

Roger Norton

Marist College

Poughkeepsie, NY

Transcribed by Kyra Walker

For the Marist College Archives and Special Collections

Roger Norton

Transcript – Roger Norton

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Summary:

Roger Norton looks back on his time as both a dean and professor at Marist College. He also shares his views on the changes Marist College has undergone through the years, his contributions and his beliefs on where the college is headed.

Gus Nolan (00:00:00):

Today is Tuesday, August 16th. We have an interview with Dr. Roger Norton. We're meeting in the Marist College library. Good afternoon Dr. Norton.

Roger Norton (00:00:12):

Good afternoon.

GN (00:00:14):

This is an interview that will go into the Marist College archives and...the way we're doing it, we're just trying to get an overview of your experience at Marist. Faculty always share before Marist, coming to Marist, the development of Marist, and then kind of a forecast into the future. What do you think is going to happen 20 years from now? But in the beginning, just to turn back the clock a little bit, could you give me kind of a thumbnail of your early years--where you were born, grade school, high school?

RN (00:00:49):

Sure. I was born in Lowell, Massachusetts. I lived in Lowell until I was in second grade. We moved from Lowell to the town next to it called Chelmsford, Massachusetts. And I spent the rest of my childhood in Chelmsford, Massachusetts, which is also where my wife is from. I met my wife, married my wife, went off to college, went off to graduate school, came here to Marist; and have been at Marist ever since.

GN (00:01:18):

Okay. And growing up...did you do any kind of special activities: sports, music, traveling, hobbies, anything in that category that would give you another interest than just going to school?

RN (00:01:36):

I played tennis. I've played tennis since I was very young. I didn't play on the high school tennis team but I played quite a bit and I continued playing tennis into my twenties.

GN (00:01:52):

Your early years at Marist, you played tennis here.

RN (00:01:54):

Yeah, I played tennis.

GN (00:01:56):

And then moved to racquetball after that.

RN (00:01:58):

I continued to play tennis while I played racquetball. Racquetball wasn't anything I'd ever done until I came here to Marist. When I was at graduate school, I played squash at Brandeis University. They didn't have racquetball courts, they had squash court. So I really started playing an inside racket game at Brandeis, and that was squash. When I came here, I actually looked to see whether they had squash courts to continue...but we did not. There was one of the racquetball courts that you could actually

convert into a squash court. You had to bring in this metal plate and the size of it really wasn't the same. And then I started meeting people who played racquetball. So I started playing racquetball.

GN ([00:02:44](#)):

In your early years--high school--did you ever work in the summer? Did you ever do anything that would be fun-producing or were independently wealthy? [inaudible]

RN ([00:02:58](#)):

No, I come from a very poor family. I mean, extremely poor. I worked from the time in which I was old enough to get a...you actually had to get a working permit to work. I think you could get one of those at 15. So I worked during the summer all sorts of different types of jobs. I also worked during the school year. I worked as a busboy, dish washer. I worked at Marshall's warehouse packing boxes and unpacking boxes. So I always worked, I always did some sort of a job.

GN ([00:03:38](#)):

Didn't you have a short military career?

RN ([00:03:41](#)):

I had a very short military career. Yes. So after I'd graduated from high school, my wife-to-be was still a senior in high school, and I enlisted in the Air Force. And we had never thought of marrying so young, but because of the fact that I was going into the Air Force...it was during the Vietnam--they weren't drafting at the time, so I never had a threat of being drafted. But Vietnam was still going on. It was winding down. I joined the Air Force. I was going to go to Lackland Air Force base and then I was actually going to go to school in Biloxi, Mississippi to become a radar technician. That was what my job was going to be and I was going to be in Biloxi for about a year and a half, 18 months. So my wife and I decided...why don't we actually get married before you go away into the service. And she was 17 years old, still a senior in high school. I was 18 years old. Her parents...the only reason her parents ever agreed to allow us to get married was because of the fact that, well at least he has a steady job. He's going into the Air Force and be in the Air Force for the next four years. So I arrived in San Antonio, Texas Friday night. And I remember that everybody came in...this was during the early seventies. People had very, very long hair.

GN ([00:05:20](#)):

You were 18-years-old?

RN ([00:05:21](#)):

I was 18-years-old. The training instructor didn't want us...we weren't going to go through getting our haircuts and all that stuff until Monday, but he didn't want us running around that weekend with this long hair. So he picked me as the barber. And so all the people in my group, I cut their hair. Including my own hair, which was somewhat long at the time. And so that was the first night. And on Sunday, I actually had some issue with my back. They were having us do various things. They sent me down to the infirmary. The doctor took an x-ray of my back and he puts up the x-ray on the screen and he says 'you have spinal bifida and spondylosis of the spine.' And he's pointing to this on my radar. As I was growing up, I always had back problems but nothing very serious. And the doctor said 'you're going to be discharged.' And this was Sunday. I arrived Friday night [laughter].

GN ([00:06:33](#)):

Was this an honorable discharge from the service?

RN ([00:06:35](#)):

And so I actually received...I was there for about three weeks because it took a while for them to work through the paperwork and so forth. But during the time I was there, I was not allowed to do anything. They...I couldn't march, I couldn't run. They couldn't...they didn't want me sitting on the floor because they didn't want anything to happen to me while I was in the service. And so I was discharged with an honorable discharge. I was discharged as if I had spent my entire...full four years in the Air Force. So some people, it takes four years to get an honorable discharge [laughter]-

GN ([00:07:13](#)):

You were always fast to get things done.

RN ([00:07:15](#)):

For me it was less than three weeks [laughter]. And so I have all the benefits of somebody who served in the military.

GN ([00:07:26](#)):

Wonderful. All right. You deserved it. You tried to do the right thing.

RN ([00:07:29](#)):

I tried to do the right thing. That's what people tell me.

GN ([00:07:32](#)):

Alright, let's turn the page. When did you first hear about Marist College and how did you...what's the genesis of you coming here?

RN ([00:07:40](#)):

Yeah, so I was in graduate school at Brandeis in Massachusetts. I was doing my PhD in mathematics. I had finished all my coursework. I passed all my exams. The only thing I had left was to write my dissertation. During my second year at Brandeis, my oldest daughter was born. And so it created more of a financial burden on us. And so although I continued going to graduate school for over a year after my daughter was born...but then I decided--since all I have to do is write my dissertation, I don't need to be on the campus...let me go and look for a job. And so there was a mathematical publication back then that you would look in and it would show all the different types of jobs that are available. But at that time, I hadn't finished my PhD and so I didn't look at universities where I had always planned...my plan was to graduate from Brandeis and go and teach at Yale or Brandeis, some sort of a research institution. But because of the fact that I hadn't finished, I only looked at colleges because I thought they'd be the only people that would hire me. And I saw Marist College. It was a two-year visiting position at Marist College in mathematics. So I applied for that.

GN ([00:09:09](#)):

Your degree and doctorate was going to be in mathematics?

RN ([00:09:12](#)):

Yes, mathematics. And so I came...I was invited for the interview. I came and I met the search committee. The search committee consisted of John Ritschdorff. That's it. [Laughter] That was the only person...I really met two people, but that was the first person that I met. And then John walked me over to meet the academic vice president and the academic vice president at that time was Louis Zuccarello, so I met Lou. It was just kind of...I mean, it wasn't even an interview. It was just sort of introducing us. And before I left that day John had offered me the job, and I remember I was offered another job. But the other job--paid hold a whole lot more than Marist paid--but it was actually at a community college and I really didn't want to teach at a community college. I wanted to teach upper-level courses. So one of the things I made John put in the contract was that every semester I would be assigned an upper level math course.

GN ([00:10:23](#)):

I see.

RN ([00:10:24](#)):

And so that was in the contract. I came back in September started my career here at Marist College. Of course when I arrived in September, Louis Zuccarello was no longer the academic vice president. The academic vice president was Andy Molloy. So Andy actually started the same year I did. Of course, the president started the year before I came. My office was in Fontaine.

GN ([00:10:52](#)):

In Fontaine?

RN ([00:10:53](#)):

In Fontaine. The old Fontaine.

GN ([00:10:56](#)):

Which was also a library later.

RN ([00:11:00](#)):

No, the library was attached to Fontaine. So there was-

GN ([00:11:04](#)):

There were offices in there. I myself had an office in there.

RN ([00:11:09](#)):

I mean, upstairs was the History faculty, the English faculty. Bill Olson was in there. George Summers was in there. The office that I actually took over was actually Chris Vertullo's office. Chris was actually teaching as a faculty member but-

GN ([00:11:29](#)):

On a part-time basis. She was not a full-time yet.

RN ([00:11:32](#)):

And so...I think maybe she was going back to teach at high school...but anyways I came and took over her office.

GN ([00:11:42](#)):

Give me an overview of the campus at that time. What did you see when you came here? Not much by today's standards I guess.

RN ([00:11:50](#)):

Well the thing is...when I came I was not impressed with Marist College in terms of our physical presence. But the thing is I had accepted just simply a two-year visiting position. So I was going to come here, I was going to finish my dissertation and I was going to go and leave and I was going to go someplace else. And so it didn't bother me. I mean, the important thing was I was going to have a couple of years teaching, it'll be good for my resume. I also had that clause in there that I was going to be teaching upper level courses. And I mean, at that time, where we hold our commencement--when you go down the hill from our current library--that was our parking lot, our massive parking lot. You couldn't see the river. The river-

GN ([00:12:38](#)):

Blocked off by trees [inaudible]

RN ([00:12:42](#)):

I mean at that time when I came in 1980, I would say that 95% of the courses were taught in Donnelly. Ninety-five percent. There were two small classrooms in Fontaine right in the center. And then there were...there was a classroom over in the old campus center back at that time. But most all the classes were taught in Donnelly, and Donnelly was also kind of a hub for meeting people. Everybody knew everybody then. I knew who all the faculty were. People would have lunch in the biology lab.

GN ([00:13:25](#)):

And the lectures that went on there were freely given...fully attended.

RN ([00:13:29](#)):

I would go up to the board all the time. Somebody would ask me a question, I got to go to the board.

GN ([00:13:33](#)):

I remember that so distinctly, yes.

RN ([00:13:35](#)):

And then of course, new buildings started being built and people were then assigned to their particular buildings. Their classes were in their building. Their offices were in their buildings. They weren't wandering around.

GN ([00:13:49](#)):

Yeah. Okay, I want to get to that in a moment. At what time do you enter into the computer aspect of Marist? When do you start switching from being a math professor...or did that ever happen in those early years?

RN ([00:14:05](#)):

Oh yeah. No, it's the only reason why I'm still here. So, after being here after the first year--just kind of getting adjusted--Syracuse University at that time had a master's program on the Marist College campus. They would actually fly their faculty from Syracuse down to the Dutchess Airport nearby, and they would offer classes. And, even though I was a undergraduate mathematics major and a PhD math student, I had always had an interest in computers. I always took computer science courses. And so when I found out that we had that and I could take those courses for free, I started taking your courses at Syracuse. And so I was taking courses there. At the same time working on my dissertation from Brandeis, one of the faculty that I had from Syracuse...I guess I impressed him in one of the classes because you know I was a mathematician, almost a PhD mathematician at that point. I had done everything but my dissertation and, he said 'have you ever thought about computer science?' And I said, 'well, yes' I said 'but I'm finishing up my work at Brandeis.' And he says, 'if you come to Syracuse we will transfer everything over from Brandeis so that you won't have any courses you have to take.' And at that particular point, Marist was thinking of starting a computer science program. And so I'm thinking about it...I'm thinking if I stay at Brandeis, I'm going to be finished in a year or two. If I do the Syracuse thing, I still had to pass all their qualifying exams and go through all that sort of jazz. I had to do a year residency and so forth. But anyways, I decided to do it. I switched from-

GN ([00:16:08](#)):

. Brandeis to Syracuse.

RN ([00:16:10](#)):

And there I was in the PhD program in computer science.

GN ([00:16:14](#)):

Did you ever...did you start taking courses Syracuse then? You left here for a while.

RN ([00:16:20](#)):

So, as part of the requirement...I knew there were things I had to do. And as part of the requirements of Syracuse, I had to do a year residency there. I had to spend a year at Syracuse and...but I wasn't going to just quit a job and just go on. So I talked about commuting to there...all I had to do is take a class on campus. And many of their graduate classes just met one time a week or maybe twice a week. And so I could have done it here at Marist, but I looked at schools near Syracuse. So I looked at Le Moyne College. I looked at Colgate, and I was offered a job at both those places. And the job at Colgate paid extremely well, paid twice of what I was making here at Marist. And while I was at Colgate, I was only going to be 40 minutes' drive instead of a three-hour drive to Syracuse from Marist. So, I left Marist to take that position at Colgate. And during that year that I was at Colgate, I fulfilled my residency requirement at Syracuse, which was good. But then at the end of the year at Syracuse...go ahead.

GN ([00:17:48](#)):

Where does the wife and the baby live at this time? Do they move to Syracuse?

RN ([00:17:52](#)):

Well, yeah, they moved with me to Colgate. Yeah they were at Colgate. But yeah, Cheryl wasn't working, my youngest daughter actually was born in May of the year in which I went to Colgate. So when we went to Colgate in August some point, my daughter was just three-months-old. Cheryl did not work while I was out there. But the thing about Colgate...in the town that it's in--Hamilton--is if you're not involved in Colgate University, then you're a farmer because that's all there is...is the university and then there's the local farms. They had soy and cattle. And so Cheryl was not happy there. I liked it. I had a beautiful office...the second most beautiful office I've ever had. But I decided to...if she wasn't going to be happy, I wasn't going to be happy. So I decided to leave and look for another job. So I called Marist. I spoke to-

GN ([00:19:01](#)):

George?

RN ([00:19:02](#)):

No, John...John MacDonald. Because John McDonald had come by then...you know on board by that time. I called John and I told him that I was going to be looking for a job and that would he write me a letter of recommendation. And he said, 'well why don't you just come back to Marist?' And I said, 'well, you know I was thinking of staying, but when I talked to the academic vice president...because of the difference in salary, they weren't able to match the salary. And he said, 'well, what's your salary?' I told him what my salary was. He spoke to people and he offered me the salary+, so I came back. I had not intended on coming back. I mean it's not that I wouldn't have come back, I just didn't know if it was possible.

GN ([00:19:53](#)):

This would be about 1985? When would this be?

RN ([00:19:56](#)):

'84. So I was here for two years, I was gone for a year and I came back. And then as part of my...I always negotiate things. So like I said, my first contract, I asked John that he put in the contract that every semester I taught an upper-level course. And as part of the contract when I came back to Marist, I was going to be viewed as if I had been here since 1980. So my benefits would start from 1980 and it was like I had just done a sabbatical away. I was just on leave for a year.

GN ([00:20:34](#)):

I noticed you've got your 20th certificate in the year 2000.

RN ([00:20:37](#)):

Right. Even though I was gone for a year.

GN ([00:20:41](#)):

Yeah. Well we're very kind that way.

RN ([00:20:42](#)):

Yes. So that...and the reason why I asked for that was just simply in terms of when I was going to go up for tenure...you went...what my...TIAA... all those things. But anyways.

GN ([00:21:02](#)):

All right. Let's change a little bit, I want to come back to one or two things on that thing...on the computer business, but we'll hold that for the moment. Here is what I want to ask you: you look at Marist today versus the first days at its core, it's a very different place. How did it happen? How did Marist change to be what it is? You could say Dennis Murray I suppose would be the prime leader, but what else strikes you?

RN ([00:21:34](#)):

Yeah, certainly within my area in terms of...I'll talk more generally but let me restrict it to my area. In my area, when we started the computer science program, I was part of creating that time computer science program. We had a close tie with IBM, and IBM at that time was the largest technology company out there. They were the prima donnas. And so when we created our computer science program--the first year, the number of students that we had coming in--in terms of computer science--were huge, I mean it was bigger than we could handle. We didn't have the amount of faculty to do it. And it was because of the fact that the students came, we had this high end technology equipment. Nothing that Marist would have ever had had it not been for the fact that we had this connection to IBM. So those first number of years that we were developing the undergraduate program in Computer Science, the undergraduate program in Information Systems, the graduate program in Information Systems, the graduate program in Software Development...we also, in terms of the graduate programs, when we started those we immediately had a feeder into that program. IBM at that time--they no longer do it--But IBM at that time--you as an employee of IBM, if you enrolled in a graduate technology program, they would pay for two courses per semester. So yeah, we had our classes filled with IBMers.

GN ([00:23:19](#)):

Okay. Along with that...part of that of course is that living here one the...Marist being on the Hudson Valley 70 miles from New York City, you also had an ample supply of candidate students who would be willing to come? I mean Marist brothers alone have like nine high schools, which was a feeder I suppose for it. Then there is...along with that of course...well just the teaching that went on. That you came here...you had to go to class, you couldn't live in the dormitory. I mean, we threw people out when they came to school, so that part of that tradition I guess went on. And within computer science, APL leave us and we went to the-

RN ([00:24:12](#)):

We went to Pascal. Pascal was the language that we went to, after APL. Now when I came here...when I interviewed here at Marist College, we did not have a computer science program, but we actually had a program created by Kevin Carolyn and it was called computer mathematics. So it was a... we got rid of the program because if it wasn't a full mathematics degree and it wasn't a full computer science degree, so it was kind of almost like minoring in computer science and minoring in mathematics. You never became a master of either. But that program was here when I came in 1980 and we had courses...the introduction programming courses. The first two of them were courses in APL, and I knew APL. I had done some... I actually did a research...a summer NSF REU program utilizing APL. And so I think that was one of the reasons why I was hired, so I could come in and immediately start teaching those courses too.

GN ([00:25:16](#)):

Yeah. Speaking about the growth and change of Marist, I speaking to an interviewee the other day and she brought out the fact that parents have changed so much in terms of wanting the best for their kids; and she felt that was part of the neglect they get when two parents working sometimes there's a neglect over it and they try to pay back...so nothing too good, you know. And they're willing to put out huge sums of money...well \$50,000 a year now. So that would be part of the source...part of which more or less students on the list to come here...more apply to get in. That wasn't always the case.

RN ([00:26:03](#)):

When I came, the acceptance rate was somewhere around 85%. So 85% of the students who applied to Marist College were accepted. The mathematics program, by the way, the number of students in there were...was teeny. I mean, I'd have...you know that upper level course that I was guaranteed every semester by my contract, I'd have less than 10 students in that class.

GN ([00:26:30](#)):

Okay.

RN ([00:26:34](#)):

But if you remember back then, in the first part of the 80s, we used to do something called the freshman...I think it was called the freshmen audit or something. It was actually a survey that we did with the freshmen. And I remember we used to review that data that came from it. And one of the things about our students at that time is our students were not highly motivated because of intellectual curiosity. They were coming to school...most of them were actually first time college-bound students, their parents were not and they were coming here for a job. They wanted to come and get a job. They weren't coming here because they wanted to broaden their horizons and go off and get a PhD. I mean, certainly there were a few of those amongst it, but it was a totally different type of student and parent at that time. Nowadays the parents of our children--our students--are professionals themselves and have...they run businesses, they're wealthy. They...and so...and they also understand colleges. The parents in the 80s, they didn't understand colleges. They would probably not feel comfortable about calling and complaining about something because they didn't go to college themselves. And so it's not only that the students have changed, but the parents have changed.

GN ([00:28:09](#)):

A footnote on that financial thing. Somebody, I think the chaplain was telling me when he first came here, one or two seniors had cars, and looks like they had been hit by a railroad train once or twice. They were banged up. Now, he says most of the students have cars that he can't afford.

RN ([00:28:26](#)):

Yeah, I mean I see students driving BMWs and convertibles and all sorts of things.

GN ([00:28:35](#)):

Let's predict into the future because part of this has to do with...what do you think Marist will be like 20 years from now or 10 years from now? Where do you see on the crystal ball as it were, of future college education? Is Marist going to be here?

RN ([00:28:58](#)):

Yes. Marist is going to be here.

GN ([00:29:00](#)):

Okay. And in Marist, what will it be?

RN ([00:29:03](#)):

Marist will be...think of a Bentley. Think of a Bates or think of a RIT. Marist is no longer going to be...we talk about our liberal arts tradition here at Marist College. But we're not a liberal arts institution. The vast majority of our students are not in the liberal arts. If you look at enrollments in the liberal arts right now, it's diminishing and it keeps on going down. The history program has a total of like 30 students across all years. Nowadays, even though their parents might be more much more successful than the parents of the past, parents...the first thing they ask when I do open houses is they ask about the job prospects for the graduates from our program. Parents are interested in sending their kids to school to get a job. And so the majors that keep on growing here at Marist College are those much more professional type programs as compared to the liberal arts program. We just started our physical... I mean our Physician Assistant program, we're starting our doctoral program in physical therapy--the DPT program. I'm starting new programs in cybersecurity, and that's what you're going to see. 10 years from now, we're going to look like a cross between RIT and Bentley. Bentley is a business school. I mean, it has some liberal arts programs but--I forget what percentage--but a huge percentage of students in business, computer information systems and so forth. And of course RIT is a technology school. Our technology program is going to continue to grow. The business programs' going to continue to grow, and the more professional programs are going to continue.

GN ([00:31:23](#)):

What about online learning? Is that going to be...are we going to be key in that? A lot of people not coming to campus or taking courses here?

RN ([00:31:33](#)):

Yeah, I mean that's a trend in terms of graduate education. It's...if you look at people who are going on to get a graduate degree in business or a graduate degree in communications or a graduate degree in computer science, they don't...they want to be able to do it at their own time, at their own pace. And so they don't want to have to...every two nights a week make certain they're out of work. They have nothing to do...go into a classroom, sitting in a classroom for three hours. And so the vast majority of master's level students-

GN ([00:32:17](#)):

Will be online. But there still will be an abundant supply of undergraduate students?

RN ([00:32:23](#)):

Yes. We're going to continue to have a whole abundance of undergraduates.

GN ([00:32:27](#)):

One of the reasons is because parents like their children to go away, especially after high school for an experience different than staying at home where sometimes they become nuisances. I shouldn't-

RN ([00:32:40](#)):

Yeah. No, it's not that they become nuisances. Parents want their children to have a safe environment to transition into a full adult where they can go and live on their own. That's what I always tell parents, I say 'college is more than just them coming to get a degree.' A big part of it is also the social aspect. It's transitioning. Taking on responsibility...being responsible for getting up and taking care of your room and meeting friends and going out to dinner and so forth that allows them to--when they graduate to go off and get a job, work someplace and be 100% on their own. And Marist College is a nice, safe place to send your children. When parents come and they look at our beautiful campus sitting on the beautiful Hudson River, our beautiful physical plant now-

GN ([00:33:39](#)):

A few anymore ever look so well [inaudible]

RN ([00:33:41](#)):

And so it's a great place to send your child.

GN ([00:33:46](#)):

Is it worth the investment? An investment is a complicated expression. We're talking about the money that's put out for it, the effort you've had to put out for it, the time you'd have to put out for it, and maybe some of the waste in terms of how does this...you have to put up with regulations and rules and so on. Together...what would you say about 'yes, indeed it is.' Even though some of it seems to be extraordinary now.

RN ([00:34:18](#)):

Yeah. I mean, education is changing tremendously and in 10 years the regulations on colleges and universities are going to be much more substantial than they are now. One of the things that the federal government is looking at right now is return on investment. And so they're evaluating colleges based upon what is the cost of that college, what is the cost over four years? What is the debt the average student who graduates from that college is in? And then what is this average salary that the students from this college are making? And they're going to start rating colleges based upon that return on investment. They're going to start giving federal aid based upon that particular number, that return on the investment. And if you're a Harvard--you get a undergraduate degree in history from Harvard, it doesn't matter. You're going to get a job someplace. You know what I mean? The network there, you're going to get a job working for a company as a highly paid executive. You get a history degree from Marist College, it's more difficult to get a job. Teaching jobs in history are hard to get. You can go and get a law degree, but you're not just working with your history degree. And so if you're going to be successful on that new way in which colleges and universities are being evaluated in terms of return on investment, you're going to end up having to have more students who are in areas in which when they graduate, they do well. They get jobs and they make a halfway decent salary.

GN ([00:36:10](#)):

Is there room in the program at Marist in the future for somebody less than the book learning and...in other words industrial arts perhaps like electronics, mechanical, carpentry? Is there room for that kind of learning?

RN ([00:36:32](#)):

Well I mean, I guess it depends upon what you mean by room. I don't think that Marist College should ever start offering certificates on trade. Degrees... having earn a degree on trade. But you know, in my program, when you go through our courses there's a huge hand-on component. Every one of our courses has a lab associated with it. You're in the classroom for three sessions but you're also in a lab for one and a half hours in which you're doing lots of hands-on things, and I think that's very important. Which is why our students in computer science and information technology and systems get...the jobs they get are absolutely phenomenal in terms of the salaries they're getting, the companies that they're working for. But it's because of the fact that they have that very strong hands-on component, when they go off on to interviews people are so impressed at what they know and what they can do.

GN ([00:37:37](#)):

What can they do? Would they...do they write programs?

RN ([00:37:42](#)):

It depends. I mean, you know we have lots of different types of programs. We have information technology, we have information systems, we have computer science, we have game design and development. If you're a computer scientist, you write programs. If you're in information technology, your area may be network and you may be the person that goes and installs the network when new buildings are put up, and maintain it. You may be the person who does database administration. Large organizations have lots of data, they have lots of people who manage that data...setting up the associate databases. We also have people who do analytics, who analyze data. So it's a huge variety of things that they do and it depends upon what path they go down by the time.

GN ([00:38:35](#)):

Okay. Looking along the same kind of line now about the overall view of it...in your experience here, what will you say were some of the disappointment you've had in terms of maybe students acquiring or performing, or disappointments in the administration and decisions that were made to go this way rather than that way? Or the faculty choosing to...because now you've moved from faculty to administration, so you have a different focus. Things that didn't happen that you wish happened? Disappointments?

RN ([00:39:20](#)):

Yeah, I mean, there aren't a whole lot of big disappointments I've had here at Marist. I've been...if you look at my family and I come from a large family with six brothers and a sister.

GN ([00:39:37](#)):

Do you have a twin?

RN ([00:39:39](#)):

No, I have no twin. No.

GN ([00:39:40](#)):

Okay. I just thought you had a twin for some reason. Somebody came in here looking like you I guess [laughter].

RN ([00:39:45](#)):

Yeah, could be. I mean, my brother who's just older than me looks a lot like me. But not my twin, he's two years older than me. But my brothers never ever settled down in a job. My brothers...they might last four years max at a job, and then they'd be off looking at something else. I'm looking for something else, I'm looking for something else. Norton's, we always talk about...there's a certain Norton characteristic. My children have it and I have it. But part of it is...we do indeed get bored of things quickly and so we constantly want to go and do something different. And I'm exactly like that myself. But the fortunate thing for me was that every four or five years here at Marist College, something new was happening. I was starting a new program in information technology. We were starting a graduate program. We were creating the Institute for Data Center Professionals. We've been doing...So my job has never been the same. It changes...every four to five years, my job has changed. If it hasn't, I probably would've left. So I've been very fortunate. I've also received an awful lot of support from Dennis, I mean, most presidents at colleges like Marist College aren't necessarily fond of technology, but Dennis always has been. And so that's benefited me tremendously. So I haven't had a whole lot of disappointments. But yeah, some things that I think about...I wish we had done here at Marist College. I wish we had voted for the unit model. I mean, to me it just made perfect sense for the faculty to bring in the unit model. The unit model...that's when all courses were going to turn into basically four credit courses. Every course would be a four credit course. And so we voted that down, and it makes it more difficult to hire faculty when the teaching load is 21 credits. Well, 21 credits on three credit courses, that's seven courses, that's four in three. I mean, nobody in this...very many places teach four in three. Had we gone to the unit model on 21 credits, it would go from seven courses actually down to...some year you teach four courses, some you teach five--four, then five. That...comparing teaching seven courses to four and five--four and five--the number of students...and so that disappointed me very much. So the next two years I worked with the faculty within my school, and we implemented the unit model within my school. We have the unit model. We took all our courses and turned them into four credit courses because I couldn't hire faculty to come into teach seven courses now. And especially if I hired a faculty on...you know we have these two types of loads. We have the teaching load and the scholarship load. If you've got outstanding scholarship, you teach 18 credits, 18 credits they'd be teaching...some semesters four, some semesters three courses. It's a whole lot easier for me to hire faculty. I wished the entire college had done it. It would benefit the college tremendously in terms of being able to hire people.

GN ([00:43:26](#)):

Turn it around now: what are some of the happiest things, the best things that happened from your vantage point? A new building-

RN ([00:43:35](#)):

I got my office up in Hancock. That's not a bad one.

GN ([00:43:39](#)):

Where was the best one? This was the second best or Colgate?

RN ([00:43:43](#)):

No, Colgate was the second best. The one that I currently have is my first best. So prior to my office in Hancock, I never had an office as beautiful as the one that I had at Colgate. Yeah, the Colgate one--how I ended up getting that, it was a major fluke.

GN ([00:44:04](#)):

But I mean..so the building itself I suppose-

RN ([00:44:08](#)):

Yeah. I mean also in terms of the large amount of support that we've had from IBM. The...I'm so impressed with the graduates of our program in terms of them coming back to recruit our existing students. Our...employment for our students and the internships available to our students is unmatched here at the college. And we're the only school that does not accept unpaid internships. We do not...if somebody wants a student for an internship, they have to pay, and they pay well. And so our students...our students go to Google, our students go to Goldman Sachs, they go to Microsoft, they go to Facebook, they go to Twitter, they go to IBM. And all of these openings that we have actually came from...a student from Marist first applied there. We had no connection at Google, we had no connection at Microsoft, but a number of years ago, somebody got in and once they got in...and then the company saw how good Marist students were, that person said 'I want to go back to Marist and recruit students.' And so they all come back to recruit our students. We constantly have our alum coming from major Fortune 500 companies coming here to Marist to recruit our students. I find that extremely-

GN ([00:45:34](#)):

Now you're talking about graduate students or undergrad?

RN ([00:45:38](#)):

Undergraduate students.

GN ([00:45:39](#)):

What percentage of the student body would be computer science people?

RN ([00:45:44](#)):

In terms of computer science?

GN ([00:45:46](#)):

Would it be a third? A quarter?

RN ([00:45:48](#)):

Oh, no. Nowhere near that. I mean, the big majors here at Marist are business, communications and psychology. Although psychology is...psychology and teacher ed...that's shrinking quite a bit. But communications, tons of communications students. I don't know if you've ever met any of the people who have been in that program, but there's lots of them that-

GN ([00:46:16](#)):

You know who founded it? I was there for the beginning of that program, and then the internships.

RN ([00:46:22](#)):

I know. And I do remember-

GN ([00:46:25](#)):

Bob Norman.

RN ([00:46:26](#)):

Bob, yeah. But, that program is probably a third. I mean, your communication program is probably the largest. I'm 10%. Maybe a little bit more, maybe 15%. This year, incoming freshmen, there are 1100 incoming freshmen. There are--in my school--150 students coming in. So, 110 would be 10%. So 150 is close to about 15% of the student population. So it's not big at all.

GN ([00:47:03](#)):

Tell me about the quality of the students coming in, in terms of their background. Their high school experience... I've heard it said, Dennis put out these numbers about percentage coming and where they score, etc. Do you find them as bright as the literature says?

RN ([00:47:28](#)):

Yes, they are. And you know, here faculty complain that 'oh, the students aren't as good as they used to be. And, I remember--I won't mention the faculty-

GN ([00:47:40](#)):

I probably know who it is. Don't-

RN ([00:47:42](#)):

No. But this faculty member was talking about, 'I've been given the same class for the past 20 years and the students...I give the same exams, I teach it the same way; and these students nowadays, they just can't handle the class.' And so, I didn't say anything to this person. What I wanted to say was the problem isn't with the students, the problem is with you. The thing is over the past 20 years, students--the way in which they learn, the things that excite them--have changed, and so you have to change along with it. Students nowadays aren't simply going to be comfortable going into a classroom and just listen to somebody lecture for an hour and a half. They want to be engaged because students are engaged. Everything they do is engage...they're connected to devices all the time. And so you have to adapt to that. And so when I look at our computer science students and our IT students, they are just so much more prepared than our students 20 years ago. They are much brighter, we can move much quicker--but we have to adjust to them. I mean, so if you go into a computer science class, you're never going to see somebody up there for an hour and a half just giving a lecture. They're constantly going to be doing...all right everybody, I want you to get on the computer and do this. I'm going to walk around...they'll go and look at what they're doing and then they'll get up and the faculty members said 'all right, who wants to show their solution.' He'll click on their computer so it appears on the screen. So there's all sorts of engagement going on. So the students need to be engaged, and if they're engaged, then they're going to do well because they are brighter. There's no doubt about it. They're brighter...the scores suggest that they're brighter, but they're not going to be comfortable with the way in which we taught 20 years ago.

GN ([00:49:45](#)):

Another question, you kind of answered it--we've talked of the adversity that do have experienced here at Marist, but you've been here a long time. Why did you stay? 37 years or something like that?

RN ([00:49:57](#)):

37 years.

GN ([00:49:58](#)):

Yeah, I just did the mathematics on that. I'm very fast. [Laughter].

RN ([00:49:59](#)):

Yes. So, Dennis just finished his 37 years. So since I'm one year behind Dennis, I'm beginning my 37th year. So I'm in my...I finished 36 years. As I told you, I think the main reason that I stayed here is...first of all, I was very comfortable in the community here. I have lots of friends in the community, people I play tennis with and racquetball with. My wife liked the community here. So I certainly liked the community. I liked the students. I never had any issues with the students. So I liked the students and I also-

GN ([00:50:43](#)):

How many students do you teach? You have two classes, one class?

RN ([00:50:46](#)):

You mean now?

GN ([00:50:48](#)):

Yeah.

RN ([00:50:48](#)):

[Scoff] We don't want to discuss that. I don't teach.

GN ([00:50:54](#)):

And most of...how long have you been dean?

RN ([00:50:59](#)):

I've been the dean for 15 years.

GN ([00:51:01](#)):

15. So you haven't taught in 15?

RN ([00:51:03](#)):

No, I just don't teach on a regular basis. I will...based upon what my commitments for the next year are going to be, I will either decide to teach or not to, but I don't teach on a regular basis. Sometimes it makes more sense for me--if I'm going to teach--for me to teach something online. So as a dean, I've also taught online but-

GN ([00:51:27](#)):

You have taught online? Are you happy with that?

RN ([00:51:30](#)):

I've developed it. Oh yeah. If you do online right, it can be done well. I remember early on when Marist was first getting involved in online courses, I remember Onkar was the dean and I remember Onkar coming to me and saying administration wants us to develop some online courses, and Onkar was saying that he's getting a lot of resistance and I knew who the resistance was from. It was from Jim Ten Eyck and Stuart Greenfield...and two very close friends of mine. I was interested in developing some things online, so I went to Jim and Stuart and I said we're going to do a course for IBM. It's going to be part online and it's going to be part on the ground. So once a week we're going to go down to IBM--down on Route 9--and we'll meet with the students, we'll give a lecture and we'll rotate in terms of who's going to do it. But then the other lecture that we normally have, we do online. And so this way...their issues with online was you never got to interact with the students and so forth, then you weren't going to be able to judge whether you're going too fast and so forth. So anyways, we did this experiment. We would go down one day, the second day the materials were available online. And these two people--Jim and Stuart--I don't know how well you knew them, I know you know them...but they were difficult people [laughter]. And so, at the end of that semester, IBM asked us to do it again the following semester. So the three of us did it again the following semester, the same way. The following semester, they wanted us to do it again and I remember Stuart saying to me, he goes 'well, yeah I'm willing to do it again, but why do we need to go down there once a week? Why don't we just do it totally online?' So here's a person who went from being opposed to online--once he had actually started doing it--he went to why aren't we just doing this 100% online? And so then we started actually developing online courses, And there was no resistance.

GN ([00:53:51](#)):

The online, when it does take place, is it live? Active at the moment or is it there that they could pick up-

RN ([00:53:59](#)):

No, they can do it anytime they want. The only thing is that an online course is broken up into modules, each corresponding to a week. So, during a particular week, materials are made available to the students. At the end of that week, they will have things that have to be done by the end of that week. They may have to turn in homework, they may have to have done a project, they may have to have taken a quiz. And so during that week, they can do it in the middle of the night. They could wait until...maybe that week was going to end, the stuff was due at the end of Sunday night, they could wait to Sunday morning and do everything on Sunday. So it was asynchronous, meaning you weren't doing anything...timed. But only during the week, by the end of that week you had to have all that material in. And then the following week--again, you'd have a week to do all the materials--do the readings, listen to the lectures, watching the videos, do whatever. But by the end of that week, you had to have done whatever was due at the end of that week--quiz, project, whatever. And so it's paced, but it's paced on a weekly basis.

GN ([00:55:17](#)):

Numerically, how many students would be in such a class online?

RN ([00:55:21](#)):

Same that you would have on ground, you don't put any more.

GN ([00:55:25](#)):

15 to 20?

RN ([00:55:27](#)):

Well, I mean-

GN ([00:55:27](#)):

Not in graduate students.

RN ([00:55:29](#)):

I mean, we'd have...you'd have up to 30 students in a class. Just like on the ground.

GN ([00:55:36](#)):

Okay. I have never experienced it, per say.

RN ([00:55:44](#)):

The same size restriction that we have for traditional classes. If a class goes above 30, just like on the ground, you could split up into two sections. However, the business school, what they do is they may have a class with 50 students in it but they'll have the lead instructor who was a full-time PhD, utilizing AAC-B terms--academically qualified--being the lead instructor. He will then hire a teaching assistant who works with him...working with the 50 students. They may split them, they may do all sorts of things. The T.A. may do the grading, whatever. But you can have a class with 50 students in it, but they'll be two instructors.

GN ([00:56:31](#)):

Marist College as its constructed now in its current organization, has one academic dean? Or is there a dean for graduate school? Is Tom Wermuth the dean for the whole place?

RN ([00:56:43](#)):

There is no dean for graduate programs. The graduate programs are housed within academic schools. So I am the dean of the graduate program in software development and in information systems and information technology. I'm responsible for those graduate programs. Your dean is...Lyn is responsible for the master's program and communications and, the ICM or IMC. Integrative Communication and Marketing, the ICM program.

GN ([00:57:18](#)):

Okay. But also all of the undergraduates as well?

RN ([00:57:23](#)):

Yes. But every graduate program has somebody that reports to the dean, but they have a director. Every graduate program has a graduate director. So the graduate director of the ICM program in your school...I think it's Savir, but-

GN ([00:57:42](#)):

I'm not familiar. If you had an opportunity, well you really do I guess because you talk to the president? But if you had to talk-

RN ([00:57:50](#)):

I just came back from California with the president.

GN ([00:57:53](#)):

Oh, you went on that trip? Oh, okay. I was going say-if you had an opportunity to talk to the board, what does Marist College need in your view now that it's missing?

RN ([00:58:05](#)):

Yeah. Well, I was on the presidential search committee and I remember when we had dinner with the candidates--the finalists--at the Payne Mansion. I remember one of the candidates--the one who we ended up choosing--asked everybody that exact same question and-

GN ([00:58:26](#)):

I didn't know that. I just made that question up myself.

RN ([00:58:30](#)):

Right. Yeah, and so they asked that question and this was my answer--that I believe that Marist College is this hidden star. That we are...we are this bright shining star, but nobody knows about us. I mean, we have high quality programs. We have a beautiful campus. We have all sorts of technology available to our students. We have beautiful facilities, but nobody knows about us. You go out to the west coast and they say...you know, I work at a university in the east coast; they go where, I go Marist. 'Marist? I've never heard of Marist.' People don't know about Marist. So what this president needs to do is take that star that we are...and we have to let everybody see this star. We have to become a much better known institution than we currently are. People don't know who the heck we are.

GN ([00:59:29](#)):

Would there be more competition to get in or-

RN ([00:59:32](#)):

Yeah. In terms of getting grants, in terms of getting students. The population--the college age population in the northeast, which is where Marist traditionally has gotten our students is not growing...but it's shrinking. It's actually shrinking. And so the amount of students that...if we're only known in the northeast we're never going to be able to meet our classes; which is why we now have an admissions officer whose based in Los Angeles, because the only area that's actually growing is out in the southwest. And so we have to get students from the southwest. If you go to Arizona and you mentioned Marist College, they have no idea what the heck you are. Who the heck is Marist College?

GN ([01:00:24](#)):

I heard we have 90 full-time students from California. Would you confirm that?

RN ([01:00:30](#)):

I met these students when I was just in California, and I think the number that was actually quoted was more like around 70 or 75 terms of being from California.

GN ([01:00:46](#)):

Can you move off to Hawaii?

RN ([01:00:48](#)):

But the thing is, I think that what--Corrin, whose the person whose out doing the west coast--she talks about the west coast contingency-and that includes Hawaii, California.

GN ([01:01:02](#)):

Washington?

RN ([01:01:02](#)):

I mean, really there's only two states in the west in which we get a reasonable amount. And that's California and Hawaii. The other states, there might be one or two students, but that might be 90.

GN ([01:01:16](#)):

Right. Very good.

RN ([01:01:16](#)):

But that's a big number. I mean, when I came here in 1980-

GN ([01:01:24](#)):

It was Manhattan and Long Island.

RN ([01:01:26](#)):

I know. I mean-

GN ([01:01:27](#)):

Didn't even cross the Hudson. We didn't have to.

RN ([01:01:30](#)):

I mean, we were a New York college.

GN ([01:01:31](#)):

Right. Alright, is there anything I didn't ask you that you were dying to tell me about? [Laughter] Why did it take so long to get here?

RN ([01:01:43](#)):

It's been a wonderful ride. It's been very exciting to see Marist College grow to become what it is today. And I remember back in 1980...I went to Brandeis University, everybody that was in my PhD class, they went off and they are teaching at Stanford and teaching at MIT and so forth. I tell them I'm at Marist and they...back then even in Boston, they didn't know what the heck Marist College was. But I found it to be a welcoming place and I wanted to stay and I wanted to be part of its growth. Now...I mean, I'm part of this. This is an absolutely wonderful thing to be part of.

GN ([01:02:41](#)):

Well, in the name of those us who are appreciating what has happened, we want to thank you. We think you've played a big part in it. Of course, I myself was there at the beginning...and it has changed in so many ways, but most of them very positive. And as much as I hope that the spirit of it will continue, I know that you're carrying the torch in that way. And so thank you very much.

RN ([01:03:06](#)):

Well, thank you for the interview.

“END OF INTERVIEW”