

Thomas Wermuth

Marist College

Poughkeepsie, NY

Transcribed by Ann Sandri

For the Marist College Archives and Special Collections

Wermuth, Thomas

Transcript – Thomas Wermuth

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Summary: Thom speaks about his time growing up the Hudson Valley and life at Marist as a student, as well as his early career teaching before coming back to Marist as a Professor. Thom reflects on Marist traditions and some of his former professors. Thom also speaks about the Hudson River Valley Institute and his love of all things history. He goes on to discuss what he believes the needs for the college in the future may be.

00:11 **GUS NOLAN:** Good morning. Today is May 22nd, and we're in the Marist College, James Cannavino library. We have an opportunity this morning to interview Dr. Tom Wermuth. He's the academic vice president. Morning Tom.

00:27 **THOMAS WERMUTH:** Good morning Gus. Thanks for having me.

00:30 **GN:** Tom I would like to start at the beginning as it were, with your childhood. Where were you born, and where were you experience in early school, your youngster years, where was that?

00:43 **TW:** Well I come from far away. I was born right across Route 9 in St. Francis Hospital. So, from Poughkeepsie, my father was from Poughkeepsie as well. And grew up in the town of Poughkeepsie. Attended, I have four siblings as well, we attend St Peter's grade school in Hyde Park. Following that continued local with Lourdes High school. When it was the old Lourdes, down South Hamilton, and did go Dutchess Community College following that and then came here on to Marist. So I am local born and bred. Which probably has a lot to do with my interest as well.

01:34 **GN:** What high schools did you go to?

01:36 **TW:** Lourdes, Our Lady of Lourdes.

01:37 **GN:** You went to Lady of Lourdes?

01:38 **TW:** Yes when it was still down on South Hamilton.

01:40 **GN:** I see, then when you graduated from high school you went to Dutchess was an immediate transfer. You went right in?

01:49 **TW:** Yes. From, graduated in June I guess, then in August I was in Dutchess. Originally was planning on studying business my brother had, my older brother who also graduated from Marist and had done Dutchess before that. Had done business at Dutchess and did business here at Marist. Only a few years behind, you follow your older brother quite a bit sometimes and

started with that but quickly at Dutchess, kind of did not have much interest in business and went to a more traditional kind of liberal arts. So yeah direct transfer over.

02:26 GN: So you are a graduate then of the community college, Dutchess Community College.

02:30 TW: Absolutely, yes and enjoyed that time very much as well.

02:33 GN: Do you anticipate being invited back like Tony Campilii to give an address or has that happened?

02:39 TW: That happened already, just this past January. And in fact I followed Tony, Tony went the year before and this year it's their annual fundraising breakfast in January. Gave a little talk there. I believe Tony may have actually just given a commencement. That may, depending on how they liked my talk maybe next year or down the road, we'll see.

03:04 GN: And when did you come to Marist then as a student?

03:06 TW: In 1982. In September of '82.

03:10 GN: And you studied history here, what did you major in?

03:13 TW: Yes, Almost, may have come in a little undeclared but pretty quickly moved into history. Was always interested in history, loved history as a kid never thought that there were opportunities. I knew there would be teaching opportunities, things like that I wasn't sure if that is what I wanted to do. Did know with all the other potential career opportunities were. But just at a certain point made the decision that I don't know what the career will be, but this is what I want to do.

03:37 GN: And why Marist? Certainly you had other opportunities, to choose colleges away from home.

03:43 TW: Yes, you know partly, it's interesting, there's probably an interesting story there I will try to make it more interesting. I didn't know that I was going to continue past Dutchess. Only one of my older siblings, my brother had actually completed his college degree. Two of my

older sisters never went to college and another sister said it wasn't necessary, my parents weren't college graduates, it was not necessarily, it was not at all argued against, but it was not necessarily encouraged either. It was just kind of that middle period perhaps. So, you know I looked at a couple different state schools as well. But I didn't know whether or not it was going to be really long term. Was I was going to finish a degree? So my brother again, had come to Marist he had enjoyed the education and felt rewarded by it. My father had been educated by the Marist Brothers when he was a kid at old St. Peter's school and still thinks incredibly highly of the Marist Brothers. So a couple of those different ingredients came together so I came to Marist.

05:00 GN: Good. Then because of the Lourdes experience and your father's experience you knew about the Marist Brothers.

05:07 TW: Absolutely.

05:08 GN: Did you have Marist Brothers as teachers?

05:10 TW: Not at Marist, but at Lourdes. At Lourdes, I probably had half a dozen Marist Brothers at various points. And several that stick out in my mind Brother Sammon, mathematics, trigonometry, great teacher, friend, incredibly student centered, just a wonderful person. At Marist I knew several Marist Brothers, my brother had several Marist Brothers earlier. I knew Brother Joe Belanger. I had variety of folks who had previously been brothers but I had no brother for a class.

05:44 GN: Then while you were at Marist what about some of the teachers you did have, you must have had some inspirational teachers to keep you on and move on in history?

05:55 TW: Several, Louis Zuccarello, who to me was just a model good teaching, great teaching with a nice balance of both the expectations, but a certain empathy for students as well. Certainly professor Zuccarello was a model, Jerry White, just, I was always impressed by his seemingly endless knowledge and ability to articulate that knowledge and to get people involved.

06:35 GN: And without notes.

06:36 TW: No notes, very impressive. Bill Olson was a big influence on me. Bill was very much into what's called public history and more practical history. Less academically inclined, for folks who maybe thinking about going into working in libraries, archives, things like that and from a very early point either the first semester or the second semester, got involved in a project with one of Bill's classes which really made a real impact on me. I was studying, actually I was studying the old main mall we were using the historical analysis to kind of study public policy problems and we had the opportunity to do a lot of research and present that research at the common council. And our presentation was, the mall should probably go, should probably be pulled back up. Years later they took that early recommendation from that Marist class in 1983.

07:36 GN: Interesting, interesting. And then when you finished Marist did you go on to graduate school again?

07:43 TW: Yes, I went right to graduate. I went to Albany because they had a public history program. One of the funny things that actually happened, when I was at Marist, not unlike Marist, nationally there was not a lot of opportunities for folks thinking about collage teaching, particularly collage teaching humanities and liberal arts. They seem to be on the decline and so for the most part the advice I had gotten was, it's going to be difficult to do an academic career. So, I pursued initially a degree in public history, in more governmental history, archival work things like that. And Albany was a leader in that, one of the first intuitions to implement it. But I did switch over at a certain point there in the first year in fact, to a more traditional, academic history, U.S. history, European history study of that. But went directly to Albany and then did a masters there in about a year and a half and then went to Binghamton which had a, Albany didn't have a Ph D. but Binghamton did and they had kind of transfer program so I moved right over to Binghamton.

08:52 GN: Did you teach anywhere along the line?

08:54 TW: At Binghamton I did, not at Albany. At Binghamton in fact a very different experience, did some teaching assistantships for supporting professors doing a lot of grading and running discussion session. But the class that I taught in my second year at Binghamton, there were two hundred and twenty six students in the class it was just a huge lecture hall. Meet three times a week for an hour. It was as much crowd control as it was, and I was twenty three years old or something, and so I was very nervous. But it also just revealed to me a difference right then, from what I had had at Marist which is twenty five other people in any class and what we still have at Marist which is the smaller classes. More engaged and rarely a twenty two year old graduate student being thrown into the class.

09:46 GN: I see. Is the teaching field the sole vocation for your employment? Did you have any other jobs? Did you drive trucks or deliver pizza?

09:58 TW: Yeah I did actually, a lot of other jobs, not with any permanency, always while I was at school. So when I was at Marist I worked for two years in a local grocery store. Most evenings and all weekends, to help out with tuition. My first, I think it may have been right after Marist, my first real job was Lake Mohonk, Mohonk Preserve, in the hotel. They hired me to, they wanted to develop an archives, since the hotel went back a hundred or more years.

10:36 GN: Yes. Presidents went there

10:38 TW: Absolutely. And then they wanted the record of that. They had all these guests receipts and the names of presidents, the authors that had spent time there, they want to put a record together of that. I did that for four months after Marist.

10:57 GN: Very interesting.

10:57 TW: I loved it

10:59 GN: What about your PhD. work was that dictated? What was the nature of it?

11:06 **TW:** It was the U.S. History more general, it was a PhD in US History, American history. And everyone has to you know, do a dissertation and you've got to figure out something that presumably no one has done before. You can master and control, I was working with an economic historian, you kind of work with a particular professor so that to some degree, guided my interest as well. But you needed a place to study, I was always interested in early American history, so not only U.S. but early independent. Also European history, medieval history and so the Hudson Valley, I grew in it and recognize it to be a rich historical region. Chose that as my focus and was able to do my PhD. work.

11:57 **GN:** What was the topic?

11:58 **TW:** It was on social and economic life in the Hudson Valley colonial period. So settlement of communities, the nature of communities, how these towns and villages changed from really the rise of global markets. Not that different from today.

12:15 **GN:** That's the part we will get to later about the genesis of your interest in the Hudson Valley. But coming back the Marist, was it always your plan to become a college professor, was that your goal that you wanted to get a PhD. to teach in college?

12:30 **TW:** At some point, once I was at Marist that kind of began to crystallize actually. I can't say I understood that or had good sense of that before Marist. Even when I was at Dutchess I didn't know what the difference, what is a college teacher opposed to high school teachers? I can't say I ever saw a calling in teaching.

12:52 **GN:** But through graduate school?

12:53 **TW:** Yea, even by the time at Marist with Lou Zuccarello, Bill Olson, and Jerry White. The more I got to know what they did, and their love for it, I certainly was impressed by it as well. At some point in there I became much more interested in the idea of college teaching.

13:13 **GN:** And then what was the occasion for you coming back to Marist to apply here?

13:18 **TW:** Yeah that was a...

13:20 **GN:** Did they seek you?

13:23 **TW:** I'd love to say they did. My first job was in South Carolina. When I graduated from Binghamton I got a tenure track job at South Carolina State in Greenwood, also known as Lander College, it developed both names and I was there for a year. I grew actually to like that, I was a little anxious at first, it was very much out of my element. But I think they liked me and I liked them. At some point you know, in the spring I did see the job ad for the Marist position. I am laughing because there's a little story. So I applied, and I interviewed initially at the big conference nationally and I interviewed with Dick Atkins, who had not been here when I was a student. So he didn't know me and I didn't know him. He was the only who interviewed me, so I thought. Then I never heard again for some months and at a certain point about a two months later almost, this was like April, so it was getting late. Got a call from Dick Atkins wondering if I was interested in coming up for an interview, a follow up interview which I said, absolutely. This is where my family was, this was the area I studied, went to. When I got up here and I went to the interview and was then offered the position. You can edit this out, what I found out was that, two or three people had turned the job down, I was not at the top of their list, I was kind of down the pecking order. But all things work out and I was not at all unhappy. A couple folks said they had been going after it, didn't take the position and it was getting late and they remembered me. So when I came up for the interview, then it was a different story, it was not just Dick Atkins it was Roscoe Balch, Bill Olson, Jerry White, Peter O'Keefe. These were all people I had as teachers. That was weird because it was not for maybe six years. I graduated in 84, now eight years later. And that was peculiar because even though eight years had passed I still felt very much like a student sitting at the edge of the table giving a presentation. And actually that continued, I had to say even into the first semester I remember going to departmental meetings I

would check, you know, I had not yet stepped out of that other role and they hadn't stepped of their role.

15:57 GN: Roscoe Balch said you mentioned him

15:59 TW: Yes Roscoe, well Roscoe was my advisor when I was here as a student and Roscoe interviewed me but it was really his position that was, they were searching for even though it was a different field. I was replacing Roscoe he's retiring in that year. I've seen Roscoe a couple of times, I saw him the last time three years ago for the Founders Day.

16:23 GN: Oh yes he came up for the Heritage Dedication. Dick Atkins was he still here? Was he the chair of the department at that time?

16:34 TW: He was, he was chair of I think of the division of Humanities, I think it was called then. Again he was not here when I was a student he came some point after, later in the 80's I guess. And he and I overlapped geography by couple of years but then he left around 1994, 1995.

16:57 GN: And when you did come, what were the courses you, there weren't very many courses on the books for the Hudson Valley....

17:04 TW: None of them are. Well I taught even general American history courses, Social History I was always interest in that. And then of course anyone in the history department a big part of their teaching was what was then Origins of Modern Times required

17:20 GN: Everybody had to take that. Eighteen sections of it.

17:23 TW: But that was also the way you got to know a much wider part of the student body too. You got to know business majors, communication majors, bio majors that otherwise and some of the classes that you would never see. So it was a mix but it was. I already had a year of full time teaching. Somewhat different in terms of some of the courses, so it wasn't like it was my first new experience. I kind of had gone through that already. So that kind of makes the courses, plus I begin to introduce Hudson Valley programing, because that was kind of expected

too. When I was hired Tom Cassy who was not on the search committee. He was in a different department he made it clear he was interested in going down in that direction had already invested a lot of time and energy in that.

18:11 GN: And how did you find the students when you returned to teach them, having been one yourself only eight years before.

18:18 TW: I think you know, they were definitely, I think a little more on the, a little higher up in terms of intellectual curiosity, probably little better trained than the students and myself that I have been with a few years earlier from my own class. I got to say it's even later in time its more dramatic now to compare our students now to 92. I started in 92. I found like all of our students still, incredibly respectful very deferential.

18:55 GN: It does seem to be something about the character of Marist students. they still open the door for you.

18:59 TW: Absolutely. Didn't change from when I was a student to when I came back as Professor and it will still happen now. I think it's that students self-select the school that they go to. They get a sense of perhaps what the culture is on campus but that is that definitely a feature of our students very respectful and very polite.

19:22 GN: Could we return to that point that we were talking about earlier. Your interest in the Hudson Valley. You mention from your earliest years you seem to have an interest in this, is that the genesis of the beginning of your studies of the valley?

19:40 TW: You know it might be. Although throughout graduate school, went throughout my time at Marist and though graduate school it's not like I've ever studied the region. I can't say, and like many people who grew up here I knew less about the region than a lot of tourists who might come to it. I think I was thirteen fourteen years old before I had gone to the FDR home. It was there. It was two miles from the house. Why wouldn't you go?

20:04 GN: Have you ever been to the statue of liberty?

20:05 TW: yes. The thing is I've been to many others places, but I hadn't been to some of these things. I think partly when I was in graduate school too, getting a little older, you start to appreciate more things about, you start to have more of a history, and I think then you start to appreciate history even more as you get older in a certain sense that things have shaped you and this was my home. At some point there, great curiosity in terms of what had been the context with this region and so forth. So I can't draw a direct line in terms of like I always knew I wanted to study the Hudson Valley, can't say that and it's not true, not consciously. At some point I just certainly became more and more aware of the region's own significance, that it had a rich history. I had benefited from that by having been brought up here. And certainly began to appreciate it more and more. And then really invested more and more time into it. So I can't say I was a local historian from an early time.

21:12 GN: How would you articulate the work you've done, what have you done in terms of this interest? The institute, writing, etc. could you talk about that a bit?

21:25 TW: Sure, sure you know initially it was much more traditional academic work in which I, you know, I did what you do, some articles, and worked on the book on the region. More than enough material to work off of, easy. You can't write a book on Hudson valley history you really have to get out in the business. But then as I taught and obviously, but I began to work more and more in the mid 90's, pretty quickly, with a lot of the different local historic sites and that was again was Bill Olson and Tom Casey, which connected me with those sites, Locust Grove, Mill's Mansion, places like this.

22:04 GN: Now you're pretty far up the Hudson, do you go down to West Point, do you go down to?

22:09 TW: As far as the city. City to Albany.

22:11 **GN:** Stony Point, Revolutionary War?

22:13 **TW:** Oh yeah, we have done, in fact at Stony Point, a little aside, we had Ed Cashin come back in 2004, we had our annual lecture series at Stony Point. That was the anniversary of the big battle there, the revolutionary battle. And Ed came up from Georgia, gave a key note address which we then published in the Hudson River Valley Review. Which you know we're very happy to do so, since his passing over the last year. But yea the valley, we view the valley including all the ten counties, on either side, the 5 counties on either side of the river, the 10 counties between Albany and New York City.

22:54 **GN:** Ok you jumped ahead there a word I didn't know, the lecture series and we view, is there some corporate body?

23:03 **TW:** The Hudson River Institute. And I did jump ahead and I apologize. We work closely with a federal agency called the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area and we use much of their demarcations too. They choose this group, this is part of the National Park Service. They choose this region as one of only twenty three National Heritage areas in the United States, the Hudson River Valley, and the others like Gettysburg and things like that. So we're unique we're one of the few regions which are recognized as a region for its long and ongoing contributions. Other places are recognized for a big battle or something like that. This is a unique region for it's writers, it's painters and all the industrial leaders which lived here, the revolution and so forth. So we work very closely with them, and in fact they supply a good deal through grants, of the funding to the institute for allowing us to do our work.

24:03 **GN:** Who are the members of the institute and how does one become a member?

24:08 **TW:** Well anyone can become a member. We have a website hudsonrivervalley.org and hudsonrivervalley.net in which is our digital library. We have thousands of records, historical records related to the Hudson valley. We have thousands of pages of books and articles related to

the Hudson valley. Images, video related to the region, and right on there is information on how to become a friend of the Hudson River Valleys Institute. And how to if one is interested the digital library is free of use to anyone but also our scholarly journal the Hudson River Valley Review, one can subscribe to that there it's published twice a year. The institute itself has a relatively small staff. I am the director, Jim Johnson, Colonel Jim Johnson is the Executive Director, Chris Pryslopski, Ann Panagulias are our staff members, so we're relatively small, but a lot of the faculties with Marist work off the institute. And we rely on faculty from other institutions that have a specialty of Hudson valley. Myra Armstead from Bard, Dan Peck from Vassar, Roger Panetta from Fordham. These folks collaborate with us on projects although the institute is a Marist organization institute.

25:33 GN: Very interesting. What would you say is one of the more satisfying experiences of this, the lecture and getting people to come to recognize what you recognize?

25:43 TW: Yeah. Actually that. Some of the different things, the Journal and the digital library are components. But I really think being able to, I think we have been successful in this way, to get more and more folks from this region really being to recognize that there is something special about the region. People know different bits and pieces, but there is a larger history here, this region is different from many others from the very beginning. In terms of how it was founded, you know other parts of the country in the seventeenth, eighteenth century founded by a single group of folks that came from a village and replanted the Hudson Valley, the earliest point a melting pot many different groups, many different ethnic groups, many different Europeans groups lived throughout the valley and had to learn to interact with each other. Dutch, French, English a whole bunch of Germans. So I think the degree to which we have been able to try to synthesize that story and generate interest in it and assist lots of the local historical organizations. And there's lots of local historic sites that don't have resources. They have the building and they

fight for money year after year just to keep it alive, the building. We've been able to assist them through access through our digital library by digitizing many of their records to make it accessible to other people from outside the region. Putting these different groups into a network using our lecture series. So, I feel as though we've been able to try to create a hub for this region, recognizing its history, its culture, its contribution to American society.

27:23 **GN:** Is there is annual lecture series then?

27:25 **TW:** There is. We do several though out the year in fact, we probably sponsor twelve or fifteen actually almost one ever month at various places and that was one of the goals too. To do is, to connect up to all the different places in the valley. So we've done a conference at West Point with West Point but it real a Marist Institute conference. We've done them in Albany, in Catskill, in Stony Point. Each year though we have the annual Cunneen-Hackett lecture in the Hudson River Valley history and that tends to be probably our bigger event. Always free and open to the public because it's sponsored by usually, there's a sponsor for it. We've had over the past couple years Tom Lewis who wrote the big book on the Hudson just two years, he was our lecturer two years ago. So you know we feel as though we've had some of the leading scholars of the region on its history, its environment, its culture.

28:31 **GN:** And there's plenty more work to be done I suspect.

28:34 **TW:** And lots of stuff coming out too with the quadricentennial, 400th Anniversary coming up next year. The institute will be co-sponsoring the conference with the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute. Roosevelts being of Dutch extract themselves with the quadricentennial committee in the fall 2009 to celebrate Henry Hudson's voyage of the Hudson. So we hope to have scholars from the Netherlands as well as from the United States here on campus and up at FDR.

29:03 **GN:** Sounds wonderful. Ok let's just change the focus just a little bit. You are in a rather

unique position having been a student, a faculty member, a dean of the division over there, and now the Academic Vice President, so your perspective it's much wider and deeper perhaps than many here. I suppose there's been a number of challenges along the way in each of those troubles. Before you say were some of the more interesting challenges that you had to face? I won't lead just talk, academically, financially, staffing wise, faculty, students.

29:47 TW: All of the above. Well I mean certainly any college at any level, administrators are going to have issues, and vice presidents over academics will have challenges. Marist is still a relatively young collage as colleges go. Most of our competitors, the schools that we compare ourselves with, that student's compare us with, they go back to the 19th century. Some of them go back to the mid-19th century, they have graduated generation after generation of alums. And we simply don't have that. We still you know, as a not religious college, only graduated in what 1962, our first.

30:35 GN: Yeah, I remember in a faculty meeting saying that in a few years we will be celebrating our fiftieth anniversary, our 50th graduation class, which is minuscule.

30:46 TW: Harvard is celebrating it four hundredth, 1636. They will be celebrating their four hundredth in about, well twenty years. But still they got a few years on us, as do many, many colleges many private colleges certainly do. One of the challenges that the institution I think has faced and done very well is you know a college education is not cheap and so student and families invest in that, they want to know the return, however you define that, whether that is an excellent academic experience, the promises of potential career opportunities. That's a big investment for them to make and Marist has had to come a long way in a relatively short period of time. To be able to compete with the bigger boys and girls of colleges, to say that we are, we can promise you not only a high-quality education, but also the same type of credibility when you leave our institution, that you would from these schools have been around a hundred years

longer than we have. That's has been a big challenge for the institution, but the VP gets that challenge because we still are young, we are still very tuition driven and we do not have the endowments that a lot of schools that we compare ourselves to, and that really makes a big difference. It makes a big difference in terms of how you can allocate money and resources, you have to be much more careful. The more careful you are the more, it's good economically but there is almost always going to be large number of very worthwhile projects and programs that will not get the resources that they are hoping to get. I could use the Hudson Valley thing as an example, they use almost no Marist resources cause they weren't available you had to reach out to other places. So that's always a challenge to be able to do those things and also stay very attuned to one of our major constituencies which is our students body. They are still supplying over ninety percent of every dollar, ninety cents on every dollar that comes in to Marist College. Which means we have to be very, have our radar out on the educational landscape, what their needs are, their interests are, in way that many other institutions don't have to.

33:00 **GN:** Right and that's a double-edged sword isn't it? In other words you have to be both financially able but academically able.

33:07 **TW:** Right. There's nothing crazier than running a college. If you try to compare, if Brooks Brothers were to stop half of every paying customer at the doors saying they don't want your money and let in half of the customers who can't pay, but will give you the clothes, that's what a college does every year. A college makes decisions which sometimes rejects the student that can pay fully and accepts the students that needs huge amount of resources from college to college. We're in a different world we are not in business, certainly not a business that makes any sense, so that's always a challenge. But the other constituencies obviously as dean of faculty. You know you have faculty, faculty by their nature are both very smart, independent and have opinions.

34:06 **GN:** They are vocal, are they not?

34:08 **TW:** I have learned that every planarary, including the last one. And that's fine because that's how colleges are to supposed to be. That it is the business that we're in and we have to be prepared to do that. But that balance of the many different interests, the students, faculty, board of trustees, which has its sense of what its responsibility is too, that's been probably one of the tougher things too learn. It's a tuff thing to navigate. Just to make sure that everyone, everyone in those groups is getting the appropriate respect that it deserves and ultimately regardless of, it's always great when all three groups, of those big groups, are on the same page and sometimes they're not on the same page and you have to make sure you're doing what's best for the institution. It's still young, but has a long history and hope to have much a much bigger future.

35:06 **GN:** What is the secret of attracting new capable faculty?

35:11 **TW:** Well I mean faculty want to come to a place that they believe will have good students and I think one of the best things that we do when we bring our faculty in to interview them, we have them teach a class and our students and I do think, obviously we have beautiful campus and that's always a immediate attractive selling point and it is a beautiful campus. But getting a sense of who some of these students are, what their abilities are, what their interest is, that is a big selling point, as well. I mean challenges are always that in certain areas there are far more professors then there are jobs and other areas there are far fewer professors then there are jobs. So it's a very competitive marketplace. So obviously things like compensation, one of the things about the Hudson River Valley is that in the last few years one of the challenges is they have, some of the things that we've benefited from if you lived here, rising housing prices for houses that you own, though obviously become a challenge for new people moving into to the area, it has become very popular area in the last few years. Then there's challenges, literally this morning a faculty member has resigned to go to school which is far lower on the spectrum of

colleges, but her spouse works at another college 200 miles away, it was a family consideration, wanted to be close, they have a young child and took the job, just again found out this morning, at a school which we would never think competes with us for anything, let alone faculty. We lost a faculty member to them because there are so many other concerns. One of the things too, for faculty is that increasingly a large number of faculty have spouses who are academics as well and obviously they're look for opportunities for both. One hand this is a great area for that, there are a lot of colleges around, that can help. But the other hand there is never going to be enough of that, so that's a challenge any school faces.

37:24 GN: What about an academic perspective, the core program and the academic developments, do you see new direction or a slight modification? Where the core is going or where you would like to see it go within the next ten years?

37:40 TW: Absolutely. In fact this we are about to appoint a new core director the previous core director Sally Dwyer who has done an excellent work for the last three years, her term is up and wanted to go back to the faculty. And we're interviewing candidates this week, we should have successfull one soon, but one of these key questions was to them, "Where do you see it?" We are on the point where the core is ready to be looked at very carefully. We've been talking about it for years, and we've done little bits and pieces, but there's been no

40:15 GN: tinkering with only pieces.

41:04 TW: Yes. And tinkering in the long run can be bad, because it misses, it's a core, it's a foundation, there's something holding it together. You tinker too much you might lose that. So this year, starting this year we're going to start a college wide discussion, literally college wide. Have sessions with faculty, academic staff, coming together to describe, you know what should the Marist graduate of 2010, where we'd be at that point 11. What are the skills, what are the knowledge, what are the values they should have, what are the things that we should be

emphasizing? And to me, once you have that discussion and you bring in so-called experts but folks, that have an understanding of other institutions too, get a look at what other places are doing. And connecting that up closely to the uniqueness that is Marist, we may end up with a slight modification, we may end up with an entirely new core, we may end up with almost nothing different. It's quite possible at the end we say, bravo we're doing it, great! You don't know. I do think though it's time for several things, I think the core, actually the core that's in place went into place the year I graduated, so I did not, in 84 maybe 85 it went into place, so I did not actually graduate under this core. I think there are many worthwhile things about it but we have to take into account some of the things that have taken place though, it is a big world and one which, the world is much closer as a world to every single person then it was when this core went into play. We have to get a more international element to this. A lot of our students study abroad now, a third, I think we should try to push just about everyone aboard, at least for even a short summer experience. We want to make short term programs for two weeks, it's not the same as a semester or a year, but at least it gets them to a place that is different from here where people might have a very different opinion about what the world, what are the important values to hold, all over the United States. I think these are things that students should get at other places so I absolutely believe we need some sort of international component built into our core. Other adjustments too, more service perhaps, we do a lot of service at Marist, and the students do a lot of service it's an important part of the heritage. There should be some sort of component that rewards it a little bit differently perhaps, it enables it more.

40:53 GN: How would you define the culture of Marist now? What does a student see as his life here?

41:04 TW: I think student, depending on what student you speak to, might be many different perspectives on that. That's a great question, and obviously it's adjusted quite a bit, even in the

twenty-five years since I started here. It has, it's organically modified the way things do, things change. In the early eighties even though we were not officially, we'd not been officially religious institution for more than a decade at that stage, the Marist brothers were still more of a presence on campus. And I think that was more of a sense at that time, that this institution was still closer to that older institution and it was, obviously it was closer in time. Now, you know obviously great attention and respect, and an important part of the mission is still related to those core values of the Marist Brothers, in terms of service and labor and quality education. And from the student's perspective, and that was in the context of the question, I don't know what they perceive to be Marist, cause on the one hand they perceive Marist to be kind of a Catholic college. You know almost a third of our students are not catholic at this stage. But they know we're not catholic in the same way as let's say Catholic University or Georgetown. They know there's some difference like that, but they still believe, that there's an importance of the religious heritage. So, in terms of, I think that we've become almost really unique because many of the schools that we compete with are either secular or they are religious. You know Fairfield, Scranton, Providence they have clear still religious mission. Those are our closest comparators and competitors still it's a very interesting thing if you think about it. And so what we have to me, the uniqueness of Marist is that, first of all we're somewhere in between the two. Of a Bard or a Vassar which has no religion, we're not Fairfield, we're not religious order still, with required theology classes and things. So, we're in this kind of hybrid state. But the thing that really to me characterizes us is actually part of that core still our emphasis on value and understanding, students have an understanding of the values component, in terms of their own lives and in terms how it impacts decisions that they make. And that does make us a little unique, those are not things that should be emphasized at more secular, private colleges. They are the types of things that would be emphasized at more religious institutions. But we're doing it in an

environment which is somewhere in between. I think it makes us somewhat unique, there are other schools like that I'm sure that have histories, their past history was religious, they no longer are fully non-religious they are somewhere in between.

44:46 **GN:** Iowa probably would fit into that.

44:48 **TW:** Perhaps yes

44:50 **GN:** Brothers used to be there but they're not there anymore. Moving to another, but not to different, your vision of Marist in the next decade, is that maybe as you describe the core, what would a student who graduated from Marist, what would you like to see them have achieved? How might that, will you let that happen on their part or will you try formulate a direction?

45:18 **TW:** Well I have ideas. And I will certainly put those ideas out and work with the faculty and try to find what will be the best core for our students but there's no question that I still believe, I'm educated in the liberal arts, educated in history, strong believer in philosophy, literature, these are things which, while recognizing the need for greater professional aspects to the institution. So, Marist will as long as I am at the academic helm, new core or not will continue to emphasize the significance of the skills and values and knowledge which liberal arts and sciences give to a student. They give you unique things. There's no question that the world has changed. And there are perhaps other ways to try to present some of these things to better understand the world that we live in for students but that's the great thing about the arts and sciences, is that they are essentially timeless. That's what separates them from any other profession, which do change a lot from time to time. So, that core will continue to be the heart of the institution. I still want to emphasize ethics and the values question. I think that we need that more than ever in a world which is.

46:41 **GN:** Somewhat unethical. Taking of a life not so important now.

41:47 **TW:** And so that to me is, it will be central to the direction that we go in. At the same time

I do think that Marist is recognizing, you know well, I was going to say is recognizing the need for the greater international component. But it just struck me, Brother Joseph Belanger, 25 years ago saying “Get these students abroad. Bring in more international.” So the ideas has always been there. But I think we really have to begin to think even more broader internationally, you know we pushed into our first truly forward adventure in Florence last year the branch campus there a couple weeks ago. Amazing opportunity for students who want to study, you know we have 7 majors there, Art History, Art Conservation, Studio Art, things that make sense for Florence, and here's a great opportunity, we have about thirty undergraduates over there studying right now. I see things like that for Marist in other places as well.

47:44 GN: How about foreign language then, being worked into this. It's not a demand you necessarily want to make, but certainly is an enticement.

47:53 TW: Yeah absolutely and about half of our students do have to take foreign language at Marist by the major that they take. If you study education, you have to have six credits of foreign language. We have good Lord 500 students studying education. If you study English or History you have to have foreign language, six credits and there are another couple hundred there and actually if you start to add it up, for many of our students it's not a college requirement but it's a major and then you have the foreign language students themselves. I think it makes sense, obviously of you're going to study in Spain, or study in Italy, to have some sense of the language before you go. And we now, we had to pullback on some languages but we also offer a broader array of other languages, we offer Chinese, Arabic now, we didn't do that ten years ago, Japanese. So there are certain things we've reached out, as the, well the world hasn't changed but the interest. Certain areas have become more important over time and we see that in our own curriculum. So, and I believe you know they say math and language are the two things that scare people the most. We require math, we require a lot of it, and people still come. I think we could

require some language, what level of proficiency that could be open I was never big, I'm not the language, it's not my orientation I had trouble with other languages, I took them while I was at Marist too. I think we do well even if we had a language requirement

49:31 GN: And another area is the computer world, technology, how you see this coming down the line? How do you respond to distant education, for lack of some other word?

49:44 TW: Well that's the best word to describe it because we have now, we have three masters' degrees that are fully distance education MBA, MPA, Communication. We have another one, Technology Management which is almost entirely distance education. Distance education, digital learning is going to be an important part of the Marist future as it is going to be important part of any college. With the introduction of these learning technologies and new pedagogies I think there's great opportunity I think about on the one hand all the people in United States who don't live near a college. Couldn't do it part time, adult returning student, and here distance education offers that opportunity. I think it has to be monitored very carefully, right now we only do it with graduate students who are adults and already have an undergraduate degree. We have some undergraduate courses online but we have no programs online. And I do not envision that in the near future, lots of other schools are doing it. I don't see it happening and I certainly in the near future, I don't see it happening for our traditional undergraduate coming here. They're coming here for a certain type of experience. I don't need to know that they're not getting out of their dorm room because they're walking over to their computer doing the course there, that's missing three quarters of the experience. I think it's going to be the way the future but I think it got to be monitored carefully. Right now what I think we're doing is OK with the graduate students but I can see the push in the next five to ten years as more and more schools do it at the undergraduate level too, that we're going to see that pressure as well.

51:30 GN: But there will be loss at something of the interpersonal and the experiences of

mingling and just getting out of one's own Parochial

51:39 **TW:** Absolutely, and I think that's why to me, where it works best is when it brings an opportunity for someone that otherwise they would not have. I think again about say the adult student living in a rural area, thirty minutes from the local community college whatever, that type of education.

51:59 **GN:** Or would be convenient to go to campus because of work of family or whatever.

52:04 **TW:** For our traditional undergrad folks, the 18 to 22 years old, unless there is some sea change in the next few years that I don't foresee, this the experience requires they do things like this, they actually sit in a room with someone and talk to them. They work with service opportunities on campus, that they become parts of clubs and participate regardless of what they're going to do later, people are going to have to communicate with each other, want to speak to each other, and it's not going to be entirely on the computer. There's no question that distance education loses, I think that there are other opportunities that it brings, at the same time it does take away some of the characteristics of education as we have known it and that why we have to be very careful. Our traditional undergraduate experiences should remain a traditional undergraduate experience. I do believe that our undergraduate students should have some sort of required course or at least a portion of a course that uses some of the methods of distance education, working with other students in other places on the computer. Because when they go into jobs they are going to do more of that so that would be a good learning experience for them there. But that would be a very small component again of course this would be a portion of a course get that type of experience.

53:23 **GN:** Do you feel the Doctoral programs are not our way of the future? Or would they eventually come in?

53:33 **TW:** They might be, they might be. I mean the only the faculty, right they never do, never

say never. The thing about doctoral programs is, I mean the resources that go into them are substantial. And often students who were pursuing the doctoral degree are expecting to get a great deal of assistance from the institution to do it. Monetary, that goes against the grain of the way of our model works presently. I'm not so sure presently we'd actually have the educational support services, the library holdings and things. I mean we're complex enough for a doctoral, and all the different programs we have plus it takes a lot of faculty resources too.

54:17 GN: So it's not in the foreseeable future and I just brought that up because it was on my mind to ask.

54:25 TW: And you know I was just asked that by a faculty member at a school meetings and again I said I didn't dismiss it but you know there are several things that we would have to take in account. Another is the faculty themselves, to oversee doctoral dissertations you got to stay at pretty high level of your own research on top of things and lots of our faculty are and that would be asking something more then we ask now.

54:46 GN: You're gifted and talented what has kept you at Marist? Certainly other opportunities.

54:52 TW: I appreciate your characterization. I love the institution, you know I really feel as though, that's why when I started off at the beginning I did not know that even at Dutchess, I thought I might finish at Dutchess. It was not, wasn't get any great push from anybody to go anywhere else. I feel as though Marist did great things for me, I benefited very greatly from a Marist education. I benefited very greatly when I came back to Marist in 92 there were 200 other people that could have been hired for that job, could have done that job I had no reason to expect it more than them and so I feel I was very appreciative and I had been treated very well as student. I had been treated very well, brought back to the institution and generally I have always been treated well by fellow faculty and administrators and generally students too. I believe very strongly, and the other thing about it too as Marist changes, I am always a little bit trepid, Marist

served a certain type of student. Marist was good for me in the early eighties. I was not sure whether or not college was my future. It was a perfect institution for someone like me and that continued a lot of students like me there at that time. Now as we move up the rankings and so forth to become more selective, I do get concerned that there are potentially good students who are getting left by the wayside by us because their S.A.T. scores aren't high enough or whatever, when we might have a value added to produce a really good contributor to the world.

56:44 **GN:** And so one last question, to continue with success story, Marist really has to be open to all of these possibilities and requests to enter and to come in here. And we have to look at a good number of factors, two principle ones. But can they do it?

57:11 **TW:** And that's a, we know the major demographic change which is happening in the United States and for areas Marist traditionally recruits students from New York and the northeast. We're going to start to see this year, next year a decline in high school graduates so the market's going to get tighter. So the students that will begin to dominate our students whose own high school background perhaps not as strong as the students that we have now, are going to need certain different types of infrastructure here over the next few years to make sure that they are at the place that they need to be. They're going to have thinner wallets and Marist is going to have to do more in that. That's not just a Marist issue that's a national issue that northeastern colleges are going to face. We have to be very attune to that and still do as many things as possible, as many different areas to remain not only competitive, but competitively attractive that a student wants to come to Marist College. There has to be something different and distinctive about us that they want to come to Marist and we have to provide that. That's our job to do that.

28:29 **GN:** Good, thank you very much Thom.

28:30 **TW:** Thank you.