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Interview with Virginia Schubert, Professor of French

Virginia Schubert

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Macalester College Archives, DeWitt Wallace Library
Oral History Project

Interview with: **Virginia Schubert**
Professor of French, 1965-2006

Date: **Tuesday, January 23rd, 2007, 1:30p.m.**

Place: Macalester College DeWitt Wallace Library, Harmon Room
Interviewer: Sara Nelson, Class of 2007

Edited interview run time: 1:06:08 minutes

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Subjects:

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Interview with Virginia Schubert

Sara Nelson, Interviewer

**January 23, 2007
Macalester College
DeWitt Wallace Library
Harmon Room**

SN: My name is Sara Nelson and I'm a student at Macalester College working with the Oral History project. Today we'll be interviewing Virginia Schubert, who was a French professor at the College, in the Harmon room of the Library. And today is Tuesday, January 23rd, 2007. I'd like to start with your first experiences at Macalester. So, how did you hear about the college?

VS: Well, it's not at all like it is for most people, because I lived—I live right over here—and I went to St. Catherine's. So obviously I knew Macalester. I knew Macalester when I was a student. And then, I knew about the French Department, because all of...a lot of the French professors in the Twin Cities know each other. And so, when they needed someone for the French department I applied. They contacted me and I applied.

[00:54]

SN: How did you become interested in French?

VS: Well that [laughter] that's a long story. Or maybe not too long a story. When I was a student at St. Catherine's, I started studying French. And I had a French major and an English major. And at that time, there...I thought that I would probably teach high school, because that's

what women did—they taught high school or they became nurses, or whatever if they graduated from college. And so, I thought if I taught high school I would probably teach English because there were a lot more jobs teaching English than teaching French. But I ended up with a double major. And I was so encouraged by my French professors that I continued and did the major. And then they encouraged me to apply for a Fulbright scholarship. At that time, there were a lot of Fulbright scholarships to France. Now there aren't very many, but at that time there were quite a few. And, it was a way to continue working on your French, when back in those dark ages—I graduated from St. Catherine's in '57—so, at that time, and if you were from the Middle West people didn't think of going on study abroad. I knew one person who did study abroad, and she was from the class behind me. So it, it just wasn't done. So having a Fulbright scholarship for a full year was like advanced study abroad because I had graduated of course. So I did graduate study in France. And then that just set my path. When I came back St. Catherine's hired me to teach French even though I didn't even have an M.A. They hired me to teach French. And then I started like that, teaching French and whatnot.

[02:48]

SN: Did you get an M.A.?

VS: I got an M.A. from the University of Minnesota. Then I went to teach. I taught four years in high school, at Alexander Ramsey high school—which is now I think the Roseville school or something. And then...I was teaching at Alexander Ramsey when this opening happened at Macalester.

[03:09]

SN: What year did you start teaching at Macalester?

VS: 1965. And I took MSFEO in 2002, so that's thirty seven years.

SN: Wow, that's a long time. OK, so you said that you came to the job at Macalester because there was an opening here. What was the hiring process like for you?

VS: Well, the hiring process was also much, much different because I was...I was not hired on the tenure track, first of all. At that time—I was thinking back at it—I think the enrollment was growing at Macalester at that time. Although, of course when I was hired I wasn't all that aware of the whole thing. But, they just needed more French professors. There was a requirement and everybody had to take French, or take a language, and at that time, not as many Macalester students came in with what would have fulfilled a language requirement. So there were lots and lots of elementary and intermediate classes. And it seemed like in the first couple of years that I was here, they kept hiring people to teach mostly in the language sequence.

[04:21]

SN: Was it a lot of native speakers?

VS: No, not at all, not at all. We did have native speakers at that time, but one, and you know in the language departments right now, what we call the native speakers—they don't like that title—but, the native speakers are sort of the teaching assistants. So I was hired to teach the classes.

And in the German Department the same year they hired sort of my counterpart, and they were just hiring a lot of people to fill the ranks of these ever-growing language departments.

[05:03]

SN: So what was your first impression when you arrived on campus?

VS: Well, again, it seemed like it was not...it seemed like I was hired more for the department rather than for the college. I mean, in the sense that my first impressions really were getting to know the people in the department. And the ones I didn't know—to get to know the ones I didn't know. When I was interviewed, I was interviewed—at that time they had this experiment for like one year, I think, of having a chair for all of the language departments, and that lasted about one year, and then he left. But I was interviewed by him, and then I was interviewed by Borghild Sundheim who had been here for a long, long time. She was sort of a fixture in the department. And I already knew at least three of the people teaching in the department. So—and then I of course met, or was interviewed by the, at that time, by the Academic Vice-President who was Lucius Garvin. And I don't think I met the President during my interview process. The President was Harvey Rice. But Lucius Garvin, and Lucius Garvin was—I was hired in '65, and Lucius Garvin was hiring at that time lots and lots and lots of faculty members. And he was going out into the universities and hiring people who were well-established in their careers and were university professors to build the departments at Macalester. He coined at one time a very, a very...what should I say?—badly accepted phrase called "Steeple of Excellence". He was looking to hire steeples of excellence. And I wasn't a steeple of excellence. What he meant by "steeples of excellence" was the people who had already been...had established careers in major

universities, and big researchers, and then he brought them in. He was building the faculty at that time.

[07:26]

SN: So what kind of classes have you taught?

VS: Oh I've taught everything. Remember I was here from '65. But in the beginning I taught elementary and intermediate and...I don't know. Have you studied, you've studied some language?

SN: I studied Latin, actually, but not here. I came in with my language requirement already done actually.

VS: OK. And so you know, you, you wouldn't understand the experience. The teaching of modern foreign languages has changed so dramatically and maybe you even know that from your friends. But it has changed so dramatically. And even when I was teaching in '65, up to '70 what ever it is, the early seventies, it was changing all the time. And it was the technology that was changing it, and we were changing technology all the time. At Macalester, when I came, had **the** cutting edge language lab in the, well, not just in the state. I suppose in the upper northwest, or maybe in a good part of the United States. And, you know, you would really laugh if you saw it today. But it had a big console. And then it had individual machines, and students came in and put on big earphones and everything. But teaching with tapes—tapes, reel to reel tapes—teaching with tapes was just a huge change from when, even when I—when I learned

French in college, they were just starting to use tapes. You know, it was a four skill approach and everything. But, still, it was much, much, much...much more old fashioned, I guess, than it is now—the way they teach, they taught or the way we taught. Classes were much larger. I mean I'm sure that I had at least twenty-five in each class, or maybe thirty. So the classes were rather large, and there was a lot of written homework. And, you know, and I'm sure they were very good classes. I'm not sure my classes were very good, but I'm sure that the classes were very good, and people were taught a lot. Students have come back to tell me—because we taught literature, and we taught culture, and that in the intermediate class. So I taught a lot of elementary and a lot of intermediate in those first years, but then after that I taught everything. And then toward the end of my career, my specialties were intermediate, and introduction to literature, and writing, and then sort of humanities type courses. We had a course called "Art and Ideas in French" or, in "France". And so we chose certain themes, and we taught using art and music and literature and something historical. And then my special field, because I have a doctorate, my special field is nineteenth-century French literature. So I taught the nineteenth century courses.

[10:55]

SN: So were you working on your doctorate while you were teaching here?

VS: Yes.

SN: What was that experience like?

VS: It was...I don't know how I did it. I guess I was young [laughter]. Because there's no other way to imagine doing it. I was doing my doctorate at the University of Minnesota, running over to the University of Minnesota at the end of the day, taking one class, you know coming back, it was just horrible.

[11:20]

SN: So how long did it take you to do it with the full-time teaching?

VS: Well I started it when I came here, so that was '65 or '66. And I graduated with my Ph.D. in '74. With summers, you know. And then you have to write your thesis—the dissertation, even when you're not teaching—the dissertation takes a while.

[11:44]

SN: So what was a typical day like during your first few years teaching?

VS: Well, I think, I suppose it was just exactly like a typical day now. Which is teaching, and having office hours, and seeing students, and correcting papers, and finding classes, and going to meetings. I think it was very similar. I think the only difference, the big difference in the way...the young faculty's day now, is that they have to do all of those things but there's such a heavy, heavy emphasis on research and publication that they are told not to get too involved in meetings and extra activities because they should be spending their time on their research and their publication. So they do have a heavy, heavy load to carry, but they are also protected a little bit because you know there's that junior faculty sabbatical and different things to help them,

which we didn't have.

[13:00]

SN: So you were one of the few women faculty members during your time at the beginning of Macalester.

VS: Yes. At the beginning there were—at one point, when we were beginning to think, "Well, now, we should have women on committees" you know, on faculty committees, we looked around and there were only thirteen women full-time. So that was I think ten percent.

SN: Were they mostly in the English department and foreign languages?

VS: Yes, they were. But also Hildegard Johnson in Geography, and she was a great name. I'm trying to think now, who else. The kind of, the great senior women, were Hildegard Johnson, Borghild Sundheim, Anne Blegen, the woman in...in German, I'm trying to think of her name. Georgiana Palmer in Latin, in Classics. But most of them, yes, were in either English or the foreign languages. And I was surprised at that because I went to St. Catherine's and of course all the faculty were women at that time at St. Catherine's. And of course all the students were women. So I never thought about the fact that at some places, or probably at most places, women were segregated to certain departments, or kind of existed in certain departments. I was surprised when I finally thought about that. But, anyway, Hildegard Johnson—Evelyn Albinson in German—Hildegard Johnson sat us down and said, well you know, we can't be on all the committees because if we're on all the committees, we won't be doing the other things we're

supposed to be doing like teaching and research and all the rest of it, and you know there just aren't enough of us, and it will work to our disadvantage to try to be on all the committees. So, Patricia Kane, of course was another great person in English. And then Dorothy Dodge in Political Science—I'd forgotten her name—so she was in the social sciences.

[15:26]

SN: I read something in my *Mac Weekly* about the Faculty Women's Caucus and your involvement in that. Could you discuss that experience a little bit?

VS: Well, I don't know if I was that involved in the Faculty Women's Caucus. It's too bad Patricia Kane isn't around because she would be the one who would be able to talk about that. There was this great episode when someone pilfered from some administrative office the list of all the faculty salaries. Is that what you're referring to?

[16:04]

SN: I read about how you got a grant and—

VS: Oh yeah, well I'll talk about that.

SN: —ok, but I didn't hear about that.

VS: This other thing was—if you find a *Mac Weekly*, it's in there because it was...somebody from the *Mac Weekly* had something to do with it. Anyway, they pilfered the salary schedule

and because we never—even to this day we don't know what other people earn. And so we, the women passed it around, and circled their salaries in all the ranks. And, of course you know where the salaries were—they were way down at the bottom. And so when that got out then it got in the *Mac Weekly*, and I don't know if the salaries actually got in it. And it was never identified who had which salary, but what was identified was that the women who were on the faculty had the lowest salaries. That was.... No, the grant was very interesting. That was, I just checked that out, I think it was in the early seventies. And we—I worked with Dorothy Dodge and Patricia Kane—and we got a grant from **H.E.W. [full name?]** to...raise women students' aspirations about careers. It had to do with careers. And so we had for a couple of years, we had these big career seminars. And it was... In this day in age it sounds absolutely stupid, but it was the most spectacular thing. And then of course we brought Kate Millett to speak, and I was...I was in charge of the career...organization of the career seminars. Like, we had one for the medical fields, and we had one for, I don't know, business fields and whatever. And then I was in charge of Kate Millett's visit. Now, I don't know if you know who Kate Millett is.

SN: I don't.

VS: She was...I think, maybe she's deceased. She was originally from St. Paul, but she was a great feminist writer. And, I mean, I didn't know what I was getting into. I went to teach at my class one day and when I came back—we didn't, I didn't, you know, I was a teacher, in a department, and I had an office—and when I came back, there were probably fifty notes on my door—post-it notes or little stick 'ums—on my door of people who had wanted interviews with Kate Millett. They knew she was coming to town. We had to ration the tickets for her talk and

all, she was this great feminist. Anyway, but what we had was we had these career seminars and it was, you know...we had...a doctor and a dentist and whatever, to push the kind of non-traditional for women medical fields. And one of my friends came as the doctor representative, and she said "you know, if I had thought of it, I think I would have become a dentist," she said "because you have more regular hours." It was funny because even she was kind of revising her career ideas at that time. Somebody came to talk about banking, and they said "well how did you become a president of a bank?"—a woman who was president, a bank president—she said "well, I bought a bank." So...but it was very, very, I think it was a very important thing to do. And as I say now, it probably looks absolutely silly. Those things are in the Archives because I sent them to the Archives—all the programs are in the Archives. All the materials are in the Archives. So we had, we had a program, and students signed up for what event they wanted to attend because we had to have rooms that were big enough. It was great. It was sponsored originally by H.E.W. through some contact that Dorothy Dodge had.

[20:23]

SN: What was the response on campus—was it mostly positive?

VS: Very positive. Yeah, very positive. At least...especially I think for the career seminars because it was practical. And I say it was...remember at that time there were no women teaching in any of the science departments.

SN: Do you know, were there a lot of female students taking sciences?

VS: Well, of course there were female students taking at least, at the basic level some sciences, and there were women who wanted to become doctors, sure.

[21:01]

SN: That's interesting. Can you talk a little bit about your process of getting tenure and how that happened?

VS: Well, again, that was sort of different because it really wasn't as...it, it, wasn't as kind of legalized and quotafied as it is now. It was sort of, you know, I don't even remember what I had to present or anything. I really don't. But I remember that it was pretty exciting to get tenure, especially after having worked on my doctorate full time.

[21:39]

SN: Did you find it hard to balance family and outside commitments with your job, particularly during the sixties?

VS: I just had to work all the time, that's all. Work all the time. Fourth of July there was no Fourth of July picnic, there was study for my prelims, or whatever. But it, on the other side, being a French professor is pretty exciting, and it gives you excuses to go to France and do research, and...so....

[22:16]

SN: So you mentioned that your specialty is kind of...

VS: Nineteenth century...

SN: Nineteenth century literature, can you talk a little bit about your research in that area?

VS: Well, my dissertation was on playwright...he was a poet/playwright, and he did write some prose fiction too. His name was Alfred de Musset, M-U-S-S-E-T. My dissertation was on the theme of the search for the ideal in his plays. And it was, it was very, very interesting—especially one of his plays, which is called *Lorenzaccio*, was never performed during his lifetime because it was such a complicated play they couldn't figure out how to present it. And so, it was fun to finally see it performed, you know. So...but then, besides working on Musset, when I taught, I taught a lot of Balzac, the novels by Balzac. And Balzac is...I mean, he could be writing about our contemporary time. He analyzed every strata of the society of France in the 1850s, '60s, and recreated characters of.... He said I'm going to do a, like a zoological, or a...analysis of human beings, and so he, he studied how people are affected by their...by where they live, and by their social class, and whether they live in the country, or in Paris, or whatever. He was just a fascinating novelist. So I loved to teach Balzac. After I went into MSFEO, I still—I didn't teach this year, but I've had four years of classes for alumni. And so we always find a chance to read some Balzac novels. And then also, I love art history, and so I always found a way to teach art history along with the literature that I taught. So I love the paintings of the Romantic School, the early painters, and then of course you go into Impressionism. And I loved the poetry. I taught a lot of Baudelaire, 1857. So, anyway, I...

[25:05]

SN: Have you done any sorts of collaboration with student researchers?

VS: We didn't do that at the time. We really didn't do that. We had students who helped us with the career seminars for women. But we didn't have so much—that wasn't a thing that was done.

And I think that even today, that works better in some fields than in others. It really does. I don't know, collaborative research in literature is difficult. Difficult, I think. What is your major?

SN: Geography, so there's a lot of kind of collaboration.

VS: Yes, yes, I know there is.

SN: Outside work.

VS: And David Lanegran used to bring me in the last few years to help, or to teach his course when he was studying the cities—the great cities of the world—and I went in a couple of times and lectured on Paris.

[26:06]

SN: Interesting. I also read that you worked on a French textbook?

VS: Yes, I did, with the chair of the department at that time. He came in after I was hired. He

was one of those “steeples of excellence” who was hired. It was a textbook to help students learn to read French. It was sort of a spin off of a textbook that he had written for graduate students. You know how graduate students have to pass reading exams in several languages? And so he wrote a book called *French for Reading*. It's still published today—this man is now deceased—but the book is still published today. They used it last summer at Duke in French for reading. I used it last summer when I was tutoring someone in French for reading. And it's a, it was a programmed method. So you...and it taught people how to use, how to guess and how to analyze language so they could—it was just an analysis of the language for the reading of the language, not so you could make language, but just to read. And we used that same technique in this book that we did.

[27:31]

SN: And you also got some awards from the French government?

VS: Oh, yes, I got several awards from the French government. I was made a knight, a Chevalier dans l'ordre des Palmes Académiques—in the Order of Academic Palms. And then I was raised from knight to officer in that same order. And it's an order...it's an award from the French government for, especially for academics. But, yeah, mostly for academics, but mostly for French people in France. So, but they do give it to some Americans. And it's kind of, I suppose it's kind of hit or miss. Someone has to...they have to know about you. So, obviously somebody must have nominated me. It works its way from the French consulate in Chicago to Paris, and then it's awarded by a decree of the French government in Paris. And then the consulate general came from Chicago to give me the first award, and it was the cultural attaché

who gave me the second one. It was exciting. I didn't bring my medal with me. The faculty used to ask me to wear my medal because I have a very beautiful medal with a wide ribbon, and a very beautiful medal. The French make beautiful, beautiful medals like that. Anyway, the faculty used to ask me to wear my medal on my academic gown for graduation because they like that idea of having a medal.

[29:16]

SN: Well, do you have anything else you would like to add about your academic experience?

VS: Well you know what we haven't talked about at all? There are several things we haven't talked about. One is that when I was here, I worked a lot on internationalism. You didn't find that in your reading about me?

SN: Um [laughter]

VS: Guess not.

SN: Not really. There's a lot of stuff about the Women's Caucus, but not much else.

[29:41]

VS: Yeah, well, internationalism has always been very important at Macalester. From the day, you know if you look back at the materials, from the day they put up the UN flag. And so it's always been a big focus. And of course we have Kofi Annan, and you know...whatever... We

always had a lot of foreign students. In the, probably, it must have been in the seventies, I don't remember what year I was...I was, well let me see. I went to the Lily Conference in '81 and the ACM **Wingsberg [sp?]** Conference in '84. So it was the late Seventies. And Jack Rossmann was the Academic Vice-President. There was no provost, he had the title of Academic Vice-President. And I was Faculty Associate to the Academic Vice-President, from—I brought those dates—I was Faculty Associate from '83 to '86. And he wasn't the Academic Vice-President for the whole time, but he was the one I started with. But, anyway, from '82 to '88, I was the co-chair of the International Studies major. So, are you ready for this? I was teaching half-time, I was faculty associate to the Academic Vice-President half-time. I was co-chair of the International Studies major with David Sanford, who was the head of the International Center at that time. So...and David had been a German professor, so I knew him, I had gone to graduate school with him, so we worked well together. But, what we tried to do was, the International Studies major and all interdepartmental majors at that time had budgets of something like two hundred and twenty five dollars. No faculty. And so, it's, you know, the interdisciplinary departments, even today, kind of put together courses from other departments don't they, in order to... But at that time it really was because there was no faculty. So, David and I were the co-chairs of the International Studies major, and students who wanted to do an International Studies major had to put together courses from different departments to get some sort of a coherent major. And you know, it was, it wasn't the way you'd want it. But it was the way we could do it, given the fact that we had had no budget except two hundred and twenty five dollars for xeroxing I suppose. So, anyway, I remember one year David and I wrote five grant proposals. And I think we got three or four of them—I think we got four of them. And so we could bring visiting professors on campus. We brought Fulbright visiting professors on campus,

and Geography was always a big, big help because they would work with us, and bring someone for Geography but who was an internationalist. So we kind of got, or kept things going, because the International Studies major or program—it was not a major, it was a program—had been developed previous to '82 when David and I took it over. But we kind of kept it afloat and raised its profile. And then of course it blossomed with the Dean of International Studies and all of that. But, we did do something, and we worked very hard at it. So, that...and with that at that time, Macalester was invited to what they call the Lilly Conference. Now Lilly is a big foundation. And the conference was out in Colorado, at Colorado College. And each college when it goes to the Lilly conference has to choose a topic that it wants to study on its own campus. And so, Jack Rossmann was the Academic Vice-President, and he agreed that it would be good to study internationalism on the Macalester campus—to see what we had, where we had it, courses, other things, you know...foreign students, study abroad, the whole thing, to study the whole thing. What was very interesting was Paul Solon and David Sanford and Jack Rossmann and I went out for the conference, it was a couple of weeks. What was very interesting was that we were on the cutting edge. A lot of people were studying other topics, and I don't even remember what they were. But we were on the cutting edge and people out there said "oh you know, we wish we were studying this topic, too," and then it got kind of to be a hot topic after that. You know, nationally. And then the second conference we went to was a conference called—it was sponsored by ACM, the Associated Colleges of the Midwest—and it was the Wingsberg Conference. That was '84, that was a smaller conference. So that was...I did really a lot with internationalism at Macalester. And then the other thing that I worked on a lot was in the department. Because the French department, when I came...it had its faculty and then I stayed on and then a couple of people retired. And we hired a couple more, and we, you know,

and then we—I don't know if you've gotten into that but we did have some big cut backs at Macalester. And so when we had those cut backs each language department lost a person, and that was hard. It was decided that one person would go from each language department. And...but anyway, the department started to change. And then about the time I was, became chair of the French Department in '88, and that was about the time that we had a lot of changes and so everybody, actually all of the tenure track people or tenured people who were there, I was involved in their hiring. So that was a rebuilding of the department. Not that there was anything wrong with the previous department, but it was...you know, people retired or whatever. So, Joëlle Vitiello, and Françoise Denis, and Diane Brown, and then Nick Dobelbower. Nick I was, I was I think already on MSFEO but I was brought in to be a part of the process. So those are the four people. So I walked away and left the department. And I was chair from '88 to 2000, and then I retired in 2002. So I was chair for twelve years.

SN: That's a long time.

VS: That's a long time. Because it's supposed to be I think a three year term. And we were reviewed I think twice during that time.

[37:44]

SN: Now I'd like to talk about the ways that you've seen the campus change during your time here. And you started here in a time of pretty rapid social change.

VS: Very rapid social change [laughter]. Well, '65 things were very calm. And very, you know,

very...not—I think students at Macalester were always interested in politics and world affairs. But in the beginning it was pretty calm. But then when the Vietnam War happened, then it really got wild. And I remember that one year I think students had the permission not to, if they wanted to, we had to allow them to not finish their class, and not take their exams, but have some sort of alternative way of finishing their class, so that they could go out and do political things. That was one thing I remember. And then I remember that year I was teaching Camus' *The Plague*. And my students didn't budge because that novel is so relevant. I mean, I didn't lose students at all to social activism. So there was the Vietnam War. And then there was the influx of the EEO [Expanded Educational Opportunity] and all of the economic problems that kind of happened after that. I can remember at times the faculty were meeting, and we were held hostage in the faculty meeting by students who wanted us to vote one way or another. It wasn't very pleasant. And there were students who would come to the faculty meeting and just absolutely fill the faculty meeting. And they would be assigned to see how different people voted, so that if we didn't vote the way they wanted us to vote, they could come and try to influence us afterwards. It was not a very pleasant time. And then of course there was the change of all the requirements, the abolishment of the language requirement, and all those other things. And that was another time when students put a lot of pressure on us for our vote.

[40:28]

SN: Were you involved in any of the activism surrounding the Vietnam War?

VS: No, not at all. I am just not involved in...I am not an activist. So I wasn't involved at all. I just kept my head down, especially because I had a lot on my plate. I was teaching and trying to

do a doctorate. So I had a lot on my plate at that time. And I had some family things going on. So, I, I tried to keep my head low.

[41:07]

SN: So how have you seen the composition of the student body change in your thirty-seven years? [Laughter]

VS: Well when I came here, there were lots and lots and lots of brilliant students. You know, really brilliant students. And, I think of somebody like Tim O'Brien, who is such a famous author now, he was in my required intermediate French class [laughter]. There were, there were a lot of—he was student body president and valedictorian of the class, you know, he was really brilliant—and there were a lot of really brilliant students—of course then he went to Vietnam. There were a lot of brilliant students. But I think the students at Macalester were always more individualistic than students at other places. But then they began to get more and more individualistic. There were some days at Macalester when I wasn't very proud of the students who were here. They...and I think, you know, I wasn't involved in the selection of the students, but I wouldn't be a bit surprised if we weren't a little too lenient in who we chose. There were too many drugs on this campus, and there was too much alcohol on this campus—it was a little bit out of control I think. Fortunately, you know, I mean, as a faculty member we didn't have to go in to the dorms. I think we weren't welcomed in the dorms... but it wasn't great.

[43:01]

SN: How have you seen the faculty change?

VS: Hmm...well right now the faculty seems very young to me [laughter]. But I suppose when I came we were young, too. The faculty now is much, much more...what should I say? I think they're really more interested in research than they were when I came to teach. And, it's not just that they are pushed to research, but the people we hire come here with the expectation that they can do their research. They're doing real cutting edge things. So, I guess that...I don't know... I'm not saying that the faculty when I was here was better or worse or whatever, but the emphasis was a little different. And I think—I don't know if I want to say that or not—I really can't talk about the faculty this very minute who's here, because I looked down the list of the faculty the other day, and I decided that I didn't know, oh I don't know half of the faculty, in the four years since I've retired. I think that, uhm, you know, I think the faculty we have right now is brilliant, and research-oriented, and in part because they have to be research-oriented, but in part because they really want to be research-oriented. When we had hard times at Macalester a lot of the faculty pulled together in a way that we had to, in order to make this thing continue—allow this thing to continue, allow Macalester—not that... But I think we did pull together and maybe that was good and maybe that was bad and maybe we wasted a lot of time in trying to work through committees, but I don't know. I guess I don't have anymore to say about it than that.

[45:45]

SN: OK, when you first started here was there a lot of camaraderie among the few female faculty?

VS: Yes and no. We were...the faculty in the French department in the beginning was all

women and we were all very good friends and we had a lot of social activities. And then, then that extended also to the women faculty in the other language departments. I don't think that you would say there was camaraderie with the other women in the other departments. And in part because people were of different ages and they had different responsibilities. And remember if a woman faculty member at that time was married and had a family, she did her work and she never said "well excuse me, I can't be there because I have to take care of my child" or "I have to pick my child up at daycare" or whatever. There was...the women faculty I knew who had children just carried on. Just like the men. But we always used to laugh and I think it's still that way. The faculty meeting is at the end of the day, and it really put a lot of extra burden on the women faculty, especially those who were married and had children and all, because they had dinner and they had children and they had all that. But, there wasn't this, well, you know, using that as an excuse. And, as I said, people were of different ages. So, there was support from the other women, but we were of different ages. And then very soon after I came—you should do a demographic of after I was there for a few years—then they started to hire more women, and they hired in the next cohort down. Now those women I think are all more or less gone. I'm thinking of somebody like Anne Sutherland in Anthropology, and Anna Meigs in Anthropology, and well, Emily Rosenberg is still here.

SN: She just retired actually.

VS: Oh did she?

SN: Last semester, I think.

VS: Last semester?

SN: Last semester was their last one here.

VS: But, so that second cohort is even gone now.

[48:26]

SN: So how have you seen the political climate on campus change?

VS: Well, you can see I'm not very political. I think Macalester has always been politically activist, and it's always been very liberal. And I just don't agree with those alums who come back and say "oh this college is getting so conservative, the students are so conservative"—they're not! I mean, they haven't changed at all. You know, "it's going to the dogs"—you know, of course that's what...a couple years after you graduate you'll say, "oh, it was much better when I was there and we had all of these values and we were such activists and whatever, and now they're this and they're that." Because I live in the Twin Cities, Macalester has always been known as an activist college. And I don't think that, you know, you could have a degree like this of difference [hand motion?] in one way or the other, but I don't think there's a difference, really.

[49:30]

SN: What have been some of the most significant events that you have experienced in your time here?

VS: Oh, I don't know [laughter]. I really can't think of an answer to that.

[49:51]

SN: OK, it's kind of hard to word this, but there have been a lot of different heads of the college, and trustees, and that sort of thing over your time here. So how have you seen the relationship between the faculty and the administration, or students and administration, change over your time, or with each President, I guess? That was kind of an awkward question.

VS: Well, that's a hard question to answer though, because you might think that there's a change when there isn't really a change, it's just that you're not as involved. Remember, I was very involved with quite a few of the Presidents who were here. And, for me to say "well the faculty are more or less involved now" I really can't say that. I think the faculty are...when I was still teaching and was less involved, or the year or two right after I retired, took MSFEO, I think the faculty are still very involved. Those who are on the big committees are very involved with the running of the college. So, I don't know. I mean, I certainly didn't from my lowly little lecturer position, didn't have anything to do with the administration or organization or the committees of the college at all, under Lucius Garvin and Harvey Rice. But certainly when I was Faculty Associate to Jack Rossmann, and then I was Associate Provost for one year to Jim Stewart, you know, I worked a lot with Bob Gavin. I worked a lot with John Davis. I worked a lot with John Davis and Bob Gavin. And then—and Betty Ivey when she was Provost—and then less after that.

[51:51]

SN: What have been some of the most controversial things on campus during your time here? A lot people mention EEO.

VS: Well, EEO was very controversial. Yeah, but you know, I don't think you should...I don't have a real good narrative about EEO. I know it was very controversial, and we felt that it was poorly run economically. And that it was probably poorly run—that the vision was probably good, but the practicality of it wasn't. And you know I certainly didn't have very many minority students in my classes, so I didn't get the bulk of it. But it...it wasn't, as far as I understood, from what I heard, but it was from hearsay—it wasn't because I was involved in a committee that was supervising or that had any direct knowledge, but I'd hear it from other faculty members who were working. You know, they said that it wasn't run very well economically. And so, it ran us into the ground economically. And, Arthur Flemming when he was president didn't control the finances of it very well. That's, I mean, that was what I heard. And then the other thing was that the students they brought in didn't seem to be very well prepared for the experience on this campus.

[53:32]

SN: So it was something that was felt a lot more in certain departments?

VS: Yes, I think so.

SN: Hm, that's interesting, I didn't really think about that.

VS: Well, where you would have more minority students studying—sociology was one for example, maybe history. I don't know, you have to think about that. And you would think probably that we would have a certain number of minority students just running through the college, running through our classes because we had required—no, we didn't have language requirements then. So, see, we didn't have them. They weren't running through our classes. And, I think that you would find them in certain classes. And if you brought students in who were either ill-prepared academically, or ill-prepared socially, to be in the center of the United States, in the north, of the central part of the United States, in this very cold climate, and where they hardly saw a minority face in St. Paul or Minneapolis. St. Paul and Minneapolis have changed drastically since we had EEO on this campus remember. We didn't...we weren't the center for the Somali population in the United States at that time. We didn't have the Hmong. We didn't have the Vietnamese. And so you had basically a very, very, very, very white St. Paul and a very, very, very white Minneapolis. And I suppose, there were areas where there were blacks who lived and socialized and all that, but if you would bring somebody in from Washington, DC, or New York City, that person would be fairly shocked and out of...sync sort of. So I think it was—as much as I know, they tried to have preparatory classes. I think that they had summer classes before the first year. And they had preparatory classes and tutors and all that. It just wasn't, you know. I think if we had brought in middle class blacks it could have worked a little better, and we could have eased this whole thing in. It's a vision, it was a great vision that just didn't seem to work very well.

SN: OK

VS: Did other people say that, too?

[56:25]

SN: Yeah. But they kind of talked about the experience of having the students in classes and that sort of thing. It's different. Like, as small as this college is, the different ways that people have experienced things is pretty astounding actually. So, over your time here Macalester has kind of transitioned from this more regional focused college to a more nationally focused one. Can you talk about how—

VS: Internationally focused.

SN: —yeah, that's changed the academics and the vision of the college?

VS: Oh, and it's changed the academics. Especially—I was thinking about it, I can't recreate the class right now, but it was my introduction to literature class, which is a third year class. And there were maybe fifteen people in it. And I suppose I had, of the fifteen I probably had seven or eight foreign students, from different countries. And there was, in this one class it was so funny, because they were brilliant students. In this one class, there was a Swedish guy, he was just brilliant—rather eccentric—but brilliant. And then, there was a black guy, and so they were introducing themselves around the table in French at the beginning. And this black guy said he was Swedish [laughter]. I looked at the blonde guy over here who was Swedish, and this black guy over here who was Swedish. And so, that's, that's Macalester. And the reason he was

Swedish was because his mother was Russian, and his father was from Ghana, I think. And his father had been sponsored in the Soviet Union—now this was in the Soviet Union—to study by the Soviet Government, a propaganda kind of thing. And he met his future wife, and they couldn't get married in the Soviet Union. And so they both ended up in Sweden and got married there, and this was the son of that union.

SN: Interesting. And he was studying French in the US.

VS: He was studying French in the US, and was kitty-corner from another Swedish guy who was blonde and traditional—Swedish guy. So, but in, especially in those classes—and before we got our serious language requirement back—we had lots more foreign students in our classes than you would probably have in some departments, because a lot of the students.... For example there were students from, especially from Albania, Bulgaria, Poland, Czechoslovakia, those countries. They said...I'd say "why are you studying French?" "Well, of course I had to study Russian, and then we were told to study German, and then we were told to study English, but the language I always wanted to study was French." And so when the student got here to Macalester, already knowing Czech or whatever country it was, then Russian, then German, then English, the student added French. And then you should see those students in, say, an elementary class. The poor American student who is trying to learn his or her first foreign language, facing, in a class with someone who is working on the fifth foreign language, and wanting to learn it because, well, one student said "well I wanted to learn French because you know, my grandfather was the editor of the Czech language paper in Paris and I wanted to tap into that tradition." So, Macalester has been...Macalester was always international, and in the

late seventies and early eighties when I was working on internationalism... They really worked very hard, and I think they're still working very hard. Jimm Crowder is working very hard to bring in a lot of foreign students. But not just to bring in foreign students for foreign students, because now, they come in they have to do a four year degree and all of that. But anyway, it was always pretty international, but in the last years I think it's got really international. And the students, because now when they come in they have to do a four year degree, they come in with a lot of English. You must know that from your experience—they come in with a lot of English and they really integrate. And then we get a lot of students from the World Colleges. Are we still getting a lot of students from the World Colleges?

[1:02:03]

SN: Yes. I think even more now, because there's a scholarship. They get ten thousand dollars per year or something...

VS: Well, we had a lot of students. That was the other thing. In the French department there are students who know French because of their background, who are not taking French but are working in the department, because they want to speak French. And since...three quarters of the faculty in the French department now are native speakers or something, I mean students are glad to come and work there. So, you have a lot of students. I remember Omar from Lebanon, and then there are some other refugees who are, you know, we've had in the past working. One from, I'm trying to think of where, his whole family had been assassinated, you know. So I mean you have a lot of—and then a lot of the Africans come in with French, and so they are either taking some French on the advanced level, or they're working in the departments. Maybe I'm

more aware of the numbers, but of course, over in, not in Geography so much, but in Econ, you've got lots of foreign students.

[1:03:26]

SN: Do you have a favorite memory of Macalester?

VS: [Laughter] A favorite memory of Macalester? Oh, dear. I don't know. [Pause] I really don't. Commencement, it's wonderful, especially since we started where the faculty splits and the students walk between us. That was always a lovely experience, carrying the flags. What else? I don't know. Lots of students. I mean especially the alums who—I have alums coming back to take my alumni class, and consistently always the same ones took that class. And they're alums from practically when I started teaching here, so the late sixties, some of those people. Lovely, wonderful students, former students. The students, in the hardest days, it was the students who kept us going. And our relationship with individual students we were working with, who were learning from us, and we were teaching. That's what kept us going. You know, in those hard days when either there was too much political activism, or, like during the Vietnam War or something where things were sort of falling apart. Or in the hard days when money was tight, and faculty were arguing with each other about decisions—it was the work with the students that made it all worthwhile, really, really, really.

[1:05:33]

SN: Well, that is the end of my questions. So, if you have anything else you'd like to add, feel free.

VS: Well, I've been thinking about the fact that I think I gave the wrong dates for Balzac. But otherwise—I think its 1830-50, are Balzac's dates. Otherwise I'm glad I said that about the students, because it really was the students. And then, a lot of the faculty, you make some good friends. You make some good friends. So...

SN: Thank you.

[End of Disc 1:06:08]