

## Oral history interview with Bill Gardner conducted by Ruth Belay

15 January 2020

Please note that transcript has been edited by the participant and is not verbatim record of the oral history interview.

00:00:00 **Ruth Belay**

If you could please state your name and the year you graduated from the University of Toronto.

00:00:03 **Bill Gardner**

Sure. I'm Bill Gardner and I graduated in '91 with a B.A.

00:00:09 **Ruth**

B.A., okay. Please tell me a little bit more about your life before coming to U of T.

00:00:14 **Bill**

I went to De La Salle high school in Toronto, was active in Volunteering and had a part-time business selling computers. In Volunteering, I contributed over 1000 hours at Providence Villa, a retirement home. I also co-chaired the 1985 International Year of the Youth Conference. I cared about the community, liked business and arrived at U of T with the objective of earning a BComm.

00:00:48 **Ruth**

OK. Why U of T though?

00:00:53 **Bill**

Well, because my grandfather went to U of T and my dad went to U of T, and it was really the only place I wanted to go to. I applied to Western [University of Western Ontario]. I applied to Queens [Queen's University]. I applied to U of T. But, really, this was the only one that I wanted.

00:01:11 **Ruth**

OK, what were some of your first impressions of U of T?

00:01:14 **Bill**

Well, it's interesting. I've got two. The main one academically, is I came here for the BComm. U of T's recruiter told me that the BComm was for somebody who wanted to go into business and I had a little company at the time. When I got here, I found out in the first week that it was all accounting. The courses that I wanted to take in the calendar were all 'balloted courses'. In order to take one I had to put a ballot in, and I may or may not get it. There was no guarantee that I could take courses that I wanted to take like Marketing. So, I met with my registrar and I explained what I thought to him, - I was thinking he would pat me on the head and say, "no, it's okay, things will work out."

But he surprised me [laughs]. He said, "a BComm isn't what you want. That's for people that want to go into accounting." He said, "what you want to do is an MBA," and I said, "well, what's that?" So, he told me and I said, "well, should I just leave U of T and apply in January to Queen's or Western?" He said, "no, no, stay. Run your company. Take a degree in something that would be interesting to you," because only about 25% of MBA students have a business degree. And he said, "get involved in student politics." So, I thought, okay. And I wasn't sure what to do with this advice.

Following that meeting, I had about two or three hours before a class, and I did some exploring on campus, found Hart House and I met a guy named Steve [inaudible], who was trying to start up something called the Investment Club. It would be a brand new club at Hart House, and I had some interest in that.

Steve and I had got talking. He was also looking at founding the Economics Course Organization. It would be the student union for economics students. So, I said, "well, I'd be interested in coming out to your Investment Club meetings, but it's my second week. I can't start a student organization." He convinced me that I could, and he and I ran for President and Vice President of 'ECO'. I did the posters, Steve did much of the selling and we showed up to classes and told people why we wanted to run - And we won. So, that was my first foray. In my first month, I helped to found the Hart House Investment Club and the Economics Course Organization. Within a month I went to my first ASSU [Arts and Science Student Union] council meeting.

ASSU was the place, we understood, where we could get money to bring in guest speakers, get office supplies, and funding for a beer and pizza social for students - that sort of thing. We showed up to our first ASSU council meeting and it was, it was unbelievable. People were screaming at each other. The ASSU executive had started spending money on non-student things, outside of campus, so essentially gave student money away to non-student causes. I think their president was forced to resign during that meeting. They weren't focused at all - what they looked to be really doing was fighting amongst themselves.

After the ASSU council meeting, I remember Steve and I talked with a number of like minded council members. There was a great deal of discussion as to whether we wanted to be associated with this group. The other course unions we spoke with included the Psychology Students' Association, the Geography Students' Union (called TUGS), and I think there was another one, maybe International Relations - they were more the moderate voices, we came to understand, on council. They filled us in on what had been going on in that last year. We made a conscious decision, it wasn't an easy one, but it was a conscious one, to try to fix things. So that's how I got involved with ASSU - that would've been in the fall of '84.

00:05:53 **Ruth**  
'84, okay.

00:05:54 **Bill**  
OK? So, do you want me to keep going?

00:05:56 **Ruth**  
Yes.

00:05:58 **Bill**  
Alright. So, what we discovered is that there were moderate student unions—ones that were doing a good job representing their students. They had events. They had public speakers. They had a real sense of community. And people would drop into their offices and they knew them and really, it gave vibrancy to those departments.

There were other course unions that existed to show up to the council meetings and then take money and then use it for non-student things. So those unions, they didn't have regular meetings. They didn't foster a sense of community within their departments. They didn't have publicised events. And the worst thing was their elections weren't publicized. – A number of these would arrive in a room and say, "okay, let's have an election," and they'd vote themselves in. So, we figured okay, the only way to turn this around is to identify the ones that are like that - there were probably about ten really bad ones. Through council, we demanded that election dates be shared. We then actually showed up at the end of those classes and urged students to get involved and to vote. (they weren't happy about this) These were classes that we never would've attended - it was strictly for the reason of just letting people know about their course union election.

Within a year, ASSU council and the course unions were much more balanced. A guy named Sander Cohen ran for ASSU president the next year. He asked me to run for vice-president, so I did. Five other people ran for the ASSU executive – we didn't get a majority on the executive that year - it was a very fractious executive. Sander and I believed that it didn't matter if somebody was more of a socialist background or liberal or a conservative or a libertarian or a communist. We really didn't care. We also didn't care about religion, ethnicity or orientation. What we did care about was ASSU's mission as defined in their constitution. ASSU was set up by SAC [the Students' Administrative Council] a number of years earlier, and ASSU's purpose is enshrined in its constitution: "*The object of the Union shall be to improve, and to provide services for the improvement of, the education and academic life of all undergraduates in the Faculty*". What that meant is if you want to support causes outside of campus, do it – there are other organizations you can join - but don't try to twist ASSU's purpose. ASSU is there to serve the Arts and Science students at U of T.

The first year on the executive was rough. The next year I ran for president and won. We had about half of the votes on the ASSU executive - it wasn't a slam-dunk on things we wanted to do, and we did get into heated arguments.

One of the big issues was whether we would put a photo copier in the office for students to make copies of past exams. (we had a past exam library). Up until that point, students needed to take the bound copies out of our office and go down to the APUS [Association of Part-time Undergraduate Students] office, just across the hallway, and lineup to use their photocopier. I was able to cut a deal where we would get a free photocopier, ASSU could freely print copies, which were expensive back then, in return for students being able to purchase copy cards and we'd make a small margin on them. The company we chose was able to make a little bit of money to pay for the machine. I can't see that they covered their costs but I think it helped them to expand on campus, which was good for them, and it really helped our students, because they didn't have to leave the office. ASSU also saved thousands a year in printing costs.

Believe or not, it took considerable effort to convince the other half of the executive to agree to the deal. Ultimately the big debate or argument against it was, "well, students will come into our office," and I said, "yes, that's what we want. We want students coming into the office." I won that argument. And we did other things in that year. For example, have you ever seen those lockers in the basement of Sidney Smith? [Ruth: Yes]

We put the lockers in [Ruth: Okay]. But we did it with fiscal responsibility. When you do something, if there's value, you don't have to bear all the cost of putting it in. We made a good proposal to the dean's office. They paid for half, we paid for half. And it actually became a money-maker after the first year as we rented them. And now you can see it to be a valuable service for day students. When they come to campus, they have nowhere to put their things. They don't have a residence. And it may take them two hours of traveling. Now, at least they have place to store their things rather than carrying everything around.

It turned out to be a good year. A number of people talked with me about running for SAC that year - which is UTSU [University of Toronto Students' Union] now. I ultimately didn't do it. I felt that we had more work to do at ASSU, so ran for a second year as president, and had a real firm majority on the executive.

So, executive members: we had an executive member who was part of GLOUT. We had people that definitely were more on the socialist camp. We also had executive members who were more conservative leaning. We had a wide spectrum of backgrounds, but we never had an argument about what to do for students, and that's what unified everybody. And it was a good year.

One thing I should mention is during my first year as President, we hired Terry Buckland. We wanted him full-time but although we lost the vote, we subsequently managed to get him at least part-time. When our full-time EA did leave (later that year), Terry became full-time. Over the years (something like 25), he grew to embody the history of ASSU, and was one of the reasons why ASSU had continuity. Terry passed away a number of years ago and his loss is still felt deeply by many. Jane Seto was hired a number of years into Terry's tenure. To me, it feels like she is still new but she's now been there likely as long as Terry was. She's doing a fantastic job of carrying the spirit of ASSU forward. She's supported by Gavin and Yoko who are also very good and committed. The university community is very fortunate to have such a strong staff team.

Staff commitment and continuity is one of the big reasons why ASSU is still relevant. It has history. Unfortunately, some of the other student organizations tend to have choppy continuity.

[Ruth: Yeah] OK? There's are other things that we did. You know the – in the Sid Smith building there's a glass enclosure on the patio with student meeting spaces? We weren't the only ones with the idea but ASSU was instrumental in fostering the idea.

From an administration standpoint, we had a very good relationship with the administration. We believed in consultation over confrontation. Discussion and consultation is more difficult and less flashy than taking over the Dean or President's office, but it gets results. I don't know if it still happens at UofT but when groups take over the Dean's office, or Simcoe Hall, it impacts their ability to work for a day or two. But in meeting with them, they realized many of the same issues that we saw, and by working together with them you can actually solve more problems than through fighting. We worked to resolve conflicts. For example, there was an issue where a number of the periodicals were going to get cancelled because of a currency valuation issue. We were able to meet with Simcoe Hall and while they didn't retract all the cancellations, we were able to preserve the ones that were valuable to students.

There were issues where students maybe got sick or had other personal issues and, couldn't write an exam or didn't get an assignment in. We coached and helped them to understand the academic appeal process. These students, on their own, wouldn't know how the process worked. We knew what the rules were, and if somebody had a good case to make, we would help them to formulate their case. If they didn't have a leg to stand on, we'd tell them. We didn't waste the administration's time.

The course registration system was another area of focus for us. Initially course registration was all on paper and somebody would type it into a computer – it was very laborious for the administration to

run something simple like registration. The university decided to implement a new registration system called Access - the first computerized registration system. You'd actually phone in and register. I reviewed their plans and I saw they were flawed, and in addition to studying for exams I spent a significant number of hours writing up where the flaws were, and recommended they delay. They thanked me, but kept going, and it was a bit of a mess that fall. Apparently my document was used to help fix it the next year. They called it "The Gardner Letter" or something to that effect.

To sum up, ASSU got involved in everything from the physical aspects of the university, like lockers and building designs, sub-committees, to academic appeals, to the registration process – everything that impacted student life in Arts and Science at U of T.

The student unions over that time started thriving, we created an event called "ASSU Day." - They still have it. This promotes the ASSU course unions and gives students an opportunity to get involved each year. Every course union had a booth, and that was pretty successful.

We won a fee referendum at the time, in an environment where no student body had succeeded at passing a fee referendum for a period of about two years, and we were 88.9 successful [laughs] in it, because people liked what we were doing. ASSU set a good foundation to then run for SAC - which is the next chapter (UTSU).

00:18:58 **Ruth**

Yes. Can you tell me a little bit more about, I guess, ASSU's involvement in stuff like curriculum development and how you guys worked with the faculty and administration and student organizations?

00:19:09 **Bill**

The course unions would be involved on departmental issues. They were more at the grassroots level. If the issue impacted Arts and Science as a whole, the ASSU executive would be consulted.

00:19:37 **Ruth**

Is there any examples that you remember, any new programs?

00:19:40 **Bill**

We were involved with Supporting President George Connell's Renewal process, extending library study hours, automated registration and teaching quality within Arts and Science. There were always initiatives to work on.

The course unions were focused on issues within their departments. They also ran events for students such as guest speakers and socials.

00:21:11 **Ruth**

OK, so yeah, stability and funding. What about, I guess, more like student organizations or student groups advocating for more diverse programs or curriculums, was that –

00:21:24 **Bill**

Now, what would a diverse program or curriculum be?

00:21:28 **Ruth**

Whether it's within geography, more courses that speak to different experiences or programs that are, like equity-based or, like African Studies or –

00:21:40 **Bill**

Got you. So –

00:21:42 **Ruth**

- those types of programs.

00:21:43 **Bill**

- we had an African Studies Students' Union.

00:21:44 **Ruth**

OK.

00:21:45 **Bill**

A number of issues you see on campus now were not advocated for back then. Indigenous rights on campus is a big thing now, and I know many meetings now start with thanking the Indigenous peoples for the land– that didn't exist at all back then. We were aware of history but not in the way people are aware of it now. We weren't trying to change what's taught in history or what's taught in geography.

In '84, my first year at U of T, there were still a lot of issues with the Soviets. They had just shot down Flight 007, over somewhere in Asia, and a lot of people died.

The Communist Party had a booth in Sidney Smith that I saw on my first week on campus, a big booth, and they stored stuff in the ASSU office. This stopped in '85 after we made ASSU more student focused, not externally focused. Those were the things that we were thinking of in the 80's.

Inclusion was an issue but not at the level of consciousness that it is now. People did join the Gays and Lesbians at U of T. They were taking a big risk at the time socially. I hope that now they no longer feel anywhere near the same level of personal risk.

00:23:26 **Ruth**

OK, okay. So, tell me a little bit more about, I guess, how you transitioned from ASSU president to now running for SAC.

00:23:35 **Bill**

I had a good base of support through what the team accomplished at ASSU. We had done well and had high recognition. At one point, the Varsity conducted a poll - I can't remember the exact numbers, but a lot of people here knew what we did and knew me personally. It would sometimes take an hour to walk the 10 minutes across campus because I'd just be stopping and talking with people about things on the way.

You need a running mate when you run. I spoke with people from a number of the colleges and campuses. I ultimately ran with Helen Christodoulou from Scarborough College, who had been very active there and very well respected.

We ran against Dominic Leblanc, whose father was the Governor General at the time, and his running mate, Brian Lacey. Another candidate was Esther Carezza - I can't remember her running mate.

It was a three-way race. When it kicked off we were all putting posters up and I remember Esther was struggling putting up one of her banners and I went over to help her and she couldn't believe it. She said: "why are you helping me? I'm running against you." And I said, "yes, but you need help." Esther actually ended up dropping out about two weeks into the campaign for personal reasons. Because of the help we provided, all of her people came over to my team and I think that ultimately helped us to win. We won by only 37 votes. [Ruth: Wow, okay]

It was a very tight race. It was one of the highest voter turnouts, from what I understand, for a student election.

When I got into SAC one of the first things that struck me was really the history. The Stewart Observatory building, the president's office, and history stemming back to the founding of the University.

We had some ambitious plans. We wanted to set up all sorts of things for students, everything from an umbrella service [laughs] as a loan, to a volunteer centre to a laser printing centre, because computers were starting to get big at the time, to working with the administration on quite a number of issues.

The student pub, at that time, had lost money for years. The president before me thought that it was in the wrong location - it should be below ground, not above ground and all sorts of excuses as to why it wasn't working out. We managed to turn it around. It not only made money, it became one of the most popular venues on campus.



There was a lot on the plate. The thing that surprised me was the level of infighting that existed on the SAC council and even on my own executive. It seemed like many on the SAC council thought they were in federal politics. A number were there to make names for themselves to support their tickets the following year. It was very different from the collaboration we had at ASSU. On my executive, Alexis Kennedy was a stand-out for what she was able to accomplish. She was able to rise above the politics.

Typically, SAC presidents don't run for a second term. Ideally, they just want to get things done. The level of politics was initially surprising to me. Success required being on the phone a lot, and making sure we counted the votes before every large proposal meeting. It was hard-fought throughout the year. But we succeeded.

I greeted the prime minister at an event which helped set the stage for the World Economic Summit in '87, - Hart House was absolutely transformed to host the event. It was beautiful.

Throughout that year, I met with the Prime Minister, Brian Mulroney, the premier, David Peterson and leader of the opposition, John Turner and the leader of the NDP, Bob Ray. I met with all sorts of people from government, from all – Liberal, Conservative, NDP. I knew that at any time we needed it I could pick up the phone and get results. U of T, was at that point, and still is, is the largest student body in Canada, and one of the most respected in the world.

00:30:13 **Ruth**

That's amazing.

00:30:14 **Bill**

CFS (Canadian Federation of Students) wanted UofT to join. Ellen Ladowski, the previous SAC president thought this was a grand idea and I went with her to the first CFS conference that I'd ever been at (and the last one). I noted a lot of in-fighting and efforts on issues that mattered little to my constituents.

They spent a lot of time arguing and working on issues that held little relevance to the issues we had at UofT at the time. My team thought, wow, if we give up control to this group, and we're not allowed to lobby on behalf of our students - that's not a good thing. We decided firmly against joining CFS. We got input from quite a few stakeholders across campus.

A number of years later SAC did join CFS. In talking to subsequent SAC (UTSU) presidents, I think that they realized they made a mistake. They gave up a lot of autonomy and flexibility when they joined. Alone, U of T has a lot of sway, globally and from a student politics standpoint, under the CFS banner, a lot of this is lost.

I can see a small college or university joining. But we can walk across the street to Queen's Park (that's sitting on U of T land) and if you want to talk to somebody, you can talk to somebody. It's not that difficult. I hope SAC is able to extract themselves in the future because this place is awesome. It should have its own independent voice.

00:32:41 **Ruth**

Yeah, I guess just going back to maybe discussing some of the things you may have lobbied for on behalf of U of T, what was that work like?

00:32:52 **Bill**

What type of lobbying?

00:32:56 **Ruth**

I don't know. Were there any, like prominent issues at the time that, as president of SAC, that you were representing U of T for or discussing with some of these leaders?

00:33:05 **Bill**

We didn't get involved in issues beyond U of T on purpose. And that allowed everybody to work as one. So, the second that you start working partisan issues that don't reflect student life is the second it all starts fracturing.

The issues that we worked on were everything from student enrollment to events for students.

Our year at SAC was the first year where Grade 13 was starting to be phased out. It wasn't completely phased out, but quite a number of new students were under 19. Historically, SAC ran an orientation event called 'Roam Around'. It was part of the new-student orientation package. Essentially, you'd try to visit every pub on campus and drink in one night.

Roam Around resulted in some very drunk students and, actually, some issues –there were probably seven or eight pubs. Well after seven or eight drinks, or double that with two drinks at each place, that's not a good thing [Ruth: Yeah].

So, the combination of those two things (underage plus risk) prompted us do something that was, at the time – shocking - a lot of people argued against it. We decided to have a dry orientation and we thought well, this is going to be pretty boring, if you just open up the pubs and serve pop. So Instead, we hosted a large concert on Philosopher's Walk. It was well attended and a success that became a tradition.

There was a fair bit of work required to lobby other student councils, the administration and City to allow an outdoor event of that type.

00:34:50 **Ruth**

Wow, okay.

00:34:51 **Bill**  
I don't know if they're still doing it but –

00:35:36 **Ruth**  
Yeah, they still do it.

00:35:37 **Bill**  
OK fantastic. So that's where the orientation concert came from.

Things were not stress free. One night, the SAC pub was besieged by a very large crowd of Caribana revellers who were trying to get into a private event. From what I understand, several hundred people had gathered and the doors were literally ripped off their hinges in an attempt to get into the event. Pub staff shut down the event - the next day, the administration shut down the pub. It took a lot of explaining and negotiation to get the pub opened back up several days later. If we had been confrontational, the pub would likely never have reopened.

Another issue we worked on was a land lease deal at Victoria College. They traded sports space that students used for a 99-year lease at a million dollars a year. We unfortunately didn't succeed on that initiative. Vic College no longer has that sports field.

We won some of the lobbying that we undertook and lost in other situations. We believed that there were very good people in the administration, people like U of T President George Connell, Provost Foley, and Dean Armstrong in Arts and Science. It was a good environment. The other student college presidents were fantastic at the time. It was a very vibrant student life.

There were some students that wanted to argue things like tuition rates, and I remember thinking well, our tuition isn't too bad, (it's different now).

At one point, foreign students looked to be paying a lot of money. I remember meeting with the president of the Chinese Students' Association and I was thinking of making it one of the platforms of running for SAC, - I remember him saying "Bill, no, don't go there, it's a bargain." So, for foreign students, actually it wasn't even that bad. (Compared to other countries)

For students – I paid \$1,300 in tuition in my first year. I paid for it myself. I paid \$4,000 in tuition for an Ivey MBA several years later. Now that same program is \$100,000. Now, from what I'm seeing, any program worth taking will cost \$20,000, \$50,000, \$80,000. I don't see that as fair. If I was a student leader on campus now, I would be actively trying to get those fees down.

One element of note was an analysis of tuition we conducted when I was at ASSU. The administration always said that we only paid maybe 20% of our education costs. So, the government pays the rest, right?

00:42:21

**Ruth**

They still say that.

00:42:22

**Bill**

OK. So, I went to the university archives and I pulled the U of T budgets at four year intervals between 1900 to 1990. And I plotted the money that was taken from Arts & Science students, versus the money that was spent on Arts & Science, and you can see a very clear shift of money out of Arts & Science into the other faculties, which is fine. They want to fund the other faculties. But in reality, Arts & Science students are paying probably 200% of their cost in many cases. It's not 20% or 10%. That's the reality of it [Ruth: Yeah]. When you stick 2,000 people in a first-year psych class you make a lot of money.

00:43:13

**Ruth**

Totally.

00:43:14

**Bill**

It used to be that you'd do a psychology degree or geography or history and then you'd go on to work in business and the degree really helped you, but today you need more than the degree. You need actual skills. The university community needs to think through the learning process and outcomes. When you graduate from U of T what do you graduate with? What can you do? I think that will be one of the things that people will be talking about in the next years. And student leaders should be part of that dialogue. They have the most to gain from it.

00:44:31

**Ruth**

Exactly. Do you still have a copy of that report, the –

00:44:35

**Bill**

ASSU may.

00:44:36

**Ruth**

ASSU, okay.

00:44:37

**Bill**

Yes

00:44:38

**Ruth**

Yeah, because that'd be great to, like have a copy of.

00:44:40

**Bill**

Yes, but the analysis is easy to do. It's actually easier now. You just need to go and pull the budgets every four years [Ruth: Okay]. And

you can see exactly where the money went. It's really easy, actually. And you know how much each student pays in tuition, on average, and you know the number of students, so it's just requires a little math.

00:44:57 **Ruth**

OK. I know SAC has been socially engaged in different issues, depending on the administration and the student leaders at the time. Divestment has been, I guess, a running theme that has been consistent from the 60s until the end of apartheid in South Africa. Was there – I know there is a SAC – a divestment committee. I don't know if it was in existence at your time or if it –

00:45:30 **Bill**

As a community, we were against apartheid. I don't recall divestment committees.

00:45:31 **Ruth**

- had been after or before.

00:45:32 **Bill**

Issues rise and fall with the times. SAC is the right place for some of those issues. So, if there was a student group formed it would be funded by SAC and then students could be active in it. That is the right place for that type of activity. If it's a student-wide issue, that's something that SAC should be involved with.

At one point, the Women's Centre [currently the Centre for Women and Trans People] on campus was a really big issue. So, every year the Women's Centre would come to SAC for money and every year it was a struggle. And for an organization that's doing something as important as they are you shouldn't have to struggle for funding every year. Because if the funding goes away then you lose everything, and then you have to rebuild when it comes back again. I saw what SAC had done with ASSU. ASSU had been part of SAC and then broke away with that constitution I told you about, providing services for students. So, I proposed, rather strongly, (and it was opposed at first), that the Women's Centre have a referendum on campus. And they didn't like me very much when I first proposed that, but they won. And then they could, essentially go about their own way, without having to come back every year and beg for money. So that was a success.

I got involved where it would change things for the long-term. One of the things that I always realize is you can't work on fifty issues at the same time. (a previous president that explained this to me.) He said, "you only have a short amount of time so pick a limited number of initiatives and try to get those things through." You can work on other initiatives, but don't let your eyes get off what is truly important.

Focus is important. So, for me, you know, the Women's Centre was definitely something I wanted to support.

There were other initiatives like the laser centre on campus for laser printing, although everybody has a good printer now, but back then they were very expensive. They cost tens of thousands for a good one. It's things like that that I wanted to do for students so we focused on those things. We focused on the pub. We also focused on events and academic issues. There were other groups that had other objectives and I would support them if they needed it, and they knew they could come to me, but I couldn't be on everything. As it was, I'd get to the office, in the morning and I'd be there sometimes until one o'clock at night. I even moved to a location right near campus, because I just couldn't commute. I was a day student so I couldn't commute with the amount of work I was doing down here. I literally went back and got six or seven hours worth of sleep and then came back on campus again.

00:48:57

**Ruth**

Yeah, it's crazy. What were some of the academic issues?

00:49:02

**Bill**

The student course registration system was one, course drop tuition refunds was another. There were quite a few academic issues that we dealt with. After 30 years, they don't all spring to mind.

Each student council whether it be college, faculty, or departmental tended to be consulted and dealt with issues in their area. ASSU tended to be more academic-oriented. At SAC, we tended to be more student life focused.

00:49:55

**Ruth**

OK. I forgot to ask about this earlier, but could you talk a little bit about the Anti-Calendar?

00:50:00

**Bill**

The Anti-Calendar was a book that ASSU published every year with course evaluations summarized for nearly all Arts and Science courses. From what I understood, there was only one other like it in North America. It was well-known and the envy of many universities. It was extremely hard to put together. So, you could imagine that we had to get students go to every class on campus, and there's a lot of classes, hand out questionnaires, get the questionnaires back and tally them. And it was all conducted by volunteers. The people that tallied them were part of each course union. They understood the classes in their departments. And they would actively filter out things that might be biased. The summaries in the Anti-Calendar were as honest and as true as possible and they were backed by numbers. And those numbers were double counted. In the beginning, it was produced on a typewriter. We'd use blue pencil to mark up where things had to go, and the reason why we did that is when you photocopied the Anti-Calendar to the final version you wouldn't see any of the blue because the photocopiers didn't copy that shade of blue.

It was a professional publishing and information assembly organization that required thousands of hours every year to produce. The administration respected it. We had very few complaints, if any, from faculty or administration, because it was done so well. In my last year there, we managed to introduce computers to the process.

00:52:21

**Ruth**

The year?

00:52:22

**Bill**

That would've been '89 I think.

00:52:26

**Ruth**

'89, okay.

00:52:28

**Bill**

Yes, the summer of '89 would've been the first year that ASSU had a computer. Now of course, computers are everywhere.

So, you know, that's one of the things too, we were very involved with prompting the University to embrace technology. – And for students to embrace technology. We tried to open the doors for students to get computers, at a discount and get them in the bookstore. I know it sounds crazy now, because you probably have a computer in your pocket, but back then almost nobody had computers.

There was no internet then. The physics building had a laser printing service, that would cost 25 cents a page or something like that. You'd have to give them a file and return later to pick it up.

00:53:24

**Ruth**

Wow.

00:53:26

**Bill**

You could use it if you were fortunate enough to have a computer. So, things that we talked with the administration about - they may seem irrelevant now. But they were relevant back then. Things that are relevant now like inclusion weren't as topical back then. We just had different issues, and they went from technology to, student services to even student services outside of U of T, like CFS.

00:54:10

**Ruth**

So, I guess hearing about everything that you've done as a student leader and being involved in student – on campus, how has that shaped, I guess, your life after U of T?

00:54:19

**Bill**

That's a really good question. But before I answer that one let me tell you what things I'm seeing now, and I think it's a bit of a shame. So, you and I, first of all, talked about booking a room at Hart House, to meet in, right? [Ruth: Yeah] And what I wanted to do is I wanted to

show you some of the background. - That first meeting, where I got into the Investment Club and then ASSU, through the Economics Course Organization, it started at Hart House, okay? Hart House was opened around 1919 – a gift to students from Vincent Massey. It was built as a centre for students, to be run by students. That's the whole purpose of the place, from the finance committee that I was actually on for about two years, to all of the clubs. That is its purpose. - And you and I couldn't book a meeting room there to talk about this without paying hundreds of dollars for it. What do you think of that?

00:55:17 **Ruth**  
That's crazy.

00:55:18 **Bill**  
Back then there was a Bickersteth Room that a Warden Bickersteth of Hart House, set aside for meetings, he gave to the students to book freely, and it was the most amazing room you've ever seen. It had a round meeting table in it. There were couches. There were – and there were many, many meetings there that students had, to talk about strategies, campaigns and initiatives and all the rest of it, and that's gone.

OK? So, this is a nice room (in the library) that we're meeting in now, but it doesn't have that same history (or windows) that the Bickersteth Room had, or any of the other rooms. So, we're not meeting there because most of Hart House has been turned into a conference centre, okay?

When you look at campus life, we ran orientation. It took a lot of work. People loved it. And I think U of T councils may still run part of the orientation, but at many other universities and colleges the administration now runs orientation. As you look area by area by area. School Administration lead Student engagement now helps students with petitions and other things, where we did that before. SAC no longer has a student pub – there are no more pubs. So, what's happening is the institutions in Canada, (probably because they fear risk and media) are removing decision making and management from student organizations.

So, they're taking away the power of students to actually create, manage and lead. So, they're taking away leadership opportunities and learning opportunities. Graduates are getting into business and unions and academic institutions and government and they're now doing things for the first time - that's unfortunate. In the past, student leaders usually went on to lead in other aspects of society. Now, the foundation that many of us were able to build in the past is lacking in the current generation of graduates.

Learning how to manage big programs like Orientation, businesses like pubs, and large budgets gives students a foundation from which to make a difference in society.



The formative years for learning are when you get into university. That's when you learn the most. And it's similar to how young kids are able to learn languages. And, you know, – you become a little tone-deaf to new languages after the age of 10 or 12 or something. So, the right age to learn languages is probably below ten. The right age to learn how to lead is as early as possible. So, university is that sweet spot for learning how to lead and manage.

And if you take away the opportunity to lead, the opportunity to make mistakes, then you're going to have a low risk administrative environment. – but, you're going to cripple that generation of leaders.

So, what am I doing now? After I graduated, I started a computer business - that turned into a couple stints as sales manager for two companies over about a two-year period. I then got accepted into the Ivey MBA program. My undergrad grades here weren't great because I was involved in everything, – solid 70s, I guess. At Ivey though, I was Dean's List, so it was the right environment for me, and I loved it. Before I graduated, I met another guy that was like-minded there and we thought that something called Customer Relationship Management be big one day.

We set up our first company, Salesforce Automation Consulting before we graduated, and we did that for about a year. And then we came up with a new model, where we'd help really big companies implement what's now called CRM [Customer Relationship Management]. We had successes over a 10 year period: Cyanamid doubled sales in two years. Molson reduced complexity from 17 different sales and marketing systems to one in a year and a half. And we then architected all of TELUS' call centres, web self-service, all of that, which was brand new at the time. Without the experience at U of T there's no way I could've hit the ground running.

Eventually, technology caught up to our vision and we incorporated CRM Dynamics Ltd. which we've run for about 15 years now. We're the largest independent Microsoft CRM consulting practice in Canada. We have 50+ team members and work on CRM projects for large and enterprise customers. This year, we were named a Microsoft Inner Circle partner, which means we're the top 1% globally, and we were Partner of the Year for business apps in Canada.

Without SAC and ASSU and the many experiences and –even some of the battles and things that happened, there's no way I would have been as prepared. I graduated with a degree in geography, following advice from the registrar, but that didn't make me ready for business.

The MBA helped. Case studies are fantastic – of situations faced by other business. But even in that, I saw case challenges largely through the lens of what I had learned at SAC and ASSU.

It's the experience working with students here, working with the administration, and dealing with tough issues and finding a way to solve them that counts. We took at times unpopular stances and worked with people through to resolution. Examples include the Access Student Registration system and coming up with a novel dry orientation program.

I often had to trade off focusing on grades to focusing on larger issues such as the Student Access Registration System. And sometimes, you know, it's the hard decisions and the hard learning that really builds a foundation, and it's involvement in student politics that made all the difference.

ASSU still exists as we had envisioned and shaped it 30 years ago. Many of the programs and services we started are still here. Their history is maintained. It's pretty awesome.

01:01:40 **Ruth**

Yeah, it definitely is. And I think a lot of people think that when you come to university learning happens only in the class, but there's so much learning that happens outside, just being part of student organizations, being part of student governments, having these different opportunities. That's why co-ops are important, because it gives you a taste of what it feels like to take what you've learned in class and apply it to different spaces, so.

01:02:05 **Bill**

Co-op can be very valuable. However, the employer won't have you running a huge program like Orientation or a business like a pub. Coop students typically work on a small facet of the business.

Real world experience does help Co-op students understand the business climate and to get a leg up on employment. This is especially true for students in kinesiology or math or business or – Yes, the real world experience is valuable. But what about students in geography and history and sociology and psychology and other Arts and Science programs – you can't go out and get a job in history, unless you want to be a faculty member. That's a hard road with no Co-op program. So, what do you do?

01:02:35 **Ruth**

There's a lot of service learning courses now. I'm actually a history and geography major. Well, in my undergrad I was. I'm now doing urban planning for my master's. But, yeah, in history I got to do a service learning course, where I got to go out to a local volunteer-run archive and support their efforts as my final assignment. So –

01:02:56 **Bill**

That's fantastic.

01:02:57 **Ruth**  
Yeah, I think –

01:02:58 **Bill**  
We didn't have coop opportunities 30 years ago. [Ruth: Yeah] - then.

Waterloo was really the only university that was doing co-ops in that time and it had a really good program. Here our co-op was student government. A lot of people have gone off to do great things. Bob Rae was involved in SAC. I remember talking with him in the SAC building. He came in to say hello, just a little after I got elected. You know, a lot of the people in politics have their start in student government. A lot of people in business have their start in student government.

So, I remember out of geography there's Christaller's Central Place Theory, there's map digitizing – seeing the first map digitizers and things like that. That information was good to know but didn't help me in business. I was most able to leverage extracurricular experience – working with people and working on planning and execution.

I remember at Ivey we shared some second-year courses with HBA [Honours Business Administration] students (Undergrads) – and we had a case where, you're a senior executive, new to a company, and your team's just not listening to you, and what do you do? And I remember one of the HBAs, he was a nice guy but he said, "well, I'd let them know it's my way or the highway. And if they don't listen to me, they'll all be fired." You could do that, but if you do that you won't have a company anymore. It's fine being right, if your actions cause you to lose your team at the same time, that's bad.

Right? [Ruth: Yeah]

At ASSU, I learned, and all of us learned that yes, you may not see eye to eye all the time, but if you can understand what – not what their opinion is, but what's causing that opinion, if you go to the levels down below opinion you start seeing that there's a lot of commonalities, then you can build it back up again, and can usually come out with a decision that's stronger than either of the two diverging opinions ever were. If you never spend the time to try to learn what someone else's perspective is, and you only go head-to-head with them, that's draining and self-defeating.

We've seen the results: Unfortunately many organizations are run by narcissists that – often succeed in the short-term, but in the long-term they wreck things. That's been seen through the history of the world, for example, I was just listening to a podcast on King John of England, and how he really started losing France for the English. A subject would be down and he'd kick them. He'd put his opposition in jail and starve them. And if you act like that, in the short-term you win. In the

long-term other people will make sure that you don't win - hopefully [laughs].

01:06:44 **Ruth**

Yeah, yeah. Is there anything else you would like to add or something else you'd like to highlight?

01:06:51 **Bill**

I'd like to see the different colleges and the universities come to terms with what somebody actually graduates with when they graduate. And it's not just book smarts (Christaller's Central Place Theory or the history of King John). As a society, we want people to be able to go out and make a difference. Future leaders should have the opportunity to prepare to actually go out and lead things.

Our country is going to be going through a lot of change in the next ten to twenty years, the change will likely be a lot larger than the Industrial Revolution ever was. We're looking at the rise of robotics and the rise of AI. And, conceivably, even in your own home, you won't have to do the laundry anymore, or the dishes. - Just get a robot to do it. You may not even have to make dinner.

For clothing, it used to be that you'd go to the tailor, or a seamstress, and say I'd like this outfit they'd say, "okay, what fabric would you like to use? What kind of design do you want?" And they'd make it for you. Now, we stock smalls, mediums and larges - and we live in a disposable world - which is a bit of a shame. Clothing is made many thousands of miles away. With robotics may be able to go online and pick the design you want, from a list of designers. You might pay a dollar or two for. You'll pick the fabric you want, which you could go down to a design centre to see the fabric, but by that point you probably have your favourites. You'd pick a pattern that they can print on demand, so like colours and other things, and it would be sent to you the next day, maybe that day. So now you don't need to stock clothing. Now you don't need to shop in stores. It democratizes everything.

But what is that one example going to do to our society? So, no stores. Massive job shifts in countries that have been providing us with that stuff. Potentially even better opportunities now, because they can do things themselves. What jobs are there going to be?

When you have huge changes you need real leaders. Real leaders only learn through experience. We need to give students some of those experiences back again. U of T, I think is better than some. We still have student organizations here. But we need to foster, wherever possible, leadership opportunities. And it's not somebody in the administration saying, "who'd like to help us coordinate orientation?" [Ruth: Yeah] It's student leaders planning and running orientation. And maybe allowing the administration to give some input into it. It would be good if we could re-introduce a number of the services that have

faded away such as the ability of student councils to run pubs and other businesses. The ability to plan and manage large events.

It's allowing people to make mistakes. And it's, as a society, not jumping down a university's throat because the student leader said or did something stupid. And the fact is stupid things aren't that common. It's just that we hear about one once a year and it gets polarized. The reality is millions of decisions are made every year and almost none of them are negative and the ones that are can become a teaching and learning opportunity. If we treat it as that, even mistakes can actually be a good thing.

01:11:08 **Ruth**

Thank you so much for sitting with us.

01:11:10 **Bill**

You're welcome.

01:11:12 **Ruth**

This has been amazing to hear about the different student organizations and, yeah, your journey as well, as a student leader, and the ways in which, you know, changes that I've seen and the benefits that I've had as a student come through, through the efforts of others.