Wharton School, and if that's the case, I understand completely. And then 48 hours later, I got an email saying essentially well then we'll make you this offer and the offer was would you be the first president.

Pat Meyer: Can you tell us about the transition from your role as an advisor to this university project to becoming the leader?

Janice Bellace: It was sort of a real immersion. In other words, the day I arrived, there were 14 issues plopped on my desk to solve.

Firstly, we had no offices. The organizing committee was physically located in a room, one large room admittedly, of Wah Chang House, the chairman's offices. And they couldn't get one more person in there. So one thing that had to be done very very quickly was to find for a two year period, let's say, the administrative home of the university. So I remember going around, not knowing Singapore that well, but going around looking at possible places so we could sign the lease. That was [how] we ended up in Goldbell Towers.

Another one, though and this was truly major, it had been assumed that we would be able to go into what was then the National Institute of Education, NIE, which was at what was called the Bukit Timah campus. And so in June of 1999, it was assumed, up until a few months before, that NIE would move out rather quickly and somehow this could be renovated, or at least some part of it could be renovated quickly so that we could start

students in June of 2000. So we go out to NIE and are told that, "This is completely impossible because their new building had been delayed." Once again I remembered, it was a day when it poured rain very, very heavily. It was just like, "It's impossible." So once again, where would we be? Secondly it was evident to me upon visiting NIE that it would need very substantial renovation and I mean very substantial. So then the next question is, "Where's our temporary campus?" This became a wonderful question of dealing with the Ministry of Land [should be Urban Redevelopment Authority, URA] and all sorts of things because there isn't that much land in Singapore that was suitable and we would be needing a temporary place, so that was going on. Tan Teck Meng was a wonderful help, so good at negotiating with so many people, just knew everything. Curiously it was the person who was head of NIE at that point, who made the suggestion. He said, "Let me point out a parcel here." He said, "This you think is part of Bukit Timah campus but it is not," and put his finger on the map and that's where our temporary campus called Evans Road was located. But he was the one who identified it. He was very helpful.

The next thing that was going on, all these things were going on simultaneously, the next thing that was going on was of course the planning for the permanent campus, which had started already but there was this issue of where we would be. I strongly wanted a city campus, so in the summer, it must have been July or August, Marina Bay had essentially been offered as a possibility. And I was not the one who suggested Bras Basah Park, I mean I would not have known, but when it was mentioned, as if to say, this is another area that would fit, I said, "Well that would be perfect." Well, the amazing thing is the Government agreed. What I didn't realize is this would, would be so controversial. So that was rather humorous in one way because I didn't realize this.

And also there was another event that occurred. The National Library was located on Stamford Road, and it was being announced right then that the National Library would be torn down, and for their current headquarters, but in the public's mind, because it had just been announced that SMU would be on Bras Basah Park, somehow it became connected that we were also linked to the demolition of the National Library. Actually it [SMU] had nothing to do with it. It had been planned for some time, and had to do also with the tunnel that would be going through Fort Canning Hill. So it was very interesting to encounter that, but I remember going to the old National Library to essentially convey to the librarians that although we had nothing to do with it, we did regret any inconvenience due them. And I still remember, finally someone said, "You do realize, Professor, we're very happy to be moving." And that was very funny, because they were saying that this building is completely inadequate for a modern library of a nation like Singapore and therefore we would have to move to a new building and it has nothing to do with SMU. But that led Tan Teck Meng to realize since they would be our neighbour that at the beginning they could assist in running our library and that was a very fruitful collaboration. So this was all maybe in a two month period.

Pat Meyer: Any risks that you were conscious of as you were taking this step?

Janice Bellace: I felt it was such an exciting opportunity. How many people ever get the opportunity to start something from scratch, that I couldn't imagine not accepting it. That's the way I think I thought at the time. I mean, some people might have thought I was crazy, I'm sure they

did, some of my colleagues thought I was crazy. On the other hand, to say, it's just, it's a unique opportunity. And the decisions that were made in the first year, and they weren't [just] the buildings -- we've been talking about buildings -- but how to structure the faculty, which school to start with, what size classes are you going to have, who are you going to hire, and so many decisions. They're decisions we live with today.

Pat Meyer: Yes, yes, those are some of the points I would like to cover. Who were your initial team of advisors or colleagues that you're working with, how did you get a working team to tackle all these various things?

Janice Bellace: They were really wonderful. I have to say, Tan Teck Meng had organized a very good team, very competent and willing to learn anything. So I'd say, "Well why don't you go to Wharton and talk to the people who do X?" and off they'd be on a plane and would just like a study trip, that's the word that's used here, but do it. So why doesn't somebody go over and look at the curriculum? Why doesn't somebody talk to the IT? Why doesn't somebody look at the admissions etc?

My great difficulty was that we had certain slots that were very difficult to fill here; I'll mention one, Director of Admissions. I'm used to an admissions process in the United States where students apply to more than one university, each university sets its own standards, decides what it wants on an admissions application, and in a sense, one has to sell the university because there's such competition. So Director of Admissions partly is a marketing person, partly has to know how to run a large operation. I'll give you an example, Penn this year had 27000 applications and maybe...well anyway, we'll take in the first year, class of 2500, so I'm used to that but it's a profession in the United States. Here, there was no one. NUS and NTU, at that point had, I don't know the term, Britain calls it UCAS. The students file one application, they didn't interview, they looked at your 'A' Level results and in a very short period of time, you get made an offer, that's it, and the student has no choice. If you don't get what you want, I guess you left Singapore. And it was very close to the start of the year so classes were going to begin in September, I think it was July. So trying to find somebody who could be a Director of Admissions -- there was no one with the background.

Janice Bellace: The level of commitment and energy and people being just very passionate about being involved in something new that was going to change the face of tertiary education in Singapore was palpable.

Pat Meyer: What schools did you expect to be part of this new university? You mentioned that the business school was going to be the one that was started first.

Janice Bellace: I envisioned it as a school, a university that would focus on business and related disciplines and if I had to name another institution that's well known it would be the London School of Economics.

So Accountancy, for instance, was hived off into a separate school, which was what I was not accustomed to, because of the requirements of the profession here, where you have to go through an approved curriculum to be a practicing accountant. The curriculum is such that it would have distorted the business school's curriculum. You see if you were at the Wharton School, you could be an accounting major inside the business curriculum. The courses they take at Wharton, the whole number would not have matched the requirements of the Institute of Chartered Accountants here. So it was easier to set up a separate school.

I know before I left we started to talk about Economics and Social Science. I mean you have to have Economics; you really can't have a business school without Economics. In fact in the United States there are a couple of business schools, more than a couple, but I'm thinking of the University of Chicago, that puts Economics in the business school. Well it fits to some extent, let me just say, Economics and Finance have an overlap, but there are other parts that don't match well. So it made sense to have another school.

I'm a lawyer so obviously I thought of Law but particularly the parts of Law that, much of Law relates to business. If you look at the curriculum of a normal law school, a good part of it relates to business transactions. We won't call that but most lawyers make their living from dealing with businesses not from dealing with individuals. So that would be an example. That took more time and what I'm particularly pleased [about], which worked out by the way, is that there's the JD. In other words when we were discussing this, and I can still remember dinner at the Mandarin Oriental, clearly there would have to be a first degree Bachelors in Law because Singapore is like Britain and it does it that way. But on the other hand there are so many Singaporeans who study abroad. So if you study in the United States, you can't do law as a first degree. I said, "Well what happens when they come home? If they want to be a lawyer in Singapore how do they do this?" And so the JD gives them that opportunity. So that was another school.

We knew we wouldn't have science labs or facilities for engineering, so what is now the School of Information Systems really wasn't very formed in my mind. In fact I met the first dean, the person who turned out to be the first dean, Steve Miller, just a month or two before I was stepping down, we had a connection through Penn, he had gone to Penn. He talked about some ideas. So some of this plays itself out as you talk and you listen and people give you ideas.

Pat Meyer: How did you go about the faculty recruitment and when did that effort start?

Janice Bellace: Almost immediately and that was the most difficult part. At the very beginning in the early '98 and early '99, it was thought that the NUS business school at undergraduate level would close. And therefore only be doctorate and MBA [would remain], I suppose. This would have meant in all likelihood that there would have been experienced faculty available. But that didn't occur such that when I came in, one of the huge problems was where were we going to find enough faculty members.

Very quickly also something else occurred. Tan Teck Meng said that we were supposed to take a thousand students the very first year. And I said, "That's impossible." It just

would be impossible to find enough faculty to teach that many; we'd get off to a very bad start with very mediocre teachers. And by the way, since we weren't getting the NIE site, where would we even put these people? So I remember speaking to Dr Tony Tan on both grounds explaining this and he said, "What number do you see as right?" and I said 300. Actually the Wharton School at that point was only taking in 400 in its first year. So we set it at 300. Even so, you had to recruit [faculty for] a class and well, it was difficult. We put ads out and everybody was using all their contacts and we did lots of interviewing and it was very intense.

Pat Meyer: What qualities were you looking for? What types of faculty?

Janice Bellace: Well the [most important] quality was a commitment to this new vision and a willingness to take the risk -- I would call it the high-risk high-return sort of strategy. And to get people who say, "Yes, I want to be in Singapore and I want to try a university where we're going to have this interactive style of teaching and really have students who were going to be entrepreneurial and articulate and not just regurgitate material. I don't want to do big lectures and I want to have more collaboration among the faculty". I tried to find people like that.

Pat Meyer: The whole process for faculty review, standards, promotions, renewals, all this?

Janice Bellace: I was very accustomed to the fact that if you join as a, usually as a young faculty member, just having received your PhD, you're on a tenure track and you get reviewed at a certain point, then you come up for tenure and you get judged, a very full evaluation. I mean I just knew the whole process. As a Deputy Dean, you run those processes. And the Wharton School right now, for instance, has 219 full-time research faculty. One year, we brought 20 in at one time, so we certainly know this and the ranks and each discipline and different pay-scales by discipline and all these sorts of things. So that was easy for me because I could see the whole thing in my head.

But what was very different was that at NUS and NTU, let's say in 1999, you only had external evaluation or external review of persons when they came up for full professor, and following the British system, there were very few full professors, very very few full professors. So it meant that most people spent their entire academic life never having an external review, that's one thing.

And the second thing was they didn't have a system that's called "up or out", in other words, so you came and you stayed seven or ten years and you didn't get tenure but you just stayed. There seemed to be almost no consequence of not receiving tenure. So when I put into effect the three ranks in the system, it was a very big change.

Pat Meyer: Were you involved in inviting people to the board of trustees or putting names forth for the board of trustees?

Janice
Bellace: I was involved to the extent that I asked if there could be non-Singaporeans which was happening at that time in Singapore and for the first time. And they said, "Yes and who do you have in mind," and I said I'd like two academics because I feel it would be important to have people with experience in universities and business schools from outside of Singapore. So I did suggest John Niland who's still on our board and a very important... I knew John, we're in the same field, not just being in university, but we're actually in the same field. And I knew he had just stepped down from being the Vice Chancellor of the University of New South Wales and Australia's not too far. And I suggested another person who had just stepped down from being a dean of a business school in the US and I had known him from the Wharton School where he'd been deputy dean and that's Ron Frank. So when I suggested that I had no idea that ten years later how this would...once again what would happen. But they said yes and those were the two. The other names were [taken] I guess [from] the organizing committee and the government had its ideas.

Pat Meyer: As you were going through this planning, did you have much interaction with the MOE? Can you describe that?

Janice
Bellace: The government was willing to let us embark on a new admissions process and I said that if you were trying to create more entrepreneurs and innovators in Singapore, one could not rely solely on your 'A' level grades. Now since Singapore is very exam conscious I think this was another major surprise to them. But the point I made is, I said, "If you're looking for a great chemist, your 'A' level grade in chemistry will be a very good predictor but if you're looking for the next entrepreneur to I don't know, to start a hamburger chain or whatever, this is not that great a predictor so you have to look for some other factors." And they discussed at length how we do it in the United States and they were willing to try. And they were very concerned and I can see this, that it be perceived as fair, because a system that's just based on 'A' level grades as it was maybe 15 years ago is very transparent. So if you say, no we're taking into other things into consideration, for instance your interview results, that's not as transparent, so you could see there was some concern about how would this be.

Pat Meyer: When you were talking to people within education or talking to the media how did you represent SMU with respect to the other two universities? How did you explain what it was trying to do or position it relative to the programmes of the other universities?

Janice
Bellace: Originally it was easy because, moving to the American model of education with this idea of a different type of curriculum, more broad-based in the first two years particularly before one focuses was very, very different than NTU and NUS. Another difference would be the size of the classes. We use the word interactive. In the United States if you said that people would look at you and say, "What do you mean?" Instead of lectures, more traditional classroom formats, this is much more talking back and forth, projects, internships, much greater focus on leadership which was one of our exciting first year courses; remind me to come back to that. So I think those were some of the differences.

Happily, I have to say, an impact of SMU is that the arrival of a third university which broke the mould, if I could use that term [was that] the other two sort of sat up and changes were made. Now of course both of them changed at the top and had other changes but I think competition spurred innovation at all three universities. And another thing I wanted and I hoped this continues was that all three, and now five, but that they don't have to be clones, but let's get to size, I was very much against another 15000 student university. I said you have two big universities, why not have one that's somewhat small. I said Princeton is much smaller than Cornell, much, much smaller in fact. And so once again there was this idea; how big should a university be. And instead of being out on a beautiful campus, not that ours isn't beautiful at SMU, but it's a city campus, so this idea there should be some real differences so that students have a choice.

Well of course I come from a business school and I certainly see advertising as a way of getting your message across. But in the very first year, it was extremely important because we didn't have the visibility in Singapore. So we needed students to apply and to do that you had to have an image, and a very distinctive image. So I do remember interviewing various advertising companies to work on this. This one I really liked because it says "Aspire to lead" with the fish and the koi leading upwards. And that's what I was looking for in our first students, remember these students, I said they are our pioneer class and they would have a different spirit and they would be willing to take this challenge and do something that was quite different, so I thought this advertisement captured that spirit and because I'd put such an emphasis on leadership and teamwork training also. But that verb aspire to lead, I just thought captured that spirit so that was important. It has been aggressive. Now originally we had to have an image and create it quickly. Brand awareness is what people would say but subsequently other presidents and other directors of admissions have had different views. This was really trying to capture the spirit of this new university. I think subsequent ad campaigns have been more closely tailored to look at student applicants rather than the university as a whole.

Pat Meyer: I would like to show you this picture from the groundbreaking at Evans Road, where you're wearing red overalls, can you tell us about this day?

Janice Bellace: This is so funny. I think just before this happened, maybe a week before or a few days, I was asked, so the groundbreaking was scheduled, and I was asked, "Would you wear construction worker overalls?" Now I must admit I thought this was very strange and I said, "Well what does the Chairman say?", and the person said to me, "Oh the Chairman said he'll wear it if you wear it." So I said, "Well, OK." (Laughter) Not realizing that the Chairman thought this was strange also but if this unusual weird American agreed. Now I didn't know that construction workers in Singapore wear red overalls because they don't in the United States, nor did I know how heavy those boots are. So it was very funny and I certainly...and I think the person who suggested it, suggested it because she knew that this would get on the front page of the newspaper. So one way, she had a great sense about what's the photo op and this was the way she was going to, because I mean anybody who's reading it, even the Business Times, would say, "What's that?" so in a way she's correct. I don't know if it made my image at first to be so iconoclastic, I normally would not do that. So that was very funny. It was very hot too.

Pat Meyer: We're in the months leading up to the opening day of the university, what's your biggest challenge leading up to the first day?

Janice Bellace: Hoping the Evans Road campus would be finished. I think it was finished the week before. I mean the paint was still wet on the walls as the students entered that. After all it was January when the ground was broken; I think it had to be done by August. The second challenge was most of the faculty were brand new and they had to come together just as the term started and they couldn't do this in Goldbell Towers -- there was no room. **The** people who barely knew each other would have to come together and teach at a place that wasn't finished yet, so that was the greatest challenge.

And I must say once again that the first Provost Tan Chin Tiong was wonderful and the others and I say this was a start up. Now if you're in a business school, you're talking about start ups all the time, well this was a start up. It's very exciting but, looking back I don't know how we did it.

And leading up also we wanted a really impressive beginning, so let's talk about the photo there of the inaugural convocation. That was my phrase, the inaugural convocation. In the United States, the opening convocation for some universities is not huge but a rather ceremonial thing. Since we would not have a graduation, a commencement for some time, I said, "Well let's have, make convocation, opening convocation a big thing." And that's where we then seized upon the idea of having this gala, sort of inaugural convocation. It was Ho Kwon Ping who selected the site, the physical location of the university would be where we were having this instead of in a nice place that was air conditioned like Suntec City. The planning that was involved in having to put, you know get the tent and all this, remember this is a very small group of people doing all this organizing to put on a major convocation under a tent on Bras Basah Park, on a day by the way when it was pouring with rain. And we had guests flying in for this, and we decided to have some very exciting academic conferences at the same times. It was just quite amazing, and the Ministers would be there, Deputy Prime Ministers etc. It was very hectic.

The other thing when I look at this photo -- the small things that you never think of when they say you know if you agree to be the first president. Selecting the gowns that we wear, the academic gowns, but I'm very proud of the fact that they have zippers so that everybody looks very neat. The British don't, things are always gaping, and I say women always look terrible in them. That's why you have such a neat appearance except for the ones that are British, which are the ministers and the chair.

And the other thing was the mace which I had never in my life thought about. Tan Teck Meng and myself with the mace. Oh by the way the first six months, we picked the logo too, the tangram lion and that was a whole thing about the logo. So [in the photo] all these things I look at. I even liked the color blue and gold. That's why we have blue and gold so it was a very...all these things. But it was a major feat to put on that opening convocation but very, very exciting. By the way, the person standing next to me, who came over, that was the Dean of the Wharton School, right there.

Pat Meyer: Convocation, first day of classes, what's your impression of the early weeks of school, of

when the university is in session? How are the students?

Janice Bellace: I was incredibly happy, I have to say that. What we called, who coined the term I don't remember, "The pioneer class." I think I did, because I remember saying, who are these students that would choose a university that has no track record whatsoever and who, when they applied, there was nothing physical. The first class are really dear to my heart. And the person who was named Dean of the Business school, Tsui Kai Chong, I always have a hard time saying his family name; Kai Chong was just wonderful, in organizing things, in really having the class bond, having some activities that really pulled them together. It was such a wonderful class, I always call [them] the class of 2000 although they graduated later. I think people were really happy, partly because some people including the organizing team had been working on this for two to three years, so finally something you've been planning happen, there was a great sense of fulfilment.

Pat Meyer: What kind of opportunities did you have to interact with the student body?

Janice Bellace: A lot, I must say. Now I'm accustomed to that by the way. I mean in the United States deans meet with students, they're on a first name basis, which at the time was unusual here. And I remember once being asked by a journalist, why had I decided, something about the students not wearing uniforms or a dress code, something like that. And I remember saying, well it never occurred to me to have a dress code, which was true, it had never occurred to me.

So it was interesting talking to the students and getting to know them and I have to say that where they were great was they were willing to take up every challenge and opportunity given to them. And that's where I'd like to go. I remember a course. I wanted a course in leadership and teamwork, because I feel once again, that in business [and] in real life, you work a great deal in teams. It's not individuals, you work a great deal in teams and that traditional education does not prepare you to do that. So there was a course at the Wharton School that had been developed when I was undergraduate dean. And we hired somebody, by the way hired an American, to do this by advertising. Once again no one had the background. She came over and I said "Go to Wharton and find out." She went over. Then came back. And the students have to, as part of this [leadership] project, part of this course, have to do a project.

I have to tell you separately something that happened. One of our staff members had been to the Singapore Zoo, and made the commitment that the university would adopt an Orang Utan, and she came back and told me this and I think it was five thousand Sing dollars. And I said, "What are you talking about, how can we do this, how can we use MOE funds to adopt an Orang Utan, this is ridiculous," and I can see NUS and NTU saying, "Well it's a noble purpose but these are MOE funds". So she said, "Where will we get the money?" So I said, "Well look at those students, give it to one of the student teams as a project, that that will be their project to raise the money and organize this." And not only did they, but it became a huge thing. It eventually became what was called Project Primate and the purpose of which was to not only adopt the Orang Utan but to educate people [about] how destruction of the rainforests was endangering various species. Because they'd gone to the zoo and talked to people and they really got very interested in this.

And so one thing they did, the event that was going to be the fundraiser, they had several things and then one big event. Do you remember back then the buses used to often be wrapped, maybe they still are with advertisements. So it was SMU Project Primate. And I think the bus company donated that and various things at all spots and then the final event was at Club Zouk. And Club Zouk said, "If you come in before nine pm, we'll charge the admission fee but then we'll give it to Project Primate" and they had all sorts of things going on at this nightclub at which I showed up. But here's the one I never expected. And I don't know if you have a photo of this but I do, do you have a photo of me and the Orang Utan?

Pat Meyer: Yes, I do.

Janice Bellace: That was the one and when people say, "What did you do at SMU that you never expected to do?" and I said, "Hold an Orang Utan in a nightclub". That was the one. The way the Orang Utan's looking at me is really quite hilarious. Well I go up to say, "Thank you everyone and one of the projects, one of those things..." and this nice zookeeper hands him to me and I think "What?" but then I thought, "Well if the handler knows he must be safe, then I guess it must be safe to hold the Orang Utan", which I held him for at least 15 minutes, maybe closer to half an hour and it was quite hilarious. Then they told me it was very funny but they raised the funds, they raised more than \$5000. So it was just a wonderful example of [how] a team and they were only first year students, really ran with it and showed it could be done. So I always remember that as an example that to me that was a great sense of fulfilment that it could work and it can work in Singapore.

Pat Meyer: Feedback from the students about the courses, the structure of the university?

Janice Bellace: Well the first year students, they loved it, they loved the ability to participate and talk. They were very, very involved. Like all students there were issues about grading, I'll leave that to the faculty to work out but no, the students were very happy and they were very involved. They were very happy. Remember Evans Road was very close, they could see the Bukit Timah campus being renovated and so they were very happy to move there.

Separately, by the way, I would say, if you go back to January 2000, I said we'd have three campuses we were building at one time; the Evans Road campus and we were planning the Bukit Timah campus and we were planning the permanent campus. So I felt like I was in a state of meetings, continual meetings of which campus building committee am I in now. But Bukit Timah, it was a privilege because it was such beautiful buildings. Because of changes that had been made over the years, especially to accommodate a very large number of students, they had 5000 at the end for NIE, it looked worse in 1999 than it had when it was opened before World War II. And so to work with architects to bring the exterior up, not totally back to what it had been, looking much more what the original architects had envisioned and have a completely modernized inside. I love the architecture and I think it was a great privilege and I'm sure NUS Law loves being there now. We're very gracious and we very much enjoyed it.

Pat Meyer: The career objectives and the opportunities for the graduates, how do they compare?

Janice Bellace: Some are different. One thing that I wanted and which has been done since the beginning was that the university would not be deemed a success unless students could get jobs.

Since we were a new university without a reputation I thought it would be very, very important from the very beginning to have very good contacts in the business community, to have our students doing internships so they would be known and be able to get jobs and to work with them. And the Office of Students Affairs, Life...I forget the title but Low Aik Meng...Ruth was hired by him, Aik Meng, does a fabulous job. They started from day one with the students. It wasn't like, wait until your final year and give you some interviews and get you practiced on how you do this, it was from the very beginning.

And that was the same thing with Alumni Affairs. This was not so well known but I said you get people to identify with the university and with their class from the day they walk in. So one of our first things was to have your class flag and with your year on it that you walk into convocation and you'll walk in with that at graduation and at all your alumni reunions. So we did that from the very beginning to build up that spirit. I was going to say the other spirit was donors from the very beginning. Coming from the Wharton School which was founded by Joseph Wharton with a very large gift, I'm accustomed to people wanting to support education and some people being able to do that financially. So that was a focus the first year and has continued to be.

Pat Meyer: Here in 2010, looking back, what are the milestones that stand out for you in SMU's history?

Janice Bellace: Well I guess, you know, looking at the inaugural convocation, the milestone was actually starting, that the planning effort came to fruition and was able to produce a faculty that could undertake to deliver a curriculum with research and have students.

I suppose that the next milestone which is almost simultaneous was to have a board of trustees and to have them engaged, and I would have to go into detail, but not people who just sit and come for an hour and rubber stamp decisions because the law requires certain decisions be approved. But really involved in the strategy of what's happening in this university and always trying to improve it and to see what function it should play in Singapore and the region.

The third one I suppose is the first graduation, it was very exciting to see the students graduate, I still remember that. I was very emotional. I was the first speaker -- but to see at the end of the day, these people are going out in the world, this is the first class of many, hundreds I hope, so that was a milestone.

And the planning for the permanent campus. And I have to say, when you see the drawings, the first drawings, I forget what they call them but they're computer generated and they're very flat. And you say, "Oh my goodness I hope it looks better than this". But it does, I mean it's very beautiful, [like] the architect said, reflecting light and the greenery of Singapore. And it did bring life to the city. When I had first seen it, not the first time, but [with] the architects, we stood in the old Cathay Building, which now of course had changed. I can still remember standing in that building for two hours looking at Bras Basah Park on a Saturday afternoon with virtually nobody walking in that park. And with this view that if we brought thousands of students into this area, we bring life. So that's true, that's another milestone I think.

Pat Meyer: What impact has it had on you this collaboration here?

Janice Bellace: Well, many but I think looking at having a better feel for how universities contribute to society. When you're part of an organization you only see it from your part what you do, rather than thinking what the entire organization does, and how you have to mobilize all parts of it. And I mean that in that sense, that did it for me. Another one is coming to know Singapore, I really love Singapore.

Pat Meyer: And we're just going to close with a question about your vision for SMU going forward, if you look forward say 20 years, what do you see as challenges, where do you see the university going?

Janice Bellace: I really see the next ten years as difficult for an interesting reason. I think when you start something, firstly it's very easy to be excited and so many things happen that your energy takes you through. And also the first people who come are very committed or they wouldn't have come, so that's the first ten years. But then the next ten years become, I'm going to say can, can become tedious or you can fall into routine. You can fail to innovate. You can become complacent or accept second best.

So to me the challenge in the next ten years with faculty particularly is to innovate, to keep up the energy level and this passion for excellence and to increase quality. That saying that Rome wasn't built in a day, that's really true of universities. If you think of whatever you think of as a great university, you're probably thinking of a university that's 100 years old. A lot of universities fall into the second or even third tier and they deliver a solid education but they don't become world class. And we started out from day one to be world class. So that's the challenge and that's my hope.

Acronyms List

| | Acronym | Definition |
|-----|----------------|---|
| 1. | EDB | Economic Development Board |
| 2. | IAAP | International Academic Advisory Panel |
| 3. | INSEAD | Institut Européen d'Administration des Affaires -European Institute of Business Administration |
| 4. | JD | Juris Doctor |
| 5. | MOE | Ministry of Education |
| 6. | MRT | Mass Rapid Transit |
| 7. | NIE | National Institute of Education |
| 8. | NTU | Nanyang Technological University |
| 9. | NUS | National University of Singapore |
| 10. | SASIN | SASIN Graduate Institute of Business Administration of Chulalongkorn University |
| 11. | SIM | Singapore Institute of Management |
| 12. | SMU | Singapore Management University |