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## Interview with Jan Serie, Professor Biology and Director of the Center for Scholarship and Teaching

Jan Serie

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Macalester College Archives, DeWitt Wallace Library  
*Oral History Project*

**Interview with:** **Jan Serie**  
O.T. Walter Professor of Biology, 1983-2008, Director of the Macalester Center for Scholarship and Teaching 2002-2007

**Date:** **Monday, August 13<sup>th</sup>, 2007**

Place: Macalester College DeWitt Wallace Library, Harmon Room  
Interviewer: Laura Zeccardi, Class of 2007

Interview run time: 1:03:35 minutes

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**Interview with Jan Serie**

**Laura Zeccardi, Interviewer**

**August 13, 2007  
Macalester College  
DeWitt Wallace Library  
Harmon Room**

LZ: My name is Laura Zeccardi and I am a new graduate of Macalester College, conducting interviews for the Macalester Oral History Project. Today is Monday, August 13<sup>th</sup>, 2007, and I am interviewing Jan Serie, Professor of Biology, in the Harmon Room in the DeWitt Wallace Library. Well, just to begin, if you'd like to state your name and where you're originally from and then what year you came to Macalester.

JS: Where I was born...you mean?

LZ: Yeah! I guess where you would consider home...

JS: My name is Jan Serie. And I'm originally from Brooking, South Dakota, a small town right on the Minnesota border. And I grew up there and, uh, left in...1970, to go to the College of St. Benedict, where I got my undergraduate degree. So I've been in Minnesota since 1970.

[00:48]

LZ: So maybe we could talk a little bit about your educational background and what you had been doing prior to Macalester and kind of how that—

JS: OK. So I got my BA in biology from St. Ben's. And then I worked for a little bit for Honeywell. And then I...went to graduate school in anatomy—which is a department that doesn't exist anymore—at the University of Minnesota. And I got my Ph.D. in 1980 and I went to teach at the College of St. Catherine. And I taught there for three years, and in '83 I moved to the biology department here at Macalester. And I've been here ever since...a long time.

LZ: What prompted your move to Macalester? Were you approached by them or was that a decision that you made to...to kind of switch schools I guess?

JS: Um...St Kate's was...undergoing some financial trouble in '83—'82 actually—and had to let quite a few faculty go. And so I lost my job at St. Kate's.

LZ: Oh, ok.

[02:04]

JS: I liked St. Kate's a lot, and certainly would've continued to teach there. But that wasn't an option. So—and I was married at the time, and my husband had a business here and had clientele here, so I wasn't free to move geographically. And so I looked around the Twin Cities for an academic position, and the only position in biology open that year was at Macalester. I applied for the job, and I was the third woman hired in the science division. And one of the other women who had been hired before me, Kathy Parson, was in—she had a joint position in chemistry and biology. And she actually took me to lunch and encouraged me to apply for the job. And I think that was really helpful for me, in seeing Macalester as a possible place for where I could teach. I had wanted to teach in a women's college. It didn't matter to me so much whether it was Catholic or not, but I wanted to teach in a women's college. And so choosing a coeducational institution was a hard decision for me. The other thing that was different was I had been teaching in the nursing program. My background is in anatomy and physiology, and in immunology and the medical disciplines. And St. Kate's had a nursing program and I was comfortable with—and my training had been—from a medical school. And I was really interested in teaching biomedical disciplines to medically interested people. And so coming to Macalester to teach general biology in a more liberal arts context, that was also something that I didn't really envision for myself. So it was the coeducational thing and the general biology thing. And they were hiring me to teach general biology and I didn't have any interest in teaching general biology. And I taught human phys which I had taught at St. Kate's and I was comfortable teaching that. But the general biology thing was just very strange for me. And so... But I got the job. I interviewed for it. It was really the only job kind of available. And so I got the job. And I thought, "Well, OK, I'll take it and it'll give me experience, and I'll see how it

goes, and I'll look for another job." And then 25 years later, or however many years later I'm still here [laughter]. I never sort of got around to switching.

[05:02]

LZ: Had you been familiar with Macalester just because—

JS: Oh sure.

LZ: —St. Kate's is, you know, obviously very close to Macalester.

JS: Sure. Yeah. I knew about Macalester. And I knew it was a very good place. And I knew that there were a lot of benefits to coming here. It's got more resources than St. Kate's. And it's more selective, and it was even then more selective, although just sort of marginally more selective at that point. In '83, I think we accepted seventy or eighty percent of students who applied, so it was only marginally more selective. But still the students were very good. And, you know—and I knew that it was a liberal place and that fit my politics really well. And I knew that I could probably do things around women's issues and women's rights and feminism here. And I could, and that helped a lot. So even though it was coeducational, I felt that I could make some progress in that area as well.

[06:09]

LZ: What was your first impression of I guess the campus, and maybe along with that goes I guess the student body, faculty, administration, and just kind of how you felt maybe in those first couple months of being at Macalester and teaching?

JS: Well, I had come from an institution where there were lots of women on the faculty, to a place where there were hardly any women on the faculty. And so I felt...I felt very isolated. And, um, in terms of the faculty, I felt very isolated. There was a pretty traditional patriarchy here. Lots of men. The women—the faculty wives—used to play bridge on like Wednesday afternoon in the Fine Arts—hallway of the Fine Arts center. And the faculty wives invited me to join. They didn't know what to do with me. I mean...so it was weird and I, um, and I felt alone. There were a few women on the faculty, and I had, you know, struck up friendships with them, and that was very helpful. But in terms of the structure of the place and the power and where the power was and who the chairs were and how the institution was run and who got elected to committees—I mean, it was very rare to even see a woman on an elected committee. It was being run by men. And, um, I didn't like it. In terms of the students...I found the students very engaging and scary almost.

LZ: [laughter]

JS: I was kind of scared of the students because they were really bright and really curious and...and really engaging. So I would go to class, and I was used to just lecturing, you know. And I would say a few things, and then there'd be all these questions that people had about this stuff. And I didn't know the answer to half the questions, or more than half the questions usually. So that was scary at first. But then I started to really, really like it. You know, I started to see that they were—they weren't challenging me just to challenge me. They were really, really curious about what I had to say, and the field, and, you know, they wanted to have a conversation with me. And so I really started to like that a lot. And I started to look forward to class because I knew that almost every class I have ever taught at Macalester, for twenty five years, some student has asked me some question I have never thought of before. And it has just been the most amazing process to go through a whole career of having students engage me like that in my discipline.

[09:23]

LZ: What I guess—John B. Davis would've been I guess—

JS: Right, he hired me—

LZ: here for one year—



JS: One year

LZ: —for a year. So I guess maybe talk about what maybe things were like under his administration and Bob Gavin would have been the next president. And kind of what those relationships were like with the faculty maybe?

JS: Sure. Well, when I got here the place was still healing from the crash, the financial crash at the end of the '60s. And, um, there were, you know, people had lost a lot of colleagues and a lot of faculty lost their jobs. A lot of staff lost their jobs. The student body had crashed. People remembered having a whole ton of really bright students who never came back because they lost their financial aid. So, when you remove a huge resource base from people really quickly, what happened—and I think this would have happened in any situation—is people start fighting with each other over the remaining resources and things get really tense and really personal. So there were a lot of unhealed wounds on the faculty when I got here. And I people held just enormous grudges against one another. And it was very hard to get anything passed in the faculty meeting because people would develop alliances and things were in stalemate. You know, it was really kind of—it was a really hard environment. And people kept reliving it, you know, you'd hear the stories over and over and over about this. And I tried to kind of piece together an institutional history. There were hardly any associate professors because all the assistant professors had been fired, and they hadn't hired. And so everybody was either—they had a few assistant professors because they were starting to hire again. And then everybody was a full professor, pretty much... And, the other thing is that...John B. Davis had been brought in to save the institution,

so essentially everybody was in survival mode. The research programs had stopped. Many people had come to Macalester expecting to be productive researchers and they were very talented researchers, but the resource base had fallen out from under them. And the institutional priorities had shifted, so that there had been an erosion in the scholarly component of the faculty job. Um, I think people were still teaching their hearts out and they were really good teachers, you know, but the institution was... The faculty productivity in terms of scholarship was certainly not what it is now. So the transition to Bob Gavin really was the transition to putting Macalester back on the track that it had been on before the financial crash. And so I think after this decade of healing and rebuilding and reestablishing trust, which John B. Davis was perfect for—I mean he's a wonderful man and he established confidence on-campus and with off-campus constituencies and he was exactly the right president for that period of time. Bringing Bob Gavin in then I think put us back on the scholarly track and back on the idea that teaching and scholarship were partners with one another. And, um, Gavin built the institution in that direction. We started hiring again, we started having tenure standards that were more like the tenure standards we have now. He was of course a very different kind of person from John Davis. He was, I think it was, the transition was a little hard for some people. John was very—I mean John...it's really sort of hard to describe how wonderful John is interpersonally. He's just a fantastic person. And Gavin was more reserved and more businesslike, and, you know, I think the transition was a little hard. It was also an adjustment to get used to having a scientist as the president.

LZ: Oh yeah.

JS: Yeah. So I think that was a little harder on the humanities and fine arts and social science people than it was on the science division.

[14:23]

LZ: Did you find as presidents they were, I guess, accessible to, you know, just the general faculty in terms of I guess maybe what sort of interactions you had with them, I guess personally?

JS: Well, I hardly ever saw John Davis, only because I only served with him for a year. So you know I can't really, I'm not really in a position to say what he was like in terms of accessibility. But Gavin, I mean, anytime you wanted a meeting with Gavin you just had to call his secretary and ask for a meeting, you know, he was available to talk. And he was out and about, and he participated in all the major standing committees in one way or another, and I think really engaged faculty. He came from a—he was an academic vice president or whatever they call it at Haverford, the dean, academic dean at Haverford. So he was used to that kind of engagement with faculty, and I think he had it. I think he took very, very seriously the charge to improve the scholarly productivity and the scholarly capacity of the faculty. So I think he was very engaged with the faculty, in some ways more so than MacPherson, maybe. But certainly more so than Brian Rosenberg. I think Brian Rosenberg is, you know, really engaged in fundraising and the capital campaign and the off-campus constituencies and the more traditional role that a president

plays. Rosenberg is kind of in—has the luxury of being able to do that because of all the on-campus work that previous presidents had done, particularly Bob Gavin I think, in getting the domestic situation taken care of before we worry about foreign affairs, if you will, you know, on-campus and off-campus constituencies.

[16:21]

LZ: To talk a little bit about the Biology Department, I guess, maybe kind of what was your first impression of the department as a whole, you know? The size and other professors that you were teaching with and then we could talk maybe specifically about what courses you taught and how that's changed, if it's changed.

JS: It's changed a lot. Well biology's changed a lot. I went to graduate school before the revolution in molecular biology, so biology is a completely different discipline, it's remade itself several times over since I've been at Macalester. And the Bio department needed to go through those transitions, and that's hard for a department. You know, you get trained in certain areas and it's hard to find the time, you know, and the inclination to kind of come back up to speed because you have to stay on top of essentially this revolution as it's occurring. And so when I joined the department it was very classic, and most Bio departments were. We taught botany and zoology and animal—plant and animal kingdoms and, you know, anatomy, and...all these sort of traditional things, and that's what Bio departments did. And quite quickly we had to start teaching cell biology and molecular biology. And we had to teach genetics in a different way. And we had to become more research active and we had to develop student-involved, student-

engaged research programs. And in fact Macalester led the nation in terms of inquiry-based laboratory development in biology. And, um, student research collaborations in biology and... You know, we had bumps along the way. I mean, I think that any time a department is under that kind of pressure to make those kinds of changes, there will be people who resist that. And rightly so, I mean, wondering whether this is just a fad, or whether this is just, you know... I mean who knows whether this molecular stuff is gonna actually stick. But I think all in all we made the transition fairly smoothly and fairly well. I went from teaching—I mean we realized that we really couldn't teach one introductory biology class anymore, that there was just too much stuff, you know. And that this kind of "skimming the surface" business was really kind of unsatisfying for everybody. So we stopped teaching intro bio and we went to a three course—sometimes a four course, we've changed it a couple times—introductory sequence. So, um, so we started teaching cell biology and genetics. I stopped teaching human physiology and general biology and I started teaching cell biology, genetics, and immunology. So I stopped teaching phys, um, in 1989, when Lin Aaonsen came. She teaches the physiology course now. I taught it just last—two springs ago, I guess—and I hadn't taught it since 1989. So it's been a long time. So as the discipline became more molecular, I became more molecular in my teaching, and, uh, quite quickly—probably within five years—I wasn't teaching anything I'd learned in graduate school. And five years after that I wasn't teaching anything that I had taught five years ago. So it's just been astounding to watch this revolution happen.

[20:25]

LZ: Have you done much interdisciplinary work with, I guess, the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies—

JS: Yeah, I headed Women and Gender studies—

LZ: Oh, OK

JS: —for some years, and was involved in the early years before there was a department. So getting a major on the books, pulling a program together, working with faculty to produce an interdisciplinary—a coherent set of interdisciplinary courses. And, um, I suppose played some role in helping lay the foundation for the development of the department. And have served on the steering committee, continued on and off to serve on the steering committee, and that's been very, very satisfying work for me. My department, the Biology Department, was pretty male and pretty traditional. And I needed to have feminists around me. And so that was really, really good for me to do that work. And I've also, I mean, I headed the Howard Hughes Medical Institute Grant at Macalester which promoted interdisciplinary science courses. I taught Women, Health, and Reproduction in the biology curriculum which was crosslisted with Women and Gender Studies. And I've taught some interdisciplinary classes with Chemistry department, so I've sort of been—interdisciplinarity has been a big theme for me in both my leadership roles in grant, in heading grant proposals, and also in my teaching as well.

[22:19]

LZ: Have you, I assume you've taught some Interim courses, I guess?

JS: I tried not to teach Interim courses.

LZ: Oh, ok.

JS: I wonder if I ever taught an Interim course. I think I probably did teach an Interim course or two. But they were, let me tell you, so much work, that I quickly realized that if I had a course release I wanted to take it off in January. And I almost always had a course release because I headed grants and I did, you know, stuff for the college that I got course releases for. And I quickly—I took it in January. Because you had to turn around from the fall semester, quickly develop a full course that you taught in one month, and then turn around and get your spring classes ready. I mean, it was just an unbelievable amount of work. So I didn't do it very often.

[23:19]

LZ: Did you then work on, I guess, personal research and publication during January then?

JS: Yeah. And getting my spring classes ready to go. That took a while.

[23:28]

LZ: Maybe we could talk a little bit about where specifically, I guess, your interests have kind of been in your research and publication.

JS: Well, for, oh, fifteen years maybe, I was a transplant immunologist. So my research was in looking at how—the islets of Langerhans make insulin. And so if you're diabetic you don't have the islets of Langerhans. And so one way to cure diabetes is to transplant the islets of Langerhans from one person to another, and then they secrete insulin and then that reverses the disease. And transplants are done in humans now. Or you can transplant the pancreas, but there are some problems in transplanting the pancreas. And so what I was interested in is finding a way to treat the islets before they went into the recipient in a way that made immunosuppression less of a requirement. And there was a lot of immunological theory associated with that. So it was an interesting problem to me not only clinically, but it was also an interesting problem just from the biology, from the biological and immunological perspective. So I ran a lab here and I had collaborators at the university [University of Minnesota], and I published in that field for probably fifteen years or so. And that field was not particularly amenable to undergraduate research and collaboration. And the reason is because the experiments take such a long time. You transplant into a diabetic mouse—I was using the mouse model. And then you have to wait a really long time before you can tell whether the transplant has worked or not. Because if it fails, it'll fail quickly. But if it survives, it has to survive a long time before you can say it's survived. Well, students don't have a really long time. They have one term, or they have one



summer or... And so, I thought maybe a better model for student-engaged research might be looking in infectious disease. And so I took my sabbatical in...sometime in the '90s, I don't remember when, to shift my focus to looking at reoviral infections. Reovirus infects the gastrointestinal system, and it causes diarrhea and it causes all kind of childhood infectious. So I took my sabbatical and I learned how to grow the virus and how to infect animals, and I learned how to test whether they had an immune response or not, and started working with students in that model. And I published a few papers on the effects of the nervous system on controlling infection, a field called neuroimmunology. And, then I became the dean of the science division.

[26:42]

JS: And, um, it was really hard—and I was chair of the Biology Department at the same time. So it was really hard for me to do the dean job, the chair job, teach my classes, and run my research lab, because the administrative positions are really, really different from the teaching and research. They're not compatible in the way teaching and research are compatible. So I stopped doing research for a bit, or I didn't engage as many students and kind of wound down my research lab a little bit while I was the dean. And then the position as the CST director opened up and I really wanted—I was going to be the first director of the Center for Scholarship and Teaching, and I really wanted that. It was really important that that...that that shop, that that department, get off the ground in a way that was seen by the faculty as good for the college. We needed it not to fail. And you don't have a lot of chances with faculty. If you screw up, they won't come back for a really long time. So I needed to give enough thought to what we were doing to make sure that that was successful. And then the next directors could screw up a little bit, right? Because you'd have the reputation and it would be ok. And so I decided that I really wanted to put all my energy into this and not have my attention divided. So I taught a little and I

shut my research lab down. And I don't regret that at all. And I haven't done any scholarly activity at all during the period of time that I've been director. I've just been working on the administrative and a little bit of teaching. I've done a little bit of teaching. And so I have a sabbatical this coming—not this coming year, but the following year, and I hope to get back into some scholarly activity during that period.

[28:57]

LZ: Does the position of Dean of Natural Sciences, does that—that position doesn't exist?

JS: It doesn't exist. It was kind of an experiment to see if divisional deans might be a way to organize the administrative structure. We're really light in that level of administrative work here. We don't have associate deans, we don't have that kind of layer between the Provost and the faculty. And it was a way to try to get a little bit more attention to that level, but it didn't work real well, so we stopped doing it.

[29:34]

LZ: What year did you become chair of the Biology Department?

JS: Oh, I don't remember.

LZ: Did you serve in that position for a while?

JS: A couple of times. And yeah, um, I probably was chair maybe a total of four years. It's on my curriculum vitae. I don't remember. Sometime in my past I was chair of Biology [laughter].

[29:56]

LZ: Well, I wanted to talk more about the Center for Scholarship and Teaching, because that's one thing that hasn't come out in any of these interviews, and I guess, maybe, what year it was started, and why it was kind of deemed that that was needed, and then what your specific role in that program has kind of been?

JS: Yeah. It was started out of conversations— um, we had a planning grant from the Mellon Foundation to try to think about how we might better support faculty development at all stages of the professional career of the faculty members. So, how could we better support new faculty, mid-career faculty, faculty who are mature in their work, and people who are retiring or near retirement. And we called it the faculty life cycle, and this grant is still called the Mellon Faculty Life Cycle grant. And so what we did is we had many focus groups on campus. Many. Like ten or twelve focus groups. Jim Stewart I think was in charge from the History Department, former provost, was in charge of this process. And he had a committee that helped him. And we held focus groups with different constituencies, so women faculty, young faculty, science faculty—

different ways of slicing the pie. We asked faculty to reflect on what the institution could do better to support them as teachers and scholars, and to support any administrative interests that they had. All of them got back and said, "We need more time." [Laughter]. So there was not much we could do about that. And then the second thing that they said was they wanted a center where they could go for help. So they could go to get help with their scholarship, or their teaching, or their leadership—building leadership skills, or, you know, some place where they could go to talk about confidential information. Or a place where they could get—sort of one-stop shopping for faculty development needs. So they could go and say, "I'm interested in this project, can you help me?" And, uh, so we thought, "Cool." That sounded like a good idea. Other institutions had centers for teaching and learning, so they had, so it was faculty development—not focused on faculty—focused on teaching, helping people be better teachers. And the MAX Center work—so helping with learning skills, and those centers were combined, in teaching and learning centers. We thought it might be a better model for Mac—or worth a try anyway—to not combine the teaching and learning but to combine the teaching with the scholarship. So it would be faculty development, and then we would keep the learning center separate and have it be in the MAX Center. And so we have grown the center into a place where faculty can get grants, any kind of internal funding for their scholarship or teaching. We have gotten big institutional grants that have helped faculty do work in multiculturalism or work in curriculum development in other areas. We now manage endowed funds that help faculty do their scholarship or do international travel. We do workshops on teaching. We run a workshop for new faculty, and new faculty now—new tenure track faculty now get a course release their first year through this program and they participate in a year-long seminar that orients them to the profession and to teaching at a liberal arts college. Um, we do a mid-career faculty seminar

that helps faculty think institutionally and understand Macalester better and their role in the institution. So we have a lot of programs, a lot of grant funding opportunities, a lot of kind of consolidation and pulling things together. And I think we built a good program. We assessed it last year in the spring. We're going to have an outside review in September. So we did a self-study, and we did a faculty survey in March. And, um, a very high percentage of faculty said that they thought the Center for Scholarship and Teaching was valuable to the campus. And so I think that we kind of are over the hump in terms of demonstrating our value to the faculty. And a lot of faculty use our services, and I think it's been pretty successful. So when I hand it off, I think I will be handing off a healthy enterprise to the next person, which is what I wanted.

[35:01]

LZ: Where do you see kind of the future of I guess faculty programs going, I guess, faculty development going, I guess in terms of Macalester? I guess...I know that's a tough question...

JS: I think the faculty need.... The faculty are very productive scholars. We—this faculty publishes at the same rate as Amherst and Swarthmore, and we're essentially as far up as we can get in terms of scholarly productivity. So we have to continue to support faculty scholarship at a very high level, but I think that that's not where the sort of—the future push needs to be. I think that new technologies are available for teaching. I think that millennial students are coming in with higher expectations that faculty use technology effectively in their teaching. And I think we have a generational issue here...[laughter] And I think that faculty need help in figuring out how to do this effectively, and not just for the sake of doing it.

LZ: Right

JS: But how can we use technology to support student learning better? There are all kinds of new pedagogical techniques that faculty are largely I think unaware of. So how do you teach more effectively? We know a lot more—there's a lot more information available on how people learn. And how do we help faculty teach in a way that's consistent with how people learn. So lecturing at them is not the most effective way to help people learn, and we know that. And yet I think we have a faculty that relies largely on lecture. Um, surprisingly high numbers of faculty lecture. And not that a little bit of lecture isn't fine, but, you know, sitting yapping at people for sixty minutes is probably not the most effective way of teaching. So how do we help faculty make the transition to more active student learning or group work or project-based, case-based work, you know, where there's real student engagement in classes. Some faculty do this extremely well. And how do we take what these faculty know and help other faculty understand this stuff better. So I think we need that. I think we need to see teaching as a difficult, difficult process. Good teaching is hard to do. And I think we need to band together more. And I think we need to build a community that listens to one another and uses one another as resources. We don't do that. We tend to be isolated, you know, we teach our classes, we don't talk to other people about how we teach. We don't have anybody come into our classrooms and watch us teach, and that's just silly. I mean, that's just silly. We're not using each other as resources the way we need to. So that's my—would be my push for the next wave of faculty development.

[38:43]

LZ: Have you seen kind of a change and a growth in your own teaching style, just kind of being aware of these issues?

JS: Yeah, to some degree. Um, because I haven't been teaching much...[laughter]

LZ: That'll do it...

JS: ...I haven't been kind of putting my money where my mouth is here, you know, because I, I haven't been teaching much, um, and I don't intend to go back to the classroom. So I have to rely on, and I do rely on, a lot of people who really do do this. And, you know, I'm not the one that's the source of information about this. I want to connect people to each other in ways that are a lot more productive than my getting involved in this.

[39:33]

LZ: Have you seen an increase in the number of women faculty that are now at Macalester—

JS: Oh yeah...totally.

LZ: —and I guess faculty of color is another kind of—

JS: Some. Yeah, some increase in faculty of color, but we're much much more successful in women. We're fifty percent female now which is just, you know, completely different from when I was here. And the culture has changed a lot, although I think that the culture is still predominantly male. Too male. The way we run our political structure is still pretty male, and that needs to change. But as more women get into higher ranks, as more women get to be full professors, get to be department chairs, get to be in positions of leadership and power, I think this is—will change, I think it's already changing. And so I'm very, very happy with how I've seen the demographics change. People of color—we have more people of color, we have more ethnic and racial diversity than when I came. We have a retention problem with faculty of color. International faculty of color we retain at very high rates. Higher actually than white faculty. Domestic born and raised faculty of color we retain at fairly poor rates. We lose about half of the tenure-track faculty of color that are born and raised in the United States, and some of that is job market stuff, some of it is dual career stuff, some of it is people realize they wanted to teach graduate students, you know, wrong career, kind of. Some of it is inevitable, some of it is that people of color are in demand, and, you know, great places woo them away from us. And, you know, we try as hard as we can but we can't retain them. So I think that there's some stuff that's explainable and inevitable, and we lose a lot of white faculty, too... But some of it I think is climate and culture, and the fact that we are really, really predominantly and culturally and dominantly white. We're a very white place, culturally. And we're not multicultural in the way that we approach ourselves. And I think that we need to learn how to be more multicultural, and I think that we need to learn how to imbue the culture with more openness and flexibility and



understanding of what people bring that's culturally different from the way that we conduct business and are. And until we get there, I think an awful lot of people won't feel at home here. They won't feel like they fit here, and they will be more likely to leave. So that's I think our next big challenge, and a lot of people are working real hard on it, but it's very challenging.

[42:41]

LZ: Have you also been involved with the Institute for Global Citizenship as well?

JS: A little bit. I was on the planning committee, and I'm on the steering committee. But I'm not on the staff, and I'm not sort of involved in the day-to-day operations at all of the institute.

LZ: What is the goal, specifically, of that institute as you kind of understand it to be?

JS: Well, there's a mission statement, which I suppose they have up on their website. Um, I think that the vision of the institute is to try to consolidate some of the stuff that we do, but we're doing it in scattered ways. So we have this—we say in our institutional mission statement that we want to provide a high quality liberal arts education, in the context of multiculturalism, internationalism, and service to society or civic engagement. I think we say "service to society." And the idea of the institute, I think, is to take those three things, and meld them, and have them synergize with each other. So that they're not, and they're not anymore seen by anybody who's

working in the field as distinct silos. People who work in internationalism understand that internationalism is multicultural, and you want people to be engaged citizens. You don't want people to just be just up in their head being scholars, although there is a place for that. But most of our students will be engaged in some way in society. So, you know, people in multiculturalism understand there's an international dimension. I mean, you know, the scholars are moving back and forth, but institutionally, we had these sort of separate entities. So the idea is let's get with the program here and integrate this stuff. So that's what the institute really is. And so you take study abroad, you take the Center for Civic Engagement, which used to be the community service office, so you turn it into the Center for Civic Engagement. You take—and you make some—you move them into the Institute. You, um, create—I think they're looking at a concentration in global citizenship which will draw from American Studies—kind of domestic multiculturalism traditionally, that curriculum—it will draw from the internationalism curriculum, it will draw from the science curriculum, and some other things to put together a curricular package. They have now a study abroad, an extended study abroad program in Maastricht, where students go all over the world and study abroad, and then they come—for one semester—and then the second semester they come together in Maastricht to talk about their experiences and to talk about global citizenship and what it means to be a global citizen, based on what they just experienced in the first semester. So that's a very exciting program. And then I think once they kind of, I think the institute is kind of consolidating—they have now a Civic Forum which they run in the spring, which is kind of the civic counterpart to the International Roundtable. The International Roundtable moved into the institute. So they're kind of consolid—and they're in the consolidating, building-a-few-programs phase. And then what will happen in the future, I don't know and I'm not sure that they know quite yet, you know, how they

will envision that. But it's a platform where the community can now kind of build on these things in a coherent way, rather than as individual entities on campus.

[46:42]

LZ: To switch directions completely, I've heard something about a TV show and a talking skeleton...

JS: That's true—TV show, talking skeleton.

LZ: And I know very little about that and I wanted to hear more about that from you because it sounded quite fun.

JS: You know, that was a long, long time ago. That was 1980. It was in the '80s that I was on *Newton's Apple*, that I was the resident scientist on *Newton's Apple*. I did sixty-three segments on *Newton's Apple*. And I did, um—which was a show for families. It was a science show for families, but also geared kind of toward a middle school kind of level of...science interest. And I did [it] with Ira Flatow, who now does *Science Friday* on NPR. But he hosted the show for a decade. He and I would sit in the audience and entertain questions from the audience about human biology. So, why does your voice go up when you inhale helium, and what does the appendix do, and what happens when you get hiccups, and... You know, lots of questions that

people have about anatomy and physiology. And we would answer them as best we could in like, I think, I don't know, I think we had ninety seconds or something like that. And sometimes I would illustrate things on this skeleton that I had, and it was called Dead Ernest. And Dead Ernest would sometimes have body parts on him. So one question was, "Why does your foot go up when you hit your knee?" So we built leg muscles on the skeleton and we showed, you know, the nervous system and how it works and how that kind of thing happens. We built intestines in him when we did some intestinal question—I don't remember what the intestinal question was. And we put a brain in him when we talked about the brain, and we put a nervous system. He was, you know, fun to decorate. And he sat with me in the audience. And I went on a national tour with him because we went on a national tour to promote the show. And he sat in the limousine with me, and we toured around to various radio stations. We would go to radio stations and he'd come and sit on my lap and we'd talk to the radio host. It was kind of fun.

[49:02]

LZ: How did you get involved with that initially?

JS: They were looking—KTCA was looking for scientists who could explain science to the lay public. And there just aren't that many, you know? It's hard to find scientists who can actually explain stuff. And they were looking at the U [University of Minnesota], which is really not the right place to look for people who can explain stuff. Sorry, but it's not the right place. So then they started to look at private colleges. And they found some teachers, they found people who actually do this for a living. And I, um, did a little screen test. I had to explain how you could

clean up an oil slick with detergent. They had a little aquarium, they had a little sailboat on the aquarium, they had an oil slick—it was really kind of funny. Did a little screen test and they hired me, and...it was fun.

[49:58]

LZ: Was that—I know you received the college science teacher award I think in 1999—did that have anything to do with that work or was that—

JS: Oh no, that was a long time after I was done, yeah.

LZ: —more for work you had done at Macalester.

JS: Yeah. I, um...Kathy Parson actually nominated me. Kathy Parson has nominated me for a lot of stuff. Kathy's been a real booster for me, for my career. And that was just for work in, my work in teaching and also in curriculum development and leadership around curriculum development and teaching.

[50:39]

LZ: Have there been other professors like Kathy Parson that you've been, I guess, maybe particularly close to, or had a, you know, a great influence on you in kind of what you've chosen to do at Macalester?

JS: Well, now, well let me answer that in two parts. Bob Gavin was a big influence on me. Um, he was... You know, we were trying to move the institution into—to make it a place where people were rewarded for doing scholarship more. And he was a real ally and I think I was an ally to him. And, you know, he was somebody who took an interest in my career and took an interest in my leadership abilities, and I think that he believed in me. He believed in what I wanted to do, and that was really important to me. So I guess I consider him to be a mentor for me. Maybe the only true mentor that I've ever had. So I want to give him that tribute. And then, in terms of faculty who have influenced me, now I have to—it's an enormously long list because I work with faculty. That's what I do. Everybody I work with I learn so much from. This faculty is really talented. They have a lot of really good ideas. They are really diverse in how they view the world. They...they are coming to their jobs from very different perspectives, and what they think is valuable, how they teach, what they think should count and not count as scholarship, how they do their work, the questions that they ask—they're all very, very diverse. But, you know, if you listen to them, every single one of them has something really interesting and important to contribute to the institution. So I just have to say...now, it's a really, really long list. And I've been privileged to have this job. It's the best job on campus. I always say it's the best job on campus. And, um, because you just constantly are learning so much.

[53:08]

LZ: Has it been hard for you, though, to transition from, I guess, dealing primarily with students to faculty, and I guess...

JS: That wasn't hard. I mean, as I got older, I got less—the generational gap between me and the students got bigger. And students were becoming more and more alien to me, you know, because they were expecting different things, you know? And I got more and more comfortable with young faculty, I think because they were less—I was less generationally challenged with the faculty [laughter]. And so, um, no, it hasn't been. Although I have to say, when I've gone back into the classroom—the last time was to teach human phys—I had, uh, I really have a great time. I really like the students a lot and find them just engaging and interesting and, you know, like I always did. But I think that dealing with faculty now has been the most satisfying for me.

[54:06]

LZ: Now you hold the O.T. Walter professorship, and I guess what exactly does that [unclear]...

JS: Well, it's an endowed chair, just like all the other endowed chairs. This one is in the sciences, and it was given to the college by the, uh, by alumni who wanted to honor O.T. Walter, who was a pre-med advisor and a zoologist, um, who taught at the college for a *very* long time. I think he had like forty years of service. He was just astounding. And it was in the old days when, um, when your pre-med advisor could kind of get you into medical school, you know,

based on his connections and a letter of recommendation from him meant you'd get in. It's not like that anymore [laughter]. So, you know, he really mentored and cultivated the students and helped them understand whether they wanted to go to med school or not. And, you know, he really helped a lot of them find their way and get into medical school, and they wanted to pay a tribute to him. And so they came back and gave the college a huge endowment for the endowed chair and for some budget relief in the Biology Department. And Gavin was the president, so, it was, you know, early '90s or something. And so the first O.T. Walter Chair was Eddie Hill, who was the chair of my department when I was hired. And, um, when Eddie retired, they gave me the honor of having the chair. And...and it's a bit work in, you sort of have to be in some way related to the biomedical sciences because that's what the donors wanted. But... So it was in some way my work in the pre-med program and also my work in training, I mean, a lot of future doctors. So I'm honored to hold it.

[56:11]

LZ: So I guess in this last section I wanted to maybe throw out there what, in your opinion, have been some of the biggest changes that the college has undergone and kind of [unclear]...

JS: Demographics. Um, we're more diverse, particularly with respect to women. No question about that. The return to the scholarly agenda that the faculty was on before the financial problems of the late '60s. This faculty is world-class in its scholarly commitment and productivity. And I do think that they take very seriously how that scholarly work translates into the classroom. I think that they are much better teachers because they're good scholars. And



they are committed to teaching. What I haven't seen, I guess, is an increase in the commitment to teaching, only because I think that the faculty I joined in 1983 was very committed to teaching. And I think this faculty is, too. I think that that's been a tradition that we have held constant, and rightly so. And, um, I see just enormous energy spent on making sure that classes are excellently done. And so I think that our teaching excellence has not eroded as our scholarly productivity has improved. We have, of course, completely transformed the campus physically. It was in very bad shape when I came, a lot of deferred maintenance, just not—I mean roofs leaked and buildings were falling down. East Old Main was condemned a year or two after I got here, and they eventually tore it down. It's right here. But they had to move, like the history department had to move because the building was going to fall down. I mean it was just really bad. Essentially, every building except—every academic building except Janet Wallace has been renovated. And the humanities part of Janet Wallace has been renovated. But the fine arts part has not. But that's the only exception. Every building's been renovated or new—like the library is new, and the student center is new—since I've come. It's just...and that matters. I mean, I think the physical facilities are... You've got to have adequate physical facilities in order to teach adequately.

[59:00]

LZ: Now, you are currently in the MSFEO program?

JS: No.

LZ: No you're not. And will that start for you...

JS: Two years from now.

LZ: OK.

JS: Next year is my last—this coming year that we're about to enter is my last year as the Director of the Center for Scholarship and Teaching. And then I have a sabbatical leave that I have put off for a very long time that is due to me, and I am going to take it. And then I enter the MSFEO program.

LZ: What, I guess, are your kind of, maybe your five-year plan, or what you foresee for yourself?

JS: Well, the scholarly question that I would like to ask on my sabbatical is, um, is to tease out and interrogate the relationship between scholarship and teaching across all the disciplines in the college. The literature on this shows that there is no correlation between scholarly productivity and research excellence—I'm sorry, and teaching excellence. But the studies that have been

done are very crude. And what I think probably is going on is that there are really positive correlations, and there also are some negative correlations, and they're cancelling each other out. So I would like to know how, specifically how does scholarly productivity translate into teaching excellence in the liberal arts context. And what kinds of scholarly productivity translate the best. Because I think that right now we hire people who are productive scholars without giving much attention to what kind of scholarship might translate best into people's teaching. And we have the luxury of having a lot of candidates for our jobs, and so we could be picky. We could be pickier about the kind of research they do if we knew more about how they might be better teachers because of the kinds of research that they do. And so that's kind of what I'm up to, is to try to, um, figure that out. And using Carleton and Macalester, hopefully, as test institutions for my sabbatical, and then continue that on in my MSFEO.

LZ: So you've essentially phased out most of your work in the field of biology.

JS: I can't go back. You can't go back. After you've been gone this long. The field changes too fast. If you're a scientist, essentially any kind of scientist, but particularly biomedical scientist, if you shut down your lab for three years, you're toast. You're not going back. So, kind of a permanent decision.

LZ: Right.

JS: But I think my work in faculty development prepares me well to do this more educational research. Yeah. So I look forward to that.

[1:02:01]

LZ: I just have one last question, and I was curious if you had kind of a standout memory or favorite memory, favorite time of Macalester, and maybe just kind of some of how you feel...

JS: Graduation. I have to say graduation. Every time I hear the bagpipes at graduation I get goose bumps. You know, it's **the** best. The best moments at Mac are watching the seniors demonstrate what they know and graduate. You know, the kind of watching the senior presentations in biology, listening to the honors defenses, reading the senior papers and the senior honors work. And knowing what they started like as first years, and seeing the impact of the four years that we provide and that people work at. Of course, I mean they're working at their own learning. But to see how people change and grow and... You really see it when you engage seniors. And you know, graduation's just a wonderful, wonderful moment when that all kind of comes together. So, I have to say—and the flags, the international flags. And, you know, I'm a ritual kind of gal, I like rituals, and that's the best. Those are the best moments for me.

LZ: Well, those are my questions. If there's anything else that you want to add...

JS: Nope. Nope. This has been a pleasure!

LZ: Alright, well, thank you very much.

JS: Yeah, you're welcome.

[1:03:35]