

Transcript of Interview with Laura Kretschmer

Interviewee: Laura Kretschmer

Interviewer: Monica Lam

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Summary: During her time at the University of Cincinnati, Laura Kretschmer worked in the Communications department. Helping to found her own department dedicated to hearing disorders, Kretschmer also co-wrote several books with her husband, and was named one of UC's 20 for 20, for contributions to her department.

Categories: AAUP, College of Allied Health Sciences, City University Transition, Gender, Faculty relations, Athletics

Tags: sexism, research grants, clinical work, Cincinnati Reds, Warren Bennis, faculty union, audiology, Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders, faculty union

Monica Lam: All right. Hello. Good morning. Could you give us your introduction?

Laura Kretschmer: My introduction? Yeah. Okay. My name is Laura Kretschmer. Professor Emeritus of Audiology that's a-u-d. started the University of Cincinnati in 1967. And retired in 2009, as emeritus professor.

ML: What brought you to UC?

LK: Well, I came. I was in graduate study at Columbia. And I took a job—I had been here before and it took a job. Because I wanted to come back to Cincinnati. I liked—I'm from—I'm from the Midwest from Kansas. But I liked it here.

ML: What did you like about Cincinnati?

LK: Well, I don't know. Just nice people. Unusual cultural experiences. I like the Reds, Cincinnati Reds.

ML: Just sports?

LK: Yeah. Lots of stuff.

ML: Yeah. So how did you become interested in Communication Studies and disorders?

LK: Well, I went to the University of Wichita to—and went into a program in communication disorders, it was called localpedics, which is—doesn't mean anything. But when I thought that I wanted to work with people who had communication disorders, it seemed like it was an interesting area. And then, when I was a senior, they had a lecture from Northwestern, on

hearing. And that grabbed me and fascinated me, so, then I went on to Northwestern and went to Columbia.

ML: So what do you hope students took away from your courses?

LK: Well, I hope that they took away that the client is the most important person, the focus of what they're trying to do, and that they need to be, try to be client centered, rather than working on disorder, work on helping the person with a disorder. So I think I got that accomplished pretty well.

ML: Were there any other core values that you want to instill in your students?

LK: Well, I was concerned that they had professional focus and that they belonged to professional associations, and that they continued to study throughout their life, not just while they were in graduate school. I think I've accomplished that too.

ML: What was the hiring process like that UC?

LK: In 1967, the hiring process was that you talk to whoever was offering the position. And then you went into an office with the dean of the college who was traditionally an old white guy, and sort of made your case and then they made you an offer, which—was sort of a take it or leave it, but I wanted to be here, so I took it.

ML: What was your relationship like among your colleagues?

LK: Well, over the years, I had a lot of different colleagues. I had some people that I was very close to and very cooperative with. And colleague or two that were jerks. But I sort of lived with that and found my own relationships as well. My husband started working here, at the University a couple of years after I did so at least—and he was at a different department. So at least I was friendly with the people that he worked with. And so no, I found support.

ML: Did you face any challenges that UC?

LK: Yeah, I think that I think that there are a lot of challenges. Not necessarily with my job since I thought that I was free to pretty much run things the way I wanted to run them all I thought was good educational experience. But I think there were challenges with salary and with advancement. I made it through anyway.

ML: So how did UC respond to your needs?

Laura Kretschmer

LK: How did they respond to my needs? No, I don't think they cared about my needs very much [Laughs]. But you know, I always had an office and, and—resources. were, you know, they were there if, if needed in terms of media or in terms of materials. Until we had a, until we had a faculty union, I don't think that they responded to anybody's needs very much. But after that, it was it was better.

Interviewer

ML: Did you work with others in your department that felt the same way?

LK: That felt that they needed union support, it felt that they needed better support?

ML: Yeah, both?

LK: Yeah. Yeah, I, I think I was maybe not in step with other people in the in the department. I think I was the only one that really felt strongly about the union. But you know, these were people that I got along with and for the most part, I respected them.

ML: What was your involvement with the union like?

LK: Well, I wasn't screaming radical by any means. But I certainly gotten involved in process of supporting negotiations. I did participate in both of the strikes that we had, simply because I thought it was the right thing to do.

ML: Would you say you'd like those were successful?

LK: Yeah, they were successful in the sense that brought the administration to the bargaining table and sort of set a precedent that bargaining was better than than not having classes or having the idea of the strike out in the community. For the most part, I think that worked out until later in terms of the administration. At some point, we did get an administration that was not interested in negotiation.

ML: Was there a particular administration that you could think of?

LK: That didn't support negotiations?

ML: Yeah, yeah.

LK: Well, I don't know. Since this is for posterity, I don't care to name anybody particularly but when Henry Winkler was president, he understood the issues and supported negotiations. Nancy Zimpher was somebody who, more recently supported negotiations. In between, there were a couple of people that didn't.

ML: Was there a particular administration that stood out to you at your time at UC

LK: Well, I mentioned Henry Winkler and I thought he was the epitome of what a college president should be. He's erudite and thoughtful and willing to to respect the faculty. He was a pretty decent guy. And I thought, although she came late in my tenure here, I thought Nancy's Zimpher of a very nice job. The community didn't like it, because she made sure to fire a basketball coach that needed firing. But you know, she was—she understood the process of bringing people together and cooperating. So that was important.

ML: What are your thoughts on Warren Bennis?

LK: Yeah, you brought that up before. Well—you know, he was everybody's fair-haired boy, sort of. And I think he thought that he had sort of reinvented the process and made it all open to everybody. Yeah, I mean, he was okay. I didn't exactly see what the attraction was. But I like some of his appointments. I liked his Dean of Education that he pointed, and a couple of others that I thought were people that sort of saw broadly what the issues were and made a lot of effort to be innovative—Now, he wasn't very high on my list, but you know, he was a nice guy.

ML: So why do you think you hr wasn't able to respond to your needs properly?

LK: Well, sort of responding to my needs, would be, you know, do a fabulous job of upping everybody's income, including mine, and providing new building and doing all kinds of supportive faculty. And I think that, that what happened over the time that I was here was that the—the relationship with the state and the finances, or lack of finances, sort of created a problem with lack of support. The students started to get some of the things they deserve. But I never—I didn't think that the faculty was getting the things that they deserve.

ML: What steps did you particularly take to try to, you know, gain, like a better salary?

LK: Ah, well, there was an instance. I'm having a little trouble putting it in time perspective, but I believe it was in the late 70s, when there were a number of women who were senior faculty that presented a case for improving salaries specifically for those women, and they were all in which I was at that time, they were all in senior ranks, associate or full professor. And so I participated in that arbitration on a recall that it got me anything, I think it did help one or two people who are really egregiously. Below in terms of their salaries. That was the primary effort that I made.

ML: Would you say was successful?

LK: For those one or two people I thought it was, I think it was successful. I did get more appreciation from their various departments. I don't recall getting a huge jump in my salary, but I did get jobs when—when negotiations sort of panned out. So I think the thing that was annoying to me is that I thought I was doing as well as my husband. And he actually came in a couple of years after I did we were at the same rank. And he was always making at least 10 to \$20,000 more than I was. Yeah.

ML: Yeah. And you two worked on some research and like projects and books together too.

LK: Sure. Yeah. And the books that we pu—books—a couple of books that we published were together. And, you know, my name was on as well as his, it was not his fault. But I think that pretty well spoke to how things work.

ML: Were there other events or incidents that were handled poorly by the university?

LK: Yeah, well, I didn't, after the—this was 1970, after the shooting at Kent State. There was substantial unrest here on this campus as there was most of the school campuses. And it required a lot of demonstration by students to get any response from, from the administration. I don't think the way they handled legitimate student complaints was really the best way to handle it. And I sort of didn't get—particularly in lighter gears, how negotiations were handled. Pretty much told the—the faculty representatives at one point, I suppose, eighties, I guess, late

eighties, sort of take it or leave it in terms of, we're not doing X or we're giving you Y but that's it. And the administrators were not really involved in negotiations, they sent in a lawyer and said, this is how it's going to be. That's not really collective bargaining in anybody's mind

ML: Did any faculty lead because of this.

LK: I'm sure that—I don't know about 1970. Later, I'm sure that there were faculty who weren't retained or didn't. I don't mean they were fired. I mean, they chose not to stay. Because let's face it, we're a little Cincinnati's a little bit—sort of inward looking and conservative. And I think it's—I think it's been a challenge for some faculty who come on and can't find a support system that they want. So they've fled, usually for better salary and better working conditions.

ML: So are you familiar with the case with Colleen McTague she sued the university because she wasn't getting paid enough? Like her salary was too low. And so she actually want that case? Do you have any thoughts on that?

LK: Yeah. Was she in geology or what was her program? Doesn't—that one doesn't ring a bell?

ML: Yes. geology professor in 2—2007.

LK: Okay, that was that was sort of more recently. There were—there are actually a couple of names that are escaping me. There were a couple of similar cases before that. Well, I'm not so good with names anymore. Yeah, I would hope that they would understand. And I'm sure that it happened. And I'm sure that she had a case. And I'm sure that she should have been reinstated and or gotten better salary. I'm sure that I'm sure of that. Gutzwiller, the person I was thinking about Kathryn Gutzwiller, who was—I think maybe she was classics. Not sure. But she was denied tenure. There was a lot of negotiation going on. It was clear that she should have been granted tenure. And I think that case was resolved in her favor. I'm not sure. I would think it was probably the 80s. You'd have to look it up.

ML: Do you think this affects like women faculty, and how they, you know, are able to like teach and interact with colleagues?

LK: Well, I think there's no question that you know, if you're not, if you do if you put in the work, and that was certainly one of the things that happened with when I was involved in the complaint, in the 70s. There are one or two people that—women who should have been advanced, put in the work, did as much or more than their male colleagues and weren't respected for that. I think there's no question that, that—there are issues, and I think they're probably continue to be issues. This is—this is not this is not new for us, or the university or for women in this context, I think, I think it's probably pretty common, to be honest.

ML: So how have you found your support system?

LK: How did I find my support system?

ML: Yes. You mentioned how, throughout your years, you know,

LK: Oh, oh.

ML: people that were, you know, like minded. And it's kind of helped you with challenges. Sure.

LK: Well, I think you have to be willing to reach out and to—to seek people that are interested in the things that you're interested in, maybe outside of teaching you. I was on the Faculty Senate a couple of terms. Although I didn't really thank the faculty so much, pull, but anyway, I did that. A couple of terms. So the people that I found as a support system, or people that liked other things besides teaching, not that they didn't like teaching, but other things in the community. Theater, or movies, or good books, or all those kind of things that you do to develop your cultural life.

ML: So how should faculty go about finding their support system? And if they can't find that within their department?

LK: Well, that's a good question. I think you have to be willing to try to survey across the university and find like-minded people, sometimes it's in research, like-minded people who are interested in teaching, look for any resources in the university that might be involved in development. One of the things that I did participate in that was helpful, although it didn't take me into administration was a year-long program for women to develop their leadership abilities and to promote—likelihood of their entering or getting a chance to enter administrative positions, which of course is the way to advance, and I did—did participate in that and found a mentor but the mentor wasn't able to take me on so I didn't—I didn't get past that particular event in terms of doing administrative things, although I was a department head for several years. Program head actually, department.

ML: What did you do as program head?

LK: Well, one of the things I did was to help develop our application for accreditation for the program from American Speech Language Hearing Association, which was to put together a report and gather data on student success and so on. And that was successful. We did get accreditation, this was in the eighties, I guess. And then I tried to help resolve some of the disputes between faculty and and students. And I had some success there and other things that were not so successful.

ML: What was the process like, gaining that position?

LK: Well, we had a program head who had some issues, couldn't be—didn't need to be reappointed, shouldn't have been reappointed. He had had some health challenges, wasn't—we weren't really getting support from the administration to help him deal with those health challenges. They looked around and said, well, who can be program head? And there I was I was appropriate rank, and really, the only person was abilities and rank, experience, so, well, I got to be program head.

ML: So depending on the circumstances, would you say communication is a challenge? Like, I guess, like navigating different, like, department dynamics?

LK: Yeah, I'm sure that that is critical. I wasn't—I wasn't particularly good at that. I tended to want to do things my way didn't warn people quite enough about—about some of the decisions that needed to be made. So I was moderately successful as a program head. I also didn't—wasn't willing to put up with inappropriate behavior from some of the faculty that were responsible. And so I did tend to confront some of them. And that didn't—didn't earn me any high marks. So I would say, yeah, that I did. Okay, but I wasn't the best negotiator and let's put it that way.

ML: Do you think it's because people have different expectations?

LK: Oh, because I'm a woman, you mean are just different expectations of

ML: I guess, like the circumstances, and potentially, you know, being a woman?

LK: Yeah. Oh, I don't think my gender was the problem. I think it was my attitude [Laughs]. So you know, it, you know—I was satisfied with some of the things that have happened in our program, but there were other things that that I didn't do the best job in the world at.

ML: If you could go back what types, like what kind of things would you have improved?

LK: Are you talking about in my whole tenure?

ML: With like the program per cycle

LK: Well, I had a, I had a couple of colleagues that—who had in inappropriate behavior that I would have tried to have found some administrative support to help me reign in that behavior, get some—censoring of those folks. That would have been useful because we could have saved ourselves some heartache, at some point. Yeah, I think the primary problem with colleagues who are doing inappropriate things is that you have to have administration that's willing to support you and calling those people out. And they were talking about men who were doing inappropriate things with students. And I didn't—I didn't feel that I ever got any. When I reported these things. I never got any support from administration, they weren't willing to call these folks out. This was well before Me Too.

ML: Yeah. Yeah, so keeping the higher ups like accountable. It's very important.

LK: Uh, yeah, well, there—there were certainly people that didn't want to deal with some of the obvious problems. And as a consequence, the problems didn't go away they sort of persisted.

ML: Did you want to elaborate on any of those issues? Or rather not?

LK: No, I'd rather not.

ML: Okay. That's fine. So, let's talk about how UC has expanded, were there any, like difficulties and transitions from being a city to a state school?

LK: Well, I thought we were all excited about going could be a state affiliated school, I think we had unrealistic expectations about what it was going to mean from a financial standpoint. We were a nice little City University. And we needed were able to take more students and we needed

new buildings and other kinds of resources, financial resources, and we thought that the state was going to give us those and then we got a basketball arena, but that's pretty much it. [Laughs] Very quickly, the resources got reduced and then pretty soon we were state affiliated, but but not really reasonably funded. So I think that's the point at which we started to work hard at getting research dollars and doing other things to try to support the university.

ML: Did you witness any tension within the community as UC expanded?

LK: There was some anxiety then I try to point out how one stays safe in any city and then assure them that—that you know, we'll take good care of their kids. If they do reasonably smart things in terms of where they walk at night, why, It could be you know, things will be alright. I don't know. We haven't ever placed in my experience, we didn't ever lose any students to violence or anything of that sort. Car break-ins but that's not a bad thing that happens everywhere. They break into cars in suburbs, too.

ML: Yeah. [Laughs] So what do you think of the implosion of Sander hall?

LK: The implosion of Sander hall. Well, I parked on the street to watch it. [Laughs] It's kind of an odd thing, but I suppose it was a easy way to get it down. I think that it had a lot of bad design features in the first place. So, I think probably they avoided having some people trapped on the upper floors. If the building got on fire, that could have been a real disaster from that standpoint. Other than the fact that it happened, I didn't really have any strong feelings. Yeah.

ML: So did you think maybe like it was poorly designed? Because UC was expanding too fast? Or?

LK: Oh. Well, maybe they picked the wrong architects. I don't know. It's just. Yeah, I mean, I, I really think of it in those terms. Point of fact, it hasn't. I mean, there's been significant problems with housing, on campus housing, for a long time. I think is probably still going on a little bit, they open a couple of dorms, so things things are probably better. And then you can see all of the departments that are—that have sprung up around the university, which I think of it has been handled—well. I mean, there, I think there were some bad decisions and having to do with expanding but the Crosley tower has always been unbelievably ugly. So it's—it's, I understand it's coming down eventually. And you know, when they put up some great buildings. So from that standpoint, I think the university architect has done some pretty good things.

ML: So have you seen ways in which UC has connected with the community?

LK: Yeah, well, we have. This isn't beside the point. It's actually fun. We have a small clinic and our department for people with—adults with hearing loss who want service and some children who, preschool children and so on. And we've tried to reach out to the community to provide that service, although there's plenty of service other services around the city. I think that the—sort of consistently that day of help, sorts of things around the city has been promoted. And flight teams are typically going out to help clean up, and help with playgrounds, and that kind of thing. I think there's certainly been some effort to try to—to improve community relations through the on-campus police department after the Dubois problem, they have a lot of meetings to try to—take the community's opinions into account and to try to do more cooperative things. They describe themselves as—we describe ourselves as, as an urban university. So it's important to fit

with urban settings and to try to do things to improve urban settings. So many people in United States live in urban settings. Yes, it feels like there's a lot of effort to reach out to the community involve the community, do things that are attractive to community, in terms of CCM performances and, and other kinds of events.

ML: How has the campus become more diverse over time?

LK: Well, I think I think there's been an effort to—in by different groups of students and for example, the first gen house and the students are, there is one effort. They're not all people of color, but they certainly are not students who've left—the family has never had anybody in college before. That's been a good effort. Most of the programs that I know, or have some familiarity with, are working hard to recruit underrepresented students nursing, for example. College of Allied Health Sciences work pretty hard to try to recruit underrepresented populations. I don't have any numbers on how that's working. But my assumption is that things are improving in terms of diversity. Do you have other data that suggests that's not true? Or

ML: Oh no I just like, curious to see how, like you've seen the campus become more diverse?

LK: Yeah, I think that's I think that's the case. It feels like it and sort of, as I think back on, rather large number of students have actually seen it seems like it's more diverse. I hope that's happening, continues to happen.

ML: Does it surprise you that students come here just for you know, co-op reasons, or?

LK: No, it doesn't surprise me about DAAP programs. Some of the DAP programs are the best in the whole country, not just by rank, but by—in fact by experience and co-op attracts a lot of students as it should, it's exceptionally good idea, it started here. And the idea of co-op started on the UC campus. And it makes sense that that students are coming in for that. CCM has several programs that are nationally ranked. So no, it doesn't doesn't surprise me when I made a student who's come from California or someplace else in the west coast or even other places on the east coast. Or internationally.

ML: So how has technology changed over time? With your, you know, teaching, you know, at UC and everything?

LK: Well, I mean, the—the biggest obvious things are going from one overhead projector to multiple media things in the classroom so that you're getting—get video or movies or internet or anything that you want in the classroom. I think the biggest change has probably been student access to various kinds of media. So, it used to be the case that maybe there'd be one or two people that would have a laptop in a class, I'm talking about early 2000s. And then by the time I finished, everybody in the class had a laptop open, but they're a little bit more involved in laptop than they were in my very interesting lectures. But there you go. So, you know, it's the same explosion in the university of media as it is in all of society. So everybody's got a phone, everybody's connected, which is okay, I spend a lot of time on my phone.

ML: Was technology ever like a distraction for students in your class?

LK: In every class, there are always some students that are distracted by the media so that you know, they're sitting away in the back of the classroom, and they're surfing and punching each other laughing, pointing at the screen and so on. I usually just said, don't do that. Because I'll call you out a couple of times then they quit. Yeah, I think—on the other hand, sometimes if you don't have an answer, why somebody can go on Google the question and get an answer and contribute to the conversation. I used something called Blackboard, which is the online service that you see hands for courses. That was very helpful. I thought when we started doing that, and this is early 2000s, I think. So you could put all the lectures after you put all your materials off, you can put the assignments up, you to take quizzes and take exams and didn't have to do on-paper stuff. That was extremely helpful. I was I was very happy for that addition. And it facilitated off-campus online courses too which I did teach some.

ML: How has technology, like impacted things like research?

LK: Um, well, I think it's, I think it's made a large difference. I can remember when I was in graduate school in the 60s, if we wanted to search in the library, we had to go and go to the card file and open the card file and pick out what we wanted and then see if we could find it on—in paper copy. We haven't done that for 25 years, because everything you want is online, the lib—all the library resources are online. Articles, you can borrow books from any place in the whole state. If you need a book. It's facilitated research, no question about—particularly the data interpretation and writing. So that part has, has made a huge difference.

ML: So where do you see the future of UC going?

LK: The future UC Well, I think they have ensured that it will continue and in some fashion. I'm not sure how I feel about the number of students that they want to cram into this place, but certainly has programs that are cutting edge across the university. And I think it's established its place in terms of innovation. And I'm assuming that there is. there is a future.

ML: Do you think being a heavy like research college affects the way professors interact with students?

LK: Well, it is it's an interesting change from people can be tenure faculty where the focus is on research. And then there'll be educators, clinical educators that will do teaching. Yeah, I think there's probably been some change. I know one of the things that we were kind of grumpy with Ohio State was that, at least from undergraduate programs— and reflecting on the students that have come to us from undergraduate programs—the majority of courses were taught by graduate assistants or I guess they would be sort of clinical associates. Which is too bad because I'm talking about speech in here. I don't know about other programs. One of the things that, that we could say as a, as a program and department was that the tenured faculty all taught, and the student had an opportunity to deal with—hear from people who should be good at what they're doing. Just because you had tenure didn't mean you're a good teacher. But anyway. [Laughs] Yeah, I think that that research is kind of pulled people away from teaching, which is an important function to my way of thinking.

ML: What is your proudest moment that UC?

LK: Proudest moment? Hmm. Well, I guess there are two sort of proud moments. 20 years ago, 21 years ago, we went from being a program in Arts and Sciences to the College of Allied Health Science into, into our own department. And they had two different celebrations for that department. One was a 10 year anniversary, and I was named as one of the outstanding contributors to the college at the 10 year anniversary. And at the 20 year anniversary, which just happened last year, I was named one of the 20 for 20, in terms of contributions to the college now, I've already retired at that point, still doing some research things. So I was pretty proud of both of those accomplishments.

ML: Did you participate in any of the Bicentennial, like celebrations,

LK: I did go to the Bicentennial for the Alumni Association. And one of our alumni from from the Department of—program in audiology was named as an outstanding alum and received something called the Marion Spencer award, and he was the guy that I had had as a student and supported his development and growth. He's not doing hearing things now. He's—he's a was a lawyer and entrepreneur. But we were quite happy to have had him in our program. Now I got invite—we got invited to something else in November for—I don't know what, exactly what that is, dinner or something. We're fairly active in, in giving some—my husband and I. So we get invited to a lot of stuff.

ML: Are you—do you still stay connected with students that have graduated?

LK: Yes, very connected. We have some excellent friends who are still here, and even some that are a little further away that we're, we're involved with. Matter of fact, one of two different ones of our students help plan our 50th wedding party, which was a Harry Potter party, and

ML: Oh that's cute.

LK: It was cute. And they planned us with our funds. But no, it was a great party. So we're proud to know those people and we still keep in touch with them.

ML: Yeah, so I know, you and your husband really like books. You guys like to, donated it like a collection.

LK: We did donate a collection of Native American children's books to the education library. And it's about 300 books in the collection right now. And we will be adding to that. These are books that we collected in, in the southwest primarily when we were vacationing there. So, we're very happy to make that endowment. And it was the first one that that education library had received.

ML: What sort of impact do you hope that it has on the university or people that you know, view the collection?

LK: Well, we're—we're certainly hoping that it expands cultural awareness for the teachers and the students who get to see the books, though, those books can be loaned out that can be read there, but they can be loaned out for student teaching experiences. And they're primarily Native American, some Alaskan and some other Native peoples in—we know that's not a population that we have a lot of students here who are—who are Native American, but we

certainly hope that they'll be aware of what the history was here as well as what the history in the United States.

ML: Is there anything else that you want to talk about?

LK: Um, no. This time, I didn't get a chance to mention that we love UC athletics, and we're all involved in that. We have season tickets for everything, Women's Soccer, Lacrosse. We've got all the games Women's Basketball, particularly Men's Basketball and Football too. But I'd like women's sports—volleyball. And I we've been involved in contributing to the Women's Excellence Fund, which is support fund for women's athletics, particularly. So we're contributing, continuing to contribute to that fund and to support women's athletics. And part of that is because we've had some wonderful student athletes in our in speech and hearing program. But additionally, we like the coaches, and we like the student athletes, so we want to contribute there.

ML: That's awesome. That's just like another way to connect with students?

LK: It is another way to connect with students. And in point of fact, regardless of what one reads, these ladies are athletes and students, students first in many cases. So, we know that they're on their way to developing their lives and having an impact.

ML: Yeah, that's awesome. Is there anything else?

LK: No, I think that's about it. Anything else from you?

ML: Nope. [Laughs]

LK: Okay. Have you got your time?

ML: Yeah, I did. [Laughs]

LK: Okay.

ML: All right. Thank you so much.

LK: Okay.