

John Pinna

Marist College

Poughkeepsie, NY

Transcribed by Ann Sandri

For the Marist College Archives and Special Collections

Pinna, John

Transcript – John Pinna

Interviewee: John Pinna

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Marist College (Poughkeepsie, N.Y.)

Summary: John speaks about his time at Marist as part of the class of 1971, his career as a now retired educator and administrator in the area, part-time History professor at Marist, town historian and CLS professor. He gives his opinions on Marist in the past, present and where it may be headed in the future.

Gus Nolan (00:00):

Well today is Tuesday, July 18th, and we have the opportunity of interviewing John Pinna. Welcome, John.

John Pinna (00:17):

Thank you.

Gus Nolan (00:18):

John is a long time associate of Marist, he graduated in 71, he has taught in the area, in the education field, both as a teacher and he's been an administrator and now for more than 20 years, he's been an adjunct professor here at Marist. So John, I'd like to start at the beginning. Give us an overview if you can kind of a thumbnail of your early days, where'd you grow up, grammar school and so on. Okay. Not too much in detail. I don't need dates, but I need timeframes.

John Pinna (00:50):

Grammar school, I started out in the Bronx. I grew up in the Bronx, went to St. Martin de Tours grammar school, P.S. 57, and then I when I left eighth grade I went to St. Helena's high school, and.

Gus Nolan (01:08):

that's on the parkway.

John Pinna (01:08):

That's on the Hutchinson River Parkway out by the Whitestone bridge. And that was my first contact with the Marist brothers, cause they taught there as a Marist school.

Gus Nolan (01:21):

How long were you in high school there?

John Pinna (01:23):

All four years.

Gus Nolan (01:24):

All four years. Okay. During high school, what did you do besides go to school? Do you work in the afternoons or in the summers? Did you play ball? Did you sing or the drama club?

John Pinna (01:37):

I was in the radio club at St. Helenas. I also participated in the photography club and the newspaper, as extra-curriculars I was also in a bowling league. I participated in basically those activities.

Gus Nolan (01:55):

You still, you were still living in the Bronx then?

John Pinna (01:59):

Still in the Bronx, yup, then when I went home I used to work at night you know, work at a job at night.

Gus Nolan (02:03):

Okay. Okay. And the summers, the same thing, you worked in the summer?

John Pinna (02:06):

Summers, I worked every summer I had to work.

Gus Nolan (02:09):

Okay. Now you're interest in the Marist Brothers, when did this start and who encouraged you to go on?

John Pinna (02:17):

My interest in the Marist Brothers really came with my contact with the brothers at St. Helenas. I had a number of brothers, particularly history, I was very, very interested in history and a number of people in the history department.

Gus Nolan (02:32):

Larry Sullivan was not in history though.

John Pinna (02:35):

Larry Sullivan was our Dean of students at the time and I knew Larry and Larry was very helpful. Being a support person for me cause things that I, I came from issues at home and Larry was there to help me.

Gus Nolan (02:53):

Okay. You didn't mention any names in the history, are they still there? Were they Marist Brothers?

John Pinna (02:59):

They're not there now, but some of the brothers I had in the history department, one was a brother Christopher, I can't remember his last name, but he was real instrumental in getting me interested in history there.

Gus Nolan (03:16):

Uh, okay. And thinking about the Marist brotherhood, that was a big step for you to take at that time.

John Pinna (03:23):

There were two, two brothers in particular, they were both homeroom brothers, a brother John Ryan. He was very, very influential in my getting interested in the Marist Brothers and Brother Thomas was another brother there that was a homeroom and they were very instrumental in getting me interested in the brothers.

Gus Nolan (03:46):

Your time with the Marist Brothers must have been rather significant in your life because it seems to have a rather definite impact, your interest in education and your own reputation in town here. Looking back, what do you think were some of those influences? What were you kind of underlined?

John Pinna (04:08):

I would say that you know, from the high school years, I think what really influenced me was the care that the brothers had about students, but not as students as people. And that they were concerned about you and I succeeding academically, but being good human beings and contributing to the community. They were always looking at encouraging us to make the world a better place. And it was not only through activities, but also through the education process and I had an interest in being a teacher and you know, that meant a lot to me and that drove me more closer to the brothers and the relationships with them.

Gus Nolan (04:53):

Move on to Marist college. What was your experience in Marist? Did you major in history while you were here?

John Pinna (04:59):

I majored, I actually I was the first American Studies major and I was, I didn't want to just be a history teacher cause I knew there were a lot of history majors out there. So I figured if I was American studies major that would give me more opportunities to enrich students' lives.

Gus Nolan (05:18):

Who was, is that a Lou Zuccerello operation there or who did that?

John Pinna (05:22):

Tom Casey ran that program. Tom Casey ran the program. He was in charge of the American studies program.

Gus Nolan (05:29):

Did you do that only the last two years? The first two years of fundamental courses,

John Pinna (05:36):

The first two years when I was in over in Esopus, we did the fundamental courses. And then when I came to the college here, that's when we specialized in the American studies major.

Gus Nolan (05:47):

Okay. Do you recall any particular projects that really moved you on either, you know, topics of papers you had to write or projects you had to undergo, a visitations that you made that, kind of kept that fire alive?

John Pinna (06:05):

I would say some of the projects that kept me alive was, in Dr. Zuccerello's class, he always encouraged us in political science to look at the social impacts of what was going on politically in the world. It wasn't just teaching the civics and the politics and the government, but it was about, you know, how does this impact, human beings, how does it impact the community? And there was always this underlining theme, and not only in Poly-Sci, but history and in English classes, where we were being encouraged to look at the benefit of society. You know, how do you use your education to improve the world, improve society and the people you come into contact with.

Gus Nolan (06:53):

Alright. Do you still have that interest today?

John Pinna (06:56):

Very much so. I'm very active in the community. I, I'm very, besides working, besides adjuncting, I also work in the accommodations and accessibility office here at Marist three days a week, with students with disabilities. I am very active. I'm the town historian for the Town of Poughkeepsie.

Gus Nolan (07:17):

I meant to ask you about that. We'll come up with, talk about Marist. What is it you do and when do you do it?

John Pinna (07:25):

At Marist I come, I teach at least one course each semester in usually in the evening, cause I like the night course and I teach in the history department and the education department. I've taught for 20 plus years methods for students that want to teach history. I teach the methods course for that. Unfortunately the numbers have dwindled to the point that we don't have anyone going in right now, but hopefully that'll be. And then I teach in the history department. I've taught, America since 1945, I've taught Native American history, I've taught world history. So I've done a variety of history courses. And I've sat on a number of committees for the college .

Gus Nolan (08:08):

That is part of the college life. Yes, yes, yes, yes. Just tend to the sidebar here about the community work, the historian for the community. Where do you do this? In the library or in...

John Pinna (08:24):

I'm the Town of Poughkeepsie Historian, so I have an office in the town, and what I do is I also am, I am also the chair of the Town of Poughkeepsie preservation commission. So I have two kind of two roles, one is to preserve the history of the town and the other is to actively participate in the community to save the physical history of the town, whether it be buildings or sites or local history environments.

Gus Nolan (08:56):

Is it your committee that decides something will be preserved? A historical Relic, as it were.

John Pinna (09:03):

We would landmark locally sites, so for example the Hudson Valley Psychiatric Center across the street is a national site. We've been involved with the developers on what should, what direction they should think about taking from historical perspective since there are, for example you know, buildings that date back to the 1850's that are up there, the 1860's. And you also have all the landscaping that was done by Frederick Law Olmsted, on the property. And then it's also, it was originally the property of the Roosevelts. So I brought all that to their attention and they've since changed their plans in terms of incorporating the history in their development now in a variety of different ways. So for example, the main administration building is going to become a historical tell. And then they're looking to restore all the Olmsted landscape back to it's original. So they're going to preserve those.

Gus Nolan (10:04):

So, your committee interacts or gets the federal involved and they get a federal stamp to make it a federal as well.

John Pinna (10:14):

We get involved from the local level, then we help people get state landmarks status and also federal landmarks status

Gus Nolan (10:21):

Our gatehouse here has been declared a historical site. You know, and that was done some years ago when they, some of the ramifications with that is that you can't change it much once it's been declared

John Pinna (10:37):

With the federal, yeah, the federal is. When we make, when we landmark locally, we only landmark and looking for the preservation of the external aspects of the building, We don't tell people what to do with the inside of their buildings. And the importance of local landmarking is, it's the only landmarking that protects the building from demolition. The state and federal doesn't ever doesn't protect it from that. So if you want to protect something historically from demolition, you have to have it recognized on a local level.

Gus Nolan (11:07):

Okay. Interesting point. Okay. Back to the scene here about when you finished Marist, when did you start teaching or how did you apply? Where did you go?

John Pinna (11:19):

I graduated from Marist, the first place I did my student teaching in Cold Spring, and that was an interesting experience because it was a K-12 school. So I was teaching History 11th grade and right next door was the kindergarten.

Gus Nolan (11:34):

Right. That was interesting.

John Pinna (11:35):

So that was an interesting environment

Gus Nolan (11:40):

Sometimes they do get the students confused?

John Pinna (11:42):

Sometimes I wanted to send some of my 11th graders to kindergarten. Then I, there was an opening for a part time position in in Hyde Park, so I applied for that cause there was a gentleman going on military leave.

Gus Nolan (11:58):

Hyde Park grade school?

John Pinna (12:01):

No Haviland Junior High, so I filled in for him for half a year, and while we knew he was coming back, so then I, when it started looking again for a job and I applied to Spackenkill school district and to the junior high and at that time they were moving all of their teachers to the high school cause they had just opened up the high school. And so I applied for an English, History position there. And because of my American studies degree, I was able to teach the English as well as the history.

Gus Nolan (12:31):

Oh, very good.

John Pinna (12:32):

And so that gave me versatility and that actually got me the job and I started out teaching History and English and then I eventually got, I was hired to teach history full time.

Gus Nolan (12:44):

Give me a year of this now. You graduated here in 71, so it would be 73, 72?

John Pinna (12:47):

71, graduated in 71, this would be a half a year in Hyde Park in 71. So that would be 72 when I went to Spackenkill.

Gus Nolan (13:03):

Okay, and then how long were you there?

John Pinna (13:05):

I was there Spackenkill, 36 years.

Gus Nolan (13:08):

36 years teaching

John Pinna (13:10):

Well, I taught for approximately 15 years, then I accidentally became the elementary principal of Hagan Elementary School. I really wasn't looking for it, but I needed to do an internship to get my Masters in Educational Administration, and so they put me there as an intern. And then they were combining two schools, they were closing Martha Lawrence school and bringing those kids, students over to Hagen and they asked me to stay on as the assistant principal with the, with Rudy Albanese who was the principal and he was my mentor there. And, when, when he retired the following year, I became the principal of the elementary.

Gus Nolan (13:51):

That's all part of the Spackenkill system.

John Pinna ([13:54](#)):

Spackenkill school right, and I did that for about I did that for about 15 years and then I left that, well actually it was more like 10 years I guess. Then I left that and went to the junior high back to where I was a teacher and became the principal of Todd Junior High and introduced the middle school program there. And then I stayed there six years, left there after six years went to the high school in Spackenkill and I taught history at the high school for six years.

Gus Nolan ([14:22](#)):

Where did you study in higher education to get this degree that you eventually got?

John Pinna ([14:27](#)):

Well the first is my master's degrees are both from SUNY New Paltz. So I have a master's in history and I also have a master's in educational administration.

Gus Nolan ([14:40](#)):

All right. Fair enough. Are you still active as an administrator? or are you retired?

John Pinna ([14:47](#)):

I'm retired from the administration. I'm retired from public education and administration.

Gus Nolan ([14:53](#)):

So it's just Marist now for the most part.

John Pinna ([14:53](#)):

It's just Marist and the town historian, those two. And I also do Rhodes Scholar programs for seniors and I've done CLS as well.

Gus Nolan ([15:04](#)):

Okay. All right. What was it? American studies. What did you do in CLS?

John Pinna ([15:09](#)):

CLS, I had taught a world history course, many world history courses, I've done the background history for Grapes of Wrath, background history of Boys in the Boat

Gus Nolan ([15:20](#)):

The Boys in the Boat, Okay.

John Pinna ([15:24](#)):

So I've done a number of programs. I did Native American, for the CLS.

Gus Nolan ([15:30](#)):

Okay. A lot of surprise products here, but I have move on. Coming to Marist, how did that happen? How did you approach it to become a teacher here or were you approached to come here?

John Pinna (15:45):

I always wanted to be a teacher. And that's one of the reasons I joined the Marist Brothers, because I wanted to teach. That actually introduced me to Marist, once I got to Marist College because that was the, the normal sequence.

Gus Nolan (16:02):

No, I'm referring to moving into the teaching here at adjunct position

John Pinna (16:07):

Now, when I got the adjunct position position came from Dr. Olson, he called me one day and asked me if I would be interested in teaching the methods course for candidates of history teachers, and he thought I would be a good person to teach it. So I was flattered because he was one of my instructors. He asked me to teach the course and I said, sure, I'd be happy to do it. And then did it for 20 plus years. And then the history department, I got into that, just they needed somebody to teach one of the courses one year and asked me if I would do that as well. So I said, sure.

Gus Nolan (16:47):

Okay. All right, turning the page a little bit. As you look at Marist now as I do, I can't believe what I see. The development of Marist to me is, is quite a story. And so my question is, how did this happen? You know, how would you say or how would you explain the principle thrust of the development of Marist? You know, would it be in the presidential leadership or the Marist tradition, the location here on the Hudson, the faculty it has, how do you explain it? Some of the explanations, there's no one one, I'm sure

John Pinna (17:28):

I would say there's several things. One is, I think the initial impetuous for the college is really from the Marist Brothers themselves and the Marist spirit. The idea that students are human beings, they're important and you need to bring the best out in them. You have to forgive me because I get emotional.

Gus Nolan (17:52):

Oh yeah, I understand. I've been down this road and it's hard for me to do this sometime.

John Pinna (17:57):

They really want to bring the best out of the students and always did because they cared about them beyond the classroom. And the impetuous was always quality, but not to the detriment of the dignity of the human person. So I think that's a big thrust. I think that the growth of the college also came from the brothers as it changed over the years. I mean, I was here when it was very small. We had, you know,

Gus Nolan (18:24):

It was a farm, at the beginning was it not?

John Pinna (18:24):

We had very few buildings. We had no lay students, no female students.

Gus Nolan (18:33):

Oh my God, that was a good ol' eays here. We had nurses at the hospital, but they weren't here.

John Pinna (18:38):

I remember the first several female students on campus and everybody falling over themselves. But I think the the growth comes the fact that the brothers were always visionaries in the future. They were never stagnant. And I think they saw that the college needed to constantly grow as a living organism. And I think they promoted that.

Gus Nolan (19:04):

Did you know Linus Foy very well?

John Pinna (19:04):

I know Linus, yes.

Gus Nolan (19:10):

And Dan Kirk?

John Pinna (19:10):

Dan Kirk, like Linus, they were here when I was here. I remember them expanding the program.

Gus Nolan (19:15):

Yeah. Because that's part of the story I think, you know, is the idea that, well John Malachy, who was the registrar and Dan Kirk was his associate with doing research and they came to the dermination that Paul Ambrose had the idea that this would be community college for the Mid-Hudson area. And they pointed out to him there aren't enough students to support such an operation, you know, and the best thing to do would be to put up some dormitories and bring. There's a city 70 miles away with thousands and thousands of Marist brothers from high school, then they could be feeders, you know. So, you know, Linus gets the credit this time putting up the dormitories, which we want. Yeah. So the location, of course, the tradition of course. Presidential leadership, I always have to say as part of it. This is my take on it now, you know, but no one ever came to Dennis Murray's class or they did, but they didn't come here because he was teaching. He was a good administrator. He was a good fundraiser. He was a good, he did his job. But that job put us in the right direction, you know, about what we could be, you know, and did. And I thought the fact that it was always a genuinely committed, sometimes obnoxious like myself and George Somner. But outside of that, you know, we were able to, we didn't get run out of town, so we were able to stay on. Another part of the Marist story, the Marist faculty, in some ways it's changed in some ways it's remained the same. Would you agree with that?

John Pinna (20:56):

I think it's remained the same in that they're looking for the quality of, faculty looks for quality in the students. I think the change is that we're in a different century. A younger generation faculty is , looks at things I think a little differently. They don't see, they, they recognize the world as a temporary place for like students. And when they go out in the real world that there's no longevity anymore. There's no, there isn't a lot of loyalty out there. And I think that's something that the new faculty is trying to deal with. When I was here with the faculty, the world was pretty stable and the faculty was preparing us for that stability that was out there. And making a difference in a world that had some stability. But the

world has changed dramatically, and I think the faculty, although committed, are also looking at a world that is a transitory in nature. And

Gus Nolan ([21:58](#)):

It's interesting you would say that because on that subject, I mean, I've talked to other professors who see the Marist in a three, some have said it's three colleges. One was survival, will we make it? The other was competition with Murray will he give us money, or put up walls and buildings and you know, so there's kind of competition. And the third is we've arrived now and it's kind of a stepping point. You come here to go to someplace else, you know? So transitory is a good way to describe, I think the world is that way. But you know, I in fact,

John Pinna ([22:30](#)):

And my fear with that is the transitory nature changes the mission, I think. And from day to day. What I see as changing at Marist is because there's this transitory reality, the commitment always isn't there for the student I think, like it used to that used to be there and that frightens me to no end. And I think the students sense it, you know, I think they sense that, that insecurity. You know, I could go to any faculty at any time here when I was here, I don't think students feel that way.

Gus Nolan ([23:04](#)):

Yeah. Right. Okay. Well first of all you knew most of the faculty when you were here, now they might know them, in their own department, well they're in different buildings to begin with. So business is there, and communications over there and you know, science is over here and so on. So you have all those kinds of things.

John Pinna ([23:24](#)):

Also the way the faculty functions today and functioned then I think is different. Although they care and they're dedicated, the dedication has its limits. And grant you, there's a lot, there's more. We have more brothers than we had and we had lay people like Dr. Zuccarello or Dr. O'Keefe, and so, who had families, but they were part of that spirit of Marist. So it was let's go beyond, let's be there. And I think some of that is slowly disappearing.

John Pinna ([23:24](#)):

Gus Nolan ([23:54](#)):

We had a swimming pool over there that would be the source of a lot of interaction, you know, so the whole family was involved. Right. I got tenure because I played Santa Claus for seven years, you know, and that may be my contribution to the community. Okay, in the time that you've been here, that's long time, 20 years teaching and before that, what would you say would be some of the most difficult challenges that you had?

John Pinna ([24:28](#)):

I think one of the, one of the most difficult challenges, initially was when I left the brothers and then was on my own. I had my, what was my senior year actually. I had to find a job. I had to find a place to live. I had to pay for my own education. I was doing my student teaching Cold Spring, I had to find

transportation to get there. I pulled the string to get Cold Spring, I mean, here I am having to drive the Cold Spring every day. So what I did is I got a job at the children's home up the street, lived up there, worked with young people up there. I did 12 hours days, ten 12 hour days and then I also did my student teaching at the same time. That was a tough transition transition. I think one of the other challenges I think that I faced is the change in the education program on a state level. That impacted not only the schools when I was working in the schools, but also impacted the training of teachers. Okay. It was becoming more, less creative and more technical, bureaucratic. And I think that that takes away from the classroom experience. I mean you got to teach your history and your facts. Okay. If you're doing literature, you have to, you teach the literature in the writing, but you had a certain latitude, the flexibility and creativity. And that's been, I think that's been taken away from the classroom teacher, and that's been difficult to accept because I think you stifle the individual.

Gus Nolan ([26:25](#)):

I dunno how I would do that. How I would not be able to take off when you see an idea and you see the application of an idea, you know. Is it as evident to me as in Oak, which way the winter is long. And then you say, well, what is the wind that affects people? You, I mean, you know, we get everybody involved about what they think is the most important. You know, your friends know your money now. Alright, back to your high. What was, how it was successful things that you would say in your 20 years?

John Pinna ([26:58](#)):

I think one of the most successful I think is my 20 years teaching the methods course. I think that almost every student I've had in that program has gotten a teaching job. And that to me that I think a great accomplishment, not my accomplishment, their accomplishment, that they've all been employed and they're out there teaching and they're making a difference and that's a major accomplishment. The other one is working with these students in the Office of Accommodations and Accessibility, working with these students on a one-on-one who have disabilities and watching them open up and, and change as human beings, become individual and be successful here at Marist as well as out in the real world.

Gus Nolan ([27:47](#)):

Where do you do that here?

John Pinna ([27:49](#)):

We do that in Donnelley. Our office is in Donnelley and we meet with the freshmen students twice a week, and the upperclassmen once a week.

Gus Nolan ([28:00](#)):

How big a staff is there?

John Pinna ([28:01](#)):

Right now we have a staff of about 25 there, counting secretaries, everyone in the office. The learning specialists, we have about 12 of those, 13 of those. And what I find really a major accomplishment is, is watching them develop as people and as students and getting to the point where they can say to me, John, I no longer need to be in the program. And then their sophomore year, they're on their own and they're successful for the next two years or three years on their own. That, that's the proof that the program is working. Cause they don't need us.

Gus Nolan (28:45):

Are there, stepping off points after two years, do you expect them to be able to, and how many would be moving through would there be 10 a year or 15 a year?

John Pinna (28:58):

Moving through the program? Well, what we have is we have, every year we accept 50 in freshmen year. And we, our graduation rate has really been terrific with the students. Most of them graduate Marist, most of them have 3.0 or higher in their GPA's, so we have a real great success rate.

Gus Nolan (29:28):

In the course of the four years, it really works for the program.

John Pinna (29:35):

It works yup, you know we will have 50 students that will successfully graduate Marist.

Gus Nolan (29:40):

Is there a comparable program and Iona or Siena?

John Pinna (29:44):

Other schools have programs similar, Marist has been doing this for over 35 years. Okay. It started way back in the old days with the Marist brothers again, you gotta bring us back to the source. And the difference with our program and many programs, many programs out there just allow, afford them commendations. Okay, we have the additional program called learning disabilities program where we give them a learning specialist and that's been going on for over 35 years here at Marist and that's the unique difference from many other programs that are out there. It's actually the, it was last year rated number one in the country in the private sector.

Gus Nolan (30:28):

Really? Best kept secret. I thank you telling me that now and I, I should have known it, but I didn't.

John Pinna (30:37):

It's amazing what we accomplish.

Gus Nolan (30:40):

When you say that reminds me of a Danny Kirk project here, when he was here, this is going back in late sixties, early seventies. We had kind of a handicap day where you got in a wheelchair to try to operate. What do you do when you're in a wheelchair and you realize curbs are problems, you realize doors don't open you, you know, where do you go in a classroom, you know, all of these.

John Pinna (31:01):

Yeah, and we continue that because we do run that every year here at Marist, and we actually put students, like for example, we'll put them through different, we'll have them experience different things that people with disabilities have. Also learning disabilities, that's one that people don't understand. Faculty has a lot of problems understanding that one, cause it's not a physical thing you can see. . And so

they think students sometimes are just being lazy. Yeah. Okay. And what we do is we try to get them to understand, well, what's going on? Here's a student that has no executive functioning skills. And a faculty member will look at that. So what does that mean? So let's show you, and we'll actually put them through and show them what that student is experiencing, where they can't organize, they can't prioritize, they don't know what to do next.

Gus Nolan (31:46):

Dyslexia can't read the right way.

John Pinna (31:49):

So it's interesting.

Gus Nolan (31:51):

Okay, changing again, the crystal ball. Where do you see Marist 10 years from now or 15 years from now, A. Is isn't going to be here and B. You know, what do you see it like?

John Pinna (32:05):

I see Marist, Marist will be here, I don't have any questions or doubts about that. My greatest fear is that it'll become like every other college a bureaucracy. Yeah. Where the students are lost in that bureaucracy. That's my greatest fear. Colleges, whether it's Marist or any other school has become a big business. And that's an, I understand the reality of that, however, somehow we've got to savor the mission.

Gus Nolan (32:39):

Yeah, oh yeah. Yeah, that's important. Well, it's gonna be here, I believe I spoke to the new president. I went to see him for a number of issues. One of them is, I said nice to have you aboard and I hope you stay for a long time. So he said he wouldn't stay as long as the previous president of 38, because he wouldn't live that long. More than likely he's going to be 60, you know, next birthday. And he was saying that, he hoped 10 years or 15 years would be, you know, that he would be able to do that. That's his mission going in now, you know, that puts him at 75. Good luck. I hope it's going to be a tough road. But, back to the project here about, you know, you see it here, but it may become very much like a business operation rather than a person centered one.

John Pinna (33:32):

Yeah, and it doesn't have to be that, but that's the direction I think we're taking right now.

Gus Nolan (33:38):

Well, part of that is going to be technology in terms of, you know, the computers and the systems that are operating, off campus learning as one of the things for instance, and one of the, ideas of independent studies and you know, all of that, it seems to lose something of the community that Marist is so much a part of and it's tradition. I'm talking you should be talking.

John Pinna (34:04):

Well, the other piece of it too is it's not, that's all I don't have, like I don't have a problem with technology. I enjoy the technology. I think what we have to understand is that you can't let the

technology drive what you want to do and you have to think about how you want to use that technology. For example, we have students that can use technology and take the independent courses and do that kind of thing. And that's great. I love that. That's wonderful. But we also have to recognize that there's lots of students that can't do that. Lots of students that shouldn't do that. And we should also tailor our education to meet those needs and not give those needs up. I know just from the, just take this population I work with in terms of the, say the disabled students, there are many of those students that can't take online courses. Not because they don't have the intelligence, it's because of their disability. They just have certain disabilities that they, for example, they don't have the discipline to do it every day because of their lack of executive functioning. So we have to have alternatives. Right? When we give up alternatives, , we slowly, uh, put ourselves in a box and then we become less effective and we've got gotta keep the alternatives out there for the students.

Gus Nolan (35:16):

Yeah. I don't think I could read a book online. All right. I have no,

John Pinna (35:20):

I'm the same way.

Gus Nolan (35:21):

I want to turn pages when I want to turn them and I want

John Pinna (35:23):

Well, my dad was a printer, Okay. And I, and interesting story about that is I have to have a book in my hands. He was a printer, I was at Vassar library one day doing research for one of my masters courses. And I had found a book that was printed in the old print with type and, it was a big book and I was sitting on the table and I opened it and I was feeling the print and the students were passing by looking at me like, something's wrong with this person, but they don't understand what that means. I have the luxury of knowing what that means cause my dad was a printer. He and I knew the process and I had seen the process, but here I was feeling this page with the print and the, it was less like being in another place. So yeah, I need the book. I can't read it online either.

Gus Nolan (36:12):

Related to this of course, is a physical, a philosophic and a psychological problem about the age that's changing. And, and I come back to, I asked Eileen, the secretary of Dennis Murray, who's just retired now, we're putting up four new dorms, why are we putting up four new dormitories? We've got to really, we're not increasing the population by one student, you know, what we are doing is upgrading the level of living for the students on campus. Most of the students coming today come from homes where they have their own bedroom, maybe their own bath, you know, and the idea to come on campus and live in a dormitory with other people and share a bathroom. That's well, you don't think about that, and so that, that part of it. And the other part of course not having your own room, there's a certain isolation, and then added to that is the cell phone where they're on their phone talking to whoever. And again, they're coming out of class talking on their cell phone rather than the guy next to them, saying this was a hell of a class or how boring or how great it was. You know, they don't share that, you know. So yeah, I think there's some problem that has to be addressed there.

John Pinna (37:32):

Well that's why I'm saying that's what I was saying before, like you can't let the, whether it be technology or trends, you can't let those drive your decision making necessarily. I think what you have to look at is what, again, going back to what your mission is about. If our mission is to make is, is to bring people together and share ideas and philosophies and experiences, then your environment needs to reflect that. Okay. And you need to encourage that. Young people today, yeah, don't want to necessarily learn how to live with another human being. Okay.

Gus Nolan (38:09):

I just trying to see what the time was, that's fine, we're fine.

John Pinna (38:12):

They don't necessarily want to learn how to live with another person or share something with another person. Cause they come from that world where they didn't have to do that. And that's not to say that they're terrible people, they just never had that experience.

Gus Nolan (38:25):

No. I have my friend right here I'm talking to and I don't need you, you know?

John Pinna (38:29):

I mean, if we don't, part of being a teacher, part of being an educational institution is to open up new experiences for the students that you're servicing. Not necessarily catering to what they already have. And that's something I think that we have to be careful of. You know? Also I think you have to you know, with the electronic world, I don't have a problem with it, but you need to get them to understand that there's a time when they need to shut that off and to just have time to reflect as a human being. Silence is okay.

Gus Nolan (39:03):

What is that?

John Pinna (39:06):

I do that with my students in class. And the first night I say, I tell them, take out your loved ones. And they look at me and they say what are you talking about? I say take out your cell phone, put it on your desk, say goodbye for an hour and 15 minutes. And I said, you know, if you can't do that, then I want you to get up, go to health services and deal with your addiction. And they laugh and they shut them off, and I don't see them the rest of the semester. So I think we have to be, I think we shouldn't be afraid to ask them to do things they don't want to do. And, and that's basically what Marist has always done. They've asked her to do things that get us out of our comfort zones and that's what we have to continue to do is get them out of their comfort zones.

Gus Nolan (39:48):

Are you familiar with the Marist project in Esopus, the summer camps?

John Pinna (39:52):

Yes. In fact, we just came from there two weeks ago. It was over there the other day with, um, Jimmy Steinmeyer.

Gus Nolan (40:01):

Jimmy Steinmeyer, don't bring that name up, I'm only kidding you.

John Pinna (40:05):

Jimmy and I were there and Dan Waters and Brian Riley we were there the other day. And Bruce Armstrong, we all met over there the other day and we met with Brother Owen and he was explaining what they were doing then.

Gus Nolan (40:18):

I don't know him. How long has he been around?

John Pinna (40:21):

Only been there a couple of years. And he, he's been a only a couple of years.

Gus Nolan (40:24):

He's younger than you though.

John Pinna (40:26):

He's younger than I am and he's, he's doing a great job. I mean he's,

Gus Nolan (40:29):

I hear nothing but great things.

John Pinna (40:30):

He's restored the place, different parts of the place. He's got the programs going on. It's a lot of good stuff going on there.

Gus Nolan (40:37):

Now did you hear that the Marist Brothers going to set their Novitiate up here next year?

John Pinna (40:43):

Here at Marist?

Gus Nolan (40:44):

Yeah. The Kirk house has become the Novitiate. And Sean Sammon who is, will become the Master of Novices. So I think there's one or two Novices to come in here, So then that to me is kind of a little bit of the old seed being planted again on the campus here. If you had a chance to go to the board of trustees, what would you say? What is one of the things you'd say that Marist has a need of now, something that they should pay attention to, that maybe we're too concerned with buildings or maybe we're not concerned with building for this a bigger chapel, or bigger auditorium, or what do you think is a need that we have?

John Pinna (41:28):

I think there's a need, but I would say to them is there's a need for Marist, for the college to listen more to the people, whether it be students or faculty or secretaries or custodians. They need to listen to the people more that are in the trenches everyday. Because, I think what's happening is people are starting to feel that they're no longer connected. The other thing I would say to them is that they need to really pass on the culture, that's being lost. We're not, we're not passing on the culture to the new people coming into the, into the institution. We're hiring people, but we're not sharing the Marist mission. We're not sharing that culture that was once here. And if you don't educate and share that, you lose it. And I slowly see us losing that. And that's what I would say, that they have to make a better effort in doing that for the future faculty and so on. Even in the administration that we hire.

Gus Nolan ([42:38](#)):

I'm just wondering how you do that well, how you might recommend.

John Pinna ([42:42](#)):

Well I think one of the ways that you can do it is you, need, first of all, you need to share that mission. And I'm not sure that that's solely shared. I think people are hired and thrown into a job.

Gus Nolan ([42:54](#)):

And what are we trying to do here? Outside of pay you.

John Pinna ([42:56](#)):

And then even now with the adjuncts, like I'm an adjunct, I've been here for the next number of years. I don't get my assignment, you know, sometimes until two weeks before the semester opens. Okay. There's not a sense of the college that people that have been here for years, you know, have a place here. It's like, okay, we need somebody, let's see who we can get.

Gus Nolan ([43:24](#)):

Oh, we gave you a trophy there, a plaque for 20 years, Thank you very much.

John Pinna ([43:30](#)):

The thing that we love doing, like teaching. So I think there, there are ways that you need to let people understand that whether it be the old codgers like myself or the new people we bring on board, that the reason they're valued is that they're becoming something part of larger than themselves. And we need to weed that, that we have to communicate okay. And we have to train the new people as well and make people feel that they're not here just to earn a buck, they're here to make a real difference in people's lives. And to do that you have to have regular training, bring people together more often than just Christmas and Easter or your beginning of the year, you know, that kind of stuff. Like I know the history department for example, does three or four events a year and it brings the history faculty together with the students and they have these, basically just talk sessions or topic sessions and they just share, they have pizza and they have food and they just share a couple of hours together. And that's important I think because we become less human every day. Yeah. Well we don't touch with, we don't have touchstones with other people.

Gus Nolan ([44:51](#)):

Alright. Coming down to the end of this, one of the final questions would be, you know, is Marist worth the investment? This way financially, \$200,000, \$50,000 a year when you're finished, what kind of a job you're going to be able, are you going to get a job? So that's a problem. The investment of the time and effort, you have to go to class here. You just can't hang around, you know, so the effort that has to go into it. Do we need philosophy? Do we need history? Do we need all this English writing? Do we need public speaking? Are those important? I have to meet new friends, I, I really, you know, I have a friends at home. I have to interact. I'm going to be away from home. It's going to be tough to live on campus, you know? Do we have to take four years or kids' lives to do that? Couldn't we just get them two years and train them how to be carpenters and mechanics and plumbers, electricians, and they can make a good life. How do you handle something like an argument that a parent would give you? Say, yeah, 200,000, what is 400,000 by the time they leave because you know, they gonna have to get a loan....
blah blah blah

John Pinna (46:07):

Well, I, I'm a true believer that not everyone needs to go to a four year college. I think that there are some young people out there, um, you know, a good percentage of them that a two year experience or even going to a trade and learning a trade is probably the best thing they can do. When the philosophy in America changed that everyone needed to four year education, then they did that even in the public schools where they said everybody has to get a Regents diploma. I think that's a mistake, right? I think that again, human beings are all different than human beings have different needs. And I think that for Marist, what we need to do is if we have someone that wants to be here, they want a four year education, and there are people that want that and there are people that are ready for that. We will serve those needs. But I also think we've got to make sure that our educational offerings are broad. There is a place for philosophy, there is a place for English literature, there is a place for history, you know, science and it's not always, it's not about making money. Okay, I can make money tomorrow by doing any number of things I always have, my whole life. That's not an issue. You can always make money if you're willing to work. The only reason you can't make money, is you don't want to work. It's that simple. But I think that the world we live in lacks the sensitivity to that, that people need for one another. We're not teaching young people to be part of a social organization any longer. All right. And what a well rounded education does philosophy, literature, all the different academic areas is it fosters a well rounded education, but more importantly is it makes people sensitive that there's something outside of themselves and therefore it's important to be part of a community. It's important to be part of a social structure. It's important to recognize that we are our brother's keepers, whether we like that or not, because if our brother falls, we fall with him or her. And I think a well rounded education. So is it worth it to come to a four year college like Maris? The answer is yes. All right. If in fact we're offering a larger, broader picture of what the world is about, if we're just trying to give them cogs, you want to be a scientist, I'll take science courses and live in your science world, or live in your computer world. All we're doing is fostering a world out there in the future that's going to be less effective for human beings, less, relevant for human beings. Yeah, we're gonna have lots of services and lots of people who can service those needs. But we're not going to have people who are interacting and problem solving and working together to make the world a better place and to help one another get through. I mean, we live in a really crazy world today and you know, we see the polarization that's taking place not only here in America but in other places. And we're fostering that, if we keep putting people in Cogs, we have to have a product that's unique and different from any other college. And we've had that for many, many years. And if we don't, if we don't have something different, then there's no reason for them to come to Marist, go to any college you want. You know, Marist isn't the place. But if we're offering something really unique, and that's a sense of, I feel important because I'm a human being, I feel important

because I'm contributing to the community I'm in at the moment. I feel I'm relevant because people are listening to me and I'm learning how to listen to them. Then I think we're giving young people something that's important for the world, the future of the world and the future of America, but if we're going to just do like everybody else, go anywhere, it doesn't matter.

Gus Nolan (50:31):

Just a sidebar, I don't know if you want to say much about this, is Marist Catholic anymore? Or Christian or does it matter?

John Pinna (50:43):

I think that there's a lot of the, I don't know if it's the Catholic, but there's still a lot of the Christian values here because I think I know most of the students still come from Catholic families and Christian families.

Gus Nolan (50:57):

Yeah, it's just do a side point on that, I mean actually Marist is more Catholic and as much as students at Notre Dame, you know, percentage wise. They don't crowd the chapel, that's all right, but most churches aren't crowded either. So, I mean it's kind of a tradition, what the question, why are they concerned for others that you've been talking to, this whole thing about. I think we made the fundamental thrust, not just making the money that you would get, but what you do with your life and a part of the greater community I think is we ponder it.

John Pinna (51:31):

See, I think that students today, as I look at them and my classes here and I, I interact with them are in this conflict between parents saying to them, you've got to make, get a good education to make money. And a lot of that's coming from home. Okay. That's the number one priority. Okay. And that's why you got to become a business major. I mean, that's why we have so many people going in the business who don't belong in there because they can't, they're never going to become good business people or, or in a communications or some. I think that the students today are in conflict with what they are trying to figure out as important for them as human beings and what they want to do and what their passion in life has got to be versus what they're being fed from the world out there. Whether it be parents or friends or just whatever saying you gotta you gotta funnel yourself here cause this is where the money is going to be and that to be successful you gotta make \$5 billion. I think they are really struggling with that. And you know, I'll find students like for example, who I advise academically who are in a program and I'll say, why are you in that program? Well my mother wants me to be a, you know, a business major or my father wants me to be and well, what do you want to do? Well, I don't want to do that, but why? I said, why aren't you saying that to your mom and dad? And of course, it's that dynamic. They're afraid they don't. Well, I said, well, you gotta figure out what you want to do. Yeah. You know, and I see them struggling with that every, every time I talk with them, they're not, they're not that. They're looking for some real, real meaningful satisfaction in what they're doing and they're not finding it because they're struggling with these values, you know,

Gus Nolan (53:22):

Different question entirely. My wife sends you and Anne her regards.

John Pinna (53:27):

Thank you.

Gus Nolan (53:27):

My question is, how did you find someone like Anne who has almost the same education thrust and impact, you know, that we were, she waiting for you?

John Pinna (53:37):

She was, I met Anne at Todd Junior High when I got my first job there the first time. And we met there, she was teaching English in eighth grade and we met and we just started talking and we would meet after I'd meet in her room after school and we talk for hours. And so I met her there and I think we had three dates and I asked her marry me.

Gus Nolan (54:05):

What year was that about?

John Pinna (54:06):

That was in seventy, let's say that was it 73? It was probably 73. Well, I met her in 72 and then we got married in 73.

Gus Nolan (54:19):

Alright, so you're 45 years married. Yeah.

John Pinna (54:23):

And she still doesn't think, it's gonna last.

Gus Nolan (54:25):

Alright, anything I didn't ask you that you wanted to say? You just, I wish you would have said this or asked me this, you know a kind of a closing statement about,

John Pinna (54:37):

no, I, I think my only concern, the only thing I share is that, Marist has been good to me. Brothers have been great and their influence. Yeah. And I think, we gotta continue that.

Gus Nolan (54:51):

Yeah. Okay. I understand you. I got the message. Thank you very much.

John Pinna (54:56):

Your welcome.