

Interviewer: Please state your name, title, and affiliation.

Dr. Austin: I'm Dr. Sharon Austin, Professor of Political Science at the University of Florida.

Interviewer: And can you tell us a little bit about your personal background, so specifically where you from and what was your home or family life like growing up?

Dr. Austin: I'm originally from the city of Memphis, Tennessee. I was raised there by my parents and I have an older brother and an older sister. It was a very nice working class neighborhood. My parents had working class jobs. They mostly worked in factories. They had been raised in the Mississippi Delta. They were sharecroppers. They lived very poor. And then they moved to Memphis when they were in their late teens, early 20s. And just they stayed in Memphis for the rest of their lives. My father died in 1998 at the age of 59. My mother died in 2016 at the age of 76. It was really just a beautiful neighborhood, beautiful community. I still keep in touch with a lot of people that grew up with a very proud community called Westwood Indian Hills in Memphis.

Dr. Austin: And it just was people we all came from, the same kind of trajectory. The families all kind of grew up in poverty in the rural south, moved to the city, seeking a better life and made a life for themselves and their families. And it wasn't perfect, but it was a very good place to grow up. I think the only thing that if I had to point to something negative from my childhood is my parents had a very contentious marriage. They separated and got back together many times. But we were sort of, my sister and brother and I were caught in the middle of that just having them always struggling for money. And that was the root of some of their arguments and having to grow up in that type of environment. But they did the best they could and they gave us a good life. And how were you introduced to the field?

Interviewer: How were you introduced to the field of political science?

Dr. Austin: I actually was a history major in college. I wanted to go to law school. I thought that would be my plan. And I took political science courses and minored in political science in college. But politics had always been a major part of my life because growing up in Memphis, the city had such a large Black population that there were a lot of African Americans always running for office. And politics was always a topic of discussion not only in our home and in our

neighborhood but in our communities and even in our churches. Sometimes politicians would come to our churches and campaign because I always attended these really large mega churches. And you could always tell when it was campaign season because they would always come to the church and they would always campaign. Eventually, our pastor stopped them from doing it because he felt like if you don't come to our church just to worship, then don't come here just to campaign. So politics was always a major part of my life, especially with the mayor's races. That's what my doctoral dissertation even was about, Memphis's attempt to try to elect their first Black mayor because it was always the topic of discussion. Presidential politics also was a major topic of discussion. I remember how my dad hated Richard Nixon.

Dr. Austin: And I remember the day that Ronald Reagan was shot, how happy the people in the community were because people were hoping he would die because he was really hated in our community. But I was introduced to politics mostly in college just from the courses that I took. And then later I decided to get a master's in political science because I thought I would go into government service or working for the government. But then I just decided eventually to get a doctorate because I wasn't tired of school and I figured it would be best to get as much of an education as I could, especially considering the fact that I was unmarried and didn't have any children. I felt that it was best to go ahead and go to school, get it over with. And that way when you're older you don't have to worry about it. And that was the wise decision to make. But I eventually went ahead and got my doctorate because of the influence of the courses that I took in college.

Interviewer: And where did you attend undergrad and graduate school?

Dr. Austin: Christian Brothers University in Memphis, Tennessee. I went to school at the University of Memphis for my master's and the University of Tennessee Knoxville for my PhD.

Interviewer: Okay. And can you tell us a little bit about your undergrad or graduate experience?

Dr. Austin: In general or just political science?

Interviewer: Just in general.

Dr. Austin: I went to a small private college, predominantly White. If I remember correctly, back then it was Christian Brothers College. Now it's Christian Brothers University. If I remember correctly there were probably about a thousand students maybe. It was a really small campus in the heart of Midtown Memphis. And from what I remember when I started college in the fall of 1983, ours was the largest class of Black students ever to attend that university. And I think I remember them saying that there might have been 25 of us and that was considered to be a lot. So it was predominantly White. One thing that I found interesting about college was that this was the first time I actually left my all Black community to go to an all White community. And not all White, but mostly White community. And I think for most of us in college back then everything was Black and White. I don't think I met a Hispanic student. I think I remember one Asian, maybe two Asian students.

Dr. Austin: But there weren't very many students who weren't Black or White. So everything was Black and White. And Memphis is a racially polarized city. So everything was Black and White. And I noticed that a lot of the White students came from either private schools or predominantly White, practically all White high schools. The Black kids mostly came from predominantly Black public schools in Black neighborhoods. And we were all kind of thrust together on campus. And sometimes in class you would hear people say things about Black people or make these assumptions about crime as if to insinuate that every Black neighborhood was this horrible criminal place, had all this crime, and every Black man was a potential criminal. So those were the stereotypes that many of the White students had. And even some of the Black students had, we call it now, imposter syndrome. But even some of the Black students kind of felt uncomfortable because we had always been conditioned to think that White people were smarter. And then when we went to college, I remember even some of my friends were saying that, "Wow, they're not any smarter than we are. They have to work just like we do." We just thought that because they allegedly went to better schools that they were going to outperform us and that we were going to struggle in college and that we weren't going to know what to do. And I think some of the Black students felt that way. Some of the White students also felt that, "Oh, you know, they don't belong here."

Dr. Austin: But we found, at least I found, this was the first time I'd ever really actually had any real contact with White people other than my teachers. And I found that they had the same problems that we had. And I was really shocked to find that some of the White students grew up in poor families. And I was like, "Wow." Because the image that we saw on television was like the Brady Bunch, you know, the middle class White people. And we didn't think that White people lived like that. And even just talking to some of my White classmates and hearing them talk about the problems in their families, they had life problems, just like they had the same problems we had. So it was really a learning experience. And that was probably the best part

about college is just meeting people from a totally different type of background and learning from them. So even though I didn't like sometimes some of the assumptions that they made or stereotypes that they had, it was nice to be around people from a different background.

Interviewer: Were you a first generation scholar?

Dr. Austin: I was.

Interviewer: And did you have any mentors along the way that made an impression on you and your career?

Dr. Austin: In high school I had several mentors. High school teachers especially, Mrs. Hill was my favorite teacher. She taught journalism and English. She was really, really smart. I was really fortunate in high school to have so many really smart, accomplished Black teachers. So they were my mentors. In college I didn't have any mentors in college. I mean in college when I was in college we pretty much had to do things on our own. So now with a lot of the support systems and counseling centers and mentoring services that college campuses have now, those didn't exist back then. So if you were in college and if you couldn't keep up you basically would be told that maybe you should leave. Maybe you shouldn't be here. Even I remember in college because it was a private school, I guess they don't do this at public schools, if you hadn't paid your tuition they would come and call you out of class and you had to go to the business office and explain when are you going to pay your bill. I don't see anything like that other than at my college.

Dr. Austin: As far as mentoring, no, not in college. In graduate school, and I didn't really get to answer the previous question about graduate school, but in graduate school I did have a professor, his name is Dr. John Scheb, he still is teaching now, I think he's approaching retirement, but he was very helpful to me in graduate school. And there was another professor, Dr. George Kia, at the University of Memphis who was from Liberia. I won't say he was a mentor, but he was someone who really, that's when I decided to get a doctorate, it was after meeting him because he was the first person that I met who had a PhD who was Black. And just having his class, he just celebrated a birthday and I just told him just recently about the impact he had on my career. So I think that he was my mentor, but Dr. Scheb mostly was my mentor, but I didn't really have very many in college, I was pretty much on my own.

Interviewer: Thank you. And how would you characterize the political and social environment in the US while you were in college or grad school?

Dr. Austin: When I was in college in the 80s, you know, these were the Reagan years, then you heard a lot about the cuts in federal funding, these were things even back then I don't think I fully understood the consequences of the cuts in federal funding. Then these were the early years of the AIDS epidemic and people had all these horrible stereotypes, we didn't know what was causing the AIDS virus and so in our country, I always say this in my classes even, whenever America goes through a hard time, they look for a scapegoat and back then the gay community was scapegoat because they've got AIDS and those people are dying of this gay disease is what it was even called. So that was also the political climate had a lot to do with that. And then at first the lack of response to the seriousness of the AIDS crisis, that didn't come along until years later, I don't think most people really understand fully how the Reagan administration just didn't really want to do much of anything, didn't really even support AIDS research at first. So that was a big issue and then the crack epidemic and the impact that that had on cities along with the cuts in federal funding, cities that already were struggling that had already dealt with a lot of middle class flight were getting poorer, crime was increasing.

Dr. Austin: And so that was the political climate during the 1980s. When I was in graduate school during the early 90s, these were the years of like, I guess George Bush, George Herbert Walker Bush, I don't remember anything that stands out except for maybe just the Persian Gulf War in the early 90s on the national level. Politically in my hometown in Memphis, they finally elected a Black mayor in 1991 after many since they had been trying to elect one since 1968. And so that was a really big deal in my hometown. But politically those were kind of the things that stand out.

Interviewer: And were you involved in student activism at that time?

Dr. Austin: At that time, no, because when I was in college, we established a Black student union when I was a senior. That was in the 1986, 87 academic year. And there was no activism on my campus. I mean, it just, it wasn't allowed. You just didn't do that at our school. What I did get involved in something when I was in graduate school, there was a horrible situation that happened to a Black female student. She was crossing the street. I was a student at University of Tennessee. And she was crossing the street. And like Tennessee, if you've ever been to Knoxville, there are all these hills and curves. And a car came over the hill. I think she was jaywalking and it hit her. And she later died. And someone from our campus paper took a picture

of her as she lay there after she had been hit. And she wasn't wearing her blouse. You could see her bra and her pants, her shoes had been, you know, she lost her shoes. And so a lot of people wanted them to apologize for having published it in our school paper. And the paper refused. So we had a march and a protest to make them apologize to her family. And eventually they did. And then there was this other incident that involved activism on my part in college. I was again at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Dr. Austin: And a student had written several articles in our campus paper about affirmative action. And his opposition to affirmative action. But he wrote it from a very racist standpoint. And he was just saying things like, "Oh, Black people, they're not qualified to be here. And they're getting in through affirmative action. And they're just passing the Black people through." And all this, I mean, it wasn't based on anything based on fact. It was just some guy just ranting his own biased opinion. And so I wrote a response to respond to what he had written. And what I didn't know was that two of my classmates who were in one of my graduate seminars were friends of his. And I guess they didn't like whatever the response was that I wrote. And then we had this really horrible incident in class once. We were talking about, it was a constitutional law class. And we were talking about free speech.

Dr. Austin: And they made a comment about the Ku Klux Klan, the guys made the comment, the question, and he posed the question the entire class, but I was the only Black student in class. And he said, he asked our professor, "Does the NAACP have any White members?" And the professor said, "Yes." And then he said, "Well, does the Ku Klux Klan have any Black members?" And the professor looked really confused. He was like, "I'd like to hope not." And then he said, "Well, they'd have an affirmative action program if anybody wants to join." And it was obvious that that was something that was directed at me. I didn't understand what it meant. But later I found out from one of my classmates that the guy who had written the stories about affirmative action was his friend. And I guess this was his way of trying to make some stupid comment directed toward me. And we got into this big argument. But yeah, that was an example of activism because I wrote something about, something that I believed in, affirmative action. And that was kind of the activism that I still engage in even now as far as writing op-eds about issues that matter to me. And that started when I was at UT Knoxville.

Interviewer: Can you tell us now about your research trajectory? So what was your dissertation topic that you already mentioned, your current main area of focus, and any scholars who have particularly influenced your work?

Dr. Austin: Let's see. My dissertation was about Memphis Mayor's elections and the efforts to try to elect the first Black mayor in Memphis. And that became my first book. The title of my first book is "Race, Power, and Political Emergence in Memphis." My current research looks at Black women mostly. I just recently published a book about Black women mayors because I've done a lot of research on just American mayors generally. And so I decided to do the book on Black female mayors. And I published that in 2023. And now I'm working on a book on Black women in the presidency. And I'm also working on a book on academic freedom because that's the battle that I'm heavily involved in. So I'm working on those two projects now.

Dr. Austin: So as far as the influences on my research, I would say just this organization, the National Conference of Black Political Scientists, have had so many political scientists who have influenced my work and who have helped me throughout my career. The late William Nelson of Ohio State, William Nelson Jr. of Ohio State University, the late Hanes Walton Jr., University of Michigan. My good friend, I noticed that you did an oral history with Minion K. C. Morrison. He's also a good friend of mine. His research on Mississippi influenced my book on the Mississippi Delta. And then Dianne Pinderhughes, who's always been like, I guess, a big mother figure to all of us. She's done a tremendous amount of work on different aspects of American politics. And I remember even the influence of Dianne goes beyond just my research, but just I remember when I first went to a conference, the American Political Science Association, and they had a booklet and it had her picture, Paula McClain.

Dr. Austin: I think they had Katherine Tate and they had some other people, but I remember seeing those three Black women. And I was thinking, I was like, I want to meet all three of them because back then at APSA, even now, but there was really no representation of people of color. You just saw a lot of White men in suits walking around and occasionally you might see a Black face, a brown face, a woman here, there. But it was mostly just White guys in suits at APSA. And so I was like, before I leave this conference, I definitely want to meet these people. And I didn't get to meet Paula until later or Katherine until later, but I did get to meet Dianne Pinderhughes. And she probably doesn't even remember it, but it just felt good just to see a Black woman, political scientist who had achieved some stature. And this was before she even became like the person that she is now who's achieved even more recognition. But just being able to have her as a role model, it really taught me a lot about mentoring. And so that influenced me as far as the way that I interact with my students. I mentored them in the same way that I saw her mentoring other people. So she had a huge impact as well.

Interviewer: And shifting gears a little bit, what does being a Black political scientist mean to you?

Dr. Austin: Being a Black political scientist means that, well, you carry a lot of weight on your shoulders. We had a panel this morning and we were talking about a book that one of my good friends wrote about Black women and the discipline. But also, for me, when I earned my doctorate, my entire community celebrated it with me. Because again, I mentioned the type of community where I'm from, and I remember my godfather and how he told me how proud he was. And I was shocked to hear him say that. Because he had never met anybody who'd earned a PhD, no one in our neighborhood ever had, including him, my family. So being a Black political scientist means that you not only are representing your community, but you also have an obligation. And you really, even if you're not obligated, you ought to want to try to help other people.

Dr. Austin: Especially for me with undergrads and with the research, or just helping them to see that it's possible for you to get a doctorate, regardless of what background you're from. You may think you're from a background where you don't have very much money, but it's possible for you to earn a doctorate. And just showing them just that I was able to do it and you can do it too. And all the things that can happen once you earn a PhD, or even if you don't earn a PhD, once you earn an advanced degree, or once you get an education, the positive impact that that can have on your life. So to me as a Black political scientist, that's kind of what you're obligated to do, is to help people find out what they want to do with their lives, and to show them that if you get an education, you'll be much better off than you would be if you didn't have one.

Interviewer: Thank you for that. And what challenges, if any, have you faced throughout your career, either due to race, gender, or your chosen field of study?

Dr. Austin: Oh I've faced a lot of challenges. I think a lot of it is because of the main challenge that I have faced is just being around as a professor, being around really insecure people. Occasionally, especially when I was a young professor, not so much now, I would occasionally get students who would try to question what my knowledge of something, or challenge my knowledge, or challenge just overall my intellect. And that was a big problem, just maintaining your composure when you were confronted with something like that. So that was a challenge. And then also just in academia, the challenge of trying to get tenure and promotion is a huge challenge because the process is so vague that they give you a set of standards, and they tell you that if you publish this book, or you publish these articles, or you do this, or do that, then you'll get tenure. And you think that the whole process is going to be fair and straightforward, but it's anything but. It's very political. And I found that out when I was up for tenure at the University of Missouri-Columbia, and I got it, but I had to really fight for it. And the tactics that your

colleagues will sometimes use to try to deny you promotions, or to deny you pay raises, or the fact that even if you are someone who's accomplished, you never really make as much money as the men if you're a woman.

Dr. Austin: That's just the way it is. Even where I work now, and now I work in a pretty hospitable environment, but there's a man who started working there the year before I did. He was a visiting professor, and then I went in as a visiting professor, but he makes at least about \$10,000 more than I do. And then I also have seen men who've gotten promoted after I was promoted, who don't have the same record, they don't have the same number of publications, the teaching evaluations aren't as good, so on paper, my record is stronger, but they end up making a lot more money. So that's a big problem, I think, for women just across the board in academia. But I would say the racial microaggressions that you have to deal with, the subtle insults of people questioning you.

Dr. Austin: I even recently had a situation with a female student, a White female student in my class, in our state in Florida, they have passed all these laws about the way that professors are supposed to talk about or not supposed to talk about race. And this student complained to the dean that I made her feel guilty as a White person because of something I taught in my class. And the class was called Community Analysis. We talked about environmental justice and Cancer Alley in Louisiana, but it's based on fact. We talked about coal miners in Appalachia, we talked about indigenous communities, and she knew that when she signed up for the class, she knew what it would be about, but she said I made her feel guilty and I had to go to this meeting with my department chair and the dean to explain what's this class about, what have you been talking about. It was a polite meeting, but I was kind of offended by the fact that I had to do that just on the basis of some allegation. So it's that type of thing.

Dr. Austin: But just earlier in my career, the insults of having students in class who just didn't think that a Black person knew what they were talking about, especially considering the fact that I started teaching at a very young age. In my 20s, I was like 26 when I first started. And having students who were in, sometimes they were even older than I was, sometimes they were slightly younger. And sometimes they, you know, I looked much younger than I was. And so I think with that and my being, you know, back then, really small, very skinny young woman having people coming into class, like once I had this incident where I was talking about something and the student raised his hand and I asked him, you know, do you have a question? And he said, "Are you sure you know what this is?"

Dr. Austin: And I said, "Just send the book." I said, "Did you read the book?" And he said, "No, I haven't read it yet." And I said, "Yeah, okay, but then why are you asking me?" He said, "Well, I'm just wondering if you're sure." And it was the way he said, "If you're sure." And I said, "Well, I tell you one thing, I'm sure if you don't have this written the way I want you to write it on the exam, you're going to fail." I can tell you that. And everybody started laughing, but I would kind of handle it with humor because the one thing that you didn't want to do was lose your temper because then you became, now we have the term angry Black woman. Back then there wasn't a term for it, but you became an overly emotional woman if you lost your temper. So you had to, I had to learn how to maintain my composure and also teach a class in such a way that I could try to be as unbiased as I could. And listen to people even when they had views that I totally disagree with, having to let them express their views. I wanted people who had views that were different from mine to speak because I always think that it's best to hear from what, not once say your opponents, but people who have opposing viewpoints, you need to know what they're thinking so that you'll know how to respond because you can't, you won't get anywhere by censoring people.

Dr. Austin: But just being able to teach a class and maintain my composure. But as far as the challenges, it's mostly just been with the lack of pay equity, lack of fairness in the tenure promotion process, and then just the racial microaggressions. And also I guess the gender microaggressions for Black women as well because usually when you hear people talk about gender, that you hear about White women, but you don't hear about the issues Black women deal with sometimes from Black men themselves. And that's something that in our community, we don't like to talk about Black men because we don't want to try and say anything that makes them look bad. But we do have to acknowledge that there is sexism in the Black community because I had a situation when I was a young professor, an older Black man, I'm just going to tell myself maybe he just didn't know any better. He was the director of African American studies and I worked with him in African American studies and I'm a very fast typist because I used to be a secretary and he asked me to type something for him. And I was like, what? I'm assistant professor or anything. And he, because he was saying that the woman that worked in the office whose job it was to type things, that she didn't type very fast and he needed this and he knows how fast I type, can you just type this up for me? And I was like, oh, well, no.

Dr. Austin: So you know, that type of thing where someone says something like that. And then I had this other situation earlier in my career. I was at the University of Louisville and I had, again, an older Black man. I'm going to tell myself that maybe he just didn't know any better. But in today's society, he would really, I'd like to hope, maybe not today's society, but he might get in trouble, I'll say. But I had gone to Barbados with a group of people and I was the only political scientist. And he had a friend who knew a lot of politicians and he wanted to introduce me to his

friend. And his friend was going to take me to introduce me to all these politicians and people and the other people who were on the trip were all in education. And so I told him, I said, OK, yeah, I'll meet your friend. But once we got there, we were so busy, I didn't have time. And then I was in Barbados and he called me. He asked me, have you met the guy's name? And I said, no, I don't have time. And he said, well, he was saying that he really wanted to meet you. And I said, well, I don't have time. And plus, and then I was like, hmm, something doesn't sound right here. And so I was like, no, I think I'm just going to stick with this group and not go wandering off with some man. I don't know. And so to make a long story short, I didn't go with this person. And when I came back, my department chair was really upset because he was like, well, you know, I did all this to try and help you to try to introduce you. And I was like, wait a minute. What's going on here? What? Why are you so upset that I didn't meet some person? Well, he was going to introduce you to all these people. And I was like, I don't need him to introduce me to anything. I went there with a group of people. And what I later found out was that this was a person who had seen my picture and wanted to meet me. And I guess my department chair was like, OK, yeah, I can maybe fix you up with it. I don't know. But yeah, that was that was probably one of the most sexist, disgusting things that has happened to me. And since I've been a professor, yeah. So I mean, those types of things, racial microaggressions, but gender microaggressions as well.

Interviewer: Thank you for sharing those. And in your view, what is necessary in order to further diversify the discipline and make it more equitable and then more welcoming to scholars of color?

Dr. Austin: Oh, my. That's a good question. And it's a timely question, especially considering everything that's happening. All of the work that generations of people have done over the years to try to diversify the profession. And now we're at risk of losing those things because of all these different challenges and the different laws, executive orders. But I would just say that we have to come up with a way to continue to mentor people, but not to depend on federal funding, because I'm noticing now in my state and now even on a national level that a lot of places, a lot of institutions, a lot of organizations that have really done a lot to mentor a diverse student body or a diverse group of people are losing their funding. And so we have to find a way to continue doing that really important work of furthering diversity, but not depending on governmental funding.

Dr. Austin: So I would say as far as diversifying the field, continue to do what we've done. We really haven't done enough and we definitely don't need to lose anything. Like I heard that the Latino Fund is under attack. I know in my home state, we have the McKnight Doctoral

Fellowship, which has funded a lot of African-American and Latino doctoral students over the years designed to make up for the lack of representation among those groups. And now someone has challenged that. And so it's privately funded, but now with Donald Trump in the White House, even those privately funded groups aren't really as safe as they once were. So I would say just come up with a way to continue to diversify. One of the things that I do is to make sure that I bring undergraduates to conferences with me. I wasn't able to do it this time for this one, but I did take a group of students back in January to the Southern in Puerto Rico.

Dr. Austin: But, you know, make sure that even if you don't have the funds to bring students with you to conferences, tell them about different opportunities that still exist that could help them and not to be afraid as especially minority scholars to continue to talk about race, because whether we like it or not, we have to talk about the fact that there is such an underrepresentation of Black and brown people. I mean, there's an underrepresentation of people who are first generation. And we can't not talk about just some of the needs of Black students simply because people don't like it or simply because people don't want to hear it. So I would say just continue to do what we already have done, but come up with innovative ways in case those strategies are ever under attack to raise our own money and to be less dependent on others.

Interviewer: In addition to existing diversity, equity and inclusion programming, what is your advice to associations like APSA or NCOBPS on how to best support Black scholars throughout different milestones in their career?

Dr. Austin: I think, first of all, we have to be realistic about the fact that the one thing that Black scholars, probably all scholars need is money. So continue with NCOBPS, the Graduate Assistance Fund or GAP, and we use that to help our graduate students come to the conferences, continue doing things like that, telling them about different grants they can apply for, continuing to mentor Black students, undergrad and grad, and also to consider their mental health needs, because that's also something when I was in college, if you had a mental health issue, that was your problem. You would just be told, why don't you drop out of school until you can get it together? But it's not realistic to do that in today's society. So understand that sometimes when students are overwhelmed and they're stressed that they need help and come up with a way to try to help them. And I know it's difficult for us to do that as faculty because we have so much to do. We have so much on our plate. But the mentoring is important. The funding is important.

Dr. Austin: And then just for women or just for women and men generally who are assistant professors or who are on the tenure track or who are lecturers, who are in academia, make sure

that they know what's necessary to be successful, that they're not overworked with service or overwhelmed with service. Make sure that they understand that tenure is very political. And even some scholars like myself who are now pretty accomplished had trouble getting tenure. Some of them didn't get tenure. We were just talking about that this morning. One of my friends didn't get tenure and she talked about the impact it had on her life. So just letting them know that if by chance you're ever in a situation like that, hopefully you won't be where you don't get tenure, that you can survive it and that it says nothing about you as a scholar or a person. It's just tenure is very political and it's very unfair at times. So just make sure at each stage of their careers to know what they need, to talk to them, to find out what they need and to give them what they need.

Interviewer: That's great. And shifting gears one more time.

Dr. Austin: Okay.

Interviewer: You have held a number of leadership positions in the profession, including as soon to be vice president elective of NCOBPS.

Dr. Austin: Correct.

Interviewer: What is your in your view makes a good leader?

Dr. Austin: A good leader is a person who understands the challenge that he or she is faced with and knows what's expected of him or her. A good leader is someone who listens, even though at times you may not be able to do everything that people want you to do. At least you need to listen to their opinions, even if their opinions are completely different from yours. And a good leader is someone who not only wants to maintain things and serve as a caretaker, but wants to enhance things. For example, my place as a person in leadership at NCOBPS is going to be not only to maintain what we have here as far as the conference, the mentoring, the other things that we do, but also to hope that after my term is over as vice president and as president, that the organization will be better off after I've served than it was when I first began.

Interviewer: Do you have any advice for junior scholars coming up in the profession?

Dr. Austin: I would say make sure that you have a life outside of the academy because you can't just let this consume your life, especially if you're living in a small town that's really isolated. I've lived in those types of environments as a single person living there by myself and dealing with all of the quiriness of colleagues and different things that you have to deal with. I always found a way to have a really close connection with my family. And also I had friends that really made it so that even if I had a really lousy day at the office, I was going through a really horrible experience. I had a support system. And that's something that we try to do, especially here at NCOBPS as well, is to provide people with support systems because we know that many of our colleagues and many students in these environments where they're isolated, like, for example, like the kind that I was in, you're the only Black student, one of few. You're in a college town and we try to provide them with some support.

Dr. Austin: So can you repeat that question again?

Interviewer: Do you have any advice for junior scholars?

Dr. Austin: Junior scholars, I would say make sure you understand what you're going to need to do to be successful there, to get promoted if you're seeking tenure, to get tenure. If you can, try to get it in writing as far as the tenure requirements, especially at the research institutions. Make sure that if you're at a teaching institution and if you, for example, are a Black professor at a predominantly White, very conservative teaching institution, you know that a lot of people there are just not going to like you. It has nothing to do with you. So just make sure that you can show that you have excelled in teaching in other ways, not just with student evaluations, but have you participated in any workshops or have you had someone that is a colleague, that's someone that you trust and respect, give a peer evaluation of your class, because you can't do anything about student evaluations. You have some students who just not going to like your class regardless of what you do. But if you have that other information to offset it at a teaching institution, that might make a difference as to whether or not you get promoted.

Dr. Austin: Try not to overload yourself with service as difficult as it is, because there are so few of us on campuses, especially Black professors that whenever now, you know, diversity is against a bad word. But it used to be that these institutions always said that they were committed to diversity. They would put together these task forces or they put together these committees and you would have to serve on it. And in many cases, you would want to say no, but you couldn't say no if you were untenured. So I would say try not to do service if you know, unless you have

to, but as hard as that's going to be. And then also try to find someone who is a senior scholar to be your mentor, to try to help you and guide you through the process. And if you can't find anyone in your department at your institution, find someone here at NCOBPS. That's a senior scholar and just tell them I'm trying to prepare myself to go out for promotion a few years. What do I need to do? And there are a lot of people in our organization that would be more than happy to help.

Interviewer: Is there anything else that you would like to share with us?

Dr. Austin: Just that this is really a phenomenal thing with the oral history project and just hearing. I'm looking forward to hearing from looking at the other oral histories as well. I don't know if they're online or not, but I think it's one of the things that we have a really good oral history program at the University of Florida and I've given oral history with them. But I always tell my students even that those oral histories are very important because even after all of us are gone, you still have the experience of knowing what someone went through to get to where they were. So yeah.

Interviewer: Thank you so much for your participation.

Dr. Austin: Thank you for your interview with me.