

## Transcript of Interview with Richard Kretschmer by Ben Orme

**Interviewee:** Richard Kretschmer

**Interviewer:** Ben Orme

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**Location [Interviewee]:** Cincinnati, OH

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**Transcriber:** Ben Orme

**Summary:** Richard Kretschmer is retired professor from the University of Cincinnati. He was taught and researched methods that helped students with hearing disabilities. During the interview, he shared his passion for teaching and helping students with disabilities. Dr. Kretschmer also gives a lot of credit toward the university for giving him the services and needs for him to succeed in his field of study.

**Categories:** College of Education, Criminal Justice, and Human Services, City School Transition, Student Engagement, AAUP, Athletics

**Tags:** Department of Education, Cincinnati Reds, graduate students, deaf, UC sports, university funding, P&G, faculty union

**Ben Orme:** Go ahead and introduce yourself, your name, and how long you have been at U.C.

**Richard Kretschmer:** My name is Richard Kretschmer Jr. and I was hired in the 1969 and I retired in 2010, and I taught for four more years, and officially retired in 2014.

**BO:** What subject did you teach?

**RK:** [Clears throat] I was in the department of special education. My area was hearing impairment, but I taught a course in language in development for the entire 41 years—45 years I was here and it was a required course in special education and speech in hearing. And I had students from reading linguistics from English, the foreign languages in the course too.

**BO:** What made you get into special education?

**RK:** Well, I am a CODA, child of deaf parents, and my parents were deaf. I was raised in a deaf household and when I decided to go college, or when I was allowed to go college, I decided that I would go into deaf education, and I, that's what I did.

**BO:** How was it, you know, being raised by two parents that had hearing disabilities?

**RK:** —Probably just like you were raised by two hearing parents. My first language was ASL. My family was the only deaf family in the community and so I learned to talk. I learned to sign, then I learned to talk. I spent all my time in a small town, small farming community, in Illinois. And was in the, to the chagrin to everyone, I was in the academic track. [Laughs]. And the reason I say that, I came from a very socially stratified community. There were the very wealthy, then wealthy, and then there was the poor and the two groups did not mix very much and I was of the poor kids that was in the academic track.

**BO:** What did you hope students took away from your class when you taught at UC?

**RK:** Well, what I wanted was two things, I wanted them to have a very—well three things, it was a year long course and in the first quarter, my expectation was that they would have a very strong understanding of how language and communication operated in—among adults, so it was very geared toward adult communication. The second quarter was language development, and my expectation was that they would come out with a very strong understanding of how children go about the process of learning language. And then the third quarter, was on special needs children, and my expectation would be that they would take the first two quarters and apply it to working with children with disabilities.

**BO:** Ok, why did you want to teach at UC?

**RK:** Well—I was working at Gallaudet College in Washing D.C. and I proposed to my wife, who was here in Cincinnati. So, we had to make a decision, we should come to Washington or would I come to Cincinnati. I made the decision that she needed to be here more than I needed to be there. So, I came to Cincinnati and applied at UC. They didn't like—they didn't want me, so they turned me down. So, I wrote a grant, a five-year research grant, got it funded and worked at the Cincinnati Speech and Hearing Center and then all of a sudden they became interested in me. And they hired me the next year. [Laughs]

**BO:** What do you think what would have happen if you took the job in D.C.?

**RK:** I probably would have stayed within the deaf community and it was actually probably a good thing that I came here to UC because, UC provided me with a platform to broaden myself and to broaden my professional goals.

**BO:** Ok, what was the hiring process when you came to UC? I know you said it was little difficult, but—

**RK:** Well, when I came here, there was a rule, that—a nepotism rule and my wife was in speech and hearing, and they wanted to hire me, but the university said no. My wife was already employed and you couldn't have a husband and wife in the same department. And so I came here to education, over to education, and I was interviewed by the faculty, every member of the faculty, and I was interviewed by the department head, and then I was interviewed by the Dean. And the Dean was the one that nixed me because he was the one in Deaf ED. and he and I philosophically did not have the same viewpoint about deafness. So, he decided that I was not a good fit, but he left the next year, and they hired me. [Laughs]

**BO:** I know that you mentioned that you had problems with the dean, when got hired, did you feel any, any problems with other faculty members?

**RK:** No, no, no. UC was the best thing that ever happened to me.

**BO:** Can you further, like you know, did they meet any of your needs?

**RK:** I was hired with the—when we were making the transitioned from between a city institution to a state institution. And part of that transition is that they wanted to increase their research visibility. So they hire me specifically to beef up the research capability for the special ed. And so that's—so I was hired to do that, and I became the director of their—the doctoral program in special ed. And I accomplished what they wanted me to accomplish. I managed to make it a well know doctoral program in the nation, and even internationally.

**BO:** Did you write any books while you were at UC?

**RK:** Yeah, I wrote two. One is considered a classic in deaf education and the other one was co-authored by a woman, Alice String, who at that time was probably the most well known person in language development for deaf in the country and she asked me to help write a book with her, so I wrote half of the book and she wrote the other half. And the classic was written by me and my wife and I am very proud of that book. It was quite the break through. It, it—People—people still remember it.

**BO:** I guess it is special since you wrote half of it with your wife. Did students change over time at your time with UC? How did they change?

**RK:** Well, first of all, I got older. [Laughs] When I first started, I was about, about the same age as the students. And as I got older, the students seemed to get younger, younger, and younger. However, I think I connected with all of the students, pretty, pretty much. I think the major change is technology. That is when I saw the biggest change. Students were connected to their phones and connected to their computers, even in class. Which didn't bother me, that's O.K. In terms of the quality of students, I don't think I saw the difference. I think the quality has always been consistently high.

**BO:** Ok, has technology changed, like the way you know, taught hearing impaired students.

**RK:** Yes, the big thing right now toward the end of my career, I became very interested in it, was cochlear implants and that has made a big change in the field. And it also set up, harden the divisions within the field because there is the pro-cochlear implants and the anti-cochlear implant people. In other areas of special ed., the technology has made major changes in terms of like voice recognition and voice generation devices for the blind and the auditory and coding systems. So, there has been a lot of changes, but the basic principles of special education are essentially the same. I mean, it is just the trappings have changed, but not the substance has changed.

**BO:** Was UC, did the lead the cochlear implant? You know, were they for or against it?

**RK:** People that are against it are the die-hard signers, who feel that the cochlear implant is going to destroy the deaf community because it allows deaf—deaf people going into the hearing society and much more freely. The people are for it, are people who are very anti-signers and the irony of it is that a lot of the cochlear implant kids when they become adults learn to sign, so it becomes both talkers and signers, but—so that's hardened the division, that has been the main division in deaf ed. and that's hardened the divisions.

**BO:** How has the faculty changed over time?

**RK:** [Pause], I think, when I first came here the faculty was very much into service and that is consistent with the fact it was a city institution rather than a state institution. When we made the switch to state, I think the, the service component has become less and less important, and research has become more important. And I have mixed feelings about that. I, I believe in service and I believe that every faculty member has an obligation to connect to the community, but I also believe very much into research, so I think there needs to be a balance between the two, but I see the, the weight going more toward research and less and less toward service.

**BO:** And which would you prefer? Would you prefer research or service?

**RK:** I'm—I'm both and the reason that I say that is that I ran a pre-school program for twelve years at a non-profit institution while I was simultaneously a faculty member, and so what I was able to do is take my research and apply it directly toward children and I think is the best, the best of both worlds is when you can find the service but also where you have the opportunity to actually find the, apply the science into—into that service.

**BO:** OK, and what are you most proud at your time at UC?

**RK:** I think the most thing I am proud of is that I, I—two things: one, is the—I had sixty-eight doctoral students that I completed dissertations with. I am very proud of those sixty-eight students in what they have done in the field. They've, they've—they helped make major changes in the field I am very proud of that. The second thing that I am proud of is that I taught—I taught a course for forty-four years and students still remember the course. I actually saw a student who was in my very first class and she talking about how she remembers the class very fondly and how, she actually remembers some the first content which is also appealing to me. So those are the two things I think that I am most proud of.

**BO:** Is there any students that have graduated or got their doctorate. Are they still working in that field now?

**RK:** Oh yes! I have—probably out of the sixty-eight that are there, about maybe fifty-five are still in the field and the other thirteen have either died or retired.

**BO:** Have they made any more significant improvements?

**RK:** Huh?

**BO:** Have they made any significant improvements?

**RK:** Yes, one of my doctoral students became the head of special education in the province of Ontario. I had two or three students who had done some major funded research at Gallaudet, and at R.I.T., Rochester Institute of the Deaf. A lot of my students have written books. I've got copies of the books that they have written, so yeah, I think they have made major contributions. Even today, they are making major contributions.

**BO:** Like how so?

**RK:** Well, I just got a call from a lady who's the head of the program, one of the programs down in Florida and she has done some major kinds of work in the public schools in Florida. And she is doing some research connected to that and what she was telling me was that I was very impressed with. And—so they are still there.

**BO:** They are still there. Um, what changes did witness when you were at UC?

**RK:** What changes?

**BO:** Yeah

**RK:** I think the major change was going from a state institution, I mean going from the city institution to the state institution. I think that was the right thing to do, but it changed the mission of the university. And it was a both an easy transition and a difficult transition. The second thing that I think is different, is that we have gone into pretty heavily into research and I know there is a lot of attempt to bring service and teaching focus back to the into the mix. But, having talked—as I talk to the younger faculty, they seem to be less interested in teaching and less interested in

service, and more interested in doing research. I think that's OK, if that is what people want to do, that's OK. It just happens—it happens to be what I am not all about. I believe the three were equal.

**BO:** What were some of the easy transitions from city to state?

**RK:** Well, I think the city never got over the fact that we made the transition, even to today, I'm not sure they reconciled that we made the transition. The second thing was the faculty because the faculty, most when I came on, most of them were hired when it was a city institution and they were very, very geared toward service in the community. And all of a sudden, the rules began to change and I think they found it difficult. And as the rules changed, the new faculty that were hired were slightly different from them. So, there began sort of a division between the service people and the non-service people. I think the students changed too. When you talk about change, that's where I saw the biggest change because the population became more widespread. Before it was almost 99% Cincinnati and then all of a sudden, we started having students from international students and we started having students from all over the country coming and that changed the complexion of the, of the student body.

**BO:** Did you like the bigger student size or student population?

**RK:** Yes, I actually helped contribute to it [Laughs].

**BO:** How so?

**RK:** It was—that was the period that I was out doing a lot of outreach in the, nationally. And as I was doing that outreach, I would have students contact me, that I had heard me and wanted to know more about the program and so I would say that during that period of time I don't think I had any students from Cincinnati.

**BO:** Did you like it?

**RK:** Yeah, yeah I liked the diversity. It was fun having someone from California and someone from Brooklyn in the same class because they had different viewpoints on life and how they saw life. It was fun to see them congeal into a group and that was very exciting to see because they would come as individuals and by the time they left, they became this sort of cadre of people, who, who still were in contact with one another when they left and that was very gratifying to see.

**BO:** Did they see like the people from California and Brooklyn, like the city of Cincinnati and the university in general?

**RK:** Yes, a lot of people felt they were being exiled to Cincinnati. [Laughs]. Particularly, the New Yorkers, they all thought because they have never been West of Manhattan. But, once they got here, they found out that they really liked it. They were a little surprised how southern the city was because they expected something more like Chicago as opposed to Cincinnati. But, they all came to like it. Most of them had families, they brought families and they were very pleased with the cost of living. Most of them had lived in places that were twice—you know they could get them same, they could get twice the living accommodations with they had where they were living. And they were all pleased, in general, with the school systems. So they came to like Cincinnati and they, they remember their experience here quite fondly.

**BO:** And you mention the transitions, the difficult times at UC. What were those?

**RK:** I remember a faculty member—a faculty meeting where the people who had been hired prior to the transition were accusing the ones that had been hired after the transition, about not caring enough about the students. And I really objected to that because I thought that I personally felt that I cared about the students and really wanted the students to do well. And I remember one faculty member saying that there was too much emphasis on research and I had felt that there was not enough emphasis on research at that time. So, it got pretty testy at times, but eventually, I mean, we all worked together. I mean, I do not want to give the impression that it was chaos, but sometimes it got a little tense.

**BO:** Was it just the older generation and the newer generation?

**RK:** Well, I don't think it is old and new, it was so much the service-oriented people versus the research-oriented people

**BO:** Ok, what were some of the incidents or events handled in a way that disappointed you at UC?

**RK:** —I think the hardest time for me was when, during, when the union was formed, and the—the response of the administration to the union.

**BO:** And how did you feel about the union?

**RK:** I was very pro-union, and I went out on strike both times, and I was a little disappointed that the administration wasn't as sincere in their negotiations, and that was a very tense time for the university. Fortunately, we got past it, but it was a very tense time

**BO:** What did you do? How did you partake at the strike?

**RK:** Well, the first time, I did, I have to admit I crossed the line only to teach my class because I felt I had a duty to the class. But other than that, we didn't come on campus and on the second strike I actually joined the pickets and was picketing. I am not comfortable with that, but I decided that—I, decided that I had to do that.

**BO:** And how long did the strike last?

**RK:** Not very long. It was maybe four or five days and then the negotiations stepped up a step and it finally got resolved.

**BO:** And how did administration feel about you teaching the class during the strike?

**RK:** They didn't know. I don't think the administration has a very good notion on what goes on at their university, the university at that time. At that time, I think they were more concerned about administration than they were about the faculty per se.

**BO:** And were you at the time of where Warren Bennis was the President?

**RK:** Mmmhmm [Nodding his head yes]

**BO:** How did you feel about him? I know there were some faculty that had mixed feelings about him?

**RK:** Uh, I think he had a very difficult job. I am not a touchy, feeling kind of person and he was into touchy, feely, big time. I have mixed feelings, there were parts of what he did that I liked and there were parts of what he did I didn't like, so I can't give you a definitive answer as to how I felt about him because you would have to give me a very specific situation and then I can react and say, 'I didn't like that' or 'I did like that'.

**BO:** What were some of the things that you did like about him, you know?

**RK:** I think he was a very personable guy and I think he was a good spokesman for the university. I don't think he was always honest. [Winces then Laughs]. But in his mind, he thought he was honest, but I don't think he was always honest. I think also, the—I know that many of the community leaders were very upset with him because he wanted to make the transition to a state. I think that was the right decision. [Inaudible]. I think he was right there—and I am going to stop there.

**BO:** How has the campus changed since you started?

**RK:** When we started, it was like a little village. Now, it has become a city. I—the building program was started, then completed, I think it has transformed the campus for the good because when I talked to incoming students, particularly undergraduates, often it is the campus is what decides them to come because how it looks and how it feels. But in the process of it becoming a city, it also has the problems of cities, of congestion and things of that nature. I think, overall, I think its been positive changes. As far as the—another changes that—I know this sounds contradictory, but I'm pleased to see more emphasis on undergraduate work and really trying to upgrade the undergraduates experience. I always felt that the undergraduate experience at UC was lacking, when compared to my own experience at Northwestern. I felt that it did not measure up, but I feel right now it is beginning to measure up.

**BO:** What were some of things that were lacking in the undergraduate programs?

**RK:** I think it was much too focused on the traditional curriculums and—and I always had the feeling that the undergraduate program, at least in my department, was sort of an afterthought. And now, it has become front and center, along with the graduate programs, I think that's, that's good.

**BO:** Would say that they are both on an equal playing field?

**RK:** I don't think they are equal. I don't think, because we are a state institution and we are depended on grant money, and stuff. But I think it's a, it's a—I don't think the undergraduate is necessarily the step-child anymore. I think it's a full... true sibling, maybe the younger sibling, but it is a true sibling.

**BO:** And how has the Northwestern—your experience at Northwestern different from?

**RK:** Northwestern was very, we did a lot of hands on, even back in 1950, let's see—1962. It was very hands on. I mean, there was a lot of lecturing and that kind of stuff, but, and I always felt like I knew why I was taking the courses. And all of my classmates felt the same, that they knew why they were taking the courses. I didn't always feel, at UC, students knew why they were taking a lot of the courses they were taking and I hope that's changed a little bit now. That students are seeing the purpose of the course. At least in special ed. I know they feel that way. Even in the liberal arts courses they are taking, they can see why they are taking those particular courses. Where as—where as at Northwestern, we always, we always had a sense of why. [Nodding his head yes]

**BO:** Ok, how have UC's priorities shifted since you started?

**RK:** What?

**BO:** How have UC's priorities shifted since you started here?

**RK:** Well, the main shift was that we went from state institution, I mean a city institution to a state. The pri—and as a consequence, much research has a resumed a high priority at the university, rightly so because, if we didn't do that, we couldn't begin to compete with other major universities. I think that the undergraduate programs have gone up and down as a result of that. But, I think we are on an upswing, at least I hope, you are both undergraduates, you can tell me if it is getting better. I think it is getting better. The—and the people who set the tone are the presidents and each president has a different tone. And—but, there, there is a consistency to president to president and there has been a shift since Bennis toward more of this academic research and also, an emphasis, on recently on undergraduate work.

**BO:** Ok, what were some, name some of the presidents that were more research-based presidents at your time?

**RK:** —let me rephrase that ok. I think our current president is very research-oriented and justifiably so because of his background so, but he has a strong interest in undergraduate education. Our previous president, and I am blocking on his name, Ono, I was cut from the same piece of cloth, that he was very research-oriented, but also very undergraduate oriented. I think the president before that, Nancy—I am blocking again,

**BO:** Zimpfer

**RK:** Huh, Zimpfer, I think she was more interested in undergraduates than she was graduates. I am going to stop there. I mean—I think the basic perimeters is the same, but sort of the emphasis changes within the presidency.

**BO:** And where do you see UC going into the future?

**RK:** Up.

**BO:** Can you explain more?

**RK:** I think the—I think our ratings across the university, the national ratings across the university is increasing, and I see us getting more and more national visibility. I am not a big sports guy, but I have to admit that the sports program helps us, cause I know once Northwestern started winning, all of a sudden, the visibility of the rank and file person suddenly appeared. And the reality is that you have to be visible to the academic community, but also be visible to the community at large. If you want to draw nationally and I think University of Cincinnati is doing that by the virtue of the diversity of the population that's here.

**BO:** How do feel about the changes with the athletic department, you know, starting to build new stadiums?

**RK:** I am OK with that. I know a lot of my colleagues my not be Ok with that, but I am OK with that. What I am not OK with if it becomes a major, major drag on the—financial drag on the, the institution. I happen to go to all of the basketball games, go to all the football games, soccer games, lacrosse, volleyball and I enjoy it. I have met with the student—student athletes and there is a misconception with student athletes that they are kind of dumb, draggy. And actually, they are quite sharp and quite with it. Now, they do get privilege in the since they get tutoring that a lot of students don't get and so forth., but they do ok and so as long they are winning and they doing what they are supposed to do, I am OK with that.

**BO:** Ok, how have you seen UC connected to Cincinnati.



**RK:** Well, I think we are getting back to being reconnected. I think when we made the transition, we started to distance ourselves a little too far. But I think we had to because the city thought they owned us, and we went through a period where you'd hear politicians and you'd hear news people still talking about us as if we were owned by them, so I think that needed to change because we are not owned by the city of Cincinnati. But, what I think what is now happen is that we are beginning to reconnect and beginning to come back to the community as witnessed to all stuff happening around campus. Not just on campus, but around campus, and the fact that faculty members are more connected to the community at large. I hope that continues because we are urban has and we have a responsibility.

**BO:** Could you see that Macys, P&G, and G.E. have and effect on the university?

**RK:** Yes, yeah I just hope we don't get overwhelmed by it. I hope we don't become like the opioid situation and become too dependent, but on the other hand, that is where the money is and the federal is becoming less and less generous, so the reality is that we do have to have some connection with the larger community like Macy's and P&G. and so forth. And I am OK with that. I can live with that. There was a time in life where I couldn't. I can now. [Laughs].

**BO:** What are you most proud of at your time at UC?

**RK:** Winning the Dolley Cohen Award.

**BO:** And what is that?

**RK:** I won that way back when I first started my career, about in the 70's, and—and I was—the reason why I am proud of that, its, its an award that usually generated by the students. The students do the nominations, get the departments drew, nominate people and so forth. And my particular case, they—when they showed me the portfolio that was developed, it brought tears to my eyes. I was overwhelmed by the—comments made by the students.

**BO:** I guess you had like a real connection to the students.

**RK:** Yes. I—I loved the students. I loved the large class size. My largest class was a hundred and ten. My graduate class and while, the thing that I was proudest was by the second week of class, I knew the name of every student in class. I wrote individual exams for every student. And so what I did, I interviewed every student, see what their interests were and I wrote the exams, I tried to cater to it to each individual student. And I did that for every year that I taught. So, my computer load, is currently loaded with old exams that I have written for students and I tried very hard to not duplicate exams because students are different from one another. The smallest class I had was they first year that I taught was, which was about thirty, then it went up to a hundred, then started to taper to about eighty.

**BO:** Do you prefer the larger class?

**RK:** I am very good at lecturing because I am very good at tying it practical—practicalities and the students seemed to respond to that. So class size did not seem to bother me. I would prefer small, seminar classes, but I was ok with larger classes. I am inherently an actor, so I was a very good lecturer. And my midterms and my finals always had a practical application, so they had to go back out into the community, collect data, and bring it back, and then answer the question. So then I could maintain that connection to the community.

**BO:** Ok, so I guess you enjoyed teaching the students?

**RK:** It depends on how you will look at it. [Inaudible]. It was more like acting.

**BO:** What else would you like me, would you like to tell me about UC, you know?

**RK:**—I am very grateful to UC. I was hired at time when they were making a transition and I was hired to do a certain task. And that task—is, when, let me back up. When I was in high school, I was in a, in the academic track, but no one expected me to go college. And so when I went to college, and I met with all of these professors I said to myself, ‘I want to be like them’ and UC allowed me to be like them. It gave me the opportunity to become connected to the larger academic community both nationally and internationally. And UC allowed me to build a reputation that I don’t think I would have gotten if had stayed in D.C. So I am very grateful to UC and I think it is a good place to work. I don’t—I don’t know if it is now because I don’t work here anymore, but it was a very good place to work and I am very grateful to UC.

**BO:** I guess to administrators.

**RK:** Everybody.

**BO:** Everybody helped you out.

**RK:** Everybody. Again, I went through a lot of deans and a lot of department heads. In general, they were very supportive and very, did the right thing. I was ok—I have been ok with—it hasn’t always been a bed of roses, but I OK with UC. I am OK with UC

**BO:** Like could you say that the department head had one goal and that was to service the students?

**RK:** In special ed. we were very student oriented, so I can’t really talk about the rest of the university. We were very student oriented and I can—I can honestly say for the department heads in special ed. the students always came first. And as a consequence the student experience both at the graduate level and the undergraduate level [Inaudible]

**BO:** Is there anything else you want to say at UC?

**RK:** No—not really. I think I’ve said everything that I can say, unless you need me to pad more. [Laughs]

**BO:** I think we are good

**RK:** Ok.

**BO:** It was nice meeting with you and everything and I appreciate it.