

VanderHeyden, Marc, 10 November 2008

Marc van der Heyden

Marist College

Poughkeepsie, New York

Transcribed by Wai Yen Oo

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Transcript – Marc van der Heyden

Interviewee: Marc van der Heyden

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Summary: Marc van der Heyden talks about his upbringing, time before Marist College, his work as the Academic Dean at Marist College. He discusses teaching method, understanding academic faculty at a college, and the culture of students on different campuses. Van der Heyden also discusses the future of colleges in the contemporary economic conditions, whether they will be worth it for both the students and the parents.

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[00:04](#) **Gus Nolan:** Good after noon Marc

[00:06](#) **Marc van der Heyden:** Good afternoon, Gus

[00:08](#) **GN:** This is a recording this afternoon with Dr. Marc van der Heyden, a former academic Dean at Marist and today is November 11th, the year is 2008. And we're recording in Greystone, the president's building here at Marist College. Marc, I wonder if we could start with just a little summary of your academic life and administrative one before coming to Marist

[00:40](#) **MV:** I'll be happy to, I'll be more detailed when I come to the part where I am part of this country but prior to that I have done my classical secondary studies and I joined the religious life in that context and studied philosophy in Holland and theology in Louvain in Holland and signed up our own study houses. I was sent to the United States in '63 to gain a doctorate in history. I left the society at that time and I made my studies in Washington at Catholic University where I graduated with a Doctorate in History in '68 and began immediately an academic career at Rider University in Lawrenceville, New Jersey.

[01:28](#) **GN:** How long were you at Rider?

[01:30](#) **MV:** At Rider, it was for eleven years. So, I started in '63. I was assistant professor of history, I became associate professor of history in '74 and at that time I also became the Associate Dean of the School of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Then in seventy-nine it came clear to me that I was going to be there forever. As I made some dramatic changes for myself and I looked for a position as a Dean, because my Dean, to whom I was the associate was only a year or two older than I am in that sense it was clear that "what I am going to do if I want to stay in administration?" because I have come to appreciate, even though I was teaching the same time, I had come to appreciate administration quite a bit and so I looked for administration in something quite and totally different. I accepted a position as an Academic Dean at Cedar Crest College in Allentown, Pennsylvania. Where I went in '79 in Allentown, Pennsylvania where I met Donna.

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And Donna subsequently became my wife and she was there on the faculty. Eventually, she became also the Dean of Admissions while I was Dean of Faculty and it's probably because we were both working last two years there working for the same president, we found that was not really very healthy situation. We both brought work home all the time. It's in that time period at the end of that time period I should say, that my father-in-law, Donna's father one time in the fall of '65, cut out of the New York Times, when we came to visit, an ad for Marist College. I thought, and we've always done and she still tells me I should be grateful to her father what followed in my life thereafter. And it was sort of like we were too late for it and I remember calling because we're planning to go to Belgium and visit the family at the Christmas season.

[03:42](#) GN: What year was that now?

[03:43](#) MV: That was in the Fall of '65, '85 rather, fall of '85. I talked to Lou Zuccarello who was the head of the committee. And asked if it would be OK if I sent my resume and my application and then could meet in January. Lou agreed that sort of delayed visit and I came in January to visit.

[04:08](#) GN: What do you know of Marist before you came, before that visit?

[04:12](#) MV: Well, in addition to what I had obviously read in the announcement in the New York Times, because I came from Belgium, I was familiar with the Marist Brothers. So, I knew that they were in the educational institution with a reputation that I was at least familiar with back home. I then learned more, first about the geography I must admit the proximity to New York after you live in Allentown became very attractive and my parents-in-law lived in New Jersey so that was part of the attraction. And then it was described as an institution sort of on the move. I remember in January when I visited then I was invited then to come back when they probably invited three or four finalists and my tour guide was none other than Rich, Richard LaPietra.

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Now for those people who know Richard, they should realize that by the time Richard is enthused by a subject matter and likes the person he's talking to then he will sell it.

[05:30](#) GN: Yes, yes, he has a convincing way. Does he not?

[05:34](#) MV: He took me around for the tour, explaining everything that was built by him and his colleagues. It was a great story and since I love stories I clearly was impressed by that. I remember how impressed I was with where the science building was at the time, which didn't look anything like it looks now. Because that was changed I think in 1990. I remember his enthusiasm and I remember actually the very sort of solid conversations I had with the committee on the role of humanities and it may have been because you know, I have been impressed by Richard or I was impressed by Lou Zuccarello. But I remember that. And then subsequent to that it was primarily John Lahey really who took the lead, in sort of helping me understand what was going to happen. And when I was offered the job, I don't think that we hesitated neither Donna or I hesitated even for a moment to say yes to it. So that's how we ended up here.

[06:51](#) GN: When you came, did you ever envisioned you'd be here ten years?

[06:55](#) MV: Yeah. Yeah because you know at that time. You know we're talking about '86 now. By the time it's '88, I would have been fifty. So, it was not like this was the beginning of a career or even mid-career by the time...

[07:18](#) GN: You were not a youngster.

[07:19](#) MV: I was no longer a youngster and, in that sense, and I remember and the conversation with certainly with John Lahey, it even may have been with Dennis at one point. Even though Dennis was not much in the picture at the time, that I said to him, "If this doesn't work out, I don't want tenure. But I do want if I don't work out as a Dean, I want my chance to go into the

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faculty in the history department. And after six years come up for tenure and be judged by my colleagues in question, etc.” And I think that impressed at least John Lahey. I am not interested in tenure. Why wouldn’t you give me tenure? But I am interested in having the chance to be back in the history department if you find that I don’t work out as dean and that was sort of the understanding. Donna and I were really convinced that this was going to be it. On top of that we landed in Rhinebeck in terms of our house and that sort of even confirmed it even more. So there was no hesitation about it.

[08:35](#) GN: OK. Can we fast forward a little when you came here, what was some of the surprises that you had both on the upside and downside?

[08:48](#) MV: On the upside I was really impressed by the fact that the college was attractive to a larger number of students than were needed. And that comes perhaps a sort of surprise in 2008. But I came from an institution that was struggling every year to meet its number for the incoming class. So, I was impressed by the success rate of the college and how it really was tough to say we have to be at this number, this number, and this. But there’s point of me most I remember in a sense sort of vividly... was the fact that there was clearly an inferior library at the time and I remember talking to Dennis in the early semester that this had to you know... And he was, you know, always not oblivious to that but it clearly was on the wrong...

[09:52](#) GN: Wasn’t on the top of the agenda.

[09:54](#) MV: No, it was clearly not. All those things I only came to appreciate ten, fifteen years later but that clearly was not on top. Another surprise I had was fairly early on, that to me always has been part of my consciousness about the faculty at Marist, which was the I wouldn’t say two-tiered faculty but it was there was definitely the faculty that was *ancien regime* and new. And there was no doubt that, *the ancien regime* that I call them, were really a community and

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obviously that had been inspired by the religious community that preceded them all. And eventually it is in that group that I also became the most comfortable. But it was palpable when you were sitting in the dean's office. And that made it at times sort of the political realignments were not that easy and on top of that the people that belonged to that group were mostly in the humanities or in the sciences and the others were all in the new territories. So, it compounded actually... this.

[11:12](#) GN: I want to get into that a little later on the division between you might say the liberal arts and the career factor.

[11:19](#) MV: It was there.

[11:20](#) GN: Yeah. There were a number changes that came about in your first years, for instance the structure, the faculty, the departments, the divisions, eventually the schools. How much of this do you feel you initiated?

[11:36](#) MV: I was primarily interested at first in making sure that we had some solid departments. It's only by the end of my career here in the mid-early 90s that I begin to think perhaps schools would be of serious interest. But, that was later on and the schools structure that I was advocating certainly was not what it eventually ended up, because I was really, I had been a product of it. I had been a part of it. I wanted a School of Liberal Arts and Sciences. I remember that vividly and I wanted the School of Business. And then I wanted a School of Professional Studies. That was sort of because I figured that if you break them further down, the liberal arts would have a hard time to remain the pivot of all. And so that was a struggle that came sort of later on. And that was sort of driven by the personalities of the people who were first the chairs of the divisions then subsequently became the deans I'm sure. But that was after I left the school. In the beginning it was obvious that the divisions, I think were six, five or six. They liked it

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primarily on historical basis and trajectory, they liked it for the people that were sort of running it, it was not really...

[13:00](#) **GN:** Certain independence to each of these groups...

[13:03](#) **MV:** And they also were geographically dispersed.

[13:10](#) **GN:** The sat above the campus.

[13:13](#) **MV:** And in many ways actually I might say in many ways somehow, I think Dennis or I mean the administration was encouraging that as well. But it did make for a harder time to sort of bring them together. While Lowell Thomas was a great addition and Dyson was even better addition, it made these separations even more.

[13:38](#) **GN:** Can we focus on the students now? You made a college really about students, despite the word clients sometimes used much to my dismay. What efforts did you make to keep in touch with students?

[13:53](#) **MV:** Well I was teaching the first couple of years and Virginia Marquardt was prepared subsequent when after two years. So I found out that I could not do it by myself because you know. There were always things happening in the Dean's Office that I would really need her help. Then we did some team teaching and we did that probably till my last year.

[14:22](#) **GN:** So, actually teaching students and being actually in a classroom.

[14:26](#) **MV:** Classroom together. Joint teaching because if I didn't show up at least she was there.

[14:30](#) **GN:** How about committees? Did you have them on committees?

[14:34](#) **MV:** I had students on committees. You know I eat in the cafeteria regularly but even though most of the time I would eating with the faculty in the science building where they had... I always make. The reason why we had this nice group of about a dozen people...there was because first of all the biology professor who die prematurely...

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[14:59](#) GN: Oh, I know Bill.

[15:02](#) MV: He has PhD from Vermont. Cicely, his wife. Perrotte. He always wanted people to try out the latest kind of pickles and it was always best to have a faculty dining arrangement in the biology department, chemistry because they were the only people ones with a Bunsen burner and had a refrigerator so they were two key elements for having some decent food, I eat there a lot.

[15:34](#) GN: And you get free lectures. There is a black board, people would ...

[15:38](#) MV: Always something going on there. It was a great time. I really enjoyed that part. For the rest I had good contact students because of the classroom work. And I had good contact because I, really well, I liked to be a part of ...

[15:53](#) GN: Let me ... This is rather a strange question but a practical one. I think you've had touch with students in various universities and the real question is... is there anything unique about Marist students? Compared to let's say you know when you're in Pennsylvania. Or in Vermont or are they the typical student that we have here?

[16:16](#) MV: Well it's interesting I did work in my life in four different colleges and I did find the profile of the students to be really different. Even though in many ways, people would say they are all alike in the sense young people are alike. But the sum total of a group can create a profile that really announces itself to you. When I was at Rider University, there was no doubt that it was ... you could feel it in the air, this was a group of students who really owned to be successful accountable of all states. Because that was predominant force and it would be in your classrooms in history or political science. Because I was part of the liberal arts, we had all these people who are sort of transient clients, quote on quote who really were only fulfilling only requirements when they were in your class. They never came because they wanted to be there so

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you had that. My second college was a women's college and they were most interesting of them all because there was no inhibition anymore because of the presence of men something like that. And I got there at the time when the feminist movement was really taking hold and I began to see how much I had to learn. And these women were carriers and inventive and innovative and sort of at the edge. And there was sort of confidence in them sometimes and edginess and that was a distinct group. I've never met another group of women. A group of women. I met many women like that. Never met a group of women who really made that into that claim. When I came here, I found this was sort of like a much more, at least in my time here. You know. We have changed because the numbers have grown so much. I always found it to be if not docile, at least rather ready and prepared to follow and then...

[18:13](#) **GN:** Not hungry.

[18:14](#) **MV:** And not as hungry and a lot of that came to me from the fact that they were to a large degree from the same geographical area. You and another quite well were familiar with the territory. Could not get excited about going to New York because they knew New York better than you did and there was no ... and I say that because subsequently ten, twelve years in Vermont and there I have students who had to leave home for at least six hundred miles before they got there. So you already had an adventurous spirit and you have kids who really came there because they wanted to ski rather than do something else. And that's an adventurous spirit so I do find differences. But ultimately as I said earlier the general observations are always going to be very much the same. But it's as a group when they get together that they really... they do project a certain image. I always found these kids at Marist to be kind and friendly sometimes a little rough on the edges but it was excused because they were from northern Jersey or Long Island, that kind of thing.

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[19:26](#) GN: Moving on, what's your view on graduate education?

[19:32](#) MV: Well see, I am a man loaded with prejudice in that regard. It belongs at a university. And I believe that our college have done the best undergraduate education and they should stick to it. And the graduate education should be elsewhere by the time people developed too many and too large a program the graduate level, they seriously have to consider to become a University. That's my first observation. My second observation is that it brings another split in the faculty because the expectations of the grad faculty have to be different from the faculty that is really engaged in the preparatory. And we also have the problem that liberal arts we would have been better off twenty, thirty years ago to change the name of liberal arts and called it pre-professional studies because all of these the liberal arts ended up running the businesses and the banks and the profession and the lawyers and the doctors and they're all the professions. So if we had said they are pre-professional people, people would have made the distinction perhaps any more I like the idea that if you have an undergraduate faculty that you really can insist on an ethos that it says it's educating the kids that comes first. And that's not easy.

[21:00](#) GN: Another point. The academic deans play an essential role in maintaining the standards of the college. And then there are visits by people like middle States. Do you consider the investment by both administrative and faculty groups to be well-invested, the time spent, the effort in these visitation and these evaluations?

[21:29](#) MV: Well. There two part of there are two parts to the question here. I really think that the recruitment of faculty is the most critical task for the academic administration and in our form of democracy that we have injected the academic life, the faculty has a great role to play in that. I still believe the academic dean where present has to be a forceful voice even being the determining voice. And the reason is very simple to me unless you're prepared to recruit people

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not better than you are not going to improve on the fact. That has to be your predisposition that's much easier for a dean to achieve than it is for a colleague in a department. It really is and if you can do that then you have to spend the time because by the time you recruit the faculty member you want to make sure that you have recruited someone who will be ready for tenure six years hence, seven years hence therefore is worthwhile spend all your time to do it right because the faculty is less critical than colleagues than they really should be. By the time you view them six years later they become friends. They find it very hard to make those decisions. It's always up to the dean or the president to make the tough decisions because it's too hard in a small institution. It's possible in a university but in a small college the faculty cannot be not be expected to make these very tough decisions. And yet these are million dollars investments in the fact, million dollars investment and they can do damage to the institutions or students or what have you. So you really have to spend the time. Now in order to have a better elevation of the potential of faculty, it is wise that faculty and administrators that take the occasional opportunity to do evaluation at other institutions so that you have comparative base so you can at least see how they go about it and you can see the faculty as a whole can help great deeply promotion of a junior faculty member getting ready to become a senior etc. That to me is the critical task. I am really proud of the fact that I have interviewed everybody who came up to campus through my tenure and I did the same when I became president. It's a must for me at least.

[23:48](#) **GN:** Move along now. What are the qualities of good teaching? How would you evaluate a teacher to be a good teacher rather than just passable?

[24:01](#) **MV:** Well by the time, you have to rely first on the peer review. Because if they are honest with you, they are normally bullseye about their colleague. It's only when they have to judge them publicly and, in a group, that the faculty lose their critical senses and their intellectual

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honesty about their colleague.

[24:23](#) **GN:** Become protective then.

[24:25](#) **MV:** Absolutely. So you have to make sure within that context. You have a reportative faculty who admit at least some of them to be honest with you. Number two, you really have to listen to the students not to the question of measuring popularity but you have to listen to the students. Because if a student says if he can't keep track of what is happening in his accounting course. And his accounting course is 220. You need to know what did you learn in 110 accounting. Because that's where the problem maybe. And that is something that a Dean can be exploring in the departmental chair. I often had to say you know ... He may be complaining that the kid is often not prepared. Let's find out what the kid took in terms of preparation. He didn't come out of high school now. He's a junior for heaven's sake. How come you don't think he's prepared? Where did he take this previous thing? But on campus how can he be not prepared? And in that sense, that's where you begin to discover a lot more and that you can do in small colleges a dean or a VP, president even can sit down with the chair you know. I go to a basketball game, I sit down next to three students. Two out of the three have this problem and they are describing it to me as if there's nothing happening but a faculty member invited me to a classroom whether as dean or as president. I always said yes. I would say why don't you come and talk about leadership. Why don't you come and talk about you know name it? Because they're on a half hour break probably and that the president coming in front of them and I always said yes. Because that where ten fifteen twenty students who have the nerve there after to see me in the cafeteria come up to me and say, "Hey, Mr. President thanks for coming to class. I mean boy that was about the best lecture I had." How come this was the best? How can that be...? "Oh you should be there this, this, this." Or we have ten of these good things. He is a great teacher.

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That's when you get the real stories. And it's possible to find out and the faculty know about one and another and who's a good teacher. And they know about the people who are slacking off and they know about the people who don't prepare and they know about the guys who are still reading or the guys who go home and sit in front of their TV. They know that about one and other but inject in room in front of their colleagues. We're social animals I mean we don't do things like that.

[26:57](#) **GN:** Yeah there is something about you can't teach what you don't know. So first you have to be content-based yourself.

[27:04](#) **MV:** You have to be current. Which means the first rule for faculty member is that he or she is a reader. Keeps track of things. But it's also true that we shouldn't look at the course evaluation because their students are less than... We call them the summa; pull them together from different sources but they never should be the determining factor. Faculty really should be the prime judge of their colleague.

[27:45](#) **GN:** There's not much maybe it would come naturally... the gift of actually transmitting what is this excitement about the subject, the interest in the subject... You don't need a lot of overhead displays and technology.

[28:02](#) **MV:** No. But we should permit. The distinction between those students who really are prepared to open their mind for it. And those who are only going through it because A, it's required. I mean even in our advising we make the mistakes sometimes and we tell the kids who sits down with us about advising and we the faculty will say well let's get this requirement out of the way this semester so why don't you take Gus Nolan's course in communication and that will take care of that requirement. That's not away the way to introduce the kids but you say, no, you really learn something about communication, you should take next semester Gus Nolan. You'll

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learn something about these thing one thing. You can cross it out on your paper to cross it out ..

We do one and another damage.

[28:50](#) **GN:** Can the dean do something to enhance teaching?

[28:55](#) **MV:** Yeah I think the dean can do it in two or three ways. He can show it by appreciation if I learn from two alums in LA that they are still taking among Reza and his course in economics the next day when I come back in Vermont I call up Reza and say, Reza I want you to know these two guy you may not remember they think that you were the cream of the crop. They thought you were a great teacher.

[29:29](#) **GN:** A little encouragement.

[29:30](#) **MV:** That's all it is. It's just one telephone call. Reza will smile when he sees me next time around he will be going to class with great enthusiasm that very day. I mean it's a simple thing and, in that sense, yes If a faculty wants to go to a workshop where it talks about some new innovative ideas about what to do with the next group of kids coming in. Find the money for it. Normally these things are in the hundreds of dollars not thousands. Don't let faculty burn out. I push very hard for sabbaticals. Junior sabbaticals. We also work very hard on making sure that teaching is appreciated and you can do that as a dean. You can do more when you are president because you sit on top of the resources but you can at least tell the dean that's where they should go.

[30:25](#) **GN:** You mentioned team teaching before. Do you find that viable?

[30:29](#) **MV:** unless the two faculty members are really comfortable with one another. I am not the greatest proponent of it because students sort of observe cracks quicker than we do you know. I remember one ... Virginia was an interesting teacher but she was straight and you know, objective and I could play off of that. She would never say in an art history course that she really

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liked this painting or something.

[31:04](#) **GN:** She wouldn't let herself get involved.

[31:06](#) **MV:** No. And I would come say, "I love this." And I would tell you why. You have to be a little careful with that but still...

[31:16](#) **GN:** Okay looking back at Marist, I say here it was a very young college when you came. In your mind, what would some of the most significant changes that you were able to participate in, in your stay here?

[31:36](#) **MV:** Well, I think one was that we did get the opportunity to recruit. I think we recruit closer to one hundred people under in my tenure faculty and we really were given some wide margin there to sort of recruit more and more on a national scale, on a wider scale. And that I think helped open up a little bit because we have been more regional in our reaching out. That was definitely something that I enjoyed. And appreciated. I think that we did begin to work on the faculty structure while I didn't like it ... In the sense of that I didn't find to be jiving with my own temperament. There was something the faculty began to like and work with. I remember the faculty meeting where they would raise question that really had to be addressed by the president or VP. But they were not addressed there. They were addressed to the air and was there for no answer that I found sort of difficult to deal with. There was some political activity that set faculty against faculty, departments against departments. There was a very strong ... faculty about merit. There was competition between the different divisions at the time. Those things I found difficult to deal with. On the other hand I think the majority of faculty were... didn't have their students as their first responsibility I really believed that. And I also believed that at times they would hide behind that first commitment to explain why they would not commit any more time to scholarship. Which I thought for a college that was sort of on the move it was necessary to

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promote that at the same time and that's where you began to see generational gaps because the older ones that come in did no longer find that to be sort of contradiction, this twofold developed. The older group had more of a hard time with that and that didn't always sit well the debate. The faculty it was even more pronounced when it became between liberal arts and the others. So that may have had some of the tensions. I think my own occasional headache came from a different story and that's really sort of a long view. It was clear to me only at the very end it that the drive to enlarge the college was something the strategic thinking of the part of Dennis and most likely the support of the board. And I was not enamored with that concept at first. In the sense I was never ... I was not enamored because to me, we didn't have the tools within the faculty, the library, the laboratories to sort of grow that group. When I came, there were eighteen hundred undergraduate students and they wanted to grow really as quickly as...

[35:16](#) **GN:** To three thousand.

[35:17](#) **MV:** to double it and I was trying to slow this down. I was trying to slow this down. I mean I left work with twenty-two hundred. So I had failed in that. But I then subsequently, you know begin to see that it was part of the standards you would grow the college in sheer numbers you would grow them by also by bringing in to the residential living because it was obvious for those people who were running the financial aspects of the institution but if you have the students in residence then you make some money on their presence. And by doing that you would have the money to build up an infrastructure that would eventually justify throwing in more students.

[36:00](#) **GN:** A nice cycle.

[36:02](#) **MV:** It was nice cycle but, in my view, it was never explained to the full communities so I away to explain to the faculty that we didn't have resources. Yet in the long run proved to have

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been the right decision because the college did grow. Growth means as a result of it. And it could build up an infrastructure in the form of a fabulous library and infrastructure in buildings and laboratories that really is the envy of many. At the same time I think that Dennis very successfully sort of explored the relationship that had be gone by his predecessors with IBM and really made that into an absolute sort of vigorous arm of the development of the institution but I had to explain to the faculty that that was indeed our future. And the faculty in the main was just not prepared neither technically nor politically to accept that technology would be it on the future. It was very hard. It was even hard for them tolerate that would be an actual television room in the new building. I remember that people were... why television room couldn't do the signs correctly and so the problem that I think we have was that the strategy I presume I know its Dennis who did it actually was correct but there was...

[37:48](#) **GN:** But getting there was not easy.

[37:50](#) **MV:** It was not that easy and it was not explained to the full communities to bring them on board to say, Hey. And so when you were sitting somewhere else on that ladder, it was sort of hard to say, "This all makes sense and you'll see." But I think that it's a lot easier now because there is a track record which there was not in '85. And now in 2008 can say hey, look around this. You were embarrassed by the riches (?).

[38:20](#) **GN:** Well relate to that, let's get back to that question then maybe it's core-related or maybe it's liberal arts vs career education. Where does the core fit into this?

[38:38](#) **MV:** Well the core to me always... That was true for me when I was at Rider, Cedar Crest, St. Michaels or here at Marist college, the core to me always was not question of being preparatory too because in an entirely liberal arts is preparatory too. A liberal arts education is career preparation. Where do you think these lawyers which we have too many now? All of it is

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career preparation. The point of the core curriculum however was to make sure the faculty had focus and that the students had something in common a body of knowledge they are searching for that would be their own. If you don't have a core the kids who live together in the dorms don't have an intellectual compass at all. One of the reasons why when I had [...] I wanted to make sure that the majors would not group together in the townhouses. No way because you have five business majors in one room. They don't learn beans. You have five journalisms in one room. They don't learn a thing but you have ...

[39:46](#) **GN:** A mix.

[39:47](#) **MV:** Two journalisms majors know have to work in their room with a guy who's doing chemistry and one who's doing micro-biology and one who's in business. Those journalism majors begin to think, "Oh, we aren't the only ones who have to work hard, this chemistry major is really home before midnight." And that's where the liberal arts education takes place it to give them a common body of knowledge to pursue the really makes for a liberal education when you're in a residential college. That's my argument for the last thirty years we're always successful.

[40:19](#) **GN:** I understand it much better now.

[40:23](#) **MV:** It is only an example

[40:24](#) **GN:** That mix of things of courses. Sometimes maybe I am right maybe I am right. The core would seem more political thing to preserve people's jobs.

[40:36](#) **MV:** The core in the faculty context always has been there in order to protect certain disciplines and because the humanities are the most vulnerable. And because the humanities faculty are the most articulate quite frequently. They make a big thing out of it you don't hear that much from the computer sciences people because they will send you an email or a text

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message but it's not an argument but there's no doubt in my mind if you look at the core in the context what students need than you talk about two or three things basic skills that they must have and they all have to be in common. And number two they need to have a substance there that can be approached. I mean the kid who's in computer sciences and at eleven o'clock finds out that her roommate is still working on a paper on Jean Jacques Rousseau and the next week on Voltaire. At a certain point, their curiosity will be what is that you're doing with all of those things. That's where the possibility. I've managed eventually the only, the last five years of my academic age 65 I finally convinced an entire college all incoming freshman would read the same book. And I told the faculty that was not enough. I also want all the faculty and all the staff to so I bought five hundred more copies.

[42:11](#) **GN:** What was the book?

[42:14](#) **MV:** The book was the Story of Pi That was the first one. The Story of Pi. because I've figured out something way to long late in my life majority of contact with students was not on the part of the faculty. It was with the [...] I in the offices where they were doing ten hours of work-study but if she is reading the Book of Pi and if you have two kids who are coming who are reading the same book, you have no idea what discussion that take place on campuses. So all of a sudden you had liberal arts coming all over the place

[42:50](#) **GN:** Very interesting I have one question maybe it's redundant. What were some of the things that you wish you could have done or couldn't do because of any of the number of reason? Could be financial, could be traditional ... it could be local here. Was there some?

[43:14](#) **MV:** Yeah, I wish I would have the opportunity that only came ten years after my arrival which was the library. I think the library really is a unifier on campuses and that's what I sort of missed in my Marist experience. And the other thing that I probably missed was the fact that we

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now became more consummate later on... a college needs to have its own history and because and we did obviously later on with the heritage professors and things like that. But we should have done that from day one because the college needs to develop a history before it can develop a story. And you only can project forward to the degree that you are cognizant to what preceded you. In other words if you only know forty years what are you going to project forward? But if you know your great-grandfather's story, you can project forward. For an institution it's even more critical and we had such a fabulous story to tell at Marist that I really didn't pick up on early enough. And I regret that because I would have been equipped to do that because the roots of this college are French which was easy for me. The roots of this college really, it's an immigrant college. It's a fabulous thing to have in this country and we're young. And at the same time, we were brought into a technology, knowledge world in which we adjusted quicker than our neighboring institutions. It was not at all an institution like Vassar on the other side of Poughkeepsie. It was not Bard with its own fancy... not New Paltz with its state's support. No, it was this little institution that said, "Hey." That's sort of demonstrating what an opportunity entrepreneurial spirit is all about and we could have connected history a lot better.

[45:36](#) GN: Well better late than at least your trying now this interview part of that history.

You've come back after ten years. You've been here now and then along the way. In your mind what has changed most? Give me two things.

[45:53](#) MV: There's an upbeat spirit to Marist and there's an upbeat spirit about Marist. And I'm back now for a year and a half. I can't even the way people talk about Marist in the community is upbeat and that is fabulous to learn. The other thing is obvious that it has grown was beyond that I thought about. And the view, it looks absolutely splendid. So you know it was a good strategy great master plan. Really it is attractive to students. I hope that our present real environment

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meaning particularly the economy will not dampen the spirit of the parents who send their kids here because it's a serious sacrifices and it's an expensive sacrifice. but at the same time I think that the connection with technology being as becoming and fabulous asset and sort of hallmark to the college. The college has to use it unique position to make sure that it connects with that. That is the strength of its own tradition. It was humanities-based education and if they do that they would have to work on that. Then they're making building blocks rather than replacing things. You have your humanities as your foundation. They are rooted in your history and in your being. And then on top of that you built the technology and then on top of that you build another... Next stuff we don't know yet. Don't replace one with the other built one on top of the other. Built one on top of the other, that sort of strategy for a place like Marist.

[47:50](#) **GN:** I find that very interesting especially. I thought I had read where I am only putting this now into context here about the use of such things as computers for research and for learning. In some ways it takes away joy of going to the reader's guide to a periodical to find. You get it all on screen now. You know. So that's the efficiency of it.

[48:17](#) **MV:** But this serendipity possible in technology too. There's serendipity possible and if we think that there is not enough serendipity. Then you can send these people into the library to maybe get studying... to doing a year abroad. We do so many of the other things we can require if that what we really believe what is critical. But there's no doubt that ... It's not that we're learning differently now with technology. I always thought technology would be like a second language. But that's not true. Then I thought technology would be going to learn in a different manner. But it's not just that we learn differently. We are learning different things. That's beginning to change and if that's true then students and faculty become much more partners than they ever were before. Because we are not dictating, it's not like here's your syllabus and we are

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going to stick to it, these kids take the first thing in the syllabus and before you know are surfing away from you and they come back.

[49:21](#) **GN:** You've never even heard of the way...

[49:22](#) **MV:** Never heard of that. What they learned was read and write and good and worthwhile. And you didn't know about it. So we have to do a new technique to do that but it's possible and I think that the potential is enormous. But it has to be rooted and something that can become their own. Technology cannot become your own. It's still only a tool and in that sense, I think to have it rooted in the humanities, then that's ...a tough one.

[49:57](#) **GN:** Another tough question. One of the greatest activity on campus here is campus ministry. We have more than five hundred kids involved in such things as meals on wheels and working with adolescents and going to home volunteering and instruction and so on. And yet one of the least attended courses would be theology courses or religion courses. And things of that, do you see something lacking in the core development of students without more of these so-called religious courses in there?

[50:38](#) **MV:** It's a very sad development on most Catholic campuses. And most colleges that come from a Catholic or Christian tradition that we have replaced really the substances for the religious foundations is all about with volunteer movement and we are delighted about it because kids do it. And we have campus [...] and they are involved in civic engagement and all that kind of thing and we have people in volunteers services. You feed the poor but it is not connected to what certainly in a Catholic institution would be the case. The first ask is very simple, where you have to know your God better and to take care of your neighbor and so if by the end of a liberal arts education in a Christian or Catholic environment if you cannot say that the students who graduated know God better and love their neighbor more then you really haven't had a

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successful education. Knowing takes some effort and that's little tougher for students to accept. I mean but that's true for our entire society where people in our society today do believe that meditation is like going to a spa. Meditation is a painful thing. Meditation calls for a sacrifice. Meditation calls for some real hard labor. But they do it the form of ... so we have to teach our students a couple of things. One the value of sciences we have to tell them the importance of solitude. We have to teach them that not only volunteering is important but it's something that is equally important at a state institution across the river where they will call it civic duty. What is critical for us is they need to have an intellectual underpinning of what their values are and for that they need to be held how to scrutinize it and they need to know what it means. What they will accept both for your knowledge and science and compare that with what they will accept on the bases of faith and all of that will take studying I don't care how they phrase that. It will take study.

[53:10](#) **GN:** Is... Was St Michaels Catholic College and how was it different from Marist?

[53:18](#) **MV:** Well our... We have similar emphasis on what we call, "Move program." It's a mobilization of volunteer services but we have campus ministry that involves a lot of people and is focused on liturgy. We have a very important liturgical choir. The presence of that on campus is obvious. The chapel is the largest building on campus so that's already here. That's the physical manifestation probably there are not more Catholics there then here. We have only sixty percent Catholics.

[54:06](#) **GN:** Is religion course required courses?

[54:09](#) **MV:** Yeah, they are.

[54:11](#) **GN:** And in the Catholic tradition, do you see that expression being used in a way of kind of softening that we don't really require theology but we have from a tradition?

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[54:29](#) **MV:** Well, the problem we discovered is that we can't find theologians so we have to be happy with the guys who have done religion or the women who have done religion. So in that sense becomes a little bit ... We still have quite a few course that are the directly catholic theology. That's a little serious problem and I had some discussions with the bishop about it. I don't know if we can deviated for just a moment. If you take a place like Vermont where you have sixty-two priests for the state of Vermont and a hundred and twenty parishes and you want me to take three of those priest and make them theology professors at St. Michaels? You'll have six more parishes without a priest.

[55:17](#) **GN:** That's a problem.

[55:18](#) **MV:** that's a serious problem and you know the bishop would like to have a theology department instead of a religion department. I said, "Alright, you and I go and look find a theologian." And then what? People are going to be upset if you find five of them and they are not in their parishes. On top of that you will be upset because I am going to find five and they are going to be five women.

[55:40](#) **GN:** Yeah. That doesn't go too well and sound episcopal options, did it?

[55:45](#) **MV:** It's a serious problem but there's no doubt that we should have... Our religion department had eight people. They were people from the University of Chicago, Brown.

[56:00](#) **GN:** Not Notre dame so much or Catholic University.

[56:02](#) **MV:** Notre Dame, Dartmouth, one from Dublin... What is it, Trinity?

[56:09](#) **GN:** Trinity College.

[56:12](#) **MV:** One from Gregorian. So we had a variety of things there but the students had to take two courses.

[56:20](#) **GN:** OK One last question that is probably the nut of this whole thing. What do you think

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are the challenges for small independent colleges? Facing them as we go ahead now.

[56:34](#) **MV:** Well. I think that the latest development in our economy will make it clear that we very vulnerable. The vast majority of people in the United States believe that private colleges are rich and they are poor. There are hundred rich colleges but there are barely two hundred college in the United States that have an endowment that is larger than an annual budget. Okay. Think about that. A few hundred. In the university of Vermont, which has a five-hundred-million-dollar budget, has only seventy-five-hundred-dollar endowment. So there are very few colleges. And to me that's one of those measures. So we are all very vulnerable. Number two, we are going to find that if the economy remains at this level, the large number of parents will opted to send their kids to community colleges as they have done before. And they did before the Second World War, many community college disappear there after that and reconstituted there after again. It's a cyclical thing and unless state colleges going to really call on parents to pay what it really cost. Sometimes state colleges are cheaper in the fact that you pay less. They're not cheap. They cost the same thing. As a matter of fact sometimes their faculty are paid even better then private so that is going to be really a serious problem. And I don't know how we are going to reduce the number of people that are needed to run the college. That is to say fifty years ago a professor at Marist or many other private colleges would be teaching five courses a semester and this would be helping assistant coach at tennis and would help some kids in guidance counselor. Now professors are going to teach two courses perhaps three. And therefore we need a guidance counselor. We need a coach in tennis and we need two people in the residence hall to make sure that they behave properly. So instead of one guy, we now have three guys and three women taking care of the same number of kids. That has grown tremendously. The faculty work has been reduced to less than a third more than that for the past fifty years. The staff has increased

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tremendously. The residential hall calling for supervision of one hundred kids. No twenty is the max now with assistance's needs galore. Imagine...we now, we need entire staff in career counseling. There's not a single career counseling person at any of the European universities. They have millions of students too. We have become such a service industry that it is hard for us to see how do we reduce that in the future. So we are going to remain very expensive. In the meantime, the cost of running an institution, you know partially because of energy, we keep this library open, fully-lit up. We keep the science building open lit-up because we have forty rats in there we want to keep alive.

[1:00:06](#) **GN:** We need to reorganize our system.

[1:00:08](#) **MV:** Yes, we have to be a little more humble what we can and cannot do.